

*Research Article*

## **Harmonisation process of Afghan asylum-seekers: a case study of Sivas satellite city**

**Medine Derya Canpolat** <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Graduate Research Assistant, Political Science and International Relations Dept., Cappadocia University, Nevşehir, Turkey.

\* Correspondence: [derya.canpolat@kapadokya.edu.tr](mailto:derya.canpolat@kapadokya.edu.tr)

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**Abstract:** The subject of this research article is Afghan asylum-seekers – as the world’s most numerous displaced people – who have applied to Turkey for international protection. Its specific focus is on Afghan asylum seekers residing in Sivas satellite city who have applied for international protection. The study evaluates their personal experiences with harmonisation and integration, with the main objective being to investigate and analyse the problems they have faced during their harmonisation process, and to develop solutions to these problems. This research was designed as a case study – as a qualitative research methodology – and takes a theoretically interpretive perspective. Within the scope of this study, in addition to observations, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven female and eight male Afghan asylum-seekers who were reached through a snowball technique. As ascertained from the interviewees, the following issues were apparent: their harmonisation processes; the problems they faced in these processes; their expectations from local people; and their plans for the future. The findings related to the harmonisation process indicated that the respondent Afghan asylum-seekers are eager to obtain Turkish citizenship and integrate into society, although it was understood that they faced crucial problems in this regard, being the language barrier, economic insufficiency, and feelings of loneliness and strangeness. To overcome these hurdles, it is thought that improving the given language courses in terms of quality and quantity will diminish the language barrier; applying government policies related to employment will decrease the financial insufficiency of Afghan asylum-seekers; and applying non-governmental policies to raise awareness among Afghan asylum-seekers of the opportunities that are open to them, will alleviate their lack of consciousness, and will lead to the development

of a greater understanding among local people about the Afghan asylum-seekers, thus eliminating their feelings of loneliness and strangeness.

**Keywords:** Afghan asylum-seekers, international protection, migration, harmonisation, integration, Sivas, satellite city, qualitative research methodologies

## **Afgan sığınmacıların göç ve uyum süreci: Sivas uydu kenti örneği**

**Öz:** Bu araştırma makalesi Türkiye'ye uluslararası koruma başvurusunda bulunan sayıca en kalabalık yerinden edilmiş grup olan Afgan sığınmacıları konu edinmiştir. Makale, Sivas uydu kentinde yaşayan Afgan sığınmacılara odaklanmıştır. Afgan sığınmacıların göç ve uyum süreçlerinde kazandıkları deneyimleri kendi bakış açılarından değerlendirmiştir. Makalenin temel amacı Afgan sığınmacıların bu süreçte ne tür sorunlarla karşılaştıklarını araştırıp analiz etmek ve bu sorunlara çözüm önerisinde bulunmaktadır. Makale nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması şeklinde tasarlanmıştır ve yorumlayıcı bakış açısına sahiptir. Makale kapsamında, kartopu tekniğiyle ulaşılan 7 kadın ve 8 erkek Afgan sığınmacı ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmelere dayalı verilerin analizi ile şu bulgular tespit edilmiştir: Afgan sığınmacıların Sivas uydu kentindeki uyum süreçlerinin nasıl geliştiği, bu süreçte karşılaştıkları sorun alanlarının neler olduğu, Sivas halkından beklentilerinin neler olduğu ve gelecek planlarının ne yönde olduğu. Uyum süreciyle ilgili bulgular, Afgan sığınmacıların Türk vatandaşlığı almaya ve topluma entegre olmaya istekli olduklarını göstermektedir. Fakat çalışmanın bulguları aynı zamanda Afgan sığınmacıların her ne kadar toplumla uyum içinde yaşamak için istekli olsalar da bu süreçte dil engeli, ekonomik yetersizlik, yabancılık ve yalnızlık duygusu gibi çok önemli sorunlarla karşılaştıklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu noktada, nitelik ve nicelik olarak dil kurslarının artırılmasının dil bariyerini ortadan kaldıracacağı; hükümetin istihdama yönelik politikalar uygulamasının Afgan sığınmacıların mali yetersizliğini ortadan kaldıracacağı; hükümet dışı örgütlerin uygulayacağı bilinçlendirme politikalarının Afgan sığınmacıların yararlanabilecekleri haklar ve fırsatlar hakkında farkındalıklarını artıracacağı; ve halk arasında Afgan sığınmacılar hakkında daha anlayışlı bir davranış geliştirilmesinin Afgan sığınmacıların yabancılık ve yalnızlık hissini ortadan kaldıracacağı düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Afgan sığınmacılar, uluslararası koruma, göç, uyum, Sivas, uydu kent, nitel araştırma yöntemleri

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## Introduction

The number of displaced people applying for international protection from Turkey has increased dramatically, and Turkey has become home to the largest number of displaced people worldwide (Global Forced, 2018). As the focus of this article, Afghan asylum-seekers represent the largest group of displaced people with international protection status or current applications, and it is estimated that there are some 172,000 thousand Afghans currently living in Turkey (UNHCR Statistical Data, 2019). Besides, 35.042 Afghans applied for international protection in Turkey in 2019, as well (DGMM, 2019).

Although Afghan asylum-seekers are allowed to stay in the satellite cities of Tukey, this group of people live in a state of anxiety due to uncertainties surrounding their gaining of legal status, their temporary accommodation in the satellite cities, the difficulties they face in making a living, the problems faced during the harmonisation process and their uncertainty for the future. Among the few studies to date with specific focus on Afghan asylum-seekers, there are reports by NGOs (SGDD, 2011; Afghan Solidarity Association, 2016) and institutes (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies [HUIPS], 2017a, and 2017b), and a number of research articles conducted in satellite cities (Ataman, 2007; Jarahzadeh, 2013; Kahya, 2014; Yıldız, Ünlü, & Sezer, 2014; Ünlüer, 2015; Kaytaz, 2016; Kuschminder & Koser, 2016; Aktepe, Tekdere, & Gürbüz, 2017; Coşkun & Yılmaz, 2018; Geyik Yıldırım, 2018; Gömleksiz & Aslan 2018; Doğan, 2019).

According to these studies, Afghans migrate motivated by a desire to live in a safe country (Kuschminder & Koser, 2016). Geyik Yıldırım (2018), in a study of Kars, revealed that Afghans are forced to migrate due to pressure from the Taliban and political instability, as well as for economic reasons. These reasons were reiterated in a project conducted by the Afghans Solidarity Association (2016) in Van, Mersin, Nevşehir, Kırıkkale, Kayseri and Denizli. Furthermore, the study by Jarahzadeh (2013) found that Afghans continued to migrate, despite the difficulties they face with illegal border crossings. However, as noted by Kaytaz (2016), the difficulties faced by Afghans that start with the migration, continue with the settlement process.

In Turkey, the legal settlement of Afghan asylum-seekers begins with an application for international protection. Upon making an application, Afghan asylum seekers are transferred by the Directorate General of Migration

Management to one of the satellite cities, and are given an identity card that shows their legal status, and grants them access to social assistance, education and healthcare services. This card, however, is not the end of their problems (Doğan Y., 2019), as after being placed in a satellite city, they may face problems of economic insufficiency and an inability to provide for their basic needs (Ünler, 2015). Furthermore, Afghan children face problems in schools due to differences in the language and education system, their inability to access school equipment (Kahraman, 2017), and the different techniques and rules applied in the Turkish education system (Doğan M., 2019). Yıldız, Ünlü, and Sezer (2014) point out that such problems can lead Afghan asylum-seekers to develop psychological problems that have been reported to result in suicide or murder in some cases. In a study introduced by the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2017b), it was found that Afghan asylum-seekers are more likely to commit suicide than any other group of displaced people. As such, there is an urgent need to remove such anxieties by supporting asylum-seekers in to come up with solutions to the problems they face during the harmonisation process.

Studies investigating the harmonisation processes endured by Afghan asylum-seekers are few in number, and many, unfortunately, are out of date; and this scarcity reduces their visibility of their plight in Turkish literature. A search of literature for studies conducted in Sivas revealed only two with focus on Afghan asylum-seekers in the city, despite it being assigned as a satellite city in Turkey. Of the two studies, one highlights the problems faced by Afghan asylum-seekers in learning the local language (Hubing, 2011), while the other analyses how Afghan asylum-seekers approach the Turkish national values (Kılıç & Demir, 2017). Despite there being more than 3,000 Afghan asylum-seekers living in the city,<sup>1</sup> there has been no study to date concerning their harmonisation. Consequently, there is a need for up-to-date studies of the problems related to harmonisation and other issues faced by Afghan asylum-seekers, which represents a gap in literature that this article aims to address with specific focus on the satellite city of Sivas.

As displaced people are perceived as temporary by the Turkish government, no permanent integration policies have been developed related to these groups, as the government has opted instead to implement a harmonisation policy to be applied for the duration of their stay in Turkey. The present study investigates the extent to which Afghan asylum-seekers can adapt to life in Sivas, and the

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<sup>1</sup> This number was verbally expressed by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) of Sivas in the personal interview as official information is not shared regarding displaced people with international protection application or status.

difficulties faced during the harmonisation process, and their perspectives as regards to integration. Its aim is to develop solutions to common problems that can be included within the regulations, allowing Afghans to live in harmony with Turkish society.

This article is presented in five sections. The first section explains the theoretical background of the study; the second section explains the methodology of the study, and the data collection and analysis processes; and the third section presents the findings of the fieldwork, detailing the perspectives of Afghan asylum-seekers. The fourth section opens a discussion of the collected data and makes comparisons with the findings of previous studies, and puts forward suggested solutions to the problems faced by Afghan asylum-seekers. The final section offers some concluding remarks.

### **Theoretical background**

The current instrument applied in the Turkish Republic related to displaced people and foreigners is the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 (LFIP). The LFIP entered into law in 2013, and introduced “international protection” as a legal status, under which certain rights are provided to displaced people under certain conditions. The concept of international protection emerged as a means of protection for persons forced to migrate as a result of a state’s failure or inability to protect their citizens due to factors such as political instability, economic crises and internal conflicts. In other words, the concept appeared with the effect of a social and political phenomena with religious, social, economic and human dimensions. This concept is included in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which it is stated the “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (UN, 2020). The primary responsibility for international protection rests with the state from which the displaced person has sought asylum. Turkey, within the framework of international law, and like every other country, must provide international protection to those seeking asylum, and Turkey determines the status of foreigners who enter the country in accordance with the LFIP.

Turkey signed the Geneva Convention in 1951, with the proviso that only people coming from Council of Europe member states would be accepted as refugees. This was reiterated in the LFIP, in which it is stated that the applications of foreigners applying for international protection from Europe would be granted refugee status. For people of other nations, the LFIP states that foreigners from outside Europe applying for international protection would be granted conditional refugee status and placed under international protection until such a time that they can be placed in a third country through the UNHCR (LFIP, 2013).

The procedures to be applied to the focus group of this article, being Afghan asylum-seekers, are also determined within the scope of this law. As Afghans do not come from Europe, they cannot be given refugee status, although the LFIP grants them the right to apply for international protection. Afghan asylum-seekers who apply for international protection are allowed to live in satellite cities and to benefit from certain rights until their status has been determined. Here, it should be noted that the Afghan interviewees in this article are referred to as asylum-seekers since all have applied for international protection from Turkey, although their status determination processes have not yet been completed.

Under the LFIP, Afghan asylum-seekers who apply for international protection are permitted to stay in one of the 62 satellite cities in Turkey until their final status has been determined. The satellite city approach applied in Turkey was detailed in the Regulation on Asylum (1994),<sup>2</sup> and sought to regulate the settlement processes of displaced people in Turkey. Satellite cities are determined by the Ministry of Interior, considering such criteria as the demographic features of cities, the features of the asylum-seekers, etc. The approach aims to apply some control over displaced people, and seeks to prevent metropolis cities from being overwhelmed by the mass movement of asylum-seekers, and to protect national security (Kahya, 2014). As such, asylum-seekers are kept under strict control in the satellite cities in which they are settled, and must sign official documents in the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management every week as proof of their stay in their assigned city. Their exit from their assigned satellite city is also kept under control, requiring the permission of the PDMM. The asylum-seekers must follow up their application processes from their satellite cities, and attend interviews arranged by the PDMM for the finalisation of their applications. During this period, they can benefit from health, education and other services and rights, allowing them to adapt to their new society (Coşkun & Yılmaz, 2018).

Afghan asylum-seekers, bringing their own customs and traditions, cultures, spiritual beliefs and lifestyles to Turkey, have encountered different customs and traditions, cultures, spiritual beliefs, and lifestyles upon their arrival. This coexistence, where mutual interaction is inevitable, initiated harmonisation (Aktepe, Tekdere, & Gürbüz, 2017). Although the concept of

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<sup>2</sup> The full name of this regulation is the Regulation on the Principles and Procedures to be Applied to Foreigners who Seek Asylum in Turkey, or Individual Foreigners Requesting a Residence Permit from Turkey to Asylum to Another Country, Foreigners who Come to Our Borders Collectively with Seeking Asylum and Possible Population Movements (<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/22127.pdf>, pp.7-11).

harmonisation has no accepted universal definition (Unutulmaz, 2016), it is defined in the Turkish Dictionary as “compliance with the social framework or getting used to a new situation” (Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlükleri, 2020). The term is also used in article 96 of the LFIP as well. In this article, the services offered to displaced people to facilitate mutual harmonisation can be described as follows (FLIP, 2013, pp. 86):

- (2) Foreigners may attend courses where the basics of the political structure, language, legal system, culture and history of Turkey, as well as their rights and obligations, are explained.
- (3) The Directorate General shall promote the courses related to access to public and private goods and services, access to courses related to the education and economic activities, social and cultural communications, and shall ensure access to primary healthcare services and awareness and information disseminating activities through distant learning and similar means, in cooperation with public institutions, agencies and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

It can be understood from this article of the LFIP that the Turkish Republic aims to provide foreigners with the ability to become self-sufficient, whether they stay in Turkey under international protection, are placed in a third country or return to their own countries. It is clear that such an approach demands harmonisation, and this can only be achieved through a process that takes heed of the fields of rights and obligations, political structure, language, the law system, health services, culture, history, education, occupation, social and cultural interaction, and access to public and private goods. Harmonisation processes are thus described in this article as a process by which displaced people prepare themselves for the situations they encounter in their new environments, acquire the skills required by the environment, and interact with the environment, as displaced groups who find themselves in a foreign context need social acceptance and interaction.

That said, harmonisation processes may have either negative or positive consequences for displaced people. According to Berry's model, a harmonisation process can result in marginalisation, separation, assimilation or integration, in which marginalisation is defined as a situation in which displaced people maintain their own culture and enter into as little contact with society as possible; separation is defined as a situation in which displaced people keep themselves separate from the cultural life of the dominant society; and Assimilation is defined as the adaptation of displaced people to the culture of the dominant society by giving up their own culture (Berry, 2011). Although integration does not have a generally accepted definition (Martikainen, 2006; Unutulmaz, 2016; Göksel, 2019), it can be defined as becoming an accepted part of society requiring

the mutual interaction of displaced people with the dominant society (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016, p. 14).

As mentioned previously, since displaced people are perceived as temporary by the Turkish government, there are no permanent integration policies in place related to these groups. While a harmonisation policy exists that is applied during their stay in Turkey, its consequences on displaced people can be either negative or positive. The present study investigates the harmonisation process and its effects on integration, questioning Afghan asylum-seekers on their thoughts in regards to their integration into society. This study is based on the framework developed by Ager and Strang, in which it is suggested that there are 10 factors dictating the achievement of integration: housing, employment, education, health services, access to such rights as human dignity, equality, justice, security, the connection of groups socially to each other, and the diminishing of structural barriers related to language and culture (Ager and Strang, 2008). The provision of housing is vital in making a displaced group of people feel secure, while self-esteem is gained through employment. Such people become closer to society through education, and to state agencies through the provision of health services. Access to such rights as human dignity, equality, justice and security requires respect for diversification within society and the displaced group, while connecting groups socially with each other has been shown to diminish language and culture barriers (Wang and Ning, 2016).

This framework was chosen as these 10 dynamics of integration are closely related to the harmonisation approach of the LFIP. In the present study, the issue of whether the 10 dynamics of integration are taken into account in harmonisation efforts is examined through the experiences of Afghan asylum-seekers.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology approach was adopted for the present study, aiming to reveal the perspectives of Afghan asylum-seekers and events realistically and holistically in the natural environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016; Merriam, 2018). Accordingly, a field study was conducted between 15 May and 10 August, 2019 including both interview and observation components. The case study design approach involves analysing the situation within an environment, the collection and analysis of data, and the systematic drawing of conclusions (Aytaçlı, 2012; Karasar, 2018). The interviewees were chosen based on the assumption that, "Afghan asylum-seekers can best describe their harmonisation experiences and the problems they face."



Since it was not possible to reach all, or even most, of the Afghan asylum-seekers living in Sivas, it was decided that the study sample would be composed of Afghan asylum-seekers who live in Sivas, who are in contact with each other, and who are aware of the lives, difficulties, needs and problems of other Afghan asylum-seekers living in Sivas. The main rationale behind this selection is to study with a similar sub-group (Patton, Ankara). To identify participants for the study, the non-random snowball sampling technique was adopted in which every person participating in the study is asked to propose other respondents who met the necessary criteria for participation in the study. First, the interviewees are asked whether they know any suitable people who would participate in the study. The people they recommend are then contacted and asked whether they would be willing to participate. This process continues until the desired number of participants is reached (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2015, pp. 172-173).

Prior to the launch of the fieldwork, before any interviews were conducted, the management of the PDMM in Sivas was consulted, and put us in touch with an Afghan asylum-seeker who met the mentioned criteria. The first interview was conducted with this Afghan asylum-seeker, while the second interview was conducted with the respondent she suggested. The following interviews were carried out with respondents suggested by the interviewees. In other words, each interviewee initiated an interview with another Afghan asylum-seeker. In this way, seven female and eight male Afghan asylum-seekers were identified who agreed to participate in the study, giving their verbal consent.

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were specifically designed not to cause trauma to the respondents, and included questions aimed at garnering demographic data about the respondents, and information on the problems they face in such areas as employment, accommodation, education, the attitudes of society and their plans for the future. The interview questions were compiled based on previous literature, as well as on data garnered through the observations and home visits conducted within the scope of the research, which were of considerable benefit.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the homes of the respondents, and due to the language barrier, interpreter support was utilised. Prior to each interview, the respondent was informed about the scope and goal of the study, and the method to be applied. It was also stressed that their involvement in the interviews was consensual. The interviews began after the respondent gave their verbal approval for participation. Each interview lasted for 2 hours.

The researcher and interpreter attended all interviews. Additional questions to those prepared in advance were asked to obtain more detailed answers to the interview questions.

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that data gathered from qualitative research methodologies, revealing factors affecting the thoughts of human beings, should be analysed through either a descriptive or content analysis approach. For the present study, a content analysis approach was chosen, as it ensures a detailed explanation. Since it is not possible to reflect all the data, a framework is drawn up involving categories and codes (Creswell, 2018). In the first stage of the data analysis, a thematic framework is formed based on the research questions, the conceptual framework of the research and the results of the field study. The following six categories were determined after encoding the data:

1. Demographic features of the respondents
2. Settlement process of the respondents
3. Harmonisation process of the respondents
4. Problems faced by the respondents
5. Expectations of the respondents from society
6. Future plans of the respondents

In the second phase, the data obtained from each interview were coded in accordance with the established themes, while in the third phase, attempts were made to define, explain and make sense of the organised data. In the final stage, to demonstrate the credibility of the article, the contents of the categories were interpreted, including respondent quotations. As the respondents declined to share their personal information, they each assigned codes (P1, P2, P3, etc.) to ensure academic confidentiality.

In addition to the interviews, observations were carried out. This approach can aid researchers in gaining an understanding of the focus group in the study and the environment in which they live, and is of particular importance, as what people say and what they do or experience are not always the same. Observations are made in either natural or structured environments (e.g. laboratories) (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2015, p. 60). For the current study, natural observations were made to gain insight into the living environments of Afghan asylum-seekers. Another benefit of observations is their ability to answer certain systematic research questions, providing information about the interviewee's situation that they may not be able to express comfortably themselves, about the physical environment in which they live or about things that they may be reluctant to talk about. Therefore, among the available observation techniques, the participant-observation technique was preferred. In this technique, the

researchers introduce themselves to the research participants and explain their aim which is gathering information by observations (Merriam, 2018, p. 118).

Prior to making any observations, the management of the PDMM in Sivas were consulted to identify the neighbourhoods where most Afghan asylum-seekers live, being Yenimahalle and Altıntabak, as confirmed by the Neighbourhood Executives of these neighbourhoods. For the observations, 20 homes of Afghan asylum-seekers were visited, accompanied by a sociologist and an expert working in the Directorate of Family, Labour and Social Services in Sivas. Sociologists carry out such periodical visits to ensure the accuracy of the residential addresses of Afghan asylum-seekers and any other information they provide. The researcher took part in such a process on five occasions to confirm the data collected during the interviewees, and to observe the conditions under which Afghans live, how many people live in a house, whether they have food, furniture and firewood, whether there are any sick people in the home and whether they can speak Turkish. During the observations, the researcher adopted sincere, honest and positive approach to keep the Afghan asylum-seekers at ease. This approach made it easier to observe the living conditions of Afghan asylum-seekers and their family members.

During the observations, information about when, where and how the data was collected, and what was observed, was noted on the observation form prepared by the researcher prior to the observations. Each observation took 15 minutes, after which the researcher immediately uploaded their notes into a computer and added more detailed information, including a description of the house, the direct quotes of the residents and the researcher's comments. The detailed notes taken during the observations were transferred to a computer and were subjected to a content analysis, which is presented in the relevant section of the interview analysis. The observations gave perspective and depth to the data garnered through the interviews, and so the validity and reliability of the findings obtained from the field were supported.

Although reliable data were obtained within the scope of the fieldwork, there are some methodological limitations, which related to the different languages of the researcher and the respondents. Another limitation is derived from the qualitative feature of the study, which prevented the generalisation of the research findings, with the study being limited to the data obtained from fieldwork conducted between 15 May and 10 August, 2019 involving seven female and eight male Afghan asylum-seekers living in Sivas.

**Findings**

The study sample included Afghan asylum-seekers of Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek origin who were predominantly young people or children, and so more involved in social life through the school or workplace. Of the 15 interviewees, four were aged 10–18 years, six were aged 19–29 years, and the remainder were aged 30 and older. The majority of interviewees were single (see Table 1).

Table 1. Respondent profile: sex, age, marital status, ethnicity

N	SEX		AGE				MARITAL STATUS			ETHNICITY			TOTAL
	Male	Female	10–18	19–29	30–39	40+	Single	Married	Divorced	Hazara	Uzbek	Tajik	
N	8	7	4	6	3	2	11	2	2	10	2	3	15

Aside from one of the respondents, all were literate. The illiterate respondent was a woman aged 40 whose health problems prevented her from going outside often. The majority were unemployed, although some worked as day labourers. Most of those who were unemployed were actually students who were continuing their education in Sivas, and those who were unable to work due to health problems. The majority of the respondents had been residing in Sivas for more than a year (see Table 2).

Table 2. Profile of the interviewees: level of education, occupation, duration of stay in Sivas

N	LEVEL OF EDUCATION						OCCUPATION			DURATION OF STAY IN SIVAS			TOTAL	
	Il- literate	Pri. Sch	Sec. Sch	HighSch.	B.A	M.A	Unemployed	Student	Worker	Interpreter	- 1 year	1-2 year		3-5 year
N	1	6	3	1	2	2	5	5	4	1	3	9	3	15

\*Pri. Sch: Primary School; Sec. Sch: Secondary School; High Sch: High School; B.A: Bachelor’s Degree; M.A: Master’s Degree; - 1 year: Less than one year

The majority of students who took part in the fieldwork spoke fluent and clear Turkish. Interpreter support was utilised for other interviewees who could not speak Turkish.

### *Settlement process of Afghan asylum-seekers*

The harmonisation processes of Afghan asylum-seekers begins when they arrive in Turkey and apply to the UNHCR headquarters in Ankara for international protection. At this stage, the asylum-seekers included in the present study were informed that they should apply to the PDMM in Sivas, and completed their applications in Sivas within the subsequent 15 days. They were then issued a temporary identity card, valid for 6 months, by the Sivas Governorate identifying them as Afghans who had applied for international protection. Concerning housing, the DGMM allows Afghan asylum-seekers to choose their place of residence, and informs them that they are responsible for their own expenses. At this point, the Afghan asylum-seekers are advised by associations and other Afghans to find accommodation.

The researcher observed that Afghan asylum-seekers tend to live with their families in households of four to nine people. Aside from parents and their children, households were made up of also extended family members, such as, for example, uncles and grandmothers, who all live together since not all family members had been able to escape together, or some family members had died in the internal unrest in their homeland. Here, the fragmented family structure of Afghan asylum-seekers is worthy of note, and it is anticipated that dispersed family members will make all possible efforts to reunite.

The monthly rents of Afghan asylum-seekers, who tend to live in two- or four-room houses, range from 300–650 Turkish Lira. It was concluded from our observations that the houses of the respondents were not in a good condition, and their rooms were small and lacking in furniture. They are provided with certain goods by their neighbours and aid organisations, as they arrived illegally have little money. Two of the respondents had the following to say about this issue:

It is difficult to go from one country to another country even with a passport, but we came here illegally. We had no home, no belongings, no money; we gave all our money to smugglers. We came via the Afghanistan-Iran-Turkey route. We came to another country illegally, and it is difficult as we do not know the language ... Of course, we faced many difficulties in procuring goods and finding a house (P3, Personal Interview: 20 May, 2019).

We faced many difficulties at first because we came here as fugitives. When we first entered our house, we slept on the rug. It was cold; and the house was cold, as well. Our neighbours helped us. They gave us a blanket and some other stuff. I worked at a tailor for a while, and at a restaurant. I am not working now, and I am at home because of Ramadan. A month after my brothers came here, they got jobs. Our current economic situation is neither good nor bad. We have seen humanity in Sivas; our neighbours are very good. We did not experience the good things we have seen here in either Iran or Afghanistan. We have come to understand in Sivas that there are good people in the world (P4, Personal Interview: 20 May, 2019).

The Afghan asylum-seekers who had difficulty finding a house stated that they also had difficulty paying their rent. Some asylum-seekers share their homes with foreigners to pay their rent. One respondent expressed this situation as follows:

I did not know anybody in Sivas. I met another Afghan person while applying to the DGMM, and we came to Sivas together. We neither knew nor could trust each other, but we had a partnership, as we spoke the same language. He knew some Afghans in Sivas, and he placed me with an Afghan family he knew. As I had no money, I could not help with the rent or food, and so they did not want me in their home. I had to find a house, but I had no money. Somehow, I got lucky and I found a house, a roommate and an illegal job (P14, Personal Interview: 23 May, 2019).

Observations of the livelihoods of Afghan asylum-seekers who appear to have difficulties with housing revealed that their income was predominantly from illegal employment, and from social assistance received from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SASF), the Tree of Life Association (TLA) or the Red Crescent:

The Taliban left me disabled. Unfortunately, I am unable to work; but my eldest son is 17 years old and works in a patisserie. My little son, who is one-and-a-half years old is sick. Unfortunately, the government does not cover all of his treatment, but we receive regular payments from SASF. The doctors in Sivas have not been able to diagnose his disease, and so we have to go to Kayseri every 2 weeks. My language and finance problems are difficult to endure (P1, Personal interview: 10 June, 2019).

My husband works on a construction site. He works day and night. We have a Red Crescent Card and I receive assistance, as I have three children and another on the way. The TLA supplies us with clothes and bread, but the clothes barely fit us, and many are outdated; but it is better than nothing (P5, Personal interview: 23 May, 2019).

As a matter of explanation, a Red Crescent Card is a way of delivering cash assistance under the Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN) to asylum-seekers under international and temporary protection in Turkey living outside of camps. The program is funded by the EU, in partnership with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, the Turkish Red Crescent, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Every family member meeting the criteria is entitled to receive 120 Turkish Lira per month (Çağlar Chesley, 2020).

It was apparent that Afghan asylum-seekers often experienced problems with housing and finances during their settlement in Sivas. While they may find a house, there is the additional problem of finding work and a regular source of income.

#### *Harmonisation processes of Afghan asylum-seekers*

The harmonisation process can be described as a process through which displaced people prepare themselves for the situations they encounter within their new environments, acquire the skills required by the environment, and interact with the environment. The harmonisation process of Afghan asylum-seekers living in Sivas satellite city was investigated in the present study from five perspectives: 1) the attitudes of local people towards Afghan asylum-seekers, 2) their relationships with their neighbours, 3) the advantages and disadvantages of living in Sivas, 4) the differences between life in Afghanistan and life in Sivas, and 5) is Sivas a city that Afghan asylum seekers recommend to their relatives to live in?

Almost all of the respondents mentioned the positive attitudes of local people towards them and the connection they had established with society, and highlighted that these positive attitudes had facilitated their harmonisation. In this regard, the respondents mentioned “the friendly and kind characteristics of the local people”, the “cultural similarities [of local people] and Afghans”, “not being excluded from the society due to the language barrier”, the “building of bonds through marriage” and “not encountering any problems”. Speaking about this issue, one of the respondents stated:

My daughter married a Turkish man. He and his family are very nice. Although my wife and I speak only a few words of Turkish, we can understand each other. My daughter is learning the Turkish language and culture, and so she can live in harmony with her new family. We visit her twice a week (P1, Personal interview: 10 June 2019).

It can be understood from the responses of the interviewees that although the majority of were satisfied with the attitudes of the people of Sivas and interacted well with them, including through bonds of marriage, there were some respondents with opposing views. Some stated that they had experienced difficulties related to the language barrier, and were sometimes subjected to insults and exclusions from society. The respondents who faced such difficulties were all school-age children, and the main reason they encountered these problems was because they had started to be educated in Turkish without learning the Turkish language. The coexistence of different groups without a common language resulted in disagreements.

It was understood during the interviewees that the majority of respondents had developed good relationships with their neighbours, although others spoke about their neighbours' negative attitudes and the difficulty they had communicating with them due to the language barrier. One of the interviewees stated:

One day we were having dinner in our backyard. One of our neighbour's kids insulted us for being foreign, and when we complained to his mother, she yelled at us. She said that we had no right to complain because we were strange people. I will not forget that moment and her rudeness. We came out of the frying pan and into the fire. We are insulted in Sivas by the local people, similar to how we were insulted by the Taliban in Afghanistan (P3, Personal Interview: 20 May, 2019).

When the interviewees were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of living in Sivas, they said that the majority of local people lived in good conditions and peacefully, and mentioned the absence of war and the "helpful and tolerant nature of the local people". For the disadvantages of living in Sivas, while some stated that they had no problems with living in Sivas, the majority expressed the "feelings of loneliness and strangeness", and the "language barrier" as disadvantages. One of the interviewees clarified this situation:

As you can see, I am an old woman. As I do not speak Turkish, I cannot go outside or communicate with my neighbours. In Afghanistan, we had close relations with our neighbours, and so I did not feel lonely. Here, I am very upset at being "strange" here (P7, Personal interview: 3 June, 2019).

When the interviewees were asked to compare their life in Sivas with that of Afghanistan, aside from one student, all of the Afghan asylum-seekers said that their lives in Afghanistan were "hard", "insecure", "worse after the Taliban seized power" and "full of economic insufficiencies", and so were happy to be



living in Sivas due to the generosity and hospitality of the local people. The student mentioned above had problems with his schoolmates in Sivas, and stated that in Afghanistan he attended school with the friends he grew up with. As he had lived in Sivas for only 3 months, he had not yet got used to his schoolmates, and was excluded from society as a foreigner.

On the other hand, the interviewees who stated that their lives in Afghanistan were "very good" said that they faced economic difficulties in Sivas and had problems with their schoolmates, and that while there lives were in danger in Afghanistan, they had money, jobs and friends there, but cannot find well-paid jobs or friends in Sivas.

Considering the statements given by the interviewees, it can be understood that the majority of Afghans who endured harsh conditions in Afghanistan had managed to improve their living conditions in Sivas and had better living conditions, leading them to be satisfied with their lives in this city. That said, some of the Afghans whose living conditions were better in Afghanistan cannot access similar conditions in the city due to the reflections of the migration process.

The interviewees were then asked whether they would recommend Sivas to their relatives, to which multiple answers were gathered from the fieldwork. Some Afghans stated affirmatively that they suggest living in Sivas because "Sivas is a safe city to live in." One of the interviewees expressed this situation as follows:

The fear of being murdered is common in Afghanistan; it does not matter whether you are a woman or man. The fear of being raped is too horrible to not be explained. We do not have such fears in Sivas, so we are lucky (P4, Personal interview: 20 May, 2019).

Some Afghans responded negatively to the question, but surprisingly made not underline any problems in Sivas. Their reluctance to recommend Sivas to their relatives was mostly attributable to such personal reasons as feuds. Here, it should be noted that the hostilities experienced in Afghanistan can be seen even among relatives.

#### *Problems faced by Afghan asylum-seekers*

To understand the problems faced by Afghan asylum-seekers in their harmonisation processes, they were asked about their emergent needs were. While a minority said that they had no such needs, the majority stated that they needed "jobs providing a regular income", "financial support provided by governmental and non-governmental institutions", "furniture", "food" and

“appropriate hospital treatment”. Speaking on the problems they faced, one of the respondents said:

I must work for a low wage. I have no guarantee of my rights at work, and sometimes I am not paid my wages. I am a victim of illegal employment. I cannot meet any of my family members' needs, and I receive no financial aid either. All I need ... in Sivas is a job that brings in a regular income. If I had a regular income, I could buy food and clothes, pay the rent and make my family happy (P10, Personal interview: 3 June, 2019).

As can be understood from the data garnered during the fieldwork, the main problems faced by Afghan asylum-seekers in Sivas are related to economic welfare. During their stay in the city, people need to work and receive financial support to meet their basic needs. They demand the right to work, legally, and for equal wages.

The respondents who attempted to set up their homes using items donated by their neighbours are in need of furniture, as the majority they receive is either broken or inadequate. Some of the respondents said that they needed healthy food, as they lack nourishment. On the issue of nourishment, although the LTA supplies bread and food aid, they needed healthy food due to the high number of households and the low monthly income among the interviewees. In addition to these problems, some of the interviewees stated that they were not treated appropriately by Turkish doctors in Sivas, although this could be derived primarily from the language barrier. Problems arise in this area due to the low level of communication between patients and doctors, based on the lack of hospital interpreters.

In addition to these problems, some of the respondents stated that their family members needed to take Turkish language courses. While the Centre of Public Training (CPT) offers language courses free of charge, the fact that not all interviewees were aware of the course may indicate that the awareness raising efforts in Sivas are insufficient.

#### *Expectations of Afghan asylum-seekers from society*

When the expectations of the Afghan asylum seekers from the society were investigated, it was found that the majority of the interviewees were satisfied with the attitudes of local people towards them. However, some of them stated that Afghan asylum seekers had some expectations such as “respect,” “empathy,” “kindness” and “job opportunities.” As stated by one of the respondents:

I cannot describe all the local people with one adjective. There are many good and generous people. I give thanks to all those who behave with kindness, but I beg the people who are rude to use to try to behave nicely to us. We were forced to come here; we escaped from attitudes that were against our dignity. We only want to live in an environment in which we are respected by society (P2, Personal interview: 15 May, 2019).

Although the majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction, it can be seen that some expected to be able to live with dignity. Here, it should be emphasised that while expectations of financial opportunity were voiced mostly by the adult asylum-seekers, the students were more inclined to look for empathy and kindness, which can be attributed to the fact that some students are excluded by their classmates.

#### *Plans of Afghan asylum-seekers*

The plans of Afghan asylum-seekers were questioned under three themes concerning their harmonisation processes: staying in Sivas; returning to Afghanistan or being settled in a third country; and obtaining Turkish citizenship.

It was determined from the data obtained from the fieldwork that the majority of the interviewees wanted to stay in Sivas and obtain Turkish citizenship. The high number of interviewees who expressed their satisfaction with the attitudes of society towards them and life in Sivas was a clear indication of this situation. A number of the respondents commented on this issue:

I have a computer in my home, and I have an Internet connection. I have friends in my neighbourhood. I am happy living in Sivas. I want to become a pilot and live in Sivas forever (P12, Personal interview: 23 May, 2019).

I do not live an ideal life; and I have no economic welfare; however, I am away from war. It feels wonderful (P3, Personal interview: 20 May, 2019).

I am very happy here in Sivas. If the Turkish government allows, I would like to stay here for the rest of my life. I cannot understand people who try to migrate to Europe. The routes to Europe are very dangerous, as the European countries hit the boats we use to get there. I have some relatives who managed to get to Europe, but they are always subjected to racism. Europeans look down on us; they do not let us become part of society. Here, the people treat us as one of their own. They open their homes to us, they share their food with us, and they provide us with things without expecting anything in return. This may be because we are all Muslims, or because we have a common root (P1, Personal interview: 10 June, 2019).

Some interviewees stated that they did not want to return to Afghanistan, to stay in Sivas or to obtain Turkish citizenship, stating that they wanted to go to European countries, to the United States or to Canada. Those with plans to leave Sivas cited “unemployment” and “cold weather.” as the main reasons why they wanted to migrate to Europe, the United States or Canada, where they believed they would have access to “a high level of social rights and freedoms”, “job and education opportunities,” and “family members living in those countries”. The following comments were made related to this situation:

When I migrated with my daughter from Iran to Turkey, I had to leave my mother behind. My brother experienced the same story. Unfortunately, my family became fragmented. My mother lives alone in Iran, my brother lives alone in the United States alone and I am living in Sivas with my daughter. I want to re-migrate to the United States to reunite my family. I believe that if I can move to the United States, I will be able to bring my mother from Iran. Also, I think I can find work with insurance in the United States. This will be so important if I am to meet my daughter's education expenses (P11, Personal interview: 15 May, 2019).

## **Discussion**

In the present study, harmonisation processes of Afghan asylum seekers into the society has been investigated through the ten dynamics developed by Ager and Strang: the provision of housing, employment, education, health services, dignity, equality, justice, security, social connections, and the diminishing of the structural barriers of language and culture. As could be understood from the garnered data, half of these dynamics had already been achieved by the respondents.

On one hand, the dynamics of housing, education, health services, social connections, security, and the diminishing of cultural barriers did not seem to be problematic for the respondents.

When they first settled in Sivas, many of the respondents had difficulty in finding a house, but all managed to rent a home eventually, and the majority subsequently established good relationships with their neighbours. All were also to benefit from education and health services, bringing them closer to society and the state agencies. Almost all stated being satisfied with the positive attitudes of local people towards them, and that they had managed to form a connection with society. All of them believed they lived in a safe city and feel secure. It was apparent in the interviews that the cultural barriers diminish as they learn about the Turkish culture.

It can be asserted that the respondents in the study follow a path of harmonisation, as the majority strongly desire to stay in Sivas and obtain Turkish citizenship. It should be emphasised that this finding is peculiar to this context, as other studies (HUIPS, 2017b; Doğan, Y., 2019) have reported that the majority of Afghans living in Turkey seek to migrate to more developed countries, especially the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe countries through the UNHCR. It can be understood from the findings of these studies that the majority of Afghan asylum-seekers want to use Turkey as a transit country, while in the present study, the majority of respondents were quite satisfied with life in Sivas.

As integration is a process requiring mutual interactions, it cannot interfere that society and Afghan asylum-seekers are close to integration, as the present study reflects only the views, perspectives and perceptions of Afghan asylum-seekers. That said, one of the most significant findings of this fieldwork on the harmonisation processes of Afghan asylum-seekers in Sivas is that the interviewees believe society is implementing an integration strategy towards them rather than one of assimilation, marginalisation or separation. Statements made by the respondents such as “the local people are very friendly and kind-hearted”, “we can build a bond with society though marriage”, “they do not exclude us from society, even though we do not speak the same language” and “society helps us by providing goods to our homes” clarifies the origins of this understanding.

As mentioned, Turkey supports social harmonisation by providing services to asylum-seekers in such fields as education, health, economy and social issues. In Sivas, both governmental authorities and NGOs play an active role to facilitating the harmonisation of Afghan asylum-seekers. For instance, a free Turkish-language course is given in the Public Education Centre in Sivas to Afghan asylum-seekers to aid their harmonisation with society. Furthermore, the Friendly Association organises social events such as picnics and Afghan nights; while the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) organises social activities and offers counselling services. The Afghan asylum-seekers who participate in these activities have the opportunity to communicate with society and with other displaced people, and can develop friendships with the other Afghan asylum-seekers they meet at these picnics or other events, and also those with Turkish language skills who offer to help others. This situation was clarified by one of the respondents:

The 13th day of spring is Nowruz Day in Iran, when it is customary to celebrate with a picnic. The FA has helped us continue this tradition in Sivas. Last year, for example, the head of this association took us to the Paşabahçe Picnic and Recreation Area on Nowruz Day and introduced us to other Afghans. I met a lady who spoke Turkish, and we became

friends. My mom is sick. When I take her to the doctor, I ask this lady to come as an interpreter, because there are no translators in the hospitals" (P3, Personal interview: 20 May, 2019).

On the other hand, the dynamics of employment, dignity, equality, justice and the language barrier seemed to be problematic for the Afghan asylum-seekers interviewed. The fieldwork findings indicated that the Afghan migrants started on their journey in the hope of finding a better life, but resulted in them encountering different problems in the geography they found themselves.

Although the majority of Afghan asylum-seekers interviewed had positive attitudes toward the local people, and stated that they wanted to continue living in Sivas, they experienced some problems in the city. Unfortunately, it was apparent that Afghan asylum-seekers who suffered from economic problems before migrating continued to suffer economic problems during their settlement process, being unable to find jobs that provide a regular income, forcing them to work illegally for low wages. As such, they have difficulty paying their rent, satisfying their basic needs and obtaining fuel. It would seem that the main issue faced by Afghan asylum-seekers is that they cannot work legally, as they are neither Turkish citizens nor refugees. Although it is possible to obtain a work permit from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the application must be made by the employer, and the necessary procedures need to be completed by asylum-seekers, who must stay in the satellite city for at least 6 months after applying for international protection (Coşkun & Yılmaz, 2018). The data collected from the fieldwork reveals, however, that employers want to employ Afghan asylum-seekers as cheap labour, without insurance, because they believe it will be more profitable for their business. Consequently, the high number of Afghan asylum-seekers employed as a cheap, uninsured labour insurance reveals the need for policies addressing the employment issue. This finding, however, is not peculiar to Sivas. The difficulties in gaining a regular income, working legally and paying the rent faced by Afghan asylum-seekers have been documented in field studies conducted in other satellite cities (Afghan Solidarity Association, 2016; Ataman, 2007; NEE, 2017a; Doğan, 2019).

In addition, some of the interviewees stated feeling "lonely and like strangers", and voiced such expectations as "respect", "empathy" and "kindness", indicating that issues such as access to dignity, equality and justice are problematic for the respondents. "Feelings of loneliness and strangeness" and the aforementioned expectations among the displaced group of people can be expected when groups with different languages, religions, races, traditions and customs come together (Demirbaş & Bekaroğlu, 2013; Erol & Ersever, 2014; Kartal & Başçı, 2014), meaning that this situation is not peculiar to the Afghan asylum-

seekers living in Sivas and similar findings have been reported in other studies (Yıldız, Ünlü, and Sezer, 2014; HUIPS, 2017b). It should be stated, however, that the hospitality of the local people experienced by Afghan asylum-seekers went a long way to making them satisfied with life in Sivas, and in helping to escape the feelings of strangeness and loneliness.

Regarding the language barrier, the findings of the present study indicate that although there a free language course is given by CPT in Sivas, the barriers associated with language have yet to be breached. There are two reasons for this: first, learning a foreign language is a time-consuming process, and second, the Afghan asylum-seekers are unaware of the opportunities available to them. It should be understood at this point that the SGDD-ASAM, which provides consultancy services in Sivas, should organise awareness-raising activities in terms of the services and activities that are available to asylum-seekers. . Speaking the same language may help accelerate the harmonisation process by easing communication between different groups. As one finding of the fieldwork in the present study, except an interpreter who works in the PDMM of Sivas, there are no interpreters who work in governmental institutions to utilise communication with Afghan asylum seekers. This situation prevents Afghan asylum-seekers from carrying out all the necessary procedures effectively. For instance, in hospitals there is a problem where Afghan asylum-seekers are diagnosed incorrectly since no patient-doctor communication can be established. This situation leads to Turkish doctors being perceived as lacking the necessary qualifications to diagnose patients. Accordingly, interpreters should be employed in governmental institutions to facilitate communication.

Regarding the language barrier, there have been a few studies examining the problems faced by Afghan children in gaining access to school equipment and in communicating with their peers (Kahraman, 2017; Gomleksiz & Aslan, 2018). One of the most important findings of the present study is that school-aged children encounter difficulties related to the language barrier, attending lessons in Turkish when they lack the necessary knowledge of the Turkish language. This situation results in a decrease in the understanding of lessons and engagement in class discussions in such children, and hinders their communication with teachers and schoolmates. Accordingly, it should be recommended to the Ministry of National Education and the Sivas Provincial Directorate of National Education that Afghan children first learn Turkish before starting their education.

When the findings were analysed in terms of the demographic characteristics of the interviewees, it was found that those who had resided in Sivas for more than a year were better able to adapt to the language, culture and

environment than newcomers. Furthermore, the respondents with a higher level of education seemed to be better able to adapt to the environment and meet their basic needs. The harmonisation of the female respondents mostly benefited from relations with their neighbours, while the male respondents benefited more from their workplaces. School-aged Afghan children aged 10–19, however, were affected more by the harmonisation processes than adults. As such, it would be beneficial to develop policies that aid children in adapting to society and that reduce the psychological damage associated with their migration. For instance, NGOs could initiate a fund-raising campaign in Sivas to provide bicycles, toys, school equipment, etc., to these children, which would increase their motivation and ease their adaptation to society.

## **Conclusion**

This article presents an analysis of Afghan asylum-seekers living in the Turkish city of Sivas who have applied for international protection, with particular focus on their perspectives of their harmonisation and integration with the host society, addressing also the problems they face throughout this process, their expectations from society and their plans for the future. In this context, the 10 dynamics of integration developed by Ager and Strang were questioned related to harmonisation processes. The fieldwork revealed that the dynamics of housing, education, health services, social connections, security and diminishing cultural barriers do not seem matters of concern, while those of employment, dignity, equality, justice and “language barrier” are more problematic.

It was found during the fieldwork that Afghan asylum-seekers are assisted by society during their harmonisation, but have problems related to the language barrier, economic inadequacy, feeling of strangeness and loneliness. One finding of particular note is that the living conditions of Afghan asylum-seekers did not suddenly improve following migration. Although Turkey provides better conditions to Afghan asylum-seekers than what they would have in Afghanistan, there are still inadequacies. The respondents interviewed were found to be eager to integrate into society, but there is an apparent need to develop policies that will ease their harmonisation process, allowing to let them live in more humane conditions and be more self-sufficient.

The contributions of this article to literature are as follows: With the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, it can be forecasted that Afghan asylum-seekers will continue to be a factor in international migration, and Turkey will continue to be affected by this mobility. Though Afghan asylum-seekers are allowed to stay in Sivas until their legal status has been determined, their harmonisation process needs to be investigated, given the connections they form with society.



Accordingly, this article fills a gap in literature by focusing on the plight of Afghans rather than Syrians, who have recently become the primary focus of researchers of immigration and integration. The study is based on fieldworks carried out in the satellite city of Sivas, and is the first such study of the city. In exploring the harmonisation processes of Afghan asylum-seekers concerning integration by way of a fieldwork study, the study makes four remarkable findings:

First, the Afghan asylum-seekers interviewed were eager to stay in Sivas and to obtain Turkish citizenship, indicating their desire to integrate and to be accepted as a part of society; second, the respondents take some time to get used to Sivas life, which can be understood from the fact that those who had resided in Sivas for more than a year were more integrated than newcomers in terms of language, culture and the environment; third, school-aged Afghan children aged 10–19 are more affected by the harmonisation process than adults; and fourth, school-aged children face difficulties related to the language barrier, as they start their education in schools whose language of instruction is Turkish, but with no knowledge of the Turkish language. Accordingly, the present study puts forward recommendations based on the difficulties faced Afghan asylum-seekers in their harmonisation process.

This article has some methodological limitations, and so further studies may be conducted into this issue.

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