

Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Between Reception and Integration

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In the last decade, the influx of over 3.5 million Syrian refugees has profoundly reshaped the dynamics of global migration governance (European Commission 2024). One of the most comprehensive studies on this topic is *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Between Reception and Integration* by Zeynep Şahin-Mencütek, N. Ela Gökalp-Aras, Ayhan Kaya, and Susan Beth Rottmann. This work presents a critical analysis of Turkey's multifaceted response to Syrian mass migration from 2011 to 2020, introducing the concept of "strategic temporality" to frame its analysis. Beginning with the theoretical framework of strategic temporality, this six-chapter work explores Turkey's legislative and political context, analyses reception practices, i.e. an in-depth analysis of protection mechanisms and a study of integration processes, and ends with considerations of the broader implications of these responses.

As an introductory part in Chapter 1, the authors state "strategic temporality" as the central theoretical framework of the book. This concept highlights how temporality operates as a governance strategy to control and manage refugee situations through institutional, legislative, and discursive mechanisms (p. 5). The book utilizes qualitative research methodologies, particularly in-depth interviews with refugees and diverse stakeholders, to offer a detailed knowledge of Turkey's reception, protection, and integration procedures and their effects on refugees' lives. Strategic temporality is framed not merely as an analytical tool but as a state practice that strategically aligns refugee policies with political, economic, and social objectives. Moreover, the authors position Turkey's policies within broader multilevel governance, illustrating how local and international actors mediate and negotiate these temporal frameworks (p. 10).

In Chapter 2, the authors delve into Turkey's legal and institutional framework, emphasizing the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) implemented in 2014 (p. 39). This chapter employs a document analysis methodology to examine Turkey's asylum regime

through a review of legal and institutional frameworks, policy papers, and political discourses. The chapter critiques how these policies reflect a broader trend of stratification within refugee governance, wherein differentiated legal statuses create a hierarchy of rights and access (p. 46). This legal framework underscores the temporality embedded in Turkey's migration governance, as evidenced by the government's evolving narratives around hospitality and eventual repatriation (p. 56). Notably, the role of EU-Turkey deal of 2016 relations in shaping these policies is discussed, while highlighting how Turkey has found an opportunity to use migration as a foreign policy tool with its relations with Brussels (pp. 60-61).

Chapter 3 provides a detailed examination of the reception mechanisms for Syrian refugees. This chapter utilizes qualitative fieldwork, encompassing interviews with refugees, local officials, and NGO representatives, to examine reception practices and conditions. The authors analyze how the framing of refugees as "guests" has evolved into more exclusionary discourses amid growing public discontent (p. 83). Practical challenges such as housing shortages and informal labor market exploitation are highlighted, reflecting the precarious conditions many refugees endure (p. 76). The chapter also discusses the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local authorities in mitigating some of these challenges, showcasing the complex interplay between state and non-state actors. The authors emphasize the importance of local governance, which often adopts innovative approaches to address gaps left by national policies (p. 80).

The protection mechanisms discussed in Chapter 4 expose the precarious legal status of Syrian refugees. The authors utilize in-depth interviews and field observations to examine the stratification of legal statuses and protective measures. They, additionally, use descriptive statistical data to substantiate their conclusions. Although TPR provides basic rights, it leaves refugees in a state of legal limbo. This status has limited pathways to permanence because it restricts access to long-term residency or citizenship. This classification as temporary visitors also perpetuates the instability of their legal status, which makes it difficult to obtain stable job or permanent housing (p. 100). The chapter critically examines restrictive practices while referring to the interviews, such as coercive voluntary returns, that further exacerbate refugees' vulnerabilities (p. 118). Moreover, the role of international and non-state actors in filling protection gaps is underscored. The authors argue that these actors often operate within the constraints of strategic temporality, balancing humanitarian objectives with compliance to state policies (p. 119).

Integration policies are the focus of Chapter 5, where the authors explore the ambivalent nature of Turkey's approach. In this chapter, authors employ qualitative interviews with refugees and local stakeholders to analyze integration processes. It also examines local government practices and the agency of refugees in negotiating their integration. The author argues that refugees face significant barriers to socio-economic inclusion, such as limited access to formal employment and education (pp. 127-128). Despite some progress, integration remains fragmented and uncertain, reflecting the broader temporality embedded in Turkey's

governance framework. Furthermore, the chapter also highlights innovative local-level initiatives that attempt to bridge these gaps, particularly in urban areas with high refugee populations (p. 134). However, the authors caution that such efforts are often undermined by the lack of a cohesive national integration strategy (p. 146).

Chapter 6, as a conclusion, synthesizes the findings and reflects on the broader implications of strategic temporality. The authors argue that this governance approach, while politically expedient, risks perpetuating precarity and instability both for refugees and host communities (p. 151). They also highlight its potential applicability to other migration contexts, such as the emerging challenges posed by Afghan migration (p. 156). The book ends with the authors' summary of refugees in Turkey being increasingly scapegoated for societal issues and targeted by hate crimes (p. 157). The authors also criticize opposition parties fueling tensions with populist rhetoric, accusing the government of altering Turkey's demography and pledging to repatriate Syrians. The refugee issue has become highly politicized throughout the political spectrum of Turkey, as the nation had numerous elections and economic downturns (Memişoğlu, Özkil and Kılınç 2024). Referring to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech, the authors state that it reflects public sentiment by stating that "Turkey has no obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse". They also point to resistance within the population to hosting additional refugees (Financial Times 2021). What can be seen from this is that with limited public and political support, Turkey is unlikely to grant full refugee status, favoring temporary protection that risks repatriation. Finally, they highlight that EU policymakers must consider lessons from past agreements when negotiating future deals with Turkey (p. 158). Within this concept, the study shows that we are likely to see more strategic temporality in the governance of the next possible migration.

Overall, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Between Reception and Integration's* interdisciplinary approach and empirical depth make it a valuable resource for academics, policymakers, and practitioners. By introducing the concept of "strategic temporality", the authors provide a nuanced framework for understanding the intersection of governance, temporality, and refugee experiences. The book provides a holistic examination of Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, covering the complexity of refugee governance—including policy frameworks, legal systems, political dynamics, and societal impacts. This is particularly relevant in regions like the Middle East, which is marked by geopolitical volatility and ongoing conflicts. This in-depth case study is priceless for understanding how host nations negotiate the many obstacles of mass migration. Although the book adeptly utilizes qualitative methods, certain chapters may benefit from deeper analyses such as the discussion on integration (Chapter 5) and may examine the long-term implications of local policies in a more comprehensive manner. More definitive policy recommendations meanwhile would enhance the book's practical significance. Thus this work is crucial for academics and legislators trying to solve the long-term effects of forced migration on world migration governance, regional stability, and international relations.

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