### *Summary:*

### Those Who Ruled Out: The Syrian Asylum Seekers in Istanbul

Since March 2011, hundreds of people died due to ongoing conflict in Syria, and many others were injured or displaced from their living spaces. According to the data collected by the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR), millions of Syrians are displaced, and more than 1.1 million Syrian citizens have crossed the border to many countries, among which are Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Algeria. In particular 77 % of this rising number is mostly composed of women and children. Women and female children over the age of 12 constitute 51 % of the population. 38% of the population is in 0-11 age group, and14% of the population is in 12-17 age group. [[1]](#footnote-1)

According to the data which were compiled and published on 6th March, 2011 by Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD); the number of Syrians who have crossed the border under the status of “temporary protection” since April 2011 is 185.982. This is the number of the Syrians who live in 17 refugee camps and settlements in 8 provinces of Turkey. However, as it is confirmed by various sources, there are 200.000 registered and unregistered Syrian citizens living in different regions of Turkey, and most of them are women and children. According to the data compiled and based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and AFAD and published on 9th March, 2013 by the UNHCR (BMMYK), about 40,000 people living in cities have been registered recently with the new regulation. With the sum of these numeric data, there are approximately 400,000 Syrians in Turkey and 30,000 of them are waiting to be registered.[[2]](#footnote-2) 75% of this number is composed of women and children.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In Turkey’s national legislation, the articles which regulate mass migration movements and urgent humanitarian aids are very limited. The circulars declared by the government in order to supply the basic rights and needs of the Syrian asylum seekers living in or out of camps are extremely inadequate and poor. Among other problems are the fact that it is almost impossible to access to some of these circulars and that both NGOs working in the field and asylum seekers do not have adequate information on the legal framework, which results in an unsteady atmosphere.

The report of “Those Ruled Out: Syrian Asylum Seekers Living in İstanbul” is written with the objectives of encouraging the establishment of protection mechanisms which will be shaped within the scope of Turkey’s legal responsibilities regarding international human rights agreements. Moreover, it is written with the contributing to the establishment of precautions that will eliminate the injustices experienced by the individuals who are deprived of their rights and freedom.

Although this report focuses on the Syrian asylum seekers, it also reflects the problems of Syrian asylum seekers who are struggling to survive in different cities of Turkey.

### *Methodology*

The report “Those Ruled Out: Syrian Asylum Seekers Living in İstanbul” includes the Kurdish Syrian asylum seekers who had escaped from the internal conflicts in Syria and came to Istanbul at different times. The reason why all of the interviewed are Kurdish asylum seekers is not a purposeful choice; rather, it is because of the fact that those who have been accessed are Kurdish asylum seekers.

The data in this report were collected by the members and volunteers of Immigrants’ Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (GOC-DER) through semi-structured interview methods, and all the interviews were conducted in February, 2013. Three groups consisting of three interviewers conducted interviews with 19 Syrian asylum seekers in three different districts, namely Eminonu, Esenyurt, and Kanarya. All the interviews were conducted in Kurdish and they were translated into Turkish afterwards. The personal information of asylum seekers is not included in the report due to the right of privacy and security concerns.

The findings of the interviews were shared with the NGOs and academicians who work in the field of children, women, migration, and social services, and one of the districts were visited by a group of representatives from NGOs and the people working in the relevant fields.

During the reporting process, the Governorship of Istanbul and the General Directorate of Security were asked to get permission for knowledge acquisition. The written parliamentary questions asked to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey were scanned.

All the data collected were compared with the media news on the Syrian asylum seekers living outside of the camps, reports by different NGOs, UNHCR data, and official data declared by Turkey, and they were interpreted through reviewing the relevant national and international agreements.

The last part of the report, suggestions, has been constituted with the contribution of the representatives of Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) and the academicians.

Goc-Der[[4]](#footnote-4) and Equal Rights Watch (ESHID)[[5]](#footnote-5), who prepared this report, are independent active NGOs that work in collaboration with the Racial and Ethnic Discrimination within the “Platform for Monitoring Discrimination”.

### *Evaluations*

The evaluations made after interviews with the Syrian asylum seekers in Istanbul are as following:

All the interviewees are composed of Syria’s Kurds. Their date of arrival varies between one and half a year and 3 weeks. However, most of them came within 2 or 6 months and none of them speaks Turkish.

While crossing the borders, no information or guidance service has been provided to the asylum seekers. Some of the interviewees emphasized that even their identity cards and passports had not been checked or asked by authorities.

Three of the interviewees expressed that they had been in the refugee camps in Turkey for a while and one interviewee states that he has been in the refugee camp in Iraq for a while.

According to all the interviewee’s emphasis who spoke in the name of their families, none of them wants to stay in the refugee camps and they propose different reasons for this stance. Some of the reasons are the physical conditions of the camps and the political assessments on them. Moreover, one family states that the authorities say there is no space left in the camps.

In terms of accommodation and housing, the living conditions of all the families are physically very poor and the places are not hygienic. Most of them share one room with many people. They stay in cramped conditions. The rooms or the shanty-houses where they stay are damp and deprived of any air conditioning, illumination and heating opportunities. Despite these poor conditions, they have to pay high rents for these places.

Because of the poor living conditions, malnutrition and constraints in accessing the healthcare, the asylum seekers, especially the children, often have health problems. The living conditions in terms of accommodation are open to the spread of epidemic diseases.

The asylum seekers try to benefit from the health services by their own means. Among the interviewees, 7 adults and 2 children struggle with the diseases which need constant care. Most of the children have health problems, which has to be taken care of.

The children are deprived of any education services and psycho-social support services for rehabilitation of the trauma they have experienced.

The asylum seekers, especially the children, cannot eat properly and they have malnutrition.

Children (about 20-25 children) ask for alms in the street in order to be able to pay the high rents for their accommodation. These children are unprotected against the risk of abusement.

The asylum seekers have to work in the informal sectors and casual works with very low wages and are bound with daily earnings; however, in some cases, they could not receive their wages and they do not know where to consult. Those who are working in the informal sector are subject to serious labor exploitation.

In the refugee camp, health, education, accommodation, and food services are provided to the asylum seekers, who are called as “guests Syrian”; however, those who are outside of the camp cannot benefit from these facilities. This situation leads to discrimination within the Syrian asylum seekers who came due to the same reasons.

### *Suggestions*

The recent developments in Syria depict that the flow of asylum seekers to Turkey will proceed increasingly. This means that the number of asylum seekers out of the refugee camps will increase. Therefore, Turkey has to urgently develop humanitarian aid mechanisms.

Registration desks should be set up in the cities populated by asylum seekers who live out of the camps under the scrutiny of the governorship. During registration, demographic information and basic needs should be determined. This policy which is currently being carried out in Gaziantep and Hatay should be considered for other cities as well.

Health and education services should be provided to all registered and attained asylum seekers, and they should be informed about their rights in terms of refugee law and how to benefit from social support. At this point, brochures in Arabic and Kurdish should be prepared and distributed by the local governor.

The neighborhood mukhtar (the elected head of a village or of a neighborhood within a town or city) should be the first contact authority for the first registration.

A coordination desk should be constituted through the participation of governorship, municipalities, and mukhtars in collaboration with the NGOs working in the field of women, children, social services, and humanitarian aids; and they should cooperate in order to solve the problems.

Coordination desks should recruit Kurdish and Arabic translators for their help in the health and public institutions, police stations, and other institutions.

In order to facilitate receiving health services for the registered asylum seekers, documents certified by the governor should be prepared.

The Ministry of Health should declare a notice about receiving health services without paying for registered and unregistered asylum seekers.

Ministry of Labor should formulate work permit for the Syrian asylum seekers who can work.

The governors and the municipalities should cooperate in order to keep children from asking for alms and they should provide educational, social, and psychological support for them.

Children, the disabled, and those with chronic diseases need to be supported by providing assistance through institutions.

Syrian asylum seekers, who want to apply for refuge in third countries, should have the opportunity to consult to UNHCR in order to submit their application.

The guest houses of public institutions and municipalities should be open to sheltering Syrian asylum seekers.

The social support funds should be used by the governors for women, children, disabled people, and those with chronic diseases, and priority should be given to women and children.

The Draft Law on Foreigners and International Protection should be urgently put on the agenda of TGNA and the suggestions and remarks of NGOs should be taken into account.

The NGOs should orient the refugees who apply to them and inform them about their rights and how to proceed as an asylum seeker. Moreover, they should not be advised about going to the refugee camp as the only choice.

The mass media should be more careful about the utterances they use while reporting the news about the asylum seekers and they should not use words that otherize them or in some instances depict them as “criminal”.

1. UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. AFAD President, Dr. Fuat Oktay, extract from press conference on Syria on Mart 2013 retrieved from <http://www.afad.gov.tr/TR/HaberDetay.aspx?IcerikID=1076&ID=5> on (06.03.2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Immigrants’ Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (Göç-Der), www.gocder.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Equal Rights Watch(ESHID), www.esithaklar.org [↑](#footnote-ref-5)