

## Current Migration Data and Main Problem Areas Relating to Syrian refugees in Turkey

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### ABSTRACT

The events that started in the neighbouring country Syria in March 2011 within the framework of the popular uprisings that took place in Arab countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, which is referred to as the "Arab Spring" in the literature, turned into great chaos and civil war in a short time. The civil war in Syria has brought along a great humanitarian tragedy, security problem and mass migration wave to neighbouring countries. Nearly ten million Syrians have turned to internal and external immigrants. In this context, humanitarian concerns and the "open door policy" that opened its borders to all Syrians seeking asylum in Turkey, there are already three and half million have been given temporary asylum to Syrian refugees. Despite the end of the wave of refugees, Turkey is still a case of escape and a country of asylum for refugees. Therefore, it is too essential to collect and analyse the latest migration trends in Turkey. In this study, first Turkey's latest migration trends, with their analysis of data and statistics, will be made, and graphs, maps and tables will support it. Then, the problems of Syrian refugees and Turkey's issues are facing through the process of dealing with the refugees. Besides, the study results available that refugees' problems and potential risks to Turkey are assessed.

### 1. Introduction

Today, one of the most important and difficult to solve problems in many countries of the world is undoubtedly migration. The fact that transportation facilities are better than the old ones and the forced push factors such as continuing poverty, war, conflict in certain regions, and pull factors such as better living facilities cause thousands of people to change places within countries or among countries every year. However, this mobility can lead to serious political, social, cultural, ethnic and religious problems, especially in the geographies it reaches. Migrants are experiencing harmonisation problems with the people living in these places, and immigrants are not accepted in the place where they move if they are too many. Undoubtedly, it is significant that the influence of immigrants on food, housing, employment, social life and culture in the place that they emigrate. These effects have led to the need for governance of migration, which has caused countries to produce policy taking legal and institutional measures. The increase in the amount of migration in certain periods causes some countries to make new regulations in order to review these policies or measures.

Turkey is a country on the migration route, constantly is facing immigration, and exposed to migration resulting from war and other conflicts occurring around the country in some periods. This migration causes some major problems in Turkey. Therefore, Turkey also produces policies to overcome migration problems and serves institutional, legal arrangements. Turkey was one of the first countries to sign the 1951 Geneva Convention<sup>2</sup> relating to the refugees' status, and it did this with a 'geographical limitation'<sup>3</sup>. For immigrants, Turkey seems to be a bridge to Europe with better living conditions for themselves. Many people's movement to Europe because of violence, conflict, and poverty has caused member states to implement restrictive migration policies. Hence, the European Union also ensures the security of its member states asked to build a strong immigration control system in Turkey, a transit country to Europe. It is also important to mention that such factors like internal developments within

<sup>2</sup> 1951 U.N. Convention on the Status of Refugees ("Refugee Convention"), which means that only those fleeing as a consequence of "events occurring in Europe"

<sup>3</sup> only to people originating from Europe

Turkey transform it into a "migration transition". The first signs of a modification policy in the field of immigration are becoming increasingly obvious and the European Union has been a major driving force since the early 2000s. As an example, as part of pre-accession requirements, Turkey has to harmonise its legislation in the spheres identified in the EU "Accession Partnership" document.<sup>4</sup> Especially, the "Action Plan on Asylum and Migration" accepted by the government in the March 2005, arranges the duties and the timetable Turkey aims to follow in order to prepare for the development of a fully-fledged national status determination system, lift the geographical limitation and adopt EU instructions on asylum and migration general.<sup>6</sup>

In 2011, the process that emerged as the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East affected Syria with countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The crisis and internal conflicts in Syria, Turkey, and some countries of the region have been affected significantly. In this process, hundreds of thousands of Syrians fled from the regime and took refuge in the countries of the region and consequently, Turkey has undergone a very large refugee flow. In this process, Turkey's refugee policy developed in the framework of the open-door policy, and the status of Syrians in Turkey has been identified as temporary protection. In this context, a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection<sup>7</sup> was adopted by the parliament in 2013 and this law officially declares the foundation of the General Directorate of Migration Management.

The number of refugees in Turkey has reached over 3.7 million, including Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Iranians, and Somalis, making Turkey the host country with the largest refugee population globally. Out of these, nearly 230 000 people are hosted in 23 camps run by the Turkish authorities (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority/AFAD), where refugees have access to shelter, health, education, food and social activities. Despite these efforts from the government and local authorities and the generosity of host communities, most Syrian refugees and many other refugees from other nationalities live outside the camps, under very challenging situations with depleted resources. Registered refugees have access to public services, including education and healthcare. European Commission humanitarian funding for Turkey under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: €1.4 billion in 2016-2017. Total aid under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: €3 billion in 2016-2017.<sup>8</sup> The flagship humanitarian programme funded by the EU in 2017 is the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a debit card-based social assistance scheme that will allow up to 1.3 million of the most vulnerable refugees to meet their most pressing basic needs.<sup>9</sup> With initial financing of €348 million from the EU, the implementing partner, the World Food Programme, in collaboration with the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish government institutions, distributes electronic debit cards to refugee families through which payments are made directly to families. (NATO - Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), 2017)

This study examines Turkey's latest migration trends with its data and statistics analysis, which will be supported with graphs, maps, and tables. Besides, the study results reveal that refugees' problems and potential risks to Turkey are assessed.

## 2. Data on Syrian Refugees in Turkey

The refugees in Turkey have reached 3.6 million people made Turkey the host country with the most refugee population in the world. (UNHCR, 2021) A substantial portion of these refugees is the Syrian refugees who fled from the civil war in Syria to Turkey. Out of these, nearly 50 000 people are hosted in 7 camps run by the Turkish authorities where refugees have access to shelter, health, education, food and social activities. (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2021) Despite these efforts from the government and local authorities and the generosity of host communities, most Syrian refugees and many other refugees from different nationalities live outside the camps, under very challenging situations with depleted resources. Recorded refugees have access to public services, including education and healthcare. (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2018) Most of those saying that refugees living in camps have better conditions than those living outside of camps. Therefore, it is needed to generalise services so all the refugees can reach public services and ensure their security. (Velićeoğlu, 2014)

<sup>4</sup> "Accession Partnership Documents", Ministry for EU Affairs/Republic of Turkey, [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/Tur\\_En\\_Realitons/Apd/Turkey\\_APD\\_2008.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/Apd/Turkey_APD_2008.pdf)

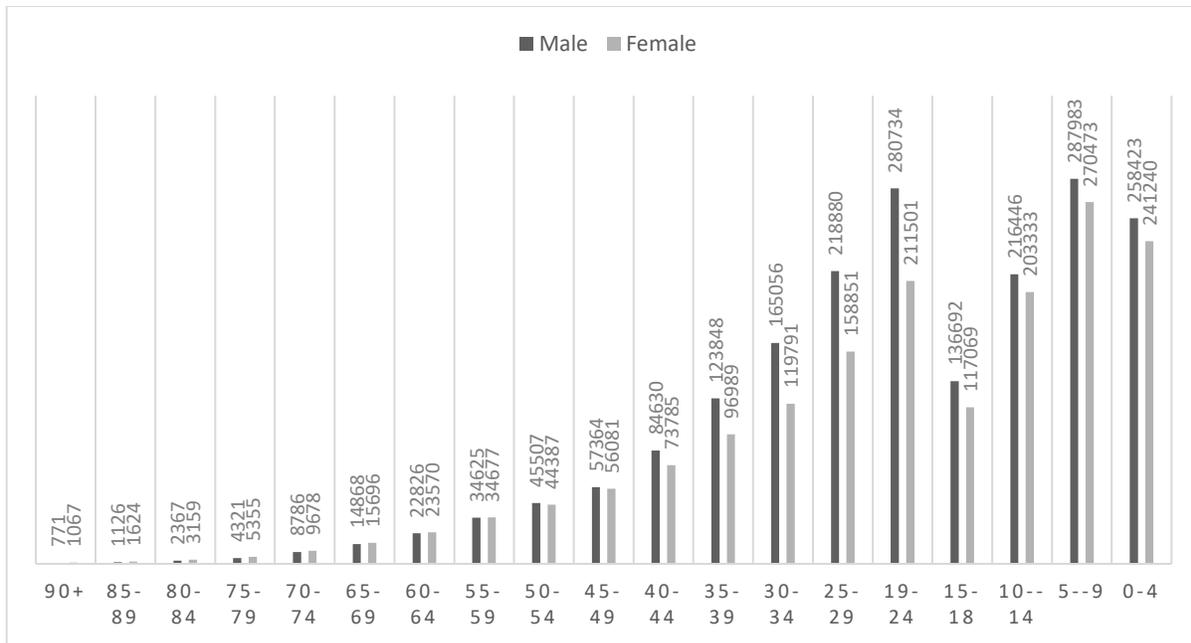
<sup>5</sup> Accession Partnership" documents lay down the tasks that Turkey has to implement to harmonize its laws and policies with that of the EU *acquis*. There is a whole section relating to issues under immigration. The most recent one is *Accession Partnership Strategy for Turkey*, Council Decision, 18 February 2008

<sup>6</sup> The Action Plan on "Asylum and Migration" was officially adopted by the Turkish government on 25 March 2005. It is available with a book entitled *Asylum and Migration Legislation*, Ankara, MOI and UNHCR, February 2006, at [www.unhcr.org.tr](http://www.unhcr.org.tr). The Border Management Action Plan was adopted 27 March 2006, *National Action Plan towards the Implementation of Turkey's Integrated Border Management Strategy*, Ankara, MOI, March 2006, This Action Plan too touches upon issues to do with immigration.

<sup>7</sup> *Law on Foreigners and International Protection*, Directorate General of Migration Management, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior, Ankara, 2013, [http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng\\_minikanun\\_5\\_son.pdf](http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf)

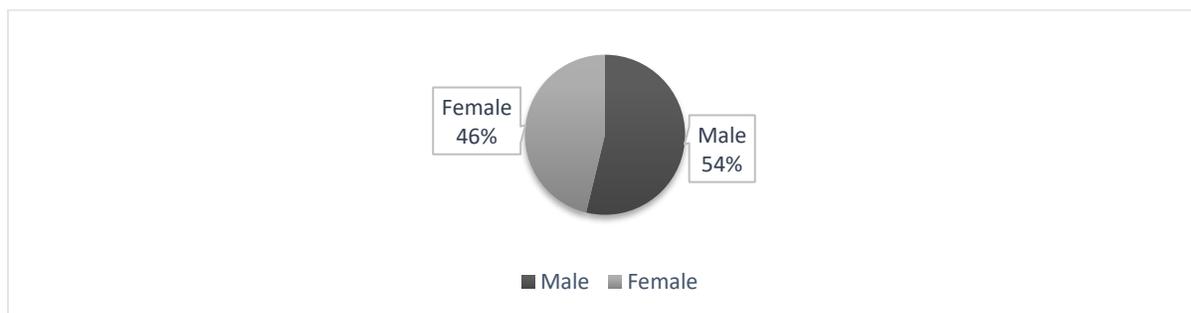
<sup>8</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations under European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey\\_syrian\\_crisis\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey_syrian_crisis_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Emergency Social Safety Net(ESSN) under European Commission, <https://www.essncard.com/>



**Table 1:** Distribution by Age and Gender of Registered Syrian Refugees Recorded by Taking Biometric Data (by the date of 10.02.2021) Source: Directorate General of Migration Management

According to the table above, the number of registered Syrians in Turkey as of February 10, 2021, compared to the previous month, an increase of 8 thousand 529 people, was a total of 3.6 million people; 1,965,253 of these people are men and 1,688,366 are women. According to the age range table, there are 1 million 731 thousand 659 Syrians in the 0-18 age range. The number of Syrians under the age of 10 is 1 million 58 thousand 119 people. In other words, 28.96% of Syrians are under ten years old. There are 745 thousand 996 people in the 15-24 age range defined as the young population. The young Syrian population ratio to the total number of Syrians is 20.41%. Turkey's young population ratio of 15.8%. The average age of registered Syrian statements by age 22. The average age of Turkey's population, according to 2018 data 31.

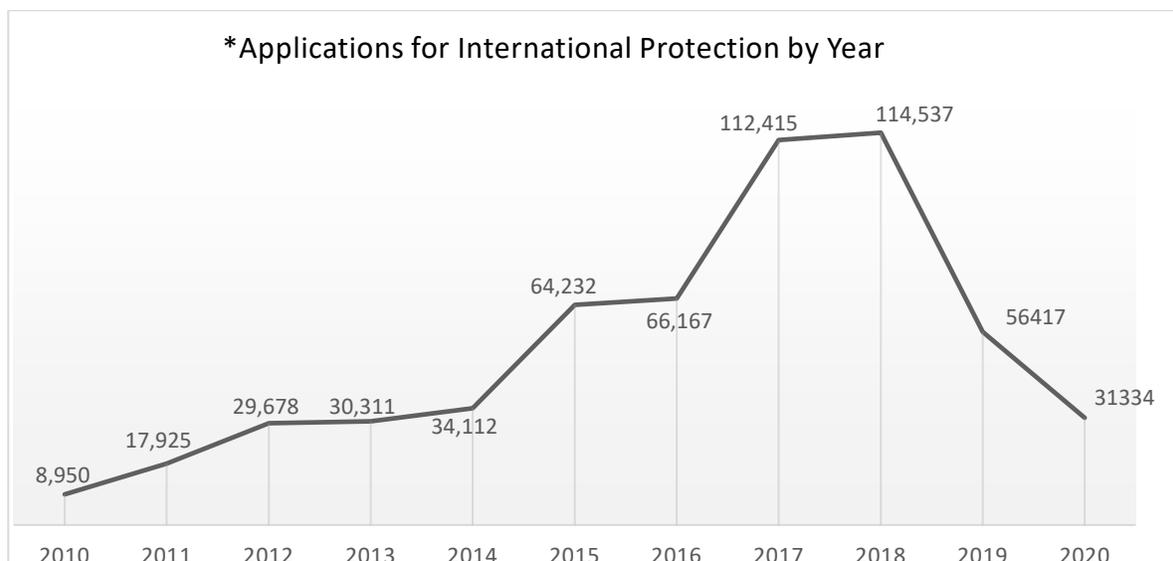


**Graph 1:** Distribution of Syrian refugees by gender Source: General Directorate of Migration Management (2019)

According to the table, the number of Syrian men is 276 thousand 887 more than the number of Syrian women. The most significant difference between the number of men and women is 69 thousand 233 people, in the 19-24 age range. This difference decreases as the number of ages increases. It is seen that the number of women in the age ranges above 55 is more than men. The ratio of registered Syrians under temporary protection to the Turkish population is 4.48%. Finally, the population of Turkey was announced by TurkStat as 82 million 3 thousand 882 people.

### 2.1 International Protection

Although international protection is an event of immigration, it is an event of human mobility that is handled separately from other migration movements for particular reasons. The concept of international protection, which has religious, moral, social, economic, and human dimensions, which has emerged under the influence of social and political phenomena as in the past, still maintains its importance for the world and humanity.



**Graph 2:** Applications for International Protection by Year, Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (2020)

The international protection field has established itself as the leading international human rights instruments. As a result of states' inability to protect their citizens, the demands and needs of international protection arise. Due to its nature of international protection, it can be defined as protecting refugees and asylum-seekers as a form of protection that replaces citizenship protection. The primary responsibility for the provision of international protection belongs to the state in which the asylum seeker requests asylum. Besides, under international law, all states have an obligation to provide international protection to asylum seekers. Turkey is also involved in preparing the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Legal Status of Refugees in which Turkey is considered the essential document of international refugee law.

In 2018, the number of international protection applications increased to 114,537 with a 1% increase compared to 2017. From 2010 to the end of 2018, the number of international protection applications was 478,327. The number of international protection requests in 2018 constitutes 23% of the total number of applications submitted from 2010 to 2018. There can be a decrease in international protection applications in 2019 with 56,417 and in 2020 31,334.

## **2.2 Resettlement of Syrian Refugees to 3rd Countries**

The resettlement process of Syrian refugees in Turkey within the scope of Temporary Protection, in coordination with the Immigration Administration General Directorate, and the lists of demographics of Syrians determined by the commissions established within the governorships are decided based on resettlement criteria. Accordingly, persons in need of treatment, people with disabilities, victims of violence or torture, women/children at risk, unaccompanied older people over 65 years of age and individuals in need of physical/legal or psychosocial protection are considered to be in priority and regarded as having special needs.

R.N	COUNTRY	RESETTLED
1	Canada (UNHCR)	5.231
2	USA	3.944
3	Canada (Direct)	2.645
4	Britain	2.524
5	Norway	1.926
6	Swedish	168
7	Australia	115
8	Austria	58
9	Belgium	46
10	Luxembourg	46
11	Romania	43
12	Bulgaria	39
13	Liechtenstein	18
14	Iceland	15
15	New Zealand	13

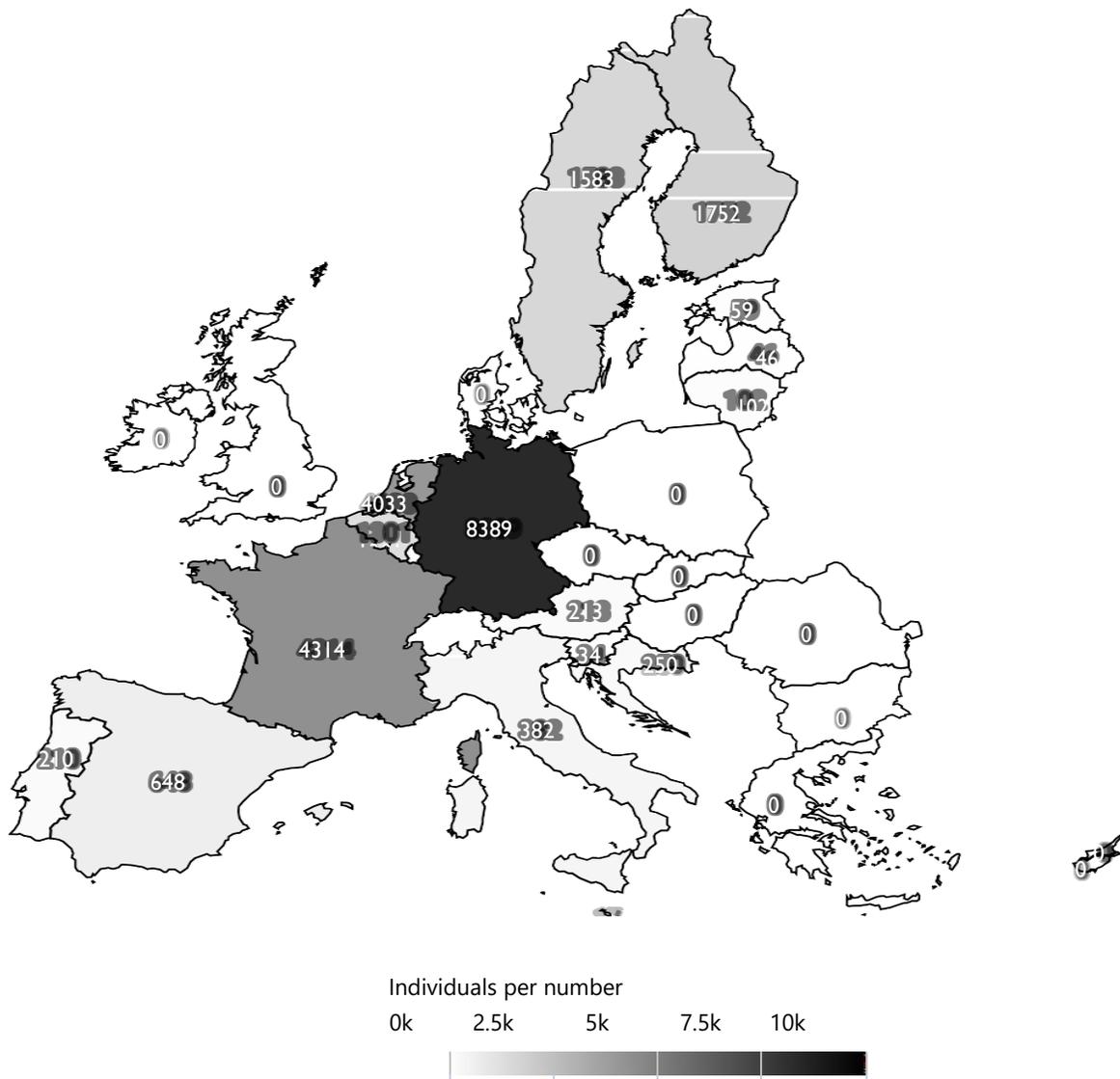
16	Netherlands	3
17	France	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16.835</b>

**Table 2:** Resettlement of Syrians in the 3rd Countries within 2014-2021, Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (17.02.2021)

As a result of the evaluation, those in need are shown as candidates for resettlement program. The lists that are notified to the General Directorate through the governorates are shared with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees after the necessary examinations and evaluations have been made. UNHCR submits to resettlement countries. After the required assessments are made on the information provided in the list, the persons accepted by these countries are notified to General Directorate to allow them to leave our country, and those who do not have an obstacle to exit are permitted to leave. States have set quotas for the resettlement of Syrians. These quotas are discussed with countries.

According to the figures given in the table above, the first three countries in which Syrian refugees are resettled between 2014-2021 are Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively. Thus, the number of Syrian refugees resettled in Canada between 2014-2019 constitutes 45 per cent of the total number of Syrians resettled.

**2.3 One-to-One Formula**



Map 1: Numbers of Syrian refugees left Turkey under the one-to-one formula Source: Own edition (2019)

One-to-one placement within the framework of the March 18 agreement<sup>10</sup>, it is defined as the placement of a Syrian foreigner in European Union countries in return for Syrian irregular immigrants who were trying to pass to Greek islands over Turkey.

In this context, as of 05.09.2019, Syrians who have been placed in European countries as one-to-one are situated in Germany (8,389), France (4,314) and the Netherlands (4,033), respectively. The total number of Syrians who have been placed in European countries as the one-to-one formula is 23.539, and Germany has the most of them with the 35 per cent of the total number.

## 2.4 Irregular Migration

Irregular migration is an issue that needs to be assessed separately in terms of destination, transit and source countries. This concept includes persons who come to their countries illegally or do not come out within the legal exit period for target countries, while those who are crossing the country's borders for non-compliance with the necessary procedures when leaving the country of origin. For transit countries; refers to persons who enter the country legally or illegally to reach the destination country from the source countries and use it as a transit country. Due to its geographical location and political, social, and economic problems in neighbouring countries, Turkey is a target country and a transit country being a bridge in foreign nationals' transportation to European countries. Besides having long land and sea borders, it is located in a location with many border neighbours, and it proves Turkey's potential in the field of migration.

YEARS	Iraq	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Syria	Moldova	Palestine	Myanmar	Georgia	Iran	Other
17.02.2021	392	4.062	686	2.325	13	194	2	117	277	3.268
2020	3.836	50.161	13.487	17.562	126	2.059	104	1.070	3.562	30.335
2019	12.097	201.437	71.645	55.236	204	12.210	296	2.171	8.753	90.613
2018	17.629	100.841	50.438	34.053	269	10.545	378	3.153	4.066	46.631
2017	18.488	45.259	30.337	50.217	308	832	374	2.954	2.707	24.276
2016	30.947	31.360	19.317	69.755	256	365	1.169	2.679	1.817	16.801
2015	7.247	35.921	3.792	73.422	261	615	5.464	2.857	1.978	14.928
2014	1728	12.248	2.350	24.984	101	508	6.425	1.519	626	8.158

**Table 3:** Nationality Distribution of Irregular Migrants Caught by Years, Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (17.02.2021)

Turkey demonstrates its definite stance on irregular migration by taking active measures at the national level and actively participating in most of the studies in the field of identifying problems, exchange of information, joint struggle and cooperation in this field, and Turkey is working effectively and decisively in order to prevent irregular migration through the country and to remove illegal foreigners from the country. The activities related to irregular migration issues in Turkey are carried out in coordination with the General Directorate of Migration Management, by Land Forces Command, General Directorate of Security, General Command of Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Command related institutions.

According to the figures in the table above, between the years 2014-2019 (as of October 5, 2019), if we examine the irregularity of the immigrants caught, Syrians and Afghans in 2014 and 2015, Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis are the leading figures in 2016 and 2017, and in 2018 and 2019 there are Afghans, then Pakistanis and then Syrians.

Among the irregular migrants caught so far, there are the most captured Afghans, and in recent years they have been intensively trying to migrate irregularly and 2019 was the year when most irregular migrants were caught. These figures indicate that Turkey is heavily exposed to ever-increasing irregular migration. However, there has been a significant decrease in irregular migration in the last two years, especially in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic that closed borders and airports may cause decrease.

## 3. Main Issues of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

It is possible to examine the basic problems of Syrian refugees in Turkey: status, housing, education, health, and employment.

<sup>10</sup> Turkey and the European Union reconfirmed their commitment to the implementation of their joint action plan, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

### **3.1 Status Issue**

Although Turkey is a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Legal Status of Refugees, Turkey is reluctant to put refugee status in recognition for immigrants coming from outside Europe and offers "temporary protection". In this context, Syrian refugees in Turkey have been taken into temporary protective status, in accordance with Article 10 of the 1994 Regulations of the Ministry of Interior. With the legal regulation number 62 on Syrian refugees' situation dated 30 March 2012, "Syrians Coming for Asylum to Turkey and the Directive on the Admission and Housing of Stateless Persons Residing in Syria" was adopted. With this directive, it has been legally accepted that Syrians are under "temporary protection". (ORSAM, 2014) The status issue for Syrian migrants, who were initially accepted as temporary protection based on the assumption that the civil war in Syria will not be long-lasting, today has become a serious problem with the prolongation of the civil war. Temporary-protection status feeds uncertainty for asylum-seekers on the job, employment, social security, education, health, integration and many other issues.

### **3.2 Shelter Problem**

At the beginning of the most fundamental problems of Syrian refugees in Turkey comes the shelter problem. According to the Directorate General of Migration Management data, nearly 60 thousand Syrian refugees were placed in 7 camps in 5 cities close to the Syrian border in Turkey's south and southeast region. The rest live outside the camps in various cities across the country. Syrians living outside refugee camps in Turkey is estimated to be 3 million 500 thousand. In regions close to the border, Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa and Kilis are the leading cities with the highest number of refugees. The most asylum seekers across Turkey with a number of over 500 thousand, are estimated to live in Istanbul. Gaziantep comes second with a figure of around 450 thousand. However, according to some estimates, around 500 thousand Syrians live in Gaziantep alone. (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2021)

### **3.4 Education Problem**

According to Table 1, more than 50% of Syrian refugees in Turkey constitute the 0-18 age group at the age of education. This reveals the fact that nearly two million Syrian students continue their education in one way or another. When we add those who have not completed their university education at the age of 18 to this number, and those who have reached university age, the seriousness of the problem becomes clearer. Ministry of Education and the Higher Education circular in Turkey continue to ensure Syrians access to elementary, middle school, high school, and universities. The primary problem in this area is the presence of a serious number of students, education in mother tongue and language problems. Most of them do not speak Turkish. In addition to what extent the issues can meet this burden of educational institutions in Turkey is a separate topic of discussion. Syrian migrants have a serious education problem in the framework of the available data. In this context, to overcome the educational problems of Syrian children, it is essential to place them in educational institutions in the country as much as possible and complete their adaptation studies. Simultaneously, the opening of new educational institutions at all levels in international cooperation and the employment of educators who will provide education in their own languages, and the steps to be taken to solve the Turkish language problem are the priority issues in the field of education.

### **3.4 Health problem**

The Ministry of Health fulfils of health services for Syrian refugees in Turkey by the Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, published in 2013 in accordance with Circular No. 2013/8. In this context, the Republic of Turkey gives Syrian refugees the possibility to access all public hospitals to receive services and is also a reserved fund for it. However, the health services and health conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey also bears a significant public health problem and our country's potential.

Syrians under "temporary protection" and conditional refugees can benefit from the General Health Insurance (GSS) as long as they live in the city stipulated by Migration Management Directorate. Within the scope of primary health care services, some of them benefit from the services offered in Migrant Health Centres (GSM), while others apply to family medicine. On the other hand, persons under "temporary protection" and conditional refugees who do not reside in the cities specified by the Directorate, due to business, social networks or different reasons cannot benefit from the General Health Insurance.

With the law published in the Official Gazette dated 24.12.2019; general health insurance was terminated in Turkey more than a year and who is in Turkey more than a year and 18 years old or older applied (or already has) for international protection status. Except for those who can document that they cannot pay as of January 1, 2020, they must pay their general health insurance themselves.

Regular immigrants who apply for residency for various reasons (e.g., business, tourist, student or family residence permit) benefit from private or general health insurance in the process of their stay in Turkey. Unregistered/undocumented migrants experience problems in accessing health services due to the lack of legislation covering these individuals. Their access to hospitals is almost non-existent, except for emergencies. Some hospitals apply the health tourism circular in emergencies, and some hospitals treat it as a person without health insurance. In addition to these, some hospitals notify law enforcement officers

if unregistered/undocumented immigrants apply. Services such as immunization, neonatal screening program, pregnant follow-up, baby/child follow-up, reproductive health counselling, which are offered within the country's scope of primary health care services, are offered to everyone, including immigrants, free of charge. Irregular migrants are registered as stateless when they enter the Public Health Management System (HSYS). Currently, there are 180 Migrant Health Centres (GSM) in 29 provinces that provide services to refugees in our country and Foreign National Polyclinics (YUP) within the Community Health Centres in other provinces. (UNHCR, 2019)

In order to register and test -unregistered/undocumented immigrants-, "stateless" entry to HSYS has been initiated. However, the absence of published legislation on this issue leads to differences in practice and creates problems in detecting and monitoring patients.

Due to the language barrier, people under "temporary protection" or under international protection, who are positive for COVID 19, the contact tracing cannot be done as prescribed. It is challenging to communicate with people sought for contact tracing due to the language barrier; Health personnel cannot conduct a qualified interview because the positive situation creates a fear of deportation. It is impossible to provide the necessary hygiene conditions and proper isolation in the accommodation conditions where many people live together. After the COVID 19 outbreak started, the unemployment rate among immigrants increased. This situation primarily affects people's access to essential nutrition and health services.

#### **4. Conclusion: Impact of Refugees to Turkey and Potential Problem Areas**

Turkey has around 4 million Syrian refugees in today, nearly one million of Syrian refugees live in border region provinces, while the rest are spread across the country. Most of the refugees live outside the camps. On the other hand, the increase in the country's population by almost 4 million in a short time due to the Syrian refugees negatively affects the provision of basic public services in terms of quantity and quality. In this context, it should be underlined that more than one million refugees in the south part of the country create great pressure in terms of basic public services as well as provocation, terrorism and security concerns in the region. The issue of asylum seekers spreading across the country also carries important potential risks with its social, economic, cultural, security and integration dimensions.

The main problems of Syrian refugees are that they cause a relatively regional and national level in Turkey security risk, unemployment, housing rent increase, illegal labour, loss of quality of education and health services, and a decline in workers' wages. Syrian refugees to be associated with the most serious security risk in Turkey is likely to come at the beginning of the problems and the possibility of provocations. Again, one of the biggest risks is that the region is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. On the other hand, the inability of refugee children living outside the camps to be directed to education and training sufficiently appears as another important problem area and the lost generation's risk. Also, in case of a long stay in Turkey and that the refugees can be given education in their mother tongue raises harmonisation in Turkey. Another problem is the disruption of the balance of wages in the labour market. Another problem area is the possibility of housing prices and rents being above their average values in border region provinces and the possibility of this situation to create rental inflation on a continuous basis. Besides, it is also a serious problem that health services cannot be provided at the desired standards due to the lack of hospitals, doctors and nurses within the framework of existing facilities, and as a result, the risk of infectious diseases spread especially in border regions.

In summary; The civil war and conflict environment in Syria have left ten years behind, and there is no hope of return for refugees and asylum yet. On the other hand, in this decade, Turkey gives a better test in the context of camps created than in other countries. However, the next steps to be taken and the management of the problem is of great importance. Because the longer the period, the more unbearable the refugees' situation, from the housing problem to education, health and employment. This will increase the issue of integration and the need for more permanent solutions. A more serious contribution of the UN and the EU is required here. Because this issue is not just a problem to be solved in Turkey. EU countries will have repercussions outside Turkey.

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