

SITUATION REPORT

Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 30 November 2013

An Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Mardin Province

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

As of 25 November 2013, the number of Syrian refugees registered with the Turkish authorities is 527,307. Along with those unregistered, it is estimated that Turkey hosts at least 700,000 Syrian refugees ([UNHCR](#)). The numbers of the camp and non-camp population is broken down as follows:

As of 25 November 2013 (Source: UNHCR Turkey Syrian Refugee Daily Sitrep)	
Number of refugees registered and with registration appointments	527,307
Total number of refugees in camps	205,171
Total number of refugees outside the camps	322,136
Estimated total number of refugees in Turkey	700,000

As of the end of November, 205,171 Syrians are hosted in 20 refugee camps that are established along the border provinces, of which 15 are tented camps and 5 are container sites.

The provinces in which refugees are settled, along with the number of camp sites and the total Syrian refugee population in each province, both in and outside the camps is given below:

As of 7 November 2013 (Source: UNHCR Turkey Syrian Refugee Daily Sitrep)		
Provinces	Number of Camps	Total Population
Gaziantep	4	139,050
Sanliuفا	3	115,259
Hatay	4	77,560
Kilis	3	65,244
Mardin	1	40,796
Kahramanmaras	1	25,807
Osmaniye	1	17,607
Adana	1	15,843
Adiyaman	1	10,277
Malatya	1	7,130
Istanbul	-	138,000 (est.)
Other	-	42,427
Total	20	700,000 (est.)

ASSESSMENT IN MARDIN

During November 2013, [Support to Life](#) (STL) field staff performed an assessment of the living conditions and needs of the Syrian refugees in Mardin province. The assessment was carried out in areas with the highest density of Syrian refugees, namely Mardin centre, Kiziltepe, Midyat and Nusaybin districts. Based on interviews with diverse stakeholders in the area and direct contact with refugee families, STL team tried to capture an overview of the current refugee status in the province and the assistance provided. Among the visited stakeholders were District Governors, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) offices, international organisations, local aid agencies, and religious community groups.

Mardin, as one of the provinces of the Southeast Anatolia region has a long border with Syria. The province is divided into ten district governorates and possesses a population of around 750,000. Mardin is renowned for its mixed population of ethnic groups, mainly consisting of Kurds, Arabs, Turks and Syriacs (Syrian Orthodox Christians).



Kiziltepe and Nusaybin (the counterpart of Qamishli on the Syrian side of the border) are districts with Kurdish majority. These are also the two districts that have been receiving the largest number of refugees from Syria. There are two land border crossing points to Al-Hasakah province in Northern Syrian, namely Nusaybin and Senyurt. Both stations are closed at the moment, which makes it impossible to cross legally even for those with valid passports. Irregular border crossing into Mardin province is common. Turkish authorities have started to build a wall alongside Nusaybin border crossing to prevent irregular passing and smugglers. Others see it as an attempt to divide the Kurdish majority populations on both sides of the border. As response to the construction of the wall, the Mayor of Nusaybin, Ms. Ayse Gökkan, spent several days on hunger strike protesting, after which the construction has been temporarily stopped.



Regular cross-border aid has been delivered into Syria at zero point from Nusaybin. Recently, rumors talk about this aid reaching the other side of the border and being distributed by networks of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) of Syria. For the past decade, Mardin has been caught between the Kurdish-based Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). The current tensions related to government's position on the Syria crisis is reflected in this competition.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN MARDIN

The official number of Syrian refugees in Mardin currently stands at 40,796. According to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Syrian refugees in the province are concentrated in Kiziltepe district with around 25,000, Nusaybin district with around 10,000, Mardin centre with 8,000, and Midyat district with approximately 6,000 refugees. Local charities in Mardin estimate as high as 100,000 Syrian refugees throughout the province.

The majority of Syrian refugees in Mardin province come from the neighbouring Syrian governorates of Al-Hasakah, Al-Raqqah and Aleppo. Most of the refugees have relatives or communal ties in Mardin province. Most of the Syrian refugees are Sunni Arabs and Kurdish Syrians, with Syriac families having found refuge in Mardin centre and Midyat, which is home to two of the oldest monasteries in the world, namely the Dey-ul Zafaran (Saffron Monastery) and the Mor Gabriel (Monastery of St. Gabriel).

There is a refugee camp in Midyat with 7,000 people capacity. It was erected on the land of the local Orthodox Church. It has two separate sections, one for Muslims and the other for Christians. The camp has 1,300 tents in total and a capacity to host 7,000 refugees. The Christian section, with a capacity to host 4,000, remains vacant for now and stands ready for a large influx of refugees in the months to come. The section for Muslim refugees, on the other hand, is full with 3,102 refugees, mostly Sunni Arabs, making full use of the facility. A similar number of refugees are believed to be living in and around Midyat town.

According to a local association, around ten new families arrive to the province on a daily basis. Most of them have no belongings and little money. Compared to the Syriac families, Sunni Arab and Kurdish families have distinctly higher number of children, women and elderly people in the household.

Reasons for leaving Syria have been stated by refugees as the deteriorating public infrastructure and services in Syria, along with elevated prices and the increased cost of living. More specifically, refugees have mentioned difficulties in accessing clean drinking water, health care services and unsafe school buildings. Overall, the hostile and violent environment has made it almost impossible for these Syrian families to carry on their daily lives back home.

The major concern voiced by interviewed refugees is the constant financial uncertainty they find themselves in. Given limited resources, many refugees have been looking for income opportunities and have taken up daily jobs such as work on construction sites, agricultural fields or in the service sector. As a result of limited financial resources, many families struggle with paying for food and rent. Families reported rents between 200-450 TL (approx. 75-160 EUR) per month in Mardin center, Midyat and Kiziltepe. With the winter season approaching, refugee families are likely to be confronted with even more challenges.

Sunni Arabs

It has been more than a year that the number of Syrian refugees in Mardin has started increasing dramatically. The refuge to Mardin province is an ongoing process with no signs of ceasing in the near future. The numbers among Sunni Arab and Kurdish groups have shown a steady increase in the past months. Local charities report no acute tension between the refugees and the host

population. There have been some sporadic incidents, but around 60% of the refugees are believed to have relatives in the area, which helps mediate the tension.

The estimated Sunni Arab out-of-camp refugee population in the province lies around 50,000. They represent the biggest fraction of the refugee population in Mardin. The majority of Sunni Arabs coming to Mardin settle in Kiziltepe, Nusaybin and Mardin centre. Compared to the Kurdish and Syriac refugees, Sunni Arabs have less kinship relations in Mardin and the surrounding area.

Kurdish Refugees

Syrian Kurds in Mardin represent the second biggest fraction within the Syrian refugee population. Most of the Kurdish population comes from the neighboring Al-Hasakah governorate. Unofficial estimations of their total numbers in Mardin province is around 30,000. Given the fact that local Kurds are a majority in the districts of Kiziltepe and Nusaybin, the majority of the refugees in these two districts are Syrian Kurds. It is estimated that the mobility rate of the Kurdish population is higher than the Sunni Arabs and Syriacs. They move both within the province as well as over the border and back.

Syriac Refugees

The biggest Christian refugee communities are settled in Mardin centre and Midyat, coming from the Syrian province of Al-Hasakah. Pastor Gürkhan, member of the Turabdin Syrian Christians Committee in Midyat, provided some insight into the destroyed infrastructure, the increasing scarcity of food and clean drinking water back home for the Syriac families. The high number of kidnappings of Christian religious leaders in Northern Syria is particularly alarming and a reason for concern.

In Syria in general and in Al-Hasakah region in particular, there is a fracturing of the opposition and the proliferation of armed groups. More and more so, Christians find themselves caught among the many armed groups, which is especially the case in Rojava district. Two fatwas recently announced by radical Islamic groups have been one of the final instigators of Christian groups to seek a way out of Syria: “No more Christians in Syria” and “Christian and Kurdish women are halal”.

Despite the worsening situation in the last months, the local Orthodox Churches have been receiving refugees for over a year now and has been periodically providing relief goods and services. Pastor Gabriel, STL team’s local contact, reported around 180 Syriac refugees in Mardin centre.

While some Syriac refugees rent apartments, others stay with relatives. Yet others use the premises of the Church free of charge. In case of Midyat, STL team was told that around 40 Christian refugees are settled there since the past six months. At present, there are three families hosted in guesthouses of the Syriac Cultural Association. Turabdin Diocese mentioned 60 Syriac families in the area. Only 19 of them have been able to afford apartment rents, while the rest is being hosted in guesthouses or are staying with relatives. The rental costs of those who stay in the guesthouses are covered by the local Christian community. For food and other basic expenses, they raise money on their own. The Church provides Syriac youth with some basic education.

Although there is a separate section in Midyat refugee camp for the Christian population, Syrians have chosen to stay out of the camps. There are only around 30 Syriac families registered by AFAD.

Pastor Gabriel explained to STL team that the Church prefers to maintain the camp as it is, in case of a sudden influx of large number of refugees from over the border.

Refugee Camp in Midyat

An interview with the Camp Manager of Midyat Refugee Camp yielded the basic information that the construction work on the camp was started in April 2013 and the camp received its first refugees on 19 May 2013. While some refugees are from the town of Qamishli just over the border in Syria, it

was claimed by the Camp Manager that 95% were relocated from collective shelters in Hatay province.

The camp uses a voucher system for its own markets on camp premises. Each refugee receives 100 TL per month, which they are able to spend in the camp market. The camp has three market places, of which only one is currently functional. Around 17% of the market's income is put back to the camp administration. With the food items that they buy, camp residents cook their own food. Refugees are also able to access non-food items provided that their cash permits.

In addition to the services of food and drinking water on a routine basis, the camp offers twelve different vocational and skills development courses, among which the most popular ones are Turkish language trainings, sewing, and computer literacy. A total of 986 Syrians are enrolled to these courses. Camp authorities stated that 1,080 Syrian students have access to the primary and secondary education services in the camp. The camp-school is accredited by the Turkish Ministry of National Education and the curriculum is coordinated with the Syrian National Coalition.

Refugees are provided a one-time weekly leave of 12 hours and a 10 days leave (for adults) for longer trips each month. There is also a functioning health centre in the camp. For urgent cases, patients are transferred to other hospitals in the province.

For statistical and health-care purposes, out-of-camp refugees are strongly encouraged to register with the camp authorities. Therefore, Midyat camp also serves as a registration centre for the non-camp population. The Camp Manager stated around 200 new registrations each day. The current registration system of Syrian refugees will soon be undergoing reconfiguration as the new system will be using fingerprint scanners in order to prevent multiple entries. The ID provided by the camp can be used exclusively for health-care provisions within the borders of Mardin province and are not valid in other provinces.

Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) is planning to extend the range of its assistance to the non-camp population. Arrangements have been made for the establishment of a Syrian school in the near future financed by the District Governorate. In December 2013, an additional refugee camp is planned in Nusaybin with a capacity of 20,000.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Government Aid

Apart from the facilities and services provided in the refugee camp in Midyat, for the registered 40,796 Syrian refugees in Mardin, the only systematic assistance provided by the government is access to free medical service and drugs. This is the primary aim of the ID cards issued to registered Syrian refugees. Other than this, public authorities provide ad-hoc assistance to the non-camp population.

The Turkish government provides occasional assistance in the form of cash or in-kind distributions of food, coal, and clothing items for the refugees. In Midyat, the District Governor mentioned cash assistance of 500,000 TL (approx. 190,000 EUR) to 4,500 Syrian refugees, amounting to around 100 TL (approx. 40 EUR) per person. In the case of Mardin centre, the financial aid received from AFAD has a value of 250 TL (approx. 90 EUR) per person. Financial assistance from the public authorities in Kiziltepe was stated by Syrian refugees as 170 TL (approx. 60 EUR) per person.

This reveals no consistent policy regarding the amount and frequency of government assistance to Syrian refugees in Mardin province.

Aid agencies

The most systematic and extensive assistance seems to be provided by Mardin Syria Aid Platform, which is a network of 47 local charities. Operating on private donations, the platform runs projects for the Sunni Arab and Kurdish populations. One of the projects, the so called “Kardes Aile” (Foster Family) project runs in Mardin centre from which almost 200 refugee families benefit. The aim of the project is to involve local families in the daily provisions for the refugees. Local families commit to contributing to the daily needs of refugee families, either partially or in full, with the platform covering the remaining portion.

Another project of the Mardin Syria Aid Platform is the “Empty Box” project, in which the platform distributes boxes to local schools and families are asked to donate dry goods to Syrian families in need. This is a project that runs with great success, so the platform is planning to extend the project and distribute boxes also to residential buildings.

Looking at overall impact, Mardin Syria Aid Platform claims to have reached out to 20,000 Syrians in Mardin. The platform also distributes 500 pieces of bread on a daily basis and provides clothing items, blankets, carpets, furniture and cash to those in need. The platform members are preparing to distribute coal for the upcoming winter season.

Dey-ul Zafaran is a Christian foundation that provides financial support to the Syriac refugee community in Mardin centre. The foundation has good relations with Syriac communities and organizations in the West and channels donations from abroad. Depending on incoming donations, Dey-ul Zafaran distributes cash in the amount of 100 TL (approx. 35 EUR) per person or takes over the subsidiary lodging costs of displaced Syriac families. The foundation also spends cash donations on food aid and clothing items.

Şefkat Dernegi is another aid agency that works hand-in-hand with Dey-ul Zafaran and provides assistance to Syriac refugees. They distribute vouchers on a regular basis for food and hygiene items. Caritas is also an active partner to the Syriac community in Mardin. The organisation procured and delivered mattresses for a cost of 14,000 TL as supply to a local hospital.

The Turabdin Syriac Committee, made up of Metropolitik, Midyat Church Foundation, and Midyat Syriac Cultural Association, also provides aid to Syriac refugee families settled in Mardin. All three associations provide shelter support as well as distribute assistance and donations received from Syriac communities abroad.

In addition to targeting Syriac families in Midyat, Şefkat Dernegi supports the many Muslim Syrians in Kiziltepe district. The association has an arrangement with a national market-chain and distributes vouchers (called BIM cards) of 25 TL value. Although not a high value, depending on their vulnerability, beneficiaries are able to possess more than one BIM card per person. The distribution of voucher cards to Syrian families occurs on a monthly basis.



Salaheddin-i Eyyubi Yardım Derneği is another aid agency that has reached out to 4,386 families living in the district of Kiziltepe. They have their own registration system and register around 50 new Syrian refugees on a daily basis.

The charity supports refugees with housing, delivery of food packs and clothing items. Second hand clothes are collected at Istanbul University and transferred to the Kiziltepe office of Salaheddin-i Eyyubi Yardım Derneği. The charity gets donations from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Eğitim Bir Sen is yet another association that works exclusively with the nearly 6,000 Syrians settled in Midyat. The organization collects in-kind donations such as second hand furniture for delivering to Syrian refugee families. When they are able to access cash donations, Eğitim Bir Sen also provides rental support to families living in rented apartment flats. Eğitim Bir Sen is planning to soon start a voucher program by opening up a food and clothing store in Midyat.

School-aged Syrian children have access to education services in the Midyat refugee camp, however those living outside the camps have limited opportunities. Until a few months ago, the Turkish government was not in favor of facilitating the opening of Syrian schools in Turkey. Recently having realised the risks associated with the further disruption of formal education, the government has released a circular dated 26 September 2013 in which they promote the establishment of Syrian schools in urban settings where Syrian refugees are settled.

In Mardin, related public authorities and municipalities have made progress in facilitating refugee schools in the province. For instance, STL team visited the site that local authorities have appointed in Midyat for this purpose and have made arrangements to set up a prefabricated school building.

Charities operating in Mardin are also highly engaged and involved in the provision of education facilities and services. With the active assistance of Eğitim Bir Sen, a temporary Syrian school was opened in a public school's basement in Midyat. Ten classrooms are available for students of 1-9th grade. A total of 370 students are enrolled in the school. For the running of the school, Eğitim Bir Sen gets support from Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) and private donors from Kuwait. Even though the curriculum is composed by the Syrian National Coalition and includes classes on ethics, national values, and national struggle, the text books are provided by Kuwait. Eğitim Bir Sen states that this is only a temporary solution until a bigger school building with 24 classrooms is opened with approval from the District Governorate of Midyat.

STL team also visited a Syrian school in Kiziltepe, the district with the highest number of Syrian refugees in the province. The Syrian school in Kiziltepe (see photo on the right) is the result of an international partnership, implemented by Gözbebekleri Dernegi, a national aid agency. The association provides education to 635 students in 8 classrooms. Arrangements have been made by extending the school building with additional 15 containers. These containers were used for similar purposes in Van after the earthquake.



At the moment, there are 10 teachers and 4 workers sustaining the education facility in Kiziltepe. Formal education is available for students of 1-9th grade. With the approval of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, the curriculum was composed by the Syrian National Coalition, with text books being provided by donors from Qatar.

CONCLUSION

Irrespective of their ethnic or religious background, kinship relations between the host communities and their guests indicate that support systems are in place for a large portion of the Syrian refugees who have chosen to settle in Mardin. Indeed, STL team observed the presence and functioning of these kinship ties in terms of offering basic facilities and meeting the most critical needs of refugee families. When coupled by ad-hoc assistance from the government and the more steady aid coming from aid agencies, support is available to Syrian refugees in Mardin province.

Moreover, unlike the case in Hatay where the Governorate has not officially launched a registration campaign, Syrian refugees in Mardin are able to access free medical service and drugs given the functioning registration system in Mardin.

Due to strong kinship relations between the refugees and their hosts, STL team has observed relatively low levels of tension at the community level in Mardin province. However, given the assumption that flow of refugees into Mardin will not slow down any time in the near future, kinship networks that currently provide a safety net for the newcomers is likely to deteriorate with the passage of time. This will inevitably lead to a rise in tensions between the host community and the refugees, as STL teams have witnessed in Hatay and Kilis where refugees have settled for much longer periods of time.

Syrian refugees are primarily in need of livelihood support. Provided with the legal framework and the mechanisms to earn an income, refugees will be able to cover their food and non-food needs. Given the language barrier between the education services offered in Turkey and the needs of the refugees, all initiatives taken to facilitate the opening of Syrian schools is highly positive and equally welcomed by the refugee families in Mardin.

As also seen in Hatay and Kilis, refugees are increasingly stating willingness to learn the Turkish language in order to start integrating into Turkish society. The longer the crisis in Syria lasts and the more hope is lost in returning home, the legal, political and social framework needs to be established for the integration process to go smoother for those who have no choice but to settle in Turkey.

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