

Forced Immigration to Turkey: The Socio-Spatial Impacts of Syrian Immigrants on Turkish Cities

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Abstract : Throughout the past few decades, forced immigration has been a significant problem for many developing countries. Turkey is one of those countries, which has experienced lots of forced immigration waves in the Republican era. However, the ongoing forced immigration wave of Syrians started with Syrian Civil War in 2011, is strikingly influential due to its intensity. In six years, approximately 3,4 million Syrians have entered to Turkey and presented high-level spatial concentrations in certain cities proximate to the Syrian border. These concentrations make Syrians and their problems relatively visible, especially in those cities. The problems of Syrians in Turkish cities could be associated with all dimensions of daily lives. Within economical dimension, high rates of Syrian unemployment push them to informal jobs offering very low wages. The financial aids they continuously demand from public authorities trigger anti-Syrian behaviors of local communities. Moreover, their relatively limited social adaptation capacities increase integration problems within social dimension day by day. Even, there are problems related to public health dimension such as the reappearance of certain child's illnesses due to the insufficiency of vaccination of Syrian children. These problems are significant but relatively easy to be prevented by using different types of management strategies and structural policies. However, there are other types of problems -urban problems- emerging with socio-spatial impacts of Syrians on Turkish cities in a very short period of time. There are relatively limited amount of studies about these impacts since they are difficult to be comprehended. The aim of the study, in this respect, is to understand these rapidly-emerging impacts and urban problems resulted from this massive immigration influx and to discuss new qualities of urban planning facing them. In the first part, there is a brief historical consideration of forced immigration waves in Turkey. These waves are important to make comparison with the ongoing immigration wave and to understand its significance. The second part is about quantitative and qualitative analyses of the spatial existence of Syrian immigrants in the city of Mersin, as an example of cities where Syrians are highly concentrated. By using official data from public authorities, quantitative statistical analyses are made to detect spatial concentrations of Syrians at neighborhood level. As methods of qualitative research, observations and in-depth interviews are used to define socio-spatial impacts of Syrians. The main results show that there emerges 'cities in cities' though sharp socio-spatial segregations which change density surfaces; produce unforeseen land-use patterns; result in inadequacies of public services and create degradations/deteriorations of urban environments occupied by Syrians. All these problems are significant; however, Turkish planning system does not have a capacity to cope with them. In the final part, there is a discussion about new qualities of urban planning facing these impacts and urban problems. The main point of discussion is the possibility of resilient urban planning under the conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability fostered by immigration crisis. Such a resilient planning approach might provide an option for countries aiming to cope with negative socio-spatial impacts of massive immigration influxes.

Keywords : cities, forced immigration, Syrians, urban planning

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