



TURKEY'S RESILIENCE-  
BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR  
SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE  
FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Zelal Başak Kızıllan

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# Turkey's Resilience-Building Strategies for Syrian Refugees in the Field of Higher Education

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## About the Author

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## Abstract

The Syrian civil war has created one of the world's biggest humanitarian and refugee crises, with the political, cultural and social integration of Syrian refugees proving challenging for host countries. In January 2019, 3,628,180 Syrian refugees were under temporary protection in Turkey, with over half of these children and youths. Education is vital for these refugees' integration and building resilience among them. This paper examines Syrian refugees' access to higher education and the ways in which it contributes to their resilience building in Turkey.

Syrian refugees face significant challenges in higher education which in turn negatively affect their social and cultural integration within Turkey. These include psychological and financial problems, language barriers and complicated admission procedures. Syrian refugees' integration within Turkish higher education has been given increased attention but remains a low priority in comparison to the provision of basic needs such as housing, employment and health.

In order to improve Syrian refugees' access to higher education, the Turkish government should make state loans available to Syrian students. Universities should also improve the provision of Turkish language courses for Syrian students. The Turkish government and civil society organisations should provide them with psychological support. Further, the Turkish government should help Syrians enter the labour market after graduation, in particular through easing restrictions on work permits.

## Introduction

Close to nine years have passed since the eruption of the Syrian civil war. The suppression of peaceful demonstrations by the Assad regime resulted in a civil war that has been sustained by the foreign military intervention of countries including the United States and Russia. According to UN data, 5,625,871 Syrians have ‘registered refugee status’ in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Thousands of Syrians have also fled to Europe through risky maritime routes.

Turkey hosts the largest number of registered Syrian refugees. According to the Ministry of Interior, Turkey provides permanent protection to over 3.6 million Syrians.<sup>1</sup> Turkey provides significant support for the development of Syrian refugee ‘resilience’.<sup>2</sup> Resilience is conceptualised as ‘personality traits that help protect against the psychological disorders resulting from exposure to terrifying incidents, such as mass violence or deportation under life-threatening circumstances; it encompasses bouncing back and positive adaptation in the face of safety-challenging experiences’.<sup>3</sup>

This paper addresses the policies and tools that Turkey has adopted to enhance the resilience of Syrian refugee students in higher education. The country’s resilience strategy is used as a starting point to analyse the challenges and opportunities that Syrian students face in accessing and completing university education in Turkey. The paper examines this in three sections: the first introduces the general framework adopted by Turkey to enhance Syrian refugees’ resilience; the second analyses the special measures implemented by the Turkish government to improve the resilience of Syrian students in higher education; and the third explores the challenges and potential outcomes of the Turkish resilience strategy in higher education.

## Turkey’s Strategies to Enhance the Resilience of Asylum Seekers

Large numbers of Syrians made asylum requests in Turkey from April 2011. Initially, the Turkish government implemented an ‘Open Door’ policy for asylum seekers and first started to build refugee camps in the border town of Hatay. In the initial months of the crisis, the Turkish government anticipated that the conflict would be short and that Syrian asylum seekers would return home. For this reason, Turkey provided immediate humanitarian aid to Syrian asylum seekers in the camps rather than taking sustainable, long-lasting measures. However, these short-term solutions were inadequate.

In general terms, there are two basic dimensions to Turkey’s strategy for enhancing Syrian refugees’ resilience. The first is the legal basis that determines the rights of Syrian refugees

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<sup>1</sup> Permanent Protection in Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration. Available at: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> (accessed 3 December 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Dilek Yılmaz Börekçi and Merve Gerçek, ‘Resilience Kavramının Sosyal Bilimlerde Türkçe Kullanımları Bağlamında Değerlendirilmesi’, *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute* (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Judith Arnetz et al., ‘Resilience as a Protective Factor against the Development of Psychopathology among Refugees’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 201, no. 3 (2013).

and the duties of Turkey as the host country. The second focuses on the implementation of these.

Turkey's refugee regime is regulated by the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, which was approved by the United Nations in 1951.<sup>4</sup> Turkey adopted the convention, but limited its application, granting 'refugee' status only to people coming from Europe. Non-Europeans are generally recognised as 'conditional refugees', who have limited rights. Accordingly, Turkey did not consider Syrian asylum seekers as refugees and instead viewed them as 'visitors' at the beginning of the war.

As such, the most important step towards enhancing Syrian asylum seekers' resilience is establishing a legal basis for their long-term permanent protection. In 2013, Turkey adopted a 'Law on the Foreigners and International Protection.'<sup>5</sup> The law was adopted predominantly as a consequence of pressure from the EU to determine the legal status of Syrian asylum seekers.<sup>6</sup> It aligned rights granted to Syrians with international standards by emphasising an effective asylum and management system. The law stipulated the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management<sup>7</sup> with 'the aim of implementing policies and enforcing strategies to deal with migration, performing operations related to foreigners' entry, exit, and deportation from Turkey, as well as matters of international and temporary protection, such as the protection of victims of human trafficking.'<sup>8</sup>

The law also defined various protection procedures such as subsidiary protection, temporary protection, or protection granted to individuals deemed conditional refugees. Syrians are not considered 'conditional refugees',<sup>9</sup> nor as individuals under 'subsidiary

<sup>4</sup> 'The Refugee Convention, 1951'. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Migration Management, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Available at <https://mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.6458.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2019)

<sup>6</sup> See also the discussion on the Turkey-EU migration deal in Mehmet Uğur Ekinci, *Türkiye-Ab Geri Kabul Anlaşması Ve Vize Diyaloğu* (İstanbul: SETA, 2016); Mehmet Güder, 'Türkiye'deki Dış Göç Olgusuna Sosyoekonomik Bir Yaklaşım Ve Avrupa Birliği İle Geri Kabul Antlaşması'nın Olası Etkileri [Socio-Economic Approach to Foreign Migration in Turkey and Possible Effects of Readmission Agreement with the European Union],' *Sosyoekonomi* 24, no. 30 (2016).

<sup>7</sup> The Directorate General of Migration Management has established a presence in 81 cities in 148 districts and also abroad.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Migration Management, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Available at <https://mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.6458.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The category of conditional refugee is conceptualised as 'people coming from non-European countries and carrying the capacity of refugee are subjected to the legal regime of 'conditional refugee', which is 'an individual protection procedure'. The conditional refugee status provides protection until the person resettles to a third country. The Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Migration Management, the Law No.6485 on the Foreigners and International Protection, Issue No: 3, December 2013, Article 62.

protection',<sup>10</sup> since they are in Turkey as a result of mass large-scale forced migration. They are given the legal status of temporary protection,<sup>11</sup> as they entered into Turkey 'in large numbers, immediately, and in masses.<sup>12</sup> Temporary protection is indicative of a status 'developed for the protection of people who had to immigrate due to sudden influxes resulting from an unpredictable and urgent situation.'<sup>13</sup>

The new legislation provided for Syrian citizens to be taken under temporary protection in Turkey. The law regulated the procedures and principles of temporary protection that could be provided to 'those whose protection requests are not taken into consideration individually.' The legislation on temporary protection also enhanced Syrian citizens' resilience and capacity to socially adapt. It prescribed the provision of 'health, education, access to the labour market, social benefits and services along with translation and similar services' to Syrian refugees.<sup>14</sup>

## Turkey's Resilience Plans in the Field of Education

The Directorate General of Migration Management prepared a Strategic Plan for 2017–21 with the aim of ensuring asylum seekers can socially adapt to their new circumstances.<sup>15</sup> The plan sets targets for regular and irregular immigration, international protection, the fight against human trafficking and protection of victims, adaptation and communication, and the enhancement of institutional capacity. The Strategic Plan also sets long-term goals for enhancing the resilience capacity of Syrians in five areas: education; health; basic needs; access to the labour market; and social support and adaptation.

The integration of Syrian refugees into the Turkish educational system is of critical importance, especially to support the younger generation whose educational development has been affected by the war. Articles 28 and 29 of the by-law on Temporary Protection set the legal framework for the enhancement of resilience in the field of education. These

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<sup>10</sup> The subsidiary refugee status states that 'a foreigner or a stateless person, who neither could be qualified as a refugee nor as a conditional refugee, shall nevertheless be granted subsidiary protection because if returned to the country of origin or country of habitual residence would be sentenced to death or face the execution of the death penalty, face torture or inhuman or degrading treatment'. Subsidiary protection is an individual protection procedure similar to the conditional refugee status. Article 63 of the Law on the Foreigners and International Protection.

<sup>11</sup> Temporary protection status stipulates the precautions to be taken and humanitarian aids to be provided in case of a collective refugee flow. Temporary protection may be granted to 'the foreigners who have been forced to leave their country and cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx incident seeking immediate and temporary protection'. İbrahim Kaya and Yılmaz Esra Eren, 'Türkiye'deki Suriyelilerin Hukuki Durumu: Arada Kalanların Hakları Ve Yükümlülükler,' *SETA* (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Temporary Protection Legislation, Article 26. Also see: Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 'Social Adaptation and Psycho-Social Support Efforts for the Syrian Citizens under the Status of Temporary Protection in Turkey', *Coordination and Planning Workshop for Syrians* (Ankara, 2016), p.59.

<sup>15</sup> The Republic of Turkey, Directorate General of Migration Management, 'Strategic Plan'.

ensure the provision of educational services to Syrians and enable the organisation of courses at the request of Syrians who are subject to temporary protection. The lessons include nursery, primary, and secondary education, language, and vocational courses, as well as skill and hobby courses for all age groups.<sup>16</sup> The by-law also guarantees the access rights of the 'temporary protection status holders' to the labour market, stipulating that, 'They [Syrians] can get work permits from the Ministry of Work and Social Security for the sectors which are to be determined by the Council of Ministers, lines of work, and geographical areas'.<sup>17</sup>

The enhancement of resilience in the field of education is performed in coordination with the Ministry of Education. The aim is to enable Syrian refugees' access to formal, non-formal and public university education programmes, as well as to enhance the quality of education provided.<sup>18</sup> Syrian refugees receive education at Temporary Education Centres established in the camps, at schools affiliated to the Ministry of Education, Temporary Accommodation Centres and at public universities. 590,114 Syrian children were registered at the Temporary Education Centres and public schools at the end of 2018.<sup>19</sup> According to the data provided by the UN, the schooling rate is 96.3 percent for elementary school, 58.1 percent for middle school and 26.4 percent for high school.<sup>20</sup>

## Syrian Refugees in Turkey's Higher Education System

The influx of Syrian refugees poses significant challenges for Turkey in providing for their bare necessities. One of the most important outcomes of the long war and protracted displacement is the interruption of education. In 2015, approximately '90,000–110,000 out of 450,000' displaced Syrians in Turkey, aged 18–22 years, were qualified for higher education.<sup>21</sup> Today this group are still not enrolled in schools or universities and lack the necessary qualifications for entering the job market. Most of the Syrian refugee youth have been struggling to cope with trauma and psychological problems. These parameters put them at higher risk of exploitation, and particularly of being 'military recruiters, criminals, and sex industry workers', as well as being the targets of crime networks for smuggling and drug running.<sup>22</sup>

Syrian students are more open to exploitation if not enrolled in schools or universities. Those left outside of the education system do not learn Turkish or fundamental skills for

<sup>16</sup> Temporary Protection Legislation, Article 28.

<sup>17</sup> Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 'Social Adaptation and Psycho-Social Support Efforts...', p.59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Asylum Information Database, Access to Education. Available at [https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-education-1#footnote7\\_uflsrao](https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-education-1#footnote7_uflsrao) (accessed 3 December 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Sezer Ş. Komsuoğlu, *Syrian Women's Access to Higher Education in Turkey*, 5 March 2019, Council of Higher Education of Turkey.

<sup>21</sup> Basak Yavcan and Hana Ghali, *Higher Education and Syrian Refugee Students: The Case of Turkey: Policies, Practices and Perspectives* (Beirut: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Europe Report'.

entering the job market. Hence the Turkish government has been attempting to establish a legal and administrative basis for higher education options for Syrian refugee students to avoid the emergence of a lost generation.

### **Opportunities in Higher Education**

There are several factors that facilitate Syrian refugees' participation in higher education. Syrians have always been able to enrol in Turkish universities as regular international students. Syrian citizens who hold valid documents, including high school diplomas, transcripts, and certificate equivalents that can be acquired from the Ministry of Higher Education, are eligible to apply to universities in Turkey. Although all international students have to take admission exams, Syrians under temporary protection are exempt from the exam and can apply directly to both public and private universities in Turkey. This regulation was first implemented in cities bordering Syria and subsequently extended to all universities in Turkey. Moreover, Syrian asylum seekers have not been charged tuition fees at Turkish universities since the 2013/14 academic year. Specific measures have been taken to facilitate the transfer of credits acquired from Syrian universities to Turkish ones.

The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has allowed Turkish universities to open Arabic-medium programmes which are specifically designed for Syrian refugee students. Undergraduate programmes taught in Arabic have been established in Mardin, Gaziantep, Urfa, and Hatay, with teaching provided by Syrian academic staff. These universities are playing an important role in integrating young Syrians into higher education. The programmes are generally designed to eliminate language barriers facing Syrian students under permanent protection. In 2018, 20,701 Syrian students were enrolled and 392 Syrian academics were teaching in Turkish universities.<sup>23</sup>

Several Turkish institutions and international organisations have given scholarships to Syrian students studying at Turkish universities. Turkish governmental and non-governmental institutions offer a regular programme of scholarships to international students. Due to the exceptional situation of Syrian refugees, the government has launched specific programmes for them, providing 5,000 full scholarships. These scholarships include university fees for four years, health insurance, a monthly stipend and Turkish language courses. Almost one-third of Syrian students in Turkey studied with the aid of a scholarship in the 2016/17 academic year.

The Turkish government has been taking proactive measures to provide Syrian university students with opportunities to continue their education in Turkey. These policies improve the resilience of Syrian students under permanent protection. University education facilitates the access of Syrian students to the labour market after their graduation, which helps create the conditions necessary for them to support themselves, improve

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<sup>23</sup> *Suriyeli Akademisyenve Öğrenci Araştırması* (Research on Syrian Academic Staff and Students). Available at <https://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/turkiyede-suriyeli-akademisyen-ve-ogrenci-arastirmasi/haber-649649> (accessed 27 November 2019).

sustainable livelihoods and to acquire the skills necessary in the process of integration and resettlement in Turkey.

### Challenges in Higher Education

Despite these measures, Syrian students also confront important barriers while studying in Turkey. Only 2 percent of the Syrian university-age population was enrolled in Turkish universities for the 2013/14 academic year and thousands of university students have been deprived of higher education opportunities.<sup>24</sup> The challenges include a lack of access to higher education, financial problems, issues around social integration, discrimination and psychological problems.

#### Language and academic barriers

There are several academic challenges that prevent the integration of Syrian students under permanent protection into the Turkish higher education system. International students who wish to study in Turkish universities must have completed high school. Additionally, diplomas and transcripts must be recognised by the Turkish Embassy in their home countries. International students have to take a Foreign Student Entrance Examination, which consists of two tests: a basic learning test; and a Turkish language proficiency test. Syrian students have been exempt from this exam since 2013. Despite this, Syrian refugees need to have a sufficient level of Turkish and English proficiency in order to follow courses. This is why language proficiency is one of the most significant barriers to higher education for Syrian students, with the exception of the limited Arabic programmes.

Moreover, students who choose to participate in Turkish programmes have to pay high fees for Turkish language courses in private schools. Language barriers become a problem even while searching for universities and filling out applications.<sup>25</sup> There are no good textbooks for Turkish language learning and teaching standards are poor. As such, Turkish language courses offered by universities and private institutions do not sufficiently prepare students for the level of proficiency required to take university-level courses, which consequently affects the academic performance of Syrian refugees. Other problems include the increasing demand for Syrian teachers due to the rise in the number of schools, the lack of available quotas in universities where the Syrian population is high and the marginalisation of students outside university.<sup>26</sup> In order to overcome such problems, the quality of Turkish language courses should be improved, academic staff should be trained to understand the specific problems of Syrian refugees and the content of the courses should be modified for Syrian students.

There are several ways in which language enhances the resilience of Syrian refugees

<sup>24</sup> Keith Watenpaugh, Adrienne L. Fricke, and James R. King, *We Will Stop Here and Go No Further: Syrian University Students and Scholars in Turkey* (California: Institute of International Education, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Faik Tannkulu, 'Türkiye'de Yaşayan Suriyeli Çocukların Eğitim Sorunu Ve Çözüm Önerileri,' *Düşünce Dergisi* 22, no. 86 (2017).

in Turkey.<sup>27</sup> Helping Syrian refugee youth to acquire Turkish language competency is crucial for access to employment and training programmes in Turkey. This skill promotes interaction between the communities and improves social cohesion. Learning Turkish furthermore promotes a feeling of belonging within the Turkish community for Syrian refugees.

Not learning the language has negative consequences for Syrian refugees in their process of resilience building.<sup>28</sup> Lack of language skills impedes Syrian youths' social life outside their immediate community. Even a basic level of Turkish eases access to basic services such as health and education. Syrian university students face difficulties in integration and socialising in university, affecting their levels of attendance and dropout rate. Lack of language acquisition hinders Syrian refugee access to higher education and employment. Obtaining a job has paramount importance for enhancing the resilience of the refugees.

#### Financial difficulties

Financial difficulties also hamper Syrian students' access to education. Syrian youth face more economic problems than their Turkish counterparts because of their financial responsibilities to their families and bureaucratic problems associated with getting a work permit. Many university-aged Syrians prefer not to study because of the economic and social difficulties that they face in Turkey. Syrian refugee families also struggle to find sufficient financial resources for their children's education. Often, they require their university-aged children to contribute to family income, and many university-aged girls are encouraged by their families to marry early. These factors generally prevent the enrolment of Syrian youth in universities.

Those who are able to enrol depend overwhelmingly on scholarships. While the Turkish government and international organisations provide generous scholarship programmes, there are several problems in getting a scholarship from the government. There is a lack of clarity, transparency and sustainability in the requirements and application procedures, creating hurdles for Syrian students. Those who receive scholarships complain that this is just a temporary solution, with financial difficulties resurfacing once the scholarship ends.

#### Social and cultural integration

According to Ager and Strang, there are ten domains which are considered indicators of the integration process.<sup>29</sup> These are grouped under four headings: means and markers, social connection, facilitators, and foundation. Employment, housing, education and

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<sup>27</sup> See this discussion in more detail: British Council, *Language for Resilience: The Role of Language in Enhancing the Resilience of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities*, ed. British Council (Ankara: 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Emrah Cinkara, 'The Role of L+ Turkish and English Learning in Resilience: A Case of Syrian Students at Gaziantep University,' *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>29</sup> A. Ager and A. Strang, 'Indicators of Integration: Final Report', *Home Office Development and Practice Report* 28, London: Home Office (2004).

health are means and markers. Social connections include social bonds (connections within a community), social bridges (with members of other communities) and social links (with institutions, including local and central government services). Facilitators are 'language and cultural knowledge' of the host country and 'safety and stability.' Education serves as a 'means and marker' of integration together with 'employment, housing and health'. As such education is not only the 'outcome of integration,' but is also a 'marker' and 'means' of integration. It is a marker in that success in the domain of education is an indication of integration and it is also a means, as it helps integration in other domains. That is why there is a close linkage between the resilience of Syrian youth and acquisition of education.

However, integration into the social and cultural life of universities is another hurdle confronting Syrian refugees. Language barriers and cultural differences make it difficult for Syrian refugees to socially interact with Turkish students. Such problems are felt less in some university cities, such as Mardin and Urfa, where Arabic is spoken. However, Kurdish students in those cities, particularly in Mardin, may have negative perceptions towards Syrian students, who are considered 'privileged' since they may receive education in their mother language and receive a scholarship from the government. This situation in turn promotes the feeling of 'otherness' among Syrian students.

The implication of such barriers for Syrian university students is that they cannot return to normality and re-establish their student identity. Integration into higher education is an important tool for refugees to change their narratives from being passive victims to being 'individual agents' who are empowered and adapt themselves into the host country, giving space for contact with members of host communities and a role in establishing relationships supportive of integration.<sup>30</sup>

#### Psychological challenges

Syrian refugees have confronted traumatic events – human rights violations, forced displacement, violence, lack of security – which can undermine mental health and coping mechanisms adopted in the host country. The process of adaptation to their new environment gives rise to new challenges 'to integrate new styles and norms of interpersonal relationships, social habits and rules and organization'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, research demonstrates that Syrian refugees display a series of symptoms of their traumatic experiences.<sup>32</sup> These symptoms are emotional (sadness, grief, fear, frustration, anxiety, anger and despair), cognitive (loss of control, helplessness, boredom and hopelessness), and physical (fatigue, problems of sleep and appetite, somatic symptoms). Accordingly, there is a strong need for the improvement of interventions that enhance the resilience of Syrian refugees in coping with distress. Such intervention is particularly important for Syrian youth in Turkish uni-

<sup>30</sup> Begüm Dereli, *Refugee Integration through Higher Education: Syrian Refugees in Turkey* (United Nations University, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Nazlı Neftçi and Önver Andreas Çetrez, 'Resilience and Mental Health Risks among Syrian Refugees in Europe: A Cultural Perspective', *Acta Psychopathol* (2017).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

versities as it has a direct impact on their level of academic success.

Even though Syrian university students are a high-risk category for mental health problems, they are not given basic psychological support at universities in Turkey. Turkish institutions struggle to respond to these problems as ‘Turkey has no previous experience ... [or] ... programmes designed to educate and integrate migrant or refugee youth’.<sup>33</sup> This exacerbates the situation for refugees as students’ emotional and psychological problems hinder their levels of integration and learning.<sup>34</sup>

#### Bureaucratic and legal problems

Syrian students face several challenges during the application process for universities. There are no common standards and so each university applies its specific conditions. Different universities in Turkey request different kinds of documentation from Syrian students, and there are no institutions which assist with application procedures and documentation. This situation leads to Syrian refugee students being misinformed about the educational opportunities provided to them. Lack of valid documents, such as diplomas and transcripts, presents another legal challenge to accessing higher education.

## Conclusion

Despite positive national legislation and its implementation in the field of higher education in Turkey, there are important barriers to the integration of refugees into the system. The lack of trained academic staff with the necessary skills and qualifications for instructing refugees, insufficient teaching materials and inappropriate curriculums have prevented Syrian students accessing high-quality education.

Language barriers also hinder Syrian students from enrolling in Turkish universities. Owing to their low levels of proficiency in Turkish, Syrian students face difficulties while following their classes and so their academic performance is lower than their peers. Language barriers also impede the integration of Syrian students into social life and thereby prevent them from feeling included in Turkish society. The lack of information about application procedures is a further restraint on access to higher education.

Financial challenges create a major barrier for Syrian students which prevents their enrollment in universities. Families generally prefer to spend their limited income on basic needs rather than education. Moreover, Syrian youth generally prefer to work rather than go to university, as their families also depend on them for household income.

Syrian students are still suffering emotional, psychosocial and mental trauma associated with experiences of war and displacement. They face problems linked closely with

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<sup>33</sup> Gokay Alpak et al., ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Cross-Sectional Study,’ *International Journal of Psychiatry in Clinical Practice* 19, no. 1 (2015); Hasan Aydin and Yeliz Kaya, ‘The Educational Needs of and Barriers Faced by Syrian Refugee Students in Turkey: A Qualitative Case Study,’ *Intercultural Education* 28, no. 5 (2017).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

their experience of violence and the hurdles of living in a foreign country with its different cultural context. The trauma that Syrian students experience negatively affects their learning levels.

Although the Turkish government has taken important steps to integrate Syrian students, they are still at risk in Turkey. Syrian students are still confronting problems, such as poverty, domestic violence, social and economic problems, lack of social support and changes in family structure. This situation creates a feeling of isolation among them.

The Turkish government should take more measures in order to enable Syrian students to access higher education. These could include the centralisation of the application procedure for Syrian refugee students, funding to improve the quality of Turkish language teaching, integration of Syrian students into high schools, adoption of education programmes that deal with psychological and social conditions and the formulation of strategies that would enable the cultural integration of Syrian students.

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### **Cover Image**

A Syrian refugee family's laundry hanging in Gazikent, Gaziantep, Turkey on 22 April 2016.  
Source: Uygur Onder Simsek/dpa

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