



**Asmin Kavas<sup>1</sup>**

*Research Associate*

*City Studies Program  
Area Studies Program*

**Omar Kadkoy<sup>2</sup>**

*Research Associate*

*City Studies Program  
Area Studies Program*

## SYRIANS AND POST-WAR GHETTO IN TURKEY

### INTRODUCTION

Cities are places where a lot of different groups of people meet. The practice of socio-cultural, social, and residential segregation brings a heterogeneous identity to those cities in the multidimensional and complex structure of the urban culture. This heterogeneity of cities including ethnic, religious, cultural, and denominational uniformities is surrounded by a homogeneous network of spatial relationships in urban areas called: Ghettos.

The ghetto concept prior to the 1980s was an outcome of ethnic, religious, denominational, and cultural discrimination. Thereafter, the term has also been used to describe parts of cities characterized with poor infrastructures, inadequate social facilities, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. The beginning of 2000s brought a new definition to ghettos. The term referred to modern gated communities as spatial productions of consumer culture. The outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2010 triggered waves of cross-border forced migration and resulted in the formation of ghettos consisting of refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1388/Asmin+Kavas>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1315/Omar+Kadkoy>

The case study of Önder neighborhood in Ankara as a post-war ghetto<sup>3</sup> or a refugee ghetto is based on a field research and in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders that covered forced migrants and settlement patterns, solidarity, and social networks of Syrian refugees. Moreover, the aim of the field research is to evaluate whether Önder neighborhood possess the criteria and characteristics of a ghetto. Furthermore, within the scope of the study, we look into factors of social sustainability such as distorted settlement, inadequate public services, high crime rates, education levels, poverty, social exclusion, alienation, and lack of political rights.<sup>4</sup>

**Keywords:** Residential Segregation, Social Exclusion, Homogeneous Relation, Urban Heterogeneity, Social Identity

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<sup>3</sup> The original paper of “Evaluating The ‘Ghetto’ Term Through Turkey” was presented by Asmin Kavas and Eren Çağdaş Bilgiç in *Constructing An Urban Future: The Sustainability And Resilience Of Cities – Infrastructures, Communities, Buildings And Housing, Amps*, 18-19 March 2018. “Post-war ghettos” which are, urban areas by refugees mostly settled by Syrians having homogeneous social status. The term was named during this presentation.

<sup>4</sup> Asmin Kavas and Eren Çağdaş Bilgiç, “Evaluating The ‘Ghetto’ Term Through Turkey”, *Constructing An Urban Future: The Sustainability And Resilience Of Cities – Infrastructures, Communities, Buildings And Housing, Amps*, 2018.

**Today, Turkey hosts 3.58 million Syrian refugees who are spread in urban settings all over the country.** One major urban cluster of Syrians is present in the southeast region of Turkey next to Turkey-Syria border. The southeast region is home to one-third of the Syrian population. The second biggest cluster is in Istanbul where half a million Syrians live. The remaining urban clustering of Syrians is in Hatay (444,216), Mersin (207,567), Adana (198,811), Bursa (146,456), İzmir (136,777) and Konya (106,456). Moreover, only 6 percent of Syrians live in 21 government-run camps located in 10 provinces of Turkey (see table 1).

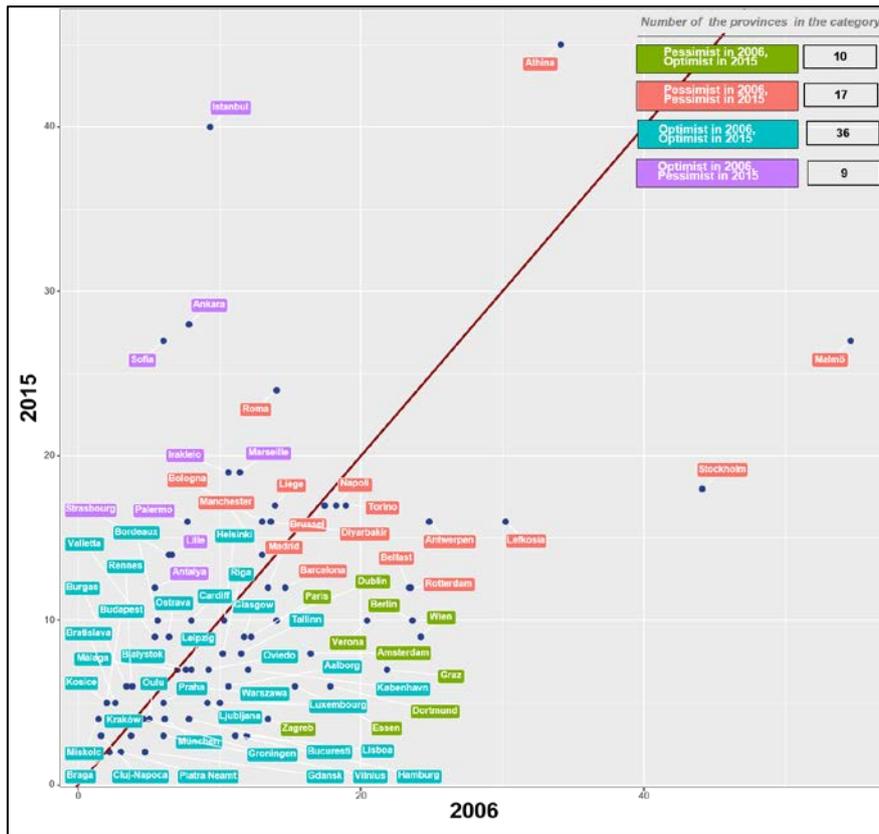
**Table-1: Urban vs. Government-run camps located in 10 provinces of Turkey**

|                | Şanlıurfa | Gaziantep | Kilis   | Kahramanmaraş | Mardin | Hatay   | Adana   | Adıyaman | Osmaniye | Malatya |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------|---------|---------|----------|----------|---------|
| Urban settings | 475,916   | 384,290   | 130,221 | 100,257       | 92,825 | 444,216 | 198,811 | 29,548   | 54,492   | 25,860  |
| In camps       | 73,631    | 23,842    | 23,919  | 16,784        | 2,617  | 17,089  | 26,091  | 8,870    | 14,129   | 9,426   |

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management

**The locals' perceptions of foreigners have changed when more forcibly displaced immigrants arrived to Turkey.** The influx of Syrians is the greatest immigration wave Turkey ever witnessed. The sheer number of Syrians who speak a different language, unanimously share one cult, and collectively descend from one ethnicity generates distinct perceptions among the locals in various cities of Turkey. Take for example Istanbul. The mega city is one of the world's most touristic cities. Nonetheless, Istanbulites perception of foreigners radically changed toward negativity between 2006 and 2015. This change ranked Istanbul on top of 72 other European cities which strongly disagree to the degree of foreigners' integration into the cities (see graph 1). Antalya, on the other hand, showed the most positive attitude among Turkish cities toward foreigners' integration into the city (Taşöz Düşündere, A and Satır Çilingir, Y, 2017).

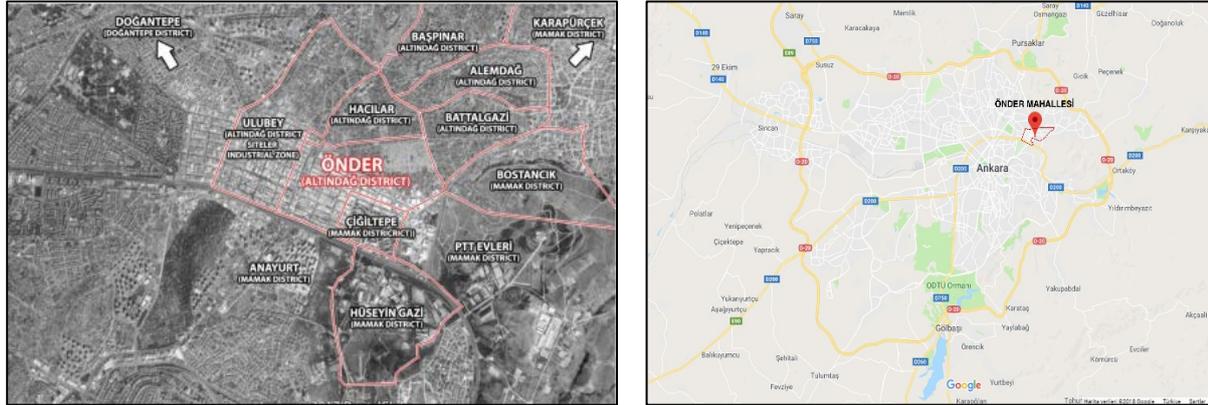
**Graph-1: Ratio of Respondents of “Strongly Disagree” to Foreigners, 2006-2015**



*Source: Eurostat Perception Survey, TEPAV calculations*

The protracted displacement situation of Syrians combined with the urban distribution and population concentration in particular provinces is leading to a ghettoization process in certain cities in Turkey. Hence, analyzing the dynamics in Syrian ghettos would help us understand the phenomena of refugee ghettos, assess the effect on the locals in specific cities in Turkey, and evaluate strands of social cohesion. One of the Syrian ghettos in Turkey is Önder neighborhood in Ankara. The capital of Turkey is home to 97,719 Syrians and Önder neighborhood in Altındağ district (see map 1) in the northeastern side of the city is considered an important shelter for a significant number of Syrian urban refugees (Eraydın, 2017). For this study, we conducted 15 interviews. 10 of the correspondents were citizens of Turkey and the remaining 5 were Syrians. 5 of the local respondents were residents of Önder for the last twenty years, 2 were the representatives of Altındağ district municipality, and 3 were police officers working in the neighborhood’s police station. The 5 Syrians live and work in the neighborhood.

**Map 1: Post-war Ghetto of Önder neighborhood, Ankara**



Source: Önder neighborhood and surrounding its neighborhoods. (Source: Google Earth, 2018)

The population of Önder neighborhood has been declining since 2007. Yet the decision of Altındağ municipality to declare Önder as an urban regeneration area accelerated local's relocation. The municipality demolished 2,150 buildings and the groundbreaking of 40 mix-used buildings (11 floor buildings including 6 shops) took place. The demolished area, however, remains without any signs of erected buildings so far (see map 2). Consequently, 6,000 locals between 2013 and 2017 relocated themselves temporarily to other places in Altındağ district. Nevertheless, the proximity to Siteler industrial area plays a significant role in providing Önder with municipal provision services (i.e. trash collection and social services) yet there is limited access to basic services such as access to clean water.

**Map 2: Urban transformation project area before and after demolishment.**



Source: Önder Neighborhood (Source: Google Earth, 2018)

The size of Önder neighborhood is 43 hectares with a population of 3,088 people, including 434 squatters, of whom 90 percent are Syrians (see figure 1). Gender wise, the population of Syrians consists of 47.3 percent of women and 52.7 percent of men.

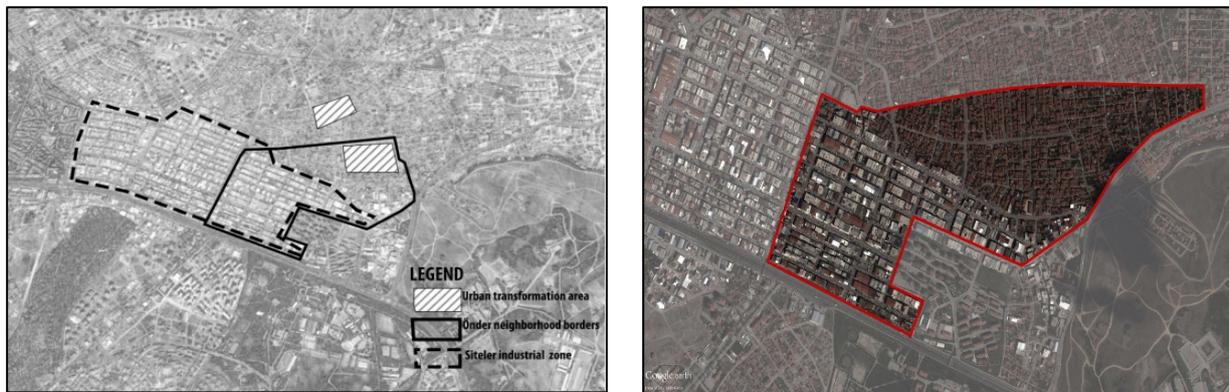
**Figure 1: Population and Gender Distribution for Önder neighborhood**



Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (2017) and in-depth interview with Altındağ Municipality

One of the reasons that add to the importance of selecting Önder neighborhood is its proximity to a small furniture manufacturing area called Siteler (see map 3). The residential and industrial areas are intertwined.

**Map 3: Önder Neighbourhood**

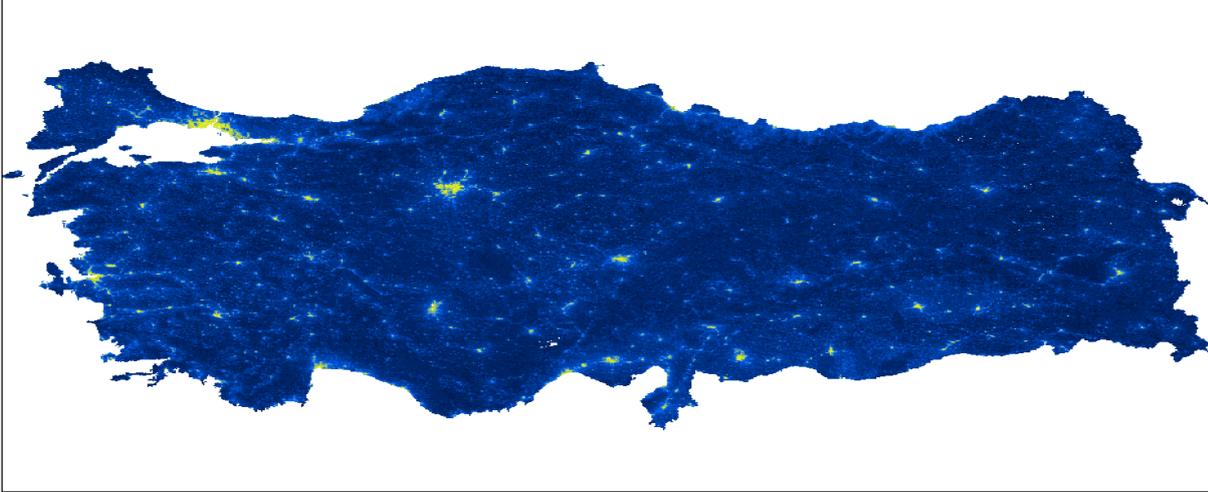


Source: Önder neighborhood (Source: Google Earth, 2018)

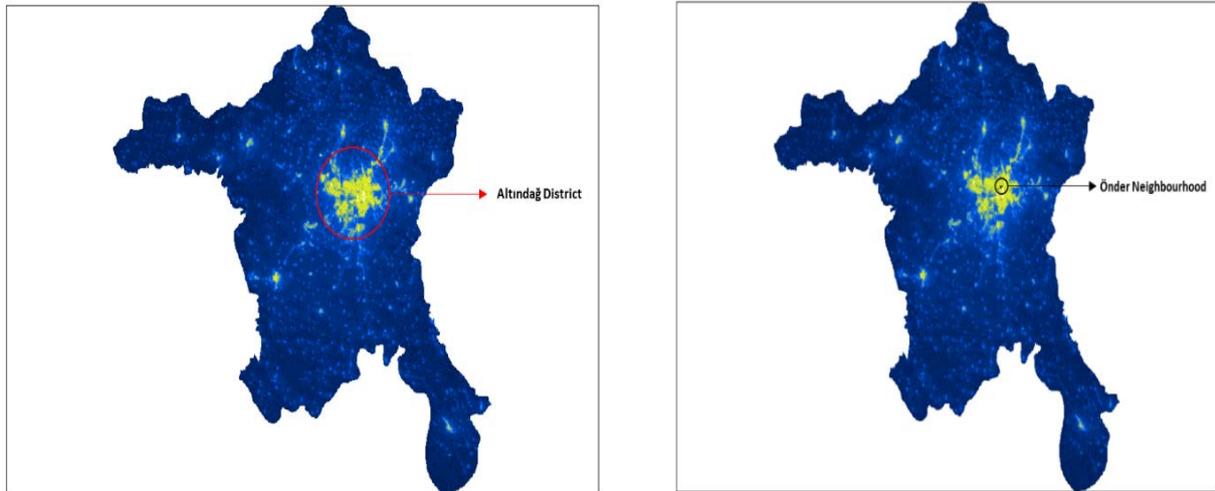
**Önder is not a neighborhood of low-level economic activity.** To elaborate, we use satellite imagery from outer space to check the neighborhoods night lights to estimate the level of subnational economic activity (see maps 4 and 5). The use of night lights recognized as a proxy for economic activity which is an indicator for demographic and socio-economic properties (Henderson, 2012; Taşöz Düşündere and Başıhoş, 2016). Initial analyses points out that Önder neighborhood has 70.2 units of mean intensity of light. The limited number of coordination points in Önder, due to its small surface area, hinders the meaning of the analysis – but it is obvious that Önder is one of the most dynamic parts of the Ankara.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> While whole population is respectively 155.378, 979, and 7 coordination points for Ankara, Altındağ and Önder respectively.

**Map 4: Intensity of night lights March-April, 2018, Turkey**



**Map 5: Intensity of night lights March, 2018 Altındağ district and Önder neighborhood**



*Source: Intensity of night lights mapping was prepared and measured by Aysegul Tasoz Dusundere<sup>6</sup>.*

According to our analysis of Önder neighborhood's night light we found out that Önder has a bigger economic vitality than Ankara. One source of the economic activity is the industrial city of Siteler where both locals and Syrians work. Another source would be the entrepreneurial spirit among Syrians who lease shops from locals to carry on with their own business. The shops leased by Syrians have Arabic signboards, which further deepens the sense of a Syrian ghetto in Önder.

<sup>6</sup>.Mean intensity of lights is measured as 2,4 units in overall Ankara where this number is equivalent to 21,7 units in Altindag district while whole population is respectively 155.378 and 979 coordination points in 2018 March satellite image

**Figure 2: Signboards of Syrian shops in Önder neighborhood**



*Source: The pictures were taken in Önder neighborhood to show how Syrian business owners use the Arabic alphabet in their signboards.*

**Önder neighborhood has a single set of values concerning the quality of social life.** Syrians in the neighborhood have economic, social or spatial balances with the dwelling units and population characteristics. A Syrian household consists of parents, 3-4 children and some relatives. Moreover, Syrians do not cross the borders of Önder unless they need to run paperwork chores in the provincial directorate of migration management or in Altındağ municipality. In relation, there is not enough time dedicated for leisure activities. For example, going to a picnic as a family is a rare endeavor. The married Syrian women, especially the mothers, do not work and spend the day taking care of the household. For socializing, these women gather at homes to sustain social and kinship relations. The one outdoor social activity takes place in front of an informal bazaar across a bakery that distributes bread every day at 11 a.m. The bazaar is the place for the Syrian women to socialize with the greater circles of Syrians in Önder.

**Figure 3: Informal Bazaar on a street in Önder neighborhood**



*Source: The pictures were taken in Önder neighborhood*

Syrian women also go to the education and cultural centers of Altındağ municipality where they can attend one of the following: vocational training, skills development courses or literacy classes for three days per week. Men, on the other hand, go to work if they are lucky to secure any job and that would be mostly in Siteler factories (Önder, 2011).

**Undocumented Syrians in Önder face the risk of labor exploitation and the inability to benefit from public provisions or humanitarian aid.** A police officer estimates the ratio of unregistered Syrians to be 50 percent or 1,400 Syrians. One consequence of being out of the temporary protection status, at least for those who seek jobs, is the sole option of informal employment. The eligibility for a work permit demands a Syrian to be registered under temporary protection for at least 6 months. Therefore, unregistered Syrians lose the bargaining chip to benefit from social security and health insurance. Economically speaking, there is an eye catching trend in Önder. The will to take an economic risk and open a business indicates a spirit of entrepreneurship. This could be a reaction to the exclusionary nature of the labor market in the greater economy. Nevertheless, the unofficial way of doing business through unregistered shops deprives the municipality, the local, and the Syrians from tax income that could be reinvested to develop the neighborhood.

Moreover, unregistered Syrian households cannot enroll children in public schools. In return, the unregistered households do not qualify, for example, for the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) – a scheme supported by the European Union and executed by the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs – to encourage the enrollment of refugee children in schools. Furthermore, unregistered Syrian households cannot access the healthcare services of public hospitals or the migrant healthcare centers. Consequently, this attributes to the high infant mortality rate among Syrians. Lastly, unregistered Syrian households would not qualify – even if eligible – for humanitarian aid such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) – EU's largest humanitarian scheme in effect after EU-Turkey Statement on Irregular Migration.

**Gender segregates the daily activities of Syrian children.** Syrian parents do not allow the girls to go to schools. They only go to Quran courses in mosques and spend the remaining time at home. Syrian boys, on the other hand, attend public schools and spend more time outside of the house. This has implications on the children's integration process. The Syrian boys will be the better integrated second generation of Syrians due to the language skills to blend in with the greater society and the education to harvest a better outlook. Unfortunately, the Syrian girls would remain in isolation from growing closer to the local culture and would remain in the lower orbits of literacy.

**The social network among Syrians and locals of Önder is based on minimum interaction.** Almost all locals of Önder moved to Mamak, Ankara, and leased properties to Syrians. Consequently, the locals who remain in Önder stand out by publically showing a message of identity: hanging out the flag of Turkey or painting the flag on the roof of the residence (see figure 4). Moreover, the economic ties are exclusive to nationality: Syrians shop from Syrians and locals shop from locals of whom only a grocery store owner, a butcher, and a hairdresser remain open in Önder. As for Syrians' economic activities the example of Selçuk Street stands out. The street is dubbed as *Little Aleppo* where all of the Syrian shops are unregistered and do not pay taxes. Syrians from around Ankara come and shop in Önder. The appeal for *Little Aleppo* is the fact that transactions are conducted in Arabic. So, there is a room for bargaining to lower the prices. Moreover, Syrians can also find products illegally brought from Syria that rare to find in the local markets.

**The social tension is present in Önder and it is a result of under regulation.** Syrians have socially created their own habitus and reproduced their culture under precarious conditions by

clustering in Önder. They turned deteriorating houses into their own and surrounded them with fences for the privacy of the female members of the family. Economically, they opened grocery stores, tailor shops, small bakeries, restaurants, furniture stores, and clothing stores. In relation, there is a weekly open market called *Syrian Markets*. Nevertheless, all of these shops and stores are not officially registered. This means Syrian businesses manipulate prices the way they deem necessary whereas the local counterparts abide by the regulations set by the municipality. In return, this causes unfair economic competition and feeds social tension (Unutulmaz, et al, 2017). Moreover, the locals' general perception of Önder is exclusionist in nature. For instance, on July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016, the media made news about a lynching attempt against Syrian refugees in the neighborhood (Çam, 2016).

**Figure 4: Locals identity protection**



*Source: The pictures was taken in Önder Neighborhood*

**The crime rates are very high in Önder neighborhood.** A police station was opened in Önder, according to Ankara's governorship circular in 2017 to sustain security (Koç, 2017). In our interviews with the police officers in Önder, we learned that the crime rate stands at 80 percent. It is important to note though that the area already had a reputation for criminal activities such as burglary and drug dealing even before Syrians settled down. Furthermore, the police officers said they receive one hundred complaints per day, they cannot respond properly. This is because either the complainant or the accused is not registered under Temporary Protection and technically it is the police who are handcuffed. Our observation indicates that Önder's aggressive atmosphere has an economic root. The idea of a Syrian shopping from out the neighborhood triggers a heated argument, which could easily escalate to a fight. This, in return, nurtures the walls of isolation the keeps Önder and its Syrian population disengaged from the bigger environment.

**Figure 5: The Police Headquarter**

Source: The pictures was taken in Önder Neighborhood

Önder neighborhood according to the findings of the field research meets all the characteristics of a ghetto. The findings from Önder meet all the parameters and characteristics of a ghetto (see table2).

**Table 2: Parameters of Ghettoization of Önder neighbourhood**

| Parameters of 'Ghetto'  | Positive / Negative Explanation for Önder | Explanation  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Population Density      | √   | Approx. 90%  |
| Residential Segregation | √   | Syrian refugees have started to settle in the area after the war broke out in 2011.<br>Uniformities are surrounded by homogeneous network of spatial relationships |
| Isolated Area           | √   | Although the neighborhood is not isolated by any structure, Syrians have minimal contact with other parts of the city  |
| Homogeneous Relation    | √   | -Syrian residents have economic dealings with each other.<br>-Arabic Alphabet is often used on shops' signboards.  |
| Social Exclusion        | √   | -Moving of Turkish residents.<br>-News about lynching in Önder neighborhood has increased.   |

## Conclusions

There are post-war ghettos of Syrian refugees in different cities across Turkey and we found one in Ankara. Locals moved out of Önder and rented the houses and shops to Syrians. The locals, who remain, however, feel an identity threat and in return they are hostile to the Syrians. The latter are divided into registered and unregistered groups. Technically speaking, the former group enjoys the access to basic public services such as education, health, and social safety nets international and local NGOs offer. The latter group, however, cannot access those benefits because they do not have the necessary identification cards. Consequently, children are unable to enroll in schools and entire households are deprived from health services. The conditions in Önder create rough survival dynamics for Syrians and when combined with a laissez-faire policy, a negative perception of Syrians formulates in the minds of the hosting society and fuels the generally polarized political spectrum in Turkey.

The determinations of Önder are consequences of a three-layer refugee governance policy at the local, the national, and the regional levels. At the local level, the government deals with Syrians by, on the one hand, providing them with working rights without an effective tools for formal employment, and, on the other hand, by restricting the opportunity of formal employment to the province of registration. Furthermore, disruption in the delivery of services occurs due to the municipalities inadequate budgets for Syrian refugees. This form of Ping-Pong policies causes reactionary responses including violent incidents, deprivation of services, widespread hostilities and anti-refugee sentiments. Moreover, the case of a local refugee ghetto with a number of unregistered Syrians has a spillover at the national and regional levels. The insecurities Syrians face in Önder and other similar places ignites the decision to undertake dangerous journeys to reach Europe where they could apply for asylum and benefit from a structured set of rights under the international law (Baban, Ilcan and Rygiel, 2017).

To sum up, designing inclusive policies to address both the vulnerable locals and Syrians could work to enhance the social cohesion and impair negative perceptions about immigrants. In so far, the assistance of both local and international stakeholders leads to discontent as it is insufficient and lacks a permeant outlook. This discontent severely damages social cohesion as it feeds alienation among Syrians and the hostility of locals. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the notion of inclusive benefits without polarizing the society with discrimination. One product that could deliver these outcomes is the second batch of the €3 billion under the EU-Turkey Deal. As such, the dialogue between Brussels and Ankara should get out of the umbrella of humanitarian aid and head toward designing an inclusive socio-economic integration policy.

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