

HATAY CONFERENCE
March 9, 2017

His Hignest Mr. Governer
Distinguished Guests, Participants

I greet you all with respect and affection,

I am very pleased to be with you all at Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay. I would like to thank Dr. Hasan Kaya, the Chancellor of the University and his team for hosting this conference.

I hope our conference titled "*Syrian Students in the Turkish Higher Education System*" for which we have all gathered here, will prove successful and productive.

I would like to welcome and thank all our dear friends, colleagues, and students, who have joined both from our country and from abroad, for participating in this conference which addresses an important aspect of the humanitarian crisis of this century.

We are here today to strengthen and accelerate the steps we have taken to ensure the inclusion of our Syrian guests in our country into the Turkish Higher Education system. I believe our union here will solve problems through studying examples in the world, sharing experiences, and thinking together. As the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) of the Turkey, I would like to emphasize that all our work has produced more efficient results by listening, working together and producing solutions together.

Dear guests,

The whole world knows that Turkish Government and people have welcomed and opened its doors to those escaping from the war, from the carnage that the war has brought, from destitution, from violence, and accepted them as family. The Syrian population, the majority of which is comprised of women and children, stands at over 3 million as of early 2017, and has now become part of our country so as to live a humane life.

We must all know that our country will safeguard our Syrian brothers and sisters with all our resources possible. What is happening is not a simple refugee crisis, and we are very aware that this is a test of humanity; a test of human values, and so we are trying to do whatever we can, regardless of the indifference of other nations.

Our government has regulated services for the Syrians who arrived to our country in this mass migration principally through the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation, which entered into force in 2013, and has also formed coordination units such as the Migration Policies Board for operational purposes. The contribution of AFAD (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) throughout the entire process and, in particular, in emergency is worthy of great praise. Our Ministry of National Education has also practically taken on the role of the Ministry of two nations during this period, and is contributing to the education and training of hundreds of thousands of people. In this process, all relevant public institutions have assumed important roles and provided services in essential areas such as health, education, access to labor market, social assistance for our Syrian friends in line with these regulations. The financial cost of all our efforts today has reached 26 billion dollars. I would like to remind you all at this point that promises of support given to our country in the international arena have not to a great extent been met. Despite these hitches, **as the Esteemed President has underlined in his speeches, our country has become a safe harbor to our friends, to the oppressed. This is the defining feature of this nation, and compassionately embracing the oppressed is the unchanging character of this nation.**

Dear Guests,

We all know that the most important kind of support for the future of the Syrians who have recently arrived to our country and who are trying to build a new and decent life is that which comes under the heading of education. Studies show that our Syrian brothers and sisters should be considered under long term policies within a framework of permanence rather than the temporary. For this reason, we intend to go much farther than merely ensuring the attendance of children and young people and in fact wish to help build a future together.

Building a future is based on having hope.

Education is the most important issue that supports the hopes and productivity of refugees. This is an important issue not only in respect of the refugees, but also in respect of the host country in order to have a harmonious future with them. It should not be forgotten that to keep the individual alive is to keep the state alive. Our country has embraced several waves of immigration throughout history, and this ancient land has become a home to many of the oppressed. They have also brought fortune to the lands they have settled in, and have been involved in the development of our country. The Bulgarian immigration in 1989, the most memorable mass migration of recent times, and the developments of its refugees are the best examples of these stories.

Dear Professors,

Now I would briefly like to look at numbers in conjunction with the title we are working on. The magnitude of these numbers will show us today the urgency of the need to accelerate the steps we take in the process of providing a sound, well-prepared and productive higher education policy on refugees.

51% of the refugee population in the world is comprised of school-age children and young people. Basic education in general is the most important component of support for this population. In our country, according to the registered data, the under-18 Syrian population is over 1.330.000 Our country is continuing to work with all staff and stakeholders of the Ministry of National Education to ensure that Syrian children have access to education.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIANS REGISTERED WITH THEIR BIOMETRIC DATA, ACCORDING TO AGE AND GENDER (23.02.2017)

AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
TOTAL	1.562.593	1.361.990	2.924.583
0-4	179.572	166.898	346.470
5-9	216.619	204.180	420.799
10-14	164.380	151.693	316.073
15-18	134.763	114.249	249.012
19-24	243.368	187.117	430.485
25-29	158.471	124.262	282.733
30-34	133.974	105.451	239.425

With the devoted efforts of our Ministry, nearly 500,000 children in our country between the ages of 6 and 18 have been included in the education system. 186,000 receive education in our schools together with our children and others are receiving education at temporary education centers. The Ministry of National Education is continuing to work to ensure that all Syrian children are able to study at our schools with their friends, and the evidently increasing number of children who have been registered to Turkish state schools in such a short amount of time is a true testament to how successful this work has been.

Removing all barriers before access to basic education is of utmost importance both in terms of our humanitarian duty and in terms of refugees contributing to their own lives and the country they live in.

In terms of today's agenda, the success of ensuring access to basic education is of fundamental importance as it dictates the number of students progressing onto higher education. Thus, at the initial stage, primary and secondary education must be given priority in public policy, and following this, long-term planning of higher education policies -in respect of both young refugees as well as the society they live in- should come into play.

A strong policy of higher education will help support the participation of Syrians under temporary protection in economic, cultural and social life and the qualifications and skills they acquire will contribute to the qualitative and quantitative growth of our country.

Together with our stakeholders, the coordination works for the inclusion of over 430,000 Syrians under temporary protection between the ages of 19-24 in higher education is primarily our institution's responsibility. When we add to this the 250,000 children in the age group of 15-18, we can see the significance of the issue at hand when looking at the numbers. These numbers also clearly convey that international support is needed far beyond the offers of symbolic scholarships made at international conferences today. Of course providing the opportunity to study at universities all over the world is important for our friends, but I would like to emphasize that it is also possible to afford much more students with opportunities within our country's system with the same budget in providing emergency solutions.

Dear Students,

As the Council of Higher Education, we are working to keep alive the hopes of our Syrian friends for the future, to help them hold on to life, and live in harmony with the society they are in. We have taken various steps in this process in the aftermath of this movement of forced migration. Accelerating these steps is the main goal of our meeting as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech.

In this process, as of 2013, the Council of Higher Education has developed a number of measures in relation to higher education in countries which have been determined by the Council of Higher Education as having unsustainable education due to the events of violence and crises.

In order to overcome the language barrier which is the primary problem for students and in order to include them in the system, some of our universities have been prescribed a mission, and a number of legislative changes have been made to allow universities to provide a more flexible programme in Turkish/foreign languages with respect to the acceptance of international students at the following universities: Çukurova, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam, Kilis 7 Aralık, Harran, Mersin, Mustafa Kemal, Osmaniye Korkut Ata.

In addition, due to the situation that students in these countries are in, facilitative decisions have been made to address problems regarding obtaining official documents, such as equivalency documents, and the determination of the level of education they have received.

The issue of tuition fees for the higher education of Syrian students has been resolved with a regulation implemented on state universities. In this regard, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities has played an important role.

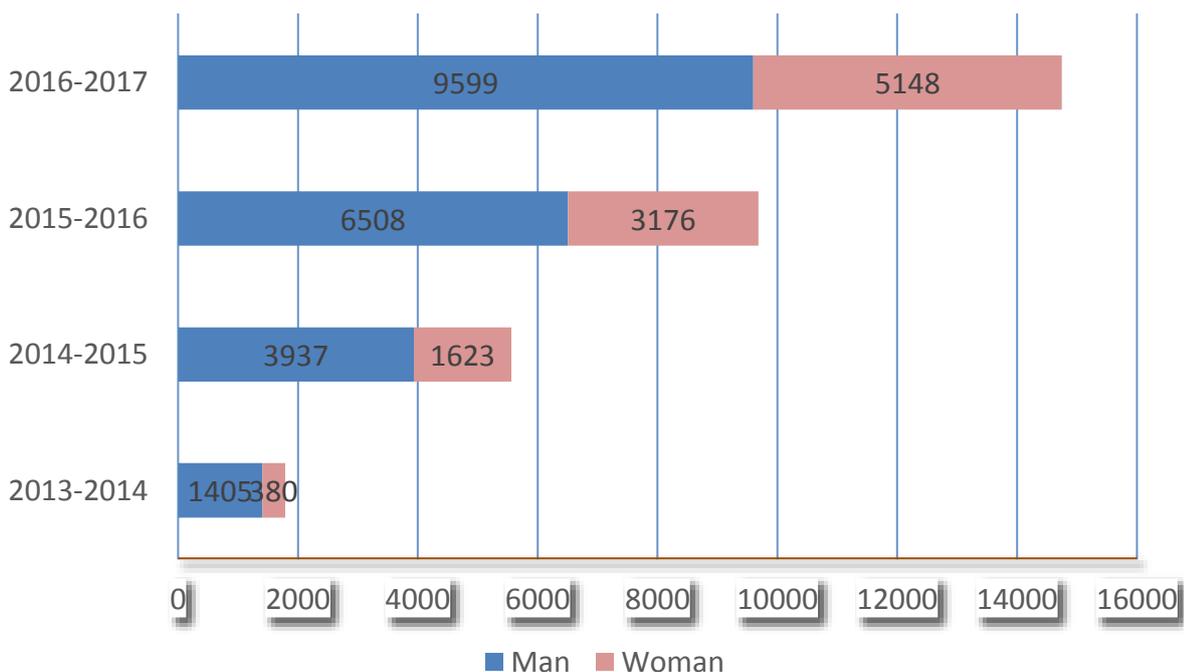
The Türkiye Scholarship Program is very important in the inclusion of young Syrians in our higher education system. This programme provides scholarships to young Syrians with the aim of providing 5,000 students with scholarships in five years. The number of Syrian students studying in our country within the scope of "Türkiye Scholarships" has reached 3,473 students in the 2016-2017 academic year.

2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	Total
127	388	1035	1148	775	3473

These figures should be considered independently from Syrian students who our country supports in other ways.

All these supportive activities and regulations which I have touched upon generally have enabled the number of students benefiting from higher education in our country to reach a significant point. As of the 2016-2017 academic year, approximately 15,000 Syrian students are studying at universities in Turkey. A third of this is females, and two thirds are males.

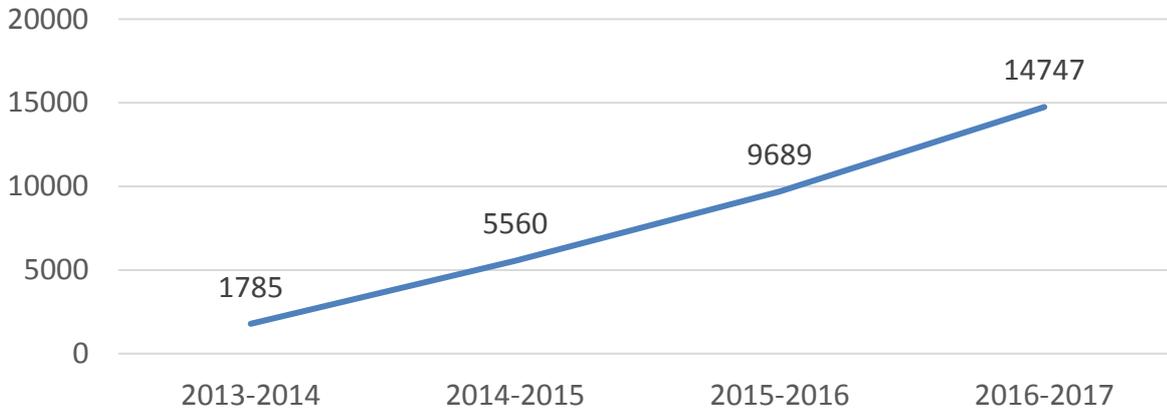
Number of Female and Male Students



1149 of these students are graduate students, and 352 of them are doctoral students. Nearly 2,000 of these students are studying at foundation universities.

The number of students today indicates that the number of Syrian students studying at our universities is increasing. Providing access to higher education for 5,000 Syrian students in 2014-1015, approaching 10,000 students in the last year, and almost 15,000 students this year show a rapid increase.

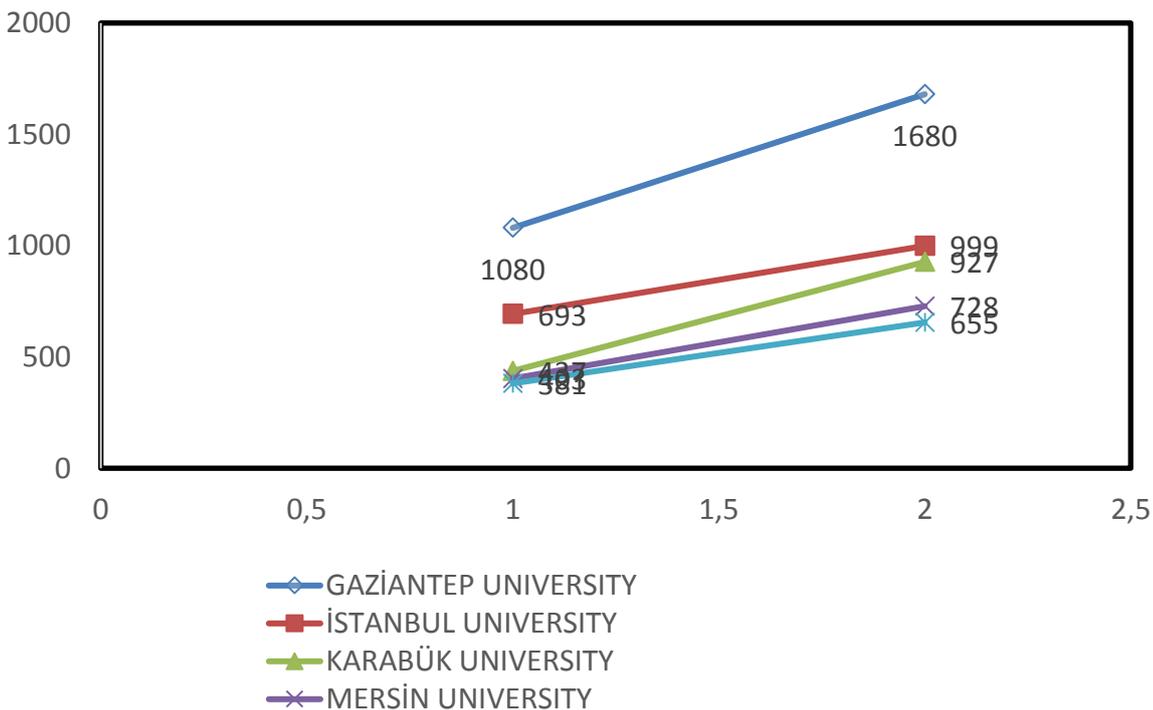
Data on the Increase of Syrian Students



I am very proud to state that our universities are all working for the education of young Syrians. We have students who are receiving education at just about every corner of Turkey. Our students are mostly concentrated at the Gaziantep University with 1,680 students, Istanbul University with 1000 students, Karabük University with 927 students, followed by Mersin, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam, İnönü, Çukurova, Istanbul Aydın, Yüzüncü Yıl and Sakarya Universities. 35 state and 8 foundation universities have over 50 Syrian students. And numbers are continuing to increase at all our universities.

2015-2016/2016-2017 academic years

Increase in number of students at the first five universities



The example of Karabük University shows us that the number of students can be high in places where there is not a high concentration of Syrian resettlement. This example relates to the number of Syrian faculty members employed.

Dear Chancellors,

Finally, I want to talk about our Syrian academic colleagues.

As you will recall, in 2016, in cooperation with the of the Prime Ministry, the Council of Higher Education has established and routinely updates a Foreign Academics Information System (YABSİS), a database of academicians and researchers who have been forced to leave their country due to war and internal conflict and migrate to Turkey, to provide them with the opportunity to work at Turkish higher education institutions. With the help of this system, it will be easier for the qualified Syrian population to participate in Turkish academia. A significant number of applicants were found to have doctorates and academic titles.

As of 2016, within the scope of Article 34 of the Law No. 2547, the number of Syrian teaching staff working in our country is 392, 327 of which are at state universities, and 65 of which are at foundation universities.

TITLE	STATE	FOUNDATION	Total
PROFESSOR	12	1	13
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR	14	1	15
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR	99	16	115
RESEARCHER		1	1
TEACHING FELLOW (FACULTY MEMBER)	120	27	147
LECTURER	77	19	96
EXPERT	5		5
Total	327	65	392

Dear colleagues,

Numerical data on Syrian students and academics shows that we are on a long and grueling but also promising path. We are here today to develop a mechanism which takes into consideration the needs of these young people entrusted to us, which observes their adaptation process to the country, and also provides psychological support and rehabilitation where necessary. We must remember that no step taken for the future of mankind is easy. **We embrace our Syrian friends in line with the cultural values and belief we have as a Turkish nation, on the side of justice, and sharing, and standing with the oppressed, with the morals we have inherited from Anatolia. As a country, we are paying a great price that no developed country in the world has ventured to pay.**

As the Esteemed President of the Republic of Turkey has expressed in his remarks, we are trying to wipe away the tears of this generation gently without letting them to feel. The past of this nation is full of examples of different religions and races sharing food with various oppressed refugees. Today, the history repeats itself once again and we are sharing with refugees our universities, schools, classes, and seats just as we share our food with them.

I hope that all the work we do together with our stakeholders today will be fruitful and contribute to the hope of the Syrian youth.