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Forced Removal: The Deportation of Syrians from Turkey

26 July, 2019

Nearly four million Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey since the beginning of the conflict in 2011. The position of the Turkish government has transformed in recent years, from a place of welcome, with open borders, to no longer allowing Syrians to register as residents in 2017, to forcibly deporting them without notice today, 26 July, 2019. This sudden spike in the number of deportations could be attributed to the new leadership under the opposition parties following the May elections. In the recent mayoral elections, President Erdoğan lost the support of his party in five of the six biggest cities. Erdoğan has been criticized greatly for his sympathetic treatment towards the Syrians, who were welcomed as guests into the country following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. Many of the mayoral candidates included an anti-Syrian rhetoric into their campaign, which may have been one of the decisive factors in the new mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoglu's large victory against the AKP (Justice and Development Party).

Just weeks after Imamoglu taking office, Istanbul authorities set a deadline for all Syrians with temporary protection status, to return to the city that they were originally registered in by the 20th of August as a means to appease the citizens of Istanbul, which is host to over half a million Syrians. Despite the August 20th deadline, checkpoints were established asking Syrians for their paperwork, and detained if the paperwork is expired, not on their person, or registered from a different city. The fate of those who encounter the Turkish authorities is often being put onto buses and sent back to northern Syria. Many of the cases of those who are deported end with them being separated from their family, without access to their necessary legal documents, and being left in a region of Syria that is dangerous and not their home. Last week, a young Syrian was deported with a group of his friends in Istanbul, and brought to Idlib. Upon his arrival in Idlib, he was detained by Hayat Tahir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria for unknown reasons and hasn't been released. The fate of many of those who land in Syria is grim, as rebel groups such as HTS threatens hundreds of lives.

The deportation of Syrians is not only violent, but they are taken to areas in Syria that are unsafe, within active conflict zones. Despite what Erdoğan and his government have stated in the past, noting that Syrians will return home once 'safe zones' are established, there are no such areas in the north of Syria. The region in the north is neither safe, nor has conflict decreased to a level that is safe for Syrians to return to these areas. The impact of sending back thousands of refugees over the Turkish border, without consent could be catastrophic, as these areas are still witnessing fierce clashes between rebel groups, the Syrian government and its allies. The Turkish government remains responsible for the safety of the Syrians who have chosen to make Turkey their home. Deporting those who fled the political violence of the Syrian regime is inhumane and leaves thousands of people's lives at risk.

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