

# Most Turks want Syrian refugees to go home

Author:

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ANAKARA: A new poll showed a hostile picture among Turks to the integration of Syrian refugee population in the country.

The survey, entitled “Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey 2020,” was conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University in cooperation with German Marshall Fund of the United States through face-to-face interviews across 29 cities with a representative sample of 4,000 people from Turkey’s adult population.

It found that 86 percent of respondents want the 4 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey to go back home, a question that has become a common denominator across almost all political parties.

More than 3.6 million refugees fled to Turkey following the civil war in Syria in 2011, but the Syrian community in Turkey has been the target of several violent attacks and murders over recent years.

Turks consider the presence of Syrian refugees as a burden on their livelihood and as a source of unfair competition in the labor market with unregistered Syrians, informal businesses and thousands of Syrian-led companies launched each year arousing great concern.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said that Turkey welcomed millions of Syrian refugees who were fleeing the civil war, but the current statistics showed social acceptance of refugee population was falling.

“It is a sign of a lack of Turkish leadership – of the false demonization of refugees as scapegoats for Turkey’s economic and other problems – that so many people in Turkey have now turned on the refugees, even though the deadly threats to them remain the same in Syria,” he told Arab News.

Deniz Senol Sert, a migration expert from Ozyegin University in Istanbul, agrees.

“During the local elections of March 2019, Turkish government used the refugee issue as a bargaining chip both domestically and at the international front. It sent the message to its own voters and to the EU that it can open the gates for letting all these refugees flood into European countries,” she said.

The Turkish authorities therefore keep signaling to Turkish society that the flow of Syrian refugees is in their control, while they are also sending a warning to the EU, which is reluctant to offer visa-free access to Europe to Turkish citizens.

In the meantime, Sert added, the government legitimized its controversial cross-border military operations into Syria with a so-called safe zone project to settle all refugees living in Turkey.

“Syrian refugees in Turkey are well aware that they are not welcomed by the host community. They even face serious obstacles when they try to open new business in Turkey although it is a kind of integration tool for this community. Neither the government nor the opposition parties can produce a pro-integration discourse to change these worrying statistics in a positive direction,” she said.

Last year, Turkish government approved the deportation of 1,000 Syrians in a week from Istanbul to Syria’s Idlib province, sparking debate about the timing of the move.

Sert said that the projects that involve Syrians are mostly conducted with a top-down approach, although in the European countries the municipalities assume this responsibility because they know the real problems and expectations on the ground.

“There are ideological and structural deficiencies that push people to consolidate their anti-refugee stance, and this trend feeds into frequent racist attacks on Syrians in Turkey,” she said.

In October, a Syrian refugee named Muhammed Dip Hurih was killed in a dispute with his Turkish neighbors over parking in the southeastern province of Gaziantep, while in the same month a 14-year-old Syrian child was stabbed to death in central Anatolia.

On Thursday, the European Commission has extended two humanitarian flagship programs in Turkey until early 2022 to provide basic needs to more than 1.8 million refugees and assist more than 700,000 children to continue their education.

But the EU programs are not seen as enough to boost integration by the society at large, with Turkish government accusing Brussels of falling short on its commitments of financial support.

Similarly, Syrians Barometer, a survey released last year under the coordination of Murat Erdogan, a professor at the Turkish-German University in Istanbul, showed that Turkish society considers the issue of Syrians as one of its top 3 problems.

“The Syrian refugees have turned into a politicized topic that reflects the already established political divisions within the society. The voters of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) follow their party’s political line, while the opposition designs its emotional stance according to their political disapprovals,” Prof. Erdogan said.

“Even in places such as southeastern Sanliurfa province, known for its multicultural characteristics, 70 percent of residents are against street signs in Arabic. The first flow of Syrian refugees has been perceived as a project of the ruling government to change local demographics. Granting

citizenships to the Syrian refugees were also perceived negatively by different segments of the society,” he added.

However, Prof. Erdogan also underlines that his survey showed that 85 percent of Turkish citizens prefer isolating Syrian refugees in camps or in safe zones rather than having them integrated into the society.



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Refugees help put ancient Syrian glass collection on display in Scotland 'In our hearts': Radio keeps Syria refugees in Iraq close to home

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## [Israeli court halts desecration of Muslim cemetery](#)

Thu, 2020-12-24 22:28

AMMAN: The Jerusalem District Court issued a temporary restraining order against the city's Israeli-run municipality on Thursday, forcing the municipality to cease its conversion of the waqf-owned Al-Yousefieh cemetery into a park.

In a press statement issued on Wednesday, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry's

spokesperson, Dhaifallah Fayez, reiterated Jordan's "rejection and condemnation of the excavations and leveling works carried out by the Israeli authorities at the cemetery's fence and stairs." Jordan described the action as "desecration of graves" and called on the Israelis to immediately stop the operation.

Wasfi Kailani, senior official on Jerusalem Affairs and director of the Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque, told Arab News, "The case is important because it sheds a light on the continued acts of desecration against a cemetery that is still being used these days by Jerusalem's Muslims. This is a documented waqf property and the cemetery – which is named after the son of Salah Eddine, Yusef bin Ayoub – is sacred to Muslims around the world, especially for Jordan and the Arab Legion (the former Jordanian army)."

Kailani said that official complaints had been filed with the Israeli government and UNESCO in 2014 and 2016. "We have known for some time that Israel had its eyes on this land near the wall adjacent to Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Lion's Gate," he said, adding that those complaints had included "documentation of Israeli authorities pouring concrete below and over existing graves in order to stop Muslims (burying) their dead at this location."

The municipality's plans for the park reportedly include a memorial erected by Jerusalemites with the approval of former Israeli mayor Teddy Kosleck to honor members of the Jordanian army who were killed in the 1967 war. Kailani claimed that would cause emotional hurt and damage to the families of the dead.

"Imagine the reaction of families of these brave Jordanian soldiers who are buried at the site as they see kids playing and dancing on the graves of their deceased martyrs," he said.

Palestinian lawyers Muhaad Jabara and Hamzeh Quteieh told Arab News that the court's decision means that the municipality's actions were illegal.



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Silent night for Bethlehem as coronavirus keeps pilgrims away  
Gaza Christians face canceled Christmas amid pandemic

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## [Pompeo says US has started work to set up consulate in Western Sahara](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2020-12-24 19:21

WASHINGTON: The US State Department said on Thursday it began the process to set up a US consulate in Western Sahara, after President Donald Trump's administration this month recognized Morocco's sovereignty over the region. In a departure from longstanding US policy, Washington agreed to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara, a desert region where a decades-old territorial dispute has pitted Morocco against the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, a breakaway movement that seeks to establish an independent state.

The recognition was part of a US-brokered deal in which Morocco became the

fourth Arab country after the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan to normalize ties with Israel in the past four months.

“Effective immediately, we are inaugurating a virtual presence post for Western Sahara, with a focus on promoting economic and social development, to be followed soon by a fully functioning consulate,” US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

“This virtual presence post will be managed by the US Embassy in Rabat,” Pompeo said, adding that Washington would be continuing to support political negotiations to resolve the issues between Morocco and the Polisario within the framework of Morocco’s autonomy plan.

Washington’s support for Moroccan sovereignty over the desert territory represents the biggest policy concession the United States has made so far in its quest to win Arab recognition of Israel.

The series of normalization deals have been driven in part by US-led efforts to present a united front against Iran and roll back Tehran’s regional influence.

President-elect Joe Biden, due to succeed Trump on Jan. 20, will face a decision whether to accept the US deal on the Western Sahara, which no other Western nation has done. Western nations and the UN have long called for a referendum to resolve the dispute.



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US adopts map of Morocco that includes Western Sahara‘Foreign maneuvers’ in

## COVID-19 could 'easily overwhelm' Yemen's health system, warns official

Author:

Thu, 2020-12-24 22:25

Al-Mukalla: COVID-19 could “easily overwhelm” Yemen’s health system and tougher measures could be re-imposed to stop transmission of the disease, an official said Thursday.

Dr. Ishraq Al-Subaee, a spokeswoman for the Aden-based National Coronavirus Committee, said the body had alerted all of the country’s air, sea and land entry points about negative PCR test requirements for travelers to Yemen to be implemented from Friday.

The committee may also suggest imposing harsher measures, including closing airports and border crossings if the disease spread in the country.

“This is an easily transmissible disease that can overwhelm Yemen’s health system. There are still shortages of ventilators and other important equipment,” she told Arab News, adding that the country could re-impose a lockdown and ban gatherings to stop transmission.

In its latest bulletin on Monday, the committee announced recording zero confirmed cases or deaths in government-controlled provinces. The total number of confirmed cases since April 10 is 2,087, including 1,384 recoveries. But local media reports said that several new cases had been detected in Aden and the central province of Al-Bayda.

Local health officials and experts previously told Arab News that the pandemic had reached all parts of the country and the number of cases was much higher than official figures.

Yemen shut its borders and airports in March and imposed a 24-hour lockdown on some cities to stem the spread of the virus. Yemenis have, however, largely flouted health guidelines by taking part in large gatherings, arranging funerals and weddings and travelling around the country.

Despite demanding more funds and equipment to help the country’s health system prepare for a new strain, Al-Subaee said that medical workers were more experienced on dealing with the pandemic than when the virus first hit the country.

“This time we are more prepared than before in terms of training and skills. Medical workers can now cope with any new shock.”

Critics and experts argued that the latest measures would not curb the spread of the new variant as travellers would continue arriving in the country. Thousands of African migrants have crossed into Yemen since January despite the conflict and pandemic.

The committee's latest decision sparked panic among Yemenis abroad, who saw it as a prelude to shutting down borders. People rushed to travel agencies and the offices of national carrier Yemenia in Cairo and other cities to change their departure to earlier dates, a travel agency worker told Arab News.

Thousands of Yemenis abroad were stranded in April due to coronavirus lockdowns.

Local medical workers have told Arab News of a sharp decrease in the number of coronavirus cases, mainly in densely populated cities with daily updates at zero cases.

Dr. Ahmed Mansour, a spokesman for the National Coronavirus Committee in the southern city of Taiz, said that local PCR labs in the city had recorded zero confirmed cases despite testing hundreds of people since September.

"We take daily almost 30 samples of people who gather outside the passport department since they come from Taiz and other provinces. Results are all negative. Tests also showed that even the new variant of the virus has not arrived in Taiz," he said.

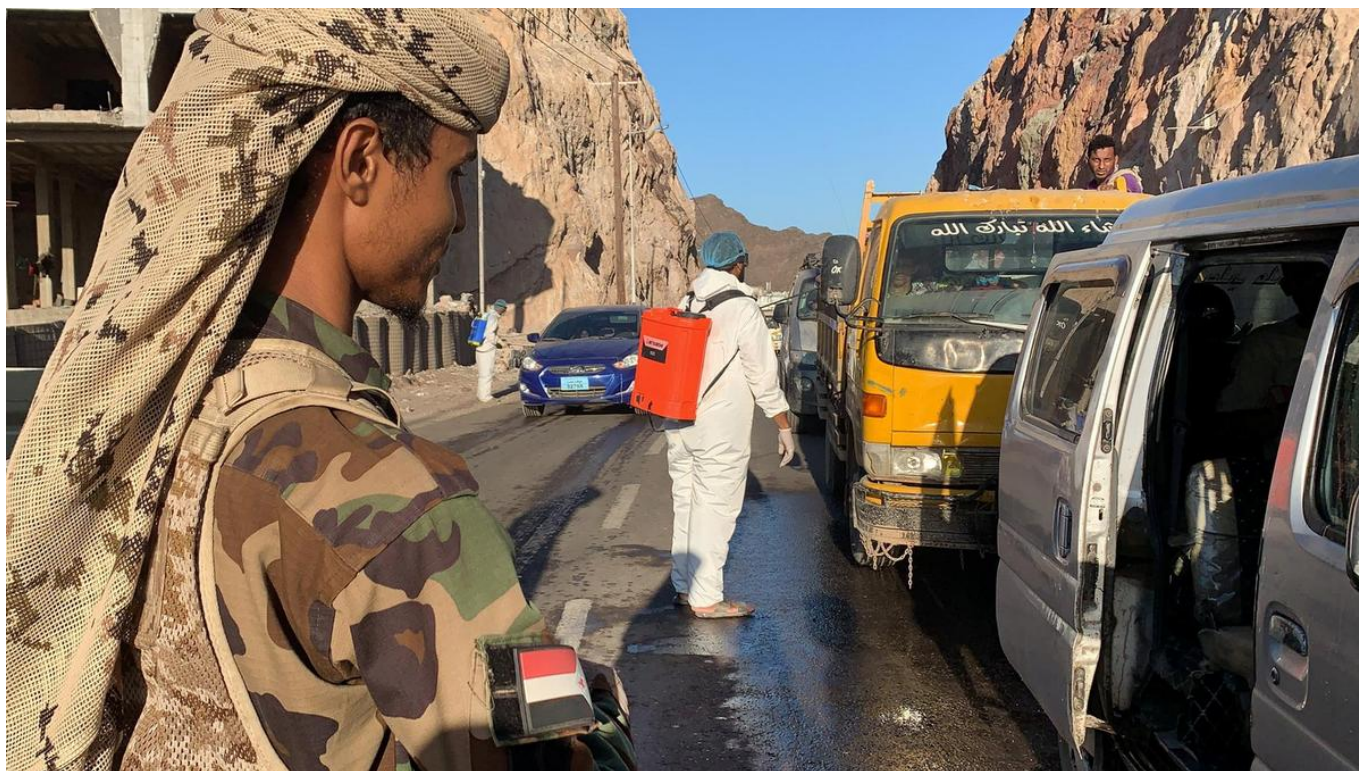
He called for the Yemeni government and international donors to provide health and quarantine facilities in Taiz with personal protective equipment and testing kits.

"We are still in need of medical equipment and protective equipment for coronavirus."

Earlier in the week, Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed said that the new government would ask the World Bank and international donors to fund COVID-19 vaccine shipments to Yemen because the country was unable to buy the jab.

He said that the new health minister and authorities would contact international donors about getting funds for vaccine distribution.

"We need support from the international community with regard to vaccines," the prime minister added.



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Saudi Ministry of Culture to preserve Yemeni cultural heritage  
Yemen to require COVID-19 test for travelers into the country

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## [Gaza Christians face canceled Christmas amid pandemic](#)

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GAZA CITY: Nasr Al-Jaldah and his fellow Christians living in Gaza face a canceled Christmas mass as the coronavirus pandemic hits the small enclave's churches.

The celebration usually offers a brief respite for Christian Palestinians living under an Israeli blockade that stops them traveling outside the territory to see family or from taking part in celebrations in Bethlehem in the occupied West bank.

Coronavirus cases have rapidly increased in recent weeks in Gaza, with its Hamas rulers imposing tough restrictions. As Israel trumpets the start of an inoculation campaign, Palestinian leaders in both Gaza and the West Bank have been left scrambling to secure vaccines.

The church in Gaza will broadcast the mass directly online for people confined to their homes after the authorities stopped all gatherings, but it is little consolation for the small Christian community

“After years of conquering the Israeli blockade, coronavirus comes to increase our worries and kill our joy of the holiday,” Al-Jaldah told Arab News. “The atmosphere does not help with joy and celebration,” he added.

He said that while he had decorated and put lights on his Christmas tree in his home in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City, he did not feel the usual joys of the holiday season.

The last count by the YMCA in 2014 found fewer than 1,100 Christians living in the Gaza Strip, among a population of 2 million. Their numbers have steadily declined from the 6,000 recorded in the 1960s, before Israel occupied the territory.

Since Israel imposed a siege on Gaza after it was taken over by Hamas in 2007, Christians there have suffered a series of military and humanitarian crises along with the Muslim majority.

“A Christian is a Palestinian citizen, and he receives what is attained by everyone, and we are all in one boat,” Al-Jaldah said. “We share the joys and sorrows. The siege, wars and even coronavirus do not differentiate between a Muslim and a Christian.”

Israel’s siege includes severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip.

For nine years, Israel has prevented Al-Jaldah, 61, from obtaining a permit to travel.

He has been banned from celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem, but he was dealt an even more bitter blow five years ago when he was declined permission to see his daughter and grandson at their home in Ramallah in the West Bank. He has still not seen his grandson since he was born.

“Every year Israel deliberately kills our joy on Christmas, and coronavirus came to eliminate any appearances and rituals for the feast,” he said.

“What is the value of the feast other than the mass and celebrations inside the church and the lighting of the tree, without the exchange of congratulations and visits with family and friends,” Al-Jaldah, said, his voice tinged with sadness.

During the past year, Israel granted his wife and two of his children permits to pass through the Erez checkpoint, but prevented him and his third son from doing the same. “How can a separated family rejoice?” He said.

"My daughter lives in Ramallah alongside my sister, and my brother lives in Jaffa, and we are in Gaza, and we cannot see each other for many years, as if we live in planets isolated from each other."

George Anton, an activist in the Church of the Latin Monastery in Gaza, said the festive celebrations for this year would be limited to the clergy residing in the church.

The church has urged everyone to celebrate at home to avoid a coronavirus outbreak, Anton said.

"We regret that the situation has reached this state due to the outbreak of the pandemic, which kidnapped the souls of the innocent and deprived us of celebrating the Lord Christ and practicing our religious rituals in the places where the feet of Christ came.

"Christians are an integral part of the Palestinian people. They suffer their suffering and rejoice in their joy, and the Christian has no suffering of its own.

"I am a Palestinian citizen residing in Gaza and carry its identity and concerns. I live under war and suffer from the siege as everyone else does, and Israel practices all forms of oppression against us as Palestinians without discrimination in religion, gender or color.

"Israel violates the rights of Gaza Christians to practice their religious rights and access the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, as well as violating the right of Muslim brothers to reach the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, in a flagrant violation of international covenants that guarantees for all the freedom of belief, embrace of religion and practice of rituals," said Anton.





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## [Christmas 2020](#)

Virus, Israeli occupation shatter Bethlehem's Christmas festivities  
Christmas opens new market for small Gaza sewing business