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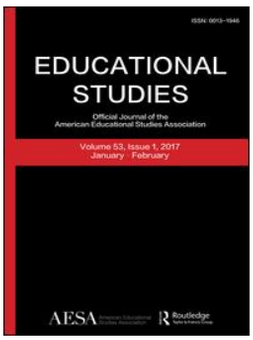

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Education for Syrian Refugees: The New Global Issue Facing Teachers and Principals in Turkey

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This study addresses the educational status and needs of Syrian school-age children at Turkish public schools and the perspectives of teachers and school principals who work with Syrian refugee students. Data was collected from an ongoing qualitative interpretive case study research project using semistructured interviews with teachers and principals who worked with Syrian refugees in 2 inner-city elementary schools in Istanbul, Turkey. The findings of this study indicate that state schools provide many Syrian children with access to education that addresses the needs and challenges associated with the refugee school-age children. For example, Syrian children are thought to have rights identical to Turkish children regarding access to a free education in the Turkish public school setting, and the government has allowed Syrian students to enroll in universities without examinations or without having to show proof that they had attended universities in Syria. However, language barriers with respect to speaking and understanding Turkish must be mitigated to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish culture. The results of the study also indicate that Syrian students are in a constant state of depression and trauma due to war and migration. Because of language-related issues and limited access to everyday necessities, Syrian children are often in need of comprehensive psychological support. Thus, this study recommends that teachers and principals participate in professional training and development programs to be able to provide psychological support to students.

THE CONTEXT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Conflict in March 2011, millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their home country. The conflict initially generated a tidal wave of internal migration within Syria, mostly toward the Turkish border (Balkan & Tumen, 2016; The Guardian, 2015). The first wave of 30,000 Syrian refugees fled to Turkey in 2012, but by the

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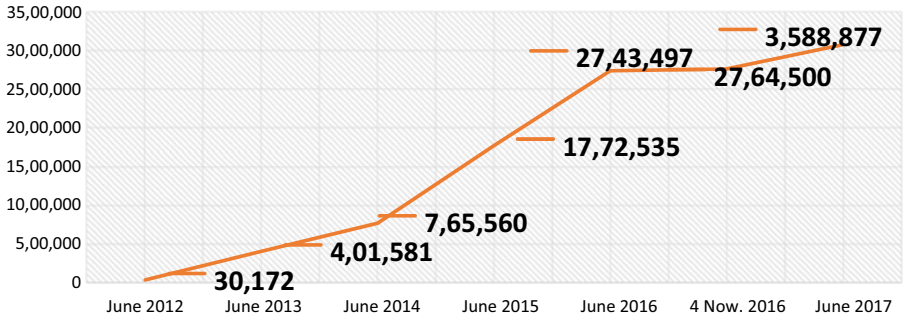

Figure 1. Number of Registered Syrian Refugees in Turkey (2012-2017). *Source:* UNHCR (2018)- Registered Syrian Refugees in Turkey.

middle of 2017, Turkey had resettled more than three million Syrian refugees (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017).

The scale of the flight of Syrians from their homeland has reached staggering proportions. By April of 2018, around 3.58 million Syrians had officially registered in Turkey, which represents approximately 3.6% of Turkey's total population. Approximately half of the arrivals are school-age children. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), Turkey has allowed the children of Syrian refugees to attend Turkish public schools: Just more than 212,000 of children are now enrolled at the primary and secondary level schools. Although estimates report that 90% of the children living in 22 refugee camps with their families near the Syria-Turkey border are enrolled in schools, most refugees live outside the official camps. In the unofficial camps, only about 25% of school-age children have been registered. In 2017, the UNHCR reported that 40% of Syrian refugee children are not attending school. Although enrollment is higher in camps than urban areas, about 500,000 refugee children have not been enrolled in any school. The number of Syrian children enrolled in temporary education centers (TECs) rose to almost 500,000 in 2016, but the Turkish government has not accredited the schools due to the low quality of teaching, compared to the public schools. The presumed low quality is mostly attributed to the fact that TECs offer instruction in Arabic and are staffed by volunteer teachers who have a limited training as teaching professionals. In addition to that, 230 Syrian-run schools are present in 19 Turkish provinces, with only Arabic-oriented curriculum and teaching conducted by Syrian teachers who have also been displaced due to the war. However, most of the schools are burdened by financial problems, have limited resources, and include many untrained teachers. Although several initiatives have been established in Turkey to attend to the needs of children, they are insufficiently implemented to address the needs of the children. Syrian students in Turkey are suffering not only from being displaced, but also from disrupted schooling; many students have gone anywhere from 2 to 4 years without being enrolled in any schools (Dorman, 2014; Karam Foundation, 2016). Unfortunately, according to the ECHO (2016) report, Syrian children who have not received any form of education remain at risk of becoming a lost generation.

Educational authorities face a conundrum. On the one hand, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE; 2013) has indicated that Syrian refugees can access formal education, which offers a modified version of the Syrian curriculum in Arabic in the camps via the national school system or through the TECs established in urban areas. TECs, which are supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have become "transitional education centers," as the Turkish MoNE plans to integrate all Syrians into Turkish state schools by 2020 (Qaddour, 2017). On the other hand, placing many children within existing education facilities in the southeast of Turkey is difficult, due to limited financial support and limited volunteer teachers in TECs. In addition, according to the Karam Foundation's 2016 report for the 2014-2015 academic year, Syrian refugee enrollment in the Turkish public-school system represented only 0.22% of the total in-school population in Turkey. Syrian refugee enrollment numbers in Turkish public schools remain extremely low for several reasons, primarily due to the language barrier or the struggles related to enrolling in schooling due to the need for a residency permit, which can only be obtained via a lengthy residency permit application (Aydin & Cinkaya, 2018; Damgaci & Aydin, 2018; Yigit & Tatch, 2017).

To provide the refugee children with an education, international engagement or support is needed. For example, the European Union, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Turkish government must work together to provide the additional financial support required to upscale the provision of educational services for Syrian children specifically in urban areas. Without the sufficient support and limited international collaboration, the responsibility for large movements of refugees will neither be properly shared in the country, nor will the children have access to quality learning opportunities. Researchers have highlighted how the teaching of Turkish needs to be a significant part of the children's education: a topic that remains marginalized (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Balkan & Tumen, 2016; Icduygu, 2015; Karakus, 2018). Although many refugees have learned Turkish due to the establishment of language classes inside and outside camps, progress has proven to be painfully slow and largely unsuccessful, despite many refugees having been resident in Turkey for several years.

One reason for this failure has been that many refugees do not feel the urgency to reach an adequate level of fluency in Turkish because they do not see Turkey as their future home, and desire to return to Syria (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Karam Foundation, 2016). In addition, there is no effort to teach English to Syrian children because the number of English language teachers is severely limited in both public schools and TECs. Research authors on refugee status and schooling (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; McBrien, 2005), cultural integration, and trauma elaboration (Berry, 1996; Castles & Miller, 2003; Robinson, 1999; Silove, 1999) have studied factors that impact the fate of refugees in a host society. These include a desire for ethno-cultural continuity (Berry, 1996), self-segregation (Robinson, 1999), the desire to maintain cultural identity (Castles & Miller, 2003), and the nature of the immigrant's departure (i.e., involuntary or voluntary; Aydin, 2009) among others. Nonetheless, because the conflict may not dissipate for years to come, learning Turkish is vital so that refugees can better adapt to Turkish society (Kanat & Ustun, 2015), and such adaptation only occurs when both cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger society are sought and adequately provided by the host society (Berry, 1996; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

In Turkey, several NGO-led professional development programs, including UNICEF, The World Bank, and the Syrian Education Association, are helping Syrian children with Turkish educational standards and the learning of Turkish (Bryant, 2017; Evin, 2014). The purpose of this training is to help Syrian children who are studying in language training centers and public schooling settings to understand the Turkish school system and to learn Turkish so that they can be better prepared to attend Turkish mainstream schools and can fit into society-at-large (Public Policy & Management Institute [PPMI], 2017).

PATHWAYS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES: ASSIMILATION OR RETURNING HOME

The dilemmas for most Syrian refugees are shaped by the politics regarding when, or if, they will able to return to their homeland. Generally speaking, most refugees fleeing from war hope to return to hearth and home, and many from the Syrian refugee community who are resident in Turkey no doubt desire to return to their villages or cities (Hein, 1993; Van Hear, 2014). If they are unable to return, they are faced with the pressures to assimilate into Turkish society (Alpak et al., 2015; Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Hunter, 2016).

In Turkey, the history of the assimilation of people from ethnic and cultural groups has often been pervasive because successive Turkish governments have sought to assimilate ethnic minorities (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018; UNHCR, 2017). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic was amalgamated from various ethnic groups in 1923 as a nation-state, with ethnic Turks comprising the majority. Because minorities were perceived as an existential threat to the integrity of the state, a Turkification policy was applied systematically, and the rights of minorities have traditionally been suppressed, despite Turkey's obligations under international law to follow international laws (Kaya, 2009).

Consider the case of the Kurds, who have been discriminated against for decades (Aydin, 2012, 2015; Ugurlu, 2014). Levene (1998) has stated that Kurds have had a long history of being oppressed; massacres were perpetrated against them by the Turkish government. The Turkish ruling elite have tried to assimilate Kurds for almost a century and have prohibited their public performance of ethnic identity, language, and cultures, and have engaged in violent conflicts against Kurds (Kaya & Aydin, 2013, 2014). Kurds, who constitute the biggest ethnic minority group in Turkey, were oppressed and stripped of citizenship rights, and Kurds have been discriminated against systematically from the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Levene, 1998).

According to Opengin (2012), "Kurds make up about 20-25% or 15-20 million of Turkey's population of about 77 million, and Kurdish is the de facto second most frequently spoken language after Turkish" (p. 155). However, Arslan (2015) argued that "due to numerous constricting and assimilative policies towards the Kurdish minority, its language was also affected by many bans, such as linguistic and cultural" (p. 2) prohibitions in schools and in public spaces. Kurdish and other minority languages, such as Zazaki, Assyrian, and Arabic, were banned until 2009 in national curriculum (Aydin & Ozfidan, 2014). Today, Kurdish children who enter Turkish schools often do not know what is taking place in schools because they do not speak Turkish at home. International human rights groups have reported that Kurdish

children have been held back because of discrimination against their mother tongue (Faltis, 2014; Ozfidan & Burblaw, 2016; Sezer, 2013). Strict bans on the Kurdish, Arabic, and Assyrians language by Turkish authorities lasted until the 21st century, and some scholars (Hassanpour, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012; Fernandes, 2012; O'Driscoll, 2014; Zeydanlioglu, 2012) have referred to the practices enforced by Turkish authorities as *linguicide* (or linguistic genocide). That is because the policies prohibited the use of the language in many areas of life, including, most importantly, in the educational and political spheres (Akpan, 2018; Damgaci-Koc & Aydin, 2014; Gunay & Aydin, 2015). Inherent in this complex contemporary scenario is the search to overcome decades-long sociocultural structures that have created, among other things, discrimination, exclusion, and subjugation (Carothers & Parfitt, 2017; Ersoy & Ugur, 2015; Ersoy & Deniz, 2016; Fleuri, 2002; Catari, Gomes, & Siqueria, 2017). Several scholars, including Banks (2008), have underlined that, more than ever before, multicultural societies face the challenge of constructing spaces in which to reflect and incorporate a diversity of citizenry, including those who cross borders as refugees and immigrants (Alanay & Aydin, 2016; Aydin, 2009, 2013; Aydin & Damgaci, 2017; Damgaci & Aydin, 2013a,b; Kayaalp, 2016; Raza, 2018). One of those spaces is the educational system.

For Syrian refugee school-age children, organized violence and immigration have been critical parts of their life experiences that have led to trauma (Beauregard, Papazian-Zohrabian, & Rousseau, 2017; Rousseau & Toby, 2007), which, in turn, has influenced how they construct their collective identities and seek possibilities to adopt in the host society (Berry, 1996). Governmental organizations and public schools should consider these specific experiences in developing meaningful processes for either integration or for preparing them to return home (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). This is a vital factor for the well-being of refugee students because some research has found that most Syrian refugees are unwilling to return their home country (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Kadi, 2018). Along this line, the International Crisis Group Report (2016) recommended that it is essential to give Syrians a long-term perspective in some form, with clearly defined steps and conditions for meaningful integration in education, the labor market and social life.

Turkey is now *home* for Syrians who have left their home country due to the ongoing civil war, and Turkey is attempting to achieve the daunting task of hosting Syrian refugees and establishing clinics and schools to meet the needs of Syrian refugees (Ozden, 2013). Help for refugees requires more than mere measures to save their lives. According to Icduygu (2015), Turkey needs to take steps to improve its asylum and admission systems. Although the Turkish government is welcoming, they must provide inclusive classrooms and a sense of belonging, which can be particularly poignant for refugees who have been displaced from their homes (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Kirisci, 2014). Refugee communities may have lived for lengthy periods as interim residents in societies in which they have not been given citizenship or rights (Hayward, 2017).

Turkey has no previous experience or program designed to educate and integrate migrants or refugees (Icduygu, 2015). The ICG (2016) report argued that Turkey's temporary protection regime is unsustainable, given the conflicts on the country's borders. Thus, a constructive national dialog on refugee integration and an inclusive definition of citizenship is needed

(Ager & Strang, 2008; Wilder et al., 2017). The Turkish government should devise and implement a coordinated strategy that accounts for interests and concerns of multiple stakeholders for Syrians. Thus, Turkey must seriously consider making Syrian refugees feel comfortable in society; otherwise, the situation will be problematic in the future, much like that which the Kurds and other ethnic minorities have faced in the past (Kirisci, 2014).

To address this issue, this study explored the educational status of Syrian refugees in Turkish schools with respect to the interpretation provided by teachers and school principals. It sought to document the needs and challenges of Syrian refugee students with reference to the Turkish government's ongoing program and integration process for refugee children. In this context, answers for the following research questions were sought:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers and principals about the needs and challenges of Syrian refugee children?
2. What are the perspectives of teachers and school principals about Syrian refugee students and the need for cultural integration?

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a qualitative case study method for data collection (Glesne, 2010; Maxwell, 2005) that emphasized the understanding and interpretation of human perceptions of their actions within a wider system of meanings to which those actions belong (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Karanja, 2010). The "use of a case study method provided an understanding of this real-life phenomenon in depth within a bounded-case context" (Creswell, 2003; Vanderjagt, 2013, p. 21). This study was conducted with a select population of teachers and principals at two inner-city elementary public schools located in Istanbul, an ethnically diverse city in Turkey. Each school had about 300 students total, 30 of whom were Syrian refugees. The grade level of Syrian refugee children ranged from the first-grade level (7 years of age) to the fifth-grade level (13 years of age). Participants in the study worked with Syrian children in regular weekday classrooms, as well as in special Saturday classes that focuses on learning Turkish. Both elementary schools included regular classroom instruction; the schools also offer extensive (free) after-school tutorials, as well as special Saturday classes for Syrian students who needed additional assistance for learning Turkish. The schools were also close to the researchers' home institutions to facilitate data collection.

The bounded case study approach allowed for in-depth insights into the lived experiences of teachers and principals as they described their challenges with Syrian children. The case study design seemed to be the most appropriate approach, considering the fact that the goal was to bring to the forefront the experiences and perceptions of teachers and principals who were working with Syrian refugee children on the ground level. In-depth interviews were followed up with conversations and formal discussions of the needs and challenges and the ways

in which to support and create opportunities for Syrian refugees (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Berring, 2006; Stake, 1995).

Each participant was interviewed in three times from January 2016 to May 2016, and each interview lasted between 45 and 60 min. Kitzinger (1994) and Arslan (2016) argued that interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups because the interaction between participants highlights their view of the world, the language they use about an issue, and their values and beliefs about a situation. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to reevaluate and reconsider their own understanding of their specific experiences (Berg, 2001; as cited in Aydin, 2009). All interviews were recorded using audio devices, and field notes were taken during the interviews, and information discussions to supplement the recordings. Both researchers transcribed all data independently, read, and analyzed the data. The researchers employed a peer-review strategy that utilized two scholars who were experts on the field and who knew Turkish and English. The scholars read all transcriptions and notes, and checked for evidence of the themes and assertions, verifying them with the original data. Finally, a third colleague read through the entire data set and translations to confirm credibility and reliability, as well as to strengthen the accuracy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sample characteristics and recruitment

As shown in Table 1, nine participants (five men and four men), including seven teachers and two principals aged from 39 to 47 ($M = 42.5$) were selected for this study. All participants identified as being Turkish nationals; six of the participants were Turkish descent and three of the participants were of Kurdish descent. All of the participants had been working with Syrian refugees in the greater Istanbul metropolitan area during, or immediately after, the 2015–2016 spring term.

Purposeful sampling was employed to obtain access to information that helped in answering the research questions. Purposeful sampling was selected because this method allowed the

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics

Characteristics		*Number of Participants* (N = 9)	*Percentage (%)*
Gender	Male	5	5.5
	Female	4	4.5
Years of experience	0 to 5	2	2.2
	6 to 10	6	6.6
	10 +	1	1.8
Ethnicity	Turkish	6	6.6
	Kurdish	3	3.4
Educational level	B.A./B.S.	6	6.3
	M.A./M.S.	2	2.2
	PhD. /E. Ed.	1	1.8
Occupation	Teacher	7	7.7
	Principal	2	2.2
Total		**9**	**100**

researchers to select participants who had the potential to provide information regarding the needs of refugee students in school settings (Born & Preston, 2016; Charmaz, 2006; Stake, 2006). Only three principals and 10 teachers were invited to participate in the in-depth individual interviews based on the qualitative nature of the study; however, one principal and three teachers did not meet the criteria for this study. Participants were excluded from participating if they had not been working or if they did not work with Syrian children in their classrooms. Thus, during the time of the research, the teachers and principals were working with Syrian children who were enrolled in the two selected schools. It was imperative that all participants had done so for this method of study to be considered suitable.

The research design incorporated a variety of evidence and used data triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005), including open-ended questions with in-depth semistructured interviews, field notes, and documents to explore deeply the multifaceted social phenomenon that participants faced (Glesne, 2010; Yin, 2011). The instrument of this study included demographic characteristics, such as gender, educational attainment, years of working experiences with Syrian children, and ethnicity, and included 10 open-ended interview questions. Questions were related to the needs and challenges that refugee children faced. After conducting a comprehensive literature search and visiting several refugee camps and schools where Syrian children enrolled, both researchers designed interview and research questions. The further questions raised about the cultural adaption/integration process and what must be done for refugee children in the future. It also sought recommendations to be submitted to policy-makers.

Data collection and analysis

The study obtained institutional review board (IRB) approval from the second author's affiliation, Yildiz Technical University, and the school district in Istanbul, Turkey also approved the study. However, due to tensions resulting from the political nature of Turkey, the IRB approval 8 eight months.

Turkey's Ministry of Interior has informed academics that "they need prior approval before conducting research on Syrian refugees living in the country." In a directive dated April 10, 2015 and classified as "secret," the Higher Education Council told teaching staff across Turkish universities that, per the ministry's decision, they would need permission from "relevant ministries" before conducting any type of survey or fieldwork among Turkey's two million Syrian refugees. The ostensible reason behind the decision is to protect the refugees' privacy" (Kayaoglu, 2015, Para 1). Although we had IRB approval and permission from the school district, some teachers and principals did not want to participate in the study because of government restrictions.

Appropriate permission was obtained from the participants in writing to authorize the audio recording of the interviews. The information sheet on the research contained a brief description of the study, the rights of the participants, information about confidentiality, an explanation of risks and potential discomfort, and an opportunity to decline participation. All interactions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a systematic inductive approach

(Patton, 2002) to discover overarching findings emerging from the data. In addition, using MAXQDA 12 software, we created a database for all interviews, field notes, and documents before disassembling data by using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 2009; as cited in Haines, 2015) to create level one codes upon entry into the database. The key parts of data that supported each code in MAXQDA were highlighted to generate a chain of evidence. After that a *peer-review* strategy was employed (Johnson, 1997), during which four doctoral students and three faculty members independently read and analyzed the interview transcripts, checking for evidence of the quotations and assertions, and verified them with the original data.

RESEARCHERS' POSITIONING

Although this study was designed to gain insights into the experiences of teachers and principals, we often wondered about ways to bring awareness to the needs and challenges that Syrian children faced in state schools. As researchers who work on issues of cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and multilingual education, we designed this study to bring attention to the long-lasting struggle of Syrian children in Turkish state schools. The conceptual framework was founded on a simple notion: refugees' identities are being transformed as they integrate into a new culture (Jarrah, 2018).

As a qualitative study is incomplete without situating the researcher, a process of self-description is necessary to either enable the identification of potential subjectivities or to enable a bracketing out of the self (Thomas, 2018). Although both researchers had expertise on multiculturalism, cultural integration, and conducting research on Syrian refuges gained through several years of study, both were Turkish citizens and could have had an insider perspective that might be biased. To lessen biases, to reach a more balanced analysis and interpretation of data, and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being investigated, triangulation was used.

The study had several limitations. First, the data were collected from a small sample within qualitative research design; thus, research needs to be conducted on a larger population from a survey design for future studies. Second, the participants interviewed were either directly involved with or appointed by the National Ministry of Education. Clearly, this meant that they were less inclined to be critical about the government and policymakers. Third, many public schools in Istanbul have Syrian children enrolled, but the sample of this study comprised only two elementary schools. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized with respect to the needs and challenges of Syrian refugee children across all of Turkey. Thus, a need exists for more studies, especially with large quantitative data sets, that investigate the needs of Syrian refugee children and the challenges they face so that educators can help with short-term and long-term solutions for children's cultural adaption/integration in Turkish society.

This study used inductive analysis to examine the data from the interviews and discussions with teachers and school principals who work with Syrian children. The audiotape recordings of the interviews were transcribed using word processing software. Once the transcription was

complete, the text was read in detail so that the researchers could gain an understanding of the content and become familiar with the emerging findings. Appropriate quotations that expressed core findings were selected (Stake, 1995).

Teachers' and principals' voices for the needs and challenges for Syrian refugees

The analysis of transcripts of interviews with participants demonstrated that participants displayed a positive attitude toward Syrian students and noted that students' major challenges included facing barriers to being admitted to public schools and needing psychological support systems. Syrian refugee children are often profoundly traumatized and in need of comprehensive psychological support. For the students who have been enrolled in Turkish public schools, much of the responsibility for managing these concerns falls on school administrators, school counselors, and classroom teachers, pointing to an urgent need to prepare them to cope with the growing crisis. Several studies have indicated that Syrian refugees carry with them memories of untold trauma and, thus, have many special needs. Syrian children will likely need ongoing, targeted support to bridge the gaps in their education, attain fluency in the receiving country language, and deal with trauma and other mental health symptoms (Qaddour, 2017; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Participants emphasized that Syrians in Turkey need psychological support, but access to this support is also limited. All participants in both schools said the students are not receiving psychological counseling, suggesting either a lack of the services or a lack of information about whether the services are available.

Although the Ministry of National Education has policies to help and educate Syrian children, they have not provided any curriculum or specific program to the public schools for Syrian children. The delivery of education to the students is left to the discretion of teachers and school principals. As of the second term in spring 2015-2016, the Directorate of National Education in Istanbul informed schools that, if they wished, they could offer Turkish courses to Syrian students and ask for help from TECs in this regard. However, some schools are unable to respond to the needs due to the overcapacity of schools, including not being able to enroll students because of the lack of teacher expertise. At both schools where the study was conducted, a Turkish teacher was tasked with offering two additional class hours of Turkish instruction to Syrian students weekly starting at the end of January. A female teacher expressed her opinion of this program, saying "Our school also offers extra Turkish classes. I believe this might be beneficial." Several teachers' voluntarily offered Turkish language classes after school program, which helps students to learn the Turkish language and understand their assignments.

Public schools do not offer any special regulations or programs in their curricula or education system mandated by the Ministry of Education to help Syrian students or to facilitate their educational experiences. However, the teachers and school principals interviewed expressed very positive attitudes toward the students and tried to support the education of Syrians students within their means. A male teacher expressed his desire for better understanding of and support for Syrian students as follows:

> I went to an Arabic course for a while. I started this year in September. I tried to follow an Arabic educational program that was focused on speaking. Because I had a 7th-grade student. He wrote essays which started in Turkish and continued in Arabic. He cannot write in Turkish. But that child has opinions that he wants to convey. Just because of the language problem, he will not be able to express his ideas. Since I did not deem it right, I tried to learn Arabic at least to understand that student's text. Of course, this is hard. I will learn a language from scratch and try to talk to the children. This is something hard.

The previously noted quotation illustrates that the Turkish male teacher voluntarily takes courses to learn Arabic so that he can understand Syrian children writings and help those enrolled in his class who faced challenges in Turkish.

Another male teacher also registered for an Arabic-language course to be able to communicate with the Syrian students and help them in class and he stated that to help the Syrian students he teaches them Turkish by voluntarily organizing Turkish reading activities in his spare time.

> Other than that, I conducted reading and writing activities with my students. In the first term, I allocated two hours after classes on Mondays. I did reading activities especially with the students who spoke no Turkish. I tried to show them the meaning of the words in the passage and how many different meanings a word might have in a passage.

A female teacher summarized what she did to help Syrian students as follows:

> Well, in math, the beginning of a topic is generally easy. For example, if you are teaching fractions, you talk about what a simple fraction is. The Syrian student more or less understands that definition because he has some command of Turkish. When I ask which one is a simple fraction, he raises his hand. Then we move to the next step. For example, when we move to ordering, he cannot do anything. At the beginning of the topics, for very easy topics, we encourage them answer the questions. … Well, generally I guide them in such simple questions to increase their self-confidence. They then become eager. Then, of course, I do not ask them difficult questions. If they cannot answer a question a couple of times, such students shy away from participation. We offer such kinds of encouragement.

Another female teacher summarized how she changed her style of teaching especially for Syrian students.

> I started taking notes on the blackboard. This means I generally try to teach by taking notes. I rarely get students to write what I say. I know that Syrian students either miss what I say or cannot write it. So, I definitely write on the blackboard. I teach the class, and then I write on the blackboard and then I get them write in their notebook [to give more time to write in their notebook]. I teach my classes in this way. This is because there are at least three Syrians in every class.

It is obvious that teachers tried to help the Syrian students and support them with solutions that they created themselves. Indeed, the teachers spent more time in summarizing their teaching and writing on the backboard so that Syrian children could write their notebooks, which takes more time. Another male teacher stated that:

> There is a student who does not participate in class at all. However, when I ask questions to him he does not understand me. That student does not speak any Turkish. To be more precise, he knows very little Turkish. I know that he will be embarrassed when I ask him a question in class. Therefore, I try not to ask (him) questions. When I give students homework, the homework he brings is not real homework. In fact, it is awful. But I praise him by saying he did well. I do not want him to feel embarrassed or depressed. He is already alienated. He has an internalized feeling of alienation. In order not for him to further strengthen this feeling, we treat him like this.

All participants who took part in this study empathized with the situation that Syrian students are in and tried to understand those students. A female teacher remarked that:

> But, of course, it is very positive that after coming from another country and not knowing Turkish, they are in such condition. I believe they could have had much bigger troubles. For example, if I went to another country, I would have experienced more problems.

A male teacher expressed his opinions on Syrian students as follows. He said, "They do not exhibit 'behavioral' problems now. They are already victims. In other words, they are unhappy [because displaced in their homeland and mental health distress]."

Teachers offered positive suggestions to increase the enthusiasm of Syrian students and to encourage them to attend classroom activities. Because Syrian children respond to diverse life experiences and new environment in Turkish classroom, Turkish teachers try to respond and address students' emotional behaviors. A female teacher remarked that:

> Or, when I look at her notebook, I say well done. Also, guidance is very important for them. For example, I ask a question. Then they solve and bring their answers to me. Even though they give an unrelated answer, we encourage them in class by saying that they started in the right way but need to make some changes.

The teachers were aware of the disadvantaged position of Syrian students due to their being in a different country and being taught in a language they either did not know or had not mastered. Thus, they did not hold them to the same academic performance expectations as they did for Turkish students, and they treated Syrians with more tolerance. Teachers tried to answer their questions in class, let them talk when they raised their hands, and help them in exams. They also graded their exams more flexibly to support the students. A female teacher stated that:

> For example, firstly, if there is an activity, I first let them talk. Secondly, if he raises his hand, when I ask a question, I let him talk without hesitation. Sometimes, I do not let them talk first though, because other students protest that I always let Syrians talk. Thus, I definitely allow them to contribute as the second or third person to answer the question. I give them the floor to talk.

The results of informal conversations paralleled the previously noted statements. In both classrooms where the interviews took place, participants mentioned that when Syrian students raised their hands, teachers tried to get them to talk.

Academic performance of Syrian students

Participants also emphasized the academic performance of the Syrian children in their classrooms. For instance, a female teacher stated that she did not expect the same level of academic performance from Syrian students and that teachers try to help them to pass their classes.

> We do not expect a high academic performance. For some children, we only want them to integrate, overcome their language problem and that is it. We do not fail them. They manage to score 45 in one way or another. They give few answers. However, we complement their grades with oral exams, etc., so as not to fail them.

Research has also shown that academic performance is based heavily on student-teacher interactions in the classroom (Graetz, 1995). In this study, a male teacher stated that he was more tolerant when grading Syrian students, and he did not expect from them what he expected from other students.

> I look at whether they took regular notes or whether they did the homework or wrote in their notebook. I do not go into much detail. I do not look at whether they write very well or bad. I look at whether they did what I wanted. I consider that enough. This means we do not expect from Syrian students the same level of academic performance that we expect from others.

Because no Ministry of National Education regulations exist regarding the assessment of Syrian refugees, teachers did not know what to do in this regard. Some teachers administered the same exams to all students without making any specific changes for Syrian students while others distributed special exams for Syrians students so as not to disadvantage them in their language learning and transition processes, and to keep them connected to classes. A male teacher remarked that:

> Unfortunately, we use the same criteria. However, I approached the dilemma like this. I gave an exam. If the Syrians students, the ones who I thought could do it, got very low scores then I canceled the exam because the questions were mostly comprehension questions. The exams consisted of mainly understanding and comprehension questions. These questions are harder for them. I try to assess students based on more grammar-based questions. This is much easier for them. They do not have trouble with questions that feature mathematical elements. This means, they can find an adjective, and adverb, or a possessive construction. However, they have trouble finding natural meaning or the main idea or topic of a text. When I prepare questions, I take the needs of the students into consideration. That means, in our exams, normally grammar accounts for 30% of the exam. However, I increased the share of grammar up to 60% so that Syrian students can receive good grades.

A female teacher noted that Syrian students did better on tests than on written exams, and she organizes her exams taking this factor into consideration. Teachers put much effort into preparing different types of exams, one for Turkish students and another for Syrian children. The test for Syrian children included more grammatical questions than comprehensive questions so that Syrian children could score better on mathematics and science lessons.

> At the beginning of the term, I approached examination preparation like this. I told them to tell me the topics they had learned well, and I would prepare an exam for them based on those topics. They told me the topics. I prepared a regular written exam. That was a classic exam with short answers. They said they could not write and preferred a text. Then we went back to the type of exam I normally administer. It was a multiple-choice test with many topics. Syrian students read, understand, but cannot write or cannot write fully and that's why they fail. I give them more time. I also give them break time.

Syrian children had difficulties in most of subjects in school, specifically; Turkish, math, and science courses due to lack of Turkish proficiency and they are not able to follow courses, therefore, their academic performance suffers. However, teachers try to give more time for tests in class and give extra support on Syrian children to help them to be succeed in academically.

Another issue related Syrian children in school was Turkish students' negative behaviors to their Syrian-peers in school. The interviews showed that Turkish students often treated Syrian students negatively from time to time, but school principals and teachers did not tolerate the behavior. The teachers tried to discourage students from such kinds of behavior and supported Syrian students in this matter. To overcome this issue, school administrators met with the parents of Turkish students and asked them to speak with their children so that their children would deal with Syrian children in a friendly and welcoming manner in their classes. After a while, the interactions between Turkish and Syrian student got much better and Turkish students engaged in positive behaviors with their Syrian peers. A male teacher made the following remark;

> The wider debates in Turkish society regarding immigration have spread to classrooms. This means there is an antipathy towards Syrians. This antipathy is reflected in the children's attitudes and behavior. There was a commonly used word when I started my classes—"Arab student." I tried hard to discourage this phrase. Now it is used less frequently. When the phrase "Arab student" is used, it is used to alienate Syrian students. Since this disturbed me, I have refrained from using that word and have tried to solve problems using alternative words.

Although some Turkish students demonstrated discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes toward Syrian students, partly because of what was being said in their family and environment, in general Turkish students supported Syrian students in a positive manner. A male teacher's remarks on this issue are as follows:

> Our children, our students do not exclude them. At least, I saw that. They did not disregard them. They helped Syrian students, whatever they needed. They supported them with every issue [to integrate into society]. Let me give an example, at least, when they are playing with their peers, they include them in their teams and games. For example, children are a little bit mean in this sense. They generally want to play with their friends but I observed that, in physical education classes or in-class activities when we have group work, they include Syrian students.

A female teacher stated that Turkish students embraced Syrian students and tried to help them. Turkish students helped Syrian children to become involved in games and social activities to integrate the school environment and community.

> As far as girls in my classes are concerned, there is help based more on affection. For example, I have a Syrian girl in my class. Although she speaks very little Turkish, the class embraced her. For example, she does not understand; she cannot write. Other students give her their notebooks and try to help her in exams. That means that they really help her. Sometimes when she does not understand me, one of the students from the eastern regions who knows a little bit of Arabic tries to translate what I say. They include her in the games and do not trouble her.

Evidence supporting this situation was gathered in informal conversation and discussion with the participants. When the teachers asked a question of Syrian students, if they cannot answer it, they try to get help from other students and answer the question. Furthermore, when the Syrian students do not understand what the teacher says, their friends repeated what the teacher has said to help them understand.

Another factor affecting Syrian students' academic performance was that of active participation in class. Depending on their level of Turkish, their class participation differed. The children who did not speak any Turkish were unable to participate in class at all. The children who spoke a little bit of Turkish participated in class a little bit, and those who spoke Turkish to a higher level were able to participate more in classes (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). A male teacher summarized the situation as follows:

> It depends on the student. There are those who are very active but also students who do not participate in class at all. Unfortunately, there are students who do not participate at all. However, when I ask questions to the students, they do not understand me. The students do not speak any Turkish. To be more precise, they know very little Turkish.

The interview results confirmed the remarks of teachers regarding the participation of Syrian students in class. Others have also found that Syrian students whose levels of Turkish proficiency were higher, participated more frequently in class, whereas students who spoke little Turkish almost never participated (Aydin & Kaya, 2017).

The role of family support

Another important finding from the interviews with participants is the importance of the support of the family with respect to the success of Syrian students. Participants noted that students whose families closely monitored them and tried to care for them adapted much more easily and recorded higher academic performance. Factors such as the socioeconomic level of the family and education level of the family were also instrumental. A male teacher stated that: "I find students whose parents pay attention to them and care for them are surprisingly successful. However, if the child comes from an insensitive family who does not help the child, then the child naturally fails."

Another male teacher stated that children of attentive parents were quite successful. He said, "There are parents who are especially attentive. There are parents who are very interested. Some of their children do even better than ours. There are good children."

The analysis of the data shows that participants tried to understand and support Syrian students and demonstrated a positive attitude toward them. Moreover, the data clearly showed

that participants mentioned that family support plays a key role in the education of Syrian students.

The trauma of war: Stress and recovery

The analysis illuminated the difficulties that students encounter. The primary difficulty is that Syrian students who have experienced hardships due to the trauma of war and migration are not provided with the necessary psychological support. Furthermore, research has also shown that refugee children have undergone traumatic experiences that can prevent them from learning. Turkey has no previous experience or program designed to educate and integrate migrants or refugees (Alpak et al., 2015; Aydin & Kaya, 2017). The findings of the study indicate that Syrian students are in a constant state of depression and trauma due to what they have faced because of war and forced displacement. The general voice of participants emphasized that the Syrian children miss their country, are afraid of loud noises, avoid talking about the past, and lack trust and self-confidence. Bourgonje (2010) stated that psychological problems, physical pain and illnesses, malnutrition, and the economic difficulties that Syrian children experience affect their education negatively. This causes children not to trust anyone, including their teachers, and to become afraid of them (McBrien, 2005). For example, one school principal said that "Syrian children have been traumatized … due to war and lost their parents and relatives, and they are grown children, but they are not tough children, and it was scary for them."

Syrian children experience the problems of leaving a war zone and losing their family members, as well as being away from their country and living in a foreign land. A female teacher stated that a Syrian girl was affected by what she had experienced and, at first, cried all the time and later stopped coming to school.

> She had a very difficult time at the beginning of the school year. She cried all the time. She cried all the way to school, in school queues, and ceremonies. She said she missed her country, her relatives, her friends, and her life there. She is better now, but now she plays truant; she does not wish to come to school.

Another male teacher emphasized the following:

> A more traumatic thing is that these children have been witnesses to war and destruction. Now we ignore these issues. We ignore this part of the children's psyche. There are some traumas that these experiences bring. Because these children express these traumas through the attitude they manifest in their relations with their classmates. This is because they are victims of war, and they live in a foreign country.

The school principal made the following remark:

> They all have experienced trauma. They need serious help. There is nothing we can do in that field. I am just a teacher. We, of course, receive some training on this topic but this is definitely

> not something we can offer specialist help with. There are children who need help. In particular, help is needed for those who are suffering as a result of the effects of the trauma, etc.

Aligning with the school principal's comments, Human Rights Watch (2015) also reported an event that had happened in a Turkish school.

> Halime's 11-year-old daughter attended classes in the 5th grade until one of the school staff slapped the girl in the face because she was in the schoolyard when she was supposed to be in class. She never came back to school after that day. A nongovernmental organization tried to mediate and arranged for a discussion with the director, but she was so traumatized and uncomfortable and afraid, she refused to go back. [para 2]

Addressing Syrian children's psychological problems also must become a priority (Hassan, Ventevogel, Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo, & Kirmayer, 2016). Having lived through war, many suffer from serious shock and the aftermath of traumatic events for which teachers and school social workers need training to treat (Tarman, 2018). To help refugee children overcome these obstacles, the Turkish government must provide Syrian children proper psychological assistance is critical (Birman, 2006.). Often, many years are required to overcome stress disorders after traumatic events; the signs of stress disorders can be observed in migrant children even after a period of 10 years has passed (Hos, 2012). Children need the support of their teachers and families to overcome the difficulties. To determine the emotional and psychological problems children experience, educators and families must pay attention to their behaviors (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Ayoub, 2014). Most teachers are not trained experts when it comes to offering psychological assistance to students, and ensuring that children who have experienced trauma receive expert psychological help is vital (Bourgonje, 2010). The positive and supportive attitudes of teachers, principals, and Turkish students will also help their Syrian peers at public schools in Turkey adapt to the situation and will contribute to the successful adaptation of Syrian students in the social context.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results show that the two Turkish state schools in Istanbul provided many Syrian children in Istanbul with access to education and a welcoming and secure learning environment. However, the school conditions (which are linked to the limited capacities of teachers and the shortage of sufficiently trained teachers able to instruct refugees), inadequate resources, and inappropriate curriculum planning have impeded the provision of high-quality education (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Aydin, Gundogdu & Akgul, 2019). Syrian refugee students attending Turkish schools are restricted in the quality of their learning experiences by language barriers, challenges such as their psychosocial/emotional/mental states, and the limited ability of the Turkish MoNE to monitor and support them in schools (Icduygu, 2015). In addition, the results indicate that all participants said that language is the main problem Syrian students are facing in public schools in Turkey. Due to their lack of Turkish-language proficiency, they are unable to follow along in classes and their academic performance therefore suffers. A

study on refugees conducted in the United States had a similar result, indicating that language barriers for refugee students lead to struggles in accessing educational opportunities and integrating into the dominant society (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). In addition, another study found that the Turkish language has been one barrier for Syrian students in their cultural integration and buy-in from Syrian communities demonstrates how language can have an impact on inclusion (Qaddour, 2017).

Despite positive national legislation and practices, refugee enrollment in formal and higher education programs remains low (UNHCR, 2016). A lack of knowledge of educational options available to refugees, the prioritization of spending on necessities over education, and the dependence on children to contribute to household income are all barriers. Moreover, Icduygu and Simsek (2016) have argued that Syrian refugees had difficulties enrolling their children in the public school setting system, mainly because of a lack of any clear regulations articulating the formal procedures for the enrollment of the students. Hayward (2017) argued that language proficiency remains an obstacle to enrollment in Turkish schools/universities, as does the fear of social exclusion and harassment. Language proficiency also limits participation in the MoNE's skill-building courses (UNCHR, 2017). On the other hand, according to an *Associated Press* report (2015), the Syrian refugees in Turkey can speak Turkish well enough to pass the language proficiency test required for entry at state universities.

The demand for schooling remains high; unfortunately, the number of places in TECs and national schools does not match the demand in many provinces, with many schools operating close to capacity. In addition, skill-building and language courses are only attended by a fraction of the refugee youth. Nielsen and Grey (2012) indicated that teenage students in the camps generally do not have access to the secondary schooling that would help them enter universities in Turkey. Nielsen and Grey (2012) argued that the problem of access is a critical challenge for Syrian education in Turkey as is determining what to do with the growing number of Syrian teenagers who need to finish their high school studies at accredited schools to compete for places at universities in Turkey. Indeed, one source of tension between Syrian parents and the Turkish authorities has been the Syrian demand for special classes for advanced students whose preparations for university entrance exams were interrupted by the war in Syria.

Making a solution more difficult, the Turkish government has made it possible for Syrians to register at Turkish state universities in 2017 without taking highly competitive entrance exams or submitting papers to prove that they had finished high school. A current study also indicated that the Turkish government offered to register 30,000 university-age students without exams; however, only approximately 6,500 students registered in universities (Bonessi, 2016). Regardless of this admission policy, language remains a big obstacle because all state universities courses are run in Turkish. Although several private universities offer courses entirely in English, Syrian refugees typically cannot pay university fees, which are very high. Additionally, a lack of awareness of available services remains a barrier to participation as does an insufficient civil society capacity to meet those demands (Aydin & Kaya, 2017).

Overall, the performance of Syrian refugee children has been lower than that of their peers, and several previous studies have examined this issue. Generally, refugee and migrant students have trouble understanding the material presented in their classes, and their language

training is insufficient for specific tasks (Ceyhan & Kocbas, 2011; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010). The lack of language has been seen as the main barrier preventing their integration into a country's educational systems and society (Oikonomidoy, 2010). The results in our study on Syrian refugee students in Turkey aligns with the findings of previous research (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; UNCHR, 2015) in that Syrian refugee children struggle to make sense of lessons taught in Turkish or Arabic, which are dual languages of instruction in some Turkish schools.

The delivery of education to the students is left to the discretion of teachers and school principals. The Directorate of National Education in Istanbul has informed schools that, if they wished, they could offer Turkish courses to Syrian students and asked for help from Public Education Centers in this regard. However, some schools cannot do anything due to their physical conditions, financial issues, and lack of trained teachers.

Print (1993) highlighted that, when teachers employ a learner-centered approach that primarily focuses on the individual student, rather than a body of subject matter, and when they are cognizant of the refugee experience as well as trauma triggers, then they can recognize changes in the emotional well-being of individuals and will have a higher likelihood of being able to intuitively respond in an appropriate manner (as cited in Hayward, 2017). Print (1993) further stressed that teachers and school principals who deal with refugee children must be trained and informed regarding trauma, the refugee journey, and the circumstances that call for a referral to trained mental health or clinical professionals; however, they also should not underestimate the importance of their own relationship with refugee background learners, which can be a respectful, affirming, and trusting one.

Our research findings indicate that participants stated that another critical challenge facing Syrian students are the fluctuations in their emotional/psychosocial/mental/academic states because of war and migration. Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) pointed out Syrian children had experienced very high levels of trauma. For instance, “79 percent had experienced a death in the family; 60 percent had seen someone get kicked, shot at, or physically hurt; and 30 percent had themselves been kicked, shot at, or physically hurt” (p. 5). Most students at the two schools in which the study was conducted had migrated with their families and had experienced severe degrees of trauma. They had experienced problems associated with leaving a war zone, being away from their home country, living in a foreign country, and the accompanying challenges of the effects of the displacement trauma. Because most of the children have not attended school for more than 2 years, authorities and the public schools need to address mental and psychological assistance to resolve the challenges face by displaced youth (Kirisci, 2014).

Support for programs has been mixed. Public schools cannot offer any programs not provided by the Ministry of National Education for Syrian students. Because no specifically developed curriculum or program exists for Syrian children, teachers and principals are struggling to deal with Syrian children. For example, UNICEF strongly urged the Turkish government to develop programs to protect Syrian children and ensure their right to go to school. The Turkish MoNE declined to comment on the issue (Bonessi, 2016). On the other hand, UNICEF is providing incentives to Syrian voluntary teachers and training them on pedagogical techniques, classroom management, and psycho-social support.

Even though Syrian families opt to enroll their children in TECs because the students attending the centers share the same culture and language, challenges still exist (Icduygu & Simsek, 2016). The trauma that the migrant children have experienced interferes with their learning. This causes children not to trust anyone, including their teachers, and to become afraid of them (McBrien, 2005).

The participants in this study exhibited quite positive attitudes toward Syrian students and did their best to improve the academic performance of Syrian students. Nonetheless, Syrian refugee students remain at risk in Turkey. According to Alpak et al. (2015), refugees are frequently exposed to a variety of stressors such as socioeconomic disadvantages, poverty, changes in family structure and functioning, the loss of social support, difficulty in accessing education, living in very crowded places, problems caused by cultural differences, and isolation (Burnett & Peel 2001; Kayaalp, 2015; Porter & Haslam 2005).

In addition, Kirisci (2014) argued that the decision to teach Turkish or to teach in Turkish, for that matter, is a difficult one that is accompanied by many cultural, legal, political, and societal consequences. Failure to provide education in Turkish, however, could create impede youth's desire to understand or integrate into the Turkish society. He further argued that the greater challenge concerns the actual content and substance of the curriculum. Syria and Turkey are vastly different countries with significant cultural, societal, and historical differences that are inevitably reflected in their educational systems and curricula. For example, although older boys and girls study in sex-segregated government schools in Syria, boys and girls study together in Turkey. Such differences mean that children who receive an education based on the Syrian curriculum are less likely to easily adapt and function in a Turkish society. Additionally, Icduygu (2015) stated that Turkey is not a country possessing unlimited resources and faces its own economic, political, social, and cultural challenges. Thus, a critical debate concerns developing a workable framework to integrating Syrian refugees into Turkish society considering the rising xenophobia in Turkey as demonstrated by the shifting language of "Syrians are our guests" to hurling discriminations and seeing Syrians as outsiders (Asik, 2017).

The findings of this study lead to several recommendations.

1. More research is needed to determine what might help reduce barriers to learning.
2. More funding and training in Turkish are needed for Syrian children at schools.
3. Access to Turkish public schools should be expanded for Syrian children via carefully designed policies.
4. Coordinated curriculum standards on a regional level should be developed as a strategy to prepare Syrian children and should include two scenarios: (a) returning to life in Syria or (b) integrating into the host society. The International Crisis Group (2016) emphasized that Syrians must be given a long-term perspective in some form, with clearly defined steps and conditions for meaningful integration into education, the labor market, and social life. The Turkish government must conduct a constructive national dialog on refugee integration and a more inclusive definition of citizenship.

5. Regardless of citizenship, targeted integration policies with clearly defined legal steps incentivizing the transition from temporary to permanent legal status are needed. This might prove difficult because a seminal 2014 survey of approximately 1,000 Turkish citizens underscored the barriers to integration. More than 80% of respondents opposed citizenship and roughly 70% wanted more restrictive policies, even to the extent of sending Syrians home (International Crisis Group, 2016).
6. Programs on the national scale should be developed to better prepare schools and teachers to address the psychosocial needs of refugee children and schools should also prioritize the hiring of more psychologists and the training of community workers to help provide support and identify targeted psychological support needs.
7. Tutoring in both Arabic and Turkish would allow for a smoother transition to the public schools that teach the national curriculum, and strategic support should be provided to help teachers with refugees in their classrooms.
8. Against this history and philosophical background, the Turkish government must develop new concepts and strategies that can address the many issues related to the humane treatment of Syrian refugees, including the ultimate possibility of their cultural, linguistic, and religious integration into Turkish society. Integration is complex on many levels, and psychological support is necessary, specifically for school-age children. Therefore, teachers, principals, and staff members should be trained how to support and help children on mental and psychological support. Addressing Syrian children's psychological problems must become a priority for Turkish authorities and educators, thus, schools need to hire trained teachers and social workers to treat Syrian children who suffer from serious shock and trauma.

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