

The Impact of Syria's Refugees on Southern Turkey

Revised and Updated

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Since Policy Focus 130 was first published in October 2013, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey has nearly doubled, from roughly 440,000 to 747,000. Although Turkey's national burden is relatively small when compared with Syria's other neighbors—namely Lebanon and Jordan—pressures are increasingly intense in five southern Turkish provinces where a disproportionate number of the refugees are concentrated. All told, and accounting for unregistered refugees, Turkey can expect to permanently host about a million Syrian refugees. Integrating these arrivals poses challenges at a scale not seen in Turkey's modern history, calling for analysis of cultural, social, and economic implications.

Questions addressed in this newly revised and updated release include whether Ankara will provide permanent residency or even citizenship to refugees. If so, how will such a move affect the Turkish political landscape, especially given refugees' general sympathy with the ruling Justice and Development Party? Also at issue is whether Turkey will maintain its remarkable economic resilience. After an initial dip in exports with Syria following the 2011 uprising, Turkish companies have bounced back, even increasing their trade volume with Syrian counterparts since last fall. Finally, Turkey's southern provinces face sensitive cultural challenges, with the influx of Sunni Arab refugees upsetting the longstanding sectarian balance. Washington will need to monitor these and other trends so that its cooperation with the Turkish government, and the international community, will be focused, attuned, and effective.

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