

The Socioeconomic Impact of Syrian Urban Refugees in Gaziantep: An Initial Assessment

October 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by SREO to present an initial survey of the socioeconomic impact of Syrian refugee presence in the urban center of Gaziantep.

SREO expresses its sincere thanks to all of those who helped enable this study, including civil society leaders, businessmen, Syrian refugees, academics, and members of the local community.

SREO takes full responsibility for all omissions and errors.

Contact: communications@sreo.org

Contents

Introduction to the Syrian Conflict	5
Executive Summary	6
2.1. Review of Literature	8
2.2. Methods	11
Findings	13
3.1. Impact on the Housing Market	13
3.2. Impact on the Labor Market	16
3.3. Education: Some Preliminary Findings	19
Conclusions	21
Going Forward	23

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The SREO team responsible for this study consists of Elliot Ackerman, Kristine Anderson, Heather Hughes, Megan Northey, Abdulhamid Qabbani, Daniel Seckman, Murat Subasi, and Matthew Trevithick.

ABOUT SREO

Syrian Research and Evaluation Organization (SREO) is an independent research and evaluation center incorporated and headquartered in Gaziantep, Turkey. SREO's mission is to develop practical strategies for stakeholders and donors engaged in Syria to effectively respond to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. SREO also provides a number of other services, including Russian, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish translation and project evaluation.

SREO is staffed by personnel with extensive experience in research implementation and international development.

1. Introduction to the Syrian Conflict

The ongoing Syrian Conflict continues to pose the greatest humanitarian and security challenge for both the Middle East and the international community. The Conflict, which started in March 2011 as peaceful protests aimed at seeking more political freedom and lifting the country's notorious emergency law, has turned into a country-wide war. It has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people, with thousands more missing and millions displaced.¹

The conditions for Syrians inside the country are deteriorating. According to UN figures, many schools inside Syria have been turned into refugee camps, depriving large numbers of school-age children from pursuing their education.² The country's infrastructure has been devastated, and thousands of Syrian families have lost their homes, jobs and livelihoods.

Foreign interference has further exacerbated the Conflict by contributing resources to both the regime and the opposition factions, igniting sectarian divisions and contributing to an ever-growing list of casualties. The instability has resulted in a humanitarian crisis: two million Syrian refugees have already registered with the

¹ UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response. (2013). *Regional Overview*. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

² School-age children form 24.7 percent of the population. The Demographic Profile of Syria. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Retrieved from <http://www.escwa.un.org/popin/members/syria.pdf>.

United Nations and another four million are expected to either flee or be internally displaced by 2014.³

Refugee camps have been established both in neighboring countries and inside Syria to accommodate displaced persons, with the majority of refugees living in camps or as urban refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Additionally, thousands who have crossed the borders are living in makeshift shelters while awaiting registration and admission to the camps. With the absence of any diplomatic solution on the horizon, humanitarian and security concerns will likely become increasingly complex.

While the international community struggles to find a solution to the Syrian Conflict, refugee populations and host communities are already overburdened with the many effects of mass migration. With the Conflict headed into its third year, the need to gain critical insights into the Conflict and its implications, by way of impartial assessment, has become imperative.

2. Executive Summary

Despite the immediacy of this issue, there is alarmingly little information on Syrian urban refugees (for a definition of urban refugees please see page 10 of this report) and their impact on Southeastern Turkey, making it difficult for stakeholders to deliver services as needed. This gap in knowledge was the impetus behind this

³ UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response. (2013). *Regional Overview*. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

report, which aims to present an initial survey of the socioeconomic impact of refugee presence in the urban center of Gaziantep. In the scope of this initial assessment, SREO's goal is to provide preliminary findings on the issues of housing, labor, and education, and to examine what impact, if any, the influx of refugees has had on Gaziantep.

The sixth largest urban area in Turkey, Gaziantep is a growing center of industry, textile and agricultural production. Due to the availability of employment opportunities in these industries as well as its proximity to the Syrian border, Gaziantep has become a destination for Syrian refugees. A 2013 estimate places the Syrian population in Gaziantep at approximately 100,000 in a city of 1,799,558, though there are no reliable figures on Syrian urban refugees in the city.⁴

Refugees living outside of official camps face unique challenges. With limited financial and social resources, many have difficulty accessing services and earning livelihoods. Further complicating the situation is their increasingly visible presence in host communities, which inevitably pressure existing socioeconomic infrastructure. The protracted nature of the Conflict introduces an additional challenge: UNHCR data affirms that prolonged refugee presence raises long-term human rights, political, and security concerns among host governments and their neighboring countries.⁵

⁴ Songul, H. (2013, October 8). Para suyunu çekti, 100 bin Suriyeli'ye çalışma izni lazım. *Milliyet*. Retrieved from <http://ekonomi.milliyet.com.tr/para-suyunu-cekti-100-bin/ekonomi-detay/1774339/default.htm>.

⁵ Betts, A., Chimni, B.S., Cohen, R., Collinson, S., Crisp, J., Gil-Bazo, M., Hall, I., Loescher, G., Milner, J., Schmidt, A., Stigter, E. (2006). "Protracted Refugee Situations: the search for practical solutions," from *The State of the World's Refugees 2006: Displacement in the New Millennium*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/4444afcb0.html>.

The scope of SREO's project is directed rather than comprehensive, drawing from data collected from key informant interviews, in both the refugee and host communities. The goal of this study is to present a multi-dimensional and non-biased glimpse into the current refugee situation in Gaziantep, drawing attention to items that merit future study in order to better provide services to Syrian refugees and their host communities.

2.1. Review of Literature

Very little scholarly information is available on Syrian refugees. While not robust in its findings, there is, however, a growing body of literature which has been used to direct SREO's research and inform SREO's analysis.

International aid organizations have published reports in their countries of operation;⁶ however, with the Turkish authorities assuming all responsibilities for the Syrian refugees both in and out of camps, comprehensive data on humanitarian needs is not always available. There have been some general studies on Syrian refugees in Turkey,⁷ yet further research is necessary to assess the continuing migrations as well as the long-term effects of residence in Turkey, both on the refugees and host communities.

Much of the available scholarship on Middle Eastern refugees has focused on Palestinian refugees, with a more recent body of literature focusing on Iraqi

⁶ See CARE (2012). "Care Jordan Baseline Assessment of Community Identified Vulnerabilities among Syrian Refugees living in Amman." IOM (2013). "Refugee Site and Shelter Assessment."

⁷ Ozden, S. (2013). "Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *Migration Policy Centre*. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf>.

refugees.⁸ Turkey, given its position connecting Europe and Asia, is an important transit point for migrants and refugees hoping to enter Europe or seek asylum elsewhere. Turkey has also encountered previous waves of refugees and asylum seekers from both Europe and the Middle East.⁹ Much of the literature on migration in Turkey has focused on Turkey's compliance with European Union law, both in maintaining EU standards for security and human rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Scholars have highlighted the dual pressure of the EU in terms of strengthening border security while offering more rights to refugees. Another recurring theme in the literature is Europe's request for Turkey to lift its geographic limitations regarding refugees as defined by Geneva Convention Article 1 (B), which only designates Europeans as refugees.¹⁰ Such literature provides insight into Turkey's current refugee policy towards the Syrians, which is categorized as a temporary protection regime.¹¹

Knowledge of Turkey's refugee policy is key to understanding refugee rights and services, which thereby impact their economic well-being and contributions to or burdens on the local economy. Under the current system, refugees in camps have access to aid, while urban refugees have neither the aid nor the rights to sustain

⁸ See Stevens, D. (2013). "Legal Status, Labelling, and Protection: the Case of Iraqi 'Refugees' in Jordan." *International Journal of Refugee Law*: 25 (1). See also *Refugee*: 28 (1) 2011 for an entire volume devoted to Iraqi refugees.

⁹ Kirisci, K. (2003). *Turkey: A Transformation from Emigration to Immigration*. Retrieved from <http://migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=176>.

¹⁰ See Cavlak, H. (2013). "The Impact of the EU on Turkish Asylum and Immigration Policy." *International Anatolia Academic Online Journal*: 1(1). Kirisci, K. (2003). "The Question of Asylum and Illegal Migration in European Union-Turkish Relations." *Turkish Studies*: 4 (1). Soyaltin, D. (2013). "Good News, Bad News, or No News: Management of Irregular Migration in Turkey." *Research Turkey*: 2 (3), Centre for Policy Analysis and Research on Turkey.

¹¹ UNHCR (2013). *2013 UNHCR country operations profile-Turkey*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>.

their livelihoods. Karen Jacobsen (2005) defines urban refugees as “self-settled refugees - formally recognized or not - residing in urban areas.”¹² Urban refugees hold a nebulous status, where they are often not accorded the same benefits as their camp co-inhabitants, nor do they have the same rights or benefits as citizens. While they have generally not been as visible as camp refugees, there has been increased interest in urban refugees and an expansion within the field of refugee studies.¹³ While they are often conflated with economic migrants, they have additional needs and issues unique to their status as refugees.

Although urban refugees occupy an ambiguous social space, they are more likely to impact the local economy, either through creating businesses or providing cheap labor. For this reason, the study of social interactions with urban refugees and the hosting community is of particular importance. Literature on urban refugees has pointed to the obstacles they face in housing, legal status, employment, and education, and this was confirmed by SREO’s findings in Gaziantep. Refugees tend to have restricted access to formal employment, with many resorting to illicit and unregulated activities to support themselves.¹⁴ Although previous studies have characterized urban refugees as economic actors with a potential to contribute to the local economy, host country governments often wish to prevent long-term stay of refugees, instead viewing them as a security threat.¹⁵ These attitudes directly

¹² P. 40, 2005. *The Economic Life of Refugees*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.

¹³ See the special issue of *Journal of Refugee Studies*: 19(3) 2006.

¹⁴ See Buscher, D. (2011). “New Approaches to Urban Refugee Livelihoods.” *Refuge*: 28 (2). Retrieved from <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/refuge/article/viewFile/36473/33161>.

¹⁵ See Buscher, Gabos, A. & Kibreab, G. (2007). “Urban Refugees: Introduction.” *Refuge*: 24 (1). Retrieved from [http://roar.uel.ac.uk/264/1/Fabos,%20A.%20H.%20\(2007\)%20Refuge%2024\(1\)%201-19.pdf](http://roar.uel.ac.uk/264/1/Fabos,%20A.%20H.%20(2007)%20Refuge%2024(1)%201-19.pdf).

affect the rights accorded by host governments and the extent to which refugees can integrate.

The available literature discusses both the positive and negative effects of refugees on the economy. Although refugees can bring with them capital, ingenuity, and a readiness to fill labor needs, they can also displace local workers, particularly when unemployment is already a problem. Other factors besides human movement affect economies in refugee host areas, such as the services and infrastructure brought by aid organizations.¹⁶ The current study seeks to assess the impact on Gaziantep after the start of the refugee influx, although further longitudinal and in-depth study will be necessary to assess the scope and long-term effects of refugee migration on the host community.

2.2. Methods

SREO's study on the Socioeconomic Implications of Syria's Urban Refugees in Gaziantep was a social ethnographic project that examined the influence of individual, economic, social, and environmental determinants of Syrian urban refugees living in Gaziantep. For this initial assessment, SREO utilized a qualitative, survey-based approach – informed by the epistemological underpinnings of narrative analysis and ethnography.

The unique challenges experienced by urban refugees is a question which can only be adequately addressed by use of a multidisciplinary and interpretive approach. Due to the complex nature of this Conflict; the diversity of peoples it's affecting;

¹⁶ Zetter, R. (2012). "Are refugees an economic burden or benefit?" *Forced Migration Review: 41*. Retrieved from <http://www.fmreview.org/preventing/zetter>.

their religious and ethnic backgrounds; their varying areas of origin and subsequent displacement; their socioeconomic backgrounds – in addition to many other factors, either contributing to or detracting from their resiliency – SREO researchers utilized ethnographic and narrative analysis, as it is best suited to study subjectivity and the influence of culture and identity on the human condition. The use of qualitative inquiry recognizes the deficits in empirical science, and bases itself on the understanding that context-dependant nuances play a crucial role in the construction of reality and can provide rich insights into complex social problems. As explained by Ferrier (1998), “This philosophy emphasizes contextual construction of meaning and the validity of multiple perspectives; knowledge is constructed by people and groups of people; reality is multi-perspectival; truth is grounded in everyday life and social relations; and science and all other human activities are value-laden.”¹⁷

The study sample was determined by a purposive, targeted-selection technique whereby SREO researchers interviewed participants, identified to comprise a diverse sample. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 participants (n=18), including three females and 15 males. The participants were further broken down into ethnic and linguistic origins and included: ten Syrians and eight Turks. The vast majority (15 of 18) interviews were conducted and transcribed in the participant’s first language. Data analysis was undertaken using a narrative analysis technique – codifying and comparing the interviews to identify recurrent themes. Data was then assessed against the existing literature available to observe commonalities, discrepancies, and to note the substantial gaps in evidence-based assessments of these issues.

¹⁷ Ferrier, J. (1998), An investigation into the diffusion of innovation in technical and further education: Implementing e-mail through action research, Thesis (PhD), Chapter 3.3, Deakin University.

Findings

Of the data collected, two major topics demonstrated consistent and significant findings: the housing market and the labor market. In addition to these two topics, preliminary findings on education emerged in the form of noticeable themes observed.

3.1. Impact on the Housing Market

Consistent with assessments from Lebanon and Jordan, SREO researchers found the refugee influx to have exerted an impact on the urban housing market in Gaziantep. Both Turkish and Syrian key informants pointed to two primary issues: an increasing scarcity of housing due to high demand, and a marked rise in rental prices over the course of the past 1-2 years. Notably, these two issues were raised by all interviewees (Turkish and Syrian) in this study.

The high growth rate of Gaziantep starting in 2000, along with statements from Turkish informants indicate a pre-existing housing shortage in Gaziantep prior to the inflow of refugees. However, data collected in this study indicates that the influx of displaced Syrians starting in 2011 has increased the already-high demand for housing in Gaziantep. High housing demands lead to inflation in rental prices, which adversely affect host and refugee populations. As all Turkish informants affirmed, the increase in rental prices became prominent starting 1-1.5 years ago. One participant, an employee in a real estate firm, gave an example saying “an apartment that used to be let for 600 TRY has increased to 1,000 TRY.”¹⁸

¹⁸ 1 USD = ~1.9746 TRY. <http://www.tcmb.gov.tr/yeni/eng/>. TRY is used in accordance with ISO 4217 standards.

Similar observations were noted among Syrian participants. Two Syrian interviewees mentioned that landlords would demand more money each month for the same property, with one stating that their landlord had threatened to throw the family out of the property if they were unable to pay the increased price. Such threats are possible given that landlords will easily find other tenants to rent their properties. Both Turkish and Syrian participants attributed the price increase to the rise in the Syrian refugee population. Although these perceptions have yet to be quantified, refugee populations being in competition with locals for basic resources has been observed in other prolonged refugee situations.¹⁹

All of the study's respondents claimed that landowners are benefitting from current circumstances and have taken advantage of the housing shortage by demanding unreasonably high rates for their properties. One Turkish informant blamed his reduced business over the last several months on the refugee presence, saying that "instead of coming to us (the real estate company), landowners just post a 'for rent' sign on their house because they know that they can charge more and won't have to pay a commission." SREO's observations on the rise of rental housing echo findings documented in a 2013 study on refugees in Southern Turkey which noted that "real estate owners... should be criticized for raising the rents and exploiting Syrians who are in a difficult position to start with."²⁰

¹⁹ Betts, A., Chimni, B.S., Cohen, R., Collinson, S., Crisp, J., Gil-Bazo, M., Hall, I., Loescher, G., Milner, J., Schmidt, A., Stigter, E. (2006). "Protracted Refugee Situations: the search for practical solutions," from *The State of the World's Refugees 2006: Displacement in the New Millennium*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/4444afcb0.html>. P. 118.

²⁰ Ozden, S. (2013, May). *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*. Migration Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf>. P. 7.

In addition to landlords benefitting financially, both Turkish and Syrian interviewees reported discrimination to be a major problem in the tenancy selection process. Syrians noted being rejected by landowners who refuse to rent to Syrians, on the grounds that they will bring in a disproportionately large number of persons into a residence. "Three families with five kids, so like 15 people stay in one apartment," stated a Turkish participant. This was echoed by another Turkish interviewee who explained his hesitation to rent to Syrians saying "you show them an apartment meant for three people, the next week there will be 10 of them." Conversely, Turkish residents indicate that landowners may turn Turkish applicants away saying that they can rent the property to desperate Syrians willing to pay a significantly higher rate. "For most [Turkish] people, landlords said instead of giving you some certain prices, I doubled [the rate] and give the apartment to Syrian people," stated a Turkish respondent.

In addition to high rental costs and tenant discrimination, several Syrian participants also cited the issue of the low quality of housing being a matter of concern. One participant explained to SREO that his family's first home in Gaziantep had been a single room with no bathroom, and that when the landlord tried to charge more than the 350 TRY they were already paying, they decided to leave. Another interviewee stated that "our house in Syria had everything. Here, we have a house but there is nothing in it to do, no space."

Findings consistent with SREO's were documented in studies conducted on urban refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. The uniformity of concerns raised in this study, alongside assessments in other prolonged refugee situations, clearly illustrates housing to be a primary concern in host communities. Difficulties in obtaining affordable housing present an obstacle to the well-being and security of both

refugees and members of the host community, which bears implications for the refugees' successful integration.

3.2. Impact on the Labor Market

Data collected in this study indicates that the influx of refugee labor may be exacerbating an already-existing unemployment problem in Gaziantep. Three Turkish interviewees explicitly stated that unemployment was the greatest challenge facing the region prior to the Conflict, and 2009 figures indicate an unemployment rate of 17.2% (the national rate is 14%) in spite of the city's robust industrial and trade sectors.²¹ Turks and Syrians reported different challenges in finding employment, with discrimination, exploitation in the workplace, language barriers, and the inability to obtain work permits emerging as themes for Syrians.

All of the study's Turkish informants spoke to a common perception that Syrians have exacerbated unemployment among Turkish locals in Gaziantep due to their willingness to provide labor at considerably lower wages than Turkish workers in the same position. This has resulted in a trend of employers favoring cheaper, undocumented Syrian labor over Turkish labor. Expanding on this, one Turkish informant stated that "if I'm a factory owner, I pay a Turkish worker 50 TRY to work on the assembly line, but I can pay a Syrian ten or 15 [TRY]. So I choose a Syrian." Another Turkish participant mentioned that while many local businesses are currently favoring Syrians, he felt that their perceived influence on unemployment was distorted, as they were just taking the place of other minorities and vulnerable populations that held undesirable and underpaid positions prior to the Conflict,

²¹ *Lifelong Competition Project: Baseline Analysis Report of the City of Gaziantep with Respect to Tourism and Life-long Learning*. (2011). EU and the Republic of Turkey. Retrieved from http://www.gto.org.tr/editorupload/HAYATBOYU_ING.pdf.

adding that “the construction jobs used to be held by Kurds. When the Syrians came, they would accept even lower wages so the Kurds left.”

Syrians faced a markedly different set of challenges within the local labor market, with many saying that they experienced difficulty finding stable work, and that any work obtained was undocumented and low-wage. Another challenge to obtaining legal work is that Syrians need a work permit, and many Syrian were unable to either afford the cost of these permits or wait for the application process.²² Syrian interviewees in this study who had successfully obtained appointments were working in low-skill service positions such as in restaurants, factories, and garages, regardless of their education level or qualifications. One Syrian respondent stated that in Aleppo he earned a high salary in a professional position, but in Gaziantep works 12 hours per day for 10 TRY per day, exacerbating feelings of humiliation and displacement in the host environment.

Several Syrian interviewees confirmed that the language barrier was a considerable obstacle to obtaining work, since many Syrians are not proficient in Turkish. One Syrian interviewee stated, “I know a Syrian working as a worker in an ice cream factory even though he has an economics degree – it’s a language issue. Our university degrees aren’t of any use to us.” Although studies in Lebanon and Jordan show that Syrians there are also compelled to take underpaid, labor-intensive jobs in their host communities, the issue of the language barrier is unique to Turkey and represents an added challenge to refugees seeking work in Gaziantep.

²² Because they are accorded “guest” status in Turkey, Syrians do not have the rights granted to refugees by the Geneva Convention in Turkey. Per Turkish law, they are required to apply for work permits which usually cost from \$700 to \$1,000. For more information, see “Turkey: Syrian refugees choosing to work risk exploitation.” (2012, 26 December). *IRIN News*. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97125/turkey-syrian-refugees-choosing-to-work-risk-exploitation>.

Apart from the language barrier, the issues surrounding the legality of Syrian labor were raised by a number of Turkish informants. Participants revealed an awareness of illegal workers, which suggests that the legalities of the labor market not be rigorously monitored by the responsible authorities. One Turkish informant mentioned that illegal Syrian workers are only detected “when they cause accidents in factories,” a point which was echoed in the aforementioned Migration Center study which documented a January 2013 explosion in a factory that killed several Syrian workers.²³ Illegal Syrian workers working outside government systems also applies to small business ownership: one Turkish informant stated that many refugees have started businesses in the city, but have not gone through the lengthy registration process with the Gaziantep Chamber of Industry, adding that in his estimation 90% of Syrian-owned businesses were unregistered.

Illicit labor leaves Syrians vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace, with both Turkish and Syrian interviewees reporting that Syrians receive low wages and work long hours. This was mentioned by all Syrian informants holding work positions, with many reporting that they worked longer hours for a fraction of the compensation that their Turkish counterparts receive. One Syrian who works as a waiter in a restaurant reports that “the [Turkish] workers who work like me earn 80 TRY but they give me only 40 TRY. I work 12 hours, I do two shifts but they give me wages for one shift. The chefs don’t allow me to keep the tips for myself. They ask me to put it in a box. When they open the box they take most of the money and give me remnants.” Turkish informants also acknowledged that Syrians were vulnerable to exploitative treatment by their Turkish employers, with one stating

²³ Ozden, S. (2013, May). *Syrian Refugees in Turkey*. Migration Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf>. P. 7.

“they do not have permission to work in Turkey, so they cannot complain if the treatment [in the workplace] is bad.”

Although no quantitative data exists to verify the reports about refugee impacts on the labor market in Gaziantep, the consistency with which study informants raised concerns about this reinforces the importance of this issue, and merits future inquiry.

3.3. Education: Some Preliminary Findings

As a result of the Conflict, three million Syrians have been internally displaced and 1.6 million refugees have poured into neighboring countries - more than half of them children.²⁴ As a result, an entire generation of Syrian youth are going without formalized education. Even though the consequences of this will likely impact the region for decades to come, little to no comprehensive research exists on the topic, with most major reports emerging from Syria making only passing references to education. A much publicized report - the first of its kind - devoted entirely to documenting the impact of the crisis on the education of Syrian youth was released on September 9th, 2013, but is focused only on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their integration within the formal Lebanese education system.²⁵ Continued efforts are needed to substantiate previous findings and generate a more nuanced understanding of this crisis. Such an understanding necessitates that research be

²⁴ UNICEF. (2013, June). *Shattered Lives: Challenges and Priorities for Syrian Refugee Children and Women in Jordan*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/Shattered_Lives_June10.pdf.

²⁵ Watson, K. (2013, September 9). *Education Without Borders*. Retrieved from http://s.bsd.net/awas/default/page/-/EducationWithoutBorders_KevinWatkins_Report.pdf.

conducted in all neighboring countries to investigate the situated challenges being faced there. Although the general education needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey echo those of Syrian refugees elsewhere, refugees in Turkey face a unique set of challenges worthy of further inquiry, some of which were noted during SREO's initial assessment of urban refugees in Gaziantep.

Although education was not a central focus for this study, the problem of education for Syrian refugees living in Gaziantep surfaced throughout many of SREO's interviews. Consistent in these discussions were issues faced by families to enroll their children in the Turkish public school system, due not only to language but also financial barriers.

The language barrier both discourages parents from enrolling their children and prevents children from being placed within their corresponding level or at all in the Turkish school system. Even Syrians speaking Turkish face difficulties in securing a place for their children. One of our interviewees, a Turkish-speaking Syrian, was able to obtain an informal placement for her five-year old son in a Turkish kindergarten, but only after much advocacy. Another interviewee was unsuccessful in enrolling her 4-year old daughter in a Gaziantep school due to the latter's inability to speak Turkish.

In addition to language, financial barriers comprise a significant obstacle to enrollment in education. Families may be unable to afford enrollment fees; alternatively, children may be forced to work to contribute to the family income. In the SREO study, one Syrian informant, a widow and mother of three school-age children, explained that while she understands the importance of enrolling her children in school, she is unable to do so, saying "I need to put my children in

school but I can't as they all need to be working." Other families cited that they could not afford the enrollment fees for Turkish schools.

Although these initial conversations lack substantiation and make it difficult to assess the educational resources for Syrians in Gaziantep, it was clear from SREO's interviews that Syrians face significant obstacles in pursuing an education for their children. Because of the widespread implications this bears on the future generations, SREO would like to explore education further in subsequent studies.

Conclusions

Due to the fluid and highly volatile nature of the Syrian Conflict and the resultant movement of refugees in and out of host communities, statistical analysis fails to keep pace with the course of events. This, combined with a gap in current literature pertaining to the Conflict, represented major limitations in SREO's current assessment.

With the above limitations in mind, SREO researchers drew from available resources and relied upon participant insights to arrive at the following conclusions. SREO found the growing refugee presence in Gaziantep to be exerting an impact on several vital socioeconomic markers, and that these effects in turn impact the quality of life for members of the refugee population and of the host community. The most significant impacts were observed in the housing and labor markets of the city, with preliminary but promising issues addressed in the education sector.

SREO's assessment resulted in the following major findings with regards to the housing market: a noted housing shortage exacerbated by an influx of refugees

and a subsequent inflation in housing costs and widespread discrimination in obtaining tenancy. This assessment also yielded the following observations on labor, as noted by SREO's participants: increased incidences of unemployment, discrimination, and employee exploitation, as well as issues surrounding legality of work and substantial language barriers.

Given that the sectors of labor and housing represent shared spaces of interaction in which vital resources are mediated, they are inherently bound in social relations between refugee and host communities, which in turn affect quality of life for members of both. Turkish interviewees pointed to a rising perception in their community that refugees represent a potential strain on essential resources. Other data revealed a growing perception that the refugee population was seen to be exacerbating a high unemployment rate in the city due to their willingness to provide undocumented, low-wage labor. Sentiments of vulnerability and exploitation were consistently observed among Syrian informants, which would suggest that urban refugees are experiencing difficulty integrating into the social fabric of the host community.

Although not originally intended, the issue of education was a recurring theme addressed by participants most interviews interviews conducted for this study. It was found that education is largely unavailable to Syrian children due to language and financial barriers, which further bars them from integration into Gaziantep. SREO hopes to further assess the educational resources available to Syrians in Gaziantep, as well as their ability to access these resources.

Together, housing, labor, and education represent some of the most critical needs for all people. The inequitable access to these resources in a refugee host area threatens the stability of these communities, in ways which are both apparent and

unknown. These relevant themes merit future inquiry, particularly as continued fighting in Syria forces refugees to flee into Turkey and prevents others from returning to their homes.

Going Forward

Having completed this initial study on the urban refugee population and host community in Gaziantep, SREO is well situated to monitor changes and developments regarding the Syrian refugee population, as well as to explore topics such as healthcare and education in greater depth.

These initial findings will serve as a baseline on which to assess the longer-term implications of a growing refugee population in Gaziantep. SREO will also expand its geographic scope in assessing the impact and integration of Syrian refugees into other cities in Southeast Turkey. Different areas in Turkey will have different contexts regarding local infrastructure, ethnic makeup, and local responses to the refugee influx. While a detailed study of one host city is valuable, further study is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the refugee situation in Turkey.

It is SREO's hope that this research will build on a growing body of evidence that will inform policy in better supporting both refugees and their host communities.