

# Effect of Syrian Refugee Crisis on Turkey

Riddhi Chopra

*School of Liberal Studies, Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, India*

**Abstract**— Since the outbreak of Syrian war in 2011, an estimated 9 million Syrians have fled their homes, taking shelter in neighbouring countries like Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and other European Union nations. As a result of Turkey's "open door policy", it is now hosting refugees more than its critical threshold which led to a huge economic stemming and is impacting the country socially, ethically and culturally. With limited assistance provided by the international community, Turkey is now struggling to cope up with the growing numbers. The paper intends to provide a profound analysis on how the displacement crisis has impacted Turkey and various initiatives undertaken by the Turkish government to reduce their burden. Also the paper highlights Turkey's shift on its refugee policies in order to encompass long term solutions.

**Keywords**— Turkey, Syrian war, refugees, open door policy, impact

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, Turkey established an "open door policy" assuming the conflict would come to a swift conclusion earning Turkey worldwide recognition for its humanitarian action and influence in a reformed Syria. However, as the conditions deteriorated in Syria, the number of refugees skyrocketed and reached 1.7 million as of March, 2015 and the significant unregistered refugee population implies that the true figure is even larger [1]. Later in 2014, Turkey witnessed an unprecedented increase in asylum applications from Iraq due to ISIS territorial gains in the region; as a result Turkey now accommodates 100,000 Iraqi refugees. Turkey maintained an emergency response of a consistently high standard and declared a temporary protection regime, ensuring non-refoulement and assistance in 25 camps, where an estimated 1.8 million people are staying at a monthly cost of \$2 million [2]. Five southern Turkish provinces bordering Syria—Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Mardin, and Sanliurfa—where 622,864 of the 747,000 registered refugees are concentrated, collectively host 83% of Turkey's registered Syrian refugees [3]. The escalating number of refugees in has aggravated a range of social, cultural, political and economic nuances thus impacting the country's economy. Large swaths of Syria being under ISIS control and without any unified and credible opposition capable of overthrowing the Assad regime the inflow rate is bound to increase [4].

## II. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

Turkey now faces social, demographic, ethnic, and sectarian pressure created by the largest refugee flow in the country's modern history [3].

### A. Social

Turkey provided free access to health care to all registered refugees and built camps that have been internationally portrayed as "model for the perfect refugee camp", which jeopardized the country's fiscal sustainability. More than 500,000 people have been sent to hospitals from the refugee camps and, according to the Ministry of Health, nearly 35,000 Syrians have given birth in Turkey. The citizens have expressed their disappointment as they believe these privileges are undermining their access to the amenities and are funded by their taxes. Moreover the camps have also witnessed increase in polygamy specially women and children being at a higher risk. Also child marriage is a common phenomenon which is affecting the social atmosphere.

### B. Shift in ethnic composition

The refugee presence is altering the ethnic and sectarian balance of the region. For instance, Kilis's Arab population, previously less than 1%, has now jumped to a wooping 59%. The ethnic transformation adjoins a political dimension in Hatay, where the Alawites dominate, constituting one-third of the province's population and support Assad's regime, but the entry of Sunni refugees is disturbing the balance, potentially sparking a Sunni-Alawaite conflagration. Moreover the Alawites are critical of AKP's (Justice and Development Party) policy on the displacement crisis which has given rise to numerous rallies and demonstration leading to instability in the region.

The Alevis, constitute about 15% of the total population, share similar secular attitude towards Sunni refugees and staunchly oppose the AKP's policies over its stance on Syria, by supporting the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). Given these shared affinities, if Hatay Alawites rallied more vehemently against government's stand on Syria, the CHP and Turkish Alevis would almost certainly follow which would complicate the political environment.

Consequently, Ankara has taken various steps to alleviate grievances voiced by Alawites. Since September 2012, it has steered away from settling large numbers of Syrian refugees in Hatay and has excluded Hatay from the list of provinces where Syrian refugees can legally obtain temporary residence permits [5].

### C. Economic impact

The growth rate of the Turkish economy during the

initial stages of Syrian crisis was 9%, but with the upsurge in refugee numbers it had fallen below 3%, which made financing the crisis an arduous task. The crisis has drained the Turkish economy as most of the revenue gets exhausted for the upkeep of camps providing health and other services. Also the gap in demand and supply, led to inflation in public commodities raising the cost of living, generating antipathy among the locals. Besides, most of the refugees are employed in the informal sector, work for lower wages, generating no revenue; as a result, the job opportunities are usurped from the Turks by the Syrians who provide cheap labour.

#### D. Housing

During the preliminary stages of the crisis, refugees were mostly housed in schools, sports halls, unused warehouses and factories to isolate them from the local population. However, as the numbers plummeted, the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) of Turkey was assigned the task of constructing camps. By Oct 2013, 21 camps were erected but with the acceleration in numbers, AFAD were left helpless. By Aug 2015, 4 more camps were built to accommodate Christians and Yazidis refugees escaping the ISIS ambush [6], [1]. Due to camp's shrinking capacity most of the refugees are now taking shelters in towns and cities, which has been a source of growing hostility between refugees and host community.

#### E. Employment

With their savings depleting, Syrians are forced to find employment – often in informal sectors due to legal restrictions. Those working in informal sectors are exposed to exploitation owing to their illegal status. Those left jobless, either turn into pro-Assad militants or join Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS in a hope to earn and reintegrate into the society [7].

#### F. The Kobane crisis

The crisis over the beleaguered Syrian city of Kobane, lead to increased scrutiny of Turkey's policy towards Syria. The ruthless attacks initiated by ISIS against the Kurds in Kobane in October 2014 led to another big wave of Syrian refugees flooding into the nation, inciting the Kurds in Turkey to join the PYD (Democratic Union Party) forces in their fight against ISIS. Turkey has been severely criticised for not intervening during the conflict in Kobane. Though there are various reasons cited, one of them being that both the sides engaged in violence were terrorist organisations. While on the other hand, hard liners press that with the general elections in 2015, ruling party AKP wasn't in a strong favour to support the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) openly. Turkey's reluctance in responding to the crisis in Syria, led to country-wide rallies and protests where ultimately people lost faith in the government.

### III. INTERNATIONAL REACTION

As the displacement crisis gained unprecedented

momentum and the prospects of return dimmed, Turkey sought support for burden-sharing from the international community for financial assistance and resettlement purpose. The international community has failed to end the violence in Syria while regional governments have pursued policies that have further aggravated the situation [4].

The establishment of International refugee system was based on the shared understanding that assisting the refugees and the host country would be the responsibility of every nation. The UN Security Council has acted paralyzed, failing to find any resolution to the crisis. The U.S. administration has shied away from intervening in Syria to bring about regime change and instead has increasingly focused on defeating ISIS, so far with no major impact. Iran and Russia continue to prop up the Syrian regime [4].

Also sharing the cost of protecting the refugees has been disappointingly limited. The Turkish government as of Aug 2015, had spent between \$ 5.6 to 6.0 billion for the refugees, in return has received minimal international assistance amounting to less than \$ 400 million.

#### A. United Nations

The UN has struggled to fund and provide humanitarian assistance to the host countries. Less than two-thirds of the 2014 aid budget for Syrian refugee crisis was met, while in August 2015 the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2015-16 budgeted for \$624 million, still remained unfunded by more than 60% [8].

#### B. Safe zones

Turkey has previously pushed the idea of safe zones along the Turkish borders so as to reduce the burden on the government. Turkey and the US have come to an understanding, but it appears that the latter is more interested in establishing a 'No ISIS zone' than safe zones for refugees.

### IV. INITIATIVES BY TURKEY

The Syrian refugee crisis has pushed the Turkey to reassess its legal framework for asylum and International protection and to accelerate pre-existing reforms. Syrian refugees are still confined in Syria— particularly due 1951 Geneva Convention over the legal status of refugees due to the geographical limitations, which prevents Syrian refugees from obtaining legal asylum in Turkey [3]. But with the enactment of the 2013 law, Syrian refugees now have some legal protections.

Certain modifications have been made to the existing laws and new ones have been instituted in order to assist the refugees. Turkey revised its "Settlement law of 2006" which promotes the settlement of 'Turkish origin, decent and culture' According to the new law, non-European refugees who enter Turkey can legally receive a temporary residence permit in any province other than Hatay (sectarian tensions being high) and Sirnak (violence issues and deep poverty). The Foreigners and International Protection, which was passed in 2013, first implemented in

April 2014 is aimed at improving Turkey's refugee policy and protecting asylum seekers, creating a specialized institution—the Directorate General of Migration Management, under the Ministry of Interior—to implement related laws [9].

TP Regulation came into effect on Oct 22, 2014, to create an effective legal system that will provide Syrian refugees with satisfactory protection and humanitarian assistance. The TP Circular also gives the right to registered refugees to seek legal employment. Negotiations to open parts of the economy to formal employment for the Syrian refugees have also been on the table so that the refugees can increase their net fiscal contribution to the host economy. Without a chance to education, the youth stands at a risk of falling victim to the radical and terrorists group. Schools for Syrian refugees have been opened by local authorities in many South Eastern provinces and Istanbul. The Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Centre (TOMER) at the University of Gaziantep provides Turkish language course in twelve refugee camps. Even outside the refugee camps, many youth centres provide a three-month course to Syrian refugees between the ages of 12-22. Moreover the Government decided to grant scholarships to many Syrian university students to promote education [10].

## V. CONCLUSION

Syria has witnessed the worst human disaster, and its economy has crumbled by more than 50% since the conflict began in 2011. Hence, even if the political disturbance settles, the refugees might not return due to the economic breakdown. Thus it is inevitable that most of the refugees are likely to stay in turkey, so the government and International community must make arrangements accordingly.

It is necessary that the international community engages itself by offering monetary assistance and facilitates the provision for education and employment. With AKP's clear majority during the recent election in Nov, 2015, it can create comprehensive policies to guide the integration process and mobilize public support for the same, which needs to go beyond TP circular.

Ankara needs to relax its limitations regarding INGO (International Non-Government organisation) activity on its soil when it faces the prospect of permanent settlement by refugees. INGO's could help curtail Turkey's spending. Based on Northern Iraqi safe haven created in 1991, Turkey could resort to it by convincing US to advocate the idea at the UN for the authorization of Northern Syrian safe haven.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahmet Icduygu, April 2015, Migration policy institute, Syrian refugees in Turkey: the long road ahead
- [2]. The UN Refugee Agency, 2015 UNHCR country operation profile- Turkey, Overview
- [3]. Soner Gacaptay, July 2014, Bilge Meneske, The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, The impact of Syria's refugees on Southern Turkey, Introduction
- [4]. Kemal Krisici, Elicabeth Ferris, Brookings Institute, Not likely to go home- Syrian refugees and the challenges to Turkey- and the international community
- [5]. Soner Gacaptay, July 2014, Bilge Meneske, The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, The impact of Syria's refugees on Southern Turkey, Shift in ethnic balance of border province
- [6]. Erdoğan, 2015b, p. 43-70, op cit endnote 42
- [7]. Mona Alami, Aug 7, 2015, Al-Monitor, "NGO finds work for Syrian refugees in Turkey,"
- [8]. UNHCR, Aug 24, 2015, "3RP Funding Update 2015" and UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service, "Total Funding to the Syria Crisis 2014,"
- [9]. Bulent Sarioglu, April 5, 2013, Hurriyet "190 bin Suriyeliye yeni statü,"
- [10]. Anadolu Agency, Oct 24, 2013, "Suriyeli sığınmaci genclere sinavsiz universite,"