

# Host-Society Perceptions of Turkish-Syrian Mixed Marriages: Gender and Conditional Integration in Yozgat

## Ev sahibi toplumun Türk-Suriyeli karma evliliklerine ilişkin algıları: Yozgat'ta toplumsal cinsiyet ve şartlı entegrasyon

Rumeysa Bozdemir<sup>1</sup> 

Reyhan Atasü Topçuoğlu<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate, Hacettepe University, Institute of Social Sciences, Social Work Department, Ankara, Türkiye



<sup>2</sup> Prof. Dr., Hacettepe University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Social Work Department, Ankara, Türkiye



Corresponding Author:  
Rumeysa Bozdemir

### Citation:

Bozdemir, R. & Atasü Topçuoğlu, R. (2026). Host-Society Perceptions of Turkish-Syrian Mixed Marriages: Gender and Conditional Integration in Yozgat *OPUS- Journal of Society Research*, 23, e1905104.

<https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjsr.1905104>

### Open Access Statement:

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the source are properly credited. The original publication in *OPUS Journal of Society Research* must be cited in accordance with accepted academic practice.

### Review Note:

Evaluated by Double-Blind Peer Review

### Ethics Reporting:

To report potential ethical concerns, contact: [editorialoffice@opusjournal.net](mailto:editorialoffice@opusjournal.net)

Similarity screening was conducted via intihal.net.



### Abstract

This qualitative study examines host-society perceptions of Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages in Yozgat and their contribution to social cohesion. Participants grounded their evaluations on social, economic, and political considerations, while some expressed negative sentiments toward Syrians, showing tension between integration and assimilation expectations. Drawing on Berry's acculturation framework, mixed marriages are conceptualized as extended cultural contact linking couples, families, and kinship networks. Participants acknowledged that such contact may foster familiarity and social proximity, but references to "racial degeneration" and cultural dilution indicate it can also produce anxiety and resistance. The findings indicate that mixed marriages are often evaluated through a pragmatic, cost-based lens and reflect patterns of conditional acceptance shaped by gender norms. Syrian brides are incorporated into local households when they conform to traditional domestic roles, whereas Syrian grooms are rare and far less accepted, reflecting a clear gender asymmetry in integration. Comparing Syrian and Turkish women functions as a discursive mechanism that reinforces male authority and reproduces gendered hierarchies. The study identifies a central paradox: while mixed marriages theoretically create space for integration through sustained contact, confining Syrian women to the domestic sphere reduce cultural dialogue and reproduces gender-based inequalities. The study suggests that the integrative potential of mixed marriages depends less on contact itself and more on how such contact is shaped by power relations and social boundaries.

**Keywords:** Mixed marriage, acculturation, Syrian, adaptation, Yozgat

### Öz

Bu nitel araştırma, Yozgat'ta Türk-Suriyeli karma evliliklere yönelik ev sahibi toplumun algılarını ve bu evliliklerin sosyal uyuma katkısını incelemektedir. Katılımcılar değerlendirmelerini sosyal, ekonomik ve politik gerekçelere dayandırırken, bazıları Suriyelilere yönelik olumsuz duygularını ifade etmiş; bu durum entegrasyon ve asimilasyon beklentileri arasındaki gerilimi işaret etmiştir. Berry'nin kültürleşme kuramına göre, karma evlilikler yalnızca eşleri değil, aileleri ve akrabalık ağlarını kapsayan genişletilmiş kültürel temas alanlarıdır. Katılımcılar bu temasın aşinalık ve toplumsal yakınlık yaratabileceğini kabul etmekle birlikte, "ırkın bozulması" ve kültürel yozlaşma gibi kaygılar da dile getirmiştir. Bulgular, karma evliliklerin çoğunlukla ekonomik ve pragmatik bir çerçevede değerlendirildiğini ve toplumsal cinsiyet normlarıyla şekillenen koşullu bir kabul örneğine işaret ettiğini göstermektedir. Suriyeli gelinler geleneksel ev içi rollere uydukça yerel aile yapısına dahil edilirken, Suriyeli damatlar nadiren görülmekte ve daha az kabul edilmektedir; bu, entegrasyonda belirgin bir cinsiyet asimetrisini ortaya koymaktadır. Suriyeli ve Türk kadınların karşılaştırılması, erkek otoritesini pekiştiren ve hane içi toplumsal cinsiyet hiyerarşilerini yeniden üreten bir mekanizma olarak işlev görmektedir. Araştırma, karma evliliklerin entegrasyon potansiyelinin yalnızca temasın varlığına değil, bu temasın hangi güç ilişkileri ve toplumsal sınırlar içinde yorumlandığına bağlı olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karma evlilik, kültürleşme, suriyeli, uyum, Yozgat

## Introduction

Mixed marriages have long been examined in migration and integration literature as both a cause and a consequence of social, cultural, and economic interactions between immigrant and host communities. On the one hand, intermarriage is often considered an indicator of social proximity and integration; on the other, it may itself function as a mechanism through which integration processes unfold. In this sense, mixed marriages occupy a critical position at the intersection of private life and broader social structures, linking kinship networks with processes of social incorporation.

International research focusing on the role of marriage in immigrant women's integration trajectories, point to both opportunities for social inclusion and exposure to new forms of vulnerability (Brettell, 2017; Hsia, 1997). In the Turkish context, studies conducted in provinces such as Osmaniye, Mardin, and Gaziantep have explored the implications of mixed marriages for family structures and social relations within migrant communities (Akyüz & Tursun, 2019; Bulut, 2016; Certel & Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2024; Doğaner, 2021). The literature presents a fundamental tension: while mixed marriages are often framed as indicators of integration, a growing body of research -particularly focusing on women- emphasizes how such unions may also reproduce patriarchal relations, informal marital arrangements, legal insecurity, gender-based violence, and even risks associated with exploitation and human trafficking.

This tension is particularly relevant in Türkiye, where Syrians have been present for over a decade and a half under conditions of protracted and complex migration. In this context, processes of integration do not unfold linearly; rather, they coexist with practices of boundary-setting, exclusion, and selective inclusion. As a result, intergroup relations often reflect a dynamic interplay between proximity and distance, acceptance and resistance.

Within this broader landscape, Yozgat represents a particularly significant case. Characterized in the literature as a nationalist-conservative Central Anatolian city (Dursunoğlu, 2019; Gedik et al.,

2020), Yozgat provides a critical setting for examining how integration is negotiated in relatively remote contexts where social norms, gender roles, and community boundaries may be more rigidly defined. Despite the increasing visibility of Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages in the city, empirical research remains limited, with only one study addressing marriages involving foreign women (Özmen et al., 2024). This gap highlights the need for a closer examination of how such marriages are perceived by the host society.

This study asks: What are the perceptions of the host population regarding Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages in Yozgat, and what do these perceptions reveal about local dynamics of integration? Addressing this question is important not only for understanding how migrant-host relations are shaped in a specific local context, but also for contributing to broader debates on the nature of integration. Building on the empirical findings, the study conceptualizes these dynamics as "conditional integration" referring to a form of inclusion that is selective, gendered, and contingent upon existing social hierarchies.

The theoretical framework of the study is initially informed by John W. Berry's acculturation theory, which conceptualizes integration as a process emerging from interactions between migrants and host societies (Berry, 1992; Sam & Berry, 2006). However, the findings of this study suggest that such processes cannot be fully captured through fixed categories such as integration, assimilation, or separation. Instead, the empirical material points to hierarchical forms of inclusion shaped by gender and power relations. In this regard, insights from Contact Hypothesis, which emphasizes that positive intergroup contact depends on conditions such as equality and institutional support (Allport, 1954), help explain why contact through marriage does not necessarily reduce prejudice. In addition, boundary-making processes (Wimmer, 2008) and everyday bordering practices (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018) provide useful lenses to understand how social boundaries are maintained, negotiated, or selectively crossed in everyday life.

Together, these perspectives allow for a more nuanced interpretation of why intermarriage does not necessarily produce reciprocal or egalitarian forms of integration.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis (Kümbetoğlu, 2008). The analysis focuses on themes such as cultural expectations, gender roles, and practices of acceptance and rejection, with particular attention to how these shape locally embedded integration processes.

The article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the second section presents the theoretical framework. The third section provides contextual background on mixed marriages in Türkiye and Yozgat. The fourth section outlines the methodology, including research design, data collection, and analytical procedures. The fifth section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. The final section concludes with an overall assessment and offers policy-relevant implications.

### ***Mixed Marriages as Acculturation, Intergroup Contact, and Conditional Integration***

John W. Berry's acculturation theory provides a useful starting point for understanding the dynamics of interaction between migrants and host societies. It conceptualizes acculturation as a process of social, cultural, and institutional change emerging from sustained contact between groups with different cultural backgrounds (Berry, 1992; Sam & Berry, 2006). Within this framework, mixed marriages can be understood as a form of prolonged intergroup contact that both reflects and shapes broader processes of social adaptation. Berry distinguishes four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1992). However, these strategies are not solely determined by migrants' preferences; they are also shaped by host society attitudes, institutional structures, and broader socio-political contexts (Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2020; Zafer, 2016). In this

sense, integration is not a neutral or universally accessible outcome but is mediated by power relations and social hierarchies.

While acculturation theory offers an important classificatory framework, it remains insufficient to fully capture the dynamics observed in this study. Since it tends to privilege direct interpersonal contact as the primary driver of attitudinal change, overlooking the role of mediated forms of interaction and representation (Sam & Berry, 2006). To better address different dynamics of observed in this study, the analysis also draws on other complementary theoretical perspectives. The Contact Hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact does not automatically reduce prejudice; rather, its effects depend on conditions such as equality, cooperation, and institutional support (Allport, 1954). This perspective helps explain why kinship-based contact through marriage does not necessarily translate into broader social acceptance. In addition, boundary-making approaches emphasize how social distinctions between "us" and "them" are actively constructed and negotiated in everyday life, shaped by factors such as economic conditions, political discourse, and media representations. These processes may reinforce exclusion or, alternatively, enable selective boundary-blurring (Wimmer, 2008). This perspective implies that host society's and immigrant groups attitudes are different and produce different outcomes. Hence, integration does not follow a uniform trajectory but unfolds unevenly across different groups and positions. Applied to the context of Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages, this framework suggests that intermarriage may not necessarily produce equal or reciprocal forms of integration but rather it may reflect and reproduce existing social inequalities. Hence, it is relevant for understanding gendered and hierarchical patterns of inclusion observed in public discourse about mixed marriages. These frameworks allow for a more nuanced conceptualization of integration as a selective, relational, and power-laden process, rather than a uniform or mutually experienced outcome. Building on this, the study interprets Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages

as sites of “conditional integration,” where inclusion remains contingent upon gender norms, social hierarchies, and locally negotiated boundaries.

### **Mixed marriages in Türkiye and Yozgat**

At the national level, marriages between Syrian women and Turkish men (3,519) significantly outnumber those between Syrian men and Turkish women (1,219) (TÜİK, 2024). A similar pattern is observed in Yozgat, where 22 marriages between Syrian women and Turkish men were recorded in 2022-2023, while no marriages between Syrian men and Turkish women were reported (TÜİK, 2024). This asymmetrical pattern suggests a gendered dimension in the social acceptance of mixed marriages. As also observed in other regions of Türkiye (Gültekin et al., 2021), marriages between Turkish men and Syrian women tend to be more socially accepted than the reverse. This study interprets such asymmetry as indicative of gendered and socially mediated boundaries shaping marital preferences and social acceptance.

From a theoretical perspective, while Berry’s acculturation framework would consider such marriages as sites of intergroup contact, the observed asymmetry suggests that contact itself is structured by gendered power relations and therefore does not necessarily lead to reciprocal or egalitarian forms of integration. In this regard, a boundary-oriented perspective (Wimmer, 2008) helps to explain how inclusion may occur selectively. Marriages with migrant women may be more readily accepted as a form of conditional inclusion, whereas marriages with migrant men remain more socially constrained.

These gendered patterns also mix with expectations and perceived economic differences. Studies suggest that marriages between Turkish men and Syrian women are sometimes associated with lower perceived economic and social costs, as well as assumptions regarding women’s conformity to traditional gender roles (Akyüz & Tursun, 2019; Bulut, 2016; Doğaner, 2021; Ünal & Doğan, 2020). These dynamics have been analysed through the

notion of a “marriage market,” where intermediaries may facilitate matches, including informal or unregistered unions (Certel & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2024).

At the same time, public and media discourse appears to circulate ambivalent representations of Syrian women. While some narratives frame them as respectful and family-oriented, others portray them as competitors or potential threats, particularly in relation to issues such as polygamy, divorce, and domestic roles (Certel & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2022; Ezberci, 2015; Küçükşen, 2017). These representations have been shown to shape social perceptions and may influence how mixed marriages are interpreted within local contexts. The literature also indicates that women and children may face heightened vulnerabilities in migration processes, including risks of early or forced marriages and constraints on women’s agency (Şenol & Dinç, 2016; Harunoğulları, 2021; Kaya, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Certel & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2024; Yaman, 2017).

Yozgat provides a particularly relevant context for examining these dynamics. Mixed marriages are a relatively recent and increasingly visible phenomenon in a setting where interactions with migrants have historically been limited. The province has been described as having a predominantly patriarchal social structure, with marriage practices often shaped by traditional gender norms (Gedik et al., 2020; Gedik & Akçıl, 2020). Existing research on Turkish-Syrian marriages has largely focused on south-eastern provinces such as Osmaniye, Mardin, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa (Akyüz & Tursun, 2019; Bulut, 2016; Certel & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2024; Doğaner, 2021; Ezberci, 2015; İncetahtacı, 2020; Ünal & Doğan, 2020), while studies in Central Anatolia remain limited. One study conducted in Yozgat examines marriages with Moroccan women, highlighting how rural demographic dynamics and gendered expectations shape such unions (Özmen et al., 2024). References to Moroccan brides also emerged in the present study’s fieldwork, suggesting the relevance of these earlier findings for understanding local perceptions. This

study examines how Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages are perceived in Yozgat and what local constructions of the “Syrian bride” reveal about host-society attitudes toward integration.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine how residents of Yozgat perceive Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted both face-to-face and online between March and May 2025. A purposive sampling strategy was used to capture diverse perspectives from rural and urban areas, including individuals with Turkish-Syrian marriages in their social networks. In total, 15 interviews were conducted and to further explore women’s perspectives, an additional focus group discussion with 4 women was conducted, bringing the total sample to 19 participants (11 women and 8 men). Participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 70 for women and 38 to 69 for men.

The study’s methodological choices are grounded in established qualitative research practices. Qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring how and why certain attitudes and perceptions emerge within specific social contexts. Rather than aiming for generalization, it seeks to understand participants’ diverse and context-specific perspectives in depth (Büyüköztürk et al, 2008). Since this study focuses on local people’s perceptions, attitudes, and everyday interpretations surrounding mixed marriages, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate.

In-depth interviews were employed as a method of data collection, following guidelines by Kümbetoğlu (2008), who emphasizes that open-ended questioning and iterative clarification facilitate a deep understanding of participants’ perspectives. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and generate answers to the research questions. The analysis followed an iterative process of coding, category development, and theme refinement. Key themes included perceptions of Syrians, evaluations of mixed marriages, gender roles, and interpretations of adaptation.

The important point these findings reflect how local residents interpret Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages rather than the experiences of Syrian individuals themselves. The sample is limited to a specific context -Yozgat- and a relatively small group of participants, and thus the findings are not generalizable but provide context-specific insights.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Hacettepe University (Meeting No: 2025/02, 21 January 2025)

## Findings and Discussion

The analysis of interviews with residents of Yozgat revealed three interrelated thematic domains: (1) perceptions of Syrians and the construction of social boundaries, (2) mixed marriages as socially regulated and conditional arrangements, and (3) assessments of these marriages in relation to social adaptation and gender.

### ***Perceptions of Syrians and the Construction of Social Boundaries***

Participants’ perceptions of Syrians were shaped by a combination of economic considerations and moral evaluations. Acceptance was often linked to perceived usefulness in the labour market and conformity to local social and gender norms, and deviation from these expectations tended to reinforce social distance and exclusion.

### ***Differentiated Perceptions Through Everyday Contact***

Some interviewees who interacted with Syrians as neighbours, relatives, or in everyday settings described more nuanced and individualized perceptions. Instead of relying on generalized patterns, these participants emphasized their personal experiences and interpersonal relationships. Religious identity emerged as an important moral reference point in these accounts. Echoing findings by Gökarıksel and Secor (2020), several participants referred to Islamic values as a reason to

avoid discriminatory behaviour; while simultaneously expressing discomfort with certain practices they associated with Syrians.

*“I am a Muslim, and I am stuck in a dilemma regarding religion. If I behave badly, how will I answer to Allah? If I behave well, I see many troubling things.” (17: Female, 30 years old, single, high school graduate, civil servant)*

In a context often characterized as nationalist-conservative (Dursunoğlu, 2019; Gedik et al., 2020), this reflects a tension between religious proximity and perceived social or cultural distance. Religious affinity may facilitate forms of moral inclusion, but it does not necessarily eliminate underlying boundaries.

References to coexistence with Iraqis and Syrians during the Ottoman period were used both positively and negatively, reinforcing this ambivalence. From the perspective of acculturation theory, religious affinity may support integration, whereas discourses emphasizing ethnic distance (e.g., notions of racial corruption or cowardice) encourage attitudes of separation or assimilation. This tension between inclusive religious frameworks and exclusionary nationalist boundaries fragments integration process.

### **Positive Perceptions Based on Economic and Social Utility**

Positive evaluations of Syrians were frequently grounded in their perceived economic contributions. Participants described Syrians as hardworking, reliable, compliant, and willing to accept lower wages, particularly in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and manual labour. These findings are consistent with previous research (Ezberci, 2015). Positive perceptions also extended to Syrian women’s marriages to Turkish men. Syrian brides were often viewed as addressing a perceived shortage of marriageable women in rural areas.

*“If there were no Syrian women, our men would be miserable. It’s good that Syrians got married; there was war, they came.” (2: Female, 56 years old, married, primary school graduate)*

This aligns with earlier findings in Yozgat, which highlight how internal migration of Turkish women to urban areas limits local marriage options for men (Özmen et al., 2024). Migrant women were often perceived as more willing to adopt traditional gender roles and as cost-benefited choices.

### **Negative Perceptions Prejudice and Social Anxiety**

Participants also expressed a range of negative perceptions, often framed through moral, cultural, and security-related concerns. Some participants, described Syrians using stigmatizing language such as “dirty”, including references to moral decline, disorder, or criminality such as “forming gangs”. Some participants also voiced fears related to demographic change, political influence, or social disruption.

*“I think refugees are damaging our society in terms of values and morals. Tomorrow, there will also be a political aspect.” (15: Male, 38 years old, married, associate degree graduate)*

Such concerns reflect broader anxieties about social change. Under Türkiye’s temporary protection policy, Syrians do not possess political rights such as participation in local or national elections, and their access to rights -such as residence, social assistance, and services- remains conditional and time-bound. Fears related to political influence or long-term institutional transformation may be interpreted as perceived rather than empirically grounded risks, shaped by uncertainty and wider public discourse.

Economic grievances were also prominent, with participants claiming that Syrians increased rents, reduced job opportunities, or benefited disproportionately from state resources. Similar narratives have been documented in other regions of Türkiye (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2020), suggesting that such concerns are not unique to Yozgat.

These findings suggest that perceptions of Syrians are structured through socially mediated boundaries that differentiate between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of presence. Existing

contact appears to be shaped more by asymmetric power relations than by conditions of equality.

In line with Berry's framework, mixed marriages may represent sites of intergroup contact; however, the findings indicate that such contact is not inherently integrative. While religious affinity may enable symbolic closeness, ethnic difference continues to underpin perceptions of incompatibility. Acceptance remains largely instrumental framed around Syrian men's roles as low-wage workers and women's as "docile" spouses. Hence, in line with contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) despite intergroup contact prejudices persist in Yozgat. This pattern reflects the limits of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice under relations of inequality.

### **Mixed Marriages as Socially Regulated and Conditional Arrangements**

Participants expressed differentiating views regarding Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages. Some argued that these unions enable Turkish men who face difficulties in finding local spouses to marry, thereby contributing to family formation and social stability. Others, however, viewed such marriages as a source of cultural disruption, social tension, and moral decline. Concerns about cultural incompatibility and even notions of "racial mixing" were also articulated.

*"I don't want our race to mix. I don't want my son to marry a Syrian girl. There will be cultural differences, it will be mixed" (." (6: Female, 36 years old, married, primary school graduate, shopkeeper)*

While previous research suggests that mixed marriages may reduce social distance (Tütüncüler, 2023), it also raises questions about their integrative potential (Hadimli et al., 2022; Er, 2024). The findings of this study reflect this ambivalence. On the one hand, mixed marriages create sustained social contact and kinship ties that may blur social boundaries at the individual and extended family levels. On the other hand, participants' narratives about morality, culture, and racialized anxieties reveal ongoing boundary making in the evaluation of these marriages. Thus, rather than fully dissolving

boundaries, mixed marriages in Yozgat appear to simultaneously soften and reproduce them.

### **Matchmaking Practices and the Transformation of Marriage Norms**

Participants consistently reported that mixed marriages in Yozgat are not formed spontaneously but are typically arranged through intermediaries. These intermediaries were described as actively facilitating matches in exchange for payment, leading some participants to characterize the system as having "become a business."

Payments to intermediaries, alongside bride-wealth and other forms of financial exchange, were presented as central components of the process. Respondents noted substantial cost difference: marrying a Turkish woman reportedly costs 700,000-1,000,000 TL, whereas marriages to Syrian women were previously around 10,000 TL and now between 30,000-60,000 TL, and identified this difference as a reason for men's choice.

*"Men are basically having unofficial relationships under the guise of a religious marriage." (16: Male, 57 years old, married, university graduate, retired)*

Participants also indicated that many of these marriages are conducted only through religious ceremonies (imam marriages) without formal civil registration. This situation limits women's access to legal rights associated with marriage.

Described practices differ in important ways from traditional forms of arranged marriage in Türkiye. In conventional matchmaking, intermediaries -often relatives or community members- facilitate introductions without receiving direct payment. Bridewealth is typically transferred to the bride's family, and wedding expenses are largely covered by the groom's side. Moreover, spouse selection is generally a family-mediated process in which both sides -particularly parents- play a central role in evaluating and deciding on potential matches. This process is embedded in kinship relations and involves reciprocal negotiation between families and nearly always means formal civil registered marriage.

In contrast, participants described mixed marriages as less embedded in these traditional structures. Spouse selection was often perceived as more strongly driven by men's individual preferences, with more limited involvement from extended family networks. As a result, decision-making in these cases appeared less reciprocal and less rooted in collective family negotiation.

Our findings are broadly consistent with previous research on the commercialization of cross-border marriages (Certel & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2024; Özmen et al. 2024). However, some participants' accounts offer that such intermediary-mediated arrangements involving financial exchanges may be increasingly perceived as "normal" in the local context. The concern is when intermediaries are involved, these marriages may be linked to broader transnational economic networks, raising questions about unequal power relations, vulnerabilities, and the commodification of women.

Unequal socio-economic and legal statuses, combined with unequal power relations, appear to structure the formation of these marriages, resulting in sustained social contact under conditions of inequality. In this sense, these arrangements not only reflect but also reproduce existing hierarchies through their normalization, particularly in relation to Syrian women.

### **Host society's views on Motivations of Turkish men and Syrian women for Mixed Marriages**

Participants often evaluate mixed marriages through a pragmatic, cost-benefit lens. This utilitarian mode of reasoning appears to shape host-society perceptions, framing mixed marriages less as cultural or emotional unions and more as socially and economically negotiated arrangements. However, this evaluation does not replace cultural considerations; rather, it operates alongside and within existing ethnic and moral boundaries. Participants attributed Syrian women's motivations primarily to war-related displacement, financial hardship, and the search for stability. Some participants suggested more instrumental motivations, such as access to residence, citizenship, or improved living

conditions. Turkish men's motivations, in turn, were commonly explained through difficulties in finding local spouses, the high costs associated with marriage to Turkish women, and the perception that Syrian women are more compliant, family-oriented, and "low cost".

*"In Yozgat, it's already the poor people who marry Syrians." (3: Male, 68 years old, married, middle school graduate, mukhtar)*

Beyond these cost-framing and gendered explanations, participants also located mixed marriages within broader moral and boundary-making processes that define who is considered socially and culturally compatible. Participants also evaluated mixed marriages through ethnic and sectarian distinctions. In Yozgat, where nationalist and conservative norms are socially dominant (Dursunoğlu, 2019; Gedik et al., 2020), marriage boundaries have historically been shaped by religious and ethnic hierarchies. For example, some participants noted that Sunnis in Yozgat may "take" brides from Alevi villages, they are reluctant to "give" their daughters in return. Similar distinctions appeared in discussions of Syrian brides: Turkmen women were described as more culturally compatible, whereas Arab women were sometimes portrayed as less suitable.

*"If I had another son, I would find a Turkmen Syrian bride, not an Arab; our customs are not suitable. Turkmen women are suitable." (12: Male, 69 years old, married, primary school graduate)*

This quote highlights that acceptance is selective and operates within pre-existing moral and racial boundaries, shaping who is considered suitable for integration (Taillandier & Maisonneuve, 2005).

According to participants, men's motivations were frequently framed in patriarchal terms of "protection," while women were labelled as "Syrian brides," a category shaped by traditional norms and moral expectations. These interpretations are consistent with previous research (Harunoğulları, 2021; Kaya, 2017, 2018a; Ünal & Doğan, 2020; Yaman, 2017). Participants narratives tend to obscure underlying power inequalities, as Syrian women portrayed simultaneously as vulnerable individuals

seeking security and as opportunistic actors pursuing legal or economic gain. This ambivalent portrayal -both “ideal” and “problematic”, both dependent but threatening- suggests that social acceptance is conditional upon conformity to gendered expectations and perceived cultural compatibility. These contradictory public images mirror findings from other contexts (Hsia, 1997) and highlight how mixed marriages are shaped by ambivalence, mutual suspicion, and unequal power relations rather than straightforward integration.

### **Gendered Consequences of Mixed Marriages**

This theme firstly examines how Syrian brides in mixed marriages are perceived by participants in terms of women’s everyday visibility, social participation, and positioning within family and community life. Secondly it examines subthemes of rivalry, rumours.

### **Perceptions of Syrian Brides’ Adaptation**

Participants reported frequently encountering Syrian women in neighbourhoods, schools, courts, and public institutions, indicating a degree of everyday visibility. However, opinions diverged regarding adaptation. Some participants argued that Syrian brides had integrated and felt comfortable, others emphasized language barriers and cultural differences.

Many respondents indicated that Syrian women’s social participation remains limited, often confined to the domestic sphere. Similar findings have been reported in other contexts, where foreign brides experience marriage primarily within household settings (Gönül, 2020; Karaçizmeli, 2023). From an acculturation perspective, meaningful contact is central to integration (Sam & Berry, 2006); yet Syrian women’s interaction with the broader community appears restricted.

Syrian women’s experiences in mixed marriages were described as shaped by multiple vulnerabilities, including domestic violence, social isolation, and expectations of unpaid domestic labour. Language barriers, co-residence with extended

families, and limited access to healthcare or citizenship further intensify these challenges. While these conditions are linked to mixed marriages, they also reflect broader patriarchal norms in Yozgat (Çakır, 2020), suggesting that women’s experiences of adaptation are not reflecting their agency but it reproduces existing gender inequalities rather than fully.

*“After a while, they adapt, like a strange bird that must adapt. They adapt to their husband’s region and customs. Sometimes we meet them somewhere, and because Syrians resemble Turkish women, I think they are Turkish.” (8: Male, 63 years old, married, primary school graduate, retired)*

Participants also emphasized differences between women from urban and rural backgrounds. Syrian brides from cities were described as struggling to adapt to village life and initially facing suspicion. Over time, however, increased familiarity sometimes led to greater acceptance. Here, adaptation appears shaped not only by national identity but also by rural-urban sociocultural positioning.

Mixed marriages may provide opportunities for social contact; however, women’s confinement to the domestic sphere, combined with language barriers and restrictive gender norms, appears to limit the scope and quality of such contact. As a result, the potential of these interactions to reduce prejudice and foster broader social acceptance remains constrained.

Furthermore, as elaborated below, social interactions between Syrian and local women are framed through competition instead of collaboration, and the absence of institutional mechanisms to support these unions further hinders social integration. Mixed marriages in Yozgat do not simply blur boundaries; instead, they may become sites where new social borders are produced. Even when they foster interpersonal familiarity, they might continue to reproduce underlying social distinctions and hierarchies.

## Gendered Comparisons, Rumours and Boundary Reinforcement

Participants indicated that Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages also reshape local women's marital experiences. A recurring theme in the data was the comparison between Turkish and Syrian women, particularly in relation to obedience, sexuality, and fertility. These comparisons were described as influencing men's expectations and women's perceived position within the local marriage context.

*"Of course, it was bad for some girls; the men went and married Syrian women. ...For example, I am 29 years old, and my options have decreased now. A man my age can marry a younger woman instead of me, he can marry a 16-year-old migrant, and they don't even ask the girl's opinion. The man works for three months, earns 60,000 TL, and goes and gets the girl. Before, he had to convince me, but Turkish men no longer put up with Turkish girls here." (7: Female, 29 years old, single, university graduate)*

*"Turkish women oppress men because they know their rights and demand their rights after divorce, so at least men marry foreigners. They are more protective of their husbands. For example, my wife is a foreigner, and she is washing even my feet. Foreign women are loyal to their husbands and have a fear of losing them." (13: Male, 37 years old, married, high school graduate)*

This statement reflects a broader narrative in which Turkish women are constructed as demanding or "rights-claiming," while migrant women are seen as more compliant and dependent partners. Such comparisons operate not merely as individual preferences but as mechanisms of control. By contrasting Syrian and Turkish women, men construct an idealized image of the "docile" wife and use this image to discipline expectations within marriage (Certel & Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2024). Whether Syrian women are actually more compliant is less central than the fact that such comparisons reinforce male authority and reproduce gender hierarchies.

Participants also described how rumours and stigmatizing narratives about Syrian women circu-

late in everyday life. During a focus group discussion, for instance, participants repeated a rumour that Syrian women wearing headscarves walked "naked under their coats." Although they could not identify a concrete source and briefly questioned its plausibility, the rumour was nonetheless reiterated. This pattern illustrates how prejudice may be reproduced through informal communication, even in the absence of direct evidence. Sometimes rumours may function as mechanisms of othering, reinforcing symbolic boundaries and moral distinctions between "local" and "migrant" women.

Participants expressed variable attitudes toward the broader social implications of mixed marriages. Some described increased familiarity at the family level, this did not necessarily translate into improved intergroup relations:

*"I have a grandchild with my Syrian daughter-in-law. She became part of our family 11-12 years ago. We have to love her." (1: Woman, 70 years old, married, primary school graduate)*

*"Processes are easier within the family, but it doesn't have a positive effect on Syrian-Turkish relations." (10: Woman, 25 years old, single, high school graduate)*

These statements suggest that acceptance may emerge through prolonged kinship ties yet remain largely confined to the private sphere. Familiarity within the family does not necessarily extend to broader social inclusion.

The perceived "adaptation" of Syrian women may be tied to conformity and limited visibility, and lack of equal participation. Even though mixed marriages create opportunities for contact, this contact appears to be structured by gendered power relations and unequal social positions. So, mixed marriages do not dissolve social boundaries but rather reorganize them, operating as sites of conditional integration, where inclusion remains selective and contingent upon gender norms, social hierarchies, and locally negotiated boundaries.

## Conclusion

This study examined how Turkish-Syrian mixed marriages are perceived by the local population in

Yozgat and whether such unions contribute to broader processes of adaptation. Berry's acculturation framework would conceptualize such marriages as sites of intergroup contact, but the findings demonstrate that they cannot be treated as straightforward indicators of integration. Instead, they are shaped by economic calculation, gender norms, and socially constructed boundaries.

The findings illustrate processes of boundary-making (Wimmer, 2008), where inclusion operates selectively. Participants' discourse shows that Syrian brides may be incorporated into family structures under specific conditions -particularly when conforming to expected female role- while Syrian grooms remain largely unacceptable. This highlights how integration is shaped by gendered and hierarchical criteria.

Participants frequently framed Turkish men as constrained by rising marriage costs and changing gender expectations, normalizing men's agency in partner selection while rendering women's limited autonomy less visible. At the same time, Syrian brides were evaluated in contradictory ways: they were praised when conforming to traditional roles yet criticized through moralizing and stigmatizing discourses. Comparisons between Syrian and Turkish women, particularly around obedience, sexuality, and domestic roles, function as mechanisms that reinforce male authority and reproduce gender hierarchies.

From the perspective of the host society, mixed marriages are often interpreted through a cost-benefit logic, where perceived economic and social advantages shape acceptance. However, this pragmatic evaluation does not eliminate cultural boundaries; rather, it operates alongside ethnic, moral, and gendered distinctions. The findings align with insights from the Contact Hypothesis of Allport, which imply that contact alone does not lead to positive integration outcomes unless conditions of equality and cooperation are met. In Yozgat, such conditions appear limited.

Mixed marriages should be examined not only as interpersonal unions, but also as socially embedded processes shaped by class, gender, religion,

and public discourse. Public perceptions of mixed marriages in Yozgat support the concept of conditional integration, in which inclusion is selective and contingent upon economic utility, cultural proximity, and conformity to local norms.

From a policy perspective, the results underscore the importance of ensuring Syrian women's access to legal rights, official marriage registration, social support mechanisms, and community-based services that reduce gender-based stigma. Future research would benefit from incorporating Syrian women's own perspectives and examining how varying levels of social contact influence local perceptions.

Ultimately, mixed marriages in Yozgat reveal that integration is not a simple or neutral process. It is a gendered, negotiated, and power-laden process in which integration and inequality coexist.

## Declarations

**Funding:** *This research received no external funding.*

**Conflicts of Interest:** *The authors declare no conflict of interest.*

**Ethical Approval:** *The study was approved by Hacettepe University Ethics Committee (Meeting No: 2025/02, 21 January 2025).*

**Informed Consent:** *Informed consent was obtained from all participants.*

**Data Availability:** *Raw data are confidential, but anonymized datasets may be requested from the authors.*

**Author Contributions:** *Conceptualization: Author 1 (50%), Author 2 (50%); Data curation: Author 1 (75%), Author 2 (25%); Investigation/Analysis/Validation: Author 1 (50%), Author 2 (50%); Writing—original draft: Author 1 (50%), Author 2 (50%); Writing—review and editing: Author 1 (50%), Author 2 (50%).*

**AI Disclosure:** AI tools (ChatGPT 5 mini) were only used for language editing and expression improvement, not for data generation or analysis, and all outputs were verified by the authors.

## References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA, USA: Addison-Wesley
- Akyüz, S., & Tursun, Ö. (2019). When Syrian 'girls' meet Turkish 'boys': Mapping gendered stories of mixed marriages. *Middle East Critique*, 28(1), 29-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2018.1549215>
- Atasü-Topçuoğlu, R. (2020). Sosyal hizmetler ve sosyal politika açısından gelen göç ve uyum: Değişim odağında bir perspektif. *Türkiye'de mültecilik, zorunlu göç ve toplumsal uyum: Geri dönüş mü, birlikte yaşam mı*, 87-111.
- Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society. *International Migration*, 30, 69-69.
- Brettell, C. B. (2017). Marriage and migration. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46(1), 81-97. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102116-041237>
- Bulut, U. (2016). Turkey: The business of refugee smuggling, sex trafficking. *Gatestone Institute*, April, 3.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş., Kılıç Çakmak, E., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş., & Demirel, F. (2008). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Certel, N., & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, R. (2022). Suriyeli kadınlarla yapılan evliliklerin medyadaki görünümü: Sosyal hizmette savunuculuk için bir çağrı. *Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet*, 33(2), 537-562. <https://doi.org/10.33417/tsh.1019481>
- Certel, N., & Atasü-Topçuoğlu, R. (2024). "Syrian second wives": Polygyny, gender relations, and the experiences of Syrian and Turkish women. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 104, p. 102891). Pergamon. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.102891>
- Çakır, H. (2020). Kadına yönelik şiddetin kavramsal incelemesi: Yozgat örneği. *İmgelem*, 4(6), 41-62.
- Doğaner, A. (2021). Kültürel bir olgu olarak Osmaniye'de Suriye'den göç edenlerle evlilikler. *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi*, 14(33), 24-38.
- Dursunoğlu, İ. (2019). Seçim sonuçları üzerinden siyasal kültür okuması mümkün mü? Karşılaştırmalı bir örnek. *Akademik Araştırmalar ve Çalışmalar Dergisi (AKAD)*, 11(20), 196-205.
- Er, N. (2024). Fransa'da Müslüman ve farklı dinlere mensup bireylerin karma evlilik yolunda tanışma ve karar alma süreçleri. *Mecmua Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 9(18), 68-83. <https://doi.org/10.32579/mecmua.1430008>
- Ezberci, L. (2015). *Suriyeli sığınmacıların Viranşehir'in toplumsal yapısına etkileri* (Master's thesis, Necmettin Erbakan University (Turkey)).
- Gedik, E., Çakır, H., & Coşkun, A. (2020). Bir inşa süreci olarak erkeklik: Yozgat örneği. *Artvin Çoruh Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(1), 84-95. <https://doi.org/10.22466/acusbd.747779>
- Gedik, E., & Akçıl, B. U. (2020). Çalışan bekâr kadınların şiddet algısı: Yozgat örneği. *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (63), 228-245.
- Gökırsel, B., & Secor, A. J. (2020). Affective geopolitics: Anxiety, pain, and ethics in the encounter with Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(7-8), 1237-1255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418814257>
- Gönül, S. (2020). Zorunlu göç ve toplumsal cinsiyet: Suriyeli kadınların evlilik deneyimleri. *Toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden türkiye'de göç araştırmaları*. 80-100.
- Gültekin, M. N., Yücebaş, M., Atasü-Topçuoğlu, R., Soyudoğan, M., Doğanoglu, M., Kuzu, Ş. L., & Gülhan, S. T. (2021). *Gaziantep monitörü 2020 uyum / Gaziantep monitor 2020 cohesion*. Ankara: SABEV.
- Hadimli, H., Bulut, İ., Yüksel, M., & Özdemir, H. M. (2022). Suriyeli kadın sığınmacıların toplumsal kabul ve uyum sürecinde evliliklerin etkisi (Siirt şehri). *Journal of World Women Studies*, 7(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7443781>

- Harunoğulları, M. (2021). Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınların sözlü anlatılarında savaş, göç ve evlilik. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 7(4), 353-368. <https://doi.org/10.24289/ijsser.969897>
- Hsia, H. C. (1997). *Selfing and othering in the "foreign bride" phenomenon: A study of class, gender and ethnicity in the transnational marriages between Taiwanese men and Indonesian women* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida).
- İncetahtacı, N. (2020). Gaziantep'teki Suriyeli ailelerin baş etme stratejileri. *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, 19(2), 499-525.
- Karaçizmeli, F. (2023). *Faslı gelinler: Sosyo-kültürel uyum açısından Alaca örneği* (Master's thesis, Hitit University (Turkey)).
- Kaya, M. (2017). Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler İç İç Geçişler ve Karşılaşmalar. İstanbul Hiperlink.
- Kaya, M. (2018a). Hukuk arasında arafta: Suriyeli kadın mültecilerin informal evlilikleri ve boşan (ama) ma krizi. *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences Research (JSHSR)*, 5(31), 4709-4721.
- Kaya, M. (2018b). Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mülteci kadınların evlenme deneyimleri: Fırsatlar ve riskler. *Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi Uluslararası Göç Ve Kadın Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı*, 21-22.
- Küçükşen, K. (2017). Suriyeli sığınmacı kadınlarda sosyal dışlanma algısı üzerine nitel bir çalışma. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(5), 2399-2413.
- Kümbetoğlu, B. (2008). Sosyolojide ve antropolojide niteliksel yöntem ve araştırma. İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık.
- Özmen, P. Y., Aydın, O. B., Ekmekcioğlu, A., & Kara, P. S. (2024). *Kırsal kalkınmada evlilik bağıyla gelen düzenli göçün rolü: Yozgat'ta Faslı kadınlar örneği* (TÜBİTAK Program Kodu: 1002- Proje No: 123K321). Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu.
- Sam, D. L., & Berry, J. W. (Eds.). (2006). *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Şenol, D., & Dinç, A. (2016). Türkiye'nin Suriyeli çocuk gelinleri: sosyolojik bir değerlendirme. *Üsküdar Üniversitesi Suriyeli Çocuklarla El Ele Uluslararası Göç ve Çocuk Sempozyumu*. İstanbul, 17, 18.
- Taillandier, A., & Maisonneuve, C. (2005). Mise en évidence d'une norme de non racisme dans la mesure des orientations d'acculturation de la communauté d'accueil. *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 67-68(3), 33-53.
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK). (2024). *Evlenme ve boşanma istatistikleri, 2023*.
- Tütüncüler, G. (2023). Karma evliliğin çocuk eğitimi üzerine etkisi. *Ömer Halisdemir Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16(1), 79-95.
- Ünal, S., & Doğan, F. (2020). Yerli halkın bakışından Suriyeli kadın sığınmacılar: Mardin'de yabancıların ötekileştirilmesi ve ahlaki dışlama. *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches*, 15(25), 3284-3327.
- Wimmer, A. (2008). The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A multilevel process theory. *American journal of sociology*, 113(4), 970-1022.
- Yaman, F. (2017). Uyum ve ötekileşme ayrımında Suriyeli sığınmacılar. *KADEM Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3(1), 91-110.
- Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G., & Cassidy, K. (2018). Everyday bordering, belonging and the reorientation of British immigration legislation. *Sociology*, 52(2), 228-244.
- Zafer, A. B. (2016). Göç çalışmaları için bir anahtar olarak "kültürleşme" kavramı. *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 17(30), 75-92. <https://doi.org/10.21550/sosbilder.290739>