

## Stuck between war and Europe: Syrian refugees in Turkey

By: [Ali Askerov](#), Noor Ghazi, Amy Curre

Askerov, A., Curre, A. & N. Ghazi (2018). Stuck between war and Europe: Syrian refugees in Turkey. Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis. 2(1), 1-21

Made available courtesy of UNCG University Libraries:

<http://libjournal.uncg.edu/prp/issue/archive>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](#).

### Abstract:

The disasters of the Syrian civil war that started in 2011 as a result of the Arab Spring have not been limited to Syria alone; rather they have affected many other countries both in the region and beyond. One of those most impacted in the region is Turkey, an immediate neighbor of Syria, which hosts over three million refugees from the latter. In addition to harming the civilians of the country, the civil war in Syria has caused numerous political, economic, and social problems for other states. It has ruined the everyday lives of the majority of Syria's citizens, including a substantial number of children, who are innocent victims of this human tragedy. The war has exposed the incompetence and seeming helplessness of the international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, which claims to be the voice of all the Muslims in the world, to aid in the peace process. The ambitions of the regional and remote states on the ground in Syria attempting to meet their own national interests at the expense of civilian casualties and the greed of the illegal organizations attempting to establish and maintain their own power have also been revealed. This paper will discuss the impact of the war in Syria on its displaced civilians, especially focusing on children, who have sought refuge in Turkey. It will explore political, economic, social, and security effects the war in Syria has had in Turkey, the region, and the World highlighting critical discussion of the policies the Turkish government has implemented to address the refugee crisis. The data used to put this paper together were collected primarily through interviewing, observation, and news from everyday regional media.

**Keywords:** Syria | Syrian war | war | Turkey

### Article:

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

# **Stuck Between War and Europe: Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

*Ali Askerov, Amy Currle, & Noor Ghazi*

## *Abstract*

*The disasters of the Syrian civil war that started in 2011 as a result of the Arab Spring have not been limited to Syria alone; rather they have affected many other countries both in the region and beyond. One of those most impacted in the region is Turkey, an immediate neighbor of Syria, which hosts over three million refugees from the latter. In addition to harming the civilians of the country, the civil war in Syria has caused numerous political, economic, and social problems for other states. It has ruined the everyday lives of the majority of Syria's citizens, including a substantial number of children, who are innocent victims of this human tragedy. The war has exposed the incompetence and seeming helplessness of the international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, which claims to be the voice of all the Muslims in the world, to aid in the peace process. The ambitions of the regional and remote states on the ground in Syria attempting to meet their own national interests at the expense of civilian casualties and the greed of the illegal organizations attempting to establish and maintain their own power have also been revealed. This paper will discuss the impact of the war in Syria on its displaced civilians, especially focusing on children, who have sought refuge in Turkey. It will explore political, economic, social, and security effects the war in Syria has had in Turkey, the region, and the World highlighting critical discussion of the policies the Turkish government has implemented to address the refugee crisis. The data used to put this paper together were collected primarily through interviewing, observation, and news from everyday regional media.*

## **Introduction**

The war in Syria is quite complex with a myriad of dimensions; it can be identified as a civil war due to the shared national identity of the belligerent parties; nonetheless, it is also true that it is an international war due to the numerous foreign states involved in it. Yet, it is also considered a war against terror, since the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a target of all the states that have had clashing interests in Syria. The citizens of Syria are fighting against each other, either on the side of the regime or the opposition while foreign forces are fighting to defend their own interests. Certain terrorist and counter-terrorist groups are regularly perpetuating violent acts across the country further complicating the situation on the ground. While the UN has been unable to play an effective role in managing the conflict constructively, many remote and regional actors such as Russia, Iran, the United States, and Turkey have been hard at work, attempting to establish a new order in the country. On the contrary, shadow organizations such as the Democratic

Union Party (PYD) and its military wing Peoples' Protection Party (YPG), as well as ISIS, are working hard to gain more control in the country and thereby establish a legitimate status. This pervasive infighting between warring factions has progressively decimated the country, leaving Syria's civilians to suffer countless atrocities in its wake. One segment of the civilians that is negatively affected by the war is the children who are not only forced to witness barbarity, but have been subjected to direct violence, as well as indirect violence such as deprivation of their rights to education, leisure, and security.

According to UNICEF, in 2015, some fourteen million children across the region suffered from the violent conflict in Syria and much of Iraq (UNICEF, 2015). By October of 2017, it is estimated that the war has already displaced more than six million Syrians internally, with nearly thirteen million in need of humanitarian assistance and more than five million who have fled the country. Of those refugees who have flooded across Syria's borders, more than 2.7 million are currently living in Turkey. Children under the age of eighteen constitute about half of the Syrian refugee population, with approximately forty percent under the age of twelve, the overwhelming majority of whom have experienced one or more traumatic events or had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

The refugee crisis in the Middle East with political, economic, and social consequences for the regional countries and beyond has not been handled effectively even though there are a number of success stories at the local and grassroots level. One reason is that the modern world has never experienced such a mass departure of refugees and the strain has revealed the incapacity of existing structures to address the issue promptly and productively. Another reason is associated with the process of policy development which requires strong cooperation among the key states, such as the US and Russia, involved in the regional affairs. In fact, the levels of cooperation necessary to reach a peaceful resolution to the fighting in Syria have not occurred and may never take place due to their polarity of stances constrained by their own views and interests. The most damaging consequence is that the war in Syria has not ended with any kind of tangible results, no matter desired or not, which in any case would create more secure conditions likely to allow a significant portion of the refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) to return to their homes.

The geographic location of Turkey has naturally made it vulnerable to a refugee crisis. Turkey, a Muslim country and an ally of the West, has borders with Iraq and Syria which makes it one of most accessible countries for the Middle Eastern refugees facing life-threatening situations to leak into. Although there are many claims about the atrocities of the Turkish military on the border trying to prevent the refugees from entering the country (Alkousaa & Popp, 2016), it is known that Turkey has accepted to date more than 2.7 million refugees from Syria alone and provided them their best immediate hope for survival, respite, and an opportunity to begin the difficult task of rebuilding their lives. Despite the government's outstanding impartial policies at the beginning of the crisis, many challenges remain. This paper will focus on the situation for Syrian refugees in Turkey and the ensuing crises for their hosts in terms of meeting their needs in the midst of the ongoing challenges

to the overall security and well-being of the refugees living there.

### **Challenges to Basic Needs: Food, Housing, Education, Health Care**

Naturally, the refugees bring their most basic human needs with them to their host countries, and as their numbers swell there is coinciding additional pressure being placed on a system already stretched to the brink. For the vast majority of refugees, they must place aside the post-traumatic stress and anxiety associated with running away from the deadly threats in their homeland to focus on surviving and rebuilding their lives in a new country. Many have little more than their hope for a better life and the clothes on their backs. Despite the significant efforts of various governmental, religious, regional, and international organizations and charities, Syrian refugees are still suffering in many cases from a lack of food, shelter, education, and access to physical and mental health. Those living in tent cities have especially suffered from a plethora of problems related to poor living conditions. However, they have adjusted to those conditions which have improved significantly since 2011 when refugees from Syria first began to arrive in Turkey.

The Syrian refugees are divided into two groups: those living in the camps, and those who have integrated into Turkish cities and towns, mostly in the south near the border with Syria. Each group has its own unique set of circumstances which dictates their struggles. Of the nearly three million Syrian refugees in Turkey, only one in ten is living in camps. Ensuring the basic needs of the refugees became the central struggle early on in Turkey. The lack of food poses a significant threat to the current and future society of Syrian refugees living in Turkey, and with the massive influx of refugees to the country, the problem of securing enough for everyone has been a struggle from the very beginning. Kizilay, the Turkish Red Crescent Society, initiated the first response to help fulfill the needs for food by cooking and distributing meals for refugees within the camps area (Usaid, 2014). However, with the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria, and an ever-increasing number of Syrian refugees flooding in, Kizilay was soon overwhelmed. The situation necessitated the Turkish government's request for assistance from the UN World Food Program (WFP) (Usaid, 2014). The program was meant to help the vulnerable Syrian refugees who walked through the border facing the unknown and shedding tears for what they had left behind.

The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of Turkey (AFAD) has worked hard to ensure the basic needs of the 246,720 refugees in all twenty-three camps are being fulfilled (European Commission, 2017). It is far more challenging for the government, local institutions, and international organizations to attend to the needs of refugees living outside of the camps, the population that represents the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Maintaining a valid record in the camp database gives refugees better access to food, education, and healthcare. Within the camp population, they obtain food through access to the UN World Food Program which provides an "E-card" with a monthly balance making it

easier to buy, cook, and manage their family's food budget and needs. Access to the E-cards brought a sense of relief within the refugee camps as the refugees could buy and cook their own familiar meals (Usaid, 2014).

Many of nearly ninety percent of Syrian refugees living outside of the camp settings have limited access to basic services. In 2016, waiting for assistance to secure a daily meal for an average refugee family was still the case for more than 500,000 Syrian refugees (Pinna, 2016). Nowadays, many families are still looking for jobs, whether they be legitimate or under the table, to feed their families and meet their basic needs. Families outside camps with no access to food service try to secure food for their families through employment. Their tenuous position in the country often leaves them vulnerable to exploitation when they are forced to work illegally.

A mere ten percent of the nearly three million Syrian refugees in Turkey live in twenty-nine camps. The circumstances force the remainder of the Syrian refugees who live outside of the camp settings to adjust to unfamiliar urban or rural areas. Although the conditions of the camps in Turkey are among the best in the region, reportedly much better than in Jordan and Lebanon, some camp residents still lack the fulfillment of their basic needs. The camps, designed as a temporary solution for refugees until the conflict is resolved in Syria, are built with rudimentary materials. However, time has shown that the war realities in Syria were underestimated due to irrational calculations that have affected the conditions prepared to help the refugee population. For example, in 2016, camp refugees lived through the cold winter and the heat of summer without electricity in Urfa Tel Hamoud Camp 1 (Alwsl, 2016). If the war in Syria persists further, the camps will either have to be reconstructed to suit the long-term needs of their residents, or alternative living arrangements will need to be considered.

Syrian refugees outside the camps can broadly be categorized into three groups. The first group refers to the Syrians who were welcomed by Turkish families to share their homes. This group is not secure since they now look for alternative living arrangements as the unexpected duration has begun to strain their familial relationships. The second group is Syrians who have found a home to rent and are struggling to make their payment which places them in an unfavorable situation. The third group has gathered in main cities of the country after exhausting their money and resources in hopes of finding opportunities to survive. Refugees in this situation have taken refuge in abandoned buildings and a myriad of shelters, such as abandoned chicken coops that lack water and electricity (Corps, 2017). Some of these refugees still live in parks, although their numbers are dramatically decreasing. There is also a population of beggars that have invaded the streets of Istanbul (Afanasiaeva & Sezer, 2014). The daily battle to simply keep a roof over their heads in the urban centers and countryside of southern Turkey is unimaginable and it is likely that the next generation of Syrian refugees will be adversely affected by their families' struggle to survive.

The refugees are occasionally perceived by the members of the local communities

where they live to be a load on the society and a possible threat to security, which not only creates tension, but adds pressure to an already strained situation. This perception has led to an atmosphere where xenophobia has emerged among some Turkish people (Asik, 2017). This increase in tension can also be attributed to rising unemployment; as the numbers of Syrian refugees steadily rise, the unemployment rate within the Turkish population also increases. Syrians living in Turkey are often desperate to do any job to support their families, thus they are willing to work in almost any condition for reduced wages, which opens them up to exploitation by opportunist employers and translates to a loss of legitimate jobs for Turkish citizens. Syrian refugee men may earn up to \$160 per month, whereas a Turkish man earns up to \$400 for the same job (Asik, 2017).

Not having the proper shelter or living in an insecure environment are factors that affect and confuse refugee children occasionally forcing them to take on adult responsibilities, and making them feel obliged to take care of their families. Education has taken a back seat while the host government, international organizations, and the refugees themselves struggle to fulfill the essential tools for survival that are minimized to food and shelter. There are many factors that drive Syrian children to either never attend school, or drop out early. Ironically, some donor organizations have focused more on providing technology, such as computers, while neglecting important resources such as books, supplies, and even teachers (Kamenetz, 2017). However, the main problem is that a large number of school-age children, especially secondary and upper secondary level, dropped out of school voluntarily in order to work and assist their families in meeting their basic needs (International Crises Group, 2016).

As if being concerned about how to feed and educate their families and keep a roof over their heads were not enough, the refugees in Turkey often face urgent health care needs as well. While the Turkish government made hospitals and healthcare facilities accessible to refugees, there are a huge number of refugees living with either nonexistent or insufficient health care (Kirisci, 2014). There are various barriers to healthcare, especially for the majority of refugees who live outside the camps. Some provinces, especially near the border with Syria, suffer from overcrowding with the flood of Syrian refugees, many of whom were sent there to receive emergency medical care. For example, the refugee population in Kilis now outnumbered the local population. The enormous numbers of people seeking medical care are straining the resources of the medical facilities in such areas and the medical system is severely overloaded. It causes resentment among patients who believe that they are not getting the proper health care service whether they are refugees or residents (Kirisci, 2014). Moreover, the unregistered population has access to emergency medical care only, which leads to many health issues that extend beyond the merely physical. Many Syrians living in Turkey suffer from a wide range of psychiatric disorders, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and are largely left untreated due to the lack of medical facilities. In 2016 the CDC reported that a group of researchers conducting a study in Turkey's Islahiye Camp found that of those surveyed, the number of Syrian refugee

children showing the symptoms of depression and PTSD reached up to forty-five percent (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). New cases of PTSD occur regularly due to the inability of many refugees to meet their most basic needs such as food and shelter, which adds to their profound emotional and at times physical trauma. The uncertainty of their future creates additional stress for most Syrian refugees in Turkey.

As of 2017, Turkey has made significant progress in its battle to serve the millions of Syrians now living in the camps. The temporary protection gives Syrian refugees in Turkey the privilege of accessing vital services such as health care, shelter and access to food service (Zeldin, 2016). Currently, there is no restriction or limitation for obtaining temporary protection. The implementation of temporary protection offers Syrian refugees some short-term solutions along with the security of being allowed to stay in Turkey as long as the war rages on in Syria. This action was permitted as part of the open-door policy to make sure that their needs are adequately met.

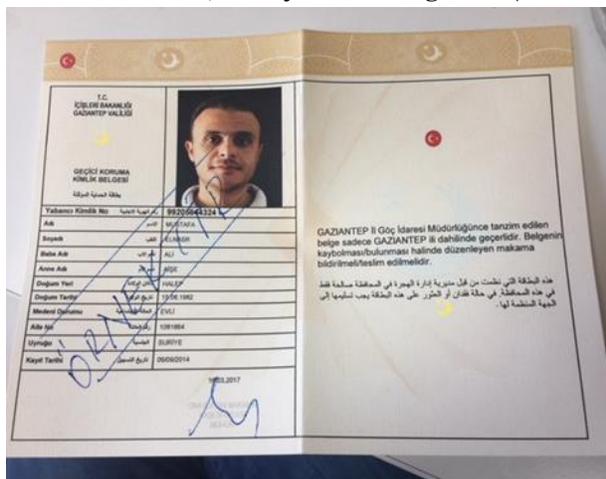
The Turkish government now allows Syrian refugees to register for a work permit which is an important step in reducing the unemployment rate and improving their living conditions. The ability to obtain a work permit attracts more highly skilled workers such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers which is likely to help strengthen the Turkish economy and ease the Syrian refugees' integration into Turkish society. Freedom to set up a private business has enabled many Syrians to start their own business which is good for the local economy in addition to the benefits for the business owners themselves. Finding a job generally means that refugee families are better equipped to provide opportunities for their children and thereby secures hope for future Syrian generations. The aforementioned policies and programs represent a positive start in the struggle to meet the basic and ongoing needs of the ever-growing number of Syrian refugees living in Turkey.

### **Local, Regional, and Global Effects**

While Turkey has historically been a host to refugees, they are currently accommodating the greatest number in the world (Miller, 2017). Syrian refugees make up over three percent of Turkey's total population. This humanitarian crisis has had a profound effect on the Syrians themselves, and on their neighbor and host, Turkey, namely the state of its economy, security, and politics. The protracted conflict in Syria and the mass exodus of nearly half of its citizens have created ripple consequences which begin locally, spread out to the region, and wind up on the global scale.

The images telecast to the West in many cases portray the refugee situation in Turkey as contained: millions of refugees tucked away amongst several encampments spread out across the country, patiently waiting for the nightmare in Syria to end. However, in actuality, life for the nearly three million refugees who have flooded into Turkey is far less regulated. Baban, Ilcan and Rygiel (2016) pointed out that only around ten percent of the refugees live in the twenty-three government-established camps. This translates to over two and a half million Syrians making their way alongside the citizens of Turkey, only they are

not, as the Turkish government once deemed them, guests, nor are they necessarily citizens which leaves the majority to live in a precarious state. The Turkish Government passed a law in 2013, Law on Foreigners and International Protection Act (LFIP), which provides for temporary protection for Syrian refugees, but does not offer them anything permanent, such as a clear path to residency. Supposedly, all refugees living outside camps should register with the Turkish government's Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) in the city where they live in order to receive their kimlik (Turkish identification card), but, for various reasons, many do not register (Baban et al, 2016).



**Figure 1.** A temporary ID card for a Syrian refugee issued by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management in Gaziantep, Turkey (Photo by Askerov)

The kimlik grants Syrians access to social services such as free education and health care for children, and basic medical services and health care for adults. The problem is that not all Syrians register for their kimlik, and of those that do, some live in such economic instability that they may not be able to afford the transportation or basic supplies their children need to attend free school, never mind that in many cases there is also a language barrier between teacher and student.

For all that the kimlik can do for a family, it cannot and does not offer any assistance with the cost of rent, which can be overpriced, and in some cases refugees are forced to resort to living in 'makeshift arrangements' such as derelict buildings, wedding halls, tents, barns, or prisons that have been abandoned (Baban et al, 2016). There is also food insecurity since the monthly grocery card provided to some is often insufficient. The economic effects, which are complicated for Syrians and Turks alike, exist around employment issues for the millions of refugees living outside the camps. On the one hand, it creates tension over competition for jobs. This competition is often uneven because, as Abboud (2016) pointed out, some Syrians, even those properly registered to work, are vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers in Southern Turkey.

For many of the Syrian refugees, work is at worst illegal and at best temporary or insecure.

As Baban et al (2016) described, they are often underemployed; and highly skilled and educated Syrians are only able to find work in restaurants, construction, or service industries for lower wages than their Turkish coworkers. In order to prevent mistreatment of the refugees by Turkish companies, in January 2016, the government began requiring companies to offer benefits and pay of equal value to both Turks and Syrians, but as with any new government regulation, full compliance will take time. Some companies had exploited Syrian workers by not only paying low wages, but at times refusing payment, and all the while the illegal workers are subject to police raids that can result in heavy fines to Turkish business owners employing illegal workers. Frayer's National Public Radio (NPR) report from August 14, 2017 echoed Baban et al and Abboud's assertion that there are many Syrians living outside the camps and working in what Frayer (2017) described as Turkey's underground economy. Most Syrians believed their displacement would be temporary but after seven years and with no end to the war in Syria in sight, Turkey has legitimized Syrians in the country making it possible for them to obtain work permits and start their own business.



**Figure 2.** A family restaurant Al Baitar owned by a Syrian in Yeditepe region of Gaziantep, Turkey (Photo by Askerov).

In response to what has become the direst displacement crisis in modern history, the United Nation's Global Regional Strategic Framework in conjunction with its Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) called for a plan to come to their aid, that plan which began in 2015 is called "Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan: In Response to the Syria Crisis," but is better known as 3RP and is still going strong today. The plan for 2017-2018 does contain some staggering financial news, but also gives reason for hope. In their Foreword to this year's report, 3RP emphasized that a complex situation in Syria required a three-pronged approach utilizing the humanitarian response for immediate needs, focusing

on long-term solutions to bolster host communities and the refugees, and empowering Turkey's national systems. The 3RP draws on the resources, knowledge and input of over 200 partner agencies, five states, and a growing roster of donors to address the needs of Syria's refugees (3RP, 2017).

As of October 2016, 3RP (2017) stated that the Turkish government reported it had spent over \$12 billion to assist the Syrians since the crisis began in 2011. Since the January, 2016 enactment of the regulation which allows Syrian refugees to acquire work permits, some 10,000 have been issued; though tiny in comparison to the number of Syrians working or looking for work in Turkey, it is a start. The report does acknowledge, however, that the problems for workers in the informal sector are still a reality: low wages, exploitation, abuse, harassment and non-payment still occur. While it is true that the financial realities for most Syrian refugees are grave, there is no question that Turkey has been enormously generous to its guests, and now, with the work of projects like 3RP, the world at large is increasingly concerning itself with its plight. 3RP (2017) reported that between international funds, governments, other organizations and private donors \$2.49 billion has been raised as of November 30, 2016. More aid is also coming from The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) which is funded by the EU Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). It is working to aid in streamlining operations of the National Social Assistance System in Turkey and will infuse funds locally (3RP, 2017). While it is true that the world's financial assistance is appreciated, there can be no doubt that the longer this humanitarian crisis persists, the more strain it will place on the economy of Turkey and all other countries hosting Syria's displaced people.

With a war raging in Syria, just across the border from Turkey, there are obviously serious concerns for local security, especially on and around the border. There is always, as Abboud (2016) pointed out, anxiety for Turkey surrounding the effects of the conflict which find their way across the border. As mentioned by Abboud (2016), two Turkish planes which were downed by Syrian forces in 2012 and many Turkish casualties resulted from attacks and bombings at the southern border. In October of 2015, nearly one hundred died at a peace rally in Ankara and while no group claimed responsibility, the so-called Islamic State (IS) was considered a prime suspect. One year later, in October of 2016, the BBC reported that thirty-two people, mostly rebels, were killed at the Atmeh crossing on the Turkey-Syria border. Fallout from the Turkish-led "Operation Euphrates Shield" was inevitable, but the now completed campaign demonstrates the threat Syria's war poses for Turkey. This threat led Turkey to launch a campaign that took its own Army and Turkish-backed Syrian rebels over the border into Syria in August of 2016. They fought to push IS militants back from their border, and keep the Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG), who they consider to be terrorists and part of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), from getting any closer. In March of 2017, Turkey officially ended the Euphrates Shield campaign after retaking Jarablus, Dabiq, and al-Bab from the terrorists. Some felt that Turkey was rethinking its strategy after suffering heavy losses in al-Bab; however, the American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces liberated Raqqa from the IS. Perhaps the momentum to defeat the IS,

that Turkey catalyzed when its troops crossed the border last March, has caught on and will continue to push south until Syria is free from the destructive grip of this convoluted battle. Until that happens, Turkey faces a direct threat to its security and must cast a wary eye to its border with war-torn Syria.

Also of concern to Turkey's interior security is the tenuous relationship between the Syrian refugees themselves inside the camps, and outside the camps between the Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens who are now sharing their cities and towns with 90 percent of the refugees who have fled across their border. Baban et al. (2016) pointed out that while the camps were doing their best, they were stretched to capacity which results in stressful living conditions for the refugees inhabiting the camps. Those tensions and struggles are also felt outside the camps, as Syrians attempt to integrate into Turkish society. Sarah Deardorff Miller (2017) pointed out that there are some Turks who are becoming more fearful as the crisis drags out that Syrian refugees pose a threat to their society and are severely depleting their social services.

The security of the region is also of great concern to Turkey who has been directly affected by the fighting in Syria and subsequent flooding of refugees, and the ongoing war involving the IS. The situation for Turkey is complicated by its position amid the two crises: failed states in both Syria and Iraq and their displaced citizens seeking refuge (Keyman, 2016). Keyman (2016) described Turkey as a "buffer state" whose role it is to keep the two crises from spreading beyond the region and into Europe and the world. There are many destabilizing factors in the region, such as the failed state situations in Syria and Iraq, a lack of leadership in the region, and growing sectarianism which directly undermine the region's ability to ensure any actual stability. Turkey's geographic location casts it as both "effective and affected" unlike other involved players such as Europe, the United States, Iran, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states (Keyman, 2016: 2280). Turkey is not only invested in the battle against the IS, it is embroiled in a fight to influence geopolitics in the region (Keyman, 2016). The spillover effect of all these struggles significantly destabilizes security in the region.

The security dilemma is not limited to Turkey alone; the entire region is thrown into chaos due to the lack of consensus among the key actors who have competing interests. There is a curious mix of cooperation and competition between Turkey and Iran, and their various allies. Turkey buys oil and gas from Iran and has interests in Iran in both the energy and construction sector, but the two countries are on opposite sides in Syria which throws their relationship into a tenuous position which has a direct effect on security of the region at large. It is a widely held belief that Iran's backing of Syria is less about their religious ties and more about being encircled by hostile pro-West nations, however, their shared wariness of Sunnis does bring them together. Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are loosely allied, while Iran, Russia and Hezbollah line up on the other side and with their differences being magnified by the Syrian war and growing sectarian divisions in the region, security remains a highly unpredictable cause for concern. The recent developments in

Saudi Arabia and Lebanon are likely to influence the regional affairs in the Middle East significantly.

The situation in Syria has received little attention from the United Nations, who has passed resolutions in regard to Syria, but has by and large ignored the security concerns the war poses. The UN Security Council (UNSC), who would ordinarily play a role in managing conflicts around the world, has solely focused on humanitarian issues in Syria and has thus far been unable to bring a political solution to the ensuing crisis. The opposing positions of the permanent members of the UNSC explain why it has been so difficult to find a political solution to the Syrian predicament. Great Britain, the US, and France all line up against the Syrian regime, while China and Russia are in support of the regime in Syria.

Further complicating the internationalization of the Syrian conflict is the fact that Syria has been turned into a battleground for a myriad of proxy wars. There is no political consensus, and issues of arming rebels how to handle Assad's regime continue to divide the region. Iran and Russia, supposed allies of Syria, have done little to encourage the regime to negotiate peace as Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia continue to push for a military solution. In the meantime, the UN and West have been hopeless failures at affecting political change. The competing interests of a myriad of the state and non-state actors in the region exacerbate already strained international relations and can only serve to further destabilize global security at large.

All the players involved in the Syrian war, whether they are fighting or funding the war, wade into the predicament loaded down with their ideologies and politics which has resulted in a refugee crisis of monumental proportions. Neither the politics, not the future of the Middle East can be understood without considering United States foreign policy. The US is exhausted from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their trustworthiness regarding US Middle East policies is a cause for concern. Arguably, the US has recently prioritized its Asia-Pacific relations over the situation in the Middle East (Keyman, 2016). Similarly, the EU with its own set of challenges has not emerged as a willing leader in the area, which favors Russia's and Iran's policies in Syria.

The UN has initiated peace talks, has had four Special Representatives for Syria, and there have been the Geneva I and II talks as well as the Moscow Process, among others, and still, the war rages on. Western states and UN have made many efforts to manage the dilemma in Syria and the entire region but they have not been able to offer any viable political solutions because of the complexity of the conflict in which many state and non-state actors are involved (Abboud, 2016). In 2016, Turkey and the EU arrived at a deal, known as the EU/Turkey Deal, in which Turkey agreed that migrants who arrive in Greece will be sent back to Turkey, and for every Syrian migrant returned to Turkey, one refugee in Turkey who has been processed for resettlement will be allowed to proceed to Greece. This deal is reputed to have raised many concerns with NGOs, not the least of which is the issue of refolement since Turkey has returned some refugees to Syria and Afghanistan (Miller, 2017). The plan has served to reinvigorate Turkey's chance to join the European Union.

However, this policy has not worked successfully and the conflict between Turkey and the EU, especially Germany, has continued to grow.

In 2014, Turkey passed the Regulation on Temporary Protection (RTP) which specifically protected Syrian refugees from having to apply for protection individually, but it does not guarantee a path to permanent residency (Baban et al., 2017). It is this insecurity about international protection and how long it will last that drive a Syrian refugee's desire to be resettled, placing them in potential grave danger as they make their way from Turkey to Greece: the gateway to Europe.

### **War, Violence, and Children**

The systematic breakdown of Syria's societal structures has tremendously affected the psychological, emotional, and physical health of Syrian children (Askerov, 2017). The most significant and immediate impact of the shock of war on children is seen in behavioral disorders which include but are not limited to severe anxiety, fear, insecurity, persistent tension, isolationism, and bedwetting (Askerov, 2017). Young children affected by violent conflicts usually express their feelings in aggressive ways since most of them are not able to give any meaning to the violence around them. The violent nature of the war affects all children; however, younger children are in a worse situation as they have limited means to express their fear and anxiety. The war in Syria as a brutal form of violence has ruined the well-being of Syrian refugee children who have developed various forms of trauma as a result.

Studies show that the most common problem among the Syrian refugee children is PTSD followed by depression and other psychological challenges (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). The environment inside the refugee camps and tense living conditions outside the camps add to their stress. If not addressed immediately, mental health problems may have serious long-term impacts on children (Tolan & Dodge, 2015). Therefore, children with mental health problems need more resources and better care in school and at home than in the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey rarely exist (Karasapan, 2016). As aforementioned, in Turkey, healthcare services are free for all the registered refugees, which means that they are more privileged in this regard than some citizens of the country. However, the main problem is that an effective treatment for PTSD goes far beyond what the medical facilities can provide. The urgent need for organizing special units within the healthcare system that are able to address the problems related to PTSD and more advanced health care for the refugees is still a necessity. The high cost of such a service is a barrier, among others, to providing better health care services; however, it appears that the main problem is associated with the uncertainties about the future of Syria as the civil war begins its seventh year. This means that hopes for the Syrian refugees in Turkey to return home are still alive which prevents certain fundamental structural changes in the health care services they receive.

According to Turkish authorities, fifty-five percent of Syrian refugees in Turkey think

that someone in their family needs psychological support (Samari, 2015). Research indicates that this is not much different in other countries. For example, the German Federal Chamber of Psychotherapists has estimated that fifty percent of the Syrian refugees in Germany have psychological issues because of violence they suffered in Syria (Rubin, 2016). However, according to the study, only four percent of PTSD sufferers are receiving treatment in Germany (Rubin, 2016). It is estimated that only five percent of refugees receive psychotherapy in the main host countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (Samari, 2015). Limited access to mental health services and inadequate resources available to refugees in all the host countries affect children's lives adversely which contributes to their intellectual and developmental challenges.

Undoubtedly, the violence that Syrian children encountered in Syria has affected their psyche and soul on a deep level; the war memories will live with them throughout their lives. Apart from the short-term effects of violence on children, its grave long-term effects may last for decades adversely affecting future generations. Memories that last long and remain fresh through storytelling play a key role in the perpetuation of traumas. The crucial role of memory and storytelling here is that they have the power of passing the feelings of suffering, deprivation, and stress from generation to generation thus maintaining the effects of trauma to varying degrees. This would potentially help new generations to form their particular perceptions about the past and perpetuate the grief (Volkan, 1998; 2014). Hence, the impact of the Syrian war on its survivors, especially children is likely to continue for many years. The Syrian children have been subject to both direct and indirect attacks that dramatically affected their physical, mental, and psychological health. The violence children experienced was quite extreme. For instance, some of them were victims of aerial barrel bomb attacks in densely populated cities such as Aleppo (Daily Mail, May 5, 2015). Certainly, using chemical bombs against civilians is a crime against humanity and nothing worse can be used against human beings to eradicate them physically. However, the destruction of their societal structures is equally ruthless and immoral as it has deprived those children and their families' right to exist and grow in peace.

To grow in a healthy way, children need the healthy social environments that have been partially damaged or totally destroyed by the war and violence in Syria, depending on the region, thus imposing violence on the children both directly and indirectly. The war ruined the social environment and structure necessary for children's healthy growth in Syria making them lose some of their skills acquired before the war. The destruction of the well-founded societal structures has led the children to suffer from behavioral disorders which make it necessary to address their problems wherever they are. As Thomas (2016) elaborates, education has an exclusive power to help reconstruct young lives by providing children with safety, a sense of normalcy, and the necessary skills they need to recover from hardships. Educating people, especially children, is important for ending the conflict in Syria and reconstructing the country. In this sense, there has been an urgent need to develop new educational opportunities for the refugee children living in the hosting countries.

There is an urgent need to develop both short-term and long-term approaches to providing education for the Syrian children in most host countries and Syria itself. In 2016, UNICEF reported that 2.1 million children in Syria and 700,000 Syrian refugee children in various countries did not have access to education. In Jordan alone, a total of 80,000 children refugees were out of school in 2016 (Humanium, 2017). It is estimated that forty percent of Syrian refugee children living in Turkey are not attending school for various reasons. This statistical information speaks volumes about the dire and unfavorable situation Syrian children face due to being displaced by the ongoing war and violence in their country.

Neighboring countries hosting the largest population of refugees such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan bear a responsibility to pay special attention to the monumental task of educating all refugee children they host. Culbertson and Constant (2015) suggest that policy implications for the refugee children must include prioritizing the vital need to increase access to education. As they stress, transitioning from a short-term humanitarian response to a longer-term development response must be reserved as one of the main goals. Therefore, investing in both government capacities to provide education and developing a well-planned strategy about how to integrate or separate Syrian and host-country children in schools to promote social cohesion is vital for success. It is also important to eliminate child labor, which is very widespread as discussed above, and attract them to education (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). However, this is a long process requiring step-by-step developments that are hard to accomplish in the current atmosphere of uncertainty. An urgent and decisive political solution to the crisis in Syria would be a starting point for all positive and constructive projects. In absence of a political solution, host countries are left to struggle through policy processes and do their best to educate Syria's children. In this sense, the Turkish model of education for refugee children is perhaps the most rewarding of all the regional host countries. The school premises operate for two shifts a day to meet the needs for physical space. Turkey's astute idea to employ Syrian teachers from the refugee population to meet the increased demand for educators is a triple win as it improves the lives of the students, teachers, and their families. The state has been generous in covering the expenses associated with K-12 education.

The refugee policies of the host countries, Turkey and others, are important for the future of Syria, although its future is currently unforeseen and unpredictable. As Karasapan (2016) put it, war and violence create an environment of constant stress which leads to developing mental health issues among children. Evidently, the destruction of the societal and educational structures in Syria has affected children's lives dramatically. Their inability to attend school for a long while has impacted both their own lives and the future of their country. Perhaps the generation who will have to participate in rebuilding Syria is these very children whose access to adequate education has been severely limited due to the war in their home country (Cochran, 2014). To illuminate, in mid-2015, enrollment rates among the refugee children were about twenty percent in Lebanon and thirty percent in Turkey

(Sirin & Sirin-Rogers, 2015). In late 2015, more than 400,000 Syrian refugee children living in Turkey were not attending school (Human Rights Watch, November 8, 2015). Although the host countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan provide the refugee children with access to education, more than 1.25 million school-age refugee children in these three countries were not in formal education in 2015 (Human Rights Watch, September 16, 2016). The situation has significantly improved as of today, however language barriers and economic hardship remain as main factors that keep refugee children out of class. It is necessary to note that unlike other host countries in the region, the number of schoolchildren has increased in Turkey significantly in 2016 and 2017.

Refugee children in various regional host countries are likely to face further challenges, since the problems associated with meeting Syrian refugees' basic needs such as food, shelter, education, medical care, and access to mental health services remain mostly unresolved. It is essential to understand their problems both for effective interventions and for moral/ethical, and humanitarian reasons. If the psychological, emotional, and physical problems of the entire refugee population are not addressed today they are certain to generate a myriad of new problems for the future Syrian society. Likewise, the effects of the destruction of basic societal structures on the refugee children should be well understood to mobilize efforts in preventing further harm, impairment, and human crisis.

### **Discussions and Conclusions**

Civilian populations are increasingly exposed to contemporary violent conflicts everywhere, but the Syrian case is outstanding. At least fifty percent of Syria's population has become either refugees or internally displaced people since the beginning of the civil war in 2011. Although some abortive efforts of negotiations around this protracted conflict have taken place, no promising results have been attained. The complexities of the war in Syria with dozens of state and non-state actors on the field offer only pessimistic prognosis. Nonetheless, the dimensions of the humanitarian crisis have become a warning about the necessity of reforming the structures on local, regional, and international levels. The Syrian crisis, along with others, has clearly demonstrated that no violent crisis in the globalized era stays confined to limits of the crisis zone. Rather, its effects go far beyond creating political, economic, and social problems for others, especially the immediate neighbors.

The war in Syria has affected the civilians tremendously. The children of the refugees are most adversely affected by the war, but the full extent of their suffering is still not sufficiently understood. One of the reasons for this is that the war in Syria is ongoing and opportunities to do scientific research to cover all of its distinctive aspects are limited at this point. However, it is well known that in general, war adversely affects children in many different ways. The effect of the war and violence it produced on the people of Syria, both in the psychological and social realms, is grave to the extreme. Those who survive the war develop traumatic injuries that are likely to have a lasting if not lifelong effect on them and those injuries will manifest as physical disabilities and mental wounds. There will be

consequences for their future mental and physical health as well as their social and economic life skills.

Turkey, the region, and the global community are suffering economic, security and political consequences as a result of the war in Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis. There are many challenges to meeting the needs of the nearly three million Syrian refugees now living in Turkey, and it is the most innocent citizens of Syria who are subject to the worst of it: the children. However, there is good news for both Turkey and the Syrian refugees who today call her home. History has proven time and again that the human race is resilient, and children's lives also hold great potential for recovery (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013). Therefore, opportunities should be created to support their recovery from their emotional and mental problems, as well as encourage further healthy physical growth, psychological development, and well-being. However, with the end of the war, which is not at this moment in clear sight, the problems for Syrians will not be over immediately. It must also be considered that the lives of the people of Turkey will be forever affected by the nearly three million Syrians currently living in their midst. The post-war reconstruction will take a long time, and it bears attention that this construction will not only be about reconstructing the ruined cities, villages, and buildings alone; it will also entail constructing people's lives, health, happiness, and lasting peace. Building peace will take a longer time, as it is a very slow and detailed process which is mired in politics, economics, and warring nations and factions all armed with conflicting agendas. The people of Syria, as well as the people of Turkey, deserve the full attention of the global community to once and for all broker an arrangement that will allow Syria's refugees to leave their host countries and return home to once again utter the beautiful words Abboud (2016, pg. xiii) so fondly recalled, "Welcome to Syria, this country is for everyone".

With a conflict as convoluted and volatile as the one raging away in Syria since 2011, and host nations like Turkey and its citizens being drained of their money, resources and energy, the global community has a moral responsibility to assist the people of that region in finding a pathway to peace in Syria. We must place political agendas aside, for if we can come together as a global community to resolve this protracted conflict in Syria, and the ensuing effects of the massive influx of refugees on Turkey, the region and the world, then perhaps we can take the lessons of diplomacy that will be undoubtedly learned and begin to build a more unified and safe place to call home.

## **References:**

- Abboud, S.N. (2016). *Syria*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Afanasieva, D., Sezer, S. (July 21, 2014). Turkey hatching plan to clear Syrian beggars off Istanbul streets. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us->

[syria-crisis-turkey-refugees/turkey-hatching-plan-to-clear-syrian-beggars-off-istanbul-streets-idUSKBN0FQ15Q20140721](http://www.uskbn.org/syria-crisis-turkey-refugees/turkey-hatching-plan-to-clear-syrian-beggars-off-istanbul-streets-idUSKBN0FQ15Q20140721)

Alkousaa, Riham & Maximilian Popp (December 7, 2016). The death strip at the Syrian-Turkish border. *Spiegel Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/death-strip-on-border-between-turkey-and-syria-a-1124706.html>

*Alwasl, Zaman* (2016-12-16). The refugee camp: True tragedy. Retrieved from <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/21286.html>

Askerov, Ali (2017). Effects of the Syrian civil war on children: Socio-psychological Effects. *International Migration and Children-Uluslararası Göç ve Çocuklar*, 159-164.

Ankara bombing: Who is behind Turkey's deadliest attack? (2015, 12 October) In BBC News

Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34504326>

Asik, G. (April 13, 2017). Turkey Badly Needs a Long-Term Plan for Syrian Refugees. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/04/turkey-badly-needs-a-long-term-plan-for-syrian-refugees>

Baban, F., Ilcan, S., & Rygiel, K. (2016). Syrian refugees in Turkey: pathways to precarity, differential inclusion, and negotiated citizenship rights. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43, 41-57. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2016.1256031

Can, S. (2017). The Syrian civil war, sectarianism and political change at the Turkish-Syrian border. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 25, 174-189. doi: 10.1111/1469.8876.12413

Cochran, J. (August 20, 2014). The education of Syrian refugee children. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/education-syrian-refugee-children>

Culbertson, S., & Constant, L. (2015). *Education of Syrian refugee children: Managing the crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015.

Culture, Context and the mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians. (2015). *United*

- Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/55f6b90f9.pdf>
- Daily Mail, (May 5, 2015). 'I saw children without heads': Syrian factory worker describes 'hell' of Aleppo barrel bomb attack in shocking new report. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3068063/Amnesty-slams-crimes-against-humanity-Syrias-Aleppo.html>
- Dincer, O. b., Fererici, V., Ferries, E., Karaca, k. k., & Carmikli, O. E. (2013). Turkey and Syrian refugees: The limits of hospitality. *International Strategies Research Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-and-syrian-refugees-the-limits-of-hospitality/>
- European Commission. (July, 2016). The EU and Refugee Crisis. Retrieved from <http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/refugee-crisis/en/>
- Europe Commission (October 16, 2017). Turkey: Refugee Crisis. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey\\_syrian\\_crisis\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey_syrian_crisis_en.pdf)
- Food Voucher Bring Relief to Syrian Refugees in Turkey. (October 14, 2016). *US Aid from the American People*. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/syria/food-assistance>
- Fernando, C., & Ferrari, M. (2013). *Handbook of resilience in children of war*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Frayner, L. (2017, August 14). For Syrian refugees in Turkey, a long road to regular employment. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/08/14/543471407/for-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-a-long-road-to-regular-employment>
- Frost, J. L. (2010). *A history of children's play and play environments: Toward a contemporary child-saving movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Gini, A. (2003). *Importance of being lazy: In praise of play, leisure, and vacations*. New York: Routledge.
- Health Care Service: Syrian Refugees and other Persons under "Temporary Protection". (n.d).

- Refugee Rights Turkey. Retrieved from [http://mhd.org.tr/assets/tp\\_health\\_eng.pdf](http://mhd.org.tr/assets/tp_health_eng.pdf)
- Human Rights Watch, (November 8, 2015). Turkey: 400,000 Syrian children not in school. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/08/turkey-400000-syrian-children-not-school>
- Human Rights Watch, (September 16, 2016). Education for Syrian Refugee Children: What Donors and Host Countries Should Do. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/16/education-syrian-refugee-children-what-donors-and-host-countries-should-do>
- Human Rights Watch (May 19, 2017). Remove Barriers to Syrian Refugee Education. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/remove-barriers-syrian-refugee-education>
- Humanium (2017). Children of Syria: Realizing children's rights in Syria. Retrieved from <http://www.humanium.org/en/middle-east-north-africa/syria/>
- Integrating Syrian Refugee in Turkey. (2016). *International Crises Group*. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/integrating-syrian-refugees-turkey>
- Karasapan, O. (Monday, April 25, 2016) Syria's mental health crisis. Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2016/04/25/syrias-mental-health-crisis>
- Keyman, E.F. (2016). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Arab spring era: from proactive to buffer state. *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 2274-2287. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2016.1199260
- Miller, S.D. (2017). *Political and humanitarian responses to Syrian displacement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ness, D., & Farenga, S. J. (2007). *Knowledge under construction: The importance of play in developing children's spatial and geometric thinking*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pinna, M. (April 28, 2016). Turkey: e-Food Card for Refugees. *Euronews*. Retrieved from <http://www.euronews.com/2016/04/28/turkey-e-food-cards-for-refugees>

Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2017-2017 (3RP) in Response to the Syria Crisis.

Rubin, S. (March 9, 2016). Brain drain: The neglected mental health of refugees in Europe: How stigma and a lack of help are leaving trauma untreated. IRIN. Retrieved from <https://www.irinnews.org/feature/2016/03/09/brain-drain-neglected-mental-health-refugees-europe>

Samari, Goleen (2015). The response to Syrian refugee women's health needs in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan and recommendations for improved practice. *Humanity in Action*. Humanity in Action, Inc.

Schaefer, C. E. (2003). *Play therapy with adults*. Hoboken, N.J: J. Wiley.

Sirin, S. R, & Rogers-Sirin, L. (October, 2015). The educational and mental health needs of Syrian refugee children. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/educational-and-mental-health-needs-syrianrefugee-children>

Syrian Refugee Health Profile (December 22, 2016). Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/pdf/syrian-health-profile.pdf>

Thomas, M. (February 6, 2016). Why education is so important for refugees around the world. Global Citizen. Retrieved from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/the-iceberg-that-will-sink-ourkids/>

Tolan, Patrick, H. & Dodge, Kenneth, A. (2005). Children's mental health as a primary care and concern: A system for comprehensive support and service. *American Psychologist*, vol. 60 (6), September 2005, 601-614.

Turkey 'ends' Euphrates shield campaign in Syria. (2017, 30 March). In BBC News Middle East. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39439593>

UNICEF (2015). 14 million children impacted by conflict in Syria and Iraq: UNICEF. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_81172.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_81172.html)

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (January 19, 2017). Over 40 per cent

of Syrian refugee children in Turkey missing out on education, despite massive increase

in enrolment rates. Retrieved from

[https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_94417.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94417.html)

Volkan, V. D. (1998). *Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Volkan, V. D. (2014). *Psychoanalysis, International Relations, and Diplomacy: A Sourcebook on Large-Group Psychology*. London: Karnac Books.

Zeldin, W. (march, 2016). Refugee Law and Policy: Turkey. Library of Congress. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/turkey.php>