By December 2018 Turkey has been hosting over 3,6 million Syrian asylum seekers providing them with access to rights and services with the status of temporary protection. Hosting 17% of the asylum seekers in the world only by itself, Turkey holds the first place among the countries that host asylum seekers in terms of asylum seeker numbers.

After the outbreak of the civil war in Turkey a small number of Syrians, which corresponds to %3,9 of the 3,6 million Syrians took shelter in our country, continue to reside in temporary tent and container camps. The rest live in city centers of the provinces close to Syrian border and in metropolis.

During the first phases of the asylum the needs of the asylum seekers were mainly met through the temporary establishments of central public institutions such as AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) and Turkish Red Crescent. With the increase in asylum seeker numbers cities began to host them. Through registration of the Asylum seekers, enabling them to benefit from rights and services and reducing the number of the camps a more systematical and permanent order has been provided in time.

The asylum seeker population who are no longer thought as temporary has established a unique way of life in cities. Benefitting from many public services in their daily lives Asylum seekers are also benefitting from municipal services as inhabitants just as Turkish citizens. It is observed that the asylum-seekers who are not taken into consideration sufficiently in planning and provision of municipal services will be much more in the agenda of the municipalities both as service users and in terms of social harmony in the next period.

After the entries began in April 2011 from Hatay, Cilvegözü border gate the numbers of asylum seekers has increased incrementally and reached over 3,6 million by December 2018. Nearly 140 thousand people who constitute %4 of this number reside in 13 temporary shelters in 10 provinces near Syria.

# How the Asylum Seekers affect Municipal Service Provision?

**Municipalities are among the main actors in service provision for Syrians.** Along with contribution to various social service needs of the Syrians directly or by assisting central administrative institutions the municipalities also ensure the provision of water, sewerage, road, transportation, parks and garden and similar fundamental urban services. In places where the Syrian asylum seeker population is low in proportion to province population even though the Asylum seeker population is high in numbers for instance in the western metropolis of Turkey, the increase in usage of urban services is not challenging. In addition, the local governments such as Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis hosting Syrians with higher numbers in proportion to official population face the issues such as social adaptation and social aid on one hand and on the other hand they face main infrastructure issues arise from insufficiency of capacity.

**The first main problem the municipalities face arise from the numbers of the asylum seekers settled in the location[[1]](#footnote-1)**. The main element of this problem is resource insufficiency. Naturally designed to provide services to a certain number of population, municipalities need to make additional expenditures in order to ensure the same service quality (quantity.)

However, as it is known the “the shares received from central government” (%57 for all municipalities according to 2017 data) which constitutes an important part of the municipal resources are mainly allocated in accordance with population. The population mentioned here means Turkish citizens. Therefore the temporary asylum seeker numbers in the location become additional costs elements.

**The municipalities that notably experience the resource problem are the ones where the percentage asylum seeker numbers in total population is high.** These municipalities are mainly the ones located in Southeast. Furthermore the authorities of these municipalities state that a significant amount of unregistered Syrians are present and being registered as they are identified. Kilis municipality tries to provide services to a population which is 2,5 times larger with an amount of resources and infrastructure calculated for %40 of its actual population. Similarly the infrastructure planning for Hatay Reyhanlı is made for a population which is expected to 120.000 in 2050 yet the district currently hosts 120.344 Syrians. Also the solid waste storage capacity of Hatay is exceeded which was estimated to be reached in 2025. Not limited to these cases the municipalities near Syrian border are facing problems in access to financial and human resources in terms of both infrastructure and scope of service.

**In other regions particularly in the metropolis in west the social issues come to the forefront rather than infrastructure.** In these municipalities, even there is a higher number of Syrian asylum seekers, the population of them being relatively low in proportion to total even though higher numbers makes the social issues stand out rather than infrastructure. These issues emerge as problems that can be described as social adaptation problems such as participation to daily life, employment, services towards the disadvantageous segments, language, cultural problems that are more related to service fields specialized in accordance with requirements.

**Aside from the problems originate from the numbers of the Asylum-seekers their cultural differences, different consumption and life habits or their educational status and professions can directly or indirectly affect the municipal services in the locations they live.** The excessive water usage of the refugees, solid matters thrown in the sewer and extreme pollution of the environment are stated as problems by municipalities. In addition sitting and picnicking in the parks until late hours, crowds living in houses, problems with following the official and settled rules (e.g. traffic rules, child age marriages) are stated as criticisms and complaints that are submitted municipalities.

**Municipalities make use of international aids and funds alongside central institutions such as AFAD, Red Crescent and İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Organization) in order to meet various service requirements.** Along with the problems present in the direct transfer of the resources by aiding institutions to the municipalities it is also stated by the municipalities that conditionality of these aids can be limiting. In some cases it is understood that municipalities receive resources from these aiding organizations through establishing associations and foundations and directly use the resources for the asylum seekers. For instance, Sultanbeyli Municipality declares that it has established an association for this purpose, the vice mayor is the chair of this association, a community center is established with the grants reached by this association and the majority of the services provided for the refugees are covered by grant funds obtained in this manner.

The municipality has mobilized a resource of approximately 14 million Turkish Lira (TL) in this manner through NGO’s in the last 3 years. Similarly the NGO’s established with the initiative of Reyhanlı Municipality were able to generate a resource of 4 million TL in last three years. Kahramanmaraş Municipality stated that they have established their own association pioneered by the municipality and particularly helping children through Syrian psychologists employed there. It is mentioned that asylum seekers also collect aids, provide services and carry out social activities through associations they established themselves. For example, Kilis Municipality organizes vocational courses in cooperation with Syrian Asylum Seekers Association which was founded by the asylum seekers. On the other hand, it is stressed that the grants and aids obtained from international institutions and NGO’s are a very small part of the requirements.

**The increase in asylum seeker numbers makes the service provision difficult and negatively affects the service quality.** Kilis Municipalityin where the number of asylum seekers it host has been head to head with settled population shows the most distinct cases of the change in service indicators. Accordingly the number of the people living in municipal borders was around 84 thousand in 2011 when the mass migration flows had not yet been started whereas it has been around 200 thousand by the year 2015. The municipality served with 25 municipal police and security. Even though this number was increased to 40 the number of persons per municipal police is 5000 in 2018 while it was 3.367 in 2011. Accordingly 3,8 TL was spent per person for municipal police services in 2011 while it has dropped to 1,7 TL in year 2018. While the capacity of public transport in the city increased 2.5 times from 2011-2017, the number of people per unit mass transit capacity (seat / place) per person (94 persons) remained unchanged. Green area size increased by 50 percent between 2011 and 2018, while green area per capita decreased from 4.5 square meters to 2.8 square meters. As part of the recreation and cultural services function in which includes parks, garden and green area services € 16,9 per person was spent in 2011, while in 2014 this amount decreased down to € 10,8.

1. Apart from Syrians there are asylum seekers in Turkey from many different countries as well. It is stated that there are migrants in Adana from 13 different countries. By the date 27.12.2018 the number of irregular migrants caught are 265.169. 33,830 of this number are Syrians the rest are citizens of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Moldova, Palestine, George, Iran and other countries. Statistic of Immigration Office/ Access date: 03.01.2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)