

## Example of Syrian Refugees in the Scope of Turkey's Migration Policy and Management

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### Abstract

*The phenomenon of migration is a concept that is often encountered today. The phenomenon of migration has a critical importance especially for many regions and countries that have faced with immigrants and migration flows in various periods. Nowadays, many countries continue to struggle with regular and irregular migration, and many countries host refugees from different regions or countries. At this point, Turkey has been seen as a bridge between the West and the East and has been accepted as a migration country or migration route for refugees. In this context, Turkey draws attention as a country that has been exposed to migration flows from various regions and geographies from the past to the present. Furthermore, especially since 2011, the increase in Syrian refugees in Turkey after the internal conflict and war in Syria and refugees who left their country and migrated to Turkey in recent years, brought along various problems in Turkey. These increasing refugees and refugee flows have required Turkey to make various policies and regulations. This article will focus on the Syrian refugees problem in Turkey and analyze Turkey's migration policies and migration management regarding refugees.*

**Keywords:** Migration; Syrian Refugees; Migration Policies

### Introduction

The problem of immigration is critical as it is an important and major problem for many countries. Poverty, conflict and various internal turmoil, especially experienced in certain regions, are the basis of this situation in the formation of the migration phenomenon. Also, various social factors such as the desire to have a better life, education and health opportunities can be seen as another factor that causes people to migrate to another region or country. These migrations, which occur for various reasons, can cause various social, political, economic and cultural problems for the regions or countries that immigrants have determined as their migration route. In this context, it is possible to see that, The phenomenon of migration is an active and variable process that has an indirect or direct effect on individuals, societies and states in almost every field and is continuous.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the integration process of immigrants to the countries or regions they go to is a situation that cannot be realized in a short time. Because, immigrants cannot be accepted by the local people in a short time in the regions or countries they go to, and they often cannot adapt to the local people. On the otherhand, the increase in the population of the immigrants in the country

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<sup>2</sup> Ç. Aslı, "Geçmişten Bugüne Türkiye'nin Göç Politikası ve Suriyeli Göçmenler Bağlamında Göç Yönetimi", Karaman Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2018, p.1.



they migrate is likely to have various effects on issues such as food and shelter, social life and employment. This is a problem for the countries and regions where refugees migrate. At this point, the solution and management of the problems created by the phenomenon of migration can be seen as a priority issue for the countries receiving immigration. At the same time, Since the effects of refugees reveal the need to manage migration, it has also caused countries to produce policies and take legal and institutional measures in this area for a long time.<sup>3</sup> Also, in regions where there has been an increase in the amount of people migrating due to certain reasons in certain periods, countries have had to regulate their migration policies and national measures regarding the phenomenon of migration. In this context, the migration problem can be seen as a problem that should be solved by the central governments of the countries in general. However, when examined more specifically, it is possible to see that the cities that receive the most immigrants and those who manage this city are affected by the effects of migration and refugees. Because the migrating refugees primarily prefer the surrounding cities and the centers of the cities. At this point, it is quite possible that these cities will experience this migration effect. At the same time, this immigration situation adversely affects the infrastructure of the cities, which is organized or formed according to the population, and deteriorates the demographic structure of the cities to a large extent. In addition, this migration wave can be seen as important in terms of causing various additional problems and responsibilities to the local administrations of the cities in the short and long term. On the otherhand, Due to its geographical location in Turkey, it is seen as a country that has constantly faced immigration from past to present. Especially in recent years, Syrian refugees constitute the majority of migrations in Turkey's geography. At this point, it is possible to see that Syrian refugees mostly choose Turkey as their destination as their migration route. In addition, Turkey draws attention in this regard, especially since it is the country that hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees in its country. In this context, Turkey aims to minimize the effects and especially the problems created by refugees by producing various migration regulations and policies for migration management. Similarly, Turkey has implemented an open door policy especially for refugees coming from Syria and it is aimed to create a governance network in the field of migration with the studies carried out.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Hosting more than three and a half million Syrian refugees, Turkey also develops integration policies regarding access to the labor market, education and health rights.<sup>5</sup> In this context, in general this article will examine Turkey's cross-border migration policy and migration management through the examples of Syrian refugees.

## **Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

At the end of the 20th century, as a result of the political crises, political instability and severe internal and external turmoil, especially in some regions, the number of people with refugee status is increasing rapidly all over the world. The Middle East region draws attention among the examples that can be shown in this regard. Various human rights violations and internal

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<sup>3</sup>D. Yılmaz, A. Seyfettin, "Turkey's Cross-Border Migration Policies and Management", Journal of Birey-Toplum, Vol:5, No:9, 2015, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Çakı, op. cit., p.3

<sup>5</sup>Ş. Doğuş, "Refugee Integration, Migration Policies And Social Class : The Case Of Syrian Refugees In Turkey", Journal of Social Policy Studies, SS: 367-392 ISSN: 2148-9424, Vol:40, 2018, p. 369.



turmoil in the Middle East have led to large numbers of regular and irregular migration movements to Turkey in the last two decades.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1.** Migration Mobility<sup>7</sup>



*Source:* Mediterranean Migration Routes 2015

Moreover, Turkey can be seen as an important location in terms of being the first choice for asylum seekers migrating from the region. Because Turkey is seen as a target country in terms of being a country where refugees can live away from political turmoil and instability and offers better economic and employment conditions than its other neighbors.<sup>8</sup> This situation is also valid for Syrian Refugees and it is seen that Turkey is the first choice for refugees. On the otherhand, when the arrival and asylum of Syrian refugees in Turkey is examined, it is possible to see that the basis of this migration from Syria to Turkey is the civil war in Syria, the decrease in living conditions and the loss of people's life safety after this war. Moreover, as a result of the negativities in Syria and the increase in internal turmoil, an influx of refugees from Syria to Turkey has started and this situation has continued to increase over the years. In this context, Turkey has been the country that receives the highest number of immigrants, as Turkey does not remain indifferent to this situation experienced by Syrians and embraces the civilian population whose life safety is in danger.<sup>9</sup> At this point, today, as a result of the ongoing civil war in Syria, Turkey continues to host a Syrian refugee exceeding 3.5 million.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> N. Ali , D. İhsan, Ö. Mustafa, " Turkey Refugee Problem and Syria Crisis Effects of Refugee Problem", Journal of İş-Sanat, 2016 p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/>

<sup>8</sup> İ. Ahmet, "Türkiye'de Kaçak Göç", Press of İstanbul Ticaret Odası Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> N. Uzman, R. Tösten, " Suriyeli Akademisyenlerin Bakış Açısından Türkiye-Suriye İlişkileri ve Sığınmacılar Meselesi, Research Journal of Hacettepe University, Vol:24, 2016, p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> K. Oğuz, " The Role of Public Relations In Social Integration of Syrian Refugees", İstanbul University, Journal of Faculty of Social Science, İstanbul, 2019, p. 3.

Furthermore, Instead of closing its borders like many other countries, including European countries, Turkey has implemented an open-door policy to the Syrian refugees who came after the Syrian civil war and has defined the Syrian refugees as guests in Turkey. At this point, Turkey has been involved in various moves and actions regarding Syrian Refugees and has determined various places of refuge for Syrian refugees. There are a total of 21 refugee camps in Turkey under the responsibility of AFAD; It is located in Osmaniye, Adıyaman, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Adana and Adıyaman.<sup>11</sup> It is seen that the basic needs of Syrian refugees such as shelter and food are met in these refugee camps. Moreover, the migration type of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey since 2011 can be seen as long -term migration. This long -term and continuing influx of refugees and migration paved the way for Turkey to regulate various migration policies and form new policies. With these policies, Turkey aims to prevent irregular migration and aimed to keep the number of Syrian refugees in its country stable. At this point, Turkey's migration policies can also be seen as a very important factor in the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkey and Turkish society.

### **Turkey's Migration Policies and Management**

Turkey draws attention as a country that has witnessed massive migration movements to its lands throughout the historical process. It is seen that Turkey is trying to make various domestic and foreign policies work for the situation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, their integration with the Turkish people and the solution of the civil war in Syria. However, today, it is critical to understand the migration policies Turkey has adopted in the recent past in order to better analyze the migration policies and management that Turkey is trying to implement on Syrian Refugees. In this context, when Turkey's immigration policies from the past are examined, it is possible to see that these policies are divided into 3 different sub-periods. At this point, according to İçduygu, Periods that can be considered important in Turkey's migration policy are the beginning of nation-state construction covering the years 1923-1950, the period when nation-state construction became local and national between 1950-1980, and the globalization of nation-state construction in the period from 1980 to the present.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, with the immigration policy adopted and put into practice by Turkey in the first period, it is seen that it is aimed to make the population the same and similar in many respects, especially in cultural and religious aspects, with the understanding of the nation-state. In this period, in the early stages of Turkey's establishment, it was aimed to send some minorities from the country and to bring those from Muslim and Turkish culture, who have a common point with Turkey and Turkish culture and religion.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it is possible to see that the nation-state phenomenon in Turkey became permanent with a local understanding during the 1950-1980 period, which shaped Turkey's migration policies and was defined as the second period by many academician and migration researchers. At this point, between the years 1950-1980, which is seen as the second period that shaped Turkey's migration policies, Turkey adopted the migration policies against mass and large migrations, the rules issued by some institutions and organizations and documents with international validity, and arranged its migration policies accordingly.<sup>14</sup> At this point, it is seen that the Geneva Convention, which determines the position of refugees in the international community and international law and

<sup>11</sup> T. Duman, "Syrian Asylum Seekers in Turkey", Journal of Polis Akademisi, Vol:1, Ankara, 2017,p.28.

<sup>12</sup> A.İçduygu," Turkey's International Migration Policies 1923-2023: From Nation State Formation to Transnational Transformations", Reports of MireKoç, Koç University, İstanbul, 2014, p.53.)

<sup>13</sup> M.Okutan , "Minority Policies in the One-Party Era", İstanbul, Journal of Bilgi University, 2009, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> D. Yılmaz, A. Seyfettin, op. cit., p.38.



defines the rights of refugees, has an important place in shaping Turkey's migration policies. Moreover, it is seen that another period that is seen as another important period in the shaping of Turkey's immigration policy and that has been effective in the formation of the immigration policies implemented in Turkey today is 1980 and after. In this context, the type of migration Turkey has faced in the period from the 1980s to the present has changed to a large extent, and Turkey's regulations, policies and institutional configurations in the field of migration have become more distinctive, especially with the effect of the European Union membership process that Turkey wants to be included in.<sup>15</sup> At this point, it is possible to see that Turkey's moves and work on this issue in various historical periods have created a framework in terms of shaping today's migration policies. On the other hand, it is seen that Turkey has some policies and practices that it has organized and diversified in the last 10 years, especially with the migration wave of Syrian refugees to Turkey. At this point, the excessive and irregular migration waves towards Turkey, especially in recent years, form the basis of Turkey's adoption of various and effective measures and policies in this regard. In particular, after the first wave of refugees from Syria, Turkey launched various strategic documents and national action plans in order to combat irregular migration in 2015, thus aiming to manage irregular migration.<sup>16</sup> In this context, according to the data of the Turkish Immigration Administration, some of the policies and studies adopted by Turkey to combat migration are developing national and international cooperation to prevent the source of irregular migration, increasing border security, and strengthening the system of returning irregular migrants within the scope of human rights.<sup>17</sup> On the otherhand, it is seen that Turkey is trying to establish an institutional structure by working in parallel with various institutions for migration management, in addition to enacting various policies and regulations to combat migration. In this context, Turkey has tried to renew its legal and institutional structure, as well as the process of combating immigration, within the framework of harmonization with the European Union and within the framework of violation decisions from the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, many institutional structures have been established to contribute to the struggle against migration in Turkey. As a result of this structuring process, the General Directorate of Migration Management was established, which is affiliated to the center and works in harmony with other migration policies, especially in order to prevent irregular migration.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the General Directorate of Migration Management, especially with the increase in the population of Syrian refugees in Turkey, various sub-institutions and organizations also contribute directly or indirectly to the central government and migration management. Institutions such as the Kızılay, AFAD and TOKİ in Turkey are noteworthy for the responsibilities and support they undertake in migration management.<sup>20</sup> Especially, AFAD and Kızılay have played a key role in both granting temporary protection status to refugees and transferring them to a safe area since 2011, and they have been seen as institutions responsible for the coordination of the migration wave from Syria. At this point, it is possible to see that Turkey is trying to continue its struggle against immigration both with central and

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<sup>15</sup> D. Yılmaz, A. Seyfettin, *op. cit.*, p.39

<sup>16</sup> A. Yeler, "Socio-Cultural Integration of Irregular Immigrants: Turkish Afghan-Uzbeks Living in Ankara", *Journal of Imgelem*, Vol:5, No:9, Ankara,2021, p.424.

<sup>17</sup> Turkish Immigration Administration - <https://www.goc.gov.tr/turkiyenin-duzensiz-gocle-mucadelesi> , (Accessed: 31.05.2022)

<sup>18</sup> A. Cansu, "Impacts of Syrian Migration On The Institutionalisation of Turkish Migration Policies", *Istanbul University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Istanbul*, 2016, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> İ. Sirkeci, M. Yüceahin, "Migration Studies in Turkey", *Journal of Migration*, Vol:1, No:1 , 2014, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> Çakı, *op. cit.*, p.37.

other local governments and institutions, as well as with various policies and practices to regulate regular and irregular migration waves.

## Conclusion

Due to its geographical location, Turkey has emerged as one of the world's primary destinations for immigration. This status is closely tied to its open-door approach to refugees from the Middle East, which significantly influences refugees' choice of Turkey as a haven. Nevertheless, this circumstance has prompted Turkey to prioritize effective migration management and the development of pertinent policies. Over the past decade, Turkey has undertaken various measures and strategies to address the surging influx of Syrian refugees and enhance its migration management efforts. These endeavors encompass a wide array of approaches, ranging from fostering integration between Syrian refugees and the local populace to facilitating their safe repatriation.

Notably, Turkey's contemporary migration policies and initiatives are crafted to facilitate the seamless integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society and promote their self-sufficiency. These policies emphasize social support and welfare provisions, with a focus on enabling Syrians to lead normal lives within Turkey's borders. This analysis delves into Turkey's overarching migration policies and management practices, with a specific focus on its approach to Syrian refugees.

However, despite Turkey's comprehensive migration policies and its dedication to effective migration management, challenges persist with regard to Syrian refugees. These challenges encompass a range of issues that continue to impact Turkey's social, economic, and political landscape. Considering this complex scenario, it raises questions about whether Turkey's migration policies might evolve to encompass the eventual return of Syrian refugees.

In summary, Turkey's strategic geographic location has positioned it as a prominent immigration destination, largely due to its open-door policy for Middle Eastern refugees. This has prompted a concerted effort to enhance migration management through a variety of measures and policies. Although Turkey's current initiatives are geared towards facilitating the integration and well-being of Syrian refugees within its borders, ongoing challenges necessitate a broader examination of potential future developments, including the possibility of repatriation.

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