INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN STUDENTS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

2019 GAZİANTEP

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES: WORKSHOP REPORT

Gaziantep University
Institute for Migration

Integration of Syrian Students into Higher Education Project Report

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Content

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Institute for Migration of the University of Gaziantep designed this project, which aimed to give a greater voice to Syrian and Turkish students, with the support of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Gaziantep, Turkey. It is in line with UNHCRs conviction that higher education is not a luxury – it is an essential investment for today and for the future as education gives young refugees the perspectives, maturity and experiences they need to become peace builders, policy makers, teachers and role models. It gives women the platform to participate in society on an equal footing with men. Also, it supports the people to contribute to the host communities, to act as the voice of their fellow refugees and, one day, to rebuild their home countries.

The aim of the project was to bring together key actors in relation to access to and continuity of Syrian students in higher education at Gaziantep University, which currently has 3,139 Syrian students – it is the highest number at any university in Turkey-, and to discuss their academic status, the challenges they face in their daily lives both on and off campus and their interaction with the local students.

The aim of this report is to document the findings of a workshop and focus group discussions carried out with Syrian and Turkish students enrolled at Gaziantep University, and to provide practical recommendations that cover a wide range of interconnected actors, institutions including students, university staff, academics and university administrators, local policymakers, national, international NGOs and international organizations. The project methodology and recommendations are not just relevant to Gaziantep University but could also be used by universities across Turkey to improve student participation into contributing to a more welcoming university environment and the positive integration of Syrian students in university life.

The project consists of three phases. In the first phase, four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to understand the challenges Syrian students in Gaziantep face both on and off the campus. Two of these FGDs were conducted with Syrian students and the other two with Turkish students. In the second phase of the project a workshop was organised and structured based on findings of the focus group discussions, and from the contributions of academics from the regional provinces of Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, Sanliurfa, Mardin, Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul, researchers, civil society workers and public employees who were invited to participate in the workshop. The third and final phase of the project is this report to present the findings and practical recommendations coming from the workshop entitled "Integration of Syrian students into Higher Education and Social Cohesion" which took place on 1-2 November 2019.

1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. SYRIAN STUDENTS IN TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION

They ask me, "Have you acquired citizenship? You are a student, right?" I answer, yes, I did. However, they withdraw citizenship once you go back to Syria and call it exceptional citizenship. I study Turkish Teaching here, why would I go back to Syria? I study here, so I will continue here.
(Syrian Woman Interviewee #4)

Following the civil war that erupted in Syria in 2011, 6.7 million people were forced to leave Syria[1] and as a result of these movements towards the immediate neighbouring countries, 3.7 million Syrians have been provided with temporary protection by the Government of Turkey, according to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM)[2]. The number of Syrians living in urban and rural locations is 3,629,552 (98.3%), according to DGMM and the majority living in provinces that share a border with Syria, such as Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Mersin and Kilis, as well as in Turkey's largest city, Istanbul.

Syrians living in cities struggle, not only to overcome the difficulties they encounter in the areas of accommodation, employment and healthcare, but also struggle to send their children to school with a view to guarantee the prosperity of their next generation. Education of their children is a priority for the Syrian community living in Turkey.

While [higher education] is typically a very low reconstruction priority, it has the potential, if addressed strategically, to act as a catalyst for effective and sustainable post-war recovery. If universities are sufficiently supported, they could play a crucial role in strengthening individuals and societies by developing the ability needed by societies to take full control of the time of recovery.[3]

Higher education represents a hope for the societies which cannot return to their homelands and for which the period of stay in the country of asylum and their futures are unclear. Higher education not only meets the urgent educational needs of the young people living in such uncertainty and constitutes an important step towards exercising their rights, but also creates a sense of security in connection with having a qualified society when a permanent solution is found for their societies such as when they are naturalized in the host country, they return to their countries, or settle in a new country.[4]

Opening pre-school, primary and secondary education institutions of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to refugees has been a significant step in accessing education. According to MoNE data (October 2019), the highest level of schooling rates for the children under temporary protection status is

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[1] UNHCR, 2019a. Figures at a Glance: Statistical Yearbooks Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

[2] DGMM, 2019a. Temporary Protection. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638

[3] Milton, and Barakat, 2016, p.5. Higher education as the catalyst of recovery in conflict-affected societies. Globalisation, Societies and Education, 14(3), 403—421. doi:10.1080/14767724.2015.1127749

[4] Zeus, 2011, p. 261. Exploring barriers to higher education in protracted refugee situations: The case of Burmese refugees in Thailand. Journal of Refugee Studies, 24(2), 256–276. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer011

observed at the primary school level (age 6-10) at 89.27%, with secondary school (age 10-14) at 70.50%, high school (age 14-18) at 32.88% and early childhood education (age 3-6) at 27.19%.[5]

The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and the Higher Education Council (YÖK) played a key role in facilitating access to higher education. 3RP partners work in close coordination with these and other Government institutions in order to ensure access of Syrians under temporary protection to educational opportunities. The Turkish Government has supported higher education access by waiving tuition fees in state universities for Syrian students. YTB provided 4,048 scholarships since the onset of the crisis and, with 3RP partners, is increasing scholarship numbers. University preparation programmes, focused on Turkish language acquisition, have also been introduced.[6]

With a circular issued on 3 September 2012, the Higher Education Council (YÖK) provided Syrian refugees with the opportunity to continue their interrupted university education in the seven provinces located on the border with Syria. Syrian students are able to transfer to a university in Turkey with a certificate indicating that they were registered at a university in Syria, or in the absence of such a document, students were allowed to take courses with a status of special students. Nevertheless, taking courses with special student status is not adequate to graduate.[7]

There are three ways for Syrian students to graduate from a university in Turkey. The first one is, as mentioned above, the chance to continue their education in Turkey with a certificate from Syria, if they came to Turkey, abandoning their university education in Syria.

The second way is for refugee students coming from Syria who have acquired Turkish citizenship. Every high-school graduate Turkish citizen has the right to take the Higher Education Institutions Exam (YKS) held by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM). This exam is a central exam and held only in Turkish language.

The third method is the Examination for International Students (YÖS), which is available to anyone who is a citizen of a country other than the Republic of Turkey. In particular, students who are under temporary protection and who do not have the chance to bring certificates as evidence from Syria, indicating that they were enrolled in higher education in Syria, can be accepted to a university by sitting this exam. However, they cannot enter any university they wish by taking the YÖS exam. First of all, not all universities offer the YÖS exam and some universities also require proof of additional exams, like ESSAY/SAT[8]. Another

[5]   MoNE, 2019, p.7. Geçici Koruma Kapsamı Altındaki Öğrencilerin Eğitim Hizmetleri. Retrieved from https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2019_11/06141131_11Ekim2019internetBulteni.pdf

[6] Turkey: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) 2018-2019 in Response to the Syria Crisis, 2018, p42

[7] Özer, 2017. Suriyeliler istedikleri üniversiteye hiçbir koşul olmadan girebiliyor iddiası. Retrieved December 9, 2019, from https://teyit.org/suriyeliler-universiteye-kosulsuz-sinavsiz-girebiliyor-iddiasi/

[8] The SAT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions.

obstacle for such exams is the language of the exam. An Arabic language option is not offered for every examination.[9]

Despite all the options available to access higher education[10] and the efforts employed by Turkey, which has followed a clear policy within the context of higher education, the YÖS exam, which is not conducted centrally, the complex university entrance processes and the inability to commonly offer Arabic or English as the languages of instruction stand as disadvantages.[11]

Practices such as declaration-based special student status, ease of undergraduate transfers, foreign student quotas, Arabic YÖS exams and Arabic undergraduate programmes are significant attempts for the integration of Syrians and the tuition fee exemption offered to Syrian students is underlined as the most positive practice.[12] The enrolment rate of Syrians in higher education institutions is 4%[13] with the number of students enrolled at higher education institutions is 27,034.[14] The enrolment rate of local students at higher education institutions is 44.1%. Once the numbers are compared, one of every two young local students can go to university, while the equivalent number is 1 in every 25 for young Syrians. In the last year, the success achieved by Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in integrating Syrians into university education has increased the worldwide rates for the enrolment of refugees at tertiary education institutions from 1% to 3%[15].

The possibility of access to higher education motivates students to complete their primary and secondary levels of education.[16] The higher education schooling rates in the upcoming years will also provide meaningful data with regard to educational success at lower stages. The students who have grown up in Syria and continued their education in Turkey are about to complete their undergraduate education. Additionally, in the universities of Turkey, the number of students in the last years of undergraduate education is higher than the number of students in the first years of undergraduate education. It indicates that the number of Syrian students who are entering universities after finishing high school level education in Turkey is decreasing. In fact, the number of Syrian students studying in Turkey at high school level also reinforces this concern that students, who displaced during their primary / early years of secondary education faced a

[9] Güler, Koç, and Dede, 2018. Suriyeli Öğrenciler için Yükseköğretime Giriş Yol Haritası. Retrieved from https://yuva.org.tr/pdf/unihazirlik_rehber_tr.pdf

[10] Yıldız, 2019. Suriye Uyruklu Öğrencilerin Türkiye'de Yükseköğretime Katılımları. İzmir: Yaşar Üniversitesi Yayınları.

[11] Watenpaugh, Fricke and King, 2014, p. 5, 23. We Will Stop Here and Go No Further: Syrian University Students and Scholars in Turkey. Retrieved from https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications/We-Will-Stop-Here-And-Go-No-Further-Syrian-University-Students-And-Scholars-In-Turkey

[12] Dereli, 2018, p. 14. Refugee Integration through Higher Education: Syrian Refugees in Turkey. Retrieved from https://i.unu.edu/media/gcm.unu.edu/publication/4405/Final_Begüm-Dereli_Policy-Report.pdf

[13] UNHCR, 2018a, p. 104. Refugee Students Voices: Refugee Students in Higher Education.

[14] MoNE, 2019, p. 8. Geçici Koruma Kapsamı Altındaki Öğrencilerin Eğitim Hizmetleri. Retrieved from https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2019_11/06141131_11Ekim2019internetBulteni.pdf

[15] UNHCR, 2018b, p.155. Global Report 2018.; UNHCR, 2019b, p.5. Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf

[16] Gladwell et. al., 2016, p. 14. Higher Education for Refugees in Low Resource Environments: Landscape Review. United Kingdom.

significant challenge in overcoming the disruption to their schooling and being in a position to access higher education.

In the context of educational achievements, refugee children face similar barriers as children from other ethnic or disadvantaged groups, such as those facing poverty, traumatic experiences, interrupted education and language barriers. Therefore, they are assumed to have similar educational support needs. Refugee children and young people are more likely to live in difficult economic conditions as refugee families have a higher rate of unemployment or informal employment and therefore have lower wages and salaries. In addition, the causes of trauma vary: refugee children and young people may have their own traumatic experiences due to forced migration, separation from family, isolation, and insecurity resulting from the lack of legal status. Therefore, education and psychosocial support needs of refugees and migrants differ from other ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups17. There is a greater need for scholarships, educational materials, and part-time employment opportunities to support refugee students economically. Support should be provided for psychosocial situations stemming from forced migration, war and future anxiety, at pre-university education and throughout the university.

In addition to the enrolment rate at higher education institutions in Turkey, attendance of Syrian students at school, their academic success and potential for employment in the post-graduation period should also be addressed. Specific challenges that will be explored in more detail in the following sections have negative effects on the educational lives of Syrian students. Some of these challenges result from the difficulties already experienced by society in general, while others are particular to students. Structural issues within the higher education system and universities could also similarly affect both local and refugee students.

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[17] Stevenson and Willott, 2007, p. 672-675. The aspiration and access to higher education of teenage refugees in the UK. Compare, 37(5), 671—687. doi:10.1080/03057920701582624

1.2. SYRIAN STUDENTS AT GAZIANTEP UNIVERSITY

Gaziantep is the province that hosts the second highest number of Syrians under temporary protection, following Istanbul. Within this context, 452,113 Syrians under temporary protection are registered in Gaziantep[18]. However, it ranks third after Kilis and Hatay provinces, when viewed from the point of its proportion to the total population.

Gaziantep University is one of the universities where courses can be taken with special student status, in accordance with the circular issued by the Council of Higher Education in 2016. Yet, students with "special student" status cannot be awarded any graduation certificates, diplomas or credits. Having 3,139 Syrian students enrolled, Gaziantep University stands as the university with the maximum number of Syrian students enrolled[19]. Including Syrian students, more than 4,000 international students are registered at Gaziantep University. The total number of students studying in Gaziantep University is 45,468.

In addition to English and Turkish programs, Gaziantep University offers Arabic programs for Syrian and Palestinian Students. There are five Arabic programs available at the main campus: Economy, Theology, Civil Engineering, Business Administration and Primary School Teacher Education.

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[18]DGMM, 2019b. Residency Permits. Retrieved December 1, 2019, from https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izinleri

[19]According to the YÖK statistics, Harran University appears to have the highest number of Syrian students. However, we believe that this data we obtained from the relevant department of Gaziantep University is more up-to-date. Students who study at Arabic programs and Vocational Schools and faculties established by Gaziantep University in Syria have not been included in the YÖK statistics yet.

2.

RESEARCH

METHOD

The challenges encountered by Syrian students are placed under five main headings in this report, however, the challenges encountered by Syrian students in their academic lives are related to each other. The purpose of the project is primarily to reveal the overall situation of the refugee students studying at Gaziantep University. Thus, one of the special objectives is to try and understand the adaptation amongst students and the perception of Syrian students by the university constituents.

The difficulties mentioned in the first part of the report are based on focus-group discussions held at Gaziantep University with 46 students in total, divided into 4 groups. Focus groups comprised of Syrian Males (n=14), Syrian Females (n=12), Turkish Males (n=12) and Turkish Females (n=8). The students were asked questions about adaptation among students, social life and campus life. The results of focus group discussions can be classified under four headings: Language and Communication, Academic Life, Access to Information and Services, and Perception towards Syrians.

3.

FINDINGS AND

FEEDBACK

3.1. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

In the focus group discussions when the Syrian refugee students were asked about the challenges they face on the campus, the most common answer was "language/communication". Other studies also point to the mutual language barrier as the biggest problem experienced on the campuses.[20] This is particularly challenging for students who are in the first year of their undergraduate education and who have not become competent in Turkish language and have difficulty in communicating both academically and with the university staff. The study of Ertong Attar and Küçükşen[21] revealed that despite the physical proximity between the Syrian and local students, there is a social distance between them, and the fact that Syrians do not feel that their Turkish is good enough to communicate is a factor to forming this distance.

Local students reported that they do not communicate with Syrian students outside of classrooms, dormitories and the campus. The number of local students stating that they have close friends among Syrian Students is relatively low. Additionally, Turkish students also mentioned that they did not see Syrian students in the campus very often. Given that Gaziantep University has 45,468 students, Syrians students are not very visible. However, this situation may vary from one department to the other as while there are no Syrian students in certain departments, the figure is high in others, especially the proportion of Syrian students is higher in faculties which offer education in English such as engineering, medicine and architecture. The fact that Syrian students and local students use areas on and off campus at different times of day can be considered as another factor that reduces encounters between them. In the interviews, students also stated that the common areas are scarce and that the both Syrian students and local students are spending time amongst themselves without mixing with one another. The classroom is the most common area for interaction among the students, but Syrian students are less likely to attend classes for economic, academic and social reasons. Different opinions were expressed regarding the poor communication among students. Students from both societies blamed the other party during the discussions, yet, it is understood that they are mostly not against communicating with each other. Nevertheless, the majority of the students noted that their friendship did not go beyond greeting and following on social media, except for exceptional circumstances.

> *[I] do not think there is a communication problem. Maybe it originates a little from us and a little from them. They generally prefer strolling around in groups, and to be honest, we are trying not to be involved. Believe me, I think that we could obtain their trust, if we offered them tea and had a few words with them. (TM I1)*

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[20] Dereli, 2018; Taşar, 2019

[21] Ertong Attar and Küçükşen, 2019, 1046-1047

I am in contact with them both inside and outside of the campus. My brother founds a Syrian partner two years ago and now he and his Syrian partner have a place together, for the last two years. I have improved my Arabic thanks to him [...] We receive their condolences and, when the occasion arises, we offer our condolences [...] I mean, no Syrian I met turned away from us and we did not turn away from them either. (TM I3)

It appears that the inability to understand each other due to language has different consequences for Syrians and the locals. Syrians withdraw to themselves, in an effort to minimize their communications with the local population, whereas the local population starts seeing the Syrian community as uniform. According to a local student, the Syrian refugee community looks like a homogeneous entity:

... it is not like good people did this; bad people did that. What they directly say is Syrians did that." (SF I7)

Difficulties also occur in the communication between various units of the university and students. In addition to problems arising partially from the language barrier, discriminative attitudes were also mentioned during the interviews. Students expressed that inability to speak Turkish makes it difficult to establish a healthy communication with the staff at their department. There are a limited number of Arabic-speaking personnel within the University. Besides the language-based restrictions, research carried out by Istanbul University asserts that the burden on the university personnel is already heavier than it is supposed to be.[22]

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[22] Ateşok, Komsuoğlu and Özer, 2019, p. 127

3.2. ACADEMIC LIFE

Academic challenge which Syrian students face is reported in the form of multi-layered challenge as an intricate mix caused by economic conditions, language barrier and discriminative behaviours affecting the academic success of students. Factors such as insufficiency of scholarships, obligation of providing for the family, lack of student solidarity, discriminatory discourse of both academic and administrative personnel, and inadequate Turkish language skills influence the academic success of students.

The first time Syrian students report running into academic challenges is when they apply for undergraduate or graduate study. Differing practices are observed from university to university, or even from faculty to faculty within the same university.

There are administrative difficulties. We are the same students. Each department is different. Some engineering faculties accept undergraduate transfer from Syria to here, while others do not. I do not know what kind of a system it is. The head of the department accepted a friend of mine, but once replaced, [the new head of the department] did not accept him (SM I2).

No definite rules apply for everyone. We ask if the engineering branches are referable, they cannot give a definite answer. The rule is changeable (SM I8).

Before the academic year 2014-2015, there was not any legal regulation for Syrian transfer students. By starting that year, the standards were specified by YOK[23].

Students continuing programmes in the fields of social sciences and educational sciences noted that they had trouble following the lectures given in Turkish and taking notes since it involves following what is said, understanding the subject and writing, students further stated that they generally failed to take notes and were focussed on trying to understand the lecture.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons for academic difficulties is that Syrians could not achieve the necessary competence level with respect to Turkish language, during their first year of higher education. Students said that the courses taught at TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Centre) are not sufficient in terms of length and they do not meet the proficiency required for academic success.

Especially my friends mentioned that they could not find any notes. [A friend of mine] While making a lecture, he said, 'Let's not give them a lecture.' They may have reasons; they may not like them. Turkish language is a bit difficult for them. They cannot get a good language education. (TM I8).

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[23] Yıldız, 2019

The poor communication among students of the courses was also mentioned in the communicational difficulties section. However, the interviews show that social difficulties have academic impact. Another difficulty noted by Syrian students is how local students do not want to be in the same working/ homework groups.

For instance, the teacher wanted us to participate in teamwork during the lecture. The groups are made of three people. I asked six people if I could be in their team. The answer was, "No, we have friends and we will make a group with them." I even asked the male students. They did not want it either. So, I will do the homework by myself, although the teacher asked otherwise, but there is nothing I can do even if it turns out to be wrong (SF I7).

During the interviews, all Syrian students talked about the same difficulty. Considering the low number of Syrian students in the classroom, they do not have any other choice but to group with local students or do their homework by themselves.

The answers received for the question of *"Do you believe that university teachers treat you differently?"* from Syrian female students reveals that Syrian students are treated in different ways.

I had to serve a four-month internship. The teacher had a really reactive attitude towards us, a discriminatory one. For instance, I had a Turkish friend, who I did the internship with. I would go there from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. My Turkish friend, on the other hand, would be there from 8 a.m. to 12 noon. She put two signatures, while I had to put four signatures. She caused trouble in everything. To be honest, such a discriminatory attitude affected me too much mentally. Unfortunately, I could not complete my internship. I could have benefited from this internship. I could have graduated, but such treatment of the teachers affected me badly (SF I2).

Syrian students claim that academics are prejudiced when it comes to grading and they give low marks even without assessing the exam papers. This study cannot confirm discrimination with grades and practices, like internships, but the lack of effective complaint mechanisms available to the students regarding such practices was apparent during the FGDs. Students also stated that they remained silent and could not complain about the way they were treated, in fear of exclusion, cancellation of scholarships and even deportation.

3.3. ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

Syrian students reported having challenges, reinforced by language difficulties and discrimination, in accessing information on the subjects that concern them. They, therefore, are not fully informed about the content and scope of services that could be provided to them by public and private institutions or how to complain about the services they could not receive. Although the students studying at higher education institutions believe that they seem to be privileged within their community, they also have challenges in accessing information on rights and for services they need in their campus lives. The main reason behind that appears as language, once again. They encounter this problem at every level, from the decisions taken at national level to the ones taken at university level. Students perceive that the regulations concerning them, and their practices are frequently amended, which makes it more difficult to keep up with them.

When a problem occurs, I do not know about my rights here. I do not know which actions to take. I do not speak Turkish and the laws do not have Arabic versions. How will I read and find out? There is no platform regarding only laws in Turkey, to which we can access (SM I6).

Syrian students must make a great effort to learn the laws of the country they live in and do not know about their rights, which could also change depending on how they were accepted by the higher education institution. This results from the still complex nature of the higher education system that was intended to provide convenience to students. A difficulty seems to arise from the fact that various official documents issued by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the universities are published in Turkish and sometimes in English, yet not in Arabic. The exams and higher education applications are not administered centrally, which can result in the development of different practices by each higher education institution.

In addition to the difficulty of accessing information at corporate level, the announcements made related to courses and curriculum by academics are mostly for the students who have a good command of Turkish language. This leads to a number of setbacks, ranging from not knowing the exam dates, to not knowing which units are included in the exam or when the class is cancelled.

Students from the host community access information about Syrian students through traditional or social media, rather than direct sources. They, therefore, often have incorrect information.

Contrary to popular belief, Turkish students think that Syrians enter universities without sitting any exam. They say that they are surprised to see that Syrians do not get any scholarships. In case of undergraduate transfers, not everybody can enter the department where they were previously studying. No clear information can be obtained particularly in the field of engineering. (SM I5)

3.4. PERCEPTION TOWARDS SYRIANS

It appears, from the reports, that the discrimination faced by Syrian students has multiple reasons. Many issues can be the cause of discrimination, such as clothes and appearance, talking Arabic in public areas, scholarships and allowances, and acquiring citizenship.

During the focus group discussions, both local and Syrian students expressed that nationalist feelings are the cause of the discrimination. However, at the core of such nationalism is specifically directed towards Syrians, not those from other countries. A taxi experience of a Syrian student in Gaziantep city illustrates that assertion:

No matter which identity I belong to whether Egyptian or Syrian; I am a foreigner. They are local people, who are scared since the number of Syrians increased. I do not say I am a Syrian when I get in a taxi. I say we are Lebanese or from another country. When I say so, drivers see and treat me properly (SF I3).

A similar taxi story was also shared by a Syrian male student.

I went to Istanbul and wanted to go to the Fatih District. My friend warned me, 'Looks like there is a problem. Do not tell them that you are from Syria! tell them that you are Palestinian. I got on a taxi; the taxi driver treated me well and did not ask for money. (SM I5)

The intolerance towards Arabic language is also observed time to time within the campus:

I speak Turkish, because my Turkish is good. However, my friends speak Arabic. They are from Egypt. People immediately said, "Shh! this is Turkey, so speak Turkish. They treated Egyptians as if they were Syrians. However, they do not say anything to the people who are speaking in English (SM I2).

I am both Syrian and Slovakian. There is no problem when I speak another language, but they glare at me when I speak Arabic (SM I3).

They reported of also being discriminated against due to reasons other than speaking Arabic. Students expressed that both the academic personnel and the students make discriminatory remarks and engage in discriminatory practices against Syrian students, over nationalist feelings, during classes and outside the classroom, including on social media.

We were organizing a concert, and I was playing the guitar. When we were at the 10th grade, our history teacher asked, 'Why do not you go to Syria and fight?' [At the university] When I went to the department, the head of the department straightforwardly said it. They were four and the lady there said, 'We cannot accept you if you are Syrian.' This is why they applied to another department. (SM I2)

The pressure has mounted recently. They glared at me when I spoke Arabic. (SM I3)

Syrian students stated that they rarely made friends with local students outside of classes and added how they felt distant from the local students and how language was not a problem, but the problem lay in cultural differences.

—Do you have friends from a local group that you frequently contact within the campus? What are your reasons for contacting them?

—I had, but we did not sit down much.
—What do you mostly have contact about?
—About courses. Actually, we do not talk much with Turkish friends.
—Why is that? Is it because of the language barrier?
—No, it is not about language. I feel like they are distant from us, and that is why. (SF I8)

We only greet each other with my classmates. There is no closeness and we do not talk much. I do not have a true friend who calls me and worries about me. [Why do you think it is?] I do not know. Not everybody, but some of our Turkish friends have incorrect perceptions, but I do not know […] I do not believe there is a problem regarding language. I have Turkish neighbours where I stay. I also have Syrian neighbours, yet I can visit my Turkish neighbour's home, whereas I cannot visit my Syrian neighbour's home. I am not discriminated. I think there is a cultural difference, rather than a language-related problem. (SF I7)

Once again, it appears here that acting by considering only the preconceived opinion of how the cultures of the people of Syria and Gaziantep are similar is incorrect. Cultural differences among students from two communities seem to be regarded by Syrian students as a greater obstacle than the language barrier, when communicating.

During the FGDs, Turkish students noted that they helped and treated Syrians well, upon observing they were in a difficult situation. Yet, the host community seems to continue establishing a hierarchical relationship with Syrians: they maintain a relationship between the capable and the incapable. The students from the host community fear that the Syrian students might take their own jobs, which, after a while, turned into animosity or discrimination and actions like not sharing notes and not helping them with the courses.

There is something like that, to be realistic, they speak English, they speak Arabic, they are learning Turkish too, so they know three languages and we will graduate from the same school. If I were an employer, I would say, 'S/He speaks both English and Arabic, I want to recruit him/her.' Well, this is on all our minds. I started university with ideas like they are already one step ahead of us and they go to school without sitting an exam and enrol to universities. I realized later that it is not injustice and we were agitated. (TF I1)

After our university education, we think like this: They speak another language and they speak Turkish, so they will definitely be recruited. That being said, in reality they are not hired. I mean, I saw that these kinds of things are happening because I am also in this working life. Well, we cast them out, but employers actually do so, as well. (TF I9)

Similar to the above example, certain ideas prevail, like that Syrian students would find jobs more easily.

In FGDs, most of the students pointed that they had more prejudices before entering the university. Such prejudices resulted from never interacting with Syrians and accessing information about them only through television, social media and their social circles.

[I] did not have a social network when I first started to the university, either. Besides, I guess they started coming over in 2011. During that period of two to three years, such events were so often—how can I say—brought to the agenda that they were always in a negative way. I do not want to associate it with the department [sociology], however, needless to say, it affected my thoughts [in a positive way]. Once I started knowing them [better], got them in my circle a little more and contacted them in real terms, I had an idea and view about them, their cultures and lifestyles, in other words, their position in [this] country (TF I10).

The conclusion of how coming together - like being on the same campus, classroom and student group, doing homework together and taking part in the same project - eliminated the prejudices of students was expressed by multiple students during the interviews:

For instance, I previously had a prejudice, outside the university: Well, Syrians did everything for money. […] Occasionally, the rumour had it that the Syrian women had sexual intercourse in exchange for very low fees. Also, their men would fight with others so as not to pay money. Then, I came here last year. There was a study about Syrians, and one of our translators was a Syrian male. Then we spent some time together, had a break and had lunch. We were two women, and he stood to pay for our meals, which surprised me. I said, 'God, I did not think Syrians were generous people.' Well, do not they do everything for money? That occasion changed me. (TF I2)

A student suggests that some news on social media scare the local students and families, causing them to refrain from communicating with the refugees. Given the contents of this kind of news, acts of extreme violence, like 'beheading, hanging and dismembering,' are attributed to Syrians. Such fabricated news, images and videos are frequently circulating on social media, particularly in WhatsApp and Facebook groups, etc. Students are not only appalled by the news that they come across on social media, but also express their hatred against Syrians because of certain news. Fake news on issues such as scholarships, admission without exams, and the chance to enter whichever department they desire etc. have a negative impact on the relationship between people from the two nations. Besides, a perception was formed on social media, again, illustrating Syrians as 'enjoying themselves' here while the Turkish Army is struggling for them in Syria.

4.

RECOMMENDATION

In this section, you will find the recommendations, prepared according to discussions carried out by working groups in the "Integration of Syrian Students into Higher Education in Turkey" workshop held in November 2019. The recommendations were summarised by leaders of each working group whose members were consisted of Turkish and Syrian academics, students, public officers, non-governmental organizations, UNHCR, Gaziantep University Institute for Migration and the Department of Sociology.

4.1. Access to Information and Communication

1. Provide Student Information Systems through which online procedures, like registrations, course selections and seeing grades, are available in Arabic. Orientation trainings in different languages could be delivered to all newly enrolled students at the university.

2. Publication of announcements, event posters and social media posts on the university's website also in Arabic to facilitate students' access to the information and events that concern them.

3. Aim to employ Arabic-speaking university staff at units frequently used by students, such as the registrar's office, library, dormitories and sports facilities.

4.2. Community Mobilization and Social Networks

4. Organise awareness raising activities, together with the university students, to reduce false information and discriminative attitudes and language by ensuring that students from both communities have an active role in these studies that contribute positively to social inclusion and cohesion within the campus.

5. Encourage Syrian students to join the students' clubs in universities, and students' clubs to organize introduction activities targeting refugee and foreign students.

6. Promote the culture of both groups so that refugee and local students can get to know each other better by giving up the notion of cultural similarity and accepting cultural differences as a wealth.

7. Organize trainings, and research to raise awareness on the local students' behaviours towards refugee students, and peer bullying.

8. Increase spaces where the local and refugee students can gather, as well as activities and events that will enhance the content and number of interactions, i.e. common cultural-artistic activities and events.

9. Organize awareness-raising activities together with the university students (i.e. theatre plays, short films, etc.), to reducing false information and discriminatory speech and attitudes and enabling

students to have direct parts in these studies would contribute positively to social adaptation within the campus.

10. Direct Syrian students towards professions like teaching and social services specialists, through practices encouraging their participation at the departments affiliated to the faculties of education. These could be urged to be more active, particularly at schools and educational institutions where refugee, foreign and local students attend together.

11. Invite Syrian NGOs, in addition to Turkish and international NGOs, to the events held at the university.

4.3. Academic Life

12. Academics could focus more on visual presentations and, to the extent possible, use sources that have also been translated into English, to allow students, who have difficulty in taking notes and understanding the lectures. to follow the courses more easily.

13. Organise trainings for academics, on how to deliver education in multicultural classrooms and organise workshops and social events addressing how to prevent discriminative language among academics and how academia could contribute to social adaptation at the campuses, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

14. Increase the number of early childhood educational institutions and facilitate access to them in order to increase participation of married students and students with children and prevent them from abandoning their education.

15. Conduct studies regarding which complaint mechanisms can be used by students when they encounter an obstacle, or they are exposed to discrimination. Complaint procedures should be made more accessible and effective, with their confidentiality improved.

16. Support professional internships of students under temporary/ international protection and provide opportunities in collaboration with the chambers of commerce as a balanced number of local students into these internships also contributes to social adaptation.

17. Enhance opportunities for Distance education, so that Syrian students can benefit from the right to education as much as the local students, despite the possibility of negatively influencing the social adaptation process.

4.4. Language and Skills

18. Explore ways to improve the quality and length of education delivered by TÖMER and create preparatory classes or orientation programme to teach Turkish language as is the case for the universities that provide undergraduate education in English or French.

19. Implement projects by universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can provide mutual language learning with local students, such as tandems that Syrian students learn Turkish from local students and local students learn English or Arabic from Syrian students, could be implemented.

20. Offer elective Arabic courses at universities, to make sure that Syrian students can preserve their reading and writing skills in Arabic language.

21. Increase the number of Turkish language courses at the Public Education Centres affiliated to the MoNE and the Vocational Courses affiliated to local administrations, with a view to enabling the refugees to receive enough language education prior to university education with free education accessible up to the C2 level.

4.5. Career and Guidance

22. Inform students, before choosing their area of study, about the departments and which fields they can work in (without legal restrictions) when they graduate. Provide introductory seminars and leaflets about the faculties and departments to all students by high schools and related units in the university.

4.6. Psychosocial Support and Health Services

23. Establish psychosocial support units at universities or strengthen these, to alleviate the impact of the traumas and violence experienced by the Syrian students during their forced migration.

24. Provide awareness-raising on family planning in the universities through health centres or facilitate access to public health centres for university students.

4.7. Promote Research in the Area of Migration Studies

25. Increase the number of research units in the field of forced migration and the number of units to address these issues; Strengthen the capacity of existing units and increase the coordination between institutions in a registered and traceable manner.

26. Determine student trends by promoting the collection of data on the statistical distribution of Syrian students amongst departments, reasons for their choices, employment after the graduation, gender, age etc.

27. Take advantage of support provided by national and international organizations, that provide funding to the Migration Research Institutes and Centres in universities in border provinces and provinces with high refugee populations, so it contributes positively to various projects implemented in these provinces and aimed at refugees, social cohesion and social participation.

4.8. Financial Assistance and Scholarships

28. Reduce the fees for language courses to more affordable levels, so that refugee students can develop their Turkish language skills, and also free courses could be opened by international and national non-governmental organizations.

29. Share information on the sources of scholarships granted to Syrian students: how much is spent and how many students benefit from the scholarships, with the university community in a more transparent manner.

30. Provide part-time work opportunities within the campus that will have a socially and economically positive effect on students as economic conditions affect university attendance and the academic success of Syrian students because many Syrian students have to work to maintain their families.

31. Widely disseminate announcements about scholarship opportunities for university students to reach all interested students and increase scholarship opportunities.

4.9. Legal and Administrative Barriers

32. Provide information to Syrian students on attaining a more permanent status, such as citizenship, that gives them greater certainty about their future. Temporary Protection, as its name suggests, implies temporariness and the number of Syrians who have acquired Turkish Citizenship, is

relatively low. A more permanent status may alleviate the students' and the Syrian society's concerns for the future and increase their enrolment rate and motivation to continue higher education.

33. Given that students would like restrictions on movement within Turkey to be lifted, explore ways of providing greater support, from University administrations (student affairs etc.), for students who need travel permits to attend scientific events, outside their province of residence, such as conferences, meetings and trainings for the academic development, in coordination with the Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs).

34. Encourage International NGOs to share responsibility in the migration process, by facilitating the work permit application process for those interested in gaps in existing services to students and social cohesion amongst students these areas so that they can contribute.

35. Hold Examinations for International Students (YÖS) centrally to make each university accessible as difficulties in accessing education, arising from the travel permit, could be reduced. Applying to all universities with a single examination could reduce the financial burden on the students and families. Foreign students could be distributed to universities more equally. Every student could be given the right to take the YÖS in the language they desire.

36. Harmonise account opening procedures for refugee and foreign students in banks with more frequent audits in order to prevent arbitrary practices.

37. Remove foreign student quotas, applied at units administrating services within the university like dormitories, sports and course centres, as they are unauthorised and should not be applied. Capacities of dormitories could be expanded.

38. Exclude or remove the upper age limit for scholarships in the event that higher education is interrupted or delayed due to war.

5.

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A.

ANNEXES

A.1. RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A.1.1. Syrian Female Students

Communication and Language:

1. Syrian women generally have less trouble communicating with the educated segment. As the educational level gets lower and the average age gets higher, communication decreases.

2. Many prejudices result from mutual miscommunication can be easily overcome when a healthy communication is established.

3. Syrian women generally look positively at collaborating with Turkish people.

Social Media and Perceptions towards Syrians:

4. Social media is believed to have negative effects.

5. A crime committed by a Syrian can be attributed in social media to all Syrian refugees.

6. A rumour saying that a Syrian committed a crime can be accepted much more easily by the society. Whether the crime has actually been committed or not is not questioned at all.

7. The initial positive attitude towards Syrian refugees gave place to prejudices in time. We observe that the unfounded news floating around social media (like all Syrians receiving money from the government on a monthly basis) has a great effect.

8. There is an overall dominant opinion that considers Syrians as the reason for the negative condition of the current economy.

9. Syrian students think that they are not shown enough tolerance during courses. However, this may differ from teacher to teacher and student to student.

10. On the grounds of the moral meaning attributed to the concept of citizenship by a part of Turkish nation, they are against Syrians' acquisition of citizenship.

Community Mobilization and Social Networks:

11. Common socialization spaces are limited for Syrian women. They mostly socialize with Turkish students at cafés outside the campus. Their socialization occasions within and outside of the university mainly take place among themselves.

12. The lack of socialization is generally accepted.

13. Syrian students encounter various problems in group studies.

Career and Future Concerns:

14. Syrians are concerned about their future in Turkey. The reason behind that lies in the fear of being deported, which is mainly because not acquiring citizenship and the news that continuously take place on the media, claiming that Syrians will be sent to various countries.

15. It has been stated that numerous problems encountered by Syrians are already problems encountered by Turkish citizens.

Administrative Barriers:

16. Syrians' travel restrictions between the cities in Turkey cause many adverse events.

17. Different definitions in the system hinder the conclusion of official procedures. Even the institutions carrying out the official procedures does not know the system completely.

A.1.2. Turkish Female Students

Communication and Language:

1. They noted that Syrian male students generally studied at certain departments and neither of the women contacted with men, nor men contacted with women much.

2. There are cultural similarities, yet, they have difficulty in taking notes and finishing their schools, as their Turkish is at a sufficient level in communication, but not at a sufficient level for the courses.

3. In general, Turkish people do not speak Arabic and Arabic people do not speak Turkish. However, this obstacle is eliminated when English is spoken by both parties as the common language.

Social Media and Perceptions towards Syrians:

4. Cultural differences between Syrians and Turks are not more than the differences among different groups within the country.

5. Some Syrians, who learned Turkish and acquired Turkish citizenship, may not be involved in Turkish groups and they may also be left out of Syrian groups, so they may remain in between.

6. We are not told where, when and to whom the money claimed to be spent for Syrians are spent. We are not told about its sources, and these uncertainties prepare the ground for malicious manipulations.

7. Social media is frequently used to provoke masses especially about the financial assistances for Syrians. The damage is done until the truth behind the news comes out.

8. The adverse events that happen in daily life are served by the media in a biased manner. For instance, when a burglary occurs, if either party is Syrian, then it definitely has media coverage. Consequently, an individual crime is introduced as a social crime.

9. The aid provided to Syrians in sight gives rise to a perception that a segment of Turkish Society is subject to discrimination.

10. It was mentioned that people with bad intentions tend to defraud Syrians because they think that the Syrians cannot defend their Syrians.

11. They mentioned that university created an environment where Turkish people could overcome their prejudices against Syrians and where they could socialize with them.

12. It was noted that the legal infrastructure required for social adaptation should be established.

13. It was further noted that Syrians were treated as war deserters, they are being asked about "why they do not stay in their country and fight there?"

14. They mostly have a positive point of view with regard to social adaptation in the future.

Community Mobilization and Social Networks:

15. It was also told that Syrian students rarely participated in student groups and social activities.

16. Women think positively about a number of joint organizations intended to be held and they want to actively participate.

Career and Future Concerns:

17. The participants said that the general condition of the country was not only difficult for Syrians, but also for themselves. They cited how it was difficult even for an average citizen to find a job and continue their educational lives comfortably.

18. The participants believe that Syrians are in a more advantageous position than themselves in finding a job, since they can speak more languages. However, they also agree that even they cannot find jobs or, even when they do, they work for lower wages.

A.1.3. Syrian Male Students

Communication and Language:

1. Announcements' being made only in Turkish or Arabic in a number of different programs for students may lead to problems. Announcements fail to reach everybody. They need to be made in multiple languages.

2. There are different practices among the departments of education. In fact, the practices applied to Syrians may differ, as the individuals differ, at the same departments.

3. An important part of the complaints, in general, is regarding how Syrians do not learn the language. It is said that the adaptation problem diminishes once they learn Turkish.

4. The departments of Syrian students at university are English or Arabic, which is easier for them, yet makes it harder to learn Turkish language.

5. Syrians cannot convey any unjust treatments they were exposed, to the relevant authorities, due to the language problem. They are mostly even unaware of their own legal rights.

Social Media and Perceptions towards Syrians:

6. Some students believe that they are exposed to discrimination by the instructors because they are Syrians.

7. Many problems occur because of misinformation on media.

8. There have been cases when the attitudes and behaviours towards Syrians were harsher than the ones towards other foreigners.

9. News on various media organs and reckless statements of politicians can have adverse impacts from a domestic viewpoint.

10. Generalizations of Syrians result in the reflection of any positive or negative situation on the overall society and the creation of a Syrian stereotype.

11. There is a prevailing opinion that tolerance towards Syrians has declined in the past years.

12. According to the media, the war in Syria is over. People may, therefore, think about "why they are not returning to their countries?" However, every individual does not have the means to go back. Security problems continue at certain districts.

Community Mobilization and Social Networks:

13. It was mentioned that any changes that could occur in the society will originate from the university. The university is a significant place of social adaptation where more than 4000 foreign students receive education and any movement of change that will start from here may affect the entire city and the country.

Career and Future Concerns:

14. Most people mentioned that they stayed in Turkey voluntarily and gladly, and that Turkey and Gaziantep are much better than the other alternatives. There are refugees who have the means to stay in Europe but prefer staying here.

Administrative Barriers:

15. The acceptance criteria, and the indefinite duration of the citizenship application, delays and hinders other activities, including daily errands. The difficulty of obtaining travel permit leads to significant problems. In a way, Syrians feel like they are in custody.

16. Standards change from bank to bank, branch to branch and even official to official, even in case of procedures with basic standards, like opening a bank account and obtaining a student identification card.

A.1.4. Turkish Male Students

Communication and Language:

1. Turkish people generally believe that there is no discrimination within the society. They consider lack of communication resulting from the mutual inability to speak each other's language as the crux of problems.

2. They think that Syrians who can speak Turkish adapt more easily. They added that those unable to speak the language rarely communicated with them and preferred living and communicating within their own social circles.

Social Media and Perceptions towards Syrians:

3. There is a preconceived opinion as some Syrians are regarded as "war deserters."

4. There is a general prejudice in the Turkish nation, due to misinformation claiming that Syrians are given privileges at certain occasions. For instance, entering the university without examination, all Syrians' receiving money from the state every month, etc.

5. Some Turkish people accepted adopting a prejudiced attitude towards Syrians in the first place. However, they realized how this was wrong in time.

6. Students noted that they witnessed how some Turkish students did not want to share their notes with Syrians who could speak little Turkish.

7. They said that social media laid the ground for discrimination, using false-fake news and, sometimes, even humour.

8. Some Turkish people mentioned that majority of the problems confronted by Syrians within the society, or at public bodies, also happened to them, and, therefore, this was not an issue of the entire society, not only related to Syrians.

9. It was cited that a lot of false-fake information was disseminated through the means of communication used by Syrians among themselves; i.e. "WhatsApp groups."

10. Numerous problems which existed before Syrians arrived, like the current cost and crowd of the cities, became more apparent and drew more attention once Syrians arrived in the country. A perception, therefore, has emerged as if the refugees were solely responsible for all these problems.

11. Political parties turn the refugees into a domestic and foreign political material.

12. Presence of cultural similarities is recognized.

Career and Future Concerns:

13. Unfortunately, Syrians who are given educational opportunities are not provided with job opportunities at the same rate.

Administrative Barriers:

14. It is hard to find clear explanations about the assistance provided to Syrians and the adaptation activities. For instance, we hear that some money is granted to them, but we are not told where that money comes from and to whom and for what reasons such money is granted to them. Such missing information paves the ground for easy dissemination of fabricated information.

Other:

15. According to some Turkish students, Syrians manifested that they still could not overcome the problems they had back in their country. They are scared of expressing their political opinions or they still have their concerns because of the war trauma they experienced in their country. They do not feel safe.

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