



Szent István University

Doctoral School of Management and Business Administration

**Refugee students in the Turkish higher education in the light  
of the Syrian conflict**

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DEDICATION

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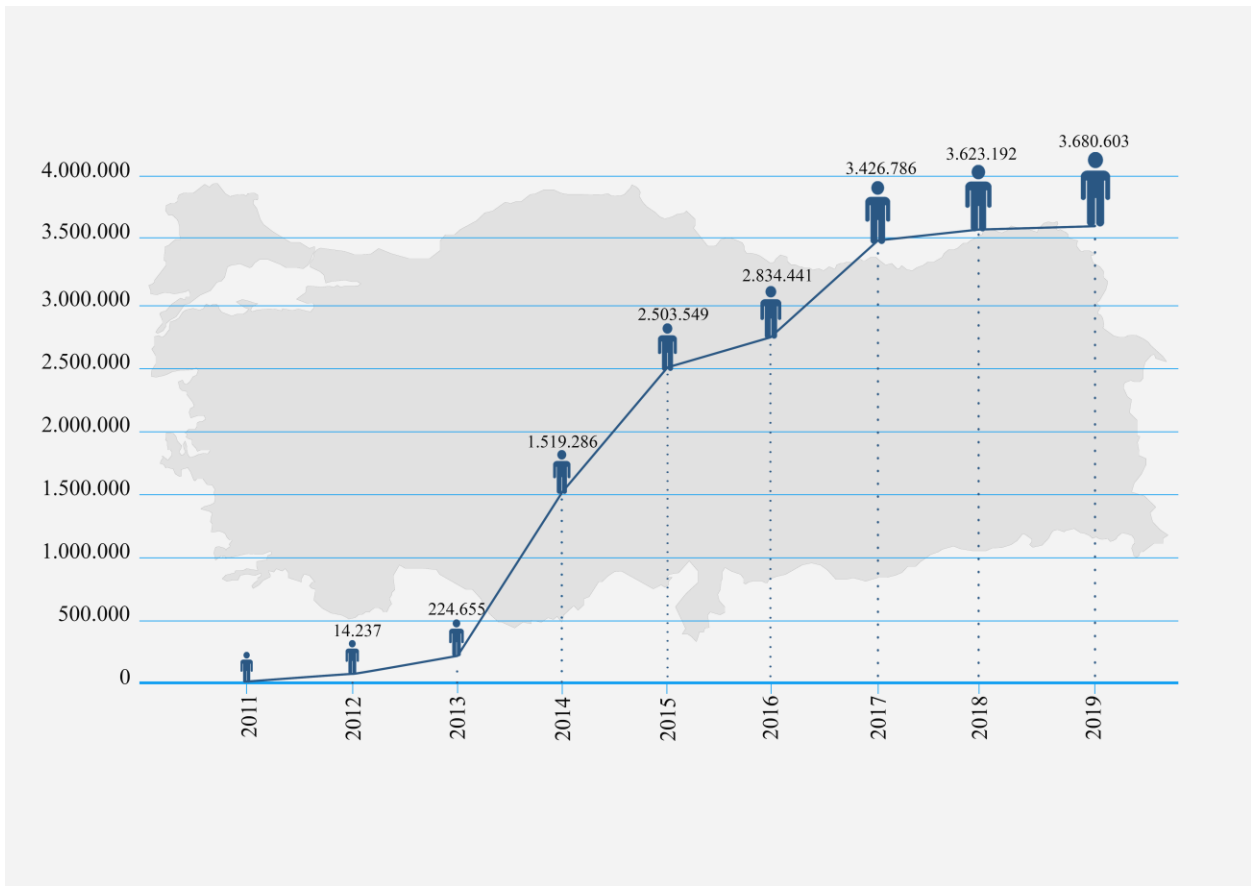


## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The number of refugees residing in Turkey after the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011 is getting higher and higher and the ongoing fierce battles are still preventing them from returning home. As more and more Syrians realize that they are forced to settle down in a foreign country, they also acknowledge that for their future life and career in Turkey, they need a proper higher education. At the same time, the Turkish government is facing a great challenge while trying to teach Turkish language to non-Turkic refugees and integrating them into a changing national higher education system. The improvement of educational institutions to accommodate the input of students with refugee background based on advancement in securing quality in higher education in Turkey results in the formation of a more educated Syrian population in Turkey willing to work for their new home. The development of science and technology in Turkey, as well as that of the management of individual and institutional career options are to be considered decisive in connection with the topic of Syrian refugee students in Turkey.

### **1. 1. Study Background**

After the civil war broke out in Syria in March 2011, an ever-growing number of refugees fled the Middle Eastern country. The first asylum-seekers appeared at the Syrian-Turkish border on 29 April, 2011 and the first temporary refugee camp has been established in the southern Turkish province of Hatay (Kap, 2014). Their number remained relatively low until the attack by the forces loyal to the regime in Damascus on the northern Syrian city of Jisr al-Soughour in August of that year. The number of Syrian refugees attained the number of 19.000 by the end of 2011 and kept growing by 3.000 to 6.000 persons ever since every day. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees registered up to 2.910.281 displaced in March 2017 (Syrian Regional Refugee Response, 2017), there might be even more according to certain estimates as the European Commission speaks of 3.2 million refugees (European Commission, 2017).



**Graph 1. Number of Syrian nationals residing in Turkey**

(Source: Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, GIGM, 2016)

The vast majority of the above refugees live outside the refugee camps, while around 10% of them are still located in one of those reception centers installed in the Southeastern regions of Turkey. Soon after the arrival of the first refugees, Turkish policymakers decided to give them quality education in Arabic as at that time everybody hoped that the crisis would end soon and the displaced would return home. In 2013, with the increase of the number of refugees and the intensity of the hostilities, Turkey changed its viewpoint and commenced to teach Turkish to newcomers (Emin, 2016). Syrians with a refugee status have free access to the Turkish national education system granted by a statute on the education services designed for foreigners issued in September 2014 by the Ministry of National Education (Emin, 2016). Though the right to education is given, the actual access to those services is distributed in an unequal manner. As far as primary and secondary school aged young people are concerned, 90% of the ones living in the sheltering centers go to school, whereas –according to estimations- a quarter of their counterparts residing outside do so (Emin, 2016).

If basic educational needs are hardly met, it is not a surprise that on the level of higher education, the situation of the Syrian refugee students is not easy. Already a surprising 27.5% of the Turks think that Syrian refugees must be banned from Turkish universities (Erdogan, 2014.a), admitting them to the Turkish higher education system has much less of a popular support. Having said so, there are also positive examples by local authorities and civil society organization helping Syrian refugees to finish their studies in Turkey. For example, to empower young female students, the local government of Istanbul's Fatih district located in the historical center of the city provides various services including bus rides to the campuses in order to contribute to the success of the Syrian refugee students living on the territory administrated by them (Macreath and Sagnic, 2017).

Even though the system has shortcomings and the students face difficulties, they are more and more numerous to enroll study program and graduate from Turkish universities and might think of a national or international career. With the words of Arthur and Rousseau, one can define career as follows: "Everyone who works has a career. And Everyone's life outside work is connected to the career." (Arthur and Rousseau, 2001:3). It is arguable that it is in the interest of the Syrian refugee students and the Turkish Republic to work together to provide not only a simple scheme for education, but a complete formula including education and a career management consulting service.

My dissertation includes three major and a number of minor issues. The three main chapters are about career in general and in Turkey in particular with the definition of career and the factors influencing it. The second chapter deals with the history of the Syrian civil war, its impact on Turkey and the current situation of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. While these two chapters are based on the review of the scientific literature, the third and last main chapter include more field research and interviews in order to better describe the present state of the affair of the Syrian refugee students in Turkey.

## **1.2. Research Aims**

My work has three main aims. The first purpose of this research is to describe the situation, the second is to identify the main problems and the third is to propose eventual solutions to the problems evoked. A list of practical resolution proposals would be fruitful both for the students and the Turkish government.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

With the increase in the number of Syrian refugee students in Turkey over the years, there are different questions about how they perceive their studies and future career and how they are received by the government and the overall population. The following questions might be addressed.

1. How the Turkish authorities and civil society organization are dealing with the issue of Syrian refugees?
2. What do the Turkish authorities and the civil society organizations do for the education of the Syrian refugee students?
3. Will Syrian refugee students studying in Turkey continue their careers in Turkey after graduation?
4. Is the economic and social development in Turkey an influence in determining career orientations of these students?
5. After graduation, would they want to work in the public or the private sector?

### **1.4. Hypotheses**

The main hypotheses of the present thesis are as follows:

H1: It is to be supposed that the Syrian refugee students are happy to live a peaceful life and to be able to study but are not fully satisfied with their living conditions. In this regard, they profoundly differ from those ordinary students opting to study abroad from a peaceful country. They do not seek diversion or adventure.

H2: As the Syrian refugee students are satisfied in general, they are also content with the study environment offered to them by the Turkish authorities and NGOs.

H3: Syrian refugee students –especially with the flow of time- would not return home even though in many parts of Syria the fire is ceased. They increasingly choose to have a career in Turkey or in the West.

H4: Indeed, the ever-changing economic situation, especially the recent hardships due to the increase of the prices and the impairment of the Turkish currency, has a deep impact on the choices of the Syrian refugee students.

H5: Syrian refugee students are willing to work in the private instead of the public sector.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

### 2.1. Sample

This work includes a detailed description of the civil war in Syria, the escalation of the refugee crisis in Turkey related to it and a presentation of the education systems of both in Syria and Turkey with a consideration of the integration of the Syrian refugee students into the overall Turkish higher education system. In addition to these issues, an analysis based on a sampling will be done in order to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions above.

The sampling was conducted in Turkey in the second half of 2018 with the collaboration of the Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı in Turkish, YÖK). The YÖK supported the sampling by providing ten contact details of two dozen of Syrian refugee students based on a special set of criteria to include both sexes and individuals of all possible ethnic and religious background relevant in the context of the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis. Ten students have been selected, the basic information about them is summarized in the table below:

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Home city	Age	Turkish university	Subject
Mohammed A.	Male	Arab	Sunni Muslim	Latakia	25	Gaziantep	Law
Ali M.	Male	Arab	Shia Muslim	Homs	22	Sanliurfa	Agriculture
Houmam E.	Male	Turkmen	Sunni Muslim	Bayirbucak	24	Adiyaman	Dentistry
Fathi L.	Male	Kurdish	Sunni Muslim	Qamishli	27	Istanbul	Engineering
Loutfi M.	Male	Arab	Christian	Safita	23	Ankara	Fine Arts
Amena L. D.	Female	Arab	Sunni Muslim	Aleppo	25	Bursa	Medicine
Qamar V.	Female	Arab	Sunni Muslim	Jisr	28	Izmir	Tourism
Nouda U.	Female	Arab	Sunni Muslim	Aleppo	25	Istanbul	Computer sciences
Raghida R.	Female	Arab	Druze	As-Suwayda	28	Istanbul	Sociology
Aya T.	Female	Kurdish	Sunni Muslim	Hassake	22	Gaziantep	Religion

**Table 1. Personal details of the respondents of the survey done for the present thesis**

(Source: own work)

## **2.2. Instrument and Analysis**

The selected students and their respective families if available were contacted at the very beginning of the academic year 2018/2019, and after obtaining permission from all of them interviews were arranged with them in October and November 2018. In fact, these interviews necessitated three study trips. The first in the South East of the country (Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Adiyaman) near the border with Syria, the second in Western big cities (Istanbul, Bursa and Izmir), and a third to the capital, Ankara. Not only a personal relationship has been established with the students but also their actual living and study conditions have been observed.

The respective interviews lasted, in general, two hours but were preceded by a brief meeting to overview the aim of the research with the student and to learn the most possible thing about their personality. The interviews evolved around five prepared questions and according to the needs further questions have been asked. The five main questions were the following ones:

1. What are your experiences with the civil war in Syria? How did you cross the border? How did Turkish authorities helped you with your personal needs and to obtain refugee status?
2. How could you start your studies in Turkey? Did the Turkish authorities and civil society organizations help you in this procedure?
3. What are your plans after graduation?
4. Does the economic and social development in Turkey influence your career orientation?
5. After graduation, would you prefer to work in the public or the private sector?

After the interviews took place, respondents were asked to contribute by giving their general opinion on the topics included in the present thesis. All their precious answers were considered.

For analyzing the data received from our respondents, five distinct points are used in the chapter detailing their answers. The first point is longer than the following four ones as it gives a summary of their personal story with the war and the situation as a refugee in Turkey. If it was possible, if there were some similarities, in the examination of the last four questions ideas given

by the students are inter-connected. At the end of the description of each set of answers, a short summary and reflection is given. This is also completed by a general evaluation of the survey.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1. The Civil War in Syria**

##### **3.1.1. Syria prior to the conflict: its politics and demography**

Syria has been ruled by the authoritarian government of the Al-Assad family since 1971. The ruling family originates from the village of Qardaha in northwestern province of Latakia. They belong to the Qalbiyya tribe and follow the minority Alawite faith in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Syrian society. The one who changed the name of the family from Al-Wahhish to Al-Assad (meaning a lion) was Ali Suleyman Al-Assad who was known for being a local tribal political leader and mediator. His son, Hafez Al-Assad after leaving his village to study in the coastal city of Latakia got interested in politics as young as 16, and in 1946 joined the Left wing secular and nationalist Ba'ath Party. After a quick career in the Syrian Air Force, he opted for politics and was charged by the Ba'ath Party to take control over the entire military. After a number of military coups and riots in Syria, Hafez Al-Assad becomes first Minister of Defense in 1966, seizes power in 1970 and establishes himself as president of the country the following year. Since 1971 the Al-Assads rule Syria as a dynasty. After Hafez's death in 2000, his son Bashar Al-Assad became the supreme leader of Syria, and he is still the political and military head of the state.

The Assad regime since its establishment in the early 1970s effectively controlled all aspects of domestic politics in Syria and could handle the occasional riots and uprising staged by its political opponents. The main challenge in this regard was the insurgency lead by the Muslim Brotherhood, a Pan-Islamic political and religious movement founded in the 1920s by Hassan Al-Banna in Egypt aimed at restoring worldwide Muslim unity lost after the dissolution of the Ottoman State and the caliphate in 1923 and 1924. Hafez Al-Assad put down this uprising with the utmost brutality of the Syrian armed forces using both pro-regime militias and faithful elite troops garrisoned in the cities concerned (Holliday, 2013). Hafez Al-Assad was not pleased by finishing the Sunni-led opposition but started to displace groups of populations within the country having as a negative effect a further atomization of the already complicated demographical landscape of Syria. Majority Sunnite tribes were relocated from Central Syria (the areas around the capital, Damascus and the major industrial center and transport hub of Homs) to the outer regions. By this move Hafez Al-Assad sought to take control of these

territories and to counter all attempts of revenge by the majority on his Alawite minority (Holliday, 2013).

Though the Muslim Brotherhood-led insurgency happened three decades before the Syrian Civil War, one might find several similarities how Hafez the father and Bashar the son reacted to the situation. Holliday argues that there are three prevailing approaches that contributed to the relative success of the Al-Assad family (Holliday, 2013). First, Hafez Al-Assad in the period between 1979 and 1982 relied only on his most trustworthy military units under the command of selected and mostly Alawite officers as he was unsure of the mainly Sunnite army staff who might surrender when facing the equally Sunnite revolutionaries and population. Second, he encouraged the formation of paramilitary units because there were relatively few really reliable army units available. Third, Hafez did not fear of attacking major urban centers like Hama with heavy artillery and was ready to control those areas with a dense system of army barracks placed in the centers of these cities.

The most emblematic scene of the Muslim Brotherhood revolt was the battle of Hama in 1982 where Hafez Al-Assad following the above detailed strategy has deployed an overwhelmingly Alawite armed force. Over 90 percent of the officers present were of the denomination of the president and that was true for nearly the half of the special troops. Al-Assad used only two conventional army units, but even there three-quarter of the officers and one third of the soldiers were from Alawite origin (Holliday, 2013). At the same time, the ruling Ba'ath Party started to arm its members and sympathizers, in each and every city a local branch of the so-called Popular Organization has been formed (Holliday, 2013). This decision had an important impact on the long run, not only in the ongoing fight against the Muslim Brotherhood. By supporting the Popular Organizations, Hafez Al-Assad gained a decent and predictable force to discipline the ethnically and religiously divided Syrian population in all possible tense situation. In the mid-1980s, this force adopts the name of *Jaysh-ash-Shabi* or Popular Army, at the beginning of the civil war in 2011, it had around 100.000 members (Holliday, 2013).

After the savage extermination of those involved in the rebellion and many civilians around them, Hafez Al-Assad considerably stabilized his autocratic regime until his death in 2000. Hafez originally wanted his son Bassel to succeed him, but he passed away in a somewhat suspicious car accident in 1994 while going to the Damascus Airport to catch an early flight to Germany. Therefore, in 2000 his other son Bashar took power. Though Bashar was not known as a liberal as his late brother Bassel but was still very popular with both Syrians and the global community until the civil war (Haran, 2016). In fact, Bashar Al-Assad did not reform his father's



system, but rather built his political agenda on the apparatus realized by Hafez. This meant internally well controlled military where the 10 to 12 most influential officers were spying on each other, extremely powerful secret police, the *Mukhabarat* and the conservative establishment within the ruling Ba'ath Party. These strong structures were capable of maintaining the status quo, even in 2007 when the young president finally wanted to pursue some reforms and met a considerable opposition from the older generations of the party. The small changes did not spell a general uplifting of the regime, this is why it is still adequate to say that the Syrian political regime was a dictatorship and there was a visible democratic deficit before the civil war started in 2011 (Haran, 2016).

Concerning the Assad regime, it is worth discussing whether it is a classical dictatorship or the ethnic and religious cleavage of the country plays a major role in it. Above, it has already been stressed the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Syrian society and Assad's relation to the Alawite religious minority which is often labeled as a sub sect of Shiite Islam or a different Islamic denomination sharing with the Shiites their utmost attachment to Ali ibn Abi Talib, Islam's fourth caliph. Indeed, there was and there is a visible divide within the Syrian society, but it not easy to give a correct answer to the above question. Haran underlines that though most minority groups (Alawites, Christians and even Sunnite Kurds making up together 41% of the prewar population) in majority were supporting Assad, but the head of state was also backed an important portion of the Sunnite Arabs who represented 59% of the total population (Haran, 2016).

Others argue that sectarianism is by far not a new phenomenon in the countries of the Levant (Lebanon and Syria), but appears as early as the 1860s when Christian Arabs greatly contributed to the rise of Arab nationalism in the Middle East (Bahout, 2013). Later, under the mandate of the French following World War I., all minority group had its "task" within the fabric of the "colonial" rule, Alawites tended to cooperate with the Europeans and started to occupy important position in the civil service and the army. In fact, the French trusted more the Alawites than the Sunnites since they considered them less susceptible of being Arab nationalist hardliners. The French also played the classical game of "divide et impera" when they created four administrative units in Syria. Two of them were for the Sunnites with Damascus and Aleppo as centers and there was an Alawite region with Latakia as capital and the Druze Mountain in southeastern Syria home of a small monotheistic but syncretistic religious group, the Druze (Mahmoud and Rosiny, 2015). It seems that even before the Assads surface, the minority groups and especially the Alawites were closer to the center whereas majority Sunnites accepted to be

ruled by them until the point it was no more bearable for them. Though during the first decades after independence (1946) the top political leaders were of Sunnite descent, but they were several times put down by successive military coups staged by an army where its already found a disproportionately high number of Alawites.

Legally speaking, the only discrimination one can find in the Syrian constitution is that the president of the republic has to be a Muslim (Mahmoud and Rosiny, 2015). In this regard, both Sunnites, Alawites and Twelver Shiites are to be considered Muslims. If there is theoretically no ethnic or religious discrimination and the division has at least a 150 years old history in Middle Eastern Arab politics, what is the best definition to describe the authoritarian supreme power in Syria? One can argue that this a very refined dictatorship in which the Assad family through cooptation of the traditional ethnic and religious elites ensures their rule (Mahmoud and Rosiny, 2015).

### **3.1.2. Syria prior to the conflict: its higher education system**

Education in general and higher education -the main topic of our present thesis- in particular is very important for all political systems in order to better forward the state ideology to the masses. If this true for democracies, then it is even more adequate for dictatorships.

During the centuries of the Ottoman rule, Syria was far from the center, Istanbul and even though having a long history of Islamic scholarship, there was not a single university on Syrian soil. The only institution resembling Western universities was the Damascus School of Medicine since 1901. The French who intended to promote quality higher education soon after the establishment of the mandate founded the first modern university of the country. The University of Damascus opened its doors to the students in 1923. Before the civil war Syria counted four major, government run universities respectively located in Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia and Homs (Mualla, 2002). A remarkable change in the Syrian higher education system took place soon after Bashar Al-Assad had come to power. In 2001, he gives permission to a privatization process and paves the way to the foundation of 20 private universities and two more public institutions, the Hama University and the Syrian Virtual University were also created (Al Hessian, Bengtsson and Kohlenberger, 2016).

Before the war, Syria's population was rapidly growing and spectacularly young with limited access to all resources including education. According to a very sad data of 2002, only 76,9% of

the overall population was capable of reading and writing, female illiteracy shows an even more catastrophic situation with a rate as low as 64% (Mualla, 2002). According to other sources the situation was already not that deplorable a decade later than until the outbreak of the civil war 74% of the Syrians completed secondary education (Al Hessian, Bengtsson and Kohlenberger, 2016). One of the structural reasons behind this failure besides the uncontrolled population growth was the weakness on the lower levels of education and the fact that only the first 6 classes of the primary education were compulsory in Syria before the civil war (Mualla, 2002). One might also detect a correlation between the uneducated masses and the outbreak of the armed conflict.

Though there exist some 200 Higher Institutes, and Intermediate Institutions of Professional and Technical Training, public universities were few and far between until the privatization in 2001. This fact let the four traditional public universities grew incredibly big by the beginning of the 2000s. The most popular among them was the University of Damascus, during the academic year of 2002-2003 some 91.989 students were enrolled there. Damascus was followed by Aleppo (50.921), the Tishreen University of Latakia (34.848) and the Ba'ath University of Homs (23.931) In fact there was another smaller university on the shores of the Euphrates river in Deir-ez-Zor (the university itself is also named Al-Furat or Euphrates), but it was really minuscule compared to the giant institutions with some 2.000 students providing with education mainly in agriculture, but also in sciences and letters (Mualla, 2002).

The most popular training at that time was the letters and human sciences. At the University of Damascus alone 31.147 students were inscribed to the relevant faculty making up one third of the overall student population of the campus. Letters were followed by the Law, Economics and Islamic Studies faculties. The latter one was only provided by the University of Damascus and an almost equal proportion of female (43,89%) and male (56,11%) students attended classes there (Mualla, 2002). Concerning co-education and gender equality at the Islamic Studies department, it can be worth noting that a number of careers are exclusively female or male. Domestic economy, nursing, dental assistant and child-rearing departments admit young women, whereas oil, gas and railway engineering departments young gentlemen only (Al Hessian, Bengtsson and Kohlenberger, 2016). It is also shocking to note that more practical forms of training were chosen by a tiny minority of the students. For instance, the Faculty of Architecture (1.140) attracted roughly 30 times fewer young people in Damascus than the letters and human sciences. Having said so, it was still the largest faculty of its kind in the entire country (Mualla, 2002).

Faculty	University	Total Number of Students			Number of Admitted Students (Freshmen)			Number of Graduates		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Medicine	Damascus	2678	1085	3763	384	183	567	406	153	559
	Aleppo	2182	719	2901	218	119	337	324	107	431
	Tishreen	696	328	1024	98	47	145	84	43	127
	Al-Baath	318	236	554	32	43	75	26	19	45
Dentistry	Damascus	962	363	1325	127	53	180	148	99	247
	Aleppo	489	208	697	79	46	125	93	49	142
	Tishreen	352	199	551	39	18	57	72	35	107
	Al-Baath	459	261	720	53	37	90	112	54	166
Pharmacy	Damascus	680	1104	1784	97	191	288	140	188	328
	Aleppo	427	383	810	52	72	124	79	59	138
	Tishreen	194	348	542	26	61	87	39	67	106
	Al-Baath	84	199	283	11	63	74	-	-	-
Civil Engineering	Damascus	1659	806	2465	180	93	273	238	95	333
	Aleppo	1058	415	1473	163	73	236	155	60	215
	Tishreen	577	555	1132	91	108	199	109	71	180
	Al-Baath	679	500	1179	118	111	229	108	75	183
Architecture	Damascus	532	608	1140	57	68	125	84	95	179
	Aleppo	420	297	717	79	70	149	92	50	142
	Tishreen	182	224	406	28	35	63	28	37	65
	Al-Baath	142	240	382	21	46	67	17	32	49
Mechanical Electrical Engineering	Damascus	4573	1006	5579	785	199	984	417	161	578
	Aleppo	3638	735	4373	812	160	972	403	140	543
	Tishreen	1658	542	2227	396	93	489	234	106	340
	Al-Baath	1257	195	1452	273	59	332	125	26	151
IT Engineering	Damascus	766	453	1219	63	47	110	23	34	57
	Aleppo	391	230	621	84	40	124	15	20	35
	Tishreen	300	201	501	67	35	102	13	9	22
	Al-Baath	294	212	506	51	48	99	8	19	27
Petroleum	Al-Baath	1252	480	1732	178	87	265	190	69	259
Agriculture Engineering	Damascus	1336	1001	2337	309	251	560	160	125	285
	Aleppo	1065	480	1545	259	117	376	145	59	204
	Deir Al-Zour	634	289	923	278	127	405	47	25	72
	Tishreen	738	903	1641	186	186	372	103	126	229
Economy	Al-Baath	639	486	1125	63	91	154	40	60	100
	Damascus	5593	3282	8874	1197	771	1968	364	411	775
	Aleppo	3156	1310	4466	1016	498	1514	250	116	366
	Tishreen	1572	1032	2604	536	279	815	146	153	299
Veterinary	Al-Baath	1673	101	1774	230	21	351	217	4	221
Sciences	Damascus	3284	2364	5648	531	497	1028	393	152	545
	Aleppo	3033	1970	5003	552	358	910	246	141	387
	Deir Al-Zour	251	66	317	247	64	311	0	0	0
	Tishreen	1947	1395	3342	504	271	775	160	160	320
Nursury	Al-Baath	1708	1079	2787	380	270	650	116	95	211
	Tishreen	176	68	244	53	24	77	32	15	47
	Damascus	1123	3302	4425	211	962	1173	136	165	301
	Aleppo	562	1491	2053	215	649	864	31	39	70
Education	Tishreen	665	3736	4401	243	1463	1706	33	291	324
	Al-Baath	336	1922	2258	68	498	566	12	153	165
	Damascus	9294	4434	13728	1132	584	1716	822	386	1208
	Aleppo	8691	2332	11023	1308	413	1721	485	114	599
Fine Art	Damascus	486	466	952	66	85	151	63	55	118
Islamic Studies	Damascus	4266	3337	7603	669	551	1220	379	263	642
Physical Education	Tishreen	495	160	655	66	28	94	79	47	126
Total Number of Students	Damascus	48853	43136	91989	8115	8658	16773	4584	4041	8625
	Aleppo	32357	18564	50921	7389	5200	12589	2812	1612	4424
	Tishreen	14267	20581	34848	3646	4737	8373	1410	2014	3424
	Al-Baath	11768	12433	23931	2248	2690	4938	1101	1043	2144

**Table 2. Number of students by faculty at the major public universities in Syria in the academic year of 2002-2003**

(Source: Mualla, 2002)

The post-secondary education of Syria was and still is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education, the policies related to the sector are proposed by the Council of Higher Education

composed of representatives of the ministry, the universities, the students and the teachers and is working independently of the ministry. Those who finished their high school education can opt for a 2 years long vocational training where a 50 to 60% of success rate is required to get a diploma or a 4 to 6 years long program to get a Bachelor's degree where the requirements also include researches and taking part in projects besides the equally important success rates. The ones who started a vocational post-secondary training can continue and in a year they are entitled to have a higher diploma, whereas Bachelors can enroll in 2 year- long Master programs with the obligation of submitting a thesis at the end of it. The most talented and diligent student can carry on to the third phase of higher education and in a relatively short time, in 2 years can finish a PhD (Al Hessian, Bengtsson and Kohlenberger, 2016).

The rapidly growing sector of private universities include the University of Kalamoon (web page available in Arabic only<sup>1</sup>: [http://www.uok.edu.sy/uok\\_new/index.php](http://www.uok.edu.sy/uok_new/index.php)) established in August 2003 in the town of Deir Atiyah in the Governorate of Damascus provides courses in medicine, engineering, diplomacy and applied sciences. The new trainings proposed by this new institution proves that the public sector lacked the practical aspect. As it was said earlier 1/3 of the students of the prestigious University of Damascus studied letters and human sciences and at the same time the Syrian industry and services sectors needed and needs young experts. Another example fitting into this trend of the private universities being more practical is the Mamoun University for Sciences and Technology of Aleppo (web page in Arabic: <http://main.cpu.edu.sy/>.) Founded in 2003 and also named Cordoba Private University gives opportunity to study to those young Syrians who wish to have up-to-date knowledge on natural sciences and information technologies. The Arab International University (formerly known as Arab European University, web page surprisingly enough in English: <https://www.aiu.edu.sy/>) in the town of Ghabaghib, more exactly on the highway linking Deraa to Damascus is also specialized in more practical training programs, mainly in the field medicine, but also hosts a department of fine arts. The above three institutions show a radically different approach to higher education compared to the more traditional public universities. Their curricula can attract a different and of course well-to-do public, and they can be highly competitive at the same time.

Seeing the developments in the education system in Syria in the early 2000s, one can understand that the civil war started in 2011 interrupted a magnificent phase of development and change. If there was no armed conflict, Syrians would not be obliged to go abroad to study. For example,

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prior to the privatization, training in medicine was not available for many in Syria therefore thousands of young Syrian doctors and dentists had to be graduated from universities in Europe (including also Hungary). So, one can say that the increase in number of Syrian students in Turkey is solely related to the civil war and not to the situation of the higher education in Syria in 2011.

### **3.1.3. The Deraa demonstration and the civil uprising**

Despite the democratization of the higher education in Syria and human development of the country in the 2000s, discontentment of the masses was visibly growing after the events of the so-called Arab Spring started in Tunisia and Egypt. Arab societies had and have a certain number of features in common, therefore when the news of the self-immolation of a young unemployed street vendor of Tunisia, Mohamed Bouazizi started to spread, the Arab World responded by massive demonstrations where the participants chanted the famous slogan of “ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam” (the people want to bring down the system). At the very beginning Syria seemed to be silent.

The first important incident happened on 6<sup>th</sup> March in the southern city of Deraa when 15 children were arrested for tagging the walls with anti-government messages. These youngsters were brutalized by the Mukhabarat, the secret police of the Assad regime including the pulling out of their fingernails, but the real reason behind the incitement of the demonstrations following this event was the way the government agencies treated their families (Aslan, 2015).

After the first occasions of the eruption of rage, Syrian authorities promised to investigate the torture of the youngsters and the subsequent killings, but, at the same time, turned away their responsibility and pointed at so-called gangs and armed groups supposedly operating in the area. This reaction of the relevant government agencies further infuriated the Syrian population as the most conservative estimates put the number of victims to 418 in the Deraa Governorate alone and to 887 across Syria until the end of April 2011 (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The epicenter of anti-government activity in the Governorate of Deraa populated mainly by Sunnite Arab tribes was the city’s Al-Omari mosque, a historical monument, the first of its kind in the country built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century by Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second ruler after the Islamic prophet Mohammed and later destroyed by the shelling of the Syrian army in 2013 (Al-Arabiya, 2013). The first protest started here on 18<sup>th</sup> March after the Friday prayer, Muslims’ main communal act of worship during the week. They were later attacked by the special units of the

Mukhabarat and live ammunition was fired causing the death of at least four people (Human Rights Watch, 2011). They were the first fatal victims of the Syrian civil war.

The next set of manifestations arises on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 when people from the city's other important mosque Shaikh Abdulaziz intended to march to the bridge connecting the two main parts of the town. Though the military tried to convince the crowd to turn away, the march continued, and demonstrators were attacked by Kalashnikov gunfire and snipers located on the top of the nearby roofs. According to testimonies, twenty people were killed and fifteen more injured in that sole incident alone (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The growing repression of the regime and especially that of the Mukhabarat let some elements of the apparatus rethink their role and loyalty towards the dictatorial rule of the Assad family and fissures began to appear in the army itself (Abbas, 2011). In fact, defectors were rare, and the Free Officers Movement remained extremely weak during this introductory phase of the Syrian Civil War. Hence, the vast majority of those involved in the uprising is consisted of unhappy civilians turned rebels. It is interesting to underline from the point of view of our present study that a high proportion of them were secularist middle class university students. Others included freelance journalists, liberal and far left political activists, members of ethnic minorities such as Kurds or ultraconservative religious Muslims (Abbas, 2011). The latter ones show that since the beginning the uprising and later the civil war had a sectarian nature.

The regime intentionally wanted to spread violence and sectarian clashes in order to divide potential opponents of the government. The main tool of doing so in the hands of the central government was intimidation. Citizens were terrified on two separate levels. On the ground by the police forces and in the media in which insurgents were pictured as being affiliated to radical forms of political Islam, namely Salafism and Muslim Brotherhood (Abbas, 2011).

Indeed, armed rebellion commenced in a Sunnite populated area, the northwestern Idlib Governorate in June 2011. Insurgents coordinated by defectors from the military raided an army unit loyal to Damascus at the town of Jisr Al-Shughour, an isolated Sunnite stronghold located on a high plateau close to the border with Turkey (Holliday, 2011:21). This particular town with Arab and ethnic Turcoman (Turkish-speaking minority in Syria and Iraq) inhabitants used to be an important trading point and even at the time of writing is held by rebels, namely the Arab Islamist militia of Tahrir-Ash-Sham and the Turcoman Turkestan Islamic Party.

The pretext for the first large scale armed battle between the regime and the opposition force was that the military attacked a funeral procession. Angry mourners overran a military depot and captured a high number of weapons and ammunition and were joined as mentioned earlier by some armed dissidents of the regime. Rebels killed up to 20 soldiers and a fermentation of the army could be observed. At the same time, the families of the rebels fled to the nearby hills or crossed into Turkey spelling the very first massive wave of refugees in Turkey (Holliday, 2011).

#### **3.1.4 . Proliferation of the armed insurgency**

The generalization of the Syrian armed conflict and the first phase of the full-scale civil war in Syria started after the formation of the main defector force, the Free Syrian Army or FSA on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2011. After its appearance on the scene, several other opposition groups representing various ideologies and interests started to arm themselves. At the beginning, President Assad's army responded with light weapons, but as early as April 2012, the central government resorted to the use of heavy weaponry including war planes and war helicopters. Very quickly the death toll rose to at least 10.000 many of whom were innocent civilians.

Already the early violence and especially the raid on the Northern town of Jisr al-Shughour made many elements of the government-run Syrian Arab Army (SAA) to defect as they felt unable to target civilians. One of the first officers to do this move with 150 of his soldiers was garrisoned just 10 km away of Jisr al-Shughour. The decision made by Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush can be called brave as that time Assad's regime commenced to execute those who left the military. Harmoush's choice had an instant impact on the rest of the SAA, not less than 60.000 defected from it until March 2012, many of these deserters later joined Harmoush's first organization, the Free Officers Battalion or later the FSA itself (Lister, 2016.a).

The Free Syrian Army in this first phase of the insurgency was a loose network of armed opposition groups across the country. Some of them were based in the North around Jisr, others in the rebel influenced cities of Hama, Homs and Deraa and a number of smaller localities. The leaders of FSA were forced to move to Southern Turkey to seek shelter from the powerful Syrian intelligence. This fear was not completely baseless as Lt. Col. Harmoush was kidnapped from a location in Turkey and later broadcasted on the Syrian state television while denouncing the insurgents and blaming them of being agents of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, long date archenemy of the Assad administration. It was clearly visible that Harmoush was under pressure, and, at the end, even this show could not save him from execution (Lister, 2016.a).



The central government of Syria did not seem to be pleased with the birth of the main armed opposition force of that time. Damascus reacted with an instant crackdown on the rebels known as the “Ramadan massacre” as 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011 was the eve of the holy fasting month of the Muslims. The total death toll of the intervention was 142, the highest number of them, around 100 in the city of Hama where the Assad’s already staged a number of killings in the past (Samuelson, 2011).

Following the establishment of the Free Syrian Army and the first tragic attacks of the SAA on the rebels, the Syrian opposition tried to organize themselves on the political level, too. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2011 the formation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) was officially announced. It was led by Burhan Ghalioun a well-known political scientist living in the French capital city, Paris and who was joined by famous opposition figures from around Syria. This political representation of the Syrian opposition was in fact an Istanbul-based coalition of very diverse political actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Arab and Kurd nationalists, the liberals and a few ethnic and religious minorities. The SNC can be portrayed as the parliament and the government in exile of the Syrian nation as it comprises a 270-member general assembly and eight-member executive committee (O’Bagy, 2012).

The proliferation of the armed insurgency caused more and more unease on the global level and prompted the reaction of the United Nations Organization. Kofi Annan has been nominated a special envoy accepted by the UN and the Arab League in order to broker a ceasefire between the central government of Damascus and the other belligerents. The intervention of the United Nations was widely contested as there were only months after the failures of the international organization in Libya, back in 2011, during the first phase of the so-called Arab Spring. The Security Council of the UN after gathering this unprecedented unanimity first sent a monitoring unit to Syria to observe the evolution of the events on the terrain, later, on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2012 established the UN Supervision Mission named UNSMIS. Finally, the increasing and widespread violence made it impossible to deploy the UNSMIS as it has been agreed upon in the Security Council. According to Robert Mood, the Norwegian officer leading the mission, their mandate was weak and they were unarmed. Not only were they incapable of observing the facts, but even they were unable to defend themselves. The mission officially ceased its activities amid tensions on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2012 (Adams, 2015).

One of the most fatal incidents from among the above mentioned ceasefire violations was the so-called Houla massacre that took place during the mandate and the presence of the UNSMIS on

25<sup>th</sup> May, 2012. According to early reports as many as 108 persons were killed, almost half of whom were children. According to the opposition forces, around noon, the Syrian Arab Army launched an important assault on the town of Taldou by shelling it from a certain distance. After that militiamen could descend from the neighboring elevations and villages to raid the town through its Houla area where these men said to be members of the Alawite minority of the president Bashar al-Assad killed the unanimously Sunni civilians (Larson, 2014). The government's version says that the responsible were the insurgents who overrun two of the five security check points established in the town. Damascus argues that all the incident was premeditated and fabricated in order to blame the Assad administration (Larson, 2014). Finally, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution stating that the Syrian central government had to be held responsible for the massacre though the exact identity of the perpetrators is still not exposed.

After acknowledging the sad reality of the civil war, the armed conflict started to have a more and more internationalized feature. One of the early incidents on the intervention of foreign countries into the fighting against their own will is the case of the defection of a Syrian Mig fighter plane pilot, Hassan Hamada in Jordan. A Jordanian security source said the pilot flew from al-Dumair military airport northeast of Damascus and landed at the at King Hussein Airbase in Jordan on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2012. As the southern neighbor of Syria granted him the status of political asylum, Jordan also intervened into the conflict on the political level and against the Assad government (Al-Khalidi and Oweis, 2012).

The following day, another neighbour of Syria, this time Turkey got involved in the civil war in Syria as Assad's forces hit a Turkish warplane near the border of the two countries. The Turkish reconnaissance jet was on a secret mission in the area and its shoot down spelled the absolute end of the good ties between the two countries. According to Turkish sources the plane was only helping the functioning of the radar system deployed along the Turkish-Syrian border and for around five minutes might have violated the Syrian airspace, but after that moved northward, back to the Turkish airspace and that was the very moment when it was stuck by a ground-to-air missile launched from Syrian territory (CNN Turk, 2012). The warplane and the dead bodies of the two pilots were found later in the Mediterranean sea. Later, on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2012 Syrian ground forces even mortared Turkish territory in the Akcakale district killing 5 innocent civilians. The following days Turkish and Syrian military were exchanging artillery attacks and Turkey was gradually drawn into the Syrian civil war.

Experts say that the 18<sup>th</sup> July bomb attack targeting the national security headquarter of the Assad regime was important in Assad's policy making both vertically and horizontally. On the vertical level, Damascus uses three tactics in order to intensify the fights. First, the car bomb was an excuse for Assad to introduce to the battle field all of his military arsenal including state-of-the-art aircrafts and helicopters. Second, Assad successfully convinced his political allies, the region's Shia powers, the Hezbollah terrorist organization of Lebanon and the Islamic Republic of Iran to intervene on its side. Third, this reaction prompted the radicalization of the armed opposition. On the horizontal level, the further internationalization of the conflict could be observed. Basically all the important neighbors of Syria, namely Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel are now forced to take a side and are in danger as they get a greater influx of refugees and might be direct actors in the conflict itself (Samaan, 2012).

In fact, during the summer period of 2012 not only it is impossible to speak about the respect of the Annan Plan or the ceasefire, but about a further proliferation of the armed conflict and the commencement of a full scale civil war in Syria which was at that time extended to the second largest city and commercial center, Aleppo. This was also the time when various terrorist organizations started to be formed or extend their activities in Syria. These terrorists did not only aim at spreading terror as it is the case with terrorists normally, but they increasingly wanted to gain control of strategically crucial territories such as air bases and oil rich regions of the country.

### **3.1.5. Advance of the Islamists and other terrorists**

Around the end of October 2012, the increasing presence of non-FSA rebels and inter-rebel fights can be noticed in the northern part of Syria. On 27<sup>th</sup> October 2012 there was such a battle in the city of Damascus opposing FSA units and a Kurdish self defense militia killing around 30 fighters. On the very same day, the Al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra Front attacked a police compound in the northeastern province of Deir Ezzor along the Euphrates river. Damascus alerted the international public as early as the Houla massacre on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2012 of the possible implication of the organization of the late terrorist mastermind Bin Laden in the Syrian civil war, but it was only evident by the end of October that the Islamists have a new tactic and goal: controlling territories and establishing a Sharia dictated rule over that piece of land.

Activities of the Al-Nusra Front intensified and as a response, the West recognized them as a terrorist organization. In the beginning, Al-Nusra Front seemed to be very unpopular in Syria for two main reasons. First, this international brigade "employing" foreign fighters was alien in the

nationalistic freedom fight of the Syrian population. Their Salafist understanding of the religion of Islam also differed from the mainstream Sunni Islam of Syria. Second, opposite to the classical but savage warfare of the Assad loyalists and the rebels, the Al-Nusra Front basically tried to intimidate the overall population more than face the enemy, let it be government troops or rebel forces (Lister, 2016.b).

By changing the methods, the Al-Nusra Front did not change the goals and is often described by other opposition forces as the ones who hijacked the original spirit of the Syrian revolution. This argument became even more valid after September 2015 when the terrorists' activities prompted the intervention of the powerful Russian army on the side of Bashar Al-Assad and his regime as the foreign intervention targeted not only the classical terrorist organizations like Al-Nusra Front but also the more liberal or less conservative elements of the armed opposition (Lister, 2016.b).

From the point of view of the analysis of the terrorist activities across Syria, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013 is a key date as it was on that day that the opposition forces managed to capture the city of Raqqa on the Euphrates river. This large urban center later served as the de facto capital of the most savage terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria also known as ISIS or after its Arabic abbreviation as DAESH. The group was founded as early as 2006 in Iraq and started to gain autonomy from Al-Qaida and notoriety due to its cruelty in April 2013 again in Iraq. It might seem a mere coincidence, but the capture of Raqqa in Syria by the traditional armed opposition and first advance of the ISIS terrorist organization in Iraq falls on the same period of time (Bunzel, 2015).

One can find several important differences in the approach of the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. One of them is that the Al-Nusra Front is more practical towards its relationship with fighting, whereas ISIS concentrates more on the ideological face of their struggle. One of the key elements of this Islamist ideology is *Al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya*. The term -first used by an Islamic State leader, Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi- is often translated to English as Jihadi Salafism refers to a political understanding of the Syrian and Iraqi situations (Bunzel, 2015). Salafism is first a religious denomination within the broader frame of Islam. Al-Salaf in Arabic is the name of the first three pious generation who followed the footsteps of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and who are regarded by the contemporary Muslims as excellent role models who had authentic knowledge of the very essence of Islam and its practice. In fact, all Muslim denominations try to adopt the way of life of the Al-Salaf, but those who call themselves Salafist, they do so to differentiate themselves from other major groups of Muslim such as the mainstream Sunnis and

the Shiites. Salafists besides following these early generation also consider some later Islamic scholars such as the 18<sup>th</sup> century hardliner Muhammed ibn Abdulwahhab. Salafism or Wahhabism (after the name of the above mentioned imam) is originally a religious way of thinking and is not compulsorily connected to a specific political ideology. One can be a Salafist and stay away from politics.

Jihad in Arabic means effort. Effort is a very broad term that covers all actions of a Muslim to rectify, defend himself or herself, his or her family, community and nation. In fact, a Muslim is on Jihad anytime he or she does anything difficult for a religious purpose. Though in the Western media and even academia Jihad is often translated as “Holy War”, it is not necessarily a war, but it can be a defensive armed struggle in certain situations. Jihadi Salafism is an extreme misuse of the Islamic theology for political goals. “The movement is predicated on an extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities” (Bunzel, 2015:7). One of the main political goals of Jihadi Salafism is the urgent re-foundation and restoration of the caliphate (*Khilafa* in Arabic), a worldwide Islamic ruling structure. Here, it is to be noted that there is an important difference between the ISIS and the equally Islamist Muslim Brotherhood movement both of them aimed at establishing the Khilafa. The very discrepancy between them is that ISIS wants it now and wants to build it on the territory conquered by them, whereas the Muslim brotherhood rather wants to have a committed community and establish the Khilafa on the long run (Bunzel, 2015-7-8).

This specific approach of the politics of the Middle East can be understood as a new beginning by a return to the past. In Iraq, from where ISIS emanates to Syria, this understanding was attractive to two layers of the Sunni community: the extremists and the disappointed Baathist strata. Salafism behaved in the way that it became, in fact, the glue between the internationalist ideology of Takfirism (*Takfir* in Arabic means to declare somebody non-Muslim, Takfirism is a widespread ideology in the Muslim world according to which everybody, including the state and the vast majority of the Muslims are verily not Muslims but apostates of Islam) and the more nationalistic world view of the dethroned Baathist activists (Barrett, 2014).

If the main goal of such Salafist Jihadi movement and that of the alliance of the Takfiris and the old Baathist establishment was the restoration of the Khilafa, their first target would not be Syria, but the region of Hejaz in present day Saudi Arabia where the two holiest shrines of Islam, Mecca and Medina, are located (Barrett, 2014). One might also add the third holy place,

Jerusalem to the list as it is now under the control of the Israeli State. None of the pilgrimage sites were aimed by ISIS, rather they tried very hard to establish a land and a real state-like functioning structure and the political vacuum of Iraq and Syria favored their plan in this regard.

So, ISIS wanted a caliphate soon, but did not do it the way to include the three holy cities, instead they opted for the establishment of a solid territory easy to conquer. Therefore, they have selected the sixth largest city of Syria, Raqqa, as it was told earlier recently occupied by the traditional opposition to the regime of Bashar Al-Assad - an easy target for an emerging terrorist organization. At the same time Raqqa is also symbolic. Maybe not that as much as Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem, but from 796 to 809 AD, it served as the capital city of Abbasid Caliphate prior to the foundation of Baghdad. ISIS finally seized the city in August 2013 (Barrett, 2014).

In 2013, terror became deeply rooted in Syria. So much so that terrorist organization started to target the neighboring country, namely Turkey. The first such attack took place on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2013 in the border town of Reyhanli. Fifty-one Turkish nationals were killed and 146 injured in the bloodshed perpetrated on the Ataturk boulevard, in front of the town hall. According to the Turkish experts the terrorists wished various things with their bombing. Among the aims, there is the punishment of Turkey for its policy towards Syria, the pressure put on Ankara in order to change this policy, to widen the ethnic and sectarian divides already existent in Turkey, as well as the radicalization of the Turkish government and to force them to be further involved in the armed conflict (Orhan, 2013). With the 2013 Reyhanli attack, Turkey seemed to be a bit unsafe, a place where major terrorist attacks can easily take place and which is maybe not the safest haven for refugees. However, the Reyhanli bombing did not prevent the Syrian asylum-seekers to continue to flow through the border between the two countries.

One of the worst Salafist Jihadist atrocities committed before ISIS started to dominate the Islamist scene was the attack on the Christian stronghold of Maloula, near Damascus, where the local Aramean population still speaks the mother tongue of Jesus Christ, the Aramaic language. The Al-Nusra Front launched an attack on the town on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

ISIS and Al-Nusra Front were gaining territories during the second half of the year of 2013, but were forced to spectacular retreats in January 2014. For example on 7<sup>th</sup> January they were kicked out of Mayadin by other militants who even executed their soldiers, or on the 8<sup>th</sup>, they had to note heavy losses in the city of Aleppo. These retreats, or the one from the border town of Azaz on 4<sup>th</sup> March, served the consolidation of Raqqa as the capital of ISIS.

One of the main incident of the expansion of the ISIS was the siege of the border city of Ayn al-Arab (Kobani in Kurdish) that started in September 2014 and lasted until January 2015. Kobani was held by the YPG since the commencement of the civil war in 2012 and ISIS took control of the villages around on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2014. The YPG for a long time considered the Islamists and the various ethnic militias -like the Turcomans- of Northern Syria as their main enemies, and not the Al-Assad regime as on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012, the government loyalists left the region without any major forms of resistance, one can say that they ceded to area to the Kurds (Acun and Oner, 2014). These fierce battles between the Islamists and the YPG of Ayn al-Arab took place in summer, 2013 when the Al-Nusra Front tried to occupy the city without any success. The turning point was 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014 when ISIS managed to take over a strategic bridge over the Euphrates river that opened the road to Ayn al-Arab they besieged until January 2015 (Acun and Oner, 2014).

The siege of Ayn al-Arab had diverse impacts on the political and social landscape of Turkey. First, there was an important dilemma over the issue as ISIS posed a threat both to Turkey and the international community, and -of course- the government of Ankara understood the importance of the war on terror, but did not help YPG, the Syrian branch of the PKK, the notorious terrorist organization operating throughout Turkey. Thousands of ethnic Kurds from Turkey gathered just over the border willing to go and help their fellows in Syria. For long, they were prevented to do so by the regular Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Finally, they got permission to cross and could contribute to saving the besieged city. Second, the ISIS attack on Ayn al-Arab generated an unprecedented wave of refugees. In September and October 2014 some 300.000 ethnic Kurds were seeking asylum in Turkey. They were joined by some 100.000 more until the end of the battle.

### **3.1.6. Foreign military interventions**

One of the first foreign military interventions is also linked to the above mentioned siege of Ayn al-Arab. US bombers, drones and Tomahawk missiles targeted the attacking positions of the ISIS fighters.

After the second half of the year 2014 more and more foreign agents, governments and armed militias intervened in the Syrian civil war. They had very different goals and they sided with very diverse factions from among the fighters making the picture of the conflict even more puzzling. So much so, that it is impossible to say that the Syrian civil war is a simple reproduction of the patterns of the conflicts of the bipolar world order of the past. None of the

intervening powers, nor the United States of America, Russia, Iran, Turkey or the other Western forces could decide until today over the fate and future of the country. They either do not have the means or the courage to topple the Assad regime. It is more and more clear that despite all the interventions in Syria, a radical change, the total democratization is unimaginable. Finally, one can say that the foreign intervention only had limited impact on the situation on the terrain and with them, Assad is gaining momentum and regaining more and more territories. It might sound paradoxical, but these military moves on the long run strengthen the central government and favors the normalization of the daily life in the region under its control, whereas the least safe places are those where the interventions are conducted. The intervening powers cite as their main goals the war against terrorism, but do not fully abolish the terrorist organizations, only force them under the surface. At the same time, the Assad family maintain their firm rule over Syria and the whole conflict with its millions of victims, displaced and refugees seem to be an action in vain.

The United States of America fixed as their main goal the total annihilation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the weakening of the other Islamist movements in the region. Second to this aim, they also wanted to stop the entire civil war and eradicate the *raison d'être* of the flow of refugees to Turkey and Europe (Rofer, 2015).

Russia approaches the whole conflict from a totally different angle as Syria used to be a client state of the former Soviet Union. This means that the Assad government did not only have friendly ties with Moscow, but was a recipient of the products and services from Russia as well as the military and financial aids. From Russian point of view, Syria's strategic location is also a key factor as this huge country is very much cut off the seas, its Black Sea ports are not sufficient therefor they contented of the possibility accorded by Damascus to use the embarkments in Tartus and Tripoli and maintain an air base in the country (Rofer, 2015).

While analyzing the alliance between Damascus and Tehran, many people think that the key connector is religion, but having a close look at the issue, it is to be discovered that Syria is a secular country led by the Alawite denomination, whereas Iran is an Islamic republic predominantly inhabited by Shiite Muslims. In fact, the political sympathy between the two nations dates back to the time of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war when Syria remained the sole Arab nation to support Iran (Ansari and Bassiri Tabrizi, 2016). At the beginning, Iran preferred to arm and assist the National Defense Force, Assad's multi-ethnic paramilitary units, later, they have accepted to send regular troops as well as religious fighters. They also convinced the Shiite



terrorist organization of Hizbullah to take part in the action as early as 2012 (Ansari and Bassiri Tabrizi, 2016).

The Republic of Turkey at the very beginning of the Syrian civil war tried to remain neutral as they had a rather good relationship with Damascus prior to the war, but with the escalation of the conflict, and especially after the involvement of the only Turkish exclave, the tomb of the grandfather of the founder of the Ottoman Empire -surrounded by Syria- in it, Turkey has chosen to intervene - mainly in its own interest. The 1923 Lausanne Treaty gave Turkey a special right over the Shah Suleyman tomb, after its relocation in 1973 following the construction of a dam, Turkey conserved those rights including the opportunity to cross Syria to reach this piece of land and to garrison there a symbolic amount of guards. Turkey first increased the number of guards when the ISIS was approaching and menacing of destructing the shrine. In February 2015, Turkey paid special attention to intervene as quickly and with as little impact as possible and a second time relocate the *turbe*, this time very near to mainland Turkey, some 180 meters from the border at a village called Ashme.

If one analyzes the Turkish approach to the Syrian civil war and the Turkish intervention into it, they can find four major phases. After the open crackdown on the demonstrators in Deraa and later in other parts of Syria prompted the condemnation of the Assad regime by Ankara, but until summer 2013, the Turkish government still hoped that they can influence the Assad administration to stop the bloodshed. Commencing in the summer of 2013, during the second stage of the inflexible Turkish foreign policy towards Syria, Turkey started to openly support the classical opposition forces. After 2014, during the third phase, while other NATO member states were revising their alliance policies in Syria, Turkey kept helping the same organization, namely the Free Syrian Army in their fight against the then emerging terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Nusra Front, and later the YPG what Ankara considers to be a terrorist organization, too. The fourth stage can be characterized on one hand by the continuous support for the FSA and the Turcoman ethnic militias and on the other, after a certain reluctance to take part in the openly anti-ISIS fights, a full scale war on all the fragmented terrorist groups with two major operations, the *Firat Kalkani* and the ongoing *Zeytin Dali* officially directed against both ISIS and YPG (Altunisik, 2016).

Though there were some earlier cases of foreign military intervention both by governments and militias, the massive deployment of foreign military personnel and arms started on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 when on the request of the Assad government, the Russians agreed upon

sending air crafts and sea-based missiles to indiscriminately target all opposition groups including the ones supported by the West or Turkey. On the terrain, Russians joined the Syrian army and the Iranians and helped them to capture the second largest urban center of the country, Aleppo, in February 2016.

Turkey is the last and -as of now- the most active intervention force in Syria. Their massive intrusion starts with the Operation Euphrates Shield (Firat kalkani harekati in Turkish) on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2016 and -at the time of writing- for the third consecutive weeks, Turkey keeps under attack the YPG stronghold of Afrin, north of Aleppo. This means that the military interventions in Syria are not over and may cause waves of refugees to Turkey.

**3.1.7. Withdrawal of the Islamists**

At the time of writing, in February 2018, it is impossible to speak of a total annihilation of the various Islamist factions in Syria though it is a fact that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has lost a vast majority of it lands. Probably the turning point was the decision made by the opposition army called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to first isolate and than take the self declared capital city of ISIS, Raqqa. This operation called Euphrates Wrath by the coalition of YPG units and moderate ethnic Arab militias started on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 (Humud, Blanchard and Nikitin, 2017). The battle for Raqqa was over on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2017. The siege and occupation of Raqqa did not mean the normalization in the region. Many reports suggest that there was a transfer of power only and the chase of ISIS from Raqqa did not bring about stability.

**3.1.8. Living conditions in government and opposition held territories**

To describe the amplitude of the welfare loss caused by the civil war in Syria let us start with a simple table presenting the basic demographic changes that occurred during the armed conflict in the Middle Eastern country.

Population (inside Syria)	Before Conflict (2010) 20.7 million	Conflict (2016) 18.5 million
Per Capita Income (Current \$)	\$2806	\$1215
Life expectancy at Birth	74.4 years	69.5 years

**Table 3. Demographic and economic changes in Syria during the civil war**

(Source: Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017)

The above Table clearly shows a great loss of human lives. There is a decrease of 2.2 million inhabitants despite a relatively important fertility rate prior to the war. The drop in the number of Syrians residing in Syria does not necessarily demonstrate the number of fatal casualties in armed conflicts, but it also takes into account the high number of refugees that went to the neighboring countries like Turkey or far beyond. The picture can be diversified with the millions of internally displaced who found shelter inside the country. The decrease of the Per Capita Income is also spectacular. It can be argued that a decrease of 56.7%, more than the half of an already very low level income data. The 1215 USD/inhabitant corresponds to the GDP of poor Sub-Saharan African countries (according to the statistics provided by the International Monetary Fund, Mozambique had a Per Capita Income of 1266 USD in 2017). Life expectancy at birth is generally growing worldwide, whereas in Syria it was lowered from a relatively good position (an average of 74.4 years) to a less privileged one (69.5 years). Another source puts life expectancy as low as just 55.4 in 2015 (Diggle et al. 2017).

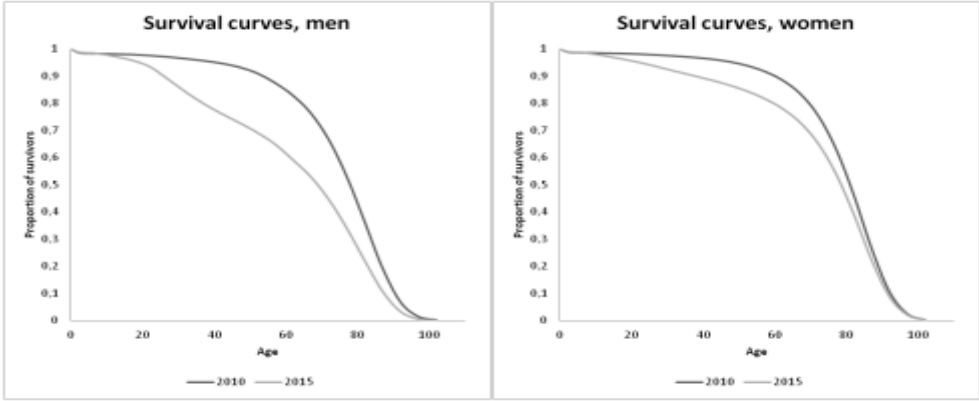
It is also possible to deduce from the above statistics and further calculations that, indeed, the demographic and economic factors are interconnected. The extreme poverty that Syrians face after conducting decent life before the war is not only due to the direct effect of war such as destruction in general and the deconstruction of infrastructure and the facilities needed for production, but it also derives from the increasing mortality and the miserable human conditions one can experience throughout the country. The decrease in life expectancy in another context would be less dramatic. In a much richer country, it would not have such a disastrous effect on the economy and the poverty (Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017).

In the context of the demographic catastrophe caused by the civil war, it is much more difficult to cope with for an individual or an actor of the national economy than in peaceful countries. People living in the Western world can trade-off their losses in much easier manners than the Syrians. This also reflects a more theoretical point for economists, too. It is impossible to measure a country in war on equal footings with countries either much richer or off the conflicts (Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017). So, our above comparison with Mozambique might have been a little bit misleading. That means that a poor citizen of Mozambique might have a much higher chance of survival in his or her country than a Syrian in war-torn Syria.

The very reason for having less chance to survive in Syria is the riskiness of the country. An inhabitant of Mozambique might have an individual income equal to a Syrian person, but his or her situation is less risky, and he or she is not obliged to spend this money on self-defense related

costs. This also means that the general deterioration of welfare appears on the individual level as an individual welfare deterioration issue (Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017). At the end, 82.5% of the Syrians live below line of poverty (Diggle et al., 2017).

Riskiness and chances of survival are the two main factors to be understood to Table out the tragedy of that particular poverty that one can find in Syria.



**Graph 2. Survival curves of Syrian men and women during the civil war**

(Source: Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017)

The above curves prove that the civil war considerably decreases one’s chances to survive. This applies -of course- more to the male population as men are more involved in the fights proper. It is also to be noted that all age categories are concerned, but it is noticeable that men between the age of 40 and 60 have a particularly low chance of not to die. This is an important notification as this chunk of society is the one which promotes economic growth through the work and business experience they have accumulated during their long years at various work places. It is also worth comparing the two sexes, as far as women are concerned, indeed, there is a relative equilibrium, that means that proportionally the same level of casualties can be observed at all age categories. The above arguments suggest “that assumptions on the degree of net risk-aversion with respect to the duration of life play a key role for the valuation of the deterioration of survival conditions, and, hence, for the measurement of the welfare loss due to the Syrian Civil War.”(Onder, Pestieau and Ponthiere, 2017:16).

Arguably, the main challenge for a Syrian is to survive. Even if one survives, they face tremendous difficulties as the Syrian economy was very badly hit by the conflict. The central government for example can count on much less revenue than before. Prior to the war, the most important part of the income of the Syrian budget was crude oil that represented around 25% of

the Syrian economy. Now, half of this income disappeared as many oil fields and installations have been destroyed or occupied and used by opposition forces. With the war both state-run and private businesses started to bankrupt or at least pay much less tax than before, but the government still tried to maintain the social welfare system on its territories and meet the basic needs, especially food, of the population until 2013. This effort to provide the inhabitants of Syria with a certain level of living provoked a huge deficit in the budget. In 2010, the balance was 2% whereas in 2013 it has risen to 54% (World Vision International, 2016).

One of the public services the Assad regime and the opposition groups fail to provide is health care. Syria's relatively stable health care system was considerably annihilated during the armed conflict. According to a calculation done by a civil society organization called Physicians for Human Rights, not less than 224 attacks against medical installations have been recorded in Syria, in 2014 alone. Due to these incidents more than 600 health care specialists have been killed throughout the country (Diggle et al. 2017). Due to the lack of a proper system to deal with the needy, Syria has seen the outbreak of a very high number of diseases. The most frequent illness was related to measles, almost one third of all epidemic catastrophes were linked to this medical problem. Next to measles, Syria can be also characterized by a number of cases of acute jaundice syndrome, acute bloody diarrhea and respiratory infections<sup>2</sup> (Diggle et al, 2017).

### **3.1.9. Higher education during the civil war**

In the above described poor conditions, surprisingly enough, the Syrian system of national and higher education continue to exist and subsist. The Syrian laws relative to the education system presented earlier are still in vigor. So, the overall structure did not change, only the infrastructure was weakened by the fights.

The actual situation on the ground is very difficult to be detected due to lack of resources. For example the web page of the largest and most prestigious Syrian higher education institution, the Damascus University (<http://damasuniv.edu.sy>) was last updated in 2011, the beginning of the civil war and most information it contains seems outdated. On this page Mohamed Hassan Al-Kurdi, an Assad loyalist is given as the rector. He still occupied this position in 2014, when he visited Moscow as member of a Syrian delegation to meet Russian students (Syrian Arab News Agency, 2014). A Spanish language news blog reports that Al-Kurdi headed a conference on the issue of the relationships between the European Union and Venezuela. Judged over the photos

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attached to the article, it seems that the university conference room is in adequate conditions, but the whole functioning is over-politicized (EmbaVenez, 2015). In fact, Al-Kurdi is no longer the head of the university. According to an article, the present rector is Mohamed Maher Kabikiby. It is possible to deduce from this news that he met with the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to host lectures and seminars on the campus of the university (Dayoub and Sabbagh, 2018). Though the Internet site of the Damascus University is old and lacks information, the university works and is included in a certain number of social and political projects.

The University of Aleppo was less lucky during the fights than its counterpart in the capital city. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013, the campus was heavily bombed and at least 82 people -mainly students and teachers- have been massacred. The attack took place on the first days of the exams and students going from their dormitories to the Faculty of Architecture were first targeted by the shootings. As there was heavy shelling from both sides, at the beginning it was unclear whether the opposition forces or the government loyalists were to be blamed for it. In fact, the university hosted several anti-government protests, so it is more reasonable to think that the perpetrators were from the ranks of the Syrian Arab Army, meaning Damascus (Sands, 2013). The Assad regime took control of Aleppo in December 2016. Since then the university campus has been partially rebuilt and the teachers and the students are back.

The third largest university of Syria, the Tishreen University, has a much more privileged situation as it is located in the heartland of the Alawite minority to which president Assad also belongs to. The city of Latakia where it is to be found was more or less saved of the horror of the war and the education was continuous at the university. This institution of higher education benefits from substantial Russian help. The aid pouring in since 2011 contributed to the creation of a so called Center for Reconciliation where Syrian army officers are trained to assess military and humanitarian situation after an area is taken back from the rebels. So, the once civil university is partially transformed into a conflict resolution study point (TASS, 2017).

The fourth largest university of Syria is the Baath University of Homs, a city that was one of the epicenters of the early protests in 2011 and 2012 as it was detailed earlier. The city was then held by the rebels and was heavily bombed by the loyalists of the Assad regime. Until November 2011, the start of the bombing campaign by the government, the university provided education and shelter for its more than 10.000 students, especially in the field of medicine the place is famed for. In early 2012, the attacks on the Baba Amr neighborhood close to the university held

by the opposition have intensified and that prompted the departure of many students. At this time, there were no lectures or exams. Later in 2012, the situation has improved. Despite the disruption of the classes, the exams of the second semester of that academic year took place and due to the complexity of the situation, the rector of the university showed an example of flexibility. Students were not required to do all their tasks or were allowed to move to universities at safer locations in the country. Though even after 2013, the life in and around Homs was not fully secure, the education at the campus was normalized (Al-Fanar, 2017).

The fifth largest public university, Al-Furat (Euphrates) of Deir Ezzor and Raqqa was one of the victims of the civil war. When in March 2013, the rebels of the Free Syrian Army took over Raqqa, the future capital of ISIS, the Raqqa campus of the university continued to do the administrative and instructional tasks, but exams were no longer allowed to be organized, the system started to collapse. Students were transferred to the two other campuses of the university in Deir Ezzor and Hassakah, at that time safe and under government control. The whole situation changed in January 2014 when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria came to power and imposed strict rules on the university including the separation of the two sexes, the wearing of Islamic attires and that no matters taught at the university could go against how they interpreted the holy texts of Islam. One year later, ISIS closed down completely the Al-Furat University and up to 14.000 students were not allowed to continue their studies (Al Ahmad, 2016).

Terror of the civilians affected the main public universities across Syria in very diverse ways. Areas where Damascus is in power are safer and education continues, whereas in more war torn regions it is halted. This is also a reason for many students and teachers of Syrian decent to flee and continue their academic work outside the country. Many of them opt for Turkey.

### **3.2. Impact of the Syrian Civil War on Turkey**

#### **3.2.1 Arrival of the refugees to Turkey**

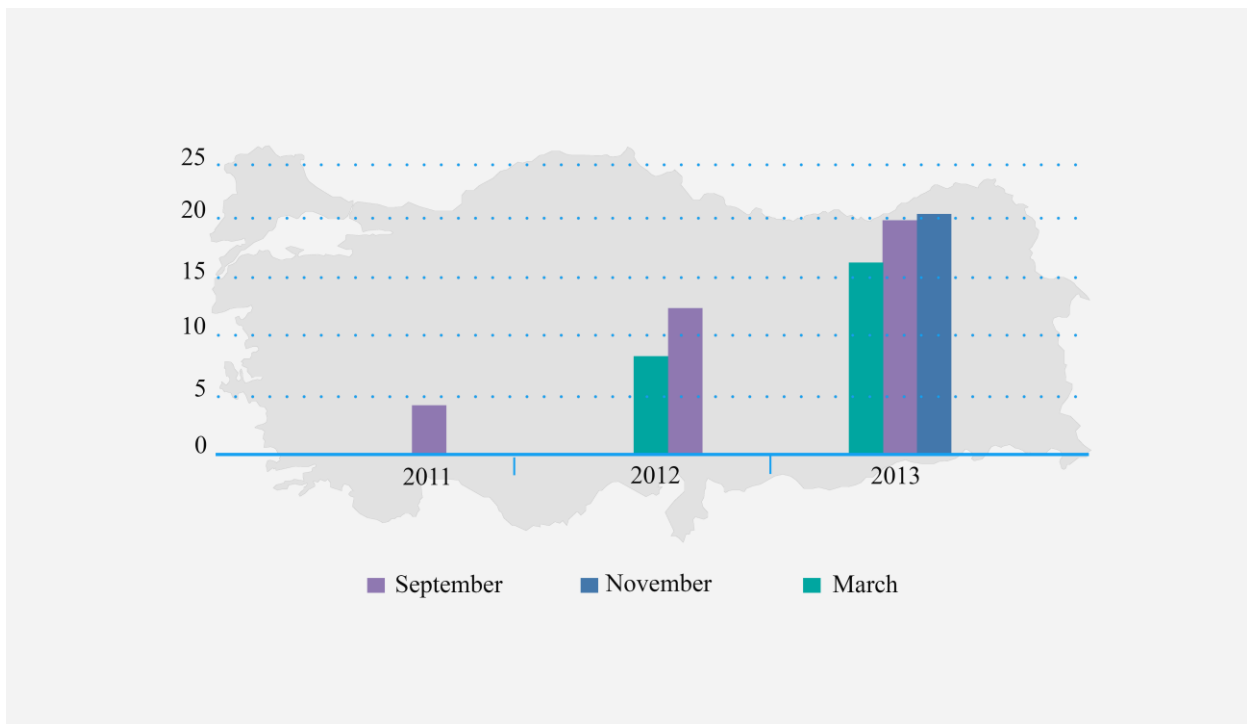
Turkey, and prior the proclamation of the republic in 1923 the Ottoman Empire, is a country that receives a fair share of refugees at various moments of history. The last important wave of asylum seekers has reached Turkey around the end of the 1980s and the beginning of when at least 300.000 ethnic Turks of Bulgaria had to flee the persecution and pogroms of that country, and some 25.000 Bosnian people who tried to escape the horror of the war in the former Yugoslav republic. Most of these people were both culturally and linguistically close to the inhabitants of Turkey and returned home as soon as their country became secure again. (Canyurt, 2015) Turkish people were enthusiastic about getting the refugees from the Balkans, and they

perceived their reception as a national duty. Nobody questioned the necessity of the steps taken by the government and the social integration of the refugees did not cause too much trouble. Due to the similitude in language and culture, their education was an easier issue than the case of the Syrian Arab refugees.

The first refugees from Syria started to appear at the Turkish-Syrian border around April 2011. After May 2011, it was a more and more frequent sight to see Syrians legally or illegally crossing into Turkey in the following districts close to the Mediterranean: Yayladagi, Altinozu and Reyhanli (Canyurt, 2015). At that time the first temporary reception centers were established. These were very basic camps with tents and a few other facilities as everybody hoped that the refugees would return soon. The Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) made its first statement on the arrival of the refugees on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011, meaning that their number reached the level of unusual situation as early as mid-June 2011. According to this early report some 8.538 Syrian asylum seekers were housed in the first temporary reception centers or camps in the districts of Yayladagi and Altinozu. The census prepared by AFAD in August 2012 shows that some 78.409 Syrian refugees have been registered with the Turkish authorities. Estimates at that time put the exact number much higher: 100.000 people (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015). In August 2012, the Turkish government realized that the space and the opportunities were very limited, and they tried to retain as many refugees as possible near the border crossings. Due to this early policy, the refugee population of the border districts exceeded the number of the local Turkish demography. The always increasing number of refugees in 2013 obliged the Turkish government to rethink their approach and let the refugees inside the country (Canyurt, 2015).

In April 2013, the Great Turkish National Assembly (TBMM) has adopted a new law on refugees that was used as early as 2014 (Macreath and Sagnic, 2017). The necessity of a new legal frame is proven by the fact that in 2013 and 2014 it was already possible to speak of a massive wave of immigration from Syria. According to official numbers, one could count up to 1.645.000 Syrian refugees on Turkish soil. At that time temporary reception centers were established in 10 different provinces of the country. Sixteen of them were very basic camps composed of tents, only six contained more sophisticated structures such as containers. In 2014, some 221.447 refugees lived in them under very rudimentary conditions, making up 13.46% of the overall refugee population (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015).





**Graph 3. Rise of the number of refugee camps in Turkey from April 2011 to November 2013**

(Source: Dincer et al., 2013)

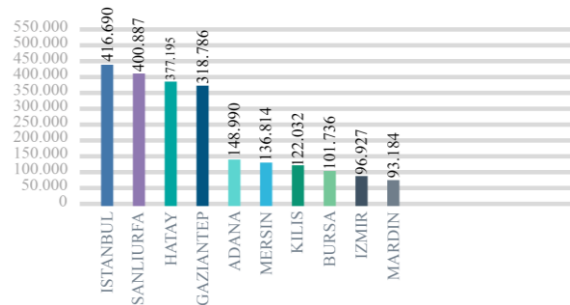
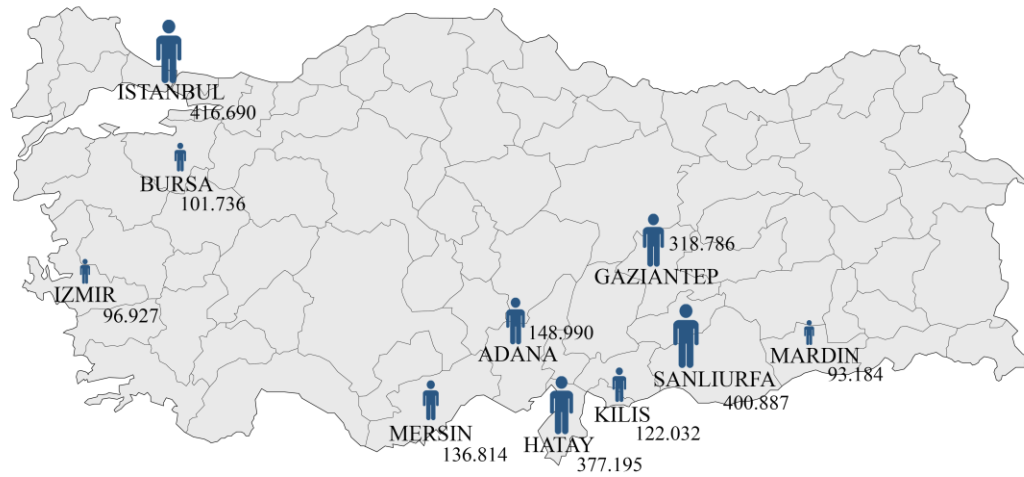
This means that the vast majority of the refugees, around 85% of them lived outside the camps and had limited access to the services provided. The high number of refugees residing outside the camps can be explained in two ways. First, the Turkish government and the Turkish civil society organizations were very simply unable to deal with such a large number of incoming individuals and families. Second, most refugees were either wealthy enough to start an independent life outside the camps, or had family members in Turkey. It has to be underlined that on one hand, a refugee is not necessarily a poor villager, and, in fact, many of those taking shelter in Turkey came from the rich merchant milieu of Aleppo. On the other hand, Turkey has an ethnic Arabic, Syria has an ethnic Turcoman (Turkish) minority. Very frequently these people have relatives just across the frontier.

Those living outside the camps are a bit out of the sight of the authorities as they have much less contact with them compared to the ones residing in the reception centers. This larger chunk of the refugees is often helped by civil society organizations like Mazlumder, an NGO founded in 1991 and having a mission to assist the oppressed. A study conducted by Mazlumder on the issue show that these Syrians mainly rent properties. This phenomenon started in the border area, in smaller cities like Kilis where in the beginning an ordinary flat cost not more than 200-300

Turkish liras. An extremely quick increase in rent was documented since 2011. In the border region, rents have risen to 700-800 YTL in the space of two years, whereas in Istanbul, a flat can cost up to 1400-1500 YTL corresponding to an average Turkish salary (Dincer et al. 2013). It is worthy to note that the rise of rents meant the first real conflict between the refugees and the general Turkish public. Very often ordinary Turks could not pay as much for a flat as a rich Syrian refugee from Aleppo.

The first dozens of refugee camps were located in the border area for political reasons. The majority of those who opted for staying outside the camps also lived in the same region of Turkey, especially those who had family members across the border, a frontier that cut off families after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The fact that the ever-increasing number of refugees lived near the conflict zone in Syria, raised a certain number of concerns. First, refugees themselves did not find the situation secure enough. Second, Turkish authorities were worried about the refugee population overshadowing the equally disadvantaged locals. A general discussion among experts also started on the topic of freedom of movement and many argued that camps have to be far from the border, at least 50 km should separate them from the war torn regions and masses of Syrian refugees have to be relocated inside the Republic of Turkey. The last push has been the Reyhanli bombings discussed in the previous chapter of our study (Dincer et al. 2013). The Reyhanli attack perpetrated by terrorists from Syria proved the vulnerability of Turkey on one hand, and the necessity of a radical change in approaching the refugee crisis.

As Syrian refugees were allowed to settle down freely throughout Turkey, they started to appear in the richer urban centers and Western Turkey. As Istanbul is the largest city in the country, it is normal to note that the biggest refugee community - officially 539.000 people, but according to some estimates 600.000 people- now live on the shores of the Bosphorus. Istanbul is followed by the most important cities near the Syrian border like Sanliurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adana and Mersin. There is at least 10 Turkish provinces to host over 100.000 Syrian refugees. The most astonishing statistics comes from one of the smallest provinces of Turkey, Kilis. In Kilis, one can find up to 130.000 refugees next to the local population of 90.000, that means that the number of asylum seekers bypasses by far the number of the autochthonous or primordial inhabitants (Erdogan et al., 2017). The exact distribution of Syrian refugees in Turkey's provinces is given by the following table.



**Graph 4. Distribution of Syrian refugees under temporary Turkish protection in 2016 according to the province of residency**

(Source: Erdogan et al., 2014)

Though some refugees were really rich and lived under excellent conditions before the war, nearly one third of the Syrian refugees can be called poor and very often they lived under lamentable conditions before and during the war. As it was mentioned earlier, the health care system in Syria collapsed around 2013 though the Assad regime tried hard to maintain a certain level of stability. In rebel held areas (most refugees came from those regions) the situation was even more tragic. The genuine poverty of rural Syria and the collapse of the national health care system therein provoked a visible deterioration in the human condition of the refugees. In the year of 2014, some 500.000 Syrian refugees were taken to Turkish hospitals and the Turkish government spent 4.5 billion USD on their bills. Forty percent of the hospitalized, 200.000 Syrian refugees had to undergo medical operations (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015).

There is also a hope for restart after the conflict is over as in the very same year, 35.000 Syrian refugees gave birth to their children in Turkish hospitals (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015).

According to another source, on a monthly basis, 6.000 babies were born in the refugee camps during the 2011-2013 time period (Dincer et al., 2013). Though the birth of an infant is very good news for the family, there is an instant legal problem with most newly born refugee. As their parents cannot prove their identity with reliable documents, these children can only get the status of a stateless.

With the births and the constant influx of the refugees, their number keeps growing. The rise of the terrorist organization, the appearance of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria close to the Turkish border lead to a further increase in the refugee population in Turkey. In 2015, some 2.503.549 Syrian refugees lived in Turkey. 53% of the refugees were male and 47% female. This means that the majority of the refugees were families who arrived to Turkey together (Akpınar, 2017). In the same year, 2015, the peak of the refugee crisis in Europe, many observers had the impression that most refugees are rather able-bodied young men. This might be true for those managed to get to the West, but it is definitely false as far as Turkey is concerned.

Though displacement of a high number of refugees from Turkey to Europe in 2015 on the Balkan route took place, their number did not decrease but has increased ever since. The reason for this is that most of those going to Europe were not from Syria, and most them just crossed Turkey without spending essential amount of time in the country. The number of refugees outside the camps grow, they establish a solid standard of living for themselves, many of them start their own businesses, so, they are interested either in going to Europe, or going back to Syria. Observing the statistics prepared in 2017, it can be stated that the number of refugees living in camps remain almost permanent, and an ever growing proportion of refugees now live in Turkish cities. In 2017, 91% (2.711.505 Syrian nationals) of the refugees reside either in their own flat or in a rented property, and only 9% (255.644 people) in camps. Half of those still in the camps live in the ethnically mixed province of Sanliurfa (Akpınar, 2017).

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Şanlıurfa	112.473
Gaziantep	38.347
Kilis	35.787
Kahramanmaraş	18.298
Mardin	3.369
Hatay	19.667
Adana	555
Adıyaman	9.657
Osmaniye	7.302
Malatya	10.189
<b>Toplam</b>	<b>255.644</b>

**Table 4. Syrian refugees living in camps in 2017 distributed by Turkish provinces (Source: Akpınar, 2017)**

The transfer of the refugees from the camps to the cities increased -as it was mentioned earlier- prices and this caused unease for both the refugees and the locals. A study done by the Mersin University shows that there is another factor making the number of the city dwellers grow: in many rented flats, now more than one Syrian family live together. After 2015, the number of unmarried men also grew. According to the same analysis they also tend to live together. The same study underlines that 5 to 6 of them share hotel rooms in the cheap hostels near the bus station of Mersin (Akpınar, 2017).

In 2018, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey was officially around 3 million, estimates give 3.6 Syrian refugees in Turkey. As the conflict is not over, the researchers can count on a further increase, but they should not forget that Turkish military and border guards are now watching the frontier carefully and do not let everybody in as reports of refugees turned back to Syria are popping up the Turkish media.

### **3.2.5. Approaches to the refugees in Turkey**

After the arrival of the first Syrian refugees in Turkey, the reception of the ever growing refugee community was rather good. They were referred to as “misafir” or guests both in Turkish and Arabic. Misafirs have a very special place in Islamic culture and jurisprudence, they not only respected and assisted but also have certain rights, too. As time passes and interests conflict, discontentment might appear among the original Turkish population, but the overall attitude towards the misafirs is still positive as of 2018.

An in-depth study conducted in February to April 2014 in three border cities (Kilis, Hatay and Sanliurfa) and three urban centers far from the frontier (Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin) with 87 refugees living outside the camps, shows that the refugees themselves like to live in Turkey, and they feel safe compared to Syria. They appreciate the assistance of the Turkish society, nevertheless they feel hopeless and do not have detailed plans for the future. This uncertainty makes them feel unhappy (Erdogan, 2014.b).

The same analysis proves that Turks consider the situation to be a case of urgent need for humanitarian action and almost everybody agrees that it is the right and duty of Turkey to receive the Syrian refugees. Turks usually cite three main arguments in favor of reception: the right and duty of taking those who flee the war, the brotherhood what is a key Islamic value and the fact that the Turkish nation is known as being hospitable. Though they are basically for the

good reception of refugees, they want them to return after the war ends, and they do not want to get more of them (Erdogan, 2014.b).

Besides the cultural values derived from the Islamic religion, there is also a political reason why an important segment of the Turkish population is ready to show positive attitudes towards the reception of Syrian refugees. The most receptive strata is the one that supports the governing Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP) and the once prime minister, now president of the republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The AKP electorate in most situations follows the guideline given by the party and Erdogan himself and the AKP and Erdogan give a rather positive view of this type of immigration, that is why many Turks become supportive of the case of the Syrian refugees. This remains true even when the AKP voters hear from the mouth of their leader that the governments spends an incredible 3.000.000.000 USD on them despite the United Nations covering only one sixth of the costs (Ates and Bektas, 2016).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his supporters argue that there is a diplomatic and an economic benefit that the Turkish society can gain out of a respectful reception of the Syrian refugees (Ates and Bektas, 2016). The diplomatic benefit can be realized when these people return to Syria and would promote a fruitful Turkish-Syrian and Turkish-Arabic coexistence and cooperation in the Middle East. The economic benefit can be visible on much shorter run as already during the first half of the 2010s Syrians started to open small businesses in big cities across Turkey and this is why some of them contribute to the well-being of the Turkish society.

A distinct demographic and economic argument also appears among the ideas of the fans of the governing AKP. They say that as Turkey (maybe surprisingly) is increasingly getting old, lacks young and innovative generations that can be gained by the integration of the talented young Syrian refugees (Ates and Bektas, 2016). This is why the topic of our present study, the training of Syrian refugees by Turkish institutions of higher education can be a key element for the further economic reforms in Turkey.

Having said so, the coexistence of Turks and Syrians, mainly Arab refugees is not easy. As it has been mentioned before, one of the early sources of confrontation between the two groups is the urging question of housing. Some statistics were given about how the house rents rose at the beginning of the 2010s by 400% in the border area, it was also detailed that many times more than one family use the rented property. One more issue can be added to the list: many Syrian refugees misuse the flats, destroy the real estate or construct something illegally next to the rented house. As these refugees tend to settle down in the popular suburbs of big cities, these bad

habits would oppose them to the relatively poor inhabitants of those neighborhoods (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015).

As it was detailed in the previous chapter, refugee camps and early refugee settlement were situated in the border provinces of Turkey. This region of Anatolia is widely known for being extremely conservative in the social norms. Anything that breaks this code provokes a certain response from the locals. Though these norms are close to the ones that were usual across the border in Syria prior to the civil war, the fact the same norms characterized the two distinct communities, does not necessarily mean that the two segments of the population can be easily mixed. On the contrary, though Syrian refugees were warmly welcomed and helped in the early days of the refugee crisis, the first mixed marriages indeed shocked the local Turks. Even more because the arrival of handsome unmarried Syrian males provoked quite a high number of divorces in the provinces of Kilis, Hatay and Sanliurfa. According to an estimate 20% of the divorces in the province of Kilis happens because of the appearance of a Syrian on the scene. Many mixed couples keep their relationship in secret or do not register their marriage with the Turkish authorities fearing the reaction of the neighbors and relatives. Mixed marriage from the Syrian point of view is a chance. As in Islamic jurisprudence paying dowry to the bride (and many times through the bride to her family) is one of the conditions of the “nikah” or Islamic marriage, Syrian refugee families ask for incredible amount of money for the hand of their daughters. This habit is more and more widespread in the Arab world, much less so in Turkey (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015).

Another source of misunderstanding between Turks and Syrian Arabs is the fact that some Syrian families let and make their children work. This concerns basically the youngsters staying outside the camps as those in the reception centers go to school and the majority of those outside cannot attend classes (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015). Most Syrian child workers end up as ambulant vendors in the busy streets of the big cities in Western Turkey. Their presence caused the first remarkably violent scenes between Turks and Syrians. The first case that really shocked the Turkish public happened in July 2015 in the port city of Izmir. A small kid selling handkerchiefs approached a group of people sitting on the terrace of a restaurant. The owner of the place appeared and brutally beat up the child. The images of the crying boy went viral, but only proved to be a prelude to further harassment throughout the country (Hurriyet Haber, 2015).

Employing Syrian refugees, not only children but also grown up people is a more general problem that should be evoked here. An unknown but possibly high number of Syrian refugees

are employed illegally. This practice leads to a growing black labor market and a situation of injustice in which companies refusing this way get comparative disadvantage on the market. Illegal employment has another negative effect on Turkish economy. These black laborers get much lower wages than their legally employed Turkish colleagues (Arslan et al. 2017). At the same time, it is impossible to deny some positive economic outcomes of the Syrian refugee crisis. This is specifically true for the otherwise underdeveloped border regions of Turkey where the young and talented Syrians create businesses and generate demand. These Syrians out of their culture are in need of special products and services. Turkish firms are increasingly taking into consideration these needs and consider it a new challenge and a new chance to infiltrate into that specific segment of the market (Arslan et al., 2017).

Not only misunderstandings can occur while Turkey is receiving around 3 million refugees on its territory, but the country runs a considerable risk as dangerous elements could have infiltrated the masses of refugees and terrorists affiliated to the organizations of ISIS, PYD, YPG or PKK might hide among the good people they forced to flee (Ates and Bektas, 2016).

Though the overall attitude is still positive, more and more incidents oppose the refugees to the mainstream population. This is also reflected by the way the Turkish media reports on the issues related to the asylum seekers. The metaphors they use compare the really high number of refugees to natural and human disasters such as fire, explosion or flood (Ates and Bektas, 2016). This manner not only dehumanizes Syrian refugees but also plays on growing prejudices and strengthens the increasing alienation of Syrians in the Turkish society. It is important to note that these negative comments do not reach the level of general racism in the society or in the system. Isolated cases of racism might occur, but again, the general Turkish public accepted and accepts Syrian Arab refugees. Though a remarkably high percentage of the Turks refuses the idea of giving Turkish citizenship to the refugees (84,5%), they are not against the distribution of permanent work permits among them as only 47,4% rejects it and 32% is for a further relaxation of the rules. 66,9% of the Turks think that Syrian refugees are rather well integrated into the Turkish society and many of them explain this by the short distance separating the Turkish culture from the Syrian (Tunc, 2015).

### **3.2.6. Legal frame of the reception of refugees in Turkey**

The legal frame of the reception of the refugees in the Republic of Turkey is built on two distinct pillars. One of them is the global structure based on stable international conventions, the other is the system that comprises the ever evolving laws of the country.



Refugees in the common sense existed throughout human history. Populations for diverse reasons were fleeing certain zones as communities or as individuals. The Ottoman Empire -for example- was a land of exile. Muslim communities in their integrity took refuge there when they were persecuted, like the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus when the Russian took away their lands. Muslim and non-Muslim individuals have also opted for the Turkish hospitality. The case of the Hungarian prince, Ferenc Rakoczi can be cited here as an example as he lived in Turkey for approximately three decades and died in the city of Tekirdag on the Marmara Sea.

Though refugees were present at various moments of history, the legal definition was only proposed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. International law defines a refugee as a person who out of understandable fear of being persecuted because of his or her appurtenance to a given race, religion, nationality or political thought leaves his or her home country. There are two major treaties on the issue of refugees in the international law two which most governments including Ankara adhere to. The first one is the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of the Refugees and its Protocol from 1967 (Latif, 2002).

Prior to the Geneva Convention the Republic of Turkey did not have any particular legal frame to deal with the incoming refugees though refugees were, indeed, present. In 1922, a massive wave of ethnic Turkish Muslim immigration took place from Greece amid a painful process of population exchange between the two countries. If one includes other Muslim refugees from the newly independent Balkan states and Yugoslavia, Turkey received up to 800.000 refugees between its creation in 1923 and the end of World War II in 1945 (Latif, 2002). In 1951, Turkey was among the signatories of the convention, but its acceptance included an important geographical limitation. Turkey was ready to receive refugees from Europe only. In 1967, when the Protocol of the convention was signed by the nations and most countries gave up territorial limitations, Turkey kept its policy to deal with exclusively European asylum seekers (Latif, 2002). The very reason behind the Turkish choice was the closeness of the country to various hot conflict zones of the Middle East and Turkey did not want to import all the political, social and economic disasters that characterized and still characterize the region. These dates correlate with the evolution of Turkish politics in general. The Geneva Convention was signed at a time of political transition and democratization in Turkey as in 1946 a multi-party political system was introduced and the first free and fair elections took place in 1950. In 1951, Turkey was a new and weak democracy that wanted to follow the directives coming from its Western allies in the NATO, but was not capable of solving all the problems of the Asian continent. In 1967, Turkey was over a military coup deposing a democratically elected government and executing its prime

minister, Adnan Menderes. After a few years of military rule, Turkey was back on the track and re-became a Western-style democracy, but it was again a weak one. Taking into account these excuses, one might understand why Turkey insisted on the geographical limitation.

It is to be stressed that the 1950s and the 1960s were the time of the Cold War opposing the allies of the United States of America, like Turkey, to the Eastern bloc. The above detailed geographical limitation meant that Turkey was ready and wanted to protect the conventional refugees fleeing the persecution of the communist regimes. Indeed, a group of Hungarian refugees ended up in Turkey after the 1956 revolution of Budapest. The first 79 Hungarian citizens arrived in Istanbul by train on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1957. They were warmly welcomed by a Turkish civil society organization called Free Hungarian Association of Istanbul. Later, more groups could reach Turkey and the Turkish authorities registered a total of 507 Hungarian anti-communist refugees (Calik, 2015). From the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1957 issue of the Turkish daily called *Milliyet*, one can even learn that Refik Korlatan, the president of the Great Turkish National Assembly (TBMM) visited the refugee camp established by the Turkish government in Istanbul.

As it is possible to see from the above example of Hungarian refugees, the aim of Turkey was to post their commitment to the cause of anti-communism and deal with hassle free small groups of refugees. The Turkish government was fully aware that the 507 Hungarian refugees would never pose a security threat as would a similar group from the Middle East, and that these refugees would not stay forever in Turkey, they rather plan to resettle in the West. It is also clear that those anti-communist refugees who finally remained on Turkish territory were easy to be integrated into the Turkish society, would learn the language and though having a different religious and cultural background would easily fit into the secular structure of the Turkish society (Latif, 2002).

In the 1980s, Turkey had to realize that its age old understanding of the definition of the status of refugees is outdated. Though Turkey still did not recognize the small groups of Iranian or Kurdish asylum seekers as refugees, they let them in, and it was permitted for them to ask for refugee status with the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and seek resettlement if accepted (Latif, 2002).

Turkey applied a totally different standard as far as ethnic Turks or members of related ethnic groups were concerned. Earlier in this chapter, it has been mentioned the case of the ethnic Turkish minority of Bulgaria who were savagely persecuted by the communist regime of Todor Zhivkov. These Muslim refugees, mostly ethnic Turks, but also Pomaks and Romas were

received on the basis of the No. 2510 Settlement Law (Iskan Kanunu in Turkish).<sup>3</sup> This law was first voted during the lifetime of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1934, and was modified on several occasions, for example in 1935, in 1939 or 1947. The first point of the law clearly states that it relates to a designated group of peoples only. This point includes the “muhacir” (literary those who left their home, but here it refers to ethnic Turks), the nomads (again ethnic Turks practicing nomadism) and the wandering Gypsies. Due to the Settlement Law important masses of ethnic Turks, but also Bosnians, Albanian, Iraqi Turcomans and Romas could start a new life in Turkey. Their massive arrival at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s opened a heated political debate whether they really flee oppression or seek better living conditions (Latif, 2002).

For a long time, Turkey did not have a comprehensive policy on refugees and their status was determined according to their ethnic origin or being members of belligerent armies taking refuge in Turkey (there was a separate law on these people). In 1994, with the visible increase of the number of asylum seekers who were at that time referred to the UNHCR, Turkey realized that an own law and definition on the refugees is needed, therefore a new law was voted in November 1994 with the no. 22127 under the following title: "The Regulation on the Procedures and the Principles Related to Population Movements and Aliens Arriving in Turkey either as Individuals or in Groups Wishing to Seek Asylum either from Turkey or Requesting Residence Permission in Order to Seek Asylum from Another Country."<sup>4</sup> (Latif, 2002).

After this law entered into force, it was widely criticized by a number of international players for being too strict with the asylum seekers. The original draft required the refugees to present their request within five days upon arrival in the border area of the country, otherwise they could become subject to instant deportation regardless to the validity of their request. Amid this criticism, in 1999, this was increased to ten days (Latif, 2002). Though this law was put under pressure by some global NGOs, it is to be remembered that it included many advances. The most important being the fact that this law recognizes refugees as it is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, this way Turkey now fully adheres to the international standards and gave up the policy of territorial limitations. This change of mind is very important from the point of view of our own topic, because this new attitude makes it possible to train young Syrian refugees at Turkish institutions of higher education.

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the law in Turkish: [http://www.zmo.org.tr/mevzuat/mevzuat\\_detay.php?kod=33](http://www.zmo.org.tr/mevzuat/mevzuat_detay.php?kod=33)

<sup>4</sup> The text of the law in Turkish: <http://www.multeci.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/1994-Yonetmeligi.pdf>

After the massive influx of refugees from Syria following the first two years of the civil war, Turkey needed a new law concerning the reception of asylum seekers. The new law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection was drafted on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2013.<sup>5</sup> The first article of the law describes the goal of the new legal system as follows: “The purpose of this Law is to regulate the principles and procedures with regard to foreigners’ entry into, stay in and exit from Turkey, and the scope and implementation of the protection to be provided for foreigners who seek protection from Turkey, and the establishment, duties, mandate and responsibilities of the Directorate General of Migration Management under the Ministry of Interior.” This sentence shows the concerns of a strong and independent state facing a massive crisis due to the arrival of millions of asylum seekers. Turkey with this new law does not only want to comply with the international rules and trends as it was the case with the 1994 law, but wants to construct its own establishment dealing with the issue. The law, in its second article introduces the notion of immediate temporary protection, a label which describes both its current policy and the legal status of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. This new law also launches the idea of the non-refoulement, this term of French origin in fact means that Turkey cannot send back a refugee to a dangerous place, whereas the 1994 law obliged the authorities to deport a refugee if he or she does not do what is prescribed by the law. It is interesting to note from the point of view of our study that four distinct articles of the law (from n. 38 to n. 41) deal with the regulation on foreign students, their residence and the conditions under which they are permitted to work legally in Turkey.

The 1994 and 2013 laws are not only responses given to the growing number of asylum seekers in Turkey, but they also reflect the considerable political and social changes that characterized Turkey during the last two or three decades. Turkey was and to some extent still is a transit country on the map of the migrants.

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<sup>5</sup> The text of the law in English: [http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng\\_minikanun\\_5\\_son.pdf](http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf)



**Graph 5. Migration routes to Europe**

(Source: Nurdogan et al., 2016)

Between 1980 and 2010, around half a million of illegal transit migrants have been caught by the relevant Turkish authorities (Icduygu, 2015). The analyzation of the trends shows an always growing number of illegal transit migrants crossing Turkey in order to reach the European Union. In 1995, one can speak about 11.000 such migrants, whereas 40.000 in 2013 (Icduygu, 2015:5). At that time there were already more refugees living in Turkey than transit migrants - legal or illegal- willing to settle down in Europe. This remains true even in 2015 when the incredible wave of migrants reaches Europe. Still one can say that the majority of them, around two-thirds of them preferred to stay in Turkey. This is to say that Turkey in the 2010s is increasingly becoming a target county besides being a transit place for some of the migrants.

The social and political transformation of Turkey into a rule of law taking into consideration the rights of the refugees can be proven through the various opportunities that the legal system of the country gives to its misafirs or guests. The renewed Turkish legal system vis-à-vis the refugees recognizes four basic rights in this regard. The first and for us the most important is the right to education. This right is derived from the 28<sup>th</sup> article of the Turkish Constitution. It is a general right and Turkish law does not make any difference between citizens and refugees, theoretically all young people legally residing in Turkey must have access to education at all of its levels including higher education. The second such right is the right to health care. Those living in the camps have the right to be assisted by a specialized organization, the Foundation for Social Aid and Solidarity (SYDV) and all the refugees are covered by the Turkish social security system. All the refugees in Turkey have the right to be sheltered. According to Turkish law, refugees

obtaining residency permit are exempted from paying the tax what a non-refugee resident has to pay. The law no. 4817 on the Work permit of foreign citizens living in Turkey gives a limited right to work. The limitation comes from the fact that the refugee is taken under international protection for a limited amount of time (Recher, 2014).

The renewal of the Turkish legal system regarding the refugees in 1994 and 2013 does not mean that it functions perfectly. Indeed, there are a number of shortcomings inherent in the system, or certain refugees might experience situations they feel unjust. One of these cases is the question of detention. Especially before the big wave of refugees following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, Turkish authorities detained refugees without any apparent reason. Two such cases in 2009 and 2010 were taken to the European Court of Human Rights. In these situations Turkey was punished and had to pay a fine for acting against the basic human rights of the refugees (Recher, 2014).

Another legal discrepancy that existed before 2011 concerned the so called “misafirhanes”. As it has been said earlier, misafir both in Turkish and Arabic means guest, misafirhane is the name of a flat or a house where guests are received. Before the arrival of the Syrian refugees, the number of asylum seekers in Turkey was low compared to the current situation, and they were housed in properties inside the cities of the border area or smaller camp-like facilities with a maximum capacity of 750 persons. Refugees housed in these misafirhanes sometimes were not allowed to leave the place or to travel within Turkey. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> article of the Turkish Constitution gives the right to move around Turkey for everybody who stays legally in the country, in practice this was not given to some refugees (Recher, 2014). With the massive arrival of Syrian refugees since 2011 and especially after 2013, Turkish authorities had to rethink this practice and refugees were no longer restricted to a certain place and were allowed to move freely around the country. This right provoked a massive transfer of refugees and this why at least 20% of Syrian refugees now leave in Istanbul.

A question related to the previous one is the issue of residency. Before 2011, in many cases refugees were only allowed to stay at a place designated by the Ministry of Interior. This practice went against the 23<sup>rd</sup> article of the Turkish Constitution giving the right to choose one’s residency freely inside the country (Recher, 2014). After 2013, this practice was also revised and the choice of the refugee respected.

The legal system of Turkey basically focuses on the material need of the refugees. It is true that the refugees lost or left behind almost all of their belongings and must be helped financially and

given shelter, food and clothing, but it is to be remembered that they had undergone painful experiences of war and other tribulations. Mental assistance might be as important as the material one. Its examination shows that the new law on the refugees voted in 2013 still concentrates on the material issues and might not be effective enough while dealing with the psycho-social problems of the Syrian asylum seekers. It is to be taken into consideration that these Syrian refugees generally came with their families, they live in poor conditions and this is why among those psycho-socially endangered there is a very high number of children and young adults (Recber, 2014).

These above examples of legal problems show that the high number of refugees on Turkish soil constantly obliges the Turkish government to revise its policy and legislation as more and more issues might appear. Occasionally, the practice proves the deficiencies of the system itself. Though the political elite still calls the refugees misafirs and has a positive approach to the problem, the system can be ameliorated. The main legal debate is on the question of citizenship. It is clear that more and more Syrians established themselves in Turkey and even after the pacification of many parts of Syria, they would not return to their country of birth. Some other Syrians come from other regions of the country - like Afrin or Eastern Ghouta - where the fights are still going on at the time of writing. For these refugees, citizenship would be a permanent solution, but there are two important problems to deal with. The first one is a legal, the second one is political issue. First, until now, it was very difficult to obtain Turkish citizenship and the Turkish government distributed just a few dozens every year. Second, a considerable segment of the Turks and of the electorate of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) opposes the idea of liberalizing the citizenship policy of the republic. Those who favor this liberalization argue that the refugees already make up an integral part of the population of Turkey and with the citizenship, the government only recognizes this fact. By giving the Syrian refugees Turkish citizenship, Turkey would also accept them as free social actors who are more than simple guests (Akcabay, 2016).

### **3.2.7. Turkey-EU agreement on refugees**

In the above point, one argues that Turkey might consider to give citizenship to Syrian refugees as a growing number of them seems to stay on a permanent basis in Turkey. There are a certain number of factors influencing this decision made by many Syrians. One of the most powerful external political and legal realities is the Turkey-EU agreement on the question of refugees.

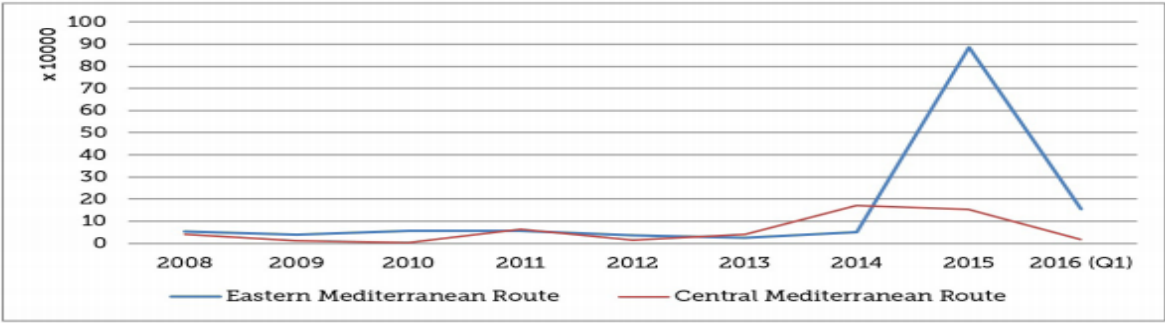
Though EU integration of Turkey is an extremely slow process and sometimes one might think that none of the parties really want it, it is in the common interest of Turkey and the EU to regulate the refugee crisis after the disastrous scenes recorded on the Balkan route in 2015 or on the seaside ever since. It is evident that the European Union wants to keep immigration to Europe under control, wants to select the best candidates for its labor market, but at the same time understands the humanitarian urgency caused by the civil war in Syria. So, the EU is ready to receive certain refugees, but not all of them and it is in its interest to cooperate with Turkey on the issue. Why is it in the interest of Turkey if its European integration might not be its top priority? First, Turkey, at least theoretically, still wants to join the elite club of Europe. Second, integrated into the European Union or not, Turkey aims at becoming a regional power by 2023, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the republic. This is not possible if there is a major rift between Turkey and Europe. In any controversial issue, Turkey has to find an almost ideal solution with its partners in the broader region. The two most important poles in this regard are the EU and Russia, therefore Turkey should be interested in the realization of common immigration and refugee policy with Europe.

The second reason for Turkey to agree upon a solution with the European Union is more practical and is related to the existence of the Schengen Treaty. Millions of Turkish citizens live within the boundaries of the Schengen area and millions want to visit them every year. By complying with the requests of the European powers Turkey wishes to join the Schengen area or if it is not possible make the entry to it for Turkish citizens as easy as possible. In the process Turkey has to make concession and - for example - join the European policy with regard to taking back refugees who were registered in Turkey and who entered the Schengen area illegally. Since 2004 nearly two dozen nations including Russia, the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus and the Balkan countries accepted these conditions. If these preconditions are acceptable for those mainly former communist countries, it should not constitute an obstacle for Turkey either (Ekinici, 2016).

After receiving an unprecedented wave of refugees, nearly 1.5 million people in 2015, both Turkey and the European Union felt the urgent need for the organization of a summit to deal with the issue of massive immigration and the role of Turkey in regulating the influx from the Middle East to Europe. On 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany pays a historical visit to Turkey where she is received with much enthusiasm. Everybody was hoping that this very popular personality (at that time among Turkish citizen asked by a polling institution, Merkel seemed to be more supported than any Turkish politicians) will have the



Turco-German deal on refugees accepted and Merkel would transform the European Union from a bastion-like entity to an integration trading with its neighbors (Karakas, 2016). The parties met on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015 in Brussels and signed the so called common action plan. According to this plan, Turkey accepts to take back all third country citizens registered in Turkey and entering the Schengen zone illegally after 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016. To cover the expenses of these illegal immigrants to Europe, the European Union prepares a fund of 3 billion euro as a source that Turkey is to utilize exclusively for giving services to those taken back after 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016. In exchange, the European Union also commits itself to the re-opening of the integration process of Turkey (Ekinci, 2016).



**Graph 6. Irregular migration to Europe between 2008 and 2016**

(Source: Benvenuti, 2015)

To put the above agreement in practice, there was a legal and political precondition from the European side and actions were expected from Turkey. In September 2015, the European Union declared Turkey and all the other states of Southeastern Europe (the Balkan) to be safe, this was needed to be able to send back refugees to Turkey or the Balkan countries, so they would not land in an insecure region according to the international law (Karakas, 2016). Of course, this is more of a political move than a legal one and some European contested the decision by saying that Turkey is home to internal political problems and homegrown terrorism as well as occasional attacks by the belligerents of the Syrian civil war. The terrorist attacks of Ankara and Istanbul or the attempted coup of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016 proved that these concerns were indeed legitimate.

The Turkey-EU agreement prompted a legal and political reform process in Turkey. The country had to revise its visa policy for foreigners entering Turkey for the future facilitation of visa procedures for Turkish citizens wishing to enter the Schengen zone. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015, the Turkish government published its new action plan to obtain visa free entry policy from the

European Union and formed a so called Reform Action Group within the government headed by then prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu. One of the main concession proposed by this group entered in force on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and gives the opportunity to get a work permit for all those under international protection as it was realized that one of the main reasons why Syrian refugees wanted to get to Europe was the lack of legal income in Turkey (Ekinici, 2016).

As it is possible see from the above examples, Turkey has taken a lot of steps very soon after the first summit in November. So, the Turkish government was looking forward to the next meeting with hopes for a fair reconciliation with Europe. The second summit was held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and prepared another European summit that took place ten days later. This second summit accepted a second set of obligations for Turkey. This resolution cancels the bilateral agreement between Turkey and Greece that existed on the issue of taking back the illegal immigrants since 2002. According to the new deal, Turkey is obliged to readmit all those who attempt to cross the border by the Aegean Sea. The reason why Turkey was ready to accept this resolution is because for every Syrian refugee taken back from Syria, it can send a refugee from its camps to Europe. First a quota of 72.000 refugees has been established, later - as certain EU member states opposed the idea - the whole process was based on the principle of voluntary acceptance and a labor market oriented selection of the refugees (Ekinici, 2016).

From the side of the Turkish government, there is a number of expectations vis-à-vis the agreement between Turkey and the European Union on taking back the refugees illegally entering the Schengen zone. First of all, Turkey hopes to be able to strengthen its border patrol capacity and the Frontex mission as well, and that European partners like Greece might contribute to this process. Second, the flexibility of Turkish authorities while implementing the agreement can help the abolition of the visa obligation of Turkish citizen wishing to enter the Schengen zone. Third, the international community and the European Union would value the above detailed 2013 law on international protection and the efforts made by Turkish authorities and Turkish NGOs and through this, the agreement would be a diplomatic success for Turkey (Ekinici, 2016).

The success of the EU-Turkish agreement is not only a political and legal issue, but a financial one as well. As it was said earlier, the European Union proposed a relatively large sum, 3 billion Euros to help the Turkish government that lacked resources until the agreement was signed in Brussels. Numan Kurtulmus, the Turkish deputy prime minister while giving a speech on the occasion of the Syria Coordination Summit in 2014 underlined that Turkey hosts around

2.000.000 refugees, it cost Turkey 7.6 billion dollar until 2014 and only a small part of this money, 418 million was given by the international community. This contribution represents not more than 5.5% of the actual expenses (Ercan, 2016).

The above numbers show that there is a profound financial injustice in the system. Concerning the financing the refugee crisis and the Turkey-EU relationship in a broader prospective, it can be found out that the disadvantage of Turkey is even more important. It can be seen from the above description of the EU-Turkey agreement that the visa liberalization cannot be separated from the issue of readmitting the illegal immigrants. Between the years of 2011 and 2016, 4.4 million Turkish citizen visited the Schengen zone and paid around 700 million euro to get visa (Erdogan, 2016.a). Another shocking data proves that every year there are around 8 million Turkish citizens going abroad and solely 15 to 20% of them choose to go to an EU member state. Out of these people, many thousands are commuting workers who live in Turkey but work in Greece and cross the outer Schengen border on a daily basis. It is even more remarkable that there are more Turkish Muslims visiting the holy sites of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia than Turks going to Europe. The EU is not the top priority touristic destination for Turkish citizens! (Erdogan, 2016.a). So, one can say that Turkey is one of the main financial supporters of the Schengen area and its functioning. On one hand, Turkey and Turkish citizens going to Europe subvention the maintenance of a strict system that separate them from their family members living abroad and, at the same time, Turkey defends Europe from further waves of illegal immigrants and unwanted refugees and Turkey finances the vast majority of the expenses of both sides.

A German newspaper said about the financial facet of the agreement that the West uses Turkey as “a cheap hotel for refugees”. If there are around 3 million Syrian refugees in Turkey and the EU pays 2 billion euro for two years, that means that EU gives 1500 euro/person for two years, or 750 euro/person/year, around 2 euro/person/day. It is clear that this far from being enough to take care of all the needs of a refugee. At the same time in the German national budget some 20 billion euro is designed to assist the 1.1 million refugees residing in Germany. That is 18,182 euro/person/year or 50 euro/person/day (Erdogan, 2016.a). So, Germany expends 25 times more on its refugees than on the refugee the West wants to keep outside Europe. An impartial observer might think that this not only unjust, but also profoundly hypocritical.

The financial injustice is not the only threat to the EU-Turkish agreement concerning Syrian refugees, the deal and its implementation is widely discussed and criticized, especially in the

West. International NGOs argue that the European Union seriously questioned its own core values while signing such an accord with the Erdogan administration they accuse of human rights violations, many also contest the European decision of recognizing Turkey as a secure country. European civil society organizations also think that Turkey would hardly fulfill its commitments. This is even more true after the failed coup d’Etat of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016 followed by what is perceived by Western liberals as a purge that also might provoke the migration of Turkish dissidents close to Fetullah Gulen’s Hizmet movement that is widely accused by the Turkish government of being the mastermind of the military action on that mid-summer day in 2016 (Benvenuti, 2017).

The growing number of disagreements between the EU and Turkey and certain EU member states (like recently The Netherlands) and Turkey can also endanger the implementation of the EU-Turkish agreement on readmitting illegal immigrants. The Turkish government for instance threatened several times of revoking its commitment and the EU also sometimes used harsh tones while arguing with Ankara (Benvenuti, 2017). Turkey’s discontentment and criticism can be understood in the light of the early implementation of the agreement as much more Syrian refugees were returned to Turkey than refugees resettled to EU member states as many European countries - including Hungary - firmly opposed the idea of migrant quotas.



**Graph 7. Returns and resettlements in April 2016**

(Source: Di Bartolomeo, 2016)

The 1:1 mechanism prescribed by the agreement apparently failed as almost four times more refugees were returned to Turkey from Greece than refugees resettled from Turkey to the

Netherlands, Germany and Finland in April 2016. During the same time period the 25 other members of the community were reluctant to take in a single refugee staying in Turkish refugee camps. The final relative success of the agreement can be explained by the fact that Turkey took its duty of controlling the Aegean shores very seriously. The number of those crossing illegally dropped from one month to another by 30.7%, and the resupply of the Balkan route of the illegal migration to Europe was slowly cut off (Di Bartolomeo, 2016).

### **3.2.8. Services provided to refugees by the Turkish government and civil society organizations**

Services provided by the Turkish government and Turkish NGOs contribute to the social integration of Syrian refugees that would be analyzed in the following chapter. These services are very varied and start already at the border, and continue throughout the life of the refugee in Turkey, be it in a refugee camp or in the city. So, the best way to describe the wide range of services available for the Syrian refugees is to follow the normal itinerary of an ordinary refugee from the border to the higher levels of social integration into the overall Turkish society.

After the arrival of the first refugees to Turkey, the country started an open gate policy. So, the first service given to the refugees was a warm welcome, though in the beginning Turkey tried to maintain a certain number of temporary refugee camps inside Syria to let the domestically displaced stay somewhere until the normalization of the situation. Among these facilities there are the Atme, Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salama camps located between the northern city of Aleppo and the Turkish border. As these camps to be found on rebel held territories were not sufficient, nearly twenty reception centers have been established on Turkish soil. These camps became overcrowded very soon and it was almost impossible to provide all the necessary services in them and Turkey was forced to re-think its service system towards the Syrian refugees (Dincer et al., 2013).

To strengthen security and to start a normal refugee camp-like service providing, there was an important precondition: the pacification of these reception centers. More and more local Turks complained about the constant movement of armed rebels around these camps and across the border. As if there was no border between the rebel held territories of Syria and the backyard in Turkey, it was a major security failure to let these foreign fighters to be present among the refugees. The Turkish government finally recognized the danger and strictly separated the peaceful refugees from the soldiers and the arm traffic came to an end. Having said so, the Apaydin and Altinozu refugee camps in the border province of Hatay continued to receive the

injured fighters of the Free Syrian Army, FSA personnel even got free medical assistance there if needed. This means that the separation of the real refugees and the FSA fighters was not perfect (Dincer et al., 2013).

The border area where the first reception centers were established was also a tampon region for humanitarian aid. As Turkish-Syrian political and diplomatic relations deteriorated, it was impossible for Turkish trucks to deliver their aid packages to addresses in Syria. Therefore, the increasing quantity of aid was transported to the region where the reception centers are located, a part of the aid was given to the residents and the other forwarded to various points of Syria with the help of Syrian vehicles. This system did not only help the refugees to sustain themselves in the camp, but also contributed to the continuation of the domestic trade in Syria and the intensification of the trade between Turkey and Syria. It might sound paradoxical, but in 2013 the international commerce between the two countries showed a very sharp increase from 381 million USD to 575 million USD (Dincer et al., 2013).

The camps themselves were designed by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) to be a complex set of facilities including primary and secondary schools, clinics, supermarkets, playgrounds, social facilities and even a place where washing machines were installed. The containers or tents where the refugees lived were equipped with fridges and even in certain cases air conditioning was provided. Though many services were already available in these temporary refugee camps, the asylum seekers were also given a small amount of pocket money, around 80 to 100 Turkish lira. This is not a huge sum, but as the refugees were taken care of, this money was mainly destined to make them capable of paying their phone bills as they wanted to keep in touch with their friends and relatives back in Syria or in other camps in Turkey (Dincer et al., 2013).

As Turkey never had to face such a great influx of refugees before, the distribution of responsibilities was not fixed at the beginning of the Syrian civil war and the arrival of the first refugees. Later, AFAD became the coordinator of crisis management, and they also had to find a solution to the registration of the refugees. Two other important organizations helped AFAD in supervising the registration of the refugees and avoid double or triple registration of certain Syrians. These two organizations were the Turkish Red Crescent and the World Food Program. They were also the most active NGOs at the very beginning (Dincer et al., 2013).

The registration of refugees had a very interesting aspect that has already been mentioned. An important number of refugee children were born in the camps and their birth certificates were

also provided by the experts of the AFAD. In the container camp of Oncupinar 2.5 babies came to this world on a daily basis in early 2013. Around 6000 Syrians were born in the camps during the first 30 months of their existence. The main problem besides the necessary medical assistance is that these children very often became classified as stateless as their parents could not prove their Syrian citizenship, and they were not allowed to get the Turkish one (Dincer et al., 2013).

<b>TOPLAM</b>	<b>2.834.441</b>	<b>100%</b>
0-4	321.460	11,34%
5-9	411.046	14,50%
10-14	308.862	10,90%
15-18	308.974	10,90%
19-24	349.064	12,32%
25-29	274.353	9,68%
30-34	233.456	8,24%
35-39	170.272	6,01%
40-44	127.139	4,49%
45-49	97.257	3,43%
50-54	80.012	2,82%
55-59	54.927	1,94%
60-64	38.781	1,37%
65+	58.838	2,08%

**Table 5. Syrian refugees in Turkey in 2017 according to their age**

(Source: Etas and Ciftci Kirac, 2017)

The high number of births in camps highlights a demographic fact concerning refugees. 54,2% of Syrian refugees are minors under the age of 18. There were between 830 and 900.000 school age children among the Syrian refugees living in Turkey in 2016. The key issue here is the Turkish language education as very few of them master the mother tongue of the locals. According to official numbers a meager 75.000 Syrian refugee students go to ordinary Turkish schools. That is around 9% of the total number of that age category. 255.000 more go to temporary education centers where a very low level of education is dispensed in Arabic. That means that at least, half a million of Syrian refugee children, more than the half of them, do not take part in official education. One of the main reasons why Syrian refugee children cannot go to school is the shortage in teachers. The overall Turkish national education system lacks around 35.000 primary and secondary school teachers. It is good to know that Turkish national education and especially the education of Syrian refugee children is well under-financed. There

is an urgent need of investing around 500 million USD into the system otherwise even the present education frame would collapse (Erdogan, 2016.b).

The fact that the majority of Syrian refugee children attending school takes lessons in Arabic cannot be simply explained by the low level of Turkish language education among them and the shortage in teachers, but also by the political decision taken by the Turkish government during the first year of the refugee crisis. In 2012, Omer Dincer, the Turkish minister of national education stated that the education of the Syrian refugee students has to be done in Arabic. It is true that at that time everybody hoped that they would be able to return home very soon. This early policy was changed in November 2012 when the minister announced that the government was about taking the necessary measures in order to start Turkish lessons in the camps (Seydi, 2014).

The lack of knowledge of the Turkish language is not the only barrier. One has to take into consideration the insufficiency of the basic knowledge of the Syrian refugee children as in 2011, after the civil war broke out, many schools were closed down. This situation is responsible for not enabling the young Syrian population with the necessary frame for continuing their studies in an ordinary national education system. The Syrian families willing to inscribe their children in a Turkish school have to send an application form to the relevant regional education authority, and then the child is tested to see in which form he or she can continue in Turkey. It is a difficult task for a Syrian family to fill out such a form in itself, and the child finds himself or herself in a disadvantaged situation already at the beginning (Akpınar, 2017).

The Turkish government has equipped the early camps with schooling facilities, but as the number of refugees was growing very high, it became impossible to host each and every student in them. That means that already those in camps were not necessarily involved in the Turkish education system. That applies even less for the Syrian refugee children living outside the camps and who form the majority of the Syrian refugee children population. One can even say that the ministry did not really care about their fate and their issue was octroyed on the governors of the Turkish provinces. The ministry sent several official letters to the governors on how to solve the question, but did not intervene financially. The first real step taken happened on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013, two years after the arrival of the first refugees from Syria. On that day, the first regional education coordination summit took place in the city of Gaziantep. This program united the representatives of AFAD, the United Nations and the local school directors, but again concentrated on the problems of children living in temporary reception centers (Seydi, 2014).



The discrepancy between those living in camps and residing outside remains. A survey conducted by AFAD shows that in 2015 around 84% of children in temporary reception centers attended school, whereas this number was as low as 14% among the ones living in cities. A report prepared by the Human Rights Watch showed that 400.000 out of the 708.000 Syrian children in Turkey never attended lessons in a Turkish school (Ertas and Ciftci Kirbac, 2017).

Though it is clear that there are important difficulties, one cannot deny the fact the Turkish officialdom is indeed trying its best to provide certain services to Syrian refugees. These efforts include the various services given by the Turkish ministry of social affairs. As refugees flee the horrors of war, probably the most important services are the psycho-social aid services. Already in 2014, 14.000 Syrian refugees benefited from this program. In 2015, their number increased to 70.000. There are psycho-social service points inside camps and one can already find a growing number of service units in big cities where the majority of the refugees live. (The vast majority of refugees, 91% of them as it was mentioned earlier, reside outside the temporary reception centers.) The help provided by these centers is very diverse. Some only need a deep conversation on the trauma of the civil war and refugee life in Turkey, others are involved in artistic creative programs such as theater pedagogy, writing poems or drawing pictures to solve the human drama, but others are in need of deeper forms of help like the intervention of a psychiatrist (Aile ve Toplum Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016).

Apart from those having psychological and psychiatric problems, another vulnerable group is that of the children. The Turkish ministry of social affairs has a special care program designed for Syrian refugee children. The normal Turkish children protection legal frame applies to the Syrian refugee children, too. In case of necessity, the Turkish government can intervene in the interest of the well-being of the child as it is prescribed by the law n. 5395 on the Protection of children. To act before a crisis happens, the ministry has established eight special centers to deal with the problems of children. A special problem is linked to the lonely children roaming around Turkey, the ministry in these cases tries to find their relatives either in Turkey or back in Syria in order to forward the child to his or her family. If this is not possible, because the child is orphan or the family lives in a conflict zone, then Turkish authorities would take care of that young person. The ministry in this process involves civil society organizations. Since 2016, some 124 lonely refugees between the age of 13 and 18 from different countries (not only Syrians, but also Iraqis, Afghans and Somalis) were framed by local NGOs and supervised by the ministry. There is a hope to increase the number of children reached by this effort (Aile ve Toplum Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016).

Another issue already evoked earlier among the difficulties of the Turkish-refugee cohabitation is the question of the roaming vendors who are also very often young children. It is not only illegal and disturbs many, but also endangers the Syrian youth. The ministry does a consciousness-raising program to tell the Syrian refugee population about the seriousness of the issue and intervenes in the areas the most affected by this phenomenon. In the province of Osmaniye a temporary reception center was founded by the relevant Turkish authorities to host these youngsters during the day so as they would not be involved in illegal trade (Aile ve Toplum Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016).

The Turkish ministry of social affairs considers women to be the third important target group of its efforts. Especially because in the painful situation of being a refugee, women are often victims of different sorts of violence. Men surrounded by the horror of the civil war frequently become more violent and direct this furor against their wives and other female relatives. The ministry recognizing this threat wants to take care of these women by establishing a network of reception centers for women victims of domestic violence. An organization called SVCOVNVIM was established in order to prevent these situations and educate the public about the problem. Some 84 women and their 77 children were taken into this system in 2015 (Aile ve Toplum Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016).

The Turkish government destines several other services to other vulnerable groups such as the elderly, and pays a special attention to the disabled as according to certain statistics a very high number of refugees were affected, it seems that as much as 40% of the refugees were seriously injured during the civil war (Aile ve Toplum Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016).

Besides education and social aid, health care is also a crucial issue when it comes to Syrian refugees living in Turkey. The Turkish constitution and international agreements give the right to these asylum seekers to access the Turkish health care system. In 2015, there were 101 permanent medical doctors serving in refugee camps out of whom 14 were Arabic-speaking (it is unknown whether they were Syrian Arabs or members of the ethnic Arabic minority of Turkey). 276 other medical personnel and 19 fully equipped ambulance cars were at the disposition of the residents of the temporary reception centers. Outside the camps, the AFAD did not establish any special health care centers destined to the refugee population, but pays for the local medical service providers to give quality health care to the Syrian refugees residing in the Turkish cities of the ten border provinces (Yavuz, 2015).

The most common illness among the Syrian refugee population according to researches conducted by AFAD is poliomyelitis. It seems that around 25% of the children living in camps has this illness and almost half of those outside are also contaminated. The main reason for this disastrous result is the low level of vaccination and - of course - the extremely high number of the underage refugee population (Yavuz, 2015). Some other infections are widespread among Syrian refugees in Turkey because of them being extremely poor. Some of them lived a very modest life even in Syria, some of them lost all what they had possessed and are forced to live a poor life in Turkey. One of the examples of the infections brought in from Syria is Leishmania, an illness frequently registered among the Syrian refugees living in camps and cities of the southern Adana province (Demirbilek and Keskin, 2016).

The Turkish government alone would not be able to help all the Syrian refugees, certain services therefor are provided by civil society organization. Hundreds of them are very active in the field of humanitarian aid, only a few names will be mentioned. In the border city of Kilis, the Blue Crescent Foundation (Mavi Hilal Vakfi in Turkish) established a hospital of 52 beds exclusively for refugees who in that particular province outnumber local Turkish population. This temporary health care institution was built of pre-fabricated materials with the help of international donations, the project has been supported by the German branch of the Maltese humanitarian movement (Turk, 2016).

The question of education has also been mentioned as one of the basic needs of a refugee and it is to be underlined that the majority of Syrian refugee children does not go to school for various reasons. NGOs - Turkish and international alike - are active in this field, too. Some of them run private schools, some of them organize extracurricular activities, some others specialize in the domain of the conciuousness-raising of both the officialdom and the Syrian refugees. The Trust of the Blue Pen (Mavi Kalem Dernegi in Turkish) is an Istanbul-based civil society organization that works on the issue of the education of Syrian girls between the age of 10 and 14. They especially focus on the value of schooling and demonstrating to the young Syrian girls that they can have better quality of life if they study instead of getting married and giving birth at an early age (Mavi Kalem, 2017).

It is evident that first the basic needs of the refugees are to be targeted, but on the long run, one has to realize that an important group of refugees would remain in Turkey either forever or for decades. These refugees after their primary necessities are dealt with, need other types of help, for example legal support for ameliorating the quality of their stay based on their financial

independence that is unimaginable without the Syrian refugees being legally employed taxpayers. In these procedures, there are local Turkish NGOs, international foundations helping them, and there is already an organization assembling lawyers of Syrian descent, the Society of Free Syrian Advocates (Suriyeli Ozgur Avukatlar Toplulugu in Turkish) based in the city of Hatay near the border already having an important local ethnic Arab population (Turk, 2016).

The above examples show that both the Turkish government and civil society organizations are busy with providing services to an enormous amount of refugees. The quality of these services and the number of Syrian asylum seekers these might reach may vary because of different conditions, but it can be argued that Turkey behaves as a good host with its misafirs.

### **3.2.6 Social insertion and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey**

At the beginning of the Syrian civil war and the arrival of refugees to Turkey, everybody believed that their integration and insertion into the overall Turkish society would not be a big deal as they would soon return to their homes. As time passed, the number of refugees invreased and the hope of their return decreased, therefore an urgent need for their integration arose. This phenomenon can explain the wide range of services detailed under the previous point.

It was during the second half of the year 2012 that authorities in Turkey started to realize that hosting Syrian refugees would not be a temporary duty but a long term one. At that time the average influx of refugees doubled to a monthly 20.000 and everybody became aware that what is going on in Syria is no more an insurrection but a wide scale civil war pushing millions to leave their homes. 2012 and 2014 were the peak of the arrival of the refugees. Around the end of 2014, some 55.000 Syrians took refuge in Turkey due to the open doors policy of the Turkish government. Some of these people mainly forced to exile by terrorist organizations like the ISIS were the ones who tried to carry on and immigrate illegally to Europe in mid-2015 (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016).

Since the early days of 2016, Turkish policies have clearly moved towards integration. One of the first signs of this shift is the distribution of legal work permits among the Syrian refugees who were not allowed to work legally in the country before. The main precondition for getting

the permit is to prove an at least six months long valid residency and temporary international protection in Turkey. A Syrian refugee having a regular residency and international protection can be employed only if he or she meets the necessary health requirements of the Turkish government. The new Turkish policy excludes the massive employment of Syrian refugees at a single workplace as at the same company a maximum of 10% of the employees can be from among the asylum seekers. In 2016, some 5.500 Syrian could get a legal work permit. As they do not represent more than 0.2% of the total Syrian refugee population, this move did not change the situation of the Syrian refugees in Turkey radically (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016).

Though the distribution of work permits did not concern the vast majority of the Syrian refugees, the Turkish government decided to move forwards when the president of the republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a public speech on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016 that the government is ready to give citizenship to certain refugees (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016). This step can be called very radical as Turkey used to be modest when it came to the distribution of citizenship as the Law n. 5901 on Turkish citizenship prescribes very strict conditions to obtain Turkish citizenship and prior to the civil war in Syria, only a few dozens of people were given Turkish citizenship.

As the old legal structure was unable to handle the situation, a totally new system has been put in place. Finally, by 2016 the Turkish government had to admit that the country definitely became a land of immigration. Not only Syrians and not only refugees, but people from very diverse background want to stay and work in Turkey because of the relative improvement of national economy and work conditions. At the same time, one should bear in mind that the level of unemployment is still very high in the country. According to the latest statistics proposed by the Turkish Office of Statistics, in November 2017, the unemployment rate of Turkey was 10.3% (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2018). So, the Turkish government has to coordinate two opposite interests: the improvement of the level of employment of Turkish citizens and the social integration of immigrants including Syrian refugees.

The most important pillar of this new policy is Law n. 6735 called International Labor Force Law. This law facilitates the attainment of a one-year work permit for all legal residents of the Republic of Turkey be it a classical immigrant or a Syrian refugee. This permit is renewable every year. Foreigners holding a long term residency permit (8 years) can apply for an indefinite work permit. This last option gives almost equal rights with Turkish citizens, exception made for the right to vote (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016). It seems that the Turkish government started to prefer this scheme instead of giving full citizenship to refugees as this idea proposed by president

Erdogan met a certain popular opposition from the side of the voters as Turks tend to be reluctant of giving Turkish citizenship to foreigners. A change in the legal system finally even excludes temporary international protection ID holders of the citizenship application, plus the time they spend in Turkey as refugees does not count into the time required by the citizenship law. Therefore those refugees who reside in Turkey and want to become a Turkish citizen on the long run are advised to change their legal status from refugee to resident (Simsek and Corabatir, 2016).

Integration (*butunlesme* in Turkish) in the Western sense of the term is not mentioned in Turkish laws, but there is a mention of harmonization of refugees that includes acquisition of a certain knowledge. This means that refugees have to be taught everything required to live an independent life in Turkey or to move to a third country. The law prescribes that refugees are meant to follow classes on the social and political fabric of Turkey as well as its culture. Public institutions and NGOs also conduct courses and distant learning training programs on more specific points of the Turkish legal system (Simsek and Corabatir, 2016).

Concerning the issues of citizenship and work and talking about the social integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Syrians cannot be analyzed only as individuals. Most Syrian refugees either live with or want to live with their families, therefore the family unity and the family reunification is a crucial problem in the life of refugees as normally an individual integrates into a larger society through and with the help of a family. The Turkish refugee policy concentrates on three top priorities when families are concerned. First, Turkish authorities try to keep families together either in temporary reception centers or in Turkish cities. Second, they process the applications of the members of a single family together as a family application. Third, if it is requested by the refugees, Turkish authorities favor the family reunification with the family members living abroad (Simsek and Corabatir, 2016). In practice, refugees from Syria report that the family reunification procedures do not often work as they should. Those in camps have higher chance to be united with their loved ones, but those in Istanbul are sometimes refused, especially if they wish to bring their spouses to Turkey who live in a conflict zone in Syria (Simsek and Corabatir, 2016).

The notion of the social integration of Syrian refugees of Turkey is not only a legal phenomenon, it also comprises other social and economic factors. In fact, social integration also refers to how these refugees can interact with the majority of the Turkish society. As it has been said several times earlier, Turkish people in general like to picture themselves as good hosts, and indeed,

especially in the beginning they developed a rather positive attitude towards Syrian refugees whom they considered to be special guests and, in many cases, brothers by religion.

The first interaction between refugees and Turkish people started in the poor neighborhoods of larger border cities such as Gaziantep and Kilis as these were the first areas where Syrian refugees initially settled down outside the camps. Though economically speaking the distance between Turks and refugees was minimal, the early problems of social exclusion could be already seen as there were remarkable ethnic and cultural discrepancies between the two groups (Deniz et al., 2016). This social exclusion was not restricted to the popular areas of the above cities but was also observed in more upmarket neighborhoods such as Yeditepe in Gaziantep where much wealthier Syrian people took refuge, but had to face similar acts of discrimination. Or even more, as they are not in need of financial help they were exposed to noticeable stigmatization for being Syrians (Deniz et al., 2016).

The above mentioned problems appeared with the arrival of the first refugees. After 2013 and 2014, the biggest waves of asylum seekers, another greater question arose. In certain areas of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Sanliurfa, Istanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep and Kilis Syrian neighborhoods were formed where the majority of the inhabitants were already Syrians and the Turks constituted a minority and where Turkish language and culture was in regression or even in peril (Deniz et al., 2016). The other urging problem is the tax avoidance of the Syrian shopkeepers of these new Syrian neighborhoods. The situation is alarming in the southern city of Mersin where officially 167,000 Syrian refugees reside. Complete Syrian streets are being installed with Arabic only inscriptions and nearly 1,250 native Turkish vendors bankrupted during a short period of three months in 2016. According to the research done by the local Trade and Industry Chamber, there are at least 700 unregistered Syrian shops around and their number has tripled during the last year (Hurriyet, 2016). In August 2016, in Mersin and many other Turkish big cities authorities opted for the removal of the Arabic inscriptions, and in the name of social integration all Syrian shopkeepers were ordered to replace them with information in Turkish. Burhanettin Kocamaz, the mayor of Mersin told Turkish newspaper that this was not against Syrians, the same rule applies to all inscriptions in any language other than Turkish. A local Turkish businessman, Hamza Kokmen argues that the best would be to display information in two languages, both in Turkish and Arabic as many of them feels excluded when they only see information in a language they do not master. He also underlined that Turks preferred visiting Turkish, while Syrians Syrian places. The decision of entering a shop or not is often taken along ethnic lines (Cumhuriyet, 2016).

In this context of growing social exclusion, the incoming refugees can always count on the people who arrived in Turkey a few decades before them. The largest influx of refugees before the Syrians was the arrival of the Turks from Bulgaria in the 1980s. Though the majority of them returned to Bulgaria, the remaining group played a considerable role in the acceptance of later refugees and immigrants from other countries like the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan. The same scenario happened with another part of the Syrian refugees who were ethnically Kurdish. Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin for example found in Gaziantep and other cities either local Kurdish people or Kurdish refugees from Iraq who established themselves there in the 2000s. In both cases, empathy played a major role in promoting social integration (Deniz et al., 2016).

With all the problems of social exclusion, Syrian refugees might find the integration into Turkish society much easier than their insertion in Europe because of this empathy. This is crucial when it comes to their education and their integration into the Turkish higher education system.



### **3.3. Situation of Syrian Refugee Students in Turkish Higher Education System**

#### **3.3.1. Turkish higher education system and foreign students prior to the Syrian Civil War**

The history of Turkish higher education can be traced back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The first institution was the Nizamiye medresesi, an Islamic religious school founded in 1067 in the city of Baghdad. Though Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Empire, it hosted an important and increasingly influential Turkish-speaking community that initiated the foundation of the Nizamiye medresesi where religious subjects were taught and discussed in Turkish and Arabic (Kilic, 1999). It is interesting to note how the very beginnings of Turkish higher education is linked to the Arab world from where Turkey is now receiving refugee students.

Later, very soon after the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the second Ottoman emperor, Orhan laid down the first higher education institution of his country in the ancient city of Nicaea (Iznik in Turkish, now a small town in the province of Bursa). This university took the name of Iznik Orhaniyesi. During the following centuries, the Ottomans built up a complete education system based on a basic distinction of civilian and military schools. Civilian education comprised of a primary and secondary level, as well as religious and non-religious higher education institutions. After the first military failures of the empire (the missed attack on Vienna in 1683, the loss of Buda in 1686 or the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699), Ottoman emperors decided to reform military education and include state-of-the-art scientific knowledge in it. The first modern university due to this effort was the so called “Hendesehane” or Abode of the Engineers, a university training military engineers that came into existence in 1773. The second modern military university was founded in 1834, this was the “Mekteb-i Ulumu Harbiye”, the Office of Military Sciences. The first modern civilian university was initiated by emperor Mahmut II. in the form of the Tibhane-i Amire. This faculty of medicine was founded in 1826. During the reform period of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century called Tanzimat in Turkish, the first Western style universities were also founded. The very first one that corresponds to the norms of the West was the Darulfunun University created in 1863 (Kilic, 1999).

The Darulfunun was followed by many other institutions, and they were further Westernized after the proclamation of the republic in 1923. Under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founding father of the republic a major university reform took place in 1933 when Ataturk invited a Swiss professor, Albert Malche to re-organize the whole system. The Darulfunun

was reformed and re-opened under the name of Istanbul University. At the same moment the first law on higher education was drafted (law n. 2252). Later, the Higher Education Board of the Republic of Turkey (Turkiye Cumhuriyeti Yuksekogretim Kurulu, YOK in Turkish) was created in 1946 to supervise the sector (Kilic, 1999).

In the 1950s, during the rule of the first democratically elected government, Adnan Menderes's Democrat Party founded a number of now important universities in the Turkish countryside including the Black Sea University, the Mediterranean University, the Ataturk University in Erzurum and the prestigious Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara. This time period therefore can be called the era of the democratization of higher education in Turkey. The Menderes government was deposed in 1960 by a military coup, Menderes himself was executed by the junta. This tragic shift in Turkish politics did not stop the democratization process as the military government accorded a large autonomy to universities (Kilic, 1999). During the following decades, many public and private universities popped up around Turkey and there were also several new laws governing the sphere of higher education. Nowadays the law n. 5347 voted in 2010 by the current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is in vigor.

The above historical summary demonstrates that after the 1950s the Turkish higher education system has been democratized and the number of universities augmented letting an ever-increasing number of foreign citizens to attend classes at Turkish institutions of higher education. The first foreign students were admitted to Turkish higher education soon after the military coup in 1980. In 1981, the first entrance exams were organized under the name of Entrance Exam for foreign national (YOS or Yabancı Uyruklu Ogrencilerin Sinavi in Turkish). In 1983, even a new law was drafted by the Great Turkish National Assembly with the number of 2922. During the 1980s foreign students were extremely rare at Turkish universities. The first visible appearance of them can be noted after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of the Turkic republics in the Caucasus region and Central Asia (Demirhan, 2017). Nowadays foreign students come from various parts of the world, but until the 2010s three main groups of them could be observed, and three separate entrance exam systems were established for them.

The first group was constituted of the children of Turkish citizens working abroad. These candidates were and are Turkish citizens and master the Turkish language and have to pass the YCS entrance exam designed for the children of those residing abroad. Those passing this

exam successfully could enroll to a limited amount of faculties only. They could study languages, history, sociology, religion etc. In recent years, new options have been added to the list as the number of candidates was lower than the contingent. This way the children of Turkish citizens working abroad now can study public administration, economics, management or even international relations (Yilmaz et al., 2016).

Academic Year	Students accepted	Contingent	Successful students
2002	122	954	
2003	165	954	
2004	198	954	
2005	300	998	249
2006	398	1000	
2007	643	1000	
2008	638*	1000	
2009	731**	1500	
2010	866	1500	
2011	1030	1501	794
2012	1085	1502	802

**Table 6. Children of Turkish citizens working abroad studying in Turkey between 2002 and 2012**

(Source: Yilmaz et al., 2016)

From the above number it can be deduced that the contingent was always higher than the number of candidates. As the program started in 2002 and it was probably not well-publicized among the members of the Turkish diaspora in the West, a meager 12.78% of the contingent could be filled up. The slowly growing popularity of this opportunity sees the number of students doubled in 2007. In 2012, the number of students accepted (1085) was already higher than the original contingent back in 2002 (954), and in that year around two-thirds of the contingent was filled up. In fact, in ten years the number of foreign students of Turkish descent increased almost tenfold. Considering the country of residence of the students, it is not a surprise that almost 40% of them come from the “gastarbaiter” community of Germany. The second largest group is from Saudi Arabia (nearly 30%), followed by far by those of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan (5-5%). In 2012, ten students from 1085 were from Syria. As in 2004 there was only one and in 2011 six. This might already be an impact of the starting civil war (Yilmaz et al., 2016).

The second important group of foreign students is made of the young people who come to Turkey to study Islamic religion. The International Theology Program exists since the academic year of 2006-2007 on the initiative of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) with the cooperation of the Faculty of Theology of the Ankara University. Later

the relevant faculties of two prestigious universities based in Istanbul (Istanbul University and Marmara University) also joined the scholarship scheme. This possibility is mainly given to the Muslims of Europe in order to raise Muslim generations there aware of their religion and culture. In 2012, 382 students took part in the program and there were already 46 people who graduated from it. More than half of the students were again from Germany, followed by France and Belgium. As this program is designed for Muslims living in the West, there are no Syrian nationals in it (Yilmaz et al., 2016).

The third major group of foreign students enter the system thanks to the scholarships given to the so called relative communities. In Turkey, the term relative communities (*akraba topluluklari* in Turkish) is used to describe the Turkic nations of the Caucasus region and Central Asia, but it also includes Hungarians. This program started in the 2000s is aimed at fostering unity in the Turanic world and spreading the current form of the Turkish language and culture in that part of the world. A total of 6538 students could study in Turkey at various levels. So, by far this is the program that brings the highest number of foreign students to Turkey. Some of the students start with a language education course proposed by the state-run TOMER institute, others follow B.A., M.A. or PhD studies. 171 Syrian nationals were accepted to this program in 2012. The statistics do not give any detail, but one thinks that they are basically ethnic Turcomans, a Turkish-speaking community of Northern Syria. The highest number of them (137 students) study at a B.A. level, 6 persons do their master, 5 their doctoral studies in 2012. The rest were at the stage of the preparatory language courses. Possibly an important part of these students were already fleeing the war as the Turcoman-inhabited areas of Syria were touched by the civil war very soon (Yilmaz et al., 2016).

Besides the above special programs, foreign students could apply for a place at a Turkish universities thanks to the bilateral agreements between the Turkish government and other cabinets. Diplomatic and political ties between Turkey and Syria were rather good in the 2000s as it was detailed it in the second chapter, but not too many Syrians found the Turkish universities appealing enough to pursue their studies there. Having said so, it is impossible to note a slow increase in the number of Syrian student opting for Turkish institutions of higher education.

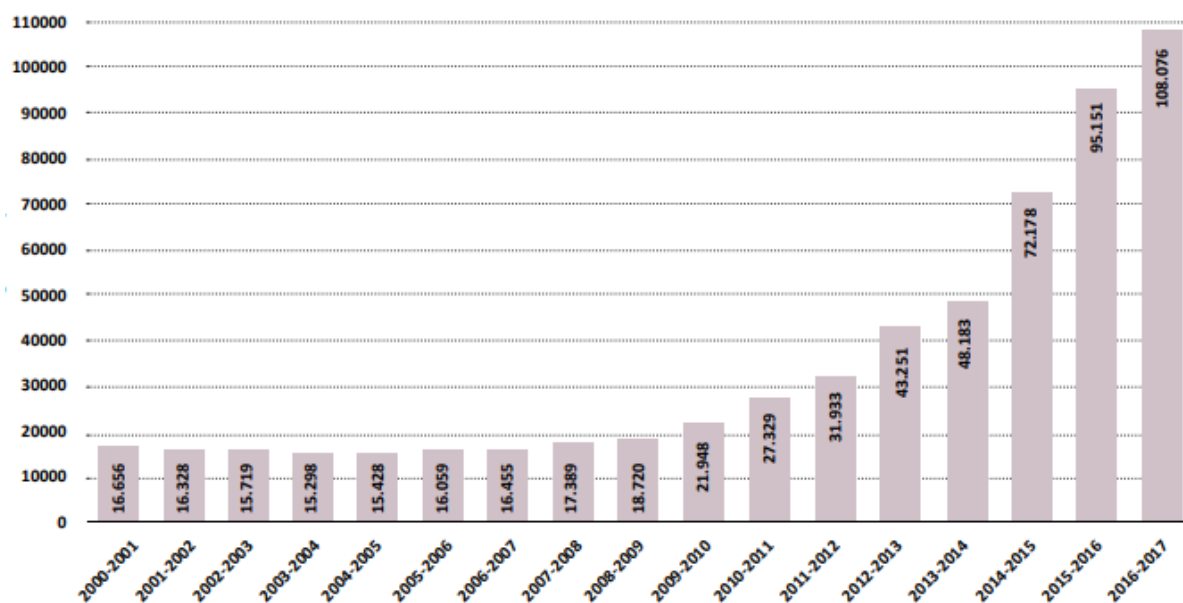
2006-2007	264
2007-2008	260
2008-2009	291
2009-2010	339
2010-2011	445
2011-2012	608
2012-2013	962
2013-2014	1785
2014-2015	5560
2015-2016	9689
2016-2017	app. 15.000

**Table 7. Syrian nationals studying at Turkish universities on bilateral scholarship programs and as refugees**

(Source: Bariscil, 2017)

The first academic year concerning which the number of Syrian guest students is available is year of 2006-2007. In that year, a total of 264 Syrian students were present at various Turkish universities. Their number was growing very slowly. The next year it was even slightly decreasing as there were only 260 Syrian students in Turkey. In the last year before the armed conflict in Syria, in the academic year of 2010-2011 some 445 Syrians studied at Turkish higher education institutions. During the following years, due to the civil war, the number of Syrian student increased exponentially. In ten years, one can find almost 50 times more Syrians at Turkish universities than before. The only possible explanation for this is the civil war and the subsequent refugee crisis.

The above table summarizing the number of Syrian students clearly show that though there is a visible increase in the second half of the 2000s, it is possible to speak of a real and massive appearance of Syrian students in Turkey only after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. In fact, this phenomenon coincides with the main trends of the country as experts underline the growing internationalization of Turkish higher education after 2008. Before 2008, not only Syrians, but foreign students in general were rare sights at Turkish universities. Between 2008 and 2013, in the space of 5 years only, the number of foreign students in Turkey tripled from 15.000 to 48.183 (Ozer, 2017). Comparing these data with the above table, researchers realize that in the academic year of 2013-2014 only 3.7% of all foreign students were of Syrian origin. So, the influx of Syrian students must be analyzed in the context of diversification that characterizes Turkish higher education during the last decade.



**Graph 8. Foreign nationals in Turkish higher education in the 21st century**

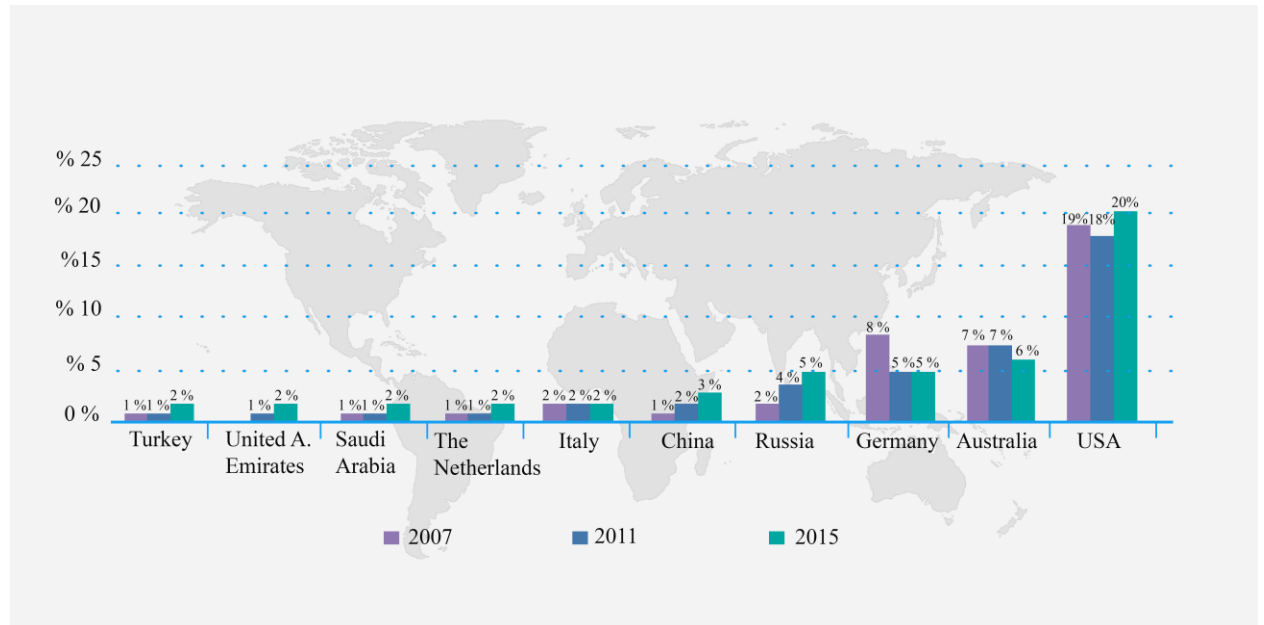
(Source: Ozer, 2017)

As it is to be seen in the above statistics, the turning point in the diversification of Turkish higher education and the massive arrival of foreign students start around the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The real increase of them is seen around the beginning of the civil war in Syria. The growth in the first academic year of the civil war, 2012-2013 is an incredible 36.3%. Calculating the increase in the number of Syrian nationals among these foreign students, the researcher finds that the growth is visibly higher: 58.2%. This increase provokes a slight growth in the proportion of the Syrian students compared to the last peaceful academic year from 1.9% to 2.2%.

To promote a quality higher education designed for the international public, a country like Turkey needs internationally recognized professor speaking English and other foreign languages very well. Unfortunately the level of language education in general is very low in Turkey. Classes are overcrowded and teachers themselves do not really master their chosen language. So, this is a great challenge in itself. The other is the capacity of attracting foreign teachers, mostly native English speakers. The opening up to foreign students was not possible before the mid-2000s because of the lack in competent international lecturers. In 2006, there were around 1.000 foreign teachers in the system, whereas in the academic year of 2016-2017, it was increased to 2.886. So, in ten years the number of foreign faculty members almost tripled. Nowadays 2% of all the professors and 1.5% of all the faculty members are from abroad. The largest amount of foreign faculty members today come from

the United States of America, whereas the second largest contingent is formed by the Syrian nationals (Ozer, 2017).

Comparing the size of the foreign student community in Turkish higher education with other countries, the scientist finds out that the patterns resemble those in other Muslim majority countries and largely differ from the West.



**Graph 9. Proportion of foreign students in the higher education of selected countries**

(Source: Demirhan, 2017)

From the above table, it is evident that there is a growth among foreign students in Turkish higher education as they represented only 1% of the overall student population both in 2007 and 2011, and 2% in 2015, when the escalation of civil war in Syria happened. One can encounter the same phenomenon in other developed Muslim majority countries with evolving universities such as the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia. One has to note here though that the latter ones attract an important international crowd by their re-known Islamic studies faculties. China, now the leading economic power surpasses Turkey and shows a more dynamic evolution from 1% to 3%. The Western countries receive much more foreign students. Germany, Australia or the United States of America got between 5 and 20% in 2015. It is to be remembered that in the West, an important decrease is registered. The most spectacular decrease is to be found in Germany where the number of foreign students dropped from 8% to 5%.

As it can be seen from the above statistics and examples, the increasing internationalization of Turkish higher education system is due to various factors. First, there is such a global climate in which it is well seen if a student studies a few semesters abroad and receiving foreign students and faculty members contribute to the amelioration of the quality of higher education itself. Second, one can observe a democratization of the Turkish higher education after the first free and fair election in 1950, an evolution which was not interrupted by the subsequent military coups. Third, in the second half of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the AKP government encouraged the invitation of foreign students and faculty members that attracted even more students during the last ten years. Fourth, Turkey became popular with the peoples culturally and linguistically close to Turkey such as Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan. And fifth, the civil war in Syria, indeed, had a positive impact on the proliferation of Syrian refugee students and teachers.

### **3.3.2. Adaptation of the system to the urgent needs of refugee students**

In the second chapter of our current thesis, the history and importance of the higher education system in Syria have already been described and in the third chapter, it has been detailed how it was dilapidated by the civil war. In the present chapter, the emphasis is put on the fact that a noticeable portion of the Syrian population graduated from or attended universities and colleges prior to the armed conflict. Some 26% of urban men and women had a degree from a university in Syria in 2014, whereas the rural population was less educated (17% of the men and 15% of the women), but still the data show higher proportion than in most Arab or underdeveloped country (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017). If these data are correlated with the statistics of other, smaller refugee groups, it is to be found out that on the international level, the Syrians might be less schooled than other nationalities. Among Iranians exiled from the Islamic republic, for example, 35% hold a university or college degree (Simsek and Corabatir, 2017). Compared to these numbers a much lower percentage of Syrian refugees have the chance to enroll university programs in Turkey as an estimated 2% of the total educated refugee population is involved in a training in Turkey.

The first refugee students or potential students make their appearance in Turkey in 2012 when the ministry sends a letter to the rectors of the universities located near the border on the subject of the so called “private students”. The term private student here refers to the Syrians who study or might study at those institutions and who might have an irregular legal status. This letter urges the rectors to recognize the natural right of these students to study. In a further warning sent to the same rectors in 2013, the Turkish Board of Higher Education (YOK) tells the heads of the



universities that those Syrians who already started their studies in Syria and want to continue in Turkey, have the right to do so and are also entitled to get scholarships and can be admitted to dormitories for free (Demirhan, 2017).

On the level of the Turkish Board of Higher Education (YOK), the question of Syrian refugee students appears in an intensified manner around the end of the year 2012. The initial decisions were taken at that time, but the real cooperation between the central authorities and the universities themselves only started in 2013. Suleyman Necati Akcesme, the Secretary General of the YOK was nominated responsible for the higher education of the Syrian refugees, and he was also the one who contacted the seven public universities that are located near the border because at that time refugees were allowed to stay either in the reception centers or in the cities close to Syria, and they got the permission to settle down at any point inside Turkey at a later moment. Akcesme emphasized that the universities have to accept all so called private students from Syria on the basis of two preconception. First, the majority of the students are from opposition held areas and are against the Assad regime, that means that they are on the same side as Turkey. Second, Syrian students are in such a situation that they are unable to return, restart their studies in Syria or even to prove with adequate official papers their previous degrees and diplomas. Akcesme asked the rectors to facilitate the entrance of the Syrian refugee students to their institutions as much as possible (Seydi, 2014).

The reception of the Syrian refugee students as private students at the universities in the border area of Turkey has created a considerable political controversy. This issue has been discussed on various levels of the political scene: the government, the ministries dealing with the question of education and the Great Turkish Nationaly Assembly. Finally, the government based its opinion and policy on Article 130 of the constitution that guarantees the autonomy of universities and gives the right to the senates of these institutions to decide over the conditions of the entrance of foreign students. That means that the government urges the universities to host Syrian refugees, but cannot force or oblige them to do so. At the same time, another constitutional value might be in peril as this practice does not guarantee the equality of the chances of a Turkish national and a Syrian refugee as a Turk has to prove that he or she is entitled to follow his or her studies at a higher education institution, whereas a Syrian is not required to present any proof of his or her past. In comparison with Syria, Turkey always had stricter entrance requirements and entrance exams were much more competitive, therefore many Turks felt it unjust to receive Syrians and refuse Turks who might have put more effort into getting to a university (Seydi, 2014).

The Turkish parliament finally addressed a letter to the Ministry of National Education on the ways how other countries deal with similar situations. The ministry in its response underlined that the current state of affairs in Turkey cannot be compared to any country near or far and it was a duty of the Turkish people to understand how deep the tragedy of the Syrian civil war was and how important it was to treat these refugees the best way possible. The point of view of the ministry in 2013 was that the reception of Syrian refugee students at Turkish universities might produce a chance on the long run and the ones who would graduate from these Turkish universities would also contribute to the growth and well-being of the Turkish nation. So, in this case, there is a humanitarian urgency (Seydi, 2014).

On 4th September 2013, with the signature of Gokhan Cetinsaya, the YOK sent an important notice to Turkish universities to inform them of a decision of the Council of Ministers under the number of 57802651/1008. According to this political decision Syrian refugees who registered as students in the first level of higher education or to the open courses of the same institutions are exempted of paying a tuition fee. Another governmental decision further facilitated the reception of Syrian refugees and Egyptian nationals (Seydi, 2014). One might wonder how and why Egyptian nationals are privileged the same way as Syrians. It is to be remembered that at that time a military coup removed from office the first democratically elected president of the North African Arab country, Mohamed Mursi whose followers were imprisoned or forced to exile. Turkey showed sympathy and was open to host Egyptian refugees such as they deal with the ones from Syria. It is true though that the Egyptian community of Turkey is much smaller than the Syrian one as the military takeover lead by Abdulfattah al-Sisi did not generate such a great wave of refugees.

The next decision of the government differentiated between a full and a partial scholarship program for Syrian and Egyptian refugees. To get the full scholarship, the candidates are required to produce for the academic year 2013-2014 the same document as the Turkish citizens, and they have to pass the prestigious OSYS exam which means that they have to be among the best 10% of the candidates. Those who are not that successful can study on a partial scholarship at the universities of the border area in the cities of Gaziantep, Kilis, Sanliurfa, Hatay, Osmaniye, Cukurova and Mersin. With the new scholarship opportunities, the previous possibility, the status of the private students is also maintained for candidates who are incapable of producing any documents of their previous studies and do not pass the necessary entrance exams (Seydi, 2014).

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013, the YOK organized an important meeting with some Turkish and Syrian professors as Turkish authorities noted that there were more and more faculty members among the refugees and, indeed, there was an urgent need to employ these people to teach the incoming Syrian refugee students. To recognize these professors as legal faculty members in Turkey, until 2013, the Turkish authorities demanded a confirmation from the Syrian embassy in Ankara. As the embassy represents the Assad regime, the Turkish government discovered that they do not confirm the status of those who originate from rebel held regions or are linked to opposition groups. Due to this situation, the Turkish government came to the conclusion that they would inspect the documents and history of these teachers themselves and would decide on the basis of the available documents without the intervention of the Syrian regime (Seydi, 2014). This historical move made it possible to employ almost 2000 Syrian professors until the academic year 2017-2018 who constitute the second largest foreign professor population of Turkey today after the Americans and without whom the massive influx of Syrian refugee students to the Turkish system would not be feasible.

With the employment of 500 Syrian refugee professors for the academic year 2014-2015, the human resources were given for a further relaxation on the entrance policies of the Turkish government. The cabinet decided that from that given year all Syrians can study for free at Turkish universities. The legal barriers were abolished, but still there was and in many times there are two other barriers: the regional differences in Turkey and the fact that most Syrian refugees still do not speak the Turkish language well enough. With the decision of accepting all Syrians to universities another problem arose in 2014-2015: the lack of standardization of the examination of Syrians in a country where everything is centralized and standardized. Universities therefore were free to choose how to measure the knowledge of Syrian refugee students in order to distribute them among classes and study groups and to evaluate them at the moments of output (Hoffmann and Samuk, 2016). In 2015, a process of standardization and centralization was launched and for certain faculties a central examination of 180 questions was designed for the future Syrian students that they had to answer within three hours (Aras and Yasun, 2016).

Due to changing governmental policies, there are now five distinct ways to enter a Turkish university if you are a Syrian refugee. The Syrian refugees residing in Turkey under international protection can choose from a wide variety of public and private universities. Of course, only a tiny minority can afford private institutions as they are highly priced and do not offer scholarship programs and work on quotas meaning that they do not accept all those wishing to enter a

training program, but they are also flexible when it comes to the authentication of the documents of the applicants. They might establish special requirements for Syrian nationals. Having said so, it has to be disclosed that at least 2.000 Syrian families can afford a place at private university (Bariscil, 2017).

Avenues for Syrians to Apply to Turkish Universities			
Avenue of application	Type of institution	Advantages	Limitations
As regular international students	Private universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential flexibility with academic and identification documents</li> <li>Higher international student quotas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tuition costs</li> <li>Individual institutional requirements</li> </ul>
As regular international students	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free tuition</li> <li>Can transfer at all levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must have all academic and identification documents</li> <li>Must pass a Turkish or English language exam (depending on field of study)</li> <li>International student quotas apply</li> </ul>
As special students	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free tuition</li> <li>Flexibility with academic and identification documents</li> <li>Do not need Turkish</li> <li>International student quotas do not apply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not receive credit or result in a terminal degree</li> <li>Cannot matriculate until able to produce official documents</li> </ul>
Through the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free tuition</li> <li>Flexibility with identification documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only first-year students are eligible</li> <li>International student quotas apply</li> <li>Limited to specific universities</li> <li>Limited to specific academic fields</li> </ul>
Through the Türkiye Burslan program	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free tuition + supplementary support</li> <li>Flexibility with identification documents</li> <li>Turkish language training</li> <li>International student quotas do not apply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only first-year students are eligible</li> <li>May be limited to specific universities</li> </ul>

**Table 8. Avenues for Syrians to Apply to Turkish Universities**

(Source: Hoffmann and Sarmuk, 2016)

As the above table proves it, all the public universities are free for Syrian refugee students. In certain cases, they can even have further financial support, too. This applies to the recipients of the Turkish national scholarship program, the Türkiye Burslari. They are offered a free of charge Turkish language course and various supplementary aids including free monthly bus tickets for those who live far from the campus. These scholarships are normally given to students from all countries of the world including Syria. Every year a contingent of 4.000 international students can obtain this help, but –though the exact numbers are unknown- one can find relatively few Syrians among them (Hoffmann and Sarmuk, 2016).

### 3.3.3. Insertion and integration of refugee students

Statistically speaking, in Turkey, the insertion and integration of Syrian refugees into the system of higher education is not very advanced. According to available data, in all other major areas

where there are Syrian refugees, a much higher percentage of the youth between 18 and 24 attend university programs. Among the internally displaced in Syria some 17% of the young Syrians go to university. This proportion corresponds to the level prior to the civil war. Many students even displace because they want to pursue their studies in a peaceful environment. It was mentioned while speaking earlier of this phenomenon concerning the Homs University and its difficult days during the first phase of the armed conflict. Turkey also fails when compared to Arab countries receiving refugees as 6% of the Syrians in Lebanon and 8% of those in Jordan and Egypt attend university programs. Of course, in all these cases there are no language or curriculum barriers for them (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

There is an important geographical split regarding refugee students in Turkey. It seems that the ones still living in the border area have a higher chance to be admitted to a local university than in the big cities of Western Turkey. By far, the most popular and most integrative university is Gaziantep University followed by the Istanbul and Karabuk Universities. This last one is a real surprise for everyone studying the case of refugee students in Turkey. Experts unanimously admit that the popularity of Karabuk university, a small university in a small town, famous for its coal mines and not its history with higher education, comes from the fact that institution work as a big family. All members of the university personnel – teachers and administrative employees alike - are friendly and very helpful. This university was very successful in promoting this image of an amicable and attentive place and the few Syrians who were directed there by the YOK invited their friends and relatives. The role of local Turkish students is also crucial as they constitute study groups in order to help fellow Syrian young people. So, Karabuk University receiving 9.6% of all the Syrian refugee students of Turkey finishes third behind the two giant institutions because of being more welcoming than the other campuses (Hohberger, 2017). Another important factor that attracts Syrian students to Karabuk University is social media. Refugees are often more active users of these web sites than ordinary people and pay more attention to the very positive coverage concerning this school. So, many Syrian in Karabuk respond that they have chosen that particular place because its popularity among persons connected by certain social media outlet (Bariscil, 2017).

University	Number of Students
Gaziantep University	1667
Istanbul University	990
Karabük University	927
Mersin University	724
Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University	654

**Table 9. Top 5 Turkish universities in terms of Syrian refugee students in the academic year 2015-2016**

(Source: Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017)

Comparing the data contained in table 12. and table 17, it is evident that around 17,2% of all Syrian refugee students study at Gaziantep university. For sure, the most important advantage of this institution is that it is located very close to the Syrian border and the camps as well as one finds entire Syrian neighborhoods in the city. Mersin (7.5%) and Kahramanmaras (6.7%) share these characteristics with Gaziantep. Whereas Istanbul University (10.2%) is attractive as it is the oldest and most prestigious higher education institution of the country and it is to be found in a city with nearly 600.000 Syrian refugees.

A special aspect, the distribution of male and female students has also to be taken into consideration as the future is unimaginable without educated women. According to recent statistics, around one third of Syrian refugee students are young ladies. This data is higher than the one describing the situation in more conservative Syria (Bariscil, 2017).

The presence of Syrian refugee students at Turkish universities can be fruitful only if they are surrounded by a balanced environment. Already they come from a country destroyed by the civil war, they might have lost their loved ones, or they are separated from them, most probably they are in a sentimentally and emotionally difficult situation, they are vulnerable, so at least, they material conditions should be all right to make them possible to study. The very basis of financial independence is a scholarship that covers their daily expenses. Syrian refugee students studying in Turkey report that in many cases they have financial problems. They say that they do not get any support while they apply for a scholarship and wait for the evaluation of their application, the scholarships have various conditions difficult to meet and in many cases when the academic year starts the scholarship money is not yet available (Hohberger, 2017).

Outspoken Syrian refugee students point out several other difficulties related to their scholarship. The scholarship contracts contain unclear conditions and sometimes go against the principle of

transparency –certain students underline. They also add that the scholarships paid on a monthly basis can mean a varying amount of money or the unfavorable cooperation of the scholarship provider Turkish authorities leave certain student in an unprivileged situation. Syrian students therefor usually reclaim three basic values concerning their scholarship programs: clarity, transparency and permanence (Hohberger, 2017). The financial difficulties can endanger the studies of Syrian youth in Turkey.

Conscientious of their responsibility, Syrian refugee students studying in Turkey have a list of suggestions in order to ameliorate the scholarship programs they are involved in. First, they propose a system in which a little service in the life of the university can raise the level of the scholarship one gets. For example, if a Syrian student helps in the library of the university, assists the newcomers –be it Syrians or other international students- in their integration process or even give them lessons in English, Turkish or other subjects, or they act as tutors of fellow students having learning difficulties. Second, they propose a system of cooperation between the state run scholarship agencies and private firms to let Syrian students take legal part-time jobs. This way they would be able to sustain themselves better out of their own efforts and get professional experience needed to enter the world of employment after they graduate (Hohberger, 2017).

Some of the Syrian students are also critical of the content of the curriculum and the level of education at Turkish universities. They first and most basic problem to evoke is the insufficiency of the introductory Turkish language courses at certain universities. Namely, they say that the program is too general and does not introduce them into the technical terms of the science they would study in Turkish. Knowing Turkish seems to be a must even for those Syrians who are enrolled in 100% English study programs as the teachers and the students are mostly Turks and often discuss the matter in their mother tongue and foreign students are either excluded or hardly understand what is going on (Hohberger, 2017). Though Syrian refugee students are not required to take a Turkish language exam when they apply, they are immediately asked to do so if admitted to university. The institution offers them a language course free of charge to prepare them for the exam. The common experience of the teachers and examiners is that Syrian have a great difficulty to read and understand written Turkish, whereas they can easily discuss a topic orally, and they also have fairly good writing skills (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

A second remark concerns subjects that are compulsory for every student, Turkish or international, and are basically designed for Turks. They give as an example the discipline called

the Reforms of Atatürk. The founding father of the Republic of Turkey might be an important Table of Turkish history, but foreign students are less enthusiastic to learn about him (Hohberger, 2017). One might also say that for a better integration into the overall Turkish society a Syrian refugee has to know as much of the history of the host country as possible, but, of course, there is the emotional difference between local students and foreigners. It is also true that Syrians do not oppose the subject as such, but they want it to be taught in English so as they could better understand the importance of the regime change after World War I.

Syrian refugee students formulate more general suggestions to make their integration better. As there is a considerable difference between the Syrian and Turkish education systems, a one-year long introductory course comparable to the German *studienkollegs* might be useful as it is not enough to learn the local language, they have to know the local manners, too. The aim of this year would be the teaching of those subjects that are included in the program of the Turkish secondary schools and are not taught in Syria, as in general, there are more subjects in a Turkish high school than in a Syrian one. This provokes a certain lack of knowledge among the Syrians and in some cases, they feel alienated by fellow Turkish students or even faculty members if they do not know something that is evident for a Turkish person. Basically, one can speak here of intensive Turkish civilization course dispensed in addition to the language study programs (Hohberger, 2017).

Living a healthy social life is also a key to the social integration of Syrian refugee students into the student population and the general Turkish public. It is not easy as Syrians speak a different language and were born into and raised in a slightly different culture. This is increasingly true for female students coming from a more traditional Syria to a more liberal Turkey as far as social norms are concerned. According to Syrian students, they need stronger ethnic civil society organizations based on the campuses, and they have to be more active, especially at the beginning of the semesters as for the newcomers this is the most difficult time period to pass. They underline the importance of the common sport and ludic activities such as football or chess, programs that can bring together the compatriots and let them share their concerns, questions and experiences. Added to these less formal activities, students suggest the installation of a guidance system in which older students can tutor their younger fellows. To perfect this tool of integration, these clubs and activities must be opened to high school student to prepare them for their training at university or college (Hohberger, 2017). It is worth noting that universities might have a difficulty in reaching out to Syrian refugee high school students or Syrians having finished high school in Syria, but not enrolled in a study program in Turkey yet. Furthermore, these young



people have to pass a special exam to validate their knowledge and diploma called Foreign Student High School Equivalence Exam (abbreviated YOLDS in Turkish) that is organized only once a year and only in some selected cities, not necessarily where refugees actually live (Celik and Erdogan, 2017).

Turkish university personnel often argue that Syrians are less interested in social activities, and they prefer not to take part in free time activities. They are more modest, reserved and shy than Turks. This might come from their nature and culture, but also from the trauma they went through. They rarely socialize with Turkish students and with other international students according to a study conducted at the Osmaniye University. Around 30% of Syrian students are members in a student club (this is a very low proportion compared to Turks who sometimes are more active in the clubs than in the classroom). This relative passivity is on many occasions described as a voluntary self-exclusion from social life by fellow Turkish students and university professors (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

A frequently repeated issue preventing Syrian refugee students to be well integrated into the system is that they are totally unaware of their rights and duties. They either do not master the Turkish language or hardly understand it at the beginning. So, very simply they are unable to read a legal document in Turkish. Their desire is a handbook in which all the legal matters regulating their life in Turkey in general and as a student in particular are explained in their own mother tongue, that is Arabic. This book must be prepared in print and made available online (Hohberger, 2017). Syrian refugee students also complain about the lack of information sharing on the legal background of their studies. As this is a very dynamic policy area, rules and regulations change frequently – as it was detailed it earlier, in the previous point - , and Syrians are not capable of finding the alternatives and the more suitable option both on the level of admittance to a study program or during their training. With the changes in the entrance exam system, many Syrians missed their exams and could not start their studies in Turkey (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

Integration is a mutual phenomenon. Not only the Turkish actors of higher education are required to provide certain services and help Syrians, Syrians too have to actively participate in the teaching processes throughout the academic year as well. Though Turkish university sources agree that Syrian students tend to skip classes more than their Turkish colleagues. There are not attendance or dropout statistics available, but the experts of the YOK underline that the estimated level of failure is around 50%. Two main reasons lie behind this sad fact. First, the bad economic

situation of Syrian students. Second, the language barrier and the lack of understanding of written Turkish (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

Integration is a double phenomenon. From one side, integration means that the Turkish government and Turkish civil societies try to accommodate the misafirs, the guests of the nation in the best possible way. From the other, integration also includes the idea that Syrian refugee students themselves strive very hard in order to fit in the structure and the overall society. Though, indeed, there are cases of failure and drop out and the percentage of university students within the total refugee population is low, especially in comparison with other countries receiving Syrian refugees, there are a few positive signs. Two of them will be highlighted. First, the total number of Syrian refugee students studying in Turkey is increasing sharply. Second, the proportion of female students among them is considerable.

### **3.3.4. Conflicts related to the rise of foreign students in the system**

The positive discrimination applied for entrance requirements and the scholarships given to Syrian refugee students provokes criticism. Certain Turks think that their own government favors foreigners over them, the taxpayer citizens of the country. Of course, on many occasions these assessments are based on false information and misconceptions. A Syrian refugee student studying in Sanliurfa says:

*“Have you all entered the university without an exam unlike us? Do all you take 1200 TL scholarship from the government?’ These are the things we keep hearing from our Turkish classmates. We took a graduation exam in Syria and only some of us are on a scholarship. There are so many misperceptions.”* (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017:37).

Syrian refugee students often feel offended by the remarks they get directly at the university from their fellow classmates or even teachers, and they also usually see these ideas posted on social media.

Sometimes nationalistic accusations against Syrian refugee students are very harsh and go to the extreme. Once a Leftwing opposition member of the Turkish parliament from Gaziantep, Mehmet Seker was quoted as saying in 2012, at the very beginning of the civil war when the first refugees were admitted to Turkish universities as guest students:

*“It is a great injustice to the families of those Turkish students who pay for preparatory courses and the fees of education that these people who come from Syria and whose real*

*identity is uncertain and do not pay any money or present any document can go to college, simply registering to our universities by declaration. Besides, are these people students? Terrorist? Al Qaeda militants? Are they from the PKK militia? To admit these people to our universities on the basis of a simple self-declaration is neither logical nor correct.”* (Seydi, 2014:290).

International students themselves in some cases perceive the situation as a form of alienation. 14.2% of foreign students studying in Turkey think that the main factor of their lack of success at university is the discrimination done by their fellow classmates and faculty members. An international student says: “Teachers behave as if we were taking away the place of a Turk. It would be enough if they consider us on an equal footing”. Another foreign student reports: “Some students get more than they deserve. If I worked as much as I could, in the eyes of certain teachers, it would not have a value and would not give me the necessary points to pass.” (Demirtas, 2017:557).

These above quotations show that there is discrimination. What cannot be judged is whether it is really related to the fact that certain students come from outside of Turkey or not. Unsuccessful students always try to explain their failure with the shortcomings of teachers. Having said so, knowing the level of nationalism that exists in Turkish society, it is impossible to exclude that the political refusal of Syrians and other foreigners can play a certain role.

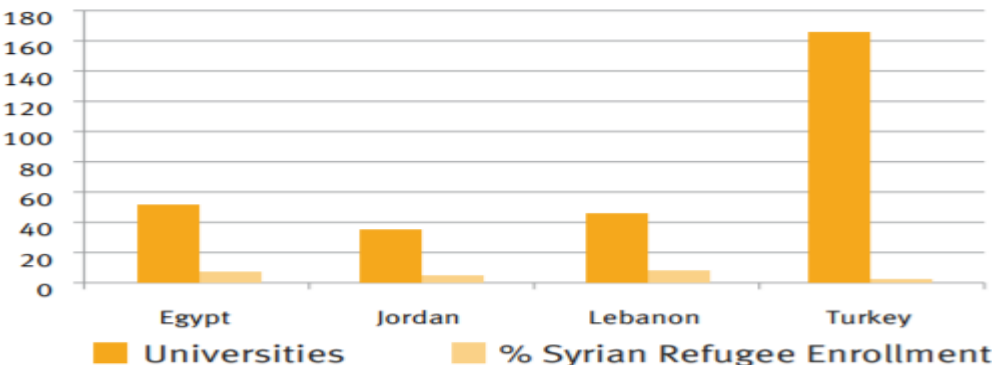
Syrian refugee students also complain about more specific, politically motivated blaming. Some classmates often tell them that “here, this is Turkey”, put into question whether the Syrian refugees were really fleeing a dangerous situation, or even occasionally they are asked: “what Assad did to you?”. Other forms of verbal aggression are related to the arrival of the refugees in Turkey. Nationalistic Turks sometimes say: “you came to Turkey to steal our bread”, “you came and everything has become more expensive” or “if you are a foreigner then behave” (Demirtas, 2017:558). These accusations can deeply hurt Syrian refugee students who had already undergone a wide range of trauma in their home country during the civil war, who had lost their friends and relatives.

Many Turks, especially the Left-wing opposition media understand this situation as a form of injustice. Turkish education experts approach the growth in number of international and Syrian student as a chance, and the spending of the government on the issue a good investment. In the entire world, nationalism is on the rise and in the West these extreme ideologies are often used

against Muslims and Muslim migrants. In many countries Muslims and migrants in general are not welcome. As the number of foreign students decrease in several countries and increases in Turkey, Ankara can attract a high number of valuable students and faculty members who later might contribute to the advancement of Turkish researches and the evolution of the sector of higher education. If Arabs and Muslims are less and less welcome in the West, sending them to Europe instead of educating them in Muslim majority Turkey would be a mistake. The problem is even more accentuate with the ongoing Brexit procedure as a rift appeared in Europe and migrants are blamed for it. Turkey has the duty and the responsibility to intervene in similar situations. So, though the criticism probably remains, but the government has to continue its education policy to serve not only the Turkish population, but also in some extent the global Muslim community (Ozer, 2017).

**3.3.5. Scenarios for the future of the education of refugee students in Turkey**

There are several scenarios concerning the future of the higher education of Syrian refugees in Turkey, all depends on how the civil war is managed in their home country. This means that Turkish authorities must prepare for two main opportunities: the war ending soon and the war lasting several more years, an early return of refugees or Syrians settling down in mass more or less definitely. One thing is true though. The level of education provided for Syrians is still low compared to the situation in other countries receiving millions of Syrian asylum seekers (Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt) and also to the potential in Turkey. It is evident that on the short run 4, and on the long term 6% of the Syrian refugee youth must be admitted to Turkish universities or another transitional solution should be found for them in the interest of the refugees and the Turkish government alike.



**Graph 10. Syrian Refugee Enrollment in the Middle East in 2014**

(Source: El-Ghali et al., 2017)

In fact, Turkey can and has to learn a lesson from the experience of other Middle Eastern nations about how they could better accommodate their Syrian refugees in their own higher education systems. Though 6% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon attend higher education, the overall situation is not perfect at all as 48% of the primary school aged children and 95% of the over 15 youth do not attend school. This data show that Lebanon focuses on the primary education and tries to build up its system designed for the refugees on a long run (El-Ghali et al. 2017.a). It is evident that the Lebanese count on the extension of the armed conflict in Syria and try to copy previous examples of exoduses in the Middle East like the one of the Palestinian people to Lebanon, Syria or Jordan. A process after which these people became at least partially Lebanese, Syrian or Jordanian. This means that there is option for Turkey to first build up a convenient primary education to the Syrian refugees and through this mean they can make a little bit Turkish those young Syrians who most probably would remain in Turkey and eventually might become Turkish citizens. It would be also good because this way it seems to be easier to integrate them into the education system and the Turkish society.

As Lebanon is focusing on the primary schools receiving Syrian refugee pupils, a considerable amount of young Syrian cannot continue their studies started back in Syria. According to estimates, some 70.000 young Syrian refugees are forced to interrupt their studies while in Lebanon (El-Ghali et al., 2017.a). If it is so, their number can only be higher in Turkey. Unfortunately, the exact number of Syrian youth unable to follow their studies in Turkey is unknown. The example of Lebanon prove that the emphasis put on primary education causes losses in tertiary education, so Turkey should possibly concentrate more on primary schools, but has to give a priority to the group of young Syrian refugees who already finished at least a semester in their home country.

Lebanon provides us with an excellent example of scholarship called JUSOOR-Lebanon. This support was created by a non-governmental organization founded by rich Syrian expatriates. This program came into existence in 2011 in Syria to promote the exchange of Syrian students with international students abroad, but the civil war changed the whole context, and now the beneficiaries are Syrian refugees studying abroad. It is true that only a dozen of students can get this scholarship, but the entire idea is something to be copied (El-Ghali et al. 2017.a). In Turkey, the involvement of Turkish civil society organizations in the reception of refugees is crucial, the Turkish government alone could not handle all the services needed for the three million people without the generous help of local NGOs. Having said so, there are two more options to be

studied by the relevant authorities: a better integration of the NGOs into the higher education of Syrian refugees in general, and the wealthy Syrian expatriates in particular.

Another noticeable initiative is the Lebanese Association for Scientific Research (LAsER). This program provides 250 students (half of them of Lebanese and half of them of Syrian origin!) with an important stipend (El-Ghali et al. 2017.a). This idea is excellent for Turkey as a number of Turks are jealous of the possibilities given to the few Syrian refugees on government scholarship. A similar program in Turkey would underline the importance of sharing, would go against prejudices and promote equality.

Lebanon, very much unlike Turkey, attracts several international scholarship programs helping Syrian refugee students. These initiatives include the Albert Einstein Academic German Refugee Fund, the Dutch Higher Education 4 Syrians or the Quality Universal Education for Syrian Students and Teachers (El-Ghali et al. 2017.a). Turkey has to be at least as ingenious as Lebanon and get more international support for Syrian refugee students. To attract them, Turkey could argue with the necessity of educating Syrians to prevent them from going to Europe.

The Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI), the entity in Iraq that receives the most Syrian refugees inside the country, is remarkably stable and proposes decent higher education to its inhabitants and refugees alike. One of the good facets of KRI is the quick and simple procedures of forwarding a student from a Syrian institution to another one in the KRI as authorities of the autonomous region facilitated the equivalency procedures due to a special cooperation between the institutions (El-Ghali et al., 2017.b). This example shows that there is an urgent need for a shift in the approach to the question in Turkey. In Turkey, students who left Syria without their diplomas and documents are required to prove to a government agency or a university who he or she was before the civil war. This way, this burden is taken away from the refugee and the universities in the two countries identify the person and authenticate the documents.

### **3.4 Summary of the literature review**

The mass demonstrations and revolutions known as the Arab Spring reached Syria during the first half of the year 2011. At the beginning, it seemed to be a limited incident in which the harsh institutions of the Assad regime targeted some young people tagging buildings with anti government slogans in the Southern city of Deraa. The then local insurgency a few months later gained momentum in other Sunnite majority regions of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. At the end of the same year, it was already possible to speak of a full-scale civil war on

one hand, and the departure of the first refugees in the direction of Turkey. Most refugees at that moment were connected to the rebel forces and planned to stay a few months before returning home. Turkey first tried to use its then good diplomatic ties to normalize the situation in Northern Syria but was facing an increasing opposition to these efforts by the central government of Syria. At the same time, it can be argued that Turkey was completely surprised by the first wave of asylum seekers and had not the necessary legal and infrastructural framework to deal with the ever-growing mass of refugees.

The civil war continued to escalate due to various factors. First, next to the classical rebel forces holding rather liberal political views and representing the majority Sunnite denomination popped up distinct Islamist military forces such the Al Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra Front or later the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Second, besides the classical and the Islamist forces, armed groups based on ethnicity (representing either the Kurds or the Turcomans) continued to appear and take control of certain territories. Third, the growing tension lead to an increasing number of conflicts between militias opposed to the Assad regime. Fourth, these militias, often labeled as terrorist organizations, claimed control of a large part of Syria and established state-like entities. Fifth, the military intervention of foreign powers such as the United States of America, Russia, Iran and Turkey further contributed to the escalation of the conflicts. Paradoxically enough, these foreign military interventions lead to the empowerment of the central government in Damascus which is now controlling most parts of the country and a relative pacification of the Middle Eastern nation. Though, in some rebel held areas, there still atrocities, most of Syria is peaceful and ready to take back the millions of refugees now internally displaced or residing in other countries like Turkey.

The first Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey as early as April 2011, and 19.000 more in August of that year. The Republic of Turkey was forced to establish temporary reception centers in the border area to house these people. As asylum seekers kept coming, more sophisticated refugee camps were realized with the help of local NGOs and the international community. During this period of the refugee crisis, refugees were not allowed to leave that region close to their homeland, but as their number was growing, they were first let to settle down in larger urban centers of Southeastern Turkey such as Adana, Gaziantep or Sanliurfa, later they were also authorized to move to the western cities like Istanbul or Bursa. In September 2019, some 3.7 million Syrian refugees reside in Turkey with only a meager minority living in refugee camps.

In 2011, most Turks were positive or even enthusiastic about receiving Syrian refugees and underlined the importance of Muslim solidarity. The growing number of refugees and the lack of proper integration options lead to a certain number of conflicts and it is possible to detect rejection of refugees and even xenophobia. Nevertheless, after 8 years of cohabitation, most Turks accept the presence of Syrian nationals on Turkish soil.

Because of the large number of refugees, the Turkish government faced unprecedented challenges to incorporate refugees into the overall Turkish society. This applies to the issue of education in general and higher education in particular, too. Lower percentage of refugees go to school in Turkey than in Lebanon or Jordan, Arab countries that also got an incredible number of refugees.

Before the refugee crisis, Turkish higher education was absolutely not open to international students. Though the history of Turkish higher education goes back to the Middle Ages, the first influx of foreign students started as late as the 1980s. The first students came from three groups: children of the guest workers residing in the West, young ethnic Turks (including the Turcomans of Syria) and the Turkic youth of the former Soviet Union. In the last year before the civil war, in 2010, some 2% of the total foreign student population was holding a Syrian passport. The number of Syrian refugee students attained 48.000 during the academic year of 2018-2019, this means that their number is now more than 100 times higher compared to the statistics prior to the war. The growth might be impressive, but this is still extremely low in comparison with the total refugee population in Turkey.

The presence of Syrian refugee students at Turkish universities generates a certain number of conflicts with fellow students and teachers. Syrians report nationalistic and xenophobic remarks and an ambiance of exclusion in certain cases. The only remedy to these problems might only be a comprehensive government policy that includes a wide range of services from a solid Turkish language education program, efficient tools to integrate the Syrian youth in Turkey to a set of central scholarships.

## **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Methodology of the analysis**

To test the hypotheses presented at the beginning of the thesis and to survey the actual opinion of the persons concerned a complex method has been used to come to the proper results. The



complexity with regards to the discussion means that the present chapter contains both qualitative and quantitative elements. Though the qualitative and the quantitative approach required different steps to be taken, the preparation for the scientific work included the same actions.

First, the target population had to be defined. Though the number of Syrian refugee students in Turkish higher education is growing, approaching them is not an easy task. Prejudices work from both sides, from the sides of the Turkish society and the Syrian refugees as well, and a relatively high number of people concerned refused to take part in the research as they were fearing reprehension either in Turkey or after returning home in Syria. Agents of the Syrian secret police might also be active among refugee students, so their reluctance might be legitimate. For these reasons, help was requested from the Turkish Council of Higher Education (in Turkish: *Yuksegitim Kurulu, YOK*). Even the YOK had a certain difficulty to find enough students, and especially students reflecting the ethnic and religious ramification of the Syrian nation. Finally, 10 students accepted to undergo a deep interview and 160 others took part in the quantitative research by filling in a survey. This sampling frame did not seem fully satisfactory, especially when it comes to the relatively low number of interviewees, but it is very burdensome to convince members of a vulnerable population to participate in a research that might – according to their fears - negatively influence their professional future.

Second, preparation for the actual research process was made in two distinct phases. Considering the hypotheses proposed at the beginning of the thesis, separate questions were elaborated for the interviews and the survey. These questions were tested on a small sample in order to know whether they were appropriate for the aims of the research or not. Individuals for this testing period were organized by the YOK and contacted online, so no actual travel had to be undertaken.

Third, after determining the target population and the sample size, and testing the first version of the research questions, a double data collection phase took place. After the professionals of the Council of Higher Education contacted the selected students and their families for the interviews in September 2018, their addresses and coordinates were later communicated, so a personal contact could be established with them. As these students live at various locations throughout Turkey, during the following two months, in October and November 2018 three distinct field trips were organized. The first near the Syrian border to Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Adiyaman, the second to Western Turkey to Istanbul, Bursa and Izmir, and the third to Ankara. The interviews

generally lasted at least three hours of actual questioning and answering, but in reality, much more due to the specificities of the Middle Eastern cultures where hosting a guest is primordial, so sometimes it lasted a whole day and permitted to better detect the family backgrounds.

The second phase of the data collection was realized later, in August and September 2019. The experts of the Turkish Council of Higher Education prepared a longer list of available Syrian refugee students. A selection has been conducted based on ethnicity, religion, age, gender and the faculty they were studying at. As a result of this selection phase, 160 students were chosen and given the survey online. The anonymity of the students involved in the research has been preserved, therefore all the requested students became respondents in the research. Assessing this response rate, one can say that this is satisfactory and enough for an in-depth quantitative analysis.

Fourth, after collecting data, separate qualitative and quantitative analyses were realized. The qualitative analysis based on the interviews includes two main approaches. As there are five hypotheses and the research questions were organized into five different sets, these five topics ranging from general satisfaction with their situation as a refugee to the career plans of the Syrian refugee students, are presented one by one while a special attention has been paid to match certain students to underline similarities or differences. Following the presentation of the answers by the 10 participants, an overview is given in which a general evaluation is compared to the results of the literature.

Based on the same hypotheses as the qualitative analysis, the quantitative part of the research applied a 5 point Likert type scale consisting of 15 subjects. As the 10th and the 14th subjects were proven to be useless from the point of view of the research, they were neglected and omitted. The respondents could give answers from “I strongly agree” (1) to “I strongly disagree” (5) to express their respective opinion. All statistical analysis used these five options. The data obtained was analyzed from diverse points of view ranging from the description of the sample population itself to the testing of the five hypotheses.

Fifth, hypotheses were tested and summarized in a table included in the chapter on the conclusion of the research. This summary shows whether the individual hypothesis can be rejected or confirmed from the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

#### **4.2 General level of satisfaction with the assistance of Turkish authorities and civil societies**

The first question to the ten individuals representing almost all segments of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey was the following one:

How the Turkish authorities and civil society organizations are dealing with the issue of Syrian refugees?

The related hypothesis proposed was as follows:

It is to be supposed that Syrian refugee students are happy to live a peaceful life and to be able to study but are not fully satisfied with their living conditions. In this regard, they profoundly differ from those ordinary students opting to study abroad from a peaceful country. They do not seek diversion or adventure.

The first Syrian refugee student studying law at a university in the Southern city of Gaziantep was Mohammed A., a young Sunni Muslim of Arab descent from the coastal city of Latakia where the overwhelming majority of the local population is from the Alewite denomination. Though there were no intense fights in his hometown, Mohammed had decided to leave the country as he and his family members were several times verbally and physically abused by their neighbors from the community of the ruling elite. He also refused to serve in the army of Bashar Al-Assad. He was 20 when he moved over the border and preferred to settle down in the vicinity of the frontier as he was originally planning to return as soon as the situation normalizes in Syria.

Mohammed left Syria alone, crossed into Turkey without the help of human smugglers near the otherwise busy Yayladagi check point close to the Mediterranean that used to be the main entry and exit point in the Province of Latakia before the war. Though he was moving slowly and alone, very soon he got seen by a Turkish patrol. He reports that the Turkish border guards were rude at first, he was kicked in the abdomen and beaten up. Soon after, Mohammed was transferred to a military police unit. As he could credibly prove his identity as he guarded his ID card and a copy of his old passport revoked by the Assad regime, he was then escorted to a reception center in the Province of Yozgat. As he was quite fluent in English and could already speak a bit of Turkish, he was selected by a Turkish NGO searching for Syrian helpers. After a few days in Yozgat, he got to Gaziantep where he still lives and studies.

He says that he was first shocked by the brutality of the border guards, but later was amazed by the hospitality of the people in Yozgat and Gaziantep. He describes most Turkish officials dealing with his case as open-minded and friendly, but he stresses that the Turkish state is very bureaucratic, though maybe less than Syria after the breakout of the civil war. He thinks that

civil society organizations and their activists are far more helpful than the authorities. Though he notices a slight change as time passes and finds local Turks less and less friendly, he believes that the situation of a refugee is much better in Turkey than in Europe. He has some friends in Sweden and Finland with whom he used to frequent the same mosque back in Syria. According to the information he can get from them, people in Europe were first enthusiastic, but it soon stopped to be so. Syrians in Turkey are more considered to be the guests of the nation – adds Mohammed.

Ali M. started an undergraduate program in agriculture at a university of another Southern city, Sanliurfa where an important Arabic-speaking ethnic minority already lived before 2011. This was his main focus after he left his home city of Homs very soon after the start of the armed conflict as his place was under attack from a very early stage of the war. The building where they lived was bombed, he and his Shia Muslim Arab family was first internally displaced and tried find a place with their large family in the capital. Some family disputes forced them out with no place to go. The entire family came to the conclusion that leaving the country is the only solution. They first tried to cross into Lebanon with the help of a Shia network. Their money was taken away, Ali lost a younger sister due to the eruption of a small ambush in the mountains at an army check point. Finally, they all went to the North and presented themselves at a Turkish border crossing. They had to wait a few days. After getting in, they were transferred to a refugee camp for families in Oncupinar in the Province of Kilis. This is one of the largest facilities of its kind and consists of a high number of containers. They got their own container where they stayed several years. They opted for moving out of the camp following a conflict with another group of refugees, also from Syria, but from the Sunni denomination. In this conflict, they were assisted by an NGO that found an empty house on the outskirts of Sanliurfa where they stay. The family, after renting out the house with the adjacent land decided to send their oldest son, Ali to a local vocational school where he first learned Turkish and agriculture. As he was a good student, again the same NGO helped them to finance his undergraduate studies.

Ali stresses the difficulties in the camp, especially if you belong to a specific minority group within the camp itself. Ali thinks that he and his family would not have survived these atrocities without the help of the Turkish civil society. For Ali, Turks are strange but most of the time helpful, he is surprised how the general Turkish public know less about Syria and the civil war. For him it took time to accept the local rules and regulations, the local tastes, but the City of the Prophets –as he calls Sanliurfa- is beautiful enough to forget about the losses and the conflicts

and to look to the future. His short-term aim is to establish a fertile farmland around the house the family rents, to live on their own and to be respected by the neighbors.

The third interviewee is Houmam E. from the region of Bayirbucak in the Turkmen Mountain. This 24-year old boy of Turkmen origin is the only surviving son of a dentist who was captured and killed by Assad loyalists. As almost all members of his family perished, he entered the Syrian Turkmen Brigades, an armed opposition force that operated in his area. As he was quite young, after a while the head of his unit told him to go to Turkey and study the profession of his late father, dentistry. He was forwarded by his elders to the city of Adiyaman where could first finish his high school studies in Turkish, his mother tongue, later, at first, he was accepted to the faculty in that city.

As Houmam is from a Turkish-speaking minority group in Syria, his insertion and integration were relatively easy though he had never been to Turkey prior to the war. He feels quite autonomous in Turkey, he could easily find small jobs designed for refugee students. His only wish now is to obtain the Turkish citizenship. He is convinced that the Turkish Republic has to extend his citizenship policy towards the Turkmens of Syria and Iraq as their ancestors were loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire, and they still proudly preserve the Turkish language and culture in a hostile environment. This would considerably unburden the life of the Turkmen refugees.

The fourth person to answer the questions of the interview was Fathi L., this 27 years old Kurdish gentleman left his home city of Qamishli in April 2016 during the most violent part of a battle that opposed the local tribal police force, the Asayish and Assad loyalist paramilitary units. His life was in danger as he is the only son of a local tribal leader, a Kurdish sub-ethnic group that has very wide connections to Kurds living just across the border in Turkey. A secret forum of Kurdish tribal leaders in Turkey that operates totally independently of the notorious terror cell of the PKK decided to forward him to Istanbul to keep him far from the frontier region. Though the situation in Qamishli proper is safe and its region is becoming increasing suitable for human life, Fathi thinks that it is still wiser to stay in Istanbul. As he was bored and got enough money from his tribesmen in Turkey, he decided to restart his studies. Before the war, he had started his engineering course with the university in Deir-ez-Zor. After the war broke out, he left the school and lived on smuggling goods between Turkey and Syria, an activity that is quite widespread in this Kurdish populated area. In some sense, it also used to be before the armed conflict. This

period of four years let him earn some money and learn some Turkish that helped him integrate into the Turkish education system.

Fathi is not very much in touch with the Turkish reality and society. Basically, he seeks assistance from Kurdish people living in Istanbul. His stay was legalized after his arrival, he had only a limited contact with the Turkish authorities whom he judges to be nice and fair. He was also surprised to realize how much of them are also of Kurdish origin even in the Western cities of Turkey. Though he is surrounded by ethnic Kurds, he enjoys the multicultural nature of the big cities very much. He is amazed how organized and clean Istanbul is compared to his home city or Deir-ez-Zor. Therefore he has much respect for the ordinary Turks.

Loutfi M., this 23 years old Christian Arab from the Lebanon Mountain town of Safita left his place with his entire family after the intensification of the pressure on his fellow community members in September 2013. At that time the Syrian branch of the Al Qaeda terror network, the Al Nusra Front besieged the famous Christian town of Maaloula further in the South. Most Christians from that area left for Lebanon that was closer, Loutfi's family decided to take another route to the North. For a couple of months, they lived in the town of Kasab, a Christian majority locality near the Turkish border. As Muslim extremists were pushing them out of the region, they did not have any other option than going to Turkey. They were lucky as they only had to march a few km and were sent to a nearby container camp in Yayladagi. Loutfi started to learn Turkish and attended a special psychological training to process his bitter war memories. This course included some drawing and painting sessions where his extraordinary skills were discovered, and he was soon offered a scholarship in Fine Arts by a university in Ankara.

Loutfi is amazed by both the Turkish people and the Turkish authorities and by the academic life in Ankara. He admits that he had many bad stereotypes about the Turks before he came to the country, but after his establishment in Ankara, all of a sudden, this feeling changed. He had some ambivalent feelings when they arrived to Yayladagi because he would have preferred to go to Lebanon or Europe where Christians number more. He finds Turkish Muslims far more tolerant of Christians than their Syrian fellows. He also admits that this issue is also present in the Yayladagi refugee camp where some of his family members still stay. His deepest wish would be therefor a family re-unification in Ankara as now it seems impossible to be with them as his scholarship is only sufficient for one person. Some of his other family members recently returned to Safita under the control of the central government. That makes his wish even less feasible.

Due to his scholarship and the possibilities it can offer him, Loutfi is not considering a return to the Lebanon mountains.

To promote gender equality, after the above five gentlemen, five young ladies have been also interviewed. The first of them was Amena L.D. from the Northern city of Aleppo. Amena descends from one of the richest merchant families of the city. They were among the very first people to flee Aleppo, and they managed to transfer most of their wealth to Turkey where they bought a large villa in a rural settlement very close to the city of Bursa. Their home in the downtown of Aleppo was later seriously damaged, and, after the central government took control, seized from the Sunni Arab family. The family launched an international construction material trade and could maintain the same quality of life as in Syria. They can also easily afford the studies of their daughter, Amena.

Amena is now 25 years old and is in her second year at a faculty of medicine. She likes Turkey, the Turks and the easy-going ambiance of the big cities. Though they live in the vicinity of Bursa, she frequently goes to Istanbul to meet the members of the local elite. She enjoys very much that there is a buzzing night scene there and morals are far more liberal than back home. Her family is “cool” as she says and permits her to follow a very Westernized lifestyle though they started to limit her expenditures as she went into some extremes in spending the money of her family. Her family helps her in many ways, they arranged all necessary paperwork for staying and studying in Turkey. She is very happy with that. This also means that she has only a very limited knowledge of the Turkish beurocracy. The only disturbing thing is that she regularly hears some racist comments. Some Turkish students think that Syrians are not real refugees and that they should go home and fight for their freedom. This type of speech suddens her a lot.

The second female participant of our research was Qamar V. from the city of Jisr. Simirarily to Amena, Qamar is also one of the very early refugees as her city became the scene of one of the earliest battles between the forces of Damascus and the opposition as it was detailed in one of the previous chapters. Qamar, not unlike Amena, is a Sunni Arab, but she takes the religion much more seriously. For example, she is keen on performing the daily five prayers as prescribed by Islam. After loosing her father and one of her brothers, Qamar left Jisr in mid-June 2011. She later recognized herself on one of the news reports by a famous Arab TV channel among a group of 4.000 refugees who came to Turkey. As at that time there were no real refugee camps, for a couple of days they were housed in empty properties in the village of Guvecci where a

temporary tent camp was established. They lived there for a few weeks, and then they could resettle to a container in the camp of Apaydin, not far from Guvecci. It was in this camp that she could start to learn Turkish. Her first idea was to continue with Islamic theology, but she was convinced by her mother that a more practical cursus would be more suitable for her. With the help of a Turkish Islamic NGO, she could obtain a scholarship to study tourism at a university in Izmir. First, she hesitated very much as Izmir is well known in the Middle East for being a very liberal and secular city, later she realized that she can keep her tradition and learn modern sciences at the same time and that she should be more independent of her environment. Now, she is happy with her choice and with her tiny room she shares with three Turkish girls in a small student hostel run by an Islamic group.

The best word to describe Qamar's attitude is gratefulness. After she lost her father and one of her brothers to a governmental mortar shelling, she could hardly imagine that she would be able to restart her life. She says that it is only thanks to God, to her mother and the Turkish nation that she got there. Even after thinking a while, she could not say a single bad word about the way they were received by the Turks.

Nouda U., this 25-year-old young lady is from Aleppo like Amena. One of the differences between them is that Nouda's family resisted and remained in the besieged city until the arrival of the Syrian Arab Army. Nouda was born to a lower middle-class family and lived in one of the working-class suburbs of the Northern metropole throughout her life. His father was an early computer enthusiast, he was one of the first Syrians to access the Internet from home through a Jordanian router in the late 1990s during the very last days of the rule of Hafez Al-Assad, the late father of the current president. Of course, this action was totally illegal and Nouda's father got a short prison term for breaking the law. He was released from prison after Bashar Al-Assad, another computer lover got to power, his short stay at Aleppo's notorious Central Prison made him known to the members of the underground opposition of the regime. In 2012, after the civil war broke out, some persons who identified themselves as members of a liberal group within the resisters approached him and sought his help to establish a reliable computer network at their headquarter. Nouda's father was first reluctant to take the challenge, but he assumed that this was his patriotic duty. This is the reason why Nouda and her family stayed almost four more years in their bombed-out home. They were among the last refugees who could leave Aleppo aboard several dozens of buses. They were driven to the Nizip refugee camp in the province of Gaziantep. In the extremely crowded reception center, they were given a very decent tent where they were obliged to stay several weeks before getting a container in the same camp. This was



the moment when some Turkish and international NOGs started a gender equality program among the refugees and were looking for girls holding a high school diploma, fluent in English and willing to learn modern technologies. Though her English was not perfect, Nouda impressed the jury and was selected for an undergraduate course in Istanbul. Using her advantage and heritage, she decided to study computer sciences.

As Nouda arrived in Turkey in 2016 with a large group of asylum seekers from Aleppo, she experienced a rather tense situation at the border and in the refugee camp. She thinks that certain officials, especially the border guards looked very tired, were fed up with the massive influx of the Syrian refugees and were on many occasions quite rude with the incoming people. Before setting her foot on Turkish soil, she had heard great stories on the hospitality of the Turks, so, she got very disappointed at the beginning. Social workers at the Nizip refugee camp were much nicer, they helped her a lot. She is amazed by the gender equality program she is now part of. She believes that this approach would not work in Syria and this program might contribute to civilizing the post-war Syria though she is not sure about returning home after graduation.

Raghida R. is the fourth lady to take the survey on the opinion and plans of refugee students. First of all, she dislikes the term refugee student or refuses to use it for herself as she did not flee a very dangerous area of Syria. This lady of Druze decent left the As-Suweyda Governorate after getting a BA degree in sociology from the University of Damascus. As-Suwayda, home of this distinct religious community was mainly peaceful during the civil war, the only major fights took place exactly during the interview as ISIS terrorists committed a number of suicide attacks in the rural part of the province. Raghida who lived alone since she finished high school, in fact, wanted to migrate to Western Europe. For her, Turkey originally was a transit point only. She tried to get to Greece. Smugglers managed to transport her and some other women to the island of Lesbos where they were captured by a unit of the Greek coastal guard. Raghida admits that they were quite violent with them, but did not wish to give any detail about its nature. According to the EU-Turkey agreement, they were sent back to Turkey. She later tried to cross the Evros river between Turkey and Greece. This attempt was not more successful than the first one. She still plans to move forward, but she also realizes that it gets harder and harder. For the time being, she started an MA program in sociology at a small private university in Istanbul that offered her a small scholarship and place in an overcrowded student hostel in the district of Besiktas.

As far as the authorities are concerned, Raghida is very disappointed, before leaving Syria, she was thinking that it would be much easier to cross the border. She admits that certain Turks are helpful, but according to her, most Turks are extremely nationalistic and dislike Syrians. The university is a safe space though – she adds. The fellows there are liberal and Western minded. She has a number of new friends there who could recomfort her.

Like Raghida, the last interviewee of the survey also comes from a rather peaceful corner of Syria, the city of Hassake. The young Aya T. was sent to Turkey by her Kurdish Sunni Muslim father. He told his daughter who wanted to study the Islamic religion that Turkey is the only place where she can learn from the authentic sources as in Syria most places offering theological training is now in the hands of extremists. Aya arrived in Turkey almost like Fathi featured earlier in this chapter. Kurdish tribal networks helped her to get to the border town of Nusaybin in the Turkish province of Mardin where she spent a couple of days while a place was arranged for her to stay in Gaziantep. Later, the same people assisted her to learn Turkish and enroll a theology program at a local university, they also helped her to legalize her stay which was not easy as Hassake does not lay in one of the very dangerous regions of the Arab nation. In fact, at almost all levels of the beaurocracy, she met people of Kurdish origin. She tries to cut herself off the outside world as much as possible and concentrates on the memorization of the holy book of the Muslims, the Quran. She thinks she would befriend local young people after she finishes with this first stage of her studies in 6 months. So far, she is satisfied with her condition.

One can deduce from the above testimonies that Syrian refugee students harbor very diverse views and feelings regarding the humanitarian work of the Turkish authorities and NGOs. Generally speaking, they tend to be more critical with the civil servants. There are a number of complaints as far as border guards are concerned, and several incidents of violence were also reported by the interviewees. It seems that they are much more satisfied with the assistance of Turkish and international civil society organizations. Frequently, they are the ones who push Syrian refugees to study.

#### **4.3 Satisfaction with the assistance of the Turkish authorities and civil society on the level of higher education**

The main question concerning this topic is as follows:

What do the Turkish authorities and the civil society organizations do for the education of Syrian refugee students?

The corresponding presupposition is:

As Syrian refugee students are satisfied in general, they are also content with the study environment offered them by Turkish authorities and NGOs.

Mohammed A., the first male student who participated in the survey on the opinion of the Syrian refugee students about their situation in Turkey, is convinced that Turkish authorities and Turkish or international NGOs operating on Turkish soil are willing to help. Having said so, Mohammed also wants to underline that one needs to have a great chance to be able to get to the Turkish higher education system. Contrarily to popular misbelief, Syrian refugees do not get any privilege or advantage when it comes to start their studies in Turkey. The only advantage is if the candidate speaks Turkish or English. Knowing a few Syrian refugee students, he thinks that their Turkish is far from being perfect. His experiences made him think that even those who are members of the ethnic Turkmen community do not master the version of the language spoken in Turkey. As far as his Turkmen schoolmates are concerned, back home, on many occasions they either speak Arabic or use a mixture of Arabic and old Turkish. Maybe it is easier for them to follow a lecture in Turkish, but the diligent and hard-working Arabic-speaking Syrians can also catch up. The knowledge of the English language sometimes helps more, especially when it comes to scientific researches or writing a paper. Mohammed believes that both in Syria and Turkey the education of foreign languages was and still is a critical issue. He himself had the chance to learn it from very talented teachers in Syria, but this is not the case for the majority of Syrian refugees. Mohammed stresses his opinion that after helping with the necessary paperwork, students need the most assistance in advancing their language skills both in Turkish and English.

Mohammed is still uncertain about his future, possibly he stays in Turkey, but is sure that he wants to do some research on international humanitarian law. The main intention of his is to combine his law studies with his own situation of being a refugee who was brutalized while crossing the border and who had to spend a certain amount of time in a refugee camp. Either he becomes a lawyer or a researcher, he needs more guidance from the university or NGOs on how to conduct a proper research on this topic. Basically he is happy with his university in Gaziantep, but he notices that the main focus there is engineering. He understands that this is due to the

history of the school that goes back to the 1970s when it was a place exclusively dedicated to those sciences. He notices that this might also concern native Turkish students.

Leading a student life in Gaziantep is not that difficult, the city is medium-sized, not too complicated to coop with and in a good deal of sense similar to his native Latakia. If he needs help with practical issues, he can easily get it. The only thing he misses is the sea that always had comforted him even during the hardest moments of life.

Ali M. who studies agriculture at a university in the Southern city of Sanliurfa wants only one thing from the authorities and the NGOs: a peaceful environment where he can forget about the past and concentrate on establishing a farm first for himself and later on for his family. As besides the horror of the war he also had to experience deep conflicts within his own family and among fellow refugees, Ali appreciates everything that detaches him from this hostile world. Therefore he is basically happy with the course his university proposed him that lets him take less theoretical and more practical courses, that includes plenty of projects on the field and – finally - is feasible while working on his rented piece of land. The administration and the teachers seem to understand his volatile situation.

Ali also wants to learn to be autonomous and to have a sense of entrepreneurship. So, in fact, he does not want the authorities or NGOs to act in his place, rather he prefers only to acquire certain information in order to better manage his plantation and to know how to sell his own products in the future. He values this kind of information more than actual help. He does not want anyone to work in his place.

Houmam E. describes his life and scholarization in Adiyaman as coming home from home. This young ethnic Turkmen disagrees with what Mohammed told in an interview earlier and tells that the Turkmens in the Turkmen mountain region indeed speak Turkish and are proud of preserving their authentic culture. For him, his native Bayirbucak is a small Turkey. He felt at home in Bayirbucak, the same way he feels at home in Adiyaman and cannot even decide which one he prefers. All those who helped him contribute to this view. He thinks that local Turks, especially the school administration staff pays a special attention to him and to fellow Turkmens. The responsibility of the Turkish government and the Turkish people is a vivid reality according to Houmam.

Fathi L. and Aya T. share a certain number of things in common. Though Fathi is male and Aya is female, they come from the same ethnic background, and they got almost the same way to

Turkey thanks to a Kurdish tribal network that operates in secret and well over the borders. Their immediate environment remain this tribal structure even during their studies, they do not mix too much with local people, even though an important proportion of them is ethnic Kurd from Turkey. If they need help, they rely on the „network” rather than on unknown people. The greatest disadvantage of this situation according to them is that they frequently feel uncomfortable and fear their environment without having a valid reason for it. This situation also prevents them from having local friends. Aya is a very reserved young lady and prefers to stay at home, Fathi would sometimes go out, but does not wish to go alone. Aya almost always lived with her family and can accept this, Fathi started to develop an interest in getting out of this circle, but, at the same time, he respects his tribal elders and prefers not to break some tribal taboos. As they only have a limited contact with the Turkish authorities and NGOs, they do not have a very deep impression of them. In general, they are very appreciative and thankful because they realize that they have chance that most Syrian youth do not.

Loutfi M. now lives for his art. He thinks that his artistic performance is more important than his studies and constitutes the key for his future success in life. He admits that the school in Ankara is secondary for him today. This is why he appreciates more those who help him to develop his talent. In the Turkish capital, he has found a special education center where he goes every Monday, Wednesday and Friday after his classes at the university. He says he is lucky as many similar establishment had been closed down a couple of years ago as they belonged to the Gulen Movement that entered into collision with the ruling AKP. This is in fact a small art studio run by an independent and secular foundation where most people are liberal minded but stay away from politics. This is very important for Loutfi as he is a Christian and frequently fears of being discriminated against. Loutfi believes that in Turkey Christians can live and worship freely. The infrastructure is not given but with the influx of other Syrian Christians the Turkish government changes and builds places of worship for them. At least, he has heard about a similar project in Istanbul and hopes that the next target is Ankara. Otherwise, he thinks that the average Turk is absolutely not aware of the basic Christian teachings. Through his art, he would like to do a consciousness-raising campaign. He tried to propose this idea to the university but got refused as the secular school cannot stage openly religious programs.

Amena L.D., the daughter of a rich merchant family of Aleppo lives a life that resembles a little the one of the two ethnic Kurdish youth. The reason is different. Almost everything is arranged for Amena by her parents. She feels uneasy with this situation, and expresses the wish to be more autonomous but it would necessitate a bitter separation from the family. For sure, she does not

want to move to a student hostel or take extra classes to speak Turkish better as many other Syrian refugee students do. Basically, she does not want to give up the luxury in which she lives. In general, she is happy with the situation at her university. She thinks that it is well housed and well equipped, the level of education is very high. She believes that the knowledge and practice she gets there is sufficient both for a practice in Turkey or to work in Syria if she returns. She finds it important to note that the university permits Syrian students to spend some extra time in the laboratories, she uses these opportunities quite frequently. For this, she is very grateful to the administration of the faculty.

Though the facilities at her university in Izmir are a bit run down and rudimentary, Qamar finds the school administration's approach to Syrian students excellent. She sees a big difference between the management of the university and local authorities in the city of Izmir. These latter ones on several occasions objected projects that included Syrian refugee students and made them undergo more than one unnecessary control at the student hostel where she stays. Her impression is that the university and the local civil society is very receptive, they also offer diverse practice possibilities on the Mediterranean shore or at the antique ruins in the region of Selcuk (the site of Ephesos). She explains this difference between the school and the municipality with a raising nationalistic sentiment. As Amena did earlier, Qamar also reports some anti-Arab comments being heard around the city center in Izmir. She even recalls that a few months ago a small ambulant vendor boy was harassed by local residents. This is why she likes tourism practices in Selcuk that harbors a multi-ethnic population as some of its inhabitants can trace their origin to Africa. People in Selcuk are also more helpful and cheat less on foreigners – according to Qamar.

Nouda U. from Aleppo is now studying computer sciences in Istanbul. The love for informatics comes from her father who was among the first people to establish internet connection in Syria. Besides computers, Nouda is interested in social media and journalism. Her greatest joy while doing her studies in the largest Turkish city is a project for young female Syrian refugees to collect and process war testimonies by fellow Syrian women. This opportunity was offered to her by her school administration. She dedicates all her free time to this work. She is always very tired, but this way she tries to return all the help she has got in Turkey after her arrival.

Raghida the Druze sociologists underlines that the only thing she really likes in Turkey is her school and her temporary fellows. She says that they are so nice, they all want them to stay forever in Istanbul even though she still wants to get to Europe. Raghida explains that a good

performance and a good relationship with the people at school can help her in this project. Now, she plans to work on separate research project and wants her school to send her to a conference somewhere in the European Union.

The interviewees of the current survey on the level of satisfaction of the Syrian refugee students prove that they all have their own stories that explain their impressions vis-à-vis their university. Though the overall picture is rather positive, there were some negative comments, too. For example, Qamar reported some opposition to the correct reception of the Syrian refugees by the local authorities, the municipality. The majority of these testimonies show that these are isolated occurrences often motivated by the racist attitude of some individuals while the overall system has a fairly positive approach to the refugees and their problems.

#### **4.4 Career in Turkey or abroad?**

The question arises as follows:

Will Syrian refugee students studying in Turkey continue their careers in Turkey after graduation?

The related hypothesis is:

Syrian refugee students – especially with the flow of time - would not return home even though in many parts of Syria the fire is ceased. They increasingly choose to have a career in Turkey or in the West.

When asked about his plans concerning his future career, Mohammed excludes with great sadness his home country, Syria. Very simply he cannot return to the city where he was born as it was already an Alawite majority place before, and now, during the civil war a “religious cleansing” took place and there is no more room for Sunnis there. To other parts of Syria where the majority remains Sunni, he does not want to move. He has no family there, no friends or less than in Turkey. Mohammed thinks that his studies also predestine him for a career in Turkey as he studies law, basically Turkish law or the Turkish understanding of law. Though he admits that there is a certain similarity between the Turkish and the Syrian legal systems, especially when it comes to civil law. The reason for this is the common past. The Ottoman rulers followed the Hanafite school of jurisprudence of the Sunni Muslim creed. Sunni Arabs in Syria rather belong to the Shafiite school, but the legal tradition in both countries can be traced back to the Ottoman

past when all subjects were judged according to the same legal principles. Today, both Syria and Turkey are secular nation states and their legal systems are not based on religion, but certain ways and approaches are inherited from the time of the emperors. In fact, Mohammed underlines, despite these common values, there are more differences than similarities and this also makes a return to Syria rather difficult. The same rule applies to starting a career in a third country. As Mohammed is fluent in English and likes the British culture very much, he also considered a career in the United Kingdom. With the complexity and the uncertainty that surrounds the Brexit, the islands leaving the European Union and its impact on immigration, he gave up this idea. As of now, Mohammed envisages his near future in Gaziantep. The city is close to the Syrian border and is home to an important Syrian Arab and ethnic Arab population. A perfect place for doing a thorough research on international humanitarian law and its impact on refugees. Why to go elsewhere – he raises his voice.

Ali considers Turkey and his rented farm near Sanliurfa a safe haven and does not consider a return to Syria. His argument slightly differs from that of his Sunni compatriot, himself as a Shia, somebody who belongs to a denomination close to the one of the ruling elite, has nothing to fear, he is rather uneasy with all these conflicts from his past, between communities and within his family. He might have family members in Syria who –theoretically - could house him, but he himself does not want to see them anymore. The agricultural training he is following in Sanliurfa is very practical on one hand, and very much adapted to the local conditions that characterize the region of Mesopotamia – that is much of Syria and Iraq and the Southern tip of Turkey between the Tiger and the Euphrates rivers. He also has a solid basis with the rented farm that he cannot move to another country. His main idea is to promote a form of biological plantation that is also easier to realize in Turkey or in any other Middle Eastern country than in Europe where the soil is poisoned with chemicals and farmers use machinery too excessively. This does not mean that Ali would not travel to the West, to commercialize his biological products, indeed, he wants to contact consumers in Europe, but he still wishes to stay in Turkey.

Houmam has chosen the profession of his father, he wants to become a dentist. He is ready to return to his native Turkmen mountain region after graduation as he understands how the health care system has been badly damaged by the years of civil war. Houmam also adds that the lack of talented doctors used to be a major challenge for Syria even before the conflict broke out as many of the professionals were trained abroad, got married in those countries and never returned. Houmam accuses the West and the European countries of brain drain and recognizes that it is his patriotic duty to go home even though he is very grateful towards the people he met in Adiyaman



and would not refuse the Turkish citizenship if it was given to Syrian Turkmens. He also has a personal consideration. His father died during the civil war in captivity. He would like to replace his late father, take back his practice and serve his people. Houmam for this very reasons excludes that he would move to the West. In the end, Houmam has to accept that returning to the Bayirbucak region is now only a dream. The area is under the control of Bashar Al-Assad and his Russian allies, the people who fled with him are still living in refugee camps in the Turkish province of Hatay or stay with families in the same region. He also begs the Turkish authorities to secure their return to their home.

Amena – who is studying medicine in Istanbul - shares some of Houmam's views. She is also concerned by the run down situation of the Syrian health care system and is conscious of the problem of the brain drain in their profession. She would readily go home after graduation and work in a hospital, she is not very much worried about her safety, rather she is interested in learning more about current working conditions at a Syrian hospital whether they have access to all materials including medical instruments and drugs absolutely necessary for medication. As her family is rich, the possibly low salary would not discourage her. The only thing that would keep her in Turkey is her family. Since they have a very successful construction stone business there, her parents and brothers obviously opt for staying in Bursa. They have also purchased a new home in a nearby village. So, if she returns, she returns alone and that would sadden her.

Fathi, this 27 years old ethnic Kurdish young man from Qamishli says that he would prefer to move to the West after graduating from his school of engineering. With such a degree – he believes - he would be welcome by major manufacturers. His main target country is Germany, and he can imagine himself working at an important car producer. He opts for Germany also because it already has a large Kurdish and Turkish population where he could feel at home and at the same time he can follow western trends. If this does not come true, he has nothing against staying in Turkey. Returning to Syria would be problematic as the status of his city is uncertain. It is still held by rebels. Whenever it is taken back by the regime, scenes of vengeance could occur. According to Fathi it is wiser to wait the clarification of the situation and observe. Anyhow, he would consult with his tribal elders about an eventual return.

Loutfi is categorical about the place where he wants to live. It is Italy. Loutfi as a Christian imagines Italy as a land of Christianity. Though he is not Roman Catholic, the fact that the pro-refugee pope resides there makes Italy attractive in his eyes. Otherwise, Italy for him is also a land of art and artists, the symphony of colors – as he calls it after seeing a number of pictures

and films about the country of his dream. Right now, he prefers to evolve both at school and in art, he only considers moving to Italy after graduation. From the practical point of view he does not know how to do and finance it and how to take his family with him might also prove to be a great problem.

Qamar is sure that pursuing a career in tourism in Syria is not yet possible notwithstanding the first foreign visitors have already appeared in the country. Many of the famous sites including the old town of Aleppo or the ruins in Tadmur (Palmyra) are in very bad shape, the land and the sea is polluted and the bitter memory of the war is still there. So, for a few years, Syria would attract much less tourist than before the civil war. Having said so, Qamar points out that if she remains in Turkey, she would not work in Izmir. Either she moves to nearby Selcuk and deals with Western tourists, or she rather moves to the holiday province of Antalya or Istanbul where she can help Arab tourist who mainly come from the Gulf region and who tend to spend a lot of money during their vacation abroad. If she was offered a similar post somewhere in Europe, she would not refuse it, but her present idea is to work in the tourism industry in Antalya or Istanbul.

Nouda misses Syria and Aleppo very much, but she is already busy with constructing a career in Istanbul. The social media project of collecting female war memories sticks her to the city of Istanbul where she imagines her future. She thinks Istanbul is a vibrant city, both Eastern and Western, it is the confluence of multiple influences where she feels at home already. She says that she would only go back to Syria if it is fully pacified and civilized again under the rule of a democratically elected government. It might be true that everyday life in most of Syria came back to its normal form, after such an uprising not to gain anything and having the same dictatorship according to her, is far from being too attractive.

It is not surprising that Raghida is categorical. She cannot imagine a better option than moving to the West and having an academic career at a university or research institute in any European Union member state. She confesses that her favorite European country is The Netherlands. If she had a choice, she would live in Amsterdam or Utrecht.

Aya is still undecided about her future and would not determine her future without consulting her father and her tribal elders. She learns religion because she wants to teach the moderate version of Islam. There is an urgent need for it back in Syria, but in a way there is also a need for it in Turkey or in any other country of the world. If it was only up to her, after graduation, she would return to Hassake as the city is quite peaceful, but the overall situation in Syria is still very volatile, so this is far from being a final commitment.

From the above testimonies, one can see that most Syrian refugee students are tantalized by homesickness, and at least half of them would readily go home if the situation in the Arab country was fully normalized. Despite they think that to return and serve the Syrian nation is their patriotic duty, they also realize that it is in many cases almost impossible, especially in cases of minority origin being a disadvantage. Most of them can easily imagine their future in Turkey, some of them even in the West. It is to be noted that many non-rational factors intervene during their decision making including their care for their people and family. One thing is sure, they are aware of their multiple level responsibilities and would decide accordingly.

#### **4.5 The influence of the Turkish economic and social reality on the career plans of Syrian refugee students**

The related question is:

Is the economic and social development in Turkey an influence in determining career orientations of these students?

The related hypothesis is:

Indeed, the ever-changing economic situation, especially the recent hardships due to the increase of prices and the impairment of the Turkish currency, has a deep impact on the choices of Syrian refugee students.

Mohammed – who studies law in Gaziantep - says that the most possible scenario is that he stays in Gaziantep. He could not travel too much around Turkey, and he is aware that in many other Turkish cities life is better and easier. He says that being close to the border and being surrounded by people with whom you share something in common is more valuable than a more modern way of life. He agrees that in recent months Turkey became more and more expensive, but it is still cheaper compared to Western countries. This is another argument to remain there.

Ali is very much worried about the economic situation in Turkey, but this would not discourage him from staying in the country. He as a farmer sees two main problems in Turkish economy. First, there is a structural arrear in the economy. Agriculture still employs large segments of the population and compared to this the productivity is low. These not specialized rural farmlands can hardly be competitive on the international market. The size of the sector has to be reduced and its productivity raised so that Turkey could soon become a postindustrial nation. Second,

obviously there are inner and outer forces in Turkey that play with the prices of agricultural products. In this context, it is not easy to be a farmer. Ali says that his own comparative advantage is that he targets the international market with state-of-the-art methods and specialized produces. He adds that he even might be one of the pioneers of the agricultural reform in Turkey. So, for him the current recession can even be fruitful.

Houmam acknowledges that he is not very much appealed to wealth, he is rather a type of person who prefers serving others. He sees that prices go up, but he is lucky as he lives in a more rural province and can readily buy fresh fruit and vegetables from the producers. He finds meat extremely expensive, even in villages. So he says he lives almost like a vegetarian, he very rarely eats meat. He adds that this must not be a problem when there are millions of Syrians who almost die of hunger.

For Fathi, having a good salary as an engineer is very important. One of the reasons he could imagine himself working at a car manufacturer in Germany is that they are well-paid. Salary in itself is not enough, he says, you should be able to spend your money on quality products and services. If you have money in Syria or Turkey, you have to limit your spending on what is available locally. Istanbul is an exception. In Istanbul, you can find everything you need, but as soon as you leave the big city, the countryside is considerably poorer. Fathi underlines that money is not everything though. In Germany, engineers are also recognized for their work not only in the material sense of the term.

Loutfi considers himself more spiritual than materialistic. So, he does not really care about the economic situation in Turkey or elsewhere. His reason for willing to go to Italy lays in his religious enthusiasm and artistic projects. He is aware that if you are an immigrant in the West, you start very low and your living conditions can even be worse than in Ankara. Aya can be compared to Loutfi. She is also spiritual in her approach to the outside world and tries to detach herself from the outer influences. She concentrates on her theological studies instead of worrying of worldly things.

Amena has a solid financial background as her family is wealthy enough to support her during her studies and possibly even after that. Her family is not concerned by the economic crisis in Turkey as they sell construction materials and despite the crisis, the prestigious infrastructural development projects go on, the Turkish government carries on this type of investments. Amena underlines that these developments also include the sector of health care. The opening of large new hospitals and similar facilities might be an argument for staying in Turkey.

Qamar – as she is studying tourism - has a different view on Turkish economy. She does not feel any anxiety regarding the weakening of the Turkish currency. On the contrary, it can be a trump in the hand of the Turks if they utilize the situation the good way. As the Turkish lira is cheap, the country and its seaside resorts become increasingly appealing and more and more Western tourists return after their number was widely shrinking following the failed coup attempt in 2016. At the same time, of course, she recognizes that the situation is not good for the everyday Turks. She thinks that the government has to change its economic policy and shift from the support of infrastructural development to the production centered industries.

Nouda and Raghida in some sense share the same view. They both assume that the living standard in Istanbul is very good, the impact of the ongoing crisis is much less visible there than in the more rural areas. Nonetheless, Raghida is sure that even this is far from the level of Western nations like The Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries. This is why she prefers to go to Europe.

Syrian refugee students are, indeed, influenced by the economic conditions and their change in Turkey, but they seem to be less worried about the situation than the native Turks of the country. It is also visible that they approach the issue from the various points of view of their field from agriculture to tourism. Maybe their inherent optimism can help Turkey tackle the question of economic and social hardships.

#### **4.6 Private or public?**

The research question is:

After graduation, would they want to work in the public or the private sector?

The related hypothesis is:

Syrian refugee students are willing to work in the private instead of the public sector.

Mohammed says that according to his double career plan, he would like to work both for the public and the private sector, but not at the same time. First, he is planning a career as a researcher in the field of international law related to the issue of asylum seekers. To do a proper investigation on this topic, he would need the help of a research institute, and as most of them are linked to a national academy of sciences or a government run university, he will need to

cooperate with them. Second, he projects a later career as a lawyer. As a lawyer, he would prefer to have his own office or assist a transnational company first and then to establish his own business. From among the ladies, Raghida's vision can be compared to Mohamed's answer. Raghida as a sociologist first finds it logical to cooperate with a research institute and establish a proper business after getting a certain fame. If in the end she manages to have her own company, she would specialize in the domain of opinion polls both in politics and economy.

Ali as a biological farmer admits that he has a limited option only. Most probably because of the civil war and some family issues, he will remain in Turkey, in a country where there is no tradition of state owned large agricultural companies and cooperatives restrict themselves only to certain activities, he can continue his experiment only as a private individual.

Houmam imagines his future as a dentist in the private sector. He would prefer to move home, but currently this option is not available as his native region is under the control of the Assad regime that does not allow the return of the ethnic Turkmens on their own land. If he stays for a long time, if he gets an offer from the Turkish government to serve the nation at a public hospital or an establishment run by a local collectivity, he would not refuse, but his absolute preference is to own a private cabinet. Houmam adds that all this might eventually change if he gets the Turkish citizenship. Having the Syrian and the Turkish passport at the same time would not discourage him from entering the Turkish civil service as a dentist.

Fathi opts for a career in the private sectors. As he explained it earlier, he imagines a career as an engineer at a large German car manufacturer.

For Loutfi, the most important thing in life is artistic freedom. If a government can assure him his freedom, he is ready to take a job, but for sure he would not help the propaganda of any agency or political faction. Therefore, he prefers to remain independent and live on the income he can get from the auctions of his paintings.

Amena is aware that the health care system in many countries is mostly controlled by the national government. Having chosen the profession of a doctor, she also accepted that her work force would be needed by the country. She would be easy with a post at a public hospital in Turkey or Syria but might also welcome the help of her rich family to establish her own cabinet in an upmarket neighborhood of Istanbul.

Qamar who is studying tourism gives an obvious answer, she would like to work with a private tour operator in Antalya or Istanbul. In her sector, it has sense of talking of a government agency or civil service.

Nouda imagines her future both as a computer expert and a journalist. She is interested in investigative journalism and prefers to remain independent. This is only possible in the private sector as governments put more and more pressure on media outlets to finance and influence the in-field work of the professionals.

In Aya's eyes, the most important thing is to stick to and transmit the teachings of moderate Sunni Islam. In Syria, as the Assad regime is increasingly controlling mosques and religious organizations, it is not an easy job. She can imagine herself as a private teacher who goes to the home of the students or as a teacher – as it is customary in the Middle East - who gathers a circle of female students around her. If she remains in Turkey, basically she has two major options: either work with the Diyanet, the government agency responsible for religious affairs or any of the numerous religious foundations who work more or less independently of the umbrella structure. In religious affairs, Diyanet is recognized as a moderate authority, so possibly she would prefer it. After all, her choice largely depends on the country where she would live after graduation.

The above confessions show that Syrian refugee students tend to choose the private sector, but it is also obvious that their selection is influenced by two important factors: the nature of their future profession and the socio-cultural reality of the country where they imagine their career.

#### **4.7 General evaluation of the interviews**

The survey the present thesis was based on proves that the actual social environment around Syrian refugee students is not limited to the already mentioned four circles, namely the family, friends, neighbors and the university, but is completed by tribal structures. Tribal affiliation and loyalty are still crucial while examining Syrian social reality, whereas in Turkey with the modernization during the first part of the republican era and internal mobility of the Turkish population, it has a much smaller, but still perceivable impact on Turkish society. In the examples, this attachment to tribal structures characterized the students of Kurdish descent, but it is also typical among ethnic Arabs and Turkmens of Syria. This tribal structure has an advantage over the other forms of social environment, as family members and friends might pass away

during a civil war, the tribe survives and remains most of the time and provides the members with stability that is very important for a refugee as these structures cross the border since they were established during the Ottoman era, well before the formation of the current frontier.

For the students involved in the survey family is a much more vulnerable structure, several family members were massacred or killed, on many occasions they found themselves in a miserable situation in Turkey compared to their existence back in Syria before the armed conflict. Refugee students can count on their parents much less than ordinary students studying at home or abroad. Having said so, not all refugee students are deprived of their families and family wealth. Those who lived in a fortunate situation in Syria, mostly continue to live well. One can see that the situation of asylum in many cases reproduces the former social hierarchies. Most refugee students speak less about friends than their classmates. It is visible that they mostly lost their friends or have hard time contacting them and communicate with them if they are back in Syria. In fact, in the question of choosing the right career path, they are much less useful than other social environments. It is also evident that Syrian refugee students do not really have local friends, they do not befriend their fellow students, rather Turkish adults, their helpers at the university or the civil society organization assisting in their integration process.

As they befriend less the local students and interact less with those Turks that have the same age, it is evident that there are considerable obstacles in the way of the intercultural learning process. For a Syrian national, Turkey in much sense is somewhat like a Western country, they discover there more the Western lifestyle and values than the actual Turkish culture. Some of them get attracted by this, but the majority remain neutral vis-à-vis the Occidental cultural influence.

As they are separated from the majority of the social environments a student usually has and finds many barriers during their intercultural learning process, most Syrian refugee students often feel alone and desperate. This is the main reason besides the uncertainties caused by the civil war in Syria why the students in the survey cannot have a clear-cut vision of their future career. The lack of a solid system supervised by the Turkish government that could assist them makes the planning process even more difficult. Therefore, an urgent community response is needed, otherwise only the strongest and the most confident students can really have fair careers. After years of peaceful cohabitation, in recent months a campaign has been launched against Syrian refugees residing in Turkey in general, and refugee students in particular that is often compared to verbal lynching. The targeted Syrian refugee students perceive this argumentation as unjust as they were forced to leave their home country and come to Turkey because their cities were bombed. The refugee students from Gaziantep University –according to the news report of the website called Evrensel - say: “we try to live together with these people, and we understand



that their living conditions are poor, but they have to imagine that ours is even worse.” One of the unidentified female students added: “during the night we were staying outside under the olive trees when planes were overflying us and hitting the home of our neighbor, they all died, it was impossible for us to stay”. Muhammed – who also participated in the above survey - states: “we do not want people to think bad things about us. Certain people believe that it is bad that we walk around Turkey freely whereas the Turkish army is about to fight in Syria. Many of us had been killed or displaced. Very simply we try to survive” (Ipek-Arar, 2019).

Because of the changing attitudes and the continuing pacification of Syria that is basically due to the final victory over ISIS in that country by the Syrian Democratic Forces in March 2019, more and more Syrian refugee students change their mind and prefer to return if they are not that much welcome as they were a few years ago. For example, Sinan Beymuru who is studying international relations at the prestigious Marmara University in Istanbul, underlines that even if the war is not over, he would return to Syria after graduation as – after all - it is his home country. Though he admits that Turkey is his second home, for him the top priority is Syria. Some other students want to play a more active role with their return as their target is to educate the Syrian people recently blindfolded by hatred. Abaraf Khoja – who came to Turkey as a refugee and now is pursuing his studies in Islamic theology - says that Muslims are now described as being ignorant. This what Abaraf wishes to change after getting back to Syria (Alioglu, 2019).

Despite the heavy criticism of the chance to get educated given to Syrian refugee students, a certain number of exemplary pilot projects are being realized by different actors such as the universities themselves, civil society organizations, the Turkish and foreign governments. One of them is also linked to the above-mentioned Gaziantep University that is currently cooperating with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that finances a special course entitled Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics designed for Syrian refugee students. The rector of the university situated very close to the Syrian border underlines that this course is not only important for the academia, but it also contributes to the development of the city and its immediate surrounding region, too. The rector finds it crucial that these training programs focused on new technologies and the use of robots in industry are being proposed to Syrian refugee students in close cooperation with the local industries and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (known in Turkey as TUBITAK) as there is an ongoing industrial revolution taking place in that particular area of Turkey. The program has to be noticed also from the point of view of higher education in general as it features a new

interdisciplinary approach as engineering, technology and mathematics are being taught together to get brand-new vision of scientific discoveries and their practical application (IHA, 2019).

One has to note that education does not only depend on how the government deals with the issue and solves the emerging problems, it is an activity between humans, the educator and the pupil, it is based on mutual understanding, on mutual goals and common aims. If the education system has duties, the students also have duties besides their obvious rights and freedom. In one sense, education is communication and is fruitful only if both parties communicate well.

The second point quoted above puts an emphasis on the issue of language skills that are primordial for an efficient communication. On one hand, the system has to empower Syrian refugee students by teaching them the necessary capabilities, but on the other, Syrians themselves have to do all what they can in order to learn the Turkish language better. According to a study 51.5% of Syrian refugee student state that they are fluent in the idiom of the Turks, whereas 41.2% constate that they know some Turkish. Having said so, most Syrian refugee students are convinced that their knowledge – both in oral and written Turkish - is largely enough to be successful in their studies and daily life. Despite their self assessment, most Syrian students accept that in certain situations – including taking notes, answering classical questions or understanding the questions of a written examination - they fail to use the Turkish language properly. Their percentage vary from 28 to 40%. An interesting finding of this very survey is that Turkish proficiency depends on the age of the students, the ones aging 24 or more have more difficulties to learn Turkish (Paksoy et al., 2016).

Language and communication in one way is a barrier, in the other a bridge. Good language and communication skills are a must in order to get integrated into the Turkish education system or into the overall Turkish society. Though it is far from being enough, Syrian refugees have to be motivated to get them interested in pursuing their studies at a Turkish higher education institution and to plan a career after graduation that might also include an option of overstaying in Turkey. The best method to galvanize the massive participation of Syrian refugees in higher education, good examples are to be shown to the coming generations. A study group formed at the prestigious Marmara University in Istanbul researched the issue and came up with some interesting personal stories, careers or possible future careers.

One of the exemplary young Syrians on Turkish soil is 17 years old Zekeriya who totalized 99.3% of the points during his secondary education and in 2016 was preparing for the YOS, an important entrance exam to Turkish higher education. According to him the key issue for a successful career is integration through the similarity of the two cultures. Zekeriya thinks that the Islamic heritage of both Syria and Turkey is similar and the Turkish language contains a high

amount of words having Arabic roots. He also underlines that Syrians in Turkey have to become Turks through education as it is easy for them and facilitates their future integration and career. His views are echoed by Salih Ismail a mechanical engineer who after graduation became a teacher of this field in Turkey (Yurtsever, 2017).

Not all Syrian refugees think the same way as Zekeriya or Salih Ismail. Imad Tahlil who studied Islamic theology and now works for a Turkish NGO called Union of Islamic Knowledge says that they were forced to leave their homes, they never had the intention to travel or study abroad and with the normalization of the situation he would return to Syria and hope to find a similar job there (Yurtsever, 2017).

The question of assimilation, integration or complete refusal of the varieties of identities offered by the situation of being a refugee in Turkey is still open and asylum seekers respond in very diverse ways. Uncertainty reigns and prevails over the general condition of refugees, their education and their career planning.

Why is it so? There is an objective and a subjective answer to this question. The objective one is that the armed conflict is still not over. At the time of writing, dozens of civilians were taken to hospital in the city of Homs because an opposition group was shelling the settlement in the hands of the Assad regime with poisonous gas. In such a case, it is impossible and unjust to require a Syrian refugee student to tell exactly what they would do in 5 or 10 years. The subjective one is linked to harmful events these refugees underwent during the civil war in Syria. Studies show that the lack of language skills is not the only obstacle, Syrian refugees also need to process their experiences and raise a certain psychological capital to have a higher chance to be able to take a good job as demonstrated by a research conducted among Syrian refugees residing in the Netherlands and Greece (Zacher, 2018).

The proper psychological background can be ensured by the family background of the refugee students. Several examples show that if the refugee parents work, and especially if they work in their original profession, it has a positive impact on the studies and future career of their children. The contrary is true as well, if the parents are well-trained professionals like teachers and medical doctors, and they do not find a job in Turkey that is related to their degree, furthermore if they were forced to leave behind all their wealth and belongings, it has a very negative influence on the studies and career of their children (Sezgin and Yolcu, 2016).

Family is not the only human environment around a student and family members are not the only source of psychological support in case of need. The second such circle around a young individual is constituted by their friends, and, in Syrian culture, the people who live in the same city, with whom the refugee student had interacted prior to the civil war. In fact, one of the main

reasons for Syrian refugee students to be homesick is that they miss their friends and neighbors, and find it extremely difficult to keep in touch with those who survived the horror of the armed conflict and still reside in the country. For this reason, Syrian refugee students have very hard time to befriend fellow students, they rather search for the company of the teachers and the personnel of the faculties (Sezgin and Yolcu, 2016).

Besides the evident psychological factor, there is an important cultural aspect of the success of Syrian refugee students and, of course, it also influences their career plans. One might call this factor intercultural learning. In fact, it is proven by several cases in Turkey, that the so called “cultural trade” in the classroom contributes in a positive manner to the integration of the refugees and their acceptance by the Turkish classmates. It has been said on numerous occasions that there are similarities between Turkish and Syrian national culture, but there are also major rifts and differences. One can evoke here the question of how people celebrate in the respective countries. Though the day of celebration might be the same as it is fixed by religion, the way is visibly distinct. This small-scale intercultural learning process recomforts the parties and acts as a support for the psychologically vulnerable groups (Zayimoglu Öztürk, 2018).

From the above examples it is evident that a refugee student is surrounded by the same human environments as an ordinary student: the family, friends, neighbors and the school. In the particular situation of the refugees these circles often fail, and the students are looking for outside assistance. This is exponentially true when it comes to career planning in a foreign country where especially the family is helpless.

A handbook prepared by the International Youth Foundation summarizes the main steps to be taken by those helpers who address the issue of assisting career planning for young Syrian refugees in Turkey. First, these activities have to be practice oriented. Refugees, even more than any other students or young people, need to know how to implement their knowledge. Second, young refugee students are to be prepared to meet the employers. Turkish employers are used to the Turkish work force and, indeed, there are important cultural differences between the way people work in the two countries. Third, professionals have to help Syrian refugee youth to select the most suitable workplace for them based on criteria they cannot learn from their family. Fourth, a complete career assistant service is needed to be formed that deals with Syrian refugee students alone. This service has to be supervised by Turkish authorities as these young students risk to end up on the grey or black market as refugees often face *ex lex* situations due to their vulnerable conditions. The service providers have to understand that their job is more complex than the ordinary career support as they also have to deal with the everyday problems a refugee might have including psychological and social harm due to the ongoing civil war in Syria. Fifth,

the same service providers have to assist young Syrian refugees with their struggle to legalize their documents, to ensure that they get the necessary qualification, and to propose them training courses and education programs following their graduation (International Youth Foundation, 2018).

## **4.8 Quantitative analysis of the questionnaires**

### **4.8.1 Sample**

The present quantitative analysis is based on a research conducted in Turkey. Altogether 160 Syrian refugee university students participated in the procedure. Out of 160 students 106 were males and 54 females. The vast majority (n=123) of the respondents were BA/Bsc students. The rest of the participants were either master students (34 persons) or PhD students (5 persons).

### **4.8.2 Instrument**

The overall aim of the present thesis is to map the career planning ideas of Syrian refugees students studying at Turkish higher education institutions. The quantitative analysis is an integral part of this research. The questions in the questionnaire were based on the results of the interviews conducted and described earlier. The other source of the questions was the hypotheses of the thesis.

A 5 point Likert type scale consisting of 15 subjects was used to test the career expectations of Syrian refugee students following their studies in Turkey. As the 10th and the 14th subjects were proven to be useless from the point of view of the research, they were neglected and omitted. The respondents could give answers from “I strongly agree” (1) to “I strongly disagree” (5) to express their respective opinion. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire a reliability test was realized. The value of reliability is  $\alpha = .877$ . The value of KMO was found to be 0.746 and the Barletta value is 0.00. According to these values the factor analysis can be considered appropriate. The result of the factor analysis being a total of 77.916%, 4 factors can be established.

### 4.8.3 Limitations

During the last couple of years a growing number of Syrian refugees pursue their studies in Turkey. As there is only a limited number of researches done on this topic in Turkey, the present analysis can be an example for further studies.

### 4.8.4 Demographic Variables

The results obtained from the research show the diversity of Syrian refugee students from the points of view of gender, age, education and financial background.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	106	66,3	66,3	66,3
Female	54	33,8	33,8	100,0
Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 10. Gender of the respondents**

(Source: SPSS output)

From Table 10, it can be seen that out of the 160 respondents, 106 were male students, whereas the female students account for 54 persons.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-22	84	52,5	52,5	52,5
23-27	45	28,1	28,1	80,6
28-32	20	12,5	12,5	93,1
33-37	11	6,9	6,9	100,0
Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 11. Age of the respondents**

(Source: SPSS output)

According to Table 11 52,5% of the participants were between the age of 18-22. That means that this age category represents the majority of the respondents. A much smaller group, those between the ages of 33 and 37 constituted 6.9% of the total respondent population.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	BA/BSc	123	76,9	76,9	76,9
	Master	32	20,0	20,0	96,9
	PhD	5	3,1	3,1	100,0
	Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 12. Education level of the respondents**

(Source: SPSS output)

Table 12 details the level of education of the students participating in the research. The vast majority of the respondents (n=123) were BA/BSc students. MA students constitute 20%, whereas PhD students 3.1% of all respondents.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Self-Finaced	46	28,8	28,8	28,8
	Scholarship Holders	114	71,3	71,3	100,0
	Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 13. Finance of study of the respondents**

(Source: own work)

Table 13 summarizes how the respondents finance their studies in Turkey. The answers show that 71.3% of them got a scholarship scheme, whereas 28.8% of the refugee students and their families have the necessary income in order to pay the courses.

#### 4.9 Reliability and Factor Analysis

In a reliability analysis, the value of “a” can be defined as follows.

0.00 < a the scale is not reliable.

0.40 < a the scale is of low reliability.

0.60 < a the scale is of satisfactory reliability.

0.80 < a the scale is of high reliability

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire a reliability test was realized. The value of reliability is  $\alpha = .877$ . The value of KMO was found to be 0.746 and the Barlett value is 0.00. According to these values the factor analysis can be considered appropriate. The result of the factor analysis being a total of 77.916%, 4 factors can be established.

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
q1		,861		
q2		,825		
q3		,846		
q4		,672		
q5			,942	
q6			,881	
q7			,427	
q8				,919
q9				,850
q11	,935			
q12	,938			
q13	,649			
q15	,661			

**Table 14. Factor analysis**

(Source: SPSS output)

#### 4.10 Test of Normality

While doing the research, the Skewness and Kurtosis values were taken into consideration. After getting the results of the survey, an effort was made to establish whether a parametric or a non-parametric test has to be utilized in the future.

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Living in Turkey	160	-,825	,192	1,004	,381
Impact of education on career	160	-,921	,192	,350	,381
Career path as a country choice	160	-,502	,192	-,435	,381



The effects of economic development in Turkey to career path	160	-,609	,192	-,471	,381
Valid N (listwise)	160				

**Table 15. Descriptive statistics**

(Source: own work)

Table 15 shows that according to the totality of the methods used, the Skewness and Kurtosis values situated between  $\pm 2$  prove the results to be normal. The results show that the variables are normal (GEORGE & MALLERY, 2010).

#### 4.10.1 Hypothesis 1

Table 26. summarizes the questions related to the living conditions of Syrian refugee students. The results confirm the idea proposed in Hypothesis 1.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Republic of Turkey guarantees my safety and my right for a peaceful life.	160	1	5	3,41	1,189
The Turkish authorities deal with me in a right and honorable way	160	1	5	3,58	1,102
I am satisfied with my living conditions in Turkey as a refugee	160	1	5	3,79	1,146
I have access to the same services including health care and social security as a young Turkish citizen.	160	1	5	3,41	1,220
Valid N (listwise)	160				

**Table 16. Living in Turkey**

(Source: SPSS output)

The above table shows that Syrian refugee students residing in Turkey are mainly satisfied with their situation as an asylum-seeker. The Syrian young people might think that their living standards are higher than that of those who opted for another country. It is interesting to note that they are happier with the conditions than with the level of safety and equality within the Turkish society.

#### 4.10.2 Hypothesis 2

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Republic of Turkey is helping refugees enrolled in higher education at all levels.	160	1	5	3,72	1,219
I have access to all the resources I need for my studies	160	1	5	3,83	1,301
My study environment does not considerably differ from that of a young Turkish student	160	1	5	3,34	1,431
Valid N (listwise)	160				

**Table 17. Impact of education on career**

(Source: SPSS output)

Table 17 summarizes the questions related to the living conditions of Syrian refugee students. Though most of them underline that they have all the necessary minimal resources for their studies, they add that their chances for leading a successful student life is smaller than that of their Turkish colleagues. Nevertheless, they admit that the Republic of Turkey is doing a considerable effort to uplift them.

The majority of the answers to the questions of the questionnaire were positive. Therefore, the results confirm the idea proposed in Hypothesis 2.

#### 4.10.3 Hypothesis 3

	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Because of the civil war in Syria, I would like to continue my career in Turkey or the West	160	1	5	3,81	1,195

I am ready to return to Syria even if the civil war is not over as I want to serve my nation.	160	1	5	3,31	1,139
Valid N (listwise)	160				

**Table 18. Choice of country or region for career**

(Source: SPSS output)

Table 18. shows in which country or region Syrian refugee students plan their future careers. Though most Syrian people have patriotic feelings, Syrian refugee students see the reality around them and are more in favor of staying in Turkey after graduation than returning home. With changing Turkish policies and a number of Syrians heading home, this might change on the long run.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Turkey	47	29,4	29,4	29,4
Europe	98	61,3	61,3	90,6
Syria	15	9,4	9,4	100,0
Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 19. Frequences, choice of country or region for career.**

(Source: own work)

Table 19 gives further details and shows that 61.3% of Syrian refugee students plan their future career in Europe, 29.4% opt for Turkey and a meager 9.4% count on returning to Syria. The above two tables prove the veracity of Hypothesis 3.

#### 4.10.4 Hypothesis 4

Table 20. summarizes the interrelatedness of the career choices and the current situation of the Turkish economy. It is possible to say that the situation of Turkish economy has a visible impact on the choices of Syrian refugee students. This means that the results support Hypothesis 4.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Turkish citizens and refugee students alike face increasing economic difficulties in Turkey	160	1	5	3,52	1,369
The current economic hardships in Turkey may influence me to plan a career in that country	160	1	5	3,84	1,185
The current economic hardships in Turkey would not deter me to stay few more years in that country, but later, I would move to the West	160	1	5	3,79	1,099
Europe has more economic advantage Turkey than for my career	160	1	5	3,80	1,191
Valid N (listwise)	160				

**Table 20. Effects of the economic development of Turkey on the career path**

(Source: SPSS output)

#### 4.10.5 Hypothesis 5

Table 21. summarizes a special aspect of the career planning of Syrian refugee students. The majority of Syrian young people plan to have a career in the private sector. This result supports Hypothesis 5.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Private industry	139	86,9	86,9	86,9
Valid Public industry	21	13,1	13,1	100,0
Total	160	100,0	100,0	

**Table 21. Position of work**

(Source: own work)

The above table show that there is a predominant desire among Syrian refugee students in Turkey to work for a private company. This can be related to their personal experience of the partial dissolution of the government in their home country as still a considerable region of Syria is under the control of various armed factions and foreign intervention forces.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following table summarizes whether the hypotheses proposed in the introductory chapter are confirmed or rejected.

	Interview Qualitative	& Questionnaire & Quantitative
Hypothesis H1	Partially confirmed	Confirmed
Hypothesis H2	Confirmed	Confirmed
Hypothesis H3	Partially rejected	Confirmed
Hypothesis H4	Confirmed	Confirmed
Hypothesis H5	Confirmed	Confirmed

**Table 22. Confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses**

(Source: own work)

It is important to note that the students included in the survey were selected according to a certain set of criteria and cannot be considered fully representative as it presents the view of ten individuals out of nearly 25.000 Syrian students studying at Turkish universities.

**Hypothesis H1 is partially confirmed** as some of the Syrian refugee students express solid criticism vis-à-vis the Turkish authorities, the growing phobia against Syrian refugee population in Turkey, especially in certain cities like Izmir and incapability of acting against these phenomena. Having said so, they are much more grateful regarding the Turkish and international civil society organizations who help them more with their life as a student than Turkish authorities themselves.

**Hypothesis H2 is confirmed** as Syrian refugee students are more satisfied with their study environment than their overall situation of being a refugee in Turkey. They admit that universities and NGOs help them in their student life and sometimes in their career planning, too.

**Hypothesis H3 is partially rejected** as it seems that the main motive in choosing the place where to live and work is determined by their love of the homeland and the feeling that they have duties regarding their country and community of origin. Having said so, one should not forget that there are considerable obstacles. Even though most parts of Syria have been pacified by the central government, important regions, especially in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional North are still under the control of the rebels. This volatile situation makes the return of some of the respondents impossible.

**Hypothesis H4 is confirmed** as Syrian refugee students are indeed interested in and influenced by the socioeconomic context in which they live. They see the ongoing economic hardships as a chance and are a bit less critical with them than the Turkish public.

**Hypothesis H5 is confirmed** as Syrian refugee students tend to opt for the private sector, but in certain cases they would not turn down an offer from the government either.

The **first aim** of the questions to the respondents of the survey included in the present thesis is to examine the level satisfaction with their situation as a refugee in general and as a student in particular. Though the **first two research questions** seem to be highly inter-connected, the respondents indeed differentiate between the two confirming that the general situation of refugees in Turkey is far from being a satisfying one, whereas those who manage to enter a university are rather appeased by what surround them.

The **second aim** of questions to the respondents of the survey included in the present thesis is to analyze the career planning of Syrian refugee students. The **other three research questions** measure the impacts that determine the future choices of students. It is clear that there are material and spiritual needs that these students try to fulfill at the same time. This means that

these young Syrian individuals are driven by both the necessity of feeding themselves and their future families and acting according to some more abstract principles like the love of the homeland, religious values or success in art.

Based on the survey and the literature, three main recommendations have to be taken into account by Turkish authorities and society.

To provide access to the higher education system for Syrian refugees is one of the duties of the Republic of Turkey as it prescribed various international agreements such as the Circular on Educational Activities Targeting Foreigners and many others. Turkish authorities and assisting civil society organization have to take three major steps to achieve this goal.

**First**, they have to provide support in order to facilitate the transition of Syrian refugee youth from the system of their country of origin to the Turkish system and later from Turkish secondary education system to Turkish higher education system. The most important obstacle to overcome is the question of equivalency as these Syrian young people cannot easily prove their academic history, or they never attended formal education (public or private) in Turkey. Second to the problematics of equivalency, it has to be mentioned that a still high number of Syrian youth is following the Syrian curriculum in Arabic language in refugee camps. It is a must to transfer those of them who would like to continue in Turkey at the level of the universities to the Turkish free of charge secondary education system (Komsuoglu-Yurur, 2017, 3).

**Second**, to speed up this transition process for Syrian refugee students, the Turkish Higher Education Council had and still has to adopt a certain number of policies. The major issues to be dealt with are as follows: missing documents proving the academic background of refugees, the lack of Turkish language skills, lack of information and guidance throughout the entire transition period. The Council facing the problem of the deficiency in Turkish and other languages now proposes a preparatory course for Syrian refugee students at eight selected higher education centers throughout the country. Turkish authorities must also tackle the question of financial support of the students as most of them come from vulnerable families and cannot finance themselves. Therefore, a scholarship scheme is being worked out and constantly reviewed (Komsuoglu-Yurur, 2017, 3).

**Third**, because of the growing criticism coming from the side of Turkish families, Turkish officialdom has to develop a special communication strategy to make them understand the particularities of the issue of the higher education of Syrian refugee students in Turkey. This can be done from the angle of basic human rights and how respecting these human rights can upgrade the external image of the whole country (Komsuoglu-Yurur, 2017, 3).

## 6. NEW SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS

New scientific findings have been deduced from the testimonies of the ten respondents but can be applied to the total Syrian refugee population in Turkey with limitations.

**The general situation of a Syrian refugee student in Turkey depends on their family background and other larger social structures.**

It is visible from the survey that those who already had higher social status in Syria and were surrounded by a firmer social (in many cases tribal) structure, find themselves in a better situation in Turkey, whereas those who lost their loved ones and went through the horror of the civil war are more vulnerable.

**The majority of Syrian refugees studying at Turkish universities are fairly satisfied with their studies and study conditions. They consider universities more protective of their rights and freedom than the Turkish government.**

Turkish universities created a more inclusive environment than the Turkish Republic in general. Turkish universities can be considered to be safe places for refugees in the more and more hostile social surroundings.

**The choice of the future country of career is largely influenced by the love for the homeland and the desire to serve it.**

Contrarily to the general belief that refugees as time passes prefer to stay in their country of residency or move to the West, the majority of young Syrians indeed would prefer to return home if it was possible for them.

**Syrian refugee students are less critical of the social and political difficulties than their Turkish counterparts.**

Though there are imminent economic hardships in Turkey in recent years, the situation is much better compared to Syria, even if one considers the situation before the civil war. Syrian refugees enjoy the relative freedom and economic wealth that Turkey can offer and rarely criticize the Turkish government for that matter.

**Syrian refugee students are divided on the issue of working in the public or private sector. They would make their choice depending on their personal story and situation.**



As other students, Syrian refugees also want to earn money in order to have a peaceful life with a certain level of dignity and wealth. Being safe at the workplace and earning money seems to be a priority whether it can be secured by a government or an entrepreneur or company.

## 7. SUMMARY

In the present PhD thesis, first a historical description and analysis of the civil war in Syria is given that is later followed by the story of the refugee crisis that the armed conflict in the Arab country provoked. The table is completed by the presentation of the respective higher education systems of Turkey and Syria. In the latter case, both the situation before and after the civil war is taken into consideration. In the case of the Turkish higher education, a detailed depiction of its history and the evolution of the reception of foreign nationals to Turkish universities is proposed. Reviewing the literature, the context of Syrian refugee students of Turkey is described, the features of Turkish higher education system, its advantages and disadvantages are identified. This part of the thesis proves that there is constant growth in the number of Syrian refugees attending Turkish universities that makes it a must to understand this social phenomenon.

In order to do so, with the help of the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK) ten future respondents for a survey were selected and contacted to conduct personal interviews with them at the locations where they live and study. After obtaining the necessary permissions from these individuals and their families, on average two hour long interviews were realized with them. The interviews were made up of two major parts. First, ready-made questions in relation with the research questions and hypotheses detailed in the introduction were put. Second, a free conversation took place on the issues of being a refugee and a student in Turkey.

The answers of the respondents were later analyzed, a search was conducted in order to identify the similarities in the stories and the opinions. This work was later completed with a more general overview of the results in the light of the literature.

Using the majority of the answers given by the ten Syrian refugee students included in the survey, three out of the five main hypotheses were confirmed, one of them partially confirmed and another one partially rejected. The results of the survey showed that though the background and the current situation of the respondents is highly diverse, some tendencies, indeed, can be observed.

The survey proved that even though Turkish authorities failed to get all the refugees in a hassle-free way, civil society organizations and universities were able to create an inclusive environment for Syrian refugee students. It also demonstrated that career planning of these young individuals is influenced by a high number of factors including material, emotional and spiritual needs.

As Turkish authorities in some sense failed and still fail to provide all the available young Syrians with a reliable training for their professional life, three important recommendations were made for the Turkish government.

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## APPENDIX

	Survey Form
	DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES
	1. Age? a) 18-22 b) 23-27 c) 28-32 d) 33-37 d) 38+
	2. Gender? a) Male b) Female
	3. Educational form? a) BA/BSc b) MA/MSc c) PhD/Dla
	4) In which semester do you study? a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5 f)6 g) 7 h)8 i) 9+
	5) Finance of Study a) Self-Finaced b) Scholarship Holders
	6) Which sector you are going to work for in future? a) Private Industry b) Public Industry
	7) Which country you are going to work in the future? a) Turkey b) Europe c) Syria
	Living in Turkey
	The Republic of Turkey guarantees my safety and my right for a peaceful life.
	The Turkish authorities deal with me in a right and honourable way.
	I am satisfied with my living conditions in Turkey as a refugee.

	I have access to the same services including health care and social security as a young Turkish citizen.
	Impact of education on career
	5. The Republic of Turkey is helping refugees enrolled in higher education at all levels.
	6. I have access to all the resources I need for my studies.
	7. My study environment does not considerably differ from that of a young Turkish student.
	Career path as a country choice
	8. Because of the civil war in Syria, I would like to continue my career in Turkey or West.
	9. I don't think that I will have a career path in Syria.
	10. I am ready to return to Syria even if the civil war is not over as I want to serve my nation.
	The effects of the economic developments in Turkey to career path
	11. Turkish citizens and refugee students alike face increasing economic difficulties in Turkey.
	12. The current economic hardships in Turkey may influence me to plan a career in that country.
	13. The current economic hardships in Turkey would not deter me to stay few more years in that country, but later, I would move to the West.
	14. Europe has less economic difficulties than turkey.
	15. Europe has more economic advantage Turkey than for my career.

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