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## Understanding Informal Communication Environment Effect on Social Inclusion

### Enformel İletişim Çevresinin Sosyal Uyum Üzerindeki Etkisinin İncelenmesi

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## ÖZ

Türkiye, 2011'den bu yana en yoğun nüfuslu Suriyeli sığınmacılardan birine ev sahipliği yapıyor. Bu nedenle sosyal uyum sosyal bilimlerin en çok tartışılan konuları arasındadır. Çalışmaların çoğu, sosyal uyum konusunda iki toplum arasındaki avantaj ve dezavantajları anlamak için yapılmıştır. Dil, sosyal ve kültürel entegrasyonun önündeki en önemli engeldir. Ancak Suriyeli nüfus sorunlarını anlamaya yönelik en yeni araştırmalardan bazıları, iletişimin Türkiye'de yaşayan Suriyeli sığınmacılar için ikinci zorluk olduğunu gösterdi. Yetkililer, sivil inisiyatifler, Suriyeli sığınmacıların uyum sürecine erişim için stratejik iletişim olanakları planladı. Bunların çoğu, resmi iletişim kaynakları veya kanalları tarafından gerçekleştirilmektedir. Bu çalışma, araştırmacıları göç ve uyum alanındaki iletişim eğilimlerini anlamak için informal iletişimin önemine yönlendirmeyi ve daha fazla başarı sağlamak için informal iletişim katmanını entegre etmeyi düşündürmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, 2018-2019 yıllarında gerçekleştirilen nitel bir saha araştırması ile Türkiye'deki Suriyeli sığınmacıların informal iletişim kaynakları ve motivasyonlarını anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Sonuç olarak bulgular, kilit kanaat önderlerinin, çok dilli komşuların ve sosyal medyanın etkin informal iletişim kanalları arasında yer aldığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, informal iletişimin boşluğu hakkında bir tartışma başlatmayı amaçlamaktadır ve politika yapıcılara iletişimin bu yönü hakkında bir örnek sunarak katkı sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler**

Suriyeli Sığınmacılar, Suriyeli Mülteciler, sosyal uyum, informal iletişim, zorunlu göç

## ABSTRACT

The Syrian Civil War forced the citizen population to flee to neighboring countries. Turkey host one of the most densely populated Syrian asylum seekers since 2011. Therefore, social integration became the most discussed topics of social sciences. Most studies conducted to understand the advantages and disadvantages between two societies in social adaptation. Language is the dominant barrier to social and cultural integration. But some of the newest studies on understanding Syrian population issues shown that communication is the second challenge for the Syrian asylum seekers living in Turkey. Authorities, civic initiatives planned strategic communication facilities to access the Syrian asylum - seekers' adaptation process. So many of these implied by the formal communication sources or channels. This study aims to direct researchers consider to the importance of informal communication for understanding a close society's communication tendencies and offers to integrate informal communication layer for providing more success. In this perspective, the study refers the informal communication preferences of Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey and observe the role of these preferences. So, a qualitative study applied with asylum-seekers in Turkey. As a result, the findings show that key opinion leaders, multi-lingual neighbors and social media are among the effective informal communication channels. This study aims to start a discussion about the gap of informal communication and it may be useful for policy makers to think about this aspect of communication.

**Keywords**

Syrian asylum-seekers, Syrian refugees, social inclusion, informal communication, forced migration.

## INTRODUCTION

The anti-regime protests starting in 2011 in Syria turned into conflicts and then into a civil war in a short while. The civil war disrupted the social life in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of people living in cities, which have been bombed and wrecked, have been displaced. The internal migration waves then passed beyond the borders. The first wave consisted mainly of the individuals running away from the war and death. This migration motivation, which continued in the next years, was added with various factors brought by the instability such as terrorist threat, unemployment, and failing to enjoy the social rights. In the next years, the number of Syrians forced to leave their country reached millions.

Syrians had to take refuge mainly in the neighbor countries in order to re-establish welfare in their lives. Iran, Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are among the countries that they took refuge in at most. Turkey receiving the highest level of migration among these countries. Together with the mass migration, while trying to meet the healthcare, education, housing, and social support needs of this population, which constitutes more than four percent of Turkey's population, with the support of many international organizations, the social integration between two societies constitutes another important arena. Most of the studies carried out on this subject noted the communicative problems as a problem, which follows the economic problems such as finding a job and earning livelihood and not resolved yet.

While the individual forced to migrate progressing to the self-esteem step of the hierarchy of needs in his/her own society, one might suddenly regress to the step of economic, social security or physical safety after the migration. In these groups, the psychological security concerns might come to the forefront in communication. This preference, which occurs before the migration starts in many cases, is a process starting from deciding to migrate to the lifestyle and standard in the migration destination and, in decisions and actions, it generally courses independently from the social environment of destination. For this reason, it is projected that the grapevine, i.e., informal communication, might be effective in touching these groups through formal communication sources.

Principally, the authorities use formal communication channels in a one-way model of communication to help migrants substitute their life quality in an unfamiliar environment. Formal communication usually refers to the officially recognized organizations and channels. Governmental authorities, local authorities, official local organizations, media, and institutions are among the pioneering channels of formal communication. Informal communication depends on social relations and it provides society members with the interaction opportunity to develop. So, differ from formal communication, it generates a network based on comfort by including sharing of feelings, personal experience and casual discussions. For this reason, the informal communication environment plays an inevitable role in understanding the latent issues and problems about tribal communities.

Informal communication has been studied about organizational collaboration for many years, and has been practiced by managers to provide collaboration among the organization members. Most researchers have common ground about using informal communication channels to ensure interaction among organizational members. The researches on Syrian

refugees show that the essential cultural and social barriers to sustain their live in a foreign country, but the studies on their informal communication environment is very limited.

The present paper aims to deliver findings that may influence the theoretical approaches about migration studies on communication. In addition to this, the findings may be helpful for professionals and non-governmental organizations for planning empathic implications on the field. Many different researches refer the Syrian daily lives and problems living in Turkey, and some others touched the Syrians who live in Lebanon and Jordan. Some researches show the digital communication habits of refugees to understand their communicative eco-system. Nevertheless, the studies on Syrian citizens' communicative habits and the informal communication environment that may help them to connect with host society are limited.

Therefore, firstly, what kind of informal channels do Syrian asylum-seekers utilize on solving daily and personal issues, secondly, how they use the informal channels to adapt themselves cultural and social life, and lastly, how these channels offer opportunity and profit for Syrian people will be explored in the findings part of the paper.

It is considered that the study can serve as a path for studies examining the communication and migration in the countries hosting crowded immigrant populations and, through examining how this communicative field will be shaped in unique structure of each society, it would provide positive contribution through the interaction to be achieved thanks to the use of right channels. Besides that, the present study aims to start a new discussion by pointing out that the informal communication should also be examined in studies on migration and communication.

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### **The Journey of Syrians from Asylum-Seekers to Refugees in Scope of Social Adaptation**

Today, Turkish Statistical Institute's [TÜİK] December 2020 records show that 4.37% of Turkish population- 83 million 614 thousand 362 consist of Syrian refugees. In other words, 3 million 656 thousand 525 Syrian were forced to migrate to live in Turkey. According to World Bank 2018 resources, with 1.5 million Syrian Refugees, Lebanon ranks second; with 1.4 million Syrian Refugees, Jordan is the third country that host the most crowded Syrian population (Macaron, 28 June 2018). While 70% of the Syrian population living in Turkey consists of women and 0-18-years-old children, there are 1 million 966 thousand male Syrians. This dense population is hosted as refugee and asylum-seeker in Turkey. According to the Konda Barometer, asylum-seeker is defined as "the person who left his/her country with the claim of being refugee but whose application for immigrant status has not been concluded" (2017, p.9).

Because of the gradual increase in the population coming from Syria and very low rates of remigration, it can be understood that they will stay in Turkey permanently and it is frequently discussed how to resolve the social inclusion problems. While studies revealed that the migrants face with various difficulties in social integration (Şimşek, 2019; Ayvazoğlu and Kunuroğlu, 2021), they also report that the migrants are also perceived as guests by the host society (Erdoğan, 2019).

Social integration is defined as a foreign individual's "sense of belonging, social friendships (business, school, neighbor, etc.), gaining a place in this friendship circle, and engagement in

sharing and participation in these environments” in a society (Kuzlucan, 2019, p. 92). For the individuals forced to migrate to another country, this integration is a prerequisite for accessing to the social rights (Yıldız, 2017, p. 55 cited in Kuzlucan 2019, p. 92). However, social integration has never been easily achieved in any society and important problems have been experienced. While a smart portion of millions of Syrian people refuge to Turkey living in camps in border cities, the majority live within the cities (Erdoğan, 2019).

One of the lacking barriers to the adaptation of Syrians living in cities considered arising from being a closed society due to afraid of security concerns. It results in ghettoization, struggling for existence as a closed community in a different society, and formation of a social distance preventing the integration of other societies. The studies conducted in-person with Syrians living in Turkey show this group gets information from their community (Erdoğan, 2019). From this aspect, low level of social belonging and integration plays a determinant role in the judgments of both societies towards each other.

Forced migration and difficulties in cultural, economic, and social adaptation as a result of it are nowadays among the research topics in many countries. The findings of the research thought may guide the policymakers and non-governmental organizations in ensuring the integration between two societies, preventing the conflicts, and achieving the social welfare. The previous studies revealed that the communication is as important as the opportunities. The studies carried out in order to understand such difficulties of Syrian migrants in countries, which host crowded migrant populations, showed that the perceptions of both societies play a determinant role in establishing this integration. Particularly, the communication might be the most important factor allowing the migrant to realize the social norms of society, in which one started living, and to get opportunities in health, education, and employment (Konda, 2017; Mansour, 2018; Ahmad, 2018; Erdoğan, 2019; Turkay and Turkey, 2019).

The 2019 data of Syrians Barometer study, which has been carried out since 2014 in Turkey, revealed that communication with the score of 3.1 has regressed to second place among the difficulties, following the unemployment ranks (Erdoğan, 2019). Some of the studies carried out in this field showed that, while there is lack of communication in cohesion between two societies, there may be an efficient communication between the members of two societies through the informal communication channels (Savran and Sat, 2019; Şimsek, 2018). Others show the conflicts between two societies arose from the lack of advocacy communications regarding the differences (Center of Middle Eastern Studies [ORSAM], 2015; Duhan and Gürbüz, 2018).

In the scope of communication, selective perception and learning motivation are significant factors to engage the audience to the context. According to Grunig and Childers (1988), the context should touch with the audience in an emotional path for creating selective perception that triggers the information processing. The familiarity, common feelings create common spaces. Hence, not only the realization of need for information but also the similarities in the process of information seeking may play an important role in source selection. Therefore, informal communication areas may build trust and comfort for communicative learning practices. Informal communication is a type of communication field that is very known and researched, on the other hand, it may be supportive for strengthening the formal communication if the organizations understand how and in which way it may be used in an

effective way to complete a communication process with true information. For this reason, the studies carried out in the fields of administration and public policies revealed, while planning and implementing, administrators should analyze both formal and informal communication tendencies (Crampton, Hodge and Mishra, 1998; Temby, Sandall, Cooksey and Hickey, 2016;

Alan and Sözen, 2017). The social problems showed that making plans by examining the informal communication needs and expectations helps with remedying the deficiencies in social communication strategies being developed and implemented and that a stronger effect can be achieved in terms of the motivation (Chen, Tang, Zhou, Sarcevic & Lee, 2013; Armijos, Phillips, Wilkinson, Barclay, Hicks, Palacious, Mothes & Stone, 2017).

Another study carried out on Syrian refugees in Egypt, show the use of technological platforms as a source of information facilitated the learning and adaptation, the communicative barriers might be overcome by examining these sources from both formal and informal aspects (Danielson, 2012). The research findings of Miettunen and Shunnaq (2020) on the Bani Kahli tribe migrated from Syria to Jordan revealed the effective role of informal communication in the adaptation process. The previous tendencies remained in information seeking process for the migrant and belonging is prioritized in the access to information. Miettunen and Shunnaq's findings open a window to understand the information-seeking and adaptation process of closed communities, monitoring the internal communication channels as vital to develop successful strategies (2020). In scope of these perspectives, a field research applied to understand the informal communication environment and motivations during the migration journey of Syrian's living in Turkey.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research methods have been employed to "describe ways of generating and analyzing data which are not reducible to numbers" (Figgou and Pavlopoulos, 2015, p. 544) for understanding the communications practices of people for years. The most significant benefit of qualitative research is to give the opportunity to gain deep insights about how and why an issue occurs and how and by which ways are the most appropriate to touch with audiences. It is a qualitative technique that is "useful to get detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in-depth" (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, qualitative method chosen to understand and observe the role of informal communication in daily basis. In-depth interview technique, one of the qualitative data collecting tool, was chosen as the research method to observe and understand the social issues, social barriers, and daily communication habits of Syrian citizens, who reside in Turkey.

The snowball sampling technique was applied to recruit the appropriate participants to research. Snowball is a non-random technique and gives the researcher the chance of objectivity, exploration of the hard-to-reach units (Naderifar, Goli, Ghaljaei, 2017). Syrian citizens are a hard-to-reach population and most of them have concerns about the official problems. In-depth interviews were held with 28 Syrian citizens, who live in İstanbul, Adana, İzmir. These three cities also refer the most crowded Turkish citizen populations at the same time. Semi-structured questions constructed what "allows the participants' more spontaneous descriptions and narratives" (Figgou and Pavlopoulos, 2015, p. 544).



**Tablo 1.** *Field Research Sample Scheme*

| Gender | Age Group | City     | IDI | Gender                 | Profile             | City     | IDI |
|--------|-----------|----------|-----|------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----|
| Woman  | 15-25     | İstanbul | 4   | Female Opinion Leaders | -                   | İstanbul | -   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
|        | 46+       |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
| Man    | 15-25     |          | 6   | Male Opinion Leaders   | Teacher Doctor Imam |          | 3   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
|        | 46+       |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
| Woman  | 15-25     | İzmir    | 3   | Female Opinion Leaders | Nurse               | İzmir    | 1   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
|        | 46+       |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
| Man    | 15-25     |          | 6   | Male Opinion Leaders   | Dentist             |          | 3   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        | İmam                |          |     |
|        | 46+       |          |     |                        | Teacher             |          |     |
| Woman  | 15-25     | Adana    | 4   | Female Opinion Leaders | Coiffure            | Adana    | 1   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
|        | 46+       |          |     |                        |                     |          |     |
| Man    | 15-25     |          | 5   | Male Opinion Leaders   | Chemist             |          | 3   |
|        | 25-45     |          |     |                        | Doctor              |          |     |
|        |           |          |     |                        | Teacher             |          |     |

Syrian Turkmen translators quidded the researcher in each city, applied by the references of these persons. Each interview took approximately 2 hours due to the simultaneous translation.

Narrative analysis technique was used to transform the research findings harmonizing with the exemplified verbatims. Narrative analysis is an informative technique to give the individual social stories. According to Figgou and Pavlopoulos (2015), “a common assumption of narrative methods is that people tell stories to help organize and make sense of their lives and their storied accounts are functional, and purposeful” (544). In this respect, the findings are presented in a narrative style by engaging the analysis part with a few participants’ verbatims.

Considering the Syrian refugees living in Turkey, the researches revealed that the social adaptation could be achieved more easily in border cities such as Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa, where Turkish citizens with Arabic origins live (Kuzulcan, 2019), while it is thought to become more difficult in western cities that are distant from the border and have cultural differences. For this reason, İstanbul and İzmir were chosen primarily and Adana chosen.



## Limitations of the Paper and Further Directions

This research has limitations in reflecting another type of communication study about Syrian asylum-seekers such as the effect of media presentation, formal communication strategies and communication strategies in the aspect of international and intercultural relations. On further researches, the multi-effect of both formal and informal communications channels will be studied to grave a holistic approach and method for easier social adaptation implications.

The Syrian population represents mostly security concerned people due to not having an official identity. Based on this reckon willful participants' references selected for participant recruitment. Therefore, the findings are representative of neither the total generation nor the Syrian population. It may give better solutions for developing local strategies to imply successful communication tactics as if developed field research represents the picture of more Turkish cities.

The field research is performed in accessible cities, with the researcher's provenance and appropriate time. Therefore, the field research part was conducted in 2018 and 2019. Further researches probably may show more daily problems and usage habits of informal information resources of Syrian people. Additionally, the research results do not include any quantitative findings but it may help to create quantitative research to understand and measure the efficacy of informal communication channels that given on the findings.

## FINDINGS

The interviews were started in İzmir and then continued with participants having similar characteristics in Adana and İstanbul, respectively. In this parallel, it was aimed to understand the important communicative difficulties in their migration stories and the informal information sources they have used in overcoming these difficulties. In all the interviewed groups, the communication sources are gathered under three titles: digital sources, neighbors, and Syrian pioneering local opinion leaders.

### General Reflections of Syrian People's Migration Journey

Majority of research participants expressed that the inability to overcome the economic problems they faced due to the civil war is the main reason of migration. Thus, the reasons laying the foundation of forced migration decision were inability to find a job, economic difficulties, and social and religious pressures (*We had no chance to find a job and earn our livelihood in Syria anymore. No electricity and water. We refrained from sending our children to school. Living conditions became difficult. Male, 31 years old*). Among mid-age individuals, main reasons for migration are to regain the wealth they used to have before the war and to establish a prosperous future for their children.

Some of participants from Latakia and Idlib expressed that terror-related security concerns and children' risk of being battered played effective role in deciding to migrate to Turkey (*"We were living every minute in a fear. We couldn't sleep because of the fear of gunshots. Anxiety, fear. We had to save our lives"* Female, 48 years old). It observed that individuals migrating to western Turkey primarily have economic concerns, whereas security concerns come to the forefront for those living in regions closer to Syrian border. Some of university- or high school-graduated Syrians aged 15-25 years expressed that they have migrated to Turkey

because they were at the age of compulsory military service (*After graduating the school, I came here to my family in Turkey in order not to join the army because it wasn't safe, 21 years old, man, İstanbul*).

Participants with security concerns stated they generally migrated to Turkey by walking, whereas those who have migrated primarily for economic concerns migrated to Turkey following their families and relatives by using a transportation. Most stated living in camps located in border cities is not suitable for constructing a life again. Therefore, they decided to migrate to Turkey by obtaining information in advance which region of Turkey they will migrate considering the communities they can receive help. Informal communication is one of the determinants of migration destination.

Those having a relative working in Turkey preferred those regions because they think it would be easier to find a job and establish a life there again. Majority of those migrating to İzmir and İstanbul aged 25-45 years were guided by a relative or acquaintance. These acquaintances include Syrian imams, teachers, foremen, and considered by the participants as the most reliable information channel while decision process (*Before we migrated to Turkey, a journalist that we knew was working as teacher in Syrian schools here. When he came to visit his family in Syria, we asked him about where to migrate and how to find a place to live. We came here to İzmir because he lives here and would help us to find our way, 25 years male working, İzmir*). It is understood the relatives' migration journey and surviving experience is taken as a reference by the participants that choose the region by their relatives' previous experience. Hence, as Ponzanesi pointed (2019), the migration decision can be an inspiration of received image and information by the information channels, as well as it is a flee.

Most of participants stated that they obtained information about opportunities, sources, and connection similar asylum-seekers through informal communication channels after started thinking to migrate to Turkey. In other words, it can be seen that migration experience is a process that starts mentally with informal communication before starting physically. Most of 25- 45 years could achieve information about the procedures of obtaining ID and registration from the individuals who worked as teachers before migrating from Syria, whereas a few asylum-seeker obtained information from the familiar asylum-seekers, who live in Turkey for a long time and had received an ID and found a job (*Our neighbor in Syria was working in leather industry here. He said that there is opportunity of food and employment here. Thus, we preferred coming to İzmir. 31 years old, male, working*). Since majority of interviewed families had 3 or more children, they got information about children's healthcare and education conditions of and ID from the Syrian asylum-seekers working as teacher in Turkey.

During the interviews with 45+ years in İzmir and Adana, they emphasized that having a familiar information source in a region is a determiner criterion to stay there permanently. 45+ participants reasoned this preference with receiving support in access to healthcare services, receiving language and methodology support in meeting daily life needs, and practicing religious duties. Male 45 + participants stated that they were the economic leader of the family in Syria but they needed tribal communities for social aid due to the hard to having a job in Turkey. Syrian imams working at religious associations in Turkey are among these key persons providing social aid. It was observed that 25-45 years males asked to imams for permission and opinion about the different religious practices.

Almost all Syrians specified the most difficult part of their experience in Turkey to be the language problem posing an obstacle in adaptation to life (*"The first year in Turkey was very difficult. People are skeptical about you because you're Syrian. One gets anxious about saying something wrong. You don't know how to meet your needs. Those were the most difficult days"* 34 years, male, working, İstanbul). The most difficult part in adaptation process was reported to be to begin the life from scratch without knowing language and with no job and no furniture. Moreover, even though most of them were living in Turkey for more than 2 years, almost the participants aged >25 years stated that they do not feel comfortable while speaking Turkish because of their insufficient knowledge in Turkish. While some participants no communication problem with Turkish society, whereas a significant portion of participants told their negative experiences. Thus, some male participants showed the frequent reaction of Turkish society on the streets as another difficulty in adapting to social life. It is understood that especially the middle-age group had difficulties in renting a house due to general perception among local people that "Syrians have not protected their homeland and they are aggressive and invasive" (*in general, people ask why we haven't fought for your homeland. We cannot express ourselves, felt embarrassed, get tired, and have difficulty.* 28 years, male, non-working, Adana).

During some interviews (25-45 male, İstanbul), said that they faced to barriers while renting a house or applying a job due to the social biases and negative media coverages. Women participants (25-45 İzmir & İstanbul) frequently stated that news about Syrians cause negative issues and they are treated like burglars. They described stress moments as their concerns that they might face with their neighbor's negative reaction about the public spaces because of not having capability to express themselves. Cooking a food, which is very popular in Syria and has a strong odor, in the house, complaints about noise arising from the crowded family life, and inability to express themselves in cases of problems with children playing in garden are among the examples negatively affecting the motivation for adaptation (*It was very difficult to rent a house at the beginning. They do not rent a house to you because you're a Syrian. A guarantor from here is requested. You do not have a place to stay, you do not understand the language, and you need to find someone to help you around.* 48 years, female, non-working, İstanbul).

Most female participants specified access to medical services as an important difficulty during the adaptation process. Since they participate in social life and business life in Turkey less than Syrian male population, had language and self-expression problems when visiting the physicians. Thus, it was observed that 18-25 & 25-45-years females preferred Syrian physicians and nurses for health examines in clinics. Woman participants aged 15-25 years stated that they had to visit hospitals in Turkey when having important health problems and, because they had to visit a female physician due to the cultural differences between two countries, they got an appointment with the help of Syrian nurses and physicians and went to hospital together with Syrian nurses and physicians to receive their support in explaining their problems. (*It wasn't so in Syria. Women and men do not work together. It's forbidden. It doesn't comply with our traditions.* 21 years, female, non-working İstanbul). 15-25 years participants told the unregistered recruitment of children in business life and deprivation of education opportunities as a frequent problem. Specially, in crowded families not knowing how to get support, children work when parents having no job due to language and qualification deficiencies. It was observed that the school-age children in a family with +45 years old members in İzmir were deprived of education to financially support their family.

Similarly, it was observed that 15-25 years a farm worker interviewed in Adana could not have education. When asked about their references in finding a job, majority stated that they were supported by Turkish citizens speaking both Turkish and Arabic. It was observed most 15-25 years old participants were more active in having Turkish friends and receiving support and information. Moreover, they could also learn Turkish more easily thanks to their friends in neighborhood. Several woman participants interviewed in İstanbul and İzmir had chance to receive vocational training thanks to their communication with Turkish neighbors and had the opportunity of working as assistant in small firms such as coiffeurs or as homeworkers.

### Key Opinion Leaders as Informal Communication Channels

BBC Media Action with Development and Humanitarian Learning Action (DAHLIA) research (2016) show that refugees having contact with other refugees are more resilient than those isolated from own group (Hannides, Baily and Kaoukji, 2016). For understanding the Syrian people's informal communication channels and motivation, the analysis was constructed under four themes: opinion leaders, digital media, non-official business channels, host society members. Regarding the Syrian asylum-seekers, the present research showed individuals' communication channels preference related to their own culture for finding write practices for social integration (Kuzulcan, 2019). The main reason for this is the comfort advantage of informal communication channels. Researches in healthcare practices showed that key persons played significant role in spreading the informal information (Chen, Tang, Zhou, Sarcevic, and Lee, 2013).

Syrian imams are referred as informative communication reference by most of participants. It was determined in the interviews with two Syrian imams in İzmir and Adana that individuals ask for support generally in financial aids, establishing balance between business and private life, marriage, wedding, and children's religious education. Imams were frequently asked for advice about problems regarding marriage, and that women are the group having most difficulties due to marriages, which have been solemnized in Syria but are not valid in Turkey. Imams also were frequently asked for advice about the problems of spouses, who haven't been registered in the temporary protection status in Turkey and thus are not considered married, as well as the polygamous marriages. Some working Syrian men ask for imams' opinions about compensation prayers since they cannot practice their religious duties completely. It is also seen that there are important problems between two societies about positions of women and men in social life and imams were asked for advice on this subject. According to Miettunen and Shunnag "In traditional tribal community, low levels of education, limited possibilities to work outside home, and lack of skills needed for working make the situation difficult for women" (2020, p. 6). It is seen that the women remain in the background due to society's structure. Women not having enough knowledge about their rights in Turkey and some of men wanting to live with social rules that they are familiar with in Syria are among the most frequently consulted subjects. As another problem, coexistence of women and men in business life in host country is considered extraordinary and religiously wrong. It was also observed that some of Syrian families prefer their children have Arabic- and religion-oriented education rather than Turkish schools and they received support from imams in this subject. Studies carried out in Turkey showed that there is a 70% cultural difference and 51% social distance between two societies (Erdoğan, 2019). It is

observed that these cultural differences are most frequently observed in religious practices and social roles. Since the coexistence of women and men in business and social life in Turkey might contradict with social life Syrians are familiar with, they may have problems in business environment and education. It is understood that some families prefer sending their children to religious education centers.

According to the 2019 data, 222 thousand Syrian children educate by temporary education centers in Turkey. Almost 500 thousands of school-age children cannot access to education (Emin, 2019). Syrian teachers interviewed in İzmir and İstanbul constitute another key opinion leader group. Besides how to manage the education of children, teachers are also asked for opinion about subjects such as official procedures in immigrant centers, healthcare, individuals knowing Arabic and Turkish languages to contact with during the official applications, and being informed about the support and aid services and teachers are generally considered as information sources on this subject. Besides how to manage the education of children, teachers are also asked for opinion about subjects such as official procedures in immigrant centers, healthcare, individuals knowing Arabic and Turkish languages to contact with during the official applications, and being informed about the support and aid services. 15-25 years old Syrians informally working in farms or with artisans to economically support their families frequently ask for help to not completely fall apart from education opportunities. The participants working as teacher in Turkey emphasized that some boys in this age group couldn't completely adapt to educational environment since they have to work, while girls may be detached from education for early marriages. These difficulties are observed most frequently among crowded families since they have no knowledge about supports. Teachers were seen to integrate with formal communication channels and they help these groups insofar as possible. Teachers also inform the communities about Turkish language courses and make effort to announce these courses in social media groups. Some female participants (25-45) in İzmir & İstanbul told they attended Turkish courses upon being informed by Syrian teachers.

Physicians as opinion leaders stated, since they are in contact with official authorities regarding finding a job, they are more familiar with Turkish language and health-related rules when compared to other Syrian asylum-seekers. The interviewed physicians stated that, since they couldn't obtain work permit, they overcame economic difficulties during adaptation process by working in jobs such as air condition repairman, factory employee, or English-Arabic translation. Healthcare professional participants stated that especially the Syrians having language barrier prefer Syrian physicians to explain their problems and to understand the treatment. It was also observed that Syrian women prefer Syrian physicians and some of Syrian women tried to have their health controls done by Syrian nurses rather than physicians. They receive support of physicians about the medication procurement and they refrain from buying their medications from pharmacies due to language barrier and adaptation problems. A non-working 45 years old dentist interviewed in İzmir stated, they were asked for opinion about university education, experience of Syrian asylum-seekers in other cities, and medications being used.

### **Digital Platforms as Informal Communication Channels**

Digital media platforms are the commonly used channels that individuals use to reach the information about personal issues. According to Gillespie (2018), these platforms "are now



the three important channels that refugees take with them when they are unexpectedly forced to leave their homes" (26 Oct 2018, par 1.). Migration Policy Institute pointed out that "social media also contributes to making the settlement and integration processes easier for refugees, allowing for informal networking to take place through outlets such as popular Facebook pages" (Kaplan, 2018, parag. 13). The qualitative study on Syrian refugees passing to Europe from İzmir results show that "forced migration and digital connectivity are coincide" (Gillespi, Osseiran and Cheesman, 2018, p. 1). A study conducted on Jordan Syrian Refugee camps by Xu, Holzer, Maitland, and Gillet (2017) showed that mobile applications could increase Syrian refugees' interaction and engagement. Their trial results exhibit that mobile app titled as SpeakUp offer the opportunity for fragile population as woman to engage with the community.

The social media accounts that are popular among Syrian asylum-seekers were actively used by 15-25 & 25-45 groups asylum-seekers. Facebook and Instagram used for informed about the events occurring in Syria at most, micro-WhatsApp groups are used for receiving support and official procedures information. Twitter monitors Syrian news in Turkey. Some participants stated that they learnt several Turkish words through posts shared by social media groups; received support for translation for official websites' content, whereas few woman participants emphasized they informed about subjects like health, social rights, and child education through the Arabic posts shared in these media (*For instance, you want to go to doctor but you cannot find the way since you don't know Turkish. I heard from these groups that I could receive support from a neighbor who knows Arabic language. 36 years old non-working female, İzmir*). Few females attend governmentally-organized free Turkish literacy courses towards Turkish citizen adults by the diffused information via social media groups (*I learned this education from someone I met in a Facebook group addressing Syrians. Then, I asked one of my neighbors about how to go to these schools. It was very useful for me to learn the words and obtain information. 29 years female- coiffeur, Adana*).

Some female (25-45) uses digital communication platforms to follow daily jobs and necessities of children's education. So much the more, some females claimed that they followed some social media accounts and WhatsApp groups to get information about the social supports. Few of working females (25-45, İstanbul & İzmir) told they took some daily job opportunities such as housekeeping by following the social media groups. A group of students aged 15-25 years use the city's digital applications to get information about the roads and a group of internet websites to cope with the language problems.

Participants (15-25, İstanbul & İzmir) actively use the digital sources for educational purposes and Turkish translations. Male participants in this group strengthened their relationship with their Turkish friends through these platforms and receive language support. Some participants from different cities noted that they got information from Instagram and private WhatsApp groups about the opportunities and conditions in other regions. While, some female participants have Turkish friends and neighbors in these accounts, Again, some female (15-25) establish closer relationship with their Turkish friends via these platforms and, thereby, they could join more friend groups. Male participants in this age group, while using WhatsApp groups very intensely used for improving their friendship with Turks and integrating with these social circles, these groups significantly contributed to the improvement of their Turkish speaking skills.

Many participants noted the technological opportunities in Turkey to be very advanced and they stated that they could find chance to obtain information from Internet and contact with Syrian artisans in different cities to find a job. Even if they had limited technological opportunities, it was also determined that 25-45-year-old females could find daily jobs from the WhatsApp groups and even the work experiences improved their capacity to establish communication with Turks.

### **Turkish Neighbors as Informal Communication Channels**

Turkish neighbors referred as the informal information resources for both Syrian women and men. Some of 45-year-old Syrian male mentioned that they asked for help from their Turkish neighbors to find the way and contact with official authorities for receiving economic support. In another interview, the participants referred Turkish neighbors, who speak both Turkish and Arabic, as the key person to convince the households to rent a home. Some of 25-45 years-old women said that Turkish neighbors have supported them economically, as well as donating second-hand house furniture. The youngsters living in Adana were supported by their neighbors, who can speak both Arabic and Turkish, for finding a job to work after school in order to support their families. It was mentioned that Turkish citizens having Arabic and living in this region supported the asylum-seekers from various aspects and guided them for access to healthcare services and economic supports. Some of woman participants in İzmir and İstanbul stated that they received support for resolving the cultural conflicts with neighbors in their buildings and neighborhoods.

It can be seen that Turkish-citizen neighbors and acquaintances are among the information sources providing guidance for access to governmental supports. It was mentioned that Turkish-citizen neighbors provided support for information and communication regarding the subjects such as overcoming the difficulties in children's education, meeting the necessities of children with special needs, and benefiting the social supports of non-official solidarity groups in every city (*Since I have a disabled grandchild, we couldn't know what to do in Turkey. A Turkish neighbor of ours guided us to the association. We started receiving support from that association. Moreover, friends of that neighbor have significantly supported us economically in the first days. 45+ years woman, Adana*).

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### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

The paper explains Syrian communities' informal communication channels used to provide information about living conditions in Turkey. The research results showed micro-level opinion leaders and acquaintances are the key informal communication channels, Syrian people get information about the issues and as for social and economic support. The research results show that Syrian people have security concerns for that reason having communication with trustworthy and well-known Syrians is very essential to ask crucial questions. These key opinion leaders include teachers, doctors, nurses, and imams. Effects of this barrier and the coping methods vary depending on age, education, employment status, and traditions of interviewed participants. Results showed that informal communication channels are useful for participants in overcoming the language barrier and having access to social rights. Most of participants listed their information sources for coping with problems in business and social environment as Syrian opinion leaders, neighbors, digital sources, and business network. Syrians living in western cities stated that they also received information



about social reactions and events from opinion leaders or social media channels. Communication is one of the most important barriers in this field. To diversity the communication channels, the videos, brochures, and such materials providing information about points and methods for receiving support on these subjects can be distributed through opinion leaders to make the efforts of Syrian opinion leaders more effective.

It was observed that Syrian healthcare professionals, who also are asylum-seekers, played an important role in overcoming the communicative problems about the health problems. Receiving medical support in their native language is an important necessity for elderly and illiterate Syrian population. For this reason, it is thought that selecting the physicians and Syrian asylum-seekers, who will play a role in healthcare services, among the popular individuals having effect on these small communities might contribute to the adaptation process. Most of the participants consider the teachers as the most important reference in young groups' adaptation to new society, learning Turkish language, and resolving the language-related problems of families in official procedures. Even though teachers are in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, ensuring the communicative cooperation might also provide positive motivation for increasing the rate of literacy.

In addition, digital media channels such as social media accounts provide significant active information channels to seek detailed information about issues and expand the social network to catch job and education opportunities. Almost all of 15-25 & 25-45 years mentioned the technological opportunities in Turkey. At this point, it was found that an informal communication environment was established for the problems through the entrusted sources in social media and it was noticed that involvement of this communication environment into formal communication strategies might be useful for ensuring the adaptation motivation.

It is seen to be important to observe and involve the informal communication environment, which is one of the communication strategies needed to achieve the social adaptation of asylum-seekers having a crowded population, into practice. Because, in closed societies such as Syrian's asylum-seeker groups, both trust and reference have determinant effect on the communicative activity. Hence, considering the studies on this subject from both formal and informal communication perspectives and advancing in cooperation with these channels for the communication strategies to be put into practice would positively contribute to social adaptation efforts. Of course, communication cannot solve all the social problems, but it has the power to reduce the negative moments of the migration journey. With the communicative partnership of key opinion leaders and local authorities, the mutual trust between two societies and positive motivation for social adaptation might be improved.

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