

# INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND SYRIAN REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES WITH TURKISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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\* The interpretations and conclusions made in this report belong solely to the author and do not reflect IPC's official position.

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## INTRODUCTION

More than 2.8 million Turkish immigrants have come to Germany since the beginning of the guest worker (*Gastarbeiter*) program in 1961 to help rebuild the German economy.<sup>1</sup> Initially, “guest” workers’ stay was perceived as temporary, and little effort was invested in terms of “integrating” them into the country. As time progressed and their stay became permanent, the lack of policies continued to lead to inequalities including educational attainment.<sup>2</sup> With larger migration waves due to various conflicts and the influx of people coming to Germany in an unplanned, unorganized manner, the German state needed to act. Over time, the system evolved to include more efforts toward integrating incoming migrants and teaching the national language, which is now promoted as an entrance ticket into the labor market.<sup>3</sup>

Over the last eight years Turkey has received around 3.6 million Syrian refugees.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the case of Germany, the influx of a large migrant population was initially believed to be temporary. Still, the Turkish government does not use the word “integration” to refer to Syrians’ stay in Turkey, which implies a more long-term perspective, but instead uses the term “harmonization.” Syrian refugees are

not legally considered as refugees but are awarded the so-called status of “temporary protection” in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Although the war in Syria makes the duration of refugees’ stay unpredictable, there is an underlying expectation that recurs from all political parties promising Syrians’ return.

Changing patterns of immigration into Turkey have led to an overhaul of immigration and asylum policies. A significant step was taken with the adoption of the new Law on Foreigners and International Protection in April 2013. The law officially declares the foundation of the General Directorate of Migration Management, which is established under the Ministry of Interior as a hub for implementing and regulating foreign nationals’ entry, stay, and exit from Turkey in addition to the protection of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers. The state, however, still does not see refugees’ stay as long term, and the refugees themselves are likely to still consider their stay as temporary for the most part.<sup>6</sup> Both perspectives (the state’s and individuals’) have implications for teaching/learning in the host country language. From the Turkish state’s perspective, this leads to a lack of initiative in terms of widening access to language education. From an individual perspective, refugees themselves may not want to invest in learning due to the uncertainty of their situations. However, in reality, the figures of repatriation and resettlement from Turkey remain very low. Of the 3.6 million, a total of 15,159 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey to third countries

1 Claudia Diehl and Matthias Koenig, “God Can Wait – New Migrants in Germany Between Early Adaptation and Religious Reorganization,” *International Migration* 51, no. 3 (2013): 8–22, doi:10.1111/imig.12093.

2 Çetin Çelik, “Disadvantaged, but Morally Superior: Ethnic Boundary Making Strategies of Second-Generation Male Turkish Immigrant Youth in Germany,” *Identities*, March 22, 2017, 1–19, doi:10.1080/1070289X.2017.1305218.

3 Alisha M. B. Heinemann, “The Making of ‘Good Citizens’: German Courses for Migrants and Refugees,” *Studies in the Education of Adults* 49, no. 2 (July 3, 2017): 177–95, doi:10.1080/02660830.2018.1453115.

4 DGMM, “Ministry Of Interior Directorate General Of Migration Management,” Governmental Website, DGMM, (January 2019), [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection\\_915\\_1024\\_4748\\_ic-erik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_ic-erik).

5 Didem Daniş and Dilara Nazlı, “A Faithful Alliance Between the Civil Society and the State: Actors and Mechanisms of Accommodating Syrian Refugees in Istanbul,” *International Migration*, August 24, 2018, doi:10.1111/imig.12495.

6 Murat Erdoğan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi: Suriyelilerle Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018).

in the period between 2014 and 2019,<sup>7</sup> and around 329,000 Syrians have returned to Syria as of May 2019.<sup>8</sup> With the vast majority of refugees staying in Turkey, learning Turkish language becomes a pressing issue. However, the need for Turkish language education is a newly emerging phenomenon, as the arrival of such a large scale of foreign, non-Turkish forced migrants is the first of its kind in Turkey's recent history. As such, there is not yet a sufficient structure of language instruction adjusted to this need.<sup>9</sup>

Several studies about Syrians in Turkey indicate that not knowing the language of the host country constitutes a barrier for migrants' access to their rights and education,<sup>10</sup> to the labor market,<sup>11</sup> to healthcare services,<sup>12</sup> and to legal services.<sup>13</sup> Language also constitutes specific barriers for women.<sup>14</sup>

## Aim of the Report

This report aims to analyze the situation of language education for refugees in Turkey. First, it outlines the overall structures at the institutional level and links between these structures. Second, it will present the challenges to and opportunities for language education in Turkey as observed through fieldwork, regrouped under three themes: 1) access to language courses, 2) different language needs, and 3) teachers' competencies. Following an overview of the findings, its goal is to offer policy recommendations for more comprehensive language education in Turkey involving the organization and coordination of refugees' language learning process.

7 DGMM, "Ministry Of Interior Directorate General Of Migration Management."

8 Refugees Association - Mülteci Derneği, "Number of Syrians in Turkey - May 2019," June 21, 2019, [https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedekisuriyeli-sayisi/?fbclid=IwAR2rU93yNuCkxalVa20sGq6blxD\\_CQU-9v8kDdP5pi4\\_fILWao79mhYJADBo](https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedekisuriyeli-sayisi/?fbclid=IwAR2rU93yNuCkxalVa20sGq6blxD_CQU-9v8kDdP5pi4_fILWao79mhYJADBo).

9 Maissam Nimer and Tuygun Oruc, "Sustainable Approaches to Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Language Education for Adults Refugees in Turkey," *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, March 2019).

10 Wiebke Hohberger, "Opportunities in Higher Education for Syrians in Turkey: The Perspective of Syrian University Students on the Educational Conditions, Needs and Possible Solutions for Improvement," *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, March 2018).

11 IYF, "Opportunities for Syrian Youth in Istanbul: A Labor Market Assessment" (Istanbul: International Youth Foundation (IYF), January 2018).

12 Gabriele Cloeters and Souad Osseiran, "Healthcare Access for Syrian Refugees in Istanbul: A Gender-Sensitive Perspective," Workshop Report (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, January 2019).

13 Şenay Özden and Oula Ramadan, "Syrian Women's Perspectives on Life in Turkey - Rights, Relations and Civil Society" (Istanbul: Badael Foundation, 2019).

14 UN Women, "Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey" (Ankara, June 2018).

## METHODS AND DATA

This report is based on a qualitative study conducted between September 2018 and June 2019 drawing on a variety of empirical data. Following intensive desk research to analyze the literature focusing on language instruction in the case of Turkey and other countries, it includes in-depth interviews with a variety of actors, namely teachers and administrators in civil society organizations (CSOs), community centers, municipalities, and language centers in several socio-economically and demographically diverse districts in Istanbul in which there is a dense population of Syrians (including Fatih, Sultanbeyli, Küçükçekmece, Sultangazi, and Beyoğlu). These interviews focused on regulations, rights to access, experiences, difficulties, degree of differentiation among students, and assessment mechanisms. The study is also comprised of interviews with Syrians and other foreigners who were/are students in Turkish language courses. Participants were selected in a way to ensure representation in terms of geographical origin, gender, and socio-economic status. Interviews covered participants' biographies and experiences with language learning. The interviews were supplemented with systematic ethnographic observations of the language classes in a variety of institutions. In addition, the study includes in-depth interviews with officials in state institutions in Ankara. The audio-recorded interviews (when permitted) were transcribed. Interview materials were analyzed through thematic content analysis, detecting and isolating the most recurrent themes in interviews and comparing them with other interviews.

The interviews with stakeholders include interviews with officials from governmental organizations, the Ministry of National Education and its provincial office in Istanbul, Presidency for Turks Aboard and Related Communities (YTB),

Turkish Employment Agency (İşkur), Yunus Emre Institute, and Turkish as a Foreign Language Education Association (YADOT). It also includes interviews with administrators of language courses or language centers in Istanbul: public education centers (PECs), municipal vocational courses (İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Sanat ve Meslek Eğitim Kursları, ISMEK), municipalities, public school, and CSOs. Among these institutions, we conducted interviews with administrators and teachers in language centers, recognized private centers, or centers within universities, as well as interviews and focus group sessions with students. We also conducted interviews with academics, stakeholders, and students in German courses (see Annex A for a complete list of interviewees).

The data collected above was complemented with a self-completed online survey using Google Forms that was circulated via email among Turkish language students in three different language centers: Akdem Istanbul (private), ISMEK (public), and Refugees Association (CSO). A total of 363 participants answered the survey. There were a total of 52 responses from AKDEM, 289 from ISMEK, and 22 from Refugees Association. A total of 197 Syrian nationals answered the survey (54% of all respondents). This report refers only to the results gathered from Syrian nationals.



LANGUAGE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE - INSTITUTIONAL MAP

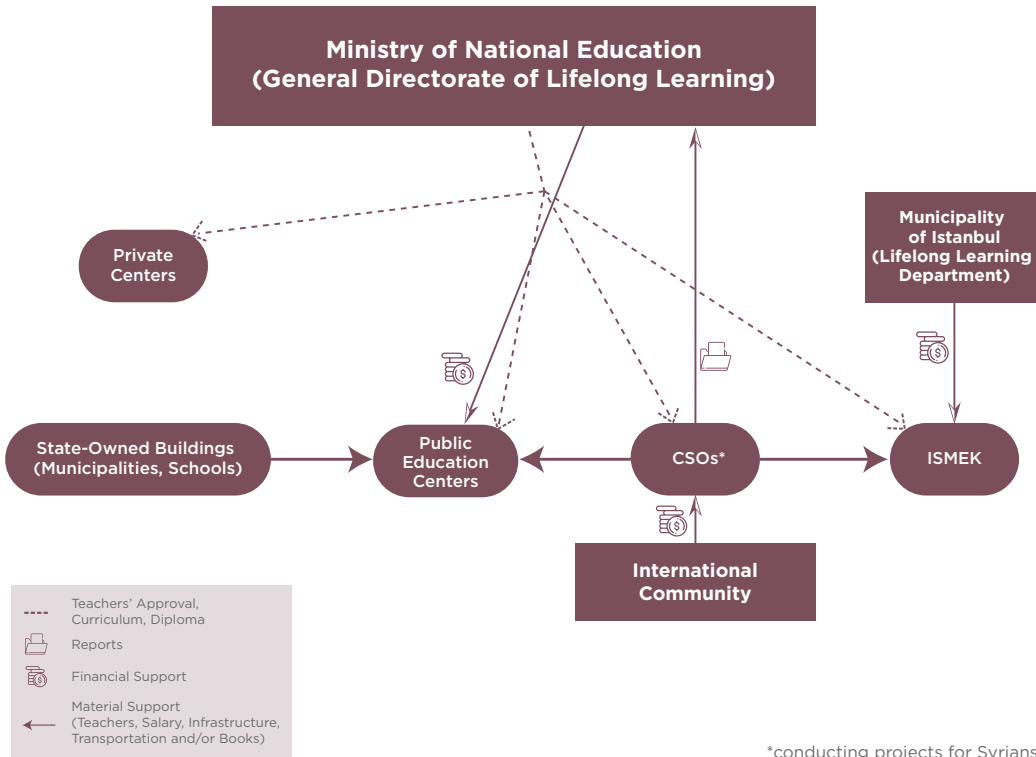
There are several channels through which language education is available for Syrian adults in Turkey. These include university language centers, ISMEK (263 centers), PECs (40 centers in Istanbul), and private centers, as well as charities, foundations, and institutions, sometimes religious organizations in mosques and some run by Syrian owners. Each channel targets different groups of students. Those who want to pursue higher education attend university center courses or private courses, while the other centers cater to those who want to learn enough Turkish to get by. CSOs, with international funding, provide support to these institutions and

operate under the abovementioned two channels (ISMEK and PECs) as a humanitarian assistance provider.

The first channel is under the Lifelong Learning Department of the Ministry of National Education and the Istanbul Municipality (IBB). There are two types of centers in which language education programs are carried out within the ministry: PECs and ISMEK centers in Istanbul.

PECs, under the Ministry of National Education Lifelong Learning Department, were founded at the start of the republic as a national initiative to

Institutional Map of Language Education Landscape in Istanbul



\*conducting projects for Syrians

teach reading and writing and republican values. With increasing neoliberalization in Turkey, these centers started focusing on skills formation for the job market. The Lifelong Learning Department resulted from the merging of apprenticeships and non-formal education in 2011. As of 2014, as Syrians' stay progressively became perceived as long term, these centers started to offer Turkish for foreigners. İSMEK, founded by the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul in 1996, is one of the largest training centers. The aim of these centers is to provide free vocational trainings for citizens on the subjects demanded. Their certificates are validated by the Ministry of National Education. Though these centers share a number of common features in their organizational and operational structure, the main difference between these centers is their funding source. While PECs are funded by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning (GDLL) in the Ministry of National Education, ISMEK centers are funded by the lifelong learning department under the Municipality of Istanbul. Decisions regarding curriculum, course duration, certificates, and basic teacher selection criteria for both institutions are all formulated by the GDLL, and courses in both of the centers are free of charge. Recruitment of teachers is approved by the Ministry of National Education through the same system.

### **Levels and Certificates**

The “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment,” abbreviated in English as CEFR, is a guideline used to describe the achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. The CEFR has developed a set of six common reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) to determine individuals' language skills. The most common levels available in most language learning centers in Turkey are A1 and A2; however, the demand for each level has increased progressively in each center. For instance, in the ISMEK centers,

A1 started in 2012, A2 in 2014, B1 in 2016, and B2 and C1 in 2018 (Interview 10). Yet, courses in higher levels are much rarer as centers focus on teaching basic language.

Organizations can propose a module that does not already exist to the ministry. Once approved, the module would be added to the list of course modules already available. This involves a long process through which academicians review the proposed module to see if it is suitable. The proposed course module is sent to three different parties that examine the new module and review it to see if it is suitable. UNDP related their challenges with trying to open a new course module that did not exist on the e-yaygın system as they proposed a “blended training” model, which combines classroom learning, online programs, and a learning management system. The process was lengthy and still ongoing at the time of the interview.

Centers provide certificates upon successful completion of the course program under the authority of the Ministry of National Education. According to stakeholders, the ministry has been providing certificates through language centers since 1924. To be able to give the certificate from the Ministry of National Education, centers have to comply with a set number of hours. The number of hours per course is determined centrally by the ministry and appears in a centralized system. While ISMEK centers provide a certificate from the ministry for the first two levels (A1 and A2), they only offer a certificate of attendance for the following two levels as the duration of the courses is shorter than the duration required by the ministry (120 hours instead of 360). Overall, students find that the course durations are too short, especially in more advanced levels. Course hours are usually the only times during which the students practice their Turkish.

The certificate process has been coordinated by the PECs through a centralized procedure with the help of an automated computer software system called “e-yaygin” since 2015. The PECs’ administrators and teachers enter information about students, including grades and attendance, into the system. Once the students successfully complete their requirements, the ministry centrally sends approval, and a certificate can be printed at local PECs and distributed to students. ISMEK centers are also allowed to offer certificates issued by the GDLL if they adhere to the ministry’s conditions. CSOs must sign protocols (explained below) with the Ministry of National Education and establish an agreement with a PEC once they have signed the protocol in order to give students certificates. The latter coordinates this process and can deliver certificates to students in these centers provided they meet the minimum requirements: 80% attendance, certain learning outcomes, and passing exams. The teachers decide on the exam content as long as they follow the modules specified by the ministry. Students need to have an official legal status in Turkey (temporary protection, residency permit, or Turkish citizenship) in order to obtain the certificate.

These certificates are recognized nationally but not by universities. Certificates from TÖMER centers are among the only certificates that are recognized by all higher education institutions in Turkey along with “Türkçe Yeterlik Sınavı” (TYS) certificates (from Yunus Emre Institute). These certificates are also reportedly valid in EU countries, as universities have adapted to the EU framework. Some private centers have protocols with universities that allow their students to take TÖMER or YYS exams. Both TÖMER and YYS exams test for all four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). The level of Turkish that is required is different depending on the level of higher education, the institution, and the program of study. These exams are costly. However, some students have come up

with strategies to save money. They study Turkish language in cheaper private centers or free centers such as PECs or ISMEK but then take the exam at TÖMER or YYS to get the certificate recognized by the university.

**Capacity**

The capacity of language centers is often a problem. PECs can use state-owned buildings such as municipalities or schools in order to deliver courses if the physical conditions are “suitable for learning and teaching.” Yet, the capacity rarely meets demand. According to the figures provided by the PECs and ISMEK, the former has catered to a total of 192,625 students since 2014 all over Turkey, and the latter has catered to 3,597 students in Istanbul as shown in the tables below. These figures, though increasing every year and though the levels offered are also expanding, are still low when compared to the overall number of Syrians in Turkey. Resources are often limited, and the waiting times between the courses are long. Courses are almost always booked beyond capacity.

ISMEK - Enrollment Numbers in Istanbul

Year	Number of foreign students	Number of Syrian students
2013–2014	1,991	522
2014–2015	2,898	534
2015–2016	4,896	1,197
2016–2017	5,481	1,835
2017–2018	9,011	3,597
2018–2019 (incomplete)	5,419	1,641
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,696</b>	<b>9,326</b>

Source: Presentation shared by ISMEK

PEC - Enrollment Numbers and Percentage Obtaining Certificates

Year	Number of Syrian students	% of students who obtained certificates
<b>A1</b>		
2014	1,144	59%
2015	39,591	67%
2016	66,643	67%
2017	33,899	56%
2018	14,028	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>155,305</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>A2</b>		
2015	4,097	77%
2016	13,481	66%
2017	11,802	63%
2018	5,045	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,425</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>B1</b>		
2017	1,365	60%
2018	1,530	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,895</b>	<b>47%</b>

Source: Presentation shared by Ministry of National Education

### Language Courses at Universities and Scholarships

Turkish and Foreign Languages Center of Ankara University (TÖMER) is perceived as the best learning environment for individuals who want to pursue their higher education studies. These centers have to adhere to the criteria set by the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK). As the duration of the courses is longer, there is more time for learning and practice. However, these centers do not show great flexibility in time and do not provide many opportunities for those who work. In

addition, they charge large amounts of money from students as they are meant to cater to privileged foreign students.

Scholarships run by the president's office have been provided within the framework of bilateral agreements signed with other states since the 1960s and were systematized in 1992 as the "Great Student Project."<sup>15</sup> The "Turkish Scholarship Program," launched in 2012, covers the expenses of prospective students throughout their studies, round-trip tickets, dormitory costs, health insurance, and a 700 TL (about 135 USD) stipend. The program was transferred to YTB after it was established in 2010. It caters to students coming mostly from the developing world (including Syrians) to study at universities in Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Syrian students initially benefitted from this program, competing with other international students. With the increasing number of Syrians in Turkey, the YTB implemented new programs particularly geared toward Syrians such as the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship, which was implemented by UNHCR and funded by the German government. These scholarships, for Syrians only, also include one year of language training implemented through YTB.

A new type of scholarship program, the "Advanced Level Turkish Education Program (*İleri Düzey Türkçe Eğitim Programı*)," was developed for Syrians in collaboration with UNHCR. These scholarships usually include only one year of Turkish language education, in collaboration with TÖMER language schools, in public (and some private) universities. The YTB created a department and trained individuals to run these scholarships. The scholarship covers the cost of around one year of

<sup>15</sup> "YTB," *Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı (YTB)*, 2019, <https://www.ytb.gov.tr/>.

<sup>16</sup> Kerem Öktem, "Turkey's New Diaspora Policy: The Challenge of Inclusivity, Outreach and Capacity," *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, August 2014).

Turkish language instruction and is funded through EU humanitarian assistance funds. While this stipend helps students sustain their own expenses, it is often perceived as insufficient to maintain a life in Istanbul when students have family responsibilities. As such, many students need to work simultaneously to make ends meet. This program started in 2013 for Syrians in camps and then expanded to Syrians residing in cities starting in 2016. When it was offered in camps, Turkish courses were offered by teachers paid by the UN, and certificates were provided in collaboration with Gaziantep University. Now, the scholarship collaborates with around 20 universities. These scholarships are offered in agreement with universities such as Istanbul Aydın University, Sabahattin Zaim University, Istanbul University, Yıldız Technical University, among others. To address the lack of capacity to teach language courses, some universities collaborate with private centers to use their classrooms. Students apply by registering on the website and filling out a general application form. The selection is based on the following criteria:

- 1 | being a Syrian citizen or Palestinian refugee from Syria,
- 2 | being registered under temporary protection,
- 3 | being between 17 and 24 years old (previously the upper limit was 26 years of age), and
- 4 | having completed high school education with a grade of at least 60 out of 100 and having the intention to pursue higher education in Turkey and “the required motivation and potential to be successful” (assessed through open-ended questions).

The eligible applications are reviewed by academicians. Students are ranked according to grades, and the top achievers are selected. In the 2017/18 school year, a total of 3,000 students were selected

from among a pool of 8,000–9,000 applications. However, the funding from the European Union toward this program has decreased over time. It is expected to decrease further as all Syrian students are expected to attend Turkish schools (with the full closure of Temporary Education Centers).

The abovementioned language education program includes eight to nine months of intensive programs, whereby students can study up to C1 level (five out of six levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Since last year students can take an additional course in academic Turkish for an extra five weeks. Students must attend a minimum of 80% of all classes to maintain their scholarship. In addition, the centers are obliged to

Poster of the “Advanced Level Turkish Education Program”



Brochure for the “Advanced Level Turkish Education Program,”  
December 2018 - Turkish



Brochure for the “Advanced Level Turkish Education Program,”  
December 2018 - Arabic



include other activities such as social community work and higher education information sessions. Instruction in these centers is perceived to be better geared toward academic studies than instruction at PECs or other such institutions. The success rate in the course is reported as 80% graduating from either B2 or C1.

### CSOs and Protocols with the Ministry of National Education

CSOs are also involved in language education through supporting the aforementioned channels. Since the EU-Turkey deal in 2015, there have been billions of euro of funding coming from the EU as humanitarian assistance, which also includes language education. While language instruction was first offered as part of the emergency response by a variety of CSOs in an ad-hoc manner, internal political dynamics have influenced these activities.

The government shut down hundreds of CSOs under the state of emergency following the July 15, 2016 coup attempt<sup>17</sup> and controlled all educational activities that were catered to Syrians, including language instruction. According to a circular issued in 2017, all educational activities by CSOs with international funding require approval from the ministry through a protocol between the CSO that is offering the program and the Directorate of Migration and Emergency Situation unit of the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning. In December 2018, there were 114 active protocols, of those 41 are with foreign organizations.

17 CAP, IPC, and IAI, “Trends in Turkish Civil Society,” *Center for American Progress*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/07/10/435475/trends-turkish-civil-society/>.

Brochure advertising Turkish language classes by Refugees Association, July 2018



The process involved in obtaining a protocol for foreign CSOs is outlined as follows. At the initial step, the applicant should state the goal of the project, the characteristics of its target group, and the funder. CSOs may provide the location, pay the salary of the teacher, and provide material support for PECs and ISMEK centers such as books and transportation. PECs may provide teachers for the CSOs. The application is then sent electronically to the Ministry of Interior Department for Relations with Civil Society; this department enquires about the CSO. Following this, the department of legal services examines the project's legal aspects. Finally, it comes back to the GDLL's protocol unit,

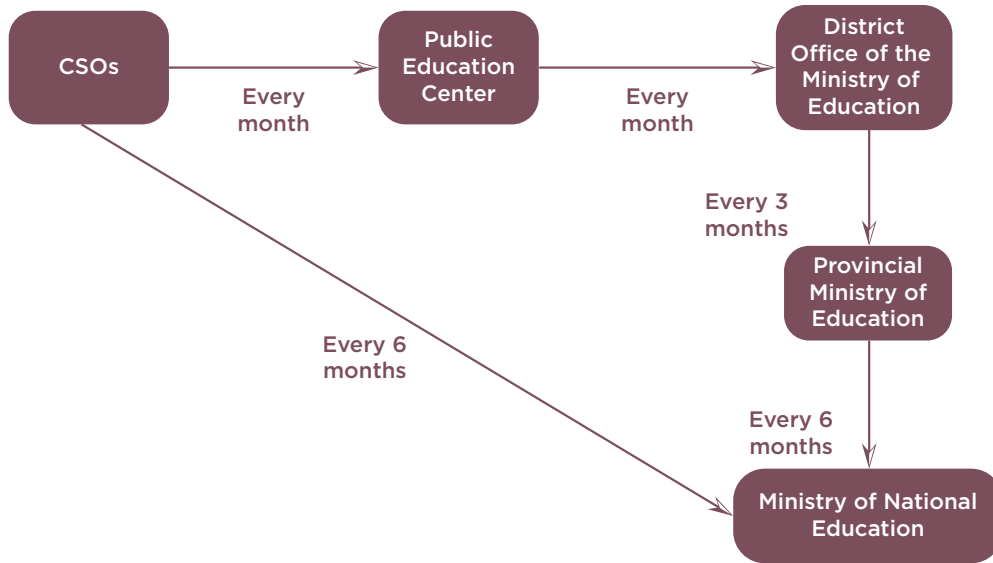
head of unit, general director, and vice-director. Necessary alterations are made in the proposal. All parties then sign this protocol.

The basic condition is that courses should be free of charge. Besides that, the content of each protocol is different depending on the proposal made by the association. This whole process is reported to take 15 days. Permission is obtained from the provincial directorates of national education. Once the protocol is approved, foreign organizations sign it for one year and have to renew it every year, whereas local organizations and Turkish state institutions can sign protocols for three years. During this period there is constant follow-up with these organizations. The protocol is then coordinated with PECs. CSOs send a report to the PEC every month, and the PEC sends a report to the District Office of the Ministry of Education (*İlçe Milli Eğitim*). The district office sends a report every three months to the Provincial Ministry of Education (*İl Milli Eğitim*), which then sends a report to the GDLL in Ankara every six months. Simultaneously, organizations are required to send a report to the GDLL in Ankara every six months too. These last two reports should match. Through this system, the ministry officials know which courses

Protocol Process for Foreign CSOs



### Monitoring Process for Foreign CSOs



are offered by each organization in each province. If within two months of having signed the protocol the organization has not yet carried out any action, then the protocol is cancelled.

Collaboration with CSOs, as mentioned above, can take different forms. Through a tripartite mechanism, in collaboration with municipalities, ISMEK, or PECs, organizations receive resources from external funders (EU, UN) and provide support to organize Turkish language courses. With these resources, CSOs take care of material needs and oversee the payment of instructors' salaries, the provision of written material for the courses, notebooks, etc.; PECs or ISMEK centers organize the language courses by taking attendance, giving exams, and monitoring attendance; and municipalities provide the facilities. In other cases, the CSO uses already existing spaces within the municipalities and an already existing pool of teachers. Alternatively, they give support to PECs directly through providing the location, paying the

salary of teachers, providing students with money for transport, stationary support, or childcare. Prior to this system, CSOs were giving education courses on an ad-hoc basis. Officials believe this to be inefficient, as it resulted in a "loss of funds" and lack of quality control. This process is now believed to be under better control.

The shift toward a more centralized system through protocols and more support to existing organizations seems to be favored by actors in state institutions. The goal of these projects is to "increase the capacity of PECs to offer Turkish language courses." However, these initiatives have all been project-based, time- and resource-bound at the local level. State institutions then become mere implementers of these initiatives, whereby the EU-Turkey delegation provides funds for projects and the ministry executes. Stakeholders are wary of the sustainability of funds, yet the idea of widening access to language in a sustainable, policy-driven manner is absent in the official discourse. CSOs



incur the costs of teachers' salaries, transportation and food for students, and supplies for the classroom. Once the funding stops, the state's centralization efforts are not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. In addition, there is no centralized tracking mechanism to follow who is registering to the courses among the pool of refugees.

### Policy for Language

The issue of teaching Turkish language to a large group of foreigners is new to the Turkish context. As such, institutions are evolving to meet the needs of the incoming population and the society as a whole. As a response to the influx of refugees, institutions are changing, and new policies are being implemented. While several initiatives and programs are implemented in coordination with the GDLL for teaching language to adults, there is still no general policy to teach Turkish to Syrian refugees. Learning Turkish is left up to the individual to access the free courses at the PECs or other locations. Though the PECs reported that they have the capacity and resources to increase their operations, opening a class still depends on students' demands. This results in an uneven distribution of courses depending on the region.

Some state officials believe that learning Turkish is up to refugees themselves and their willingness to learn. Given that Syrians are under temporary protection, they cannot be asked to learn Turkish, officials say; there is a system in place if the individuals are willing to learn Turkish on their own. According to several officials, the problem is that some individuals are not willing to learn Turkish. Some Syrians are believed to have "weak motivation" to learn, especially adults:

For adults to receive language education they need to do it voluntarily. As long as they're not willing, it can't be done. They can receive courses from PECs. (Interview 71)

Some stakeholders point to the importance of linking citizenship to language learning to encourage individuals to learn Turkish.

## IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR ADULT REFUGEES

Whether from an institutional or individual perspective, the need to learn Turkish seems to be largely related to perceptions about the future and the long-term stay of refugees in Turkey. As refugees' return to their home country seems to be less realistic, the perceived need to teach the language (from the institutions' side) and to learn it (from the individual perspective) has gained importance. As such, there is an identified need for refugees to improve their situation through learning the language. Stakeholders have highlighted that perceptions have changed; while initially individuals were planning on returning, slowly they have started to realize that the return option is no longer viable. Some factors have also contributed to furthering the need to invest in learning the language. For instance, those who have obtained Turkish citizenship have gained stability and a long-term vision for their future; they have started to imagine a future in Turkey and thus invest more effort into learning the language. In addition, those who invested most in learning appeared to be the ones who like languages in general and were favorably disposed toward Turkish. They expressed admiration for the Turkish language and culture through television series and music. All interviewed stakeholders and refugees agreed on the importance of teaching or learning Turkish for adults living in Turkey for different reasons. The importance of language was expressed in terms of the following three aspects: 1) social and cultural inclusion, 2) official matters and bureaucracy, 3) employment.

### Language for Social and Cultural Inclusion

Stakeholders and individuals perceive that the main reason to learn the language is to be able to communicate and make friends with Turkish people, to understand and learn the "habits and cultures of Turkish people," to get familiar with the

culture of the host society, and to understand "how they live." Some see it is a "matter of survival." It is also a way to read Turkish media and understand what is happening around them. Stakeholders also linked learning language to being comfortable in one's neighborhood, to interacting and living in harmony with neighbors. This was especially noted among people who live in certain neighborhoods in which locals only speak Turkish and not English:

It's the biggest problem that they are facing in Turkey right now, the language barrier. So, that's why it is the very first activity that we started, because it is very much needed. As you know... Sultanbeyli, it's a part of the city where, as you know, the education level and socioeconomic level are low, so you can't communicate in another language. Also, the refugee profile here is uneducated, almost all uneducated or low levels of education, so that was our biggest problem. That's why we started to give language courses. (Interview 86)

In some cases, learning the language served to avoid negative outcomes. At the individual level, it helps avoid feeling isolated in the long-term. In addition, it is agreed that language learning is essential to avoid forming isolated groups of refugees in their own community. In several instances, it was brought up that the lack of knowledge of the language may lead to embarrassment and situations that weigh on psychological well-being. It is also needed to overcome the stress of their situations, their worries for their children and families:

Living here is very difficult. It has many stressful sides: not only that we need to learn their language, but also we are stressed for our children as well. We don't know what might happen in the future. We keep thinking about

this point actually, but we hope that if we learn the language our lives might get a little bit easier! That we'll be able to communicate with people more and better. We'd even be able to tackle our everyday life issues! (Interview 34)

Learning the language is perceived by some individuals as a tool that would help them defend themselves and their rights in the face of discrimination and injustice, at work or on the street. Stakeholders also brought up negative outcomes of not learning the language on a society level. From the perspective of several institutions, language is linked to its importance at a societal level to avoid "issues":

A person cannot participate in life, meaning he/she cannot generate revenue; a person that cannot generate revenue would go after alternative means. These can lead to problematic situations. (Interview 9)

Some actors encourage learning from best practices of national language strategies in other countries. They recommend researching government policies elsewhere (namely, Brazil, Germany) to apply similar solutions.

### Language for Official Matters and Bureaucracy

Language is needed to meet daily needs, to carry out administrative tasks with Turkish authorities, in schools or in hospitals, and even to register to language courses. Knowledge of Turkish language is also perceived as necessary for the procedures of applying for citizenship. Some refugees have encountered discriminatory behaviors in response to not knowing the language:

I started here from A1 level. While I was learning it, I got the citizenship despite not knowing a word in Turkish. I had many embarrassing situations while I was getting my citizenship in the Immigration Administration or

in the office of population. Some of them were discriminating, others weren't. (Interview 61)

Several individuals brought up the issue of not being able to communicate with the medical staff in hospitals without knowing the language. Otherwise, they would need a translator:

To be able to communicate in the hospital! We still need somebody to translate and we can't explain ourselves there. Hospitals are the most important reason to learn the language, so you can explain the pain you have. (Interview 35)

Similarly, school-related matters came up among parents. They brought up the need to be able to help their children with homework and transmit their cultural capital, especially among university graduates. They also believe that language is important to communicate with school administration, teachers, other parents in the school, and to attend parent-teacher meetings. One of the stakeholders, a school director, indicated that it was important for the parents to learn the language themselves instead of always using a translator, because there are certain things that cannot be communicated via a translator, as one teacher recounts:

We were having difficulties because we could not communicate with them when we needed some things for the students, because they could not express themselves and we could not understand them either. We called in a boy who knows Turkish and who came from Syria to translate. At this point, we could not discuss personal issues, for example. When a boy has some personal issues, he can't explain himself to us. To stop this, we asked them to know Turkish. And they wanted it already, too. (Interview 102)

Identifying this need, stakeholders began to offer courses tailored to school-related needs. In addition, individuals who had interrupted their studies

stated that they need to know the language to be able to continue their studies. This was the case among students who had received scholarships to study Turkish in the TÖMER centers within universities.

### Language for Employment

Language also plays a role in employment-related matters. This manifests in different ways: language helps Syrians find a job or “gain a profession.” The development of advanced language skills is particularly necessary for highly skilled workers, such as medical professionals and teachers. For refugees, language represents a major barrier in order to transfer and utilize their cultural capital in the new context. Syrians often need to pass Turkish exams to get their professional equivalence and be able to work in Turkey:

I am a citizen now, for one and a half years. But now, I am still learning Turkish; I do not speak Turkish well. I go to the hospital to find work, [they say:] “how can we hire you, you don’t know Turkish...” To be able to continue your life here, it is good to learn Turkish. We have to learn it, and we have to do equivalency and so. (Interview 61)

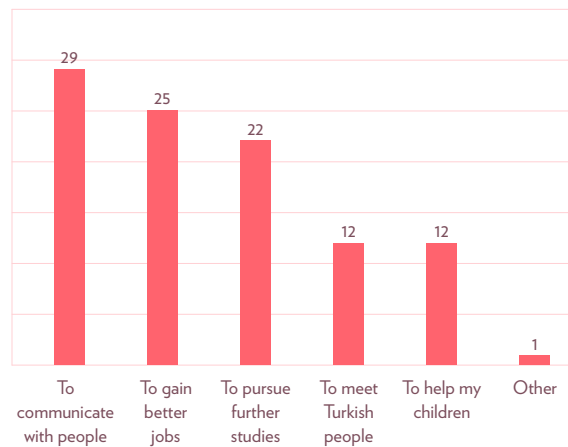
Once Syrians do obtain employment, it is necessary to communicate with Turkish employers and negotiate and stand up for their rights when needed. In addition, learning the language to a proficient level provides better opportunities for valorized jobs, for instance, employment either as translators for international companies, in hospitals, or in CSOs. Learning Turkish is perceived as a means to “escape the prison” of long working hours in manual jobs:

[I am responsible for] just Arabic [speaking customers], then they told me to take all foreign customers. But I don’t know English... I was speaking some English with foreign people, then I tell them to contact me on Whatsapp to use the translator, just to be able

to do my work. I stayed in this job for eight months. (Interview 63)

In the online survey carried out among language students in courses (as described in the methodology section), most respondents felt that they needed to learn Turkish to “communicate with people” (29%), to “gain better jobs” (25%), to “pursue further studies” (22%), or to “meet Turkish people” (12%). Interestingly, women are more likely to agree with the statement “I need Turkish in my daily life overall.”

Reasons to Learn Turkish (%)



**THEME 1: REFUGEES' ACCESS TO LANGUAGE CLASSES**

Despite the importance given to language by stakeholders and individuals, in a lot of cases access to language education is hindered by barriers due to refugees' living conditions.

**Limited Capacity and Location**

Institutions' lack of capacity leads to problems in registration, overfilled classes, and long waiting periods to enter a course or in between courses. Actors recognize that there is a high demand for language courses in Turkey among Syrians, especially in Istanbul, that they cannot meet. Due to capacity limitations, centers either register students on a first-come, first-served basis or by selecting the top students on an entrance exam. Students have to wait between levels, and this delays their learning process. Many students then have to resort to private centers, which use the continuity of classes to attract students:

I've tried [to study at ISMEK] but I couldn't register... When I went there—it was, like, the beginning of the year—they told me that I have to wait for six months... I've already lost one year, so it will be losing two years. So, no, I don't want to wait. (Interview 81)

Several CSOs are trying to fill the gap in capacity in some areas of Istanbul by opening up several A1 and A2 level classes, but they also report not being able to meet Syrians' needs. As mentioned above, the intermediate and upper level courses are only offered in a few locations. The location of the language center appeared to impact access to language education. This was ranked second (14%) in the survey, after teacher quality (59%), as the most important criteria to learn Turkish. Though some CSOs arrange transportation, this solution is not always sufficient.

In addition, some PECs made agreements to teach the parents of Syrian students in their neighborhood schools. This solution addresses both capacity limitations and location barriers. Respondents were very satisfied with this solution:

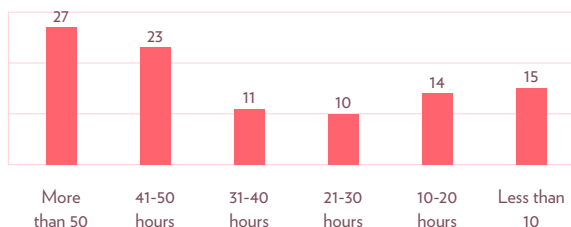
We all wanted to learn but did not have the means to go to a distant place that gives courses. And here, there were none, and now recently—and thank God—we come and benefit. We improved. (Interview 104)

However, using different buildings resulted in lack of equipment (e.g., board, technology).

**Time Constraints due to Long Working Hours**

One of the main reasons that makes it hard for refugees to attend language classes is their economic status. The need to earn money and working conditions, especially among men in the informal sector, lead to long and irregular working hours, which are hard to arrange with language classes. This is particularly the case when Syrians first arrive, as they think first of their primary needs and sustaining their livelihood. The fact of “having limited time due to work” was identified as the second greatest difficulty faced in learning Turkish among the respondents of the survey (38%) after lack of practice (39%). Overall, almost one-quarter of the respondents work more than 50 hours per

Number of hours of work per week (%)



week (27%) or between 41 and 50 hours (23%). They were less likely to be working 21–30 hours (10%), 31–40 hours (11%), or less than ten hours (15%) per week.

As a result, center administrators claim that the larger proportion of the Syrian population is not able to access language courses. Syrians often work until late at night (23:00 sometimes). Some even work on Saturdays. Those who are accessing courses come to class exhausted after a long workday and are likely to drop out. The only exceptions are in cases in which the employees have flexibility at work, allowing them to leave early and work on other days. This usually tends to be more common among those who occupy white-collar jobs. Men who are unemployed due to their inability to practice their profession (doctors, teachers) and/or rely on financial support from relatives are also more likely to attend language courses.

The courses offered, therefore, need to be flexible in terms of course scheduling to fit students' demands. Some centers are aware of this difficulty and have tried to accommodate:

We talk to people and learn which hours and days they can attend. After learning their demands, we contact ISMEK. We tell them which hours and what sort of qualifications for the instructors we need. (Interview 59)

The course schedule also needs to consider some gender-specific safety concerns. A woman mentioned that evening classes are not possible for her because of safety concerns. Such considerations also need to be taken in planning the timing of courses. According to our observations, the differences in schedules and responsibilities of men and women have led to a de facto gender division in the classes. As men are more likely to be working and women are more likely to be in charge of child rearing, the timings that are most suitable for men

usually tend to be late afternoon or weekends, while women prefer classes on weekday mornings.

Several interviewees brought up the model of European countries, in which refugees are provided with the opportunity to study the language when they first arrive while receiving financial support to sustain themselves without needing to work. Such a model would favorably impact Syrian refugees' motivation to learn Turkish. Some students state that if this happens in Turkey, then staying becomes a better choice than moving to Europe:

I think all should be provided with facilities and opportunities. You need to have a time period in which you have the financial means to sustain yourself for [the duration of your] education. Some cannot come by since they are employed. These people need to be supported. ISMEK helps these people: It is free and provides education in the weekends, mornings, afternoons, and in the evenings. But still, it is open to discussion whether ISMEK is sufficient or not. (Interview 17)

Some state actors, however, do not believe that this solution is possible given the large number of refugees in Turkey; they believe refugees should be able to work and learn the language at the same time.

### **Cost of Language Courses**

Accessing language education in private centers is costly and rendered inaccessible for many Syrians, especially for those whose financial situation is difficult and have to support family members. This was especially difficult for those who needed to study at TÖMER centers to pursue their studies. As a solution, programs have emerged to offer scholarships for university students (as described previously). In addition, some organizations have been offering small stipends for adults to attend the courses in PECs.

### Family Dynamics and Childcare Responsibilities

Another issue mentioned in the interviews was the need for women to take care of their children as a barrier to access language courses. This significantly delays their ability to start taking Turkish courses. Women often only manage to join the classes once their children start school. When children get sick, they have to miss classes. Some rely on relatives or neighbors to look after their children in order to be able to attend. However, this depends on whether they are living in proximity of relatives and/or have good relations with their neighbors. In some cases, children are attached to their mothers, and leaving them at home with a relative or at a neighbor's house and attending class is not always a realistic solution:

We have children. That's why going to any center is not easy for us. For example, when I first came my daughter was two years old. She used to cry a lot. It was impossible to take her to the class. That's why, especially for women, there should be a unit to look after the kids. Let it be paid even, but there is no such thing here. (Interview 24)

In order to respond to this need, several CSOs offer childcare services. This seems to have improved access. However, these efforts are not sufficiently widespread. A stakeholder in a CSO also mentioned the possibility of collaboration between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Family and Social Services to make the efforts more sustainable.

In the absence of childcare services, some teachers have taken the initiative to let women bring their children with them to class. Although teachers and students reported that this disturbs the class, it was a necessary solution when childcare support was not available. As such, while the solution is noteworthy, it does not represent a long-term alternative to the provision of childcare:

For instance, my son, I cannot leave him at home. His sister is older. At first here, they said, that it was not possible to have children, and most don't. But, thanks to the teacher, he said okay, and he was patient with the children. (Interview 104)

Women also face additional barriers in accessing language education. These barriers are deeply interwoven within the overall family structure. Some stakeholders in institutions and teachers have noted that some women do not come because male members of their families do not allow them to go. This barrier needs to be further investigated in order to understand the possible reasons for which permission is not granted, and accordingly, initiatives could be designed while considering these reasons, if possible, such as including other family members.

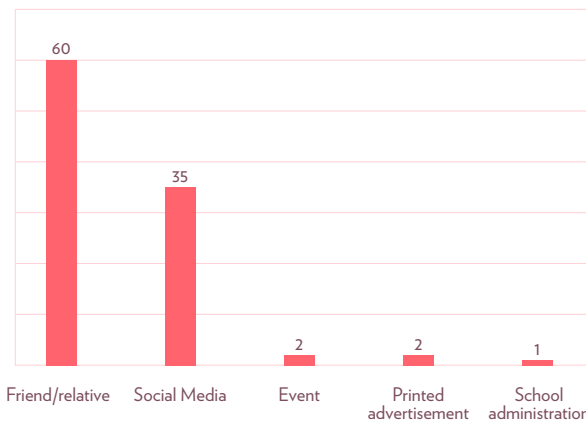
### Channels of Communication and Outreach

Being in a new country without knowing the language and the institutional system makes it hard for refugees to obtain information about the offers available in terms of language education, especially as the current system of language courses is quite complex to navigate. In order to facilitate access to information in terms of language learning centers and mechanisms of registration, the German cultural center mentioned a website for migrants in Germany called [meinwegnachdeutschland.com](http://meinwegnachdeutschland.com), which is in 30 different languages and provides all the preliminary information necessary to facilitate refugees' access to services, including language courses. On the website there is a map indicating where all the different service providers are located. The teachers in language classes help refugees navigate this website. This could be adapted to the Turkish context and linked to the website of the Migration Management Department.

Word of mouth appeared to be the predominant way of obtaining information. Survey results

demonstrate that the majority (60%) stated that they learned about courses through a relative or friend. The rest of the participants received information from social media (35%) and other sources (5%). This implies that there is not yet sufficient official capacity to attract and inform refugees about language education and their rights.

Way of hearing about the courses ( % )



Refugees who have been here awhile typically provide newcomers with information:

My friends told me that there is a place here to enroll. One of my friends was enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of Turkish. So, I asked her about myself for the 1<sup>st</sup> level, and she answered positively about it. I came directly to join the course. (Interview 34)

Word of mouth being a very important way to gain trust and reach a large number of potential students, a state official at the Ministry of National Education (Interview 101) described a new community initiative that involves recruiting Syrian community leaders or “voluntary instructors” to inform adults about Turkish courses. Their main function is to encourage children to attend schools:

We are already in the neighborhoods. We have 800 teachers in Istanbul. They work at places where there are the most Syrians. They are always in the field. They are always with people. There are more than 1,500 voluntary Syrian instructors, [and] we are always in contact with them. They live within the society. Our strategy to reach them is different—by having family trainings, parent meetings via Syrian teachers, via our teachers in the field. Our public education centers work in the field. They do area analysis, and they invite them to learn Turkish. They do work. (Interview 101)

Social media also represents a common way to share information. Syrians who are interested in pursuing their higher education degrees have Facebook groups in which information circulates about language classes and scholarships. As mentioned above, more than one-third of respondents (35%) heard of the language courses through social media:

Our primary advertisement is through social media. That’s where they hear it the most. Also, foreign students learn [about courses] from each other. (Interview 33)

There are other ways that institutions and organizations reach out to students. CSOs recruit students from beneficiaries who are visiting the center for other activities or services. In some cases, partnerships with ministries, with municipalities, or with organizations such as the Turkish Red Crescent were also formed in order to implement outreach activities and reach the most vulnerable groups. Many suggestions were provided to reach a wider audience. Some stakeholders suggested a general publicity program. The program would not only inform students about language courses but also create awareness on the importance of language learning. The Migration Management Department suggested communicating information through children who are in school (Interview 107).



### Course Registration Issues

Some logistical barriers emerge during the application process that make access to language courses more difficult. For example, several institutions do not give their information in Arabic, and Syrians have to fill out forms in Turkish. Registering often requires knowledge of how to use the online system. This is particularly difficult among older adults. Several rely on friends to get help with navigating the system. CSOs facilitate access to a complex web of courses that are offered by the municipality and the Ministry of National Education. The solution that CSOs have employed is having an Arabic speaker reach out to beneficiaries to advertise the courses and register students. They do not use online systems but rather reach out to individuals directly.

In addition, another barrier to registering for formal courses is the requirement of Syrians to identify their legal status given by the Turkish state. This automatically excludes individuals who are not registered in Turkey or in the city in which they live. As a solution, some CSOs have allowed students who are not registered to attend the courses, though they are not able to give them certificates:

We are not looking for refugees who are registered or unregistered. It doesn't matter for us. We are trying to help everyone the same. (Interview 87)

### Online Platform and Materials

In order to address some of these access issues (namely, limited capacity, time constraints, childcare responsibilities, distance to centers, among others), some suggested working on online educational platforms and materials such as radio programs or YouTube materials. Certain organizations such as Yunus Emre Institute already have in place an online portal for distance learning, which had existed prior to the massive influx of Syrian

refugees in Turkey. There are around 250,000 subscribers around the world (in 2019). The program is free of charge. Its content was adapted in the last year to meet the particular needs of refugees. UNDP representatives also mentioned a project in which they are developing a “blended learning approach,” combining face-to-face with distance learning. This new initiative, funded by the EU, will deliver Turkish language courses to 52,000 adult Syrians living in ten provinces across Turkey. The trainings aim to “better integrate Syrians aged 18 to 57 under Temporary Protection into economic, social and cultural life.” It uses a “blended training” model, which combines classroom learning, online programs, and a learning management system. UNDP also provides infrastructural and technical support to 53 PECs.

## THEME 2: DIFFERENT NEEDS

### Socio-Demographic Differences among Refugees

The profiles of refugees who are learning Turkish are extremely heterogeneous. As such their needs are different in terms of language education. While some are highly educated and already speak a second language such as English, others are relatively uneducated, illiterate in the Latin alphabet, or in rare cases, illiterate in the Arabic alphabet. The problem of illiteracy needs to be considered as a particular case. It is a very specific need to meet, different from the need for learning grammar or speaking skills. Indeed, Syrians who are illiterate face dual challenges: learning a new language and a new alphabet. This manifests in differences in the speed of reading and learning, according to classroom observations. The ages of students also have an impact on their needs with regard to learning. Older students are more likely not to have been exposed to Latin letters as compared to younger ones, who are exposed through the use of technology and knowledge of English. Older students reportedly read more slowly and are easily distracted, while younger ones have more ability to focus on the courses. Those who want to learn Turkish for business or for higher education also have different needs from each other. More educated students should learn more academic Turkish, while students who just want to learn Turkish for daily life should be able to focus on conversations. Students who are illiterate need more specific attention on learning the alphabet.

Students all take a placement test in which their level is ascertained according to the common European guidelines. The centers then divide their students accordingly into different classes. These tests are not tailored to distinguish different levels of lower literacy. Often learners' needs are different,

yet the teaching method and content is the same. It seems necessary to separate the students according to their level of education and type of Turkish that they want to learn for the classes to be more beneficial for all:

Educational background differs among Syrians. Some of them are illiterate and others have a very low education level, so these people don't care much about attending the courses and find it difficult to continue. They think that the courses are for conversation only and find that they are rather academic. Therefore, I think there should be conversation courses for these and more academic ones for the others. Another thing is the attendees of the courses are also from different educational backgrounds; for example, I'm an engineer and my wife is a teacher. We study with illiterate and low educated people in the same class, and the teacher repeats the lessons over and over and over and very slowly until we get bored. (Interview 66)

It is difficult for teachers to manage such a heterogeneous class, especially when they have not received sufficient training on how to handle this. The teachers we spoke to reported that teaching in a mixed class was difficult. In one case, a teacher had to start from teaching the alphabet, while some students were very bored (Interview 70). For this reason, some centers exclude illiterate people and set literacy as a prerequisite to attend the courses.

As a solution, one of the interviewed organizations has an "alphabet course" a few weeks before the start of the course to give those who are illiterate a basis and facilitate the experience of all of the students in the classroom. Stakeholders mentioned that when the literacy campaign was launched, the

lessons were given in a more accelerated format (76 instead of 120 hours). The idea to offer accelerated literacy training may help in reducing the discrepancy in proficiency levels among the students. Online programs (as mentioned earlier) can be useful, as their modular nature can be tailored and offers more flexibility. One of the stakeholders mentioned using a program in which individuals, in collaboration with a teacher, can start from the most appropriate module and work their way forward. This would also allow teachers to cater to differences among students with low literacy levels (Interview 90).

### Tailoring Courses to Different Needs

The particular needs of students with regard to language vary from case to case. In general, the difference in learners' needs depends on the students' ultimate goals. First and foremost, most refugees need to learn the type of language that can help them "survive" or meet their daily needs. They need to learn the language register and vocabulary to go to the hospital, to take the bus, to go to the market, to open a bank account, to enroll children in school, to apply for a work permit, etc. Some organizations offer informal classes or workshops and solely focus on these competencies. They have classes in which they discuss and practice such situations:

We try to meet their [refugees'] needs: to go to the hospital, what to ask, the pronunciation, shopping, when they take the bus, go to the grocer... I make them learn from practice. They want to learn how to pronounce letters. We have fun. We discuss. They don't want to be cheated at the market. (Interview 93)

Several interviewees reported the need for vocational type of language. The characteristics of language depend on employment type. The needs of people who own businesses are different than those who do housework or work in the service sector.

For instance, in jobs such as sales, restaurants, call centers, real estate, and tourism, speaking skills are particularly essential.<sup>18</sup>

The Istanbul governor's office (*valilik*) has taken the initiative to develop a curriculum for teaching Turkish on the job for workers in construction, adapted from a curriculum that was tested in Germany—although this has not yet been implemented in Turkey. A consortium was formed for the Workplace Enriched Language Course for Migrant Education project or "Welcome project." As an A2 level of proficiency in language is needed in order for individuals to attend vocational training, the programs that offer vocational training usually include a language education component before the vocational training. However, they follow the same system as the regular courses, i.e., they are not tailored particularly for vocational training purposes.

### Academic Turkish

The need for learning academic Turkish was also brought up by students and stakeholders. The regular classes at ISMEK and PECs are usually perceived as insufficient for the levels of reading and writing that are required at university. Language centers at universities (TÖMER or other) or some private centers are perceived as geared toward university studies. These options are costly, but these costs can be covered by scholarship programs (as described above). These programs aim to enable students to learn the vocabulary specific to their field of study by presenting them with academic articles in their field. Some centers sometimes invite faculty members to speak about their topic in the academic Turkish course. There is a variety of academic books, often prepared by the centers

18 Gökçe Uysal, Baran Alp Uncu, and Merve Akgül, "Suriyeli Gençlerin İşgücü Piyasasına Uyumunda Dil Engeli," Research Note (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir University Center for Economic and Social Research (Betam), May 10, 2018), <https://betam.bahcesehir.edu.tr/2018/05/suriyeli-genclerin-igucu-piyasasına-uyumunda-dil-engeli/>.

themselves, that include a variety of academic articles to be read in class:

We do something like this in academic Turkish... We call on the social sciences faculty academicians, for example, a teacher from literature and a teacher in economic and administrative sciences, to introduce their own departments and introduce their own terminology. The teachers come every week... they are constantly introducing their own concepts and terms. They are also chatting with the students for a day about their fields... They learn a little about terminology, about the department in which they will study. On other days our own teachers [from the science department] teach from our academic books for academic Turkish, and [we] use our new books. (Interview 29)

### **Need to Develop Speaking Skills**

Unlike those who want to pursue higher education, who want to develop their writing and reading, most other students stressed the need to practice speaking Turkish. Learning grammar in class is not sufficient. Students reported frustration with not being able to speak more inside and outside of class, as classes tend to be too structured around the course texts, and outside of class students lack communication with Turkish people:

We want to talk more in class, but the teacher tells us that we cannot because we are at A1 still. (Interview 67)

Dialogue, I want dialogue. For example, writing or grammar is not that important. Dialogue and talking is more important. (Interview 69)

Without practice, students felt that they could not progress in speaking regardless of the level of the grammar courses. Courses alone seemed insuf-

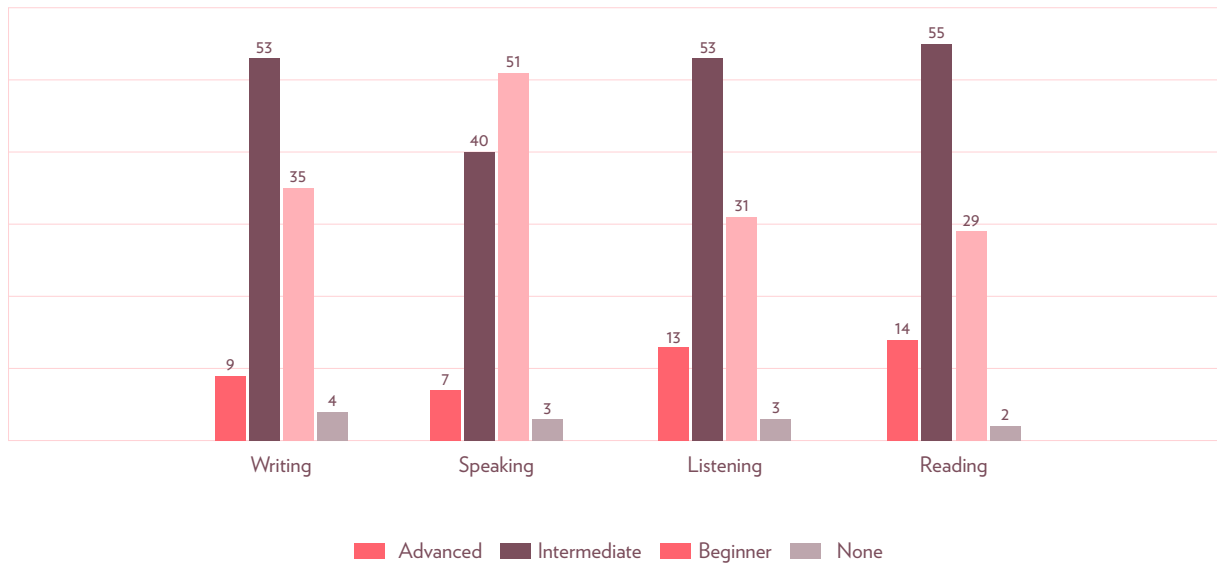
ficient for improving daily interactions. They give examples of individuals who have taken all levels of classes without knowing how to speak and, inversely, individuals who have acquired speaking skills without having attended classes. Listening is always perceived as easier than speaking, which results in frustrating situations in which though students mostly understand, they are not able to reply when someone talks to them in Turkish:

Now, [when] a Turkish person comes and talks to us, we understand what he says, but we do not manage to reply. We are not able to tie [words together] until now... When we started the course, we knew a few words; but thanks to the teacher we learned more words, but we still can't tie [them together]. Hopefully when the course finishes we'll be able to talk. (Interview 104)

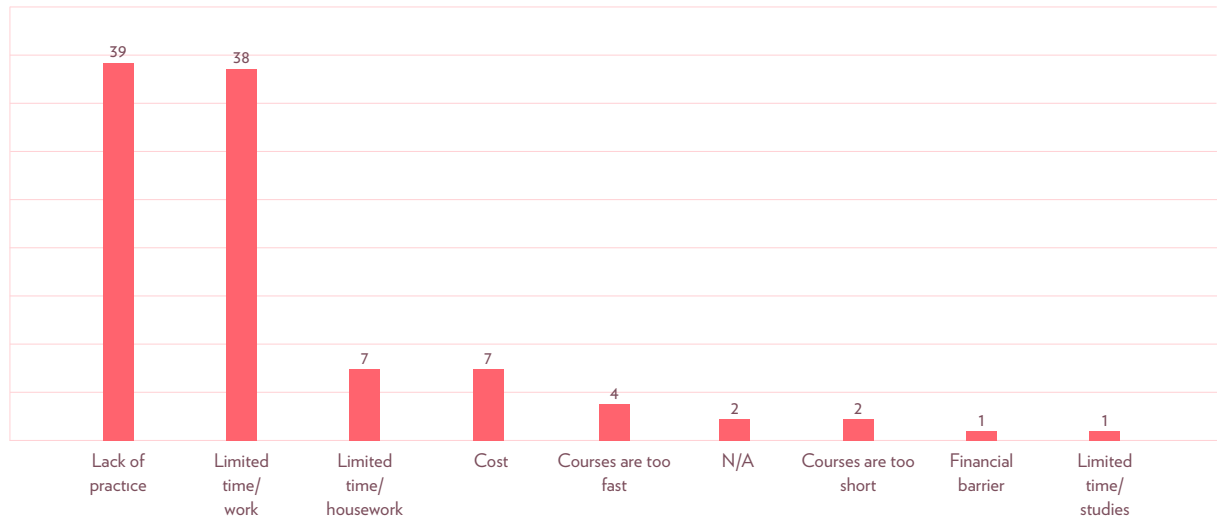
According to the survey results, the respondents generally perceived and rated their speaking and writing skills lower than their reading and listening skills. A higher percentage rated their reading (14%) and listening skills (13%) as advanced compared to writing (9%) and speaking skills (7%). Similarly, a higher percentage rated their reading (55%) and listening skills (53%) as intermediate compared to speaking (40%). In contrast, a higher percentage rated their speaking skills (51%) and writing skills (35%) as beginner as compared to listening (31%) and reading (29%).

The most important difficulty faced in learning the language appeared to be the lack of practice (39%), followed by having limited time to study language due to work (38%).

Perceived language skills (%)



Biggest difficulty faced in learning Turkish (%)

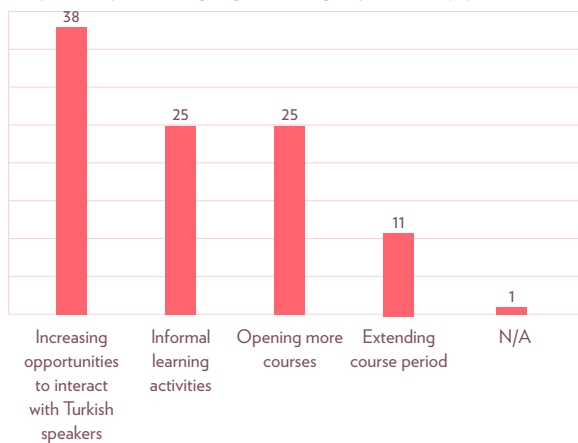


According to one expert, language uses are mixed: language learned in class is different from that used in day-to-day life. As such, he highlighted the importance of practice in daily life (Interview 98). In the classrooms, speaking practice was reported to be especially difficult when the classes are composed of Arabic speakers only. This was confirmed by our observations in the classrooms, as Arabic speakers tend to talk in Arabic among each other in class, explaining to each other and commenting on the discussion in the class (Interview 19). Some teachers set rules asking students not to speak Arabic among themselves but to practice Turkish with each other.

### Turkish Practice Outside the Classroom

Students' difficulties in terms of speaking hinder their relationships with Turkish people. They feel they cannot interact with their neighbors, and vice-versa their lack of interaction hinders their opportunities to practice. Several mentioned not being able to practice Turkish outside of the classroom. According to the results of the survey, most respondents felt like they needed more opportunities to interact with Turkish speakers (38%). This is followed by the need for informal activities and

Ways to improve language learning experience (%)



opening more courses (25% each) and extending the course period (11%).

One of the organizations reported that although Syrians use the Turkish that they learn in the classroom in places like in the park, in the market, etc., they feel like they do not have real dialogues. They do not socialize with Turkish speakers, only Syrians (Interview 3). In many cases, their interactions with Turkish people are often limited to their interaction with their teacher or with the center administrators. Time that students spend in class is the only time during which they speak Turkish in the day.

This issue is perceived to be more important for those who live in areas with high concentrations of Syrians. Having a lot of Syrian friends and neighbors in proximity further decreases their chances of interacting with Turkish people. A woman told us about her daughter who lives in Bursa and became fluent much quicker as all her friends were Turkish. While she herself, living in Istanbul around Syrians, has still not learned much and was in level A1.

Having Turkish friends was often mentioned as an essential factor in helping Syrians improve their language skills, especially among university students, those who work with Turkish people, or those who are friends with their Turkish neighbors. This gives them a way to practice:

I had two Turkish girlfriends. They benefited me a lot. Knowing that I didn't know how to write, these two girls were always sending me messages. (Interview 63)

When asked with whom Syrians communicated in Turkish the most, we found that most said Turkish friends and neighbors (29%), followed by colleagues (18%), waiters and sales persons (17%), Turkish authorities (13%), and employers (12%).

Persons with whom Syrians communicate in Turkish (%)



### Suggestions to Increase Social Interaction

Teachers and organizations are generally aware of the fact that further language practice is needed. One organization pointed out the importance of including social and conversational language in the content of the course and curriculum for language learning (Interview 79). Some organizations have been organizing conversation classes or creating opportunities for interactions with Turkish people. In universities, they invite Turkish students as volunteers to speak Turkish with foreign students in a structured manner (Interview 98). Several interviewees suggested opening local centers for conversation in municipalities or cultural exchange activities between Syrian and Turkish people:

We designed social integration projects for women and men, but since men are working, it is not easy to build a project for them... We arranged food introduction programs for women. We provided food cards (that can be used in stores), and municipalities opened kitchens. Women got together in those kitchens and cooked their own dishes; for example, one cooked falafel, the others did trileçe. It was a really good project. It

happened among small groups in six municipalities. (Interview 58)

Several organizations mentioned that it is usually difficult to attract Turkish participants for these projects. The organizations that were the most successful were those that work with a variety of associations and institutions in the district (such as mayors, religious directorate, CSOs, and political parties) as they already have established connections with the local people.

A stakeholder suggested seeking municipalities' help to pair up Turkish volunteers with Syrian partners. To develop relationships, they can work toward a common goal like cooking together for a charity. He suggested that Syrian women can teach Quran to other women or organize food exchanges for breaking the fast during Ramadan. These initiatives can be integrated with an ISMEK course on cooking (Interview 80). Another stakeholder suggested recruiting Turkish neighbors as language coaches (Interview 90). Some municipalities have been organizing trips for individuals, including Syrian and Turkish individuals, making sure the participants were a mixed group of Syrians and Turkish people. They do not allow them to speak Arabic. They make them sit one Turk, one Syrian.

The municipality gives them the bus and equipment (Interview 91). The idea of an all-expenses paid trip by the municipality represents a good way to attract participants. Some schools also organize social days inviting parents (Turkish and Syrian) to come and bond. A school director mentioned that they do fun days once a year, with music and food, and perceives them to be beneficial. (Interview 102)

These activities are more successful when the activity is mutually beneficial for both parties. For instance, some activities match Turkish language learners with Turkish students who are going to become teachers of Turkish as a foreign language within conversation clubs. It is beneficial for the latter as they gain experience with foreign students who are trying to learn the language. In addition, such activities are considered as a volunteering experience on their CVs. One of the stakeholders even mentioned giving out certificates of participation:

We said if you work for us for a certain number of hours we will give you a certificate of participation that you can put on your CV. Participating in such voluntary project looks good on your CV. Also, there were some who wanted to learn Arabic or English and get to know a foreigner. They met and made plans to get together on the weekend to speak Arabic for one hour and Turkish for one hour. It has been nice. (Interview 99)

Language exchanges are mutually beneficial for both parties in the exchange. Some individuals themselves have initiated contact with Turkish students who wanted to learn Arabic. Language centers have carried out activities matching Turkish individuals who want to learn Arabic with Syrians who want to learn Turkish:

We do happy hours between classes where students from Turkish and Arabic class come

together and talk on a preplanned topic in order to practice. (Interview 16)

The centers that plan such activities indicate that these events should be educational and structured. They sometimes prearrange the topics to be discussed during the activity with exercises or lists of questions to guide the discussion. Informal conversation practice should preferably be structured and fit into the curriculum. A center also organized an event that aimed to promote the Arabic language. In this event, both Turkish and Arabic-speaking individuals participated. The performance started with a Turkish national hymn sung in Turkish and Arabic by a Syrian and a Turkish person, respectively. It was followed by additional performances, for example, a poetry reading.

One of the students suggested the idea of carrying out literacy classes together with Turkish and Syrian people, organized by PECs. An organization reported that they will start a project in which they offer Arabic lessons and literacy courses for both Turkish and refugee populations. In addition, one of the teachers mentioned giving diction lessons in seminars to teach foreigners how to pronounce things and distinguish spoken from written language.

### **Teaching Materials**

There are a few sets of books that are widely used and recognized for teaching Turkish to foreigners: Hittite (Ankara University TÖMER), Istanbul (Istanbul University TÖMER), Yedi İklim (Yunus Emre Institute), and Gazi set (Gazi University). Each of these sets was prepared according to the norms set by the Ministry of National Education. Though there are some differences in the way the material is presented in each of these books in terms of colors, drawings, and density of texts, they are generally geared toward potential university students. This leaves out students with different needs, as described above.



The decision about which books to use is taken through different mechanisms depending on the center. Sometimes this decision is taken under a broader initiative, whereby books are distributed to several centers and branches. In this case, books are provided to students free of charge through the ministry, funded by a third party (by large CSOs), or by individual CSOs themselves to students directly. In other cases, there is a bidding process that takes place for such a centralized decision, resulting in agreements with particular publishers. The centers usually review the sets and decide according to teachers' experiences in using these sets:

Hittite and Ankara are difficult. We definitely don't use them. We spoke about this with all the teachers. We analyzed them [Turkish textbooks] all. Later, we founded a commission with a few teachers. We examined existing books and new books. We looked and researched. (Interview 17)

In fewer cases, the decision is left to the center administrator, coordinator, or teacher. Different preferences emerged in the interviews regarding these sets. Some felt that diction should be included in the books as spoken language is sometimes different from written language. Others thought that the representation of Turkish culture is important and should be included, while some pointed out that the topics needed updating. There was also some criticism with regard to the grammar content of these books not being adapted to the needs of the students, i.e., too simple and insufficient for conversations in the first levels, A1, A2, and too advanced after B2:

We have this problem with the book. For instance, A1 level only covers present time, but in class, when talking, we use the past. And students automatically ask, so we have to teach it extra. Of course, a book cannot cover

everything. For example, there aren't animal names, there are fruit names. (Interview 17)

Several stakeholders identified the need for more teaching materials, namely materials adapted to teaching literacy. The books they use for literacy are reading-writing books from Turkish primary schools. There is a lack of books for teaching literacy to foreign adults. In addition, some raised the need for books that are specifically tailored for Arabic speakers. In addition, the existing sets do not contain materials especially for teaching academic Turkish to prepare students for areas of study. Each center uses different books or materials.

### THEME 3: TEACHER COMPETENCIES

The vast majority of respondents selected “quality of teacher” as the most important criteria to learn the language (59%).

The quality of the teacher also appeared to be very important from students’ point of view. Those who liked their teachers were more likely to succeed, whereas students who were not satisfied with their teachers lose motivation. They attributed their achievements to the teachers:

For us, our teacher helped us to like this language... A big part of my success in language is because of her. (Interview 82)

#### Student-Teacher Relations

The relationship between students and teachers is deemed important for learning, especially as the teacher is often the students’ only Turkish contact. According to our observations, favorable teacher-student relations were conducive to investment in learning. Interviews with teachers also reveal that teachers often perceive themselves to be close to the students and develop family-like relation-

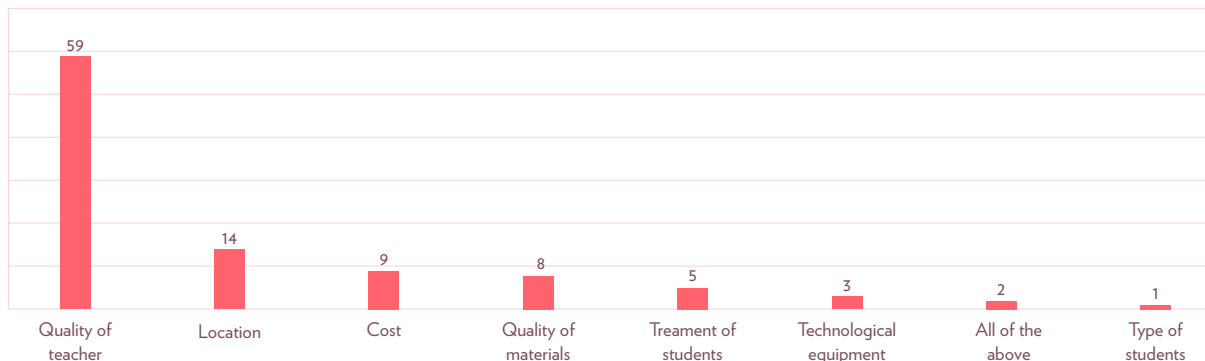
ships. Some report laughing with their students during class time. There are frequently mentions of students bringing food to the classroom to share with their teacher. Students expressed the importance of this relationship as follows:

Either they demoralize, or they raise us... the teacher gives us a lot of encouragement, makes us feel self-confident... we are like a sensitive child. We are refugees here. We feel like one word raises us and one word makes us fall down. (Interview 104)

#### Selection of Teachers and On-the-Job Training

The Ministry of National Education requires all PECs or CSOs that have signed protocols to hire teachers who are university graduates with a degree in Turkish literature or Turkish language. However, these degrees prepare teachers to teach language and literature to native Turkish speakers, not to foreigners. Only some of these programs may include a few hours of teaching Turkish as a second language:

Most important criteria to learn Turkish (%)



Education faculties have Turkish teaching departments. Those departments also teach Turkish to foreigners, but there are still not enough hours. The lessons have been created to help students with the relevant culture. (Interview 29)

Stakeholders highlighted the inadequacy of graduates of Turkish language and literature who do not have certificates in teaching Turkish as a second language.<sup>19</sup> Teachers often have to figure out themselves how to adapt to the particular needs of foreigners. In addition, many students stated that their teachers are going too fast for them. In contrast, teachers in the TÖMER centers in universities have to adhere to another set of criteria set by YÖK. They are required to have received a certificate for teaching Turkish as a second language. In addition to these requirements, each center has its own regulations for selecting teachers. Some do written exams, interviews, or require additional test scores. They look for criteria such as their willingness to continue to develop, their level of energy, and their diction, among others.

In order to address the inadequacy of teachers, some of the centers train teachers on the job. Some of these trainings include training on body language and service education. In others the training is more practical and involves attending classes and observing. In some cases, the teachers themselves are observed practicing teaching and receive comments from their more experienced peers or supervisors. Given the lack of standardized training, though all centers adopt the same curriculum as outlined by the guidelines of the Common European Framework, the lack of training in second language instruction results in discrepancies.

<sup>19</sup> Teaching Turkish as a second language refers to teaching Turkish to students who live in a Turkish-speaking country like Turkey (as opposed to teaching Turkish as a foreign language to students who do not live in a Turkish-speaking country).

### Certificate Programs

As the need to teach Turkish as a second language to foreigners has only newly emerged in Turkey, there are few training programs in this area that are gradually developing. Some of the interviewed teachers had obtained these certificates or graduate degrees in universities or centers. Some are well established, such as the training programs by the Yunus Emre Institute and TÖMER centers in universities. Other centers have developed their own programs progressively.

These certificates are not standardized. Each center offers a different number of hours, duration of the program, and curriculum. The Yunus Emre Institute certificate is one of the first programs established. The courses last ten hours per day, five days a week (including theory and practice at TÖMER) for the duration of four weeks. In other places, such as Marmara University, the program includes a total of 90 hours of instruction and takes around one month. The certificates mostly focus on teaching all four skills. While some focus more on theory, others offer observations and mock lessons based on evaluation criteria. There are exams to evaluate teachers' level of competence at the end of the course.

The shortcomings of some of these certificate programs were highlighted in the interviews. Some perceive that the theoretical base in some of these certificates is weak, as it relies a lot on hands-on practice in class with students. In other cases, the teachers felt that the certificates lacked real-life practice. Some pointed out that the duration of the curriculum was too short. This leads to superficial coverage of the materials:

Um, no, of course I didn't find it sufficient. While teaching, lecturing, I kind of taught myself too because the training I got was a four-month training anyways. I mean, a four-month training is not enough training for teaching Turkish to foreigners. (Interview 91)

The centers that offer teacher training indicated during the interview that they had collaborated in some cases with institutions such as municipalities of areas with a high concentration of refugees to provide teacher education to teachers who will teach refugees:

Last year, we trained all of their teachers in Istanbul. As an institution, we usually train teachers. We train teachers who are beginners. Because teaching Turkish to foreign students is a whole different field than normal Turkish education. (Interview 28)

The main issue appears to be that these programs and curricula are not standardized, but instead their content, duration, and style varies from center to center. They have emerged ad hoc and have proliferated particularly as the context required more and more teachers to teach Turkish to foreigners.

### Suggestions for Training Certificates

Other countries also faced difficulties with regard to second language instruction and developed solutions to design and more broadly disseminate teacher training. In Germany, prior to the influx of refugees around 2015, teachers were required to have a bachelor's in education, a master's degree, and complete practicum to be able to teach German as a second language. However, given the shortage of teachers, some universities started developing a one-semester certificate program that was created for teaching German to newcomers. As outlined by the director of such a program, it aims to teach those who studied German or German linguistics in their bachelor's degree through three modules: (1) multilingualism and language contact, (2) second-language acquisition and instruction, (3) practice and reflection (Interview 51).

Another potential solution for delivering standardized training, particularly one that incorporates theory and hands-on experience for teachers of

Turkish as a second language, is the renowned Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA). The idea behind CELTA is to show trainers examples of how teaching works, not teaching them, per se. They give assignments, practice exercises, ask them to interview students speaking, and analyze mistakes. This training includes input sessions in which the teachers are taught units/topics such as the ones listed below. It also includes teaching practice, which involves lesson planning, mock teaching, feedback sessions, and written assignments (Interview 89). Figure 1 details the suggested topics, with 1.5–6 hours of training per topic (Interview 95).

### Suggested Units/Topics for Training Teachers

- Classroom management: instruction for activities, using the board, correcting, organizing group work, checking what students are doing, giving feedback
- Teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, speaking
- Language analysis: understanding students' problems, analyzing your own language from the students' points of view
- Using technology: applications, surveys, etc.
- Adapting course books, different questions, testing, writing quizzes
- Teaching monolingual classes: when to use native language to explain something, teaching beginners
- Functional language: asking for something, ordering, doing demonstrations in class, asking for the bill; correcting
- Modules that are specific to refugees: teaching illiterate individuals, social/psychological side, trauma sensitivity

There should be a standard certificate recognized by an institution such as the Ministry of Education or YÖK that should be required from all teachers who teach Turkish as a second language in addition to having obtained a degree in Turkish language or literature. Some initiatives are being put in place by UNHCR through the Ministry of National Education to include a teacher-training component in their programs in collaboration with recognized institutes. Similarly, UNDP's online program also includes a teacher-training component, mainly focusing on teaching the particular style and curriculum of such a program. One of our interviewees, an expert in language training for teachers in foreign languages, provided suggestions about how to deliver training to a large number of trainers. He suggested a cascade model whereby a few master teachers are trained. Each of these would then train more trainers or teachers, or alternatively, a fixed number of full-time trainers can continuously train teachers in batches (Interview 95). This stakeholder also identified the need for the professionalization of Turkish teachers in training for second language education (Interview 95). An organization, YADOT, facilitates this process as it organizes conferences each semester, inviting speakers and attendees that are professionals working in the field in Turkey.

### **Tailored Training Curriculum for Teaching Syrians**

There were several specific suggestions to include in the curriculum for teaching Turkish as a second language to Syrians. The certificate curriculum would include modules that are specific to Syrian refugees, including, for example, "psychological, sociological base knowledge, Arabic grammar and commonalities" (Interview 95).

First, several stakeholders mentioned that it is important for teachers who will work with refugees to learn how to deal with a psychologically vulnerable group having undergone traumatic experi-

ences. This may include a module on awareness of sensitive topics that should not be mentioned (families, home countries, etc.) or on equipping teachers to address certain needs:

Specifically teaching Syrians, one needs psychology training. Some of the students lost their parents; they might have reactions. There are some who faint; they have panic attacks, tremble in the exams. (Interview 99)

Second, this certificate could include information about how to teach and deal with mixed levels in the classroom. As previously discussed the level of students varies greatly depending on the center. Some of the students may be illiterate in their own language or in the Latin alphabet, while others might be highly educated. This can be combined with skills on how to motivate students to learn through making the classes more enjoyable and interactive by using multimedia materials and through organizing appropriate events.

Third, there are specific skills that can be taught for those who are teaching language to students who do not have any prior knowledge of Turkish. This is particularly important in the first level as the teacher needs to be able to transmit information and instructions to the class. They suggest using methods such as drama, theater, drawing, and hands-on activities to make sure that the message reaches students. Stakeholders mentioned that during the first weeks, the fact that the teacher does not speak Arabic makes it difficult to understand. It is thus important to train teachers to be able to reach students who do not know Turkish in order not to lose them.

Some stakeholders suggested hiring teachers who are themselves not native Turkish speakers. These teachers would act as role models for students learning Turkish. In classes in which all of the students' native language is Arabic, knowledge of the basics of Arabic language among teachers

was brought up as a factor that would create more familiarity in the classroom between teachers and students. According to our observations, it helped make the lessons more engaging. One of the teachers, for instance, since the first class of A1 level, had captured the attention of the entire class for three straight hours every session by acting, mixing languages, making comedy, and drawing links with what is familiar to the students by giving examples of Arabic grammar and demonstrating how it was different or similar (based on class observations). Teachers who knew the basics in Arabic pointed out that knowledge of Arabic grammar was useful. Those who had studied Ottoman could also benefit from their knowledge. Some also stated that they had learned a little bit of Arabic from the students themselves. Students feel more comfortable when the teacher knows Arabic, as it helps them to ask and engage with the teacher.

He gives us the meaning in Arabic and Turkish so that we understand it better... Honestly, we are very comfortable with him because it is difficult for us in Turkish. We ask him what it is, and he explains it in Arabic... If they tell us they will change the teacher, we would not come [laughs]. (Interview 104)

While using the same materials that are designed for all foreign students, when faced with a classroom with Syrian or Arabic-speaking students only, teachers could be trained to use additional tools in order to address this audience and more effectively reach the students. While several teachers mentioned that knowledge of Arabic was beneficial, centers and students in a few rare cases indicated that they preferred not to have a mediating language. Rather, they emphasized the importance of teachers only using Turkish in class.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the importance of language education for adult refugees, there should be a national policy to reach all Syrian adults in a more systematic manner. For this to happen, there needs to be a paradigm shift at the state level involving the acceptance of the presence of Syrians in Turkey and of the status of Turkey as a host country. It took Germany several decades to recognize that it had become a country of immigration and to start developing integration policies, including language education for newcomers. Further, the development of a national policy and strategy would involve the coordination between various ministries, namely the Ministry of National Education Lifelong Learning Department, the Ministry of Interior Affairs Migration Management Department, and the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs. CSOs and other organizations should be given a particular role in developing and facilitating these processes. In order to encourage language learning in line with Syrians' long-term stay in Turkey, Turkish citizenship could be linked to learning Turkish. The shift toward a more centralized system in terms of funding through the protocol system seems to be favored by actors in state institutions. However, these initiatives continue to be project-based, time- and resource-bound at the local level. The state institutions then become implementors of these initiatives. The idea of widening access to language in a sustainable, policy-driven manner is absent in the official discourse. State efforts need to focus on developing an overall strategy for language learning in consultation with state actors and actors in the field to ensure long-term sustainability once the funding stops. In addition, there is a need for evaluation, tracking, and monitoring the learning process at a central level rather than leaving it to the initiative of individuals. As such, there could be efforts to monitor who is taking which courses and who is not able to access them. The Ministry of

National Education already collects this data (on the e-yaygin database), and the Migration Management Department has the full data on registered individuals under temporary protection. Bringing together these datasets would allow the state to gain more information about access.

### Refugees' Access to Language Classes

- 1 | **Capacity:** PECs started using different spaces for offering courses to adults in collaboration with other facilities, namely schools and municipalities. However, at the moment, this collaboration depends on the willingness of the school and of the PECs. It should be required for certain PECs and a predetermined number of schools to offer these classes, and resources should be provided accordingly to the actors involved.
- 2 | **Distance to the center:** Some initiatives have been providing transportation through shuttle service or reimbursing transportation fees. The solution of offering classes in each local neighborhood school in collaboration with PECs (as mentioned above) is more systematic.
- 3 | **Number of teachers:** In order to address the shortage of teachers and resulting limited capacity issue, initiatives can be launched to train and recruit Turkish volunteers in each neighborhood to be "language coaches" through PECs. This option promotes and ensures some degree of relations between Turkish and Syrian individuals in the neighborhood. This effort could be linked to the abovementioned initiative to open classes in local schools in areas with a high density of Syrians.

**4 | Time constraints:** Course times should be chosen in dialogue with beneficiaries. There should be more flexibility in scheduling courses to fit students' demand as is already being done in most initiatives. Alternatively, an optimal solution would be to follow the model of European countries, in which refugees are provided with the opportunity to study the language when they first arrive while receiving financial support. UNDP and the online portal learning system of the Yunus Emre Institute have launched a program offering online courses merged with a face-to-face "blended learning approach."

**5 | Cost:** The courses within PECs and municipalities are free of charge. A limited number of scholarships by YTB have emerged to cover the costs of language centers at universities for potential students. However, the number of beneficiaries is still limited, and their number will likely further decrease. There could be a policy to lift the fees for these courses for Syrians who wish to study academic Turkish (similarly to public university tuitions).

**6 | Childcare responsibilities:** Some CSOs are already providing childcare facilities in their centers, but this service remains limited. This is particularly useful for women who wish to access language education. In courses implemented in schools, a school staff member could be hired to watch the children in a nearby classroom while their mothers are studying. In absence of childcare, teachers could allow mothers to bring their children into the classroom and provide sufficient distractions.

**7 | Permission from family:** Involving other family members in the activities in the classes or centers to create an atmosphere of trust

and appease family dynamics makes it more likely for women to be allowed to attend classes.

**8 | Information about course offering:** The Migration Management Department could create a website with a map outlining all different language learning options, where all the different service providers are located, and details about course registration (along the lines of the German website: [Meinwegnachdeutschland.de](http://Meinwegnachdeutschland.de)). The website should be in Arabic, disseminated through text message to all registered Syrians, and advertised through social media. For those who would not be able to access information on a website, this information could be linked to the existing migration management department call center (number 157). The call center can refer them to Arabic speakers who can register them in courses in the closest center. This website can also advertise the online programs mentioned above. At the time of writing, there was a website being developed by the Migration Management Department called "Live In Turkey" as well as a mobile application that offers limited information on this topic.

**9 | Word of mouth** is also important for circulating information. Currently, some Syrian individuals, previously teachers, are being hired within the PECs to spread information on Turkish language courses within the Syrian community. This information can be spread more systematically through coordination with the Migration Management Department.

**10 | Legal status:** Having a legal registration status should not be obligatory for the application for language classes or to obtain certificates.



## Different Needs


- 1 | **Profile of students in classes:** Students should be separated according to their level of literacy and purpose of learning Turkish. This would involve designing several types of curricula focusing namely on needs for business or vocation, for conversation, higher education, and a special (possibly accelerated) curriculum for literacy for adults, which could be offered prior to the courses. The vocational language training can also be part of on-the-job training in companies, along the curriculum developed by the Welcome project. The online programs mentioned above can also give flexibility to teachers to teach at different literacy skill levels.
- 2 | **Teaching Materials:** The current teaching materials are geared toward students who will pursue higher education; additional course books could be developed for different purposes and groups as described above (namely to address different levels of literacy).
- 3 | **Language practice:** This requires intensifying practice and developing more active skills (speaking and writing) through opportunities to interact with native Turkish speakers. Creating mutually beneficial opportunities and structured activities for Turkish and Syrian residents to do together would be a good solution. Another solution involves recruiting and training volunteers in each local neighborhood. These volunteers could be “language coaches” in charge of bringing together Syrian and Turkish residents for mutually beneficial activities or conversation groups. Such initiatives can be led by the municipalities in coordination with PECs. This would be particularly beneficial for women who do not practice speak-

ing due to the lack of interaction with neighbors. This initiative would attract Turkish people who want to learn Arabic, those who want to become teachers of Turkish for foreigners, or those who want to gain volunteering experience. Literacy classes could also be offered for both Turks and Syrians.

## Teachers' Competencies

- 1 | **Criteria for selecting teachers:** Teachers should be required to obtain a degree in “Teaching Turkish to Speakers of Other Languages” or a recognized and centrally established certificate for teaching Turkish to foreigners (similar to YÖK).
- 2 | **Teacher training:** There should be a standardized curriculum for teaching Turkish to foreigners including a balance between theoretical and practical methods and experience. The CELTA is a good example of this.
- 3 | **Training content:** Training should include specific units geared toward teaching refugees: namely, some basics in Arabic language and teaching Turkish to Arabic speakers, how to deal with refugees having undergone traumatic experiences, how to tailor instruction to different needs, and how to motivate students and make the classes more interactive. Illiterate refugees need to learn how to read, starting with the most basic skills often taken for granted by a literate individual,<sup>20</sup> possibly solved through the presence of a bilingual educator or bilingual assistant alongside the educator.

<sup>20</sup> John Benseman, “Adult Refugee Learners with Limited Literacy: Needs and Effective Responses,” *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugee* 30, no. 1 (May 6, 2014): 93–103.



In the future, after language instruction, there has been a move toward supporting vocational training for Syrians as part of the exit plan strategy of the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program. However, before moving on with these plans, there should be a structure that systematically addresses the above points. A shift from humanitarian aid to sustainable social services requires a concerted effort on the part of state actors in the Turkish government to create a clear strategy for language learning.

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**ANNEXES**
**Annex A: List of Interviews**

No.	Date	Institution	Location	Position
<b>State Institutions</b>				
20	2018.11.09	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Coordinator
23	2018.11.13	Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR)	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Director
55	2018.12.03	YTB Türkiye Scholarships	Ankara	Expert
56	2018.12.03	YTB Türkiye Scholarships	Ankara	Expert
57	2018.12.03	YTB Türkiye Scholarships	Ankara	Expert
71	2018.12.13	Ministry of National Education - Lifelong Learning Department	Ankara	Public Relations Director
72	2018.12.13	Ministry of National Education - Lifelong Learning Department	Ankara	Project Expert
73	2018.12.13	Ministry of National Education - Lifelong Learning Department	Ankara	Project Expert
74	2018.12.13	Ministry of National Education - Lifelong Learning Department	Ankara	Protocol Unit
75	2018.12.18	Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR)	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Project Coordinator
101	2019.01.04	Ministry of National Education - Lifelong Learning Department	Istanbul, Fatih	Director of Lifelong Learning
102	2019.04.12	Fuat Soylu Middle School	Istanbul, Şişli	Director
107	2019.06.17	Directorate General of Migration Management	Ankara	Project Coordinator
<b>CSOs</b>				
1	2018.09.06	Support to Life	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Project Officer
2	2018.09.13	SGDD-ASAM	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Coordinator
3	2018.09.13	SGDD-ASAM	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Coordinator
11	2018.10.11	Support to Life	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Livelihood Officer
12	2018.10.11	Support to Life	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Community Center Manager
14	2018.10.11	Support to Life	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Livelihoods Project Officer
21	2018.10.11	UNHCR	Ankara	Protection Associate
41	2018.11.22	Joblinge	Berlin, Mitte	Vocational center

No.	Date	Institution	Location	Position
44	2018.11.23	Diakoniewerk Simeon Gmbh Jugendmigrationsdienst	Berlin, Treptow-Köpenick	Social Worker
46	2018.11.24	Ulme 35	Berlin	Founding Member
49	2018.11.26	Flüchtlingskirche	Berlin	Volunteer
53	2018.12.03	UNHCR	Ankara	Associate Education Officer
54	2018.12.03	UNHCR	Ankara	Associate Education Officer
58	2018.12.04	WALD	Istanbul, Fatih	Project Coordinator
59	2018.12.04	WALD	Istanbul, Fatih	Team Leader
78	2019.01.10	UNDP	Ankara	Director of Adult Language Training Component
79	2019.01.16	Turkish as a Foreign Language Education Association (YADOT)	Istanbul	Coordinator
80	2019.01.16	Turkish as a Foreign Language Education Association (YADOT)	Istanbul	Director
84	2019.02.19	Association for Refugees	Istanbul, Sultanbeyli	Education Coordinator
85	2019.02.27	Açev	Istanbul, Mecidiyeköy	Director
86	2019.03.06	Association for Refugees	Istanbul, Sultanbeyli	Fundraiser and Networker
87	2019.03.06	Association for Refugees	Istanbul, Sultanbeyli	External Relations
93	2019.03.18	Kadav	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Founder/Director
106	2019.05.25	Yunus Emre Institute	Ankara	Expert
<b>Language centers</b>				
6	2018.09.27	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Fatih	Head of Communication
8	2018.10.01	Goethe Institute	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Director
9	2018.10.02	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Assistant Publishing Editor
10	2018.10.02	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Publishing Editor
15	2018.10.31	Public Education Center	Istanbul, Fatih	Assistant Director
16	2018.11.07	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Language Coordinator
22	2018.11.13	Goethe Institute	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Coordinator
27	2018.11.16	Public Education Center	Istanbul, Fatih	Assistant Director
28	2018.11.18	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Tophane	Academic Coordinator
29	2018.11.19	Yıldız Teknik University	Istanbul, Davutpaşa	Manager

**INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND SYRIAN REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES WITH TURKISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TURKEY**

No.	Date	Institution	Location	Position
30	2018.11.19	ISMEK	Istanbul, Esenler	Teacher
31	2018.11.20	Akademlstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	Public Relations Director
32	2018.11.20	Akademlstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	Education Advisor
33	2018.11.20	Akademlstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	General Manager
40	2018.11.22	VHS	Berlin, Antonstrasse	Language Center
43	2018.11.23	Integrationskursträger dtz-bildung & qualifizierung	Berlin, Neukölln	Manager
50	2018.11.27	VHS	Berlin, Pankow	Program Director
52	2018.11.30	Moabit Hilft	Berlin, Turmstrasse	Founder/Volunteer
77	2019.01.10	Bea	Berlin, Brandenburg	Coordinator
89	2019.03.12	International Training Institute	Istanbul, Kağıthane	Director
92	2019.03.14	Yıldız Teknik University	Istanbul, Davutpaşa	Faculty
94	2019.03.18	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Director
95	2019.03.21	International Training Institute	Ankara	Ankara Director
96	2019.03.25	Marmara University	Istanbul, Göztepe	Teacher Trainer
97	2019.03.25	Marmara University	Istanbul, Göztepe	Teacher Trainer
99	2019.03.28	Fatih Sultan Mehmet University	Istanbul, Fatih	Director
105	2019.05.08	Public Education Center	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Director
<b>Teachers</b>				
4	2018.09.15	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Fatih	Teacher
5	2018.09.27	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Fatih	Teacher
7	2018.09.27	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Fatih	Teacher
13	2018.10.11	Support to Life	Istanbul, Küçükçekmece	Teacher
17	2018.11.07	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Expert Language Teacher
39	2018.11.20	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Teacher
70	2018.12.12	WALD	Istanbul, Sultangazi	Teacher
76	2019.01.10	Joblinge	Berlin	German Teacher
91	2019.03.13	Association for Refugees	Istanbul, Sultanbeyli	Teacher
103	2019.04.16	Cezayirli Gazi Hasanpaşa Primary School	Istanbul, Kasımpaşa	Project Coordinator

No.	Date	Institution	Location	Position
<b>Academics</b>				
42	2018.11.22	Humboldt University	Berlin	Faculty
45	2018.11.23	Evangelische Hochschule	Berlin	Faculty
51	2018.11.28	Humboldt University	Berlin	Faculty
60	2018.12.04	University Duisburg-Essen	Duisburg-Essen	Faculty
88	2019.03.11	Boğazici University	Istanbul	Faculty
90	2019.03.12	University of Minnesota	Duluth, Minnesota	Faculty
98	2019.03.26	University College London	London	Lecturer
<b>Students</b>				
18	2018.11.07	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
19	2018.11.09	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Group of Students
24	2018.11.14	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
25	2018.11.14	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
26	2018.11.14	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
34	2018.11.20	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
35	2018.11.20	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
36	2018.11.20	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
37	2018.11.20	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
38	2018.11.20	Municipality	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
47	2018.11.25	Goethe Institute	Berlin	Student
48	2018.11.25	Goethe Institute	Berlin	Student
61	2018.12.11	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
62	2018.12.11	ISMEK	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
63	2018.12.11	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Student
64	2018.12.11	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Student
65	2018.12.11	Istanbul University	Istanbul, Beyoğlu	Student
66	2018.12.12	WALD	Istanbul, Sultangazi	Student
67	2018.12.12	WALD	Istanbul, Sultangazi	Student



**INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND SYRIAN REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES WITH TURKISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TURKEY**

No.	Date	Institution	Location	Position
68	2018.12.12	WALD	Istanbul, Sultangazi	Student
69	2018.12.12	WALD	Istanbul, Sultangazi	Student
81	2019.01.17	AkdemIstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
82	2019.01.17	AkdemIstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
83	2019.01.17	AkdemIstanbul	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
100	2019.03.28	Fatih Sultan Mehmet University	Istanbul, Fatih	Student
104	2019.04.16	Cezayirli Gazi Hasanpaşa Primary School	Istanbul, Kasımpaşa	Group of Students

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