

**Media Coverage,  
Perception and Evidence:**  
The Economic Impact  
of Syrian Refugees  
in Turkey

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*By Ravale MOHYDIN*



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**WRITTEN BY**

Ravale Mohyidin

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İSTANBUL / TURKEY

**TRT WORLD LONDON**

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

**TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.**

1620 I STREET NW, 10TH FLOOR,

SUITE 1000, 20006

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

## Executive Summary

Considering Syrian refugees are likely to be in Turkey longer than expected, and previous research shows economic tensions between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens as threatening social integration, this paper discusses the role of Turkish media coverage of the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey on Turkish citizens' perception of how Syrian refugees are affecting their economic well-being. By comparing it with international (non-Turkey) media coverage of the economic impact of refugees as well as research on the effect of media coverage of economic matters on public perception about the state of the economy, it is hypothesized that a connection can be made between relevant media variables and Turkish citizens' negative perception of Syrian refugees' economic impact. This is particularly with respect to perceived (versus actual) changes in employment opportunities, wages and living costs for Turkish citizens.

According to an examination of previous research pertaining to international media coverage of refugees worldwide, three trends have emerged. Firstly, it tends to influence information through highlighting what is important, using language to determine how information is perceived, determining which source cues are to be used and framing format. Secondly, previous research on media coverage of refugees showed that they tend to be framed either as 'economic opportunists' or as 'economic burdens', both often representing different ends of the political spectrum on the same divisive topic of economics. This puts them at risk of being treated with hostility in the media, as confirmed by previous research. Thirdly, these themes of hostility are linked to social outrage against them, often in a circular manner. The themes of hostility are often connected to comparisons of public resources spent on refugees versus citizens, perpetuating an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. Additionally, previous research focused on how an 'us versus them mentality' is perpetuated by an emphasis on the refugees' 'illegal status' as per a country's refugee policy, which may or may not exist.

Comparing research on international media coverage of refugees with research on the Turkish media's coverage of Syrian refugees, both similarities and differences emerge. Different than the international media coverage of refugees that mostly represented them as economic opportunists or economic burdens, the Turkish media has tended to emphasize the need to utilize public funds to help Syrian refugees as victims of war or presents them as economic burdens who are exploiting public funds meant for the Turkish citizens. They are, however, not represented as economic opportunists who have migrated out of choice in search of jobs. There is a lot of news coverage about the amount of humanitarian aid spent on Syrian refugees in Turkey, which appears to be the primary issue of importance for Turkish citizens but also, similarly to international media coverage about refugees, perpetuates an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. This is potentially exacerbated by Turkish news articles' tone and language that tends to be negative, even when covering humanitarian issues. Curiously, despite the huge number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, their perspective and daily struggles are not included in the media, again creating distance between them and the Turkish citizens. This lack of refugee perspective is similar to international media coverage for refugees.

To answer the question of whether Turkish media coverage affects public perceptions about the economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees, research on whether international media coverage of economic matters in general actually influences public perceptions about the state of the economy at all was explored. The research alluded to two findings: firstly, tone is significantly associated with public perception. Secondly, it did not matter how many times the news covered particular economic matters, but positivity or negativity of tone appears to matter significantly for the public to perceive an incident as positive or negative. The fact that news coverage about economic matters pertaining to Syrian refugees in Turkey tended to have a negative tone could lead Turkish citizens to perceive the Turkish economy to have less to offer to them than before the Syrian refugee influx. Past research has demonstrated the

circular relationship between negative news, even when untrue, and social outrage, underscoring the potency of economic threats as arguments against hosting refugees.

Moreover, international media coverage about economic matters tends to be most influential for public perception of the economy's success when it emphasizes the future of the economy. The Turkish media often represents Syrian refugees utilizing public funds. Turkish citizens may view this as resources (public funding on education or health, for example) that are no longer available to them, potentially limiting their future success.

Potentially linked to resentment on the part of Turkish citizens towards Syrian refugees due to the reasons outlined above, recent research on Turkish citizens' perception of Syrian refugees showed that a majority of Turkish citizens do believe that the Syrian refugees have pushed the cost of living up and that they have reduced employment opportunities and earning potential for Turkish citizens. They also believe that the Turkish government is spending too much money to support them.

With that said, comparing perceptions with evidence on the topic shows that actual changes in employment, wages and living costs for Turkish citizens are not entirely the same as the perceived changes. While it is true that the majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey are employed by the country's already large informal economy, previous research has shown that Syrian refugees have displaced underprivileged Turkish workers in the informal sector. However, there is no way to determine whether the influx of Syrian refugees is the only causal factor in this regard. Moreover, Syrian refugees have been meeting the demand for cheap labour in Turkey and increasing profits for Turkish businesses. Importantly, research has not been conclusive about similar job supplanting in the formal economy. There is research that suggests that because of Syrian refugees lowering labour costs for Turkish employers, more Turkish workers – who may have been offered informal jobs before – have actually become formally employed.

Previous research also conclusively suggests that there was no change in wages for those employed in formal jobs, and there is insufficient research to

suggest the same for the informal sector. In fact, there is research that points towards an increase in wages for Turkish citizens in the informal sector post-Syrian refugee influx, however, that could be attributed to job displacement rather than or in addition to the influx of refugees (assuming labour demand is relatively elastic, which it is in this case). There is also evidence that the benefits of accommodating refugees will accrue over time as Syrian refugees create demand for goods and services, generate local jobs and industries, establish companies and continue to engage in trade. Moreover, because of the number of children and youth amongst the Syrian refugee population, they offer an extension of Turkey's demographic window of opportunity well beyond the current expectation up until 2030, should they continue to reside in Turkey.

This study confirms that a connection can be made between relevant media variables and Turkish citizens' negative perception of Syrian refugees' economic impact. Media is an important consideration for protecting social harmony, even if there is only a correlation between the Turkish media's coverage of Syrian refugees' economic impact and Turkish citizens' resentment towards them on economic matters. This is particularly true when contrasting Turkish citizens' perceptions of negative changes in employment opportunities, wages and living costs for them and actual evidence of the same, as findings about actual changes in employment, wages and living costs for Turkish citizens do not appear to inform media coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This is especially the case when there is a need for an admission on the part of the media of at times inconclusive nature of critical evidence.

However, evidence must inform the Turkish media's coverage of the Syrian refugees' economic impact in Turkey. Given the size of the refugee population, the slim possibility of them returning to Syria soon and existing economic tensions between the two communities, there is a dire need for integration efforts. The Turkish media, supported by donors, implementing partners, the Government of Turkey and the Turkish business as well as civil society, can play a pivotal role by providing timely, accurate and complete information about the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey, encouraging critical analysis and promoting social harmony.

## Introduction

**T**urkey's open-door policy for Syrian refugees has earned Turkey the title of the world's largest refugee-hosting country (Esen & Binatli, 2017). Since 2011, the Syrian civil war has left more than 3.5 million Syrians dispersed in Turkey- constituting almost 3.5 per cent of the host country's total population (this figure is an approximation, reflecting official registrations only, with the actual number being around 300,000-400,000 higher). An ever-increasing number of Syrian refugees in the public sphere<sup>1</sup> brought widespread concern among Turkey's population as the Syrian Civil War continued, resulting in instances of violence and enmity between the two communities. Potential economic consequences in particular seem to have hit a nerve, as reflected in the discourses of various political parties' (Altindag and Kaushal, 2017) and in the media during the 2018 Turkish General Election itself.

Given the strong possibility that Syrian refugees will continue to stay in Turkey, it is important to focus on integration efforts between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees. This is where the media can play a pivotal role, given its vast reach (Yanatma, 2017): by providing timely, accurate and complete information about the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey, encouraging critical analysis and promoting social harmony.

This paper will first look at previous research about how international media covers refugees and the relevant narratives' impact on host communities. It will then go on to look at how (in terms of language, tone, framing and other media variables) the Turkish media has covered the economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey. Comparing perceptions with evidence from experimental and observational data of the impact of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey on Turkish citizens' wages, employment and living costs as well as their contribution to the economy otherwise in the forms of entrepreneurship and market formation, this paper will present an analysis of people's perceptions in relation to factual data. Providing context, the paper will explore the underpinnings of public perception: is it due to, or caused by, the Turkish media's coverage of the economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey or is the public perception merely informing the media coverage? Exploring the potential for a circular relationship existing between negative news and public outrage leading to possibly permanent damage to Turkey's social fabric, the paper will synthesize policy and programmatic recommendations for the media, donors and implementation partners, the Turkish government as well as civil and business society.

<sup>1</sup> Initially, the Turkish government, aware of the delicate balance between meeting humanitarian as well as security needs, responded to the influx of refugees by shouldering most of the burden alone (Amnesty International, 2014). The Turkish refugee camps for Syrians, though praised to be among the most well equipped refugee camps ever, were not meant to be a long-term solution. Entering its seventh year, nobody expected the conflict to continue for this long, rendering it more expensive to host refugees than anybody could have previously imagined. Given the unprecedented numbers, hosting them in camps became very expensive. Responding to the need for a long-term and sustainable solution that fosters integration and facilitates economic self-empowerment for Syrian refugees, the Turkish government allowed them to live outside refugee camps.

# Media Narratives Shaping Perceptions of Refugees Internationally

The media uses agenda setting (Iyengar 1990; McCombs & Shaw 1972 in Shanahan et al., 2008) to highlight issues that it considers important and deserving of attention when it comes to refugees. The use and type of language used as well as what sources are employed by media personnel are important when it comes to agenda setting, which affects not just what is perceived as important but also why (Terkildsen et al., 1998 in Shanahan et al., 2008). Evidence exists to suggest that perception of an issue is influenced by the source of information and language used to describe it. Additionally, if the media cites local sources, the issue remains localized (Shanahan, 2008).

Framing an issue, or presenting an issue while describing the context that would gain the most support from an intended audience, makes it easier for media consumers to digest it as they are able to interpret it more readily (Carpini, 2005 in Shanahan, 2008) as it is 'thematic shorthand' (Terkildsen et al., 1998 in Shanahan, 2008). According to Iyengar & Simon (1997), the media, when covering refugees, relies on 'episodic' framing pertaining to specific incidents rather than 'thematic' framing pertaining to general or abstract context most often (Iyengar & Simon, 1997 in Shanahan et al., 2008). This means that specific incidents involving refugees get media attention, such as illegal crossings or violent incidents, rather than a general context involving, for example, the daily lives of refugees. This primes (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Iyengar & Simon 1993; Miller & Krosnick 2000; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. 2002 in Shanahan et al., 2008) media consumers to associate specific incidents with particular groups of people. As per Shanahan et al. (2008), "ultimately, the type of media framing format influences how recipients attribute responsibility for problems". This is very important in the context of representation of refugees in the media, for they are often targets of 'racial hoaxes' (Russell, 1998 in Cerase & Santoro, 2018) which result in media hypes, both of which are propelled by hostility towards them as perpetrators of problems.

According to Cerase & Santoro (2018) the expanded definition of a racial hoax is:

An intentional attempt to produce, circulate or boost: an allegation of a crime; a threat posed against someone's health, security or safety; a violation of social norms; a challenge to social

hierarchies or any other supposed deviant behaviour. Such attempt aims to spread outrage, blame and social exclusion. It targets an individual or a group because of race, ethnicity or religion, while fostering hate and discontent (Cerase & Santoro, 2018, pp. 334)

According to Cerase & Santoro (2018), politicians as well as mainstream media are likely to include racial hoaxes in their coverage and discourses, which has resulted in a new kind of media hype borne of seemingly plausible news. The media's power lies in the fact that they have a platform through which they can safeguard public interest but also influence public opinion (Cerase & Santoro, 2018), and media coverage of refugees is not disconnected from this reality. Research shows that media discourses feature a strong characterization of refugees as economic opportunists in Italy and in other parts of Europe (Cerase, 2013; Holmes & Castaneda, 2016 in Cerase & Santoro, 2018), accompanied by hostility towards them in both tone and language. Hostility and outrage have been shown to increase consumption of news (Vasterman, 2005 in Cerase & Santoro, 2018). Most importantly in the context of this paper is the following: significant research suggests that a circular relationship exists between media hype and social outrage (Vasterman, Scholten & Ruigrok, 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær & Wien, 2008; Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009; Cerase, 2011 in Cerase & Santoro, 2018). Considering that negative news about refugees is more likely to lead to social outrage against them, and that social outrage is going to continue to drive negative news about them, it is important to consider research that outlines which type of negative news is likely to lead to social outrage against refugees.

An interesting study done by Cerase & Santoro (2018) demonstrated the circular relationship between social outrage and negative news, even when untrue, as well as the potency of economic threats as arguments against hosting refugees. When unfounded news about migrants being paid 35 euros a day by the Italian government spread, it was nested between existing hostility for immigrants apparently exploiting national welfare and data about money being spent on them, and led to much outrage in both traditional as well as social media (Cerase & Santoro, 2018). Even debunking the news did not help.

as the media hype about the costs of immigration helped the hoax to remain alive (Cerase & Santoro, 2018). As per the researchers' (Cerase & Santoro, 2018) analysis:

It conveyed well fears regarding lack of resources connected to the financial crisis, but it also built on the typical dichotomy 'us' vs 'them'. In fact, based on these arguments we ('us') are not the problem: 'they' are stealing public money and are taking advantage of our welfare system (Cerase & Santoro, 2018, pp.340).

Thus, media hypes and racial hoaxes pertaining to refugees and immigrants being an economic threat is not new. The racial hoax also appeared to serve a purpose as it continues to be used to 'compare immigration resources and money assigned to other categories (as poor people, elderly, or those affected by earthquakes), which belong to the 'us' category, widely represented as unprivileged, threaten group' (Cerase & Santoro, 2018). This is also the case in a study conducted by Don & Lee (2014) in Malaysia where two contrasting themes were found when it came to representing refugees in the media. Firstly, that they were a major problem to be dealt with and secondly, that they were victims that needed help, both representing different political interests and agendas. Additionally, research explains that 'the othering of immigrants may begin with an emphasis on their illegal status' (Messer et al., 2012 in Don & Lee, 2014) as refugees are considered illegal in Malaysia for lack of a clear refugee policy. This could be similar to media coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

Zhou and Moy (2007) also cited prior research in the United States (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989 in Zhou & Moy, 2007) that highlight politicians' and interest groups' influence on the reconstruction of media narratives, regardless of the realities on the ground. Differences between perceptions and reality are important in shaping public opinion about immigration.

A study conducted in Britain on the impact of print-news coverage on the narratives of locals regarding refugees (Leudar, I, Hayes, J., Nevpakil, J. & Turner, J., 2008) found that British newspapers tend to frame news coverage of refugees within a discourse of hostility. However, the local narrative may or may not be affected by the hostility

themed media coverage. This finding was aligned with other research (Nekvapil & Leudar, 2002 in Leudar et al., 2008) that noted that readers use media representations flexibly in their own contexts, which may or may not be related to the original one (Leudar et al., 2008). Results indicated that while some locals adopted the hostile narrative, others avoided refugees without being explicitly hostile towards them (Leudar et al., 2008). However, only two locals in the sample believed refugees to be victims of trauma and in need of asylum. It was interesting to note in the study that none of the locals actually referred to media coverage as an influencer for their opinion (Leudar et al., 2008). This study importantly indicates that even though media coverage may or may not influence local narrative negatively, locals do not consider it influential. Thus, the effect may be subconscious.

*Differences between perceptions and reality are important in shaping public opinion about immigration.*

<sup>2</sup> For many years, Turkey has been a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention on the Status of Refugees and its associated 1967 Protocol (İçduygu, 2015). It was the basis of international protection in Turkey, to which the country remained largely committed. However, due to geographical limitations being a part of the Ratification of the Refugee Convention, Turkey has considered resettlement to a third country - usually the European Union, the United States or Canada - a durable solution for refugees from Syria, as well as all non-European refugees. Turkey is only able to provide resettlement to refugees originating from European countries (Soykan, 2012). This is despite the fact that in recent years, the majority of the refugees in Turkey have sought refuge from non-European countries (notably from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria).

# Media Coverage of Economic Impact of Hosting Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Recently, media narratives about the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees may have resulted in the Syrian refugees' fate being one of the most divisive topics during the Turkish General Election in 2018. Echoing the conflicting narratives on the issue, both alliance campaigns (with various parties that made up the alliances agreeing within themselves on the issue to a large extent) focused on the resources spent on Syrian refugees, the consequences and benefits of doing so and the motivations behind them. The People's Alliance advocated compassion towards them throughout the election campaign, outlining efforts that promote self-sufficiency for Syrian refugees and lambasted opposition parties for their lack of faith and generosity. Opposition politicians on the other hand, highlighted resources spent on rehabilitation for Syrian refugees as misplaced utilisation of funds (Al-Monitor, 2018) to gain favour with Turkish voters on television and social media as well as during election rallies at the expense of Syrian refugees. According to Erdogan, Kavukcuer & Cetinkaya (2017) this is a continuation of previous trends. While pro-government newspapers reported on Syrian refugees in terms of sacrifice, generosity and kindness, the pro-opposition media defined hosting Syrian refugees as 'short-sighted' (Erdogan, Kavukcuer & Cetinkaya, 2017). Yaylaci & Karakus (2015) concluded that major newspapers did not highlight Syrian refugee crisis' humanitarian aspect or the grim realities of war enough and that, instead, they appeared to use them as a 'tool' to pursue their own 'political and ideological interests'. Don & Lee (2014) also found the same two contrasting themes when it came to representing refugees in the Malaysian media, both representing different political agendas that may or may not necessarily reflect realities on the ground.

It is clear then that the Turkish media is primarily representing Syrian refugees as victims or as burdens. According to Erdogan (2015), when it comes to economic costs, certain newspapers refer to refugees as 'helpless' and those that 'should be taken care of', while others refer to them as 'economic burdens and opportunists', i.e. competition for jobs, decreasing wages et cetera. This is the same case when it comes to coverage of Syrian refugees in Europe and the United States (Yucel

& Dogankaya, 2017). A study by Goker & Keskin (2015)<sup>3</sup> argued that the media presented Syrians solely as passive and as victims, while Sunata & Yildiz (2018)<sup>4</sup> found that there was a huge focus on humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees in the news. Reducing their stories to 'victim' and 'burden' frames (Carpini, 2005 in Shanahan, 2008) influences how Turkish citizens attribute responsibility for economic problems, potentially creating space for racial hoaxes.

Yucel & Dogankaya (2017) found that tabloid newspapers tended to have a more negative tone with less use of adjectives like 'empathy' or 'caring' (Yucel & Dogankaya, 2017). Moreover, articles that had a humanitarian approach highlighted issues like victimisation, lack of jobs, integration et cetera. However, even these articles carried a negative tone and did not highlight social expenditure on Syrian refugees in a positive light (Yucel & Dogankaya, 2017). Using certain words to describe Syrians such as 'refugee' was significantly associated with a negative tone in the news, while the term 'guest', was negatively associated, but not significantly (Yucel & Dogankaya, 2017) – this is not surprising as guests are conventionally considered to be temporary. Previous research highlighted above (Soroka, Stecula & Wleizen, 2015; Leudar et al., 2008) found tone to be of great consequence when it comes to influencing public perceptions of economic matters.

A 2014 critical discourse analysis of a sample of Turkish newspapers shows that language used in news items contributes to the further social exclusion of Syrian refugees in Turkey (Nas, 2015). By 2014, it had become clear that Syrians would not be returning to Syria anytime soon, and so the narrative of 'us' versus 'them' had begun to develop, with a focus on resources spent on and opportunities given to Syrian refugees versus Turkish citizens (Nas, 2015). According to Nas, the media narrative helped to justify Syrian refugees' social exclusion and even economic exploitation. This is corroborated by Cesaro & Santoro (2018), who demonstrate the existence of a circular relationship between social outrage and negative news (even when false), and state that economic threats are potent arguments against hosting

<sup>3</sup> The study only documented the researchers' own viewpoints and not actual narrative or discourse analysis, and that may introduce bias.

<sup>4</sup> They conducted an analysis of more than a 1000 newspaper articles from mid-2015 produced by three of the most active news agencies in Turkey.

refugees. Furthermore, media narratives about economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey can be particularly damaging when it comes to integration efforts. Through their affecting of public discourse, media narratives hold the potential to be particularly damaging to Turkey's social fabric with implications for internal security.

Regardless of whether a particularly media outlet or newspaper is pro or anti hosting of refugees, Syrians do not appear to have much voice, and their perspectives are not included. Neither perspective highlights the daily economic, social or political struggles faced by the refugees themselves (Erdogan, Kavukcuer & Cetinkaya, 2017). Even if a refugee is the source of news, they are more likely to be branded a victim needing protection rather than a self-sufficient person (Yucel & Dogankaya, 2017). Nas (2015) also found that the media does not cover news from the Syrian perspective. The study conducted by Sunata & Yildiz (2018) highlighted the fact that the three most utilised story angles included refugee policy, illegal crossings and refugees as victims needing help – but never from the Syrian refugees' viewpoint. This, along with the fact that the media appears to be portraying Syrian refugees as the 'other' is important to note. Research (Herda, 2005; Igartua & Cheng, 2009; Brader, Valentino & Suhay, 2013 in Allen, Blinder & McNeil, 2017) shows migrants who are perceived as different or comparatively less privileged by citizens are more likely to be viewed negatively by citizens.

Considering this paper will focus on research examining Turkish media narratives about economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees and how those may affect public perceptions while contrasting them with related evidence, it is useful to look at research that indicates whether media narratives about economic matters, in general, actually influence public perceptions about them at all. If media narratives about economic affairs do matter when it comes to public perceptions about the state of the economy, then positive or negative coverage of economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees will influence integration efforts.

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# Impact of Media Coverage on Public Perception of Economic Matters

Research exists that finds evidence for public perceptions of the economy having an effect on media coverage and vice versa (Haller & Norpoth, 1997; Wu et al., 2002 in Leudar et al., 2008). Other research finds evidence for media coverage of economy matters influencing public perception of economy and not vice versa (Blood & Phillips, 1997; Hollanders & Vliegthart, 2011 in Leudar et al., 2008). Leudar et al. (2008) find that media variables, especially tone of the news article, to be significantly associated with public perceptions. Soroka et al. (2015) also found that tone is of consequence for influencing public perceptions of economic matters. It did not matter how many times the news covered economic matters, but valence (positivity or negativity) of tone appears to matter significantly.

It is hard to determine whether media narratives cause economic fears or whether the media publishes about existing economic fears that they believe their readers would find interesting, as there are no relevant causal studies. However, results from a quasi-experimental study (Shanahan, McBeth & Hathaway, 2011) that looked how media policy narratives influence public opinion showed that they did affect public opinion in two significant ways: firstly, by strengthening readers' pre-existing opinions and secondly, by converting readers' opinions. Additionally, according to a content analysis study by Zhou & Moy (2007), who examined the interplay between online public discourse and offline (traditional) media narratives, online public opinion can transform a local event into a national one as well as exert influence on media narratives.

Soroka et al. (2015) also found that the media tends to focus more on the future of the economy rather than its current state. This could be the case for Turkish media when it comes to coverage pertaining to economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey. With the Syrian Civil War continuing, the impact of Syrian refugees on the Turkish economy may be expected to be long-ranging.

Linking the Turkish media's negative coverage of the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees with evidence of the extent of the media's coverage of economic matters' impacts public perception about the health of the economy, it is not farfetched to consider that Turkish citizens' perception of the success of the Turkish economy and what it may offer them has deteriorated. That has the potential to create resentment on the part of Turkish citizens towards Syrian refugees in Turkey.

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<sup>5</sup> However, this is only in early stages of coverage as the media adapts narratives as necessary.

# Perceived Economic Impact of Hosting Syrian Refugees in Turkey

About three years after the collection of most of the above data, the Centre for American Progress, a U.S. think tank, reported that 78 per cent of Turks believe they spent too much money caring for Syrian refugees (Evans & Dikmen, 2018). According to survey research conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2017, "economic issues appear to be a key point of contention for both communities. Perceptions of being undercut in the labour market are strong among the host community, while the refugees feel underpaid and overcharged" (WFP, 2017). International Crisis Group reported that most Turkish citizens believe the influx of Syrians has had an adverse impact, while a survey of Turkish citizens in Istanbul published in December 2016 found that '72 per cent felt uncomfortable encountering Syrians and 76 per cent had no sympathy for the refugees' (International Crisis Group, 2018). Many Turks perceive the costs of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey to include lower wages, an increase in unemployment as well as rising rental and food costs (Topal, Ozer & Dokuzlu, 2016). They also worry about deterioration of the Turkish economy as well as draining of social aid funding for Turkish citizens. Social media campaigns have cropped up against Syrian refugees who have continued to reside in Turkey (Sharma, 2017).

These sentiments emerging from the resentment caused by perceived economic costs can be potentially linked to a threefold increase in intercommunal violence between Turkish host communities and Syrian refugees in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 (International Crisis Group, 2018). Although there is no evidence that the Turkish media is causing the public to develop negative opinions (or vice versa), given the research conducted internationally, it is clear that media narratives are linked to the public's perception of the economic impact of Syrian refugees.

Consequently, there is a need to pause and reflect on the effects of such a phenomenon. It is recommended that problematic perspectives related to employment opportunity, wages, market creation and living costs are addressed, utilizing the Turkish media as an instrument for integration efforts instead. If left unaddressed, these perceptions may continue to fuel existing tensions and threaten to destroy already delicate intercommunity relations.

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# Implications of Turkey's Evolving Refugee Policy on Syrian Refugees' Economic Security

Prior to addressing particular perceptions, which call the economic contributions of Syrian refugees into question, it is important to provide context by highlighting the impact of Turkey's evolving refugee policy on Syrian refugees' perceived or actual economic security. In the context of the international community's failure to equitably share the responsibility<sup>6</sup> of hosting Syrian refugees and the duration of the conflict exceeding initial expectations, Turkey developed its first asylum law - the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013<sup>7</sup>.

The new law, though much better aligned with international standards, still maintained the politically charged geographical restriction. It granted temporary protection to Syrian refugees and provided access to some social services, but did not provide refugees the right to work. In January 2016, the Turkish government allowed Syrian refugees to get work permits if their employer applied for them. According to the International Crisis Group, there were only about 15,000 out of more than 3.5 million Syrians with permits to work legally in Turkey by 2018, which is less than 0.5 per cent (International Crisis Group, 2018). This figure highlights the difficulty involved in the process of getting formal work permits<sup>8</sup>, not just for Syrian refugees, but also for all foreigners in Turkey. Unfortunately for Syrian refugees though, because of their inability to return to Syria, they are compelled to accept informal work to be able to survive.

An estimated 750,000-900,000 Syrian refugees are employed informally or unofficially. Given the pre-existing size of the informal economy in Turkey, with estimates ranging from 7% to 139% of the formal economy (Akalin & Kesikoğlu 2007 in Esen & Binatli, 2017), it is clear that there was already a sizeable informal economy in place prior to the arrival of the Syrian refugees. This is even more so in southeast Turkey, where most of the cities with a significant proportion of Syrian refugees are located (Esen & Binatli, 2017).

Even though a small fraction of refugees have settled in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, the presence of Syrian social networks, government-sponsored refugee camps and a flourishing informal economy - including seasonal work offering employment to unskilled workers - in South East Turkey have made it the most viable region of the country for Syrian refugees. Classic economic theory states that if there is an increase in the supply of informal labour, it should reduce the demand for it, leading to either lower wages or the displacement of citizens from the informal sector. Living costs, especially rent, are bound to increase as Syrian refugees continue to reside. This is what Turkish citizens believe is happening and anticipates will happen, and what may be the cause of tensions between host communities and the Syrian refugees.

<sup>6</sup> Turkey put constraints on international NGOs and civil society in providing financial assistance due to security concerns (Erdogan and Unver, 2015). After April 2012, however, the Turkish government had to accept financial assistance as the conflict continued, and joined the United Nations (UN) Regional Response Plan. However, promises of funding have not been reliable. For example, of the \$497 million earmarked for Turkey in UN regional funding, by October 2014 Turkey had only received 28 per cent of it (Amnesty International, 2017). On the other hand, the European Union took a more security-oriented approach as compared to a humanitarian approach to the conflict, resulting in the signing of European Union-Turkey agreement in 2016 to curb the flow of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the European Union. This was successfully achieved as evidenced by decreasing numbers. However, according to the agreement, Turkey was to receive rehabilitation assistance worth €6B, but the European Union has contributed less than promised until now, despite assurances (Deutsche Welle, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The LFIP has been crucial in developing the essential pillars of Turkey's national asylum system and establishing the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) as the main entity in charge of policy-making for all foreigners in Turkey. From this perspective, the LFIP is a potential sustainable solution to Turkey's illegal migration and refugee crises.

<sup>8</sup> At the workplace for which a work permit is requested, the number of refugees cannot exceed 10 percent of the Turkish workers, and refugees cannot be paid less than the minimum wage. Many employers find this to be counterintuitive: they would hire Syrians because were cheaper than locals in the first place. It was (and still is) a disincentive for Turkish employers to apply for work permits for their current or future Syrian refugee employees.

## Evidence and Narrative

Instead of alleviating concerns by introducing impartiality into coverage of Syrian refugees by emphasizing both factual consequences and benefits of hosting Syrian refugees as well as by outlining limitations faced by them, politicised media narratives about what is actually happening on the ground are resulting in propagation

of stereotypes, ignorance and growing acerbity. It is important to look at evidence pertaining to economic effects of the Syrian refugee influx on the Turkish economy to determine the gap between evidence and narrative, as well as potential ways to close it for the purpose of integration and social harmony.

## Syrian Refugee Influx and Employment Opportunity for Turkish Citizens

A research study looking at the causal effect of Syrian refugee flows on the labour market outcomes of Turkish citizens in south-eastern Turkey (Ceritoglu, Gurcihan-Yunculer, Torun & Tumen, 2015) found that Syrian refugees have negatively affected the likelihood of employment for citizens. They found that unemployment increased while labour force participation, informal employment and job find rates decreased for Turkish citizens, with disadvantaged groups such as the poorly educated<sup>9</sup> and women suffering the most.

Aligned with the results of this study were the results of another recent study conducted by Del Caprio & Wagner (2015), who analysed the impact of Syrian refugee flows on the Turkish labour market. The paper examined refugee flows by controlling for the distance between the Turkish-Syrian borders, as other factors, such as disturbed trade may confound results - i.e. Turkish citizens who had been engaged in trading activities along the border earlier were laid off because of disrupted trade, and not because of inflow of refugees. The study found that when the distance from the Syrian border is accounted for, there is a negative effect on informal employment (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015), i.e. if distance is not a factor, informal opportunities have decreased for Turkish citizens. In fact, Del Caprio and Wagner (2015) found that:

The inflow of informally employed Syrian refugees leads to large-scale displacement of Turkish workers from the

informal sector, around six Turkish citizens for every ten refugees. Displacement occurs among all types of informally employed Turkish workers irrespective of their gender, age and education. There are particularly large informal job losses for Turkish [workers] without any formal education (who still comprise 14 per cent of the private sector, paid employment) (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015, pp. 4)

Through a descriptive study, Bahçekapılı & Çetin (2015) report the same: the arrival of refugees has increased unemployment in Turkey's regions most affected by the crisis. Another study by Kizil (2016) studied the impact of Syrian refugees on Turkish citizens' employment levels across Turkey by comparing unemployment levels between 2014 and 2015. His findings indicated that regions close to the Syrian border that also housed refugee camps did experience an increase in unemployment levels. However, he used correlations in his analysis, which though they establish a mutual connection between Syrian refugee inflow and Turkish citizens' unemployment levels, they do not establish causation as other factors, such as prior or current development in the region, cannot be ruled out. There was an important finding that merits consideration and that was that Syrian refugees primarily migrate from the border regions to cities like Istanbul in search of work, even if it is informal.

<sup>9</sup> Out of the 1.8 million Syrian refugees who are of working age, a majority of them are low skilled, eight out of ten of them have had less than eight years of education, and only ten per cent have a university degree.

It is worthwhile to contrast research findings on the impact of voluntary immigration of unskilled workers such as this on Turkish citizens' employment, assuming a somewhat elastic labour supply because it is unlawful to employ Turkish citizens and pay them below minimum wage. Informal workers make less money than formal workers do all over the world, and thus, as per classical economic theory, lower wages for informal workers leads to employers preferring them to formal workers, ensuring a reduction in the demand for formal employment.

However, studies conducted by Del Caprio & Wagner (2015), Ceritoglu et al. (2015) or Tumen (2016) do not show this. They have all reported a positive effect of Syrian refugee flow on formal employment for Turkish citizens. Del Caprio & Wagner (2015) reported that for every ten Syrian workers in the informal labour market, three or four jobs were created in the formal labour market, and, perhaps critically, these newly created formal jobs were only for men who had not completed high school education therefore they would have most likely been informally employed previously as they were low skilled. Ceritoglu et al. (2015) and Tumen (2016) reported the same positive impact on the formal labour market. The increase in formal employment for citizens may have been because Turkish employers were more willing to offer formal employment to better-qualified Turkish workers – who may not have accepted informal labour before – after having made more profit because of hiring cheap Syrian informal labour.

Another study (Akgunduz, van den Berg & Hassink, 2015), however, came up with findings that suggest there were no negative effects of refugee inflows on either formal or informal labour market outcomes for Turkish citizens. The research used aggregate data while the studies by Del Caprio & Wagner (2015), Ceritoglu et al. (2015) and Tumen (2016) utilised rich micro or individual-level data. Aggregate data can produce misleading inferences about individuals, as the data is about groups, and any effect of a phenomenon would have to be particularly strong to be detected, missing the more subtle effects. Additionally, the analysis by Akgunduz, van den Berg & Hassink, (2015) included “only two treatment years, 2012 and 2013, when most of the refugees were still in refugee camps, and the number of Syrian refugees was still relatively low compared to current numbers” (Esen & Binatli, 2017).

The study by Esen & Binatli (2017) included 2016 data, which is critical as Syrians had access – albeit limited – to work permits in Turkey after January 2016. It confirmed

that the density of Syrian refugees in areas across Turkey was negatively associated with informal employment. Unlike Ceritoglu et al. (2015), Tumen (2016) and Del Caprio & Wagner (2015), Esen & Binatli (2017) also reported the same for formal employment. They explained that the pre-2016 data increase in formal employment might have been due to new governmental or municipal jobs being created to help operate refugee camps, but now that more Syrians were leaving the camps, this was no longer the case. They also discussed that the negative association with formal employment for Turkish citizens could also be due to the inclusion of the 2016 data, which reflected the period in which Syrian refugees were allowed to receive work permits. At this point, the research is not conclusive as to the effect of Syrian refugee influx on Turkish citizens' formal employment opportunities.

Although there is not enough conclusive evidence to suggest that the presence of Syrian refugees is reducing formal employment opportunities for Turkish citizens, there is enough research to suggest that underprivileged Turkish workers from the informal sector (especially minority groups and women) have lost jobs in regions with a high density of Syrian refugees. However, there is still no evidence to suggest that these same informal workers would not have lost their jobs – or left voluntarily – under ‘normal’ circumstances, but this has not been highlighted in the media.

Similarly, there is insufficient as well as conflicting research to suggest any conclusive change for Turkish citizens employed in the formal economy. More research on the impact of Syrian refugee inflows on Turkish citizens' employment is required to make a thorough assessment. The Turkish media mostly does not refer to the inconclusive nature of research findings, often overlooking nuances, and instead presents a more conclusive picture than is the case in reality.

Often important, but ignored by the media, is the perspective that Syrian refugees are meeting the demand for cheap labour in Turkey and, consequently, reducing costs and increasing profits for Turkish businesses (Ceritoglu et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is often ignored that Syrian refugees as well as the fact that they are frequent targets for exploitation. According to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), as of March 2017, more than two-thirds were women, children and the elderly, who usually find employment in the informal sector, similar to cases around the world (AFAD, 2017). They have been partially absorbed in the informal sector,

and have accepted jobs that perhaps Turkish citizens are not willing to do, with many especially women<sup>10</sup> and children<sup>11</sup> experiencing exploitation and abuse.

Media narratives appear to generally not consider other variables that may be influential, and often confuse correlation with causation. According to a review of 177 news articles and 33 opinion columns from August 2014 covering local protests against the reduction of employment opportunities and wages in Gaziantep, more than a third of the news articles blamed Syrian

refugees entirely for unemployment (Ataman, 2015). This is a complicated issue in the best of conditions, but considering southeastern Turkey had high unemployment even prior to the Syrian refugee inflow (Kizil, 2015), one cannot explain the issue by the presence of Syrian refugees alone. Some newspapers did not cover the local protests at all, while others linked refugees to rising unemployment and, consequently, social tension (Ataman, 2015). The reality faced by Syrian refugees, as evidenced above, is far more nuanced than it appears.

## Syrian Refugees' Entrepreneurship and Market Creation

The very existence of Syrian refugees has led to the creation and sustainability of refugee rehabilitative Turkish industries along the Turkey-Syria border. This may have also contributed to the increase in formal sector employment for Turkish citizens. However, according to Turkish citizens' perceptions of Syrians' economic survival in Turkey, more than 85 per cent believe Syrian refugees are utilizing services provided by the Turkish state, 65 per cent believe they are making ends meet 'by begging' while only 49 per cent believe that they are economically surviving 'by working' (Erdogan, 2017). About 77 per cent of Turkish citizens 'do not agree at all' or 'do not agree' that Syrians would contribute to the Turkish economy (Erdogan, 2017). The agenda setting power of the media is evident here as there is significant media coverage focusing on the extent of the Turkish government's support for Syrian refugees or the funds spent on them (Summers, 2018). This has potentially led to Turkish citizens potentially experiencing 'compassion fatigue' (Moeller, 1999), especially when they do not have the same resources themselves.

Most Syrian refugees do not speak Turkish, and that makes them, less than ideal candidates for jobs, particularly in sectors that do not experience much informality such as finance and administration. Many have set up businesses to be able to support themselves, resulting in Syrian ownership of one quarter of all foreign businesses established in Turkey (Esen & Binatli, 2017). According to Vural Çakır, Chair of the Human Development Foundation (INGEV), 8,100 Syrian companies were established with foreign capital status in Turkey, employing more than 100,000 people as of October 2017 (Anadolu Agency, 2017). Investors and merchants have also moved operations from Syria, especially from Aleppo, to Turkey. Çığatay & Menekşe (2014), who studied bilateral trade between Syria and the Turkish provinces where the refugees have settled in, reported large increases in trade after an initial decline at the start of the Syrian civil war.

<sup>10</sup> In 2013, female-headed Syrian refugee households constituted 22 per cent of the non-camp Syrian refugee population (AFAD, 2013 in CTDC, 2015). This is because many women were abandoned, lost their parents or husbands in the war or their parents or husbands became disabled or could not provide (CTDC, 2015). With almost 65 per cent of female Syrian refugees being either illiterate or having had primary education only, they do not have the educational qualifications for skilled work (AFAD, 2014). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of them do not have the required documentation for legal work permits or, at times even residence permits that may help them get access to basic facilities (AFAD, 2014). This leaves them economically vulnerable as they have to engage in informal employment to make ends meet, or not have an income source at all. Informal employment can be unreliable and exploitative, with women reporting incidents and fears of sexual harassment, bad working conditions and discrimination by Turkish employers (CTDC, 2015). Many of them report 'an increased risk of depression and psychological distress as they face the pressures of displacement, anxiety of their new gender roles and feeling of isolation' (UNHCR, 2013 in Asaf, 2017). Interviews with Syrian refugee women show that some of them are pressured into sex in exchange for rent, or if they fail to pay a month's rent (CTDC, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Unreliable and low wages lead to many Syrian refugee households, particularly female-led, having to send young children to work. In Turkey, 'child labour is unregulated, and in many cases, children face abuse, bullying and harassment by their employers, who use them as cheap labourers due to their extreme financial needs' (CTDC, 2015). Estimates indicate that around 70 per cent of non-camp refugee children were out of schools and engaged in labour in 2014 (Letsch, 2014 in CTDC, 2015).

# Syrian Refugee Influx and Living Costs

Claims of significant price increases have followed Syrian refugees as they have continued to settle in Turkey. While there has no doubt been some price increases, it is not necessarily a direct result of the presence of refugee. Additionally, there have actually been price reductions associated with the arrival of Syrians. Tümen (2016) reports reductions in prices of goods and services because of Syrian refugee inflows, as well as a positive effect on housing rents. According to Balkan & Tümen (2016), consumer prices for both goods and services have declined by approximately 2.5 per cent, with the decline in prices in informal labour-intensive sectors being around 4 per cent<sup>12</sup>. As Syrian refugees were mostly absorbed into the large informal labour market, the prices of goods and services produced by informal sectors declined.

Bahçekapılı & Çetin (2015) also reported reduced prices in the regions most affected by the crisis. Their analysis, however, was descriptive and did not account for other influences that may be responsible for the price increase post-Syrian refugee inflows. Akgunduz, Van den Berg & Hassink (2015) found that only food costs increased moderately in areas where refugees had settled mostly compared to the rest of Turkey. However, his analysis used aggregate data, meaning his results were not as rigorous. Therefore, the findings are not as reliable as the ones originating from rich micro data, like in the study by Esen & Binatlı, (2017).

Other influences could have also played a role. Since 2011 when the first Syrian refugees arrived, Turkey's inflation rate has been on the rise, with core consumer prices almost doubling in the past ten years. Additionally, Syrian refugees have contributed to a rise in overall private consumption. According to Kuyumcu & Kösematoğlu (2017), there was a 4.5 per cent increase in private consumption due to the rise in population partly as a result of the huge influx of Syrian refugees in 2015. This was associated with a better than expected and highest GDP growth rate since 2011 (Candemir, 2016 in Kuyumcu & Kösematoğlu, 2017). Morgan Stanley economist Ercan Erguzel wrote in 2017:

Instead of consumer loans or increases in gross wages and salaries, they believe that -at least some part of this strong domestic consumption can be explained by the huge refugee influx in the last two years, reaching almost 3 million Syrians currently meeting their basic needs from Turkey' (Kuyumcu & Kösematoğlu, 2017, pp. 79).

The research suggests either that some prices have actually decreased or that there was not enough conclusive evidence to suggest Syrian refugees' influx is responsible for an increase in prices. However, the Turkish media's emphasis is on potential consequences of the Syrian civil war for both Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees (such as, according to Sunata & Yildiz (2018), refugee policy, illegal crossings, victimization et cetera), without mentioning potential benefits, or even the admission that there is not enough evidence to suggest either case.

*As Syrian refugees were mostly absorbed into the large informal labour market, the prices of goods and services produced by informal sectors declined.*

<sup>12</sup> The decline was negligible in the formal labour-intensive economy

## Discussion

Even though tensions are rising between the Syrian refugees and the host communities in Turkey based on perceived injustices - such as loss of employment and wages - the reality is far more nuanced. There is conclusive research that suggests that Turkish workers from the informal sector have lost their jobs in regions with a high density of Syrian refugees. However, there is no evidence to suggest that these same informal workers would not have lost their jobs under 'normal' circumstances. Similarly, there is insufficient research to suggest any conclusive change for Turkish citizens employed in formal sectors. Although it is acknowledged that measuring the impact of Syrian refugee inflow on wages is difficult - which may be the reason why there is not enough research conducted - existing studies have mixed findings and results are not clear. Whilst some suggest no positive or negative change in wages for either informal or formal workers, other research has shown an increase for those who have remained in their informal jobs. Considering the mixed findings, there is insufficient evidence to suggest wages decreased for Turkish citizens in either the formal or the informal sectors.

Representing fear as fact, media narratives related to Turkish citizens' employment or wages being affected by the Syrian refugee influx do not even utilize evidence to inform their coverage, much less highlight the inconclusive nature of research findings or that other variables may be responsible. They are presenting fear as fact, with a lack of media coverage for positive features such as job creation for Turkish citizens by Syrian refugees as they set up businesses in Turkey or the fact that Syrian refugees, as cheaper labour, improve profit margins for Turkish businesses, which may lead to hiring of additional Turkish citizens.

Lower labour costs are also associated with a reduction in prices of goods and services produced from informal sectors, which, as most research shows, has in turn reduced overall prices in regions with high numbers of Syrian refugees. These regions have also experienced an increase in trade, entrepreneurship and industry as more time has passed. Turkish media narratives instead appear to focus on how Turkish citizens as well as the Turkish government is helping Syrian refugees and not the other way round. Additionally, the emphasis is more likely on negative consequences of Syrian refugees being a part of the Turkish work force, highlighting Syrian refugees

needing help, framed as either victims or burdens, rather than the extent to which they attempt to help themselves which in turn helps Turkey.

As little is known about how Syrian refugee inflows would affect Turkish citizens' employment in the long run, one could attempt to learn from research on the long-term impact of voluntary immigration on labour outcomes for host communities. Results show insignificant positive or negative effects - which may be the case here as well (Devlin, Bolt & Patel, 2014). On the other hand, research (Esen & Binatli, 2017) has found that the benefits of accommodating Syrian refugees only accrue over time: hosting Syrian refugee youth extends Turkey's demographic window of economic opportunity well beyond 2030. However, instead of future economic opportunities, pro-opposition Turkish media tends to focus on political ramifications of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey (International Crisis Group, 2018).

The Turkish media's role is very important in communicating ground realities to the Turkish public about the consequences and benefits of hosting Syrian refugees to the Turkish economy. Attempting to answer whether the media is a cause of public misperceptions or exacerbates already existing public misperceptions about the economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey is beyond the scope of this paper and is a potential direction future research can take. However, there appears to be a clear connection between negative media narratives about the economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey and Turkish citizens' resentment towards Syrian refugees. It is in the interest of the citizens of Turkey - including the Turkish state, civil society and media - and Syrian refugees to explore ways to narrow this gap in communication.

# Recommendations

This paper, adopting a multi-pronged approach based on the analysis of extant research, offers recommendations for the media, donors and implementing partners, the government as well as civil and business society in Turkey, to improve media coverage of the economic impact of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

## Media

- Media outlets must recognise their power and responsibility when it comes to reporting on Syrian refugees' impact on the Turkish economy, and understand its potential to create social tension. Even if media narratives were just one of the factors involved in building perception about Syrian refugees, improving this aspect would help improve perceptions about Syrian refugees' actual economic costs and benefits to Turkey, especially if they address fallacies related to employment opportunity, wages, market creation and prices. If left unaddressed, these perceptions may continue to fuel existing tensions and threaten to destroy already delicate intercommunity relations. This is very important considering Syrian refugees have remained in Turkey longer than expected due to the protracted Syrian Civil War and appear likely to continue to remain for the foreseeable future. Misinformation and/or a lack of information about sensitive issues like Syrian refugees' impact on the Turkish economy cannot be ignored. While expecting media outlets to abandon or diverge from editorial guidelines may not be realistic, it is imperative for all media outlets to understand that it is in Turkey's national interest to maintain social harmony, and consider the powerful effect they have on public opinion. Avoiding bias is key when it comes to reporting on Syrian refugees.

- All relevant media personnel must educate themselves on the issue, whether via specialised content training or seeking information on their own (like this brief), to present the clearest and comprehensive information.
- Reporting of the issue can benefit from offering a neutral viewpoint. That could be achieved by the following:
  - Include Syrian perspectives on their economic opportunities and struggles in Turkey, specifically by using Syrian refugees themselves as sources

of news. This will also help to humanize them and create empathy among the Turkish population for their plight. Research by Kolukirik (2009) showed that by not including refugees' perspectives, news content presents them as the 'other' which may create antagonism by promulgating an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. It is possible that this will contribute to less intercommunal engagement, thereby exasperating the situation.

- Research shows that underprivileged Turkish citizens are at the greatest risk of facing unemployment due to the influx of Syrian refugees, even though there is no evidence proving that they would not have lost it otherwise under 'normal' circumstances. Media can facilitate integration by making the issue a part of public discourse by highlighting the importance of helping this socioeconomic group in the media by providing their economic struggles more coverage. Include underprivileged Turkish citizens' voices on the issue, underscoring the importance of including their well-being in all policymaking geared towards rehabilitation of Syrian refugees.

- Choose to report on events that focus on the well-being of both Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. Providing different amounts of coverage to Turkish citizens' well-being could signal to the public that concerns pertaining to Turkish citizens are more pervasive or problematic, which may not be the case.

- The media coverage could include positive news pertaining to economic impact of Syrian refugees, to provide a balanced overview. The story angles can go beyond the usual ones related to security, victimhood or illegal crossings, which are the common themes (Sunata and Yildiz, 2018). Framing Syrian refugees as 'economic burdens' or 'economic opportunists' must be avoided, while stories that humanize them, and highlight them as entrepreneurs contributing to the society and economy must be used to craft public discourse about them.

- In-depth reports should replace the short and fast tabloid-like news to give more in-depth coverage that offers the reader the opportunity to analyse the situation critically.

- Accurate, ethical and humane reporting

will allow Turkish citizens to weigh both the economic costs as well as the benefits brought to the table by Syrian refugees. It is recommended to refer to research and evidence as much as possible in news coverage, and when there is no or inconclusive evidence, it is recommended that be highlighted by the media.

- The Turkish media could not only highlight present economic benefits of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey, to address Turkish citizens' current resentment, but also point out long-term economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees, considering economic news' coverage tends to focus on the future, and highlight the extended economic window of opportunity hosting Syrian refugee youth offers the Turkish economy.
- As evidence garnered from several studies show, the descriptive tone of media coverage is critical when it comes to public opinion. News coverage of Syrian refugees in general, and their impact on the Turkish economy in particular, would benefit from a balanced tone.
- Reporters must use neutral language and terms for Syrian refugees. Specifically, avoid using words like '*multeci*' (refugee) and '*kacak*' (illegal), and instead use words like '*Suriyeli*' (Syrian) to describe them, as they are significantly associated with articles' negative or positive tones, respectively.

## Donors and Implementing Partners

- Media outlets, especially privately funded ones that are highly commercialised, face significant funding limitations. Given that, public journalism – in this case, reporting the mundane daily economic struggles faced by Syrian refugees that could serve the purpose to de-otherize them – may not be as profitable as part of mainstream news streaming. It could be helpful to consider a more cost-effective media such as community radio. Donors, such as the European Union, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP, as well as implementing partners, such as Turkish Red Crescent, that are working to improve conditions for Syrian refugees may invest in this medium. Considering that 41 per cent of Turkish citizens are still accessing their daily news from the radio (Newman, N. et al., 2016), most likely in rural areas such as the region bordering Syria, this may be helpful. According to Voltmer (2009), community radio is 'a cheap, flexible and easy to produce medium, radio can overcome the distance that usually exists between large, centralised

media organisations and their audience. Even though it might not reach the ears of the central government, it has been extremely instrumental in the diffusion of innovations, the empowerment of citizens and the solution of problems at the grassroots'.

- Advertise donor-funded work that includes benefiting local host communities also in the Turkish media. An example is resilience-based programming in southeastern Anatolia, where 1750 Syrian and local people completed highly demanded vocational trainings for work in the services, manufacturing and local agricultural sectors together (UNDP, 2018).

## Government of Turkey

- Community radio may help improve intercommunity relations as outlined above. However, Radio Television Supreme Board Code recognises local or community radio as private broadcasting in Turkey, meaning they are to obey similar conditions in terms of permissions and licenses (Algul, 2013), which can be tedious and poses significant limits to sponsors of community radio in terms of financing. This diminishes the cost effective nature of the medium's potential to encourage integration between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. In the past, such limitations were circumvented by internet-based radio stations, but now, according to amendments as per the 2018 Omnibus Law (Ersin, Solak & Guray, 2018), internet-based radio stations must also apply for licenses. Providing a voice to Syrian refugees in Turkey, internet-based community radio stations could be facilitated by the Turkish government that could reduce or exempt them from fees when it comes to obtaining licenses for internet radio stations that specifically address the communication gap between the two communities, to aid them in their efforts for integration. The Turkish government's facilitation in this regard would help develop a self-perpetuating system for information exchange between the two communities, as well as serve as an instrument for public diplomacy, highlighting the Turkish state and peoples' commitment to rehabilitation of Syrian refugees.
- Considering underprivileged Turkish citizens are the most at risk of facing unemployment and/or feeling resentful of facilities provided to Syrian refugees, the Government of Turkey can devise programs that may be helpful to this section of Turkish society. A potentially effective suggestion is free vocational

training and certification that enables Turkish citizens to move from informal to formal sectors of the economy, which may offer them additional protection in the Turkish labour market. This allows the Turkish government to collect more tax revenue as formal employment. Even though donors such as the ILO have been involved in providing the aforementioned services, the Turkish citizens' resentment is primarily founded upon perceived inaction on behalf of their own government. A concerted effort on the part of the government may go a long way to improve perceptions and alleviate Turkish citizens' resentment.

### Civil Society and Business

- If media outlets are considered as the 'supply side' of news coverage of the economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees, then news consumers are the 'demand side'. Supply responds to demand and vice versa if all other things remain equal. Local as well as internationally supported civil society organisations, especially ones that work with Syrian refugees as well as ones working to support victims of hate crime, can

create awareness for the need for balanced reporting that gives voice to Syrian refugees as well as highlights economic gains accrued from hosting them in Turkey. This is especially because research shows that hate discourses fuelled by the media can trigger hate crimes (Vardal, 2015). Civil society organisations such as relevant NGOs and activists can also pitch stories from their fieldwork to the media, along with maintaining excellent blogs online that can provide accurate and timely information.

- Businesses can also support media that encourages integration. For example, the Istanbul Apparel Exporters' Association (IHKIB) recently signed a deal with the International Labor Organization (ILO) to integrate Syrian refugees into the workforce (Daily Sabah, 2018). This deal, along with similar financially beneficial agreements, can include pro-integration, specifically economic in nature, advertising as well as sponsored media content as part of contractual terms, to counter potential resentment from the Turkish workers not offered the same employment.

## Conclusion

Media narratives and public opinion have a significant connection. Syrian refugees in Turkey have garnered significant political, and in turn, media interest, and will continue to do so as they try to rebuild their lives in Turkey. Careless media coverage can be damaging when it comes to any issue, but especially when it comes to perceptions about the economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey, it can lead to oppression and at times, violence.

. This paper highlighted research on international media coverage of refugees and compared it with the Turkish media's coverage of Syrian refugees, outlining ways in which media coverage could fuel tension between the Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. Exploring the underpinnings of public perception, misperceptions about Syrian refugees' impact on Turkish citizens' opportunities for employment and wages as well as living costs were associated with a circular relationship existing between negative news and public perception, leading to public outrage and possibly permanent damage to Turkey's social fabric. Observational and experimental studies' evidence was used to present realities on the ground, against the backdrop of an ever-evolving Turkish refugee policy adding to the economic insecurity crippling refugees, especially the more vulnerable ones including women and

children. The story that is being told is not comprehensive, and potentially creates space for social disharmony.

The paper synthesized policy and programmatic recommendations for the media, donors and implementation partners, the Turkish government as well as civil society and private business. It is important to understand the issue fully in terms of economic costs and benefits, communicate the details both accurately and comprehensively by including evidence and Syrian refugees' voices in the discourse as well as support integration efforts through responsible reporting, informed debate and opportunities for communication between the two communities. These policy and programmatic recommendations can be utilized to rehabilitate refugee populations anywhere in the world, but more especially for countries that have large informal economies.

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