

# A More Effective Refugee Policy: Reinvestigating the Socio-Economic Composition of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

CHING-AN CHANG

National Chengchi University, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

ORCID No: 0000-0002-8383-6377

**ABSTRACT** *This paper analyzes the socio-economic composition of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the potential it offers for facilitating the planning of refugee policy. The most severe humanitarian crisis since WWII, the Syrian conflict has already lasted for more than 10 years. Turkey is hosting almost four million Syrians –more than any other country. Given the prolonged nature of the conflict and the slim hope of a quick resolution, various studies and reports have suggested that Turkey should develop a policy of integration. While most of the literature on Syrian refugees has categorized them as homogenous people in need, the findings from this study suggest that the socio-economic composition of Syrian refugees is diversified and can affect the kind of refugee policy that could be implemented. This paper argues that reinvestigating the group’s diversified socio-economic composition could facilitate the planning of an effective refugee policy in Turkey.*

**Keywords:** Syrian Refugees, Turkey, Integration, Socio-Economic Composition, Policies of Inclusion

**Insight Turkey 2022**

Vol. 24 / No. 1 / pp. 135-152

Received Date: 01/28/2021 • Accepted Date: 11/11/2021 • DOI: 10.25253/99.2022241.8

## Introduction

**A**fter the eruption of the Syrian uprising in 2011, millions of Syrians were forced to flee to neighboring countries. Turkey hosts almost four million Syrian refugees –the highest number of any country<sup>1</sup>– yet the hospitality of the Turkish government and its people have created many internal issues. Various studies and reports have identified the challenges the country has encountered as a result of the arrival of the Syrians; these include economic deterioration, environmental damage, and cultural confrontations.<sup>2</sup> Because all hope has been lost for seeing a mass return of Syrians to their home country in the near future, many studies have suggested that the Turkish government should focus on developing a long-term strategy for integrating the refugees into Turkish society.<sup>3</sup>

Refugees, by definition, are people who flee their countries due to domestic disaster to seek refuge in another place. They are widely considered to be in an inferior socio-economic position relative to citizens and are typically depicted as people who lack resources and must accordingly seek assistance from host countries or other organizations. Nevertheless, we should not forget that before becoming refugees, most were professionals in different fields. This is certainly true for many of the Syrians now living in Turkey. While they are portrayed by the mainstream media and studies homogenously as unfortunate people, one-fourth of these individuals (more than 800,000) are working in the labor market; others include businesspeople, doctors, teachers, and university students with various types of capital.<sup>4</sup> More than 10,000 Syrian-owned companies have been established in Turkey since 2011; 23,000 Syrian teachers, 27,000 Syrian students registered at Turkish universities, and another thousand Syrian doctors have arrived in Turkey as part of the refugee wave.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Syrian professionals have established various organizations or websites, for example, the Syrian International Business Association (SIBA) for Syrian businesspeople, Association of Syrian Engineers in Turkey for Syrian engineers, and Doctors Directory for Syrian doctors.<sup>6</sup> These organizations can facilitate the local authority's communication with their members.

The total number of these groups constitutes only an estimated 2-3 percent of the Syrian refugee population, and they can be considered socio-economic elites. Members of this relatively small but significant segment of the Syrian refugee society have rarely been studied by scholars, nor have they been considered by local governments planning integration policies. One exception is the recent, limited literature on the emergence and challenges of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities the Turkish government has encountered, this paper examines how these refugees –in particular businesspeople, teachers, students, and doctors– could potentially make a positive contribution to their host

country. The paper does not judge whether refugees have a positive or negative impact on host countries; instead, it argues that acquiring a deeper understanding of the diverse socio-economic composition of the refugee population can help to counter the view that refugees are simply a burden. It may also facilitate the planning of an effective refugee policy.

**Because all hope has been lost for seeing a mass return of Syrians to their home country in the near future, many studies have suggested that the Turkish government should focus on developing a long-term strategy for integrating the refugees into Turkish society**

## Methodology

The data in this article are based on two sessions of fieldwork conducted in Turkey; these consisted of 129 semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Syrian refugee businesspeople in İstanbul, Mersin, and Gaziantep in 2014 and 2015. Later, in January-February 2020, I revisited İstanbul to interview 21 İstanbul-based Syrian refugee businesspeople. During both fieldwork sessions, I had the opportunity to interact with another dozen Syrian non-businesspeople and to engage in deep conversations with them. Approvals were gained from the universities' ethics committee and the names of the interviewees were anonymized as per their requests.<sup>8</sup> Despite the six-year time span between the two sessions of fieldwork, since we did not witness a massive re-emigration of Syrians from Turkey to other countries in that period, the continuation of Syrians living in Turkey and their further settlement indicate that the data still reflect the general situation of Syrians in Turkey. Each interview took between one and two hours, and some interviewees were interviewed more than three times. Among all the interviewees, only two were Syrian businesswomen. As a male researcher, it was not easy for me to arrange interviews with businesswomen. The lower representation of businesswomen among the interviewees may also be attributed to the greater difficulties they encounter in Arab countries compared to their male counterparts, resulting in the fact that there are far fewer of them.<sup>9</sup>

The criteria for the Syrian sample of refugee businesspersons in this research were as follows: those who formerly worked in business and had been registered in the Syrian chambers of commerce prior to relocating to Turkey, and who are currently registered in the relevant local Turkish organizations. A snowball recruitment approach was applied to achieve an expanded data set. In addition, I visited the local chambers of commerce and industry in both İstanbul and Gaziantep. Through introductions from the chambers' staff members; I reached other Syrian businesspeople outside of the snowball recruitment. Additionally,

## Although the neighboring countries seem to be a safe haven, regulations there shook the faith of the young in being able to remain

and their strategies for living in Turkey. Because the situation in Syria is still unstable, all the interviews were anonymous for the safety of the interviewees. During the interviews, I immediately wrote down the responses and then transcribed them onto a laptop using Evernote software. Again for reasons of confidentiality, when quoting or referencing the businesspeople's words, I identify the respondents only by their cities of origin, the business sectors in which they work, and their current cities of residence. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the raw data. After coding the data, four key themes emerged: their decision-making in undertaking a relocation, the establishment of their businesses, the challenges they are encountering in Turkey, and the strategies they have applied to address these challenges.

I attended a social event with SIBA in Turkey in 2020, as a result of which I interviewed an additional two businesspeople. I conducted the interviews with Syrian businesspeople mostly in standard or Levantine Arabic. The interview questions related to the interviewees' relocation and settlement, the scale of their businesses and business practices, their challenges,

### The Context of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Rapid and Unselective Flight

An unprecedented revolution took place in Syria at the beginning of 2011. Toward the start of the revolution, people took to the streets in peaceful protest, demanding the basic rights enjoyed by citizens elsewhere in the world. However, the brutal suppression of these unarmed civilians by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad ignited their long-term dissatisfaction with an authoritarian regime. The peaceful demonstrations escalated into armed conflict between the government forces and opposition fighters, which quickly increased in intensity. In mid-2012, the Assad regime's top officials were bombed in a government building in the capital of Damascus in the South, and the opposition took control of an industrial area in the second biggest city, Aleppo, in the North.<sup>10</sup> The situation worsened and, after the intervention of foreign governments both in the region and beyond, the revolution became a civil war. The lack of safety gave many Syrian citizens no choice but to leave their country.

The question of where to flee from their war-torn homeland was the most crucial consideration in the minds of these innocent civilians. At first, most Syrians thought the conflict might end soon, and some decided to move to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon to remain nearby.



Others chose to flee to Egypt, an Arabic country with an acceptable cost of living. It is not difficult to understand that geographic proximity dictates higher numbers of refugees; most Syrians followed a natural route. Turkey drew a higher number of Syrians from the northern provinces, and Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt received more from the southern provinces. As of January 2022, the officially registered number of Syrian refugees was 5,684,672, with Turkey hosting more than 3,700,000, Lebanon almost one million, Jordan almost 700,000, Iraq more than 250,000, and Egypt around 150,000.<sup>11</sup>

Although the neighboring countries seem to be a safe haven, regulations there shook the faith of the young in being able to remain. At the same time, there were reports of Syrians being smuggled into Europe since many of them no longer had any hope of going back to their homeland in the immediate future. Yet, while the European countries promised to provide asylum to refugees, only a very few refugees have been successful in this aim –those who can afford to pay the smuggling fees and who are in good enough health to survive the arduous journey to Europe. Even worse, in 2016 the EU reached an agreement with the Turkish government to prevent the arrival of refugees in Europe, which has led to international criticism of the EU’s unwillingness to take responsibility for Syrian refugees.<sup>12</sup> The European countries combined have accepted only around one million Syrians in total, the same figure as Lebanon.<sup>13</sup> As a result, many Syrians began to consider their relocation to neighboring countries to be permanent, or at least greatly prolonged. For those who have remained there, pursuing a stable livelihood has become their main goal.

Thousands of children, who had to leave their education to migrate, cannot read or write in Turkish. With Turkey and UNICEF, the Accelerated Education Program provides children under temporary protection with the opportunity to have an education.  
TUĞÇENUR YILMAZ / AA

The phenomenon of emigration from Syria to Turkey was characterized by the rapid relocation of an enormous population; the relocation itself was unselective in terms of the migrants' socio-economic background. The numbers of registered Syrians in Turkey grew rapidly in mid-2014,<sup>14</sup> which suggests that many wanted to stay for the long term. Indeed, especially in the case of Turkey –which has received almost one-fifth of the entire Syrian population– the phenomenon of a 'transplantation' of Syrians has emerged. For instance, Fatih and Aksaray districts of İstanbul have been given the nicknames 'Little Syria' and 'Little Damascus,'<sup>15</sup> respectively, while Gaziantep province has been dubbed 'Little Aleppo.'<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in both Fatih and Aksaray, Syrians are participating in various activities, including establishing businesses or employment in companies, restaurants, groceries, barbershops, and educational institutes. This transplantation indicates that people from a variety of socio-economic classes have relocated and that the socioeconomic composition of Turkey-based Syrian refugees is diversified and deserving of further analysis.

## The Challenges that Refugees Present to Host Countries and Their Implications

Various studies and reports have indicated the extreme need for the Turkish government in the integration process and in formulating policy to support the integration of refugees in the long term.<sup>17</sup> One of the main factors in successful integration is the refugee-host relationship;<sup>18</sup> it has been argued that this is influenced by the impact refugees have on the host society.<sup>19</sup> Thus, understanding the impact of refugees on the host society may be helpful in the integration process, and in formulating and implementing successful policies to benefit both refugees and indigenous citizens.

The arrival of refugees leads to various security, environmental, economic, and social impacts on the host society. Previous studies have presented various arguments concerning this issue. Some scholars have pointed out negative effects, contending that once refugees enter a host country, crime rates can rise, the local environment can be damaged, the refugees can become an economic burden, and the local traditional culture can break down as a consequence of social interaction between the refugees and the host population.<sup>20</sup> Other reports have stated that refugees can bring positive economic benefits to the local economy through the human resources and economic capital they can contribute to host societies.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, it has been argued that other factors determine whether the impact is positive or negative; these include the hosts' access to power or resources.<sup>22</sup>

The economic impact of refugees on host countries can be seen at both the local and national levels. Refugees can influence competition, the labor market,

and the prices of local goods. The impact of Syrian refugees on local labor markets is contested, and several studies have examined the impact of Syrian laborers on local markets.<sup>23</sup> Some studies point out that refugees can cause locals to lose their jobs because refugees are more willing to accept lower wages, while others argue that refugees do not negatively affect the labor market, or that they may have a negative impact on the lower classes only.<sup>24</sup> Studies do agree that the cost of basic goods and housing rent increases in refugee districts.<sup>25</sup> At the national level, refugees are usually blamed for increasing the national budget because governments fund the settlement of new arrivals.<sup>26</sup> It has been claimed that the relocation of refugees may boost host countries' trade with the refugees' home countries, a statement supported by the rise in exports from Mersin in 2013.<sup>27</sup>

**At the national level, refugees are usually blamed for increasing the national budget because governments fund the settlement of new arrivals**

Other studies have focused on certain socio-economic groups among migrants and refugees –mainly workers, women, and children. The issue of how social class affects migrants pre-and post-migration has been studied widely.<sup>28</sup> These scholars argue that class plays an important role in migrants' departure and relocation.<sup>29</sup> Şimşek argues that the integration of refugees into the host country goes through a process of 'class-based' integration, by which those who are better off can integrate more easily than those with fewer economic resources.<sup>30</sup>

According to Bourdieu, the distinction between classes can be discussed according to different levels of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, and these four types of capital may be interchangeable.<sup>31</sup> In studies of migrants and refugees, the concept of capital is used to analyze how immigrants and refugees use their capital to promote their new life in the host country.<sup>32</sup> The literature exploring the forms of immigrant capital shows that the various types of capital they bring to and accumulate in the host country promote their integration into the host country's society.<sup>33</sup> Some scholars believe that refugees' capital is similar to that of immigrants and that it can simplify the process of integrating them into the host country; however, the difference between immigrant capital and refugee capital is that the latter's four types of capital depreciate due to the conflict-driven background of the immigration and that it cannot even be taken to the host country.<sup>34</sup>

In discussing how refugees can settle in the host country, most studies argue that their success can be attributed to refugees' support from family or friends at home and abroad, or from the networks they establish with locals.<sup>35</sup> Cultural and symbolic capitals are the other two types of capital that are believed to

## Unlike previous studies, this paper attempts to examine the situation of Syrian refugees with a focus on their socio-economic composition and what possible or potential resources they could contribute to their host countries

group of individuals who need help or who create problems in the host country, without differentiating the various socio-economic characteristics of the group. Research that does take into account such demographic features has focused mostly on workers, women, and/or children.<sup>37</sup> This focalization reinforces the notion that refugees categorically need assistance and are in a weaker socio-economic position than citizens. More recent studies have shown that some refugees become entrepreneurs after they have relocated and that this leads to competition with existing small businesses.<sup>38</sup> Most of the literature on refugee entrepreneurs has concentrated on this point (and their emergence in general) rather than on the effect their businesses have on the host society. This again tends to imply that refugees are all in a more or less similar socio-economic situation, which directly affects the results of any analysis of the influence they might have. More importantly, research that contends that refugees are a burden might contribute to discrimination on the part of locals against the refugees. Finally, since there is an underlying assumption that one of the main presumptions regarding refugees is that they went through a devaluation of their capital due to conflict, i.e., that their cultural and symbolic capital may not be transferrable, almost no literature has discussed their possible possession of economic capital, and therefore their potential to contribute to the host society.

Unlike previous studies, this paper attempts to examine the situation of Syrian refugees with a focus on their socio-economic composition and what possible or potential resources they could contribute to their host countries. By doing so, this study seeks to provide a different picture of the refugees that goes beyond their depiction as a burden or as inherently disadvantaged persons. The present study does not aim to discuss whether refugees' input is of benefit to host countries since such an undertaking would require further quantitative and qualitative research; rather, it argues that the demographic and socio-economic composition of the population of Syrian refugees living in Turkey should be examined more closely because this might offer an alternative to their image as poor, resourceless, and homogenous.

strengthen the negotiating ability of refugees in the host society.<sup>36</sup>

This brief review of the literature on refugees' impact on host societies and refugees' class indicates that the impact of refugees on host countries remains debatable. More importantly, studies that attempt to analyze the impact of refugees usually describe them as poor or resourceless people, a homogenous



## The Demographic and Socio-Economic Composition of Turkey-Based Syrian Refugees: Opportunities

The large numbers of Syrian refugees in Turkey might lead to demographic pressure on locals, who may feel that the refugees are taking their jobs and squeezing their living space. This perspective is common in countries that accept refugees or immigrants. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the ages and socio-economic composition of Syrian refugees might show that it is exaggerated.

Around 17.4 percent of Turkey-based Syrians are ages 0-4 and above 60.<sup>39</sup> Thus, among the huge wave of Syrian refugees in Turkey, around 630,000 are not of working age and are likely to require state assistance. Around 30.6 percent are aged 5-17. This means that around 1,114,993 individuals would ordinarily be in school. Yet the data suggest that there are an estimated 612,000 Syrian students in Turkish schools, so approximately half a million Syrians who should be enrolled in schools are not.<sup>40</sup> This group of Syrians might also require support (e.g., from the local education ministry). However, the story should not end at the 48 percent of the population ages 0-17 and above 60 who are a 'burden,' since 51.9 percent (around 1,891,116) of the Syrians in Turkey are between 18 and 59. Of these, 30 percent have higher education degrees.<sup>41</sup> This age group of people will contain numbers who are in higher education or who are working. In other words, more than half of the Syrian refugees in

A research competition, which was organized with the cooperation of Boğaziçi University, TÜBİTAK, and Türk Telekom, produced 110 project proposals aimed at improving the living conditions of the Syrians refugees in Turkey.

BOĞAZIÇI  
UNIVERSITY / AA

Turkey currently are or will be the breadwinners in their families. A further discussion of the socio-economic composition of this group is warranted.

According to data from 2017, of the 51.9 percent of the refugees referred to above, 662,797 are working in Turkey in the areas of agriculture, manufacturing, construction, transport, commerce, trade and hospitality, and other services.<sup>42</sup> However, as suggested by the concept of forms of capital, capital is convertible and may be of various types. This implies that the socio-economic composition of refugees may also be diversified; and the refugees who belong to different socio-economic classes may possess distinct forms of capital that can be used for their living. Thus, in addition to workers, there are at least four groups of people, around 100,000 in total, who do not fit into the 'poor and disadvantaged' refugee category. They include businesspeople, doctors, teachers, and university students. The situation of each of these groups will be considered in more detail below.

Several thousand Syrian businesspeople are living in Turkey. This estimated number derives from data on Syrian-owned companies in Turkey. Since 2011, more than 10,000 Syrian registered companies have been established in Turkey and, at a conservative estimate, they deposited more than \$4 billion in Turkish banks in 2014.<sup>43</sup> The number of companies in Turkey with at least one Syrian partner has been suggested to reach 15,159 in 2019.<sup>44</sup> Not only has this economic elite invested their capital in Turkey, but they have also created jobs. Some might argue that they compete with local Turkish enterprises; their economic contribution to local markets in terms of job creation, capital inflows, and business skills is clear, but it is too early to judge whether the consequences are ultimately positive or negative. Also, as shown by Turkish regulations concerning foreign enterprises' employment practices, owners are required to recruit local workers for their businesses. Furthermore, as many have suggested, Syrian businesspeople continue to trade with their customers in other Arab countries via Syria once they have registered their companies in Turkey.<sup>45</sup>

Given the massive influx of Syrians into Turkey, providing medical services is a major issue for the government. The Turkish government provides free medical care for Syrians who possess governmental identity cards. However, various complaints have been made both by locals and Syrians. Locals complain that they cannot access medical resources because the Syrians have them for free; the refugees complain that the language barrier does not readily allow this, and local doctors say that they cannot provide proper medical assistance to refugees because of the language barrier.<sup>46</sup> Syrian refugee doctors previously belonged to an elite class in their homeland, and the Turkish government has granted Turkish citizenship for most skilled Syrians including medical professionals who remained in Turkey. Although they are highly adaptable to local society, they are unable to work legally as medical professionals in Turkey

since only Turkish citizens can work at public services according to the laws.<sup>47</sup> Most Syrian doctors who wish to provide services to their communities open informal clinics in their houses, and many of them have contemplated moving to another country.<sup>48</sup> An Aleppan doctor I interviewed stated that he could not work officially and therefore decided to flee to Europe to continue his work there.<sup>49</sup>

There is little doubt that education is an indispensable element of society. There are currently thousands of Syrian teachers and university students in Turkey. The teachers seem to be in a better position than the doctors. The Turkish government, cognizant of the importance of providing Syrian schoolchildren with education, has recruited a great many Syrians for that purpose. Although the teachers have a better opportunity to work than they did before, discrimination (e.g., lower salaries than those of their Turkish counterparts) has been reported.<sup>50</sup> This may have a negative effect on the quality of the teaching. In addition, 27,000 Syrian students are currently studying in Turkish universities, with both government funded Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB, Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar) and other NGOs have been supporting Syrian students on an unprecedented scale.<sup>51</sup> Syrian students like all other international students need to take the Foreign Student Examination (YÖS, Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrenci Sınavı) for university entrance.<sup>52</sup> The government used to generously waive tuition fees for Syrians who are engaging in regular daytime studies in public universities. This has led to complaints from local students, who wonder why the Syrian students' fees should be paid for them, or why they have to be accepted at all.<sup>53</sup> However, Syrian students have had to pay tuition fees at private universities all the time. But apart from tuition fees, all other living expenses (e.g., housing, food, and entertainment) have to be paid for by the students themselves. Some Syrians are studying in private universities in Turkey and are paying international students' fees. More importantly, after they have completed their higher education they will immediately join local labor markets. With their Arabic mother tongue, fluency in Turkish, and a major degree, they will be able to contribute to society in a different way than local students.

The discussion of the four groups presented above shows that they are quite different from the stereotypical refugees as presented in the media or the scholarly literature. Their presence and activities in the host country demonstrate that they could or do contribute to and have a positive influence on local society in terms of capital inflows, human resources, and the expansion of international networks. The economic initiatives of Syrian businesspeople can make the most important contribution in the first instance. As mentioned



**If the Syrian companies' owners establish and operate their businesses in Turkey following the local employment regulations, this can create job opportunities**



Turkish refugee camps stand out among similar facilities in the world with their well-organized shelter centers, infrastructure, social facilities, health and education services provided by Turkey for Syrians fleeing the civil war.

PROVINCIAL  
DIRECTORATE  
OF MIGRATION  
MANAGEMENT / AA

above, they have not only brought a great amount of capital into the country but have also invested in local markets. In addition to generating capital and engaging in economic activity, they are also required to pay taxes annually to the government. Furthermore, according to the local business regulations for foreign investors, one local worker has to be employed for every five foreign workers. This suggests that if the Syrian companies' owners establish and operate their businesses in Turkey following the local employment regulations, this can create job opportunities.

Doctors, teachers, and university students can also make an economic contribution to the local economy, albeit on a more modest level. Doctors, when they are working in their informal clinics, are required to purchase medical equipment and drugs, which are not cheap. University students either have financial support from their families or work part-time jobs to pay for various costs associated with their education. This means that most of their expenditure takes place inside the country. For example, their housing rents are paid to Turkish landlords. Each group spends money in the local economy on food, transportation, and so on. Although the amounts are small when compared with the large amounts of capital inflow that derive from businesspeople, they are nevertheless considerable, and none of these refugees require financial support from the government except the students' tuition fees.

The relocation of these groups of people to Turkey leads to competition with the local society in terms of human resources. Yet their possible or actual integration into the local society can be considered a brain gain for the host country. More importantly, if the Turkish government were to formulate inclusive regulations to allow Syrian doctors to work legally in Turkey, this might

## **Migrants' ethnic ties could be used to expand their networks not only in the host countries but also transnationally**

alleviate the competition for medical resources between the locals and Syrians. Although the Syrian students might not be seen as making an immediate contribution to local human resources, over time, maximally four years, they will be able to inject new vigor into Turkish society by using the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the country's universities.

Finally, the refugees' expansion of their international networks is based on their existing ties. These networks, and the refugees' knowledge of Arab markets, could be exploited to export Turkish goods to other Arab countries. For instance, during both of my fieldwork trips, many refugees explained that they formerly had customers or partners in the Gulf and that once they settle in Turkey and rebuild their enterprises, they immediately reconnect with their previous business acquaintances in other Arab countries and export the products they now produce in Turkey.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it has been suggested that migrants' ethnic ties could be used to expand their networks not only in the host countries but also transnationally.<sup>55</sup> Since most of the Syrian refugees are Arabs, they have the potential to form a bridge between Turkey and other Arab countries (in terms of business and other forms of communication). Syrian university students who are proficient both in Arabic and Turkish also have the capacity to unite Arabs and Turks.

### **Are the Syrians in Turkey a Burden or a Benefit?**

The Syrian conflict has already lasted for 10 years and although it seems less intense at present, there still is a long road ahead before refugees from the war can return to their homeland. Since the Syrian regime still uses conscription for reservists, most young males would prefer not to return. Also, many of them have already built a new life in the host country; it is not easy for them to give up what they have established and simply leave. Finally, the damage to their neighborhoods back home is another reason why they do not choose to return since they might not even have a home to return to. Thus, for the host countries, consideration of a long-term plan of integration is inevitable.

The present study does not intend to suggest that Turkish locals do not experience any negative effects from the arrival of Syrians; rather, it attempts to present a different way of understanding the so-called burden of their presence. Although the millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey have been discussed mostly

in a socially and economically homogenous manner, they are a very diverse group. More importantly, they include professionals who possess the ability to live independently and can thus contribute to the local society. The feasibility of integrating the brainpower of refugees is a matter for the local authorities to consider.

The present study suggests that it would benefit the local authorities to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the socio-economic composition of the Syrian population in Turkey. As other scholars who are working on Syrian refugees in Turkey have suggested, the lack of a clear picture of their demographic characteristics is one of the main impediments to gaining a better understanding of them.<sup>56</sup> A more sensitive, class-based approach that differentiates among the socio-economic strata of the Syrians living in Turkey could help local governments with regard to the allocation of resources and the integration of various capable people into suitable positions. By developing such an understanding, governments could not only alleviate their expenditure on the refugee crisis but also channel available and appropriate people and their abilities into society. This could ease the tense relationship between locals and Syrians since it is understandable that indigenous citizens consider refugees as economically poor and needful of the host government to meet their daily requirements.

The present study has discussed Syrian businesspeople, doctors, teachers, and university students. Other professionals, such as engineers and lawyers, require further analysis and should be considered in policies of inclusion. Whether the refugee issue should be considered as a crisis or an opportunity for the host country depends largely on the success of those policies. ■

## Endnotes

1. "More than 70 Million Displaced Worldwide, Says UNHCR," *BBC*, (June 19, 2019), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48682783>.
2. Yusuf Emre Akgündüz, Marcel Van Den Berg, and Wolter Hassink, "The Impact of Refugee Crises on Host Labor Markets: The Case of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Turkey," *The Institute for the Study of Labor*, (February 2015), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8841.pdf>; Soner Çağaptay, "The Impact of Syria's Refugees on Southern Turkey," *Washington Institute*, (October 28, 2013), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/impact-syrias-refugees-southern-turkey-revised-and-updated>; Osman Bahadır Dinçer, Vittoria Federici, Elizabeth Ferris, Sema Karaca, Kemal Kirişçi, and Elif Özmenek Çarmıklı, "Turkey and Syrian Refugees: The Limits of Hospitality," *Brookings*, (2013), retrieved January 26, 2021, from [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Turkey-and-Syrian-Refugees\\_The-Limits-of-Hospitality-2014.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Turkey-and-Syrian-Refugees_The-Limits-of-Hospitality-2014.pdf); Kemal Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality," *Brookings*, (2014), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Syrian-Refugees-and-Turkeys-Challenges-May-14-2014.pdf>.
3. Sevda Akar and M. Mustafa Erdoğan, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Integration Problem Ahead," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2019), pp. 925-940; Ahmet İçduygu and Doğu Şimşek, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Fall 2016), pp. 59-69.

4. Luis Pinedo Caro, "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market," *ILO Office in Turkey*, (February 9, 2020), retrieved January 26, 2021, from [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-ge-neva/---ilo-ankara/documents/publication/wcms\\_738602.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-ge-neva/---ilo-ankara/documents/publication/wcms_738602.pdf), p. 12.
5. Omar Kadkoy, "Syrian Entrepreneurs in Turkey: Emerging Economic Actors and Agents of Social Cohesion," in Emel Parlar Dal (ed.), *Turkey's Political Economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 120.
6. "Syrian International Business Association Turkey (SIBA)," retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://siba.org.tr/en/>; "Association of Syrian Engineers in Turkey," retrieved January 23, 2022, from [https://www.facebook.com/syrtreng/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/syrtreng/?ref=page_internal); "Doctors Directory," retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.almubdaa.com/dir/ar/tr/All/home.html>.
7. Zaid Alrawadieh, Eyüp Karayılan, and Gürel Çetin, "Understanding the Challenges of Refugee Entrepreneurship in Tourism and Hospitality," *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 9-10 (2019), pp. 717-740; Belal Shneikat and Zaid Alrawadieh, "Unraveling Refugee Entrepreneurship and Its Role in Integration: Empirical Evidence from the Hospitality Industry," *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 9-10 (2019), pp. 741-761.
8. The ethics review approval was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee from the National Chengchi University, on the July 5, 2019 (valid through: November 1, 2019 to October 31, 2020). The application number: NCCU-REC-201906-I052.
9. Hala Hattab, "Towards Understanding Female Entrepreneurship in Middle Eastern and North African Countries," *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2012), pp. 171-186; Nisreen A. Ameen and Rob Willis, "The Use of Mobile Phones to Support Women's Entrepreneurship in the Arab Countries," *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2016), pp. 424-445.
10. "Syria Conflict: Ministers 'Killed in Suicide Attack," *BBC*, (July 18, 2012), retrieved January 26, 2021, from [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18882149](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18882149); Almalaf-sy, "ālāt ma`āmil Ḥalab wa-aṣḥābu-ha fi al-ḥarb [Aleppo Factories' Machines and Owners in War]," (January 5, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2021, from [http://www.almalaf-sy.com/article.php?id=4628#.Vow7G\\_mLTIU](http://www.almalaf-sy.com/article.php?id=4628#.Vow7G_mLTIU).
11. "Syrian Regional Refugee Response," *UNHCR*, (2022), retrieved January 19, 2022, from <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.
12. Ignazio Corrao, "EU-Turkey Statement and Action Plan," (2016), *The European Parliament*, retrieved January 26, 2021, from [www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-plan](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-plan).
13. "Syrian Regional Refugee Response," *UNHCR*, (2021), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113>.
14. "Syrian Regional Refugee Response."
15. Dorian Jones, "Refugee Influx Turns Part of İstanbul into 'Little Damascus,'" *VOA*, (March 11, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.voanews.com/europe/refugee-influx-turns-part-istanbul-little-damascus>; Bilge Nesibe Kotan, "In İstanbul's 'Little Syria' Refugees Find Themselves in Campaign Crossfire," *TRT WORLD*, (March 28, 2019), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/in-istanbul-s-little-syria-refugees-find-themselves-in-campaign-crossfire-25345>.
16. Ignacio Fradejas-García, "Humanitarian Remoteness: Aid Work Practices from 'Little Aleppo,'" *Social Anthropology*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (May 2019), pp. 286-303.
17. Dinçer *et al.*, "Turkey and Syrian Refugees;" Çağaptay, "The Impact of Syria's Refugees on Southern Turkey;" Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges."
18. Karen Jacobsen, "The Forgotten Solution: Local Integration for Refugees in Developing Countries," *UNHCR*, (July 2001), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://www.unhcr.org/research/working/3b7d24059/forgotten-solution-local-integration-refugees-developing-countries-karen.html>.
19. Leah Berry, "The Impact of Environmental Degradation on Refugee-Host Relations: A Case Study from Tanzania," *UNHCR*, (January 2008), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://www.unhcr.org/research/working/47a315c72/impact-environmental-degradation-refugee-host-relations-case-study-tanzania.html>.

20. Richard Black, "Forced Migration and Environmental Change: The Impact of Refugees on Host Environments," *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (November 1994), pp. 261-277; Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Refugees and the Spread of Civil War," *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring 2006); "The State of the World's Refugees 1997-1998: A Humanitarian University," *UNHCR*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Beth Elise Whitaker, "Changing Opportunities: Refugees and Host Communities in Western Tanzania," *UNHCR*, (June 1999), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/3ae6a0c70.pdf>.
21. Elizabeth H. Campbell, "Urban Refugees in Nairobi: Problems of Protection, Mechanisms of Survival, and Possibilities for Integration," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 396-413; Jacobsen, "The Forgotten Solution."
22. Beth Elise Whitaker, "Refugees in Western Tanzania: The Distribution of Burdens and Benefits among Local Hosts," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 2002), pp. 339-358; Karen Jacobsen, "Can Refugees Benefit the State? Refugee Resources and African Statebuilding," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 2002), pp. 577-596.
23. Ximena V. Del Carpio and Mathis Wagner, "The Impact of Syrians Refugees on the Turkish Labor Market," *World Bank Group*, (August 2015), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22659/The0impact0of00Turkish0labor0market.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Ayşegül Kayaoğlu and M. Murat Erdoğan, "Labor Market Activities of Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *Economic Research Forum*, (February 2019), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://erf.org.eg/publications/labor-market-activities-of-syrian-refugees-in-turkey/>; Ken Suzuki, Saumik Paul, Takeshi Maru, and Motoi Kusadokoro, "An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Labor Market," *Asian Development Bank Institute*, (March 2019), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/491661/adb-wp935.pdf>.
24. Akgündüz, *et al.*, "The Impact of Refugee Crises on Host Labor Markets;" Oytun Orhan, "The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighboring Countries: Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations," *ORSAM*, (April 2014), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/the-situation-of-syrian-refugees-in-the-neighbouring-countries-findings-conclusions-and>.
25. Jean-François Maystadt and Philip Verwimp, "Winners and Losers among a Refugee-hosting Population," *UCLouvain*, (2009), retrieved January 26, 2021, from [https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/core/documents/coredp2009\\_34.pdf](https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/core/documents/coredp2009_34.pdf); Jennifer Alix-Garcia and David Saah, "The Effect of Refugee Inflows on Host Communities: Evidence from Tanzania," *The World Bank Economic Review*, Vol. 24, No.1 (2010), pp. 148-170.
26. Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges," p. 26; Orhan, "The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighboring Countries," p. 28.
27. Uri Dadush and Mona Niebuhr, "The Economic Impact of Forced Migration," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (April 26, 2016), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/04/22/economic-impact-of-forced-migration-pub-63421>; Oytun Orhan and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, "Effects of the Syrian Refugees on Turkey," *ORSAM*, (January 2015), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187409/09012015103629.pdf>, p. 32.
28. Saskia Bonjour and Sébastien Chauvin, "Social Class, Migration Policy and Migrant Strategies: An Introduction," *International Migration*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (August 2018), pp. 5-18; Estella Carpi, "Bringing Social Class into Humanitarian Debates: The Case of Northern Lebanon," *Middle East Institute*, (December 4, 2019), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/bringing-social-class-humanitarian-debates-case-northern-lebanon>; Nicholas Van Hear, "Reconsidering Migration and Class," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Fall 2014), pp.100-121; Oksana Yakushko, "Immigration and Social Class," in William M. Liu (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Class in Counseling*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 515-525.
29. Yakushko, "Immigration and Social Class."
30. Doğuş Şimşek, "Integration Processes of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: 'Class-based Integration,'" *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (September 2020), pp. 537-554.
31. See the definition of economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capital in Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in John Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241-258.

32. Reyhan Atasü-Topcuoğlu, "Syrian Refugee Entrepreneurship in Turkey: Integration and the Use of Immigrant Capital in the Informal Economy," *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2019), pp. 200-210; Victor Nee and Jimmy Sanders, "Understanding the Diversity of Immigrant Incorporation: A Forms-of-capital Model," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2001), pp. 386-411.
33. Alessio D'Angelo, "The Networked Refugee: The Role of Transnational Networks in the Journeys Across the Mediterranean," *Global Networks*, Vol. 21, (2021), pp. 487-499; Alessandro Monsutti, *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan*, (London: Routledge, 2012); Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock (eds.), *Social Suffering*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-24; Aryan Karimi, "Refugees' Transnational Practices: Gay Iranian Men Navigating Refugee Status and Cross-border Ties in Canada," *Social Currents*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (2020), pp. 71-86; Jane Wilkinson, Ninetta Santoro, and Jae Major, "Sudanese Refugee Youth and Educational Success: The Role of Church and Youth Groups in Supporting Cultural and Academic Adjustment and Schooling Achievement," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 60, (2017), pp. 210-219; Navjot K. Lamba and Harvey Krahn, "Social Capital and Refugee Resettlement: The Social Networks of Refugees in Canada," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Vol. 4, (2003), pp. 335-360; Sara Carlbaum, "Refugee Women's Establishment in the Rural North of Sweden: Cultural Capital in Meeting Local Labour Market Needs," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, (2021); Susan Rottmann and Maïssam Nimer, "Language Learning Through an Intersectional Lens: Gender, Migrant Status, and Gain in Symbolic Capital for Syrian Refugee Women in Turkey," *Multilingua*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2021), pp. 67-85.
34. Audrey Prost, "The Problem with 'Rich Refugees:' Sponsorship, Capital, and the Informal Economy of Tibetan Refugees," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2006), pp. 233-253; Linda Morrice, "Refugees in Higher Education: Boundaries of Belonging and Recognition, Stigma and Exclusion," *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (2013), pp. 652-668; Petra M. Eggenhofer-Rehart, Markus Latzke, Dominik Zellhofer, and Katharina Pernkopf, "Refugees' Career Capital Welcome? Afghan and Syrian Refugee Job Seekers in Austria," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 105, No. 9 (2018), pp. 31-45.
35. D'Angelo, "The Networked Refugee;" Monsutti, *War and Migration*; Karimi, "Refugees' Transnational Practices;" Lamba and Krahn, "Social Capital and Refugee Resettlement"
36. Kleinman and Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience;" Wilkinson *et al.*, "Sudanese Refugee Youth and Educational Success;" Carlbaum, "Refugee Women's Establishment in the Rural North of Sweden;" Rottmann and Nimer, "Language Learning through an Intersectional Lens."
37. Pieter Bevelander and Ravi Pendakur, "The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants: A Comparison of Outcomes in Canada and Sweden," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2014), pp. 689-709; Çetin Çelik and Ahmet İcduygu, "Schools and Refugee Children: The Case of Syrians in Turkey," *International Migration*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2018), pp. 253-267; Sonja Senthana, Ellen MacEachen, Stephanie Premji, and Philip Bigelow, "Employment Integration Experiences of Syrian Refugee Women Arriving through Canada's Varied Refugee Protection Programs," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, (2020), retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1733945>.
38. Laurice Alexandre, Charbel Salloum, and Adel Alalam, "An Investigation of Migrant Entrepreneurs: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2019), pp. 1147-1164; Sibel Güven, Murat Kenanoğlu, Omar Kadkoy, and Taylan Kurt, "Syrian Entrepreneurship and Refugee Start-Ups in Turkey: Leveraging the Turkish Experience Final Report-2018," *TEPAV*, (2018), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/10023>.
39. "Syrian Regional Refugee Response."
40. "Syrian Regional Refugee Response."
41. Caro, "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market," p. 3.
42. Caro, "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market," p. 12.
43. Deborah Amos, "Syrian Financial Capital's Loss Is Turkey's Gain," *NPR*, (March 29, 2013), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/29/175622297/syrian-financial-capitals-loss-is-turkeys-gain>.

44. "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sayısı Şubat 2022," *Mülteciler*, retrieved March 9, 2022, from [https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/?gclid=CjwKCAjwoNuGBhA8EiwAFxomA1kZLs6MrLP8Rd2Vtffhfr-JYL4LK0oUByS2EqPM2mese9Ma1jUl38RoC5yQQAvD\\_BwE](https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/?gclid=CjwKCAjwoNuGBhA8EiwAFxomA1kZLs6MrLP8Rd2Vtffhfr-JYL4LK0oUByS2EqPM2mese9Ma1jUl38RoC5yQQAvD_BwE).
45. Interviews by author, conducted in İstanbul and Gaziantep, Turkey.
46. Yıldırım, Komsuoğlu, and Özekmekçi, "The Transformation of the Primary Health Care System for Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2019), pp. 75-96.
47. Basri Furkan Dağcıoğlu, Aylin Baydar Artantaş, Ahmet Keskin, İrep Karataş Eray, Yusuf Üstü, and Mehmet Uğurlu, "Social Adaptation Status of Syrian Refugee Physicians Living in Turkey," *Central European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2020), pp. 149-154.
48. Nihal Kayalı, "Syrian Refugees Navigate Turkey's Shifting Health Care Terrain," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, No. 297 (Winter 2020), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://merip.org/2020/12/syrian-refugees-navigate-turkeys-shifting-health-care-terrain-297/>; Interviews by author.
49. Interview by author, Gaziantep, Turkey, February 21, 2015.
50. Kinana Qaddour, "Educating Syrian Refugees in Turkey," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (November 20, 2017), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/74782>; Hossam al-Jabalawi, "Impoverished Syrian Teachers in Turkey," *Al-Fanar Media*, (April 18, 2018), retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2018/04/impoverished-syrian-teachers-in-turkey/>.
51. Hakan Ergin and Hans de Wit, "Integration Policy for Syrian Refugees' Access to Turkish Higher Education: Inclusive Enough?" in Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca, and Remus Pricopie (eds.), *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*, (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 124.
52. Multeciler, "Suriyelilerle İlgili Doğru Bilinen Yanlışlar," retrieved March 9, 2022, from [https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyelilerle-iligili-dogru-bilinen-yanlislar/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmpyRBhC-ARIsABs2EAow\\_INBrPbX-Z4aQZtieclOMPmvawJjNev3z358G2JHKWj5vG4rPA2YaAgblEALw\\_wcB](https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyelilerle-iligili-dogru-bilinen-yanlislar/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmpyRBhC-ARIsABs2EAow_INBrPbX-Z4aQZtieclOMPmvawJjNev3z358G2JHKWj5vG4rPA2YaAgblEALw_wcB).
53. Personal observations.
54. Interviews by author, İstanbul and Gaziantep, Turkey.
55. Ayumi Takenaka, "Transnational Community and Its Ethnic Consequences: The Return Migration and the Transformation of Ethnicity of Japanese Peruvians," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (1999), pp. 1459-1474.
56. Tuğba Adalı and Ahmet Sinan Türkyılmaz, "Demographic Data on Syrians in Turkey: What Do We Know?" *International Migration*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (June 2020), pp. 196-219; Tuğba Adalı and Ahmet Sinan Türkyılmaz, "Demographic Profile of Syrians in Turkey," in Elwood D. Carlson and Nathalie E. Williams (eds.), *Comparative Demography of the Syrian Diaspora: European and Middle Eastern Destinations, European Studies of Population*, (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 57-91.