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UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN TURKEY'S EDUCATION POLICY TOWARDS SYRIAN
REFUGEE CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to better understand why Turkish educational policy towards Syrian refugee children has changed. Turkey has faced the challenge to address the educational needs of over a million Syrian school-aged children. Turkish government officials are concerned that an entire generation of uneducated Syrian children may increase possible future societal issues, such as crime, illiteracy, and unemployment. Turkish authorities have not always adopted the same approach when addressing educational needs of its children and curriculum. After eight years of the conflict within Syria with no end in sight, Turkey is initiating massive changes to further integrate Syrian refugees into its society, including through the provision of educational access. This thesis primarily focuses on the explanations behind the transition of children's attendance from temporary education centers (TECs) to Turkish public schools. To understand this transition, the author reviewed the academic literature, conducted semi-structured interviews in Turkey with a diverse representation of the main stakeholders, and applied a thick description methodology. The research found that policy changed due to misperceptions on how long the Syrian conflict would last. This research is important because it highlights the various factors and lessons learned that may apply to educational policy within other states hosting large refugee movements.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A civil war between President Bashar al-Assad's government and rebels broke out in Syria in 2011. This is currently the largest refugee-generating conflict, displacing millions of people and forcing many to flee to other countries. Among them, Turkey is the country that hosts the largest refugee population in the world. 3,646,899 Syrians were under temporary protection in Turkey as of early 2019 (Figure 1). While the term "refugee" is problematic due to Turkey's laws, it is appropriate to use here given that Syrians in Turkey are de facto refugees and are regarded as such by the international community. The unique status given to Syrians in Turkey will be further discussed below.

Among the many challenges faced by Syrians in Turkey, the plight of children, especially in regard to their educational needs, is of particular importance. There are around 1.3 million school-aged Syrian children in Turkey (Figure 2). This includes many children born to Syrian refugees in Turkey since 2011 that are reaching school-age. Just over 60% are enrolled in school (MoNE, personal communication, August 1, 2018). Coşkun and Emin (2016) said, "Education is the most critical area in the context of Syrians' development as a society" (p. 45). Any and every year without a quality education sets the child behind his/her peers in a wide variety of ways. Turkish government officials are concerned that an entire generation of uneducated Syrian children may increase issues, such as crime, illiteracy, and unemployment, within Turkish society. Turkish authorities have not always adopted the same approach when

addressing educational needs of its children and curriculum. They adopted one policy in 2014, and another one in 2016, that partially reversed the previous policy. Why did the government change policy? This is the primary question to be answered in this study. Did a single incident convince the government that the policy needed adapted? Or was there a gradual transition in mindsets and demands that fostered this change? More importantly, how did the actors involved with the educational programs of Syrians made sense of this policy change? To address these questions, a thick description analysis and comparison of the situation, actors, and explanations for the transition will be used. Conversations with actors such as government officials, international organizations, and researchers will shed light on the Syrian refugee influx and educational situation in Turkey.

For a better understanding of the topic and thesis, the background will be described in detail. The first section gives a brief history of the Syrian refugee influx in Turkey. The next section provides the Turkish government's policy during the first three years of the refugee influx, including the treatment of the first Syrian refugees and the temporary protection scheme. Another section describes the Turkish government's policy on education of Syrian refugee children from 2011 to 2018, from the early improvised schools to the ongoing transition from the Temporary Education Centers to the Turkish public schools. After the background chapter, the methodology (consisting of a review of the literature, semi-structured interviews, and thick description) is presented. The core of the analysis follows, with a section focusing on a specific category of interviewees. A discussion of the findings as well as a summary of the successes and challenges of the new education policy concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2

Background

The History of the Syrian Refugee Influx in Turkey

The Syrian civil war remains an ongoing, multifaceted conflict pitting President Bashar al-Assad as well as the Syrian Arab Republic's government and military against various rebel, ethnic, and religious groups. It began in March 2011 after unrest inspired by Arab Spring protests in other countries and calling for President al-Assad to step down was violently suppressed. Soon afterwards, it became a raging war between various factions with competing agendas. From Islamist groups rising up to create a new state to interventions by the United States and Russia, the many developments of this complex conflict are beyond the scope of this paper.

This conflict has displaced millions of people, both internally within Syria and externally in neighboring countries such as Turkey. There are 6.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as over 5.6 million people seeking asylum in neighboring countries and in Europe. Turkey hosts the largest number of Syrians. The fact that it shares a long border with Syria, that the border was relatively easy to cross due to policy, and that it is a large country with opportunities are just three reasons why Syrians seek refuge there. Lebanon, currently hosting 946,291 Syrians, and Jordan, with 670,238 Syrians, are two neighboring countries also heavily affected by the displacement (UNHCR, 2019).

Additionally, with no end in sight after more than eight years of war, these displaced people face dire circumstances and an unknown future. The stakes are raised even higher as the majority of the Syrian refugee population are children and therefore vulnerable to illiteracy, poverty, child marriage, child labor, and more. The magnitude and urgency of the largest contemporary displacement in the world demands our attention and analysis.

Turkish Government Policy on the Syrian Refugee Influx (2011-2014)

The initial policy of the Turkish government during the Syrian refugee influx must be understood in order to better understand the current policy. An early policy executed in a state of confusion and uncertainty was followed by another policy that attempted to be more inclusive a few years later.

Treatment of the First Syrian Refugees

While the original reception of Syrians was generally warm and positive, these sentiments dwindled as the conflict continued. The first Syrian refugees entered Turkey in late April of 2011 (Dinçer, et al, 2013). Turkey and Syria had signed a visa-free agreement in 2009 that allowed easy entrance across the border (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). Those with passports could freely enter Turkey and live where they wanted, but those without documents were immediately placed in temporary “guest” camps (Dinçer, et al, 2013). Batalla and Tolay (2018) said that during the beginning of the conflict, Syrians

were able to freely enter Turkey and were not limited to crossing at an official border gate nor were required to have proper identification (p. 4). Many Syrian refugees flocked to Turkey due to violence in Syria, Turkey's open-door policy, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's welcoming statements towards the Syrians (Hacioglu, 2018).

Turkey's sudden and unexpected influx of Syrian refugees broke several records. More Syrian refugees came to Turkey in a shorter period of time than any other refugee movement into Turkey previously and this was also the first time that Turkey has taken in so many non-European refugees (Kirişçi & Salooja, 2014). The Turkish government's original response was to have Syrians follow the regular asylum-seeking procedure. The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), the agency that usually processes asylum seekers and migrants, claims it processed the first Syrians from April to October of 2011 (ASAM, personal communication, July 24, 2018). However, the majority of the literature ignores which specific government agency processed registration of the Syrian refugees during the very beginning due to the extreme brevity of that time frame.

“Temporary Protection” Policy

As mentioned in the introduction, Turkey does not officially consider Syrians to be “refugees” because it maintains the geographical limitation of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, more simply called the 1951 Refugee Convention. Therefore, Turkey only grants the “refugee” status to those coming from Europe, as they sought asylum during and after World War II. Those who seek asylum in Turkey

originating from other geographical areas are given alternative legal statuses, such as international protection, subsidiary protection, and others. As also previously mentioned, for the sake of simplicity, Syrians in Turkey will be referred to as “refugees” throughout this thesis even though they are not formally recognized as such by the state.

In October 2011, Turkey’s Ministry of Interior announced the granting of “temporary protection” to Syrians but did not precisely define what this status encompassed (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). The government maintained this policy both on the condition that the number of Syrians in Turkey would be less than 100,000, and on the assumption that the conflict in Syria would soon end (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). Neither proved true.

Registration of the refugees then switched from ASAM to Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD), and, within the next three years, this agency viewed this important emergency as becoming a normalcy. For example, AFAD has adapted to this situation by eventually building and managing twenty-six camps, or temporary accommodation centers (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). While camps hosted large amounts of Syrians in the early years, they started to be less central to the Turkish response over time; as of mid-March 2019, there were only thirteen camps populated by just over 141,000 Syrians throughout southern Turkey (Figure 3).

The escalation of the conflict in Syria in 2012 led to additional consequences in Turkey. The situation in Aleppo caused many more refugees to flee to Turkey (Dinçer, et al, 2013). This put great pressure on Turkey, causing stricter immigration policies, additional camps, and security fears (Dinçer, et al, 2013). Around this time, the Syrian refugee influx was testing the limits of the hospitality Turkey was offering. It was no

longer sustainable to provide the same amount of resources and services as had been provided since mid-2011 (Dinçer, et al, 2013). The Turkish government and policy-makers also had assumed that the civil war back in Syria would be resolved by this time, but this had not been the case. As the war worsened and dragged on, Turkey struggled to balance managing the refugees within the country and continuing humanitarian aid outside the country (Dinçer, et al, 2013). Something substantial needed to happen.

Therefore, another policy was necessary. In April 2013, Turkey passed a new immigration law, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which was implemented the following year (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). It primarily established the legal basis for the “temporary protection” status, separate from international protection, conditional refugee status, and subsidiary protection. This general idea behind this law and some of its features, such as creating the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), had existed for several years before the Syrian conflict began, but was adapted and officially adopted into law to address contemporary concerns. This law also paved the way for the transfer of some of AFAD’s responsibilities, such as the registration of Syrians, to DGMM. This was so that, eventually, AFAD could return to its duty as a purely disaster and emergency response agency while DGMM could focus on all aspects related to the migration of Syrians to Turkey.

In October 2014, the government released an additional policy, the Temporary Protection Regulation, that clarified the ambiguities of the status since its announcement three years prior. It provided Syrians with rights and services, including free access to education, on the condition that they are registered within a particular province and hold a Temporary Protection Identification Document (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). This regulation

appointed AFAD to coordinate how these services would be delivered, through the appropriate Ministries and other institutions (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). The predicament surrounding the temporary protection status is that it is still temporary and how long it will last is unknown. For example, many Syrians are fearful that it could be terminated in the near future, with little to no warning. Even having the temporary protection legal status, the majority of Syrians are stuck in a limbo state because they have no path to refugee status (with more protections as enshrined in the UN Refugee Convention of 1951) nor to permanent residency in Turkey. Only a few tens of thousands Syrians have received a phone call from the Turkish government offering citizenship due to their high level of education or skill, for example. Therefore, the temporary protection scheme remains the main policy framework in place, even though five years have passed.

Turkish Policy on Education of Syrian Refugee Children (2011-2018)

There are over a million Syrian school-aged children in Turkey. Just over 60% are enrolled in school (MoNE, personal communication, August 1, 2018). Turkish policy on the education of Syrian children has gradually changed over the past eight years. In the first few years, an array of different educational opportunities emerged to address Syrian school children's needs. Since 2016, Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is in the process of streamlining all of the children through one system (the Turkish public education system) that attempts to reconcile their diverse educational needs and desires.

Early Improvised Schools (in both urban and camp settings)

While the majority of Syrians settled in temporarily established camps early on, most have now moved on to live in urban environments and less than four percent now live in the established camps in Turkey (Figure 4). Unutulmaz (2018) said, “While education facilities did exist in the camps that were set up and run by Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD), these camps hosted only a minority of the Syrian communities in the country” (p. 5-6). Therefore, this left the educational situation for the majority of Syrian children, especially in urban areas elsewhere throughout the country, in great uncertainty. This phenomenon is important to understand what options Syrian children have to access education.

At this time, there was a large discrepancy between law and reality. The Constitution of Turkey states that all children in Turkey have the right to public school education. Article 42 of the Constitution of Turkey says, “No one shall be deprived of the right of education” as well as “Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools” (Hacioglu, 2018, p. 22). Education is compulsory and free in Turkey, including that of foreigners regardless of their nationality, according to both domestic and international law of which Turkey is a signatory. Article 34 of the LFIP states that the children under 18 years of age of all legal residents in Turkey have the right to receive primary and secondary education in public schools (Unutulmaz, 2018). In 2012, Turkey expanded its education requirement from eight to twelve years, now divided between primary as well as lower and upper secondary school (Hacioglu, 2018). However, multiple challenges prevented the vast majority of Syrian children from accessing public school education in Turkey. The LFIP contained

no provisions that specifically addressed the education of Syrians because they had no legal status within Turkey (Unutulmaz, 2018). Many Syrian families would not enroll their children for various reasons, regardless of what the Constitution and LFIP said about educational access. Low enrollment and attendance in Turkish public schools was primarily due to the linguistic discrepancy between Arabic and Turkish. Another reason was Syrians thought that their stay in Turkey would be temporary and that they would return after the conflict in their homeland. Some moved frequently and did not want to be registered until they resided in another province they preferred, such as Istanbul. Other factors, such as employment, proximity to extended friends and family, as well as cultural misgivings about the Turkish education system set-up, also influenced whether a Syrian child was able to attend a provincial public school with Turkish peers.

There are various origin stories that conflict among the literature and research on how centers specifically for the education of Syrian children developed. Regardless, the educational situation for Syrians in Turkey was lacking, both in camp and non-camp settings. The international community pushed for schools to open in camps because the Turkish public schools were so poorly attended by Syrian children (Çorabatir, personal communication, July 30, 2018). Among other facilities, such as gymnasiums, health clinics, and mosques, schools were built in the camps that AFAD created, now managed by DGMM. Yet educational access outside the camps was different because many school-like centers spontaneously appeared due to initiatives by Syrian individuals, not by Turkish authorities. Unutulmaz (2018) said that by 2012, the tough environment surrounding the Syrian refugee communities in Turkey spurred organic efforts to educate their children in temporary centers (p. 6). Due to the growing number of Syrians in

Turkey, the number of these centers and the students in attendance grew exponentially (Unutulmaz, 2018). For example, schools with religious and Quranic classes formed to reinforce the most important traditional cultural and religious values that parents missed from the Syrian curriculum (Hacioglu, 2018; Taştan & Çelik, 2017). Whether Syrian teachers and parents lived inside or outside the camps, they had great concern about the lack of educational access, which led to the existence of temporary education centers.

Several local government officials recounted their version on how the early schools for Syrians came into being. The city of Gaziantep claims it had the first two schools for Syrian students, called temporary education centers (TECs), that were established in Turkey in 2012 and 2013 in order to eliminate risk of the “lost generation,” with Syrian teachers and an Arabic curriculum (GMM, personal communication, August 9, 2018). Even though not many Syrian children were enrolled at the time, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality (GMM) officials still believed the idea of a temporary center specifically for education was important to implement. They credit their mayor, Fatma Şahin, for developing a model that allowed everyone in Gaziantep, both Turkish and Syrian, equal access to services, because she was most concerned about possible future problems between the Syrian and Turkish communities. A former Minister of Family and Social Policies herself, Mayor Şahin supposedly had more than a dozen meetings with the MoNE throughout early- and mid-2014, convincing the Ministry to adopt GMM’s TEC model and to establish similar schools all over the country later that year (GMM, personal communication, August 9, 2018). This case demonstrates that local government officials also had great concern about the lack of school access, which led to the existence of temporary educational centers.

The 2014 Push for Temporary Education Centers

Additional laws were needed to address the educational needs of Syrians. The September 23rd, 2014 Circular on Education Activities Targeting Foreigners, or Educational Services for Foreigners, formally introduced the Temporary Education Centers (TECs) and began the establishment of TECs across Turkey as well as officially recognized the informal schools and centers intended for Syrian children already in existence. The Circular formally granted Syrian children to enroll in school with foreign identification and without a Turkish residency permit, relieving many families and allowing broader educational access (Hacioglu, 2018). Unlike the vague laws previously, the Circular provided more details in regard to the educational rights of as well as procedures for those under temporary protection in Turkey (Unutulmaz, 2018). It also enabled the provincial organization of the MoNE, with provincial commissions set up in each city to execute the following tasks:

- (i) to decide on the procedures of accreditation and determination of education levels and to direct students to appropriate education institutions; (ii) to carry out necessary work concerning the establishment of TECs inside and outside of camps, which now requires approval from governorates; and (iii) to carry out necessary work concerning the quality and content of the education provided by the TECs” (Unutulmaz, 2018, p. 8).

These provincial commissions would greatly assist the MoNE’s nationwide oversight of the TECs.

Establishing government-recognized TECs was a big step for the education of Syrian youth in Turkey. The TECs’ goal was to prevent Syrian students from falling

behind academically and to provide temporary education so they would not experience severe gaps or consequences upon returning to Syria and its educational system (Hacioglu, 2018; Taştan & Çelik, 2017). These TECs followed the curriculum used in Syria with some slight modifications. One of those modifications was that the MoNE edited Syrian textbooks, removing all mention of the al-Assad family and government as well as negative portrayals of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). Lessons at the TECs were conducted in Arabic. The majority of the teachers were Syrians, including many who were teachers in Syria. Even though these teachers were considered volunteer educators, they received an UN-paid monthly salary. Unutulmaz (2018) said, “Until the end of 2016, the salary paid to educators at TECs was quite low (600 TL to those working at TECs located in camps and 900 TL to those working at outside TECs)” (p. 10). Unutulmaz (2018) continued, “In 2017, however, it was raised to 1,300 TL, almost the level of the minimum legal wage in Turkey, for all volunteer educators irrespective of the location of their TECs” (p. 10). One researcher said that 36,000 Syrians worked at the TECs spread across Turkey and that they received required specific training and certification before teaching. The MoNE created an online system to track enrollment, absence, and success of the Syrian students in the TECs (Hacioglu, 2018).

After the MoNE formalized the TECs already in existence with the 2014 Circular, TECs began operating in both urban and camp settings. Unutulmaz (2018) said, “Starting from 2014, the MoNE itself has opened a large number of TECs as part of its efforts to regulate education programs catering to Syrians and to eliminate any potential security vulnerability by bringing TECs under strict control” (p. 10). According to Unutulmaz

(2018), “There were 425 TECs active in 21 different cities providing education to 328,642 Syrian students as of early 2017” (p. 9). Unutulmaz (2018) said, “While only 36 of these TECs are located within camps, the vast majority of them (389) are scattered across urban centers, mostly in the cities with the highest concentration of Syrian refugee communities” (p. 9-10). Unutulmaz (2018) continued, “More than half (248) of TECs have been opened by the MoNE, while the second-largest founders of TECs are NGOs, which have established 101 centers” (p. 10). Therefore, the many TECs allowed more Syrian children educational access, regardless of their location within Turkey.

Of the two most common education options at the time (besides the less common options of non-formal education via non-profits, religious institutions, and Syrian private schools), the TECs were the more popular choice among Syrian families. Syrian families favored the familiar linguistic and cultural aspects of the TECs because they were knowledgeable and confident in the curriculum and environment with some ties to their homeland. More conservative Syrian parents were comfortable in the classrooms separated by gender for their teenage children. There was even standardized testing for 12th graders in the TECs; an SAT-like exam, in Arabic, for those university-entry intentions (Kahf, personal communication, July 27, 2018).

The 2016 Reversal from TECs to Turkish Public Schools

In early 2016, Ankara made the decision to phase out the TECs, to transition all Syrian children to Turkish public schools with the goal of 100 percent enrollment. This large-scale policy change is funded in part by UNICEF and the European Commission

(Batalla & Tolay, 2018). In an October 3rd, 2016 announcement, MoNE authorities stated that its new educational policy towards Syrians consisted of two main components: to integrate TECs with public schools and to increase access to Turkish language classes (MoNE, personal communication, August 1, 2018).

The transition from the TECs to the Turkish public schools started in the summer of 2016 (GMM, personal communication, August 9, 2018). Syrian children in the first and fifth grades were enrolled in the Turkish public schools during the 2016-17 school year. At the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, those in second and sixth grades were enrolled. For 2018-19 school year, the third and seventh graders made the transition. By fall 2019, all TECs will be closed when the fourth and eighth grade children are enrolled (GMM, personal communication, August 9, 2018).

The idea behind the inclusion into the Turkish public education system is that quality education provides refugee children protection from various exploitations: child labor, early marriage, military recruitment, radicalization, marginalization, illiteracy, poverty, and more (Hacioglu, 2018; Taştan & Çelik, 2017). This education can enable them with skills, integration, and a better future for the refugee children not only in Turkey but in other countries in which they will settle (Hacioglu, 2018). If and/or when they return to Syria, they will have the capabilities to rebuild their homeland.

This sudden change of policy, from privileging temporary education centers specifically geared for Syrians to forcing every Syrian to enter the Turkish public education system, requires further explanation. Why did Turkish authorities undertake such a policy reversal?

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

To address the research question of why Turkish authorities changed their approach on the education of Syrian refugee children, this research surveyed the existing literature on refugee policy and policy change. Refugee studies as practiced by political scientists is a field that has been characterized by a lack of theorization, with most studies focusing on a single context. Much research has focused on the politics of asylum, sometimes leading to discussion of asylum policy formation, or has focused on the impact that policies have had on refugees (Brettell & Hollifield, 2015; Black, 2001). This study, however, is interested in refugee policy change, especially concerning education. Tools and insights developed by policy analysis can be helpful here. Birkland (2016) demonstrated how policy inputs and outputs as well as various environments affect policy. Jacobsen (1996) looked at the following factors specifically: “the costs and benefits of accepting international assistance, relations with the sending country, political calculations about the local community’s absorption capacity, and national security considerations” (p. 655).

In terms of methodology, this research relies on qualitative methods via a review of existing literature, interviews, and ethnographic observations.

A literature review of a dozen academic sources was first conducted. It analyzed the various policy throughout the years of the influx in Turkey. Reports, policy documents, and statistics were included. As was already shown in the sections above, the

most relevant sources for this section included works from Batalla & Tolay as well as Kirişci & Salooja, and Dinçer, et al. However, a large gap in the research remained. The majority of previous research had both not focused specifically on the Turkish government's policies towards the education of young Syrian refugee children nor had it explained much of the transition of these policies that have occurred. A few who have researched this topic, such as Unutulmaz and Hacıoğlu, provide recent contributions of benefit to this paper.

To supplement the review of the existing literature, fifty-two semi-structured in-depth interviews, ranging in length from a half hour to over an hour, were conducted during a month-long research program hosted by the Turkish Heritage Organization in the summer of 2018. There was great diversity in the representation. These actors included state officials, local government officials, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), representatives from international organizations (IOs) and the United Nations (UN), and researchers. The author grouped the interviewees into five categories based on the likelihood that an actor's position, perspectives, and explanations would resemble those of similar actors within that same category in order to provide a better comparison and contrast among all responses. During the interviews, verbal consent was obtained and information was recorded via note-taking. Each interviewee had a different preference regarding how their name and/or affiliation could be used publicly. Accordingly, this study respects their wishes, whether they are referred to by their name, by their institution, or by their profession. Turkish-English and Arabic-English translators were present and utilized during many of the interviews, according to the linguistic needs and

preferences of all involved. Due to the human subject aspect of this research, an IRB was required and approved by Penn State. Each week of the program was spent in a different city: Washington, D.C. in the United States as well as Istanbul, Ankara, and Gaziantep in Turkey. These cities were chosen for specific reasons; Washington and Ankara provided access to government and IO officials while Istanbul and Gaziantep hosted significantly Syrian refugee populations. Multiple topics were covered, from health to gender issues to legal protection, allowing for a broad conversation and better understanding of the broader situation of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey. This extensive fieldwork allowed engagement with first-hand actors, to whom the question of why the Turkish government suddenly changed its educational policy could be asked.

In order to interpret the data gathered during these interviews, thick description will be used to analyze the ways in which different actors view the reasons on why the Turkish government changed its policy towards the education of Syrian school children. Thick description as set forth by Geertz (1973) was initially envisioned for ethnographic work in order to provide detailed interpretation of observed behaviors, where the researcher provide additional information about the situation. By extension, thick description is now used widely in different social science disciplines, including political science. This thesis follows the working definition provided by Ponterotto (2006):

Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context. [...]

Thick description accurately describes observed social actions and assigns purpose and intentionality to these actions, by way of the researcher's understanding and clear description of the context under which the social actions

took place. Thick description captures the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships among them. Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turn leads to thick meaning of the research findings for the researchers and participants themselves, and for the report's intended readership. Thick meaning of findings leads readers to a sense of verisimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively "place" themselves within the research context (p. 543).

Thick description therefore strives at being explicit about the role played by the researcher in interpreting the data collected. Conducting this research in Turkey, one frequently had to go beyond extrovert expressions and had to read in between the lines, to recognize that the actors may have had limited recollection of past events, to take into consideration interests and bias based on the actors' profession, or past, or normative values, etc. Such an interpretation attempts to contextualize and relate the behaviors and statements surrounding educational policy change within Turkey. By contextualizing each statement, and by contrasting statements from different actors, this analysis will allow to provide a rich understanding of the complex process that has led to the policy change.

Chapter 4

Explanations and Findings

The majority of actors in the field of Syrian refugee education in Turkey agreed that the TECs were not a suitable permanent educational system and that the new policy is in a general good direction. However, they differed on the specific reasons for the transition. The following questions were used to guide and to systematically interpret the interview data: 1. What are the different things that the actors highlight? 2. Why would different actors want to focus on certain particular elements, as opposed to other elements? 3. How do the actors explain the transition? 4. How do their explanations differ from the explanations of others? and 5. How does an actor's position and identity inform the type of explanation given?

President Erdoğan

For a full understanding of the explanations provided and discussed, it is necessary to first review President Erdoğan's perspective on the matter of Syrians and Syrian children's education in Turkey. Even though this researcher did not interview him, what he has said in speeches is ample for better contextualizing the responses of the state government officials that follow.

Syrians are often referred to as "guests" and "Muslim brothers and sisters". Erdoğan has used the term "guest" to imply that it is Turkey's moral obligation to host Syrians in Turkey temporarily (Polat, 2018). When addressing the UN General Assembly

in September 2014, Erdoğan said, “Today, irrespective of their religion, sect or race we embrace and help everyone” (Polat, 2018, p. 7). Islamic values, such as compassion, are also emphasized to explain Turkey’s responsibility to care for the incoming Syrians. Erdoğan said, “We see all our siblings coming to our country [...] and convivially welcome them. We open our homes to them. We share our bread” (Polat, 2018, p. 7). To some extent, many Turkish citizens felt similarly. When asked why Turkey should admit Syrian refugees, the majority of the Turkish survey participants responded that it was mainly out of humanitarian obligations, without discrimination based on language, religion, or ethnicity (Erdoğan, 2014). Therefore, Erdoğan’s rhetoric is about Muslim solidarity as well as hospitality and benevolence for fellow human beings in need of a safe haven.

State Officials

The interview with a representative of AFAD was just one of the interviews conducted with state officials. AFAD is attached to the Ministry of the Interior and has been the main state entity in charge of the reception of Syrian refugees during the first years of the influx. According to an AFAD official, policy was initially temporary and, as the war went on longer than expected, was gradually made permanent. The official said, “As of today, the war goes on and they cannot go home. It could take decades” (AFAD, personal communication, July 30, 2018). The official said that no big events occurred as the primary motivation for change in mindset. The government just had to change strategy. The official continued, “The only reason [the government] changed strategy was

because the people are most important. Turkey loves refugees” (AFAD, personal communication, July 30, 2018). The official stressed that because the Syrian refugees are now expected to remain in Turkey for a long time, the government must change its policy, including educational policy. The official also noted that no matter what the government does, it has to be approved by the public.

AFAD would want to focus on these elements in particular to show that the government is proactively stepping up to the responsibility of hosting Syrian refugees for years to come. The official highlighted how the government is changing the status of everything, not just education. The official focused on how refugees should be seen as people who should be cared for by Turkey because it is the right thing to do. The official also added that Erdoğan cannot do whatever he wants; that the Turkish people have great power in public opinion and must also feel the same in order to execute such generous policies.

There are three main themes present in the AFAD official’s account that serve as the explanation for the transition: the realization of the refugees’ permanence in Turkey; the compassionate approach taken by many within the Turkish government; and the limitations posed by the Turkish public. According to AFAD, the transition is primarily explained by adapting strategy and policy to the predicted situation. It appears that the prolonged length of time of the influx wore on the Turkish government to rethink its approach to Syrian refugees, including education.

The AFAD official perceived the reasons for the transition of refugee education in Turkey differently than other actors. Nothing was explicitly said about harmonization or integration here, as was present in many other conversations. The official also did not

elaborate on why Turkey loves refugees or why Turkey should feel obligated to provide for them. Similarly, there was no mention of common religious brotherhood, as there was in other conversations. However, there was an emphasis on the idea of compassion. Perhaps the AFAD official wanted to convey the positive message to the international community that Turkey is an extremely generous and benevolent host country.

AFAD's position and identity within the Ministry of the Interior informs its explanation for the transition. The official also exuded a positive picture of the Turkish government, of which they are a part. Therefore, AFAD must represent and execute Erdoğan's perspective. The official mentioned the importance of taking responsibility and caring for the Syrians in Turkey because it was the correct, humanitarian action to take, conveying Turkey as a morally better and stronger state than its neighbors for doing so.

DGMM is another body under the Ministry of Interior that is important for their role in Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee influx. DGMM now controls the majority of the camp operations within Turkey and are in charge of all migration-related matters and statistics. DGMM was officially created with the LFIP in 2013 and began operating the following year, although the Turkish government had been honing the idea behind DGMM for many years prior. LFIP contains no mention of "integration"; rather, it introduces DGMM's duties in relation to "mutual 'harmonization' for the purpose of 'equipping foreigners with the knowledge and skills to be independently active in all areas of social life without the assistance of third persons'", whether they are in Turkey, Syria, or any other country (Hacioglu, 2018, p. 16). Turkish authorities, including DGMM, prefer use of the term "harmonization" and avoid "integration" (İçduygu, 2015).

Hacioglu (2018) said, “While collective understanding of integration refers to [the] idea of belonging with equal rights in the path to citizenship, harmonization emphasize[s] the foreignness of newcomers who are being offered rights and services in their temporary space” (p. 16). Using a specific term thus sends a clear message on exactly what the Turkish government’s perceptions are and how they affect policy, from still seeing the “otherness” of their Syrian “guests” to predicting how the longevity of the Syrian conflict affects Turkish society, infrastructure, and resources.

DGMM’s perspective of harmonization helps explain how the transition has developed over the past few years in regard to the Syrians coming into and already living in Turkey. The DGMM representative highlighted that all have the right of access to education. Since other groups with special status in Turkey (international protection applicants, refugees, conditional refugees, people under subsidiary protection) do not have “special schools” but rather are expected to attend the Turkish public schools, the assumption is that people under temporary protection also fall under the same expectation. According to the DGMM representative, the process of harmonization will work through Syrians attending Turkish public schools. Other actors interviewed attributed harmonization little to no credit for the transition. DGMM’s position and identity within the Ministry of the Interior informs its explanation for the transition. The official also exuded a positive picture of the Turkish government, of which they are a part. Therefore, DGMM must represent and execute Erdoğan’s perspective; as Turkey is a centralized state, all bodies of government must have a uniform outlook and approach.

A representative from the MoNE’s Immigration and Emergency Education Department gave more specific information on the current situation of the educational

transition. The MoNE is important here because they are in charge of the implementation of the educational component for individuals under temporary protection. The representative said, “Because Turkish and Syrian people share a common religion, religious courses in public schools will highlight brotherhood between the two people” (MoNE, personal communication, August 1, 2018). Unlike the AFAD representative, the MoNE representative placed special emphasis on common ground and brotherhood through religion that would be reinforced through the curriculum.

While the representative gave no motivation for transition, she emphasized that the government is proactively stepping up to the responsibility of hosting Syrian refugees for years to come. The MoNE’s position and identity informs its explanation for the transition. The Ministry is now responsible for the education of over a million Syrian children and for preparing them for long-term residency in Turkey. The MoNE has played a key role in the transition of educational policy over the past few years, as it is the main enforcer of the large public school system in the country. The representative also exuded a positive picture of the Turkish government. Here again, it seems that they must represent and execute Erdoğan’s perspective, especially with the religious solidarity aspect.

Local Government Officials

Local government officials were also interviewed. While the Turkish Ministries and agencies, such as AFAD and DGMM, have been busy crafting and executing policy, Turkish municipalities are the first responders to handle the influx of Syrians into their

communities (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). Over the past several years, they have scrambled to provide for the Syrians' most urgent needs, including education, even if it means they overextend their legal boundaries and resources (Batalla & Tolay, 2018).

The province of Gaziantep hosts nearly 430,000 Syrians, representing about 22% of the total province's population. Many Syrians sought refuge in the large city of Gaziantep, a large city near the Syrian border. Gaziantep has one of the most advanced and efficient capabilities to provide services, such as education, among various other municipalities providing similar services (Batalla & Tolay, 2018). Batalla and Tolay (2018) said, "Gaziantep has been the first to establish a migration directorate within the municipality structure and has also created new institutions in order to respond to the increased needs of refugees" (p. 12). The local government has had to react appropriately and swiftly while facing a uniquely challenging situation.

According to GMM officials, the reasons behind the transition were due to the change from-temporary-to-permanent mindset and due to the national security concerns. After a few years of the influx, those in leadership positions at GMM believed that the Syrian conflict was not a short-term event and needed to be readdressed with a better, multi-faceted approach. Mayor Şahin was most concerned about possible future problems between the Syrian and Turkish communities. GMM wanted attention focused on the fact that they were the first to act to initiate progressive educational reform. One GMM official said, "Turkish and English language courses provide social cohesion" and "it is better for everyone to be in Turkish public schools" (GMM, personal communication, August 9, 2018). Therefore, GMM said that the transition can be explained due to their beliefs that it is best if all children are included in one school system that will prepare

them with skills for societal life in Turkey. As a local government body, GMM representatives are very familiar with the situation on-the-ground and may have more freedom to say things higher-level state officials may not. GMM highlighted that they are taking on the massive responsibility for caring for the Syrian refugees in their community while attempting to avoid as much risk as possible. Within the period of about two years, these responsibilities and risks convinced Turkish authorities in Ankara to realize that policy needed to be adapted to alleviate the local municipalities.

NGOs and CSOs

While an NGO education coordinator did not provide any specific reasoning behind what he believed had caused the policy change, he has personally observed that the transition has helped the Syrian students with whom he works. The children are better engaged in the Turkish public schools now than they were in the TECs and the initial challenges associated with the transition have slowly eased. The coordinator said, “The Turkish program has appeared to be more demanding but in a positive way.” This is a reference to the more rigorous and formal structure as well as higher quality and standards within the Turkish public schools. The coordinator continued, “The move is a good thing and I think it should be done.” The coordinator concluded, “Getting a child off the street into school is a success.” He also appreciated the compulsory attendance and permanent aspects of the Turkish public schools that were lacking in the TECs. The coordinator’s position, identity, and familiarity with children that transitioned from the TECs to the public schools made him a credible and reliable source of information. Even

though the coordinator is not explicit about what he believes to have caused the transition, his insights do resemble aspects of the temporary-to-permanent perspective present in other actors' interviews.

Dr. Ammar Kahf, Executive Director of Omran and co-founder of the Syrian Forum, (personal communication, July 27, 2018) said that the transition from the TECs to the Turkish public schools was a necessary move because the TECs were poorly monitored (in regard to the curriculum, numbers, and lack of standards). The quality of the education itself was not high-standard. The validity of TEC diplomas was questioned around 2015 after some students' diplomas were not being recognized and accepted by Turkish institutions of higher education. He also said that Syrian parents are happy about the move because it places their children on the path to integration into Turkish society.

Like the educational coordinator, Kahf did not provide any of his explanations or reasons for what may have caused the transition. He also focused on the inferiority of the TECs when compared to the Turkish public schools. Kahf indirectly implied that Turkish authorities were aware of the TECs' inferiority and that this is the reason why they pushed to change educational policy. Kahf focused on the poor quality of the TECs and the diploma problem in particular. He was particularly knowledgeable about these elements and believed that they were not emphasized enough by other actors. Kahf's position and identity further informs his explanation of the differences between education in the TECs and the public schools, as he has credible first-hand experience. He is a Syrian father who helps the families of school-aged children living in Turkey navigate the educational situation.

Metin Çorabatir is the founder and president of the Asylum and Migration Research Center (IGAM), a small, independent NGO based in Ankara. Çorabatir highlighted the impact of IOs when he said, “International Organizations had an influence in telling the Turkish government that education should be a priority. This was an easy sell because Turkey also wanted to prioritize education” (Çorabatir, personal communication, July 30, 2018). Çorabatir explained that the transition is partially attributed to the IOs’ critical pressure on the government to change their approach towards Syrians’ education. Çorabatir mentioned the government’s apprehension about religious TECs as a catalyst for the transition. The centralized Turkish government was concerned about some religious-leaning TECs because they could not control the specifics of the Islamic curriculum (Çorabatir, personal communication, July 30, 2018). Çorabatir also focused on the change in temporary-permanent mindset as an explanation for the transition. He said, “Around 2017, the government changed its outlook based on people not going back soon” (Çorabatir, personal communication, July 30, 2018). Many worried about Syrians being isolated in the long term, especially in regard to the different languages and cultures. Çorabatir’s separate/independent position and identity from the government may allow him more freedom to say what higher-level state officials may not. He may also have the ability to be more critical of the government’s actions.

Researchers

One sociologist whose research overlaps with this topic shed light on aspects and explanations of the transition. The sociologist highlighted that the Turkish state is not

comfortable with having educational institutions operating autonomously; the government prefers to have students in schools controlled by the Turkish state so they know who is there and what is being taught to them. She said, “The education policy is also part of this same process of centralization. Even the TECs are now controlled by the State.” She also said that they have “state agents” such as teachers who are familiar with the Syrian refugee children and their cultural background. The sociologist explained the transition from the TECs to the Turkish public schools was a great way for the government to gain knowledge and control over Syrian children. She emphasized that the primary reason for the transition is for more government control and power over the situation. She also identified a change in mindset, similar to other interviewees’ accounts. She said, “Around the same time as the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, the government had to admit that the influx was not a temporary situation; a permanent solution was needed.” According to her, the government had to acknowledge a “change in presence/attitudes towards Syrian refugees.” The sociologist’s separate position and identity from the government may allow more freedom to say what higher-level state officials may not. She may also have the ability to be more critical of the government’s actions.

Another academic highlighted the original point about Turkey’s infrastructure limits-turned-capabilities. The academic said, “On education, there was a logistical reason [as to why they did not integrate Syrian children in Turkish schools initially]. They first needed to upgrade the public schools’ facilities and to work on physical infrastructure.” She explained the transition that the government had wanted to have the Syrian children in the Turkish schools all along but could not include them earlier because of infrastructure limitations. Once the capabilities were ready, the transition

could begin. She also highlighted the poor quality of the TECs and change in mindset as in other accounts. She said, “TECs were OK in a temporary situation, but not OK in a permanent situation because Turkish and Syrian curricular elements were mixed in a way that could not be qualified.” She said, “The emphasis of being here for a long time versus a short time impacts what they have access to.” She also said that the government educational policy was due to the shift in perspective that the state-of-emergency stage was over. This academic also had an independent position and identity from the government. Such a scenario allows one more freedom to say what higher-level state officials may not. She may also have the ability to be more critical of the government’s actions. The infrastructure-capability argument is neither as strong nor likely as the quality and change-in-mindset arguments that other actors also mentioned.

In addition to the researchers interviewed directly, other academics have highlighted and published alternative views on why the transition occurred. Hacıoglu (2018) and Unutulmaz (2018) both had methodologies, research questions, and published literature within the last year that are similar and helpful to those within this thesis. The temporary-to-permanent mindset reasoning was also present in their research. As hopes of a swift return to Syria decreased, enrollment in the TECs increased (Hacıoglu, 2018). The TECs were only a viable option if the situation was temporary (Hacıoglu, 2018). Unutulmaz (2018) believed that a temporary mindset was present during the first few years after Syrians started arriving in Turkey (p. 5). Unutulmaz (2018) said, “The dominant perspective on the migration of Syrians to Turkey, one shared by both Turks and Syrians, was that the war in Syria would not last long and that the Syrians would soon return to their countries” (p. 5). The early policy and literature focused on temporary

measures, such as their temporary protection status (Hacioglu, 2018). However, there has been a recent realization that the Syrian refugees will be in Turkey longer than expected and that there are limits to temporary protection (Hacioglu, 2018). Several laws and regulations were enacted around 2014 to accompany the government's change in mindset as well as to address the government's concerns (Unutulmaz, 2018). Unutulmaz (2018) said, "These legal measures had two primary aims: to bring the education of Syrians under the control of the state and to clarify the education options to which Syrians' newly established legal status entitled them" (p. 7). Unutulmaz (2018) said, "Essentially, these legal measures were an acknowledgement that the vision of temporariness was now being replaced" (p. 7). These elements have attracted the attention of many authorities and academics, including this researcher, to highlight flaws and to recommend changes.

It is clear that the current policy and literature focuses on integration. The realization and necessity of the government to implement a policy including integration also explained a great deal of possible and/or partial reasoning behind the change. In regard to Syrian refugees in Turkey, the means of social and educational integration have changed over time (Hacioglu, 2018). Education via the modified Syrian curriculum taught in Arabic slowed down the process of Syrians participating comfortably in Turkish society (Hacioglu, 2018). Despite good intentions and small, quick fixes to policy, the time is now for the Turkish government to draft and execute a new policy that embraces long-term, complete integration (Hacioglu, 2018). Unutulmaz (2018) said, "It was only after the aforementioned change of perception about the future of Syrians in Turkey that the issue of Syrian integration emerged as one of the most important items on the political agenda" (p. 12). Unutulmaz (2018) said, "Through more comprehensive and

inclusive education policies, the Turkish state is now contributing to this transformation of the perception of Syrians as longer-term residents of the country” (p. 11). A more inclusive education policy paves the way toward integration and the long-term, the big ideas behind the current policy.

The closure of the TECs also has to do with how they operated. Turkish authorities had little to no means to control or audit the TECs. The students, teachers, and administrators were Syrians and the materials were in Arabic (Unutulmaz, 2018). The Syrian teachers did not have any Turkish accredited qualifications (Unutulmaz, 2018). The lack of official recognition in regard to diplomas, either at institutions of higher education within Turkey or elsewhere, given out upon graduation from the TECs concerned the Turkish government about the curriculum’s content and quality (Hacioglu, 2018; Unutulmaz, 2018). This strongly corroborated the accounts given by the NGO and CSO representatives above.

Discussion

While the government’s national security concerns and the concerns about the poor quality of the TECs provide partial contribution to why the policy changed, this researcher found the temporary-to-permanent mindset shift to be the dominant explanation. The majority of actors interviewed as well as the literature recognized a transition from perceived temporariness about how long the Syrian conflict would last and how long that it would affect Turkey between 2011 and 2016 to an explicit, serious approach of involving Syrians into all aspects of Turkish society between 2016 and the

present day. This explanation is stronger than the others because it appears most frequently in the responses given by actors from multiple categories. AFAD, GMM, Çorabatir, the academic researcher, and much of the literature attribute this change from the temporary, emergency response of organic schools and TECs to the permanent, inclusive effort within the Turkish public schools as the main reason why the Turkish government then changed educational policy towards Syrian youth.

The second explanation frequently provided was regarding national security concerns. Turkish authorities, international organizations, and researchers frequently expressed worry about the present and future situation of the Syrian children if they were not receiving a quality education. The government cited national security concerns as justification to exert more control over the children's education. International organizations pressured the Turkish government and other actors to provide a quality education. The new policy of mandatory attendance in the Turkish public school system is intended to resolve these fears as well as benefit the children with necessary skills and important opportunities.

Chapter 5

Analysis of the Successes and Challenges of the Current Policy

Successes

The current policy has been successful and worthy of praise in various regards. There have already been reports that the Syrian children are successfully performing in the Turkish public schools (Çorabatir, personal communication, July 30, 2018). Several of the interviewees expressed hope and satisfaction about the overall benefits of the transition. Education provides stabilization to the lives of these children, increases their opportunities within Turkey by learning the language and culture, and access to the skills necessary for a self-sufficient life as well as for rebuilding Syria (if and/or when they return) (Hacioglu, 2018; Taştan & Çelik, 2017). Schools provide the hope, reliable structure, and routine normalcy that children need, especially important for vulnerable and traumatized refugee children (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). The Turkish public schools have the capability to be a central institution that acts as a support mechanism for Syrian refugee children attempting to adapt to their new life in Turkey (Ozer et al., 2016, p. 88). The education of Syrian refugee children in the Turkish public schools system is an extremely crucial element if the policy of integration is to succeed.

Challenges

However, some obstacles, criticisms, and worries about the transition remain. One of the challenges is to determine the specific educational needs of each individual child.

Placing refugee children in the appropriate class grade must be conducted on a case-by-case basis, given that children have often missed significant amounts of class time. For example, a ten-year-old child that who was never educated in Syria due to the circumstances would struggle in an upper-level class among peers of a similar age who have continued informal education at home or in the TECs. There are three ways of deciding which grade would be most suitable for the child: 1. by declaring actual age and going into the correlating grade for that age; 2. by entering the grade where they left off; and 3. by examination to determine which grade is most appropriate for the child (TESEV, personal communication, July 23, 2018). There is the additional obstacle that Turkey's education system and curriculum greatly differs from that of Syria's. For example, high school is not mandatory within Syria but is within Turkey. The TECs currently offer 15 hours of Turkish language courses per week to prepare the remaining Syrian children for the transition (MoNE, personal communication, August 1, 2018). Yet there are arguments over what language of instruction should be used in the schools. Some defend that Arabic is the most appropriate language in order to maintain the child's Syrian cultural identity as well as the hope of returning to their homeland while others argue that Turkish will better include them into the larger society of their host country (Hacioglu, 2018). The MoNE is balancing the well-intentioned motivations behind these arguments by conducting the curriculum in Turkish but supplementing it with Arabic and Syrian culture-based elective courses.

If Turkish authorities desire a successful integration via education, then both the policy as well as the curriculum need to be adapted. They must account and provide remedy for the likely psychological states of trauma experienced among the Syrian

refugee children (Hacioglu, 2018). Due to fleeing the conflict, many Syrians have experienced depression, anxiety, and PTSD, causing them to exhibit behaviors such as violence, submission to peer pressure, and introversion (Hacioglu, 2018). These consequences have a great influence on the child's performance in both school and society. Policy and curriculum must also account for the diversity of those in its education system. Batalla and Tolay (2018) said, "Questions are being asked regarding how the Turkish curriculum could be revised to better integrate the experience of Syrians, which reignite the broader questions of multiculturalism in the Turkish education system" (p. 18). If the Turkish government is willing to adapt the MoNE curriculum to accommodate the Syrians' educational desires, other cultural and ethnic minorities, such as Iraqi asylum seekers and the Kurds, will also want their say.

Yet even while the debate on multiculturalism in Turkey reappears, the MoNE is facing the logistical challenge of merely including more than a million new students into its existing educational facilities within a four-year period. Unutulmaz (2018) said, "Based on the average number of students per teacher in Turkey, the MoNE calculates that adding an extra half million students will require around 28,000 new teachers" (p. 11). There is much speculation over whether these teachers will be Turkish, Syrian, or a diverse mix of both. Competing opinions and perspectives weigh heavy on these options, reviving an old political debate. Unutulmaz (2018) said, "Ethnic and cultural diversity have never been welcomed in the country, which was established on the very strong republican ideal of a unified nation embodied in the notion of a modern Turkish citizen" (p. 13). The Republic of Turkey's first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, considered education to be one of the most effective means of carrying out this philosophy. In

Turkey, it has always mattered who decided the content of the curriculum, who taught the class, and who has the strongest speaking voice; for they would determine the future of the country's path. Unutulmaz (2018) said, "In such a context, the integration into the system of such a large number of Syrian students, who receive free public education in the same schools and classrooms as Turkish students, has the potential to create great political repercussions" (p. 13). It reopens the possibility that the Kurdish, Armenians, Yazidi, and other minorities will fight for equal rights as well as the possibility of controversial and discriminatory responses from the Turkish authorities. Therefore, the large wave of refugees in less than a decade, the nature of the unideal circumstances, and more have forced the Turkish government to reevaluate its policy. Some want to prioritize a swift and successful integration of the Syrian students into Turkish society while others prefer to focus on how the school environment would be most suitable to accommodate all children, no matter their ethnicity, culture, or language.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The transition of educational policy towards Syrians over the last eight years demonstrates that Ankara knows that education is key to lessening any negative, long-term consequences of the situation in Turkey. While the Turkish government may only be able to control some limited aspects of the entire situation, they are able to control the quality of the educational experience a Syrian child should encounter.

The research found two main reasons for the transition: a perception shift from Syrians having a temporary to permanent stay in Turkey as well as national security concerns. The temporary-to-long-term explanation was the most common explanation, mentioned in interviewee accounts among multiple categories that covered various different aspects of this idea. Both the Turkish authorities, the Turkish public, and the international community expected a quick resolution to the conflict, assuming the Syrians' stay would be temporary and that no legal directives specifically addressing the situation would be necessary. Eventually, the government adapted existing as well as crafted new policy to provide uniform, quality educational access.

Before the majority of the research was conducted, the author expected the continued Syrian conflict to be the reason why the transition took place. However, the literature review proved that this prediction was too simplistic and did not explain all aspects of the transition fully. The situation was much more complex and multiple explanations appeared. Additionally, the interviews both confirmed the contents of the

existing literature and provided further details. While the author's initial theory resembles the dominant research finding, the discrepancy demonstrates that further research was necessary to better understand the reasoning behind the transition. The research findings also revealed how aspects of the theoretical framework were applied to the case of Turkey. For example, as previously mentioned by Jacobsen (1996) and confirmed by the interviewees' accounts, national security considerations were partially responsible for policy change.

The current policy towards integration of Syrian youth into the Turkish public schools and society is the appropriate and necessary next step. The extended stay of Syrians in Turkey challenges the temporary protection status and forces Turkish authorities to reconsider policy to incorporate long-term integration. Policy and practices that do not address the importance and urgency of integration are outdated and incapable of reflecting the challenges of the present situation. Successful integration must be included in every aspect of life and society, especially in education if Syrian children are to become welcomed and appreciated. Integration through education influences their self-esteem, sense of belonging, language ability, social skills, and future socio-economic status.

Even though it has taken Turkey several years to balance its perceptions and desires with the reality of the circumstances and to adapt its policy accordingly, Turkey's current policy of integration now places it to serve as a possible role model for other countries around the world with refugees in similar circumstances. When facing new mass inflows of asylum seekers and refugees, most host countries focus on emergency humanitarian assistance. However, most contemporary conflicts are protracted, leading to

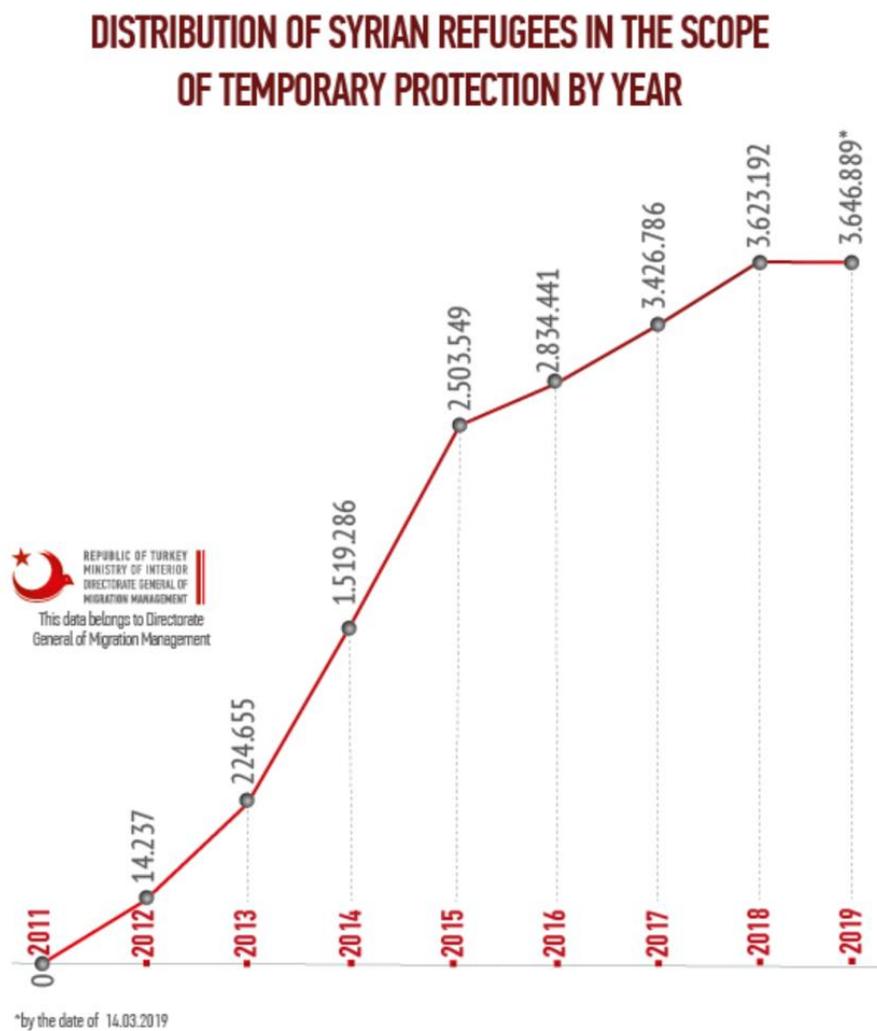
an unexpectedly extension of the foreigners' stay. One of the main challenges for any host country is to realize the need to go beyond the emergency situation by implementing policy that addresses long-term needs. As shown here, this is particularly true for the education of school-age Syrian children. The case of Turkey has demonstrated that this change of mindset, from a short-term to a long-term view, requires a combination of factors to come together: actors on the ground (such as local municipal authorities) or NGO/CSO actors who are able to share and communicate with national authorities about the realities on the ground; external actors that put additional pressure and bring expertise from other similar situation(s); as well as a leadership that is committed to have an approach that aims at a normative and positive approach to address the refugees' needs. Even Turkey's desire to centralize and control the influx has led to the positive outcome of the early push for a policy transition to compulsory attendance within the public school system. Whether these conditions can be replicated in other similar contexts – for example, the current refugee situation surrounding Venezuela as another important and timely case – will be an important line of work for future research projects.

While there are ample studies on refugees and migrants, there is still a lack of academic research specifically on the topic of Syrian refugee education in Turkey. Reports produced by NGOs and think tanks quickly lose relevance due to the constant changes of the situation. This researcher contributed updated information, research findings, and suggestions on the particular subtopic of educational policy towards Syrian children in Turkey to the field.

Appendix A

Figures

Figure 1.



Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), (March 2019),
“Temporary Protection”.

Figure 2.

DISTRIBUTION BY AGE AND GENDER OF REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES RECORDED BY TAKING BIOMETRIC DATA

| AGE | MALE | FEMALE | TOTAL |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| TOTAL | 1.978.313 | 1.668.576 | 3.646.889 |
| 0-4 | 258.180 | 241.149 | 499.329 |
| 5-9 | 260.017 | 244.426 | 504.443 |
| 10-14 | 202.466 | 187.526 | 389.992 |
| 15-18 | 149.512 | 123.652 | 273.164 |

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), (March 2019),

“Temporary Protection”.

Figure 3.

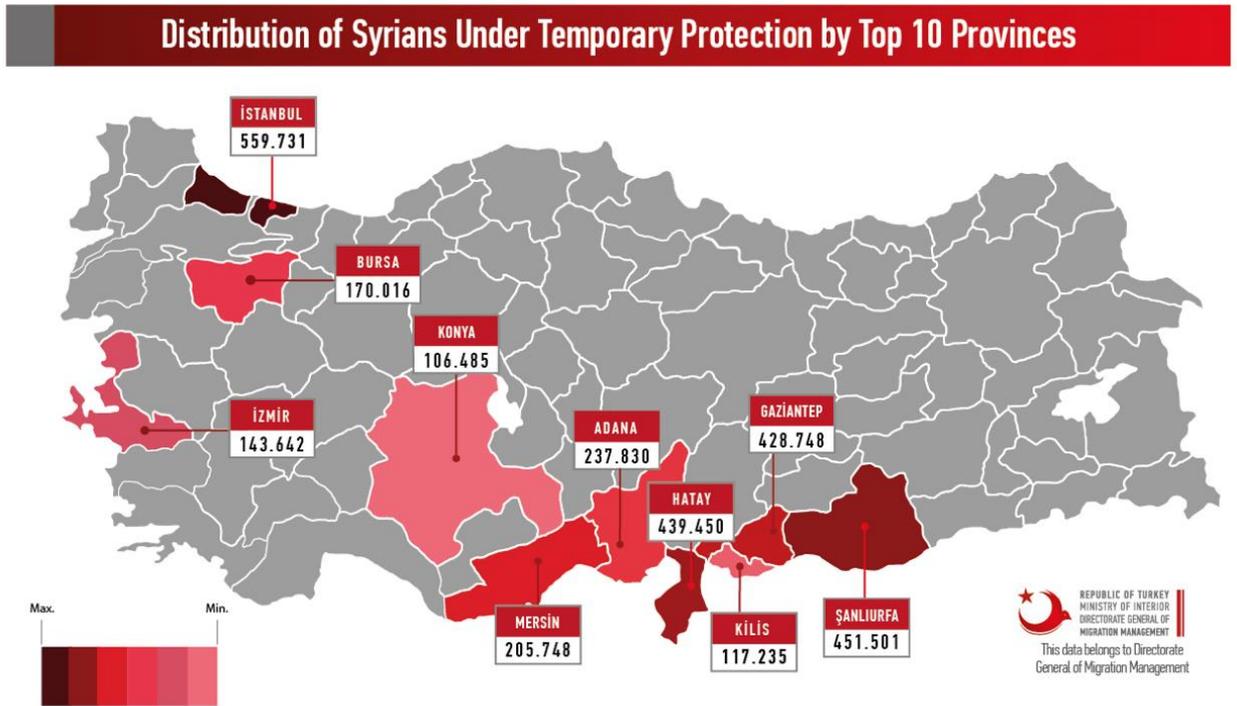
**DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE SCOPE OF
TEMPORARY PROTECTION ACCORDING TO SHELTER CENTERS
(13 SHELTER CENTERS IN 8 PROVINCE)**

| PROVINCE | NAME OF TEMPORARY SHELTER CENTERS | TOTAL TEMPORARY SHELTER CENTERS | GRAND TOTAL |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| SANLIURFA (3) | Ceylanpinar | 17.392 | 42.399 |
| | Harran | 9.891 | |
| | Suruc | 16.334 | |
| ADANA (1) | Saricam | 27.226 | 27.159 |
| KILIS (2) | Oncupinar | 4.231 | 14.724 |
| | Elbeyli | 10.471 | |
| KAHRAMANMARAS (1) | Merkez | 13.639 | 13.649 |
| HATAY (3) | Altinozu | 7.984 | 16.683 |
| | Yayladagi | 4.338 | |
| | Apaydin | 4.460 | |
| OSMANIYE (1) | Cevdetiye | 14.104 | 14.102 |
| MALATYA (1) | Beydagi | 8.871 | 8.761 |
| GAZIANTEP (1) | Nizip 2 | 3.735 | 3.659 |
| Total | | 141.136 | |

by the date of 14.03.2019

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), (March 2019),
 “Temporary Protection”.

Figure 4.



Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), (March 2019),

“Temporary Protection”.

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