

Briefing Note – 23 September 2014

Syria/Turkey:

Displacement of Syrian Kurdish refugees into Sanliurfa province



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Urgent
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major

Crisis Overview

Affected groups	Key figures	Percentage
Resident population in Sanliurfa	1,762,075	
Previous Syrian refugees in Sanliurfa (as of 5 September)	181,044	10.3%
Newly displaced Syrian refugees (as of 22 September)	130,000*	
Total refugees (as of 22 September)	311,044	15%

Sources: UNHCR 15/09/2014; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2012; *UNHCR 22/09/2014

On 16 September, Islamic State (IS) launched another offensive on the Kobane area in northeastern Syria, controlled by Kurdish forces. Kobane city, with a population of 400,000, is under siege. The city had been relatively stable during the conflict and was host to 200,000 IDPs.

On 19 September, Turkey reopened parts of its border with Syria, and as of 22 September, 130,000 Syrian refugees had crossed into Turkey's Sanliurfa province. This is the largest displacement over such a short time span since the start of the war.

Large concentrations of refugees are in Suruc and also in Dikmetas. Numbers are expected to continue to rise in the coming days.

Turkey already sustains more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees and this latest influx outstretches local capacities, particularly since the number of refugees outside of camps continues to rise in Turkey. On 22 September the US and a coalition of allies began flying air strikes on IS targets in Syria.

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale The number of Syrian Kurdish refugees arriving in Sanliurfa province is likely to continue to rise in the coming days, further aggravating the situation. Early assessments indicate that refugees are arriving with few or no belongings.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Food
- Shelter
- Access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation
- Non-food items, including clothing, blankets and mattresses
- Health including medicines, medical supplies and psychosocial support.

Humanitarian constraints Largest influx of refugees in such a short period since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, posing a challenge to existing response capacities. Security constraints make cross-border assistance to Syrian refugees impossible. Continued opening of border crossings into Turkey remains a concern.

Crisis Impact

More than 130,000 Syrian Kurds have fled across the border into Turkey in three days, escaping an advance by IS jihadists (AFP 22/09/2014). This is the largest influx in such a short period since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (BBC 22/09/2014).

The border with Turkey is the only exit available to people fleeing the offensive. On 19 September, Turkey reopened the border to allow refugees to enter (AFP 19/09/2014). 90% of the refugees are Kurdish (CARE 22/09/2014). While some Syrians fleeing to Suruç prefer to stay in the town, around 4,000 refugees have travelled to other cities in Turkey, including İstanbul, Ankara, Mersin and Adana in the last four days, according to Turkish media reports (Cihan News Agency 22/09/2014).

There are concerns over possible further mass displacement in the coming days (CARE 21/09/2014). The city of Kobane sheltered approximately 200,000 Syrian IDPs, in addition to a population of around 400,000 (UNHCR 20/09/2014). Kurdish forces have evacuated at least 100 villages in Syria since the IS offensive started on 16 September (Reuters 20/09/2014).

Returnees: Some 350 refugees that had previously taken shelter in Turkey decided to return to Syria and were permitted to cross through the Akçakale border gate in Sanliurfa, ordinarily closed due to clashes in Syria (Cihan News Agency 22/09/2014).

Impact on Access of Affected Population to Essential Services

According to a preliminary assessment of 56 Syrian Kurdish refugee households (392 people) on 22 September, households comprised on average seven people. 41% of refugees are children, including 14% of new refugees under five years old.

Households surveyed expressed that the most important needs are temporary shelter (88% of interviewed households) and food (75%). 30% of households named clothes and mattresses as an important need, followed by blankets (23%), and support to disabled family members or to family with chronic diseases (18%). The overwhelming majority of refugees (91%) intend to return to Syria when the security situation permits (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014).

- **Food Security and Nutrition:** A shortage of food has been recorded (BBC 22/09/2014). 34% of newly-arrived refugees stated lack of food (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014). Refugees cited the lack of appropriate baby food as a major concern (CARE 22/09/2014).
- **WASH:** 73% of surveyed households stated that hygiene services were not available, while 70% mentioned lack of access to safe drinking water (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014). Access to safe drinking water and basic hygiene are both needed (CARE 21/09/2014).
- **Health:** 100% of interviewed indicated that health services for refugees are not available and 46% noted a lack of medicines (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014). People

with chronic diseases are in urgent need of health assistance (CARE 22/09/2014). Many of the recently arrived refugees had spent nights outside and had been walking for hours. They are exhausted (CARE 22/09/2014).

- **Shelter:** The refugees are being housed in whatever buildings are available: in wedding halls, mosques, municipal buildings, or staying with relatives (Reuters 20/09/2014). Around 2,000 people are being sheltered in a boarding school (Euronews 21/09/2014). 36% of refugees said that temporary shelter was not available to them. Most refugees interviewed plan to rent accommodation (82% of households). 14% plan to stay in collective shelters. Only 5% plan to be hosted by residents (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014).
- **NFIs:** Blankets, mattresses, heaters and winter clothing – particularly for children – are needed (BBC 22/09/2014). The majority of people surveyed in a collective centre reported having no clothes other than the ones they were wearing (CARE 22/09/2014).
- **Protection:** Refugees have reported a shortage of humanitarian assistance (AFP 21/09/2014). Reports indicate that people arrive traumatised, stressing the need for psychosocial support.
- **Livelihoods:** 100% of newly-arrived refugee households interviewed have less than a month's financial capacity (CARE/SNAP Assessment 22/09/2014)

Vulnerable Groups Affected

- As Kobane had been relatively calm during much of the conflict, 200,000 IDPs had resettled there (UNHCR 20/09/2014). For many of the refugees in Turkey, the flight has been the second or third displacement over the last three years (CARE 21/09/2014).
- The refugees are mostly elderly, women, and children (international media 22/09/2014).

Humanitarian Constraints

- Humanitarian resources are already stretched by the Syrian refugee crisis across the region, and this new influx adds more pressure (CARE 22/09/2014).
- Cross-border assistance is impossible, due to security constraints on the Syrian side.
- Opening of border crossings remains a concern.

Aggravating Factors

Border Restrictions

- According to Turkish officials, refugees are able to enter through crossings at Cilvegozu and Oncupinar, which are almost impossible to access for Kurdish refugees from the Kobane areas. Limited entries are possible at Mursitpinar, the closest crossing (AFP 22/09/2014). On 19 September Turkey opened a 30km section of

the border to Syrians fleeing Kobane. But on 21 September only two out of nine border posts in the area remained open, according to UNHCR (BBC 22/09/2014).

- Since reopening the borders, Turkish authorities have tightened entry procedures, leaving many refugees stranded on the Syrian side of the border waiting to enter.
- Clashes between Kurds wanting to cross into Syria and Turkish security forces have led to a tense situation on the Turkish side of the border (The Hornet 22/09/2014).
- On 22 September, several hundred Kurds clashed with security forces close to the border, protesting Turkey blocking Kurds trying to enter Syria. Similar clashes took place the day before. Security forces again dispensed tear gas and used water cannon to dissolve the crowd (AFP 21/09/2014).

Political and Social Tensions

- Many Kurdish refugees from Syria foster deep hostility towards Turkey, owing to the conflict between the Turkish Government and Kurdish opposition fighters (BBC 22/09/2014).
- Social tensions between refugees and the Turkish host community have been more frequently reported over the past months, especially in cities hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees such as Gaziantep. Individual incidents occasionally trigger aggressive reactions, popular protests and violent attacks against Syrians. Particularly in Gaziantep, the authorities have begun to move refugees out of the city in an attempt to defuse tensions. In mid-August, it was reported that some 7,800 Syrians would be moved to camps near the city, or to other camps in the neighbouring regions of Mardin and Sanliurfa. Some Syrians had already begun to move to other cities across Turkey including Konya, Kayseri, Izmir and Istanbul (ACAPS 04/09/2014).

Key Information

IS fighters have advanced to within 15km of the town of Kobane on the Syrian border with Turkey, taking dozens of villages in the area (Cihan News Agency 22/09/2014).

Past Displacement

- More than 3 million Syrians have fled the country since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 (UNHCR 22/09/2014).
- As of 15 September, the estimated number of Syrian refugees in Turkey stood at 1,350,000, of whom 220,110 were in camps. 77% of refugees were women and children, and 23% were men over 18 years of age (UNHCR 15/09/2014).
- As of 15 September, 181,044 registered Syrian refugees were in Sanliurfa (72,695 in camps, 108,349 outside of the camps), and 210,625 were in Gaziantep (32,914 in camps, 177,711 outside the camps) (UNHCR 15/09/2014).

- The number of refugees outside camps has risen sharply since September 2013, increasing from 263,430 to 627,156 in September 2014.

Drivers of the Current Conflict

IS perceived the PYD's armed wing, People's Protection Units (YPG) to be a threat to important lines of communication that run close to the Kobane canton's borders and hence tried to reduce YPG's area of operations. IS wanted to create a buffer zone between YPG's area of free movement and the 'borders' of IS's area of control in Aleppo canton. IS also aimed to protect key terrain essential to the congruity of IS territory in Syria, particularly the towns of Sarrin, Zawr Maghar, and Upper and Lower Shuyukh. Lastly, IS wanted to deter possible YPG advances on potential IS vulnerabilities surrounding the canton of Kobane. After a first IS offensive against YPG in March and April 2014 failed, a new offensive was launched in late June, and IS made significant gains (Institute for the Study of War 19/09/2014). According to IS statements, IS considers the Kurdish in Syria to be apostates for being too secular (The Independent 22/09/2014).

Relevant Stakeholders

Democratic Union Party (PYD) and People's Protection Units (YPG): Syrian Kurds, repressed by the current Syrian regime, have been in de facto control of Kurdish zones in the north since the Syrian government withdrew its forces mid-2012. On 12 November 2013, the PYD, an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party, announced the formation of a transitional autonomous administration after making key territorial gains (AFP 22/09/2014). With the Government's decreasing control, Kurdish leaders from the PYD formed an armed wing, the YPG, aiming to secure control over predominantly ethnic Kurdish areas in northern and eastern Syria (Institute for the Study of War 19/09/2014). On 10 September, YPG formed an alliance with Islamic Front and the US-backed Free Syrian Army to counter IS (VICE 12/09/2014).

Islamic State: IS is an Islamist insurgent group originating in Al Qaida in Iraq. IS has increased its stature with swift advances that have captured large parts of Iraq and Syria in last two years. In Syria, IS is fighting Syrian government forces but also other opposition groups and the northern and eastern *de facto* autonomous region under Kurdish control.

International and Neighbouring Countries' Relationship to the Conflict

- **Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK):** As of 21 September, 3,000 PKK fighters based in Iraq's Qandil mountains were reported to be crossing from Iraq into Syria and heading for Kobane (The Independent 21/09/2014). In Turkey, the PKK called upon Turkish Kurds to join the fight against IS in Syria. Hundreds of PKK members have attempted to cross the border into Syria (Washington Post 21/09/2014). The Kurds have been

demanding the creation of a unified Kurdish state, and are thus seen as a threat to the territorial integrity of the countries where they live. The PKK is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, and its insurgency has left 45,000 dead in Turkey in the past 30 years (AFP 22/09/2014). In March 2013, Turkey entered a truce with the PKK. Peace talks stalled as opponents claimed the Turkish Government was neglecting the Kurdish minority. Turkey has been concerned that weapons sent by Western countries to fight jihadists might end up in the hands of PKK separatist fighters crossing into Turkey (New York Times 21/09/2014; AFP 22/09/2014).

- According to President Erdogan, the **Turkish military** plans to establish a buffer zone just beyond Turkey's borders with Iraq and Syria, which is also intended to facilitate aid delivery to refugees (Today's Zaman 22/09/2014).
- On 22 September, the Obama administration announced the **US**, together with allies, would commence launching air strikes on IS targets in Syria (Foreign Policy 23/09/2014).

Key Characteristics of Host Population and Area

- **Demographic profile:** 1,762,075 people in Sanliurfa province; 45% are rural.
- **WASH:** As of 2011, 99.1% of the rural population in Turkey had access to improved sources of drinking water, and 75% had access to improved sanitation facilities
- **Cooking:** 11% of the population use solid fuels for cooking.
- **Health statistics (countrywide):** 2012 infant mortality rate: 12/1,000 live births; under-5 mortality rate: 14/1,000 live births; maternal mortality rate: 20 pregnancy-related causes of death per 100,000 live births.

Sources: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2012; UNICEF 12/2013; Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves

Response Capacity

Local and National Response Capacity

Turkey is already hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees and officials estimate the relief effort has cost the government over USD 3 billion (Today's Zaman 21/09/2014). The Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) is leading to response to the refugee crisis, in cooperation with UN agencies and international and local organisations. AFAD will establish a refugee camp with the capacity to host 20,000 refugees in Suruç (Cihan News Agency 22/09/2014). AFAD and UNHCR are stepping up assistance for the Syrians currently arriving through several crossings into the province of Sanliurfa in southern Turkey; including the organisation of a transit camp in Suruc, 15km across the border from Kobane and accelerating the construction of two new refugee camps for those who are not hosted by local communities. First response is also being provided by the Turkish Red Crescent

Society and local municipalities (ECHO 22/09/2014). Turkey will prepare for a large wave of refugees fleeing from war-torn areas and will focus on providing humanitarian aid to the refugees inside the proposed buffer zone. The Turkish military is also working on determining possible locations for tent cities and hospitals (Today's Zaman 22/09/2014). Government and NGO-operated centres lack sufficient capacity to stem the large number of refugees and towns and cities in the region have found themselves hosting the overflow of desperate Syrians (Euronews 02/08/2014).

International Response Capacity

Intergovernmental organisations, as well as international NGOs are currently conducting needs assessments and coordinating with AFAD to support the newly arrived. More support is needed from the international community to cope with the massive influx numbers of refugees (CARE 22/09/2014).

Information Gaps and Needs

Further information is required on refugees' priority needs, based on larger samples, including: shelter, health, WASH and food security needs of recently arrived refugees.

Lessons Learned

In the past, Syrian minorities, including Christians, Assyrians and Kurds, have been difficult to identify and were not always willing to identify themselves as part of a minority group (ACAPS 05/09/2013).

The Syrian crisis has taught responders:

- Some Syrian refugees have found temporary places of safety among family and communities, but host communities cannot bear such financial burdens for long.
- Many refugees are in situations of multiple displacement. IDPs are forced to move again with time, often across borders, exhausting coping strategies and increasing their vulnerability.
- Agencies need to be aware that there are refugees among the refugees, primarily Iraqis and Palestinians (Syria Learning 06/2012).
- The aid community needs to prepare both for winter provisioning as well as seasonal movement.

Turkey/ Syria: Movement of Syrian Refugees (as of 23 September 2014)

