

## AN INQUIRY INTO SOCIO-SPATIAL SEGREGATION: CASE OF SYRIAN URBAN REFUGEES IN TURKISH BORDER CITY

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*Massive influx of displaced people into urban areas reshapes cities' economic, social, political and spatial structures. This research creates a broader understanding of the displaced person phenomenon as one of the main drivers of the urban transformation through analyzing formation of urban marginality in the case of Syrian refugees in a Turkish border city, Gaziantep. This paper uses the findings from the fieldwork that I conducted in Gaziantep including in-depth interviews with both refugee and host communities, and a series of mapping exercises showing the spatial distribution of urban refugee in the city. The urban marginalization explored in the research reveals that the city itself as a social and physical entity is as important as policy interventions in the integration process of refugees.*

### 1. Introduction

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that more than half of the world's 10.5 million refugees live in the urban settings rather than the designated camp-based settlements (UNHCR, 2009). In other words, almost 5,5 million people have fled into cities, creating new forms of urban marginality and inequality. Cities are being reshaped by diversity, conflict and rapid population growth due to urban refugees, yet urban studies still fail to address the question of displaced people. Undocumented refugees in urban areas are considered to be the most vulnerable group due to their inability to claim any right or justice (Grabska, 2006). I argue that if we are to discuss spatial social justice in cities for refugees and other persons of concern, we need to understand the mechanism and the facilitators behind the social and spatial inequalities. This paper aims to create a broader understanding of the displaced person phenomenon as one of the main drivers of the urban transformation through analyzing formation of urban marginality in the case of Syrian refugees in a Turkish border city, Gaziantep.

Since the first uprising against the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria there has been an ongoing-armed conflict between different rebel groups and the government that cause destruction of urban settlements and massive displacement of local population to Syria's neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. UNHCR (2015) reported that Turkey is hosting 1,759,846 Syrian refugees and as expected, more than 70% of them live in cities and towns as urban refugees (AFAD, 2013). What does it mean for the city? How does the displaced population establish their lives in the urban area and consequently transform the urban fabric? These two key questions have become the standpoint of this research.

This paper analyzes the social and spatial transformation in Gaziantep, Turkey as the most affected area from the massive urban refugee influx (Figure 1). Within the research framework, I define the transformation as a mutual process in which displaced population produces a new spatiality constituted through their social, economic and spatial activities, and simultaneously this new formation reshapes the city's existing structure. Urban spaces are not only social and physical configurations in the city but also critical political entities of the urban fabric (Sanyal, 2014). Although the perceived transformation is predominantly marginalization, the process of segregation is rather complicated with multiple actors, institutions and political forces. Unfolding the marginalization requires an agenda that enables the understanding of different facilitators and their interrelationships. The major organizers of urban refugee's restructuring in the city, as seen in this paper, are refugee policies and the city itself as a socioeconomic and physical entity.



Figure 1. Density of Syrian Urban Refugees in Southeast Turkey

## 2. Related Research

Research on refugee integration requires interdisciplinary approaches combining various branches of social sciences including political science, economics, sociology, anthropology and urban studies (Castles *et al.*, 2002). This paper particularly focuses on the relationship among refugees, urban marginality and the city in order to bridge the gap between forced displacement studies and urban studies. Integration level of refugees defines the extension and model of transformation in urban areas; therefore providing a definition of integration is critical for the purposes of this paper. The concept of integration is ambiguous and controversial because it has been described in various ways by different disciplines. Other terms such as assimilation, acculturation and inclusion have also been studied and used instead of integration (*ibid.*). Berry (1997) defined integration as a mutual accommodation situation where both host and refugee populations maintain their original cultures and identities while connecting with the broader society through daily interactions. The concept becomes more complicated when different modes of integration such as social, cultural, economic and political are considered. Besides the objective dimensions of adaptation such as employment and education, refugees' perception on their integration is a critical subjective indicator for understanding and measuring the success of integration (Montgomery, 1997). Different definitions, standards, and measures used in refugee literature do not only affect the scholarly research but also influence the policy decisions and implementations in practice (Korac, 2003). Building upon these arguments, I define the integration with spatial, economic and social equality and inclusion as well as perceptual integration of both populations.

A significant portion of refugees build informal livelihood in urban settings through their engagement with illegal employment and trade. A case study in Eastleigh, Nairobi where the population was composed of predominantly Somali refugees revealed that the urban refugees built trade networks and business in the informal economy and eventually started providing employment for the host society (Campbell, 2006). Similarly, according to a research on Sudanese refugees in Egypt, despite of the economic, social and political marginalization of refugee population, Sudanese refugees reshaped the urban spaces in Cairo (Grabska, 2006). They established schools, centers and housing networks as a new spatial layer in Egypt. Consequently, they became social and economic actors of the society as well as important labor resource for the economy.

Integration process of the displaced people into the host community largely depends on the efficiency of the policy intervention. However, the major challenge is that host governments do not usually recognize urban refugee rights in policy (Buscher, 2001). Even in the circumstances where there are proper institutional integration programs and legal frameworks, mode of integration greatly varies based on the success of programs and policy terms. A comparative research on Yugoslavian refugees in Netherland and Italy shows that policy frameworks and reception strategies of the countries shape the perception towards the refugees in the new societies, which eventually affects the social and economic inclusion of the newcomers (Korac, 2003). Besides the impacts of policy concepts, Reitz (2002) points out that existing social structure of the receiving society is a critical factor for the

inclusion of the migrants. Established ethnic and racial communities as well as the existing immigrant groups in the society create a social framework where the diversity helps the integration process of the newcomers.

### 3. Gaziantep, Turkey

Gaziantep is the financial center of the Southeastern Anatolia and the largest city in the region. Between 1990 and 2000, the population was increased by 31.25% due to immigration related to economic growth (TUIK, 2005). In 2008, 1 out of 3 people was rural immigrant and 69.5% of these people immigrated because of economic purposes (Genis and Adas, 2011). Consequently, Gaziantep as an internal migration-receiving city has been struggling with housing and employment problems. In 2011 when the refugee influx began, the population of the city was 1.753.596 and the official unemployment rate was around 16%. Because of the high unrecorded employment in the city, the actual rate of unemployment is unknown.

The first influx of Syrians fled across the border to Turkey in April 2011 and In October 2011, Turkey declared an open door policy for Syrian refugees and established a legal framework known as the temporary protection (Dincer *et al.*, 2014). Majority of the refugees came from the regions close to the Turkish-Syrian border including Aleppo, Idlep and Raqqa. Close to half of them indicated that their homes in Syria were not inhabitable due to the severe damage. Many of refugees showed security reasons for their departure and a smaller portion of them reported political reasons (AFAD, 2013). The number of Syrians that crossed Turkish border has dramatically risen with the increasing use of violence. Gaziantep, a city in southeastern Turkey, has become the destination for displaced Syrians due to its economic resources and its proximity to the border. The number of registered refugees in the Gaziantep is 314,917, as 240,000 of them being urban refugees out of camps (GMM, 2014). Because of the open door policy, the exact number of displaced people out of camp settings is unknown. However, many local authorities claim that the real number of Syrian migrants is far more than the official records including the undocumented refugees.

### 4. Research Questions

The framework of this research is built on a number of questions. What are the main drivers behind urban marginalization of refugees? How does the city's existing socioeconomic and spatial structure affect the urbanization process of refugees? What determines the spatial distribution of displaced population in the lack of policy implementation? How do the policy terms associated with refugees contribute to the integration or marginalization process? In order to answer these questions, I conducted a field investigation in Gaziantep during August 2014. Fieldwork included series of mapping exercises showing the general spatial distribution of urban refugees in the city and extensive in-depth interviews with the key informants from both refugee and host communities.

In parallel, and complementary to the field investigation, I analyzed the refugee policies, socioeconomic profiles, and spatial distributions of refugees. The study method had four components. The first part was to focus on overall process of social exclusion by using findings from the interviews. The second part was to analyze local refugee policies in relation to their roles in urban marginalization process. The third part was to compare socioeconomic identities of host and refugee population. Finally, the fourth part was to examine mapping studies produced during fieldwork in order to explore formation of new spatial patterns and configurations.

### 5. Field Investigation

As a part of the fieldwork in Gaziantep, I conducted open-ended interviews with Syrian refugees and members of receiving community. The main goal was to map the process of social exclusion in a chronological order and to explore the reasons of segregation. In the literature, qualitative interviewing is a common method for refugee research and mostly focuses on the voices of

refugees, their experiences and subjective evaluation of their integration. However, this approach ignores that integration is a mutual phenomenon since it disregards the perspective of existing population. Therefore, this research is based on the voices of both newcomers and existing community. While the interviews with refugees intended to gain information about their use of city, economic activities and the settlement locations since they crossed the border, the interviews with the local residents focused on their interaction with the migrant population.

Despite the availability of camp residency, Syrian refugees preferred to live in non-camp settings because they already had relatives and business contacts in the city. The economic relations across the border over the years have created kinship relationships between the Turkish and Syrian communities, and many refugees used their family routes upon arrival in Turkey. When the refugee inflow began in 2011 and the population of urban refugee was considerably small, integration of displaced people with the host society was established through pre-existing networks. Humanitarian support by the local community provided housing and livelihood for the newcomers thus they gradually constructed their lives in the city. The successful integration of the first Syrian community has led to subsequent chain migration of refugees into the urban areas. However, growing population of forced immigrants in the city started to have severe impacts on housing and labor markets.

Urban refugees are obligated to find their own accommodation, in spite of the refugees in the camps settings who are provided with shelters and basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. High demand on housing led to extreme rise in rental prices and housing scarcity, which had been an already-existing problem in Gaziantep. According to the interview with the President of the Association of Real-Estate Agencies, monthly rents for apartment units increased from 300 TRY to 900 TRY in 2013. Housing market problems emerged as a potential source of tension between refugee and the host community. One Turkish interviewee, a landlord, explained that she rented her apartment to a 7-person Syrian family, however, the family began hosting other refugees and the total number of people in the apartment went up to 20, causing unrest and infrastructural problems in the building. Similar stories indicated unwillingness to rent housing to the urban refugees. On the other hand, many refugee respondents stated that illegal status of tenant-landlord arrangements caused exploitation and abuse of the refugees. High rental prices, scarcity of housing, and discrimination against the refugees have forced Syrians to find shelters in public parks, abandoned buildings and vacant areas of buildings such as garages, roof terraces and storage rooms (Figure 2). As a result, the Syrian population is largely located in the inner city, where they find vacant buildings and ruins.



Figure 2. Left: A vacant house occupied by 30 Syrian refugees.  
Right: A vacant garage used as a market place by a Syrian refugee

Besides the housing problems, another dramatic impact of rapid population growth is on the labor market. Because the Turkish Government does not issue work permits for the refugee status, Syrians built up illegal livelihoods in urban settings. Many Turkish business owners took advantage from

refugees' inability to engage in formal employment, and forced them to work under exploitative conditions. The data collected from the interviews shows that the urban refugees provided labor at below market rates without demanding any benefits from the employers. Consequently, refugee workers replaced local workers and unemployment rate in the host society increased dramatically. During the fieldwork, I interviewed Turkish employers from three different businesses. The first respondent, owner of a contract manufacturing business, stated that when he saw that Syrians provide the same quality of work at a lower salary, he started to hire them. Over time, because of the language barrier he had to make a decision to have either all Turkish employers or all Syrians so that they could communicate with each other. At the time of the interview, all the workers were undocumented Syrian refugees who replaced Turkish workers. The second respondent, owner of a pistachio orchard, said that he hired both Turks and Syrians as temporary agricultural workers. Although they worked for exactly the same hours, Turkish workers earned 35TL per day, and Syrian workers earned 18TL. The third respondent, owner of a small grocery store in the city center, stated that he is going out of business because the new residents of the area, Syrian urban refugees, preferred to go to Syrian-owned shops. Turkish interviewees mentioned the existence of "Little Aleppo" or "Little Syria" in the city as the second commercial center that belongs to the refugee community. As a result, both receiving and migrant population are severely damaged by the lack of refugee employment policy. In the case of refugees, they are subject to exploitative employment conditions and serious protection problems, which creates hatred towards the host country and society. On the other hand, local community holds refugees responsible for rising unemployment rate and lack of labor opportunities.

Growing unemployment and rising rents due to the increasing demand by the urban refugees gave rise to social tensions and protests against the Syrian population in Gaziantep. Threats against Syrians have also impacted daily lives and routines. One Syrian informant stated that he had to sell his car that had Syrian license plate because the car was attacked several times by Turkish people. Another Syrian interviewee explained that they did not feel secure going outside of their home because their Turkish neighbors threatened them with eviction. Multi-dimensional conflicts have emerged gradually through complications in housing and labor markets. Findings of the fieldwork indicate that social tension is an outcome of a 2-year long interaction between host and refugee communities.

## 5.1 Refugee Analysis

What is the contribution of policies related to urban refugees in the process of social and spatial transformation of the city? Refugee policy terms have various levels of involvement with either the marginalization or the inclusion of refugee communities. The subject of policy can be discussed in multiple scales such as UN policies or Turkish Government policies as well as specific policies including border, security or registration strategies. For the purposes of this paper, I chose the policy decisions that have direct impacts on the social, economic and spatial restructuring of the new population in Gaziantep. I used the policy reports provided by the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, City Council (2014) because they primarily organize the urban life of refugees.

The Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality classified the complications with refugee influx as security, housing, health, social, environmental, education and economic problems. On the municipal reports, policy proposals and decisions are introduced for each problem statement. In terms of housing, the local policy focuses on the relationship between homeowner/landlord and refugee tenants and introduces a legal framework for contracts and rent control by the municipal authorities. The framework also requires landlords to only rent their properties to the registered refugees in order to encourage them to legalize their status. Although there are policy proposals to build affordable housing for the refugees, there hasn't been a serious attempt to put it into practice. Policy response to refugees' accommodation problems does not address the most serious problems of inadequate housing and refugee right to housing, although they remain effective on reducing conflicts of landlord-refugee tenant relations.

Employment policy introduces two critical points: first, the policy avoids generating a pull factor for the future immigration and second, it aims to preserve the civil peace and prevent social conflict. The

policy suggests that every institution can only have 10% of its employees to be Syrian who should have the same employment rights with Turkish citizens including the insurance plan and the minimum wage. Similar to the housing policy, employment strategies also fail to address the broader problem of unemployment and the exploitative employment conditions. There is also a number of unanswered questions remain as potential sources of future conflicts: what will happen to the thousands of urban refugees who are already employed illegally? Under what condition urban refugee will gain legal work permit? Besides the potential conflicts, the policy doesn't make any recommendation on when the policy goes into operation and who is responsible for controlling the employment conditions.

In the case of public services, urban refugees have been holding free access to medical care and education. Although refugees' access to state hospitals has been a successful implication, access to education has failed because of the language barrier and the curriculum differences. The only policy that is directly targeting the integration process is the language program in which the municipality runs campaigns for encouraging refugees to learn Turkish language.

Refugee studies scholars advocate gaining legal status for refugees as an important step towards sustainable and permanent solutions (Grabska, 2006), which is also embraced by the Gaziantep Municipality. Through the policy interventions in employment and housing, Syrian urban refugees are obligated to obtain legal status in the city. However, overall evaluation of refugee strategies shows that refugee integration into the receiving society has not been the part of policy approaches. The lack of state-led attempts on integration results in severe social and spatial segregation and creates isolated refugee communities. Moreover, The Turkish government has been criticized for inadequate governmental policy that causes the weak coordination between local and global humanitarian help (Dincer *et al.*, 2013).

## 5.2 City as a Social Entity

How does the city's existing socioeconomic structure affect the urbanization process of refugees? The city as a social entity plays a critical role in the integration process of refugees. Depending on how similar or different the newcomers and local people are, social and economic conflicts may rise between communities and eventually lead to segregation of refugees. Republic of Turkey Prima Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) conducted a profiling survey in 2013 as face-to-face interviews with the refugees. By using AFAD survey results (2013), I conducted comparative analysis between the host and the refugee communities based on the indicators directly related to housing and employment focuses.

	REFUGEE POPULATION	RECEIVING POPULATION
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	6.2 PEOPLE	4.8 PEOPLE
GENDER DISTRIBUTION	MALE: 51.4 FEMALE: 48.6	MALE: 51 FEMALE: 49
WORKING AGE (19-54)	45%	44.50%
ILLITERATE	18.80%	14.20%
SCHOOLING	72%	85.10%

Table 1. Comparison between refugee and receiving populations

Table 1 shows the comparison list based on education level, age distribution, household size and gender distribution. Within the employment subject, the most crucial finding is on the age distribution showing that in both communities the working age group forms the largest proportion of the total with %45 for the refugees and %44,5 for the receiving society. Massive influx of working age population into the city added heavy pressure to the existing unemployment problems. In the matter of urban refugees settlement, critical benchmarking factor is the greater household size of the refugee population, which creates a new layer of settlement problem. Housing typology in the region is developed in accordance with the typical household size of the local population, thus both building infrastructure and the models of housing units are not capable of hosting larger number of people. In addition to the similar age distribution, both populations have greater percentage of male and

education level is slightly lower in the refugee community, which indicates that the two populations share similar demographic characteristics. A case study of community relations in a refugee settlement shows that similar identities in terms of gender, age and language help the interactions among refugees, migrants and existing residents, and provide close relationships across differences (Dale, 2007). However the case of Syrian refugees in Gaziantep has a reverse situation because the similar identities compete for the same social, economic and educational resources in the city, which causes social tensions and segregation of refugees.

### 5.3 City as a Spatial Entity

What determines the spatial distribution of displaced population in the lack of state-led resettlement process? The mapping exercises that are produced as a part of fieldwork show that the urban fabric facilitates the distribution pattern of refugees. Existing spatial configurations in the city become the pull and push factors that determine the movement directions and the settlement areas. The major challenge of the mapping study was the lack of data on refugees; hence the study relied on the qualitative data collected during the fieldwork. Data collection involved interviews with municipal authorities, real estate specialists and NGO members as well as Syrian urban refugees who were asked to explain their reasons why they chose to reside in the particular neighborhood. Refugee respondents were also asked questions targeting to understand their use of city, such as the places they go more often, which streets they know in the city, what kind of transportation they use, and where they go to socialize.



Figure 3. The map of Gaziantep, areas of urban refugee settlements.

As shown in the Figure 3, spatial organization has a main spine that became the attractor point pulling new refugees to the surrounded area. The main spine, namely Inonu Street, is the commercial and business center of the refugee community in the city. Most of the businesses on the street are either owned or managed by Syrians. Main reasons that made this area an attractor point are the pre-existing Syrian-owned businesses that were located in the area before the refugee influx and the intercity bus, which is the main gate to the city for the people who cross the border from Syria. The secondary neighborhoods that have high refugee populations are the existing marginalized areas and urban poor shown as area 1, area 2, area 3 and area 4 on the map.

Besides the Inonu Street as the commercial center, small sized industry has the largest number of

Syrian workers. Area 5 became the refugee worker zone where most of the small sized factories are located in the city. Although this area is defined as the business zone, refugees work all around the city in various businesses, which is very difficult to map due to undocumented refugee employment. In the case of public space use, interviews showed that public park-1, public park 2, public park 3 and public park 4 are mostly used by Syrian population. Figure 4 attempts to visualize possible flows in the city by connecting public spaces with housing and business zones of refugees.



Figure 4. The map of Gaziantep, public space use of Syrian urban refugees

To sum up, urban fabric is the main organizer of refugees' spatial distribution in the urban settings. Mapping analysis demonstrates a number of notable spatial features of urban refugees.

- Urbanization of refugees is centered on a business main spine.
- Transit stations and its surrounding areas are pull factors for urban refugees.
- Neighborhoods of urban poor and ethnic communities are pull factors.
- Neighborhoods where vacant houses are available are pull factors.
- Small industry sites and service sector zones are pull factors.

## 6. Conclusions and Discussion

Massive influx of displaced people into urban areas reshapes the cities' economic, social, political and spatial structures. Systematic analysis of refugee segregation in this paper demonstrates that the generators of urban refugee marginality are multifaceted with complex interrelationships and require interdisciplinary research. A new layer of urban marginality and inequality is emerged in Gaziantep through social and spatial exclusion of Syrian urban refugees. This paper documents that social exclusion of refugees is not an immediate outcome; rather a gradual process with multiple actors and factors. The drivers of social exclusion in the case of Syrian urban refugees are the conflicts emerged from the labor market and housing issues. These problems can only be addressed with proper policy regulations that recognize refugee's right to housing and employment.



This research also reveals that understanding and analyzing the spatial distribution of refugees is a significant component of the refugee research because it identifies the potential areas of marginalization. Spatial organization of the refugees in the urban settings is highly dominated by the pull and push factors of the city's spatial configurations such as existing urban poor, neighborhoods of the same ethnicity and transit stations as the entry points of the city. This key finding about the role of city's spatial fabric in refugee integration brings up two critical questions for future studies: Is there a typical spatial model that urban displaced population produce? Can we predict the spatial distribution of urban refugees before the migration begins? I argue that successful integration strategies and policy concepts rely on the understanding of the distribution patterns of displaced population in urban areas together with their facilitators.

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