Preliminary thoughts on the Syrian refugee movement

Sema Erder

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*Translated from the Turkish by John William Day*

While forced migration has, in many ways, defined global history, Syria’s recent experiences with forced migration will, in time, prove to occupy a unique place. The cruelty of the war and of the Syrian refugee movement, circulated through media images, has exposed the near bankruptcy of not only the national but also the international refugee protection system.

The current migration flows have carried all the tensions and conflicts in the Middle East into Turkey, at a time when responses to demands for more democracy have been met with political repression in the west of the country and military repression in the east. The preliminary significance of this conjuncture for Turkey is clear: the state must rethink and reconfigure its relations with the groups that were once part of Ottoman geographies, as well as those ignored since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. The various groups arriving from Syria—Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians, and Yezidis—carry with them varied contentious political histories. Thus, refugees may be initially classified as Syrian, but may then subsequently be grouped as either “friend” or “enemy” along lines of ethnicity and/or religion. This calls for a more textured analysis of Syrian refugee flows to Turkey, which is currently missing.

This commentary aims to offer some preliminary reflections on the Syrian refugee crisis. First of all, we have to note that the tragedies of the Syrian refugee flow and its aftermath have exposed the limits of organizations both international, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Sema Erder, Professor Emerita, Marmara University, Göztepe Campus 34722, Kadıköy, Istanbul, Turkey, erdersema@gmail.com.

1 On the importance of forced migration for the constitution of modern Middle Eastern societies in the late Ottoman period, see Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On the social consequences of late Ottoman and early republican settlement policies, see Sema Erder, *Zorla Yerleştirmeden Yerinden Etmeye: Türkiye’de Değişen Iskan Politikaları,* unpublished report (publication forthcoming, Istanbul: Can Yayınları). Syria’s complex human geography is made up not only of Arabs and other local populations but also various groups exiled at the end of Ottoman rule from Anatolia and the Caucasus, including Armenians, Kurds, Circassians, and Turkmen, all of whom had different relations to the Ottoman Empire.
(UNHCR), as well as national in formulating solutions capable of addressing mass forced migration. The violent reconfiguration of global power relations constitutes the backdrop of this migration, and its predicaments cannot be addressed by existing organizations, which were founded on an understanding of refugees that emerged in the wake of World War II. Syrian migration also demonstrates to the leadership in Turkey that such mass forced migration cannot be addressed by “closed” domestic policies alone. It further highlights the need for stronger and more “open” international collaboration. In short, Syrian forced migration requires that we do away with accepted truths and begin to rethink and rebuild how we address contemporary refugee crises and migration.

International law, in the development of which the United Nations (UN) played a leading role in the aftermath of World War II, established the legal bases for refugee status; the UN also sought to secure the international protection of refugees. Since the adoption of the Geneva Convention in 1951, the UNHCR has worked globally to protect groups defined as refugees and asylum seekers. Until the end of the Cold War, this refugee system operated with minor deficits, and the vast majority of refugees continued to live in the Global South. As Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo’s early study had already shown, during the Cold War refugees tended to settle in geographies close to home, based on such reasons as “sociocultural familiarity, political activism, and hope for quick repatriation.” But at the same time, their study predicted that, as means of communication and transportation became cheaper, more and more refugees would choose to settle in northern countries, which according to the authors underscored the need to formulate a “better international refugee regime.”

Generally, until the end of the Cold War, the UNHCR was able to manage the movement of refugees in a manner consistent with its principles, protecting groups fleeing war or political unrest by establishing security zones and refugee camps close to areas of conflict. Northern countries, meanwhile, selectively admitted only a small share of refugees, according to their own labor market needs or political calculations, and aided by the slow functioning of the UNHCR’s bureaucratic mechanisms. In this way, the UNHCR was able to intervene in the administration of refugee movements without violating the national sovereignty of northern liberal democracies. Such slow and selective practices continued until contemporary mass refugee crises such as that in Syria, having thereby prepared the legal grounds for a form of refugee status more or less supportive of human rights. Unfortunately, though, such practices

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3 Ibid., 258–282.
have had limited meaning in a country like Turkey, which struggles to secure even its own citizens’ basic human rights. Such is the case, as well, in many of the countries producing refugees. We can thus argue that the current state of international refugee law and the scholarship on migration reflects the experiences of liberal democratic states.

Due to the consequences of globalization and the breaking up of the Eastern Bloc, human mobility has, in recent years, increased in ways previously unseen, as well as undergoing important qualitative changes. At the same time, September 11 and similar violent events have led to an increase in xenophobia in northern countries. In such a context, the UNHCR’s outmoded bureaucracy has little effect, and the number of refugees taken under international protection has not increased at an adequate pace. The UN Secretary General’s Special Representative, Peter Sutherland, has accordingly recently written that, of more than 20 million refugees, the UNHCR has been able to settle only some 75,000.4 Similarly, in its semi-annual report in the first half of 2015, the UNHCR made clear that it had only been able to settle 33,400 people across its 76 member countries, with 3,800 in Turkey.5

Globalization has also led to other forms of mass migration beyond refugees. In recent times, not only refugees but millions of people have begun to migrate, many regardless of national and international regulations. These new forms of human mobility, often termed “irregular migration,” are the subject of a growing literature by such international organizations as the UN, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as by politicians, researchers, human rights advocates, and civil society organizations. Much of this literature focuses on those who find themselves without access to basic rights in the countries to which they migrate, or, as the recently popularized term would have it, the new “precariat.” One key feature that distinguishes emergent studies of new forms of migration and mobility from previous work is the effort to comprehend and to study the circumstances in the southern countries.6

Recent meetings, research and reports, and debates held by leading global institutions make clear that this new conjuncture of migration cannot be

resolved by outdated rules and institutions; in other words, the general opinion is that there is a clear need for new models and policies on a global scale. One instance of the concrete steps being taken toward this end is the conference Peoples’ Global Action for Migration, Development, and Human Rights (PGA), held in Mexico City in 2010. Attended by civil society organizations from five continents, one result of the conference was the following declaration in the name of migrants worldwide: “We are human beings with rights to mobility, freedom of speech, decent work and social protection—not a commodity.” After this conference, the UN added such concepts as “civil society,” “human rights,” and “governance” to the agenda of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, held annually to search for ways to address global migration.

Rather than covering the entirety of the emerging literature on the new faces of migration, I will instead touch here on the work of Schierup, Ålund, and Likić-Brborić on the “democratic deficit in global governance.” They define new migration movements as a form of “alter-globalization.” Criticizing prevailing approaches to the management of migration based on such categorizations as “inclusion/exclusion,” they debate whether a democratic form of managing migration through prioritizing “human rights” and including “civil society” is a “realizable utopia.”

The recent refugee crisis has exposed contemporary forms of global migration and popularized the perception worldwide that anyone, at any time, could become a migrant. Moreover, the new wave of migration has shocked a European public opinion that is accustomed to protecting its borders. At the same time, these events have compelled the European public opinion to begin to more clearly perceive and question the consequences of irresponsible interventions carried out by their own governments in other parts of the world.

Thus Zygmunt Bauman, who has described Europe’s reactions to the arrival of Syrians as a “migration panic,” defines Syrian migration as essentially stemming from the “seemingly prospectless destabilization of the Middle-Eastern area in the aftermath of miscalculated, foolishly myopic and admittedly

10 Ibid., 51.
11 Ibid., 54.
abortive policies and military ventures of Western powers.”  

Similarly, in a critical piece on the same reactions, UN Special Representative Peter Sutherland stressed the need for fundamental changes to the European Union’s (EU) migration policies. Sutherland furthermore emphasized that, similar to the search for solutions to global climate change, the international community must find a solution for the protection of migrants, stressing the critical importance of this matter for world democracy.  

As Turkey’s geographical position changed from the edge of the Iron Curtain to that of the EU’s Schengen border, Turkey has hosted not only asylum seekers but also the flow of shuttle and transit migrants from neighboring countries. Turkey has, for some, become a temporary migrant workplace, and, for others, a center of informal trade, a space of refuge, or a waiting point en route to Europe. For both shuttle migrants from ex-Soviet countries and asylum seekers fleeing regional conflict, Turkey has provided a space where the security of life is not threatened. The UNHCR, meanwhile, has only resettled to third countries a small proportion of refugees arriving in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in Iran or the wars in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo. What is more, countless refugees living outside the bureaucratic surveillance of the UNHCR have either returned to their home countries with the return of peace or have secretly fled to the EU with the facilitation of human smugglers.

Since the foundation of the republic, Turkey has pursued a “closed” migration and border policy. Turkey’s regulations related to obtaining citizenship, in particular, carry the traces of the War of Independence and the 1930s nationalist zeitgeist. These policies only accept as refugees those groups coming from the West, specifically groups from the Balkans loyal to the Ottomans. And even for those coming from the Balkans, as Kirişçi reminds us, special care was taken to keep out “non-Muslim Turks and non-Turkish Muslims.”

Turkey’s “closed” border policy changed in the 1960s with the rise of a developmentalist perspective. In order to increase foreign currency earnings, the state began to incentivize tourism and to send laborers to Europe. This policy began to open borders, if ever so slightly, inviting into the country,

13 As Sutherland notes, the “international community proved that it could subordinate national self-interest to a greater global goal: confronting climate change … The same thing must happen to forge a better system for protecting migrants. It is a matter of life and death … and a profound test of the civic health of democratic societies worldwide.” Sutherland, “Will 2016 Be a Better Year For Migrants?”
particularly in the 1990s, not only tourists but also foreigners (yabancı) and guests (misafir).\footnote{Here, the distinction between foreigner and guest refers less to a legal distinction than to various forms of recognition of non-citizens commonly employed by the state and in everyday life. Affected by cultural and historical precedents, those who arrive are separately identified, even if their legal status is the same, as guests and foreigners. For example, while German tourists or Russians involved in informal trade markets (bavul tüccarları) are labeled as foreigners, those who arrived from Bosnia after the war were greeted as guests.}

Until the recent influx of Syrians, migrants to Turkey have managed, if with difficulty, to find a way to get by, often through the country’s widespread and dynamic informal economy. Some find work in sectors where informal labor is common, such as construction, textiles, agriculture, entertainment, home care, or informal trading activities. Some live on the savings they arrived with until they find a way to reach the dirty market of the human smugglers. Consequently, a majority of those who arrive lead lives beyond public scrutiny. The only exception to this was perhaps the petty traders from the Eastern Bloc, labelled “Natashas,” a derogatory term suggesting that they were involved in the sex trade.\footnote{See, e.g., Aylan Arı, ed., Türkiye’de Yabancı İşçiler: Uluslararası Göç, İşgücü ve Nüfus Hareketleri (İstanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2007); Gülay Toksöz, Seyhan Erdoğan, and Selmin Kaşka, Türkiye’de Düzensiz Emek Göçü ve Göçmenlerin İşgücü Piyasasındaki Durumu (Ankara: IOM and SIDA, 2012), http://www.turkey.iom.int/documents/Labour/IOM_irregular_labour_migration_tr_06062013.pdf; and Deniz Yükseker, “Shuttling Goods, Weaving Consumer Tastes: Informal Trade between Turkey and Russia,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 31, no. 1 (2007): 60–72.}

The fact that so many foreigners arriving in Turkey hold expectations of continuing on into Europe has led the EU and international NGOs working on migrant rights to have an interest in them. However, until the onset of the Syrian refugee flow, the problems that migrants face were discussed only within a narrow bureaucratic/academic circle composed of researchers, public authorities, and some EU officials. The influx of Syrian refugees has forced the debate about migration out beyond this limited circle.

Syrian refugees are made up not only of a heterogeneous ethnic and religious background, but also of a range of class and economic positions. Some are urban residents with “passports,” while some lack even Syrian citizenship. Media accounts demonstrate that businessmen, professionals, artists, shopkeepers, villagers, and nomads are among those arriving to Turkey. Yet here, ethnic and religious differences are of particular political importance. Politicians as well as informal supporters of particular stances, for example, express more concern for Turkmen and Sunni migrants, while others are more supportive of Yezidis and Kurds.

It is important to stress that the state has allowed the arrival of all groups and accepted all as guests. This effectively turned on its head Turkey’s
traditional refugee policy, along with the geographical limitation on the Geneva Convention. Syrian refugees were first designated with the legally ambiguous title of “guest,” and since the passing of a regulation in 2014 have been designated as being under temporary protection. Such a change in their status clearly has had concrete effects in the lives of Syrians, reducing fears of immediate deportation and facilitating the meeting of everyday needs, specifically in terms of access to educational and health services. To date, we simply lack detailed information on how access to the benefits of this shift in status may or may not break down along lines of class, ethnicity, and religion. We do know, however, that this shift in status is not sufficient to grant Syrians formal rights to residence and work. According to 2014 data, among the 380,000 foreigners who held residence permits, only 32,000 were Syrian, while for those who hold work permits, the numbers were 52,000 and 2,500 respectively.\textsuperscript{17} Recent government decisions, such as the new regulation on working permits for foreigners under temporary protection, further suggest that this number will rise in the coming years.\textsuperscript{18} A more comprehensive look at these recent practices and legal transformations may help us to understand whether there have been lasting changes to Turkey’s traditional migration policies.

Another important matter that calls for more attention is the fact that public authorities have kept the UNHCR at bay since the outset of the Syrian forced migration to Turkey. This points to a widespread perception among authorities, at the beginning, that this migration would be temporary, and that the refugee camps created along the Syrian border would be enough to meet migrants’ needs. The fact that these camps were closed to the media, to domestic and foreign NGOs, and even to opposition deputies triggered sharp public criticism. The UNHCR, meanwhile, confined its actions to camp inspections. Today, most operations concerning Syrian refugees are overseen by the newly established General Directorate of Migration Management (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü) within the Ministry of the Interior and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı, AFAD). The contemporary function of the UNHCR in Turkey is largely limited to meeting the bureaucratic needs of some asylum seekers who come from countries other than Syria. Along with this curious condition, critical analysis of the UNHCR’s actions in Turkey may help us to better appreciate the functioning (or non-functioning) of the international system for the protection of migrants.

\textsuperscript{18} “Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancı Çalışma Izinlerine Dair Yönetmelik,” 2016/8375.
We may claim that Syrians living under temporary protection in Turkey have not experienced significant problems in terms of the security of life or the meeting of urgent needs. One might even say that, due to the political attention they have received, Syrians have enjoyed advantages not afforded to other irregular migrants in Turkey. A recent World Bank report defines Turkey’s hosting experience as a unique and successful “development response” to the forced displacement crisis. Hence the collective surprise when, in the summer of 2015, Syrian refugees who had been living in Turkey for some three years began seeking to move on to EU countries in large numbers.

Precisely why this unexpected flight of Syrians from Turkey to the EU was initiated remains an open question. One explanation may lie in the inefficient functioning of the initial policy of accepting them as guests and subsequently granting them temporary protection, as well as the ways in which such policies clashed with refugees’ expectations. At the same time, public reactions to Syrians have been far from positive, and there has been little support for their permanent presence in Turkey. Xenophobia can also have negative effects on refugees. Forms of discrimination may also emerge along ethnic and religious lines within the heterogeneity of this group. Moreover, Turkey’s turbulent and tense political environment may be a factor leading refugees to question their future in the country. We will learn the answers to these questions in time, probably from studies on migration carried out in those European countries that receive Syrian migrants. What I wish to stress here, though, are the following points: (a) Turkey does not have the legal arrangements, institutions, and resources that would cater to the needs of such a large and diverse refugee group with differing expectations; and (b) Syrians trust and more highly regard the EU’s refugee policy as compared to that of the UNHCR, despite growing trends of xenophobia across Europe.

The increasing flight of Syrians to Europe primarily exposes the need to rethink not only the EU’s but also Turkey’s migration policy. Perhaps the most important consequence of this flight has been its role in encouraging the media and the public to appreciate, for the first time, the significance and scale of the refugee problem. As a result, migration, once the concern of a limited few in Turkey, is increasingly the subject of widespread discussion and debate. We may be witnessing the first steps toward a new conversation on questions of foreigners and migrants in Turkey. Standing before true progress, however, are a number of important obstacles. In what follows, I will try to reflect on this issue in terms of its relationship to civil society, politics, and academia.

The state’s acceptance and legitimation of Syrian refugees as guests has rendered them more visible in ways different from previous migrants to Turkey. Syrians are able to appear in streets, public squares, and parks without fear of the police. The same visibility, meanwhile, has yielded complex reactions from a broader public, ranging from surprise and fear to a humanitarian impulse to help. Syrian refugees have, to a degree exceeding any other migrant group, become objects of interest in the wider society, informal networks, municipalities, NGOs, trade associations, and the media. Even if many NGOs appear to be quite inexperienced in terms of how to effectively help migrants, and even if much of their work to date has approached help more in terms of poverty relief or charity, their close attention appears to have removed some of the fear of refugees. When crafting new migration policies, then, what is of clear importance is further research on the dimensions, depth, and consequences of the public’s and civil society’s response to the refugees.

Here, it is helpful to recall the Global Forum on Migration and its search for new migration policies on a global scale. Though it received limited media and public attention, the eighth such forum took place in Istanbul in October 2015. It is important to look more closely at which NGOs participated and which did not, and to ask what perspectives were voiced and what decisions were made. In general—and independently of questions of migration—governance and the participation of NGOs in decision-making processes is a matter of much debate in the context of democratization in Turkey. Political scientists, urban scholars, and public administration scholars are debating issues such as localization, local politics, and local democracy on matters ranging from urban transformation projects to the Kurdish problem. The grounded work of migration researchers may be of critical importance to such emergent debates. At the same time, this sort of detailed analysis, when carried out from the perspective of such countries as Turkey—where democracy and civil society always exist in a precarious state—may help us to better assess the prospects of democratic global migration management.

This brings us inevitably to Turkey’s current tense and turbulent political atmosphere. The consequences of the division of NGOs in Turkey so often along lines of secularism and religiosity, the lack of cooperation and compromise, and the tendency of the government to work only with a number of politically affiliated NGOs are reflected in the research on migration, as in other fields. Such a situation—in a country where civil, political, and social rights are always fragile—only adds difficulty to the open discussion of migrant rights as human rights. The situation of migrants and refugees has clearly

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demonstrated the importance of peace and citizenship rights. However, the ongoing debates, similar to those that surround poverty alleviation, are bogged down in unproductive conversations on whether to approach the problem through the lens of charity or human rights. Generally, political polarization, conflict, xenophobia, and nationalist ideologies have, in Turkey as in other countries, inhibited a rights-based approach to migration.

I want to also touch upon the academic discussion and research related to the Syrian refugee flows. Syrian migration has recently attracted the attention of social scientists both within Turkey and beyond, especially in the EU. A potential danger of this heightened concern by the EU is the distinct possibility of the continuation of a Eurocentric research perspective, supported by grants from the EU and other sources, with discussions proceeding in an instrumentalist, policy-oriented framework bent on preventing further migration—a problem that has been observed and critiqued in previous work.21

In this sense, there is no shortage of obstacles before researchers in Turkey working on irregular migration in general and Syrian migration in particular. Such longstanding prohibitions and taboos as the lack of transparency throughout the process of management of the Syrian refugee flow, the failure of public authorities to share any data with researchers, and the growing polarization in public opinion are among the most important obstacles. The recent attempt by the government to tie the possibility for such research to official approval is particularly revealing of the environment within which researchers operate.

All these obstacles further introduce methodological problems for conducting research. In a situation where we lack even credible data sets on the number of Syrian refugees, researchers often use intuition to design research projects and formulate research questions, as they have no choice but to draw on information and limited and mostly biased observations obtained from the media and NGOs. As it has been nearly impossible to employ quantitative research methods in the study of Syrian migration, qualitative research methods have been widely employed, and often in less than credible ways.

Another obstacle before researchers is the theoretical frameworks within which migration research has been carried out, as a highly specialized field within the social sciences. This field is of special importance to the configuration of state-society relations in northern countries. The dominant theoretical

framework in a field developed through the incentives of public and international grants is evident in the predominance of policy-oriented concepts developed by structural functionalists—such as assimilation, integration, and adaptation—or in such legal and administrative concepts as the refugee, the asylum seeker, trafficking, and smuggling. These concepts have been widely criticized on the grounds of their inadequacy for thinking more carefully about recent global patterns of human mobility and for developing more humane conditions for those affected by migration. Through the greater participation of scholars in various fields such as political science, anthropology, legal scholarship, and even philosophy, such a situation may ultimately lead to a conceptual enrichment and a rethinking of migration studies. Aware of the importance of an understanding and thoughtful observation of the local, and with an eye to the production of knowledge able to add to ongoing global discussions, I wish to stress the need for open debate among those who specialize in migration studies. As this field is so suffused by problems of methodology, scientific ethics and conceptualization, creative work, and the development of new research techniques is essential.

Syrian migration lays bare the mercilessness and pain entailed in the unholy trinity of war, death, and migration. Each boat departing from Turkey’s Aegean coast exposes the limits, if not the meaninglessness, of so much of what we have written, so many of the beliefs and truths we hold dear, so many of the debates and discussions we have had, the rules we have developed, the decisions we have made. There is still hope, though, that a newly galvanized and more meticulous way of thinking about these matters may result from this human disaster, and that all the tragedies we now see may lead to new forms of political life, new legal practices, and a new academic dynamism.

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Limits to temporary protection: non-camp Syrian refugees in İzmir, Turkey

Ayselin Yıldız & Elif Uzgören

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Limits to temporary protection: non-camp Syrian refugees in İzmir, Turkey

Ayselin Yıldıza and Elif Uzgörenb

aDepartment of International Relations, Yaşar University, İzmir, Turkey; bFaculty of Business, Department of International Relations, Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Turkey

ABSTRACT
This article investigates the situation of non-camp Syrian refugees living in İzmir with a focus on socio-economic prospects and challenges concerning their survival and integration on the one hand and social acceptance by the host Turkish society on the other. The data were generated by semi-structured interviews conducted between February and April 2014 with non-camp Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens living in İzmir. The empirical research intends to contribute to the literature through insights on the socio-economic conditions of non-camp Syrians, their level of integration to Turkish society, difficulties and challenges encountered and the perception of Turkish citizens about the rising Syrian population in Turkey. It argues that Turkey's open-border and 'temporary protection' policies are approaching their limits with the increasing number of new arrivals and the concomitant difficulties faced in integrating into Turkish society. The paper suggests that there is an urgent need to create a 'rights-based approach' with a long-term integration policy and presents policy recommendations which aim to extend and secure the rights of Syrians through socio-economic adjustments without jeopardizing their social acceptance from and peaceful co-existence with Turkish citizens.

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Introduction
The civil war in Syria beginning in 2011 has caused a humanitarian crisis, with one of the biggest refugee flows in this century. As of February 2016, more than 4.5 million Syrian refugees were registered or awaiting registration in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey (UNHCR 2016a). While the humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate, the total number of internally displaced people in Syria has reached nearly 7.6 million, amounting to the largest number of internally displaced persons in any country in the world (ECHO 2015). Turkey established an open-border policy at the onset of the crisis and welcomed more than 2.5 million registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2016a) by hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees in one country worldwide (UNHCR 2014a, 2016a; European...
According to the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of the Republic of Turkey,\(^1\) (AFAD), 269,672 Syrian refugees are currently sheltered in 25 camps in 10 provinces of Turkey (AFAD 2016a), while nearly 2.2 million non-camp Syrian refugees are living dispersed among communities throughout the country. The non-camp refugees are scattered around various locations, intensely concentrated in the south and south-eastern provinces of Turkey such as Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Şanlıurfa, Adana and Mardin. Beyond the border cities, a high number of non-camp Syrian refugees are also concentrated in west coastal city of Izmir where they are making their way across the sea to reach Greek islands of Chios (five miles) and Lesvos (six miles). UNHCR (2016b) and International Organization for Migration (IOM 2015) reported that of the more than one million refugees who arrived in the European Union (EU) in 2015, more than 850,000 arrived by sea in Greece from Turkey. In 2015, total arrivals of migrants and refugees from Turkey to Chios are recorded as 120,804 (UNHCR 2015a) and to Lesvos as 494,978 (UNHCR 2015b). Consequently, Izmir, which formerly had been known as a hub of tourism, started to become associated with an increasing number of desperate Syrians risking their lives to cross the Aegean Sea on inflatable boats and tragically washing up on the Izmir coast. Apart from the transit ones, a considerable share of the Syrian refugees also prefer to settle in Izmir permanently or spend a longer time to save money before they depart to Europe. According to a senior official in Izmir branch of Directorate General for Migration Management, the total number of registered Syrian refugees in Izmir is about 74,000 (Interview of Dr Düvell and Dr Yıldız, 2015). Accordingly, as Turkey has become a migration transit and destination country (Kirişci 2009; Kaya 2012; İçduygu 2013), Izmir emerges as an important transit hub and hotspot for migrants and refugees on their route heading to Europe across Turkey.

Turkey’s open-border policy that ensures non-refoulement and humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees has been publicly applauded by the international community (e.g., European Commission 2014, 2015; UNHCR 2015c; United Nations (UN) 2015). As İçduygu observes, it is also criticised due to some legislative loopholes and administrative shortcomings (İçduygu 2015, 13). Unfortunately, the trajectory of support provided by the international community has so far been inadequate. Hence, the main responsibility has fallen to Syria’s neighbouring countries, with Turkey shouldering much of this burden. In its fifth year, the Syrian conflict has entered a stalemate, with the emergence of radical armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Violence continues to severely threaten the lives of civilians, and estimates of future massive flows of refugees are difficult to predict. Even if the conflict in Syria ends, with the Assad regime in place or overthrown, peace and stability in the country will not be restored easily. New waves of refugees would likely threaten the sustainability of the open-border approach of Turkey, which would certainly encounter additional socio-economic challenges. The future of nearly 2.5 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey is unclear. Moreover, as the temporary stay of Syrians in Turkey is prolonged and a high number of them started to permanently settle in Turkey, discontent is increasing within Turkish society. Especially, there are three critical challenges for the non-camp Syrian-settled refugees in Turkey as well as Turkish society: Syrians’ socio-economic conditions, their integration into Turkish society and social acceptance by the Turkish community. Accordingly, Turkey needs not only to consider the financial aspect of accepting refugees and providing humanitarian assistance but also to address the settled refugees’ social adaptation, acceptance and integration. This requires developing a comprehensive
and sustainable long-term policy in order to avoid the economic, social and security pitfalls of hosting such a high number of Syrians.

Despite the alarming growth of Syrian refugees in Turkey, there are few empirical studies in the literature that focus on non-camp refugees who constitute almost 88% of all the Syrian refugee population in Turkey. In addition to some studies and reports (AFAD 2013; Erdoğan 2015; Kanat and Üstün 2015; ORSAM 2014; ORSAM and TESEV 2015) the socio-economic conditions of non-camp Syrian refugees and their acceptance by the host Turkish society needs to be extensively studied in order to provide insights for future policies. This study aims to contribute to the evolving literature on the non-camp Syrian refugees in Turkey by conducting an empirical analysis relying on primary data generated through a field study in İzmir. It elucidates the prospects and challenges around the social adaptation of these refugees and gauges their social acceptance by Turkish society. The research findings have been extracted from 32 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted with Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens living in İzmir from February to April 2014. This study is not intended to represent the entire non-camp Syrian refugee situation in Turkey through a quantitative sampling. Rather, it contributes to the debate through a qualitative study aspired to present both the narratives of Syrian refugees and perceptions of the host society in İzmir. The research, with its specific focus on İzmir, builds upon a previous comprehensive study conducted by Erdoğan (2015), which presents findings about the conditions and problems faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey in general. On the basis of empirical research, this paper argues that the current temporary protection regime has approached its limits and that such prolonged regime presents a significant challenge for the survival of the Syrian refugees and their acceptance by Turkish society. The paper proposes Turkey to develop a rights-based approach involving a long-term integration aspect constructed on an analysis of needs and perceptions of both the Syrian refugees and Turkish people. It also pays attention to the evolving Turkish migration policy at a larger level concerning its limits and possible future challenges. The next section gives an overview of the legal status of the Syrian refugees in Turkey and presents the limits of the current temporary protection regime. These challenges are then uncovered through the empirical research that falls to the scope of the following subsections. The final part debates shortcomings of the current policy and presents future policy recommendations.

The legal status of Syrian non-camp refugees under temporary protection and its limits

Since the eruption of the crisis, Turkey – with a border of 911 km with Syria – has followed an open-border policy by extending protection to all destitute Syrians regardless of their political, ethnic, cultural or religious affiliations. Regarding the Syrians’ legal status, Turkey registers them under a temporary protection2 regime according to Regulation No. 29153 on Temporary Protection (2014 Regulation), which was enacted in line with Article 91 of the new Law Number 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection. Since Turkey still maintains its ‘geographical limitation’ with regard to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol, Turkey does not grant ‘refugee’ status to the fleeing Syrians. The 2014 Regulation adopts a group-based ‘temporary protection’ and applies to all Syrian nationals, as well as stateless persons from Syria seeking international protection, including those without identification documents. It ensures non-refoulement and assistance to all Syrians whether
they reside in or outside of camps. The 2014 Regulation is accompanied by a non-public Circular on the ‘Admission and Accommodation of Mass-Arriving Syrian Asylum Seekers’, which defines the domestic law basis for how the policy applies to the ‘temporary protection’ regime. The role of UNHCR in Turkey is limited by providing policy and technical advice to the Turkish Government, such as refugee registration, camp management and assisting with voluntary repatriation (UNHCR 2015d). It cannot carry out registration or be involved in refugee status determination since the protection of Syrians is legally defined under the authority of the Turkish Government.

The General Directorate of Migration Management, operating under the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, registers Syrians covered by temporary protection. Almost 10% of all registered Syrians have been hosted in 25 camps coordinated by AFAD, which provide education, health, religious and other services. Camps are appreciated and described as ‘well-organized and well-run’ in terms of the facilities and services provided (International Crisis Group 2013; European Commission 2014). However, the rising number of refugees triggered by the ongoing conflict in Syria has put the capacity of the government-run camps under tremendous strain (Dinçer et al. 2013). Regardless of whether they live in or out of the camps, all Syrians are ensured through their registration with Turkish authorities to benefit from free basic health care, education and social assistance. In line with the Ministry of National Education’s circular on foreigners’ access to education issued in 2014, all Syrian refugees are allowed to enrol in Turkish state schools and temporary education centres. They are also allowed to attend Turkish language or vocational training courses offered by public education centres free of charge. In the same manner, registered Syrians residing in or outside the camps may receive free medical treatment from state hospitals for primary and emergency health services in 81 provinces of Turkey. Though there is no limitation in principal or under legal terms, it is only through the empirical research that can uncover whether Syrian refugees can actually benefit from these services in practice which is presented above.

Turkey has been generous in providing humanitarian protection and aid for Syrians in the last five years, even when the number of refugees has become overwhelming. In terms of cost, Turkey, being the largest donor in 2012 with 980 million US dollars humanitarian assistance to Syria (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2012) has spent more than 6.7 billion US dollars so far on humanitarian assistance for Syrians in Turkey (AFAD 2016b). However, the details of expenses concerning whether this amount is mostly spent for camp or non-camp refugees are not clear. In contrast, international funding to Turkey has amounted to only 455 million US dollars (AFAD 2016b) and overall funding covers a mere 44% the total required funds for Turkey (UNHCR 2015a). The financial burden is ever increasing with the swelling numbers of incoming refugees, necessitating more camps and more social services. Furthermore, most studies report that the majority of Syrian refugees seem prepared to stay in Turkey for the long term since, even if the conflict is resolved in Syria, peace and stability will not be restored immediately (Kirişçi 2014; Erdoğan 2015; Kanat and Üstün 2015). Thus, while efforts of the Turkish Government and the hospitality of the Turkish people have been laudatory so far, the great number of refugees is straining the available resources to the breaking point.

Turkey’s temporary protection regime does not violate international obligations since Turkey maintains its geographical limitation under the 1951 Convention and its practices are generally in line with the UNHCR’s Guide on Temporary Protection (UNHCR 2014b).
and the European Union’s Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) introduced in 2001. It ensures non-refoulment as the main principle consistent with Article 33 of the 1951 Convention, Article 3 of the Convention against Torture, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Ciger 2015, 29). However, the 2014 Regulation falls short in three areas. First, it does not allow access to refugee status determination mechanisms since Article 16 of the 2014 Regulation indicates that the international protection applications of temporary protection beneficiaries will not be processed until the temporary protection regime ends. Thus, it does not legally allow Syrians to be transferred to third countries as UN-recognized refugees (International Crisis Group 2013). In fact, due to the geographical limitation clause, only asylum-seekers from Europe are eligible for recognition as refugees. Second, the 2014 Regulation does not include a maximum time limit for temporary protection and fails to clarify the path for access to individual refugee status determination procedures once the temporary protection ends (Ciger 2015, 34). Last, the 2014 Regulation addresses access to health care, education, employment and other social assistance as ‘services’ provided and mandates the state to decide which should indeed be granted as ‘rights’ to the people in need of protection. In its fifth year of the refugee crisis, Turkish Government has already published a new regulation, which will allow Syrian refugees registered under temporary protection to apply for work permits. As Erdoğan (2015, 61) mentions, formulating the legal context concerning the rights-responsibility nexus for asylum seekers is as crucial as their social acceptance.

Research papers developed by international organizations have already highlighted problems encountered in the absence of rights-based approach for migrants and presented strategies and best practices to promote rights-based migration policies (e.g., ILO 2006, 2010; IPU, ILO and UN 2015). Accordingly, the protracted temporary protection regime leaves the refugees in a state of prolonged limbo as it might prevent the development of rights-based sustainable policies. Thus temporary protection, which is designed as an emergency scheme to offer refugees immediate protection in the event of a mass influx, also carries a risk to allow states to escape from their international obligations in granting refugee status and rights. Rather than offering refugee status, different types of decisions such as ‘subsidiary protection’ or ‘humanitarian status’ – being issued by some European countries – (Eurostat 2015) constitute similar challenges in terms of granting rights. Notably, there are important challenges with a service-based approach. First, it creates vulnerability on the part of the refugees to claim and demand their fundamental rights to fulfil their basic needs. Second, the social assistance and/or service are left to the arbitrary mercy of political authority. This also renders Syrian refugees vulnerable to manipulation of political authority, creating subjects or ‘needy’ individuals rather than refugees with legally guaranteed social and economic rights. Third, a service-based approach is far from guaranteeing the continuity of the social services. Fourth, it is problematic for providing refugees with the conditions of decent work, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation. Fifth, it further bears risks for disadvantaged group such as disabled, elderly, women, children, etc. Contrarily, a rights-based approach guarantees the continuity, inclusiveness and sustainability of the services, as well as equality to access and take advantage of services. It provides an institutional framework to develop a comprehensive and inclusive integration strategy. Additionally, it also helps to foster social acceptance by host society and eliminate the risk of rising xenophobia and negative stereotypes.
In terms of granting refugee status, Turkey has been criticized for maintaining the geographical limitation of the 1951 Convention obligations, since this has actually become void in practice due to the large number of non-European refugees already residing in the country. However, Syrian case demonstrated that Turkey’s reluctance to lift the geographical limitation is understandable to an extent, as the response of the international community has fallen short in providing international solidarity and protection to displaced Syrians. The EU has not put its own temporary protection regime in action for the Syrian crisis. The number of total asylum applications of Syrians in EU+ countries registered in the last five years remains only at 813,559 or approximately 17% of all Syrian refugees registered by the UNHCR (2015a). The US has admitted 2200 Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2015 with a goal of resettling at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016 (US Department of State 2015). Canada accepted the resettlement of 36,300 Syrian refugees between 2013 and 2015 (UNHCR 2015e). Accordingly, Syrian case demonstrated that, even if Turkey were to grant ‘refugee’ status, the lack of a comprehensive international assistance mechanism and resettlement programme, as well as the low number of refugees being accepted by developed countries would leave all refugees mainly under the responsibility and protection of Turkey. It might increase the number of stranded refugees in Turkey more. Accordingly, this dilemma of keeping the geographical limitation on the one hand and hosting many de facto refugees on the other, leaves the refugees in Turkey to the mercy of Turkish authorities in terms of accessing their fundamental rights in line with universal principles.

It is the contention of researchers that if Turkey – as a transit and also as a destination country – lifts the geographical limitation, it might increase its attractiveness by granting refugee status in its geographical position where it is exposed to high migration and refugee flows. For instance, FRONTEX reports that the majority of the total number of 885,000 migrants in the EU in 2015 arrived via the Eastern Mediterranean route, through several Greek islands, especially Lesvos (FRONTEX 2016). They are not only originated from Syria but also Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Prior to Syrian crisis, irregular migration was again taking place intensively through Eastern Mediterranean route, as 40% of all migrants arriving in the EU in 2008–2009 have followed this route. Additionally, the EU increasingly tries to externalize asylum issues by designating non-EU territories as primary places of protection which in turn puts Turkey at the risk of becoming a ‘buffer zone’ for EU’s unwanted refugees (Yıldız 2012). Triggered by the refugee crisis in Europe, the signing of joint action plan between Turkey and the EU on 29 November 2015 constitutes an example of this politicized relation since it has linked and conditionalized Turkey’s EU membership aspirations to the cooperation in the field of migration. Thus, the Syrian case proves that lifting the geographical limitation that would require Turkey to process asylum applications and build protection capacity strongly necessitates the establishment of mechanisms that would ensure concrete and sustainable international support of the refugees. The policy responses of Turkey to the Syrian refugee crisis will have significant implications for the future of evolving Turkish migration policy as well. However, in specific respect, the crucial point is, temporary protection regime in Turkey, first initially instituted as an urgent measure, has become the prolonged policy for five years which cannot be constituted as a means to address access to and full protection of Syrian refugee rights. Referring to the fact that, the vast majority of Syrian refugees are not living in the camps but in the urban areas and most of them are intending to stay in Turkey for a long period of time, the temporary protection regime does not provide the effective use of basic rights and also it prevents developing effective integration strategies.
However, once more, the limitations of the temporary protection regime can only fully be uncovered through an empirical study that falls to the scope of the next subsection.

**Field study on non-camp Syrian refugees in İzmir**

İzmir, with a population of 4,168,415 (TÜİK 2016a) is third most popular destination city for internal migrants after İstanbul and Ankara. In 2014, the city received 124,439 newcomers for a net migration rate of 5.6% (TÜİK 2016b). Unemployment rate is recorded as 15.4% in 2013 (TÜİK 2016a). In addition to industry and agriculture, service sector constitutes one of the main economic activities with an increased share of 58.4% in 2012 (IZKA 2015). İzmir has also been one of the primary destinations for Kurdish migrants since the late 1980s and ranks as the third Turkish city with high rates of Kurdish immigrant population (Saraçoğlu 2011, 145). The ethnic structure of the population in İzmir plays an influential role in attracting Syrians of Kurdish origin to the city, often through a network of Kurdish relatives and friends. Moreover, İzmir has become a transit city for migrants aiming to illegally cross first into Greece and then to more developed EU countries. In 2015, 91,611 people have been apprehended or rescued at sea during 2430 search-and-rescue operations conducted by Turkish authorities in the Aegean Sea (UNHCR 2016b). Thus, İzmir is one of the cities challenging the idea that Syrian refugees are mainly living in the cities with camps along the Turkish–Syrian border. They are dispersed around İzmir mainly in the districts of Basmane, Çimentepe, Kadifekale, Buca and Yeşildere, where this field study took place.

The research findings rely on data generated through 32 semi-structured interviews conducted from February to April 2014. The first group consisted of 13 Syrian refugees living in İzmir who had fled the civil war in Syria during 2011–2014. The respondents were located by tracking their applications for social and economic aid from the local authorities. After completing these initial interviews, researchers were guided towards other individual refugees through their kinship and friendship networks. The second group of respondents involved 19 randomly selected Turkish citizens who were interviewed mainly about their perceptions of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. In most instances, the interviews took place in informal settings and lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. After explaining the aim and scope of the research, consent of each interviewee was taken with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality before the interviews began. Naturally, some undocumented Syrians were concerned about public exposure; thus the researchers avoided questions that could make the respondents feel threatened. The interviews were not recorded on tape since that could likewise prevent respondents from sharing sensitive information. The interviews were mostly conducted in Turkish; however, for five Syrian interviewees, researchers brought along a Syrian translator. The presence of an interpreter of the same nationality as that of the respondents made the interaction during the interviews more meaningful, trusting and fluid. It is decisive to highlight that the article does not aspire to come up with a quantitative analysis in order to draw conclusions related to the prospects of integration and social acceptance. Rather, it purports to present a qualitative analysis based on narratives and stories of Syrian refugees related to their journeys from Syria and their socio-economic conditions on the one hand, and narratives of the host Turkish community related to how they had received and experienced immigration on the other. Although the aim was not to draw general conclusions, still researchers continued conducting interviews until the saturation point was reached and the gathered information started to repeat itself.
Two different interview guides were used for the Syrian and Turkish respondent groups. The guide used for Syrian respondents was divided into five main categories involving different sets of questions: demographic information related to age, occupation, ethnic background and family; their migratory trajectory such as the way they entered Turkey and why they chose Izmir as a destination; socio-economic conditions related to housing, employment and social aid as well as difficulties and challenges they encountered; their perception of social acceptance by the host Turkish society and their level of integration within the society; and their future prospects concerning their temporary or permanent stay in Turkey. The interviews conducted with Turkish citizens attempted to find answers to research questions grouped under four categories, namely: their level of interaction with and social acceptance of Syrian refugees; whether they considered Syrians as a security and social challenge; their opinion about the possibility of Syrians being offered Turkish citizenship and their likely permanent stay in the country; and their expectations of future policies of the Turkish Government.

Socio-economic conditions and challenges of non-camp Syrian refugees

All 13 Syrian interviewees identified themselves as Kurdish and Sunni Muslim. Concerning their education level, four (R2, R5, R9, R13) held university degrees, whereas the remaining nine had had a primary school education or less. Most were married with at least two children migrated with them, while only three respondents (R1, R13, R5) were single. All of the respondents spoke Arabic and Kurdish and eight could speak very basic Turkish. All stated that they left Syria due to security reasons and each recounted a tragic event that prompted their departure. Some faced direct life-threatening situations, such as their houses being bombed (R2, R6, R11), and the rest were similarly faced with serious situations that threatened their lives. The respondents referred to three ways of crossing the Turkish border. More than half entered Turkey with a passport or identity card (R2, R5, R7, R8, R9, R10, R13) and registered with Turkish authorities, which allowed them to benefit from some public social services. The remaining respondents entered Turkey without any identification document (R1, R3, R4, R6, R11). This group is not registered and cannot apply for social benefits. Unregistered Syrians who entered the country through unofficial channels mentioned their inability to access public aid; their answer to why they did not register with the authorities was the fear of being deported or sent to camps. Thus, researchers observed that Syrians with or without documents were able to cross Turkish border without encountering any serious problems. However, Syrians were aware that they needed to be registered in order to benefit from social services. For instance, a striking point was that each documented respondent reported that they were the only member of their family to hold a passport or ID, and that the other family members were undocumented. The social aid given to the registered family member was shared by at least three or more unregistered family members. This apparently reveals that they face challenges to benefit from services. On the one hand, unregistered Syrian refugees constitute a challenge in terms of documenting their socio-economic conditions and developing a needs analysis for a comprehensive integration process. On the other hand, in most of the cases, the social services provided for single person is shared by more family members, rendering the social assistance even further insufficient. More importantly, unregistered Syrians can be accepted as the most vulnerable group since they do not exist in the society in legal terms. Thus, neither their
social and economic activities can be traced nor their fundamental rights (e.g., economic, social and cultural rights) can be protected.

As to why they decided to head for İzmir, most respondents referred to existing networks of family and friends based in the city. Most respondents acknowledged İzmir as ‘safer’ as it was farther from the war. Thus, İzmir provides a sense of security. They all identified İzmir as friendly and welcoming towards Syrians. R1 stated, ‘I stayed in Şanlıurfa for a while before coming to İzmir and people in Şanlıurfa do not like Syrians at all. We are perceived mostly as beggars. However, İzmir is safe and people are friendly’. Others referred to lower costs of living in İzmir, especially in comparison to İstanbul. None of the respondents had ever stayed or considered staying in the refugee camps. The camps are perceived as places for people who lack relatives or friends in Turkey (R7), which constrain freedom (R11), and which are overcrowded with poor living conditions (R9, R10, R11). One respondent defined camps as ‘prisons’ (R8). They believed that being out of the camps offered more opportunities for employment (even if it is irregular) and the possibility of establishing a life in Turkey.

As discussed above, there are no legal restrictions for registered Syrians to benefit from social services. However, in practice Syrians face constraints and socio-economic challenges to access and benefit from them. For instance, all respondents were living in desperate housing conditions. The monthly average rent they paid for unsanitary, damp and shanty-type dwellings was around 250–300 Turkish Lira (TL) as of April–May 2014. Families consisted of at least four people in each dwelling and most were expecting additional new family members escaping from Syria. They all lacked enough basic food and drink, including milk, which is critical, as the majority of the respondents had small children and babies. Most respondents stated that they were helped by their neighbours in obtaining food. All were economically dependent on their limited savings, which were almost exhausted at the time of the interviews. Some registered Syrians (R2, R7, R10) mentioned that they could receive financial aid only once or twice from Association for Social Assistance and Solidarity functioning under the İzmir Governor. This is a small amount, insufficient to cover basic needs. All respondents appreciated the shelter provided by Turkish Government but most of them noted the inadequacy of the allocated aid and services.

Regarding employment, except for R8 (chronically ill), R3 (pregnant), R4 (housewife) and R5 and R13 (student), the respondents were working illegally on a daily or weekly basis. The working Syrians all wished to be granted work permits. They worked in construction or in restaurants, collected recycle paper, sold mussels or worked as tailor. R7 remarked, ‘I work whenever I find a job. I accept any job that is available’. It was observed that all were victims of black market practices, working as cheap labourers without social protection. Employment in the informal economy made them prone to exploitation. Since they are not yet allowed to work under temporary protection status, there are no legal authorities to resort to in case employers do not pay them. For example, R6 reported,

I worked as a construction worker for three days. The employer decided to dismiss me due to his fear that the police might discover my illegal status and he would have to pay a high penalty. Then I found two other jobs consecutively, for five days and three days, respectively. I did not get paid for any of them.

The Syrians also stated that they were paid less than their Turkish co-workers for the same job, since employers knew that they were desperate for any income to survive. As R10 put it, ‘There is discrimination in employment. We are paid half of the amount compared
to Turkish workers, although we do the same job. Besides, Turkish workers are insured and have social protection'. To quote R7, ‘Some Turkish workers are also not pleased with the situation. They think that Syrians are pushing the wages down and taking the jobs of locals by working for lower wages. Some employers even see us as slaves. I have two kids at home and I have no other option than to get work under any terms’. Similarly, R1 remarked, ‘I have a health condition, a hernia. However, I accept every kind of job, including hard labour. I have worked as a construction worker and porter’ R2 stated, ‘I work until midnight as a tailor. My Turkish colleagues are paid more for the same job and they work less than me. I am sometimes paid, but sometimes not’. Finally, almost all of the registered Syrians raised concerns about the difficulty of obtaining a work permit even if they were allowed to work. This was also explicitly revealed during an interview with two dental technicians, Turkish and Syrian friends who met at an international conference before the Syrian crisis erupted. The employer of the Turkish technician offered to hire the displaced Syrian friend. During the discussion with his employer, the Turkish technician mentioned he was keen to get a work permit for his Syrian friend so that he could be employed legally, but he was unable to access clear information about the procedures to follow. Two crucial observations can be deducted from all these narratives. First, the temporary protection regime reaches its limit especially related to providing decent working conditions for Syrians to survive. Second, without a comprehensive integration policy including an employment strategy, the risk for social exclusion and rising xenophobia is increasing in the host society.

It is decisive to consider their perceptions related to social acceptance of the Turkish society, respondents found local people to be welcoming and are thankful to the Turkish state for providing them with protection. They had not confronted discrimination on the basis of their nationality and faced no discrimination in terms of benefiting from social services in schools, hospitals and so forth. The words ‘hospitable’, ‘helpful’ and ‘friendly’ were used to describe the attitude of İzmir residents. As far as their integration into society, the lack of knowledge of the Turkish language was highlighted as the first, and most significant, barrier. All respondents except R5 expressed an eagerness to learn Turkish in order to integrate fully into daily life. Second, access to public services was noted as posing a challenge to integration. Although the registered Syrians are nominally provided with educational and health care services, researchers observed that in practice, they have encountered problems. Respondents were not well informed about such services. Proper schooling is a growing concern, since a generation of Syrian children is increasingly deprived of education. Interviewees recounted difficulties in enrolling their children in public schools in İzmir. Lack of the Turkish language among Syrian children is a major barrier. A respondent stated that he was searching for ways to send his children to school, hoping that he would find classrooms where the language of instruction was in Arabic (R8). All respondents with children wished them to learn Turkish but to also keep their native Arabic language. In response to whether their children felt any discrimination in school, most respondents replied that there was none. Most respondents found the attitude of teachers and parents of other children to be positive. However, two respondents (R2, R12) stated that some Turkish students had discriminated against their children. R12 stated, ‘Some Turkish students insulted my children and now they do not want to attend the school anymore’. Another respondent (R4) complained that a school official did not want to register her child saying that the classroom was already full to capacity. As far as health services are concerned, most respondents stated that they did not encounter any problems obtaining basic health services
at the public hospitals for free, but they did mention the high cost of medicines and their inability to afford them. The Syrians with serious health problems were desperately in need of assistance, yet they did not have enough money to pay for their medication.

As far as expectations of the Turkish state and future plans are concerned, with one exception (R5), respondents stated that they would prefer to stay in Turkey if they could be granted work permits or citizenship. All respondents stressed that they did not want to be a burden to the Turkish state but would prefer to have the right to work in order to look after themselves. Most stated that if they were not offered citizenship or work permits in Turkey, they would try to migrate to a European country. There was little hope among the respondents that the war in Syria would end soon. Even if it did, the loss of their belongings, houses and property in Syria gave them little reason to return. Most added that they would prefer to stay in Turkey rather than go to Europe due to cultural and religious similarities between the two countries. As R8 stated, ‘I would prefer to reside in Turkey and would not even consider migrating to Europe if I am granted Turkish citizenship. We are culturally similar. Europeans do not like Muslims, anyway’. None of the respondents were informed about refugee status or UNHCR’s activities. Two had considered contacting smugglers. However, they changed their minds due to tragic stories they had heard. R10 told a story in which smugglers took Syrians from one point along the coast of İzmir (Konak district) and left them on a point farther north (Karşıyaka district), saying that they had reached Greece. These narratives support that temporary protection regime underestimates the situation that most of the Syrians are not temporary, but they are willing to stay permanently in Turkey. Thus, the prolonged regime in fact limits their healthy integration in the society and also does not provide a reasonable and sustainable solution in the long-run.

Social acceptance of Syrian refugees by Turkish society

Nineteen Turkish citizens living in İzmir were randomly selected and interviewed. Except R17 and R19, all respondents mentioned that they had encountered Syrians in İzmir. Most said that they had no direct contact with Syrians but they had seen them living under desperate conditions. In general, those interviewed expressed hospitality and social acceptance towards Syrians on humanitarian grounds, and believed that they should be provided with shelter and protection due to the ongoing war in Syria. However, the majority perceived Syrians as ‘guests’ who must return to Syria after the war ends. Some thought that Turkey should stop accepting further Syrians and establish a quota for the newcomers according to its own limited resources (R20, R27, R28, R29). The rest thought that Syrians would probably settle in Turkey and emphasized the need for a better organized and comprehensive policy, especially for the non-camp refugees (R19, R20, R23, R29, R30, R31, R32). For example, R23 stressed that ‘Syrians can stay in Turkey as long as they adapt to the social order. However, the assistance should be managed in a planned and organized way. They should be accommodated in the camps or we should provide them with some special places to live’. R19 stated that

Turkey should have developed a plan before allowing protection to such high numbers of Syrians. I do not see a comprehensive policy that manages the process after accepting people. I appreciate our open-border policy, but we are not well prepared to handle Syrians inside.

Almost all respondents indicated that the presence of Syrians in the long run would likely cause negative effects on the local labour market and might also hinder the social services
provided for Turkish citizens. Nine respondents (R15, R16, R17, R20, R21, R22, R23, R25, R26) mentioned that employment priority should be given to unemployed Turkish citizens rather than the Syrians. Syrians were thought to be mostly unskilled and could cause wages to drop or might take the jobs of unskilled locals. On the other hand, they were not considered a threat to skilled Turkish workers. To quote R17, ‘Most of the incoming Syrians do not have education, thus I do not see them as a threat for my job security. I do not think there are skilled labourers among them that could contribute to our economy.’ Eight respondents remarked that Syrians benefitting from social services would restrict and negatively affect the provision of services for Turkish citizens. Some respondents were content with Syrians receiving services as long as those for Turkish citizens were not restricted. The majority stated that Syrians placed a burden on Turkey’s limited resources. For instance, R15 said, ‘I am not pleased because while most of our Turkish citizens are already unemployed and in need of social assistance, Syrians are becoming an additional burden on us.’

Strikingly, half of the respondents perceived Syrian refugees as a security threat now, whereas the other half thought that they would most likely become a security threat if they stay longer under current conditions. R18 remarked, ‘We do not know whether they were criminals before; it is difficult to differentiate them. Even if only one of them was involved in a crime, all of them might be labeled as criminals.’ Similarly, R29 stated, ‘Syrians do not constitute a security threat now, but if they remain on their own, under these conditions with no homes or food, they could easily become a threat.’ Most respondents expressed unease at seeing increasing numbers of Syrians, especially children, begging on the streets (R14, R16, R21, R22, R25, R26, R27), citing this as one of the main security concerns. They said that they supported Syrian children getting an education and did not feel uneasy if Syrian children shared the same class with their own children.

Almost all respondents strongly opposed granting citizenship to Syrians. Some (R15, R19, R32) stressed that they do not see citizenship as a solution since the Syrian crisis is not merely Turkey’s issue, but rather one requiring international responsibility and solidarity. R19 stated that conferring citizenship is something to be discussed later, but other possible options for protection should be explored first with the support of the international community. While R15 expressed the view that ‘Syrians must not be granted citizenship, since it would have a socially devastating impact’, R28 thought that ‘Syrians might be allowed to stay here and granted citizenship if they do not damage our country, people, language, and religion.’ Some of the respondents highlighted that the Syrian refugee crisis was being highly politicized in order to benefit Turkish politicians, rather than being assessed on humanitarian grounds (R17, R19, R20, R21, R24). Respondents raised concerns that Syrians might vote in the local elections in 2014, which proved unfounded, though it is possible that the Syrian refugee problem may be used for political purposes in the future unless a rights-based approach replaces the current policies that leave the distribution of social services to the discretion of political authorities. It is critical that politicizing the issue carries the high risk of marginalizing it and aggravating new misperceptions that might distort the peaceful co-existence of the Syrians and Turkish people.

Conclusion

According to UNHCR (2014a), Turkey is the world’s largest refugee-hosting country with its open-border policy that provides temporary protection to nearly 2.5 million displaced
Syrians. The response of the international community has remained insufficient, both in terms of opening national borders and providing humanitarian aid to the refugees. This has left the burden of protection and aid to Syria's neighbouring countries, Turkey being not an exception. While Turkey's open-border policy has been praised in terms of providing shelter to millions of Syrian refugees, for security reasons and absorption capacity Turkey cannot continue to expand its humanitarian protection at the rate that Syrians are arriving at the border. Under these circumstances, in which Turkey is left to deal with huge numbers of Syrian refugees without substantial international support, Turkey's concern regarding lifting the present geographical limitation and becoming a more attractive destination country for more refugees is a serious issue that warrants debate. Turkey registers Syrian refugees under its temporary protection regime, which is largely in line with international standards in terms of accepting them on the frontier, ensuring them non-refoulement and providing them with basic needs, including shelter, food and medical support. Notably, this regime is approaching its limits given the rising number of refugees crossing the border and it bears weaknesses and difficulties in practice. First, the lack of a clear maximum time limit for temporary protection creates an unclear path for future status and prospects of the refugees. Second, their current status puts restrictions in accessing to a refugee status determination mechanism. Last but not least, the vague language of the 2014 Directive that seems to equate ‘rights’ with ‘services’ creates difficulties such as leaving the sustainability of and fair access to granted services under the mercy of Turkish Government. Besides, the empirical research revealed that although these services are not restricted under legal terms, interviewees highlighted difficulties in practice while taking advantage of these services.

As the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey reside outside of camps, this study focused on the socio-economic challenges of non-camp Syrian refugees based in İzmir, as well as their social acceptance by Turkish local society through an empirical study conducted between February and April 2014. The empirical research revealed that the sustainability of the temporary protection regime is approaching its limits and extending this emergency measure as an alternative to refugee protection cannot be considered as a viable solution. Though most Syrian interviewees indicated that they faced no discrimination in general, they are facing various socio-economic challenges related to housing, employment and education. They are not well informed enough to access and take advantage of public services. Moreover, the flaws and insufficiencies of the legal context are causing bureaucratic hurdles on the ground. In the absence of institutionalized policies especially for non-camp refugees, their situation is mainly left to judgement of local authorities, which may cause problems with their smooth integration into and acceptance by the host society. This also threatens the sustainability of the tolerance for refugees currently shown by Turkish citizens. If the accessibility to and distribution of public services are observed as becoming strained and insufficient, this could increase unrest within Turkish society and endanger the peaceful coexistence between the newcomers and the locals. The interviews reveal that there is a sentiment among Turkish citizens that unrest may arise due to the lack of a comprehensive integration policy. Without such a policy, Syrians may be perceived as a threat to security and to the economy in the long run in line with the risk of rising xenophobia. In addition, there are concerns that the refugee crisis is becoming politicized for the benefit of a few rather than eliciting the appropriate humanitarian response.

The field study conducted in İzmir revealed important insights that might contribute to future policies concerning Syrians in Turkey. First, considering that almost all Syrian
respondents said that they had no intention of returning to their homeland, there is an urgent need for Turkey to develop a comprehensive and long-term integration policy for Syrians rather than prolonging the ad hoc arrangements based on the assumption of temporary stays. The reality that a significant amount of Syrians will remain permanently in Turkey must prompt a shift in government policy addressing long-term integration issues. This is especially important given the high number of Syrians living outside the camps, who seem to be left on their own without guidance. While the access to public health and education services are appreciated, there remain several problems encountered in practice. Granting work permits to Syrians, enabling their access to the labour market, ensuring enrolment of children and youth into schools are urgent measures that should be priorities of this policy shift. Moreover, since these growing challenges have the potential to generate tension between Syrians and the host Turkish society, there must be a clear, long-term and comprehensive government strategy to integrate Syrians into the society. As Erdoğan (2015, 23) has stated, ‘xenophobia and enmity may rapidly spread among some groups within Turkish society, which so far has demonstrated high levels of social acceptance toward Syrians and has been quite supportive of them.’ An integration policy needs to reduce the legal, administrative and practical barriers to participation in the labour market, sustain the education of Syrian children and foster Turkish language courses for all Syrians to facilitate communication. Second, the policy should take a rights-based approach rather than one that puts the emphasis on ‘services’ provided by the Turkish Government. In doing so, the integration policy should encompass not only the socio-economic needs of Syrians, but also respond to the concerns of the Turkish people by respecting the limits of their social acceptance and tolerance, which has been constructed so far on the idea that the Syrians’ stay will be temporary. Third, a healthy social connection between Syrians and local communities should be encouraged in order to prevent the rise of racism, xenophobia and hatred. Moreover, the public transparency of the new policy is essential to combat the growing perception that the refugee issue is being used for political purposes, overshadowing the humanitarian aspect. Lastly, Turkey has to call for more international support, not only in financial terms, but more for developed countries to undertake their fair share of absorbing one of the world’s largest displacements of people in recent history. By underlining the fact that the Syrian refugee crisis is not only an issue for Turkey, but one that requires international solidarity, developed countries should be called upon to accept more Syrian refugees through extended resettlement programmes. Without these measures, Turkey runs the risk of becoming an outsourced land of humanitarian protection and a hub for higher and higher numbers of stranded refugees.

Notes

1. Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of the Republic of Turkey (AFAD) is the coordinating institution for managing refugee camps in Turkey and all related services, including the provision of shelter, food, health care, security, social activities, education, worship, translation, communication, and banking, with the support of relevant ministries, public institutions and organizations.

2. Temporary protection is an emergency measure meant to serve during a situation of mass outflow and is complementary to the international refugee protection regime. Being one of the essential mechanisms to provide immediate protection status to refugees in crisis, it also carries a risk in terms of giving governments the opportunity to avoid full protection of refugee rights.
3. Turkey signed the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol with a ‘geographical limitation’. It does not have a refugee status determination process for asylum seekers coming from countries outside Europe. According to its April 2013 law on foreigners and international protection and its 1994 Asylum Regulation (amended in 2006 and supplemented by a government directive the same year), Turkey provides non-European refugees with ‘temporary asylum-seeker status’.

4. In the case of a mass influx of displaced persons, it does not offer refugee status immediately but provides a generalized form of protection to all members of a large group (Official Journal of the European Communities 2001).

5. EU+ countries include the EU28 plus Switzerland and Norway.

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Notes on contributors

Ayselin Yıldız is an assistant professor at Yaşar University Department of International Relations and has been the director of Yaşar University European Union Center between 2005 and 2015. She has been research fellow at Wageningen University, University of California Berkeley and University of Pittsburgh. Her main areas of study include migration studies, Turkey–EU relations and external relations of the EU.

Elif Uzgören is a lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Business, Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir. She completed her PhD on Politics from Nottingham University. Her research interests are International Political Economy, Turkish politics and the European integration.

ORCID

Ayselin Yıldız http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8845-2367

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