



Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions

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Principal Findings

What's new? Intercommunal violence between host communities and Syrian refugees increased threefold in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. Growing grievances in Turkey's largest metropolises Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are driving inter-ethnic rivalries, socio-economic inequality and urban violence.

Why does it matter? The challenge of integrating over 3.4 million Syrians is compounding tensions in a country already struggling with socio-economic strains and political tensions. Grievances could be ripe for political exploitation by opposition parties in the run-up to next year's elections.

What should be done? Ankara and its international partners should take steps to ensure the sustainable integration of Syrians while pre-emptively addressing and managing host community grievances. They should also develop mechanisms to defuse refugee-related tensions particularly in the country's rapidly growing cities.

Executive Summary

Turkey has demonstrated remarkable resilience in absorbing more than 3.4 million Syrians over the past six years. But host community hostility toward these newcomers is rising. Incidents of intercommunal violence increased threefold in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. At least 35 people died in these incidents during 2017, including 24 Syrians. The potential for anti-refugee violence is highest in the metropolitan areas of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir where host communities see Syrians as culturally different and resent their competition for low-wage jobs or customers, especially within the informal economy. Many also believe Syrians receive preferential access to public services and assistance. These grievances are ripe for politicisation in the run-up to the 2019 elections, especially if economic growth slows, driving labour force participation down. Ankara – with the support of international donors – needs to step up efforts to ensure the long-term integration of Syrians into Turkish society while pre-emptively addressing and managing host community grievances.

Turkish society has displayed solidarity toward Syrian refugees, but their compassion is waning. Host communities – particularly those who feel marginalised by ethnic, sectarian or ideological cleavages – perceive Syrians as a threat to their political and economic interests. Over-centralisation aggravates these problems: the national government tends not to engage local authorities or civil society in planning for initiatives designed to promote social cohesion, often excluding those best placed to understand local needs and tensions. Treasury allocations are distributed among municipalities according to the number of Turkish citizens, without considering the refugee population, which means resources are especially stretched in communities with large numbers of Syrians. By ignoring or downplaying tensions, the government has allowed hostilities to reach a boiling point in some refugee-dense communities.

Although the government and donors have made enormous efforts to provide education for refugee children, some 370,000 of nearly one million school-age Syrian children are not enrolled, and another 230,000 still attend the temporary education centres (TECs) being phased out as Syrian children transition into the public-school system. International donors need to continue channelling resources toward improving teaching capacity and expanding school infrastructure. Syrian teachers currently working at the remaining TECs could be employed by public schools as “intercultural mediators” to help Syrian children fit in and keep up with their classmates.

Integrating Syrians into the formal labour market is arguably the greatest challenge. Those who remain in Turkey, instead of moving onto Europe, tend to have little education and few skills. Most do not speak Turkish. An estimated 750,000-950,000 Syrians currently work in the informal sector; only 15,000 have obtained the permits needed for formal employment. Changing this will not be easy: the informal sector also employs one-third of the Turkish labour force. Syrian refugees will need language classes and help learning other basic skills; both Syrian and Turkish workers need access to vocational training based on a forward-looking assessment of market needs. Turkish authorities should also remove the bureaucratic barriers that discourage Syrian entrepreneurs from establishing formal enterprises.

Ankara, its international partners, Turkish citizens and the refugees themselves should acknowledge that this will take time. Their long-term roadmap should include measures designed to:

- ❑ Provide municipalities with funding that reflects their actual population, both Turkish and Syrian, so that local authorities can address the needs of refugees without sacrificing the quantity and quality of services available to citizens;
- ❑ Engage local authorities and grassroots civil society in planning for initiatives designed to promote social cohesion;
- ❑ Respond to local grievances over the refugee influx with public messaging that recognises problems while countering misinformation and provocations;
- ❑ Gradually transition from unconditional humanitarian aid to assistance that promotes sustainable livelihoods; continue assistance for those considered especially vulnerable (such as the disabled or elderly), without conditions;
- ❑ Expand vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities to help both Syrian refugees and local citizens acquire skills that match labour market needs and are based on sector-specific development strategies;
- ❑ Increase inspections of unregistered workplaces and provide capital and technical assistance to Syrian entrepreneurs who want to establish registered businesses or scale-up their existing businesses. Whenever possible, such support should be channelled to Syrian-Turkish joint ventures.

Ankara has been reluctant to develop a long-term strategy for Syrians' integration for two main reasons: it would like to encourage Syrians to return should circumstances allow and it fears a public backlash should it appear to accept their permanent presence. This is short sighted and merely increases impatience among host communities anxious to see Syrians leave, creating grounds for intercommunal confrontation. Instead, the government needs to acknowledge that most Syrian refugees are likely to remain and take steps to integrate them without neglecting the needs and grievances of Turkish citizens, especially in the country's rapidly growing cities.

Istanbul/Ankara/Izmir/Brussels, 29 January 2018

Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions

I. Introduction

Over eleven million Syrians have fled their homes since civil war began in 2011, including more than six million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and about five million refugees.¹ Syria's immediate neighbours have taken in most of those fleeing across borders and no country has done more to shelter this homeless, shell-shocked population than Turkey. The country's 80 million people were hosting 3.4 million registered Syrian refugees (around 46 per cent of them female) as of December 2017, plus from 300,000 – 400,000 unregistered Syrians.² There are also more than 450,000 non-Syrian refugees (mostly Iraqi, Afghan and Iranian) in Turkey.³

The strain of integrating such a massive exodus is compounding tensions in a country already struggling with socio-economic strains and political tensions. Turkish citizens feel that Syrians threaten their access to jobs in an economy with high un- and under-employment. Economic competition becomes especially bitter when it pits newcomers against groups that have long felt marginalised, such as the Kurds.

Emergency rule, in effect since the coup attempt in July 2016, has fed into the grievances of ethnic and sectarian minorities as nationalist discourse intensifies and space for civil society shrinks. The removal of over 100,000 civil servants has strained capacity to meet the needs of both Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, especially in the areas of education and health care.⁴

Preventing any further refugee exodus is one of the strategic objectives behind Ankara's military involvement in Idlib. Recent attacks by regime forces in rebel-held parts of the province have forced up to 100,000 civilians to take refuge in makeshift camps near the Turkish border.⁵ If the security situation deteriorates, Turkish authorities fear more of the area's estimated two million civilians could become displaced.⁶

¹ "Syria Emergency", UN High Commissioner for Refugees (www.unhcr.org), n.d.

² An estimated 11 per cent of Syrian refugees in Turkey are unregistered. "Refugee Livelihood Monitor" published by the Human Development Foundation (İNGEV) and pollster IPSOS in July 2017. Turkey applies geographical limitations to the 1951 Geneva Convention, which means that citizens from countries outside the Council of Europe cannot obtain official refugee status. Syrian refugees are provided with temporary protection, which allows them to stay in Turkey legally with access to basic services, such as health care, schooling and social assistance.

³ Statement of the Turkish interior minister, Süleyman Soylu, on 16 November 2017 following the Migration Policies Council meeting. Available at <http://bit.ly/2nSiJ5Y>.

⁴ Since the coup attempt, some 140,000 civil servants were removed from duty, with around 40,000 being subsequently reinstated after investigation. 159,000 individuals (public and private sector) were detained and some 47,000 arrested according to statements released by the interior ministry. "İçişleri Bakanı Soylu: 15 Temmuz 2016 tarihinden itibaren 47 bin 523 kişi tutuklandı" ["Interior Minister Soylu: 47 thousand 523 individuals arrested since 15 July 2016"], Anadolu Agency, 17 December 2017.

⁵ "Assad crackdown on Idlib could trigger a refugee 'catastrophe'", *The Guardian*, 13 January 2018.

⁶ "Başbakan Yıldırım'dan 'İdlib'e Yönelik Operasyona' İlişkin Açıklama" ["Prime Minister Yıldırım's statement on Idlib operation"], *Milliyet*, 10 October 2017.

If that were to happen, given existing strains on public services and growing domestic opposition to Syrians refugees, Ankara would be hard pressed to maintain its open-door policy.

In the absence of substantive European Union (EU) accession talks and with the EU-Turkey relationship deteriorating, the March 2016 refugee deal represents the main framework for dialogue between Turkey and the EU. Relations are strained: Ankara complains that EU assistance is disbursed too slowly and ridden with too many conditions while the EU finds Turkey's bureaucracy ill prepared to absorb funding and develop projects effectively. But despite their differences, both the EU and Turkey understand that cooperation is in their mutual interest.⁷

In a November 2016 report, Crisis Group analysed how the Syrian influx played into the country's complex demographics and political polarisation.⁸ It urged decision-makers working with Syrian refugees to acknowledge they were likely to remain in Turkey permanently and engage with constituencies across ethnic, economic and political divides to mitigate domestic tensions.

This report is based on research in refugee-dense neighbourhoods of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, Turkey's three largest cities. It provides a bottom-up analysis of the frictions generated as refugees have moved into these urban areas from the border region. First, the report examines violence between refugees and residents, though data is limited and many incidents may go unreported. Next it looks at the disconnect between popular perceptions and the Turkish government's official discourse. It notes that an over-centralised state apparatus can stifle local initiatives for defusing intercommunal tensions.

Finally, the report addresses how to promote the refugees' socio-economic integration, without deepening sectarian and socio-economic differences. It suggests ways to mitigate tensions that could fuel hatred and resentment and, potentially, spark further outbreaks of violence. With the EU expected to allocate another €3 billion for Syrians' integration in Turkey, there is an opportunity to program funding for the long-term benefit of both Syrians and local host communities.

⁷ According to the EU, 1.78 billion has been disbursed thus far, and the first tranche of 3 billion has been fully contracted to projects in Turkey. Up-to-date figures available on the website of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: <http://bit.ly/2mNa3cO>.

⁸ Crisis Group Europe Report N°241, *Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence*, 30 November 2016.

II. Rising Tensions

A. *Urban Violence*

An international organisation that tracks refugee-related social tension and criminal incidents recorded 181 cases in 2017 (as of 30 November), which resulted in 35 deaths (24 of them Syrian). Violence peaked in July 2017 and increased nearly three-fold over the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016.⁹ Residents of neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of tension say that there are many more unreported incidents of such violence involving refugees.¹⁰

1. Culture clashes

International donors have focused most of their efforts on helping Syrians settled in Turkey's border provinces such as Gaziantep, Kilis, Urfa and Hatay. By and large, however, there is more cultural continuity and less tension between residents and refugees along the border provinces than within metropolitan areas in western Turkey. Turkish citizens along the Syrian border often speak Arabic or Kurdish, which allows them to communicate with Syrian Arabs and Kurds. Moreover, these are largely rural, culturally conservative areas, making them more hospitable to the Syrians who have settled there, many of whom come from the countryside.¹¹

In major cities, the refugees' inability to speak Turkish limits opportunities to find and build on shared values and interests. "The differences in subculture are more distinct in cities farther from the border", said an international agency official.¹² The lack of interaction between refugees and hosts reinforces the latter's conviction that Syrians do not conform to Turkish societal norms. "Eighty per cent of Syrians think they can integrate, while around 80 per cent of Turkish citizens say they can't", an EU official said.¹³ A recent study confirms this trend: 63 per cent of Turkish citizens either feel "far" or "very far" to Syrians, while 72 per cent of Syrians feel "close" or "very close" to Turkish society.¹⁴

⁹ These figures are based on monitoring of the media and other sources by an international organisation that has preferred to remain anonymous. The number of incidents began rising in spring 2017 with seventeen in May, 25 in June, 30 in July, 25 in August, 27 in September, twelve in October, and fourteen in November. Crisis Group interview, international organisation representatives, Ankara, September 2017, and email correspondence with international organisation representative, December 2017. The peak of incidents in July 2017 may be related to more interaction in public spaces when the weather warms up, the days grow longer, and crowds congregate in parks and on beaches.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, July-September 2017. Most violent outbreaks are not reported in mainstream news outlets. Left-leaning opposition outlets are more likely to cover them.

¹¹ Most Syrians who fled across the border and stayed in Turkey came from the countryside. Gaziantep is an exception as it is also a hub for Syrian business and civil society communities.

¹² Crisis Group interview, International Organization for Migration (IOM) representatives, Ankara, September 2017. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, September 2017.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, EU official, Ankara, September 2017.

¹⁴ "Syrian Barometer: A Framework for Achieving Social Coherence with Syrians", 6 December 2017, forthcoming manuscript to be published by Istanbul Bilgi University, cited with author's permission, available at <http://bit.ly/2BgVx2H>.

Turkey's three largest cities – Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir – host approximately 23 per cent of the Syrians in the country. Since 2015, Istanbul has become the province with the largest number of refugees: as of December 2017, the metropole hosted about 538,000 registered Syrians.¹⁵ Counting those registered in other provinces but living in Istanbul, as well as those who have not registered at all, the number of Syrians living in the metropolitan area exceeds 700,000.¹⁶ The large number of undocumented Syrians fuels perceptions they live in the shadows. Local residents in Sultangazi, a demographically diverse district of Istanbul that hosts some 40,000 Syrians, told Crisis Group they did not trust refugees unless they had settled with their families and registered with the authorities.¹⁷

The capital city of Ankara presents a different case. Relatively few Syrians live there (around 90,000), and so there are few internationally funded programs to foster social cohesion. Yet most refugees are concentrated in a few neighbourhoods where they constitute as much as 20 per cent of the population, which has overcrowded classrooms and fuelled host community resentment.¹⁸ Many of these neighbourhoods, such as Önder, Battalgazi and Ulubey, have been traditionally homogeneous and largely conservative and nationalist. Gentrification over the past few years has already reduced the availability of affordable housing.

Izmir's nearly 130,000 Syrian refugees are more dispersed across different neighbourhoods where residents share their ethnic background. Most Syrian Kurds settled in Izmir's Kadifekale, Limontepe, Yeniçamlık neighbourhoods; Syrian Arabs moved to Buca's Gediz neighbourhood; and Syrian Turkmens went to Bornova's Doğanlar neighbourhood.¹⁹ Clashes tend to take place more often in workplaces than in residential neighbourhoods, usually because of the perception, particularly among Kurdish manual workers, that Syrians have reduced their opportunities for work.

Refugees' tendency to cluster with fellow nationals, sometimes resulting in ghetto-like segregation, can intensify hostility on both sides. Young Syrian men walk in large groups for protection, which makes them appear hostile and dangerous to locals.²⁰ Social media – such as WhatsApp or other messaging platforms – helps spread rumours rapidly through both the Turkish and refugee communities. Latent hostility based on negative perceptions – such as that Syrians receive undue aid or take local

¹⁵ The number of registered Syrians in Istanbul rose rapidly since 2016, from 394,556 in April 2016 to 479,555 in April 2017 and 522,406 in November 2017, 537,829 in December 2017, according to Directorate-General of Migration Management (DGMM) figures available at <http://bit.ly/2Bn2gMI>.

¹⁶ A survey conducted in March–April 2017 (but not yet published) found that 29 per cent of Syrians in Istanbul were unregistered. “A Study of Refugees' Protection Situation”, Support to Life (Hayata Destek) Foundation, privately shared with Crisis Group on 2 January 2018. A Turkish official interviewed by Crisis Group said the number of unregistered Syrians in Istanbul did not exceed 10,000 but estimated that an additional 250,000–300,000 may be registered in another province of Turkey. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, December 2017.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul's Sultangazi district, July 2017.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) integration experts, Ankara, July 2017.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Izmir, August 2017; refugee education consultant from Izmir, Istanbul, October 2017.

²⁰ Crisis Group field observations, Istanbul and Izmir, July and August 2017.

jobs – creates an atmosphere in which rumours of sexual harassment or other violations of locally accepted cultural norms can trigger physical clashes.²¹

In the Demetevler neighbourhood of Ankara's Yenimahalle district in July 2017, for example, social media spread the rumour that a Syrian refugee had raped a five-year-old girl. The allegation sparked clashes between dozens of Syrian and Turkish men who fought each other with sticks, stones and knives. It took all night for police – three of whom were reportedly injured by stabbing – to restore order.²²

2. Working-class and inter-ethnic rivalries

Most violent incidents take place in low-income inner-city districts, with Istanbul topping the list. Tension is most acute in working-class enclaves where refugees settle to find affordable housing and unskilled employment in small textile, shoemaking or furniture workshops. Recruiters also seek out labour in these neighbourhoods for construction and seasonal agricultural work. Between 750,000 and 950,000 (predominantly male) Syrians are estimated to participate in the informal economy.²³ Though comprehensive data is unavailable, workforce surveys suggest they chiefly work in the textile, construction, shoemaking, agriculture, furniture and seasonal agriculture sectors, often substituting for host community workers.²⁴ Syrians have been able to obtain work permits since January 2016, but there is little incentive to seek permits and the process is cumbersome, so only about 15,000 have done so.²⁵

Many Turkish citizens – particularly those less qualified and working informally – face heightened competition for work.²⁶ From their perspective, the massive presence of Syrians has created a zero-sum dynamic, forcing them to compete for a limited number of jobs or accept lower wages. With nationwide youth unemployment at more than 20 per cent, and lower growth rates predicted for next year, economic pressures are likely to increase.

The risk of social friction is especially high in low-income urban areas with other marginalised minorities, such as the Kurds. “The space previously occupied mostly by Kurds who migrated from the south east to bigger cities to work in the informal sector is now being filled by Syrians who accept less pay”.²⁷ Many Kurds living in western metropolitan cities were themselves displaced from conflict in south-eastern Turkey and harbour longstanding grievances against authorities. This makes resentment based on the perception that Syrians benefit from more public assistance and greater social acceptance particularly acute. (See Section III.A.1 below)

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, local residents, Ankara, July 2017.

²² “Ankara Yenimahalle Demetevler’de ne oldu” [“What happened in the Demetevler neighbourhood of Ankara’s Yenimahalle district”], *Akşam*, 5 July 2017.

²³ Crisis Group estimates based on two large representative survey results and migration authority figures: “Refugee Livelihood Monitor” published by the Human Development Foundation (İNGEV) and pollster IPSOS in July 2017; “Syrian Barometer”, op. cit.; DGMM “Temporary Protection” statistics <http://bit.ly/2Bn2gMI>.

²⁴ Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), household labour force surveys, 2016–2017.

²⁵ “Bakan Sarıeroğlu, 2018 Yılı Bütçesinin Sunumunu Gerçekleştirdi” [“Minister Sarıeroğlu presented budget for 2018”], 17 November 2017, <http://bit.ly/2zaS2yG>.

²⁶ Around 34 per cent of the Turkish workforce, or approximately nine million people, works informally. They are more vulnerable and more resentful as they do not have job security or social security.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, economist, Ankara, July 2017.

A good example is Işıkkent, located in Izmir's Bornova district, which hosts the city's main shoe/leather producers and where Syrian workers have largely replaced Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. Of nearly 10,000 workers in Işıkkent, 60 to 70 per cent are Syrian, many of Turkmen origin.²⁸ Izmir employers appear to prefer Syrian Turkmens over Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin, who are considered hard to manage in comparison to "obedient" Syrians.²⁹ Because Turkmens also speak adequate Turkish, locals do not have any language advantage. "If you ask me whether I prefer a Syrian or a local Kurd, I would say Syrian, because they are really respectful", said the manager of a shoemaking workshop. "Kurds usually behave in an unmannerly way They pick fights quickly".³⁰

The replacement of local Kurds by Syrian Turkmens and Arabs in Işıkkent has increased ethnic friction, resulting in small clashes and two large-scale protests in 2013 and 2014 mainly led by Kurds who had lost their jobs. Employees reported that groups of men regularly harass Syrians on the street, beat them up and threaten them or their families. A similar dynamic occurs in Istanbul's Sultangazi district, where local youth groups are said to attack refugees, including Afghans and Pakistanis, on paydays to extort money.³¹

Some of the most serious incidents involved Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin and Syrian Arabs who compete for seasonal agricultural work in Izmir's Torbalı district, located on the outskirts of the Izmir province. The area hosts between 8,000 and 10,000 Syrians. In April 2017, angry locals, mostly Kurds and Roma, forced about 500 Syrian agricultural workers to flee their makeshift tents in Torbalı's Pamukyazı neighbourhood after rumours spread that Syrians had beaten a local child. An argument between the child's family and the Syrians escalated into a mob attack by locals armed with knives and clubs, leaving about 30 people injured.³²

B. *Popular Perceptions and Official Discourses*

Opinion polls suggest Turkish attitudes toward Syrian refugees are generally negative and may be hardening. Surveys conducted in Istanbul and Ankara in 2009 and 2015 found that negative perceptions of foreigners had increased. In Istanbul, only 15 per cent of respondents said, "absolutely not" in 2009 when asked if they viewed the presence of foreigners in their city as positive; six years later the number giving this response had risen to 34 per cent. In Ankara, the percentage responding "absolutely not" rose from 20 per cent in 2009 to 35 per cent in 2015.³³

Most Turkish citizens believe the influx of Syrians has had an adverse impact. An October 2017 survey found that 78 per cent of citizens believed Syrians had made

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Izmir, August 2017.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Izmir, August 2017.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, manager of a shoemaking workshop, Izmir, August 2017.

³¹ Crisis Group interviews, municipality representatives and representative of the local education ministry branch, Sultangazi district of Istanbul, July 2017.

³² "İzmir'de 'mahalle' kavgası; 30 kişi yaralandı, 500 Suriyeli mahalleyi terk etti!" ["Brawl in Izmir's neighbourhood: 30 injured, 500 Syrians fled the neighbourhood"], *T24*, 8 April 2017.

³³ The survey was conducted by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV). "Göçmenlere Karşı Kötümserlik Artıyor Mu?" ["Is Pessimism Toward Migrants on the Rise?"], TEPAV, January 2017. Survey available at www.tepav.org.tr.

their country less safe.³⁴ Another countrywide survey published in December 2017 found that 75 per cent of Turkish citizens did not believe they could live together peacefully with Syrians.³⁵ A survey of Turkish citizens in Istanbul published in December 2016 found that 72 per cent felt uncomfortable encountering Syrians and 76 per cent had no sympathy for the refugees.³⁶

After negative reaction to its June 2016 announcement that Syrians would be fast-tracked for Turkish citizenship, the government clarified that the process would be gradual and limited.³⁷ But both the domestic opposition and Syrians seeking citizenship complain that the process for obtaining citizenship is not transparent.³⁸ This issue could heat up again before the 2019 elections: the opposition has consistently warned that the government may be resettling Syrians in order to dilute the opposition vote in certain districts.³⁹ Politically marginalised groups believe the government uses Syrians to advance political goals, both domestically and in foreign policy. Minorities such as the Alevis, heterodox Shiites who represent about 15-20 per cent of Turkish society, feel that Syrians are granted rights denied to other religious or ethnic groups. “We Alevis still do not have equal citizenship”, said the representative of a cultural centre. “In some cases, rights that Turkish citizens do not have are being granted to Syrians”.⁴⁰

Many negative perceptions are based on myths and misconceptions. Some Turkish citizens believe, for example, that Syrians receive monthly salaries without working or that they can enter university without taking obligatory exams.⁴¹ Such convictions generate anger that can be easily politicised. Officials downplay these tensions, fearing that acknowledging them would allow opponents to mobilise against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).⁴² So while opposition leaders and media tend to be alarmist – a neighbourhood leader in Istanbul claimed to be “waiting for a

³⁴ “Syrians’ Agenda Study”, Economists’ Platform (*Ekonomistler Platformu*), October 2017. Available at www.ekonomistler.org.tr.

³⁵ 37 per cent said Syrians should be harboured in a “safe zone” in northern Syria, while 28 per cent preferred them staying in camps only. “Syrian Barometer”, op. cit.

³⁶ “Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Algı ve Tutumlar Çalışması” [“Study on Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees”], December 2016. The research was conducted jointly by Kemerburgaz University and the University of Kent.

³⁷ Only educated Syrians deemed capable of contributing to the Turkish economy have been selected for citizenship, according to Turkish authorities. Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, September 2017. “7 bin Suriyeliye vatandaşlık geliyor” [“Citizenship to be granted to 7 thousand Syrians”], *Hürriyet*, 8 July 2017. An expert and an NGO worker estimated in December 2017 that 25,000-30,000 Syrians had received Turkish citizenship. Turkish officials announced in October 2017 that they planned to grant citizenship to 50,000 qualified Syrians over the next six months. Crisis Group interviews, expert and NGO worker, Istanbul, December 2017. “Yeni pasaportlar kart şeklinde üretilecek” [“New passports will be produced as cards”], *Hürriyet*, 30 October 2017.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Syrians and opposition party representatives, Istanbul, July-August 2017.

³⁹ See Crisis Group Europe Report N°241, *Turkey’s Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence*, 30 November 2016, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, representatives of an Alevi cultural centre, Istanbul’s Sultangazi district, July 2017.

⁴¹ Crisis Group field research, Izmir, Istanbul, Ankara, summer-fall 2017.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, local officials, Istanbul, July and September 2017.

bigger incident at any moment”⁴³ – public officials and pro-government media downplay tensions, depicting clashes between Syrians and locals as merely isolated incidents. This stifles potentially salutary public debate.

1. Compassion fatigue

The ruling party promotes the notion that Turkish citizens should “help Muslim brothers and sisters in need”. This concept of faith-based solidarity has been at the centre of its efforts to contain and counter negative sentiments toward refugees. “It is thanks to religion that we do not see much violence”, said an official working with an Islamist charity in Istanbul. “The concept of ‘honour’ (*namus*) is restraining people”.⁴⁴ Turkish citizens in pious neighbourhoods confirm this view, but also say that over time real-life challenges overwhelm faith-based solidarity.⁴⁵

Even communities with religious and ideological affinity to the government, appear to be turning from compassion to grievance or impatience.⁴⁶ Large majorities of the ruling AK Party (61 per cent) and the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party or MHP (70 per cent) find the presence of Syrians worrying as do majorities within the two main opposition parties, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) (69 per cent), and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) (65 per cent).⁴⁷ One local *muhtar* (elected neighbourhood headman) in Istanbul’s Sultangazi district lamented that the central government used the “trade of religion”, calling for sacrifice and tolerance, to stop people from complaining about the need for schools and protection of workers’ rights.⁴⁸

Among left-leaning or secular communities, the ruling party’s discourse of Sunni Muslim solidarity has deepened antipathy toward both the government and Syrian refugees. Alevis, as mentioned above, feel particularly vulnerable. “We perceive a systematic effort to divide society on the basis of religion, using sectarianism”, said a representative of the community in Istanbul.⁴⁹ These groups might be drawn to a discourse focused on universal rights, though in their eyes the government lacks the legitimacy to make such arguments. Some Alevis suspect the emphasis on religious bonds between Turkey’s Sunni majority and the mostly Sunni refugee population is part of a strategy to further marginalise them:

We Alevis already feel like we do not belong. Our houses of worship are not recognised in the constitution. It is no secret that the president has no regard for our faith. ... We cannot help but think Ankara is conducting demographic politics. In

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, pro-opposition neighbourhood headman, Istanbul, July 2017.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official working for a state institution and the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), Istanbul, July 2017.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, residents, Ankara’s Altındağ district, July 2017. This sentiment was confirmed by Crisis Group interviews with ASAM integration experts in Ankara in July 2017.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group field research in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, July-September 2017.

⁴⁷ The biggest concern, the study finds, is that Syrians will harm the Turkish economy. “Syrian Barometer”, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, July 2017.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, representative of an Alevi *cemevi*, Istanbul, July 2017. *Cemevis* are Alevi houses of worship, though not officially recognised as such by the Turkish government.

a place like Gazi neighbourhood that is around 50 per cent Alevi, Alevis are concerned that Syrians will be settled to reduce the Alevis to a minority.⁵⁰

2. Contradictory messages

A wave of negative stories about Syrians swept across Turkish media in July 2017, starting with the clashes in Ankara triggered by social media claims on 3 July that a Syrian had raped a Turkish girl. Throughout the month, outlets critical of the government described how the refugees purportedly were “invading” Turkey’s beaches, leaving mounds of trash and harassing women.⁵¹ A local resident told one newspaper that because Syrians do not speak Turkish, they cannot understand warnings, so “a small incident can easily spiral into an attempted lynching”.⁵²

Such reports prompted strong rebukes from leading government figures. “There is blatant public provocation”, said Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak. “People are being called to the street by strange social media accounts. These are agitations from abroad, ill-intended incitements”. He called for tolerance, prudence and common sense. “Let’s all remember that these people are only in Turkey temporarily, that Turkey is hosting them in line with traditions of hospitality”.⁵³ The interior ministry released a similar statement stressing that certain media outlets and social media accounts “were misrepresenting and exaggerating the tense eruptions between Syrians and Turkish citizens and doing so with language geared at igniting reactive anger in society”. The aim of these reports, it said, was to create societal discord for domestic political purposes.⁵⁴

While they viewed statements suggesting refugees might soon return to Syria as counterproductive, civil society groups welcomed government efforts to correct misconceptions by explaining how Syrians contribute to the economy and debunking myths about high refugee crime rates. The government’s strong statements on behalf of refugees also encouraged local authorities to prioritise the issue of integration.⁵⁵ A social worker in Ankara said these positive messages had helped them deal with negative perceptions in host communities.⁵⁶ The government should not issue such statements only during periods of heightened public concern, however. They should occur regularly, acknowledging both the reality of certain problems and the rationale for official policies to address them.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, representatives of an Alevi cultural centre, Istanbul’s Sultangazi district, July 2017.

⁵¹ See, for example, “Yeşilköy ve Florya plajlarına çöp ve çadır isyanı” [“Garbage and tent outbreak on the beaches of Yeşilköy and Florya”], *Habertürk*, 3 July 2017; “Plajda küçük kıza taciz iddiası: 5 Suriyeli yakalandı” [“Alleged harassment of a little girl at the beach: 5 Syrians were caught”], *Cumhuriyet*, 28 June 2017.

⁵² “Sahiller duman altı” [“Coastal areas are thick with smoke”], *Hürriyet*, 4 July 2017.

⁵³ “Başbakan Yardımcısı: Hoşgörüyü elden bırakmayalım...” [“Deputy prime minister: Let’s keep on being tolerant...”], *Hürriyet*, 5 July 2017.

⁵⁴ “İçişleri Bakanlığı: Suriyeli misafirlerimizle yaşanan gerginlikler çarpıtılıyor” [“Interior Ministry: Tensions with our Syrian guests are being distorted”], Anadolu Agency, 5 July 2017.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities in Sultangazi, Istanbul, July 2017.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Ankara’s Altındağ district, July 2017.

C. *Over-centralisation*

Political upheaval following the July 2016 coup attempt has exacerbated the challenge of integrating Syrians. NGOs and INGOs operate in an atmosphere of heightened suspicion. Over 100,000 civil servants have been purged for alleged links to “terrorist organisations”, and nearly 1,500 NGOs were closed. The national government has also limited the ability of appointed district governors to make local decisions, diminishing the role of local authorities in policymaking.

Whether justified or not, these measures have severely strained both public sector and civil society capacity. Locally elected officials and grassroots civil society play vital roles in refugee integration: they can assess needs and defuse tensions; they can also help monitor and coordinate the district work of national entities. Trusted representatives of both Syrians and Turkish citizens at the neighbourhood level need to be empowered to mediate disputes and prevent intercommunal frictions from festering.

1. Disempowerment of grassroots

Centralisation can lead to sub-optimal results because national officials often lack the local knowledge needed to address social divisions and stabilise communities. Those with the most first-hand exposure to neighbourhood dynamics, the muhtars, have only limited administrative duties. The “granularity and local-level input that is so much needed on refugee integration and social cohesion issues gets lost at the central level”, said an EU official.⁵⁷

The government also has required multilateral agencies to work through central government ministries. International organisations may no longer work directly with regional development agencies, even if they have qualified personnel aware of local realities and capable of implementing projects. “AFAD [the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency] and the Ministry of Development have told us to talk to them even when we are only *thinking* of a certain project ... and the areas covered are reduced to those that are palatable politically”, said a high-level representative.⁵⁸

Centrally appointed local authorities – such as the district governor, police and the district branches of national ministries – can be more effective if they coordinate with community actors. Locally elected leaders are often better placed to detect and manage frictions between host and refugee communities. “Municipalities are much more embedded with the local community”, said a district governor in Istanbul. Municipal officials “have a much better grasp of the local population’s daily realities, their life challenges, than we do as appointed governors or than our superiors in Ankara do”.⁵⁹

Yet in some localities, there is little or no dialogue between state authorities and local elected officials or civil society organisations. Tension between the ruling party and the two main opposition parties – the CHP and the HDP, which together won about 35 per cent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections – further impedes grassroots cooperation. An official from the Beşiktaş municipality in Istanbul, which

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, September 2017.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, international organisation representative, Ankara, September 2017.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, district governor, Istanbul, September 2017.

is run by the CHP, said state authorities had not shared any data on the number of refugees living there or on any other refugee-related issues.⁶⁰

Some NGOs say lack of official support and information makes their work harder; they also complain about greater official scrutiny. Failing to use the human capital represented by Turkish NGOs makes it harder to address the country's enormous refugee challenge. "Civil society is in survival mode", an activist said. NGOs are "under so much pressure that their capacity to contribute to Syrian integration is much lower than it would have been ten years ago".⁶¹

2. Insecure communities

Following the coup attempt, nearly 25,000 police officers were removed from office for alleged ties to FETÖ (an abbreviation for Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation, a term coined by the government).⁶² Communities critical of the government, particularly those that are left leaning, fear the government is hiring ultranationalist youth to fill gaps in the overstretched police force. Distrust of security services is deeply rooted among Kurdish movement sympathisers, whose anger toward the state is sometimes channelled toward Syrian refugees. A local representative of the Kurdish movement in Istanbul's Sultangazi district attributed violence against refugees to suppressed resentment:

We have no rights. There is police impunity for any action against the Kurdish youth here. Workers cannot hold strikes. Expressing dissent on social media leads to arrest. This is all building up frustration, which can be channelled against the Syrians, many of whom see Erdoğan as their saviour. It is unfortunate but the pent-up frustration among our youth surfaces against Syrians, so Syrians don't enter certain streets.⁶³

Syrians also distrust Turkish police. They complain that law enforcement gives locals the benefit of the doubt when they are involved in brawls with refugees.⁶⁴ Fearing deportation, or simply out of mistrust, they almost never call the police to report crimes or threats. Moreover, police generally do not have Arabic-speaking personnel, relying instead on Syrians – often children – who speak both languages, or the translators used by the district governorate, if they can be reached.

In August 2017, authorities introduced a new system of "neighbourhood guards" tasked with patrolling urban areas and monitoring local tensions.⁶⁵ The interior ministry had hired 386 guards in Istanbul by October 2017 and was considering applica-

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, September 2017. Crisis Group observed that this was not the case for municipalities run by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, September 2017.

⁶² "Emniyet Genel Müdürü Selami Altınok: 22 bin 987 emniyet mensubu ihraç edildi" ["Director General of Public Security Selami Altınok: 22 thousand 987 police removed from office"], *Karar*, 12 December 2017; "İstanbul'da her 500 kişiye 1 polis düşüyor" ["1 police per 500 residents in Istanbul"], *Milliyet*, 28 September 2017.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, HDP Sultangazi district head, July 2017.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, former NGO project manager who worked with Syrian families in Istanbul, November 2017.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Turkish officials, Ankara, September 2017.

tions for another 2,000 positions.⁶⁶ Countrywide, the number is expected to reach 15,000 in 2018. Liberals as well as Kurds and other minorities, fear that authorities are hiring youths linked to the Turkish nationalist party, MHP. They fear these guards could abuse their power or be used to strangle legitimate dissent.⁶⁷

Neighbourhood headmen are often the first to identify which groups are vulnerable and where tensions are brewing.⁶⁸ They should be clearly tasked to play an early-warning role. Ankara should develop guidelines for local authorities (governors, mayors, police chiefs, neighbourhood headmen) on how to identify and pre-empt tensions before they escalate. In neighbourhoods with large numbers of refugees, headmen should be able to hire Syrian assistants to help them smooth frictions and flag potentially dangerous situations. Syrian community leaders can also assist district governors and mayors, making their efforts to address refugee needs more effective.

Refugees and their host communities generally do not interact much, which can generate misunderstandings that lead to violent brawls. Field workers say daily interactions at laundromats, video game centres, sports fields, and playgrounds reduce hostility more effectively than lectures on tolerance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other international donors have tried to foster social cohesion by creating or rehabilitating these public spaces.⁶⁹ Local NGOs, neighbourhood headmen or imams sometimes launch similar initiatives in an ad-hoc manner.⁷⁰

Turkey (unlike countries such as Germany and the U.S.) does not offer refugees cultural orientation courses, but it could incorporate such material into the training provided at community centres. These centres should find ways to attract participants from both the host and refugee communities, so they can learn about each other's behavioural norms or cultural sensitivities. Locals rarely use these facilities, believing their programs cater only to Syrians.⁷¹

⁶⁶ "İstanbul'un bekçileri yarın akşam göreve başlıyor" ["Istanbul's new guards will begin duty tomorrow evening"], *Akşam*, 13 August 2017. The interior ministry announced plans to hire 2,000 more guards in Istanbul on 25 October. "İstanbul'a 2 bin yeni bekçi (Bekçi alımı için gerekli şartlar)" ["2000 new guards to be hired in Istanbul (application requirements for guards)"], *NTV*, 25 October 2017.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, neighbourhood guard candidates and residents, Istanbul, December 2017.

⁶⁸ "After all it is municipalities who are embedded with the local community and know best where their needs are ... with decision-making having moved away from the local level we have also moved away from local action". Crisis Group interview, UN representative, Ankara, September 2017.

⁶⁹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), among others, also have projects to foster public interaction. Crisis Group interviews, IOM, UNICEF and UNHCR, Ankara, September 2017.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, July-August 2017.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, local residents, Ankara, July 2017.

III. Investing in Long-term Integration

A. Economic Integration

Government officials like to emphasise the positive impact Syrian refugees have had on Turkey's economy. The massive influx has stimulated growth and attracted new investment by providing cheap labour and boosting consumption. Some experts believe that Syrian refugees helped Turkey's economy grow about 3 per cent in 2016 "despite terrorist attacks, a failed coup attempt, political turmoil and a decrease in foreign capital inflows".⁷² They also argue that Syrians are not taking jobs away from locals, but rather accepting menial positions that Turkish citizens do not want. "Today no one except for Syrians works in the unskilled labour market in Kahramanmaraş, Adana, Osmaniye, Gaziantep and even at Ostim in Ankara" said Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak in July 2017. "Our factories would stop operating [without them]".⁷³

Many locals see a race to the bottom, however, not expanding opportunities. As discussed above (Section I.A.3), hostility toward Syrian refugees – at times violent – is rising as Turkish citizens accuse Syrians of unfair competition for jobs and business. The following sections explore strategies to help Syrian refugees transition to productive employment without pitting them against equally disadvantaged local communities.

1. Address both refugee and citizen needs

Much of the cash and in-kind aid provided to Syrians is also extended to host communities (such as social support from municipalities and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation of district governorates); refugee-only funding, including cash cards and aid distributed via local community centres and NGOs, generally comes from international donors. Yet many Turkish citizens resent what they perceive as a zero-sum dynamic in which Syrians gain at locals' expense. A middle-aged Turkish man in Ankara's Altındağ summed up this sentiment:

It is as if all these distributors of aid and the state only realised that this neighbourhood had a poverty problem after the Syrians settled here. Suddenly they opened shiny offices and started distributing aid. As if before Syrians came, our neighbourhood was a bed of roses. Nobody ever cared about us as we struggled for years to sustain ourselves. After the Syrians arrived, suddenly everyone came here to help them.⁷⁴

⁷² Crisis Group interview, migration expert, Ankara, July 2017. See also this forthcoming (date unforeseeable) study on how refugees induce "positive spillovers in local economies": Onur Altındağ, Ozan Bakış and Sandra V. Roza, "How Do Refugees Affect Businesses? The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey". Turkey's economy grew by an unexpected 6.7 per cent in 2017, one of the world's highest rates. See "Global Economic Prospects: Economic Outlook for the Europe and Central Asia Region", The World Bank, January 2018, available at <http://bit.ly/2DiYbH4>.

⁷³ "Başbakan Yardımcısı: Hoşgörüyü elden bırakmayalım..." ["Deputy prime minister: Let's keep on being tolerant..."], *Hürriyet*, 5 July 2017.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ankara's Altındağ district, July 2017.

Because central government budgets do not keep up with demand, impoverished Turkish citizens have to compete with Syrians for state-generated aid. This funding is currently allocated to local authorities based only on the number of Turkish citizens in their district. Pegging allocations to the total number of residents (including refugees) might release tensions among citizens who see Syrians as taking away their share of a fixed budgetary pie.⁷⁵ The Turkish deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs announced in September 2017 that the government was working on a formula for municipal budgets that would take refugee populations into account.⁷⁶

2. Move from unconditional to conditional support

Syrians must become self-sustaining, not only to prepare for the eventual decrease of international aid, but also to mitigate the resentment of poverty-stricken locals. Nearly nine out of ten Turkish citizens believe Syrians' main source of income is state assistance.⁷⁷ Most of the direct aid to Syrians, however, comes not from the government but from the EU's European Social Safety Net (ESSN), which provides unconditional cash support dispensed through a debit card.⁷⁸ More than one million Syrians in Turkey benefit from this project, which is channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP), the Turkish Red Crescent and the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

Some local NGO representatives argue that unconditional cash should be phased out because it complicates their efforts to help Syrians achieve sustainable livelihoods. "We have reached a stage where it does not make sense anymore to provide direct cash support", said an NGO representative. Instead, they argue, funding needs to be designed to help Syrians become self-sustaining.⁷⁹ For example, cash assistance under the ESSN could be offered only to those who enrol in Turkish language courses and/or vocational training, with Syrians deemed especially vulnerable (such as the disabled, sick or elderly) exempt from these conditions.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ In September 2017, Turkish media quoted deputy Prime Minister in charge of economic affairs Mehmet Şimşek saying that they were working on amending the law on local government accordingly. "Suriyeli barındıran şehre Hazine teşviki" ["Treasury incentive for cities hosting refugees"], *Sabah*, 11 September 2017. Unless this change is implemented, municipalities have little incentive and insufficient resources to cater to Syrians needs.

⁷⁶ "Suriyeli barındıran şehre hazine teşviki" ["Treasury incentives for cities housing refugees"], *Sabah*, 11 September 2017.

⁷⁷ Murat Erdoğan, "Syrian Barometer", op. cit.

⁷⁸ Cash support came to about 120 Turkish liras (\$35) monthly in November 2017. Refugees can qualify for this aid based on criteria including income, number of children, and factors such as being a single parent, having a disability or illness, caring for elderly dependants etc. For more information about this program see "FAQ on Emergency Social Safety Net", World Food Programme (WFP) Turkey, December 2016. The debit card, distributed by the Turkish Red Crescent, is known as a "Kızılay" (Red Crescent) card. The program is expected to continue until the end of 2018.

⁷⁹ NGO representative reflections shared at event attended by Crisis Group titled "Migration and the Integration into the Education System" organised by Friedrich Naumann Foundation's Turkey Office, 13 October 2017.

⁸⁰ See also, "An Introduction to Cash-Based Interventions in UNHCR Operations", UNHCR, March 2012.

3. Incentives and training

International organisation representatives and European officials repeatedly call for providing Syrians with more formal job opportunities. This requires eliminating some of the bureaucratic barriers that discourage Syrians' formal employment. Streamlining the cumbersome process for obtaining a work permit would help: Syrian refugees are required to obtain employer sponsorship, among other steps. Another bureaucratic constraint is the quota on foreign employees: each firm can only hire one Syrian for every ten Turkish citizens.⁸¹

The government could also extend workforce participation incentives to businesses that employ refugees. Employers who hire a Turkish citizen who has completed a state-sponsored apprenticeship program, for example, are exempt from paying that employee's social security contributions for six to 30 months, depending on age and gender.⁸²

Given the sheer numbers of the Syrians seeking employment and the size of Turkey's informal sector – estimated to employ about one-third of the Turkish workforce – many refugees have no choice but to accept informal employment, which generally means accepting lower wages, with no benefits or job security.⁸³ Both Syrians and Turkish citizens need new skills to find better paying jobs in the formal sector. The Turkish labour market suffers “skills and educational mismatches” manifested in an estimated 1.2 million unfilled market vacancies.⁸⁴ More targeted vocational training and on-the-job apprenticeship programs, based on sector-specific development strategies, could help address this problem. NGO representatives said training programs were usually ineffective in matching skills with local market demand.⁸⁵

Both the Ministry of Labour and Social Security – through its employment agency, İŞKUR – and the Ministry of National Education – through the Directorate General for Lifelong Learning – have vocational centres around the country that offer training for various skill levels. International organisations, such as UN Development Programme, the World Bank, the German Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and

⁸¹ See Crisis Group Europe Report N°241, *Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence*, 30 November 2016, pp. 7-8. Employers can obtain exemptions from the hiring quota when there are no Turkish citizens willing to take the job or with the necessary expertise/qualifications. This is rarely the case for the unskilled jobs sought by Syrians, however.

⁸² Information on incentives for Turkish citizens available on İŞKUR website, <http://bit.ly/2wx6v2Q>.

⁸³ Informal workforce figures from website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, <http://bit.ly/2AtmfJY>.

⁸⁴ Roger Kelly, “Achieving Sustainable Growth through Economic Inclusion in Turkey”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, summer 2017.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, NGO representatives, Istanbul, December 2017 and January 2018. For example, in Gaziantep, a city in south-eastern Turkey near the Syrian border, İŞKUR, the labour agency, offered hairdressing classes to female Syrians because that was what most of them wanted. Most were then unable to find jobs, however, because there was no demand. Crisis Group telephone interview, NGO representative in Gaziantep, October 2017. In another case, İŞKUR paid Syrian women in Gaziantep cash incentives over six months to complete textile crafts training. Although an employer wanted to hire those who completed the course, only about 10 per cent accepted the offer. “What motivated them was not the prospect of finding formal work, but the daily cash incentive”, said an external evaluator working for an international organisation. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, October 2017.

International Labour Organization, work with these institutions to support both refugees and host communities.⁸⁶ Syrians are generally unaware that they can also enrol in such vocational training, though most would need to take Turkish language classes in advance.⁸⁷

Lack of data “makes designing/implementing effective vocational training courses very difficult”.⁸⁸ To devise more targeted policies, planners need to identify the skill sets of the Syrian refugee population and their socio-economic characteristics. The Directorate-General of Migration Management (DGMM), with EU funding, is currently surveying the qualifications of registered Syrian refugees throughout the country.⁸⁹ Approximately 20-30 per cent of Syrians in Turkey are illiterate and another 10 per cent learned to read and write but never attended school. This means that significant investments will be needed to provide the basic skills necessary for integration into the labour market.⁹⁰

On-the-job apprenticeship programs, designed by the labour ministry in consultation with employers, are another way to plug both Syrians and local youth into the formal economy. Some programs that have been implemented successfully in border regions of Turkey could also be applied in urban areas. The Golden Crescent Movement Association in Kilis province, for example, in cooperation with the local İŞKUR office, implemented a project matching Syrians with employers and covering their expenses for six months. To be successful in economically disadvantaged areas, an İŞKUR official said, such efforts should be led by “big enterprises that are determined to invest in these places and to hire refugees”.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, representatives of international organisations, Ankara, September 2017. The World Bank, with funding from the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, implements a labour market integration program for both Syrians and Turkish citizens. It provides €50 million for job search support, skills assessment, language, vocational, on-the-job training etc. The project also has an institutional component to help local İŞKUR offices provide counselling, job assistance and monitoring. Germany's KfW also receives €20 million under the Facility for Refugees for a project providing high-quality vocational education and training for Syrians and hosts. Its development agency (BMZ) in 2016 committed more than €62 million for direct job-creation projects open to both citizens and refugees and another €22 million for vocational training and labour market integration projects through İŞKUR, the ministry of education and local chambers of commerce, industry and crafts. Crisis Group e-mail correspondence, EU and German government officials, November 2017.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, public education centre official in Izmir's Bornova district, October 2017.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, migration expert, Istanbul, October 2017.

⁸⁹ As of 11 October 2017, the DGMM had updated the records of 529,313 Syrians in 57 provinces. See “Turkey: Fact Sheet”, UNHCR, October 2017. A Labour Ministry official told Crisis Group that this effort, based on the Syrians' own statements, turned out to be ineffective. He said the labour ministry had begun to implement a new project that would identify Syrians' skills via practice-oriented exams/tests. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, January 2018.

⁹⁰ AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) study, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2013”, <http://bit.ly/2BVMPri>; DGMM figures (as of 7 April 2016) provided in response to a parliamentary inquiry by the main opposition party, CHP, available at <http://bit.ly/2C82nt2>.

⁹¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, October 2017.

4. Expand the formal economy

Turkish small business owners resent the growing number of unregistered Syrian businesses, including street vendors and shops selling electronics or accessories, grocery stores, restaurants, hairdressing salons and bakeries.⁹² These informal enterprises operate without supervision by tax officers, municipal controllers or health inspectors, giving them an unfair advantage, according to Turkish shopkeepers.⁹³

In Fatih, a district in central Istanbul, Turkish café owners complained they could not compete against Syrian establishments that ignored the ban on smoking cigarettes indoors. An employer in Sultangazi, another Istanbul district, said untaxed, unregistered businesses could pay better wages, accusing them of luring away employees.⁹⁴ A local shop owner in the Torbalı district of Izmir expressed similar grievances: “Syrians here illegally opened shops selling goods much cheaper than we can”. He said local business people were ready to “storm” Syrian-owned shops when the municipality stepped in to close them down, avoiding what could have been “quite an outburst of violence”.⁹⁵

To bring unregistered Syrian businesses into the formal economy, authorities should cut the red tape needed to obtain a licence, reduce registration costs and make information on procedures more accessible. Syrians also find it more difficult than Turkish citizens to obtain financing. Unlike Turkish-owned enterprises, Syrian businesses cannot get credits from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organisation (KOSGEB) or the economy ministry. Syrians also find it hard to get bank loans, perform international transactions or simply open an account. Investors, discouraged by bureaucratic hurdles and unsure of growth potential, provide these Syrian enterprises with little in the way of microfinance.

Syrian businesses can have a significant impact, however. According to a June 2017 study by Building Markets, a U.S.-based NGO, Syrians in Turkey have invested more than \$330 million, creating more than 6,000 formal companies since 2011. The same study finds that these enterprises employ on average 9.4 Syrians, the majority of whom previously worked in the informal sector.⁹⁶ As of December 2017, there were about 8,000 registered Syrian businesses in Turkey; experts put the number of unregistered enterprises at about 10,000.⁹⁷

International donors are seeking ways to support refugee-owned small and medium enterprises or SMEs.⁹⁸ The opportunity to receive loans and technical assistance

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, business owners, Istanbul's Sultangazi, Ankara's Altındağ and Izmir's Bornova districts, July-August 2017.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, Konak and Torbalı districts of Izmir, August 2017; and Sultangazi and Fatih districts of Istanbul, July 2017.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, textile sector employer, Istanbul's Sultangazi district, July 2017.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Izmir's Torbalı district, August 2017.

⁹⁶ “Another Side to the Story: A market assessment of Syrian SMEs in Turkey”, Building Markets, June 2017.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, expert on Syrian entrepreneurs, November 2017; “8 bini aşkın Suriyeli şirket 100 bin kişiye istihdam sağlıyor” [“More than 8 thousand Syrian businesses are employing 100 thousand”], Anadolu Agency, 19 October 2017.

⁹⁸ New projects by the World Bank, UNDP, ILO, IOM, Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), to be funded under the EU Facility for Refugees, are expected to be implemented in 2018. Crisis Group e-mail correspondence, EU official, November 2017.

could encourage Syrian entrepreneurs to register their businesses and provide formal work opportunities for other Syrians. Supporting Turkish and Syrian joint ventures is another option, with the added benefit of fostering more interaction between Syrians and Turkish citizens.

B. *Strains on Education*

Turkey's already strained education system is struggling to integrate nearly one million Syrian school-aged children. Simply enrolling Syrian students is a tremendous challenge; around 370,000 children are still out of school. But authorities must also manage local host community anger by addressing their legitimate concerns about overcrowding and its impact on educational quality.

1. Phasing-out Temporary Education Centres

Ankara established temporary education centres or TECs to provide an accredited Arabic-language curriculum for Syrian children, setting the centres up first in camps along the southern border and later in urban locations around the country. It decided in early 2016 to phase out the TECs over three years and integrate Syrians into the public-school system. As of late 2017, 37.5 per cent of the 976,200 school-age Syrian refugee children attended public schools while 24.5 per cent still studied in TECs. The remaining 38 per cent did not attend school at all.⁹⁹

The decision to phase out the TECs angered Turkish and Syrian families alike. Turkish parents complain the influx of Syrians has overcrowded their schools and overwhelmed the capacity of teachers. Many believe that Syrian children spread disease and call them troublemakers, claiming they steal from other students.¹⁰⁰ Syrian parents, on the other hand, complain that teachers and classmates discriminate against their children.

Experts say phasing out the TECs entails two main risks: that fewer children will enrol in school and that those who do enrol will feel even more marginalised and eventually drop out.¹⁰¹ To encourage school attendance, the EU and UNICEF in partnership with the Turkish ministry of education, launched a Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program in March 2017, designed to encourage an additional 230,000 Syrian refugee children to attend school and reduce dropout rates. The CCTE provides refugee families with bi-monthly cash transfers amounting to about 35-60 Turkish lira (\$10-\$16) based on age and gender.¹⁰²

Absorbing Syrians into the national education system is the right policy in the long run. Not only will this help Syrian children integrate into Turkish society, it will also

⁹⁹ Data on Syrian refugee enrolment available from the Ministry of National Education at <http://bit.ly/2AJ4BOV>.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, official of a local branch of the Ministry of National Education, Istanbul, June 2017.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, migration expert, Istanbul, September 2017; migration expert, Ankara, July 2017.

¹⁰² The CCTE, with a total budget of €34 million, was inaugurated in May 2017. "EU's largest ever education in emergencies programme in Turkey reaches first refugee families", press release, European Commission, 8 June 2017. Syrian girls often drop out because their families force them into early marriages.

provide them with a diploma recognised in Turkey and abroad. However, phasing out the TECs too quickly is straining public school capacity and fuelling tensions between Turkish citizens and refugees.¹⁰³ “In practice integration into the schools is not working”, said a migration expert. “Teachers and school principals do not know how to manage this transition”.¹⁰⁴

Overcrowding is especially acute in urban areas with high refugee concentrations. In Istanbul's Sultangazi district, 6,000 Syrian students were added to a school system that accommodates about 103,000 children. The influx has dramatically increased the size of public school classes, reversing recent progress. “We are now back to conditions we were in four or five years ago”, said a TEC director. “It is hard for everyone to swallow this”.¹⁰⁵

The problem is even worse in Ankara's Altındağ district, where Syrians make up 20 per cent of the population in some neighbourhoods. In response to parent complaints, school administrators decided to create Syrian-only classrooms, effectively undermining the goal of integration. “Teachers are desperate”, said an NGO representative. “Sometimes they use other Syrian children who have learnt a bit of Turkish to translate for them in the classroom”.¹⁰⁶

The EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey provides a total of around €650 million for education, including programs to build new schools, provide language support and train teachers to facilitate the transition away from the temporary education centres. Implementation takes time, however. The European Commission announced in December 2016 that it had signed contracts worth about €270 million for building and equipping schools that should accommodate more than 70,000 Syrian refugee children.¹⁰⁷ UNICEF has tried to address the problem of capacity by building prefabricated classroom structures as a temporary measure.¹⁰⁸ Expanding such short-term measures could prove useful in this transition process.

Another issue is whether to integrate the roughly 12,000 Syrian teachers still employed at TECs into the public-school system. Turkish teachers oppose bringing these teachers into public schools permanently when hundreds of thousands of Turkish teachers work on short-term contracts. UNICEF (with funding primarily from the German government and the EU) currently pays TEC teacher salaries; it could continue to do this for Syrian teachers, employing them in public schools on a temporary basis as “intercultural mediators”, a model that has worked in other countries dealing with large refugee populations. Syrian teachers could make sure refugee children understand lessons, quell tension between children, and facilitate communication with Syrian parents.

¹⁰³ According to a September 2017 study by the Education Reform Initiative, around 77,000 new classrooms and 70,000 additional teachers are needed to meet demand. “Education Monitoring Report 2016-2017”, Education Reform Initiative, October 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, migration expert, Ankara, July 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, TEC director, Istanbul's Sultangazi district, July 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, NGO representative, Ankara, July 2017.

¹⁰⁷ “Facility for Refugees in Turkey: the EU invests in the education of 70,000 Syrian refugee children”, press release, European Commission, 22 December 2016.

¹⁰⁸ This measure was partly funded by the EU. Crisis Group interview, UNICEF representative, Ankara, September 2017. UNICEF has also paid to run, renovate and clean some schools for six months.

The longer children remain out of school, the higher the risk that they will feel marginalised. The discrimination faced by many Syrian children in public schools, both from classmates and teachers, could create an alienated and angry generation. Authorities need to manage the transition from TECs carefully to avert this risk. Host community and Syrian concerns about coexistence in Turkish public schools need to be addressed through better public communication and by focusing on the message that refugee-related capacity-building also benefits locals.

2. Diminishing role of civil society

The Syrian influx encouraged the establishment of NGO-run learning centres in Turkish cities. Most of these previously had signed authorisation protocols with district or provincial governorates, a procedure initially sanctioned by Ankara.¹⁰⁹ Starting in mid-2017, however, the national government cancelled these protocols, requiring NGOs to apply for authorisation from the education ministry. The official reasoning was twofold: some NGOs were suspected of having links to illicit groups; others were faulted for not meeting the required education standards. “Centres were established all around Istanbul that we had no control over”, said a Turkish official. “We did not know who they were operated by”.¹¹⁰

The cancellations limited refugee access to specialised courses, such as vocational training, and assistance to help children learn the Turkish language and other basic skills. “We are concerned that NGOs have been pushed out of the non-formal education sector”, said a representative of an international organisation. “In our view, non-formal education has to be strengthened/scaled up NGOs play an important role in that”.¹¹¹

Twelve NGOs had signed new protocols with the National Education Ministry by 10 December 2017; twenty others reportedly had applied, but remained unclear about their status.¹¹² Organisations aligned with the government obtained renewals quickly, while the process dragged on for more secular groups, fuelling suspicions that the ministry was using refugee assistance projects to boost conservative values.¹¹³ The representative of an NGO that recently secured a protocol called the process compli-

¹⁰⁹ Some of the centres forced to stop teaching were internationally funded, such as the Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants or ASAM, which ran 24 such centres in fifteen provinces around Turkey. Though some of its non-education related services continue to be offered to both refugees and locals, ASAM has suspended language programs for about six months, losing trained teachers who took other jobs. Crisis Group interviews, ASAM representatives, Istanbul, July 2017.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Istanbul, July and September 2017.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, September 2017.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, NGO representative, Istanbul, November 2017.

¹¹³ For example, the government quickly authorised Ensar, an Islamic foundation with close links to the government, to reopen its learning centres. The National Education Ministry posted a list of organisations that signed protocols on its website, <http://hboprojeler.meb.gov.tr/protokol-liste.html>. Turkish news outlets reported that the national education ministry, in a letter dated 8 September, had asked all 39 district directorates in Istanbul to direct Syrian students into religious “*imam-hatip*” schools. This led to uproar among secular constituencies and opposition parties. “Suriyeli öğrenciler imam hatiplere yönlendirilsin’ genelgesi” [“Circular on directing Syrians to imam-hatip schools”], *Sözcü*, 20 September 2017.

cated and opaque: “There is no clarity on why the protocol is granted or not ... NGOs with hundreds of employees do not know what their status will be two years from now”.¹¹⁴

Instead of cancelling local protocols, the government could subject NGO-run centres to more rigorous inspection procedures while allowing those already supervised through EU or UN mechanisms to continue. Procedures for renewing authorisations should be more transparent and expedited for organisations with proven track records. This would provide Syrians with much-needed educational support while ensuring that NGO-run facilities perform according to clearly defined standards.

¹¹⁴ NGO representative views shared at event attended by Crisis Group titled “Migration and the Integration into the Education System” organised by Friedrich Naumann Foundation’s Turkey Office, Istanbul, 13 October 2017.

IV. Conclusion

Turkey has taken important steps to integrate 3.4 million Syrians, accommodating this massive influx of refugees with less backlash than might have been expected or feared. However, it still faces stark social challenges. Frictions between host and refugee communities are rising, particularly in inner-city districts with high refugee density. Ankara policymakers should develop mechanisms and public messaging aimed at defusing refugee-related tensions at the local level.

Despite strained relations, Turkey and the EU have a shared interest in continued cooperation to ensure the sustainable integration of Syrians into Turkish society. Both sides understand the consequences should the March 2016 deal between Turkey and the EU unravel. As the EU decides how to allocate an additional €3 billion to Turkey for Syrians' integration, it should also consider how to counter rising negative public sentiments toward the refugees.

The Turkish government cannot continue operating without clear policy goals for the sustainable integration of Syrian refugees. It needs to prepare both short- and long-term plans designed to prevent intercommunal confrontations while educating Syrian children and helping adults transition from assistance to productive employment. Ankara also needs to address public sentiments, mostly negative, about Syrian refugees becoming Turkish citizens.

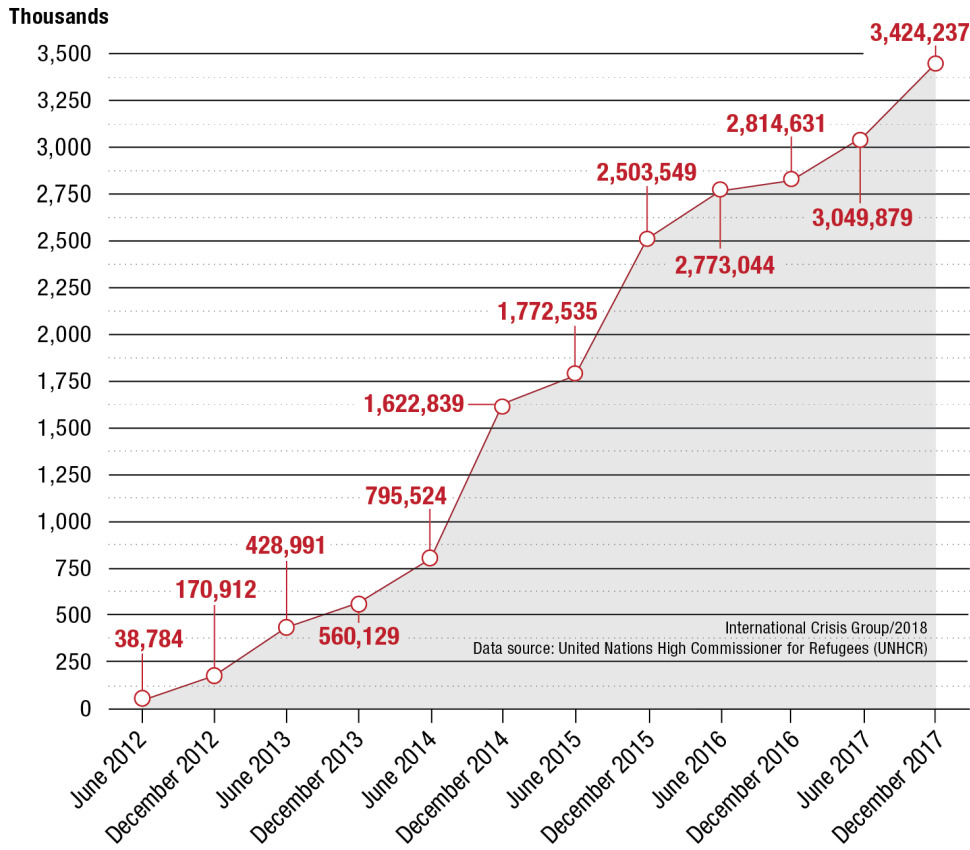
Failure to secure wide support for these policies, from both refugees and their hosts, could stoke resentment and violence. Turkish society ultimately must come to terms with the reality that a significant portion of the Syrian refugees who fled into Turkey will remain there. The question is not whether but how to weave them into the country's social fabric.

Istanbul/Ankara/Izmir/Brussels, 29 January 2018

Appendix A: Map of Turkey



Appendix B: Number of Registered Syrians in Turkey (2012-2017)



Appendix C: List of Acronyms

AFAD – Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency).

AK Party – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party): Turkey's ruling party since 2002, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It received 49.5 per cent of the vote in the November 2015 parliamentary elections.

ASAM – The Organisation for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants.

CCTE – Conditional Cash Transfer for Education: A program funded under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey that aims to incentivise the schooling of Syrian refugee children.

CHP – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party): Turkey's main opposition party headed by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. It received 25.3 per cent in the November 2015 parliamentary elections. One of the party's MPs is imprisoned for leaking state secrets and spying charges.

DGMM – The Directorate-General of Migration Management.

ERG – Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (Education Reform Initiative): An NGO in Turkey specialised in education policy.

ESSN – The Emergency Social Safety Network: One of the EU's humanitarian aid projects in Turkey providing direct cash support to some one million Syrians in need.

FETÖ – Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü (Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation): The designation given by the Turkish authorities to Gülen movement members/sympathisers the state considers responsible for illicit infiltration into state institutions and the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. Ankara demands the extradition of U.S.-based Fethullah Gülen who is accused of heading the organisation.

HDP – Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party): The main legal party representing the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. It received 10.75 per cent of the total vote in the November 2015 parliamentary elections. Nine of the party's MPs (including its co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş) are imprisoned over terrorism charges, while five (including former co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ) were stripped of their MP status.

IHH – İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Humanitarian Relief Foundation): A prominent Islamist-leaning Turkish aid organisation operational in more than 130 countries.

ILO – International Labour Organization.

IOM – International Organization for Migration.

İŞKUR – Türkiye İş Kurumu (Turkish Employment Agency).

KfW – Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (Reconstruction Credit Institute): A German state-owned development bank based in Frankfurt. It was founded in 1948 after World War II as part of the Marshall Plan.

KOSGEB – Küçük ve Orta Ölçekli İşletmeleri Geliştirme ve Destekleme İdaresi Başkanlığı (The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organisation).

MAZLUMDER – İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği (The Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed): A non-governmental human rights organisation in Turkey established in 1991. While initially the organisation's focus was on religious discrimination, in recent years it expanded its scope to areas such as the Kurdish issue and the refugee crisis.

MHP – Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party): Turkey's right-wing, nationalist party headed by Devlet Bahçeli. It received 11.9 per cent of the vote in the November 2015 parliamentary elections. Following disarray in the MHP, five of its MPs (among other party figures and members) joined the Good Party (İYİ Parti) that was formally established on 25 October 2017 and is headed by Meral Akşener.

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. The Turkish government began phasing out the TEC system in the 2015/2016 school year.

Tzu Chi – An international Buddhist aid organisation headquartered in Taiwan that operates in 56 countries. The organisation has a branch in Istanbul's Sultangazi district where it distributes aid, provides health and education services to Syrians.

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme.

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

WFP – World Food Programme.

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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. 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, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

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