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**MIGRANT AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION  
IN TURKEY:  
DEFINITION, POLICIES AND CHALLENGES**

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## ***Table of contents***

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The Definition of Integration.....	4
3. Integration Policies for Migrants and Refugees in Turkey.....	5
3.1. Integration Policies in Education.....	6
3.2. Integration Policies in Healthcare.....	8
3.3. Integration Policies in Labor Market Participation.....	9
4. The Impact of Marginalization, Discrimination, and Racism on Migrant Integration Process.....	9
5. Conclusions.....	11
References.....	13

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## 1. Introduction

Turkey, a country that has been receiving migrants since the 1990s, has become a nest for persons coming from a variety of countries, notably Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. The economic and political upheavals that occurred in Turkey's neighboring regions as a result of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar world led to an increase and diversification of migration movements. The migration of more divergent groups has brought new challenges in terms of migration management and integration in Turkey.

Since 2015, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, mostly consisting of the Syrians.<sup>1</sup> Six percent of its total population consists of refugees and migrants.<sup>2</sup> About one-third of the total Syrian population consists of children aged 10 and below, born and raised in Turkey. Furthermore, a remarkable number of Syrians (approximately 25%) are youths aged 10-20. That is to say, almost 60% of the Syrian refugee population were either born in Turkey or have spent a significant part of their childhood in Turkey, therefore, they are more familiar with life in Turkey than in Syria (WFP, 2020). Indeed, studies suggest that majority of the Syrian refugee population are less apt to return to their home country (Erdoğan, 2018; Kayaoğlu, Şahin-Mencütek & Erdoğan, 2021). Moreover, due to the EU's security policy and strategy of externalizing migration as well as the uncertainty of the conditions related to the war in Syria eliminate the possibilities of resettlement to the third countries, namely EU countries, and of repatriation for Syrian refugees (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020). In this respect, local integration and social cohesion have become one of the fundamental matters of the refugee agenda in Turkey.

The migrant integration practices observed in Turkey can be grouped in three distinct periods in terms of migrant groups' characteristics and state policies. In the late Ottoman and early Republican period, integration policies were based on "ethnic kinship". The state aimed to increase and nationalize the population, therefore, people who immigrated from Ottoman territories in the Balkans were considered as "ethnic brothers" [*soydaş*]; in a short time, they were naturalized and integrated. However, this model has felt short in the face of changing and globalizing nature of migration movements since the 1990s. In the post-Cold War era, there have been three main changes in migratory movements: diversification in migrant profile due to the arrival of migrants who were other than "ethnic brothers" or "kins living abroad"; increase in the number of new arrivals; increasingly irregular character of the new arrivals. In parallel with the irregularity and diversification, the authorities adopted a policy, which can be defined as "deliberate ignorance". The 1990s and early 2000s had been a period of "de facto integration" where the state actors' and the civil society organizations' involvement was little, if any (Danış et al., 2009) and the living conditions of migrants were shaped by "uncertainty" and "temporariness" (Danış, forthcoming).

Following the arrival of millions of Syrians after 2011, the third period started. This has been a period of "open-door policy" and welcoming practices –in particular in the beginning. Syrians

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Directorate General of Migration Management figures, as of November 11, 2021, the total number of Syrians under temporary protection is 3,731,028. In addition, there are around half a million persons of Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, and Somali nationality under Temporary/International Protection. The total number of applications for international protection in 2020 is 31,334 made by migrants from Afghanistan (22,606), Iraq (5,875), Iran (1,425), and others (1,428), for further information see <https://bit.ly/3xZUZwR>.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the terms "refugee" and "migrant" are interchangeably used. We use the term "refugee" to refer to Syrians under temporary protection as well as individuals from other nationalities who have applied for or have received international protection. The Turkish government does not define people under international, temporary or conditional protection as refugees due to its "geographical limitation" condition on the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The geographical limitation does not allow Turkey to give refugee status to asylum seekers from anywhere but European countries.

were brought under temporary protection, following the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which was issued in 2014.<sup>3</sup> This regulation assured for Syrian citizens and other people coming from Syria the right for non-refoulement and access to fundamental human rights. The EU-Turkey Statement in 2016 was a milestone in many terms, but particularly because, until that time, any tangible policies on the integration of migrants/refugees were not available. Since 2016, the Turkish government has developed and implemented policies for the integration of Syrians under TPS concerning education, labor market participation, healthcare, and social cohesion. It has provided various services funded by the EU and has encouraged NGOs to maintain their services towards refugees. However, since social acceptance by the Turkish people has been low (Morgül & Savaşkan 2021), these efforts can only be defined as a fragile top-down integration model, closely controlled by the state.

This paper is intended to provide a general account of integration and cohesion policies of the Turkish government with a special focus on education, labor force participation, and healthcare before and after 2011, when mass forced migration from Syria arrived; and a brief discussion on how marginalization, discrimination, and racism influence integration process of migrants and refugees. To do so, it will first present a working definition of migrant integration.

## **2. *The Definition of Integration***

Integration is a complicated phenomenon that has multiple dimensions. From a policy perspective, the EU defines integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States” (Council of European Union, 2004: 17). The main areas of integration are defined as education, equal access to basic services (housing, healthcare, etc.), labor market participation, active participation (in the democratic process and the formulation of integration policies and measures), and social inclusion (European Commission, 2016). The EU initiated the “core indicators” approach on integration in 2010, which have since come to be used for “integration monitoring” at the levels of the EU and member states and sub-units (e.g., states and municipalities). The four major areas in the core indicators are employment, education, social inclusion, and active citizenship.

*The Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX), a long-term project that assesses integration policies as well as measures integration outcomes and public opinion, identifies three dimensions of integration in eight policy areas: basic rights (employment, training, health, and non-discrimination); equal opportunities (education, health, political participation); and secure future (family reunification, permanent residence, and access to nationality).

The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) prefers “social harmonization” or “social cohesion” [*uyum*] terminology instead of integration. On DGMM’s website harmonization is defined as “neither an assimilation nor an integration. It is rather a voluntary harmonization resulting from mutual understanding of each other between the migrants and the society.” DGMM tasks the Harmonization and Communication Department with “executing the duties and procedures regarding mutual Harmonization of the foreigners with the society.” Harmonization arrangements and efforts target active interaction and voluntary participation between migrants and the host society members.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was passed in 2012, Syrians who are registered in temporary protection status could not apply for international protection.

### 3. *Integration Policies for Migrants and Refugees in Turkey*

The fundamental difference between migrations in the past and today is the shift in the identities of migrants and the state's reception policies. During the Ottoman and early Republican period, migrants (called *muhajirs*) were considered as "relatives" due to historical ties and kinship, therefore, they were swiftly naturalized and integrated (Kirişçi, 2006; Parla, 2011). As of the 1990s, the diversification of groups that migrated to Turkey has led the policies towards migrants to continue in uncertain and temporary conditions (Danış & Parla, 2009). This post-Cold War approach based on the assumption that migrants would certainly return one day manifested itself in the policies adopted regarding the mass forced migration from Syria. Upon their arrival in 2011, millions of Syrians were called "guests" by the government authorities, media, and in official announcements (Sert & Danış, 2021). Despite being a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention, Turkey imposes "geographical limitation" condition. Due to this limitation, only those incoming from Europe are accepted as "refugees" whereas asylum seekers escaping non-European countries, such as Syria, do not have the right to obtain refugee status in Turkey. Thus, the terms "asylum-seeker" or "refugee" used for the Syrians in Turkey do not have any meaning in legal terms. Moreover, labels used for defining all migrants have become increasingly varied. The blurring of the relationship between migration and asylum, and the atomization of refugee status through new subcategories such as temporary protection, secondary protection, or humanitarian protection pave the way for "the legal production of migrant illegality" (De Genova, 2002).

The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was passed in 2012, but Syrians are not given the option of making an international protection application in Turkey. Syrians were brought under temporary protection only after a Regulation on Temporary Protection was issued in 2014. This regulation aimed to provide non-refoulement assurance and access to fundamental human rights for Syrian citizens and other people coming from Syria. The main idea of the regulation was to provide immediate support to those who had to leave their country in case of mass asylum (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016). According to DGMM figures, by the end of 2020, 3.6 million Syrians were in temporary protection status (TPS). A very small group of Syrians in Turkey with higher socio-economic status –only 2% of the total Syrian population– opted for a residence permit like legal foreigners in the country instead of applying for TPS (Danış, 2019).

TPS covers services such as shelter, food, education, health, and access to clean water for those living in camps and reception centers established for refugees. Although an important number were hosted in the camps at the beginning, currently those who do reside out of camps constitute a sheer majority of refugees (more than 97%). TPS is valid if only refugees reside in the provinces where they are registered, and it excludes them from accessing international refugee rights. In this regard, there is critical literature on temporary protection, which suggests that the temporariness of protection has prolonged the discourse of guesthood (Toğral Koca, 2016, Baban et al., 2017; Abdelaaty, 2019). Although protracted temporary protection, which may be considered as "Turkish style of refugee protection", is seen as an affirmative legal development in comparison with Jordan and Lebanon, it confines Syrians to an indefinite temporariness (Ilcan et al., 2018). Moreover, the expulsion campaign launched by the Istanbul Governorate in the summer of 2019 strikingly showed how temporary protection status can easily be overridden.<sup>4</sup>

LFIP charges DGMM with planning harmonization activities drawing from recommendations and contributions from local administrations, public institutions, civil society organizations, universities, and international organizations. As defined in the law, these activities aim to facilitate mutual harmonization between those who already have or have applied for international protection and the host society; to provide basic information about the political structure,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/18336/turkey-to-expel-syrians-living-illegally-in-istanbul>

language, law system, culture, and history of Turkey as well as their rights and obligations; to provide basic knowledge and skills that would enable them to act independently in Turkey, in countries of resettlement and after return to their home countries. As mentioned above, on its website, DGMM emphasizes that harmonization/cohesion in the law and these activities refer to “neither assimilation nor integration”. Instead, it refers to “a voluntary harmonization resulting from a mutual understanding between the migrants and the society” (DGMM, n.d.). Yet, Turkey had not followed any tangible policies on integration (or harmonization as the Turkish government prefers) of migrants and refugees until the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016.

The EU-Turkey Statement is problematic in many aspects. After the “refugee crisis” in summer 2015, the EU wanted Turkey to slow down the refugee influx and made various promises in return: 3+3 billion euros to be spent on the reception of Syrian refugees; to open new negotiation chapters in Turkey’s EU membership process; it also agreed to provide Turkish citizens with a “visa-facility” for Europe if the 72-item list is completed –especially on the condition that Turkey implements the Readmission Agreement, which was signed in 2013. While this “dirty bargain”, which was harshly criticized by NGOs working in the field of refugee and migrant rights, particularly Amnesty, means an even more difficult, expensive, and dangerous journey for refugees, Turkey’s position as a “buffer zone” is getting stronger. The Statement clearly shows how Turkey and the EU ignore the effects of these decisions that put the lives of migrants and refugees at risk while both parties act in their own interests.

Since 2017, there has been a new policy concerning the naturalization of Syrians with “high qualifications” and with contributions to Turkey. Even though neither the selection criteria for naturalization nor the number of naturalizations is pronounced, according to declarations of the Minister of Interior, as of 2020, around 150,000 Syrians have been claimed to receive Turkish citizenship<sup>5</sup>. So far, Syrians have been naturalized through the “exceptional citizenship” clause in the Turkish Citizenship Law. In fact, this is quite problematic because this clause was originally formulated for outstanding scientists, athletes, artists, and so on. Further, this route for naturalization requires one to be invited to apply for citizenship in exceptional situations (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018), and these invitations seem to be somewhat arbitrary. The other route is related to the amendments to Citizenship Law made in 2016; according to which foreign nationals who make investments or acquire immovable property in Turkey can apply for citizenship.

Upon the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016, even though other groups of migrants have been left out, certain policies on the integration of migrants and refugees have been put into action in areas of education, healthcare, labor market participation, and social cohesion.

### 3.1. Integration Policies in Education

Education is one of the major fields for the integration of refugees. Yet, the challenge is considerable: 1,5 million Syrians are under the age of 15 and need schooling.<sup>6</sup> Before 2016, temporary education centers fulfilled the need for education for Syrian children. The idea was to allow and support the Syrian refugees to create “their own schools” to make children capable to read and write Arabic and to be ready for an eventual return. Following the policy change in the Ministry of National Education in 2016, Syrian children have gradually been integrated into the Turkish education system and Arabic teaching temporary education centers were closed (Erdoğan, 2020). This has been one major indication implying that the state authorities finally

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/gundem/kac-suriyeli-turk-vatandasi-yapildi-6618302/>

<sup>6</sup> DGMM (n.d.). Temporary protection statistics. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Gf9q3h> (accessed December 2, 2021).

recognized Syrians would be not “temporary” but “permanent” part of society in Turkey in 2016, which was the same year the EU-Turkey Statement was signed.

In order to solve the physical capacity problem and to increase school enrollment rates, the Ministry built 129 new schools funded by EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey.<sup>7</sup> As of 2020, the schooling rates of Syrian children are reportedly around 90% in elementary school, 71% in middle school, and 32% in high school (Hürriyet, 2020). In 2021, the Minister of Education declared 432,956 children under TPS would be enrolled in Turkish public schools (Cumhuriyet, 2021). In higher education, over 48,000 Syrians enrolled in Turkish universities during the 2021-2022 academic year. However, school enrollment rates for children from other migrant groups are quite low; the school participation among non-Syrians consists mainly of international protection applicants (Yükseker, 2021). The children of undocumented migrants have no access to schools.

Overall, the number of Syrians who are registered in Turkish schools is quite high. However, these ratios do not provide any insight into non-attendance and drop-outs. According to a UNESCO report, the number of additional teachers to fulfill the need for the education of Syrian children of school age is insufficient. UNICEF (2019) states that the estimated number of Syrian children out of school is as high as 400,000. Discrimination, bullying, and prejudice are still prevalent at schools, coming from both peers and teachers. The high level of child labor, child marriage, discrimination, and fear of deportation remain as main underlying factors that severely restrict access of Syrian children to school as well as their school success (AIDA, 2021).

The EU has an important role in supporting school enrolment and assuring the attendance of Syrian children in Turkey. Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program, funded by ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) and carried out by the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, the Ministry of National Education, AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency), the Turkish Red Crescent, and UNICEF. The program aims to encourage children’s access to the education system; the CCTE program supplies cash aid every two months for vulnerable refugee families to enable them to send their children to school. The condition for receiving payment on a regular basis for a family is to keep children in school; the maximum day of non-attendance for a child in a month is limited to 4 days. Furthermore, the EU launched the PIKTES project (Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Education System)<sup>8</sup> in 2018, aiming to provide support for school enrolments and attendance, to increase the integration of Syrian children, and access to qualified education. In 2019, the Ministry of National Education started “social cohesion lessons” that offer knowledge of different cultures and daily life in Turkey for students.

The rates of dropouts and non-attendance, however, are still high, particularly at the high school level. The period during the COVID-19 pandemic caused interruptions in face-to-face education; the consequences of the pandemic excessively influenced refugee children and particularly girls (AIDA, 2021). The student support packages reserved for students’ needs in schools were redesigned to alleviate inequalities in access to long-distance education (EBA), running online through electronic devices such as tablets or laptops. Yet, we will be able to thoroughly understand the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of refugee children only in the future.

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<sup>7</sup> For further information about this EU Facility Project, *see*, “Education for All in Times of Crisis II”. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3GgnOZ1> (accessed November 29, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Further information about PIKTES Project is available at: <https://bit.ly/3Gdc6hC>.

### 3.2. Integration Policies in Healthcare

As our global experience during the COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably shown us, public health means everyone –regardless of their legal status– should have equal access to health services. However, as in the case with many other countries in the world, migrants and refugees face inequalities and obstacles in access to healthcare in Turkey. Until the LFIP was enacted in 2014, there were not any specified legal rights of migrants to facilitate their access to healthcare. They had to cover their healthcare expenses, and in the case of their inability to afford healthcare, individual initiatives from voluntary healthcare professionals, CSOs, and other social networks would aid (GAR, 2020). After LFIP, not only those who held IPS but also those who have applied for IPS are entitled to a set of rights that facilitate their access to healthcare. Similarly, TPS provides free access to health services and medicine on the condition that they are officially registered (Yaman, 2017).

Undocumented migrants have still obstacles in access to public healthcare services because of their irregular status. They are expected to meet their healthcare expenses under the “Regulation Concerning International Health Tourism and Tourist Health”, also known as “Health Tourism Regulation”, which defines costs of healthcare services for non-citizens who do not have IPS or TPS or who are not covered under general health insurance. Those who are undocumented or work informally (as in the case of most Afghans) in Turkey are obliged to visit private clinics, pharmacies, or to try to find homemade medical solutions as alternative ways to access to healthcare. Moreover, unregistered migrants usually avoid applying to formal healthcare services due to the risk of deportation (GAR, 2020).

In 2015, the Turkish government’s centralization efforts led to establishing Migrant Health Centers (MHCs), particularly designed for those under TPS. In December 2016, a 36-month health project titled “Improving the health status of the Syrian population under temporary protection and related services provided by Turkish authorities”, also known as the SIHHAT Project, funded by ECHO was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO), the EU, and the Turkish Ministry of Health. Under SIHHAT Project, 178 MHCs operate as primary healthcare institutions in 29 provinces for Syrians under TPS. MHCs eliminate the language barrier, one of the most crucial challenges that Syrians face in access to, at least, primary healthcare services. However, their limited Turkish language skills, lower socio-economic status and difficult working conditions reportedly leads to discrimination in their access to secondary and tertiary healthcare services (GAR, 2020).

Besides, in December 2020, CEB (The Council of Europe Development Bank) together with the Turkish Ministry of Health launched “Strengthening Health Care Infrastructure for All”, also known as the SHIFA project<sup>9</sup> with €90 million of support. The project aims to establish new MHCs, provide a supply of medical equipment, maternity and health kits, as well as contribute to the capacity building of the ministry. Even though there are still some obstacles in access to specialized hospitals, these efforts towards Syrian refugees seem to bring positive results: Public services are expressed as the most successful area in basic services provided for Syrian refugees.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Statewatch (2020). Final contracts arranged for €6 billion EU-Turkey deal. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rVwiB5> (accessed December 1, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2020). Main Findings. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Do6IGM> (accessed December 1, 2021).

### 3.3. Integration Policies in Labor Market Participation

In the Turkish economy, the labor market is pervasively based on informal employment regardless of employees' nationality. About 30% of Turkish citizens' employment is informal, i.e. off-the-books, and it is estimated that this ratio for migrants' and refugees' employment is over 90% (Erdoğan, 2020; MIPEX, 2020).

To access the formal labor market, people under TPS are required to apply for a work permit in Turkey. The procedures for the entitlement of work permits to persons under TPS are regulated under The Regulation on Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection, issued in 2016. As in many other fields, the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement had an influence on the gradual increase in the number of work permits granted to those under TPS. Yet still, it is very limited. In 2019, the total number of work permits granted to foreign migrants was 145,232. Among them, Syrians who obtained work permits were 63,789; 93% of work permits for Syrians were issued to men and 7% to women. In 2020, 123,574 migrants obtained work permits in total; 62,369 of them were Syrians. Although the Syrians constitute almost half of the foreign work permits, it is still known that a sheer majority of Syrians work informally.

There are many challenges in the access to the labor market for Syrians under TPS. The regulation on work permits is very restrictive. Work permit applications can be made six months after receiving TPS, by the employer via an online system or by the beneficiary in the case of self-employment. Syrians under TPS can only obtain work permits in the provinces where they reside. Syrians under TPS who work as seasonal agricultural workers are exempted from the work permit. Moreover, the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services may also set a quota on employees under TPS depending on the needs of the sectors and provinces. The number of employees under TPS active in a certain workplace cannot exceed 10% of the total number of employees. The limited number of community centers providing information on opportunities regarding the work permit system<sup>11</sup> means beneficiaries have little or no knowledge of the system at all.

Substandard working conditions, low wages, and unemployment were pointed out as major problems, in the *Syrians Barometer 2019* (Erdoğan, 2020). Besides, the labor market in Turkey poses high exploitation risks for children. For instance, in the textile sector, around 19% of the total workforce is underage, and this number is as high as 29% for Syrians. According to WFP (World Food Programme) report (2020), social cohesion between refugees and the host society in the labor market seems to be damaged because of the economic hardships. The increase in unemployment rates and job competition worsen the labor relations and weaken equal payment and fair condition demands of refugees.

## 4. *The Impact of Marginalization, Discrimination, and Racism on Migrant Integration Process*

Today, in many parts of the world, migrants and refugees are perceived as threats to the existing social, cultural, and economic norms of the host countries. This perception breeds the rise of anti-refugee feelings in European countries. In Turkey, and other countries neighboring the EU, political authorities turn fears of the European societies into a useful tool for their own policies and bring migrants and refugees to the table as a political bargaining chip (Damış, 2019). The

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<sup>11</sup> As of 2020, there were only 16 centers operated by the Turkish Red Crescent. For further information, the Turkish Red Crescent (2018). *Syria Crisis: Humanitarian relief operation*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/31xb411>, (accessed November 30, 2021).

instrumentalization of refugees for political interests as well as the absence of clear-cut policies related to migrants and refugees reproduce xenophobia and racism in Turkey. Both in Europe and Turkey, the inability of politicians to propose durable and plausible solutions towards poverty, income disparity, failure of the welfare system, and so on, propagate the anti-refugee discourses.

Turkish society was appreciated with its hospitality towards Syrian refugees in the early years of massive arrivals. However, there have been dramatic shifts in the attitudes towards refugees in the last ten years. In the beginning, Syrian refugees were welcomed as “guests” (*misafir*); the implicit expectation was that the unrest in Syria would come to an end soon and they would return to their home countries. However, ten years after Syrians’ arrival, prejudicial perceptions and negative attitudes have become more and more pervasive in Turkish society (Erdoğan, 2020; WFP, 2020). WFP suggests two possible underlying reasons for this reversal: 1) economic recession started in mid-2018 that led to competition for limited employment opportunities between natives and refugees, and 2) the political discourse that has turned against refugees since the election period in March 2019.

In March of 2020, the Turkish governmental declarations about “opening borders,” at the Turkish-Greek frontier, indicate how this “hospitality” is on thin ice once again and the lives of immigrants are only a trump card for Turkish authorities. In August 2021, anti-refugee sentiment reached the point that crowds attacked homes and workplaces of Syrians in Altındağ, Ankara.<sup>12</sup> Only a few months later, in October 2021, several Syrians were arrested and faced deportation after the Turkish government authorities accused Syrians of “inciting hatred” by sharing videos of eating bananas on TikTok.<sup>13</sup> These developments have inevitably damaged the migrant integration process.

Another serious concern that the host society faces at times of mass migration is losing their jobs or suffering a decrease in their wages. The increase in unemployment among university graduates as a result of erroneous economic policies worsens this fear of losing jobs. Effective access to the labor market involves significant challenges for Syrian women. Lack of childcare and lack of information and training opportunities prevent women from participating labor force from the very beginning. Further, traditional gender roles assigned to women as caregivers limit women’s access to public space in comparison with men, and training opportunities mostly pertain to traditional vocations such as sewing and hairdressing (AIDA, 2021). Besides, even though women manage to take jobs outside their homes, they often experience discrimination and ill-treatment.

Today, only 1.5% of Syrians in Turkey live in camps; the rest resides in various cities, and they must find their housing on their own. However, various studies show that Syrians face discrimination in finding suitable houses to live in (Güngördü, 2018; Güngördü & Kahraman, 2021). Rents are high, housing units are often run-down and small. Syrian families are often forced to live in crowded and substandard apartments, and they prefer neighborhoods on the peripheries of cities where other refugees live. The concentration of refugees in certain areas of cities poses a risk for social cohesion as it may eventually lead to ghettoization.

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<sup>12</sup> BBC News Türkçe (2021). Altındağ olayları: “Battalgazi’de Suriyeliler ekonomik olarak çok güç kazandılar, mahalledeki rahatsızlık ondan. August 13. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-58205315> (accessed November 30, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> The inspiration for the banana challenge was a viral video of a street interview in which a heated discussion between Turks and Syrians about the economic crisis in Turkey. In the video, a Turkish man said that he sees Syrians in the market buying kilograms of bananas, but he cannot afford them. BBC News (2021). Why Syrians face deportation from Turkey over banana jokes. November 2. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59133076> (accessed November 29, 2021).

The monetary support provided by the EU funds to alleviate the livelihood challenges of Syrian refugees is another source of resentment within Turkish society. In November 2016, Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), an EU-funded program, was introduced by the World Food Programme, the Turkish Red Crescent, and the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, under the coordination of AFAD. Persons who are registered under IPS or TPS categories and who fit into the criteria of eligibility receive financial assistance under ESSN through *Kızılaykart*; it is a monthly allowance of 155 TL (around 10€) per person.<sup>14</sup> Social Cohesion Assistance (SUY) is another program, funded by ECHO, that offers cash assistance to Syrians under TPS, people holding IPS, and asylum applicants.<sup>15</sup> As the state authorities have not provided sufficient information to the public about these cash aids, a significant part of society believes that these cash aids are provided by Turkish funds. In the context of the recent economic crisis in Turkey, resentment stemming from this common false belief of spending limited resources on refugees and migrants has been turning into more severe xenophobic reactions.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Turkey has been an immigration country since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For now, the last episode in Turkish immigration history has been the arrival of Syrian refugees. This mass displacement has created a colossal challenge for the Turkish state and society. While the early years have been relatively smooth thanks to the welcoming attitude towards the refugees who were seen as “temporary guests”, cohabitation has become more and more problematic as the same actors noticed that this stay would be permanent. Turkey-EU Statement in 2016 has been a turning point in this process: It confirmed that refugees would permanently stay in Turkey and provided various financial supports to alleviate integration challenges due to this permanent stay. However, the Statement has caused an increase in anti-EU reactions in Turkish society while it has reduced the EU-Turkey relationship into a simple externalization-instrumentalization nexus.

In addition, the political and economic crisis that Turkey has been going through reduces its reception and integration capacities. It is obvious that there are numerous and serious challenges in the integration process. One of the major obstacles is the lack of a clear and transparent policy. Although DGMM has prepared a harmonization strategy document, it has not been officially shared with the public yet. While the former migrants (*muhacirs* from Balkans), defined through kinship ties, were easily included in the society by being granted citizenship, there is no roadmap for the integration of new migrants and refugees living in Turkey today. Moreover, migration management is stuck between the EU’s security approach and externalization policy and Turkey’s use of migrants as a trump card in diplomatic area. Although the funds provided by the EU under the 2016 Statement are significant to remedy the problems encountered in the incorporation of refugees, particularly in areas of education and healthcare, the uncertainty of how long they will last also raises a sustainability problem.

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<sup>14</sup> The Turkish Red Crescent (2019). *Kızılay Kart, Cash based assistance programmes*. Available at: <https://platform.kizilaykart.org/en/index.html>.

<sup>15</sup> ECHO (2020). The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN): Offering a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn_en) (accessed December 1, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> As a clear example of this, the mayor of Bolu cut off in-kind and cash aid from the municipal budget to refugees at first. Then, more recently, he declared that the water bill and solid waste tax fees of refugees living in Bolu will be increased 10 times. However, this racist proposal did not put to the vote due to “lack of information”. Evrensel (2021). Bolu Belediye Başkanı Tanju Özcan’ın mültecilere yönelik ırkçı teklifi oylanmadı. August 6. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rJPVM7> (accessed December 6, 2021).

The idea that refugees are “temporary”, that is, they would return to their home countries one day, is still prevalent in Turkish society after ten years since their first arrival. This perception of temporariness and uncertainty weakens the integration policies and practices. The development of medium- and long-term, extensive, and need-oriented strategies is particularly important to establish and maintain social peace and harmony. The practices of discrimination and exclusion against refugees and migrants, and the increasingly widespread hate speech are the biggest obstacles to the integration process. In this sense, policies and strategies that encourage the host society to accept the possibility of living together with refugees and migrants in the long term are crucial to maintaining social cohesion.

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