

October 29, 2019



***Turkey: Renewed Concern
Among Syrian Refugees over
a New Wave of Illegal***

Turkey: Renewed Concern Among Syrian Refugees over a New Wave of Illegal Deportations

Reportedly, HTS arrested several deportees after entering Syria

Executive summary:

Turkey has forcibly deported Syrian refugees to the war-torn country, putting their lives in grave danger. As they became more vulnerable to harsh living conditions and abuses by extremist groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and even to be killed at the borders, trying to re-enter Turkey.

In turn, STJ has documented the arrest of several deportees by HTS and the death of at least one another by bullets of the Turkish border guards (Gendarmerie), while attempting to cross the borders illegally into Turkey.

It is evident that Turkey has taken no effective measures to guarantee the safety of those Syrians deported; actually, it did exactly the opposite.

Despite all the State's decisions not to deport Syrian refugees, the expulsions have never stopped, especially against those who reside in Istanbul. It's worth mentioning that Turkey gave unregistered migrants a deadline until August 20, 2019, and extended it to October 30 of the same year, to leave or face forced removal.

In conjunction with the wave of forced deportations, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces issued a statement dated August 2, 2019, denying news reports that Syrians have been deported from Turkey; claiming they are "allegations".¹

It was noted that the Turkish government have adopted drastic measures, which can be characterized as an organized policy to deport Syrian refugees, as it detained them in camps at the Syria-Turkey borders under dire conditions and gave them a choice between staying there or signing the so-called "voluntary return" documents. Contrary to all statements of Turkey's officials especially that made by its interior minister Süleyman Soyulu during a press conference, in which he said: "Deportation of Syrians is out of question."²

STJ field researchers observed a marked increase in the number of the deportees before the first deadline expired on August 20, 2019. A source from the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing confirmed to STJ that the number of Syrian refugees deported from Turkey to Syria had reached 8,900 in the last August alone, suggesting that the Turkish authorities wanted to deport as many Syrians as possible before the first deadline.

However, STJ researchers noted a significant reduction, but not a halt, in the expulsions, following the extension of the deadline, from August 20 to the moment of preparation of this report in early October 2019.

¹ "Press Release about the Allegations in the Press and on Social Media regarding Syrians under Temporary Protection in Turkey", Syrian National Coalition, August 2, 2019 (last visit October 24, 2019)

<http://en.etilaf.org/press/press-release-about-the-allegations-in-the-press-and-on-social-media-regarding-syrians-under-temporary-protection-in-turkey.html>

² "Deporting regular migrants out of question: Turkish min.", Anadolu Agency, August 21, 2019 (last visit: September 23, 2019) <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/deporting-regular-migrants-out-of-question-turkish-min/1561650>.

Witnesses said that the Turkish government would confiscate the refugees' cell phones during their forcible deportation, so they couldn't film. It expelled them across the unofficial border crossings of al-Alyani, Kherbet Eljoz and Atme crossings in northern rural Idlib, which is under HTS' control, and also through al-Raei crossing in northern rural Aleppo and Jindires in Afrin, under the control of the Turkish-backed National Army.³ This may indicate the Turkish government's unwillingness to publish the numbers of the Syrian refugees it has deported.

STJ had documented in an earlier report the deportation of thousands of refugees, including women and children, from all Turkey, and mainly Istanbul, in the context of the Turkish government's removal campaign against what it called the 'irregular refugees', which peaked in July 2019.⁴

I. Deportation of asylum seekers:

A number of Syrian refugees who were involuntarily deported from Turkey to Syrian territory faced several dangers, most notably the risk of being detained by extremist organizations such as HTS, in addition to being killed on the Syrian-Turkish border, as many of whom attempted to seek refuge in Turkey again. STJ researchers documented the detention of a number of refugees forcibly deported by HTS, one of whom was Christian. They were arrested on various pretexts, like violating HTS 'general order; by smoking or wearing banned clothes...etc. While local activists documented the death of a refugee attempted to enter the Turkish territory after his deportation.

Wael M. born in 1990 in the province of Aleppo, was expelled from Turkey on July 20, 2019 for being caught attempting to access Greece illegally by the Turkish gendarmerie. He was deported into Syria through Bab al-Salam border crossing, despite his pleas not to be sent to areas controlled by extremist groups, since he is a Christian. In this regard he spoke to STJ saying:⁵

"We were held in Aydın prison for seven days following which we were offered a choice between remaining in prison indefinitely or signing the "voluntary return" document. So, I was obliged to sign, but I begged the police not to send me to Syria, since I no longer have relatives there. As I was an expatriate in Lebanon since 1996, because my mother is Lebanese and my father is Syrian, but that did not help me. I was deported with a young man from Idlib, through Bab al-Salamah border crossing, from where we headed to the city of Saraqib in Idlib. Several checkpoints, belonging to extremist organizations, on the road asked me about my origin,

³ Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salamah are considered official border crossings.

⁴ "Turkey: Thousands of Syrians Forcibly Returned to Peril", STJ, September 29, 2019 (last visit: October 4, 2019) <https://stj-sy.org/en/turkey-thousands-of-syrians-forcibly-returned-to-peril/>.

⁵ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in September 2019.

especially since my dialect is a mixture of the Lebanese and Syrian. I was interrogated at one of the checkpoints for about an hour where they suspected me to be affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah, but thank God when I present my personal documents proofs, they let me go.”

Wael was detained at HTS checkpoint in the village of Kherbet Eljoz while attempting to cross the borders back into Turkey on July 22, 2019. He was interrogated by HTS members for four days, which was described by him as the roughest and scariest moments he ever experienced in life, especially when HTS learned that he is a Christian. Fortunately, however, HTS released him on July 26, 2019, most likely to enhance its image, as he suggested. Wael made repeated attempts to enter Turkey and finally succeeded and managed to access to Greece, where he is staying and dreaming to get to Europe.

Mohammad Khalid from al-Qunaitra was also detained by HTS after being deported from Turkey on July 24, 2019, for being caught attempting to cross into Greece, according to a media activist. He added that Mohammad was detained by HTS for alleged indecent images found on his phone and because of his weird haircut. However, following his release, he managed to re-enter Turkey through dangerous illegal routes.

Local activists in Idlib confirmed that HTS is still detaining Somar Jamal Abthou, from the Isma'ili-majority city of Salamiyah, in rural Hama. He was deported to Idlib with some other youths in July 2019. On July 23, 2019 they were arrested by HTS and later most of them were released except for Somar, who is still unaccounted for. He was arrested for allegedly having indecent images on his phone in addition to photos of him indicate that he was a former member of the Syrian regular army.

On the other hand, local activists documented the killing of Hisham Mustafa Al-Mohammad, born in the city of al-Safirah in Aleppo, by bullets of the Turkish border guards, while attempting to enter the Turkish territory illegally on August 5, 2019. Hisham was married with three children, and was deported to Syria, despite having a Temporary Protection Identification Document (Kimlik) registered in Istanbul. The Turkish government said that Hisham was arrested in the context of a "terrorist investigation" and that he decided to return voluntarily to Syria. However, the young attempted to cross into Turkish territory illegally, which led to his kill near the border town of Harem. Media sites circulated a video of an interview with Hisham's father, who spoke in details about the unjustified arrest of his

son from his house by the Turkish authorities on May 28, 2019, and confirmed his death by the Turkish border guards.⁶

STJ has issued a series of reports documenting the Turkish border guards' offensives against Syrians, and their deportations of asylum seekers.⁷

II. Turkey's deportation of refugees is an organized policy:

Despite the Turkish government's statements about giving the Syrian refugees a deadline to settle their legal status until August 20, 2019, and extending it until October 30, 2019, Turkey continued to deport refugees to Syria, contrary to its promises. STJ has documented the expulsion of many refugees into Syria, either following the declaration of the initial deadline or after its extension, despite holding Kimliks registered in states other than Istanbul.

Local organizations have documented the arrest of the Palestinian refugee, Maher Bashir Abweini, by HTS, after he was deported by the Turkish authorities to Syria in August 2019.⁸ He was arrested for not having a Kimlik. HTS said that it would release him after verifying his legal status which would take a few days. STJ, however, couldn't confirm whether the young man was released or not.

a. Expulsions continue despite the announced deadline

A time until Aug. 20 has been given for foreigners of Syrian origin under temporary protection who are not registered in Istanbul (registered in other provinces) to return to the cities of their registration. Those determined not to have gone back will be transferred to the provinces of their registration in line with the instruction of our Interior Ministry," said a

⁶ For more info please check:

<https://www.facebook.com/Verify.syr/videos/2497464006979655/?v=2497464006979655>.

⁷ "Turkish Gendarmerie Gun Down a Displaced Woman and Deport Syrian Asylum Seekers", STJ, June 15, 2019 (last visit: October 8, 2019) <https://stj-sy.org/en/turkish-gendarmerie-gun-down-a-displaced-woman-and-deport-syrian-asylum-seekers/>

⁸ "The Palestinian Refugee Maher Abweini Detained in Idlib by HTS following Deportation from Turkey", Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, August 27, 2019 (last visit: September 24, 2019)

<https://www.actionpal.org.uk/ar/post/12211/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8>

statement released by the Provincial Directorate of Press and Public Relations on July 22, 2019.⁹

Omar M.,²⁰ from Idlib, was one of those deported from Turkey on July 25, 2019; a few days following the first deadline, after being detained for not having a Kimlik. Omar had fled Syria to Istanbul before several years and used to work there in a shoe factory. In this regard he spoke to STJ saying:¹⁰

“Before the first deadline was announced, I decided to be locked in the house, for fear of deportation, since I don’t have a Kimlik. My friend Mohammad was also hiding with me, though he owned a Kimlik from Gaziantep and needed renewal. However, given a deadline, we became less fearful and decided to travel to Gaziantep to renew my friend’s Kimlik and me to apply for one. That costed each of us about 1500 Turkish Lira. However, on July 25, 2019, while we were in Yusuf Pasha street waiting for the taxi which would take us to Gaziantep, Turkish policemen came to us and asked for our Kimliks. We told them that we were working on resolving our legal status, but they dragged us to a bus, which was contained about 20 handcuffed Syrian youths. We were driven to Kilis refugee camp along the Turkey-Syria border, where we were shocked to see dozens of youths transferred there in the same way.”

Omar added that the Turkish policemen started beating him and other youths as soon as they entered the camp. They stayed there for about six days, during which they underwent severe beat, mistreatment and intimidation by Turkish policemen. He said:

“The situation was dire in Kilis camp; the food was scarce and we used to sleep on the ground, let alone the intimidation and beating we were subjected to. Thus, to escape suffering and humiliation, many youths signed the “voluntary return” documents, while I and my friend preferred to wait. On the third day, a Turkish policeman came and told us to sign the “voluntary return” documents in a threatening tone, or we would be detained in the camp for more six months. After three more days, we could no longer tolerate the bad conditions and mistreatment, so we decided to sign the return documents as what other youths did. I felt like dying by a shell is easier than that kind of life. Now I am in Idlib with no job, living on my family’s little support. I would definitely try to go back to Turkey illegally if I get enough money in the coming period.”

⁹ “IRREGULAR MIGRATION, UNREGISTERED SYRIANS, UNREGISTERED EMPLOYMENT”, ISTANBUL GOVERNOR’S OFFICE, Provincial Directorate of Press and Public Relations, July 22, 2019 (last visit: September 23, 2019) <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-kayitsiz-suriyeliler-kayit-disi-istihdam-basin-aciklamasi>

¹⁰ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in September 2019.

Turkish policemen not only chased Syrian refugees in streets, they even stormed their workplaces and homes and also searched mosques for them, especially in districts of Esenyurt and Fatih. It appears to be a systematic way to dislodge as many Syrian refugees as possible, and in addition to the above, many Turkish employers helped the Turkish police by turning in their irregular Syrian workers and inviting them to come to the factories. Rabee, 20, from rural Damascus, was one of those deported to Syria after his Turkish employer turned him in on July 26, 2019, regarding this he spoke to STJ saying:¹¹

“I was working in a factory in the Zeytinburnu district, but to avoid detention since I have no Kimlik, I agreed with my employer to quit the job and he promised to give me my unpaid salary of the last two months, which was 3,000 TL. On July 26, 2019, I went to the factory to receive the money, and while I was waiting for my employer, the Turkish police came and arrested me. They got me on a bus where there were about 15 irregular Syrian refugees. We were driven to Kilis camp, which was overcrowded and the toilets there were filthy. Moreover, the policemen beat, humiliated and intimidated us, in a way to drive us to sign the “voluntary return” documents. Indeed, that was what happened; the next day, me and a number of other Syrian youths signed return documents and were deported to Idlib, where I’m staying in a mosque until I could find a job to support myself. Living conditions are very difficult here, and only the lucky ones can find jobs.”

Hamza M., 24, another Syrian refugee who was deported to Syria after his Turkish employer turned him in for not having a Kimlik. He recounted to STJ saying:¹²

“I was working in a sweatshop in the Zeytinburnu district for about four years for a very good salary. However, when the Turkish government launched its deportation campaign, we started to close the door of the sweatshop and work in silence. On August 19, 2019, me and two of my co-workers decided to quit working in the sweatshop and to go to Gaziantep to apply for Kimliks. The employer promised to fully pay us and everything seemed to be ok, but he stabbed us. As when we came to the sweatshop next day, we found the Turkish police waiting for us; they detained me and my co-worker and took us to a nearby police station, where they forced us to sign “voluntary return” documents under beat and intimidation and then deported us to Syria.”

¹¹ The witness was interviewed by STJ field researcher in late September 2019.

¹² The witness was interviewed by STJ field researcher in September 2019.



A side of the Turkish police inspections near a mosque in Istanbul in late July 2019. Photo credit: media activists.

b. Increased expulsions before the expiry of the first deadline:

After listening to several Syrian deportees, STJ marked an increase in expulsions before the expiry of the first deadline which was on August 20, 2019. That indicates an organized policy to deport as many Syrians as possible before the required deadline. Mohammad Y. born in 1998 from Hazeh, was among those deported to Idlib on August 8, 2019, with a friend a relative, though holding a Kimlik from Bursa. He spoke to STJ saying:¹³

“The Turkish police detained me along with my relative Anas Kh. and my friend Mohammad A. and took us to a camp in the city of Edirne, where we were held with about 70 other people, including Syrian families with children among them. We stayed there for three days without food, taking beats with sticks and sleeping on the floor. On the fourth day, they gave us a little food and then we were deported to Antakya, where we were placed in a detention center and got beat with sticks by officers there. Then they brought documents and forced us to sign them. After that they drove us into Syria through Bab al-Hawa border crossing. Now I am in the Dana area in rural Idlib and my financial situation is very bad; I can’t even support myself.”

¹³ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in September 2019.

Amer J., 25, from the town of Armanaz in rural Idlib, was also deported to Syria on August 8, 2019 for being in Istanbul while holding a Kimlik from the city of Aydın. He talked to STJ saying:¹⁴

“Turkish policemen stopped me in Aksaray, Istanbul and took me to a police station, where I underwent an investigation about my presence in Istanbul while holding a Kimlik from Aydın. Subsequently, I was detained for a month, during which I was moved between several prisons like Aydın and Şatırla prisons; the conditions were dire in the latter, where I got a skin disease, which I still suffering and treating. When in Aydın prison, where I was held with 30 people, an officer came and gave us blankets with papers to sign; he said they were blanket receipts. But it turned out that they were “voluntary return” documents, and we all were deported to Syria, as a result, through Bab al-Hawa border crossing. Now I’m in my town Armanaz in a very bad financial situation.”

c. A significant reduction, but not a halt, in the expulsions, following the extension of the deadline

The deadline given initially to irregular Syrian refugees to resolve their legal situation, was extended to October 30, 2019 through a statement released by Istanbul Governor’s Office on August 27, 2019.¹⁵ It also said that it will issue Temporary Protection Identification Documents from Istanbul for students of basic, secondary and university education, as well as family members registered in Istanbul, orphaned children and business owners investing in Istanbul.

However, contrary to these decisions, STJ documented the deportation of a number of Syrian refugees, during the deadline extension. Among them were holders of Kimliks registered in cities other than Istanbul, and people with no Kimliks at all. Besides, a number of asylum seekers caught attempting to access Europe from Turkey illegally were also deported. A significant reduction, but not a halt, in the removals, was marked following the extension of the deadline. Witnesses said that the Turkish government would confiscate the refugees’ cell phones during their forcible deportation, so they couldn’t film. It expelled them across the informal border crossings of al-Alyani, Kherbet Eljoz and Atme crossings in northern rural Idlib, under HTS’ control.

¹⁴ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in September 2019.

¹⁵ "IRREGULAR MIGRATION, UNREGISTERED SYRIANS, UNREGISTERED EMPLOYMENT" PRESS RELEASE (2019-48), Provincial Directorate of Press and Public Relations of Istanbul, August 27, 2019 (last visit: September 23, 2019). <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/duzensiz-goc-kayitsiz-suriyeliler-kayit-disi-istihdam-basin-aciklamasi>.

Basel Kh., 25, was one of those deported to Syria on August 28, 2019; during the deadline extension, for holding a Kimlik from Bursa. He spoke to STJ in this regard saying:¹⁶

“I had been living in Istanbul for about 3 years, where I used to work as a delivery boy for a restaurant in Istiklal street. On that day, two Turkish policemen stopped me when I was delivering an order in Beyoglu district, and asked me to present my Kimlik card. When they saw that it was registered in another city, an officer cursed me for no reason and asked me to leave Istanbul. I replied that the Turkish government had given us a deadline to stay in the city until October 30, 2019, and that he had no right to deport me. The agent beat me on the face, which prompted me to insult him. The other policeman told me that I had to beg them not to deport me, but I refused. So, they took me to the nearby police station and asked me to sign a “voluntary return” document; I agreed on a condition to send me to Damascus, where my family lives, and this is what happened. But as soon as I arrived in Damascus, I was given a notice to join the compulsory military service within 15 days, in order to be sent to the deadly frontlines in Idlib.”

The local organization, Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, in turn, said that the Turkish authorities has expelled the three Palestinian refugees, Mohammad al-Zoubi, Rashid Hijazi and Uday al-Jada’a, who had fled al-Yarmouk Camp in rural Damascus towards northern Syria. The three men were reportedly deported on September 29, 2019-during the deadline extension- while trying to cross into Greece illegally from Turkey’s Aydın. The Turkish police officers tore up the identity documents of the three refugees; Palestinian Authority passports, UNRWA Card, and the Temporary Identity of Palestinian Refugees, after a verbal altercation between them and the Turkish police, and then deported them to Idlib on Monday, October 7.¹⁷

The same organization reported the detention and the consequent deportation of two other Palestinian refugees who are Ahmed Yousif Abu Naser and Othman Moussa Khalil, from the Sbeneh Camp in Damascus suburbs, to northern Syria by the Turkish government in the context of its deportation campaign against illegal refugees.¹⁸

¹⁶ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in early September 2019.

¹⁷ “Turkey Pushes Back 3 Palestinian Refugees to Northern Syria”, Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, October 8, 2019 (last visit: October 9, 2019) <https://www.actionpal.org.uk/en/post/9204/flash-news/turkey-pushes-back-3-palestinian-refugees-to-northern-syria>

¹⁸ “Turkey Pushes Back 5 Palestinian Refugees to Syria in 2 Days”, Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, October 10, 2019 (last visit: October 10, 2019) <https://www.actionpal.org.uk/en/post/9209/flash-news/turkey-pushes-back-5-palestinian-refugees-to-syria-in-2-days>

III. Stories of Syrian refugees who survived deportations after paying bribes

While many Syrian refugees were deported on the pretext of breaking the law, others escaped such deportations through paying bribes to Turkish police officers, among them was Mohammed.kh,³⁰ married with two children, who told STJ that he escaped expulsion by paying a bribe of 600 TL and he went on to say:¹⁹

“I was about to be detained by the Turkish police from Esenyurt district for not having a Kimlik. They ordered me to get in their car; I collapsed and started crying and saying that I have an old sick mother and two children who would be without a breadwinner if they deport me. I begged them and I was ready to kiss their hands. Then I got an amount of 600 TL, I had saved to pay the rent of the basement I reside, and gave it to them, so they let me go but threatened to deport me if they caught me again.”²⁰

Tariq A., 22, is another Syrian refugee escaped the deportation by bribing the Turkish policemen with 600 TL. He said:²¹

“In early August and while I was with my friend heading to the sweatshop we work in, in Esenyurt, three Turkish policemen dressed as civilians, stopped us and asked for our Kimliks. I showed them mine, which is registered in another city, and my friend told them that he doesn’t have one, so they threatened to deport us to Syria. We started begging them not to do so, and I gave them 300 TL, and also did my friend, so they let us go.”

Ahmed D.,25, from the village of Kafr Dariyan in Idlib also survived deportation after bribing a bribe to Turkish police who stopped him for not having a Kimlik. But the second time he was caught, on August 3, 2019, he was deported to Syria. In this regard, he said:²²

“Without warning, the Turkish police stormed the shared dwelling where I used to reside in Bağcılar district, and asked for our Kimliks and left after we bribed them. One more time I encountered Turkish police while I was on my way to work with other three Syrian youths, and they asked for 100 TL. From each of us to let us go. However, I couldn’t survive the third time they caught me when they re-stormed my shared dwelling and detained me with my friend and then deported me to into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.”

¹⁹ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in September 2019.

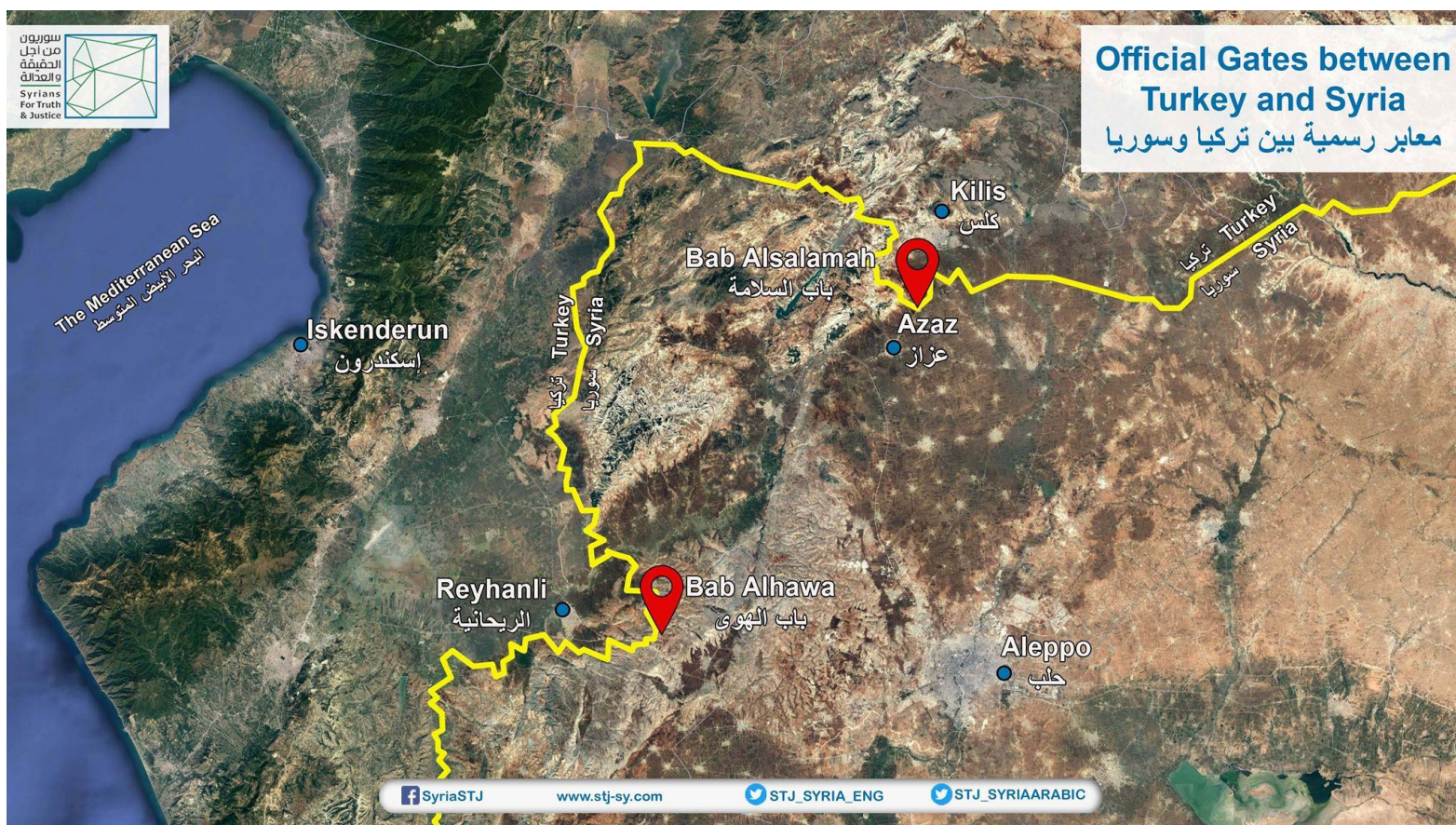
²⁰ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in early September 2019.

²¹ The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in early September 2019.

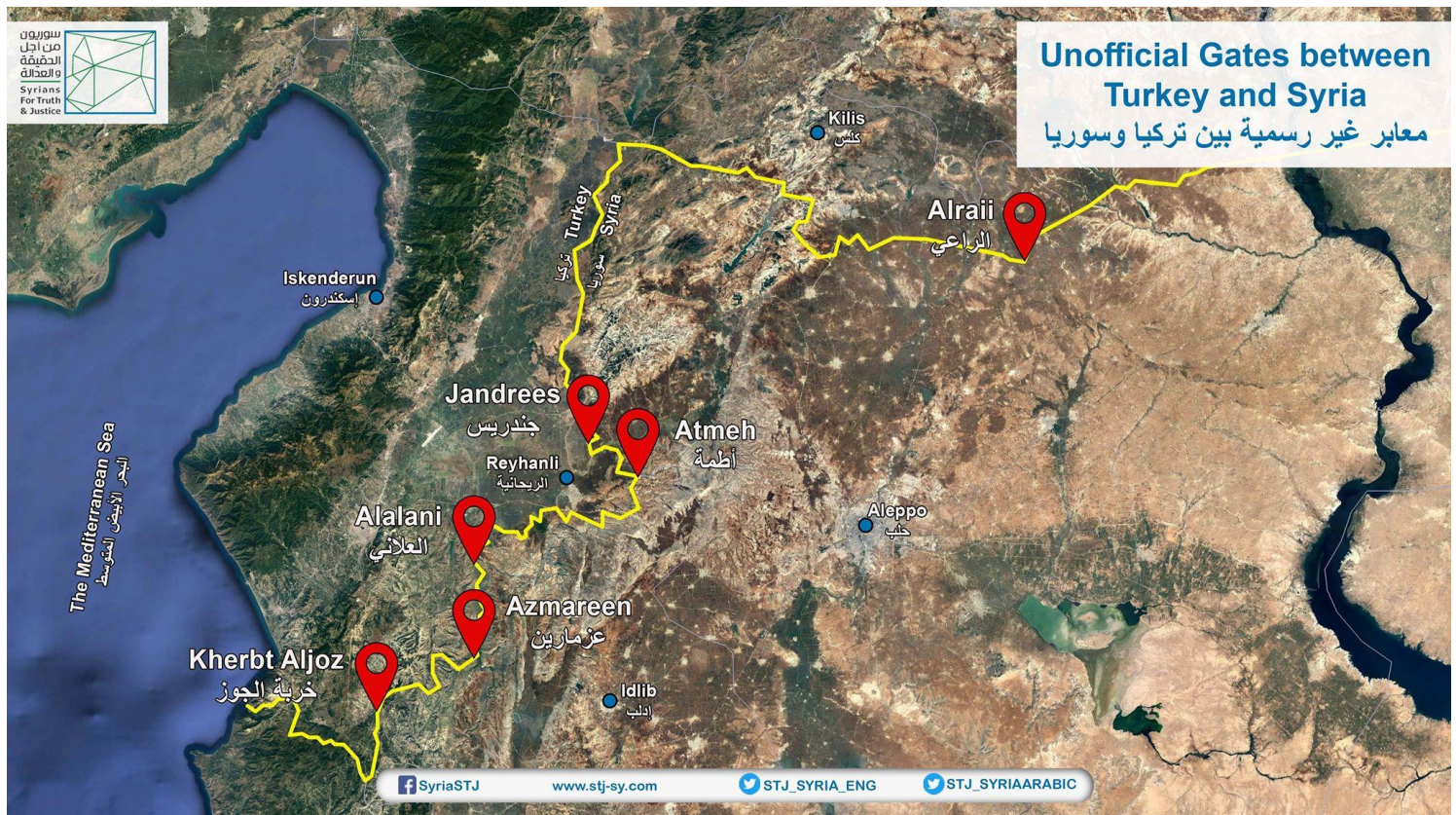
²² The witness was interviewed online by STJ field researcher in early September 2019.

IV. Hundreds of Syrian refugees deported through unofficial crossings in rural Idlib and Aleppo:

According to STJ field researchers, the Turkish government not only deported Syrians through the official border crossings of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salamah, as hundreds of refugees were deported into rebel-held areas in Idlib and Aleppo through unofficial border crossings mainly the al-Alyani, Kherbet Eljoz and Atme crossings in northern rural Idlib, under HTS' control, and al-Raei crossing in northern rural Aleppo and Jindires in Afrin, under the control of the Turkish backed National Army. This may indicate the Turkish government's unwillingness to publish the numbers of Syrian refugees deported.



A satellite image illustrates the locations of the border crossings of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salamah through which the Syrian refugees were deported.



A satellite image illustrates the locations of the unofficial border crossings through which the Syrian refugees were deported to Aleppo and Idlib.

An official at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing told STJ that more than 300,000 Syrians who were deported from all Turkish states, mainly from Istanbul, crossed the border from early 2019 until late September 2019, noting that the largest number, which is 8900 deportees, was recorded during August 2019. He said that the Syrian refugees are transported upon arrival to the Syria-Turkey border, by bus to the immigration department in the crossing, to be investigated about the reasons for deportation, and then referred to the court in case found guilty, and the latter decides his fate Then. In this regard he said:

"Most of the Syrians were deported for not having a Kimlik at all or holding one registered in a city other than where they reside. We have heard accounts from some of those deported saying that the Turkish government withdrew the "Kimlik" from some refugees to deport them. We also received a number of refugees who were caught attempting to cross to Europe from Turkey illegally. A number of refugees were also deported through unofficial crossings such as al-Alyani, Kherbet Eljoz and Azmarin illegal routes. As for our statistics, the number of Syrians deported from Turkey in August alone reached 8,900, in July 6,160, in June 4,370, in April 2823, in March 3,046, in February 3,307, in January 4,466 and in September 2019, the number reached 8,653. Most of those deported were Syrians caught

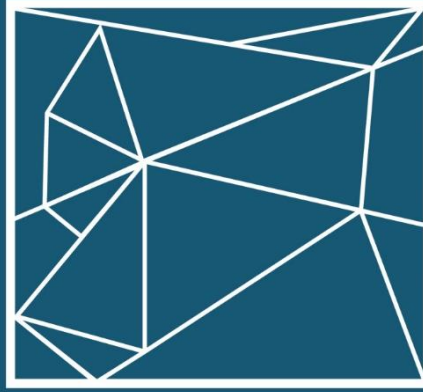
attempting to cross into Turkey illegally, fleeing the continued military operations in Idlib province. They were arrested by the Turkish authorities and pushed back to Syria. In 2018, the total number of deportees from Turkey reached 41,000.”

Another source from the Bab al-Salamah border crossing told STJ field researcher—who felt the former’s reluctance to provide the true figures— that the total number of Syrians deported from Turkey to Syrian territory through the Bab al-Salamah crossing border from early 2019 to its late September reached 19,658; 2,657 in September, 4,261 in August, 2,964 in July and 1,322 in June 2019. In addition to 1,163 others in May 2019, 1279 in April 2019, 1947 in March 2019, 1,824 in February 2019 and 2,241 in January 2019.

On June 3, 2019, the Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said in a joint press conference with the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, in Turkey’s Istanbul, that the number of Syrian refugees who "voluntarily opted to return" to the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch (northern Syria) amounted to 331,000 refugees, according to the Turk Press website, loyal to the Turkish government²³.

²³ “Turkey Supports the Voluntary Returns to Liberated Areas in Syria”, Turk Press, June 3, 2019 (last visit: October 3, 2019) <https://www.turkpress.co/node/61733>.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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