

# **Migrant Women and their Educational Capital: An Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

*The study aims to find the ways in which the educational capital of the university graduate women, who were forced to migrate due to civil wars in their countries, reflects on the process of adaptation to a new society and lifestyle, in relation to their social and cultural capitals. Accordingly the meaning of being an educated woman within the context of migrant women's own cultures, and the ways in which their educational capitals are reflected on in the process of the adaptation to a new culture, with its advantages and disadvantages were examined. This research is a basic interpretive qualitative study. Interviews were conducted with 11 university graduates women. The research findings revealed that the legal policies of Turkey as an immigration country and the attitudes of the people are not inclusive and supportive. While the forced immigration is expected to invalidate all types of capitals individuals had within the framework of the fundamental dynamics of the target country, it is found in this study that the family status of the participants was the main factor shaping both their access to education within the context of their culture and their positions as women, and their adaptation processes to the new society.*

**Keywords:** *Migrant women, migration, educational capital, university graduate, occupation*

## **Introduction**

Migration movements stemming from political causes such as war brings about a series of changes in the social fabrics of the immigration countries as well as the lives of the migrating individuals. When the target country's socioeconomic and cultural conditions do not have the necessary infrastructure for such migration waves, such movements equate to unfavorable conditions, especially for the migrating individuals. According to Parrenas (2001), migration is a process flowing in the opposite direction of social mobility. It is quite common that immigrants' university degrees become useless to get a decent job after migration. Accordingly, educational competencies of individuals lose their value during migration (Al-deen & Windle, 2015). Therefore, forced migration can be considered as a process in which the educational capital of individuals becomes handicapped and the education becomes unfunctional in terms of overcoming the disadvantages arising from migration.

The changes in the economic, social and physical environments substantially affect one's life quality, health condition and process of settling in a new environment (Khan & Watson, 2005). In addition to the disadvantages brought about by the loss of one's previous economic resources, one has to go through a process of adaptation to a novel society and culture. The process of immigration is traumatic to all; however, it leaves deeper marks on women, combined with the social and psychological problems resulting from gender inequality (Berger, 2004, cited by Şeker & Uçan, 2016). According to Morokvasic (2004), who argued that migration, with all of its aspects, is a gendered phenomenon, migration patterns and migration discourse; experiences, obligations and duties of immigrants; and expectations towards migration are determined by the

gender. Male-dominant point of view, which also dominated social sciences for a long time, shaped immigration studies and made migrant women invisible.

The typical immigrant perception of this point of view, which is also reflected in migration theories, was a young man who migrated due to economic problems, and the migrant experiences falling under this category were assumed to represent all immigrants, irrespective of their gender and other features (Morokvasic, 2014). Evaluation of the phenomenon of migration from a gender perspective and the scientific research tradition that made the diverse migration experiences of migrant women visible started to be shaped from the late 1960s. Boyd and Grieco (2003), who analyzed the process of the inclusion of gender perspective in the international migration theory argued that the expression “immigrants and their families” was a code referring to male immigrants and their wives and children; however, with the effect of the women’s movement focusing on the gender inequality, the invisibility of women as immigrants was started to be questioned, and thereby, the old perspective holding female immigrants only as the wives and children of men was started to be left behind to reveal female immigrants’ own unique experiences.

Gender and immigration studies show that migrant worker women are located at the lowest rung of the hierarchy in the labor market. Migrant worker women are at a disadvantage compared to native women as they are migrants, compared to migrant men as they are women, and compared to skilled migrants as they are migrant workers (Gökbayrak, 2006). In addition to the general policy of the immigration country toward immigrants, circumstances specific to that country, such as employment conditions and labor market, define all female immigrants’ options, skilled or not. On the other hand, the social relations mechanism, which is defined by patriarchal values and norms, doubles the disadvantages faced by migrant women. Firstly, married women migrate mostly depending on their

husbands, and men are the priority when it comes to finding a job (Boyle, Cooke, Halfacree & Smith, 2001). As the patriarchal values combine with the social and economic hardships of being involved in a new and often foreign society, this primary role of women is often reinforced. Even a female migrant was able to work in her own country thanks to the education she received, her role is immediately restricted to domestic responsibilities (chores or child, elderly and patient care etc.) when she loses her economic power (Al-deen & Windle, 2015). Secondly, even if she is skilled, a female immigrant who cannot join the labor market of the immigration country with official channels due to various reasons (language barrier, not having residence or work permit etc.) may be forced to work home or care services, which is also an implication of gender norms. Even skilled women who are granted with the opportunity to be employed through official channels are usually employed in gendered jobs (education, health, social services sectors), even they are technical workers with relatively rare skills (Meares, 2010; Salaff & Greve, 2004; Raghuram, 2007).

The biggest obstacle in the way the employment of educated and skilled women in jobs that fit to their qualities is that their occupational skills and university degrees are not recognized by the immigration country (Çelik, 2016; Ünlütürk Ulutaş & Kalfa, 2009).

Today, despite the studies that scrutinize the relationship between gender and international migration, little interest is shown to the experiences of educated and highly skilled women (Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan & Pessar, 2006; Meares, 2010; Purkayastha, 2005), and the dominant international migration paradigm has overlooked the significance of this issue (Kofman, 2000; Raghuram, 2000). Meares (2010) argues that the research on the effect of immigration on qualified migrant women mostly offers quantitative data, and therefore tend to overlook the discourse on motherhood, family and work, and

the gendered structure of social norms and expectations. The limited number of qualitative studies focusing on skilled migrant women suggested that international migration negatively affects the working lives of skilled migrant women. The literature focusing on highly educated and qualified migrant women since late 1990s has shown that many middle-class, skilled migrant women face various challenges in finding jobs that are suitable with their qualifications in the new country (Dumont, Martin & Spielvogel, 2007; Man, 2004; Salaff & Greve, 2006).

The research on irregular immigrants who live and work in Turkey mostly focuses on migrant women who work in home and care services, and the common feature of these studies is that they reveal the vulnerability of immigrants (Toksöz & Ünlütürk, 2011, p.175). Due to the civil war started in 2011, the most prominent subjects of the mass migration to Turkey have been Syrian migrants in the last decade. In later years, various security problems occurring in Iraq created a new and different migration wave. Nevertheless, the literature has focused on Syrian migrants in recent years. Körükmez, Karakılıç and Danış (2020) argues that despite the number and scope of the studies on Syrian migrants, the available information on this issue is still quite limited and superficial, the migration phenomenon is taken in a monolithic way, and the diversity of the migrants (in terms of age, gender, class, ethnicity, legal status etc.) is mostly overlooked. The education level and the accompanying degrees and professional qualifications should also be added to this statement.

Castles & Miller (2008) calling the 21st century the “migration age” argue that increasing inequalities between the North and South will force more and more people to migrate to reach better living conditions. They state that political, ecological, and demographic problems and ethnic and political conflicts will bring about refugee outflows in the future. International migration accelerated

with the effect of the changing political and economic conditions after the Second World War, and some events since the end of the 1970s (USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq war, Gulf War, etc.) have led to mass migrations. After the cold war, as a result of the change in the balance of the world, there was another wave of migration from the Eastern Bloc to the West. Turkey has been affected by the migration waves, more or less. Since the 1980s, a significant part of the migration arise from the "global south and east" countries which are in political and economic instability, and Turkey became a transition country and EU countries become destinations simultaneously in this period (İçduygu, 2017). For instance, as a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, a great number of immigrants migrated to Western Europe and North America via Turkey. Refugee flows toward Turkey have become a recurrent phenomenon due to human rights violations in Turkey's neighboring countries (Yıldız & Sert, 2017). On the other hand, the attacks on September 11, 2001, created another breaking point. Accordingly, the Middle East policies of the USA structured the Arab Spring, and the conflict created regional instability and exacerbated the Syrian civil war in 2011.

The conflict in Syria and the threat of ISIS along the northern line of Iraq and Syria have caused the biggest migration wave in recent history. Turkey is the most affected country by this process. Migrants tend to illegal border crossing due to the measures implemented by Europe. These migrants used Turkey as one of the main transition corridors in migration flows to the West, due to its geographical location between the Middle East, Asia, and the Balkans (İçduygu, 1996). It is stated in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report (2022), that international migration is not systematic, but is shaped by economic, geographic, demographic, and other factors that result in different migration patterns such as migration “corridors” developed over many years. The number of international immigrants has increased in the last 50

years. Approximately 281 million people living in a country other than their country of birth in 2020 are 128 million more than in 1990 and more than triple the estimated number in 1970 (IOM, 2022). There are 89.3 million displaced by force people in the world by the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2022). Besides being a transit country, Turkey is regarded as a safe residential area for immigrants and asylum seekers from different religions, languages, and races due to war and human rights violations. It has become the country that receives the most refugees (Şimşek & İçduygu, 2017).

According to the data revealed by the United Nations Refugee Agency, the number of Syrian refugees under temporary protection exceeded 3.6 million as of August 2022, and 46% (1.7 million) of this number consists of women and girls. In addition to this number, there are approximately 300,000 people who applied for or obtained international protection status in Turkey, a majority of whom consists of people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran (UN Women, 2022). Taking the indicators given in both international and national reports into consideration, it can be said that there is limited information on educated and skilled women who migrated to Turkey. According to the research on Syrian Women in Turkey conducted by AFAD in 2014, 6.2% of Syrian migrant women in Turkey hold university degrees. According to the Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Under Temporary Protection Status In Turkey by UN Women, 85% of the participators did not work in paid employment, 40% of those who worked in paid employment were teachers, and the employment rate in Turkey is 20% (UN WOMEN, 2018, p.19-45). There is no detailed data on the employment rate of the graduate women after they migrated to Turkey and the sectors they work in. However, it was revealed that the language barrier and the additional barriers related to gender roles make the employment of refugee women in Turkey difficult, and the women who have the chance to work are employed in jobs that are considered to suit gender roles, such as house cleaning

and child, elderly and patient care, or work informally in agricultural, tourism and service sectors for low wages and under unfavorable work conditions (Mazlumder, 2014, p.41). Barin (2015) states that Syrian women in the native labor market usually work in dangerous sectors or low-waged and insecure jobs because of reasons such as their university degrees are invalid in Turkey or the process for the validation takes too long, and this situation makes them lose their qualifications.

The main problem of this study is whether educational competencies of migrants have any equivalence in the new society or not. In this context, the main purpose of the study is to find the ways in which the educational capital of the graduate women, who were forced to migrate to Turkey due to civil wars in their countries, reflects on the process of adaptation to a new society and lifestyle, in relation to their social and cultural capitals. In line with this purpose, the meaning of being an educated woman within the cultural context of migrant women's, and the ways in which their educational capitals are reflected on in the process of the adaptation to a new culture outlines the questions that this study seeks to answer.

## **Method**

### ***Research design***

This research is a qualitative study and was conducted in a basic interpretive design. In such studies the researcher is interested in the way individuals make sense of and interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2015). The focus of this study is the way the educational capital of migrant women finds an equivalence in both their sociocultural environment and Turkey. The approach of qualitative research holds a special importance particularly for migration studies as it has a potential to offer a rich, deep and detailed analysis; expounds the complicated, contextual and multifaceted dimensions of migration dynamics; and facilitates



understanding those who are deprived of participation to and representation of conventional society and politics (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2019, p.2).

Furthermore, Merriam (2015) defines three criteria for a study designed in the basic interpretive design as determining 1) how individuals interpret their experiences, what meaning they attach to their experiences, and how they build their worlds. This study is structured in the basic interpretive design to determine how participants experience and make sense of the ways their educational capital reflects on the process of adaptation to a new society.

### ***Study group***

Criterion sampling and snowball sampling (Frankel & Wallen, 2007; Patton, 2014), which are purposeful sampling methods, were employed in this research. The criteria taken as a basis are that the women participating in the study migrated to Turkey when the security problems in their counties started and are university graduates. Because the immigration profile of Turkey has been shaped by the civil wars that took place in the border countries in recent years, the working group was composed of women who migrated from Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, approaching a group and establishing relationships in Eastern cultures is a serious problem for when conducting research (Karasar, 2009). Therefore, after trust-based relationships were established with people from various channels, snowball sampling was employed to reach out for participants. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were held with 11 graduates who accepted to participate in the research voluntarily.

Three participants, who work as teachers in Temporary Educational Centers (TECs), were visited in the schools where they work. One of the participants was reached through her teacher in the Turkish literacy class in the Public Education Center she attends. Three participants were visited in their homes. Two participants were reached through the representative of a non-

governmental organization where they volunteer, and interviews were held after their meeting in the organization building. Two participants were reached through the teachers of their children, and the interviews were held in places determined by them. More people were contacted during the data collection process; however, they rejected to be interviewed, some because of their hesitations about participating in a study, and others because they could not get a permit from their spouses. Nine of the participants are married, and two are single. Six of the participants work in a job in Turkey. Three of them work as teachers in TECs, whereas two work in what they call “Iraqi Schools” that implement the Iraqi curriculum in the city center as private education courses. One of the participants work as a translator with an official status in a public institution in Turkey. On the other hand, those who do not currently work stated that they have applied to jobs like translation and teaching in TECs, and those hold university diplomas such as medical or teaching degrees are in the process of getting a diploma equivalency. Five of the participants are from Iraq, and six of them are from Syria. Amine, Kawa, Ayşe and Revan are in the age range of 40-50, and others are in the range of 30-40. In order to ensure the confidentiality, pseudonyms are used instead of the real names of the participants.

### ***Process***

The data is collected through intensive interviews. The interview form is structured based on the literature review, which is conducted in the context of the problem status of the research. As the research fields of the researchers include gender, culture, migration and education, a theoretical infrastructure related to the research problem was already built. In the structuring of the interview form, three fundamental dimensions were determined in relation to the research purposes. The first dimension focuses on the lives of participants before the immigration to allow a description of the sociocultural context in

which they grew within the framework of their lives in their countries. The second dimension examined their immigration processes, whereas the third examined their experiences in Turkey with a focus on the adaptation process to a new society and living conditions within the context of their educational equipment. The opinions of two expert who worked in the fields of both gender, and migration and education were sought in relation to the interview form. The interview form consisted of twelve basic questions related to the research problem, in addition to the basic demographic information of the participants. Four of the Iraqi women are of Turkish origin and one is of Arab origin. Only one of them could speak Turkish. Similarly, two of the Syrian women are of Turkish origin and four are Arab origin, whereas only three of them could speak Turkish. Of the women who did not speak Turkish, Nisa was interviewed in English, and the others were interviewed through the mediation of people who speak both languages fluently. All of the interviews were conducted by the researchers. The interviews lasted approximately 25-45 minutes. Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the research, ethical requirements were observed, their permission was taken to audio-record the interviews, and all of the interviews were recorded.

In order to ensure the objectivity in qualitative research, the prejudices, thoughts, feelings, and evaluations of the researcher should be kept out, and the researcher should not reflect their personal experiences on the research process (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Creswell, 2015). This basic approach of keeping the objectivity was adopted by the researchers in this study.

### ***Data Analysis***

During the analysis of the data, firstly the interviews were converted to texts. The raw data was read several times by both researchers. In the first phase, the answers were analyzed based on the three basic dimensions determined during

the structuring of the interview form. These dimensions also served as a general framework in the presentation and interpretation of the findings. Accordingly, the data was collected under three main sections. The second cycle of the analysis process included the thematic analysis of the data classified under each section. For that, the data was read several times, the codes were identified, the categories around which these codes converged were created, and moving from these categories, the themes were determined. The MAXQDA program was used for the data analysis. According to the results of the analysis four themes were determined, namely “Accessibility of Education”, “Adaptation to the Life in Turkey”, “Positive Transformation Areas”, and the “Barriers to the Functionalization of Educational Competencies”.

### ***Research Context***

In the research process, within the context of the research purposes, the researchers chatted with the migrant women before and after the interviews and made observations on their lifestyles. The research was conducted in regions densely populated by Syrian and Iraqi migrants in Ankara city center. The observations made during the interviews, narratives of the mediators who helped reach the participants, and especially the lifestyles of the participants observed during home visits included important indicators for the definition of this context. Observations and unstructured interviews recorded in the form of field notes are presented with the purpose of describing the research context. Amine, who migrated from Iraq and attends to an adult Turkish literacy class in the Public Education Center in weekends worked as an Arabic teacher in Iraq. She lives with her husband and four children. Two of her children are currently working, others are students. She attempted to do something related to her profession several times; however, her lack of a social capital and responsibilities for her children kept her from such a mobility area.

Nur, who is of Syrian origin and was a classroom teacher in her country, lives with her husband and two children. She teaches at a private school that teaches Iraqis. Her husband, who is a lawyer, was not able to practice in Turkey. However, with the support and guidance of his relatives who settled in Turkey before him and have experience in certain lines of work, he started trading in a field related to the construction industry. Both Nur and her husband having regular income jobs, they can provide a decent environment for their family in terms of living conditions. The residential area she lives in and her living conditions support this.

Rihab, coming from Syria, was a geography teacher in her country. She lives with her husband and two children and works as a translator in a Turkish public institution. That she is of Turkish origin and has relatives who settled in Turkey before and built an effective social network provided Rihab with an advantage in terms of both language and social mobility. Her position in public service provided her with a new social environment, so that she was able to break out of the areas of migrant life constrained by their own cultural contexts. This helped her to take a more effective part in the educational lives of her children.

Meryem, comes from and worked as an English teacher in Iraq, could not find a job related to her education in Turkey. Besides, her children being too young, the responsibility of taking care of children prevented her from looking for a job. However, she is trying to get her diploma equivalency or do a master's degree from foreign student quota. The economic capital of her husband helped them to start their own business after they came to Turkey. She lives with her husband, her two children and two sisters of her husband in a duplex apartment at the highest floors of a building located in a neighborhood, which is in the transition zone of the lower middle class and lower class.

Nisa is a single woman who graduated from the department of English Language and Literature and worked as an English teacher in Syria. When she first came to Turkey, she taught in a private Syrian school. She is currently working at a TEC. However, she says that her current job does not provide assurance in terms of supporting herself in Turkey and she wants to go to Europe for the diverse job opportunities suitable to her education. Especially as a single woman, she says that the dynamics originating from her cultural environment and the poor neighborhood they live in can be quite challenging for her. In this context, one of the main points she emphasizes is the lack of a male who can protect or support them. Her father and older brother passed away in Syria, and their ties with her only remaining brother were severed in Turkey. Nisa, her mother, her widowed sister and her sister's children are all living together.

Minel migrated from Syria, and though her main profession is mathematics teacher, she could find a job as a translator. She says that although the sociocultural structure she comes from does not approve girls to go to school, her father supported their educational life despite the pressures of their environment. She says that his husband started a car repair business after they migrated to Turkey. She is a mother to two children, and she says that it is hard for her to leave her children with her relatives, who she does not trust much. But working is the only way to lead their lives at similar standards to the life they had in Syria, though it can never be like before.

Kawa works in the same TEC with Nisa. As a graduate of Theology and a former teacher in her country, she spoke of cultural barriers in her country related to her education experiences during the interview. Her husband is not a graduate and works in body shop in the industrial zone. Kawa has two older daughters who go to college in Turkey. One of the interesting observations we

had about her was she brings her 2 or 3-year-old to the school when she is working. She says that her friends who does not have a class to attend when she is teaching look after her baby. She states that her daughters going to university in Turkey makes her really happy, and even though her current job is temporary, her daughters have the chance to go to school safely and are likely to have permanent job in Turkey.

Farah is a veterinary doctor with a master's degree from Iraq. She works as a biology teacher in a private school teaching Iraqi people in Turkey. She had an arranged marriage to a relative of her in her country, and as the physical violence was added to the severe incompatibility that existed since the beginning of her marriage, she decided to end her marriage. She comes from an educated family. She has one child and live with her brother who works as a draftsman. Farah also makes to live in Europe in the future, like Nisa, and she is getting prepared to go to her brother's, who is working as an engineer in Vienne.

Zehra is a chemistry teacher from Iraq. She worked as a teacher in her country, but she could not find a job in Turkey. Her husband works as a teacher in a private school teaching Iraqi people. children are attending both private Iraqi school and a public school here. We visited Zehra in her home, which is located in the same neighborhood and transitional zone with Meryem's home. Domestic order conditions such as the furniture and the children's room (study desk, bookshelf etc.) similarly to the living conditions of lower middle-class families in Turkey. Zehra wishes to get a master's degree in Turkey after her children get older, and has applied for diploma equivalency to be able to work in public schools, but she did not receive a response yet.

Ayşe is an English teacher who migrated from Syria. She says though she does not have a social network in Turkey to help her find a job here, they used to come to Turkey before the civil war for vacation, shopping, sightseeing etc. purposes and they planned their children's educational life in Turkey years ago. Her husband still lives and teaches in Syria. Ayşe lives here with her four children. Her older daughter studies medicine. Her other children go to middle and high schools. Ayşe says she came across several job opportunities in Turkey, but she definitely cannot do a job that is under her qualifications and standards. Lastly, Revan is a retired doctor from Iraq. She could not find to opportunity to practice in Turkey. She plans to stay in Turkey for the education of her children. Because both her and her husband receive a pension from Iraq, they have not had to work in a job other than their profession in Turkey. Revan says both her and her husband's only focus here in Turkey is to help their children receive a good education. Their narratives mostly focus on the education of their children and that the social order is more advanced in Turkey, instead of social conflicts or the challenging aspects of their experiences in Turkey.

It can be seen that the participants do not consider it possible to work in jobs other than those that are related to their education and where they can feel themselves safe. The lives of those married to men with lower levels of education are more clearly confined to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, others seem to be able to break out of the context characterized by traditional roles through the participation in their children's educational lives, social networks or working life. In addition, particularly those who work in the TEC live in the districts on the periphery of the city because they have limited sources of income, cannot access to effective social networks and cannot exploit the advantages or mobility areas that their education could provide them with otherwise. These factors can be seen as both cause and effect of each other. It has been often emphasized both in structured interviews and private



conversations that these participants desire to have the modern ways of life, but they repeatedly experience the sociocultural barriers in the regions they reside. On the other hand, those who can be said to be relatively more advantageous are the ones who have relatives or social networks that can guide them in Turkey. These participants express the importance and contribution of their social networks in terms of them finding jobs or their husbands doing higher-income businesses.

## **Findings**

### ***Accessibility of education***

Before the categorical analysis under this theme, reviewing certain indicators limited with the topics of access to education and participation in workforce may provide a framework about the status of women in Syria and Iraq. In this context, the Global Gender Gap Index, which is annually published by the World Economic Forum, shows that Syria ranked as 152<sup>nd</sup> and Iraq as 154<sup>th</sup> in term of gender equality among 156 countries in the 2021 report (WEF, 2021, p.10). This ranking indicates that the gender gap is very deep in both countries. In one of the sub-indices, namely economic participation and equal opportunity index, Syria ranked 153<sup>rd</sup> and Iraq 115<sup>th</sup>. The participation rates of women in the workforce were 15.8% in Syria and 12% in Iraq. The rates of women who were in senior management and decision-making positions were 9% in Syria and 21.8% in Iraq. The rates of women who work in other professional and technical positions were 39.4% in Syria and 32.5% in Iraq (WEF, 2021, p.221-223).

In another sub-index, namely access to education, Syria ranked 118<sup>th</sup> and Iraq 145<sup>th</sup> among 156 countries. According to the data on the access to education, 73.6% of Syrian women and 79.9% of Iraqi women were literate. Women's rate of access to primary education was 67% in Syria, whereas this rate dropped to

48.1% in secondary education and to 42.8% in higher education. However, considering that the participation rate of men in higher education was 37.5%, the educational status of Syrian women in terms of higher education painted rather a positive picture (WEF, 2021, p.361). Women's access to education was 86.9% in primary education, 41.5% in secondary education and 12% in higher education in Iraq. Men's rate of access to higher education was estimated to be 20% in Iraq (WEF, 2021, p.223).

It is important to understand what it means to be an educated woman in this social structural context, in which channels and under which conditions women find opportunities for education and social mobility, and this sociocultural context related to the accessibility of education providing a deeper perspective to the experiences of the participants in Turkey. Within the framework of interviews held with the participants, the accessibility of education is defined under two categories, namely the sociocultural contexts of access to higher education and education and job opportunities.

#### *Sociocultural contexts of access to higher education*

There are various barriers to the education of women in societies where traditional social structures and cultural norms dominate. These cultural barriers are also the causes of the limited options that women can find in the work life. Beyond the indicators provided above related to the participation of women in education and paid working life, the diverse sociocultural structure of both countries in terms of ethnic, religious and sectarian aspects is out of the focus of this research, but it is emphasized by the participants during interviews. Habib (2018) states that social norms vary by religion, ethnic origin and the region (rural and urban areas) in Syria, but all these norms usually place women in secondary roles and statuses. According to Charles and Denman (2012), the limitations placed by traditional social norms and patriarchal families in Syria

have greater effects on the women who live in rural areas in poverty than those who come from middle and upper classes, and this influences women's decision-making functions in life issues, especially access to education. During the interviews held within the scope of this research, some participants gave examples of the social and cultural norms varying by the region when they describe the traditional perspectives, especially on access to education:

Zehra: Men are better than us. For example, according to my father, it did not matter if it is a boy or girl. He wanted us to receive education. We lived in a very central region, like Çankaya, therefore education was accessible to all there. But when you go to the skirts of the city, or to villages, even men have only primary school education, live aside the girls.

Nur: We lived in Lazkiye, it is an open place. It is very different from Halep. They care about women. They receive the education they want. [...] In Halep, women have no value. [...] Women are for men. The reason Lazkiye is different is [...] in Halep, in Damascus, it is religiously too oppressive, they interpreted the religion wrong. But Lazkiye is open in terms of religion. It is not diverse in terms of religion, but there are Alawis. Alawis are open-minded, their lifestyles are more open, comfortable and different in that sense. This way of living gave us advantages, too.

The narratives on how women receiving higher education and gain competence in a profession are received within the social structure show that the general opinion holds that women need not to receive education.

Minel: In Halep women are so closed to homes. They cannot stay out much. They never remove their veils, they do not go out, men get so jealous. For example, no windows are allowed. They get married when they are 14 or 15 years old. They used to always ask my father how he sent us to school when I was going to university. They used to say enough with the schools, she is twenty-one now, you should get her married.

Nisa: I lived in a popular region in Halep. But most of the Syrian women have a traditional mindset. They generally don't like girls going to university much. But my

father was fond of education and he ensured that we all went to university and complete our education. The people around us did not go to university. They used to gossip about me that I was going to university and thus must have many boyfriends.

The narratives above also reveal the neighborhood pressure on the education women during their educational lives. The narratives of participant women on their educational experiences show that the families, especially the fathers, was determinative on the approach of women towards education and played an important role in overcoming the pressures coming from the environment. Whether the father was educated or not did not hold much importance. What mattered was their supportive performance related to the education of their daughters especially, and this opened the way to education for women.

Minel: Not everyone can receive education in Syria. My father is fond of education, so we got education. [...] The reason we went to school was my father.

Rihab: My father was a tradesman. He was engaged in trades. My mother was a housewife. My father was not educated, neither my mother. But they say a girl should always be educated, they thought so. We all are educated. My father worked for us all his life. He did his best by himself for us to go to school, complete our education. Until now, he has always said that a woman should work. He says why did I put so much effort for you if you are not going to work? He does not want us to be needy. But not everyone around is like that. At that time my father used to tell me I can send you to Turkey for education if you want.

Those who said that as a girl or woman they did not encounter any obstacles both in their educational and working lives have parents or older siblings who are high education levels.

Farah: Both my mother and father were teachers. My siblings are engineers. I am a veterinary doctor. All these guided me. I mean, it was an educated family. I never experienced an obstacle to my education. I was in fact free.

Ayşe: There is no one in my family who did not enter university. I am an only daughter, and the youngest of my family. My cousins both from my mother's and father's sides, went to university. There are doctors, officers, teachers among them. I mean, education level is high. I did not experience any problem just because I am a girl or woman, neither with my family nor with my husband after my family. There were no obstacles.

Nur: It varies from family to family. My family wanted us to go to school. Six of us are university graduates. My father even sent us to different cities for education. But for other families, a girl should marry and go if she reached 15 or 16. [...] I was the youngest girl in the family. It is very important, of course, that my older siblings got education. I did whatever I saw. I will get in this school and work. I did not even think about not going to school, because there is no such thing in my family.

Revan: My father used to teach English at college. Education was very natural for us. All of received it.

It can be seen that in a social structure where the traditional codes are dominant, for the women who got the opportunity to access education generally due to advantages provided by the family they were born into, being educated means being knowledgeable, positioning oneself differently from others, gaining self-confidence and build a more independent life. The opinions of some of the participants are as follows:

Meryem: Going to school, being a university graduate made me feel so good about myself. I became different, of course. You become different in all senses, you become knowledgeable. I speak English, Arabic, Turkish, and some French. I mean, I am different than the people who knows nothing. You become different in thinking-wise, too.

Nur: As a woman, going to university made me feel good about myself. You trust yourself, for example. Everyone treats you differently. You are educated, you are knowledgeable, you are such and such.

Rihab: I would want all women to receive education. I would love to change the things in the minds of the women I meet. Really, the pressure of culture is everywhere

in their lives, thoughts. Woman can do nothing. I wish they were freer. The meaning of freedom is different for them unfortunately. [...] The most important thing in a culture is education. If she is educated, other things follow. If there is no education, nothing follows.

### *Education and Occupation Opportunities*

It can be said that the cultural sanctions that constrain them within their traditional environments still exist for these women who were able to receive education. As one of the most typical features of the societies where the traditional structures are dominant, teaching and nursing are the professions considered most suitable to women. The most frequently emphasized point by those participants who are teachers is that the teaching as a profession is perceived as the most suitable profession for women because it does not prevent them from carry out her domestic responsibilities and that women have no opportunity to improve themselves except for receiving education within certain limits.

Meryem: There few opportunities there. I mean, we have only our education. Our right to receive education. Except from that, we have nothing. Even in our work area – for example, I am a teacher, I can teach, I have a right for that. They accept nothing else. Like painting – my sister really really loves painting, but my father did not accept it. She became a teacher, too.

Minel: We, women, can only become teachers in Syria. Because teachers have two months of vacation in summer. Men usually do not accept women like doctors, engineers, architectures. Because they work all day.

Zehra: Only women are suitable to teaching. The work environment should not be complicated. Our school is not complicated, I mean boys and girls are separated. At the same time, teaching is convenient, you can be both a teacher and a housewife. I had children, I needed short working hours, so I worked as a teacher.

When looking at the mobility area of women related to their work lives, it can be seen that they have no chance to work in the private sector, and only working in the public sector is seen suitable to them.

Kawa: In my family, you can work if you have a diploma, but never in other jobs. For example, if you are a doctor, you can work. But in factories, shops, I mean in regular works you cannot possibly work. If you are educated and have a diploma, you can work.

Farah: I was not working in Iraq. Because there is no job. I graduated from Veterinary Medicine. I could not enter public service. I could not open a clinic for myself. For example, my husband, a man finished this department, he could open a clinic.

Because there is freedom in Iraq for them. This kind of jobs are theirs. I could not get a job in the government.

According to these narratives, the paid work life of women appears to be limited with government-controlled jobs and sectors. These jobs meet a requirement within the educational policies of the government, like in the case of women teachers needed in girls' schools, and provide them with an official status. The women who participated in the research conducted by Körükmez, Karakılıç and Danış (2020) and had the paid work experience in Syria also draw attention to the structure of the working regime in their country being shaped by gender roles and stated that women predominantly work in environments where only children and other women present.

Charles and Denman (2012, p.203) states that Syrian constitution accepts gender equality and Syrian women gained certain rights that women in other Arab countries did not have, and that the education right is one of them.

According to the writers, social and physical constraints shaping the access of women and girls to education depend largely on geographical location and family traditions. Though poor families living in the rural areas prioritize the

education of their male children in secondary and higher education, women living in large cities like Damascus tend to benefit a full access to education. In addition, middle and upper-class families from all religions find university education prestigious both for women and men, which renders the university education accessible for women. Nevertheless, the participation rate of women in workforce is quite low and limited to certain areas. One of the reasons that women cannot convert their education to employment is that the education outcomes turn into being a more educated and desirable woman in many communities. That is to say, being highly educated is associated with getting married to a man with higher socioeconomic status (Charles & Denman, 2012). Abu-Assab (2017, p.17-18) also states that the general status of women in prewar Syria was relatively better compared to other countries in the region, but considering the factors such as political environment, sectarianism and state feminism, the indicators related to the participation rate of women in the workforce are misleading and women's participation in the workforce should not be taken as a sign of the gender equality (cited by Körükmez, Karakılıç & Danış, 2020, p.15).

### ***Adaptation to life in Turkey***

The reflection of being an immigrant due to compelling reasons on the lives of university graduate migrant women is being visible in the adaptation process to a new order. Therefore, the variables around which the daily life practices of the participants after migrating to Turkey are shaped are examined in this study. In this context, migrating means a decline in the living standards for most of the participants. This decline in the living standards is discussed especially in terms of living spaces and working life. Furthermore, both the cultural sanctions within their own context and the need of protection from possible dangers or adversities in a new environment are also among the fundamental characteristics of this process.



### *Work and Welfare*

Being forced to migrate means the loss of their material assets or income sources for these individuals. This situation can be said to be determinant in the sense that it shapes their level of welfare and safe living spaces in relation to work and income. For the participants, who were able to obtain the right to access to education within the unique sociocultural structures of their countries, but now lost both their jobs and material assets, immigration is associated with a decline in welfare. Nur's words about this situation are as following:

Nur: I often feel bad in terms of my economic conditions. The salaries immediately fell. My lifestyle changed a lot. I lived much more comfortable in Syria. But here, if both of us do not work, we cannot make a living with two children.

The participants emphasized especially the problems resulting from their husbands not being able to work. This can be said to be related to the fact that the duty of providing for the family is put on men in the context of the traditional social structures. The narratives of some participants related to the experiences of their husbands in the job search process focus on the problems their husbands had.

Amine: It is hard to live here. I think it was easy there. When we first came here, it took eight months before my husband could work. My two sons also work. They were students, now they are drop outs, working in a café.

That the legal status of migrants in Turkey has not been clarified yet create an obstacle to their official participation in the labor market. Six of the participants found an opportunity to work in Turkey. Those participants who do not work in a paid job said they cannot find a job related to their own profession, and they cannot work in other jobs, especially in services sector.

Revan: I am a doctor. My husband is also a doctor. I don't have the chance to get an equivalency or do my own job here. We want to practice as doctors. I cannot work in other jobs.

On the other hand, the language barrier and age can be an important obstacle for migrant women to do their own jobs here.

Ayşe: I thought about working here, but I could not find much opportunity in my field. Because firstly, I don't speak Turkish, and secondly, they prefer to hire someone younger. And the opportunities I found are washing dishes etcetera, I can't do these. I even thought if I could teach English to children in kindergartens, but they said the municipality should employ me. I taught the children of neighbors and so on.

One of the most important points within the framework of social and cultural norms appears to be the approval of husbands.

Meryem: There are supermarkets around here and they are looking for workers, but our husbands do not allow us. I am at home, I have accepted it, what can I do after all? I mean it is very hard. I started to forget English, I want to go to some courses, but...

The immigrants' gender relations in their own cultural context and in the new society reflect social gender schemas, which is a part of their socialization process. Immigrants coming from rigid patriarchal societies tend to reproduce the same gendered behavior (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). The family structure and the gender regime shaping this structure becomes determinant in terms the forms of participation in new society.

One of the challenges expressed by the participants in terms of the adaptation to a new life is the houses they live in. That the houses they live in are not their own property aggravates their current economic problems. Comparing their old and new lives, the participants especially emphasized the issue of living spaces

and pointed out the challenges of surviving in Turkey. The words of Meryem on the house she lives in, which is a two-floored and quite spacious house located on a main street in Mamak, one of the central districts of Ankara, focus on the differences of the past and today:

Meryem: My husband had a fabric shop. It was very large. Our house was also very large. I can say it was like a palace. This house and others, they are very small compared to it.

In the process of adaptation to a new life, another challenge that migrant women faced is security. Because they have had to live in districts where the rents are low, they suffer the environmental conditions of the regions where crime rates and security problems are relatively are higher. It can be said that this is a factor that makes the adaptation process and their living conditions harder. Some of the participants said that they always feel that they have to protect themselves and especially be careful about their clothing choices because of these problems.

Nisa: I live here because the school I work in is very close to my house. This region is a very problematic region. I come and go to the school, but except that I lock the door and never go out. For example, I have trouble with my clothes. Maybe I could prefer to wear in white sometimes. I could wear dresses that are not too long. But as you can see now, I wear long and black clothes. I cannot put on makeup much.

The changes in the dressing style, which can be directly associated with security issue, can also be seen as a strategy to obviate the social exclusion to an extent. According to Sevlü (2020), Syrian women changed the way they dress to be more compatible with local styles. Changing the dressing style as a way to control potential negative attitudes and behaviors can also be seen as a silent resistance, so that migrant women can find the opportunity to move freely in the

new space they created for themselves (Sevliü, 2020, p.66). In another study on the daily life experiences of Syrian refugees, that Syrian women started to wear hijab in Turkey though they did not in their country is interpreted as an attempt to implement their own strategies by using various tactics in the space and within the strategies of the local people (Deniz, Hülür & Ekinçi, 2016). Minel expressed her own experiences related to this issue;

Minel: I did not wear a hijab in Syria. I started to wear it when I came here. Because this is a foreign place and I am afraid here. Look, my friends here also wear hijab and long dresses.

It can be seen that the participants lost many things like their jobs, houses and welfare after being forced to migrate. However, for some participants the problems they faced in the adaptation process did not last long and they could adapt to the life in Turkey.

### *Social Conflicts*

The attitude of the society toward immigrants is another challenging aspect of the adaptation process. Research shows that immigrants got reaction from certain sections of the immigration community, the people whose life conditions change see the newcomers as a reason for insecurity, the newcomers are seen as the reason for unemployment, diseases and crime, and the leading theme disturbing the society and leading it to xenophobia is the fear of losing their jobs and/or income levels (Castles & Miller, 2008, p.18-21, cited by Özservet Çakırer, 2017, p.2). Some of the participants expressed that in situations they interact with the society (e.g., to rent a house, to build neighborhood relationships), they were treated with prejudice or reactive.

Zehra: One of the most challenging things here is that the Turkish people do not like immigrants. When my children go down to play on the street, they don't get angry

with a local person but they get angry with us. I was like a king, I was teaching at high school. I had everything, my house, my car... they see us as immigrants, like we know nothing, like we are poor and needy. We are not so different actually. We had everything, too.

**Ayşe:** Prejudices gave me a hard time when I first came here. They said we got everything ready for us here. The house we lived in belonged to us, but they said the government pays our rent, we can enter universities without entering any exam. They overlooked our efforts. For example, my daughter entered a good university, she worked hard to study medicine. My other daughter is in high schools and she is very successful, too. They told her you can choose whatever department you want. I could not even respond, I used to get petrified. The people are very rigid, you cannot change their prejudices.

According to research conducted by Hacettepe University Center for Immigration and Political Studies – HUGO (2014), the number of people emphasizing the cultural differences, marginalizing Syrians and seeing their presence in the country as a “problem” is quite high. Despite the tendency to define Syrians as “people fleeing tyranny” and “people in distress”, there is also a tendency to see them as “not one of us” (2014, p.20). The discrimination against and prejudices faced by the migrant women constraint their lives substantially and lead these women to avoid socializing and building relationship with the local people even if they the opportunity (Gönül, 2020, p.91).

### ***Positive transformation areas***

Leaving the problems caused by the forced immigration and economic constraints and social conflicts hindering the adaptation to the new society aside, being have come to a country that has a higher development level brings along positive transformations in some areas of life. All of the migrant women mentioned some advantageous aspects of living in Turkey along with the

hardships they have faced here. The position of women in social life and educational opportunities for children make Turkey favorable for immigrants.

### *Social Life*

The analysis of the fundamental dynamics of the cultural structure that the migrant women were born into shows that certain sanctions are still imposed on these women in their social environment, and even though they received university education, the primary role they have to fulfill first is motherhood and housewifery. Considering the characteristics of this sociocultural context, it can be said that the social life in Turkey has a structure allowing women to have more active roles in the society. The participants' narratives on the advantages of the social life in Turkey focused on the women's place in daily life. The relatively freer lives of women in Turkey and the social order allowing women to move more freely in daily life appear to have transformed the practices of migrant women.

Rihab: Of course, my life here is different. My social life is different. I participate in other activities. My life changed a lot here. I had the same thoughts there but I could not act because of the culture. For example, I went to play a football game two days ago. I liked it in Syria, too, I wanted to go to games, but I could not. Because everyone would talk about it. They would say she is an older woman, isn't she ashamed of herself? [...] Of course, my life changed a lot here in a positive sense. We go out with my friends. We went to picnic two days ago. I mean there was music, singing, it was not just an ordinary picnic. There were both men and women. [...] These make my life here different than the life I had in Syria. For example, I have both male and female friends at my work. [...] I could definitely not do it in Syria.

Farah: The cultural level here is much higher than Musul. I am free in all aspects in Turkey. Let's say a woman went out twice a day in Musul. She would be talked about, like why she came, why she went. I could not do what I wanted in Iraq. Musul is better compared to the rest of Iraq, but when you compare it to Turkey, no. It was easy to get divorced in Iraq legally, but socially they would look at a divorced woman with

evil eyes. In Turkey, in Lebanon, they don't harass women when they get a divorce, but Iraq they say bad things.

Especially the fact that Farah got divorced after she came to Turkey can be interpreted as she got free of the sanctions of the cultural pressure on her. In addition, Rihab's words about how she could not play football in Syria but she can play here without feeling any pressure and she can attend social events without observing the gender of other people can be interpreted as the social pressure on her has been lifted. In addition, Rihab said her husband does not interfere with her decisions or make pressures and supports her for the things she likes to do, but she could not participate in any of these events because of the pressure coming from the environment and the way the society sees women. Other research points out to similar transformations. This liberalization seems related to that these women joined a new environment after the immigration and thence the social pressure in their origin country lost its dominance (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019). Munajed (2020) argues that despite of the multiple disadvantages brought about by the immigration, the rights stated in the Civil Law (such as the principles banning polygamous marriage or the property regime in case of divorce) and the prohibition of discrimination in the constitution allow women in Turkey to exercise their rights more compared to Syria, and he associates this with the Kemalist heritage of Turkey.

### *The Educational Opportunities for Children*

The uncertain future course of the security problems created by the civil war in their country and that their children have the access to education in Turkey make it more advantageous to be here for especially the women who have children at the age of high school or university education. The changes in the status, resources and points of view of migrant women are effective on their interaction with their children's education (Al-deen & Windle, 2015). For

mothers whose children are at the age of preschool or primary school, the physical properties of schools, educational practices and teachers' qualities also constitute an advantage compared to their country.

Meryem: I would go back to Iraq if I could teach. But, the children. Here education is very important, very different. It is not like this there. Çınar's teachers, all people in the kindergarten, they are very very nice. I would really want to send my children to school here. My husband always says we may should stay here for the kids. It was not like that in Iraq. Teachers are not like this. Yesterday I talked to my sister, her child is at school. They push them really hard. There is pressure. Teachers are tough. They hit children there, they beat them.

Zehra: I think the most important thing is the children's education. Because, education is good here. I would want them to go to a private school (in Iraq). State schools are really bad now. They are too crowded, like there are 120 students in one class. There are even no desks, they sit on the floor. Really bad. So, I thought about private education for kids but I cannot afford it. So, the life in Turkey is better.

Though the immigration process seems to reset all kinds of capitals individuals have and create a tabula rasa; however, the educational and cultural competencies of families helps them with supportive practices of their children's educational lives (Al-deen & Windle, 2015). For example, while Ayşe was talking about how she did not seize the job opportunities to be able to care for her children, she said she has transferred the knowledge she have thanks to her education to her children since from their young ages.

Ayşe: Actually, I have all the conditions for a woman to be able work in my environment. I did not choose to work to care for my children better, so that they can grow up better. For example, I thought them English since kindergarten. I read books, introduced them to music. I raised my children like that. My children are in really good conditions here. both my daughter in the high school and my son in the middle school are top students. My daughter is going to a good school, where she wants. Other is getting prepared for university, to enter a good university.



The women who have children at the age of high school and university also emphasized the high-quality education and their children's future in Turkey:

Kawa: My daughter, who goes to college here, wants to finish her school and work here. My older daughter studies in Mersin. My other daughter studies agricultural engineering.

Revan: My children go to school here. My daughter is the top student of her school. Her older brother, my son, gets prepared for the university exam. Even if everything works out and we go back, they seem to stay here. Because they get better here, they get used to here.

### ***The barriers to the operationalization of educational competencies***

The statuses of the migrants in Turkey vary by how they arrived here and where they came from. Some are in refugee status, whereas others are in temporary protection. Some were able to get the right for citizenship, where most of them were not. Due to the uncertainty surrounding their statuses, they cannot come up with permanent solutions to the issues of working in a regular job in Turkey and making future plans in Turkey. On the other hand, the chaos created by the irregular migration does not allow the development of social policies for qualified migrants. The migrant women appear to face various barriers to employing their diplomas to gain economic income due to this uncertainty and lack of policy.

### ***Uncertain Status***

The migrant women cannot be just labelled as qualified migrant without considering the fundamental dynamics of the culture that were born into, its perspective on women, and the ways of living that constrain women. The effects of these cultural dynamics are visible on their lives in their countries, the immigration process, and the adaptation process to a new society. However, not everyone is affected in the same way by these sanctions. The family structure

and the socioeconomic status appear to be the cause of this difference. The differences in the opinions of participants related to the way that their lives in Turkey are headed can be argued to result from these resources. The women who children adapted to the educational life in Turkey and whose family have a regular income emphasize the advantages of living in Turkey. On the other hand, those who do not have job security and whose husbands could not find a job express their wish to go back to their country.

Amine: I am thinking about going back to Iraq next year. My past is there. I was an official. I will go back to my job. I don't think about working here. Even if I did, I would not be able to find a job.

On the other hand, the single participants said that they are trying to go to Europe, but they will prefer to stay in Turkey if they can find a job here.

Nisa: I have no future plans for Halep. But I applied for going to Europe. I am waiting for the news from the foreigners' department like it will come at any moment. I want to go to Europe, because life is better there. It is very hard here. But I can stay here if the school is not closed.

Farah: I live here with my brother. He is an engineer. My sister lives in Vienne. If we cannot find regular jobs here, we both are considering to go to Europe.

Boyd and Grieco (2003) states that the immigrant policies of countries determine the entrance status of immigrants, and the entrance status usually affects the rights of residence and work. The entrance status is more likely to affect women than men, because rights related to residence and work usually vary according to gender. The rights of migrant women, who are regarded among those migrant men are obliged to look after, might be legally dependent on the immigration and residence status of other family members. And this can affect the abilities of women to gain income by themselves. (Boyd & Grieco,

2003). Therefore, the effects of the status uncertainty in Turkey should be discussed especially within the context of rights and freedoms of migrant women.

### *Limited policies for skilled immigrants*

Skilled immigrants are more desirable for countries compared to other immigrant groups, because generally they already have a skill needed in the labor market (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). However, for Turkey that is currently struggling with unemployment and poverty of its own, it takes time to prepare functional policies related to these massive migration waves. Therefore, the issues such as problems the government have to fight against within its own social order, the immigration that took place in waves, the government not being prepared to this both in economic and political senses, and the changing of the social fabric are obstacles to the development of effective policies regarding the problems of immigrants. When it comes to qualified migrants, not having the residence permit, which means not being legally recognized by the government, also means not being able to practice their own occupations. Among the participants of this research who work in Turkey, it can be seen that only one of them (Rihab) works in a public institution. The fact that she is of Turkish origin gives her the advantage of speaking both Arabic and Turkish languages, and thus she can work as a translator. However, she is still not in a position equivalent of the diploma she obtained in Syria or in a legal status. Farah, who has a veterinary medicine diploma, explains her job searching experiences as *“I looked for a job related to my own occupation, but I could not find one because I do not speak the language.”* It can be inferred here that speaking the language provides one with more job options.

The diplomas of the skilled migrants are legally recognized at TECs. These centers are established to offer a chance to foreign students who are at the

school age to finish the education they left unfinished in their country. The language of education in these centers is Arabic, and the teaching staff is all Syrian (MoNE, 2014). Considering those who are employed in TECs, diplomas gain validity within the framework of the policies developed for the immigrants in Turkey. Therefore, the people who are working as teachers are constrained with schools addressing migrants. TECs and the private schools teaching the children of migrants and implementing Iraqi curriculum seem to be the only places where the women can be involved in the paid work life.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

A majority of the research on international migration and gender tend to focus on women who are at a disadvantageous socioeconomic position. Because they are defined as a priority risk group in the migration literature, these studies mostly categorize women either as migrant women in dependent status or unskilled women workforce who are subjected to human trafficking (Gökbayrak, 2006). However, this study focused on the ways in which the educational capital of university graduate women, who were forced to migrate to Turkey due to civil wars in their countries, reflects on the process of adaptation to a new society and lifestyle, their experiences during this process, and how they attribute meaning to these experiences. During intensive interviews, there were three main foci about the sociocultural context of educated migrant women in their country, the immigration processes, and the adaptation process. Data analysis also revealed a parallel framework. The holistic implication of this analysis framework implies that deflation of their credential value affected all the women. However, there is not a standard of the middle-class life, the variations also lead to variations during adaptation process. Variables related to family structure, language, ethnic that affect their positioning and social networks in Turkey are also important.

One topic that all participants agreed upon in their narratives is their educational experiences within their sociocultural context. Though social norms in their countries vary by religion, ethnic origin and region, these norms and values place women in secondary roles and statuses both in educational and working lives. In addition to the fact that the socioeconomic, cultural and educational capitals of their families provide a powerful background, fathers were the important figures who fought against the oppressive effects of the established norms to support the participants to continue with their higher education. However, after completing their higher education, the options offered to women in the paid labor market were limited to teaching and other jobs in public institutions. Domestic roles, which are accepted as the primary responsibilities of women are based on the free time providing by the teaching profession. The roles and experiences of the participants in the migration process have similar features such as the ISIS threat and the lack of life security, and the researchers observed that the effects of premigration traumas still continue. Though it delayed their arrival to Turkey, the participants holding a passport because either themselves or their husbands are civil servants passed through the borders more easily. This somehow helped them in terms of both choosing the city and neighborhood/district they will live in and being able to find a job. However, the particular challenges of the postmigration process cause the disadvantages to continue both in short and long terms within the context of legal procedures (obtaining work permit, diploma equivalency, citizenship etc.).

The narratives of the participants underline the importance of the social networks created by relatives and friends in issues such as deciding on the city they will live in, choosing the place they will live in, and finding a job. In addition to the career requirements such as finding a job or establishing a business, the newcomers need to find a place to live, obtain information, advice and emotional support (Man, 2002; Parrenas, 2001; Salaff & Greve, 2004).

According to the research emphasizing the role of social networks and social capital in the context of the integration of refugees and their access to resources, social networks and access to paid works are positively related (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014). Ryan (2011), who states that social networks are accessed, or new ones are built after migration, separates the social networks of immigrants as solidarity networks and mediating networks and says that this situation creates a dilemma. According to him, while solidarity networks constitute a disadvantage for the integration of the immigrant to the new society, the intermediary networks can be advantageous. In this sense, the intermediary networks mean positive social capital. While social networks among immigrants can protect the disadvantaged groups from discrimination and exploitation, they can also prevent their members from receiving information about the larger society. The findings of the current research also agree with this description. Accordingly, the immigrants who cannot interact with the new society because of fear of security, marginalization etc. show solidarity among themselves, but this situation keeps them back in terms of adaptation and social integration. On the other hand, those who were able to take part in the new society effectively, in terms of both working and civil life, were able to access the intermediary networks. For the migrants to access to more qualified jobs and find career opportunities, they need to access to these intermediary networks (Purkayastha, 2005).

Various studies showed that migrant women have difficulties in finding a job and usually are forced to work in jobs in lower levels than their educational levels (MacDonald, 1998, cited by Purkayastha, 2005). Many immigrants are hindered due to language barriers, limited educational experiences, limited economic resources, differences in child raising practices, physically demanding jobs, the lack of social networks, and cultural differences (Kim, 2009). This statement is valid in terms of the experiences of the participants in this research.

The narratives of the participants who do not currently work in a paid job emphasizes the effects of not speaking Turkish and job options not compatible with their education (e.g., dish washing) and stated that even if they wanted to work in jobs in the services sector (e.g., working in supermarkets) their husbands would not allow them to. Another important reason for not working in a paid job is having young children and lacking the support mechanisms for child rearing. Föbker and Imani (2017) states that the negative effects of the family migration on participation in the labor market is the strongest for women with young children and the care responsibilities originating from the traditional gender roles and gender dynamics become an important barrier to entering labor market and even to looking for jobs. Because the opportunity to work largely depend on the presence of affordable childcare and domestic labor in the new country, especially not having a social network composed of relatives and friends who can look after children seem to be one of the most important obstacles to working and even looking for a job. Migrant women have to leave their paid jobs to look after their children or work in low-paid, part-time and precarious jobs in the private sector (Man, 2004; Shah, 1998, cited by Purkayastha, 2005). In this sense, the decrease in the living standards of the participants in Turkey is a result of not being able to transfer their socioeconomic, cultural and education capitals, which defined their class position in their country, to the new country. To sum it up, both the difference of standards in the countries they come from and the ways they became a part of the new country do not mean the continuity of their educational competencies or social statuses (Al-deen & Windle, 2015).

The importance of the participation in the labor market and having a paid job should not be limited to economic incomes and the increase of the domestic welfare, but should be discussed in relation to the increase in the social status of women both in the family and the society, the expansion of their mobility areas,

developing new social networks and contribution to the social adaptation process through practices in various social environments. The migrant women, whose mobility areas are constrained due to reasons such as not being able to find a job compatible with one's skills, not being able to obtain a diploma equivalency within legal processes, the care responsibilities of children or domestic dynamics, have trouble in adapting and developing a sense of belonging to the new society (Gilmartin & Migge, 2016). On the other hand, the factors affecting the sense of belonging and adaptation to the new society can be life decisions such as getting married, getting divorced, having children or changing one's profession. Looking from such a point of view, Farah's decision to divorce his husband after she came to Turkey might be associated with the new social order enabling her for that. It is understood that the husbands of married women are generally determinant on both immigration process and the interactions these women have with the new society while adapting to it. Kōu, Mulder and Bailey (2017) states that if the migrating woman is single, she can take the variables about herself into consideration; but if she is married, the husband is the one who is making decisions about the immigration process. The migration process of Nisa to Turkey and that both Nisa and Farah are making future plans in Europe appear to be related to this situation. It should be noted that the immigration plan to Europe is not particular to single women. It can be said that the cultural capital and having networks to help them in target countries are determinant at this point. Educated and professionally skilled Syrians say they want to go to a Western European country or countries such as the USA and Canada if it is possible, and say that the reason for this is there is a low possibility for them to find a job suitable with their qualities in Turkey (HUGO, 2014). Within the context of the findings of this research, it can be said that education by itself is not the only factor in such a plan, and other variables and mobility areas are needed as well.



Certain research discussing the phenomenon of immigration in the context of gender argues that immigration sharpens the line between male and female identities, enforces gender norms and tightens the ties confining women to their houses (Meares, 2010; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). However, immigration can also change the status of women and men and the gender regime within the family. Boyd and Grieco (2003) states that the literature on women and immigration focuses on two statuses that can change as a result of the immigration process for women. The first one of is the status of migrant women within their family. For some women, immigration may mean social mobility, and economic independency and a relative increase in the autonomy as a result of the participation in the workforce. That some of the participants feel themselves freer and do certain things they could not in their previous environment might be associated with this relative autonomy. New economic and social responsibilities may change the power dynamics within the family and help women to have more control on decision making and family resources. Nevertheless, the participation in the workforce is not enough to provide an equality between a migrant woman and her husband. For some migrant women, the participation in the workforce might increase the burden they have to carry, especially if they cannot find support mechanisms for childcare and domestic help, or at least some alternatives (Salaff & Greeve, 2004). The second aspect of the status change for women is shifting from one patriarchal society to another, and in this case even if the immigration improves the social status of women, it might not help their position within the family (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Within the context of this research, that the husbands of some women did not permit them to interview with the researchers, which was one of the problems in finding participants for the research, or their opinions that the native women are “too” free, indicates that the gender regime within the family did not really change much. On the other hand, having children can be interpreted as a empowering factor in both struggling with new and difficult conditions and

hoping for the future. Even though they have a life with many uncertainties, the educational expectations of the participants also draw a framework for their future plans. Their strong belief that their children are receiving a good education in Turkey and this education is an important factor that will positively shape their expectations about the future is one of the interesting findings of this research.

As Körükmez, Karakılıç and Daniş (2020) states, the existence of an inclusive and supportive policies; support mechanisms offered by the government; an open, equal and embracing social atmosphere for NGO's, civil initiatives and refugees is very important for the empowerment of all refugees and helping them gain resilience in the long run. The research findings revealed that within the framework of the migrant experiences and perspectives, the legal policies of Turkey as an immigration country and the attitudes of the people are nor inclusive and supportive. Accordingly, what really provides an advantage to the education migrants in Turkey is the existence of civil initiatives in Turkey, which they can interact with depending on their social status in their own country. These networks, on the other hand, are usually not established within the inclusive policies of the target country, but are nongovernmental organizations related to the social origins of the participants. While the forced immigration is expected to invalidate all types of capitals individuals had within the framework of the fundamental dynamics of the target country, it is found in this study that the family status of the participants was the main factor shaping both their access to education within the context of their culture and their positions as women, and their adaptation processes to the new society.

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