

**T.C.
IŐIK UNİVERSTİY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**MASTER THESIS
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAM**

Yahya SAYED OMAR

**CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING SYRIAN REFUGEES
INTO TURKISH SOCIETY**

**SUPERVISOR
Prof. Dr. Ödül CELEP**

İSTANBUL, August 2025

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ÖZET

SURİYELİ MÜLTECİLERİN TÜRK TOPLUMUNA ENTEGRASYONUNUN ZORLUKLARI

Bu araştırma, Suriyeli mülteciler ile Türk toplumu arasındaki sosyal uyum süreci üzerinde üç temel değişkenin dil yeterliliği, Suriyeli mültecilerin eğitim düzeyi ve etnik aidiyet etkisini değerlendirmeyi amaçladı. Çalışma, konuya ilişkin önceki akademik çalışmalar ve politika raporlarının incelendiği literatür temelli bir yaklaşıma dayandı. Bulgular, dilin uyum sürecinde belirleyici bir rol oynadığını gösterdi. Özellikle günlük iletişimde daha güçlü Türkçe dil becerilerine sahip mülteciler, ev sahibi toplumla etkileşim kurmada, eğitime erişimde ve işgücü piyasasına katılımda daha başarılı oldular. Buna karşılık, sınırlı dil yeterliliği sosyal etkileşimi kısıtladı ve izolasyonu güçlendirdi.

Eğitim düzeyi de önemli bir faktör olarak ortaya çıktı. Daha yüksek eğitim seviyesine sahip mülteciler, Türk toplumunun yapısına uyum sağlamada daha yetkin oldular; iş fırsatlarına daha kolay eriştiler, bürokratik sistemlerde daha etkili hareket ettiler ve kültürel ile entelektüel etkileşime katıldılar. Öte yandan, düşük eğitim seviyesine sahip olanlar, etkili bir uyum sağlama konusunda daha fazla engelle karşılaştılar ve bu durum onları kapalı mülteci ağlarına daha fazla bağımlı hale getirdi. Üçüncü faktör olan etnik aidiyet, sürece ek bir karmaşıklık kattı. Suriyeliler ile Türkler arasındaki etnik farklılıklar, sosyal mesafeyi artırdı; kimliğe dayalı ayrımlar önyargı ve stereotipleri besledi. Bu durum, sosyal destek sağlasa da çoğunlukla mülteciler ile ev sahibi toplum arasındaki bölünmeleri derinleştiren etnik gettoların oluşmasına yol açtı.

Sonuç olarak çalışma, başarılı bir uyumun çok boyutlu stratejiler gerektirdiğini ortaya koydu. Dil engellerinin hedefli programlarla giderilmesi, mültecilere yönelik eğitim fırsatlarının desteklenmesi ve kültürlerarası temasın teşvik edilmesi, farklılıkların azaltılmasında temel adımlar oldu. Literatürden elde edilen bulguların senteziyle bu araştırma, mülteci uyum mekanizmalarına

daha derin bir anlayış kazandırdı ve Türkiye’de sosyal uyumu güçlendirmek isteyen politika yapıcılar ile uygulayıcılara öneriler sundu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Entegrasyon, Dil Farkı, Etnik Köken, Eğitim Düzeyi ve Suriyeli Mülteciler

ABSTRACT

CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING SYRIAN REFUGEES INTO TURKISH SOCIETY

This research aimed to evaluate the impact of three fundamental factors language proficiency, the level of educational attainment among Syrian refugees, and ethnic affiliation on the process of social integration between Syrian refugees and Turkish society. The study relied on a literature-based approach, in which previous academic works and policy reports related to the subject were reviewed and analyzed. The findings showed that language played a pivotal role in the integration process. Refugees who possessed stronger skills in the Turkish language, particularly in everyday communication, demonstrated a greater ability to interact with the host community, access education, and participate in the labor market. In contrast, limited language proficiency created barriers that restricted social interaction and reinforced isolation.

Educational attainment also proved to be a significant factor. Refugees with higher levels of education were more capable of adapting to the structures of Turkish society, as they accessed job opportunities more easily, navigated bureaucratic systems more effectively, and engaged in cultural and intellectual exchange. On the other hand, those with lower levels of formal education faced greater obstacles in achieving effective integration, which led them to rely more heavily on closed refugee networks. The third factor, ethnic affiliation, added additional complexity. Ethnic differences between Syrians and Turks tended to reinforce social distance, as identity-based distinctions fostered prejudice and stereotyping. This situation often resulted in the formation of ethnic enclaves which, while providing social support, exacerbated divisions between refugees and the host society.

In conclusion, the study showed that successful integration required multidimensional strategies. Addressing language barriers through targeted

programs, supporting educational opportunities for refugees, and encouraging intercultural contact were essential measures for bridging divides. By synthesizing insights from the literature, this research provided a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of refugee integration and offered recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to enhance social cohesion in Turkey.

Keywords: Social Integration, Language Difference, Ethnicity, Education Level and Syrian Refugees

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Yahya SAYED OMAR

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

SGDD-ASAM: Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants

FRIT: Facility for Refugees in Turkey

IIS: International Institute for Social Integration

IOM: International Organization for Migration

GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PICTES: Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System

RNGO: Refugee Non-Governmental Organization

TESEV: Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

TECs: Temporary Education Centers

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNHCR: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WBG: World Bank Group

WW II: Second World War

CHAPTER 1

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the long-standing and ongoing civil war in Syria, millions of Syrians have fled, with the majority seeking asylum in Turkey. According to United Nations estimates, the number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye at the end of 2024 reached more than 2.9 million refugees (UNHCR, 2024). Due to the length of the asylum period, which exceeded fourteen years, numerous cases of social tension between Syrian refugees and Turks were documented, indicating that the Turkish government and relief and humanitarian organizations have not achieved clear success and have failed in some areas (Makovsky 2019, 37). Social integration programs face several challenges and barriers, the most significant of which are the linguistic and ethnic differences between Syrian refugees and the Turkish host community (Robila 2018, 11). The effect of these factors on the effectiveness of refugee social integration programs has been demonstrated, this is because the language difference between refugees and the host community leads to difficulties in communication, which negatively affects the effectiveness of social integration programs. (Feinstein and Poleacovschi, 2022).

Simultaneously, many previous studies have demonstrated that the level of education among refugees affects the outcomes of social integration programs (Lergetporer et al. 2021) but refugees live under the influence of all these variables (difference in language, ethnic affiliation, and education levels). Therefore, it is not possible to separate these factors from one another except within the context of an academic research, with the goal of studying each factor separately. However, in reality, all of these factors exert their influence on social integration programs simultaneously. They may also be influenced by one

another, such that the level of education may influence the relationship between language difference and indicators of social integration. Refugees with a high level of education may not be affected by language differences to the same extent as those with a low level of education or who have never been educated; the same is true for the relationship between different ethnic affiliations and indicators of social integration.

This study seeks to evaluate the impact of ethnic affiliation, level of education, and language on the social integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey, by reviewing the recent and previous literature. The research aims to determine whether Syrian refugees with high educational attainment are more capable to integrate with Turkish society than those with low educational attainment. This will also demonstrate whether Turkish acceptance of refugees differs depending on the education level of the refugees. This study also seeks to determine whether there is a relationship between the language differences of Syrian refugees and Turkish on their ability to integrate into Turkish society. In particular, this study is interested in whether refugees who speak the Turkish language are more capable to integrate into Turkish society than those who do not speak it at all or not speak it very well. This interest stems from the expectation that the Turkish acceptance of the Syrian refugees depends on the refugees' ability to speak Turkish as well. The research is also interested in determining the impact of the ethnic difference between Syrian refugees and Turkish society on the ability to social integration.

The research seeks to provide answers to these research issues by reviewing the existing literature, by reviewing the literature that is related to the topic of social integration and asylum in general, with a focus on previous literature that is concerned with the issue of Syrian asylum in Turkey and the issue of social integration specifically.

1.2 RESEARCH GAP

Many programs have been organized during the Syrian refugee years in Turkey to promote refugees' social integration with the host community. Some programs allow refugees to open special schools for their nationals depending on the curricula in the Arabic language and by adding seminaries, projects, and programs between Turkish government institutions and international organizations, such as IOM, UNHCR, GIZ and others.

There are numerous factors that influence the effectiveness of social integration programs for refugees with language, ethnicity, and education level being the most significant (Lim, 2021). Numerous previous studies have examined these factors sporadically, assuming that the effect of each factor is independent of the effect of other factors (Fajth et al. 2019). However, the validity of this assumption cannot be established with certainty, as the previous factors may influence each other. For instance, the influence of language on the efficacy of social integration programs is greater in the case of a common ethnic affiliation than in the case of a different ethnic affiliation (Ouael Sarsour, 2022).

1.3 STATUS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKISH CITY, ISTANBUL

Syrian refugees are dispersed across several Turkish provinces, and Istanbul is one of the provinces with the largest number of refugees, with an estimated population of more than 500,000 (Balcioğlu 2021). Their percentage is estimated to be 3.4%, and in recent years, several cases of tension have been recorded among Syrian refugees throughout Turkey, including in Istanbul¹, and this is attributed to the city's diverse neighborhoods.

Recent research confirms that social acceptance of Syrian refugees in Turkey has continued to decline, with increasingly negative attitudes among the

¹ Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions, *International Crisis Group*, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions>

Turkish public. Findings from the Syrians Barometer 2023, conducted at the national level with the support of UNHCR, revealed that a large majority of Turkish citizens do not believe peaceful coexistence with Syrian refugees is possible, as 83.3% of respondents expressed skepticism about living together harmoniously. Moreover, 89% stated that Syrians should leave Turkey, the highest level recorded since the inception of the Syrians Barometer studies (Erdoğan, 2024). What is particularly striking is the shift in public opinion regarding the form of return: while in earlier surveys the dominant preference was relocation to a “safe zone” (37.4% in 2017 and 44.8% in 2019), this option has steadily declined to 29.9% in 2023. At the same time, support for the stricter option of “they should definitely be sent back” has surged dramatically from only 11.5% in 2017 to 59.1% in 2023. These findings, accompanied by additional isolationist views such as confining Syrians to camps or special settlements, underline that Turkish society is not only reluctant to pursue social coexistence but is increasingly oriented toward permanent return policies. This trend reflects a widening gap between the realities of long-term Syrian presence in Turkey and the Turkish public’s strong resistance to integration (Erdoğan, 2024).

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The significance of these issues is demonstrated by the significance of integrating Syrian refugees in Turkey. The duration of the refugee period has already exceeded a decade, making it difficult to predict its end with precision. Recent reports indicate that the rate of social disorders among the Turkish and refugees has accelerated.²

The decline in indicators of social integration between Syrian refugees and the Turkish host society is attributable to a number of causes and factors,

² Turkey’s Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions, *International crisis group*, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions>

including the difference in language and different ethnic affiliation (Feinstein and Poleacovschi, 2022). However, focusing solely on these primary causes may lead to a limited understanding of the roots of the problems of social integration. There are indirect effects of social integration, including educational attainment (Ozer and Eren, 2021). Its effect demonstrates the relationship between language factors, ethnic affiliation and education level as causes and social integration as the outcome, this is what the study seeks to test and verify. The study is based on a major inquiry, which is: How do the level of Syrian refugees' education, language difference, and ethnicity affect their social integration with the Turkish society?

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research problem stems from several questions. These questions revolve around the impact of language, ethnicity, and educational level on the social integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society. The following is an explanation of the research factors.

Language: This refers to the language difference between Syrian refugees and the Turkish host community.

Ethnicity: This means the difference in ethnic affiliation between Syrian refugees and the Turkish host society.

Education level: This means the difference in the level of education among Syrian refugees.

Social integration: refers to the multidimensional process through which Syrian refugees become part of Turkish society, involving social inclusion, economic participation, cultural adaptation, and access to rights and services, while also recognizing the role of the host society in facilitating this integration.

The following is an explanation of the research questions:

1. What is the impact of the language difference between Syrian refugees and Turkish society on the effectiveness of social integration?

2. What is the impact of the difference in ethnicity between Syrian refugees and Turkish society on the effectiveness of social integration?
3. What is the impact of the level of educational attainment of refugees on their integration into Turkish society?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research aims to achieve several objectives, namely:

1. Review the real reasons for the social integration indicators for Syrian refugees in Turkish society.
2. Review the impact of ethnic and linguistic differences, as well as the level of education of Syrian refugees, on their integration into Turkish society.

1.7 RESEARCH IMPORTANCE

Research is significant on two levels: academic-theoretical and practical-applied. On an academic-theoretical level, this research is a crucial step toward a precise understanding of the interdependence among different influencing factors. In this study, the relationships are examined across multiple dimensions, focusing on how aspects such as language proficiency, ethnic affiliation differences, and educational attainment shape the broader process of social integration.

In terms of practical significance, it relates to the benefits the research can provide to those in charge of social integration programs. Identifying the actual obstacles that limit the efficacy of social integration programs is a crucial step in achieving success in these programs.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts on secondary data sources, including published statistics, policy reports, academic studies, and relevant surveys. This methodology allows for a comprehensive examination of existing knowledge to

explore the relationship between various social, cultural, and educational factors and their influence on the process of refugee social integration within the host society.

1.9 STUDY POPULATION

The study population includes Syrian refugees who sought refuge in Istanbul, Fatih and Esenyurt neighborhoods.

1.10 EXISTING STUDIES ON THE SYRIAN REFUGEES

The academic literature on the social integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey reveals a complex and multidimensional field of inquiry. Rather than presenting isolated findings, this section synthesizes major contributions to identify patterns, debates, and theoretical orientations relevant to the present research.

One recurrent theme in the literature is the role of education in shaping integration outcomes. (Philipp et al, 2021) argue that higher levels of education among refugees tend to enhance their acceptance by host communities. This influence operates on two levels: a direct, short-term impact related to public perception, and a more indirect, long-term contribution tied to the perceived potential of educated refugees to positively influence the host society. Education thus emerges not only as a personal asset but also as a symbolic factor affecting societal attitudes. Some scholars emphasize the structural and contextual factors influencing refugee integration. (Albrecht, 2021) highlights the importance of the asylum context—whether integration is voluntary or forced—as a major factor shaping outcomes. He identifies social and linguistic barriers as key obstacles to meaningful integration.

(Makovsky, 2019) explores the societal and historical dimensions of integration in Turkey. He places the integration of Syrian refugees within a broader context of socio-political transformations. According to Makovsky, this

process is part of a long-standing pattern of demographic and cultural shifts, such as the 1923 population exchange. He argues that current tensions go beyond the recent refugee influx and are rooted in deeper historical and political issues, including the unresolved Kurdish question.

Institutional and regional variations are brought to light in the (Robila, M.,2018) report on Syrian refugees in Turkey. The report identifies spatial disparities in integration challenges, noting that major urban centers like Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir experience higher levels of social tension compared to rural areas. These tensions are often linked to cultural differences and the density of refugee populations, with smaller towns showing more resilience and less visible conflict.

Collectively, these studies point to the need for a nuanced understanding of refugee integration—one that accounts for both structural conditions and individual agency, and which situates current developments within broader historical and regional contexts. This research builds on these insights by further exploring the interplay of language, education, and identity in shaping social integration, particularly within the Turkish socio-political landscape.

CHAPTER 2

2. GENERAL ASYLUM AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION CONCEPTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of refugees and migrants is one of the most delicate issues in human rights. Due to its complexities, which are frequently not considered deeply, and because only the superficial aspects of the issue are often addressed in the media, and in light of the increasing hate speech and discriminatory racist attitudes against them in many countries around the world, it is currently one of the most serious challenges facing human rights. The accompanying random discourse against the culture of accepting the other put them in the crosshairs of extremist-oriented parties such as the radical populist right in Europe, and nationalist groups that call for identity preservation and consider the presence of these foreign refugees as an explicit threat to the ideas they advocate (Abdalla, 2017).

According to the United Nations, a refugee is a person who is outside of her/his country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their religion, color, race, nationality, affiliation, political opinions, or social class, and they are unable to stay or do not want to due to fear. Or “every person who does not have a nationality and is outside their usual country of residence due to the previously mentioned events or out of dread of returning there” is called a refugee (UN, Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1967).

As a result of the occurrence of multiple internal crises in several Middle Eastern countries in recent years, the number of refugees worldwide has increased, necessitating the need for humanitarian assistance, humanitarian shelters, and the provision of job opportunities to achieve stability. Naturally, all these issues are also connected to the process of social integration of these refugees in countries that host them. This is in light of the decrease in the number

of returnees to their homelands compared to what was recorded in the 1990s; Where 1.5 million refugees were able to return each year, while this number decreased to 385 thousand refugees only over the past decade (UNHCR, Global issues 2020).

It is presumed that nations treat refugees in accordance with the Global Compact for Refugees, which was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 17, 2018. To achieve a sustainable solution to the conditions of refugees and to raise awareness of the significance of the asylum file, as well as the need for international cooperation to find radical and effective solutions to refugee crises, the World Refugee Day, which takes place annually on June 20, was proclaimed.

In order to delve deeper into the refugee file, this chapter is devoted to discussing a number of key concepts as to the meaning of social integration that the majority of countries aim to achieve in their refugee files, as well as the most important factors that affect the successful social integration of refugees in those societies.

2.2 BETWEEN THE LINGUISTIC, SOCIAL, AND HUMAN MEANINGS OF ASYLUM

As the global refugee crisis worsens, there is an urgent need to define "refugees" in a way that is both fair and comprehensive. This is essential for ensuring that all refugees are able to access the protection they need, and for holding host countries accountable for their obligations under international law.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who is "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Refugee Convention 1951, 15). However, this definition has been criticized for being too narrow, and many countries have adopted their own definitions that are more inclusive.

The lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of "refugee" makes it difficult for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide international protection to refugees. The UNHCR can only provide protection to those who meet the definition of a refugee in the 1951 Refugee Convention, and this can lead to refugees being denied protection in countries that have adopted more restrictive definitions. In addition, the different ways that countries define "refugees" can lead to discrimination against refugees.³ For example, a country that defines a refugee as someone who is fleeing war or violence may be less likely to grant protection to a refugee who is fleeing persecution for reasons of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Germany, migrants who flee their countries due to poor economic conditions are often deemed ineligible for asylum. Germany has rejected asylum applications from many migrants from countries such as Albania and Kosovo, who were classified as economic migrants rather than refugees⁴.

The challenges of defining "refugees" are complex, but it is important to continue to work towards developing a definition that is both fair and comprehensive. This is essential to ensure that all refugees are able to access the protection they need. Because the 1951 Convention does not specify the procedures states must follow to determine the status of a refugee, it is necessary for states to implement national legislation in this regard. Because the High Commissioner for Refugees has only a supervisory role in ensuring the implementation of the Convention and the 1967 Protocol (AD), in addition to providing advice upon request, the UNHCR still needs a formal advisory function. Consequently, data and information regarding refugees from states parties to the Convention and Protocol are gathered.

3 Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/handbook-procedures-and-criteria-determining-refugee-status-under-1951-convention-and-1967>

4 Kosovars have virtually no chance of asylum in Germany, DW, 2 November 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/kosovars-have-virtually-no-chance-of-asylum-in-germany/a-18248755>

The context of data collection can vary widely depending on national procedures and legislative frameworks. Many countries with refugee or asylum-seeking populations are required to: provide annual statistics on asylum applications and outcomes; share regular updates on their legal and procedural developments in relation to refugee protection; participate in global reporting mechanisms, such as UNHCR's Global Trends report, which provides an annual overview of the global refugee situation and includes data on forced displacement and refugee populations. In addition, some countries may engage in ad hoc data collection efforts during times of crisis or mass displacement, providing more frequent updates to international bodies coordinating humanitarian responses (UNHCR, Global issues 2020).

2.3 DEFINITION OF REFUGEE

The recognition of a person as a refugee is linked to the fact that they have a well-founded fear of being exposed to killing, violence, or persecution if they return to their country of origin. This fear must be related to one of the five reasons listed in the 1951 UN Convention, namely: race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion.⁵

Based on this, there are several concepts related to refugees. First, the term 'persecution' does not have a universally agreed-upon definition and is not defined in the 1951 Convention. However, it can be said that it includes serious human rights violations that pose a threat to life or liberty, as well as other types of serious harm. These violations can be carried out under the authority of the official state, or occur at the hands of armed groups, criminal gangs, or even members of broken families.

As for the concept of well-founded fear, the circumstances of each individual asylum case are determined by the well-founded fear of being exposed to persecution based on an assessment of the person's background, personal file,

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (1951). *Convention relating to the status of refugees*. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

experiences, the situation in their country of origin, and the experiences of others in the same situation. Taking into consideration the humanitarian aspect, the definition of a refugee explicitly includes those who lack any nationality and live outside their habitual residence, but their presence outside their primary location must be linked to the reasons mentioned in the definition of a refugee, which motivate them to flee from one place to another ⁶.

This also leads us to the situation of internally displaced persons and those fleeing from the effects of climate change. Usually, they are not referred to as refugees unless the situation is more complex than climate change. Scarcity of natural resources such as water and desertification of agricultural lands, resulting in food shortages, all contribute to internal conflicts and violence. In such cases, climate change becomes an indirect cause for categorizing these individuals as refugees if they are targeted during aggressive acts or if access to humanitarian and relief assistance is hindered due to reasons outlined in the 1951 Convention. Examples include the impact on racial or religious communities due to food insecurity or famine resulting from conflict. Here, a link is established between their justified fear of persecution and one of the reasons mentioned in the refugee definition according to the 1951 Convention.

Similarly, the African Union's 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa adopts broader criteria to protect individuals who find themselves compelled to seek asylum due to dangers in their country. Border-crossing individuals fleeing due to climate change are considered refugees under the regional instruments of refugee law. ⁷

Some countries provide complementary forms of protection for individuals who do not qualify for refugee status under international or regional

6 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021). *Handbook on procedures and criteria for determining refugee status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/5e9e634a4/>

7 African Union. (1969). *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*. <https://au.int/en/treaties/oau-convention-governing-specific-aspects-refugee-problems-africa>

law. Nevertheless, there remains a need for international protection for those who may face danger in their country of origin and cannot obtain protection there. The complementary protection also encompasses individuals who cannot return to their homeland due to reasons such as natural disasters or humanitarian situations. However, this should not conflict with granting refugee status to asylum seekers who meet the criteria under the 1951 Convention.

The specific rights associated with complementary protection vary from one country to another. Based on observed experiences, it has been evident that these individuals should be treated like refugees. They require a secure legal status, access to the labor market, personal documents, and the possibility of reuniting with their families.

There is another arrangement that allows for assistance to be provided to individuals experiencing severe humanitarian conditions in their home countries, known as "temporary protection" or "temporary residence." It is an alternative system to the protection provided to refugees or other forms of complementary protection. This type obliges states to provide a safe haven for fleeing individuals or those affected by humanitarian crises. Countries that have adopted temporary protection include the United States in cases of violence, armed conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics, or any exceptional circumstances. Those granted temporary protection may also obtain work permits.

Natural disasters have also prompted some countries to provide temporary humanitarian protection to displaced persons, as was the case after the earthquake in Haiti. Brazilian authorities issued humanitarian visas to Haitian citizens fleeing the aftermath of the earthquake for a period of five years, and later granted permanent residence visas to thousands of them (Jubilut 2016, 77).

In Argentina, immigration systems allow for temporary entry into its territory for humanitarian reasons for those who do not meet the usual entry requirements. Additionally, individuals affected by disasters can obtain "temporary resident" status.

As for Finland, its legislation stipulates that those who do not qualify as refugees have the right to temporary humanitarian protection if they face

difficulty returning to their country of origin due to an environmental disaster. Finland also provides temporary protection in cases of mass influx resulting from disasters.

Regardless of the approach adopted by each country regarding the regulation of entry conditions, whether for individuals who qualify as refugees or not, fair, and effective procedures are beneficial in determining the status of individuals and ensuring their safety. This allows for the rebuilding of their lives. These procedures also serve as an important guide for the government to process asylum applications quickly and efficiently, considering the allocated budget and respecting human rights principles.

Fair procedures also contribute to mitigating the misuse of the asylum system and improving a country's capacity to manage incoming individuals who do not hold the nationality of the host country. By regulating the asylum process and establishing the correct framework, the acceptance of refugees by the local community increases, facilitating social integration.

Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; however, it maintains a geographical limitation that restricts full refugee status to individuals originating from European countries. Consequently, Syrians fleeing the war and seeking asylum in Turkey are not legally recognized as refugees under Turkish law. In response to the large influx of Syrians beginning in 2011, Turkey adopted a temporary protection regime through the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014 (DGMM, 2014). This framework allows Syrians to reside legally in Turkey and grants access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and protection from forced return. However, it does not grant them the full legal status and rights associated with refugee recognition under the Geneva Convention.

Scholars argue that this system constitutes a form of "pseudo-integration," where basic humanitarian needs are met without establishing a clear legal pathway to permanent status or full societal inclusion (İçduygu & Millet, 2016).

Thus, while Turkey's approach fulfills immediate humanitarian obligations, it creates long-term challenges for social integration and legal security among Syrians living under temporary protection.

2.4 THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The integration of refugees into host communities has always been a subject of debate in political and social circles. Therefore, we find that the concept of integration has gained significant importance in sociological thought due to its direct connection to society. It views social life as encompassing the whole, achieving harmony and integration. To achieve this integration, it is necessary for all individuals to share the same values and beliefs. This is based on the idea that traditional institutions should be set aside in favor of modern institutions that require individuals to modify their behaviors and beliefs according to what Bourdieu called "habitus" (Paul 2023). Habitus is a system of predispositions in perception, evaluation, and action that allows individuals to engage in activities related to scientific knowledge, generating appropriate and renewed strategies (Bourdieu 1990, 69).

To implement this, there is a process of teaching and assimilation for the communities to continually reproduce themselves in a permanent and adaptive manner. This perspective focuses on how society preserves its values, beliefs, and symbols during the socialization process carried out by societal institutions in an integrated manner (Ager, and Strang 2008, 171).

On the other hand, the second perspective carries a political dimension. It sees modern societies as characterized by diversity, complexity, and heterogeneity, dominated by values of freedom and equality. According to this perspective, social integration is produced through institutional mechanisms with a political character (Portes and Zhou 1993, 81). Therefore, democracy becomes the organizer of the heterogeneous society. Conflicts between political parties, individuals, and all components of society are transformed into dialogues to reach solutions that satisfy everyone. The aim is to achieve social integration

by empowering the authority of the state and activating its political, economic, and social status (Berry 1997, 13).

In this case, the absence of social integration cannot be considered an individual responsibility but rather a societal outcome based on certain perspectives. It is not limited to one group over another, but the burden of achieving integration falls on all components of society by gradually institutionalizing rights to achieve it (Bourdieu 1977).

The Turkish government's approach to managing the presence of Syrian refugees has evolved from short-term humanitarian response to a more structured long-term policy framework focused on social cohesion. Notably, the government avoids the term "integration" (*entegrasyon*), preferring instead the concept of "cohesion" (*uyum*), which is less politically charged and arguably more culturally resonant in the Turkish context (DGMM, 2019). The term integration can imply assimilation or permanent settlement—topics that remain sensitive within Turkish society, where public resistance to long-term refugee presence has grown. By contrast, "cohesion" emphasizes peaceful coexistence, mutual adaptation, and societal harmony, without necessarily implying full membership or permanence. This semantic choice reflects both political pragmatism and an attempt to reduce public backlash.

In 2018, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) published the "Harmonization Strategy Document and National Action Plan (2018–2023)", which represents the most comprehensive policy effort to promote cohesion between Syrians under temporary protection and Turkish society. This strategy outlines objectives in areas such as education, labor market access, health, housing, social services, and civic participation, with a strong emphasis on language acquisition, community interaction, and public awareness (DGMM, 2018). It positions local governments, NGOs, and public institutions as key stakeholders, and frames social cohesion as a two-way process that involves both refugee adaptation and host community readiness.

The cohesion strategy notably promotes inclusive public services rather than parallel systems, aligning refugee access with national institutions. In

education, this includes the closure of Temporary Education Centers and the integration of Syrian children into public Turkish schools. In employment, it encourages formalization through regulated work permits. In social and cultural life, it promotes joint activities, intercommunal dialogue, and the reduction of discrimination.

However, critics argue that while the terminology of cohesion softens the discourse, it may also obscure structural inequalities and the limited pathways to legal permanence for Syrians in Turkey. Unlike European models of integration that often include naturalization or long-term residency, Turkey's cohesion model remains framed within the logic of "temporary protection", leaving questions of citizenship, political participation, and permanent settlement largely unaddressed (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). As such, the cohesion strategy promotes social functionality without political inclusion, which can lead to a sense of precariousness among refugees, even as they participate in Turkish society.

In practice, the implementation of the National Action Plan has been uneven, with strong results in areas like education and health access, but slower progress in employment and public acceptance. This reflects both institutional capacity constraints and rising public resistance amid economic hardship. Nevertheless, the adoption of an official strategy and cohesive terminology indicates a policy shift toward long-term management, even if framed within the language of temporary protection.

2.4.1 The Social Structure and The Achievement of Integration

Before addressing the concept of social integration, it is necessary to establish the definition of "society," which was deemed to be a group of functionally interdependent individuals residing in a specific geographical area at a specific point in time and sharing common cultural and social characteristics, despite its class and ethnic diversity. However, there is a standard that guides the conduct of this group's members, which is based on the values they've agreed upon, (Shils, 1961).

A society is made up of individuals who share common values and culture. However, this group may be joined by individuals who do not share its values and culture for a variety of reasons, the most prominent of which is asylum (Ager and Strang, 2008). In this context, the concept of social integration emerges to combat cases of exclusion that may occur to new individuals by some members of the host society, or cases of exclusion that affect some layers of society, such as minorities or social groupings (Cyrine and Ali, 2020).

The purpose of integration in this context is to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among all members of society, regardless of their background or beliefs. This can be achieved through a variety of means, such as providing access to education and employment, promoting cultural understanding, and combating discrimination (Phillimore, 2012).

When social integration is successful, it can lead to several benefits for both individuals and society. For individuals, it can lead to improved mental and physical health, increased economic opportunities, and a stronger sense of well-being. For society as a whole, it can lead to greater social cohesion, economic prosperity, and peace (Ager and Strang, 2008).

And because the individual is by nature a social being, they strive to comply with the rules governing the society to which they belong or in which they reside in order to be accepted and welcomed by its members (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 602). However, this does not imply total compliance without his assent. Two categories of social influence exist. The first is the social and media influence, in which the exile evaluates his behavior to ensure his compatibility with the host community and seeks guidance from those around him when he finds himself in an unfamiliar situation (Cyrine and Ali, 2020). The second is the normative social influence: the refugee's need for social acceptability compels him to integrate and coexist with others to avoid exclusion and isolation (Phillimore, 2012).

Accordingly, it can be stated that the purpose of social integration is to eliminate barriers between different groups within the same society and to facilitate the adaptation of its members to their diversity and differences (Castles

and Miller 2013). That social integration is a set of measures taken to facilitate the incorporation of new individuals into society (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004).

When individuals migrate from one community to another whose culture, customs, and values are distinct from those of their original society, the significance of social integration becomes particularly apparent (Sam and Berry, 2010). Although the values are similar, the way they are expressed varies from society to society and culture to culture. The extent to which a new individual can adapt to the host society depends on his capacity to receive, comprehend, and embrace the society's characteristics. He abandons his culture entirely, but his values, customs, and culture are preserved in his new existence (Alba and Nee, 2003).

Based on that, it can be said that social integration is intended to remove barriers between different groups within a single society and to adapt individuals to their diversity and differences. It involves a set of measures taken to facilitate the integration of newcomers into society (Kymlicka, 2005).

The importance of social integration becomes particularly evident when individuals transition from one community to another characterized by different cultures, customs, and values from their original community (Heckmann, 2005). Although values may be similar, the way they are expressed varies from one society to another and from one culture to another. The extent to which the new individual can adapt to the host society depends on their ability to perceive, understand, and accept what exists in this society. It is also linked to the host society's ability, as well as its members, to provide support that helps the newcomer integrate more effectively and positively, without completely abandoning their culture but rather preserving their values, customs, and culture in their new life (Sam and Berry, 2010).

2.4.2 Ways to Achieve Integration

The issue of integration pertains to the variability in individuals' capacity to comprehend and embrace new concepts. Every person possesses unique qualities that set them apart from others, marked by attributes that may not be

shared by their peers within the same group. It is a common occurrence that individuals may encounter challenges in the process of integrating and adjusting to new social environments. This phenomenon can be attributed to the inherent diversity in human dispositions. Consequently, the significance of transitioning from social solidarity to social adaptation, and subsequently to social integration, becomes evident (Sam and Berry, 2010).

The inclusion of integration inside the social integration plan is of paramount importance in order to guarantee its efficacy and accomplishment. For instance, it is imperative for the host community to uphold the idea of equal opportunity to ensure the provision of job possibilities to all individuals, without any kind of discrimination. This process occurs after the dissolution of hurdles pertaining to the newly arrived individual, including linguistic barriers if the host community employs a distinct language, and subsequent to the comprehension of the legal framework controlling the host society. In order to mitigate the risk of unintentional violation, which could potentially jeopardize merger prospects (Kymlicka, 2005).

In the absence of integration, society undergoes a fragmentation process wherein distinct groups become insular and disconnected from one another. This phenomenon gives rise to the formation of smaller communities inside the larger societal framework, ultimately leading to adverse consequences for cohesion, stability, and security (Fajth et al, 2019).

Integration is related to the nature of social upbringing, which prepares the individual for social interaction with everyone and the acquisition of more open behaviors away from intolerance and discrimination. Which qualifies him for social compatibility with his surroundings in a manner that achieves social integration, and that upbringing A that the individual undergoes from the beginning of his life and throughout all of its stages through the institutions that guide him (Sam and Berry, 2010).

Integration is the process of citizens exercising their roles at all political, economic, and social levels, and it has a broad meaning that aims to create equal opportunities to consolidate social ties and achieve real integration of the

individual into his society as well as his acquisition of a political identity that strengthens his patriotism. State organizations (Kymlicka, 2005).

Since social integration is based on two pillars, it is challenging to provide a precise definition. The coupling of this concept with political practices and societal discussions on immigration and asylum issues in Western countries. The accompanying talk about cultural and national identity and the enactment of laws and procedures regulating the process of immigration and integration, made it difficult to formulate a specific and clear definition. for the process of social integration. It is not limited to immigrants and exiles, but includes various social groups and religions (Sam and Berry, 2010).

2.4.3 Concepts That Contradict Social Integration

Among the concepts that oppose social integration are inequality or "anomia", exclusion, criminality, deviance, separation, rebellion, dispersion, alienation, xenophobia, and discrimination for individuals. This term was introduced to sociology for the first time in 1897 by the French scientist (Emile Durkheim, 1933) in his book *Suicide*, in which he cited the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyot (Kymlicka, 2005).

Considering the collapse of standards and the contradiction between what is marketed in terms of official ideas and ideologies and what is actually carried out, "Anomia" appears. Where this separation and contradiction causes the citizen to experience alienation, leading to his isolation and deviance (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004).

The concept of social exclusion or exclusion has two aspects. One focuses on specific problems such as unemployment, displacement, and homelessness, while the other refers to the lack of effective participation of individuals in society's institutions (Phillimore, 2012).

Recently prevalent in contemporary culture, the concept of alienation represents the state of helplessness that the individual inflicts upon himself, society, and state institutions. In 1959, the American sociologist Melvin Seaman identified five traits of alienation: Flood the activities Loss of meaning or

purpose, lack of belonging or loss of familiarity due to lack of understanding of society's customs, and this occurs among immigrants and refugees to countries that are socially and culturally different from their country of origin, isolation, and self-alienation "alienation of the soul" (Williamson, 1997). The term "integration" is frequently used as a synonym for "integration;" However, the final term is more inclusive and significant than integration in describing the unification of each participant's parts.

To ensure the success of the merger, it is evident that the following elements must be present (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004):

- Common loyalty and mutual interest between all parts of society that are intended to unite.
- The opportunity for all parties to establish communication and economic and social interaction.
- Consistency in gains and losses for all parties involved.

As a result of mutual social interactions and the state of tolerance that accompanies those interactions, it is possible to state that social integration is predicated on values and standards shared by people (Sam and Berry, 2010). Because there are differences among the participants in these social interactions, which vary in their intensity and the strength of their solidarity based on the size of the participating group and the homogeneity of its members, the situation regarding families with a limited scope differs from the larger open framework, such as the society that includes this family. Open networks have the capacity to homogenize at greater levels, resulting in a heightened interest in values like tolerance and coexistence (Ager and Strang, 2008).

While theories based on economic and political factors see the possibility of resolving the issue of social integration, theories based on social and cultural factors view the issue as more challenging (Cyrine and Ali, 2020).

The sociologist (Kaym, 2011) has elucidated two types of solidarity: mechanical and organic. He believes that traditional cultures, characterized by undifferentiated patterns of work and crafts, are bound by shared norms and criteria that confer upon them a strength that resists any challenge or breach. In

such cases, the individual does not separate from the collective. But rather, this leads to the rejection of any newcomer to the group. On the other hand, mechanical solidarity is based on convergence of standards and beliefs, characterized by civilization and diversity. However, according to (Kaym, 2011), the increasing social inequality in industrial societies has contributed to the collapse of this type of solidarity, giving way to organic solidarity (Alba and Nee, 2003).

Based on Kaym's arguments, traditional societies that engage in agriculture rely on solidarity based on similarities among their members through close bonds such as kinship, lineage, and strong homogeneity in values and interests. However, secularization has led to the diversification of similar groups, making it impossible to achieve social cohesion based on mechanical or organic solidarity. It is here that Kaym emphasizes that continuous and indirect exchange of services and products contributes to the development of collective awareness, forming a nucleus for social integration (Kaym, 2011).

In order to generate social solidarity and preserve it, members of society should refer to customs and cultural values. Additionally, people's participation in society and various groups, based on shared rules and close relationships within family and kinship networks, enhances social solidarity and social integration (Phillimore, 2012). However, it should be noted that achieving complete integration in any social system is difficult. It is realized when there is a relative state of relationships without being constrained by specific molds. It is important to recognize that social integration does not mean eliminating differences within society but rather placing those differences within agreed-upon frameworks (Putnam, 2000).

Economics plays a significant role in achieving integration. Interaction within diverse social networks and work contributes to reducing the distance between constituent groups in society. Interests become intertwined, leading to mutual benefit. Continuous mutual exchange is a fundamental aspect of important interactions (Szymańska, 2021).

2.5 FACTORS AFFECTING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Wars, armed conflicts, and security disturbances force people to displacement and mass migration. These events are accompanied by other factors such as poverty, poor economic conditions in the country, and the lack of rights and freedoms. All these factors compel families to search for safe havens for themselves and their children (Al-Ali, 2018). Looking at the period witnessed by the Arab region, with revolutions and the resulting internal security disturbances that claimed the lives of many in countries like Yemen, Libya, and Syria, migration waves have also increased to neighboring countries such as Turkey in the case of Syria, as well as European Union countries. They seek to build a new, safe, and stable life. However, the host countries provide a different cultural and social environment than the one these migrants and refugees came from, which means they urgently need to adapt and adjust to the new country. This adaptation becomes crucial for true integration, especially considering the difficulty of returning to their home country (Fargues, 2014).

When discussing integration, it is important to differentiate between the situation and circumstances of each migrant and refugee compared to others. Each country has its own unique nature that differs from others, and the same applies to each refugee. The secret to successful integration lies within the host country itself (Al-Ali 2018, 55). For example, migrants in Germany adapt more quickly than their counterparts in other European countries. This can be attributed to the facilitations adopted by the state to assist these refugees in integrating into society, (Feinstein and Poleacovschi, 2022)

The rapid integration of refugees in Germany can be attributed to the measures taken by the state to regularize their status. One such project is the law that allowed tens of thousands of refugees to settle their status and obtain legal residency. According to the law approved by the government of Olaf Scholz, these refugees can obtain a one-year residence permit until they prove their financial self-sufficiency (Phillimore, 2012). At the end of the probationary

period, they can obtain permanent residency. It also requires enabling them to reunite with their families (Ilgit and Klotz, 2018).

The law addresses the situations of foreigners and refugees residing in Germany by providing them with opportunities to meet the requirements for long-term residence, securing means of livelihood, and proficiency in the German language (European Commission, 2020). This facilitates their integration into the country and allows them to benefit from their work experience. Settling thousands of Arab refugees, who arrived after their countries in the Middle East witnessed turmoil, in industrial jobs is a good opportunity to enhance the integration process and meet the requirements of residency. The proposed law also includes an amendment that allows well-integrated youth and teenagers in Germany, up to the age of 21, to obtain the right of residence after 4 years of being in the country. In the future, this period will be reduced to only 3 years, and the age limit will be raised to 27, (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2008).

Here, attention must be drawn to the varying degrees of adaptation among individuals who come individually compared to those who come with their families. The former often adapt and integrate quickly, while it can be more challenging for those who come with their families, even in the presence of shared factors between their home country and the host country.

Regarding the German draft law to facilitate the integration process through ensuring means of livelihood, a British study has shown that most European countries need to intensify their efforts to integrate foreigners into their societies. Highlighting the superiority of Sweden in this regard, as it implements the best integration policy for foreigners in the continent, (European Commission, 2022).

According to a study conducted by the British Council in collaboration with the Migration Policy Group, which included 25 EU member states, as well as Switzerland, Norway, and Canada, to assess the integration policy in those countries and compare them, excluding Romania and Bulgaria, which recently joined the European Union. It was found that Sweden ranked first in terms of

integration opportunities and dedicated services for this purpose, followed by Portugal in second place, while Latvia ranked last. Meanwhile, Germany's efforts to achieve wider and desired integration have not been sufficient, (American immigration council, 2011).

The study concluded that social integration requires support from host countries through the implementation of measures that facilitate the entry of refugees and migrants into the labor market, as well as granting them the right to vote and citizenship (Migration Policy Group and British Council, 2011).

The data generated by the British study serves as an indicator of the need for European countries to reassess their policies regarding asylum, integration, and benefit from the experiences of countries that have succeeded in achieving higher levels of social integration for refugees.

2.5.1 Work and Refugee Integration

The reason behind Sweden's success in the social integration policy for refugees lies in the fact that every foreign refugee living on its territory has the right to work in most fields, as long as they have been present in the country for more than a year. This includes self-employment opportunities. Additionally, the state provides various forms of assistance to unemployed refugees and immigrants, such as language lectures to facilitate job opportunities (Detragiache 2016, 793). Sweden also grants immigrants the right to vote in local and municipal elections after three years of residency, (International Labour Organization, 2012).

The steps taken by Sweden to facilitate the process of finding employment opportunities and achieving financial stability for immigrants and refugees are considered one of the contributing factors to social integration. Work is indeed the best way to integrate refugees, as proven by many successful experiences. However, it is not without specific cultural challenges, such as some immigrants' reluctance to work with women or deal with alcoholic beverages. These are cultural obstacles and challenges that immigrants and refugees face in obtaining

employment opportunities that align with their religious and cultural beliefs (Detragiache 2016, 793).

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the idea of work for the purpose of achieving integration is still welcomed, especially considering the need for countries like Germany to have new workers, particularly as the elderly population increases, (Detragiache, 2016). To achieve its goal of attracting thousands of newcomers to its labor market, Germany needs to overcome barriers such as professional experience and language skills.

These obstacles and challenges are evident in the numbers. Out of 307 training opportunities offered to refugees in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany, only 110 applied. Among them, 80 individuals completed language training and have a good command of the German language, but only 40 of them actually started working. The rest declined due to religious reasons, dissatisfaction with the job offered, or transportation difficulties, (Michelle, 2021).

This highlights that despite work being a good opportunity for achieving social integration for refugees and immigrants, cultural and religious differences pose barriers. These differences limit the scope within which they can search for employment, especially considering their limited proficiency in the language of the host country and their limited professional experience.

In contrast to countries such as Sweden and Germany, Turkey has taken a more gradual approach to integrating Syrian refugees into the labor market. A significant development in this regard was the enactment of the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection, issued in January 2016. This regulation allows Syrians under temporary protection to apply for work permits in sectors and provinces where there is a documented labor need, with the condition that they have been residing in Turkey for at least six months and are registered with the authorities (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2016). The regulation was intended to reduce informal employment and improve the economic integration of Syrians by enabling legal access to the labor market.

Despite this progressive step, the actual number of Syrians granted work permits remains limited in comparison to their population in Turkey. Many face structural and social barriers such as bureaucratic obstacles, employer reluctance, low wages in formal jobs compared to informal employment, and sectoral restrictions (İçduygu & Diker, 2017). Cultural and linguistic differences also present significant challenges, similar to those observed in other host countries. Moreover, enforcement of labor protections remains weak in many sectors where Syrians are concentrated, particularly in agriculture and construction. Therefore, while the 2016 regulation marked a formal shift toward labor market inclusion, its practical impact on social integration remains partial and uneven.

2.5.2 The Role of The Refugee in Enhancing Integration Opportunities

The role of refugees in enhancing integration opportunities is not about completely assimilating into the host society, but rather about coexisting and adapting to that society while presenting a positive image of themselves and their homeland. Therefore, refugees are expected to do two things: firstly, to present a positive image of themselves, their homeland, and their people by respecting the laws and treating others with respect regardless of cultural and religious differences, avoiding conflicts with others (Berry, 1997). Secondly, they should plan for a real process of stability if they wish to continue residing in the host country. This highlights the necessity of learning the language, familiarizing themselves with the culture of the new community, securing employment that provides them with financial stability, and enables them to live independently without relying entirely on the assistance of the host country (Ager and Strang, 2008).

There is always a debate on how refugees and immigrants can coexist and adapt to the new society, which may drastically differ from their customs, culture, and the religion they grew up with. This debate is divided into two sides: one side advocates for authenticity, taking a strict approach towards anything new and sudden for the refugee, rejecting all the customs and traditions they

encounter (Modood, 2007). The other side sees no problem in fully adapting to the customs and traditions of the host society, even if they differ from their own values and habits. They view the matter from a broader perspective, focusing on the ultimate goal of stability, integration, and acceptance by the host community (Putnam, 2007).

Considering both viewpoints, we find that there is a narrowing down and a compromise. It is not appropriate to treat the refugee coming from their homeland as someone who has completely shed their values and customs. This means that it is difficult to suddenly abandon those values in order to conform to the new society. However, on the other hand, it is possible to gradually plan the integration process while selecting what aligns with their values and religion without compromising them (Putnam, 2007). The expectation is not only to completely abandon what they were raised on and believed in but rather to adapt and adjust. There is a distinction between relinquishing one's values and adapting to new circumstances. The refugee can overcome these challenges by mastering the language of the host country and improving their linguistic and professional skills, which opens up opportunities for greater and more diverse employment. This enables them to distance themselves from any work that conflicts with their values and religion, such as working in the hospitality industry, which sometimes requires serving alcoholic beverages to restaurant patrons, which is religiously prohibited for Muslim refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008).

2.5.3 The Media and Its Role in Achieving Social Integration

As a mediator between the educated elite and the general public, media outlets have the power to shape public acceptance of refugees and foreign immigrants. The images portrayed in these media outlets can have a dual impact, either promoting refugee integration or undermining social integration opportunities by disseminating negative messages and instilling fear and hatred towards their presence (Esses and Lawson, 2013).

Media discourse often portrays refugees in a negative light, depicting them as villains and monsters to be cautious of, presenting them as a disruptive

element to the country's economy. This promotion of hate speech, particularly by certain media outlets in Europe, has been a significant factor in reducing social integration opportunities for refugees, (Alencar, 2017).

In this regard, there has been a noticeable alignment between the media discourse and extremist political discourse regarding asylum in Germany. Negative propaganda, or "propaganda," has been directed against refugees by some parties and public figures, considering the newcomers as a real threat to the state.

The German media institution Bild has adopted a sensationalist approach in its coverage of the refugee issue, using racially charged headlines against refugees, especially Syrians. Examples include headlines like "This is how refugees turn into criminals" or "After 1300 lessons, four out of five refugees fail the German language test", (Kerrie, 2022). These headlines and biased media coverage extend beyond Bild to several other media outlets that have capitalized on refugees as a sensationalized subject for their non-neutral coverage, falling within the category of hate speech.

The media has adopted the practice of context truncation, where a portion of information is extracted and highlighted as an absolute truth in the headline of the published media article (Kerrie, 2022). For example, in the news headline "After 1300 lessons: Four out of five refugees fail the German language test," the content of the news itself indicates, according to the Migration and Refugee Office, that this percentage applies to the subset of refugees who can read and write, which is less than 20% of the total number of refugees in Germany, (Kerrie, 2022).

The website Bildblog, which specializes in monitoring editorial violations in German media, explained that website visitors cannot fully understand the truth based on these fragmented headlines unless they purchase the print version of the newspaper or pay a subscription fee on the Bildplus website to read the full article. It becomes evident that the lack of details in such headlines contributes to forming a negative perception of refugees and leads to their unwelcoming in the host country, (Janosch, 2015). considering them as

unproductive and inactive. Consequently, violations against refugees in general, along with verbal and physical harassment, emerge as a result of the entrenched ideas and hate speech promoted by some media outlets (Lehmann, 2016).

The major wave of refugees in 2015, following the control of the terrorist organization ISIS over large parts of Syria and Iraq, and the escape of thousands from their oppression and violence towards Europe and neighboring countries, led to the conduction of several field studies on the portrayal of these refugees in the media. One such study was conducted by the “Auto Brenner” Foundation under the supervision of the Research Institute at Leipzig University. This study examined the content published between February 2015 and March 2016 and concluded that the media discourse aligned with the official political discourse without delving deeper into addressing the issue despite its complexities, (Jeffrey, 2019).

This study followed another study conducted by the “Macromedia” Media Institute in Berlin in collaboration with the Research Center in the Department of Criminal Investigation in Lower Saxony. It revealed that the German media portrayed refugees negatively, consistently linking them to crimes, sexual assaults, and terrorism. Moreover, the focus was placed on crimes committed by suspected refugees, while turning a blind eye to the possibility of German citizens being involved in racist crimes against refugees.

The study's numbers showed that the widely circulated newspaper "Bild" topped the biased media against refugees, and that two-thirds of the reports on crimes of any kind published by the newspaper were suspected of being committed by refugees, which reflects its deliberate focus on the negative side of the asylum file, (Jeffrey, 2019).

In light of the media's role in shaping public opinion and directing social discussions in a specific direction that serves its anti-refugee discourse, the discourse shaped by it has gradually attracted people, and represents a major burden on the process of integrating refugees into German society, despite official attempts to remove obstacles to that process and take measures to facilitate their integration, (Kerrie, 2022).

We cannot limit the negative role of the media in the process of social integration to European and Western countries only, but also to an Arab country like Jordan, where a similar discourse was found to that in Germany. Although the Jordanian media showed widespread sympathy for Syrian refugees at the beginning of the Syrian crisis; however, it gradually turned into an anti-refugee media after the continued influx of refugees to Jordanian territories at the peak of the crisis, (relief web, 2017). And thus the Syrian refugee turned from a cause to be defended to a burden that the media portrays in its various materials, like this.

There has been a gradual shift in the description of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian media. After using the word "refugee", it turned into the word "burden", and then "component"; which raised the concern of Jordanians about the government's plans for the resettlement of Syrian refugees (Zureiqat, 2018). It was also observed that the Jordanian media did not care about the psychological and social aspects of refugees; where their voices were absent in the media coverage in favor of official, international, and donor countries; meaning that the voice of these refugees was marginalized to become a one-sided image with a one-way direction. The Jordanian media also confined the Syrian refugee woman to the role of the victim only, which is a negative stereotype that has been formed about the Syrian woman. However, this does not mean that there are no neutral media coverage that conveyed the correct image of refugees, whether men, women, children, or the elderly, (relief web, 2017).

A recent analysis of media representations of Syrian refugees in Jordan underscores a persistent trend toward negative framing, particularly within digital spaces. A 2023 study indicates that social media platforms continue to circulate predominantly negative, tragic, and suffering-oriented depictions of Syrian refugees, potentially contributing to a decline in public empathy as repeated exposure to such content fosters compassion fatigue (Aldamen, 2023). Additionally, broader media discourse continues to influence policy narratives: in their analysis of Jordanian media and policy-making, (Elnakib, 2024) found

that while early responses to the refugee influx emphasized integration—such as granting Syrians access to the national health system—later policy revisions reflect a more restrictive approach, suggesting that shifts in media framing may have played a role in shaping public and political will. More structurally, (Awamleh and Dorai, 2023) examine spatial governance strategies in Jordan and report that urban media tends to highlight the economic and infrastructural pressures associated with hosting refugees, reinforcing negative stereotypes and justifying policies that segregate or confine refugee populations through encampment-focused narratives. Collectively, these contemporary sources illustrate that despite evolving policy needs, the media environment in Jordan still contributes to shaping public opinion in ways that favor containment over integration.

This method, followed by many Jordanian media outlets, contributes to the creation of a culture of hate, incitement, and discrimination against refugees. Especially by portraying them as the face of the economic crises that the kingdom is suffering from, in addition to using catchy headlines, especially when presenting issues related to refugee women to attract the largest number of viewers to the website (Achilli, 2015)

In the context of Turkey, the media has played an ambivalent and often contradictory role in shaping public perceptions of Syrian refugees and influencing their social integration. Unlike many Western countries where media narratives have increasingly leaned toward securitization and criminalization, Turkish media coverage has fluctuated significantly over time, reflecting shifting political discourse and public sentiment.

Existing research shows that media outlets in Turkey have alternated between humanitarian portrayals of Syrians as "guests" in need of protection and more exclusionary narratives that depict them as burdens on the economy and public services (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021). In the early years of the Syrian influx, particularly between 2011 and 2014, state-aligned media emphasized Islamic solidarity and humanitarian responsibility, often using the term *misafir* (guest) to describe Syrian refugees — a culturally significant term

suggesting temporary presence and moral obligation rather than legal entitlement (Özçürümez & Şenses, 2015). However, as the refugee crisis became more protracted and public dissatisfaction grew, this positive framing began to erode.

From 2015 onwards, the Turkish media started reflecting increasing public concerns about competition for jobs, rising rents, demographic change, and perceived cultural incompatibility. Several studies highlight that oppositional and nationalist media outlets have increasingly used populist language, portraying Syrians as a threat to national identity, economic stability, and social cohesion (Taş, 2020). Hate speech and misinformation about Syrians became more common, especially on social media platforms, with unfounded rumors about Syrians receiving excessive state aid, committing crimes, or disrespecting local customs spreading widely (Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016).

Moreover, media framing often fails to represent Syrian voices directly, instead constructing their identity through the lens of political, economic, or moral debates in Turkish society. A study by Erdoğan (2020) found that Syrians are frequently objectified in news coverage, either as helpless victims or as problematic outsiders, rarely being portrayed as active social agents or contributors to society. This lack of representation undermines efforts to promote social inclusion and contributes to a one-dimensional public image of the refugee population.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that some independent and rights-oriented media outlets in Turkey have attempted to counter these dominant narratives, offering more balanced reporting, highlighting success stories, and advocating for inclusive policies. However, such efforts remain limited in reach and influence compared to mainstream media channels, which tend to align more closely with prevailing political discourses and audience preferences.

In conclusion, the Turkish media's role in refugee integration has been shaped by a mixture of state policy, public sentiment, and political polarization. While media can potentially support integration by promoting empathy and understanding, its current role in Turkey has often reinforced social divides,

stigmatization, and exclusion of Syrians, especially in periods of economic hardship or political tension.

2.5.4 Education and Language and Their Role in Integration

One of the rights that the United Nations and all international organizations have recognized is the right to education. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in 1948, Article 26 states that everyone has the right to free education, at least in its elementary and fundamental stages, and that elementary education shall be compulsory ⁸. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1989, also confirms this right. Education is the foundation for building a conscious generation that is aware of its rights and duties, and is able to contribute to building the community, whether its original community or the host community, especially with the increasing number of refugees in the world, approaching the 100 million refugee mark, (UNHCR, Global trends 2021).

Language poses an obstacle for these refugees who intend to move forward in education, in addition to the legislation of some host countries that do not allow the education of refugee children. Regarding language, it is an obstacle because the language of the refugees differs from that of the host country, as happened with Syrian students in Turkey, and it posed a difficulty in receiving their lessons there (Tarek, 2022).

After the closure of Syrian schools in refugee camps in Turkey in 2017, students were forced to attend Turkish schools, which highlighted the language gap, which led to the dropout of a large number of refugee children from the educational process, according to studies presented at a seminar by the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), a British organization that aims to protect

⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, on site: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-right>

academics around the world⁹. The studies also highlighted the clear gap in how Turkish teachers interact with refugee students with different cultural backgrounds and who are psychologically affected by the consequences of the war in their homeland (Tarek, 2022).

Providing opportunities to learn the language of the host country is an important step in overcoming the obstacles to the integration of refugees into society and finding a common language of dialogue between all its components. However, the success of this depends on the support provided by the governments of the host countries for refugees; as they cannot afford to study the language financially on their own, and often do not have any financial resources that allow them to spend on completing their children's education or developing their language skills.

The studies we mentioned earlier revealed that most Turkish teachers have a problem communicating information to refugee students due to language barriers. This made it difficult to evaluate them, especially as these students are suffering from psychological trauma. This led to the recommendation of granting a study period estimated at one or two years to learn Turkish before attending school, with the Turkish government providing support programs in this regard. It also recommended the implementation of joint activities between Syrian and Turkish families to enhance opportunities for social integration in Turkey.

In another example of the impact of language on the education process of refugee children and their integration into host communities, the Greek legislation gives children with incomplete legal documentation the right to enroll in schools and gives unaccompanied refugee minors the opportunity to learn. However, the implementation of this on the ground faces many challenges. The means of achieving this have been divided into three directions: buildings

⁹ Greek Council for Refugees. (2021). *Challenges in the education of refugee children in Greece*. Greek Council for Refugees.

affiliated with refugee reception centers in camps, afternoon classes in public schools for refugees, and classes in public schools in the morning. This division and the allocation of specific schools for refugees in Greece did not help to achieve social integration, on the contrary, it pushed refugee children to not accept to learn, especially with the language barrier. Official statistics showed a significant decline in the registration of refugee children in public schools between 2019 and 2021, due to a number of factors, including language, and the insufficient efforts of the Greek state to remove the difficulties in front of these children to attend school. The situation was exacerbated by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of rejection that followed them from some of the administrators of public schools and Greek families, (Greek Council for Refugees, 2021).

At the end of this chapter, we conclude that wars, armed conflicts, and security disturbances push people to displacement and mass migration. These are accompanied by other factors such as poverty, poor economic conditions, and the lack of rights and freedoms. All this forces families to search for safe havens for themselves and their children.

With the exacerbation of the global refugee crisis, there is a need to define who is a refugee. This will enable host countries to take appropriate measures to deal with them and fulfill their obligations under the 1951 Convention and international human rights law.

The integration of refugees into host communities has always been a topic of discussion in political and social circles. When discussing integration, it is important to differentiate between the situation and circumstances of each migrant and refugee. Each country has its own unique nature that differs from others, and so does each refugee. The secret to the success of integration lies in the host country itself.

Integration is the process of a citizen exercising their roles on all political, economic, and social levels. It encompasses a general meaning that aims to create equal opportunities to strengthen social ties and achieve a true fusion of

the individual into their community, and for them to acquire a political identity that reinforces their loyalty to the state's institutions.

Integration is linked to the nature of social upbringing, which prepares the individual for social interaction with everyone and to acquire more open behaviors, away from prejudice and discrimination, which qualifies them for social harmony with their environment, thus achieving social integration. This upbringing is passed through the individual since the beginning of their life and throughout all its stages through the institutions that guide them and shape their personality, such as the educational institution and the family.

The economy plays a key role in the integration of refugees, as involvement in diverse community networks and employment helps reduce conflict among social groups. When interests overlap and become mutual, this leads to stability and continuity, which is a fundamental principle in social interactions. Additionally, the media plays a vital role in shaping public acceptance of refugees and migrants. The image presented by the media is a double-edged sword: it can either support integration or hinder it. Negative messages may spread fear and hatred, ultimately obstructing social cohesion.

The discussion of refugee issues in this chapter has shown an important point, namely the absence of a culture of human rights among media workers. This was evident from the mistakes they made in addressing refugee issues, which had a negative impact on the content of media materials.

On the other hand, providing opportunities to learn the language of the host country is an important step in overcoming the obstacles to the integration of refugees into society, and finding a common dialogue language between all its components. However, the success of this matter depends on the support provided by the governments of the host countries for refugees, as they cannot afford to study the language financially on their own, and in many cases, they do not have any financial resources that allow them to spend on completing their children's education or developing their language skills.

In response to the significant educational challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkey—particularly language barriers, financial hardship,

and psychological trauma—the Turkish government, in cooperation with international partners, has implemented targeted programs to promote school attendance and integration. Two of the most notable initiatives are the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) and the Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System (PICTES) program. The CCTE program, jointly supported by the European Union, UNICEF, and the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services, provides financial incentives to vulnerable refugee families whose children regularly attend school. This initiative encourages sustained participation in formal education (UNICEF, 2021).

Complementing this, the PICTES program, launched in 2016 with funding from the EU and implemented by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, aims to support the integration of Syrian children into Turkish public schools through multiple components. These include intensive Turkish language instruction, psychosocial support, training for Turkish teachers to work with refugee students, and the employment of intercultural mediators to ease communication between schools and refugee families (European Commission, 2020). The program also funds catch-up classes and support for out-of-school children. As of 2022, PICTES had reached over 700,000 Syrian children and contributed significantly to the decline in dropout rates among refugee students (UNICEF, 2022). These two programs represent concrete steps toward addressing both structural and social barriers to education, thereby playing a key role in the broader strategy of social integration.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF INTEGRATION AND RACIAL BELONGING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of social integration of refugees is intertwined with other related issues such as racial identity, educational level and linguistic differences. The nature and boundaries of this relationship are not fixed but vary from case to case (Rosenblatt, 1964). In this chapter, several models of these studies are overviewed. While many of these studies take place in Europe or Asia, they share the same main subject and focus on integration and its impact on language, racial identity and educational level. Most of these studies also focus on forced migration and asylum, which directly intersect with the topic of this research. Additionally, the majority of these studies are conducted in communities where the nationality of refugees is different from that of the host society, further emphasizing the possibility of applying the results of these studies to the research context (Crossman, 2019). This chapter is divided into three sections, each addressing the study and analysis of the relationship among social integration and racial identity, linguistic differences and educational level. Each relationship is studied within its general framework and then applied to the research context, which is concerned with the factors influencing the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF RACIAL IDENTITY AND INTERPRETIVE THEORIES

Forced migrations resulting from wars or natural disasters often involve individuals or communities with racial identities different from those of the host

society. Initially, these racial differences may be accepted, especially if the duration of refuge and residence is limited. In such cases, humanitarian sympathy is evident towards migrants or refugees (Castles and Miller, 2009). However, when the period of refuge is extended, feelings of sympathy may decline, and the discourse shifts towards social integration. The process of social integration faces challenges and obstacles from both the host and migrant communities, and one of the main foundations for these obstacles is the difference in racial identity. This difference becomes a major source of conflict between the host and migrant communities and can escalate to complete rejection or even confrontation. This directly relates to the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, as social integration between Syrian refugees and Turks is subject to multiple variables, including the racial differences between the two communities (Oware and James, 2003).

Generally, racial differences are considered one of the primary causes of social conflict worldwide, both in the past and present. Many wars between nations and civil wars have been driven by racial identity, either directly or indirectly. In some cases, racial differences have been exploited to achieve political goals. For example, during WWII, racial identity was deliberately and effectively emphasized as a tool for recruitment, motivating fighters and constructing ideologies (Rosenblatt 1964). During World War II, racial identity was strategically used by Nazi Germany to further its militaristic goals. Hitler's regime emphasized Aryan racial superiority as a means of uniting Germans and justifying expansionist policies (Mazower, 2009). The Nazis used racial identity as a tool to: recruit soldiers who were motivated by nationalistic and racial ideologies. Persecute Jews, Roma, and other minorities, which contributed to the Holocaust. The racialized rhetoric motivated citizens and soldiers to view these groups as enemies not just of Germany, but of the Aryan race itself. Establish and maintain control over occupied territories by implementing racial hierarchies, which justified both military actions and the subsequent treatment of occupied populations (Mazower, 2009).

3.2.1 The Concept and Significance of Racial Belonging

Regarding the concept of racial belonging and its terminological significance, it is considered a common concept both at the popular and scientific levels. This term is familiar across different levels, and belongingness linguistically means being associated or closely related to something. It has fundamental social relationships that enable integration with the community. Belongingness is defined as “the feeling of loyalty and affiliation towards something, and in this context, belongingness can be to a homeland, an ideology, or a religion” (Crossman, 2019). Belonging arises from an individual's desire to assume membership due to their love and conviction in what that membership represents. Individuals often try to conform to the rules that ensure their continued belongingness and continuously work to prove this belongingness (Phinney and Ong, 2007).

The individual strives to make that group stronger, tries to assume the group's identity, the individual often feels loyalty to that group and uses all things that indicate the strength of their relationship and emotions towards that group and what it represents. In this case, the individual is committed to what they believe is right (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). As for psychology, racial belonging refers to a type of unity between the individual and the community, with the presence of feelings of safety, satisfaction, pride, and self-esteem. It forms an orientation that the individual feels during their interaction and integration with the group, and their sense of unity with it, believing that they have become an accepted part of it, possessing a distinguished status and a secure position.¹⁰

Racial belonging seems to be built on biological origin, but in reality, it is a concept associated with social characteristics and governed by four essential factors. The first factor is the symbols used by members of the same community, the physical traits shared by members of the same community, the shared history

¹⁰ Race and ethnicity, *American Psychological Association*, <https://www.apa.org/topics/race>

of all members within the community. Finally, racial categories are those groups that exercise power over minority groups in society (Oware and James, 2003).

As mentioned, racial belonging refers to a type of social identity based on cultural background, lifestyle patterns, and shared experiences. It is built upon various elements that form the sources of racial identity for individuals and groups, such as language, shared sense of history or ancestry, religion, shared beliefs, values, and customs. Racial groups are considered "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) whose existence relies on self-definition. Members of these groups may perceive themselves as culturally, historically, or ideologically distinct from other groups, and other racial groups may also see them as different. However, according to sociologists, the concept of race is fictional and not real. It has lost credibility in recent decades. Scientifically, humans are not divided into racial groups genetically, as they share approximately 99% of their genes. It is difficult to divide them racially or genetically. Studies have also shown that race is not an inherent concept, meaning that an individual acquires their racial belonging through culture rather than genetics. However, it remains a primary source of individual and collective identity and a major driver of group decisions and orientations. Groups do not recognize the scientific perspective on races but rather deal with them as if they were real, and they perceive racial differences as significant and distinct from other groups (Thompson, 2023).

Today's racism has become more cultural than biological, especially in the way it manifests in modern societies. The traditional notion of racism based on the belief in biological racial superiority has diminished due to advances in science that have debunked the idea of significant genetic differences between races. Humans share about 99% of their genes, making the biological basis for race largely irrelevant.

However, racism persists, and it has evolved into something more culturally focused. This shift has led many scholars to argue that today's racism is more about cultural superiority or xenophobia than biological differences. This form of racism often targets people based on their ethnicity, religion,

nationality, or cultural practices rather than their skin color or physical traits. For example:

Xenophobia often arises from a fear or dislike of outsiders or those perceived as different due to cultural practices, language, or religious beliefs. This is common in discussions around immigration and national identity, where concerns about cultural dilution or economic threats drive exclusionary policies.

While racial superiority ideologies persist in some corners, the modern landscape sees more cultural racism framed around a perception of cultural incompatibility. (As Fenton, 1999) explains, many forms of exclusion are now based on ethnicity or cultural identity rather than race as a biological concept. These forms of cultural racism focus on the differences in lifestyle, norms, and values between communities.

Many far-right populist movements across Europe and the U.S. have capitalized on cultural racism, using arguments of nationalism and cultural preservation to justify discriminatory policies against refugees, immigrants, or religious minorities like Muslims. The fear is not necessarily racial, but rather that certain groups will not integrate into the dominant culture and may threaten the social cohesion of the host society. Xenophobia, in this context, has become a significant driver of policies and attitudes aimed at excluding outsiders based on their perceived inability to adapt culturally, not on their biology.

In this regard (Harrison, 2002) suggests that modern racist ideologies are framed around ethnocentrism, where cultural traits (like language, religion, and traditions) become the basis for judging the worth of different groups. These cultural differences are often exaggerated to depict minorities or immigrants as "other" and incompatible with the host society, which serves to justify their marginalization.

The theoretical explanations for the emergence of racial identity can be categorized into three main approaches to the concept of 'race' (Vanderwerf and Enoch, 2009):

1. Essentialist Approach: Until the 1970s, essentialist explanations of race were prevalent. According to this approach, race is seen as a real and fixed

aspect of an individual's identity. It is believed that racial identity is an innate need for individuals, and they are born with their racial affiliation. Genetic, physical, and cultural characteristics are considered to differentiate individuals of different races.

2. **Constructivist Approach:** According to this approach, there are no genetic or biological justifications for race or racial identity. Instead, racial identity is acquired through an individual's interaction with surrounding social groups. Cultural context is considered the primary factor shaping racial identity. Regardless of genetic affiliation, individuals belong to the group with which they interact culturally (Barth, 1998). In this approach, the characteristics that define racial identity are not fixed and may change over time.
3. **Materialist Approach:** This approach is based on various cultural, psychological, and economic considerations, primarily drawing from Marxism. According to this approach, race and racial identity are secondary phenomena resulting mainly from class-based social relations. Racial differences between groups, which sometimes lead to direct conflicts, are seen as indirect consequences of social class disparities and differential access to resources. This approach is the least accepted in academic circles.

In general, according to theories explaining racial affiliation, they all revolve around the idea of natural differences among human groups. It is believed that all populations worldwide can be divided into biologically distinct population groups called races. Each group is characterized by a set of visible physical characteristics or differences, which serve as signs or symbols of racial identity and status. However, individuals may belong to a racial category without possessing any or all the associated physical features. In such exceptional cases, early 20th-century race scientists invented an invisible internal element called the "racial essence" to explain these deviant situations (Eriksen, 2002).

Regardless of the reality of races, racial categorization has directly contributed to the division of human groups based on racial identity. Certain

racial groups are considered racially 'superior' or 'inferior', leading to the foundation of racial violence and resistance to social integration efforts by both native and immigrant communities. Racial-ethnic class differentiation serves as a major barrier to social integration programs, and even if these programs achieve success, racial-based class differences can later lead to conflicts and escalate into civil wars. The extent and degree of racial differentiation plays a significant role in the occurrence of subsequent clashes or conflicts, which may evolve into ethnic civil wars (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007).

3.3 THE IMPACT OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION

All theories that explain race and racial belonging are based on the existence of differences between human groups, whether real or perceived. These differences have a real and significant impact on the stance of each group towards others, which directly relates to social integration programs. These programs essentially aim to encourage the acceptance of other groups and their joining, either permanently or temporarily. However, this is not a simple matter, as the majority of countries are not composed of a single race but rather a mixture of races. Each race has its own cultural preferences and social attitudes towards other groups. Moreover, the historical relationship between groups plays a crucial role in shaping the general and specific attitudes of a group towards others. Additionally, racial pockets complicate the overall social landscape and increase the challenges and obstacles that hinder the success of social integration programs, especially in the case of forced displacement resulting from military violence or natural disasters (Eriksen, 2002).

In general, there are numerous studies and research that have addressed the impact of racial differences on social integration programs. Some studies even question the viability of social integration itself. Some argue that social integration cannot be fully successful in the presence of racial differences. Races and racial belonging, regardless of their scientific validity, have been formed

over centuries, and it is unlikely that racial extremism or their influence on attitudes towards other groups can be completely eliminated. Therefore, in some cases, social integration programs may have unintended consequences by negatively affecting the likelihood of acceptance of local racial groups towards immigrant communities (Eriksen, 2002).

3.3.1 Racial Diversity and Social Integration

The effectiveness of social integration programs is influenced by several racial factors, including the level of racial diversity in the host society. The success of social integration programs for refugees is closely linked to their ability to access employment and income. Studies have shown that refugees have higher chances of finding employment in racially diverse communities, compared to communities with a single race or fewer racial groups (Portes and Bach, 1984).

Many studies indicate that racial diversity, particularly in host societies, plays a supportive role in social integration programs. In a study conducted in Switzerland to assess the level of integration of refugee students in various classrooms, the study found that refugee students faced social rejection and were unable to build social relationships with other students. However, what is more important is that they experienced less rejection in classrooms that were more racially diverse. This difference in social integration in relation to racial diversity can be explained by two factors. First, in racially diverse communities, refugee students have more opportunities to meet their peers from other racial minorities who are generally more accepting of refugees in general (Anzures et al, 2020).

The second reason is that racial diversity reduces the intensity of rejection towards other racial groups due to decreased racial polarization and a reduction in racial bias (Tropp, L. R. and Prenovost, 2008). This leads to the conclusion that social empowerment programs may be more effective in racially diverse communities compared to communities with a single race or few racial groups.

Social psychology confirms that contact between different racial groups increases familiarity with members of the immigrant group, reduces racial and

ethnic prejudice and bias, and leads to more positive attitudes between groups, especially among members of the racial majority group. As a result, members of the racial majority group form increasing numbers of cross-racial friendships when racial diversity is higher, and aggression towards racial minorities decreases (Delaney et al, 2015). In this context, refugees are viewed as a minority ethnic group migrating to the local community.

The prevailing belief that living in an area with racial or ethnic diversity hinders social integration, as it increases the difficulty for newcomers to acquire the language and customs of the host country, is an incorrect belief that is refuted by research and facts (Delaney et al, 2015).

To confirm this, many countries seek to distribute refugees within their borders to ensure the highest level of racial interaction between newcomers and native residents. They adopt specific policies in accommodating and geographically distributing refugees, believing that racial concentration hinders social integration programs. Germany, for example, according to German laws regarding refugees, asylum seekers lose their financial support if they leave the federal area they were initially assigned to.¹¹

In Switzerland, asylum seekers and refugees with subsidiary protection are not allowed to move from the designated area. In Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, asylum seekers who rely on public housing assistance are geographically distributed (Anzures et al, 2020). All these policies primarily rely on one justification, which is that racial interaction between diverse groups supports social integration programs and reduces social tensions between refugees and local residents.

By examining the reality of Syrian refugees in Turkey, where a large number of Syrians have concentrated in specific geographic areas due to various considerations, it is evident that this racial-ethnic concentration poses a barrier to the effectiveness of social integration programs. This observation aligns with

¹¹ Bans on entry and residence, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/AsylFluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsylverfahrens/Ausgang/EinreiseAufenthaltsverbote/einreiseaufenthaltsverbote-node.html>

the principle that racial diversity supports social integration programs, and vice versa.

3.3.2 Ethnic Enclaves, Networks and Social Integration

In general, refugees tend to congregate socially within small ethnic groups, which they believe provide them with a sense of social security. This phenomenon is more pronounced in the case of forced displacement, especially in the case of displacement caused by armed violence and civil wars. This social clustering based on ethnic grounds is considered to be an ethnic pocket within the host communities (Eriksen, 2002). These pockets support and reinforce the sense of security among the incoming groups, but they may cause anxiety and fear among the local ethnic groups. In ethnic pockets, migrants speak their own languages, shop, work, and practice their religion among themselves. At the same time, local residents view these actions and this behavioral independence with concern, feeling that the newcomers will not adopt the norms and values of their community. At the same time, advocates of ethnic clustering for migrants believe that pockets risk turning their residents into the lower class and obstructing access to economic opportunities (Algan et al, 2016), which affects the effectiveness of social integration programs directly or indirectly.

Within or outside ethnic pockets, migrants constantly seek to build social networks with members of their race, in order to achieve several goals: including easy access to the labor market. According to studies and field surveys, the more the size of the ethnic network increases by 10%, the more the chances of getting a job increase by 2%, during the first three years after migration (Munshi, 2003). The same applies to workers in companies of migrants or refugees, as refugees seek ethnic clustering within workplaces, which indicates that ethnic networks contribute to the transfer of information about job opportunities. These results collectively contribute to understanding the importance of ethnic networks in facilitating the integration of refugees, which explains why the majority of refugees and migrants when they first arrive in a new country, they often choose to live with previous migrant groups in geographically concentrated "ethnic

pockets" (Martén ,2019); And back to the issue of Syrian displacement in Turkey, the majority of them have gathered in ethnic pockets, especially in major cities.

In addition to the above, social networks play an important role in reducing search costs and problems of asymmetric information in the labor market; These networks can provide ethnic pockets with access to networks that provide information about job opportunities and job referrals. Social literature also suggests that participation in the "pocket economy" enables migrants to improve their economic status faster than the secondary labor market of the host community (Algan, 2016). This indirectly supports the chances of success of social integration programs.

3.3.3 The Direct and Indirect Impact of Ethnic Enclaves on Social Integration

Many people who oppose immigration see social integration programs as a threat to the ethnic culture of the community they live in. They also see incoming groups as a threat to their own ethnic identity, here are emerging concepts, such as "We are against them" (Laurentsyeva and Venturini, 2017) and social integration is only possible when immigrants are accepted as members of the community through mutual recognition.

In this context, many studies of forced displacement have shown that local ethnic communities sometimes view refugees as a potential threat to the ethnic composition of the host country, which could lead to instability. For example, the arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey following the escalation of the conflict in Syria led to concerns among many ethnic groups in Turkey. The Turkish Kurds, in particular, viewed the Syrian refugee influx with fear, as it could potentially threaten the delicate ethnic balance in Turkey, especially in the southeast of the country.

This is especially concerning given that the majority of Syrian refugees are Arabs, (International Alert 2015, Itani and Grebowski 2013). In Lebanon, too, many Lebanese fear the implications of the Syrian refugee crisis for the country's

fragile sectarian balance (Adamson, 2014) . Some believe that countries that receive large waves of refugees are often at risk of civil war, especially those with a diverse ethnic composition (Loescher and Milner, 2005).

The question of whether refugees disrupt the ethnic balance in host countries is a politically significant one. There are many examples that illustrate the role of some refugee waves in causing political, security, and social unrest. For example, the massive influx of Afghan refugees to Balochistan province in Pakistan in the 1980s led to an ethnic conflict (Jamal, 2016).

The refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region in the 1990s also led to increased public and scholarly awareness that refugees can become involved in conflict. For example, perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide mixed with refugees in Zaire, and they were recruited in refugee camps, which ultimately led to the outbreak of a civil war in the years that followed (Whitaker ,2003).

As for the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey, it did not lead to any similar unrest. In general, Turkey does not experience security disturbances except for the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. The Syrian refugee crisis did not have a direct impact on this conflict. However, later, the Turkish social aversion to the Syrian presence was exploited in some political positions, such as the 2019 municipal elections and the 2023 presidential elections. The candidates in these elections were aware of the general Turkish public position that rejects the Syrian presence and the idea of integration with it. Therefore, they worked to attract the votes of voters, especially those with nationalist tendencies. In general, in multi-ethnic countries with a majority and minority ethnic group, governments are more likely to support the reception of refugees who are ethnically similar to the majority ethnic group in the country. At the same time, they are more likely to obstruct the arrival of refugees who are ethnically like the minorities in the country (Whitaker, 2003). For example, Kenya has repeatedly planned to close its borde

with Somalia due to the infiltration of rebels. In 2016, more than 300,000 refugees, the majority of whom were Somalis, settled in Kenya. ¹²

Similarly, the Pakistani government refuses to host Bihari refugees who speak Urdu from Bangladesh in the Sindh province, for fear of ethnic clashes between the Sindhi majority and the minority of immigrants, who also speak Urdu (Rüegger, 2018). The same applies to the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey. The Turkish government welcomed Syrian refugees and supported their reception through an open-door policy. It also strengthened its social integration programs. In doing so, it is exerting new pressure on the Kurdish minority. In addition, the religious and sectarian affiliation of Syrian refugees intersects to some extent with the general trends of the Turkish government.

3.4 IMPACT OF ETHNIC DIFFERENCES ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

The ethnic factor is considered the strongest factor in terms of its impact on social integration issues. The ethnic difference between Arabs and Turks is considered relatively sharp, especially since the Turkish national project differs from the Syrian national project. It is noted that Turkish nationalism has seen a clear rise in the last century, especially after the establishment of the modern Turkish state by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Under the rule of the Justice and Development Party, Turkish nationalism saw a new rise. This clear national trend caused the Turks to view Syrians as an indirect threat to their national identity, especially since the presence of Syrian refugees, who are overwhelmingly Muslim, posed a direct threat to nationalism with the fear that this national trend would turn into a religious trend. Which threatens the pillars of the Turkish state, especially in terms of its transformation into a state with an

¹² The Guardian. (2016). Kenya's Plans to Close Dadaab Refugee Camp Raises Human Rights Concerns. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/07>

Islamic orientation. This led to the aversion of Turks to Syrian refugees, and directly threatened social integration programs.

The growing public concern in Turkey regarding the presence of Syrian refugees cannot be attributed solely to ethnic differences; rather, it reflects a more complex intersection of identity politics, cultural anxiety, and fears related to secularism. While the ethnic distinction between Arabs and Turks does contribute to a sense of social distance—fueled by historical stereotypes and limited cultural familiarity—it does not, by itself, explain the depth and persistence of public discomfort toward Syrians. What appears more pressing, particularly in the Turkish context, is the perceived threat to the country's secular identity.

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, secularism (*laiklik*) has been one of its foundational pillars. The influx of millions of Syrian refugees, many of whom are visibly religious and culturally conservative, has triggered concerns among segments of Turkish society that their presence could gradually alter the secular character of the state. These concerns have intensified in the context of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), whose policies and discourse have been viewed by critics as favoring a more religious and Islamic-oriented public sphere. As a result, many secular Turks perceive the long-term presence of Syrians not only as a demographic or economic issue but as an ideological and cultural challenge to the secular framework of the republic (Erdoğan, 2020).

Public opinion data supports this interpretation. A 2021 KONDA survey revealed that over 70% of Turkish citizens favor the return of Syrian refugees, citing both economic and cultural incompatibility. Moreover, a 2022 report by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) indicated that many citizens view the Syrian population as socially conservative and religiously distinct, which fuels fears of "Islamization" and the erosion of secular norms (TESEV, 2022). These perceptions have been reinforced by media narratives and political rhetoric that frame Syrian refugees as instruments of the AKP's broader ideological project. Consequently, the barriers to integration are

not only social or linguistic but also deeply ideological, rooted in Turkey's internal debate over its identity and future direction.

In this light, concerns about secularism play a more prominent role than ethnic difference in shaping Turkish attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The tension is not merely about the "Arab other" but about the perceived threat to a national identity constructed on secular principles. This fear of cultural and religious transformation significantly undermines efforts toward refugee integration and explains the persistence of public resistance despite humanitarian appeals.

The Syrian refugee crisis has been met with widespread Turkish social acceptance since its inception, supported by humanitarian sympathy for the humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian crisis. This social acceptance continued until 2014, after which it began to decline relatively, driven by several factors, including the continuous increase in the number of Syrian refugees, in addition to the fact that the refugees' stay in Turkey has become clear that it will continue for a long time (Erdoğan, 2017). At the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, it was believed that it was a temporary refuge that would end after a few months. This belief was caused by the official Turkish and international climate that expected the fall of the Syrian regime and the victory of the Syrian revolution after a short period, based on the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan experiences. However, after the refugee crisis extended for several years and the Syrian military and political scene became complicated, the Syrian refugee crisis seemed to continue for several additional years, which caused a decline in Turkish public acceptance of Syrian refugees (İçduygu and Şimşek, 2016).

The Turkish government also played a major role in promoting social acceptance of Syrian refugees among Turks. The Turkish government, headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has focused on emphasizing the humanitarian and religious obligation of Turks to welcome Syrian refugees (Doğan and Şirin, 2017). The Turkish government has also referred to Syrians as "guests" rather than "refugees." This is evident in the repeated speeches of President Erdoğan, who said in one speech: "We are a nation with a

consciousness of *Ansar*, and we see all the brothers who come to us as guests. We must welcome them warmly, and we open our homes to them and share our bread with them.¹³ " This style of rhetoric was successful in the early years of the Syrian refugee crisis in easing the tensions in Turkish society. However, its effectiveness began to decline later, especially after 2016 ((Erdoğan, 2017).

(Karakaya Polat, 2018) offers a critical analysis of this strategy, arguing that the AKP constructed a discourse of religious solidarity, historical mission, and moral superiority to differentiate between the Muslim "brothers" in need (Syrians) and external or internal "others" such as Western critics or secular domestic opponents. According to Polat, this discursive framework positioned the AKP as morally superior for embracing refugees and framed Turkish society as fulfilling a divinely sanctioned historical role. While effective in mobilizing support and easing social tensions in the initial phase of the crisis, this religiously charged narrative began to lose its resonance in later years, particularly after 2016, as public fatigue and economic concerns grew (Erdoğan, 2017).

Thus, while the AKP's use of religious and moral discourse initially contributed to public acceptance of Syrians, its long-term effectiveness was limited by broader political and socioeconomic pressures. Over time, the symbolic language of *Ansar* gave way to increasing calls for repatriation and tighter border controls, reflecting a shift from moral obligation to political pragmatism.

Recent quantitative studies further illustrate the deepening deterioration of social acceptance toward Syrian refugees in Turkey. A 2024 study found that approximately 86% of Turkish citizens believe that refugees and immigrants should be sent back to their countries of origin, reflecting widespread opposition to long-term integration (Secen, 2024). Similarly, the *Syrians Barometer 2023*, conducted with the support of UNHCR, reported that 83.3% of Turkish respondents do not believe peaceful coexistence with Syrians is possible, while

13 "Onlar *ansar*, *muhacir* ne demek bilmezler". *Trthaber*, 2015, on site: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/onlar-ansar-muhacir-ne-demek-bilmezler-168651.html>

89% expressed support for their departure from the country—the highest figures recorded since the Barometer’s inception (Erdoğan, 2024). These findings are consistent with the escalation of social tensions observed in recent years. For example, in July 2024, violent anti-Syrian unrest spread across multiple Turkish cities, leading to the detention of 474 individuals, more than 120 injuries, and at least one confirmed death (Time, 2024). Collectively, this evidence underscores not only the persistence of public hostility but also its escalation into episodes of open xenophobic conflict, further demonstrating the widening gap between the long-term presence of Syrians in Turkey and Turkish public resistance to coexistence.

This sharp contrast in social attitudes between Turks and Syrian refugees towards the issue of social integration can be attributed to the fact that Turks see Syrians as a source of economic, social, cultural, and even national threat, while Syrians see Turks as their hosts.

3.4.1 Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Ethnic Enclaves

In the early days of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, most refugees concentrated in the Turkish provinces bordering Turkey. This was due to several reasons, the most important of which was geographical proximity, in addition to the existence of ethnic intersections between the refugees and the Turkish social incubator in these provinces (Tören, 2018). Later, after the increase in the number of refugees and the length of the period of asylum, and the lack of clarity of the end of the conflict in Syria, many refugees moved to other Turkish regions, especially the city of Istanbul. In general, most refugees relied on concentrating in ethnic enclaves within the provinces in which they settled. This ethnic concentration contributed to the emergence of a network of relationships that support their social stability and enhance their chances of accessing the labor market (İçduygu and Aksel, 2019). However, at the same time, it led to a large segment of refugees not learning the Turkish language, which indirectly affected the effectiveness of social integration programs. Table 3.1 presented below

shows the number of Syrian refugees in the most important Turkish provinces in which they settled.

Table 3.1 Distribution of Syrian Refugees in Turkey (Refugees Association, 2023)

Province	Number of Syrian Refugees	Percentage of Syrian Refugees to Local Turkish Residents
Istanbul	496,485	3.30%
Gaziantep	450,031	22.18%
Hatay	438,741	27.25%
Sanliurfa	422,729	20.76%
Adana	246,462	11.10%
Mersin	210,632	11.61%
Bursa	175,649	5.87%
İzmir	146,352	3.39%
Konya	113,736	5.16%
Kilis	112,192	78.71%

It is noticeable here that a significant portion of Syrian refugees are concentrated in the southern Turkish provinces that are relatively close to the Syrian border. This may partially reduce the intensity of social tension between Syrian refugees and their Turkish hosts. This cannot eliminate social tensions, but it may help, albeit partially, in social integration programs aimed at integrating refugees into their Turkish society.

In general, the concentration in ethnic enclaves has led to increased tension between Syrian refugees and Turkish hosts. In 2017, in the province of Izmir, thousands of workers of Kurdish and gypsy origin rioted against Syrian workers who had taken over agricultural work in the province, forcing local camp

residents to flee their camps.¹⁴ This clearly illustrates the dangerous extent to which social tensions between Turks and Syrian refugees have reached.

Syrians in Turkey are largely viewed as having a different nationality rather than a different race. Most Syrians and Turks share the same religion (Islam) and have some cultural similarities, particularly in southern Turkey, which is home to ethnic Arab populations. However, racial and ethnic identities in Turkey are complex. While religion (shared Islamic faith) might act as a unifying factor, differences in nationality and ethnic background—for instance, between Turkish Kurds, Syrian Arabs, and Turks—have created tensions. This has been especially prominent in regions where Kurds and other ethnic minorities like the Roma (gypsy) population see Syrians as economic competitors (Erdoğan, 2020).

Religious identity, specifically the concept of Muslim brotherhood, has been invoked by the Turkish government to promote acceptance of Syrian refugees. President Erdoğan's references to Syrians as "guests" and invoking the Islamic concept of Ansar (helpers), who assisted the early Muslim migrants, is an attempt to align Syrian refugees with religious solidarity among Muslims (İçduygu and Millet, 2016). This religious framing was successful to some extent during the early stages of the Syrian refugee crisis but has not fully mitigated tensions, particularly as the situation became prolonged and resources were strained.

Despite the shared Islamic faith, economic competition and cultural differences have complicated social integration. Moreover, not all Turkish citizens may subscribe to the religious narrative of brotherhood, as evidenced by growing anti-refugee sentiment in Turkey in recent years.

14 "İzmir'de 'mahalle' kavgası; 30 kişi yaralandı, 500 Surely mahalleyi terk etti!" ["Brawl in Izmir's neighborhood: 30 injured, 500 Syrians fled the neighborhood"], T24, 8 April 2017

CHAPTER 4

4. THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ON THE INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES INTO TURKISH SOCIETY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and social integration, as well as its impact on the effectiveness of social integration programs for immigrants and refugees has been extensively studied in various research studies (Beißert et al. 2021). The research interest in this issue primarily focuses on the importance of language as a factor in the success of social integration programs (Keblysek et al. 2017). Furthermore, the influence of language extends to various elements of social integration, and linguistic differences become apparent in different refugee and migration environments, unlike other factors that, in some cases, require in-depth studies. Therefore, the relationship between language and social integration and its continuous impact are subjects of ongoing research interest.

Regarding the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society, the language difference between the parties has an impact on the effectiveness of social integration. However, this impact needs to be accurately determined through study and analysis. It is necessary to identify the impact it has on the attitudes of Syrians towards Turks and the attitudes of Turks towards Syrians. Language plays a role in shaping these attitudes, although the boundaries of this role may not be sufficiently clear. To accurately determine this role, this chapter addresses this issue by analyzing previous studies and attempting to apply them to the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section focuses on analyzing the relationship between language differences and social integration in a general context, while the second section transitions from generalization to specific cases by examining the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and determining the impact of language differences

between refugees and the host community on the effectiveness of social integration programs, mutual acceptance, and the role of language in these matters.

4.2 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION, BOUNDARIES OF RELATIONSHIP AND INFLUENCE

Language is considered a crucial element for social integration, especially as it serves as a means of communication between refugees and host communities (Kinzler, 2013). In the context of language differences, communication is limited and may even be severed. Under such circumstances, it becomes challenging to implement social integration programs. On the contrary, these conditions often exacerbate phenomena of marginalization, tension, and conflict. The role of language is decisive in social integration programs, whether in a positive or negative sense. A shared language promotes social integration among groups, while linguistic differences can contribute to social segregation, reaching the point of marginalization and conflict.

In general, to understand the nature and boundaries of the relationship between language and social integration, it is necessary to first precisely define the concept of language and identify the functions it fulfills at both the individual and societal levels. A clear understanding of these functions serves as a fundamental basis for determining the impact of the relationship between language and social integration.

4.2.1 The Concept of Language and Its Functions

Language has received significant attention from linguists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists due to their important and central functions. As a result of this interest, there are several definitions of language. It has been defined as a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols through which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. It has also been defined as the expression of ideas

by means of spoken sounds that are combined in words. Words are then integrated into sentences, and this combination reflects the speaker's thoughts. American linguists Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager formulated the following definition: Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols through which a social group cooperate, (Crystal and Robins, 1964)”.

Language serves multiple important functions that are integral to human communication and interaction. At its core, it facilitates communication, allowing individuals and groups to express ideas and emotions. It also fulfills the innate human need for social interaction, helping people connect with their environment and one another. From an early age, language plays a utilitarian role, enabling children to express their basic needs, and as they grow, it also becomes a tool for imaginative thinking and creativity. This imaginative function highlights how language and thought are inseparable, allowing individuals to conceive new ideas and innovate within the boundaries of language.

Beyond this, language carries an informative function, as it conveys news and knowledge between people. It plays a key role in education, serving as a medium for the transmission of knowledge and culture across generations. Additionally, language has a historical dimension, preserving the record of events, and thus acting as a vehicle for the history of societies and cultures. Its artistic role is also significant, providing a framework for the expression of the arts and evolving alongside artistic development. Language also performs a symbolic function, allowing for the naming and referencing of both tangible and intangible entities, giving structure to human understanding of the world.

Moreover, language serves as a means of emotional release, facilitating the expression of feelings and emotions. Lastly, it plays a bonding role, fostering a sense of belonging and identity, reinforcing both racial and national ties, and helping individuals express their affiliation with particular groups (Crystal and Robins, 1964).

In addition to the previous functions, language also serves other secondary or subsidiary functions. The functions mentioned earlier are considered primary

functions, and one of the secondary functions is affiliation. Language enhances social affiliation because individuals tend to harmonize and integrate with people who share the same language. From this perspective, language becomes a factor in nationalist tendencies (Pulinx and Avermaet, 2017, Nerghes and andPozzo 2018). This explains why refugees or immigrants tend to concentrate in ethnic or linguistic enclaves. This phenomenon is reinforced when the language of refugees or immigrants differs from the language of the host community, as it strengthens the bond among refugees or immigrants but also increases social distance between them and the host community due to linguistic divergence.

4.2.2 The Impact of Language on Social Integration

Language and social integration are interrelated in a reciprocal relationship, meaning that each influence and is influenced by the other. Alongside the positive role of shared language in promoting social integration, language differences can have a negative impact on the process of social integration. This is supported by previous studies, some of which are reviewed in the context of this research. According to previous studies such as (Berry 2005, Byram 2009 and Chiswick and Miller 2001), the impact of language differences on the effectiveness of social integration programs can be observed at several levels, as follows:

Reinforcing differences between groups, language differences between groups contribute to accentuating differentiation and increasing social distance. On the other hand, shared language plays a role in reducing racial, social, and national biases. For example, the role of racial differences between groups may decrease if the language is shared, while the role of ethnic affiliation may decrease if the language is different. In some cases, the impact of language may outweigh the impact of racial and religious affiliation. This is because language is a factor that individuals use constantly and extensively, whereas racial affiliation indicators only appear in specific situations (Beißert et al. 2021). For example, when individuals interact with others from different ethnic backgrounds, but if the entire group belongs to the same ethnic group and there

are no individuals belonging to other ethnicities, the role of ethnicity diminishes significantly.

Many researchers argue that immigrants' or refugees' accurate knowledge of the host communities' native language reduces stereotyping towards them as different, leading to more openness between refugee communities and host communities and fostering a positive perception of refugees (Beißert et al. 2021).

In addition to that, according to the functions of language, it serves the function of social identity, especially in cases of multiple languages within one society. In the presence of several languages, language becomes a social identity, and it becomes the most important criterion for determining group membership. Individuals construct their perceptions of the boundaries that separate their group from neighboring groups through the factor of language. At this point, the individual and collective "inside and outside" concept of the group emerges. Any individual who does not speak the language of the group is not considered a part of it and is seen as a potential threat (Kebusek et al. 2017). In this regard, language is a symbol of connection or difference and represents a real proof of group membership. It is worth noting that in the case of individuals learning the language of a certain group, even if they do not belong to it, they symbolically become affiliated through the factor of language.

In the same context, the researcher argues that the connection between the language factor and social integration is evident through children's behaviors. Children from the host community never resonate with refugee children who do not speak the language of the refugees. This may develop into a sense of insecurity or anxiety towards them, as they cannot understand what they are saying. Children may transfer these feelings of anxiety to their parents, further exacerbating the negative impact of language differences (Kinzler ,2013).

Additionally, the language factor plays a role in social exclusion. Refugees' proficiency in the language of the host community improves the stereotypical image towards them, and vice versa. Participating in the language gives the impression to the host community that refugees are similar to them,

thus reducing social rejection (Beißert et al. 2021). This reinforces the idea of social acceptance.

Difficulty accessing public services, one of the functions of language is to express needs and to request and obtain services. Therefore, in the case of language differences, the process of requesting needs and accessing public services is not always available. This leads to the deprivation of non-speaking refugees of a wide range of services, such as education, legal services, healthcare, public services, and other essential services in the community. This negatively affects their satisfaction and may lead to a negative perception of the host community.¹⁵ Thus, impacting social integration opportunities.

Numerous studies have confirmed that refugees who do not speak the language of the host community often face difficulties in accessing public services. If they do manage to access them, it is often at a higher cost due to the need for interpreters. A study by Abohalaka and Yeşil (2021) titled Identifying Perceived Language Barriers among Syrian Refugees Visiting Hospitals in Ankara aimed to determine the relationship between Syrian refugees' proficiency in the Turkish language and their ability to access medical services. The study selected a sample of 221 participants, and only 11.1% of the sample could speak the Turkish language. Regarding those who did not speak the Turkish language, 48.5% of them relied on immediate translators to access medical services in the hospital, while 29.62% did not receive any assistance. This created a negative stance towards the host community.

Studies also indicate that even with the use of immediate translation services, they can be costly. Additionally, many refugees are not highly motivated to interact with translators as they may be unwilling to share personal information with them. Furthermore, some translators may not be sufficiently competent; resulting in receiving services that may differ from their actual needs

¹⁵ Language and Literacy Programmers For Migrants And Refugees: Challenges And Ways Forward, e Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2019.

(Haas et al. 2020). In these cases, the language barrier becomes a significant obstacle to this process.

Academic Achievement, one of the functions of language is its role as a primary tool for academic achievement. However, in the case of refugees and their inability to communicate in the language of the host community, their ability to achieve academic success is significantly diminished and may even come to a complete halt (Kempert et al. 2016). Previous studies conducted in countries receiving waves of refugees or migration have shown that the academic achievement of immigrants or refugees is lower compared to their counterparts in the host society, resulting in low educational qualifications (Christensen, 2006). This lower academic achievement can be attributed to several factors, with language being a major barrier. Academic achievement in refugee-hosting countries is directly related to the refugees' ability to use the language skills of the host community (Esser ,2008). The language barrier is also considered a major reason for children falling behind in school (Kempert et al. 2016). It is important to note that general knowledge of the host community's language is not sufficient for academic achievement. Acquiring good language skills, including fluency in speaking and writing, is necessary but may not be accessible to a wide range of refugees (Moe et al. 2016), which overall leads to a lower level of academic achievement for them.

The decline in the academic achievement of refugees compared to the host community's good educational attainment can lead to a negative perception of refugees by members of the host community. This is accompanied by a general sense of bias due to language differences, which intensifies when these factors are coupled with racial differences. This exacerbates feelings of rejection and negatively impacts the prospects and possibilities of social integration. In some cases, it can even lead to social rejection and marginalization.

Entering the labor market, language is considered a key to professional opportunities and a prerequisite for working in many sectors, especially in the presence of workers from the host community. Being able to speak the language of the host community is a necessary requirement for communicating with fellow

workers. In the case of inability to speak the language of the host community, the opportunities to enter the labor market become limited. Some previous studies argue that refugees are at a significantly higher risk of unemployment compared to local residents, even if refugees have better vocational skills and educational levels than their peers from the host community. This is primarily due to the language barrier (Thöne-Geis, 2016). Refugees are unable to make use of their professional experience due to the language barrier. A study conducted on Turkish immigrants in Germany in 2006 showed that improving language skills had a direct and positive impact on their employment opportunities, as well as their occupational and income levels (Kalter, 2006).

The main reason for the impact of the language barrier on refugees' chances of entering the labor market is that advanced language skills are necessary for most operational and administrative processes. In the presence of low language skills, operating costs increase. Therefore, employers prefer not to hire refugees who do not have good language skills. In addition, low language skills lead to weakness and slowness in forming human capital in companies. Furthermore, the language barrier prevents the transfer of human capital from labor-deficient countries to receiving countries (Kalter, 2006). Therefore, the language barrier prevents effective and actual entry of immigrants and refugees into the labor market, resulting in higher unemployment rates in the refugee community. This negatively affects the general acceptance and effectiveness of social integration programs and can even lead to complete alienation. Additionally, full mastery of the language of the host community enhances the chances of obtaining a good job, where "good" here refers to a relatively acceptable income level in the local community. Furthermore, previous studies confirm that immigrants or refugees with good language skills have higher chances of finding good jobs (Cao and Boyd, 2009), which enhances their social acceptance by the host community.

It is worth mentioning here that the ability to understand the language of the host community is the minimum requirement for entering the labor market. However, the ability to use language skills effectively, including vocational

skills, job promotion, and obtaining a relatively acceptable income level, is associated with the ability to effectively use the language of the host community, in addition to reading and writing skills (Esser, 2006).

These factors collectively play a role in the social acceptance of refugees by the host community, either positively or negatively, depending on the level of proficiency of refugees in the language of the host community.

4.2.3 Language, Social Categorization, and its Impact on Social Integration

Language is considered a manifestation of individual and collective identity, as well as an indication of national and ethnic belonging (Esser, 2006). Therefore, individuals or groups who speak a different language are often perceived as a potential threat, and this is where the relationship between language differences, bias, and out-group homogeneity comes into play (Cao and Boyd, 2009). This problem becomes particularly apparent when there are relatively large groups that speak a different language, as is the case with refugees. When refugees speak a common language different from that of the host community, it creates an impression that this group is homogeneous, even if it is not, (Cao and Boyd, 2009). This homogeneity can lead to increased bias, threat perception, and anxiety from the host community, fueling racism towards refugees and reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality. (McBrien, 2005) A significant portion of the attacks on refugees have been directed at those living in communities where their native language is spoken, and who do not have language skills specific to the language of the host community, on the other hand, when refugees speak the language of the host community, bias and out-group homogeneity decrease to minimal levels.

4.2.4 Language and Social Integration: A Reciprocal Relationship

Within the context of this discussion, it becomes evident that language differences negatively impact indicators of social integration. However, at the same time, the relationship between these two variables is reciprocal, meaning

that each of them influences and is influenced by the other. Without social integration between refugees and the host community, refugees will make slow progress in developing their language skills. At the same time, they cannot fully integrate into the host community without language skills. This seems to present a social dilemma, and here civil organizations or government institutions can play a crucial role in providing language training to refugees in the language of the host community, which contributes to addressing the language barrier (Thöne-Geis, 2016).

It is worth mentioning here that the relationship between language and social integration is not isolated from other surrounding factors and influences. The nature and degree of this relationship are directly affected by racial differences between the host community and the refugee community. The impact of language differences on indicators of social integration increases when there are racial differences between the two sides. Additionally, religious and cultural differences also play a role in determining the strength of the impact of language on indicators of social integration (İçduygu and Millet, 2016).

4.2.5 The Impact of Language on the Groups of Refugees

In the majority of mass migrations, especially forced ones, refugees or migrants tend to cluster in small groups within confined geographic areas. They often gather in specific neighborhoods or villages in response to a sense of community security. These clusters are referred to as ethnic groups, which can also be metaphorically termed linguistic groups. Shared ethnic identity alone is not enough to drive individuals to cluster together; they also need a shared language. In this context, the importance of the language factor may outweigh the significance of the ethnic factor. The need for communication and interaction within the group is a necessity that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, these groups can be considered linguistic groups (Anzures et al. 2020).

Ethnic or linguistic groups can create anxiety within the host community, particularly because they reinforce the "us versus them" mentality. These groups promote the phenomenon of in-group and out-group dynamics, where the in-

group refers to the host community and the out-group refers to the refugee groups. Additionally, linguistic unity among refugees enhances cohesion within the refugee groups (Algan et al. 2016). This perception of potential threat felt by the host community, regardless of its validity, becomes a major obstacle to social integration programs (Kalter, 2006).

In Switzerland, asylum seekers and refugees with subsidiary protection are not allowed to move from their designated area. In Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, asylum seekers relying on public housing assistance are geographically distributed (Anzures et al. 2020).

4.3 THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Language is one of the most prominent factors that affect the social integration of refugees, whether positively or negatively. If the language is shared between refugees and the host community, it plays a positive role in the success of social integration programs. However, if the language is different, it can have a negative impact. It's worth mentioning that language is not an independent factor in its relationship with social integration indicators (Alencar, 2018). It is influenced by other surrounding factors such as national, ethnic, and religious affiliations, as well as customs, traditions, and general political attitudes. These factors can either increase or mitigate the negative impact of language differences. For example, if the ethnic and religious affiliations of refugees and the host community are shared, it will contribute to reducing the negative impact of language differences, and vice versa (Erdoğan 2020).

Language is also considered one of the most important factors that differ between Syrian refugees and the host Turkish community. Many previous studies and research have focused on analyzing the relationship between language and social integration or integration into the labor market. Many studies have also analyzed the impact of language on the integration of children and the effect of language training programs on the social integration of Syrian

refugees with the host Turkish community. In this study, the reciprocal relationship between language differences and social integration will be analyzed based on academic literature that has directly or indirectly addressed the issue (Alencar, 2018).

4.3.1 Language and Integration of Syrian Refugees

Regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, despite several commonalities that bring Syrians and Turks together, there are several factors that can be described as differentiating factors. The two communities share religious affiliation, some customs and traditions, as well as history and geography. However, they differ in various aspects, including ethnic identity, language, and national project. Language is one of the prominent factors that can have a negative impact on the social integration between Syrian refugees and the Turkish society.

In general, a significant percentage of Turks consider themselves different from their Syrian counterparts. According to a 2014 Brookings report, 70% of Turks believe that they are different from Syrians, and language is considered a major factor that reinforces this difference. Additionally, according to a 2016 World Bank report, 18% of Turks believe that Syrian refugees cannot effectively integrate into Turkish society, and the language barrier is one of the main obstacles to integration.¹⁶ It is worth noting the high demand for Turkish language learning courses among Syrian refugees. This is because accessing services and improving their overall perception by the local community is indirectly related to the level of language skills possessed by refugees (Coşkun and Emin 2016). However, the effectiveness of Turkish language education programs for refugees has not met the desired level due to insufficient financial and human resources, which has indirectly affected the effectiveness of refugee integration (Karatepe and Dal, 2020).

¹⁶ World Bank Group. The Welfare of Syrian Refugees: Evidence from Jordan and Lebanon, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/the-welfare-of-syrian-refugees-evidence-from-jordan-and-lebanon>

Although recent data explicitly reproducing the figures from the 2014 Brookings and 2016 World Bank reports was not found, the persistence of cultural and linguistic distance between Turks and Syrians remains evident in newer findings. A 2022–2023 analysis by the IAB Research Report shows that while Turkish language proficiency among refugees does improve over time - from 47% to 63% - language remains a central barrier to deeper integration (IAB, 2024). Complementing this, the Syrians Barometer 2023 indicates that cultural differences (21.9%) and lack of harmony (15.6%) are still among the most cited issues in the public's view of the Syrian presence in Türkiye (Erdoğan, 2024). Together, these findings affirm that language and perceived cultural distinction continue to play a major role in the general perception of Syrians by Turks, reinforcing Turkey's social cleavages that were earlier evidenced by surveys in 2014 and 2016.

Language is associated with various aspects of the lives of Syrian refugees, including access to healthcare, social services, entry into the labor market, and access to education. These services, in general, require more than a basic understanding of the Turkish language; they require proficiency and advanced skills in Turkish. For example, Syrian students in Turkey are unable to enroll in Turkish universities unless they pass an advanced Turkish language test (Karatepe and Dal, 2020). The language barrier prevents Syrian refugees from accessing a wide range of services, which can affect their overall perception of the host community, regardless of responsibility. The important point here is the outcome, which is the deprivation of non-Turkish-speaking refugees from a wide range of services. In general, it is not expected that refugees deprived of public services will actively seek integration with the host community. Partial or complete deprivation of public services can lead to the division of the refugee community into two classes based on the ability to access services. This class division weakens the real and effective cohesion among refugees, which has a negative and indirect impact on the possibility of integrating refugees into Turkish society. The language barrier here is the real but unrecognized factor,

while the apparent influential factor is the possibility of accessing public services.

The concept of emotional well-being is indirectly related to social integration (Bağcı and Canpolat, 2019). Which is directly influenced by effective social interaction with the surrounding community. In the presence of a language barrier, levels of emotional well-being are negatively affected because the language barrier hinders effective social communication. The absence of social interaction, in turn, negatively affects the implementation of social integration programs.

A recent study examining the effect of Turkish language proficiency on the well-being of Syrian refugees in Turkey found that higher language proficiency, when controlled for education, is significantly associated with greater life satisfaction, though it did not significantly predict reductions in post-traumatic stress (Argın, 2023). Conducted with Syrian refugees in the Fatih district of Istanbul, the study utilized standardized scales to assess life satisfaction and PTSD symptoms. Regression analysis revealed that language proficiency combined with education accounted for 24% of the variance in life satisfaction, indicating a medium effect size (Argın, 2023). Although its small and geographically limited sample suggests caution in generalizing the findings, the results underscore that improved Turkish language skills - especially among more educated refugees - can bolster subjective well-being, which is a key component of successful social integration.

Additionally, emotional well-being contributes to reducing tension and anxiety among refugees, improves their implicit attitude towards the host community (Bağcı and Canpolat, 2019), and indirectly supports indicators of social integration between Syrian refugees and the host Turkish community.

4.3.2 The Language Barrier and The Escalation of Social Violence Between Syrian Refugees and The Turkish Community

The escalation of social violence and the language barrier have been linked in several studies and research. However, this does not necessarily mean that the

language barrier is the main cause of social violence. It is a contributing factor, along with other factors, in fueling violence. It is a secondary and assisting factor, rather than the primary cause, and this directly applies to the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. In a study titled "Threats to Social Cohesion between Syrians and Turkish Society," conducted in collaboration between the İNSAMER Center for Humanities and Social Studies and the Syrian Dialogue Center and the International Association for Refugee Rights, the study states that the Turkish community's interaction with Syrian refugees has gone through several successive stages, starting with containment and welcome and ending with direct targeting, passing through several other stages. The stages are as follows:



Figure 4.1 Evolution of the Turkish community's interaction with Syrian refugees (Hawasli, 2021)

This negative progression of interaction cannot be attributed solely to the language barrier (Sarmini et al. 2020). The language barrier existed during the containment and welcome stage, and it was more acute at that stage because it was at the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis when the language barrier was at its peak. This is because the number of Syrian refugees who spoke the Turkish language was extremely limited. However, the language barrier has an indirect role in the negative progression of the situation because it coincides with other variables. It coincides with the economic pressures faced by the Turkish economy, which affected the standard of living for Turks and increased unemployment rates. It also coincided with certain Turkish political agendas, where the Syrian refugee card was used to achieve domestic political gains between the Turkish opposition and the ruling Justice and Development Party.

These circumstances contributed to increasing the negative impact of language differences (Hawasli, 2021).

Many instances of social violence point to indirect effects of language differences, and in some cases, language barriers may not have a clear impact. For example, Syrian refugees who have mastered the Turkish language still face racial discrimination, and language is used as an excuse for practicing discrimination (Sarmini et al. 2020). There have been recorded cases of Syrian refugees who have been naturalized and obtained Turkish citizenship but still faced racial discrimination. For instance, some bank employees refused to open a bank account for a Syrian refugee, claiming they did not understand what the refugee wanted due to their limited Turkish language skills. In response to such cases, many refugees, especially those who are fluent in Turkish, hide their Syrian origins to avoid racial discrimination (Hawasli, 2021).

In an attempt to understand the real impact of the language barrier on social violence between Syrian refugees and the host Turkish community, cases of violence have been documented according to Turkish provinces. The following table provides an overview of this data (Hawasli, 2021):

Table 4.1 Percentages Of Social Violence Cases According To Turkish Provinces (Hawasli ,2021)

Province	Population	Syrian Refugee Population	Syrian Refugee Percentage of Province Population	Number of Reported Violence Cases	Percentage of Violence Cases to Syrian Refugee Population
Istanbul	15,519,267	496,483	3.3%	15	0.003%
Gaziantep	2,069,364	450,031	22.2%	9	0.002%
Adana	2,237,940	246,462	11.1%	8	0.003%
Hatay	1,628,894	438,741	27.25%	5	0.001%

According to the data in the table above, it is evident that the number and percentage of social violence cases between Syrian refugees and Turks are relatively similar across Turkish provinces. Istanbul ranks first with 15 cases, and in general, Istanbul is one of the provinces where refugees speak Turkish the most. This relatively diminishes the role of the language barrier in causing social violence. However, statistics indicate that the majority of social violence incidents involve young males between the ages of 18 and 30, who are often classified as socially lower class (Hawasli,2021).This strengthens the hypothesis of the impact of the language barrier, as this group is less concerned with learning the Turkish language and often resides in ethnic or linguistic groups.

The role of schools in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugee youth in Turkey is central, particularly in terms of language acquisition and fostering cross-cultural interaction. Following the closure of Temporary Education Centers (TECs) in 2017, which had delivered education in Arabic, Syrian children were gradually transferred into the Turkish public school system, where Turkish is the primary language of instruction (Aras & Yasun, 2016). This policy shift was part of a broader governmental strategy aimed at promoting long-term integration by immersing refugee children in the local language and social environment (MEB, 2019).

One of the most significant efforts in this regard is the PICTES program (Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System), funded by the European Union and implemented by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. Since its launch in 2016, PICTES has provided intensive Turkish language courses, remedial education, and psychosocial support to Syrian students while also offering teacher training and intercultural mediation (European Commission, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). By 2022, the program had reached over 700,000 Syrian children, helping improve both enrollment rates and classroom participation.

Despite these efforts, school attendance among older Syrian adolescents—particularly males aged 15–18—remains significantly lower than among younger children. Economic pressures, the need to contribute to household

income, and a perceived lack of future opportunities contribute to high dropout rates in this demographic (UNHCR, 2020; Erdoğan, 2020). As a result, many young men do not benefit from school-based language instruction and remain outside the formal education system, limiting their exposure to Turkish and their opportunities for social mobility. This is especially evident in low-income urban districts where Syrian youth often cluster in ethnic enclaves, and where informal labor is widespread (İçduygu & Diker, 2017). These young people may have limited interaction with Turkish peers and institutions, reinforcing social isolation and increasing the likelihood of tensions and misunderstandings.

Moreover, while younger children may acquire Turkish more easily through school immersion, psychosocial trauma, cultural gaps between families and Turkish school norms, and insufficient teacher preparedness continue to hinder learning outcomes (Aras & Yasun, 2016; Şirin & Türk, 2020). Although programs like PICTES address some of these challenges, the scale of need far exceeds current capacity, particularly in cities like Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa, where the refugee population is concentrated.

Thus, while schools play a critical role in promoting integration, they cannot alone resolve the linguistic and social challenges faced by refugee youth. There remains an urgent need for complementary non-formal education programs, vocational training, and youth engagement strategies that specifically target older adolescents who are disengaged from the school system.

In addition to school-based instruction, Turkish language acquisition among Syrian refugees has been significantly supported through non-formal education initiatives led by municipalities, civil society organizations, and international partners. Numerous Turkish municipalities—especially in major cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa—have established Public Education Centers (Halk Eğitim Merkezleri) offering free Turkish language courses. These programs are often implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education and funded by the European Union through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT). Municipal programs have been instrumental in providing accessible, community-based language education to refugees of all

ages, particularly to those who are no longer in the formal school system (European Commission, 2021).

Additionally, a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Turkish Red Crescent, Support to Life (Hayata Destek), and Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) have launched intensive language and integration courses for both youth and adults. These courses typically include not only language instruction but also orientation sessions on Turkish society, legal rights, and basic civic participation, aiming to facilitate broader social integration. Demand for these language courses has been consistently high, with many programs reporting over-enrollment and long waiting lists, especially in urban areas with dense refugee populations (Kaya & Kırac, 2016). EU-funded projects such as "Improving the Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System" and "Social Inclusion Through Education and Training" have also included language training components, particularly for out-of-school youth and women. The popularity of these programs underscores the critical role of language as both a practical and symbolic bridge to integration. However, disparities in access persist, especially in rural areas and among adolescents engaged in labor, which suggests the need for more localized and flexible delivery models (UNICEF, 2022).

In conclusion to this chapter, most academic literature emphasizes the significant role of the language barrier in hindering social integration efforts between Syrian refugees and the Turkish society. Logical evidence supports this claim, and understanding the nature and direction of the relationship between social integration and language is essential to comprehend the boundaries of its impact. Social integration is directly or indirectly affected by the language barrier, but at the same time, refugees cannot develop their ability to speak and master the Turkish language without direct interaction with Turks. The reciprocal relationship is the most accurate interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to consider this issue when implementing any social integration programs.

CHAPTER 5

5. THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT ON THE INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKISH SOCIETY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The educational attainment is one of the factors that indirectly affect immigrants and refugees, often concentrating its impact on employment and the refugees' ability to enter the labor market, in addition to its positive impact on income levels. However, the social integration aspect remains uncertain or less apparent, as academic studies have primarily focused on the economic impact of educational attainment, with a noticeable decline in emphasis on its overall social impact and social integration indicators.

Regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, they undoubtedly have different levels of educational attainment. However, it is unclear whether educational attainment has an impact on their social integration with the Turkish host community. In other words, are Syrian refugees with higher educational levels more likely to integrate with the Turkish society compared to their counterparts with lower educational levels? Does the attitude of Turks and their social acceptance of refugees depend on their educational attainment? If there is an impact or relationship, is it positive or negative?

According to the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), more than 25% of Syrian adults over the age of 18 have not completed primary education, while around 15% had completed secondary education. A very small percentage had attained university degrees before fleeing Syria. A study by (Erdoğan,2020) indicated that around 50% of school-aged Syrian refugee children living in urban areas attend school, compared to nearly 90% of children in refugee camps, where access to education is more structured. For

adult refugees, the lack of language proficiency in Turkish has further hindered their ability to access formal education or vocational training opportunities.

Answering these questions is essential to achieve a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the determinants and obstacles to the social integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. It also contributes to expanding the theoretical and practical perspectives on the essence of social integration, particularly because this aspect and relationship have not received sufficient academic attention. This chapter aims to provide precise answers to these questions and achieve a deeper understanding of the essence of this relationship.

5.2 THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The educational level and academic achievement are considered indirect factors that influence an individual's behavior, actions, and life indicators. They affect the nature and type of work a person engages in, the level of income they receive, and the social relationships they have. In most cases, the educational level is associated with the social class to which an individual belongs. Changes in social class resulting from educational advancements inevitably have an impact on the social relationships of the individual. This directly applies to immigrants in general and refugees in particular (Philipp et al. 2021). To understand the mechanism by which the educational level and academic achievement influence the social integration of refugees, it is necessary to comprehend the relationship between the educational level and the social class to which individuals belong in general. This is because the social class can act as a mediator for the transfer of influence between the educational level and indicators of social integration (Erdoğan, 2020).

5.2.1 Educational Level and Social Class

The concept of social class is a common concept both at the general level and at the scientific and academic level. Social class refers to "a group of individuals who share similar levels of power and wealth, and who usually have

similar lifestyles" (Erdoğan, 2020). The majority of theories explaining social class often focus on the economic aspect as the most important and primary factor that determine an individual's class membership. According to Marx, belonging to a particular social class is determined by the relationship between the individual or group and the means of production (Cottrell, 1984). Ownership of the means of production plays the most significant role in determining social class. Based on this perspective, one's class membership can change either downwards or upwards. It is observed here that the economic factor, the ability to control resources, income level, and wealth, is the most influential factor in determining social class membership. It is also noted that the majority of early theorists, including Marx, did not focus on the social dimensions of social classes. For example, Marx believed that the level of education is a result of belonging to a specific social class, not a cause. In other words, belonging to the bourgeoisie – one of the social classes during Marx's lifetime – means having access to public services, including education, and the ability to afford educational costs, while belonging to the lower classes like the proletariat implies relative deprivation of access to public services, including education, and hence a lower educational level (Tori, 2015). To clarify the logical framework of this relationship, it can be said that according to Marx and other early theorists of the concept of social class, the income level and ownership of the means of production are independent variables, while access to public services, including education, is an independent variable.

In modern theories of explaining social classes that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, the economic factor has not been excluded as a primary factor in determining social class membership (Erdoğan 2020). But the focus has been shifted to other factors. For example, the German sociologist Max Weber believes that the level of education may be one of the markers of social class, but at the same time. It may play an indirect role in determining membership in a particular social class. In other words, obtaining a high level of education may be a gateway to transitioning from one social class to another (Psychol, 2018). This interpretation is based on the idea that higher education

can lead to higher income and higher-quality professions, which necessarily means moving to a higher social class according to the social ladder.

According to numerous previous studies and research, the level of education can lead an individual to transition from a lower social class to a higher one, as education generally reflects on income levels. It is necessary to mention the concept of social class awareness because belonging to a specific social class does not have an impact on an individual's behavior and psychological preferences unless they have awareness or perception of social class. Here, the level of education plays an important role in social class awareness because it is considered an entry point to a sense of intellectual superiority. The prevailing social culture also plays a role in determining the impact of educational level on social class membership. For example, the social esteem and preference between white-collar and blue-collar jobs play a significant role in determining the role of education and its impact on social status and general acceptance. In most developing countries, there is a clear preference for white-collar jobs over blue-collar jobs, which means that the higher an individual's educational level, the higher their social acceptance. This can indirectly be applied to refugee and immigrant communities, as a higher level of education can lead to higher social acceptance by the host society, especially if the host society has a culture that favors white-collar jobs over blue-collar jobs (Tori, 2015).

In addition to that, the difference in social structure within societies is an obstacle to effective social integration. Some societies are class-divided into poor, middle-class, and wealthy classes, while in other societies, social classes may be highly intertwined, making it difficult to observe distinct social classes (Psychol, 2018). The European society, for example, is described as a classless society or a society based on a middle class, with rare instances of poor and wealthy classes that have minimal impact (Elrick and Winter, 2018.). In such cases, immigrants or refugees may face obstacles in integrating with the European society because they belong to a society with a distinct social structure. According to this perspective, some refugee communities in Europe are not fully

aligned with each other, leading to difficulties in harmonizing with the host society.

Based on the previous discussion, the researcher argues that the higher educational level of individual refugees can indirectly affect their transition from a lower social class to a higher one. This can positively influence the perception and attitude of the host society towards them, increasing their chances of integration. It can also reduce the intensity of social bias, marginalization, and rejection by the host community. Income level plays a crucial role in this matter. In most cases of forced displacement, especially those resulting from military conflicts and accompanied by long periods of displacement, the average income of refugees is significantly lower relative to the average income of members of the host society (Tori, 2015). For example, in Turkey, according to the International Labor Organization, the majority of Syrian refugees works in the informal labor market and receives wages below the minimum threshold (Erick and Winter, 2018). This means that refugees, based on income criteria, belong to the poor class. According to data from the World Bank, the middle class in Turkish society accounts for 41%.¹⁷ This indicates social difficulties in integrating two societies, where the majority of one society belongs to the poor class, while nearly half of the other society belongs to the middle class. In this context, the level of education may play a role in bridging the social gap between the two communities and facilitating social integration, particularly as a higher level of education supports the host society's acceptance of refugees and contributes to reducing social rejection, bias, and marginalization.

The social position of the host community is influenced by several factors, including the educational level of refugees, which positively affects their social perception. This supports the success of social integration programs and projects, and vice versa. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of host communities

¹⁷ New World Bank Report Looks at Turkey's Rise to the Threshold of High-Income Status and the Challenges Remaining, the world bank, 2014, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/12/10/new-world-bank-report-looks-at-turkey-rise-to-threshold-of-high-income-and-challenges-remaining>

have a negative perception of the educational attainment of refugees, regardless of the reality of this belief. (Lergetporer et al. 2021) relied on a field survey involving 4,000 German citizens and 5,000 university students, both citizens and refugees. The study found that the prevailing belief in German society is that the overwhelming majority of refugees are illiterate or at least have low educational attainment, which contradicts the reality (Lergetporer et al. 2021). This emphasizes the importance of educational attainment in shaping the general attitude of the host society towards refugees.

5.2.2 The Educational Level and Social Integration: A Reciprocal Relationship

Despite the limited number of studies that have analyzed the relationship between the educational level of refugees or immigrants and indicators of social integration, some academic literature has touched upon this research topic within a broader context. They have discussed the relationship between higher educational attainment of Afghan refugees in the UK and their levels of social integration, either directly or indirectly. A British study titled "The Impact of Educational Attainment on the Integration and Well-being of Afghan Youth Refugees in the United Kingdom" confirms a strong positive relationship between higher levels of education among Afghan refugees in the UK and their levels of social integration. This means that refugees with higher qualifications were more likely and prepared to socially integrate with the host community. However, the study also suggests that the positive impact of educational attainment may diminish or even disappear under the influence of other mediating variables, such as language barriers, (Gladwell 2020). This indicates that the positive influence of educational attainment on social integration is not independent or absolute but rather depends on other variables that may amplify or weaken its effect.

The previous study also indicates that the educational level of refugees, although considered a positive factor in their integration, has a lesser impact compared to the impact on host community members, (Gladwell, 2020). This

means that if the educational level of a refugee is equal to the educational level of a host community member, the positive impact on the host community outweighs the impact on the refugees themselves. For example, in the European Union, 60% of refugees work in jobs that require lower educational qualifications than the degrees they hold, (Bonfanti and Xenogiani, 2014). This is an additional evidence that the relationship between educational level and social integration of refugees is subject to multiple considerations and factors, including the nature of refuge and asylum laws in each country.

5.2.3 The Level of Income, Educational Level and Social Integration

Many studies suggest that the impact of refugees' educational attainment on social integration is mediated through the possibility of entering the labor market, the nature of jobs available, and the prevailing income level. Other studies indicate that the majority of refugees have average or low educational levels because most of them come from countries suffering from security, political, and social disorders. Where the overall education level is low. The majority of those with higher education and higher educational levels have broader options for seeking asylum and generally have the freedom to choose their country of asylum. In most refugee-hosting countries, individuals with higher education degrees are labeled as migrants rather than refugees, which is an indicator of general social acceptance by the host society for this social group (EMN, 2014). However, in refugee environments with a large number of refugees, such as the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, where the number of Syrian refugees exceeds 3.6 million, the proportion of refugees with low educational levels is considered high. This means a decrease in income levels and the possibility of entering the labor market, which negatively affects social integration indicators.

One of the pieces of evidence supporting the relationship between educational attainment and the integration of refugees into the host community is that, in general, women in refugee environments have lower educational levels compared to men. According to the OECD, half of refugee women have lower

educational levels than men, which have led to difficulties in their entry into the labor market. The chances of refugee women entering the labor market are 17% lower compared to men.¹⁸ This creates additional challenges in achieving social integration for women, in addition to other social obstacles, especially prevailing social beliefs in most refugee environments. Income and the ability to enter the labor market have a clear impact on social integration indicators for both men and women.

Recent evidence underscores how educational attainment and labor market access among refugees significantly shape public acceptance in host societies. A comprehensive 2024 OECD report, *State of Immigrant Integration – Germany*, highlights that refugees with medium to high educational levels - especially women - experience markedly better employment outcomes: over 50% of medium- and highly educated refugee women are employed, compared to much lower rates for those with limited education (OECD, 2024). Additionally, the report emphasizes that limited language proficiency remains a key barrier to skilled labor migration and integration (OECD, 2024). Together, these recent findings reinforce the notion that higher education and recognized skills can mediate social acceptance by enabling economic integration, while also underscoring the persistent systemic obstacles that need to be addressed.

Regarding the impact of educational attainment on social integration, it is necessary to differentiate between the academic achievement obtained by refugees in their home country and the education they acquire in the host country. In a study on the integration of refugees in American society, the research suggests that completing one year of university education in the refugees' home country leads to a 10% increase in income in the host country. Completing secondary education and obtaining a university degree in the home country results in a 25% increase in the average income of refugees in the United States. However, language proficiency is a crucial factor to consider. These

18 Integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on site: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2019/01/ready-to-help_g1g9d904.html

effects decrease if refugees do not have proficiency in the English language (Manhica et al. 2018). This confirms the role of both educational attainment and language as social variables that influence indicators of social integration.

5.2.4 Language Factor, Educational Level, And Social Integration

In most social issues, variables do not operate independently; they interact and influence each other. Studying each variable in isolation, while ignoring the impact of other factors, may lead to inaccurate results. This directly applies to the relationship between the educational level of refugees and indicators of social integration. The relationship between these two variables is not independent but influenced by other factors and variables, including language. This is particularly evident when refugees have a different language than the host community. Several studies demonstrate the negative impact of language barriers on the relationship between educational attainment and indicators of social integration. The ability of refugees to leverage their academic qualifications for financial and social investment is directly linked to their ability to speak the language of the host community. This goes beyond general language proficiency and involves acquiring linguistic skills and the ability to use the language effectively at a level comparable to native speakers (Dowden, 2021). According to the OECD and the World Bank, there is a strong negative relationship between language difficulties and labor market outcomes, regardless of income levels or educational qualifications and country of origin. If refugees master the language of the host country like native residents, their employment rates will be 10% higher than their actual levels.¹⁹ Joining the labor market means more interaction with the host community and, therefore, increased chances of success in social integration programs.

Finally, in conclusion to this section, it is important to emphasize that refugees' utilization of their educational achievements in their home countries,

¹⁹ World Bank Group. The Welfare of Syrian Refugees: Evidence from Jordan and Lebanon, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/the-welfare-of-syrian-refugees-evidence-from-jordan-and-lebanon>

particularly in terms of social impacts, such as opportunities for social integration, faces several obstacles and challenges. This applies to the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Refugees frequently face substantial challenges in transferring their educational credentials to their host countries. Many refugees lose essential documentation, such as diplomas or certificates, during their displacement, or simply do not have the opportunity to gather them before fleeing. Host countries often have strict regulations regarding the recognition of foreign educational qualifications, and degrees from refugees' home countries may not be easily acknowledged. The process of credential recognition is typically complex, lengthy, and costly, which poses an additional burden, especially for refugees who lack the financial resources to afford such procedures.

Furthermore, refugees generally have lower levels of educational attainment compared to both native residents and other migrant groups, often leading them to view their academic qualifications as less valuable. This perspective is exacerbated by the fact that refugees did not choose to migrate under normal circumstances; their displacement was often sudden and involuntary, meaning they had no opportunity to plan for their new life or to bring along documents that verify their qualifications.

Additionally, refugees frequently arrive in large groups, creating intense competition for limited employment opportunities in host countries. This oversupply of educational credentials, coupled with limited demand in the local job market, further diminishes the perceived and practical value of their academic achievements (Manhica et al. 2018).

5.3 THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

The issue of social integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey is subject to several factors and variables, including language, ethnic identity, educational attainment, and other factors and variables. These factors are interconnected,

influencing and being influenced by each other. The previous chapters have thoroughly studied the variables of language and ethnic identity (Erdoğan 2020). Concerning the variable of educational attainment among Syrian refugees, the first part of this chapter established its positive impact on indicators of social integration and the level of social acceptance by the host community in general. However, it should be noted that there are other factors and variables that may play a positive or negative role. The positive impact of educational attainment on access to the labor market and its effect on income levels aligns with positive indicators of social integration (İçduygu and Millet, 2016). On the other hand, the language barrier has a negative impact. This is the general framework of the relationship. Transitioning from generalization to specification, in the scientific endeavor to apply these findings to the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, it is possible to test the validity of the results by considering the specific Syrian-Turkish context. This can be done by extracting the results while taking into account the particularities of the Syrian-Turkish situation and referring to academic literature that has addressed this issue directly or indirectly (Erdoğan, 2020). The aim is to apply the findings of these studies to the researched case.

5.3.1 Educational Attainment of Refugees and The General Attitude of The Turkish Society

In the context of the first part of this chapter, a direct relationship was established between the educational attainment of refugees and the general perception of them by the host community. To demonstrate this relationship in the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, previous academic literature has been examined. (Şar & Kuru, 2020) study titled "Attitudes towards Syrian Refugees in Istanbul" conducted a field survey among 1,636 Turkish citizens. Participants were asked about their general attitudes and feelings towards Syrian refugees, including emotions such as anger, anxiety, empathy, and hatred. The study categorized the results into low, moderate, and high levels and found that the dominant feeling among Turks towards Syrians was anxiety, while the lowest emotion expressed was hatred, with only 24% of respondents reporting feelings

of hatred compared to 33% reporting anger. Furthermore, 35% expressed empathy towards Syrians. The study also aimed to capture participants' opinions on the fate of the Syrian presence in Turkey and the various proposals put forth by different political parties, such as ending Syrian refuge and repatriating Syrians to Syria, granting them long-term residency without citizenship rights, or providing them with Turkish citizenship. The study also found that many participants considered living in proximity to Syrians to be a significant problem. Additionally, the study observed that Syrian refugees showed a tendency to distance themselves and displayed a lack of desire to integrate into Turkish society, preferring to remain within their relatively large groups. The results confirmed that individuals with lower levels of education tended to be more distant compared to those with higher levels of education. The highest level of distance was observed among individuals who had never attended school or did not complete secondary education. However, there was almost no difference in the level of distance between high school students and university graduates²⁰.

Recent research continues to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing Syrian refugee students in Turkish higher education. A 2022 study published in Higher Education Policy revealed that despite increased access to universities, Syrian students still face substantial barriers related to language proficiency, cultural differences, and limited financial resources, all of which influence their integration and academic performance (Bajwa et al., 2022). Similarly, Kaya (2023) emphasized that Turkish language proficiency remains the strongest predictor of academic success and social adaptation among Syrian students, with higher proficiency levels correlating not only with stronger academic performance but also with improved peer relationships and a greater sense of belonging on campus. Complementing these findings, a 2024 report by UNHCR and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) noted that more than 55,000 Syrian students were enrolled in Turkish

20 İstanbul'da Suriyeli Sığınmacılara Yönelik Tutumlar. (2020). İstanbul Politik Araştırmalar Enstitüsü. İstanbul. ss.47-52.

universities, but persistent challenges such as economic hardship and limited social interaction with Turkish peers hinder their full integration (UNHCR & YTB, 2024). Collectively, these recent studies underscore that while access to higher education for Syrians in Türkiye has expanded significantly, language barriers and socio-economic inequalities continue to constrain the transformative role that academic achievement could play in fostering broader social integration.

Another factor that also affects the relationship between academic achievement and social integration indicators for refugees is ethnic enclaves, which play a negative role and limit the positive impact of educational level. (Hammoud et al. 2022) study "Determinants of Social Integration of Refugee Children: Evidence from Lebanon, Turkey, and Australia," the results of this study are supported. The students residing in neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by displaced persons were less likely to feel welcomed by the host community, with 11% of refugee students sharing neighborhoods with the host community experiencing this feeling. This confirms the interaction and overlap of social factors and variables. Here, the interaction of language, racial belonging, and educational level with social integration indicators becomes evident (Hammoud et al. 2022).

And among the other evidence presented by previous studies on the positive relationship between education level and social integration indicators is the case of Syrian refugees. According to the OECD, the percentage of Syrian refugees in Turkey with a university education is much lower compared to Syrians who have arrived in Sweden, Austria, or Canada. At the same time, social integration programs for refugees in these countries were found to be more effective compared to Turkey.²¹ Which further supports the hypothesis that

²¹ Integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on site: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/integration-of-refugees-and-other-vulnerable-migrants_5j3vqwh2tp35.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fcomponent%2F9789264311312-7-en&mimeType=pdf

higher education level positively affects social integration indicators among refugees and the host community.

5.3.2 Variations in Educational Attainment Level of Refugees and Its Impact on Social Integration Indicators

The variation in educational achievement levels of refugees and its impact on social integration indicators have been studied and analyzed in general. However, without delving into the details of educational levels, the question arises: does an increase in the educational attainment rate of refugees positively reflect their acceptance by the host community? Or does the difference in educational attainment level have no effect? This aspect has been academically addressed in some previous literature. For example, (Lergetporer et al. (2021) study titled "Attitudes, Social Acceptance, and Rejection towards Refugee Students: The Case of Düzce, Turkey" analyzed the impact of varying educational attainment levels on the social acceptance of Syrian students in Turkish schools. The study relied on a sample of 1,600 students studying in several schools within the Düzce province in Turkey. The study examined the degrees of preference and rejection based on changes in educational attainment levels and found that the degree of social acceptance among students decreases as their educational attainment level increases. Thus, there is an inverse relationship between educational attainment level and social acceptance among students. Social acceptance of refugees is high in primary school but declines in middle and high school. (Lergetporer et al. 2021) found that refugees educated in Syria are more socially accepted by Turks than those educated in Turkey. This indicates a positive relationship between education and social acceptance when education is obtained in Syria.

Conversely, a negative relationship exists when education is obtained in Turkey. In conclusion, most academic literature highlights the significant role of refugees' educational attainment in shaping social integration outcomes. However, this variable does not act independently; it both affects and is affected by other factors such as language barriers, ethnic identity, permanent income,

and access to the labor market. Educational attainment interacts with these mediating variables, influencing the overall integration process. Demographic factors, including the country where the education was completed, also shape its impact. Interestingly, certificates obtained in Syria were found to have a more positive effect than those acquired in Turkey.

The studies reviewed in this chapter indicate a positive impact of Syrian refugees' educational attainment on their ability to integrate into Turkish society. Additionally, the level of Turkish acceptance toward refugees is influenced by the refugees' educational qualifications. Therefore, refugees with higher education are more likely to achieve successful integration.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study set out to explore the multifaceted challenges surrounding the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society, with a particular focus on three critical variables: language differences, educational attainment, and ethnic affiliation. Drawing on both theoretical frameworks and empirical insights, the research aimed to illuminate how these factors contribute to or hinder the social integration process, and to identify patterns that may guide policymakers and stakeholders in developing more effective integration strategies.

The findings of this study reveal a complex and intertwined relationship between the three factors under investigation and the broader dynamics of social integration. Each of these elements' language, education, and ethnicity plays a distinct but interconnected role in either facilitating or obstructing the successful inclusion of Syrian refugees into the host society.

Language as a Barrier and a Bridge to Integration, language emerged as one of the most prominent variables affecting social integration. The findings affirm the conclusions of earlier research, which highlighted language as both a barrier and a potential bridge in the refugee integration process. In the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the lack of proficiency in the Turkish language significantly hampers their ability to access essential services, participate in the labor market, and build meaningful social connections with Turkish nationals.

One key conclusion drawn from this study is that language should not be viewed simply in terms of formal or official proficiency (e.g., academic Turkish), but more crucially as a tool for everyday communication and interaction. Refugees who acquire communicative competence in Turkish are better positioned to establish trust-based relationships with the host population, navigate bureaucratic procedures, and reduce the cultural distance that often characterizes host-refugee relations.

Moreover, language serves not only as a practical tool but also as a symbolic marker of national belonging. In a context like Turkey, where language

is closely tied to national identity, the inability of Syrian refugees to speak Turkish may be perceived by segments of the host society as a reluctance to integrate, even when such perceptions are unfounded. Thus, the promotion of language education programs tailored to the needs and realities of Syrian refugees particularly programs focused on functional, daily-use language is a critical policy recommendation derived from this research.

Ethnic Affiliation and the Dynamics of Social Distance, another key conclusion of this study is the centrality of ethnic difference in shaping the contours of social integration. The research confirms that perceived and actual ethnic distinctions between Syrian refugees and the Turkish host population can contribute to increased social distance, stereotypes, and exclusionary attitudes. Ethnic identity in this context operates on both subjective and structural levels— affecting how individuals perceive themselves and others, while also influencing institutional responses to refugee presence.

The study found that ethnic enclaves—whether formed intentionally by refugees for security and support, or as a result of marginalization—tend to reinforce divisions between the refugee community and the broader society. While these enclaves provide short-term social and economic support, they may inadvertently perpetuate isolation and inhibit meaningful cross-cultural interactions. This finding supports the theoretical perspective that social integration is not solely the responsibility of the refugee, but a mutual process requiring engagement from both the host and the newcomer.

Furthermore, ethnic belonging interacts with other identity markers—such as religion, language, and national origin—to create complex layers of inclusion and exclusion. The Turkish case is particularly instructive given its historical and political sensitivities around national identity. Policymakers should thus be cautious not to reinforce ethnic binaries in public discourse and instead promote inclusive narratives that recognize the contributions and diversity of the refugee population.

To mitigate the negative impact of ethnic differentiation, this research recommends initiatives that foster direct interaction between Syrians and Turks

in shared social spaces, such as schools, workplaces, and community centers. Such interactions have the potential to challenge stereotypes, reduce social prejudice, and foster empathy—thereby strengthening the foundations of integration.

Educational Attainment as a Predictor of Integration Outcomes, educational attainment was also found to be a significant determinant of successful integration. Refugees with higher levels of education demonstrated greater adaptability, stronger language acquisition, and more effective engagement with host society institutions. Education contributes not only to economic integration through improved employability but also to social integration by enhancing cognitive and social skills necessary for intercultural communication and understanding.

Moreover, education serves as a powerful equalizing mechanism, particularly for younger refugees, offering them the opportunity to overcome structural disadvantages and build sustainable lives in their host country. Schools, in particular, function as key arenas of socialization and integration, where young refugees learn the host country's language, norms, and values.

Importantly, the study found that the interplay between educational level and language proficiency is especially consequential. Refugees with both higher education and language skills tend to report stronger feelings of social inclusion and experience fewer incidents of discrimination. This indicates that the two variables are mutually reinforcing and should be addressed in an integrated manner in policy formulation.

To this end, the study recommends expanded access to educational opportunities for refugees of all ages, including adult education and vocational training programs that incorporate language instruction. Additionally, public awareness campaigns should be designed to inform the host society about the qualifications and skills that refugees bring with them, thereby countering negative stereotypes and facilitating smoother integration.

Integrated Analysis and Policy Implications, taken together, the findings of this research underscore the importance of adopting a holistic and

multidimensional approach to refugee integration. Language, education, and ethnicity are not isolated variables; they interact dynamically within a broader socio-political context that includes legal frameworks, public attitudes, and institutional capacities.

The Turkish government has undertaken notable efforts to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society, particularly focusing on education, language instruction, and acknowledging ethnic diversity, yet social integration indicators suggest these efforts remain insufficient. Since 2017, the government committed to enrolling Syrian school-aged children in the national public system, resulting in nearly one million attending Turkish schools by 2024—though approximately 400,000 remained out of school (Baker Institute, 2025). To bolster language competence crucial for integration, “Turkish for Adaptation” classes and language support programs were deployed; in the 2020–2021 academic year alone, over 386,000 Syrian students received Turkish language training, and mechanisms such as adaptation and catch-up classes were expanded to strengthen their academic outcomes (MoNE/UNICEF collaborative data, 2020). Moreover, the World Bank’s 2023 case study on Turkey highlighted persistent language barriers as a key constraint undermining educational and social integration of refugee children, while EU audit reports raised concerns about transparency and limited evaluation of EU-funded integration programs in education, health, and social services in Turkey.

Beyond education and language, the issue of ethnicity—particularly the concentration of refugees in ethnic or linguistic enclaves—also impedes broader integration. Urban clustering and the rise of enclave-like structures foster social distance and limit intercultural engagement between Syrians and Turkish communities. As such, although government policies have expanded access to schooling and language instruction and recognized the need to address cultural differences, many refugees still face exclusionary social environments and persistent integration barriers. These outcomes reflect a broader pattern: while Turkey’s response includes commendable advances in access, the quality and

depth of social integration—measured through mutual acceptance, interethnic interaction, and institutional transparency—remain below desired levels.

One of the most important conclusions drawn from the study is that effective integration cannot be achieved through fragmented or one-size-fits-all policies. Rather, integration efforts must be tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of refugee populations, while also addressing the structural and cultural barriers present within the host society.

From a policy perspective, this means creating inclusive programs that:

- Provide accessible and context-sensitive language education.
- Encourage cross-cultural engagement to overcome ethnic divides.
- Expand educational pathways for refugees, especially for youth and adults with disrupted schooling.
- Involve local communities in integration processes to build mutual understanding and trust.

Equally important is the role of the media and political discourse in shaping public perceptions. Host society narratives that portray refugees as a burden or a threat can severely undermine integration efforts, while narratives that emphasize shared humanity and potential contributions can facilitate acceptance and inclusion.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on refugee integration by offering a focused analysis of the Syrian refugee experience in Turkey. It highlights the challenges posed by language barriers, ethnic divisions, and disparities in educational attainment, while also identifying pathways toward more inclusive and sustainable integration.

By centering the lived experiences of refugees and grounding the analysis in empirical data, this research provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors seeking to build a more cohesive and resilient society. In doing so, it affirms that while integration is a complex and ongoing process, it is not an impossible one especially when approached with commitment, empathy, and a strategic vision for inclusion.

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