Networking the Specialists in the Field of Syrian Students in Turkish Higher Education
(25th November 2019, Ankara)
Workshop Report

Multiple types of research are carried out by various actors to facilitate social cohesion of the Syrians and local communities in Turkey. However, it is often emphasized that there are not sufficient attempts to share experiences and establish permanent networks in this area. From this point of view, it is suggested that the idea of creating the occasion for the gathering of the experts and academicians from public institutions and non-governmental organizations working in the field of social cohesion of Syrian students in higher education for sharing their work, and meeting on a permanent platform where local dynamics are more effective in the long term. The basis of this network is being carried out within the scope of "Networking the Specialists in the Field of Syrian Students in the Turkish Higher Education" project supported by Health Security Partners.

The project been carried out jointly conducted by Mersin University, TOBB ETU Center for Social Policy Research (SPM), and Harran University Migration Policy Research Center (HÜGÖÇ).

As the first step of this network, which is planned to be implemented within this framework, a meeting was organized. The opening speeches of the meeting held on November 25, 2019, at Ankara Mövenpick Hotel were given by Dr. Günnur Ertong Attar from Mersin University, Director of Harran HÜGÖÇ Dr. Hakan Gülerce, Deputy Director of TOBB SPM Assoc. Prof. Başak Yavçan, the senior expert of Health Security Partners Patricia Westenbroek, vice-rector of Mersin University Prof. Dr. İsmail Yağcı (video message) and CoHE Advisor Assoc. Prof. Bilge Kağan Özdemir.

In the first session in the morning, Assoc. Prof. Burcu Şimşek from Hacettepe University Faculty of Communication Digital Storytelling Workshop shared the preliminary deliverables of the project "Social Cohesion and Gender: Syrian Students in Turkish Higher Education" and as the keynote speakers, Prof. Murat Erdoğan from Turkish-German University and Deputy Director of TOBB SPM Assoc. Prof. Başak Yavçan also shared the outputs of the "Elite Dialogue II" project. In the afternoon, an open discussion session moderated by Prof. Serdar Sayan, the Director of TOBB ETU SPM, served as a lively forum for exchange of ideas.

In the afternoon session, the representatives from three public institutions, twenty academicians from various universities in Turkey and the representatives from nine civil society organizations and two international organization participated in the workshop.

The Overview of the Activities of the Participant Organizations and The Recommendations From the Workshop:

Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) as a long-standing association in the field, has been working with different donor agencies. ASAM, which has been currently carried out twenty projects, states that there is no clear definition and a process of social cohesion, and each financial provider has a different opinion on this issue. Therefore, a working team has been established within the association to harmonize the projects, and a guide has been prepared but not finalized yet for specifying the definition and criteria of social cohesion (What can be done to ensure social cohesion? Which activities can be considered as social cohesion activities?). Besides, satisfaction analysis has been conducted with the Syrian counselees in 10 centers where a study conducted independently by the funding institutions. There are also some questions about social cohesion within the scope of this study. Regarding the results of the four provinces currently completed, the activities conducted in schools and municipalities have positive effects on social cohesion. It is underlined that the concept of social cohesion should be addressed both in terms of migrants and refugees and of the local community. However, it is stated that an impact analysis of the projects carried out within the association in terms of social cohesion has not been conducted yet. Therefore, they are looking for a fund in which they can apply for this kind of project.

It is pointed out that pre-test and post-test design and cross-cultural communication studies can be used for impact analysis of projects on social cohesion.

YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities): Another participant of the workshop, Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, mentioned the activities carried out within the framework of the social cohesion of international students, especially in university life. In this context, more than 40 academic advisors have worked at 35 universities that are funded by UNHCR in order to deal with the academic and social integration of Syrian students under temporary protection in the campus. In addition, taking into account the effect of language training on increasing social cohesion, 10,000 students learned Turkish in the framework of Higher Education Support Program in 4 years funded by UNHCR.

UNCHR: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees puts emphasis on the activities of social cohesion. Social Cohesion is one of the Strategic Priorities of UNHCR. UNHCR and YTB are partners in several scholarship projects in the area of higher education like DAFI and Higher Education Support Project. Academic Advisors component is a complementary part for these scholarship programs conducted with YTB. The priority of the duties of the academic advisors mentioned before is to ensure the academic integration of Syrian students under Temporary Protection to university life and their social cohesion. It is stated that regular reports were received from these advisors, and it was decided which way should be followed in future planning. Also, in the DAFI and Higher Education Support Programs, social cohesion is covered in the cross-cultural communication training courses. UNHCR conducts several focus group discussions with Syrian university students which includes questions on social cohesion. UNHCR is currently working on the standardization of activities to be done in university campuses on social cohesion.

Adıyaman University: The participant mentioned that Syrian students from a different area for themselves because Turkish students do not include them socially. While carrying out social cohesion studies, not only migrant students but also local people should be analyzed, and the results of these analyses should be taken into consideration.

YTB, SPARK, and DAFI easily access Syrian students and requires their participation in some activities and programs to prevent the scholarship from being dropped. On the other hand, the situation of students who do not receive any scholarship is inadequate in many respects. It is necessary to make plans to increase the social cohesion of students without a scholarship.

SPARK: The organization defines social cohesion as the social acceptance for Syrian community and the sense of belonging to Turkey; for this purpose, they carry out activities by bringing the two communities together. However, due to the different views of the donors, the definition has been updated as the sharing of responsibilities for social problems, raising awareness, and carrying out joint studies for solutions. Within the scope of social cohesion, they establish student societies in universities and activate the existing communities. Special attention is given to include an equal number of Turkish and Syrian students in activities pointed to social problems but is confronted with the resistance of Turkish students. On the other hand, studies and activities have been carried out with academicians and administrative staff in the universities; Syrian and Turkish academics are brought together for training on different education and training methodologies such as peer to peer learning. Administrative staff working in universities are also provided with training in various fields such as career

counseling, cross-cultural communication, education-teaching methodologies, and mental health awareness.

The Association for Migration Research; is an organization that executes social cohesion workshops. The first activity of their workshop, which is composed of 3 modules, aims to develop a vision of social cohesion; migrant integration and social cohesion policies of sixteen selected countries are examined and then made comparisons with Turkey's policies. As a result of these workshops, it is determined that it is difficult to make a general definition since social cohesion is an ideological concept and changes according to the place, subject, and position of items. Therefore, it is considered that it would be more beneficial to make a definition by conducting studies with local administrations at a micro level based on the studies carried out by institutions and organizations related to this subject instead of determining a macro policy. Regarding good examples examined during the workshop, it has been found that the economic area triggers the beginning of social cohesion and that the political integration stage, such as taking part in political parties or public institutions, ensures real cohesion.

Hasan Kalyoncu University: Prof. Emel Topçu stated that the issue of social cohesion started at the end of the 1990s with the initiative of the European Commission. She added that almost sixty academicians have gathered to put 270 indicators of social cohesion and that the European Commission has prepared annual reports based on these indicators.

In the first years of the reports, it was seen that social cohesion was defined as bilaterally between the host country's government and the immigrants/refugees. However, as time passed, it was stated that the governments of the host countries could not do anything differently about social cohesion after carrying out studies on the indicators and that the responsibility for ensuring social cohesion passing to the communities. On the other hand, the issue of social cohesion in Europe has not yet become apparent, and the concept of integration corresponds to a unilateral hierarchical structure. It is claimed that the concept of " integrated society" in which newcomers and host society are fully covered with each other would be more appropriate instead of the "integration," which refers to the perception of migrants' adaptation to the society in all respects. To improve social cohesion in our country, Prof. Topçu suggested that we can reutilize some of the ways in the past by reviewing our historical origins and considering our characteristics.

İzmir Katip Çelebi University: Dr. Filiz Künüroğlu stated that cohesion could be better understood if we focus on its psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Psychological adjustment points out whether or not one feels happy and well in a new culture; socio-cultural adjustment includes whether or not they can easily lead their own lives in the current

community. The results of their studies conducted with Syrian refugees in Turkish and Dutch contexts have shown that psychological adjustment of refugees in Turkey is higher due to the proximity of the two countries' cultures. On the other hand, more institutional support and interventions are needed to increase the socio-cultural adaptation of Syrians in our country.

Gaziantep University: Assoc. Prof. Mesut Yücebaş pointed out that the Syrian issue is, in fact, a Turkishness issue and determined by the political sphere. He stated that it is necessary to go beyond the scope of the political sphere to accomplish social cohesion, but we do not have the legal basis for integration as a country. It is considered that the projects carried out by different institutions and organizations have a significant effect on the exclusion of social cohesion from the political field, and such workshops also increase the interaction between actors in the field. It is seen among the society that there are widespread discourses such as Syrians constitute a source of cheap labor and stealing the work of Turkish citizens. He claimed that the misconceptions would disappear as the migrants became aware of their political rights and began to seek their rights. From this point of view, while trying to improve social cohesion, it is necessary to carry out studies to increase social acceptance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Clarifying the definition of social cohesion will increase the quantitative as well as the qualitative contributions of several ongoing projects.
- It will be beneficial for the advisors of the YTB to make awareness-raising activities not only for students but also for academicians.
- In the context of social cohesion, it was suggested that academicians should be more involved by working to break their prejudices. It is thought that the impact of the studies will be expanded by including some respected academicians in a few activities.
- By choosing a bottom-up route, the students can be asked to select the advisors of YTB; thus, the effectiveness of consultants, whose number is planned to be reduced, can be increased.
- Programs can be developed to identify the areas of responsibility of local governments in social cohesion studies.
- It is necessary to work on the active use of social media to increase social cohesion.
- It will be useful to conduct context analyses and plan different studies to increase the impact of the studies instead of repeating the same activities.
- While social cohesion is being discussed intensively in recent works, the issue of social acceptance should also be addressed. Focusing on these two concepts during the policy development phase is essential. The first goal of social cohesion is to provide a basis for

immigrants and citizens to live together without conflict. In this regard, education is one of the priority issues. Since the academic achievement of students is an essential criterion in measuring the well-being of individuals, it can also be accepted as a sufficient criterion for the social cohesion of migrants.

- The participation of Syrian academics in related fields should be ensured.
- International Student Academies run by YTB can participate more actively in research on social cohesion.
- A network of experts is needed to develop national capacity through long-term and sustainable work. There is a need for a platform through which universities transfer their interdisciplinary scientific knowledge, the non-governmental organizations demonstrate their projects, and social entrepreneurs share their experiences gained in the field. Decision-making mechanisms should work in a coordinated manner to increase the impact of this platform. This can be facilitated through a website that would increase the visibility and accessibility of completed studies. It would be useful to include the reports of the projects carried out by the civil society or the public as well as the academic articles published elsewhere. For the sustainability of this platform, a coordination team can be designated, and people can communicate with different groups in the field.
- It is crucial to involve university research centers working on migration with the platform to be established. The fact that these centers have similar curricula will lead to the exchange of students among them.
- Regular meetings of institutions, organizations, and academicians working on social cohesion will also affect the spread of the platform to be established.
- It was emphasized that it was important to ensure the continuation of these networking meetings, and the second meeting will be held in Şanlıurfa and be hosted by HÜGÖÇ, upon the general acceptance of the participants.

Participant List

Name	Institution	e-mail address
Nazife Karadağ	Adıyaman University	nazifekaradag@adiyaman.edu.tr
Elif Gökçearslan Çiftçi	Ankara University	elifgokcearslan@gmail.com
Pelin Koç	ASAM	kocpelin@gmail.com
Zeynep Gürler Yıldızlı	ASAM	zeynep.yildizli@sgdd-asam.org
Pınar Yüksel Duran	ASAM	pinar.yuksel@sgdd-asam.org
Hatem Derya Şahin	ASAM	derya.sahin@sgdd-asam.org
Gülşah İyigün	ASAM	gulsah.iyigun@sgdd-asam.org
Duygu Bahçekapılı	ASAM	duygu.bahcekapili@sgdd-asam.org
Ayşe Aslı Sezgin	Çukurova University	aaslisezgin@gmail.com
Mesut Yücebaş	Gaziantep University	mesut.yucebas@gmail.com
Burcu Şimşek	Hacettepe University	bsimsek03@gmail.com
Ahmet Göçen	Harran University	ahmetgocen35@gmail.com
Rukiye Çorlu	Harran University	rcorluu@gmail.com
Hakan Gülerce	Harran University	hakangulerce@gmail.com
Emel Topçu	Hasan Kalyoncu University	emeltopcu2007@gmail.com
Filiz Künüroğlu	İzmir Katip Çelebi University	filiz.kunuroglu@ikc.edu.tr
Şerife Durna	Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University	serifedurna46@gmail.com
Adem Sağır	Karabük University	ademsagiroglu@gmail.com
Canan Yıldıran	Karabük University	cananyildiran@karabuk.edu.tr
Ramiz İstanbullu	Mersin University	istanbulluramiz@gmail.com
Günnur Ertong Attar	Mersin University	gunnurertong@mersin.edu.tr
Zeynep Tekin Babuç	Osmaniye Korkut Ata University	zeyneptekinbabuc@gmail.com
Müjdat Avcı	Osmaniye Korkut Ata University	mujdatavci@osmaniye.edu.tr
Büşra Dündar	SPARK	b.dundar@spark-online.org
Kezban Çelik	TED University	kezban.celik@tedu.edu.tr
Zeynep Tecik	TED University	ztecik@gmail.com
Ece Alemdar	TOBB ETÜ SPM	malemdar@etu.edu.tr
Başak Yavçan	TOBB ETÜ SPM	basakyavcan@etu.edu.tr
Murat Erdoğan	Turkish German University	merdogan1103@gmail.com
Nihan Tüzel	UNHCR	tuzel@unhcr.org
Polat Sait Alpman	Yalova University	polatalpman@gmail.com
Selman Yarcı	Yalova University	selmanyarci@gmail.com
Kağan Özdemir	YÖK	kagan.ozdemir@yok.gov.tr
Aylin Yıldız	YTB	aylin.yildiz@ytb.gov.tr
Pelin Eroğlu	YTB	pelin.eroglu@ytb.gov.tr
Meryem Uzar	YTB	meryem.uzar@ytb.gov.tr