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TURKEY-EU POLITICS OF REFUGEES THROUGH THE LENS OF CIVIL AND STATE ACTORS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency [Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı]
AKP	Justice and Development Party [Adalet Kalkınma Partisi]
CCTE	Conditional Cash Transfer for Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
ECHO	European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
EU	European Union
FRIT	EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IO	International Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PICTES	Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System
TP	Temporary Protection
TPR	Temporary Protection Regulation
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Responsible Deal Project aims to understand the impact of humanitarian and asylum policies on refugee decision-making and integration, with a special focus on Syrian refugees. By foregrounding the perspectives and interests of Syrian refugees, we offer policy-makers with the tools they need to address the challenge of migration in the 21st century from a rights-based perspective. Responsible Deal was initiated and led by Professor Erik Berglof of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and its last completion phase in 2022 was co-led by Dr Rim Turkmani. In 2022, the programme was hosted by the Conflict and Civiness Research Group, an autonomous research unit within LSE IDEAS, the LSE's in-house foreign policy think tank. Our work investigates the causes and dynamics of conflict, and the survival strategies employed in everyday life, in situations of war and intractable violence in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

ABOUT THE REPORT

This study is part of a bigger initiative funded by the London School of Economics that aims to explore where and how to best protect and integrate Syrian refugees. The overall project was motivated by the increased politicization of migration in Europe and the discourses on refugees at the level of both the EU and the governments of Syria's neighboring countries, which, in turn, created international pressure to deal with the Syrian refugee 'crisis'. As a result, a series of funding agreements between the EU and Syria's neighboring host countries – Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey – were drafted. For the present study in Turkey, we undertook expert interviews with governmental and non-governmental representatives with insight into the specific Turkish context. Specifically, this group of experts were:

Representatives of NGOs who are involved in the issue of Syrian refugees and migrants, have knowledge in EU-Turkey funding deals in context of refugees, and/or participated in the pledging conferences such as Brussels and London conferences and representatives of UN bodies.

The interviews seek the participants' perceptions regarding Turkey's policies in dealing with Syrian refugees, the political environment and the discourse in Europe surrounding migrants and refugees, and their opinions on how this has been linked to the emergence of international pledging conferences and the subsequent implementation of different international funding agreements with host countries in order to deal with migration, namely the EU-Turkish deal, that have been adopted between the EU and host countries in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. Additionally, the interviews seek to get a better understanding of how these agreements have been perceived in terms of many aspects related to their governance, application of rules, management, and protection of the rights of migrants and refugees.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Syrian war started in 2011, an estimated six million Syrians have fled mostly to neighboring countries¹. Today, Turkey, which initially held an open-door policy, currently hosts more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees registered under Temporary Protection status (TP)². Initially, both the Turkish government and the refugees themselves anticipated that the war in Syria would not last long and that the Syrians would return to their home country. However, as it became clearer that their stay was going to be long-term, the state, with the help of humanitarian assistance organizations, started to focus on developing strategies to improve their situation.

Though a signatory of the 1951 Convention, the Turkish government interpreted the original geographical focus on Europe and did not give Syrians an official refugee status. The definitions of Syrians' status and rights were specified in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection passed on April 11, 2013, and Syrian refugees in Turkey became recognized by the status of TP that is defined under Article 91 of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458). The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) issued by the Council of Ministers on October 22, 2014, further specifies this status³. This status provides them access to basic rights such as education, employment, and health services, but it does not lead to permanent residency or citizenship. Yet, accessing the services that the laws guarantee for them is often impeded by numerous obstacles.

As a response to the summer of 2015, as the European countries facing refugee 'flows' were trying to protect their borders, the Turkey-EU deal was put in place in March 2016⁴. This deal offered Turkey financial assistance to set up a migration governance system in return for a promise of reducing visa restrictions for Turkish citizens. Based on this, Turkey would set up stronger border controls to stop the arrival of refugees to European border countries. The EU committed to resettle a fixed number of refugees that it would select.

Social assistance was the largest portion of this financial aid. It was implemented through a program called the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), launched in December 2016, which offered "a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey"⁵. Projects were also implemented to increase the enrolment of Syrian refugees in schools, through a variety of programs, such as Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System (PICTES) and Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE). There were also a wide variety of additional projects in terms of other aspects of the integration of refugees such as vocational training, language education, among many others. The number of work permits issued continues to be exceptionally low: a total of 132,497 work permits have been issued to Syrian nationals between 2016 and 2019⁶. This can be attributed to the unwillingness of the employers to apply for work permits, preferring to hire refugees informally and pay them less. In addition, there are numerous restrictions that fall under this legislation such as a limit on the number of non-Turkish employees. Other limitations include prohibitions on non-Turkish citizens from practicing certain professions such as positions in healthcare and legal services⁷. Further, in the latest statement, the Ministry of Interior declared that 110,000 Syrians acquired Turkish citizenship in February 2020⁸.

In 2020, the European Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum aimed to address European migration challenges. It was presented as a "new approach to migration, addresses border management and ensures more coherence to integrate the internal and external dimensions of migration policies" and "to place a much more effective and comprehensive governance system that ensures that solidarity is effective in practice and that the challenges of migration are addressed comprehensively"⁹. It aims to promote solidarity among member states in terms of managing migration and asylum, and to establish a new framework to strengthen relations with neighboring Mediterranean

¹ UNHCR, "Syria emergency." Accessible from: <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html#:~:text=Over%205.6%20million%20people%20have,continues%2C%20hope%20is%20fading%20fast>. [Last accessed November 21, 2020].

² Directorate General of Migration Management. Accessible from: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> [Last accessed November 24, 2020].

³ European Commission, "Needs assessment report for the preparation of an enhanced EU support to Turkey on the refugee crisis. Technical Assistance for a comprehensive needs assessment of short and medium to long term actions as basis for an enhanced EU support to Turkey on the refugee crisis." Service Contract No. 2015/366838. (June 2016).

⁴ Ahmet İçduygu and Maissam Nimer, (2020) The politics of return: exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, (Third World Quarterly, 2020), 41:3, 415-433, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503.

⁵ European Commission, "The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN): Offering a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey." (25/06/2020).

Accessible from: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn_en#:~:text=Coming%20up-.The%20Emergency%20Social%20Safety%20Net%20\(ESSN\)%3A%20Offering%20a,to%20vulnerable%20refugees%20in%20Turkey&text=Refugee%20families%20currently%20receive%20120,%2C%20bills%2C%20food%20and%20medicine](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn_en#:~:text=Coming%20up-.The%20Emergency%20Social%20Safety%20Net%20(ESSN)%3A%20Offering%20a,to%20vulnerable%20refugees%20in%20Turkey&text=Refugee%20families%20currently%20receive%20120,%2C%20bills%2C%20food%20and%20medicine). [Last accessed: December 6, 2020].

⁶ Bastien Revel, "Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey," (The Atlantic Council in Turkey, 2020).

⁷ Meltem Inel-Ciger, PhD, LL.M., "Protecting Syrians in Turkey: A Legal Analysis," (International Journal of Refugee Law, Volume 29, Issue 4, December 2017), Pages 555–579.

⁸ The Asylum Information Database (AIDA). Naturalisation Turkey. Accessible from: <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/naturalisation-0> [Last accessed: 6 December 2020]

⁹ Speech by Vice-President Schinas on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, (European Commission Press Release September 23, 2020).. Accessible from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech_20_1736 [Last accessed on December 6, 2020].

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countries. Yet, this pact is still under considerable debate. It will bring an end to the "Dublin System", but it is unclear whether or how this new pact will achieve these premises.

This report, based on a three-month-long qualitative research, through in-depth interviews with state and non-state actors involved in the governance of migration and refugees in Turkey, focuses on the following aspects. First, it examines the perceptions of actors about the policies in Turkey towards refugees, as well as the public attitude about their presence in Turkey. Second, it tackles the EU policies towards Syrian refugees, and the public perceptions in the EU. It then looks at the perceptions surrounding the Turkey-EU deal and the fundraising conferences. After examining how the current situation has impacted relations between neighboring countries, if at all, it sheds light on the new pact and its relation to the question of return.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study targeted stakeholders from organizations working in a wide range of areas related to migration in Turkey, including but not limited to, humanitarian, advocacy, and legal fields, and it sought to obtain the views of organizations with different political affiliations, purposes, and agendas. We contacted representatives from state institutions as well as those from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both national and international, secular, and faith-based and from both larger and smaller cities in Turkey. This diversity was considered essential to obtain a broader perspective and gain an understanding of various concerns, needs and expectations of actors in different fields. The list of the organizations and the number and title of participants interviewed is annexed at the end of the report.

Of the 16 organizations interviewed for this report, eleven organizations were founded and based in Turkey, and five organizations were international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) with their headquarters outside of Turkey, including three UN agencies, each working on a distinct field related also to migration and refugees. Of 11 organizations based in Turkey, three provided services worldwide and two of these are considered faith-based; one was a human rights organization working also with refugees, and another was a local NGO conducting both advocacy and humanitarian work; two were carrying out advocacy work for refugees; one was a research institution working on immigration and refugees; one organization was working on the refugee topic through the Turkey-EU relations lens.

2.1. Selection Of Stakeholders

A form was created listing various organizations working in the field of migration in Turkey as well as the key contact people from these organizations. For the present study, a total of 104 representatives from different organizations were contacted via an explanatory email apart from two interviewees, who were suggested by a colleague and were contacted via phone. Since most stakeholders from these organizations were working from home due to the contingencies of the field related to the pandemic, we were not able to make visits to reach interviewees and therefore relied on email and phone communication. Of these, 24 organizations agreed to participate in the interview, and, among these, we were able to conduct interviews with 16 organizations out of 24, as this was the number of interviews set for this research. Interviewees were selected to represent a wide variety of areas and types of organizations and institutions. The interviewees who agreed to participate in this study were given the option of having an online interview or responding to interview questions in written form. All participants preferred to be interviewed. These participants were sent reminders close to the meeting time. We also asked each interviewee to suggest relevant stakeholders for this report and we were able to reach one participant via the help of one of our interviewees. While stakeholders from local and international NGOs were responsive and willing to talk, it was quite difficult to reach the desired number of representatives from governmental institutions, especially in the context of the pandemic. In two cases, public officers responded saying that they would seek institutional permission and would only join the interview if the institution deemed it appropriate. In both cases, the institution rejected the request for an interview. A total of two interviews (out of 16) were from state institutions. Several organizations touched upon the difficulty of expressing one's opinion freely in the present political climate in Turkey. It is also important to state that the restrictions during the pandemic have immensely impacted the ways the permissions of organizations were sought. The likelihood of reaching more governmental institutions would have been higher had the researchers been able to visit the institutions and seek permission in person.

2.2. Interview Process

All the interviews were conducted either via online video conferencing (15) or by phone (1) due to the pandemic. The interviews were carried out over a period of one and a half months from October until mid-November 2020. They lasted around one hour, ranging between 35 to 95 minutes depending on the depth of conversation. The interview protocol (in Annex 2) was first designed by the commissioning institution (Issam Fares Institute, American University of Beirut) and was further developed with the input from the commissioned researchers. The protocol covered such topics as the profile of the organization and the interviewee, the refugee crisis and its impact on the fundraising conferences, various aspects of the Turkey-EU deal, and prospects of a new deal. Whereas the protocol was structured, the interviewees were given flexibility to answer based on their knowledge and expertise and follow-up questions were asked to learn more about some threads that showed up in the interview.

The participants were asked if they and their organizations wished to remain anonymous. Out of sixteen, seven preferred to remain anonymous, two wanted their interviews to be counted as personal opinions rather than reflecting those of their institutions. One participant asked to see the transcription of his interview before his ideas are published. Since more organizations sought anonymity, we decided to anonymize entirely by only referring to the category of the organizations. In three cases of interviews, more than one participant represented the organization in the interview; there were two groups of two and one group of three. As a result, we talked with 16 organizations, but with 20 participants. Of these 20 participants, five were non-Turkey nationals and the interviews were conducted in

English with four and in Turkish with one who was highly proficient in Turkish. All interviewees agreed to be recorded for transcription purposes.

2.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and translated by a team of researchers and analyzed by the two lead researchers. The interviews that were conducted in English were transcribed, and the ones that were conducted in Turkish were simultaneously transcribed and translated in preparation for analysis. The data analysis was an iterative process that started before the fieldwork and developed during and after the interviews. A set of themes were generated which also shaped the protocol. Thematic coding was later used to analyze the transcribed texts and the researchers analyzed the data simultaneously, spotted the recurring themes, and identified overlaps. The themes became more precise during the writing process.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section outlines the eight major themes and the subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. The areas of agreement and disagreement among stakeholders are particularly highlighted and illustrated with the use of the most significant quotes from the interviews.

3.1. Turkey's Policy Responses

3.1.1. Overall Perception of Policies

There were a range of different opinions regarding whether Turkey's policies towards Syrian refugees were successful or not. These are generally shaped by the political affiliation of the organizations. Some state actors (especially those sympathetic to the party in power) tended to view the state policies favorably even when they offered minor critique, for example:

We see that the state's policy on refugees inside Turkey are close to international standards. So, accepting refugees without discrimination in Turkey, the fact that they benefit from the many services from health, education and so on, there are no practices such as forced return or deportation. (NGO 8)

The aspects that were most appreciated were the open-door policy, quick response through the implementation of regulations, the rapid creation of a migration governing body as well as the extensive service provision in an inclusive manner:

Every time as a state policy, we execute policies that aim [for] integration in at least one way, in every field it is like this. From health to education services, we see that the attitude of the state is very inclusive. (State actor 1)

In contrast, organizations with clear secular agendas, funded by large INGOs or representatives from local NGOs tended to be more critical. Some of the limitations that were pointed out include the lack of clarity regarding access to certain rights, the fact that refugees are obliged to register and stay in the province in which they are registered, and most importantly, the limited number of work permits which pushes refugees into exploitative work conditions:

If I look at the Turkish government's general policy and the laws and regulations tied to the state, actually it is safe to say that it has made good progress. The fact that the regulations were completed when needed along with the increase in the number in Turkey of Syrians fleeing the civil war in Syria and the fact that the Migration Authority is operating widely is actually quite positive. I think this is a policy that has a plus value. (NGO 10)

3.1.2. Turkey's Policies in Comparison with Other Countries

Some organizations compared the Turkish policies to those of other countries or regions. In sum, while they admit that refugees have more rights in Europe as they can seek asylum, they recognize that the numbers of refugees that Turkey has admitted is not comparable to the number received by Europe, to explain this discrepancy. Yet in comparison with neighboring countries Lebanon and Jordan, the services provided by Turkey are believed to be better, admitting that the economic situation in these other countries are less favorable than in Turkey. Actors have also indicated that Turkey's policies, compared to neighboring countries, have been more inclusive and its approach more proactive, which has been evident in the rapid set up of services:

In terms of the actual policy, I came from Lebanon to Turkey, so I always compare both. In general, Turkey, policywise, is, I think, a global example and a global best practice, because the policy framework is very inclusive, it's very open. And also, Turkey has put it in place in a very proactive way, whereas other countries either didn't or did so very reluctantly or did so in exchange for potential funding and everything. And I think, Turkey, even if then there was the deal with the EU and everything, the key principles of open access to services, access to the labor market and so on, were put in place very early on. Honestly, it's remarkable when you compare ... you go to Lebanon and also to Europe, such a huge number of refugees. It's remarkable and it's also making our life much easier because we can really have constructive conversation[s] with the Turkish government officials and counterparts. (NGO 6)

Further, this same actor, comparing with Lebanon, stated that Lebanon was more likely to use refugees for political gain than Turkey, except for the crisis at the border in January 2020 when Turkey threatened to open its borders for refugees to pass to Europe.

3.1.3. Open-Door Policy as A Humanitarian Action And “Temporary Protection Status”

Overall, the fact that Turkey maintained an open-door policy was applauded as a humanitarian action across the spectrum, whether among NGOs that are close to the government or large INGOs:

When the [Syrian] war was starting, when the civilians started to lose their lives, Turkey took an important decision of opening its doors. This was one of the rare examples in the world. Every person in Turkey looked at the situation from a humanitarian perspective, without an economic, political or a religious concern. (NGO 4)

The size of the population that came to Turkey turned out to be much larger than anticipated:

When it was envisaged that there would be around 200,000-300,000 refugees from Syria in the year 2011, this number turned out to be millions ... We are the country with the highest number of refugees in the world at the moment. (NGO 9)

After this point, border passage became more restricted and controlled, citing security concerns. Furthermore, in 2016 Turkey started to construct what it called security zones in the north of Syria, through bilateral agreements with Russia, the Syrian regime and Iran to progressively move refugees there. The policy approach changed with time. According to several interviewees, the initial approach was that of an immediate emergency response and was overseen by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). Turkey felt obligated as a neighboring country to accept people who are seeking refuge for a short time, until they would go back to their country once the situation gets better in Syria. However, as of 2014, as it looked like a political solution would not be reached anytime soon, the approach started to change. At that point, there was a shift, as the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was founded and refugees started to register in order to start accessing services:

In 2012, when the crisis in Syria had started, Turkey was seeing this as an obligation from the neighbor country approach. Everyone thought that the crisis in Syria will be for a short time. So, Turkey opened camps with the understanding, similar to the whole world, that this is a short period. The situation in Syria will get better. The Syrians will go back. Since 2014 when the political solution was very far, and everyone understood that this is a long way to go. (NGO 11)

Also at the beginning, there were unclarity on how long Syrians were staying in the country. So, they have been first well handled by AFAD, which is mainly an immediate response for emergencies. And later, when it was clear that refugees are staying for a long time, there was handover to the immigration unit in the country. So, between also that shift, there were some issues with registration and there were many Syrian refugees who were not registered, not able to benefit from some of the basic services that are provided for them in general. (NGO 1)

As several pointed out, the Turkish state is clearly concerned with this topic. However, while all recognized that Turkey had made some significant efforts in integrating refugees, there were concerns about the policies still not being designed and conceived for the long-term, which were brought up consistently. There is a perception that a lot of programs are being carried out to meet daily needs but none of them points towards a long-term sustainable future. NGO 5 suggests that different legal infrastructures need to be established to achieve social cohesion and build a better future:

I do not think that anything is planned for 10 years after, for five years after, so I do not see a long-term plan in any way. (NGO 5)

As a result, refugees constantly have a feeling of temporariness even after nearly 10 years. This has important implications with regards to integration into the host society:

It's been 9-10 years, everyone would like to see refugees more integrated into the community, more learning the language, more adapting to the regulations of the country, the customs of the culture, and all of this. But how could you achieve that when all your message is about how temporary they are here starting from the naming of the registration status as a temporary protection to the aid you provide, and how it's linked almost month-to-month kind of assistance and could stop any second for any political reason. (NGO 1)

Lastly, there were discussions that emerged with regards to the controversial status of the Syrians in Turkey. While Syrians were initially perceived as “guests” and their hosts as “Ensar”¹⁰, they were eventually granted Temporary Protection (TP) status, which gave them more rights than other refugees in the country, including access to a work permit, health services and education. Yet, this status still does not fit with the international definition of an asylum seeker or a refugee and still implies temporariness:

A refugee who has been under temporary protection for under nine years, currently has no right to apply for refugee status. (NGO 7)

While temporary protection status does not offer refugee rights, in terms of citizenship, and can be revoked at any point, some state officials believe that” when we look at its [sic] all features, we see that Temporary Protection is also a refugee status”. (State actor 1)

3.1.4. Introduction Of a New Migration Governance System Ensuring Basis Rights

Initially, there was no migration policy in place. There had been waves of migration towards Turkey before but none of this magnitude. Furthermore, previous migration waves always consisted of taking in “within their own kin” i.e., Bulgarian Turks or Albanian Turks. It is the first time that the country receives such a large population that is not ethnically related. This resulted in what was qualified as “failure in registration” as migrants came into Turkey through open doors and dispersed throughout the country “in an irregular way”, said NGO 4. The lack of registration at the entry was perceived by several as a flaw. The Turkish state reacted by promptly founding the DGMM. This contributed favorably to improving the bureaucratic processes and the humanitarian side for the refugees themselves (NGO 4):

In a long period from 2013 to the year 2020, Turkey has passed an important exam in founding the DGMM, easing the life for refugees as much as it could, improving the bureaucratic and humanitarian dimensions of it. (NGO 4)

The government then started to put in place policies that would ensure that “minimum conditions” are provided for refugees to live a decent life (NGO 14). They established the Law for Foreigners and International Protection to provide rights for migrants in the country, giving Syrian refugees access to TP status among several schemes of protection. The deal ensured access to education, health services and employment:

All public institutions started to develop policies ... a kind of comprehensive response for the basic needs of the people who are fleeing from Syria. Instead of following directly the internationally-agreed kind of policies towards refugees, Turkey developed its own kind of policies like temporary protection status for Syrian refugees based on its political agenda toward the Syrian crisis. (NGO 13)

There are mixed feelings about Turkey’s policies regarding economic integration of refugees and their livelihood conditions. While some of the organizations believe that the government is trying its best to keep the refugees’ situation acceptable – in light of the economic crisis – others felt like the policies did not fit the gravity of the situation, as the actual number of work permits that have been issued to Syrians remains low. As a result, most Syrians are working informally in difficult conditions.

With regards to education policy, the approach also shifted from first establishing temporary education centers for Syrian children, to having exerted massive efforts to enroll them in public schools. A representative from the Ministry of Education expressed admiration for the number of students that are going to school and are provided with all kinds of support:

We are schooling them. For example, there are 142,000 children in Istanbul attending school. At our state schools, they receive the same quality of education as our children. All kinds of support are given to them; book support, language support, stationery support, clothing support and transportation support. They also benefit from the full-time teachers that all our children benefit from and from all the facilities of our public schools. (State actor 2)

Similarly, at the higher education level, there have been programs encouraging enrollment of Syrians in universities. It is believed that an inclusive and integrative system is being implemented. This has moved Turkey to the top in terms of enrollment rates of refugees in higher education, according to the UNHCR. A state representative (State actor 1) indicates that the goal is to integrate as many Syrian students as possible into the system. They have introduced

10 An Islamic religious reference to the early Muslims who hosted the prophet Muhammad when he emigrated from Mecca.

measures such as “removing their tuition fees, facilitating their entry into the universities even if they don’t have some documents with them. And also supporting them with various scholarship programs” (State actor 1). A few mentioned that Turkey has also benefited from this deal, as it has developed its local capacity to implement international projects and by developing its institutional structure in terms of migration governance in light of the EU expertise:

Turkey is receiving money and projects are being implemented. The capacity has increased locally to implement international projects. We established a Migration Management but while executing these, we benefit from the EU example. (NGO 5)

It is also believed to have benefited from the presence of refugees, as cheap labor into its labor market, and as a “soft-power” in the world.

3.2. General Public Perceptions in Turkey

3.2.1. Overall Perceptions and Change Over Time

With one exception from a state actor who describes the public perception towards refugees as positive, as elaborated in the quote below, most of the interviewees reported negative perceptions. This state actor believes that the Syrians were accepted by families as demonstrated by the success in their integration into the national education system through school enrollment:

Both our adult people and our children embraced them immensely. If the [Turkish] children did not embrace them, if their parents did not, and if the people in their district did not embrace them, could these children increase from 30,000 to 102,000 [in school enrolment] and share the same school with the same children in the same neighborhood? For this reason, this stems from the fact that the nation’s view of them is good, positive and helpful support. (State actor 2)

Those who reported negative public perceptions, highlighted cases of discrimination at all levels, social tensions, and violent incidents over the years. Indeed, several cited the latest survey conducted by Murat Erdoğan, entitled the Syrian Barometer. This survey reveals the society’s position towards not accepting Syrians in the long run. The host society is still expecting the Syrians to return to their country. Some experienced discrimination in their daily lives, including in state institutions; they also refer to the hate speech on social media and mainstream media:

Turkey has a considerable territory, a big population, and it also has a much greater capacity to integrate the refugees within itself than Lebanon. Nevertheless, people worried that they would lose their jobs or that their social, economic, and cultural lives would be negatively affected by a large number of refugees. (NGO 8)

The public perception towards refugees is believed to have changed over time. When they first arrived, the whole population was favorable to their presence. However, the situation changed after a while, as they became part of the political debates:

Syrians were a common issue supported by the whole Turkish nation, of all political parties or all those who call themselves humans in Turkey. But after a while, when this problem got entangled with the problems of granting them citizenship or the attitudes of the opposition, or of the ultra-nationalist groups, the Kurdish problem, and other problems, Syrian refugees in Turkey have increasingly become the subject of political debates. (NGO 9)

The Syrian Barometer survey clearly demonstrates this change over time from 2014 to 2019, that shows that the social distance has become greater, prejudice is worsening, even within the supporters of the party that is currently in power, the AKP. Many attribute this change over time to the ambiguous policies and changing political discourse of the government. (NGO 6)

3.2.2. Drivers Of Public Perception

According to many actors, the main driver of negative perceptions towards refugees is the unfavorable economic situation of the host population to start with, including the high level of unemployment. As such, the struggle to get by is believed to be the cause of these negative reactions. One of the interviewed actors, from a local organization, believes that the presence of the refugees is used politically as the reason for the discontent of the people, while the market benefits from their presence by creating a cheaper labor force (NGO 12). Another stressed the broader socio-economic environment:

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Our people are already poor and even people in our country do not have their own rights, social and otherwise, or do not show the capacity to protect their own rights. (NGO 14)

Further, a lack of transparent communication contributed to increasing the tensions between hosts and refugees. There are misperceptions about how much money was spent on refugees by the state and a lack of information about the initiatives that are under the Turkey-EU agreement in the public. This might be fueling the negative perceptions:

The state should have clear communication, there are needs which have been covered by many of the initiatives of the government or under that EU-Turkey deal, be clear with the host about what has been provided, and what has also been benefited from the refugees rather than using refugees as a card. If you look at the tension that we have right now, which is quite high, between the Syrian refugees and the host society, it's mainly driven from those big statements about the billions or the amount of money and the resources that Turkey allocated for them, without providing much detail about it. (NGO 1)

Some representatives also criticized the state for not facilitating the integration of Syrians or openly engaging with the refugee crisis. There is a deafening silence on the part of the government with regards to the issue of discrimination of Syrians in Turkey. It is more generally believed that the state's indifference in terms of countering the "othering" discourse and hate speech was detrimental. One of the organizations describes the misperceptions of the Turkish citizens in general with regards to the support received by Syrians:

When you look at the street, for instance, you go to the market with a Syrian and you are going to buy bread. The Syrian gives a card and takes his bread without paying any money, but the Turk is unable to buy bread, he needs to pay for it. The Turk thinks "why does the state give money to the Syrian but not me", but he is not aware that money is 300 or 400 TL per month. Ultimately, he sees the Syrian as the reason for his own poverty and misery. (NGO 9)

As a result, organizations themselves try to help overcome this misinformation, by emphasizing that their programs are carried out with EU support.

3.2.3. Using Refugees' Presence as Political Strategy in Elections

The political agendas are also believed to be shifting during major events such as election times. There are no clear plans and this affects public opinion. Indeed, the topic of refugees was at the top of the agenda during election times. The main opposition (even the alleged left wing) ran its campaign on anti-Syrian rhetoric in the 2019 election, as major candidates promised to send Syrians back to their country (NGO 9). They blamed the refugee crisis on foreign policy errors by the government. They used anti-Syrian sentiments of the voters in a harmful way for public opinion (NGO 10). A candidate for Istanbul Fatih Municipality (an area in which a high percentage of residents are refugees) hung up a banner that said "I will send back the Syrians" as part of the election campaign. The respondents referred to the negative effect of growing public dissent towards Syrians on the change in political discourse used by political parties:

The Minister of Interior published the number of Syrians who voluntarily returned. We can say that they [the government] switched to the discourse "we will send them back" when they realized that there was a grassroots reaction due to the Syrian visibility after the elections. This is actually very aligned with the global trend. (NGO 10)

The political discourse is believed to be influencing public opinion. Indeed, during the arrival of the refugees, the AKP government used the Muhacir (guest) and Ensar (host) image, which is religious oriented rather than rights-based. Actors also identified an Ottomanist approach of protecting the subjects under the empire or religious fraternity. This impacted the way in which the public perceived the newcomers. Public opinion is influenced by the political positions whereby the opposition strongly supports the return of the refugees to their home country, and the government itself is divided and changes positions, and this has impacted public opinion based on political affiliation:

It also requires social acceptance. At the end of the day, people will vote. If there is something that creates a reaction in people... We also saw in the last elections. There is a picture that: "of course Syrians are with us and they would be our citizens" ... you do not see that such a picture is drawn by any political party or leader. (NGO 5)

They recommend that, to improve public attitudes, politicians from all sides including the president, need to remind people to look at the situation from a humanitarian perspective. In contrast, some believed that the public's perception has an effect on government policies. Indeed, as the perception of refugees is unfavorable, politicians avoid making policies with a view to long-term sustainability.

3.3. EU Policies in Dealing with Syrian Refugees

3.3.1. Overall Perceptions of The EU Policies

While there were different opinions regarding Turkey's policies towards Syrian refugees, from being successful to pragmatic, from being humanitarian to inconsistent, all organizations, unequivocally, found the EU's policies problematic and not reflecting the democratic and humanitarian ideals that the organization claims to represent. All participants, with no exception, believed that the main purpose underlying all EU policies in dealing with Syrian refugees has been geared towards keeping them away from Europe, and specifically Western Europe. The policy of "keeping Syrians away" or what one of the participants called "outsourcing the refugee crisis to Syria's neighboring countries" (NGO 13) has been the determining element in the relations that the EU has developed with Syria's neighboring host countries including Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. A participant from an organization that does advocacy work for Syrian refugees in Turkey expressed the following:

To be honest, I am criticizing. Now, the point of view of the EU and its affiliated organizations and many other funding organizations, especially in the field of refugees, is to keep these people in a buffer zone. "As long as they do not arrive at our doors, we will do whatever is necessary for this". One and a half years ago, I attended a meeting in Brussels. The parliament had brought together NGOs working in this field from all over the world; the only spoken thing is the safe return. (NGO 12)

Another participant who works for an international organization in Turkey, but who is a national from a European country, found the EU policy problematic:

My personal opinion, I find it completely hysterical. On the one hand, you see these things like Merkel and a few individuals who are truly remarkable. And again, that's what you really hope to hear more of. I mean, I'm not even talking about Hungary or these countries, but the political debate in the EU is dominated by inflated concerns related to the impact of accepting very small numbers of Syrian refugees. (NGO 6)

The opinion that the EU aims to keep refugees away is widely shared by all organizations. One organization, still agreeing that this approach is problematic, shows sympathy for the EU for the following reason:

The main point of struggle of the EU is to keep refugees in Turkey and to prevent them from going to Europe. Of course, the EU does not only have the Syrian issue on its plate, there is also migration from North Africa. Europe is, in a way, an attraction center for refugees from all over the world. It tries to prevent this by taking measures in those places. (NGO 9)

Since the EU wants to keep refugees in Turkey and in Syria's other neighboring countries, it heavily invests in integration programs and finds ways to ameliorate the conditions of refugees in those countries so that refugees do not seek to go to Europe. To this end, the EU has not only allocated funds to support refugees in third countries, but it has provided further incentives for these countries in the forms of trade deals, developing economic agreements, visa-related reforms, and various other country-specific incentives:

We saw this during the Turkey-EU deal in 2016 and before, in 2011, Turkey was already given funds. It is a development in 2016 and different objectives were pursued between the parties. The EU was aiming to externalize the migration and to keep the crisis out ... The EU was aiming to improve relations based on interest and a strategic partnership. (NGO 5)

However, across the board, all actors, regardless of the type of organization and how close they are to the state, believed that the share of responsibility was unequal, whereby Turkey has taken on the largest share of responsibility in comparison to the EU. The latter is perceived to just be giving funds and has kept its borders shut, while the former has taken on such a large number of refugees:

You cannot compare the EU with what Turkey is hosting. Turkey is hosting four million, the EU in total maybe, I'm not sure if they reach one million as a whole nation [continent]. Financially as well, whether these figures might be exaggerated or not, Turkey has spent more than what the EU has spent. In terms of the exact burden-sharing, I can confidently say that, no, it's not. (NGO 11)

We [Turkey] take 90 percent responsibility. Our approach is completely humanitarian, not like an expectation from them. They are guests of God and as long as they are here, let us provide them with the best opportunities and let them live with us. (State actor 2)

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An overwhelming number of organizations find the financial support that the EU provides to Turkey to be insufficient and not addressing or seeking long-term solutions to the refugee situation. They have repeatedly stressed the need for more EU funding for Turkey if the EU continues its policy of keeping Syrian refugees away from Europe:

We are talking about a refugee population of four and a half million or five million, and it is impossible to always keep this with 100 million or 200 million-dollar donations or short-term solutions. Even if you look at the education of Syrians, there are over 900,000 Syrian students. They need to be integrated and if the EU does not want them, it needs to support Turkey for integration. Integration is not only about families talking to each other, but more about finding employment for them, creating employment sources, providing education and supporting their health. (NGO 9)

Furthermore, some highlighted the insufficiency of the financial support to meet the needs of such a large number of people, a number which continues to increase as time passes:

When you look at the financial support, is this support sufficient to meet all the needs of 3.5 million people? Then it is not equal, and not what it should be. This number has increased with newborns, we have always looked after these people, and we always will. (State actor 2)

The share of responsibility is especially perceived to be unfair if we consider the long-term repercussions on neighboring countries of hosting such a large number of refugees including social and economic risks in the future:

Of course, not [it is not a fair share]. Because the neighboring countries... the cost on the neighboring country is very high when we compare to funding from the EU. Since it's not just funding, or about implementing programs and policies. It's a very high social problem. It cannot be defined as equal burden sharing between EU or donor countries and the neighboring countries. No. (NGO 13)

As one of the participants stated, the policy of “keeping Syrians away” has had and will continue having a determining impact on the EU’s border policies and its strategies of border protection. The EU has long followed strict and exclusive immigration policies, but with the Syrian refugee situation, this policy became more apparent:

Since the 90s, it [EU] has been keeping its borders tightly. Instead of sending back those coming here, it constantly tightens its borders to prevent them from coming, makes stricter policies. Another one of its methods is to make agreements with third countries outside the EU and mostly neighboring countries [of Syria] to stop this influx. (NGO 7)

The increased emphasis on keeping the refugees away from Europe did not only alter the EU border policies and border protection practices, but it has also shaped the border policy and protection practices of Syria’s neighboring countries, including Turkey. As part of the deal, the EU offered funds to strengthen Turkey’s technologies used in border protection, increase its capacity and the training of its personnel. It remains to be seen how this change will impact future attitudes towards refugees among the population and the mobility of refugees across and beyond Turkey.

A few organizations pointed out the prevalent breaches by the EU and its member states of the principle of *non-refoulement* in relation to Syrian refugees. More broadly, it was noted that the actions taken by EU states and organizations against Syrian refugees seeking asylum strikingly conflicted with the international covenants and agreements around refugee rights or human rights in general.

3.3.2. Non-Humanitarian Refugee Policies

In terms of the financial aid, it gives to Turkey to support Syrian refugees, some organizations found the EU policies to be at least partially successful and understandable, others consider them insufficient, still others as discriminatory and inhumane. While some organizations are more cynical towards the Turkish government and its policies towards Syrians compared to the EU, all organizations criticize the EU because they believe that it could have been more proactive in managing the Syrian refugee situation. Many organizations found the policy and actions of both parties, the EU and Turkey, problematic, but the organizations that are closer to the government in their discourse and ideologies stressed the lack of what they described as a “humanitarian” approach in the EU’s attitudes towards refugees in contrast to Turkey. One participant from such a religious-leaning organization made the following remarks:

The EU, when their foundation aims, etc. are considered, I see them as a Union who don't know nearly no other civilization besides themselves and founded with the aim of providing security to themselves. Especially, in their perspective of refugees, when I was defining Turkey, I said that we are looking at it with a humanitarian perspective, but the first perspective in the European Union is not a humanitarian perspective, I can say that. So, when I compare Europe and Turkey, with a

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humanitarian perspective, accepting refugees to its country without discriminating any nationality, religion, or race...when we compare it to Europe, I think it is more advantageous. By the way, there are also good things that Germany and Europe did but since it has lost the humanitarian perspective, at the end people lose themselves. (NGO 4)

All organizations acknowledged refugees' wish for going to Europe due to unfavorable social and economic conditions and their precarious status in Turkey, and better social system in Europe. Whereas refugees who obtain asylum in Europe are considered to be in a much better situation than refugees in Turkey, the conditions of refugees in camps in Europe as they await their asylum were found to be worse than the conditions of refugees in Turkey. A few organizations considered the problematic and inhumane conditions in camps in Europe as deliberate as such conditions were believed to deter refugees from seeking to go to Europe:

A refugee that is residing in Turkey ... would see it differently than a refugee who is living in Europe, for instance in Germany or in the Netherlands. And we see this in their actions. When I went to the camps in France, we saw that people being literally left in a prison-like place where people made ghettos within that camp, where they were left to live with each other and were removed from the French society and where they were never sought to be integrated, where they were left to die or to be killed by each other, where there were no legal discipline whatsoever, etc. We saw such camps. The people that came to Turkey from the EU and the UN said that Turkey's camps in the border are in good quality. (NGO 4)

Whereas two religious organizations and one of the two state organizations contacted for this interview considered the EU's immigration policies as inherently discriminatory or xenophobic, several NGOs advocating for the rights of refugees have identified the changing nature of the EU's response to Syrian refugees over the course of the Syrian war. The EU's initial policies at the onset of the Syrian war were seen as positive, but as the organizations pointed out, the EU shifted its more humanitarian and welcoming policy in the earlier years of the war to one that has been more exclusive and unwilling to accommodate Syrian refugees on its soil for various reasons (see 3.3.3. and 3.4 below). One of the participants from an NGO that advocates for the rights of refugees shared the following observations:

In 2011, before the Syrian crisis and in the early stages, the EU was actually always – thanks to its past which is the source of these refugee and asylum policy arrangements – it was actually doing quite well due to low numbers [of refugees], running safe channels and controlling it in a more humane way. At least it looked that way... The ones going through Turkey had been accepted one way or another. There seems to be no serious intervention in people's crossing of borders, crossing of countries. Then when these numbers could no longer be managed or EU citizens' response within their own country to this matter... The EU's policy had been to keep refugees outside of the EU. Yes, there are immigrants, there are refugees, but let them not be in Europe. (NGO 10)

3.3.3. The Underlying Reasons for The EU's Exclusive Immigration Policy Towards Syrians

The EU's exclusive immigration policy with respect to Syrian refugees – selecting more qualified Syrians for asylum – has been criticized many times by organizations with different agendas and missions. A public officer from a state institution working on the education of young Syrians made the following statement:

I think the EU updated its policies throughout this process. In the beginning there was a lack of planning, what would happen was uncertain, but right now it is more about a policy of holding them in Turkey and drawing more qualified students to Europe and behaving in a more selective way. But for Turkey there is no such luxury, so we are working to integrate both qualified and unqualified refugees, differently from Europe. (State actor 1)

This exclusive EU response to Syrian refugees was also criticized for not prioritizing refugees' lives and needs, but rather prioritizing the EU's requirements instead. EU policies in this period therefore reflected self-interest and not the humanitarian aspect of the problem, as many organizations pointed out. These concerns were seen as related to the EU's security concerns, economy, and its anxieties over the change in the religious and cultural composition of Europe. The religious-leaning organizations close to the state have especially cited religious and cultural concerns as having a decisive impact on EU policies towards Syrian refugees. The increasing number of Muslim refugees from all over the world coming to Europe, its changing demographics, and the heated political debates over these were all cited.

Secular organizations, especially those that work in international organizations which receive the largest share of financial assistance, focused on the technical, economic and political aspects EU policies towards Syrian refugees. Economic concerns, or perceptions of the economic cost of refugees, were cited as significant factors impacting EU

policymaking and its deferral of the protection of refugees to Syria's neighboring countries. Participants from an international humanitarian aid organization touched upon this matter as follows:

I was working at a state institution at the time and I can talk about this. We have to look at two things. One can look politically; this is due to the rise of the right-wing politics. The main reason for this is the crisis in the conventional labor market or job creation in Europe and economies worldwide. This crisis needs a scapegoat; the most powerful scapegoats in Europe are refugees and migrants. There is a political reaction here ... The second issue is economic concern. In other words, refugees are seen as an economical cost to the EU. Basically, they look at the overhead cost. The technical level for discussion was... Turkey is doing something with less euros, so let's give money to Turkey. When you look at the negotiations between Turkey and the EU, basically, one of the most important reasons underlying the rapid funding of the EU of six billion dollars was that if we try to host them in Europe, it will cost us ten times as much. (NGO 13)

3.4 General Public Perceptions in EU

3.4.1. Global Increase in Far-Right Sentiment and Its Impact on Refugees

All organizations pointed to the increase in far-right sentiment in European countries, along with the broader global rise. While various reasons were proposed that were believed to trigger this, anti-refugee sentiment as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis was seen as the most forceful element in determining the nature and the direction of this phenomenon. The increase in radical right forces world-wide has been attributed by many organizations to the economic crisis that the world is going through:

If you are aware, not only the EU, the whole world turned to the right and there are a few elements that trigger this; historical motives and hatred are being used in politics. Secondly, economic problems... The world is no longer an economically comfortable planet. Ultimately, these ultra-right-wing movements have gotten stronghold in places like Holland, Germany, France and everywhere and it is the same in Turkey. If you notice those ultra-right people are not the intellectuals, the working class has become ultra-right wing. (NGO 9)

Another participant also touched upon the use of the discourse of hate in politics and stated that the presidency of Donald Trump and his unfiltered xenophobia has also normalized free expression of such far-right political ideas by leaders and political parties around the world. Another participant from an NGO that does advocacy work for refugee rights, who said the growth of the far right was a worldwide phenomenon, also pointed out the multifaceted nature of this rise and the various forces that feed into it. She saw a relationship between the increased strength of the radical right and the diminished power of the left:

Now it is, as I said, multi-layered. There are racists in Turkish society; there are also in German society, in French society, and in Greek society. This is a separate category. But this is also a class issue; there are poor people who show anger towards their class siblings. In this sense, these right-wing populist discourses are trying to mobilize and win those masses through the issue on the migrants. Of course, there is a share of leftist discourse and left politics being extremely weak and unable to highlight things as they should. The fascist will remain fascist again, but at least it will not be as massive as it is today. (NGO 12)

Many participants argued that, while right-wing populism is a global phenomenon, its impact has been more apparent in the EU context due to the refugee crisis. Moreover, the increase in terror attacks in many European countries since the Syrian war was also seen as a factor fueling right-wing discourses by one of the organizations. However, such terror attacks are being projected indiscriminately onto all refugees who are themselves escaping terror and violence and seeking a safe place in Europe:

I will not discuss its reasons but terrorism activities also impact this, terrorism, religious or nationalist attacks, Al Qaida The root cause of deterioration of peace in the EU is to cover up this with foreign sentimentalism... If you think that everything stems from foreign elements, then you become ultra-nationalist. There is no trouble in explaining this to the masses, they just explain it in reverse way, all the threats are being projected to refugees, to outside forces, attacks and pressures so that some remain in power. (NGO 9)

One of the participants, acknowledging the empowerment of the far right, highlighted the differences between European countries in this regard:

We are seeing in the last few years a lot of xenophobia, a lot of anti-migration sentiment. And this is all related to who has the political power. From my personal experience, when I traveled to Spain five years ago, at the major building was a big panel saying "Welcome Syrian Refugees", but this is not the situation in other European countries. So, we can say that the approach toward the Syrians is also different from country to country in the EU. But this is not only related to the Syrians, this is related to the migration in general. (NGO 11)

3.4.2. The Impact of The Far Right on Europe's Policies and Political Parties

There are divergent views as to whether this radical-right sentiment is coming from below, that is from people themselves, or if it is being driven by elites or political parties. The majority of the organizations pointed out the latter, but a few organizations also recognized the former. The statement below was expressed by an organization sympathetic to the state:

What the public says is somehow coordinated by the politicians. Because the public looks at what the politicians say, like in most of the places in the world. Or a few politicians organize a certain part of the public and what that part does, affects several societies and those societies affect politics in a circular way, they make it the decision maker. (NGO 4)

Many organizations thought that the refugees are being used as a scapegoat by different political parties for various societal ills:

If you'd like people to vote for you, you need to put the fear into their hearts. Many people believe that refugees will be able to benefit from our limited resources. It would be negative on the economy, they come with different culture, religion, which led to voting for extreme parties. (NGO 1)

At the same time, participants from different organizations expressed opposing views on this phenomenon. They iterated that the policies of the EU are driven by voters:

Actually, everything depends on the voters. With the discomfort of the voters or the rising right-wing, the EU's policy had been to keep refugees outside of the EU. (NGO 10)

3.4.3. Refugees Crisis as A Sensitive Topic for Progressive Voices in Europe

A number of organizations made extended analyses on the impact of the refugee crisis on the internal dynamics in Europe and various ways that the left and progressive forces have been debilitated in their response to the crisis due to the public pressure and the pressure emanating from right-wing circles. Political parties, which otherwise would be more receptive to refugees, abstain from doing so because they are targeted by far-right forces which manipulates public sentiments. This dynamic gives more power to far-right voices in Europe compared to progressive voices. The refugee crisis becomes a useful discursive tool for these forces who use the public's fear and anxiety to silence and disempower the left.

The rise of right-wing parties is causing them to shift to these radical things. Loss of votes due to fear of loss of power. So, moderate politicians hesitate to pursue a softer policy. (NGO 13)

This view is widely shared by many organizations:

If you look at the ways that Europe right now [sic], it seems a bit more divided than ever before. If you look at Brexit, you look at the rise of the right parties in the five countries like all of this, if you look at the core driver for that change, I would say, is that the Syrian crisis, that the refugee immigration and all what the media have changed the entire region. (NGO 1)

It was noted that this condition also impacts the EU's international policies and its relations with Syria's neighboring countries.

3.5 Turkey – EU Deal

Shortly after the summer of 2015, when refugees started arriving in large numbers at the border countries of the EU, the EU reacted in an emergency mode and signed a bilateral deal with Turkey. The key points of this deal are as follows:

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- **Migrants to be returned to Turkey:** All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands as from March 20, 2016 will be returned to Turkey.
- **Border protection:** Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for irregular migration opening from Turkey to the EU.
- **One-for-one:** In return for any Syrian refugees the EU departs from Greece to Turkey, the EU will take in one Syrian refugee currently in Turkey, i.e., on a 'one-for-one' basis.
- **Additional financial aid:** The EU agrees to speed up the payment of three billion euros in aid for refugees in Turkey, under the terms of an earlier summit.
- **Visa Liberalization:** The EU agrees to accelerate plans to bring in visa-free travel for Turkish nationals to the Schengen passport-free zone, provided that all benchmarks have been met.
- **Turkey's EU accession negotiations:** The EU has agreed to speed up talks concerning Turkey's EU membership.

In this section, we present the key points about the deal from the perspective of stakeholders, with regards to (a) the way in which the deal was designed; (b) their perceptions as to whether the deal prioritized refugees' rights and needs; (c) how it impacted Turkey-EU relations in terms of share of responsibility and commitment to its terms and conditions; (d) how the funding was used and accounted for; and, lastly, (e) the deal's sustainability.

3.5.1. Design of The Deal

Several key actors were identified as having been involved in the design of the deal. These were generally representatives of the Turkish state (then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in consultation with the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, the DGMM, and the Turkish Coast Guard), the EU delegation in Turkey and the EU Commission, and the German state (particularly, chancellor Angela Merkel). Several actors, especially in INGOs, indicated that the deal was designed in consultation with the UN agencies and other INGOs. Many reasons were given to explain the context of how the Turkey-EU deal came about. Some believed that the deal was a way for burden-sharing between Turkey and the EU, or a way for the EU to provide assistance to Turkey in strengthening its migration system:

What we can do [is] to support Turkey ... to continue providing assistance for the Syrian refugees, but also to strengthen the migration system there and to make sure that this is a benefit for the migration in our own countries. (NGO 11)

That is a burden sharing. Which part of this burden Turkey could carry; how could the EU support or assist to this collaboration? I think that it is the most important factor. (NGO 2)

Others believed that the main point of the deal was to avoid a "migration flow" into the EU, especially in light of the events that took place in 2015, when the number of people that were passing peaked and so did the number of deaths. For Turkey, the visa exemption is believed to be the main motivator.

3.5.2. Protection Of Refugee Rights and Needs

In this section, we describe the perceptions of stakeholders about whether or not the deal contributed or prioritized the protection of refugee rights and whether or not it catered to their needs and placed them at the center of its design. This deal was considered by many to have instrumentalized refugees in politics and both sides (Turkey and the EU) were harshly criticized by the major stakeholders working on migration governance. Many of them stated that refugees were used as a bargaining chip to serve the parties' political interests:

Turkey's agreement with the EU and the refugee policy is something we criticize. In particular, refugees' use as a political tool, instrumentalization, and treating them as a threat. (NGO 8)

I think no country will sign a deal without meeting some of its interests. Because there is no rights-based approach, I believe the refugees' interests were more prioritized. (NGO 14)

Several stated that this agreement allowed the EU to undermine the *non-refoulement* principle through the repatriation agreement with Turkey. Indeed, it is designed in a way that allows the EU to effectively pick which refugees it accepts. It is thus by definition not protecting the rights of all refugees. Some argued that it violated the Geneva Convention in terms of refugee rights:

Within the scope of this agreement, if a refugee has a relative in Greece, crossed the border of Turkey and is requesting asylum from Greece, they say: "No. I am sending you back to Turkey since you do not satisfy these conditions. Within this agreement, later I will receive somebody else who is more secure, literate and experienced." To what extent can it protect the rights of refugees? "No, we

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are not going to let you live here because we have a readmission agreement with Turkey.” What kind of justice, equality, refugee-friendliness or hospitality is that? (NGO 4)

They will also take away their existing rights because it will make it easier to return people in certain conditions. Many articles prohibited in the Geneva Conventions will remain ambiguous and, look, how ingeniously prepared, it does not say send back but has created such a subtext that it will not challenge those who send refugees back. (NGO 12)

Indeed, more than half of the organizations touched upon the deal's violation of human rights, in particular refugee rights, with its return component. They stressed a need for a more rights-based approach to the new deal. This was expressed strongly by one of the participants from a human rights organization that also works with refugees:

All agreements that do not prioritize human beings should be torn [up] and thrown [out]. No matter how much these agreements are revised, as long as they do not have a perspective that is rights-based, prioritizes human beings, is based on freedom and equality, provide minimum living conditions, integrate them into the new country without feeling culturally alienated, letting them live anywhere they like, what are you going to revise and how much? A deal that does not even use the concept of right once... This text does not have a rights-based approach and it is hard to create successful texts as long as this is not prioritized. (NGO 14)

In fact, the priority of many refugees was to move to Europe but in this deal, the EU did not provide sufficient resettlements. This deal took away refugees' rights to live where they choose to live:

This is a horrific deal. Everyone should be able to have a chance to live in any place they like in the world and be equal to other people in that region. Of course, to think that 3.4 billion dollars aid can solve this... If we look from 2015 onwards, there are still people who try to cross the sea. As long as the world powers do not prioritize human beings, and continue to adopt political approaches that prioritize money, sanctions, and bargaining not human beings, this problem cannot be solved in accordance with human rights. (NGO 14)

Some actors brought up the fact that the deal ignores the rights of non-Syrian refugees altogether, who are the ones in the most difficult situation and who are still trying to exit Turkey when they can, as demonstrated in January 2019 when Turkey threatened to open its borders with Greece:

There are 400,000 non-Syrian refugees and their conditions are far worse right now. Anyway, I think this is one of the parts that works. The money is distributed as cash, taken by card. This was reflected in, for example, the last time Turkey opened its borders with Greece, it was expected that everyone would go. But most of these people who went were Afghan refugees or others, refugees seeking international protection. So, their rights are much worse than Syrians because they are a bit forgotten. (NGO 7)

There were also some positive aspects of the deal that were brought up, with regards to giving access to the rights of Syrian refugees and taking into account their needs. Indeed, several indicated that the deal took into consideration and worked on ensuring the refugees' access to protection, health, education and offered funds to make sure these needs are met in an “inclusive” manner:

A lot of money [was paid] to make sure that children are able to go to school, that people are able to get healthcare. There's a lot of protection projects at all levels, like local NGOs and more that support employment. So, in terms of the deal, I think it's quite strong and coherent and that should be acknowledged. (NGO 6)

When there is a cash program that supports almost 40, 50 percent of the refugee population on a monthly basis covering a certain percentage of their minimum expenditures. So, in terms of target, in terms of coverage, size, it is quite unique. We had never seen such a program before. (NGO 1)

Some mentioned that these rights were already granted to Syrian refugees as they were under the TP status, i.e., before the Turkey-EU deal. However, the deal still had a good effect, as it would make it harder for the Turkish state to take these rights back. Furthermore, the projects that came with the deal are believed to have improved the situation of refugees through more funds for projects, especially in terms of basic rights and needs, such as education, through financial transfers:

I think they are definitely contributing. For example, the CCTE [program] guarantees access to education, increases the number of Syrian children enrolled in school. That's one of the basic rights, the right to education. There are also protection programs that include support with legal counseling

or aid. And of course, many benefited from different livelihood initiatives like cash for work that enables them to get the work permit and be legally employed in Turkey. (NGO 1)

This same stakeholder also indicated that through this deal there were programs that helped refugees get more clarity about procedures and legal pathways. However, one of the actors referred to the discrepancy between access to rights in theory and in practice, especially with regards to the right to work. She pointed out that the EU should pay attention to the local context and its labor market structure when designing programs and policies (NGO 5).

3.5.3. Commitment From Both Sides to The Deal

As for the commitment to the deal from both sides, there were discrepancies detected. Some pointed out the nonliability of the agreement which was characterized by the fragility of the terms and conditions. EU payments were among the issues that emerged. Several claimed that the payments had all been made but that the topic was turned into a political debate by the Turkish state to put pressure on the EU. There might also be a lack of clarity with regards to communication around that topic:

Beyond that, there is a public debate about these financial processes regarding the EU not providing enough of the promised, committed financial support. I do not agree with these statements on this issue either. I think the European Union provides the necessary financial support. I just think that it is being made the subject of a political debate. (NGO 3)

They are committed because if you look at the six billion that they promised Turkey to pay, they have already paid that. (NGO 11)

Yet, several mentioned that the EU did not make the payments it had committed to, or at least not in a timely fashion (this point of view was also conveyed by INGOs):

The parties had an agreement for six billion euros for 2016-2019. Some parts of it were received but some parts were not. These payments, part of the agreement, were not made. (NGO 2)

They mentioned that, from the European perspective, some parts were not paid because they were pending Turkey delivering certain aspects and taking certain steps, which it did not fulfil:

When it comes to financial assistance ... we keep hearing from different leaders in Turkey that the EU didn't commit to the full amount of money. What I heard from the European side, is that the agreement includes steps in order to transfer this part, which were, from their perspective, ignored. (NGO 1)

Furthermore, some actors reported that the funding criteria did not allow for an easy implementation, due to the rigid bureaucracy and procedures that are tied with it:

The EU provided assistance in two strands of FRIT funds for refugees in Turkey - when we look at the implementation, we see that they did not help the intermediate institutions or the Turkish institutions to use these funds, let's say more flexibly, they use their own kind of existing very high bureaucratic procedures instead. So, they committed six billion, and they provided, but in reality, besides the ESSN, the cash transfer to the refugees, all other projects still in place and not implemented totally. Many are still waiting for the procedures. (NGO 13)

In addition, most noted that the EU did not proceed with the visa liberalization aspect, as well as Turkey's EU accession, which have been completely side-stepped. The EU also fell short on the resettlement issue. In that aspect too, the EU is perceived to have failed to play its role. The number of refugees received via resettlement are small in comparison to the figures promised. This perception was common among organizations:

One of the articles of the agreement stipulated the issue of resettling refugees with a one-to-one formula. The EU has not played an active role in the issue of sharing of the vulnerable refugees and their settlement. If the numbers shared by the Republic of Turkey are correct, the EU received an ironically small number of refugees. (NGO 3)

It promised to be gradually receiving refugees who are in Turkey's hands. They said "do not let them come illegally, let's get them on the plane, choose and take them". These promises did not find much action. (NGO 8)

Turkey, from its side, is reported to be adhering to controlling migration. This was an important aspect of the deal and it was fulfilled to a large extent; all agreed that the number of crossings had been significantly reduced and so did the

death rates. Most, whether state or non-state actors, claimed that they had implemented strict monitoring of their borders after the deal:

Turkey committed to prevent people from passing to the EU countries from the beginning of the deal. When we look at the numbers of people who are passing through irregular ways to the EU decreased after the agreement, because there were high security precautions in place. (NGO 13)

It stopped the transit from the Aegean Sea after the Statement because there I guess the European Union, Frontex, has worked jointly with our [Turkish] coastguards. So especially in the Aegean Sea with the deal an increasing control mechanism was devised. After 2016, I know that these numbers have fallen sharply. In that respect it can be said that it was successful in terms of preventing irregular passage. (State actor 1)

Yet, several noted the exception of the crisis in January 2020, when this system broke down and the Turkish side, after years of threats, decided to open its borders and send refugees to Edirne, on their way to Greece.

3.5.4. Funding Use and Accountability

Responsible use of funds and accountability are key topics of debate between the EU and Turkey in terms of allocation of funds, whereby the EU needs the INGOs to be mediators tracking the money, while Turkey wants the funds to go directly to its own institutions. In this section, we tackled the perceptions of state and non-state actors about this topic.

3.5.4.1. Responsible use of funds

Actors recount several successful initiatives which were launched with the funds, such as training and education, among others. They also explain the ways in which they make sure that the assistance reaches the most “deserving” migrants:

I can definitely say that for my organization, after establishing a mechanism of determination of the people in need, we ensure that the relevant aid that is given to us is delivered in a transparent manner to the target. Sometimes I see with regret that organizations go out to the street just to appear and distribute aid without carrying a needs-assessment beforehand. (NGO 10)

However, most recall a lot of waste of funds due to administrative costs, as larger organizations commission smaller ones to carry out the work:

There is a loss due to the fact that the relevant resource is constantly being transferred from one institution to another. This phrase “administrative process” is actually tricky, I am talking about the 40 percent that disappears by costs required for the functioning of institutions which are above these institutions. (NGO 10)

In addition, some communicate that a lot of the funds are spent on bringing in professionals from abroad to run projects:

Last year, I was going to Antep. It was like a Norway flight, everyone was blond and only I was a brunette because it is full of expats, UN projects, etc. The streets of Antep, blond men in shorts. Since there are many projects that are being implemented there, funded by the UN and EU and expats who work there. (NGO 5)

One of the local organizations suggested that it would be more cost-efficient to directly fund the local organizations:

For this reason, providing more direct financing of local institutions with a high implementation capacity, which can actually execute the implementation, will have greater and more accurate effects, thus reducing the administrative costs. The support can reach the ultimate beneficiaries. (NGO 10)

3.5.4.2. Accountability mechanisms

Most interviewed actors in the humanitarian field stated that there was a strong monitoring system for the EU funds, whether small NGOs who are receiving funds to implement projects or the larger INGOs. They believe that expenses are traceable and there are strict procedures that regulate the spending of these funds:

For all those that are allocated for the humanitarian programs, absolutely, yes. All are easily able to be traced and be held accountable for. From the EU side, it is ECHO, a responsible body, they have very strict rules around their monitoring. This starts from one of the UN agencies, who were responsible for the CCTE. They have their own strict internal procedures as well. A similar case as

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the majority of humanitarian assistance which is in the form of cash transfer, through local banks. They can trace the money how it is going to the people's accounts. (NGO 1)

Stakeholders describe the bureaucracy and reporting mechanisms through which expenditures are recorded. This process usually takes place with the mediation of several entities, namely the ECHO, the EU's commissions and subcommissions, steering groups and the EU Court of Auditors:

A report is shared at the end of the project as per the agreement established with all funding organizations, including us and as in all other projects. In addition, all the processes [regarding the finances and procedures] of the project are shared with the relevant funding institution. We are working with the humanitarian aid office of the EU Commission, with ECHO, so we are already periodically reporting ourselves both financially and regarding the whole procedures of the project. Every incoming penny has to be accounted in some way in accordance with the whole operation. Therefore, I think this issue is monitored well. (NGO 3)

A high-level steering committee was established with ... EU member countries in Brussels. Though the EU committed more flexible implementation for refugee responses at the beginning, they put all the bureaucracies in place so there are lots of mechanisms for accountability, transparency, visibility and... lots of reporting. There are subcommittees, steering committees, task forces and working groups in all sectors. The EU doesn't allow any funding allocation directly to the Turkish institutions. There are many intermediary agencies, the UN institutions, and there are lots of responsibilities on these institutions to provide reports financially to the EU for accountability. (NGO 13)

Some points were raised with regards to the lack of transparency regarding procurement in Turkey:

Procurement law in Turkey changes almost on a monthly basis. There are a lot of points that Turkey does not fulfill with respect to transparency. There are problems even with NGOs in Turkey, with respect to transparency. (NGO 9)

In addition, some reported that the state does not provide data showing how the funds are being channeled into different institutions. There were questions with regards to the accountability of the funds given to the state institutions. Some of the organizations claimed that the assistance to the state is not monitored as closely as that given to NGOs. However, the state actors that were interviewed described the process in great detail, arguing that they undergo a double process of control: one from the state, and another from the EU. They said there were systems in place for records to document all the processes involved:

From the perspective of our institution, it is used in a very responsible and transparent way. All of it is made via the system, bank records, etc. Since we are a public institution, we also have a responsibility to Sayıştay [Court of Accounts] so we can say that we are supervised two times. So not only there is external supervision in terms of projects but also since we are a public institution, all the money we receive and how it is spent is also supervised. (State actor 1)

The system in the state institutions is described as a centralized system which, they say, makes it easier to ensure accountability, especially in comparison with other neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. There were further changes that were implemented when the second part of the funding was disbursed. It consisted of establishing an office in the presidency to facilitate communication with the EU Delegation and whose role would be to ensure transparency.

3.5.5. Sustainability

There were doubts across the board about the sustainability of the Turkey-EU deal among the interviewed actors. Among the top reasons that were given for their discontent was that the deal was meant to be short term; in other words, it was developed with the belief that Syrians would return to their country within a few years after the war. Economic sustainability was at the forefront of the concerns and stakeholders question whether the EU will be able to continue providing financial support to Turkey, emphasizing that this will have to come to an end. The issue of providing cash assistance to refugees, on which the largest proportion of the EU funds are spent, also does not provide long-term sustainable solutions:

Providing cash assistance to so many people for years. Sustainability will never be achieved, it will be great for today, like I would be able to know that I would be able to pay my rent, I would be able to put food on the table. If you talk about a durable solution, no. (NGO 1)

Many reasons were given to explain the fact that it is unsustainable. Firstly, it was set up as an emergency short-term remedy with no real long-term horizon. One of the actors, who was familiar with the new migration pact established in

2020, hinted at the fact that the latter was designed with a longer-term perspective in mind (NGO 5). Secondly, the deal greatly depends on stable political relations between Turkey and the EU, as well as in the wider region. This makes it, almost by default, crisis-prone.

3.6 Fundraising Conferences

The organizations were asked about the reasons behind the fundraising conferences that have taken place in several European countries since the refugee crisis in 2015. As a result of these conferences, bilateral funding agreements were drafted between the EU and Syria's neighboring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Various reasons were proposed by different organizations for the undertaking of these conferences and they each had different insights about how the conferences were conducted. Nevertheless, the majority agreed on the urgent humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis and the political pressure that was directed at the international community as a result of the tragic deaths of a large number of refugees while crossing the sea to Europe.

3.6.1. Reasons Behind Fundraising Conferences

These conferences are planned as collective efforts by several countries (European and others) to provide financial support to Syria's neighboring countries, while at the same time collectively figuring out mechanisms to reduce movements:

To ensure that there is a collective effort from all European countries and other countries to provide support, at least pick up the financial support. And to agree on a mechanism to reduce that movement, close the borders and focus on the ones that they already have and ensure to a certain extent that those neighboring countries of Syria are also being supported, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon; that they have the needed humanitarian assistance (NGO 1)

It is stated that, in many cases, the neighboring countries themselves appealed to the EU or the UN for such conferences, as they were not able to handle the situation in their countries:

This crisis in the neighboring countries is the one main reason behind the policy shift; Turkey pushed EU countries and other donors, to come and intervene directly. That's why the negotiation started. At the same time, the other neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, you know, they directly went to the UN and said, "as a government we cannot deal with this crisis". You know, even though we have a high number of refugees in Turkey, we must know that according to the population size, Lebanon and Jordan are hosting very high numbers of refugees, so it was very difficult for them to deal with, directly from government resources and institutions. So that's why the international community had to intervene. (NGO 13)

This is further exacerbated by the fact that those stakeholders who had attended such conferences, always felt like the Turkish state representatives were not asking for enough funds. They expressed that the representatives, unlike those of other countries, did not outline the difficulties faced but rather emphasized the achievements of Turkey:

In a meeting I attended in Brussels, for instance ... the Jordanian Minister of Migration openly stated that it is no longer possible for them to manage this situation. Economically, he clearly stated that "the poverty of our own people is obvious; we do not have the chance to manage a crisis with limited funds sent". He talked about education problems. He talked about integration to education problems; representatives from both Lebanon and Jordan mentioned these topics too. Interestingly, the only public representatives who did not complain about it had been public representatives of Turkey. He said that we enrolled 60 percent of them in school, but he did not go into anything about the quality of the schools. He only mentioned the number of children who enrolled in school. (NGO 12)

3.6.2. Disagreements Over How the Funds Should Be Distributed

The approach towards granting large multi-billion-euro funds to Turkey is perceived to be difficult to manage and ineffective, as institutions usually lack the technical capacity to handle them. Though there is a need for such large amounts of funding based on the number of refugees, institutions require capacity development to change their approach:

The approach in the way of supporting Turkey, of massive resources available over a multi-year timeframe, with an evolution from more humanitarian focus at the beginning towards more developmental approaches now. At some point, from the UN perspective, it was also just too much money, because not that it was enough necessarily to address the needs, but in terms of the

capacity to actually implement and spend it, when you have three billion euros coming, it's a lot. Then in terms of the capacity to actually put it in practice, that's where we have a bit of a gap. Institutions don't necessarily have the technical experience of dealing with the refugee population. Suddenly, you need to provide services for a lot more people and it's not your usual Turkish citizens. It's like refugees with specific needs, specific backgrounds, positions and challenges. For a public institution to do that requires quite a lot of specific capacity development. (NGO 6)

Most importantly, these large funds involve a lot of procedures that limit the amount that actually trickles down to the field:

From the donor's perspective, and from the implementation perspective, we saw a shift from one-year to multi-year funding with the deal, which did not trickle down to the field at the end of the day. The change in the structure of providing funding tells us a lot about the crisis as well, because the funding scam, the procedures, the call for proposals, all these bureaucratic procedures prove that it is not working with such a prolonged crisis. That's why I think, from a structural perspective, we solved that shift from 2015 to 2016 with the deal, at the end of the day, it didn't trickle down as a practicality into the field. (NGO 13)

3.7 Relations Among Host Countries

The domestic policies of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have been immensely impacted by the refugee crisis as a result of the Syrian war. However, none of the organizations have observed any changes in regional relations among state actors in Syria's neighboring host countries since the influx of Syrian refugees. Neither collaboration nor tension was detected in regional relations between Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. These countries are believed to have little to no communication or cooperation at the governmental level with respect to Syrian refugees. The lack of communication can also be understood with an example provided by one of the organizations about family reunification:

I don't see anything like "we all hosted Syrian refugees, so let's develop a common policy and be a united body, and have a consensus on this issue, how we get funding or support each other". In fact, we want you to know how much difficulty we face with these countries in terms of reuniting the fragmented families we follow, let alone establishing and maintaining a common policy on refugee issues among these states. Some of the family is staying in Lebanon, some in Turkey or Iraq. We face difficulties to gather family members, in any country. These are still ongoing, and we are trying to convince state representatives, politicians and decision-makers there. (NGO 8)

While the lack of relations between state institutions among the neighboring host countries is well documented, stakeholders note that NGOs in these countries have exchanged knowledge and expertise, especially at the beginning of the crisis and this was encouraged and organized by the international funding organizations. Lebanon, which had prior experience in hosting a large number of refugees, already had experienced NGOs working with refugees. Several organizations mentioned their visits to these NGOs in Lebanon to learn from their experiences, and these trips were facilitated by the international funding agencies. Organizations noted many differences between these countries, which impacted how NGOs operated. It was argued that Jordan and Lebanon have less regulatory burdens and restrictions on NGOs. This has led many NGOs to base their international operations in these countries, impacting the amount of funding each country is receiving from international donors. One participant from a humanitarian organization made the following statement:

Jordan is like an international hub for NGOs. Everyone has their base there because there are no international restrictions. But if an NGO or an international NGO wants to operate in Turkey, there are many legal liabilities. Jordan needs to be in the third place (when it comes to aid), but it is in the first place. In a way, it benefits from this situation. Lebanon, there is also freedom there and many NGOs from Turkey who had registration problems went to Lebanon and Jordan and started to use the funds for Syrian[s] there. This is, of course, not a problem for inter-state relations. The Turkish state never will say, "you are giving more to Lebanon". This has never happened and it is very unlikely to happen. Lebanon is, in a much more difficult condition than us. (NGO 9)

Moreover, all of these countries were said to be geopolitically implicated, in different ways, in the Syrian war. They take positions that seek to anticipate the results of the war, depending on whether the Assad regime will survive. One organization raised the possible impact that the result of the war might have on relations among these countries:

If you look at the way the Middle East region is split, it's basically two camps and we know that Turkey is in one of those camps and you already know which countries that feel aligned in the region, which are not. Before, there was recent tension between the Syrian regime forces, Russia

and Turkey inside Syria. And then suddenly everything changed and they were in direct confrontation inside Syria. As a result, [there were] changes in the way Turkey dealt with Lebanon with Jordan, Iraq and others based on their affiliation and their closeness to the regime of Assad. (NGO 1)

3.8 Future of Turkey – EU Deal

None of the organizations were content with the terms and conditions of the Turkey-EU deal and an overwhelming majority thought that the conditions of the deal, even if insufficient, were not entirely met by both sides. They all acknowledged a need for revision, but only a few were pessimistic about its likelihood. The majority stressed that the renewal or extension of the deal is inevitable given that the lack of a deal would lead to the recurrence of the refugee crisis in the EU.

A few organizations stated that a new deal should take into account the fact that the conditions are different from the time when the deal was first developed and this time, they should be long-term.

Since they came with the 2016 deal, a lot changed in their lives; some got jobs, their lives changed, some finished schools, etc. So, by looking at the needs, according to the priorities maybe the nature of the projects would change. This would require some brainstorming and for those who would do it, I say good luck. It is not a very easy thing to do in the current context. (NGO 5)

One organization shared the results of a study they had conducted with refugees which shows that many live below the poverty line and depend on the EU's financial assistance:

One of the things we looked at was what source of income Syrians were relying on. Many said that they're relying on humanitarian aid. There was a follow-up question such as without this humanitarian aid, are you able to survive where you are? It appeared that without a massive aid program, it's difficult for the refugees to stay where they are in Turkey. It might be if one of those big programs stopped, it's basically a push factor for refugees to either return to completely unstable Syria or to migrate towards the north and to Europe. The majority of the refugees are under poverty line and a big part of them under extreme poverty line and without any temporary and longer-term solutions, there will not be any sustainability. (NGO 1)

3.8.1. Reforming The Turkey – EU Deal

Interviewees generally advocated a new approach – based on radically different underlying principles to the status quo – to the Turkey-EU deal. They want an agreement which is not instrumentalized for the political interests of either side; which is based on a participatory process and includes not only western and international NGOs, but also NGOs and actors from Syria and Syria's neighboring countries; and which should be rights-based. The latter would mean, in practice, that restrictions around migration should be loosened, safe channels for migration should be created, and refugee quotas should be increased. In addition, accountability mechanisms should be in place to hold the sides responsible for any breach of the agreement, and refugees should, in turn, have the right to seek justice through international channels if they feel like their rights have been violated. Some found the amelioration of the deal unlikely or difficult due to various reasons: the economic crisis that the world is going through, the pandemic and the isolationist policies that accompany it, the strained relations between the sides, and the pressure that comes from empowered right-wing parties that refuse to share the burden of the crisis.

3.8.2 The Issue of Return

Participants were asked about the return of Syrians, which has been one of the most debated issues in politics in the last few years. A few argued that the subject of return will likely be one of the key topics on the agenda during the drafting of a new deal and the EU will likely support Turkey in its plans to resettle Syrians in occupied parts of northern Syria. An overwhelming majority believed that a safe return is not possible under current conditions and that many Syrians might not want to return. One organization clarified this as follows:

For safe return... Let's say if you are someone who came from Aleppo, let's say you safely returned. Aleppo is under ruins, have you seen it? Where will that person settle when they return? The return is only possible for those... as you know they made a survey, 45 percent stated that they will not return and those who want to return are from villages, who have land in villages, who have life in villages and may be able to recultivate the land and earn their livelihood. There is no life in the cities, how will he open his shop, his factory? It is all ruined, there is nothing. Now there are so many in

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Idlib region; from Hizb ut-Tahrir to Hizb ul-Şam, and Shabiha guerillas under the state, so many intricate terrorist groups, Hizbullah, those on Iran's side and Sunnis, they are all there. If you were a Syrian, would you return to Idlib, especially if you have found some money here, or have job? There are educated, qualified Syrians who accept to do a work worth 5,000 for 1,000 TL. Why? Because they do not want to return. Safe return is only a dream, it is impossible at the moment as long as Assad does not leave Syria. (NGO 9)

Organizations had divergent views about whether Syrians should return or not. Two argued for a general right to migrate, i.e., a form of global freedom of movement, protected through international law. One stressed that the issue of return should be handled as a humanitarian issue rather than as a tool for political bargaining. A few organizations argued that the subject of return is no longer viable because many Syrians have already settled and that the focus should be on integration rather than return. A few organizations expressed that Syrians should return to their country for their own benefit, but more for the benefit of Turkey. They stated that refugees should be protected at all costs and should not be forced to return to a war zone, but they also believed that the Syrians present a burden for the host countries in many ways and unless they return there will be long-term consequences for Turkey. The same organization that expressed the views earlier about the impossibility of a return at the moment, still argued for a longer-term return perspective. They argued that their future is grim in Turkey, given their precarious legal and employment status:

If they do not go back, it is going to be a serious problem, not only for Turkey but for the whole region. There is an uneducated, unemployed generation, about 600,000-700,000 Syrians. What will happen to them, to their education, their future? ... Everyone tries to deal with it with temporary solutions, it is like putting the dust under the carpet, but you do not get rid of the dust by putting it under the carpet. A political solution should be sincerely sought and enabling Syrians' return to their country. By focusing on a political solution, five to 10 year-long plans need to be prepared to give hope to these people. If you ask Syrians whether they have any hope, they will state that they do not have any and the only hope is going to Europe and do something there. Those in Turkey have found jobs and Turkey is not in a condition to provide employment for the rest. (NGO 9)

4. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Challenges

Turkish policies: Despite the overall favorable perceptions of interviewees on receiving such a large number of Syrians, including the open-door policies and the creation of a new system to ensure some basic rights, the main issues that remain concern the employment conditions, and, most importantly, the lack of a long-term plan and vision, especially with regards to their still precarious legal status.

Public perceptions in Turkey: The perceptions towards refugees in the public is predominantly negative, manifesting in discrimination at all levels, social tensions and violence, and it has been shown to worsen over time. It is driven by economic factors and affected by poor socioeconomic conditions in society, as well as a lack of effective communication on refugee policy (causing misinformation), but the instrumentalization of the question by political parties is still the main factor.

EU policies: This is widely perceived to be problematic, in contradiction with the EU's democratic ideals and in violation of existing international agreements. The goals of these policies are to keep refugees out of Europe and to fund integration programs to improve their conditions in their respective host countries. As a consequence of the current visa and border regime, it ends up selecting more qualified refugees, and avoiding the undesired cultural change that comes with hosting a large number of refugees, with the aim of reducing its economic liability.

Public perceptions in the EU: The negative public perceptions in Europe are increasingly driving right-wing policies and reflect the lack of progressive alternatives.

Turkey-EU deal: It was designed by state and non-state actors to ensure burden-sharing and avoid migration flows from Turkey to the EU. Interviewees argued that:

- It does not protect refugee rights. Refugees are used as a bargaining chip to serve political interests. It overrides the *non-refoulement* principle and deprives refugees of the right to choose their country of sanctuary. While it also ensures rights to basic services, there are often discrepancies in practice.
- It is skewed in favor of EU interests, which bears insufficient financial responsibility, and lets Turkey bear the long-term social and economic effects of refugees. Further, there appears to be a lack of clarity with regard to the EU payments, which are used as a political tool by both sides. While Turkey controlled its borders as required, the EU did not meet its obligations with regards to resettlement, nor with regards to visa liberalization for Turkish nationals.
- A lot of funding is wasted on administering large projects and recruiting experts to big organizations, whereas funding local organizations would be more cost-efficient. As for accountability, there appears to be strong mechanisms in place to monitor, control and report. Yet, a couple of participants mention lack of transparency of procurement and other mechanisms within state institutions.
- Economic sustainability is in question, as funding will eventually come to an end. The fact that refugee politics are shaped by other political matters also negatively impacts sustainability.
- Poor relations between Turkey and the EU are evidently a major challenge for any sustainable approach. Concerns over the human rights environment in Turkey, as well as its role in the Syrian conflict, present difficulties for NGOs and international donors.

Fundraising conferences: It was argued that the funds are not sufficient, that Turkey is not requesting enough funds, and that they are distributed inefficiently in large amounts that are difficult to manage.

Relations with neighboring countries: Interviewees observed how there has been no change and only little cooperation in Syria's neighboring countries. This is reflective of their different geopolitical positions in relation to Syria. But NGOs do exchange expertise across countries.

An alternative approach: It was further argued a new approach is needed which does not instrumentalize refugees, should be participatory, and should include regional actors. It should be rights-based, loosen restrictions on migration, provide safe channels to move, and allow refugees the opportunity to appeal in case their rights have been violated. The topic of return cannot be incorporated because it is not a possibility at the moment but will be necessary eventually.

4.2 Recommendations

Drawing together the observations and perspectives from the interviewees we can find support for the following changes in approach at the European and Turkish levels of governance:

- Approach refugee protection as a long-term reality, starting from their temporary legal status in Turkey (as being under TPR) and promote livelihood activities that provide decent living conditions.
- Communicate policies more clearly within the host community and for putting pressure on political parties to not use this topic as a political propaganda tool.

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- An EU approach based on humanitarianism rather than a narrow geopolitical and national security focus, which prioritizes the exclusion of refugees from Europe. This should include seeking to develop a common approach to supporting Lebanon and Jordan in tandem with Turkey.
- Foreground refugee rights and not political interests in a new approach; both sides should take responsibility for a long-term solution with more burden-sharing by the EU. In addition, the EU needs to show more commitment to its side of the deal, including financial payments that support longer-term development goals in Turkey and the wider region. Also, there was support for increasing funding to smaller projects with local organizations rather than major international NGOs. The design of these arrangements should be participatory and include local organizations from the neighboring countries.
- Financial contributions should be geared towards generating employment opportunities for Syrians in Turkey. A change in policy to lift the requirement of Syrians who are under TP to get work permits should go hand-in-hand with this.
- There should be no forced return of refugees to Syria. Both the EU and Turkey should also not encourage or incentivize return if both material and political conditions in Syria fail to improve, i.e., if returning refugees would be at significant risk of harm.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

No.	Date	Code	Type
1	02-10-2020	NGO 1	International
2	02-10-2020	NGO 2	International
3	06-10-2020	NGO 3	Local
4	09-10-2020	NGO 4	Local
5	12-10-2020	NGO 5	Local
6	12-10-2020	NGO 6	International
7	12-10-2020	NGO 7	Local
8	13-10-2020	NGO 8	Local
9	14-10-2020	NGO 9	Local
10	16-10-2020	NGO 10	Local
11	16-10-2020	NGO 11	International
12	20-10-2020	NGO 12	Local
13	22-10-2020	State actor 1	Local
14	23-10-2020	State actor 2	Local
15	23-10-2020	NGO 13	International
16	13-11-2020	NGO 14	Local

ANNEX 2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction of the goal of the research

The study is part of a bigger initiative funded by the London School of Economics that aims to explore where and how to best protect and integrate Syrian refugees. The overall project was motivated by the increased politicization of migration in Europe and the discourses on refugees at the level of both the EU and the governments of Syria's neighboring countries which in turn created an international pressure to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis. As a result, a series of funding agreements were concluded between the EU and the governments of Syria's neighboring host countries Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

For the present study in Turkey, we are mainly interested in interviewing governmental and non-governmental representatives who can provide sufficient answers to the study's questions (below) that are specific to the Turkish context. Feel free to answer or not depending on your experience and knowledge.

Anonymity

You can choose to remain anonymous or have your institution also remain anonymous.

Recording

The interview will be recorded (audio only) for transcription purposes. Please let us know if you are comfortable with that.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Overall perceptions about policies and attitudes of Turkey and EU towards refugees

1. How do you perceive *Turkey's* policies in dealing with Syrian refugees?
 - What do you think about the political position/attitudes in *Turkey* since 2011 towards Syrian refugees? (I.e., is there division between political parties AKP vs opposition, etc., what impact on policies?)
2. How do you perceive EU's policies in dealing with Syrian refugees?
 - Overall, how do you describe the political landscape or attitudes in Europe toward migration issues in context of the existing Syrian crisis?

International fundraising and funding agreements

3. Starting in 2015, a shift in EU policies and actions towards refugees and migration occurred which culminated into convening several international fundraising conferences (ex. London 2016, Brussels 1 to 4 conferences) and international funding agreements in response to the Syrian crisis. How did this shift happen? (Why, what do you think were its drivers?)
 - Many critics believe that the main objective of these policies and actions is to limit the influx of refugees to Europe and to contain the refugee crisis in the main host countries. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
 - To what extent did the interests/agenda of the Turkish government converge with the international conferences' agenda?

Specifically, Turkey-EU deal

4. Do you have insight into how the Turkey-EU deal was designed?
 - Do you think that the Turkey-EU deal has been inclusive of all refugees' priorities and of host communities including the protection of refugees in its design?
 - To what extent do you believe that the terms of the Turkey-EU agreement can be achieved and sustained?
 - To what extent was it successful in containing irregular migration (refugees in Turkey)?
 - Do you believe that the EU and the host countries have taken equal share of responsibility towards Syrian refugees?

Compliance and accountability

5. To what extent do you believe that the EU and Turkey are committing to the rules or terms of the Turkey-EU deal from both sides?
 - Are you aware of the existing accountability mechanisms that have been developed by the EU to regulate the implementation of the Turkey-EU agreement and that the financial assistance is used responsibly?
 - What are your perceptions regarding the monitoring of the financial and budgetary procedures of the Turkey-EU deal?

Protection and rights

6. To what extent do you believe that the Turkey-EU agreement is contributing to the protection of the refugees' rights?

TURKEY-EU POLITICS OF REFUGEES THROUGH THE LENS OF CIVIL AND STATE ACTORS

Relations with host countries and return

7. How have the relations between Syria's neighboring host countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, etc.) with each other been affected by the issue of refugees and migration? (e.g., strengthened relations, more cooperation, more tensions, tried to organize safe returns together.)

8. After the Turkey-EU deal comes to an end, what will happen to the key points of the agreement, do they need to be revised? (Namely by considering safe return or other changes, in light of growing pressure.)



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