

## Forced deportation of Syrians in Turkey

August 13-2019

Syrian refugees have recently witnessed a significant change in the Turkish government's policy towards their legal status. The Syrian Civic Platform has been monitoring the change in Turkish policy towards refugees. This paper attempts to highlight the most important developments regarding the situation of Syrian refugees.

### Legal Status of Syrians in Turkey:

The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, according to the Turkish Immigration Service in 2019, exceeded 3,649,000 Syrian refugees. Most of them are in the city of Istanbul (an estimated (547,000)). The Turkish government has launched a massive security crackdown to ensure that the status of Syrians in Turkey is legal.

The legal status of Syrians present on Turkish territory is governed by three types of residency:

1. The first are those who entered legally and through the border outlets and applied for tourist residency.
2. The second are those who entered Turkey illegally across the border as a result of the war and applied for temporary protection.
3. The third are those who received work permits, which is only available to those previous residence holders.

### Turkish policy towards refugees:

During the years of the Syrian crisis, Turkish policy towards Syrian refugees has stagnated from lenient to more severe.

There has been a lack of clarity and confusion for Syrians on Turkish policy and the decisions of the Turkish government for years. Many Syrians struggle to earn a living in Turkey in the absence of stable income for them. There is also abuse and exploitation of Syrians as laws and government decisions are quickly changed and enacted without warning or opportunities for Syrians to try to better comply with new regulations. The most recent example of this abuse, has been the massive security crackdown that began in July to investigate Syrians who doesn't have legal documents in Istanbul.

These arrests were accompanied by apparent violence and abuse by police and security personnel. Most of those arrested or detained were returned to the Syrian province of Idlib after being forced to sign voluntary return papers under violence and coercion. These people were not given any prior warning of their deportation. As of August 10, 2019, there were approximately 28,238 deportees, primarily to Idlib.

**Hassan, a graduate of the Faculty of Economics who was living in Esenyurt district in Istanbul, said: "I went out on Thursday (July 4, 2019), to the market near my house to buy some things. The Turkish police stopped me and asked me for a temporary protection card. I was carrying a protection card registered in Urfa. I asked them to speak with my wife and tell her (she is nine-months pregnant) but they refused. Then the officer said that after a simple procedure they would take me back. They took**

**me and some other young men to the nearest police station. We were forced to leave to Syria by bus."**

The types of Syrians caught by the Turkish security forces are those who do not hold any Turkish legal document, reside in provinces other than those that issued them with a temporary protection card, or work without a work permit.

**Ahmed Mamdouh has been living in the Bayazit area in Istanbul for approximately four years and he told us: "The police raided our work on Monday, July 8, 2019. The owner of the factory smuggled some of the workers from the back door, and those who couldn't escape were arrested. I stayed because I thought my papers were legal because I have a temporary protection card registered in Istanbul but despite the intervention of the owner of the factory, I was arrested and deported to northern Syria under inhumane conditions, leaving behind my family and my work."**

The effects of this campaign on Syrian refugees:

- The campaign launched by the Turkish government was accompanied by an escalation of racist hate speech against Syrian refugees, including the spread of false rumors and news about them.
- Many Syrians live in other provinces other than those they are registered. The main reason for this is their need to work, since Syrians do not receive social welfare from the Turkish Government and only a few benefit from the support of international humanitarian organizations. The recent clampdown on Syrians in Istanbul will increase the tragic situation of Syrian families if there are no alternative plans to create jobs for them in the Turkish provinces to which they are being transferred.
- The new procedures separate Syrian families, with many cases recorded with the refugee returned to Syria without consideration for their families in Turkey.
- There are significant potential threats to the lives of Syrians being returned to Syria from militant organizations and ongoing fighting and shelling throughout the northwest of Syria.
- Despite the intervention of many Syrian and Turkish organizations as well as assurances from the Turkish government that detained Syrian refugees and their families will have time to settle their legal status with the police, the return of Syrians to Syria has continued.

**Salwa is based in Istanbul with her family. She says that her husband was deported to Konya where his temporary protection card was registered. He did not find work there and she was forced to work in a shoe factory with low salaries and long hours. She says: *"We are seriously considering going back to Syria. In Turkey we live in a state of permanent fear of being in possible violation of laws that may be passed. I can't even travel to see my husband because I haven't been granted a travel permit even though I have submitted all the required papers."***

These recent measures by the Turkish government do not tack in consideration the minimum rights and respect to the presence of refugees on its territory, which should protect refugees from forced return.

The Syrian Civic Platform calls on the Turkish government to deal with the issue of Syrian refugees on its territory in a manner that takes into account the interests of the refugees who continue to suffer from the ongoing war in Syria and recommends:

1. Immediately stop all forms of deportation to Syria, and reopen investigations into confessional papers signed by refugees when being returned by the police to Syria; many of whom were forcibly returned.
2. Facilitate procedures for issuing work permits by the Turkish government, and give an exception status to Syrians in this regard.
3. Work with the UN and international humanitarian organizations to create projects and work facilities for Syrian refugees in Turkey and in provinces where there are no job opportunities.
4. Work with the UN to consider the Syrians on Turkish territory and in neighboring countries as refugees and not under the terms of temporary residence, nor to consider Syrians as an opportunity to apply political pressure.