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Syrian Refugees in Urban Turkey

Between Migration Policies and Realities

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Introduction

For many years, refugees were associated with refugee camps established as an emergency response to mass migration and emergent needs, but the past two decades have witnessed an increased number of refugees settling in urban settings. With this shift towards cities, scholars and policymakers alike are focusing more on various topics concerning refugees in urban areas (Kobia and Cranfield 2009; Crisp et al. 2012; Ward 2014; Marfleet 2007; Rees 2020; Taruri et al. 2020). According to the most recent UNHCR estimates, there are over 70.8 million refugees and IDPs worldwide, and of those 61 per cent are living in urban settings, ranging from metropolises to peri-urban areas (UNHCR 2019). Scholarship on urban refugee populations has focused on multiple issues, such as access to shelter, employment and education, as well as health services. In parallel, scholarship on displacement has witnessed a gradual shift towards developing humanitarian policy to address the specificities of urban refugees (Zetter and Deikun 2010; Landau 2014). This recognition has encouraged international and national organizations, as well as state and non-state actors, to develop methods to access urban refugees and ways to implement refugee-focused interventions in urban settings (Zetter and Deikun 2010; Kobia and Cranfield 2009). Ur-

ban refugee presence has also gradually given rise to questions and debates about cities as inclusive spaces and the ways that humanitarian responses must change to address urban refugee concerns (Brandt and Earle 2018; Brandt and Henderson 2018).

This chapter will discuss the case of Syrian urban refugees[1] in Turkey. It begins by presenting an overview of the past decade, examining how urban refugee settlement emerged in the Turkish context to highlight the ways that this settlement was the result of both deliberative policies and spontaneous realities. In the process, it discusses changes in the Turkish government's approach to refugees in general and to Syrian refugees since 2011, thereby raising globally relevant questions about the future of urban refugee policy development.

Urban Refugees in Turkey: The Population That Was Not

Syrian refugees' current situation as urban refugees must be understood not only in terms of the policies implemented in response to their displacement, but also in light of Turkey's approach to other, prior, asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast to previous mass migrations to Turkey, the Syrian case is distinguished firstly by most of the refugees self-settling and by the overwhelmingly urban nature of their settlement.

While a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Turkey maintains a geographical limitation on the Convention whereby only asylum seekers from Europe are considered refugees. Asylum applicants from elsewhere are granted conditional refugee status based on the five bases specified in the Convention and are expected to be resettled to third countries. For many years, Turkey did not have a law governing migration or asylum, and the introduction of Turkey's first Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 (it was adopted in 2014) upheld the geographical limitation and signalled the transition of existing practices into law (Çiçekli 2016).

Since the 1990s, the Turkish government has implemented a policy of assigning asylum seekers to satellite provinces (urban or peri-urban areas) across Turkey, and away from major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir, and this policy continued with the adoption of the LFIP. The policy was designed to reduce pressure on services in major cities by directing asylum seekers and conditional refugees to smaller cities and provinces. The regulations also aimed to ensure the visibility and immobility of asylum seekers and conditional refugees, through such measures as requiring them to appear before the Provincial Directorate for Migration Management (PDMM) in their respective city on a regular basis or restricting their access to services to the province of their registration. Asylum seekers' access to

rights and services are outlined in the LFIP of 2013, but asylum seekers' experiences have varied depending on the province they are assigned to and their ethnic background and religion, among other factors (Leghtas and Sullivan 2016). Due to this policy of assignment to and relative containment in satellite cities, as well as the perceived temporary nature of asylum seeker presence, urban refugee policies for major cities – or even for the majority of urban contexts in Turkey – were underdeveloped or non-existent.

When the first Syrian nationals fleeing the war crossed the border in March 2011, the Turkish government referred to those entering as 'guests' and announced that it was implementing an open border policy enabling those fleeing the violence to seek refuge in Turkey (İçduygu 2015). Since this was a mass migration that was perceived to be short-term, the state established refugee camps in border provinces to host Syrian refugees fleeing the violence (AFAD 2013b). While 'guest' is not a legal status, the government had used it in previous instances of mass migration to Turkey, particularly in the case of Iraqi nationals in 1991 (İçduygu and Bayraktar Aksel 2022). The government subsequently announced that Syrians arriving in Turkey seeking protection would be under the temporary protection of the Turkish state. In 2014, the Temporary Protection Regulation was released, which outlined Syrian refugees' rights, obligations and access to healthcare, education, social security support and the labour market (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). Later in 2016, the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection was issued, which outlined the rules governing the labour of Syrian refugees as well as the process for them to be granted work permits (Figure 7.1). The policy and legal mechanisms to govern the Syrian refugee influx were developed over time and in a changing environment, legally, socially and in terms of Turkey's foreign policy, thereby influencing processes and everyday realities. Due to this ad hoc-ness and the continuous changes, Baban et al. (2021) refer to these dynamics as creating a 'precarious' status and presence for Syrian refugees in Turkey.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter, urban contexts in Turkey have been at the centre of Syrian refugee migration. Existing research highlights the ways in which national-level policies concerning refugees have been implemented at the local level mainly through a discussion of specific urban case studies (Woods 2016; Woods and Kayalı 2017; Betts et al. 2021). Alternatively, studies have examined the role and significance of different urban actors, such as local municipal actors, community leaders or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in facilitating refugees' access to registration and services and influencing their local integration (Üstübici 2020; Betts et al. 2021). Betts et al. (2021) compare the approaches of mayors in key refugee-hosting cities in Turkey and Lebanon to identify the extent to which mayors as individuals affect the implementation of policies for refugees at the micro-level. Other research highlights the

'multiscalar' nature of the response given the involvement of international actors such as the European Union or International NGOs (INGOs) alongside national NGOs in implementing municipal or NGO projects and activities for refugees (Güngördü and Bayırbağ 2019; Danış and Nazlı 2019).

Examining the intersection of migration and urban planning, Güngördü and Bayırbağ (2019) discuss the challenges that Syrian refugee migration to Turkey presents in terms of urban planning. Their research provides a historical view, tying the current urban policy situation to prior internal (rural–urban) migrations to metropolises in Turkey to argue that the existing urban policies have created a situation of increased competition over scarce resources for lower-income host community members and refugees. They argue that going forward, it is necessary to develop urban policies that account for refugees as part of the urban fabric, as well as the mobile nature of different urban populations. Continuing with a focus on the local or micro-level, Haliloğlu Kahraman (2021) examines Syrian refugees' satisfaction with living spaces in Ankara, providing insights that can contribute to developing urban policies that account for refugees' urban shelter needs. However, as a case study limited to a single district, this research demonstrates the need for more comprehensive and large-scale studies concerning urban living conditions and needs. Tangentially relating to both urban policies and politics of space, research has been carried out examining the interaction between refugees and host community members, especially in urban districts hosting high numbers of refugees (Altiok and Tosun 2018; Üstübici 2020). Relying on different approaches to analyse host–refugee engagement, these studies highlight that coexistence within urban settings must be considered in the development of urban policies for refugees and focused on issues of integration. While the current literature provides insight into various dimensions of urban refugee presence, there remains a gap in terms of overall discussion of urban refugee policies in Turkey. This chapter seeks to address this gap by discussing the changes in the policies towards Syrian refugees and examining the intersection of Turkey's policies towards Syrian refugees and the urban directedness of their settlement.

Syrian Refugees: Becoming Part of the Urban Population

At the start of the influx, the Turkish government began establishing refugee camps to host incoming Syrian refugees (Figure 7.2). As of May 2014, there were around 220,000 Syrian refugees housed in twenty-two camps in provinces neighbouring Syria, with another 515,000 registered urban refugees (Kirişçi 2014). The number of camps increased to twenty-six by 2016, but no more camps were established subsequently. Indeed, the Turkish government initially expected that all Syrian refugees would remain in the camps,
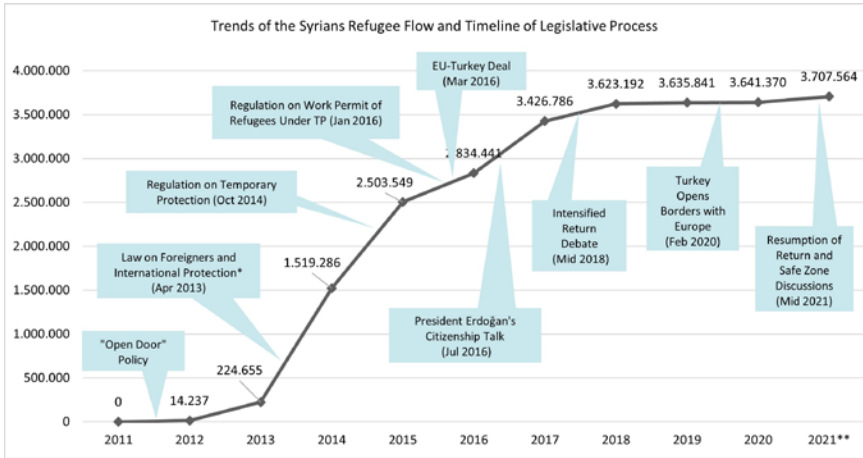
Figure 7.1. Number of Syrian refugees registered under Temporary Protection in Turkey since 2011. © Ahmet İçduygu.

Source of data: Presidency of Migration Management (PMM).
  * The passage of the LFIP was motivated by Turkey's efforts to align its laws with EU accession requirements initiated prior to the Syrian influx.
** As of 2 September 2021.

on the basis that the war in Syria would end quickly and only around a quarter of a million refugees would flee to Turkey. These assumptions influenced the planning and preparation for the arriving refugees. However, with the protraction of the war and its worsening in its third year, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey gradually rose (Figure 7.1).[2] Due to the limited camp capacities, many Syrian refugees began settling in urban areas, mostly in cities neighbouring the Syrian border, thereby distinguishing this refugee presence as a predominantly urban one (Erdoğan 2020: 29).

Analysing the changes in the camp and urban refugee population since 2011 shows that the number of refugees living in camps gradually increased from 8,000 in 2011 to a little over 280,000 in 2015. In 2014, camps hosted 14.3 per cent of the total Syrian refugee population in Turkey; the percentage decreased to 8.7 per cent in 2015, to rise slightly in 2016 to 8.9 per cent, only to decrease once again to 6.9 per cent in 2017. Meanwhile, the number of out-of-camp refugees increased rapidly (Figure 7.2). Since 2017, the government has sought to gradually close all the refugee camps in southern Turkey (European Commission 2016). The number of refugees living in camps slowly decreased from a little over 250,000 in 2016 to only 53,130 in 2021. There are currently only seven camps in operation, hosting 1.54 per cent of the current refugee population in Turkey, and the process to empty the camps continues (PMM 2021).
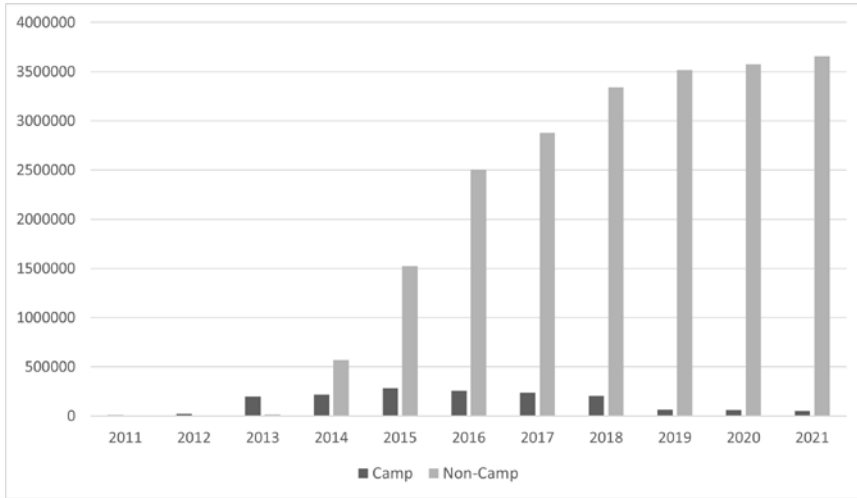
Figure 7.2. In-camp and out-of-camp Syrian refugees since 2011. © Souad Osseiran.

Source: İçduygu and Altiok (2020) and PMM (2021).

Out-of-camp Syrian refugees favoured settling in urban settings in southern provinces such as Kilis and Gaziantep, in other metropolitan areas such as Istanbul or Izmir, or by following their connections and networks to other cities and provinces across Turkey (Erdoğan 2017: 10). While the geographical distribution of Syrian refugees is a key issue, the percentage of refugees present with respect to citizens is of equal importance in many provinces and districts (Erdoğan 2020). In provinces such as Kilis, Syrian refugees currently represent 74.9 per cent of the population, while in Istanbul, which hosts the highest number of refugees, registered Syrian refugees represent only 3.5 per cent of the total population registered as living in the province (Figure 7.3). Urban infrastructures, services and provisions are all affected by the increase in service users. However, the higher percentage of refugees relative to citizens in certain provinces also raises concerns about issues of coexistence, social acceptance and cohesion in urban settings.

Examining the variation in the number of refugees registered in specific provinces supports the hypothesis that refugee mobility within Turkey, or spontaneous movement, was possible during certain periods of time. However, this mobility never negated the fact that state actors would (and did) intervene to govern or control urban refugee presence and mobility at different moments, as will be explored later in the chapter. The distribution of refugees in certain provinces highlights that there was a gradual shift over time (Figure 7.3), with refugees registering or moving their registration to
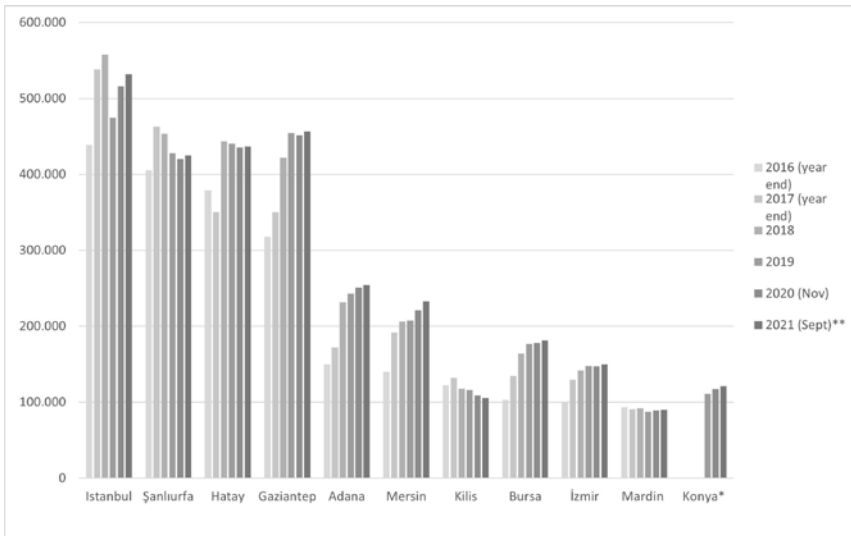
Figure 7.3. Provinces hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees since 2016. © Souad Osseiran.

Source: İçduygu and Altiok (2020).
* Figures for Konya for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are unavailable.
** PMM website 2 September 2021.

provinces in western Turkey. According to Erdoğan (2020: 29), the cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara alone host 'more than 20% of Syrians under Temporary Protection . . . 13,39% of all registered Syrians live in Istanbul'. The period before 2017 can be described as one of spontaneous mobility, with registration practices and regulation implementation gradually playing catch-up to refugees' agential moves.

The figures concerning registered refugees simultaneously provide insight into the geographical distribution of refugees across Turkey while also disguising certain refugee movements within the country. In the face of refugee movement within Turkey, the government began instituting different measures to contain refugee mobility from 2016 onwards. In 2017, registration in the border provinces was halted, thereby forcing refugees crossing the land border to go to other provinces to register (European Commission 2018). In the same year, registration in and transfer of registration to Istanbul were halted. In the face of these measures to contain refugees 'in place', some refugees registered in provinces close to Istanbul such as Bursa, Yalova or Kocaeli, but lived in Istanbul, and others chose to live in Istanbul (or other major cities) without registration or access to services (ibid.: 31). Restricting refugee movement between provinces served as part of mechanisms to govern refugee presence and mobility.

This recognition of refugee mobility also highlights the ways that registration figures disguise dissonance between, on the one hand, the number of refugees living in a province and the estimated need for services, and registration figures on the other. As such, certain southern provinces such as Hatay or Şanlıurfa have a high number of registered refugees, but research indicates that there is a difference between the numbers registered and those actually living in a given province (Erdoğan 2020; Turper Alışık et al. 2019). Similarly, in the case of Istanbul, over 530,000 Syrian refugees are registered as of September 2021 (PMM 2021); however, the actual number of Syrian refugees living in the city is estimated to be higher. The urban nature of the Syrian displacement and the relatively high level of refugee mobility within Turkey serve to support the argument that refugees' urban presence for the most part was accepted by state actors, but this did not preclude state intervention at specific moments due to the rise in public tension or to achieve certain objectives with respect to refugees' mobility. The following section explores in more detail governmental policies regarding the mobility of 'urban refugees' in Turkey.

Syrian Refugees in Cities: Between Mobility and Immobility

Over the years the distribution of Syrian refugees across Turkey changed, with a gradual shift from a high concentration in the southern border provinces to a larger-scale distribution across the country, especially in key metropolitan cities in western Turkey. Refugees' networks, perceptions of job opportunities and a desire to migrate to Europe among other considerations influenced their mobility within Turkey. Observing the changing governmental policies with respect to the refugee population over time alongside the registration numbers offers certain insights into the ways that this refugee influx unintentionally became an urban issue (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). It also highlights the ways that priorities concerning refugees' visibility and mobility emerged, and continue to arise, with respect to specific events.

For different cities across Turkey, the arrival of Syrian refugees presented key challenges for governmental, local and NGO actors in terms of providing refugees with access to education, healthcare and social security support. As the initial years of the displacement (2011–14) were marked by a discourse of temporariness and expected imminent return, refugee mobility within Turkey was largely allowed (Baban et al. 2021). While state actors focused on providing services to the refugee camps established in the border provinces, Syrian refugees who settled in urban areas in the southern provinces or major cities faced uneven support and ambiguity surrounding their access to services. The perceived temporariness of their presence influenced

their access to rights such as healthcare or education, as the government relied on ad hoc measures and short-term policies. Government officials even referred to this period as one of 'temporary permanence' for Syrian refugees due to the lack of long-term policies and clarity over their future in Turkey (Uzun 2015). According to Korkut (2016), officials' approaches were built around specific 'discursive' frames rather than concrete programmes or long-term migration policies. In addition, the then Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) was established only in 2014, which also influenced state actors' ability to respond to the refugees' presence and their dispersal in urban areas.[3]

The years 2014–16 witnessed a rise in government efforts to systematize policies concerning refugees' access and presence. As Erdoğan (2017: 18) remarks, in 2014, the then DGMM began a campaign to register out-of-camp Syrian refugees. Primarily focused on the border provinces, these efforts then extended to other provinces in Turkey. They were followed up by a second campaign in 2016, led by the DGMM, to verify the registration of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (European Commission 2018: 29). In the second campaign, refugees were expected to register their address at a local civil registry office (or Nüfüs office), submit proof of their address registration to the PDMM and undergo a pre-registration phase before being registered as persons under Temporary Protection. The increasing emphasis on ensuring the visibility of the refugee population in terms of geographical location filtered into humanitarian and aid efforts, as access to many services is dependent on registration.

The period 2016–19 witnessed the narrowing of the scope of activities provided by INGOs and NGOs assisting Syrian refugees in Turkey (Osseiran et al. 2018). Key governmental institutions gradually took over the management and support of refugees' education and health, as well as the provision of social support. The increasing institutionalization of services was accompanied by a growing emphasis on fostering social cohesion through various initiatives and projects. Concurrent with the increased efforts to foster inclusion has been rising xenophobia in public opinion against Syrian refugees. Tensions in urban areas escalated in some districts of the major cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara (International Crisis Group 2018). The rising tensions were accompanied by the shift towards policies to restrict the mobility of Syrian refugees between provinces.

The Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) outlines that registered refugees can only access services in the province of their registration, with the exception of primary healthcare and emergency hospital services. While it is possible for Syrian refugees to move their registration, since 2016 several provinces have moved to stop or temporarily halt all transfer processes (European Commission 2018: 31). As mentioned above, many Syrian refugees still moved between provinces; however, their access to services is restricted

due to their movement and state actors can return them to their province of initial registration. The year 2019 witnessed the governor of Istanbul calling on all Syrian refugees registered in other provinces to return to those provinces or face forceful removal (Erdoğan 2020). Similarly, unregistered refugees were given a deadline to leave the province and head to other provinces where registration for Syrian refugees is possible. At the time of writing this chapter, a similar process has been initiated in Ankara following the Altındağ incidents.[4] These measures aim to placate negative Turkish public opinion about Syrian refugee presence, enforce the Temporary Protection Regulation stipulations concerning registration and reduce Syrian refugees' mobility within Turkey. With the protraction of the refugees' presence, state actors then shifted towards implementing measures that curtailed refugee mobility within Turkey.

Case Study: Syrian Refugees in Istanbul, Changing Dynamics and Policies

Istanbul has occupied a pivotal position as a migrant- and refugee-receiving city, as well as a transit node for migrants and refugees seeking to continue their migration to Europe (Biehl 2012). According to Erdoğan (2017: 29), it was estimated that in 2016 one million non-citizens were living in Istanbul alone; of those, Syrian refugees represent but a portion. Many Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict favoured Istanbul due to the work opportunities it provided, its housing opportunities and possible prior ties or connections to other Syrians or Turkish citizens living in the city; and for some, Istanbul was the destination to make connections to achieve onward migration to Europe (Kılıçaslan 2016; Osseiran 2016).

The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is formed of thirty-nine local municipalities, and Syrian refugees are dispersed across these districts with varying concentration. Syrian refugees have settled on both the European and Asian sides of the city, although there is a higher concentration on the European side. Even in the ten districts hosting the highest number of refugees, there is variation in terms of concentration and a higher percentage of refugees are located on the European than the Asian side of the city (Table 7.1 and Map 7.1). In 2020, the district hosting the highest percentage of Syrian refugees with respect to the overall registered population was Esenler (7.84 per cent), followed by Sultangazi (7.52 per cent), Bağcilar (6.62 per cent), Zeytinburnu (6.59 per cent), Esenyurt (6.44 per cent), Fatih (6.38 per cent), Başakşehir (5.07 per cent), Küçükçekmece (4.87 per cent) and Avcılar (4.55 per cent) (Table 7.1). On the Asian side, the only district to make the top ten was Sultanbeyli, where 5.95 per cent of registered residents are Syrian refugees (Table 7.1). Aligning with global trends with respect to urban
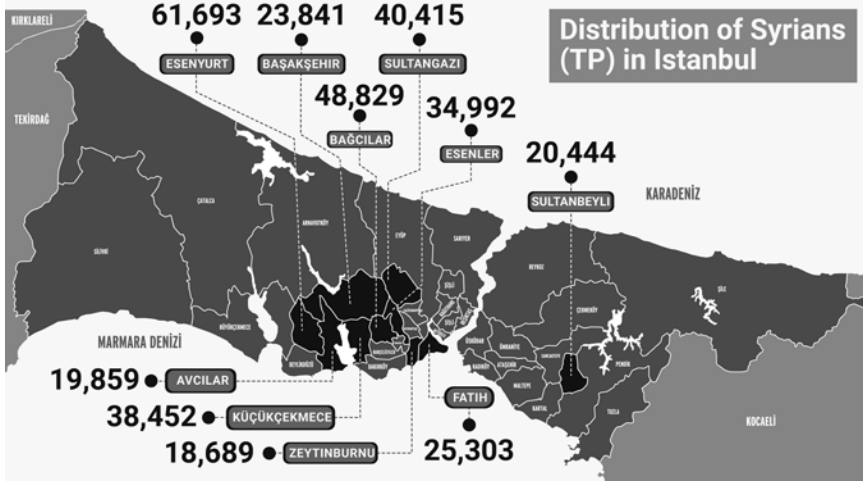
Table 7.1. Top ten districts in Istanbul based on number of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (2016 and 2020).

District	Number of Syrians (TP), 2016	Percentage of Syrians (TP) in population (%) in district for 2016	Number of Syrians (TP), 2020	Percentage of Syrians (TP) in population (%) in district for 2020
Küçükçekmece	38,278	5.02	38,452	4.87
Sultangazi	31,426	6.02	40,415	7.52
Fatih	30,747	7.33	25,303	6.38
Esenyurt	29,177	3.92	61,693	6.44
Bağcılar	27,645	4.97	48,829	6.62
Zeytinburnu	25,000	8.63	18,689	6.59
Başakşehir	26,424	7.48	23,841	5.07
Esenler	22,678	4.93	34,992	7.84
Sultanbeyli	20,192	6.27	20,444	5.95
Avcılar	19,554	4,59	19,859	4.55

Source: Erdoğan (2017) and Erdoğan et al. (2022).

refugees, Syrian refugees tend to settle in lower-income or working-class neighbourhoods, closer to work opportunities (Map 7.1). In the case of Istanbul, several of the main districts with higher concentrations of Syrian refugees are known to have been reception districts for internal migrants over the years (Kılıçaslan 2016; Balcioglu 2018; Üstübici 2020; Genç and Özdemirkıran-Embel 2019).

The higher concentration of refugees in specific districts with respect to the overall population registered in the area, which includes citizens and registered non-citizens, highlights that specific neighbourhoods have been favoured by Syrian refugees (Table 7.1 and Map 7.1). Comparing the changes in concentration of refugees with respect to the overall district population between 2016 and 2020 in the ten districts mentioned above indicates that certain districts witnessed changes while the percentage of refugees remained constant in others. Some districts witnessed a rise, such as Esenyurt, from 3.92 per cent (2016) to 6.44 per cent (2020), and Esen-

Map 7.1. Map of the top ten districts in Istanbul based on the number of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (2016 and 2020). © Ahmet İçduygu and Souad Osseiran.

ler, from 4.93 per cent (2016) to 7.84 per cent (2020), while other saw a decrease, like Fatih, from 7.33 per cent (2016) to 6.38 per cent (2020), and Zeytinburnu, from 8.63 per cent (2016) to 6.59 per cent (2020). The variations indicate the circulation of refugees within the city over time, with some refugees moving away from initial areas of arrival such as Fatih or Zeytinburnu to other areas due to better housing conditions or work opportunities. Alternatively, as in the cases of Küçükçekmece or Sultanbeyli, the number of refugees registered increased slightly, but the ratio with respect to the overall population decreased, indicating that perhaps more Turkish citizens have chosen to move intothe area. The increased concentration in certain districts highlights that refugees represent a visible segment of the population, impacting the urban fabric of the city in different ways.

In the earlier phase of displacement, Syrian refugees coming to Istanbul were incorporated in an ad hoc manner into the urban fabric. Refugees settled in districts based on their connections, rents and the availability of economic opportunities (Balcioglu 2018: 10). Several of the districts favoured by refugees are known to be more conservative or religious, although they offer a poorer 'quality of life' (Erdoğan 2017; Balcioglu 2018). Certain districts, such as Küçükçekmece or Bağcilar, are also known for their high number of ethnic Kurds, highlighting the influence of kinship or ethnic ties on the choice of district (Kılıçaslan 2016; Osseiran 2016). Kavas et al. (2019) indicate the impact of the presence of other Syrian refugees and businesses on choice of residence. In addition, the existence of work opportunities

that can be taken up easily without Turkish language skills was also a a factor in the choice of place of residence. Labour-intensive sectors with high rates of informality served as an easy initial entry point into the job market for the majority of refugees coming in this earlier period. Various research highlights the incorporation of Syrian refugees into certain sectors such as the garment industry and construction in Istanbul and other major cities (Danış 2016; Uysal and Volkan 2020). Other sectors, such as tourism and small- and medium-sized enterprises, also witnessed a high incorporation of Syrian refugees with different forms of capital (linguistic, financial, social, etc.) who found a niche in Istanbul catering to Syrian refugees (in the restaurant sector, bakeries, etc.) and incoming tourists from Arabic-speaking countries (Baban et al. 2021). As of 2016, Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection can be granted work permits according to the regulation governing their labour; however, the number of those with work permits remains low and Syrian refugees continue to work informally in many sectors and provinces (İçduygu and Altiok 2020; Pinedo Caro 2020).

While coming to Istanbul presented certain opportunities, it also gave rise to various challenges for refugees and local public officials in the early years of the displacement. Refugee families faced challenges of how to register their children in schools and identify what educational opportunities were available. For refugees and state actors alike, access to healthcare was (and is) another key issue of concern, both from a public health perspective and for refugees with chronic or war-related conditions.

With respect to education, related research shows that as Syrian refugees anticipated they would soon return to Syria, many Syrian families were reluctant to send their children to Turkish schools (Çelik and İçduygu 2019). Under Turkish legislation, registered asylum seekers or foreign nationals with residence permits can register in public schools. Alternatively, if children did not have this status, they could be registered in the school as guests. As guests, they would be unable to obtain a diploma, but could attend classes. Due to the ambiguities about these processes, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) issued a circular (No: 2014/21) on 'Education Services for Foreign Nationals' to provide guidance for provincial education directorates and public schools on how to deal with refugee students in 2014 (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). At the same time, Istanbul and other provinces, with high numbers of Syrian refugees, witnessed the formation of schools referred to as Temporary Education Centres (TECs). TECs were run by Syrian teachers who taught a modified version of the Syrian curricula in Arabic (Osseiran et al. 2018). In 2016, the government of Turkey implemented plans to close the TECs and to integrate Syrian students into the national education system (European Commission 2018).

In the case of healthcare, under the Temporary Protection Regulation, Syrian refugees can access healthcare free of charge under the national

health insurance with the same coverage as citizens. At the start of the influx, Syrian refugees' access to free healthcare was limited to the border provinces, but in 2013, access was extended to all Turkish provinces (AFAD 2013a). Despite the regularization of access mechanisms, refugees and public officials continued to face challenges due to language, lack of knowledge of the Turkish public healthcare system and increased pressure on the health sector. In 2016, the Ministry of Health (MoH) launched the Sihhat project, funded through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT). As part of the Sihhat project, the MoH established Migrant Health Centres (MHC) gradually in various provinces with a high number of Syrian refugees. A total of 178 MHCs have been established across Turkey, and they are distinguished by the fact that they employ Syrian healthcare professionals, doctors and nurses to provide primary healthcare services. Istanbul currently hosts thirty-seven MHCs for Syrian refugees and foreigners (Istanbul Health Directorate 2021). The MHC locations are assigned based on the number of refugees registered in a district. Providing health services in Arabic aims to reduce barriers to primary care, increase access to vaccination, improve maternal and infant health and decrease pressure on emergency hospital services. Simultaneously, the MHCs prompt concerns about a parallel system developing for Syrian refugees and the implications that this may have for the public health system overall and in terms of integration and local attitudes towards refugees.

As noted earlier, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is formed of thirty-nine local municipalities, and these have been involved to varying degrees with the refugee populations living in the respective districts. Based on the Municipalities Law (Law No. 5393), municipalities can provide support and services to residents registered in their area, but the phrasing raises ambiguity about whether refugees or migrants can be considered within the scope of the law or not (Coşkun and Yilmaz Uçar 2018; Rottmann 2020). Coşkun and Yilmaz Uçar (2018) conducted research with municipal actors in five key districts in Istanbul, including three that hosted a high number of Syrian refugees at that time, namely Bağcılar, Sultanbeyli and Esenyurt. They argue that while the central government prefers to maintain control over migration issues, the Syrian mass migration has resulted in local actors playing central roles in 'implementing migration policies' (ibid.: 104). According to Erdoğan (2017: 77), municipalities' decisions to provide services specifically for refugees varied between districts depending on financial, legal and political considerations. The variation in part indicates a lack of coordination or centralized decision-making by which municipalities might play an active role in refugee-related activities or programmes. Certain municipalities moved to establish infrastructure to offer support, information or services to refugees, as well as to support social cohesion efforts, while

others chose to disengage from the refugee population within their district. As Güngördü and Bayırbağ (2019) explain, a given municipality's willingness to engage with refugees living within its district was also affected by the funding available to it, since municipalities were not granted extra funding for providing these services. In response, some municipalities such as Şişli, Sultanbeyli and Zeytinburnu connected with NGOs – and INGOs in some cases – to fund projects to provide services such as Turkish language courses or psychosocial support to refugees (ibid).

Following the EU–Turkey deal (2016), through the FRiT, the funding arriving to Turkey has been used to upgrade existing infrastructure in Istanbul and other provinces to increase capacities in order to better deal with the refugee presence. The EU–Turkey deal also signalled a shift in the approach to the refugee presence. While prior to the agreement, Syrian refugees' return was upheld as the most likely scenario, the post-2016 period witnessed increasing moves to promote social cohesion and integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). NGOs and civil society organizations moved to develop projects focused on social cohesion. Various measures such as transitioning Syrian school-aged students into the national education system, increasing the scale and support for free Turkish language classes and increasing vocational training and employment-focused programmes and the like (European Commission 2018) are examples of this shift. Perhaps one of the principal indicators of the shift towards accepting the likelihood of Syrian refugee long-term presence was the announcement to grant three hundred thousand Syrian refugees Turkish citizenship (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). According to İçduygu and Altiok (2020), the measure appeared to signal that the Turkish government was accepting that many Syrian refugees would settle in Turkey permanently. At the level of policy and planning, the adoption of the 'National Strategy on Harmonization and the National Action Plan' outlines further possibilities to organize engagement between refugees and host communities (PMM 2018).

The year 2019 marked a subsequent shift with respect to the Turkish government's approach to Syrian refugee presence. Amid rising xenophobia and negative public opinion, in Istanbul and elsewhere in Turkey, 2019 witnessed the discourse of 'return' emerging once again at both the local and national levels (Rottmann 2020). The discourse of 'return' was accompanied by military activities in northern Syria aimed at securing part of the area to enable refugees' safe return (İçduygu and Altiok 2020). Decisions at the international level concerning the regime in Syria and the future of Syria continue to influence and affect any discussion on a future of safe return, thereby affecting the presence and futures of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

At the provincial level, the negative public opinion concerning refugee presence within the host society resulted in the government implementing

certain components of the Temporary Protection more strictly than they might have otherwise. On 22 July 2019, the governor of Istanbul issued an order for all Syrian refugees registered in other cities or who were unregistered to leave the province or face the consequence of forced removal (Amnesty International 2019; Erdoğan 2020). The deportations of some refugees from Istanbul at the time resulted in anxiety among the Syrian refugee community about their future in Istanbul. For many, it signalled the time to return to the province of initial registration, while others remained in the city with a continued lack of access to education, healthcare and the like.

In early August 2021, after a Turkish citizen was killed during a fight with Syrian refugees in Altindağ district in Ankara, Turkey faced another wave of xenophobia against Syrian refugees, as well as against other migrant and refugee groups. The incident was followed by Turkish citizens attacking Syrian refugees' businesses and places of residence in Altindağ district, highlighting that negative attitudes to the urban refugee presence were on the rise again. Moreover, these negative attitudes have coexisted with continued discussions about the possibility of establishing a safe zone in northern Syria to enable the return of many Syrian refugees. Following the events in Altindağ, the Ankara PDMM announced that it was closing registration to any incoming Syrian refugees applying in Ankara and was calling on all Syrian refugees registered in other provinces to return to their province of first registration.[5] Ankara thus followed Istanbul and other provinces in reacting to increased tensions by containing refugee presence and mobility. These recent events and state actors' responses highlight the ways that refugee-related policies in Turkey emerge as a reaction to events and public debates about the refugee presence. In addition, the policies demonstrate the ways that mobility and movement emerge as continued sites of struggle.

Conclusion

Syrian refugees in Turkey present a novel case study given the coexistence of diverse realities within a single space. Reflecting on the case of Syrian urban refugees in light of existing global debates on urban refugees more generally underscores how humanitarian interventions can be implemented in urban settings in the process of developing a migration management system. For Turkey and other countries, concerns over refugee visibility, local actors' ability to cope with the sudden increase in the population, the need to develop urban policies that account for refugees, and other issues continue to be relevant.

Examining the case of Syrian urban refugees in Turkey illustrates the ways that ad hoc policies and refugee agency intersect. The Turkish gov-

ernment's migration response to Syrian refugees shifted over time from a more ad hoc approach, based on refugees' anticipated temporary presence, to a more systematic approach with an understanding of the need to register refugees and accept the possibility of longer-term presence. To return to the question posed in the introduction to this chapter, the case of urban Syrian refugees is a combination of ad hoc policies and spontaneous realities. The refugee response demonstrates that interventions in urban settings concerning health, education and social security are possible. These efforts are contingent on comprehensive documentation and registration processes as well as the involvement of multiple actors at different levels. However, the effectiveness of interventions in facilitating social cohesion or inclusion of refugee populations remains a distinct concern. As many refugees have settled in lower-income districts alongside Turkish citizens, competition over the limited available resources – jobs, housing and the like – indicates the need for urban policies that account for diverse and rapidly changing populations and needs. The rising tensions in urban areas in the south of Turkey, in Istanbul and most recently in Ankara highlight that further efforts are needed beyond merely ensuring service provision. Urban refugee policies must be developed that account for the possible longer-term integration of refugees and the impact of their presence in cities. As we write this conclusion, the incidents in Altındağ district in Ankara and their ramifications demonstrate the continued ad hoc nature of policies responding to rising tensions between host and refugee communities. In addition, policies to immobilize refugees emerge as a tool to contain the refugee presence and alleviate public concerns in the host society.

Based on the current situation and dynamics, it is possible to argue that the near future may witness further public discussions about refugee return and the continuation of negative attitudes towards refugee presence. In addition, cities may experience increasing segregation, with citizens moving out of districts with perceived high percentages of refugees. These possible realities present a challenge for policymakers, municipal actors and urban residents going forward.

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Notes

1. While the legal status granted to Syrians seeking protection in Turkey is 'Persons under Temporary Protection', the authors favour the use of 'Syrian refugees' in this chapter.
2. While the figures here concern registered refugees, some Syrian refugees remain unregistered, and it is difficult to estimate their exact number.
3. Since the time of writing, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) has become the Presidency for Migration Management (PMM). The change to status occurred upon the Presidential Decree issued on October 29, 2021 (Official Gazette, 2021). PMM and DGMM are used in the text as relevant.
4. See Ankara Province Directorate for Migration Management (2021).
5. Ibid.

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