CHP’S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REFUGEE QUESTION IN TURKEY

This article presents a summary of the Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) policy recommendations for Turkey’s refugee crisis, originally published in June 2016, in a book titled Sınırlar Arasında: İnsanlık Dramından İnsanlık Sınavına (In Between Borders: From A Human Tragedy to a Trial of Humanity). The author offers concrete recommendations on a structural, humanitarian, and practical level, as well as parses the domestic and foreign policy implications of inadequately taking into account the likely permanence of the refugees. Advocating for a rights-based approach that seeks permanent solutions rather than temporary ones, the author emphasizes that the integration of refugees in Turkey is vital for the development of a pluralist system.

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** The policy recommendations in this article are a revised and translated version from the CHP’s refugee report Sınırlar Arasında: İnsanlık Dramından İnsanlık Sınavına [In Between Borders: From A Human Tragedy to a Trial of Humanity], which was published in June 2016.
In recent years, millions of people, especially in the Middle East, have left their homes as a result of conflicts and wars. We are witnessing the heartbreak­ing stories of those who became refugees hoping for a better life. While migration routes claim the lives of many refugees, hundreds of thousands of refugees become victims of all kinds of exploitation.

Europe is faced with its biggest refugee cri­sis since the Second World War, with Turkey hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. Although the ruling party in Turkey is proud of hosting more than three million refugees, it would be difficult to argue that Turkey’s refugee problems are being solved with respect to human rights and universal values.

This obvious deficit regarding refugees in Turkey was the basic motive that led us to form the Committee for Enquiry over Questions Concerning Migrants and Migration within the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in September 2015. The committee, which consists of nine deputies, aims to develop concrete solutions for the problems of refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey. The work of the Committee involves a number of aspects including intensive field work (visits to the refugee camps and repatriation centers, and interviews with the refugees in Turkey); holding regular meetings with scholars, activists, and officials; analysis of expert reports on the issue; and producing written and oral press statements. As a result of many months of work, the Committee published a book in June 2016, titled, In Between Borders: From A Human Tragedy to a Trial of Humanity (Sınırlar Arasında: İnsanlık Dramından İnsanlık Sınavına). Policy recommendations in this book are based on social democratic principles and universal values such as human rights. In this article, I will share these policy recommendations concerning the problems of refugees in Turkey:

**Structural Recommendations**

- The issue of refugees and asylum-seekers needs to be addressed through a
rights-based approach that seeks permanent solutions, and not on the basis of religious references and temporary solutions. The aid that is delivered to refugees should not be characterized as a favor that is done for them. This aid must be included in the scope of social assistance by the state, and it needs to be rights-based.

• The policies of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) focus on making use of the refugee population in Turkey as a threat and a tool for blackmail in domestic and foreign policy, drawing upon them to extend its domain of power, and using human dignity as a tool for bargaining instead of developing policies that aim to improve the living conditions of refugees. These policies are unacceptable, and they must be changed.

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• A Ministry for Migration and Integration needs to be established. Large-scale policies for the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers should be developed and implemented. There is also currently a lack of harmony and coordination between public institutions. Public institutions and organizations need to be integrated, and their tasks and responsibilities should be redefined. The volume of migration in Turkey exceeds the capacity of the General Directorate of Migration Management (ĢİGM) and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD).

• The current body of regulations and the institutional structure that regulates migration in Turkey need to be restructured, so that the reality of migration in Turkey can be addressed with responses that conform to universal values and international law.

• Turkey must withdraw the geographical limitation that is maintained regarding the Geneva Convention of 1951. Refugees in Turkey must have the legal status of refugees, and retain all the rights that international law recognizes for refugees.

• The data on refugees in Turkey must be continually updated. Extended and detailed work of data collection and mapping must be carried out regarding the education, professional status, physical circumstances, and economic conditions of refugees. All of the refugees that are currently located in Turkey, and those who are yet to make their entry, must therefore be put on record, and border crossings must be carried out under public control.
• Plans for settlement must be made keeping in mind that refugees and asylum-seekers have become a reality in Turkey. Refugees and asylum-seekers need to be provided with healthy conditions for shelter. The settlement practices of refugees must be monitored. Data should be collected concerning these practices, and ghettoization should be prevented.

• The number of people per tent in refugee camps must be reduced, and more containers should be used instead of tents.

Recommendations Regarding Basic Rights

• Refugees need to be informed about the advantages of being registered, and awareness-raising activities must be carried out among refugees in this regard. Booklets in different languages, particularly in Arabic, need to be distributed for this purpose.

• There is an atmosphere of resentment between impoverished groups and Syrian refugees that stems from a lack of access to basic human rights. This atmosphere must be changed by securing these basic rights.

• Even though it seems as if Turkey is implementing an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees, the attitude of officials on the Turkish-Syrian border leads to problems. There, human rights violations have occasionally resulted in deaths – this must be brought to an end.

Recommendations Concerning Services

• The services provided to Syrian refugees in our country are inadequate. Refugee children are unable to continue their education, comprehensive health services are inaccessible, and basic human rights are not guaranteed since the minimum requirements such as shelter are not secured. Services for registration, legal support, translation, education, and health must be provided more efficiently. Mechanisms must be put in place that address women’s and children’s issues, and other groups that have special needs. The services provided to refugees must be adapted for the coordination and development of these services.

• Healthcare personnel must be given the necessary information regarding the services that will be provided to the refugees, and translation services need to be provided for better access to healthcare.
• Everyone should have access to quality healthcare. In view of the fact that most Syrian refugees live outside of the camps, access to healthcare needs to be provided for non-registered refugees. For the sake of public health, preventive healthcare services (such as maternal and infant health, and vaccinations) must be provided for all, regardless of the demand for these services. Networks for monitoring, inspection, and evaluation should be made to function efficiently with regard to these services.

• Healthy nutrition for all should be a priority. Food support must be provided for infants of refugees living inside and outside of the camps. Addressing the problem of food insecurity must be one of the main policies, considering the prevalence of malnutrition.

• All agents within the judicial system must be trained regarding access that refugees have to the legal system.

• Amendments to legislation must be made for improved access to judicial assistance, so that efficient application methods can be made to work in cases of rejected applications for international protection, forced deportation, or violation of the principle against repatriation, and also in other cases of human rights abuse and victimization.

• Refugee women are the sector within the refugee population that endures the most severe victimization due to migration and poverty. A unit for the protection of women against gender-based violence must be established to protect women who have been victims of sexual violence.

• The practice of marrying with refugee women as second wives is illegal. These illegal acts must be identified, and the necessary measures must be taken against the perpetrators.

• Although the rates of school enrollment in refugee camps has reached 90 percent, it is stated that only 25 percent of Syrian children living outside of camps are enrolled in schools. Accordingly, from data released by Human Rights Watch for the years 2014-2015, there are 708,000 school-age children, but more than 400,000 of them are not enrolled in any school. The fight against crime, such as early and forced marriages, the recruitment of child soldiers, or child trafficking,
is only possible by including these children in the education system, coupled with special attention to the development of their linguistic capabilities depending on their age and development. Therefore, it is essential that work should be carried out immediately to increase enrollment rates among refugee children.

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- Legal regulations must be made to ensure the accessibility of education for refugees in Turkey. Syrian refugees should be encouraged to receive vocational education. The Ministry of National Education, the Council of Higher Education, the Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (TÖMER), the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), and the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) must coordinate their efforts in this regard.

- Necessary work should be carried out to enable Syrian scientists in our country to benefit from national scientific research funds and research funds from the EU.

**Recommendations Concerning Local Administration and NGOs**

- Municipalities must be encouraged to engage in work that will enable the refugees to participate in social life and have regular access to public services. Therefore, the necessary regulations must be implemented primarily in the Municipal Law.

- Municipalities must assume a more active role in solving the problems that refugees face in their daily lives.

- Community centers must be established to provide social services to refugees and to ensure the integration of refugees into society at large. In these community centers, activities geared towards the integration of refugees with local people must be carried out in an intercultural environment where people can empathize with each other.

- Coordination should be increased with NGOs and institutions affiliated with the UN on the subjects of migration and refugees. NGOs must be included in every phase of the processes concerning refugees.

- Centers of Repatriation and refugee camps must be kept open to visits and inspection by NGOs and political parties in keeping with the principle of transparency. Mechanisms of civilian supervision should be formulated to administer these centers.
**Recommendations Concerning the Discourse Over Refugees**

- It needs to be accepted, that many of the Syrian refugees in our country, who were first welcomed as “guests” and were only afterwards granted the status of temporary protection, will permanently stay in Turkey. Those who wish to go back to their country once the crisis has ended, however, must be assisted. Projects need to be developed to encourage and materially support their return to Syria.

- There must be a no-tolerance attitude towards the racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary discussions and practices that target refugees and asylum-seekers in our country, and which are driven by xenophobia. Preventive measures should be taken against hate speech and animosity towards Syrians. In order to make a peaceful coexistence possible, it needs to be explained to the public, with discursive or legal measures, that seeking asylum is a human right.

- The language that the media uses about refugees must conform to universal values and human rights.

- Persons who have been transferred to Repatriation Centers, or refugees staying inside or outside of refugee camps, should not be treated as “criminals.”

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**Recommendations Concerning the Economic Dimension of the Refugee Question**

- The public should be informed about the positive contribution of migration on development at the regional, national, and local levels.

- Necessary legal amendments must be made to integrate refugees into the labor market in Turkey. Refugees should be drawn out of the shadow economy into the regular economy, and measures need to be taken to prevent their exploitation as providers of cheap labor.

- Refugees need to be protected against abuse and exploitation in the shadow market in the form of long working hours, adverse working conditions, low wages, and lack of social security. Measures must be taken against abuse and exploitation. An efficient mechanism to address the complaints of refugees who have been subject to exploitation and violence must be put in place, so that these complaints can be swiftly investigated.
• Social aid and refugee solidarity funds should be transparent, accountable, and easily monitored.

**Recommendations for Foreign Policy**

• The current understanding of foreign policy, which has led to the devastation of neighboring countries, must be turned around 180 degrees. Turkey needs to be the vanguard in the quest for regional peace and stability.

• In view of the fact that millions of people have entered the country in a very short period of time, in only a couple of years, Turkey has experienced a crisis that cannot be resolved on its own. Therefore, our foreign policy must be restructured to take migration into account and our diplomatic relations must be used for the creation and operation of multi-stakeholder channels of negotiation.

• Coordination between our institutions and international NGOs, international organizations (such as UNHCR, UNESCO, IOM, ILO, OSCE, EC), regional actors (the EU), and dispersed or migrant organizations, needs to be strengthened.

• Permanent operations must be developed in cooperation with the countries of the EU, the European Council (EC), and the UN, which deal with issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers. The refugee question should be kept on the top of the agenda for the international public.

• Relations with the EU over the question of migration must be focused on burden-sharing. Relocation as a method needs to be employed efficiently. The short-term policies of the EU that focus on shifting the burden, and the unproductive approach by the AKP that targets material benefits, are both unacceptable.

• The EU should propose a secure route for the passage of refugees. It should improve the conditions of acceptance and bring border administrations into conformity with human rights. Additionally, the EU countries must again raise their resettlement quotas.

**Recommendations Concerning Security**

• An efficient legal infrastructure needs to be established for the fight against human trafficking and for the prevention of human trade. Likewise, the powers of judicial and law enforcement agencies need to be enhanced, and politicians should act with determination to achieve this goal. Human traffickers must be brought to justice.

• Agents of law enforcement need to be educated about xenophobia. They should be trained in raising awareness about the fact that terrorism and refugee
migration are different facts. They should be put under efficient civilian supervision in this regard.

- Measures to ensure the border security of Turkey as it impacts national security must be taken in a responsible manner, taking into account Turkey’s responsibilities regarding human rights and humanitarian assistance for the Syrian refugees. A decisive attitude must be adopted pertaining to jihadi organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front. We must ensure that each executive body adopts serious measures in the struggle against these organizations.

In closing, the CHP Committee for Enquiry over Questions Concerning Migrants and Migration dedicates this study to the precious memories of the refugees who lost their lives in the waters of the Aegean and Mediterranean.

We believe that accepting refugees as political subjects with rights would contribute to the solution of problems related to the refugee crisis. In this regard, the integration of refugees in their host societies is vital for the development of a pluralist system. Besides, as mentioned above, the exclusion of refugees and hate speech targeting refugees deepen social and economic inequalities and fuel societal polarization. It is obvious that developing comprehensive social policies at the national level to tackle the refugee crisis is a necessity. However, especially in the case of Turkey, a durable solution for the refugee crisis only with national level policies is far from a reality. The peaceful settlement of armed conflicts in neighboring countries is another necessity in order to forge a long-term solution. Therefore, social policies which aim to integrate refugees into Turkish society should be coupled with changes in Turkish foreign policy.