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Bring Future Back: Disability Based Experience of Syrian Students in Higher Education System in Turkey (UDISES)

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INTRODUCTION

For years migration studies have remained blind to the phenomenon of disability. Millions of displaced people ended up with impaired corps and various disabilities during the great world wars, yet, neither the 1951 Geneva Convention nor international human rights agreements and documents mentioned and elaborated on the rights of the persons with disabilities. Cast under the shadow of epistemological, ontological and practical invisibility, disabled refugees and migrants were rarely contemplated in humanitarian intervention sphere. Thus, throughout the 20th century both academia and policymakers remained blind towards people with disabilities who usually spent their lives cast in the shadow of private space.

The Cold war and the last decade of the 20th century faced with the cruelest wars, ethnic conflicts and military interventions in Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, etc. While the conflict-affected refugees and IDP population in the world increased, migration studies remained rather Western, modern, masculine, and disabilty-blind. Until 2010, the IDPs and refugees with disabilities were approached under the nationalized rulings of the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the national humanitarian aid and services programs. During the 2010 Executive Committee's 61st session, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) enacted Conclusion No. 110 (LXI) on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and assisted by UNHCR. Subsequently the disability as a subject started to search for its place in the migration studies. Until very recently, there was no data about the displaced population with disabilities. In 2011, World Health Organization report on Disability underlined that more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability, of whom nearly 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning. This population has usually been approached as a sole health issue, i.e. technical health problem, that requires medical solutions and therapy. Specific categories of people with special needs were being provided with certain special services. Recently demands for social, political and cultural rights and policies found a place in the ongoing disability discourse.

Disability is a social issue that requires emancipation of different skills and abilities. Disabled and marginalized under the infrastructural and structural handicaps of the common space and surrounding, the utmost way to emancipate the skills and abilities of disabled youth is accessible education. Providing accessible education removes the structural and infrastructural barriers in front of the disabled youth and turns their special skills and features into valuable talents and abilities. Education gains utmost importance especially in cases of forced migration because any knowledge gained via education serves as a survival knot for desperate refugee youth. This is valid especially regarding the disabled youth in exile, because education brings them an opportunity to survive, to leave the closure of the private space, to get rid of dependency, and to gain axes to basic rights and freedoms, i.e. self-reliance.

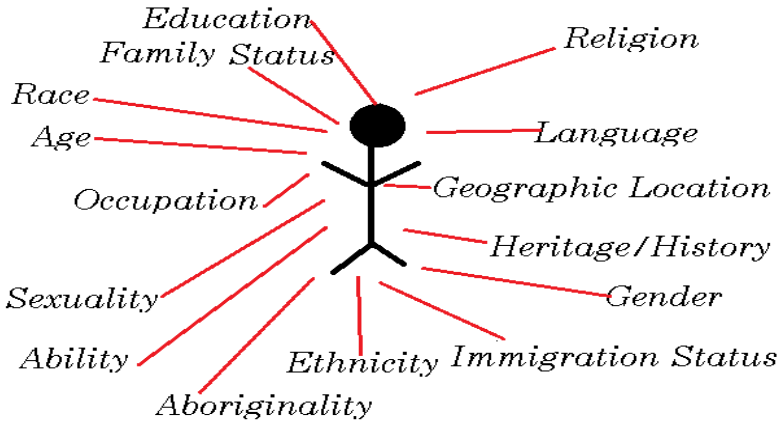
The consequences of displacement can last for a lifetime, especially when it interrupts education and limits future opportunities (IDP Profiling Working Group of the Protection

Cluster, April 2016; Trako, February 2017). Although education is mostly seen as a luxury for refugees due to limited means, it brings opportunity towards self-reliance and meaningful future. This is twice as important for disabled youth in exile who have almost no access to the accessible surrounding and scholarship opportunities.

1. Methodological and Conceptual Framework

Thinking of disability as diversity, the main principle of the UDISES Project is to follow and strengthen a rights-based approach that aims at self-reliance and self-sustainability among persons with disability. According to our understanding of disability, disability is not a personal feature of certain group of persons, instead, disability is legally, administratively, structurally, culturally and politically constructed barrier that prevents persons with certain physical, mental or psychological differences, needs and difficulties to access their fundamental human rights. Disability is about restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of persons who have impairments, and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of the social activities (Shakespeare, 2004). Thus, instead of using the concept of special needs, we emphasize the structural inequality that limits equal access to significant human rights. Because disability is about physical and social (economic, environmental and culture) barriers that raise inequality for persons who are viewed by others as having some form of physical, mental or intellectual form of impairment to take part in the daily community life. Disabled persons are persons with different abilities who have to be provided with more accessible administrative and institutional infrastructure. The lack of accessible and universal infrastructure disables their access to numerous basic human rights, the right to self-reliance, and overall freedom to live independently.

Figure 1: Intersectionality



The second principle is to promote an intersectional approach and creating an understanding towards disabled persons as the main warranty against xenophobia, marginalization, and vulnerability-based solutions that often lead to escalated exploitation and violence towards

disabled persons. Policies and practices based on intersectional approach bring a broader understanding of disability, challenge and remove barriers, and create broad accessbility.

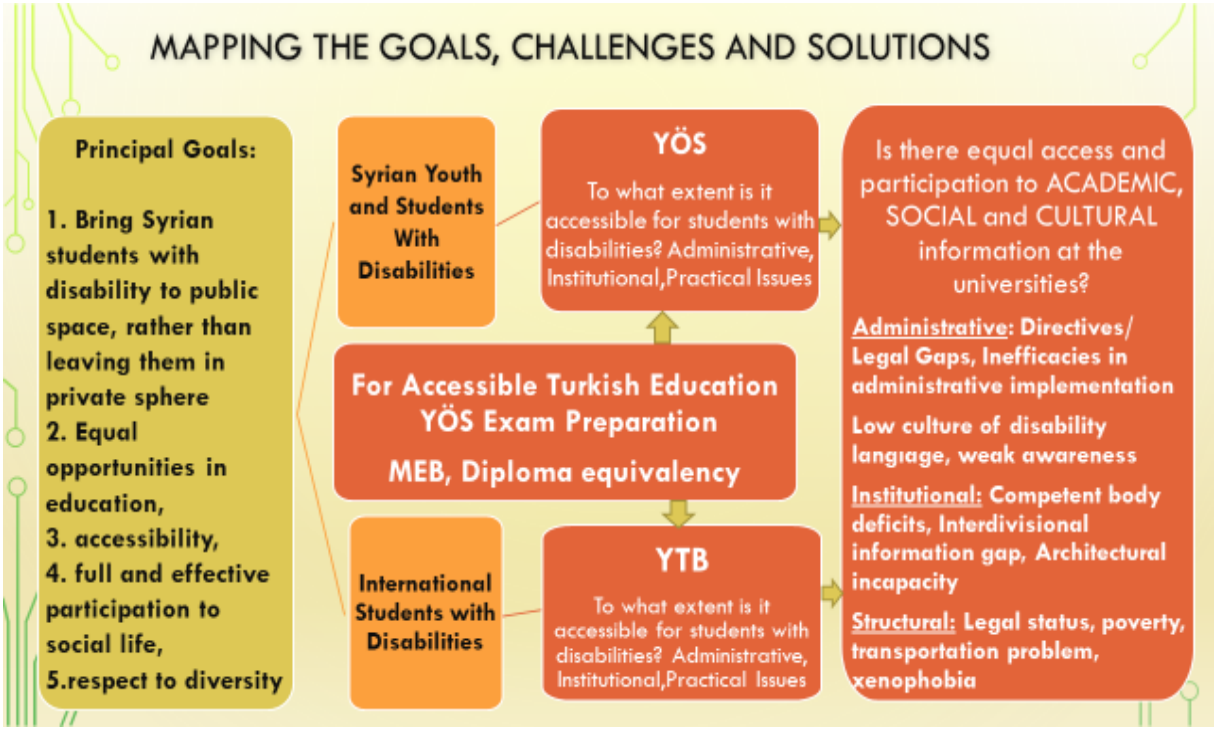
Finally, promoting communication and solidarity between the host society and migrants with disabilities, without any discrimination and human rights violation constitutes the main path towards sustainable, accessible and inclusive international protection.

Picture 1: Workshop on Obstacles, Experiences and Solutions in Higher Education of Syrian students with Disability in Turkey, held at IU Rectorate Building on January 11th, 2019

The data collection, research and evaluations have been reached throughout a bottom-up participatory approach. Disabled Syrian students were involved in all activities of the UDISES Project as the main discussants, speakers, presenters and strategy designers. They told their stories during their panel, expressed their problems and demands in the front of the bureaucrats from public institutions (Presidency For Turks Aboard And Related Communities (YTB) and Directorate General on Migration Management), NGOs working in the fields of disability and migration (UNHCR, UNWOMEN, Yuva Association, ASAM-SGDD, etc.) and Disability Centers and YÖS Exam for Foreign Students Centers of Universities in Istanbul. Networks established by the Syrian youth such as Syrian Special Needs Organization and Students Without Borders were involved and had played a guiding role during the Project activities.

Observations, presentations, official contacts, experience sharing, workshops, meetings and short interviews constituted the primary research data sources.

Figure 2: EU HOPES UDISES "Bring Future Back" Project Map



The main goals of the UDISES Project were:

- to cross over migration and disability studies within the unique case of Syrian students with disability at the higher education system in Turkey;
- to define and challenge the barriers that policies, practices, performances, perceptions/prejudices raise in the front of Syrian students with disability on their way to higher education in Turkey.

UDISES Project aims to find ways for accessible education, full and effective participation to social life, and respect to diversity. Finally, the Project aims at bringing to the fore the administrative, institutional, structural and societal barriers that prevent disabled migrant and refugee youth to exercise their right to education.

2. Global Disability in Displacement

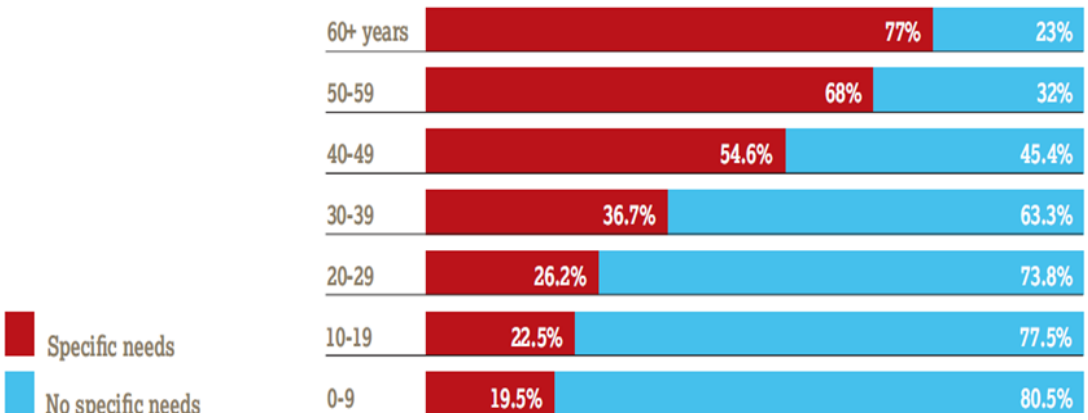
Recent conflicts and wars aglomerated the number of displaced persons with disabilities up to one in every five refugees. Persons with disabilities make up around 15 % of the global population and comprise a significant minority of refugees and migrants (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016, August 19).

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in March 2011, more than 470.000 Syrians have been killed (Benard, 2016), and approximately half of the population have been displaced (Save the Children, 2016; Bevington, 2016). More than 7.6 million people have been internally displaced, and more than 4.2 million people have been living as migrants/refugees outside Syria (UN, 2016). Additionally, according to the Syrian Government Report in 2015, more than 1.5 million people lost either their arms or legs (El Watan, 2015). Besides, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimated that 13.5 million Syrians (including 1.5 million persons with disabilities) were in need of humanitarian aid by August 2015. More than half of this number consists of children (UNOCHA, 2015). Furthermore, UNOCHA has also estimated that due to the ongoing conflict at least 2.8 million Syrians have been left disabled as of December 2016 (UNOCHA, 2017). There are ongoing debates on the validity of these percentages since there are still vital problems regarding depiction and registration of the displaced migrants and refugees with disabilities.

A great number of displaced people with disabilities remain unregistered due to administrative disabilities and discriminative procedures or personal perceptions and preferences. There is still no reliable data regarding the age and gender aspect of the disabled persons on the move. Neither is there a detailed database on the variety of disabilities among the displaced population. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found out that in the case of Greece, mental health issues are most prevalent among women and children who come from Afghanistan and Syria. According to federal basic care facilities staff report published in Austria, psychosocial disabilities occur most often among young males and unaccompanied children (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016, August 19).

HelpAge International and Handicap International (2014) reported the percentage of survey refugees with specific needs per age category in *Hidden victims of the Syrian crisis: disabled, injured and older refugees*:

Figure 3: Survey-based age data about Syrian refugees with special needs



There is an insufficient number of recent studies based on international or national direct and reliable data collection. Thus, one of the primary aims of the UDISES Project was to collect accurate data about disabled refugees in Turkey.

3. Syrian Refugees and Disability Regulations Under the Turkish International Protection and Foreigners Law

As a neighbouring country, Turkey hosts more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees. Around half of this population is constituted by children of school age (DGMM, 2017). According to the official data based on official status registration, there are 18,511 disabled Syrian refugees in Turkey, around 0.5% of the Syrian population in Turkey. Men constitute about 62% of the Syrians with disabilities, while women form 38% of the officially registered disabled Syrian refugees under temporary protection. This data consists only of the registered Syrian refugees who succeed to retrieve the special disability health report, thus are able to prove and register their disability during their application for temporary protection (See Table 1). There is no data available about the age structure of the disabled Syrian population in Turkey.

Table 1. Syrian Population under Temporary Protection in Turkey, January 2019

Syrian Population under Protection in Turkey	Man	Woman	Total
All (%)	1.977.154 (54%)	1.667.193 (46%)	3.644.347
People with Disabilities (%)	11.463 (62%)	7.048 (38%)	18.511 (0.5%)

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management Turkey, 07 February 2019

Provided by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), this official data does not correspond to the number of disabled Syrians claimed by the Syrian Association for Disability in Antep that stated about 650,000 Syrian persons with disabilities.[1] This inconsistency in the data is caused by various conditions such as uncompleted and partial registration, inaccurate data on impairment/disability, or inaccurate interpretation of disability. Indeed, the official DGMM data (provided in Table 1) does not include the disabled Syrian refugees who could not retrieve the required Health Council Report that defines and proves the percentage of disability.

Turkey is a signatory country of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Rights of the Refugees. Nonetheless, according to the 1967 New York Protocol Turkey applies geographical restriction on the basis of granting refugee status only to those who come from European Council member states (Baklacıoğlu & Özer, 2011). As a consequence of this restriction, refugees coming from Syria can not claim refugee status in Turkey. Yet, under the regulations of 2013 International Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Turkey has provided Syrian war

[1] Personal communication with Nur İncetahtacı in Gaziantep

refugees temporary international protection involving access to free health and education services as well as the right to legal employment (Kartal & Manço, 2018).

Under the Temporary Protection Directive around 3,600,000 Syrian refugees are accommodated under temporary protection status in Turkey. This status is regulated under national directives and regulations related to the Article 91 of the 6458 Law on Foreigners and International Protection. It is important to underline that the temporary protection status is under the jurisprudence of the national law and national political preferences. It does not provide international protection as delineated under the jurisprudence of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Rights of the Refugees. The introduction and dismissal of the temporary protection status belong to political decision taken by the Turkish president.

According to the Article 91 (Temporary Protection) of 6458 numbered Law on Foreigners and International Protection is:

1- Temporary protection may be provided to foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection

2- The actions to be carried out for the reception of such foreigners into Turkey; their stay in Turkey and rights and obligations; their exit from Turkey; measures to be taken to prevent mass influxes; cooperation and coordination among national and international institutions and organisations; determination of the duties and mandate of the central and provincial institutions and organisations shall be stipulated in a Directive to be issued by the Council of Ministers.

The main features of the Temporary Protection policy in Turkey were based on open door policy, allowing Syrian refugees to enter the Turkish sovereign territory, and temporary accommodation based on humanitarian response covering the basic and emergent needs of the officially registered Syrian refugees. As a party to the 1951 Convention, Turkey follows the principle of non-refoulment. Yet, the duration of the temporary protection is under the auspices of the government as well as Turkey-EU deal on Return creates ambiguities in the implementation.

Based on the Article 91 of the 6458 Law, in October 2014 the Turkish Government enforced the 2014/6883 numbered Temporary Protection Regulation that regulated the acceptance, coordination, settlement, residence, employment and access to social services for war refugees or international protection applications due to forced mass inflows. Temporary protection status is open to all displaced persons involved into mass inflows reaching Turkey. However, this status is activated upon application to and confirmation by the DGMM in Turkey.

The temporary protection status treats the mass flow refugees with disabilities under the humanitarian category of foreigners with special needs. This category involves foreigners such as unaccompanied children, elderly, pregnant women, single mothers and fathers, persons

who have undergone gender-based physical or psychological violence or repression. Temporary protection holders with special needs are usually provided access to services such as facilitated entrance to the country, temporary protection registration, free health services at the public hospitals, free education at the public schools, psycho-social support and resettlement to a third country. Children with special needs are approached under the principle of the best interest of the child; victims of violence are placed under special protection framework.

The right to public education of Syrian refugee children has been designed under consecutive circular of the Ministry of National Education Turkey (MEB) launched between April 2013 and September 2014. The Ministry of National Education circular "2014/21 Education Services for Foreigners" emphasizes Turkey's responsibility as a signatory of the relevant international conventions and the 6458 Law on Asylum. This circular designs all aspects of Syrian access to education in details and emphasizes the right to education for Syrian children.

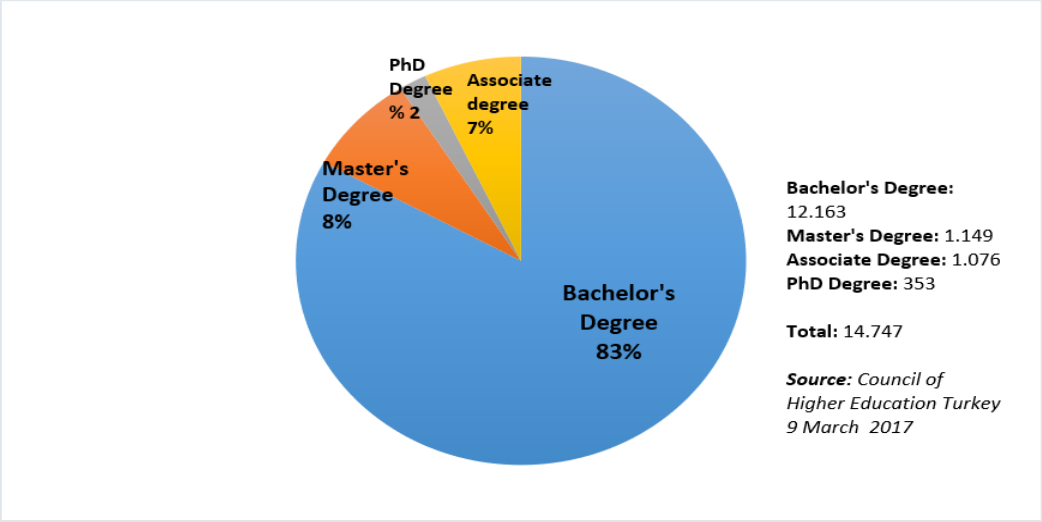
Previously Syrian children were provided with educational services in both public schools or so-called Temporary Education Centers (GEM) established by and for the Syrian community. In 2018, the GEM's were closed and/or replaced with public schools. The circulars accepted "foreign credentials" without "residence permit" as sufficient for Syrian children who want to enroll in public schools. Online registration and evaluation system called "e-school" has been adapted to record the Syrian students and support their schooling. The "Foreign Student Information Management System" (YÖBİS) passwords enable online registration, success evaluation, and all other procedures related to Syrian children enrollment to the public schools. Syrian children who have foreign identification document/foreign identity number are being registered to schools through these passwords, while Syrian children who do not have a foreign identity number/foreign identification document can be enrolled as a visiting student.

The Syrian access to the higher education system is designed under the Amendment of the Regulation on the Principles of the Transition between the Programs in the Higher Education Institutions with Associate Degree and Bachelor's Degree Programs, and Double Major. According to Article 2 of this regulation, students who have already started pre-bachelor's, bachelor's and master's degrees (except Proficiency and Dentistry Specialization programs) in Syria and Egypt before the year 2013-2014 are provided the opportunity to transfer to higher education institutions in Turkey. In most cases, the transfers are free of charge, yet, relevant diplomas or transcripts are required. By the year 2018-2019 we were not able to identify special regulations regarding the foreign or Syrian students with disabilities. International students with disabilities usually solve their problems by reference to International Students Offices or Disabled Students Bureaus situated at the universities' Student Affairs Offices. So far, none of the e-school, web or online application and information systems are accessible for the disabled students with visual or learning difficulties. Students within this category do not have any facilitated procedure. Applications of these students are being proceeded by their relatives.

4. Syrian Youth/ Students with disabilities in Turkey

According to the 2017 Migration Report prepared by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior, there were 605,443 registered Syrian students in Turkey. About 358,205 of these students were registered at public schools and about 238,641 of them followed the so-called temporary education centers (DGMM, 2017). In the year 2018-19 the number of the registered students increased only by 0.01% reaching 655,075. About 26,539 Syrian students left the education system for employment reasons. The total number of the Syrian school-age children in Turkey is 1,047,536 (Ministry of National Education Turkey, 2019). While 97% of the Syrian students are registered at the elementary, primary and secondary school level, the number of students registered at the higher education remains below four percent. The number of Syrian students registered at the higher education system in the year 2018-2019 increased to 20,701. Around 80% of these students are registered at the bachelor's level.

Figure 4: Syrian University Students in Turkey (March 2017)

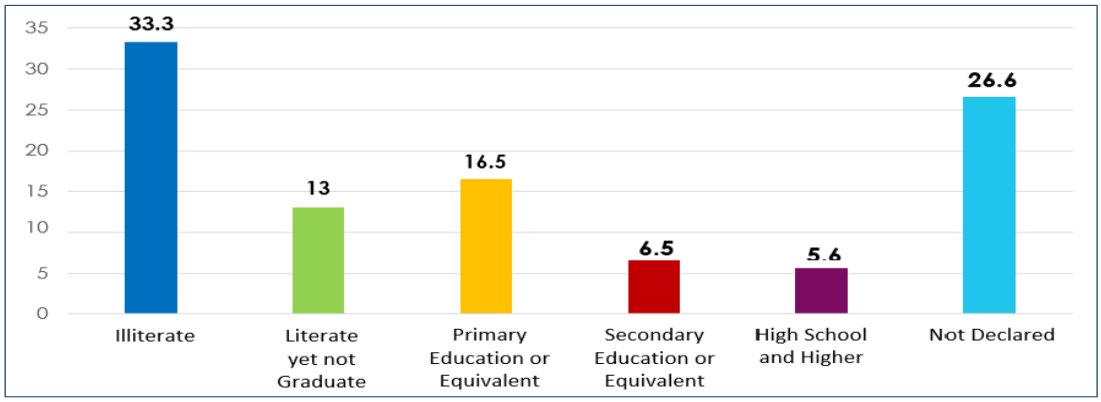


Although education at the public schools and universities is usually free of charge or charges low affordable costs, the high living expenses constitute the most important challenge for the Syrian students. Most of them have to contribute to family income, some of the Syrian students have to take care of large families, thus have to work, even while studying at high school or university. Financial shortcomings and increased poverty are the major challenges restricting the Syrian students' access to higher education (Yuva Association, 2018).

As a border country to the Syrian conflict, Turkey provides the closest and low-cost shelter and medical care for Syrians coming from the northern rural and less developed regions of Syria. The high rate of illiterate and low skilled Syrian population in Turkey points to the fact

that majority of the Syrian refugees in Turkey seek for unqualified employment and do not have sufficient resources to follow higher education.

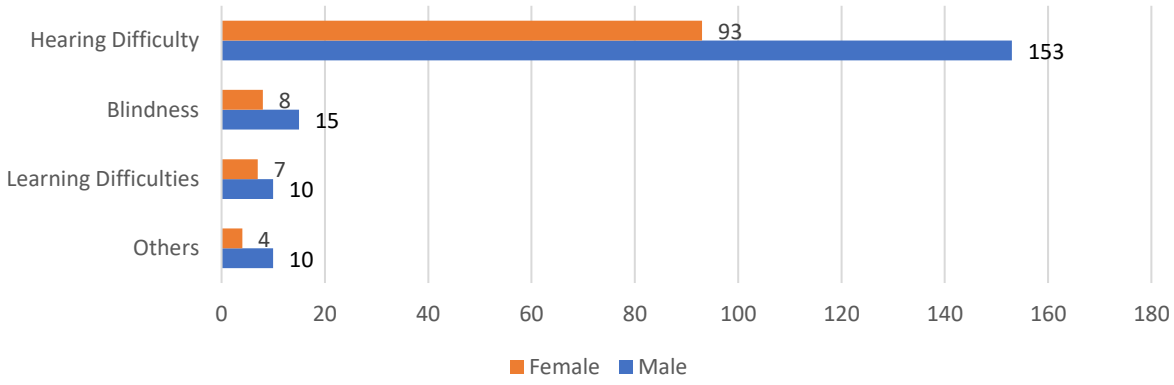
Figure 5: Level of Education among registered Syrians in Turkey



Source: Ministry of Development Turkey, March 2015

Comprehensive data about the number of disabled Syrian students in Turkey is not available. The Ministry of National Education data points to 300 disabled students (188 males, 112 females) following primary or secondary education during the year 2017-18. The types of disabilities of these students are visualized in the following graphic.

Figure 6: Major Disability Types Among Registered Syrian Students Following Primary And Secondary Degree İn The Year 2017-2018



The number of students with special learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia) is reported much higher than the number of the students with disabilities. While in 2017-2018 school year the number of Syrian students with learning difficulties in Turkey reached 12,000-13,000 at the primary and secondary school, their number sharply decreased during the last three years of the secondary education to 33 students at the last year. Only 8 Syrian students with learning difficulties continue to the university preparation class. This sharp decrease in the school participation is due to lack of accessible higher education system application, registration, information and examination, unaffordable cost expectation, family dependency,

and lack of financial resources.[2] All these factors lead to a loss of hope for access to higher education. Even if students with disabilities or learning difficulties succeed to reach higher education out of their city of residence, they cannot afford it separated from their families, because of two reasons: the high cost of living in another city and loss of direct family care that they usually depend on. Therefore, the number of Syrian disabled students who succeed to reach higher education is very low.

The Council of Higher Education Turkey (YÖK) reports only eight Syrian students with disabilities registered at higher education in Turkey.[3] This number points to another administrative handicap in the accessibility to the higher education system. It represents only the number of the students who were able to prove their disability via required Health Council Report. Those are most probably the 8 Syrian students with disabilities registered at Gaziantep University. This data does not include disabled Syrian students who could not or did not provide the required health council report during their application to the YOS (Examination for Foreign Students applying to higher education in Turkey) system or university. [4]

Indeed, during the UDISES Project, we had the opportunity to involve 17 Syrian students with disabilities studying at different universities around Turkey. Majority of the disabled students who could not retrieve the required Health Council Report complain about the long and complicated procedure and language barrier that frustrated them from following it all. The narrow and handicapped approach of the health system constitutes the first hard administrative barrier in front of the Syrian disabled students. It prevents their right to ask for an accessible application and examination. Although most of the 42 YÖS examination centers have the required technical opportunities to provide accessible exams and tests to disabled applicants, this mechanism works only upon official health report and request for appropriate exam design. Although many of the interviewed Syrian students with disability had the opportunity to undergo some necessary medical treatments and operations (upon certain additional payment), the lack of health council reports reminds that many disabled Syrian children and youth may not have sustainable access to relevant social and health services.

On the other hand, education itself constitutes one of the most discriminative systems in regard to all disabled children in Turkey. Only 15% of the Turkish citizens with disabilities succeeded to complete a two-year or four-year high school/university. Indeed, 60% of the interviewed disabled Turkish citizens defined discrimination as the highest in the field of

[2] Coordinated by Kızılay, the Conditional Education Aid Project has been initiated with the idea to fight child labor in the ages between 6 and 17. Within this assistance fund,children who follow secondary education were granted monthly assistance of 50-60 TL. However, the amount of the assistance is not sufficient to dissuade families from removing their kids from school See Further: Türkkızılay, *Türkiye'de Yaşayan Suriyeli Çocukların Eğitime Erişimi ve Katılım: Bağcılar Örneği*, 2017.

[3] Data officially requested from the Council of Higher Education Turkey, 2019.

[4] Reliable, robust data are needed on the numbers and profile of disabled migrants and refugees. Disability Statistics should be disaggregated so that the percentages of persons with disabilities and their different situations become obvious so that the problem can be seen in its true dimensions. These statistics should also be gender-disaggregated. Separate studies need to be made on each dimension as disability, migration and gender with an intersectional approach so that the effect of each aspect can be separately assessed.

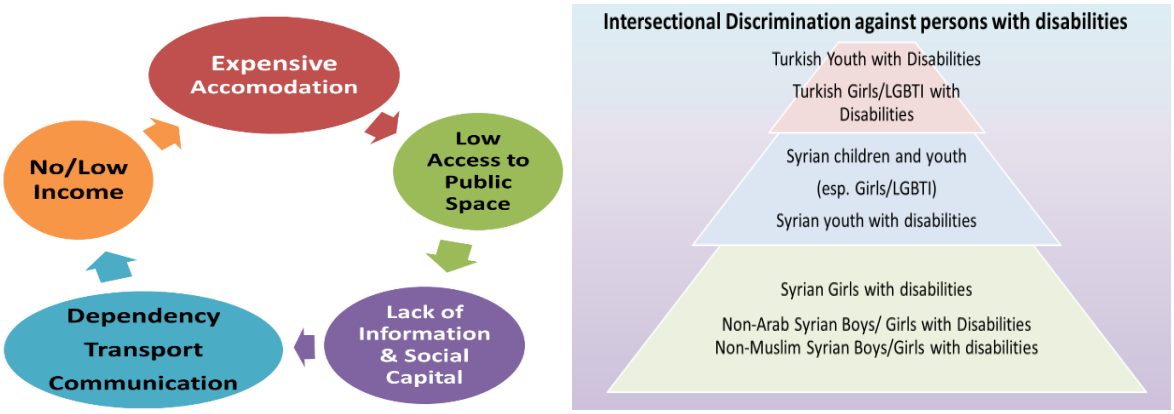
education. Discrimination in education is followed by discrimination in employment (15%) and the health sector (10%). Low access to secondary education and public space are significant hurdles that limit the hopes for higher education as well (Association for Monitoring Equal Rights (ESHID), 2018).

Discrimination in education and employment aglomerates twice when it comes to disabled refugees and migrants under temporary protection. Indeed, this is the case with the Syrian disabled youth in Turkey who has to cope with structural poverty, various economic, cultural and social discriminations and inequalities. Besides the administrative barriers that prevent the recognition and registration of the Syrian disabled students, there are significant structural conditions that eliminate the access to higher education for disabled Syrian youth.

5. Social, Cultural and Structural Challenges in front of the Disabled Syrian Students Access to Higher Education in Turkey

As critical disability studies argue, persons with disabilities find themselves in a complex network of social relations that, in turn, determine their capacities for self-realization and success. Thus, education is not only important for academic and cognitive development and qualification, but it is a mean of developing life skills to reduce a priory inequality, it gives persons the chance to communicate and develop socially by leaving the walls of the private space through interaction with others. Education is a medium for learning particular skills, find employment and break the dependency on the family and structural poverty (Smith- Khan, 2013, p. 3). Indeed, education acts as a self-empowering strategy for coping with the endless circle of structural violence that disabled refugees face in most of the receiving countries.

Figure 6: ***Circle of Structural Poverty***



Lack of income and low chances for employment are the determinants that construct the mobility and communication dependency as the major wall surrounding disabled Syrian students. This immobility and dependency, on the other hand, reproduce imprisonment within the private space, lack of information and social capital that are of utmost importance

for developing coping strategies against the challenges of the disabling environment and structural poverty.

Structural poverty is an important problem for all disabled persons. However, while for example, the average income of Turkish youth with disabilities in 2018 was about 2000 TL per month, for Syrian youth with disabilities who hold Kızılay humanitarian support card it was 120 TL. Poverty is already a typical feature of 4,882,841 disabled citizens in Turkey (TurkStat, 2011). According to the ESHID (2018), the number of disabled citizens in Turkey had reached 12 million by the end of 2018. More than 40% of the disabled population in Turkey live below the poverty line. [5] Yet, as a result of social exploitation, low and irregular income, and high rents, the rate of Syrians living under the poverty line is twice as high.

This situation gets worse for the Syrian girls/women with disabilities or Syrian students with non-Muslim or non-Arabic identity background who face multiple discrimination and inequalities. As intersectionality approach suggests, multiple identities contribute to the oppression and discrimination leading to more than a single disadvantage. Women with disabilities have fewer opportunities to access health care, education, and employment. For instance, the rate of higher education graduation among disabled men in Turkey is 4%, while only 1.5% among disabled women (TUIK, 2011). Indeed, during the UDISES Project, we could reach only one Syrian woman student with hearing difficulties who had to interrupt her studies because she was not provided an accessible classroom, lecturing and examination opportunities. As stated by The Global Gender Gap Index 2018, Turkey and Syria, (ranked 130th and Syria 146th respectively) both countries already stayed behind in regard to the gender-based equality in the field of economic, educational, health and political participation.

Table 2. Global rankings, 2018

Country	Global Index		Economic Participation and Opportunity		Educational Attainment		Health and Survival		Political Empowerment	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Iceland	1	0.858	16	0.793	39	0.999	121	0.968	1	0.674
Norway	2	0.835	11	0.806	41	0.999	95	0.972	3	0.563
Sweden	3	0.822	9	0.808	52	0.998	115	0.969	7	0.512
Turkey	**130**	**0.628**	**131**	**0.466**	**106**	**0.968**	**67**	**0.976**	**113**	**0.101**
Syria	146	0.568	148	0.273	113	0.955	1	0.980	135	0.063

Source: The Global Gender Gap Index, 2018

In the case of disabled Syrian students, gender-based discrimination often combines with tough social and cultural barriers that lead to exclusionary behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions that discriminate against disabled students. These barriers often emerge because of a lack of understanding, ignorance, and misjudgements about Syrian students with disability. Attitudinal barriers are often experienced by all disabled students and often include reluctance or negative attitudes of the persons without disabilities. The lack of awareness of

the teaching staff, for example, is of tremendous importance for the academic success of the disabled student. Education methods that do not take under consideration the different mobility, communication or language-based needs of disabled students halters appropriate and fruitful participation to the in-class education process.

Disablist approaches may influence the psycho-emotional well- being of disabled students resulting in low-esteem and social isolation. Indeed, many Syrian students do not want to disclose their disability because of negative attitudes, fear of discrimination and stigmatisation. Being both disabled and Syrian make them open to hate speech and degrading attitudes. As a result of the language barrier and low knowledge of the Turkish language, Syrian disabled students are prone to poor academic performance in comparison to their Turkish peers or students without disabilities. Various environmental and organizational barriers often aggravate those experiences.

Lack of accessible environment constitutes the primary challenge that forces disabled students to interrupt their education. Access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems is the basic right of the disabled students. Lack of physical accessibility and appropriate architectural design of the university buildings, houses, open spaces and sidewalks usually discourages students with mobility difficulties and blindness from continuing their education. Expensive transport services are one of the hardest barriers in front of low-income disabled students. One of the main problems of the Syrian students is the lack of cheap and accessible transport. The municipal transportation services are very insufficient; thus universities are the institutions that have to support or assist with accessible transportation.

Although disabled students constitute the most well-trained and creative digital technology consumers, their efforts become short when the institutions, i.e. universities do not design their information and announcement systems in an accessible way. Lack of reasonable adjustments for obtaining and making data or information lead to disinformation, externalization and failure to follow the education procedures. All of these end up with failure in the education. Majority of the universities in Turkey do not provide access in class technology, web-based learning, and document preparation. This is generally due to the lack of appropriate coding and formats for communication with disabled students with different needs. Almost all of the university websites are not Java affiliated, thus not accessible for students with visual difficulties. There are no subtitles in videos, sign language interpreter, accessible multimedia and augmentative and alternative modes that can make the web sites accessible for students with visual or hearing difficulties.

Procedures and practices, courses or curricula that are not designed according to the needs of the disabled students construct organizational barriers that lead to discrimination and exclusion of the disabled students. The lack of accessible communication, information and application network leaves disabled students dependent on others' mercy or assistance. In

addition to these organizational barriers, Syrian disabled students use to face academic barriers based on lack of Turkish language knowledge and relevant social capital, lack of legal documents, and lack the opportunity to retrieve and provide high school degree documents or get degree equivalency.

Complex and decentralized admission provides background for inconsistent and discriminatory performances regarding the admission procedures. While some universities apply tough requirements of official high school graduation documents, others adopt exceptionalist stance in this regard. For example, the Turkish Ministry of National Education offers 12th-grade equivalency tests for refugee students who are not able to present the required academic records. So far, this exam is not accessible for Syrian students with disabilities. These legal documents remain an essential precondition for access to higher education.

Important handicaps persist regarding the Examination for Foreign Students YÖS, as the main door to Higher Education in Turkey. Available in 7 different languages, the YÖS website, information and application system is not accessible for disabled students**.** Syrian students who want to enroll in the higher education in Turkey have to pass the YÖS exam[6] which consists of two tests: a basic learning skills test and a Turkish language proficiency test. The questions in the Basic Learning Skills Test are available in Turkish, Arabic and English, but not accessible for disabled students. There are 42 YÖS stations in Turkey and abroad, none of these centers have active accessible YÖS web page and exam design, i.e., Java accessibility, videos with subtitles, sign language interpreter, accessible multimedia or augmentative and alternative modes. Administrative representatives who were interviewed stated that one of the reasons for this gap is the lack of disabled student applications and the gaps in the identification of the disabled students. Shortly, the administrators and service providers expect disabled students to apply and insist on those technical modifications and arrangements.

Some technical experts and programmers who deal with the university information systems say that the used programs are not adoptable for the technology that is used by disabled people (this is usually Java program). Some authorities say that the installation of the required text in videos, sign language interpreter and related multimedia is very expensive and a complicated procedure. According to the disabled students, screen reader technology accompanied by subtitles informing about visuals is sufficient for the blind students to follow the relevant web sites. Videos that do not contain conversation can become accessible via audible description. Deaf students must be provided sign language and subtitle options.[7] Actually, all these installations are available at the Istanbul University Disability Information Center that provides services for visually impaired students and academic/administrative staff

[6] A detailed guide can be found on Yuva Association, Road Map of Access to Higher Education For Syrian Youth, https://yuva.org.tr/pdf/unihazirlik_rehber_eng.pdf

[7] Interview with Ilgın Aydınoğlu, IU ENUYGAR

in Istanbul University Central Library. In the center, there are 20 computers with special screen reading programs, 10 computers with screen magnification programs, video magnifiers for persons with low vision, two Braille displays, three Braille printers, 5 optical character recognition programs and two relief graphics and image printing machines. Furthermore, there are two fully equipped cabins for audiobooks.

The Istanbul University Experience: Strengths and Weaknesses

In 2005, the newly launched Disability Act ordered the establishment of Disability Advisory and Coordination Units at Higher Education Institutes in Turkey. Accordingly, higher education institutions were required to support students with disabilities and to guarantee educational opportunities equal to those of their typically developing peers. Istanbul University is one of the first universities that implemented the propositions of the 2005 Disability Act before its introduction.

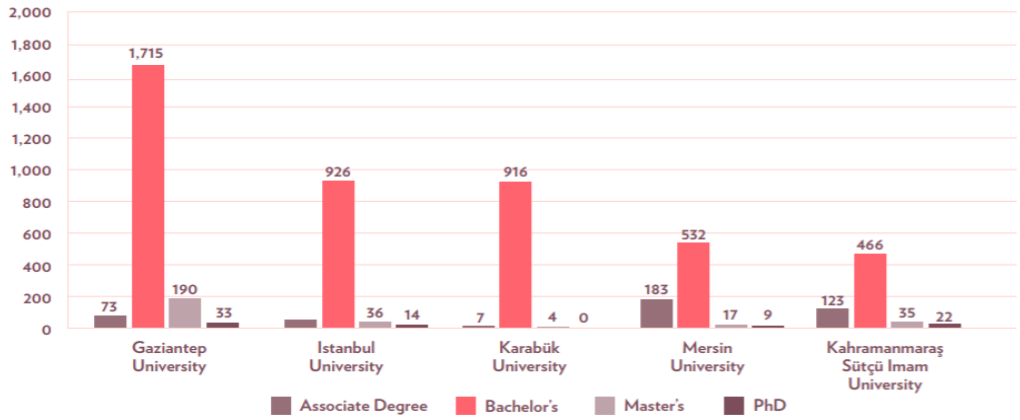
In December 2003, the Rectorate of Istanbul University established the ENUYGAR, Istanbul University Disability Applied Research Center. Since 2003, ENUYGAR provide partial solutions (physical, academic etc.) to students with disabilities. In 2005 Istanbul University established the required Disability Advisory and Coordination Units, while the Disability Applied Research Center (ENUYGAR) was restructured as a separate unit for coordination of students with disabilities studying at Istanbul University. Since then, IU ENUYGAR Coordination Unit for Students with Special Needs accommodates and facilitates the accessibility of the education system at the university, as well as the enrollment and participation of disabled students at various higher-education related experiences.

Since 2011, Istanbul University and ENUGAR hosted 1398 students with disability. In the meantime, ENUYGAR experience has developed and based on all this experience ENUYGAR drafted criteria and suggestions for accessible education at Istanbul University. Some of the ENUYGAR suggestions have been implemented, they were provided appropriate infrastructure and offices. In 2014 Istanbul University Senate approved '*The Rules for Equal Opportunities in Education for Students with Special Needs*'. This is an official guideline for constructing an inclusive higher education environment at the university campuses. The Rules foresee principles such as equal opportunities in education, accessibility, avoiding any kind of discrimination, full and effective participation to social life, respect to diversity, and protection of personal information.

Yet, both the International Students Office and ENUYGAR lack sufficient qualified staff, they also lack further institutional and personnel capacity in dealing with the problems and procedures of displaced students. There are also some problems in identifying the disabled students. Istanbul University is the biggest public university in Turkey with an enrollment of

253,924 students.[8] This number gives hints for the existence of a higher number of disabled students. However, either those students do not want to disclose their disability, or the application, examination and registration systems do not have the required capacity to identify the disabled students. Indeed, only disabled students who reached and registered via ENUYGAR's application form got access to the ENUYGAR's assistance and services.
The same identification problem exists regarding the access to Syrian students with disabilities studying at Istanbul University. After Gaziantep University, Istanbul University is second in regard to the number of enrolled Syrian students.

Figure 7: Universities with the highest Syrian Students enrollment



Source: Wiebke Hohberger, Opportunities in the Higher Education for Syrians in Turkey, Data from Council of Higher Education Turkey.

The number of Syrian students enrolled in the higher education at Istanbul University reached 1,217 by January 2019.

Table 3: Syrian Students Registered in the Higher Education System in Turkey by *January 2019*

	Man	Woman	Total
All Turkish Universities	12.980(63%)	7.721(37%)	20.701
Istanbul University	745(61%)	472(39%)	1.217

Source: Council of Higher Education Turkey Statistics, 2017-2018.

Indeed, Istanbul University manages 24 of the most intensive YÖS examination stations in Turkey and abroad.[9]

[8] The other YÖS exam centers are situated at the following universities: Marmara, Yıldız Technical, Galatasaray, İstanbul Kültür and İstanbul Medeniyet University.
[9] The other YOS exam centers are situated at the following universities: Marmara Üniversitesi, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, Galatasaray Üniversitesi, İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi, İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi

Table 4. YÖS Exam Stations

İ.Ü.YÖS Exam Stations In Turkey		İ.Ü.YÖS Exam Stations Abroad	
İstanbul	Ankara	Germany – Cologne	Northern Cyprus, Turkish Republic - Lefkoşa
Adana	İzmir	Azarbaijan – Baku	Mali - Bamako
Erzurum	Gaziantep	Algeria – Algeria	Egypt - Cairo
Hatay	İpsala (Edirne)	Indonesia – Jakarta	Mauritania - Nouakchott
Şanlıurfa	Trabzon	Kazakhstan - Almaty	Sudan - Khartoum
Mardin	Van	Kyrgyzstan - Bishkek	Saudi Arabia - Jeddah

Source: Ministry of National Education Official Reply to Istanbul University

In 2018, the student record system pointed to 13 disabled Syrian students enrolled into higher education at Istanbul University. Those students were registered to the university as foreign students under the YÖS program. After the investigation of these student records we found out that while filling the registration form those students placed a tick to disability by mistake, hopefully they misinterpret the disability options such as “special needs”, “learning difficulties” and “speech and language problems” as related to insufficiencies in their control over Turkish language. As it is well known, low knowledge of the Turkish language is one of the most common problems among Syrian students.

Another explanation might be that Syrian disabled students who enter the universities via YÖS system, could profit from tuition discounts. However, a majority of the Syrian students at the universities in Turkey continue their education under the ruling of the Article 2 and do not pay education fees, thus do not need to declare their disabilities. This facilitation prevents the identification of disabled Syrian students at Istanbul University. We also have to underline that the applications of the disabled youth are also very limited due to the low accessibility and competition opportunities at the secondary grade. So far none of the relevant web sites, neither YÖS nor Istanbul University web sites became fully accessible for initial applications of students with visual difficulties. The students with physical and hearing disabilities can partly benefit from these websites on their own, but the other students with psychological, learning and linguistic difficulties need third party assistance.

So far, almost all the Disability Coordination Centers available at the universities in Turkey require personal applications and registrations of the disabled students. ENUYGAR assistance and mechanisms get into action upon personal applications by the disabled students. When the websites are not accessible for direct personal application, disabled students avoid those procedures or never learn about them at all. For example, most of the disabled students that were invited to the UDISES Project activities could not be reached through the university communication mechanisms, but were found and connected via Syrian youth blogs, Syrian Disability Association and related networks. The linguistic and cultural barrier seems to have a tremendous impact on communication among the university bureaucracy and the Syrian

students.

On the other hand, Istanbul University has relatively strong and active disability network and infrastructure. Two disability coordination units are working full time at IU campuses. These units are operated by the Faculty/School Academic Consultants. All students that need special assistance and arrangements are invited to the Beyazıt or Avcılar campus offices. Students who declare disability (via the e-application form at engelsiz@istanbul.edu.tr), verified by relevant medical documentation are requested to fill out questionnaires with their personal information, problems, needs and adjustments. The information is kept completely confidential and cannot be shared with third parties. ENUYGAR Coordination Unit for Disabled Students provides academic accommodation, institutional support, social support and recreational training that involves the following services:

a) Academic Accommodation

- Facilitated Registration
- Campus orientation
- Services related to the provision of lecture notes-reader support, taking notes, taking voice recordings and other services (Preparation of training materials (e-texts, Braille printing, audiobooks, internet supply of welded materials etc.) via the Disability Information Center within the Istanbul University Central Library and Documentation Head Office;)
- Assistive assistant support in laboratory training
- Homework assistance (Providing different applications in terms of presentation and duration in accordance with the student's preference)
- In-time provision of special tools and equipment for education to students with financial difficulties
- Accessibile exams are designed via:
    - Questionnaires in different formats - enlarged font, embossed font, audio file, etc.
    - Readers and/or markers of the exam terminology
    - Additional exam duration
    - Access to the exam room, single-room hall provision, etc.
    - Permission to enter the exam with the necessary tools (medicine, medical equipment, hearing aid, magnifying glass, etc.

b) Social Support and Recreational Activities

- 'Independent Living Skills Training' for visually impaired students
- Priority in registration for university dormitories
- Scholarships and opportunity in part-time working student program through the Counseling and Social Support Unit

- Accessible architectural arrangements through the Department of Construction Affairs (ramps and lifts construction, arranging accessible toilets, accessible elevators, etc.)
- Repositioning of classrooms and other activities in non-accessible buildings
- Sport opportunities in accord with the student interests (chess, tandem bike, etc.)
- Facilitated application and access to Enez Summer Camp of IU
- Regular ceramic and marbling courses at IU ENUYGAR Art Workshop
- Social skills training and personal counselling services through the Career Development Center (KAGEM)
- Psychiatrist and Psychological support services through Medico and Guidance Counselling Social Support Unit
- Guidance for post-graduation job opportunities through governmental and non-governmental organizations,

All those ENUYGAR services are provided under the following procedural order:

Operational Chart of ENUYGAR Disabled Students Coordination Unit

- ***At the beginning of each academic year, ENUYGAR Coordination Unit requests the list of disabled students who enrolled at IU from the I.U. Registration Office***

↓

- ***A special congratulatory letter, signed by the Rector of IU is sent to the students' home address, including the Brochures of ENUYGAR Coordination Unit and the IU Handbook for Equal Opportunities for Students with Special Needs***

↓

- ***Students that register to the Faculty's Students Affairs Office are informed about ENUYGAR Coordination Unit and encouraged to visit/register personally or via internet website***

↓

- ***ENUYGAR Coordinator welcomes the student and provides information about the services***

↓

- ***The student completes and signs the 'Personal Information Form' and declares demand for academic accommodations***

↓

- ***All faculties, schools, and institutes of Istanbul University have academic advisors (faculty members and residents) who are assigned to support the disabled students***

↓

- ***ENUYGAR Coordinator fills the 'Information Sharing Document' belonging to the applicant student and sends them to Academic Advisors in closed envelopes***

↓

- ***The academic advisors and ENUYGAR Coordinator work jointly in order to provide the students with the services they require, and to carry out the course and exam adjustments in accordance with the needs of disabled students.***

↓

- ***If necessary adaptations are not made, disabled students apply to ENUYGAR Coordinator by e-mail or petition. With the Coordinator, he/she will fill out and sign the 'Informative Document for the Instructor of Special Needs Students' and hand it both to the academic advisor and the instructor.***

↓

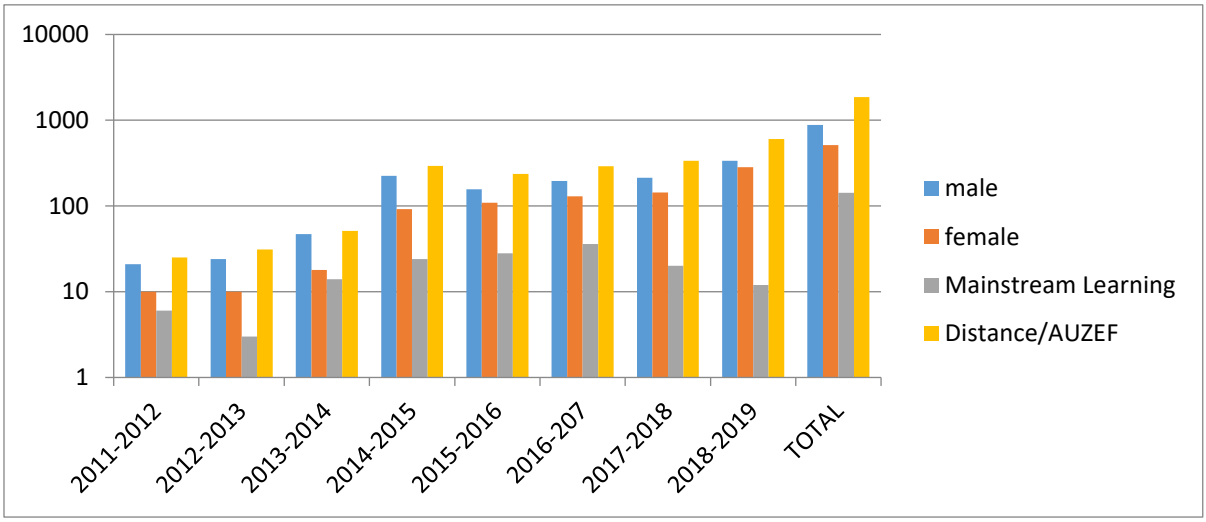
- ***In case of a contravention or negligence, Faculty Deans, Schools and Institute Director are informed.***

↓

- ***Academic advisors report to the ENUYGAR Coordinator twice a year (fall and spring semesters) for the students they are responsible for.***

After the launch of AUZEF Distance Learning programme in 2013, the number of registered disabled students increased fastly and has reached 1865 by the year 2018. Almost all of those students follow distance education. Only 143 follow the mainstream formal education. This increase in the number of disabled students raises various challenges in the front of the ENUYGAR and the Istanbul University.

Figure 4 : Disabled Students registered at Istanbul University



It is not easy to provide and develop the up-mentioned 'Disability Support Services' due to the shortcomings in trained personnel and specialists working at various branches of the university administration. There is also inconsistency in the implementation of 'Disability Support Services' across different Turkish Higher Education Institutions. There are 205

universities in Turkey and most of them have support units for disabled students. Yet, very few of them have an accessible web page and accessible academic tutoring. In 2008, European Union-funded 'Towards Inclusive Universities (TUI) Project' facilitated the development of the Turkish University-Disability Network as a mean for standardization of the disability assistance performances and practices in higher education. The main outcome of the project was the dissemination of outputs of the project to the target groups and beneficiaries and the creation of an online network of specialists supporting disabled students at the university level. An e-mail based electronic platform was formed in 2009. The group expanded to over 400 members in five years and has gathered around 550 members representing most of the universities in Turkey. Nevertheless, the regulations, institutional barriers, limited resources and personnel confines the efforts for further accessible education. Technological accommodations are still limited, infrastructure is still not sufficiently accessible, and poverty still constructs a barrier in front of disabled students. Opportunities for part-time work or scholarships are very limited for the citizens, and do not exist at all for the foreign disabled students.

Syrian refugee students with disabilities do not have the right to work part-time at the university. They are not eligible for education scholarships provisioned for citizen students as well. The only possibilities for scholarship in Turkey are provided by the YTB Turkish scholarships program, DAFI (UNHCR) and SPARK Foundation for Syrian students who are situated in the Eastern Anatolian provinces. Yet all those scholarships have age limitations. For example, YTB age requirement is under 27 for scholarship application. Therefore, many disabled Syrian students are not able to get this scholarship. Scholarships are especially important for disabled students living in the metropolitan cities because of the long distances, expensive life, high transportation and accommodation costs.

Disabled students who become separated from their families during their higher education, i.e. have to study in another city, away from their family, are rarely able to afford the high living expenses and often stay short of resources for buying external assistance services. Left alone, those students frequently end up their education and join their families or in some cases, families have to leave their jobs and move to a small city where no appropriate employment opportunities exist. Since this second option leads to extended poverty of the whole family, most of the disabled students prefer to leave their higher education.

Often times the lack of Turkish knowledge forces Syrian students to change their faculty and high school programme. A student at Gaziantep University who used to study at the Faculty of Medicine in Aleppo, was registered at the Faculty of Theology or Department of Arabic Literature. The psychological trauma of the war in Syria already places a rather heavy burden on the disabled Syrian students; thus they often lose any hopes for better future and choose daily survival strategies, instead of sustainable and planned effort. That is why support mechanisms that can facilitate Turkish language development of disabled Syrian students are of tremendous importance. The language barrier is one of the most comprehensive handicaps that encloses Syrian youth into their "Syrian ghetto". The lack of cooperation between Turkish

and Syrian NGO's that provide education and training support leads to the ghettoization of Syrian youth and narrows their access to the educational opportunities provided by the Turkish NGO's and public institutions. Solidarity and cooperation between the Syrian and Turkish associations is a necessary condition towards breaking the legal, cultural and administrative barriers in front of higher education.

Conclusions: Barriers and Problems to be Challenged

There will be a day when the armed conflict in Syria will stop and Syrian refugees living in the surrounding countries will return back to their villages, cities and homes. Among them, more than 2 million disabled people will look for survival strategies and self-sustainable life. Those who acquired some skills or useful knowledge will be able to foster relatively independent life and those who lived enclosed in the private space will continue their life emprisoned. All this will be as a result of handicapped perceptions of the Syrian decision-makers and receiving countries.

Disability is a way of living that actually non-disabled people do not know and do not care about while disability for disabled people is about struggling handicapping environment constructed by discriminative policies, institutions, practices, perceptions, and performances. When designed to accommodate different disabilities, the environment becomes accessible for all externalized disabled people. Around 10 million displaced persons expect acceptance and recognition of their uniqueness and individual differences. The problem is not as much related to their expectations, as it is more about breaking the mental frameworks and barriers in the thoughts of the non-disabled people. Changing the common prejudices against disabled persons is the hardest aspect of the solutions for all disability problems. The starting point has to be the reconstruction of disability discourse from pure medical model and burden into an issue of social diversity ostracized through structural discrimination. Constructing the discourse of disability with a medical model that can be managed through solutions offered by the medical sector is the main routine that prevented sustainable reconciliation and solutions in the field of disability. Indeed, the constant hegemonic reconstruction of disability as a priory dependency lies at the core of the entire problem in this field. This dependency and needs-based approach is the main factor that leads to high discrimination in the sphere of education.

Access to the right to education is the only way for self-sustainable independency of the disabled people. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates states to take all measures and ensure access to higher education without discrimination on the basis of disability. Accordingly, all disabled persons should fully exercise their fundamental rights in accessing physical and social environment, services, information, and communication that pave their road to education. Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that "*access to information and communication facilities, including the physical environment, transportation, information and communication*

technologies and systems, and access to public facilities and services in both rural and urban areas " have to be provided. Indeed, Syrian students with disabilities have to have secured access to 'reasonable accommodation', 'universal design', and 'special measures' for equal opportunities and non-discriminative environment. Under the 'universal design' principle, the environment, products, programs and services have to be designed as suitable for everyone's use. 'Reasonable accommodation' comprise necessary modifications to ensure the active participation of disabled students in all spaces and aspects of societal life. As CRPD demands, the Syrian and Turkish disabled students should be assisted and dignified through their full participation in societal life. The UDISES Project has taught us that all this might become applicable when administrative and societal actors become brave enough to learn from and cooperate with disabled persons, i.e., disabled students.

Not only students who attended our workshops but also disabled Syrian students that joined our workshops online contributed a lot and shared their unique experiences. Their best desire was being provided with equal opportunities for self-reliance. Besides scholarship, they preferred assistance for part-time employment. Mohammed came to our office and said, "*I do not want a scholarship, I want a part-time job that may help me cover my living expenses of 800 TL (100 Euro) per month. Otherwise, I will have to end up my education and search for a full-time job, but without a diploma and with 20% visual difficulty, I am hopeless for it as well*". Belal, in his late 20's, had a dream to continue his computer programming studies and write innovative programs that may serve for the development of Turkey's programming as well. Many of the disabled students started their talks by underlying their gratitude to Turkey for her help and shelter and their inner desire to not become a burden but work for the development of Turkey. Many of the Syrian students expressed their desire not to be treated differently and externalized from their Turkish counterparts. Indeed, one of the most important novelties of the UDISES project that came out of the interviews with Turkish and Syrian students is that, regardless of their ethnic and religious identities, the Turkish, international, and Syrian disabled students struggle against similar basic challenges and problems. There are differences hidden in the details (lack of language, cultural differences and social capital), but the structural challenges are common.

The UDISES Project outcomes disclosed that the main challenges in front of the Syrian youth with disabilities are structural, thus require public policies and legal rulings, as well as extensive material resources for constructing accessible infrastructure **(**IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre & UKaid, 2016).

Public policies to overcome societal and infrastructural deficiencies and barriers are needed, especially in regard to the following structural barriers:

- **Unaccessible registration and exam system**: YÖS and university websites have to be accommodated in accord with the needs of different disabled students. Online or mobile courses, exams, and registration will lead to tremendous growth in the number of disabled students enrolled in the higher education system in Turkey. Harmonization

of the YÖS exam system will solve the inconsistencies in the YÖS performances and thus facilitate the procedure and make the YÖS system more accessible.

- **Lack of diploma and documents validation** (*denklik*), eliminates their right to higher education. Especially for refugees who often flee their countries in cases of emergency, under general or local armed violence and conflict, provision of official documents should not constitute a barrier in front of disabled youth that struggles for self-sustainability and self-reliance and regret being defined as a burden. **YÖS** Level exam for those who cannot bring diplomas etc. equivalent documents should be provided and become more accessible for disabled students.
- **Lack of respectful disability language and communication skills** among the persons *without* disability such as educators, administrators and students. In spite of anti-discrimination policies and legislations, Syrian students with disabilities continue to confront cultural barriers. Emancipatory support to all (Turkish, international and Syrian) disabled students in the higher education is a complex issue and further research to ascertain the diversity and common aspects is imperative for improved quality of education. Both Turkish Ayşe and Syrian Esma could not complete their education because the lecturers showed reluctance to their hearing difficulty andeffort to lipread.
- **Multi dimentional Poverty,** is the most challenging structural handicap that forces many Turkish and Syrian disabled students to interrupt their higher education, thus lose their hopes for a better future. Because of the lack of part-time job opportunities and income, students with disabilities are more likely to fail to afford housing, food, accessible transportation, assistive devices and extra health expenses. Payments of health care and rehabilitation services are important challenges for Syrian students under temporary protection.

  On the other hand, the right to education is a universal right and a primary responsibility of the states. Similarly to the right to water and food, the right to public education has to be supported by the social welfare programs. While the majority of the disabled students prefer part-time employment, Disabled Student Allowances provide the other dignifying solutions for broader access to education for disabled youth. Both Turkish and Syrian disabled youth have to be supported for better education. In this regard, the Turkish scholarships programme provides significant education opportunities to thousands of poor students all around the developing world.

  Till the end of 2018, YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities) Turkish scholarships program provided language and/or tuition scholarships to about 12,200 Syrian students, almost 60% of the all 20,701 Syrian students registered at the higher education in Turkey by that time. By December 2018, YTB granted 1,040 international scholarships and 3,200 Turkish scholarships to Syrian students below the age of 21. The Age limit of 21 is one of the main barriers that prevent Syrian lost generation from access to those full scholarships. By January 2019, there was no

identified disabled Syrian student who benefited from the above-mentioned scholarships. After the UDISES Project workshop in January 2019, YTB acknowledged the need for further support to disabled refugees and international students.[10] Such a program may open new perspectives for skilled disabled students who want to improve their special talents and skills at higher education in Turkey. Similarly to YOS, Turkish Scholarships are the second door for enrolling disabled students with special skills and knowledge into the higher education system in Turkey.

- **Divided families**: studying away from family is one of the major sources of poverty itself. Endorsed in September 2013, the Article 2 annexed to the Regulation for Double Major, Side Major, and Inter-institutional Credit Transfer at Bachelor's and pre-bachelor grade levels, provide the opportunity for horizontal inter-institutional transfer and passage of students that undergo special problems.[11] According to this article, "students who cannot continue their education in their countries of residence as a result of general violence and humanitarian crisis, can apply for horizontal transfer to higher education institutions in Turkey". Article 2 can be instrumentalized for solving divided families problem in the best interest of all disabled students. Centralized horizontal transfer for disabled Syrian and international students can also be launched by the YÖS system.
- **Kızılay social aid cards** (KIZILAYKART-SUY) social cohesion programme (financed by the ECHO and WFP) provides humanitarian aid to applicants that fall under the 6458 Law definition of people with special needs. Since its launch in 2016, this program has reached 4,289 Syrians with a high disability rate above 50%. Taking into consideration the higher number of disabled Syrians in Turkey, the number of disabled Syrian refugees that have access to this humanitarian aid program remains very limited. It remains limited even when compared to the 1,400,000 Syrians covered by the KIZILAYKART aid program (Türk Kızılayı, (Turkish Red Crescent), November 2018).

By the end of 2018, KIZILAYKART had launched Plan B that liberalizes the discretion of the inspectors (takdir hakkı) to detect and define the most vulnerable Syrian families and respondents. According to Kızılay, this will give an opportunity to include more vulnerable Syrians into this social cohesion aid program. Beside the disability aid program, KIZILAYKART provides aid to school age children. The so called KIZILAYKART-ŞEY Conditional Education Aid Programe (financed by UNICEF) inslatted 207 million TL to the Kızılaykarts of 167,000 families and 314,000 children. This aid is very limited (60 TL in 2018) and aims at promoting the education of school age children and fight against child labor. All KIZILAYKART programs regard gender-based equality in the distribution of the aid. There is a possibility to launch a special

[10] Information provided at the presentation of the YTB Representative during the UDISES Project Workshop on Obstacles, Experiences and Solutions in Higher Education of Syrian students with Disability in Turkey, Istanbul University Rectorate Building, 11 January 2019.

[11] *Ön Lisans ve Lisans Düzeyindeki Programlar Arasında Geçiş, Çift Ana Dal, Yan Dal ile Kurumlar Arası Kredi Transferi Yapılması Esaslarına İlişkin Yönetmelik*, Ek Madde 2, 21 September 2013.

support programme for unaccompanied Syrian students with disabilities. Yet the current 120 TL per month social cohesion aid cannot cover the minimum monthly survival expences of 800 TL. Indeed the KIZILAY-ŞEY budget remains short when compared to the ECHO and WFP funded KIZILAY-SUY budget that has devoted 3 billion TL to 1,400,000 Syrians between the years 2016 and 2018. Unaccompanied Syrian students with disability can be involved under a special category within the KIZILAY-SUY program and supported to complete their education.

Accessible accomodation: Another applicable solution for disabled Syrian students might be the provision of free of charge accessible accomodation at the available, accessible dormitories that are situated at a close distance to the university campuses.

Accessible Rehabilitation Centers: People with disabilities need special health care services that help them to achieve and maintain optimal functioning in interaction with their environments. These services should include physical therapy, occupational therapy, vocational training, speech and language therapy, cognitive therapy, and counseling services for the person and/or family members. While public rehabilitation services are rather insufficient in Turkey, outpatient rehabilitation services for the Turkish children and youth with disabilities are provided by purchasing services from the private sector by so called Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers (SERC). In these centers, children and young persons with disabilities can get services both for special education or/and rehabilitation according to their need. Both public rehabilitation services and SERC are only available in city centers and inaccessible for the international and Syrian students.

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is an approach initiated by WHO with a view to enhancing the quality of life for disabled persons. This is a multisectoral approach that is implemented through the combined efforts of persons with disabilities, their families and communities, as well as relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies and NGOs with the aim of promoting equal opportunities, social inclusion, and poverty reduction for disabled persons. CBR has been used as a strategy for rehabilitation in lower income countries and rural regions since the 1980s in over 90 countries. It is an alternative approach to institution based rehabilitation services. CBR addresses basic needs and involves practical, accessible regional solutions with low cost. This kind of service delivery may not only decrease the cost of transport but will certainly increase the access of millions of disabled children to vital rehabilitation services. Such services are urgently needed in the Southeastern Anatolian provinces and city peripheries where the population of disabled children is very high.

Rehabilitation is also very important for war and violence-affected youth with disabilities, especially if they have undergone impairment or psychological trauma due to conflict-related violence or injury. Such injuries require long term hospital care and/or physiotherapy that may lead to delay in their transition to higher education in

the receiving country. This is a typical problem concerning so-called Syrian lost generation with disabilities. Thousands of disabled Syrian children could not be identified as disabled and had to live imprisoned into the private space while losing any opportunity for further education. Those children were stolen of their right to self-reliant future and easily defined as "social burden" both on the family, society, and public budget.

- **Perception of disability as a burden** is one of the most destructive and degrading factors that undermines the capacities and dignity of the disabled youth, no matter whether it is Turkish, international, or Syrian. The effect of this prevailing vulnerability-based approach not only destroys any chances for developing reasonable and effective policies, but it reconstructs the disabled youth as societal waste to be thrown in the invisible periphery of the society. More importantly, this perspective eradicates the efforts of disabled youth for emancipated future while on the other hand, paves the path to its social exploitation.

  Consequently, this vulnerability-based perspective constructs a fruitful basis for cultural discrimination and prejudices against both disabled Turkish and Syrian students. Discriminative approaches, prejudices and hate speech, on the other hand, widens the intercultural spaces between the Turkish and Syrian students and limits chances for further dialogue and solidarity. Both Turkish and Syrian disabled youth undergo the outcome of this discriminative approach. Thus solidarity and cooperation among all disabled students should challenge the prevalence of this vulnerability-based perspective.

Any social and financial investment that will improve the lives of disabled youth will bring a vital opportunity to bring their hopes for a better future back. Such efforts will open wide opportunities for employment of thousands of non-disabled persons, while on the other hand, it will bring new perspectives for further realization of the innovative knowledge, dreams and skills of thousands of disabled students. All disabled students hold very special skills and talents that are being wasted under the barriers of the existing infrastructure. Disability policies on rights-based approach can construct their path to a bright, innovative future.

Finally, as a normative power, the European Union holds important institutional, legal, and financial instruments to head innovative rights-based solutions for dignified future of the Syrian disabled students. EU financed programs such as HOPES, DAFI, ERASMUS, SOCRATES, STARK, etc. have the capacity to provide Education-based Resettlement Programs for Disabled refugee students and extend educational scholarship programs for unaccompanied or/and disabled refugees and migrant students who live below the poverty index. Innovative programs that promote part-time employment opportunities or training programs that may grant applicable skills to the disabled students offer the most dignified and sustainable way to their emancipation. Indeed, regarding Turkey, the ERASMUS exchange programme in Turkey has to be designed to accommodate Syrian students with disabilities as well.

The most sustainable and dignified international protection is not the sole humanitarian one, but the one designed by the refugees' desire for self-reliant future!

Source: Abby Young-Powell**, "**What Nujeen Mustafa did next: 'As a refugee I feel I'm in a constant test'" *The Guardian*, 19.06.2017.

As Nujeen Mustafa said after crossing 3500 km across the Medditerranean and 7 international borders from Halep to Germany:

…One day the war in Syria will end! I have to prepare for a much harder war: the one against discrimination! I have to struggle for recognition at the public space, for emancipated future and against prejudices that define me as foreigner, odd and vulnerable... (The Guardian, 2016)

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