

SYRIAN REFUGEES ON THE WAY TO EUROPE

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Friedrich Naumann
STIFTUNG

FÜR DIE FREIHEIT

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INTRODUCTION

Before we started this project, our main aim was to publish only the transcript of the interviews we would be conducting and avoid to intervene between the reader and the interviews. However, when we finished the last interview we decided to share our observations during the interviews, as we highly believe that could be useful for readers to have a wider perspective on Syrian refugees planning to go to Europe.

The interviews were conducted in 13 different cities and towns. Interviews in Turkey were conducted in three major geographical areas in order to offer readers a comparative analysis. The cities and towns which are closer to the Turkish-Syrian border were chosen to determine if the refugees were intentionally staying closer to the border areas with a hope to return to their homes or to keep their ties with Syria. The second geographical area where interviews were conducted is in the western coasts of Turkey known to be the points of departure to Greece. We tried to understand the realities of the human smuggling in these areas. The rest of the interviews was mostly conducted in the industrialized cities to observe if the developed and industrialized areas are offering better job opportunities, which could possibly eliminate the ideas of going to Europe by a stable income and employment. We tried to avoid being sentimental, which we highly believe is one of the most problematic issues when a non-academic work is made related to the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Instead, our main priority was to let refugees speak freely as they wished and to avoid leading the interviews to the emotional and traumatic sides of the war in Syria.

Interviews were conducted between 16.04.2016 and 06.09.2016. The age ranges of the interviewees are between 17-70 years and all interviews were conducted orally in Arabic, Turkish and English. The interviewees were chosen randomly from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups of Syria. Interviews were semi-structured, since this methodology was used to understand the experiences of similar people by learning about their personal experiences. Semi-structured style also allowed us to have a greater flexibility since the Syrian Civil War is still very dynamic and within the period of five months during the interviews we were able to ask different questions according to the new developments. In accordance with the necessity of academic and journalistic ethics, interviewees were not directed to an idea. We took great care not to guide interviewees to a certain idea or thought, and assured interviewees that they were free to stop the interview and free to skip the questions asked.

Convincing refugees to be ready for an interview was the most challenging part during the project. We had to convince them that they would be referred to by a pseudonym, their real identities would be kept hidden and we were not members of any state institution or “a religious cult”. Some interviewees expressed that some Christian missionaries approached them before and wanted to be sure that we would not be asking them any questions about their personal religious beliefs or invite them for a religious talk. Some other interviewees were highly disturbed by the sponsorship of a German foundation to this project and feared that we were secretly collecting data for those who would be eligible to have residence permits in Germany. Sometimes we were perceived as secret police or member of local intelligence services and realized that we got poor results from some of the interviews due to this fallacy. We decided not to publish such interviews with poor and misleading answers. We were allowed to use a voice-recorder in some interviews but after realizing voice-recorders are causing interviewees to be suspicious, resulting in anxiety and risking to have poor results we ceased to use voice-recorders. Nearly all of the interviewees refused our request to take their picture and publish it in this book. The original idea we had was to publish the pictures of refugees after the end of each interview. However, through over 150 interviews, including the ones we did not publish in this book, only a few of them allowed us to publish their photographs. In addition, some interviewees

called us a few days/weeks after the interview and demanded not to publish their interviews. All those factors caused us to lag behind the original timeline.

During the field work there were some other difficulties as well. Those who have been to Europe and deported back to Turkey did not want to share that information with us. Twice we learned by coincidence that we made interviews with those who have been to Greece and deported back to Turkey but pretended that they have never been to Europe before. Compared to randomly found interviewees, we received more detailed answers from the refugees whom we had common friends. Some interviewees refused to share any kind of information about their life in Syria, mostly due to their political background. Even once we regretfully learned that the son of the interviewee was nearly being kidnapped by ISIS members since he was one of the leading Turkmen opposition figures in Gaziantep. Also, it is extremely hard to communicate with the Syrians that are from the lowest income groups and living in very challenging conditions compared to those refugees who had better economic living conditions. We also realized that the refugees in the western coasts of Turkey that are waiting for their turns for “departure” tend to communicate with us in groups rather than as individuals. The psychology of small groups, most probably due to a forthcoming common risk that allows them to establish strong bonds with each other, is strong in the coastal areas and interviews were conducted under the “observance” of other Syrians who acted as passive observers.

On the other hand, against all the mentioned difficulties, we mostly succeeded to break the “ice” between us, the researchers, and the refugees. We realized that upon establishing a mutual trust, their need to talk with someone who was interested in their situation was clearly visible. Even being aware that we were only going to publish a book and would not be able to provide them help, they still wanted to explain their situation, their needs and their lives in details. Many times at the end of the interviews they expressed their gratitude to us for just “listening to them” and their problems. The positive outcome of “breaking the ice” allowed the majority of the refugees to talk freely with us after clearing their suspicions, sometimes even leading two hours of talks. For that reason, we had no choice but to summarize the interviews and only publish the parts which are directly related to the main scope of this book: To clarify the motivations of refugees for going to Europe.

Many times we have witnessed that after we thanked interviewees and finished the interview formally, they shared much more information with us. As an example, one interviewee who just started to live in Turkey 10 months ago with a very fluent Turkish refused to answer our question for how he learned Turkish in such a short period of time. As soon as we informed him that the interview was over, he told us off-the-record that he learned Turkish thanks to his “squeeze” – a Turkish girlfriend - and allowed us to use this information anywhere but not in the interview itself. Again, it was interesting to see that some Syrian Arab refugees learned Kurdish in neighbourhoods populated by a significant number of ethnic Turkish Kurds. It is also important to note that though a common “Syrian” identity is strong amongst all refugees, Turkmen, Circassians and Abkhaz generally differentiate themselves from ethnic Syrian Arabs in all means. On the other hand, Syrian Arabs also differentiate themselves culturally and socially from the other Arab countries and their citizens, which may be noted as one of the reasons why Syrian refugees generally do not consider going to other Arab countries. Another main reason for Syrian refugees for not considering this option is based upon the strict visa policies of Arab countries. According to interviewees, even if they would cross the borders to another Arab country, they are certain about a quick deportation back to Syria. However, they generally take it for granted that they can go to any European country without having a visa and they are mostly certain that they would not be deported easily, and express that at least will be able to live in Europe for a long time as the deportation procedure and trials take a long time. Though European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been fully functional and operating to coordinate border control efforts in Europe with

a complex and highly technological border control systems, Syrian refugees find it less risky to cross the European borders illegally compared to long, vast and poorly controlled Arab countries borders.

Though it was not on our original agenda, we tried to conduct some interviews in the refugee camps. However, getting an official permission was not possible in such a short period of time during our visits to the cities near the Syrian border. Generally, widows with little children, divided families and economically very poor families prefer to live in the camps. We were able to speak with some people that used to live in the camps and were informed that even if a refugee residing in a camp thought about going to Europe, it was practically not possible for them to go due to their poor economic conditions. The refugee camps have a really negative image and nearly anyone we spoke to never considered living in a camp, though most of them have not seen a refugee camp before. The reason for refugees indicating that they will try to pass the Balkan countries as quick as possible is also based on this negative image; the refugees tend to believe that Balkan countries will be forcing them to stay in refugee camps.

Another important detail we realized is the difference between the refugees who are able to speak Turkish and those who only have a limited Turkish proficiency or are lacking the command of Turkish. During the interviews, we observed that the ability to communicate in the Turkish language sharply increased the working conditions (as well as living conditions indirectly) of the Syrian refugees. The school-age children are having a hard time to register to public schools and most of them are not registered to any school. The inability to learn the local language (Turkish) and school-age children being isolated from the education system are the most imminent dangers to the well-being of refugees as well as the policies of Turkish state towards Syrian refugees.

According to most of the refugees, the efforts of the NGOs, International Organizations and state institutions towards Syrians seem to be poorly coordinated and not adequate. Most of them are not aware of their rights or the presence of organizations that are obliged to help them. Some Syrians who received aid from different NGOs do not even remember the name of the organizations that provided the aid. Refugees rarely have access to the NGOs or other organizations. Moreover, from time to time we heard about the “corrupted” NGO workers and organizations not only in Turkey but in different countries hosting the refugees as well. During our visits to different cities we have seen the outstanding efforts of NGOs and state institutions, however it seems to have little impact on the Syrian refugees, according to their statements.

In some parts of the world, Syrian refugees may be granted a permanent residence permit or obtain citizenship in different countries where they are bound with ethnic ties. In such cases refugees in some Caucasian countries received repatriate status (citizens who returned to their “ancestral homeland”) which allow refugees/repatriates free accommodation, citizenship, different types of grants, free use of lands for farming, tax exemptions, free medical services and education. During the fieldwork we have witnessed that these refugees intend to live in Europe even though they have such rights and advantages in the regions outside of Europe and this is a clear example that this motivation is not only related to financial means.

Most of the qualified Syrian refugees seem to be already settled in various European countries. The highly educated Syrians or those who have knowledge on a specific area that are still living in Turkey are generally not employed by relevant sectors since they can't reach the employment pool. We have realized that many engineers had to work as unqualified workers in restaurants or construction sites. A Syrian refugee with an engineering diploma working in a construction site as a simple labourer, where his boss refuses to pay his salary, is not something uncommon in Turkey. Since most Syrian refugees are working unofficially, they do not have proper health insurance or are paid below the minimum wage

limit determined by the state. It is also very common to see the problems between Syrian refugees and local workers in all sectors. There was a case that in a textile factory a hardworking Syrian caused unrest amongst the Turkish workers as the boss became more demanding from the local workers after realizing the efforts of the Syrian worker. There was also another example: A 16 year-old Syrian teenager who told us that as he was selling Turkish bagels, he barely escaped from being stabbed by other sellers thanks to the help of a retired police correspondent. Again, we conducted an interview with a paper-collecting Syrian refugee that was beaten by other paper-collectors. Such challenging working conditions and hostile environment are forcing refugees to search for their future in Europe.

Conscientious objectors amongst Syrian refugees are also another case to be analyzed. Many refugees between the ages of 18-24 stated that they escaped from Syria after they received an official call for conscription. Such conscientious objectors are not only from Sunnite or ethnic Turkmen/Kurdish areas but also from the pro-government cities, which are predominantly having an Alawite population. Regardless of this factor, the “homeland” concept and patriotic feelings towards Syria are very strong and there is a strong nostalgia. Regardless of their socio-economic and ethnic background, all people expressed that they had a happy life in Syria. Refugees still keep strong bonds with their relatives, no matter if those relatives are living in Syria, Turkey or Europe.

Coming to the main focal point of this book, the refugees’ motivations to go to Europe, we witnessed some interesting facts. The perception of “Europe” according to most of the refugees seems to start from Austria up to the north. Greece, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries are not perceived as a part of “Europe”. Refugees want to reach their target destinations as quick as possible and do not want to stay in any Balkan countries, no matter if they are EU member states or not. The Aegean Sea still seems to be a popular smuggling route, where the prices range between 500 to 10.000 USD depending on the conditions offered. Smugglers seem to operate freely in Turkey and it is pretty easy to find a smuggler that would be “helping” the refugees to cross the border. Smugglers are also using the internet and can be found easily from social media platforms and communicated with through different smartphone applications. Nearly none of the interviewees mentioned the fear of Turkish security institutions that could stop them on their way to Europe. It is also amazing, yet quite sad to see that refugees are quite well-informed about all the routes that may lead them to Europe. We have witnessed that some refugees arrived to Norway from the Russian-Norwegian border by bicycle. When we investigated the reason of this interesting decision to cross this border by bicycle, we have seen that due to a bureaucratic gap, the border-crossing between Russia and Norway was much easier by bicycle. We received this information from our next-door neighbours in the Caucasus whom we had contacted during this project. This couple, together with their twin children managed to cross the Russian-Norwegian border by buying bicycles near the border and crossed the border by bicycle and applied safely to the Norwegian authorities as being refugees. A short while ago they received their residence permit in Norway. When a route is controlled stricter, refugees immediately contact with each other within their “refugee network” and share the new routes that can lead them to Europe.

Social media platforms play a very strong role in constructing the image of “Europe”. Refugees are enchanted by the image of Europe on the social media groups and do not foresee any kind of adaptation or cultural problems they may face. They generally tend to perceive Europe accordingly with their positive hopes without bearing in mind the negative aspects, risks or dangers. The analysis of such perception is not within the scope of this book and falls into migration psychology and political psychology. However we can say that their hopeless conditions in Turkey enforce them to aggrandize the conditions of refugees in Europe and cause an imaginary positive perception of Europe. During our long trip between the cities where interviews were conducted, we have met with people who had been able to go to Europe and to return to Syria in order to join the army after facing tough conditions

in Europe as well as prejudice and discrimination, especially in the Balkan countries. Amongst the European countries, Germany seems to be the most popular target destination according to the results of the interviews. However, we must be cautious about the interviewees' expressions about their will to go to Germany, since before the interviews we have expressed that our project was funded by Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

Finally, we would like to state that we carried out this project mainly with a journalistic approach and did not make a data analysis based on the interviews conducted. On the other hand, we strongly encourage the future researchers to be more involved with the field research about Syrian refugees in Turkey, as the realities on the ground never ceased to surprise us during this project. Many times answers of the interviewees forced us to question the objectivity of mass-media coverage on Syrian refugees.

INTERVIEW #1, 11 JUNE 2016

KONYA, 25, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Syria and I am 25 years old. I studied at Damascus University, Industrial Engineering Department and graduated in 2012. After finishing my studies I worked at medical stores and maintenance related with medical sector for two years.

How did you enter Turkey?

With my Syrian passport, first I went to Beirut and from there headed to Adana. Later I moved to Konya by bus.

Why Konya? Is there a specific reason?

Because I knew some people from Konya before. Finding a job is easier here, there are lots of job opportunities. There is a well-developed industrial area where you can look for a job. I started working at wood processing company after coming to Konya. It was a basic job for unskilled labourers. I worked there for ten days. I wasn't able to continue because of the heavy rains and terrible conditions in the workplace. There was no roof where we worked! After that I changed my job and worked three months at a factory, producing toilet papers and cleaning papers.

Are you still working there?

No, I worked there for three months. There was a problem with the machines. In addition, they did not pay our salaries. They always said we will pay later..later...later...That "later" never came.

So they never paid you?

I went there three times in ten days following my leave of work. Finally he gave me my money and asked me to start working again. I didn't accept. After that I restarted searching for a job. Big Turkish companies don't want Syrian employees because of the language problems. There are not many people that speak English in Konya, which makes things harder. I went at least to twenty factories for finding a job. One of them said okay but let me tell you what happened. I asked them in Turkish when I entered the manager's room by saying "Hello, do you need an employee?" and then they said yes. After that I continued in English and he didn't understand. They realized that I am a Syrian and told me Syrians cannot work as a specialist, but only as workers. In their minds they put limits for Syrians. You can only be a basic worker. So I started working there, for a factory making shoes.

You are an industrial engineer. Did anyone in Turkey ask any questions about your skills?

Some workers asked about where I used to work in Syria. But that's all, no one asked in detail. Your skills and diploma do not mean much for the owner of the factory. You are a Syrian, and there is a limit for your salary. A salary that is less than Turkish citizens have.

How did you encounter with the war in Syria for the first time?

First time in 2012. On a Friday afternoon. The clashes started right next to us. An armed violence occurred just 150 meters away. You know, the situation in Syria is getting worse. One day they blockade some parts, other day another part, the following day some other roads...

So when did you finally decide to leave Syria? Was there a specific event?

I made my decision at the end of 2013. The armed clash was really close to me, in the heart of the city, which used to be safe, where you could stay with your family and even work just like I was doing. I saw the dangers were too close. So I left at the end of 2013.

Did any of your family members leave Syria before you?

A lot of them.

Where did they go? Are they still there?

Lebanon and Iraq. Those in Iraq are still living in Erbil. Most of those in Lebanon went to Europe. Life is really hard in Arab countries and Turkey.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

I do not have a work that is related with my profession. I cannot even rent a house.

Why? Because of your budget or...

Turkish people do not want to live with Syrians. Only after months of searching you can find a house to rent as a Syrian.

How will you go to Europe? Which route will you follow?

Anyway that I can find. I tried to get a visa from France but it did not work out. Legal way seems not possible, it is too hard to get a visa. If you have money you can go in legal ways, but that is the problem; money. I will try all the ways, even the sea.

When do you plan to leave?

Anytime. Life is too difficult here; I do not have a job based on my skills. I have experience about my profession but cannot find a job as an engineer. After all those times here I still feel myself as a stranger. I do not have anything here. I am nothing here. Like a slave. You mean less compared to an ordinary Turkish worker. I am working illegally, I don't have insurance. We do not have any rights here.

Do you think Europe is different in the sense of all the troubles you mentioned?

Yes, in Europe you can find a job based on your specialization. You have your legal rights. In Europe, governments give you home and provide language courses. Here I may even live in the streets if I cannot pay my rent. You never get job offers if you are a Syrian. You are just trying to stay alive. All of my Syrian friends are working for 800 Turkish Liras for a month. That is much less compared to a Turkish worker. In Europe everything is legal and you have rights, the human rights.

What about the religious and cultural differences? Will it be hard to adapt in Europe?

In Europe you will not notice any difficulties. There are differences but they are minor ones. Even here there are differences between us and Turkish people. Europeans are Christians and we are Muslims, true. But I do not think it can be problem. As I told before, you can be a Muslim but you will still have your rights in Europe. I know a (Muslim) person who was born in Europe and living there. They have full legal rights there.

If you cross the borders illegally, is there a risk of deportation in European countries?

Sure. I have friends that were deported. But many of them are caught by Turkish police during the border crossing instead of European police. There are some friends of mine who succeeded to cross on the fourth try.

How can the Syrians find human smugglers?

You can use internet. There are social media groups publishing their offers for human smuggling. Prices are different. When I asked one of them I was given a price for 7000 dollars, the other one said 2500 dollars and another one asked for 1000 dollars. The price changes accordingly with the smuggler.

What about moving to Arab countries? They speak the same language and they are culturally very close to Syrians.

They do not give visas. They have political problems. 1 million people are on their way to Germany, because Germany has good laws and less political problems.

Is there a specific country that you want to go?

I can tell you all the countries are same for me. But for an easier life and language I can say Germany. I am an engineer and Germany offers lots of opportunities. For example a friend of mine is a lawyer, he went to France because the legal system and education are similar in Syria and France. He is living as a refugee now in France.

Are your Syrian friends in Europe happy?

None of them is happy because they left their homes, their country. But at least Europe is safe.

Where are your family members? Are they in Turkey too?

No, they are still in Syria.

Is it hard to live in Syria at the moment?

Yes, of course. Everything is very expensive. Also it is hard to find a home. Concerning my family, our first home was in a really bad neighborhood but now they managed to move to a better district recently.

When you decided to go out of Syria, what was your family's reaction?

They respected my decision. Think about a family that is always anxious about their son whenever he goes to work every morning, not knowing if he will come back or not. So they said okay, go and make a living there. They did not try to stop me.

Do they consider about coming to Turkey and follow your path?

Yes, but I am 25 years old and I can manage the problems, they are old. It is better for them to stay in Syria for the moment. The basic problem for them is the language. Also there is a risk that the Turkish police can take them to camps after entering Turkey.

What about refugee camps here, what are the conditions? After the war, when the peace comes, will you return to Syria?

Camps have a lot of problems. The conditions are not good. They just offer you food and nothing else. For the post-war, yes, I will return. There is nothing for me to do here.

INTERVIEW #2, 12 JUNE 2016

KONYA, 19, MALE

Could you please briefly tell about your life in Syria?

My father died when I was little. I grew up with my grandmother and had no other relatives. I had many problems and personal crises in Syria. I had to face so many problems. After my grandmother died, I had no one left. My mother does not care about me; she has a different life with her husband. My life in Syria was really bad. After my grandmother died, I came to Turkey.

When did you come to Turkey?

6-7 months ago. I was living in Damascus and decided to come after my grandmother passed away. I cannot establish good relations with the people in Turkey. No one helps me. Their attitudes are really negative.

Did you ever think about going to refugee camps?

No.

How did you come to Turkey? What are your plans now?

With an airline company, legally. I have a Syrian passport. I am saving money to go to Europe. I do not know exactly how to go for now. Maybe by crossing the sea. I just want to go, I will try all the ways. I will open a new page in my life in Europe.

What kind of difficulties you expect in Europe?

I think I will not face any problems. I can learn the language.

Do you think about any specific country?

At first I was thinking about going to Sweden or Britain. I have some friends there. But these countries are not giving enough money and help. So I am thinking somewhere else.

Are your friends in Europe happy?

Yes, they are. All of them opened a new page in their lives. You will have a very good life in Europe, unlike Turkey. Life here is merciless.

If the rich Arab countries open their borders, would you still prefer to illegally go to Europe?

Yes, Europe is better for me. The people in those Arab countries are bad people, just like those people living here.

Did you ever receive help from the Turkish government?

No, never. I think all the people you will meet today for your project never received any cash from the government. I heard some Syrians received some help, like food portions, but it is only for large families. They also can give 100 Turkish Liras every three months. The aids are not systematic. I also heard some large families have some special cards for shopping in the markets for free but that practice stopped now I think.

Let us imagine you have 50% chance to die in the boat when you will cross the maritime border and 50% chance to make it to Greece, will you take this risk?

Yes, of course. Better to die than staying here.

INTERVIEW #3, 12 JUNE 2016

KONYA, 21, MALE

Can you please tell about yourself?

I was not working in Syria but studying at the university. We were living in Homs. We are Syrian Turkmen.

What was the image of Turkey for you and your family before the war?

Turkey was always perceived as a very developed and nice country. I always thought our life and future were lying in Syria. We are loyal to our land. We have a fine life here in Turkey, but this is not our land. We have another life. We have not forgotten our homeland, Syria.

Can you obtain a Turkish passport since you are a Turkman?

I cannot. Iraqi Turkmen are receiving passports but Syrian Turkmen are not given such rights. Actually in order to obtain it, we need to prove that we are Turkmen with an official document. I know some Syrian Turkmen who had such documents and got their Turkish passports.

How did you enter Turkey?

I came here legally, with a plane to İstanbul Airport.

Why did you choose to live in Konya? Where do you work here?

I had friends only in Konya and I do not know anyone else in the other Turkish cities. I work here in Vatansaray district, in the marble sector.

What was the main reason for you to leave Syria?

Life in Syria is very difficult. Economy is extremely unstable and politically it is a mess.

Did you come here with your family?

Yes, but my mother and father are living in Adana. My father is ill and cannot work. My mother is not able to work due to health conditions, so I am sending money to them.

Were you always working in the marble company or do you have other work experiences in Turkey?

I used to work in glass-making workshop. Also sold Turkish Bagels in the streets and worked in a patisserie.

Why would you like to go to Europe?

I do not want to go.

Well, if you had enough budget to go?

Still no, never.

Why?

Because Turkey is geographically very close to Syria, whenever we want we can visit or return to Syria.

Do you have any relatives living in Europe?

Yes, but I have no contact to **them**.

What are the positive and negative things in Turkey?

There are job opportunities but salaries are low. Life here is very similar to Syria that allows us to adapt quickly, the only difference here is there is no war. There are also good and bad Turks here but once you speak Turkish life becomes much easier. Especially when I say that I am a Turkman they show a great sympathy and they do not like Arabs. For the things like the amount of salary it is all the same for everyone but life is generally easier for us, the Turkmen.

Do you see Turkey as a homeland because of your ethnic identity?

Yes, naturally.

INTERVIEW #4 & #5, 12 JUNE 2016

KONYA, 26, MALE

KONYA, 26, MALE

Can you tell me about yourself and your lives in Syria?

A: I was born in the capital, Damascus. I studied until the high school and started to work as the air-conditioner master. We used to own a small factory for making electronic devices, I had my own workplace, a car and a house. Then the war started in Syria and I was called to the army. That was the moment I decided to go to Turkey and start a new life.

B: I have a similar story. I was born in Damascus and studied until sixth grade and had to start working, leaving the school afterwards. I started to work in the timber industry but when I was called to the army I refused it and came to Turkey.

How did you enter Turkey?

A: With my passport, using the ferry.

B: Same, from Latakia to Mersin port.

After landing in Mersin did you come to Konya directly? Why did you decide to come here?

A: Yes, we both came to Konya directly and our reasons are same, we had friends in Konya.

What do you think about the working conditions in Turkey?

A: My salary is 1100 TL. With this salary I cannot get married or get my own house.

B: My salary in the factory is very low. All of us have negative relations with other workers and managers. I am sick, but I cannot go to hospital because they are too expensive. The hospitals sometimes accept me and sometimes not. You must have a refugee card for medical services and it is too hard to get it. Public hospitals are free but medication is very expensive.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

B: My illness is very serious and working hours are too much. I need medication. I want to go to Europe to get a better medical treatment. In Europe there is also a possibility to have a family unification as economy is better but there is no possibility to bring my family here because of financial strains.

A: Yes, the main reason is to take our families with us to a better place.

Can't you bring your family here?

B: There is no possibility. They can't take a visa and are not able to live here because of the high prices.

Do you consult with your family about your thoughts on trying to go to Europe?

A: Yes, they support me for this idea.

B: They support me as well for going to Europe and calling them to wherever I settle.

Do you have any plans in your mind for how to go?

A: I do not have enough money to go by legal means so I will cross the sea.

B: The border police is too strict and gates are closed, so we need to go by the sea.

Isn't it dangerous?

A: That is right, but sitting here in Turkey is more dangerous than the sea.

B: If you give more money they provide you better safety about the boats and the route. So the danger depends on how much you are willing to pay.

Do you have any friends or family members who are gone with that way?

A: I know two people. They tried to go with a small ship but somehow they returned to Turkey. They did not try again.

B: Yes, I have a friend who succeeded.

Which country you would like to go in Europe?

A: Sweden is a good option according to many people. Some of my friends are already there. The Swedish government has good relations with refugees.

B: I would like to go to Britain. Life is easy there and we have some knowledge in English. British people are also nice towards the Syrians.

Why do you not mention the rich Arab countries?

A: Because none of them accept Syrians.

B: You need a visa and you need a lot of money to live there. Many Syrians do not have such money.

If you can make it to Europe, do you think you will have problems about your religious beliefs?

A: Of course we will have problems. We will continue to keep our beliefs.

Can you explain to me Europe in just three words?

A: Problem-free, relaxed, safe.

B: Work, language and family unification.

After the war, will you return to Syria?

A: Of course.

B: Yes, of course.

INTERVIEW #6, 12 JUNE 2016

KONYA, 24, MALE

Can you tell me about yourself?

I had my own job, I was selling furniture. Everything was so good in Syria. The bombings in my area directly affected my life; I was stuck in the middle of the war. Day by day my friends were going to Turkey and I called them asking for help to cross the border. I came here illegally. I walked 50 minutes to cross the border and risked my life for coming to Turkey.

How did you manage to cross the border? I mean the border patrols, mines...

No, no, I asked the help of my friends, not the human smugglers. They showed me the less risky paths, but still there were risks. There were lots of people who crossed the border from the same path. If you do not have a passport, there is no other way. If you want a Syrian passport you need to go to the government-controlled areas and it is also another problem.

Did you come directly to Konya?

No, I stayed in Antakya for a day, headed to Antalya and then arrived to Konya.

Did you find a job in Konya?

Yes, I have been working in the aluminum industry for a year.

How is life in Turkey?

I'm always working. Always. For long hours. When I started to work my salary was really low but now it is better, still not enough to live though.

Do you have an insurance? What happens if you need to go to hospital?

This is a problematic issue. Once I was in need of emergent medical treatment. They gave me an appointment for the next month. I told them this was an urgent condition but still, they asked me to wait one month.

So this is why you want to go to Europe?

I have lots of deep reasons to go to Europe. There is a "life" out there and a good healthcare.

Do you have any friends or relatives in Europe?

Yes, I have. Excuse me, no. Not in Europe. They are in Malaysia.

What do you think about Europe in general?

Better life, better works and more systematic rules.

How do you plan to go?

By legal ways, with a visa. It is very expensive so if I cannot get one, I will have to cross the sea illegally.

Is it risky to cross the border from the sea?

Yes, it is. But lots of people did it and they are in Europe already.

What about rich Arab countries? Would you like to try that option?

Again they ask for visa and the border is closed. It is impossible. There is no way to go there.

Do you think you will have any problems if you make it to Europe?

Of course, there will be problems. The language can basically be a problem. Also the culture.

Which country in Europe you want to go?

I don't have an idea but I think it can be Switzerland.

When you compare with Turkey, what are the advantages of Europe?

Life is better. Jobs are good. Here there is a pressure in all the aspects of life

Are there any good or positive things about Turkey?

It has a beautiful nature.

Let's imagine you made it to Europe, but the Syrian War came to an end. Will you be returning to Syria?

Of course I will return. Everything I have is in Syria. My job, my life. I would not mind to start from the beginning in Syria.

INTERVIEW #7, 9 JULY 2016

İZMİT, 21, MALE

Which city you are from?

I am from Latakia like all my family. My dad was a real estate agent. But when the war broke out, no real estate or related job remained.

Did you finish high school in Syria?

Yes, I finished high school. I want to enroll to a university here but my high school diploma is in Syria so I can't register to a university here.

When did the war in Latakia start? What were your feelings when you see the war starting?

It started five years ago. There is nowhere in Syria that does not feel the outcomes of the war. It is impossible not to see the war in Syria wherever you are. The Assad forces tried to take me to the army when I was 20. I did not want to join the war. But if I had to stay in Syria there was no other chance, they would forcibly take me to the army. So I decided to escape from Syria.

How did you manage to come to Turkey?

I did not come illegally; I had a passport and arrived to Adana Airport in 2015.

You came to Turkey in 2015? But your Turkish is fluent?

Yes, Turkish is an easy language to learn. I got it very quickly.

Are you Turkman?

No, I am Arab but I learned Turkish quickly by chatting with people in the streets and the neighborhood.

Did you come with your family or alone from Syria?

I came with my brother; my parents are still in Syria.

Did you manage to find job opportunities in other cities before coming to İzmit?

No, I stayed in Adana for a short time and then I went to Mersin and worked for a brief period. Now here in Körfez district of Kocaeli I am working in a factory near Gendarmerie (building).

What about the salary?

There are job opportunities but Syrians are getting less salary than the Turks. I could only get 15-20 Turkish Liras in Mersin, making around 400 TL per month.

Why did you decide to go to İzmit? Was it because of the financial reasons?

The people in Mersin were really bad. They were treating Syrians in a really bad way.

So it is better here?

Yes, much better. A friend of mine started living in İzmit before me, so I heard about here from him. He told me that "Come here, there are works you can do. My salary is 800-900 TL here." So I quit my job and came to İzmit.

Do you want to go to Europe?

Yes. I will.

Why do you want that?

Actually I did not want to. There are no Muslims in Europe. All of them are Christian countries. And also I love Turkey very much. I want to get the Turkish citizenship. But the opportunities here are very few unlike Europe. I want to go for that reason. Here I work for 900 TL. There I can earn more.

Aren't you afraid of cultural and religious differences that you may face in Europe? Will you be able to adapt if you go?

I am not afraid. All humans are brothers. Why should not I adapt? Of course if there was a Muslim country in Europe like Turkey that would be better.

There are Arab countries which are rich in economic terms like Saudi Arabia, why are you not thinking of going to those countries?

They are dishonoured. They close their borders. They do not want Syrians. They are ignoble. The most ignoble is Saudi Arabia. Kaaba is there, we are Muslims, they are Muslims as well but they closed their doors to us.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

If I can get a Turkish citizenship, a Turkish ID and a Turkish passport I can go much easier. Otherwise I have to go illegally. For example there is a river near Edirne. I am planning to swim and cross the border. If I see a soldier or police I will flee.

Will you bargain with smugglers or try by yourself?

First I need to speak with them (human smugglers). It is hard to go by myself.

How will you find smugglers?

They are already present in the area. You can find them once you go to the area you want to cross the border.

Is it that easy?

Actually, it is not. You can find them on the internet. You may try your chance by searching the word "smugglers" in internet.

Do they ask for a lot of money?

Yes, for us it is a lot. For example if you want to go by the sea they ask for 1500 TL. That is from near İzmir. Edirne costs less, about 500 TL.

Why is the sea route more expensive?

Because it is faster, you can cross the border in a short time.

Is it risky?

Very risky. People are dying but there is nothing to do. Europe must accept us. I work about 12-15 hours per day and make only 15 TL. Why it is like this? People want to go to Europe for that. There is no other reason.

Are the working conditions the biggest problem here?

Yes, work is the biggest problem. There is no other reason. We are Muslims. There are mosques and Islamic traditions here. We have nothing to do in Europe if we would not be making money there. There are no mosques or Islamic traditions in Europe but they offer wealth and comfort.

Would you still risk yourself if you knew that during crossing the border from the sea to Greece there is a chance of 50% survival and 50% drowning?

I would not go for that risk. I just want to live in the best way. I want nothing else. I love Turkey. I told you, I do not want to live in Europe at all and I do not like Europe.

Why do you not like it?

I have friends who have been to Europe. There is more work and more money, you get what you deserve. The worst European country is Germany. They provide the official documents allowing Syrians to stay too late. In other European countries you can get them after 4-5 months.

So why are most of the Syrians trying to go to Germany?

Because the biggest "money" is in Germany.

What is the first word that comes to your mind when I say "Europe"?

Law.

Which country do you want to live in Europe?

I do not know. If I had money in my pocket and a visa, I would go to America (USA). Because Europe is slowly dying. If you ask me the best country, it is Switzerland.

Will you return if peace comes to Syria?

I love Turkey too, but if the war ends I will immediately return. I have a home, a car and a good life in Syria. But I will only return if the war ends.

Do you have a lot of Turkish friends?

Yes, a lot. I learned Turkish that way.

INTERVIEW #8, 10 JULY 2016

İZMİT, 22, MALE

Could you please share with us your story in Syria and Turkey?

I came here when I was 19-20 years old for the first time, now I am 21. I was born in Damascus and used to live there. I learned the Turkish language here. I saw the war for the first time in the street when I was walking downtown. Assad forces engaged with the opposition. At first I realized their guns of the opposition and quickly after they started shooting and Assad forces counter-attacked them. After the gunfire slowed down a tank entered the street, hit the buildings and left the area. This happened in 2011, at the beginning of the war.

Were you studying in Syria?

Yes, I was studying at a high school. I could not manage to graduate. But I had my own computer repair shop in Damascus.

What exactly happened that caused you to decide on leaving Syria?

It was not my decision, my family decided about that.

So what caused their decision?

We were very wealthy in Syria, but we grew poor due to the war. This is why we left. The economic reasons...

Do you have brothers or sisters?

I have a younger brother and an elder sister.

How did you come to Turkey?

My mother and brother came here by plane and I and my father arrived by ship. It was an ordinary, passenger ship. All our documents were legal. Later my sister followed us. She was married there and after her divorce she also joined us.

To which cities have you been in Turkey?

We directly came to İzmit after we arrived to Turkey.

Why did you decide about moving to İzmit as soon as you arrived?

My mother had a friend from İzmit. She used to study near our house in Syria. A Turkish girl, she was like our sister then. She helped us. This is why we moved to İzmit.

Did you manage to find a job right after?

When I first came here I looked for a job but...I ended up working in an auto-washing place. He gave me 10 TL for my first day. I quit the job in the second day. After that I worked in a textile workshop. The boss gave me 750 TL at the end of the month. I ceased to work there as well. There is a factory that produces insulation materials for buildings. I started working there and I got 800 TL per month. I was promoted and became a master with a wage increased to 850 TL per month. After a while, I quit the job and started working in a shopping mall. That job was good, really good. No one was pointing at me and saying "he came from Syria". They were treating me well and I received 1400 TL. Now I am working in a garden, helping recreational changes. I get 70 TL per day. Also soon I will start working in a warehouse and will get 30 TL per day. So I will be working from morning to 5 PM in the warehouse and then in the garden.

You tried a lot of different sectors, but why did you not continue your specialization, computer repairing here?

Here in the neighborhood that I live people do not care much about their computers. I do not see much shops related with this as well. Actually I thought about finding a computer repair shop and work there, so with that idea in my mind I visited Tütünçiftlik district. There was a small computer shop. It was a small shop yet three workers were already working there. He (the boss) gave me 30 TL for the day I worked but I quit the job there as well.

Which countries in Europe are better to live according to you?

All my friends have gone to Germany. The Germans are giving residence permit, so that was their reason to choose Germany.

How did they manage to go?

They were smuggled from the border. Some tried to go via Greece, but it did not work out. Some of them managed to cross but others were deported to Turkey again. But all of them illegally crossed the border.

Let us say that I am a Syrian and I want to cross the border illegally. What are my options?

Look, there are three ways. First, you can go by yourself with a map. But you need a smartphone to do it. If they catch you, you are sent back. The worst is, you can be beaten up by the Greeks. We have a friend living nearby, (his name is) He tried to go like that, but was beaten by the Greek police and came back.

Is his surname?

Yes, do you know him?

We made an interview with him before, but he never mentioned this and told us he never tried to cross the border?

(He smiled and made a head gesture indicating he didn't know why he didn't mention this to us). The second way is the sea. You do not even need to find a human smuggler. The only thing you need is a plastic boat. You can succeed, you may get lost, or you can find your own way. Once you make it to Greece, you need to take a train and head to Germany. Germans will accept you as refugees. The third way is to find a smuggler. He will be asking money from you. A lot of money. The money he will be asking will change accordingly with your luck on that day.

How can you find him?

There is a city near the border, what was it...Yes, Edirne. Go there. Anyone who wants to find a smuggler will find it somehow.

Do your friends in Germany have problems?

They had to stay in the camps for too long. Their salaries (amount of money provided by German government) are low. Some cannot obtain residence permits.

What happens to those that do not receive residence permits? Are they deported?

No they are not deported, but they have to wait there. They will receive it sooner or later but it is not known when. Also the laws there are different. According to our culture if your children make something bad you can punish them accordingly with the culture, you can slap them very slightly. But there if you touch the children (for punishment) they will immediately take the child from you and you won't be able to see your child again. Some of my friends had such experiences.

In Syrian culture is it normal to beat a child?

Sure. The child needs to be disciplined.

Are you afraid of facing cultural differences in Europe once you start to live there?

Honestly, I do not know. I can't communicate with my friends in Europe frequently. But I do not think so. Refugees are treated nicely there. Of course I will have difficulties, not in cultural means but I do not like Europe. There are too many gaps (he means "cultural degeneration") in Europe and I also do not like such cultural gaps there as I am a Muslim. That would be the only difficulty I will have. I can learn the language, it is easy.

What is the biggest advantage of Syrians that are able to have a refugee status in Europe?

It is not an advantage for a Syrian to be refugee in Europe; It is the advantage of Europe to have refugees. They take the youth and children. None of the Syrians that are married or born there will be returning to Syria. The young generation will stay in Europe which is better for Europeans as their population is aging.

Why is there no trend among refugees to go to the rich Arab countries?

Because once you are caught they will quickly throw you out of their borders. But if they catch you in Europe they give you a residence permit. This is why those who enter Germany immediately go to the police and inform them about their arrival as refugees. Sure in Greece and Arab countries things do not work like that. They deport you as soon as they understand you are a refugee.

Can't you just trick the people in Arab countries as you are a local citizen?

They will immediately understand from the accent we have. If I go there they will quickly realize I am either Syrian or Lebanese. Not much but still apart from the language we have differences in culture and traditions, too.

Will you adapt to the new conditions easier in Germany or Saudi Arabia?

I would adopt to the local life in Germany easier compared to Arab countries. But if they accept me I would be going to Saudi Arabia as well, at the end we speak the same language and share a similar culture. Actually if I had money I would go to Tokyo.

Why Tokyo? What is the difference between Europe and Japan?

Technology. It is my child childhood dream to go to Japan; I would like to go there because of that, not because I know Japan well. Probably refugees in Japan are also facing difficulties.

Would you be willing to return to Syria after the war?

I will. But even if I already established a fine and stable life here or in Europe, I would still be visiting Syria very frequently. Because at the end nowhere can be like your homeland.

INTERVIEW #9, 10 JULY 2016

İZMİT, 17, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am 17 years old. I am a Syrian Turkman. When the war broke out I was 13. After the evening prayer no one was going out and clashes were starting shortly after the prayer. We were sitting at home with fear while reading Quran. There were clashes in the morning as well but darkness was bringing more violence. We had to move to a lot of different houses. Once a bomb has fallen in the middle of our kitchen but did not explode, it was in our third house. The bomb was fired by the Assad's militias. If it exploded we would die. We were 10 people in the home and we had guests. I remember every single detail even now. We were always in the center of the clashes, even though we changed three different houses. We were moving our house to be away from the violence but the violence always found us at the end. So at last my father told that we must go to Turkey to stay away from this war. It was our only option, and we expected to return once the war ends.

Were you able to understand which groups did the opposition members belonged to?

Yes, from their beard and clothes I could understand who belonged to which group. Assad's men were obvious as they were putting Assad's pictures on their clothes.

How did you enter Turkey?

Illegally.

With the help of a human smuggler?

No. When we first decided to leave the border controls were very flexible. Gendarmeries saw us but turned a blind eye. So we crossed the border. But now they catch anyone who tries to cross without a passport and hand them over to Assad's men.

How did you learn Turkish, you are speaking the language just like a Turkish national?

My mom and dad already knew Turkish when we were in Syria. I also used to know a little bit. But when I started to sell Turkish bagels in the street I practiced and learned very quickly.

Did you directly come to İzmit?

We first arrived to Kilis and headed to Adana-Osmaniye. We stayed eight months in Osmaniye. There my father was working for 40 TL per day. We just could not survive with that amount. Sometimes my father was not able to get the money from his boss. My sister's father-in-law was living in İzmit and advised us to try İzmit as it offered more job opportunities. We decided to go to İzmit. Now my father works here. I am also working, just like my elder brother.

Were you studying in Syria?

I dropped the school in the 7th grade. Here I wanted to continue my studies but the schools refused to register me.

Why did you choose to work instead of insisting to study and find a way?

I have to work because if my father goes to work afterwards he must take three days to rest. I must help them.

Can you compare the conditions in Izmit and Osmaniye?

Rents in Osmaniye were more or less 500 TL. My father was getting 40 TL every day while my brother got 100 TL every week. Turkish government was also helping us in irregular periods. Here the rent is 200 TL. Izmit is more comfortable, you can quickly find a job. In Osmaniye it was really hard to find a job.

Where do you work now?

I am selling Turkish bagels. Sometimes, I also go to the teahouse for help where my elder brother works. My father is working in construction. My elder brother is married and lives in a separate home with his wife and his child. He used to live with us but the house was so crowded so they moved to their own house. Now we are living together with my parents, my sister and her four children. My sister's husband is in Syria, fighting with the opposition against Assad.

Do you have any friends here from the local Turks in your generation?

No, I do not have any friends. Only the son of my uncle. That is all. I leave the home in the morning, return in the evening. I just know this elder brother (pointing out the person who arranged this meeting).

How did you meet with him?

When I started to sell Turkish bagels some young local people started to chase me to stop selling in the neighborhood. They threatened me with knives. This older brother helped me when he saw the situation. Those who threatened me were complaining to him about the presence of Syrians. Another problem is when the local gypsies or Kurds are selling something they say that they are Syrians. This is why the locals do not like Syrians. They are perceived negatively because of that Kurds and Gypsies acting like Syrians and disturbing people. Now I do not say anymore that I am a Syrian. I am telling either I am from Antep or Ağrı. Once someone asked me where I was from and I told Ağrı. After five-six days he approached to me and asked the same question again. I did not recognize him so I told Antep that time. He became so angry thinking that I was making fun of him.

You are too young for that but did the Syrian government call your father or brother to the army? Or did the opponents ask you to join their ranks?

No, when we were in Syria it was not the case but now the government takes anyone they see in the streets to the army.

Do you have any family members who passed away because of the war?

Many of my relatives were wounded, but no one of them died.

Do you think Europe is better than Turkey for living?

Actually Turkey is better for us. We speak the same language since we are Turkmen. When we move there we won't be able to communicate with people. But Syrian Arabs here have hard times finding a job as they do not know Turkish. They also cannot learn Turkish, maybe it is because they don't want to learn. The conditions in Europe are better but still I prefer Turkey, we are comfortable here.

So you are happy here. But in what conditions you will think about leaving?

The road to Europe has no difference than death. If you decide to go, you have to go illegally. No matter what, I will not go to Europe. I will stay here. This is my homeland. I want to make my military duty here. Some of my relatives went to Europe from the Aegean Sea, but that road means 90% chance to die. If you really insist to go you must have a few people you know that are living there already.

Do you speak with your friends living in Europe as refugees?

Yes, they are generally comfortable. The governments gave them houses for accommodation and a monthly wage. My friends in my age are forbidden to work due to their age, and they enrolled to the schools in Europe. Regardless, Turkey is better for us.

Why is it better?

I have a strong connection to Turkey with my heart. I see Turkey as my motherland.

Would you like to return to school?

Yes, of course. But I have to decide, to study or to work. Now I have to work. Also I do not know the Turkish alphabet, I cannot read or write it.

How much do you make for selling Turkish bagels?

In average 50 TL every day. My grandfather does not work, he is 83 years old. My father needs to rest. My work helps them at least a little bit.

Does the Turkish state help you in different areas such as health and free-access to hospitals?

Yes, some of my relatives got sick. The state has given us a special card so we can visit the doctors for free. We can go to any hospital we want. Also we show these cards to the police when they are making routine ID checks.

Is it easier for you to get a Turkish citizenship since you are a Turkman?

It is better for us to get a citizenship and Turkmen are getting the citizenship easier than Arabs. When we are working without citizenship it is not possible to have insurance. We can't work in some sectors areas as well.

What about Arab countries? Would you be willing to live there?

Arab countries do not allow Syrians to enter their countries. They are dishonored. Why should I choose Arab countries while those refugees in Europe are treated nicely?

Will you be returning to Syria after the war?

Yes, we will. I was born there. Syria is my homeland. But if I can get a Turkish citizenship and make my military duty here, I will not return to Syria. Nowadays, Syria is shattered into pieces and it will not be normalized in the next 50 years.

INTERVIEW #10 & #11, 17 AUGUST 2016

İZMİT, 23, MALE

İZMİT, 21, MALE

Could you please tell me about your life in Syria?

A: We are from Maarat Numan. I finished the technical school and started working as carpenter for two years before I came to Turkey. My father died when I was 10 years old, so we were living in our uncle's home together with my brother, sister and mother.

B: I followed my brother's path for being a carpenter and started studying in a technical school but had to quit the school due to the war.

When did you encounter the war?

A: I have seen the bloody massacre of 2012 and the clashes between the Free Syrian Army and government forces. Is it enough?

B: We lost three family members in that massacre. Government forces randomly murdered people who were protesting on the streets.

I am really sorry to hear that. When and how did you come to Turkey?

A: We moved to Idlib during the battle for our city and returned when Assad's forces were driven out. We tried to survive but everything became really expensive.

B: People are still trying to buy food beyond everything and they do not buy furniture unless they really have to. Anyway, the problem was to find raw materials supplier. Otherwise the demand allowed us to survive more or less.

A: We left everything and our uncle is taking care of our shop now. It is not damaged yet. First we arrived to Antakya and stayed there for a few days. After that we came to İzmit. Actually we wanted to go to İstanbul but we could not find a place to rent with our financial situation. İzmit is cheaper.

Did you enter the country legally?

A: We wish we did so. However, the governmental services do not exist in our area. We never had a passport before the war so the only remaining option was to enter illegally.

Was it risky to enter illegally?

B: The border gate was only a few hundred meters away from the area we crossed.

What would have happened if the soldiers saw you?

A: Nothing. I have not heard anyone shot while crossing the border illegally until now.

Were you able to find a job in Turkey?

B: Yes, we are working in a local workshop. My brother is employed as a master as he is more experienced. Before finding this job I was a dishwasher and my brother was washing the cars. We were busy from day to night, still only got money to rent a room and to eat. Now things are better, we are getting the same salary as the Turkish workers.

A: The problem in Turkey is not about finding a job, but to find a fair boss that pays you in a nondiscriminatory sense. You can find a job but generally you have to agree for getting lower than the minimum salary. Our current boss is a nice person and pays whatever the Turkish workers are getting. Once we started to get the amount of Turkish workers' salaries, we were able to save some money.

You started to save money to go to Europe, right?

A: Exactly.

Which European country you would like to live in?

B: We both want to move to France. Our uncle taught us French when we were little. Our French is not perfect but at least it can help us at the beginning.

What about your sister and mother, would you be taking them with you?

A: Only after we are guaranteed to have legal documents in Europe. Otherwise there are no reasons for an adventure. For the moment they are having a simple but a secure life in Syria. If Assad raids the town they will quickly come to Turkey.

Can you please describe the "Europe" in your minds?

B: I dream of a life where I do not have to think for tomorrow. An easy life, respecting each other, a place where law and democracy exist...

A: Equality and justice. These are the things that come to my mind when we talk about Europe.

Have you ever thought about going to Jordan or Lebanon instead of Turkey?

A: Jordan is no better than Syria for us. Lebanon is overcrowded already and there are no opportunities for new refugees.

What are the advantages of Turkey compared to Arab countries?

A: It is geographically very large. There are endless options to work. People are generally nice and helpful. We also share the same religion.

B: You do not have to register yourself to anywhere. We heard that in Jordan you have to register to Jordanian government or United Nations. Here we can go, live and work anywhere we want.

Did you ever think about going back to Syria?

A: Sometimes I blame myself for leaving my mother and sister and I want to return.

B: I do not regret leaving and I do not want to return. What can we do if we return? Pay 50 dollars for one kilogram of salt? Wait for another jet flying over us and pray not to die? It is over. Syria is over. Maybe someday there can be a "New Syria" but nothing will be the same again. I am sorry for my family in Syria. If we go to Europe we will unite as a family again and if we stay in Turkey we will unite as well. But we will never live under Assad regime again. The blood of my family members was spilled by him and we will never live under him again.

INTERVIEW #12, 17 AUGUST 2016

İZMİT, 35, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

Before coming to Turkey I was living in Damascus. I am a teacher of mathematics. I am married and have two sons.

When was the first time you witnessed the war in Syria?

One morning I arrived to the school and could not find my students in the class. Soon after I learned why they were absent I realized that there will not be a life for us in Syria. My two students were caught in the cross-fire and died while returning from school to home. Families of the students did not want to send their children to school after hearing the news and for that reason my class was totally empty. I told myself “it is time to leave Syria”.

How did you come to Turkey?

First we thought about going to Jordan. But when we contacted with the people we know who have been there we dropped that idea.

Why did you abandon that idea? Also, why was Turkey not the first country that came to your mind?

We abandoned because we learned that life in Jordan was very expensive. We also heard that Syrians living in the camps were living in very poor conditions and Jordanians were not that kind towards them. We first thought about Jordan because of the common language. Turkey did not come to our minds because we didn't know Turkish. The different language was worrying for us. It is really hard to be left alone with your two children in a country that you do not know its language.

Are you working here? You expressed that you are a teacher. Can you carry on with your occupation in Turkey?

Yes I am working, but regretfully not as a teacher. I do not have such a chance. I am serving tea in a parking area for lorries. I get 50 liras per day.

Is that amount enough for the livelihood?

No, never. I have two little children. One is 4 and the other one is 6 years old. They need to have good nourishment. They need to live in good conditions and I can't provide it with the money I earn here. Exactly for this reason I want to go to Europe. The people are nice here but the refugee policies are bad. As a teacher I must serve tea to survive. They are not using the possibilities they have. There are many qualified, educated Syrians like me but they are all working in the areas where it is irrelevant with their professions in Syria.

Will you be able to work as a teacher when you make it to Europe?

I do not know. That is not what I am talking about. Probably not teaching but I can be a translator for Arabic language. I can make accounting. I can work as an ordinary white-collar worker. But not as a tea-maker. Europe dignifies people.

Aren't you afraid of crossing the border illegally?

I am afraid. The things I see in the televisions, the things we heard make me really afraid. Especially it is too hard to cross the border with two children. But I must take such a risk for their future.

How will you cross the border, from the sea?

No. Never. Neither I nor my wife knows how to swim. Even if we know I think that will not help much in a sinking boat. For that reason the sea is the last option for us. We will cross the border from the land.

Will you get help from someone?

Yes, there is a man that we are communicating with via internet. He will take us to the other side for 1000 dollars per person. He told that he will be taking 500 dollars for each child. We will spend all the money we saved for that.

Are you afraid of not adapting to Europe?

No. As I told you coming to Turkey was also scaring to us due to language problems. But we got over with that fear. Both of us know English. When we arrived in Turkey we had no advantage of knowing the Turkish language.

Do you want to go to England?

I do not know which country it will be. But no, I was not talking about England. Nearly everyone in Europe knows English, what I meant was that.

Do you have any relatives or friends that have been to Europe?

Yes, I have few friends. One of them is in Norway and the other one is in Germany. My friend in Norway is still waiting in the camp. The other one in Germany has established his own life already. He had a lot of saved money. For that reason he is more comfortable.

Why did you not think about going to rich Arab countries?

I am telling you, if I had a chance that would be my first choice. But they are not accepting us, the Syrians. There is also no way to go illegally.

If the war ends, will you return Syria?

For sure. It is my homeland. I am a teacher. I can continue my life from where I left.

INTERVIEW #13, 8 MAY 2016

İZMİT, 70, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am a Turkman from Aleppo. Both of my parents are Turkmen. I was born and raised there, I was going to die there but this war broke out. I have a son and two daughters. My wife passed away a long time before the war. One of my daughters is married and living in Syria now with her children and her husband. We came to Turkey together with my son and daughter who is divorced. My other daughter has two children and my son has a wife and two children. One of my grandsons is also married and his wife is also staying with us. We all live in this house.

How was your life in Syria?

We were farming. I was born and lived in a village. My son left the village after getting married. Later my wife passed away. However my daughters were married in nearby villages and were living in those villages. We had a nice life. Later my daughter divorced and started to live with us with her two children. I was spending my time with my grandchildren. What else can you do in old age...We had a house, animals and a field. That was sufficient for us.

Why did you leave your village and move to Turkey?

My son was away from the village. If he was, he would probably realize about the war sooner or later, but a bomb has fallen on the factory that he was working at. His friends died and some of them, including my son, were wounded. Later he came back and told me it was time to leave. This war will reach everywhere, to all the villages and cities. At first I didn't want to move. I asked what we were going to do about the animals. After a while I accepted. We sold them off for a cheap price. Now my son says with that money we will be going to Europe. They will be adding on some more money for going to Europe. I don't know.

Wouldn't you like to go to Europe?

Dearie, I am already 70 years old. I did not leave my village before, and without this war I would never be leaving. Why would I want to go? I am Turkish, Turkman. I know Turkish. Nevertheless those lands look unfamiliar to me. I miss the lands that I grew. God knows how Europe will make me feel.

Apart from you, can your children and grandchildren adapt to the life in Europe?

I cannot adapt. I even could not adapt here but I have hardworking children. They will work, and make Europeans to sympathize with them. Nevertheless, I wish there was a possibility to stay here. If not Syria, this is also my homeland.

How do you earn your living here? Are there any family members working?

My son had an operation on his leg in Syria. He had an occupational accident. He became permanently disabled. Both of my grandsons, one of them is married, are working. My grandchildren from my daughter are minors. They need to go to a school but they cannot.

Why?

Well, we do not have money. Don't you see how many people are living in this house with two rooms?

Have you ever tried to go to another city?

Here my grandchildren can find jobs easier. If one of them leaves the job the other one can keep on working. What are we going to do in another city? One of them is 25 years old and the other one is 17 years old. They have no profession. The younger one did not even manage to finish high school as the war broke out.

What are they doing now?

The older one is working in a house. He gets 50 liras per day. The younger one is selling Turkish bagels. Wherever he finds a work he runs after it. Sometimes he replaces his brother in the teahouse during the evenings.

How much do you pay for rent?

600 liras.

How do the people treat you? Do they see you as Syrians or as Turks?

As a Syrian Turk. Syrian Arabs are weird people. No matter what the Turks do, they keep on complaining. This is also our homeland. For that reason we have no right to complain. People are trying to help. They do not give their houses for rent to Syrian Arabs but we can live in this house.

Why do they not rent their houses?

Because they really use the homes in a bad way. Yesterday a Syrian family left the home they rented from the neighboring building. They even broke the sink. There were no tiles left in the bathroom. We are also crowded but we use the house well.

Which European country does your family want to go to?

They want to go to the Netherlands.

Why?

I have been told that my grandson has a friend there. He may help us. Actually he will not be helping but whatever...They are afraid to go to a country where they do not know anyone.

If the war in Syria ends, would you like to return?

Of course, Dearie. I told you, it is my motherland, my land. I do not want to live anywhere else.

Did you receive any news about your home? Is it still undamaged?

Yes, it is not damaged. But I have been told that the village is nearly empty. Only the elders without any relatives remained together with women. If nothing happens to my house, I will return. I want to die in my village.

INTERVIEW #14, 2 AUGUST 2016

ESKIŞEHİR, 27, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I do not want to give my personal details but I was living in Maaret El Numan, Idlib before the war with my wife and three children. I had a good job, life and family. Now there is nothing left in my life. I lost everything.

If this question will not cause any discomfort for you, could you tell me how the war started and how it affected your life?

There were lots of injustices in the country. If you are from Baath Party, you can reach everything. But if you say a single word about Assad, you could starve to death. We rebelled against that.

So you were an opponent?

Yes, I was an opponent. I participated in the conflict. We had no other choice. Assad didn't offer us an alternative. I lost my wife and my three children. They were murdered by Assad Forces. My family, my life... They took away everything from me.

When did you decide to come to Turkey?

After losing everything. I had nothing left.

How did you cross the border?

Near the fields from Antakya. Illegally, of course. First I stayed in a refugee camp then a friend of mine said there is a job for me in Eskişehir and I came here.

Why did you choose to come to Turkey?

Because Turkey was my only option. I wanted to escape from that hell.

Where are you working now?

In a lumber mill. I did not work in another place.

So you are satisfied with your job?

Yes, very much. My boss and colleagues are good people. My salary is enough for a lone wolf. I do not have to pay rent as they allowed me to stay in the factory.

But you still want to go to Europe, why?

Yes, I still want to go to Europe. It's not about economy or cultural problems. I like Turkey and Turkish people. They are kind towards us. But I am afraid here. Syria is very close to Turkey. Syrian intelligence, Assad Forces can find me. You know that I was an opponent. I always live with this fear.

Do you believe that they will not be able to find you in Europe?

Yes, because Europe has stronger laws compared to Turkey.

Is that your only reason to go to Europe?

Actually not. I am comfortable here. But it is... I cannot move forward here. I cannot make a family again. I think I may do that in Europe. There are many opportunities in Europe.

How do you plan to go to Europe? From the sea or...

Yes, from the sea. It is a cheaper way and I found some contacts to go.

Human smugglers?

Yes.

Do you have any friends in Europe?

No, I do not have.

Which country would you like to go to?

Germany.

Why?

I do not know. I just heard German government is sensitive and tolerant for refugees.

There are some rich Arab countries....

No, no, no. I do not want to go to any other Arab countries.

OK. So, do you think you will have adaptation problems in Europe about your culture or religion?

I do not think so. Because I believe that I am an open minded person. I can adapt easily anywhere.

Do you think about going back to Syria after the war?

No, never. I have really bad memories about there. I certainly do not think about turning back there.

INTERVIEW #15, 2 AUGUST 2016

ESKİŞEHİR, 24, FEMALE

Could you tell me about your life in Syria?

Before the war I was studying at the University of Damascus in the Department of English Language. I was living with my mother. I also have an older brother but he is married so he was living with his family. He is a translator and his wife is a chemist. They had a pharmacy in Damascus. When the conflicts started we couldn't understand what was happening. Then some injured people started to come to my brother's pharmacy asking for help. His wife and the other employees were trying to help all the people. But it started to be dangerous; if you help someone who supports Assad, they were accusing you for supporting Assad. Or if you help opponents, you could be an opponent in the eyes of the people. This situation was becoming dangerous for us. We were not safe. This wasn't the only danger. Finally the rockets started to fall on our neighborhood. After this incident we sat together with my brother and his family and started to think for the solution of this problem. We decided to come to Turkey. I was a student at those times but I could not go to my university because of the violence in the streets. I had to leave the university and came to Turkey to be safe.

When and how did you come to Turkey?

About two years ago. We came here by the legal way. We had passports, so we came by plane to Adana. We had no idea about the cities in Turkey. We stayed in Adana for 3 or 4 months. Then my brother said Eskişehir is a safe and modern city, far from the border. We thought we could find a job and have a regular life in Eskişehir. Also it was on my mind to continue my studies in Eskişehir.

What happened after?

We moved to Eskişehir and my brother found a job. His first job was not related with his profession. It was in a pet shop. Now he is working in a translation agency and learned Turkish. Sometimes I do Arabic-English translation if he finds me an offer. My brother's wife does not work because she gave birth in Turkey. They have a baby now.

Why do you want to go to Europe?

Because the salary of my brother is not enough for all of us. We are living in the same home all together. They have a baby now and this home is really small. I want to study in a university. That is not possible in Turkey. There is no government support and if I want to live a good life and study at a university, I need to have money, and for the money, I need to work. I cannot do both at the same time. University was my dream. If we go to Europe I can live with my mother and study at a university.

Which country do you want to go to?

Actually I want to go to England. But education is not free for the colleges there. You need to pay tuition fee. I do not know the status of refugees in sense of education. England was my dream since my childhood, but going to Germany is the nearest target for me now. I have also some friends who went to Germany and they are happy there. They are telling that the German government provided them a home and economic support.

Do you have any other relatives in Europe?

Yes, we have a cousin in Austria. They are also happy there.

Do your friends or relatives have any problems in Europe?

They have some minor problems about the bureaucratic documents, but I do not know the details. A friend said that in Germany some people do not want refugees and they have problem with this matter. Still, they are happy in Europe.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

I do not know. There are some options but I want to go by legal means. My brother says that it is so hard to get visa. But I want to try that first.

If you cannot get visa, which way will you try?

I am afraid from the sea. We have a baby, so it is too dangerous. The other way is to cross the land border. We will try going from Edirne to Bulgaria.

Do you have any contacts or will you try by yourself?

You can find a contact if you go to Edirne. Or you can try to find them from the internet. That is the easiest part.

Have you ever thought of going to rich Arab countries? Like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar?

No, because they do not allow the refugees. You need to get a visa and getting visa is really hard if you are a Syrian. Money opens the door, but if I had money, why should I leave here?

What are the differences between living in Saudi Arabia and Germany for you?

If you go to Germany, a few years later you can live like local people. You can adapt or people can get used to you. But in Saudi this is not like that. If you are not a Saudi, you are a second class person. And for a woman living in Saudi Arabia is the same thing as living in a jail. You simply think that we are Arabs and they are also Arabs. But there are big differences between us. For example, in Syria a woman can go to a university or can work. But in Saudi it is not possible. I have dreams. I do not want to stay at home and just raise a child. If we go to Saudi, I cannot study at university, I cannot walk in the streets alone.

Do you believe that you will face problems with the Europeans because of your culture or religion?

I do not know. From my side I do not think so. Because religion is not a matter about human relations for me. I can adapt to the European culture. I can learn their language instantly. Also I know good English. Western culture is not something unusual to me.

Do you want to go back to Syria if the war ends?

I have never thought about this. Seriously. But I do not want to go back now. I do not believe anything will change and get better in Syria after the war ends. Even if everything will finish, we do not have anything left there now. Our home and my brother's pharmacy were bombed. Nothing left behind. But sometimes I miss my old life. Syria is our land and I want to see Syria again. Maybe we can go just to visit if the war ends. But that would be all.

INTERVIEW #16, 2 AUGUST 2016

ESKİŞEHİR, 26, FEMALE

Could you tell me about yourself?

I was born in Homs and studied at high school there. After high school I got married and then I had 3 children. My husband was an engineer. I have never worked since coming to Turkey. I have 3-year old twin sons and a 5-year old daughter.

When did you witness the war in Syria? When was the first time you encountered it?

When I saw the war for the first time, we were nearly going to die with my daughter. I was pregnant and my daughter was a baby girl. We were waiting for my husband to meet in the city center. Then something that I still cannot understand happened. Suddenly I heard guns fired, we were caught in the crossfire. Before this event I have also heard bombs, shots when I was at home. Clashes were generally starting in the nights. But this time it started in the afternoon and we were in the middle of it. After that I decided that nothing would change for better in Syria. So I convinced my husband and we moved to Turkey. Also my brother helped us as he was already in Turkey. I was pregnant when we came here. My twins were born in Eskişehir.

Was the medical service free for you?

Yes, we did not pay any money for the hospital. We have a refugee card and we can get services from every governmental hospital with this card. But the medicine is not free and it is really expensive.

Why did you choose Turkey, apart from your brother being already here?

As it was the only option. We saw it as a temporary port to arrive Europe.

Which cities you have been to in Turkey? Why did you decide to live in Eskişehir?

We have only been to Antakya and Eskişehir, we did not see other cities. Again, Eskişehir was the only option because of my brother living here already.

Have you ever thought about working here?

Actually I am working, but not in a shop or something. I am doing stitching and knitting at home and sell them. There are some shops which buy my handicrafts.

Is your husband working?

Yes. He is an electrical engineer but he did not find a job related to his profession. He is working at constructions and installing electric lines. He has a basic job and the salary is not enough for three children.

Do you want to leave Turkey because of this reason?

Yes. I also think about my children's future. In Turkey, if you want to live in a good house, you need to pay too much. Last winter, my babies were always sick because we are living in an old house and there is no heating system. Our economic situation is not good enough to rent a good home. My husband cannot work as an engineer because of the language problem.

Which country would you like to go to?

We would like to go to Britain because my husband can speak English and I also know some English. We are thinking that our children can receive a good education there and my husband can find a job related to his profession. In Turkey, neither government nor the people help you. Salaries are not much. If you are Syrian, you need to work as a basic worker and you are cheap labor force for Turkish bosses. We do not want to live a rich life. We just want to live like when we were in Syria. Here we are just refugees and we are living in bad conditions. There are rats in my house. Who wants to live a life like this?

Why are the refugees' salaries less than Turkish citizens?

Because we are obligated to work. We cannot choose a work and say "Oh, I refuse your offer, sorry". Also Syrians do not have insurance. So, we are a cheaper workforce compared to Turks. Turkish workers do not work without insurance or with less salary than the minimum limits. So, most of the Turkish people are saying that "We do not want Syrians, we cannot find job because of them". We also do not want to work with such conditions. This is not our fault. There are no control mechanisms to check the conditions of the working places by government. I think the authorities know everything. But they are shutting their eyes to these. I do not know the reason but Turkish people's reaction about this matter is very unnecessary. They need to stand against the government, not against Syrians.

Did you face any discrimination from Turkish people?

No, I did not. But my husband always hears complaints about Syrians.

Are these complaints like harassment?

No, but they are really disturbing.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

I do not know. I need to think about safety of my children. Because of this I do not want to go from the sea. I am afraid of it. We heard always bad news about the Syrians who tried the sea. We may try going through Edirne but we need save some money for the smugglers. Legal way is more expensive and does not have a guarantee. You may not get a visa at the end.

OK, imagine that you cross the Turkish border and you are in Europe. What is your plan to go to Britain?

I do not know. Britain is just our wish. Any European country is fine to go.

Do you have any contact with your relatives or friends who went to Europe?

Yes, my cousin is in Sweden with his family and I have a friend in Norway.

Do they have any problem in these countries?

Yes, my cousin is still in the refugee camp. They do not know what will happen. The government can deport them. My cousin is learning the language on the camp. They are interviewed by authorities regularly.

The majority of European population is Christian. Why do you prefer to live in Europe instead of the Muslim countries?

Europe is wealthier than Muslim countries.

There are also rich Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar?

Yes, but these rich Arab countries do not want refugees. They do not give visa. You cannot cross their borders illegally. If you enter the country illegally they can directly deport you. In addition to that our culture is different. Yes, we are all Arabs but the culture is different. In Saudi, women cannot live liberally. There are hardened Islamic rules. Syria is more liberal than those countries. For example, if we have chance to go to Saudi Arabia, I will refuse it. Every woman can understand me. You (asking the interviewer), as a woman, would like to live in Saudi Arabia?

Do you think you will have problems in Europe due to your religion and your culture?

Probably not. In Syria I also had some friends who were Christians. My husband was working under a Christian boss. I believe even if I cannot adapt to the culture or a new country, my children will do. They are too young. They will study in Europe and they will grow within the European culture.

Do you want to go back to Syria if the war ends?

No, I do not want to go back. I believe nothing will be the same. I do not want to raise my children in post-war Syria. They deserve a better life.

INTERVIEW #17, 3 AUGUST 2016

ESKİŞEHİR, 29, FEMALE

Could you please tell me about yourself? How was your life in Syria?

I was born in Syria, Aleppo. I am a Turkman. Before the war, I was living in Aleppo with my husband and daughter.

How did you engage with the war in Syria?

There were some protests at the beginning. Opponents started to protest Assad. Then supporters of Assad organized a counter-protest. Then some people fired their guns. We were running with the panic. Still I remember every single detail on that day. There were dead people on the ground. I started to see ruined buildings the next week...

How did you come to Turkey?

Through the land border and illegally. We had no passports at that moment. My husband is Turkman too, and he speaks much better Turkish compared to me. When we told the border guards we are Turkmen they were really helpful. First we stayed in a camp for two months but the conditions were really bad for my 4-year old daughter. Some of my husband's relatives were in Eskişehir and we managed to communicate with them, leaving the camp afterwards.

How about the job opportunities here, were you able to find a job?

At first we had no idea, but we thought about our relatives so even if my husband were not able to find a job quickly we would at least have a place to stay. We lived all together for 5 months, my husband, my daughter, me, my mother-in-law, my father-in-law and my husband's relatives. We were nine people living in the same house.

Why did your relatives decide to go to Turkey before you?

Their house was bombed. Luckily, they survived as they were all in the city when their house was bombed.

Do you have other close relatives living in Turkey now?

Yes, my husband's grandfather and brother with her wife and children are also in Eskişehir. My sister is in İzmit and my brother is in Kayseri at the moment.

Do you have regular contacts with them?

Sure, we speak every day.

Do they plan to leave Turkey as well?

My brother has no such plans but my sister and her husband are thinking about that.

So your brother is happy in Turkey, right?

Yes, because he has got a good job and he made some good friends in Kayseri. He is working in a factory. As his Turkish is very good, he is working as a translator in the factory as well, making translations between the Syrian workers and the chiefs. The factory sells its products to Middle Eastern countries and he also helps with the communications in export/import relations. He even went to a business trip as a translator once.

What about your sister, what is her motivation to leave Turkey?

Same as mine. Here is like our second homeland because we are Turks. But the money that my husband gets is not

enough. We had a small shop in Aleppo. Nothing is left now. Here, he is working in a store as night guard. His salary is just 1300 TL. Our rent is 500 TL. The owner says it will be increasing after the New Year. We have a child. Electricity and water bills are really expensive. Every month 500-600 TL goes for kitchen expenses. My daughter must start primary school this year but I do not know how we can bear the costs of her school. Education is free in Turkey but she needs notebooks and clothes. Public transportation is also a problem for us. We are living in a suburb. We are Turkish but the government doesn't give us citizenship. If they give us Turkish citizenship, we may stay here. But the conditions are really hard for us. I have to think of my daughter's future.

Do you think her future will be better if you live in Europe?

Yes, because we can earn more money than we earn in Turkey. European education system is also better than any other countries. There are so many Syrians here. Unless we underline we are Turkmen the people simply treat us like Arabs, but in Europe there is freedom and equality.

Which country would you like to go to?

I do not know. All European countries are fine for us. After crossing the border, we will apply for asylum.

Do you have a "strategy" to cross the border?

We will try every way.

Even the sea?

Yes.

Is it dangerous?

Yes, but if you have enough money, the smuggler will provide better conditions.

Do you have any contact with someone who went to Europe before? Any friends or relatives?

No, I do not have.

Will you start searching for a job as soon as you make it to Europe?

I cannot work because I have a child but my husband can work anywhere. We heard that European governments provide jobs to refugees and if they do not work, governments provide salary.

Conditions are good in Europe, but what about culture or religion? Do you think you will adapt to European culture and daily routine?

Yes, why not? Religion is of course important but we know that Europe is liberal about such issues. We can practice Islam freely there.

There are some rich Arab countries like Saudi Arabia or Qatar. Why do you not want to go to those countries? You can speak Arabic, so you will not have language problems.

We also do not have language problem in Turkey. These Arab countries are rich but we are not Arabs. We are Turkmen and we just share the same religion with them. Besides, they do not give visa for Syrians. They do not accept Syrians to their countries.

Do you want to go back to Syria if the war ends?

Yes, of course. We know how to live and survive in Syria. However Europe, even Turkey are different systems for us. Syria is our land. If the war ends, we will go back to Syria.

INTERVIEW #18, 3 AUGUST 2016

ESKIŞEHİR, 36, MALE

How was your life in Syria?

I had dime stores in Damascus, Syria. My brother and I were working together. We had a good life and lots of estates. I am single but my brother is married and has two children. I was living with my parents. They are very old but my father enjoys good health. He was helping us in our shop from time to time. But you know, war destroyed all we had, our homes, stores, cars...Every single thing we had...

Did any of your relatives get wounded or die because of the war?

Luckily no, but many of my friends are dead now. Some of them had nothing to do with the war. Randomly someone bombs your home or shoots you, and it's the end. Some of my relatives including my brother were also wounded.

So you decided to go to Turkey in order to stay away from violence?

When we realized that death was becoming an ordinary concept around us, we decided about that. My brother was caught between two gunfire when he was at our shop. A bullet penetrated his arm. After this two of our stores were bombed. We sold whatever was left and moved to Turkey. We had valid passports and enough money to survive for some time in Turkey, so we booked plane tickets and came here.

Why did you prefer to live in Eskişehir?

Eskişehir is a modern city and we decided to open a shop in Turkey. I also had a Turkish friend in this city. We met with him in Saudi Arabia. He was there for business. So, I called him at once when we came to Turkey. He said that he still lives in Eskişehir and offered me help to start business.

Did you open a store in Eskişehir?

Yes, we opened it with my Turkish friend. It is like the stores which we had in Syria, the concept is similar. We know this job very well. My friend helps us. He is also our partner, he helps us about bureaucratic matters.

What are you selling in your store?

In Syria, we were supplying our products from the Far East. In this store we are selling similar products; cheap and practical things, plastics, cheap clothes, kitchen wares. We have a wide product range.

It means you came to Turkey with capital?

Yes. We had capital when we were coming here. But we lost most of our capital in the war.

Do you want to leave Turkey?

No, I do not want to leave but my brother thinks about going to Europe with his wife and children.

Why? You have a business and your own store here.

Yes, but we are living here together in the same home, my mother, father, me, my brother, his wife and children. All of us have to live in the same house. We are not that poor, but the money is not enough to rent another home. And we spent all our money to open this store. My brother thinks he can find better opportunities in Europe and his children can get good education. His wife's family is in Germany now. They are also trying to convince my brother to go to Europe.

Does he want to go to Germany too?

Yes. Actually his wife wants that. You know, she is the boss in the family.

How will they go - legally or illegally?

They are trying to get visa but it will not be easy. So they are thinking to go by illegal ways.

From the sea?

No. That is too dangerous.

So, how will they go?

They will try to go from the Balkan route.

Are you worried for them? What do your parents think about this?

I am, of course, worried for their safety. It is a dangerous way. Our mother and father do not want them to leave. But we cannot force them to stay. We will just give them financial support. If they have enough money they can be safer. If you pay more money to smugglers, they provide you better possibilities for crossing the border.

Do you have any contact with Syrians who went to Europe?

I do not have, but as I said my brother has contact with his wife's family.

Are they happy in Germany?

Yes, they are. They have jobs, enough money, accommodation, whatever is necessary to have a basic life at the beginning. The German government helps them for their children's education. There were some document problems which were solved recently; that is what I heard. They are really satisfied now.

Why did your brother not try to go to rich Arab countries? Like Saudi Arabia, Qatar?

These countries don't give visa.

Refugees also cannot get visa from European countries. Why do they not try to go to these countries by illegal ways and register themselves as asylum seekers?

They are rich countries, okay, but they do not share their wealth with refugees. They see us as a problem instead of being those in need. Adding to that, we are not just "someone", we are Arabs, Muslims, still they do not care about anything but themselves.

As a Syrian, do you think you will have problems in Europe because of your background?

In the countries you mention (Arab countries) yes, but in Europe, no. I do not like the European culture unlike my brother, but let us be honest: They see you as a human. They are also liberal and unless you do something really wrong, they do not care where you are from or what your religion is. Thinking about adaptation to European culture annoys me when I think of my nephews may grow like Christians.

Do you want to go back to Syria if the war ends? Or your brother, will he return back, even if he would be living in Europe already?

I do not know. It all depends on the business here. I will of course never lose my ties with Syria but it all depends on how the war will end. My brother will probably stay in Europe, he just dreams about Europe and nothing else. He is too much determined to leave Syria behind; probably he is having a worse trauma than me.

INTERVIEW #19, 3 AUGUST 2016

ESKIŞEHİR, 19, FEMALE

Could you tell me about your life in Syria?

I was born in Latakia, Syria. I am 19 years old. When I was 12 years old I lost my parents in a traffic accident. I have an elder brother who is 23 years old. Our uncle and his wife raised us. I was studying in the high school when the war started. I was not able to finish but my brother has a high school degree. He wants to continue his studies but you know, it is not possible here. I also want to finish high school, but as I cannot go back to Syria and bring my middle-school diploma they refused to register me for the education system here.

When did you confront the war?

I have never seen the war in literal means. Latakia was generally silent compared to the other cities in Syria. Maybe except Tartus and the coastal areas, Latakia is the least effected city from the war.

So, why did you decide to come in Turkey?

Because my brother was in danger and we came to Turkey.

What kind of a danger?

The government called all of the young men in Syria to arms. He did not want to join the army. Because he was thinking that this war was nonsense and this was not his war to fight for.

Then you came to Turkey with him?

Yes. We came together. He did not want to leave me in Syria alone. I have my uncle and his family but my brother did not want to leave me behind.

How did you come to Turkey? From which way?

We came from the Syrian-Turkish border in Antakya. Illegally, of course.

Why are you saying “of course”? Couldn't you get a passport from the authorities? Or was the border closed at that time?

They would never give my brother a passport; instead they would take him to the army once we applied for the passport.

Why did you choose Eskişehir to live?

I have no idea. It was my brother's decision.

Have you ever been in another city in Turkey?

No, I have never seen the other cities. I have just been to Antakya and Eskişehir. We are here for 2.5-3 years and I have never seen any other part of Turkey.

How did you learn Turkish?

On the street. I was working in a textile factory. There, I had some Turkish friends and they helped me to learn.

Which jobs did you work before?

Always in the textile sector. This is my second job in this sector, though.

Can you explain your work there?

I am working here with a tailor, you know her. She helped me when we met and likes me as her daughter. I do not earn much money but I am happy there as she is really a good person. She also helped my brother to find a job. In the first factory we worked at they did not pay our salaries regularly. We were working together with my brother. Now he is working in a market thanks to her again.

Why do you want to leave Turkey? Is that your mutual decision with your brother?

Yes, we decided together. We want to leave because he wants to study at a university. I want to live a comfortable life. Here, my boss is really a good woman. But she also earns some little money from her shop. She just gave me a job because she understands what we are going through.

Does Europe mean a “comfortable life” for you?

Yes, of course. In Europe government will help us. My brother can register to a university. I can finish my high school. Here in Turkey we need to work. Yes, in Europe we also need to work to live. But there we can work and study together.

Which country would you like to go to?

I do not have any idea. It does not matter. We just want to have a good life in Europe.

So will Greece or Bulgaria be fine? They are very close to the border as well.

No, no. I did not mean that. I mean Germany, France, Sweden or other countries. Not Greece or Bulgaria. It is better to stay here than staying in Greece.

But Greece and Bulgaria are in the European Union as well?

But they are not European countries?

OK, so which route would you follow to go to Europe?

I do not know, again it is up to my brother. But the sea, no. I do not know how to swim and I have seen so many drowned people while trying to cross the sea. My brother insists it is the better option compared to walking all the way from Bulgaria to Germany. Turkey and Europe has agreed about the refugees and I think we can legally go now.

Do you have any contact with you friends or relatives who are living in Europe?

No, we do not have any contact with them.

Why do you not want to live in Arab countries which have a good economy?

We want that. But how can we enter those countries? They do not give visas to Syrians.

Europe also does not give visa easily?

Yes, but there are some illegal ways to go to Europe. But for rich Arab countries, this is not possible.

Do you think you will have some problems about your culture or religion in Europe, where European countries are dominantly Christian?

I do not think so. We want to live in Europe. So we need to obey the rules of their countries. If their culture is different, then we will try to follow their laws. They cannot force us to change our religion, but if there is something that we need to obey, we will obey. Just like here.

Do you want to return to Syria if the peace comes?

No, we just have our uncle related with Syria. We may visit Syria for them but I do not want to live in Syria again.

INTERVIEW #20, 3 AUGUST 2016

GAZIANTEP, 35, FEMALE

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I am from Syria, Qamishli city. I had a nice, simple childhood living together with my relatives. We were poor, but it was not a problem compared to our conditions today.

What was the difference of facing economic challenges here in Turkey and in Qamishli?

Actually it is very similar, we had no identity cards there and we have no status here. We were second class there, we are second class here. When we needed to go hospital there we could not do it like the other locals (Arabs) because of lacking citizenship. We cannot reach all the services here because we do not have a status. But at least it was Syria, we were born there, we knew how to find a way to survive there. Here, we are complete strangers.

When did you come to Turkey?

Two years ago.

After two years, do you still feel as a stranger?

Yes.

What makes you feel like a stranger here?

Language, life, people, system. Even the weather. I still cannot adapt.

When was the first time you were confronted with the war?

I did not see any clashes. Just heard some shootings but our area was generally calm.

So why did you decide to move to Turkey?

Because economy was getting even worse. Also I told you, we do not have citizenship there.

What do you mean by that?

We are Kurdish, to many of us in Qamishli the Syrian regime did not give citizenship. Baath Party does not want us in Syria.

How were you able to cross the border?

By walking, simply.

Were there any border guards?

The experienced people helped us and we crossed from a weakly controlled part.

Where did you go after that?

We went to Urfa. It was better than here (Gaziantep) but there were no jobs.

Where do you work here?

I am not working, my husband and brother are working as junkman. They collect some iron, copper, or something valuable and sell it.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

Because we do not have any status. We are neither Turkish, nor Syrian citizens. If we go to Europe we will be citizens and will work there.

Do you know how the procedure works for refugees to have citizenship or residence permit in Europe?

No, but many Syrians got it. I know, I read from the social media.

Do any of your family members live in Europe currently?

No, but some of them are trying to go in these days. They will try their chances next week.

How will they go? Legally?

No, of course not. They have no passports. They were trying to find some way in the West (Western Turkey).

Do you think you will be faced with any difficulties because of your religion or culture in Europe?

Why? They do not have people like Assad. They care about human life. Why should they make problems with my religion?

Which country you would like to live in Europe?

I do not know. My relatives will go there and will contact us and we will follow wherever they are.

Do you ever think about going back to Syria? Let us assume the war ends tomorrow, would you be going back?

Never.

Why?

You do not understand. I am repeating, we were not citizens there. We were nothing. We were like Ghosts. Living there, but ignored. I do not want to live in a place like that.

INTERVIEW #21, 6 JUNE 2016

GAZİANTEP, 21, MALE

Can you please tell about yourself?

I am from Idlib city. I finished the high school and started preparing for university, but you can guess the rest. The war came, everything turned upside down.

How did you feel the war for the first time, how did it affect you?

Things started in Idlib and we were quickly drawn into the war. You could not avoid it. First the protests, then clashes and violence followed by the distribution of arms which I still do not know how arrived to the city and were distributed so quickly.

How did you decide to leave Idlib?

We did not decide, we had to. Everyday some bullets were breaking the windows of our home or our neighbours' home. You cannot go even to market for the whole day when clashes were dense. So we had to leave.

What happened to your home?

Some of my friends are still looking after it for us, but it is already plundered. No windows and door as well. It is like only a construction. But still we are lucky, many of the houses are in much worse conditions.

So you still think about returning one day?

I want to, but I do not know if I can. It is very hard in such conditions.

What if the war ends?

The same. I would like to return but where to work? How to survive? It is not the same Syria anymore. Okay, let us say the war ends. So what kind of a Syria we will have? Assad will remain? What about al-Nusra? What about Jihadists?

What did you do after leaving Idlib?

We first went to Damascus. It was good at the beginning but it quickly got overcrowded the next year. Prices increased while wages decreased. So we left to Turkey.

How did you cross the border?

From the border gate. They did not ask for visa and it was quick, without any problem.

Which cities you have been to in Turkey?

I visited Mersin and Antakya.

So, what about your life here in Gaziantep? Are you happy?

I am happy. I have a job at a small workplace. At the beginning it was difficult, but learning Turkish changed many things and made life easier.

How does it make life easier?

You start to defend your rights. You understand what your boss wants. You are not afraid of the miscommunication.

You are happy but you also expressed your will to go Europe. What are the reasons for that and where would you like to go?

I want to get a citizenship. If Turkey grants me a citizenship why should I leave here? I am used to here, I like the people, and the more I stay and get better at Turkish the easier to find opportunities. But without citizenship I cannot stay here. I want to be equal.

Do you think you will get a citizenship in Europe?

I will try and be stubborn. It is their mistake for what happened in Syria and they have to do something for recovery.

Why do you think it is their mistake?

How those arms came to my city out of nowhere? Assad is a dictator, okay, but why they are involving with Syrians own matters?

What does Europe mean to you?

Opportunities. If you work hard you get anything you want to reach there.

How will you be going to Europe? Do you have any countries in mind?

I do not know, but probably I have to pay smugglers. First I will try to go legally, but I also do not know how. Maybe I will ask for a visa as a tourist and stay there. I want to go Germany, its economy is better and I can find a job there I suppose.

INTERVIEW #22, 6 JUNE 2016

GAZIANTEP, 63, MALE

Can you please tell about your life in Syria before the war?

I am from Tabqah area. We were farmers with my family, living in central Syria. I graduated from primary school and stopped studying because of my father demanding me to help him for farming.

How did you confront with the war in Syria?

Few years before the war we were hearing very strong criticisms from some other villagers against Assad. You know, it was not very easy to criticize Assad family in such way. We tried to stay away from such discussions; we had a humble but stable life, similar to our great grandfathers. The soil and the nature were providing us an income for years. You know the rest, the clashes spread. At first we were dealing with two main groups, and then ISIS arrived and forced us to share our crops with them. Every day they were "inventing" some hadith and were forcing us to do everything accordingly with whatever they want. They also started to increase their demands for our crops and leave apart making some profit; they left us only the crops enough for us to survive. After a while you get tired of seeing armed men around your farmlands and house.

How did you come to Gaziantep?

We had passports and crossed the border from the official gate. But my son had to come back illegally this time because of being rejected from the border gate last month. We are afraid to go now because of this new procedure.

Where do you work now?

I am not working. I know farming, I am a farmer but there is no way to do it here. We do not have land and we cannot buy. My children wanted to work in the farms around here but all farmers are saying they also have economic hardships. I understand them, Turkey is very expensive. My children are working in temporary jobs. Two of them are working in a magazine owned by Syrians; the other three are trying to find a job.

Why do you want to leave Turkey and move to Europe?

It is very hard to survive here. Sometimes the food is given by the municipality, but it is never enough. We have to survive. My children cannot find permanent jobs.

What are your expectations if you can make it to Europe?

They will be providing the jobs that we can do. I am sure they need young and talented people. I may be old, maybe they will not want me, but my children can do lots of things there.

You could be using your skills in other Arab countries, have you ever thought about going to some countries speaking Arabic?

Yes but where? Jordan? Iraq? Lebanon? None of them have better conditions than Turkey. Moving there is harder than Turkey, they do not want Syrians.

Do you have relatives settled in Western countries?

Not relatives but some people we know made it to Germany. Some of them are in Sweden or somewhere near it. My children have contacts with them from the internet.

What kind of problems you expect in Europe if you move there? Also, how do you plan to go?

I expect no problem. They will put us in the camps first, I heard they are not like the ones here, and they will provide us something. I do not know how to go, I just tell my children I will never go from the sea. I am not young and cannot save myself if things go bad.

What is the best outcome for Syria according to your perspective?

We had no problems before ISIS arrived. I told you, we were not rich, but we had a life that we are used to. They must sit and talk, all of them. Syria is fertile enough for all of us to live.

Would you like to return back to Syria after the war?

Of course. How can you leave your homeland if you do not have to? I just want to go back to my old life. I do not want my wife to sit and gaze, doing nothing. I do not want to think about next week. I do not want my children to desperately look for a job every day.

INTERVIEW #23, 6 JUNE 2016

GAZİANTEP, 30, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself and your life in Syria?

I grew up in Homs and finished high school there. Later I graduated from a technical school related with mechanics and started to work in a car mechanic shop. The business was fine; I specialized in engines and opened my own car repair shop in the industrial area.

How was your life affected by the war for the first time?

I still have no idea how all happened so sudden. Probably you know the story in Syria and the reasons of this war. The eye of an outsider may be different but let me tell you that we never thought things would be going to such a horrible direction. First protests were something expected, but later it quickly turned into an armed violence and spread quickly to everywhere, including my city. We tried to avoid being a side but you are forced to choose a side. I thought to myself this is not a war that I can choose a side, where brother kills brother.

When and how did you come to Gaziantep?

I tried to sell my tools and machinery. After selling all, together with my wife and children I immediately moved to Turkey. Crossing the border was easy, it was a bit crowded but we quickly found ourselves in Turkey.

Which cities you have been to and how did you decide to stay here?

I spoke with my distant relatives who were living here about the job opportunities in Turkey and amongst all cities Gaziantep seemed to be fine. In the east and north there are no jobs and industry. In the western parts I heard Syrians are having trouble due to being unwanted in the touristic areas. So we decided to move to Gaziantep. The city is also close to the border and whenever necessary we can cross the borders if there is no danger.

Where do you work now?

I am working in a car mechanic shop. This is a better job compared to others; it needs specialization and is a necessity for a large part of the population. I guess I am lucky.

Why are you planning to go to Europe?

As I said I am in a better condition compared to many other Syrians, but all those hard work should have better outcomes. Even in Syria now I would have a better life with such heavy workload. Europe has better working conditions and offers a peaceful life.

What is the image of Europe in your mind? What do you see about it when you close your eyes and think?

It is peaceful. People respect each other. No religious problems, no violence. You work hard and as a result you get a fine life. I do not think Europe will ever have such problems like Syria is facing now.

Do you think about any countries to live in in the West?

Germany probably. If not, France. Both countries have a good reputation about the car engines; population is high which means there are more cars to be worked on.

How do you plan to go?

I am nearly done with the financial issue. I got enough money. I also have the contacts with the human smugglers. I just need to look a little bit more on which way is easier and less risky. I do not want to drown or step on a mine.

How did you find smugglers from here?

From the internet and social media. They always change their web pages and phone numbers but it is easy to find once you establish contact with one of them.

Do you know anyone that left Turkey with the help of smugglers?

Sure. Some of my friends from here and those I know from Syria are gone. Most of them has residence permit now and they are happy. The minimum conditions European countries offer are better than here.

Are those people in Europe happy with their current lives? Do they face any difficulties?

Yes, they are happy, why shouldn't they? Once they are out of the camps they are free to do whatever they want. After you got the permit you can live just like the locals.

What about religious and cultural differences?

There are also cultural and religious differences in Syria. Here the people also have differences, even in the same city. So there must be differences in Europe too, but the differences do not lead to violence there.

Did you ever think about going back to Syria? Would you return to Syria once the war is over?

I miss Syria. But this does not mean I am thinking about going back. Do you think if there are any news for causing me to think of returning? Everything is still the same with the day I left. Only the maps and controlled areas change, that is all. I do not want to return back to Syria. It is over. I will of course visit my relatives, my homeland, but it is too late to go back. I have no hope for a solution but when the solution comes, I would already have established a life, here or in Europe.

INTERVIEW #24, 7 JUNE 2016

GAZİANTEP, 19, MALE

Can you please briefly tell us about yourself?

I was born in Afrin, but grew up in Aleppo. I have a big family and we used to live together with my grandparents. I have three sisters and two brothers. I was going to high school but after we came to Turkey I had no chance to continue because of language problems.

When was the first time you and your family were confronted with the war? How did it affect you?

I remember my father was saying things were really going bad and he prepared us for anything that could happen. Normally he never did pressure us but suddenly he did not allow us to go to streets alone. Shortly after, we understood it was for our good when we heard the gunfire in our district. How did it affect me? It stole my life. I spent my last years with poverty and fear.

Fear what for?

Fear of losing my family, fear for my life, fear for future, fear from helicopters, fear from sudden voices...

How did you come here?

It was very sudden and we only took a few pieces of luggage because of heavy clashes. Two days after we left, our home was hit by a RPG that is what our neighbors told us. We had no passports so we had to cross the border illegally. I was very afraid about mines but Kurds from Turkey helped us to find a secure path. We first went to a big town (Suruç) and moved to Gaziantep afterwards.

Have you ever been to other cities in Turkey? Do you work somewhere currently?

We went to Antakya for a visit. I also saw Kilis city to pick up our relatives that came after us. I am washing the dishes in a restaurant now. Sometimes I also deliver the orders in nearby areas if there are few dishes.

Did you learn Turkish?

A little bit. I want to learn more but I do not have time after work.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

I like here, but I cannot work like this until I die. Do not misunderstand me, I am not avoiding to work, but if I do not continue my studies, I will be washing dishes for all my life. I need to study first to get rid of this life.

Can't you study in a Turkish school?

My father says it is impossible. He asked somewhere but all said that it is impossible.

If you could study in Turkey would you like to stay here?

I think, yes.

So which country you would like to go to and study in Europe?

Anywhere. I want Germany the most, because of what I hear from my friends but all countries are fine for me.

Let us say Romania offers you a residence permit, would you go?

No.

Why?

Romania is not in Europe.

Could you please tell me some European countries that you know?

Germany, France, England, Sweden, Austria.

Do you have any friends or relatives living in Europe now?

We have some relatives who moved to Sweden and Germany before I was born. They always invite us but we do not have passports so we cannot go even if we have invitation letters from them. My father says once we have enough money we can go and stay with them for some time.

Do you think you will have problems because of your religion and your ethnicity?

No, there are millions of Kurds living in Europe. None of them has problems. They are also Muslims and I never heard that they are attacked or something negative happened.

Would you like to return to Syria?

No. I do not feel myself belonging there. But if my family will return, I also will join them.

What do you think of the future of Syria?

I do not know. I do not want to think about it.

INTERVIEW #25, 14 JULY 2016

GAZIANTEP, 39, MALE

Can you please tell me about yourself and your life in Syria?

I am originally from Daraa. My brother and I were running a business on selling home furniture. We even had small import and export activities with other countries. I cannot consider myself rich for our times in Syria, but we had a pretty comfortable life.

Did you close your business after the clashes erupted?

No, we tried to resist until the last minute. But you do not have much choice when your workshop is bombed.

When did you come to Turkey? Right after your workshop was bombed?

We first moved to Damascus but city center was very expensive. We thought about establishing another business in Damascus but it became also very risky in such economic circumstances. Shortly after, we decided to move to Turkey with our capital, which was not much but enough to establish another business.

Was it easy to establish a work here?

It is easy but at the same time it is hard. We're not refugees, we're not immigrants, we're not tourists but we're "guests", which does not allow you to establish anything within certain rules and regulations. However, after observing other Syrian entrepreneurs, we realized that there were no legal necessities to establish a business so we started.

Do you have any fears that unregistered business could cause a problem?

What would you feel if you were in my shoes? Of course I am afraid! On the other hand, there is no need to exaggerate this, Turkish government never harassed or caused problems to people like me who tried to establish a business to survive. We are not stealing anything, we are not murders, but just two people who are trying to survive abroad.

So why do you want to settle Europe?

I will be going to find some job opportunities with our current business, while my brother will stay here. If all goes well, we will be travelling between Turkey and Europe for business.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

I will first apply for a business visa, if it does not work out for a tourist visa. Again if not, I will go there simply as a refugee. In all cases I want to get a permanent residence permit.

Do you plan to bring your family to Europe if you can settle there?

Of course. They will have a better life there. Look, we are luckier than most of the Syrians, but we still know that we are "guests". Today Turkey is very merciful to us, but you will never know what tomorrow will bring. Just like what happened in Syria.

Which countries you are thinking about applying for a residence permit?

The Scandinavian countries because of our business project. If not, I will try Spain or Italy.

If you cannot get a visa and have to cross illegally, which routes would you choose?

I will try Libya-Italy way instead of others. Crossing the Turkish Sea (Aegean Sea) to Greece is not easy as before. Other ways need a long walk from Bulgaria to Austria.

How can you arrange this route?

It is dangerous, but going by land is dangerous too. We heard from the Facebook groups that Syrians are attacked in Bulgaria by fascists. On the other hand, a little bit more dollars mean a less risky travel whatever route you choose.

So you mean there is a “more comfortable” way that smugglers provide?

Of course, the nature of the trade applies to this dirty, disgusting sector as well.

Do you have any relatives living in Europe?

No, they all live in Turkey and Syria. In Syria, some moved to Damascus from other areas but those in Turkey all moved to different cities.

Can you express to me your feelings about Europe in three words?

Freedom, respect, trustworthiness.

What is the best outcome for Syria that you can hope for, in realistic terms?

Assad's resignation is the best outcome. But if Assad loses the war it would be worse, all the groups will continue to fight and it may even be bloodier. Assad must resign, all groups should sit and talk and a new system must emerge. Do not know what kind of a system, I am not a politician, but a system where brother should not kill brother.

In such a solution, would you like to return Syria?

It depends on whether I will be able to continue business and make it to Europe. If all goes well we can also have a foot in Syria and who knows, we can even return back. There is no reason for me to cease the ties with my country.

INTERVIEW #26, 20 AUGUST 2016

GAZIANTEP, 17, MALE

Could you please tell me about your life in Syria?

I am from Khan al-Shih. It is a small town near Damascus. I was a student when the war started but the school was closed for a long time so I had no chance to graduate. My father was a farmer and my mother is originally from Palestine. I have two sisters.

What caused your family to leave Syria?

I was just 14 when they decided to leave Syria. They generally do not prefer to speak politics or things related with the war near me and my sisters.

Are you happy with their decision to come here?

No. I was happy in Syria. I do not care about politics. There wasn't much violence and I still don't understand why they decided to leave. Maybe my father had some problems with the opposition, I don't know. Just I remember my mom was crying while locking the door of our home before we came to Turkey and she still thinks about our home and life in Syria. After leaving our home we first went to Idlib and after a few weeks we crossed the border.

How about your life in Turkey, were you able to adapt easily?

Not very much. After learning Turkish I made some good friends, I have no problem with Turks. I just don't feel that I belong to here. Most of my Syrian friends feel the same.

Are you going to school?

No.

Could you share with us an ordinary day from your life here?

I wake up, have a breakfast and drink tea. I watch television, when I am bored I go outside to walk around or speak with my friends. I play some games on my phone or watch videos from the internet. After that we eat dinner together, watch television, speak to each other and sleep.

You expressed that you would like to go to Europe. What would change in your daily life if you were living in Europe?

I would be studying, learning a new language, have a social life. I told you, I am really bored here. Wake up, eat, go out, walk around, chat, eat dried nuts, check out Facebook, eat and sleep. It is like a circle, doing the same things every day. I feel like I am cursed. In Europe, things will be different, totally different.

Have you tried working here?

My father doesn't want me to work.

Do you have any plans to go to Europe?

No. I will walk from the border. Just like many other Syrians I will try to find a way. Not all the people are coming here with their pockets filled with money. I know people who just crossed the border by themselves and registered themselves as refugees.

Have you ever spoken to your family about your decision?

Yes but they do not think I am serious. My sisters know that I am very serious, they are trying to convince me not to go, but I already made up my mind.

Would you like to return to Syria?

Yes, but believe me it is easier to go to Greece than to my hometown. Let us think that I re-entered Syria. ISIS, YPG, Assad, FSA, al-Nusra, all of them will be on my way if I want to make it home. If I can manage to cross from one territory the others will make trouble. Who will give me food or help me to reach al-Shih?

What do you miss most from your life in Syria?

I miss my home.

INTERVIEW #27, 20 AUGUST 2016

GAZİANTEP, 46, MALE

Can you tell us about your life in Syria?

I was born in Damascus but grew up in different cities because of my father's job. He was a military officer and he worked in nearly all parts of Syria. I learned Turkish in the Turkmen villages where we spent a few years. Moving from one part of Syria to another helped me to understand and love the Syrian society better than most of the people who are living in the major cities. I am a dentist and worked in Aleppo for many years.

When and how did you come to Turkey?

About two years ago we decided to move here with my family and came to Gaziantep.

Have you ever seen other cities of Turkey?

Sure, last year we went to Antalya for a family trip. We have seen all the cities from here to Antalya.

Are you currently working?

Yes, twice a week I go to the refugee camps as a volunteer and rest of the days, except Friday, I work in a private dental clinic.

Why did you decide to leave Syria?

I tried to resist against this idea for many years. No matter what, I promised myself to resist as much as I could. Personally, I do not feel guilty for leaving Syria. After all, when your clinic is bombed, is there anything you can do? I am still very curious about who did that and why. I am not a member of any party, group, organization; I tried to help everyone regardless of their ideas. I am a very well-known person, so I am still thinking why someone would like to destroy my clinic. It was possible to work somewhere else by finding another clinic but I lost my motivation. I was a cheerful person, now I do not even want to enter the society or talk with friends.

So what are your plans now?

I have been helping people in the refugee camps for many months. I did my best to help. Now it is time to think about my own family. We are leaving in a few months, perhaps next year in early spring. It is really time to leave.

I understand it is for the well-being of your family, but what are the primary reasons?

Look, I have three children. Two of them are married but we are a very close family and they will follow me wherever I go. The wives of my sons are no different than my own children and they all know it. They are all struggling to do something in Turkey however options are very limited here. You can go to the camps, try to find a job in the cities but that is all. You cannot enjoy full rights of being a citizen. We are all very, very grateful to Turkish society and government. Allowing us to live in Turkey and opening the doors are maybe the maximum they could do. We will never forget all the efforts of the Turks. Have you ever been to the refugee camps? Just go and check how many volunteers from all over Turkey are working there. All those efforts are for us. But the life in Turkey is already very challenging, so we want to go to some country where we can simply melt within the local population. Just like America. We are going to keep our culture, while we will integrate the society and build our future.

Is it difficult to integrate into the Turkish society?

No, but the problem is we don't know what will happen tomorrow. Imagine you are driving in a foggy weather with a heavy rain. You must be really slow and need to be careful. But if you drive slowly, you can't reach the place you are going in the right time. If you drive fast, you may suddenly fall from the cliff or hit another car or someone. We want to reach where we would like to go now, but we can't. In Europe the weather will not be foggy and rainy, so we will be able to reach our destination quickly. There will be no obstacles.

Which country you would like to live in Europe?

Any country that respects the rights of refugees and is willing to treat them like their citizens.

Do you have some countries in your mind?

Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

Would you like to return to Syria once the war is over?

Maybe. I really would like to. Nevertheless, I can't be sure of how all these problems will be solved.

INTERVIEW #28, 20 AUGUST 2016

GAZIANTEP, 30, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from Jisr ash-Shugur. I had a large family; traditionally we always lived close to each other. For example, when my brother got married he constructed a new house just next to our yard. The other part of the yard belonged to a small house of my cousin. If I would get married my land to build my home was also ready. We had to leave Syria in summer of 2011. I was managing a small restaurant in ash-Shugur.

Why did you leave Syria?

We fled from the attacks of the opposition against the Syrian Military. So many people left ash-Shugur in 2011, just like we did. I was able to return to check our house from time to time but it is not possible anymore.

Why is it not possible anymore? Are you forbidden to enter Syria?

I can enter that is not the problem but it is not FSA ruling there. Al-Nusra is very powerful and it is wise to avoid travelling there. Our houses are abandoned already, just a few furniture left. I heard that the Nusra members settled to the city.

Did you directly come to Turkey after leaving your city?

Yes, first I came to Reyhanlı and took a bus to Adana. My brothers and father stayed in Reyhanlı. They are still there but I tried to find a better job opportunity. From Adana I traveled to Ankara, stayed there shortly and moved to İstanbul.

Were you able to find a job?

Yes, I tried many jobs but the best job I could do was being a headwaiter in a middle-sized, yet nice restaurant. I quit the job a few weeks ago.

What are your plans now?

I will get married and go to Germany. My fiancée will be coming to Kilis from Syria and after the marriage we will be going to Europe. We met online and we have similar plans about our life. Living in Europe is also a part of our common plans. I will be going to Kilis to meet with her.

Please do not misunderstand me, like all other questions you are free to skip this one but I am curious about your decision to leave quickly after the marriage.

We knew each other for 8 months and everything is prepared. She also does not want to live in Turkey, so we will travel to Europe in our honeymoon. Joking aside, we really will be going to Europe.

Which route you will follow?

From Edirne to Greece.

Do you have any relatives or friends living in Europe? If you have, are they satisfied with their living conditions?

I have a few friends in Germany, France and Austria. They are generally happy, only in the camps the life is boring but after some time the authorities generally provides you an official paper and you are free to live in the country and even allowed work. I am not sure about if they are allowed to work officially but I heard that it is possible.

If rich Gulf countries would provide you visa, would you go to those countries instead of Europe?

If I am single, yes. If I am married, no. They are economically good and you can save some money. On the other hand it is not a good decision to live with a family.

Why?

As we are Syrians. We are now considered as a cheap labor force, similar to Indians or Filipinos. You are expected to work inhumanely and obey whatever they say, including mobbing. I had three friends who used to work in Qatar and Emirates before the war. If the conditions were like that before the war, imagine how it can be now.

What is your dream?

To have children and to see them growing happily. To see them going to school. To grow old with my wife. I am a simple man, I just want to settle somewhere and have peace.

INTERVIEW #29 & #30, 20 AUGUST 2016

GAZIANTEP, 22, MALE

GAZIANTEP, 20, FEMALE

Could you please tell me about your life in Syria?

A: We are from Rastan village in Syria, near Homs city. Before the war we had a happy life. Our land was enough for us to survive; the climate of Rastan is suitable for different products to grow. My father and grandfather were working in the farm. Seasonal workers were also coming and helping my family every spring and summer. My uncles also had shares in the land and we generally worked with family as well. Life in rural Syria used to be very calm. As a villager and a farmer only problem was to think about weather and pests. It was a simple but happy life.

How did the war in Syria affect your life?

A: We had to leave our lands. What else could be worse? Thanks God none of us were killed or wounded. Our home is destroyed. Rastan is, from what we hear, a ghost town now. We were close to the border so again we were lucky, those who had to leave their homes stayed in schools or public buildings in other parts of rural Syria until they found their way to the cities.

What was your feeling when you entered Turkey?

A: Fear. Nothing but fear. I felt like I am paralyzed, believe me if someone shot me I would not feel the pain. My sister and mother were very emotional and I felt responsibility for them.

B: I felt fear but also hope. I cried so much when we started to cross the border thinking that we would never be able to return to our lands. It has been four years. Still I hope to see it again.

How is your life in Turkey?

B: I am happy here. Gaziantep has a large Syrian community. We have relatives here so unlike my uncle and his family in Istanbul we had little adoption problems. We sometimes visit our neighbors and they visit our home from time to time.

A: If I were to sit at home I would be happy as well but I have to work 10-12 hours every day and my life is far from being perfect.

Where did you work after you came here?

A: First I worked as a dishwasher. I was “promoted” to be a waiter. After that I had to quit the job. Later I started working in a factory; even I did not get even a single Turkish Lira. Feeling disappointed again, I tried to be a shoe shiner but were chased by local shoe shiners. I tried my chance in constructions. Finally I got some daily wage. Now I am working in a welder shop with another Syrian friend. At least this is our own job.

B: My brother does not allow me to work.

A: I am not a dictator, however this is not Syria. We are working for you to be comfortable; you already have lots of things to do at the home.

Do you ever think that you would have a better life if you chose to live in other Arab countries instead of Turkey?

A: No, I have friends who lived in Jordan and Lebanon and both of them complained about their conditions.

What were the main problems of your friends there?

A: The biggest problem in Jordan is unemployment. I told you about my problems for finding a job here but at least there are opportunities here. You can always find something if you do not complain about working conditions. In Jordan it is not easy to find a job even if you speak the same language. Maybe some specialists could have better opportunities, I don't know. Lebanon is also similar to Jordan, it is very crowded. The locals do not like Syrians.

B: I see lots of negative stories on Facebook. Not only the Jordanians but also Europeans do not like Syrians. There are many good people but generally they only perceive us like we are the causes of the problems. We are the victims, not the root of the problems. Those who are responsible for all this mess are swimming the sea of money now.

What do you mean?

B: I feel only sorry for who are dying in the war. Soldiers, opposition, even fighters in Nusra. They all are brainwashed by their leaders.

A: I hate all of them. They are all the same. They are sucking our blood and fill their pockets. Weapon trades, black market merchants, even drug dealers. This is a dirty war, and everyone has the equal share on this dirty war.

B: The greatest evils are America and Russia.

What are your future plans?

A: I want to study and become an agricultural engineer. I will do whatever necessary. If I must I will travel a thousand kilometers with my bare foot. I don't want to live a life like a beggar. Someday the war will end and we will again return to our lands. They can destroy everything, burn our home, burn our cars, but they can't destroy our soil.

So you are willing to return Syria after the war?

A: Yes.

What does Europe mean for you in three words?

A: Opportunities, human rights, peace.

What about you, what are your future plans?

B: Like my brother, I want to study. I always argue with my family that I do not wish to sit at home and wait for someone to get married. To escape from this dead-end I must study. Only my brother supports me so we will go together.

What does Europe mean for you in three words?

B: Equality, liberty, freedom.

What are your biggest fears in Europe? Do you think you will have cultural problems?

A: There are extremists in Europe that does not want Syrians. I never heard any attacks in Europe but on the way to Europe the police beats the refugees.

What do you mean on the way to Europe? Does the police beat refugees in Turkey?

A: No, in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia and some other countries they do it.

What about you?

B: I am just afraid of the anti-Islam movements in Europe.

Which European country do you want to study at?

A: I prefer England. If not Germany.

B: I agree to him. England and Germany have the best universities.

INTERVIEW #31, 5 JUNE 2016

ANKARA, 42, MALE

Could you please tell us briefly about your life in Syria?

I had a confectioner shop in Syria. I owned a car, villa, everything. I came to Turkey and now I have nothing left. If the war did not start, I had everything, all the things I needed. I was living in Aleppo. My children were going to school, now they can't. It is the war...Nothing else we can do. I opened this confectioner shop here, but I am not making profit. When you go to Sitaler district and ask for a job they say "there is no job available for you". You need money for rent, you need money for food. But they pay 35 Turkish Liras daily. Not only to me, to all Syrians. Everywhere it's the same. For example, a friend of mine works in Sitaler, gets 25 Turkish Liras per day. He starts working at 7 AM, comes back home at 7:30 PM. Working 12 hours for 25 Turkish Liras.

How did you come to Turkey?

By minibus, with my passport. But there are too many people coming illegally. It was not hard to cross the border without a document, but it is very hard now. When I was crossing the border two and a half years ago I had fifteen luggages with me, no one stopped me. They only said welcome to Turkey.

Why did you choose to come here?

Because I had no other chance. Turkey is very close. If you come from Aleppo, it is even closer. Aleppo-Kilis road does not take much.

How did the war in Syria affect your life at the beginning of the events?

The outbreak of the war was so fast, we did not fully understand what was going on. Then we started to hear the sounds of the bombs. I lost about 10 close relatives in the war. The bombs fell on to my home and car. I came here just for my children.

Why can't your children be registered to the schools?

The money I get here is not enough to send my children to school.

How many children do you have?

I have two daughters, one is six and the other one is twelve years old. My sons are fifteen and sixteen years old. None of them are going to school. They need to take dolmuş (shared taxi), we need gas in the home for heating. The money I get is not enough for all these. My two daughters are going to mosque but not to school.

If you could make enough money to send your children to school, would you still be going to Europe?

Why should I go if I can make some profit enough to send my children to school? Also, Syria is very close to here. Here in these lands we have Islam, followers of Sunnah. In Europe, they don't have these facts.

Which country you would like to go to in Europe?

It does not matter where. You can go to Europe, then take your family wherever you are living two months after. Food, house, all is ready. Here it's not like that. Here, whenever you get the bill, you must pay. In Europe, it's not like that.

Which route are you planning for going to Europe?

Most of the people choose the sea. I am planning the same.

Have you ever thought about going to economically strong Arab countries?

Saudi Arabia doesn't accept Syrians as refugees. If you need to go to Gulf countries you must have lots of money.

What are the three words you think of when the "Europe" is mentioned?

To get what you work for. Family reunification. To receive all the services. Let's say you pay your rent late here. They immediately kick you out of the home. But in Europe it won't be like that. Two years ago I arrived to Antakya from Syria, and from Antakya to here. It was necessary to change my residential address. They didn't do it. I went to Çankaya district. They said you can't live here. Go back to Antakya, you can only reside where they registered you first. Without a residential address, I can't send my children to school even if I want to. When I go to hospital I can't take free services. I only stayed in Antakya for 3-4 months but still...

Do you have any relatives living in Europe? Are they happy?

My sister's husband went to Europe. He is very happy but waits for his family to come to Germany as well. His family is in Ankara. When he came to Turkey he searched for a job two months without success, so he went first to Denmark and to Germany.

Did he witness any problems because of his religious beliefs?

No. Last religious holiday Denmark sent him to Turkey. Just for allowing him to see his family, and now they gave him a home, with all furniture including fridge and washing machine. He also has a monthly allowance. But here every two-three months the owner of the house asks you to find another house. Your neighbours don't want you. There are lots of problems.

If the war finishes in Syria would you like to return?

Yes, it is our homeland. I will return back to Syria after the war and I will be grateful to this country, Turkey.

Even if you were able to live in Europe, would you still like to return Syria?

Of course. It is the homeland.

INTERVIEW #32, 15 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 48, MALE

Could you tell me about yourself, your life story?

I was born in a village near Damascus. My father was a shoemaker, so after graduating from middle school I started to work with him. I've got two elder sisters and they got married before my father died. After the death of my father, I started to run his shop and I also got married. I have two sons. Shortly after, I started to work in a furniture company as well since shoemaking was not enough for us to make a living. Not many people want handmade shoes in these times.

How old are your sons?

One of them is 12 years old. The other one is 15 years old.

When was the first time you were confronted with the war?

You do not have to be confronted in order to feel the effects of the war. The war simply affects every single part of Syria.

So, how did the war affect your life?

How? Well, I'm here. I'm far from my country, my town, my village, my homeland. My company which I was working for was closed. It was a small-scale company. The son of the owner of the company joined the opponents and was killed by a rocket. After that the owner went somewhere, I don't know where and why. Before the company was closed, I couldn't take my salary because of the war conditions. So, I decided to move to Turkey. I thought we can find a home, a job in Turkey at least.

How and when did you come to Turkey?

We came here as refugees two years ago.

Not from the border gate, right?

Yes, we did not enter legally. We came to Antakya first. After that we moved to Ankara.

Why Ankara?

As one of my elder sisters and her husband were here.

Which cities have you ever been to in Turkey?

Just to Antakya and Ankara. Before coming to Ankara we went to Adana as well, but only briefly stayed there.

Are you working somewhere right now?

No, I'm not working now. I quit my job two weeks ago. I was working in a furniture shop. It was not a permanent job I knew but still, no other option. Before that job I worked in a car-service. They didn't give me my money, so I left.

Why did you quit your last job?

I had some problems with the other workers. They were saying that the Turkish workers cannot find jobs because of Syrian refugees. That is a general belief among Turkish workers. We always hear that.

How do you financially survive now?

My son is working in a marble shop. The other one sells bagels on weekends.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

Isn't it clear? As there are no jobs here for us. There is no help from the government. We don't want to stay in the camps here. My sons need to work because of our economic situation. My grandsons can't go to school. In Europe, they may go to school, they may have a good future. Here it's not possible. Also the local people don't want us, Syrians, here. They don't want to rent their homes, they don't want Syrian neighbours.

Which country do you want to go to and why?

Germany, as my sister, her husband and their children, who used to live in Turkey, are in Germany now. Germany has well-established laws, refugee rights and good conditions. The German government helps refugees, gives home and money to them. If you can't find a job, the government takes care of you.

How you will go to Germany?

I am saving money for the human smuggler. I already have a deal with him to take me from (He did not want the village's name to be published) to Greece. I will go first, then my family will follow me by the same way.

Isn't it a dangerous way?

Yes it is, but if you save enough money you have a faster and better boat.

Do you have any other relatives or friends who went to Europe except your sister and her family?

Yes, I have another friend. I heard, he went to Sweden but I don't have contact with him anymore. He closed his Facebook account.

Will you have any problems to live in a Christian country?

Maybe. My wife wears hijab. I don't approve modern clothing for women. But I believe in Europe they will tolerate our beliefs. I don't tell them to wear hijabs, and they won't tell me what I should wear.

Why don't you want to go to rich Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Qatar?

They don't give visa to us. They don't allow us to cross the border. They also will not share their bread with refugees. At least here you opened the borders to us. At least here we still see many people that have mercy and love towards us. There...Okay, I don't want to talk more. My mouth is full of bad words so I don't want to speak about them.

What are the differences between going to Germany and going to Saudi Arabia according to you?

Saudis don't like the other Arabs. They understand that you are not Saudi, then you are a second class person. But in Germany that's not like in Saudi Arabia. My sister says everyone is equal there. Afghans, Syrians, Pakistanis, Germans, Turks. Everyone have to obey the law and law equally applies to everyone.

Why is your sister satisfied with her life in Germany?

She has access to accommodation, children go to school and don't need to work, they have support from the government. The only problem is the permanent residence permit but right now they have a good life.

Will you consider returning to Syria after the war?

If I can go to Europe, no. But if I'll be in Turkey, yes.

INTERVIEW #33, 22 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 22, FEMALE

Could you tell me about your life in Syria?

We were three sisters, me being in the middle. I am 22 years old. My father died when I was fifteen years old. My mother passed away when I was three. My uncle and his family took care of us after my father. We were living in a big Arab family with our grandparents and cousins. Before the war I was working in a beauty center.

When did you feel the war in Syria? How did it affect you?

First we didn't understand there was going to be a civil war. Our town was far away from the city center of Damascus. But one day when I was in Damascus with my uncle, I saw that some people started to fight after a political argument. I was scared and understood the problem was much deeper than we thought. The argument had no guns, but I heard swears against Assad family...Well, it was something very unusual.

When did you come to Turkey? Was it your decision?

We came here about two years ago. It wasn't my decision. It was my family's decision. We went to Beirut first and then came here. My elder sister was just married so she stayed. My younger sister, my uncle, his wife and our two cousins came here with me. My cousins and their mother came with the passenger ship to Turkey, but I, my sister and my uncle came here illegally. Well, from the border gate, but still, without passport. Turkish police just let us in.

Did you register to an international or local organization as asylum seeker when you entered?

No, why should we? I mean, should we?

Which cities you have been to in Turkey?

Antakya, Adana, Ankara.

Why did you choose to live in Ankara?

My uncle had some friends here. He told me that the refugee camps were so dirty, he went there to see if we can live in the camps. So we all thought Ankara would be better for us as it is a big city and the capital.

So were you or your relatives able to find a job here?

Yes, my cousin and uncle work in Siteler (district). Salaries are low but at least they have a permanent job. I am working at a hairdresser. At the end of the month I will quit, my uncle does not want me to work.

Why?

I don't know. He told me I am too young and don't know the "rules" in Turkey. He claims that someone can convince me to something easily. I suppose he means marriage, but how can I get married to a Turk whom I can't communicate with? Nevertheless I have to quit, he is like my father and I won't question his requests. He has been taking care of me all those years.

Why do you want to leave Turkey? Is it your family's decision, too?

Yes, but this time I agree with them. The conditions in Turkey are not good. We do not move even a single step forward. We have enough money to eat bread and that is all. Education? No. A comfortable life? No. Citizenship? No. In Europe we will reach to all those things.

What is the country you wish to live in?

I don't know, but that doesn't matter. Europe is Europe. Uncle says Germany is better though, as they are friendlier towards Syrians.

How does your family plan to go to Europe?

I just know the legal way is not possible. I have some friends and distant relatives who made it to Europe but not a single one has gone with legal ways.

So what about other alternatives to live like Gulf Countries or Iran?

Iran? Well, there are millions of refugees from Iran going to Europe, why should we fill their place? Moreover the language and culture are very different. Gulf countries do not provide visa so we can't go.

European countries also don't grant visa, can't you go illegally to the Gulf countries?

They will deport you once you are caught. That is the biggest difference. They won't accept us as refugees.

If you live in Europe, can you adapt to the local culture?

I don't need to adapt. I will just obey the rules and that is all. Why should I change myself? We are not going to Europe to change, we are going to work and earn what we work for.

Do you think to go back to Syria if the war will finish?

This is a serious decision and we all must decide as a family. But when we return, what do we have? There will be no home or job waiting for us. At least in Europe we will have a job and a house to live.

What if you stay in Turkey and the war finishes?

Then I would like to return. Here we don't have a house or job as well. At least Syria is our homeland.

INTERVIEW #34, 14 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 68, MALE

Can you please share with us your life story before 2011?

I was born in the rural Idlib area. My parents were farmers, a tradition since the 17th century for my tribe. Our tribe extends as far as to Iraq, even beyond the borders, to Al-Anbar province (of Iraq). We have never betrayed our country. I fought in two wars for Syria. Even on Lebanese soil I dropped my sweat and blood for my country. I have four children and 9 grandchildren.

What happened in 2011 exactly?

It is America and the Jews who are responsible. We were rising once again as a country that would bring justice to Arab lands, but they are responsible for whatever is happening today. In Libya, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Egypt, they all have the signs of their bloody hands. We were just living in peace and demanded the same for Palestine. They first attacked Egypt by organizing so-called protests, then they tried exactly the same games in Syria. Well, we are still standing, and resisting against the enemies of Syria.

Why did you decide to move to Turkey?

When the protests started in Idlib, we made our sides very clear. Soon after, those “peaceful activists” attacked our home, burned our house in order to force us to flee. They are so blinded by their greed for money.

What do you mean by that?

Son, do you think they are just poor, innocent people demanding “justice”? They are getting their arms from the tree or collecting them from the soil? How did they have all that arms? In the villages you could have some guns where most of them are old and remained us from our fathers, but in the cities how can they find all those rockets, Kalashnikovs and grenades?

So after your home was set on fire by the opponents you came to Turkey, right?

First, they are not “opponents”. They are terrorists. We moved to Latakia after Idlib but it was extremely crowded with few job opportunities. So we, as a family, decided to move to Turkey. Two of my sons remained in Syria and joined the army. One of my sons, the youngest one, remained with us.

Why did he choose to stay in Turkey?

He did not choose, I asked him to stay. I am the eldest and I decide the future for our family, but we need a young family member to take care of us. He wants to join the army too, but it will not happen before my sons in the army fall to the ground.

Our friend told me you are willing to go to Europe, is it true?

True, we are planning to move to Europe.

Is there a specific reason for that?

Our priorities and the children’s priorities are different. We have to stay strong, but the young members of the family must study. We have bread, thanks God, we are not rich, but we survive. That is enough for us. I do not need a telephone or a computer, or fine clothes, but these children need to study. They are not even going to school here, rotting in the streets doing nothing.

Have you ever spoken to a local school?

Yes, but they said they can't let our children study in their schools. Three different schools, three different reasons. I am sure they are not bad people. I even offered them money, but it is not related to money. I think it is about the (Turkish) government's policy. That is the thing I do not understand. They, thanks to Erdogan, allowed us to live here, they share their bread, but why they don't let these kids to have education, I really don't understand.

Which country will you be going to in Europe?

I don't know, I think once we enter Austria we will stay there.

Why Austria?

As it is geographically the closest country that we can go to.

But there are other countries on the road to Austria, like Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary?

They do not want us. That is also good, they rush to let refugees pass to the west and do not block your way anymore. They help Syrians to leave their borders quickly, which will make our job easier.

How do you plan to go?

With our passport. We have all valid passports and we can extend it whenever we want. First we will try to get visa, if not, we will walk.

You are just going to walk? Won't you ask for help from a group or a smuggler?

We will cross the border legally and after that we will keep on walking, or take a bus, train, whatever necessary. My daughter knows some English and we will try to find our way.

Do you think peace will come to Syria?

At the end, the justice will rule Syria. We are not dead yet. If all my sons fall down to the soil, I will join the army. If I fall, my daughter will go for fighting against terrorists. If she falls, then my youngest grandson will go. Terrorists will fail, sooner or later. See what is happening in Aleppo? Assad's lions are getting closer to capture it, day by day. Those terrorists will sooner or later crush and we will rebuild our country.

INTERVIEW #35, 22 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 36, MALE

Could you please briefly explain your life in Syria?

I am the third child of my family. I have four sisters and an elder brother. I was born in Aleppo, but studied in Damascus at a technical school. I used to work in a company where we were repairing the mechanical problems in different types of machines. It was a fine, stable life we had in Syria. I am married, my wife is from Damascus and she was a teacher.

What caused you to leave Syria?

Basically speaking, things got out of control. Since 2012 we were very aware of what this war was turning into, but we never imagined it would cause Syria to break apart. There is no alternative way to live peacefully. We started to realize having serious psychological problems with my wife, we sat, made a serious talk, and finally decided to leave.

Were the psychological problems caused by the war?

Not that simple. The life in Syria has changed. Every day, you hear the negative things. Aleppo will fall or not? The price of the bread is rising again? Oh, they executed someone in Ghouta? Israel attacked again? Uncle Mohammad's son died at the front? Nothing that could make you smile is happening in Syria. Why should I have to live such a life? More than that, why should my child should live in such conditions?

Did you find peace in Turkey?

Thanks God, yes. You see our home, we are not wealthy. Nevertheless we have peace. I do not even watch the Syrian TV Channels to stay away from that life in my mind.

So this is why your Turkish is good, thanks to the Turkish television that you are watching?

True, it really helps you a lot. Most Syrians who still have not learned Turkish have no right to complain if they are already living for a couple of years. If you isolate yourself, you will never learn the language. (Talking to his little daughter) Look to the uncle, speak with him Turkish, Sweetie. She is shy now but believe me she speaks very good Turkish.

Does she have friends in the neighbourhood?

Of course, she has. They play together.

Have you ever faced any discrimination or negative attitudes?

No. Well, you know, sometimes they ask us questions that are really not nice, like "why did you not stay and fight". I am not blaming them. It is very, very hard to understand Syria by looking from afar. People are the same everywhere, five fingers in your hand are all different, just like the people. There are good people here, there are bad people here, but generally here everyone is nice towards us.

So why do you want to go to Europe?

I want to go far away from this region. We like Turkey and are grateful to it. Anyway, I will not stay here. This country, God forbid but, will turn into a similar situation like in Syria.

Why do you think in such way?

(He mentions the failed coup attempt of July 2016) Didn't you hear all the sounds that day? Is it something normal? Let me tell you, it is not and all started in Syria just like that.

So which country you are thinking about to live in Europe?

I am still searching. I am not sure yet but I joined some internet groups to make more research.

Do you have capital to go?

We saved some but let us see whether it will be enough. If not I will keep on working and save some more.

What may cause you to return to Syria? If all goes well and there will be a long-lasting peace, will you return?

No. There is no "long-lasting peace" anymore. Just look at Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, can you see a chance for peace?

So what does Europe mean for you?

A door that will open us access to a new life.

INTERVIEW #36, 13 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 21, MALE

Is this your motorcycle?

No, it belongs to where I work. However I can keep it after the working hours.

Where do your work?

In the, Restaurant, just right there on the main street.

How did you find that job? Do you drive with your Syrian driving license?

I don't have a license. The police do not stop motorcycle couriers. Only once, when I was sitting on my motorcycle near the restaurant they started chatting with me, but did not ask for a license. One of my Turkish neighbours helped me to find this job. I was searching for one and the boss was his friend, so I got it.

What can happen if the police stops you and asks for your license?

Nothing. What do we have to give them? I'm not telling they ask for money, but they are not stupid, all the police in this neighborhood know our living conditions. We are working with our honour, I am not stealing and I am not doing something illegal. If I had a chance, I would get the license but I am not a citizen. They know this, so nothing will happen. I am not going to downtown, just delivering the packets for nearby areas.

Are you happy in Turkey?

Well, thanks God. I miss the life in Syria, this is not my country but what to do?

Your friends told me you are planning to go to Europe, is it right?

Yes. I will try to go within a few months.

What is your reason for that?

I am happy but you cannot step into a higher level. Today I have money and a job but tomorrow if they say "Okay, sorry but we have to fire you", then I will start another job search, work a few months, then get fired, then search for a job again, then get old, then what?

So you are thinking that your life in Europe will be different?

Of course, I do. They are taking you into their system and you become a citizen at the end, an equal citizen with equal rights. No, I am not meaning Turks are treating us bad, but we are "guests", nothing more. Europe offers you whatever you want. You want to work? Okay, here are your documents. You want to get married? Okay, the law says you must fill this, do that etc. Here we do not even know what to do if we need a work permit.

Have you received any invitation from NGOs about learning your rights and legal status?

No. Do you know where we can get this information if they are providing training for that? Can you give me their address?

Which country do you plan to go to in Europe?

Germany. They are more systematic in this issue. None of my friends in France had their documents prepared in order to work, but those that have gone to Germany already got the necessary documents.

Are your friends in Europe satisfied with their conditions?

In France not much. Britain also is problematic. They are treated nicely but they are not given information about what will happen to them. In Germany, they are provided with legal information, and seriously they do whatever they say sooner or later. In France, they may even get deported.

What about your family? Do they support your decision?

I prefer not to talk much with them about that, they are so much worried but they can't stop me. I said I'm going to Turkey, and I'm here. If I want to go to Europe, I will.

Your family did not agree with you when you decided to come to Turkey?

They were against it but when we sat and talked they didn't not have any arguments so they let me go. I really feel sorry for them, they, of course, want the best for me but they can't give any reason for me to stay. "Syria is our homeland". So what? Will it cease to be my homeland if I'm not living there?

Will you be thinking about returning once the war is over?

I do not know. Really, I do not have any idea. It is not an easy decision.

INTERVIEW #37, 13 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 27, MALE

Can you please briefly tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from Damascus. We have a traditional family, which has roots going back to Saudi Arabia, companions of Prophet Mohammad. My father was a businessman, buying and selling different types of goods in his shop. My mother is a housewife.

How did the war affect your life?

At the beginning the economy got really worse. The protests and violence resulted in an increase in foreign currencies and the Syrian Pound lost its power. The spread of violence stopped the flow of goods and the trade. For example we were not able to trade with Idlib, trade ceased totally. One of our cargo trucks was stopped on its way to Raqqa and plundered. As a result we had to close the shop and wait. The longer we waited, the more money we spent and when we realized we were hitting the bottom we decided to move to Turkey with whatever was left of our capital.

Why did you choose Turkey?

It was the only option. Going to Europe meant a trip to the unknown and, frankly speaking, we never thought about it until two years ago.

What about other Arab countries?

We tried some of them by applying for a visa, but only Jordan accepted us. Well, accepted us as refugees, not like Syrians that would like to live and work inside Jordan.

Couldn't you register yourself as refugee and establish a business at the same time in Jordan?

You need to get a visa, a residence and a work permit. The Jordanian government does not provide such rights. Well, they provide, but you need to pay a huge amount and if you pay that amount you won't have much capital left to establish a business. You will have the work permit but what would you do with it if you do not have financial resources?

What kind of business are you doing now?

We have opened a second-hand shop where anyone could buy or sell furniture, clothes, electronic materials etc. My father has largely left the business to me as he is old and tired. The business is fine, but we can't do much as we are not in a central district. Half of the district is made up of Syrians, and you know what kind of conditions we live in. We can't make profit enough for us to save money unless we open a shop in a district where the majority are Turks.

Can't you find a place in surrounding areas?

We can, but the problem is they are expensive. We surely can rent somewhere in the central areas, but that is a big risk.

Here in Turkey, how did you manage to get work and residence permits?

We didn't. We have just decided to come up with the idea, asked some of the Turks we know about this and got their support. They informed us that it was not necessary to take work permits for Syrians.

So what happens when the tax officers or other governmental authorities visit your shop?

Nothing happens because they never visit or control us. We are not doing anything illegal here, why should they bother with it? We are not parasites, we are not beggars, we are not thieves, we just want to live, eat halal when we sit on our chairs at dinner table. If you (the government) do not allow us to work, what we are supposed to do in order to live?

What about refugee camps?

Have you ever been to a refugee camp? Go and see the life there. Cold, mud, surrounded by kilometers of empty soil. I am sorry, but if we were going to live in refugee camps we would go to Jordan.

So what is your plan about the future? You have expressed that you are willing to go to Europe.

Yes, I just need to save money. If I make 15000 Euros I can go with my whole family to Europe.

Will it be enough to get the visa?

What visa? Brother, look, they will never provide us visas. Even for a business trip. If you want to go to Europe, you can, but not with visa.

What are the other ways to go?

By land or by sea. I do not know the land but the sea route is easy. You pay for the boat and they take you to an island.

Can refugees be deported from the islands?

Of course but the more inside you go (to Greece) the less chance they will deport you.

Which country would you like to go to?

Austria. It is less crowded and closer to Turkey.

Will you return to Syria after the war?

I don't think so. I'm really tired of moving from one place to another. I want a silent, stable life where I can grow old with my children. Syria is not the Syria we know anymore. We have nowhere to go. They will reconstruct it for sure, once it is over, but I do not wish to adapt to the new Syria.

INTERVIEW #38, 13 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 33, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am the first daughter of my family, with two other sisters and two brothers. We are from al-Hasakah. I have attended only primary school in Syria, and was not able to continue school. We were not a wealthy family, but thanks God we were not starving.

What happened in your city during the civil war?

Our area was generally calm. Far from Idlib, Damascus, Raqqa or other places that were devastated. However I am from a mixed family – a Kurdish father and an Arab mother- and we already had problems about the bureaucracy. We were lucky to get our citizenship, but many others (Kurds) were not lucky and had troubles. When the war got widespread, Assad's army tried to recruit my brothers.

Why did your brothers not want to join the army?

Why should they? Have they ever been ordinary citizens? What did we get from Syria? Whenever there is a dirty job they remember us and want us to fight till death for Syria. This is not our war, we have nothing to do with the fight between the Alawites and terrorists (opposition). My brothers and all my family think the same way. This is not our war, so why should we die for it?

Why did you decide to move Turkey?

It is close to Syria and we can return whenever we want to. We still regularly check our house in Hasakah. Every two-three months one of my brothers or my parents go there for a short visit.

What about the border police in Syria, don't they force your brothers during those visits to join the army when they check their ID's?

They do not enter from the border gate, but from the paths in the field. There is a wall being constructed in some parts of the border but still the paths they know are free from it.

So you still have a house in the city?

Yes, but in one of the clashes between Assad forces and SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) it was partly damaged. Still most of the things and the building are undamaged.

Does it mean that you are willing to return someday? Under which conditions would you be returning to your home?

Of course, I personally would return. My sisters and parents also want to return someday, while my brothers are changing their minds all the time. At the end we had a better life in Syria. I will only return if Syria becomes a democratic country, not under the terrorist opposition (she means Free Syrian Army), ISIS or Assad forces. They are all terrorists and if they rule the country, it means we will never return to Syria. There is a hope for SDF and they may force to have a federalist structure, but I do not know about the future. We all hope for a democratic Syria.

Are you working here? How does your family survive financially?

I am not working. I searched for a job but here there is not much work for women. My brothers found a job easily, the salary is very low but still men can find a job quickly. My brothers and father are working.

What is the reason for you to think about going to Europe while you still have a house in your city?

I told you, we do not know the future of Syria. Yes, there is a chance for democratization but Assad is still strong and it is hard to eradicate ISIS in the Sunnite Arab areas. Here we can survive barely, but in Europe I think we will have a much easier and comfortable life. We will be provided with a house, salary and full rights.

Which country you are planning to go to?

Sweden or Germany. Most probably Sweden because of my parents' insistence. They told me there is a (Kurdish) community they know for long and some distant relatives that can help us.

Do you think you will have difficulties in Europe?

Maybe. We had difficulties in Syria, here as well and the similar things may happen there, too. We are not the first family that is migrating to Europe.

What do you fear most once you will make it to Europe?

Nothing, the worst is they will deport us back to Turkey. If they do, it won't be the end of the world because we know the system here. My brothers can find a job, we can rent another home, and we can still try to go to another European country or stay here.

INTERVIEW #39, 13 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 19, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am from Syria, Aleppo. I come from a large family, belong to tribe. I grow up with my family, living in the same neighborhood which was a little far from the city center with our relatives. Actually it may be considered as a rural area. I had a nice childhood, a crowded family where we shared all the good and bad things.

When did you come here? Were you studying in Syria?

We came three years ago. I was studying in high school but had to leave. I do not continue my studies here, though I really would like to.

Why can't you continue your high school education in Turkey? Is it because of financial problems?

Financially we may deal with it. Also I think the education in high school is free in Turkey, am I wrong? The problem is the language, I can go to market and make shopping, or answer basic questions but educational language is something different.

Have you tried to learn Turkish? Are there any language courses provided by different organizations for Syrians?

I watch the television and try to speak with people but it is not enough. I bought some books for learning Turkish but it needs a dense practice with a native speaker. Until now I haven't heard any language courses provided. We received some minor aid but never knew about language courses.

Do you have some Turkish friends for practicing the language?

I have but most of them are working and only in the weekends they are free. They have their own life so they can't always be around you, which is pretty normal.

Are you also working somewhere?

Yes, I am working in the grocery store. I don't need a fluent Turkish as most of the customers are Syrians living in this district. Well, there are also a few people like you who wish to try Syrian products from locals.

What about the relations with the local Turks? Are they welcoming the refugees or are there some problems?

The problems exist. Maybe not that bad but there are some troubles. Most of the time we are faced with the angry comments of the locals. We thought our cultures were very similar when we first decided to come to Turkey, but we quickly realized that they are very different. From time to time some Turks from other areas, sometimes with foreigners, visit our district and provide some help. I can't say Turks are welcoming or not welcoming to us, but there are problems.

What about your plans to go to Europe?

It does not only belong to me, even if I really want to, I can't go alone. My brothers and parents are also convinced to leave Turkey, but it is not that easy. You need passport, visa and money. If one of these three is missing, you need to go by illegal ways.

So what are the illegal ways?

The sea, the long walk (she means the Balkan route), any route that will lead you to Europe.

Isn't it dangerous?

Travelling from the land is not dangerous. The worst can happen is that they will close the borders and you are trapped in a country that you do not want to live. The sea is dangerous, but it is nearly guaranteed to find yourself in the country you wish to go.

What are the countries you wish to go to?

Sweden, Germany, Norway, Austria. Any of those countries will accept us. But the land route is risky, they may close the borders before you make it to the west and they may even force you to live in the refugee camps.

Why living in the refugee camps is not preferred by Syrians? As far as I know they provide you shelter, electricity, food and other basic needs in the camps.

Yes, but the camps are like prisons. In prison, they also provide you all the things you mentioned. The only difference between a refugee camp and a prison is that in prison you know how long you will stay. In the camps you don't know. We want to live just like ordinary people.

Do you think the war in Syria will end soon?

No. Every day it is becoming more and more complex. At the beginning there was nothing like SDF. Now they control more territory than Assad. ISIS is still very strong. The borders are not controlled. Russians, Americans and other countries are operating in Syria. Too many countries are involved.

Will you be returning to Syria if the war ends?

No. From what we hear from our friends who stayed in Syria it is like a half-destructed country now. It needs to be rebuilt. I already missed the best years of my life in Turkey, away from Syria. I am not eager to spend the rest of my youth for rebuilding a country.

INTERVIEW #40, 22 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 48, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from a family that has a long and traditional history for being merchants. My father and my grandfather were also merchants like me. I studied business at Damascus University and decided to stay in Damascus. I am originally from Al-Rai, but my father was working in Aleppo, where we all moved when I was child. I am married with two children.

How did the war in Syria affect your life?

The violence and all those problems do not allow to have a stable income unless you work for a governmental service. If you work for the government, your income is always stable. Less or more, but Assad pays your salary in the specific days. However, if you are working in the agricultural sector or in private business, the war economy is not for you. A man needs a stable economy to survive, but in Syria it was not possible.

So it means you felt the war with regard to economics only?

Living in Damascus and only feeling the economy shrink is not possible while you hear the bombs, rockets and jets. Let us say, you make good business in times of troubles but it is impossible to have an ordinary life even if you have money in your pockets. The money does not save you from rockets. Anytime I heard a sound, I thought about my children, my family and tried to find the place where I can escape from the explosions.

What were your reasons to move to Turkey?

Stress. Feeling fear each and every single hour whether your family is doing fine, or let's say directly, if they are still alive caused too much pressure. My mother is Turkman and we know Turkmen language, which was another factor for us to make this decision.

What was your expectation of the life in Turkey? Did you find what you expected?

Did we find what we expected? No, we didn't. Are we happy now? Yes, thanks God. We expected better life conditions, a fine, stable governmental aid, more systematic programs towards Syrians. None of them exists after all the time we have been here. Nowadays, it is still better than Syria, the conditions are incomparable.

Do you feel a difference to other Syrians in means of adapting to the ordinary life because of speaking Turkmen?

It really changes a lot. It does not cause a better income but it causes more sympathy from the people, an easier life since you don't need to ask help for translation and they do not try to trick you. I have seen so many negative examples between the employers and employees but when you speak Turkish language the problems generally fade away.

Where do you work now?

In a company which produces furniture for homes. Most of us in this district work in the same sector. My salary is the minimum determined for national workers, my two sons are also working in the same sector and three minimum wages are enough for living. Our current financial situation can't be compared to what we had in Syria, but we are still luckier than many others.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

If we really need to stay in Turkey, I won't be depressed. At the end, we are Turks as well and this is our land. However the economic and social system is very different, I am not that young to learn the system to establish my business. I also lack capital to organize something. We will have the Turkish citizenship sooner or later so the minor problems here will be solved too. But my children do not have that much time to wait for it.

Which country you will be going to?

We are thinking about Germany, but it depends on the conditions. Right now Germans are providing the necessary documents easier than the other countries and have a better system when it comes to accept refugees. But if somehow they close their borders, we will try any other country, starting with England.

In which conditions you will drop your ideas about going to Europe?

If we get citizenship and have full rights as others, maybe. On that case I will try to sell what I have in Syria to have a capital. After that, why not? At least we are here for two years, we know the language and we know more or less how things work here.

So does it mean that you are not willing to return to Syria?

No. Syria is finished. Just look at the news, the system in Latakia is extremely different from Raqqa. Northern Syria is under Kurdish rule. Who can guarantee that Israel will not invade some other lands of Syria? Let us assume Syria is stabilized, and then have a look at its neighbors. That region will not be living in peace until the oil production stops.

INTERVIEW #41, 14 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 18, MALE

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I am 18 years old and from Latakia. I came here last year after finishing high school.

How did the war affect your life?

I was at middle school when the war started. We were hearing about some problems, but we generally had no idea. Then everything started to change, protests, strikes, violence, armed opposition. I was little but still I was listening to family talks, things that happened were very surprising. Personally, I have not witnessed much about the war, Latakia and our village was generally safe.

So why have you decided to come to Turkey?

I had to make my military service. I know what you will say, but things are different there. I would fight for martyrdom if Syria was fighting with another country, but now the brother is killing another brother in this war. We are not mature enough to understand what is really going on. I support Assad and I am against terrorists, I hate ISIS, I hate al-Nusrah, but my mind is so confused. I do not wish to participate in any form of a civil war. I mean, we say ISIS is terrorists, but what if someone is fighting for ISIS because they are threatened? Anyway, I support Assad in his campaign but I must really decide about something. Maybe after that I can join the army, but now, no.

Would you be making your military service in Turkey if you will get a Turkish citizenship?

If I must then I will do. My only condition would be not to fight against Syria. It is my only principle.

Could you please share with us your experiences in Turkey? How did you come here, what have you been doing since last year?

I came here with my passport, arrived at Istanbul airport first. I am still trying to find a university to study but even if there are some scholarships for the universities, many times they are choosing the other Syrians, I mean refugees, to fill their quota. The private universities are very good and allow me to register, but they are extremely expensive. My family sends me some money but it is not enough for both studying at a private university and for living.

So did you come here alone?

Yes, I came here alone. My parents and brothers are still living in Latakia.

What was their reaction when you made your decision to live in Turkey?

They did not want at the beginning but later supported me when I said I wanted to study at the university.

Why did you not choose to study in other Arab countries?

They can give visa but it is very difficult. If I pay for a private university in other (Arab) countries, of course, they can grant me a visa but the problem is the same, they are expensive. The state universities do not accept Syrians except there are some scholarship agreements. I was thinking the same for European countries and learned that the situation is different. The universities in Europe are not as expensive as Arab countries or Turkey and I can get a visa, even if the procedure will take a long time.

Have you ever applied to a university in Europe?

Yes, British, German, Swedish, Polish, Italian and Maltese universities. They were all very kind and welcoming but advised me to solve the visa problem before I officially start. The problem is, when I asked about visa and called the embassies, they told me to send official registration forms from the university. If I don't register I can't get a visa, if I don't have a visa they do not register me to the university. I am trying to solve this problem.

Maybe you can go there illegally and apply to a university?

No, that will be a big trouble. I do not want to be a refugee. My family did not leave home. Here, I am not living like a refugee, so why should I try to be one?

You said you are not a refugee here, how did you get your residence permit?

I don't have a residence permit. I am trying to explain to you that I am not a refugee in the sense of living. I am not begging somewhere, I did not leave Syria and sold whatever I have, I am not trying to get a Turkish citizenship or find a smuggler and make it to Europe. The conditions I am living in are different than the other Syrians. I am just trying to study, not trying to find a way to live here or go to Europe.

So do you mean that you will return to Syria after graduating from the university?

It depends on the war. If the war is still going on, I will stay wherever I am. If the war ends, of course, I will return.

INTERVIEW #42, 14 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 24, MALE

Can you please share with us something about your life in Syria?

I am from Ghouta region. My mother is a housewife and my father was a local merchant, selling tobacco products. I am the second child of seven brothers and sisters. I graduated from high school when I was 18. When the war got worse we moved to Damascus. Our home was destroyed partially by a mortar fire, my two brothers and little sister got wounded but luckily we were all alive. Ghouta was a damned area, ISIS and other radicals, Free Syrian Army and Syrian Army were all trying to capture it. Our home is now totally destroyed after the capture by the Syrian Army. We don't know who bombed it, why it was bombed, or what is left from our house. It's all gone.

Why were you not able to stay in Damascus?

It is overcrowded. Some parts of Damascus are very secure, but the balance of the city, like all Syria, is broken. Too many people, too little jobs available, too little money to keep shops and streets alive.

When did you decide to leave? Was there an event that made your family decide to leave the country?

When you start to count your coins for tomorrow and try to find out if you have enough money to buy bread, then it means that it is time to leave.

Which cities you have been to in Turkey and how did you enter the country?

We entered illegally. Actually I do not know if it is illegal or not, we entered from the border gate, but we had no passports. The border guards simply did allow us to pass after a brief talk. They offered us to register ourselves for the camps but we never considered that. The conditions in the camps are horrible and for a crowded family like us, it would not be good to stay there. We first went to Kilis and shortly after headed to Adana. My two brothers and I worked in Adana but we tried to move far from Syria. I think Adana was secure enough for us but my father and mother still have psychological trauma. Every time they watch the news they feel more insecure. So they decided to move to Ankara.

Were you able to find a job?

Yes, we found jobs with my brothers but the salaries are really low. We get not more than 1200 TL, still lower than any other Turkish workers and no matter what we do it is impossible for us to proceed to a higher position. The money we get is enough to survive, but what will happen when we start to get older? Still working as ordinary workers, getting even less money than minimum wages for Turks?

Is this the reason for you to think about going to Europe?

Exactly. At least there are rules and law in Europe. Will I be a citizen and receive the European passport? I know in which conditions I will get the citizenship. In Turkey, who are we? Guests? Refugees? Asylum seekers? Immigrants? Muslim brothers of Turks? Who are we? I want to get a life, not swing between heaven and hell.

Don't you think you will have any difficulties in Europe?

Any difficulties can't be harder than here. At least you get what you work for there. The minimum wage is 100 Euros? Everyone gets 100 Euros. You need to live 10 years in the same place to get citizenship? Then you really get that after 10 years.

What about the cultural differences?

Here we also have cultural differences. We are Muslims, all right, but all the other things between Turkey and Syria are different. European countries do not care about whether you are Muslim or not. Everyone must obey the law and the laws are based on equality.

Which country you plan to go to and how?

I will try Switzerland but it is not very possible. Germany will be my second option. The question how is based on how much money I will have. If I have enough money I will try the sea, if not I will walk from Bulgaria to Austria, or take a bus, train, whatever is necessary.

I do not understand, the sea is more dangerous but you are telling me if you will have enough money you will choose the sea, why?

The sea is much faster and if you have enough money you will travel with less people, which means less risk for your boat to sink. On the other hand, the long walk is more dangerous, especially in winter it is impossible to walk due to the weather. Full of mud, cold and snow.

What does Turkey mean to you and what does Europe mean to you in one sentence?

Turkey means a friend that opened its doors. Europe means freedom and equality.

Would you be thinking about going back to Syria after the war?

We have nothing left. I have nothing left. All my friends are gone, none of them lives in Ghouta. It is not my Syria anymore. Syria is destroyed, just like our house and it is impossible to rebuild the same country or the same house.

INTERVIEW #43, 14 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 32, MALE

Can you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from Azzaz city, which is very close to the Turkish border. Together with my brother and father we used to make border trade between the two countries. After high school, I decided to help my father so I did not think about studying at university. I am married and have two daughters, and we are expecting a baby boy soon.

Will you be returning to Syria for the birth?

No, the baby will be born, Inshallah, here in Ankara. Everything is ready, my wife goes to routine controls and when the time comes, we will go to the hospital.

Are the medical expenses for your wife free?

Yes, when we moved here three years ago we did not know about it but last year a government authority gave us a card to receive health services for free.

How did you decide to move to Turkey?

The clashes around Azzaz were too much and the border trade became impossible. We first tried the other way (smuggling goods), but it was extremely dangerous. Two of our friends were shot. We are not used to do any other job, border trade is our specialization. It has a different nature than ordinary business. Azzaz is not Damascus or Aleppo, the population is much smaller and you can't easily open a shop, sell something and run the business. So we decided to cross the border and try our chance, doing exactly the same thing but being based in Turkey. It was, of course, impossible but you know, we just hoped for that. After this unsuccessful attempt we sent our families to Syria and I and my brother came to Ankara searching for a job. After we found a job we recalled our family to Turkey.

Where do you work here?

We are working in a factory producing wooden materials for furniture. We are ordinary workers, but for the moment there is nothing else we can do.

What kind of difficulties were you faced with here?

In this district we don't have many problems. We live with Turks, but there is a very large Syrian community, which reminds me of Azzaz. There, we also lived with Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs all together. On the other hand, the language is the biggest problem, you get easily lost without the language. I don't mean about finding a certain street or address, you need to know the laws, regulations, traditions and anything you can imagine. Without the language not much is possible.

Have you tried to learn it?

I can speak a little bit, we have many common words but it is not enough. You need to really sit and study to learn a new language however after all those hard work, who has enough energy to even open the cover of the book at the end of the day?

What about your children? Have they learned Turkish and adapted to the life?

Their Turkish is much better than mine, they have friends and communicate with people, even if they are still very little. If we stay here, I am sure they will speak Turkish fluently in a few years. They are not aware of much so they simply enjoy their childhood.

What is the reason for your plans about Europe?

My children. I told you, they enjoy their childhood just now but after a few years they won't be enjoying that much as they will realize we are in a foreign country and their fathers are working too hard for too little. I want them to live the best life they can have. That life can't be found here or in Syria.

Which country do you think would provide the best education to your children?

Scandinavian countries but I do not know if we can make that far. The borders are not that easy to be crossed anymore. Let us see. If we are exhausted on the road we will stop in Austria and apply for being a refugee there.

Do you think about returning to Syria someday?

Why not? For a visit, to see our relatives. It is our homeland; the war changes many things but not our love for Syria. Maybe, if everything will be really, really peaceful we may restart our business in Azzaz.

INTERVIEW #44, 15 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 25, MALE

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Daraa, in Southern Syria. I studied at high school. After graduation, I started to work in an air-conditioner repair service. I thought about trying for university but the money I got was satisfying and I did not want to leave my city to study. I have two brothers, we lived in our own home. We were a humble family and had whatever we needed.

How were you affected by the war?

Psychologically I am still trying to recover. All happened suddenly. For an outsider it looks like a long process but for us it was not. We never thought about leaving everything behind and seeing brother killing brother.

What caused you to make up your mind and leave your country?

We decided to leave in April 2013, when the clashes with ISIS and al-Nusra started. It was the moment that we really lost our hopes for the future of Syria. When the government killed civilians at the beginning of the civil war, we were very angry but still had hope. We had to stay even if Assad was a murderer, because we believed in justice. Assad is evil but when you are squeezed between two evils, you just think about going far away from hell. You turn one side and see a murderer, the other side you turn and you see a terrorist.

Did you leave directly to Turkey from Daraa?

No, we first moved to Damascus. It was overcrowded, expensive and the job market was so little since everyone from the rural areas moved there. After spending six months in Damascus we decided to go to Turkey.

How did you go? Through the border gate?

Yes, but not through the checkpoint. We walked from the fields.

As you had no passports?

We had passports but we were afraid that the border guards would not let us in.

Was the border closed at that time?

No, but you can never be sure. Generally, Turkey has always opened its borders for Syrians but we were hearing rumors that it was not allowing Syrians to enter anymore. So we took the risk.

Were you afraid of the mines?

There were dozens of Syrians with us and everyone assured each other about the safety of that road. There is a network amongst the Syrians and which roads are risky and which are not is quickly spread. Everyone shares their experiences.

How does this happen? By social networking?

Yes, by Facebook. You can get anything from the network, sometimes it misguides you but especially if you have a family member or a friend who followed a similar path you can always get the right information.

Will you be using this network on your way to Europe?

Exactly. I already checked everything and planned the route. I will go with my brothers from the sea, departing from Ayvalik village.

But this time it would not be like crossing the fields, isn't it dangerous to choose to cross the sea?

It is but we will have the best quality of everything. We have been working hard, saving money, and got enough to rent a boat with less people, buy the best safety tools.

What if you are caught on the road?

If the land is closed we will jump to the sea and swim, anyway we have just one small bag for each. If not, we have some spare money to try once more, though with worse conditions as we will have less money for our second chance. Again, if we are caught, we will simply work to save money and try again.

What causes you to insist even if you will be failing a couple of times? Is Turkey really that bad?

I want to have a life. Not being a refugee, simply I want to live in Europe as ordinary Europeans, with peace, no hate, no wars, no discrimination. What will I do if I stay here? Work in the full of dust and breathe it and wait for my lungs to die? Or live in one room with my brothers till I get old?

Will you be returning to Syria once the war is over?

Maybe. It is very early to think about it. The war will not finish for many years. Let me consider once it is over. For now, I just want to leave from here.

INTERVIEW #45, 22 JULY 2016

ANKARA, 53, FEMALE

Can you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from the City of Hama. I was not able to finish high school, as my father did not allow me to continue high school. When I was young, I was helping my mother for the housework and got married at the age of 20. My husband is also from Hama, a textile engineer. He comes from a wealthy family and was able to study at university. We have three children and two grandchildren.

When did you first see the war with your bare eyes?

At the massacre of Hama. I saw how Assad's forces shot the protestors randomly. He did not stop the massacres and sieged our city until he controlled it. I will never forget and forgive those who had spilled the blood of innocent people.

Did you leave the city after the violence you mentioned?

How you can leave when you see tanks everywhere? The city was sieged. As well, we never thought about leaving until two years ago. I always waited patiently and prayed for this war to finish, but days followed days, months followed months, years followed years and we were all exhausted. When my children decided to leave, I also convinced my husband to leave. Even the bread is not the same bread that we were eating. Leaving its price apart, the taste of it is not the same. Maybe it is psychological but I think everything has changed. I lost my nephew; children of my close friends died or were wounded. Why should my children die as well? A random rocket would fall on you and you are dead. Assad's men will raid your house and can arrest you without any proof.

How did you come to Turkey?

First my two sons went to Turkey to see if the conditions were available for us to move. Then, one by one, they took their families and finally my oldest son came alone and helped us to move. We first went to Gaziantep and then we moved to Mersin. After that we moved to Ankara.

How was the border crossing? Did you have any problems?

We came without passports because Assad is not giving any of us passports. Only the wife of my oldest son was able to get one, but she also crossed the border from the field. Once we were in Turkey we went to Gaziantep, a taxi driver was arranged before we crossed so he took us by taxi to the city.

Why would you like to go to Europe?

I am happy here and I do not want to leave at all. It is the decision of my children, and wherever they go we have to go with them since it is very hard for us to get a job with our old age. They are helping us financially, otherwise we can't survive anywhere. Our home in Hama is still not destroyed, our neighbours are taking care of it and guarding it for us, but I am worried about my children. I need to be close to them.

Are you afraid about cultural problems that you can face in Europe?

Not much, they know how to tolerate each other and everyone is living in harmony. At least their governments are not surrounding their cities with tanks and shooting its own citizens. They are not ruled by dictators. If there are no dictators forcing people to do something, they can solve all their problems.

Will you be returning to Syria if the war finishes?

If Assad leaves, of course, I will return back. Wherever I am, I will return. It is my homeland. If Assad remains, I will never go back. Who can give a guarantee to me that they won't arrest my children?

INTERVIEW #46 & #47, 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

ANKARA, 31, MALE

ANKARA, 26, FEMALE

Could you please tell me about your departure from Syria and your life in Turkey?

A: We came here three years ago from Idlib. We crossed the border and arrived at Antakya. We were not able to find a job. I left school when I was a little boy after my father died and started to work in the construction business to look after my family. I thought about working in construction again but Antakya does not offer much opportunities. I worked for a week and when I realized that they were giving me half of the money that they are giving to Turkish workers I quit the job. We came to Ankara thinking that there would be more buildings waiting to be constructed. I ended up working as a porter in Sincan district. Many times they did not pay my salary or gave less than we had agreed upon. I got injured from my back and had to stay at home for three weeks due to the heavy work. I started to collect paper from trash and sell it. Sometimes, I find copper and other materials that people are willing to buy. My wife also started to help me.

What are the biggest difficulties for you while working?

A: Once I was beaten by the local paper-collectors. Again I had to rest at home for a month. I think my rib was broken, it still hurts when I take a deep breath in the cold weather. During that month, my wife and my 10 year old son collected the valuable materials from the trash. Otherwise we would be starving. Paper-collectors are like a mafia here: When they see you they immediately threaten you to leave their area.

How are your relations with your neighbours?

B: They were afraid of us when we first moved. The children in the street did not want to play with my children at the beginning. My little daughter knows Turkish now and it is easier for her to communicate with other children. My other children are also getting better now, the people here are getting used to us. They told us that a few weeks prior to our arrival to Ankara there were some Syrian families, but they had a really big argument with the local people. Some people were wounded and all Syrians were forced to leave the street. Probably that was the reason for us to have communication problems at the beginning. Now we have better relations, some of them even help us but they are also poor.

What are the difficulties you are facing in your social life?

B: Turkish was hard to learn. Now I can speak some but my children know better than me. I wanted to find a job for cleaning the houses but the first thing they ask is if I know Turkish. I don't know why it is necessary to know Turkish for cleaning a house.

A: The medical services are another problem. I applied for getting free medical services but they did not provide me a card. For that reason whenever I must go to the hospital I borrow another Syrian friend's card to be examined by doctors.

What about NGOs or international organizations? Have they ever helped you?

A: Sometimes they come, do something good and leave. They always promise to come back but none of them came back until now.

B: They do it just for themselves. It is their job; they just come here, see us, sometimes help and leave. They are not really thinking of us.

A: Many times they advise us to go to the camps when they hear our complaints. I told them if they have ever seen a camp and most of them say they haven't seen. Then I advise them to go and see the camps first and then come back. We have seen the camps in Antakya, I still prefer to live in our small and old house compared to the camp.

Do you have any friends or relatives living in Europe?

A: No, I met just two people in Ankara that have been to Europe and came back.

Do you know why they came back?

A: I think they were deported. They just told me that they would try to go again.

How do you plan to go to Europe? Will you take the help of a smuggler?

A: By our own. We will go and see, we do not have money to pay for smugglers to rent a boat. We will go to Edirne and try to find a way. If we can't find a way we will stay in Edirne. I am tired of living with stress. Maybe I can find a better opportunity there.

What do you expect to find in Europe? What are your dreams if you can manage to go there?

A: I may be uneducated but I am not stupid or illiterate. Here the maximum I can do is to work in construction or to collect paper. In Europe, I can still make basic jobs but I will live with my honour. I can work in a market, in a shop, as a cashier, night guard, anything. I am not dreaming of being rich. I am just dreaming of living with my honour.

Would you stay in Turkey if you would get Turkish citizenship?

A: It would be nice, but still what would it change? Will I be able to find a job as soon as I get citizenship? The problem here is not citizenship or something else, we want to live with our honour.

If the war in Syria ends, would you like to return?

B: No. The name Syria is just something left on the paper. No one would be able to live as they used to live before.

A: I also do not want to return. Let us say I work for 20 more years in the construction business. What will happen after that? It is over for us. No matter what, we will go to Europe!

INTERVIEW #48, 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

ANKARA, 24, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Homs. My father was a pilot in the army before the war. After graduating from high school I moved to Damascus for studying at university. A year later, my parents came to Damascus after my father retired. My brother and my sister continued to live in Homs. During my final year at university the events started but I managed to graduate. In the meantime, my family's house in Homs was burned by oppositional forces. After this, my brother and sister also settled in Damascus.

Why did you decide to come to Turkey? Which way did you enter the country?

After graduation, I had two options, either going to college or joining the army because of the mandatory military service. There was also the risk that my father would be called back to duty. Many pilots were called back. So, as a family we decided to go to Turkey. In fact, I wanted to continue my education in Europe rather than Turkey, but it is impossible even to get a student visa. We wanted to come by ship but since the passenger ships stopped their navigation we had to enter from Antakya by land route.

Have you experienced any problems with the entry? Is it possible to have a problem when you want to go back because of your father's duty?

During the entrance we did not face any problems. My father does not want to return to Syria anymore. I experienced the real problems after I left for Turkey. My father will not have trouble if he returns; moreover whenever he wants he can be a pilot again. According to what he says there is a big shortage of pilots in the army. We were registered as refugees and entered. Some of my mother's relatives were living in Istanbul. So, we joined them. As my father's pension was still paid by the state we had enough livelihood but in order to be more comfortable financially we later settled in Ankara. My brother found a job here and my father's pension together with my brother's salary is enough for us to live. We do not have a good life as in Syria, but we are not in a bad situation.

You mentioned the problems you faced after leaving for Turkey, what kind of problem you had? Did you return to Syria?

Yes, I needed to take my high school diploma to apply for a master's degree in Turkey and so I had to return to our home in Damascus. While leaving the border I asked the migration service and nearly any authorized person I saw whether I would face any problem during my return. They all said that I would not have any problem if my name was not on the list. However, two days after I went to Syria when my father wanted to learn more about my situation and to be sure he was told that my name was on the list and I would not be able to return to Turkey. They told that the reason for that was my exit to Syria though I was registered as a refugee. It means that I had no option to re-enter Turkey in legal ways.

So when you returned, you entered illegally?

Yes, forced by the circumstances. I re-entered Turkey from Afrin, but this time illegally. The problem is now that I have my high school diploma but this time I do not have a legal residence permit so I can't make the registration procedure.

What would you do if the police catches and deports you?

I will enter again illegally. There are lots of ways to enter.

Why do you want to go to Europe?

Actually, my family does not want to go. Moreover my mother wants to return to Syria but my older brother and sister do not wish to return since our home that we stayed in with my father in Homs was burnt. I can return and make my military service but I really do not want to see war and clashes. When I was a child I had a great interest in guns and especially in war planes. Now, I do not even want to see them. Here, I can't register to a university but if I can get a residence permit in European countries I think I will be clear of obstacles. They are not giving visa but when I get the residence permit I will be able to register. I can enter Turkey legally, but when I return I become illegal. They are not accepting my legal application to study in European universities but when I enter illegally and get a residence permit they accept it.

Is there a country that you would like to go to?

Germany. Education is free of charge or has a very little amount of fee. It is the most comfortable place for refugees. They are giving more than 1000 Euros and provide lots of opportunities.

Where do you get such information?

From the internet and from Facebook.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

If I can buy a plane ticket and tell that I want to be a refugee in the airport that I land that would be the shortest way. But they are not selling plane tickets to the countries which demand visa. Maybe, I can go to Spain over Morocco. Going to Greece is very risky and those who crossed Bulgaria told that the locals frequently attacked them.

Do you think that you will have difficulties for adaption in Europe?

No, why should I have difficulties? I am not having difficulties here as well.

Would you like to return to Syria after the war ends?

Sure, I want. I do not think the war in Syria will finish soon but as long as we can have a normal life like in old Syria, yes. I can stay in Europe if the conditions are suitable, I do not have any problems with any country. I wish I had an opportunity to stay in Turkey.

INTERVIEW #49, 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

ANKARA, 46, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Damascus. I had a childhood that may be considered as ordinary but all the memories that come to my mind from childhood are good memories. We had a large family, staying in the homes next to each other with a shared yard. After high school I wanted to go to university but after the marriage I did not have the opportunity. My family moved to the city before I was born.

When were you faced with the war in Syria for the first time?

Nearly 5 years ago. We had no problems in the sense of religion, never had troubles with our neighbours that belonged to a different sect or religion. Religious beliefs were never turned into social problems. However within the time such things started to be spoken and conversations turned into discussions, discussions turned into violence. Even when the clashes broke out in Damascus, we still did not know the events would turn into such a serious dimension. Our home was not close to the city center so we just heard the news.

Why did you decide to leave Syria?

For my children. I did not want my son to join the army. The war turned into such a shape that we did not know the purposes of the groups. If the government enrolled my son we were not able to resist. Opposition was making a non-stop propaganda. For us, politics is a distant concept but young people can be easily tricked. My daughter was little and we were always wary as a family. My husband, whom I divorced with, had ceased his contact with us long ago, so together with my son and daughter we made a decision to go to Turkey. Imagine that there were some areas that you had to run while passing as both sides may have shot you.

How could you be targeted although it was obvious that you were a civilian?

Very easily, if you die, the opposition would say "Look, Assad is shooting the women just quietly wandering in the streets". Assad's soldiers and TV channels would make news on "the opposition is murdering the civilians". They would even keep on making politics over your corpse. After a short while your death would be forgotten. Everyday, there are too many incidents like this. It was not important for a woman to be shot by an unknown person in the middle of a street.

Why did you come to Turkey?

According to me the most logical place to move was Turkey. I chose here because of security. If you go to the Arab countries you never know what will happen. All of a sudden a new "revolution" may start and we may need to leave there as well. I perceived Turkey as a much securer place.

Did your ideas change?

No, I would still be coming to Turkey. Turkey is a much more comfortable, beautiful and a free country.

Have you ever considered returning to Syria?

We always watch the news with a hope, sometimes consider returning but it is too hard. Imagine, in Damascus where our home is located there are still ongoing clashes. For the moment it is controlled by the opposition but I do not think it will last long. Streets which are already destroyed would turn into dust and smoke if they are controlled by another group. Let anyone who will have the victory have it - I do not care, I only want an order.

Where did you use to work in Syria? Were you able to find a job here?

I was working in a workshop. I started as an ordinary worker after the divorce but right before the war I was already a functional manager. Here I worked in a company for a short time but the company closed after two months. I continued to look for a job afterwards but no one accepted to make a legal insurance or pay the salary they are paying to Turkish workers.

Have you ever thought why they wanted to pay less salary to you?

There is no need to think about it. If I refuse this job, there are many Syrians that may accept it instead of me. My financial situation is a little bit better thanks to my relatives' support, but you can find many Syrians living in even worse conditions than me that would accept to work just to buy bread.

Why do you want to leave Turkey?

In order to live a life that we deserve, with our honour. I am not lower than the other workers that are working. I am not a beggar. I have knowledge in foreign language. I am not speaking Turkish that bad any longer. But still I do not see myself equal. What would change if I stay here 10 years more? There is no chance to establish a life. It is not a problem to make a fresh start from scratch. Here, there is not even an option to start a new life.

Which country you want to go to in Europe? Have you ever made a plan about your route?

My uncle and his sons are in Austria, so I want to go Austria as well. At least, we can support each other. They know the procedures and I can adapt easier. I really would love to go legally but when I went to the Austrian Embassy they gave me no hope. I wanted to apply to be a refugee in the embassy but they did not even let me it.

Do your relatives have any troubles in Austria right now? How did they reach Austria?

They do not have troubles; they just do not want to wait any longer. The procedures are really slow. They arrived to Austria by the land road after illegally entering Bulgaria. Bulgarians made them wait for a long time but later let them leave Bulgaria.

Under which conditions would you renounce going to Europe?

I may return to Syria if the war ends. I do not know right now. But if I can stay in Austria I wouldn't like to return. There is no guarantee that within 10 years the same things can happen again. If all my relatives want to return then, maybe, I can return. I would not want to live alone in a foreign country.

How do you see the future ten years of Syria?

There is nothing left from old Syria. The blood is now dividing the people. I do not think people can forgive each other. Even if the war ends, how can someone from Latakia go to Daraa? How can someone from Idlib live in Damascus? Even if he/she lives, how will the government perceive him/her? Everyone will act with a suspicion towards each other. Maybe, it can change after two-three generations but for a long time everyone will have suspicions against each other in Syria.

INTERVIEW #50, 9 AUGUST 2016

DIDYMA, 21, MALE

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I am from the City of Aleppo. I moved to Turkey with my family about a year ago. I have two sisters and a brother. Our two cousins also came with us to Turkey. I studied at high school in Aleppo, succeeded in the exams for entering the technical school but my family decided to go to Europe. So, I was not able to register.

How did the war affect your life in Syria?

I have not been able to freely walk in the streets and found myself in the middle of a meaningless war. None of the young population in Syria is mentally healthy, we needed to live an ordinary life, but it was not possible. Everytime you hear the rockets, every time you look at the news, you hear your friends or relatives being wounded or dead.

You told me that you were 21, did you make your military service or were you called to arms?

I was called as soon as I finished high school, which I really think is ridiculous as 17-18 year old children should not be sent to the battle. Especially, being called to a battle which they have no idea of. I had an operation on my knee when I was a child so I can't run. This is why they did not enlist me to the army after their call. I heard rumors that people like me would be recalled to serve the army, but in the bases, not on the front line.

How did you enter Turkey? Which cities you have been to? Were you able to find a job here?

We entered with the help of smugglers and will leave with the smugglers as you can see. The policies of Turkey always change and we were unsure whether we could enter from the border gate. Thus, we did not want to run a risk and paid the smugglers while entering. Smugglers operating at the Turkish-Syrian border are not expensive since many people are doing this job and they only show the safe path, so we paid them to guarantee ourselves. We arrived in a city, or a big village but I can't recall its name. Then, we headed to Adana where my family had a good friend who was already living there for two years. We stayed with them and after learning everything about how to go to Europe we came to Didyma and are now preparing to go. For that reason I did not look out for a job, we all came here to go to Europe as fast as possible.

Imagine that I am a Syrian and want to go to Europe, what should I do? Whom should I contact?

You can check out the Facebook pages. Some of them are outdated but those who are active will help you. Another way is just to come to the border and ask the Syrians waiting near the border about that, you won't have any difficulties.

So which way did you and your family follow?

We tried to find the best one so we asked everyone we know and checked out the Facebook pages. We later contacted a smuggler from Viber (a smartphone application) and talked the details. He called us here but did not give a specific time. We may wait about a few weeks he said.

Do you know his real name?

We call him Moustafa but I think it is not his real name. His phone is even not a Turkish or Syrian number but has the code of some country from Africa.

Did you pay the money in advance?

No, we agreed to pay when we will see the boat.

Are you afraid of the risks?

Sure, who isn't? However, it is a risk that we must take. The worst that will happen is that we will return to Turkey and try again.

Do you have any relatives that live in Europe now?

Yes, some relatives of my mom are living in Austria now.

Are they happy with the conditions?

They are very happy, especially after they got their residence permit last week. Now they are going to the language courses and my cousin is working in a local bakery already. He used to work "black" but now he is much better as he can have a work permit as well.

Will you return to Syria after the war?

No. I am young and I want to continue my life in a better way. I will never cease saying I am a Syrian, I am an Arab and I am a Muslim but living in Syria is not a case for me anymore. It is destructed so much that it will not be able to recover for the next 20 years even after a peace.

INTERVIEW #51 & #52, 9 AUGUST 2016

DIDYMA, 20, MALE

DIDYMA, 33, MALE

Could you please tell me about yourself?

A: I am from Damascus but my parents migrated from a village near Hama. They migrated to Damascus before I was born due to my father's business. He used to work as a technician related to pipe systems used in water drainage channels. I wanted to follow his work as the customers were never ending but also wished to study at university in order to have more theoretical knowledge and better opportunities. However, I was not able to attend university due to the war.

B: I was born in Homs, studied at high school. Later, I started to work with my father who had a bakery, a very famous one in fact that was established by my grandfather. After I got married my wife also started to help us in the bakery. I have got three children. The youngest was born in Turkey.

How and when did you come to Turkey?

A: I came about four months ago. I applied for a passport but was not able to get it so I crossed the border from Qamishli. The other parts are now monitored by Turkish soldiers and there are some walls are constructed now as far as we heard. I sometimes feel guilty about coming illegally but I had no other chance. I am just here as a temporary guest and I never did anything illegal and do not wish to stay here, thinking this makes me feel better than feeling guilty.

B: About three years ago I arrived at Istanbul Airport from Amman. We all came legally, we had our passports.

Did you work somewhere in Turkey after you came?

B: I worked as a waiter in İstiklal Avenue. I was happy and doing fine. Regretfully I was fired six months ago because of the poor business. The boss said the number of customers coming to the restaurant dropped too much and he was not able to employ the same number of workers. I was fired together with two other workers. One of them was also a Syrian. After that I was not able to find a job.

Why did you decide to go to Europe?

A: If I stayed in Syria I would be called to the military. I avoided it with a report I got from a doctor but it was for two months and I was not able to extend it. I have no wish to join the war. We are not cowards. There are too many people like me. This is not a war against an enemy, this war is a dirty war started by foreigners. For what reason will I die? Assad? ISIS? Free Syrian Army? Al-Nusra? Tell me, which one is worth to die for? I am leaving Syria until that madness stops.

B: I told you, it is impossible to live in Istanbul without a job. The first two months we barely survived but after that we moved to our relatives' home. Twelve people living in a house was just too much, so we decided to leave and seek our fortune in Europe.

Which country are you planning to go to?

A: I will try Sweden. Only Sweden and Germany are giving the (residence) permit quickly. I don't believe other countries want the Syrian refugees; they are just receiving us because they have to. If they had the chance they would not allow us to enter.

B: We have relatives in Austria, so we will go there. At least we know the situation in Austria, how to register ourselves, how we will be treated, which procedures will take place etc.

You have told me that you are only waiting here for the right time to leave, what do you mean by that?

B: I think we are waiting for the weather to get a bit better at the moment. The smuggler said that the open sea is too wavy.

A: I am on the same boat with him and was informed about the windy weather too.

Did you meet with the smuggler personally?

B: I met him once before few days. He is from Daraa, at least this is what he told me. He seems to be experienced. I don't know much about him. I just spoke to him for a few minutes about the details.

A: He did not show up when I asked him to meet but I am on frequent contact with him.

How do you know that you will be in the same boat?

A: He told that there is no other group at the moment, so we just guessed it. He says that we are 10 people as a group waiting for the next boat.

What can be the problem during your trip to Greece?

A: The boat may sink, this is why we are waiting for clear weather. Turks may catch us, Greeks can catch us. The engine may stop in the middle of the sea.

What would you do if the engine stops while you are in the middle of the sea, far from the land?

B: If the weather is fine and our food and water is enough, nothing. Maybe the waves can throw us to an island. But if it goes really bad, I would call 112.

112 is the emergency number in Turkey, right?

B: Yes.

Why would you call the Turkish emergency?

B: First, I do not know any other numbers. Second, the worst that could happen on that case is Turks to take us back to Turkey. If that happens we can try again.

Can't you find the emergency number of Greece, so they can pick you and take you to the island?

B: Greeks would not take us to their lands, instead throw us back to the Turkish side. They always do so. This is what we hear from the people here.

From the local Turkish people?

B: No, the other Syrians.

You have told that you were the only group waiting for crossing the sea, are there any other groups?

A: Yes, there are other boats and smugglers present.

B: He is right, try to investigate other bays and you will see many other people waiting, it is not only us.

If something goes wrong and you can't head to Europe, would you stay in Turkey?

A: No, I will try again until I make it.

B: I will try to walk if this way fails. Even in Greece or Bulgaria we will have a status, so I will try other ways.

What do you mean by having a "status"?

B: We are not refugees here and do not get money from the government. We need to be refugees to have the money but Turkey does not want to give us a residence permit or refugee status.

Would you be willing to go back to Syria after the war?

B: I would think about it and probably I would return.

A: If the situation gets better and I do not have to serve a military duty fighting inside Syria, yes.

INTERVIEW #53, 9 AUGUST 2016

DIDYMA, 26, MALE

How did you enter Turkey?

Four years ago from Antakya. At that time, the borders were open to all Syrians and we came without much difficulty.

Do you have any idea if the border crossing is as easy as before?

Not as easy as before. I have not heard anyone from my family or friends who was denied entering, but the authorities ask for a visa and sometimes interrogate you at the border, that is what I know.

Could you please tell me about your four years in Turkey?

I came here right after getting my diploma as an agricultural engineer. I was hoping to find a job so from one place to another I looked for it. I was told in Antakya that Adana city has large fields and better opportunities on agriculture compared to Antakya. Yes, I found a job in the agriculture sector: as a night guard for the greenhouses. The money was not enough for me to live on so I moved to Istanbul. Things were better at the beginning, I found a home easily. We were five Syrians sharing the home. I had friends at least, but after a few months I got depressed. Imagine, you are living in a country of 70-80 million people and you still end up with having friends only from Syria.

So the Turks did not want to establish friendship with you?

No, that was not the problem of liking me or not. The problem is living in two different worlds. You only meet with the local people in the common areas where you can't avoid seeing each other and after that everyone leaves back to their own world. A few times I played football with some Turks I know from my workplace but that is all.

Why do you prefer to leave Turkey?

I don't have a life here. Okay, let us think I will stay here for 10 more years. Will my salary rise? Or will I be able to find a job? Maybe yes, but I can't see any hope for possible improvements.

I see, so why you decided to go to Europe instead of some Arab countries where you could easily find a job?

Arab countries do not give visas to Syrians.

Do you have any idea for the reason?

As they do not like us. They don't like anyone who is not from their country. Saudis do not like anyone but Saudis, Jordanians only like Jordanians. They even do not like Palestinians living in their country (Jordan). It has been long years since they started living together but they still don't like Palestinians. How do you expect them to help us in those circumstances?

But I heard the Syrian refugee population in Jordan is very high?

Yes, but they are living a miserable life. I mean, you know we are also not having a perfect life here but at least we are free. If we want to work, we work, if we want to leave, we leave.

So do you get a work permit easily here?

No, but we can work. There is no problem with working even without a passport.

What is your dream?

To work professionally in a field, to have a family and a good life.

Would you get married to a European even if she would be from another religion?

Of course, why not? If she understands me and does not force me to do something against Islam, I don't mind.

Would you expect cultural or religious problems in Europe?

Look, we are not like Afghans or others. Most Syrians are educated and liberal. We also had Christians in Syria and there were no problems amongst us. Why should we have any problems about religion? There are laws, you obey them and you respect the others. That is all.

Will you return Syria after the war ends?

To visit my family, yes. Many of my friends are still in Syria. But to live there? No.

INTERVIEW #54, 9 AUGUST 2016

DIDYMA, 26, MALE

How long have you been waiting here for crossing the sea?

It has been about 10 days.

Why did you decide to leave Turkey?

We can't live here the way we want. We need to live with dignity. We are working from the morning till the evening, come home, eat dinner, look at the television and sleep. We do not have a social life at all, except going out together and chatting with our Syrian neighbours.

Was your child born here or in Syria?

He was born here, in Istanbul.

Did you pay for the hospital? Did your child get a citizenship?

No, we did not pay anything. Our daughter can't get citizenship even if she was born here. That is one of the reasons for us to leave. If she was born in Europe she would get the passport.

Which European country you are planning to go to if you can succeed to cross the sea?

Germany. It is closer to here and they treat refugees better than other countries.

Greece is also a member of the European Union, wouldn't it be easier for you to stay there?

Greece does not want us. They try to stop Syrians and want to send those who already succeeded to enter their country. Why should I stay in a country that does not want me?

Will you be going to Syria after the war?

We will see. If everything turns back to what it was before the war, why not? Our home is still there, our parents are there. Memories are there. You can't leave everything that easy. I hope things will get better soon.

INTERVIEW #55, 10 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 41, MALE

Which cities of Turkey you lived before coming to Bodrum?

I lived in Adana and Mersin for two years. I was working in a restaurant. It was not hard to find a job at all if you ignore the amount of money you get. On my first job the boss asked me how much I wanted and I replied with an answer indicating lower than the minimum salary in Turkey because I had no idea about the wages. Of course, he was very happy to hear that and right after I started to work. I moved to Mersin after this job for a better and more comfortable life but things were more or less the same. My children were still not allowed to go to school, my wife was unhappy, so we decided to leave Turkey.

How long did it take to save the money for going to Europe?

About 4-5 months I saved the necessary money but my brother also contributed financially. Still not much, so if we can't make it to Europe we will return back and start all over again saving money.

Can't you go without smugglers?

It is impossible from here. Look, you need a boat, a professional navigation device, knowledge of when the border guards patrol the island. The island looks close from here but actually it is not.

What are the risks?

Drowning is the biggest risk. We have life vests and tried them already before using it in the road. They are simple but will work if something bad happens, God forbid. So this is not our biggest concern at the moment. However in the winter you really can die, this is why we chose this period to go. If we were to miss this summer we would be waiting for next summer to leave.

What about the Turkish police? Do they allow you to go?

It seems, yes. A few days ago they asked me why I came to Bodrum with my family and I told that I was looking for a job. They are not stupid, they understood but did nothing. How can they prove that I am going to leave? Even if they prove, why should they force me to stay in Turkey?

Are you feeling sad to leave Turkey?

Not sad, but I have a different feeling which is hard to explain. I like Turkey, its people, its culture. We did not face many troubles here. You opened us the doors of your country without asking anything. We are grateful to you. But nice memories do not help much to your life conditions. I am not sad, but excited. Everything will be much better, God willing.

What is your plan now? You will arrive on an island and after that what will happen?

After we arrive on the island we will take a ferry to Greece (mainland) and try to buy a train ticket to Germany. If we can't have one, or someone forces us to leave the train, we will walk to Germany.

Sometimes I hear Balkan countries closes their borders, what will you do in that case?

I will try to walk to cross the border. If it does not help, I will stay until they re-open the borders.

What if they want to send you back to Turkey on your way to Germany?

I will resist. I don't want anything from their country, so why should they keep me?

Can you describe Europe in three words?

Democracy, freedom, peace.

Can you describe Turkey in three words?

Our brothers, Erdogan, friendship.

Did your children feel sorry to leave Turkey?

Yes, a little bit. But I assured them they will have friends and go to school in Europe.

Will you return back to Syria from Europe if one day peace will come to Syria?

No, but I will take my children there for short visits or holidays.

Why are you so certain about not living in Syria again?

Because it is a destroyed country. Nothing is the same. I am from Idlib, and I am sure the city will be totally destroyed sooner or later. When the war ends, what will I be doing in Idlib?

INTERVIEW #56, 10 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 34, MALE

When did you decide to leave Syria?

I was called to the army in 2013. I am not a man of politics. I was a simple merchant, having a video-music shop selling CD's. When they called me to the army I investigated a little bit and it turned out to be true. The problem is, I already did my military service in Syria. Shortly after, I packed my luggage in a few days and went to Turkey thinking that the war would be finished in 6-7 months. Six months ended, another six months ended, another six and you see, it is getting worse only. I am divorced, do not have any children so there is not much reason for me to return Syria. After some time my parents also followed with my brother and sister. They are in Eskişehir now.

Are they planning to go to Europe as well?

Yes, they are. I will be the first to leave. Depending on the conditions they will follow me.

What do you expect to find in Europe?

Having a simple, stable life. I worked here in construction, although I am not a construction worker. I worked in a car washing company, although I am not a car washer. I worked in a lumber factory, although I do not have any idea about lumber or trees. I understand that without a diploma in Turkey this is the maximum you can have. Probably in Europe I may do the same things but at least I will have my own private house, even if it is a small one. Here in Turkey it is impossible to survive on your own.

How did you find the smuggler?

A friend of mine advised a smuggler and I contacted him by WhatsApp. My friend successfully went to France a few months ago.

Do you pay the money in advance?

I will pay it when I get on board.

Do you know the name of the island that he will be taking you to?

He told us but I don't remember. From there we will again cross the sea to the mainland. After that we will do our best to go forward.

Don't you have any information or a route after you go to mainland Greece?

There are a few options: You can once again try to cross the sea, to Italy. This is a good option but it is expensive. Another one is to take a train or bus to the nearest country. For example, I will go to Macedonia, from there to Serbia, Croatia and Austria. After Austria, it is safe, so even if I run out of money I may stay in Austria.

What do you mean by safe?

They can't force you to return. After Austria all the countries provide accommodation and give a monthly wage.

So none of the Balkan countries are doing this?

Yes, they put you in the refugee camps and afterwards you are like a prisoner. You can't leave the camps and you can't work or live in the cities.

Are the camps really in bad condition? Do you have any friends who stayed in those camps in Balkan countries?

No, but we always hear it from the news and Facebook groups.

INTERVIEW #57, 11 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 36, FEMALE

Your knowledge of English is impressive, how did you learn it?

I studied English Literature at Damascus University. I also speak French and a little bit of Turkish.

Did you learn Turkish in a course?

No, let us say: I learned it in the streets. There are many common words and it is easy to understand the grammatical structure of Turkish. Once you get the grammar things are not that hard.

Do you have friends among local people in Turkey?

Of course, many. We had good relations with our neighbours wherever we lived. We are very similar but, of course, there are some little differences. You learn to understand each other as time goes by. My children also had friends and, believe me, their Turkish is much better than mine.

So what is the reason for you to leave?

Simple: the financial problems. If we were allowed to work and had a work permit we could have a nice life and would never leave as Turkey is like our second home. My husband is an engineer. However, he used to work in a shop where they serve students mainly for photocopy services. He can fix the machine easily when it is broken but he can't work anywhere else as an engineer. I could be a teacher but I am also not allowed to work. Imagine both of us working in our professions, wouldn't it be wonderful for everyone?

Please correct me if I am wrong, I have seen many shops opened by Syrians and they also do not have a work permit. Isn't it possible to work without a work permit?

Yes, but you misunderstood. We can work, we can open shops, but not as a Turkish citizen. If I apply for a job in a private or public school, can I work? No. Can my husband work in a private company? Yes, but with a minimum wage, probably even lower than the minimum wage. If we had capital we could establish our own business but we are not merchants.

Do you have a valid Syrian passport?

It is valid, we extended it two years ago. It does not matter for going to Europe, if you don't have a visa, have a valid passport or not, it doesn't matter.

Did you have any contact with local NGOs or international organizations?

Yes, they really help in the urgent cases or for paperworks, but finding a job is something that you should do by yourself.

When did you decide to leave Turkey? Was there a specific event causing it?

No, we slowly started to think about it. We were not very desperate, but the children need to go to school. Under these circumstances it is not possible to register them at a school.

What is the reason for that? Did you speak with the school principals?

Of course, they are generally very kind but they send you to the ministry. The Ministry sends you to somewhere, and at the end they ask you to speak with the school. One or two years of not studying is maybe tolerable, but I do not want my children to remain like this. Even now, I am thinking how they would adapt to the schools in Europe.

Do any of your friends in Europe send their children to school?

Yes, I have a few friends whose children are going to school. There are also language courses for them and you will be amazed to see how those little children learned the language so quickly. This is another reason for me to hurry. When the children are young, they learn new things faster.

Will you think about returning to Syria?

I would like to, but my husband does not want it. I really like to teach young Syrian students but my husband is so hopeless about the future of Syria.

What do you think about the near future of Syria?

I am not watching television and I also do not want my children to watch it much. I only follow Turkish channels. The only thing I know is that Assad is getting stronger and ISIS will be dissolved sooner or later. After all these bloodshed, I don't know how the people of Syria will unite again.

INTERVIEW #58, 11 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 34, MALE

When did you come to Turkey? Was there a specific event that caused you to take this decision?

I came to Turkey about two years ago. I am from Deir-ez-zor. I come from a mixed heritage, my mother is half Armenian-half Arab and my father is half-Turkman, half-Arab. Before the war, we had no such hatred amongst us, as you can see from my family heritage, but the radicals have started to discriminate all non-Sunni Arabs. My grandmother's family decided to leave the city after some people spit on their face for being "infidels". They felt threatened so there was no other choice for them to migrate with us. First, we moved together to Damascus thinking it was secure. It was still better than Deir-ez-zor but the mortars were randomly falling from the sky. Finally we decided to leave Syria to find peace. If you ask for a specific event, a rocket fell just next to our apartment in Damascus, leaving a huge crater in the street. God knows what would have happened if it fell on our apartment.

Who fired that rocket, do you have any idea?

We don't know. In such cases, if you are supporting Assad you say: Opposition did it. If you are supporting opposition you say: Assad did it. It is many times not possible to determine who fired. I am not afraid of anyone, I hate Assad as much as I hate the opposition. They both have blood of the innocent on their hands.

Were you called to the military service?

No, but that was another problem. You may be called even if you did your military service in the past. There are some news about that in these days.

What happens if you refuse the military service?

They will take you by force. I heard that they also cause trouble to the close relatives of those who resist to go.

Could you please tell us about your life in Turkey?

I have been in Turkey for more than a year. The first two months I was not able to find a job. I was not experienced and I searched a specific job on my technical knowledge. Maybe, it took a while to realize but if you are a Syrian, you can't get a job on your area of knowledge. Even if you get, you receive the lowest salary. Even if you get the lowest salary, your boss may not pay it. So I decided to work in one of my friend's shops in Gaziantep.

What about the camps? Why did you not prefer to stay in a refugee camp?

The conditions were really bad. It is overcrowded and conditions are poor.

Which camps you have been to?

I did not see the camps with my own eyes but I have spoken to many friends who saw or stayed there. It is also a psychological issue. If you stay in a camp, you feel yourself as a prisoner. There are certain rules and you are limited. You feel yourself being in a cage.

How did you decide to go to Europe?

Who wants to live in a country where one can barely survive until the next salary? The other option offered is the camp. I may be a refugee but I am not a prisoner. After searching for a better job and always getting the same salary offers, I decided to go to Europe.

Which country you would like to go to?

France, if not Germany. I studied French in the high school and it will be easier for me to learn it. Many of the Syrians, especially elders, know very good French and we are used to their culture.

You have expressed to me that you are waiting your turn to cross the sea, what are your plans?

If I can cross the sea, I will try to make it quickly to Austria. I have some friends living there which already got their documents (residence permits). I will stay with them for a few days. After that they will help me to go to France.

What are the risks on your way?

You may be caught by the police and they can force you to stay in their countries, in refugee camps.

About crossing the sea, how long does it take to make it to Greece?

The sea is the easiest and safest. I am alone right now so if the worst happens I can swim or wait for border guards to pick me up. I do not think that would be a problem though- Did you climb that hill (he points to a small hill looking to the seaside) in the morning? Go there just before the sun rises and count the boats and tell me if any of them sinks. It all depends to the boat you pay for. If you have 1000 Euros for it, of course the risk is much higher. If you pay more, you are safer with less people on the boat.

Let us imagine there is a risk of 25% of being drowned while crossing the sea and you know about this before your departure, would you nevertheless take that risk?

No, then I would try another way. I would simply stay here until the war ends. I really want to be in Europe but I am not a fool. I enjoy life, if not why should I be going to Europe?

INTERVIEW #59, 12 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 27, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am a mother of two children. I got married in 2008. We were living in Aleppo's government controlled area. I am a pre-school teacher and my husband was a government officer, working for telecommunication infrastructure.

How long have you been in Turkey? How did you enter the country?

We are in Turkey for about two months. We came to Istanbul from Amman by Turkish Airlines.

Your husband told that you will leave Turkey in a few days, is it true?

Yes, he is right. We may even depart tomorrow morning.

Why did you not choose to live in Turkey? What are your plans now?

Turkey is very nice but my sister has been living in Turkey since four years. We came here before to visit her. She is happy, but after four years she is still living in the same conditions, the children do not seem to be doing good, probably due to malnutrition. They receive some help from the Turkish government but it is not enough. Our living conditions in Syria were better than hers, we asked her to return to Syria. Regretfully because of her husband's political background they can't. Now we will try to move to Sweden together with my cousin's family.

Why Sweden? Why not some other rich Arab countries where you could have job opportunities?

First of all, Arab countries do not want to have even a single Syrian refugee in their lands. We are angry with so many things, but we do not understand that policy. Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, I think also Egypt, accepted some refugees but they are not treated well. We have some friends living in Sweden and Denmark. So we know the conditions there and compare it with the Arab countries.

How do you communicate with your friends in Europe?

Most of the time by Facebook messenger.

You said that both of you were employed in Syria before you came here, what caused you to leave Syria?

The war will not end in the near future. If you could just see my students in kindergarten and how they are affected you would not be able to stop crying. Just look at the picture of what she drew (she shows the picture drawn by a 5-year old girl from her smartphone) – you see dead people on the ground. Is this normal? My children are also affected by it. The war will not stop. I do not want my children to grow up in such conditions.

As far as I know, some areas in Syria are very safe and peaceful like Tartus and Latakia. Have you ever considered moving there?

They are better, you are right. But we are not Alawites and life in those areas is so expensive. All the rich people from the other cities moved there, making it crowded and expensive. It is even a miracle to find a house in Latakia.

How did you arrange the meeting with the smuggler?

My husband had two friends that successfully crossed the sea with this smuggler, so we got his number from our friends. Even if you don't know a number, you can find smugglers if you need them. So, it is not a problem.

How?

Did you walk at the seaside? Look at the single men, just walking back and forth, checking the new faces. That people you see are most probably the smugglers.

What kind of difficulties you expect to face in Europe?

Making it to Sweden is the hardest thing. The rest is easy, we will just follow the procedures to get a residence permit.

Is it easy to get it?

If you obey the laws and be honest in the interviews, I think it is easy.

What do you miss most in Syria?

My brother, my home, my school, my friends... We are leaving it, but still it is our homeland.

INTERVIEW #60, 12 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 32, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am 32 years old. I have 2 children. Before the war, I was working in a factory in Damascus. After the civil war started, the economy went so bad that our boss had to close the factory. Last time I saw the factory it was bombed, but I think the owner already sold all the machines and moved to America (United States). After that, I worked in a textile workshop, making a similar job on a smaller scale. I got tired of the conditions in Syria. All the prices got higher day by day. Still it was cheaper than Turkey but combined with the war it made the life in Syria really hard. I was worried for my children. So I came to Adana for all those reasons. The son of my uncle was living there. We stayed two years in Adana.

Were you able to find a job in Adana?

Yes. It was nice but the inequality was driving me crazy. I was working harder than other workers, getting lower salary, and got warned by the Turkish colleagues because "I was working too hard". They generally pretend to work hard but when the boss is not around they slow the work, take irregular breaks. I am not used to it, a person must have a self-respect. My relation to the workers was not good, however the boss was happy about me, happy but still giving a lower salary. I spoke with many of my friends in Adana and understood that I was in a much better situation than most of them. At least, I was getting my salary if you know what I mean.

What caused you to decide for moving to Europe?

I fought with the owner of my house in Adana. Yes, I really fought with him. Most of the time I tried to pay the rent at the right time but you know sometimes you lack money because of some unexpected things. I was only two days late to pay the rent and I was thinking about paying it the next day. He knocked at our door like crazy and started shouting. I tried to calm him down but he was like an insane. I can tolerate many things but can't tolerate to be humiliated next to my wife. So things got out of control and we moved two days after, coming here.

What are your plans now?

We will go wherever we can in Europe. I am tired of being humiliated. I am a refugee, not a robot or animal. I will try to go to Germany first, if not I will keep trying to reach Norway.

Why will you try to go to Germany?

There are many Syrians there and most of the people in Germany that we have contact with are happy.

Do your contacts in Germany have some negative experiences?

Not much, they are just too stressed about the interviews that the government officials are having with them. They always live by a fear of being deported.

Do you know anyone being deported before?

Personally no, but I heard some were deported. Only one of them was Syrian though, they were mostly from Afghanistan or some countries from that region.

Do you think you may face inequality in Germany as well?

I do not think so; it is a country where the law reigns. If you do not put your nose into others business', you live your life just the way you want. No one cares if you are Muslim, Jewish, Atheist, Alawite or Japanese. If you respect the law, you live your life as you wish.

What are the advantages of living in Germany compared to Turkey?

Again, the law. The government also helps financially and provides accommodation. In Turkey, the only accommodation that the government provides you with are the refugee camps.

What about the medical services in Turkey? Are they free for Syrian refugees?

I think the basic medical controls and pills are free. Complex and serious operations are not free. That is what I heard from our friends who have been to hospitals here.

Did you ever use the medical services in Turkey?

Yes, they did not ask for money.

What is your dream for the next five years?

To have a stable life, happily with my children and family, without seeing any more violence.

INTERVIEW #61, 12 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 38, MALE

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I am from Idlib, married and have 4 children. My wife is also from Idlib. I graduated from the University of Damascus and started to work as graphics designer in a private company inside Damascus city center. My wife was a nurse in Idlib and moved to Damascus after we got married.

When did you come to Turkey? What were the reasons for it?

I came to Turkey two years ago. The reason is simple, every time my children heard the planes or helicopters they were hysterically crying. They are still afraid of the dark. One of them has a heart problem since birth and the quality of medical services in Syria is much worse now compared to pre-war conditions. We thought Turkey would be a better place to live.

Is Turkey a better place to live, as you thought?

This is a hard question. We are generally treated very nicely in your country. But the problem is the unknown future for us. I pray for Turkey, I like this country very much, but the future here is really vague. I am not comparing Turkey to what is happening in Syria but the bombings, problems in military, terrorism make me think of my family. I don't have Syrian TV channels at home. After what happened last month, I don't allow my children to watch Turkish television as well. It reminds me of what happened in Syria.

So are you moving to Europe for security reasons?

Not only that, also the education, future of my children, the medical services, everything is much better there. I just want my children to grow happily.

Why are you trying to cross the Aegean Sea instead of other ways?

What other ways? If you know easier and legal ways tell us, so we will do it. It is not possible to go to Europe with legal means. The other way you mention is the land route which carries more risk.

I thought the sea route was riskier?

Exactly the opposite. Everyone thinks it is risky but it is not. Of course you need to find the right person (smuggler) and the boat. First, the border in the north is very strict. Second, you have to cross too many countries. And you know what? They hate Syrians in those countries and I have four kids and a wife under my responsibility.

What is the reason for that hate against Syrians in those countries?

I don't know. Really it is too hard to understand. We are not terrorists. We are not murderers. I hope they will not be in the same situation like us someday.

How did you find the smuggler?

We had two options, İzmir or Bodrum. We chose Bodrum thinking it would be easier to find someone that can help us. Truly it was not hard to find, we heard Arabic speakers in the main street and asked them about where to find a boat that could take us to Greece. The person we asked called a friend of him. The next day, we met with the person who would be finding us a boat and we are waiting to go in a few days.

How much did you pay for the smuggler?

9500 US-Dollars for all of us.

What will you do after landing in Greece? Do you know which island the smuggler will be taking you to?

The smuggler says we need to surrender to the police and fill the information papers to ask for transportation with a vehicle to the border for going to Europe. I don't know the name of the island.

And what will happen after the Greeks will take you to the border?

We will take a bus or train to the Netherlands.

Why did you choose the Netherlands? There are countries which are easier to reach, like Austria?

I looked at all the information about refugees and I think the Netherlands is the best country for us. Northern countries are cold and do not accept large number of refugees. Germany is very crowded with all refugees from everywhere in the world. Going to England is also hard because they control their borders and deport refugees. The Netherlands is not very popular but they grant documents (residence permits) quickly.

What is your dream?

To find a job, to have a home, and see my children growing in peace.

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

No. Maybe yes, but not for a long time. I will go just for my children to see their homeland.

INTERVIEW #62, 12 AUGUST 2016

BODRUM, 24, MALE

When and how did you come to Turkey?

Three years ago, I came to Mersin Port with my legal passport.

How was your life in Syria?

I had a nice and happy life. I had everything I need, friends, school, family, motorcycle. Our problems were the basic, daily ones. The only thing I wanted was to finish university, start working, have a family. All my dreams are shattered.

Did you see the armed clashes with your own eyes?

Of course, many times. A rocket fell to where I was standing 30 seconds before. The apartment opposite to ours was totally destroyed. My uncle was shot by a sniper and barely survived, my mother had a heart attack due to the clashes in the streets...

So your family decided to move because of the war conditions?

Yes, we realized that we started to forget laughing. Dad was fired by the Assad's supporters because he was speaking about politics in his workplace. He was not a member or supporter of the opposition but he was criticizing Assad's actions towards the protesters and later his aggressive military actions. Afterwards my uncle helped us but his business was also not good.

Did you find a job in Turkey?

I was not searching for a job at first, my main aim was to continue my studies at university. We spoke with some organizations that are helping Syrians but at the end I gave up. One day they are saying "Okay, we found a university and you won't pay money for that", the next day they say I need to pay some money, and at the end they say it did not work out but they will look for another university. So I started to work in a shop, helping to repair electronic devices. I worked there for three months and later worked in different places.

How did you decide to move to Europe?

My father may stay here, nothing much would change and they may return back to Syria someday. In my case, I must study or start a business career. One day, we were chatting with my friends and after long hours of discussions we decided to try our chance for Europe.

Are you with those friends of yours now in Bodrum?

One of them is here, the other two crossed the border two weeks ago and are in Germany. We are late because of financial issues, I awaited the necessary money from my uncle and it only arrived two days ago. After I got the money next day I came here.

Do you have any contacts with people that can help you to cross the sea?

Yes, the same guy that helped our friends will provide a boat.

What about your friends in Germany, are they in a camp?

They are in a camp but not like the camps in Turkey. It is more comfortable and every few days they are spoken to about the procedures. That was not the case when we came here. No one asked what we would do or why we entered your country.

Have any of the NGOs or governmental institutions contacted you in Turkey?

No. They only gave us a card to have free medical service, and once they gave us 300 TL, but which organization gave it I don't know.

Are you afraid of the risks on the road to Germany?

Sure, but what can we do? It is a risk we need to take. I don't believe there will be a big problem though, I know how to swim and the sea is not cold. The colored life vests can be easily seen from the coasts, too.

Is there a risk for Turkish coast guard or police to stop you on the way?

I am not aware of the situation but everyone says police doesn't care if you are leaving. In the past, they were strict for a period of time and later started to ignore again. This is all I know. It is obvious that we are not here for holiday and police never asked for our passports until now. If they were really caring to block our way, they could do so. Let's hope we can really make it to Greece without a problem.

With taking similar risks you could go to rich Arab countries, did you think about that option before?

I do not want to live in other Arab countries but even if I wanted to it is impossible. Let's think you entered their countries, they would deport you the same day when they realize you are Syrian.

Do you think you may have adaptation problems in Europe?

Only the language, after learning it nothing will be a problem.

INTERVIEW #63, 14 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 37, FEMALE

Could you please tell us briefly about yourself?

I am from Syria. I am married and have three children. I received my high school diploma from Hama city. I worked as a janitor in a school afterwards. My husband was working in a bank before we came to Turkey. We used to live with my husband's family in Syria.

How did the war affect your life?

My uncle was murdered in the 1982 massacre by the Assad family. I will not hide it, I hate all the Assad family, Hafez, Bashar, Rifaat. They have been causing bloodshed to Syria for 40 years. When the protests started the first wave hit the members of our family, many of my relatives were arrested.

Were you afraid to get arrested as well?

No, I am a woman and out of politics. I just hate the Assad family. If you ask me who I support, I just support democracy. There was no reason to arrest me.

What caused you to leave Syria?

Some of my family members joined the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups. I was worried about them. We had frequent contacts at the beginning but it started to slow down and finally ceased. However I think they are alright. When they are alive you do not hear much but when they are dead the news arrives quickly. The problem is my parents and children. We can't live in such an environment. They still remember 1982, they all told me what really happened at that time. Now all Syria is facing a 1982 massacre.

Did your parents also leave Syria?

Yes, they left together with my brother. We left Syria three months earlier. They moved to our home as soon as they arrived.

Which cities did you live in in Turkey?

Adana and İstanbul. Adana was a nice city, it had many similarities with Syria. The problem was to find a job so we decided to move to İstanbul. I think we made a mistake by moving to İstanbul, life was really hard for us there. In Adana, we had time to walk in the parks, visit the dam, had neighbours. In İstanbul, you have no chance for that. I was cleaning the houses, my husband was working in construction if there was a need for men and when we came home we were just eating, sleeping and working again.

How old are your children? Did they learn Turkish?

My daughter is 15 years old and I have two sons aged 12 and 9. They did not go to the school for the first two years. We were able to send them to school only last year. They had problems, they were older than their classmates and their Turkish was not very good to follow the lectures.

Why were they not able to go to school in their first two years in Turkey?

At the first year it was already winter when we came and we were in a very different environment. The second year we tried heavily to send them to school. Finally, we did in in the third year.

Who helped you during this process?

Some officials from the government came to our neighborhood and asked the Mukhtar (elected neighborhood representative) for the addresses of the Syrians. They visited all the houses and asked us about our problems and tried to help us.

Did they help you in other subjects as well?

Yes, they provided us with an ID card indicating our condition and gave us a monthly salary. Not much but still - that money really helped.

Why did you come to İzmir?

We will try to cross the sea to Europe. I think we will stay here for some time. My husband knows the details.

What do you think of life in Europe?

I don't know much. My husband says the conditions and life are better in Europe.

Under what conditions will you return to Syria?

It is not something that only depends on me. We came here as a family. When we will go back we need to discuss as a family. But I think we can't return soon. Assad is still there, the war is still violent.

Are you afraid when you think about crossing the sea to Greece?

Of course, I am but my husband says Greece is only 20 minutes away. This fact calms my heart.

INTERVIEW #64, 14 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 21, MALE

Your friend just told me that you will be going tomorrow morning to Greece, is it true?

Yes, that is what I have been told by the smuggler.

Can you please tell us your experiences for finding a boat to Greece?

I came to Turkey last year. I stayed with my relatives who were living in İstanbul. It took a long time for me to decide whether to stay in Turkey, to return to Syria or to go to Europe. All the options have advantages and disadvantages. I can stay in Turkey, my family financially supports me but I don't want to live such a life. I am already 21 years old and I must work or study. I was feeling that it was the most important cornerstone in my life to decide about staying or leaving and to study or work. Believe me, it was a very hard decision. So, I finally made up my mind to try my chances in Europe. I found someone to help me crossing the sea and I have been told to come to İzmir for departure.

Could you please clarify, is it that easy to find smuggler that can help to cross the sea?

Generally, yes.

So how do you find a smuggler?

Look, you don't know Arabic, right? Even if you don't know Arabic, walk around Basmane (a district in İzmir). In maximum 10 minutes you will find the person you are searching for. Coming to your question, I found them on the internet.

Did you speak with him on the phone or meet with him personally?

I spoke via WhatsApp and met with someone he works with but not with him personally.

So he also has subordinates working for him?

Of course, think of it as a company.

How much did you pay for it?

Nothing so far. I will give the money when I see the boat. The price is about 2500 dollars. Too much if you ask me but I will be going in the "first class". There will be maximum 15 people on the boat and we will have the original life vests.

What can be the possible problems?

I made a long research on the internet to avoid problems but this is life, you never know what happens. I think the only problem is being caught by the coast guards.

Let's think that the coast guards caught you and you were taken back to Turkey. What happens after that?

Nothing! You either try again or stay in Turkey. Life will go on.

What about you, will you try again in that case?

I want to, but I can't. At least for the next year I must save money. This time, my family sent the money but I can't ask one more time.

Maybe you could return to Syria and work there to save money?

Look, if I return to Syria, I must serve in the military. It is an obligatory service. Returning to Syria means I must stay there until the war ends.

What is the main reason for not returning to Syria? It is the military service or something else?

The primary problem is the military service. I am not afraid to die and I love my homeland. I also have no problem with Bashar Assad, I think he is a real patriot. The problem is, I am not a soldier. If I wanted it to be, I would go to a military college. If Syria was fighting with Israel, I would join the military. No matter what, the ones I will be shooting in a civil war will be Syrians. Of course, I know ISIS means terrorists but it is the duty of the soldiers to fight them. My duty is to study or to work.

What are your plans in Europe, if you can manage to go there?

I will try to get the residence and work permits. If I can, I will try to get a citizenship as well, study and have a life in Europe. I told you, it was a very hard decision but I am determined to go now.

Let's imagine that the news tonight will officially declare the war in Syria is over, would you return or still insist to go to Europe?

I would return, of course. Anyway, the war will not end for a long time. I am very sure about it.

INTERVIEW #65, 14 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 41, MALE

How long have you been living in Turkey?

I came to Turkey about two years ago. I arrived in İstanbul directly after staying in Jordan for a few months.

Why did you leave Jordan and decide to come to Turkey?

Jordan was the first place that I could take my family to safety. I was living in Suwayda, a city close to the Jordanian border. The Turkish border was too far away from my city. Actually, our first decision was to live in Jordan, thinking it would be easier to live there but conditions were not good. Yes, worse than here. The only advantage of Jordan was the language. It was easy to communicate and adapt to the social life, but the disadvantage is the lack of economic opportunities. The country is already flooded by Palestinians and they also have hard times finding a job.

Are there any differences between the Jordanian and Turkish society's perception of Syrian refugees?

You will be surprised but Turks treat us better. It doesn't mean Jordanians attacked or harassed us but we were not welcomed there at all. They seemed to tolerate us and nothing more. Here people are much nicer to us. Except for the working conditions, all is well.

So your only reason to leave is the working conditions?

Not that simple, working conditions is the biggest problem but generally, we have no future here. My life seems to be paused. It is like a dream, which I am waiting to wake up from. I used to have a work, home, friends, social life in my own country. Now, the only thing I do is to survive for the next day. My career? Stopped. My social life? Stopped. My hobbies? Stopped. Can I go to fishing on weekends? I can't. Can I go to picnic with my family? I can't. Can I just take my car and drive when I am bored? I can't. So what I have in Turkey is not a life. I just want to have a life.

Do you think you will be able to have the life you search for in Europe?

Only God knows, but I think I have a better chance in Europe for that. Here we do not have any legal documents or work permits. Without the most elementary things, how can you improve your life?

Are you working now?

Yes, I used to have my own butcher's shop, but now I am a simple worker in a butcher's shop. Still, thanks God, I have a job and can take care of my family.

Is your salary enough to single-handedly support your family?

It is not, of course. We live in the same house with my brother's family. We are nine people in the house.

Did you ever receive help from some organizations or the Turkish state?

We irregularly receive food from the government or municipality. Once, the local people also helped the Syrians living in our street with giving second-hand clothes.

What are your future plans?

I am still trying to save some money. Once I have 10.000 US-Dollars in my pocket, I will take my family and leave from here. Haven't decided yet but I am thinking about going to Edirne and try to find a way from there to go to Austria.

Did you contact with a smuggler?

No, I don't trust them. If I really must, I will pay them. But first, I'll go to Edirne and try to cross the border by myself. It is stricter than the coastlines but I and my wife don't know how to swim. One of my friends told me that his son helped him finding the right way with a system from his smartphone that allowed them to cross the border.

The friend you mentioned, is he in Europe now?

He is, but he was threatened in Bulgaria. It was a really a hard and long road he said. He went there last fall. We contacted him a few times after he made it to Sweden. He warned us not to go in the cold season because he got really sick from his lungs on the road. He also warned to pass Bulgaria as quickly as possible as the police and some locals really treated them in a bad way.

What does Europe mean to you in three words?

Comfort, respect, justice.

Would you go back to Syria if the war ends?

I would like to but both my parents passed away in the last three years. I have relatives in Syria but there is nothing else for me. I saw the picture of my shop, a friend of mine sent it. There is nothing left of it. At least the building is still there, half of the buildings in the street collapsed. If I was not next to my wife and children I would really cry after seeing that picture. I don't care about money or my shop but our colorful street turned to gray. There was not a single different colour in the picture of the street, just gray.

INTERVIEW #66 & #67, 15 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 39, FEMALE

İZMİR, 44, MALE

Can you please tell me about your life in Syria?

B: We were married 19 years ago. I am from Aleppo and my wife is from Idlib. We have two children, aged 17 and 14. I am an oculist and my wife is a pharmacist. We both graduated from Damascus University, one of the best universities in the Middle East. We both worked for many years in Damascus and had a busy, yet stable and happy life. I have travelled to Turkey three times before for conferences and common trainings based on the agreements between the governments. My wife and children also came to Turkey with me apart from work related visits. We had a very nice holiday in Antalya in 2005 or 2006, I don't remember the exact time.

Did you continue to work as a doctor and pharmacist during the war?

B: Sure, we had to. I continued to work in the hospital without any complaint. No matter who comes as a patient, I will always do my best. This is why I became a doctor. Until the last minute I served my people.

A: Similar to him, I also did my best to help whomever in need. My pharmacy was very close to the hospital he worked at and many times we even had to work during the nights where we normally did not have to.

When did you come to Turkey? How did you enter the country?

B: We came about 10 months ago with Turkish Airlines from Amman to İstanbul.

As far as I see you were happy with your work conditions and had a stable income in Syria. May I ask why you left Syria?

B: We were probably amongst the luckiest group in Syria; always in the safe side of the country and had regular jobs. I call it the safe side but I do not think everything was secure, we have seen enough rockets and bullets for all those years.

A: And saw enough wounded and dead people that always reminded us about how dirty a war could be.

What do you mean by “dirty war”?

A: Do you think it is normal for a country to fall into this situation that quickly? Is this something normal? It is so dirty that all groups fighting at the moment are guilty. All groups think about their own benefits, not the benefits of Syria and each of them is supported by external powers.

B: This is one of the reasons for us to leave. We served long years, without any complaints, many times working voluntarily in the night shifts. But we are humans and we have limits. After all those years, even if you are used to see the most traumatic things as a doctor, you come to a point that your nerves break down. Believe me, I was psychologically in a really bad situation. During the last months before we left I became extremely aggressive, even to my family. I was yelling to the basic questions and requests. I was not aware of that until I saw my wife crying one day silently after I shouted. I realized that I was not the man I used to be and we sat and talked that day.

A: We tried to decide whether to have a long vacation or to leave Syria.

B: Yes, I thought a long vacation would make everything better. We both got one month of vacation and travelled to Latakia. After returning back things seemed to be better. Later I came to the conclusion that I was exhausted. I talked to my wife again and we decided to leave. My parents and brothers are still in Damascus, though. Sometimes I feel guilty because our condition was better than my brothers, yet we left Syria.

Why did you come to Turkey?

A: I love Turkey! I still remember our holiday before the war. Your country is really amazing, the food, the climate, the culture, anything you have is really attractive.

B: These are the good sides but I chose here because of my past experiences and contacts in Turkish hospitals.

Were you able to find a job easily?

B: Yes and no. I was not able to work in hospitals because of some procedures that I still do not understand. I am a doctor, right? I have been to Turkey before based on mutual agreements and conferences, right? Still they demand too many things to start working as a doctor in the hospital. I feel humiliated. Anyway, I was able to start working in a private eye-clinic, not legally but having some kind of an "assistant" status. I was a doctor and became an assistant here.

A: I am in a similar situation. I am a pharmacist, I had my own pharmacy but here the only thing I could do is to work in a pharmacy as an ordinary worker. Also the language problem is very challenging. Again I am telling you, even here we are amongst the luckiest group. We both were working and had better salaries compared to other Syrians.

So what are your plans now? Which route you would like to go to Europe?

B: No, we are not going to Europe, we changed our plans. We just received a letter from the USA that welcomed us as refugees. We have been told that we will be settling in Detroit.

How and where did you apply in order to get this invitation letter?

B: We applied first to UNHCR and to the US Consulate in İstanbul. We have been to a few interviews and just recently learned that we were able to migrate to USA. Two other friends of us followed the same way, they were also doctors but it took about 1.5-2 years for them to receive the approval. Again, we are lucky, thanks God.

I heard from your friend that you were preparing to go to Europe. So I suppose it means that you cancelled your plans.

A: We also applied for a similar status to Norway and Britain.

B: True, we also followed a similar procedure, entered two interviews in each countries consulates. But our primary decision is the USA.

Why?

B: There are fewer refugees in USA and the mentality of the American government is different. In America, you are a treated as a citizen, or at least until you get your passport you are always equal and you don't feel much the difference between you and locals. In Europe, you are a refugee. Maybe your children will be Europeans, but you will always be a refugee.

Would you return to Syria if there would be a peace agreement?

B: It is too late. I served my country for many years, under the war conditions as well. I believe that I paid back my debt to Syria.

A: I want to see Syria every year. My family is still there and I will miss them but I want my children to study in America. That is the best for all of us.

INTERVIEW #68, 15 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 46, FEMALE

How long have you been living in Turkey?

I came to Turkey two years ago.

What made you decide to migrate here?

One of my children has autism. We have to take him to special doctors and schools probably for all his lifetime. Before the war we moved to Damascus for that and everything seemed to be going well. However, the war caused a very negative effect on his therapy. Now my sister in Damascus says the situation is better but when we were living there the sound of the jets, bombs, rockets, explosions were never ending. He sometimes cried non-stop for hours. Our own psychology was not well after all that violence in Syria, how could my poor boys be well there? So, we decided to move anywhere he could have peace and continue his therapies.

To which cities you have been in Turkey?

We first went to Gaziantep. After that Adana, Mersin, Ankara and now we are here.

Why did you frequently change your residence?

As we are dependent on our child. Wherever better conditions are offered to us we move there. We stayed just a few days in Gaziantep and moved to Adana to live with my husband's cousin. It was not easy to find a job and a hospital that could take care of my child there so we moved to Mersin. It was a better city, the climate and conditions were really positive for my child but my husband was fired from his job. Then we moved to Ankara trying to apply to the United Nations, Turkish government and other institutions. They helped us and we moved to Izmir.

Which organization helped you?

When we went to the United Nations they called somewhere and they conducted interviews with us. After that we went to a doctor. The doctor gave us a paper and we were sent to a private hospital here. We also get monthly financial aid from the United Nations.

What are the reasons for you to think about migrating to Europe?

We are happy here but our future is uncertain. Many of our friends are in Europe and have documents there or are waiting to get their documents. In two years, I never received a paper from Turkey indicating that we are refugees or we are living here legally.

Which country you want to live in Europe?

I don't know much but my friends there say Germany is the best country for refugees.

Why do they think Germany is the most suitable country?

They told me that they got papers quickly and government gave them language courses and accommodation. They also help you to find a job. I also think Germany is better because they have very good hospitals and doctors.

Were you still able to get therapies from the doctors in Syria before you left?

Yes, I can't complain about it. They were trying their best. On the other hand many doctors had to work too much and they were all busy with the people wounded in the war. Once my child's doctor had to enter an operation because of shortage though he had no experience in operations and was not specialized in it. May God help those who are still in Syria.

Would you return to Syria after the war?

I don't want to return to Syria. No.

INTERVIEW #69, 16 AUGUST 2016

MALE, 25, İZMİR

When and how did you come here?

I came here three years ago for studying. First I arrived at İstanbul Airport and came to İzmir by bus.

At which university and department are you studying?

I am studying at Ege University. Is it possible if I don't mention my department?

Sure, but why do you hesitate to tell your department?

Well...If I tell, anyone from my social network can understand that it is me. I am the only student from Syria in my department. Nothing bad should happen but you know, just in case. You never know what happens.

Why did you choose İzmir to study?

I like this city very much. Before the war we visited İstanbul, İzmir, Bodrum and Antalya with my family for holiday. I could go to another country but I find Turkey much closer to me culturally. Learning the language is also not hard, we have lots of common words.

Are you going to Syria to visit your family from time to time?

I don't but they frequently come here instead. Sometimes my mother stays with me for a few weeks. I would like to go as well but you know the situation.

Is that the problem of military service you mentioned before the interview?

Yes, if I go they'll take me to the army. It does not matter if I am studying at a university or not.

Will you be going to military after your studies?

Of course not. I support Assad, but I am not a soldier. Let's think I returned and joined the army. Will I be of any help for the siege of Aleppo? Am I a sniper? Or a tank driver? I do not even know how long it will take to serve the army if I would decide to return.

You expressed that you are willing to go to Europe, what is your motivation for that?

I told you that I am happy in Turkey. I have a girlfriend, a fine life, I enjoy being a student, I like the food, culture, everything. I want to continue my studies in Europe after graduation. Who knows, maybe I will return someday after a Master's degree and work here.

Do you think you will have adaptation problems in Europe?

No. Look, I am different than the English. But Greeks are also different than the English. Does Swedish people looks like Italians? Do they have any similarities? They look different, their languages are different, and their cuisine is different. Do they have any problems with each other? So why should I be afraid?

Does your family support your decision? Do they think of moving to Turkey or Europe with you?

Honestly, they want me to stay in Turkey. They are not open-minded like me. Sometimes; my mother talks about staying with me but my father is opposing it. He says he won't leave his motherland and won't be a refugee in a foreign land.

What about you, if the war ends in Syria would you like to return?

Maybe yes. I don't know right now. Everything depends on so many different variables. If I say yes or no now, I would be only telling a lie.

INTERVIEW #70, 16 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 37, MALE

How long have you been living in Turkey? Could you please tell me about your life in Turkey?

I crossed the border from Antakya about four years ago. Shortly after, we took a bus to İstanbul. My mother's relatives were living there. After spending a few days with relatives I rented a house in Kartal district. I had some money to survive as I sold my two cars and whatever I had. I was a driver in Syria so I tried to find something that I could do related to my background. Working as a taxi driver was impossible, as I had no idea about İstanbul before I came here. It is a really big city. I have a driving license to drive trucks and other large vehicles. I tried so hard to find a job but the main problem was my work permit in Turkey. There were some opportunities to work as a driver for carrying goods to Iran but to cross the border and to work I had to get a legal permit. It was not possible to get it so I started to work in a teahouse. After a year, I quitted and started to work in a local shop in a mall.

Did you apply to get a residence permit?

Yes, I have a residence permit.

What are your near-future plans?

I saved enough money to take my wife and three children with me to Europe. I am done here. It is enough. I do not want to spend my life in such desperate conditions. Everything is ready but I am trying to save just a little bit more.

What do you expect to find in Europe?

I expect a better life. I want a good education for my children, a social life for my wife. I want to live as an ordinary person in Europe, with all legal documents received.

How did the war in Syria affect your life? Was there a specific event that caused you to leave the country?

Life in Syria for me was really nice. I had two cars and was thinking about buying the third and hiring another person to work with me. Our house was really close to my family, we just changed all the furniture in our house, all was brand new. Nothing matters now because a mortar destroyed the house. If you ask for a special event, there is no special thing that caused us to make up our minds to leave. It was a spontaneous and a sharp decision.

Is there any specific European country that you would like to live in?

Switzerland or England. But we may try to go to a smaller country as well, maybe Belgium or Denmark.

INTERVIEW #71, 16 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 35, MALE

We will not ask you anything related to your personal background, but could you please tell me when and how did you come to Turkey?

I came three years ago, from near Tel Abyad. I was wounded and had to receive medical treatment. So, my friends quickly took me to Antep. You see this scar? Thanks God I can move my leg better and do not stumble anymore.

Where did you get the medical services? Was it for free?

In Antep. I don't know the name of the hospital. It was for free, of course.

How long did you stay in Antep? What happened after?

I stayed about three months. There I had some other health problems as well. After that I returned to Idlib and continued to fight against the regime. I told my family to move to Turkey, so they settled to Antep. I spent a few weeks with them and returned to Syria, again. Finally, I also joined my family in Antep after a while.

Did you come back to Turkey because of your health problems?

That was my excuse to the people in Syria but I was very angry about the policies of the group that I belonged. We rebelled against Assad, we demanded democratic changes, but they allied with radicals who just spoke about verses from Quran and nothing else. Look, you can't ally with lesser evil to fight against the greater evil. They are both the same.

How was your life in Turkey?

It was very hard. Imagine, you only know how to fight for many years and suddenly you are trying to return to an ordinary life. Of course, I had my own job before the war but the battle is so dense that you start to lose what you knew before. Finding a job was relatively easy but I was very aggressive, immediately losing my control whenever something negative happened. I realized it after speaking with an old friend of mine. I also had problems with my wife. Now things are better thanks God.

How did you manage to solve your problems?

I started to spend more time with my family, I switched off the television and sold the satellite dish. The less I hear about Syria, the happier I am. Also İzmir is better than other cities. The climate is better, life is cheaper, my children are happier here.

Were you able to work in İzmir?

Yes, my friend found me a job at the port. Physically it was challenging but the daily payments were better. The attitudes of the workers in İzmir are also much better. They do not isolate you or talk behind your back.

Do you have any plans to go to Europe?

Every day I change my mind about that to be honest. Sometimes I say I am tired of all this and want to have an ordinary life in Europe. I need some time before I go. I am really tired, crossing the sea, walking, waiting, running from one country to another...Only thinking about this makes me even more tired.

Which country would you like to go to once you decide to leave?

Sweden or Norway. Those countries are very wealthy, life is calm and people are kind. My uncle is in Sweden now. We talk to him sometimes and he says that he is very happy. He told me that even the camp they settled in was better than the houses in Jordan.

Did you ever think about moving to Arab countries where they can offer better job opportunities?

Taking a visa from them is impossible. Another thing is, there is no guarantee that they will not face the same destiny as Syria. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, maybe the next one is Jordan, maybe Saudi Arabia, maybe Qatar. So, what will we do after that, move to another country again?

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

If Assad controls Syria I can't. If he and the extremists would be kicked out of Syria surely I will return. What did I fight for all those years? I fought for my country and I will not turn my back to my homeland.

Let us imagine you are in Europe, have residence and work permit. Would you still return to Syria?

Of course, I would. Nowhere is like your motherland.

INTERVIEW #72, 16 AUGUST 2016

İZMİR, 24, FEMALE

Could you please briefly tell about your life in Syria?

I was born in Afrin and I am 24 years old. I was living with my parents, two brothers and two sisters. I graduated from high school. Following graduation I started to help my mother in housework. Sometimes we were altogether working in our farm.

Your father was a farmer?

Yes, we had some land and have been farming since my great-grandfather. Afrin is a fertile area and many different things can be harvested. My mother's father was producing soap. My cousins are still doing that job.

How did you confront the war?

Afrin is secure; Assad's army left Afrin about 3-4 years ago. I heard some minor clashes between Assad forces and YPG but that is all.

What caused you to move to Turkey?

It was not my personal decision. One day, my parents gathered all the family and discussed about that. The problem in Afrin is not the security or war but economy. Turkey is imposing an embargo on us. The smuggling is not easy as before, now the border is very strict. The prices are changing all the time. Our soap is very famous and there is a high demand for it in Turkey but we can't sell it legally. We need to buy some tools from Turkey, yet there is an embargo and we can't buy them. Last year we sold our crops so cheap that it was not equal to half of the normal price. After the family talk, we came to the conclusion that I and my brother should visit Turkey and look for the opportunities.

How long you have been living here? How did you enter Turkey?

For three months. We crossed the border with the help of smugglers.

Is crossing the land border to Turkey risky? How much did you pay for the smugglers?

It did not use to be risky but now the border is stricter. The Turkish soldiers do not randomly shoot people crossing the border but if they are suspicious on that day for some reason then the risk is high. We did not pay anything for human smugglers. The person who helped me was someone we knew for long time.

Did you make up your mind to move out of Turkey?

Yes. We will not live here. It is a very nice country but whomever we spoke to is not happy. Finding a job is a problem, rents are very expensive. We will return back next week and later my brothers will try to go to Europe.

What is your brothers' main motivation to try Europe?

It is the same motivation that brought us here; they will go and see whether it is worth to go to Europe. We already have relatives in Cologne, living there for more than 20 years. My brother will stay with them for some time and see if it is better to go or to stay.

How do they plan to go?

Our relatives will write an invitation letter for my brother but the problem is he does not have a passport. First, they will try to get passports from Damascus, if not then they will try to go by other ways.

What are the “other ways”?

I don't know but I think they will cross the sea by boat.

Don't you think it carries a big risk?

Of course it is risky, but he is determined to go. I generally prefer not to interfere into their decisions.

Do you personally want to live in Europe?

Not much. If the war ends or Turkey lifts the embargo, we will return back to our ordinary lives. ISIS is far from us, Assad and the Free Syrian Army have nothing to do with us. Life in Afrin is calm. There is no reason for me to leave. My parents are getting older, as well. One of us must stay with them.

INTERVIEW #73, 18 AUGUST 2016

ISTANBUL, 43, MALE

Could you please tell us when and how you came to Turkey?

I came here four months ago with my family. I crossed the border from Azzaz to Kilis.

All your family members had their passports?

Well, actually none of us had a passport. It was a spontaneous decision to leave and we had no time to think about applying to obtain passports.

What was the main reason for your urgent decision to leave?

My workshop was near the Castillo Road. Isn't it an enough reason to flee?

I am sorry but could you please explain to me about why Castillo Road is important? Is it near Aleppo?

It is near Aleppo and the most important road all over Syria at the moment. Assad, FSA, SDF, all of them want to control that road and I am tired of endless clashes, road blocks, mortars and violence. Finally, when I was threatened to leave the area I made up my mind to go and left everything behind. I did not even touch my workshop, just closed the shutters and packed everything in one night, headed to the closest border. Probably Aleppo will witness an apocalypse in a few months and I want to stay away from all this madness.

Why did you choose to live in Istanbul?

My cousin has been living in Istanbul for a long time so we decided to be their guests until we could think logically.

So what is your decision?

I told you we will be leaving soon as well. A few more days and we are going to leave. We came here with six pieces of luggage and we will move on with these six pieces.

There are millions of Syrians living in Turkey. What is your reason to leave Turkey quickly instead of staying and working here?

If they like Turkey, let them stay here. I also like Turkey but if I am leaving my homeland, I prefer to live in a more civilized country, where people do not those in need into outcasts.

Did you feel prejudice and discrimination here?

Of course. There are really nice people out there but I am tired of facing souring faces when you do not know the Turkish language. Actually it should be me to show a souring face when they can't speak English. Anyway...

How do you plan to go to Europe?

We will cross the border to Greece or Bulgaria and search for a safe passage to a third country.

Don't you think of staying in Greece or Bulgaria?

There, living conditions are no better than in Turkey. At least here we are all Muslims and culturally we are closer. Greece and Bulgaria are still not well developed in the sense of human rights. Of course they won't be sending me to gas chambers but no matter how much I know they would not care about my rights.

Did you have any friends or relatives faced with troubles in Greece or Bulgaria?

I am following the Syrian Facebook groups and read dozens of negative experiences in both countries.

Can you give me some examples?

Sure, I read two comments that were expressing how they were beaten by Greek police and two others warning that they were robbed in Bulgaria and local authorities did not care.

Are there any alternative routes apart from those two countries?

Many, however, they also have disadvantages. I may go to Egypt first but their borders are very strict. I may try to go to Ukraine and cross to Poland but Ukraine itself is not secure. Flying to Russia and moving towards Norway or Finland is another possibility but I am afraid of the severe cold. Even in the summers nights it is freezing as far as I heard.

Which European country you would like to live in?

Any Western European country, from Germany to Ireland. To be honest I would love to live in Spain or Italy but their economies are very weak and they do not have much to offer refugees. Maybe France would be nice as well but practically I will try Germany first.

Why?

According to my investigations, the refugees are treated well there and their bureaucratic procedures are easier compared to France or England.

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

It depends on what you mean by "after the war". War in Iraq also finished, is it a better country now? Or Libya, is it a better country today? If Syria will return to what it was, so I will be back.

INTERVIEW #74 & #75, 18 AUGUST 2016

İSTANBUL, 38, MALE

İSTANBUL, 33, MALE

As we agreed, I won't ask anything related to your life in Syria but could you please tell me briefly about your life in Turkey, from the first day you entered the country?

A: I was a cross-border businessman, buying and selling sugar from one country to another depending on the prices and subsidies.

B: I am an ex-military officer from the Syrian army. I quit the army in 2013.

How do you "help" Syrians to leave Turkey?

A: I help them to cross the Syrian-Turkish border once they contact me.

Do you personally go to the border every time you receive a message?

A: Of course not, we call our employees near the border areas and they do the job. I am the first contact person. Once they cross the border safely, they go to the towns or cities where they have to wait for their turn.

And what do you do?

B: I am responsible for solving the problems that may occur during the border crossing.

What kind of problems?

B: You know, sometimes the situation at the border changes. Sometimes Turks really carry out heavy patrolling and monitoring, sometimes they are just too flexible. I am finding the best area and time to cross the border.

How do you get this information? From your friends in the borderlands?

B: Of course, I have some employees on both sides. Most of them are locals.

How much are you paying your employees?

A: Okay, look, these kinds of questions are really out of the limits.

I understand. So within the limits, could you please clarify how does this system work?

A: They contact us first...

How?

A: By phone calls, WhatsApp messages, Viber calls, Tango calls, Facebook chat, many different tools are available. We ask them where and how they want to cross the Syrian and Turkish borders. We offer them a price and once the deal is made, we greet them on the border.

Does it make a difference if they enter legally or illegally?

B: If they have no passports or do not want to cross the border from the official gates, the price and the risks increase.

What if on their way from the Turkish-Syrian border to the Turkish villages the police or other security organizations ask their IDs?

A: Until now nothing happened. You just need to show any kind of a Syrian ID and they don't bother you much after that.

B: Except if you are a single, young Syrian man. If there is a security alert they may even be interrogated but once the police realizes he is an ordinary man, he is released.

Okay, so now he/she is at the western coast. What is the next phase?

A: He waits his turn until the next boat arrives.

Do you provide accommodation while your customers are waiting for the next boat?

A: No, but our employees never allow them to stay in the streets. There are lot of budget-friendly hotels where they can stay while waiting for their turn.

How long do they need to wait?

A: Sometimes a few hours, sometimes a few weeks.

There is a huge difference between a few hours and a few weeks, what does determine about such a big gap?

B: The changes in the patrols, alerts, politics, weather, waves, winds... Every single thing must be perfect, otherwise the boat sinks or is caught by the coast guard.

Do you have a pay-back guarantee if the coast guard catches the boat?

A: It is a risk that they accept, but in that case if they decide to try their chance again we make 50% discount. Most of the others in this business are not doing that.

B: The risks are low. Many of those are sending us their pictures once they arrive to their final destinations and thank us on our Facebook or Instagram pages.

Are you also available on Instagram?

B: Of course, why not?

Are you leading this organization? Did you establish it by your own?

A: No, the boss is living in Izmir.

Is he also a Syrian?

A: Yes.

Have you ever been interrogated by the police?

B: No, we are not doing something against the Turkish state. Why should we get arrested or interrogated? If possible, we are even willing to pay tax.

Is this a seasonal job? In winter the weather conditions are different and challenging, do you freeze the business in some seasons?

A: In winter, you may have to wait for weeks. Geographically speaking, the Greek Islands are very close to Turkey, but you can never trust the sea. So the boat captains have to make a serious decision but never force their chances if there is a serious risk.

So what are the reasons for so many casualties?

B: Of course people die, but it is the greedy people in this business who are responsible. If you put 70 people on a boat that has the capacity of 10 people the boat sinks and people die. Or if you provide them Chinese-made life-vests they easily drown. I know this is not the perfect job, I even understand it from the way you are looking at us now, but you can't stop the people. If you can't stop them, you must help them. We never cheated or tricked anyone. They don't want to live in Syria, so you can't put a gun to their head and force them to stay. The same goes for the Turkish government, if they don't want to live here, let them go. Why do you keep playing with Syrians like they are just a tool between Turkey and Europe?

I am not a part of this...

B: No, no, don't misunderstand me, I know you are trying to do something good for Syrians by writing your report but we are also doing something good by helping them. Just in a different way. Tell whomever you are reporting that I am not happy, my friend is not happy, you are not happy, no one is happy about what is going on but these are the realities.

Are you optimistic about the future of Syria?

B: No. It will be the same for many years. Maybe, the violence will slow down but Syria will never be secure as it was before.

A: Who would like to stay in an insecure country?

But Turkey is not as secure as Europe, too?

A: Now you start to understand my point. If you were a Syrian, you also would not stay here.

But you are still here?

A: One day I will go with one of those boats. We told you, no one is happy.

B: We just need to spend some more time here, than we will leave.

What about your boss? Will he be leaving too?

A: Ask these questions to him. I can't speak on his behalf.

You are both very experienced and still keep the contact with the people you helped. Which country in Europe is better for Syrians to live in according to you?

A: It depends. Do you want to get your papers (legal permits) quickly? Go to Germany. Do you want to have better living conditions? Go to Norway. If you want to integrate to the society, England is the best. If you want less risk or you are old, Austria is the best.

What about Greece, Romania or Bulgaria? Why don't you consider them as safe countries?

A: They are safe but you may be deported or find yourself in a refugee camp. Right now Greece and Bulgaria are letting most of the refugees go wherever they want, unless they promise to leave their countries. The monthly salaries are low and conditions in the camps are the worst in Europe.

Which country you would like to live in Europe?

A: Switzerland.

B: Norway.

INTERVIEW #76, 18 AUGUST 2016

ISTANBUL, 46, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Damascus. I spent my childhood in Lebanon because of my father's work. We had to return to Syria after clashes started in Lebanon. Lebanon was very similar to Syria. Until the beginning of the clashes people from many different nations and religions used to live in peace. I graduated from the Department of Architecture at Damascus University. I completed my Master's Degree in the same field. Twice, I participated in conferences in Europe. Because of my heavy workload I was not able to get along with my husband and we divorced. He was working at university as well but demanded from me to leave my work and become a housewife. I did not agree with this.

How did the war in Syria affect you for the first time?

I wanted to have a calm and peaceful life but it was not possible. I was afraid of the sounds of the clashes when I was taking my daughter to school. My son had to go to school on his own but I was always worried for him. First, I decided not to take my daughter to school and quit my job. We moved to my parent's house. As soon as my son finished high school I decided to go to Turkey. I am a mother and I do not wish my son taking part in such a war.

What were your son's thoughts about this subject?

He was not supporting a side clearly but I could understand that he was being politicized more each day. This war does not only affect the adults but the youth, even the children. If you demolish the common playgrounds of the children what do you expect them to look for? Among each other they are talking what they hear in their family chats. I did not raise my son to die in such a war. He understands better about what is going on in Syria. When you are inside the events you can't see some truths, only after being pulled away things are understood more clearly.

Why did you choose Turkey among the alternatives?

I thought I could find a job here easier. I am an architect and thought that anywhere in the world I could continue to do my profession. The economy of Turkey is better than of Arab countries in case there is a comparison between them at all.

Did you easily find a job here?

I was not able to find a job. Being self-confident, I searched for the jobs that I can work on related to my profession. I was able to find a few places I thought that they would be suitable to me but no one was interested. Language is another problem all by itself and there are very few people that have English knowledge here. Secondly, even towards the educated Syrian population they look with an arrogant eye. I understood their presumption on anything related to Syria when they asked me which university I graduated from. They do not even give an opportunity to Syrians to work as a white-collar employee and to prove themselves.

How do you earn a livelihood?

My older brother and my cousin are supporting me. My older brother lives in Latakia, while my cousin has been living in England for a long time. After the divorce I was able to earn a livelihood all by myself and suddenly I turned into an ordinary and helpless woman. This situation is not my fault but I do not want to live in such a way.

What are the main reasons for you to go to Europe?

All the subjects we talked about. I can make shopping in the market in Turkish but nowadays they always have dissatisfaction in their faces. Maybe it only looks to me like that, I do not know. I have never seen anyone that share something common with Turks and socialize with them. It is not like being alienated, but we are ignored here. I was not harmed by anyone directly but we feel that we are living here as ghosts. Look, I have been living in this country for two years and until now no authorized person asked anything about me. No one came to my house. Not even a single police asked something for two years. We have an unregistered life here. Sometimes, I think what would happen to me if I die, where will they bury me? I am so afraid of not even having a graveyard.

What kind of a life does await you in Europe?

I don't know but I am sure it will be better than here. Look, not even a single person or an institution was interested in me. In Europe, whenever you put your step into a country you immediately see someone that is helping you. Everyone communicates with you, volunteering citizens, police, custom guards, they do not ignore you. Even if they deport you at least they communicate with you and say that they do not want you there. Here they don't give residence permits, but they do not deport as well. Here, nobody cares about the education of the children, but they provide health services to children to save them from dying. The only thing we want is to tell who we are. We go to the mukhtar (official neighborhood representative), he says that if we do not have food they can collect charity. May God protect these people, but we only want to get information. The mukhtar says he also is not informed.

How do you plan to go to Europe?

By the land road to Bulgaria first, and after that by autobus or any transportation vehicle to my cousin who lives in England. I received an invitation letter from him but England expressed that they will certainly not provide a visa in this way.

Do you have any relative or friend in Europe?

One of my friends from university went to France and stays in a camp now. Her French is very good so he does not have much trouble. Though the conditions in the camps are not perfect, she says that it can't be compared to the camps in Jordan where she used to stay.

What kind of problems in the camp she faces there?

For basic needs she does not have any problem. We frequently chat over Skype. The only thing they want is to receive their documents quickly and become French citizens after getting residence permit officially.

If you can reach Europe, is there anything that you fear to happen?

My only fear would be deportation. Especially if they would try to send us back to Syria, it means that the worst thing which can happen is coming. My parents are still in Syria but the past two years that we lived would be in vain. Actually, it is better than returning to Turkey. At least my parents are there. I am too tired of fighting all alone during the last two years.

INTERVIEWS #77 & #78, 19 AUGUST 2016

ISTANBUL, 33, MALE

ISTANBUL, 35, MALE

Could you please tell about yourself?

A: I am from Hama. The roots of my family go back to Latakia but they settled to Hama due to the duty of my grandfather and stayed there. After finishing school I wanted to study at university but later gave up this idea and started to make business with my father. My father is a civil engineer; I was helping my father on the managerial parts. I had a fine and comfortable life. I had my own home that I bought with my father's support and I had no financial difficulties even if I was not rich.

B: I was born in a village near Damascus. After high school, I studied two years on repairing electronics. I had a repair shop for white goods in Damascus. It was not a big one but business was not bad in my area. I had a usual, ordinary life like everyone else.

How did the protests and clashes in Syria affect you?

A: At the beginning business stopped. We were not able to get raw material anymore. We could not finish the work we were supposed to, couldn't get the debts we owned but also could not pay our debts. In the past, there were also some economic problems from time to time but those strains applied to the entire country. The government in Damascus tried to solve the problem for better or worse. This time solving the problem became impossible as there were many different areas where certain groups were holding the power. If you wanted to buy goods from Latakia it was only a matter of chance whether to receive them in Damascus. During the war it is impossible to know whether the building you just built will not be bombed tomorrow.

B: My situation was not that bad at the beginning of the war. In fact the business increased; white goods got broken more frequently due to the blackouts and poor electricity. However, my own shop started to remain without power. If the clashes would not have spread to my area, probably I could go on in some way.

Did you see the clashes directly?

B: Sure. As a matter of fact I moved my home and shop to a more central district in Damascus after seeing the clashes in our area. Actually, I moved next to my uncle. It was hard to find a house in Damascus center and those, which were available, were too expensive.

A: There are clashes everywhere in Syria. Even if you are not right in the middle of it, from afar you can see lots of things: the sound of an explosion, a dust cloud rising up at the horizon or a flame. These were all parts of daily life.

How and why did you come to Turkey?

A: We landed in İstanbul with my father, mother, wife and children. Our first thought upon arrival was to wait in Turkey until the war would end. After that we thought about sending construction material to Syria from Turkey but demand was low and all the roads were controlled by different groups. It was not clear how we could deal with those groups. Now, we want to go to Europe before we spend all the money we have. Honestly speaking we are hesitating to make business here.

B: I came here by crossing the border from Antakya. I had a passport, they did not ask for a visa on the border gate. We simply entered and arrived in İstanbul with the first bus we found.

Why are you living in İstanbul? Have you ever considered to live in another city?

A: There are more employment opportunities here. When cities become smaller, it also becomes harder to find a job. When you are in desperate conditions you can at least be a dishwasher here, but in the small cities such chances do not exist.

B: I think the same way. In small cities people are more helpful, but finding a house and a job is harder.

Why do you plan to go to Europe?

A: We tried our chance here, it is not working out. If you are not legal here, you have no rights. If we want to make business and we can't agree at the end, how can we apply to the courts? If the court says "you are not living here legally and are working illicitly" what would happen then? If a Turk robs me, what I can do? We do not have any rights here.

B: People do not understand us here. They perceive us as beggars, thieves or penniless people. They help, right after that they ask us when we are going to return to Syria.

Which country you would like to go to?

A: I want Sweden but if it not I will stay where it is proper to stay.

B: Refugees are receiving help most at the northern countries. I think, I will be going to Sweden or Germany.

Do you have any people you know that went to these countries before?

A: I have some friends in Germany.

B: One of my friends is in Norway and another one in Sweden. Some of my friends are in Austria but I did not hear from them for a long time.

Since you have not heard from your friends, is it possible that they were deported?

B: No, on the contrary if they were deported we would know. At least they would post it on their Facebook accounts.

Why would they need to post it immediately to Facebook?

B: People share everything they faced, positive or negative, share it while going to Europe. We are all in the same or similar situation, for that reason everyone wants the others to have a better life. Personally, I also share my experience that I have in Turkey with whoever asks.

Are there still people who want to come to Turkey?

B: Of course there are, but their numbers are shrinking. I don't think anyone cares who will win the war anymore. Those people living in the secured cities do not think to come here at all but people in the areas where there are dense clashes going on still want to come.

A: People who bankrupted and those who can't find a stable job also want to leave. Security is not the only problem. Actually the economic problems have more priority compared to others.

INTERVIEW #79, 19 AUGUST 2016

İSTANBUL, 45, FEMALE

Could you please tell about your life in Syria?

I was born in a village near Damascus. Now, it will be okay if I do not tell the name of the village, right? I was born and grew up there. I lived there most of my life. My mother passed away when I was a child and my step-mother, the mother of my brothers, raised me.

Did you study?

My family does not give importance to the school education of the girls. So I did not study after primary school. There was a wedding of one of our relatives in another village. I met my husband there. At the beginning, our families did not want (our marriage). However, they were convinced afterwards and we got married. I have a daughter, she is 20 years old now. As I was not able to study at university I really wanted her to study. When the incidents started she was not able to attend university and we had to come to Turkey.

When did you feel the war for the first time?

I do not remember such a thing. I mean, I can't tell exactly where and which hour. But I have strong instincts. I felt bad things were going to happen since the beginning of the protests (in 2011).

Were you supporting or opposing the protests?

No, I was trying to understand what was happening, just like my husband. We also had some complaints but those complaints were not political. Due to her age, my daughter was surely looking at the events with a more political perspective. However, as she was a girl she did not join a group or a protest. She was only talking about this within the family. She was telling about her worries for her future saying Assad was a dictator.

Did you leave Syria due to your daughter?

No, on the contrary, she did not want to leave the country, but she had to. War got out of hand. We were afraid that our turn was on the way.

How did you arrive to Turkey?

My husband is a businessman. He worked with a few people from Turkey. We decided due to those Turks. I mean, they did not tell us to come but we trusted their presence. Knowing some people here gave us courage. They told us it would be for our benefit to come by legal means. Otherwise we were told that we might be sent to the camps or something bad could happen on the road. My daughter and my husband had passports but as I did not go abroad before I did not have a passport. For that reason we had to wait for a while. I got my passport at the end with huge difficulties and afterwards we came to Mersin via the Mediterranean Sea.

Did you stay in Mersin?

No, we went to Adana. Our main aim was İstanbul but we stayed in Adana nearly for three months. My husband told us that we had at least to know a little bit of Turkish before moving to İstanbul.

Were you able to learn Turkish?

Sort of. I can speak a little bit. We can say that my daughter learned it. My husband already knew some Turkish as he was working with Turks. Now his Turkish is even better.

Do you, your husband or daughter work in Turkey?

No, my husband wouldn't let me or my daughter work in a different country. Before we came here we sold some of the goods we had. We are living on that money. We had a workshop in Syria and now all is in ruins. But the land of the workshop still belongs to us, at least technically, on paper.

Does your husband think about working?

Here (in İstanbul), it is very hard for my husband to find a job. No one would hire him except the basic jobs as he is Syrian. My husband is now 55 years old. After this age, especially after having his own workplace for all his life, he won't work in a factory or in construction. In addition, we do not need it at the moment. But the money we have will melt away sooner or later.

Do you want to go to Europe for that reason?

Yes. This is also a reason. Europe is not like Turkey. We can start a new life there; if even only a small one we can establish a new workshop. Also I really want my daughter to study at university. As soon as she graduated from high school the incidents erupted. She was not able to continue her studies. I really want her to be a doctor. She can receive a good education in medicine in Europe.

Which European country you want to go to?

I want to go to England but it is hard to go there. University education is expensive. So maybe it can be Germany or the Netherlands.

Will you be able to adapt to these countries? Are you not afraid of the cultural and religious differences?

There are immigrants in many of the European countries. One of my husband's friends, who recommended us to come to Turkey, has a sister who has been living in Germany for many years. According to what she is saying they have been living there as Turks like they used to live. Their districts, cafes, markets are different she says. I have been told that they had mosques and a community. It's like that not only in Germany but in many other European countries.

So you believe that when you will be going to Europe you are going to live with the Arab culture?

Of course. I am an Arab and will die as an Arab. I do not have to be similar to them (the Europeans).

Then why don't you like to go to rich countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia where Arabs are living?

It is so hard to get a visa. It is also nearly impossible to enter in illegal ways. Yes, both of us are Arabs, but there are many cultural differences. I want my daughter to study. In these countries it is very hard for women to study. It is not like Syria.

Will you return to Syria in case the war ends?

It depends on where and how we live. If we established a life, made an investment why should we return? But if we have to stay in Turkey, we will return to Syria.

INTERVIEW #80, 19 AUGUST 2016

İSTANBUL, 32, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am 32 years old. I was living with my father in Palmyra. I am a graduate of the department of English Literature. I know French as well. I was a tourist guide. I lost my father when I was 25. My mother was a nurse. Later she retired and since then I have been living with my mother.

When did you get affected by the war for the first time?

Tourism was one of the first sectors that got affected by the war. Before it was even called a “war”, i.e. as soon as the protests started, I was not employed anymore. I was aware of that. We had some money, a house and a car from my father. For that reason, at the beginning I did not suffer much. I tried to make translations for pocket money. But still again in this sector there was no job. We survived with my mother’s pension. Until ISIS arrived we did not think about leaving. We saw the hell in Palmyra.

How did you escape?

Believe me, I also do not know. We escaped as soon as the city was taken back from ISIS. A corridor was established and we escaped to Turkey. I was really worried since my mother suffered from a chronic high blood pressure. Thank God, she is all right. But we had to stay in the camps for about a few months.

How were the conditions in the camp?

Very bad. We hardly lived there as two adults. There were children and babies in the camps. I felt sorry for them the most. Volunteers, the state...everyone tried to do something but they managed to help only to a certain point. Later, together with my mother, we decided to rather die outside than staying in the camp. We came to İstanbul as it was the only city that we knew.

Are you working somewhere currently?

No. I haven’t learned Turkish yet. As soon as I learn I will look for a job. Right now, we are spending the money that we had prior to coming here. It goes like that for a while. I thought about learning Turkish in the camp and leaving it afterwards but it did not happen.

What are you doing to learn Turkish now?

I am going to teahouses here. Trying to communicate with people. There are students in the opposite building. I am trying to teach them Arabic and they are trying to teach me Turkish.

What will you do if the money you have will finish?

I really don’t know. Before that happens I must find a job or go to Europe. Because the only possibility the state provides here are the refugee camps. Besides we escaped from there.

Will it be different in Europe?

Of course, it will be different. The conditions of the camps are better there. Social opportunities are more as well as job opportunities. If we run out of money here, we may even starve to death but in Europe it is not like that.

How will you be going to Europe? By legal means?

No. My mother does not have a passport. Even if she has it is nearly impossible for us to get a visa. For that reason we will be going illegally.

Which route will you be using?

The seaway. But before that we have to get some courage, especially my mother.

Which country would you like to go to in Europe?

France.

Why?

As I know French fluently. Actually I would like to go to England, but the visa will be a problem. Also I have some French friends in France that I met while I was working as a tourist guide. They told that they could help me.

Why don't you prefer wealthy Arab countries?

For a person like me with such a lifestyle there is no possibility to live there. And neither getting visa nor entering illegally is possible.

Finally, if the war in Syria ends, would you like to return?

If I won't be going to Europe, I will return. There are no jobs that I can do here, especially while lacking Turkish language. But if we will be in Europe we won't return. We would establish a new life. Only if our house is not destroyed, I might return to sell it.

INTERVIEW #81, 22 AUGUST 2016

ŞANLIURFA, 24, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from Tel-Abyad, a village that is bordering Turkey. We had our own shop for selling and repairing tires. My father established the business and together with my brother we were working in our shop for changing, selling and repairing tires. Our town is near the border so most vehicles were in need of controlling their tires before they moved on to Syria, Iraq or other Arab countries. Until Summer 2014, we were generally safe and had little difficulties. Of course, the system changed after Assad withdrew his forces and we had to adapt, but daily life was as usual. After ISIS stormed the village, we were forced to leave.

What was the reason for ISIS to evacuate you from the town?

I don't know. First they told Kurds must leave. Even though we are not Kurdish we fled after hearing this because you never know what is on their mind. They are irrational, have no brains and live like wild animals. Can you predict what will an animal do at its next step? Most of us left the city. A year after Kurdish forces captured the city, I returned and saw that my shop was destroyed, nothing was left from that shop but debris. I could have stayed in Tel-Abyad, it is secure but I was really tired. Assad was defeated by the opposition, the opposition was defeated by ISIS, ISIS was defeated by the Kurds, and now what? Every new group forces you to change something. Kurds will not stay there for long, Tel-Abyad and most of the villages in the area do not have a Kurdish majority and Assad will never allow a Kurdish autonomy. It is also hard to understand the Kurdish aims. When I returned they spoke about cantons, democratic confederalism, self-governance and many other things. I am not a politician, I just need a simple life and laws that I can understand and obey to.

When and how did you come to Turkey?

In Summer 2014. Together with many other villagers and my family I crossed the border to Akçakale. We had no passports and the border guards did not ask for any documents.

Did they offer you to stay in the refugee camps?

Yes. We thought we would be able to return in a short time. This is why we accepted to stay in the camp. After a few months, when the winter was coming, we left the camp. The conditions in the camp were not adequate and we lost our hope to return to Syria.

Could you please tell me the procedures for settling and leaving the camp?

Everything is chaotic. When we crossed the border, everyone was shouting, the military, police, UN employees, NGO workers, the relatives of the people from Tel-Abyad living in Turkey, it was a total chaos. UN workers approached us and asked some basic questions and actually convinced us to register for the refugee camps. They registered our names from our ID cards. When leaving the camp it was the same: They asked some questions, put a great effort to convince us this time not to leave. We told them that we would go to our relatives' home in İstanbul and, finally, they let us go.

Do you really have relatives in İstanbul?

Yes, however our relatives there told us the conditions in İstanbul are not good at all. My aunt is living in Şanlıurfa with her husband and children so we called them. They also used to live in İstanbul for two years but told the same thing, especially complained about the prices in İstanbul.

How is your life in Urfa?

Very similar to our life in Syria. This time not in our own shop but we are again doing the same thing, repairing and selling tires. I am happy here.

You have expressed to me that you would be going to Europe, may I learn the reason for your plans even if you are happy here?

My brother is forcing me to join him and my father does not allow him to go alone. It has risks I know but not as much as it is written in the media. The worst that can happen is that we would be sent back to Turkey.

How do you plan to go?

My brother insists that the sea is the easiest way. Otherwise we have to walk a long way and cross too many borders. If one country let us go, the other may stop us. If we reach Greece, we can cross to Italy and we won't have to worry about being stopped and deported.

How much does it cost approximately per person to reach Italy?

About 3000 US-Dollars.

Why would you like to live in Italy?

It is just another station. After reaching Italy, we can go to other European countries easily.

Isn't Italy also an economically advanced European country?

Yes, but the problem is that we don't know anyone who lives or used to live in Italy. All the people we know just used Italy as a transit country. Maybe, the life conditions are better now, but I can't put myself into a risk.

INTERVIEW #82, 22 AUGUST 2016

ŞANLIURFA, 29, MALE

When did you come to Şanlıurfa? Did you live in other cities of Turkey after you crossed the border?

I used to live in Kilis for a short while. We stayed there for medical purposes of my wife and came to Şanlıurfa after that.

Why did you choose Urfa to live? Do you have relatives here?

Not relatives, but my friends came here two years ago. They told us that they would be going to Germany and offered us their home and kept their furniture for free. If we moved to another city we wouldn't be able to buy all the furniture we needed.

Where are your friends that you just mentioned now? Were they able to reach Germany?

After two months, yes. The Greek police caught them when they landed on the island and did not allow them to leave for a month. They told that what the Greeks called "camp" was only made up of tents. The weather was hot so they wanted to shower, but the fresh water was only available two hours a day. The Greek police did not listen to them and they were not treated well. They protested against the conditions in the camp with other refugees and only after that the Greeks let them go.

How are their lives in Germany?

They say it is much better. They are living in a room, not a tent. They have fresh water, electricity and all other basic needs. The children are regularly controlled by doctors.

Do they have any problems?

They are waiting for their official documents in order to be accepted as refugees but they don't complain about it. Sometimes it takes a year so they are waiting patiently.

Will your family go with you to Europe?

I saved enough money and I can go whenever I want. When my uncle will have made it here, he will be settling in the house that we live in now. I will be going and my wife will stay with my uncle and his wife, together with my children. As soon as I make it to Europe, I will ask authorities that I want to bring my wife and children as well.

So you will leave the furniture and the same house that you got from your friend who is in Germany to your uncle?

Yes. The owner of the house is a really a nice person and the furniture is in good condition. The rent is also not expensive, why should they search for another house?

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

If I will be a refugee in Europe, no, I would not.

INTERVIEW #83, 22 AUGUST 2016

ŞANLIURFA, 34, MALE

When and how did you come to Turkey?

I came during the Kobani siege, about two years ago. Please do not ask more questions about Kobani.

Okay, so how did you decide to live in Şanlıurfa?

I was in need of urgent medical treatment, so I had no choice but to come here.

What about your family? Did they go with you?

No, during the siege they were living in Mersin. They came to Şanlıurfa after I was taken to a hospital in this city.

How is your life in Turkey? Are you currently working?

I do not work, friends in the municipality are helping me.

Our mutual friend told me that you were willing to go to Europe. Could you please tell me which countries you would like to go to?

Sweden or Germany.

Why specifically those two countries?

I have close friends there and I need to continue my medical treatment. Please do not ask specific questions.

Okay, what does Europe mean to you in general?

Friends. I don't mean personal friends, the friends of my people. There were many people from Europe defending Kobani with us and there are still many of them fighting against terrorists. They understand what we are faced with and support us. Whenever we were in need, some countries were waiting us to fall and being enslaved by ISIS but European countries were always with us.

Have you ever considered to live in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq?

I wish we could but life in Iraqi Kurdistan is very hard for Syrian Kurds. I don't want to go into politics but just ask yourself why we are coming to Turkey, but not to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Would you like to return to Syria if the war comes to an end?

Of course, we sacrificed whatever we had for defending our lands. The future is bright for our people and our revolution.

INTERVIEW #84 & #85, 23 AUGUST 2016

ŞANLIURFA, 29, FEMALE

ŞANLIURFA, 34, MALE

Could you please tell me when and how you entered Turkey?

B: We entered Turkey two years ago from Antakya, without legal documents.

Did the border guards allow you to enter without having passports?

B: They just asked our ID cards or anything that could prove that we are Syrians. One of the guards knew Arabic and he asked us a few questions. After a short conversation he let us in. We first visited our relatives in Antakya and stayed with them for a few weeks. Later, I found a job in Urfa and came here.

Where did you work in Syria? What kind of job you found in Urfa?

B: I was working as a manager in a factory. We had close ties with Turkey and the trade between the two countries was excellent before the war. I visited Turkey many times and even established a small scaled partnership with another factory in Istanbul. I am now working as a chief responsible for Syrian workers in a medium-sized workshop. It is a very well planned project with local NGOs and international sponsors. There are about 15 workers from Syria in the factory, which have full rights similar to the Turkish workers. They have insurance, a regular monthly wage and they attend social organizations.

A: I also work in that workshop. Actually, I was a teacher of Mathematics in Syria but it is not possible for me to work here as a teacher. I tried to apply to local schools but the language barrier was the main reason for not being employed.

Have you ever seen the clashes between the army and the opposition?

A: If someone is from Homs telling that he did not see any clashes, you can be sure he is a liar.

B: Twice the next buildings to our house were hit and partly destroyed. Our son is now eight years old and still suffers from the trauma.

A: Later, we were caught in the armed clashes between two groups, I had to find a corner to hide and put my son between me and the wall. There was no one to help. Thank God, none of the armed men, I still do not know which group they belonged to and who they were, did not care about me and I felt I was a ghost for that 15 minutes until the clashes ended. Silently staying there, hardly breathing for not to attract attention I prayed to God.

Have you ever considered going to an Arab country instead of Turkey? Especially the rich Gulf countries may potentially offer good opportunities.

B: They are not providing visas to Syrians.

A: The life in other Arab countries is different from Syria. Maybe only Lebanon is similar to Syria. The women are not treated equally in most of the Arab countries. Let us imagine that we found a job in Saudi Arabia and they are providing us visa. I will not be able to drive a car. I will not be able to wear whatever I want. If I will not be happy, my children will not be happy as well. They really sense your feelings and I think the happiness comes collectively. If someone in the family is uncomfortable, sooner or later it affects everyone.

You expressed to have a stable and good life in Turkey. What is behind your desire to think of going to Europe?

B: We are thinking about going but it does not mean we are packing our clothes and buy the tickets right now. It may be a long process, maybe we will even decide to stay. I just fear that something bad is going to happen here as well. The military tried to take control in Turkey: Brother killed brother. PKK is another problem. Turkey is also having problems with other countries. I love Turkey, I will always remember Erdogan and Turkish people that opened their home for us but I sense something bad is coming.

A: We were shocked for what happened in July (2016). May God protect the Turkish people. They have a bad example right next to them. Why they still fight with each other I don't understand. Can't they just look at what happened in Syria and learn the lesson?

B: I don't feel secure here anymore. My children can't bear another war trauma.

Which country you would like to go to in Europe?

B: France or England. I know French and can be fluent after a few months of practice. My wife knows English so we can have a much easier life in both countries. The language is the key, which is what we learned from our experience here. After speaking the local language, people start to think that you respect their culture.

A: When I spoke Turkish people generally start smiling and try to help me. It changes many things. My son also speaks Turkish and has friends. Those Syrian children who can't speak Turkish are generally playing with each other. We are not Turkish however we are living here, working here, so we should learn the language.

Would you return to Syria once the war is over?

B: The war will not end soon. Even when it will be over I don't think Syria will recover soon. How can you wash away all the blood in the streets? The generations who have seen a civil war can't build a strong society. So many people lost their children, parents, beloved ones in the war and everyone is accusing one another. I don't want my family to be part of this. I, probably, won't return to live again in Syria but I will visit it from time to time. Some of my relatives and friends are still there.

INTERVIEW #86, 26 AUGUST 2016

MERSİN, 45, MALE

For how long have you been living in Turkey? How and why did you decide to live here?

I have been living here since 2015. We came here with a large group of people from al-Yarmuk. We are originally Palestinians that had to leave our homeland because of the Israeli occupation. This is our second exile in the last 60 years.

What was the main reason for you to leave Yarmuk?

Yarmuk was a refugee camp and had been neglected by the government for decades. When the civil war started Assad divided the people in the camp, supported one group against the other. There was very intense fighting between two groups. We were trying to live under these tense conditions but after ISIS controlled our neighborhood we had to flee. Actually, we got the information of their final push so we did not see ISIS and fled earlier than their attacks.

Can you please tell me if any of your relatives are still living there?

No one does, of course. Would you stay if ISIS was in full control of your district? We all came to Turkey. Some of my relatives were in Lebanon before they went to Europe.

What are the main concerns when someone is going to leave Syria and need to decide between Lebanon and Turkey?

Lebanon is a safe haven. In case you have a hope that war may end soon it is better to go Lebanon. The language and culture are very similar. The state structures are also similar so you know what you need to do when you are in trouble. On the other hand, Lebanon does not allow you to build a new life. You can just stay there and wait. Turkey is the opposite. If you have a dynamic personality and want to establish a life, you decide to come here. You are free to do whatever you want. The problem is, everything is different here and it is more challenging.

By coming here do you think you made the right decision?

I don't think so. The problem here is not related to the state, Turkey is trying to help us. At least it opened its doors. The problem is that there are millions of refugees. The system has collapsed. One day, someone approaches us promising that we will receive monthly financial aid for the next year. They give us the money, but that is all. The second payment never comes. We go to hospital. When it comes to a payment they say something. Next time we go they say anything else.

Where are you working right now?

I am working in the port, carrying goods and other things from and to the ships. They told me it was a forbidden area for foreigners to work but no one ever complained until now.

What are the main reasons for you to think about moving to Europe?

I am unhappy here. Syria was not perfect as well. I told you, we were refugees and we always felt that we did not belong to Syria. However, there was a system, we had an ordinary life and the prices of the necessary goods for us to survive were really cheap. In Syria, the bottom level of life standards was much higher than the bottom level of life standards in Turkey. Here, you can reach the top, there are opportunities, you can be rich and the level of being rich is limitless. In Syria, you could be rich up to a

certain level, unless you are from the circles of the Assad family and Baath Party. I just need an average life, I am not a professor or a specialist. Look, when you are in Europe they provide accommodation. You start to live like a human. Not in tents, not in camps. They give you your dignity back.

Do you have any relatives in Europe right now?

My two sons are in Europe.

In which country? How did they manage to go? Are they satisfied with the conditions?

They are both in Germany. They travelled from Bulgaria to Romania and reached Germany. It took two months for them to reach Germany, they had some problems on their way but they do not want to talk about details. I think they were robbed or had problems with the police, I don't know. They are very satisfied and they will try to take us there as well once they are approved to live in Germany. One of them had a serious dental problem and Germans took him to the hospital for free.

Would you like to return to Syria one day?

Who doesn't? I love Syria but again I am saying, we were like guests in Syria. We have memories there but our homeland is Palestine. If someday I will return, it will be to Palestine, which is occupied today.

INTERVIEW #87, 26 AUGUST 2016

MERSİN, 22, FEMALE

When and how did you come to Turkey?

Right after the civil war got intense, in 2012, we decided to go to Turkey. However, we arrived here only in 2014 because my mother wanted to stay in Syria and we hardly convinced her. We crossed the border without passports. My mother was really afraid during the border crossing and we also thought it was a bad idea to take her with us as she has chronic heart problems. We had no other choice anyway, we were barely finding the necessary pills for her in Syria. My brother investigated the conditions of Syrians in the refugee camps, which lead us to stay away from refugee camps. So we decided to live in Mersin because one of my brother's friends was living there with his family. They left for Europe a few months ago.

Did you see clashes between armed groups?

I do not know which groups they belonged to but I saw armed clashes. I was really afraid of my brother instead of me, actually. My mother and I were worried that my brother could join one of those armed groups. It was one of the reasons for my mother to accept coming here with us.

Are you happy to live in Turkey?

I am not. Because everything is expensive, the salaries are very low. My mother does not want me to work and we have to survive only with my brother's salary. He sometimes works 15 hours per day. We hardly can pay our rent.

Have you ever received aid from the Turkish state?

No, but in Ramadan people helped us with donating food. There is also an organization that provides us second hand clothes.

When did you start to think of going to Europe?

As soon as I understood the living conditions in Turkey, a few weeks after I came here. We all thought the living conditions would be better here.

Have you ever talked to your mother about your intention to live in Europe?

Yes, I talked to her. She is very afraid to go. I told you, she was also afraid of coming here without a passport. Nevertheless we are very determined to go to Europe with my brother and we believe that we can convince her. Here we can find the necessary pills for her heart problems but we must pay to buy them. Doctors do not want to examine us in the hospitals as well.

What are the differences between, let's say, Qatar and France for you?

France is a country of civilization. You can find everything there. The medical services are better. They treat refugees well. The educational system is better. If we were to go Qatar we would not be treated well because we are Syrians.

What does Europe mean for you, in three words?

Civilization, welfare, health.

What does Turkey mean for you, again in three words?

Escape, poverty, alienation.

Do you think you will have cultural adaptation problems in Europe?

I don't think that I will have difficulties. In Europe there are also lots of mosques and Muslims. There is an Arab population living there for many years.

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

I and my brother are not willing to return. My mother will surely return because she misses her sisters very much.

INTERVIEW #88, 26 AUGUST 2016

MERSİN, 35, MALE

Could you please tell me about your life in Syria?

I was born in a village near Damascus and lived there until I was 25 years old. After getting married I settled to Damascus city. My father and mother passed away before I moved to Damascus. My father-in-law was a carpenter and I started working with him. I have four children. Our profit was enough for us to have a fine life. First we had to close our shop because of the economic instability before the war. After that I started to work by my own. Our own customers were calling whenever they needed me or recommended me to other potential customers. After the war all my work has stopped. My savings were melting away each day. While the clashes were going on, my father-in-law passed away. After his death I took my children, my wife and my mother-in-law to Turkey.

How did you enter Turkey?

I had a passport but my wife and mother-in-law had no passports. That forced us to cross the border illegally. While crossing the border we were stressed but there were no problems. We saw the soldiers after we crossed the border and we were really afraid that we were to be sent back to Syria. Soldiers greeted us warmly and took care of the children.

Why did you decide to live in Mersin?

There was a family we met while crossing the border. As we had no relatives or friends in Turkey we followed them to Mersin. My mother-in-law had some savings so we rented a house with a single room. I started to look for a job thinking that I could work as a carpenter. I couldn't find anything in that sector. I made up my mind that without knowing Turkish it would be really hard to find a job. After I had learned basic Turkish that would help me in daily life I found a job in a storehouse.

How did you learn Turkish on your own?

Near our home there was a teahouse. I visited it frequently and watched television. I motivated myself to learn Turkish by thinking about my family. I still can't speak fluent Turkish but it is enough for the moment.

You expressed that you are willing to go to Europe. What are the reasons for that?

Actually we get on well with the local people. In our neighbourhood most of the people are Kurdish. I used to have lots of Kurdish friends in Syria, so I know a little bit Kurdish and this causes our neighbours to have great sympathy for us. They accept us like one of them. However Europe is different, there are all kinds of possibilities you can reach in European countries. Even if the war did not start I still would want to live in Europe. When I was coming to Turkey, Europe was already on my mind.

How do you plan to go?

I will try to cross the sea to Greece, after that to Germany. First I will go alone. I don't want to risk my family.

What causes you to think about Germany instead of other countries?

Job opportunities. I also like Germany and German culture.

Would you like to go to rich Gulf countries if they would grant you a visa?

No, I wouldn't. The things you can have in Europe are better than the Gulf countries. I told you that I always wanted to live in Europe, not other Arab countries.

Do you have any friends or relatives living in Europe?

No.

How do you get your information about the living conditions of refugees in Europe?

Mainly through Facebook and by the Syrians living around us. Most of the people have friends or relatives who are living in Europe. So, they share the experiences with the people they know.

Would you like to return to Syria after the war?

No...Well, maybe. If the problems really come to an end, I will.

INTERVIEW #89, 27 AUGUST 2016

MERSİN, 42, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I am from Dayr Hafir, a village near Aleppo. I have three children. I lost my wife ten years ago. Our main occupation was animal husbandry. We had a large number of cattle. My sister took care of my kids in our small farmhouse. She also had a child and divorced from her husband a long time ago so our children grew like brothers and sisters.

Why did you leave Syria?

During the times of war, especially in a civil war, the most important thing is not the car, not the house, not the jewelry but the food. We were able to defend our farm for a while but how can you resist dozens of men threatening you with their guns? We tried to survive with farming but they also wanted to share our harvest. We felt like we were becoming slaves in our own farm so I left everything behind and came here.

How did you enter from the Turkish border?

I am from the rural areas. I had lots of friends from the farmers in the north, near the border. I spoke with some friends from Tel-Abyad and they helped us to cross the border safely.

So you crossed the border without your passports?

Why should a farmer and animal breeder need a passport? I never thought I would need to go to another country.

Are you working now?

I am working in a farm. Owner of the farm is an Arab from Antakya. I met him in Antakya and he offered me to work in his farm.

What are the difficulties you are facing in Turkey?

I don't have many difficulties in Turkey. My life here is similar to my life in Syria. Only the animals and the land do not belong to me and I work for a very low salary. If a Turk was making this job I am sure he would get more than my salary, probably twice more.

Why would you like to go to Europe?

European countries are giving a great importance to animal husbandry, breeding and farming. Most of their population is living in the cities today so I think they need people like me.

In which country you would like to live in Europe?

France. Many technical things we use in farming and husbandry are similar to France.

Do you think you and your family would have difficulties due to cultural and religious differences in France?

There is no need to adapt. I am a Muslim and I will live like a Muslim. Just like they are Christians and live their life accordingly with it, I will live my life just the way I want.

If Turkey would grant you citizenship, would you stay here rather than going to Europe?

Of course, I would stay here. This would be perfect and I think Turkey should give us citizenship. We are already living here for a long time. We caused no problems and can see Turkey as our country. This is a Muslim country, we have no difference in that sense. All Muslims are brothers and we can share everything.

Would you like to return to Syria when the war is over?

Of course, I would like to return.

INTERVIEW #90, 30 AUGUST 2016

MERSİN, 60, MALE

Could you please tell us about your life in Syria?

I was living in Hama with my wife. I have two sons and a grandson. One of my sons owned an electronics shop, the other one is an engineer. They are living in Damascus. I used to work in the government office of Syrian Railways but retired before the war.

How did you confront the war for the first time?

During the protests I was at home and suddenly heard screams. I saw the crowd running mindlessly to random directions. I never thought that soldiers would shoot citizens. I worked for the Syrian state for decades, I know that not everything is perfect, I know it is not a democracy, but that was something really unexpected. In the past, there were some similar mass protests and unfortunate events but Bashar (Assad) is not like his father. Anyway, even after the violence I still thought things would stop and calm down but I was wrong again. Things quickly got worse and you know the rest.

Why did you leave Syria?

My two sons joined FSA. Don't ask me for the details, please. They know their mistakes and it is over. They are in Turkey now, in another city and we will go together to Europe.

Why do you want to go to Europe?

For my sons. They don't trust the Turkish state and want to go somewhere.

Have you ever considered to go to other Arab countries?

I am telling you that they do not feel safe here, yet you are asking me about going to Arab countries. How can you trust a country that does not even provide shelter to refugees? Many people say that the war in Syria is caused by America and other countries but this bloodshed is caused by the other Arab countries as well.

Did you work in Turkey after you moved here?

No. I have a pension and my wife also has a pension. It is enough for us to live here. We live in a single room, and we are imagining that our time here is a long vacation. We chose to live in Mersin for that reason, the climate is nice and it is close to Syria. We have valid passports, have no problem with the police living here legally while respecting the law.

So why do you want to go to Europe?

My sons will be going to Europe and I do not want them to be alone. No matter how old they are, they are our children and we feel responsible for them. They had very hard times and as their parents we must support them. Psychologically it is hard to bear such terrible experience. I will just leave my wife here. She will get my salary as well and live on her own until we make it to Europe. After that if all goes well she will join us.

Will you be able to adapt to such a different culture if you live in Europe?

Turkish culture is also different. Before the war if I was to live in Daraa, Raqqah or Latakia it would be the same as they all had different cultures. You just need to observe, learn and respect the local culture. If you do that you can even live at the North Pole without difficulties.

Which European country you are planning to go to?

Sweden or Norway. I think Sweden is better and easier. They are neutral countries; most of the other European countries are supporting one group or another. Sweden and Norway are the countries that I can only trust. They won't threat my sons or will hand them over to the Syrian government.

Would you like to return to Syria if the war ends?

Maybe. I don't want to think about it now.

INTERVIEW #91, 31 AUGUST 2016

ADANA, 25, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am from the City of Aleppo. I have two sisters and a brother. My father used to have a shop in the grand market of Aleppo selling mostly jewelry. I used to study at university before the war. I am married, my husband is a lawyer. I have got one child and he was born in Adana.

How and when did you enter Turkey?

We came to Turkey three years ago from Antakya. We used the border gate but we had no passports. We fled from Aleppo which was no different than hell. Every time I was going out for market or shopping I was looking at my home as it would be the last time. When I was in the market my home could be destroyed or I could die because of bombs or rockets randomly falling. When I learned about my pregnancy I insisted to my husband to cross the border and give the birth in Turkey.

During your pregnancy and birth, did the Turkish state provide free medical services?

Yes, everything was free. My doctor was also really helpful. Even now I get free medical service for my baby. My husband is paying for his check-ups but medical services are free for me and the baby.

When you were in Syria, did you know what kind of rights you would have as a refugee before your pregnancy? Did any of the state institutions or NGOs contact you in Turkey?

No, I had no idea. Only when we crossed the border they told us about the refugee camps. No one contacted us in Turkey.

How is your life in Turkey? Is your husband working?

My husband is a lawyer but the legal system here is very different. His diploma does not help him to find a job here. He speaks French and English and sometimes translates the documents of other Syrians. He translates everything but notary gets most of the payment without even checking if the translation he made is correct.

Before the interview you have expressed your intention to live in Europe. Could you please tell me why you would like to live in Europe?

We want to establish a new life. If we stay here, I don't know what kind of rights Turkey will grant me. Will we have a citizenship, or will my baby need to go to the military when he is grown up? Leaving everything aside, will the baby get a citizenship? We applied to the municipality for my baby to get a citizenship but they told us it was not possible. One day we hear them saying Syrians will get citizenship, the next day we hear that we all must return to refugee camps. European countries have clear rules and whether you like it or not, they have procedures.

Let us say that you have a chance to stay in Greece and they are offering you a residence permit. Would you like to start a new life in Greece?

No.

But Greece is also a member of the European Union and is obliged to follow the European Union laws?

Yes, but I never heard of any Syrian refugee staying in Greece willingly. Instead many times I hear negative things about the Greek police. One of my friends I knew from Syria was beaten in Greece and deported. He told me that the people on the island helped them, gave them food and blankets but the police was very rude and deported them.

What are the countries that you would like to live in?

France. My husband knows French and he tells the legal systems of Syria and France are very similar. I also want my second child to be born in Europe, so he may get citizenship.

Would you like to return to Syria if the war ends?

I don't want to live in Syria anymore. I have a family there and will always visit them for sure but that is all.

INTERVIEW #92, 31 AUGUST 2016

ADANA, 20, MALE

Could you please tell me about your life in Syria?

I am from Latakia. I have four children. Two of my brothers are in Syria taking care of my mother and sister. One of my elder brothers is living in Europe now. My father passed away in 2010. I came to Turkey three months ago in order to find a way to go to Europe

In which European country does your brother live now?

He is in Austria. He wanted to go England but liked Austria when he arrived there and applied for a residence permit. He has been waiting for that permit about six months. He told me he is happy there, his wife and children are also happy and hoping to stay in Austria.

Why don't you follow the same route like your brother? Adana is far from the Western part of Turkey, why are you currently living here?

I am living with a friend of mine who is working in this city. I don't want to pay for a hotel or rent a house. My brother went there across the sea but he told me it was extremely difficult. The Turkish government is cooperating with Europe and the police is not allowing the boats anymore. He tried twice before to make it to Greece. I am waiting and trying to find another way. I have a passport so I applied for a language course in England. If I will be accepted I will apply for a visa with the acceptance letter.

What if you are not granted a visa?

I will go to Russia and try from that side. I heard the Russians are allowing Syrians to cross their borders to any country they want if the Syrians have valid passports. One of my mother's relatives has been living in Moscow for nearly 30 years so I will ask for his help. A friend of mine went to Norway from Russia and he is living in a camp right now.

Is he happy in Norway? Do you have contact with him?

He is happy because there are really few Syrians there and the conditions of the country are perfect. We spoke through Skype a few times and he showed me around, it is a really beautiful country, I think. He can't leave the camp but the camp he lives is much better than what my brother showed to me in Austria. He only says that it is very cold, even in the summer nights it is freezing he said.

What caused you to leave Syria while most of your family is still living there?

They called me to the military.

Why do you not want to join the army?

Can we skip this question? I don't want to answer it.

Sure. Can you please tell me if you can make it to Europe, what are your plans?

I want to improve my English. I was serious when I told you I applied for a language course in England. After that I want to study engineering or architecture at university.

Will you return to Syria after graduating from a European university?

Why not - if the war is over.

INTERVIEW #93, 31 AUGUST 2016

ADANA, 34, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am from Çobanbey, in Arabic al-Rai, which is a Turkman town near the Turkish-Syrian border. I used to work as a teacher in other parts of Syria but I returned to Çobanbey when the Syrian government lost control of the town. I have three children and my wife is also from Çobanbey.

What caused you to leave Syria?

As soon as we heard ISIS was approaching our town I immediately took my family to Turkey. We have relatives living in Gaziantep and I told them to take care of my wife and children. I rushed back to Çobanbey in order to defend it but I was captured by ISIS. Seeing that there are hundreds of people that I personally knew from the Syrian Turkmen community in Turkey, I started to help and organize campaigns for them. Right now I am in Adana to organize a fund for refugees.

What were the biggest problems of the refugees in Turkey?

The lack of organization. So many Turkish citizens are trying to help, regretfully the chaos reigns. International organizations, United Nations, local NGOs, nation-wide operating NGOs, municipalities, ministries, and the government are all trying to do something, but instead of working like different parts of a single machine, they mostly operate on their own. I saw with my own eyes that some aid coming from major Turkish cities was left in the streets for a week because there was no organization to distribute them. Sad but true! I thought everything was organized and planned before coming here, but everything is in a chaos.

Could you please tell me why you would like to go to Europe?

I am not going to Europe, that kind of thoughts in my mind are dead now. I am going back to my home town.

I am surprised to hear that, our common friend told me that you were thinking about going to Europe soon?

He is right, I was thinking about that before Turkey liberated Çobanbey. Now we will wait a few weeks and return to our town. Turkey is my homeland too, I am Turkman. However, my home and my family are in Syria. I am really excited to go. The best thing is we don't need to obey Assad, YPG, ISIS or anyone. We will rule ourselves and Turkey is protecting the area. Under these circumstances why should I leave everything behind and go to Europe? Look, those who are going to Europe are generally hopeless. You told me that you made interviews with those who are trying to go to Europe. Tell me, whether any of them had any hope left for their future? When your hopes are lost, you try to escape. But now, I am speaking on my behalf: I have hope and I am going to return with my family. However, I will continue to come to Turkey frequently in order to help other refugees.

INTERVIEW #94, 31 AUGUST 2016

ANKARA, 30, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Aleppo. I was not able to study at university due to the financial strains of my family. I made business for a few years and later that found an opportunity to attend university. I registered to the Department of Economics but for private reasons I was not able to continue. When I re-concentrated on trade all my business ceased. Adding to that, my warehouse where I kept my goods was plundered.

Which group plundered the warehouse?

I do not know, they are all the same. All of them are dishonourable, all of them are thieves. There is not any group that would not take the goods inside the warehouse after seeing it. The Army is the same, ISIS is the same, Kurds are the same, and the Free Syrian Army is the same.

When did you see the war for the first time?

I saw it during the beginning of the protests, at least I demanded reform and for that sake I participated in the demonstrations. Demonstrations turned into clashes. I did not go to the protests anymore after that. Even though I did not participate, I was not able to escape from the clashes. We suddenly saw the tanks and war erupted. My warehouse was plundered and afterwards I crossed into Jordan.

What kind of conditions you found in Jordan? How did you cross into Jordan?

I crossed the border as a refugee and did not have a passport. I was transferred to a camp. The camp was not as bad as I was told, but it is impossible to expect a homelike place. I am used to live with difficulties. I stayed in the camp for a few months but I felt like I was rotting in the camp. Every day we were doing the same things. You only spend your time. There are no activities or services. I am not a person who sits all the time and likes to live with freeloading. So I decided to go to Turkey.

How did you cross into Turkey? Could you please tell us about your life in Turkey?

First I returned to Syria. I went to my home hoping that things would have calmed down but everything was worse. Actually the trade turned into a more profitable thing, f. ex. there was arms smuggling in different areas. Everyone was inside that business, even the army was selling arms and was turning a blind eye to the smuggled weapons. It is not a secret, how did the opposition find bullets that could last for months? How come their bullets are not ceasing? The same goes for the movement of goods. All the goods on the black market and their profits are shared. In many regions of Syria there are no laws. Those who want can make a good amount of dirty money. I crossed the border and came to Turkey in order not to get the dirty money and not to put myself into dirt. Actually, I did not have much hope. I did not have much money but I was able to bring some capital. As the money was not that much I had only little hope. But, still, everything went fine. We decided to go with my childhood friend and we crossed the border similar to crossing the border to Jordan before. We told that we did not want to go to the camp and we moved to Adana.

Weren't you interrogated by someone when you crossed the border? Were you informed about your legal rights and other issues?

No. We expressed that we fled from the war, they continued the process and we entered. They asked if we want to settle in the camp or not and then asked where we are heading to - and that's all. We rented a house in Adana. We opened a small grocery store in the neighborhood with the money we brought. We brought goods from Syria over Idlib.

How did you bring the goods from the border? Illegally?

No, we brought them legally. Honestly speaking, I do not know the details at all, my friend was giving the orders by calling his network around Idlib. We brought the goods via a Turkish company and paid a certain amount of money to that company.

Is your grocery store standing still? Why do you still want to go to Europe even though you have an orderly life?

This is not orderly. You cannot establish an orderly life in such a way. We only tried not to go to bed with an empty stomach. Thank God, we did not starve. But this is not an orderly life. We wanted to register our business. As we did not know whom to ask for the procedures necessary to open a shop we consulted the police but they directed us to the mukhtar. The mukhtar told us that as we were not registered he was not able to help us and that we needed to get a residence permit first. When we made it to the residence center (civil registry), they asked for our passports or a document related to our entrance. Then, they directed us to the Directorate of Migration. We went there as well but were faced with similar things. At that moment since we were not able to preserve the goods any longer, we just opened the shop and started business.

Did you face any problem judicially?

No. Police also occasionally came to our grocery store for shopping. They liked to try different things. We never had any judicial problems, no one asked any questions. They also do not treat us in a negative way. Sometimes we offer them little stuff. We chit-chat. They also feel sorry for us but there is nothing to do.

How do you plan to go to Europe? Do you have any country in mind?

Together with my friend I am thinking of going by the seaway when the weather will be fine. I want to go to Germany but if not I can go to other countries as well.

For example if Hungary would give you a residence permit will you stay there?

I honestly do not know. First I would like to go to the countries that I have knowledge about. But if Hungary or another country helps me maybe I will stay there.

Which countries you have more knowledge about?

Most of my friends went to countries like Germany, Austria, and Belgium. I frequently keep the contact with them. The things I know are only as much as what they told me.

What are the difficulties that your friends are facing?

They do not have much trouble but those who are married and had to leave their spouses in Syria or another place are living under a big stress. Authorities are telling them that maybe they will not allow their spouses to enter the country. The same troubles also take place with their mothers, fathers and brothers and sisters. The countries they are residing in have well-established order. Unlike Turkey and Jordan, you can't simply go there and do whatever you want. If you have an illness they even treat it. But nobody knows whether they allow you to stay or whether you can bring in your spouse. Apart from that they are doing fine.

If you make it to a European country and you are deported what would you do?

I will try to go again or to stay there illegally. If still I can't make it, I will return to Turkey.

INTERVIEW #95, 31 AUGUST 2016

ADANA, 28, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I was born in Daraa but together with my family we moved to Damascus when I started at primary school due to my father's job. I used to work in the marketing department of an international computer company.

When was the first time you came across the war in Syria?

When our road was blocked! When we were on our way to the company's Aleppo branch our road was blocked. While we were trying to understand what was going on, a clash broke out. Before that we had heard such things in the news but when we went through the same thing ourselves we realized the seriousness of the problem. We immediately returned to Damascus, All our work started to disrupt. After a while, the company closed all their offices in Syria and withdrew from the country.

What were your feelings after witnessing the clashes?

Actually, I thought that the opposition would be suppressed quickly. Through all those years we have been told about the power of Assad and the Syrian Army. Thus, we did not give any chance to the opposition. Everything turned out so fast. While we were trying to understand what was going on clashes started in all the cities. I thought that, at least, my job would not be affected. Being unemployed - that was the toughest thing for me.

Did you lose anyone from your family or your close friends?

Not from my close friends but I know that some of the people that I am acquainted with died during the clashes. After we left the house where my mother used to live, it was completely destroyed. Our house was also plundered but the building is not destroyed.

From whom do you get the information about your house or your relatives in Syria?

We have a lot of friends who did not emigrate and are still living in Syria. We gave the keys of our house to them for keeping an eye on it while we are away. They go and control when there are no clashes.

What were the reasons for you to come to Turkey and the reasons of the friends you mentioned to choose staying in Syria?

Unemployment was the main reason for me to leave Syria. I made marketing for many years but there is nothing left in Syria to market. The demand was on the most basic level. In the old days, people who were willing to buy a computer had a lot of alternatives. Moreover, if asked he/she could buy any model and brand from anywhere in the world. Now he/she must choose from whatever is offered. I applied to many companies but everyone has more or less the same conditions. The people I know that remained in Syria are mostly government officials. They do not have problems with their salaries. They have a stable and fixed income even if there are delays in payments.

When and how did you come to Turkey?

We came in 2014. First, we went to Idlib and then crossed the border to Antakya.

What kind of image Turkey used to have for you before coming here?

I did not come to Turkey before but many relatives and friends of mine visited Turkey. They all were talking very positively about it. Everyone was like-minded about the hospitality and the comfort of life. But coming for a holiday and being a refugee is very different. In the first case, they take you inside their shop by force and in the second they do not want you to stay even close to their shops.

What is your biggest difficulty in Turkey?

It is uncertainty. Actually, this is not only a problem of living in Turkey but it is the biggest problem in our life. We do not know what will happen tomorrow, neither in Syria nor in Turkey. Turkey may take a spontaneous decision and forcibly send us all to Syria. Or some unexpected things may occur in Syria out of nowhere. If we are not going to return to Syria anymore and we know it, then we will take our path accordingly. If Turkey will grant us citizenship we will establish a life accordingly. But it is impossible to know what we are, and what we are going to be.

When you go to Europe will you be confronted with similar and ambiguous situations?

No, this is actually why we want to go to Europe.

So which country you want to go to in Europe? Which route you will follow if you will be going?

I would like to go to Europe. I heard from my friends there that 1000 Euros is paid for each person. They also give an extra financial aid for the children and enroll them to schools for free. At the moment I do not know which route to go.

Were you able to find a job in Turkey?

I found one but they are all temporary: a night guard, planting flowers in the municipality, dyeing. I never thought about working in these jobs but I have a family to take care of. I do not steal, I am not doing anything to be ashamed of. But I do not know how I can carry on with such a life. I just want to have a stable income and have my rights.

What kind of rights?

I want to live here with legal means. I want my children to attend school. I want my wife to go to a Turkish language course. I want to have a job with insurance. Now, if I fall and break my arm during painting I have no rights.

Don't you have free medical treatment rights in the hospitals?

We don't know, too! Sometimes doctors examine and prescribe medication, sometimes they ask for money to examine. This is another reason for us to go to Europe: at least the medical service is totally free.

Where do you get such information regarding the rights of refugees?

From our friends that went there, from the internet, Facebook...This kind of information is not hard to access, everyone is trying to help each other.

Under which conditions would you like to stay in Turkey instead of going to Europe?

If they give citizenship, we will stay here. At the end, our cultures are very similar. There are many common words with Arabic in the Turkish language. Some of the people are really treating us nicely. If we can live here after becoming citizens it would also be easier to visit our relatives in Syria.

INTERVIEW #96, 31 AUGUST 2016

ADANA, 39, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am from Aleppo. I have two children, my wife is also from Aleppo. We had a nice life in Syria. We had our own house and car. I was making business in small scale, generally bringing goods from Iraq and Jordan and selling it on the local market. Once we also used to supply goods. Not in large scale but there was a continuous flow of goods. My wife was also helping with accountancy and similar things. Things were not that complex since there were about 10 people working including drivers.

When and how did the war start to affect you?

People became too much politicized. Before we also used to talk about politics and discuss. Weapons were not talking instead of words then. Even during the protests I had serious discussions with my friends. I also have (political) ideas but people got so radicalized that sometimes families broke apart. I still can't understand how can the people who support ISIS defend them? Sometimes I think that we were living in a dream. For example we just realized how the Kurds suffered. We understood that some radicals were living in the same land just next to us. We thought there were no problems between Alawites and Sunnites. From my side there is no problem, Christian, Alawite, and Sunnite - they are all the same.

What was the main thing that caused you to leave Syria? After which event and how did you decide to leave?

It is not hard to decide after a rocket hits a wall of your home. If we were not in the kitchen at that time probably I would lose my children who were sleeping in bed next to that wall. I couldn't live with such a risk any longer. After this event, my wife cried for days. We moved to Turkey in the shortest period of time. I sold anything I had. Only my house was left, and it is only debris now.

From which way did you enter Turkey? Can you please tell me about your life in Turkey?

We entered from Antakya with our car. I and my wife had passports since we visited different countries before. We expressed that we want to enter as tourists but naturally they did not believe. However, they did not block our way. Our life in Turkey is not bad, my children are happy, my wife is happy, too. But the money we have will not last long. We have been living here for 1.5 years, we spent less, and from time to time I am trying to make trade but each month the money we brought with us is decreasing. I do not want my wife to work, anyway we do not have anyone else to look after our children.

Why do you want to go to Europe?

The amount of money we currently have can easily lead us to Europe. It is easier to start a life there. I would like to stay in Turkey but what we can do if tomorrow they send us back in masses? One day they are saying they will give citizenship, the next day they say all Syrians will return to their country. We did not face much trouble inside Adana but many people that we know have told that they suffered from affronts in other cities.

What kind of affronts?

There are lots of examples, which one to tell? There is a family I know that was forced to leave the house because they were making too much noise although they were not even wearing slippers in order to avoid making a noise. Besides, renting a house itself is challenging. When you express you are a Syrian the price immediately increases by saying “you will become crowded in the house”. All the time they say that we get monthly payments from the state. Okay, where is it? What money? They are saying everyone is getting 1000 liras monthly. I did not get even a single penny from anyone. They are saying you are shopping as much as you want from the market and do not pay for it. If you want come with me for shopping now and let me leave without paying. They will immediately gather and attack. I have no idea where they get this information from but everyone thinks that we live in comfort without working and doing anything. May God bless Erdoğan, he welcomed us. But none of these are true.

Isn't there any matter where the state is helping you?

They examine us in hospital for free and the medicine is also free. Doctors treat us fine but some of them write something without even looking at our face and tells us to leave the room after that. Once I saw a pregnant Syrian woman having a labour-pain left all alone in the corridor. We approached her and she said that she has been waiting there for hours and no one takes care of her. She mentioned that her husband was working and she could not reach him at that moment. We went to speak with the nurse to express her situation but the nurse shouted at us. Was it really hard to hold this woman's hand and calm her? What is our crime?

Do you think it is possible to face similar troubles in Europe?

No one can know it but I am sure things are much different there. I see the pictures of the camps, they are very beautiful. It is the opposite of those who stayed in the camps in Turkey. Maybe, there will be people who do not like us but I don't believe that would be so cruel.

If a country in Europe gives you a residence permit or citizenship, would you return to Syria after the war?

I don't know. I am not sure. We need to live and see what happens.

What if Turkey provides you with a residence permit or citizenship?

Then we can stay. At the end, Adana and Syria are close to each other. If we become citizens many things will change. We can do whatever we want. Working, trade, education, all will be possible. I do not think they will be granting us citizenship, though.

INTERVIEW #97, 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

DÜZCE, 60, MALE

Could you please tell us about yourself and your life in Syria?

I do not want to talk about myself at all. My name should remain anonymous but if I tell they will recognize me. Actually my life in Syria was really nice. I had many financial opportunities. Though having all these opportunities, politically I felt oppression on me. Single party, a single ruler...You have no right to have a word. You contribute to production but you have no right to speak up. You have contributed to economy but you are only considered based on your political support for those in power.

Do you have children?

Yes, I have, more than one. They are adults.

Did you decide for them to leave Syria?

No. They are old enough to support themselves. I was forced to leave Syria.

How did this happen?

People revolted, and I supported them. Even though not being physically present, I used my financial power. If I did not do that I wouldn't be able to see in the eyes of my grandchildren in the future. People were saying enough is enough. I also said so. I was tired of the pulling strings in business life and providing benefits to supporters of the party. So I supported the Free Syrian Army. It is clear what happened after. The regime did not allow me to stay in Syria. My own acquisitions were raided and totally destroyed. I got whatever left and fled to Turkey.

You did so together with your entire family, including your children?

No, only some of my children were with me. I had sent the others to Turkey before.

Did you enter Turkey by illegal ways?

Yes.

Did you have difficulties or were you faced with obstacles?

No. Opposite to that, the Turkish authorities who saw us treated us really well. They wanted to settle us to the camps but we did not agree.

Did you come to Düzce directly afterwards? How did Düzce occur in your mind?

Yes, we arrived at Düzce. Some of my children that had arrived in Turkey before were already there. They had already established their life.

Are you happy to be in Turkey?

It depends on your point of view. Düzce is very comfortable. People treat us fine. We rented a nice house. We receive the news from our relatives in İstanbul. We are told that rents are very high there and that they have to stay in houses with poor conditions. Thank God, we are not living under such conditions. Our religion is the same, our culture is also alike with the Turks.

So why do you still want to go to Europe?

Well, I do not want to go...

You told that you will be going.

Yes, I will go. But I do not want to go, my children want. They have concerns for the education and the future. They are thinking about my grandchildren.

Can't they study in Turkey?

I think the same. Surely, they can. Actually...Let me tell you something. Education and other things are basically their excuse. They are telling me: "Father, we want to have a comfortable life". With order, security, peace. It is uncertain what will happen to Turkey. But, is Europe like that? There is stability. Can you believe? I am also afraid to establish a business in Turkey. Our future is unknown.

Which country you will go to in Europe?

I don't know. Let us cross the border first.

Aren't you afraid of being unable to adapt to the life there? You expressed that you had advantages in Turkey in the sense of religion and culture.

I am afraid. I am most afraid about my grandchildren to grow up like Europeans. They are Christian. Their culture is different. We, Arabs, protect and take care of our women. They are free according to what Islam orders. In Europe, it is not like that. I can't adapt in my age, it is very hard. But my children and grandson are so eager for it. This makes me afraid. We are Arabs and will stay Arabs. Being away from your homeland shouldn't change a thing in this regard.

Do you have any acquaintances that went to Europe?

Yes, I have but we have no contact with any of them. I personally do not even know which country they are in right now.

Will you move to Europe by illegal ways?

Sure. Is there any other way? Which European country can give visa to Syrians...

Which road will you try? Land or sea?

I don't know. My children are investigating that. Thank God, we have money. I don't want to spend the money in Turkey. If there is a way, let me go to Europe, let me do whatever work I will do there.

If the war in Syria ends, would you like to return?

It depends on how it will end. If the regime wins and takes back the power I will never return. We can't return. If there is another way, maybe. But I don't think so. Even if I am willing to return my children wouldn't want to. They may stay in Turkey as an alternative and will return if they can't go to Europe. Again, I don't think so. Syria is over for us now. My homeland that I grew up in and loved does not exist anymore. Nothing will be the same.

INTERVIEW #98, 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

DÜZCE, 32, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself and your life in Syria?

I got married when I was 19 years old. I have three children. We lived together with my husband, his family and my children. We did not live in the same house, but we were very close. I lost my parents after getting married. One of my brothers joined the Free Syrian Army. The other one is in Germany together with his family. Life in Syria was nice. My husband was working with his brother and father. Our financial situation was very good. We had to leave Syria because of my father-in-law who supported the opposition. We started to get afraid. Nearly every day the house that we used to live in was under harassing fire. The opposition can protect you only to certain limits. We fled from the home but they found us. We were even more afraid as there were children at home. They were not able to go to school. We came to Turkey upon the decision of my husband, his father and brother. I was born into a large family and lived inside it. Even if we were not in the same house, we were always together with my brothers and my husband's brothers. The war made me lose this. Everyone was scattered around.

We came to Turkey with my father-in-law, mother-in-law and my husband's younger brother. Still, I wish there would be no war, and once again we were all together as one family. I wished my children to know their aunt and uncle. Now, I also have a daughter, who is 1.5 years old. She does not even know her uncle, her aunt or her father's two brothers. They did not see each other. We were not a family like that. We were all next to each other in Syria. Now, one of us is in Germany, one in Syria, one in Austria, one in Turkey. War took away many lives but it also scattered families. I do not only miss my family but I also miss my neighbours and friends that I used to see every day. Who knows, maybe they are not alive anymore?

When did you make the decision to come to Turkey?

I told you, they found our second home and we started to get really afraid. At the end, my father-in-law told that we were going and we are here now. If it was up to me I would have immediately moved to Turkey before moving our house. I was so afraid something bad would happen to my children. But my husband and father-in-law wanted to try. It did not work out.

Do you have any contact with your friend in the Free Syrian Army?

No. We do not talk to each other. (Expressing her fear)....Actually, we talk to each other on internet from time to time. I always think about him. I am very afraid. He tells that he is fighting for all of us. He says that he is fighting for his homeland. But isn't there anyone else apart from my brother to put up a fight for it? If only he would come here and live with us. If he only would come to Europe with us. His life would change. What will happen there (in Syria)? What if someday he dies? Maybe, I won't even get the news. No one would remember his name. In the war men die. But women also die every day after their men pass away. That is harder.

Do you also think that the government is oppressive?

Of course, I think so. If there is no oppression of the regime then what are we doing here? Would such an amount of Syrians be living under these conditions? Did the people revolt out of nowhere...? They even lacked space to breathe and this is why they revolted. Still my father-in-law is afraid. He is telling that there may be people from the Syrian intelligence services everywhere. We do not speak to any Syrians. We are even wary to speak to Turks with Arabic knowledge who are coming for help. Imagine how afraid we were in Syria considering our fear here.

Do you want to go to Europe because of this fear?

Yes. Fear is also a reason. Here it is exactly like Syria. Anyone can enter from the border. Assad's men can wander everywhere. They can kill opponents by masking it under "street fight". In the news it is covered that way. They report that a Syrian was murdered. They say that he is poisoned by the smoke. Do such things always happen to members of the opposition? Security here is really bad. We are not safe here. Moreover, there are bombs exploding everywhere. How will the Turks protect us?

Will you feel yourself safe in Europe?

Of course, I will. Europe is not like Turkey. It is clear who enters and who leaves the border zone. All refugees are registered. Of course something can happen there as well but there is a very low chance for that to happen.

Do you have other reasons to go to Europe? As, f. ex., the education of your children etc...

Sure. They may receive a good education in Europe but the same can be done here as well. In fact, Turkey is a more beautiful country for us. Beyond anything else, it is a Muslim country. My children may receive education as Muslims. But the reason for us to go is not education. We can't make my father-in-law understand this. He wants to stay here. He thinks that we want to go to Europe because of its comfort. But we are afraid, as he is a well-known person and the regime is hostile towards him. He is also afraid, more careful than us but he thinks that nothing will happen to him in Turkey.

So which country you would like to go to?

I do not want to answer this question. Maybe when you publish the book we will be in Europe. We are determined. For that reason I speak a little bit more relaxed with you.

Do you have contact with your relatives living in Europe?

Yes, we talk over the internet. My sister went to Germany together with her husband and family. Brothers of my husband are all in different countries now.

Is your brother happy to be in Germany?

Yes, he is very happy. The Germans are providing all kinds of facilities to the refugees. They tell that only the bureaucratic paperwork is very slow. My brother says that he will never ever return to Syria again. He tells that after seeing the life in Germany he won't be able to live in Syria. It is said that they value the people there.

Would you return to Syria if the war ends?

No, never. I don't know what is going to happen to my children. Even if everything ends only God knows what will happen in the future. Maybe, we will be sealed as we were once members of the opposition. Maybe, the balance of power will change again. Syria does not exist for me anymore. It is really hard to say this, but it does not exist for me.

Don't you even want to go there to visit your relatives and friends?

Never. I do not want even to put my foot on Syrian soil again.

INTERVIEW #99, 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

DÜZCE, 20, FEMALE

Could you please tell us about yourself?

I am 20 years old. I was born in Damascus. I have one brother. My father and mother are alive. My father is a doctor. My mother is an English teacher. I finished high school in Syria. Here, I am studying at university.

How is your life going in Turkey? Do you have troubles at university?

Yes. I have troubles with the language. I can't take notes as my Turkish is not so good. Sometimes, I don't understand the lecture. But lecturers are helping me in the exams. While they are carefully looking for the grammar knowledge of Turkish students they ignore my mistakes. I feel at ease. But here (in Düzce) there are not opportunities like Damascus. It is a small city. Social activities are limited. People are nice but their point of view towards us disturbs me. They are acting like all the Syrians are in need of help or begging. There is a lot of people with goodwill among them, but I don't want help from anyone. The financial conditions of my family are fine and we have enough money.

How is your relation with your friends at university?

I had difficulties at the beginning to make friendship. Both language and culture were preventing that. University students are more relaxed here. I think that is because of living away from their families. I live with my family. For that reason most of the times I can't keep up with them. I don't have any other problems with my friends.

Are your father and mother working?

It was hard for my father to find a job. But my mother found a job where she could work as an Arabic translator. Before coming here she knew a little bit of Turkish. Here she learned it better. My mother's father, I mean my grandfather, was a Turkman. My father can't work as a doctor but still he found a job related to the health sector. He found a job in a pharmacy.

Does your brother go to school?

Yes, he goes to school over there (pointing to his school).

When did you decide to come to Turkey? Have you ever witnessed the war?

My father wanted to stay as he was a doctor. He thought that he could help the people. My mother was really insisting on leaving. She was worried for us. I graduated from high school. Afterwards my father also was convinced to leave when he was caught in the middle of an armed clash.

Did you enter Turkey legally or illegally?

We legally entered with our passport.

Why do you want to go to Europe? Won't you continue your education here?

Actually, I like it here. But I dream of studying medicine like my father did. Here, it seems that I don't have that possibility. We enroll to the universities with a different status. Our examination system is a little different. Also it seems to me to be wiser to study medicine in Europe. And there is the situation of my father. For the moment, he can't work as a doctor here. In the past, there were rumors that

Syrian doctors will be hired but no news so far. My father received a good education and worked for many years. If he stays here, all his education and life would be idling away. We have some money that we saved now. My parents are working. But this is only enough to a certain point. They get really low salaries. If we would live in a city that is not as small as Düzce is, like f. ex. İstanbul, we would be living in much worse conditions. I don't want to spend my life in a small city and graduate from a department that I don't want. I don't want to see my father unhappy because of not being able to work in his profession.

Which country you want to go to?

I want to go to England. But getting a visa is so hard. I also don't know their policies towards refugees. For that reason we will be going to Germany, the Netherlands or Austria.

Why not European countries like Spain or Italy but instead the countries you mentioned?

These countries have a good economy and education. Otherwise it would be more logical to stay in Turkey. If we will be going we need to go to a country that is developed.

Do you think you can adapt to the country you will be going to?

Yes. Why shouldn't we adapt? Both my mother and I don't wear hijab. We don't have any difference in appearance from a European. In the sense of language I think we can adapt immediately. I and my parents know good level of English. My mother teaches English to my brother as well. Learning a new language wouldn't be hard for us. I learned Turkish somehow.

What about religion and culture?

We are not Muslims that are living under strict rules. Both my mother and father have liberal views. Concerning culture, in Syria we were not living different from any European...On the contrary, I think that I will be more comfortable in Europe than in Syria both about women rights and other areas of rights.

Do you know any people that went to Europe?

One of my friends is in Norway with her family. They have no complains except the cold weather. Sometimes she shares her pictures through the internet. I can see that she is having a good life. She said that after language adaptation she will be starting at university. Sometimes I wish that I were in her shoes.

If the war in Syria ends, will you think about returning?

My father would want to return. But if we already made a life in Europe I wouldn't want to. I think my mother wouldn't want, as well. We will only go there to visit our friends and remember our past life.

INTERVIEW #100, 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

DÜZCE, 42, MALE

Could you please tell about yourself and your life in Syria?

I am a father of three children. I have twin daughters and a boy. My daughters are 10, my son is 15 years old. I was making home furniture, timber flooring and recreation. We had our own place in partnership with the son of my uncle. We were having a good profit, living a good life. We had 5 workers.

What happened and made you decide to come to Turkey?

First, our business went bad. We had to fire two workers. Later, we had to fire them all as no one was eager anymore to renovate homes or gardens. We had to close our office. But still my cousin was determined to stay in Syria. I wish I could grab his arm and bring him to Turkey. We lost him and his wife by a rocket shot. First I was furious. I wanted to join either the government forces or the opposition. I wanted to fight against whoever killed him. Later I foresaw that the same end was coming for my family. If we stayed there we would share the same destiny. For that reason I left Syria together with my wife and children.

Why did you come to Turkey?

To tell the truth, we did not come to Turkey to stay. We agreed with a smuggler from the internet. We were to go to İzmir and cross to Europe. But things did not go as we hoped for. One of my daughters could not bear the travel. After crossing to Turkey she became sick. We were very afraid. I managed to contact a friend of mine who came to Turkey before us. He told that they were living in Düzce and could look after my daughter. When we went to a doctor in Düzce we learned that one of my daughters was having pneumonia and the other one was going through a very strong flu. We decided to stay until they healed. Afterwards we lost our contact with the smuggler. So for this reason we stayed in Düzce. My friend found me a job in a timber workshop. We have been here for a while. But we will go to Europe. If we can save some more money I want to go a safer way. I can't put my children into a risk again.

So you will not be going by the seaway?

I don't know. There are safe ways to go from the sea, too. But still it seems to me that going from the land is a better choice.

Which country you want to go to?

I want to go to the northern countries. They have higher welfare as well as it will be easier for me to find a job related with my profession. If that does not happen, than it will be Germany.

Why Germany? Why do you not want to go to the Arab countries living in welfare?

You can perceive both of us as Arabs but the difference between us is as much as our difference to the Europeans. Their perception of Islam and ours is different. Lifestyles are different. And should I go there to get oppressed? You can't compare the approach of Europeans and theirs towards us. They are also not providing the visa. Going illegal ways is nearly impossible.

Europeans are Christians. Their culture is also different. Would you be able to adapt?

We will try to adapt. You have to adapt to the place you are living. It is not only Europe...We also adapted to here. We have to. Of course, we will not lose our religion and culture but we will live in accordance to the life there.

How are your working conditions here?

Conditions are good. But the salaries are bad. Without the help of the people it would be hard for us to survive and save money. A businessman here helps us and provides food every month. Another one bought clothes for my children. Turkish people know the solidarity. But the state does not have a policy. Notwithstanding, we did not come here to stay. So I have no idea about the conditions in the camps. Or I do not know if there is aid to other refugees. What I know is that the state does not help my family and my friend's family. Still, may God bless the Turkish people.

You had a friend here and he helped you. Well, do you have someone you know in Europe?

No, I don't. To say it in better **words**, there is no one to help. They are also waiting there as refugees.

Which country do they live in?

Both of them are in Germany.

If the war ends, would you be thinking of returning to Syria?

No, I don't think of returning. I lost the son of my uncle whom I loved like a brother. Both sides are responsible for that. I accuse both sides. I do not want to look at the face of anyone there. I can't live in Syria in these conditions. I will never take my children there. Maybe, I will go to see what it looks like at the end but I will not let my children enter that hell.

Friedrich Naumann
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