



RADICALIZATION OF SYRIAN IMMIGRANTS: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management declared 3 million 588 thousand 877 refugees have been registered in Turkey with their biometric data as of April 26, 2018. The refugee population is composed of 1 million 947 thousand males and 1 million 852 thousand females.² These figures keep increasing every year. Around 1 million of the immigrants are school age children. 492 thousand 544 Syrian children have been enrolled to school in Turkey as of the 2016-2017 education period. 59 percent of Syrian school age children are receiving an education.³ However, according to 2018 data, this figure has dropped to 50 percent. At the same time, approximately 1 million 200 thousand Syrian immigrants are between the ages 18-34 years, constituting the youth population. Their chances to be employed are quite low.

The proportion of school age children and the youth population coming from war zones to total refugee population entail a serious risk for Turkey. Studies on migrant radicalization show that unschooled and unemployed young immigrants represent an important threat. Turkey has demonstrated great generosity and achieved unprecedented success. Turkish experience and policies concerning refugee children deserve to be held up as a model for the world. After all, Turkey is learning to deal with an intensive migration flow and accordingly, the experiences of Syrian immigrants are teaching us a lot about migration policies in the world.

¹ http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1368/Hilmi+Demir_+PhD.

² [http://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/.](http://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/)

³ [https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/11/Engelleri-A_percentC5_percent9Fmak-T_percentC3_percentBCrkiye_percentE2_percent80_percent99de-Suriyeli-percentC3_percent87ocuklar_percentC4_percentB1-Okulla_percentC5_percent9Ft_percentC4_percentB1mak.pdf.](https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/11/Engelleri-A_percentC5_percent9Fmak-T_percentC3_percentBCrkiye_percentE2_percent80_percent99de-Suriyeli-percentC3_percent87ocuklar_percentC4_percentB1-Okulla_percentC5_percent9Ft_percentC4_percentB1mak.pdf)

In Turkey, basic needs of migrants such as food, health and shelter are satisfied. Six school age kids out of ten go to school. Moreover, many organizations provide psychological support to these children. However, overcoming traumas such as the ones experienced by the refugees and ensuring integration to the society does not seem to be an easy process. The victimizations and psychological traumas that children and the youth escaping war zones have endured, leave them vulnerable to violence. In particular, studies have shown that psychological destruction resulting from post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) make individuals prone to violence. This inclination to violence, especially when combined with social exclusion and unemployment, can shape into significantly wider threats. In this study, we will shortly discuss the traumas experienced by migrants, the effects of youth unemployment and social exclusion on the radicalization process and whether it represents a risk for Turkey or not.

2. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Experiences that unexpectedly and negatively affect the daily lives of the individuals by creating horror, anxiety, despair and panic, and damaging one's psychology are called "traumatic experiences". Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined as a symptom that can occur after severe traumatic events that threaten the physical integrity of the individual, such as witnessing or encountering a real death or death threat, a severe injury, or attack. This symptoms, when lasts less than three months, are said to be "acute", and are otherwise called "chronic" PTSD.⁴

People who have been exposed to a traumatic event can find themselves in a general confusion of feelings such as insecurity, anger, fear, confusion and guilt. Normally, individuals usually have the ability to cope with trauma. And sometimes they can overcome it by getting help from outside. However, war environment itself is the reason for trauma and at the same time makes it more difficult to deal with it. The experience of war, conflict, murder or natural disaster can increase the probability of trauma in people at risk up to 58 percent.

War affects children more than adults. Children coming from war zones fear intensely from the repetition of events, to be wounded, to die, to stay alone and defenseless, or to be excessively punished for their mistakes. Troubles such as sleep disorders, depression can crop up in children who have experienced war trauma. These children may have difficulties communicating with their peers, may stop playing and laughing, lose appetite, or may cut off communication with others all together. They might also have concentration issues at school and be depressed, feel desperate about the future or display aggressive behavior. Children who have been exposed to violence in war zones may have significant shifts in beliefs and attitudes, including loss of confidence in others.⁵ Traumatic experiences can also negatively affect children's physiological growth process. The disruption of their growth linked to the unsecure environment

⁴ https://www.journalagent.com/kpd/pdfs/KPD_2_1_34_41.pdf.

⁵ Burcu Tokuç, Savaş ve Çocuk, HASUDER Yayın No : 2014-1, Ankara.

they live in can create risks for their future. In fact, children who have not been able to overcome their traumas cannot be expected to become psychosocially healthy adults.

Children who have been subject to violence have a higher probability of being involved in crime, to feel anxious, to be unsuccessful in their work, to have memory issues, to be aggressive compared to other children. For this topic, we can mention a case study conducted by Tokuç. In Dr Nexhmedin Morina and Dr Ulrike von Lersner's 2009 study, it is shown that there is a strong relationship between being in an orphanage due to war during childhood or adolescence and experiencing depression, anxiety disorders and other psychological problems in young adulthood.⁶

As mentioned before, after being exposed to war trauma, children's stress disorder, if not handled correctly, can negatively affect growth. In a study conducted on 3,000 children who experienced war, children were found to have experienced multiple traumas and were shown to have a high level of PTSD.

Other indications of PTSD due to warfare include anxiety, tension, startle response situations, unrest, anger bursts and aggressive behavior. The child, as well as rightly accusing the ones responsible for the situation, can accuse some adults that he holds responsible for remaining incapable of protecting him. On the other hand, the child's wrongly aimed anger can be reflected on his closest relatives. Reviving unwanted images of the event and the feeling of experiencing the traumatic event again are also among frequent occurrences. Difficulty with attention and maintenance, sleep disturbances and malaise, changes in appetite and somatic complaints for which the reasons cannot be determined can also be seen.⁷

As a result of conflict, children and the youth can lose confidence in themselves, in others, and in the future. They usually are anxious, depressive, and introvert, or rebellious and aggressive. Adolescents who are still struggling to create an identity may be forced to assume an adult role that they are not prepared for because of the war, and as a result may experience identity confusion. Anxiety about losing their families, about physical integrity and independence can lead to withdrawal, loneliness and sorrow. In studies conducted in refugee camps in Turkey, some children have been found to experience fear for their own or others' lives, as well as leaving their loved ones and losing them.⁸

Problems such as decreased attention, increased tension and physical complaints such as headache and stomachache, loss of appetite and sleep problems, recurring nightmares and other numerous undesirable symptoms can also be accompanied by depression. Instead of using games and fantasies as a method of coping, the adolescents may demonstrate risky self-

⁶ Burcu Tokuç, age s. 22.

⁷ Burcu Tokuç, age, s. 33.

⁸ Brit Oppedal, Serap Özer, Selçuk R. Şirin "Traumatic events, social support and depression: Syrian refugee children in Turkish camps" , *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 13:1,ss. 46-59.

injurious behaviors in order to get away from their worries; they can tend towards more rebellious, aggressive and antisocial behaviors.⁹

3. Post-war Stress Disorders and Openness to Violence

Does experiencing post-war stress disorders or being subject to a trauma always trigger a participation to a violent organization? Or in what cases and conditions can trauma and post-war stress disorders lead the individual to take part in these violent organizations? In response to these questions, it is important to mention the "Trauma and Openness to Legal and Illegal Activism Among Somali Refugees"¹⁰ study by B. Heidi Ellis, John Horgan and his team. The study explores the participation of young Somalian refugees in the US in violent organizations. Many different studies show that exposure to trauma leads to participation in activist actions. The main problem here is identifying whether post-war trauma leads to participation in violent actions or not. Another important factor is how the power of social ties play a role in this participation.

In October 2011, a suicide bomber has organized a deadly attack against the African Union and Somalian peace corps in Mogadishu. It was thought to be the third suicide bombing attack ran by a Somalian American. The first one had been organized by the 26 years old Somalian American Shirwa Ahmed. Ahmed had carried out this attack under the name of Al-Shabaab.

In addition, 40 Somalian Americans and more than 20 Somali-Canadians have left the USA and Canada to join Al-Shabaab. In recent years, especially in such cases, there are many migrants in the Foreign Terrorist Fighters. There are various studies in the literature about whether young people exposed to war trauma are vulnerable to messages that encourage violent extremism. As Taylor and Horgan point out, participation in terrorism is a process; nobody is naturally a terrorist, there can be many different ways that lead to terrorism. The role of environmental conditions is particularly important in this process. The role of living conditions in the refugee camps they come from, which deepens their post-war trauma, cannot be disregarded as well. Focusing on Somalian refugees again, there are violent raids, rape, food shortages and illnesses in camps. Many refugees have been waiting for a place to settle for years. Since the mid-1980s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have begun to relocate Somalian refugees and as a result 150,000 Somalian refugees have been settled in the USA.

The issues of resettled refugees do not end with housing, particularly in ghettoization, in the case of having to live in dangerous neighborhoods, where violence and exclusion have an extensive role in their lives. Difficulties to adapt to different cultures, cultural conflicts in schools, inability to receive religious education, economic inadequacy, the loss of social and

⁹ Gülsen Erden, Gökçe Gürdil. Savaş Yaşantılarının Ardından Çocuk ve Ergenlerde Gözlenen Travma Tepkileri ve Psiko-Sosyal Yardım Önerileri. Türk Psikoloji Yazıları, Aralık 2009, 12 (24), ss. 1-13.

¹⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2013.867849>.

occupational status lead to major breaks in social ties. Therefore, the cultural discord that these migrants experience deepens their trauma.

For example, since September 11, 2001, Muslim refugees in the West have been facing discrimination against Islam and their identity. Discrimination is known to increase the risks of negative outcomes such as mental health problems. That is why the Somalian migrants settled in America have not been able to find neither social nor psychological support to overcome their war-induced trauma. They have been socially excluded, and they have always been culturally demeaned. According to Taylor and Horgan's studies this situation has made them more politically active.

The difficult living conditions of many refugee camps does not end with being settled. As was the case for the majority of Somalian refugees who have been settled, violence, fear, exclusion, lack of access to basic education and health services have continued to pose a threat to their lives. According to this, social marginalization and discrimination for the ones resettled in the West make it difficult to overcome the postwar trauma.

Exposure to trauma is an important risk factor for the subsequent violent behavior, anger and hostility. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that every individual exposed to trauma becomes violent and resorts to aggressive behavior. Studies show that strong emotional relationships, particularly strong social bonds, stronger parental ties and school commitment mitigate this risk. Hirschi's social control theory demonstrates that encouraging social norms such as family and community can help young people avoid continuity of trauma and eliminate the risk of inclination towards violence.¹¹ When the individual has strong ties to family and society, it increases their probability to respect social norms and stay away from violence.

Trauma often triggers radical changes in the identity of individuals. Receptiveness to new world views after experiencing a notable event is regarded by some as a key component of the process of radicalization. The findings of the study therefore show that post-war disruption and rejection of social ties as well as PTSD is strongly linked to participation in illegal and violent rebellious activities. Indeed, trauma and the tendency for illegal violent activism is more common among those with weaker social ties to their community.

To conclude, post-war stress disorders alone may not lead the individual to violence, but exclusion, cultural discordance, the continuation of deprivations, the weakening of social ties, mixed in with other factors, eventually increases the risk of individual becoming more inclined to it.

¹¹ Hellfire and Delinquency: Another Look Author(s): Steven R. Burkett and Mervin White Source: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, cilt. 13, No. 4 (Dec., 1974), ss. 455- 462.

4. Youth Unemployment

Study by Moamen Gouda and Marcus Marktanner on the link between youth unemployment and being a foreign fighter provides interesting results.¹² Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, tens of thousands of fighters from numerous countries came to join ISIS and other extremist groups in Syria. The majority of foreign fighters came from Arab countries, mainly Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco. However, a significant number of foreign fighters came also from Western countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom as well as from former Soviet states such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Countless researches have been conducted concerning the motivations of foreign fighters. There is no single way to become a foreign fighter, and no static, unique profile neither. Ideology, social conditions, quests for adventure, political complaints, etc. seem to have an effect on the choices of individuals in this regard. Socioeconomic conditions of foreign fighters seem to vary quite a bit. For this reason, some researchers have rejected economic reasons as being the driving factor, while others have argued that this is the case.

Gouda and Marktanner have spearheaded some research on the relation between the rate of unemployment in a country and the participation of foreign fighters to ISIS. According to them, youth unemployment, unlike general unemployment, can be a decisive factor in the journey of foreign fighters. Of course, as stated above, it has been shown that this factor is not significant on its own, but rather, needs to be coupled with factors such as exclusion and weak social ties.

Reducing youth unemployment or finding a job for immigrants can be considered to be an indirect but effective tool to challenge the problem of foreign fighters. The authors, also examining the opposing theses and studies in this area, in relation to the application of economic poverty and violence, reveal that the problem is not poverty, but youth unemployment.

The presence of a young male population is always seen as a dynamicity indicator. This can pave the way for solicitations and the continuation of violence. According to Bueno de Mesquita and Benmelech, Berrebi and Klor studies quoted by Thomas, bad economic conditions, that lead to higher unemployment, makes it possible for terrorist organizations to hire more skilled personnel. Richardson's examination of terrorist attacks in fifty-six countries between 1980 and 2008 has shown that there is a link between high unemployment rates, poverty and terrorism. Caruso and Schneider identified a 5 percent increase in terrorist activity for every 1 percent increase in youth unemployment.¹³

¹² Moamen Gouda ve Marcus Marktanner, "Muslim Youth Unemployment and Expat Jihadism: Bored to Death?", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, DOI:10.1080/1057610X.2018.1431316.

¹³ Raul Caruso and Friedrich Schneider, "The Socio-Economic Determinants of Terrorism and and political violence in Western Europe (1994–2007)," *European Journal of Political Economy*, 27 (1) (2011), ss. 37–49.

A recent report from the World Bank suggests that there is a strong relationship between the male unemployment rate and that country's tendency to its indirect supply of terrorists to ISIS. According to a survey conducted in sixteen Arab countries among 3,500 people between 18-24 years old, people perceive unemployment as the main factor leading people to join ISIS. Overall, 24 percent of the survey respondents see unemployment as the main factor leading to participation to jihad.

According to a report prepared by the UK Muslim Council based on the census data of 2001 and 2011, we can see that the average unemployment rate of Muslims is high despite the ever-increasing education attainment levels in the last decade. Moreover, according to the report, the Muslim prison population (13 percent) and the proportion of Muslims in social housing (28 percent) is considered a cause of concern. According to the numbers published by the Labor Party, from 2010 to 2015, the number of unemployed Muslims who have been working for one year has increased by almost 50 percent.

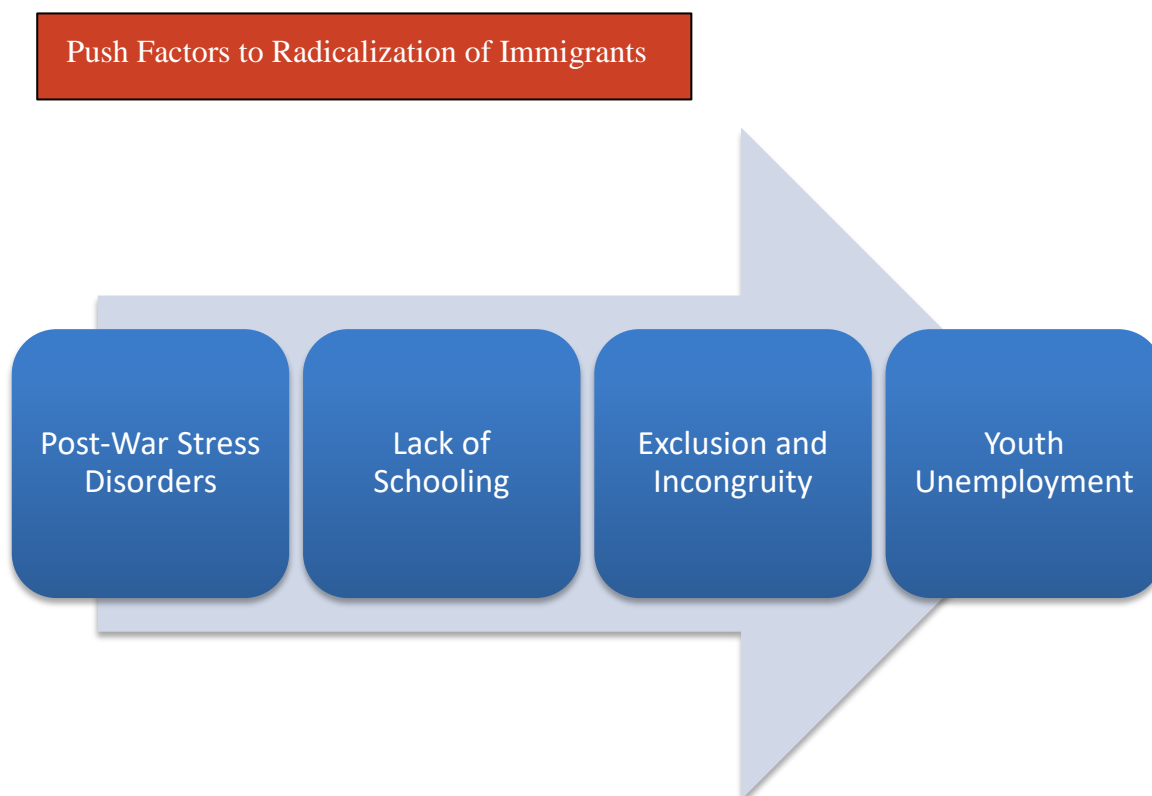
In 1999, while the overall unemployment rate in France was around 10 percent, it was found that this ratio among immigrants was more than double (22 percent). In the Netherlands, unemployment rates are higher for ethnic minorities compared to the rest of the population.

In the Netherlands, the rate of unemployment is 5 percent in 2009 and for Dutch Muslim minorities it is 11 percent. This is 10 percent for Turks and 12 percent for Moroccans. The situation in Germany is no different. A recent study has highlighted that only 119 out of 378 German Muslim foreign fighters in Syria worked at school or at a job before leaving the country.

Hence, in average, if we assume that in the West there is a higher rate of youth unemployment among Muslims, we can say that this is an important factor in the absence of social integration among young Muslims.

In conclusion, Thomas, in his report, asserts that rather than general unemployment, youth unemployment and its proportion to the general population is an important determinant of an individual's participation to activities of foreign fighters. Moreover, it argues that socioeconomic frustration has increased the identification of people, especially with certain conflicts in progress, alienating themselves and preventing assimilation. Naturally, the long-term unemployment rate of the young population, which is high among Syrian immigrants, should be viewed as a risk from this point of view.

As a result, we can summarize the driving factors that affect the risk of radicalization of immigrants as follows:



The transformation of the trauma process into problems, obstacles to school enrolment and exclusion from society, when coupled with unemployment, facilitates radicalization. The above chart shows the order in which the factors lead to radicalization.

5. The Immigrant Problem in Turkey: Opportunities and Risks

The migrant problem faced by Turkey differs from the European experience in many ways. This reduces the risk of Turkey and offers new opportunities to solving the immigration problem. First, when the civil war started in Syria, Turkey made considerable efforts to welcome migrants and has them with good living conditions in camps. These conditions are very different in Western camps. In the Turkish camps, the absence of crime and of bad treatment of the migrants, as well as the installation of playgrounds for children has helped reduce post-war stress.

The study of B. Heidi Ellis, John Horgan and his team shows that the most fundamental effect on the immigrant radicalization is the combination of trauma and exclusion. For immigrants, the difficulties which started in the camps continue with settlement problems. Recognition and integration are serious issues as they come from different cultural backgrounds. The stories of immigrants in the West often constitute the perception that they are a parasite. In Turkey, the immigrants are accepted as they are, and they do not suffer from cultural difference. Immigrants in Turkey do not feel like parasites but like guests. In fact, most of the migrants leave camps to move into urban settings. Many migrants settle to cities by their own means, but

they also often get support. As they do not experience deep cultural conflicts with the Turkish society, the expectation is that they would not face issues such as exclusion.

One of the major differences in the Turkish case is the very high schooling rate. Among the Syrian children and the youth, the schooling rate is around 65 percent. It is almost impossible to see such high schooling rates among refugees in Western countries. There are approximately 600 thousand immigrants that are of school-age. The most important factor in high schools is the imam hatip schools. There is a single type of high school in Syria and Iraq, and children are educated with an intensive curriculum that includes Quran and religious education. In addition, girls and boys are separately educated in different classrooms. Syrian refugees in Turkey showed a great attention to the imam hatip high schools as they provide conditions similar to the ones in Syria. This has led to an increase in enrollment rates. Moreover, in imam hatip high schools, together with religious education, social and positive sciences are also being taught. This can lead to a transformation in terms of the mentality of immigrants. Moreover, this is expected to facilitate their integration into the Turkish community.

At the same time, it cannot be said that Turkey does not face any difficulties. Studies show that even if PTSD can create behavioral issues, it is not enough to lead to radicalization on its own. Also, concrete measures are taken to determine the rate of radicalization in adult immigrants. Face-to-face interviews and surveys can be ways to measure what determines adult radicalization. On the contrary, it is difficult to determine the effects of exposure to radical ideology on children. We are forced to find other techniques for children who are not able to talk about the trauma they endured. Until now, the effects of radicalization on children have not been studied extensively.

Yet in Syria, dozens of videos were broadcasted about the ISIS training thousands of children and forcing them into acts of violence therefore training them to become terrorist in these camps. In this case it is difficult to claim that children are not exposed to radical ideologies.

A number of effective tools such as "free association" and "narrative therapy" can be designed for this. In this regard, Turkey should be given the opportunity to work with psychologists and experts on radicalization. There is a lack of trained professionals in this field and of interdisciplinary studies on radicalization in Turkey.

The lack of specialists capable of giving psycho-social consultancy in institutions such as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Immigration, Security, Religious and Education authorities is another problem we are facing. The conducted studies show that psycho-social intervention programs are effective in the treatment of PTSD.¹⁴ That's why more professional programs should be found to fulfill this need.

In addition, the interviews determined that the immigrants have serious difficulties in Turkish education. Immigrants who came to high school and university have poor knowledge of the Turkish language. Besides external support courses, a year of Turkish language and counseling courses could increase the success of immigrants who started school. Although there is a high rate of schooling among refugees, we do not have enough information about the school success of these students. As well as the schooling rate, the adaptation and success of children and young people should be an important criterion.

¹⁴ Seda Tokgünaydın, Serap Tekinsav Sütcü, "Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar-Current Approaches in Psychiatry 2016;8(Suppl 1), s. 96.

We can rank our suggestions related to this below:

1. Master programs to train specialists on trauma and radicalization should be made available.
2. More psycho-social support should be provided to migrant children. Migrant families should be particularly encouraged to benefit from it.
3. Advisory services should be provided for migrant children to follow their radicalization tendency.
4. The curriculum of Imam Hatip high schools should be made in a way that ensure the integration of immigrant children.
5. Special preparation programs should be implemented for immigrant children in schools and higher education.
6. The school success of migrants should be followed, and their reasons for failure should be explored.
7. Vocational courses should be opened, and job opportunities should be created to reduce youth unemployment.