

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY*

Suriye Sığınmacı Krizi ve Türkiye

Sertif DEMİR**

Abstract

There are many theories explaining migration concept in mostly economic perspectives. Among them, forced migration explicate the unwilling internationalization of migrations due to political or natural reasons that intimidate their lives. Syria has been subject to internal war and violence for ten years consisting of ethnic and sectarian elements. This war led to devastation and destruction of the whole country and disintegration of its population. As a result of war millions of people have become refugees. A global holistic approach is required to end the Syrian refugee crisis which also affects Turkey.

Keywords: Syria, Crisis, Migration, Refugees, Turkey.

Öz

Göçü çoğunlukla ekonomik perspektifle açıklayan birçok teori vardır. Bunlar arasında zorunlu göç, göçlerin hayatlarını tehdit eden siyasi veya doğal nedenlerle isteksizce uluslararasılaşmasını açıklamaktadır. Suriye, on yıldır etnik ve mezhepsel unsurları içeren iç savaşa ve şiddete maruz kalmıştır. Bu savaş tüm ülkenin harap olmasına, yıkılmasına ve nüfusunun parçalanmasına yol açmıştır. Savaş sonucunda milyonlarca insan mülteci oldu. Türkiye'yi de etkileyen Suriye mülteci krizini sona erdirmek için küresel bütüncül bir yaklaşıma ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Suriye, Kriz, Göç, Sığınmacılar, Türkiye.

* Makale Geliş Tarihi: 01.04.2021 Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 29.04.2021

** Prof. Dr., University Turkish Aeronautical Association, Faculty of Business,
e-mail: sertifd@thk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-8329-8735.

INTRODUCTION

Migration and refugee issues are again at the center of international agenda as were after the First and Second World Wars. Because the world experienced a tremendous refugee problem during both wars. Those refugees and immigration of people caused by wars led the League of Nations and United Nations to consider the problems and to find solutions. For example, the International Labor Organization was established in 1932 to tackle refugees after the First World War. In the last 20 years, human beings have faced huge migration and refugee influx because of various reasons, but mostly from internal wars/conflicts and poor living conditions. Increasing migration and refugees have become urgent and challenging problems in the world, which adversely affected the social, economic, political and cultural life of many states.

Scholarly, many theories have been conceptualized to illustrate the causes, motives and outcome of internationalization of migrations. In fact, most migration theories postulate the economic factor as the main cause of internationalization migration. War, persecution and political violence are hardly deemed as dynamics affecting migration of people. Forced migration best explicates the internationalization of migration.

Syria has been devastated by an ongoing internal conflict that has continued for ten years. Syrian crisis can be described as a new type of war in our age with involvement of global powers with their proxies, regional mid-scale powers, ethnic and sectarian radicals, foreign fighters, neighboring countries. Some scholars defined Syrian crisis as a hybrid-war which consisted of both classical warfare and non-classical warfare concepts were united based on an asymmetric approach. It has become a war trial center where new weapons, ammunitions, technology have been tested. Because of the wars Syrian refugees have turned to humanitarian crises/disasters. Syrian refugees account for more than half of the

refugees in the word. This humanitarian tragedy needs to be examined from such perspectives.

Overall, this study tries to explain Syrian refugee crisis in detail. In order to make this analysis, first conceptual evolution of migration type and theories will be clarified. Second, the focus will be on the clarification of the global refugee issue. Third, study centers on scrutinizing the Syrian crisis. Finally, Turkey's Syrian refugee policy will be explained.

Narrative approach employing a qualitative method will be used as a search tool.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION THEORIES

Migration is a phenomenon that has existed throughout history as human beings moved from place to place due to various reasons. The reasons for the movement were wars, conflicts, scarcity, drought, famine, man-made or natural disasters, poverty, climate change, political pressures, persecutions and political violence. Human beings faced enormous influx of migration during the both World Wars periods because of war atrocities, invasions, mass killing and political regime changes in countries. After the world wars, migration also took place but this kinds of migrations were generally economic-motivated rather than politically one.

As globalization has spread and it started in the late 20th century, it reduced the barriers among nations. Therefore, the inter states-migration also raised for the purpose of working, education, commercial, business etc. These kinds of migration are generally called voluntary migrations, resulting from enlarging economic activities. Bearing in the mind that America is land of migration, its economic growth can also be attributed to those migrated people, among other reasons.¹

¹ Sertif Demir, "The European Union Migration Policy: Evolution Through Refugee Crisis", Hasret Comak et al., eds., *Refugee Crisis in International Crisis*, Vol II, London 2021.

MIGRATION TYPES

In order to understand migration in all perspectives we need to explain the types and theory of migration and refugees. Migration issue has many aspects. It cannot be just explainable from one field. It has, to some extent, linkages with economics, social, cultural, and political factors/ fields. Those factors can influence the migration motives.

Some scholars categorized migration into several groups according to motives, causes and results. In this context, Jennissen² outlined four sorts of migration: 1) Labor migration; 2) Return migration; 3) Chain migration; and 4) Asylum migration. Looking at their explanations, labor migration refers to migration to another country for working. Return migrations is defined as returning to the origin country of citizenship after remaining almost a year at foreign country. On the other hand, migrating to other countries for family unification can be described as chain migrants. Asylum migration refers to movement to another countries seeking international recognized refugee status.

Likewise but little differently some scholars³ classify international migration to three forms. These are labor migration, forced migration, and international retirement migration. Labor migration is defined as migrating to other countries for working. Forced migration refers to refugees and asylum seekers who move foreign countries because of political reasons or natural disasters etc. Retirement migration occurs when people buy property and settle in a country after their retirement.

Another categorization is more simply and less complicated which consists of forced and voluntary migration. Forced migration involves an

2 Roel Peter Wilhelmina Jennissen, *Macro-Economic Determinants of International Migration in Europe*, Rozenberg Publishers, Amsterdam 2004; A. A. I. N. Wickramasinghe-Wijitapure Wimalaratana, "International Migration and Migration Theories", *Social Affairs*, 1(5), Fall 2016, p. 17.

3 Simon Bell et al., *Migration and Land Use Change in Europe: A Review*, Living Reviews in Landscape Research, 4, 2010; Wickramasinghe&Wimalaratana, *op.cit*, p. 17.

unwilling movement of people to other countries due to political or natural reasons that intimidate their lives. Nevertheless, voluntary migration directly refers mostly to economic conditions, based on willingness of people.⁴

Forced migration mostly occurs in problematic lands where wars, conflicts, natural and man-made disasters such as poverty, famine, droughts, and earthquakes affect human life. People are forced to migrate due to annoying conditions. Political violence, persecutions, civilian wars, degrading ecosystems are major root causes of such enforced migrations. People who migrated for such reasons also seek political asylum. According to statistical information, the number of the forced displaced people have enlarged year by year.

MIGRATION THEORIES

There are many theories explaining migration in theoretical perspectives. As explained before, migration is relevant to many aspects such as economics, social, political and cultural and security. Therefore, migration theories have to explain all aspects of dynamics affecting migration in generalized concepts. Aim of this theoretical explanation is to provide some clues that shed lights on the topic.

The first and oldest migration theory is called neo-classical economic theory migration. This theory refers to economic motivation of migration; it claims that people or workers migrate from low-wage countries to high-wage countries.⁵ This theory explains migration through wage variations among states.

4 Graeme Hugo, "Migration, Development and Environment", *International Organization for Migration Geneva*, 2008; Saskia Koppenberg, "Where Do Forced Migrants Stand in the Migration and Development Debate", *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration*, 2(1), 2012, p. 77-90; Roger Zetter, *Protection in Crisis: Forced Migration and Protection in a Global Era*, Migration Policy Institute, 2015; Wickramasinghe-Wimalaratana, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

5 Wickramasinghe-Wimalaratana, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

The second theory is New Economics of Labor Migration theory that centers on collective behaviors of family, households for migration rather than individual acts. According to this approach, collective decision is required through consent of family, household or cultural group for international migration. The decision will consider not only to increase income, but also to calculate the risks that can be confronted.⁶ Key issue is here international migration decisions are generally taken by all collective consent via calculating expected income and risks to be faced.

Another theory is called dual labor market theory which asserts that industrialization of developed countries causes for internationalization of migration. Developed countries need to fill labor gaps as their economies progress which motivates international migration. On the other hand, low wages and high unemployment and inflation, economic dualism can lead to migration to other countries.⁷ This theory explains the root cause of international migration based on the labor demand of industrialized economies and looking for higher income by labors in other countries.

Network migration theory illustrates international migration through the existence of family, friends, relatives, fellow countrymen living in foreign countries. This family or relativity network or ties triggers and facilitates the internationalization of migration.⁸

The last but not the least one is world systems theory which views migration from the Marxist perspective. Wallerstein, as a key representative of this view, asserted that international migration is a natural outcome of economic globalization and market penetration across national boundaries.⁹

6 Douglas S. Massey et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal", *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 1993, p. 431- 466; Wickramasinghe-Wimalaratana, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

7 Michael J. Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor Industrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1979; Wickramasinghe&Wimalaratana, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

8 Joaquín Arango, "Explaining Migration: A Critical View", *International Social Science Journal*, 52(165), 2000, p. 283-296; Wickramasinghe&Wimalaratana, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

9 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Academic Press, New York 1974.

As seen from those migration theories, they are dealing with internationalization of migration focusing on economic perspectives rather than political.

ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL FORCED MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

The reasons of present-day-displacement have shifted to be more intricate due to fact that conflict, violence and human rights abuses are rising and are becoming more complicated. These complexities are also overlapping and intertwining with ethnic and religious hostilities, severe drought, poorness, scarcity, and adverse environmental dynamics.¹⁰ Because of these many undesirable situation in countless countries, millions of people are forcibly migrated to other countries where they think to find shelter and protection for their and family.

Therefore, the scale and difficulty of today's forced displacement is associated with the frequency, magnitude and longevity of today's conflicts, and the inability of the global community to find a solution and to resolve them.

Seeking protection or shield for themselves and their families led people to migrate to other countries. If migration occurs inside a country, it is called internally displaced persons (IDPs). Migrated people seeking protection outside home country are defined refugees and asylum seeker. The international legal definition of the term is contained in the 1951 Convention. It defined refugees as "individuals who have fled their country due to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" and crossed an international border to seek safety." Bearing in

¹⁰ "A Guide to International Refugee Protection and Building State Asylum Systems, Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 27", UHCR, 2017, p. 6.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

the mind that, asylum is a fundamental right; it is granted in international obligation, per 1951 Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees.¹¹

Per principle of non-refoulement, refugees are entitled not to forcibly return to their origin country as determined in the 1951 Convention. On the other hand, asylum seeker is a general definition for someone seeking for international protection right.

Reviewing the number of refugees, according UNHCR, the number of enforced displacement has surpassed 80 million around the world in mid-2020. That means such a number of people who forcibly displaced are in need of protection and assistance.¹² 45.5 million of them are internally displaced people (at the end-2019), 26.3 million of them are refugees (as of mid-2020), 4.2 million are asylum-seekers (as of mid-2020) ¹³ It requires providing huge humanitarian assistance to those migrations for hosting countries. According to international laws, hosted countries need to provide basic human requirements with refugees and IDPs. They need to meet their safety and protection, free access to shelter, food and health needs. Hosting countries also need to take measures against any criminal activities, violence, abuse and exploitation of refugees. For the long duration, refugees also require education support as needed.

Looking at the origin of countries for refugees as of mid-2020, 67% refugees have originated from just five countries. These are Syrian Arab Republic with 6.6 million, Venezuela with 3.7 million, Afghanistan with 2.7 million, South Sudan with 2.3 million and Myanmar with 1.0 million.¹⁴ Syria has become the country from which the largest refugees originated.

11 "Figures at a Glance", UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>, (Date of Accession: 07.10.2020).

12 "Forced Displacement: Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Internally Displaced People (IDPs)", European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en, (Date of Accession: 07.10.2020).

13 "Welcome to UNHCR's Refugee Population Statistics Database", UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

14 *Ibid.*

It is not a vague issue since the Syria crisis is the main culprit of this migration.

The other important fact is that 39 % of refugees hosted in five countries while Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees with 3.6 million people. Colombia is second with 1.8 million, Pakistan with 1.4 million, Uganda with 1.4 million, Germany with 1.1 million.¹⁵ The other interesting points is that developing countries host 86 per cent of the world's refugees.¹⁶ Seeing the hosting countries, Turkey has been covering much of the burden of refugees in the world. This issue has not been much appreciated by the World. Looking other countries, unfortunately, they are low- and middle-income countries. Becoming a hosting country for forced displaced people requires huge economic support. The economic burden of refugees must be shared fairly.

An estimated 30-34 million (38-43%) of the 80 million forcibly displaced persons are children below 18 years of age (end-2019).¹⁷ This is another aspect of the humanitarian crisis that the world confronted. This number is likely to increase because of newborns.

Forced dislocation is no longer a momentary issue, because in our globalized world the displacement of human beings has become an ordinary problem.¹⁸ Additionally, it definitely leads to internal political crisis in a hosted country because of accommodating an unexpected amount of migrated people. Nevertheless, if the duration of forced people extended in the host country, the political frustration will also likely rise against refugees.

Looking at the situation of these refugees, the striking number of them are living in bad and undesirable conditions for many years. Although

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

national and international organizations are struggling to alleviate their problems, however, no solutions is in sight.¹⁹

International law documents that are approved by nations are as follows: The essential documents for refugees are 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. These documents outline essential rights of refugees. Additionally, these documents are interrelated with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent related documents as well as the four 1949 Geneva Conventions on International Humanitarian Law. On the other hand, the rights and obligations of stateless persons are included in the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.²⁰

SYRIAN CRISIS AND REFUGEE PROBLEM

Syria has been subject of internal wars and violence for ten years composed of ethnic and sectarian elements.²¹ This war led to devastation and destruction of the whole country. Additionally, the unity, togetherness, and cohesion of Syria have disappeared because of separation of county to three regions. Foreign powers like America, Russia and China; regional mid-powers like Turkey, Iran and Israel; and non-state actors such as Hezbollah and other radical Islamic religious groups; terror groups like Iraq and Syria Islamic State (ISIS). Of course, those non-state actors hired numerous foreign fighters. Syrian crisis can be described as a new type of war in our age with involvement of global powers with their proxies, regional mid-scale powers, ethnic and sectarian radicals, and neighboring countries. Some scholars defined Syrian crisis as a hybrid-war, which

19 "A Guide to International Refugee Protection and Building State Asylum Systems Handbook for Parliamentarians", *UNHCR*, No: 27, 2017, p. 10.

20 "International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics Eurostat", *Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics*, March 2018, p. 19.

21 Further information see: Sertif Demir-Carmen Rijnoveanu, "The Impact of the Syria Crisis on the Global and Regional Political Dynamics", *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, 13(1), 2013, p. 55-77.

consists of both classical warfare and non-classical warfare components. It has also become a war trial center where new weapons, ammunitions and technology have been tested.

The beginning of Syrian crisis is traced back to Arab Uprising or with the popular name Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in autumn 2010 and spread to the Arab world. Although this study does not aim at scrutinizing the root causes of Arab Spring, it is necessary to explain some crucial dynamics that led to this uprising. Bear in mind, the Syrian crisis caused Syrian refugees to turn to humanitarian crisis/disaster. Syrian refugees account for more than half of the refugees in the word. This humanitarian tragedy needs to be examined from the outset and from the many perspectives.

The developments in the Middle East in the post-1950 period and partially in the post-Cold War period should be evaluated within the scope of the historical dimension and the humanitarian, geographical, religious and ethnic characteristics of the region. When we look at the historical facts, the stability in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa was achieved by dominant powers throughout history. The North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula have historically been a region dominated by external dynamics rather than internal dynamics. The hegemonic/dominant powers and empires provided fragmented political structures with protection umbrellas and used military power when necessary. These political approaches have been the source of stability in the history of the region.

Today, the developments in the region mostly resulted from the inability of resolving problems that emerged after the First World War. Artificial borders drawn by the dominant powers of that time created an environment for the emergence of oppressive governments in the region. Because the leaders of those artificial states believed in their existence can only be achieved by relying on the dominant powers.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

The events known as the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Revolt”, which started in Tunisia in 2010 affected the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa and led to civil wars, collapse of governments and change of regimes in some countries. When we look at the reasons of these events; poverty, corruption, injustice, violations of fundamental human rights, restriction of political rights, failure to ensure individual rights and freedoms etc., have been root causes of the uprising. Major dynamic can be attributed to disregarding the democratic demands and the unequal and unfair share of wealth. Especially the repressive regimes ignoring the young generation’s desire for democracy, freedom, a better life and equal enjoyment of wealth, which sparked the fire of this uprising. Moreover, those long-existed problems coupled with ethnic, religious and sectarian uneasiness constituted the source of the events.

This movement, which created great hopes in the beginning, has resulted in unexpected outcomes. Because while the Arab Spring caused the change in political powers that were not in line with the Western world, it did not have any effect on the kingdoms and sheikh administrations that were in close contact with the West. In addition, the Arab Spring overthrew the secular but repressive and authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; however, the newly established regimes have not become more modern, democratic, secular and libertarian ones. Instead, there is fragmentation and civil war in Libya; military regime in Egypt has been ruling country after dethroning the Moslem Brotherhood regime, which came to power after popular movement in 2010-2011 deposed Mubarak. President Mursi and Moslem Brotherhood regime tried to turn country to sole Islamic Regime instead of establishing fully democratic system in Egypt. In Tunisia, partially progress achieved, thanks to the cooperation of secular and conservative groups, and the country reached to a more advanced level of governance than before. On the contrary, looking at other undemocratic regimes, the King of Saudi Arabia and the sheikhs of

the Gulf States used oil wealth to control social discontent and preserved their status.²² Nevertheless, in Yemen and Syria civil wars continue.

Syrian Crisis has differently evolved from the other Arab Countries in violence, stakeholders, destruction, and outcome perspectives.

The reasons for the Syrian civil war are, if generalizing, the existence of a repressive power based on a single-family rule, the absence of democracy, freedoms and political liberties. Besides, the Assad family transformed Syria into a police state in which no political right was granted. Furthermore, the regime was unable to overlap the Sunni-Shia sectarian differences though secularism. The Alevi minority holding the power against the Sunni majority was also another root cause of uneasiness.²³ In addition, the global economic crisis that started in 2008 accelerated basic economic problems of Syria and played a triggering role in the emergence of the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, the environmental crisis also played a role in Syria's uprising. Between 2006 and 2010, Syria experienced extreme drought since its establishment. This drought caused enormous farmers to face poverty and led mass migration of rural people to urban slams.²⁴ However, the real cause of the Syrian civil war is the chain of social events that affect the Arab world, defined as the Arab Spring.

The political opposition started in 2011 and shifted to the armed opponent, as their demands towards more freedom and liberty were not met peacefully. This armed political opposition, which is increasingly divided and differentiated, started to change the balances in the region,

22 Further information see: Sertif Demir, "Tarihsel Gerçekler Bağlamında Arap Yarımadası ve Kuzey Afrika'daki Gelişmelerin Analizi", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-Ertan Efeğil, ed., *Türk Dış Politikasında Güvenlik Arayışları*, Barış Kitabevi, Ankara 2012, p. 255-284.

23 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-İrem Bilgetürk, "Mehdilik Anlayışı Kapsamında İnan Dış Politikası Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 4(1), 2020, p. 254-255.

24 "Syrian Civil War", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

especially with its shift towards the sectarian axis and radicalization. In fact, the West/the US deemed a moderate opposition embraced, at least slightly, the Western type political understanding. Instead, the armed opponents shifted to radicalism and included all types of radical organizations. Syria has become a venue where all these radicals fought with Syrian regime as well as with themselves. As a result, the innocent demands that started with the request for more democracy in Syria in 2011 have turned into a sectarian/religious/ethnic/political internal conflict that has continued for ten years.

The Protests in 2011 quickly escalated into a full-scale war in the country. Three campaigns drive the conflict: coalition efforts to defeat the ISIS, violence between the Syrian government and opposition forces, and military operations against Syrian Kurdish separatists, which connected to group Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terror organization in Turkey, by Turkish forces.²⁵ Turkey wanted to clear Kurdish separatists off in Arab originated Syrian lands to make a safe zone in the region for the repatriation of Syrian refugees in Turkey.²⁶ Currently, opposition forces have maintained limited control in Idlib, in northwestern Syria, and on the Iraq-Syria border.²⁷

As a result of the civil war until today (Mart 2021), approximately between 388,652–594,000 people have died, 1.9 million people have been injured (almost 11.5% of the population) and approximately 5,6 million people have become international asylum seekers. Of 6,7 million of Syrians are internally displaced persons (IDPs) The number of refugees in Turkey has reached to 3,655 million. About a third of the population died, injured or became asylum seekers due to the civil war.²⁸

25 "Civil War in Syria", *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021); For further information see: Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-Kadir Ertaç Çelik, "ABD'nin Suriye Politikasında Vekil Aktör Olarak Terör Örgütleri: YPG Örneği", *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2(2), 2018, p. 14-45.

26 "Syrian Civil...", *loc. cit.*

27 "Civil War...", *loc. cit.*

28 "Situation", *UNHCR*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

Table-1: Dispersion of Syrian Asylum Seeker

	Data Date	Refugee Number	Percentage
Turkey	17 Mar 2021	3,663,336	65.4%
Lebanon	31 Dec 2020	865,531	15.5%
Jordan	28 Feb 2021	664,603	11.9%
Iraq	28 Feb 2021	243,890	4.4%
Egypt	28 Feb 2021	131,235	2.3%
Other (North Africa)	31 Jan 2020	31,657	0.6%

Source: "Situation", UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

As seen from Table, Turkey host the 65% percent of all Syrian refugees. This is very high number which brought heavy economic, social, political and cultural burden for Turkey. Following section will analyses Turkey's efforts regarding with Syrian refugees. Lebanon is the second and Jordan is third country that host most of refugees.

TURKEY'S SYRIAN REFUGEE POLICY

Anatolia has become the land of migration throughout history. Because it is located at the intersection of three continents and also historically functioned as a transportation route of people, goods and ideas. Whenever a crisis occurred in its neighboring lands, people tended to migrate to Anatolia for safety. Additionally, Turks have always provided safeguard with those people affected by wars, conflicts, mass killing, persecutions or political pressures. Looking at the history, Ottomans became safe havens for Polish who escaped from the wars. Polish village name came from the ancestry of today's people living in this village. Intellectual Germans migrated to Turkey from Hitler fascist regime during the 1930s. Anatolia became a shelter for the Russian refugees who escaped from the Red Army after the Collapse of Russian Tsars regime by 1917 Revolution.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

Likewise, Iranians who escaped from the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iraqi Kurdish who were fiercely displaced by Saddam Forces in 1991 are some examples that Turkey experienced in the past.

Turkey also hosted hundreds of thousands Turkish origin people living out of border Turkey, living in either neighboring or remote countries. When Ottoman Empire dissolved at the end of the First World War, many Turks remained at the border of newly-established states that are successors of Ottomans. Therefore, various numbers of Turks remained the sovereignty of those successors like Bulgaria, Greece, Iraq, Syria. Jordan. Those Turkish originated people migrated to Turkey because of political pressures, intimidation, persecutions or through population exchange. In this perspective, there estimated over one and half million Turks living Balkans, because of persecution, intimation, political discrimination risk, migrated to Turkey from 1920s until the Cold War ended.

Turkey's policy toward those kinds of migration was always the same. Providing humanitarian necessities, security and care until return to their origin countries or final destinations were the main theme of long-duration migration policy.

When Syrian crisis started in 2011, Turkish government tried to solve instabilities in Syria through negotiation with Syrian regime as Turkey had established good relations with Syrian Government in the last ten years. However, this policy failed as Basher Assad and his family were unwilling to share power with opponents and increased violent methods to subdue the uprising. Then, Turkey, with the influence of America, has left its neutrality policy in Syrian crisis and started openly to support opponents in Syria.

As violence escalated, many Syrians began to migrate to Turkey to escape from wars. Turkish government accepted an "open door policy" for the Syrian Citizens who migrated to Turkey for war-affected reasons,

in 2011. Turkey also declared this policy to the world. Turkey did not request any aid from the UN and its related agencies in the beginning.

As the Geneva Convention on the Legal Status of Refugees in 1951 restricted the refugee definition only to one coming from Europe for asylum seeking, Turkey could not have categorized Syrian migrants as “refugee” in the beginning. Thus, Turkey named Syrian refugees as “guest” because of the geographical restriction, however, Turkey treated Syrian immigrants as refugees although their status has not clearly been defined. Turkey has seen Syrian refugees as brother and guest therefore, provided secure regions in Turkey for Syrians. Turkey also hoped that Syrian civil war would end very soon and refugees would return to their homes.

However, this expectation did not come true. As the number of the Syrians in Turkey has heightened due to escalated violence in Syria, the social, political and economic burden of Syrian refugees have also become a challenging issue for Turkey. Turkey, therefore, started to voice the possibility of international assistance to share the economic burden of the Syrian Refugees after number of refugees increased day by day.²⁹

From the political perspective, Turkey has utilized immigration and asylum policy to demonstrate its “soft power” capabilities, to achieve her foreign policy goal of “acting as a powerful regional country” and “order establishing actor” in the Middle East.³⁰ This policy further has had mixed results as refugee problems overwhelmingly surpassed Turkey’s capacity to support them, and required foreign economic assistance. Turkey has also been under the critics of the European Union (EU), for using refugees as leverage in foreign relations.

On the other hand, Turkey also reviewed and modified its legal

29 Sertif Demir-Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz, “An Analysis of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey’s Political-Military, Social and Economic Security”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 13(26), 2020, p. 1-19.

30 Nefise Ela Gokalp Aras-Zeynep Sahin Mencutek, “The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey”, *Migration Letters*, 12(3), 2005, p. 194.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

requirements. In this perspective, the Turkish government enacted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014. This law specifies procedures for foreigners, refugees, and people in need of international protection.³¹

As the illegal migration increased and terror groups infiltrated to these migrated people, Turkey decided to build 900 km a wall alongside the Syrian border after 2016. The erection of this wall de facto ended the “open door policy” after 2016.³² However, Turkey’s policy regarding with Syrian refugees has not changed from the original points. They are still brother and guest.

In January 2016, the Turkish government started to issue work permits for Syrian refugees who have been in Turkey for more than six months.³³ These legal changes indicate that Turkey is moving from a humanitarian-emergency response to a strategy of long-term integration.³⁴ Finally, Although Turkey has not granted official refugee status to Syrians, This decision is likely to have far-reaching implications for refugee issues.³⁵

Syrian refugees have become a problematic issue between the EU and Turkey, as many of them want to migrate to Europe for a better life. In 2014-2015, the number of refugees migrating to Europe increased. Turkey and the EU reached an agreement in March 2016 which aimed at keeping the refugees at Mediterranean basis and in Turkey. The EU would provide economic assistance to host refugees in Turkey until their safe return to Syria. Although they experienced some problems, the EU attached utmost importance to this deal. On the other hand, Turkey took advantage of this

31 Ahmet İçduygu-Doğuş Şimşek, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), 2016, p. 61.

32 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, September 2019, p. 3.

33 İçduygu-Şimşek, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

34 Sophia Hoffmann-Sahizer Samuk, “Turkish Immigration Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis”, *SWP-Berlin*, March 2016, p. 12.

35 Ahmet İçduygu-Evin Millet, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration”, *Working Paper*, August 2016, p. 2.

deal especially at the tensions with Greece at East Mediterranean natural gas issues. Fearing from another refugee influx, the EU, notably Germany, acted more positively toward Turkey at the EU Summits discussing the imposing sanction to Turkey.³⁶

On the hand, most Syrian refugees live in separate venues similar to ghettos where they established their own community and created their own internal trade system. The fact that Syrians live together in the ghettos is a challenge to the integration process. This situation may cause security problems in the future.³⁷

CONCLUSION

Migration is a phenomenon that has existed throughout history as human beings moved from place to place due to various reasons. The reasons for the movement were wars, conflicts, scarcity, drought, famine, man-made or natural disasters, poverty, climate change, political pressures, persecutions and political violence. On the other hand, the present-day-displacement has shifted to be more intricate due to the fact that conflict, violence and human rights abuses are rising and are becoming more complicated.

There are many theories explaining migration in theoretical perspectives. However, the migration theories scrutinize economic factors affecting internationalization of migration rather than focusing on political-motivated migrations like in Syria. Among the migration types, forced migration involves the unwilling internationalization of migrations due to political or natural reasons that intimidate their lives. In this perspective, forced migration can best explicate migration occurred in Syria.

Syria has been subject to internal wars and violence for ten years

36 Further information see: Demir-Yılmaz, *op. cit.*, p. 1-19.

37 Oytun Orhan-Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey", *ORSAM*, Report No: 195, January 2015, p. 7; Further information see: Demir-Yılmaz, *op.cit.*, p. 1-19.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

composed of ethnic and sectarian elements. This war led to devastation and destruction of the whole country and disintegration of its population.

As a neighbor of Syria, Turkey has faced a very serious adverse impact of Syria. Turkey hosts the 65% of all Syrian refugees. This is a very high number which brought heavy economic, social, political and cultural burden for Turkey.

A global holistic approach is required to end the Syrian refugee crisis which also affects Turkey.

REFERENCES

“A Guide to International Refugee Protection and Building State Asylum Systems Handbook for Parliamentarians”, *UNHCR*, No: 27, 2017.

“Civil War in Syria”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

“Figures at a Glance”, *UNHCR*, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>, (Date of Accession: 07.10. 2020).

“Forced Displacement: Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Internally Displaced People (IDPs)”, *European Commission*, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en, (Date of Accession: 07.10.2020).

“International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics Eurostat”, *Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics*, March 2018.

“Situation”, *UNHCR*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

“Syrian Civil War”, *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

“Welcome to UNHCR’s Refugee Population Statistics Database”, *UNHCR*, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>, (Date of Accession: 22.03.2021).

ARANGO, Joaquín, “Explaining Migration: A Critical View”, *International Social Science Journal*, 52(165), 2000, p. 283-296.

ARAS, Nefise Ela Gokalp-Zeynep Sahin Mencutek, “The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey”, *Migration Letters*, 12(3), 2005, p. 193-208.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY

BELL, Simon et al., *Migration and Land Use Change in Europe: A Review*, Living Reviews in Landscape Research, 4, 2010.

DEMİR, Sertif, "Tarihsel Gerçekler Bağlamında Arap Yarımadası ve Kuzey Afrika'daki Gelişmelerin Analizi", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-Ertan Efegil, eds., *Türk Dış Politikasında Güvenlik Arayışları*, Barış Kitabevi, Ankara 2012, p. 255-284.

DEMİR, Sertif, "The European Union Migration Policy: Evolution Through Refugee Crisis", Hasret Comak et al., eds., *Refugee Crisis in International Policy*, Vol II., London 2021.

DEMİR, Sertif-Carmen Rijnoveanu, "The Impact of the Syria Crisis on the Global and Regional Political Dynamics", *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, 13(1), 2013, p. 55-77.

DEMİR, Sertif-Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz, "An Analysis of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey's Political-Military, Social and Economic Security", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 13(26), 2020, p. 1-19.

ERDOĞAN, M. Murat, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, September 2019.

EROL, Mehmet Seyfettin-İrem Bilgetürk, "Mehdilik Anlayışı Kapsamında İran Dış Politikası Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 4(1), 2020, p. 240-280.

EROL, Mehmet Seyfettin-Kadir Ertaç Çelik, "ABD'nin Suriye Politikasında Vekil Aktör Olarak Terör Örgütleri: YPG Örneği", *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2(2), 2018, p. 14-45.

HOFFMANN, Sophia-Sahizer Samuk, "Turkish Immigration Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis", *SWP-Berlin*, March 2016.

HUGO, Graeme, "Migration, Development and Environment", *International*

Organization for Migration, Geneva 2008.

IÇDUYGU, Ahmet-Doğuş Şimşek, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), 2016.

IÇDUYGU, Ahmet-Evin Millet, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration," *Working Paper*, August 2016.

JENNISSSEN, Roel Peter Wilhelmina, *Macro-Economic Determinants of International Migration in Europe*, Rozenberg Publishers, Amsterdam 2004.

KOPPENBERG, Saskia, "Where Do Forced Migrants Stand in the Migration and Development Debate", *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration*, 2(1), 2012, p. 77-90.

MASSEY Douglas S. et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal", *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 1993, p. 431-466.

ORHAN, Oytun-Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey", *ORSAM*, Report No: 195, January 2015.

PIORE, Michael J., *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor Industrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1979.

WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Academic Press, New York 1974.

WICKRAMASINGHE, A.I.N.N.-Wijitapure Wimalaratana, "International Migration and Migration Theories", *Social Affairs*, 1(5), Fall 2016, p. 13-32.

ZETTER, Roger, *Protection in Crisis: Forced Migration and Protection in a Global Era*, Migration Policy Institute, 2015.