



Syrian Civil War and Being a Refugee: "Instead of Assad, We Left"

Suriye İç Savaşı ve Mülteci Olmak: "Esad Yerine Biz Gittik"

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Başvuru/Submitted: 06.03.2023
Revizyon Talebi/Revision Requested:
13.03.2023
Son Revizyon/Last Revision Received:
05.04.2023
Kabul/Accepted: 07.04.2023
Yayımlanma/Publication: 19.04.2023

Atıf/Citation: Çırak, Selçuk, "Syrian
Civil War and Being a Refugee: 'Instead
of Assad, We Left'", *Tarihin Peşinde*
Uluslararası Tarih ve Sosyal Araştırmalar
Dergisi, S. 29, (2023), 95-106.

ABSTRACT

The Syrian civil war turns into a massive crisis, which required an international intervention, however, the inability of the global actors to reconcile led to this crisis being left to its own devices. At this point, Turkey is home to nearly 4 million Syrians.¹ Thus, this situation reveals another important issue, which is the integration of Syrian refugees. The main purpose of the research is to shed light how the Syrian refugee crisis has evolved through the eyes of refugees based on the experiences of a refugee whose journey started in Aleppo and ended in Istanbul. In this regard, the crisis is tried to be analyzed through an interview with a Syrian refugee within the framework of the integration of refugees.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, Syrian Refugees, Refugee Crisis, Refugees Integration

ÖZ

Suriye iç savaşının büyük bir krize dönüşmesiyle uluslararası müdahaleye muhtaç kaldı ancak küresel aktörlerin uzlaşmaması bu krizin kendi haline bırakılmasına yol açtı. Geleneksel noktada Türkiye 4 milyona yakın Suriyeliye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu durum bir diğer önemli konuyu, Suriyeli mültecilerin entegrasyonunu ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırmanın temel amacı, yolculuğu Halep'te başlayan ve İstanbul'da sona eren bir mültecinin yaşadıklarından hareketle Suriyeli mülteci krizinin mültecilerin gözünden nasıl evrildiğine ışık tutmaktır. Bu bağlamda, Suriyeli bir mülteci ile yapılan anket çalışması ile mültecilerin entegrasyonu çerçevesinde kriz analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye İç Savaşı, Suriyeli Mülteciler, Mülteci Krizi, Mültecilerin Entegrasyonu

¹ According to the current number provided by Presidency of Migration Management (Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı), there are 3.426.719 Syrian refugees in Turkey as of 06.04.2023. <https://www.goc.gov.tr/>, (Access date: 06.04.2023).



Introduction

The Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia in 2010, affected many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Although the Arab Spring was originally called a popular uprising, it turned into a civil war in Syria. The Syrian crisis started with innocent demonstrations against an authoritarian and oppressive regime, as in other Middle Eastern countries, for the people's demands for democracy and freedom. However, these actions turned into a civil war in a short time with the violent and armed interventions of the Assad regime. The long years of civil war have turned into a humanitarian tragedy in Syria. On the one hand, the Assad regime remains to keep the power in administration with military and economic aid Russia and Iran provided, on the one hand, the United States, Turkey, Qatar, and France give the support to different groups of opponents. Thus, the situation has become an inextricable multilateral and multi-component civil war. Moreover, many al-Qaeda-derived armed militia groups such as the Al Nusra Front and ISIS have formed in the region, as a result of this; the Syrian crisis caused the Syrians who did not want to be a party to the civil war had to leave their country.²

Undoubtedly, this civil war in Syria had regional and global effects and reflections. A large number of terrorist acts originating from ISIS took place all over the world. At the same time, the issue of Syrian refugees, which is another result of the civil war, has affected many neighboring countries of Syria and many European countries. Therefore, this civil war, which has been going on for many years, has brought many more problems. In particular, with the regional and global security risks, as well as the enormous humanitarian tragedy, the Syrian civil war has been the bleeding wound of the Middle East.³

This study aims to draw a picture of the framework of how the Syrian civil war developed and why it became inextricable. At the same time, the refugee crisis that occurred as a result of the civil war in Syria may be depicted in the case of a refugee whose perspective represents most Syrian refugees and challenges the exclusionary practices directed at them. In this context, the article attempts to shed light on the Syrian refugee crisis in the light of the data obtained from the semi-structured interview about the experiences of a Syrian person from Aleppo, who directly witnessed the events. In other words, the article presents an evaluation of the Syrian civil war, the refugee crisis and the integration issue from the perspective of a refugee.

I. The Emergence of the Syrian Civil War

In order to understand the Syrian civil war, it is necessary to examine the demographic structure of Syria. Looking at the population structure of Syria, it is seen that 80% of the population are Syrian Arabs. However, Syria has a heterogeneous population in terms of the presence of different religious and sectarian communities. In that regard, before the Syrian civil war started in 2011, Syrian population consisted of 80 percent Syrian Arabs, 10 percent Kurds, 5 percent Turkmens, 4 percent Assyrians, 1,5 percent Circassians and 1 percent Armenians.⁴ However, these communities in Syria do not live side by side. Under the influence of the religious and sectarian state system developed in the years when Syria was under the French mandate, each sect lives in its own region and city (**Map I**). This situation has caused rivalries among the sects throughout history and has prevented the development of a supra-identity belonging to the Syrian nation. The fact that the Nusayris, who are a minority in Syria, have a

² See Atilla Sandıklı and Ali Semin, *Bütün Boyutlarıyla Suriye Krizi ve Türkiye*, Bilgesam Press, İstanbul 2012.

³ Dilek Canyurt, "Kazananı Olmayan Bir Savaş 'Suriye İç Savaşı': Neden Bitmedi, Barış Nasıl Gelebilir?", *Uluslararası Yönetim İktisat ve İşletme Dergisi* 14, no: 4, (2018), pp.1103-1120.

⁴ TESAD, Suriye Krizi Hakkında Genel Analiz, 2017. <https://www.tesadernegi.org/suriye-krizi-hakkinda-genel-analiz.html>, (Access date: 03.02.2023).



say in the administration of the Assad regime is the most visible example of this sectarian-based rivalry. Therefore, the demographic diversity in Syria symbolizes a demographic sensitivity.⁵



Map I: French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon, 1922

Although the actions of the people living in Syria against the oppressive regime in the Arab Spring period are characterized as the pursuit of democracy and freedom in essence, the occurrence of this crisis is also closely related to the end of the Cold War. Developed close relations with Soviet Union especially after the World War II, Syria could not get the power it needed against the West after the collapse of the Soviets, and the Assad regime began to lose its influence in the region. This situation enabled the communities living under the oppressive regime in Syria to revolt with the Arab Spring, as well as the countries that gained their independence after the Cold War.⁶ The rebellion movements that started in Daraa in Syria also showed their effect in the capital Damascus and these anti-regime demonstrations started to spread gradually. The Assad regime promised reform in its public statements. However, a few

⁵ Ayşe Tekdal Fildiş, "Günümüzde Suriye'de Yaşanan Sorunların Tarihsel Arka Planına Kısa Bir Bakış", *Orta Doğu Analiz* 5, no: 52, (April 2013), pp. 55-62.

⁶ Timuçin Kodaman and Haktan Bırsel, "Arap Baharı Rüzgarında Bir Kimlik Arayışı, Arap Milliyetçiliğinden Suriyeliliğe: Bir Suriye Paradoksu", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi* 4, no: 7, (2012), pp. 17-29.



economic reforms and some financial aid did not satisfy the demonstrators and opposition groups, and voices demanding regime change began to rise. This situation triggered the civil war by the Assad regime's intervention against the demonstrators using armed forces. Furthermore, this situation pushed the opposition groups against the Assad regime to seek armament. Thus, the Syrian Civil War emerged, which affected many countries, especially Turkey, politically and economically.

II. International Actors of Syrian Crisis

The Syrian crisis has been one of the main agenda issues of the international community since November 2011. In 2011, the Arab League called for the Assad administration to stop the violence against the demonstrators, free the political prisoners and engage in dialogue with the opposition, and then sent an observation mission to the region. As a result of the observation mission drawing attention to the humanitarian disaster in the country, a draft resolution on the Syrian crisis was submitted to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in January 2011 with the support of the Arab League. Also, the Arab League met in Cairo on February 12, 2012 and called for the assignment of a United Nations-Arab Joint Peacekeeping Force for Syria and the termination of diplomatic relations with Syria. The UNSC draft resolution on the Syrian crisis, which also requires the withdrawal of the Bashar Assad from the administration, was not accepted with the veto of Russia and China. Thus, the Arab League's attempt on the Syrian crisis failed. After the failure to take a joint decision in the United Nations Security Council, the Friends of Syria Group was established with the initiative of the USA and France, including Turkey and the Arab League, and the first international conference on Syria was held in Tunisia on February 24, 2012. At the Friends of Syria Group meeting in Tunisia, the humanitarian situation in Syria, medicine and food aid to civilians were discussed. The meeting, which Russia and China did not attend, was supported by the United Nations, the Arab League, the European Union, the Islamic Organization, the Arab Maghreb Union and the Gulf Countries Cooperation Council, as well as Turkey.⁷

In January 2015, political dialogue paths were opened when the Syrian government and the opposition came together in Russia. Russia has also carried these efforts to international platforms with the Astana Process. With this development, Russia has been able to involve regional actors, such as Iran and Turkey, who have different approaches to the crisis. The process, which was also supported by the UNSC, became the prominent initiative in providing a political solution to the crisis.⁸

III. Syrian Refugee Crisis

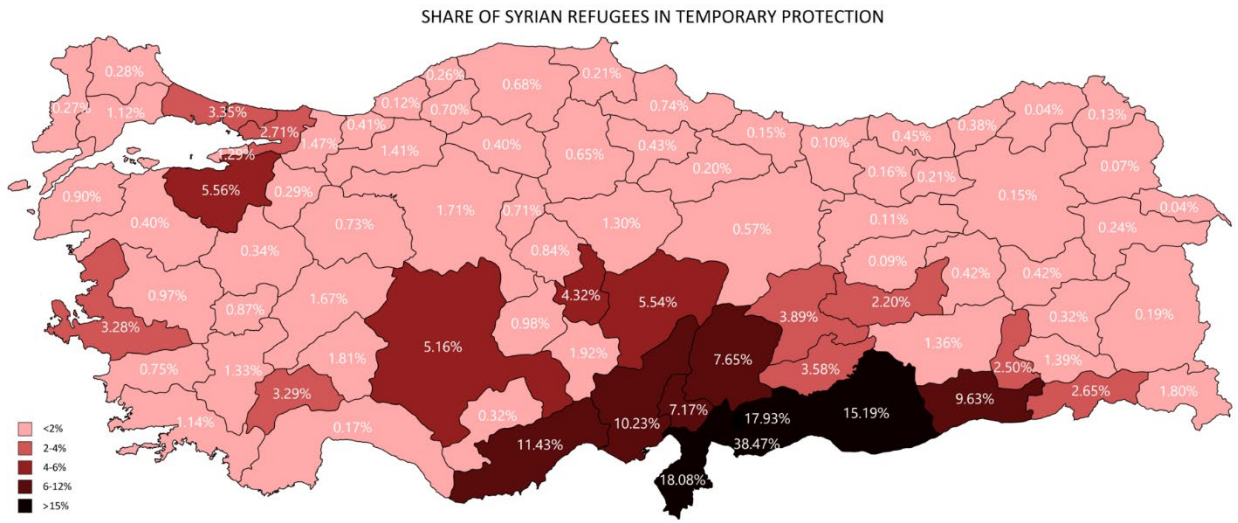
The civil war between the Assad administration and the opponents has left the civilian population defenseless between two fires. Syrians whose life safety is in danger in such an environment and they had to immigrate to their neighbors Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and most importantly to Turkey, which they saw as the safest and closest place. For this purpose, the refugees came to Turkey in masses from Syria to the Turkey's border. Turkey has accepted refugees coming from the Syrian border with an open door policy. Initially, the incoming refugees were placed in the refugee camps established in the border provinces under the coordination of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). However the increase

⁷ Coşkun Topal, "Suriye İç Savaşı ve Uluslararası Düzen", *KTU SBE Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 9, (2015), pp. 117-122.

⁸ Ben Hubbard and David E. Sanger, "Russia, Iran and Turkey Meet for Syria Talks, Excluding US", *The New York Times*, 20 December 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/20/world/middleeast/russia-iran-andturkey-meet-for-syria-talks-excluding-us.html>, (Access date: 18.12.2022).



in the number caused the refugees to go out of the camps. The number of Syrian refugees who took refuge in Turkey increased continuously throughout the civil war and reached almost 4 million.⁹ According to the statistics compiled by Presidency of Migration Management (*Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı*), the top 5 cities where most Syrians with the status of temporary protection (*geçici koruma*) (3,435,298 persons) reside are Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, and Adana. This figure shows that the Syrian refugees with the status of temporary protection inhabit either the border cities or the metropolises (**Map II**). A small population of Syrian refugees residing in temporary shelters (*geçici barınma merkezi*) (65,658 persons) is concentrated in Adana, Hatay, and Kahramanmaraş provinces. Male Syrian refugees outnumber female Syrian refugees by approximately 220,000. Most Syrian refugees are young, i.e. under the age of 24 (approximately 1,065,000 males and 865,000 females).¹⁰



Map II: Share of Syrian Refugees in Temporary Protection Status, August 2022

The migration journey of the Syrians to Turkey was full of unpredictable risks, while on the one hand there was hope of getting rid of the civil war. The advance of refugees on the Syrian side of the border under ISIS control was fraught with danger. ISIS militia groups were forcing refugees to go through the road where there are many mines and many times not allowing refugees to cross the border. Gunshots and explosions were heard very often while advancing on this dangerous road. When the border was reached, the wait of the refugees could last a day under hunger and thirst. Considering the scorching heat of the region, it was obvious that conditions were too harsh for most refugees. As it can be seen, what the refugees experienced was a humanitarian tragedy.¹¹

The Syrian refugees were not only adults, especially children, who were most affected by this journey, which was full of difficult conditions and life-threatening risks. In other words, child refugees bear the most permanent traces of the wounds inflicted by the civil war. Common fears of many children are especially the appearance of airplanes in air and airplane noises. Because the sound of the plane reminds the sound of a missile, when the sound of the plane is heard, the children remember the war days and fear that their lives are in danger. As

⁹ Nasrullah Uzman, "Türkiye'nin Güvenliği Açısından Suriyeli Sığınmacılar Meselesi", 21. *Yüzyılda Eğitim ve Toplum* 5, no: 15, (2016), pp. 135-157.

¹⁰ See Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, Geçici Koruma. <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>, (Access date: 30.03.2023).

¹¹ Ahmet Şık, "Ölümden Kaçış", *Cumhuriyet*, 15 June 2015. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/olumden-kacis-298945>, (Access date: 03.02.2023).



it is clearly seen, Syrian children have suffered greatly from the civil war and cannot extinguish their fears of war, even in the country where they took refuge¹².

IV. The Issue of Integration of Syrian Refugees

Syrian refugees face many difficulties while establishing their lives when they settle in the country they go to, as well as the difficulties they experience during the migration process. Many problems, such as the prolongation of the process of granting refugee status to the Syrians, and the limited access to the labor market, education and health, also make the integration of refugees difficult. In addition, some policies aiming to ensure the integration of immigrants create some problems. Since most integration policies push refugees to an isolated life, these policies lead to the exclusion of refugees by the society. A recent publication by French cartoonist Fabien Toulmé, *L'Odyssee d'Hakim*, depicts the above-mentioned difficulties most Syrian refugees go through in a poignant narrative. This three-volume book has been translated to Turkish as well, among other languages.¹³ In the case of Turkey, the integration processes vary according to income level and their wealth. Undoubtedly, one of the main difficulties faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey is the difficulty in paying the high rents. Furthermore, Syrian refugees face more difficulties in business life, from being unable to work due to status uncertainty. This situation exposes Syrian refugees earn insufficient wages in the current social and political climate where there is no way of returning to their home country. Although the right to work for Syrian refugees is specified in the regulations, it is not easy for Syrian refugees to access the labor market in practice. For this reason, employees are forced to work unregistered. Also, this situation prevents Syrian refugees from feeling safe in the workplace where they were employed. Another important issue is that the cultural differences push the refugees into a state of isolation. There are also some positive signs about the integration of refugees into life in Turkey. In this context, there is a fact that the integration processes of Syrians who have opened a business in Turkey are faster than Syrians who have to work as unregistered employees. Syrian refugees who set up a business in Turkey can easily rent a house and communicate more easily in the society they live in. Therefore, this difference is directly related to the economic situation of the Syrian refugees.¹⁴

V. An Interview on the Syrian Crisis and being a Refugee

The experiences of a refugee, who embarked on a long migration journey that started in Aleppo in Syria and ended in Istanbul in Turkey, reveal the humanitarian tragedy of the Syrian crisis. In Aleppo, especially near the universities, mostly young demonstrators were shouting slogans and hanging banners. Anti-regime words were written on the walls of almost every government building. Soon after, regime forces started to step some houses almost every night, and especially men were being detained. These detentions sometimes lasted for days, some people, who succeeded to return, were tortured, but some with no news at all. A few people disappeared from every street every day. When the regime response started to intensify violently, corpses that were left as a cautionary on the side of the road began to be seen. This was basically to instill fear. The other fears were the sound of gunfire, an explosion which

¹² UNICEF, "Listen to Syrian Children's Stories", March 2014. <https://www.unicef.org/turkey/en/stories/listen-syrian-childrens-stories>, (Access date: 07.02.2023).

¹³ See Fabien Toulmé, *L'Odyssee d'Hakim*, 3 vols, Delcourt, Paris 2018. Turkish translation is Fabien Toulmé, *Hakim'in Yolculuğu*, 3 vols, Desen Yayınları, İstanbul 2020.

¹⁴ Doğuş Şimşek, "Mülteci Entegrasyonu, Göç Politikaları ve Sosyal Sınıf: Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler Örneği", *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi* 40, no: 2, (2018), pp. 367-392.



was heard every day. These explosions, which were rare in the beginning, became more frequent as the regime forces seized certain neighborhoods. State institutions such as schools and hospitals were closed. Children were able to receive education secretly in some houses. Neighborhoods captured by government forces had many casualties, sometimes a child and sometimes a woman. The people of Aleppo did not think that the regime forces would use such a bloody and violent force because there was a belief that the international community would not allow this atrocity. However, this belief started to decline with each passing day, because what they heard was only the reactions seen on social media and people kept dying in war. Especially the developments were heard by the Russian press. However, there was no news of the intervention of the West or the United Nations. Life in the city was becoming more and more unlivable with each passing day. The rubble of bombed-out buildings was the most common sight. Some days the water was cut off and some days the electricity would not come at all. There was news that Russia would try to reconcile the government with the opponents. After the peak of the civil war, a humanitarian corridor would be created in the region and people would be evacuated but each family had a row. Many families in Aleppo agreed to leave their country and they came to Turkish border which was the closest safe place. In fact, people were forced to abandon their country. Aleppo people were brought to the border region by buses, some tried to leave the region with their own vehicles. However, these roads had multiple checkpoints. Some points under the control of the regime forces were the most dangerous passageways. There were places where people waited in groups after approaching the border. People waiting to become refugees were sharing the food and water with each other.

The difficulties experienced by a Syrian fleeing the civil war continue even after this person becomes a refugee. Especially the Syrians who do not know Turkish have difficulties in communicating with the local people. While some people stay with their relatives in border cities, others have to stay in refugee camps. Complaining about the occupancy of the camps, many refugees have to fend for themselves to find rental places. Many Syrians with professions such as teachers and engineers have to work in day-to-day jobs in order to earn their living. Since there are more refugees and fewer job opportunities in border cities, these border cities have the most livelihood problems. Those who opt to go to big cities are more fortunate in finding a job. Local people sometimes employ exclusionary practices and rhetoric towards refugees. Syrian refugees are used to this uncomfortable situation. Refugees in Turkey are given temporary protection status. However, this statement, which states that it is temporary, drags the refugees to a sense of uncertainty about the future. Most of the Syrians who have been living in Turkey for many years and have a regular income do not want to return to Syria. In fact, many Syrians who have started to work in Turkey according to their professions enjoy a more integrated social and business life after a while.

Conclusion

In Syria, where there is a religious and sectarian state system, it has triggered the competition between the sects and created a sensitive demographic structure within the Syrian society. Nusayris, who had a say in the administration with the Assad regime, were in the minority in Syria. With the collapse of the Soviets after the Cold War, the balances in Syria also changed and the Assad regime began to lose its power in the region. With the Arab Spring's leap to Syria, the demands of the Syrian people, who were governed by the oppressive regime, for democracy and freedom, turned to the demand for regime change. The Assad regime tried to



suppress the demonstrators violently as a threat to the regime, and the regime used its armed forces against its people. This situation also led to the civil war by pushing the opposition groups to seek armament. The civil war is becoming more complex and inextricable day by day because different regional and global actors support different opposition groups. The civil war, which has turned into a humanitarian disaster in Syria, has made a sound in the international community and has brought international actors such as the Arab League and the UNSC to the issue. However, the fact that Russia and China do not support a joint peacekeeping intervention shows that the global actors are separated in the Syria crisis. This situation prevented international actors from bringing peace to the region.

The humanitarian tragedy in the Syrian crisis has reached serious proportions. Especially children have been the most affected by this war. Children who cannot forget the tragedy they experienced carry the scars of war in the country they settled in after becoming refugees. In addition, the Syrian people, who were crushed under the heavy picture of the civil war and suffered countless losses, also face extra problems in the countries where they took refuge. Moreover, although refugees who have acquired temporary protection status have the right to work in the regulation, the fact that it is not easy to implement in practice has led to labor exploitation and unregistered employment. Undoubtedly, this situation negatively affects the integration process by causing the Syrians to be more isolated. An interview with a Syrian refugee reveals the tragic face of the civil war. Especially the incidents in Aleppo show that the city has become unlivable. A thought-provoking point that emerged in the interview is that the Syrians were forced to leave their country not voluntarily.



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ANNEX-I

1. The details of the interview

Since the subject of the research is related to Turkey, a Syrian refugee living in Turkey was chosen for the interview in this study. In order to reach this refugee, a post was published on a social media platform where Syrians living in Turkey were members. The post mentioned that an interview with a refugee living in Turkey should be conducted to be used in an academic research. After the positive response from more than one person. After this post on social media, the suitability of the possible candidates for the study was evaluated upon the positive response from more than one person. In this context, the criteria for the candidates to be interviewed were to witness a part of the civil war and to observe the changes in the region. After the determination of the suitable candidate for the interview, the date of the interview was agreed upon. Since the interviewee and the interviewer were not in the same country, the interview was carried out by video call over the online platform. The interview consists of two 30-minute sessions. The first online interview was scheduled for 20.05.2022, and the second interview was scheduled for 22.05.2022. In the first interview, 5 semi-structured open-ended questions were asked. In the second interview, it was made to eliminate some uncertainties and deficiencies in the light of the data obtained in the first interview. Since the interviewee knows Turkish, the interview was conducted in Turkish and translated into English.

2. Questions and Answers

1. Could you introduce yourself? Where were you living in Syria, what did you do for living?

My name is Jamal, i am 36 years old and married, I used to work as a teacher in Aleppo. I came to Turkey in 2015, when the civil war intensified, and now I live in Istanbul. I work in a company that we partnered with a relative. I can speak Turkish. Therefore, if you wish, you can also do the interview in Turkish.

2. How did the turmoil start in Syria and why did it turn into a civil war? What kind of change took place in the city you live in during this process, what kind of events did you witness?

Aleppo was actually a university city; many young people from different cities of Syria were coming to study at the universities there. Therefore, the population of the younger generation was high in Aleppo. In the beginning, small-scale demonstrations were taking place around the university and in the squares in the city center. Slogans of democracy and freedom were shouted. These slogans were also written on the walls of government buildings. There were posts on social media that there would be a revolution. These posts were very popular among university students and started to spread everywhere. The demonstrators were openly expressing that the Assad regime had be overthrown in some places, and these statements appeared on the streets from social media to some TV news and even as graffiti. Therefore, it was impossible for the Baath party not to have witnessed these developments. Afterwards, Assad's men began to arrest some demonstrators, some of whom were tortured and some never came back. Lots of people were getting lost and no one can find them. In some demonstrations, there were young people injured by Assad forces. They could not silence the voices of the demonstrators, and the protests began to continue everywhere. The people no longer wanted the Assad regime. While all this was happening, Assad forces were resorting to violence and leaving some of the killed demonstrators by the



wayside. So he was trying to strike fear into our people. Things got serious and the war for the revolution had begun and this would continue until Assad was gone.

We heard gunshots every day. In some neighborhoods, buildings began to be bombed. We were afraid. Whenever we saw an airplane in the air, we would land in the basement of the houses, we would avoid gathering together on the street. In the city, government buildings were closed; many stores were starting to close. We were starting to not find the products we were looking for. We were even getting used to electricity and water cuts. Because of the war, the elderly were even ignoring their illnesses. Children playing in the street were dying or injured by the explosions. Because they were children, they didn't want to be trapped inside the houses and the sound of airplanes and gun had become their nightmare. Nobody could go to work anymore. In order to provide education to the children, some teachers gave lectures to them secretly in hidden places.

3. Was there any hope in the region that this war would end and peace would come? Were you able to follow the international and regional press? Who was informing you about the developments in the region?

At first we did not think that these disturbances would turn into wars. We were saying that somehow the world would not allow such a war to happen. We thought that Assad would withdraw from the administration and thus democracy and peace would come. But it didn't turn out the way we thought. We were following everything on social media, the world heard our voices, but did nothing. When the war came to our door, we started to lose hope. Neither the United Nations nor the America, nobody was here. We were learning about the developments through the Russian press. Russia was deciding what was going to happen. We felt the power of Russia. They were talking about creating a humanitarian corridor and leaving our country. Assad was not going but we were going. The closest place we would go was Turkey, but a listing had been made. Not everyone could go at the same time and we were waiting for our turn.

4. How did your immigration journey to Turkey take place, what did you encounter during the asylum process in a country? Could you briefly describe the conditions at that time?

When it was our turn to emigrate, we faced the reality of leaving our home. We didn't know what to expect where we were going, but those who went before us said they were safe. Now we had to go to save our lives. Life in the city we lived in was no longer bearable. We migrated for our future. Some families with buses and some with their own vehicles could only go to the Turkish border on the designated road. There were several checkpoints on the way. At these checkpoints we were showing our papers and they were checking the car. However, some checkpoints were very dangerous because these points were under the control of the regime. When we got to the border, we saw people waiting in groups. Those who had food and water shared with those who did not. Many of us were staying in refugee camps provided near the border. However, as we heard from those who settled here before, the conditions in the refugee camps were bad and These places were very crowded. We had relatives residing in Istanbul and we submitted the documents proving that we had relatives there. So we came directly to Istanbul.

5. What kind of difficulties did you experience during an integration process after settling in Turkey? Could you easily adapt to life in Turkey? What are the difficulties of establishing a life in Turkey as a Syrian?

As a Syrian, I can say that I have faced many difficulties in Turkey. Since I did not know Turkish, I could not communicate with the Turks and the shopkeepers. I used translator most of the time to meet



my needs. I can say that I was lucky in terms of accommodation, because we were staying with our relatives in Istanbul. Many Syrian relatives lived in some places close to the Turkish border, and those who were able to stay there were lucky. Those in the most difficult situation had to stay in refugee camps. Some Syrians who did not want to go to the camps and did not have a relative in Turkey could go to other places with their own money, and were trying to cover their own expenses like finding a rental place. When I came to Turkey, I could not do my own profession because I did not know Turkish. I also didn't know how to become a teacher here. Many Syrians with professions like me had to work simple jobs to earn money. We had to take care of our family and therefore we did not have the luxury of choosing a job. When I came, I worked at my relative's workplace for a while. Afterwards, I added some capital and became a partner in this business and we expanded the business. However, the situation of our brothers who stayed in the border provinces was more difficult because there were no job opportunities there and also it was not easy to find accommodation. In short, those who could come to big cities like me were more fortunate in finding a job. But life is not perfect here. Sometimes people here say words that belittle and humiliate us. Other children make fun of our children. We no longer hear such things and got used to what they did. Another issue was the status we were given and we knew that this status was temporary. However, we do not want to experience uncertainty again after establishing a life here. I made a lot of effort to build my life here, learned the language, started my own business and made Turkish friends. I want to build my future here and I do not plan to return to Syria. I can say that I am happy to be able to take care of my family here. Since I am satisfied with my current job, I did not want to be teacher again, but some of my engineer and dentist friends started their own profession in Turkey.