

## Syria–Turkey Borders

Death Lurking Syrians on both Sides



### **ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies**

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## Introduction

Syrians are heading for the surrounding countries, fleeing the hell of war and hoping to find a safe haven from shells and gunfire. Turkey was their largest destination, considering the facilities that this country provided in a series of multiple gifts, and its ability to incorporate "hospitality" into the core of Turkish foreign policy, especially in its relationship with the EU, which have succumbed to Turkey leveraging refugees, in case Europe does not remain silent about Turkey's violations of human rights inside and outside its borders and to provide prompt funding for the project to maintain Syrian refugees in Turkey.

In late 2011, the policy of hosting Syrians to Turkey was described as an "open door" policy, as Turkey started implementing the procedures of protecting Syrian refugees and receiving them on Turkish territory with no interference or objection from Turkish border guards, who did not prevent refugees from smuggling, overcoming all legal obstacles.

Given this policy and the fact that Turkey has the largest shared border with Syria (911 km), the areas adjacent and close to the Turkish-Syrian border were among the geographical areas most affected by the war in Syria and constituted a haven for Syrians displaced from the interior. According to statistics released by the Turkish government, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has reached over 3 million and 700 thousand, most of whom are children and women.

Over the years of war, it has become apparent that Turkey is applying the "open door" policy to Syrians fleeing the war, not only to protect them, but also to make the Syrian refugee file a multifunctional lobbyist by using them as a tool to impose Turkish policies onto the European Union countries. Since 2015, Turkey has become a springboard for most Syrians heading for Europe. The issue of Syrian refugees was no longer merely a humanitarian issue, but became a matter managed by the Turkish-European negotiations <sup>[1]</sup> with Turkey starting to influence regional and even trans-regional issues, as its military levers have arisen in many wars, such as the Libya War and the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and even in Africa, especially in Mali and Somalia, and its dispatch of extremist Syrian militias to any front it wants. Subsequently, the Turkish government declared itself satisfied with the number of refugees and began to prevent them from entering the country, in an attempt to rather establish their presence on its borders and to use these displaced Syrians to implement plans for demographic change inside Syrian territory, specifically in the occupied Kurdish Syrian cities.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 2017, to limit the influx of refugees, the Turkish government built a separating wall along its 911 km border to prevent Syrian civilians from reaching Turkey and gave the gendarmerie the freedom to kill any Syrian who tried to reach Turkey fleeing the war.

Since then, even for some time earlier, the Turkish gendarmerie forces began to target the Syrians massively, killing dozens of them. For instance, during the past month, the Turkish border guards threw the body of a child on the border strip opposite the

village of Arrada in the Zarkan district in Al-Hasakah countryside, after they killed him under torture while trying to reach Turkey.

### Escaping Death, yet Faced with Shooting

“Syrians fleeing to the Turkish border in search of safety and asylum are being forced back again by shootings and abuse. As the engagements in Idlib and Afrin displace thousands more, the number of Syrians trapped along the border is likely to risk their lives to reach Turkey.” said Lama Fakih, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch in a report issued by Human Rights Watch, "Turkey/Syria: Border Guards Shoot and Repel Fleeing Syrians".

Human Rights Watch reported that 13 of the 16 refugees interviewed by them, who entered through a smuggling network between May and December 2017, have confirmed that the Turkish border guards shot them. They said that 10 other Syrians who were unable to reach Turkey, among them a child, were killed.

On the other hand, the Human Rights Watch confirmed that 7 cases interviewed by them, confirmed that asylum seekers detained by Turkish border guards received no medical assistance when they needed it, but were sent back to Syria.

Regarding this issue, the Turkish journalist and writer, Musa Ozugurlu, confirms to ASO Center for Studies that Turkey does not want more Syrians to enter Turkey, because, “Turkey uses the files of displacement and asylum for political purposes with regard to the Syrian regime and Russia, when, for instance, it is necessary to use this file to pressure Russia and the regime if they decide to launch an attack against Idlib.”

In spite of these numerous killings, the issue of Syrians killed by Turkish gendarmerie forces does not receive the attention of Syrian human rights, in particular, human rights organizations or even political and media outlets affiliated with or close to the Syrian opposition.

Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, explained in a statement to ASO Center for Studies, that, "Syrian human rights organizations are of a dual nature and have interests with Turkey either through tourism in Turkey or by allowing them to move freely there. We consider them to be very reckless and negligent. They do not deserve to be human rights organizations. It's not a surprise that those who remained silent about the crimes of the Turkish occupation in Afrin, Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad and supported the occupier and the occupying factions, will remain silent about the crimes of the Turkish gendarmerie against the Syrian refugees."

### It's Not a Unilateral Decision

So far, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has been able to document 20 cases of killing by Turkish border guards, including children and women, from the beginning of this year until last May.

The director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, told ASO Center for Studies that, "orders are given to the Turkish border guards and the gendarmerie itself confirms that, regarding shooting live bullets at anyone trying to enter Turkey before they even reach to the border. These are military orders from officials and are not unilateral decisions, except for those who enter from the existing security crossings by agreement between Turkey and its loyal factions."

While the Turkish writer and journalist, Musa Ozgurlu, asserts that the decision to target Syrian refugees is not unilateral, but that the Turkish law provides protection for the soldier who commits murder, because they are ordered to fire live bullets at those who are trying to illegally pass through Turkey, "As a result, they are unaccountable to the law."

On the other hand, he confirms, that there are no racist aspects to this matter, as he says, "I do not think that it is related to the issue of racism, but rather it is a political issue. Anyone who wants to enter Turkey from Syria will be killed by the guards if they want to."

With regard to Kurds, the writer and journalist, Musa Ozgurlu, points out, "Racism against Kurds is certain, however, the army might kill anyone attempting to cross the borders without recognizing whether they're Kurds or Arabs. If they arrest someone and find out that the person is a fighter in the YPG (the People's Protection Units) ranks, they may be put in prison. On the issue of Turkish soldiers not being held accountable for killing refugees who cross the border, there is a legal order protecting them, given that they have an order to shoot live bullets at those trying to cross and therefore they are legally not responsible before the law."

## No Accountability

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have entered Turkey illegally since the start of the popular protests against the Syrian regime in 2011. These refugees are often subjected to verbal and physical attacks, and many of them are targeted with live bullets, while some are killed in an attempt to escape the war in Syria and reach Turkey.

Despite all the attacks against Syrians on the Syrian-Turkish border and the killings of Syrians at the hands of Turkish gendarmerie forces, Turkish gendarmes are not held accountable and are not criminalized for murder.

Regarding this issue, the writer and journalist, Musa Ozogurlu, explains, "There is legal protection for Turkish soldiers who fire live bullets at Syrian refugees... The law in Turkey allows the army to shoot those who cross the border illegally and even kill anyone trying to cross the border. A particular case concerning the borders of Syria and Turkey, taking into account that there is a war in Syria and that Turkey has a position on this war."

While the director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights notes, "No lawsuits have been filed against Turkish soldiers who have committed crimes against Syrian refugees. We never heard of a lawsuit against a Turkish gendarmerie soldier who killed, wounded or tortured Syrians. There was only one video showing the torture inflicted on the refugees by a Turkish soldier, who was allegedly to be prosecuted, nothing more than that."

## Targeting Syrians on Syrian Soil

Syrians for Truth and Human Rights Organization said that the Turkish border guards fired directly at a farmer and his two grandchildren on February 10, 2021, in the village of Al-Adnani in the countryside of Jisr Al-Shughur town, west of Idlib. As a result of this targeting, the child, Yazan Bakir, was killed.

The child's grandfather told Syrians for Truth and Justice while documenting the incident, that, "It was not an involuntary incident on the part of the Turkish soldiers, but rather a direct fire on us. The Turkish soldiers on the borders act aggressively and recklessly. We were denied access to our lands because of their continued firing."

Jiwan Soz, a journalist specialized in Turkish affairs, says, "Turkey practices overt terrorism against the residents of various Syrian cities on its borders, by deliberately shooting farmers in the countryside of Idlib and Syrian Kurdish cities, or by targeting them through drones. Ankara recently targeted civilians in Kobani, which caused civilian casualties."

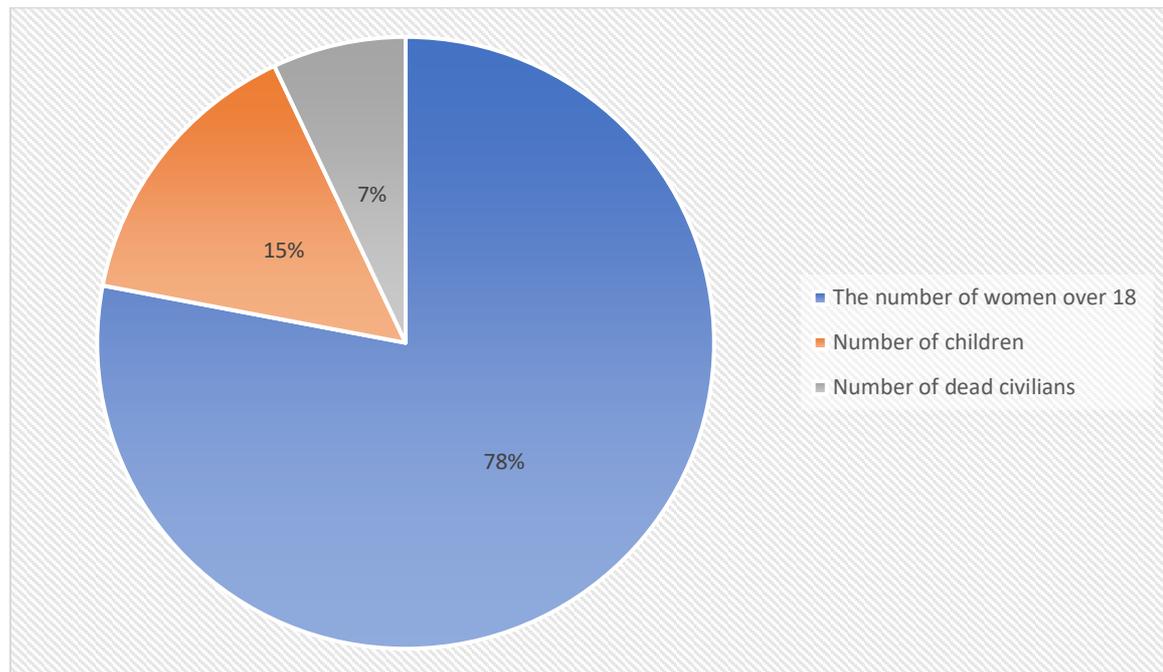
He points out that Turkey "has recently failed to obtain an American or Russian green light to launch a new attack against Syria, specifically the areas controlled by the Kurds and their local allies in the SDF coalition. Therefore, Ankara is attempting by other means to destabilize this area through border guards who target farmers in their fields with live bullets, as well as with drones that target inhabited civilian gatherings."

The journalist specializing in Turkish affairs finds that, "The international community must take genuine and serious measures to compel Ankara to put an end to its violations and military operations on Syrian territory, particularly that it paves the way for the return of terrorist organizations like (ISIS). Ankara uses ISIS' former princes in its war against Kurds within the so-called Syrian National Army, fully supported militarily and logistically by Turkey."

## Illustrative Chart

According to statistics obtained by ASO Center for Studies from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the number of Syrians who have been killed by Turkish gendarmerie forces since the beginning of the popular protests against the Syrian regime has reached 489 civilians, including 90 children under the age of 18, and 45 women over the age of 18.

An illustrative table the percentage of men, women and children killed by Turkish border guards since the beginning of the popular protests against the Syrian regime.



### Conclusion:

Turkey has benefitted greatly from popular protests against the Syrian regime, and the war that changed the course of those protests towards undesirable destination for the civilians. Turkey is arguably the only beneficiary to date of Syria's devastation since Iran and Russia failed to gain what Turkey obtained financially and politically from this devastation. Hundreds of Syrian industrial companies have migrated to Turkey and provided cheap labor without any legal guarantee. This cheap labor supported many Turkish factories and companies that in turn exploited this subservient labor to the maximum. Agricultural crops including wheat, olive, and oil, as well as water resources, "the water of Afrin River directed to Reyhanli Dam" [i] were transformed to Turkey." Turkey has benefited from the enormous abundance of Syrian mercenaries who risk fighting Turkish wars even if they are in China. Turkey has a human reserve of refugees, which it can use for demographic change in Syrian Kurdish cities it occupied between 2018 and 2019.

Moreover, unaccounted funds for smuggling operations carried out through Turkish airports, estimated at millions of dollars benefitting Turkish smugglers. In addition to the huge budget (more than six billion) received from the EU on the grounds that Turkey cannot bear the economic costs of refugees. Not to mention, its continuous attempts to resolve its differences with the EU States, using refugees as a means of pressure on these countries, which seem to succumb, in anticipation of any large wave of refugees that Europe is no longer capable of handling, especially after the growing political discourse of the European far-right. On the other hand, Syrian refugees suffer

greatly from excessive popular and political racism against them in Turkey, that drives the majority of the Syrian people to consider leaving Turkey, without having a clear exit.

As Turkish interests in the region changed and some renewed, Turkey used the file of the displaced Syrians to change the demography of the Syrian Kurdish region that it occupies. It has become clear through the statements of Turkish politicians and officials that it wishes to settle refugees living in Turkey in the occupied Kurdish area and to build permanent settlements for the displaced Syrians in the Kurdish region, after Kurdish civilians were expelled from it.

Either way, by killing Syrians on its borders, the Turkish government seeks to manage the Syrian refugee file in line with its interests, inside and outside Syria. While Turkey kills Syrians today at its borders and prevents them from entering, the borders might be accessible in the near future to use Syrians in a political confrontation with the EU. As long as the killing of Syrians and using them as means of pressure do not receive any international attention or interference.

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://cutt.us/lANGe>

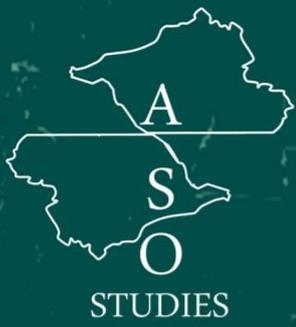
Migrant crisis: Germany warns Turkey against 'blackmailing EU'

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://cutt.us/pOm6P>

Afrin... «Turkification» and Demographic Change

<sup>[3]</sup> Details of Turkey's Theft of Afrin's water to Fill the Reyhanli Dam in Turkey

<https://cutt.us/etxU8>



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