



SYRIAN MIGRANTS IN TURKEY: FROM GUESTS TO SETTLERS

The civil war in Syria between the regime and opposition forces has entered its ninth year in March 2019 forcing 13 million Syrians to leave their homes and migrate to either abroad or safe regions in the country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) data, on June 13, 2019, there are 5,635,301 people who seek refugee abroad, mostly in the neighboring countries with Turkey taking the lead as it accepted 64.1%, or 3,614,108 people. The rest of refugees are in Lebanon (935,454 people), Jordan (664,330), Iraq (252,983) and Egypt (132,713). Besides, 6.6 million people have relocated within the country, and approximately 1 million of refugees have reached Europe through mostly illegal ways.

With its open door policy, Turkey welcomed Syrian refugees who started to arrive in 2011 after the Syrian government crushed the civil protests by force, thus causing the civil war. While some refugees decided to continue their journey to reach Europe illegally, the majority settled in camps established by the Turkish government. It is worth mentioning that Ankara has so far spent over \$37 billion in order to provide humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees since 2011, which is more than 17 times higher than what the country received from the European Union (€2.1 billion). However, with the escalation of the conflict the number of arrivals dramatically increased, and the camps had difficulties with accepting so many refugees. The massive flows from Syria created organizational and bureaucratic issues which required the Turkish government to come up with alternative and quick solutions.

As a result, the Turkish government decided to make some changes in its asylum procedures in order to ease the bureaucratic hurdles. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol allowed the right of seeking a refuge in Turkey for European origin people and for the "Turkish descent and culture" group. Thus, there was a geographical limitation within the regulation which does not cover the Syrians. That's why they were given a temporary status. In 2013, the Turkish government renewed the 1994 Asylum Regulations with the new, more comprehensive Law on Foreigners and International Protection and established the Directorate General of Migration Management as the authority responsible for managing the migration-related procedures in the country.

With the adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, the conditions for asylum seekers improved, but there were still certain problems. Even under the new law, Syrians were not able to get a work permit due to their temporary refugee status

since new changes regarding the labor market granted the right to work only to high-skilled foreigners and refugees who were staying in the country for a long time. With the introduction of the Regulation on the Work Permit of Foreigners under Temporary Protection in January 2016, they were given a legal option to work in Turkey.

Currently, a large part of the Syrian refugees live in cities mostly in the southern part of the country and in big cities like Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. If they choose to live outside the refugee camps, they need to take care of themselves and their families. However, up until January 2016, approximately 400,000 of them worked illegally in different sectors like textile, construction, manufacturing and agriculture as low-wage labor force. According to a survey conducted by the UNHCR in 2017, 76% of Syrians in Turkey are reluctant to return to their home country in near future and only 6% of them plan to go back to Syria. Taking these two findings into consideration, it could be said that the willingness to start a new life in the host country has pushed almost 9 out of 10 Syrians in Turkey to leave the refugee camps and try making a new start for themselves.

According to the Regulation on the Work Permit of Foreigners under Temporary Protection, Syrian refugees need to prove that they have been staying in the country for more than six months, and their employer needs to send an online application to the Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security. As a rule, employers need to pay them a minimum wage, and their share within a company or enterprise cannot exceed 10% of the total number of workers. Moreover, Syrian refugees can only work in their registered region. Nevertheless, the minimum wage requirement of the work permit regulation limits and in certain cases possibly discourages most employers to hire Syrian refugees through legal procedures. While the mandatory payment of a minimum wage is a good incentive for Syrian refugees to earn a decent salary for their hard work, it damages, however, their comparative advantage in the labor market. Since a significant part of them cannot speak Turkish fluently, if they speak at all, employers would prefer to hire local workers who are native speakers if there is no any difference in terms of labor costs.

Another issue is related to the 10% limitation within a company. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, there are 31.4 million people registered as a workforce in the country, 28 million of whom are employed, and the unemployment rate was around 10% in 2018. If we take the 10% rule into consideration under a macro perspective, it will be equal to 2.8 million permits,

while there are almost 1.9 million Syrian refugees in the working age group. Thus, technically the limitation covers all the Syrian refugee workforce. However, due to their unequal distribution within the country and different shares of Syrian refugees compared to the total population in their registered cities, a number of additional problems occur. For instance, the city of Kilis represents one of the extreme cases regarding such issues. In this city, the total workforce is around 16,000 people and according to the 10% rule, only 1,600 work permits should be issued. However, there are 130,000 registered Syrian refugees who reside in the city. The geographical limitation rule, under which they can only work in their registered area, creates an inescapable bureaucratic wall for the remaining 128,400 Syrian refugees in Kilis. The only exemption for the 10% rule given in the regulation is that an employer can apply to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security a month prior to hiring a foreign employee indicating that there is no qualified Turkish citizen who could do the same job. Only if an application is approved, a company can hire more Syrian refugees beyond 10%.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the expected spike in the number of work permits obtained by Syrian refugees is not observed since many employers are reluctant to go through all these bureaucratic procedures to hire them, especially if they are unskilled or want to work in positions which could easily be filled by local workforce. By 2016, 13,298 work permits were issued, and the number increased to 31,185 in March 2019. Comparing with the total number of the Syrian refugee workforce, it is only 0.9%.

In conclusion, it could be said that years 2013-2016 were a fruitful period for the Turkish government to develop its legal and operational effectiveness for addressing the issues of the Syrian refugees in the country. These attempts were considered as a good start that lays a foundation for the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society both economically and socially – the process that can be called a transition from guests to settlers. However, later on, due to numerous internal and external events with a high priority for the Turkish government, it seems that this process has slowed down since there have been no any significant modifications in the policy towards Syrian refugees, such as, for example, finding a more tailor-made solution to the 10% quota problem. In order to sustainably continue the successful transition and integration process for Syrian refugees who are willing to stay in the host country and adapt to their new lives, the Turkish government and other stakeholders need to work together and modify the existing approaches, if necessary.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- As a result of the early presidential election held in Kazakhstan, incumbent president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was reelected with 70.96% of the vote. His closest challenger, Amirjan Kosanov representing the Ult Tagdyry (Fate of the Nation) movement, gained 16.23%. The five other candidates, Dania Yespayeva, Toleutai Rakhimbekov, Amangeldy Taspikhov, Jambyl Ahmetbekov and Sadybek Tugel, received 5.05%, 3.04%, 1.98%, 1.82% and 0.92%, respectively.
- During the meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council held in Bishkek, the parties reviewed the implementation of the results of the 2018 Qingdao Summit and the priority goals of the SCO development in the context of current global political and economic processes. The SCO member states pledged to promote practical cooperation in politics, security, trade, economy, and the humanitarian sphere.
- The fifth summit of the heads of state of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) was held in Dushanbe as Tajikistan assumed the CICA chairmanship for 2018-2020. The parties exchanged views on security issues in Asia, including the conflicts in Afghanistan and the Middle East, and measures to promote mutual dialogue, trust and coordination.
- Azerbaijan and Turkey held a joint military exercise named “Indestructible Brotherhood-2019” in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The tactical drill was aimed at developing coordination and interoperability between the armed forces of the two countries. Nearly 5,000 soldiers participated in the exercise, accompanied by more than 200 tanks and armored vehicles, up to 180 rocket systems and artillery mounts, and 21 aircraft and helicopters.
- Ministers of defense of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey Zakir Hasanov, Levan Izoria and Hulusi Akar held a meeting in the Azerbaijani city of Gabala. The parties exchanged views on prospects for developing cooperation in a trilateral format, with Baku and Ankara inviting Georgia to take part in future joint exercises.
- The Moldovan government under Prime Minister Pavel Filip representing the Democratic Party of Moldova resigned. A new government was formed by the coalition of the pro-Russian Party of Socialists and the pro-EU ACUM bloc, with Maia Sandu, the leader of the Party of Action and Solidarity, elected as a new prime minister.
- The official opening of the Embassy of Mongolia in Kyrgyzstan took place in Bishkek with the participation of Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidarbekov and Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1992, and previously Mongolia was represented in Kyrgyzstan by its Consulate General.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The fifth trilateral meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga was held on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Bishkek. The parties pledged to strengthen mutual cooperation through aligning their national development strategies and constructing the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor.
- Uzbekistan and the Asian Development Bank signed a memorandum of agreement on public-private partnerships to improve municipal water infrastructure in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Namangan and Karshi. The government of Uzbekistan identified the water supply and sanitation sector as one of the top priorities in the national development agenda and initiated a series of reforms to spur the sector's development.
- 24 documents worth \$7.7 billion were signed at the Kyrgyz-Chinese business forum held in Bishkek. The agreements include the construction of a \$260 million plant for the production of organic fertilizers in the Nookat district of the Osh region and a \$60 million dairy factory in the Suzak district of the Jalal-Abad region.
- In January-May 2019, Kazakhstan extracted 36.5 million tons of oil and gas condensate, 21.7 million of which were produced at the country's three major oil deposits – Tengiz (12.48 million tons), Karachaganak (4.97 million tons) and Kashagan (4.24 million tons). During the same period, Kazakhstan exported 29.1 million tons of oil and processed 6.7 million tons of oil.
- According to the National Bank of Kazakhstan, during 2005-2018, Japan became one of the top trade and investment partners of Kazakhstan, with the inflow of Japanese investments reaching \$5.8 billion, including \$403 million in 2018. The mutual trade turnover reached \$2 billion in 2018, and more than 70 enterprises with Japanese capital currently operate in Kazakhstan.
- During the working visit of Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze to the United States, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia and the U.S. Department of Commerce signed an agreement on opening a U.S. commercial representative office in Tbilisi. The office is expected to coordinate economic relations between the two countries and serve as a hub to promote U.S. business interests in the region.
- The delegation of the Vietnamese Bank Association visited the headquarters of the Eurasian Economic Commission to discuss prospects of cooperation in the sphere of financial services. The parties also considered the possibility of expanding trade and economic cooperation under the free trade area agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and Vietnam that came into force in October 2016.

Society and Culture

- Secretary General of the Turkic Council Baghdad Amreyev visited Ashgabat, which marked the first-ever official visit of a Turkic Council Secretary General to Turkmenistan. During the visit, Baghdad Amreyev met with Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov to discuss prospects for further developing constructive and mutually beneficial relations between the Turkic Council and Turkmenistan.
- Chairman of the Civil Service Affairs and Anti-Corruption Agency of Kazakhstan Alik Shpekbayev met with Ambassador of Turkey to Kazakhstan Nevzat Uyanik. The Turkish diplomat emphasized Kazakhstan's positive achievements in upgrading its public service and implementing e-government, while Alik Shpekbayev briefed the ambassador on the work aimed at anti-corruption support of capital investment projects.
- A commemoration event dedicated to the June 2010 interethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan was held in Osh. Kyrgyz officials and public figures took part in a flower laying ceremony, a minute of silence and a common prayer in memory of the victims at the Mothers' Tears memorial, and expressed condolences to their families.
- The international conference of women parliamentarians titled “The Role of Turkic World Women in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals” was held in Baku. At the event co-organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries and the National Assembly of Azerbaijan, the participants discussed the importance of gender equality and emphasized the need to integrate women in the political, economic and social areas of life.
- The 6th International Symposium on the Study of the Turkic World was held in Baku, gathering about 400 scientists, statesmen, and public figures from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan. Participants discussed common problems of Turkic-speaking peoples and ways to strengthen their mutual humanitarian cooperation, including through new research and education initiatives.
- The number of children born to women who are not in a registered marriage has decreased in Azerbaijan. In 2018, 20,716 such children were born in the country, while their number in 2017 was 22,796, in 2016 – 26,288, in 2015 – 24,038 and in 2014 – 25,486. The majority of extramarital births take place in rural areas.
- According to the TourStat analytical agency, the Burabai resort in Kazakhstan, Issyk-Kul Lake in Kyrgyzstan, Naroch Lake in Belarus, the Absheron resorts in Baku and Sevan Lake in Armenia are the most popular summer resorts in the CIS countries among Russian tourists. It is estimated that on average they spend a week or two at these resorts and spend between \$50-110 a day.