

EMBARGOED 12:00 noon Wednesday CEST, 7 October 2015

Survey to be presented at Federal Press Conference in Berlin, Germany

For interview requests, please contact Hania Mourtada in Beirut (hania@thesyriacampaign.org +96178858828) or Ferdinand Dürr in Berlin (presse@adoptrevolution.org +4917621719335)

Majority of Syrian refugees in Europe are running from the Assad regime, not Isis, says survey

*First survey of Syrian refugees in Europe shows most want to return, but not under Assad.
A no-fly zone would help more stay*

The main cause of Syrians coming to Europe is to flee the violence of the government of Bashar al-Assad, according to the first survey among refugees of its kind.

92% of respondents to the survey supported by researchers from the Berlin Social Science Center said they were fleeing the fighting, with more than two-thirds (70%) holding the government responsible. Less than half blamed Isis (32%), the Free Syrian Army (18%), Al Qaeda/Nusra (16%) and Kurdish forces (8%).

A majority of respondents (52%) in the five German cities surveyed said they would need Bashar al-Assad to leave before considering going home. Only a small minority (8%) said they wanted to stay in Europe indefinitely.

More Syrians would stay in their country if Europe and the international community imposed a no-fly zone to stop the barrel bombs according to a majority of the respondents (58%). Less than half that number consider more humanitarian aid a factor that would help people stay (24%).

Elias Perabo, from Adopt a Revolution, one of the organisers of the survey said:

“This survey shows clearly that Syrian refugees want to return home, but to a country without Bashar al-Assad in charge. While many people focus on the brutality of Isis it’s really the barrel bombs and air attacks of the government which are creating most Syrian refugees.”

Haid Haid, from the Planet Syria campaign and another organiser originally from Atareb in Syria added:

“The survey tells Europeans what any Syrian living under the barrel bombs will tell you. A no-fly zone to stop the bombs will also stop many, many Syrians from fleeing their homes.”

Further findings from the survey:

- Most respondents (86%) feared arrest or kidnap if they stayed in Syria. Mostly by the government (77%) but also Isis (42%) and other groups
- When asked which internal developments led most to the current situation in Syria, the majority blamed the government's military response to the demonstrations (79%) followed by the rising influence of Isis and other jihadist groups (31%)
- A minority (8%) is fleeing to avoid recruitment into the conflict, mostly to the Syrian Arab Army (75%). They want to avoid killing their own people (84%) more than to avoid being killed themselves (21%)

Complete survey data available on request.

Notes to editors

- The survey was conceived, implemented and evaluated with the assistance of Heiko Giebler, social scientist at the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), department for Democracy and Democratization heiko.giebler@wzb.eu +49 30 25491 513
<https://www.wzb.eu/en/about-the-wzb>
- Methodology: 889 Syrians living in Germany were interviewed between 24 September 2015 to 2 October 2015 using a standardised questionnaire. Interviews were held in 12 centres housing arriving refugees, other refugee accommodation and refugee registration points in Berlin, Hanover, Bremen, Leipzig and Eisenhüttenstadt. At the time of the survey, no representative demographic information (gender, age etc.) was available for the population in question. Surveyed individuals were interviewed in locations that are frequented by all refugee groups independent of political opinions and social characteristics. The data was collected in five towns, avoiding selection effects due to location choices of different refugee groups. Surveyed individuals were approached upon entering or leaving registration centers and refugee housing. All self-declared Syrians were asked to participate in the survey. A combination of face-to-face interviews and computer-assisted self-completion of questionnaires using tablet computers (CAPI) was used. This ensured respondents' confidence in the anonymity of the survey and allowed for the inclusion of illiterate respondents in the survey. Questions were selected in cooperation with experts of the current situation in Syria and translated into Arabic by specialists. The survey was carried out by 18 Syrian nationals.
- The group of organisations supporting the survey are Planet Syria www.planetsyria.org, Adopt a Revolution www.adoptrevolution.org and The Syria Campaign www.thesyriacampaign.org