

SYNTHESIS OF MIGRATION TRENDS IN AND AROUND TURKEY



DRC Turkey

February 2017

Overview of Mixed Migration Trends

Eastern Mediterranean Route

The number of people arriving by sea to Europe sizeably fell in 2016, with only [362,376](#) recorded arrivals compared to [1,014,973](#) in 2015 (UNHCR, 2016). Numbers migrating along the Eastern Mediterranean route have also substantially decreased. **In 2016, only [173,450](#) people - compared to [856,723](#) last year - crossed over by sea from Turkey to Greece.** In fact, 87% of those arrivals occurred during the first three months of the year, before the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement. In addition, the **Turkish Coast Guards reported a decrease in the number of interceptions** (833 compared to 2,430 last year) **and apprehensions** (down by 60%) in 2016. Despite the reduction in arrivals, total figures for 2016 remain 3 times higher than yearly average arrivals between 2008-2014. According to [IOM](#), as of February 8, 2017 approximately 74,909 refugees and migrants are stranded at the borders of Greece and the Western Balkans. In fact, this buildup has been gradually increasing as border controls across Europe have tightened even further. Since the March 2016, those stranded at the Greek and Bulgarian borders have increased by 47% and 443% respectively.

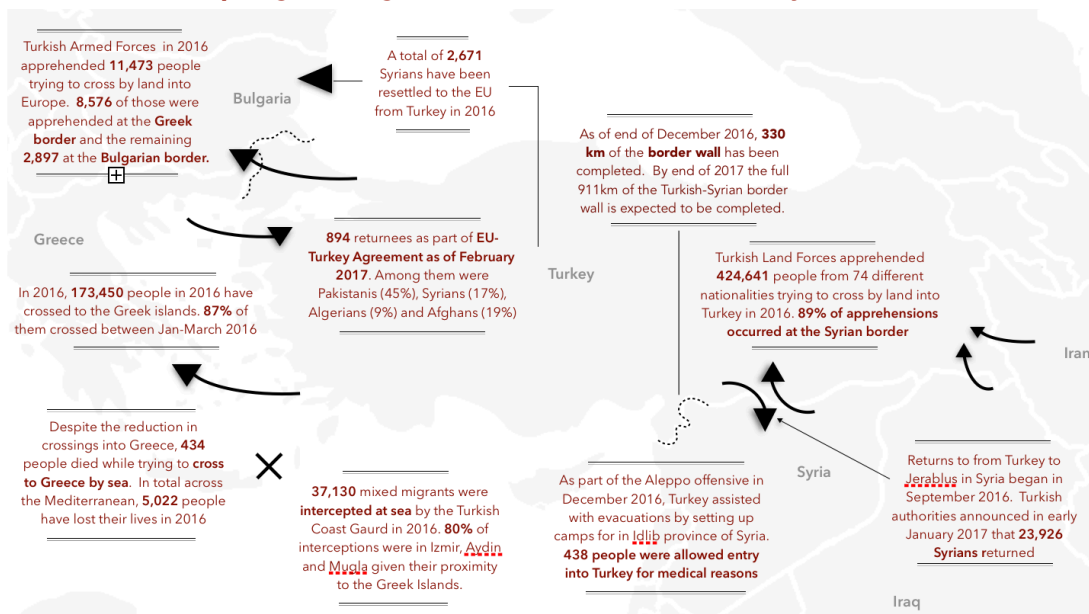
EU-Turkey Statement

As of February 2017, [894](#) people have been returned to Turkey as part of the EU-Turkey Statement and [386](#) under the already existing Greece-Turkey readmission agreement as of January 2017. Asylum seekers in Greece can be returned to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or withdraw an asylum application in Greece; opt for an assisted return; after a negative asylum claim; and, lastly, when an asylum claim has been found 'inadmissible' - that is, on the grounds that Turkey is either a 'safe first country' (where a person has been recognised as a refugee or otherwise enjoys sufficient protection) or a 'safe third country' (namely, that Turkey can provide protection to the returned person). Turkey's status as a 'safe third country' has however been challenged in Greek courts throughout the year. In February 2017, the Greek Council of State (the Supreme Administrative Court) unanimously rejected two separate appeal cases by concluding that Turkey qualifies as a safe third country. For the moment, the issue has been referred to the grand Chamber of the Court for further consideration, where a final decision is expected to be made. However, if approved, the decision could potentially open the door for an accelerated returns process that would significantly increase the number of returnees from the EU.

Restrictions at the Turkish-Syrian border

Border restrictions continued in 2016 with **Turkish Land Forces apprehending [424,641](#) individuals, 80% at the Syrian border.** Construction of a concrete wall along the 911km Turkish-Syrian border continues, with plans to complete it by end of 2017. Of the nineteen official border crossing points between the two countries, only two (Cilvegözü and Oncupınar) are currently open for Syrians with emergency medical health needs. Despite the number of registered Syrians in Turkey rising to 2,841,036, there is a modest trend in return figures as **[23,926](#) Syrians were reported to have returned to Jarablus** during the last quarter of 2016. The Turkish government continues to advocate for a safe zone in Northern Syria where Syrians can return to, the latest effort through involvement in the evacuation of Eastern Aleppo and the construction of IDP camps in Idlib, Syria aimed at stemming flows into Turkey. This policy of assisting displaced populations within Syria is mostly evident in Jarablus and Azaz where Turkish authorities have increased reconstruction efforts aimed at laying the groundwork for voluntary return.

Spotlight of Migration Trends in and around Turkey in 2016

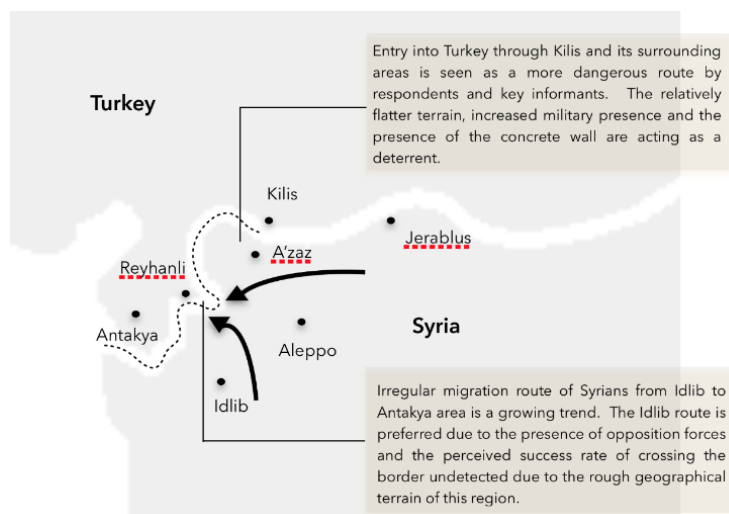


Arrivals to Turkey

Tightening of Border Controls

Considering the [current status](#) of crossings at the Syrian border only two (Cilvegözü and Oncupınar) border gates are open, four have a restricted access and the remaining thirteen are closed out of total nineteen official border gates in between Turkey and Syria. It is [claimed](#) that although these border gates were closed temporarily as a security precaution, the gates remained shut, making it impossible for Syrians to cross legally. In addition to border closures and restrictions, Turkey started implementing [visa restrictions](#) for Syrians entering the country by air or sea. Turkish authorities [claimed](#) that these restrictions are imposed within the framework of fighting against terror and crime.

Lastly, Turkish authorities began constructing a concrete wall along the 911km Turkish-Syrian border. As of the end of 2016, [330km](#) of the concrete wall and a further 191km of barbed wire fence has been constructed along the border. Recent research and findings from DRC's Mixed Migration research indicate that despite the construction of the wall and increased military presence at the border, Syrians are still managing to cross into Turkey using irregular means. Due to the rough geographical terrain surrounding Hatay province in Turkey there are areas where constructing the concrete wall and fences has become impossible – it is this migration route that has gained prominence in 2016.



Apprehension Figures

Arrivals statistics of irregular migrants to Turkey is non-existent. The only reliable data to assess the migration numbers of irregular migrants is by focusing on apprehension statistics. For Turkey, there are two sources available for the apprehension figures on land: [statistics](#) released by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) and [statistics](#) released by the Turkish Land Forces unit of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). In addition, Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) provides [apprehension figures](#) at all seas around Turkey (see next section for data from TCG).

Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) Apprehension Figures

174,466 Irregular Migrants

Turkish Land Forces Apprehension Figures

424,641 apprehended by Turkish forces

It is unclear whether there is a duplication of land statistics used by both sources however it is clear that DGMM data includes all irregular migrants apprehended at the border – either trying to enter to or depart from Turkey through irregular means – individuals detained in Turkey who have either overstayed and not extended their visas or are living without proper documentation and rejected as asylum seekers. Whereas statistics provided by the TAF include all individuals apprehended at the borders, including those involved in criminal behaviour – smuggling and trafficking of arms, drugs and people.

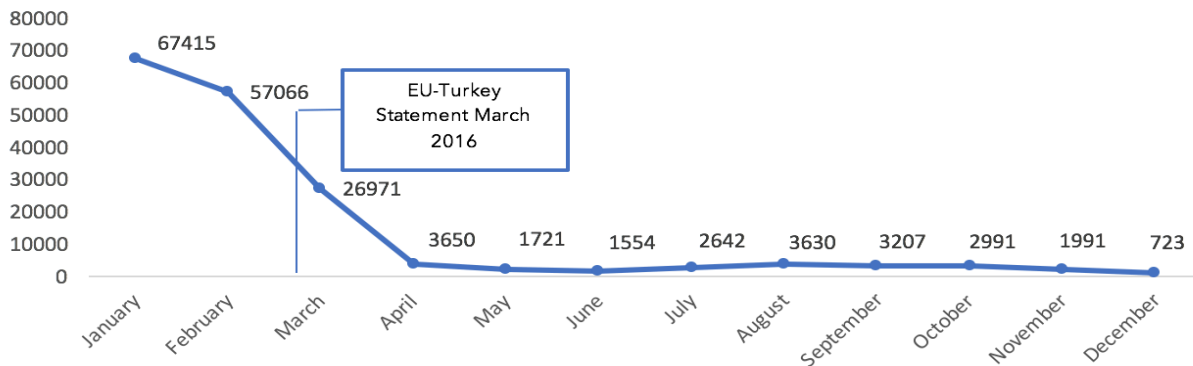
Departures from Turkey

Greece

The cumulative departures from Turkey to Greece over land and sea in 2016 is estimated at [173,450](#) individuals, while this number was [856,723](#) for 2015. Arrival figures to the Greek islands in 2016 gradually started to decline after signing of the EU-Turkey Statement on March 20th, 2016. In fact, 87% of all [arrivals in 2016](#) occurred within the first three months of the year, January - March 2016. In addition, apprehension figures by the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) has also dropped when compared to last year. Although the number of arrivals has decreased, the total 2016 figures still constitute a rise in arrivals by more than 3 times the yearly average arrival numbers between 2008-2014. In fact, the Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) in their most recent briefing paper "[Women and Girls on the Move](#)" indicated that there is no evidence that recent policy changes have discouraged women and girls from migrating to Europe since the proportion of female asylum applicants has continued to increase following the launch of the EU-Turkey Statement. According to [IOM](#), as of February 8, 2017 approximately 74,909 refugees and migrants are stranded at the borders of Greece and the Western Balkans. In fact, this buildup has been gradually increasing as border controls across Europe have tightened even further. Since the March 2016, those stranded at the Greek and Bulgarian borders have increased by 47% and 443% respectively.

Turkish Coast Guards reported to have conducted 833 operations and have apprehended 37,130 people trying to cross by sea from Turkey to Greece. This represents a reduction in numbers compared to 2015 when the coast guard conducted 2,430 operations and apprehended 91,611 people

Arrivals by Sea to Greece in 2016



Bulgaria

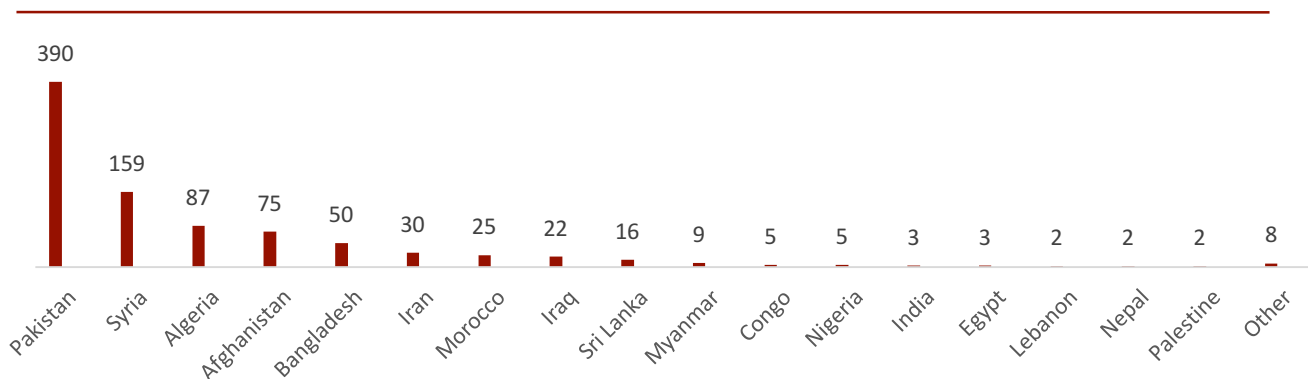
In 2016 the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior apprehended a total of [18,802](#) irregular migrants while this number was [31,174](#) in 2015. Even if the numbers of apprehended migrants in 2016 show a decreasing pattern in comparison with 2015, when we look more closely at the figures that show the number people accommodating and stranded at the reception centres, we see a [71% increase](#) prior and after the EU-Turkey deal. It is [estimated](#) that there were 865 persons stranded in Bulgaria in March 2016 while this number flared out to 7,070 as of 29 Sept 2016. Bulgaria has been implementing [push-backs](#) especially after the [unrest](#) in the camp in Harmanli and the [UN](#) has asserted that there are serious concerns regarding Bulgaria's detention regime since virtually all people entering Bulgaria irregularly are subjected to detention. And yet the huge increase in the number of people stranded at the reception centres still shows us that individuals choose this way to enter into Europe through Turkey even if the risks are greater in comparison with 2015. Lastly, the EU has launched a common border guard at Bulgaria-Turkish border. The new body is [estimated](#) to be built on the basis of the current border agency - Frontex - and will have some 120 coast guard officers at the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

Returns to/from Turkey

Returns from the EU

On March 18, 2016, 28 EU heads of state and Turkey have reached an [agreement](#) that holds core ideas of “to secure EU external borders by reducing flows of illegal arrivals to Europe from Turkey and give an end to smuggling of human beings”. From March 2016 to February 2017, [894](#) individuals have been returned to Turkey as part of the EU-Turkey Statement as of January 2017. In addition, a further 386 were returned to Turkey under the Greece-Turkey bilateral readmission agreement as of December 2016. Individuals sent back from Europe are placed in immigration detention centers (sometimes referred to as removal, reception or accommodation centers by Turkish authorities) operated by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) of the Interior Ministry. Of the 894 people sent back through the EU-Turkey Statement, the majority is from Pakistan (43%), Syria (18%), Algeria (10%) and Afghanistan (8%). Local NGOs providing legal assistance and counseling to persons in immigration detention have reported that some returnees from the EU are claiming that have either received inadequate or no information at all on asylum procedures in Greece prior to return. This is evident with the [EU reporting that 47](#) returnees have applied for international protection in Turkey. Only one of them has been granted with international protection while the remaining 46 have been released pending decision. Lastly, in connection with the EU-Turkey Statement, a total of [2,761](#) Syrian refugees were resettled from Turkey to the EU and Norway as part of the 1:1 framework.

Breakdown of Nationalities sent back from Europe as of 21.2.17



These Syrians were resettled in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Returns to Northern Syria

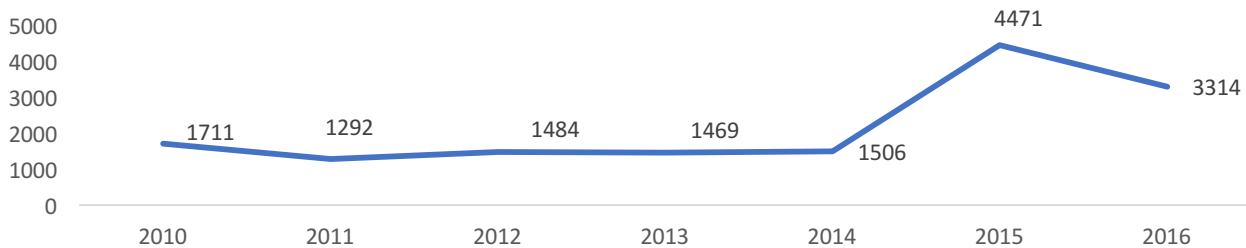
Following the military incursion of Turkish forces into Jarabulus and subsequently gaining control of the area, formal returns of Syrians began to take place as early as September 2016. Previously, the so-called Islamic State was in control of the area for almost two years. During the first wave, up to 250-300 Syrians returned to Jarabulus through the border gate of Karkamis in Turkey in September 2016. By November 2016 the figure had reached 7,741 and by early January 2017, the number of returnees reached [23,926](#) according to Oktay Bahceci, head of the Gaziantep regional migration office. However, most recently the Deputy Prime Minister, Numan Kurtulmus stated that 50,000 people in fact have returned to Jarabulus, however it's unclear whether this figure also includes IDPs from Syria as well. In line with the Turkish government's long standing desire to create a safe zone in Northern Syrian, Turkish authorities have increased reconstruction efforts in both Jarabulus and Azaz, particularly through the government's humanitarian wing, AFAD. Lastly, there have been [reports](#) that the Turkish government has completed the training of 450 Syrian police officers who are set to return to serve in Jarabulus.

Smuggling & Trafficking

Smuggling

Combating smuggling has been a high priority for Turkish authorities and become even more urgent after the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. In 2016 alone, Turkish authorities apprehended [3,314](#) smugglers in Turkey. Although this is a reduction from 2015 when [4,471](#) smugglers were detained, it is still a large number in relation to previous years (2010-2014) when the average apprehension rate of smugglers was almost 1,500 cases each year.

Number of Smugglers Detected by Year



However, despite increased surveillance and stricter border mechanisms, smuggling networks are continuing to thrive along the southern border. Research conducted by DRC Turkey Mixed Migration indicates that with the construction of the wall at the Turkish-Syrian border the reliance on smugglers and their associated fees has increased in 2016. For example, in January 2016, a family would pay a smuggler USD 100 to cross through a ditch through Kilis into Turkey. That same journey in November 2016 would cost on average USD 600. Naturally, smuggling fees at the western provinces of Turkey to the European Union countries is costlier, starting from USD 500 or USD 1,000 and even as high as EUR 20,000 per person if air travel and fake passports are involved. Smuggling fees along the southern border are also rising because of the associated rise in both the risk of apprehension by Turkish Land Forces and the growing trend to take more dangerous routes along the rough geographical terrain from Idlib in Syria to Hatay in Turkey.

Trafficking

Turkey has been identified as “a destination and transit country, and to a lesser extent source country, for women, men, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour” in the [2016 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) published by the US Department of State. Trafficking victims in Turkey are predominantly from Central and South Asia, Eastern Europe, Syria, and Morocco. The report indicates that foreign victims are offered cleaning and childcare jobs in Turkey and upon arrival traffickers force them into prostitution in hotels, discos, and homes. Similarly, [2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) published by UNODC referred specifically to a largely under-reported but notable trend (86%) from Eastern Europe and Central Asia to Turkey.

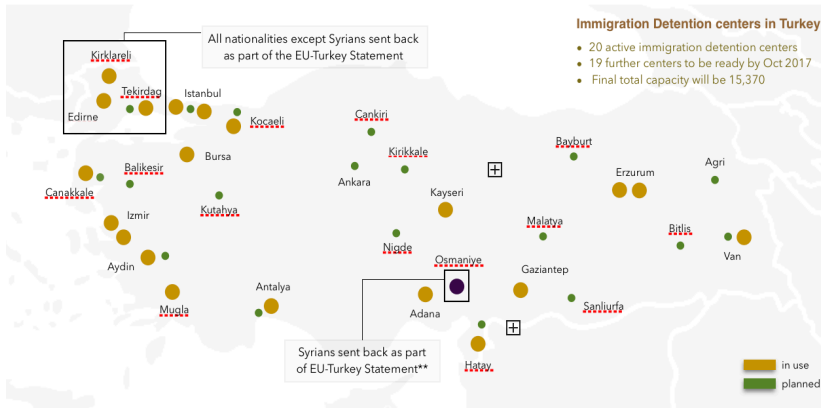
In addition, international and civil society organizations call attention to the increasing vulnerability of displaced Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians to trafficking in Turkey. The [number](#) of human trafficking victims has been increasing significantly, 21 in 2013, 50 in 2014, 108 in 2015 and 151 in 2016, marking a about %45 percent increase from 2015 to 2016, although trafficking cases often remain unreported. In fact, according to the 2016 Global Report, front-line police officers in Turkey generally fail to identify sex trafficking victims, especially among women in prostitution, and deport them without referring them to access victim assistance. In addition, it is usually family members, acquaintances and neighbours, commit the trafficking of persons rather than organized criminal networks.

Protection Threats on the Move

Deaths at Sea

Thousands of people trying to cross by sea from Turkey to Greece continue to die or go missing. As border control mechanism become stricter, with increased surveillance and the narrowing of legal channels for migrants to access the EU, people are forced to take even more dangerous routes and often unreliable vessels across the Mediterranean. In 2016 alone, according to [IOM](#), 434 people have died or gone missing in the waters between Turkey and Greece. In fact, despite the reduction of mixed migrants heading to the EU, as indicated by IOM, the total [number](#) of deaths in the Mediterranean has increased to 5,079 in 2016, up from 3,777 in 2015.

The State of Immigration Detention in Turkey



Not only are apprehended migrants entering or departing Turkey through irregular means detained in such facilities, but so are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants sent back from the EU as part of the EU-Turkey Statement. Whereas Syrians are sent back to Duzici reception center in Osmaniye, other nationalities are usually sent back to Kirkkaleli removal center mainly with a view to be processed for onward deportation from Turkey to either their country of origin or the previous country of transit. Whilst Duzici is

technically classified as a reception center, it amounts to *de facto* detention of Syrians for administrative purposes. Local NGOs and UNHCR [confirmed](#) that they are having serious difficulties gaining the permission to visit Duzici reception center on a regular basis. Local NGOs providing legal counselling services in places of immigration detention site other obstacles such as capacity issues by the DGMM to process cases in a timely manner, the lack of interpreters in some removal centers and arbitrary procedures which restricts access to certain facilities. In addition, under Turkish law, the due authorization of a lawyer requires the issuance of a formal power of attorney by a notary's office, which is sometimes impossible to obtain if a detainee doesn't have any valid identity documents, rendering a detainee unable to authorize a lawyer to represent them. Lastly, with the lack of a recognized mandate that allows legal actors to gain access to provide information and counselling to all detainees, NGOs or lawyers can only access removal centers if a detainee specifically contacts and requests a legal visit, creating a further obstacle for a person in detention to access legal assistance.

Asylum Seeker and Refugees at Risk of Deportation

On October 29, 2016, the Turkish Council of Ministers issued an executive order ([No: 676](#)) which brought about changes to Articles 53 and 54 of the [Law on Foreigner and International Protection \(LFIP\)](#) – the main law which governs the asylum system in Turkey. With these changes, a deportation decision may be issued for international protection applicants and status holders “at any stage of their asylum proceedings”, if the Ministry of Interior authorities identify the person concerned are “leaders, members or supporters of a terrorist organisation”, or “pose a threat to either public order, public security or public health” and “are deemed by national and international governmental agencies to be affiliated to terrorist organizations”. Therefore, even asylum seekers and refugees (Syrians under temporary protection and other nationalities under international protection) may be issued a deportation decision on the basis of an assessment by the Ministry of Interior. Secondly, the clause in the law that ensured protection from removal during the legal period of 15 days to appeal such a deportation decision has also been lifted. These amendments are seen as dismantling safeguards designed to against *refoulement* or otherwise unlawful deportation. Nevertheless, in November 2016 the Turkish Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Syrian man who was subject to deportation stating that since “there is still an ongoing civil war and instability in his country so that there can be irreparable consequences if he is to be deported”. Legal experts point that this case will set the precedence for future such deportation cases, especially appeals made by Syrians and Iraqis, but it is unclear what actual impact it will have on deportation cases in general.

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