

Anti-refugee attacks in Turkey claim life of Syrian child worker

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On June 30, starting in Kayseri and spreading to many Turkish cities, anti-Syrian refugee attacks targeted migrant workers with one child worker killed and at least two children seriously injured.

On July 2, child migrant workers employed as seasonal agricultural labourers in the Serik district of Antalya were attacked. Ahmed Hamdan El Naif, a 17-year-old Syrian, was stabbed to death, while 15-year-old Hasan Khalid El Nayif and Bashar Obaid Al-Marai were seriously injured and hospitalised.

The child labourers, including the victim El Naif, were reportedly unregistered and underpaid migrant workers. Working in a greenhouse in temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius, the child workers arrived at the district centre unaware of the night raids, where they were attacked in broad daylight by anti-migrant groups.

The organised character of the provocation against Syrian refugees was reflected in the sharing of the identity data of 3.3 million Syrians in Turkey in Telegram groups after the attacks began. The Ministry of Interior announced an investigation and confirmed that the data dated back to September 2022.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that 1,065 perpetrators of attempted pogroms had been detained, 855 of them in Kayseri. Yerlikaya said that 468 of those detained in Kayseri had criminal records for 50 different offences. These crimes include smuggling migrants, assault, looting, theft, sexual abuse, threats and insults, drugs, damage to property, fraud and extortion.

The fact that only 28 people were arrested from the hundreds who were originally detained in the aftermath of incidents that left one child dead, many others injured and countless homes and businesses destroyed, shows the government's tolerance of anti-refugee aggression. The attitude of the government, which

paves the way for new pogroms, is in stark contrast to the arrest of more than 70 people in Istanbul in recent months for protesting against the closure of Taksim Square for May Day demonstrations.

The scale and severity of the pogrom-like attacks is forcing migrant workers to choose between going to work in fear of being attacked and going hungry. A worker in a steel door factory in Kayseri told the newspaper *Evrensel* about the situation of his migrant colleagues: "I have been working with these people for years. I have never seen anything wrong with them. The people I know are just trying to make a living. But after these incidents, they can't even come to work."

Workers in Gaziantep, where there is a large migrant population, have similar concerns. Workers' shuttles were reportedly targeted during the days of the violent attacks. B?RTEK-SEN, an independent grassroots union, reported that a shuttle bus carrying its members was intercepted by attackers and that local workers protected their Syrian class brothers and sisters and forced the attackers off the vehicle.

The ruling class exploits migrant workers, who are the most vulnerable section of society and live in fear of being deported at any moment, under brutal conditions and low wages.

Muhammet, a Syrian textile worker living in Istanbul, explained their dilemma to *Evrensel* as follows: "The pressure on Syrians has increased over the years, especially since 2017, and that's when the repatriations started."

Mohammad explained that if they returned to Syria, they would be at risk for their lives and unemployment wherever they went: "On the other hand, the EU doesn't let us in, their borders are closed because there is an agreement... Our temporary protection cards are not being renewed, even though our cards have not

expired, men especially are being detained outside and sent back”.

The ruling class and the entire political establishment are waging a dirty propaganda campaign against the refugees, who are the victims of the regime change war launched by the United States and its allies, including Turkey, in Syria in 2011.

As the Socialist Equality Group wrote in its statement, “Adopting the lies-based programme of the far right to divide and confuse the working class, the establishment parties, whether in government or in opposition, have made Syrians and other migrants the scapegoats for the rising cost of living, the deterioration of living conditions and other social problems caused by the capitalist crisis.”

With official annual inflation above 70 percent, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government's intensification of austerity and the erosion of real wages have exacerbated the poverty of workers and pensioners. This played an important role in the March 31 local elections in which Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), in power since 2002, finished second for the first time, behind the Republican People's Party (CHP).

In last year's presidential election campaign, in an attempt to divert opposition in the working class, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, candidate of the bourgeois opposition led by the CHP, adopted the anti-refugee programme and rhetoric of the far-right Victory Party. Kilicdaroglu formed an alliance with the Victory Party in the second round, while Erdoğan, posing as a friend of asylum seekers, was supported by Sinan Oğan, the Victory Party's candidate in the first round, who promised to “send back refugees”.

Anti-refugee agitation is based on traditional far-right lies. One of these is that asylum seekers are a source of crime. Official data and studies refute this claim.

Enes Ataç, a PhD candidate in the sociology of migration and politics at Pennsylvania State University, shared academic articles on X/Twitter in the wake of the anti-immigrant attacks. These included a World Development article that presented “a fairly detailed analysis that Syrian refugees are much less likely to commit crimes in Turkey than the local population”, and a Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization article that showed “the total number of crimes per capita decreased with the arrival of refugees”.

The attacks of the ruling class on the living conditions of the working class are inseparable from the offensive waged against the democratic rights from the attacks on refugees. The recent provocations show the urgency of the fight for the unity of all workers on the basis of an international socialist programme and organisation against the chauvinism and xenophobia spread by the ruling elite.



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