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TURKEY'S CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOREIGNERS SINCE THE INFLUX OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

1. The immigration phenomenon has become one of the most debated topics in recent years following the refugee problem that emerged as a result of the civil war in Syria, discourse of “Leave EU” groups against foreigners before BREXIT, Trump's attitude toward immigrants during the election process. In 2015, 244 million people worldwide were living in a different country than the country in which they were born. This figure, equivalent to 3 percent of the world population, corresponds to the largest immigrant population in history at the same time.³ Globalization has created an economic environment in which goods and services can cross borders more easily, and has been instrumental in establishing a new social order in which individuals can be more mobile as well. Unlike many countries that have viewed immigrants as “cheap labor force” in the economic development process, Turkey faced the problem of foreigners while hosting the victims of a civil war. 2.8 million⁴ out of nearly 5 million⁵ Syrians who are forced to leave their homes due to civil war are currently residing in Turkey. The economic integration of refugees in the face of increasing number of Syrians in Turkey has

¹ <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1336/Aysegul+Tasoz+Dusundere>

² <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1347/Yasemin+Satir+Cilingir>

³ Global Migration Data Analysis Centre. (GMDAC). Global Migration Trends Factsheet.

<http://iomgmdac.org/global-trends-factsheet/>

⁴ T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü. 22 December 2016 update

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR). Syria Regional Refugee Response. December, 22 2016 update

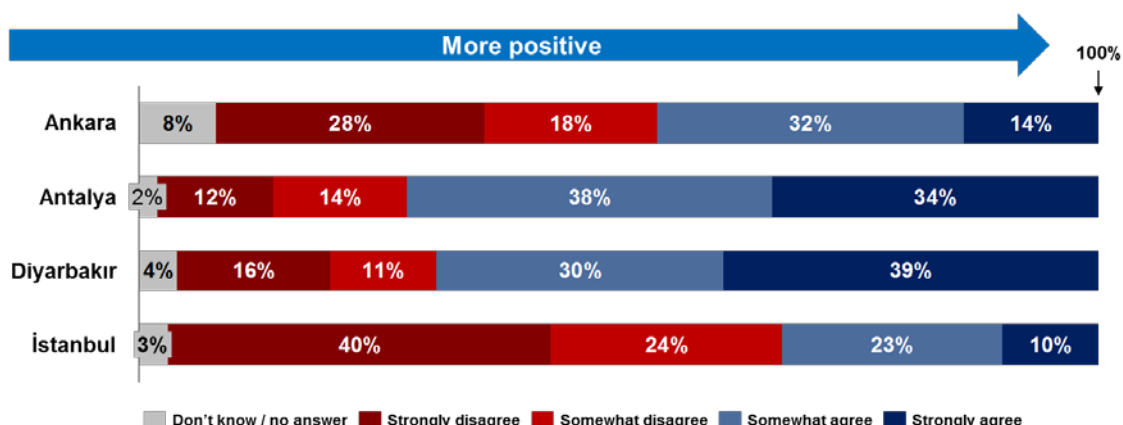
become a much talked subject. Yet, economic integration is only one of the steps for achieving social cohesion. The perceptions and attitudes of the locals towards foreigners play an important role in the harmonization process as well. In this study, we will examine a topic not much touched upon in Turkey so far: How is the perception toward foreigners in Turkey, and does Syrian refugee problem that started in 2011 have a negative impact on these perceptions?

2. **With the immigration from Syria after 2011, Turkey witnesses the greatest migration wave of its history. As Turkey witnesses a major migration movement, there are not yet enough available data sources to analyze the change in perceptions of the society over time.** The recorded increase in the number of foreigners and the fact that foreigners are now more visible in daily life have also affected the views of the locals on foreigners. Especially, some parties in the society have started to see refugees as a threat to the social structure, moral norms and economic competition.⁶ While different studies have begun to measure the perceptions of the locals on refugees, the fact that these studies have just begun prevents the possibility of comparison with the past. In order to compensate this shortcoming and be able to examine the change in perceptions towards foreigners in Turkey, a survey that was conducted in a different theme but also included questions about perceptions towards foreigners since 2004 was utilized. To elaborate, in the perception survey prepared by the European Commission to measure the quality of life in cities some questions are asked to evaluate the perceptions of the locals towards foreigners every three years. This survey, going on since 2004, has been carried out in cooperation with 28 European Union (EU) countries, 32 countries including Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. Field studies are being carried out in 79 cities of 32 countries. Ankara, Antalya, Diyarbakir and Istanbul were the cities included in the survey from Turkey, which is covered as a country in the study since 2006.
3. **According to the study's 2015 data, Antalya and Diyarbakir think that foreigners are well integrated into their cities, while Ankara and Istanbul have more negative judgments regarding the integration of foreigners.** During the survey, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "*Foreigners who live in this city are well integrated*". 72, 69, 46 and 33 percent of the respondents in Antalya, Diyarbakir, Ankara and Istanbul respectively stated that they "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with this statement. Not only are Istanbul and Ankara well behind Antalya and Diyarbakir in terms of positive perception towards foreigners, but also magnitude of negative perceptions in these cities is also remarkable. It is noteworthy that 64 percent of Istanbul thinks that foreigners have failed to integrate to the city (Figure 1).

⁶ Habertürk. December, 01 2016. Suriyeli Sığınmacılara Yönelik Algı ve Tutumlar Raporu.

<http://www.haberturk.com/yerel-haberler/haber/10232021-suriyeli-siginmacilara-yonelik-almi-ve-tutumlar-raporu> (accessed December 28, 2016).

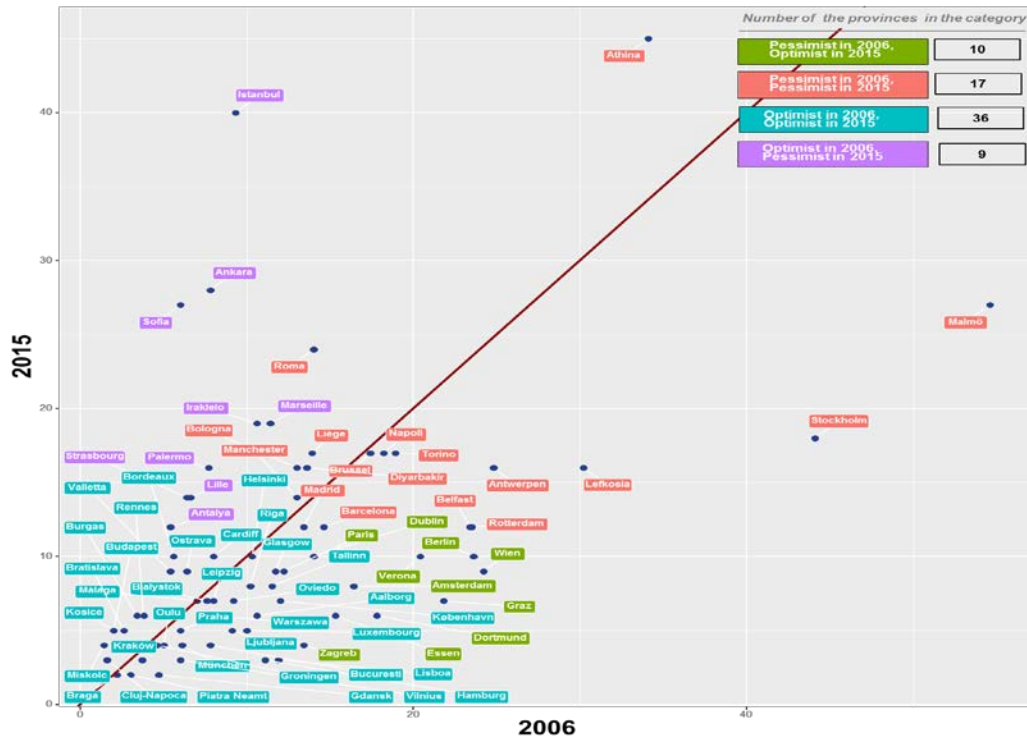
Figure 1: Responses to “Foreigners who live in are well integrated” statement, %, 2015



Source: Eurostat Perception Survey, TEPAV calculations

- 4. İstanbul is also experiencing the most radical change in perceptions towards foreigners in the recent years.** For instance, in 2006, only 9.3 percent of the city was strongly disagreeing with the integration of foreigners but in 2015 this figure spiked to 40 percent. As a matter of fact, with the increase of 30.7 points, İstanbul is the province which experienced the biggest change among the 72 European provinces that has participated in the survey in 2006 and 2015. While İstanbul is followed by Bulgaria's capital Sofia with 21 percentage points, Ankara with 20.2 percentage points is in the third place. Meanwhile perceptions regarding the failure on the foreigners' integration have increased dramatically in Ankara and İstanbul, the ratio of "strongly disagree" for all countries in the same period has decreased by 2 points. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Ratio of Respondents of “Strongly Disagree” to “Foreigners who live in are well integrated” statement, %, 2006 and 2015



Source: Eurostat Perception Survey, TEPAV calculations

- In addition to those beliefs that foreigners haven't been integrated to the society, the respondents in Ankara and Istanbul believe that the presence of foreigners is not good for their city. Eurobarometer asks respondents whether “the presence of foreigners is good for this city” at a scale from “definitely disagree” to “strongly agree”. The responses to this statement reveal that in 2009⁷, Ankara was the third most pessimistic city among European cities with a 19.7 percent “definitely disagree” response. In 2015 pessimism about foreigners’ presence increased to 35 and 34 in Ankara and İstanbul respectively, while these cities shared top two positions on the list of pessimism. Ankara and İstanbul also ranked in top two based on the percentage point change. The respondents in Ankara and İstanbul did not only think that the integration of foreigners had failed but also were of the belief that the presence of foreigners by itself is not good for their cities (Table 1). This dramatic change, which occurred almost in 10 years, in our two biggest metropolises cannot be thought independently from the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

⁷ This question was asked in 2009 for the first time. Since it was not included in the previous Eurostat Perception Surveys, percentage changes were calculated between 2009 and 2015.

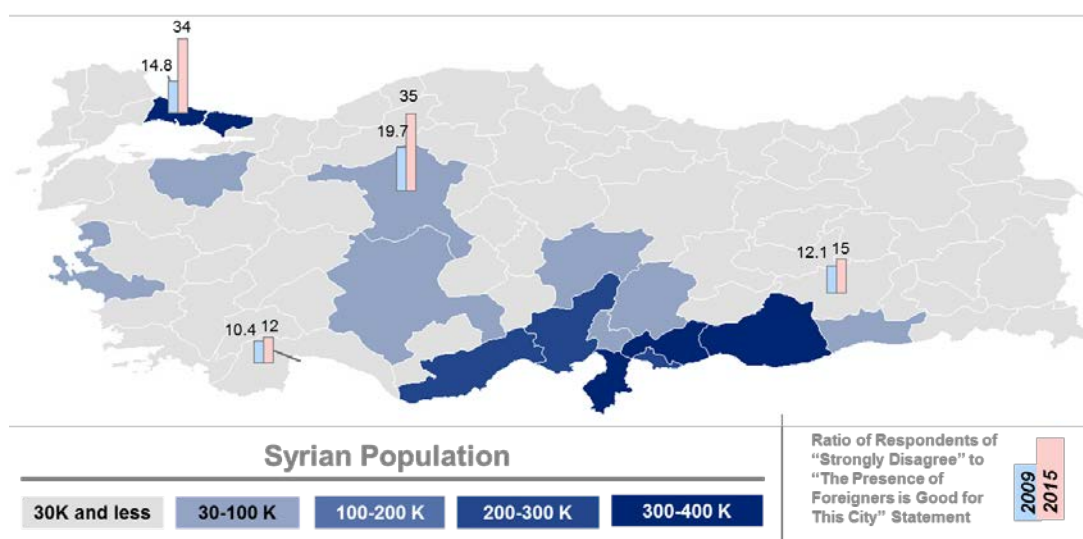
Table 1: Ratio of Respondents of “Strongly Disagree” to “The Presence of Foreigners is Good for This City” Statement, %, top 5 cities, 2009 and 2015

| | 2009 | | 2015 | | 2009 | 2015 | Change |
|-----------|-------|----------|------|-----------|------|------|--------|
| Lefkosia | 41.30 | Ankara | 35.0 | İstanbul | 14.8 | 34.0 | 19.2 |
| Athina | 32.00 | İstanbul | 34.0 | Ankara | 19.7 | 35.0 | 15.3 |
| Ankara | 19.70 | Athina | 29.0 | Roma | 11.4 | 22.0 | 10.6 |
| Irakleio | 19.70 | Bologna | 23.0 | Marseille | 10.7 | 19.0 | 8.3 |
| Antwerpen | 19.50 | Roma | 22.0 | Bologna | 15.0 | 23.0 | 8.0 |

Source: Eurostat Perception Survey, TEPAV calculations

6. **The increase in negative perceptions in Ankara and Istanbul has not been observed in Diyarbakır and Antalya.** Yet the Syrian population in these provinces is not very visible like in Ankara and Istanbul (Figure 3). There are 429,972, 66,998, 29,169 and 366 registered Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakır and Antalya respectively. Adaptation of refugees will be more difficult in Istanbul and Ankara, as the dynamics of big cities and the needs of city life are considered. The fact that the Syrian population is more visible in streets in metropolises like Istanbul and Ankara may be another factor shaping perceptions towards foreigners. In the case of Kilis, Hatay and Şanlıurfa, where the Syrian population is both high in number and ratio compared to the local population, the change in perceptions cannot be measured at this stage. However, observed trend in 4 survey cities may indicate a possible follow-up perception change in these cities as well. Struggling with perceptions to ensure the social cohesion between the locals and foreigners is the first step in an environment where perceptions shape attitudes and attitudes shape behavior.

Figure 3: Ratio of Respondents of “Strongly Disagree” to “The Presence of Foreigners is Good for This City” Statement, %, 2009 and 2015, Syrian population in 2015



Source: Eurostat Perception Survey, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Movement, TEPAV calculations

Note: Statistics on number of Syrian refugees are from Directorate General of Migration Management on February 2, 2016.

- 7. The change in attitude towards foreigners after a major immigration is not a distinct situation observed only in Turkey.** Although Turkey is the major host country, countries from the region specifically Lebanese and Jordanian are hosting Syrian refugees as well. According to the current estimates, 1 million Syrians live in Lebanon and 656 thousand Syrians live in Jordan.⁸ In these countries with less population than Turkey, Syrian migrants can affect economics and social life in different dimensions. For example, in 2013, a field study was conducted by the International Alert and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies in Lebanon aiming to evaluate the changing security perception of the public. As a result of this study, the presence of Syrian refugees was identified as the greatest security threat. This problem stems from the concern that the Syrians might get involved in crime, become radicalized which could result in terror and crime activities.⁹ Similarly, 79 percent of the Jordanians in 2014 states that they do not want more Syrian migrants in their country.¹⁰
- 8. There are various methods to avoid this problem before aforementioned change in the attitude of locals towards foreigners damage society's dynamics.** For example, in Marseilles, where the immigrant population is heavily populated in France, policies are being developed that aim to increase social inclusion rather than distinct policies focusing on immigrants as a separate part of the society.¹¹ In Lebanon, which recently faced a similar refugee crisis to that of Turkey, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan prepared for the year 2015-2016 underlined the need for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees and meeting the requirements to supply necessary protection for the Syrian refugees, it is stated that the same effort should be shown for the local vulnerable population as well.¹² Similarly, the Jordan National Resilience Plan (2014-2016) emphasizes the importance of supporting both locals and refugees in need.¹³
- 9. When designing policies for Syrian refugees, favoring vulnerable local population at the same time can function to improve social cohesion and to impair negative perceptions about immigrants.** The assistance provided by local and international organizations to Syrians in need consists mostly of acute solutions rather than permanent solutions. However, the inability of the disadvantaged local population to reach similar

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR). Syria Regional Refugee Response.

Data for Lebanon is lastly updated at September, 30 2016 while data for Jordan is lastly updated at December 19, 2016.

⁹ International Alert. (2015). Citizens' Perceptions of Security Threats Stemming From the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon. Background Paper. February 2015.

¹⁰ Brookings Doha Center. (2015). Fortress Jordan: Putting the Money to Work. Brookings Doha Center, 3 February 2015 Barakat, Sultan and Andrew Leber.

¹¹ European Commission. (2005). Study on Immigration and Social Cohesion. Final Report. 21October 2005.

¹² World Vision. (2015). Social cohesion between Syrian Refugees and Urban Host Communities in Lebanon and Jordan. 18 November 2015. Joseph Guay.

¹³ Ibid.

benefits leads to various discontents.¹⁴ This discontent severely damages social cohesion while feeding alienation in the form of local people who cannot benefit from public services that foreigners utilize. It is important for the public to emphasize the basic notion of the social state without polarizing the society with the local-foreign discrimination in long-term solutions, while the dissatisfaction of the local people is already becoming more apparent in Turkey and the other region countries hosting Syrian refugees. Because otherwise, the humanitarian aid to refugees will create a polarization in society, and the perceptions of foreigners damaging urban life will be strengthened. Such perceptions shaping attitudes and behaviors will also trigger social conflicts. According to recent reports, various conflicts have already occurred between the Syrians and the local population in such places as Ankara, Gaziantep and Kayseri. For this reason, the struggle with distorted perceptions, which the Eurostat perception questionnaires pointed to numerically, is essential to preventing social conflicts.

¹⁴ IE MED European Institute of the Mediterranean. (2015). The Syrian Refugee Crisis:

Conflicts in the Making. IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2015. Carol Tan. June 2015.