**EDITORIAL**

**Syrian Crisis and Migration**

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## Abstract

With the growing insurrections in Syria in 2011, an exodus in large numbers has emerged. The turmoil and violence have caused mass migration to destinations both within the region and beyond. The current "refugee crisis" has escalated sharply and its impact is widening from neighbouring countries toward Europe. Today, the Syrian crisis is the major cause for an increase in displacement and the resultant dire humanitarian situation in the region. Since the conflict shows no signs of abating in the near future, there is a constant increase in the number of Syrians fleeing their homes. However, questions on the future impact of the Syrian crisis on the scope and scale of this human mobility are still to be answered. As the impact of the Syrian crisis on host countries increases, so does the demand for the analyses of the needs for development and protection in these countries. In this special issue, we aim to bring together a number of studies examining and discussing human mobility in relation to the Syrian crisis.

**Keywords:** Syrian crisis; Syrian migrants; migration policy; integration.

## Introduction

In this issue, we aimed to shed some light on the Syrian refugee crisis which seems to shake European common policy on migration and asylum. However, it seems focus is still on raising walls, strengthening borders, and futile categorisations of movers as 'refugees' and 'economic migrants'. As well put in a recent interview, "managing international migration is not a matter of controlling borders; it is a question of transnational peace" (Bardakci, 2015). People will continue fleeing the environments where they feel insecure and Europe will continue to face large influxes from neighbouring countries in trouble.

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The 2015 summer of tragedy is about to turn into a nightmare as we approach to winter while conflict in Syria continues and more and more Syrians try to reach Europe. Since mid-Summer, there has been a surge in number of refugees arriving in Europe, mostly through unauthorized channels and the death toll on Turkish and Greek shores reached drastic levels. Only after the body of Aylan Kurdi, a small Kurdish child from Syria, found on a beach in Bodrum, a popular tourism destination, ordinary people and governments in Europe began discussing and offering help, albeit inadequate as yet. The common question is why now so many Syrians are desperately leaving the region, mostly through and from Turkey? How many more "refugees" will come to Europe? Are these "refugees" or "economic migrants"?

Let's begin with the last question: First of all, in our conflict driven culture of migration model (Sirkeci, 2009; Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011; Sirkeci and Cohen, 2016), all human mobility is down to some kind of a conflict. Conflict is defined in a very broad sense which includes latent tensions and disagreements on the one end and goes to armed and violent clashes (e.g. wars) on the other. This is to say, migration is initiated by discomforts, difficulties, restrictions, clashes, and finally violence and wars at the country of origin. People only decide to move when they see that given conflict as a threat, an environment of insecurity, which is unmanageable. This also allows us to factor in potential conflicts arise as people move from one place to another, including the transit areas. Thus migration changes in response to these new challenges *en route* and in destinations. This is the dynamic nature of human mobility, which can be helpful to understand why suddenly so many Syrians are also desperate to leave Turkey, a country welcomed them in millions in the first place.

The second question about refugee versus economic migrant is utterly unhelpful. The difference between a refugee and an economic migrant is "imagined". In fact, most economic migrants have some story of difficulty driving them to other countries whilst all refugees have an obvious economic cause along with the immediate threat they are escaping from. Therefore countries or political parties trying to address the current crisis by sifting through the registration documents and trying to categorize people as refugees and not so refugees are in a futile play. This futile play is what we have seen over and over again. People move away from difficulties and once this experience of movement/migration is established, accumulated over time, a culture of migration emerges and that is what leads continuous migration from certain parts of the world even after the root causes have disappeared. There are hundreds of studies, qualitatively showing that there are almost always multiple motivations for migration. More to the point, these motivations may change over the course of the move as people move spatially and over time. For example, economic motivations may become secondary when movers face extreme discrimination in a country or a very positive

welcome by a tiny and poor country may not be enough when there are no means to survive. Therefore, these people must be recognized as migrants who perceive greater risks and dangers at home. The response should cover improving economic, political, and cultural wellbeing. Mending just one aspect will not settle the issue.

Nevertheless, the root causes in Syria are unlikely to disappear soon. Long before the current violence, this was a country of multifaceted problems: unemployment, income inequality, suppression of minorities, suppression of opposition is just a few issues to name. If one wants economic drivers for migration, the average GDP per capita in Syria has been about a third of –or less- that is in Turkey, and about a tenth of the averages in most European countries. This means even without the current violence, there were adequate reasons for many Syrians to leave. The violence is perhaps providing an opportunity framework to facilitate the process. We should not also forget that the conflict migration is not a Syrian problem, it is a wide spread issue and the responses to this must be transnational and comprehensive in nature. We mean, offering more blankets and tents here and there will only sooth the upset of the giver but will not alleviate the much deeper issues countries like Syria are facing. Therefore, any effort to manage migration has to focus on securing livelihoods for people in their home countries. Syrian migration will continue for the foreseeable future just like Iraqi emigration and Afghan emigration continues; after a while it may slow down but Europe must accept to live with sizeable Syrian immigrant communities from now on. If there is no settlement about the crisis in Syria these outflows will remain to be strong for a long while.

The first question is critical and more investigation is needed to answer fully. For instance, why so many Syrians are desperate to leave Turkey now? Syrian refugees have been coming to Turkey in large numbers since the early 2011. By mid-2014, estimations had already shown the number of Syrians in the country were well over 1.6 million officially and over 2 million unofficially. What did change? The official numbers reached 2 million since then and anecdotal evidence is there that some local conflicts between Syrians and natives arose. Germany's announcement to admit half a million Syrians per year is clearly an incentive, but there were already a large number of Syrians leaving Turkey long before. One question comes to mind is the potential impact of the agreement signed between Turkey and the EU on 16 December 2013 on "the readmission of persons residing without authorization"[1] which is ratified by Turkey on 25th June 2014. When signed, it was expected that the agreement is fully implemented in three years. That means in 2016, this agreement may come into force fully. What would be the implication for so many Syrians as well as others who reaches Europe through Turkey? Article 4, paragraph 1(c) of the agreement states: [Turkey shall readmit … such persons who] "illegally and directly entered the territory of the Member States after

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[1] For the full text of the agreement see: http://gocdergisi.com/kaynak/.

having stayed on, or transited through, the territory of Turkey". We are not sure, of course, if this is a widely known fact among Syrian movers who reside in Turkey. However, migration literature offers enough accounts on myths of migration referring to the ways in which people make decisions to move based on hearsay – often good stories relayed by past movers. Thus, we believe if a hint of the facts about this agreement reached to Syrian communities, a reaction would be in order. Yet, the question remains: Do Syrians fear of being sent back if they delay their onward moves any further as we approach to 2016, the year of implementation? Could this be one of the reasons behind the 2015 upsurge in desperate efforts risking so many lives to reach European Union territories? These are the two questions worth investigating further to understand the recent peak of the European crisis in dealing with a truly transnational phenomenon.

### The crisis

Syrian crisis was not expected and began to produce refugees in April 2011. Now 4 years on, there are estimated to be over 6 million displaced about two thirds of whom headed abroad, most arrived in neighbouring countries. Today, the UNHCR reports 2.1 million registered Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, more than 24,000 Syrian refugees registered in North Africa and 1.95 million registered Syrians in Turkey (http://data.unhcr.org, 06.09.2015). In order to understand the whole picture, we also need to consider Syrian refugees who cannot able to register to the officials and/or try irregular ways to stay in other countries. This number is not stable as Syrians continue to stream into different countries.

Since the environment of human insecurity[2] in Syria gives no signs to change in the foreseeable future, it seems that large-scale refugee movements from this country will continue. Thus, Syrian's intensifying refugee crisis together with human tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea diverted public as well policy makers' attention to the subject. Particularly, policy makers whose main focus on possible impacts of refugees on their country became to discuss humanitarian aspect of the topic and they also emphasised the importance of a collective responsibility in the field.

*Migration is not a popular or pretty topic. It is easy to cry in front of your TV set when witnessing these tragedies. It is harder to stand up and take responsibility. What we need now is the collective courage to follow through with concrete action on words that will otherwise ring empty[3]'*

The world's attention turned to Syrian crisis and the refugee question caused by the proxy war in the Syria very recently. However, Syrian migration is not a new phenomenon. The difference is the volume and transnational

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[2] Environment of insecurity is defined and discussed in (Sirkeci, 2006)
[3] European Commision Press Release, 06 August 2015. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-5480_en.htm

effect of Syrians today is particularly high. Barrout (2008) conveys that the number of emigrants along with the relatives who left the country before 1922 were around 500,000 while this number increase to 4,180,444 by 2007 (as cited in Mehchy and Mahadi Doko, 2010:2). The Syrian refugees today already reached half of these numbers.

Both Middle East countries and countries outside of this region received considerable number of immigrants from Syria in different time periods (Mehchy and Mahadi Doko, 2011; Chalcraft, 2009; Gualteri, 2004; Hourani and Shedadi, 1992). Political environment of Syria has long motivated Syrians to move other countries as they felt political oppression and insecurity (Beitin, 2012; Fargues and Fandrich, 2012). This country has been unstable; it has experienced chain military coups from the very beginning of its foundation. Syria experienced more than 20 military interventions over the following years of the first coup d'état happening in 1949 (Beshara, 2013:21).

In addition to political turbulence, economic motivations were also strong to pave the way for migration flows from Syria. Until the 1960s and 1970s, emigration from Arab countries was mainly to Europe and the USA (Mehchy and Mahadi Doko, 2011). In addition to this, Lebanon was a popular destination country for Syrians. Workers preferred this country because of the visa convenience for physical closeness of the country (Winckler, 1997:109). Intra-regional migration trend intensified in the second half of the 1970s as job opportunities in the oil producing countries of the Middle East increased (Winckler, 1997). Lebanon still received large numbers of Syrian workers as there were labour shortage resulted by civil war (1975-1989) (MPC Team, 2013), but Gulf countries appeared as new attractive destinations for the Syrian economic immigrants. As a result of this trend, remittance became an important part of Syrian economy. According to the Syrian government source, this country received two billion dollars remittance from expatriate Syrians in 2007 (Seeberg, 2012:10).

Until 2011, the literature mainly emphasised economic consideration motivated emigration from Syria. However, 2011 has been a turning point year for Syria as both volume and nature of migration from this country changed dramatically. Following popular uprisings against dictatorships in several Arab countries, many Syrians poured into the streets to protest Bashar al-Assad government. Street protests evolved into a civil war that would cause an enormous refugee influx later on.

As the number of Syrians seeking asylum in neighbouring countries as well as in Europe increases, issues related to this topic have become more diverse and complicated. Currently, Syrian question is not only a matter of foreign policy for the states; the future of Syrian refugees is also on top of the agenda.

While the world has been witnessing 'the worst refugee crisis since World War II' (Amnesty International, 2015), somewhat surprisingly there is limited

literature on Syrian refugee crisis. Rather than academic studies empirically focusing on the issue, it is more common to see field works conducted by regional and international human rights organisations and the specialized agencies of national and international organisations (e.g. Amnesty International, 2014, 2015; IRD&UNHCR Report, 2013; Ajluni and Kawar, 2014; International Crisis Report, 2014).

When we examine at the studies and the reports, much focuses on the situation of Syrians in host countries and policy responses, the economic impact of refugees on host areas and the access of rights in these places .They mainly concentrate on three countries that receive the largest numbers of refugees: Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The first wave of studies descriptively reveals the issue, policy responses of host countries to Syrians and public attitudes towards their new neighbours (Naufal, 2012; Özden, 2013; Dinçer et.al. 2013; Refaat, 2013; Döner et al., 2013; Thorleifsson, 2014; Achilli 2015). While they inform the situation in the camps -as long as they can have access and collect data-, it is also possible to sense the relation between the non-camp refugees and local people. In addition to this, some of them underline the reluctance of states to grant definite status to those have fled the Syrian conflict and complicated results of this policy. (Özden 2013; Aranki and Kalis 2014).

As the duration and cost of Syrians in host countries increase, scholars diverted their attention to investigate the impact of Syrians on the countries in political, social and economic terms (Al, Kilani, 2014; Orsam, 2015; Berti, 2015; Stave and Hillesund, 2015; Akgündüz et al., 2015). While the impact studies claim to approach from the social and political aspects of refugee question, much focus is placed on the financial cost of refugee hosting. In this regard, the importance of international cooperation and burden sharing/responsibility sharing initiatives are emphasised as a remedy to deal with the question (see Kirisci, 2014; Bidinger et al., 2014).

In addition to these groups, another wave of research conducts specific sectorial analysis of rights of Syrian refugees. The right of education (Christophersen, 2015; Ahmadzadeh et al., 2014; Education Sector Working Group, 2015), healthcare (Murshidi et al., 2013; El Khatib et al., 2013) and the right of work (ILO, 2015; Bidinger, 2015) are important areas which Syrians face obstacles to access in the countries they seek international protection. These studies try to attract attention on these fundamental rights.

Besides neighbouring countries, studies that scrutinise European countries began to appear as the number of Syrians aiming to reach these countries increase. While these studies investigate the responses and practices of European countries, they also suggest the European countries to take more responsibility in terms of providing reception and protection facilities and sharing burden of other host countries (Miller and Orchard, 2014; Fargues, 2014). More studies discussing the policy responses of European countries

towards Syrian refugees and situation of these people in Europe's refugee-hosting countries are expected since there has been visible awakening in these countries after publication of drowned Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi's devastating picture.

Although analytical reports have been relatively bourgeoning regarding Syrian refugees in host countries, it is more difficult to find those endeavours for non-Syrian refugees. However, more than 5 hundred Palestinian refugees that have been living in 12 refugee camps in Syria found themselves in the middle of another conflict when the civil war broke out in 2011 (UNRWA, 2015:2). Once again, we see different organisations' regional reports on showing vulnerable position of Palestinians from Syria in new host countries (ANERA Report, 2013; European Commission, 2015). In addition to these reports, some studies explore that the situation of Palestinians fleeing Syria conflict is even worse than citizens of Syrians as they cannot have rights that Syrians can (White, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Therefore these studies undercover case of the Palestinians from Syria and that shows particular importance of investigating this.

As the discussion above illustrates, Syrian refugee issue is related to variety of areas, which are still in need of a deep analysis on conflict and migration nexus, humanitarian protection, refugee burden sharing, mass influxes and public opinion formation, refugee health care and refugee integration support with different aspects. The main reason for this is it is a dynamic process therefor the situation and legal status of Syrians in host countries change constantly. Also, attitudes towards the case keep changing. Spreading refugee tragedies through media has pushed the policy makers' attention to this subject although they opt for closing their eyes for a long time. Public opinion towards Syrian refugees has become a salient topic as the length of their stay in the countries extend. Social and cultural dimensions of refugee hosting is yet left untouched in the literature therefore more empirical research is required to analyse the possible different impacts of refugees.

Taken all together, in this special issue dealing with Syrian crisis and its impact on migration, we aim to approach the subject from variety of angles. In this regard, not only state policies and priorities are illustrated, but also rights and lives of Syrians in host societies are critically discussed. By doing so, we try to open an academic discussion that questions 'the future impact of the Syrian crisis on the scope and scale of this human mobility'.

### Content of the special issue

This special issue of *Migration Letters* is dedicated to discuss the impact of Syrian crisis on human mobility. The eight contributors of the issue have tackled the question from multidisciplinary perspectives in various research fields. Nevertheless, all of them deal with the question of migration from a humanitarian angle and critically approach the state practices applied so far. These studies reveal the hidden side of the refugee crisis in the host countries

by examining data collected from different sources; newspapers, reports, official documents and interview data the authors generated themselves.

This special issue starts with a contribution by Ela Gökalp Aras and Zeynep Şahin Mencütek, who illustrate Turkey's policy responses regarding Syrian refugee case by emphasizing country's foreign policy priorities. While this study provides an overview of Turkish asylum policies from the first day of Syrians arrival to the country, it also offers a discussion with respect to changing foreign policies reflect on states responses towards the refugees. On top of this, this article puts forward an assertive claim with respect to size of Turkey's power in Middle East by saying 'she should behave like a middle range power that has to take strategic steps to balance her relations within the region and with global powers'.

Just after Aras and Mencütek's inspiring article, another policy discussion is offered by Burcu Togral Koca. Within 'critical border studies', this study brings a new perspective to assess the open door policy of Turkey that is applied for Syrians since the first wave of the influx started. This is one of the critical researches that disclose the realities/limitations of the state policies. Thus Koca's study sparks the readers to re-evaluate the 'open door policy', which is often considered as liberal and humanitarian approach.

Yaylaci and Karakus analyse the perceptions surrounding the Syrian refugees as reflected in the newspapers. The method employed to analyse the news is content analysis. The selected newspapers are Hurriyet, Yeni Safak and Cumhuriyet between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2014. The results of their investigations of the papers reveal that the political standing of the newspapers and their attitudes towards the Turkish government strongly affect the way they reflect the news on the Syrian refugees.

Oner and Genc tackle with an intriguing question why are the Syrians desperately trying to leave Turkey. They particularly look into the humanitarian dimension of the refugee crisis. They first argue that Turkey's new migration and asylum regime has not been able to decrease the refugees' vulnerability, and second that Turkey's "new asylum regime" is in fact "not that new" due to the fact that asylum-seekers coming from non-European countries have been provided a de facto temporary protection. The article reveals that the Syrian refugees are vulnerable in many fields mainly because they are subject to a protection regime marked by temporariness.

After first four papers, state policy analyses leave their place for the examination of social and cultural dimension of refugee issue. In this regard, educational assessment of Syrian child refugees in Turkey is examined in the fifth paper by Tuba Bircan, Ulaş Sunata. The authors investigate educational needs of the refugee children in Turkey. By highlighting the importance of the issue, Bircan and Sunata suggest the government to cooperate with international, national and local institutions in order to avoid losing a generation of Syrian.

In the final special issue article, examining the social dimension of refugee question is continued but this time another refugee hosting country is scrutinised: Jordan. Ayham Dalal, discusses the socio-economic activities of refugees and how these activities contribute to urbanization of refugee camps. By focusing on Zaatari camp in Jordan, this study sheds the light on how Syrian refugees can access the labour market. Considering the recent discussions revolving around the impact of refugees on host countries in economic means, this study asserts how states' 'planning/theory' can be completely different than 'practice/reality'.

We hope these articles will be of use in kicking off the scholarly exchange on Syrian migration and conflict and we are inviting new research on this genre to *Migration Letters*. Particularly studies focusing on Anthropological aspects, daily routines of Syrian migrants, and their past migration experiences, xenophobia, integration issues are in need for further investigation. In addition to this, the academics are expected to produce practical resolution suggestions for the decision makers. Particularly, how to ensure collaboration and efficient burden sharing and how to mitigate tension between refugees and host country population are the two critical questions waiting for scholarly attention. All in all, we hope to see more inspiring, empirical and guiding studies in the future and this issue will be a drop in the ocean.

Along with the special issue articles, at the end of this volume, we are pleased to offer the readers, a rare critique of migration theories by Douglas Massey; Macedonian case study on emigration tendencies by Petreskis; a comparison of Turkish and Romanian migration experiences in Europe by Poetzschke; and an introduction to the HuKou system of China by Cui and Cohen. Finally, Martin and Sirkeci reviews the Turkish Migration Conference 2015 and Sirkeci and Cohen offers the first attempt of a comprehensive ranking of impact in Migration Studies literature.

189

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191

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192