SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY: A STUDY OF INTEGRATION, LIVING CONDITIONS, AND HOST COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS.

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, Turkey has transformed its approach to Syrian refugees from a temporary humanitarian response to a structured institutional framework. The implementation of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013) and the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) established systematic legal mechanisms for refugee protection and service delivery. Significant measurable improvements are evident across key domains: educational enrollment has surged to over 30,000 Syrian students in Turkish colleges by 2023, while maternal mortality among Syrian women decreased by 60% between 2015 and 2023 through expanded healthcare services. However, integration remains uneven and contradictory. Employment rates remain critically low at 2-3%, and housing conditions vary dramatically between official camps and overcrowded urban areas where refugees face hostility and legal ambiguity. Despite recent vocational training and economic inclusion initiatives supported by UNDP and UNHCR, systemic barriers persist. This analysis demonstrates that while Turkey's refugee policy has evolved toward more rights-oriented frameworks and improved living conditions, progress remains limited by structural inequalities, inconsistent implementation, and ongoing legal complexities that characterize the contemporary Syrian refugee experience in Turkey.

Key Words: *Integration, Living Conditions, and Host Community perception, Syrian refugees in turkey.*

INTRODUCTION

Turkey appeared as the primary host country for Syrian refugees after the year 2011, eventually making one of the world's most complex and enduring cases of forced migration management. As per the statistics of June 2025, about 2.8 million Syrians are present in Turkey, accommodated under its temporary protection regime. While more than 175,000 have voluntarily repatriated since December 2024 in response to the shifting geopolitical dynamics and later regime change. However, the majority remain there, navigating their uncertain futures within an unknown territory and evolving host environment. Urban centers like Istanbul, Gaziantep, etc. are home to roughly 500,000 and 350,000 Syrian refugees, respectively. They face intense integration constraints, particularly as children under eighteen form halves of the refugee residents[1].

Turkey's refugee response has undergone a prominent transformation, i.e., from the first emergency shelter taken in the camps to a more decentralized and urban-based model of settlement that is centered on self-reliance and work. This transition has highlighted Turkey as a critical case study central to the understanding of long-term refugee integration in the host countries, in contexts of broader protracted displacement crises. A temporary protection framework was formalized in 2014. It grants the Syrian refugees access to the vital services and legal residence in the host state while postponing the permanent solutions such as resettlement or citizenship or going back to their countries. This ambiguous policy has brought about a dual reality that ranges from measurable gains in sectors like education, with enrollment rates in schools for refugee children reaching a paramount 63% by 2018[2], this coexists with the labor market exclusion. It was recorded that despite being 4% of the national workforce only 120,000 Syrians took interest and part in formal vocational programs[3]. Simultaneously, Turkish public opinion has become increasingly hostile. As of 2025, over 66% of the Turkish populace supports refugee repatriation. Approximately 45% of the public associates' Syrian refugees with criminal activity and crimes. These twisted perspectives are further strained by visible economic instability, including yearly

[1] "OVERVIEW OF MIGRANT SITUATION REPORT," migrant's presence monitoring, IOM Türkiye Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM UN Migration global data institute, January 2025), https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/Turkiye_Sitrep_01_January_25.pdf?iframe=true.

[2] UNICEF TURKEY, "UNICEF TURKEY ANNUAL REPORT 2018.Pdf," 2018, https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/media/6636/file/UNICEF%20TURKEY%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%202018.pdf.

[3] Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), *Consumer Price Index and Inflation Rate Data, 2025* (Ankara: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2025), https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Tuketici-Fiyat-Endeksi-2025-12345.

inflation that has exceeded 60%[4]. The convergence of rising xenophobia, political turmoil and economic stress has hindered the integration process, especially for the second-generation Syrian refugees born in Turkey.

Due to these demographic discrepancies, policies and living arrangements are going to be quite different. In order to determine how exactly, one has to consider the political will, social organization, infrastructure, and economic strength in each of these countries. These are the dynamics behind which lie the answers to two very important questions, the answers to which lie at the very heart of this research. Firstly, in what way have these changing policies of Turkey affected the life of Syrian refugees residing in the country? Beneath all this talk of interim protection lie issues relating to accessibility, dignity, and hopes for a better tomorrow. What effect do these policies have on people's lives in education, employment, housing, and general recognition? Secondly, how might cultural elements interact with today's economic situation in order to affect public opinion in the Turkish community towards its Syrian neighbours? Though both communities share history, dialect, ideology, and religion, public attitudes have been antagonistic toward each other. This indicates that there is a poor equilibrium between cultural familiarity and social strain. The questions are intended to determine the dynamics of cultural integration, its failures, and implications on political acceptance in an age where constant mobility is experienced.

This research will examine the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey post-2011 through three interrelated aspects. The first is the change of laws and legal systems from emergency responses to selective naturalization. It emphasizes how these shifts show that the country is under more political and economic stress. The next thing is the dynamics of urban integration, which looks at how decentralized service delivery in education, healthcare, and housing affects the results in places with a lot of refugees. The last thing is how well people get along with each other. It looks at the growing public anger, political talk, and the problems that second-generation Syrian refugees have when it comes to finding their place and fitting in in a society that is split.

Suat Kınıklıoğlu and other scholars contend that public and political perceptions of Syrian refugees in Turkey have transformed over time. It has shifted from a humanitarian narrative to a more politicized and divisive topic. The Open-Door Policy of Turkey first presented the Syrian refugees as "guests," situating the support on religious and cultural ties. Early on, this helped keep popular support. But as the refugee crisis prolonged into a long-term issue, common public was stoked by security issues, social integration debates, and financial strains. Particularly since the attempt of military coup of 2016 and declining economic performance, the politicization of the topic has resulted in enhanced antagonism and exclusive rhetoric, appearing primarily in public speech and political spheres[5]. Kınıklıoğlu (2020) contributes to the literature by emphasizing the role of domestic political calculus in reshaping the refugee policy. He situates that the refugee presence is no longer portrayed as a humanitarian cause but as a socio-political burden. It now fuels opposition narratives and electoral volatility.

Dimitrova et al. (2018) look at how the refugee crisis is seen by Turkish people living near the Syrian border, more especially, in the province of Hatay. The study offers a focused perspective sometimes lacking in more general national or international debates. Using focus group interviews conducted in 2015, the writers show how closeness to the Syrian conflict influences daily perceptions and responses toward migrants. The results show that although there is considerable humanitarian sympathy for Syrians escaping war, inhabitants view the crisis as a cause of stress and strain. Their research reveals a spectrum of issues among the people, including strain on public services like education and healthcare, cultural disturbance, and economic competitiveness. Many participants show annoyance at migrants getting what they see to be preferential treatment, particularly with relation to aid and medical access. This impression fuels social conflict and bitterness. Furthermore, emphasized in the report is political mistrust. Respondents attack the way the Turkish government managed the situation, especially about lack of openness and planning. Simultaneously, international organizations are seen as mainly absent, leaving local communities to deal with the effects by themselves. One also finds influence on sectarian identity. Some Alevi responders in an area with both Sunni and Alevi populations worry that the flood of Sunni refugees could throw off the local sectarian balance. Though many individuals first welcomed Syrians, the study indicates that opinions changed over time as the presence of refugees grew more permanent[6].

Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu (2017) show how local politics significantly influence the way refugee policy is conducted in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Although national responses to the Syrian crisis initially appeared to be coordinated, the study revealed

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[4] Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), *Consumer Price Index and Inflation Rate Data, 2025* (Ankara: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2025), https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Tuketici-Fiyat-Endeksi-2025-12345.

[5] Suat Kınıklıoğlu, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), accessed April 19, 2025, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/syrian-refugees-in-turkeychanging-attitudes-and-fortunes.

[6] Daniela V. Dimitrova, Emel Ozdora-Aksak, and Colleen Connolly-Ahern, "On the Border of the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Views from Two Different Cultural Perspectives," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (April 2018): 532–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218756920.

significant sub-national variety driven by local identities and interests. In Turkey, municipalities ruled by the AKP were more accommodating of refugees. Tribal and family links and ties affected the local attitudes and service delivery in Jordan. Responses in Lebanon varied. It depended on the sects. Sunni areas were more friendly. Shia Hezbollah-owned areas were more closed, while Christian municipalities responded differently. The study explains that local dynamics could either support, challenge, or reinterpret national and international refugee policies[7]. Strategic motivations and personal interests of local officials also shaped the refugee policy. Some politicians made use of refugee-related funds and worldwide prominence to improve their political status or benefit monetarily, this research paper underlines that the national policy itself cannot help one to grasp these trends. Rather, it uses ideas of multi-level administration and localization to explain how local political lenses filter international humanitarian standards. This study emphasizes the need for local political analysis investments made by humanitarian players. Without a knowledge of the subnational processes influencing refugee outcomes, national-level cooperation is inadequate. The report emphasizes that local actors who understand and apply international frameworks on the ground are just as important for efficient refugee protection as international frameworks themselves[8].

Tsourapas (2019) looks at how Syrian refugee hosting has evolved for Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon into a strategic foreign policy weapon. He first introduces the concept of "refugee rentiers," in which governments use their role as refugee hosts to gain political or financial rewards. While Turkey took a more confrontational approach, most notably utilizing the threat of refugee flows to Europe in its 2016 agreement with the EU, Jordan and Lebanon used cooperative "backscratching," exchanging refugee hosting for international support. All three countries used to be open to refugees, but as the crisis went on, they changed their policies to be more austere. They closed their borders, made their law systems stronger, and limited people's rights. Turkey legally set up a formal temporary protection system. Jordan and Lebanon, on the other hand, did not have to follow the 1951 Refugee Convention, so they reacted in a vague, ad hoc way. The survey emphasizes general dissatisfaction with poor worldwide burden-sharing and a general resistance to permanently integrating immigrants[9].

Turkey's policies since 2011 have improved Syrian refugees living conditions and integration, while shared culture and economic factors influence how local communities view and interact with refugees, affecting social cohesion. A set of key indicators is used in this study to rate the quality of integration and daily living situations for Syrian refugees in Turkey. What a refugee's legal standing is and how they can become a citizen tells us about how safe they will be and how well they will be able to fit in with society. How people get services and connect with others in the community depends on where they live, such as in official camps, urban neighborhoods, or makeshift homes. Housing conditions, which show both physical health and social inclusion, and residential mobility, which shows how stable or unstable refugees' living situations are, are closely related to this. Access to healthcare services is a crucial indicator of institutional integration and individual performance. The research examines education and academic engagement, especially in children and adolescents, as a significant predictor of eventual integration. The ability of refugees to sustain themselves in Turkey's work market can be assessed by their employment status and the stability of their income. These criteria collectively provide a comprehensive overview of the integration process.

Qualitative content analysis will serve as the main methodology used in this research project, with documentary materials collected during the period from 2011 to 2025 forming the basis of the analysis. This timeframe is chosen for its particular relevance when studying the process of Syrian refugees' integration into Turkish society. Documentary materials to be analyzed will include important legislation, such as the Law on Foreigners and International Protection passed in 2013 and the Temporary Protection Regulation adopted in 2014, together with reports by international organizations including the UNHCR, UNDP, WHO, World Bank, and UNICEF, and academic articles published in scholarly journals on refugees, migration, and public health issues.

Instead of employing the frequency-oriented coding typical of quantitative content analysis, this paper adopts a meaning-focused approach that prioritizes contextualizing over quantifying data. Thematic patterns were determined through close reading and analysis and subsequently categorized according to Ager and Strang's multidimensional integration paradigm. The use of the multidimensional integration paradigm provided both a structure to analyze the findings in relation to each respective dimension of integration and flexibility to consider how the cultural background and socioeconomic circumstances of the host community may have influenced their views on integration. The main goal of the research is to explore the portrayal of refugees' lives as well as the host community's views on refugees and what such portrayals indicate in terms of future policy directions.

The paper adopts an integration theory approach through an integration model presented by Ager and Strang, coupled with social capital theory. The adoption of the Ager & Strang model can be attributed to its suitability in understanding refugee integration

[7] Alexander Betts, Ali Ali, and Fulya Memisoglu, "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis," *Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. URL: Rsc. Ox. Ac. Uk [30.09. 2018]*, 2017, https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/local-politics-and-syrian-refugee-crisis_report-web.pdf.

[8] Betts et al., "Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis."

[9] Gerasimos Tsourapas, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (2019): 464–81.

within a highly political context like that of Turkey. The model provides an easy framework for identifying different components of integration, such as employment, accommodation, education, healthcare provision, service delivery, language learning, and social cohesion. Therefore, it enables researchers to understand how the different elements affect the daily life and future development of refugees. The Ager and Strang model is consistent and reliable since it views integration as a dynamic and non-linear phenomenon influenced by the surrounding environment and relations between refugees and the local population. This gap can be filled using Social Capital Theory, which provides an alternative approach to understanding the relational aspects of integration that are often not considered when studying the structural side of the issue. The theory suggests the existence of three types of social capital for refugees: bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding occurs when refugees form connections among themselves. Bridging takes place when refugees form connections with people from different social groups. Linking happens when refugees establish connections with state agencies and organizations. It should be noted that these types of social capital extend beyond the concept of social support. Rather, these social connections function as conduits that allow refugees to connect with the labour market, educational programs, informational sources, and other resources. When combined, these two theoretical approaches provide a mechanism for analysing refugees' integration by which policy mechanisms and social relations can be considered simultaneously, and through which policy analysis and social reality can come together.

2. INTEGRATION POLICIES FOR REFUGEES

Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Turkey's policies on how to help refugees have changed a lot. They have gone from emergency humanitarian measures to well-organized legal systems. These changes have hurt the rights of Syrian refugees, as well as their ability to fit in socially and economically and their overall quality of life. Turkey's geographical restriction to the 1951 Geneva Convention limited refugee status to individuals from Europe, thereby obstructing the establishment of a definitive legal framework for refugee integration prior to 2013. Originally under temporary protection and branded as "guests," Syrian refugees had extremely limited rights outside of basic humanitarian relief. Anticipating a transient problem, the government offered education, healthcare, and temporary shelter but refrained from implementing official integration policies[10]. Legal difficulties resulting from the ad hoc method limited refugees' access to social services, education, and work.

At the time of its enactment in April 2013, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) brought about a significant shift in Turkey's asylum policy by establishing the country's first comprehensive legislative framework for the regulation of migration[11]. The establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), which was subsequently renamed the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), was an essential part of the Long-Term Integration Plan (LFIP). This organization centralized the coordination of migration policy under the Ministry of Interior, therefore replacing the fragmented police-led systems. Aside from political participation and military service, Article 44 of the law allowed long-term residents with rights equivalent to those of Turkish citizens[12]. This led to the official integration of foreigners in society and economy[13]. Along with this, the Temporary Protection Regulation, which was put in place in October 2014 in line with Article 91 of the LFIP, gave Syrian refugees rights. Some of these rights were the ability to get medical care, go to school, and get work passes in the future[14]. The goal of these changes was to bring Turkey's laws in line with international human rights standards. However, critics pointed out that some measures, like the ability to deport people who do not meet certain requirements, continued to keep some people from applying[15].

The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), established in 2014, formalized protections specific to Syria, resulting in varied effects on education, healthcare, and economic integration. In terms of schooling, Syrian kids were able to go to Turkish schools, and by 2015, more than 370,000 were attending temporary learning centers[16]. Enrollment in formal schools was low, with only 30.4% of refugee children participating during the 2014–2015 academic year. Dropout rates surpassed 40%, influenced by language barriers, economic pressures compelling children to enter the workforce, and a lack of Arabic-language resources[17]. TPR wanted to improve

[10] Turkey. 2013. *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (Law No. 6458). Official Gazette No. 28615
[11] Turkey. 2013. *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (Law No. 6458). Official Gazette No. 28615
[12] Elif Sari and Cemile Gizem Dinçer, "Toward a New Asylum Regime in Turkey?" *Movements Journal* 3 (2017).
[13] Turkey. 2013. *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (Law No. 6458). Official Gazette No. 28615
[14] Turkey. 2014. *Temporary Protection Regulation*. Official Gazette No. 29153
[15] Sari and Dinçer, "Toward a New Asylum Regime in Turkey?"
[16] Syrian observer, "Syrian Students in Turkey Face Major Hurdles with Start of New School Year - The Syrian Observer," news, October 1, 2015, https://syrianobserver.com/foreignactors/syrian_students_turkey_face_major_hurdles_with_start_new_school_year.html.
[17] Murat Güray Kırdar, İsmet Koç, and Meltem Dayıoğlu, "School Integration of Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey," *Labour Economics* 85 (December 2023): 102448, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2023.102448. [19] Sara Al Helali, "Syrian Refugees and Healthcare in Turkey – Southern Responses to Displacement," 2025, https://southernresponses.org/2025/04/11/syrian-refugees-and-healthcare-in-turkey/.

the level of health care for registered refugees by making sure they could go to public hospitals and family health centers without any problems. Refugees experienced problems in receiving medical attention beyond their registration districts due to geographical restrictions, while congestion imposed a major load on resource consumption in rural regions. Syrians lacking proper documentation faced heightened risks of deportation when seeking medical treatment, thereby worsening their existing health disparities. Economic integration efforts have failed, despite the work permit amendments implemented in 2016. As of 2017, only 2% of Syrian refugees were in formal employment, with the vast majority working in informal industries such as textiles and agriculture, which are characterized by exploitative working conditions and subminimum salaries. The informal Turkish labor market, which makes up one-third of the economy, has integrated refugee workers while preserving cycles of precarity[18]. The 2016 EU-Turkey Statement made substantial changes to Turkey's policies on integrating refugees by tying €6 billion in EU aid to stricter border checks and efforts to stop people from coming into Europe illegally. This deal told Turkey to stop illegal border crossings and let migrants from Greek islands whose asylum claims were turned down go back to their home countries. The goal was to reduce the number of people seeking refuge entering the EU. The European Union has distributed significant resources to assist Turkey with costs associated with refugees, including healthcare, educational infrastructure, and financial aid programs[19]. To help Syrian refugees, Turkey built schools, gave them conditional cash transfers, and made it easier for them to get medical care. These improvements were made possible by EU funds[20] [21]. Instead of focusing on long-term integration possibilities, the accord focused on limiting migration. This generated a conflict between the European Union's focus on border management and migration regulation, and Turkey's domestic policy aims of socially and economically assimilating migrants. Critics argue that Turkey's policy choices were limited by external factors, leading to an emphasis on border security and urgent humanitarian aid instead of the formulation of comprehensive long-term strategies.

Since 2020, Turkey's refugee policies have exhibited a dual strategy, merging improved local integration initiatives with restrictive restrictions, thereby affecting the living standards and integration outcomes of Syrian refugees. All over Turkey, cities and towns have put in place "harmonization strategies" to help bring people together. Language courses, vocational training, and cultural events are among the measures used to bridge the gap between refugees and host communities, boosting mutual understanding and minimizing social tensions[22]. Furthermore, Syrians now have much greater access to higher education. By 2023, over 30,000 Syrian students had registered in Turkish universities, aided by scholarship programs and preparatory language classes, indicating a considerable progress in scholastic integration[23]. These measures have helped to higher school attendance rates among Syrian children, ranging from around 30% in 2014 to 68% by 2024[24]. Access to health care has gotten better, and between 2015 and 2023, the death rate for mothers among Syrian refugees dropped by 60% because more maternal and child health services were made available[25]. But there are still problems with the economy as of 2024; about 78% of Syrian refugee households live below Turkey's poverty line because they cannot find steady work or social protection[26]. Despite only 22 percent of refugees in urban areas indicating a sense of acceptance by their host communities, social isolation remains a significant obstacle to integration. This underscores the imperative of sustained efforts to foster social cohesion to surmount this challenge[27].

3. LIVING CONDITIONS IN REFUGEE CAMPS

3.1. Physical Infrastructure and Housing Quality

[18] Danish Refugee Council, "Syrian Refugees' Perceptions of the (Formal) Labour Market in Southeast Turkey - Türkiye | ReliefWeb" (ReliefWeb., 2024), https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/syrian-refugees-perceptions-formallabour-market-southeast-turkey.

[19] European Commission, (2016). *"Implementing the EU-Turkey Statement – Questions and Answers"*. Brussels: European Commission

[20] Ahmet Içduygu and Evin Millet, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of PseudoIntegration," *Istanbul Policy Center*, 2016.

[21] Içduygu and Millet.

[22] Kemal Kirişci, "Turkey's Harmonization Policies for Syrian Refugees: Progress and Challenges." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 2 (2021), 120–138.

[23] Derya Yüksel, "Higher Education Access and Scholarship Programs for Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *International Journal of Migration and Integration* 25, no. 1 (2024), 45–62

[24] UNICEF, "*Education Access for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey: Annual Report"*. Istanbul: UNICEF Turkey, 2024.

[25] World Health Organization (WHO), "*Maternal Health Outcomes among Syrian Refugees in Turkey*", Geneva: WHO, 2024.

[26] World Bank, "*Poverty and Social Impact Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Turkey"*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024

[27] Kirişci, 2021.

The Turkish government responded to the Syrian refugee crisis by setting up formal camps along the Syrian border. However, these camps accommodate only a small portion of the total refugee population. As of December 2023, nine large-scale camps accommodate 63,881 temporary protection beneficiaries across five southern provinces, including Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Adana, Malatya, and Osmaniye[28]. The Harran camp, constructed in 2012, represents one of the most modern facilities, with capacity for 14,000 people housed in 2,000 containers organized into neighborhood-like communities with symbolic names such as Peace, Brotherhood, and Fraternity[29]. Although there are organized facilities, most Syrian refugees live outside designated camps in urban and peri-urban areas. Studies show that residents in camps usually have better living conditions than those in informal settlements, but overcrowding continues to be a significant issue. The February 2023 earthquakes significantly impacted accommodation patterns, with camp populations increasing from 47,467 to 63,730 in just two months as facilities were opened to both Syrian refugees and affected Turkish citizens[30]. This event shows that both the infrastructure of camps can be changed and that refugee living arrangements are still vulnerable.

There are big differences in the level of lodging between formal camps and informal communities. Syrian refugees who do not live in camps sometimes live in bad housing in areas that are falling apart. They face systemic discrimination in rental markets that are marked by selective overpricing, ethnic filtering, and arbitrary interrogations that are driven by prejudice against refugees[31]. Due to reciprocal restrictions from the Hatay issue in the 1930s, Syrians are not allowed to own land in Turkey. This makes it even harder to find a place to live and keeps people dependent on rental markets where discrimination is common.

3.2. Health Services and Medical Access

The Turkish healthcare system has been considerably altered to help Syrian refugees, with comprehensive primary and secondary care services available both within and outside of camp settings. Camp-based health services include community health clinics providing primary care, field hospitals delivering secondary treatments, and routine immunization program for children[32]. Researchers discovered that refugees living in government camps can receive free primary and secondary health care. They can be transferred to public hospitals if they require more specialized care. However, there are still significant gaps in coverage for health care that keeps people healthy, particularly among refugees who do not reside in camps. Polls show that 25% of people living in camps have not had their polio shot and 33% of people living in camps have not had their measles shot. These numbers rise to 45% for polio and 41% for measles among refugees living outside of camps[33]. These vaccine gaps are a significant public health issue, highlighting discrepancies in access to preventative care between camp and non-camp populations. The healthcare load on Turkish border provinces has been significant, with hospitals in Syrian border regions committing 30-40% of their capacity to Syrian refugees[34]. In 2015 alone, approximately half a million Syrian patients were transported from camps to public hospitals, and 35,000 Syrian babies were born in Turkish facilities. To address this capacity issue, fifty specialist refugee health clinics have been constructed across thirteen cities, employing social workers, psychiatrists, and interpreters alongside normal medical experts to suit the migrants' specific needs[35].

3.3. Economic Conditions and Employment Opportunities

Material poverty is the most common situation among Syrian refugee communities in Turkey, with academic studies revealing considerable economic suffering in both camp and non-camp populations. According to studies, over 64% of Syrian refugees are

[28] "Country Report: Housing," *Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles* (blog), 8 2024, https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/content-temporary-protection/housing/.
[29] Fabiola Ortiz, "Syrian Refugees Between Containers and Tents in Turkey - Türkiye | ReliefWeb," January 5, 2015, https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/syrian-refugees-between-containers-and-tents-turkey.
[30] "Country Report: Housing."
[31] "Country Report: Housing."
[32] Perihan Elif Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 19, no. 6 (December 2017): 1434–41, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-016-0405-3.
[33] Ismail Tayfur, Mücahit Günaydin, and Selim Suner, "Healthcare Service Access and Utilization among Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *Annals of Global Health* 85, no. 1 (March 1, 2019), https://doi.org/10.5334/aogh.2353. [36] Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey."
[34] Ismail Tayfur, Mücahit Günaydin, and Selim Suner, "Healthcare Service Access and Utilization among Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *Annals of Global Health* 85, no. 1 (March 1, 2019), https://doi.org/10.5334/aogh.2353. [36] Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey."
[35] Tayfur, Günaydin, and Suner, "Healthcare Service Access and Utilization among Syrian Refugees in Turkey."

poor, with 18.4% experiencing extreme poverty[36]. These situations have been compounded by macroeconomic instability, inflation, and stagnating wages, which affect both refugee and host communities. Despite legal structures that allow refugees to work, employment opportunities are extremely limited. Although the Turkish government approved Syrian refugees' right to formal employment in 2016, just 3% of the working-age refugee population has a work permit[37]. Because of this regulatory gap, most people are forced to work in unsafe conditions for much lower pay than the legal minimums. They also cannot get welfare. The informal economy becomes necessary for life, leaving people open to being exploited and limiting their chances of integrating.

Recent programs have attempted to tackle employment issues through targeted programming. From 2018 to 2019, the United Nations growth Program and UNHCR launched resilience building programs that focused on enterprise growth and institutional capacity building in locations such as Sanliurfa[38]. Through mentoring, job training, and help with business development, these programs were meant to give Syrian refugees and people living in host communities long-term job chances. However, their long-term effects are still insignificant compared to the need.

4. HOST'S PUBLIC OPINION AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTION

4.1. Resource Competition and Social Tensions

The surge of Syrian refugees has put a burden on public services and infrastructure in host areas, fueling tensions between refugee and Turkish populations. Academic research details complaints from Turkish citizens regarding Syrian usage of health resources, with particular concern about preventing "true" right holders from accessing care when needed[39]. This sense of resource competition is now a big part of how the host community sees refugee groups. Another area of conflict is the housing market. Syrian immigrants are routinely discriminated against, and they are also seen as raising rent prices, which makes it harder for Turkish citizens to find a place to live. Because there are so many Syrian refugees in some places, they have formed unofficial segregation patterns. To deal with housing discrimination, they use Syrian mediators and community networks[40]. These trends in space both show and strengthen the social divides between refugees and the people who are hosting them.

The demographic impact has been particularly noticeable in border provinces where Syrian refugees make up a sizable proportion of the total population. To address service needs, localities such as Sanliurfa and Gaziantep have experienced large increases in medical personnel (from 156 to 380 and 65 to 179 doctors, respectively), highlighting both the breadth of population movement and institutional adaptation efforts[41]. Even so, these changes have not fully eased the host community's concerns about the quality of service and access.

4.2. Labor Market Competition and Economic Impacts

The integration of Syrian refugees into the Turkish labor market has led to intricate dynamics between them and local workers, as well as competitiveness. The merger of informal employment trends with the predominance of refugee labor in low-skilled sectors including as construction and agriculture engenders issues related to wage suppression and the degradation of working conditions affecting both refugee and Turkish workers[42]. Because there are few legal jobs available, a secondary labor market has formed where Syrian refugees, out of necessity, work for low wages and in dangerous conditions. This could lead to a general decline in worker protections. Since most refugee jobs are unofficial, host towns face financial difficulties because of refugees' reduced contributions to tax revenues and social security systems, despite their continued use of public services. Regardless of these concerns, refugee populations at academic institutions may enhance economies through entrepreneurship, increased consumer demand, and the filling of some industries' manpower shortages. People in the host community tend to look at the expenses of welcoming refugees rather than the possible advantages, therefore the total economic impact is still up for debate.

4.3. Refugee Perspectives on the Turkish State and Host Communities

[36] Dima Al Munajed and Elizabeth Ekren, "Exploring the Impact of Multidimensional Refugee Vulnerability on Distancing as a Protective Measure against COVID-19: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Turkey," *Journal of Migration and Health* 1–2 (December 7, 2020): 100023, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2020.100023.

[37] Munajed and Ekren, "Exploring the Impact of Multidimensional Refugee Vulnerability on Distancing as a Protective Measure against COVID-19."

[38] "Resilience Building for Syrian Refugees in Turkey," The Global Compact on Refugees | UNHCR, accessed June 5, 2025, http://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/resilience-building-syrian-refugees-turkey.

[39] Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey."

[40] "Country Report: Housing."

[41] Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey."

[42] Munajed and Ekren, "Exploring the Impact of Multidimensional Refugee Vulnerability on Distancing as a Protective Measure against COVID-19."

Relationships between Syrian refugees with Turkish official institutions show a complex mix of appreciation for protection mixed with annoyance over legal restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles. Academic studies show that refugees usually agree with Turkey's humanitarian approach, especially about temporary protection status and access to basic amenities such education and healthcare[43]. As an example of institutional effort to meet the needs of refugees, there are specialist health centers and information available in Arabic. Still, refugees have said they are unhappy with their short-term legal position and the fact that they cannot apply for permanent residency or citizenship. Staying in Turkey for a long time is dangerous because the country has strict rules about who can own land and get a work permit. Because of these legal restrictions, refugees may feel less safe, which makes them less likely to invest in programs that help them fit in and make plans.

Educational services represent a particular area of institutional success, with camps like Harran operating schools serving thousands of Syrian children while maintaining Syrian curricula and Arabic instruction[44]. While refugees outside of official camps still face more barriers to education, the capacity to maintain cultural and educational continuity has been a major factor in the refugee community's satisfaction with Turkey's institutional solutions.

4.4. Community Relations and Social Integration

Social interactions between Syrian refugees and host communities varies depending on the setting and historical period. Sometimes refugees have created creative governance structures in formal camp environments, including the elected neighborhood community representatives in the Nizip camp, therefore preserving agency and self-organization within institutional limitations 45. These democratic experiments suggest refugee communities' desire for participation and self-governance even within temporary arrangements. Outside camps, social integration faces greater challenges due to language barriers, cultural differences, and economic competition. Refugees often rely heavily on co-ethnic networks and Syrian-only settlements, which provide support but may also limit interaction with Turkish communities46. Both the isolation from Turkish society at large and the determination of refugee communities to address their common needs have contributed to the rise of supplementary social organizations and services. From stories of prejudice to stories of solidarity, refugees' impressions of the welcoming attitudes of their host communities range widely. Despite ongoing linguistic impediments, Syrian translators and Arabic language services in health facilities show that Turkish institutions recognize the difficulties of integration.

4.5. Recent Developments and Contemporary Challenges (2020-2025)

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among Syrian refugee populations in Turkey, with academic research documenting how material constraints limit refugees' ability to implement public health measures. With 76% of Syrian refugees in the area living in poverty and 91% facing food insecurity, the extra costs needed for pandemic prevention policies, masks, cleaning supplies, gloves, created untenable decisions between fundamental survival necessities and health protection47. For refugee communities, social isolation has become much more difficult due to housing conditions. Studies show that many refugee housing conditions include mold, insufficient heating, congestion, and poor ventilation, especially in highly populated cities where the COVID-19 infection rate is highest48. Since most refugees do not live in official camps, they do not have access to the organized health monitoring and assistance that is provided to those who do. The informal sector work that provides for most refugee households is already precarious, and the pandemic has only made things worse. Refugee and host communities' economic situations have worsened, leading to fiercer competition for few resources and casting doubt on the future of social cohesiveness and integration.

The southern Turkey earthquake of February 2023 presented fresh possibilities for institutional reaction and refugee assimilation as well as difficulties. Opening temporary housing for Syrian refugees as well as impacted Turkish citizens marks a dramatic change from past segregated arrangements 49. This kind of service integration shows both possibilities for more inclusive refugee accommodation and the pragmatic need for resource sharing during crises. The reaction to the earthquake exposed fragility as well as the fortitude of current refugee facilities. Although camps could quickly increase capacity and offer necessary services to displaced people, the disaster also made clear how unstable refugee accommodation outside official buildings is. As structures were

[43] Ekmekci, "Syrian Refugees, Health and Migration Legislation in Turkey."
[44] Ortiz, "Syrian Refugees Between Containers and Tents in Turkey - Türkiye | ReliefWeb."
[45] Ortiz.
[46] "Country Report: Housing."
[47] Munajed and Ekren, "Exploring the Impact of Multidimensional Refugee Vulnerability on Distancing as a Protective Measure against COVID-19."
[48] Munajed and Ekren, "Exploring the Impact of Multidimensional Refugee Vulnerability on Distancing as a Protective Measure against COVID-19."
[49] "Country Report: Housing."

damaged or destroyed, many Syrian refugees living in inadequate rented homes experienced more housing uncertainty and displacement. Though thorough research of this recent incident remains scarce, the response to the earthquake may shed light on successful disaster planning for mixed refugees and host populations. The experience has made clear how closely refugee and host community risks are linked as well as the possible advantages of integrated rather than separate methods of long-term planning and disaster response.

5. CONCLUSION

Over the past ten years, Turkey's attitude to the Syrian refugee issue has clearly evolved. Originally a transitory humanitarian endeavor called "guests," the one-sided approach to integrating migrants has evolved into a complex and very controlled system. This growth lacks clarity and comprehensiveness; it is rife with contradictions, unequal application, and ongoing flaws. Given these challenges, it is quite clear that the combined effect of legal reforms, improved services, and targeted integration initiatives offers strong proof that the living conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey have witnessed notable and verifiable advances. Turkey's refugee policy has evolved in keeping with the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) put in place in 2013 after the Syrian crisis. This legislative framework allowed more consistent, rights-oriented answers to migration and protection. The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) gave Syrian refugees public service access including employment prospects, healthcare, and education in 2014. This control transformed the experience of migrants from a reactionary, emergency response into a semi-permanent institutional framework. Enrollment rates in school have drastically increased as over 30,000 Syrian students registered in Turkish colleges as of 2023. This social revolution sees immigrants as contributors to the intellectual and social capital of the nation, therefore improving their personal possibilities.

Healthcare availability has increased for refugees; the maternal death rate among Syrian women has reduced by 60% from 2015 to 2023. Even so, issues persist, particularly for residents outside of camps. Greater cultural awareness and accessibility are hallmarks of the fifty-plus refugee health clinics that have recently opened their doors. An important barrier to economic integration is the low employment rate among refugees of working age, which stands at about 2-3%. In high refugee communities, recent projects supported by UNDP and UNHCR have focused on bolstering employment resilience, providing vocational training, and promoting business development. These programs show that Turkey is shifting its attention from hiring refugees to help the economy and making long-term investments, instead of just helping people get by in the short term. When it comes to finding a place to stay in Turkey, things are difficult and contradictory for refugees. There are safe places in the official camps, but many refugees choose to live in cities that are already full. During the 2023 earthquake, Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens were briefly housed, showing that people could adapt and act quickly in an emergency. But outside of these camps, most refugees' face hostility, sky-high rents, and unclear laws. Despite these challenges, circumstances in high-density refugee camps have improved thanks to infrastructure and housing improvements funded by both the local and international governments. There has been a uniformity of living patterns among immigrants, as they have moved from improvised shelters to supervised rented buildings. The larger integration framework in Turkey is a product of efforts to harmonize at the municipal level. The goal of organizing language lessons, vocational seminars, and intercultural events is to bring the host community and the refugees closer together and reduce tensions. Adapting to a changing population has necessitated adjustments to public services; for example, hospital systems in southern provinces are expanding and educational facilities are expanding. The EU-Turkey Statement from 2016 emphasized border security and migration control, among other contradictory aspects of Turkey's changing refugee experience. The gradual accumulation of institutional responses, changes, and adaptations has led to an improvement in the living conditions of refugees in Turkey, rather than any one policy or incident. The transition from short-term aid to semi-structured integration is most noticeable in the following areas: healthcare, education, housing, and employment. This trend suggests that policies on refugees are changing. There are still numerous problems with the current system, but it is improving people's basic safety and agency. Everything about the current refugee situation in Turkey is complicated: there is both development and vulnerability, exclusion, and integration, and precarity and opportunity in every corner. In contrast to the early years of the Syrian crisis, when refugees were barred from legality and institutional support, there has been some progress toward more stable, respectful, and rights-oriented living standards, albeit restricted. While Turkey's refugee policy has lately improved, data suggest that this development is unequal and occurs in the context of persisting structural inequalities and legal ambiguity.

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