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## An Assessment of the Refugees' Access to Labor and Housing Markets and Healthcare Services in Turkey from Syrian Refugees' Perspective

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### Abstract

In March 2011, Syrians engaged in peaceful protests as a means of demanding socioeconomic reform. However, the regime's response prompted the start of a civil war, which has caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to lose their lives and millions more to seek asylum in neighboring countries, with Turkey serving as the destination for most of Syria's refugees. This study assesses the Syrian refugees' experiences as they attempt to navigate the Turkish labor and housing markets and access healthcare services. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 60 Syrian refugees in Hatay and Gaziantep provinces of Turkey, this study has determined that the Syrian refugees in Turkey have been forced to work for less pay than the country's citizens and without insurance, expected to pay high rents and deposits for housing, and they have experienced numerous problems in accessing healthcare services in Turkey such as having difficulty in accessing proper translation services.

**Keywords:** Refugee studies; Syrian refugees in Turkey; labor market; housing market; healthcare services.

### Introduction

*There is the front line. We see them and they see us. There're only three kilometers between them and us. We live here in isolation, penniless. You can hardly call it living. If it weren't for the fact that I fear God, I would've killed myself... We're dying slowly here, like animals that have been tied to a tree and left to starve to death. Our relatives who stayed behind have died in the bombing. The snakes creep around us day and night. Would you be able to spend one night with us? Impossible! Look at these bags... These are our clothes. We stuff them into bags so that we can leave quickly at any moment. We're lost and homeless... Our children will regain our rights. We want them to be educated. We want them to fight so that we can return to our homes. We won't kneel down to Bashar al-Assad. We will never kneel. And we won't go back.*

~ Samar Yazbek, *The Crossing*, p. 209-210.

Today, the world is playing witness to one of the most acute humanitarian crises in history. On 15 March 2011, the peaceful demonstrations that began in the Daraa province of Syria spread throughout the country and resulted in the Syrian regime

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attacking civilians, which in turn resulted in a civil war. The Syrian civil war, which began over seven years ago, has not only caused thousands of civilians to lose their lives, but it has also led millions of Syrian citizens to seek humanitarian aid as well as refuge in neighboring countries. The majority of Syrian refugees who fled from the civil war sought refuge in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Of the 5.6 million refugees who fled Syria (UNHCR, 2018a) Turkey hosts roughly 3,5 million refugees within its borders (UNHCR, 2018b). A mass migration of this magnitude calls for an analysis of the Syrian refugees' current living conditions in the countries in which they have taken refuge.

After the Syrian civil war began, the Turkish government had established 21 camps for the Syrian refugees, and all of these centers are located among the ten provinces close to the Turkish-Syrian border. The Syrian refugees live in camps, are provided with the education services, health services, psychosocial services, food security and services, vocational training courses, religious services, translation and banking services, laundries, TV and Internet rooms, and supermarkets by the Turkish Government.

Previous studies analyzing migration have shown that the majority of those who have been forcibly displaced prefer to live among their host communities rather than to stay in camps that remind them constantly that they are refugees (Zetter, 2015). This is the case in Turkey as well, as about 85% of the Syrian refugees in Turkey live in both rural and urban areas among the Turkish citizens (Sirkeci, 2017: 128). Therefore, this study focuses on the living conditions of those Syrian refugees, who live outside the camps. Though an increasing number of recent studies have examined the Syrian refugees in Turkey (Kirişçi, 2014; Yazgan et al. 2015; Bircan and Sunata, 2015; Sirkeci, 2017; Yucesahin and Sirkeci, 2017; Gok and Çifci, 2017; Bilecen and Yurtseven, 2018), this research is important because it is rooted in the personal experiences of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and it gives voice to the problems the refugees have faced since being uprooted from their homes. In this study, before the interview-based findings are discussed, Turkey's migration policy with regard to the Syrian refugees will be briefly examined.

### **Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

On April 29, 2011, 252 Syrians entered Turkey via the Cilvegözü border gate in Hatay, and as a result, the first Syrian refugee made a claim for asylum within Turkey's borders (Dinçer et al., 2013). As the Syrian government continued to issue uninterrupted attacks on its country's civilians, and as the harsh clashes between regime security forces and dissidents grew in number and magnitude, the number of people fleeing Syria for Turkey increased. As of April 2018, according to the United Nations records, the number of Syrian refugees living in Turkey totaled 3,578,246 (UNHCR, 2018b), making Turkey the country to accept the greatest number of Syrian refugees. Turkey signed both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol with the geographical limitation, and had stated that it would only grant refugee status to those coming from Europe. However, beginning in the early 1980s, the majority of immigration movements



aimed at Turkey came out of Europe; this prompted the Turkish government to establish new regulations regarding immigrants. In 1994, Turkey enacted Regulation No.1994/6169 on the agreement referred to as 'Procedures and Principles Related to Possible Population Movements and Aliens Arriving in Turkey either as Individuals or in Groups Wishing to Seek Asylum either from Turkey or Requesting Residence Permission in order to Seek Asylum from Another Country'. In addition, Turkey had defined which individuals seeking asylum from the country would be considered asylum-seekers and would be thus provided temporary protection. Given the scope of the international and domestic agreements to which Turkey was subject, it did not recognize the Syrians as refugees. The first Syrians who entered the country in April 2011 were initially defined as "guests," but because this expression was not legally defined, the Ministry of Interior, in March 2012, via Directive 62, titled "Directive Regarding the Admission and Accommodation of Nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic and Stateless Persons Residing in the Syrian Arab Republic Arriving Turkey In Order to Seek Mass Asylum," the Syrian refugees were legally defined as individuals under the temporary protection regime (Orhan, 2014). On 11 April 2013, in order to try to better coordinate this mass refugee flow, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey approved Law No. 6458 regarding Foreigners and International Protection, and put into force thereafter. One of the most significant results of this law is the creation of the Turkish Ministry of Internal Affairs Directorate General of Migration Management, whose aim is to develop regulations and policies concerning only migration and asylum. Within the scope of this law, it was stated that an open-door policy would be implemented, temporary protection would be provided, and the Syrians would not be subject to forced returns (Erdoğan, 2015b). On 22 October 2014, in order to determine the scope of Law No. 6458, with regard to Article 91, the "Temporary Protection Circular" was introduced. Per this Circular, health services, education services, access to the labor market, social services, and translation services were regulated so that they could be made available to the Syrian refugees (Erdoğan, 2015b).

The Turkish government, despite the fact that the Syrian refugees began coming to Turkey beginning in April 2011, delayed registration, as it expected that events in Syria would end soon. Initially, different public offices (e.g., municipalities, districts, chiefs of police, Prime Ministry of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), local governorate) handled the registration process. Later, this duty was assigned to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) (Erdoğan, 2015b). Since the registration process was late to start, it was difficult to assess the situation and come up with an accurate number regarding how many Syrian refugees were living in Turkey. In order to get an accurate count as to how many refugees were living in Turkey, in 2013, the Directorate General of Migration Management developed a biometric registration system that registered refugees working in coordination with the Foreigners Department of the National Police. As part of their registration process, the Syrians were fingerprinted and photographed, and each Syrian was provided a free temporary protection identification card. This was important because it



allowed the government to better provide the refugees with access to free health and public education services. However, these identification cards did not automatically grant the refugees with residency and work permits. Today, it is estimated that more than 95% of the Syrian refugees in Turkey are registered (Erdoğan, 2015a).

### **Methodology**

In this study, a total of 60 Syrian refugees who currently live in Gaziantep and Hatay border provinces of Turkey were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in public areas (e.g., parks, cafes, streets, city centers) or in interviewees' houses and workplaces. In order to gather different opinions, interviews were conducted with people in different neighborhoods (including neighborhoods situated in the low, middle and high income areas), with diverse education levels (graduate, high school, secondary school, primary school, and illiterate), and different religious or cultural perspectives (Sunni Arabs and Syrian Kurds).

The researcher audio-recorded all of the interviews, which were all semi-structured in nature and took approximately one to two hours each. The researcher took into account the socio-cultural structure of Syrian society, and in order to make the Syrian interviewees more comfortable, the researcher sought male and female Syrian translators to accompany her in the interviews; the male translator assisted the researcher when the interviewees were male, and the female translator assisted when the interviewees were female. All of the interviews conducted with Syrian refugees were coded and sub-coded for analysis in the Dedoose digital qualitative data analysis program.

In addition to conducting interviews, the researcher visited public areas (e.g., streets, hospitals, schools, parks, and bazaars) and private areas (interviewees' houses and workplaces) in Hatay and Gaziantep provinces. These visits permitted the researcher to make observations and take photographs that reflected the daily lives of the Syrian refugees. In order to maintain confidentiality and to protect the interviewees and their identifiable information, the names of the interviewees were changed to pseudonyms.

### **An Assessment of the Syrian Refugees' Living Conditions and Access to Services While Living Outside of the Camps**

By all means, the Syrian refugees living outside the camps have a much harder time financially compared to those living in the camps. This is because the Syrian refugees who live in camps have direct access to the services and aid being offered by the Turkish government, while the Syrians refugees living outside the camps face challenges even in accessing these same services. In the interviews conducted in Turkey's Hatay and Gaziantep provinces, the majority of the Syrian refugees stated that they received only a small amount of aid from the government. They also stated that sometimes NGOs offer food and clothes, but these things are very limited, so most refugees go without aid for the whole year. This section will



examine the living conditions of the Syrian refugees who reside in Turkey's Hatay and Gaziantep provinces and the problems these refugees have faced.

### **An Assessment of the Syrian Refugees' Access to the Labor Market**

Since arriving to Turkey, the Syrian refugees have had a big impact on the country's labor market. The refugees who live outside the camps do not have access to basic needs, such as food and clothes, and the majority of them work illegally in the provinces where they live in order to secure basic necessities for themselves and their families. Though it is illegal for the Syrian refugees to work while in Turkey, the Turkish government has turned a blind eye to those working so that they can make a living. However, in January 15, 2016, the Turkish government, so as to help prevent the exploitation of labor that a number of Syrian refugees had been encountering, a regulation was implemented that paved the way for the refugees to gain legal work permits. This section will discuss the problems the Syrian refugees (who did not have work permits when their interviews were conducted) have encountered with regard to the labor market.

Syrian refugees interviewed in Hatay and Gaziantep provinces stated that one problem they encountered in Turkey, with regard to the labor market, involved being exploited for their labor. Although a few Syrian interviewees in these provinces stated that some Turkish employers treated their Turkish and Syrian workers equally in terms of wages, and some employers even paid the refugees more than they paid Turkish citizens, this was not the overall consensus. The majority of the interviewees stated that the Turkish employers exploit refugee labor and pay the Syrian refugees far less than they pay Turkish workers. Adila, a Syrian interviewee in Hatay, discussed this problem:

*If Turkish workers and Syrian workers both work in farming, the Turkish workers are paid more. If the Turkish are paid 50 Turkish liras [approximately \$14] per day, we are paid 14 [approximately \$4], and the landowners do this because there are a lot of Syrians in need of work and willing to accept anything just to live.*

As Adila explained, since some Turkish employers know that the Syrian refugees are in need, the employers are able to pay them far less to do the same work as the Turkish workers. Also, the interviewees added that they are sometimes forced to work long hours performing very strenuous tasks or engaged in hard labor, and they accept low wages in return for their work. Several academic studies offer supporting evidence to suggest that the refugees generally receive wages that are lower than those offered to the native citizens (Chambers, 1986; Kreibaum, 2014; Maystadt and Verwimp, 2014; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2016). In particular, research has found that the disruption of the supply-demand balance in the labor market (resulting from an increase in supply), the employers' awareness of the refugees' desperation to earn whatever income they can, and employers seeking to exploit this situation so as to decrease their business costs are likely culprits behind the wage gap between the Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens.

In addition to paying Syrians low wages, some Turkish employers also delayed paying their Syrian workers by as much as a couple of months. According



to the refugees, there are some employers who never pay their Syrian employees, despite the fact that the employees have worked as required. However, because the majority of the refugees do not have the work permits necessary they are not able to claim their rights.

Another problem the Syrian refugees experience in the labor market has to do with their lack of insurance. Because these workers are working illegally without permits, they are not granted insurance that would enable them to make claims should they experience work-related accidents. Haroun, a Syrian refugee who works in Gaziantep, discussed a situation his relative experienced:

*My relative was working in iron when his eye was injured. A piece of iron hit his eye and took it out. His Turkish employer took him to the hospital. The employer told my friend to tell the police that he wasn't at work. He told my relative to tell the police that he was walking by when he got the injury. The employer promised my relative to give him his payment every month. My relative agreed to do that. When the police came, my relative told them that he was not working with the employer. When the police left, the employer paid my relative for the first month. The second month, the employer refused to give him the payment he promised.*

Before the Turkish government granted the Syrian refugees the right to obtain work permits, the employers were unable to provide insurance to the refugees. And because the majority of Turkish employers did not employ the Syrians legally, they felt no obligation to ensure that the Syrians were provided insurance, which is something employers must provide to Turkish workers. This served to make Syrian workers appear more desirable to Turkish employers since these workers are less costly than Turkish workers. However, as was the case for Haroun's relative, there have likely been other Syrians who have experienced work-related accidents, but because they were working illegally and therefore uninsured, they were unable to make any claims against the employer or the insurance. Depending on the severity of the accident, some Syrian workers may have been unable to continue to work due to injury. The Syrian refugees stated that if they were all employed legally, then they would be able to air their grievances when their employers wrong them, and they would be in the position to make claims against insurance if they experience work-related accidents. As it stands, Turkish employers are aware that there are many Syrian refugees searching for work, and the majority of them are ready to work without insurance just to make a living. As such, the majority of employers do not feel responsible when Syrian workers experience accidents since the employers know that they can easily replace the refugee workers. This leaves the refugees with little recourse, as they are working without permits, which is considered a crime per Turkish law, and are thus unable to appeal to Turkish authorities when employers mistreat them.

In Turkey, the regulation to which foreigners who want to work in the country are subject is Law No. 4817, "The Work Permit for Foreigners." According to this law, in order for a foreigner to get a work permit in Turkey, he or she must have a valid passport and a residency permit, and the Turkish employer for whom the foreigner wants to work must verify that there is no Turkish citizen available and qualified to do the work that the employer wants to be done. However, because



the Syrian refugees do not own these stated official documents, and because of the problems that they have been experiencing in the labor market, the Turkish government took an important step on 15 January 2016, and issued Regulation No. 2016/8375, "Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection." According to this regulation, the Syrian refugees who are given temporary protection identification cards have the right to work in the province(s) that issued their cards to them; in order to work, however, employers must appeal on the refugees' behalves to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. This regulation also states that the refugees who receive work permits cannot be paid less than the stated minimum wage. However, in order for this regulation to be implemented effectively, the businesses that hire Syrian refugees must undergo strict inspections and follow-up visits conducted by the authorities as necessary (Erdoğan, 2015). It is unrealistic, of course, to expect that this regulation will prevent all illegal work and exploitation of refugee workers, as laws aimed at improving Turkish workers' working conditions and security have been in force for many years, and there are still Turkish workers who work illegally and Turkish employers who hire them. Further, because the Syrian refugees are working for less pay, they are more desirable to Turkish employers; if Syrians were able to demand insurance from their employers and pay that is the same as or close to that earned by Turkish citizens and in, then employers might prefer to hire Turkish citizens, as they are better able to communicate with them.

### **An Assessment of the Syrian Refugees' Housing Needs**

The arrival of the Syrian refugees to Turkey has affected the housing market, especially in border provinces such as Hatay and Gaziantep where most of the refugees stay. With the influx of refugees came an increased demand for housing, and because there are too few houses available to meet the needs of the population living in the region, there has been an abnormal increase in housing prices. Hanna, an interviewee in Hatay, shared his views concerning this:

*Because of the refugee situation, everything has become too expensive. The rent may be normal here, but not for me. We find that everything has become expensive because we rarely work and because costs are higher. And the rents increased a lot after the Syrian refugees came because there was a big demand on houses. So, it is not because of the homeowners. This is a universal law about how demand and supply controls everything. It is not related to Syria or Turkey. The situation in Syria is similar to the situation here.*

The houses, which have been built such that they will satisfy the needs of the local people in the region, are not enough in number to cover the housing need that emerged after the mass immigration of Syrians to Turkey's border cities like Hatay and Gaziantep. This alone rendered the existing houses more valuable and caused the rent and sale prices to increase. The increasing rent prices place even greater strains on the Syrian refugees' budgets, as they try to maintain their lives while experiencing difficult economic conditions. In order to overcome the high rent prices, the refugees sought out a solution that would enable them to rent houses jointly with a couple of families.





Another problem the Syrian refugees have experienced with regard to housing is the Turkish homeowners' attitudes toward the Syrians. While some of the Syrian refugees mentioned that some Turkish homeowners helped them when it came to housing (e.g., did not increase the rents, or let the refugees live in their houses free of rent), other interviewees stated that, since the homeowners are aware of the existing demand for their houses, they try to kick the refugees out if there is a short delay in their rent payments. Hadya, an interviewee in Hatay, discusses her experience:

*The homeowner does not communicate with us very well. I mean, if we have a box of oil, we give her a bottle, or we give her a kilo of dry beans or sugar just so that we can keep her happy with us. When there is a delay with our payment at the end of the month, she gets so furious. She is satisfied as long as we pay the rent. When there is a delay, though, she becomes angry and tries to kick us out. For that reason, we pay the rent in advance before the end of the month.*

As evidenced by this story, some Syrian refugees, in order to satisfy their landlords, sometimes share their rations with the homeowners, but some homeowners still tend not to show any tolerance when the tenants pay their rents late. These homeowners even threaten to evict the tenants. It seems that some homeowners are so readily threaten to kick the refugees out because they know that there is great demand for their homes and they want to collect as much rent as they can, which can mean renting to people who can and will pay more. However, this does not affect only the Syrian refugees. Many Turkish citizens who have been living in their rented homes for years are expected to pay more or vacate the premises to make room for new tenants willing to spend more on rent.

Something else that some interviewees mentioned regarding landlords has to do with the water and electric bills associated with the houses that the Syrian refugees rent. Aisha, a Syrian interviewee living in Gaziantep, stated that the water and electric bills come together to the building in which she lives and are paid by all of the tenants in the building. Aisha lives in an apartment, however, that is in the same building as a bakeshop and a supermarket that the owner of the house operates. Though the bill should be divided into three, the landlord insists that Aisha pay half of the total. Hacer, an interviewee in Gaziantep, has also experienced issues with regard to the water and electric bills. Hacer stated that in her house there is only one bulb and a refrigerator, but the homeowner insists that Hacer pay an exact amount every month without showing her the bills. In the home visits in Hatay and Gaziantep, it was observed that the majority of the Syrian refugees do not own electronic devices (e.g., TVs, ovens, refrigerators, computers) that are generally found in the houses of Turkish citizens. Despite this, the Syrian refugees are required to pay high bill amounts in addition to their high rents. Although not all Turkish landlords demand such high rents, those who do put further strain on some of the refugees' already strained budgets.

Another point of contention with regard to housing has to do with the fact that many of the houses available for the refugees to rent are lacking in hygienic facilities and are cheaply built. Some places that were used for storage and as coalbins before the refugees came were emptied once the refugees arrived to the





border provinces, and they are rented to the refugees as though they are houses. Hadya, an interviewee in Hatay, shared a problem she has experienced:

*I pay 175 liras for rent. If the house were a good house, then this would be fine. My family is big, and my husband doesn't work. It is unfair to pay this amount of money for this house. Is this a house? This is not a house. We chose this house because my family is big, but living here means that we live in fear of insects, snakes, and any other creatures that approach the kids.*

In addition, many refugees frequently noted that the bad conditions of the houses invite disease. For instance, Rassa, a Syrian refugee living in Hatay, stated that the house she has been living does not allow for much sun to shine into the house, and this means that the house is often too humid. Rassa said that, over time, this humidity has caused a chronic lung infection in her son who she now needs to take to the doctor every month.

The house visits that took place in Hatay and Gaziantep indicated that the houses in which the Syrian refugees have been staying are old, squalid, lack lighting and air that can circulate, and have unhealthy conditions. In Reyhanlı County in Hatay, where house visits were conducted, it was noted that while some people give the coalbins or storage units to the refugees for free, some citizens charge a bit of rent for these places. However, as is underscored in the Turkish Medical Association's report (Türk Tabipleri Birliği, 2014), the houses in which many Syrian refugees have been living are unhealthy. Since the majority of the Syrian refugees are not consistently or sufficiently employed and thus do not have much income, they are unable to cover the costs associated with better housing. As such, they tend to prefer to rent houses that are cheaper but generally unhealthy. Some refugees are able to rent houses in relatively better condition, but to afford them, they must share the houses with other families.

In addition to the aforementioned housing-related problems they have experienced, the Syrians have also had problems finding housing in some parts of Hatay for sectarian reasons. For many years, Hatay had provided shelter to people of various religious, sectarian, and ethnic structures such as Sunni Turks, Sunni Arabs, Alawite Arabs, Christians, Armenians, and Jews. Despite this, and despite the fact that it looks like people from different ethnic and religious groups live together in Hatay without any major conflicts, the Sunni Arab and the Alawite Arab citizens tend to prefer to live in different neighborhoods. Since most of the Syrian refugees who escaped from the civil war in Syria and took refuge in Turkey are Sunnis, the ethno-religious structure in the region plays a role in Syrians' ability to find housing. In-home visits conducted in Hatay confirmed that almost all Syrian refugees prefer to live in regions, such as Reyhanlı, Kırkhan and the center of Antakya, which are comprised predominantly of Sunni citizens. Further, the Syrian refugees tend to refrain from regions, such as Samandağ, Defne, Harbiye and Armutlu, which are predominantly comprised of Arab Alawite citizens.

In Gaziantep, unlike in Hatay, sectarianism has no effect on the Syrian refugees' housing options. Rather, here, the Syrian refugees are led by their budget constraints, and as such, they prefer to live in neighborhoods that are affordable. In addition, the interviewees stated that the Syrian refugees prefer to live in



neighborhoods, such as Oğuzeli and Düztepe, which are comprised predominantly of Turkish Alevis. In the in-home visits conducted in Gaziantep, it was observed that the majority of the Syrian refugees did indeed live in Oğuzeli and Düztepe neighborhoods, as these regions were more appropriate to their budgets, and when they were questioned about their relations with their neighbors, the Syrians stated that the majority of their neighbors are Turkish Alevis, but they do not experience problems with them.

Hatay is home to a sizable Alawite population, which is comprised of fewer than one million inhabitants and is of Arab origin. However, it is estimated that there exists between 15 and 20 million Alevi in Turkey who are predominantly of Turkish origin (Gettleman, 2012). Therefore, most of the Turkish Alevis in Turkey do not have established sectarian ties with the Arab Alawite population in Syria. Also, while the Turkish-Syrian border was drawn, some of the Arab Alawites remained in Hatay and others remained in Syria, and this, in addition to their mutual ethno-religious ties, provides another reason as to why the Arab Alawites in Hatay feel close to the Alawites in Syria. This means that the Alawites in Syria share both language and culture with the Arab Alawites in Hatay, and it is because the Alevis in Gaziantep are predominantly Turkish and do not share a language with the Syrian Alawites that they are not as close to the Syrian Alawites as the Arab Alawites in Hatay are.

### **An Assessment of Syrian Refugees' Access to Healthcare Services**

The Turkish government saw healthcare as a necessary service to provide to the Syrian refugees who were taken in and placed under temporary protection. For this aim, The AFAD, via Article 27 of the Temporary Protection Circular, stated that all Syrian refugees who register with the appropriate authorities and procure a temporary protection identification card, including those living outside the camps, will be granted the right to benefit from all healthcare services, including emergency health services, for free.

In the interviews that were done, the majority of the refugees have stated that they are pleased with the free healthcare services available to them in Turkey, but they have also noted that they have experienced problems from time to time as well. This section will serve to discuss and analyze the problem Syrians are experiencing with regard to the healthcare services that have been made available to them.

Syrian interviewees in both provinces have stated that they have experienced poor treatment and negative attitudes<sup>1</sup> on the part of the hospital staff because they are Syrian. The refugees noted that since the hospitals are often overcrowded, they have trouble finding the appropriate lines for their physical examinations, and

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<sup>1</sup> In a recent study, Gökgöz, Arena, and Aydın (2017) conducted a survey with a total of 1,514 university students in Turkey's Hatay and Ankara provinces. The purpose of the study was to better understand the exclusionary attitudes people have toward the Syrian refugees. The study revealed that the participants in Hatay – where more of the refugees reside, compared to Ankara – are more inclined to perceive the Syrian refugees as a threat to Turkey's culture and safety as well as the quality of life in general (p. 140).



they have stated that during their examinations, some doctors and nurses treat them harshly because they are Syrians. Akram, a Syrian refugee in Gaziantep, shared a problem that he experienced in the hospital:

*Doctors don't pay attention to Syrians. If a doctor wants to inject you, he is rough about it, as if he is injecting a donkey. Doctors treat us badly. Are we animals? For example, they give us orders: "Take off your cloths," "Stay there," and "Don't talk." If you are in pain, you cannot express yourself easily or in a calm manner. Once, I took my mother to the doctor, and the doctor wouldn't let us talk. My mother wanted to show him where her pain was, but the doctor did not let her talk. Then, I got upset and I pushed the doctor, and they dismissed me from the public hospital. I hit him that day, and the police arrested me. The next time, I took my mother to the private hospital.*

As was the case with Akram, some Syrian refugees might occasionally encounter hospital staff who treat them badly and exhibit negative behaviors, and the problem might sometimes escalate further. This poor treatment of the Syrians may be the result of the personal feelings of the medical personnel, or it may be the result of a now overworked and overburdened hospital staff, as the influx of refugees has created additional pressure on the healthcare system. In assessing the public hospitals in Turkey, it is clear that there are problems with overcrowding and overworked staff. Even though, in recent years, with the opening of new research and practice hospitals, and with the added amenities provided to Turkish citizens with social insurance who can go to private hospitals, the crowdedness of the public hospitals has been mitigated slightly, but once the refugees arrived from Syria, the demand for healthcare increased. And this has not only affected Syrian refugees negatively but also Turkish citizens.

One of the most noted complaints among Syrian refugees in Gaziantep with regard to healthcare services was the overall lack of available translation services in the hospitals. In addition, many have found that they have had to pay for the service, which is a problem, since it is supposed to be available to them for free. Syrian refugees, especially those in Gaziantep, stated that there are free translation services in the hospitals, which are provided by the Turkish government; however, there are too few translators available, and they are not often easy to find prior to a patient's exam. Cantara, an interviewee in Gaziantep, discussed the hardship experienced with regard to the translation services:

*I have had a lot of difficulties. I suffer a lot because of that. Three days ago, I went with my husband to the hospital because he has heart problems. We took the interpreter with us. She stayed with us from 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., when the doctor came. I had the very last appointment time, and doctors leave work at around 4:00pm. When my time came, the interpreter left. We could understand nothing. My husband brought an interpreter, and we begged him to interpret for us either with money or for free. When the interpreter started interpreting, he found difficulties in the Turkish language. The doctor dismissed him and required a good interpreter to interpret for us. We brought another interpreter, but the nurse refused to let him in, as my appointment time was over. I told the nurse that I came at 6:30 a.m. and, I could hardly walk because of my foot. I begged for the nurse to let me see the doctor as my diabetes was 500 [in blood sugar] and I came in early in the morning. She said to me, "Come tomorrow."*



In Gaziantep, the majority of the Syrian refugees are having a hard time communicating with the Turkish people, including those who work as medical personnel. Though there are translators who work in the hospitals who are supposed to help bridge the communication gap that exists between the Syrians and the Turks, there are too few translators available, which means that there are some Syrian refugees who are unable to benefit fully from the healthcare services made available to them. It should be noted, however, that the problems Syrians are experiencing with a lack of translators seem to exist primarily in Gaziantep, as the interviewees in Hatay have not had any major problems accessing translation services. Since the majority of the local people in Hatay speak both Turkish and Arabic, the Syrian refugees do not experience any major problems finding Turkish citizens who can translate for them. Further, some members of the hospital staff know Arabic, which means that translators are often unnecessary.

Additionally, although the translation services in the hospitals are covered by the government, the Syrians often feel obliged to pay for the services after the translators sit with them for hours while they wait for doctors to become available. The Turkish government has been aware of the problem the refugees have had with regard to the lack of sufficient translation services in the hospitals, and it has been working toward a solution. Fatih Özer, the vice-president of AFAD, and the discussed the problems that refugees have been experiencing with regard to translation services in the interview I conducted on April 21, 2015, and he stated that it is difficult to find a sufficient number of Turkish citizens who know Arabic proficiently enough to be able to serve as translators for Syrian refugees in public spaces such as hospitals. As such, the AFAD is working to open health centers that will cater only to the Syrian refugees, and this could go a long way to eliminating some of the problems the Syrians are experiencing as they try to access healthcare.

The Syrian refugees interviewed also noted that prescription drugs in Turkey are very expensive, and due to their financial situations, they find it difficult to pay for their medications. Zaida, a Syrian interviewee in Hatay, discussed the hardship she experiences when trying to pay for drugs:

*The service in the hospital was not good. I was sick with a cough. I paid almost 450 liras for medicine, but I wasn't cured. I went to Aleppo and paid only 50 liras, and I was cured thanks to Allah. I am only counting the cost of medicine, not the fares involved in going there and coming back. I get free service when I go to a Turkish hospital, but we must pay for the medicine. Every visit to the doctor costs me 100 or 110 liras for medicine. You can count the total of four visits.*

While it is known that the Syrian refugees get their drugs for free in the camps, as it is seen in the example, the Syrian refugees who live outside the camps are experiencing problems in accessing the drugs due to financial shortcomings. The Syrian refugees living outside the camps are technically responsible for paying only 20% of the drug fees, as the AFAD is supposed to cover the remaining cost. However, the AFAD has delayed making drug payments to the pharmacies, so the pharmacies require that the Syrians living outside the camps pay 100% of the drug fees (Türk Tabipleri Birliği, 2016). In accordance with the protocol the pharmacies and the AFAD established, the pharmacies should receive payment for the drugs



dispensed to the Syrian refugees within a month from the time the medications were dispensed. However, because the payments are not being made in a timely manner, the refugees have been forced to pay out of pocket for their medications. In order to address this, new legislation was implemented on March 16, 2018, and management of the Syrian refugees' drug payments was transferred away from AFAD to the Directorate General of Migration Management (Çelik Nacar, 2018; TEB Mersin Eczacı Odası, 2018).

Another topic that has been brought up with regard to the Syrian refugees living outside the camps is access to psychosocial services. Nearly all of the interviewees expressed that their general health conditions are good due to their faith. They believe that what they experience is the part of their destiny and, therefore, they resort only to God and not to psychosocial services. However, some of the interviewees stated that they want to benefit from this service due to the stress and the trauma that the war has caused them. A Syrian interviewee stated that, when she first came to Turkey, her child was very frightened of the planes he heard, and he even cried when he heard fireworks at weddings. And of course, there are some Syrian refugees who have stated that if this service is given to them for free by the government, they might take advantage of it, but otherwise they do not have financial means to pay for it.

One final shortcoming noted with regard to the healthcare services made available to the Syrian refugees has to do with maternal and infant health services within the scope of protective health services. In a report published by the Turkish Medical Association, it was stated that services such as pregnancy monitoring, mother and baby nurturing, post-partum assistance, and family planning have not been sufficiently provided to the refugees (Türk Tabipleri Birliği, 2016). Addressing this through amendments or legislation, for example, is important as it could serve to help reduce mother and infant deaths.

### **Recommendations Aimed at Addressing the Problems Syrian Refugees Experience in Turkey**

One of the problems Syrians have been experiencing has to do with the negative attitudes of doctors and hospital staff with regard to the Syrians. Upon the Syrian refugees' arrival to Turkey, the country's healthcare system became overburdened, which meant that doctors and hospital personnel in the border provinces, where most Syrian refugees live, had to work longer hours in order to meet the increased demand for healthcare. This seems to have caused hospital personnel to become nervous, tired and perhaps more easily agitated, and because the personnel perceive the Syrians to be the source of their troubles, they sometimes act negatively toward them. To help alleviate this problem, the Turkish government should send extra hospital staff (e.g., doctors, nurses, practical nurses) to the overburdened provinces, and it should provide additional healthcare buildings and equipment as well. In addition, the hospital staff should be subject to an orientation program that would educate them with regard to how best to approach the refugees.



Another problem that the Syrian refugees have noted with regard to their ability to access healthcare in Turkey has to do with drug fees. As discussed in detail in the previous section, pharmacies have demanded that the refugees outside the accommodation centers pay for their prescribed drugs. This is due to the fact that there have been problems with the pharmacies receiving agreed-upon, contract-based payments from AFAD for the drugs. To solve this problem, management of the Syrians' drug payments was transferred away from AFAD and assigned to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). The new protocol between the DGMM and pharmacies, which was implemented on March 16, 2018, will enable the pharmacies to receive their payments in a timely manner and will permit the Syrian refugees to access their drugs without being forced to pay for them entirely out of pocket.

In the "war, migration and health" report published by the Turkish Medical Association in 2016, a number of problems, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome, sleep disorders, have begun cropping up among individuals who are victims of war. It is important that these services be made equally available to those refugees living within the camps and those who live outside the camps, as both groups of refugees are victims of war, and even if the refugees living within the camps may have a slightly greater need for the services, those living outside camps face their share of stressors, including financial hardships and not being able to find work or housing (Miller and Rasco, 2004). These services can go a long way to reducing the impact of trauma that these refugees experience.

Just as many refugees experience difficulty in trying to take advantage of the free healthcare service made available, the Syrian refugees have experienced difficulty in procuring housing. Upon the refugees' arrival to Turkey, particularly in the border provinces where most of the Syrian took up residence, rents increased considerably. The Turkish government could take precautions to resolve this issue for the refugees who have been affected. For example, the government could implement regulations within the border provinces that would prevent landlords from increasing rents beyond a pre-determined rate annually, and any landlords who violated this regulation would face penalties. This would help to eliminate arbitrary and exorbitant increases in rental prices, which would make life easier for refugees.

Syrian refugees have also been subjected to labor exploitation while in Turkey. After the Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey and entered the labor market, they found that the increase in labor caused for a reduction in wages. In January 2016, The Turkish government, intending to forestall the labor exploitation, passed the "Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection". According to this regulation, the Turkish employers who want to employ Syrians cannot pay the workers less than the minimum wage [1,600 Turkish liras, which is equal to ~ \$400] or force them work without insurance. If businesses implement the regulation properly, then the legal work permit will have a positive impact on the lives of the refugees, as it will enable them to be paid regular wages and take



advantage of insurance. However, at this point, the Turkish government should also inspect businesses regularly in order to increase compliance with the law.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the Turkish government has taken remarkable steps to help improve the living conditions of the Syrian refugees, and as a result, Turkey has incurred great costs. Just in the last six years, the Turkish government has spent \$27,3 billion in order to assist the Syrian refugees in meeting their basic needs (AFAD, 2017). During this time, Turkey has received \$526 million in international aid, which has helped to offset only 2% of the country's total expenses thus far (AFAD, 2017). The Turkish government has done what several European countries – the so-called defenders of democracy and human rights – could not or would not do. However, if the solutions that are outlined above are to be carried out, then other developed countries must share in the burden of providing refuge to the Syrians and must allocate their own resources to the cause. This is necessary not only to help address the crisis as it is, but also to prevent the crisis from worsening.

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