

## SITUATION REPORT

### Refugees in Edirne, 17 September 2015

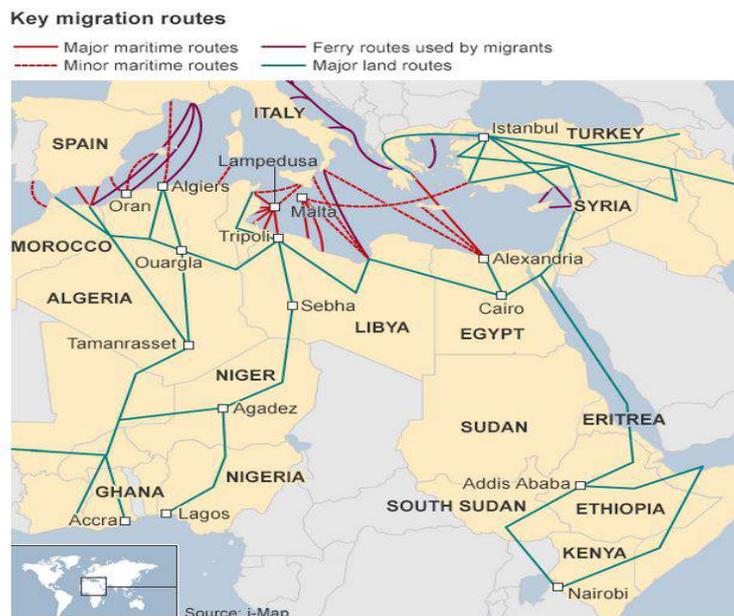
#### BACKGROUND

As the crisis in Syrian enters its fifth year, an increased number of refugees are seeking safety, protection and opportunities to provide for their families. Turkey, which historically has been a transit point into the EU<sup>1</sup>, but since the Syria crisis has become a destination country as well currently Turkey hosts almost 2 million refugees. In Turkey, Syrian refugees are given temporary protection, provided with shelter at camps and access to all public healthcare and educational institutions, unfortunately the ability to legally work still has no clear definition, and other refugees or migrants from Iraq, Iran or Afghanistan are provided no legal statuses.

Overall there are 9.5 million people displaced due to the Syrian crisis and as neighboring countries including Turkey reach capacity, refugees are fleeing to Europe in record numbers. In 2014 alone, almost 60,000 irregular migrants were apprehended by the Turkish authorities (the previous decade totaled no more than half a million). The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which monitors all entry points, estimates that more than 350,000 migrants were detected at the EU's borders between January and August 2015, compared with 280,000 detections for the whole of 2014.<sup>2</sup>

The journey for many refugees from Turkey, via land or sea is dangerous as well as expensive, most often refugees hire human smugglers to assist their journeys. Some smugglers have been reported to charge upwards of 2,800USD<sup>3</sup> per person (8,400TL or 53,000 SYP) to cross by sea to Greece.

Irregular migration routes:



Source: BBC

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/09/turkey-refugee-crisis-christian-fortress-europe>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32707346>

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, a young 3-year old Syrian boy and his family with 8 other passengers attempted to cross from Bodrum, Turkey to Kos, Greece, but smugglers abandoned the boat and eventually the rough waves capsized the boat. The young boy, Aylan Kurdi's body washed ashore in Bodrum and spurred a global outcry for intervention.<sup>4</sup>

As weather conditions grow colder and migration into the EU becomes stricter, many refugees are bonding together to bring attention to their plight and to protest the action of smugglers. Through a facebook announcement<sup>5</sup>, Syrian refugees were urged to come to Edirne on September 15<sup>th</sup> to demand that Turkey open its borders and allow them legal access to Europe.

The city governor reported that around 8,000 refugees initially came to Edirne but were turned away.<sup>6</sup> As of September 17<sup>th</sup> there are roughly 3,000 refugees (including many women, children and infants) spread throughout Edirne, demanding access to Europe. There are also reportedly 800 protesters on a hunger strike<sup>7</sup>. At present the Edirne governor has given the refugees 3-days to leave the city.

## **METHODOLOGY**

After an initial conversation with UNHCR on the urgency of the situation of refugees in Edirne, STL staff traveled to Edirne on Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup> to assess the situation and identify needs, possible interventions and vulnerable cases.

The STL team went to 3 gathering points: a camp set-up on the highway approximately 3 km outside of Edirne, the Otogar (main bus terminal) as well as the city center. Of the 3 sites, STL estimates there are approximately 2,150 people, including women, children and infants. Interviews were conducted with refugees and organizers, representatives of Edirne Security Directorate, as well as aid organizations.

## **PROFILE OF AFFECTED POPULATION**

According to UNHCR, the situation in Syria has no political solution in sight and military confrontation will likely continue leading to ongoing and increased destruction of infrastructure, high levels of insecurity and violence furthering the restriction of humanitarian access and delivery<sup>8</sup>. Over half the country's population is displaced, either internally or throughout neighbouring countries.

As of August 2015, the number of Syrian refugees registered with the Turkish authorities is 1,938,999, the highest number of refugees in the region and the world at present. Initially Syrians entering Turkey were choosing to settle in one of the border provinces, with Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa having the highest concentrations of refugees; but as of January 2015, only 229,257 Syrians (or 13% of the total refugee population) are settled in the refugee camps offered by the Turkish authorities. Those refugees in government camps are provided with shelter, food, water, non-food items, medical services, sanitation, washing facilities, education, and psycho-social support in some cases. The basic needs of those Syrian refugees are sufficiently provided for; a greater need lies in the majority of refugees, around 87% that have settled outside of the camps, facing challenges navigating their way in Turkey with little official services and support, together with an important language barrier as most of them do not speak Turkish.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/09/03/a-desperate-refugee-family-a-capsized-boat-and-3-year-old-dead-on-a-beach-in-turkey/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/Crossing-no-more- -%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-967188883324005/timeline/](https://www.facebook.com/Crossing-no-more--%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-967188883324005/timeline/)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/turkey-threatens-to-oust-refugees-camped-near-greek-border>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/around-800-refugees-go-on-a-hunger-strike-as-they-wait-near-news-photo/488607868>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html>



During our arrival water was being distributed by Kizilay/Turkish Red Crescent and the local police. The representative of Edirne Security Directorate reported that all the basic and immediate needs were being provided.

*Location: Antik Park in the City Center*

The group organizer, a Syrian refugee from France who came to Turkey to assist migration efforts reported that approximately 350 people (including pregnant women, children and infants) were camping in the park. The refugees were mostly from Syria, in addition to a few Iraqi and Iranian (4-5) families. When asked how families came to arrive at the park, many reported hearing rumors (particularly via Facebook) that Turkey was offering boats to Germany. The families arrived through border crossings at Mardin, Urfa and Gaziantep in the past few weeks.

Special needs and vulnerable cases were identified and their contact and phone numbers were provided to UNHCR for further follow-up.

**SHELTER and NFI**

Approximately half of the tents at all three sites were vinyl pop-up camping tents brought with the refugees. The rest of the tents were made with tarps and blankets either brought with the families or provided by aid organizations. All the shelters were set directly on the ground. The tents were located very close to one another, making it difficult to move among them.

The weather is generally very hot (32 degrees on the day the STL team was visiting) during the day and very cool in the evenings (16 degrees that same evening). So the established shelters are not sufficient for any long periods of time and pose a health risk to the refugees, particularly to young children who may be overheated during the day and cold at night.



*Highway camp set-up  
Source: STL*



*Otogar Station*  
*Source: STL*



*Antik Park in the City Center*

## **FOOD**

IHH and Kizilay distribute water and readymade meals at the highway camp as well as the Otogar station, but some men are refusing to eat due to a Hunger Strike. It had been 3-days that the men were not eating, only drinking water. Women and children are eating and did not report being hungry. When asked by the STL team if they were in need of food they refused and said their only need is that the border be opened.

Women were receptive to food for babies, particularly at Antik Park. DGMM accompanied STL to the site and distributed cases of infant food and nutrition formula to the camp organizer to distribute among families with infants and small children.

## **WASH**



*Outhouses at the Highway Camp*  
*Source: STL*

None of the camps have water from taps available on-site. All water must be brought from off-site. Washroom facilities if available, were limited or cost prohibitive.

Four outhouse toilets were established at the Highway Camp for refugees, but inspection of the facilities showed they were overused and poorly maintained and posed a health risk in the coming days. Edirne Governorship proposed to build WASH facilities, but the refugees did not want any permanent structures nearby owing to their demands they be allowed to pass through the borders into the EU and their camp was only for temporary purposes.

At the camp in Antik Park, the only washrooms were public and available for a cost of 1 lira. Since the facilities were a pay for service, they were fairly well maintained. Although many women complained of the burden to pay for the service. STL did not access the facilities at the Otogar.

## HEALTH

Access to health services was extremely limited, every person interviewed by STL was not registered therefore not under temporary protection. Many families reported that their children had colds and fevers and needed medication. Some adults with chronic diseases reported needing medicine as well.

No first-aid was provided on-site at any location. At Antik Park, where STL received the highest number of reported cases of sick children, the head of Edirne DGMM immediately contacted the local hospital to determine if space was available to accommodate refugees who needed medical attention.

## PROTECTION



The majority of the refugees in Edirne were not registered; some came directly from Syria and did not intend to stay in Turkey. Those refugees who had been living either in Istanbul or along the southeast border said they had tried to register but were turned away by local authorities or told to come back with an appointment – many interviewees said they would like to be registered under temporary protection but were frustrated with the process and uncertain of their rights.

*Antik Park in the City Center*

*Source: STL*

## **HUMANITARIAN NEEDS**

Overwhelming the majority of refugees did not want shelter, food or anything except to cross over the border. They were adamant in their demands. Local authorities and NGOs were providing the basic needs, but if the situation continues further intervention is necessary. Additionally, many of the refugees reported claims that 3,000 to 4,000 additional refugees were expected within the coming days.

Urgent needs identified by the STL team as follows:

- Baby food
- Diapers
- Wet wipes / baby wipes
- Warm child and baby clothes