



# THE IMPACT OF SYRIA'S REFUGEES ON SOUTHERN TURKEY

REVISED AND UPDATED



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# THE IMPACT OF SYRIA'S REFUGEES ON SOUTHERN TURKEY

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Cover: (top) Newly arrived Syrian refugees are seen at Ceylanpinar refugee camp near the border town of Ceylanpinar, Sanliurfa province, November 2012 (REUTERS/Murad Sezer); (bottom) Turkish Red Crescent tents at a refugee camp in Yayladagi, Hatay province, June 2011 (REUTERS/Umit Bektas).

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

SINCE THE INITIAL RELEASE of this study in October 2013, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has skyrocketed, although the precise numbers are difficult to obtain and even the official numbers fluctuate. As of June 2014, official Turkish government figures cite more than one million Syrian refugees, both registered and unregistered. A more conservative estimate by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) put this number at 900,000, of which 747,000 are registered. This study will focus on the UNHCR figures.

From March 2011 to May 2011, when the Syrian demonstrations were mostly peaceful, only 252 Syrian refugees relocated to Turkey.<sup>1</sup> By mid-January 2012, the regime violence had accelerated, Homs was bombarded for a month straight, and the number of refugees increased to 9,500. By the end of August 2012, with a full-scale civil war raging, the figure had climbed to 80,000.<sup>2</sup>

According to UNHCR, by May 2014, in addition to the 747,000 Syrians living in Turkey as refugees, some 100,000 to 150,000 had crossed the border with their passports and were illegally extending their stay.<sup>3</sup> This study will analyze the impact of the Syrian refugees in the five southern Turkish provinces bordering Syria—Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Mardin, and Sanliurfa—where 622,864 of the 747,000 registered refugees are concentrated. In other words, these five provinces collectively host 83 percent of Turkey's registered Syrian refugees. This study will refer only to registered refugees in these provinces, since estimates of unregistered refugees are unavailable. Relatedly, there is a strong sense that many, if not most, of the unreg-

istered refugees have made their way to big cities in western Turkey where economic opportunities are significantly better than in southern Turkey.

At the time of this writing, Turkey has done a commendable job in welcoming the Syrian refugees, setting up entire cities equipped with clinics and schools at an overall cost that had risen to as much as \$4 billion by June.<sup>4</sup> However, with prospects suggesting a further intensification of fighting, the number of Syrians in Turkey will likely increase, presenting Turkey with even further challenges.

Ankara's move to provide safe haven to Syrians fleeing violence signaled a sharp shift away from the policy of rapprochement pursued by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) toward Syria over the preceding several years. The warming can be traced to 1998, when the Syrian regime ended its support for Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) activities against Turkey. Subsequently, ties improved to such an extent that, by 2009, the two countries had lifted travel visa restrictions and, by 2010, the Turkish and Syrian cabinets were holding joint sessions, attended by key defense, interior, and justice ministers. Economic relations between the two countries likewise improved.

The Syrian uprising upended all these efforts. When the Syrian demonstrations began in early 2011, Ankara initially sought to provide counsel, urging the regime of Bashar al-Assad to enact reforms and refrain from violence against protestors. But when that policy proved ineffective, Ankara began to provide safe haven to the Syrian rebels, later opening its doors to civilian refugees. The demographic, economic, political, and social impact of the Syrian refugees on the southern Turkish provinces merits in-depth analysis.

Turkey has taken serious steps in the past year to improve conditions for the growing influx of Syrian refugees. And even though the *New York Times Magazine* referred to a Kilis refugee camp, one of twenty-two in Turkey, as the world's best,<sup>5</sup> Turkey will nonetheless continue to face social, demographic, ethnic, and sectarian pressures created by the largest refugee flow in the country's modern history.

## POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TURKEY

The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey may seem small when placed against Turkey's total population of 76.6 million, but the refugees represent a significant percentage of the population of each province in focus here. Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, and Mardin—ethnically mixed and consisting of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Sunni, and Alawite residents—include 7.9 percent of the country's population<sup>6</sup> and produce slightly more than 5 percent of its economic output.<sup>7</sup> Gaziantep is Turkey's sixth largest city. Thus, the provinces are neither central nor marginal in the broader Turkish context.

To begin with, the refugee presence in these five provinces is altering their ethnic and sectarian balance. For instance, Kilis's Arab population, previously less than 1 percent, has increased to 59 percent. And whereas Alawites dominated the Arab community of Hatay before the war, constituting approximately one-third of the province's population, the influx of Sunni Arab refugees is shifting the balance and stoking tensions. With widened sectarian conflict in Syria, additional refugees will likely flow into the province, potentially sparking a Sunni-Alawite conflagration.

Meanwhile, the position of Turkish (and Kurdish) Alevis, who constitute about 15 percent of the country's population, could complicate matters.<sup>8</sup> While different from Arabic-speaking Syrian Alawites,<sup>9</sup> the Alevis share with Alawites secular attitudes and suspicions of Sunni Islamic activism. Like the Alawites, the Alevis staunchly oppose the AKP's policies, including its stance on Syria, and support the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in overwhelming numbers. Given these shared affinities, if Hatay Alawites rallied more forcefully against the government's Syria policy, the CHP and Turkish Alevis would almost certainly follow.

In this regard, a potential source of sensitivity surrounds the protests against Turkish government policy that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park in late May 2013 and spread to seventy-nine cities over a month, involving some 2.5 million mostly secular Turks. Although the Syria issue was not central to these rallies, daily anti-AKP demonstrations have continued in Hatay to this day. The province's

Alawites have dominated these protests, and an Alawite youth was killed after a September 9, 2013, demonstration.<sup>10</sup> Should massive Gezi-like protests flare in Turkey again, Syria policy and the refugee question could become wedge issues across the country. Moreover, post-Gezi rallies have shown the persistence of tensions between Alevis/Alawites and the AKP's Syria policy. All six of those killed by security forces in the Gezi and post-Gezi rallies have been either Alevi or Alawite.

In economic terms, the 2012 closing of the border to trade and the loss of Syrian markets led to a decrease in Turkey's foreign trade with Syria. However, with Turkish companies exporting relief supplies to the NGOs in Syria, and Syrian businessmen opening up trade offices in southern Turkey, Ankara has regained its access to the Syrian markets. Thus, as regards the Turkish economy, Turkey seems to be weathering the Syrian crisis.

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## 2 TURKEY'S BORDER PROVINCES NEAR SYRIA

WHATEVER TURKEY'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE, violence in Syria does not appear likely to subside soon. What is more, the country is potentially moving toward becoming a weak or failed state. It is plausible, therefore, that many of the Syrian refugees will stay in Turkey in the mid to long term to avoid strife in Syria, becoming permanent residents. In such a case, the Syrian refugees could affect the southern Turkish provinces where they are settled, much as millions of Afghan refugees who stayed in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s transformed that country's ethnic makeup as well as its social and political dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Turkey has done a good job of welcoming refugees, setting them up in various cities, as well as isolating refugees from the local population. At the same time, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is smaller than the number of Afghan refugees who went to Pakistan or, for that matter, Syrian refugees now in other Middle Eastern countries. According to UNHCR and the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate, an official body that reports to the Turkish prime minister's office, as of May 2014 about 220,117 Syrian refugees were living in a total of twenty-two refugee camps in Turkey; about 527,792 refugees were living outside these camps.<sup>2</sup> UNHCR also estimates 152,091 Syrians are in Turkey illegally.<sup>3</sup>

For regional context, the 747,000 Syrian refugees legally in Turkey make up almost 1 percent of Turkey's total population, as compared with Jordan, where, as of May 2014, the number of registered refugees was about 596,062, or 8.16 percent of the population, and Lebanon, where the figure was about 1,024,887, or 21.35 percent of

the population.<sup>4</sup> The flow of refugees into Turkey, correspondingly, has had nowhere near the economic, political, and social effects it has had in Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>5</sup>

All the same, the influx has created local pressures, particularly in the southern Turkish provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Sanliurfa, and Mardin,<sup>6</sup> which are hosting some 83 percent of the registered refugees. Smaller numbers of refugees have settled both inside and outside camps in nearby provinces, including Kahramanmaraş (47,908), Adana (21,521), Adiyaman (11,273), Osmaniye (20,356), and Malatya (7,714).<sup>7</sup>

The five border provinces themselves make up 7.9 percent of Turkey's population and 5.25 percent of its area.<sup>8</sup> The most populous of these is Gaziantep, which is home to a large and growing city of the same name<sup>9</sup> with an export-driven industrial economic base. Next to Gaziantep is Kilis, the smallest province of the five, which has an agrarian economy and has traditionally thrived on smuggling to and from Syria. Sanliurfa, which, like Gaziantep, hosts a growing city of the same name, has a prosperous agro-commercial base. The traditional home of Turkey's Christian Syriac community, Mardin benefits from its position as the hub of the country's trade with Iraq. Finally, Hatay, Turkey's southernmost province, a panhandle bordered by Syria to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, is home to the country's largest proportion of Arabs and has a mixed economic base of industry, trade, and agriculture.

Of the five border provinces, three are hosting particularly high proportions of refugees, inviting comparisons to the situation in Jordan and Lebanon: Kilis, where the 75,762 refugees constitute some 59 percent of the province's local population, trailed by Gaziantep, where the 188,813 refugees equal 10.5 percent, and Sanliurfa, where the 177,577 refugees make up almost 9.85 percent. In Hatay, the 133,331 refugees constitute 8.87 percent of residents, and in Mardin the 47,381 refugees amount to 6.07 percent.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned earlier, since the first 8,000 refugees arrived in Turkey in December 2011, the numbers have grown exponentially, reaching 28,500 in May 2012, 351,000 in May 2013, and jumping to 747,000 in May 2014. Given the situation in Syria, the numbers are only expected to rise.<sup>11</sup>



## LEGAL STATUS OF REFUGEES

The Syrian arrivals mark the first time Ankara has granted refugee status, albeit temporary, to people coming from Syria or elsewhere in the Middle East, Asia, or Africa. Until the Syrian war, Turkey had assigned refugee status to Europeans only, a policy rooted in Ottoman history and Cold War politics.<sup>12</sup>

The fine print is key in this discussion. While Turkey has traditionally agreed to accept asylum applications from Asian, African, and Middle Eastern seekers, only European applicants have been granted refugee status. During the Cold War, this policy did not raise eyebrows. Most twentieth-century refugees to Turkey were Muslims fleeing persecution in the former Ottoman lands of the Balkans, with millions coming from Bosnia, Macedonia, and Albania, the former Yugoslavia, as well as Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. This situation persisted after the Cold War, although in 1991 the country provided temporary safe haven to about a half million Iraqi Kurds fleeing Saddam Hussein's rule.<sup>13</sup> Twenty years later, in November 2011, following lengthy domestic debate and input from UNHCR, Turkey decided to grant temporary refugee status to asylum seekers from Syria in order to lift them from their position of legal limbo.<sup>14</sup>

Aiding the Syrians' present cause is the Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which was passed in 2013 and first implemented in April 2014. The law, aimed at improving Turkey's refugee policy and protecting asylum seekers,<sup>15</sup> creates a specialized institution—the Directorate General of Migration Management, under the Ministry of Interior—to implement related laws.<sup>16</sup>

Syrian refugees are still constrained in Syria—in particular, by the geographic limitations of the 1952 Refugee Convention, which prevents Syrian refugees from obtaining legal asylum in Turkey. But as a result of the 2013 law, Syrian refugees now have some legal protections. According to the new law, non-European refugees who enter Turkey can legally receive a temporary residence permit in any province other than Hatay (where sectarian tensions are high) and Sirnak (where PKK-related security concerns and deep poverty may discourage refugee inclusion). Temporary residency is a step up from refugees' former "guest" status. Further, the temporary pro-

tection regime established in 2011 allows Syrian passport holders to cross the Turkish-Syrian border without having a visa and with no other restrictions.<sup>17</sup>

## POTENTIAL NATURALIZATION

Although the Turkish government has not announced any plans to naturalize the Syrian refugees en masse, given the potentially permanent nature of the refugee population in Turkey, the Turks will eventually need to face this issue. In fact, Ankara has already started to grant citizenship to thousands of Syrians inside the country.

Turkish law offers three pathways to citizenship: birth, five years of residency, or marriage. Birth to a parent or parents with Turkish citizenship, known as the *jus sanguinis* principle, is enshrined in Article 8 of the Turkish citizenship law: "A child born in Turkey, but acquiring no citizenship of any state by birth through his/her alien mother or father, is a Turkish citizen from the moment of birth."<sup>18</sup>

Article 11 outlines the option of applying for citizenship after five years of uninterrupted legal residency.<sup>19</sup> And Article 16 lays out the marriage option: "Aliens who have been married to a Turkish citizen for at least three years and whose marriage still continues can apply for the acquisition of Turkish citizenship."

The marriage option has emerged as the most common way for Syrian refugees to pursue Turkish citizenship. According to former interior minister Muammer Guler, 3,577 Syrians obtained Turkish citizenship between 2008 and 2013—396 in 2008, 573 in 2011, 841 in 2012, and 753 in 2013—with 2,543 of the total number doing so through marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Turkey could soon face a flood of applications by refugees invoking the five-year residency clause. The roughly eight thousand refugees who have resided in Syria since late 2011 could thus qualify for Turkish citizenship by the end of 2016. By the end of 2018, a half million refugees could similarly qualify, and as many as a million could occupy the same position by the end of 2019.

Citizenship will likewise be viewed as an option for the many refugee children born in Turkey. As of April 2014, 11,533 Syrian babies

have been born to refugee families in Turkey's camps.<sup>21</sup> Currently, the Syrian citizenship of refugee parents is an obstacle for the newborns; instead of becoming Turkish citizens, the newborns in the camps obtain a temporary ID card but remain stateless. These newborns will no doubt ultimately need official citizenship.

The naturalization issue is likewise politically charged, given refugees' general allegiance and gratitude to the ruling AKP and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Many refugees have even named their babies Recep Tayyip or Emine—after the prime minister's wife—and would likely vote for the AKP if they had the right. Thus, the citizenship issue could affect Turkish politics as well.

A select few Syrians, meanwhile, have already been admitted as citizens through Article 12, which waives the five-year requirement. In November 2013, then interior minister Guler explained that over the past three years, seventy-eight Syrians had been granted citizenship in this way.<sup>22, 23</sup>

## PREPARING FOR LONG-TERM STAYS OUTSIDE THE CAMPS

Lacking work permits, Syrian refugees face major financial hurdles. And the Turkish job market is strained especially by illegal Syrian immigrants who are unregistered as refugees. Such arrivals typically use their existing savings to rent small apartments, and they seek informal work opportunities in textile factories, clothing stores, restaurants, and construction and agriculture sites. If these Syrians are caught by the police, they are sent to refugee camps. As illegal workers, they earn below the minimum wage, reportedly around \$250–300 monthly, which is just enough to cover their living expenses. Some salvage a bit extra to send back to their families in Syria.

Turkey must therefore address work-status issues in order to successfully integrate refugees, who have largely spent whatever savings they brought and are forced to take low-paying jobs as violence continues in their home country. Thus, Mehmet Ali Sahin, deputy chairman of the AKP, announced recently that the government is seeking to amend the law on granting work permits to Syrian refugees in order to boost their employment prospects.<sup>24</sup> This law, according to Sahin,

would only apply in provinces where most refugees reside. The unemployment rate in southeastern Turkey, covering the five Turkish border provinces and some others nearby, reached 14.5 percent in 2013, the highest in Turkey's seven geographic regions.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, even a limited work permit could affect the regional job market as well as the local population.

Alongside efforts to ease entry into the job market, Turkish officials are preparing for a longer stay for Syrian refugees by investing in their education. Schools for Syrian refugees, for instance, have been opened by local authorities in many southeastern provinces. The Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TOMER) at the University of Gaziantep provides Turkish-language courses in twelve refugee camps. Even outside the refugee camps, such as in Sanliurfa's Yenisehir neighborhood, a youth center provides a three-month course for Syrian refugees ages twelve to twenty.<sup>26</sup> In Istanbul, seven schools have been opened for refugees, while the decision to open a five-hundred-student school in Izmir was made in November 2013.<sup>27</sup> In return for Syrian refugees' efforts to learn Turkish, the government decided to grant scholarships to six hundred Syrian university students. Moreover, these students were required to prove their Turkish-language skills but not to take the national university entrance examination.<sup>28</sup>

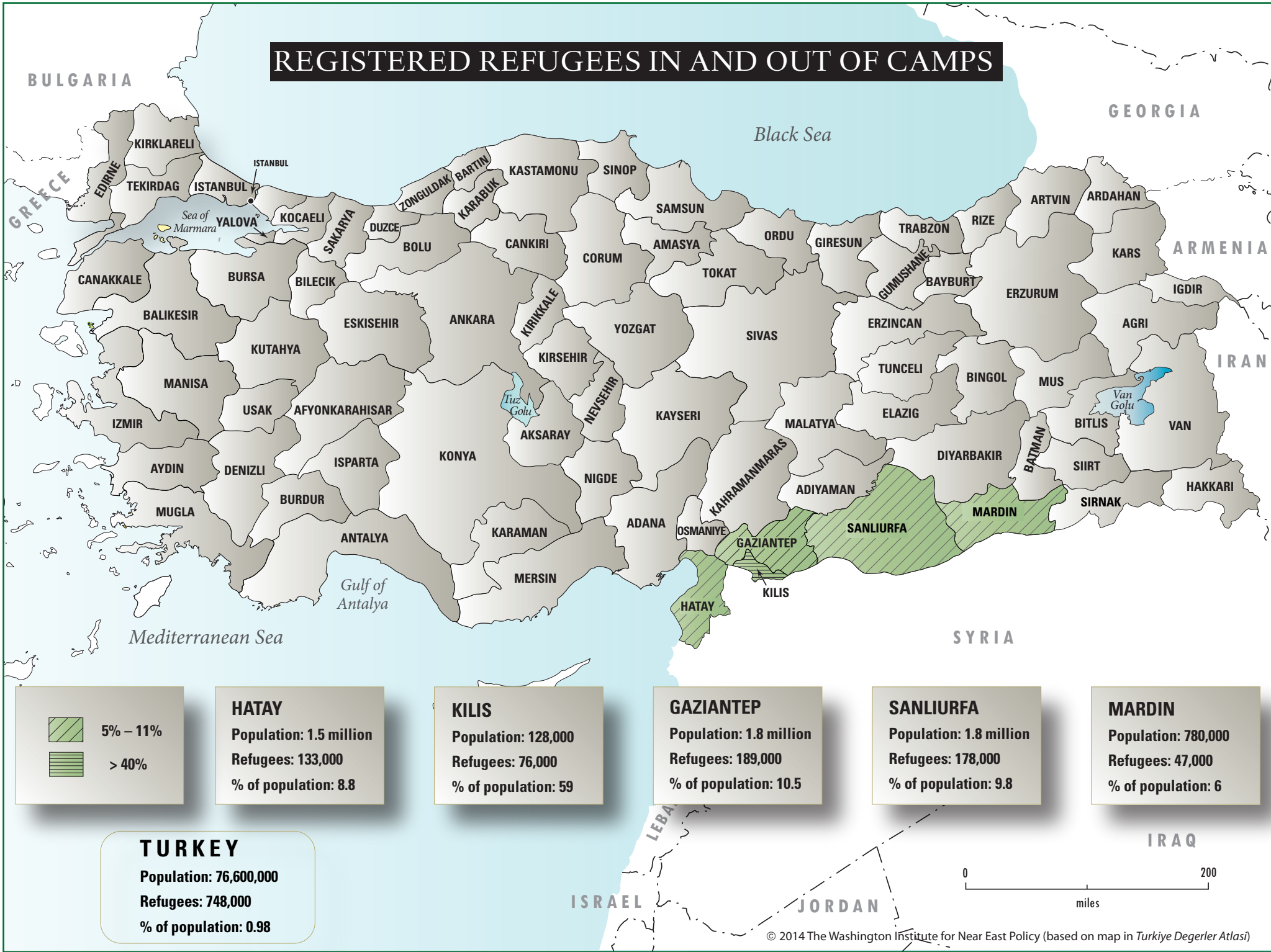
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# REGISTERED REFUGEES IN AND OUT OF CAMPS



## 3 SHIFTS IN THE ETHNIC BALANCE OF THE BORDER PROVINCES

GIVEN RECENT CHANGES in Turkey's asylum policy and the likelihood that violence will prevent the refugees from returning to Syria, they could well stay in Turkey for the short to middle term, potentially even longer. Such a development would certainly affect the demographic makeup of the southern Turkish provinces, posing several challenges for some.

Turkey does not currently collect any data on its citizens' ethnic origins; the last such collection occurred during the 1960 census. At that time, ethnic Arabs (defined as those whose mother tongue was Arabic) constituted 1.25 percent of the Turkish population.<sup>1</sup> Still, three provinces reported large proportions of Arabic speakers: Hatay (34 percent), Mardin (21 percent), and Sanliurfa (13 percent).<sup>2</sup>

Assuming that the share of ethnic Arabs in these provinces has remained at least constant since the 1960 census—according to a 2007 poll by KONDA, 1.38 percent of the country's population declared their mother tongue to be Arabic<sup>3</sup>—and that the Syrian refugees are overwhelmingly Sunni Arabs, one can deduce that the ethnic makeup of certain Turkish border provinces is likely being reshaped by the refugees. In Mardin, for example, the 21 percent Arab representation may have risen to 25 percent of its local population; in Sanliurfa, the 13 percent figure may have jumped to 21 percent.

Hatay and Kilis have seen even more dramatic changes. In the former, the Arab population has swelled from 34 percent to about 38 percent—and possibly much higher with the inclusion of unregistered refugees. In Kilis, which once had an Arab community of less than 1 percent, the demographic makeup has changed far more starkly due

to the refugee flow; ethnic Arabs now equal 37 percent of the population. Similarly, ethnic Arabs once represented less than 1 percent in Gaziantep, but unlike Kilis, Gaziantep has a large existing population. Although the province has absorbed more registered refugees than any other, ethnic Arabs now constitute a relatively modest 9 percent of its population.

In Kilis, Gaziantep, and other such provinces, the population change is driven not only by arriving refugees but also by high birth-rates among refugees.<sup>4</sup> This suggests a second generation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, further shifting ethnic and sectarian balances.

### HATAY AND ALAWITES: A SPECIAL CASE

The ethnic transformation of the southern Turkish provinces has a unique dimension in Hatay, a province of 1.5 million people where the Arab population<sup>5</sup> includes Turkish citizens of Alawite origin who are ethnically and religiously related to Syrian Alawites and overwhelmingly support the Assad regime in Damascus. Indeed, Alawites constitute a majority of the Arab community in Hatay, which also includes Sunni Arabs and a smaller number of Christian Arabs. The newcomers, however, are mostly Sunni Arabs and supporters of the insurgency against the Assad regime. As the Syrian Arabs settle in Hatay, changing the complexion of the province, tensions are likely to emerge between them and the Alawites, especially where the latter are particularly numerous.

For their part, Alawites in Hatay are staunchly secular and therefore at odds with the conservative and occasionally Islamist bent of the ruling AKP in Ankara. Most of the Alawites support the country's main opposition faction, the Republican People's Party (CHP).<sup>6</sup> After Ankara began providing safe haven to Syrian opposition groups and armed rebels in fall 2011, Hatay Alawites grew even more critical of the AKP's policies. They have played a disproportionate role in anti-AKP rallies, including a demonstration in spring 2012 that drew two thousand people and an autumn 2012 protest attended by some five thousand.<sup>7</sup>

With Hatay's Alawite population numbering between 400,000 and 700,000, the 133,331 Sunni newcomers could well stir up sectar-

ian tensions, considering their enmity toward the Alawite regime of Bashar al-Assad.<sup>8</sup> An instance of such tensions occurred in April 2013 when assailants attempted to break in to the home of Ali Yeral, who heads the Ehli Beyt Culture and Solidarity Foundation of Turkey, an Alawite NGO.<sup>9</sup> Another case occurred when an Arab Alawite leader was verbally assaulted in downtown Antakya in January 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Adding to the complexity, those entering Hatay include fighters injured in combat against Assad's troops. Hatay's existing population, wary of the emerging demographic threat, shows particular skepticism toward Syrian fighters who come to Turkey for medical treatment. In an incident reflecting these sentiments, an ambulance transporting injured civilians and rebels from Syria to Hatay province for medical treatment was attacked in April 2014.<sup>11</sup>

Alawites in Turkey charge further that the AKP government's Syria policy is both too aggressive and contains a hidden sectarian agenda. In turn, signs of Alawite sympathy for the Syrian regime have been evident for some time, as visible in the pro-Assad rallies sponsored by groups such as the "Platform against Imperialistic Interference in Syria." The largest, held in September 2012, drew thousands.<sup>12</sup> As one Alawite explained during an interview with Aljazeera, most Alawites believe that Western imperialistic powers, along with Sunni-led regimes, are trying to topple a legitimate government in Syria.<sup>13</sup> Minor tensions between Sunni refugees from Syria and Hatay Alawites have been reported as well. Alawite business owners and civil servants complain of Syrian refugees questioning them over their sectarian identity, with some claiming they have been blacklisted and harassed by Sunni Arab émigrés.<sup>14</sup>

For Hatay Alawites, suspicion of arriving Syrian Sunnis is often personal. Some see the arrivals not as refugees at all but rather as fighters who have killed or endangered their relatives in Syria. Others depict them as jihadists who threaten Alawites on both sides of the border. For example, one business owner recounted an incident in which a Syrian asked a Hatay shopkeeper if he was Alawite.<sup>15</sup> When the shopkeeper answered in the affirmative, the Syrian replied that Turkish Alawites would meet the same fate as their Syrian brethren—in other words, that their time would come. Security had to intervene to break up the ensuing fight.

Ankara has taken steps to alleviate grievances voiced by Alawites. Since September 2012, it has steered away from settling large numbers of Syrian refugees in Hatay, redirecting many of them to interior provinces. It has also excluded Hatay from the list of provinces in which Syrian refugees who have entered the country legally can obtain temporary residence permits. Yet alongside the 133,331 registered refugees in Hatay,<sup>16</sup> given the province's wide availability of Arabic-language networks, are likely many of the undocumented, a cause for concern for Ankara. Wider sectarian conflict in Syria would likely spur a larger refugee flow into the province and could, in turn, spark a local Sunni-Alawite conflagration.

## POTENTIAL IMPACT BEYOND HATAY

Alongside its Alawites,<sup>17</sup> Turkey has a large ethnic Turkish- and Kurdish-speaking Alevi community, constituting about 15 percent of the country's population. These Alevis, while distinct from the Arabic-speaking Alawites, share with them secular attitudes and suspicions of Sunni activism. The Alevis themselves could therefore complicate matters in the country.<sup>18</sup> Like the Alawites, the Alevis are powerfully opposed to the AKP's policies, including its stance on Syria, as well as supporting the CHP in overwhelming numbers. A recent poll by CHP parliamentarian Sabahat Akkiraz indicated that 75 percent of Alevis and Alawites backed her party in the 2011 elections.<sup>19</sup> Given the two groups' shared political affinities, if Hatay Alawites rallied more forcefully against the government's Syria policy, the Turkish Alevis would almost certainly follow.

Alevi and Alawite resentment toward the AKP government was inflamed further by the crackdown on the Gezi Park protestors in downtown Istanbul in June 2013 and ripple-effect demonstrations across Turkey. As noted, all six persons killed as a result of violence in the Gezi protests were Alevis or Alawites—and two of those Alawites were from Hatay. Accordingly, antigovernment protests in Hatay have become common even as protests have mostly subsided elsewhere in the country. Since the June 15, 2013, police takeover of Gezi Park,<sup>20</sup> at least thirty demonstrations have been held in Hatay, all against the AKP government and denouncing its Syria policy. Noteworthy is that

anti-AKP demonstrations have also continued nearby in Alawite-populated areas of Adana and Mersin provinces, echoing the events in Hatay.<sup>21</sup> Antigovernment demonstrations have likewise continued in Tunceli, Turkey's only Alevi-majority province, as well as in the Alevi-dominated Ankara district of Dikmen.<sup>22</sup>

Although Syria has not loomed large in this post-Gezi scene, the daily anti-AKP demonstrations have continued in Hatay to this day. On September 9, 2013, an Alawite youth was killed at one such protest.<sup>23</sup> The Turkish government must be mindful of these developments in the aftermath of the Gezi crackdown. Syria policy and the refugee question could become wedge issues should massive protests flare again in Turkey.

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## 4 ECONOMICS

FOR THE DECADE PRIOR TO THE CRISIS in Syria, Turkey had developed deep trade ties with its neighbor to the south. The subsequent collapse of relations in 2012, and the associated economic restrictions, had an economic impact particularly in the southern Turkish provinces, such as Gaziantep and Kilis. More recently, however, Turkey seems to have recovered from the crisis and even increased its export trade with Syria.

### RECOVERING, EVEN BENEFITING, FROM THE CRISIS

Over the past decade, the discovery of new export markets for Turkish goods, including Syria, helped drive the country's strong economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Yet after Turkey's overall exports to Syria reached \$1.6 billion in 2011, its export revenues fell to \$497 million in 2012. The next year saw a recovery, with Turkey's exports to Syria doubling to \$1 billion.<sup>2</sup> At the Cilvegozu border alone, three hundred trucks cross daily to export goods to Syria.<sup>3</sup> Most of these goods, including food and first-aid products but also cement, are delivered to NGOs and also to areas under Syrian opposition control.

The picture from province to province is subtler. Nicknamed the "Anatolian Tiger" for its export-oriented manufacturing base, and known for its residents' trading and business acumen, Gaziantep had benefited from strengthening ties between Turkey and Syria before the start of the Syrian uprising. The city even hosted a Syrian consulate from 2005 until 2011, when the Syrian government shut down



its mission. As Turkey's policy toward Syria grew confrontational, between 2011 and the first quarter of 2012 alone, fifteen Gaziantep-based companies were forced to close their plants in nearby Aleppo.<sup>4</sup> Gaziantep's exports overall to Syria dropped by 44 percent between 2011 and 2012.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, while Gaziantep's most direct foreign trade route to the Middle East went through Syria, the closing of the Turkish-Syrian border in 2012 meant an increase in export costs.

But trade between Gaziantep and Syrian markets has subsequently picked up. After dropping from \$98 million in 2011 to \$54 million in 2012, Gaziantep's exports to Syria increased by 411 percent to \$278 million in 2013, heralding the best such figures since the Syrian war began.<sup>6</sup> For the first time, Gaziantep seems to be benefiting from the crisis by exporting relief supplies. According to some local businessmen, the UN and other NGOs are required to buy the goods in Turkey to provide them to displaced people in Syria, which has contributed to Gaziantep's export revenues.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the province's export revenue in various sectors such as seafood, poultry, and meat increased by more than 70 percent.<sup>8</sup> According to the president of Gaziantep's chamber of commerce, Syria used to export food products by sea, but this has changed with the civil war.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, most of these goods are exported from Turkey. Another factor contributing to the province's export success involves Syrian exporters who have opened offices in Gaziantep. The president of Gaziantep's chamber of commerce explained in an interview that almost a hundred Syrian exporters had opened offices in Gaziantep; these exporters then export goods produced in regime-controlled Latakia to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the province managed to hold its trade volume above the national average by turning to new markets, such as Iraq. Gaziantep increased its overall foreign trade volume by 36 percent between 2010 and 2011, and the figure grew by 12 percent between 2011 and 2012, and then by 20.5 percent between 2012 and 2013.<sup>11</sup> With the UAE, Libya, and Yemen, between 2012 and 2013, Gaziantep's exports increased by almost 37.5 percent, 38 percent, and 50 percent, respectively. Overall, the province's export volume, at \$5.6 billion in 2012, increased to \$6.2 billion in 2013.<sup>12</sup>

Sanliurfa, like Gaziantep, enjoyed prosperous trade with Syria before the war. In 2011, Sanliurfa's exports to Syria reached \$69 mil-

lion; this figure dropped by 92.5 percent the following year, helping propel a 28.5 percent drop in the province's overall exports. However, similar to Gaziantep, Sanliurfa experienced an increase in its exports with Syria in 2013. Following an export deficit with Syria of about 45 percent between 2011 and 2012, Sanliurfa's exports to Syria increased by a remarkable 695 percent in 2012–2013; over the same period, the province's cement exports increased by 214 percent.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Syria again became Sanliurfa's main export market after Iraq in 2013.

While Sanliurfa faced an economic challenge with the beginning of the Syrian war, which drove down its exports to Syria and overall export revenues, its fortunes have since reversed. After Sanliurfa's overall exports dipped from \$148.3 million in 2011 to \$110 million in 2012, they rose to 153.7 million in 2013.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Sanliurfa seems to have adapted economically to the permanent crisis in Syria.

Hatay province's overall exports remained more or less steady from 2011 to 2012, dropping negligibly from \$2.05 billion to \$2.04 billion.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, they fell slightly to \$2 billion. Although the province's overall exports dropped a bit between 2011 and 2013, its exports to Syria increased by 20 percent; between 2012 and 2013, they rose by 96 percent.<sup>16</sup> One thus sees that Hatay has benefited increasingly from the crisis in Syria, a story also told by its export figures. Between 2012 and 2013, Hatay's overall export goods increased dramatically, including a 93 percent increase in electronics and a 56 percent increase in cement, ceramics, and earthenware products, all used for construction.<sup>17</sup> Overall, Hatay's exports to Syria reached \$123 million in 2013.

Similar developments occurred in Mardin province. While Mardin's exports to Syria reached more than \$17.2 million in 2011, dropping to \$3.6 million in 2012, they increased to almost \$10 million in 2013.<sup>18</sup> Between 2012 and 2013, the export revenue for food products such as seafood, poultry, and meat rose by 155 percent.<sup>19</sup>

Kilis, too, has seen increasing exports with Syria. Although the province's exports with Syria amounted to almost \$18 million in 2011, they decreased to \$6.5 million in 2012. However, in 2013, the province's export trade with Syria recovered, rising to almost \$12.3 million. Thanks to a more than 300 percent increase in exports of goods such as textiles, the province's overall export revenue increased as well.

In nearby Malatya and Mersin provinces, two growing export-oriented economies, exports to Syria rose in 2011–2013 by 204 percent and 368 percent, respectively.<sup>20</sup> Mersin's Silifke district alone exports 250 tons of tomatoes to Syria and Iraq daily.<sup>21</sup> Other recovery stories include those of Kahramanmaraş and Osmaniye provinces, whose exports to Syria decreased between 2011 and 2012 by 54 percent and 90.5 percent, respectively, but then rose by 271 and 470 percent between 2012 and 2013.

## NOTES

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## 5 CONCLUSION

AS OF SUMMER 2014, at least 747,000 and perhaps more than one million Syrian refugees had flooded into southern Turkey. In demographic terms, this influx could result in permanent Arab majorities in border provinces such as Hatay and Kilis. Furthermore, in Hatay, the shift could catapult Sunni Arabs to dominance over Alawites, upsetting the existing balance in the Arab community. Such changes could have consequences given the resistance of the country's Alawites, and especially Hatay's Alawites, to Turkey's Syria policy.

On the economic front, while Turkish business, and the country's trademark export market, has registered remarkable success in dealing with the fallout of the Syrian crisis, increased refugee flows into Hatay will likely push up the cost of living and unemployment in southern Turkey, creating resentment against the Syrian refugees among the local population.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR WASHINGTON

So far, Turkey has done a commendable job in welcoming the Syrian refugees, setting up entire cities for them equipped with clinics and schools. The overall cost for these relief efforts had risen to as much as \$4 billion by earlier in 2014.<sup>1</sup> But the future challenges are daunting, and the United States can play a role in helping Turkey successfully integrate the Syrian refugees into the Turkish population. Such integration will be especially critical should the refugees remain in Turkey beyond the short term. To this end, Washington should consider taking the following steps:

- *Engage Ankara on its plans to set up a safe area inside Syria.* Turkey now considers Iraq and Syria as a single threat of conflict due to the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), now known as the Islamic State (IS). Ankara is also eager to create high-level bilateral structures with Washington to discuss issues regarding Iraq and Syria.

Given worries about the social, demographic, and ethnic and economic pressures that added refugee flows would create for the country, especially its southern provinces, Turkey appears to be planning the eventual creation of a safe haven along its border with Syria to house and shelter Syrian refugees. In this regard, Turkey has been studying the model of the northern Iraqi safe haven created with UN backing in 1991. This haven was enforced by U.S. and allied militaries, "the coalition of the willing," providing the Kurds escaping Saddam a safe zone across the Turkish border. The northern Iraqi safe haven was implemented after about half a million Iraqi Kurds had already crossed into Turkey, thereby preventing the flow of more refugees into Turkey. And, in fact, many Iraqi Kurdish refugees in Turkey returned to Iraq once this safe haven was created. Ankara is now eager to facilitate a sort of replay of this scenario. To this end, Turkey wants the United States to lobby at the UN for a mandate for the northern Syrian safe haven. With little U.S. appetite to commit troops to protect such a safe haven, however, Turkey would need to devise its own coalition of the willing, perhaps including Arab nations and France. Moreover, Turkey would need to convince the United States to commit in principle to the initiative. While the idea of a safe haven inside Syria now seems to be Turkey's sole remedy for the refugee problem, Washington should engage Ankara at the ministerial level to understand Turkey's objectives and establish common ground on the broader Syrian crisis.

- *Encourage Ankara to mitigate ethnic and sectarian tensions in Turkey's southern border provinces.* Such a strategy would involve reaching out to leaders of the Kurdish and Arab communities in Syria, on the principle that defused Arab-Kurdish tensions in Syria would translate to defused Arab-Kurdish tensions in southern Turkey.

The avoidance of ethnic clashes could be established as a sine qua non for U.S. assistance to Syrian groups.

More important, Washington might consider gently encouraging Ankara to reach out to Turkish Alawites to assure them that Turkish (and U.S.) strategy on Syria is not based on sectarian favoritism. To this end, a special program could be set up through which Turkish Alawite leaders are invited to Washington and given access to the foreign policy process on Syria. At the same time, the Ankara government might consider launching regular consultations with its country's Alawite community leaders to address their concerns over Syria, as well as to help prevent future police violence against Alawite demonstrators in Hatay. Turkey has already taken some positive steps toward the broader Alawite community, such as by establishing separate quarters in Hatay for Syrian Alawite refugees who want to abandon the Assad regime.

In pursuing such an "Alawite opening," the Ankara government might consider seeking assistance from the opposition CHP, which is popular among Turkish Alawites and has already reached out to the Assad regime, thereby gaining recognition with Syrian Alawites who support the regime as well as Turkish Alawites who oppose the ruling AKP's Syria policy. An Alawite opening—led by the CHP and encouraged by the AKP—would help the Ankara government address sectarian tensions in southern Turkey and avert potential political violence that could erode its popularity as the 2014 local and presidential elections approach. For its part, the CHP may be tempted to work with the AKP if it feels empowered in the decisionmaking process on Syria, boosting its cachet both at home and abroad. Relatedly, an AKP-CHP joint committee to discuss Syria would send a constructive message to Syrian and Turkish Alawites alike. Given the current polarization between the AKP and CHP, however, the requirement for both parties to work together may be a tall order.

- *Study ways of helping Ankara alleviate its refugee burden.* The UN is already active in southern Turkey, helping shelter and care for the Syrian refugees. Washington might therefore consider encouraging American, European, and international NGOs to take a more

active role in southern Turkey. This would require a determined U.S. push to convince Ankara to relax its limitations regarding foreign NGO activity on Turkish soil. U.S. policymakers should relay to their Turkish counterparts that while Ankara faces the prospect of a near-permanent presence of Syrians in its territory, international NGO assistance could help decrease the long-term financial burden created by this situation. More specifically, the United States could encourage the involvement of NGOs that provide job and language training for Syrians in Turkey, helping ease their integration into Turkish society. However, despite Washington's best efforts to convince Ankara to provide increased room for international NGOs operating on Turkish soil, Ankara seems intent on limiting their number. The Turkish government seems especially uncomfortable with NGOs with non-Islamic, quasi-religious affiliations. Yet Washington should continue to emphasize to Ankara the value of NGOs in providing relief to refugees, especially since Turkey now faces a potentially permanent presence of at least a million Syrians. Washington should also consider encouraging European countries to help share the financial burden of hosting the refugees as well as take in a number of refugees themselves. Such steps would prevent the Turkish system from collapsing under the weight of an increasing refugee flow.

On October 9, 2013, EU internal markets commissioner Michel Barnier, noting the increased number of Syrians arriving in EU countries, said that the union "needs to brace for a possible 'massive' influx of Syrian refugees."<sup>2</sup> Assisting Turkey now in the ways just outlined could help sustain present Turkish relief efforts, in turn avoiding the possibility of massive illegal refugee flows into Europe in the future.

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Dr. Cagaptay's work has been published extensively in scholarly journals and major international print media such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. He has been a regular columnist for CNN.com and *Hurriyet Daily News*, Turkey's oldest and most influential English-language paper, and appears regularly on U.S. and international television news programs.

His most recent book, *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (University of Nebraska Press, February 2014), is a guide to Turkey's changes, in both their inspiring potential and the grave challenges they pose. Structured as a travelogue, each chapter opens on a different Turkish city and captures a new theme of Turkey's transformation.

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“Turkey has taken serious steps in the past year to improve conditions for the growing influx of Syrian refugees. And even though the *New York Times Magazine* referred to a Kilis refugee camp, one of twenty-two in Turkey, as the world’s best, Turkey will nonetheless continue to face social, demographic, ethnic, and sectarian pressures created by the largest refugee flow in the country’s modern history.”

