

THROUGH THE EYES OF TURKISH CITIZENS: HOW THE SYRIAN REFUGEES AFFECT TURKEY AND TURKISH SOCIETY

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Abstract

The public demonstrations that broke out in the Daraa town of Syria in March 2011 against the corrupted and repressive Bashar al Assad regime, along with the regime forces that fired on unarmed civilians, transformed into a prolonged civil war. Since the eve of the crisis, hundreds of thousands of people in Syria, once home to 22 million citizens, lost their lives, millions of civilians have been internally displaced (IDPs), and millions more were forced to seek asylum from neighboring countries. Among the chief countries from which the Syrians sought asylum (i.e., Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt), Turkey has become host to the largest refugee population in the world. As of April 2018, the country was home to 3.5 million Syrian citizens (UNHCR, 2018). In order to examine how so many claims of asylum have affected the Turkish citizens, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 60 Turkish citizens in border provinces such as Hatay and Gaziantep where the majority of the Syrians live. These interviews highlighted many problems that Turkish citizens began experiencing after the Syrian refugees began arriving to Turkey, and enabled the researcher to propose solutions aimed at addressing those problems.

Key Words: *Syrian refugees, migration, Turkish society.*

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Türk Vatandaşların Gözünden: Suriyeli Mülteciler Türkiye'yi ve Türk Toplumunu Nasıl Etkiliyor

Öz

Mart 2011'de Suriye'nin Dera kentinde yozlaşmış ve baskıcı Beşar Esad rejimine karşı patlak veren halk gösterileri, rejim güçlerinin silahlı sivil halka ateş açmasıyla birlikte uzun süreli bir sivil savaşa dönüşmüştür. Krizin başladığı günden beri bir zamanlar 22 milyon vatandaşa ev sahipliği yapan Suriye'de yüzbinlerce sivil hayatını kaybetmiş, milyonlarca sivil ülke içerisinde yerinden edilmiş ve milyonlarcası da Suriye'ye komşu olan ülkelerden sığınma talep etmek zorunda kalmıştır. Suriyelilerin en çok sığınma talep ettiği ülkelerin (ör. Türkiye, Lübnan, Ürdün, Irak ve Mısır) başında dünyada en çok mülteciye ev sahipliği yapar hale gelen Türkiye yer almaktadır. Nisan 2018 itibarıyla Türkiye 3,5 milyon Suriye vatandaşa ev sahipliği yapmaktadır (UNHCR, 2018). Suriyelilerin bu yoğun sığınma taleplerinin Türk vatandaşlarını nasıl etkilediğini araştırmak amacıyla Suriyelilerin yoğun olarak yaşadığı Hatay ve Gaziantep gibi sınır illerinde 60 Türk vatandaşı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu görüşmeler, Suriyeli mültecilerin Türkiye'ye gelmeye başlamasıyla birlikte Türk vatandaşların yaşamaya başladığı birçok problemi ortaya çıkarmış ve araştırmacıya bu sorunlara çözüm önerisi geliştirme imkânı sunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriyeli mülteciler, göç, Türk toplumu.*

Introduction

In March 2011, the public demonstrations that began against the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria were transformed into a bloody war as the regime quelled the demonstrations with violence, and as other actors, including ISIS, became involved, one of the most acute humanitarian crises in history emerged. The Syrian civil war affected neighboring countries as well; namely, those who served to host Syrian refugees. Turkey, which hosts the largest Syrian refugee population, for example, was directly affected in terms of security and socioeconomics. The border provinces such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Kilis have been most affected, as this is where most of the refugees have settled. This study examines in detail how the arrival of the Syrian refugees affected Turkish citizens in the border provinces of Hatay and Gaziantep. To do this, rather than analyzing exclusively rather impersonal statistical studies, this study conducts an in-depth examination of Turkish citizens' thoughts pertaining to the situation and their experiences with the Syrian refugees. As such, an interview technique was used to gather in-depth, first-hand information.

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As soon as the Syrian crisis began, the Turkish government founded camps intended to shelter the Syrian refugees. As the number of refugees who sought asylum from Turkey increased, more camps were formed. Today, there exist 21 refugee camps in Turkey; the Turkish government established these camps along the Turkish-Syrian border. However, the majority of the Syrian refugees in Turkey preferred to live among the Turkish citizens especially in the bordering provinces rather than to stay in camps. In the summer of 2015, the researcher stayed in Hatay and Gaziantep provinces of Turkey bordering Syria and interviewed with total of 60 local Turkish citizens – 30 in Hatay, and 30 in Gaziantep –to answer the question ‘How has the arrival of the Syrian refugees affected the daily lives of Turkish citizens in the provinces close to the Turkish-Syrian border?’ To be able to reach different opinions, the researcher visited parks, cafes, workplaces and houses in different neighborhoods in the low, middle and high income areas in Hatay and Gaziantep, and found interviewees with diverse education levels (graduate, high school, secondary school, primary school, and illiterate), and different religious or cultural perspectives (Sunni Arabs, Alawite Arabs, Sunni Turks, Alevi Turks, and Kurds). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, each of which took approximately one to two hours to complete. All data derived from the interviews were coded and sub-coded in order of importance and frequency of mentioning, and the data were then analyzed in the Dedoose digital qualitative analysis program.

When these interviews analyzed, it was revealed that, because of the mass migration of Syrian refugees into the bordering provinces of Turkey, the Turkish citizens have become very concerned about the general economy of the provinces they live in, labor market, housing, security of the nation and the healthcare services they receive.

How the Arrival of the Syrian Refugees has Impacted the Economies of Hatay and Gaziantep

The civil war occurring in Syria has not only caused radical political changes in Turkish-Syrian relations, but it has negatively affected the economies of border provinces, including Hatay and Gaziantep, through the implementation of sanctions and cease of border crossings. The deterioration of the bilateral relations did not only cause trade between Turkey and Syria to cease; since Turkey went through Syria to trade with other countries, such as

Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf countries, Turkey's trade relations with these countries was also severely affected (Taşçı and Özsan, 2015) This section will discuss how the breakdown of Turkish-Syrian relations has affected the economies of Hatay and Gaziantep.

In 2009, when Turkey and Syria stopped requiring visas of the other's citizens, the tourist-based and commercial visits that originated in Syria increased economic activity in Turkey's border provinces (e.g., Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Adana, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, and Mardin). However, both tourist and commercial visits came to an end once the Syrian civil war broke out, and this meant that the border provinces were no longer privy to the economic prosperity they had enjoyed as a result of the increased activity. Hatay, for example, has close historical, cultural and geographic ties with Syria, and when the visa requirement was lifted, the province became a key destination for Syrian merchants and tourists (Kervankıran and Çuhadar, 2014)

When Syrian tourists and merchants no longer flocked to the border provinces, local artisans began experiencing financial hardships. Ali, a man who runs a children's goods store in Hatay, discussed how the economy of the region changed after the civil war in Syria began:

The people most affected by the Syrian civil war are the artisans. Before the war, except those who came with their own vehicles, ten busloads of Syrians would arrive every day. These people used to come just to buy goods... They had legal permission to stay in Turkey for two or three days. A lot of Syrians came here, and they would come here just to buy goods. Of course, they also had needs for accommodation and catering. They used to have an economic exchange. For example, catering businesses were very lucrative in Hatay, but all of the artisans benefited from the Syrians because the artisans did business with the Syrians... After the Syrian civil war began, the artisans suffered a significant decrease in earnings such that they are now facing an economic crisis.

As noted in Ali's account of the situation, before the civil war, Syrians routinely came to Hatay; these Syrian tourists and merchants conducted business and shopped in the province. This activity boosted sales for all manner of artisans in Hatay. In addition, since Hatay's hotels and restaurants benefited from the increased economic activity, as they served the incoming Syrian tourists and merchants, a number of new hotels and restaurants were opened. However, approximately two years after the visa requirements were lifted, the

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Syrian civil war began, which meant the end the tourism-based and commercial visits originating from Syria and thus the end of the economic prosperity that the business owners and investors had been enjoying. Baki, a university professor in Hatay, described this situation:

With regard to what I observed, let me explain it a very simple way, the crisis in Syria had serious effects on the lodging industry. I am telling you about Hatay, but the citizens from other provinces also made investments based on the expectation that tourists would come from Syria. They built hotels and restaurants. This was especially the case in Hatay, which is a place that is keen to entertain, and a place where people come to eat and drink. I mean, for instance, there are Harbiye and Kuzeytepe here. There are several hotels there. People made serious investments, and their investments suddenly fizzled out willy-nilly. The investors tried to maintain with just the domestic tourism, but that had to lower their expectations, and in the long run, their investments didn't pay off. Bankruptcy? Maybe there weren't likely many bankruptcies among those who invested here in Hatay, but there were serious bankruptcies among those who made investments in Syria.

Per the official Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) records, the number of visitors that came from Syria to Turkey in 2010, when the bilateral relations were normal, totaled 899,494, and this number increased to 974,054 in 2011. However, because of the civil war that broke out in 2011, the number of Syrian visitors dropped to 730,039 in 2012 (TÜİK, 2016). In 2013, however, the number of visitors who entered Turkey from Syria climbed to 1,252,826 (TÜİK, 2016). Since 2011, the total number of Syrians who have come to Turkey began to increase again, but these have not been tourists; most of these people have been refugees who have sought refuge in Turkey (Kervankıran and Çuhadar, 2014). As Baki stated, the serious decline in Syrian tourists and visiting merchants has served to bring financial problems to those who invested in Hatay. Many investors took out bank loans based on their expectations regarding the region's increasing commercial potential. Fewer Syrian visitors with tourism-based or commercial intentions, however, led to decreased earnings, which thus lead to investors' inability to pay off the loans they borrowed (Kervankıran and Çuhadar, 2014).

The investors hurt by the outbreak of Syria's civil war are not isolated to Hatay or the other border provinces. After Turkey and Syria stopped requiring the other's citizens to present visas, and several trade agreements were signed, a number of Turkish investors made investments in Syria. The Damascus Trade Consultancy has estimated that the investments in Syria that are Turkish in origin total about \$300 million; however, it is estimated that investments made by Turkish businesspersons and their Syrian partners total approximately \$900 million (Patronlar Dünyası, 2010). After the Syrian civil war broke out, some investors were able to save some of their investments, but other investors were unable to withdraw their investments and ended up in bankruptcy. Aslan, a university professor from Hatay, discussed this point:

I know two people who made investments in Syria. They went bankrupt, unfortunately. One of them was the distributor of Peugeot in Hatay. He was working in the automotive sector in Turkey, but he was from one of the wealthiest families of Hatay. They created a large business in Syria, I guess; it was a furniture manufacturing business. I mean, it's hearsay, but he had made a \$10 million dollars investment, and after the war broke out, he went bankrupt, and even his Peugeot store here closed. There was also Canan Bureau Furniture here [in Hatay]. It had also made a big investment in Syria, in the furniture sector. I know that they went bankrupt as well due to the investments in Syria. There is even a famous apartment site here in Hatay where my friend lives. My friend was the business owner's neighbor, and the business owner had to sell his house because of the events that transpired once the war broke out.

Aslan's examples are not anomalous, as the majority of the interviewees in Hatay stated that they had heard that many businesspersons, all of whom had made investments in various business sectors, went bankrupt after the Syrian civil war began. In addition to the large investors and businesses, the local citizens who used to make their livings by selling the goods that they brought from Syria in their luggage were also hurt once the war in Syria began. Sevilay, a professor in Hatay talked about how the closing of the borders between Turkey and Syria affected the luggage trade:

A lot of negativity resulted from the borders closing. The people of Hatay and Syria were engaged in a significant amount of trade. It was simple trade that we called luggage trade. The things that they bought back were things like tea, sugar, clothes and duty-free alcoholic drinks. There

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were also many goods that were being transported from here to Syria. The cessation of this trade affected the people involved in very negative ways.

Before the war, via the luggage trade, which was especially prevalent in Hatay, ordinary citizens were able to bring food products (e.g., sugar, tea, rice) and items like gas, fuel oil, and spare parts to Turkey from Syria. They would go to Syria for the day, and they would bring the goods back to Turkey with them in their luggage, and they could sell at a profit, as these goods were much cheaper in Syria than they were in Turkey. In Hatay, almost 25,000 families used to bring goods from Syria via the luggage trade (Ayhan, Basılğan, and Algan, 2012). Though these families brought back some of these goods for their own personal use, they sold many of them and were able to make decent incomes since they could sell for more than the Syrian purchase price (Ayhan, Basılğan, and Algan, 2012). Once the Syrian civil war began, going to Syria and bringing back goods became impossible and, as Sevilay stated above, the people of Hatay whose livelihoods depended on the luggage trade were particularly affected.

In addition to tourism and border trade, other business sectors and industries were affected by the start of the Syrian civil war; among these was the trailer transportation industry. Mert, an insurance agent in Hatay, shares his observations with regard to the trailer transportation situation:

The big trailer transportation trailer companies in Hatay went bankrupt. Hatay is a province that owns the largest trailer fleet in the world in proportion to population. Hatay has a population of 1,500,000, and there are 8,200 trailers here and, I guess, 5,000 to 6,000 of these trailers are presently sitting idle. If you pay attention, on the street you will notice that there are trailer garages everywhere with trailers for sale. Before [the Syrian civil war], you could not see even one trailer in the province because they were all off on their respective voyages, shuttling goods to Syria and to other Arab countries beyond Syria... But when the sanctions were imposed, the trailer industry became entirely distressed.

Within Turkey, Hatay's trailer fleet is second only to Istanbul's. Since the majority of people living in Hatay speak Arabic, and because Hatay is right on the border that separates Turkey and Syria, Hatay is generally considered the center of land transportation when it comes to moving goods from Turkey into Syria and other Arab countries (Reçber and Ayhan, 2013). However, the trailer

transportation industry in Hatay suffered a great loss once the borders were closed. To demonstrate this, we need only to look at the numbers: in 2010, the number of trailers traveling from Hatay to Syria totaled 108,591, while this number fell to just over 6,000 during the first half of 2012¹ (Collinsworth, 2013).

Due to the changing conditions in Syria, in March 2012, the Turkish authorities put into place an alternative to the trailers that normally served to bring goods to and from the Arab countries. This alternative came in the form of roll on/roll off (RO-RO) boat voyages. However, a Ro-Ro boat's capacity is limited to between 85 and 90 trailers, and the boats are unable to transport, for example, fresh produce because they take too long to make their way to some Arab countries (Ayhan, Basılğan, and Algan, 2012). Further, costs associated with transportation via the boats are much higher than costs associated with trailer transportation.

In support of Mert's account of the situation, it was observed that several trailers in Hatay – trailers that were once too busy to sit idle – were waiting in garages to be sold. Neither the trailers nor many of those who operated them were able to continue working once the Syrian civil war began. As it had happened in the tourism sector, many citizens had taken out bank loans in order to purchase trailers, and like those who invested in tourism, people who invested in transportation lost out and became insolvent once the Syrian crisis began and the borders were closed.

While many discuss the way the Syrian civil war has negatively affected the local economy, some interviewees noted that the Syrian refugees who have taken refuge in Turkey have actually caused the region's economy to boom. Haydar, a manager of an olive oil business in Hatay, discussed the ways the Syrian civil war has positively affected Hatay's economy:

Right now, if I were to estimate [how many Syrians live] in Hatay's center and its villages, I would guess approximately 150,000 people. What

¹ Although Collinsworth stated that Hatay's economy has been negatively affected in some ways (e.g., trailer transportation) as a result of the Syrian crisis, she claims that the overall impact of the crisis was not especially great. The author supports this view by claiming that the share of Hatay's exports to Syria and the Middle Eastern countries via Syria is not so large that it would be affected as a result of the Syrian crisis. However, the author overlooks the fact that Turkey's total exports to Syria and other Middle Eastern countries was carried out via the border gates along the Turkish-Syrian border. Further, when the Cilvegözü border gate in Hatay was closed for security reasons, Turkey's total volume of exports to Syria and other Middle Eastern countries was negatively affected.

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do these 150,000 people do now that they live here? Since they brought their resources and their wealth, such as gold and currency, with them, they make investments here. They do business. For instance, they rent workplaces. What could I, as Syrian, do in my workplace? I could sell slippers, I could sell bread, I could sell foodstuff. Or I could provide a service. For instance, the Syrian that you saw a couple of minutes ago, his occupation is tailoring, but he is selling bread. Does this create loss in Hatay? No, it does not. There are now 150,000 more people living here, and they have a need to spend their currency on goods. What happens to their currency? It returns to Hatay, it remains in Hatay. They are using the gold or the currency that they brought, and since they are making their purchases here, their gold and currency stay with us here in Hatay. When their valuable things remain with us, we respond to them with what? We provide them with food; we sell them our fruits, vegetables, meat, and eggs. In exchange, we take their gold and their currency. Does this result in a loss for Turkey? I don't think so. I think that it benefits the country.

As Haydar stated, some wealthy refugees have taken refuge in Turkey as well, including the businesspersons and investors that were forced to flee Syria because of the civil war, and they have helped to enhance the Turkish economy in some ways. While the portable assets that the refugees brought with them to Turkey have served to positively affect the economies of the border provinces, it is estimated that the refugees have also deposited between \$2 and \$2.5 billion in banks around Hatay (Reçber and Ayhan, 2013).

Furthermore, as Haydar noted, some refugees, in order to maintain their lives, opened businesses in the provinces bordering Syria, and some others began working for local businesses in order to earn money. Roughly 3.4 million Syrian refugees, the majority of whom live in the provinces bordering Syria, spend a large part of their earnings on essentials such as food and clothing. This spending allowed for a boom to the economies in the regions bordering Syria, as it meant that money was circulating among the catering and merchandising sectors. For example, Metin, a pastry shop owner in Gaziantep, stated that he has benefited from the arrival of the Syrian refugees to region, as it has caused his daily sales of pastries and the like to increase significantly.

How the Arrival of the Syrian Refugees Affected the Housing Needs of the Turkish Citizens

There are two primary matters that the Syrian refugees who live outside of the camps must address in order to maintain their lives. The first matter has to do with housing, and the second involves securing work that will enable them to meet their everyday expenses. Since the majority of the Syrian refugees who entered the country live within the camps, they are a part of the job market and must find work. As a consequence, this has caused rent prices to increase and wages to decrease, especially in the provinces bordering Syria. This section will discuss how the Syrian refugees' migration to Turkey has affected homeowners as well as local citizens in Hatay and Gaziantep.

The arrival of the Syrian refugees to Turkey has had a significant impact on rental prices in the provinces positioned along the Turkish-Syrian border. The houses built in the region were built so as to keep supply and demand in balance, and this has served to determine their prices from the time they were first constructed. However, the influx of Syrian refugees to the area, has upset the supply-demand balance, and because there are not enough houses to satisfy the new demand, housing prices have increased. This imbalance and the resulting increase in housing prices has served the homeowners well, but it has done a disservice to both the Syrian refugees and the local citizens in search of housing to rent or purchase.

Some Turkish interviewees mentioned that it is not right to increase the rents just because there is an influx of Syrian refugees, and they also believe the homeowners' attitudes and opportunistic actions served to create the unusual increase in rents. Melike, a housewife in Gaziantep, discusses how some homeowners increased their rents and sale prices based on the assumption that the Syrian refugees would pay the homeowners' prices without question; she also explains how this has hurt both the refugees and the local Turkish citizens:

The Syrians are not the cause of the rent increase. I mean, the Syrians came at the end, and they had no choice but to seek housing. I mean if the homeowner asks for 1,000 liras [~\$290], then they will pay it; they are ready to rent a very small house since they have no other choice. I think that the attitude of the homeowners is wrong. I mean, we should not throw them out on the street; if we are a hospitable country, then we will be a good host to the refugees. We have a conscience, and the homeowners don't have to increase their rents just because those seeking housing are Syrians... Also,

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they should not increase the housing costs so much for Turks either. They should rent their houses according to their real values to both Turks and Syrians. I do not find the attitude of the Turkish citizens, the homeowners especially, to be particularly nice in this regard... They should be conscientious, and they should offer to rent or sell their houses to both Syrians and Turks for normal prices... As far as I see it, right now, both are victims because of the inflated rents.

Although the influx of Syrian refugees to the provinces bordering Syria, and their need for more housing than was available, caused rents to increase, it is clear that homeowners' attitudes also served as catalysts for the increase in housing prices. While some homeowners aware of the refugees' housing needs made their houses available to the Syrians for free, others took advantage of the situation and took the opportunity to rent out their houses to the individuals – either Turk or Syrian – willing and able to pay the highest prices.

Turkish interviewees also criticized the homeowners for demanding higher rents from Turkish occupants once the refugees put greater demand on the housing market. When the Turkish occupants could not or would not pay the increased rent, the homeowners often evicted them and placed Syrian renters in the houses because they were willing to pay the higher rent amounts just so that they could secure housing for themselves. İhsan, a Turkish real estate consultant in Gaziantep, stated that he earns 2,000 liras [\$580] per month, and he spends 1,000 liras [\$290] of his income on rent. He claimed that his landlord is firm regarding the rent amount and the due date, and if İhsan were to opt to vacate the house, the homeowner could easily rent it out to a Syrian for 1,500 liras [\$435] per month.

The interviewees also stated that the influx of Syrian refugees has affected the sale prices of houses available on the housing market. The interviewees stated that, once demand on the housing market grew, homeowners in Hatay and Gaziantep began to sell their houses at much higher prices than they had previously. One Turkish interviewee explained that she had been wanting to buy a brand new house for some time, but once the Syrian refugees arrived, the houses that had been selling for 100,000 liras [\$29,000] almost doubled in price in Gaziantep, and it became difficult for her to find a house she could afford. Other academic studies conducted in the provinces bordering

Syria have also verified that the selling prices of the houses increased in the provinces such as Gaziantep (ORSAM and TESEV, 2015).

How the Arrival of the Syrian Refugees Affected the Labor Market

Like everyone else in Turkey, the Syrian refugees who choose not to stay in the camps must work and earn money in order to maintain their lives. However, the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey has meant a much larger labor pool, which has caused a decline in the value of work. Labor is further devalued because Syrians have been willing to work for lower wages than Turks in order to get any job that may provide them a living. A number of studies done in other host countries suggest that incoming refugee populations in those countries have also caused the value of labor to fall (Chambers, 1986; Kok, 1989; Kreibaum, 2014).

In Turkey, especially in the provinces bordering Syria, such as Hatay and Gaziantep, the decline labor wages has negatively affected the living standards of many Turkish citizens, especially low-income Turkish citizens. Hasan, a Turkish graduate assistant in Hatay, explained how the Syrian refugees' participation in the labor market has affected the Turkish workers:

I think that the arrival of the Syrians affected the labor market. Before, a Turkish citizen was able to find a job with a minimum wage; right now, you can employ a Syrian for one-fourth the wage of a Turkish citizen. Since this is the case, I don't think that the Turkish workers have any influence on their employers anymore. I mean, they are no longer able to say no to their employers since there are too many Syrian workers ready to do the work the Turks won't do. I mean, the employer says that if you do not want to work, I can hire four Syrians instead of you, and I will make them work their arses off.

The Syrian refugees accept the low wages offered, and this has caused the Turkish workers to have to work for wages much lower than they would be willing to accept under normal conditions. The Turkish workers have begun to get less than they deserve and, like the Syrian refugees, have begun to experience financial hardships. Further, during the period before the Syrian refugees came, the Turkish workers were able to pursue their rights and fight against injustice, but once the refugees arrived to Turkey, the Turkish workers (especially those who share the same businesses with the Syrians) began to refrain from pursuing their rights. The Turkish workers began to take into

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consideration the existence of the plethora of refugees who stood waiting outside in hopes of securing work; the increased competition for work meant that the Turks felt less secure in their ability to gain work and require more of employers by pursuing their rights and decent wages. Because the refugees created rivalry in the labor market and brought down the wages, the local people felt uneasy about their presence (Kok, 1989). The employers are, of course, to blame in this because they are able to hire Syrians willing to work for low wages. The employers create unfair competition between not only the Turkish citizens and the Syrian refugees, but also between the businesses that want and do not want to employ Syrians.

In addition to working for low wages, the Syrian refugees' were also forced to work in jobs for which they were largely overqualified, and this caused unemployment among the region's low-income Turkish citizens to increase. Mahir, a Turkish artisan in Gaziantep, assessed the ways in which the Syrian refugees affected Turkish citizens' employment:

The open-door policy has had negative effects on Turkey. Right now, in the construction sector, in factories, in artisan shops, the Syrians make up the majority of workers [in Gaziantep]. Additionally, Turkish citizens are living in a country where the minimum wage doesn't mean much. Because of present circumstances, the employers are firing or laying-off Turkish workers and employing Syrians for cheap. Our people have become victims because of this. When you go to Ayakkabıcılar [a neighborhood in Gaziantep], all of the workers are Syrian; the tailor studios, the factories are all Syrian. I mean, this has damaged our people. I mean, our citizens used to earn 1,000 liras [~\$290] minimum wage, and they used to pay 200 to 300 liras [~\$58 to \$85] for rent, and now it is hard to find a house in Gaziantep for less than 400 liras [~\$117].

Gaziantep, which is the largest industrial province in southeastern Turkey, owns tens of factories. It was observed during visits to places of business in Gaziantep, as Mahir stated, the majority of Syrians work in the shoe-making, textile, construction, and agricultural sectors. While the Turkish citizens who are formally employed in the provinces bordering Syria are not affected by the Syrian refugees' involvement in the labor market (because most of the refugees do not have formal work permits), the local citizens who earn low wages and who work in the irregular and unregistered labor markets, such

as agriculture (Del Carpio and Wagner, 2015) and construction, have been most affected by the arrival of the refugees (Çetingüleç, 2014). Studies conducted regarding the impacts of Syrian refugees on the host countries' agricultural sectors indicate that the refugees' arrival served to displace a number of native agricultural workers (Del Carpio and Wagner, 2015).

The unemployment problem discussed here affected primarily low-income locals who work in low-skill jobs (Ceritoğlu, et al., 2015), and the excessive increase in rents among the border provinces created more problems for these citizens. In Hatay and Gaziantep, many of the interviewees discussed the fact that the local citizens were unable to secure work once the Syrian refugees arrived to the region. Although the majority of the Turkish citizens stated that the arrival of the Syrian refugees affected the labor market negatively by lowering wages, just as the citizens criticized homeowners for increasing rents, they criticized employers for making them work for less pay and for longer hours. The interviewees believe that what the employers are doing is unethical, as they are forcing the Syrian refugees to work without work permits or insurance. This form of exploitation serves as an opportunity to employers who are able to achieve increased output by employing more workers at lower wages. However, the employers have to take into consideration the serious problems they may face should the Syrian refugees experience work-related accidents without insurance in their workplace.

It is not only the low-skilled businesses that have benefited from the influx of Syrian refugees; businesses that require higher skilled and experienced workers have also benefited from the Syrians. In particular, the Turkish interviewees in Gaziantep stated that the majority of the Syrian refugees worked in the textile sector in Syria, which means that they are very specialized with regard to textiles and can thus serve as personnel in the workshops and factories that operate in the textile sector. Arif, a Turkish artisan and retired teacher in Gaziantep, assessed how the Syrian refugees have affected industries and businesses in Gaziantep:

The Syrians' arrival has also had a positive effect [on Turkey]. For instance, some industries have experienced difficulties in finding experienced or qualified citizens to work. Once the Syrians arrived, however, many of these industries began to find the necessary qualified or experienced personnel. But because the government has pursued a negative

policy with regard to Syrians working, the employers are obliged to make them work illegally. This has resulted in some negativity.

Even though the refugees present an economic burden to the countries that host them, when their skills and education are put to use in the appropriate sectors, they are able to contribute to the economy of the host countries (Fielden, 2008). Gaziantep, one of the most industrial provinces in Turkey, is home to several textile businesses and factories. A significant portion of the Syrian refugees who fled to Turkey have specialization that is pertinent to this sector, and this has served not only the small scale businesses but also the larger factories that operate in this field in the east and southeast provinces of Turkey (e.g., Gaziantep).

The Turkish interviewees also stated that the Syrian refugees have affected the labor market by opening new businesses in Hatay and Gaziantep. Syrian refugees have opened bakeries, groceries, butcher shops, hair salons, and hookah shops – all of which appeal especially to Syrians – in both Hatay and Gaziantep. The Turkish shopkeepers have complained about the Syrians opening these shops since they believed that many of the Syrians' shops are unregistered. This means that the businesses do not pay taxes for the revenues they generate, do not insure their workers, and use cheap or poor-quality raw materials. The Turkish interviewees stated that, due to the taxes and insurance fees they pay and the qualified products they use, the Syrians' shops present unfair competition; this annoys the Turkish interviewees. In Turkey, in order for a foreigner to open a new business, it is required that he or she be in possession of a residency permit, a work permit and a business permit. In addition, the individual(s) hoping to open a business must complete the official documents that are to be submitted to the municipality, the finance office, and the chamber of artisans. As told via the domestic media, Turkish citizens often report the Syrian businesses that have been opened and are operating without the required permits or the required official documents. Whether the Turkish citizens report them or they detected by the authorities, if these businesses are determined to be unlawful, they are closed (Ercan, 2014). The Turkish citizens have already expressed their annoyance at the refugees' presence in Turkey, however, and the fact that the Syrians have opened new business in Turkey only adds fuel to this fire, as it suggests that the Syrians are planning on remaining in Turkey permanently.

How the Syrian Refugees Affected Turkey's National Security

One of the foremost elements that have served to ensure social stability is the achievement of citizens' security. When people do not feel secure in a given environment, they cannot be expected to be happy or to maintain a sense of peace that is characteristic of social stability. In the interviews conducted with the local people in Hatay and Gaziantep, one of the most important issues the citizens stressed had to do with the fact that they stopped feeling secure once the Syrians arrived in Turkey. The interviewees' primary security concerns include the lack of proper control over Syrians' abilities to enter and exit the country. The acts of terror – some of which were the work of Syrian militants who managed to make it into the country amidst the refugees – have been experienced in Turkey. Additional crimes that are claimed to be connected to Syrians include assault, burglary, and murder (which was facilitated in part by the ease with which the Syrians can escape Turkey and return to Syria); and the fact that the Syrians' wander around at nights in groups, and disquieting the local people.

While the majority of the Turkish interviewees stated that Turkey's open-door policy is necessary in the event of war in order not to victimize the people who fled from Syria, they stressed that there needs to be more control over Syrians' abilities to enter and exit the country. Some local people have security concerns regarding acts of terror the country has experienced; terrorists of Syrian origin who entered the country along with the refugees have carried out most of these acts. Bombings occurred in the town of Reyhanlı in Hatay on May 11, 2013 and at the Cilvegözü border gate in Hatay on February 11, 2013, and these actions resulted in the death of a number of civilians, which has prompted local people to become concerned about security, particularly in Hatay.

The Syrian refugee crisis resulted in an influx of refugees trying to make their way into Turkey, and was no easy feat for Turkey to properly control this influx at all points along the border, as Turkey and Syria share 911 kilometers of borderland. Despite all of the security precautions taken, it would have been impossible to ensure that no illegal crossings occurred. In conflict zones there is always a risk that the rebel groups may transport their networks into the host countries, and this presents a security threat to these countries (Kreibaum, 2014). In recent years, Turkey has been a target of terror organizations. The terror organizations that want to take advantage of Turkey's open-door policy have begun to enter the country, along with refugees, via the Turkish-Syrian

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border, and once they make it into the country, they carry out their acts of terrorism in large provinces, such as Ankara and Istanbul, which results in the deaths of many civilians. It should be expected that these threats will create security concerns among the people who live in the country; however, these concerns have given rise to the illusion that all refugees are terrorists, which means that all refugees are often blamed for the actions of a few.

Further, the idea that the refugees' ability to enter and exit the country whenever they wanted generated the illusion among Turkish citizens that the refugees are inclined to commit crimes. Some local people believe there are refugees who are less inclined to refrain from committing crimes because they can easily flee to Syria, and escape arrest, once they have committed a crime in Turkey. It is because of this that many local citizens believe that the rate of crime has increased in the region since the refugees arrived. It is true, of course, that along with the 3.4 million refugees fleeing the Syrian war and the atrocities associated with it, some people inclined to engage in crime crossed the border into Turkey. These people did not just become inclined toward crime once they made it to Turkey, however; they committed criminal acts when they lived in Syria as well. That said, interviews conducted with the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry of Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) authorities, who cited the Directorate General of Security official records, suggest that relatively few Syrian refugees have been involved in crime. It is not expected that Syrian refugees would engage in criminal activity since they have taken refuge in Turkey and view it as a safe haven for themselves. Nonetheless, the local people who, under normal conditions, might not react much to criminal acts that occur during the day (such as an assault or burglary) tend to react in much more profound ways when they believe that Syrians are responsible for the crimes. For instance, in Gaziantep, where the aforementioned crimes had been committed, the local people began protesting via marches through neighborhoods occupied primarily by Syrian refugees. There had even been initiatives put forth to lynch the refugees. Halit, a worker in a private company in Gaziantep, discussed this:

Sometime last year, the Syrian refugees caused a serious problem for Gaziantep. For instance, with regard to housing and employment, they began to disturb people. For instance, we, the people of Gaziantep are peaceful people. I mean, we do not fight with one another or with others

easily... Last year, however, the presence of the Syrians really began to affect the people of Gaziantep. The people rebelled. It was even shown on TV. What did the Syrians do? It happened in four different neighborhoods. For example, a landlord wanted to collect rent, and a Syrian refugee cut the landlord's throat. The Syrian refugee begged for money from a Turkish citizen, and when the citizen did not give him money, the refugee killed the Turk. The people in Gaziantep could not endure this. The Turkish citizens rebelled; they began setting the Syrians' cars on fire or beating the Syrians who passed them in the street. When the government realized that the people were rebelling, and that the situation was going from bad to worse, it came around and collected all of the Syrians whose living conditions were poor – this included those, for example, who were sleeping in garages - and settled them in the camps. I mean, the government forced them to leave the city. Right now, Gaziantep is more relaxed regarding all of this than it was last year.

More recently, thanks to measures put in place by the government, things are more under control. Still, even though the crime rate is low among Syrian refugees, something as abstract as rumors about the refugees engaging in crimes is enough to stir up a strong sense of anger among the local people, and this leads the local people to hope that the Syrians will return their country as soon as the war ends. Because of this, and in order to resolve the issues at hand and prevent things like this from happening again, both parties must approach one another with more tolerance.

Last but not least, the local people who live in the Hatay and Gaziantep stated that they are unsettled because of the refugees who wander around in crowded groups at all hours of the night. The local people no longer prefer to go out in the evenings after a certain hour, and this places limitations on their social lives. It is understandable that, given the high number of people from different cultures who have been forced suddenly to live together in the region, some people will have to make adjustments to their social expectations. However, some adjustments are too much to expect. Turkish people in the region now feel restricted in terms of their social activities and this problem is the outcome of two different cultural groups living together in the same region, and it is not likely that this will be resolved in the near future unless the refugees return to Syria.

How the Syrian Refugees Have Affected the Healthcare System in Turkey

Based on observations and interviews conducted in the provinces of Hatay and Gaziantep, another area where there seems to be some notable problems, as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey, is the country's healthcare system. My personal observations, which were made in both the public and private hospitals, served to demonstrate just how overcrowded the outpatient clinics and emergency services are. The majority of the crowdedness is the result of long waiting times. Further, the number of doctors and hospital personnel are insufficient to meet the increasing demand on healthcare services, a demand that has grown due to the arrival of the Syrian refugees, and that physically and mentally exhausts hospital personnel and causes them to be less attentive to their patients, regardless of whether those patients are Turkish or Syrian. In the interviews conducted with the local people who live in these provinces, I learned that many of them attempt to deal with the overcrowded hospitals by either going to private hospitals or, if there is no genuine emergency, just avoiding the hospital altogether. The people in these regions, especially those who have to go to public, university, and research and practice hospitals due to their financial constraints, also complained about the reduced quality of service.

Another matter that troubles those who live in Hatay is that the local hospitals seem to give priority to the Syrian refugees in the medical examination lines. The majority of the interviewees stated that even though they themselves arrived to the hospital earlier, the Syrian refugees are always given priority status while waiting in the hospitals' examination lines. Cüneyt, a university professor in Hatay, responded to the question regarding the changes he has experienced in the healthcare sector:

When my family and I go to the hospital, we prefer to go to the university hospital. In the morning, when the outpatient services start at the university hospital, the hospital staff says that we have to let the Syrians come first. The citizens react to this. I mean, I am a Turkish citizen paying taxes; I am a citizen of this country, so why do the Syrian refugees get to be seen first? I have money taken from me; why isn't any money taken from them? In fact, they have a point. There, in the hospital, if the Syrians need to be seen first, that's fine, but perhaps the hospital personnel could make it

less obvious by not shouting for a Syrian patient to be seen while there are several Turkish citizens waiting to be seen.

In contrast to what the interviewees in Hatay said, the interviewees in Gaziantep have stated that they have not noticed that the Syrians have been given priority status. Further, these interviewees stated that all people schedule their medical examination appointments either by phone or Internet, and their position in the line is based on the time for which they made their appointments. Although the Syrians are not given priority in the waiting lines in either Hatay or Gaziantep hospitals, there are times when some Syrians may need to be examined before the Turkish citizens waiting in line because of emergency situations (e.g., many Turkish interviewees in Hatay stated that they have seen several people who came from Syria and who were seriously wounded due to attacks in Syria) or because of other valid reasons. This disturbs the Turkish citizens, though, and causes them to believe that all Syrians are given priority in the hospitals.

Yet another problem in the healthcare system, as noted by the local citizens of Gaziantep, is that the medical examinations have been taking too long because the hospital staff and the Syrian refugees are unable to communicate effectively because they do not speak the same language. This is less of a problem in Hatay than in Gaziantep because many of the local people, including hospital staff, speak Arabic. Even though the Turkish government placed translators in the hospitals located among the borders provinces where most of the Syrian refugees live, there are too few translators to keep up with demand. This means that there are problems with the refugees receiving proper medical treatment, and it also contributes greatly to other patients' extended waiting times. Melike, a housewife in Gaziantep, summarizes an event that she experienced in Gaziantep Children's Hospital:

The situation in the hospitals is hard for both the Turkish citizens and the Syrian refugees. Because an interpreter is required for each doctor to explain to each Syrian patient what his or her problem is, we must wait for hours to be seen. Therefore, at least one interpreter is required for each doctor. As a result of this, we have all become victims. We must wait, I mean, because the exchange between the doctor and the Syrian patient takes longer than half an hour. Even the medical exam takes less time. They became victims, but so did we.

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In addition to the service-related and communication problems that people have been experiencing, the local people have other health concerns related to the Syrian refugees. For example, many local people may be developing uneasiness due to the re-vaccination of their children for some diseases after the Syrians arrived. This situation has especially affected families with children, as these families are concerned about the health of their children. Demir, a high school teacher in Hatay, discussed his anxiety related to this:

There are vaccinations that the Ministry of Health provides. When you ask why they are providing these vaccinations, they say, ‘With the Syrians has come the risk of certain diseases spreading.’ Because of this, we have begun to behave or act in a more cautious manner. For example, we used to take our children to the park all the time, and now we take them less. You know our Atatürk Park, the Big Park? Most of the people there now are Syrians. When you go to the children’s play area, more than half of the people there are Syrians. So, I am afraid to take my child there, but I have to so that he can spend time in the natural environment. I keep my eyes on him the entire time, though! I don’t allow him to come into close contact, and I try to prevent him from touching the other children.

Like Demir, other parents with small children began to worry about the health of their kids due to the re-emergence or increase of some infectious childhood diseases after the arrival of the Syrian refugees. The risk of emerging diseases being spread always increases during wartime, and this is especially true when services and basic infrastructure are poorly functioning, which results in people not being able to sufficiently benefit from healthcare services and not having access to particularly hygienic living conditions (Erçoban, 2014). Polio has not been a problem in Turkey in so long, and there has not even been need for the vaccination, but the disease, along with other diseases such as measles and oriental sores, began cropping again (Gaziantep Ticaret Odası, 2015). Therefore, many Turkish citizens have opted to keep their children from sharing public spaces with Syrian children to prevent their exposure to potential sickness.

The problems experienced with regard to the healthcare system in the region, the slowing down of service, the lowered service quality, and the need to re-vaccination Turkish children against some infectious childhood diseases serve to disturb and worry local citizens. While some of the interviewees stated

that they prefer private hospitals, others stated that they prefer to go to the hospitals in the nearby cities in order to be examined. Even though the government has taken some measures aimed at remedying the deficiencies here, the measures seem to have fallen short.

Conclusion

In sum, this study examined how the Turkish citizens living in Hatay and Gaziantep, have been affected by the arrival of Syrian refugees to the region. Through observations and oral interviews conducted with the Turkish citizens in the region, the researcher was able to discern what problems the Turkish citizens have had with the Syrian refugees. The abnormal increases in rent and sale prices of houses, and the observable decrease in labor wages in the irregular labor market are among the initial complaints the Turkish citizens discussed. Additional problems, such as the breakdowns in the healthcare system and security concerns of the local citizens, were also discussed in detail. A number of Turkish citizens are concerned about security because by posing as refugees, some Syrian terrorists have infiltrated Turkey and have organized bloody attacks on civilians.

Even though the government has taken some steps so far to minimize the problems the Turkish citizens began experiencing after the arrival of the Syrian refugees to the region, more tangible solutions need to be implemented. For instance, given the current conditions, it would be beneficial to everyone (both local Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees) if the Turkish Government worked quickly to take some extra measures such as constructing health centers that serve only Syrians to reduce the language-related deficiencies in the healthcare service; preventing illegal entries into Turkey by enhancing border security to reduce the security concerns of the local Turkish citizens; inspecting businesses regularly (especially the ones in bordering provinces) in order to make sure both the Syrian and Turkish employees are paid no less than the minimum wage; and to obviate landlords from arbitrarily increasing the rental and sale prices of their houses, which might call for preventive regulations that would, for example, prohibit the landlords from renting their houses out for more than a pre-determined annual rate. Though they may not address all of these problems as thoroughly as they need to be addressed, these steps will go a long way to resolving many of the problems that have plagued the region.

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