



# Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence

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## *Executive Summary*

Turkey's response to the influx of Syrians is a source of national pride. The massive numbers pose significant absorptive and financial challenges and compound problems stemming from complex demographics, deep political polarisation and rising security threats. The uncertainties with regard to the Syria war delayed long-term planning by both authorities and Syrians in Turkey. Ankara now needs to assume the permanence of the refugees in order to craft an integration strategy to mitigate the long-term risk for the nation's stability. Replacing top down, erratic policymaking with a national plan alongside efforts to build consensus among constituencies is necessary both for Syrians to have clarity about their future in Turkey and to ensure that their hosts do not see them as an economic burden, security threat or instrument for redesigning national identity.

The scale is staggering. 2.75 million Syrians are registered in Turkey, around 3.5 per cent of the population. When the influx began in 2011, Ankara assumed a smaller number and shorter timeframe, but with the war showing no signs of abating and Europe's migration policies in disarray, it is a reality that looks set to stay or expand. Emergency responses have meant fitful policies and convoluted rhetoric. For the refugees, challenges include learning the language, finding meaningful jobs, housing and education, vulnerability to exploitation and navigating an unfamiliar, complicated bureaucracy. Acknowledgement of likely permanence has begun in 2016 to show up in policies for integration in education and employment. Implementation of the new progressive integration policies, however, needs tighter coordination between public institutions, which should be aligned around a holistic, coherent strategy. Moreover, the year's dramatic political upheavals, peaking with the July coup attempt and its aftermath, have deepened the general sense of an unpredictable and precarious future that dominates the refugee experience.

Host communities complain about the impact of dense refugee concentrations on the labour force, social benefits refugees receive and potential for increased crime and terror. Violence against refugees is isolated and downplayed, though the occasional flare-ups on social media and alarming coverage after the president said citizenship would be granted suggest the potential for friction. Squaring state capacities with refugee expectations and host grievances is complicated. Integration policies need to consider host community concerns of a zero sum equation between their and Syrians' interests and be coupled with communication strategies alongside other efforts to foster dialogue between refugees and hosts.

The refugees are overwhelmingly Sunni Arabs, adding an ethnic-sectarian dimension to the issue. The common European assumption that Turkey is a natural environment for Syrians tends to neglect the complexities of its society. Much as in Europe, absorption involves not merely administrative and financial matters, but also cultural and political values. Sensitivities of minority communities are based on collective memories of persecution, recent political marginalisation and mistrust of the president and government. Alevites, Kurdish nationalists, liberals, secularists and some Turkish nationalists worry that political leaders are using refugees to transform national identity, consolidate power and reframe Turkey's role in the Middle East as more Arab, Sunni and hegemonic. The perception that refugees are a demographic

threat and pawns used by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) dampens prospects for a dispassionate, constructive debate about their presence and future.

Suspicion of AKP's refugee agenda is also fuelled by lack of clarity about, for example, locations for new refugee housing and camps and possible citizenship prospects. An inclusive national dialogue is needed to distinguish unfounded speculation from legitimate concerns, but the polarised environment hinders an integration debate. Opposition parties complain the president decides on refugees without consulting and wants to use them to achieve absolute power. Because society's cultural, ethnic and sectarian fault lines correspond to party constituencies, they manifest themselves in political confrontation at the centre.

Ideally, Ankara would, in line with international precedents and human rights standards, lift the geographical limitation it applies to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and give Syrians formal refugee status, but this is currently unlikely. A long-term citizenship prospect would provide Syrians with an incentive to integrate but poses risks if offered without building consensus and setting clearly defined, fair conditions. Regardless of citizenship, targeted integration policies with clearly-defined legal steps incentivising transition from temporary to permanent legal status are needed. This requires decision-making and engagement by political leaders that is inclusive, not imposed. More comprehensive debate on a new constitution and amendment of Article 66 on the definition of citizenship could provide a positive framework if government and opposition engage constructively.

While Europe is most concerned about preventing more Syrians from seeking refuge in its countries, a more nuanced focus needs to be on how the refugees integrate in Turkey over the long term. However, the low numbers the European Union (EU) is willing to accept make Turkish authorities unwilling to engage on refugee rights and give Ankara a sense of occupying the moral high ground in face of EU requests on issues such as the rule of law agenda. It is a dynamic from which all stand to lose.

**Ankara/Brussels, 30 November 2016**

# Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence

## I. Introduction

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The politics of Syrians' integration into Turkish society is complex on many levels. Domestic upheaval has increased political polarisation and further eroded confidence between Turkey and the European Union (EU). That polarisation and the tensions with the EU render management of the crisis more difficult at the same time as the consequences of not integrating the refugees are becoming more dangerous.

AKP has pursued unprecedented consolidation of power after losing its thirteen-year parliamentary majority in June 2015, then restoring single-party rule in the November 2015 election. Since disintegration of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) conflict ceasefire in July 2015, dramatic escalation in the mainly Kurdish-inhabited south east has cost over 2,300 lives, with no end in sight. Seven attacks attributed to the Islamic State (IS) in the same period have killed more than 250. This instability was compounded by the 15 July 2016 coup attempt led by what the state calls the Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation/Parallel State Structure (FETÖ/PDY).

The failed coup created grounds for emergency rule, which has dramatically increased presidential power. It has also resulted in dismissal of some 125,000 civil servants and arrests of many, straining bureaucratic capacity in areas ranging from the judiciary to law enforcement and education, all of which are relevant to refugee absorption capacity. Moreover, with the focus on PKK- and FETÖ-related developments, refugee integration challenges are not getting the attention they need.

The expedited pace of concentrating power in the presidency and the top-down yet haphazard nature of decision-making render establishing constructive dialogue with the opposition and building national consensus on Syrians' integration ever more unlikely. Sensitive issues such as the prospect of granting citizenship are perceived by government critics as ploys to strengthen AKP's electoral base. Though the refugee crisis was not of Ankara's making, and the open door policy toward refugees has been widely commended, the way dynamics have evolved leaves refugees feeling instrumentalised in both Turkey's domestic politics and its EU relations.

The EU-Turkey refugee deal plays into this picture in complex ways. In the last two years, the refugee issue has alternately reinvigorated and strained ties. The deal has delivered mutual benefits: the flow of irregular migrants to the EU has been curbed, and European funding and programming have had visible positive impact on Syrians' opportunities in Turkey, which is also in the country's long-term interests. The promise to curb the flow to Europe has likewise increased Ankara's leverage and arguably rendered EU counterparts less vocal about human rights and rule-of-law issues. Achievement of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens, however, hinges on compliance with EU conditions relating to anti-terrorism laws, among others, which is unlikely in the post-coup environment.

Anti-EU rhetoric is high in Turkey, while the appetite in the European Council and European Parliament to support visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens is low. Ankara is floating the prospect of reintroducing the death penalty, and the European

Parliament adopted on 24 November a non-binding resolution proposing a freeze on accession negotiations. A major confrontation is possible that could not only derail the drawn-out accession negotiations, but also spell the end of the refugee deal. Such a confrontation, especially at a time when the Syrian government's progress toward recapture of the parts of Aleppo long under insurgents' control risks creating a new wave of refugees, would have important implications for the inflow to the EU and Turkey's political trajectory.

Bitterness toward the West has swelled over the Syria conflict as well as the refugee crisis. Ankara sees the West as intent neither on ending the former nor sharing the burden of the latter. That it hosts by far the most refugees has reinforced Turkey's political demands regarding developments in Syria. Creating a safe zone in the north of that country has been a priority. One of the aims of Operation Euphrates Shield, launched in August alongside allied Syrian armed-opposition factions, is accordingly to establish a territory where Syrians could stay if another refugee wave comes from Aleppo.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, a neo-Ottomanist vision gains traction, with the presence of Syrian refugees playing in complex ways into the search for an answer to the questions who is a Turk and where does Turkey belong.

This third Crisis Group report since 2012 on the integration of Syrian refugees thus comes at a febrile time in Turkey's modern history. Ultimately, only a sustainable resolution to the conflict in Syria will stem the flow of refugees and create conditions in which their needs and rights, including the right of return, can be comprehensively addressed and protected. While Europeans are most concerned about how to prevent the flow to their countries, a greater focus is required on how the refugees integrate in Turkish society over the long term.

This report concentrates on that integration and consequential social and political implications. It does not examine the intricacies of the EU-Turkey deal or its compatibility with the UN Refugee Convention, which also involves implementation in Greece and the Balkans.<sup>2</sup> It is based on extensive field research in three provinces bordering Syria – Hatay, Gaziantep and Kilis – as well as interviews with Syrians in Adana, Izmir and Istanbul and with state institutions, political parties, NGOs and international organisations in Ankara and Istanbul. The aim is to assess how humanitarian and development considerations on behalf of the refugees accord with the interests of the host community, political realities and Turkey's stability.

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<sup>1</sup> The operation also aims to drive IS from the border area and block the Syrian Kurdish group YPG from connecting the Afrin canton with its territory east of the Euphrates.

<sup>2</sup> "Fire in the Aegean – Scenario of failure – How to succeed", European Stability Initiative (ESI), 11 October 2016, [www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=67&newsletter\\_ID=108](http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=67&newsletter_ID=108).

## II. Navigating Displacement: Turkey's Response and Refugee Perspectives

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A challenge that started as “guests” being housed in camps and given emergency help in 2011 has turned into 2.75 million Syrians under “temporary protection”, 90 per cent of them settled around the country, mostly in provinces bordering Syria and the lower income outskirts of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. Integration into society remains skin-deep. The temporary protection regime in theory allows unlimited free health care, access to education by joining the public system or enrolling in one of 400 Temporary Education Centres (TECs) and, since January 2016, work permits. They can also sign contracts for services (electricity, water, gas, TV, mobile communication, etc). But around 400,000 children (43 per cent of the school-aged) are still not enrolled in any educational institution. Only 10,227 Syrians have received work permits as of 24 November.<sup>3</sup> Even as both refugees and Turkish hosts increasingly recognise their permanence, a sense of precariousness prevails.

### A. *The Bureaucratic Scramble*

Ankara expected neither an influx of this size nor for the conflict to continue so long. The conceptual and institutional shifts necessary to integrate Syrians in a sustainable way came late and fitfully.<sup>4</sup> The concept of “temporary permanence” (*geçici kalıcılık*), pronounced by then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's adviser in December 2015, summarised the convoluted approach and the government's difficulties to define a strategy.<sup>5</sup> The chaotic policymaking, a patchwork of small initiatives with micro effects, left refugees having to find their own way. Ex-UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Spokesperson Metin Çorabatır explained:

There were very few experts on migration or asylum in the country. Neither the political leadership nor opposition parties had consultants that knew the relevant international norms. The necessary legal frameworks for dealing with such an influx were not in place. So decisions were made ad hoc, for short term solutions to challenges as they erupted.<sup>6</sup>

Repeated reshuffling of the officials responsible for devising policies and coordination have hindered accumulation of know-how and strategy development. Nearly all institutions involved with policies relating to Syrians are understaffed or had to grow so quickly they are still learning responsibilities. The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), mandated not only to register those needing protection, but also to handle all issues concerning foreigners, was established in 2014 with a staff of ten that grew to 3,000 by 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> “60 bin yabancıya çalışma izni” [“60 thousand work permits for foreigners”], Anadolu Agency, 24 November 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group previously examined Turkey's response to the challenges posed by the continuing influx of Syrian refugees and their spread across the country, underlining the need for a comprehensive social and economic integration strategy. See Crisis Group Europe Report N°230, *The Rising Costs of Turkey's Syrian Quagmire*, 30 April 2014.

<sup>5</sup> “Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyelilerin Durumu Değerlendirildi” [“Status of Syrians under temporary protection assessed”], *Milliyet*, 17 December 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interview, Metin Çorabatır, ex-UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson, Ankara, 30 September 2016.

Authorities came to understand only in 2015 that the refugees were “a long term situation”.<sup>7</sup> One of the first public acknowledgements came that September, when Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş said most Syrians seemed destined to stay, and the government was working on increasing capacity to integrate them.<sup>8</sup> It was 2016 before ministries assessed the increased personnel needs and the language and professional training programs necessary. Lagging institutional capacity has meant that refugees have often not been able to take meaningful advantage of opportunities the temporary protection status provided on paper.

The ad hoc temporary protection regime established at the beginning of the crisis was enshrined in law in 2014.<sup>9</sup> Because continuation or termination is at government discretion, Syrians have no guarantee they will not be sent back one day. Ankara still lacks a clear strategy for their permanent integration. Authorities say there are too many unknowns, short and long term: “Will there be another wave, maybe soon from Aleppo? When will the war end, and what will it look like when it does? ... How many will want to move back? How will Turkey-EU relations and the economy unfold? ...” Without answers, they say, expecting a firm strategy is unrealistic.<sup>10</sup> Not knowing what is on offer from Turkey in the long term, however, has implications for Syrians’ motivation to integrate.

## B. *Incentive and Opportunities to Integrate*

Syrians express gratitude for the protection Turkey offers. 70 per cent of those Crisis Group talked to across the country underscored a desire to go home when the war ends, but many also listed numerous factors that make Turkey more desirable than Europe. These include proximity to Syria, cultural similarities (especially in border provinces), social tolerance, the government’s hospitable approach and absence of Islamophobia. Some said being physically close to Syria makes them more optimistic about the future. Another widely shared sentiment was to be actively involved in making a new Syria, as many believe those who leave for Europe “will not be able to come back”.<sup>11</sup>

But hurried policymaking and ever-shifting institutional frameworks pose problems, especially for non-camp refugees, who are unclear about their status, puzzled about where to get information and say registration procedures and access to services differ from place to place and time to time.<sup>12</sup> The resulting sense of limbo directly im-

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<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ali Osman Öztürk, public diplomacy coordinator, Turkish prime ministry, 30 September 2016.

<sup>8</sup> “Bakanlar Kurulu sona erdi” [“The cabinet meeting has ended”], *Habertürk*, 22 September 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the geographical limitation it imposes on its adherence to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Turkey does not give official refugee status to citizens of countries not in the Council of Europe. It holds that unrestricted application of the convention would attract crippling numbers from its turbulent neighbourhood.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interview, prime ministry official, 30 September 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Gaziantep, Adana, Istanbul, Osmaniye, Kilis, February-March 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Most Syrians interviewed, including those engaged in daily economic activities, were unaware of the introduction of work permits. Many also did not know the location of local authority buildings, particularly the DGMM. A few said they received informative Arabic mobile text messages from the prime ministry’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) on registration, access to education and health services and internal travel regulations. However, not everyone registered receives these. Some Syrians said fliers circulated by authorities are unhelpful and a more permanent, standardised means is needed to receive information on rights and obligations. Social media groups

pacts ability to integrate. Many are reluctant to invest in learning Turkish if they do not see themselves as permanently settled. Lack of firm legal status, limited job opportunities and inadequate access to education were the circumstances most cited by interviewees who would rather stay in Turkey but anticipated leaving for the EU or elsewhere. The challenges that keep many Syrians out of school or work and without command of Turkish are also at the core of their being perceived by host communities as a negative influence on the economy and potential security threat.

### 1. Education and the risk of a lost generation

Though the number of Syrian children enrolled in school is gradually rising – there was a 50 per cent increase between June 2015 and March 2016 – some 400,000 of the around 900,000 of school age still do not attend any educational facility as of November, according to national education ministry figures. This contravenes Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees the right to free education.<sup>13</sup> At the January 2016 “Supporting Syria and the Region” conference in London, Ankara committed to enrol all Syrian children in schools by the end of the 2016-2017 academic year.<sup>14</sup>

Continuation of low enrolment would mean a generation of children would not be able to live up to its potential, whether they stay in Turkey or someday go home. The situation also lends itself to child labour, child begging, early marriage and potential for radicalisation. Syrian families have had the option to send their children either to TECs or public schools, where by law the language of instruction is Turkish.<sup>15</sup> They have largely preferred the TECs, which were set up as an emergency response and teach in Arabic an adapted Syrian curriculum approved by the Turkish national education ministry. Classes are run by Syrian teachers of various qualification levels for only a few hours a day.<sup>16</sup> The key challenges for the some 125,000 in public schools

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are a source of information, but some noted that incorrect information is circulated online as well. Crisis Group interviews, Izmir, Adana, Istanbul, Osmaniye, Gaziantep, February-March 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Article 28 reads: “1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all ...”.

<sup>14</sup> Turkey's statement reads: “The Republic of Turkey and its international partners committed to the aim of providing education to every Syrian refugee child by the end of the school year 2016/17. The Republic of Turkey is already providing education to 310,000 Syrian children and has committed to enrolling 460,000 Syrian children by the end of this school year. In order to achieve this objective, stronger and urgent support for Syrian children's education is needed”.

<sup>15</sup> According to November 2016 figures of the national education ministry, around 125,000 refugee children were enrolled in Turkish public schools and following the national curriculum. Undersecretary Yusuf Tekin of the ministry announced the same month that 509,000 (57 per cent) of the some 900,000 Syrian school-age children were enrolled in educational facilities. Figures announced by official Turkish institutions and UN agencies include children formally enrolled in temporary education centres and public schools but not those in informal/underground facilities. Crisis Group field research indicates that an unknown number attend informal programs set up by former Syrian teachers, charities or business groups. The phasing out of TECs is expected to increase demand for illegal facilities, which can bring a new risk.

<sup>16</sup> According to a UNICEF report, 247,000 children were enrolled in the 2015/2016 school year in TECs in urban areas and camps. Some 1,000 Turkish language teachers and 11,500 Syrian volunteer teachers worked in these. Seven new schools were built, and 200 were renovated in Turkey in 2015. Additionally, Turkey hired 8,700 Syrian “volunteer” teachers, and 10,000 Syrian students received subsidised school transportation. “UNICEF Annual Report 2015”, December 2015.

are the language barrier and, at many, the lack of catch-up provisions.<sup>17</sup> The education ministry, NGO and private language school projects that exist to expedite Turkish language learning are deemed chaotic and experimental.<sup>18</sup>

Recognising the risk of creating a marginalised community as a result of parallel education systems, Ankara plans to absorb Syrian children into the national structure by phasing out TECs in the next three years. Ambiguities remain, however, with regard to how the process will play out.<sup>19</sup> As of September, Syrians starting primary and pre-school (first graders and kindergarten level) can only attend public schools. This is to be extended each year, with the eventual closing down of TECs and integration of all Syrian students into the Turkish system.

This leaves some Syrian parents concerned about their children not developing proficiency in their mother tongue and having trouble reintegrating into the Syrian school system if they return after the war.<sup>20</sup> In light of the families' expressed preference, the education ministry is currently working on ways to enable the children to maintain their Arabic language with elective and extra-curricular classes in public schools. This is important for all Syrians attending Turkish schools.<sup>21</sup> It would also conform with Article 29(c) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which reads:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to ... the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Another reason families have preferred to send their children to TECs or have not sent them to any school is economic. There are increased drop-out rates when children reach secondary and upper secondary level, because most families want their children to earn income for the household.<sup>22</sup> Since most TECs function for only a few hours a day, students can work in the informal sector. Many school-aged Syrians illegally do low-skilled labour, mostly in construction, manufacturing and textiles, to help support families.<sup>23</sup> The Emergency Social Safety Network (ESSN) for basic needs that was agreed in September 2016 as part of three billion Euros in EU aid is expected

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<sup>17</sup> "Syrian refugees missing school in Turkey", BBC News, 30 June 2016.

<sup>18</sup> In Gaziantep, some schools, including Münifpaşa Middle School, have begun offering Turkish courses for Syrian students to help them adapt to a non-Syrian curriculum. "Suriyeli Öğrenciler İçin Türkçe Kursu Açıldı" ["Turkish course for Syrian students opened"], *Haberler*, 8 October 2016. In June 2016, Ankara University signed an agreement with Sequa, an international development organisation, to teach Turkish to 1,200 Syrian refugees. Syrians older than sixteen living in Ankara, Istanbul and along the Syrian border will take a five-month course to provide basic command of Turkish. "More Syrians to learn Turkish with new project for refugees", *Daily Sabah*, 25 June 2016.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF representative to Turkey Philippe Duamelle explained: "There are clear instructions coming from Ankara to schools in all provinces around the country to open the doors for Syrian children". Crisis Group telephone interview, 1 November 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interview, Syrian NGO representative, Istanbul, 21 October 2016.

<sup>21</sup> The issue is politically charged, however, because of the controversies regarding Kurdish language instruction.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, UNICEF, 1 November 2016.

<sup>23</sup> The high number of Turkish children working has increased with the influx of Syrians. "Number of child workers nears million in Turkey", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 20 September 2016.

to help with this problem. Beginning in the first months of 2017, monthly cash transfers and electronic debit cards will be given to some one million refugees following an application and needs-based selection process. Each family will receive a Kızılay (Red Crescent) card that provides 100 TL (around \$30) per person a month.

Work is in progress for an additional conditional “education cash grant” to encourage families to send their children to school. The plan under discussion would give further monthly support of 35-60 TL (\$11-\$18) for each child attending school and a one-time financial allowance of 100 TL (around \$30) per semester.<sup>24</sup> Such incentives have been in place for low-income Turkish families since launched in the early 2000s with World Bank help. The ESSN has an initial one-year limitation. Syrians welcome it but do not see it as a sustainable response to their concerns: “No one knows what will happen afterwards”, said a Syrian NGO representative working on integration.<sup>25</sup>

The Turkish education system was strained even before the Syrian influx. After the failed coup and dismissal of some 30,000 teaching personnel suspected of affiliation with FETÖ/PDY or the PKK, this is even more so. The non-formal education sector (NGOs, civil initiatives, vocational and linguistic training) also needs more support, so children who do not return to formal education have alternatives. “Access to formal education needs to be sustained”, UNICEF’s Turkey representative said, “but much more investment is needed into non-formal education”.<sup>26</sup> Addressing Syrian children’s psychological problems also must become a priority. Having lived through war, many suffer from serious shock and trauma that teachers and school social workers need training to treat.

## 2. Challenges entering the labour market

Limited job opportunities in Turkey, especially for the highly skilled and educated, drove many to seek refuge in Europe until 2016.<sup>27</sup> Those in Turkey continue to face challenges such as complicated administrative procedures to obtain a work permit and mobility restrictions. Many have sustained themselves largely by working in the informal sector, and others receive assistance from international humanitarian aid entities, the state and local NGOs, but a longer-term strategy for self-sustenance is needed. As discussed below, this is also important for addressing host communities’ concerns Syrians drain service budgets and drive down wages, a perception that engenders social exclusion and friction between host and refugee communities.

Acknowledgement of the need to integrate Syrians into the workforce began in January 2016, when Syrians under temporary protection were granted the right to receive work permits. The process, however, is cumbersome.<sup>28</sup> Between January and

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<sup>24</sup> “Some of the EU money directly channelled to assist access of Syrians to Turkish public schools will be conditioned on performance, that is, the state will receive funding in line with the number of Syrians enrolled”. Crisis Group telephone interview, UNICEF, 1 November 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interview, Syrian NGO representative/consultant who has worked extensively in the field on integration challenges and is based in Gaziantep, Istanbul, 21 October 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, UNICEF, 1 November 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Above 40 per cent of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands gave “finding a job adequate to their skills, meeting their basic living expenses, avoid exploitation” as the main reasons for leaving countries they had stayed in for six months or more before leaving Syria. UNHCR Factsheet, February 2016.

<sup>28</sup> The labour ministry’s Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection was put into effect in January 2016. It sets the upper limit of Syrians to be employed in businesses

November, only around 10,000 obtained them.<sup>29</sup> Neither employers nor Syrians have an incentive to apply for formal work arrangements. For the employer, officially hiring a Syrian means paying a monthly minimum wage (some \$400), social security contributions and taxes. For Syrians, particularly the low-skilled without a competitive market edge, illegal employment gives advantages over citizens, since they can take lower wages and pay no social security contribution.<sup>30</sup> The estimated 300,000–500,000 working informally believe legalisation might cost them their jobs.

The practice leads to poor work conditions as well as child labour, and Ankara needs to tackle it. Because only increasing inspections and fines on employers for informal hires could result in the loss of the only income for many Syrians, however, such measures should be accompanied with incentives/derogations to encourage Syrians and employers to enter into formal arrangements. These could include making effective vocational training and employment services more accessible to Syrians as well as the incentives available to citizens from the Turkish Employment Agency (İşkur), including two- to four-year waivers of social security payments for women and young adults.<sup>31</sup> Simplifying work permit procedures and building Turkish language into vocational training programs will also be needed. While some informality in the workforce is inevitable, the more Ankara encourages Syrians to work legally, the more the economy will benefit in the long run and alleviate social tensions from competition, especially in the low-skilled job market.

Another need for Syrians is to obtain travel documents for provinces other than where they are registered.<sup>32</sup> Those Crisis Group talked to argued that, after a security clearance, they should be able to have documents valid for at least a year and multiple visits. The system is in theory operational, but some say no documents are issued

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at 10 per cent. It also requires applicants to have a Turkish identification card (*kimlik*) for at least six months. To receive an identity card, applicants must show a housing contract, which many landlords are unwilling to conclude. Once they have had a *kimlik* for six months, they must remain in the district where registered and find an employer there who will apply for a work permit for them.

<sup>29</sup> There are multiple reasons for the low number of applicants. Workplaces need to apply for work permits for the Syrians. Preparing the application document is complicated and labour-intensive and lawyers or fixers to assist in the process can cost as much as \$1,000. Various professions are exempted; it is difficult for professionals to get the required equivalence certificates of their diplomas from the Turkish Higher Education Board (YÖK) or documents from Syria; there is a general lack of information about work permit procedures, and the language barrier is a major problem.

<sup>30</sup> According to Hussam Orfahli, head of an Istanbul firm that assists Syrians with paperwork, “the minimum wage is 1,300 TL [around \$400], and most employers refuse to give contracts so they can pay less and don’t have to pay for your health insurance”. “Fewer than 0.1% of Syrians in Turkey in line for work permits”, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2016. “Cheap and illegal, Syrian workers show underside of Turkey’s refugee crisis”, Reuters, 4 December 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Crisis Group Skype interview, Ankara-based UN Development Programme (UNDP) representatives, 24 October 2016. For more information about the incentives offered to Turkish citizens by İşkur see, in Turkish, [www.iskur.gov.tr/tr-tr/isveren/tesvikler.aspx](http://www.iskur.gov.tr/tr-tr/isveren/tesvikler.aspx).

<sup>32</sup> Turkish authorities say the need to regulate Syrian refugees’ mobility is a direct outcome of recent terrorist attacks by suicide bombers whose identities were detected through the DGMM’s registration system for Syrians under temporary protection. According to a prime ministry official, this measure also helps stem the flow of refugees toward Turkey’s western border and prevent irregular crossings. Bus companies and railway officers do not sell tickets unless Syrians show permission documents. However, such mobility restrictions also pave the way for less desirable mobility methods such as human smuggling. Recent reports indicate facilitators drive refugees without travel documents from border provinces to desired destinations in Turkey for 250 TL (around \$88).

since the post-coup crackdown.<sup>33</sup> Many also say administrative procedures are arbitrary and uneven. Thus, implementation of mobility restrictions differs province to province, municipality assistance varies, registration and issuance of ID cards is halted at times, and they struggle with questions such as how to get a driving licence.

Communication should take into account refugees' economically diverse profile, vocational and language training requirements and labour market needs. A detailed study of Syrians' skills and Turkish economic needs would help. A tax/social security payment exemption for a certain period after entrance into a legal work relationship could also provide incentives to both Syrians and employers. Lifting employer sponsorship for Syrians' work permit applications might be an additional enticement.

### 3. Experience of political upheaval

Uncertain politics makes Turkey less attractive for Syrians considering their long-term prospects. They were sympathetic to AKP in the run-up to the June 2015 elections due to appreciation for a safe haven and President Tayyip Erdoğan's commitment to confront the Assad regime, while they saw the opposition as representing anti-refugee sentiments and worried when the AKP lost its parliamentary majority. A Syrian Turkmen said, "we were probably more worried about the election results than Turkish society was, because the possibility that main opposition Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) might win created a deep sense of fear: what if their leader would send us back to Syria, if they collaborated with Assad?".

Some other Sunni-Arab Syrians asserted that the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) were scared of the "Arabisation of Turkey", that "MHP would only protect Turkmen Syrians and the HDP only Kurdish Syrians or Iraqis, leaving out Arab Syrians". A half Kurdish/half Arab Syrian said, "HDP is sincere about Syrian Kurds, but not enough about all refugees. If it were, it would have shown more support for AKP's positive policies".<sup>34</sup> These concerns were alleviated when AKP regained its majority in November 2015.

Another form of uncertainty swept over refugees when Erdoğan said in July 2016 Syrians would receive citizenship. Government representatives later said that initially around 300,000 would be naturalised, with families, possibly amounting to one million. Government representatives said there would be skills-based criteria but none have been announced, leaving Syrians unsure they would qualify. More important was the societal backlash (detailed below). Interviews showed the nationalist reaction caused many to feel more exposed and under increased social pressure. One said, "we were living in quiet and peace, blending in, minding our own business. After the announcement I feel much more anxious when someone asks me where I'm from".<sup>35</sup>

The 15 July failed coup changed politics drastically. Syrians poured into the streets protesting the military takeover the first night and organised parallel rallies to the celebratory gatherings for weeks after the coup was defeated. Those in Istanbul re-

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<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Syrians, Istanbul, October 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Osmaniye, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Adana, February-April 2016. But some educated Syrians said the government instrumentalised them in EU relations and Syria policy.

<sup>35</sup> "Syrians in Turkey could become citizens: Erdoğan", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 July 2016. "Suriyelilere 'istisnai vatandaşlık' formülü" ["Formula of 'exceptional citizenship' for Syrians"], *Milliyet*, 15 July 2016. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, July 2016.

called fear that a military government, traditionally more nationalistic and secularist, could mean rule similar to what they fled in Syria or harsh backlash against refugees, as in Egypt after the Morsi government was deposed in 2013.<sup>36</sup>

Turkish authorities underline the need to balance Syrians' preferences and needs with the security considerations and economic interests of the country at large. Noting their displeasure with international complaints that they are not managing the crisis well enough, the prime minister's public diplomacy coordinator explained:

Our GDP is what it is. We have a large young population and many unemployed who complain Syrians are reducing their access to jobs and services. We are grappling with an unstable neighbourhood and raging conflict with PKK and have no veto in the UN Security Council. ... There is just so much we can do .... Integration will take time; it can only happen with political consensus so as to not upset domestic stability. We need more support to develop our capacity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> According to a *Middle East Eye* article, many Syrian refugees took to the streets to protest the coup the night of 15 July. They cited the pro-Sisi media and street-mob attacks on refugees in Egypt while police looked the other way. "Many [refugees] were kicked out of the country", said Sameer al-Shami, who later came to Turkey. "Syrians in Turkey Celebrate Erdoğan's Triumph over Coup Attempt", 19 July 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ali Osman Öztürk, 30 September 2016.

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### III. Beyond Guests: Are Syrians Welcome?

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The president and AKP have adopted a “welcoming our guests” rhetoric, blended with a focus on compassion required by Islamic values, to justify an open door policy for Syrians as well as aid and services. In certain contexts, Syrians escaping the “tyranny of the Syrian regime” have been referred to as *muhacir* (a term rooted in Islamic history used originally to denote those who had to move from Mecca to Medina because of religious persecution, and later Muslims fleeing oppression in non-Muslim countries); helping them has been deemed *ensar* (an affirming descriptive for those who help fleeing Muslims).

Not only religious but also nationalist pride has been central in the government’s contrast of its magnanimity in hosting Syrians with the lack of compassion and hospitality exhibited by EU countries. President Erdoğan said:

We are a nation that has the consciousness of *ensar*. We see all our siblings coming to our country as *muhacir* and convivially welcome them. We open our homes to them, share our bread. Today there are around two million siblings within our borders who fled from ... Syria and Iraq. ... Two million here, 130,000 in the whole of Europe. Where is [your commitment] to human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Wasn’t it you who were protecting the oppressed? What happened to the European Union *aquis*? Where are you?<sup>38</sup>

Such language resonates with AKP’s conservative and nationalist constituencies.

The interaction between host community and Syrians varies by province, socio-economic situation and political disposition and has changed with realisation refugees are likely to be permanent. In border provinces where many have settled, there is often little social interaction. Residents complain about emergence of working class ghettos, “little Aleppos”, while NGOs note that “Turkish people have started to avoid avenues that they see Syrians as having taken over”.<sup>39</sup> The potential for tension also varies province to province based on economic, demographic and cultural considerations.<sup>40</sup> Particularly Kurdish nationalists, Alevis and secularists fear that if Syrians stay, society will become more distinctly Sunni conservative, further marginalising religious minorities, liberals, leftists and others who feel threatened by what they see as increased consolidation of a Sunni national identity under AKP.

Border provinces are particularly prone to tensions, though there have been efforts to restrain and hush them.<sup>41</sup> Host community resentments increased in summer 2016,

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<sup>38</sup> “Onlar *ensar*, *muhacir* ne demek bilmezler” [“They don’t know what *ensar* and *muhacir* mean”], *TRT Haber*, 18 February 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interview, Muzaffer Baca, International Blue Crescent, Istanbul, June 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Few refugees spoken to in Kilis February-March 2016, from children to elderly, had Turkish friends. Crisis Group interview, Muzaffer Baca, International Blue Crescent, Istanbul, June 2016. Gaziantep, economically vibrant and already diverse, is generally regarded as comfortable for Syrians of different ethnic and sectarian identity. One from there said, “we do not feel the urge to hide our ethnic/religious identities because Turkish people treat us as Syrians, not as Kurdish-Syrians, or Christian Syrians or Alawite Syrians”. However, refugees Crisis Group talked to in Gaziantep did not think they would be so comfortable in Hatay, where there is a sizeable local Alawite population.

<sup>41</sup> This was confirmed in Crisis Group interviews, Metin Çorabatır (ex-UNHCR spokesperson) and UNDP. “There is a risk of tension between refugee and host community, particularly in provinces where the Syrian population is most concentrated. The host community says they can’t speak the same language, and do not fit in; Turkish citizens say the hospital lines have grown too much, the

first after the citizenship prospect was voiced, then after the coup attempt. Manifestation is limited to sporadic violent flare-ups, but the potential is evident.<sup>42</sup>

### A. *The Growing Anti-refugee Sentiment*

Particularly after the 2014-2015 influx and realisation of the problem's long-term nature, the broad-based, positive "having guests" sentiment gradually began to fade. Surveys repeatedly find a widely-held view that refugees are a burden. In 2013 nearly 60 per cent of the population thought immigration negatively impacted tourism, labour and the economy broadly. A seminal 2014 study underscored these findings as well as the cultural distance and other insurmountable barriers to integration host communities perceived. Over 80 per cent of respondents opposed citizenship; roughly 70 per cent wanted more restrictive policies, even sending Syrians home.<sup>43</sup>

Far less welcoming of Syrians as neighbours than guests, 81 per cent of the public believes they have not integrated well. A push by political leaders for such integration would likely be unpopular, because the public has not wanted to hear that the refugees will stay. Opposition parties have started to point out, as did CHP deputy head Veli Ağbaba, that the high rate of Syrian children not going to school holds "the danger of a lost generation. They will exponentially join crime waves. We are at a critical juncture to prevent this by urgently integrating them in our education system and providing vocational training".<sup>44</sup> The burden on services, declining job opportunities, deteriorating trade relations in regions nearest to Syria and fear of refugees as a security risk are complaints voters share irrespective of party.

#### 1. Refugees as an economic burden

With approximately 3.5 million Turkish citizens unemployed, resentment is high about Syrians competing for jobs, mostly in the informal sector, where they are willing to work for lower pay. In Izmir, disgruntled citizens pointed out that seasonal (unskilled) workers used to get 50 TL a day (around \$16), but Syrians accepted 30 TL (around \$10); others said shoemakers used to hire out for 80 TL (around \$25), but Syrians do the work for 12 TL (around \$4). Syrians are also seen as favoured in

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labour market has become harder to penetrate, they can't find jobs, university seats are taken away." Crisis Group Skype interview, UNDP representatives based in Ankara, 24 October 2016.

<sup>42</sup> There was sporadic violence against Syrians in Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep in June 2016. On 17 July 2016, following the coup attempt, a group that organised through social media burnt workplaces and homes of Syrian refugees in Ankara's Altındağ district. Riot police used tear gas to break up ensuing violence. "Suriyeli Mültecilerin Dükkanlarına Saldırı" ["Shops of Syrian refugees attacked"] *Milliyet*, 17 July 2016. An attack on a street in Konya populated by refugees injured five Syrians. "Can nöbeti ... Alevilere taciz Suriyeliye linç" ["Life watch ... Alevi harassed, Syrians lynched"], *Cumhuriyet*, 18 July 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Transatlantic Trends: Topline Data, 2013. The German Marshall Fund of the U.S. (GMF), <http://trends.gmfus.org/transatlantic-trends-2013/>. Murat Erdoğan, "Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration Research", Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Centre (HUGO), November 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Turkish Perceptions Survey, GMF, 2015, pp. 12-13, [www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Turkey\\_Survey\\_2015\\_web1.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Turkey_Survey_2015_web1.pdf). Crisis Group interview, Metin Çorabatır, ex-UNHCR spokesperson, Ankara, June 2016. "CHP Genel Başkan Yardımcısı Ağbaba: Sığınmacıların tamamı güvencesiz bir şekilde çalışıyorlar" ["CHP Deputy Chairman Ağbaba: All refugees are working without protection"], Anadolu Agency, 20 June 2016.

public services, for example using health facilities, unlike citizens, for free and without paying into social security. Reaction to the citizenship idea and social benefits that Syrians but not low-income Turkish citizens enjoy showed the potential for serious backlash, from not only opposition but also AKP constituencies.<sup>45</sup>

Border provinces, especially Hatay, were particularly hit by border closures, though there was compensation in some, such as Gaziantep, where Syrians enlivened the economy as consumers and cheap labour and money flowed in from Syrian businessmen abroad and international aid bodies.<sup>46</sup> Landowners, taxi drivers and construction managers who employ manual workers told Crisis Group their net economic balance was positive.<sup>47</sup> Economists say refugees buy goods such as refrigerators, cooking equipment, cooking oil, flour and building material, so contribute to growth. The flipside is inflation in regions with many refugees tops the national average.<sup>48</sup>

Hardest hit have arguably been unskilled construction and agricultural workers, as well as those in textile workshops. The potential for friction is highest among such groups, first of all because they compete for the same jobs and public assistance, but also because such positions were largely held by Kurds who had previously moved from south-east Anatolia to western city outskirts, and thus ethnic, ideological fault lines also exist.<sup>49</sup> Municipalities where many refugees have settled complain they do not receive additional money from Ankara to help with the burden and are not included in refugee-related decisions.<sup>50</sup> They can access international funds on a project basis, but their budget from the central government should be adjusted to the refugee numbers they serve. A Municipal Law amendment to do this was drafted in April but not sent to parliament.

To reduce host community concerns, the positive economic aspects should be better communicated. The paid-in capital of Syrian-owned businesses in Turkey was about \$220 million in 2015. As of March 2016, Syrians in Gaziantep had established over 600 businesses.<sup>51</sup> It is also important to explore the trickle-down benefits for host communities of international aid used to help border provinces. This may be

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<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group interviews, citizens, NGOs, Izmir, February 2016. "Suriyelilere vatandaşlık: AKP seçmeni ne diyor?" ["Citizenship for Syrians: What do AKP voters say?"], BBC Turkish, 13 July 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Trade with Syria was restored at some border gates, as Turkish commercial trucks were able to unload at the border (primarily food items and construction materials) and subsequently reload on to Syrian trucks. This was the case, for example, at the Öncüpınar border crossing, Kilis province, which Crisis Group visited in March 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Gaziantep and Kilis, March 2016.

<sup>48</sup> "Turkish economy grows 4.8 per cent in first quarter", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 June 2016. According to the Turkish Statistics Institute, inflation was a percentage point higher in Gaziantep. "Syrian refugees boost Turkish economy, but for how long?", *Al Monitor*, 6 April 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interview, Turkish businessman and philanthropist, Istanbul, September 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interviews, municipal representatives, Hatay, Istanbul and Izmir districts, January-June 2016. UNDP representatives said, "municipalities tried to extend services but some got overstretched .... they say they have trouble obtaining additional resources to cover the financial burden of the Syrians they now accommodate, and they are not a party to the programs devised at central [Ankara] level". Crisis Group Skype interview, October 2016.

<sup>51</sup> The dollar figure does not include informal firms and money invested directly through real estate deals, front-company transactions, etc. "The impact of Syrian businesses in Turkey", Brookings Institution, 16 March 2016. According to Gaziantep's Chamber of Trade, Syrians had established 614 businesses (mainly in the textile, logistic, footwear and plastic sectors). Gaziantep province hosts some 350,000 refugees, the most after Istanbul. "Over 600 businesses owned and operated by Syrian refugees in Turkey's Gaziantep", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 15 March 2016.

less significant in terms of consumption or trade increase, but more significant where the strengthening of infrastructure (eg, renovation/upgrade of public schools, improved technology in health services, better waste water management, etc.) is concerned.

## 2. Refugees as a security risk

Host communities widely see Syrians as a security risk. Jihadists connected to radical networks active in the war are suspected to have penetrated Turkey, taking advantage of the open border policy. This perception was exacerbated when an IS-linked suicide bomber registered as a refugee killed ten German tourists in Istanbul's historic centre in January. Hatay residents from different walks of life, including aid NGOs who work with refugee children and hospitals, say militants/rebels cross the border for logistics, training and medical care; some name schools they say only (Syrian) martyr children can attend and hospitals where only fighters and their families are accepted and assert the funding sources are unknown.<sup>52</sup> The Turkish intelligence agency gives the police and offices responsible for registering Syrians who apply for temporary protection names of suspected members of terrorist organisations, but forged identity documents are not hard to obtain, and not all Syrians register.

Harassment and petty crime also cause concern. Locals as diverse as a mother with a fourteen-year old daughter in Istanbul and a taxi driver in Hatay complained about too many "young Syrian men on the streets with nothing to do" and that Syrian men have a different upbringing, are relatively unchecked and drive cars with Syrian license plates that cannot be traced.<sup>53</sup> According to a 2014 study, 62 per cent of respondents also believe Syrians in Turkey distort social order and moral values by criminal activity (such as violence, theft, smuggling and prostitution). However, official statistics reveal that the impact of refugees on crime rates is low. According to the police, only 0.33 per cent of Syrians (33 in 10,000) were involved in criminal activity between 2011 and June 2014. According to its governor, Syrians were involved in 2015 in only 1.3 per cent of all criminal cases registered in Gaziantep, where around 220,000 reside.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the sheer weight of the new situation, with large numbers of foreigners suddenly being highly visible in the communities, rumours, xenophobia and deeply rooted anti-Arab sentiments have most likely led to the misconception that Syrian refugees are violent and inclined to criminality. Isolated acts bear a serious risk of being attributed to all Syrians, creating potential for violent reactions from host communities. To counter this prejudice and combat widespread group stereotypes, the government should devise policies and initiate information campaigns that reflect the diversity of the country's Syrian population.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Hatay, June 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Gaziantep, Adana, Istanbul, Kilis, February-March 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Murat Erdoğan, "Syrians in Turkey", op. cit. The percentage of foreign nationals in Turkish prisons has been 1.6-1.8 per cent between 2011 and 2014. Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), [www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=18689](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=18689). "Suriyelilerin adli olaylara karışma oranı on binde 33" ["Ratio of Syrians involved in crime, 33 in 10,000"], Anadolu Agency, 19 September 2014. "Suriyeli Misafirlerimize yönelik çalıştay düzenlendi" ["Workshop organised for our Syrian guests"], Gaziantep Provincial Directorate for Disasters and Emergencies website, December 2015.

## B. Identity and Demographic Balance Concerns

Mistrusting the state/AKP, various minority communities believe the government is strategically settling refugees so as to weaken voter blocs in districts known to support the opposition on sectarian or ethnic grounds. They consider Syrians a threat to Turkey's demographic balance and an instrument by which to reshape its national identity.

Minorities ranging from Alevis and Kurds to secularists worry that long-term refugee settlement will mean their own further marginalisation in neighbourhoods and districts where they have been dominant. The risk of changes to the character of their hometowns is commonly voiced, such as "our women feel like they have to dress more conservatively; if they vote in local elections this place will fall under AKP control; they are ruining our social cohesion". The suspicion that President Erdoğan will use Syrian votes to tip elections in his favour fuels this negative disposition.<sup>55</sup>

Residents of provinces such as Kahramanmaraş, Diyarbakır and İzmir have alleged the government aims to change demographics with camps or subsidised residential complexes for Syrians. The claims of refugees crowding out Turkish minorities became entangled with the debate over the March 2016 EU-Turkey refugee agreement because it was announced that six camps would be built with EU financial aid. In April-July, speculation spread that they would be in strongly secularist Dikili (İzmir province) and majority Alevi areas such as Sivricehöyük village (Kahramanmaraş province), Divriği, İmranlı, Dara, Zara, Hafik, Yıldızeli (Sivas province) and Mazgirt (Tunceli province). Though authorities say these allegations are groundless, they have not released information about where the camps will be, except for Sivricehöyük, where construction is underway. While distrust of AKP is important in shaping these fears, so is history. The spokesperson of the pro-Kurdish HDP explained:

Historical memories are evoked by the systematic relocation plans of the political leadership. There are many examples in our history of forced movements of political nature. In the '50s and '60s, Kurds were moved to the [western] provinces and tensions with residents erupted.<sup>56</sup>

### 1. Sectarian cleavages

Turkey's Alevi community, between 15 and 20 per cent of the total population, has been especially concerned about the settlement and permanence of Syrian refugees. Secular-minded, it has always distrusted parties representing political Islam and traditionally votes for CHP. Its fear of religious extremism is rooted in experience of violence. Where Alevis were historically concentrated in Anatolia, such incidents ended with relocation and a much diminished presence in old hometowns.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Sığınmacıları kullanarak demografik yapıyı bozacaklar: Oy vermiyorsanız oy vereni buluruz!" ["They are going to use the refugees to disrupt the demographic structure: If you do not vote for us, we will find those who will!"], *Birgün*, 31 March 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ayhan Bilgen, HDP parliamentarian, Ankara, 14 June 2016.

<sup>57</sup> In the 2012 elections, some 75 per cent of Alevis are thought to have voted CHP; in the 2015 elections, according to Crisis Group interviews, Alevi community leaders (Ankara, June 2016), Alevi families are thought to have split votes between HDP and CHP strategically to ensure HDP would pass the 10 per cent electoral threshold, and AKP would not secure an absolute majority. According to a Washington Institute article, AKP parliamentarian Mustafa Albayrak, while discussing the demand for government support for houses of worship (*cemevis*), said that would "open the path

Alevis have long-standing demands and security concerns that AKP governments have not met.<sup>58</sup> They have little representation in the upper echelons of the party, feel discriminated against because their houses of worship (*cemevis*) lack legal status and complain of derogatory language and lack of protection from the state and government. Recently, they were alarmed because the Bosphorus Bridge opened in August was named for Yavuz Sultan Selim, a sixteenth century Ottoman ruler who massacred tens of thousands of Alevis. The legacy of such massacres has made many especially sensitive to speculation since January about refugee resettlement.<sup>59</sup> The head of a prominent Alevi NGO, asserted: "Alevis will not feel safe and will move from these areas, so the settlements will amount to displacement".<sup>60</sup>

General Alevi distrust has been exacerbated by the government's stance on the war in Syria. AKP's categorical anti-Assad position carries sectarian insinuations from the Alevi perspective. After the May 2013 bombing in the border town of Reyhanlı, President Erdoğan, assuming pro-Assad elements were responsible, said, "53 of my Sunni citizens were martyred".<sup>61</sup> It was later discovered that IS was responsible, and Erdoğan's words came to symbolise his disposition to think in us vs. them terms, geared at exclusively protecting Sunnis.

Besides Sunnification of society, a widespread Alevi concern is that refugees will be particularly hostile to them since they are escaping an Alawite regime.<sup>62</sup> Fear that Syria's sectarian conflict could spill into Turkey, resulting in local confrontations, is particularly pronounced in the border province of Hatay, where approximately half the population is Arab Alawite, with close historic and economic connections to the Syrian Alawites. At the peak of the refugee influx, some Alawite villages in the Samandağ district of Hatay apparently armed themselves to prevent refugees from entering. They say they fear both jihadist infiltration and that real refugees might consider

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for subsidies to devil worshippers". "Turkey's Slow-Burning Alevi Unrest", 24 March 2014. Zeidan, David. "The Alevi of Anatolia." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3.4 (1999), pp. 74-89.

<sup>58</sup> See Crisis Group Europe Report N°230, *The Rising Costs of Turkey's Syrian Quagmire*, 30 April 2014, p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Between 1937 and 1938, the state put down a suspected rebellion in what many consider a "Turkification" campaign in Tunceli province, killing well over 10,000 and exiling many more. In a 2011 official apology, President Erdoğan said the operation was "planned step by step" and "one of the most tragic events in our near history". The next major incident occurred in Kahramanmaraş, where an attack on a right-wing cinema on 19 December 1978 escalated into a week of reprisals on Alevi neighbourhoods and establishments during which 100 lives, 100 homes and 200 shops were lost. In Sivas on 2 July 1993, 35 people, mostly Alevis, attending the cultural Pir Sultan Abdal festival were burned to death in a hotel by local Sunnis.

<sup>60</sup> "The Turkish state is using the refugees to change the demographic structure of the population to benefit itself. They are planning to settle refugees in provinces where there is Alevi concentration. ... So why place them in an area that will cause tension. Their culture and traditions are not harmonious". Crisis Group interview, chairman of an Alevi association based in Ankara, 15 June 2016.

<sup>61</sup> "Erdoğan: Reyhanlı'da 53 Sunni Vatandaşımız Şehit Edildi!" ["Erdoğan: 53 of Our Sunni Citizens have been Martyred in Reyhanlı"], *Radikal*, 14 June 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Alevis and Alawites have commonalities; both are variants of Shia Islam, and members of both communities tend to oppose Islamist ideology and governance. However, they are distinct in historical evolution, culture, and religious practices. Alawites in Turkey are of Arab ethnic origin, are concentrated mostly in the province of Hatay, have close ties to Syrian Alawites and are estimated to total less than one million. Alevis, of both Kurdish and Turkish ethnic origin, reside mostly in central and eastern Anatolia, as well as in cities in the west of Turkey, and are estimated to total between fifteen and twenty million.

them an extension of the Syrian president's clan and attack them. "Many refugees hold Alawites responsible for the civil war", a local elected official said. "Sectarian conflict may be triggered".<sup>63</sup>

In February 2016, bidding began for construction of a settlement camp to house 25,000-27,000 refugees on a field next to Sivricehöyük, one of 24 Alevi villages of Dulkadiroğlu district in Kahramanmaraş province. The village of around 3,000, joined by Alevi associations from across the country, organised days of protests. Construction began in March, and in April protestors clashed with the local gendarmerie. The movement received support from several members of opposition parties and social media campaigns such as #OvamaDokunma (#Don'tTouchMyField). The province's governorate banned the protests in June. The dispute is delicate, because coming across as anti-refugee is also a turn-off for voters. When HDP Co-chair Demirtaş supported the protestors, pro-government media attacked him as anti-refugee, and he defended the protestors as opposed not to the refugees but rather to AKP's ill-intentions.<sup>64</sup>

Claims of similar projects for Divriği, Sivas and Mazgirt, Tunceli circulated in government-critical outlets. An online platform published a letter allegedly from the governor of Sivas to the mayor of Divriği in April asking him to "urgently" find a site for a camp in line with the EU deal.<sup>65</sup> In response to speculation about a camp in Mazgirt, the district mayor said:

If the region is to be alienated or changed in line with [some people's] own strategic aims and political understandings, nobody will accept this. A camp here would mean the death of the beliefs, experiences of the people .... No state or power can play games on this geography or beliefs of a people.<sup>66</sup>

Authorities and AKP representatives deny there is a systematic assimilation and disruption policy and stress there is no political agenda behind placement of refugee camps. Given historical traumas and identity cleavages as they relate to the war in Syria, however, opting not to locate settlements near Alevi communities would be prudent. Moreover, the government should engage with local communities that have identity-related fears about refugee infiltration into their neighbourhoods. Decisions on refugees and camps are made centrally and coordinated with appointed governors of the provinces, while locals say they feel imposed upon, particularly because no one has established dialogue with them and listened to their security and other concerns. The absence of communication channels and transparency over refugee settlement creates grounds for speculation, much of it unfounded, to multiply.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Hatay, June 2016. Alawites there said they had links with the Syrian Alawites across the border, were not sympathetic to President Bashar al-Assad but were more concerned about ascendance of jihadists and Sunni militants than continuation of his rule. Mehmet Caner, local elected Sivricehöyük official, quoted in "Turkish villagers rally against refugee plans, citing fears of Sunni extremists", *Hürriyet*, 7 April 2016.

<sup>64</sup> "Turkey: Container Cities, Uprooting Alevis, Fear of Infiltrating Jihadists". Gatestone Institute, 26 April 2016. "Demirtaş 'Mültecileri istemiyoruz' eylemcilerini savundu", *Sabah*, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> "Maraş'tan sonra Sivas Divriği: Alevi Nüfusu Yoğun İlçeye Mülteci Kampı Hazırlığı" ["After Maraş is Divriği, Sivas: Plans for a Refugee Camp in Alevi Majority District"], *Diken*, 12 May 2016.

<sup>66</sup> "Valilik açıkladı, Tunceli'de sığınmacı kampı kurulmuyor" ["Governorate announcement: No refugee camp to be built in Tunceli"], *CNN Türk*, 2 June 2016. District Mayor Tekin Türkel is of the leftist ÖDP (Freedom and Solidarity Party). His reaction was followed by a governorate statement that no refugee camp was planned in Tunceli.

## 2. Kurds, Liberals and Secularists

The Kurdish communities in Turkey, particularly those sympathetic to the Kurdish national movement, have their own reasons to be critical of Ankara's Syria policy. They view it as bent on containing Syrian Kurds, specifically the PYD, from gaining ground in northern Syria. Much like Alevis, they also see refugees as a security and political risk and worry they will be settled in the restive Kurdish majority districts in the south east. Those districts traditionally support the Kurdish movement and vote HDP, some with an electoral margin that might be disrupted if Syrians could vote.

Clashes between PKK urban militia forces and state security have led to displacement of over 300,000 Kurds and to suspicion that rapid demographic transformation would follow. Memories of assimilation policies toward Kurds in the '80s and '90s have led to fears reconstruction would be part of efforts to, "change the demographic structure, and balance out the Kurdish population".<sup>67</sup>

Secularist segments of the population share a version of this sentiment. "Hand-picked groups are being distinctly relocated ... [to] traditionally CHP voting places", that party's deputy chairman and spokesperson said. "I talk to people there who would normally be open to refugees because they are social democratic and liberal, but they think the ruling party is settling refugees to change voting figures in their district, gerrymandering, so they are adamantly opposed to refugee settlements".<sup>68</sup> Plans for a temporary detention centre in Dikili, Izmir created an outcry among residents in spring 2016. The facility, to temporarily house up to 72,000 refugees returned to Turkey under the March 2016 EU agreement, would be 110km from the centre of Izmir, a CHP stronghold. Dikili residents Crisis Group interviewed in April 2016 noted news of similar plans for centres in the tourist hub of Çeşme; despite an assurance from former Governor Mustafa Toprak that refugees will be transferred from the centre within 24 hours, many expressed fear of long-term effects.

Pro-refugee local NGO representatives say the city's residents, fearing heightened security risks and cultural dissonance, were unwelcoming and urged the government to host refugees elsewhere.<sup>69</sup> The Izmir metropolitan municipality and some district municipalities have refused to provide services or had no resources for refugees.

Ideologically-based mistrust of the government is at the centre of these threat perceptions, but the result is a closed mindset about humanitarian approaches toward refugees and unwillingness to acknowledge practical economic reasons for their settlement in Western metropolitan centres where job opportunities are higher. Some experts try to de-politicise the debate:

There is indeed an emotional closeness to President Erdoğan. Syrians in Turkey name their babies after him, but deducing from this they are strategically being instrumentalised is a stretch. The fear voting rights will be granted ... to bring about a favourable outcome for AKP has been there since 2011. Secularists see Arabic writing all around in the big cities ... as a sign secularism is under threat. Alevis in Hatay fear Sunni Syrians will take control of the province. While the

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<sup>67</sup> CHP Istanbul parliamentary deputy Erdoğan Toprak in his report on Turkey's refugees. "Türkiye'nin yeni seçmenleri: Suriyeliler" ["Turkey's new voters: Syrians"], Deutsche Welle, 18 March 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interview, Selin Sayek Böke, Ankara, 13 June 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview, Kadir Beyaztaş, assistant general coordinator, Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), 15 June 2016.

result may be Sunnification in some cases, how much is deliberate, how much inevitable is hard to know. Particularly if naturalised, the Syrians cannot easily be moved here and there; ... they won't agree to move where they do not want to.<sup>70</sup>

Systematic intercommunal dialogue between Turkish citizens and Syrians can also help disperse the notion the latter are a homogeneous group that will unconditionally support Erdoğan and his agenda. A targeted government communication strategy is needed to explain policies, approaches and dilemmas to the public comprehensively, so as to pre-empt misunderstandings that may feed tensions among host communities.

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<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, migration expert, Ankara, June 2016.

#### IV. Political Polarisation and Opposition Conundrums

Polarisation of society, with almost half the nation deeply concerned about the president's consolidation of power and interpreting every government move in that context, is an obstacle to healthy debate on any issue. That parties have distinct identity-based constituencies, ethnic, sectarian and cultural, renders discussion of refugee integration even more politically charged. Belief that Syrians would vote for the AKP if citizens further impeded constructive discourse.<sup>71</sup>

Absence of productive dialogue is not specific to the refugee crisis. For almost a decade, AKP and opposition parties have been unable to come together constructively. Almost every issue is seen in zero sum terms. This polarised national scene gives the CHP, MHP and HDP no incentive to ease the government's challenges with respect to the refugees, and trying to represent the sensitivities of their diverse constituencies makes it even more difficult for them to be forthcoming about integration. The main opposition party's spokesperson said:

It is necessary to prepare the public, but we cannot do this because of the increasingly ingrained political polarisation. There cannot be an open national debate based on rational parameters such as security, services or the labour market. Everything is perceived in the framework of polarisation.<sup>72</sup>

Opposition parties at large view the refugee issue as AKP's fault, due to an unsound Syria policy they consider ideologically motivated: unequivocal in opposition to Assad, vigorous in support of anti-Assad armed Sunni rebels and lenient toward IS, at least until 2014.<sup>73</sup> In the run-up to the June 2015 elections, the leader of the CHP, the main opposition party, promised, without articulating a clear plan, to end the war if elected and send Syrians back home, where they would be happier.<sup>74</sup>

Opposition parties also face the conundrum that while most of the public does not support permanent residence, it shares the pride in contrasting Turkey's compassion with what is widely viewed in the country as European Islamophobia. This dichotomy contributes to the incoherence of public positions, because it is politically expedient neither to appear anti-refugee, nor to engage on proposals to facilitate long-term integration.

Complex voting bases also limit opposition party manoeuvrability. CHP, which wins some one fourth of the total vote, has a secularist-minded urban constituency

<sup>71</sup> This is exacerbated by social polarisation. 74 per cent of survey respondents did not want their children to play with those of parents who vote for another party. "Turkey: Divided We Stand", GMF, April 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, Selin Sayek Böke, CHP spokesperson, Ankara, June 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Deputy CHP MP Selina Doğan said in parliament, "the underlying reason for the refugee crisis having deepened so much is the wrong and short-sighted Syria policy of the AKP. What the AKP calls strategic depth, has in Syria – just like around the world – gotten stuck in the muddle. The AKP with a sectarian approach and with dreams of 'reaching Damascus in three hours' has incited the war in Syria by demonstrating it is unable to read foreign policy and international [power] balances ...", [www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b10401h.htm](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b10401h.htm), 21 June 2016.

<sup>74</sup> "CHP's latest election promise of sending back Syrian refugees in Turkey comes under criticism", *Daily Sabah*, 23 April 2016. Earlier CHP statements followed the same line. "CHP head pledges to get Turkey out of troubling situation", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 11 June 2015.

and strong Alevi support base in east/central Anatolia and western provinces.<sup>75</sup> It tries both to respond to the perception of Alevi and urban middle class secularist supporters that refugees threaten their identity and safety and also to find sustainable solutions. A CHP parliamentarian explained: "Our hands are tied. When we publically vocalise the concerns of an Alevi village, for example, this is used against us to brand us as taking the side of Alevis, which [is] a turn off for the support we get from the Sunni population".<sup>76</sup> After the 2015 elections, representatives started emphasising the need to come to terms with the reality that most Syrians would stay, so must be integrated. A June 2016 report by the party's refugee research commission drew attention to the mounting integration challenges and outlined recommendations, including that efforts should be coordinated by establishing a Migration Ministry, and that the geographic limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention should be lifted.<sup>77</sup>

The MHP has grappled with a similar dilemma: to be supportive of Ankara's open door policy while appealing to its nationalist, security-conscious, West-sceptic constituency. Before the June 2015 elections, its leadership emphasised the huge economic cost of Syrian refugees and said Turkey could face higher crime rates due to the increasing numbers. A helping hand for "guests" is right, the party chairman said, but not turning Turkey into a depot of refugees to serve European interests, and certainly not giving them the right to live here permanently.<sup>78</sup> The MHP has also been particularly vocal about the security threats refugees may pose:

... refugees have definitely turned into a national security problem. The issue of uncontrolled Syrians is a matter of survival for Turkey. Is there any guarantee that in the short, medium, or long-term all these people will not become pawns/tools of terrorist organisations or enemies of Turkey?<sup>79</sup>

Pro-Kurdish HDP purports to side with the downtrodden but needs also to be receptive to a left-leaning constituency that is inherently against Ankara's Syria policy and concerned about Arabisation and rising Sunni Islamism in Turkey. Its June 2015 election program urged lifting the geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which it considered a violation of the right to life of millions who fled war and suffering, and emphasised refugee integration.<sup>80</sup> Reflecting concerns of Kurdish host communities, however, it has also alleged that Ankara does demographic engineering by settling Sunni-Arab Syrians in majority Kurdish and Alevi provincial centres and rural areas and cited concerns of jihadist activity in camps.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> The CHP won 25.4 per cent of the vote in the November 2015 election, second after AKP's 49.4 per cent. "Turkey election: Ruling AKP regains majority", BBC, 2 November 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interview, CHP parliamentarian, June 2016. There have been cases in the past when President Erdoğan used the Alevi roots of the CHP chairman to undermine the party's appeal among mainstream majority-Sunni voters.

<sup>77</sup> [www.igamder.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SINIRLAR-ARASINDA-BASKI2.pdf](http://www.igamder.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SINIRLAR-ARASINDA-BASKI2.pdf).

<sup>78</sup> "Toplumsal Onarım ve Huzurlu Gelecek: Bizimle Yürü Türkiye" ["Social Repair and Peaceful Future: Walks with Turkey"], MHP official website, 7 June 2015. "Bahçeli: Hükümetin yanındayız" ["Bahçeli: We are with the government"], *Takvim*, 26 April 2016.

<sup>79</sup> "Ne kadar bela varsa, Türk düşmanlığında birleştirdiler" ["All the menaces out there came together in enmity to Turks"], Doğan News Agency, 19 February 2016, citing deputy head Celal Adan.

<sup>80</sup> [www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDP%20Se%C3%A7im%20Bildirgesi%20Tam%20Metin.pdf](http://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDP%20Se%C3%A7im%20Bildirgesi%20Tam%20Metin.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Explaining the party position, co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş said, "... you [the government] are the ones who are going to send 27,000 Sunni Syrians to Maraş Pazarçık, an area with a total Alevi pop-

Judging by their evolving discourse, each party has recently begun to come to terms with the reality that most Syrians will stay in Turkey. However, and despite engagement between AKP, CHP and MHP on national security issues such as the operations against what the state calls FETÖ/PDY, dialogue on the thorny refugee issues has not begun. In the meantime, engagement with HDP is virtually absent, with the party marginalised by the government because of alleged PKK ties, and ten of its deputies arrested in November 2016, including its two co-chairs. The concerns and proposals of all parliamentary opposition parties should be seriously addressed so as to alleviate legitimate concerns of their constituencies, safeguard social cohesion and avert inter-communal conflict.

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ulation of 3,000. Camps will be built in Dikili, Çeşme .... to achieve a sectarian change .... You [the government] are not opening refugee camps to independent monitoring. There are serious allegations... of IS and Nusra receiving training there. There are claims they massacre [people] in Syria, then come back to these camps [and commit] sexual abuse, prostitution, rape .... are we not right to look for other aims here?”. “Demirtaş’tan Bahçeli’ye: Kan görünce yanaklarına can geliyor” [“Demirtaş to Bahçeli: When you see blood your cheeks flush”], *Cumhuriyet*, 5 April 2016.

## V. Protection, Integration versus Citizenship

When speculation that refugees would acquire citizenship first arose before the 2014 local elections, opposition parliamentarians submitted written inquiries, asking for clarification on the plans regarding the legal status of the Syrians. Authorities and rights-based NGOs issued press statements that the speculation was unfounded and intended to create a climate of hatred and resentment against refugees. The speculation indeed appeared groundless, until the president unexpectedly announced in July 2016 that citizenship would be granted to Syrians currently under temporary protection.<sup>82</sup> Nationalist sentiments against refugees and allegations of a secret AKP agenda to increase its vote base increased and dominated politics until the coup attempt in mid-month. The hashtag #ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiYorum (#IDon'tWantSyriansInMyCountry) started trending worldwide.

The AKP incrementally nuanced the citizenship prospect, emphasising it would depend on criteria for naturalising only 300,000 Syrians and their families, chosen for educational or technical skills to contribute to the economy. It also underlined that meticulous security checks would be performed to ensure that candidates had no criminal record or connection to terrorist networks. The interior ministry was reported to be working on a dual citizenship formula and a concept of “exceptional citizenship” for those and their families who could make “extraordinary” contributions in “industrial investments, science, technology, economy, sports, arts and culture”.<sup>83</sup>

The declaration that Syrians would be granted citizenship presented opposition parties with a clear opportunity, given the prospect's unpopularity. The CHP called for a referendum. The MHP leader, playing the nationalist card, said, “our citizens are Turkish, our homeland is Turkish, and our future will be Turkish”. HDP leader Demirtaş initially called for a referendum but reversed himself, saying basic human rights and liberties issues could not be put to a vote. AKP representatives have strongly objected to allegations of electoral calculations and emphasised the party's humanitarian intent.<sup>84</sup>

Syrians' current status is not sustainable. Once obtained, there is no time limit for their temporary protection, but there is no clear legal provision on how those under temporary protection can transfer to permanent legal status. The only options for acquiring long-term residency are to apply for a legal short-term residence permit or

<sup>82</sup> “Suriyeliler 30 Mart'ta oy kullanacak mı?” [“Will Syrians vote on 30 March?”], *HaberTürk*, 5 February 2014. “MÜLTECİ-DER'den Suriyeli mültecilerin oy kullanma iddiasına yanıt” [“Response from MÜLTECİ-DER [Association for Solidarity with Refugees] on the allegation that Syrian refugees will vote”], *Bianet*, 28 March 2014. “Turkey plans to offer citizenship to Syrian refugees”, *The Telegraph*, 3 July 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Tolga Şardan, “Suriyelilere ‘istisnai vatandaşlık’ formülü” [“Formula of ‘exceptional citizenship’ for Syrians”], *Milliyet*, 15 July 2016.

<sup>84</sup> “Muhalefetten ‘Suriyelilere vatandaşlık’ tepkisi” [“Opposition's Response to Citizenship for Syrians”], *Al Jazeera Türk*, 12 July 2016. “I also want to correct a mistake I made in our parliamentary group meeting: I wrongly expressed a matter not the official policy position of our party. I did injustice to these people by saying it should be put up for a referendum. A referendum cannot be held in matters concerning fundamental rights and freedoms”. “Demirtaş: Referandum diyerek haksızlık yaptım” [“Demirtaş: I did injustice calling for a referendum”], *Al Jazeera Türk*, 14 July 2016. “The AKP looks at the refugee issue only from a humanitarian and protective point of view, not a ‘political gains’ perspective. ... Those who claim that this is our strategy ... are trying to fuel tensions”. Crisis Group interview, Afif Demirkıran, AKP member of parliament, Istanbul, September 2016.

find an employer willing to sponsor a work permit. Both are time consuming, expensive and subject to bureaucratic obstacles. Moreover, as explained above, Syrians in Turkey lack incentive to try to become part of the formal labour market. It appears the government recognises the problem but does not know how to resolve it.<sup>85</sup>

As many Syrians still say they would like to go home once the war ends, policymakers insist they must keep options open. "As long as the future of Syria is uncertain, their expectations as well as our policies will remain ambiguous", a senior bureaucrat said. An AKP parliamentarian, however, said citizenship would close the door neither for Syrians to go home nor go to Europe. Syrians do not believe citizenship will be available anytime soon.<sup>86</sup> From an international norms and human rights perspective, Turkey should recognise the refugee status of those who qualify based on country-of-origin circumstances. This would require lifting its geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, not only for Syrians but also for other nationalities, and strengthening its individual protection system and administrative capacity to process asylum applications.<sup>87</sup> However, Ankara is unlikely to take this step, as it is concerned it might encourage so many new refugees that the country would face unmanageable administrative and economic burdens.<sup>88</sup>

It is uncertain whether the government will open fast-track naturalisation, but it is clear that doing so could cause problems. Granting Syrians citizenship without targeted integration policies or applying different criteria to them than to non-Syrians could be seen as unfair by both host communities and third-country refugees. President Erdoğan acknowledged the risks at the 2016 UN General Assembly: "We initiated the process of citizenship for the refugees .... This brings about social risk problems. We took this risk and do not regret it".<sup>89</sup> But it is essential to give Syrians a long-term perspective in some form, with clearly-defined steps and conditions for meaningful integration in education, the labour market and social life.

If the citizenship vision is to be pursued, it needs to be done with more clarity. Reactions of host communities show the necessity of a healthy political debate. It is also important to take account of apparent divisions among the Syrians themselves. Low-income and low-skilled groups seem to have less appetite for citizenship due to tax and social benefits they might lose. Interviews revealed that the temporary pro-

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<sup>85</sup> "There is no clear idea how to solve the issue, so the president, as in other instances, throws something onto the agenda, and gauges ... reactions". Crisis Group interview, Turkish migration expert, Ankara, September 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, September 2016; Afif Demirkıran, AKP MP, Istanbul, September 2016; Syrian refugee, Istanbul, October 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Human rights organisations draw attention to Turkey's preferential treatment of some migrant groups and neglect of others. Amnesty International reported Turkey hosts more than 400,000 non-Syrian refugees, mainly from Iraq and Afghanistan, but also Iran, Somalia and Palestine. While Syrians can apply to the state for temporary protection, others can apply for international protection via UNHCR, a multi-year process during which they have only limited state protection. Ankara's policy has been criticised as preferential based on migrant groups' ethnic and religious traits. Following the announcement of possible citizenship for Syrians, the interior minister said Ankara would grant citizenship to around 17,000 Ahıska Turks and justified this by reference to common ethnic roots. "Güvenli Olmayan Sığınak" ["Unsafe Shelter"], Amnesty International, July 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Experts Crisis Group interviewed said Turkey's approach is becoming obsolete, as migrants from third countries will come irrespective of whether Ankara maintains the geographical limitation. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, October 2016.

<sup>89</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Vatandaşlık sürecini başlattık" ["President Erdoğan: We have initiated the citizenship process"], *Sabah*, 20 September 2016.

tection regime is perceived as more advantageous, especially for lower-class Syrians.<sup>90</sup> Others more concerned about their legal status and future in the country, such as skilled workers looking for equal opportunities or those concerned about training/education and work prospects, seem to welcome the citizenship prospect more.

Constructing an inclusive citizenship definition in the constitution is necessary to lay the policy groundwork. Changing Article 66, which defines citizenship as being Turkish, is crucial for designing a more inclusive national identity. It reads: "Everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk". Amendment is also a longstanding, legitimate demand of the Kurdish movement that all four main political parties considered during talks on a new constitution in 2012-2013. It would be crucial to ensuring that Syrian, Kurdish and other ethnicities feel they are equal members of Turkey's social fabric. A high-level AKP bureaucrat agreed: "We need a new, inclusive citizenship definition in the constitution before we can start implementing new policies on the naturalisation of Syrians".<sup>91</sup> Given the deadlock among parties over amendment, however, it is highly likely that offering citizenship en masse to Syrians will be delayed.

Policy should thus prioritise sustainable integration, with or without citizenship. It should also take account of long-term challenges unintegrated Syrians could pose for Turkey and mitigate risks associated with a potentially marginalised social group.

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<sup>90</sup> "Suriyelilere vatandaşlığa neden karşı çıkılıyor?" ["Why the opposition to citizenship for Syrians?"], BBC Turkish, 5 July 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interview, Turkish state official working with prime minister, Ankara, September 2016.

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## VI. Conclusion

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Turkey's aid and support to in-country Syrians has been commendable; 2016 in particular has marked an improvement in integration opportunities. The decrease in irregular migrants and asylum seekers crossing to Greece, or drowning trying, is also noteworthy. However, risks prevail. Though for now civilians fleeing the war zones are staying in the country as IDPs, new influxes from Syria and Iraq to Turkey may take place that would make it even more important for the EU and Turkey to coordinate, not only to meet basic needs and ensure sustainable integration of Syrians in Turkey, but also to curb migratory flows to the EU and, more generally, for Turkish stability. Consideration of saturation limit and absorption capacity is a necessity.

All sides need to be cognisant of the risk and consequences of the Turkey-EU deal unravelling. Ankara and Brussels need each other but are heading for a collision. Ankara threatens to withdraw from the agreement if visa liberalisation does not result. Anti-EU sentiment is soaring and will increase if visa requirements are not lifted, but the authoritarian turn in Turkey diminishes prospects. European diplomats say too many Turkish citizens may qualify for asylum under current circumstances.

The low figures the EU is willing to accept make Turkish authorities unwilling to engage on refugee rights. Since April, only some 2,300 have been resettled from Turkey to the EU; before the April deal, 4,000 were settled in total from there, Lebanon and Jordan. The July 2015 EU commitment was to take a total of 22,504 in 2015-2016. This and EU fear of a new influx also bring an unhealthy dynamic to the relationship that permeates other layers, including discussion on rule of law and human rights issues in Turkey.

More resources must be channelled to Syrians in Turkey, with a focus on improving access to education and jobs. While devising the required policies, local dynamics and political sensitivities should not be overlooked. Mechanisms are needed to encourage consensus-building with opposition parties, as is a dispersal approach that does not violate host communities' notion of fairness. All this is vital to prevent long-term social tensions and accustom Syrians to a social and political reality in Turkey considerably different from their own and little understood in Europe.

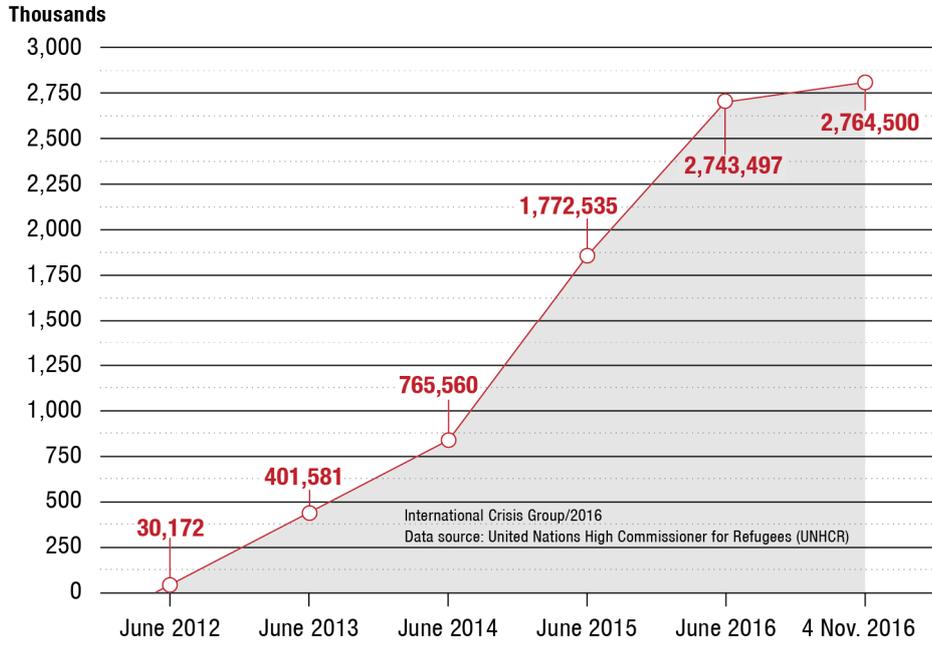
Turkey's temporary protection regime is not sustainable given the conflicts on the country's borders. A constructive national dialogue on refugee integration and an inclusive definition of citizenship are needed. Ankara should devise and implement not just for Syrians but for all migrant groups a coordinated strategy that takes the interests and concerns of multiple stakeholders into account. Ultimately, however, resolving the core problem requires a more concerted effort from all stakeholders to end the Syrian conflict and reconstruct that devastated land.

**Ankara/Brussels, 30 November 2016**

Appendix A: Map of Turkey



Appendix B: Number of Registered Syrians in Turkey (2012-2016)



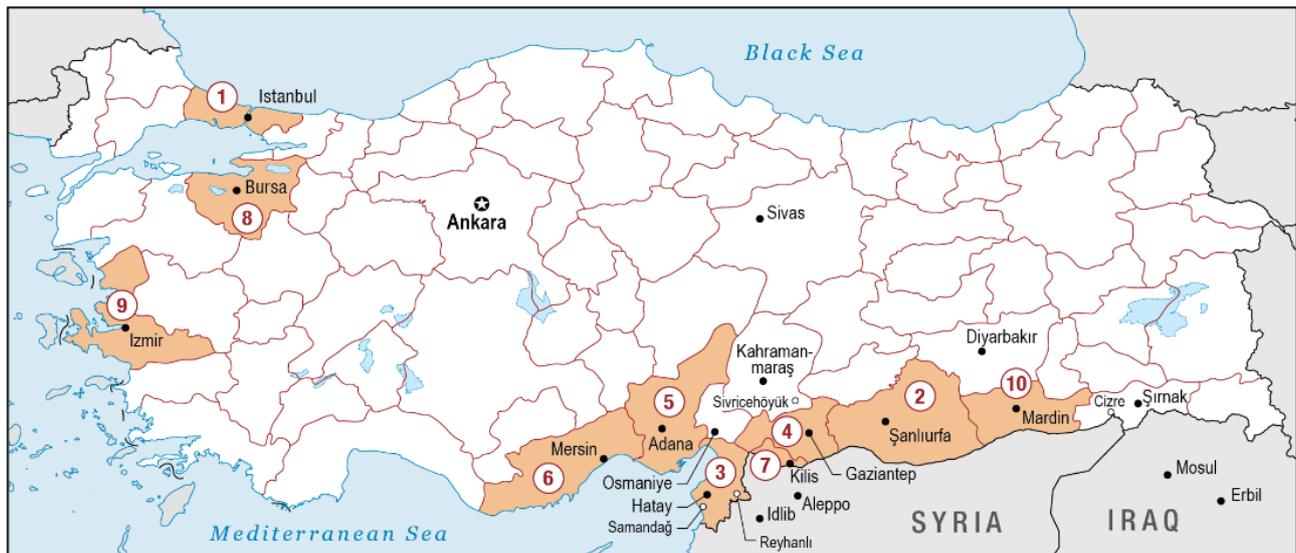
### Appendix C: Top Ten Provinces with Highest Number of Syrians in Turkey

As of 10 November 2016\*

Province	Total Population (excluding Syrians)	Number of registered Syrians	% of Syrians**
1. Istanbul	14,657,434	413,406	2.7
2. Şanlıurfa	1,892,320	398,551	17.4
3. Hatay	1,533,507	377,731	19.8
4. Gaziantep	1,931,836	318,802	14.2
5. Adana	2,183,167	149,049	6.4
6. Mersin	1,745,221	135,921	7.2
7. Kilis	130,655	122,734	48.4
8. Bursa	2,842,547	100,665	3.4
9. Izmir	4,168,415	95,610	2.2
10. Mardin	796,591	93,071	10.5

\* Figures of the Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM).

\*\* Figures rounded.



- ① Istanbul    ③ Hatay    ⑤ Adana    ⑦ Kilis    ⑨ Izmir
- ② Şanlıurfa    ④ Gaziantep    ⑥ Mersin    ⑧ Bursa    ⑩ Mardin

## Appendix D: Glossary

AFAD	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency).
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party), Turkey's ruling party since 2002, led by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım since May 2016; President Tayyip Erdoğan led the party before assuming his present office.
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party), Turkey's main opposition party.
ESSN	The Emergency Social Safety Network, A humanitarian aid project funded by the EU.
EU	The European Union.
FETÖ/PDY	Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation/Parallel State Structure, the designation given by the Turkish authorities to Gülen movement members the state considers responsible for the 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt and illicit infiltration into state institutions.
DGMM	The Directorate General of Migration Management
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party), the main legal party representing the Kurdish political movement in Turkey.
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons.
İşkur	Türkiye İş Kurumu (Turkish Employment Agency).
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party).
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party) Co-founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, it started an armed insurgency in Turkey in 1984. It is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the EU, the U.S. and a number of other countries.
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party), the Syrian Kurdish affiliate of the PKK, founded in 2003.
TEC	Temporary Education Centre, schools established to provide education for Syrian students in Turkey. They typically employ Syrians as teachers and use an adapted Syrian curriculum.
YÖK	Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu (Turkish Higher Education Institution).

## Appendix E: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013. Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in nine other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington DC. It also has staff representation in the following locations: Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Caracas, Delhi, Dubai, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kabul, Kiev, Mexico City, Rabat, Sydney, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and U.S. Agency for International Development.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Henry Luce Foundation, Humanity United, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Koerber Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Ploughshares Fund, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Tinker Foundation.

**November 2016**

## Appendix F: Reports and Briefings on Europe and Central Asia since 2013

*As of 1 October 2013, Central Asia publications are listed under the Europe and Central Asia program.*

### Special Reports

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

### Ukraine

*Ukraine: Running out of Time*, Europe Report N°231, 14 May 2014.

*Eastern Ukraine: A Dangerous Winter*, Europe Report N°235, 18 December 2014.

*The Ukraine Crisis: Risks of Renewed Military Conflict after Minsk II*, Europe Briefing N°73, 1 April 2015.

*Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine*, Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°79, 5 February 2016.

*Ukraine: The Line*, Europe Briefing N°81, 18 July 2016.

### Central Asia

*Kazakhstan: Waiting for Change*, Asia Report N°251, 30 September 2013.

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