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**THE INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES in TURKEY
via EDUCATION**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts
in
International Studies

by
Aysenur Hacioglu
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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

The Syrian conflict, which was initiated as a pro-democratic movement against Bashar Assad's government, has displaced millions of people both internally and externally. The conflict soon escalated into a civil war with increased tensions between different rebel groups within the country. The conflict of interest of the international actors dragged the country into the center of proxy wars (Pecanha et al., 2015; Gerges, 2013). While the instability and insecurity in Syria have increased over time, it has also led to a refugee crisis worldwide, which has been regarded by the UN as the worst humanitarian crisis of our time (UNHCR, 2018b). In the absence of a predictable end to the civil war, the devastating consequences of the struggle are affecting a growing number of people. Since the beginning of the conflict, 6.6 million people are internally displaced, while 5.6 million people seek refuge in other countries (UNHCR, 2018b). Many Syrians scattered to neighboring countries, principally Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Some Syrians also seek asylum in other countries especially in Europe which spread the refugee crisis beyond the region and created 'the largest refugee exodus in recent history' (LIRS, 2015).

The high numbers of refugees are also a costly burden for host countries since most of them are low or middle-income countries, which makes it difficult to serve the needs of refugees properly and emphasizes the importance of international support (Betts *et. al*, 2017). Considering that more than half of Syrian refugees are children, the majority of the displaced population represents a vulnerable population which requires special attention from both the host countries and also international actors (Alpaydin, 2017, p.36; Duruel, 2016, p.1409; Tastan & Celik, 2017; Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014, p.14; Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004, p.4; Ozer et al., 2016, p.77).

Turkey, who shares the longest borderline with Syria, hosts 63 percent of the total number of Syrian refugees, currently at more than 3.5 million (UNHCR, 2018b). However,

Turkey as the country with the highest number of refugees in the world does not legally recognize Syrians as refugees. As a signatory, Turkey put a geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) which allows the country to grant refugee status only to migrants from European countries. Furthermore, the Settlement Law of 1934 and its version in 2006 indicates that only people with Turkish descent and culture are eligible for permanent residency and citizenship rights. To date, ambiguity in Syrians' status in Turkey continues. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Turkish government has followed an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees and provide temporary protection to them. Under the temporary protection system, Syrians obtained basic rights that are similar to those of refugees such as access to food, shelter, health, and education as well as non-refoulment and resettlement to a third country (Dardagan-Kibar, 2013). The prolonged stay of Syrians in Turkey, on the other hand, undermines the success of temporary protection and emphasizes the importance of long-term planning and integration policies (Icduygu & Millet, 2016).

Because of the protracted situation of refugees in most cases, and the fact that the majority of the world's refugees are self-settled (Jacobsen, 2001; IRC, 2017), discussions on durable solutions and integration gain more attention from host states and international actors. While the number of refugees, asylees and migrants have been increasing globally, it is crucial to plan beyond the initial response to displaced persons and to consider integration methods from their arrival regardless of the possibility of their permanent stay or repatriation. The UNHCR has also proposed and supported three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, resettlement to a third country and local integration.

The available literature also agrees that integration is a two-way process, which requires efforts not only from the newcomers but also from the host society (Korac, 2001; Morrice, 2007; Borrie, 1959; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). The significance and benefits of

integration are the key factors that affect the willingness of the host country to pursue integration, refugees themselves and the relevant international organs. It is important to achieve successful integration because it can constitute a durable solution for protracted refugees (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Melteheanos & Ioannidi, 2002). Refugees can also constitute human and social capital, through which the host society can benefit from their knowledge and skills as well as from their culture (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Korac, 2001), and it is a comprehensive way to ensure the human rights and dignity of refugees.

The integration of refugees and migrants can be studied through both economic integration, as well as socio-cultural integration or integration to the education system, and these are interrelated and affect one another. Thus, successful integration requires incorporation into each and every aspect of life. Considering that half of the refugee population are children, the education of refugee children is an important step for the overall integration of refugees and their future in the host country. Integration into the education system is an important variable influencing refugees' future socio-economic status in the society (Bansak et al., 2018), Education can also improve self-esteem (Morrice, 2007; Borrie, 1959), and ideas of citizenship and belonging (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Borrie, 1959) at the schools, education will also help to promote skilled social capital for the society (Morrice, 2007). Specifically, language education is crucial for the integration of refugees, which will be required for social interactions and participation in the labor market (Melteheanos & Ioannidi, 2002; Borrie, 1959). Finally, the adaptation and integration of children into school will affect their families as well, since the school is also a social institution which reflects a sample of the society. Moreover, through education, the students will have a good knowledge of the language, history, and the aspects of the new culture and environment which will also advance their parents' integration (Borrie, 1959, p.137; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017).

In the case of Syrians in Turkey, despite their prolonged stay, the idea of integration is still new due to legal and social obstacles. Turkey and Syria share a long historical background that can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire. Living together under the empire for centuries and then sharing a border as neighbors created cultural and religious ties between the two nations as well as ethnic and religious similarities. Thus, the reception of Syrians at the beginning was based on ideas of ‘guests’, ‘neighbors’, and ‘Muslim brothers’. Also, before the conflict, the two countries experienced growth in their trade volume (Cetin, 2016), and improved diplomatic relations with “reciprocal liberalization of visa policies” (Kirisci, 2014) which steadily increased the number of visitors between the countries. Hence, many of the first flow of Syrian refugees had already acquired passports which eased their border crossing. However, despite shared values between the two nations, there are still differences in language, cultural and religious practices. According to the survey of Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center (HUGO), the majority of Turkish participants supported the statement of ‘helping Syrians due to humanitarian reasons regardless of religion, ethnicity and language’ rather than ‘historical and geographical ties’, ‘ethnic brotherhood’, or ‘religious brotherhood’ (Erdogan, 2014). Moreover, surveys among Syrians in Turkey also show that some Syrians do not feel positively about the shared history during the Ottoman Empire and considered Turks as occupiers of their lands. In line with this, the Turkish Ministry of National Education, working together with the Syrian Ministry of Education, edited the Syrian textbooks for children and removed parts about the Assad government as well as negative statements on the Ottoman Empire and the Turks (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017). Turkey’s regional interests and involvement with Syrian conflict on the basis of border protection is also affecting Syrians’ reception and their relations Turkish society. While Turkey’s military operations are condemned by many

Syrians, Turkish people tend to relate terrorist attacks and insecurity in the borders with the arrival of Syrians.

In order to regulate the increasing number of foreigners in the country, Turkey introduced a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 that provides regulation for basic concerns of alien status and rights (Dardagan-Kibar, 2013). The law is also the first domestic law governing practices of asylum in Turkey. While the law brings certain rights to Syrians such as non-refoulement, work authorization, access to healthcare and education, and acquisition of immovable property, it does not really address long-term solutions to their stay. Besides local integration, other durable solutions for the Syrians in Turkey would be repatriation and resettlement to a third country. Since Syrians don't have the refugee status in Turkey, they are not eligible for resettlement to a third country under the 1951 Convention. However their case of resettlement can be heard if the third country requests their resettlement, yet it would be less likely to be successful and would take a long time. Although, there are no legal obstacles to repatriation, the escalating conflict in the country indicates that repatriation will not be possible in the near future. Thus, it creates a limbo situation for Syrians which inhibits them in making plans for their futures. Therefore, local integration becomes a likely long-term solution for Syrians in Turkey. Bearing in mind that it has been seven years since the arrival of the first Syrian refugees in Turkey, current policies and practices are still inadequate to address the significance and the urgency of integration methods. Similarly, the adaptation of Syrian children into general public education system is a recent practice and it was only one year ago that the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) ruled to integrate Syrian refugees into the mainstream education system, which is expected to be achieved gradually over three years. Considering that 90 percent of Syrian refugees live outside of Turkish camps, it is important for those children to be able to integrate into mainstream education. However, less is known specifically on refugee

education compared to studies on refugees and migrants more generally (Ozer et al., 2016, p.82). Although NGOs and think tanks have produced reports, there is still a lack of academic research on the education of Syrian refugees in Turkey partially due to the fact that research loses its validity quickly due to the rapidly shifting situation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine current policies and problems on the integration and education of Syrians in Turkey, in order to provide an informed perspective on how to integrate Syrian refugees in Turkey via education. The fact that children comprise more than half of the refugee population in Turkey, and that they represent a vulnerable group (Alpaydin, 2017; Ozer et al., 2016; Duruel, 2016, p.1403-1409; Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014, p. 14), indicates that it is significant to study integration and education to build a better future for all.

1. Methodology

The research relies on qualitative methods via ethnographic observations, fieldwork, in-depth interviews, a focus-group and the review of the existing literature and law. The thesis aims to examine the ways in which education may play a role in Syrian integration in Turkey. Thus, in order to have a better understanding of the current level of integration and situation of their education, the researcher conducted fieldwork in Turkey in the summer of 2018. The location of the research included two main hubs for Syrian refugees, the first being the capital Ankara and the second in Gaziantep, a border city with Syria. The two cities were selected due to their significant population of Syrians, moreover, Ankara offers easier access to government officials and Gaziantep has access to both encamped and self-settled refugees. Fieldwork was undertaken at the beginning of summer which is the end of the fiscal year for education activities in Turkey when education activity reports are released. During the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews were conducted with government officials from the

Ministry of National Education, teachers, educators from the camp, and Syrian parents. A total of 40 interviews were conducted, including 14 Syrian parents and teachers and 26 Turkish educators. The interviewees were identified through referrals and their contacts, thus convenience and snowball sampling were utilized. During the interviews, written consent forms were collected from Turkish participants and verbal consent was obtained for the Syrian participants in order to minimize risk since their documentary status is still not stable in Turkey. In-person interviews and field observations were recorded via note-taking. The main language of interaction was Turkish yet for some of the Syrian participants, the help of an Arabic-Turkish interpreter was needed. The main focus of the field research was self-settled refugees since they represent more than 90 percent of the total refugees and also the rate of school enrollment in cities is quite low in comparison to camps.

In Ankara, semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-settled refugees and unstructured participant-observation occurred with Syrian children. The majority of the participants were Syrian mothers with school-aged children. The questions guide includes two parts. In the first part, they were asked about their overall experiences with settlement in Turkey as well as their socio-economic situation, their perception of integration and thoughts on future prospects. In the second part, they have been asked about their children's experiences with education in Turkey. Interviews with Syrian and Turkish teachers were also held in Temporary Education Centers (TEC). Questions asked during the interviews included their roles and experiences with Syrian refugees and education. In Gaziantep, the interviews with the teachers and education officials were conducted at the tent and container camps in Nizip Accommodation Center. A focus group was also held among Syrian and Turkish primary school teachers in which they discussed the advantages and disadvantages of education in the camp and the differences between the Syrian and Turkish education systems. Participant-observation also allowed for unstructured data collection with children and camp

officials. Ethnographic observations have also been noted for the self-settled refugee neighborhoods, at schools, and at the camp.

The goal of the interviews was to grasp the current state of integration and education of Syrians, in terms of future policy plans on education from the view of policymakers, examine the problems and achievements in practice from the point of the educators and, finally, find out the experiences and expectations of the Syrians. By the same token, the thesis aims to discuss the concepts of refugee integration and education in regards to the unique case of Syrians in Turkey. Thus the paper intends to provide some practical recommendations mainly for the Turkish state but also for educators, NGOs and international actors.

Chapter II will review the literature and the discuss the concepts of integration and education of refugees in a global context. Different approaches and terms will be examined with an emphasis on a stance for cultural pluralism and multicultural education. The relation between integration and education will be analyzed here as well. Chapter III will cover the relations and historical connections between Syrians and Turks, the reception of Syrians and also discuss their education in Turkey. Chapter IV will present the data and analysis of the findings from the fieldwork and the literature. Chapter V will offer policy recommendations for the Turkish government and service providers as well as educational actors. The final chapter will present concluding remarks, highlighting the need for long-term planning and integration and the importance of education for successful integration of Syrians in Turkey.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Integration

Discussions on the integration of refugees and migrants is not a new phenomenon, one which became especially popular during the mid 20th century, yet since that time perspectives on its meaning have shifted and the field has advanced considerably. Approaches to the integration of refugees and migrants have been referred to under different terms, mainly ‘assimilation’, ‘absorption’, ‘melting pot’ and more recently ‘cultural pluralism’, ‘harmonization’ and ‘integration’ (Borrie, 1959; Melteheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Hing 1993; Icduygu, 2015). The term ‘assimilation’ has been heavily used in the second half of the 20th century and even in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which refers to the disappearance of any differences between the newcomers and the host society and the total absorption into their new permanent society (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004). The arguments on the successful integration of different cultures into American society have also created a division between the proponents of ‘melting pot’, ‘Anglo-conformity’ and ‘cultural pluralism’. While the first group would want to preserve Euro-culture, English institutions and language, thereby expecting compliance and assimilation into Euro-culture by all others, cultural pluralists praise the benefits brought by diversity and support the preservation of different cultures and languages as parts of the unity (Hing, 1993; Borrie, 1959; Melteheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). The word ‘integration’ which has replaced assimilation more recently is in the same direction with cultural pluralism. The UNHCR, in its three durable solutions for refugees (repatriation, resettlement and local integration) also uses the term ‘integration’. Therefore, the recent literature on refugees and migrants rejects the loss of cultures by melting into another and focuses more on the incorporation of newcomers into the new country. Integration can be understood as the equal access of refugees and migrants into the labor

market, education, health and other services, participation in politics and other social activities and becoming self-sufficient with ensured dignity and human rights (Korac, 2001; Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Bansak et al., 2018; Melteheneos & Ioannidi, 2002; Hing, 1993).

Because the majority of the world's refugees live outside of the camps and stay long-term in the host country, local integration becomes a prominent durable solution for the wellbeing of both refugees and the host society. The fact that in many of the case self-settled refugees get integrated into society by themselves without or before the assistance of host state, emphasize the importance of the involvement of government in order to ease and better the process. "Isolated refugees and asylum seekers are then placed in areas where the local people themselves have scarce resources", it undermines the possibility to see them as an asset not a burden on the society (Morrice, 2007, p. 166). However, both host state and local population can benefit through local integration of refugees on the matters of "national security, local economic development, reduced burden on community sources, relations with sending country and donors" (Jacobsen, 2001, p. 11). Moreover, children comprise more than half of refugees globally, and as a vulnerable group, may experience deleterious effects (Alpaydin, 2017; Ozer et al., 2016). However, "Education can play a significant role in compensating for all these social, economic and cultural losses that refugees have experienced by reducing uncertainty and rebuilding a sense of confidence" (Alpaydin, 2017). The school is not limited to education but it is also a central institution acting as a support mechanism for refugee children who are trying to adapt to their new life (Ozer et al., 2016, p.88). The school also gives refugee children hope and a sense of normalcy and belonging that are important for traumatized populations (Jalbout, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Thus, education is an important component of achieving successful integration. Education will bring stabilization to children's lives, providing access to skills for a self-sufficient life,

skills to rebuild their own country by creating a qualified human resource, and increase their potential to integrate in the new country by learning the language, culture and becoming a productive member of the society (Jalbout, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017). “The economic orientation of OECD further suggests that the educational system is viewed as a functional sub-system of the economy that treats the student as human capital crucial for the national welfare” (Timm, 2016, p.2). Hence, educating refugees will create human capital for the host country that can benefit the whole society. Similarly, Madziva & Thondhlana (2017) offer 3 approaches to quality education: a human capital approach that focuses on economic gains, a human rights approach that views education as a basic right, and a social justice approach that sees education as an opportunity to hear the voices of marginalized groups (945).

Moreover, previous cases of conflict show “the cyclical nature of conflict, violence, trauma, and poverty” (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015, p.18), yet, through education, refugee children can gain a measure of protection from exploitation through child labor, early marriage, military recruitment, radicalization, marginalization and poverty reproduction (Jalbout, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017). Thus, education can provide a better future for refugees in the new country by contributing to their overall integration but it also can create a skilled and educated generation who can be the means for rebuilding their country and preventing new crises in their home and host countries.

2. Education

A review of the literature on refugee education demonstrates that there are several indicators of successful education policies, including legal status in the host society, the degree of similarities and differences between the societies, and the willingness and capacity of the host country. For the successful education of refugees, the policymakers first and

foremost should take the psychological state of traumatized children into consideration (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Rutter, 2006), there must be a focus on language education and it should be a “welcoming environment, free of racism and violence” (Rutter, 2006, p.5). Moreover, policymakers should realize that neither the society nor the refugee population is homogeneous (Morrice, 2007; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Borrie, 1959; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017), thus, education policies and curriculum should be built accordingly. Arnot and Pinson (2005), investigated different conceptual models to refugee education in the U.K. where they identified good practice as a holistic model that “aims to contribute to social inclusion, well-being and development of students” (40). Furthermore, the education of refugees should be mixed and united without gender discrimination or elimination of underserved children (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Borrie, 1959). Finally, the community connection and the involvement of NGOs are also significant for the comprehensive education policies for refugees (Morrice, 2007; Borrie, 1959). Last but not least, in order to achieve a successful educational outcome that can grasp the above-mentioned features, it is crucial to eliminate challenges and problems such as discrimination, inclusion of students with lack of psychological assessment and lack of language skills into mainstream schools (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012), and insufficient training for teachers and school personnel on how to deal with refugee children.

There are also arguments on the language of education. While some argue that refugee education should promote the durable solution of repatriation and thus teaching in their native language and curriculum (Alpaydin, 2017), others argue that in order to fully integrate refugees, they should be included in the mainstream education (Timm, 2016; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017). Recently, due to the protracted nature of the conflicts, the UNHCR has also changed its focus on instruction in the language of origin country to the inclusion of refugees into the national education system and studying in host country language (Dryden-

Peterson & Hovil, 2004). The general motive behind the arguments is to adopt an education model that can “help children to embrace their new home and learn the host-country language without losing their ties to own culture” (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015, p.2). Studies show that educational outcomes are better when newcomers adapt to new cultures while keeping their connections with their original culture (McBrien, 2005) thus, “strengths of a bicultural identity ease the emotional strain of integration” (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Thus, an education system that can support the overall integration should also take into consideration the differences and social capital of the newcomers as well. “A more sustainable and democratic alternative to assimilation is the concept of cultural pluralism which states that newcomers acculturate best by maintaining their unique cultural identities, values and practices provided they are not in conflict with the laws and values of the host society” (Timm, 2016, p.4). In line with that, Timm (2016), argues that in order to support cultural pluralism, the education system should involve the needs of newcomers and shift to multicultural education since refugees contribute to the overall education through their own experiences rather than being a burden.

In the case of Turkey with Syrian refugees, the means of social and educational integration have evolved over time. The government policies and early literature on Syrians in Turkey were focused on temporary measures which are also related to Turkey’s geographical limitation clause to the 1951 Convention which allows Turkey to not to grant refugee status for non-Europeans. However, more recently both the Turkish authorities and academics have recognized the prolonged situation of Syrians and the limits to temporary protection (Oner & Genc, 2015), hence, the literature has started to focus more on the integration of Syrian refugees. In the literature on Syrian refugees in Turkey, there are two main focus; the first mainly studies the problems of Syrians and the second focuses on the public perception

towards the Syrians (Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015, p. 239). Both groups have recently increased their attention to long-term solutions and integration.

The protracted situation of Syrians and challenges to their integration gain attention from academics and policymakers, who highlight the necessity of policy changes. However, despite the improvements and efforts of the Turkish authorities, the integration process of Syrians has still not been dealt with in depth through proper policies. The process has mainly built on helping refugees by giving certain rights and proper living conditions but neglecting to integrate them into society for the long-term. The fact that Turkish authorities even avoid of the use of the term ‘integration’ and instead use the word ‘harmonization’ in official statements provides further support (Icduygu, 2015). Thus, LFIP does not mention *integration* yet it introduces duties of the Directorate General in related to mutual *harmonization* for the purpose of “equipping foreigners with the knowledge and skills to be independently active in all areas of social life without the assistance of third persons” in Turkey, in a third country of resettlement or in the country of origin (Article 96). While collective understanding of integration refers to idea of belonging with equal rights in the path to citizenship, harmonization emphasize the foreignness of newcomers who are being offered rights and services in their temporary space (Strang & Ager 2010).

In terms of education, every year lost is crucial. Children who are dropout of school and lack of necessary education are in danger of marginalization and fell into cycle of poverty, violence and exploitation (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Jalbout, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017). On the other hand, by providing proper education to all children states can create a social capital through educated people who are self-sufficient, self-aware and can contribute to the common good of society. Despite the efforts of MoNE, only after their 5th year in Turkey, the schooling percentage for Syrian children has reached 60 percent which is still low considering that 12 years of education is compulsory and free in

Turkey. The literature on Syrians in Turkey focuses on problems, yet few address practical solutions, and even fewer focus on the relation between education and integration. In the broader literature, although there are many works on the integration of migrants, relatively less research has been done on the local integration of refugees. Therefore, the aim for this research is to examine current policies and problems on integration and education of Syrians in Turkey and propose practical policy recommendation.

CHAPTER III: THE CASE OF TURKEY

1. Background

Turkey has long been a country of destination for migrants because of its convenient location as a transit corridor between West and East, North and South. Besides its transit role, the country has also been considered both a sending and receiving country for migrants. Its diverse society and ties with its neighbors can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire which created an ethnolinguistic and multicultural society in the region. After the fall of the empire, while many ethnic groups founded their own nation-states and caused mass migrations in the region, some stayed in the newly formed countries. Thus, especially in the border cities of Turkey, many neighborhoods have strong ties and relatives across the border. Syria shares the longest borderline with Turkey, and some border villages were divided in two after the dissolution of the Empire, which are called by the same name on both sides of the border (Orhan & Gundogar, 2015). The familial connection is also one of the most important elements for Syrian refugees to flee to Turkey where they may have relatives to help them out. Similarly, neither the refugees nor the Turkish citizens on the border are homogenous groups, a fact which affects the settlement choice of the refugees and their reception from the host society (Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017, p.989). Thus, while Kurdish people in eastern

Turkey are generally sympathetic to Kurdish refugees, those with Arab origins prefer ethnic Arab communities also in the east, and while Turkish Alevis may feel threatened by largely Sunni Syrian newcomers, the Turkish population more broadly tends to favor Turkmen refugees (Orhan & Gundogar, 2015, 17).

Since its foundation, Turkey has experienced both inward and outward flows of people. “From 1923 to 1997, more than 1.6 million people immigrated to Turkey, mostly from Balkan countries” (Kirisci, 2003). During this period, the country received immigrants mainly from Soviet nations and the Middle East. “Right after the Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War, approximately one million Iranians entered Turkey in 1979 ... after the Massacre of Halapja in 1988 and Gulf War in 1991, more than half a million people took refuge in Turkey and they were recognized as ‘guests’ without any official legal protection” (Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015, p. 238). Besides people fleeing from conflicts, Turkey experienced population exchanges with Greece, Bulgaria, Israel, and Armenia. Hence, while many newcomers returned back to their birth countries when periods of conflict ended, some preferred to stay and naturalized over time. “Then, the government of Turkey gave these people a chance of becoming [a] Turkish citizen by evaluating their status in the framework of 1934 Settlement Law” (Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015, p. 239). On the other hand, Syrian refugees are a unique case in both countries’ history. Syrian refugees in Turkey are not eligible for citizenship under the 1934 Settlement Law since they do not have Turkish origin and culture, yet they are not eligible for refugee status either under the country’s obligations to the 1951 Convention due to the treaty’s geographic limitation. Thus, Turkey accepted Syrians as guests at the beginning of the war and refugee crisis but also offered Temporary Protection. More recently, Syrians are now allowed to apply for citizenship.

2. The Reception of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Turkey's open-door policy toward Syrians since the beginning of the conflict changed the country's demographics dramatically with the arrival of 3.6 million migrants. This radical change over the last seven years created a need for immediate policy measures regarding the status and rights of foreigners in the country. Prior to this, Turkey did not have a "comprehensive migration and asylum regime which relied mainly on two legislative documents until the adoption of the LFIP in 2013" (Oner & Genc, 2015, p. 253). Before the LFIP, Turkey's regulations were based on the 1934 Settlement Law which was revisited in 2006 (while revision kept the pre-condition on Turkish origin, it changed the discriminative statements such as towards LGBT+ people) and the 1994 Regulation on the Procedures and Principles related to Possible Population Movements and Aliens Arriving in Turkey (Oner & Genc, 2015). Besides the national law, Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol that regulates the status and rights of refugees. However, it is the only country that maintains the original geographical limitations acknowledging refugees only from Europe (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2015). Thus, the latest refugee exodus undermined the secondary law on asylum in Turkey which aims to bring laws in line with the EU standards with the adoption of LFIP. "The new legal regulation is much more detailed and systematic ... on the other hand, [it] reflects the priority given to public policy and security concerns" (Dardagan-Kibar, 2013, p.125-126). However, although the new law brought rights and protection for aliens, it is still regulating mainly the temporary protection regime. Despite its achievement of expanding rights and scope compared to the old law, it has been criticized for keeping the geographical limitations for refugee status and instead, bringing in the term 'conditional refugees' which are basically non-European refugees (Oner & Genc, 2015; IBU Child Studies Unit, 2015, p. 2). Article 42 of the LFIP indicates "Refugees, conditional refugees, and subsidiary protection beneficiaries, as well as persons under temporary

protection or humanitarian residence permit holders, are not entitled to the right of transfer to a long-term residence permit”.¹ For Syrians in Turkey, Temporary Protection Regulation was granted in 2014. Therefore, it is expected for those people to repatriate or resettle to a third country in the long-run which undercuts individual and institutional efforts at local integration.

Since the beginning of the reception of Syrians, both the Turkish authorities and society consider their stay as temporary and treat them as guests. Hence, when their stay is prolonged, discontent has risen among the Turkish host population. Complaints from society include competition in the workforce and an associated reduction in wages, increases in rents, overcrowded social institutions such as schools and hospitals, increases in begging and stealing on the streets, and fear of newcomers gaining political and citizenship rights (Jalbout, 2015, p. 4). Although some of the frustration of the host society can be eliminated through public policy and planning, it has been argued that the media has a significant impact on public opinion about Syrians (Dryden-Peterson & Hovit , 2004; Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014; Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015). While some argue that “most policies benefiting Syrians are framed as gestures of goodwill to a victimized population based on a moral and religious duty,” without reference to or emphasis on the normative and legal protections based on international and humanitarian law (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014, p. 41). There are also arguments that the media frames Syrians as “helpless,” “deprived and needy” and thus hinder the realization of their potential contributions to Turkey (Cebi, 2017, p.143). Therefore, both the laws and the media have shaped the public perception and the integration period of Syrians in Turkey. In a broader context, there are other barriers to the integration of Syrians that are discussed in the literature. These can be summarized as informal legal status since they are still under temporary protection and have not been recognized as refugees; problems

¹ Article 42, Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Published: April 2014, Available from: http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf

with participation in the labor force such as limitations to work authorization, labor exploitation and job scams, and illegal labor with lower than minimum wage (Cetin, 2016; Baban et al., 2017); negative public perception towards the refugees (Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015; Yildiz & Uzgoren, 2016; Orhan & Gundogar, 2015); challenges with access to education (Yildiz & Uzgoren, 2016); and finally inadequate implication of laws and policies mainly due to the lack of knowledge about the new regulations, inadequate explanation or even misinformation on rights and practices.

In the discussion of solutions to the abovementioned barriers to integration, some support the shift from a service-based to a rights-based approach (Yildiz & Uzgoren, 2016), some argue for greater inclusion and empowerment of municipalities (Cetin, 2016) and *muhtarliks* (neighborhood representatives) (Bariscil et al., 2017), some point out the importance of capacity-building and public relations (Kanat & Ustun, 2015) and others also focus on help from NGOs (Cebi, 2017) and increasing collective help from the international community (Sandal et al., 2016; Yildiz & Uzgoren, 2016; Bariscil et al., 2017; Icduygu, 2015).

Since the beginning of the reception of Syrians, Turkey has been the primary actor responsible for the needs of Syrians in its territory and has spent around 8 billion US dollars for the purpose. This constitutes the largest investment made to address the Syrian crisis which was larger than the total budget for the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for five hosting countries (Jalbout, 2015, p. 3). However, the increasing number of newcomers and their prolonged stay in the country eventually led Turkey to search for financial and strategic assistance from the international community. To date, structural assistance has been provided by UN agencies, mainly the UNHCR and UNICEF as well as the EU, and financial assistance has been received from country donors including the U.S., Kuwait, Japan, the U.K., Germany, and Finland (Jalbout, 2015, p. 12). Nonetheless,

considering the high cost of accommodating a large and rapidly growing population, international assistance only covers a small portion of total expenses which is still behind the required funding for 3RP. Hence, in order to properly address the needs of Syrians in Turkey, the international community should be committed to its obligations under UN funding plans and Turkey should seek ways to increase support from outside donors (Jalbout, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Bariscil et al., 2017).

3. The Education of Syrian Children in Turkey

Turkey regulates the education of foreigners according to its domestic law as well as the international agreements to which it is a signatory. Turkey is party to several international agreements that includes clauses on right to education such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 54). In addition to its obligations under international law, Turkey has domestic laws that establish rights to education. The 5395 Child Protection Law provides protection of rights to every child in Turkey regardless of their nationality (IBU Child Studies Unit, 2015). Similarly, Article 42 of the Constitution of Turkey addresses the right and duty of education indicating that “No one shall be deprived of the right of education” and “Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools” which again embrace every child in the country. ² By the same token, in 2012, Turkey expanded compulsory and free education from eight to twelve years, divided between primary, lower and upper secondary school (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p.18). The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) which is the

² Article 42, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Published: October 1982, Available from: https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf

primary government organ responsible for education also provides free textbooks for compulsory educational institutions and students.

The educational needs of Syrians created the necessity of an additional law and departments to more effectively coordinate the situation. Before the arrival of Syrian refugees, the framework of rights and services for the education of foreign students was regulated with the Foreign Students Circular (Duruel, 2016). However, the first comprehensive directive regarding the educational rights of the asylees and refugees was established by the 2014/21 Circular on Educational Services for Foreigners when the LFIP came into effect. One of the most important aspects of the Circular was that it granted the right to enroll in schools with foreign identification regardless of whether the individual possessed a residence permit, which previously had been an issue for many Syrians (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Duruel, 2016). In 2016, the MoNE also founded a department to regulate planning and coordinating Syrian education, called the Immigration and Emergency Education Department under its Directorate for Lifelong Learning (Tastan & Celik, 2017, p. 26).

“Educational activities outside the camps were first initiated when a Syrian teacher who came to Nizip expressed the Syrian children’s need for education to the then-President of Religious Affairs Mehmet Görmez” (Tastan & Celik, 2017, p. 23). This initiative started as religious and Quranic classes for Syrian children and turned into the basis of Temporary Education Centers (TECs). MoNE has formalized the TECs with the 2014/21 Circular and they started operating both in- and outside of the camps. The goal for the foundation of the TECs was to prevent Syrian students falling behind on their education and providing temporary education so that they would not experience severe educational gaps upon return to their country (Tastan & Celik, 2017, p. 25; Duruel, 2016, p. 1406). Thus the curriculum at TECs is a modified Syrian curriculum and the language of education is Arabic. The main difference in the modified Turkish curriculum is the exclusion of supportive statements

toward the Assad regime and negative statements toward the Ottoman Empire (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2014; Duruel, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017). The classes at TECs are mainly focused on teaching Turkish and familiarizing children with Turkish culture while maintaining their ties to the Syrian education system as well. Besides the TECs, other options for Syrian children include non-formal education mostly through non-profits and religious institutions, Syrian private schools, and the Turkish public school which requires language proficiency in Turkish. However as hopes of Syrian return faded, the enrollment rates at TECs have increased since it is the most accessible option. The schooling rate has doubled and reached 60% among Syrian refugee children by 2017. The Ministry also created an online system called YOBIS to track enrollment, absence, and success of Syrian students (Tastan & Celik, 2017). On the other hand, the longevity of Syrian displacement also led the MoNE to consider alternatives to TECs because it was only a valid solution if Syrians were to return back soon. Otherwise, the certificate they receive upon graduation from TECs has no accreditation either in Turkey or elsewhere. Another motive for the Ministry to begin organizing alternative educational options for Syrians is its position that education in Arabic and the Syrian curriculum slows the integration process (Coskun et al., 2017, p.13). Thus, in 2016, the MoNE ruled to close down the TECs gradually within three years and transfer all students to public schools where they will join the mainstream education system.

Turkey is the principal actor in the education of Syrian children in its country both in terms of planning and budgeting. The main contributors to their education are also UNICEF, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) and UNHCR along with country donors via technical and financial support (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The European Union is also the donor for the largest educational project for Syrians in Turkey, dubbed Promoting Integration of Syrian Children to the Turkish Education System (PICTES). PICTES is a two-year project under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT) program signed between the

EU and Turkey in 2016. The goal of the project is to integrate Syrians into the Turkish educational system, increase the quality of Syrian education, and capacity-building in schools and personnel via Turkish & Arabic language classes, make-up and tutorial classes, raising awareness on educational opportunities, school materials and transportation support, and supporting teacher wages and training.

3.a. Problems in Syrian Children's Education in Turkey

Temporary measures to support Syrian children's education are gradually being replaced by long-term planning and systems by the MoNE. However, there are still major problems that undermine the quality and success of the educational system for newcomers. Especially with the incorporation of Syrian students into mainstream education, obstacles become more crucial, spreading to public schools and affecting a greater number of students. Nevertheless, as laid out by the EU as well as a basis for the PICTES project, "their enrollment into the Turkish education system is an opportunity to support overall integration efforts" (EU Delegation to Turkey, 2017). Therefore, it is significant to focus on barriers to integration to the education system and eliminate them. Problems that are heavily discussed include economic hardships, lack of language proficiency, cultural differences and adaptation, discrimination at schools, insufficient psychological support and counseling, inexperienced teachers, staff shortages, lack of school materials, and inadequate information about the law, system and opportunities in Turkey (Alpaydin, 2017; Duruel, 2016; Nielsen & Grey, 2013; Coskun et al., 2017).

One of the main issues that affects the schooling of Syrian children is economic hardship since most of the families have little to no income and rely on government support. Also, there are children living in single-parent households, parents and children with disabilities, or children living with other relatives. Thus, most Syrian refugees are not able to

afford school expenses such as transportation, uniforms or fees. Moreover, sometimes children are expected to work in order to contribute to the family income or girls get married in return for bridewealth compensation to their family (Coskun et al., 2017, p. 30; Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 9; Tastan & Celik, 2017, p. 2; Duruel, 2016, p. 1412). Due to the actuality of their situation and frequent changes in regulations, Syrian families often lack information on their children's educational rights and opportunities or how to access them. Similarly, Turkish personnel is also not well informed on most recent regulations which cause Syrian children to be refused to schools or asked for extra unnecessary documents (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Tastan & Celik, 2017).

The language barrier is another significant issue for the integration of Syrian children in Turkish schools. With the exception of Turkomans, most Syrian refugees speak only Arabic, and despite compulsory Turkish language classes, their interaction with Turkish peers and teachers is not as engaged as it should be. Thus, language capacity affects the willingness of both Syrian students and teachers negatively to engage with each other. It also affects communication between the school and parents since most of them do not attend school meetings and miss announcements and events due to the language barrier. Hence, some families prefer Syrian schools or religious schools rather than Turkish schools (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 24). Similarly, some students leave Turkish schools when they struggle with the Turkish language since they are not able to comprehend the lessons and may face discrimination from their peers or teachers because of language or cultural differences. Although there are similarities between the two cultures, the differences in school environment such as female Syrian students avoiding male students or teachers, and some female students wearing the headscarf along with language differences can cause alienation among Syrian students. Negative and distant attitudes toward Syrians from some teachers and Turkish parents also leads to a polarization in the classroom between Turks and Syrians

(Tastan & Celik, 2017; Ozer et al., 2016, p. 87). The competency of teachers in dealing with students from different cultures and traumatized backgrounds is crucial to coping with problems in the classroom. Therefore, teachers and other school personnel who lack the necessary training to work with refugees can exacerbate existing problems (Alpaydin, 2017, p. 42). For instance, sufficient counseling for traumatized students is undermined by language barriers and the high number of students in need (Duruel, 2016, p. 13; Coskun et al., 2017; Ozer et al., 2016, p. 99). In addition, although there are Syrian teachers working at Turkish schools, there is a lack of Syrian counselors that can help minimize barriers for Syrian students (Coskun et al., 2017, p. 54).

Another problem with the education of Syrians is the school infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and lack of school materials. Public schools which also host TECs face a lack of classroom space and have to operate in double-shifts. Moreover, many schools in the cities that have a high number of Syrians were already having trouble dealing with capacity and infrastructural issues (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 19; Tastan & Celik, 2017, p. 8). Double-shift systems not only generate extra expenses and the need for extra school staff, but it is also not an efficient educational system due to the very early and late hours of instruction. On top of that, transportation is another issue for families since many TECs are located long distances from their homes and late class hours and fees for shuttles are deterrent factors especially for girls' attendance (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 48).

CHAPTER IV : FIELDWORK IN TURKEY

The researcher conducted 6 weeks of fieldwork in two cities in Turkey where data was collected through ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The findings show that Turkish people, mainly educators, tend to have negative opinions and

biases towards the settlement of Syrians in Turkey. However, in-depth interviews also showed that they are willing to be cooperative if integration can be achieved such as through language proficiency and education under the Turkish system. On the other hand, Syrians who have been interviewed were generally pleased and tolerant. However, in similar, they have also pointed out difficulties with integration sometimes driven by biases. The section below will examine the fieldwork and findings in detail.

1. Fieldwork in Ankara

Ankara, as the capital and one of the largest cities in Turkey, is home to a high number of Syrians due to the living and employment opportunities and easy access to government assistance. The city has diplomatic potential due to its capital position and geographical advantage being located in the center of the country, and most of the major government offices are located in Ankara. For instance, the first public school that has officially performed as a TEC is located in Ankara which was also one of the first schools in which the PICTES program was implemented and recently received a high-level visit from the Delegation of the EU in Turkey for the evaluation of the program³.

A total of 24 interviews were conducted in Ankara, 10 of whom were Syrian parents, and the remainder comprising Turkish and Syrian educators (teachers, principals and counselors). The interviews were held in two public schools that are also TECs and located in a neighborhood mostly occupied by Syrian settlers. While most of the interviewees were Turkish speakers (either because they are Turkish or Turcoman Syrian), five of the Syrian interviewees were Arabic-only speakers and a translator provided assistance. The male-

³ The name of the school is *Fatih Sultan Mehmet İlkokulu* in Altindag, Ankara which is one of the places included in the fieldwork (see Appendix A).

female ratio of the participants was close to even overall, with the exception of Syrian participants who are predominantly female.

2. Fieldwork in Nizip Temporary Accommodation Center in Gaziantep

Gaziantep is a border city in the southeastern region of Turkey. It shares a border with the Syrian governorate of Aleppo which puts the city in a geographically strategic location. The city hosts a high density of Syrian refugees who flee to the closest city across the border where some also have relatives. Besides its significant number of self-settled Syrians, Gaziantep also has two Temporary Accommodation Centers (TACs) in its village of Nizip next to the Euphrates (Fırat in Turkish) river. Nizip TAC consists of two divisions called Tent and Container City which are home to around 15,000 people. The TAC includes facilities like education centers, a gymnasium, mosque, and community centers. While the Tent City facilities and houses are constructed out of tents, the Container City has modern one-room container houses and buildings. In the spring of 2018, the two centers have also built concrete education centers with the joint project of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the EU (see Appendix B).

A total of 16 interviewees were contacted in Gaziantep of whom five participated in focus groups. All the participants were educators (teachers, education coordinators, and principals) in the Tent or Container city. While two were Syrian, the remaining participants were Turkish. The interviews were conducted in-person over three days at the education centers in Nizip TAC with the permission from the Gaziantep Directorate of National Education (see Appendix C). All the interviews including the ones with Syrians were conducted in Turkish.

3. Findings

The focus of the fieldwork was on the aspects of integration and education of Syrian settlers in Turkey. While the overall findings of the fieldwork were in line with the previous literature, due to the actuality of the situation, new regulations and improvements pose new conditions and questions as well. In order to protect the identity of the participants, alphabetical and numerical coding has been used to refer to each participant. Syrian interviewees are coded with letter B and Turkish interviewees are coded with letter A, while the focus group with 5 people are referred to as AX.

3.a. Integration

In terms of the question of the integration of Syrians in Turkey, Turkish and Syrian participants have asserted opposing views. Around half of the Turkish interviewees indicated that they do not believe the integration of Syrians is possible. There were three main reasons for this belief that come forward: Syrians are biased against Turkey and the Turkish language and they are not trying to learn (A1, A4, A7, A10, A13, A14, A16), Syrians are hoping to return back home therefore they are not trying to integrate (A1, A10, A13, A14, A15, AX) and finally, the cultures of Syria and Turkey are different and incompatible (A2, A4, A7, A11, A12, A13, A15, A20, AX). The main cultural differences that were brought up were uncleanliness, early age marriage, and polygamy in Syrian families. In terms of the integration of encamped vs. self-settled refugees, most of the participants agreed that self-settled Syrians are more integrated into the society (A13, A15, A18) and it is hard for people in the camp to adapt to the culture and education system (A13, A16, A18, A20, AX, A26). Three of the Turkish interviewees also stated that the places where Syrians are settled in Turkey are already underdeveloped, thus making it more difficult for people to integrate. Since many of the border cities that Syrians prefer already have infrastructural issues, and

with the increase in population, access to health, education and other services becomes more difficult. Syrian participants, on the other hand, believe that Turks do not want them in the country and sometimes verbally abuse them on the streets. Syrian participants report that Turkish people blame them for stealing, begging, and spending their taxes (A6, A8, B1, B3, B7, B9, B11). One of the Syrian participants who lives in Antalya but came to Ankara to see a doctor pointed out that their city government does not offer any services to Syrians in order to deter them; thus, she had to use her Turkish friend's identity card for services (i.e. to get a plane ticket). Syrian interviewees also complained about low wages for Syrian workers compared to their Turkish coworkers, and difficulties in renting a house due to the higher prices and unwillingness of landlords. Ironically, these issues were also brought up by Turks as Syrians cause wages to fall and rents to increase. Besides these counter complaints, both Syrians and Turkish participants accept that the help and tolerance from Turks were better at the beginning of their arrival yet over time community relations deteriorated, while ongoing Syrian integration decreased the need for outside help. Four of the Turkish interviewees also mentioned that they do not help Syrians as they used to because they believe Syrians are ungrateful and do not appreciate Turkish efforts. One of them gave examples of finding school materials distributed to students in the trash, and the use of bread that is distributed by the municipalities as ashtrays. The findings on integration show that there are reciprocal social biases, fears, and misunderstandings that are obstacles for further integration. On the other hand, despite the obstacles, the majority of Syrian participants specified that they are happy with their life in Turkey, they like their neighbors, and wish to learn Turkish so that they can ease their life (B1, B2, B3, B5, B7, B8, B9). Yet three of them emphasized that they do not want their children to forget Arabic since it is the language of the Quran. Four of the Syrian interviewees also indicated that they do not wish to return Syria and thus applied for Turkish citizenship.

3.b Education

The findings on education can be categorized under those related to the Turkish education system and regulations on refugee education, Syrian students' integration into schools and the system, problems experienced in their education and, finally, the benefits of education. Almost all the participants were educators who were working with Syrian students at the time of interviews.

For the question of their opinion about the current education system, two participants supported the TECs, while five participants indicated they do not support mixed education which is the idea of transferring all refugee students into the mainstream education system with their Turkish peers as an alternative to the TEC (A1, A3, A8, A9, A16). TEC supporters emphasized how these centers help students stay on track without losing a year. The arguments against mixed education were based on a presumed incompatibility between Syrian and Turkish students. Six of the participants believed that Syrian students damage the order and discipline in schools thus affecting Turkish students negatively. Another concern was Syrian students' proficiency in Turkish which affects their success in class but also their communication with teachers and other students. The language barrier marginalizes Syrians, thus, teachers complained that they can only talk with other Syrians in Arabic. One of the most significant problems at school stated by more than half of participants was the violence of Syrian students, especially toward their peers. Most of the Syrian refugees in Turkey who fled from the conflict have experienced psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, and PTSD, hence, violence, peer-pressure, and introversion are manifestations of their trauma (Coskun et al., 2017, p.14). By the same token, both teachers in the cities and in the camp indicated that the Syrian education system is different from the Turkish system in the sense that it has a stronger, more authoritarian teacher figure who is allowed and even encouraged to use physical methods to discipline students such as slapping and caning. Therefore, some

of the Turkish teachers complained that Syrian students do not respect or listen to them since teachers tend to be younger, more naïve and mostly women compared to more dominant Syrian teachers in the same school. Primarily, recently graduated young teachers who have not been assigned to any public school prefer to be work as a one-year contracted teacher in TECs. Similarly, the education coordinator in the camp explained that they caught Syrian teachers who use caning which continued for a while despite warnings by the administration since it is supported by Syrian parents. During the interview with a Syrian male coordinator, when talking about the problems in refugee education, the coordinator also jokingly expressed that there is a need for discipline by adding that coordinators should use physical methods to discipline teachers and teachers should use them on students.

Despite the skeptical views towards mixed education, the majority of participants assert that they support mixed education and integration of Syrian students into Turkish schools. The main reasons for their support were that the language and cultural adaptation classes in TECs are not sufficient and a better way to adapt to the culture and learn the language is to get educated with Turkish students. Similarly, most of the participants found PICTES successful and beneficial as well. However, almost all the participants emphasized the insufficiency of language classes despite Syrian students obtaining language classes at school, with the PICTES program and also during summer camps run by private and government offices. Other obstacles to the success of mixed education were the disproportionate distribution of Syrian students in Turkish schools and age and competency differences within the classroom. School principals interviewed complained that while a few schools are struggling to accommodate a high number of Syrian students with double and sometimes triple shifts, others do not have any Syrian students at all. In addition, there are many students who had to leave school for a few years due to the conflict or displacement, and when they enroll they do not have the necessary knowledge base to enroll in the same

classroom with their peers, thus they have been enrolling in a lower grade-level class. Some of the participants indicated that age difference in the classroom, especially during puberty, can cause problems in the class environment.

As one of the most crucial factors in education, teacher interviewees emphasized the vicarious trauma they experienced and the lack of support they receive to cope with it. Participants in the camp also pointed out that the majority of teachers working in the camps have one-year contracts and are newly graduated and inexperienced. Moreover, teachers themselves also stated that knowing that they are temporary affects their willingness and efforts to engage with students. The frequent change in teachers undermines students' attachment to school. Another critique was the inadequacy of counseling services at school and the lack of experienced counselors available for Syrian students. Many Syrian participants, on the other hand, expressed that they are very pleased with Turkish teachers and find them very passionate and caring towards children. One Syrian teacher indicated that compared to their education system in Syria, Turkish teachers are more involved with children and perform a caretaking role, similar to a parent. Another Syrian interviewee who is taking care of her orphan grandson stated that she has been offered many forms of assistance from the grandson's teacher including adopting him if it is too difficult for the elderly couple to take care of him.

The capacity and facilities of the school and TECs are inadequate to satisfy the needs of a high number of students. Five of the participants specifically emphasized that their schools need both psychological and material support. Although material support is provided by different international and domestic organizations as well as the government, they are not sufficient. In addition, four of the participants draw attention to the fact that most of the material support is distributed to Syrian children only, which creates a sense of discrimination towards Turkish students. Many of these schools are located in suburban neighborhoods

where Turkish families also have low incomes and their children are in need of help as well. A principal and a teacher from different schools mentioned that international organizations (i.e. UNICEF) came to their schools and distributed some materials (i.e. school supplies, clothes, shoes, snacks etc.) only to Syrian students in front of all the students. Both participants expressed their discomfort with the organization's officers due to the discrimination and made them expand their help to Turkish students in need as well.

Despite the problems and challenges in education, most of the participants agreed on the benefits of education for Syrian integration. The prominent achievements that are repeated by several participants were that the schools help children to adapt to Turkish culture by exposing them to it on a daily basis, Turkish proficiency is improved through language classes and also opportunities to practice in mixed classes at school, the school creates a positive change in the behaviors and mental health of Syrian children by giving them a feeling of belonging and normality, and finally, education reduces the risk of radicalization and terror activities especially within the camps where it is easier to be exploited in an excluded space. One of the interviewees stated that through the school in the camp they found out that some girls in high school had been involved in early marriage (younger than 18 years), so they reached out to the families, used the community center and mosque to inform people about the illegality of this practice and its harmful effects. Yet, when the practice still continued behind the scenes, the school reached out to the imam who gave his blessing to those marriages and was finally able to reduce the practice and bring some of those girls back to school. Participants who worked at the camp also indicated that children find the school to be a fun place and they do not miss a class since it is their main connection to the world outside of the camp. Some participants mentioned that even simple things from daily life such as a car, an animal or a flower can be completely new for those children who have never been outside the camp thus, they encounter this world via school, sometimes during a lecture

sometimes through a school trip. One of the participants shared a story from their school trip where a male Syrian student mentioned that in Syria, women normally do not attend these kinds of events and mostly walk behind the men, and a female Syrian student responded as “it was in the past, we are different here” (A17). Similarly, both the teachers at the camp and at the city acknowledged that Syrian students took them as a role model especially female students, such as in wearing their headscarf the same way as their teachers. Therefore, teachers, the school and their interaction with students are crucial for Syrian children in terms of their perspective towards Turks and the culture as well as generating their own values and character.

In summary, this project finds that the education of Syrian children in Turkey is significant for their integration to their new society but also in order to build their future which will affect the futures of both Turkey and Syria in the long term. However, the findings also show that there are difficulties to be overcome in terms of communication and biases between the two societies that increase the significance of the role of teachers, the school and quality education. There are also technical, infrastructural, financial and regulative problems brought up which are the responsibility of government authorities.

4. Limitations

The situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey is an on-going issue that is subject to change over time. At the time of the writing of this thesis, there might be changes in the system and it is possible that new regulations that can affect the integration and education of Syrians might be introduced. The fieldwork in Ankara was conducted in two schools and one neighborhood where most of the participants were either related or belonged to the same group of settlers which was commonly Turcoman. In addition, although in Ankara both parents and teachers were interviewed, in Nizip TAC, the researcher was only able to make

contact with teachers due to the strict approval process to communicate with settlers. Thus, this research does not claim to reflect the general opinion of all the Syrians and Turks in Turkey. Due to confidentiality concerns, audio-recording has not been utilized and all the interviews were recorded by note-taking. Moreover, during an interview with a few Syrian participants who only speak Arabic, the researcher was assisted by other participants for interpretation which affects the accuracy and privacy of the conversation. Another challenge during the interviews was to achieve complete privacy where most of the participants preferred to stay in the same room with others, thereby possibly affecting each others' answers.

CHAPTER V: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

1. Policy Recommendations

- 1) The integration of refugees can be successful as long as it is supported with government law and policies. Although Turkey has realized the importance of long-term planning as a response to the prolonged stay of Syrians, the regulations and path towards integration are still not clear and progressive. The Directorate of Migration Management (DMM) prefers to use the term *harmonization* instead of *integration* which contradicts and eliminates impetus for future planning for Syrians. DMM explains their responsibility under LFIP as “Harmonization stipulated by Law and in the duties of our Directorate General is neither an assimilation nor an integration. It is rather a voluntary harmonization resulting from a mutual understanding of each other between the migrants and the society” (The Directorate of Migration Management). Thus, in order to eliminate the uncertainties in Syrians' future in Turkey, clear law and regulations on integration

should be established and they should explicitly be explained both to refugees and locals.

- 2) Biases, misunderstanding and media-oriented opinions harm the relations between Turks and Syrians. Turkish authorities and media should work together to inform and explain all the facts and laws to avoid conflicts and marginalization in the society. For instance, some services and opportunities to Syrians such as citizenship and exemption from taxation should clearly be explained to the public with laws and their justification. During the interviews, some of Turkish participants stressed their furiousness because of tax immunity for Syrians. Accordingly, in their neighborhood in Ankara, there had been conflicts between Syrian and Turkish shop owners due to tax immunity and Arabic signs of Syrians stores. The conflict caused some Syrians to lost their store in fire and resulted in change of signs with Turkish. Turkish society should be informed and encouraged on positive discrimination other than exploitation. Similarly, inequalities in wages and rents for Syrians should be defeated by both criminalizing the discrimination but also promoting employers and landlords with incentives. One of the Syrian participants shared that they have been problems with finding an apartment since landlords either ask for a lot of money or do not rent at all because they are Syrian or because they have a lot children. She explained that they try to hide two of her children in order to be able to rent the house but when it did not work out they had to stay on street for two days until another Turkish tenant helped them (B3). Moreover, government and international aid providers to Syrians should consider not ignoring and discriminating against the underserved Turkish population as well which may generate hostility in the society.

- 3) Temporary Education Centers (TECs) have been an important step for the education of Syrians when many children had a chance to continue their education and learn Turkish. However, it has been acknowledged that TECs are not beneficial in the long run since they are not accredited and inadequate for full adaptation to culture and language. While Turkish authorities took the first step by approving the gradual shut down of the TECs within three years, this process should be handled with great care. Students with insufficient Turkish proficiency should be guided to language preparatory schools before starting public school. Students who have lost years in their education should be provided with expedited remedial classes rather than being placed in a class with younger levels. For instance, one Syrian parent stated that his son had been placed in 2nd grade at school at first, then he has been transferred to first grade and 3rd grade within a year due to his misbehavior in the classroom (B6). Yet, this misplacement of class negatively affected his adaptation to school, to his classmates and to the lectures. The curriculum should also be modified in order to address the concerns of Syrian families on forgetting Arabic and Syrian culture. The MoNE has already planned to add elective classes of Arabic Literature and Language, and Arab Nation Culture, however, it is important to inform people about the new system as well. Finally, there should be a compulsory class for Cultural Adaptation in order to ease the transition of Syrian students.
- 4) The public schools have had trouble accommodating the high number of students where only a few schools carry the greatest burden. However, with the closing of TECs, these schools which are already operating in double-shifts will be less efficient. Therefore, the system should be revisited to support an equal distribution of Syrian students rather than registering students in their neighborhood. Turkish

teachers from these schools indicated that some Syrian students particularly girls miss their classes especially during winter since it gets dark and late when the classes end. Transportation support should be provided if necessary or funds should be allocated to build new schools for the neighborhood with a high number of Syrians. These schools should also be supported with school materials, experienced staff and training.

- 5) Families, teachers and schools are the three main elements of education (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017). Syrian families who are excluded due to the language barrier should actively be part of the education of their children. In that matter, school-parent organizations at schools should work with both Turkish and Syrian parents and act as a bridge between them, utilizing an interpreter for meetings and events if necessary. Schools should organize activities such as picnics, celebrations, and trips to merge Syrian parents with Turkish parents and teachers. Schools can help to increase the support of families for their children and eliminate the conflict in the classroom by eliminating the conflict between families. During an interview, a school principal (A6) told that he did meetings with Turkish parents to explain the importance of schooling for Syrians and how it may affect the neighborhood negatively if they do not attend classes. He said that this way he was able to ease the tension and objection of Turkish parents towards Syrian students at the school and some parents even started to report Syrian children who does not go to school. In similar, he also did meetings with Syrian parents explaining the importance of schooling for their acceptance and adaptation in the society. By the same token, by building a healthy relationship with families, schools can prevent dropouts due to economic hardships or biases towards school. Besides the family relationship, schools should

also promote better communication between Syrian and Turkish teachers whose combined work will be necessary to achieve successful education for Syrian students.

- 6) Teachers are the most important actors in the education of refugees, through which they are exposed to extra stress and trauma. It is important that teachers who are engaging with refugee children have necessary training and education on how to communicate and handle them. Although the PICTES program has provided training for teachers, it only covers teachers within the program. During the fieldwork, many teachers expressed that they have been experiencing vicarious trauma and they have been left alone in many aspects such as how to interpret the curriculum, how to communicate with students and to protect their own mental health. They stated that besides the teachers within the PICTES, no one received any training or workshop regarding working with refugees. Thus, the MoNE should provide compulsory and comprehensive training for teachers, school staff and principals who will be interacting with refugee children. Finally, each school with refugee students should have an experienced and trained school counselor in order to efficiently address the psychological needs of student. MoNE should also seek and encourage the hiring of Syrian teachers who can support and reduce the job load on Turkish teachers.
- 7) The support of NGOs and the international community is significant to provide better educational opportunities for Syrian children. Turkish authorities, as the main actor for the educational needs of Syrians, should build more partnerships and programs such as PICTES in order to increase its funds and capacity for improving conditions. Similarly, NGOs should be involved and provide assistance to Syrian students in their transition to the new system after TECs. For instance,

with the closing of TECs one of the Syrian public schools have been turned into a study center in order to help students with their homework since most of them cannot get this support from their families due to language barriers. Thus, NGOs should support Syrian students and parents in their adaptation to the Turkish education system.

2. Conclusion

The regions of the Middle East and North Africa have been shaken by the pro-democracy movements at the beginning of 2011 when several countries with predominantly Muslim populations began protesting against their governments. In 2011, Syrians protested against the corruption and authoritarian rule of the Assad government, which soon turned into a civil war that includes different interest groups. When the conflict escalated and spread around the country, it also created a humanitarian crisis in the region. “In the five years since protestors in Syria first demonstrated against the four-decade rule of the Assad family, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been killed in the ensuing violence and some twelve million people - more than half the country’s pre-war population - have been displaced” (Z. Laub, 2016). Many of the displaced people fled to neighboring countries, mainly to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Turkey followed an open-door policy for Syrians since the beginning of the conflict which attracted the majority of Syrian refugees to the country. Moreover, the Turkish government’s supporting statements towards the refugees and anti-government movements of Syrians created a relatively safe country image for Syrians. Similarly, during the interviews, some of the Syrian participant expressed their gratitude towards Turkish government and especially towards President Erdogan whose public speeches on the news they followed. Nevertheless, although Syrians are allowed and encouraged in Turkey, they have not received

refugee status. Turkey is the only country that keeps its geographical limitation under the 1951 Convention. Thus, even though the Turkish government offered Temporary Protection for Syrians and expanded their rights in line with refugee status, it has not removed the limitation clause. However, the longevity and obscurity of their stay created a need for new laws to regulate Syrians' settlement in Turkey. In that matter, the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) which is "codification of most of the national laws on foreigners and the legal regulations on asylum and migration" (Dardagan-Kibar, 2013). While the Turkish government responds to the prolonged situation of Syrians by improving rights and protection under the new law, there is still a lack of initiative in terms of integrating them into society. On the contrary, the government agency for migration explicitly rules out integration from its responsibilities and puts harmonization as its goal instead. Yet considering the possible durable solutions for the Syrians in Turkey, local integration is the most viable and beneficial option that will determine the future of both the host society and the refugee population. Therefore, a successful integration instead of voluntary harmonization will prevent marginalization of the new group and also will allow host society to benefit from their differences. In addition, more than half of the refugee population in Turkey is children which highlights the significance of a durable solution for their future. The education of these children can improve their successful integration into Turkish society and also their embracement from society since it is a two-way process. Education can strengthen the refugee community, protect children from abuses and exploitation, empower them to become self-sufficient and enlightened individuals who become capable of rebuilding their own and others' lives (UNHCR, 2018a). Therefore, education can play an important role to eliminate barriers to integration by creating a self-sufficient and empowered population. Thus, Turkey as home to majority of the refugees in

world and destination for Syrians for 7 years, may benefit from educating its refugee population.

In Turkey, the importance of Syrians' education has been realized later, since at the beginning the initial reaction from the government was to respond to the emergency by providing basic needs and services. In the fourth year of their stay, the schooling rate was as low as 30 percent which caused lost years for many children. The undersecretary of MoNE, Yusuf Tekin stated that only 600.000 out of 1 million school-aged Syrian children have access to their primary right of education, which is not a point of pride for the ministry (Hurriyet News). With the foundation of TECs, the enrollment rate has rapidly increased and children were able to get back to school in their language and curriculum. Despite the benefits of TECs, the core idea of its foundation to provide temporary education until repatriation has lost its validity. Thus, MoNE has approved the gradual closure of TECs and the transfer of Syrian students to mainstream education in order to improve the school adaptation process, support integration and provide a quality and accredited education. The transition is crucial for both Turkish students and teachers as well as Syrian students, hence, it is important to make headway on language proficiency, lost years at school, trauma assistance, and unequal distribution of students before transferring Syrian children. The fieldwork also supports that unprepared transition before eliminating the problems creates more harm than good since unfamiliarity and incompatibility between students, school, teacher and families leads further trauma, dropouts and alienation from school all together.

Healthy relations and communication among teachers, schools, and family are important for refugee children's education. Therefore, especially in the education of Syrians, it is important to support and train teachers and schools. The experiences of teachers and the attitudes of schools towards Syrian students and families will shape the success of their integration into the education system. Within the two public schools visited during the

fieldwork, the two principals' approaches to Syrians were different which affects teachers' opinion as well. While one school has a more positive and embracing attitude, the other was more critical and unpleasant. The tracking and hiring of Syrian teachers can also improve school-family relations. Thus, staff and teacher training, events and activities for Syrian and Turkish families, and improvements of the conditions and facilities at school will promote a successful education.

Turkey as a country hosting the highest number of the refugee population in the world, is being an example and making improvements in its law and regulations, and there is a need for international support to better these efforts. According to the MoNE, the international funds only cover 10 percent of the expenses for educational needs of Syrians (Hurriyet News). Hence, Turkish government should seek more opportunity and programs like PICTES. The assistance and funding from the international donors can contribute to eliminating some of the barriers to education and integration which can also affect the Turkish government's approach to integration. Similarly, during the gradual closure of TECs and transfer of students to public schools, support of the NGOs is important for the transition such as language classes, tutoring, and family information sessions.

In the seventh year of the reception of Syrians, Turkey hosts more than 3.6 million refugees of whom a great majority live outside of the camps. The interviews with locals and Syrian families illustrated that most of the Syrians wish to stay in Turkey long-term or permanently which emphasizes the significance of integration policies. Considering that half of these refugees are children, providing them a quality and embracing education can help their adaptation process to a new culture and becoming a self-sufficient member of a Turkish society. Therefore, it is in benefit of the future of both Syrian refugees and Turkey to achieve successful integration via education. However, the thesis also found that there are some barriers to successful education as well mainly on language proficiency, the capacity of

schools and teachers, and biases and misunderstandings in the society. Therefore, this thesis has attempted to provide recommendations to overcome those barriers.

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APPENDIX A

A Classroom with Turkish and Syrian students at Fatih Sultan Mehmet Primary School



APPENDIX B

The New Concrete Primary School at Nizip TAC



APPENDIX C

The School Area and a Classroom at Nizip Tent City

