



The Practices of Turkish Higher Education Towards International Students and Syrians, and Their Contributions to Migration Management

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ABSTRACT

Türkiye's immigrant load has made it crucial to create a roadmap for migration management. Türkiye's migration management initiative took on a new form with the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management in 2013. The Directorate became the primary public authority responsible for implementing migration policies, asylum procedures, and integration programs. Meanwhile, numerous institutions and organizations from both the public and private sectors, including local governments, NGOs, and universities, have taken on key roles as main actors in the field of migration management. As the higher education institutions that form the focus of this study, universities have opened their doors to migrants in this new era to enable Syrians under temporary protection to benefit from educational services.

Foreign students pursuing higher education in Türkiye are not limited to Syrians. Another significant policy initiative of Turkish higher education in recent years has been opening its doors to international students as part of the internationalization efforts in higher education.

Türkiye, with its rich history, fascinating cultural structure, position as a strong and stable country in its region, high-quality university education, and incentives provided by the state to attract international talent, has become a preferred destination for international students in recent years. Today, Türkiye hosts over 300,000 international students, the majority of whom come from the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and European countries.

In this study, data and methodology rely on statistical figures shared by the Presidency of Migration Management and the Council of Higher Education, along with official websites, activity reports, and other publications, documents, studies, and research from various universities. Secondary data sources include statistics and information obtained through a literature review.

The original aspect of this study lies in its evaluation of Turkey's higher education policies toward Syrian students in Turkish higher education, as well as its assessment of internationalization efforts in Turkish universities—particularly as reflected in the experiences of international students of diverse nationalities enrolled in Turkish institutions. Additionally, the study examines the evolving roles and activities of universities within the context of migration management. In this regard, the study aims to contribute to the literature while also opening a window for policymakers and decision-makers.

Keywords: Higher Education, Internationalisation, International Students, Syrians, Migration Management

Türk Yükseköğretiminin Uluslararası Öğrenciler İle Suriyeli Öğrencilere Yönelik Uygulamaları ve Göç Yönetimine Katkıları

ÖZ

Türkiye'nin güç bağı, göç yönetimi konusunda bir yol haritası oluşturmasını zorunlu kılmaktadır. Türkiye'nin göç yönetimi hamlesi, 2013'te Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı'nın kurulması ile birlikte yeni bir şekil kazanmıştır. Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, göç politikalarının, iltica prosedürlerinin ve entegrasyon programlarının uygulanmasından sorumlu temel kamu otoritesi haline alırken, başta yerel yönetimler, STK'lar ve üniversiteler olmak üzere kamu ve özel sektörden birçok kurum ve organizasyon göç yönetimi alanında temel aktörler olarak görevler üstlenmiştir. Çalışmanın odağını oluşturan yükseköğretim kurumları olarak üniversiteler bu yeni dönemde Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyeliilerin eğitim hizmetlerinden faydalanabilmeleri adına kapılarını göçmenlere açmıştır.

Türkiye'de yükseköğretim gören yabancılar sadece Suriyeliler değildir. Son dönem Türk Yükseköğretiminin önemli bir diğer politika hamlesi de yükseköğretimde uluslararasılaşma hamlesi kapsamında uluslararası öğrencilere kapılarını açması olmuştur. Türkiye köklü tarihi, ilgi çekici kültürel yapısı, bölgesinin güçlü ve istikrarlı ülkesi olması, kaliteli üniversite eğitimi sunması ve uluslararası yetenekleri ülkemize çekmek için devlet tarafından sağlanan teşvikler sayesinde son yıllarda uluslararası öğrenciler için tercih edilen bir ülke haline gelmiştir. Bugün Türkiye, çoğunluğu Orta Doğu, Afrika, Orta Asya ve Avrupa ülkelerinden gelen 300.000'den fazla uluslararası öğrenciye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada veri ve yöntem olarak, Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı'nın ve Yükseköğretim Kurulunun paylaştığı istatistikî veriler ile birlikte, çeşitli üniversitelerin resmi internet sayfaları, faaliyet raporu ve diğer yayın, doküman, çalışma ve araştırmalardan yararlanılmıştır. İkincil veri kaynağı olarak da literatür taramasından elde edilen verilerden ve istatistiklerden yararlanılmıştır.

Bu çalışmanın özgün tarafı; Türk yükseköğretiminde eğitim alan Suriyeli öğrencilere yönelik Türkiye'nin yükseköğretim politikası, farklı ülke uyrukluğuna sahip ve Türkiye'deki üniversitelerde eğitim alan uluslararası öğrenciler üzerinden Türk yükseköğretiminde daha görünür hale gelen uluslararasılaşma çabalarına yönelik bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmada üniversitelerin göç yönetimi bağlamında üstlendikleri yeni roller ve faaliyetler üzerine de bir değerlendirmede bulunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma hem literatüre bir katkı, hem de karar alıcılara ve politika yapıcılara bir pencere açmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yükseköğretim, Uluslararasılaşma, Uluslararası Öğrenciler, Suriyeliler, Göç Yönetimi

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Introduction

Migration has been a constant in human history, from the emergence of Homo Sapiens in East Africa (approximately 150,000 to 200,000 years ago) to the present day (Arslan 2021a). Even after abandoning a nomadic lifestyle and transitioning to a settled life, humanity did not give up migration or the habits of nomadism. Changes in settlement, whether to access better living conditions or to escape fear or threats, have continued to be a part of human life. Today, the migrant population, equivalent to 3.6% of the world's population, has reached almost every continent and influenced nearly every country. On the other hand, the dynamics driving migration are increasingly diversifying, and the actors involved in migration are also growing. Labor migration, lifestyle migration aimed at achieving a better life, irregular migration, refugee and asylum-seeking migration, and climate-induced human mobility (climate refugees) are the primary dynamics shaping migration. However, in recent years, a rapidly growing type of migration has been added to the list of migration types: 'education-driven migration.' Through its recent policies, Türkiye has been hosting a significant number of foreign students from various countries, particularly at the higher education level.

Foreign students pursuing higher education in Türkiye primarily come from two sources. The first is Syrian students under temporary protection. In the final months of 2010, a social movement began in Tunisia, demanding democratic reforms, and spread across the region from the westernmost part of North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. This movement was named the Arab Spring. However, as developments evolved into increasing uncertainty, regional conflicts, human rights violations, terrorism, and war zones emerged, creating an unlivable vast geography where even basic public services could not be provided. In response to these developments, millions of people, particularly those concerned for their safety, flocked to regions where they could find security. People seeking to migrate from our southern neighbors, Syria and Iraq, crowded at our borders, leaving Türkiye facing migration on a scale it had never experienced before. A significant portion of this migrating population consists of Syrians who entered our country as forced migrants. On the other hand, a substantial part of this influx is made up of young people. Naturally, integrating these young individuals into every level of the education system is essential for their social integration.

This study provides an assessment of Türkiye's higher education policy towards Syrian students receiving education in Turkish higher education institutions, as well as the internationalization efforts that have become more visible through international students of various nationalities studying at Turkish universities.

Türkiye's Higher Education Policy for Syrians Under Temporary Protection

The Council of Higher Education (YÖK), through a circular titled 'Special Student' published on September 3, 2012, allowed Syrians to continue their interrupted university education in Türkiye for the 2012-2013 academic year. This policy enabled them to attend courses as special students at universities located in seven provinces near the border, such as Gaziantep University, Kilis 7 Aralık University, Harran University, Mustafa Kemal University, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Çukurova University, and Mersin University. Syrians could apply by submitting documents proving their student status or, in the absence of such documents, by having their declarations taken into consideration. In the relevant circular, this arrangement, initially planned to be limited to the 2012-2013 academic year, was extended after it became clear that the uncertainty of the conflict in Syria would persist for some time. The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) introduced a new decision, this time amending the principles regarding transfer procedures. With this new provision, students who lacked the required documents for transfer were also allowed to attend courses as special students in higher education institutions. However, since graduation from a higher education program/department is not possible solely through special student status, becoming a regular student is mandatory for graduation. Therefore, Syrian students must submit certain documents and meet specific conditions to continue their university education (YÖK, 2021; Güngör and Soysal, 2021).

However, due to the impossibility of establishing a clear timeline for the end of the conflict in Syria, which began in 2011, it became necessary to develop an action plan. During this initial phase, a series of regulations were introduced to integrate Syrian students into Türkiye's higher education system. The following elements stand out in these regulations and efforts (YÖK, 2017):

Overcoming the Emphasis on Temporariness: It is emphasized that Syrian students should not be treated as merely a "temporary" group or neglected. This highlights the need for a more sustainable approach to their right to education and academic future.

Equality in Education Quality: It is stated that Syrian students should not receive lower-quality education compared to other students in higher education. This is crucial for ensuring equality of opportunity in education.

University Access and Support: The importance of supporting Syrian students' access to universities is emphasized. This includes ensuring they can study not only at universities in border provinces but also at universities across Türkiye.

Quota Adjustments: A series of studies are being conducted to reorganize quotas for Syrian students. This adjustment is highlighted as a necessary step to better meet their educational rights.

As a result of these decisions, more Syrians gained the opportunity to pursue higher education. In the current situation, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has enabled Syrians, like other foreign students, to take the Foreign Student Exam (YÖS) and gain the right to study at a higher education institution in Türkiye.

As of 2021, the number of individuals under temporary protection in Türkiye reached 3,737,639, and although it decreased to 2,820,362 by February 2025, there is still a significant population with temporary protection status (Directorate General of Migration Management). Within this population, there is a considerable group that shows no intention or tendency to return to their home country (İpek et al., 2024). According to data from the Ministry of National Education, the school-age population is increasing every year due to the fertility rate (MEB Lifelong Learning General Directorate, 2021). Among the Syrian population under temporary protection in Türkiye, 1,073,121 (32.53%) are of school age. Of this school-age population, 811,860 (75.65%) have been included in the education system. Among these students, 787,122 are registered in the e-school system, 9,564 in open schools, and 15,174 in the Vocational Training Center System (MEB Lifelong Learning General Directorate, 2023). These statistics represent significant data for higher education institutions in the coming years.

According to YÖK data, in the 2022–2023 academic year, students from numerous countries were studying in almost every faculty/department of Turkish universities (YÖK, 2023). However, Syrian students constituted a significant majority among these students, and their numbers had been steadily increasing over the years. For example, in the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 53,097 Syrian students; in 2022-2023, this number rose to 58,213, and in 2023-2024, it reached 60,750 (<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>). When we examine the distribution of these students by educational level, 19,175 are enrolled in associate degree programs, 35,552 in undergraduate programs, 2,870 in master's programs, and 616 in doctoral programs (YÖK, 2023).

To facilitate the higher education journey of Syrian students, YÖK has developed and implemented several scholarship programs in collaboration with international partners. Currently, there are three different scholarship programs available for Syrian students: HOPES (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians), DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative), and United Nations Scholarships (www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr). While 15% of these scholarships are funded by the Republic of Türkiye, 85% are covered by international partners. The foreign partners of the HOPES program include the United Nations, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Netherlands Organization for Internationalization in Education (Nuffic), Campus France, and the British Council. The DAFI program is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. In the 2022–2023 academic year, the DAFI program supported 605 Syrian students. Additionally, the Netherlands-based SPARK program

provided scholarships to 586 international students from North Africa and the Middle East in 2022. Apart from these programs, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, also offers scholarships to eligible Syrian students.

In 2012, the program was named as "Türkiye Scholarships" (*Türkiye Bursları*), and its operations began to be coordinated by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Türkiye Scholarships is implemented in collaboration with all relevant institutions, including the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), the General Directorate of Credit and Dormitories (KYK), the Presidency of Migration Management, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While Türkiye Scholarships received around 42,000 applications in 2012, this number surged over the years, reaching 121,766 applications from 170 countries in 2024. Under this program, approximately 5,000 international students are granted scholarships annually. As of now, there are roughly 15,000 scholarship recipients continuing their education through Türkiye Scholarships. Among these overall figures, Syrian students constitute a significant portion. For instance, according to YTB's June 2020 data, out of 27,606 Syrian students, 3,556 received full scholarships, while around 16,000 were granted partial scholarships (YTB, 2025; Türkiye Scholarships, 2025).

In addition to Syrian students pursuing higher education, Syrian academics and researchers who had to migrate to Türkiye have also gained the opportunity to work at Turkish universities through the Foreign Academic Information System (YABSİS). Thanks to this system, a significant number of foreign academics have been able to work at Turkish universities (Internationalization Strategy in Higher Education Document, 2017). Legally, Syrian academics and researchers are employed in Turkish higher education institutions under Article 34 of Law No. 2547. It is observed that a total of 257 Syrian academics are working at both private and state universities (URL -3).

Internationalization in Higher Education and the Transformation in Türkiye's Higher Education Policy

The journey of people leaving their birthplace or initial settlements to move to distant geographies initially occurred due to climate and natural factors. However, with the Industrial Revolution, economic reasons became the primary driving force. Even as the borders of nation-states were drawn, cross-border human mobility did not cease; instead, new developments emerged that further influenced this movement (Arslan, 2021b). Today, in addition to the reasons mentioned, the pursuit of better education has become a significant factor behind people crossing national borders, whether temporarily or permanently. Particularly in the era of globalization, where its effects are felt in every field, the advancement of information and communication technologies and transportation opportunities has given rise to a new concept: "international studenthood." While the term "foreign students" is used for students who hold a nationality different from the country where they are studying,

the term "international students" is used to describe this educational activity that transcends national borders (Teichler et al., 2011). For this purpose, many people change their place of residence to pursue higher education in another country, seeking opportunities they cannot find in their home country or aiming for better, higher-quality, or more affordable education. We observe that Turkish higher education has embraced these developments and placed a significant number of students from various countries into programs at Turkish higher education institutions.

Individuals who enroll in another country's education system for the purpose of studying are referred to as international students. Student mobility for educational purposes continues to increase annually. Globally, there were approximately 800,000 international students in 1975; this number rose to 1.3 million in 1990, 2.1 million in 2000, and 4.2 million in 2010 (Internationalization Strategy in Higher Education Document, 2017). Today, this number has reached 6.3 million worldwide, with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Canada, France, China, the United Arab Emirates, and Türkiye standing out as preferred destinations (International Student Mobility at a Glance, 2022).

The motivation behind countries opening their doors to talented international students and offering enrollment opportunities at the higher education level lies not only in attracting skilled human resources but also in the belief that this will enhance their soft power capacity and potentially transform into strong public diplomacy. Today, diplomacy manifests itself not only in the dimension of public diplomacy but also in various fields of relations between countries, including trade, economy, politics, technology, art, and education. In this context, while many types of diplomacy can be discussed, a new term has emerged in international relations terminology: "Education Diplomacy" (Demir, 2019: 232-243; Çiçek, 2020). Education diplomacy is a form of soft power that particularly focuses on educational activities at the higher education level.

International student mobility is seen by states as an important soft power tool in foreign policy. In the global education market, the United States stands out as the world leader by a significant margin, being the most preferred destination for international students (Jones, 2010). The U.S. has maintained this leadership position for many years. It hosts a large number of universities that rank highest in higher education. Additionally, the U.S.'s success in the education market is largely due to its investments and technological advancements in this field. In recent years, the U.S. has been continuously transforming to maintain its share in the education market, adapting to technological developments, changing demographics, and evolving learning needs. In the rapidly changing global education market, the U.S.'s share is expected to reach a volume of \$3.12 trillion by 2030 (United States Education Market Overview 2024-2028).

The appeal of the United States in the global education market attracts significant interest from students seeking and consuming educational services from other countries. Among those who choose to study in the U.S., students of Asian origin (40%) and from the European continent (30%) stand out the most. The total number of international students studying in the U.S. far exceeds that of any European country (Jones, 2010).

The U.S. is followed by the United Kingdom and France. According to 2023 data, 718,085 international students were studying in the UK, securing its position as the second most preferred destination for international students globally. Looking at data from previous years, the number of international students in 2020 was recorded at 550,877, reflecting an increase of over 60,000 compared to 2019 (UDEP 2024).

France, on the other hand, strives to be both a model country and a hub of attraction in higher education. From the 2019/2020 academic year to the 2020/2021 academic year, the number of international students in France increased by 3.35%, rising from 358,000 to 370,000. From 2017 to 2020 alone, France saw an increase from 324,000 to 358,000 international students, representing a growth of over 10.4%. Between 2019 and 2020, France increased its international student population by 4.3% in just one year (Study in France 2024, Campus France 2024).

Since the early 2000s, Türkiye has implemented various public diplomacy tools to influence and attract international attention. One of these policies is education diplomacy aimed at making Türkiye a hub for international students. Behind Türkiye's goal of becoming a significant player in attracting international students lies not only economic gains but also the positive image it leaves on these individuals, who complete their education and return to their home countries or move to other nations, thereby advancing public diplomacy efforts (Çiçek, 2023).

For foreign students enrolling in Turkish higher education institutions through international migration for educational purposes, the results of the Foreign Student Exam (YÖS) are used. Since 2010, each university has been administering this exam independently. Foreign students take the YÖS exams conducted by various universities and, upon success, are admitted to both foundation and state universities in Türkiye. The number of international students in Türkiye, which was around 16,000 in 2002, has increased in parallel with the growth of Turkish higher education capacity, reaching 27,000 in 2010, 72,000 in 2015, and 108,000 in the 2016-2017 academic year. In the 2022-2023 academic year, a total of 103,498 new enrollments brought the total number of international students in Turkish universities to 301,694. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the number of foreign students studying at Turkish universities reached a new record of 336,366 (Internationalization Strategy in Higher Education Document, 2017: 33; YÖK, 2023; <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>). Excluding Syrians under Temporary Protection, we see that 243,481 individuals are in Türkiye for educational purposes.

Among the countries with significant international student mobility for educational purposes in Türkiye, Turkic Republics stand out. In addition to the Turkic Republics, students from numerous other countries are placed in various universities and departments across Türkiye. When examining the countries of origin of students in Türkiye for international education, countries such as Azerbaijan (34,247), Iran (22,632), Iraq (16,172), Somalia (10,043), Kazakhstan (8,864), Palestine (5,705), Sudan (5,171), Morocco (4,958), Uzbekistan (4,794), Indonesia (4,462), Afghanistan (4,448), and Pakistan (4,171) are prominent.

This population, temporarily and voluntarily residing in Türkiye for educational purposes at higher education institutions, can study at Turkish state universities with paying

tuition fees. For the 2023–2024 academic year, the minimum tuition fees varied by program, ranging from 8,200 TL to 82,812 TL. Universities may adjust these amounts upward at their discretion (YÖK, 2023). For example, while Çukurova University keeps tuition fees within the scale determined by YÖK, Karabük University has set tuition fees for foreign students between 10,000 TL and 125,000 TL. However, with a Council of Ministers decision dated August 31, 2013, Syrian students have been exempted from university tuition fees. Additionally, the YÖS exam fee for Syrian students is lower than that for other foreign students. For instance, while the standard exam fee for Gaziantep University's Foreign Student Exam is 80 dollars, the fee for Syrian students in 2022 was set at 150 TL.

Initially, the exam language for admission to Turkish higher education was Turkish and English. However, as Türkiye has become a hub for students from African countries, Russia, Central Asia, and the Far East, the geography of international student admissions has expanded, and languages such as Arabic, Russian, French, and German have also been introduced for the YÖS exams. Diversifying the exam language is a significant step, especially for Syrians in Türkiye and others worldwide who wish to study at Turkish universities (Güngör and Soysal, 2021).

Furthermore, foreign students wishing to study in Türkiye are required to have a Turkish language proficiency level of C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In exceptional cases, students with a B2 level of Turkish proficiency may also be allowed to continue their studies, but they are expected to improve their proficiency to C1 during their education. Language proficiency certificates are provided by consulates and Yunus Emre Institutes. Additionally, Turkish language education is offered by TÖMER centers within universities (Güngör and Soysal, 2021). However, the number of foreign students admitted to universities may exceed the capacity of TÖMER centers, necessitating exceptional measures. For example, Gaziantep University has deemed it appropriate to launch Arabic programs for Syrian and Palestinian students meeting specific criteria (SAT 1, Tawjihi, GCE, ACT, TRYÖS, GAÜNYÖS, İÜYÖS, etc.) starting in 2018. However, the number of students meeting the application criteria is very low, and the evaluation of applications and exam administration (50 dollars) is subject to fees. Moreover, as of 2018, only four programs (Mechanical Engineering, Classroom Teaching, Theology, and Business Administration) are offered in Arabic, and these programs are fee-based (5,897 TL – 8,425 TL for the 2018–2019 academic year). For the 2023–2024 academic year, only Classroom Teaching and Theology programs have accepted students for Arabic-medium education, with tuition fees set at 12,600 TL.

All universities that admit foreign students have International Student Offices. These offices handle the application processes, admissions, and registration procedures for foreign students. Additionally, they are responsible for tracking scholarships, tuition fee payments, communication with provincial migration offices, residence permit processes, correspondence with embassies, procedures for students with blue cards or dual citizenship, and exemptions based on the language of instruction. At Gaziantep University, the International Student Office also manages the application and admission processes for Arabic-medium programs.

The Role of Universities in Türkiye's Migration Management

Due to its geopolitical position, Turkey has become a significant destination country for migrants. The country plays a crucial role in combating irregular migration, particularly in the Mediterranean region (Akçay & Deniz, 2021, 377). On the other hand, the civil war in Syria since 2011 has triggered a wave of migration from Syria to Turkey. The influx of Syrian refugees has reached substantial numbers, and with their prolonged stay, Turkey has become one of the countries most profoundly affected by migration. This movement has led to significant changes in Turkey's legal framework, administrative structure, and higher education policies (Ayık, Kılavuz, & Arslan, 2024; Arslan et al., 2023).

Türkiye is one of the countries hosting the largest number of foreigners. Türkiye has implemented a migration management policy involving various stakeholders to ensure the social integration of Syrians under temporary protection and foreigners who began living in Türkiye through irregular migration, as well as their access to various public services, while safeguarding the security and social harmony of the Turkish population. To this end, as a result of the new migration management initiative, Türkiye has not only made legal arrangements but also redesigned its administrative structure to suit the new conditions, establishing various migration units within central and provincial administrations (Arslan et al., 2023).

Turkish higher education has adapted to the new conjuncture, influenced by emerging circumstances and certain imperative conditions. In this context, universities have assumed roles in migration management across various domains - from supporting research on challenges faced by local administrations with high migrant populations (Tosun & Korkmaz, 2024) to contributing to nationally coordinated scientific publications and activities. As mentioned earlier, higher education opportunities have been provided to serve several purposes: facilitating Syrian refugees' social integration, meeting their educational needs (considered among fundamental public services), and enhancing migrants' qualifications to prepare them for employment and social participation in the near future. Furthermore, by offering educational opportunities to students arriving through "education-motivated migration" from numerous countries, Turkish higher education has created possibilities for "education diplomacy" - establishing people-to-people connections with these nations.

On the other hand, in the face of Türkiye's excessive migration burden, universities have taken on roles beyond being mere educational institutions. They have become actors in the migration management process by offering different perspectives, developing solutions, adapting theoretical knowledge to encountered problems, creating projects, and conducting research on migration. Every publication, project, research, proposal, and perspective developed by universities on migration is valuable for Türkiye's migration management.

Another outcome of the recent migration issue in Türkiye at the higher education level is its reflection in academic studies. It is evident that interest in international migration as a subject of academic research, covering all its dimensions, is steadily increasing (Gürses: 2021). In this context, initiatives to establish graduate education units and academic research institutes focusing on international migration as a field of study/research have gained momentum (See Table – 1).

Table – 1 Migration Institutes/Research Centers Established in Higher Education in the Field of Migration

University	Institute/Research Center
Ahi Evran University	Migration and Local Governments Application and Research Center
Avrasya University	Migration Issues Research and Application Center
Ankara Yildirim Beyazıt University	Migration Policies Application and Research Center
Bitlis Eren University	Population and Migration Application and Research Center
Celal Bayar University	Population and Migration Application and Research Center
Gaziantep University	Migration Institute
Hacettepe University	HUGO – Migration and Politics Research Center
İstanbul University	Migration and Migration Policies Application and Research Center
İstanbul Bilgi University	Migration Studies Application and Research Center
Koç University	MİREKOÇ – Migration Research Application and Research Center
Police Academy	Migration and Border Security Research Center

(Arslan, 2021b)

Evaluation and Conclusion

The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has, as part of its internationalization efforts in higher education, attracted a growing and diverse community of international students and academics from various countries. While there were 18,000 international students enrolled in Turkish higher education in 2000, this number reached 300,000 in the 2022-2023 academic year. According to current figures, Türkiye hosts approximately 3% of the world's international students. Looking at the numbers, Türkiye is increasingly rising in the international education market as a country that "exports education." Countries that attract migration through international education not only gain economic externalities but also seize a significant opportunity in terms of human capital, as talented individuals contribute to the country's growth, development, and innovative and competitive power.

In addition to its efforts to attract international students at the higher education level, Türkiye has also been striving to employ qualified foreign academic staff. The presence of academics with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds on campuses, engaging with students in various activities, will not only help Turkish students gain exposure to different cultures, broaden their perspectives, and develop empathy but also accelerate internationalization. However, as of now, only 3,132 foreign academic staff are employed in Turkish higher education, indicating that the sector has not yet reached the level needed to meet expectations in this area (Workshop Report on Internationalization in Higher Education and the International Visibility of Turkish Universities, 2022).

When analyzing the profiles of international students enrolled in Turkish higher education, it is evident that students predominantly come from neighboring and nearby countries, as well as those with cultural and linguistic similarities. There has also been a noticeable increase in interest from African countries, with a visible rise in the number of international students from the continent in

recent years (Workshop Report on Internationalization in Higher Education and the International Visibility of Turkish Universities, 2022).

Türkiye aims to strengthen cultural, economic, and political relations with various countries through its internationalization efforts and educational policies for international students. Additionally, the young individuals educated in Türkiye are expected to serve as voluntary ambassadors, deepening inter-country relations and contributing to the strengthening of public diplomacy.

Another recent focus in higher education policies is the inclusion of Syrians under Temporary Protection in the higher education system. The issue of Syrian migrants, who arrived in Türkiye through mass migration and have now been in the country for over a decade, has remained relevant since the beginning. In response to this migration burden, Türkiye has made administrative changes, established new institutions for migration management, and restructured existing ones to enhance their capacity and functionality (Arslan et al., 2023). While Syrians under Temporary Protection are included in the higher education system and exempt from tuition fees, allowed to enroll as special students in seven specified provinces (Mersin, Adana, Hatay, Osmaniye, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa) without documentation, and granted access to Arabic-medium programs at Gaziantep University, no other positive discrimination measures are observed. International foundations, associations, and organizations provide scholarships and aid to Syrian refugee students, but these reach only a small portion (3.5%) of active students. It is crucial for universities to establish funds to support financially disadvantaged students. In addition to financial support, initiatives should be taken to provide social and psychological support to refugee students. The support mechanisms currently provided by universities are weak, and this weakness has the potential to create problems in the short and medium term. Individuals who are not supported socially and psychologically are likely to turn to crime, perceive the host culture as hostile, and isolate themselves from the host society.

The participation of young populations in education is a goal for all countries hosting migrants. Formal education is one of the most important tools for migrant populations to learn the values and lifestyle of the host society and integrate into it. Since 2011, Turkey has hosted millions of Syrian migrants. The country's migration policies, grounded in humanitarian values, have simultaneously introduced measures to facilitate and ensure migrant participation in education (Çiçek and Turan, 2023)

As previously mentioned, Syrian refugee students who cannot prove their student status are allowed to study at state universities in seven provinces near the Syrian border (Mersin, Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa). These universities were likely chosen due to their proximity to Syria, similar climate, and the aim of keeping the Syrian population near the border to prevent uncontrolled spread to other regions of the country. However, current data on international student numbers show that this goal has largely not been achieved. According to YÖKAK data, in the 2022-2023 academic year, 214,324 foreign students were enrolled in state universities in Türkiye. During the same period, the universities hosting the highest number of foreign students were Anadolu University (16,439), Karabük University (11,890), Istanbul University (9,937), Atatürk University (9,164), Dumlupınar University (7,255), Uludağ University (5,334), Ondokuz Mayıs University (4,827), Sakarya University (4,651), Ankara University (4,246), and Çankırı Karatekin University (4,201). Among the universities hosting the most Syrian students, the top ten were Anadolu University (9,286), Gaziantep University (2,455), Istanbul University (2,416), Harran University (1,879), Siirt University (1,866), Mersin University (1,664), Mardin Artuklu University (1,570), Karabük University (1,498), Atatürk University (1,464), and Sakarya University (1,155). While the lower number of students at universities like Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, which were initially expected to host Syrian students, may seem related to the damage and deficiencies caused by the earthquake on February 6, 2023, the lack of data on student transfers from these seven universities to others makes it impossible to draw definitive conclusions.

None of the universities examined have specific practices for migrant students. Across universities, refugee students have the same rights and responsibilities as other local and foreign students. It is clear that, beyond the measures envisioned by YÖK, universities have not created many supportive practices in favor of Syrian students.

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