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Turning Burden (Discourse) into Opportunity: The Situation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, and Impact on or Role in Local Economic Development

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Abstract

In the context of the ongoing military conflict inside Syria, a large number of Syrian refugees have taken refuge in the neighboring Turkey. The legal, administrative, economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of their presence in Turkey are subject to ongoing debate in the Turkish society, as well as among international institutions and civil society organizations. On one side, concerns are being raised by some parts of the society and politicians of the negative impact of the growing number of the Syrian refugees on the Turkish economy and society. On the other side, various NGOs and international organizations voice the alarming situation of these refugees that suffer from lack of a clear and benevolent legal and administrative framework, lack of channels of integration into Turkish society, and lack of opportunities of participating in the local economic life.

In the developed countries, with long-established immigration and integration policies, refugees benefit from better legal and administrative framework that helps to alleviate their problems. Also, sub-national (local and regional) governments in those countries play an important role in implementing integration policies for immigrants and refugees. One of the important aspects of such policy is the socio-economic insertion of immigrants and refugees, something that has positive impact on the local economic development.

In Turkey, the situation of Syrian refugees is aggravated not only by the general lack of adequate and sufficient policies designed and implemented by the central government and its agencies, but also by the absence of strategies of socio-economic insertion that would,

at least for a part, alleviate the situation of these refugees and prevent or lessen any negative impact on local economy.

Solving this problem is possible through taking a series of measures: Lifting, by the central government, of the existing legal and bureaucratic obstacles; Empowerment of local governments in dealing with refugees and international migrants in general; Development of specific policies jointly by the central government agencies, the local governments and various local economic actors, aiming at achieving active participation of Syrian refugees in the local economic life. Such approach would turn, at least partly, the burden of their presence into an opportunity, while also helping to prevent negative discourse in the media and in the local and national political circles towards the Syrian refugees. The paper makes analysis of the existing situation and outlines some possible solutions

Keywords: *Local Economic Development, Local Integration Policies, Refugees Burden, Socio-Economic Insertion, Syrian Refugees.*

Introduction

The Syrian armed conflict triggered a serious influx of refugees to neighborhood countries. The humanitarian situation inside and outside Syria is of grave concern, with growing domestic, regional, and international consequences. As the conflict enters its fourth year since spring 2011, insecurity, widespread violence and targeted persecutions continue to force the Syrians to seek safety and protection elsewhere. In the period of 2012 - 2013, the numbers of Syrians displaced within their homeland and seeking refugees in the five main host countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey) increased dramatically (Syrian Regional Response Plan, 2014).

The magnitude of the influx of the Syrian refugees into Turkey surpassed initial projections. According to a recent survey conducted by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), most of Syrian refugees come from the region close to the Syria-Turkish border, which is also the area of intense conflict. About 36 % of the Syrian refugees to Turkey are mostly located in the 20 camps in 10 cities and around 64 % of them live outside the refugee camps in various cities, including those 10. The number of Syrian refugees in the camps and registered outside the camps stands at over 219.081 and 405.458 respectively (UNHCR, 2014). The rapid increase in the flow of new arrivals from Syria has not subsided. The majority of Syrian refugees are residing independently in several cities near the border, mostly in Hatay, Gaziantep, Urfa, and Mardin provinces. Women and children (below 18 years) make up 76 % of the refugee population, while 24 % are men and above 18 years (AFAD, 2013).

Arrivals of new refugees are expected to continue through 2014. On this point, the principal response both from Turkish authorities and UN agencies will pose major challenges. In Turkey, the Syrian refugee response is managed by the government through

AFAD, in collaboration with UNHCR and other international institutions. Due to this particularity, the cooperation between those actors tends to depend on the dynamics of the situation. As the number of Syrian refugees steadily increases, Turkey appealed to the UN assistance¹. The growing number of refugees shows that Turkey cannot unilaterally deal with the crisis and needs collaboration with international organizations.

The large number of Syrian refugees has overwhelmed national structures and affected their capacity to cope with the needs of this population (Support to Life, 2013). In this respect, Jaeger (1989) provides sketches of the describing phenomenon on the new asylum seeker and reactions of the receiving states. He argues the states must to assess asylum seekers what they enjoyed adequate measure of “protection”. Turkey has signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention) and its additional 1967 Protocol, however it applied the “geographical limitation” meaning that Turkey applies the convention only to refugees coming from Europe². As result, the Syrians who have fled to Turkey cannot be considered refugees in the sense of Geneva Convention and therefore benefit from the universally accepted minimum rights prescribed by it. According to the policy of Turkish government they are considered as “guests”. This approach that limits the acceptance of refugees to those coming from Europe originate din the wish to welcome (only) the Turkish speaking minorities from the Balkans as well as other Muslim communities, such as Albanians, Bosnians, Circassians that were allowed to settle in Turkey, in the belief and expectation that they could easily assimilate into Turkish identity (Kirişci, 2007). This policy is also considered to be rooted in Ottoman history and Cold War politics (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). This situation limits the legal protection of refugees in Turkey.

Many Syrians have stated that their major complaint about the Turkish government is that they are not being granted refugee status and that “guest” status implies unpredictability about their presence in Turkey (Özden, 2013). Not being granted refugee status is an important factor that increases the vulnerability of the Syrians who have fled their country for political and humanitarian reasons. Access to education, social services, and employment are all rights guaranteed to refugees in Geneva Convention, however Turkey’s Temporary Protection Regime does not cover all the basic rights of refugees. It can be said that operating under such circumstances is not the most favorable context to work in. In other words, Turkish government has not carried out a policy towards Syrian based on a discourse of rights, but rather one based on “generosity”. Such a charitable approach rather than a right-based approach risks also to feed a negative public opinion in Turkey towards refugees.

¹ “Syrians Fleeing to Turkey are Stuck in Dreary Limbo”, *LA Times*, 8 April 2012.

² Turkey is the only country that has a geographic limitation on the 1967 Protocol to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees among all European countries (UNHCR, 2011). (COMPAS, <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/research/dynamics/turkish-migration-studies-group/project-briefs/>) In April 2005 the Turkish government introduced what is known as the ‘National Action Plan’, which ...foresees the removal of the geographical restriction denying the chance for Asian, African or Middle Eastern, etc refugees settling in Turkey on a permanent basis in 2012 (Danış, 2004: 91).

In the countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, such as Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, these refugees are often considered a “burden” on economic resources, and even as potentially leading to real dangers³. Some local people have expressed their discontent with the Turkish government allocating resources to the Syrians instead of Turkish citizens who are in need. Those of Syrians that entered Turkey with their valid passports can qualify for obtaining and renewing residence permit, which facilitates access to health and education services in Turkey. Non-camp refugees who do not possess a passport and who are not registered do not enjoy such benefits, and in practice large number of the Syrians do not possess passports due to the emergency situation in which they fled their country⁴. The admission of Syrians without passports at the official border crossing points is controlled by the Turkish Passport Control Police and is generally linked to the availability of places within the camps, with exceptions, e.g., for those requiring emergency medical treatment. Those who enter irregularly are later able to regularize their stay through registration at one of the AFAD Coordination Centers (UNHCR, 2013). Due to rapid population movement, the documents of the refugee population are often lost or destroyed, and, as a consequence, their registration remains one of the crucial issues. Due to lack of clear legal framework, such as provided according to Geneva Convention, the Syrian refugees face many difficulties in obtaining necessary documents, for example birth certificates for new-born babies or marriage certificates for those married while in Turkey, or school certificates etc.

Notwithstanding the increasing of influx number of refugee beyond prediction, Turkey has enjoyed a boost in its status as a “refugee-caring nation,” who has shouldered much of this burden alone. According to Turkish government officials, Turkey has spent over \$ 2 billion on assistance to Syrians and commit to providing high-quality assistance for the refugee living in the camps (Support to Life, 2013). In contrast, this big amount of funds not necessarily coupled with the adequate responses in refugee management. Obviously due to the fact that the armed conflict in Syria was not expected to last so long, Turkey lacks consistent and full-fledged integration policy towards the Syrian refugees that seem to be

³ See in this regards several articles and reports such as: “Can Lebanon Handle 3,000 Syrian Refugees a Day?”, Al-Akhbar English, 31.01.2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/18473> ; “Jordan's economic growth hit by Syrian refugee burden: central bank” Reuters, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, 29.10.2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/29/us-meast-investment-jordan-idUSBRE99S0PN20131029>; “Jordan: Local Perceptions on Syrian Refugees (Part 1/2)”, Fair Observer, Hana Asfour, 17.03.2014, <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/jordan-local-perceptions-syrian-refugees-68941>; “Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Economic risks and Opportunities”, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Moath Freihath, 26.01.2014, <http://arij.net/en/syrian-refugees-jordan-economic-risks-and-opportunities> ; Jordan responds to the economic impact of the Syrian refugee crisis, but is mitigating the effects possible?” Al Bawaba, 09.01.2014, <http://www.albawaba.com/business/jordan-syria-refugees-546088>, “Jordan's rural poor chafe under the burden of hosting Syrian refugees”, Al-Jazeera America, Rania Abouzeid, 21.10.2013, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/21/jordana-s-rural-poorchafeundertheburdenofhostingsyrianrefugees.html> . (all articles last accessed: 05.04.2014)

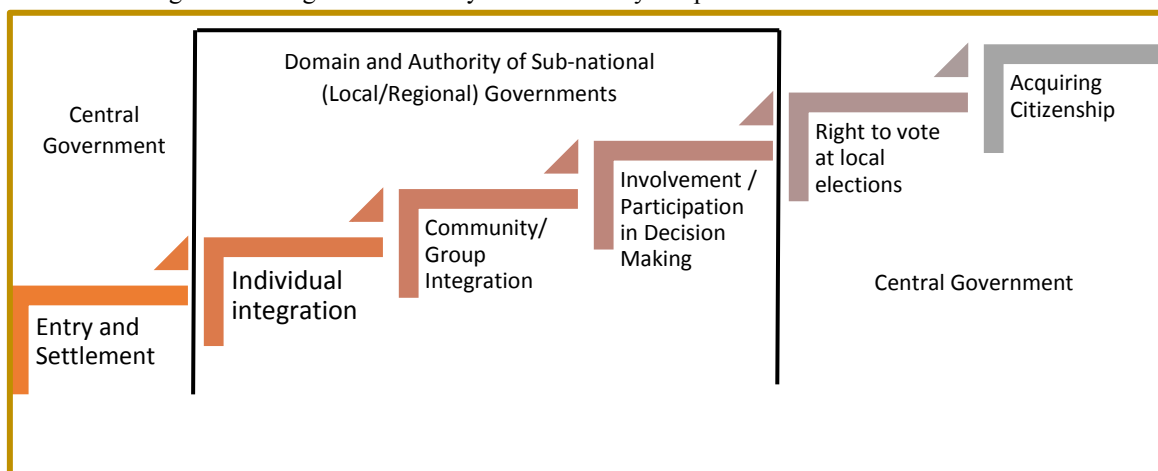
⁴ Syria Refugee Crisis: “We should be accepted as because we are humans”, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jul/25/syria-refugee-crisis-live-web-chat> (last accessed: March 25, 2014).

obliged to stay for long time. This situation reflects the overall lack of genuine integration policy towards migrants in Turkey, due to the fact that Turkey, both politically and administratively, has not fully internalized the fact that, with growing economy and improving life standards, is steadily becomes an immigration country.

In the West and in industrial countries there is an important experience accumulated through decades of managing immigration and integration of migrants in the society. The management of immigration and integration in the West and in particular in Europe has been subject of a certain division of roles between central governments and sub-national (local and regional) governments. Daoudov (2013) explains that in the developed countries, this division of roles and resulting complementarity is based on principles that immigration policy is managed by central governments, with increasing role of European Union, while policies related to the integration of migrants are implemented by local and regional governments. The sub-national governments are therefore seen as important stakeholders in policy-making in the overall field of international migration.

The whole process that an immigrant undergoes from his entry to a new country to acquisition of citizenship (the naturalization), when he legally ceases to be immigrant, can be analyzed in a form of “integration stairway” (see Figure 1). At the beginning and the end of the process there are the types of policies that are shaped and implemented by the central government, such as decisions on visas, residence permits, laws granting voting right or citizenship. In between, there is the realm of sub-national (local or regional) government policies that deal with the integration of immigrants, such as language or cultural courses, vocational training, employment, dialogue with immigrant associations, involvement of migrant communities in the local participative democracy processes. For that purpose sub-national governments are empowered and equipped to deal with the migrants’ needs.

Figure 1. “Integration Stairway” and Authority Scope of Sub-National Government



Source: Daoudov, 2013

Thus, sub-national governments play crucial role in managing diversity and ensuring equality of opportunities for the migrants, through set of policies as mentioned earlier. Local governments' impact on the migrants will be specifically beneficial in the following two areas (CLIP, 2008); i) services provided by the city administration and by the organizations to which it sub-contracts service provision, ii) access to employment within the city administration, including access to regular employment contracts, promotion, and good working conditions.

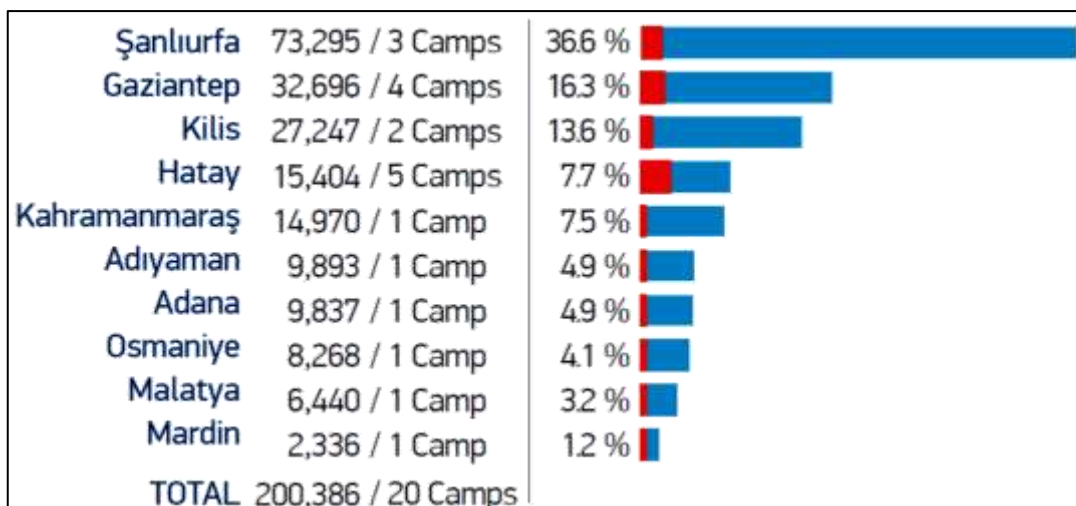
As a matter of fact, it is considered that the socio-economic integration of migrants is most successful if pursued in partnership with local governments. Local governments, as key actors in the local economic development, can develop specific policies build up the economic capacity of migrants, to integrate them into labor market and to benefit from their entrepreneurial skills. The local economic development strategies involve local government, private sector and non-profit sector, and local communities in joints efforts aiming at improving local economic conditions. It focuses on enhancing competitiveness, increasing sustainable growth, and ensuring that growth is inclusive (World Bank, 2013). Migrants form both an important partner and a target group for such policies.

The objective of this paper is to make analysis of the existing situation in Turkey in relation with Syrian refuges and outlines some possible solutions. While some research demonstrate the considerable efforts realized by the Turkish government for these refugees, this paper explores the specific ways that they can be involved in local economy and more particularly the role that local governments can play in integration of the migrants including their economic integration, this role being generally ignored. This issue has received insufficient scholarly and expertise attention in Turkey.

Capturing the Situation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

The precedent-setting case for the rapid increase in the inflow of new arrivals from Syria has not subsided. The majority of Syrian refugees are residing independently in major cities of Turkey. Since January 2013, the camps in Turkey have increased from 14 to 20 in 10 provinces hosting more than 200.386 Syrian refugees, which shows a dramatic increase.

Figure 2. The Number and Distribution Cities of Syrian Refugees



Source: AFAD Survey, 2013

All registered refugees are eligible to receive basic rights of education, health, and social services offered by AFAD. According to Turkish government circular, these refugees receive the same treatment as Turkish citizens, with the public authorities covering the costs. But, in practice, the influx of refugees has tested the ability of the system to serve all its constituents. Some refugees with chronic illness who are waiting registration and living outside the camps have complained that they cannot receive the care they need (Dinçer, et. al., 2013).

In another case, most non-camp Syrians are not registered, hence important information on their vulnerabilities is lacking. The protracted nature of the displacement means that refugees are exhausting their resources and struggling to make ends meet, with some reportedly engaging in negative coping mechanisms. Syrians who are living illegally in Turkey, and not registered as “guests”, pose unique challenges for the job market. They typically use their existing savings to rent small apartments, and they seek informal work opportunities in clothing factories, clothing stores, and construction (AFAD, 2013). According to Turkish government figures, one out four non-camp refugees lives in inadequate conditions or in an open area. About 62 % of Syrian refugees residing out-of-camp live together with at least 7 people in sometimes very crowded conditions. These types of living conditions are facing Syrian in almost all provinces in Turkey.

As mentioned, in developed countries based on the principles of Geneva Convention (see article 17 “Wage-Earning Employment” and article 18 “Self-Employment” of the Convention), the refugees are given “the most favourable treatment” in what concerns their access to labor market. As Syrians in Turkey are not eligible for refugee status, they are submitted to the same regime with other foreigners in what concerns obtaining working permit. In practice, the procedure of obtaining work permit require important volume of paper work, not easily accessible for the refugees in their situation, and it seems that Syrians in general do not have work permits. Without such legal work permit, Syrians that are obliged to work to sustain themselves are not only at the mercy of their employers when it comes to pay, but they also have no access to any social or medical assistance that comes with employment. Reports have surfaced of Turkish employers refusing to pay their Syrian employees, the latter not reporting these abuses for fear of being sent to the refugee camps. More than 80 companies in Osmaniye, Gaziantep, and Kilis have faced legal

proceedings for hiring illegal Syrian workers⁵. Increasing demand by Syrian illegals for informal jobs has meant lower wages and a more untenable cost of living.

For most refugees, educational credentials appear to be little help in finding jobs in Turkey. Even being a physician and doctor can be meaningless, especially if one lacks Turkish-language skills⁶. Moreover, bureaucratic barriers in recognizing diplomas or skills of refugees tend to be a serious obstacle for their potential integration into the labor market. In addition, Syrian students who obtained a high school diploma suffer from the problem of international recognition. Also, Syrian children that study at schools in Turkey do not receive official certificates. Instead, Turkish authorities apparently have applied to Libyan authorities for granting recognition certificates for primary education that Syrians received in Turkey, to circumvent the problem of lack of documents⁷. The department of education affairs of the Syrian interim government has been working to expand the recognition of the high school certificate to include most Arab countries as well as countries with the Friends of Syria group (The Syrian Observer, 2013). Indeed, many Syrian university students had the same problems in continuing their education⁸. But this year, the Turkish government allowed those students to continue their studies in Turkish universities after providing documents confirming registration at one of the Syrian universities, which may not be easy for all such students. In such a situation, highly skilled professionals or academicians try to earn money by informally teaching Arabic language to Turkish students, usually in the neighborhoods where they have settled in. Such obstacles in the education field would have been overcome should Turkey apply the principles of the Geneva Convention. Thus its article 22 “Public Education” the Convention stipulates that refugees shall be accorded the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education, while “treatment as favourable as possible” should be accorded in other levels of education and in the matter of recognition of certificates and diplomas.

The ability to identify with the content of an explanation, the media also bring significant impact to transfer and deliver information for the public sphere. Impressed by the role of media, we give the essential lesson for the society to be more responsible, informed, and keep up-to-date about the flow of information. In this context, the media's relationship with society is both reflexive, which is the media simultaneously affects and is affected by mass society. Acceptance of the influx of refugees and report of the current condition, crucially depends on

⁵ Metin Can, “Job Opportunities for the 40.000 Syrian Refugees Staying in Turkey,” *Sabah*, February 21, 2014, <http://english.sabah.com.tr/Economy/2014/02/21/job-opportunities-for-40000-syrian-refugees-staying-in-turkey>.

⁶ Tuğba Mezararkali, “Syrian Refugees No Longer Neighbors across Borders but Next Door,” *Today's Zaman*, August 8, 2013, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-323655-syrian-refugees-no-longer-neighbors-across-border-but-next-door.html>

⁷ This problem has been raised and criticized during the conference “The economic, social and cultural dimensions of Syrian refugees” organized by Istanbul Commerce University of on 19.12.2013, with the participation of one of the authors, Murat Daoudov.

⁸ Syrian Refugees and the Educational Challenge in Turkey, *The Syrian Observer*, <http://syrianobserver.com/Features/Features/Syrian+Refugees+and+the+Educational+Crisis+in+Turkey> (last accessed: March 24, 2014)

the justification, which is turn depend on the ways of media objection and portrayed in the news.

It can be pointed out that media has strong influence on how the refugees issue is apprehended in the society and by the government. Media explains persuasive and ambiguous images of “Syrian” in form of legitimate interest. Editorials strive to mobilize people do actions which help in strengthening the first place ideological and takes a cognitive perspective (Al-Sharoufi, 2010). For example, *Aljazeera America* or *Reuters*, as mentioned earlier, wrote their news reports about Syrian refugees in Jordan using titles that present them as “burden for Jordan’s economy”. Responsible and well-informed attitude by media plays crucial role in developing positive, rights-based attitude towards humanitarian aid in general and refugees in particular, while ignorant and even sensational approach by media can fuel negative sentiments towards them. Also, the refugee issue may be hijacked by ill-intentioned national and local politicians that wish to surf on nationalistic sentiments by making populist statements and using refugee issue as another battlefield against their political opponents, especially when criticizing the ruling political classes. Obviously, such discourses in the media are frequent in some Turkish media that plays on the sentiments of poor or unemployed Turks by presenting the humanitarian aid to Syrians as “the money wasted by the government”⁹.

The Significance of Migration to Local Economic Development

An important but unanswered question is the economic and social impact of Syrian refugees to the host country and whether they can be seen as bringing, potentially, any benefit for the host country. Throughout the history, migration has been intimately related to economic and social development. Assessments of the influence of migration on development have varied over time: sometimes migration has been seen as beneficial and the others side facing as detrimental of development, depending on the situation and circumstances. According to ICARA 1 (International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, 1981) highlighted the ‘burden’ that refugees place on their hosts: imposing additional costs and social welfare budgets, arresting economic growth, distorting markets, and causing environmental degradation. On the other hand, refugees also bring benefits for local development as well as new human capital and skills, expanding consumption, creating new patters of international trade, fostering innovation and cultural entrepreneurial activity, all of which stimulates the economic growth.

⁹ Examples of such approach are numerous in Turkish press. Here one self-speaking sample: “*Tayyip, Suriyeli mülteciler için ne kadar harcadı? Bu para; işsize maaş, emekliye aş öğrenciye burs, esnafa ve çiftçiye ucuz kredi olabilirdi*” (How much Money Tayyip [the Prime Minsiter of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan] has spent for Syrian refugees? This Money could be been spent as salary for unemployed, food for retired, stipend for student, cheap credit for craftsmen and farmers), Sözcü, Başak Kaya, 16.09.2013 <http://sozcu.com.tr/2013/gundem/tayyip-suriyeli-multeciler-icin-ne-kadar-harcadi-372007/> .

As mentioned earlier, in Europe the policies of integrating migrants into social and economic life of host societies is mainly the prerogative of the sub-national governments. The central governments and the European Union set the general framework related to the immigrants. One of the European/national policies that affect the immigrants is the anti-discrimination policies that seek to fight the obstacles for immigrants in accessing jobs because of their origin, race, color, religion etc. The distribution of roles in migration and integration management that confers to the local level the care about the integration component, combined with the European/nationally set anti-discrimination requirements, makes that sub-national/local governments have the dual obligation or motivation: on one side to prevent that migrants are overtly discriminated, on the other side make, by all available means, the integration of migrants into the society a successful process. For example, the law in all EU member countries requires cities/local governments to comply, at the very least, with the anti-discrimination provisions. The law may also require the monitoring of ethnic minorities' access to jobs and services. Some cities emphasized anti-discrimination law as a policy driver (CLIP, 2008). The range countries from which migrants originate in a given city may be truly diverse, notwithstanding that they may be predominantly be of a particular nationality. In Frankfurt, for example, migrants come from a staggering 174 countries. Notably, legal, demographic, and economic factor tend to primarily drive policies relating to employment (Rath J., 2011).

Promoting integration in local communities, for a long time the immigrants were largely viewed as cheap labor. Immigrants were predominantly depicted as low-skilled labor due of their limitation in the structure of economies. Only more recently has attention shifted towards immigrants who start their own businesses. Ethnic entrepreneurs promote immigrants for create their own jobs. Creating jobs even poor jobs helps alleviate unemployment among immigrants. Moreover, ethnic entrepreneurs often act as self-appointed leaders for their communities (Li, 1999).

European, central and local governments, as well as key institutions are attaching value to ethnic entrepreneurship as the way for turning into positive goals. It is interesting when migration is linked to new global economic transformation and the resulting restructuring of the labor force. In Europe, migrant find employment as domestic workers or creating jobs by open the small businesses.

Explaining cross-national variation in ethnic entrepreneurship strategies relates to national policies on immigrant integration produce the result of different conception of this context related about immigrant. Greece and Slovenia, for example, do not distinguish between nationals and immigrants in their legal framework. This policy merely support schemes of self-employment and citizenship rights.

Daoudov (2013) illustrates that in Turkey local governments are not legally empowered to deal with migrants and refugees. The notion of integration of migrants is very new for Turkish legal and administrative system at central government level, as this notion has only

been introduced by the recent new Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458 of 2013). This law gives a very limited role to local governments as actors among others that may advise the central governments on integration policy. No operational involvement has been foreseen for these by the related law. On the other side, the current legislation on local governments (laws on municipalities or special provincial administrations) do not provide legal framework for these dealing with foreigners, not to mention developing specific integration policies towards them. This lack of legal framework and of awareness of the role that local governments in developed countries play in the field does not allow benefiting from their potential role. Thus, when speaking about integration policies that cover dimensions such as social and cultural services, participatory local democracy, vocational training, support to entrepreneurship, the local governments in Turkey are the most qualified and well-equipped level of government to implement qualitative policies in the field. indeed, Turkish municipalities distinguish by increasingly developed social and cultural policy, by ready infrastructure of vocational training, by various innovative policies aiming at fostering local economic development and entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Although there was a big influx of refugee movements in the recent years, the conceptualization of the refugee issue in Turkey, and specifically the integration policies and the role of local governments in this respect have not received sufficient attention. Access to basic rights and overall legal framework is a major concern among the refugee population. While the growing number of Syrian refugees reveals the limitations of the Turkish temporary protection regime, migration and asylum remains one of the least elaborated dimensions of the Turkish policy nowadays.

To overcome the problems mentioned in the article, and in order to develop set of measures that would alleviate the socio-economic situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and would allow turning their presence into benefit for the local economy, several measures can be envisaged:

1. Lift the geographic restriction/limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention and fully apply the favorable legal regime to the Syrian refugees. This would solve the problem of documents related to the personal status of the refugees (birth, marriage etc.), as well as in other fields.
2. Lift the obligation of work permit for Syrian refugees. As mentioned, in accordance with the principles and the spirit of Geneva Convention, refugees shall be given favorable work regime. Notwithstanding the lifting or not of the geographic limitation, such decision can be taken by Turkish government, for the period of the armed conflict, for the sake of providing legal and clear framework for the work or Syrian refugees. This exemption from the obligation of obtaining work permit

would, on one side, allow this labor force contributing legally to the economy, rather feeding the informal economy, and, on the other side, would save the Ministry of Labor and Social Security from potentially huge amount of paper work related to processing individual work permit requests.

3. Solve the issue of certificates or diplomas in the education field by all possible means. This would include delivering certificates of primary/secondary education for the children going to schools in Turkey (whether schools organized by Syrian refugees or regular Turkish schools). Also, recognition of Syrian diplomas of all levels should be eased as much as possible. As for those unable to bring official proofs of their studies done in Syria, organize simplified exams that would allow them to qualify for diplomas for the same level of study in Turkey. Such possibilities exist in European countries, where refugees that can obtain homologation of their level of studies, based either on insufficient documents coupled with some exams, or in some cases even without any proving document, provided that the person succeeds in the exam.
4. Develop genuine integration policy in Turkey that takes into account the needs and the benefits of immigrant communities in general and of refugees in particular. Such policy would learn from the developed countries that have accumulated the experience through decades of migration management. Immigrants and in particular refugees should be provided full spectrum of services that allow them to acquire necessary skills for better integration into the host society, such as language courses, course on history of Turkey, its political, legal and administrative system, vocational training. Mechanism of involving them and their associations into the processes of participatory democracy at local level should be also developed.
5. Empower local governments to actively deal with immigrants in general and refugees in particular, by amending legislation related to local governments and developing necessary secondary legal instruments. This would in particular include the transfer of the implementation of the integration policy to local government level, while central government's role would be limited in this field to developing of standards and overseeing the policy implementation. The local governments would be able and encouraged to use their existing infrastructure and policies (e.g. social and cultural services) to serve immigrants and refugees, or to tailor them to the specific needs of these groups, or to develop new policies and tools when necessary.
6. Develop joint policies by central and local governments specifically aiming at fostering local economic integration of Syrian refugees. This would include developing specific joint policies and programs by the İŞKUR (Turkish National Employment Agency) and the local governments; as well as developing specific programs in this field by regional development agencies. These agencies are

governed by boards consisting of representatives of central and local governments, of business community and civil society, and are good platform for coordinated joint policy-making for the sake of turning the refugee issue into asset for local economic development. On the other side, local chambers of commerce and local governments can develop, together with other stakeholders, cooperative initiatives to support refugee-based entrepreneurship. Central government can also take active stance, by introducing encouraging measures, e.g. through favorable tax policies, for such initiatives.

7. One of the specific fields in which Syrian refugees could bring substantial benefit for the Turkish economy is the education and training field aiming at developing a workforce speaking Arabic language. It is a known fact that with growing economic and social interaction with the Arab countries, various Turkish sectors are in urgent need of Arabic speaking personnel that severely lacks. Incorporating Syrians in the schools and universities as teachers of Arabic language, as well as trainers of Arabic language and (business) culture in the various foreign trade and tourism business organizations and companies, or as Arabic speaking staff in the “intellectual and creative sectors” such as press and media, research, publishing, music, design, are only few examples of possible economic activity that can be generated by active involvement of skilled Syrian refugees.

In closing, the Syrian armed conflict and its repercussions on Turkey in terms of refugee influx can take long time. Turkey should revise its policies related to the matter preparing mid-to-long-term strategy dealing with the Syrian refugees. In the context of overall development of its new immigration and integration management policy, Turkey should make focus on successful integration of Syrians refugees. In this context, it would be particularly beneficial to focus on policies and measures of their economic integration, thus alleviating their situation and turning their presence on the territory into economic benefit. Local governments should be seen as important stakeholders in this policy; they should be legally empowered and practically encouraged to deal with the integration of immigrants and refugees into local communities. One of the main concerns should be the economic integration of Syrians, something that should be achieved by joint and coordinated efforts by central government, local governments, private sector and civil society.

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