

#### **24.4.2019 Zeynep Şahin Mencütek: Return Aspirations of Syrian Refugees in Turkey**

Return migration is a quite dynamic and complex phenomenon driven by contested concepts, approaches and controversial practices. Drawing from the literature on transnationalism, diaspora and mobilities, the existing studies have focused on the motivations and decision to return, post-return reintegration, and reverse cultural shock. However, they rarely differentiate the return of labour migrants and those forced migrants, although return has long been considered as a critical component of managing the irregular migration and one of the durable solutions for refugee protection by international actors. As the top refugee hosting country for Syrian refugees, the empirical studies about the return of refugees from Turkey to Syria is of importance. This research aims to Syrian refugees' prospects for return. It focuses on the aspirations/plans, current practices of Syrian refugees about the forced and voluntary return and the local hosting communities' expectations about the issue of return. Data for this study was gathered using the key official statements of Turkey's political parties and elites, newspaper and online reporting, published reports, scholarly work and ethnography. Ethnographic field research covers in-depth interviews<sup>1</sup> with 40 Syrian refugees in Şanlıurfa and İzmir as well as stakeholder interviews. These provinces represent main entry, exit and transit localities for Syrian refugees' mobilities. The research demonstrates that return issue has been politicized both the government party and opposition party by being utilized in relation with broader political aims such as garnering vote, appeasing local host communities, or legitimizing a military operation. Interview data shows that Syrian refugees consider return in the case of improving conditions in Syria which I called *conditional and remote return aspiration*. It is worthwhile to note that this research aims to contribute to filling an empirical gap, but not based on the premise that Syrians' return should be promoted or facilitated in any hosting country.

<sup>1</sup> This field research is funded under the scheme of RESPOND: Multilevel Governance of Migration in Europe and Beyond. The Project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 770564.

**Zeynep Şahin Mencütek** holds a PhD degree in the Politics and International Relations from the University of Southern California, US. Previously, she worked as a teaching assistant, lecturer and assistant professor in the International Relations departments in Turkey and in the US. Since September 2016, she has been affiliated with the Kate Hamburger Kolleg/Center for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg, Germany as an Associate Fellow. She is fellow at the Center from March 2019 to March 2020. She also serves as the Senior Research Fellow in the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul for the Horizon2020 project titled RESPOND: Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond. Her research expertise lies in comparative migration, diaspora politics, and international relations of the Middle East in which she has an extensive publication record. Her first monograph titled *Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East* published in December 2018 by the Routledge Global Cooperation Series. The book comparatively examines policy responses of main refugee receiving countries -Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon- to the mass migration of Syrians.