GUESTS, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, REFUGEES OR TRANSIT MIGRANTS? SYRIANS IN TURKEY IN 'PURGATORY'

Jade Cemre Erciyes

Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Abkhazia and Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex

Abstract

The total number of registered Syrians in Turkey reached 2.5 million by the end of 2015. After five years during which Turkey claims to have been maintaining an 'open-door' policy for those seeking protection, the Syrians in Turkey are still given only 'temporary protection' status, which limits their access to the labor force, education, healthcare, and other support systems. With a majority of those who are registered being under 18 years old, not knowing Turkish and having minimal access to a basic education, the problems of integration into and acceptance by the host-country society will only grow in time. The Syrians, when they can find employment on the black market, are paid less than half the minimum wage, work without security or job safety, or even any guarantee of payment. As the Syrian border area is being militarized and repressed parallel to developments in Turkish politics, and the situation in Syria is not improving but dislocating more people each day, more and more Syrians are joining the transit migrants in making life-threatening journeys to reach Europe, paying whatever savings they have left to human smugglers. Whether or not they will one day return to their left-behind 'paradise' or reach their 'imagined paradise' – Europe – they seem to be stuck in 'purgatory' in Turkey without any prospect of making the place a 'home'.

Keywords: Refugees, Syrians, Turkey, integration, 'temporary protection centers'

Huéspedes, solicitantes de asilo, refugiados o migrantes en tránsito? Sirios en Turquía en 'Purgatorio'

Resumen

El número total de sirios registrados en Turquía llegó a 2,5 millones a finales del 2015. Después de cinco años en los cuales Turquía afirma haber estado manteniendo la política de una "puerta abierta" para aquellos que buscan protección, los sirios en Turquía aún reciben sólo "protección temporal" del estado, lo que limita su acceso a fuentes de trabajo, educación, salud, y otros sistemas de apoyo. Dado que la mayoría de los que están registrados son menores de 18 años de edad, quienes no saben turco y no tienen un mínimo acceso a una educación básica, los problemas de integración y aceptación por parte de la sociedad del país

sólo crecerán con el tiempo. Los sirios, cuando pueden encontrar un empleo en el mercado negro, reciben menos de la mitad del salario mínimo, trabajan sin seguro ni seguridad, o incluso cualquier garantía de pago. A medida que el área de la frontera de Siria está siendo militarizada y reprimida en paralelo a la evolución de la política turca, y la situación en Siria no está mejorando sino desplazando a más personas cada día, más y más sirios se están uniendo a los migrantes en tránsito, arriesgando sus vidas para llegar a Europa, pagando todos sus ahorros que les queda a los traficantes de personas. Ya sea o no que un día volverán a su 'paraíso' que dejan atrás o llegar a su "paraíso imaginado" - Europa - parecen estar atrapados en 'purgatorio' en Turquía sin ninguna perspectiva de hacer del lugar un 'hogar.'

Palabras clave: Refugiados, sirios, Turquía, la integración, "centros de protección temporal"

Introduction

At the end of 2015, the number of Syrian refugees registered in Turkey reached 2.5 million – almost 3 percent of the overall population. This article is about these 2.5 million people – who are being given a different official status and are living in almost any city in Turkey as well as in camps designated for them, whose living and working conditions vary and who are receiving all manner of support but who are also facing discrimination from the local society. People in Turkey have been talking about the refugees from Syria since 2011, when they first started to arrive *en masse* at the border, seeking refuge in what they saw as a safe 'haven' from the war on their doorstep. Those who had arrived thought of their stay as temporary, as did the Turkish media, the local population, local authorities, and local and international NGOs; even policymakers thought this was a temporary situation and welcomed the Syrians as guests. However, as the years have gone by since 2011, the Syrian situation has escalated into an international crisis. For some this is a 'refugee' crisis; for others, mobile in the region, it is a crisis of mobility and freedom. For Syrians it is their life. The Syrians are called guests, asylum-seekers, refugees, non-registered migrants – all labels which imply a status of temporariness, increasing their wish to move somewhere else where they could feel 'at home'. Whether they eventually do go back to Syria or move on to a new place, or whether they stay in Turkey, their current situation is just transitory. In between all the given labels, various choices and decisions they have to make, and actions they need to take, people whose numbers equal the the total population of cities like Paris or Chicago are living 'in purgatory' in Turkey.

In this article, using narratives of my own and other people's experiences, I reflect on how Syrians in Turkey are part of the 'everyday' lives of anyone passing by or living in Turkey. Besides these narratives, I refer to reports from different regions and to papers, presentations and accounts of researchers on different aspects of this population living in a state of limbo. It must be understood that, although I try to draw a general picture of the situation of Syrians in Turkey, the data and narratives below will show that it is not possible to make robust generalizations about the reasons for their migration, their current living conditions or their future prospects. This text is merely a limited effort to narrate a complex reality, a starting point from which to understand the multidimensional nature of the 'crisis' of Syrians in Turkey.

Syrians in Turkey

In the second six months of 2015, several events brought the Syrian question onto my everyday agenda. My cousin canceled her plans to visit our childhood seaside resort in the summer, saying that she could not have a holiday where people are dying trying to cross the sea. Another cousin changed her plans to 'not vaccinate' her new-born baby because the childhood illnesses that had almost disappeared in Turkey had multiplied and all the doctors and nurses, as well as the media, strongly suggested vaccination. My uncle put up a sign in Arabic in the front window of his shop (as did the majority of other shopkeepers) setting out the services they provide. A friend of mine lost her job when her employer, an international NGO working with refugees, decided that it was not possible to undertake any projects with such increased numbers

of refugees and that it was better to transfer the aid to state institutions. Some friends and relatives became neighbors with Syrian families and they said that it felt like hundreds of people were living in tiny flats because there was always someone coming in or out. My Arabic-speaking friends say that they help Syrians in shops and markets every single day. During a two-month stay in Turkey, I twice found myself trying to help Syrians – once on a train journey and once on a bus; the only thing they had was a piece of paper that said where they wanted to go. They had been misdirected, and had ended up hundreds of kilometers away from their destination. On various occasions in public and private spaces I listened to people talking about the Syrians. In Turkey, these days, even strangers find themselves talking about Syrians. Their discussions move from one topic to another, but the local populations – despite their own multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious existence in Turkey – feel that the Syrians are 'different'. The most common discussions you hear (mostly by political liberals) in the street are about concerns that the refugees will bring in religious conservatism, will become citizens and will vote for the Conservative Party in the elections, are supporters of ISIS and will bring the religious war to Turkey and so on. Some are afraid simply because they cannot communicate with the Syrians; some state that they are dressed disturbingly differently and are dirty, beggars and thieves etc.

There is also the everyday reality for a migration researcher in Turkey. At every social-science conference organized in Turkey in 2015 there was at least one panel on Syrians. In May of last year the government announced a 'restriction on research on Syrians' in the name of protecting 'the right to privacy of the refugees' (Kayaoğlu 2015). Despite this regulation, the number of analyses and small-budget, short-term research projects being published skyrocketed in the last months of 2015. Various social media groups had posts and discussions about Syrians either in Turkey or *en route* to somewhere else. Then there was the questions of friends who were trying to bring in Syrians or send them elsewhere. I received questions about how to invite Syrians to Turkey, about how they check the passports in some European airports, the various countries' asylum policies, and living conditions for refugees. The hardest of the questions was from a Turkish-Adyge friend – how to convince a Syrian-Adyge relative, who was determined to cross the Aegean Sea, to stay. Throughout the days that followed, my friend tried everything and all I could do was just listen and suggest options, such as employment or help for return migration to the ancestral homeland – Adygeya, the Russian Federation or Abkhazia, where I was living. When one night the sea was calm, he got on the ship and we waited, holding our breath. My friend wrote to me hours later:

> He made it. His Turkish mobile number is still working on the Greek Island so he was able to call me, we could talk. He made it with 56 other people, children and women, mostly Syrians but others as well. He said the smugglers told him that if he drove the boat himself he could pay a smaller price. They said it was easy, that he would just need to go straight. He did. When they had arrived on the Greek island there was 10 centimeters of water in the tiny, old fishing boat.[1]

'IOM expects Greece to receive its one millionth migrant since the beginning of 2015 by sometime next month' [March 2016]' (IOM 2016). This young man, for further news of whom I waited in fear throughout subsequent days and who, not telling his family, risked 56 other people's lives, including children the same age as his own, is going to be one of a million who will have made it to Europe by the time that this article is published. He never made it to his final destination, Finland, where he was promised work and security. During the journey he had found out that the conditions were not so favorable there. Instead he went to Germany and was granted a residence permit there. The friend who sends me his news thinks that he will soon be granted citizenship. He thinks his family living in one of the camps in Turkey will be able to join him soon. I questioned why this talented, hard-working young man was making such a risky journey. The answer my friend gave was 'He was fed up. Fed up with working but not receiving his wages… he saw no hope for the future in Turkey'. A couple of

1 Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Turkish are mine.

days later, I received other news about a Syrian-Adyge who wanted to sell his kidney to raise the fee for the smugglers to take him to Europe. Such a thought was repeated in a collection of migrant narratives from Istanbul by Mathias Fiedler (2015: 4), so it is clear that the smugglers have found something more valuable than money – the healthy body parts of desperate migrants. In the light of this everyday reality, let us now look at the various questions that come to mind relating to Syrians in Turkey – *Why* and *how* do they come? *Where* and under *which* conditions do they settle? *What* is the socio-cultural distance between the Syrians and the locals? *When* are they leaving?

Why and how? The arrival

The reasons why Syrians are leaving their homes and seeking refuge in other places may seem obvious: the conflict (civil war, war) in their home. No matter what we call it, the ongoing clashes in Syria – which have now spread to the world, creating an international political division of various pro- and anti-groups – has affected millions of people, destroying their homes and dislocating them. The 'humanitarian situation in their home country' had worsened considerably, and it became impossible to survive, with even the basic supplies becoming hard to find (Özden 2013). In Syria they feared for their lives and the economy had collapsed (Apak 2014: 63). The first arrivals were 'political activist youth... [who] had to flee because they were actively involved in the revolution... They escaped from torture, imprisonment and persecution' (Özden 2013: 3). They were followed by large numbers of Sunni-Arabs, mostly women and children, who had fled the escalating violence. To quote Erdoğan (2014: 72), 'After ISIS came into the equation in 2014, other Syrians, such as Yazidis (Ezidi), Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds and Alawites arrived and significant alterations took place in the ethno-religious picture'. Research suggests that the majority of the Syrians took refuge in Turkey because of its geographical proximity (AFAD 2014; Anon. 2015; Apak 2014; Orhan 2014; Özden 2013). Despite the proximity, the journey was hard, and varied according to the border conditions and individual circumstances. Turkey's changing border regime, 'associated with the concerns on border security, economic burden, the realization of false assumptions about the length of the crisis and the isolation in the international community in terms of her policy direction in Syrian civil war' (Aras and Mencütek 2015: 194–195), has been what influenced border processes.

Those arriving can be categorized in three positions: those with passports, those without passports who crossed the official border, and those who crossed from the border area where there is no official entry-point. Those with passports could usually go through the border controls without any problems. Those without passports who did not dare to pass through the minefields had to wait until the border was open for them to cross. This depended on a number of conditions, so the Syrians had to walk and wait for days in a conflict zone without basic supplies; they were sexually harassed, had to pay bribes, deal with theft and face various other problems while waiting to cross the border. 'We walked for around three days or more' or 'They shoot at us. Our child was injured, we were held in custody for two hours', 'Five days we waited at the border' – these are just some of the statements of Syrians about their border-crossing experience (Anon. 2015: 32). In 2015, Turkey 'made the admission of Syrians at official border crossings conditional on the availability of places within the camps, or on specific humanitarian circumstances', turning the 'open-door' policy into a 'non-arrival' policy (Aras and Mencütek 2015: 205). At times when the borders were closed, those who did not want to be admitted to the camps passed through the border area which was controlled by a variety of groups fighting in Syria at different times. Choosing to enter Turkey via the 'unofficial' route had its own caveats and risks.

Where and which? The settlement

Syrians are settled in every city in Turkey. According to AFAD (2016) data, as of 8 February 2016, some 273,023 Syrians (together with 10,913 Iraqi refugees) live in 25 'temporary protection centers' in ten provinces located in the Syrian-Turkish border area (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Syrians and Iraqis in 10 Turkish border provinces

Province	Syrians	Iraquis	Tent camps	Container camps
Hatay	16,736		5	1
Gaziantep	41,457	9,321	4	1
Sanliurfa	112,063		4	1
Kilis	33,820			2
Mardin	12,402	1,592	2	
Kahramanmaras	18,407		1	
Osmaniye	9,506		1	
Adiyaman	9,939		1	
Adana	10,681		1	
Malatya	8,012			1

Source: AFAD (2016).

However, the total number living in these camps is just 10 percent of the total number of Syrians who have arrived in Turkey. The camps could never accommodate all the arrivals. Those who had entered Turkey in the early years, with their passports or via an unofficial route, settled in cities which they thought suitable for themselves. Among the reasons for choosing to settle outside the camps, often in a particular city, were having relatives or acquaintances living there, thinking that they could get a job in that specific place, having the finances to live on their own, not adapting to camps or not finding any available spaces in the camps; however, often they settled in a particular place by chance (Anon. 2015: 33; Apak 2014: 63; Orhan 2014: 14). The religious and ethnic composition of the place of settlement was also influential in the decision, for example the Nusayris (an Arab-Alewite group) preferred to settle in Hatay, where Turkish Nusayris live; on the other hand, Sunni-Arabs preferred to settle in Mardin, which had a Sunni majority (Apak 2014: 61). Though the Syrians are dispersed, living in differing but mostly poor conditions, there are also some atypical settlement trends. One such place is Sulukule. Until just a few years ago it was a Romani settlement in the center of Istanbul. It was emptied of its population as part of an urban transformation project where private housing construction took place. Of the 250 luxurious and spacious houses in the area, 200 are said to be rented by well-off Syrians, who live 2–3 families together, having shops that sell Syrian products and enjoying the security of a segregated settlement (Diren 2015: 38).

The camps are officially called 'temporary accommodation centers' but are referred to as 'guest camps' since Syrians have guest status in Turkey (Özden 2013: 5). The camps in Turkey have varying conditions but generally they are argued to be 'superior compared to those in other countries', because they have socio-cultural facilities, eg. playgrounds, meeting rooms, Internet access, training classes, mosques, kitchens, baths, toilets and washing facilities (Orhan 2014: 12). AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) builds the camps but the majority of the services are provided by other state institutions or private businesses. Those in the camps are registered by AFAD under the temporary protection scheme, have identity cards, are provided with monthly financial aid that they can use to buy their choice of food items from the camp shops, as well as health care, various education and training opportunities and other resources. Some accounts have been reported (Ozden 2013) about inequality in the distribution of aid in the camps but generally the camp infrastructure was argued to be good. The inhabitants may be allowed out to work in seasonal agricultural jobs or factories, but leaving the camp is by permission only. Although they may be seen as a safe 'haven' by some, life in the camps is said to be monotonous and limiting,

hindering migrants' integration into local society – possibly a bigger issue in the long run.

Life outside the camp is not much easier. In terms of access to resources, those who are registered under the temporary protection scheme can still receive some financial aid. Nevertheless, this money is not enough to rent proper accommodation and the majority live in unsuitable housing conditions, with more than one family squeezed into one tiny place. In the study in Adana province it was found that 36 percent of the interviewees were sharing a flat with other families, one third of the houses had no heating, no separate bathroom, and were damp and inadequately protected (Anon. 2015: 39). AFAD's study revealed a similar picture, with more than half of the off-camp accommodation observed to be unsuitable in terms of size and comfort, and the majority not having enough or suitable sleeping facilities, fuel for heating or cooking, or kitchenware (2014: 86). In every city in Turkey one can now find shops that sell Syrian products, which are generally cheaper than Turkish ones. Many shopkeepers have already learned basic Arabic to enable them to communicate with the increased number of shoppers. However, since the Syrians cannot work and earn money, the availability of services and resources is of limited use. They still depend on aid.

In terms of education, the children have access to schooling in the camps. The majority of the camp schools follow a Syrian curriculum, though some follow a combined Turkish-Arabic curriculum. Students registered outside the camps can enroll in public schools and those without registration can attend school as 'guests' while various NGOs, community organizations and local authorities have established 'informal schools' (Bircan and Sunata 2015: 228). According to AFAD (2016) only 13.8 percent of those living outside the camps were able to attend some type of education, while 16.4 percent of the survey participants stated that their children attended 'other' types of educational course. These 'other' schools vary in structure, place and content. Some are located in school buildings, some in mosques, community centers or other public places and some in private spaces such as shops and cafés. The different initiatives reflect both the sectarian and socio-economic divisions in Turkey and those that existed in Syrian society. During a short period of fieldwork in two private spaces in Istanbul where Turkish language courses were organized for refugee children, a colleague noticed that the two places, despite their proximity, hosted totally different groups of people – one had students from all over Istanbul, economically better-off Syrians, and the other had a student profile of local Syrian children (Wenching Ting, personal correspondence, January 2016). In Özden's (2013) report, Syrians 'state that they are very uncomfortable with the accusation of being sectarian and that they feel like the Turkish public is trying to pull them into Turkey's own sectarian issues' (2013: 4).

How are they different?

There is very limited contact between Syrians and the local population, no matter whether they live in a rural or an urban setting. As in the case of Adana, we can presume today that the majority of the Turkish population meet Syrians only in shops and marketplaces; around half have a Syrian neighbor (Aslan 2015: 12). In a study of social acceptance, it appears that half of the population would not like to be neighbors with Syrians and half are afraid that Syrians might hurt their families (Erdoğan 2014: 32). 'As the proportion of Syrians increases, local people tend to adopt more negative reactions' (Orhan 2014: 17). It is not only their numbers which has affected their relations with the locals but also their prolonged stay. Syrians state that 'still being called "guests" disturbs them the most as to be a guest is not a "right" but a condition, which depends largely upon the host' (Erdoğan 2014: 60). Besides, after so many years, Syrians living in small cities know their way around; indeed, in the study in Mardin almost half stated that they no longer feel like a 'stranger or foreigner'. In this study Apak shares the narrative of a Syrian: 'They don't call us by our names but as Syrians. I say I have a name but they won't listen' (Apak 2014: 65). This 'othering' and distancing is greatly influenced by the various migrant and local identities. Turkish citizens approach Syrians in accordance with their own ethnic, religious, economic, political and gender identities – the Kurds welcome Kurds and the Turks welcome Turks; Arabic-speakers welcome their kin; Sunnis welcome Sunnis; employers welcome cheap labor;

ruling-party supporters welcome all while nationalist parties oppose all; and women do not welcome women. Field research by ORSAM suggests, speaking of the situation in the border region, that:

> …there is sympathy towards Kurds and antipathy against Arabs in the places where Kurds form the majority. Kurds think that Arabs support radical groups such as al-Qaeda, which they use against the Kurds in Syria. In contrast, Arabs think that Kurds seek to divide Syria and support PKK-affiliated parties. The majority of Turks sympathize with Turkmens, while most of the Arab Alawites consider the Syrians entering Turkey as traitors to their own country. This is the reason why Syrians tend to move to places in Turkey where people with similar ethnic, religious or sectarian identities live (Orhan 2014: 17).

Aslan similarly suggests, in his study on the city of Adana, that those who define themselves as Turks keep their distance from the Syrians, while those who define themselves as Arabs, Alewites or as being from Adana take neither a distant nor a close stance towards the refugees (2015: 15). Furthermore, the members of the various political parties have different levels of approval of the support given to Syrians; the 'nationalist' party (CHP and MHP) voters think that the support given by the state is enough, more so than the ruling (AKP) and opposition party (HDP) voters (Aslan 2015: 21). In the city of Hatay, locals 'expressed complaints based on "differences between the urban culture of Hatay and the peasant, non-urban, uneducated background of Syrians"' (Özden 2013: 10). Cultural differences are repeated in many other research reports. The clothing, the food and the culture of public behavior of the Syrians are repeatedly said to be different from those of the Turkish host population. The statement that 'We are culturally akin to Syrians' was supported by less than one fifth of the respondents, while those who think that they are culturally distinct form the majority (Erdoğan 2014: 72). Despite their negative attitudes and socio-cultural distance, when asked if they agree to a more 'provocative proposal' asserting that 'the refugees should be sent back to their country even though the war is ongoing', only one third of the respondents agreed whereas more than half opposed it (Erdoğan 2014: 66).

Many refugee children are forced to work in seasonal jobs, and in factories or textile production. Even if they have the desire to study, the necessity to work is what limits their education the most; when 'males are expected to work and contribute to the family budget by their parents, most of the young girls... marry willingly or with family pressure' (Bircan and Sunata 2015: 234). In one study, the Syrian women stated that they had occasionally received improper propositions from men (Apak 2014: 66). Due to their vulnerable position, Syrians have often been employed without work permits or any benefits, as very cheap labor, and 'are forced to work under exploitative conditions, with their lives at risk' (Özden 2013: 7). The economic effect of the cheap employment of Syrians is an important topic of interest. Due to the increased numbers of Syrians, there has been a 'fivefold reduction in wages', 'market prices in the border provinces have risen' and there has been a 'rise in rental prices'. On the other hand, 'AFAD's efforts to provide aid to the Syrians created a lot of demand for various products and services, which are supplied through the local economy' (Orhan 2014: 15–16). Some Syrians are begging on the streets of big cities (arguably together with local beggars who, nowadays, claim to be Syrians, too) because they have been unable to secure employment. A study in Ankara province, Altındağ district, where there is a considerable population of Syrians, shows that the locals compare their own socio-economic status with that of Syrians and request that they, as locals, be given priority in their relations with the state – such as in receiving aid. However, in the same study it was also explained that the local industrial area, where there are many furniture production workshops, has seen a period of economic enlightenment thanks to the cheap, good-quality work provided by talented Syrian employees (Artar 2015). In the light of these examples, one might argue that the Syrians have both a positive and a negative impact on the economy and either a welcomed or a more-distant socio-cultural position in Turkey.

When do they leave Turkey?

The answer to this question is simple – when they cannot stay any longer, they leave:

> Ammar is 45 years old, a business man from Aleppo. Before the civil war began he had a textile factory... He has now lost everything... He fled with his family to Mersin. After living off his savings for a while, he and his sons started to look for jobs. Their official status did not let them get formal jobs, so they have to work off-the-record for cash... In spite of the high cost of living he was confident about living in Mersin... He insists that he wants to make an honourable living and not depend on aid until such time that he can return to his country... Nevertheless, he feels that without a job there are no solutions open for him and his family. 'I put my car up for sale, and the rent of the house will expire in December', he told me. 'I will either spend that money for living till it wastes away, or use it for escaping to Europe'. Eventually, I heard that Ammar and his family chose the second option and after a lengthy journey finally reached Sweden in the first week of January. The journey cost around 1,000 dollars per person; they now receive 4,000 Swedish krona (€427) per person, which gives them a fair living (Çetin 2016).

This is the narrative of a successful journey via Turkey to Europe, much like the one I narrated in the introduction to this article, about the Syrian-Adyge who made it to Germany. Everyone will have heard the story of the football trainer who was tripped by the Hungarian camerawoman while running across the Hungarian-Serbian border carrying his youngest son and how he was given a job as a trainer by a school in Spain – a very sad incident that had a happy ending (Kassam 2016). However, not all journeys had a happy ending. The IOM reports that 319 people died *en route* to Greece from Turkey within the first five weeks of 2016 (IOM 2016). When someone refers to the Aegean Sea route, the image that strikes us all now is of the dead child – Alan Kurdi – on the beach and the question of how an individual risks his or her life and the lives of others (even their own children) to reach Europe. The data and narratives above show that, despite the hardships, life goes on in Turkey and there is still the prospect of being able to go back 'home' when the war is over. According to AFAD's (2014) study of over 2,000 interviewees, 13.8 percent of those outside the camps and 26.3 percent of those within them want to move on somewhere else. Of these, only 10.8 percent want to move abroad, while 21.6 percent would go back to Syria. This means that only around 2 percent of the respondents wanted to go to Europe or America. Sixty percent stated that they would go back to Syria when the war ends, 20 percent that they would go only if the regime changed and 9.5 percent that, when conflict comes to an end in their city, then they will go back home. So only about 6 percent think that they will never go back or that they would go somewhere else (AFAD 2014: 142).

In September 2015, there was an online announcement that called all those who wanted to go to Europe to meet up and protest together at the Greek border in Edirne, Turkey. An onsite assessment revealed that some of those who were waiting had seen the news on Facebook and had gone directly from Syria to try their luck. The majority had gone because there was no chance of an education for their children without the right to work in Turkey, they were unable to earn a sustainable living and they felt that they had no choice but to go to Europe, where they could have a normal life. A group of 8,000 people who had congregated there were sent away by the local administration, but 800 stayed on and started a hunger strike in Edirne. Families and children were kept out of the strike, so the local authorities and NGOs were providing them with food and water. Three camps were established in parks and empty spaces, accommodating almost 2,150 people – the majority of them Syrians but also some Iranians (Hayata Destek 2015). The border was not opened and there is no record of what happened to these people.

'Syrian refugees in Turkey, like other migrants and refugees, have to be highly flexible' (Fiedler 2015: 10). Though the camps limit the mobility of Syrians in Turkey, the majority living outside the camps, espe-

cially in unregistered settlements, need to be and are highly mobile (Diren 2015: 41). They move to where they see hope, an opportunity or a way out of their desperate and vulnerable situation. A narrative shared by Fiedler (2015: 7) when collecting border stories is a good example of the persistent idea of some Syrians of getting to Europe:

> In the past, Jawad had been a lawyer in Syria. I knew Jawad from earlier research... At the end of 2013, he had already tried to get into Europe via Bulgaria. He made it, but he had to stay in [detention centers]... At that point, the camp was completely overcrowded and the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) was unable to tell him whether he would be accepted as a refugee or not. After a few months, he could not endure the wait any longer and he decided to go back to Syria. 'I went to Syria and stayed in Syria about four months. I can't stay in Syria, everything is bad in Syria, too. Therefore, now I am in Turkey'. While having tea, Jawad told me that he was prepared to take a boat across the Aegean Sea to Greece. He said that he did not see any other way to go to Europe.

Conclusion

It was a young Syrian woman in Abkhazia, who had followed her Abkhazian relatives to safety out of Lebanon, who had said to me in 2012, 'The streets of our home smelled of jasmine, our sweet-smelling paradise'. Today her city is in ruins and the smell of jasmine is just a nostalgic memory. The narratives and data in this article have been presented in an effort to answer some of the questions arising in relation to the Syrians in Turkey. Many research projects and analytical papers have been completed, despite the ban on independent research on Syrian refugees. Combining selected examples from local research with larger, state-organized data, I have tried to draw a picture of the various conditions under which Syrians are living. The narratives collected from personal communications and observations, and quoted from published works, show that every migrant has his or her own story of mobility – enough, surely, for a book of testimonies. It is not possible to generalize in the answers to any of the questions but the temporariness of the Syrian situation in Turkey creates a feeling of being in an in-between situation. Some may be more settled, more comfortable in terms of finances and security, and be enjoying the temporariness of their situation with the hope that they will one day go back to their 'home'. Others feel more out of place, troubled by everyday hardship, see no future for themselves or for their children under the current conditions and want to change this temporariness by taking drastic measures. These range from constantly changing places within Turkey to find the best conditions, selling a kidney or handing all their savings over to smugglers, to risking their children's lives in dangerous journeys across the Aegean Sea.

Scholars suggest that Turkey's establishment of a 'temporary protection regime' for the Syrians and the country's 'insistently calling them guests and brothers who would return back' (Aras and Mencütek 2015: 202) is the basis of the continuing problems that Syrians are facing in Turkey today. To be able to change the status of Syrians, 'practical solutions for Turkey would be revising two main legal documents: namely, lifting the geographic limitation on the 1951 Geneva Convention and rephrasing the traditional requirement of "Turkishness" in the Settlement Law of 2006' (İçduygu 2015: 14). Though policy-wise and from a humanitarian perspective this would be the right thing to do, the various studies on the perceptions and acceptance of Syrians in Turkey cited above show that such efforts to integrate Syrians will be highly challenged by the community. Policy recommendations can come in various forms – at local, regional and political levels. However, the most important recommendation is that the 'Syrian refugee crisis should be governed at the global level, with states, international organizations, and NGOs working together to share the burden of refugee flows with the primary receiving countries' (İçduygu 2015: 14). No matter if these people are seeking refuge in Turkey, waiting their turn to apply for asylum in a third country, using Turkey to transit to Europe via life-threatening journeys, or are 'guests' until the war in Syria is over, in Turkey they are living in purgatory. But who is not?

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