Migration and Obstacles to Social Cohesion: The Perception of Young People in Turkey[1]

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the obstacles in the social cohesion process and analyze them sociologically, thereby suggesting social and political solutions to the problems through the perspectives of young people living in the city of Şanlıurfa. The present study was carried out with young people born in Turkey and Syria, who came together at the workshops conducted within the scope of a European Union funded Erasmus+ project in 2021. It used in-depth and semi-structured interviews to collect the data from young participants aged between 18 and 30 to understand the actions and narratives of participants and the intersection of their actions and narratives. The present study identified four fundamental obstacles to social cohesion: legal, economic, socio-cultural, and the public sphere. According to the study's findings, the abovementioned obstacles seriously hamper social cohesion between migrants and host communities.

Türkiye'de Gençlerin Göç Algısı ve Toplumsal Uyumun Önündeki Engeller

Öz

Bu çalışma, Şanlıurfa ilinde yaşayan gençlerin bakış açısıyla toplumsal uyum sürecindeki engellerin ortaya çıkarılarak sosyolojik olarak analiz edilmesini ve böylelikle sorunlara toplumsal ve politik açıdan çözüm önerileri oluşturmayı hedeflemektedir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışma, 2021 yılında Avrupa Birliği destekli Erasmus+ projesi kapsamında gerçekleştirilen çalıştaylarda bir araya gelen Türkiye ve Suriye doğumlu gençlerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgularla yaş aralığı 18-30 olan genç katılımcıların gündelik hayat pratiklerini ve anlatılarını ve bu pratiklerin ve anlatılarının kesişimini anlamaya yönelik analizler yapılmıştır. Çalışmada yasal, ekonomik, sosyo-kültürel ve kamusal alan engelleri olarak adlandırılan sosyal uyumun önündeki dört temel engel değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, yukarıda belirtilen engellerin göçmenler ve ev sahibi topluluklar arasındaki sosyal uyumu ciddi şekilde engellediği ortaya çıkmıştır.

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Introduction

Turkey has faced an extraordinary wave of mass migration, especially since 2011. Due to the internal turmoil and violence in Syria, millions of people sought refuge in various countries, especially neighboring countries. Turkey, the neighboring country of Syria, is hosting the highest number (3,723,674) of Syrian migrants under temporary protection status (Presidency of Migration Management, 2021). This situation has influenced Turkey's social and political life led many scholars and political circles to conduct studies to help both communities live together in peace and harmony.

Migration is a phenomenon that affects both migrants and host communities. It affects all social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the society (Sezgin and Yolcu, 2016, p. 420). The positive aspect of migration is that it provides an opportunity for local people to get benefits from the skills and expertise of migrants (Yıldırım, 2004, p. 31). It also enriches culture (Dumont and Liebig, 2014), where social cohesion is achieved. Migration may also cause negative impacts, especially at its early stage and in areas lacking social cohesion. In this respect, social cohesion is an essential element for developing the society that hosts millions of migrants.

With the mass forced migration of Syrian migrants to Turkey, the status of Syrians who are hosted under temporary protection in Turkey became the subject of constant debate. In the current scenario, the return of Syrian migrants to their country seems impossible; therefore, the important issue is how to develop social cohesion between migrants and host communities.

Social cohesion is described as the outcome of a combination of harmonious interactive activities amongst a group of people living in close proximity, purposely advancing the interest of all those involved (Bourne and Solomos, 2007, p. 28). It is a two-way process whose achievement depends upon the conduct of both migrants and host communities. It entails various responsibilities on the shoulders of both communities that must be fulfilled for developing cohesion. Turkey is a country that has a history of hosting migrants with welcoming hands. Of late, an unprecedented level of mass migration from Syria has caused members of the host community to react differently, which sometimes leads to negative and hostile events. Gülerce and Çorlu (2021) revealed that Syrian students have a high willingness to social cohesion, but they continued to experience problems such as marginalization, exclusion, and stigmatization by host communities in different ways. However, the government has taken important measures to facilitate social cohesion, which reflects in the perception of young migrants who consider Turkey as their own country and

regard themselves as a part of the country (Ok & Gülerce, 2020, p. 32). Likewise, young locals starting to accept the migrants as new friendships between the young generation of both communities are on the rise, but some important policies and actions are still needed in this regard.

For the understanding of social issues of a society, it is indispensable to determine the thoughts and approaches of young people. The views of young people about social cohesion and their thoughts about the establishment of solidarity between migrants and host communities will contribute to transforming the existing negative perception of both communities about each other and bring out the expectation of both communities from each other. The present study aimed to examine the attitudes of young migrants and young locals about social cohesion between migrants and host communities. More specifically, it sought to determine the problems that create impediments in social cohesion and analyze them sociologically, thereby suggesting social and political solutions to the problems.

Method

The study was carried out with young people born in Turkey and Syria, who came together at the workshops conducted within the scope of a European Union funded Erasmus+ project called "Codes of Harmony and Solidarity in the Eyes of Youth," held in Sanliurfa. This Project, numbered 2020-3-TR01-KA347-097413, is carried out by Migration Policy Application and Research Centre at Harran University and supported by European Union Education and Youth Programs Centre (Turkish National Agency) within the framework of Erasmus+ KA347 Support for Policy Reform. The project aims an active participation of young people into policy reforms. The present study used in-depth and semi-structured interviews to collect the data from young participants aged between 18 and 30 to understand the actions and narratives of participants and the intersection of their actions and narratives. The study conducted interviews with 14 local young people (both male and female) and 7 migrant young people (both male and female) to have an equal number of participants in the sample groups since 28 young locals and 14 young migrants participated in the workshops. To allow for a conversational style of interviewing, permission was also sought to audiotape the interviews. Each interview lasted 40 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim and then translated into English. Following each interview, detailed notes were taken to record significant features of each interview such as the non-verbal behavior of the participants. These notes were also used in the data analysis. Transcripts were analyzed through the MAXQDA program, which allows working with multiple codes (Ergan & Ergan, 2021, p. 82). During the analysis, a total of 154 codes were obtained by coding

sometimes words and sometimes expressions. Then, 7 categories were reached by paying attention to the compatibility and integrity of these codes in terms of similarities and differences. In the study, in which open coding reflecting the exploratory aspect of the qualitative research was used, the findings were evaluated under the themes of "approach to migrants and social cohesion" and "obstacles to social cohesion". Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained by using codes such as letters L for (Local) participants and M for (Migrant) participants were used. In addition, the age and gender of the participants (female: F, male: M) are also shown in parentheses. All the participants are coded from P1 to P21. When defining the participants, firstly the participant code, secondly the expression of being an immigrant or a native, thirdly age and finally the gender are shown. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Harran University.

Findings and Discussion

Migration is a phenomenon that creates physical changes in space and significant changes in social structures (Adıgüzel, 2017, p. 3). Individuals and communities that experience migration often consider it in a negative sense. In the present study, when participants were asked who migrant was, they answered it by using phrases such as "the person away from the land where he was born, grew up, and accustomed," "helpless person," and "a person who is forced to leave his/her country and lives in another place." A 26-year-old male migrant participant stated: "Those who voluntarily leave their homelands have hopes, but those who have no hopes are called migrants. For me, the word migrant has a negative connotation. That is why, when someone calls me migrant, this breaks my heart" (P16, M, 26, M).

Local young people also considered migration as a negative phenomenon and used phrases such as "being out of place," "being homeless," and "not belonging anywhere." For instance, a 23-year-old female local participant defined the migrant as "someone who feels that he/she belongs nowhere."

The approach of local participants to migration develops through an empathy built upon fear. The difficult living conditions, language barrier, and exclusion from society led local young people to develop an empathetic approach towards migrants. For example, a local 22-year-old female participant said that

> We can be in their place; we might turn into migrants one day. Right now, none of us has a guaranteed place. A war may break out in our country right now. We may have to leave our

homeland and migrate to England, Greece, or another country. This is life; after all, it is unclear how we will be or what will happen to us.

However, some participants of the study criticized migrants by saying that while Turkish soldiers fight to ensure border security in Syria, some of the Syrian migrants live comfortable lives in Turkey. As a 21-year-old male local participant said,

> The people of Turkey are really hospitable towards migrants, but the perception that 'Syrians are sitting idly here while our soldiers are fighting there' prevails in society. Indeed, we cannot observe the post-war psychology of some migrants. Okay, I am not saying that they should cry all the time; however, their sitting idly in parks, smoking hookah all day, singing and dancing irritates me (P12, L, 21, M).

Moreover, some local young participants expressed their anger on migrants for migrating out of their country without putting resistance, as one participant stated, "if I were in their place, I would have fought." Nonetheless, one should not forget that majority of the migrants were comprised of children at the time of migration who have now turned into a young population of the society and have no knowledge of and commitment to their own country. In the study of Kaya and Şahin (2021, pp. 86-87), it was stated that young people do not know their country because they left Syria at an early age. This reflects in the statement of a 21-year-old female migrant who spent a significant part of her life in Turkey and considered herself as a part of Turkey. Even though her family is seeking ways to go to Europe, she wants to stay in Turkey. She expressed, "When I left Syria, I was very small and did not know anything about it. I did not even have a friend there. I got used to living here, I learned Turkish, I got citizenship, and I feel like Turkey is my homeland now" (P21, M, 21, F).

The most important achievement of the state is to create a secure society (Geçit, 2020, p. 113). Citizenship is the basic indicator of subjection to the state. Citizenship is the spiritual bond between people who make up a nation (Güveyi, 2019, p. 153). In a study its revealed that obtaining Turkish citizenship of Syrian-origin university students makes the social cohesion process easier (Gülerce, 2021). The issue of obtaining citizenship is always discussed when it comes to migration. When the participants were asked for their opinions on granting citizenship to migrants, 12 participants approved granting citizenship to migrants. These participants believed that those who wanted to be Turk citizens should be given citizenship, as it would bring benefits to both the state and migrants. Out of the 7 participants who gave negative opinions on granting citizenship, 5 participants (including two migrants) thought that citizenship should be given only to people who could contribute to the country, while 2 of them argued that no migrants should be given citizenship.

One of the important things that shape the approach towards migrants is about their future plans, including returning home. When asked about their plans, two of the migrants expressed their intention to go to Europe because of various problems they encountered in Turkey; whereas, five migrant participants stated that they were pleased to live in Turkey and intended to live here if they get suitable living conditions. For example, a 21-year-old male migrant participant said that "I was a kid when I came here. I have spent most of my life here. I am studying here, and I want to work here. My life is here. Sometimes, I think that if I go to Syria, I will be a migrant there" (P18, M, 21, M).

Although local people have great expectations that migrants eventually return to their own country, local participants believed that migrants would not return to their country. They even considered that this situation could have positive impacts on society. Most of the participants emphasized that migration began a new process of cultural formation that brought richness to the society and earned popularity as well. Another dominant view was that migration brought economic wealth as it added a new labor force and created employment opportunities. One of the reasons behind this positive approach is workshops and events attended by participants within the scope of the project (Codes of Harmony and Solidarity in the Eyes of Youth) that have nurtured their empathetic approach. Other studies found similar results (Gülerce & Ökten, 2021, pp. 19-20; Ok & Gülerce, 2021, p. 32). Based on these findings, it is safe to say that the social distance between migrants and local youth has been reduced by knowing each other by virtue of workshops and events where migrants and local youth meet each other establish regular relations and work together.

One of the most important indicators of cohesion is the close relations between two communities. Friendships and neighbor relations bring the two communities closer to each other as participants reported that they had negative opinions about migrants but friendship with migrants altered their opinion and helped them to understand and approve of migrants and their problems. Friendships bring the people of two communities closer and provide opportunities to experience each other's cultures. Schools, projects of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and events provide opportunities to meet young people of both communities and befriend each other. These events also provide opportunities to introduce each other's culture, lifestyle and share food, music, etc. Thus, young people who know each other better, break their prejudices against each other to a certain extent. For example, a 25-year-old female local participant explained,

> During a project on leadership training, which I took part in before, I met and befriended
> many migrants. I had some prejudices about migrants before, but I saw that when we were

together, we had fun, added something to each other, and could get along well even if we did not know each other's languages. After we met on this project three years ago, our friendship never ended, and we still see each other (P11, L, 25, F).

Over the course of time, knowledge about each other's cultures led to significant changes in people of both communities. The participants observed that Turkish women emulate Syrian women's attires, headscarves wearing styles, and make-up while Syrian men emulate Turkish men in terms of attires and hairstyles. As stated by a 21-year-old local male participant enunciated,

Men used to wear white dresses when they first came and overused jelly. As time passed, they began to dress like us and get their hair and beard cut like us. However, there was no change in women. On the contrary, our women wear headscarves like migrant women; they have started to emulate their attires and put on make-up like them (P13, L, 22, M).

A healthy social cohesion is necessary to enable societies from different cultures to live together.

It is of utmost importance to learn about the obstacles, which come in the way of social cohesion. When participants of the study were asked about social cohesion, they defined it as "understanding, mutual respect, respect for differences, tolerance, acceptance, meeting on a common ground, being a member of a single society". Social cohesion process entails legal, economic, socio-cultural dimensions, and public sphere, and these all are interconnected with each other. This study adds another process that may delay social cohesion that is the public sphere.

Legal Obstacles to Social Cohesion

The legal dimension of cohesion includes the right to work, right to own property, right to access educational opportunities, right to get citizenship, and right to get the freedom of movement. Syrian migrants in Turkey receive an identity document, which serves as a residence permit and grants them the right to benefit from all public services, as well. This document has three forms: "International Protection Applicant Identity Document", "International Protection Status Holder Identity Document" and "Temporary Protection Identity Document." With this document, Syrian migrants and other foreigners under subsidiary protection get the right to work freely, obviating the need for a work permit (Regulation on Employment of International Protection Applicants and People with International Protection Status, 2016). However, migrants under temporary protection need to get permission to work. In the present study, both local and migrant participants agreed that the legal status and rights of migrants in Turkey are satisfactory; however, migrants are

mostly unaware of their rights and do not use their rights. These rights, rules and regulations are mentioned under the Regulations for Temporary Protection (Presidency of Migration Management, 2022). A 20-year-old male local participant stated, "A migrant in Turkey can receive free education and benefit from health services. He can travel around the country. In case of an important and urgent situation, they can apply to the lawyers at the Directorate of Migration Management. However, most migrants do not know this" (P3, L, 20, M).

Intercity traveling of foreigners/migrants under International Protection and Temporary Protection in Turkey are subject to a Road Permit, which migrants can obtain by applying via e-state. (On Foreigners to Obtain Road Permit Documents via E-State, 2021). The only issue raised by participants regarding legal rights is that migrants cannot travel without this document. For instance, a 28-year-old female migrant stated that "Everyone is equal before the law in Turkey. Migrants' legal rights are also sufficient, but there are some minor issues such as travel permits" (P19, M, 28, F).

One of the most important issues regarding migrants' access to legal rights is the misconduct of some individuals who hold offices, banks, etc., who abuse their authority and show exclusionary attitudes. For example, a 26-year-old male migrant participant said,

> Legal rights for migrants are satisfactory, but there are some problems in exercising these rights in real life. All foreigners have the right to open a bank account in Turkey. If he/she does not have a property or a regular income, he/she should not take a loan, but they do not even allow him/her to open an account in the bank. I was granted a stipend by an institution, and I was asked for a bank account number. Therefore, I went to the bank to open an account. The bank employee did not want to open an account for me. I said it was my right, and I showed my resistance by not leaving the counter and blocking the path of other customers, thereby forcing an employee to open an account. The employee opened an account for me because he had to. I knew Turkish, and I knew that I had the right to open a bank account. However, many migrants do not know their rights and cannot have their transactions done because they cannot speak Turkish (P16, M, 26, M).

Migrants' children can receive education from kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high school institutions with the same rights as Turkish children have. It is a prerequisite for foreigners to pass Foreign Student Exam (YÖS) to enter a university in Turkey. This exam which started to be carried out by the Centre for Assessment, Selection, and Placement (ÖSYM) for the first time in 1981, has been conducted by universities since 2010 (Demirhan, 2017, p. 550). However, a lack of knowledge about this exam lead many local people to

believe that Syrian migrants enter universities without any examination. For instance, a 22-year-old male local participant explained,

> University exams are very difficult in Turkey. I studied for this exam for two years; I spent a lot of money. I was very uncomfortable because I thought that Syrians entered the university without an exam. When I interacted with them, I learned that they also have to pass exams. I even noticed that some Syrians were more knowledgeable than me in our department (P7, L, 22, M).

Soon after the mass migration of Syrian refugees to Turkey, a decision was taken that exempted Syrian students from university fees like local students; however, the new decision taken in 2021 reversed this exemption; now Syrian students are required to pay tuition fees, like other foreign students (President Decision, 2021). This decision will result in a massive decline in enrolment of Syrian students in universities as young Syrian migrants who already face financial constraints.

Economic Obstacles to Social Cohesion

The second dimension of social cohesion is the economic process. Creating one's own economic resources, becoming self-sufficient, and abandoning the dependence on the state or any other institution are among the indicators of the economic cohesion of migrants (Crisp, 2004, p. 1). This study considers that economic problems as one of obstacles to social cohesion.

The economy is the foremost topic of the discussions related to migrants and migration. More specifically, taking away jobs from locals, increasing competition, and declining wages are the focus of constant discussions (Friedberg & Hunt, 1995, p. 23). The migrants are generally accepted as unskilled labor in host countries because of the language barrier or the non-recognition of their educational qualifications. In Turkey, most migrants work as unskilled labor in construction, agriculture, manufacturing industry sectors, and home services (Ciğerci Ulukan, 2017, p. 17; Çınar, 2018, p. 122; Ministry of Development, 2014, p. 17). Migrants work on low wages, for long hours, often in bad conditions to meet their family needs (Bilek, Sandal, & Yıldız, 2019). A study conducted on Turkish workers (Çınar, 2018, p. 128), found that people held Syrian construction workers accountable for a reduction in wages. The present study found that local participants frequently voiced economic concerns such as taking away jobs from locals, increasing competition, and declining wages and viewed these factors as impediments to social cohesion. However, the young migrant participants explained:

> The locals say, 'Syrians came and took our jobs. However, from the point of view of migrants, when people are stuck with money, they can work in any job, even if the salary is low. Because there is no other choice (P17, M, 21, M).
>
> Unemployment is a big problem for local young people also. Especially, during the Covid-19 period, the employment opportunities declined significantly; The employers prefer migrant workers as migrants work on fewer wages and without insurance. This is not the fault of migrants but local employers (P20, M, 29, M).

The migrants with temporary protection identity documents, provided by the Republic of Turkey, still work informally since they are either oblivious of their employment rights or cannot find better jobs (Şahin, 2022, p. 400). On one hand, migrants' approval to work on low wages causes them to suffer exclusion as they are held accountable for lowering the wages and reducing employment opportunities for local people. On the other hand, the feeling of being more exploited by local employers relative to the local worker in the same work hinders their cohesion and integration into the society (Vesek, 2020, p. 1). Local people are well-informed about this pay discrimination against migrants. For example, a 20-year-old male local participant explained, "I worked for a couple of months. My wage was 2000 Turkish liras, but a Syrian girl received just 1300" (P3, L, 20, M).

In Turkey, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) run support programs for migrants. Some of them provide financial support to migrants that create misunderstanding among natives who believe that this financial aid comes from the Turkish government. More specifically, financial aid provided by KizilayKart, a debit card formed by the Turkish Red Crescent organization, funded by Emergency Social Safety Net Programme (ESSN), gives them a reason to believe in this way. However, this is not about the Turkish government since KizilayKart is funded by European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). This program (ECHO) aims to help the refugees meet their basic needs such as food, housing, and clothing. Moreover, 155 Turkish liras for each family member are transferred to the debit card every month (KIZILAYKART-SUY, 2021). However, all migrants are not eligible to obtain the cards; it is only given to those migrants who meet the criteria such as lonely women, individuals over the age of 60 who have no one, single parents with at least one child below the age of 18, families with a disabled member who has above %40 disabilities, the families with four or more than four children, and families with a large number of dependent family members (KIZILAYKART-SUY, 2021). The small number of the participants in the present study believed that the Turkish government provides financial support to migrants; migrants do not want to work as it may cause a loss of government support, especially financial aid.

Socio-Cultural Obstacles to Social Cohesion

The third dimension of social cohesion is a socio-cultural process in which migrants become a part of the new society without losing their own identity. Social cohesion never refers to the situation in which the values of the host community are acquired and assimilated by the migrant community; it expresses the state of being a part of the society with its differences. However, this is a challenging task for both societies. This study observed that barriers to cohesion in the social process are maintained by the two communities.

At the early stage of mass migration of Syrian refugees to Turkey, Turkish people associated this migration with Hijrah (migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medinah in times of Prophet Muhammad) (Önkal, 2020, p. 462), and tried to develop brotherhood with Syrian migrants repeating the history of Ansar-Muhajir relation in which Ansar embraced Muhajirs who migrated from Mecca to Medina. However, over the course of time, positive perceptions and relations weakened, thereby increasing social distance between migrants and local people (Erdoğan, 2019). Although the social distance between the two sides has increased, local people still have a feeling of pity towards the migrants in general. A 24-years-old local female participant (P1, L, 24, F) believed that as long as the feeling of pity and understanding of hospitality is intact, it is not possible to talk about full harmony with migrants as these feelings keep alive beliefs that migrants will return to their country.

It is a matter of the fact that the hard living conditions of migrants develop compassion among local people who regard migrants as guests and show hospitality. However, prejudice may replace the atmosphere of compassion and hospitality if the issue is not seen and accepted in line with a broader perspective of human rights. Prejudice is making inferences about a person or group without knowing them well (Investigation on Prejudice towards Immigrants, 2017). Prejudice goes hand in hand with standardization (Akrami, 2005, p. 8). The behavior of one or more members of the group becomes generalized and perceived as general features of the whole group. Standardization has a specific relation with stigmatization (Goffman, 2014, p. 30). A negative practice or behavior of a member is generalized for all others and accepted as a group characteristic. Lack of information about people or groups leads to fostering prejudice, which in turn creates hindrances in the development of closer relations. A 28-year-female migrant stated, "They do not know us, and they do not want to meet us. Some Turkish people think we all are very uneducated" (P19, M, 28, F).

A 26-year-old male migrant participant stated that his 60-year-old mother was exposed to racism in a bus (making her leave the seat to him) by an old Turkish person. What is more,

he emphasized that this is not just about Turkish people, but many more racist acts from migrants to locals take place in daily life. Overall, the general opinion of the participants viewed that these acts such as racism, exclusion, or discrimination are the byproduct of prejudice which refers to negative judgements, beliefs, and feelings about people because of their social group membership (Akrami, 2005, p. 8). This study found that the term racism was emphasized ten times during interviews which indicates the importance of the issue. Moreover, the term "exclusion" and marginalized were used 28 and 6 times, respectively in the present study.

One of the significant obstacles to social cohesion is that both communities have quite different and disconnected lives which block their socialization and integration. This situation, known as ghettoization, is more felt by low-income migrants. A 22-year-old male local participant specified that "if you go to Hayati Harrani Neighborhood in Şanlıurfa, Syrian migrants live in almost all houses." The reason for disconnected lives and lack of interaction are some prevailing apprehension between communities. For instance, local people have apprehension that the migrants are likely to change local cultural values over the course of time. As Bauman (2015) stated that newcomers always pose a threat to the self-confident lifestyle of locals. Hence, the locals perceive migrants as a threat to their cultural values, and to protect these values, they employ some strategies ranging from ignoring to staying away from migrants. Migrants avoid intermixing with locals fearing assimilation and being harmed. The apprehension between communities is boosted by mass media and social media; acts such as racism, stigmatization, discrimination, or exclusion, mostly result from prejudicial contents of these media towards migrants. A Twitter review found that migrants in America are marginalized as "uneducated, deprived of moral values and should be deprived of even basic human rights such as the right to health and the right to sue" (Kalav & Fırat, 2017, p. 2220). As participants of the study explained,

I read an opinion column today. It describes "migrant children as potential criminals in the future because they do not receive education". So these kids are already directly stigmatized (P10, L, 23, F).

Some people constantly follow social media, do not go out and learn about life. Local people do not want to harm Syrians. They aim to ensure social cohesion as soon as possible. But when they read things on social media, they shut themselves up at home, fearing that the Turks will harm them (P17, M, 21, M).

There was a fight in the neighborhood of Hayati Harrani. A local media channel from Şanlıurfa reported the news. In the news, Syrians were brought to the fore, blamed for the

fight; then this turned into hatred. After this incident, I experienced serious hopelessness. I said they would never accept us. Since I came here, I have done my part, learned the language, stopped wearing Fistan (a traditional Arabic dress). OK, now you have the ball. If you don't want to play, keep the ball. I did what I could (P16, M, 26, M).

Exclusionary language of mass and social media provokes fear among both communities and develops prejudicial attitudes towards each other. As a result, locals avoid interacting with migrants and the migrants feel a great fear towards the local community and do not leave their ghetto-like neighborhood which in turn preclude them from learning the local language and knowing the local culture.

The language barrier is another key issue. The language problem is seen as the most important reason that prevents migrants from mixing into the local society. A 21-year old male participant (P15, M, 21, M) who has been living in a neighborhood where Turks are concentrated stated that this situation made it easier for him to learn Turkish. He further said that they had an easy acceptance process as there were families who could speak Arabic. The presence of people who understand and respect each other facilitates social cohesion. However, those migrants who continue to live in their own community or neighborhood preclude them from learning the local language and this may create misunderstandings between people of both communities. As participants explained, for instance a 26-year-old male migrant participant stated:

> There are four shops in our neighborhood. Three of them belong to Turks and just one is Syrian. All Syrians prefer a Syrian shop as they cannot speak Turkish, and this may create some misunderstanding. Turks may start to hate us, thinking that we shop there because these shops belong to Syrians. However, if we knew the language, we could also do shopping from Turkish shops and this will facilitate the cohesion process between the two communities (P16, M, 26, M).

A 21-year-old male migrant participant (P17, M, 21, M) said that migrant community misunderstands most situations and feels excluded because they do not know the local language and culture. This misunderstanding causes them to stay away from the local people.

It is clearly observed that the migrants who spend time along with their own people and have no contact with locals have hopes of returning to their country. It is unclear when their return will be possible, but their current living style of isolation from local people impedes the process of social cohesion. A 21-year-old female migrant participant said, "When we came here first, we thought we would stay here for a year at most. It has been years and

we are still here. The hope of returning back to our homeland prevented us from settling in here" (P21, M, 29, M).

However, migrants who spent their childhood and early youth in Turkey have started to see Turkey as their own country and feel uncomfortable being seen as guests. As a 26-year-old male migrant participant stated:

> When we first arrived in Turkey, local people showed great hospitality towards us. However, when our stay is prolonged, they are waiting for us to leave. However, I made a life here and when I return to Syria, I will start from scratch and become a migrant there. Who can do this to himself (P16, M, 26, M)?

In the cultural dimension of cohesion, there are problems experienced by both communities in the process of understanding and accepting the values of each other. Local people fear that their culture will be ruined by migrants while the migrants are afraid of relentless assimilation. Thus, both parties keep away from each other. Social cohesion can never be realized by saving the purity of one's own culture. For healthy cohesion, both communities have to simultaneously sacrifice some of their values and soften some cultural practices to come closer to each other. In fact, it is a new culture creation process that enables the coexistence of two different communities and the creation of a single community via uniting them.

The Obstacles to Social Cohesion in the Public Sphere

Syrian migrants were first accommodated in the temporary camps in the Turkish cities near the Syrian border (Akkoyunlu, Ertan and Ertan, 2017, p. 10). Over the course of time, due to their long-lasting stay migrants abandoned the camps and began to live in cities. More specifically migrants from Rakka, Deir Ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah, Aleppo, and Qamishli cities of Syria began to live in Turkish border cities such as Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, and Mardin due to historical kinship ties with local people (Kaya & Şahin, 2021, p. 28).

> When Syrians first came, they were placed in the camps in border cities thinking that they would return to their homeland very soon. This brought about a sharp rise in population there. (P1, L, 24, F).

At the early stage of migration, this kind of cultural affinity provided various opportunities for cultural solidarity; however, the longer stay of migrants accompanied by increasing population rates in the Southeastern Anatolia Region [Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), 2020], which is the poorest region of Turkey, increased unemployment and poverty. More specifically, the sudden increase in population reduced the efficiency of health care

services and caused various problems related to nutrition, hygiene, drinking water, and waste disposal (Aydoğan & Metintaş, 2017, p. 39-40).

Housing is another problem caused by the sudden increase in population. According to a study conducted with the students of Harran University, Sanliurfa, 93.3% of Syrian students live in rented houses (Kaya & Şahin, 2021, p. 30). Another study in Mersin, a coastal city of Turkey, presented almost similar results and found that in some instances more than one family shares the same house due to the exorbitant prices of rented houses. The same study also revealed that due to the increasing need for housing and exorbitant house-rents, migrants had to take shelter in desolate places, empty abandoned places, parking lots, etc. (Mersin University Regional Monitoring Application Research Center, 2014, p. 62-63). According to a study conducted by Karasu, (2018) 45.7% of participants emphasized that rent and housing prices increased drastically in Sanliurfa due to a growing number of migrants. Besides that, local people do not prefer renting their houses to migrants with the justification that migrants misuse houses and do not pay rent. A 21 year-old male local participant said,

> The problem is that they do not rent their houses to Syrians; they think that all Syrians are bad. When you want to rent a house, they usually show the places that are too bad to live in (P15, M, 21, M).

> While searching for a house to rent, we sometimes have to talk with dozens of people. Most of them reject us telling that they do not rent out houses to foreigners. Okey, I accept that some migrants may have damaged the houses, not paid the dues or rent, but how many people could they be? One, two, three maybe a hundred people. But what is the fault of other millions? Aren't there people who do the same thing among Turks (P20, M, 29, M)?

Çebi emphasized that NGOs have a considerable role in meeting the needs of migrants and supporting social cohesion (2017, p. 138). However, the participants of this study criticized NGOs by stating that NGOs in Şanlıurfa have communication problems among themselves. Consequently, the aid usually did not achieve the desired goals. The efforts to achieve social cohesion are less effective because NGOs mostly focus on just financial aids and have communication problems among themselves.

> There are quite large organizations with the massive budget here, and they provide financial aids to migrants. However, their actions on social cohesion are insufficient. social cohesion is as important as financial aids. Without achieving social cohesion, no matter how much help you give, the migrants will remain in the same situation, and work done in this regard will be useless (P15, M, 21, M).

Conclusion

A wave of mass migration from Syria to Turkey has influenced the social and political life of Turkey. This situation has led many scholars and political circles to conduct studies to help both communities to live together in peace and harmony. This study aimed to get the views of young participants regarding migration related issue and their solution as they are the key stakeholders of the society. The present study identified four basic obstacles to social cohesion which are termed as legal, economic, socio-cultural, and public sphere obstacles. According to the findings of the study, the abovementioned obstacles seriously hamper social cohesion between migrants and natives.

Most participants have the opinion that legal status, and rights of migrants are satisfactory in Turkey. However, some of their rights are restricted such as freedom of mobility as Syrian migrants must have travel permit for intercity travelling. Moreover, government authorities have reversed the decision that exempted Syrian students from university fees; now Syrian students are required to pay tuition fees, like other foreign students. This decision will result in a massive decline in enrolment of Syrian students in universities as young Syrian migrants who already face financial constraints.

With respect to economic obstacles to social cohesion, local people find it hard to get by with the decreasing wages due to a large number of uninsured and low-cost laborer. It is a fact that most migrants work as unskilled labor on low wages, for long hours, often in bad conditions to meet their family needs in Turkey. These circumstance had led locals to mispercieve migrants as responsible for declining wages. Besides that, bank card (KizilayKart) given to the migrants who meet the criteria cause misunderstaning, thereby hampering the social cohesion. To live together in peace and harmony, cultural amalgamation is an essential factor. However, due to prejudices, the members of both communities fear losing own cultural values and facing mistreatment by the other side. This situation leads to both communities to avoid interacting with each other. Even if there are sometimes specific individual intimacy, ghettoization-like settlements substantially hinder mutual relationships for both communities.

Another point is that improper placement policies for migrants bring about problems with infrastructure, housing, and employment. In addition, the exclusionary tone of mass media and politicians instil fears among the people of both communities, thereby causing them to stay away from each other. It is a matter of fact that the migration has profound social, cultural and economic benefits. The skills, potentials, and cultural heritage of migrants can be used for the enrichment of Turkey. Therefore, both the migrants and host natives need

to take steps that include mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance in order to eliminate negative aspects of migration and achieve mutual gains.

Recommendations

The participants' suggested solutions to ensure social cohesion and harmony can be listed as below:

The migrants must be well-informed about their legal rights, and the practices that restrict their freedom of travel, and educational rights must be stopped immediately.Overcoming economical problems will also solve other related issues for both local people and migrants. Illegalemployment of migrants must be banned. They must be employed in the same legal conditions as local workers. The discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants, especially in terms of housing, should be prevented.

Immediate actions must be taken by NGOs and local administrations to overcome the language barrier.

To provide a cultural affinity, the number of activities that bring both communities together must be increased.

Mass media must immediately reform the content of their news, programs, etc., which promote prejudicial attitudes, and racism against migrants. Instead, it must work as a contributor to social cohesion.

Hate crimes must be punished.

Politicians must avoid using hate speeches; they must make more lenient policies towards migrants.

Migrants must be entitled to represent themselves in policy-making process.

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