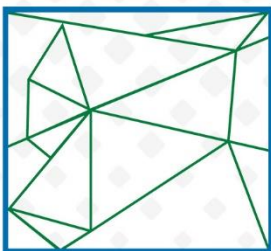


Turkey Forcibly Returns Refugees to Syria Daily



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In January 2022, the Turkish authorities enforced tighter administrative measures against Syrian refugees and arbitrarily deported dozens, ignoring their legal statuses

In early 2022, the Turkish government adopted harsher arrest and return measures against Syrian refugees. The procedures were enforced across Turkey, but the cruelty of execution climaxed in Istanbul province.

The Turkish authorities illegally returned dozens of refugees to Syria, ignoring their legal status, established by government-issued documents that warrant their presence and guarantee them protection, including work permits, student residence permits, and *kimliks* (temporary protection identity documents).

The new measures did not even spare Syrian refugees who were in the process of getting Turkish nationality. Several citizenship candidates were deported to Syria.

Over January 2020, the Turkish authorities carried out daily deportations against large batches of refugees, each including approximately 40 persons.

The deported were sent back to Syria through three formal border crossings, Bab al-Hawa in Idlib province, Bab al-Salameh in Aleppo province, and Tal Abyad in Raqqa.

Notably, the estimated number of deportations does not cover persons returned to Syria after they were arrested for trying to enter Turkey illegally.

These tightened measures fall under the wider refoulement policy Turkey has been imposing against Syrian refugees since 2019. Refugees are detained in deportation camps and centers, maltreated, and coerced into signing or putting their thumbprints on ‘voluntary return’ documents, which are often presented to refugees as “release documents”.

In this brief report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) continues the documentation process started in previous investigative. The [earlier report](#) draws a full picture of the deportation policy and measures Turkish authorities deployed against a large number of Syrian refugees, among them women and children, in 2021. The report is built on several testimonies and evidence obtained from deported refugees and border crossing employees. Additionally, the report revealed the authorities’ manipulation of the real number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, which is not reducing despite the mass deportations that have been underway since 2019.

Dozens Deported Everyday

In January 2022, the Turkish authorities deported hundreds of Syrian refugees to northern Syria, using several official border crossings.

To obtain verified details on the forcible returns, STJ reached out to a commander within the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), who serves at the Bab al-Salameh Border Crossing. The commander recounted:

“In December and January, daily batches of Syrian refugees were deported, varying between 25 and 50 refugees through Bab al-Salameh crossing, 50 to 100 through Bab al-Hawa, and 10 to 20 through Tal Abyad. These numbers do not include persons detained and returned while trying to enter Turkey illegally, or persons who voluntarily returned to Syria and of their own accord . . . in January also, the Turkish authorities forcibly returned 210 refugees, all in one batch through the Bab al-Salameh crossing.”

In addition to numbers, the commander highlighted the different practices enforced against the returned refugees on the Syrian side of the borders, which depend on the military group in control of the crossing. He narrated:

“The forcibly returned persons are treated differently, based on the entity administrating the border crossing. The Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya offers the returned water and facilitates their movement. However, the 9th Division and The Mu'tasim Division subject the returned refugees to interrogation, take their photos, and send them to security forces, saying these people might be threatening. For its part, the Sultan Murad Division arrests any Kurdish person they find among the returned and refer them to interrogation, which is carried out in the presence of a Turkish officer.”

STJ observed similar discrepancies in the reporting methods of the three key border crossings used for the deportations. The administration of the Bab al-Salameh crossing [reported](#) the entry of a total of 421 persons in January, referring to them as “those who have voluntarily returned”, without any indications that some of these were forcibly returned.

The [administration](#) of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing reported the entry of 1139 persons, whom they called “deported”.

For their part, the administration and [official account](#) of the Tal Abyad border crossing reported the entry of 500 persons, referring to them as those who “returned”, not mentioning that some were forcibly returned.

Arbitrary Arrest Drives

Routine checks are among the common practices the Turkish authorities have enforced in areas within Istanbul, where there are high concentrations of Syrian refugees. Police officers often ask Syrians for the legal documents that warrant their residence, including the *kimlik*.

However, in January 2022, the police carried out arrest drives and acted against their common methods. The arrests were arbitrary. Several *kimlik* holders were arrested, even though the drives were supposedly searching for unregistered Syrians, who do not possess *kimliks*.

Mayar A. is one of the refugees arrested and deported, even though he had a work permit and is highly proficient in the Turkish language. Mayar was denied his right to hire a lawyer. He narrated:

“I have been living in Turkey for eight years, with my wife and three children. I speak Turkish very well and had an Istanbul-issued work permit. I had also sent my documents to the Administration of Immigration to obtain Turkish citizenship. . . On 9 January, the police stopped me in a Syrian marketplace in Esenyurt and asked for my *kimlik*. I showed them the *kimlik* and the work permit. However, they asked me to stand aside and kept my documents ... Shortly after, they asked me to board a bus, took me to a hospital, and tested me for COVID. Then, they transported us to the Foreigners Deportation Center in Tuzla. They told me that these were only routine measures. I was detained in the center for nine days, after which they transported us by bus to Kilis province on the border with Syria. It was then that I learned we were being deported. I asked them to allow me to hire a lawyer, but they refused. And when I refused to sign and put my thumbprint on the ‘voluntary return’ form, they told me we signed and added a

thumbprint on your behalf. They took us to the Bab al-Salameh border crossing and handed us over to the Syrian side on 18 January.”

A second refugee, Said A., is a student in an Istanbul-based university and a Turkish citizenship candidate. Said was arbitrarily arrested and deported to Syria. He told STJ that he was arrested close to the campus on 6 January:

“I have a *kimlik* issued from Afyon province, and I am a student at the University of Istanbul, the institute of electric engineering. On 6 January, I had just finished an end semester exam, when the Turkish police stopped me near the university. They asked for my *kimlik*. I presented them the *kimlik* with my student ID. They protested that I did not have a travel permit from Afyon province. I asked them to give me a second. I told them I could get an e-permit through the designated website, but they did not allow me to use my phone. I told them that I had only one semester left and I will be graduating, but they refused to listen. . . They transported me to the Tuzla deportation center, where I spent 12 days. Then, they took me to the Syrian borders and handed me over to the Bab al-Salameh border crossing, even though I refused to sign and put my thumbprint on the ‘voluntary return’ document.”

He added:

“I was in the process of getting Turkish citizenship, but they ruined all my chances after they deactivated my *kimlik*. I contacted a lawyer to settle my status, but he asked for 30,000 Turkish liras (TL). This is too much money. I paid another lawyer 3,000 TL to investigate my case. The lawyer found out that the Turkish authorities have issued me a five-year entry ban and coded my file V87, which says I am a security threat to Turkey. This is what the lawyer told me.”

The deportations have been garnering massive attention on social media. On 31 January 2022, a video went viral, showing dozens of Syrians forcibly returned through the Bab al-Salameh crossing. The deported narrated how the Turkish authorities arbitrarily arrested them from several areas, detained them in Tuzla, and then deported them to Syria even though they had legal documents that allowed them to stay and navigate Turkish territories.

A number of [Syrian media outlets](#) investigated the video and reported that some of the refugees who talked in the video were deported within a group as large as 150 persons.

The outlets found out that the deported were arbitrarily arrested from the streets, and that many lost jobs, while others were forced to leave their families behind. One of the deported is a father who was torn away from his 4-year-old child. The father was sent to Syria, while the child remained alone in Turkey, in the care of his father’s friends.



About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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