



Not Likely to Go Home: Syrian Refugees and the Challenges to Turkey— and the International Community

KEMAL KIRIŞCI
ELIZABETH FERRIS

Center on the
B United States
and Europe
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Not Likely to Go Home:

Syrian Refugees and the Challenges to Turkey— and the International Community

KEMAL KIRIŞCI
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Since October 2013, when we first visited Turkey to research the extent and impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the country, the scale of displacement has increased dramatically. At that time there were around 2 million refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Today this figure has climbed to more than 4 million while estimates of the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have increased from around 4.2 million to 7.6 million.¹ More than half of the population of Syria is displaced and in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Until recently, the overwhelming majority of those displaced were fleeing indiscriminate Syrian government attacks on and repression of civilians. Today there is additional displacement resulting from the brutal treatment of civilians by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and by fighting between ISIS and other opposition groups. Furthermore, ISIS territorial gains in Iraq and its brutality against civilians, especially minority groups, unleashed additional large waves of IDPs into Kurdish-controlled areas in Iraq and refugees into Turkey.

The Syrian conflict and resulting displacement have become protracted, and solutions to both the conflict and displacement seem further away than ever. Bashar al-Assad and his regime continue to

persist although there are increasing reports that the regime is weakening.² Large swaths of Syria are under ISIS control and there is still no unified and credible opposition capable of replacing the Assad regime and bringing an end to the current chaos and violence. The sheer extent of the destruction in Syria, coupled with the complete absence of a peace process—or prospects for future stability—is increasingly driving Syrians to seek refuge beyond the immediate neighborhood. More and more desperate Syrians are risking their lives in an effort to make it to the European Union countries by crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas in unsafe boats. Greece is especially hard hit. As of August 2015, almost 200,000 people, many of them Syrians, had made their way from Turkey across to Greek islands.³ That is a more than fivefold increase in numbers over the figures for the whole of 2014. The sudden upsurge in Syrian refugees and irregular migrants in general is not only deeply straining the resources of recession-stricken Italy and Greece but also creating tensions within the European Union over burden-sharing.⁴ Clearly, the impact of this displacement crisis is being felt increasingly beyond the immediate neighborhood of Syria, even though the bulk of the refugees remain in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. And it is conditions in those host countries, coupled with

despair over prospects for a return to Syria that is driving refugees to seek safety outside the region.

This displacement is causing an enormous humanitarian crisis with implications for host countries, international aid agencies, and, of course, for those whose lives have been forever changed. But the displacement is not just a humanitarian crisis. The widespread displacement and the sheer scale of human need inside Syria is also a sign of the breakdown of international humanitarian governance. The international community has failed to bring the fighting in Syria to an end while regional governments have pursued policies that have further aggravated the situation. The UN Security Council has been paralyzed and has failed to find a political resolution to the crisis. The U.S. administration has shied away from intervening in Syria to bring about regime change and instead has increasingly focused on “degrading and ultimately destroying” ISIS, so far with no major impact on the ground. Iran and Russia continue to prop up the Syrian regime. In the meantime, the conflict that is driving the displacement crisis continues.

The persistence of the crisis and the accompanying violence also lays bare the weaknesses of the international humanitarian assistance system. The most striking weakness is the failure of the international community to demonstrate solidarity in burden-sharing with the neighboring countries hosting the bulk of the Syrian refugees. After all, the international refugee system was set up on the shared understanding that refugees were an international responsibility, not just the responsibility of the country where they happened to arrive. Resettlement of refugees to third countries is one widely recognized manifestation of burden-sharing. In spite of numerous appeals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of

August 2015, there were a little over 100,000 places made available for resettlement, an amount corresponding to less than three percent of the overall number of Syrian refugees.⁵ And yet less than 10 percent of the pledged resettlement places have been used by the EU and the U.S.—a truly minuscule number.⁶ The picture as far as burden-sharing in the form of providing funding for humanitarian assistance has not been much better. The UN has struggled to find funding for its budgets to assist countries hosting refugees and to provide humanitarian assistance into Syria. Less than two-thirds of the 2014 aid budget for support inside Syria was met, while in August 2015 the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2015-16 still remained more than 60 percent underfunded.⁷

Turkey has been especially affected as the largest recipient of Syrian refugees in the region. Since October 2013, the number of Syrian refugees has increased more than threefold and now numbers almost two million registered refugees. According to UNHCR, when other refugees including those from Iraq are added, Turkey became the world’s largest recipient of refugees in 2014.⁸ There are expectations that if the current situation in Syria persists, this number may well increase to 2.5 million.⁹ In spite of having the largest economy in the region and a strong state tradition, Turkey’s resources and public patience are wearing thin. Growing public resources are being channeled into efforts to meet the immediate needs of the refugees in the country, while the government and civil society are trying to address the increasingly widely accepted reality that the refugees are unlikely to return to Syria. In the meantime, the economic, social and political impact of the refugees is growing. Although Turkey has much more capacity to manage the situation than Jordan and Lebanon, it is difficult to see how Turkey will be

able to cope without greater burden-sharing with the international community.

Initially, Turkey attempted to respond to the influx of refugees on its own. However, as the numbers increased and the prospects of return dimmed, it sought support for burden-sharing from the international community in the form of financial assistance as well as help with the resettlement of especially vulnerable refugees. So far, it has received very little support on either front. Even though the crisis is now into its fifth year, so far very few Syrian refugees have been resettled from Turkey. Turkey's resettlement needs at the beginning of 2015 have been determined by the UNHCR to be 214,000 and the agency planned to submit 20,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement.¹⁰ But in 2014 there were less than 9,000 refugees resettled from Turkey—a figure which also includes non-Syrians.¹¹ Sharing the cost of caring and protecting refugees has been disappointingly limited. The Turkish government as of August 2015 had spent more than \$ 5.6 to 6.0 billion for assistance and protection of the refugees.¹² In return Turkey has received international assistance amounting to less than \$ 400 million, a situation that has been called “unsustainable” by a government spokesman.¹³ Such a weak level of international solidarity has caused considerable resentment, although it must be acknowledged that the government itself was slow in developing effective cooperation with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as well as international agencies.

Refugees continue to come to Turkey and there is general consensus that they will remain in the country for the foreseeable future. This raises a host of questions for Turkey and for the broader international community. How has Turkey been impacted by the refugee crisis economically, socially and politically? How does the situation today compare with the one in 2013? How is Turkey coping? How has the international response evolved? How can the emerging cooperation between Turkey and the international community in addressing the needs of refugees be improved? Are there lessons to be learned? Is there a viable strategy to address this humanitarian crisis given the reality that the chaos reigning in Iraq and Syria is likely to last for years if not decades?

The report seeks to address these questions and is divided into four sections. The following two sections will compare the way in which the refugee situation in Turkey has evolved since October 2013 and discuss Turkey's institutional and societal efforts to manage this increasingly complex situation. The third section will discuss the impact that refugees have had on Turkish society, economy and politics together with the challenges that Turkey faces in integrating the refugees into Turkish society and in attracting support from the international community. The report will conclude with some general observations and recommendations.

COMPARING TODAY WITH OCTOBER 2013

In addition to the significant increase in numbers, there are three striking differences between the refugee situation today and that of October 2013. Firstly, the ethnic and religious background of the refugees has become much more diverse. Originally, the refugees were overwhelmingly Arab Sunni Syrians with a smaller number of Turcoman and Alawites. Today they have been joined by Kurds from northern Syria as well as Yazidis and Christians from Iraq. Iraqi refugees fled to Turkey after ISIS captured Mosul and its environs in June 2014 before their onslaught could be stopped by the Peshmerghas from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and US air strikes. There were roughly 40-50,000 Iraqis who entered Turkey on that occasion. However, by June 2015, the number of Iraqi refugees in Turkey had grown to 240-250,000.¹⁴ The government and various municipalities constructed camps to house some of the refugees while others settled into villages and towns inhabited by their co-religionists or ethnic brethren in southeastern Turkey. In addition, around 190,000 mostly Kurds crossed into Turkey, fleeing the fighting between Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces and ISIS in Kobane and its surroundings in October 2014. Some of these refugees have since returned, although the majority still live in a large government and smaller municipality camps while others are dispersed across the region of Suruç across from Kobane. In June 2015, clashes erupted between ISIS and PYD forces as well as their Syrian Arab allies—this time for the control of the Syrian border town of Tel Abyad. This led to about 25,000 people—mostly Arabs, Kurds and Turcoman—to flee into Turkey under chaotic circumstances. Nevertheless, the bulk of the new arrivals since our last visit have continued

to be Arab Sunni refugees mostly fleeing regime attacks on Aleppo and its environs.

Secondly, the politics of receiving Syrian refugees has also dramatically changed. The Turkish government received the initial waves of refugees in 2011 with open arms. At the time their numbers were limited and the government believed that the regime in Damascus would not last long. They had very quickly instituted an “open door policy” and extended temporary protection to the refugees. They had hoped that the refugees would be able to return to Syria in a very short time and Turkey would in the meantime have earned a lot of goodwill—if not also influence—in a reformed Syria.¹⁵ However, by the time we re-visited Turkey in October 2013, the wisdom of this approach was already being questioned and there were increasing calls for the international community to share the burden with Turkey. Nevertheless, the government continued its “open door” policy and, as will be seen in the next section, introduced measures to address problems resulting from an increasingly protracted refugee situation.

At the same time there was a marked change in the government’s handling of the refugee influxes coming from Kobane and Tel Abyad. In the former case, as the Kurdish inhabitants of Kobane turned up on the Turkish border in ever increasing numbers, the police and the military were brought in to hold back the refugees. Fortunately, the ensuing melee and humanitarian crisis lasted only a very short time and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was on a state visit in Baku, issued instructions to open the border and admit the refugees.¹⁶ A similar situation erupted in June 2015. As the fighting around Tel Abyad gathered intensity and the civilian population amassed on the Turkish border, the Deputy Prime Minister, Numan Kurtulmuş,

announced that Turkey would keep the border closed and instead extend humanitarian assistance across the border into Syria.¹⁷ However, local authorities were simply overwhelmed by the refugees pushing against the barbed wire fences and eventually allowed them to come through.¹⁸

Subsequently, a short-lived heated and inconclusive debate occurred in Turkey when the government contemplated the idea of a military intervention to create a safe zone for refugees.¹⁹ Many commentators argued that the idea of a safe zone had more to do with the Turkish government wanting to prevent Kurds from gaining control of further territory in Syria along the Turkish border and domestic politics than with the welfare of refugees.²⁰ At the same time there were also accusations that PYD was pursuing ethnic cleansing against Arabs and Turcoman in the region.²¹ The idea of a safe zone or a safe haven has long been on the agenda of the Turkish government which had brought up the idea on a number of occasions.²² The idea appears to have been first raised in July 2012 after the government announced that Turkey's "red-line" in terms of number of refugees was 100,000 and that, if this figure was exceeded the possibility of a "buffer zone" would be sought.²³ Similarly, drawing on the experience of the safe haven created in northern Iraq in the aftermath of the Kurdish refugee crisis of March-April 1991, in October 2014 the government advocated the idea of creating pockets of safe havens near the Turkish border around population centers for humanitarian reasons.²⁴ The idea resurfaced again in the form of a rectangular area north of Aleppo stretching about 60 miles along the Syrian-Turkish border, when Turkey and the U.S. signed an agreement in July 2015 to coordinate their military effort against ISIS.²⁵ The Turkish side argued that the area could be used both for military action against ISIS as

well as for enabling some of the refugees in Turkey to return to Syria.²⁶ However, in the meantime, it has become quite evident that the U.S. and Turkey have very different understandings of what such an area would entail. The U.S. emphasis is increasingly on an "ISIS free zone" rather than a "safe zone" or a "no fly zone" that might provide protection for refugees and IDPs.²⁷

Thirdly, the worsening refugee crisis has deepened the social, economic and political problems that were already visible in October 2013. The massive increase in the number of refugees outside camps and the lack of adequate assistance policies toward them has aggravated a range of social problems. Refugees experience problems of adaptation in urban settings and the language barrier seriously complicates their ability to integrate into the communities where they live. There is growing concern about underage Syrian girls being forced into marriage as well as fears that a recent constitutional court ruling decriminalizing religious weddings without civil marriage will lead to a spread of polygamy involving Syrian women and girls.²⁸ The sight of Syrians begging in the streets is causing particular resentment among local people, especially in cities in western Turkey. There have also been reports of occasional violence between refugees and the local population.²⁹ In turn this reinforces a growing public perception that Syrian refugees are associated with criminality. A public opinion poll held in October 2014 revealed that more than 62 percent of those surveyed supported the idea that Syrian refugees were involved in criminal behavior.³⁰ These attitudes contrast with local authorities' and security officials' observations that in reality, criminality is surprisingly low and that Syrian community leaders are very effective in preventing crime and defusing tensions between refugees and locals.³¹

The presence of large numbers of refugees especially in cities along the Syrian border has mixed economic consequences. The government spends large sums for the upkeep of the refugee camps as well as for health and other services for both camp and urban refugees.³² This fuels resentment among locals who feel that this undermines their own access to especially health services (that are funded by their taxes) while health personnel feel increasingly overwhelmed by increasing demand.³³ The presence of an ever-growing number of urban refugees has inevitably pushed prices up in general and especially for housing, causing additional complaints among locals. Furthermore, many refugees are employed in the informal economy and work for lower wages than Turkish citizens; they do not pay taxes or make contributions to social security. This not only makes the Syrian refugees vulnerable to exploitation, but also generates resentment especially from Turks employed in the informal economy.³⁴

However, at the same time, the refugee crisis has also led to an increase in formal employment among Turkish citizens as the result of the growth in the number of organizations aiding Syrian refugees located in the region.³⁵ This is clearly visible in cities such as Gaziantep, Kilis, and Şanlıurfa that host the offices and centers of an increasing number of international INGOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies that provide these services.³⁶ The presence of Syrian refugees has also been seen as a pool of cheap labor for positions that locals have become reluctant to take up. Yet, the need to support Syrian refugees in Turkey, coupled with the fact that most of the humanitarian assistance sent into Syria is actually purchased in Turkey, has benefitted the local economy considerably. Additionally, there has also been greater economic activity spurred by small as well

as bigger businesses, often in the form restaurants but also factories set up by Syrians who were able to bring over their capital to Turkey.³⁷ Lastly, these very provinces have also seen their exports to Syria rise by more than 200 percent from 2011 to 2014 while the overall increase in Turkey's exports to Syria stood at only 11 percent.³⁸ The growing number of firms set up by Syrian business people especially in Mersin with connections in Syria is also seen as a factor that has helped increase exports.³⁹

The continued influx of large numbers of refugees has also had political consequences. Although the public at large was initially welcoming and generous towards refugees, this has changed as their presence persisted.⁴⁰ There are growing calls for their return and an end to new arrivals.⁴¹ However, these calls are not uniform. Ethnic and religious affinities deeply shape reactions. Religiously conservative Turks and Turkish citizens of Arab descent, usually voting for the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), have by and large been more open to receiving the bulk of refugees who are Sunni Arabs.⁴² Others such as secular Turks, Alevis and Kurds have feared the potential of large numbers of Sunni Arab refugees changing the demographics of local society and politics.⁴³ Interestingly, this fear became very visible during the run up to the local elections in March 2014 as rumors spread that the government was going to allow refugees to vote.⁴⁴ Refugees from different ethnic and religious backgrounds such as Syrian Alawites, Christians and Kurds have preferred to stay with their brethren and co-religionists or in localities administered by opposition parties such as the Republican's People Party (CHP) and Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). As much as Ahmet Davutoğlu (both as former Minister of Foreign Affairs and as Prime Minister) has repeatedly argued that Turkey welcomes any refugee in need of

protection independently of their ethnic and religious background, these identity-driven political perceptions and distrust have persisted.⁴⁵

One conspicuous example of how politics fuels mistrust and aggravates the challenge of caring for refugees is that of Kurdish refugees from Kobane. For a long time, they remained reluctant and were also discouraged by HDP local authorities to move into the well-equipped and specially-prepared government camp in Suruç. Instead, they preferred to stay in municipality camps while local authorities complained that the government was not providing material assistance for their camps. The mistrust is inevitably linked to the complicated politics that surround the Kurdish question in Turkey. The AKP government had been negotiating with the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan since 2012 to find a political solution, and a cease-fire had been in place since 2013. However, the ISIS siege of Kobane and the reluctance of the Turkish government to intervene to stop the destruction of the town has deeply aggravated the problem of mistrust and adversely affected these negotiations.⁴⁶ Even after the mistrust was somewhat overcome and some Kurdish refugees did move into the camp, the camp could not be used to full capacity. Similarly, as most of the refugees that fled Tel Abyad were Arabs and Turcoman, none could be placed in the Suruç camp for fear of provoking inter-ethnic tensions.

The extent and depth of this mistrust erupted into full scale conflict and violence soon after Turkey

and the U.S. reached their deal to cooperate more closely against ISIS in Syria. This deal coincided with an ISIS attack on a group of young activists gathered in Suruç to bring humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to the inhabitants of Kobane. This was very quickly accompanied by attacks launched by the PKK on two police officers.⁴⁷ This has precipitated a cycle of violence between the PKK and Turkish security forces that has already claimed the lives of many people and pushed the country into instability. This sudden violent escalation of the Kurdish problem in Turkey is a conspicuous manifestation of the complex manner in which the Syrian refugee crisis has impacted politics in Turkey. Many commentators have argued that pro-Kurdish HDP performed well during the Turkish general elections in June 2015 (winning 80 seats in the parliament) primarily because conservative Kurds that traditionally voted for the governing AKP switched their votes after Kobane.⁴⁸ This outcome contributed to AKP's failure to obtain the majority in the parliament needed to form a government on its own. The failure to form a coalition government and the political jockeying that has already started for the re-run elections to be held in November 2015 is clearly aggravating the violence.⁴⁹

Clearly, the presence of now more than two million refugees is deeply affecting Turkey economically, socially and politically. This is inevitably also adversely affecting the country's ability to provide protection and assistance to the refugees.

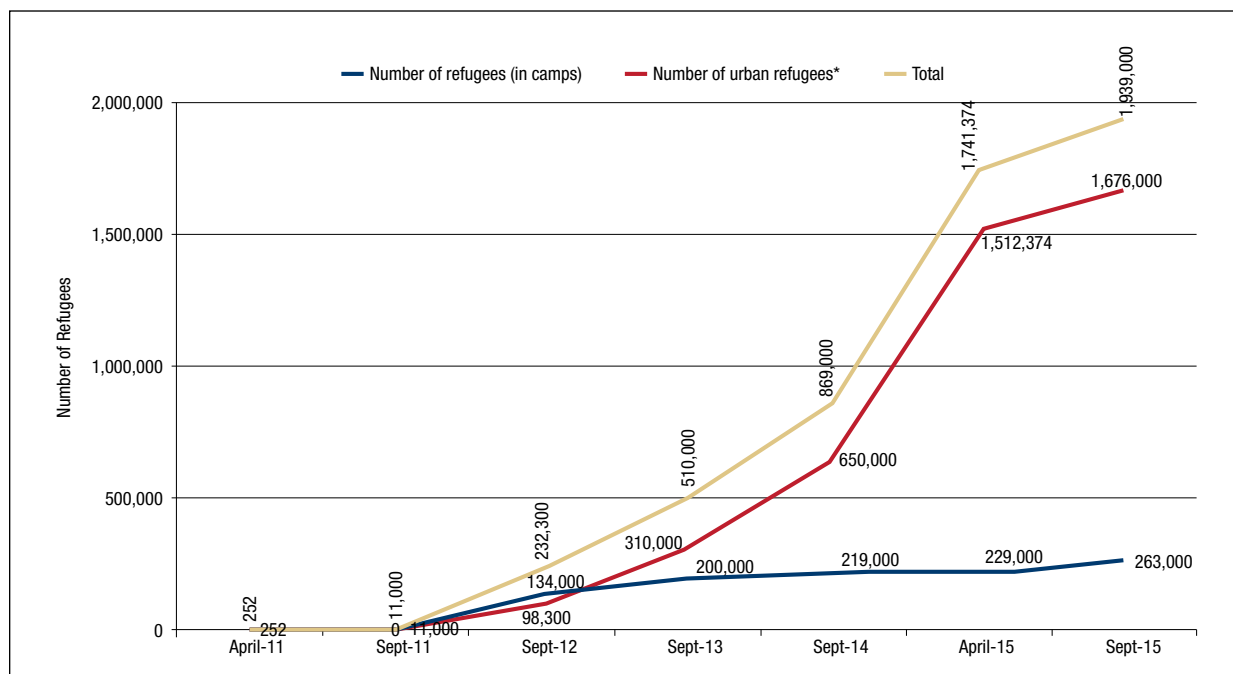
MANAGING THE REFUGEE INFLUX

Soon after the first batch of refugees began to arrive in the spring of 2011, Turkey adopted an open door policy, permitting refugees fleeing the violence and regime repression in Syria to enter Turkey easily.⁵⁰ In the initial stages of the crisis, refugees were mostly housed in schools, sports halls, unused warehouses and factories. However, as the numbers continued to increase, the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) of Turkey was given the task of constructing purpose-built camps for refugees. These camps received considerable international praise and recognition for their quality, both in terms of the housing and services provided. However, by October 2013 there were already twenty-one camps housing about 200,000 refugees. It had become evident that AFAD could not go on constructing camps as more and more refugees preferred to live in urban settings. At the time, their numbers were estimated to be around

400,000. The government put into place provisional arrangements to ensure access to health services, while in April 2014 it oversaw the establishment of the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) to implement the newly-adopted Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law no. 6458, April 11, 2013). The Law had been in the making for some time quite independently of the Syrian displacement crisis, but did include general provisions for the management of the mass influx of refugees.

Subsequently, the DGMM issued in October 2014 secondary legislation in the form of a Circular to define temporary protection (TP Circular), instituted registration of the refugees and established coordination between different agencies to provide services for urban refugees.⁵¹ AFAD remained responsible for establishing and running the refugee camps as well as ensuring emergency assistance for new arrivals. As of August 2015 there were over 1.9

Graph I: Number of registered Syrian refugees and refugee camps in Turkey 2011-2015



Source: UNHCR & AFAD

million registered refugees with more than a quarter of a million of them living now in 25 refugee camps (See Graph I).⁵² Four of these camps were set up to house Christians and Yazidis escaping the ISIS onslaught in Iraq.⁵³ Additionally, there are ten refugee camps for Kurds from Kobane as well as Arabs, Christians, Kurds and Yazidis set up and run by HDP-led municipalities close to Iraq and Syria.⁵⁴ In addition to the registered Syrian refugees and those cared for by HDP, there are another 200 to 250,000 refugees who have failed to register for a variety of reasons. These range from a fear that registration may complicate their return to Syria if Assad's regime clings to power, to rumors that if they are registered they risk being sent to a camp and may not be able to move on to Europe.⁵⁵ DGMM at the same time is also responsible for processing individual asylum seekers coming from other third countries.⁵⁶

Managing the presence of two million refugees has not been an easy task—even for a country with significant administrative and economic capacity. This was also complicated by an initial reluctance by the government to seek international assistance. Turkey chose not to be included in the first Syrian Regional Response Plan (SRRP) of the UN and preferred not to cooperate with the UNHCR beyond ensuring supplies of tents for camps and overseeing voluntary return. However, compared to October 2013, there is now a visible improvement in coordination between the Turkish government and international agencies such as IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO as well as OCHA when it comes to cross-border assistance issues.⁵⁷ In sharp contrast to the SRRP of March 2012 when Turkey was first included, the newly-instituted UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) 2015-16 is very extensive and provides a growing list of areas of cooperation and projects

focusing on refugees, as well as on host communities.⁵⁸ However, the government complains that they have spent over \$5.6 to \$ 6 billion on the refugees so far and received very little international financial support.⁵⁹ The 3RP for Turkey has been budgeted for \$624 million, however less than a third of this promised funding has been received to date.⁶⁰ The amount of international support that Turkey has received so far is equivalent to less than ten percent of the Turkish government's expenditure on Syrian refugees.

Turkish non-governmental organizations too have become much more involved in supporting refugees in comparison with October 2013. Previously, together with the Turkish Red Crescent, most of the Turkish NGOs such as Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), Kimse Yok Mu?, Helsinki Citizens Assembly-Turkey, Support to Life and International Blue Crescent were focused on the provision of emergency assistance to urban refugees in the form of clothing, food, health services and some shelter support. More recently, together with some of the above NGOs, others such as the Association of Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), Anadolu Kültür, Human Resources Development Foundation (HRDF), IMPR Humanitarian, Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed (MazlumDer) etc... have also embarked on projects to improve the adaptation of the refugees to their new environments and the quality of their protection in Turkey.⁶¹ These projects range from teaching language courses, including Turkish, to running courses to help women acquire vocational skills as well as psycho-social support programs. There are also a growing number of child-friendly spaces that are created by these and other NGOs as well as legal counseling with respect to their rights under the terms of temporary protection.

A range of INGOs have also established themselves in Turkey. While many actually are primarily engaged in cross-border assistance into Syria, some are making important contributions to addressing refugees' needs. Some have partnered with Turkish NGOs and work closely with UN agencies. The distrust with which the Turkish authorities have traditionally viewed INGOs has been overcome to at least some extent as recognition has grown that they are needed to address the situation facing urban refugees. In contrast to October 2013, when the registration and legalization of the status of INGOs was still difficult and contentious, recently the government has issued a growing number of registration permits for INGOs. This naturally greatly facilitates their operations in Turkey, including securing residence permits for long-term international staff and making it possible for them to carry out such mundane tasks as opening bank accounts. Local authorities such as the governorate and municipalities of Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa have instituted regular coordination meetings with INGOs as well as with Turkish NGOs. There are also a growing number of Syrian NGOs operating especially in the education sector beside those engaged in cross-border assistance. However, there are also continued complaints from representatives of Turkish and Syrian NGOs about INGOs that have persisted since October 2013. These complaints are centered on the reluctance of INGOs to include them in coordination meetings and the hierarchical nature of the relationship as most local and Syrian NGOs are engaged as just "implementing partners." Furthermore, these NGOs also resent that they are often unable to apply directly for EU and other international agencies for funding and observe that a

significant part of funds coming from donors to INGOs actually fail to reach target populations as they are absorbed by administrative costs.⁶²

As much as Turkey's hosting of Syrian refugees has received wide-ranging praise (including from us) not surprisingly, Turkey's management of the presence of Syrian refugees is not without problems. The greatest and possibly the toughest problem has to do with the long run. The issue of their integration into Turkish society will be discussed in the next section. Beyond that the more immediate problems have to do with access to the services promised under the TP Circular. Amnesty International and others have reported that Syrian refugees have on occasion been denied entry into Turkey, especially in the case of Palestinian refugees from Syria. There have also been allegations of violation of non-refoulement, one of the central pillars of the TP Circular.⁶³ There have also been reports of forced relocation of urban refugees into refugee camps.⁶⁴ Furthermore, some INGOs complain that they still encounter difficulties in getting themselves registered and find the process of registration to be very vague and ambiguous. Simultaneously, there have also been complaints both from NGO personnel as well as local government officials that there is a flood of small NGOs often with no more than an office and a door bell seeking to benefit from the situation for personal gain and fame. Difficulties of coordination and especially duplication of tasks are also raised as challenges that require attention to better manage the needs of urban refugees, especially those who are most vulnerable.

THE LONG RUN AND BURDEN-SHARING

One of the most striking aspects of the situation today in comparison with October 2013 is the broad consensus that exists in Turkey among academics, officials and civil society activists that the refugees are here to stay and that measures are urgently needed to help with their integration. As a report prepared by two Turkish think-tanks ORSAM-TESEV notes, integration in an informal manner has already started.⁶⁵ The report notes that since the beginning of the conflict over 35,000 people of Syrian origin have been born in Turkey,⁶⁶ there have been many marriages between Turks and Syrians and more and more Syrians are learning to speak Turkish. Compared to October 2013 there is a much clearer acceptance and recognition on the part of both refugees and officials that learning Turkish is critical and needs to be ensured. Nevertheless, what is still lacking is a comprehensive governmental policy towards integration, although there are signs of a piecemeal one emerging with respect to education and employment.⁶⁷

The need to provide education was recognized at a relatively early stage. Initially, however a rather fragmented and poorly coordinated policy on education emerged. Refugee children in camps acquired early access to schooling based on a modified Syrian curriculum accompanied by classes in Turkish. In urban settings, the government permitted children, whose parents had residence permits, to access Turkish schools while Syrian-run schools with little overall supervision began to emerge.⁶⁸ Concerns increased about the content and quality of the substance of education, especially with respect to religious teaching. These concerns finally led the Ministry of Education to implement a much-needed policy to bring all informal Syrian

schools under its supervision. At the same time, the Ministry is preparing its own schools in the border areas to accommodate Syrian children in the form of second shifts.⁶⁹ Furthermore, parents who are registered under the TP Circular will also have the option of sending their children to Turkish schools.

However, there still remain a number of challenges. At the moment, only 130,000 out of some 600,000 school-age Syrian refugee children are in school. As a Turkish education official acknowledged: “whether the refugees stay or return to Syria, we simply cannot afford to allow for a lost generation.”⁷⁰ In this regard there is closer cooperation between Turkey and UNICEF to develop and fund a program to reach a larger number of Syrian refugees. Additionally, given the fact that most Syrian children inside Syria are not in school, the country’s future may well depend on the education received by Syrian children outside the country. But education is not only an important issue for Syria’s future, it is also a security issue now. As the Turkish education official pointed out: “without a chance of education, they risk falling victim to radical and terrorist groups.” Education and some fluency in Turkish are also regarded as a must to ensure integration and avoid social exclusion.⁷¹

Employment is seen as another important avenue to informal integration. As more and more Syrian refugees have seen their savings disappear, they have been forced, as mentioned earlier, to find employment—often illegally—in various sectors of the economy ranging from agriculture to construction and textiles industry. Many Syrian entrepreneurs have brought their businesses over to Turkey and are providing employment to refugees as well as locals. However, it is being able to work legally in the country that will be critical for

the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. As one Syrian refugee starkly captured it, like education employment also has a security dimension. He noted how “refugees who are left jobless and without means of survival can become the devil: They can turn into [pro-Assad militants] or join the likes of Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. Providing them with employment allows them to reintegrate into society and gives them hope for a better life.”⁷²

The TP Circular in principle gives the right for registered refugees to seek legal employment. Prior to the general elections in June the government had prepared legislation (now pending in the Turkish parliament) to open parts of the national economy to formal employment for Syrian refugees.⁷³ This would be a huge step forward for Syrian refugees, and the government needs to be encouraged to implement the necessary regulations to enable Syrian refugees to work in the formal sector. Without legal employment, as one Turkish academic in Gaziantep noted, especially the educated and middle class Syrian refugees are reduced to cheap labor. Among the refugees are orthodontists and engineers, teachers and nurses, who have much to contribute to the Turkish economy. Some of them, the academic warned, are trying to make their way to the EU because of the frustrating situation they find themselves in.⁷⁴

In the long run, ensuring the integration of the refugees would be a “win-win” for all involved: Syria, Turkey and the international community. However, it would be unfair to expect miracles from Turkey. Protection of refugees is considered to be an international responsibility and demands burden-sharing. As discussed in the introduction of this report, so far burden-sharing in the form of refugee resettlement from Turkey and funding to meet the needs of refugees has been disappointing. The UN

in its 3RP 2015-16 has recognized that local communities hosting refugees deserve assistance too, and budgeted for projects to increase the resilience of these communities. This is a very positive step; however it is disappointing that the budget remains seriously underfunded. It is paramount that the international community finds better ways to share the cost of projects with Turkey, and also to contribute its expertise in addressing the challenges of providing education and employment opportunities for Syrian refugees.

Burden-sharing is also critical in terms of legitimizing the expenses of the government in the eyes of the Turkish public by showing that caring for the refugees is an international responsibility. Receiving such support can demonstrate that Turkish officials and civil society are not alone in their efforts. In turn, the Turkish government when highlighting the expenditure that it has made for the Syrian refugees would earn goodwill and trust if it acknowledged that there are funds coming into Turkey (even if they are not at the desired level.) These funds do help to meet at least some of the needs of the refugees and also provide jobs for Turkish nationals, especially in places like Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa. They also contribute to the local economy as international agencies and INGOs often spend these funds on Turkish products, and pay local taxes on these products and on local wages. Furthermore, greater transparency on the Turkish government side on where the \$ 5.6 to 6 billion is actually spent would earn considerable goodwill in the eyes of both donors and the domestic public. In the long run, such transparency would surely help with managing this complex and difficult displacement crisis.

One issue that is likely to continue to come up repeatedly is the idea of an internationally-protected

safe haven or zone for refugees. As discussed earlier, this is an idea that Turkey has pushed forward on numerous occasions since 2012. For a range of reasons, it has not been possible to put it into place. Actually, until the arrival of ISIS along the Turkish border there was a kind of an informal safe zone where there were numerous makeshift camps housing large numbers of IDPs. These camps received assistance from Turkey, with AFAD helping to provide some container housing too. There was an implicit understanding that these camps were under the protection of Turkey. Turkish aircraft was authorized to deter any Syrian jet or helicopter that approached the area. However, the number of camps diminished in time as some of these areas came under ISIS control and the inhabitants were forced to flee. The remaining ones are partly in a geographical area where the US and Turkey had announced the prospects of creating some kind of a safe zone. However, it is not yet clear what form this safe zone may take—let alone whether it would actually happen. Furthermore, there is considerable skepticism as to whether safe zones are the best forms of providing protection and assistance to IDPs.⁷⁵ There is also the added concern that such zones may be used as an excuse to prevent refugees from crossing into Turkish territory or to compel refugees to return.

Ultimately, it is a political solution to the conflict in Syria that would create the circumstances for the return of the refugees. In contrast to October 2013 when the Geneva process still seemed to have some vague prospects of success, at the time of the writing of this report when and how such a solution would emerge still remains unclear. Even more worrying is the question of whether Syria will actually survive as a nation state. What is clear is that Syria has gone through unimaginable destruction, and its economy is reported to have contracted by more than 50 per cent in real terms since the conflict began in 2011.⁷⁶ Hence, even if the political circumstances permitted and refugees wanted to return, they simply may not be able to do so any time soon. Hence, it is inevitable that a large number of the refugees will most likely remain in Turkey and that the government and the international community need to brace themselves for this reality for a long time to come. In the meantime, there also remains the challenge of assisting those Syrians who are either IDPs or stuck in very difficult circumstances. This will continue to make Turkey an important conduit for cross-border assistance.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude this report, the Western media is filled with reports on the “migrant crisis” that the EU faces, as an ever-growing number of mostly Syrian refugees try to make it to the EU. The *Washington Post* reports that as of the end of July the number of illegal border crossings have reached to more than 325,000 already—many more than the almost 265,000 for the full year in 2014.⁷⁷ This is still a fraction of the more than 4 million refugees that are mostly being cared for by Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The sudden surge should be a wake-up call for the international community to recognize its failure to share the burden with these three countries, and that the current humanitarian system is in some disorder. Repeated calls for burden-sharing have gone unheeded. In April 2015, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres and UNHCR Special Envoy and Hollywood celebrity Angelina Jolie Pitt appealed to the United Nations Security Council for assistance to neighboring countries and highlighted the protracted nature of the crisis.⁷⁸ In the meantime, it is not surprising that many who fled the war in Syria and struggled for years in neighboring countries are giving up on returning home and “self-resettling” themselves to EU.⁷⁹ There, the Syrian refugees hope to find some semblance of order and hope for the future. The High Commissioner even went as far as suggesting that the EU should adopt the policies of Turkey.⁸⁰ Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, in the midst of “Europe’s refugee crisis” seemed to take up the call when she urged European countries to mirror Turkey’s approach towards Syrian refugees.⁸¹

As we have tried to show in this report, Turkey has been deeply impacted by the Syrian displacement crisis economically, politically and socially. So far

it has managed reasonably well. Turkey’s response has received wide recognition as well as praise. Guterres has paid numerous visits to Turkey to highlight UNHCR’s appreciation, as well as to try to draw attention for the need to support Turkey. However, the strains of hosting and taking care of more than two million refugees are becoming increasingly visible. While a long standing expert of migration studies and the Director of COMPAS at Oxford University, Franck Duvell, expressed his amazement for the generosity with which refugees have been received in Turkey and the absence of a societal panic compared to Europe, public opinion is fast changing.⁸² The economic and political costs of caring for Syrian refugees together with Iraqi ones are rising, while there is growing recognition that refugees are in Turkey for the long run and that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive integration policy. This is occurring at a time when the Turkish economy is significantly slowing down. The growth rate for the Turkish economy when Syrian refugees first began to arrive in 2011 was almost 9 percent, among the highest in the world. In 2014 it had fallen below 3 per cent.⁸³ This will make financing the needs of the refugees increasingly challenging and their integration into the local labor market more difficult. Politically, Turkey is also entering a difficult period as the country has to prepare for another round of general elections in November while violence between the PKK and security forces has started again after a long period of calm. Under these circumstances, how long can Turkey cope with the ongoing influx of Syrian refugees without greater support and engagement from the international community and especially the EU?

There is clearly an urgent need to revisit the issue of burden-sharing. Enhanced levels of funding are going to be necessary and a greater effort will

need to be made to meet the funding targets of the UN's 3RP 2015-2016 budget. Greater support is needed to help Turkey integrate refugees, especially with respect to their education, access to the labor market and health needs. The EU ought to have a special interest in supporting Turkey given that a large portion of the Syrian refugees who are attempting to make their way into the EU are actually coming from Turkey. The German Minister of Development Gerd Müller's has called for supporting countries hosting Syrian refugees in the order of billions of Euros and raises the question of how can "the EU prove that it is a community of values." He warns that "If we don't solve the problems there, the problems will come to us."⁸⁴ Resettlement of refugees, especially the most vulnerable, as a traditional burden-sharing method will need to be taken more seriously. As discussed in the introduction of this report, the current level of resettlement is simply inadequate. It is difficult not to wonder if today's "EU refugee crisis" would have reached such levels if there had been a serious and credible resettlement program currently in place. Lastly, the Syrian displacement crisis reveals the weaknesses and problems associated with the current international humanitarian system. The system requires an overhaul to achieve greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency in terms of meeting the needs of victims of displacement. The fact that the next World Humanitarian Summit will be held in Turkey in May 2016 may present a good occasion to address these challenges based on lessons from the Syrian displacement crisis.

There is also a lot that Turkey can do. The Turkish decision to adopt an "open door policy" to Syrian as well as Iraqi refugees is commendable, as are the reforms that were adopted to modernize Turkey's immigration policies in general right in the midst of a refugee crisis. The bureaucratic and organizational

challenges of registering 1.9 million refugees while also ensuring their protection and access to basic services such as health are not to be taken lightly. However, their presence in Turkey has now entered its fifth year and there is now widespread recognition that most Syrian refugees are in Turkey for the long run. This is accompanied by studies showing that in many ways, at least some of the Syrians have begun to integrate. What is still lacking is indeed a comprehensive policy to guide this integration process and also mobilize public support for it. Such a policy inevitably will have to go beyond the letter and spirit of the Temporary Protection Circular and focus on how to make Syrians a permanent part of Turkey. Clearly, this is not an easy task but it is a task that is urgently needed in the light of the growingly protracted nature of the crisis in Syria.

The Turkish government has come a long way in cooperating and coordinating with international agencies and INGOs, but there is always more room for improvement and trust building. This relationship is going to have to be further deepened and expanded if the long term integration of the refugees is going to be addressed in an effective manner. At the same time, the Turkish government (especially AFAD) and Turkish civil society have accumulated considerable experience with respect to humanitarian crisis management. INGOs could be more forthcoming in acknowledging and learning from these experiences especially when addressing the challenges of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Also, in the context of strengthening cooperation between Turkey and the international community, it will be important for Turkey to become more transparent. The Turkish government, rightly, highlights the billions of USD that it has spent for the protection and upkeep of the refugees, while complaining about the meager international financial support it has received. Howev-

er, making the details of the expenditures public will be important in terms of winning the trust of major donors. This would go a long way to allay their concerns with respect to accountability and transparency. In this regard, recognizing that the international assistance that does come to Turkey makes an important contribution to the Turkish economy is also important. Such transparency would also help to gain greater support from the Turkish public.

Lastly, there is the Turkish government's fascination with the idea of no-fly, buffer or safe zones in northern Syria. Turkey's leaders on numerous occasions called for such zones and at least on one occasion in June 2015 came close to attempting to create one unilaterally. This is to some degree understandable as it is seen as a means that could alleviate the refugee pressure on Turkey. However, there are a number of serious complications associated with such zones especially if they are set up unilaterally or without the authorization of the UN Security Council and credible enforcement. Firstly, as discussed earlier it is not clear whether safe zones actually do ensure protection for refugees. The sad experience of Srebrenica ten years ago clearly speaks for itself. Secondly, the creation of such a zone to encourage return to Syria without a proper resolution to the conflict is extremely risky and may be very difficult to reconcile with the principle of non-refoulement. Thirdly—and probably much more worrisome—would be if the zone is at the same time envisaged as an area

from which the opposition would be encouraged to mount attacks on the regime in Damascus or ISIS. This would risk using refugees as some form of a shield or tool for a larger and riskier political objective. Turkey would be well advised to stay away from the idea of safe zones. Instead its focus should be to continue to seek international support while ensuring the current open door policy is maintained and greater effort is made to integrate Syrian refugees into mainstream life in Turkey.

Ultimately, the solution to the Syrian displacement crisis is a political one demanding the settlement of the violent conflict in the country. Unfortunately, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this report, the international community is far from arriving at such a settlement. In this regard, the best that Turkey can do is to refrain from policies that aggravate the displacement crisis in Syria and instead contribute to efforts to find a negotiated settlement. It is truly sad that in the international community there is an image of Turkey supporting radical and extremely violent Islamist groups in Syria that are becoming as much of a source of destruction and displacement as the regime in Damascus. This creates a very paradoxical situation where Turkey is caring for an ever-growing number of refugees from Syria while inadvertently contributing to the violence provoking their displacement. Just breaking out of this vicious cycle would make a major contribution towards improving the management of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey.

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51. For a detailed discussion of the legal status of Syrian refugees in Turkey see Erdoğan (2015b), p. 43-70, op cit endnote 42 and Ahmet İçduygu, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Long Road Ahead*, (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015).
52. "Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal" <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> accessed August 17, 2015. Some of these camps include refugees from Iraq including Yazidis.
53. The Turkish government has instituted a separate policy for refugees from Iraq. This policy has been defined in an internal document that is not publicly available but allows Iraqi refugees to benefit from the "humanitarian residence permit" defined in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and keeps open, unlike for Syrian refugees, the possibility to apply for individual asylum procedures. This policy also allows Iraqi refugees to have access to public services. The number of Iraqi refugees in Turkey in August 2015 is put at around 240,000. This information was obtained from email exchanges with a member of a Turkish NGO and a migration expert as well as from "İçişleri Bakanlığı'nun Yeni Genelgesi Irak'tan Gelen Mültecilerin Haklara Erişimini Kolaylaştırabilir," *Uluslararası Af Örgütü*, February 26, 2015, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:3IqICgSa19cJ:https://amnesty.org.tr/icerik/37/1504/icisleri-bakanligi%25E2%2580%2599nin-yeni-genelgesi-irak%25E2%2580%2599tan-gelen-multecilerin-haklara-erisimini-kolaylastirabilir+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=tr>. This article has since been removed from the web but is available as a "cache".
54. The number of refugees cared for by HDP was put at around 84,000 as of late August. The municipalities provide for the refugees in and outside camps from local resources and receive very little assistance from the central government. Email correspondence with HDP officials, August 2015.
55. Erdoğan (2015b), p. 69, op cit endnote 42 and Sarnata Reynolds and Daryl Grisgraber, *Birth Registration in Turkey: Protecting the future of Syrian children*, p. 6, Refugees International, April 30, 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/150430_turkey_birth_registration.pdf, and Zümray Kutlu, *From Ante-Chamber to the Living Room: A Brief Assessment on NGO's Doing Work for Syrian Refugees* p. 6, (Istanbul, Anadolu Kültür and Open Society Foundation, 2015).
56. In 2014 Turkey was, after Russia, Germany and the U.S., the fourth largest recipient of individual asylum applications filed by nationals coming from third countries other than Syria, *World at War*: (UNHCR, 2015) pp. 28-29, op cit endnote 8.
57. Interviews with Turkish and UN officials in Istanbul, Ankara and Gaziantep, June 11-19, 2015.
58. The fact that the *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-16* for Turkey is 90 pages long is telling in itself compared to the few pages in the SRRP of March 2012: <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/3RP-Report-Turkey-A4-low-res.pdf>.
59. See endnote 13.
60. "Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal" <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224> accessed August 25, 2015.
61. Interview with members of these NGOs in Istanbul, Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep, June 11-18, 2015. For a survey of a range of NGOs working with Syrian refugees see Kutlu (2015), p. 14-24, op cit endnote 55.
62. These complaints were raised in practically every interview with Turkish NGOs as well as some INGOs. Similar issues in a more general context are discussed in Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-06-16/regime-change-humanitarian-aid>.

63. *Struggling to Survive: Refugees from Syria in Turkey*, Amnesty International, November 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR44/017/2014/en/>.
64. Ayça Söylemez, “Suriyeli mülteciler Ankara’dan sürüldü,” *BİAnet*, January 6, 2015, <http://bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/161327-suriyeli-multeciler-ankara-dan-suruldu>; also see the effort to move Syrian refugees from the tourist resort of Antalya to refugee camps: Sümeyye Ertekin, “Antalya’daki Suriyeliler gitmek istemiyor,” *Al Jazeera Turk*, December 22, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/antalyadaki-suriyeliler-gitmek-istemiyor>.
65. Orhan and Şenyücel Gündoğar (2015), p. 8, op cit endnote 29.
66. Erdoğan (2015a) puts this figure at 60,000 (op cit endnote 22, p. 53.) Erdoğan at a seminar held at Hacettepe University on June 19, 2015 cited the figure of 100,000 for the number of Syrian babies born in Turkey. For the problems and challenges of registering these babies and ensuring that they do not fall into a situation of statelessness see Reynolds and Grisgraber (2015) op cit endnote 55.
67. This was a topic that came up in almost all the interviews held by the authors of this report. Similar observations were also made in reports by Orhan and Şenyücel Gündoğar (2015), op cit endnote 29 as well as Kanat and Ustün (2015) op cit endnote 33. Both reports praise the success of AFAD but stress the need to develop comprehensive integration policies.
68. Kirişçi (May 2014), p. 23-27, op cit endnote 15.
69. Interview with local officials in Gaziantep, June 17, 2015.
70. Ibid.
71. Orhan and Şenyücel Gündoğar (2015), p. 34, op cit endnote 29.
72. Mona Alami, “NGO finds work for Syrian refugees in Turkey,” *al-Monitor*, August 7, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/syrian-refugees-turkey-ngo-employment.html#ixzz3ktQWAXp4>.
73. This development was mentioned frequently in interviews, and also discussed in some detail during a seminar at Hacettepe University, June 19, 2015.
74. Interview in Gaziantep, June 17, 2015. Similar observations have been cited in Orhan and Şenyücel Gündoğar (2015) op cit endnote 29 and Kanat and Ustün (2015), op cit endnote 33.
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THE AUTHORS

Kemal Kirişci is the TÜSİAD senior fellow and director of the Turkey Project at Brookings. Before joining Brookings, Kirişci was a professor of international relations and held the Jean Monnet chair in European integration in the department of political science and international relations at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. His areas of research interest include EU-Turkish relations, U.S.-Turkish relations, Turkish foreign and trade policies, European integration, immigration issues, ethnic conflicts and refugee movements.

Elizabeth Ferris is a senior fellow in Foreign Policy in Washington, D.C., where her work encompasses a wide range of issues related to internal displacement, humanitarian action, natural disasters, and climate change. Her most recent book, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action*, was published by Brookings Institution Press in April 2011.

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The Turkey Project at Brookings
1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
brookings.edu