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Metamorphosis of educational understanding: Temporary integration of Syrians in Turkey

Sahizer Samuk[‡]

Abstract

The integration of refugees in Turkey has been realized in the field with the help of DGMM (Directorate General on Migration Management), Kızılay and UNHCR mainly, and by many more international and non-governmental organizations that have supported refugees by answering their short-term needs such as giving them cards for shopping, clothes, preparing them for winter (“winterization”) and providing educational assistance. I conducted 15 interviews with state officials, various NGOs and a few refugees. During my research many interesting points about integration policies (to-be-formed) at the moment in Turkey were discovered. One interesting finding was that the state officials do not like to use the word “integration”, as it is reminiscent of the way Turkish migrant workers were treated in Germany, where assimilation and integration were understood as the same concept. I use the term “temporary integration” for the case of all refugees, but this article will focus mostly on the Syrians. Within the context of temporariness, this article’s central attention will be the educational integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I argue in the paper that the temporariness and the nostalgia with the Ottoman past are two main elements mostly present regarding the educational integration of Syrians in Turkey.

Keywords: Syrian refugees; Turkish immigration policies; educational integration; temporary integration; harmonisation.

Introduction

With the Law on Foreigners on International Protection in 2013, “harmonisation”— a term used to refer to integration—was endorsed by Law as well by article 96. The Turkish government specifically chose this concept, because it would imply the two-way approach in line with the 2004 Common Basic Principles of Europe¹. Moreover, it would differentiate the definition of ‘assimilation’ from endorsing a reciprocal meaning.

Two-way integration requires that the host society itself changes, adapts and transforms, not only its immigrants and refugees. Integration cannot be imposed or demanded by force, and becoming integrated is not only about reconciling cultural differences. This concept also includes other important dimensions, such as educational integration, access to healthcare, political participation, family reunification, access to a path

[‡] Dr Sahizer Samuk, Department of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Email: sahsamuk@gmail.com.

¹ http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles_en.pdf accessed on 26th of June 2016.



toward citizenship and respect for the principle of non-discrimination². This article's focus will be educational integration.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the necessity of creating harmonisation policies in Turkey, and also to establish that, while creating these harmonisation policies, it must be understood that the refugees and migrants are not being integrated into an empire. The idea of harmonisation suggested by the DGMM conflicts with the idea of integrating the subjects to a greater majority, which is considered by the government to be reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire. When I began my semi-structured, in-depth interviews in November 2015, in Gaziantep and Ankara, it turned out that the integration policy and migration policymaking regarding Syrians in Turkey are both quite influenced by these nostalgic ideals of empire-like behaviour. However, I have also observed that regarding the educational integration policy, empire-like treatment of immigrants and nostalgic approach were more visible than in other areas of integration.

Turkey, to an extent, had been successful in integrating refugees, especially the Syrians. Turkey had been an immigrant country for more than 30 years, but until the Syrian refugee crisis came to the fore, integration had never been discussed nor endorsed to this extent. The high number of Syrian refugees (more than 3 million by 2017 (Sirkeci, 2017:127) also has a great significance: it shows how much Turkey had to (and still must) realise in terms of reforming immigration policies and creating diverse integration policies for different refugee groups, as all these groups have different needs (within groups, needs differ based on age and gender; between groups, Syrians and Iranians may have different priorities).

As indicated above, harmonisation was the term that was preferred for the reason that it meant mutual recognition, respect and adaptation. Göksel (2015) indicated that recent developments on immigration, for instance, the adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK) and the establishment of a Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) in 2013, demonstrate that the need for devising systematic integration policies is recognised by the state. Article 96³ has been an important one for reinforcing harmonisation, as foreseen below:

² These are the indicators taken from MIPEX. It is also very recent that Turkey has been evaluated by MIPEX indicators; it has scored 25 out of 100. There are many reasons for this, though the article does not aim to analyse all reasons in detail. Rather, it aims to understand the *raison d'être* of the state in enacting the law and including harmonisation within.

³ http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf accessed on 16 November 2016.



ARTICLE 96– (1) The Directorate General may, to the extent that Turkey’s economic and financial capacity deems possible, plan for harmonization activities in order to facilitate mutual harmonization between foreigners, applicants and international protection beneficiaries and the society as well as to equip them with the knowledge and skills to be independently active in all areas of social life without the assistance of third persons in Turkey or in the country to which they are resettled or in their own country. For these purposes, the Directorate General may seek the suggestions and contributions of public institutions and agencies, local governments, non-governmental organisations, universities and international organisations.

In line with this article, the Turkish state started language courses for the foreigners; they consulted public agencies and gave a number of conferences and seminars for raising information and awareness on integration. Workshops and informative sessions with migrants were held in different cities across Turkey. The legislation of Foreigners and International Protection has been translated into 10 languages. A cartoon character based on a migrant child, called MUYU⁴, was created; additionally, a website for migrant children was formed, and a children’s comic book (with the same name MUYU) was published. The experts at DGMM also organised and were involved in activities on the 18th of December Migrant Day Celebrations. A helpline previously used by IOM, the 157 Helpline, was also transferred to DGMM in order to answer immigrants’ questions and respond to their needs. Hence, migration and integration policy are becoming institutionally entrenched in the Turkish context. This is not only due to the Syrian refugee crisis, but is also a result of years of work that has been accomplished, and the years of cumulative experiences and constructive criticism together with support from local NGOs and the international community.

In this article, I will discuss if the term “temporary integration”⁵ is applicable to the case of Syrians. It seems that their case has been treated as harmonisation and a two-way approach was adopted, but still there are discussions and debates around their temporariness and permanency. Although this term was mostly applied to the case of the temporary migrant workers, I find the term temporary integration also useful in this case, as the Syrians might return to their country when peace is restored, but they might also never again have the chance to return. Their status allows them to integrate, but it keeps them under temporary protection.

As the situation has been protracted and refugees have stayed much longer than expected, the context of this issue has changed tremendously

⁴ MUYU, when read reversely is ‘uyum’ which means harmonisation in Turkish.

⁵ This term was first used by the author to refer to temporary migrant workers, meaning that integration can be temporary. However, in this case, the definition is slightly different.



in the last five years. Although there were no official integration policies, there was a great deal of organisation at the local level to provide social support to Syrians, to help them with health and education access by the AFAD (The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), IOM, Welthungerhilfe (WHH), IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Mazlum-der, WHH, Kimse Yok Mu, and many other, similar organisations (also including Syrian organisations, such as Minbar Al-Sam). Gaziantep became a hub of both international and local organisations. Within this context, Syrians' case carries the traces of both integration and temporariness.

As a result of my field-work in Ankara and Gaziantep in the month of November 2015, I found that Syrians were temporarily integrated under the status of temporary protection. However, since their numbers are high and the state's capacity is not yet at the level of managing such major numbers, integration will be a long and multi-lateral process (Akçapar and Şimşek 2018). It seems that NGOs and INGOs have achieved great results in terms of performing their duties as social service providers, negotiators, translators, researchers, and organisers of macro-level meetings, yet the systematic approach to the general situation is missing from the scene. This is not only because the state has a limited capacity, but also because the numbers are not easily manageable. However, it is also necessary to add that DGMM has improved its system and personnel capacity greatly in order to meet the needs of migrants, and this improvement has led to great innovations in the process. They have also started to publish online statistics (previously under the discretion of TUIK⁶) and a yearly report, both in a very detailed manner. Migration management and integration management have become core areas in which the Turkish state wants to develop its capacity and its institutions. While trying to build its capacity, Turkey is usually looking up to good practices internationally.

In this article, I attempt to understand from my interviews what kind of vision of integration and harmonisation the Turkish state has in mind, and what their implications could be for the area of educational integration, especially where the conflicts of ideologies gain precedence. I am of the opinion that educational integration is the most controversial topic regarding temporary integration; this will be explained with the interviews that provided me the most original insights into educational integration. Finally, I will articulate some policy suggestions in the conclusion.

⁶ Turkish Statistical Institute, which is called now Turkstat



A Short Review of the Literature and the Background of the Current Terms

The literature on the integration of Syrians is mostly focussed on the social, economic, demographic and political aspects of integration (Sirkeci, 2017; Yüceşahin and Sirkeci, 2017; Kivilcim, 2016; Doğutaş, 2016; Kaya, 2016; Kirişçi, 2014; Erdoğan, 2014; Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2014; Dorman, 2014; Özden, 2013; Seydi, 2013). However, a full-fledged study on the diverse pillars of integration (education, health, social and political participation, welcoming and referral-orientation, and status transitions including security of status and family reunification) has not yet been published. Göksel (2015) deliberated over the term harmonisation and its meaning in the nation-state context. Erdoğan (2014), although not specifically indicating matters of integration, wrote a very extensive first outlook on the Syrians' situation as well as the public's opinion of it. He also indicated the extent to which the Syrians had access to social, political and economic rights.

Exceptions to these works include Tibet (2017), who carried out a detailed analysis of the wishes, educational dreams and non-formal education of foreign children in Turkey. She had conversations with the minors and tried to understand their world. Her work introduces a unique and intriguing method of study that has yet to be experimented with by Turkish scholars. She suggested that most of the young refugees did not have much hope about their future in Turkey.

The academics have come to a point where discussing integration or harmonisation as a national model is insufficient. For instance, in educational integration policies, there is a need to elucidate which needs are to be provided regarding educational qualifications for the teachers and trainers (Balkar et al., 2016). Moreover, we need to achieve progress in improving educational institutions for enabling a multicultural society where some of the children are extremely vulnerable, and scared. The issue of underage Syrian brides is another complication within this dilemma⁷.

It was thought that temporary protection status would be sufficient, as the refugees would return to their country after the end of the war (yet to this day the war is not terminated); however, it was seen that the crisis was protracted and Syrians were forced to stay, since they had no chance to return to their home country. This was one of the reasons why the government officials also refrained from using the word "integration". Another reason why "harmonisation" was chosen over "integration" was

⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/proof/2018/01/child-marriage-divorce-syrian-refugees-turkey/> accessed on 25th January 2018.



that the DGMM had associated integration with the assimilative policies of the European countries. As one of my informants, a professor⁸, stated:

“When you go to DGMM do not use the word ‘integration’ because it has historical connotations with the integration of Turks in Germany. They have been mostly assimilated⁹. It is better to use the word harmonisation. It does not mean that assimilation is a pejorative thing necessarily, if there is a host society then migrants will adapt to the economic and political ways of organisation there. But Turkey is trying to say that they suggest a different experience than those EU countries applied, that is why they say harmonisation.”

Not only the word harmonisation, but also the “open door policy”¹⁰ towards Syrians, has been affected by empathy and nostalgia towards the Ottoman history. It is worth noting how the occupation of Constantinople (an invented tradition) is celebrated every year, as this was not a common practice even fifteen years ago. The Republican holidays (youth and children’s day), on the other hand, have lost their lure and attraction. There is a great effort on the part of the government to align itself on the side of the Ottoman world, as if Ottoman Empire is repeatable and as if there had not been an eight-five-year Republican history in-between. Governance of space/time/historical victories (and/or losses) and common memories as a resurrection of a glorified Ottoman-ization reveals itself in many other areas (Karaosmanoğlu 2010; Harmanşah 2014). Refugee integration has also some traits of this governing ideology.

The Syrian refugee crisis has become a part of this understanding; hence, the world “ensar” (the one who helps the Muslim refugees; helpers; Muslim foreigners) is being used as a name by many NGOs in different cities. Although these NGOs are highly representative of the refugees in some cities, the structures of these NGOs suggest a Gramscian perspective on organic intellectuals and NGOs, rather than on representing an independent state of mind. These organisations seem to be closely connected with the dominant ideology of the state and appear to be the most active ones, especially in the Middle Anatolian cities.

The professor I interviewed also made these important remarks regarding the issue of harmonisation: “Ottoman history is more relevant than Turkish history when harmonisation is considered. If we have such a

⁸ Interview in November 2015, Ankara.

⁹ At this point, we discussed whether assimilation is integration. For my thesis, I claimed that integration is not assimilation, but he suggested that “integration” recalls Turkish experience and that is why the DGMM did not want to use this word.

¹⁰ Open door policy meant that the Turkish state would have its borders open to the Syrian refugees at whatever cost, and both AFAD and DGMM said that this policy would be followed no matter what. However, there is some counter-evidence to this claim in some scholarly works.



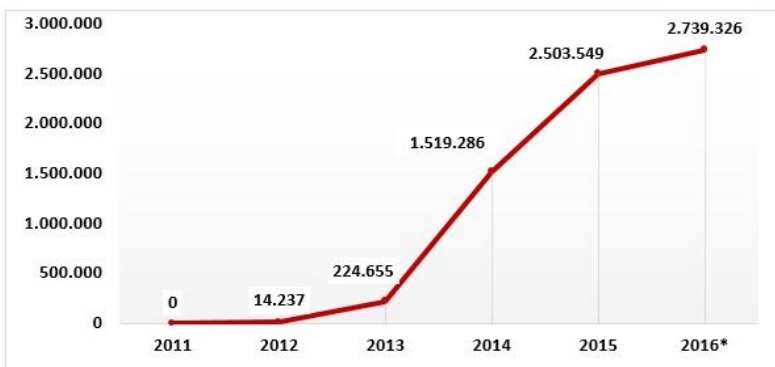
historical enrichment and experience, for sure it will be used. The fact that these people are coming from previous Ottoman territories and they are Muslims makes a difference in terms of the approach towards them.” Ottoman history and societal relationships are taken more as a referral point, to keep a long story short. However, I believe that this understanding is not based on factual historical research. This is more of an invented past, or “invented traditions”¹¹.

Despite all these discussions, the officially-accepted belief reflects the idea that “harmonisation” sounds better than “integration”, although integration does sound more international; harmonisation sounds unique, while integration sounds more commonly used. It could also mean, in the Turkish state’s words: “I will not follow a model that is followed by the EU, I have my own tools and history lessons to figure out what kind of system I am going to apply this term in my country.” However, considering that the Syrians are high in numbers, choosing this term is not a coincidence. It is quite doubtful if the same term “harmonisation” would have been used in the case of non-Muslim refugees.

A Brief Background of Protracted Temporariness: Numbers and Comparisons

Turkey has never had to deal with such a great number of refugees before, and it has never had to lift such a burden before the Syrian refugee crisis. 2013 was the tipping point that caused some changes in the policies regarding migration (see table 1 below):

Table 1. The holders of Temporary Protection Status in Turkey



Source: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713 accessed on 26th of June 2016.

¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, ed. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.



Harmonisation policies were unforeseen for Bulgarian Turks, Russians and former Soviet Union migrants and refugees, as well as for Iraqis, Iranians, Afghans, and Pakistanis. Some might claim that it would be one-dimensional to interpret this issue only in terms of religious affinity and past ideological interpretation. In this case, it would be necessary to add that the state also did not have the personnel and institutional capacity to build this kind of structure before 2013, as there was no YUKK before 2014. However, with the assistance of the NGOs and IOs, and with academia pushing the debate into an immigration country since the 1990s (Kirişçi, 2007; Tolay, 2015), the policy rationale was finally ripe for change. It is a contextual change, as the Syrian refugee crisis triggered the necessity of enacting a major legislation. However, the role of the previous advocacy by academics, NGOs and INGOs cannot be denied.

Within the framework of supporting the development of harmonisation policies in Turkey, six aspects of harmonisation have gained prominence¹²: 1) Developing orientation and referral services; 2) Securing access to statuses, as well as civil, social and economic rights; 3) Granting efficient and systematic social service provisions; 4) Guaranteeing access to decent health services; 5) Increasing access to education; 6) Integration in the labour market; 7) Strengthening mechanisms for social participation. Adopting a holistic approach to integration is an urgent need for Turkey, where there are currently 3,583,434 Syrians registered¹³. However, this harmonisation policy does not only have the purpose to cover Syrians, but all migrants and refugees residing in Turkey, as Syrians make up 80 percent of the migrant population (IOM Strep 2016). The state has recognised the need for an all-encompassing integration policy.

When it comes to education policy the key facts are as such: 62 percent of the Syrian children are enrolled in formal education; over 20,000 of Syrian youth are attending Turkish universities; 1152 Syrian students are receiving full scholarships supported by UNHCR; and finally, 4292 Syrian youth are enrolled in UNHCR supported higher education preparation programs¹⁴ (UNHCR 2018). When the full numbers of the children are considered, these numbers enrolled in educational institutions seem to be

¹² Working at IOM Ankara for four months, these are the areas, which were discussed and accepted in order to prepare the National Strategy Document on Harmonisation Policies of Turkey. These categories might have changed slightly.

¹³ Data Source UNHCR, June 2018 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113> latest access on 12th of June 2018.

¹⁴ Promoting access of refugees to education, accessed on <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63882> latest access on 2nd of June 2018.



lower than what the ideal situation could be. According to the statistics of 2016 (UNICEF 2016), 54 percent of total Syrian population registered in Turkey are children and amongst them 325,000 are enrolled in schools. Therefore, it is possible to see that there is a slight increase in the number of the students enrolled in the schools from 54 percent to 62 percent. On the other hand, the funding for the 3RP¹⁵ strategy of the UNHCR comes from diverse resources¹⁶. Diversifying the resources can be a good strategy but it does not mean that there would not be a donor fatigue in the future as temporariness is protracted.

On the other hand, funding seems to be a problem that is encountered in Jordan and Lebanon as well. According to Culbertson and Constant (2015: 37) in the long-term donor fatigue can be an issue if long-term infrastructural measures are not taken into consideration. The research reveals that the Syrian children in Turkey are not integrated into the mixed classes (where Turkish children are educated) as much as they are in Jordan and Lebanon (Kolcu 2014 quoted in Culbertston and Constant 2015: 50). Only 7 percent of the Syrian children are in the same classroom with Turkish children (ibid.). On the other hand, what is common between three countries is that the traumatised children are not sent to special schools but are registered in normal schools (Culberston and Constant 2015: 61).

Table 2: Registered Refugees including Children in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

	<i>Registered refugees</i>	<i>Child refugees (under 18)</i>	<i>Child refugees (under 5)</i>
<i>Jordan</i>	<i>661,859</i>	<i>334,901</i>	<i>100,603</i>
<i>Iraq</i>	<i>248,382</i>	<i>106,804</i>	<i>40,486</i>
<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>991,165</i>	<i>546,132</i>	<i>158,586</i>
<i>Turkey</i>	<i>3,588,877</i>	<i>1,647,295</i>	<i>495,265</i>

Source: UNHCR data portal accessed on May 2018, compiled by the author.

Turkey is not the only country to handle the situation of educational integration of Syrian children. In Jordan and Lebanon Syrian children are facing similar challenges in educational integration. The practices slightly differ. In Jordan Zaatari for instance, the curriculum is based on Jordanian

¹⁵ 3RP strategy of the UNHCR focuses on resilience which means that not only short term goals should be aimed but also medium term capacity building meaning long term goals shall be bridged with short term goals (Culbertston and Constant, 2015: 35).

¹⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63650> accessed on 2nd of June 2018.



curriculum where the teachers are also Jordanian as well as the management (UNICEF 2018). The problems that faced in the educational integration by the children in Jordan can be categorised as such: child labour, violence, vandalism, congestion, tardiness of students, theft acts, and early marriages (UNICEF 2018). These complications also occur in Turkey as it will be depicted in the upcoming sections of this article.

Methodology

The empirical data was gathered via 15 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders, policymakers and NGOs in Ankara and Gaziantep in November 2015. All the participants were involved in migration policies at the local or national level. Since the interviews were semi-structured they allowed some space for the interviewer to ask questions depending on the information given. The interviews lasted one hour in average and the method of reaching the interviewees was mainly via contacts that are known but also as a result of snowball sampling. The main themes of the questions asked were about the diverse dimensions of integration such as social, economic, cultural and educational integration. The answers were recorded either via recording machine or via taking notes, depending on the consent and the preference of the interviewee.

Later on, the interviews were transcribed word by word. Afterwards, they were sent to the interviewees for their consent and approval, making sure that the information is transcribed rightly. In order to abide the ethical rules, they were anonymised and the names were deleted totally. The interviews were examined according to thematic coding. The thematic codes were based on some predetermined keywords: temporariness, educational integration, social integration, health integration and labour market integration. On the other hand, new information that was unexpected were found, mostly regarding the educational integration and perceptions of diverse NGOs and experts on educational integration of Syrians. It has been depicted as a sensitive topic, which paved the way for a more inductive research article such as this one.

Interviews and Analysis: Harmonisation, Nostalgia with the Ottoman Past and Temporariness

There are many aspects that render the Syrians' presence temporary, but also there are other aspects that benefit their integration. Temporary protection status is a much better status to possess than many others, though as many critics claim, it does not provide as much security as the international protection status. The reason that the Syrians were given temporary status is that their numbers were too high and it was impossible



to provide international protection for them in such an emergency situation; this idea has also been supported by my interviews. It has also been suggested by a few of my interviewees that their integration is a must, and that some Syrians do wish to attain full international protection status (IPS), since it is a safer status. This section will analyse in what sense they are seen as temporary and in what sense they can be considered integrated as a result of their agentic behaviour and of state and civilian support.

One of the officers at DGMM drew attention to the fact that criticisms might be raised: “We know that the temporariness of their legal status is being criticised. But when the migration is in high numbers and in aggregate massive numbers, temporary protection is provided to all of them rather than individual statuses.” The law of Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK) has placed temporary protection as a regulation so that they would have a status closer to international protection status:

ARTICLE 2 – (1) The provisions of this Law apply to the activities and actions related to foreigners; the international protection to be extended in cases of individual protection claims of foreigners at borders, the border gates or within Turkey; the immediate temporary protection to be provided to foreigners in cases when there is a large influx into Turkey and where they cannot return back to the country they were forced to leave; and, the structure, duties, mandate and responsibilities of the Directorate General of Migration Management.

In addition to the above remarks, according to a social worker in Malumat¹⁷ (an organisation that provides educational service to refugees, gives women information on health issues, teaches languages, etc.), temporary protection is a system that Turkey uniquely created to find a solution to the mass arrivals of refugees:

“Since it was not possible to give all of them refugee status, the Turkish authorities have found such a solution thinking that these people might remain here. The good sides of this decision were that they could benefit from their rights in the areas of education, health and these rights were guaranteed to them. They do not have the refugee status, but they can benefit from first step health services, education, security and also from justice. They can complain to the police if something bad happens to them. They can benefit from judicial assistance. If they don’t have enough money they can ask to have a lawyer from the lawyers’ association. Even though it is temporary there is a legal basis for their rights.”

A Labour Agency director in Kilis also confirmed that examining the situation as a temporary one might create a problem: “They do not have the same rights as the refugees. Hence, there is an atmosphere like the

¹⁷ <http://malumat-gzt.org/tr.html> accessed on 1 December 2016.



Syrians will leave tomorrow¹⁸. This means that you are cutting their connections to the production process. And then you are sending a kid to school after 3-4 years of a gap. The upcoming process will be much more difficult.” On the other hand, the main gap is actually that the more educated and economically well-off people are somehow able to manage to continue their schooling¹⁹.

The director added to his words: “In academic, social and cultural terms, the ones that are at the bottom of the ladder are being wasted. While some kids are being sent to private schools some of them cannot and they are lost.” In fact, the education system stands as the main crux and area where most of refugees’ problems arise, as well as where conflicts regarding ideological differences manifest themselves and nostalgia with the Ottoman Empire comes to the fore.

A social worker in ASAM added that harmonisation is a must because these people are expected to stay as long as the conflict is protracted: “They have to do local integration, or harmonisation whatever we call it, and it should start as a process. Only in the camps (the information of 3-4 months ago), 70,000 children were born. You cannot see them as guests and you can’t solve the problem when they see them as guests.” There are 26 camps in Turkey, but most refugees prefer to leave the camps, especially in the summer. This is because being in the city gives them more possibilities for socialisation and they feel more liberated to be there. The camps’ quality varies, with some camps having been heavily criticised while some others were praised for their practices. In general, it seems that the ones who can afford to rent a house in the city choose to leave the camps.

Temporariness and integration are two elements that are united in the case of the Syrians. They are de facto integrated, although their status is not as safe as those who are internationally protected. An officer from AFAD underlined that they cannot apply for full refugee status and Turkey still has not lifted the geographical limitation so that international protection status can be granted, but only just before they are settled into the third country. The officer from AFAD said:

¹⁸ Using ‘tomorrow’ metaphorically, meaning “soon”.

¹⁹ Currently, Turkey adopts a more privatised school system where the children would be sent to private schools and the state would support them with some financial incentives as high as 3,000 Turkish Liras. However, this is not an opportunity that all migrants and refugees can benefit from, since this support would not suffice to continue education in private schools.



“In practice the geographical limitation²⁰ is being applied because they cannot make applications for attaining the refugee status. They cannot get residence rights and citizenship. Those with the passports can get more residence rights. They have places for temporary residence. Those who have worked before and those who had work permits a long time ago can get residence permits, too. The ones who came later are not included in this group. There are some who have come before the war started and they had double citizenship, for instance.”

As it is seen, those Syrians who had previous social networks in Turkey and those who have always had the closest links with the area are in better conditions, especially if they can benefit from the right to open their own businesses. Those who have become Turkish citizens have a right to become entrepreneurs. However, before the Work Permit Law that was enacted in January 2016²¹, those under temporary protection were not able to work with their status. “As a solution to the problem, the ‘Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees Under Temporary Protection’ has been issued in the Official Journal No. 2016/8375, dated 15 January 2016, and these refugees will be granted work permits under following conditions and restrictions.”²² Now they can work with a quota limitation: if there are five Turkish people working in one place, one Syrian can be recruited. Therefore, the problem of work permits on the legislative side seems to have been “resolved” since January 2016. Nonetheless, problematic approaches continue to persist: some employers do not want to employ Syrians legally in many parts of Turkey, since it means that they have no comparative advantage if they are employable as a Turkish citizen who incurs the same costs to the employer. On the other hand, not having any quota restrictions for the temporarily-natured jobs for those under temporary protection could mean that temporariness might bring precarious status to these refugees, as it does all around the world for temporary migrant workers.

It is not only true that the EU should take some responsibility, it is also important to underline that many tensions are arising in Gaziantep, where there are more than 350,000 Syrians. Here there are social conflicts between the local population and the migrants, which have increased

²⁰ Turkey has not lifted geographical limitation, but acted in such a way that geographical limitation would not apply in many cases. International protection status is also given to those who come from countries, which used to be subjected to geographical limitation.

²¹ <http://turkishlaborlaw.com/news/legal-news/362-turkey-grants-work-permit-for-syrian-refugees> accessed 22 July 2016.

²² <http://turkishlaborlaw.com/news/legal-news/362-turkey-grants-work-permit-for-syrian-refugees> accessed 22 July 2016.



recently.²³ Moreover, it is often the case that some employers might prefer to employ Syrians at lower wages and exploitation might be one of the consequences. The price of labour is generally lowered in this case. The labour market gap is filled with Syrians, because most of the time it is the Syrians who accept to work for lower wages in the domains of textiles and farm work. A responsible from IHH said: “Gaziantep benefited from the Syrian labour, many of them are working in leather and shoe industries. Since most of the vocation schools were closed, there is a need for labour in the industries and Gaziantep made use of the Syrians’ labour.” In addition, child labour is one of the problems that Syrians are facing (Del Carpio and Wagner, 2016).

We have seen that the crisis was prolonged and the adverse situation for the Syrians has been protracted. After four or five years of stay, many Syrians have understood that they would not be able to go back to their country. A general consensus amongst the NGOs I interviewed was that the main solution to the crisis would be ending the conflict. They also agreed that a second, less ideal, solution would comprise of sharing the burden of the crisis with EU countries. However, neither of these scenarios have been made a reality, and so integration (or harmonisation) of the Syrians, their livelihood, educational integration, increasing the state capacity and training the DGMM personnel started to be considered as the main solutions. On the other hand, as a part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan²⁴ led by UNHCR and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) the INGOs, NGOs and government have to work together (Brussels 2018). Moreover, international community also expects Turkey to include a national strategy for integrating refugees whilst respecting the principle of *non-refoulement* (ibid.).

A great organisational and collaborative structure has been developed in the Southeast of Turkey as well as in Istanbul. It was surprising to see how many NGOs and INGOs are working in Gaziantep, for instance, to do the needs assessment, provide aid to families in need, promote children’s education and help families send their kids to school. There are also monthly meetings coordinated by the governor in Gaziantep that enables all the NGOs to come together with the local authorities, such as the

²³ There have been many news stories where a landlord had a fight with the Syrians who did not pay their rent, or the occupants were being asked to pay a higher rent. Also in some cases, Syrians were placed where the Kurdish were residing, and this inconsiderate policy has been causing tensions because the infrastructure is already insufficient and there is already a reaction to the government for the social, economic and political policies’ implementation on the ground.

²⁴ Resilience plan includes integration in many aspects: education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure, socio-economic support, livelihoods, social cohesion, employment and other social services for refugees in Turkey.



governorship, to discuss the problems. Therefore, for the people whose situation might be considered temporary, this kind of capacity building is invaluable. However, one of the problem-ridden areas is related to the topic I would like to discuss in the next section: educational integration. This is the sphere wherein most of the ideological leanings manifest themselves, and where there are divisions and many dichotomies in terms of developing a coherent policy. The future of effected Syrian children seems to be hopeless unless an elaborate, efficient and long-term solution is found to this indecision and to the dichotomy in the educational system.

Challenges regarding Syrian children's education: Institutional and natural barriers

The current situation of the Syrian children and other foreigner children's education is currently very complicated. Their stay was thought to be temporary and they were therefore granted temporary protection by the Turkish state; however, while the temporary protection status had provided them with the right of access to health and education, after four or five years it is clear that they cannot be "permanently temporary".

Despite children's right to access education, there were many problems regarding their education: some children could not start or continue their education because they were not registered, others had problems because they were registered but their respective identity numbers could not be seen in the common portal of educational system (of the Ministry of Education). Therefore, if the discretionary power of the school managers did not allow their registration, they would not be able to initiate their education in Turkey. It is estimated that there are more than 600,000 refugee children not enrolled in educational institutions. Furthermore, problems related to educational preparations and societal and harmonisation issues are also part of the dilemma.

Turkish constitution considers educational rights as inalienable (also as indicated in the Constitution of Turkey in article 42). When it comes to implementation, the role of the managers of the schools reveal that many children who have refugee backgrounds (whose parents might have the status of international protection, or they might have applied for international protection status or their parents might be under temporary protection) cannot have access to the educational possibilities. Especially the children of the irregular migrants are the most vulnerable ones.

There are two types of schools for foreign children in Turkey. One teaches Arabic and gives education using the Syrian curriculum; these are the temporary education centres. The temporary education centres exist both in the camps and outside the camps. The other option is public school,



which teaches Turkish and the Turkish curriculum. The first school type takes place in the afternoon, within classrooms in Turkish schools or in separate buildings designated for educational reasons; the second is via enrolment of students to the Turkish schools. A representative from a humanitarian assistance NGO in Gaziantep, named *Kimse Yok Mu?*, indicated that “There are Syrian teachers there and Syrian curricula is continuing to be taught. At the same time there is a Turkish teacher, Turkish manager and assistant manager.”

I have noticed that great problems related to the content of the curriculum are present and conflicting views are raised on how the curriculum can be revised at the policymaking level (at the time, the Ministry of Education did not give clear signs of how the curriculum would be adapted to multicultural values). Some organisations claimed that the Ottoman history is taught to Syrian children in the Arabic curriculum, where Ottoman is represented as a repressive and assimilative power; the interviewed leaders of these organisations claimed that this would cause hatred in refugee children towards Turkey, the country in which they took refuge. However, there is an anachronism in this aspect. Some NGOs did not mention the Turkish Republic at all, mostly discussing the content of the classes on Ottoman history being taught to the children.

An IHH representative, for instance, indicated that teaching the curricula and portraying the Ottoman Empire as a coloniser was not the right approach: “They are buffering/alleviating policies, they are not thought in detail and these classes are not long-term oriented. For instance, in the curricula of the Syrian students who come to Turkey, the rhetoric that Ottoman was a coloniser still exists. This is not a good representation, because these children are given the reasons to hate Turkey if this history class is taught like that.” These claims clearly underline that not the Republic, but the Ottoman is the reference point, for some of the NGOs. In fact, helping Syrians is considered a duty within being a good Muslim in line with learning the lessons from the Ottoman past, as some religion-based NGOs believe; they also draw attention to the fact that the Ottoman should be portrayed as a remarkable actor when history is taught to Syrian children. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that education is one of these areas where the ideology of a purposefully chosen and invented past reveals itself the most.

The various institutional barriers have been briefly explained above. Some natural barriers related to Syrian children’s learning opportunities and future are as such: first, the issue of two languages (learning Arabic in a system where they might sit the exams in Turkish, if they stay long enough in the Turkish educational system) must be overcome, as the reconstruction



of their home country will unfortunately take longer than expected. Although this area might seem the most problematic, in practical life and at school children are the ones who can learn languages the most quickly. A language specialist from the British Council underlined that children, especially in elementary school, might seem to not be learning the language (as they do not speak as much as the native speakers in the class); however, they do learn cumulatively. Besides these, many migrants and refugees make their kids communicate with the strangers who speak Turkish, since it is harder for parents to learn another language and their children pick it up language quicker. Thus, Syrian children become cultural and linguistic mediators and interpreters.

The second issue is related to child labour as highlighted above. Many families do not send their kids to school because they are obliged to work, especially in the families without any working males, whilst the mothers take care of the house and younger children. In this case, the older children are burdened with taking more work-related responsibilities, which causes them to discontinue their education. My observation is that while these children become cultural mediators for their families, they can also become a source of cheap labour for their families. To counteract this problem, NGOs are providing economic assistance to families whose kids are working on the street or in factories, on the condition that the children are sent to school.

The third issue is related to certification in education and the fact that few children are hopeful about their educational prospects in Turkey, they are rather dreaming of going to Europe²⁵. They are also uncertain of the validity of the certificates they receive from temporary education centres.

The fourth problem is related to gaps in educational life. This is connected with the other issues of having stayed in a war zone for too long, and then having an interrupted educational life due to being involved in the labour market. This generation has the lowest prospects in the educational system, as they have lost too many years. Different suggestions are made for these groups of refugee students, like intensive schooling. Turkish educational actors do not have much experience with this topic. Whether Turkish educational institutions are prepared for this kind of intensive schooling for foreign students whose first language is not Turkish is another question mark.

²⁵ Elif Eda Tibet gave a presentation on this topic on the 17th of March 2016, at Limak Hotel, Ankara. It was a successful organisation on preventing the lost generation planned by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASAM) and the British Council.



Last but not least, there is the problem of young marriages, which mostly affects females. Turkey already has a low level of literacy for females compared to males: 9.2 percent of Turkish women are illiterate, while 1.8 percent of Turkish men are²⁶. This means that Turkey must deal with its structural problems when refugees are in need of structural solutions. Another institutional problem that has not been mentioned here revealed itself in an interview with a trainer and teacher²⁷, who gave lectures to teachers about cultures and values. She underlines that the parents of Turkish children are uncomfortable about the fact that the young refugee people feel more relaxed here in Turkey, particularly regarding their behaviour and style of dress. Some conservative Turkish parents think that the young refugees are too confident in themselves. Contrarily, Turkish youth are not as bothered by this fact as their parents are.

Finally, Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan demands that Turkey continues to increase the opportunities for “education in both formal and non-formal educational settings, whilst giving importance to vocational training, higher education, providing courses both in Turkish and Arabic languages, and focusing on quality learning outcomes” (Brussels 2018, 6). In order to reach these aims, institutional and cultural transformation is necessary as well as to approach educational integration (or harmonisation in the area of education) with a structured vision and long-term perspective. This perspective needs to consider all these aspects in detail, not only by name. For instance, Kirişçi (2016) emphasizes that within informal education, radical Islamist education is a growing trend. Another question is related to the weight that should be given to both languages for the respect of transnational identities. All these aspects might seem as straightforward issues and purposes, but the devil is in the detail.

Research and Conclusions: Educational Integration into the Empire with Rewriting History?

From my fieldwork²⁸ I observed that the schooling rate in the camps is 94 percent, while it is 20 to 30 percent outside the camps. In a meeting with ASAM representative İbrahim Kavlak, he also underscored that there was a need to reach those who are outside the camps. Not only Syrian but Iraqi children will be also in need of education after the second intervention in Iraq, as they also need shelter and access to their rights to be free from

²⁶ <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=21519> accessed on 2 December 2016.

²⁷ Interview via Skype in October 2017, Luxembourg.

²⁸ Presentation by İbrahim Kavlak, head of ASAM, April 2016.



labour and to be free from forced early marriages²⁹. The ASAM representative also added that in January, February and March 2016 a total of 16,000 refugees arrived from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran; their access to education is also inadequate³⁰.

What has the state been doing so far? The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities provides full scholarships and partial scholarships, as well as some Turkish language program. Yunus Emre Institute³¹ is also cooperating with teaching Turkish and grant certification. However, Yunus Emre seems to be still devoid of statistics in terms of how many teachers they can train and how many they have trained so far, as well as to how many students they would need to reach out. Their capacity seems to be limited. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is assisting temporary education centres in relation with article 42 of the Constitution (right to education). On the other hand, they were also aware that these temporary education centres somehow had to be integrated into the main educational system in Turkey. If the children are to stay in Turkey, two curriculums with diverse subjects and backgrounds cannot be taught. Therefore, it is better to have a common curriculum and include optional courses for foreigners in Syrian history and Arabic. The curriculum can also adopt some multicultural and/or intercultural elements so that the ideal of diversity is taught in schools at an earlier age.

The idea that the refugee children are guests should be totally eliminated from institutional speeches, as children's futures are at stake (regardless of whether they are staying in Turkey specifically). Integration or harmonisation must be the main aim, because being considered a guest creates a different dynamic. The purpose of the DGMM can be temporary integration with full rights to education, health and housing, as the immigrants' permanence shall be taken into account realistically.

Syrian refugees have already been in Turkey since 2011, which implies that more than six important years of their youth's childhoods and adolescences have been in Turkey. Some of these children will choose to stay in Turkey. In return, MoNe claims that they would like to unite temporary education centres with the mainstream schools. However, do they have a plan on how to do it? This is not yet clear. MoNe also provides

²⁹ It is very important to underline at this point that Zeynep Kivilcim's work (2016) on legal violence against Syrian female refugees in Turkey draws our attention to the cases of legal inaction by the Turkish authorities and how Temporary Protection Regulation allows the authorities to escape responsibility for any harm brought to female refugees (i.e. by physical, sexual and economic violence).

³⁰ Presentation by Ibrahim Kavlak, head of ASAM, April 2016.

³¹ It is an institute that teaches Turkish in Eastern Europe. It has strong presence in Bosnia, for instance.



an abundance of statistics on temporary education centres in meetings and public announcements, particularly on the number of kids that are enrolled in both the Turkish schools and temporary education centres. Surprisingly, this information provided by state institutions sometimes tells us nothing about the quality and content of education. This does not mean that they do not put enough effort into integrating children to the education system; however, they need to provide more transparent information for the public and for researchers.

Another serious issue affecting the future of children in Turkey in general is as such: privatisation of the education system in Turkey does not help the cases of minorities, those in poverty nor refugee kids from Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian or Afghani. The state must clarify what they need to enact on educational reform rather than focussing on numbers. At the end of the day, providing more statistics without presenting any kind of meaningful relationship between the variables does not clarify the situation of children's educational integration in Turkey. There is a risk that they will receive worse quality education and that there will be a parallel system to the main educational system. On the other hand, refugee children could not be educated in solely their native language and home curriculum. Granting Syrians the right to be educated in Arabic does not mean harmonisation or integration; on the contrary, it only means there is a policy gap in multicultural and multilingual educational criteria.

To sum up the problems related to integration of refugees in the domain of educational: language barrier, families' economic problems, social integration problems (such as negative public opinion and exclusion by other students in classrooms), insufficient infrastructure (ex. schools, services to schools and sport and arts facilities that do not necessitate speaking the local language fluently), the misalignment between education systems (having created a double system) and finally, new instability arising in the Middle East that brings new refugee kids to Turkey without any prior preparation or experience on the side of Turkish teachers and schools. These are the major issues detected and confirmed by other scholars as well as by my fieldwork. This article has added one contextual problem to all these barriers to education: the risk that the curriculum will be changing in to glorify and mystify religion and the Ottoman Empire rather than evolving to include a multicultural and intercultural perspective. The children are not being integrated into the nostalgic image of Ottoman Empire, they basically need a multicultural or intercultural curriculum that introduces diversity to them, simultaneously allowing them to be who they want to be.



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