

# Syrian Asylum Seekers and The Question of Living in Turkey or Returning to Their Home Country: Mardin Case

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## Abstract

Turkey, having faced mass migration since April 2011, has been the country hosting world's largest population asylum seekers. Within Turkey, the question as to whether Syrians will return to their country has often been the subject of debate. The main objective of the study is to discuss and evaluate the issue of Syrians living in Turkey for short, medium, and long-term periods. This study, via a survey, empirically examines the situation of Syrians from multiple perspectives on their returning tendency. The results of face to face interviews with 284 Syrian asylum seekers in Mardin have been reviewed and according to the results, 56.3% of them are reluctant to leave Turkey. In addition, the Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS), another assessment tool applied in the study, argued that there was no significant relationship between the social adaptations of the asylum seekers and their tendency to return to their home countries ( $p>0.05$ ). The low, medium, or high levels of social cohesion of asylum seekers do not affect their views on returning. Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that 60.0% of individuals who have spent 5 years and more in Turkey do not plan to return to their home country.

**Keywords:** Asylum-seekers, Returns, Syrian Civil War, Migration, Syrians.

## Mardin Örneğinde Suriyeli Sığınmacılar: Türkiye’de Kalmak ya da Geri Dönmek Öz

Nisan 2011’den itibaren kitlesel göçlerle karşı karşıya kalan Türkiye dünyanın en fazla mülteci barındıran ülkesi olmuştur. ‘Suriyeliler ülkelerine geri dönecek mi’ sorusu Türkiye’de sıkça tartışma konusu olmaktadır. Türkiye’de yaşayan Suriyelilerin kısa, orta ve uzun vadede ülkelerine dönme veya Türkiye’de kalma ihtimalleri hususunda gerçekçi tespitler yapılması gerekmektedir. Bu araştırma Suriyeli sığınmacıların mevcut durumunu çoklu açılardan ele alarak hem bir durum saptaması hem de “geri dönme eğilimleri” anket ve sosyal uyum modeliyle ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. 284 Suriyeli ile Mardin’de yapılan yüz yüze görüşmelerin sonucuna göre sığınmacıların %56,3’ü Türkiye’den ayrılmak istememektedir. Çalışmada uyguladığımız bir diğer değerlendirme aracı olan Sosyal Uyum Kendini Değerlendirme ölçeğine göre ise sığınmacıların sosyal uyumları ile ülkelerine geri dönme eğilimi arasında bir ilişki bulunamamıştır ( $p>0.05$ ). Sığınmacıların sosyal uyum düzeylerinin düşük, orta veya yüksek olması ülkelerine geri dönme düşüncelerini etkilememektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışmada Türkiye’de yaşama süresi 5 yıl ve üstü olan bireylerin %60,0’ının ülkesine dönmeyi düşünmediğini ortaya çıkarmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sığınmacılar, Geri Dönüş, Suriye İç Savaşı, Göç, Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler.

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## Introduction

Human history has recorded numerous examples of millions of people, been forced to leave their home countries for different reasons. Immigrants face the reality of adapting multiple factors, including different languages and cultures.

Throughout different periods of history, Turkey has been exposed to migration from neighboring countries for many reasons like war or civil unrest. However, 3.6 million Syrians living in Turkey is the most extensive mass migration in country's history. It is difficult for countries to manage mass migration, and while they can try to plan or manage movements efficiently, it always results in challenges. When the civil war in Syria first broke out, it was assumed that the war would be over in short time, and asylum seekers would return to their country. Yet, over a brief period, the unrest that started in Syria in 2011 has now become a global issue with an unresolved state and the involvement of international actors (Kirişçi, 2014:5).

Given the fact that conflicts have been going on for many years in Syria, the question whether Syrians living in neighboring countries will *ever* return to their home countries, bears in minds This is frequently discussed in host countries, and there is no an easy answer. This situation does not cause instability but also constitutes an obstacle to take permanent, holistic, and sustainable steps. In case of asylum seekers continue to live in Turkey under temporary protection, they will eventually become permanent citizens of the country. Confronting this reality, Turkey will benefit from taking measures to reduce the adverse effects and adopting long-term holistic social adaptation policies. This study aims to uncover the tendency of Syrian asylum seekers living in Turkey to return to their country using surveys, models, and a descriptive field study.

## The method of the study

This research was conducted with Syrians in Turkey, who are over 18 and inhabited Kızıltepe and the city center of Mardin province- where asylum seekers are mostly located. Between the dates 15.07.2019 - 15.09.2019, data collection was completed through face-to-face interviews. The study was conducted with 284 Syrians, and the research was compiled with a questionnaire form containing the socio-demographic characteristics of asylum seekers that used (SASS) the Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (Bosc, Dubini, Polin and et al. 1997).

SASS is a 21-item survey, and it questions four main areas of social functionality: the ability to streamline and cope with work, leisure, family, and the environment. It looks for answers to complementary questions to evaluate the motivations, behaviors, self-perceptions, and interests in different roles that asylum seekers have in their daily lives, as well as their overall satisfaction. The score range of the scale is between 0-60, and adaptation of the scale was developed by Bosc et al., (1997) into Turkish, while validity and reliability studies were performed by Akkaya et al. (2008). In a case where a person gets a score below 25 points, it is thought that there is a problem with social functionality. During the field study, communication with asylum seekers who did not speak Turkish was established through translators who spoke Arabic and Kurdish.

### **Data Analysis**

While analyzing the research data, IBM SPSS 22 statistics package program was used. Descriptive statistics of the data were given as percentage values, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, median, minimum and maximum values. Both the Shapiro-Wilk normality test and Q-Q plots have initially been examined when the data showed normal distribution. However, since the data did not provide normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test was used in two independent-samples group comparisons and the Kruskal-Wallis test in more than two independent samples group comparisons. The statistical significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Demographic Transformation in Syria**

The 2011 Syrian civil war and related international migrations point to a significant moment in world political history and the most extreme population mobility. The pre-war population of the Syrian Arab Republic was 22 million- including citizens and residents. Today, according to United Nations (UN) data, the Syrian population has decreased to 16.6 million (Kumaraswamy and Singh, 2016:416). And, since 2011, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 11 million Syrians have had to leave their homes (6.7 million of which were in the country). The Syrian crisis has deepened as the uncertainty in the region persists, and multinational actors are increasingly involved in the Syrian issue. Moreover, as Syria has started to become a multinational rather than a regional problem, all European countries, particularly neighboring countries, have been most affected by this crisis. Within this environment, Turkey, which has a 911 km-long borderline

with Syria, has become the largest refugee-hosting country in the world. According to UN figures, as of January 15, 2012, 9,500 Syrians were living in Turkey, and as of late, on January 9, 2020, the Syrian population in Turkey has continuously increased to current numbers of 3,576,369 ((UNHCR, 2019).

Additionally, according to the Turkish statistical institute (TSI), as of February 2020, Turkey's population has reached 82.3882 with the proportion of Syrians under temporary protection across the country now reaching 4.3% of the Turkish population (TSI, 2020). As a whole, Syrians have asylum seekers in many countries: Lebanon with 914.368 asylum seekers, Jordan with 654.692, and Egypt with 129.210 (UNHCR-Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2019). And, more than a million Syrian war asylum seekers have fled to Europe outside of neighboring countries. In Europe, Germany, which implemented an open-door policy against human drama, is currently home to 770.000 Syrians (Helms, Van Esch and Crawford, 2019:316).

### **Will Syrians Return to their Home Country?**

In Turkey, bureaucrats and politicians initially assumed that the civil war in Syria would end within an abbreviated period, and Syrian would return to their countries when the crisis had ended. But, as the number of Syrians has increased, human mobility has also drastically increased. Indeed, countries can generally plan or organize for migration, an event that happens regularly or is on-demand; however, managing mass migration is also tricky for countries, even those with a comprehensive migration history. Yet, for Turkey, such a mass migration had to be managed within a certain framework of international law because the Syrians taking asylum-seeker status in Turkey (from eastern countries), according to the 1951 Geneva Conventions, are not accepted as refugees. Turkey, under this contract, was obliged to give only refugee status from European countries. Yet, for the first time in international literature, Turkey set a conceptual and legal framework for asylum seekers who enter the country from neighboring countries under the name 'temporary protection'. In this way, Turkey established the legal framework for refugees using the 'Temporary Protection Directive No. 2014/6883, as well, numbered 6458 Law on Foreigners and International Protection 04.04.2013 (Eren,2019:128). Moreover, significant steps have been taken towards health and employment, especially education.

But, the question as to whether Syrians will return to their countries are still among the issues that are frequently discussed in public at this time. In particular, the presence of immigrants is discussed in Turkey just as much as

in Western countries, especially during the election period. In fact, the chief ombudsman Şeref Malkoç, emphasized the permanence of Syrians, stating that

*“after such migration and population movements, there appear to be very few returns, according to UN records, with only 20% of refugees returning to their countries. Indeed, 80% of them stay in the country they are visiting. No matter how much we encourage them to return, nearly 80% seems to stay”* (www.hürriyet.com., 2017).

According to a social and economic evaluation’s report prepared by a team of 70 experts from the World Bank, t four main factors will be effective in helping Syrians return to their country: security, livelihood, shelter, and basic needs (such as education, health, water, and electricity). Indeed, 103.000 Syrians who took asylum-seeker status in neighboring countries were able to return to their countries. The research reveals that while elderly asylum seekers tend to return more often, those who do not return are mostly families with children (Onder, 2019).

In point of fact, the Syrian regime actually calls for Syrians to return to Syria. However, after hundreds of Syrians have returned, they are arrested, interrogated, or tortured. Shockingly, eyewitnesses and human rights institutions found that almost two thousand Syrians were interrogated after their return. The fact that many of the questioned and arrested people are from the regions under the control of the opponents further increases the anxiety (Loveluck, 2019).

At times within Turkey, politicians, bureaucrats, and administrators raise the issue of the return of the Syrian agenda. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş stated in 2014,

*“it seems that the matter of temporary migrants in Turkey will continue to remain as a matter for more time. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that our brothers, who have left their lands under these conditions and have gone to this land or other countries, will return to their land for a long time. Thus, we need to produce a set of permanent policies to protect the fundamental rights and freedom of our brothers and to solve their problems.”* Still, there is often similar controversy in Turkey’s public opinion (www.aa.com.tr, 2014).

In specific, government agencies have tried to encourage voluntary returns through different mechanisms. The Ministry of Interior in this context has authorized the Turkish Red Crescent to process those who want to return voluntarily based on the instruction dated 30.03.2012: The instructions for hosting and the admission of Syrian Arab Republic citizens coming to Turkey

for collective asylum and Stateless Persons residing in the Syrian Arab Republic (Hoffman and Samuk, 2016:9). In this context, according to the report of the Ombudsman institution, 3205 asylum seekers made voluntary repatriation to the country as of 2017 (Ombudsman Institution, 2018: 186).

Overall, since the onset of the Syrian crisis, additional comments have been made on Syrian asylum seekers by both politicians and bureaucrats. Some studies and politicians report that if Syrians are given permanent status, they would not prefer to return to their country after the war. For this reason, giving temporary protection status would be the right choice (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017). Moreover, it is stated in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) report that 100.000 asylum seekers who returned to their countries had their temporary protection status removed after the Fırat operation (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2019:248). In contrast, on the report, prepared by the Ombudsman Institution regarding the Syrian Special Report, it is noted that “the tendency of Syrians to continue staying increases with each passing day. (Ombudsman Institution, 2018:35). Similarly, it is emphasized in the report that policies were determined within the framework of the temporal dimension of the Syrian crisis; however, it is necessary to develop social adaptation policies considering that they might become permanent. Black et.al (2004) reports that for states it is a difficult issue deciding on the legality and humanity of returning asylum seekers to their countries. According to him, three basic conditions are required for the return of asylum seekers: voluntary returns, safety issues, and sustainability. However, these conditions are not fulfilled in Syria, and for this reason, it seems difficult for Syrians to return to their countries before the end of the war in Syria.

On the other hand, there have been asylum seekers who, as a result of civil conflicts and economic-related issues, have migrated from different countries but still returned to their country of origin over time. For example, the migrants who took refuge in Turkey between 1989 and 1990 voluntarily returned to Bulgaria. Likewise, Ethiopian refugees came to their home countries from Somalia and Djibouti between 1984-1986. However, the number of refugees who migrated from Afghanistan, due to ongoing terrorist incidents and instability, had a very low rate of return to their home country. In reality, Afghan asylum seekers, instead, migrated to neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. Although UNHCR or developed countries supported them through return programs, their return efforts weren't very successful (İçduygu and Karadağ, 2018).

Furthermore, the World Bank report states that it may take at least 30 or 40 years for Syria to rebuild and stabilize. In addition, the reconstruction of Syria will involve serious cost. Therefore, in the near future, the conditions don't appear suitable for the return of asylum seekers, both in terms of time and cost (World Bank, 2017).

### **The Effect of Uncertainty in the Region on Returning Asylum Seekers**

Between 2011 and 2015, the Assad regime-controlled less than a fifth of the Syrian territory. Yet, with the support of Iran and Russia under the Damascus administration, Assad has regained two-thirds of the land. Additionally, in 2016 and 2018, Turkey created a security corridor with the Fırat and Olive Branch Operations. In addition, the Afrin and Jarabulus regions were also added to the corridor and are now under Turkey's control. Turkey intended to create a safe area as a base to purify the area from terrorists and facilitate the return of Syrians. However, the conflict continued in the region, and the Assad forces, who did not comply with the agreements made after Sochi in Idlib, caused a new wave of immigration. Rather than returning asylum seekers to safe districts in Turkey, Turkey began to see the influx of immigration from Idlib to Turkey increase (Aktürk, 2019).

On the ground, the military attacks of Russia and Iran against Idlib have encouraged the regime and forced the processes in the region into uncertainty. For this reason, the atmosphere of insecurity has caused those asylum seekers in neighboring countries to lose their hope of returning to Syria (Parker, 2019). Increasing rocket attacks of the terrorist organization YPG against Kilis province, and the anxiety of the desired terrorist state to be established in the region, have forced Turkey to take active measures in conducting military operations. Thus, Turkey felt compelled to create safe zones in the region with a depth of 32 km and 460 km, extending free areas from terror along the borderline. Despite the fact that financial support was requested from the international community on this matter, in the past period, the expected support was not received (Alptekin, 2019). However, President Erdoğan declared that he wanted to establish a safe zone with or without US support (Mckay, 2019). In this manner, Turkey has struggled in many areas to reduce the influx of new immigrants in Turkey and to sustain a return of asylum seekers, either through diplomacy or the creation of a safer zone. First, the Geneva process was initiated within the UN, but as time passed, the negotiations proved unsuccessful. Therefore, Turkey entered into a search for a diplomatic alternative. Under

the leadership of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, as the guarantor country's status, started negotiations in Astana in the hope that the wars in the region would be resolved through diplomatic means. The Parties made short, medium, and long-term plans on mostly free and fair elections and the establishment of the constitution, which received the approval of the Syrian people. With the agreement, it was announced that the patrol forces of the three countries in Idlib, Latakia, Hama, and Aleppo regions would take part as controllers and observers, aiming to prevent possible conflicts and monitor violations of the ceasefire (Cengiz, 2020:204). Despite these measures, the attacks of the Assad regime on Idlib continued. Finally, the Esad regime attacked the Turkish Armed Forces' observation sites, and 8 Turkish soldiers were killed. In response to this, Turkey reported that 80 regime troops were also killed (www.bbc.com.tr, 2020). While diplomatic relations in the region have gained momentum, the regime's attacks and the Russian and Iranian equation deepen instability in the region. So, as a result, the conditions required to provide returns have become more complicated, and asylum seekers who were thinking of returning have become increasingly hesitant and often tend to give up.

Despite all, the international migration organization has encouraged those who fled the country due to civil wars, economic and political instability to return to third countries or their own countries, and settlement of more than 150.000 people from Turkey to 16 other countries has been completed. International institutions and immigration authorities support migrants whose asylum requests are rejected or who have not been able to reach the destination country on the condition that they return. Alongside Syrians, Pakistanis and Afghans are also being assisted in returning to their countries.

### Peace Spring Operation and Istanbul Elections

After the Olive Branch, Fırat Shield, and Peace Spring operations partially made in the north of Syria, it is reported by official institutions that asylum seekers have returned. However, they disclose different data on the exact number. Despite this, the Minister of Justice Abdülhamit Gül did give a number after the operations by stating, "315000 Syrian brothers returned to their own country in Syria. As the safe areas in Syria occur, all guests will return to their countries" (Acet Ince, 2020:67). Both local governments and governorates desire to facilitate returns by supporting those who want to return, and after this process, Turkey has frequently begun to emphasize that it would provide a safe zone for the return of asylum seekers, yet at the same time, the Turkish Representative of the EU Delegation, Christian Berger, pointed out that



*“rather than return, the focus needs to be on the integration of Syrians, {and} there is a need to ensure security and stability in Syria in order to obtain mass rotation of returns (www.dw.com.tr, 2018).*

Since 2011, administrative and legal changes have been made for Syrians to receive access to basic rights in different fields, from education to health and employment. It was even on the agenda for Syrians to become citizens with President Erdogan, stating, in Kilis province, that they were working on providing Syrians with citizenship opportunities, *“I believe that among our brothers, there are those who want to become citizens of Turkey”* (www.hurriyet.com.tr,2016). In regard to skilled labor, public opinion in Turkey is that talented asylum seekers went to the Western countries while unskilled Syrians stayed in Turkey. Therefore, the proposal to make qualified Syrians legal citizens was advanced, albeit partially. However, after 2015, the presence of Syrians in social media and public opinion has heightened the debate, and as a result of increased responses, decision-makers and politicians have signaled a policy change regarding immigrants.

Moreover, in the general and local elections held in recent years, stereotypes and prejudices related to Syrians have been promulgated by political parties during the selection process. Particularly in the polls conducted in local elections, politicians expressing their discomfort about Syrians have forced the political parties to make policy changes. This was especially prevalent in the election on the 23rd of June 2019, with the AK Party, in which Istanbul’s loss to the CHP had been attributed by the central government to the Syrians and appeared to have greatly influenced the election. Accordingly, CHP won the election. After the election, although the decision of the governorship of Istanbul to send the informal Syrians to the provinces where they are registered is not related to the election, some circles reported that the election results were effective in this decision. In the press release, titled “irregular migration, unregistered Syrians, informal employment”, the governor’s office announced that 16,423 illegal immigrants were sent to the removal centers, and 4,500 Syrians in the province were sent to designated accommodation centers between the dates of July 12 and August 25, 2019 (Istanbul Governorship, 2019).

## Survey Details

In the study, 52.1% of asylum seekers were women, 32.4% were between 24-29 years old, 35.9% were high school graduates, 52.5% were married, and 64.8% had children. It was also discovered that most of those who had children (58.7%) had more than three children. In addition, 3.9% of the Syrian who participated

in the study had two individuals in their family, and the majority of them were students (39.4%, 25.7) and housewives (24.6%, 25.0%), both in their countries and in Turkey. And, reasons for migrating to Turkey differed: 88.0% of them left the country because of the war; 27.1% chose to migrate to Turkey because of relatives in Turkey, most of which had lived in Turkey for more than four years. For living conditions and overall adjusting, 67.3% of them perceived their living conditions as moderate; 26.4% of them had difficulty in communication due to language differences, 25.7% wanted to have a professional job in a few years, and 56.3% of them did not consider returning to their country.

**Table 1. Gender**

Gender	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	87	58.8	61	41.2
Male	73	53.7	63	46.3

In Table 1, the opinions of asylum seekers participating in the study on returning to their country by gender are given. It was found that 58.8% of women and 53.7% of men did not consider returning to their country.

**Table 2. Age**

Gender	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
18-23 years	40	44.0	51	56.0
24-29 years	52	56.5	40	43.5
30-35 years	28	62.2	17	37.8
36-41 years	17	73.9	6	26.1
42 years and above	23	69.7	10	30.3

Table 2 shows the opinions of asylum seekers participating in the study on returning to their country by age groups. While most of the individuals aged 18-23 (56.0%) who participated in the study considered returning to their country, it was found that most of the individuals over the age of 24 did not consider returning to their country.

**Table 3. Educational Level**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	2	50.0	2	50.0
Literate	14	87.5	2	12.5
Primary School graduate	19	63.3	11	36.7
Secondary School graduate	24	64.9	13	35.1
High School graduate	53	52.0	49	48.0
Bachelor's Degree	48	50.5	47	49.5

The opinions of Syrian participating in the study on returning to their country by educational degrees are shown in Table 3. It was found that 50.0% of illiterate individuals, 87.5% of literate individuals, 63.3% of primary school graduates, 64.9% of secondary school graduates, 52.0% of high school graduates, and 50.5% of university graduates did not consider returning to their country.

**Table 4. Marital Status**

Marital Status	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Married	86	57.7	63	42.3
Single	46	47.9	50	52.1
Spouse-dying individuals	20	74.1	7	25.9
Divorced individuals	8	66.7	4	33.3

According to the marital status of the Syrians participating in the study, the idea of returning to their country is given in Table 4. The findings were that 57.7% of married individuals, 47.9% of single individuals, 74.1% of spouse-dying individuals, and 66.7% of divorced individuals did not think about returning to their country.

**Table 5. Families with Children**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Families with Children				
Yes	112	60.9	72	39.1
No	48	48.0	52	52.0
Number of Children (n=184)				
1- 2	18	40.9	26	59.1
3-4	39	59.1	27	40.9
5 and above	55	74.3	19	25.7

The opinions of asylum seekers participating in the study on returning to their country by the families with children are shown in Table 5. The findings showed that 52.0% of individuals without children and 39.1% of individuals with children were considering returning to their country. Considering the idea of returning to the country, based on the number of children, showed that while most of the individuals who had 1-2 children (59.1%) considered returning to their country, it was found that individuals with three or more children did not think of returning to their country.

**Table 6. Family Members**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
2-4	24	42.1	33	57.9
5-7	70	55.6	56	44.4
8 and above	66	65.3	35	34.7

The opinions of asylum seekers participating in the study on returning to their country by the number of family members are given in Table 6. It was found that most of the participants (57.9%) who had 2-4 family members considered returning to their country, while most of the participants who had five or more family members did not consider returning to their country.

**Table 7. Reasons of Leaving Own country**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Due to war	138	55.2	112	44.8
After losing loved ones	6	75.0	2	25.0
Completing education (for self or children)	10	50.0	10	50.0
Due to spouse	1	100.0	0	0.0
Finding a job	5	100.0	0	0.0

In the study on returning to their country, reasons for leaving their own country are shown in Table 7. It was found that 55.2% of individuals left their country due to war, 75.0% of the individuals lost their beloved ones, 50.0% of the individuals had intended to receive education for their own or their children, and all of the individuals who had a spouse or wanted to find a job did not think of returning to their country.

**Table 8. Reason Why They Chose Turkey**

The reason why they chose Turkey	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Love of Turkey	27	57.4	20	42.6
Having relatives in Turkey	43	55.8	34	44.2
Turkey is a neighboring country	32	56.1	25	43.9
Turkey is an Islamic state	10	76.9	3	23.1
Turkey accepts them into the country	18	43.9	23	56.1
Turkey is safe	12	50.0	12	50.0
Similarities in terms of culture and tradition	9	69.2	4	30.8
To have a job	9	75.0	3	25.0

The reasons why Syrian refugees chose Turkey were presented in Table 9. 57.4% of those individuals chose Turkey due to a general fondness to the country; 55.8% had relatives in Turkey; 56.1% chose Turkey because it was a neighboring country; 76.9% chose Turkey because it is an Islamic state; 43.9% chose Turkey because Turkey accepted them into the country; 50.0% chose Turkey because they found the country safer in comparison; 69.2% chose Turkey because it has similarities to their country in terms of culture and tradition, and 75.0% of those individuals chose Turkey because of current jobs. All groups listed prior did not think of returning to their home country.

**Table 9. Staying Time in Turkey**

Staying time in Turkey	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	46	48.9	48	51.1
5 years and more	114	60.0	76	40.0

According to the period of staying time in Turkey listed in Table 9, 51.1% of individuals who have lived in Turkey for less than 5 years thought of returning to their home country, while 60.0% of those whose period of living time in Turkey was 5 years and over did not think of returning to their home country.

**Table 10. Assessment of Living Conditions**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Good	29	74.4	10	25.6
Moderate	112	58.6	79	41.4
Bad	19	35.2	35	64.8

The opinions of asylum seekers participating in the study on returning to their country, specific to the assessment of living conditions, are shown in Table 10. As reasons to stay in Turkey, 74.4% of the individuals who evaluated their living conditions viewed them as satisfactory and 58.6% of the individuals assessed their conditions as above satisfactory. In contrast, 64.8% of the individuals who evaluated their conditions as poor thought of returning to their country.

**Table 11. Challenging in Turkey**

	Yes		No	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Language (not being able to communicate)	38	50.7	37	49.3
Social environment (humiliation, exclusion, racism)	27	46.6	31	53.4
Economic difficulties	28	43.8	36	56.3
No challenging cases	45	83.3	9	16.7
Homesickness	5	71.4	2	28.6
Problems with a travel permit	9	69.2	4	30.8
Problems with university acceptance	2	40.0	3	60.0
Not finding a good job	6	75.0	2	25.0

According to the most challenging situation in Turkey as presented in Table 11, the results showed that the following asylum seekers with related percentages did not consider returning to their country. Along with this, the most challenging situation in Turkey was the language barrier (not being able to communicate), and the percentage was 50.7%. While those with no challenging cases were 83.3%, there were multiple other issues that were considered challenging to the asylum seekers: homesickness was 71.4%, 69.2% for those who had problems with traveling permits, and the percentage of difficulty in finding a good job was 75.0%. It was found that individuals who had difficulties in the social environment and considered returning to their country were based on multiple issues: humiliation, exclusion, racism at 53.4%, economic challenges at 56.3%, and trouble entering the university at 60.0%.

**Table 12. Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS) scores of the asylum seekers participating in the study (N = 284)**

Scale	Mean $\pm$ SD	Median (Min-Max)
SASS	26.07 $\pm$ 8.29	26.00 (0.00-51.00)

It was found that the total Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS) score average of the asylum seekers participating in the study was 26.07  $\pm$  8.29, as presented in Table 13. It appears that the level of social adaptation of asylum seekers, in general, is moderate.

**Table 13. Comparison of the scores of the asylum seeker's Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS) according to returning to their country**

	<b>SASS Totals</b>
Yes	25.91±8.91
No	26.28±7.45
p*	0.875

\*Mann Whitney U test

A comparison of the scores of the asylum seekers' Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS) is presented in Table 13. It was found that asylum seekers' opinions on returning to their country did not affect their SASS average score ( $p>0.05$ ).

In this study, SASS mean scores and the socio-demographic characteristics of asylum seekers were compared and analyzed. There was no statistically significant relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of the asylum seekers participating in the study and the SASS mean scores ( $p>0.05$ ). This result shows that the citizens of Kurdish and Arabic origin, who know Kurdish and Arabic and are mostly Muslim, live in the Mardin region where the study is carried out and have social harmony within their Syrian communities with similar characteristics. In fact, they were not affected negatively, but in contrast, they easily adapted.

## Conclusion

Since the 2011 Syria crisis, terminologies, such as 'temporary training centers, temporary protected status, and Ansar-immigrant', have reflected Turkey's viewpoint toward the Syrians. Between 2011 and 2015, administrative and legal regulations were designed under conditions of temporality. After 2016, significant changes were made regarding education, health, and employment, especially the international protection law (Tanrikulu,2018). Although making Syrians citizens were briefly discussed, this idea was abandoned due to reactions within domestic public opinion. After 2016 and following Turkey's general and local elections, the issue of Syrians has become the subject of political debate, and the idea that the presence of Syrians has influenced the election results has taken hold within the political parties. Subsequently, Syrian returns were supported by local and central governments with recommendations for safe zones being offered as an alternative. Therefore, the Syrian crisis has become a global issue rather than a regional issue. Although it was expected that a stable and comprehensive reconciliation would be achieved in Syria with the agreements of Astana and Sochi,

the attacks on Idlib caused a loss of hope. With Turkey's Peace Spring, Olive Branch, and Fırat Shield operations, the return of Syrians to their country has now been encouraged. Instead, these operations have resulted in Turkey seeking the return of asylum seekers and the implementation of safe zones. Despite requesting support from many countries and institutions regarding the safe zone, the expected support has not been received; therefore, not nearly as many voluntary returns have taken place as Turkey as had been expected.

In the Syrian crisis, which has now lasted over 9 years, the time factor continuously plays an important role in determining whether Syrians are permanent or temporary. Since their first arrival, Syrians who took asylum in Turkey at an early age or were born in Turkey now tend to feel like citizens of the country. As long as migration is well-managed, it has the potential to increase positive outcomes rather than the negative. However, if it is not managed well, it may contain significant risks.

In summary, many factors will affect Syrian voluntary returns. First of all, it seems unrealistic to expect the end of the war environment and safe and secure conditions to return to Syria. Although diplomacy continues in the medium and long-term, these negotiations have mostly been interrupted. Even if permanent peace is established, it is thought that the construction of Syria, employment opportunities, and basic needs will take a long time to recover.

Therefore, the environment that would have formed the return of Syrian in the short, medium, and long term are quite remote. In addition, although there is a tendency for the elderly or people who have spent some of their lives in Syria to return, this research shows that they have adapted over time, and the tendency to return is gradually decreasing. At the same time, asylum seekers who firstly lived in camps now live in cities, and 95% have managed to make a living. Moreover, Syrians, who have since spread to 81 provinces in Turkey, continue to make a livelihood either in business life or working in different sectors. In this context, their tendency to return to Syria will continue to decrease due to the fact that they have created both a steady life and emotional ties.

By addressing the current situation of Syrian from multiple perspectives, this research is significant in terms of both determining the situation and effectively understanding and analyzing the return trends. In the field research, conducted by face to face interviews with 284 Syrian living in Mardin province between the dates 15.07.2019 and 15.09.2019, the return tendencies were examined. According to the research results. First, together with 58.8% of women and 53.7% of men, most asylum seekers do not want to return to their home country. Second, most of the individuals over the age of 24 (56.5% of



those in the age group 24-29, 62.2% of those in the age group of 30-35, 73.9% of those in the age group of 36-41, 69.7% of those in the age of 42 and over) do not consider returning to their home country. When questioned about returning to their country, and according to the education levels of the Syrian, (from the literate to university graduate including 50.0% of illiterate individuals, 87.5% of literate individuals, 63.3% of primary school graduates, 64.9% of secondary school graduates, 52.0% of high school graduates, and 50.5% of university graduates), the majority of the Syrian do not want to return to their home country. Our findings confirm that 57.7% of the married who form the majority, according to their marital status, do not want to return to their home country. We also find that the majority, 60.9% of the asylum seekers with children, do not want to return to their home country, and as the number of children increases, the idea of returning to the country decreases. In fact, the number of Syrian children who were born in Turkey and continue their education in Turkey are not to be underestimated, and Syrian families tend to take up permanent jobs due to their children's educational processes. Clearly, this situation affects their voluntary return decisions. Other findings of this study show that 55.6% of those who have 5-7 individuals living in the family and 65.3% of those who have 8 or above individuals do not want to return to their home country. As the number of individuals in the family increases, the idea of returning decreases. When examining why Syrians chose Turkey, this study has found that 55.2% of those who responded 'due to war' do not want to return to their country. Although there were alternative countries for Syrians who were forced to flee their country, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt (all with similar language, culture, and history), more than 64% arrived in Turkey.

Generally, as a result of this study, it is clear that the majority of Syrians in Turkey with a living period of 5 years and more, 60%, do not want to return to their home country. An important point emphasized by the literature is the relationship between the long period of stay in the host country and the less desirable alternative of returning to the home country. Evidently, there are many examples in the world that confirm this relationship, and especially after the fifth year in an immigrant country, the asylum seeker's tendency to return very rapidly decreases while their tendency to stay permanently increases.

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