

October 2014

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Syrian University Students
and Scholars in Turkey

By: Keith David Watenpaugh, Adrienne L. Fricke, James R. King



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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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with Chris Gratien and Seçil Yilmaz

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This report on the conditions and educational needs of Syrian university students and scholars in Turkey is part of a broader regional study by IIE and the UC Davis Human Rights Initiative. It follows the May 2013 report “Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syrian Refugee University Students and Scholars in Jordan” and the June 2014 report “The War Follows Them: Syrian University Students and Scholars in Lebanon.” The project brings together field-based research in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to assess the impact of the conflict in Syria and the resulting refugee crisis on higher education. It aims to provide policy and program recommendations for use by governments, multilateral agencies, international NGOs, donors, universities, and other institutions, with the overall goal of improving access to higher education opportunities for displaced and refugee Syrian university students and faculty. The project also explores Syrians’ human right to education in these front-line hosting states. A final study will be published by early 2015.

Institute of International Education

The Institute of International Education (IIE) designs and implements programs of study and training for students, educators, young professionals, and trainees from all sectors. Established in 1919 as an independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, IIE administers over 250 programs serving more than 35,000 individuals each year.

IIE, Higher Education Emergencies, and the Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF)

This study derives from IIE’s longstanding commitment to support higher education and national academies during periods of repression or emergency. IIE has assisted displaced and persecuted students and scholars since its founding, and has helped students and scholars fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution, Nazi Germany, and post-war Iraq. This commitment was formalized in 2002 with the creation of the IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF), which provides academic fellowships and life-saving support to professors, researchers, and public intellectuals who face threats to their lives or careers. IIE-SRF has assisted nearly 600 scholars from 51 countries, in partnership with more than 300 hosting academic institutions in 40 countries.

In response to the crisis in Syria, IIE has provided emergency support and educational opportunities to over 350 Syrian faculty and university students whose lives, education, and academic work have been threatened due to the conflict. For this work with Syrian scholars, IIE-SRF was awarded the Middle East Studies Association’s 2013 Academic Freedom Award. In addition to IIE-SRF, the IIE Syria Consortium for Higher Education in Crisis has enabled more than 100 Syrian university students to resume their studies at member institutions in the U.S. and globally. IIE’s Emergency Student Fund (ESF) has also supported Syrian students who are currently studying at U.S.-based colleges and universities. Since 2010, ESF has supported more than 500 university students from Syria, Libya, and the Philippines, among other countries.

University of California, Davis Human Rights Initiative

The University of California, Davis Human Rights Initiative creates opportunities for research, teaching, and public service collaboration around the question of human rights across the scholarly disciplines. UC Davis joined the IIE Syria Consortium in 2013 to provide original research and policy recommendations that can be used by IIE, Consortium members, and other institutions, universities, multilateral agencies, and governments in their efforts to support Syrian faculty and university students.

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View of the Sultanahmet district of Istanbul. The New Mosque in the foreground was constructed in the 17th century. *J. King, June 2014*





INTRODUCTION

On a warm June afternoon in Reyhanlı, Turkey, more than 30 displaced and refugee¹ Syrian university students, some with their parents, gathered in the living room of the apartment that serves as the headquarters of the Union of Free Syrian Academics (UFGA). They had assembled to talk with our research team about their efforts to finish their university studies. Before the war in Syria began, Reyhanlı had been a sleepy border town on the road between Antakya and Aleppo, frequented by smugglers. Today, it hosts tens of thousands of Syrians who have crossed into Turkey at one of the few border crossings that remain in the hands of the Western and Turkish-supported Free Syrian Army. Parts of Reyhanlı now feel like a refugee camp – with the sense of boredom, frustration, and expectation one finds in camps – but without barbed wire and restrictions on movement. We were visiting the town because it is home to several initiatives and programs related to higher education and other necessary support for Syrian students and scholars.

The young people we met with that afternoon face many of the same challenges in resuming their undergraduate and post-graduate education outside their war-torn home country as the Syrian students we encountered in Jordan (April 2013) and Lebanon (March 2014): namely, lack of proper or incomplete documentation, financial concerns, and the transferability of past academic credits. However, Syrian students in Turkey

face two special problems: the barrier created by the complex and decentralized nature of Turkish higher education, and the fact that instruction takes place primarily in Turkish. A small number of technical and medical programs use English as the language of instruction, but most academic work is in Turkish, a language that very few Syrians studied prior to the conflict. Even accessing information on educational opportunities presents tremendous challenges for these students, since the websites and application information for the vast majority of Turkish universities – including Mustafa Kemal University in Antakya, the nearest public university to Reyhanlı – are in Turkish or English, rather than the students' native Arabic.

As few as 2% of the Syrian university-age population was successfully enrolled at Turkish universities for the 2013-14 academic year. Despite this gap, the Government of Turkey appears to be laying a legal and administrative foundation for improved higher education options.

As a result of these barriers, only a small number of Syrians in Turkey are accessing higher education in any meaningful way. Using pre-war demographic statistics and information provided by Turkey's Higher Education Council, the Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK), we estimate that as few as 2% of the Syrian university-age population successfully enrolled at Turkish universities for the 2013-14 academic year.

According to the leader of a Syrian academic association, "Either they [Syrian young men] continue their studies, or they will join [ISIL]."

Because of the at-times confrontational tenor of the conversation, the UFSA meeting in Reyhanlı was less a traditional focus group and more a "town hall" meeting, where the participants explored with us and with each other a broad range of issues, complaints, and concerns, including some going beyond higher education. Presiding over the meeting was Dr. Ammar Ibrahim, a distinguished professor of Agricultural Economics at Aleppo University. Dr. Ibrahim had fled the violence in Syria with his family, and was now leading the UFSA. Many of the students looked to him for answers that he could not provide about enrollment, the transferability of credits, and which entrance and language examinations they should take. The meeting highlighted the fact that, for displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey, attempts to continue their university studies have largely been met with failure, leaving them confused and disillusioned; others appear to have just given up. The majority of the students and their families expressed the feeling that the international community had

forgotten and abandoned them. This sense of abandonment, even more than the disconnection from higher education opportunities, was a source of anger and resentment for these university-age youth and their parents.

The anger and frustration of Syrian young people should be of immediate concern to the international community. Our team's research visit to Turkey coincided with noteworthy battlefield and political successes by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (*al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*; also known by its initials, ISIL or ISIS), including the seizure of the Iraqi city of Mosul, the capture of Syria's largest oil field, and the declaration of the Caliphate. According to some reports, ISIL controls more than one-third of Syria's territory.² At the same time, the moderate Syrian opposition's Free Syrian Army continued to lose ground, and its political wing, the Syrian National Coalition, was beset by accusations of corruption and ineptitude. The successes of ISIL, which now calls itself the Islamic State, along with other radical Islamist groups like the Nusra Front, are increasingly attractive to Syrian young men. Even if they do not embrace ISIL's radical ideology, many of these young people see little value in the moderate opposition.

The potential for radicalization was among the foremost concerns expressed to us by Professor Ibrahim, who described the problem in the starkest of terms: "Either they [Syrian young men] continue their studies, or they will join the *Da'ish*" (the Arabic acronym for ISIL). For a modern Syrian educator and social scientist like Dr. Ibrahim, the prospects of a generation of Syrians abandoning education for the violence and barbarism of ISIL must be heartbreaking. It is also a clear sign that Western-educated and politically and religiously moderate scholars may play a diminished role in Syria's future.



The same acute frustration was also evident among the university-age women we met, who face different social and professional challenges than their male counterparts. For many women, higher education in Syria had been an avenue of empowerment that could lead to careers and the delay of marriage. In our conversations with Syrian young women in Turkey, many expressed the view that continuing higher education outside of Syria was one of the few ways to improve their social options and general mobility, as well as their ability to support their families financially.

As one young woman, a former English Literature student at Damascus University explained, without the help needed to access higher education, *“We will stop here and go no further.”*

The words resonated with the members of the research team and became the title of this report. Her meaning was plain. On the one hand, many Syrian youth will remain in Turkey for the medium- to long-term, even after the war in Syria concludes. As we describe throughout this report, displaced and refugee Syrians generally seem to feel that Turkey offers an environment in which to rebuild their lives. Its size and supportive policies hold significant potential to furnish Syrians with educational and professional opportunities.

At the same time, the challenges of displacement risk marginalizing these young people, leaving their potential unfulfilled. If successive age-cadres of Syrians are unable to continue their higher education, Syria will lose its future doctors, teachers, engineers, and university professionals. Further, if circumstances require them to remain in Turkey, the prolonged or permanent disruption of their education will

hinder their ability to integrate and function in Turkish society; if they move to other parts of the world, it could impede their transition to these new societies.

Ultimately, supporting these young people’s reengagement with higher education is not only good policy. It affirms the human right to education as enumerated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it also serves as a challenge and opportunity to the international community of universities and colleges, higher education organizations, and similar institutions to work to defend that right.

The central concern of this report is how best to address the needs of displaced and refugee Syrian students and scholars like those we encountered that afternoon in Reyhanlı. It is the third phase of a broader research collaboration between the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) Human Rights Initiative. This collaboration studies the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on higher education, and documents the conditions and educational needs of Syrian university students and scholars in the front-line states to the conflict: Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. In Jordan and Lebanon, although we found a number of valuable initiatives to promote access to higher education, the overall political conditions did not allow for larger government-sponsored programs.³ In Turkey, despite the clear and substantial difficulties for Syrian university students as outlined below, the government appears to be laying a legal and administrative foundation for improved higher education options. Whether this promise will be fulfilled will depend on both Turkish policies and the international community’s response to opportunities for partnership.



Syrian students in Istanbul discuss with researcher James R. King options for continuing their studies in Turkey. *A. Fricke, June 2014*

In addition to the educational initiatives we observed, we also witnessed many Syrians using social media, as well as traditional forms of networking, to create opportunities for peer mentoring and knowledge sharing, to build individual empowerment and group solidarity, and ultimately to improve their access to higher education in Turkey. The resilience and initiative shown by these young people should assure policy makers, donors, national governments, and intergovernmental bodies that efforts taken on behalf of Syria’s “Lost Generation” would have far-reaching and successful outcomes.

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERSHIP

The conceptualization and fieldwork for this project was overseen by Dr. Keith David Watenpaugh, Associate Professor and Director, UC Davis Human Rights Initiative, a historian and theorist of Human Rights and Humanitarianism Studies, and an expert on Syria; Ms. Adrienne L. Fricke, a

human rights consultant specializing in Africa and the Middle East, who currently serves as Syria Advisor for Physicians for Human Rights; Mr. James R. King, Senior Research and Program Officer at the Institute of International Education’s Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF), who has lived and worked throughout the Arab world, including conducting research on a Fulbright grant in Jordan from 2005-2006; Mr. Chris Gratien, a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Georgetown University, who specializes in the environmental history of Anatolia; and Ms. Seçil Yılmaz, a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at the City University of New York, who specializes in the history of medicine and public health in the late Ottoman Empire, and has experience in Turkish university-based educational exchange programs. Ms. Louise Klann, a Master’s student in International Relations and Religion at Boston University, provided project support, including research.



Recent Syrian high school graduates in Reyhanlı with researcher Dr. Keith Watenpaugh.
J. King, June 2014

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a 20-day rapid assessment by a multidisciplinary Arabic- and Turkish-speaking team of Human Rights, Middle East Studies, and International Higher Education experts who travelled to Turkey in June and July 2014. The research team spoke with close to 100 Syrian university-age students and more than a dozen Syrian university professionals, meeting in 17 focus groups in five cities with large Syrian populations: metropolitan Istanbul and Ankara in the west; and Gaziantep, Antakya, and Reyhanlı in southeastern Turkey. We interviewed students and faculty from across Syria, including Raqqa and Deir al-Zor, regions that were occupied by ISIL at the time of writing. The majority of respondents were originally from the Governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. Most of the students and scholars were Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims, although several were from Syria’s Kurdish,

Christian, and Palestinian minority groups. The number of male respondents outnumbered the female respondents by approximately three to two.

Participants in the focus groups fell into the following categories: a) enrolled students in Turkish public and private universities, including Bilgi, Boğaziçi, Gaziantep, Koç, Middle East Technical, Okan, and Zirve; b) unenrolled but university-qualified students actively seeking to enroll in Turkey or elsewhere; c) recent secondary school graduates who had taken one of the Arabic-language exit examinations commonly called the “Baccalaureate” and who were seeking to begin university studies; and 4) displaced and refugee faculty. We also interviewed one student who had recently secured admission to a university in the United States.

All of the Syrians we spoke with were displaced, though none indicated to us that they had registered as refugees

with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).⁴ Since the beginning of the conflict, Syrians have been classified as “guests” in Turkey, as opposed to the more commonly used terms *göçmen* or *muhacir* (“refugee” or “migrant”). As we discuss below in the legal section, Turkey recently adopted a comprehensive new law applicable to all foreigners that will supersede the “guest” classification.

It is unclear how this law will affect Syrians living in the 22 refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian border, who comprise approximately one-quarter of the overall Syrian population in Turkey. Our research team was unable to meet with residents of the camps due to Turkish government restrictions on access. However, based on interviews with individuals who had recently left the camps and our previous experience with the Za’atari camp in Jordan, we are confident that they contain many university-eligible students. This population may have special needs and warrants additional study and attention.

The research team interviewed a number of university administrators, Turkish government officials, and higher education policymakers and experts. These included the Turkish Prime Minister’s Special Administrator of Syrian Affairs, affiliates of YÖK, representatives of the Ministry of Education in the Interim Syrian Government, and educational experts from the UNHCR and the European Council. We also met with representatives of Syrian-diaspora and international civil society organizations engaged in efforts to identify scholarships, support, and public service opportunities for university-age Syrians, including Addar in Istanbul, the UFSA and Orient School in Reyhanlı, and the Dutch NGO SPARK in Gaziantep.

When speaking with the Syrian students and scholars, we explained that the research team was unable to provide any goods, services, or scholarship opportunities, and that our goal was to gather information and share it with the international community. We obtained oral informed consent, including consent to take photographs, and we described the security precautions employed to preserve anonymity and the confidentiality of all raw data. We utilized semi-structured interviewing techniques that allowed us to gather baseline data about the respondents’ educational backgrounds, ages, geographical origins, and future goals, as well as their answers to more open-ended questions about access to resources, information exchange, and interactions with peers and institutions. The names of respondents included in this report have been changed to protect their privacy and safety.

BACKGROUND: SYRIA'S “LOST GENERATION” IN TURKEY

The Scope of the Problem: Thousands of University Students Deprived of Higher Education Opportunities

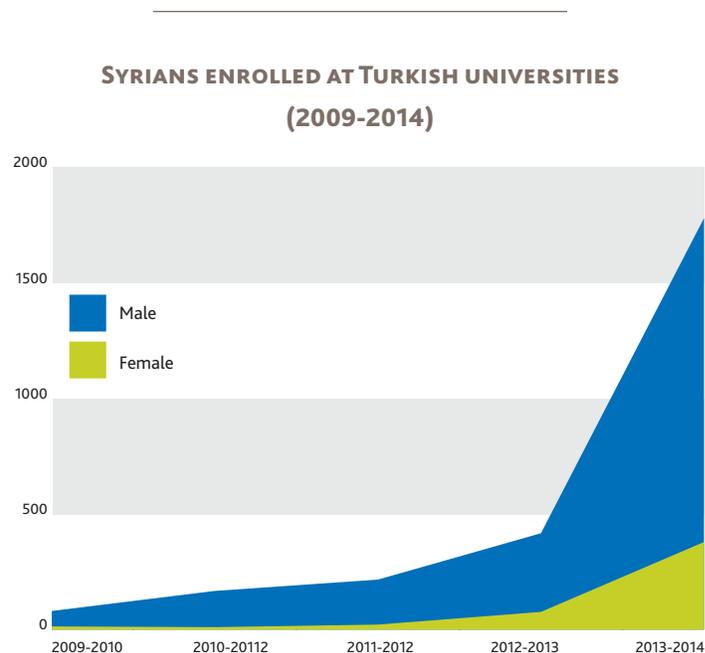
As discussed in our previous reports “Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syrian Refugee University Students and Scholars in Jordan” and “The War Follows Them: Syrian University Students and Scholars in Lebanon,”⁵ pre-war Syria had an extensive higher education sector. Estimates indicate that as many as 26% of Syrians (male and female) went on to vocational training or university studies prior to the current conflict.⁶ The war has damaged the country’s universities and

other institutes of higher learning, and it has made it difficult for many students to attend classes and faculty to teach or conduct research. Since the civil conflict began in 2011, university professionals and students have joined the exodus of more than three million Syrians, further weakening the post-secondary education system.

Neither the UNHCR nor the Turkish government separates the university-age population as a distinct category of demographic analysis. For the purposes of our analysis, we consider this category to encompass young people between the ages of 18 and 22, who under pre-war circumstances would be preparing for, or attending, a university. Utilizing demographic statistics from Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, we estimate that roughly 10% of the total Syrian population in Turkey (officially 847,266 at the time of writing and unofficially well over one million)⁷ is 18 to 22 years old.⁸ As described above, pre-war figures indicate that as many as 26% of university-age Syrians attended university or some other form of post-secondary education in Syria. By applying this percentage to the Syrian population in Turkey, we conclude that the country likely hosts as many as 20,000 to 30,000 “university-qualified” Syrian students.⁹ This estimate includes both students forced to discontinue their university studies in Syria and secondary school graduates who would have normally entered a university.

Figures provided to us by YÖK indicate that 1,784 Syrian students – or less than 10% of the university-qualified population and less than 2% of the total university-age population – were enrolled in Turkish universities for the

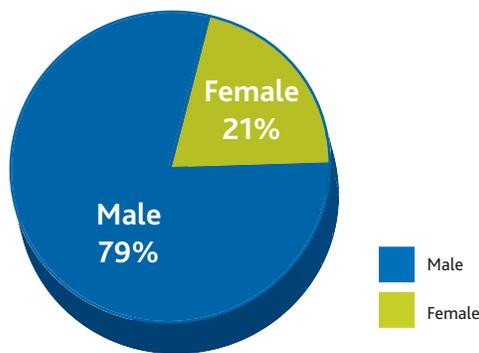
2013-14 academic year.¹⁰ It is important to note that due to reporting delays, the most current data on Syrian enrollment at individual universities may not be reflected in the figures provided to us by YÖK. However, even considering possible discrepancies, a significantly lower proportion of Syrians is attending university in Turkey than in Lebanon or Jordan. We analyze the reasons for this low enrollment throughout the report. Unlike Lebanon, however, where Syrian enrollment is declining, Syrian access to the Turkish higher education system has recently improved dramatically. Between 2012-13 and 2013-14, Turkish universities experienced a 300% increase in Syrian enrollment (*see table below*).¹¹



Notwithstanding this notable increase, at present, the vast majority of university-age Syrians are unable to access higher education in Turkey.

Syrian young women are particularly vulnerable. Despite constituting approximately half of the pre-war university population, Syrian women make up only a small portion of the Syrians enrolled in Turkish universities (*see table below*). This is the case in Jordan and Lebanon as well, where Syrian women’s enrollment in higher education is also very low. Of the total population of university-age Syrian women in Turkey, we estimate that less than 1% were attending an accredited university in the 2013-2014 academic year.¹²

SYRIANS ENROLLED AT TURKISH UNIVERSITIES BY GENDER (2013-2014)



Several factors may contribute to this discrepancy in women’s access to higher education, especially as families may choose to allocate resources to their sons rather than their daughters for a host of strategic, economic, and cultural reasons. For example, the choice may be a consequence of families’ desire to prevent sons from fighting in Syria, as well as the much-discussed phenomenon of marriage for economic survival.¹³ Regardless, the erosion of the educational status of Syrian young women is an urgent humanitarian concern and one that parallels the security concerns driving efforts to help young men.

Politicization of Syrian Campuses: Paramilitaries, Torture, and Student Fighters

University campuses played an important role in the early phases of the uprising against the Syrian régime of Bashar al-Assad, and university students were often at the forefront of demonstrations, in addition to organizing the peaceful political opposition and providing ad hoc humanitarian assistance. The political awakening on Syrian campuses, which were not uniformly in opposition to the régime, initiated a crackdown by the armed forces, by pro-régime armed gangs known as *Shabiha*, and by students loyal to the government. Last spring, we received reports from Syrian students in Lebanon about the para-militarization of the National Union of Syrian Students (NUSS) (*al-Ittihad al-Watani lil-Tulab Suriyya*), a Ba’ath-party affiliated and pro-régime student organization. The students indicated that the NUSS, at times wearing insignia, were patrolling Syrian university campuses, guarding the university gates, and monitoring fellow students and faculty for political activism or disloyalty. Syrian students and faculty in Turkey also reported this development, describing it as part of a broader infiltration of Syrian university campuses by the security apparatus. They noted that before the war, campuses tended to be relatively protected from the state violence that was more commonplace in other parts of Syrian society.

One student, Nadim, whom we met in Gaziantep, had been enrolled at al-Ba’ath University in Homs. Situated along a crucial ethnic “fault line,” the university’s pre-conflict student body was mixed Alawite and Sunni Muslim; the territory where the campus is situated has remained in



Syrian government hands since the beginning of the conflict. Because the campus lies in government-held territory, students who are suspected of opposition sympathies face expulsion, if not detention and torture.

Such was the case for Nadim. In December 2012, NUSS seized him at the gate near the school of medicine campus and accused him of serving as national president of the Union of Free Syrian Students (UFSS). (The UFSS

Despite constituting approximately half of the pre-war university population, Syrian women make up only a small portion of the Syrians enrolled in Turkish universities.

formed primarily as a Facebook group, and at the time its membership may have numbered in the dozens; it no longer appears to be functional). While Nadim had participated in local organizing committees, which served both political and humanitarian relief functions, he denied being the group's leader. Nonetheless, he was beaten until he made a forced confession, whereupon he was expelled from the university and fled Syria, first to Dubai and then to Turkey, where he hopes to continue his studies.

Nadim's story is important for two reasons. First, like many young Syrians we spoke with, he envisions his studies as a form of struggle on behalf of Syria and its future, not merely a path to self-improvement and a career. Second, it demonstrates the routine nature of violence in contemporary Syria. Nadim did not consider being illegally detained by the NUSS, then kicked and punched by fellow students, as torture. Rather, he

regarded it as a kind of standard hazing. Both he and other students in the focus group who heard his story remarked that if anything, it was “torture lite” and not comparable to the torture that routinely occurs in Syrian detention facilities.

Murad, one of the young men who accompanied Nadim, said little during the focus group meeting. Unlike the others, who were neatly groomed with short hair and clean-shaven faces, Murad’s blond hair was long and unkempt, and he

Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, where political and military realities have severely limited the interaction of civilian displaced populations and fighters of various loyalties, fighters are widespread in Turkey. Their presence increases the likelihood that young men may be exposed to radicalizing ideologies and drawn back into Syria to fight.

wore a beard that appeared to have gone untrimmed for months. When asked about his educational background, he explained that he had also studied at al-Ba’ath University but had chosen to fight against the régime in the siege of the Old City of Homs. In Gaziantep for a break from the fighting and to see his friends, Murad planned to return to Syria to resume the fight. We observed in him no resentment that, while he fought, other young men had gone to Turkey

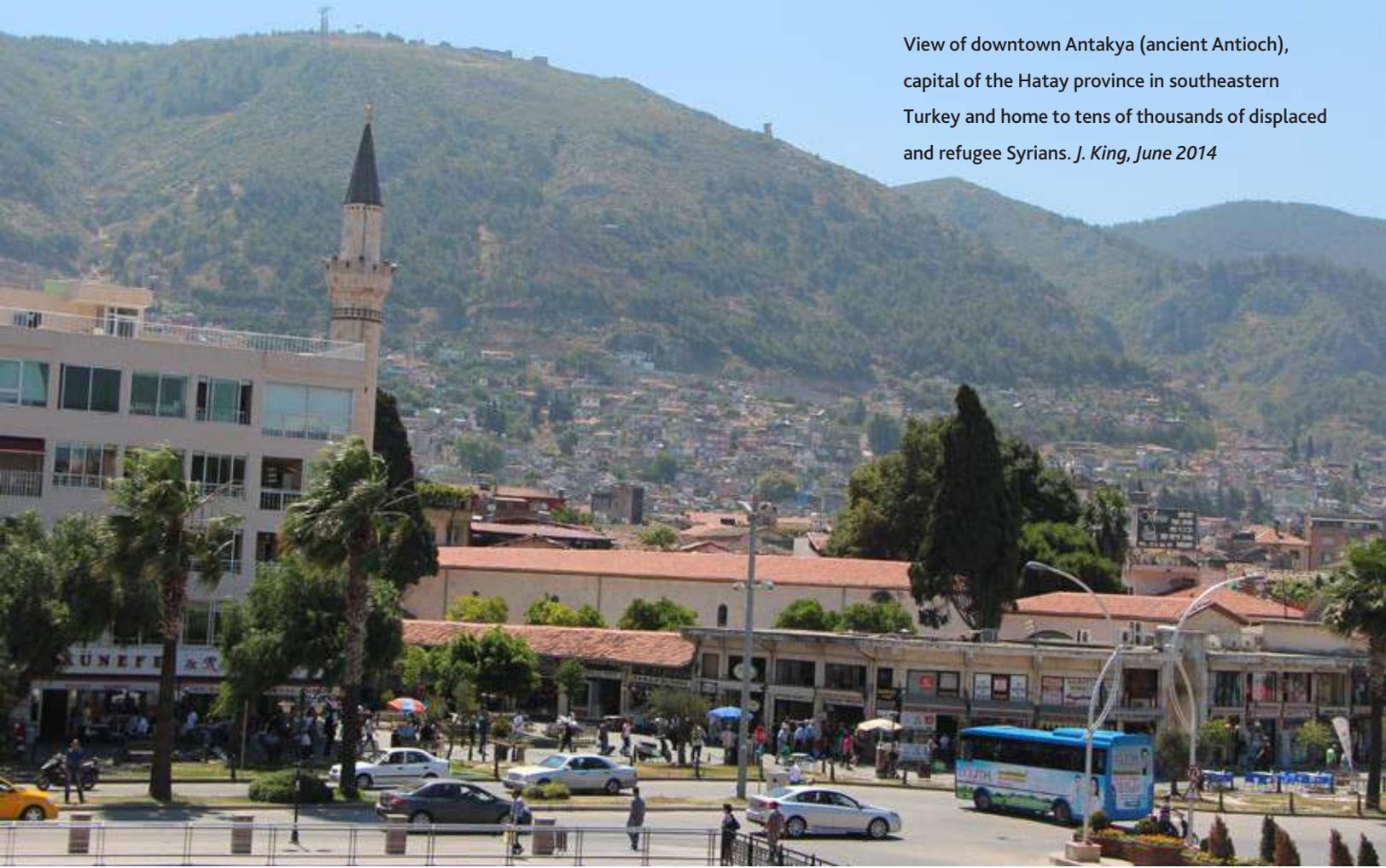
to find work and study. He explained that while they were “used to studying,” he had grown accustomed to fighting during the past years, and that his path now lay in protecting his family and community in Homs. There appeared to be mutual respect between Murad and Nadim. As Nadim told us, “Our priority is our studies; Murad’s is Syria now. Every student is different.” Murad was unlike the bulk of the students we met, who were often distracted and anxious; he was calm, focused, and relaxed.

The story of Murad and Nadim highlights an important dimension of the larger question of Syrian young men, in particular in Turkey. Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, where political and military realities have severely limited the interaction of civilian displaced populations and fighters of various loyalties, fighters are widespread in Turkey. Their presence increases the likelihood that young men may be exposed to radicalizing ideologies and drawn back into Syria to fight.

Will Syrians in Turkey Return?

As we observed in the context of Lebanon and Jordan, it is very likely that Syrians in Turkey will soon face a “protracted refugee situation” (PRS). The UNHCR defines a PRS as a situation in which refugees have lived in exile for at least five years and there is little or no possibility that the cause of their displacement will end and allow them to return home. Syrians who fled early in the conflict are now less than two years away from reaching this milestone. With the UNHCR estimating that the average PRS length is now close to two decades,¹⁴ the reality that Syrians in Turkey may live in extended or permanent exile makes finding higher education solutions all the more critical.

View of downtown Antakya (ancient Antioch), capital of the Hatay province in southeastern Turkey and home to tens of thousands of displaced and refugee Syrians. *J. King, June 2014*



While many Syrians in Turkey professed to us a desire to return, some young Syrians in particular are increasingly aware that this may not be possible in the near future, and are beginning to conceive of themselves as permanent exiles. At the Syrian private elementary and secondary school Shamouna (lit. “Our Syria”) in the Istanbul exurb of Esenler, our team asked a group of 18 recent high school graduates whether they thought they would go back to Syria someday. One third did not raise their hands.

There are multiple explanations for this response, which corresponds with our experience elsewhere in Turkey. In part, it is reasonable to assume that students may be unable to imagine their return to Syria given the ongoing conflict and instability. Even after the hostilities end, the situation will likely remain dangerous, and the country will have

fundamentally changed. Equally important, despite the reality that many students are living in difficult conditions, Turkey is politically and economically stable and provides a more welcoming environment than other host countries in the region. Students may also conclude that it offers a broader spectrum of long-term opportunities for education, work, and the expression of political ideas. Badia, a graduating high school senior hoping to study Embryology, expressed to us this sentiment: “If you cannot get your human rights in your home country, then you go to another where you can.”

Finally, some Syrians consider Turkey as way station to other countries. Several of the young people we interviewed expressed confusion and anxiety about their long-term status in Turkey and hoped to resettle in Western Europe or North America, where they saw a clearer path to work and permanent residence.



View of the Bosphorus from the Boğaziçi University campus in Istanbul. Syrian students who have enrolled in universities in Ankara and Istanbul appear to be benefiting from their cosmopolitan experience. *J. King, June 2014.*

Why Improving Higher Education Access for Displaced and Refugee Syrians Matters

We observed a spectrum of young people, from those who remain keenly focused on rebuilding Syria, to students like Badia, who are building their futures in Turkey or elsewhere outside Syria. In our view, the international community and Turkey should prioritize expanding higher education opportunities for Syrians regardless of whether they settle in Turkey or ultimately return to Syria.

Improving the access of Syrians to post-secondary education can contribute to regional security and stability by providing alternatives to a range of undesirable outcomes, including crime, radicalization, or fighting for young men, and early or forced marriage for young women. In addition, the human and intellectual capital these young people represent has

tremendous potential to increase social stability in post-conflict Syria, as well as in Turkey and the greater region. Syria is now categorized as a “low human development” state because of the collapse of its economy, health, and education sectors.¹⁵ The failure to connect Syrian students to higher education and other training opportunities will only accelerate this decline and leave Syrian society without experts trained in fields of study critical to post-conflict recovery. This is also the outcome when Syrian professors and researchers are left without access to the research facilities and other resources that would allow them to collaborate with Turkish and international colleagues to conduct research relevant to Syria’s recovery and reconstruction.

The international community, therefore, has the opportunity to begin this rebuilding process now by supporting displaced



and refugee Syrian university students and scholars. This is especially true as Syrian young people who access higher education in Turkey benefit from exposure to a range of viewpoints, activities, and social relationships not present in Syria. Several students we interviewed expressed a desire to use this experience and knowledge to rebuild Syria. As Sima, a Public Administration student at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, explained, “Our experience at METU has been so positive. I want to take what I learn here and bring it back home to help build universities like this one.”

In addition to these practical benefits, by ensuring that Syrians have access to higher education in Turkey or elsewhere, the international community would demonstrate its commitment to the human right to education. Though the authors recognize the inherent difficulties in the implementation of this right, there is a clear connection between higher education and peace, security, and development and the constellation of rights that motivates humanitarian efforts more generally. Defending access to higher education is a professional and ethical responsibility for the international community of

A Public Administration student at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara told us, “Our experience at METU has been so positive. I want to take what I learn here and bring it back home to help build universities like this one.”

universities, university professionals, and educators, with profound policy and humanitarian implications that can impact the entire Middle East.¹⁶

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Turkish domestic politics and the country’s foreign policy shape the status and conditions of displaced and refugee Syrian university students and scholars in Turkey. The complex historical and social relationship between Turkey and Syria, as well as between Turks and Arabs, also plays an important role. Equally significant, Turkey’s large territory and population of nearly 77 million mean that, in contrast to Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian refugees impose less of a burden on Turkey’s infrastructure, including employment, housing, and natural resources. Nonetheless, the large numbers of Syrians in the border provinces have strained public resources and led to heightened tensions and occasional violence.¹⁷

Turkish Policy toward the Conflict in Syria and Syrians in Turkey

Under the leadership of the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), Turkey’s evolving policy toward the Syrian conflict has influenced how Syrians in the country are treated. Like many regional governments and Western observers, Turkish policymakers anticipated that the wave of social upheaval inspired by the “Arab Spring” would bring a quick political transition in Syria. The Government of Turkey was an early supporter of the conservative Muslim and Syrian nationalist

opposition to the régime of Bashar al-Assad; it has continued to provide both humanitarian aid and military assistance to Syrian groups based in Turkey but operating in Syria.

As the uprising transitioned into civil war, the Turkish government supported elements of the Syrian opposition, allowing them to form a civilian government-in-exile, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. This group is known as the Syrian National Coalition or simply *al-Ettilaf* (lit: “the Coalition”), and it has a loosely affiliated military wing, the Free Syrian Army. Turkey recognizes the Coalition as the sole legitimate *representative* of the Syrian people but not as the *government* of Syria. The Coalition has been able to provide medical supplies, health services, and some educational services in the area of Idlib and in parts of Aleppo, in large measure because the Turkish government has allowed both goods and people to cross the border. Many, in fact, argue that Turkey’s open border and

Although the Government of Turkey has been described as “lack[ing] a coherent refugee education policy,” its higher education policy – while continuing to evolve and suffering from inconsistent implementation – nonetheless holds the potential to facilitate Syrians’ integration into Turkish universities.

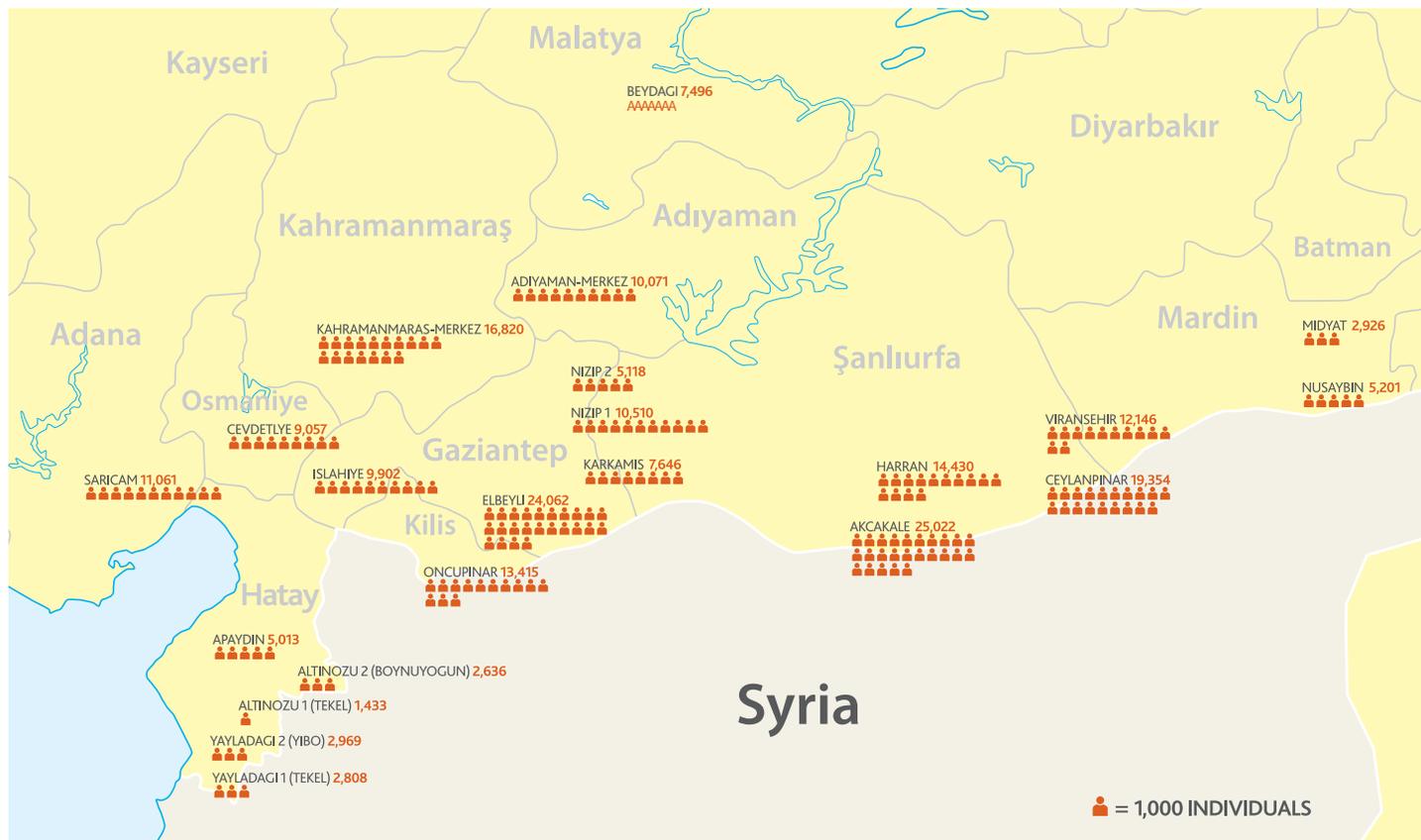
support have been the primary reason that the Coalition has been able to continue to operate.

The Turkish state invested heavily in building refugee camps along its border with Syria that comport with international standards of care and safety and currently house more than 200,000 of the estimated one million Syrians in Turkey. As described to us by the Turkish Prime Minister’s Special Administrator of Syrian Affairs, Governor Veysel Dalmaz, questions about the government’s policy toward the education of displaced and refugee Syrians began to arise as Turkish officials foresaw the protracted nature of the conflict in Syria. Primary and secondary education has been analyzed in several recent reports¹⁸ and will not be covered here. Critically, although the Government of Turkey has been described as “lack[ing] a coherent refugee education policy,”¹⁹ its higher education policy – while continuing to evolve and suffering from inconsistent implementation – nonetheless holds the potential to facilitate Syrians’ integration into Turkish universities. This issue is discussed in the section on Turkish higher education below.

The Potential for Politicization of Turkish Support for Syrian Refugees

The election of former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as President of Turkey in August 2014 means that government policies supporting Syrians in the country will likely continue. However, the experience of Syrians in Egypt provides a cautionary tale. There, displaced Syrians were associated with the failed policies of the Muslim Brotherhood and suffered popular and official backlash when that

SYRIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN TURKEY (AS OF JULY 2014)



government was overthrown. Similarly, Syrians in Turkey may be subject to hostility because they are perceived as beneficiaries of Erdoğan's AKP, whose position towards the Syrian conflict is not shared by all Turkish voters. Indeed, a recent wave of unprovoked attacks on Syrians and their shops and restaurants in the cities of Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep in the summer of 2014 suggest a possible increase in tensions between Syrians and Turks.

Although these disturbances may be related to domestic Turkish politics prior to the presidential elections, they may also represent a larger trend. Underlying the tension is suspicion on the part of both Turkey's far right and far left political parties that the AKP may give voting rights and/or

citizenship to large numbers of Syrians resident in Turkey, thereby creating a loyal and socially conservative voting bloc. The politicization of support for the refugee population is relevant to international humanitarian and educational organizations, because their presumed natural allies in Turkey – namely, progressive, left-leaning secular activists and NGOs – may not be ideal partners for projects related to Syrians due to this mistrust of the AKP's motives for helping Syrians. For example, the Turkish NGO İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation appears to have had exclusive access to the camps because of İHH's ideological harmony with the Turkish government.²⁰ As a result, Turkish human rights-oriented organizations and institutions may be hesitant to collaborate on government-sponsored projects.

Despite these incidents and the risk of politicized support from the Government of Turkey, we noted few complaints from Syrians about their treatment in Turkey beyond concerns about work insecurity and occasional instances of discrimination, especially when compared to their peers in Lebanon and Jordan. While some Syrians we interviewed were unhappy with conditions in the refugee camps and had fled them on the pretense of needing medical care, even these individuals seemed unconcerned about Turkish police following or otherwise harassing them. Indeed, the majority of Syrians we spoke with expressed positive attitudes toward the Turkish state and its people.²¹

LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT: SYRIANS IN TURKEY AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT THEM

International actors seeking to provide support for Syrians in Turkey must take into account two significant aspects of Turkish policy: first, the state's past practices with regard to international actors operating in the country, and second, a new comprehensive law regarding all foreigners residing in Turkey, including those seeking protection. As noted above, although Turkey is a state party to both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR) and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the current government has been reluctant to classify Syrians as refugees and has developed a unique nomenclature to define the Syrian presence in the country.

Turkey's Management of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Turkey is considered a “strong state,” and unlike Lebanon or Jordan, it has largely handled the Syrian refugee crisis within its borders through its own programs, thus limiting the role of the UN, foreign governments, and international NGOs. According to the “Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014,” the Government of Turkey was the third largest government donor of humanitarian assistance in 2013, providing \$1.6 billion, an increase of nearly \$600 million from 2012. A significant portion of these funds were used to address the Syrian refugee crisis within its own borders.²²

The Turkish Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister's office control matters related to all foreigners, including those seeking protection on humanitarian grounds, like Syrians. The central government promulgates circulars, or decrees, which establish policy directives on issues such as temporary protection, education, and access to healthcare. In practice, these policies are often unevenly implemented, with provincial governors interpreting the circulars differently. Syrians in Turkey, and the NGOs that seek to assist them, may therefore have different operational constraints from one province to another.²³ This situation compounds the confusion that Syrians and relief and development agencies experience when, for instance, trying to understand the impact of new regulations on access to higher education.

Although the Turkish government initially managed the arrival of Syrians with limited international support, the continued flow of refugees led it to seek wider assistance in dealing with the crisis, especially with the refugee camps filled to capacity.



Higher education is similar. With few exceptions, the existing initiatives and opportunities for Syrian university students were developed by the Turkish state. As the scale of the crisis has grown, however, it has become increasingly clear that international stakeholders must share the burden of supporting Syrians in the country, including their higher education and other post-secondary education needs.

Turkish government officials and higher education policymakers consistently expressed to us their enthusiasm for international partnerships, and indeed, there are significant opportunities for these to be developed. Yet it is important for external actors to recognize that they may face difficulties running their own programs in Turkey, even if these programs are developed in collaboration with local partners. The NGO registration process has been described as lengthy and cumbersome.²⁴ According to a May 2014 Brookings Institution report, several well-established international NGOs have faced challenges registering in Turkey,²⁵ forcing them to operate within an ambiguous legal space in which their activities are tolerated but not officially sanctioned. These organizations may confront logistical barriers to establishing a formal presence in the country, and they risk having their operations disrupted or shuttered at any moment.

Several Turkish colleagues described for us the Turkish government's longstanding reluctance to authorize foreign humanitarian involvement in the country, especially the oversight and control that often accompanies these programs. One explanation may be the international community's history of excluding local NGOs from their operations or even their prejudices against Turkish organizations, which have prevented

closer cooperation in the past.²⁶ A recent survey of gaps in education for Syrians in Turkey notes that permission for an international NGO to register in Turkey is premised on whether it has a local operational partner and whether it has sought registration since the Syrian humanitarian crisis began in 2011.²⁷

It is critical, therefore, that institutions seeking to develop educational initiatives for Syrians integrate their efforts with the local higher education sector and existing educational and humanitarian programs. Additionally, the Turkish government should take a clearer position on the role of partnerships and burden-sharing in helping Syrians to continue their university studies and other advanced training. Concrete mechanisms and clear criteria are necessary to encourage foreign governments and international organizations interested in supporting Turkish-

The politicization of support for the refugee population is relevant to international humanitarian and educational organizations, because their presumed natural allies in Turkey – namely, progressive, left-leaning secular activists and NGOs – may not be ideal partners for projects related to Syrians due to mistrust of the AKP's motives for helping Syrians.



Zirve University in Gaziantep. Despite the tuition costs, some Syrian students in Turkey are enrolling at private universities, which tend to be more flexible with documentation requirements. *J. King, June 2014*

led initiatives or implementing their own programs in Turkey. As the Brookings report concludes, “Turkey has to help the international community to help Turkey.”²⁸

The “Foreigners Law” and its Potential Impact

An important first step may be the recent promulgation of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (“Foreigners Law”),²⁹ which came into effect on April 11, 2014. The law created a new government agency under the Ministry of Interior, the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), responsible for all policies related to migration.³⁰ While it remains to be seen how the law will be applied in practice, significantly, the GDMM aims to “establish cooperation and ensure coordination” with international organizations.³¹

The law also contains provisions that seem to recognize the importance of creating durable solutions to the potential social problems posed by large numbers of foreigners in the country, including post-secondary education initiatives. Article 96 provides that, “in order to facilitate the mutual harmonization of the society and of foreigner[s]” and to “equip them with knowledge and skills that will facilitate their self reliance in all spheres of their social lives,” the GDMM “may plan harmonization activities within the bounds of economic and financial possibilities.” In doing so, it may “tak[e] advantage of the recommendations and contributions of public institutions and organizations, local administrations, *non-governmental organizations, universities and international organizations*” (emphasis added).³²

Interested international actors should recognize both the challenges and opportunities inherent in potential partnerships in Turkey. In the institutional case studies section of



this report, we highlight several best practices from two organizations, SPARK and Orient for Human Relief. It is worth noting that despite SPARK's prioritization of a partnership with the University of Gaziantep, it has still faced challenges registering in Turkey. Orient, on the other hand, has been able to register with the Turkish government, which has allowed it to rapidly expand its medical and educational programs in southern Turkey.

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT:

Turkey's Higher Education Sector and the Challenges and Opportunities for Syrians

As in Jordan and Lebanon, Turkey's higher education system offers a range of quality, educational styles, and administrative procedures that impact access for Syrians. Unlike in Jordan and Lebanon, however, the Turkish government has promulgated a series of decrees that are designed to facilitate the integration of Syrian students at Turkish universities. This policy, combined with the expectation of continued expansion of the country's university system, represents an important opportunity for the international community to cooperate with the Turkish government and Turkish institutions to support Syrian access to higher education. Conversely, several factors may continue to limit this access, including language barriers, Turkey's decentralized system of university admissions, and the difficulties that Syrians and international actors alike face in securing up-to-date information on both national policies and the admissions rules at individual universities.

Overview of the Turkish Higher Education System

Turkey's higher education system has grown rapidly since the 1980s, and even more so under the AKP government. Since its election in 2002, the AKP has prioritized reforming and expanding the country's educational system, including post-secondary education, in order to meet the increasing demands of the Turkish population. It has, for example, more than doubled the number of universities in the country since 2002.³³ Thirty years ago, fewer than 400,000 students were enrolled at Turkey's 28 universities; currently, 104 public and 72 private "foundation" universities host more than five million students.³⁴ While the percentage of Turkish citizens who received some form of higher education in 2002-03 was less than 15%, this figure rose to close to 40% in 2012-13, placing immense stress on the entire system.³⁵ Turkish institutions range from American-style liberal arts universities with fewer than 3,000 undergraduate students, to public research universities with enrollments in the tens of thousands. While several universities are regularly listed among the world's best,³⁶ some private institutions appear to be driven primarily by profit in the context of increasing demand for post-secondary education.

Especially for Syrians without Turkish or English proficiency, the university system remains inaccessible.

Despite this large and diverse higher educational system, at present, Turkey cannot accommodate all of its eligible and interested students. In 2014, for example, fewer than 925,000 of more than two million applicants were placed in university programs, including extended and two-year vocational faculties and distance-learning programs.³⁷ This lack of capacity undermines the country's ability to meet the unanticipated demand of tens of thousands of Syrian university students.

The Government of Turkey has consistently taken proactive measures to grant Syrian university students with opportunities to continue their studies in Turkey. Although these policies have the potential to increase Syrian enrollment at Turkish universities, university-qualified students continue to face several significant barriers to pursuing higher education in Turkey.

Especially for Syrians without Turkish or English proficiency, the university system remains inaccessible.³⁸ Turkish is the language of coursework in the majority of academic programs at Turkish institutions. In recent years, English language training has become a priority, especially at Turkey's private universities. Many universities or university faculties use English as the

official language, although several Syrian young people we interviewed noted with great frustration that Turkish is often the de facto language of instruction and academic interaction. One university administrator explained that his university prefers to have at least one international student in each class, in order to ensure that the students and instructor do not revert to speaking only in Turkish. Several universities offer admitted international students a one-year Turkish preparatory program, and similar programs for English are quite common. Arabic is commonly used within the Islamic Law faculties but not elsewhere.

The central higher education council, YÖK, administers, plans, and oversees all post-secondary education in Turkey,³⁹ including placing high school graduates at universities according to their scores on a centralized entrance exam. This test-based admissions process is significant because it means that Turkey's public universities do not have offices of professionals set up for the purposes of recruiting eligible students. As a result, those institutions that aim to be proactive in recruiting and enrolling eligible Syrian students may lack the capacity to do so and will likely need support. University administrators stressed this point to us. Private universities conduct outreach to recruit Turkish and international students and tend to be more flexible in their admissions process.

International Students in Turkey

As part of its reform and expansion efforts, the AKP has sought to attract international students to Turkish universities. The number of international students has grown from close to 30,000 in 2011 to approximately 50,000 in 2014.⁴⁰

Non-Turkish citizens can apply for admission to Turkish universities through several avenues: as regular international students; as part of the Erasmus Programme (for Europeans); or through Turkish government-funded scholarship programs. Regular international students are subject to quotas, set by YÖK annually to determine the number of non-Turkish citizens who are allowed to enroll within each university department. In support of the internationalization of Turkey's campuses, YÖK has increased these quotas from around 65,000 in 2012 to an expected 140,000 for the 2014-15 academic year.⁴¹

Although international student quotas have remained unfilled at a national level, the quotas at individual universities (and within university departments) present a barrier for Syrians to access higher education in Turkey, as they are competing for limited slots with applicants from across the globe, including the Turkic countries of Central Asia. This barrier may be relevant in the regions where Syrians are most highly concentrated, such as Istanbul and southeastern Turkey, and in specific fields of study like engineering or medicine. In our meeting with Governor Veysel, he explained that his office has been working with YÖK, the Ministry of Education, and the Interim Syrian Government's Ministry of Education to coordinate the placement of Syrian students at universities that have been unable to fulfill their international student quotas, especially in Turkey's far eastern provinces.

The process for non-Turkish citizens to apply is complex, decentralized, and subject to shifting national and university-specific regulations. International students are admitted based on the results of a *Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrenci Sınavı* (YÖS) (lit. "Foreign Student Examination"). Since 2010, this exam has

become decentralized, with each university creating its own version of the YÖS and choosing the languages in which it is offered. In addition to the YÖS, most universities require students to provide national or international baccalaureate exam results. Students must also submit original copies of their high school diplomas and transcripts, passports, and Turkish residency documents, as well as proficiency tests for their academic program's language of instruction. These requirements pose an insurmountable obstacle for the majority of Syrian students, many of whom lack the necessary paperwork and do not speak Turkish or English. Rarely have Turkish universities demonstrated flexibility in these requirements.

International students can also apply through the *Türkiye Bursları* ("Turkey Scholarships") program. These scholarships are administered by the *Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı* (YTB) (lit. the "Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities"), an agency housed within the Prime Minister's office, in coordination with YÖK, which places the recipients – 4,000 for the 2014-2015 academic year – at public universities. Applicants are not required to know Turkish, and the package includes a year of preparatory Turkish language training, along with housing and other supplemental support. Only non-Turkish citizens are eligible for the scholarships, which are awarded according to applicants' fields of study or regions of origin.⁴² At the time of writing, it appears that few Syrians have received these scholarships, although the Government of Turkey is planning a program specifically for Syrian nationals, described below. Because the program falls outside the international student quotas and does not require Turkish language proficiency, it may represent an important means for Syrian university students to access higher education, including those

without passports but registered with the Turkish government's relief agency, Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFAD) (lit. the "Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey") or the police.

The Government of Turkey's Policy Toward Syrian University Students

Unlike the other countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, the Government of Turkey has consistently taken proactive measures to grant Syrian university students with opportunities to continue their studies in Turkey. Although these policies have the potential to increase Syrian enrollment at Turkish universities, university-qualified students continue to face several significant barriers to pursuing higher education in Turkey. These include the higher education system's decentralized admissions process, frequent changes in regulations vis-à-vis Syrian students, language fluency provisions, and documentation requirements, among others. As one frustrated graduating high school student told us, "We don't know anything about what is possible for us in Turkey."

In 2012, YÖK extended admission to Syrians at the Southern Tier public universities, which includes those universities located in the provinces that are adjacent to the Syrian border: Mersin, Çukurova (Adana), Osmaniye Korkut Ata, Mustafa Kemal (Hatay), Kilis 7 Aralık, Gaziantep, and Harran (Şanlıurfa).⁴³

As the first major policy decision directed toward the influx of Syrian university students, this circular was poorly understood by students and administrators, and it was thus applied inconsistently. Originally written for the 2012-13 academic year and later extended, the decision allows students without

academic or identification documents to enroll as "Special Students," similar to auditors in the American system. Special Students do not receive credit or diplomas, and they can matriculate only after meeting the regular admission criteria for international students. For the 2014-15 academic year, all public universities in Turkey can enroll Syrians as Special Students.

A subsequent 2013 circular, which was renewed for the 2014-15 academic year, stipulates that Syrian undergraduates admitted to Turkey's public universities should not pay tuition. The decision allows Syrians with the requisite paperwork (as well as Egyptians), in most fields, to transfer at all class levels. It introduces a degree of flexibility with regard to documentation: first-year students in specific fields who lack passports, but are resident in Turkey and registered with AFAD or the police, can apply through the YTB agency mentioned above, and be placed by YÖK at one of ten universities. All of these students are subject to the international student quotas.

Most recently, the Turkish government announced that it will offer five thousand scholarships for Syrian students as part of the Türkiye Scholarship program.⁴⁴ YÖK confirmed to the research team that YTB has finalized the application process for this program, although it is unclear when students can begin applying.

To summarize, Syrians are able to enroll at Turkish universities through four possible avenues, with a fifth likely to be opened in the year ahead. The advantages and limitations inherent in each avenue are described in the chart below.



AVENUES FOR SYRIANS TO APPLY TO TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

AVENUE OF APPLICATION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
As regular international students	Private universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential flexibility with academic and identification documents • Higher international student quotas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition costs • Individual institutional requirements
As regular international students	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tuition • Can transfer at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have all academic and identification documents • Must pass a Turkish or English language exam (depending on field of study) • International student quotas apply
As Special Students	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tuition • Flexibility with academic and identification documents • Do not need Turkish • International student quotas do not apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not receive credit or result in a terminal degree • Cannot matriculate until able to produce official documents
Through the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tuition • Flexibility with identification documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only first-year students are eligible • International student quotas apply • Limited to specific universities • Limited to specific academic fields
Through the Türkiye Bursları program	Public universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tuition + supplementary support • Flexibility with identification documents • Turkish language training • International student quotas do not apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only first-year students are eligible • May be limited to specific universities

Despite these responsive policies to address the problem of Syrian access to higher education, implementation to date has been uneven. Results have, therefore, been mixed, as evidenced by low enrollment figures, especially at the seven designated universities.⁴⁵

The map below describes the overall number of Syrian students enrolled at universities in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, and the southern provinces during the 2013-14 academic year.

One possible explanation for this policy disconnect may be a lack of coordination between YÖK and Turkish universities. Several enrolled Syrian students reported that they were continuing to pay tuition, despite the directive from YÖK that their study should be free. They indicated that neither they nor their university administrators knew how to eliminate the fees. Other students we interviewed believed

that “connections” can result in successful admission, with a few even suggesting that bribery for enrollment was commonplace. A number of students described the outsized role of individual faculty or administrator support in securing admission, especially when documents are missing.

These examples highlight the need for coordination mechanisms and information-sharing tools to ensure that new educational policies and YÖK directives are implemented at the university level. They also point to the importance of academic counseling services for Syrians interested in attending a university. Local Syrian and Turkish organizations, as well as international organizations, can play an important role in helping Syrians navigate this challenging system.

In spite of these challenges, Turkey’s higher education system also has flexible aspects that Syrian students can take advantage of to resume their university study. A 25-year-old from Idlib, Amal had begun her studies in biotechnology engineering at Aleppo University, but fled with her family without documentation in mid-2012. She returned to Aleppo to retrieve her transcripts in early 2013, a dangerous journey necessitated by the Syrian government’s refusal to process transcript requests by Syrians outside the country. Although Amal had hoped to continue her studies outside of Turkey, her family would not allow her to leave Gaziantep. As a result, she attempted to enroll at the UoG Medical Biology Department, which offers courses in English. The department head reportedly refused her initial application, noting his program’s negative experience with





Iraqi refugee students in the past. She persisted and was eventually allowed to take classes as a Special Student auditor. After Amal demonstrated her commitment and skills, including advanced English language competency, the department chair sponsored her admission as a full-time student. Amal is concurrently studying to pass the TÖMER, the Turkish-language competency examination, and she expects to enroll during the 2014-15 academic year.

Amal's story is important for several reasons. First, it confirms that despite setbacks and major barriers, talented and committed Syrian students with family support or other resources can succeed in enrolling in Turkish universities. Second, her experience highlights the value of English language proficiency as a means of continuing higher education, especially in Turkey. And finally, the restrictions of movement imposed on Amal by her family indicate that while the option to study further afield in Europe or North America may be available to some elite Syrian male students, it is unavailable to many women. As we discuss in our recommendations, the limitations on travel for Syrian university-age women places a unique responsibility on Turkish universities to provide them with higher education opportunities. A number of the university administrators we interviewed recognized this responsibility and were open to partnerships with international organizations or other universities to help meet the higher education needs of female Syrian university students.

One final policy warrants further investigation and is analyzed in greater detail below: the Government of Turkey's summer 2014 decision to accept the baccalaureate exams administered by the Interim Syrian Government.

BEHAVING LIKE A STATE: THE INTERIM SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE QUESTION OF THE BACCALAUREATE EXAM

In March 2013, the Syrian National Coalition established the Interim Syrian Government (ISG).⁴⁶ It aims to create a shadow government that is capable of demonstrating competence, political inclusiveness, and moderation to Syrians and the international community. Its effective range inside Syria includes those areas from the border adjacent to Antakya and Gaziantep, south to the outskirts of Hama, and a narrow strip extending north from the Jordanian border around the city of Deraa.⁴⁷ Key fields in which the ISG operates include medical services and education.

In addition to responding to dire humanitarian need, the ISG's provision of services in these sectors is intended to strengthen its political sway with the Syrian diaspora. While the Turkish government supports the ISG, including its Ministry of Education (MoE),⁴⁸ the ISG itself has been largely unable to achieve internal consensus and political legitimacy.⁴⁹ Unsurprisingly, the MoE has had difficulty addressing the wide range of educational needs of Syrians in Turkey. Its inability to carry out its mandate, admittedly in a challenging environment, leaves the Syrian community in Turkey with insufficient support and advocacy in the fields of basic and higher education. Our research team met with representatives of the ministry three times, once in Istanbul and twice in Gaziantep.

The ISG-MoE has launched three major initiatives related to promoting primary, secondary, and higher education. These programs are vital to its search for legitimacy and international



Members of the research team (top) speak with Syrian student focus groups in Gaziantep. C. Gratie, June 2014

recognition and are based on the political idea that Syrians will return to a “liberated” Syria in the future and rebuild their communities under the leadership of the Syrian National Coalition, and by extension, the ISG. Given the current political and military situation in Syria, however, the authors believe that this goal is likely unrealistic. As a result, policies that are grounded in this expectation – rather than the realities and needs of the displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey and elsewhere – may result in the misallocation of badly needed resources, and has a bearing on issues of protection.

The first of the major ISG-MoE initiatives is to support the operation of schools that use a revised Syrian public school curriculum, complete with newly printed textbooks. According to Dr. Mohieddin Bananeh, the ISG Minister of Education, the MoE’s curriculum is identical to that taught in Syria except for “changes to Ba’athist-influenced aspects of religious studies, history, and civics.” Our team did not have

the opportunity to review the curriculum, and it was unclear from our conversations which schools are using it.

The second ISG-MoE initiative involves developing plans for ISG-managed post-secondary educational projects. Dr. Bananeh and others within the MoE hope to see the establishment of a Syrian university within the “liberated” territory of Syria, near the Bab al-Hawa crossing along the Turkish border. Such a university would absorb students who had fled Syria with only a few years remaining in their educational program, who could then complete their coursework and examinations. Other MoE officials, including the charismatic educational psychologist Dr. Fawaz Awad, expressed misgivings about the project, noting that since the Syrian régime “targets hospitals, just think what it would do to a university.” Dr. Awad advocates the creation of technical training institutes in each Syrian governorate controlled by the ISG that would



focus on the skills most needed for conflict and post-conflict settings, including construction and engineering, health care, communications, and education. While the research team finds merit in developing high-need professional training centers, we are concerned that such institutes would be exposed to the same dangers as the proposed university.

The third initiative undertaken by the ISG-MoE is its administration of an alternative version of the Syrian baccalaureate examination (in Arabic, *al-thanawiyya al-'ama*). Functionally a combination of a high school exit exam and a university admissions test, the baccalaureate plays a critical role in many national education systems, including in Syria. The baccalaureate is the single most important exam that Syrian students who hope to attend university will take; it has broad cultural and class implications. Not only must a student pass the exam to enter a university, but the score can determine the course of study available, with prestigious programs like medicine, engineering, and pharmacy requiring the highest scores. As noted in the previous section, an exam record is often part of the required paperwork that students need to register for higher education abroad, and most Syrians cannot continue their university studies without it.

Because the Government of Syria's baccalaureate is recognized in Syria and internationally, Syrian students have risked their lives to take the examination, considering it the best option for their futures. The Syrian government does not allow the exam to be administered outside of its testing facilities. As a result, some Syrians have crossed back into

government-held parts of Syria to take the test, fearing that otherwise they will lose years of hard work and study. To avoid returning to Syria for the baccalaureate, many Syrians in Turkey are taking the versions offered by opposition-friendly governments like Libya and Saudi Arabia, which have been administered in Turkey.⁵⁰

Beginning last year and again in June 2014, the ISG's MoE began to administer its own baccalaureate exams in opposition-occupied areas, including the city of Idlib, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, the ISG invited higher education officials from the European Union and representatives from the student governments of EU universities to observe the administration and grading of the examinations.⁵¹ Although a number of the students who had attempted to matriculate at Turkish universities in 2013

It is critical that Syrian students, both those living in exile and in Interim Syrian Government-controlled regions, be able to choose which baccalaureate exam they pursue. The international community should work to provide them with viable options while considering the broader safety implications of this high-stakes examination and to explore safer and more neutral alternatives.

and 2014 reported that MoE-administered tests were not accepted, many expressed confidence that their results would be formally recognized in Turkey and elsewhere. Indeed, as of June 2014, the Turkish government issued a decision that specific universities in select provinces would accept the examination results as part of their admissions policies.

According to Dr. Awad, the Turkish state also plans to begin, at the request of the ISG, to *require* Syrians resident in Turkey who hope to enroll in Turkish public universities to present either the MoE baccalaureate results or the Government of Syria's version. The team was unable to obtain written documentation of this policy request or the Turkish government's response. If Dr. Awad's informants are correct, such a policy would impose a requirement that Syrians in Turkey take a particular exam based on their country of origin.

Education is always a site of political struggle, and while we recognize that the ISG seeks to gain international legitimacy by demonstrating its ability to administer this important examination – and by extension, its ability to govern – this policy may have the unintended consequence of limiting educational options for young Syrians and could even endanger them. All functioning universities in Syria are currently controlled by the régime and do not accept MoE-administered examination results. A student who sits for the MoE baccalaureate exam risks losing recognition of its value in a post-conflict scenario in which the Assad régime prevails. Students who sit for this examination in opposition-held parts of Syria may be labeled enemies of the state and face arrest, torture, and even execution should these areas

revert to régime control. In a recent study on education for Syrians in Turkey, researchers reported that some parents felt that Libyan academic credentials would be politically more neutral than a certificate issued by the MoE.⁵²

It is critical that Syrian students, both those living in exile and in ISG-controlled regions, be able to choose which baccalaureate exam they pursue.⁵³ The international community should work to provide them with viable options while considering the broader safety implications of this high-stakes examination and to explore safer and more neutral alternatives. This work is especially important for young people in Syria living in areas under the control of opposition forces or ISIL, who have few if any safe options for taking the examination – and by extension, for continuing their studies at the university level.

We recommend that post-secondary institutions that are evaluating Syrian student applications, whether in Turkey or elsewhere, consider the baccalaureate results voluntary or waive the requirement altogether. In the Turkish context, this would serve the secondary purpose of addressing the growing concerns that many of these documents are forged or purchased. In lieu of the baccalaureate exam, we encourage universities to consider expanding the use of their own entrance examinations, like the SAT or YÖS, as suggested by some Turkish administrators. Finally, we encourage the international community to explore the transfer of authority for the administration of this examination to a neutral third-party, such as UNESCO or the UNHCR.⁵⁴



View of Istanbul and its Golden Horn.

J. King July 2014

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON SYRIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY

There is tremendous variation in the backgrounds, support networks, aspirations, and evident degrees of resilience of displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey. In general, we observed that the experiences of university-age Syrians can be analyzed depending on where they live and using three broad geographic categories: metropolitan Istanbul and Ankara; the large cities of Turkey's southeast, primarily Antakya, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa; and finally, the refugee camps and Reyhanlı.

Turkey's Metropolitan Centers: Istanbul and Ankara

Istanbul is a vast sprawling metropolis spanning the Bosphorus with a population of over 14 million, making it the fifth largest city in the world. The Turkish government estimates that hundreds of thousands of Syrians are currently living in the city.⁵⁵ Due to

Istanbul's size, however, Syrians are less visible as a refugee community, despite the presence of Syrian beggars in some areas. Syrian neighborhoods have begun to form, primarily in Istanbul's lower-middle-class suburbs like Esenler, the home of the Shamouna School we visited. Istanbul's historic bohemian district of Beyoğlu has attracted Syrian intellectuals and university students, some of whom have created social and cultural centers like Addar and Hamisch.⁵⁶

The students we encountered in Istanbul, as well as in Ankara, conveyed a generally positive outlook and were hopeful about their futures, though not necessarily that of the future of Syria. Many were eager to learn Turkish. There was a striking contrast between the demeanor and outlook of these students and those we met in Amman or Beirut. In Istanbul and Ankara, we observed little evidence of suffering from the kinds of negative social pressures, discrimination, and insecurity at the hands of intelligence services or regular police that we were told of in Lebanon



Gaziantep (pictured here) is the primary center of Syrian exile life and hosts more than 200,000 Syrian refugees. *J. King, June 2014*

and Jordan. Syrians in Istanbul and Ankara described generally positive relations with their Turkish peers, with several indicating that they felt respected.

Those students who were enrolled at public and private universities explained that their problems in Turkey were largely bureaucratic and economic – for example, renewing passports, paying tuition, and finding employment – and not more serious social or safety concerns. This level of security, along with better access to information, has allowed Syrian students in Istanbul and Ankara to imagine themselves as part of a broader community, in solidarity with other members of the Syrian diaspora. Among the many questions the graduating seniors at Shamouna School asked us was, “How are Syrian students doing in Lebanon and Jordan?”

The Southern Tier: Antakya, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa

The Syrian diaspora is a significant presence in the major cities of Turkey’s Southern Tier: Antakya, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa. Historically, this area was part of the Ottoman Province of Aleppo and only became part of Turkey in the 1920s; Antakya, and the rest of the province of Hatay, formally joined Turkey only after a 1939 referendum.

As a consequence, there is considerable shared history and culture – even extended family relations – between the peoples of northern Syria and southern Turkey.

The primary center of Syrian exile life is Gaziantep, where university students have done a great deal of self-organizing. Gaziantep is also the staging area for humanitarian relief in southern Turkey and northern



Syria and is home to the regional headquarters for many NGOs that are providing employment opportunities for multilingual young Syrians.

Displaced and refugee students in southern Turkey may have fewer employment and educational options than those in Turkey's metropolitan centers. For example, a recent report cites an NGO worker's remark that it is "mind blowing" how few resources are present in Gaziantep "compared to the needs and the numbers that are residing [there]," noting that the city is in dire need of more support in all sectors, including education.⁵⁷ Moreover, the close proximity of Syria increases awareness of events there, including exposure to Syrian and foreign fighters. For example, it is possible to call into parts of northern Syria with cell phones from just south of Gaziantep and Antakya, as Turkish cell coverage extends beyond the border.⁵⁸ This constant connection to the conflict in Syria may put Syrian young people under more strain than their counterparts in Istanbul and Ankara, who are more removed from the border and conflict. Although, as documented elsewhere in this report, some Syrian students in Gaziantep exhibit a great deal of resourcefulness and resilience, they also show signs of considerable stress, including nervousness, emotional outbursts, and regular use of tobacco. In general, they also seemed less hopeful than their peers in other parts of Turkey.

While many of the university-age Syrians we interviewed were living in what could be described as "Syrian bubbles," interacting primarily with other Syrians, others were learning Turkish and making Turkish

friends. Their experiences with ill-treatment have been relatively limited, and they did not complain of the types of difficulties of social acceptance reported by students in Jordan and Lebanon. As described earlier, there is evidence of anti-refugee prejudice that is unfortunately far-reaching. How these attitudes develop with regard to Syrians in Turkey remains to be seen, but at present, Turkey seems to provide the most favorable environment in the region for Syrian students.

Rana, a Syrian Christian from the Golan who had enrolled at the University of Gaziantep before the war and recently received a degree in hotel management, told us that when she first arrived in Gaziantep five years prior, she felt welcome as a Syrian both on campus and in Turkey as a whole. She reported a clear shift in attitudes toward Syrians in recent years, explaining that they are sometimes ridiculed behind their backs by other students, or are the subject of unfavorable comment in public spaces. While Rana's knowledge of Turkish protects her from this kind of light harassment, she was compelled to admit to the more recent arrivals in her focus group that Gaziantep felt like a different place than the one she had first come to know only a few years ago.

Syrians have also formed mutual assistance and cultural organizations in Gaziantep. One of the most interesting cultural spaces is the Nihavent Restaurant, located in an upscale shopping district. It serves Syrian food and doubles as an art gallery and performance space. Places like these can be important for university-age Syrians hoping to learn from those who have successfully

One frustrated graduating high school student told us, “We don’t know anything about what is possible for us in Turkey.”

enrolled. For example, our team was impressed by the commitment of several enrolled students to supporting their peers through informal social networks. Abdullah, a Master’s student from Idlib with fluent English, had finished his coursework but was delaying graduation in order to maintain military deferment. He described cultural barriers hindering Syrians from applying to Turkish and international universities, including their unfamiliarity with university applications in general and inexperience in written communication. Abdullah hoped to launch study groups to help other Syrians take such tests as the TOEFL and GRE. After meeting with the research team, he sent us a long email that delineated his vision for an educational center that would serve both Turkish and Syrian students.

Camp-Based and Reyhanlı Students

Turkish government restrictions made it difficult to meet with university-age Syrians living in Turkey’s 22 refugee camps. However, the team did interview three sisters of school- and university-age who had lived for a time in one of the refugee camps. In their case, the camp was reserved for Syrian military officers who had defected to Turkey and their families. As a consequence, it functions as a kind of internment camp

with additional restrictions on travel. The young women informed us that while they felt secure there, little effort was made to help them continue their education, beyond rudimentary secondary schooling. In fact, their family had left the camp without official permission so that the girls could continue their studies at the high school and university levels respectively. A striking feature of our encounter with this group was that the youngest of the sisters spoke a great deal more Turkish than her oldest sister; it is probable that integration with Turkish education may be easier for younger Syrians. The former camp-based students were quite relieved to be out of the camp and living in Istanbul, where they had escaped the intense boredom of the camp and found education and job opportunities more readily available.

This sense of boredom and lack of opportunities was inescapable in the border town of Reyhanlı, which, as discussed at the outset of this report, resembles a refugee camp. There are few opportunities for Syrian young people in the town, beyond those in the humanitarian sector. Outside the establishment of the UFSA, there is little evidence of the kind of vibrant diaspora social and intellectual scenes found elsewhere in Turkey. Among our major concerns is that Reyhanlı appears to be a place where foreign fighters who travel via Turkey to Syria to fight may be mixing with the local Syrian university-age population, exposing these young men to radicalization. Several former university professionals, as well as parents, expressed concern about this problem, noting in particular the dearth of secular schools in Reyhanlı.



DISPLACED AND REFUGEE SYRIAN ACADEMICS

Hundreds of Syrian academics are languishing without work in Turkey. While the majority are living in urban environments, others reside in refugee camps along the Syrian border. Like their student counterparts, many are suffering from intense trauma and shock, often more acute due to their precipitous loss of social status and inability to provide for their families.

At our meeting with the Union of Free Syrian Academics in Reyhanlı, we interviewed a number of former professors of Syrian universities, including a legal scholar from Damascus named Noora, who had trained at an elite French law school in civil law. Intense and charismatic, Noora had arrived in Turkey in early 2014 after being detained and tortured in a Syrian prison for her pro-democracy activities. Describing her love of playing the piano, she raised her hands for us to see, revealing three deformed fingers that were broken during her imprisonment. She asserted, forcefully, “My hands are a symbol.” Noora had been unable to find work in Turkey. She pointed to another professor in the room, Iman, an engineer and more senior colleague, asking, “If Iman cannot secure work here, with so many publications and so much experience, how will I?”

We also interviewed several Syrian academics in Antakya, including Samir, an engineering professor from Latakia who fled his home country in the summer of 2013 and had not yet found work. Samir described his harrowing experiences in Syria and the frustration he had faced in Turkey. In 2011,

Syrian régime forces arrested and imprisoned him for one month due to his support for the anti-régime demonstrations; subsequently, he was seized on his home campus and imprisoned in Homs for more than a year. He described the horrors of being beaten by members of the *Shabiha* and tortured while under interrogation. Samir had applied unsuccessfully to universities in the Gulf, where he believed he was declined “as a Syrian,” as well as in Turkey. With his limited English and Turkish, his employment opportunities are severely limited.

As with students, Syrian academics in Turkey are struggling to navigate an unfamiliar system, exacerbated by language barriers that are often insurmountable. As a result, the Turkish higher education system is accessible only to a minority of scholars with English proficiency, or those who work in the fields of Arabic language or Islamic law and theology, where instruction is in Arabic. Numerous Syrian academics we met inquired about establishing an Arabic university or professional institutes in Turkey or the border regions, which they believed could also educate the displaced and refugee students. Many others requested support for English-language training.

A further challenge is their lack of official identification documents, especially passports. Without such documents, securing work is very difficult in Turkey and impossible internationally. Dr. Ibrahim of the UFSA estimated that up to 70% of the Syrian academics in Turkey’s southeast provinces lack passports and cannot retrieve them due to the situation in Syria. In fact, many of the scholars we met had no official identity documents.

Without the opportunity to formally study English or Turkish, and unable to secure work abroad, the vast majority of Syrian university professors in Turkey have no professional options. Several we interviewed had turned to new Arabic-language higher education initiatives that lack accreditation or long-term strategies (for example, the Free Syrian University, an institutional case study below) and reported that they had become disillusioned. Unlike those in Jordan or Lebanon, however, Syrian scholars in Turkey are organizing – whether through the ISG’s Ministry of Higher Education, largely run by former university staff, or initiatives like the UFSA – to help Syrian faculty find work

Without the opportunity to formally study English or Turkish, and unable to secure work abroad, the vast majority of Syrian university professors in Turkey have no professional options.

internationally or in Turkey and to support Syrian students’ integration at Turkish universities. As a general rule, these efforts suffer from lack of funding, disorganization, and limited connections with the Turkish higher education system.⁵⁹ Several scholars we interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of support they were receiving from the international community, one comparing the higher levels of assistance that Jewish and Iraqi academics received during the 1940s and 2000s, respectively, to the plight of Syrian academics today.

Despite these challenges, there may be opportunities for Syrian scholars within the Turkish higher education system. A 2014 YÖK study on the future of higher education in Turkey recommended that the country add 45,000 academic positions over the next five years, in order to align it with international standards on faculty-student ratios; the study also noted that a mere 20,000 of the 140,000 total staff at Turkish universities hold Ph.Ds.⁶⁰ Yet, based on Turkey’s low foreign faculty to domestic faculty ratios, it appears that recruiting international faculty is not a top priority a present.⁶¹ In addition, these efforts may be hampered by language barriers, and in some cases, bureaucratic roadblocks, especially related to the process of assessing the credentials of foreign faculty and issuing work permits.

Nevertheless, Turkish government and university representatives we met expressed guarded enthusiasm for exploring collaborations with international organizations to support their Syrian colleagues. IIE’s Scholar Rescue Fund has already partnered with several Turkish universities to provide Syrian scholars with visiting academic positions.⁶² As in Jordan and Lebanon, international organizations and donors can play a critical role in facilitating the integration of Syrian faculty in Turkey. This help could include language training, as well as fellowships to cost-share positions at Turkish universities. Without this funding support and the promise of attractive international partnerships, very few Syrian scholars will find opportunities to continue their academic work at Turkish institutions.



INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDIES

CASE ONE: SPARK's Holistic Programing

As described throughout this report, to avoid creating a permanent underclass of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Syrians must be given higher education opportunities, along with access to language and vocational training, that will allow them to integrate into Turkish society and local labor markets. At the same time, it is critical to develop leaders who have specialized skills and are motivated to begin the rebuilding process immediately after the war in Syria eases.

SPARK, a Dutch NGO that focuses on higher education and entrepreneurship in societies torn by conflict,⁶³ offers an important model of holistic programing that supports both Syrians' integration into Turkish higher education now and their development of skills critical to rebuilding Syria. Operating out of Gaziantep since March 2013 and using a model developed in the Balkans and elsewhere, SPARK launched its International Syrian University in Exile (ISSUE) in June 2013. The 2013 summer university and a 2014 winter university have delivered intensive courses to nearly 100 university-age activists residing in Syria or in Turkey who have a direct link to initiatives inside Syria. The ISSUE program aims to provide civic-minded Syrian youth with skills in fields critical to emergency management and post-conflict reconstruction.⁶⁴ Led primarily by Syrian faculty and trainers who are also

displaced in Turkey, the ISSUE workshops are housed on the University of Gaziantep campus and are delivered in partnership with UoG. At the winter university, SPARK also launched a business plan competition for the students, awarding several grants to Syria-based projects in the fields of animal husbandry, communications, and energy.

Recognizing the immediate need to support Syrian access to Turkish universities, SPARK is now preparing to launch a scholarship program with the UoG that would allow an estimated 60-80 Syrians to continue their studies at the university. At present, it is unclear what mechanisms could be used to enroll these students, whether as part of the Türkiye scholarship program or through a tailored scheme. SPARK will provide the scholarship recipients with stipends to cover their housing, transportation costs, study materials, and a monthly allowance. In addition, working closely with the Union of Free Syrian Academics and other partners, it plans to establish a Syrian Support Desk that will offer academic and career advising and provide the students with opportunities to volunteer within both the refugee and Turkish academic communities.⁶⁵ The scholarship program will be managed by the UoG, with SPARK providing technical and logistical support as needed. SPARK's prioritization of local partnerships with Turkish institutions and Syrian civil society groups represents an important best-practice for international organizations operating in Turkey.

CASE TWO: Orient School and Languages Center in Reyhanlı

Orient for Human Relief, a foundation connected to the Syrian businessman and philanthropist Ghassan Aboud, supports a wide range of medical, relief, and educational programs for Syrians affected by the conflict.⁶⁶ Based in Reyhanlı and with activities in opposition-controlled Syria and throughout southern Turkey, it presents an important model for addressing the diverse post-secondary education needs of Syrian youth. By offering English and Turkish language classes, preparation courses for various Turkish and international higher education tests, and vocational training, Orient's educational program is designed to support Syrians' entry into Turkish universities, higher education institutions abroad, and the Turkish job market.

We visited the Orient school in Reyhanlı, which opened in October 2013⁶⁷ and at the time of our visit was delivering primary and secondary education to more than 1,600 displaced and refugee Syrians; a further 2,000 students have taken Turkish, English, and test preparation courses at the affiliated Orient Languages Center (OLC). Students do not pay any fees, and Orient covers the cost of their books. The Orient students we met were bright, motivated to enter university, and largely optimistic, although like their peers elsewhere, they expressed anxiety about the low acceptance rates amongst Syrians at Turkish universities and frustration at the lack of information about educational opportunities. Many indicated that they would prefer to continue their studies in the United States or Europe.

Orient's accomplishments over a short period would not have been possible without Turkish government support and sanction – for example, in allowing the foundation to operate in the Nizip refugee camp near Gaziantep. Although focused on the Syrian community, significantly, Orient programs – including its English- and Arabic-language courses – are open to students from any country. Turkish students have taken English language courses, and the OLC plans to begin offering Arabic language courses as well. This openness is a particularly important strategic choice given the pervasive poverty and lower educational levels among the local population of Reyhanlı, and it is likely a factor in Orient's ability to register and secure the support of the Turkish government,⁶⁸ which also recognizes Orient-issued TÖMER certificates and has assisted the OLC in identifying language instructors.

Given its success to date and free tuition, the demand for Orient's educational services will only increase in the years ahead. International donors and partners, as well as Turkish institutions, should partner with the foundation to meet this demand. In addition, there is a significant opportunity for both Turkish and international universities to develop scholarship schemes in partnership with the Orient schools that would allow Orient graduates to study at their institutions.

CASE THREE: The Free Syrian University

The Free Syrian University (FSU) is a post-secondary learning initiative that is described on its official website as a “nonprofit educational institution providing society with educated cadres.”⁶⁹ Claiming to offer study in ten different faculties, the FSU was founded in October 2013 by a group



of individuals who had fled Syria, led by Dr. Musab al-Jamal. Their stated goal was to provide learning alternatives for Syrian university students without access to a traditional university environment. The research team met with Dr. al-Jamal, who is currently president of the university, in the Reyhanlı apartment where the university was previously housed (according to its official website, it has since moved to Antakya). According to Dr. al-Jamal, as of June 2014, 32 students were attending classes in person, with several hundred enrolled remotely; courses are offered at discounted rates, and in cases of demonstrated financial need, for free.

Despite the positive international press that the FSU has garnered,⁷⁰ it is important to recognize the inherent limitations of higher education initiatives that lack accreditation, like the FSU, especially in credit transfer and degree recognition. We interviewed several Syrian academics who previously worked at the FSU, the majority of whom were quick to dismiss it. One noted, “It has no students. It has no faculty. It has no facilities. It’s not a real university.”

Arabic-language higher education holds widespread appeal among both Syrian academics and university-age students in Turkey, and the FSU is, in part, responding to this partiality. At the UFSA town hall meeting in Reyhanlı, a recent female university graduate raised her hand and asked, “Why can’t there be an Arabic language university here in Turkey? There are so many professors here, and so many students who need to learn. This would solve a problem for everyone.” This question reflects a deep desire among many displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey. It also reveals this population’s vulnerability to programs

that imply that they are recognized internationally and therefore able to provide university credits that are transferable, even to institutions in Syria.

International donors and institutions, as well as the media, should recognize that while non-accredited adult learning initiatives may have social and intellectual benefits for the exiled Syrian community, a university exists only through recognition by a competent authority. In order for students and their families to make informed decisions about how to spend their academic time and money, therefore, it is critical that they know that the FSU coursework is not recognized in Syria or Turkey. While the FSU’s next steps are unclear, Syrians and the international community should recognize the inherent limitation posed by its lack of formal accreditation.

CASE FOUR: Social Media and “Syrians at the University of Gaziantep”

Through contacts made at the Syrian café Nihavent, the research team met with Mohannad, a displaced fourth-year student enrolled at the University of Gaziantep. At a coffee kiosk next to the university’s main entrance, Mohannad explained that he “had been enrolled at the university by my father during a business trip to the city,” which we understood to mean that his father had used his influence to secure Muhannad’s matriculation, either through money or connections. Equally critical, Muhannad explained, was the support of his fellow Syrian students in Gaziantep, in particular a friend named Salim, who is also from Aleppo.

Though many of Aleppo's residents have fled the bombing and generalized violence that followed its 2012 siege, it was Salim's activism that forced him into exile because it placed him in danger of detention by the Syrian government's domestic intelligence services. To address the crisis of internal displacement from the Aleppo countryside, Salim and several university friends moved to help the city's growing number of homeless and hungry people. They took advantage of school buildings, unoccupied for the summer, and opened them to the internally displaced – without the permission of the local authorities – levying supplies and donations from the more fortunate members of the Aleppo community and other university students. What started with a simple reaction to local needs became an impressive network of aid throughout the Aleppo suburbs.

Salim narrated these events with a sense of dismay that the Syrian authorities, including the Syrian Red Crescent, did not support the humanitarian activism of this group of university students. As the secret police began to interrogate, arrest, torture, and even kill his associates, Salim fled, first to Saudi Arabia and eventually to Gaziantep. Though clearly proud of his past defiance and present resilience, Salim also displayed feelings of both helplessness and survivor's guilt at having been unable to protect his friends in Aleppo from the violence that eventually befell them.

Once in Gaziantep, Salim wasted little time in applying his organizing experience toward supporting the city's incoming Syrian students, eventually working with Mohannad and

others. They formed an active Facebook page – “Syrians at the University of Gaziantep”⁷¹ – that posts information and allows students to pose questions to one another and provide immediate answers in a virtual environment. With thousands of members, it is among the largest of many such groups for displaced and refugee Syrian university students that reflects the diffuse and collectivist character that defined early protests in Syria. For example, one Facebook group for all Syrian students in Turkey, with roughly 15,000 members, declares in its “About Us” section that “Every student is a potential leader.” Facebook groups are a lifeline for university-age Syrians in exile, who, despite individual hardships, remain well-connected through the internet and social media. Through such Facebook groups, students

Social media-based mutual assistance groups like the “Syrians at the University of Gaziantep” Facebook page are effective but fragile, because they depend on trust, social connections, and the engagement of young Syrian activists. Their success could be hijacked by Syrian exile organizations and exploited for a variety of political ends, a possibility that was raised by the group's organizers themselves.

share information about new higher education programs and opportunities, ways to overcome bureaucratic barriers, and housing openings. The effectiveness of Syrian student organizing, free from the bureaucracy that characterizes many Turkish institutions, suggests that more formal institutional involvement would undermine, rather than enhance, their activities.

Our research team's visit to the international students' office at UoG revealed the effective role that Salim, Mohammad, and their colleagues are playing. As discussed above, UoG is the foremost institution of higher learning in its region, and it has been designated as one of the principal academic destinations for Syrian university students in southeastern Turkey. Created in the likeness of a sprawling American-style public state university, METU in Ankara, it is a full-fledged campus, equipped not merely with undergraduate and graduate faculties that teach a wide variety of subjects in English, but also with the infrastructure that international students would typically need. Still, Salim and his friends were serving a critical function as intermediaries between incoming Arabic-speaking students and the UoG international office's small staff. During our visit, for example, numerous Syrian students approached Salim regarding his Arabic translation of a document that had been provided to all international students, physically posted on the window of the office.

Social media-based mutual assistance groups like the "Syrians at the University of Gaziantep" Facebook page are effective but fragile, because they depend on trust, social connections, and the engagement of young Syrian activists. Their success could be hijacked by Syrian exile organizations and exploited for a variety of political ends, a possibility that was raised by the group's organizers themselves. The international higher education community should take a "do no harm" position toward these organic groups and give the young Syrian activist community the space to create and administer these initiatives, providing assistance only when specifically invited to do so. International organizations should also recognize that such groups are able to effectively communicate information about opportunities to the wider student community.



Facebook page of "Syrians and the University of Gaziantep."

KEY FINDINGS

1. The overwhelming majority of university-age Syrians in Turkey – as many as 98% – are not continuing any form of higher education. However, Syrian access to higher education in Turkey is improving dramatically, with enrollment rates at Turkish universities rising by more than 300% between 2012-13 and 2013-14.
2. Despite pre-conflict Syria's rough parity between female and male attendance rates at universities, Syrian young women are enrolling at much lower rates in Turkey than their male counterparts. Because female students with the educational credentials to study in Europe or North America are unlikely to leave their families behind, it is critical that they be supported to continue their education in Turkey.
3. Several factors impact Syrians' ability to access institutions of higher learning in Turkey: insufficient information about educational opportunities, exacerbated by frequent changes to regulations; language barriers; missing academic and identification documents; the limited capacity of Turkish institutions; and economic hardship.
4. Syrian students are struggling to learn about educational opportunities in Turkey and how to best navigate the Turkish higher education system. The most effective knowledge sharing and academic counseling has been "peer-to-peer" on social media forums like Facebook, where a number of local groups have formed to advise students and share the most up-to-date information.
5. At present, the Government of Turkey and Turkish universities are playing only a minimal role in advising and knowledge sharing.
5. The Government of Turkey and its Higher Education Council (YÖK) continues to develop a humane and forward-thinking policy that aims to facilitate the integration of Syrians at Turkish universities. There are, however, significant gaps between this policy and its implementation.
6. With few exceptions, the Government of Turkey has developed the existing higher education initiatives for Syrians. There are important opportunities for the international community to work with Turkish partners to fund and build capacity for these initiatives, as well as to develop new programs to support Syrian university students and scholars. However, the Turkish government has largely resisted foreign involvement in the refugee issue to date, and it remains to be seen how receptive it will be to cooperation with international actors.
7. Turkey's large size and population, strong economy, and relatively stable political situation have allowed it to manage the influx of Syrian refugees without significant international assistance. However, as the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year and the refugee population continues to swell, it is critical for the UN, governments, and international donors and organizations to support and partner with Turkish institutions to meet the refugees' needs, including in the area of higher education.



8. It is vital that international actors work closely with Turkish partners, integrating their programs with existing Turkish initiatives and the local higher education system.
9. Turkish higher education institutions are generally open to establishing programs for Syrian university students and scholars, although this support is complicated in some instances by contemporary Turkish politics and the perceived connection between support for the refugees and the political agenda of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP). International partnerships could help mitigate potential sensitivities over educational programs targeted at Syrians.
10. The practical impact of Syrian student enrollment on Turkey's academic infrastructure has been negligible thus far. Although the country's higher education sector continues to develop rapidly to accommodate both its own population and international student interest, it lacks capacity to meet domestic needs. This was true even prior to the influx of Syrians. As a result, qualified Syrian students seeking to continue their higher education in Turkey have, in some cases, faced restrictions due to preexisting international student quotas, although this barrier to enrollment may change as the Turkish government expands scholarship opportunities for Syrians.
11. Unlike those in Lebanon or Jordan, university-age Syrians in Turkey generally report positive experiences and supportive environments both on and off their university campuses; however, tensions between the Syrian and local Turkish populations are on the rise as Syrians move from protected "guests" to semi-permanent residents. There are regional variations in how Syrians are treated, with the majority of reported attacks coming from southeastern Turkey, while problems in Istanbul and Ankara are relatively rare.
12. A significant percentage of Syrian refugees will likely settle permanently in Turkey, even after the conflict in Syria ends. As Syrian children and young people learn Turkish, within several years, the language barrier to higher education will be greatly reduced.
13. Turkish and English language training is an essential vehicle for Syrian assimilation into Turkish society, the local labor market, and institutions of higher learning, as well as for facilitating Syrians' international mobility.
14. With few exceptions, Syrian faculty are unable to secure academic work at Turkish universities without support from international organizations.
15. While the Interim Syrian Government's Ministry of Education has Turkish government support and has achieved some success, its educational programs are hampered by several drawbacks, including the outsized prioritization of certain initiatives and the volatility of Syrian politics in exile. In addition, if the Government of Turkey's position of support were to shift, any existing programs could collapse, with devastating results for student beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

International humanitarian community:

1. Support efforts to help qualified Syrian students

connect with higher education opportunities in Turkey and abroad. The international community should help ensure that displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey are able to access higher education by devoting the necessary attention and resources to:

- address the suffering caused by the conflict in Syria;
- maintain the intellectual capacity needed to rebuild Syria after the conflict;
- contribute to Turkish and regional security;
- promote women’s empowerment; and
- affirm the human right to education.

2. Provide a range of post-secondary education options, working with Turkish institutions, to meet the diverse needs of university-age Syrians. Although scholarships to study at Turkish universities are essential, vocational training that is directly connected to the local labor market may be more beneficial for a significant subset of the displaced population. Syrians with the educational background to pursue studies in Europe, North America, and the Gulf should be supported in this endeavor.

3. Recognize young adults aged 18-24 – and the subset of university students – as a specific and internationally recognized category of humanitarian analysis and support. The international humanitarian community should focus research on this demographic, with special attention

on how best to close the evident gender gaps in university attendance for Syrian and other displaced populations.

4. Call for an investigation by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria regarding accusations of student torture centers on Syrian campuses.

International higher education:

1. Facilitate the integration of Syrians into the Turkish higher education system. While many Syrians in Turkey believe that forming Arabic-language institutions of higher learning is the best solution to their higher education crisis, these institutions may not be able to attain accreditation, in large part due to sensitivities in Turkey surrounding non-Turkish language instruction. Integrating Syrians into the Turkish higher education system will provide them with the most immediate and secure outcomes in terms of formal recognition and accreditation.

2. Partner with Turkish universities interested in developing or expanding programs that can assist Syrian students and faculty. Donor agencies, educational NGOs, and institutions of higher learning internationally should work with the Turkish government and local NGOs to develop mechanisms and a strategic impetus for Turkish universities to identify and enroll eligible Syrians. By providing outreach and academic vetting support, positive publicity, and supplemental funding, international organizations can help institutions enroll Syrian students.



Programs should seek to build regionally based consortia of universities that could focus on female students or specific fields.

- interface with local, regional, and international NGOs; and
- offer language training and preparation courses for relevant national and international academic tests.

3. Provide scholarship opportunities on campuses in Europe, North America, and the Gulf.

This is especially critical since Turkey's higher education system lacks the capacity to enroll significantly more students. Initiatives like the IIE Syria Consortium can ease this process by identifying qualified students, assisting institutions in hosting these students, and mentoring the students in their adjustment to academic life abroad. The IIE Syria Consortium might also serve as a type of clearinghouse to connect students with scholarship programs outside of Turkey, such as those being planned for Germany and Finland.

4. Establish regional academic centers, in collaboration with local Turkish and Syrian partners, that can assist Syrian university students on their short-term adjustment and longer-term decisions.

Centers could play several important roles. They may:

- provide psychosocial support, academic and career counseling, and visa advising;
- serve as an information hub for academic and scholarship opportunities and Turkish government regulations relevant to Syrians;
- host academic fairs with Turkish and international higher education institutions;
- connect students to volunteer, internship, and job opportunities;

5. Connect Syrian university students and graduates in Turkey with volunteer and job opportunities to serve the refugee community,

especially in the areas of education, human rights, and health care, including mental health. University scholarships could be directly tied to internships, work-study programs, and post-graduation employment. Such programs can provide alternatives to radicalization, crime, and other antisocial behavior. Furthermore, they represent an important opportunity to empower highly motivated youth with advanced skills and training to help meet the vast humanitarian and educational needs of the Syrian refugee population. They should also emphasize the potential of higher education to build social solidarity and provide occasions for Syrian and Turkish university students to connect, develop friendships, and even collaborate.

6. Support English and Turkish language training for Syrian faculty, which will improve their chances of finding work.

In addition, both Turkish universities and institutions outside Turkey should partner with international programs like the IIE Scholar Rescue Fund to offer visiting positions to displaced and endangered Syrian professors and researchers.

Governments:

- 1. Work with universities and higher education NGOs internationally to share the costs of connecting Syrian university students in Turkey with educational opportunities.** This could include supporting the Turkish higher education system to expand capacity. Turkey needs more universities to satisfy local demand, and governments should help to increase Turkish higher education capacity, thus benefiting both the refugee and local populations. Assistance and cooperation could also focus on language training, as Turkish universities have made English-language learning a priority in recent years.
- 2. Develop a dual approach to supporting Syrian faculty and university students in Turkey by: (1) providing funding and capacity building support to help facilitate their integration at Turkish universities, and (2) establishing scholarship and fellowship programs that will allow them to enter higher education institutions internationally.** In this way, governments in Europe, North America, and the Gulf can encourage more cost-effective regional integration, while demonstrating a willingness to share responsibility for the crisis.
- 3. Demonstrate flexibility in granting student and visiting scholar visas to displaced and refugee Syrians,** wherever in the world they travel to take advantage of scholarship and fellowship opportunities.

Government of Turkey:

- 1. Establish clear criteria for international actors interested in supporting the higher education needs of displaced and refugee Syrians in Turkey.** The Government of Turkey should also develop concrete mechanisms for soliciting and monitoring funding to implement local Turkish-led programs, as well as clear guidelines for international stakeholders seeking to establish educational programs in Turkey.
- 2. Develop mechanisms and tools for information sharing that will help ensure better coordination between YÖK and Turkish universities in implementing government educational policies related to Syrians.**
- 3. Follow through in establishing a Türkiye Bursları (Turkey Scholarship) program for Syrian students.** If the program is successful, the Turkish government should collaborate with international partners that are able to provide additional funding and supplemental assistance to scale up and expand the program.

Turkish universities / higher education NGOs:

- 1. Waive the requirement of the secondary school baccalaureate exam for Syrians and instead utilize university-established admissions tests.** This change would allow qualified Syrian students to enroll without risking their security by returning to Syria to take the exam. It would also eliminate some document fabrication.



2. Form cross-university councils of faculty and administrators to advise Syrian students who are attempting to enroll in Turkish universities but are facing challenges with their documentation or equivalency. Such

councils would fill an important void in helping ensure the implementation of Turkish government decisions that are intended to facilitate the enrollment of Syrian university students. Due to decentralized admissions practices across Turkey's universities, coupled with YÖK's evolving regulations and lack of a mechanism for universities to seek clarification, Syrians' ability to enroll is often dependent on individual universities being proactive and flexible. These

councils would perform a critical ombudsmen-like role for Syrian students as they attempt to navigate Turkey's complex higher education system.

3. Work with the Turkish government and international partners to assess the most effective and sustainable policy and program approaches to integrating Syrians at Turkish universities. Turkish research institutions

focused on higher education should analyze the role of international partners and how their support might also benefit the Turkish higher education sector writ large, as well as the local population.

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ENDNOTES

1. We use the phrase “displaced and refugee” throughout this report. Many of the Syrians we interviewed cannot return to Syria for fear of violence or persecution or due to the current situation more generally. We consider these Syrians to be “refugees,” even if they are not registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (see footnote 4) or classified as refugees under Turkish law. Other Syrians, who travel between Turkey and opposition-held parts of Syria, may be considered “displaced.” As a general rule, Syrians in Turkey prefer the term “displaced” (in Arabic, *nazih*) over “refugee” regardless of their particular circumstances, because the term has fewer negative connotations.
2. Davidson, J. and Brooking, E. (July 24, 2014). “ISIS Hasn’t Gone Anywhere – and It’s Getting Stronger.” Council on Foreign Relations. Available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/07/24/isis-hasnt-gone-anywhere-and-its-getting-stronger/> (last accessed September 29, 2014).
3. In Jordan in particular, several donors, international NGOs, and governments have established or made a commitment to establishing higher education programs since the publication of our 2013 report. Several of these new initiatives will be described in our final study.
4. It is worth noting that the UNHCR’s registration activities are more limited in Turkey than in other host countries because of the terms under which it operates in Turkey. For more information, see Akram, S. et al. “Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility-Sharing.” Boston University School of Law, (April 2014), p. 99. (“Unlike other host countries in the region, UNHCR provides its services through the Turkish government rather than doing so directly”). Available at www.bu.edu/law/central/jd/programs/clinics/international-human-rights/documents/FINALFullReport.pdf (last accessed September 29, 2014).
5. Watenpugh, K. D. et al. (May 2013). “Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syria’s Refugee University Students and Academics in Jordan.” University of California, Davis and the Institute of International Education. Available at www.academia.edu/3474289/Uncounted_and_Unacknowledged_Syrias_Refugee_University_Students_and_Academics_in_Jordan (last accessed October 1, 2014). See also Watenpugh, K. D. et al. (June 2014). “The War Follows Them: Syrian University Students and Scholars in Lebanon.” The Institute of International Education and University of California, Davis. Available at www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Publications-and-Reports/IIE-Bookstore/The-War-Follows-Them-Syrian-University-Students-And-Scholars-In-Lebanon (last accessed October 1, 2014).
6. According to 2011 statistics from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s Institute for Statistics, 25.6% of Syrians were enrolled in tertiary education in 2011. More details can be found at www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=SYR®ioncode=40525 (last accessed September 29, 2014). Other estimates indicate that 26% of urban Syrians (male and female) attained some form of post-secondary education; in rural areas, 17% of men and 15% of women. See Kabbani, N. and Salloum, S. (2011). “Implications of Financing Higher Education for Access and Equity: The Case of Syria.” *Prospects*, 41(1), 97-113.
7. UN data. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224> (last accessed September 17, 2014). Recent events in the Kurdish regions of northern Syria have led more than 100,000 additional Syrian refugees to enter Turkey, fleeing ISIS. See Hubbard, Ben (September 22, 2014). “Raids by ISIS Push Flood of Refugees into Turkey.” *The New York Times*. Available at www.nytimes.com/2014/09/23/world/europe/over-130000-flee-syria-for-turkey-in-wake-of-isis-raids.html (last accessed September 28, 2014).
8. According to the Syrian government Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 20.2% of Syria’s mid-year 2011 population was between the ages of 15 and 24. We estimate, therefore, that the 18-22 demographic constituted roughly half, or 10%, of this population. For more information, visit www.cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-11-2-2011.htm (last accessed September 29, 2014).
9. We assume that Turkey is hosting a minimum of one million Syrians, a number that is on the low end of Turkish government estimates. Proceeding with this assumption and utilizing the CBS demographic statistics from the previous footnote, we conclude that there are at least 200,000 Syrians between the ages of 15-24 currently in Turkey, with around half being undergraduate age (18-22). CBS statistics indicate that the proportion of Syrians enrolled in some form of higher education in pre-war Syria was at least 20%, while the UNESCO Institute of Statistics reports a 25.6% enrollment rate. . Using these numbers, we therefore conclude that there should be a minimum of 20,000-30,000 Syrian university students or university-qualified students in Turkey. Considering that many displaced and refugee Syrians who were in the midst of their university studies have been unable to resume their education in Turkey, and are now over the age of 22, these numbers may be even higher. For education-related statistics in pre-war Syria, visit the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, available at www.cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/chapter11-EN.htm (last accessed September 29, 2014).
10. Statistics from YÖK on Syrian enrollment at Turkish universities for the 2013-14 academic year. Data shared via personal communication, June 27, 2014, on file with the authors. In some cases, the YÖK numbers may be lower than the most current enrollment rates, while in other cases, they may be higher.
11. Statistics from YÖK on Syrian enrollment at Turkish universities from the academic years 2009-10 through 2012-13, Data shared via personal communication, June 21, 2014, on file with the authors.
12. Statistics from YÖK on Syrian enrollment at Turkish universities for the 2013-14 academic year, Data shared via personal communication, June 27, 2014, on file with the authors. According to UNESCO’s Institute of Statistics, 25.8% of Syrian women were enrolled in tertiary education in 2011.
13. Letsch, C. (September 8, 2014). “Syria’s Refugees: Fears of Abuse Grow as Turkish Men Snap Up Wives.” *The Guardian*. Available at www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/08/syrian-refugee-brides-turkish-husbands-marriage (last accessed September 13, 2014).



14. For more information, see the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre at www.prsproject.org (last accessed October 1, 2014).
15. "Squandering Humanity: Socioeconomic Monitoring Report on Syria." (May 2014). Syrian Centre for Policy Research, UN Development Programme, and UN Refugee and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, 6. Retrieved from www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/scpr_report_q3-q4_2013_270514final_3.pdf (last accessed September 29, 2014).
16. The human right to education is established in Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and Article 13(2)(c) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), which states that "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education." Retrieved from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights website at www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx. See also Steiner, H. and Alston, P. (2000). "Comment on the ICESR and the Character of the Rights." In Steiner, H. J., et. al (eds.). *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals*, 245-248. New York: Oxford University Press; Beiter, K. (2006). *The Protection of the Right to Education by International Law*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
17. See, for example, "Needs Soar as Number of Syrian Refugees Tops 3 Million": <http://unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/news/2014/needs-soar-as-number-of-syrian-refugees-tops-3-million.html> (last accessed September 29, 2014); Ihlamur-Öner, S. (2013). "Turkey's Refugee Regime Stretched to the Limit? The Case of Iraqi and Syrian Refugee Flows." *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 8(3), 191.
18. See Ahmadzadeh, H. et al. (September 2014). "Ensuring Quality Education for Young Refugees from Syria (12-25 Years): A Mapping Exercise." University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, 56-69. Available at www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/rr-syria-youth-education-2014.pdf (last accessed September 29, 2014). Turkey's educational policy, including the various issues surrounding Arabic versus Turkish instruction, is described in depth in Kirişçi, K. (May 2014). "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality." Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 23-27. Available at www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/05/12%20turkey%20syrian%20refugees%20kirisci/syrian%20refugees%20and%20turkeys%20challenges%20may%202014%202014.pdf (last accessed September 29, 2014).
19. Ahmadzadeh, et al., 64.
20. Ibid, 9.
21. Syrian academics in Antakya indicated to us that in 2012-2013, conflict arose between Syrians in the city, who are primarily Sunni Muslims, and its Arabic-speaking Alawite inhabitants, who identify with the ruling Alawite minority in Syria. A heavy police presence defused the situation. Anecdotally, Alawite refugees outside of this geographic area are reported to have faced difficulty accessing services.
22. "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014." (2014) Bristol, United Kingdom: Development Initiatives. Available at www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GHA-Report-2014-interactive.pdf, 27-30. The report describes Turkey as the world's "most generous" country in 2013, as measured by humanitarian assistance as the percent of its gross national income (0.21%).
23. Akram, et al., 97.
24. Dinçer, O. et al. (2013) "Turkey and Syrian Refugees: The Limits of Hospitality." Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Available at www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/11/18%20syria%20turkey%20refugees/turkey%20and%20syrian%20refugees_the%20limits%20of%20hospitality%20%282014%29.pdf (last accessed September 23, 2014).
25. Kirişçi, 42; 28-29. The November 2013 Brookings report noted that a mere 10-12 international NGOs had been able to successfully register in Turkey, and it pointed to instances in which the Turkish government rejected applications. See also Dinçer, 30 and Ahmadzadeh, 65-66.
26. Kirişçi, 42.
27. Ahmadzadeh, 66.
28. Kirişçi, 42.
29. Law on Foreigners and International Protection (6458/2013), adopted April 4, 2013. Available at www.refworld.org/pdfid/5167fbb20.pdf (last accessed September 29, 2014). For a comprehensive discussion of the limitations and benefits of the Foreigners Law, see the discussion of Turkey in Akram et al., Note 4.
30. Article 103 (1).
31. Article 103 (2).
32. While it is unclear how existing higher education policies specific to Syrians formulated by YÖK will be administered under the new GDMM, the text of the law seems to imply a desire for coordination of social policies benefiting Syrians and other refugee populations. It is also important to note that for Syrians living in Turkey's refugee camps, AFAD retains primary jurisdiction over education and other activities. It is unclear how AFAD's mandate will be affected by the new law, if at all; it is likely AFAD will continue to control most aspects of camp life, including access to education.
33. For general information and statistics related to Turkey's higher education system. see Günay, D. (2014). "Turkish Higher Education System: New Developments and Trends." The Turkish Council of Higher Education. 25 June, 2014. Paris, France, 34-35. Available at <http://int-e.net/kis2014ppt/DurmusGunay.pdf> (last accessed September 23, 2014).
34. This figure includes 2.5 million students enrolled in Anadolu University's open education program. Nearly three million students attend a university on a physical campus.

35. This growth is reflected in the annual share of the state's budget that is dedicated to education, which has increased by more than 27% during AKP governance. Celik, Z. and Gur, B. (2013). "Turkey's Education Policy During the AK Party Era." *Insight Turkey*, 15 (4): 151-176, 153, 158.
36. For example, the *Times Higher Education* 2013-14 World University Rankings includes four Turkish universities – Boğaziçi, Istanbul Technical, Middle East Technical, and Bilkent – among the top 250 universities in the world. Retrieved from www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking/region/asia (last accessed September 23, 2014).
37. Retrieved from the website of ÖSYM, the body responsible for administering university entrance exams for Turkish citizens, at <http://dokuman.osym.gov.tr/pdfdokuman/2014/OSYS/yerlestirme/2014-OSYS-YerlestirmeSonuclar%C4%B1nalliskinSayisalBilgiler23072014.pdf> (last accessed September 15, 2014).
38. Commentators have reported concern that the Turkish government's policy of providing free access to higher education for Syrians is likely to benefit disproportionately Syrians who are ethnically Turkman, and therefore speak a dialect of Turkish. See Özden, Ş. (2013) "Syrian Refugees in Turkey," MPC Research Reports 2013/05, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, 8.
39. The Council consists of 21 members, who are appointed by the President of Turkey, cabinet ministers, and the Inter-Universities Council, which is comprised of university rectors and senators. YÖK decisions seek to centralize and standardize university education and academic production in Turkey, including curriculum development, faculty hiring, and administrative appointments.
40. In a recent interview, YÖK's president indicated that the number of international students in Turkey was close to 70,000. See "Turkey seeks to lure more foreign students." (May 30, 2104) *Hurriyet Daily News*. Available at www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-seeks-to-lure-more-foreign-students.aspx?pageID=238&nlID=67202&NewsCatID=341 (last accessed September 29, 2014). A complete list of the number of international students by nationality who were enrolled in Turkish universities during the 2013-14 academic year can be found on the YÖK website at https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/yuksekgoretimIstatistikleri/2014/2014_21.pdf (last accessed September 23, 2014). The top sending countries were Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran.
41. Correspondence on file with the research team, June 27, 2014.
42. There are, for example, individual programs for students hailing from Africa, the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Bosphorus region, Central Asia, and the Arab world. For more information, see www.turkiyeburslari.gov.tr/index.php/en/ (last accessed September 23, 2014). Grants are also available for students at the Master's and Ph.D. level through the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK). For more information on that program, see www.tubitak.gov.tr/en (last accessed September 23, 2014).
43. See "YÖK decides to allow Syrian students in Turkish universities" (September 21, 2012) *Today's Zaman*. Available at www.todayszaman.com/news-293063---yok-decides-to-allow-syrian-students-in-turkish-universities.html (last accessed September 29, 2014).
44. See <http://en.etilaf.org/all-news/local-news/interim-ministry-of-education-university-for-syrian-refugees-in-turkey.html> (last accessed September 23, 2014); correspondence with research team, June 27, 2014 and July 22, 2014.
45. As noted earlier, these statistics may not always reflect the most current enrollment numbers. The University of Gaziantep, for example, reported that 168 Syrians are currently enrolled, an increase from 69 in 2012-13 and 39 in 2011-2012; correspondence with research team, August 27, 2014. Sixty-six are enrolled according to YÖK, which noted that universities' statistics should be considered more current.
46. For background, see "The Syrian National Council" (2013). Carnegie Middle East Center. Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=48334> (last accessed September 20, 2014); Blanchard, C., et. al. (September 2014). "Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response." Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
47. It is important to recognize that while the ISG is headquartered in Turkey, it primarily focuses on opposition-held Syria. Functionally, however, its reach into Syria is very limited. If the FSA and its allies continue to lose territory to ISIL and the Syrian government, the area in which the ISG can operate will shrink. In reality, the ISG has very limited authority and a rapidly diminishing domain, and many Syrians expressed deep doubts that it could be an effective government-in-exile for those in the diaspora.
48. For more information about the MoE, see the website of the Interim Syrian Government (in Arabic), available at www.syriaig.org/syr14/index.php/minstmenu/edu-mnu (last accessed September 23, 2014).
49. See "Syrian opposition coalition dissolves interim government" (July 22, 2014). *Reuters*. Available at www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/22/us-syria-crisis-opposition-idUSKBN0FR12420140722 (last accessed September 29, 2014).
50. For example, a Syrian-Libyan NGO, the Syrian Education Council, administered the Libyan exam in August 2013 to approximately 1,500 Syrian students in Turkey. "Baccalaureate Secondary School Leaving Certificate" (September 2013). SPARK Syria Policy Brief. On file with the authors.
51. In one instance, French higher education observers participated in the exam process, and a number of students were offered admission and scholarships to French institutions.
52. Ahmadzadeh, 63.
53. Some students reportedly take more than one baccalaureate exam in an effort to preserve their options. "In some cases students sat for Syrian government exam in areas under the government control and then took the exam of the IMOIE due to uncertain recognition status of both and lack of information about eligibility criteria at various universities." *Ibid*. Several graduating students we met at the Shamouna and Orient schools had taken more than one baccalaureate exam.



54. The UNHCR has the mandate to promote higher education in Turkey. It currently operates under the terms of a 2013 Memorandum of Understanding with the Turkish government, which limits the scope of its activities to registering refugees.
55. See Akagündüz, Ü. (September 27, 2014) "Istanbul fears 'Arabization' with Syrian refugee influx." *Today's Zaman*. Available at www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_istanbul-fears-arabization-with-syrian-refugee-influx_359862.html (last accessed September 29, 2014).
56. Addar ("home" in Arabic) is a community center that aims to help Syrian and Palestinian refugees rebuild their lives in Turkey. Currently, it runs a preparation school and arts classes for children, a crafts group and book club for young women, a theater group for young adults, and Turkish and English language classes for adults. More information on Addar can be found on the center's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/groups/addar.c.p/?fref=ts (last accessed September 23, 2014). Hamich ("margin" in Arabic) is a Beyoğlu-based cultural, intellectual, and artistic center that aims to create a forum for Syrians in Turkey, and others, to critically explore issues related to living in exile and cultural identity. Additional information can be found at "Syrian culture house Hamisch opens in Istanbul" (March 19, 2014) *Anadolu Agency*. Available at www.aa.com.tr/en/news/303180--syrian-culture-house-hamisch-opens-in-istanbul (last accessed September 29, 2014).
57. Ahmadzadeh, 65.
58. This situation is unusual because cell coverage has been suspended in many other parts of Syria, and many calls are made using internet-based applications such as Viber and WhatsApp.
59. A former university administrator in Syria questioned the seriousness of these efforts, believing that some scholars were primarily interested in securing salary support to survive in Turkey with their families.
60. More information on the report, entitled "Growth, Quality and Internationalization: A Road Map for Higher Education in Turkey," can be found at Kılıç, Y. (May 12, 2014). "Report Claims Turkish Universities Need 45,000 More Academics." *Today's Zaman*. Available at www.todayszaman.com/news-347618-report-claims-turkish-universities-need-45000-more-academics.html (last accessed September 29, 2014).
61. During the 2013-14 academic year, Turkey hosted roughly 2,400 foreign faculty, more than one quarter of whom were language instructors. Fewer than 60 were working at the seven designated universities. Complete statistics on foreign teaching staff in Turkish universities can be found on the YÖK website at https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/yuksekogretimIstatistikleri/2014/2014_35.pdf (last accessed September 13, 2014).
62. For more information on IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund, visit www.scholarrescuefund.org.
63. SPARK was founded in the early 1990s by University of Amsterdam students who formed a team of students and professors to work with their peers in the former Yugoslavia to improve the university system. Originally named Youth in Solidarity with Yugoslavia, and later the Academic Training Association, SPARK has led student and staff exchanges, curriculum development programs, and business training and competitions in 15 countries, including the Balkans, the Great Lakes region of Africa, and the Arab world. For more information, visit www.spark-online.org/.
64. Course offerings included Reconstruction Planning, Logistics, and Local Economic Development; Utility Management in Crisis Situations; and Foundations of Entrepreneurship in Conflict and Post-Conflict Society, among others.
65. In addition to ISSUE and the UoG scholarship program, SPARK has led various other initiatives in support of Syrian higher education. These include administering a scholarship program for Syrians to study at universities in the Netherlands; arranging capacity-building and networking tours to Europe for officials within the Interim Syrian Government's Ministry of Education; and providing independent assessment reports on the ISG-administered baccalaureate exams. SPARK is also exploring the establishment of vocational institutes inside Syria that can absorb Syrian students living in opposition-controlled areas or who are excluded from higher education; Syrian academics connected to the UFSA would staff these institutes, as the initiative is also focused on building the capacity of Syrian officials and educators to one day rebuild Syria's higher education sector.
66. Orient was founded in Antakya in late 2010. With the outbreak of conflict in Syria several months later, Orient initially focused on providing medical relief and treatment to wounded Syrians in Turkish hospitals. It has since expanded to offer a diverse range of "medical, educational, social and relief works along with childcare, disabilities, environmental and social awareness and many other [humanitarian and social] fields." For more information, visit www.orienths.net/index.php?Lang=EN (last accessed September 29, 2014).
67. Orient also operates a school in the Nizip refugee camp that serves more than 2,000 Syrians, having opened during the 2012-13 academic year. In addition to its educational activities, the school plans to offer vocational training in tailoring, plumbing, and computer science, among other areas. The school teaches a modified Syrian curriculum for some students and the Libyan baccalaureate for others.
68. Another factor may be that the Director of Operations at the Orient school in Reyhanlı is an Arabic-speaking citizen of Turkey.
69. The official Free Syrian University website is available at www.fsyriauni.com/ (in Arabic). Its Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/Free.Syrian.university (last accessed September 23, 2014).
70. See, for example, Seckman, D. and Trevithick, M. (January 17, 2014). "The Scholar-Rebels of the Free Syrian University." *The Atlantic*. Available at www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/01/the-scholar-rebels-of-the-free-syrian-university/283175/ (last accessed September 29, 2014). ("The Free Syrian University has formally enrolled 870 students in Turkey and has hundreds more on digital mailing lists inside Syria and other neighboring countries, mainly in Jordan").
71. See www.facebook.com/groups/415269801917272/?fref=nf (last accessed September 23, 2014).

