

**LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE:
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**DEVELOPMENTS IN TURKEY
THE REFUGEE CRISIS
& THE MEDIA**

Assoc. Prof. M. Murat ERDOĐAN
Yudum Kavukçuer – Tuđçe Çetinkaya



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INTRODUCTION

Since April 2011, Turkey is experiencing the most serious migration movements in its history. People forced to leave their homes in Syria have arrived in Turkey together with refugees and migrants from other countries.

The total number of people coming to Turkey has exceeded 4.2 million in the past six years; approximately 1.2 million continued to Europe and other countries, whereas 3.5 million people remain in Turkey. Among those remaining, 3.1 million are Syrians.

While only 8 percent of the refugees are living in camps and are relatively isolated from Turkish society, the remaining 92 percent are living all around the country, in almost every city. This makes the issue of refugees in Turkey an evident social phenomena and a natural foundation for the discussions of social acceptance and exclusion. Turkish media has a very special role for the high, albeit fragile, social acceptance and for conflicts remaining at a very minimal level. This study makes an analysis of «refugeeism» first in a legal, then in a sociological sense, the situation of refugees in Turkey as of December 2016 and the attitudes of the Turkish media.



REFUGEEISM

Refugeeism is an international institution closely related to the structure of the nation-state. Under normal circumstances, every person is protected by the country of his or her citizenship. People who cannot be protected by their country due to a life threatening warfare or due to oppression because of their ethnical, political or social status resort to seek protection from another state. During World War II, approximately 20 million people had to take refuge in other countries.

The issue of refugees originating from Syria since March 2011 has already gone to history as one of the biggest humanitarian tragedies in world history and a crisis that has led to 5.5 million people to leave their country and over seven million people becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The legal foundation for international law in terms of asylum seekers and refugees was laid down by the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees¹. According to the convention:

“Refugee is every person owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”.²

This definition implies that everyone “who had to leave their country due to a force majeure” is a refugee irrespective of the legislation of the country of asylum and status.³ In the 1967 Protocol, the issue of refugeeism

1. Text of the Convention: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

2. Convention Relating to the Status of the Refugees, Chapter 1, Article 1 (2)

3. IOM – Glossary on Migration: http://www.turkey.iom.int/documents/goc_terimleri_sozlugu.pdf?entryId=10260

became independent from time and regional limitations.⁴

The law on refugees cannot be tackled without making a reference to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, defining fundamental human rights from a universal framework of principles. The provision that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” in article 14 affects all international and national regulations on the issue.

According to figures provided by UNHCR there are 65.3 million refugees in the world today with different legal status. Among those, 21.3 million have a refugee status acknowledged by the UN.

Turkey has made a geographical reservation to the Geneva Convention limiting refugee status only to people coming from Europe, while not acknowledging non-Europeans in the country as refugees. Hence, Syrians in Turkey receive a “temporary protection status”. Despite this, Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of de facto refugees in the world.

The fact that the majority of refugees, four percent of Turkey’s 80 million population, lives together with Turkish society outside the camps is important in terms of social acceptance and tension.

4. 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of the Refugees https://treaties.un.org/pages/ShowMTDSGDetails.aspx?src=UNTSO&tabid=2&mtdsg_no=V-5&chapter=5&lang=en#Participants



REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world since 2014. According to data of December 2016, there are more than 3.1 million Syrians in Turkey. 90 percent of Syrian refugees (2.764.000) received temporary protection status, 300.000 Syrians have made pre- registration and are waiting for the necessary proceedings to receive their temporary protection status. There are also 350.000 non-Syrian refugees that came to Turkey in the last five years. So between 2011 and 2016 the number of refugees in Turkey has reached 3.4-3.5 millions. An important aspect with regard to refugees in Turkey is that they are living all over the country. As of November 2016, only eight percent of the refugees, corresponding to 258.000, live in one of the 25 refugee camps located in ten provinces of Turkey. The remaining part of more than 92 percent are living in cities. The fact that the majority of refugees, four percent of Turkey's 80 million population, lives together with Turkish society outside the camps is important in terms of social acceptance and tension.

Istanbul, with a population of 14 million people, ranks number one in the list of cities with refugees. There are currently 539.000 Syrian refugees in Istanbul according to official figures and 600.000 according to unofficial figures. Şanlıurfa is in second place, which is followed by the provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Adana and Mersin. There are more than 100 000 refugees in at least ten provinces of Turkey. In the province of Kilis, the 130.000 refugees now outnumber the local population of 90.000.

44 percent of the Syrian refugees in Turkey are under the age of 18. The important number of young people illustrates the need for education, as there are currently 850.000 Syrian refugees in school-age (5-17). Only 36 percent of these children, 311.000, have access to school. 62.000 go to Turkish state schools and receive Turkish education while 255.000 attend temporary education centres delivering Arabic education according to Syrian curriculum in camps or outside camps; the quality of these centres has been questioned.

At least 550.000 children receive no education at all, which might constitute the most serious problem for both Syrian refugees and Turkey in the medium to long term. There is a need for at least 40.000 new teachers and 30.000 new classrooms to integrate 80 percent of the Syrian children into the Turkish education system. Doing so further requires an enormous financial endeavour as it is foreseen that only the annual cost of teachers would be higher than 700 million Euros.⁵

The concern of losing a job to a foreigner is present in many countries with a large influx of migrants. More than 2.8 million of the Syrians living in urban areas in Turkey work to maintain their livelihoods. Studies conducted estimate that at least 400.000 Syrians work in the informal economy in Turkey. This situation may result in cheap labour and the loss of employment of nationals which is problematic for Turkey with its relatively high unemployment rate of 11.2 percent. 3.5 million citizens of Turkey are seeking employment as of December 2016. This constitutes another potential challenge for the country.

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5. Brute salary of a teacher working at Turkish state schools is calculated approximately as 4.000 TRY, corresponding to 1.250 EUR.



MEDIA & REFUGEES

The attitudes of written and visual media about refugees in Turkey in the past five years constitute an important area of research both for understanding the current situation and for identifying future policies. Turkey's to date high but fragile social acceptance level cannot be assessed independent of the attitudes of the media. Analysing the rhetoric towards refugees in the media can be an important way of developing a co-existence culture that is peaceful and respectful.

The key issues emerging from the analysis conducted on the coverage of refugees in Turkish media can be summarized as follows:

The issue of refugees do not attract the attention of Turkish media: Media attention is very limited even though Turkey has become the country with the most refugees in the world by hosting approximately 3.5 million refugees since April 2011.

“The future of the Assad regime”, not “Refugees”: The situation for the Assad regime was tackled more than the situation for refugees.

Sentimentality: Refugee issues are dealt with a highly sentimental perspective. Related economic, social and political impacts are discussed in a very limited way.

Ideological preferences: Discussions are more on the axis of Syrian policy among the pro-government media groups and the opposition rather than refugees.

Sacrifice vs. Short-sightedness: Pro-government media reflect the topic of refugees as an example of “sacrifice, collaboration, generosity and kindness,” whereas the pro-opposition media defines it as an act of short-sightedness.

News, no commentary: Media makes news of the events taking

place rather than conducting analyses. Not least the local media highlights the topic of philanthropic acts or singular events.

Foreign policy priority: The topic of refugees is not just a humanitarian one but it is also closely related to the government foreign policy. For this reason, the criticism is directed against the foreign policy of the government.

High-standard refugee camps: Pro-government media organizations prefer to broadcast and publish images from camps with very high standards.

“The great escape”: A substantial part of the media coverage of refugees is about the efforts of refugees trying to flee Turkey and the related accidents.

From this perspective, the situation for refugees is rather ignored by the Turkish media, if compared with the coverage in Europe.

After the arrival of Syrian refugees to Turkey since April 2011, some important breaking points in the media coverage can be observed. The period from 2011 until 2015 was characterized by covering the human tragedy and the future of the Assad regime. The most frequently used discourse on the topic of refugees until September 2015 was that of “illegal migrants,” a connotation that immigrants are illegal and a perception that they are guilty. An example is the event of January 19, 2015, when 333 immigrants were brought back to Turkey by the coastal guards as they were trying to go from Mersin, Turkey to Italy. Mainstream media used the following discourse to cover the event: “333 Illegal Immigrants Captured”, “Illegal Immigrant Operation”, “Raid on Illegal Immigrants”. News covering sinking refugee boats do not dwell much on the term of “human traffickers” but rather focus repeatedly on “illegal immigrants”. This creates a perception of guilt in peoples’ minds.

With the emergence of the image of the three year old boy Aylan Kurdi who lost his life as the boat trafficking refugees sank off the Bodrum shore on September 2, 2015, the attention of the media was immediately placed on the tragedy that the refugees suffer. With the international attention shown to the topic, Turkish media started to cover news of the tragedy as well as criticize the silence of the world in this regard. News started to use

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headlines such as “Children Washing Up On Shores” and “Global Media Finally Woke Up”.

After each catastrophe experienced in the Mediterranean Sea, news started using headlines such as “Result of Lack of Conscience of Europeans”. These kinds of news coverage frequently involve Turkish politicians’ statements blaming Europe and speaking highly of the important deeds done by Turkey. It is striking that Turkish media draws more attention to the problems facing refugees in Europe rather than in Turkey.

In the months up to the EU-Turkey agreement, words such as “flood” and “influx” appeared in the news coverage. These kinds of coverages included generalizations and figures.

“Refugee Crisis” and “Visa Liberalization” made the headlines with the second breaking point, the signing of the agreement between the European Union and Turkey, on March 18, 2016.

The possibility for visa liberalization caused the media to write news from the axis of politicians’ opinions and their discourse. The fact that the clauses of the agreement included a visa freedom to the EU shifted the focal point of news from “the tragedy of refugees” to that of “visa-free entry to EU countries”. Refugees were no longer the subject of the news after the headlines «Delightful News», “Dream Comes True”; they became just a clause of the agreement. On the other hand, refugees also became a topic of debate between the ruling party and opposition parties, they became a tool for politicians in reaching their political aspirations in which the topic was shaped according to the opinion of the electors. The issue appeared in discussion programs, in-depth analyses, and commentaries.

The last, and most controversial, breaking point from the perspective of the media was on July 2, 2016, when President Erdogan made a statement about “citizenship” in a refugee camp. This issue led to a very intense series of discussions on the future of refugees in Turkey for the first time. This discussion maintains its vitality though it is shadowed by the July 15 coup attempt.

Looking at the characteristics of these three different periods reveals that a main problem is the lack of knowledge on the legal differences of “refugees”, “migrants” and “asylum seekers” and their different legal rights.

Turkish news contents do not cover the differences of these three status, why these people migrate and what kinds of rights they have. When news discourse does not pay attention to these differences and ignore the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, it leads to shortcomings in the public perception.

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REFUGEES OR GUESTS?

Turkish media generally uses the term “guest” for the Syrians. This concept can be seen in both positive and negative connotations. An article written by J. Tolay in 2010 suggests that “hospitality”, “multiculturalism” and “pity” are the characteristics that are on the forefront in Turkish peoples’ minds in terms of asylum seekers in the country.

That concepts of “refugees”, “asylum seekers”, “people under temporary protection” and “guests” are discussed in a very different context than the technical, legal and international ones, which has to do with the fact that Syrians have had to stay in Turkey far longer than foreseen. Initial prediction was that refugees from Syria would stay for a week, a month or at most a few months; however, as the internal turmoil in Syria turned into civil war, the number of Syrians living in Turkey increased and the duration of their stay extended to three years which led to the concept of “guests” being discussed more frequently. As the duration of stay exceeded the boundaries of guesthood, “guests” are perceived from the perspective of “demarcation” and “knowing their places”. Likewise, even though the concept of being a guest involves many positive aspects and sympathy, it does not grant any right ownership. “Guests” should make do with whatever is provided to them. Lately, the concept of “guesthood” is used especially with this connotation of “limits” by local society. Media also stresses this connotation very frequently. The most striking example for what “being a guest” means and how it is perceived can be read from a piece written by Ertuğrul Özkök in Hürriyet Newspaper on July 27, 2012. This piece headlined with “Friend, Know Your Place if you are a Guest!” provides significant clues to the framework of the concept of being a guest turning into deprivation of rights.⁶

6. Hürriyet Newspaper, 27 July 2012: Ertuğrul Özkök: ““Friend, Know Your Place if you are a Guest!”; <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/21077508.asp>. “Who are we? We are a country that embraced 500 thousand Kurdish people. –Who are we? We are a country that opened our gates and hearts for those who rebelled against Bashar Assad regime for the first time. - Who are we? We are a country that embraced oppressed Syrians while

A frequent phenomena is local people saying: “We are a hospitable nation, we have always embraced those who are in need throughout the history”, and adding “But guests should know that they are just guests and adapt themselves to us”. It is clear that the concept of guesthood is not sustainable for permanence that exceeds a certain duration, and it expresses exclusion, marginalization and a tool of putting boundaries.

European countries that are the cradle of human rights repulsed those back into the sea who tried to escaped from oppressors in Tunisia and Libya thinking that we do not want to deal with the issue of refugees. We have established good quality and comfortable camps examples of which can only be seen in very few countries. We have provided more opportunities to them compared to our people in that region . And now these people are uprising. And why, because 1200 Turkmen people fleeing from persecution were brought there. They say they do not want them. Why, because they have electricity shortages from time to time. They do not only refuse but also raise a red flag and take our police officers hostage and injure some persons in charge which naturally injures us. Am I the only one? Don't you feel like yelling: “Friend, know your place if you are a guest”. Your costs are covered by the tax payers of this country. Think of that excuse, they have no AC, they experience power shortages. It was only yesterday dozens of people lost their lives in our prisons. We could not provide for them, but we do for you... But still you are not satisfied... Just a little respect... Hell broke loose in the region, Turkey takes risks that no one else does, and still maintains its support despite the risk of creating new risks in the neighbourhood. But you raise the red flag... If you are so interesting in an uprising, if you have such an enthusiasm, what are you doing there? Leave your wife, children and elderly relatives. Go and join those people at war risking their lives. What you do is not just disrespectful to us but those who fight over there...”

It is clear that the concept of guesthood is not sustainable for permanence that exceeds a certain duration, and it expresses exclusion, marginalization and a tool of putting boundaries.



LAW & ORDER

Another key issue is the reporting in Turkish media on crime committed by refugees. Since the arrival of Syrian refugees, news on theft, mugging and assaults increase from time to time. Periods when these news are on the rise vary according to the political agenda, especially in the mainstream media. Prejudices of the society solidify as these news keep appearing in media and result in stereotypes about refugees. These kinds of news spark off huge reactions in Turkish society and lead to a perception of threat and feelings of panic. After such periods, there have been incidents of arsoning tents and shops of Syrian workers; however these news did not appear in the media as much as other topics. News which claim that theft, assault or murder was undertaken by refugees use the word “Syrian” persistently.

The “moral panic” concept of Stanley Cohen is of importance in terms of the impact the media may have on the public. Cohen states that when media constantly refers to a particular segment of society in negative terms, it may lead to a perception of threat and panic⁷. The fact that the media refers to refugees only in terms of problems, conflicts and violent incidents results in them being perceived as elements of threat that disrupt order. This facilitates the antagonism of “us” and “them” and leads to discrimination against refugees. A huge lack of knowledge and carelessness is observed in terms of accuracy and details in the preparation of especially this kind of news. Inaccuracy and insufficient information lead to an increased perception of threat.

Pro-government, opposition and alternative media channels create their news contents according to the views they represent. Polarization and conflicting views in politics have repercussions in society and media; and antagonism is created on the topic of refugees and may even lead to hate speech. Russell King and Nancy Wood indicate that when the media in countries receiving refugees use the language of political parties and

7. Stanley Cohen (2011)

pro-government groups, this may result in dissemination of perception of “other”, “guilty” and “unwanted”. King and Wood refer to media as an important tool for giving a voice to the refugees and letting them speak their mind, however they add that it may also pave the way for racist behaviour by reversing the process and slowing down adaptation⁸.

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8. King and Wood (2002)



SCOPE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study was conducted in Turkey within the framework of a three-dimensional scan of the media:

1. Printed Media - National Newspapers

18 newspapers were examined through their web pages. A balanced selection is made in terms of opposition and pro-government newspapers for analysis.

Newspapers that can neither be defined as Pro-government nor Opposition	Pro-government Newspapers	Opposition:
Hürriyet	Sabah	Cumhuriyet
Milliyet	Star	Birgün
Posta	Yeni Şafak	SoL
Vatan	Akit	Evrensel
	Takvim	Agos
Opposition:	Opposition:	
Nationalist Newspapers	Conservative ("Islamist") Newspapers	
Yeniçağ	Milli Gazete	
Sözcü		

2. Printed Media - Local Media

Local media study was conducted in 9 provinces intensively populated by Syrians (Adana, Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Mersin, Ankara, Izmir) through the websites of local media organizations.

47 local newspapers were examined, names and provinces of which can

be found in the following list below:

Adana

Adana, Ekpres, Yeni Adana, Ceyhan Mavi, Söz, 5 Ocak, Günaydın
Adana, Refleks Newspaper, Kent Adana

Adiyaman

Gölbaşı, Adiyaman Güne Bakış, Besni Yeni Bakış, Kahta Gerçek

Gaziantep

Güncel, Nizip Denge, Telgraf

Hatay

Antakya, Özyurt, Atayurt, İskenderun Ses

Kahramanmaraş

Kahramanmaras, Kahramanmaraş'ta Bugün, Yorum, Yen Afşin

Kilis

Kilis Postası, Hududeli

Mersin

Mersin, Mersin Haberci, Mersin İstikbal, Tarsus Haber, Demokrat
Mersin

Şanlıurfa

Şanlıurfa Olay, Urfa Haber, Şanlıurfa, Gap Gündemi.

3. Visual Media (TV Channels)

CNN Turk, NTV, HABERTURK, TRT, ATV, KANAL D



CONCLUSIONS

The media coverage of Syrian refugees has generally been very low since the day people started arriving in Turkey. There is poor news coverage about refugees except for the sinking refugee ships in the Aegean Sea and the “EU-Turkey Agreement periods”. Low representation in media has both positive and negative consequences. Negative aspect is that they have no voice, their problems, expectations and life conditions are not adequately known by the society, and they have no means of expressing themselves. On the other hand, the discourse of Turkish media against refugees may have a negative impact on the adaptation process by creating prejudices. Therefore, a positive consequence is averting conflicts that may arise between Turkish society and refugees by not attracting attention to the refugees and leaving them in the background. If they are covered on news consistently with negative incidents and adaptation issues, this may build a perception that they constantly create problems in the society. Consequently, the fact that they were excluded from media, except certain periods, rather than mentioning them in media with incomplete or inaccurate information and covering news that are open to manipulation, has prevented problems rising on the issues of social acceptance and cohesion. However, Syrian refugees spread to many cities and regions of Turkey over a long time and made a life for themselves. Though limited, they have access to certain rights and services which enable them to work, study and carry on with daily life. At this point, media almost never refers to the daily lives of Syrians in Turkey and the problems they encounter. Media should recognize and give a voice to them and make news describing their problems which might lead to a strengthened social cohesion.

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