

**How Do Refugees Decide on Their Future Home?:
A Qualitative Analysis of Return Decision of Syrians in
Turkey**

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis offers an explanation to the question of how refugees decide about their future life aspirations regarding their residency. Some refugees return to their home country, while others stay in the host country, or resettle in a third country. This study tries to understand which factors would increase the likelihood of return and which factors encourage refugees to stay in the host country. Expanding the capital accumulation theories that are mostly centered around labor migrants to the conditions of refugees, this thesis provides a model for the process of evaluation before a decision to return, stay or resettle. According to this model, refugees decide on one of three future options after comparing the social, economic, and human capital they accumulated in the host country with the capital they would have after a possible return to their home country or future resettlement in a third country. They tend to choose the option in which they would acquire more social, economic, and human capital. Qualitative data from 40 in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Konya was gathered to see if the real cases of decision-making processes of Syrian refugees are compatible with the expectations of this research. As some examples of the social, economic, and human capital accumulation of refugees, developing new social relations, attaining an educational program, and having a stable, fairly paid job in the host country have a negative effect on return; while developing no or few social relations, having no or little education/ not being able to get educational degrees accredited, being unemployed/having an unstable underpaid job in the host country, and still having a home and source of income in the home country have a positive effect on the decision to return of refugees.

ÖZETÇE

Mülteciler Gelecekte Yaşayacakları Yeri Nasıl Seçerler?: Türkiye’de Yaşayan Suriyelilerin Geri Dönüş Kararına Dair Nitel Bir Analiz

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Bu tez, mültecilerin gelecekte nerede yaşamak istediklerine nasıl karar verdikleri sorusuna bir açıklama sunmaktadır. Bazı mülteciler kendi ülkelerine dönerken, bazıları ev sahibi ülkede kalır veya üçüncü bir ülkeye yerleşir. Bu çalışma, hangi faktörlerin geri dönüş olasılığını artırdığını ve hangi faktörlerin mültecileri ev sahibi ülkede kalmaya teşvik ettiğini anlamaya çalışmaktadır. İşçi göçmenleri etrafında şekillenmiş olan sermaye birikimi teorilerini mültecilerin koşullarına uygulayan bu tez, geri dönüş, kalma veya yeniden yerleşme kararı öncesindeki değerlendirme süreci için bir model sunmaktadır. Bu modele göre mülteciler, ev sahibi ülkede biriktirdikleri sosyal, ekonomik ve beşeri sermayeyi, kendi ülkelerine olası bir dönüş veya gelecekte üçüncü bir ülkeye yerleşme sonrasında sahip olacakları sermaye ile karşılaştırdıktan sonra üç seçenekten birine karar verirler. Bu değerlendirmede daha fazla sosyal, ekonomik ve beşeri sermaye elde edecekleri seçeneği seçme eğilimindedirler. Bu araştırmanın beklentileriyle Türkiye’deki Suriyeli mültecilerin gelecekte yaşayacakları ülkeye dair karar alma süreçlerinin uyumlu olup olmadığını görmek için İstanbul ve Konya’daki Suriyeli mültecilerle yapılan 40 derinlemesine mülakat görüşmesinden nitel veriler toplanmıştır. Buna göre mültecilerin sosyal, ekonomik ve beşeri sermaye birikiminin bazı örnekleri olan ev sahibi ülkede yeni sosyal ilişkiler geliştirme, bir eğitim programına katılmış/katılıyor olma, adil ücretlendirilen ve stabil bir işe sahip olma gibi faktörler geri dönüşü olumsuz yönde etkilerken; yeni sosyal ilişkiler geliştiremememe, hiç eğitim almamış ya da çok az eğitim almış olma, eğitim derecelerini akredite edememe, işsiz olma ya da düşük ücretli stabil olmayan bir işe sahip olma, ve halen kendi ülkesinde bir evi ve gelir kaynağı olma gibi etkenlerin mültecileri geri dönüşe teşvik ettiği gözlemlenmiştir.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The present study tries to understand how Syrian refugees who came to Turkey after the breakout of the civil war in Syria in 2011, shape their future plans in terms of the country they prefer to live in. It tries to solve the puzzle of migration decision-making of refugees by asking the question of “Why do refugees who came due to the same or similar reasons to the same country reach out very different choices in their life projections?” acting upon the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

As most immigrant groups do, the Syrian refugees in Turkey who had to leave their country after the breakout of the Civil War in 2011 can consider three different paths for their lives in the future, namely, staying in the host country, returning to the home country, and resettling in a third country (Icduygu & Nimer, 2019). The preferred choice among these three future plans can be determined after a very different reasoning process of a Syrian refugee or a member of other immigrant groups which is shaped by the deliberation of what this person has at the time of consideration and what s/he can have in the future with this option. This logic is compatible with the conceptualization of migration by de Haas which brought a new perspective to the migration decision-making discussions with the framework that migration is the “function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures” (de Haas, 2021, p. 17).

Understanding the returning and staying patterns of refugees can be considered a key component of both the research on refugees and immigration policymaking. Since the ongoing research on refugees tries to capture the factors related to in and out-flows of refugees, the mechanism behind the decision-making to return would give notable clues to anticipate new flows of refugees. Additionally, for a country like Turkey, which hosts

nearly 4 million refugees, having predictions about the plans of refugees for their future lives would help the development of policies in many fields of life such as education, health, labor, social cohesion, etc. Thus, this study aims at contributing to both return decision-making literature and immigration policymaking with its findings on the process of decision-making for returning to the home country or staying in the home country.

The migration decision-making literature tries to understand the logic behind these choices of the people who are willing to migrate and the immigrants who want to return or stay. The researchers who contributed to this literature examine the factors which can lead immigrants to stay in the host country, the conditions under which immigrants would prefer to return to their home country, and rarely, the situations which cause immigrants to resettle in a third or a fourth country.

Although there is a significant number of studies focusing on the return decision-making process after a voluntary migration such as labor migration and high-skilled mobility (Davanzo, 1983, Constant & Massey, 2002; Haug, 2008), the mechanism behind the return decision of the forced migrants such as refugees and asylum seekers is understudied and still requires more research (Müller-Funk, 2019). Thus, one of the most important contributions of this study is bringing a new perspective to the return mechanism of a group of forced migrants, i.e., refugees through benefiting from the existing literature, which is shaped mostly around the voluntary migrants' decision-making for returning or staying.

Another contribution of this study is the utilization of capital accumulation theories which were focusing on mostly voluntary migrants on refugees' return or stay decisions with a combination of the different types of capital appropriate for the cases of refugees. In addition to the most common explanations about return decision mechanism in the existing return migration studies which are based on the economic reasoning of immigrants, structural dynamics including the home and host country conditions, transnational ties to home countries, and social networks they have in their home and host countries, some scholars shape their return theories around the capital accumulation of immigrants in their home and host countries. Basing their approaches on the classical "capital" definitions by prominent scholars like Adam Smith, Pierre Bourdieu, and James

Coleman, researchers focusing on migration decision-making explain the decision to migrate or return by utilizing the arguments about the accumulation of different kinds of capital such as social, human, cultural, financial. However, as in most of the migration decision-making literature, the studies which employ the capital accumulation theories aim to understand the attitudes of voluntary migrants. Thus, this study provides an input to the return migration literature by taking a new combination of the different capitals (i.e. social, economic, and human) and applying a new capital theory for refugees– which might have different conditions and concerns than the voluntary migrants. According to the pre-field work deductions from the literature and the cases of Syrian refugees in Turkey, this study suggests that refugees evaluate the opportunities brought by social, economic, and human capital they accumulated in the host countries they currently live in, and they already had in their home country while they are determining their return and stay decisions.

Therefore, it is argued that the more social, economic, or human capital refugees accumulate in the host country the less likely would they return to their home countries or resettle in a third destination. Similarly, the likelihood of return increases while the refugees still have a substantial amount of social, economic, and human capital and their home countries. Accordingly, it is more likely for refugees with no or little time spent on education, no or very few friends or social networks, no or limited Turkish, and no or insufficient salary, to return to their country if they would still get their social sphere, their homes and properties, and their salary or jobs they had before their migration.

Qualitative data was collected through fieldwork to understand if these arguments are supported by real cases of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Forty semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between June 6 and August 8 in 2020. Twenty of these interviews took place in Konya as face-to-face conversations, while the remaining twenty were in Istanbul as 11 face-to-face and 9 video call conversations due to the Covid-19 Pandemic measures.

As supported by most of the cases of the forty interviews, among all interviewees, those who could achieve to accumulate new social capital in the host country by making new friends or having a network with neighbors are more likely to stay in the host country

while those who could not prefer mostly to return to their home country. Also, human capital investments like having education and learning the native language in the host country decrease the likelihood of refugees returning. On the contrary, the refugees who could not transfer their human capital (such as university degrees or professional skills) to the host country or invest in human capital after their migration tend to return to their home country. Moreover, those who lost their economic capital in the home country such as homes, cars, and agricultural lands are more willing to return while those who could not find economically sufficient jobs and acquire economic capital in the host country are less likely to plan a future in the host country.

Since only three interviewees consider resettling in a third destination yet without a real plan for this, the mechanism behind the refugees who prefer to resettle is not explained by the data collected during the fieldwork. This situation may be totally random, however, one possible explanation behind not encountering a substantial number of refugees with an exact plan for resettlement would be that most of the refugees who aspired to move from Turkey to another destination such as the European countries have already found ways to realize their plans and left the country. Therefore, to understand the factors behind their decision to resettle, additional research should be conducted.

After this introduction, according to the organization of this thesis, general background information about the Syrian refugees in Turkey is given, the review of the existing literature and the theoretical background follows, then after the methodology of the research is explained the findings of the study are shared. The thesis ends with the conclusion part which is consisting of a summary of the findings, comments about the results, contributions and limitations of this study, and suggestions about future research.

1.2 Background

The flow of Syrian Refugees in Turkey started after the breakout of the Civil War in Syria in 2011 which was the result of the protests as a part of the Arab uprisings in the

region, and never stopped since then. In ten years from 2011 until now, since the political and social conditions affecting the experiences of the Syrian refugees in Turkey have been changing, the experiences of refugees who came since 2011, differed as time passed.

After the Civil War started to displace Syrians from the cities they live in in 2011, as a neighboring country, Turkey was one of the first countries which are Syrians' first migration destinations along with Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. While the number of refugees was around fifteen thousand at the end of 2011, in the first half of 2021 the official records remarked that the number of registered Syrians has exceeded 3.5 million (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNCHR], 2021a). With this massive influx throughout the ten years of the Civil War, Turkey became the country hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world leaving far behind Lebanon with around 855,000 and Jordan with around 669,000 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021b).

In the process that the number of refugees reached from thousands to millions, the policy implementations and the public perception of Turkish citizens had various changes interrelated to the increasing number of refugees and the years that the war sustained.

In the first period of the influx of refugees, Turkey applied an "open border" policy along its border with Syria starting from the arrival of the first groups of Syrians in April 2011 (Akbas et al., 2016). However, the Syrian refugees could not be registered as "refugees" as a result of the 1951 Geneva Convention's Turkey-specific reservation of coming from Western countries and also moving to Turkey individually but not as being a part of a move "en masse". Despite this, several government institutions, NGOs and Turkish society spent much effort to convey humanitarian aid to the Syrians in camps around the border cities and those who achieved to settle in the several cities in the first years of the refugee flow (Icduygu & Nimer, 2019). It was expected by the government and the Turkish society that the war in Syria would end soon with the support of the international regime and consequently, the Syrians who got displaced because of the harm of the war would become able to return to their country. This perception of the Turkish government, which has been under the rule of the Ak Party since 2002, led the political elites to describe the Syrian refugees as "guests" and not to put so much effort into improving effective long-term integration policies for them (Ihlamur-Oner, 2013). The

description of “guest” gained the sympathy of the public and shaped the expectations of Turkish society about the return of the refugees in direction of being in a few years after the start of the influx to Turkey.

After the first years, the lack of legal status of the Syrian refugees started to pose problems as their settlement in cities increased and a significant part of them wanted to start working and sending their children to schools to make them continue their education which they had to stop while moving to Turkey. Also, the number of refugees rose from 14,237 in 2012 to 224,655 in 2013 and with a drastic increase, reached approximately 1,5 million in the last months of 2014 (Presidency of Migration Management [PMM], 2021). This increase in the numbers broadened the impact of the problems which Syrians face due to their lack of status in Turkey.

In October 2014, the Turkish government enacted the “Regulation on Temporary Protection” to deal with the problems Syrians face while they are trying to continue their lives in Turkey related to working, reaching health services, having education, and applying for certain government services, etc. This regulation was kind of a specification for the situation of Syrian refugees of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection which was adopted in 2013 as a part of the “EU-isation of Turkey’s migration and asylum legislation” (Icduygu & Millet, 2016). With the execution of this regulation, the Syrian refugees were given Identity Documents implying that they were registered under the “temporary protection” of Turkey which provides them protection and welfare rights including access to labor markets, education, and health services as well as social aids and some state services (Resmi Gazete, 2014). Government officials improved the already taken identity and biometric data by adding new detailed information and the fingerprints of the refugees to give them the identity documents, thus, taking identity cards was not a difficult process for most of the refugees. However, although this document and the foreigner identification number that comes with it is an important step to enhance the daily works of the Syrians, the residency permit and the citizenship applications were not the opportunities that come with this identity document.

While the crisis in Syria was leaving four years of war behind and starting its fifth year in 2015 with no possible future of peace, the number of refugees in Turkey was

keeping rising steadily. At the end of 2015, there were more than 2.5 million refugees registered within Turkey's borders (PMM, 2021). The sense of 'no peace or political solution to the crisis is coming in near future in the minds of Turkish political elites and an increase of one million in the number of refugees throughout 2014, were the pushing factors for the government for preparing a more detailed and improved regulation on the access of the refugees to the labor markets to make them more integrated economically. At the beginning of 2016, the "Regulation on Work Permit on Foreigners Under Temporary Protection" which facilitates the application of refugees under temporary protection to the ministry of labor for working as documented employees came into force (Resmi Gazete, 2016). With this regulation, certain rights such as being paid at least the minimum wage in Turkey and having the life insurance that all workers should be given by their employers were provided to the refugees to decrease the undocumented employment of refugees as well as to regulate some of the working conditions they have. However, the poor implementation process of this new regulation and the lack of some crucial arrangements for the refugees in some sectors like seasonal agriculture were problematic for many refugees (Turper et al., 2019) Although the policy was insufficient in implementation, some political elites mentioned the possible economic benefits of the Syrians to Turkey and the government's steps for facilitating the process during the same year, which can be considered as efforts to shape public perception towards seeing refugees not as burdens but as opportunities (Alakoc et al., 2019).

Not only Turkey and some other Middle Eastern Countries were dealing with the refugee flows, but also European countries were very concerned about the number of refugees reaching European countries which peaked in the summer of 2015 with over a million-refugee entries (Migration to Europe in Charts, 2018). After this big inflow, in March 2016 European Union reached an agreement with Turkey about ceasing undocumented entry to the European countries as well as "In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk" (EU-Turkey Statement, 2016). According to EU-Turkey Statement's two main action points, 1) "All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey" and 2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria" (EU-Turkey Statement, 2016). The parties

of the deal also decided that Turkey will be provided a 3 billion Euro aid for the financial costs of hosting refugees for the years 2016 and 2017 (EU-Turkey Statement, 2016). An additional 3 billion euro- aid was also promised by the EU for the following years (“EU greenlights €3 billion for Syrian refugees in Turkey”, 2018). Another topic at the table was the visa liberalization for Turkish citizens who want to enter Europe’s 26-member border-free travel zone by the end of June 2016. Although Turkey demanded visa liberalization for its citizens as a regulation that is provided with this statement, this liberalization process was bounded to fulfillment of all benchmarks by the EU officials (“EU greenlights €3 billion for Syrian refugees in Turkey”, 2018).

After this deal started to be implemented in 2016, at the end of the year, the number of refugees who reached Europe by crossing Turkish shores or land boundaries had a dramatic decrease (Migration to Europe in Charts, 2018). Also, by August 2021, almost 30 thousand Syrians were resettled in European countries after the necessary documentation is done by the parties (PMM, 2021). However, according to the statements of Turkey’s President Erdogan several times, the pledged 3+3 billion Euros was not given to Turkey with full amount (Gauthier-Villars, 2020). Despite the determination of the end of 2019 as the deadline for the full payment of 6 billion Euros, as of August 2021, only around 4 billion Euros is paid to Turkey through humanitarian aid and social projects for the Syrians (European Commission, n.d.). Also, the visa-liberalization process has not been achieved so far due to the lack of fulfillment of the benchmarks as reported by the European Commission (2019). The dissatisfaction of Turkey with the EU-Turkey Statement’s terms is voiced in several speeches by President Erdogan and some other political elites such as the Minister of the European Union (Gauthier-Villars, 2020; Directorate of EU Affairs, 2017).

After five years of hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey, in 2016, with the help of research and field studies done by the academia and some NGOs such as the government-related aid association Türk Kızılayı (Turkish Red Crescent), the Turkish government came to a point of awareness of the high possibility of long term or permanent stay of the refugees in Turkey that the Turkish government and society assumed that they will return their countries after a temporary stay that finishes with the end of the crisis in Syria. The announcement of President Erdogan on the possibility of giving Syrians Turkish

citizenship in August 2016 (Uras, 2016), and regulations on work permits would be considered a sign of the willingness of the government to integrate the Syrians into the country since their likelihood of return was not predicted as probable as much as it is believed before (İçduygu & Diker, 2017).

However, as the number of Syrian refugees and the years of their stay increased, the negative feelings of Turkish people started to rise and be expressed by mouth on the streets, and words on social media. As the Syrian Barometer survey research done in 2017 indicates, 82% of Turkish society was not in favor of having refugees in Turkey permanently at those times (Erdogan, 2018).

Although the realization of the possibility that most Syrians would not be temporary immigrants gave momentum to several integration policies and projects, starting from the end of 2015, the government got aware of the strongly rising anger and xenophobia among the Turkish society against Syrians. The public opinion which had a change gradually from being commonly positive to moderate and finally negative manner, activated government to change its position about the Syrian refugees and try to make policies enhancing the return of Syrians. Both the discourses of the political elites and the foreign policy steps on the Syrian Civil War issue were the signs of this change.

For example, in the three cross-border operations, “Euphrates Shield” between August and March 2017; “Olive Branch” between January and March 2018, and “Peace Spring” between October and November 2019, of Turkish Armed Forces to Northern Syria, the aim of creating safe places where Syrians in Turkey can return, was emphasized along with other triggering reasons such as the border control and fight with terror in cross border territories by the political elites (Koseoglu, 2019).

Also, in the UN General Assembly, which was held in September 2019, President Erdogan announced a plan for the region they agreed with the US military in August to build a safe corridor for the displaced Syrians to allow them to return (Zontur, 2019) and asked for the support of the UN to put this regional restoration plan into effect. According to the plan, life zones would be built in 10 districts with a population of thirty thousand each and 140 villages with five thousand people in the region of northern Syria (İşte

Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın Dünya, 2019). In each village, there would be an administration office, one thousand houses, two mosques, two schools, a center for the youth, and pieces of land to cultivate for the villagers also in each district, six thousand apartments, one small-scaled and ten medium-scaled mosques, eight schools, a high school, two sports centers, five centers for youth, a hospital and a small industrial zone would take place as Erdogan shared with the head of UN member states (“İşte Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın Dünya”, 2019).

Since 2017, although groups of Syrians still try to enter Turkey as the fight escalates near the borderline of Turkey, occasionally some groups have been trying to return to their homeland or the camps set up by Red Crescent, several times. For example, after the military operations of Euphrates Shield in northern Aleppo and Olive Branch in Afrin, approximately 350,000 refugees returned to Syria according to official statements (Koseoglu, 2019).

One possible factor in the rise of negative feelings against Syrians and the effort for the return policies by the incumbent government may be the actions and talks of some Turkish political elites. For example, during the local elections in March 2019, the candidate of the AK party who is also the last Prime Minister of Turkey, Binali Yıldırım answered a question about his policy plans for Syrians as they will send back all Syrians who get a part of a crime or threaten the security of the lives and the properties of the residents of Istanbul and they have “zero tolerance” those who do these (“Yıldırım: Suriyeliler Kalıcı Değil”, 2019).

Also, in July 2019 a rapid and strict policy implementation was started by the Ministry of Interior that all undocumented or unregistered immigrants will be deported from Turkey and all the Syrians under temporary protection who live in a city other than they are registered will be sent to their registration city if they do not leave voluntarily in approximately a month (“İçişleri Bakanı Soylu'dan “Suriyeli eylemi”, 2019). After this decision started to be implemented, reflections from several NGOs regarding the Syrians' rights pushed the minister to state that this regulation was not to repatriate Syrians, the main target of this was to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants who came from Afghanistan and other countries from the Middle East and Africa, and Turkey did

not deport any Syrian who is under the temporary protection status (İçişleri Bakanı Soyulu'dan 'Suriyeli eylemi', 2019). Although deportation was not implemented for the Syrians under temporary protection, the order for the refugees who were living in the city other than they are registered to move to their cities of registration was struggling for the families who came to Turkey partially and thus got registered in different cities. After the deadline, a one-month extension for the moving of Syrians to their cities of registration was declared by the Ministry of Interior (Deadline extended for unregistered Syrians, 2019). This policy aimed to encourage nearly five hundred thousand Syrians who have been registered in a city other than Istanbul to leave. However, no statement was done by the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) or the Ministry of Interior about the achievement rate of this policy after the start of implementation.

At the beginning of 2020, a drastic change occurred in Turkey's policy on the control of borders and shores to Europe. As opposed to EU-Turkey Statement, Turkey opened its border gates and lifted the shore controls for Syrians and other immigrants on their way to Europe. This policy change came following the attack of Syrian Regime Forces on the Turkish Army in Idlib in which 33 Turkish soldiers died (Trew, 2020). After the borders were open, Turkish officials stated that the probability of a new migration wave consisting of the 950,000 displaced Syrians who were stuck on the Turkey-Syria border was the factor behind the opening of the borders (van Hagen, 2020). To let some groups of refugees from this new wave head to Europe, and consequently be able to deal with the new refugee flow's cost to the country, the borders were opened as announced by the government officials ("Why Did Turkey Open Borders", 2020). Days after the implementation of this new decision, President Erdogan emphasized the reasoning behind their new border policy with these words: "We will not close these doors in the coming period, and this will continue. Why? The European Union needs to keep its promises. We don't have to take care of this many refugees, to feed them" (van Hagen, 2020).

Two other senior officers from the Presidency, stated that there is not a change in our policies towards the Syrians under temporary protection, and Turkey will keep hosting Syrians who want to stay in Turkey, but for those who want to go to Europe, Turkey will not put a barrier before them. In their statements, one emphasis was also common that, unlike Turkey, Europe does not take its share of responsibility in the refugee issue, and it

is time for European countries to fulfill their promises with this opening of the borders (“Why Did Turkey Open Borders”, 2020). Just hours after this new decision, hundreds of Syrians walked to the border cross between Turkey and Bulgaria, and in the following days, thousands of Syrians and Afghans went to Aegean shores to reach the Greek islands, however, this new decision did not mobilize the expected numbers of Syrians and other immigrants to go to Europe. According to Minister of Interior of Turkey Suleyman Soylu, as of March 6, 2020, the number of refugees who achieved to reached Greece is 142,175 (Soylu, 2020), while Greek officials mentioned only “thousands” of Syrians and other immigrants who could achieve to reach the border and more than 10 000 were stopped while trying to enter Greece (“EU to give migrants in Greece €2,000 to go home”, 2020).

Although the Turkish government did not find the support it expected from the UN and EU for its Safe Zone Plan in Northern Syria where millions of refugees were planned to return from Turkey and resettle there, groups of Syrians have been returning to Syria gradually dependent on the conditions they have in Turkey and Syria. According to the official statements from the Ministry of Interior, as of July 2021, 441,571 Syrian refugees from Turkey have voluntarily returned to Syria since 2016 (İhlas Haber Ajansı, 2021). In addition to these returning groups and the potential newcomers who are living at the borderline between Northern Syria and Turkey, the last movement of refugees from Turkey to Europe contributed to the dynamic structure of inflow-outflow waves of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

From 2011 to 2021 the situation of the Syrian refugees in Turkey changed as the years of stay and their number increased and changed the society’s perception and consequently the policy implementations of the Turkish government. A multidimensional plan through which improving policies for the longer or permanent stay of the Syrian refugees in Turkey and preparing plans to courage some group of them to return to Syria at the same time has been carried out. In addition to the effect of changing public perception and government policies on the lives of Syrians, the conditions of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the lockdown measures may have effects on the living conditions and capital accumulations of the refugees. Although the effects of the former two factors were tried to be examined during the fieldwork of this study, the effect of the latter might not

be caught in this research since more than three-fourths of interviews were completed before the Pandemic.



Chapter 2:

**LITERATURE REVIEW WITH THEORETICAL AND
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Understanding the return action is an important part of scrutinizing the migration move and migration decision-making process since there is the possibility of return for every migrant. Thus, there are many studies in which return migration has been examined through its numerous aspects in migration literature. As Cassarino argues, while scholarly debates on the return of immigrants date back to the 1960s, it was in the 1980s that the return migration literature has been enriched significantly by the scientific research of the scholars who were trying to understand the return move and the effect of it on home countries (Cassarino, 2004).

Although return migration has been researched by scholars for decades, after the 2000s the number of studies related to the return movement of immigrants and refugees displayed a rise in the international migration literature as the policies of host states became more encouraging temporary stay and return due to the rise of the security concern in the refugee regimes of states (Chimni, 2004; Frelick, 2007). In the last decade, the spread of nationalism sentiment especially in Western societies and the political arena also contributed to the concentration of the national governments and consequently researchers in return decision-making of immigrants and refugees (Castles et al., 2014).

As a country that is a neighbor of both Europe and the Middle East, with nearly 4 million refugees she has, Turkey is one of the countries where the return issue is discussed widely among policymakers and researchers. Since another alternative for the refugees in Turkey is to resettle in a third country as in the case of millions of refugees resettled in Europe passing through Turkey, European countries are also interested in the return or resettlement decisions of refugees in Turkey to be well-prepared for a

possible new migration flow to Europe. For these reasons, the return of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is an increasingly significant issue to survey for contributing to both the policymaking process and the return migration literature in general.

In this study, the future plans of the Syrian refugees in Turkey regarding the country they aspire to live in are tried to be understood in the light of existing return literature by taking the parts of the capital accumulation theories that may apply to forced migrants and improving them with additional arguments related to refugees. The relation between the decision to stay in the host country or return to the home country or resettle in a third country and the social, economic, and human capital accumulation in the home and the host countries is examined by using qualitative data gathered in the field study. To provide tools for understanding this relation, the concepts of return and capital accumulation are covered first. After the conceptual framework, the existing studies in the return migration literature are mentioned, and finally, a detailed review of the studies on the relation between return migration and the social, economic, and human capital is provided to show applicable and inapplicable ideas for return of refugees and draw the theoretical base of the present study.

2.1 Concept of “Return Migration”

In the migration literature, there are definitions for return move in which the time of stay in the home country, the purpose of return, afterward of return, and the generation of the migrant is determined and emphasized. Some of these definitions may fail to include all types of migrants who can go back to their countries in different ways of returning. One of the most comprehensive and basic definitions for return migration is “moving back to one’s country of origin” in the words of Carling et al. (Carling et al., 2015, p. 1). Since there is no specific condition of this back move with a time, generation, or purpose restriction, this simple definition of Carling and his friends embraces all different types of return move including retirement return, temporary return, deportation, refugee repatriation, or other stories of return migration. Thus, this definition is appropriate and comprehensive for the target population of the present study.

2.2 *Concept of “Capital” and “Capital Accumulation”*

In the economics literature, the term “capital” is widely used in various theories by many scholars, however, the relation of “capital” and the “forms of capital” with the “social world” is pointed out by the prominent sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (Palloni et al., 2001). He defines the concept of capital by explaining its main functions in social life. In his words, “Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor.” (Bourdieu, 1986). In this definition, being accumulable and convertible are the main features of capital. As Bourdieu suggests, people can collect the positions, properties, labor, the benefits they have, or gained over time to use them in social life, and this process is referred to as capital accumulation (Bourdieu, 1986).

There are forms of capital that can be converted from one to another, mainly as social, economic, and cultural capital; and through using the capital accumulated in time or converted from one to the other, people can make a profit for themselves in each area of the life (Bourdieu, 1986). Moving from the ideas of Bourdieu, capitals can be seen as the determining factors of one’s position in every area of life and the future s/he will have. Thus, as all conditions and situations in life are affected by the capital everyone has, it should be proper to explain migration decision-making and the future plans of immigrants or refugees with capital and capital accumulation.

Among the studies on migration decision-making or return process, there is a considerable number of studies in which capital accumulation theories and the hypotheses on the effect of the different forms of capital on the decision-making process are scrutinized to understand the mechanism behind the return, stay or resettlement decisions of migrants (mostly voluntary). After the basics of return migration studies are explained in the following part, the literature on different forms of capital and the

theories on the relationship between social, human, and economic capital with the return decision are elucidated.

2.3 *Return Migration Literature*

Return migration studies showed a variation in their focus on addressing different issues related to return. These issues are mainly, the type of immigrant groups returning, the form of return, and factors affecting the return.

Firstly, in terms of the type of returning group the literature displays diversity, for example, some studies try to explain the return of labor, seasonal, professional, or educational migrants (highly skilled migrants) (Ahlburg & Brown, 1998; Constant & Massey, 2002; Davanzo, 1983; Galor & Stark, 1990; Haug, 2008; Palloni et al., 2001) while some other studies take the issue of return of forced migrants including the refugees who fled war (Icduygu & Nimer, 2019; Kibreab, 2003; Müller-Funk, 2019; Müller-funk & Fransen, 2020) or another type of violence as well as natural disasters. However, although the general literature on return migration has been widening, the decision-making process of the refugees on their future in the host or home country is lacking research compared with the return of other types of immigrants such as labor migrants or highly skilled mobility (Müller-Funk, 2019).

Secondly, return migration literature varies in taking the issue of the return of immigrants in different forms mainly as forced return and voluntary return. Carling et al. refer to voluntary return as a “return that is not linked to restrictions on residence, work or settlement” (Carling et al., 2011, p. 91); while defining forced return as “forcible return against the will of the returnee; deportation” (Carling et al., 2011, p. 103) in a similar vein with many studies focusing on the enforcement of repatriation or forced return by the state agencies (Andrijasevic, 2010; Chirwa, 1997; Fekete, 2005; de Haas, 2007). Although forced return would be a case for the refugee groups too, since this study evaluates the aspirations of refugees based on their preferences, it only scrutinizes the voluntary return of Syrian refugees In Turkey.

Thirdly, the factors affecting the migration experience and consequently the decision-making process of the migrants leading to return, stay or resettle are covered through different aspects and perspectives by the migration scholars. For example, while some studies focus on the home and the host countries' conditions that can be effective in the migration experience of the immigrants, some other studies focus more on individual factors that can vary among migrants, dependent on the attributes and experiences each one of them has.

Also, while trying to understand the return decision-making mechanism by looking at these home and host country conditions and the individual factors or all of them together, migration scholars benefited from the theories they come up with or adjusted from the social science literature to return migration issues. These theories are categorized mainly as economics theories (Neoclassical and New Economics), structural approach theories, transnationalism theories, and social network theories (Cassarino, 2004).

Additionally, rather than focusing on a specific aspect of return migration, some scholars explain migration (including return migration) from a broader perspective which was a trend abandoned since the late 1990s. Hein de Haas is one of the prominent scholars of this small group who try to bring a systematic theory that comprehends all different types of migration with different purposes around capabilities and aspirations framework. In the following part, the four prominent groups of return migration theories and the migration based on the capabilities and aspirations framework by de Haas are summarized.

2.4 Prominent Camps in Return Migration Literature

2.4.1 The Economics-based Theories

The most outstanding theories in this group are Neoclassical and New Economics Theories in which rational choice is put at the center of the return decision. Although both put the rational choice at the center, they differ in taking the action of return as a

success or failure. On the one hand, the Neoclassical Theory of return migration suggests that migrants try to maximize their profits by moving to another country and having higher wages, and returning to their home country is the result of their failure to maximize their wealth in the host country (Todaro, 1969). On the other hand, New Economics theory proposes that migrants calculate the costs and benefits of their move to another country, and they determine a goal for increased earnings and skills considering whole family members in the home and the host country; after they achieve this goal, they return to their home country as a result of the success they experienced in the host country (Stark, 1991; Taylor, 1996). As it can be understood from these two different perspectives, in Neoclassical theory, migrants prefer to stay longer or permanently in the host country to maximize their profits while in New Economics theory, migrants determine a goal and hope for staying temporarily and returning home after they achieve this goal for their family members (Cassarino, 2004).

Despite their wide usage by many migration scholars to understand the returning migrants, Neoclassical and the New Economics theories are not utilized generally while analyzing the decision-making process of refugees since their basic principle is freedom of choice that refugees face significant restrictions to enjoy before and sometimes after their move (Klinthäll, 2006). Thus, even though the New Economics theory is more compatible with the priorities and ideologies of the refugees because of its emphasis on the consideration of the whole family members and the ties to the home country compared to the Neoclassical theory, the economics theories for return migration solely would not be adequate for understanding the refugees' future choices between returning and staying since their fundamental premises for the time before the move such as rational choice and profit maximization do not fit to the conditions of refugees.

2.4.2 *The Structural Approach Theories*

The structural approach considers the institutional and social factors in addition to individual factors to understand the return decision and return move. They argue that analyzing only individual factors would not be enough to scrutinize migrants' expectations and the realities they will see in the host countries (Cassarino, 2004).

Different than the economics theories, the theories with the structural approach put an emphasis, especially on migrants' consideration of the context along with the structural conditions in their home countries, and comparison of these conditions with the opportunities they already have in the host countries, while suggesting that after this comparison migrants consequently have an expectation from returning before deciding to return (Cerase, 1974). One critical point against these theories is that since returnees may have difficulties acting according to the tradition of their home countries, and lack social networks in their previous social circles, they may fail in realizing their plans and their expectations.

Since the structural approach brings the conditions of home countries including the political conditions, power relations, and traditions into migrants' calculation before a return plan, it can be better applicable not only to labor migrants but also to refugees who have to flee their countries before making long term plans and preparations by leaving many things behind like their dreams and aspirations. Also, the argument on the failure of the returnees who stayed long term in the host countries might be less probable for refugees since their plans on migration are not for the long term in the first place. However, this approach would be insufficient in explaining the situation of refugees who have very few things left in their home countries due to the conditions of wars or natural disasters and thus making their future plans focusing on more to what they currently have in the host countries. At this point, under the umbrella of the structural conditions, it would be appropriate to mention the arguments about the effect of the host and home country conditions on return decision-making.

Home Country Conditions -As argued in many studies on return migration, one of the most important factors affecting the return decision of a migrant who would like to aspire to go back to his or her country is several conditions in his/her home country. Since nearly all migrants would like to predict the situation that they will see if they could achieve to return to their home countries, they try to estimate the difference in social and economic conditions as well as the political and security situations between the times before they leave and just before they return. While the positive improvements in the home country conditions may encourage a migrant to return, possible risks and negatively changed life conditions may lead her/him to extend the stay in a host

country. In the literature, some of the main home country conditions a migrant who plans to return prioritize are the safety of the living place, access to housing and private property, the economic well-being of the country, and the availability of positions in the labor market (Cassarino, 2004; McSpadden, 2004; Sert, 2010; Schemeidl & Mason, 2011; Williams, 2006; Harild et al., 2015).

Security in the home country holds a crucial place, especially for the refugees who fled their countries because of the violence they encountered during a civil war or an ethnic conflict. The continuum of these insecure living conditions in the home country can be one of the biggest barriers to returning move of a refugee. In addition to security, as mentioned in the return studies, the possibility of being labeled or excluded from social relations by a group of people who stayed back in their home country, or the members of political authority would be another discouraging factor for the return of refugees. For example, despite the call in July 2018 by the Esed regime for returns of Syrian people who got displaced and fled the country, some returnees reported that government officials do not welcome and sometimes tortured them after their return; or in some extreme cases, regime or its related groups arrested those who fled the country showing several reasons like denying to fight with the regime against opposition groups (Icduygu & Ayasli, 2019).

Additionally, as emphasized in some of the studies in the literature about the effect of home country conditions on return, access to housing and private property is another important factor that migrants consider for the period after their journey to their home country (Sert, 2010). In some studies, returning to the home a migrant left behind is stated as a requirement of being a returnee who is not considered an internally displaced person (Koser & Black, 1999). One thing to note here is that the influence of access to private properties in the home country on return decision is also covered in the economic capital theories which will be explained in more detail in the following parts.

Another significant factor for the preparations or the plans for return is the consideration of the overall economic conditions in the country of origin of a migrant. Particularly the existing job opportunities and the conditions of the labor market are the issues evaluated by the migrants since the life quality in and the reintegration into the

home country are related to the job and the wage of a returnee. (Zimmermann, 2012)

The concern of finding a job equal to or better than the job a migrant was doing before leaving the country can be seen as a common issue among all types of migrants including labor migrants, refugees, or highly skilled migrants. Especially for the labor migrants that send remittances to their families in their home countries, leaving the job in the host country and not being able to replace it in the home country would be a central push factor that decreases the possibility of return. (Ahlburg & Brown, 1998)

However, the study by Klinthall shows that as much as the home country conditions, the existing situation in the host country is influential in the return decision of the migrants (Klinthall, 2007). In this study, the return patterns of the immigrants in Sweden that came from different home countries are examined and while the increase in return to Chile is explained by political and economic progress in this country, the rise in the return moves to Iran and Poland where no significant political or economic progress were seen is justified by the consideration about the economic crisis in Sweden by the immigrants who have return intentions (Klinthall, 2007). As we can understand from this study, not only home country conditions but also host country conditions that are mentioned in the following part are playing important role in the return decision-making of a migrant.

Host Country Conditions- As well as conditions in the home country, migrants' experiences and how these experiences are shaped through several conditions in host countries are examined in many studies in return migration literature. The migration experiences of migrants can be seen directly related to integration into life in their host countries and consequently, the integration can be seen as related to the return decision-making process. The integration process of a migrant occurs dependent on both the individual factors a migrant has and the political, economic, and social conditions of the host country she or he lives. The outstanding examples of the political, economic, and social factors mentioned in the return migration literature are the host state's position on immigrants, labor market conditions and accessibility of working positions, and public opinion about migrants as well as the reflection of this opinion to the public attitude in a host country.

In a situation in which migrants are not provided governmental support about the legal issues they deal with, any financial support or facilitation for the fundamental necessities is not given, the return decision of these migrants can be influenced, and return action would be more expected. On the contrary, in a safe and welcoming environment where the integration of a migrant is more likely, the decision to stay more in this host country comes into prominence as a result of their evaluation process (Harild et al., 2015; Kibreab, 2003).

Even though the influence of host country conditions on a migrant's decision to stay or return has been examined by many studies in the migration literature, these studies rarely pay specific attention to refugees' position towards host country conditions. Thus, the discussion on the effects of host country conditions on the refugees' decisions is vaguer than the economic migrants or brain drain (Albert, 2010). Yet, in some of the studies in return migration literature, the factor of the International Refugee Regime is emphasized as a part of the discussion on the host country's effects on the return of refugees. Some government policies can be shaped in consideration of The International Refugee Regime, referring to the global atmosphere about the host country reflections of asylum applications developed by world countries and international organizations on asylum (Skran, 1992).

2.4.3 *The Transnationalism Theory*

The migration scholars who believe that the effect of migrants' moves between the home and the host country they do regularly on the return intentions is not elucidated by the arguments of structural approach, realized that the transnationalism ideas of international relations may help to understand the mechanism of return decision making of migrants (Cassarino, 2004). Unlike the economics models on return migration suggest, a return movement of a migrant would not be the finalization of the migration experience, but rather a migrant can do this back and forth moves between his/her home and host country regularly and this also can contribute to his/her return intention and plans, as the idea of transnationalism proposes.

Thus, Transnationalism Theory in migration literature can be understood as an effort to scrutinize the regular back-and-forth moves of the migrants between home and host countries and the social and economic relations and acquisitions they have through these moves in both their origin and destination places (Portes et al., 1999). Also, the idea of transnationalism includes not only these social and economic relations and linkages in the home country but also the feeling of common identity which arises from common ethnic origins, shared values, or solidarity (Hsing, 1998).

Another point that the Transnationalism Theory suggests is that the migrants who plan to return, invest in their reintegration and adaptation to their home countries' conditions, values and people through making visits there. The study of Carling et al. examines the impact of transnationalism on the return intentions of immigrants in Norway who came from several countries and were surveyed in 2005 (Carling et al., 2014). They argue that during their migration experience, migrants develop identities in host countries through the integration process they have in addition to their home country identities which they continue to contribute through the transnational linkages (Carling et al., 2014). Thus, the authors try to understand how these transnational links to home countries and the integration in host countries shape the return intentions and actualization of these intentions of migrants, and they conclude that integration and transnationalism can be both positively and negatively related to the return move (Carling et al., 2014).

Although the Transnationalism Theory widens the analysis of return migration by adding the cases of returnees who do regular moves between home and host countries before their final return, application of this theory to the refugees may not give perfect results since it would be hard and sometimes not possible for forced migrants to do regular visits to their home countries for developing transnational linkages that contribute their return plans.

2.4.4 *Social Network Theory*

In a similar vein to Transnationalism Theory, Social Network Theory focuses on migrants' sustaining the linkages with their home countries before and after their return.

The difference between the transnationalism and the social network approach in explaining these linkages to the home country perspective is that unlike the idea of transnationalism, social network understanding suggests that these linkages are not a result of the common identity but rather they are the product of mutually beneficial long term networks between the migrants and the people in both countries (Cassarino, 2004).

In addition to the abovementioned networks which play a crucial role in the return move and the success after the return of a migrant, the social capital that the migrants have in their home countries is also effective in the aftermath of the return according to the social network approach. The notion of social capital will be stated while explaining the literature on social capital theories of return migration, yet it is important to touch upon the emphasis on the social capital in the Social Network Theory here as well. Although not totally based on the social capital arguments, the social network approach emphasized the influence of social capital namely the social resources that a migrant has in his/her home country obtained personally or thanks to his/her family before the first migration movements in the life of a returnee back in his/her home country. As the theory suggests, social capital and social networks are interrelated thus, through developing the former, a migrant can have a rise in the latter and vice versa. Also, not just the social relations but also economic networks between home and host countries are found effective in the aftermath of the return of a migrant. These social and economic networks are different from the relationships that transnationalism defines in terms of migrants' aim to have them, and their ways to acquire them.

With its emphasis on the social and economic networks a migrant has in the home country, the Social Network Theory can seem applicable to refugees since the return move is not based on the migration experience only just as in the economics theories. However, a migrant's resource mobilization in a host country which is seen as a requirement for return in Social Network Theory can be lower for refugees when compared to the labor migrants or all other voluntary migrants. The migration experience in the host country and the effect of this experience on the return plans of a refugee should be analyzed to understand the key factors behind the return move or return intention, and therefore, the Social Network Theory solely would not be sufficient to answer the questions about the return of the refugees.

In addition to economics-based, structural, transnationalism, and social network theories which focus on particular aspects behind return move, some scholars explain return move as part of a more systematic and broad migration theory. As one of the most prominent theories of this group, Hein de Haas' approach to explaining migration encapsulates the return move as well. He argues that the conventional migration theories lack some important factors related to migrants such as "people's access to economic (material), social (other people), cultural (ideas, knowledge, and skills) and bodily (good health, physical condition, and habitus) resources shape their ability to move (or, conversely, their ability to stay), their preferences and aspirations (to stay or to go), their choice in terms of destinations and their ability to obtain work, housing, education, and legal status while protecting themselves against abuse and exploitation" (de Haas, 2021, p. 15). He brings a systematic understanding that he applies to different moves of people (first move, resettlement, or return move) and different types of migration (i.e. voluntary migration and forced migration). He conceptualizes all types of migration as "a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures" (de Haas, 2021, p. 17). Thus, in his view, migration aspirations mirror people's "life preferences" and "subjective perceptions" about life and opportunities in another place (de Haas, 2021, p. 17). Return move or staying is the output of the same function. Migrants base their return move or decision to stay on their life aspirations and capabilities in their home and the host country. Different from the four prominent theories, de Haas' theory is shaped around the migratory agency himself/herself and thus more applicable to different types of moves and different types of migrants.

Four prominent theories on return migration provide ways to understand return migration by considering the beforehand of the return, the actual return move, and the afterward of the return. Approaching the issue from different perspectives such as the individual or structural, micro, and macro dimensions as in these theories, help to understand different sides of the return decision-making mechanism of migrants. However, since the migration stories of different migrant groups can have distinct features under diverse conditions of home and host countries and migrants' individual lives; most of the return theories are far from claiming to achieve inclusion of all these

different conditions and situations and analyze the different stories of return. Thus, migration scholars have developed other theories, hypotheses, arguments, and ideas inspired by or broadened these four main theories to provide a better understanding of different kinds of return processes. In addition to the broad theorization of migration as a function of capabilities and aspirations by de Haas (de Haas, 2021), theories that try to explain the return move related to capital accumulation theories are examples of these alternative ideas to the abovementioned four main theories.

While benefiting from the arguments of these prominent theories, capital accumulation theories try to provide a more comprehensive analysis of different types of migrants having their migration experience under different conditions. In this sense, they are similar to the systematic approach to migration by de Haas. Both former and the latter take into consideration the access to social, economic, and cultural (knowledge and skills) opportunities in the home and the host countries. Since in this study the target population is a special group of migrants i.e Syrian refugees in Turkey whose move of return occurred acutely and whose migration stories include a lot of uncertainties due to outside factors, the theoretical base of this research will benefit from these four main theories' arguments and de Haas's aspirations-capabilities approach of migration to the extent that they apply to refugees while placing these arguments around the capital accumulation theories on return migration. In the following part, these capital accumulation theories are examined in detail.

2.5 *Capital Accumulation Theories on Return*

As previously covered under the conceptual framework, capital accumulation theories are mostly used in the capitalist economy literature. Thus, in the capitalist economy literature, social and human capital are examined mostly focusing on their relations with the economic (financial) capital. Just as in economics studies, in sociology studies the forms of capitals are covered focusing on their interrelation. Bourdieu, as one of the most referred scholars who brought the capital accumulation theories to social life, defines three forms of capital an individual can have and he strongly emphasizes the transformability among these capitals (Bourdieu, 1986):

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

Two of the three forms of capital Bourdieu defined in his studies are referred to in this study in a similar vein to his usage of the concepts. These are social and economic capital. The third capital he defines i.e., the cultural capital which can also be "institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications" (Bourdieu, 1986) is not used while evaluating the return intentions in this study. Rather, the concept of "human capital" is preferred since it captures the acquisitions from the educational attainments and job skills a migrant has in the home and host countries as covered in many return migration studies.

Also, in this study, the interrelations between the capital and the effect of transformations on capital accumulation are not necessarily examined and measured. Rather, the effect of each of the capitals on the return decision-making of refugees with regards to the accumulation of them in their home and the host countries is scrutinized separately to avoid a more complex and less comprehensible analysis. To this aim, the literature in which the return migration is examined through benefiting from the social, economic, and human capital theories is mentioned in this part.

Like the return migration literature in general, it is rare to encounter a study that specifically focuses on the return of refugees in the studies focusing on the relationship between various capitals and return move. The research on this topic has been done largely by taking labor immigrants or highly skilled immigrants as subjects. Yet, sometimes more comprehensive theories have been generated in which the target population or the sample is covered as "immigrants" without specifying the type of migration. In some of these studies, each of the social, economic, or human capital is

examined as an independent variable in combination with some other factors behind a return move or stay of an immigrant while in some other studies they are more overwhelmed as an independent variable. As the studies covered in this literature review exemplify, when the researchers employ two or all of social, economic, or human capital to analyze the return decision, they mention each of the effects of the capital in a similar direction on the return decision. In most of the studies, capital accumulation was used to understand return, if two or all of the social, economic, and human capitals are examined, the direction of the impacts (i.e. negative or positive) of these two or three forms of capital on the return decision is generally found the same. However, these three capitals have a variation in their definitions and their ways of operationalization for measurement as mentioned in the explanation of the studies and theories on each of the capital types in the following part.

2.5.1 Social Capital Theories

Although the ideas and theories of social life, social relations, social assets, etc. go back centuries before, the term “social capital” was firstly used at the beginning of the 19th century by L.J. Hanifan as Putnam indicates in his book (Hanifan, 1916, as cited in Putnam, 2000). He explained the meaning of social capital and its place in human life with the words:

I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit.... If he may come into contact with his neighbour, and they with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community (Hanifan, 1916).

The term was firstly used in 1916, however, its popularity increased at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries mainly with the studies on the social capital of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (1993). Bourdieu defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential

resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” and believes that it possibly generates inequality in society (1986). Two years after Bourdieu’s definition, Coleman employs social capital as the source of collective action and states that it occurs through “changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action” (Coleman, 1988). With a perspective concentrating more on its positive aspects of it, Putnam focuses on the role of social capital in collaboration in society. He refers to social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” and sees it as a requirement for developing democracy in a country (Putnam, 2000).

In most of the migration decision-making studies in which the concept of social capital is under examination, the definitions of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam are used as a starting point to explain the term social capital for migrants and its influence on migrants’ decision-making process for both their first move or the return migration, and other aspects were built upon these definitions. For example, after touching upon these three definitions, Garip referred to “migrant social capital” as “resources of information or assistance that individuals obtain through their social ties to prior migrants” (Garip, 2008). In her study, she also considers the migrant social capital as a factor that decreases the migrating costs and risks for those who consider migrating (Garip, 2008).

In the return migration literature, the social capital theories are employed mostly as parallel with the social network theories. One can claim that the social capital theories are more comprehensive than the social network theories because of two reasons: First, the social capital theories examine a wider circle of sociality including not only relations with family and relatives but also networks with friends and in social organizations participated. Second, they emphasize the possibility of capital transformations among the forms of capital and its multidimensional effect on the immigrant’s life while the social network theories are more social relation centric as mentioned in the first part of the literature review.

In the migration literature, scholars examine the social capital to analyze its effect in three periods: the first is the pre-migration period in which the decision to move to a country is made, the second is the post-migration period in which the decision to return or stay is made, and the third is the post-return period in which social, economic, and cultural reintegration of the returnee takes place.

As an example of the first group of studies in which the period before the migration is scrutinized, Garip's study on Thai migrants can be mentioned (Garip, 2008). One of her main arguments is that if a potential migrant has social networks and connections in a possible destination place, s/he can use them to facilitate his/her move to this city/country by reducing the costs and the risks of moving, thus there is a positive relationship between having the social capital in a host city/country of a prior migrant and the decision to migrate to this country (Garip, 2008). The findings of Palloni and his friends' study on the Western Mexican immigrants in the United States are also supportive of Garip's arguments on social capital before the migration that they argue that the social capital the Western Mexicans have in the US i.e., their social networks helped their first migration (Palloni et al., 2001).

For the second group of social capital studies consisting of the research on the reintegration of a returnee, one example is the article by Sanders and Nee (Sanders & Nee, 1996). As the authors argue, the social capital accumulated in the return country during the time abroad provides opportunities for the self-employment of the returnee in his/her reintegration period (Sanders & Nee, 1996). The findings of the study of Yoon and In-Jin are also consistent with the argument that the social capital in the host country accumulated abroad plays an important role in the adjustments to a new life of a returnee (Yoon & In-Jin, 1991).

The third group, the research questioning the effect of the social capital in the post-migration period and specifically the return decision-making process, is the group that this study mostly benefits from among the abovementioned three groups. According to this group of studies, social capital accumulation including the social networks in the host country has a substantial effect on the decision to return or stay of a migrant. One inspiring example of this group of studies is the research conducted by Haug on the

return migration of Italian Guestworkers in Germany (Haug, 2008). As supported by her empirical data, the social capital in the home country increases the likelihood of return while the social capital accumulated in the host country has a negative effect on the decision to return to the home country (Haug, 2008).

Additionally, Carling and his friends' study in which returns from the United Kingdom and Norway by Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistani, Burundian, and Polish immigrant groups were analyzed, the importance of capital accumulation and transformation as well as the social factors in the home and the host countries in the return migration were emphasized (Carling et al., 2015). As they suggest, the return movement of a migrant is affected by the social capital accumulation and the social factors in both the home and the host countries. The findings of de Haas and his friends in their study examining the return aspirations of Moroccan migrants in Europe are also similar to the arguments mentioned above (de Haas, 2014). As their empirical work also reveals, the return aspirations of the migrants are negatively related to social integration in the host country (de Haas, 2014).

When the existing studies on the effect of social capital and return decision-making are considered, the argument that the social capital in the host country decreases the likelihood of return while the social capital in the home country increases would be adapted to the case of refugees. Since, although it would not be as easy as in their home countries, there is still the possibility that they can develop social networks in the host countries, which would affect their migration experience and future decisions. Likewise, the social capital in the home country can enhance the return of a refugee as well, yet maintaining the social networks in the home country may not always be easy for the refugees. Since, as would be the case for many refugee groups, the family members in the home country might start living in different host countries as the conditions forcing them to migrate would be the case for all family members or close social spheres. Or refugees may not do regular visits which keeps their social relations in their home countries strong since they mostly are not capable of affording the cost of regular visits. Thus, in this study, it is expected that a refugee who accumulated social capital in the host country would be more effective in return decision-making compared to the social capital accumulation in the home country.

2.5.2 *Economic (Financial) Capital Theories*

While economic capital mainly refers to the resources necessary for running one's businesses in economics studies; in other social sciences, it generally refers to the material resources and the private properties an individual has as can be exemplified by Bourdieu's passage on forms of capital referred before (Bourdieu, 1986). In this study, similar to Bourdieu's description, economic capital refers to material assets in the form of money, land, property, etc. Another point that should be mentioned here is the differentiation between financial and economic capital. Although financial capital and economic capital are used to denote different concepts, in social sciences and specifically in migration studies the usages of financial and economic capital are almost overlapping. Thus, the use of economic capital in this study can be seen as the equivalent of financial capital in some other return migration studies.

Among the definitions of different forms of capital, economic capital (financial capital) is the one of which we rarely encounter a strong definition in return migration studies. This is not because this concept has not been considered as an explaining variable of return, but rather because economic factors are covered as embedded in various return theories and different forms of capital. For example, some studies examined the money, private properties, and economic resources a migrant has in the home and the host country, under the category of the human capital s/he accumulates in these countries. Even though the interrelation and transformation between the forms of capital are considered inevitable, economic capital is scrutinized as a separate indicator from social and human capital in this study since its impact would be better understood while analyzed separately from other capitals.

Additionally, rather than the shaping effect on the return decision of a migrant, the discussion between the economic (financial) capital and the return migration is more encountered in the studies which are focusing on the after-return period of a migrant. There are many studies in which economic capital is covered together with the other forms of capital as a factor facilitating an immigrant's re-integration to the return country and as a contribution s/he can add to his/her home country's socioeconomic conditions. For example, Reynolds mentions social, human, and economic capital

(Reynolds, 2011); Wahba uses human and financial capital (Wahba, 2004); Tiemoko describes social, human, and financial capital (Tiemoko, 2004); Åkesson and Eriksson Baaz refers to social, economic and cultural capital as factors which are accumulated in the host country and influence the new lives of the returnees in their home country (Åkesson & Eriksson Baaz, 2015). Thus, the effect of the economic capital on return migration is lacking research since the economic capital accumulation in the host country has been mostly analyzed not for the decision-making process before return, but for the re-adaptation to the home country after the return.

Also, among most of the studies in which the factors shaping the return decision are analyzed, the economic conditions including the material assets an immigrant has in the home and the host country are discussed without using the concept of economic capital necessarily, but rather the economic aspect of the return decision is covered as referring to it with the concepts of economic resources, conditions, or expectations.

For example, in her study, Da Vanzo demonstrated that homeownership in a destination country decreases the likelihood of returning or resettling in another country since it increases the “location-specific capital” (i.e. the assets that the migrant loses or replaces hard in another place) a migrant has (Da Vanzo, 1983). Another argument of Da Vanzo is that the likelihood of the return of a migrant decline if the labor market opportunities in the home country are less assured compared to the host country (Da Vanzo, 1983). Both of these arguments can be found related to the economic capital a migrant accumulates in the host country. Yet, since Syrian refugees mostly cannot afford to buy houses in Turkey, having a home in Syria as well as the wages and job opportunities in Turkey and Syria will be the things under examination as an indicator of economic capital.

Another example of return migration theories on economic factors is Neoclassical and New Economics Theories on return migration, as covered in the first part of the literature review. Both theories put the rational choice of immigrants which is shaped around economic profit maximizations at the center of the decision to return or stay (Cassarino, 2004). Higher wages and increased profits which were used to refer to the economic profit maximization in these theories may also be considered as related to the

economic capital since, in this study, as well as many other return migration studies, higher wages, property-owning, and profit maximization through several means correspond to accumulating economic capital.

In the study of Constant and Massey which investigates the return patterns of the labor migrants in Germany, it was revealed that the immigrants' return pattern cannot be understood by employing only the Neoclassical or New Economics theories (Constant & Massey, 2002). Each of these theories' suggestions can be seen as effective in the decisions of immigrants while we examine them along with the other motivational factors migrants have. According to Constant and Massey's study, one of the factors which can affect return decision-making is the lack of a stable job in the host country which was found related to return to the home countries (Constant & Massey, 2002). Likewise, steady employment and wage differences between the home and the host country occupations have been seen as a determining factor in the decision to return or stay in the early return migration literature as in the studies of Sjaastad (Sjaastad, 1962) and Hicks (Hicks, 1979).

Also, in his pioneer study on labor migrants in Europe, Dustmann suggests that a migrant evaluates the difference between the costs and benefits of his/ her life in the host country and the home country before the decision to return (Dustmann, 1996). The necessary condition of a well-considered return of a migrant is being at the point where the costs of being in the host country surpass the benefit as he argues (Dustmann, 1996). In another study pointing out to relation between the decision to return and migrants' rational comparisons between the home and the host country's economic conditions, Dustmann mentions three motives that potentially lead migrants to return: "(1) the migrant prefers consumption in the home country; (2) if prices are lower in the home than in the host country, this allows the migrant to take advantage of high wages abroad, but low prices at home; and (3) human capital acquired in the host country is more valuable in the home country." (Dustmann, 1996).

Although the main driving factor before the first migration of refugees may not be the economic factors or accumulation of economic capital, refugees can consider their economic well-being in the host country and the home country while evaluating a return

decision, so that they can afford the living costs of themselves and their families. Thus, it is possible to argue that, the Classical and New-Economics understanding of the return migration may not apply to refugees, since their main motivation for migration is mostly protection. However, as stated in the studies explaining the return of labor migrants, refugees can compare the economic conditions – and the economic capital they accumulate with these conditions – between their home and the host countries before deciding to return or stay. They consider the economic capital (wages, and properties such as home, car, land, stores, etc.) they accumulated in the host country and the possible future economic capital in the host country after the return move to determine and choose the better scenario for them and their families.

2.5.3 *Human Capital Theories*

Despite today's wide use of the concept of human capital in different social sciences, the initial usage of this term goes back to the inspiring writings of Adam Smith who is seen as the founder of the Capital Economy. In his book, he explains "capital" in different ways and the one that points out the acquisition of talents through "education, study or apprenticeship" inspires many scholars studying human capital (Smith, 2002). Centuries after Adam Smith, what human capital refers to did not have a big transformation as we see in the book chapter on human capital by Claudia Goldin (Goldin, 2016). She explains human capital as people's investments such as "education, training, health" and that people's productivity enlarges through these investments (Goldin, 2016). One of the most cited explanations of human capital is the one mentioned in Coleman's prominent sociology article "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital" in which the relationship between social and human capital was examined (Coleman, 1988). Coleman states in his article that "...human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways." (Coleman, 1988).

In the return migration literature, human capital is used in a similar meaning to its definitions in economics and sociology literature. For example, Constant and Massey mention human capital as "personal trait and characteristics that affect migrant's

productivity” (Constant & Massey, 2002), while Ahlburg and Brown state the components of human capital as “the work experience, skills and work behaviours acquired by the migrant” and “education and labour market experience” in their study (Ahlburg & Brown, 2007). Similarly, Sanders and Nee referred to human capital as “skills and knowledge” migrants obtain in a host country in their study (Sanders & Nee, 1996). Additionally, in the transdisciplinary studies of migration focused on the returnees, the concept of human capital is generally referred to as the “transfer of knowledge, ideas and skills” between the host and the home countries (Åkesson & Eriksson Baaz, 2015).

The theories on human capital and return migration are mostly centered around two topics: 1) the impact of human capital in either the home or the host country in the first migration and return move, 2) the contribution of a returnee to his/her home country through his/her human capital accumulated during the migration experience. For the latter topic which is not necessarily related to the question of the present study, some studies conclude that the returnees can contribute to their home countries by taking their newly acquired skills or education (Müller, 2007; Klagge & Klein-Hitpaß, 2007; Sanders & Nee, 1996) while some other studies suspect about the contribution of the returnees to their home countries questioning the amount of skills migrants acquired abroad (King, 1986; Ahlburg & Brown, 1998).

Among the studies focusing on the former topic i.e., the relation between the human capital and the return decision of a migrant, one of the most prominent studies on return migration that employ human capital theory is the research done by Dustmann in 1996. As this study suggests, the cost of return rises with the increase in the human capital in the host country since it is hard to transfer this capital to the home country. An increase in the cost of the return is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of a return action of a migrant (Dustmann, 1996). Another important factor that Dustmann examines through gathering quantitative data from labor migrants in Europe is the language learning of migrants. He finds that learning the language of the host country is negatively associated with the migrants’ decision to return (Dustmann, 1996).

The detailed study of Massey and Espinosa on Mexican migrants in the United States is also worth mentioning for the purpose of this research. After covering the prominent theories on return migration, the authors found social capital formation, human capital formation, and market consolidation as the most effective processes in both the first move and the return migration of a migrant (Massey & Espinosa, 1997). In their empirical work, they use the indicators “general human capital”, and “general social capital” to denote the capitals a migrant has before his/her move; while they are using “migration specific human capital” and “migration specific human capital” to refer to the capitals a migrant accumulated during his/her migration experience in the destination place (Massey & Espinosa, 1997, p. 945). As they conclude from the data analyses, the social capital in the destination country before the first move facilitates the first migration. Also, the decision to first move is negatively related to the general human capital before the migration since migrants believe that the skills they have in their home country will be awarded more than they would be in the US (Massey & Espinosa, 1997).

However, the migration-specific social and human capital (i.e., specific to the place of migration) are found as the factors that perpetuate the migration of a migrant (Massey & Espinosa, 1997). Another important point from their study is the contribution of having “physical capital” (Massey & Espinosa, 1997, p. 945) i.e., home, land, and business-owning to the decision of first migration and the return or repeat migration. As the findings suggest, the decision to migrate in the first place is negatively related to having physical capital in the home country, and not returning or resettling in another country is positively related to having physical capital in the host country (Massey & Espinosa, 1997). The usage of physical capital in Massey and Espinosa’s research is very similar to the reference to economic capital in the present study. Thus, the finding of their study about physical capital is also supportive of the hypothesis on economic capital mentioned before the part on human capital.

One important point about the relationship between the human capital and return decision is the consideration of the situation of the children of the migrants. In another study by Dustmann, it is demonstrated with the empirical quantitative data that the number of children a migrant has in the host country is negatively associated with the

likelihood of return (Dustmann, 2003). The possible reason behind this relation is suggested by the author as the willingness of the migrant parents to make their children sustain their education in this host country (Dustmann, 2003).

The arguments about the effect of having education (or having children continuing to education), learning the national language, or gaining a professional skill in the host country on the decision to return would be valid for refugees as well. Although the means for investing in human capital may be less available for refugees than the voluntary migrants, they can utilize the opportunities for accumulating their human capital. For example, the right to have education or access to job markets may not be granted by legal terms in each host country, yet, while existing, refugees can benefit from these rights and develop their human capital in a host country.

With the help of some parts of the existing literature surveying the relationship between human capital and return migration, this study anticipates that a migrant's or his/her children's human capital (i.e. the assets that come with education, job skills, and experience, language learning) accumulated in the host country would be compared with the human capital before migration and after a possible return in the decision making process. The more human capital a migrant accumulated in the host country the less likely will s/he return to the home country, which is expected in this research.

As mentioned in this chapter, return migration studies examine three main topics: the factors affecting return decision, the reintegration of a returnee, and the contributions of a returnee to the home country. In the first group of studies four different groups of theories are prominent: Neoclassical and New Economics theories, Transnationalism Theory, Structural Approach Theory, and Social Network Theory. The Capital Accumulation Theories on return tried to scrutinize the relationship between the forms of capital and the decision to return, resettle or stay by employing and testing the arguments of these four prominent theories with the analyses on capital accumulations of migrants.

In this study, the expectations about the refugees' plans for their futures were shaped by a theoretical framework structured by taking the applicable parts of the

theories in return migration literature, which is mostly centered around labor migrants, and adapting them to the case of refugees. Thus, according to this theoretical framework, it is expected for refugees to compare the opportunities which are brought by the social, economic, and human capital they accumulated in the host country, with the probable opportunities which would come with the social, economic, and human capital they would have after a possible return or resettlement. As a result of this comparison, if the total benefit of social, economic, and human capital a refugee has in the host country exceeds the possible total benefit from the capital in the home or a new destination country, then the likelihood of the returning and resettling of this refugee decrease while the duration of migration in the host country increases.



Chapter 3: **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study tries to scrutinize the future plans of the Syrian refugees living in Turkey and aims to understand the reasoning behind the decision to return, resettle or stay. Which factors are effective in the plan of return, which group of Syrians is more likely to stay, and under which conditions Syrians aim to resettle are the questions tried to be answered in this project. For this purpose, the qualitative data which was collected by covering the existing return migration literature and conducting in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees living in Turkey was used. As mentioned before, the mechanism behind a refugee's decision to return is tried to be understood by focusing on the variance in the independent variables namely the social, economic, and human capital of refugees. To this end, the literature on the return migration with a special focus on capital accumulation theories was reviewed and the inadequate points for understanding the return of refugees were tried to be fulfilled while the theoretical framework was shaped. Then, to understand if the real-life cases of refugees are compatible with the observable implications of this framework a fieldwork study was conducted to gather data.

In the initial preparation phase of this research, spending nearly two years in Migration Research Center at Koc University as a research assistant and participating in the survey questionnaire preparation and focused group meetings for the research project "Improving Interactive Social Integration Model in Migration Governance in Turkey" (in Turkish: Türkiye'de Göç Yönetişimi Alanında Etkileşimli Toplumsal Bütünleşme Modeli Geliştirilmesi) which was funded by Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) helped to the researcher to get familiar with Syrian refugees and provided some background information about their migration experiences in Turkey, which facilitated to preparation process of the fieldwork.

3.1 Fieldwork

The fieldwork of this study consists of semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with forty Syrians who came after the Syrian Civil War began as refugees. Although all the interviewees came to Turkey in refugee conditions according to the UN's definitions in the first place, currently the majority of them are under the "temporary protection regime" while less than one hundred thousand of them obtained Turkish Citizenship after their move to Turkey.

The interviews were conducted between June 6 and August 8 in 2020 in Istanbul and Konya. The former has the largest share of the registered Syrian population with 531,574 (3.54% of the total city population) and the latter, with 121,326 (5.45% of the total city population) Syrians it hosts, is one of the ten cities of Turkey hosting the highest numbers of Syrian refugees. The selection of the cities was done considering both the high rates of refugee populations there and the accessibility of the researcher to the contacts in these cities who help reach out to refugees. Although these two cities are similar in hosting a high number of refugees and the rate of Syrian population compared to the total city population, the difference in the socio-cultural and economic conditions may have different effects on the Syrians' experiences. On the one hand, Istanbul is a Metropolitan city with more economic resources and a melted point social structure, on the other hand, Konya is a smaller Anatolian city in which local traditions and values are more visible compared to metropolitan areas. The researcher intends to check possible common differences between the interviews in Konya and Istanbul to see if some different conditions of these cities appear in the return decision-making of refugees.

In these cities, the neighborhoods in which Syrian refugees have a density were visited to facilitate the application of the Snowball technique while determining the interviewees. Yet, to not restrict the fieldwork to these neighborhoods which are densely populated with refugees, the refugees from other places that are not considered "Syrian neighborhoods" were also reached out. Nine of forty interviews were conducted as video conferences using digital communication platforms such as Skype and Zoom due

to the precautions for the Covid-19 Pandemic. At the other meetings, social distancing and face covering were paid attention to.

Each of the interviewees was informed about the study to take their consent for the interview. All the data in the fieldwork was gathered anonymously as explained to the interviewees. The interview guide which includes the guiding questions and general information about the study was shared with the interviewees when requested. With the permission of the interviewees, the talks were audio-recorded without any labels indicating their identity. Also, the answers of the refugees were noted in detail. After each interview was done the interviewee got renamed with a Syrian name randomly.

The interviews in both Istanbul and Konya were conducted in Turkish, English, and Arabic according to the will of the interviewee. For the ones in Arabic, a professional translator did the translations. All the data gathered from interviews was then translated into English by the researcher with the help of translators when needed. The duration of the interviews varied between 30-45 minutes. As the interviews were planned to be semi-structured, the researcher avoided asking every question in the interview guide without being needed, but rather she tried to catch the answers while letting the refugees talk in detail about their life back in Syria and Turkey. During the discussions, the researcher paid particular attention to not pushing the refugees to talk about their bad experiences and losses during the civil war in Syria. Approval for the interview guide and the processes of the whole fieldwork was issued by the Ethics Committee of Social Science Studies at Koc University.

In the interviews, the refugees were asked about their backgrounds, lives before the beginning of the war, their move to Turkey, and their experiences in the years they have lived in Turkey. In the final part of the interview, the future plans of the refugees were asked to understand their aspirations for returning, staying, or moving to another country, if they have not mentioned them during the talk already. To understand their future plans and their reasoning about returning, in addition to their aspirations under the current conditions they have, hypothetical scenarios in Turkey and Syria (i.e., the situation in which the war ends, the possibility of having Turkish citizenship, or finding

a better job, etc.) were mentioned, and the probable decisions on return migration in these scenarios were learned.

3.2 Operationalization

Since the purpose of this study is to understand the mechanism of the return decision-making and find out how social, economic, and human capital accumulation is related to the decision to return or stay, the interview guide was prepared to focus on the indicators of social, economic and human capital as the independent variables as well as the aspirations and plans about returning, staying or resettling as the dependent variable. The existing literature on return decision-making was used while determining the indicators of the social, economic, and human capital of refugees. Additionally, the conditions and possibilities which may be distinct to Syrian refugees in Turkey such as the political and security conditions in Syria and legal issues in Turkey are also considered in the question-forming process.

To measure the social capital of refugees in Syria, the social networks they had before coming to Turkey were asked. The social relations with family, neighbors, relatives, and friends, and the time spent with these people in social gatherings or occasions are considered the indicators of Social Capital in the home country. The social capital accumulation in Turkey was also assessed by learning if the relations with the family and relatives in Syria exist in Turkey and if new social relations with the new neighbors and friends (particularly the Turkish neighbors and Turkish friends) could be formed during their migration experience in Turkey. How much time they had in Syria and Turkey for socializing with these people was evaluated to understand the difference in the refugees' social capitals in Syria and Turkey. The places and the opportunities they can make friends in Turkey, such as the Turkish courses, art and craft courses, memberships to or visits to social organizations, clubs, foundations, associations, etc. were also considered indicators of social capital. After having the information about these indicators separately, the refugees were asked to compare the qualities of their social lives back in Syria and Turkey.

The evaluation of the human capital variable was done by having information about the level of education and job-related skills like a foreign language or craftsmanship refugees had in Syria and currently have in Turkey. Not only their level of education and job skills but also their parent's level of education and occupations were learned and considered to have a better understanding of refugees' socioeconomic level in Syria and Turkey. The information about education was learned from each member of the family. Because if the interviewee has already completed his/her education in Syria, s/he may consider the education of his/her children in Turkey as a factor that should be considered while deciding to return or stay. As well as the years of education in Turkey, the evaluation of the quality and problems (i.e., discrimination by other students or the teacher) of the education was also asked of the interviewees for each household applicable. Thus, it can be stated that not only the increase in the capital but also is the quality of this increase examined and assessed in this study.

For the estimation of the economic capital variable, the interviewees were asked about the previous and current situation of their wages, net benefits of living, and properties such as a house, apartment, car, etc. The assets related to occupation such as the stores, machines, lands, and animals were also learned to evaluate the economic capital refugee families have in Syria and Turkey. For the assets in Syria, two terms were particularly asked and compared: before and after the start of the war. While asking about the property losses after the war, the researcher did not ask detailed questions to not to disturb the interviewee because it is a sensitive topic. Just the existence of their properties was asked if they have not already mentioned it. If the interviewee did not get into detail about his/her loss of homes, cars, lands, etc., the researcher did not ask questions on how this loss happened or the actors of this loss.

3.3 Sample

The sample of the study consists of 20 refugees from Konya and 20 refugees from Istanbul. The statuses of these refugees vary. 8 of the total participants hold Turkish citizenship, while the other 6 have already applied and have been waiting for the citizenship examination process of the Turkish government. The data were gathered at

the household level. The information about all their family members was gathered from each interviewee and none of the interviewees were selected from the same family. Among the participants, 21 of them are women while 19 of them are men. 19 of the total participants are between the ages of 18-30 (13 of them are women and 8 of them are men) while 21 of them are at the ages of 31-60 (8 of them are women, 11 of them are men). The difference between the number of male and female participants is tried to be as small as possible to be able to understand the opinion of both genders. Also, when the gender proportions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, which is nearly half men and half women, is considered, the sample's proportion of men and women can be seen as compatible with the whole population.

In addition to gender, the sample has a variety of ages and ethnicities of the participants. In total, 4 participants mentioned themselves as Syrian Turkmen, 3 participants mentioned themselves as Syrian Kurds, and as concluded from the answers to the question on "languages spoken in your home" the rest of the sample is Syrian Arabs. The most important consideration about the sample is having a variety in the social, economic, and human capital accumulation to observe their impact on the different decisions on returning or staying. Thus, while snowballing, it is avoided to have very little variance in the social, economic, and human capital among the refugees. Yet, refugees with a high amount one of or more capital and refugees with a low amount of capital are both included in the sample by having basic former information on a possible interviewee. Also, to be able to encounter refugees with more social and/or human capital, the researcher visited a Turkish language course by the Konya Metropolitan Municipality and some of the interviews were conducted there. Likewise, to increase the possibility of encountering refugees with less social, economic, and human capital, the neighborhoods in which some non-governmental organizations are providing financial support were visited. After reaching out to these non-governmental organizations, the information about the general situation of the socioeconomic status of the refugees they are in touch with was learned. Since most of the refugees in these neighborhoods were having difficulty affording the living costs of their families due to a lack of job opportunities compatible with their skills, some of the interviewees were chosen from these neighborhoods where non-governmental organizations were providing financial support.

Chapter 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The present study tries to understand the decision-making mechanism behind Syrian refugees' decisions to return, stay or resettle. By benefiting from the existing literature on return migration and migrants' capital accumulation, the expectations about the future decisions and plans of the refugees are formed around the social, economic, and human capital accumulation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the effect of this capital on the decision to return or stay. In this chapter, the effect of the social, economic, and human capital accumulation in the host country and home country on the decision or aspiration to return to the home country, stay in the host country, or resettle in a third country is analyzed by evaluating the outputs from the interviews with the Syrian refugees in Turkey. The analysis starts with a summary of the general profile of the participant refugees and a framework for their plans for their future. It continues with the examination of the main arguments of this study by giving empirics and passages from the interviews that are related to the arguments.

As stated in the previous chapters, it is argued in this research that – each of the social, economic, and human capital accumulations in a host country by a refugee has a substantial effect on the decision to return to the home country or continue to stay in the host country. This effect for each type of capital on the return decision is negative. Meaning that the higher the capital accumulation in the host country the lower the propensity to return to the home country. The role of the possible future capital after the return to the home country or resettlement in a third country in the evaluation and decision-making process should not be omitted while focusing on the capital in the host country. Before deciding to return or resettle, a refugee considers the possible capital after a return migration or a resettlement process and compares them with the current capital s/he accumulated in the host country. If the latter is evaluated as a more satisfactory situation, then the propensity to stay in the host country increases. Another important point that should not be ignored is the difference in the impact of the capitals. In this study, the possibility that the impacts of the capitals would be in different amounts and there would be interrelations between them is considered possible. Yet, the

scope of this study may not be convenient to reveal which type of capital is commonly the most effective one for refugees' plans for their futures. To find out the orderings among the different effects of the capitals, further studies with broader scopes should be conducted.

It should be noted that this study does not restrict the impact of capital accumulation on returning to the home country or staying in the host country with the condition that all three different types of capital are accumulated substantially. Rather, it is the case for this study that one refugee can accumulate only one, or two of the social, economic, and human capitals in the host country, and s/he may find just one or two capitals' effect on his/her life enough for deciding on staying in the host country. A refugee's decision to stay can be made in some cases by being affected overwhelmingly by only one type of capital, while in some other cases it can be made by being affected by two or all three types of capital partially. Therefore, this study will cover and analyze the influence of each of the capitals on return decision-making individually while emphasizing the possibility that a refugee may decide to return or stay with the effect of all different combinations of one, two, or three capitals.

It is shown in its general form how the social, economic, and human capital accumulation in the host country is evaluated by a refugee in comparison with the probable capital s/he will have after a possible return or resettlement in Figure 2. The reasoning behind the decision to return and the effect of each of the capital accumulations is explained in detail with examples from refugees' stories after the general empirics about the interviews are mentioned.

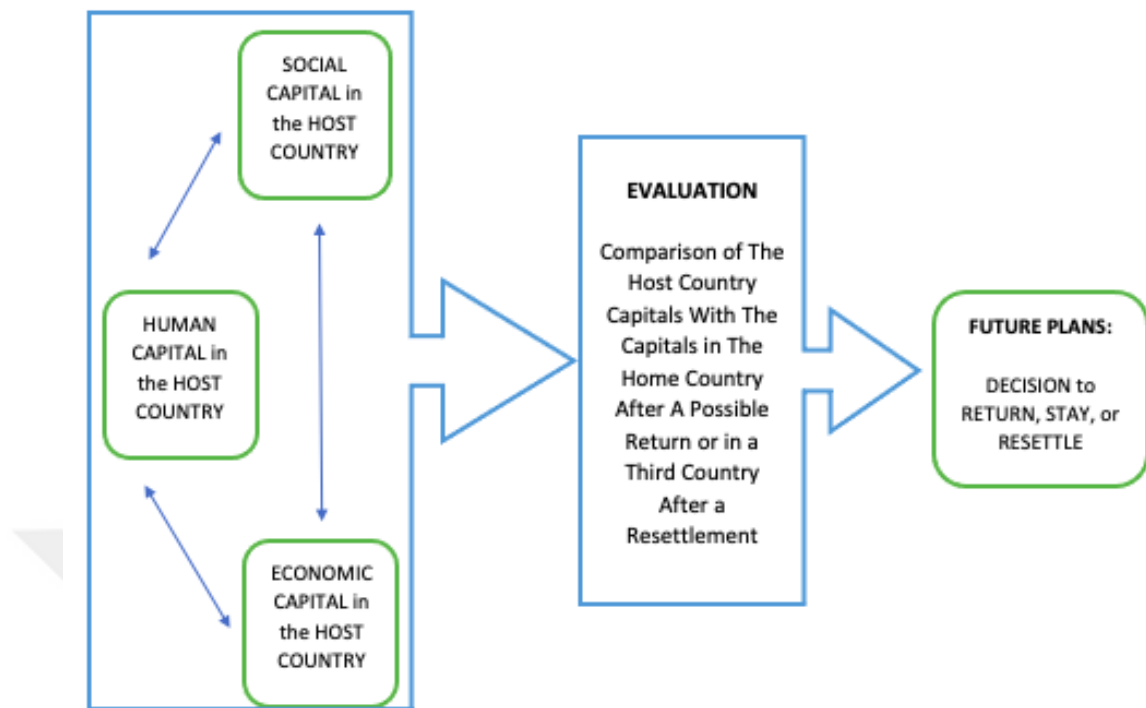


Figure 4.1 The Role of Social, Economic, and Human Capital Accumulation in the Host Country in Future Planning of Refugees

When the data is analyzed in a general frame, the main finding is that among the 40 interviewees, 24 of them prefer to stay in Turkey, while 16 of them plan to return permanently to Syria in near future. Only 3 of the total 40 interviewees consider resettling in a third Western country if not staying in Turkey or returning to Syria, yet without an actual plan for this. It should be noted that the mindset of the refugees who are planning to resettle in a third country was aimed to be understood by this research. However, all of the participants put returning and staying before the option of resettlement and only three of them stated a conditional resettlement scenario. One of them stated that he can prefer resettlement in the case he would not achieve to return to Syria and stay in Turkey and two others mentioned a temporary stay for an academic plan and after it returning to Turkey. Thus, the driving factors leading refugees to resettle in a third country could not be observed to the full extent with the fieldwork of this study.

In addition to the return and stay preferences, 12 out of the 16 interviewees who desire to return to Syria, commented on their social, economic, and human capital-related conditions in Syria as equal to or better than Turkey. Most of them are the ones who do not own homes, lands, and jobs both in Syria and Turkey and those who had accumulated less human capital (like education and language learning) in both countries. Also, 20 out of 24 interviewees who stated their intention to stay in Turkey, mentioned one or more social, economic, and human capital factors such as having relations with family and neighbors, the poor condition of their homes and properties in Syria, their education and language learning in Turkey.

As mentioned in the methodology part, the participants are consisting of Syrian men and women aged between 18 to 57 from various socioeconomic statuses and educational levels to control if these different demographic characteristics influence the future plans of refugees. However, in the interviews, both returning and staying were stated as the future aspiration among all these different ages, education, and socioeconomic level groups of participants. Meaning that, in the sample of this study, age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status alone were not stand as deliberative factors for the decision to stay or return. However, these properties of refugees have an influence on the various capitals' accumulation and consequently, they may be seen as related to the future plans of refugees.

For example, while the participants from young ages were more prone to consider the human capital effect because they accumulated it through formal education or work experience, the middle-aged participants mostly were not worried about their job skills in the scenario they returned to their country. Yet, another example would be a father in his fifties whose children completed university and high school programs in Turkey who had the same concern for human capital as the younger participants considering his children's future in Turkey. Thus, in this study, since a similar way of consideration about capital accumulation is observed among different ages, the age factor is not displayed as a determinant of the decision to stay or return nor the gender, and socioeconomic status.

Another point paid attention to during the interviews was the differences between the participants in Istanbul and Konya. In both cities, the researcher tries to reach refugees with various levels of social, economic, and human capital. Although the exact amount of capital accumulation would not be learned before hearing their stories, the choices of the neighborhoods and places for the interviews helped the researcher to have this variety. For example, neighborhoods with both lower and medium levels of income were visited. Additionally, a language course and university platforms were among the interview spots. These visits provided the opportunity to have participants with higher education in addition to the less educated refugees who might be encountered more in the neighborhoods with low-income levels.

Although it was tried for both groups to include participants with different levels of social, economic, and human capital, the researcher observed a more optimistic approach in the interviews of the refugees living in Konya compared to the ones living in Istanbul. Some possible reasons behind this situation are explained in the conclusion chapter. After the fieldwork was completed, it was revealed that the rate of refugees who have a return plan in Istanbul is slightly higher compared to refugees in Konya. While 9 of the 20 participants in Istanbul stated their aspiration as returning to Syria, 7 of the 20 participants in Konya stated their willingness to return to their home countries. Although the gap is not dramatically high, it would be meaningful when it is considered along with the researcher's observation that the participants in Konya are more optimistic about their feelings and plans than the participants in Istanbul.

In the following part, the effect of the differences in the participants' capital accumulation in both countries is examined separately with the data from the interviews. After these discussions, a conclusion about the effect of social, economic, and human capital accumulations on the decision to return, stay or resettle takes place.

4.1 *The effect of “social capital” on the future plans of Syrian refugees:*

Since different definitions of social capital in the political science, sociology, and migration literature are covered in the conceptualization and literature review parts, a

general concept of social capital which has derived from these different definitions will be used in this part. As roughly outlined, social capital refers to the acquisitions of people from their social relations and actions in their social environments. These social relations may be with their family members, neighbors, friends, colleagues, etc. Also, attendance at events of an organization, a charity, a foundation, a language, or a skill acquisition course, etc., and having social interactions there can be considered as a part of one's social capital.

The participants are questioned about their relations with family members, relatives, neighbors, friends, and colleagues in both Turkey and Syria. Any social events they attend in a social organization or public institution such as skill courses of the government in Turkey and Syria were also learned during the interviews. Some of the information about their social life and social capital was gathered throughout the interviewee's storytelling spontaneously.

With the data gathered in the interviews, the effect of social capital accumulation in the host country on the future plan of a refugee has been observed. Among the sample of this study, those who have less contact with family members and relatives, do not have good relations with their neighbors, or made no or a few new friends, and thus, not so much accumulated social capital in Turkey are more likely to making returning plans to Syria.

When the stories of the participants who mentioned their aspirations to return to their home country are considered, it appears that the majority of them could not increase their social capital in Turkey. Although the only reason they would like to return to their countries may not be their lack of social capital accumulation, its commonality among the refugees who prefer to return to Syria signals its important effect on the return decision-making process.

For example, the feelings of Ahmad, a 51-year-old ironer in a clothing factory, about his routines and social life demonstrate how social capital accumulation can play an important role in the integration into a host country and consequently the decision to stay or return:

Our life in Syria was very good. Before the war, all the means were very good. Five years ago, when my son was 11 years old, terrorists kidnapped him. Then they released him and we came to Turkey immediately to protect him from terrorists. Now my son works with me in a factory. I should emphasize that we have never been mistreated at work, we work with good people. We are also pleased with the Turkish government, they helped us a lot. But our days pass between home and work. Due to our workload, we cannot spend time with so many people. Also, our relatives could not come to Turkey, which is why we only rarely meet with our neighbors. Thus, I really miss spending time and having conversations with people I knew very well.

He also replies to the question of the interviewer “Where would you like to be 10 years from now?” as:

If the conditions are suitable, we want to return to Syria. We have both home and relatives there. If the war ends, the country will improve over time, even if it was bad at first. I love my country, and my city, and I want to be there. If they gave me a chance to come back right now, I would go immediately.

On the contrary, those who are happy and satisfied with their social life in Turkey are more prone to stay there. Similarly, among those who state their willingness to stay, most of the refugees are the ones who could achieve accumulate more social capital in Turkey. Having more family members and relatives in Turkey and making new friends who are Syrian, Turkish, or from other nationalities (Kurdish, Afghan, etc.) in Turkey, have a positive effect on the decision to stay in Turkey.

For example, Khadijah, a 38-year-old housewife, expresses her willingness to stay in Turkey after mentioning her social life there:

If you want the truth, Turkey is better in many opportunities. Here, I live a social life that is maybe better than my social life back in Syria. I go to the health and sports center in my neighborhood as well as to the Turkish language class that Konya Municipality's Department of Public Relations opened for Syrians. I have some Syrian friends here, we gather with them to have conversations at our homes. I also feel close to Turkey and the Turkish people.

Souad, 38, defines the life she left in Aleppo and her love for her country with these words:

Everyone loves their homeland. I also considered returning to Syria, but there is no electricity, and no clean water anymore. There is no life, no job, how will we live there? It takes many years to recover. Nothing was missing before the war, then we had a tough time. Aleppo is now destroyed, there is nothing to live for there. Here, we have many Turkish friends. But we barely meet with my relatives because everyone is very busy. I am very happy with my life right now. Friends are very helpful. I also help them with their work. I love my Turkish friends so much, I see them as brothers and sisters. Although sometimes we hear on the public buses people saying, "Why you came here?", I don't hear them, I think about my good friends but not about these people.

Souad's words also signal how the increasing mistreatment of Syrian refugees in Turkey may not be enough to be the sole reason for a refugee to decide on leaving the country. Although negative behavior against refugees can work as a contributing factor to return decision-making, refugees consider other conditions they have or potentially have in the host and the home country before they decide to return or stay.

Although big changes happen in the social lives of refugees, they tend to be fair while comparing their before-war conditions with their lives in Turkey after their migration or their possible living conditions after a return. Many of the participants of this study who compared what they had in Syria and now have in Turkey, were implying the lives they live either in Turkey or in Syria cannot be as before the war. Thus, it was observed that the conditions in Turkey were not judged by comparing them with the conditions in Syria before the war.

For example, Nebil, a 41-year-old refugee who stated his future plan as staying in Turkey at the end of the interview, mentioned how his social relations changed after he came to Turkey with his wife and four children in 2014. However, he was pleased with his social relations in Turkey since he considers all the tough conditions his life brought to him:

My social life and the social environment in Turkey have changed a lot compared to my years in Syria. Maybe 95% of it changed. When I first came to Turkey, I worked with Turks in a charity association. Later, I got a job in a wholesale company in Cağaloğlu, Istanbul and I have been working in the same place ever since. For this reason, I did not have the opportunity to be friends with the Syrians here, I have always been friends with the Turks at work. My Turkish friends have been very nice to me. When I first came from Syria, they helped me to settle down and adapt to my new life here. Their help has

made our years here easier. So even though my environment in Syria changed a lot, I had to get used to my new order here. Thank God I always came across very good people in this new order.

As the passages from the interviews with Syrian refugees demonstrate, the social capital accumulation in Turkey is poor among those who aspire to return to Syria in a near future. Also, these group of refugees mostly miss their previous social life while believing that it would get better than what they have in Turkey after they return to Syria. While the passages from the interviews of those who do not consider a return as a future plan but rather prefer to stay in Turkey are considered, most of them seemed to be pleasant or happy with the social relations and activities in Turkey, while some of them stated that they have no one left in Syria. Therefore, as expected, the social capital in the host country is negatively related to the return aspirations while the prevalence of the social capital in the home country is positively related to the returning plans of refugees.

4.2 *The effect of “human capital” on the future plans of Syrian refugees:*

Among the three types of capital, human capital is the one that takes a longer time to accumulate and has a longer-term effect on the lives of immigrants -including refugees- compared to the other two types of capital. Any investments in human capital through educational attainment, professional skill development, or language learning can take years to do, and once completed they can play determining roles in the quality of life of the refugees.

For example, a refugee who spends his/her four or five years of college education in a host country is likely to have better job opportunities compared to the ones who do not have the same level of education. S/he has a comparative advantage in having a job related to his/her education. Likewise, learning the language of a host country can provide a refugee with similar job opportunities to the natives of this country. Not being restricted to jobs that do not require communication in the native language can also fasten the process of social cohesion between the refugees and the locals. This kind of human capital accumulation in the host country can decrease the likelihood of a refugee returning to the home country. Especially in the cases when this refugee believes that

s/he cannot use the human capital s/he accumulated in the host country back in his/her hometown, a comparison of the human capital in both countries can be significantly influential in the return decision-making process.

In contrast, if a refugee cannot invest in his/her human capital in a host country by having an education, learning a language or acquiring a new professional skill, etc. this situation reflects in his/her future plans and put the option of returning forward considering the possibility that previously accumulated human capital can provide better opportunities in the home country. In the case that educational attainments or job training are lacking in both countries, the home country may still have the advantage to be the final destination of a refugee since his/her native language has been an already obtained human capital which s/he can use to sustain his/her life there.

While the situation of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is considered, it is possible to argue that having a college degree from a Turkish university provides a young refugee much more opportunities than not having one. Also, in many cases, refugees couldn't have degree equivalency in Turkey for the degrees they had in Syria. The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) requires the applicants to bring original hard copies of the diplomas for the application for degree equivalency (YÖK, 2020). However, many refugees could not take hard copies of their diplomas while they were migrating to Turkey under difficult conditions. For these kinds of situations, YÖK requires additional processes such as contacting the university of graduation in Syria or examination of the knowledge in the area of degree (YÖK, 2020). In some cases, it is not possible to request the universities in Syria to prepare new documents for the proof of degree conferral. Thus, having a college degree in Syria and not having equivalency in Turkey may push refugees to return since they can do jobs compatible with their educational attainment. Similarly, having a college degree in Turkey may increase the likelihood of staying in Turkey since it can bring better job opportunities. Also, the time and effort spent to have this degree may be wasted after a possible return.

Not only do the refugees who attained college/university shape their decision to return around the human capital accumulation in the host country, but also do the refugees whose children have started or completed college education in Turkey. Those

who prioritize the gains and losses of their children for their future lives after a possible return, tend to choose the place where their children are more advantageous in terms of human capital. This way of thinking would be more visible in the refugee parents of children of college education age since a college degree is the most path-determining one for the lives of people compared to primary and secondary school completion. However, it is possible to see cases that refugee parents of primary or secondary school attendees in Turkey do not prefer to return to Syria considering the possibility of wasting time to start again to some grades for their children.

Among thirteen participants who or whose children attained college education in Turkish universities, only four of them stated their aspiration to return to Syria while nine of them explained their plans as staying in Turkey. Also, several participants who are parents of children attending primary education in Turkey mentioned their concerns about the loss of time their children would have in case of a new adaptation process to a school in Syria.

In addition to human capital accumulation in the form of educational attainment, investing in human capital by learning the host country's language has a significant role in the decision to stay in Turkey. Job opportunities that do not require any language requirement are limited in Turkey. The refugees who achieved to learn Turkish to some extent are more advantageous in finding jobs and communicating with Turkish neighbors, friends, etc. compared to the ones who could not or did not learn Turkish due to several reasons. The comparative advantage increases with the increase in the level of Turkish language a refugee achieved to learn. Although a refugee may not emphasize Turkish language learning as a reason to stay in Turkey or return to Syria, human capital accumulation through learning Turkish is a significant contributing factor in many Syrians' decisions. It facilitates finding jobs and having social networks easier and thus it accelerates the accumulation of social and economic capital as well.

Both the stories of many refugee participants on their employment processes and the empirics on the participants' language learning attitudes reveal the effect of language learning on the decision to return or stay. Among twenty-one refugees who can understand the researcher's talk in Turkish easily and communicate in Turkish

without a need for a translator, only four of them aspire to return while among nineteen refugees who have poor or no Turkish language proficiency, twelve of them plan to return to Syria.

As a young refugee who has a poor ability to speak Turkish and no educational attainment in Turkey, Ali's case is an example of how only a bachelor's degree in education from Syria may not help to prevent a refugee from being a totter (dumpster diver). He and his wife who had to drop out of college to move to Turkey after the war began, are planning to return to their country after the war ends even if the conditions there would not improve substantially. When asked where he wants to be in ten years from now, he responds:

We want to return to Syria. Our whole family is there. We can go even if everything is not improved there. Our brothers are also in Istanbul, but they will return to Syria as soon as the war is over. We have no conditions to stay in Turkey. Turkey is very beautiful, but we still do not want to stay.

However, Imad's story pushes him to a different point of view about returning. As a 25-year-old refugee who completed his Bachelor of Engineering degree at a prestigious university in Turkey, he prefers to stay in Turkey to not start over again to build his life in Syria.

After gaining some work experience in Turkey's big companies, I am planning to have a master's degree from a European University. But then, I would like to continue living in Turkey. Turkey provided me with an education and other opportunities; I am willing to pay back for what it provided me so far. Also going back to Syria means that I need to build my life again just after I build it in Turkey.

Similarly, the case of Muhammed, a 47-year-old father of four school-age children, implies how central the human capital accumulation can be for a refugee family while deciding to return or stay. Although he misses his country, he makes his decision by putting his children first and since all of them spent several years in Turkish schools including universities, he wants his family to stay in Turkey to avoid any interruptions in their education lives:

We have friends here, we are meeting with them. But not like in Syria. We met the Arabs in our neighborhood, and our neighborly relations developed. Our little kids don't want to move out of the neighborhood right now. Besides, all our property there is already gone. If we return to Syria, my kids will have to start their education all over again. I do not want them to waste time with this, where my kids are successful, I also feel successful and good. That's why we want to stay here.

The words of 42-year-old Sumayya about her concerns about her children's primary and secondary school education after a possible return is also an example of the refugee parents who consider their children's human capital accumulation and transformation from host to home country:

I have to think about the future of my kids. They spent 5 years in Turkish schools. They learned all the subjects in Turkish. As a mother, how can I make them start over to learn everything they covered in Turkey by returning to Syria? I feel like I have to struggle against all the difficulties in Turkey for the future of my three kids.

All the quotations from the interviews of the participants of this research exemplify how human capital in the host and the home country can play determining roles in the decision to return to Syria or stay in Turkey. Per the expectations before the study, those who had accumulated a substantial amount of human capital through education or language learning in Turkey were less likely to return to Syria, while those who could not develop or poorly accumulated human capital in Turkey and are still capable of using the human capital in Syria aspire more to return to Syria.

4.3 The effect of “economic capital” on the future plans of Syrian refugees:

Although it generally does take shorter to accumulate economic capital than social and human capital, its influence on the return decision-making is not necessarily less than the other two capitals. The components of the economic capital such as salaries, rent amounts, and the status of the properties can sometimes change rapidly, yet this change has longer-term effects on the lives of the refugees.

For example, losing a house in the homeland due to an air strike or selling an apartment due to the sociopolitical change in the neighborhood (like becoming the new

minority of the neighborhood) decreases the economic capital in the home country, which in turn, reduces the likelihood of returning to the home country since it is more advantageous to live in Turkey. Additionally, the changes that affect income such as losing agricultural lands to the regional armed groups (which is the case for many refugees coming from rural areas), closing a store/firm, or losing a job are the situations that refugees have a drop in their economic capitals in the home country.

In contrast, obtaining new properties or increasing wealth by opening a store or having a well-paid job in Turkey increase the economic capital a refugee accumulates in the host country. Although it is very unlikely for a refugee to increase the economic capital back in Syria under the war conditions, the amount of the change in the economic capital lost in the home country (like the difference between losing only a car or losing the whole source of income) can have a role in the decision to return or stay of a refugee. Similarly, refugees technically increase their economic capital in Turkey in any case even with tiny amounts since almost all of them had zero economic capital in Turkey before their migration. Yet, the relative amount of the economic capital in the home and the host countries after the losses and the gains is more important for decision-making.

As happens in other capitals, a refugee tends to compare the economic capital in both countries and shape his/her plans according to it. If the economic capital in the home country is still higher than the economic capital in the host country after the losses and gains, this refugee is expected to tend to return to Syria. However, if a refugee did not have a high economic capital in the home country before the migration or lost most of it due to several reasons and achieved to accumulate a considerable amount of it in Turkey, then s/he is expected to aspire to stay in Turkey more than a return.

To have a broad image of the effect of economic capital accumulation on refugees' future aspirations, comparisons of the overall numbers of the participants grouped regarding their economic capital can be analyzed. Among the 16 refugees who prefer to return to Syria, 5 of them are the ones who still have homes and properties there. Additionally, 6 of this group are refugees who already have a low economic capital in Syria and could not increase it in Turkey either. These numbers signal that since they

did not give a high amount of economic capital up while coming to Turkey and they have not been able to make it higher than what they already have in their homeland after their migration, they do not get hesitant about their losses after a possible return to Syria. On the contrary, among the 24 refugees who plan to stay in Turkey, 15 of them already lost their houses and/or their properties that bring them financial resources such as stores, lands, and small firms.

The response of Mahmud, a 28-year-old refugee man in Konya, to the question about his working conditions and financial situation in Turkey shows the comparison in the evaluation of returning. He thinks that his economic capital accumulation in Turkey puts him in a position better than his times in Syria. Since he believes that the possible return scenario would not be better than his current welfare status in Turkey, he does not want to return to his home country:

We had a family-run market in Syria, but after my father passed away, our business deteriorated with the war conditions. I have been working as a worker in a factory since I came to Turkey, the salary is moderate, but I am satisfied with the conditions. There is no problem in the working environment. I am also on good terms with my boss. After he saw my performance and good personality, he replaced most of his Turkish workers with Arabs. My salary now is better than in Syria. Also, my living conditions are better in Turkey. I am neither very happy nor very unhappy here. I have a job; I have a salary. Of course, I would like my conditions to be better, but I do not think it will be any better in Syria. That is why I do not plan to return to Syria.

It is possible to see the effect of the economic and human capital accumulation and how the capital comparison process works in the words of a 28-year-old Syrian man, Affan, who makes his living by being an Arabic teacher in a high school in Konya. Before he ended his interview by revealing his intention to stay in Turkey, he mentions his current economic conditions and compare them to the situation in Syria during the period before the war. Then, he complains about the economic losses due to the war by mentioning how he had to sell his house in Syria. He also mentions the educational lives of him and his wife and their dreams for their future life in Turkey:

I came to Turkey in 2014. I first worked in a factory in Bursa. The working conditions were bad, and the salary was low there. Then I moved to Konya. I have been working at Imam Hatip High School since I came here for 4 years. My living conditions in Konya were not very good at first, but then they got better.

My salary is now at a good level. I get a minimum wage from the government, but it's a good amount since the school administration adds to it. My salary was not very good in Syria before the war anyway. Also, we have sold the house there for less than its value. Since the Assad army evacuated the area where our house is located, so we sold it out of necessity. We built a life here. I am doing my master's in Arabic Language and Literature at Konya Necmettin Erbakan University. My wife had also left her Law education there before we come from Syria. Now she continues her education in Konya, and she will start to work when she graduates. After completing my master's degree, I want to have a doctoral degree and then open a language school.

Similarly, in addition to the oppressive conditions resulting from the war, the economic conditions were an important part of the migration motivation of Sumayya, a 42-year-old Turkmen-Syrian woman; and these conditions which compose the economic capital in Turkey and Syria are still one of the most important concerns of Sumayya while evaluating the returning:

Actually, where I live was a safe place during the war, but we still had reasons to come to Turkey in 2015. There were two main reasons for this. The first was the psychological pressure from the government. Since I was working in a government institution, the officials in my office were constantly trying to understand what I thought of the war and the government. The other reason was economic. Before the war, my husband's salary was not enough to support our family. That is why I had to work hard. Our financial situation was not very good at that time, and it got worse after the war. My working conditions were also very harsh, they were constantly checking the civil servants. If I moved to another city in Syria, the conditions would still be the same. Thus, we decided to move to Turkey since there were both economic difficulties and psychological pressure.

My husband was a teacher, and I was an accountant in Syria. Now I am not working, my husband works as a waiter here. His income is barely enough for our family expenses now, but it is not much different from the one in Syria. I thank God for our situation though.

We are happy with our life here. Unfortunately, I do not see a future in Syria. Even if Assad leaves, it will take 50 years for Syria to recover. My house there was also a house with very bad conditions, and I wanted to leave. If I go back, I cannot go back to that house, I have to find a new house, which would be very expensive in today's conditions. That's why I don't want to go back.

All the quotations from the interviews of the Syrian refugees who prefers to stay in Turkey are examples of how they evaluate the rises and falls in economic capital they had in Turkey and Syria before the war, during the war, and would have after a possible return. When the comments on the economic conditions of the interviewees who desire to go back to Syria are considered, the effect of not losing substantial economic capital

or still having a home in the home country can be seen. For example, Uthman, a 57-year-old refugee man complains about the lack of jobs and financial opportunities in Turkey and emphasizes that he has a home:

2 years after we came, job opportunities here decreased a lot because there were too many Syrians, and life became more difficult. We wanted to go to Canada, where my friend lives. We thought the facilities there were better. We have to work to live in Turkey because we do not have any other income, but in Canada, we could go to school instead of working thanks to government facilities. If Turkey wasn't so expensive, maybe we could stay here, but if the conditions don't get worse, we want to return to Syria. We have a home there.

One of his children adds to his father's words: My brothers and I want to stay in Turkey. We do not think we will do anything in Syria. We grew up here, we know this place. But of course, if our father leaves, we also go back and forth between the two countries.

In addition to the examples from the interviews of the refugees who prefer to return to their home country while still holding a substantial amount of economic capital there, the cases of the refugees who desire to return to their home country by having a limited amount of economic capital in both Syria (even before the war) and Turkey exemplifies the importance of the economic capital accumulation in return decision. These groups of refugees are mostly consisting of Syrians who could not accumulate economic capital by having a medium and high level of salaries, properties like houses, cars, lands, stores, etc. This low level of economic capital in the home country is mostly resulting from the reasons like having low-skilled underpaid jobs, not having stable jobs due to the fragile state economy, leaving schools after the breakout of the war, or not being able to start working due to the young ages before leaving the country.

The story of Rama and her husband is an example of the refugees who left the country before completing their education and thus not being able to start accumulating economic capital with salaries and properties. Rama who is a 24-year-old young woman was a law student, and her husband was a year ahead of being a teacher when they left the country after the war affected their lives significantly.

Before the war, I was studying law and my husband was studying to be a teacher. But when the war started, we had to leave our schools. We managed somehow until 2015, but then our financial situation got worse. After we came to Turkey, we could not continue our education here because the documents

showing our university registration remained in Syria. Then I found out that I had cancer and could not work at all. My husband has always collected papers to make a living since we came, but now there is no work due to Covid-19. Our conditions here are very harsh. That is why we see our future in Syria. Our whole family is there. Even if the conditions there do not improve completely, we want to return to Syria.

Overall, the qualitative data collected by doing interviews with forty refugees in Istanbul and Konya was very compatible with the expectations of this thesis on the effect of capital accumulation in return decision-making. It has been observed that almost all the participants featured capital accumulation in the home and host countries while expressing their desire to return or stay. While some of them clearly showed the status of their capitals in both countries as the reason behind their decision to stay or return; some of them mentioned the consideration of their capitals between the lines of their responses.

One conclusion from the fieldwork of this study was that most of the refugees who plan to return are those who cannot accumulate a substantial amount of one or more types of capital in Turkey after their migration. To put it another way, the refugees who plan to return are those who prefer the opportunities which would be provided after a possible return by the social, economic, and/or human capital they have already accumulated in Syria, to the opportunities which have been and would be provided by the capitals they have invested in Turkey. As seen in the passages from the interviews, the examples of this group of refugees are those who could not have a social network consisting of family members and Turkish or Arab friends and neighbors; who stopped their education in Syria and could not continue in Turkey; who could not achieve to find financially adequate jobs in Turkey; who still have properties such as home, lands, cars, stores, animals, etc. in their hometown and who had a very limited amount of capitals in Syria even before the war and thus do not get worried about their education, property or job losses due to war or migration.

Another conclusion inferred from the qualitative data of this study is that the refugees who would like to stay are those who achieved accumulating more social, economic, or human capital in Turkey than they would have in Syria after a possible return. These groups of refugees are mostly the ones whose family members are already

in Turkey and who have social networks consisting of Turkish and Arab friends and neighbors; who study at colleges or whose children have gone to Turkish primary and secondary schools; who have jobs in Turkey with wages higher than or similar to the wages they had in Syria; and whose homes or other properties were bombed, seized, or significantly damaged during the war that they would have difficulties to replace their houses, lands, cars, animals, etc. These common characteristics of the Syrian refugees who desire to return or stay demonstrate that the return decision-making process mostly took place as compatible with the expectations of this research.

One interesting and important point revealed after the fieldwork of this study is that the number of refugees who plans to resettle in a third country was very low among the participants. Only three refugees mentioned the possibility of resettling in a third country. However, one of these three people expressed this willingness as a conditional option to not being able to return to Syria while the two others proposed resettling as a temporary scenario in which they spent some years abroad for their academic development and then return to Turkey. Therefore, to understand which factors led the refugees to a third country, future research with a bigger sample should be conducted. Alternatively, data from fieldwork with those who already emigrated to a third country would be added to the data of this study to compare the reasonings of those who already resettled in a third country and stayed in the host country.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

This qualitative work tries to reveal the mechanism behind refugees' decision to return, stay or resettle with a focus on the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The theoretical background is shaped around capital accumulation theories on return with a combination of social, economic, and human capital by taking the parts which apply to the refugees and adding some additional parts which apply to specific cases of Syrian refugees. Evaluation of capital accumulation provides a comprehensive understanding by taking both the structural factors like home and host country's socioeconomic legal and security conditions and various individual factors such as the capability to adapt to a new atmosphere, acquire a social network, have education, find a job, etc. into consideration. Although the number of studies in the capital accumulation literature which include the conditions of refugees in the analysis is very restricted, a significant part of the ideas and findings on voluntary migrants were adapted to the conditions of the refugees in this study.

Since not only does the capital accumulation literature lacks the cases of refugees but also most of the return literature explains the return of the labor migrants and other voluntary migrants, while not refugees, one important contribution of this study to the existing literature is the provision of a model for return, stay or resettlement decision for refugees which is a group of forced migrants. Another input to the return studies is the explanation of the decision-making process with the combination of social, economic, and human capital accumulation factors. Although there are examples of studies that cover two types of capital together such as social and human; economic and social; or cultural and human capital, the grouping of all three types as social, economic, and human capital provides a more comprehensive perspective for refugees' conditions as it includes most of the crucial part of the refugee lives.

Also, since the case of Syrian refugees has been studied for less than a decade, this research has the opportunity of touching upon the issues which were not covered by the previous studies. Among the different topics of this newly occurred research case like the social cohesion of Syrians and Turks, public opinions in both populations, and the domestic and international political aspects of the refugee flow, the return decision-

making is one of the least studied, moreover, a study which tries to understand the future aspirations of Syrians by focusing on their capital accumulations was not encountered by the researcher so far. Thus, it would be considered another contribution to the literature to explain the return decision-making of the Syrians in Turkey.

Another important point is that the contribution of this study is not only in the literature on the topics of return decision-making of refugees and Syrian refugees in Turkey but also in the public policy analysis area. This research helps policy analysts and policymakers to have a projection about the number of refugees to prepare education, health, labor, and social cohesion policies for increasing their welfare. This projection would be used to facilitate the resource allocation and budget arrangements for the policies for Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Furthermore, having information about how refugees relate their social, economic, and human capital in both countries and their decision to return, stay or resettle can guide different actors such as state agencies, NGOs, and society to organize the conditions refugees wait for to start their returning or resettling process. For example, knowing that it is unlikely that a refugee who completed a bachelor's program in Turkey returns to his/her country of origin would lead the state agencies to create the necessary job positions in different sectors to maximize the mutual benefit of the refugee and the state.

As detailed in the analysis and findings part, with the help of existing literature on migration decision-making, the data collected in the fieldwork in Konya and Istanbul by conducting 40 in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees who have different levels of social, capital, and human capitals signals how different conditions shape the decision-making process to return or stay.

First of all, it has been observed in all the interviews that, the refugees include the status of their social, economic, and/or human capital in the home and host countries in the evaluation process of the return decision-making process. With different amounts of emphasis on different types of capital, all the interviewees mentioned what these capitals in both countries have brought to them and would bring after a possible return.

While 32 of them stated their decision to return or stay by mentioning reasons related to their social, economic, or human capital accumulation in the home and host country, 8 interviewees mentioned these capitals, yet prioritized some other factors such as political reasons and patriotism while explaining their aspiration to return or stay.

The collected data supports the idea that the social, economic, and human capital that refugees accumulate in the host country increases their probability of staying there. Similarly, the likelihood of the return increases when these capitals were acquired more in the home country compared to the host country.

It is possible to say that this idea which was stated for the aggregate capital accumulation is valid for the separate effects of the social, economic, and human capital. Thus, each type of capital accumulated in the host country encourages stay while their presence in the home country encourages return. In the decision-making process, refugees consider the opportunities which have been brought by their capital accumulations in the host country and the potential conditions which are provided by the capital of the home country after a probable return. The likelihood of the return decreases if the former outweighs the latter and it increases otherwise.

For example, refugees who achieved to increase in their social capital by making new friends, investing in human capital through educational attainment, or accumulating economic capital with a job with a substantial salary in Turkey are more likely to stay rather than return to Syria. In contrast, those who could not make a social network in the host country and misses their family and friends back in the home country; could not transfer their educational degree or professional skills; or could not have a job with a sufficient salary are more likely to return to their old conditions in their home country.

Another important finding is that there is no direct relation between the fundamental demographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity and the decision to return which can be deduced from the fact that similar reasoning about both the decision to return or stay was mentioned by nearly all different categories of age, gender, and ethnicity in the participants but not come forward in a specific age, gender or ethnicity.

Last but not least, as intended in the fieldwork, the differences in refugees' future aspirations between the groups in Konya and Istanbul were tried to be caught. According to the observations of the researcher, the interviewees in Konya were more optimistic manner than the interviewees in Istanbul. Possible reasons behind this situation would be not being exposed to the complexity and metropolitan problems of Istanbul of refugees in Konya, and the high effort of the Konya Municipality to provide refugees better opportunities such as free language courses, food aids, and other social programs. This observation of the researcher can be seen parallel with the slight difference revealed in the fieldwork between the number of refugees who prefer to return to Syria in the groups of Konya with seven refugees out of twenty and Istanbul with nine refugees out of twenty.

5.1 *Limitations and Future Research*

This research was planned to analyze the return decision-making of refugees benefiting from qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Although the qualitative part was conducted by the researcher, the quantitative data collection which was a part of a TUBITAK 1003 Project titled "Improving Interactive Social Integration Model in Migration Governance in Turkey" was postponed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Thus, this thesis only benefited from the existing literature and the fieldwork consisting of 40 interviews reached via the Snowball sampling method. Due to the lack of large-N data with random sampling, this research avoids generalizing the findings to all Syrian refugees in Turkey and all forced migrants worldwide. To have higher generalizability, a survey study with a large-N sample must be done as future research.

Also, despite the aim of understanding the mindset of the refugees who plan to resettle in a third country, only 3 refugees mentioned such a plan after stating their first intention of staying or returning. This limited number of refugees among the whole sample may signal that after millions of refugees crossed the borders to reach Europe in the first four-five years of the conflict, most of the resting refugee population in Turkey became less prone to resettle in a third country.

There may be several reasons for this situation such as the dangerous way which are required to reach Europe (after the EU-Turkey deal, the roads to the nearest region with most socioeconomic opportunities were closed), the lack of information about the conditions in third countries, the lack of courage and eagerness to build a new life in a new country after living for years and accumulating capitals. Nearly two third of the interviewees stated their concern about the religious life their children would have in a Western country and the fear of discrimination as the reason they do not prefer to move to a third country. Yet it has been observed by the researcher that the information about the conditions of possible host countries is not known to the full extent, thus a significant number of refugees get afraid of living in Western countries even with the largely Muslim and Arab populations. Also, it is supportive of this argument that the three refugees who mentioned resettlement in a third Western country are all university graduates who were able to learn about the conditions in these countries from their relatives who already went there. Although these are the speculative reasons behind the low number of refugees who prefer to resettle in a third country, further studies should be conducted to understand the difference between the number of refugees who aimed at moving to Europe or other Western countries in the first five years and the next five years.

Additionally, since the theoretical background of this research is formed around the capital accumulation theories, the mindset of the refugees who make their decision only based on their political stance or patriotism are not reflected in this study. Only two of the interviewees put forward these kinds of reasons among other social, economic, and human capital factors while explaining their decision to stay or return. However, since the number of these refugees was very low and their aspirations are not totally refrained from the capital accumulations, this research did not include an additional theoretical framework for the political stance and patriotism among refugees. Research that focuses on these aspects can be conducted in the future.

This research also recognizes the effect of the “myth of return” which refers to the belief among a big portion of international migrants that they will return to their country eventually, even though a much lower rate of them actually returns due to several

reasons (Carling, 2015). There is the possibility that the psychological, political, or cultural conditions of the refugees may lead the participants of this study to express their return intention when their return is not very likely. However, since the fieldwork was conducted eight years later than the first refugees arrived in Turkey, the effect of the myth of return is expected to be lower compared to the first arrival period as the refugees comprehend their capabilities and capital in the home and the host countries.

Finally, future research may be done to reveal which one of the capitals is most or least effective in the return decision-making of the refugees. Even if all of them are found effective in the decision-making process, the results of research which put the comparative effects of the capitals at the center may be built on the findings of the present study.

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