

Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Long Road Ahead

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Turkey now hosts the world's largest community of Syrians displaced by the ongoing conflict in their country. According to United Nations estimates, Turkey's Syrian refugee population was more than 3.1 million as of mid-September 2017. Turkish reception policies at the outset were predicated on the assumption that the conflict would come to a swift conclusion, allowing the displaced Syrians to return home, but as conditions continue to deteriorate in Syria and the conflict stretches into its seventh year, it has become clear that a shift in policy to encompass longer-term solutions is needed.

The Syrian refugee crisis arose as the Turkish government was in the midst of overhauling its immigration system to meet international—and, particularly, European Union—standards. The implementation of these reforms has limited Turkish authorities' capacity to manage the Syrian inflows, and as a result, management of the crisis was left largely in the hands of national organizations working on the ground, in camps, without larger policy guidance. Meanwhile, based on the 1951 Convention formal immigration channels, including recognition of refugee status, remain restricted to Europeans, while non-Europeans receive temporary protection status and are expected at some point to resettle in a third country.

This lecture provides an overview of Turkey's migration landscape and the position of Syrian refugees in Turkey today. It also offers an assessment of current policy approaches toward displaced Syrians in Turkey, looking at changes in Turkey's asylum and protection regime before discussing ongoing challenges and future policy directions in this area. Finally, it discusses policy recommendations—both for Turkey and for other states—given the likelihood of long-term or permanent displacement for Syrians.

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