

# RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IMPACT ANALYSIS

# International Students in the Context of Higher Education in Turkey

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**Bridging Youth and Young Professionals**  
In a Migrational Context via Digitalization

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# Introduction



**Bridging Youth and Young Professionals**  
In a Migrational Context via Digitalization

**A**mong immigrant groups, international students often form a neglected group. International student groups are considered in a different category as a type of immigrant who has immigrated from their country of residence to another country for educational purposes. In this sense, it is possible to evaluate international students in many categories from basic education to higher education, from formal education to distance education. However, when international students are mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is foreign students who formally attend higher education. The first of the limitations of this study is the foreign students who attended higher education institutions in Turkey and continue their education.

International students are an important asset for both source and destination countries. International students contribute not only to scientific progress and research but also to the development of skills and cultural diversity in the higher education environment they attend (Trice, 2003).

International students act as an important bridge between the country of origin and the country of study. These functions are multidimensional. First of all, international students have a unique position in establishing acquaintances and increasing interaction between the two cultures. The familiarity between cultures contributes to many fields from tourism to investment, from cultural diplomacy to international politics.

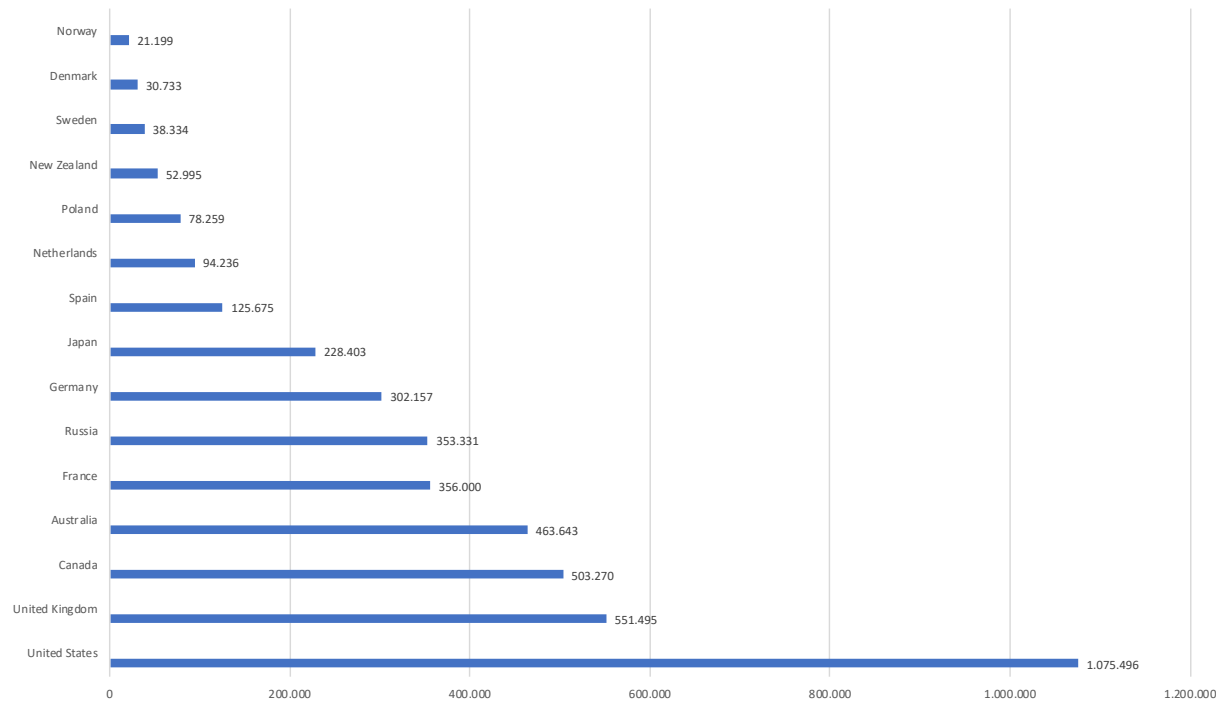
Beyond that, international students are a critical and important source of income for the institutions they study at. It is known that international students spend much more on accommodation and food than other students (Cantwell 2015, Lewin 2012). International students usually pay 2-3 times the tuition fees paid by other students in the institutions where they study (Lewin, 2012). In the case of Turkey, the situation is even more advanced. While domestic students studying in higher education in Turkey are exempt from tuition fees, international students pay semester fees. These fees constitute an important source of economic income, especially for universities. On the other hand, the presence of international students creates a more multicultural environment on campuses.



Despite their scientific, cultural, and economic contributions to target countries and educational institutions, international students are considered to receive inadequate service from the current system and are one of the most vulnerable groups, especially in periods of crisis (Cluett 2002; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 2017; Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). Disadvantaged groups include immigrants and among immigrants, international students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, are groups whose problems have deepened and deserve special attention.

This study mainly focuses on researching the difficulties and solutions of international students in the general and covid periods. As part of the YOUNGMIG project, “Learning in Turkey aims to evaluate the experiences of international students during the period of COVID-19 through the eyes of international students and faculty members who attend their courses.

# International Students by countries\_2022



**Source:** statista.com

According to 2020 data, there are 5.6 million international students worldwide. North America and Northern European states stand out among the countries hosting the highest number of international students. The rate of international students among higher education students in the USA exceeds 18%. This rate is around 10% in England, 7% in Australia, 7% in Germany and 6.8% in France. The number of international students in these five countries constitutes half of the world's total (Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2012, 26).

Table 1.1 shows the countries that have accepted the most international students by year since 2015. According to this, international students are mostly hosted by Northern European and North American countries. Among all countries, it is understood that the United States of America (USA) hosts a higher number of international students compared to other countries.

**Table 1.1.**

Top countries accepting international students by year, 2015-2020

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Australia	294.438	335.512	381.202	444.514	509.160	-
Austria	67.691	70.483	73.964	75.259	74.631	-
Belgium	56.453	61.102	44.978	53.896	52.143	-
Canada	171.603	189.478	209.979	224.548	279.168	-
China	123.127	137.527	157.108	178.271	201.177	225.100
France	239.409	245.349	258.380	229.623	246.378	-
Germany	228.756	244.575	258.873	311.738	333.233	-
Japan	131.980	143.457	164.338	182.748	202.907	-
Malaysia	111.443	124.133	100.765	-	81.953	-
New Zealand	57.091	53.854	52.678	52.702	53.002	-
Netherlands	86.189	89.920	96.289	104.015	108.353	-
Poland	43.988	54.734	63.925	54.354	55.191	-
Republic of Korea	54.540	61.888	70.796	84.749	98.857	-
Russia	226.431	243.752	250.658	262.416	282.922	-
Saudi Arabia	73.077	79.854	78.344	73.977	73.216	69.005
Switzerland	50.591	51.911	53.368	54.279	55.698	-

Ukraine	57.583	54.144	52.768	49.632	55.333	61.026
United Arab Emirates	73.445	77.463	-	-	225.339	215.975
United Kingdom	430.833	432.001	435.734	452.079	489.019	-
United States of America	907.251	971.417	984.898	987.314	976.853	-

**Source:** UNESCO Statistics (2015-2020)<sup>1</sup>

Although the UK was the country with the highest number of international students for many years, in 2019, Australia surpassed the UK with 509,160 students and took its place behind the USA. Between 2015 and 2019, Australia's international student chart showed a rapid increase. Although the number of international students in the UK is constantly increasing, it is at relatively lower levels in terms of the rate of increase.

One of the countries that have a continuous increase in the number of international students is China. China is home to approximately 200,000 international students.

In the light of the data in Table 1.1, it is understood that the number of international students in each country does not increase continuously, but some countries show a fluctuating or decreasing trend. Malaysia stands out as one of these countries. In Malaysia, which reached its peak with over 120,000 international students between 2015 and 2019, the number of international students decreased to 81,953 as of 2019.

On the other hand, Belgium and New Zealand have wavy graphics similar to each other. Although the number of international students they host increases from time to time, the number of international students in both countries is behind 2015 as of 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Countries accepting more than 50,000 students are included in the table.

Table 1.2 below shows the data for the sending countries of international students. When the countries sending students abroad as of 2019 are examined, there are a total of six countries sending more than 100.000 students abroad. Accordingly, Asian and European countries are at the forefront of sending international students. It can easily be said that China and India have a very important share among Asian countries. Accordingly, while China sent 1,061,511 students to other countries for education in 2019, this number is 461,792 for India. From 2015 to 2019, the number of students sent by both countries to foreign countries is constantly increasing. Other countries following China and India as of 2019 are as follows: Germany 122,445; France 103,161; America 102,246; Republic of Korea 101,943.

**Table 1.2**

Top countries sending international students by year

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bangladesh	55.989	62.191	57.920	50.078	44.338
Brazil	50.387	51.969	58.280	70.055	81.882
Canada	49.915	50.578	49.570	48.367	49.074
China	818.604	866.843	928.395	997.702	1.061.511
France	86.691	90.836	94.756	99.567	103.161
Germany	117.088	118.081	122.958	122.524	122.445
India	256.996	305.369	341.465	377.849	461.792
Indonesia	44.850	47.755	47.612	49.943	53.604
Iran	51.138	52.770	53.214	56.902	59.585
Italia	60.906	67.195	74.794	76.123	77.505

Kazakhstan	78.253	90.213	84.859	88.118	89.292
Malaysia	64.728	65.086	63.281	61.586	59.144
Nigeria	92.531	96.692	85.917	76.285	71.133
Republic of Korea	107.861	105.477	105.453	101.694	101.493
Russia	57.430	57.330	57.143	57.603	48.160
Saudi Arabia	86.239	90.238	84.242	77.406	66.398
Turkmenistan	51.065	47.872	46.224	49.350	63.584
Ukraine	68.205	77.419	77.890	78.578	77.586
United States of America	80.539	83.949	86.571	86.029	102.246

**Source:** UNESCO Statistics (2015-2019)<sup>2</sup>

When the data in Table 1.2 is examined, it is possible to comment that countries are generally willing to send students abroad. However, it can be said that there are countries that act in the opposite direction or that are under the influence of some negative conditions. Although there is not a big decrease, there are decreases in the number of students sent abroad by Germany. Unlike Germany, Canada also displays an unstable outlook. The number of students sent abroad by Canada changes from year to year, with decreases or increases in various dimensions. On the other hand, it is seen that Saudi Arabia has had a continuous decrease in the 4 years since 2016. Nigeria is a similar example, and while Nigeria sent 96,692 students abroad in 2016, this number decreased to 71,133 in 2019.

On Table 1.3, which includes the percentages of countries for international students in the world, it is also seen that the countries hosting the highest number of international students in the world are in decline in terms of percentage.

<sup>2</sup> Countries sending more than 50,000 students are included in the table.

**Table 1.3.**

International student hosting rates of OECD countries (%)

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019		2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
<b>Australia</b>	6,1	6	6	7	8	<b>Netherlands</b>	1,3	2	1,8	1,8	1,8
<b>Austria</b>	1,6	2	1,4	1,4	1,2	<b>Russia</b>	4	3	5	4,7	4,7
<b>Belgium</b>	1,2	-	1,2	1	1	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	-	2	1,5	1,5	1,2
<b>Canada</b>	4,7	3	3,6	3,9	4,6	<b>Switzerland</b>	1,4	-	1	1	1
<b>China</b>	1,8	2	2,5	3	3,3	<b>South Africa</b>	1,9	-	-	-	-
<b>France</b>	6,2	6	5	5	4	<b>Spain</b>	2,5	1	-	-	-
<b>Germany</b>	6,3	5	5	5	5,5	<b>Türkiye</b>	-	1	1,6	2,1	2,5
<b>Italia</b>	1,7	2	-	-	-	<b>United Kingdom</b>	13	10	9	8	8
<b>Japan</b>	3,5	3	3	3	3,3	<b>United States of America</b>	16,5	19	19	18,3	16
<b>Korea</b>	1,5	1	1,1	1,3	1,6	<b>Other OECD Countries</b>	7,9	10	-	-	-
<b>New Zealand</b>	1,7	-	-	-	-	<b>Non-OECD Countries</b>	15,1	20	-	-	-

**Source:** OECD (2015), Education at a Glance; UNESCO Statistics (2015-2019)

This shows that other countries are also competing to have international students and are trying to increase the number of international students they host. America is the clearest example in this regard. Although the number of international students hosted by the USA in the date range indicated in the table has

increased continuously, it can be said that this number shows a decreasing trend when the percentage is analyzed. In this context, for the United States, which hosted 19% of the world's international students in 2013, this number decreased to 16% in 2019. The situation for France and Belgium, which has prestigious position in terms of hosting international students, has decreased similarly to the United States.

On the other hand, the efforts of many countries to increase their market share yielded positive results. Countries such as Australia, China, and Turkey have a steadily increasing trend as an example of this situation.



# International Students in Turkey

**T**urkey has made significant progress in the internationalization of higher education institutions in recent years. Policies for international students, which started in the early 2000s, included the target of attracting 250,000 international students to Turkey by 2023 (Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2012). The number of students increased to 185,047 in the 2019-2020 period. As of 2022, this number seems to have reached 223,952 (YÖK Statistics, 2022).

Turkey's basic policy in internationalizing higher education is not based solely on economic motives. It can be said that the regions where Turkey accepts students are generally concentrated in the developing and underdeveloped countries in its east and south. It is possible to evaluate international students as a continuation of Turkey's policies to support the development of these regions. Turkey, which is at the top of the list of countries that provide the highest amount of foreign aid compared to the GNP per capita, also supports the human development of the countries it supports with students coming to Turkey.

International student mobility fosters mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity between target and source countries and societies. For this reason, it is considered an important foreign policy and public diplomacy tool (Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2012, 27). This issue constitutes the pivot point in Turkey's policies in recent years. Beyond the economic gains, it is seen that the development of the source countries is also prioritized, and public diplomacy is carried out for the benefit of tens of thousands of students from university education in Turkey through the scholarship opportunities that Turkey provides every year.

In recent years, important strategic texts on international students have been produced in Turkey (Alkin, Karaarslan, & Yardım, 2019, 14-15). In this context, the report titled "Turning Turkish Universities into Attraction Centers for International Students in the Framework of Internationalization of Higher Education" prepared by the Development Research Center of the Ministry of Development, published in 2015, is one of the important steps (Ministry of Development, 2015). Regarding the tenth development plan in the report, it is emphasized that the issue of international students is among Turkey's priorities. Another text is the "Internationalization Strategy Document in Higher Education 2018-2022" prepared by YÖK (YÖK, 2017).

Looking at Table 1.4, which includes the data on the number of international students hosted by Turkey, it is noteworthy that Turkey has developed a constantly increasing capacity to attract international students between 2011 and 2021. So much so that from 2011 to 2021, the number of international students in Turkey has increased approximately 8 times. By 2018, Turkey has become an important choice for international students and had become one of the top 10 countries hosting the most international students in the world.

**Table 1.4.**

International students in Turkey and percentages (%)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Accepted international students	27.329	31.933	43.251	51.997	79.308	96.957	117.435	135.419	154.509	185.047	224.053
Sended international students (T.R. Citizens)	-	-	-	-	45.655	45.545	45.734	47.477	47.628		-
University Students in Turkey	4.303.550	4.923.940	5.619.079	6.062.886	6.689.185	7.198.987	7.560.371	7.740.502	7.940.133	8.240.997	-
Ratio of Accepting International Students to Students in Turkey	0,63	0,64	0,76	0,85	1,18	1,34	1,55	1,74	1,94	2,24	-

**Source:** Study in Turkey (2022); UNESCO Statistics (2022); YOK (2022), [istatistik.yok.gov.tr](http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr)

On the other hand, the number of students sent abroad by Turkey remained at almost the same level between 2015 and 2019, with 47,628 students sending the most students in 2019, and in 2016 with 45,545 students sending the least. When the number of international students hosted by Turkey and the number of students sent abroad by Turkey is compared, it can be said that the difference has increased in favor of incoming students.

# COVID-19 and International Students

In the literature, there are many studies on the pandemic experiences of higher education students during the pandemic period in various countries. While some of these studies focus on all higher education students, an important part only focuses on international students (Bekci, 2021; Özkan Bardakcı & Bardakcı, 2021). Many of these studies point to different aspects of pandemic processes through a specific country example. Although each of them may seem like a different case, the problems they raise largely point to common issues.

Like all students, international students have faced serious psychological, economic, and academic difficulties during the period of curfews during the pandemic (Gallagher, 2020, Hannigan and Saini, 2020; Hari, Nardon and Zhang, 2021). The comprehensive study by Bhojwani et al. (2020) is one of the earliest studies that draw attention to the difficulties experienced by international students in the USA. In this period, students have difficulties with many issues from health services to internet access, but it is noteworthy that one of the most important issues is the inability of institutions to provide adequate service and support (Bhojwani et al., 2020, 55). Another study focusing on the experiences of international students in Portugal reveals that the pandemic period has deepened and made certain problems that already exist (Cairns, 2021, 13). A study completed in Poland highlights many of the common issues, including an 'unprecedented level of uncertainty, anxiety and stress' currently among student immigrants (Krzaklewska and Şenyuva 2020, 2). Another Canadian study (Firang, 2020, 820-823) focuses on how social workers can support international students by pointing to their place in vulnerable groups.

In addition to the moral burden of social and social isolation, the number of immigrant students who face other kinds of xenophobia and discrimination is not to be underestimated. Racism (Koo, Yao, and Gong, 2021; Nam, Marshall, Tian, & Jiang, 2021) and human rights violations (Farbenblum and Berg, 2020) are phenomena that many students encounter in their daily lives to varying degrees and forms. International students' mental health (Humphrey and Forbes-Mewett, 2021), academic order and well-being (Velde, Buffel, Bracke, Hal, Somogyi, Willems, and Wouters, 2021) and communication experiences (Li, Xie, Ai, and Wouters, 2021) of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Li, 2020) have also been the subject of separate studies.

Many students have been deprived of mobility abroad in the 2020/2021 academic year, as COVID-19 has largely paved the way for measures restricting human mobility. This period has been identified as another source of stress for students waiting to move abroad (Czerska-Shaw, Krzaklewska, and Modebadze 2020).

A study conducted in Russia (Novikov, 2020) revealed the infrastructure deficiencies and unpreparedness of universities in distance education, the low reliability of exams, and the deficiencies of the socialization environment in face-to-face education processes. In another study in the Netherlands (Misirlis et al., 2020), psychological problems such as increased anxiety levels, loss of social capital, and stress disorder were identified.

# Being an International Student in Turkey in the COVID-19 Period

**C**COVID-19, which collapsed as a halo of fear over the whole world at the end of 2019, turned into a pandemic in a short time and started to affect the whole world severely. Since March 2020, the cases seen in Turkey have started to increase dramatically over time. Accordingly, the government and its affiliated institutions have made radical policy changes in their duties and responsibilities.

With the spread of the pandemic all over the world, quarantine and curfew processes have started. In this process, 89% of higher education institutions globally announced that they took a break from face-to-face education. Although it is thought that it will be over in a few weeks, it has been understood that the quarantine process will not last as short as thought before it takes too long.

The Ministry of National Education announced on March 16 that educational activities were suspended for one week; Then, on March 23, 2020, the Higher Education Institution announced that it had decided to continue educational activities in higher education institutions on digital platforms with remote access. After this process, all universities in Turkey started education in digital environments by developing and completing existing remote access opportunities.

Two different decrees were published by YÖK on 30 May 2020, titled “New Regulations in the Scope of Combating the Global Epidemic” and “New Normalization Process Guide in the Global Epidemic” on 20 July 2020 (YÖK, 2020). While these decrees list the things to do for all students in higher education institutions, many issues related to international students are also discussed.

At the forefront of these issues are the application, admission, and registration processes of international students. In the recommendations of YÖK, there are suggestions such as supporting the registration freeze processes of the students and planning the make-up educations. In addition, universities that accept international students with the YÖS exam are recommended to accept students with alternative methods. In addition, it is recommended to pay special attention to the accommodation needs of international students in Credit and Dormitories Institutions (Güven, 2021).

However, the transfer of formal education to the digital environment with an unusual and radical deci-

sion has created new problems. Limitations and difficulties in accessing the Internet and technological opportunities, infrastructure deficiencies and inadequacies in universities' access to distance and digital education, the inability to provide studying that requires physical environment such as practice and laboratory, the inability of faculty members to sufficiently adapt to rapid and radical change (TEDMEM, 2020) is the first reported problematic issue can be counted among the titles. Many problems such as the lack of motivation of students, the decline of active participation during interactive face-to-face education in online education, and the separation of students from social life have begun to be seen.

It is possible to say that there is an important literature about the COVID-19 pandemic period in Turkey. One of the most comprehensive of these studies was conducted by Karadağ and Yücel (2020) among more than 17 000 university students. One of the most prominent problems is that students are not sufficiently informed by both the higher education institution and the universities they study at. Most of the students stated that they were not satisfied with at the forefront of these issues are the application, admission and registration processes of international students. In the recommendations of YÖK, there are suggestions such as supporting the registration freeze processes of the students and planning the make-up studying. In addition, universities that accept international students with the YÖS exam are recommended to accept students with alternative methods. In addition, it is recommended to pay special attention to the accommodation needs of international students in Credit and Dormitories Institutions (Güven, 2021).

It is clear that international students experience more profoundly the same difficulties that all students in general experience. International students were more helpless in terms of accessing the Internet and digital technological tools. Because, while domestic students can obtain the support and assistance of their social capital or secondary institutions (NGO, local governments, ministries, etc.) more quickly and directly, these opportunities have become more difficult and difficult for foreign nationals.

International students have more and more profound psychosocial problems and needs than other higher education students. Many international students have stated that they deeply experience the helplessness and fear of death brought about by the uncertainty in the process (Saatçi & Aksu, 2020). During

this period, the mobility restriction of international students staying in dormitories was more severe than other students. Because, unlike students who could return to their families in a short time during the period when the restrictions were lifted, going abroad has become extremely difficult and even impossible for foreign students.

It is one of the most important realities revealed by the pandemic period that some special applications are needed in extraordinary processes and situations in the policies followed for international students. In such situations, the resilience and resilience of migrants and international migrants among disadvantaged groups need to be further supported. These supports are not limited to physical and tangible needs. Perhaps more psychological and moral support and assistance should be planned.



# Methodology



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The population of the study is international students studying in Turkey. The sample group for the study was also selected from this universe. However, since it is difficult to reach these participants directly, the snowball/chain method, which is used as a sampling technique in qualitative research, was used. Accordingly, in the research, firstly, an online survey was conducted with 75 young migrants who are studying in Turkish universities, and then focus group interviews with others were conducted with 2 groups of six people. Information about the students who participated in the focus group interview is given below. 25 lecturers were also included to the survey. All these professional lecturers at various universities have the international students teaching experiences in their classroom.

**Table 2.1.**

Information about the students participating in the focus group discussions

FIRST GROUP					SECOND GROUP				
Code	Gender	Nationality	Age	Department	Code	Gender	Nationality	Age	Department
MP1	Male	Albania	35	Sociology	MP4	Male	Albania	22	Civil engineering
MP2	Male	Somalia	30	Sociology	MP5	Male	Thailand	21	English Literature
FP1	Female	Turkmenistan	27	Sociology	MP6	Male	Syria	24	Dentist
FP2	Female	Uzbekistan	28	International Relations	MP7	Male	Ivory Coast	22	Theology
FP3	Female	Gambia	25	International Relations	MP8	Male	Kyrgyzstan	26	Medicine
MP3	Male	Gambia	-	International Relations	MP9	Male	Ghana	21	Radio, Cinema, TV
Not: MP: Male Participant, FK: Female Participant									

Focus group interviews were held to support the findings obtained as a result of the surveys, and the statements of the participants were shared directly under the relevant headings.

# Findings



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## Participant Information

### *Demographic Information*

**T**he demographic information of the participants, who were included in the quantitative research, is given below. Accordingly, 66.7% of the participants are male, 33.3% are female and 80% are single. Considering the age of the participants, the 21-25 age group draws attention with a rate of 45.34%. Most of the participants (81.3%) do not work in any job.

**Table 3.1.**

Demographic Information

		N	%
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	50	66,7
	<b>Female</b>	25	33,3
<b>Age</b>	<b>18-20</b>	11	14,66
	<b>21-25</b>	34	45,34
	<b>26-30</b>	18	24
	<b>31-35</b>	11	14,67
	<b>&gt;35</b>	1	1,33
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Single</b>	60	80
	<b>Married</b>	15	20

<b>Working Status</b>	<b>Working</b>	14	18,7
	<b>Not Working</b>	61	81,3
<b>Income Groups</b>	<b>Lower</b>	15	20
	<b>Lower-Middle</b>	22	29,3
	<b>Middle</b>	22	42,7
	<b>Middle-High</b>	6	8

### *Country of Origin / Nationality of Participant*

**W**hen the country of origin/nationality of the international students participating in the research is examined, it is seen that there are participants from 29 countries in total. It is understood that most of the participants came from Asian and African countries. Among these countries, Somalia (14), Syria (7) and Bangladesh (7) stand out.

**Table 3.2.**

Country of origin/nationality of the students participating in the survey

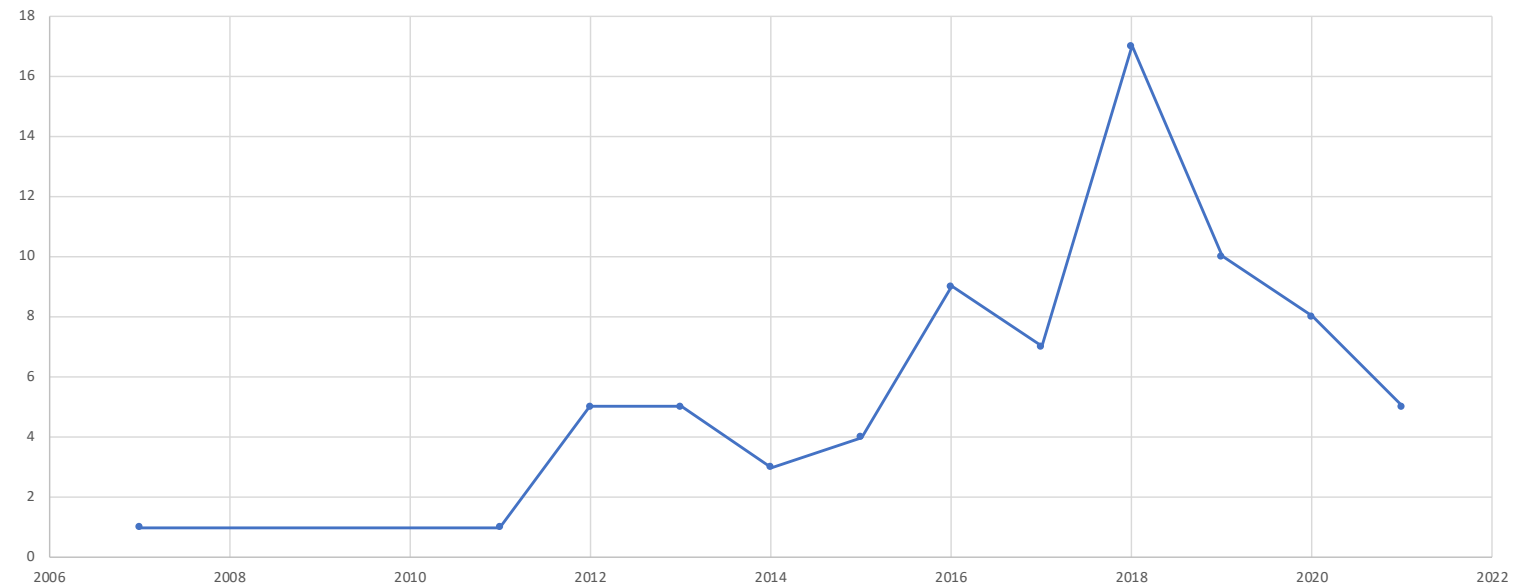
Regions	Countries	Number of People	Regions	Countries	Number of People
Sub-Saharan Africa	Somalia	14	Central Asia	Turkmenistan	4
	Gambia	3		Azerbaijan	3
	Tanzania	1		Uzbekistan	4
	Benin	1		East Turkestan	1
	Niger	1		Kyrgyzstan	1
North Afrika	Egypt	3	Asia	Bangladesh	7
	Algeria	1		Rwanda	4
Middle East	Syria	7		Afghanistan	4
	Palestine	2		Indonesia	2
	Yemen	1		Philippines	1
	Iraq	1		India	1
Balkans	Albania	2		Thailand	1
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1		China	1
	Montenegro	1		Pakistan	1
America	United States of America	1			
TOTAL				75	

## Arrival in Turkey

Looking at the figure below showing the dates of arrival in Turkey, it is understood that the participants mostly came to Turkey after 2016.

### Şekil 3.1.

Arrival dates of the participants in Turkey



# Language Information of the Participant

## *Native Language*

**Table 3.3.**

Native information of participants

<b>Dil</b>	<b>Sayı</b>	<b>Dil</b>	<b>Sayı</b>
Arabic	15	Malay	1
Albanian	2	Uzbek Turkish	4
Azerbaijani Turkish	3	Pashto	1
Bengali	7	Rwandan	1
Bosnian	2	Somalian	14
Dendi	1	Swahili	1
Indonesian	2	Turkmen and Russian	1
Persian	3	Turkmen	3
Hindi and Urdu	1	Urdu	1
English	4	Uygur Turkish and Chinese	1
Kinyarwanda	3	Uygur Turkish	1
Kurdish	1	Zerma Language	1
Kyrgyzstan Turkish	1		

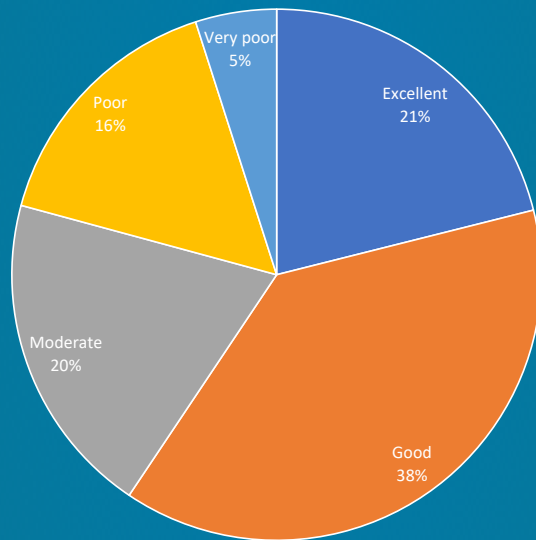


## Turkish Language Capability

**C**onsidering the Turkish language proficiency, 60% of the participants stated that they knew Turkish well and very well, 20% average/administratively, and 20% poor or very poor.

**Figure 3.1.**

Turkish language proficiency of the participants

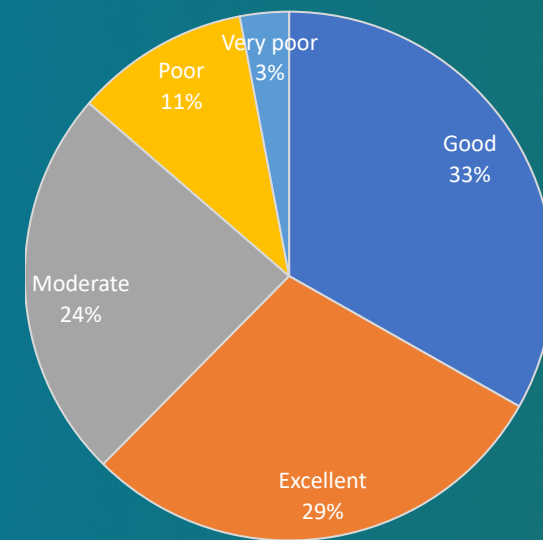


## English Language Capability

**T**he rate of those who answered the questions about the English language proficiency of the participants as good or very good is 62.6%, the rate of those who say average is 24%, and the rate of those who state that they are poor or very poor is 13.4%.

**Figure 3.2.**

English language proficiency of the participants



## *Problems with Language*

In the focus group discussions, the participants were asked about the language problems they experienced in Turkey. According to the findings, it is possible to list the language problems experienced by the participants as follows: Language problems experienced in social relations at school, official jobs and education process, not knowing English in official offices, language problems in daily life. The following statements of the participants describe these situations:

“It was a little difficult to interpret in the classroom while taking scientific preparation courses. When you talk to the teacher to ask a question, the students, I mean, gossip or something... When you wanted to ask the teacher something, when you had a language problem, the students on the side started talking to each other while talking to the teacher.” (MP2)

“When we first arrived, we had language difficulties. Then we got used to it, it wasn’t that hard. After 4-5 months, I started to understand, but there was a problem in speaking. Then I feel sorry for my hometown... I have never been away from my family...” (MP4)

“We couldn’t make many friends with local friends, we only made friends with foreign people. They did not get close to us, both in terms of language and social relations.” (MP1)

A Turkmenistani participant states that she encounters various problems due to language problems and tries to speak Turkish better in order to overcome them:

“After learning Turkish, I tried not to speak dialectal. Because when I speak dialect, that is, when they realize that I am a foreigner, I usually have problems in the bus, taxi, grocery store or shopping, and I have this automatically entered in my head, so “you will speak Turkish, no one will understand that you are a foreigner, no one will defraud you, no one will harm you” so this way.” (FP1)

# Educational Information of Participants

## *Level of Education*

**6**5.3% of the participants are undergraduate students. Of the remaining participants, 18.7% stated that they were graduate students and 16% were doctoral students.

## *Registered University*

**W**hen we look at the universities where education is received, it is seen that students from 23 universities in 11 provinces of Turkey participated in the research. Among the universities, the most participation was made from Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University (25).

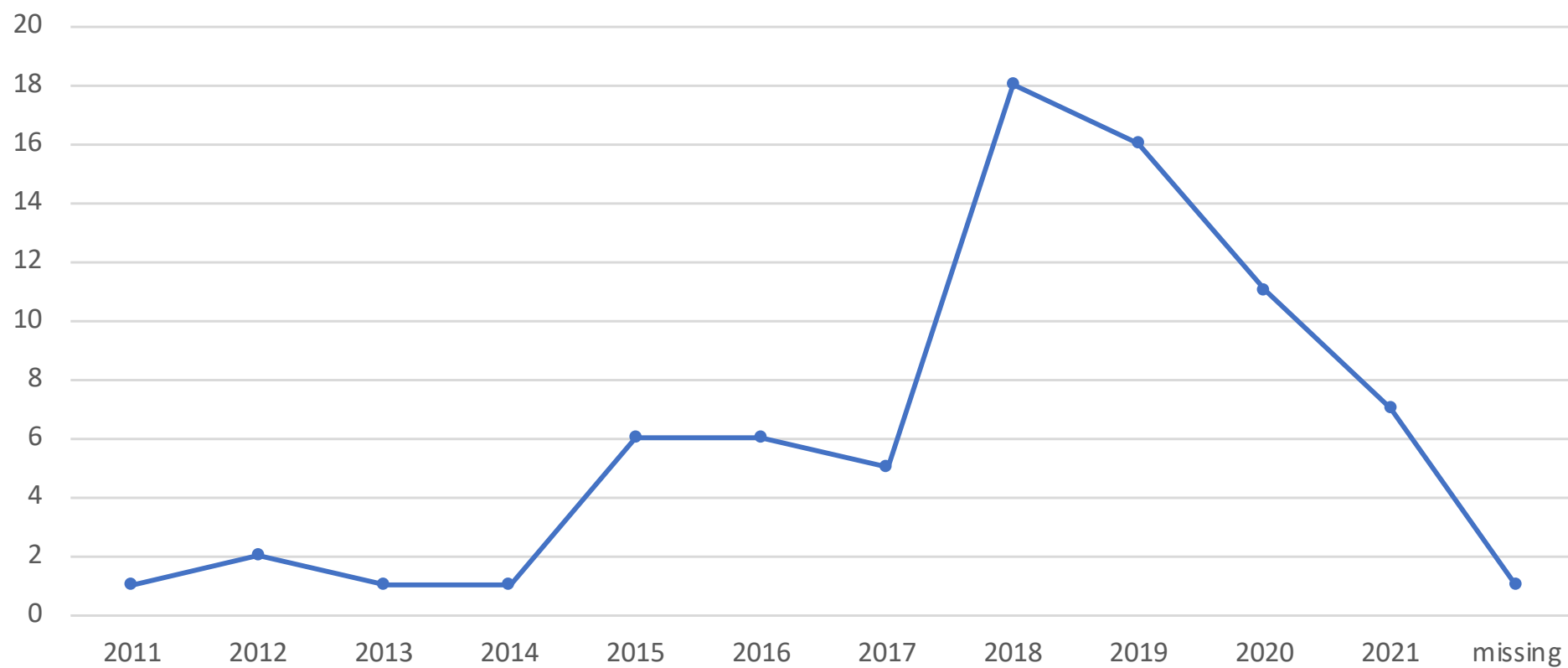
**Table 3.4.**

Universities where participants studied

City	University	Number of Participant	City	University	Number of Participant
Ankara	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	25	Ankara	Orta Doğu Teknik University	1
Ankara	Ankara University	7	Ankara	Başkent University	1
Konya	Necmettin Erbakan University	6	Ankara	TED University	1
Ankara	Hacettepe University	5	Bartın	Bartın University	1
Ankara	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University	3	Denizli	Pamukkale University	1
Ankara	OSTİM Teknik University	3	Eskişehir	Osmangazi University	1
İstanbul	İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	3	Eskişehir	Anadolu University	1
Şanlıurfa	Harran University	3	İstanbul	İstanbul University	1
Van	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	3	Kayseri	Erciyes University	1
Ankara	Ankara Sosyal Bilimler University	2	Kırşehir	Kırşehir Ahi Evran University	1
Ankara	Gazi University	2	Konya	Konya Teknik University	1
Bursa	Bursa Uludağ University	2			

**Figure 3.3.**

Participants' first years of university registration in Turkey



## Department of Education

**T**he departments where the participants studied are given in the table below.

**Table 3.5.**

Departments where participants studied

Department	Number	Department	Number
Faculty of Medicine	8	Software Engineering	1
Political Science and Public Administration	8	International Trade	1
Sociology	7	Information and Document Management	1
International Relations	6	Law	1
Islamic Sciences - Theology	5	Dentist	1
Economy	4	Marketing	1
Business	3	Social Sciences	1
Electrical and Electronics Engineering	2	Faculty of Political Sciences	1
Mechanical Engineering	2	Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language	1
English Language and Literature	2	History	1
Journalism	2	Biosystem/Agriculture	1
Veterinary	2	Department of Social Studies	1

Political Science and International Relations	1	Nursing	1
Civil Engineering	1	Biology	1
Geology Engineering	1	Plant Protection	1
Computer Engineering	1	Unknown	5
TOTAL		75	

## Education Language

**C**onsidering the languages in which the participants studied at their universities, it is understood that 52% of the participants received education in Turkish and 48% in English.

**Figure 3.4.**

The language of instruction in the departments where the participants studied

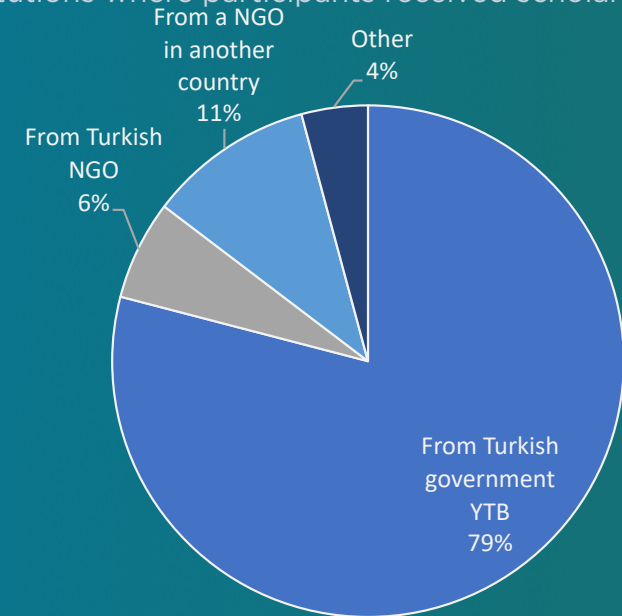


## Scholarship Information

**4**5% of the participants state that they have received a scholarship. Looking at the institutions receiving scholarships, it is seen that the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (72.5%) stands out.

**Figure 3.5.**

Institutions where participants received scholarships

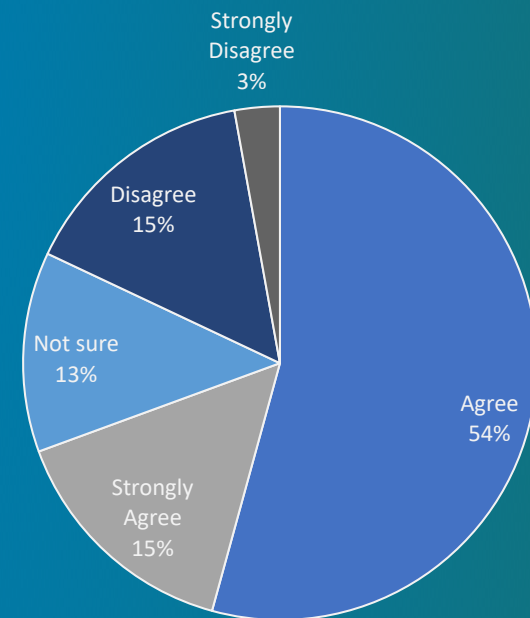




## Education Life

**M**ost of the participants (70.6%) expressed that they are satisfied with living in Turkey.

**Figure 3.6.**  
Participants' satisfaction with living in Turkey



Although the participants are happy to live in Turkey, it is known that they encounter various problems from time to time. For this reason, in the focus group discussions, the participants were asked about the challenges they faced in Turkey. As it is understood from the answers received, it is seen that the participants mostly experience problems in language, bureaucratic procedures, health, economy, and accommodation. The following excerpts summarize the participants' thoughts on these issues:

"I was faced with the economic problem a lot, it was changing a lot with our exchange rate, so the money we got from there was not enough here. I've come across a lot of things according to him. ... There was a problem of immigration administration. I had a problem there because I didn't know much there. As I learned there, now I can do everything myself." (FP1)

"Bureaucratic procedures are very difficult here. As a student. Let's say something always happens every year. I have to go to immigration office to renew these things. Sometimes they go, [to renew paperwork] a few months [appointment for later]. For things without reason." (MP3)

"No guidance... Only a small portion of foreign students in Turkey are interested in YTB. Other than that, they suffer a lot. I think that they are incapable of lear-

ning a language and where to apply. It was a waste of my time because of this. Because I don't know where to apply. Of course, it helps because I don't know the language." (MP6)

Some participants, on the other hand, stated that they had problems especially with food:

"The food thing. In the Far East, we eat rice, morning, noon, and evening. But I can eat here 3 or 4 times a week. I'm struggling a bit. I came first, I didn't even eat for how many months, I eat Turkish food, the food I brought, the ready-made pasta I brought from Thailand." (MP5)

"My biggest problem is food. I live in a private hostel. But I don't like the food there. I was always getting food from outside. I'm used to it now." (MP7)

Some participants stated that they faced problems such as discrimination:

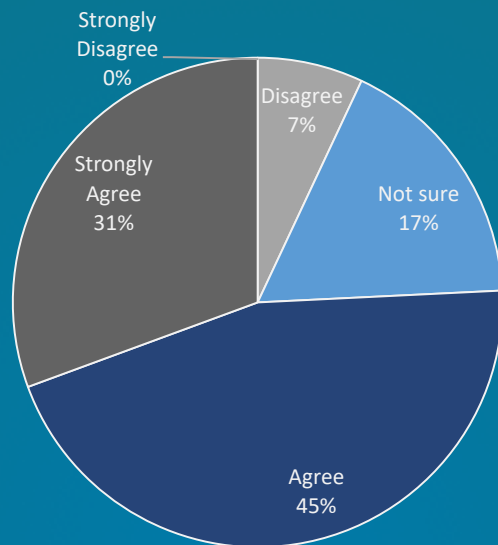
"Since I have no other alternative... but I would go if I had the opportunity. There is racism against Arabs even if they do not accept it. So there is still. Especially for Syrians in the last period. They even try to use it on the agenda, you know, to get votes... you have to prove that you are not guilty in any case." (MP6)

Likewise, three-quarters of the participants (76%) stated that they are generally satisfied with living in the city where their university is located.

73.3% of the participants stated that they were generally satisfied with studying at the university they were enrolled in, while 12% stated that they were not satisfied with their university.

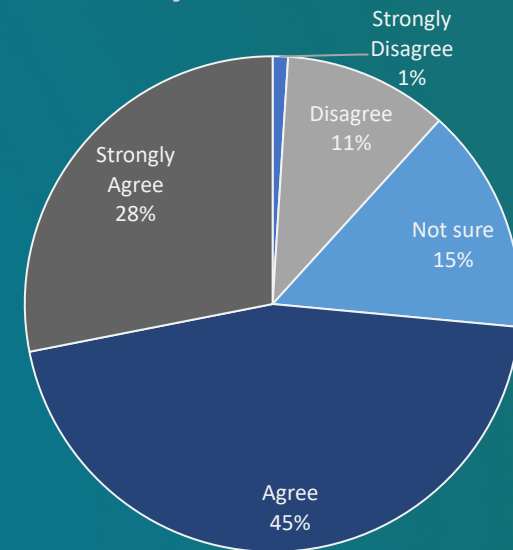
**Figure 3.7.**

Participants' satisfaction with living in the city where their university is located



**Figure 3.8.**

Participants' satisfaction with studying at the university they are enrolled in

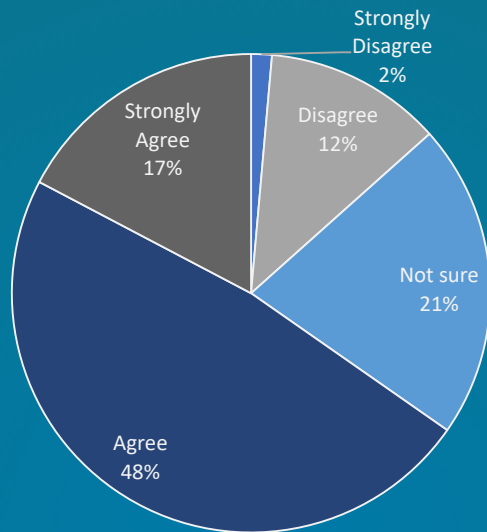


65.3% of the participants believe that the education they received at the university is quite satisfactory for them. While the rate of those who are undecided about the subject is 21.3%, 13.3% are not satisfied with the education.

While 53.3% of the participants agreed with the statement “I feel that the professors at my university always treat me like local students”, the rate of those who did not agree is 18%. The rate of those who are undecided about the subject is 28%.

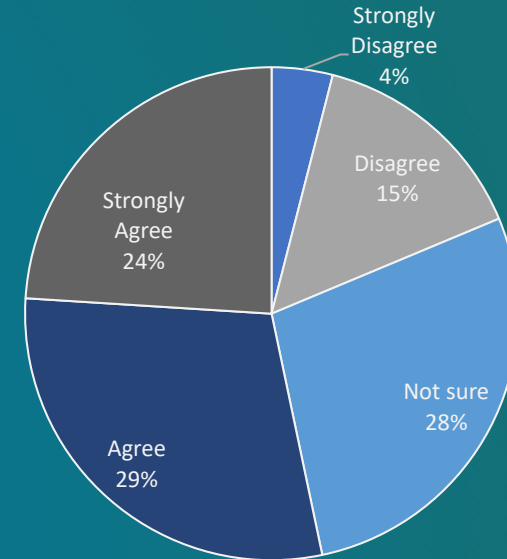
**Figure 3.9.**

Participants' satisfaction with the studying



**Figure 3.10.**

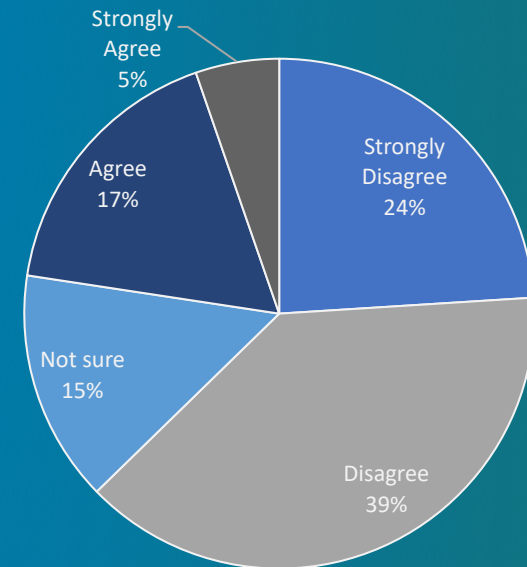
Discrimination status of the instructors at the university where the participants studied



Most of the participants (53.4%) stated that they did not have serious problems with the language of instruction at their university, and 22.6% of the participants stated that they had problems with the subject.

**Figure 3.11.**

The situation of the participants having problems with the language of instruction of the university they study at



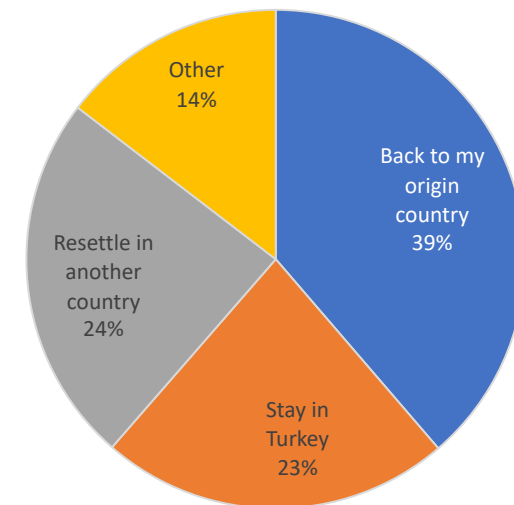
In the focus group interviews, the participants stated that they had serious problems with the language of education:

“The biggest challenge with language is conceptual. You can’t find some concepts in Turkish neither in English nor in any other language, these are things specific to Turkish.” (MP1)

“There are too many concepts, I mean, we don’t have that much, I can’t find such a thing. I don’t understand them.” (FP2)

Most of the participants stated that they intend to return to their country of origin (38.7%), stay in Turkey (22.7%) or settle in another country (24%) after graduation.

**Figure 3.12.**  
Future perspective of the participants



In the focus group interviews, the participants were asked what they wanted to do after the education process in Turkey, and it was seen that the findings were similar to the options above. The following statements of the participants are as follows:

“Before my education ended, I was already assigned to the private sector, after this pandemic process started slowly. I will probably continue in the private sector again. Since I’m already married, my family is here too, so we are already thinking of staying here.” (FP1)

“After completing my education in Turkey, I want to go to my country and sit in the presidential chair.” (MP1)

“I was working in Somalia as a teacher. I am still working. I hope to go as soon as it’s over.” (MP2)

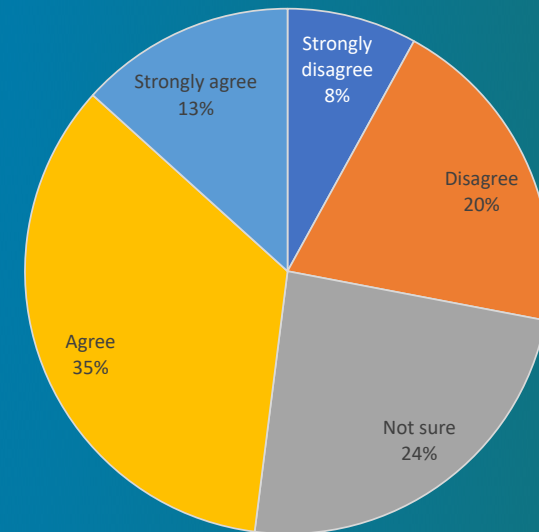
“I have already started preparing my work. At the embassy, at the embassy of Uzbekistan. I even talked about the internship, they said okay you can come. I hope to start my internship when these exams pass.” (FP2)

## Being an International Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**N**early half of the participants (48%) stated that their social life was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While 24% of the participants were not sure about the issue, 28% stated that they were not affected by this period.

**Figure 3.13.**

Impact of COVID-19 on social life





In the focus group interviews, the participants summarized the problems they experienced in their social life as being bored, not being able to go to their country of origin, not being able to do sports and socializing. The following statements of the participants describe this situation:

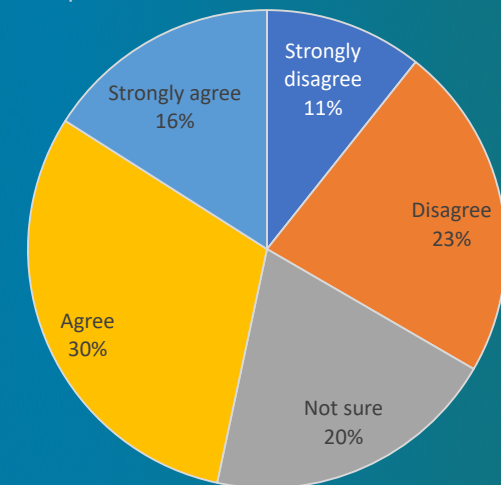
“Not being able to go out... at first we couldn’t get used to it. Then full, we couldn’t go out. We were just going to the market or something. We were bored, for example, I don’t go out. For example, we were playing a match, but we couldn’t.” (MP1)

“Not being able to go home... we couldn’t go home when the pandemic came. There is quarantine. Not open country (Thailand). We missed home, we couldn’t go.” (MP5)

“I was bored sitting at home. It created psychological problems for me. Since time did not pass, I thought about everything, namely questioning coming here, questioning the life you live... I tried to participate in some different activities, going out, doing sports, but that was also limited.” (MP6)

In the research, the participants were asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their education life, and 46.7% of the participants stated that the pandemic had a negative impact on their education. 33.4% of the participants stated that the pandemic did not have a negative impact on their education life. 20% of the participants stated that they were not sure.

**Figure 3.14.**  
The impact of COVID-19 on education life



In the focus group discussions, the participants stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their education life in various ways. They stated that academic efficiency has decreased especially in the distance education process. The problems experienced were stated as problems such as infrastructure and technical problems experienced in the internet and computer access point, the inexperience or inadequacy of some of the instructors in technology, and the problems of learning only theoretically in lessons with a practical aspect:

“For example, I want to be at school, there are classes. I want it to be interactive. Talking to the lecturers in classes... but some lecturers leave videos when they are online. That video is a bit of a thing, you can’t talk to the teacher directly. Some of them don’t give videos, they just leave notes and go. That’s a bit of a negative.” (MP3).

“Sometimes it was interrupted, the teachers did not know how to enter, how to open the lesson. Then it got in order. It did not give the same effect as face-to-face. For example, there was a lab lesson, we were making videos. We were having difficulties in practical lessons, but in theoretical lessons, it wasn’t that much. But it still had an effect. It was not interactive.” (MP1)

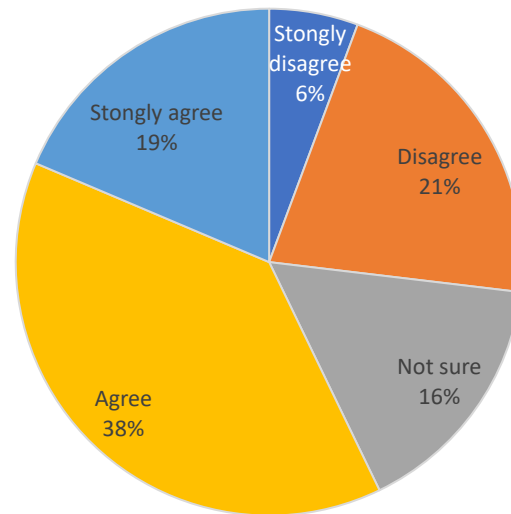
“I had internet problem. I stayed with friends. Everyone was playing on the internet. I was in trouble every day. I couldn’t hear the teacher’s voice. Sometimes, the internet did not attract the people.” (MP5)

“Internet and computer problem. Also, since our lessons are technical, we couldn’t get to know our friends in distance education, we couldn’t be social.” (MP9)

57.4% of the participants stated that their economic life was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 26.6 of them were not, and 16% were not sure about the issue.

**Figure 3.15.**

The impact of COVID-19 on economic life



The students who participated in the focus group interviews expressed their economic problems as increased consumption, being unemployed and not being able to go to the country of origin due to not being able to save enough money. The following statements are important in terms of summarizing these thoughts of the participants:

“Before Covid, I was going to a restaurant (work) occasionally in Turkey, I was going to construction. I was working in such jobs; I was not working all the time. It was cut (with the pandemic). It was always difficult to find a job, as restaurants closed. Even if you find a job, you cannot go out on the street.” (MP8)

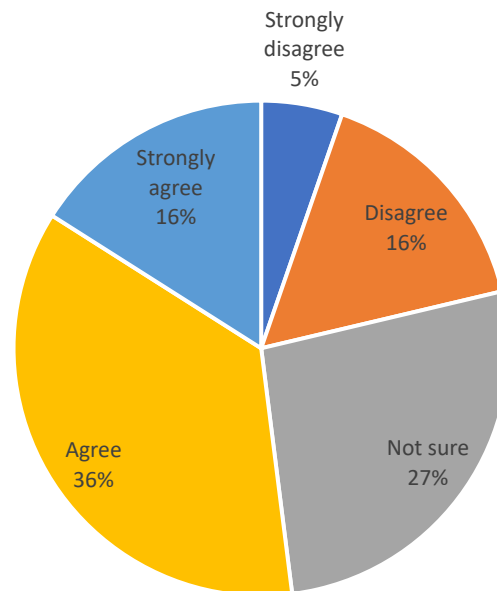
“When I want to go to my country, I think about buying a ticket, but I can’t buy a ticket, so many students face this problem.” (MP7)

“Since we were always at home, we consumed more, we spent more.” (MP6)

52% of the participants stated that they were more stressed during the pandemic period compared to before. While 26% of the participants were undecided, 21.3% stated that they were not more stressed in the pandemic.

**Figure 3.16.**

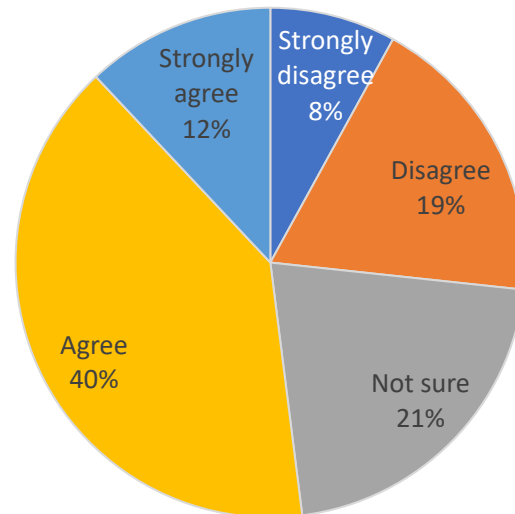
Stress caused by COVID-19



During the quarantine period of the pandemic, more than half of the participants (52%) stated that they had terrible experiences, and 40% stated that they had not experienced such experiences.

**Figure 3.17.**

Distribution of COVID-19 experiencing horrible experiences



In the focus group interviews, the participants also expressed the difficult situations they experienced. For example, a Syrian participant stated the following:

“I was bored sitting at home. It created psychological problems for me. Since time did not pass, think about everything, namely questioning coming here, questioning the life you live... I tried to participate in slightly different activities, going out, doing sports, but that was also limited.”  
(MP6)

## Demographic Information

**2**5 academics participated the survey and 72% of the are male and 28% are female in all participants. Majority of participants are in the age of 30-49 (% 80) and assistant (% 32) and associate professors (% 36) in their faculties.

**Table 3.6.**

Demographic information

		N	%
Gender	Male	18	72
	Female	7	28
Age	23-29	2	8
	30-39	9	36
	40-49	11	44
	50-59	3	12
Academic title	Research assistant	2	8
	Lecturer	4	16
	Assist. Prof.	8	32
	Assoc. Prof.	9	36
	Prof.	2	8

Faculty members at eight different universities participated in the survey. Although geographically in varied regions, the highest participation was from Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (12) and Necmettin Erbakan University (7). The number of total participants is 25.

**Table 3.7.**

Affiliations of university and department

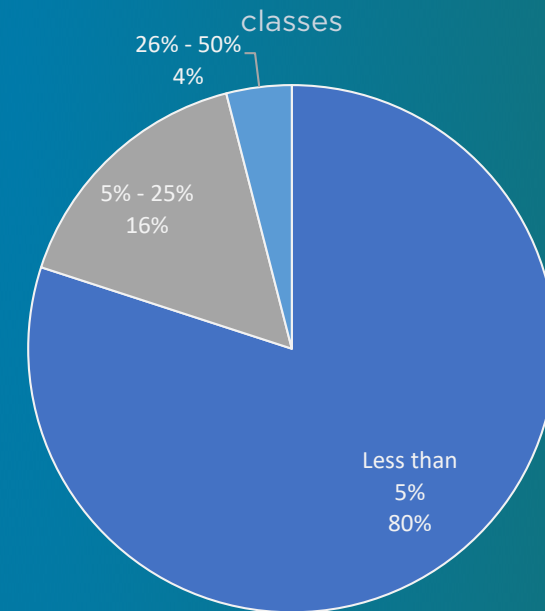
City	University	Dept	Participant	Total participant
Ankara	Ankara University	International Relations	1	1
Konya	Necmettin Erbakan University	Linguistic	1	7
		Philosophy	1	
		Business	1	
		Political Science and Public Administration	1	
		Sociology	3	
Konya	Selçuk University	International Relations	1	2
		Sociology	1	
Konya	KTO Karatay University	Sociology	1	1
Muş	Muş Alparslan University	Social Sciences	1	1
Şanlıurfa	Harran University	Sociology	1	1
Van	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	Education	1	12
		Geography	4	
		Social Sciences	1	
		History	4	
		Turkish		
		Veterinary	1	
				25

## Academicians' Thoughts on International Students

**R**egarding the distribution of international students in the classes taught by the faculty members is examined, the major participants (80 %) declared that the number of students in their class is less than 5.

**Figure 3.18.**

Distribution of average international students in the classes



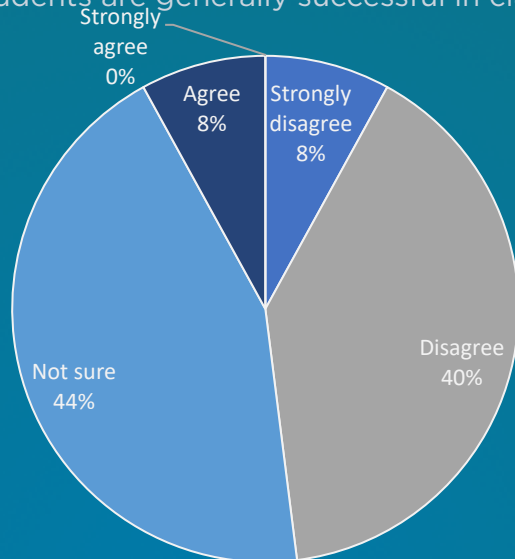


Almost half of the participants (48%) responded negatively to the question asked about whether international students are generally successful in the courses academically, while the rate of those who said they were undecided 44% and the rate of those who answered positively was 8%.

guage skills of international students are at a sufficient level, most of the participants (72%) answered insufficient. Only 16% of the participants stated that it was sufficient.

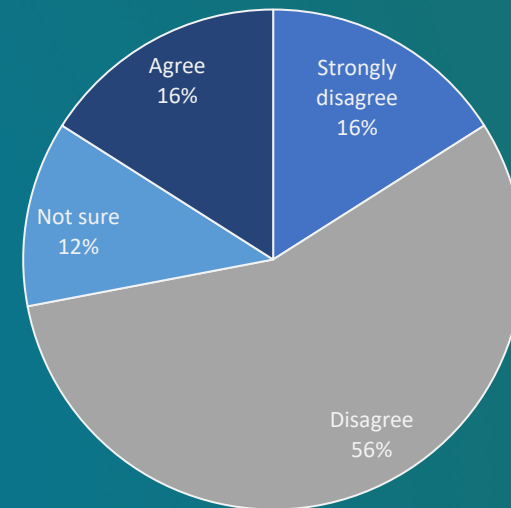
**Figure 3.19.**

International students are generally successful in classes academically



**Figure 3.20.**

Academic Turkish language skills of international students are at a sufficient level



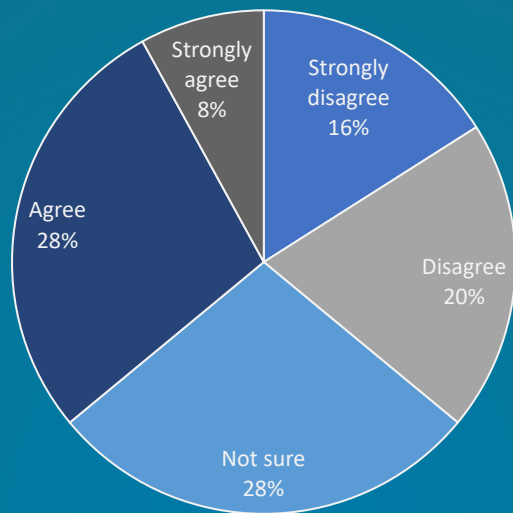
When asked about whether the academic Turkish lan-

Most of the participants (56 %) disagree with the statement that the academic Turkish language skills of the international students are sufficient. Only one of the third participants replied that the language skills of international students are adequate.

While 56% of the participants think that international students have a positive impact on Turkey's international economic, cultural and diplomatic fields, 44% of the participants think the opposite way.

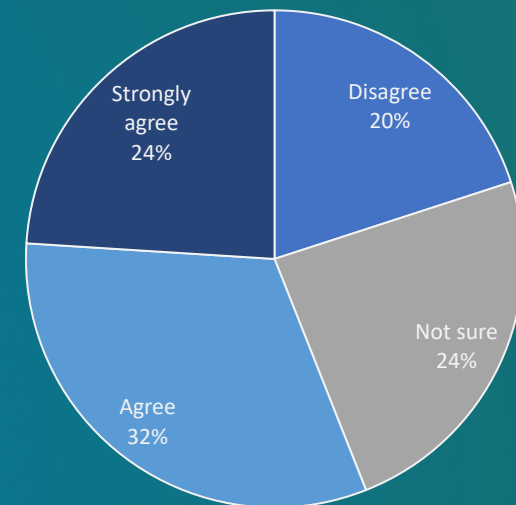
**Figure 3.21.**

The university I work at is sufficiently relevant to international students.



**Figure 3.22.**

International students have a positive impact on Turkey's international economic, cultural and diplomacy

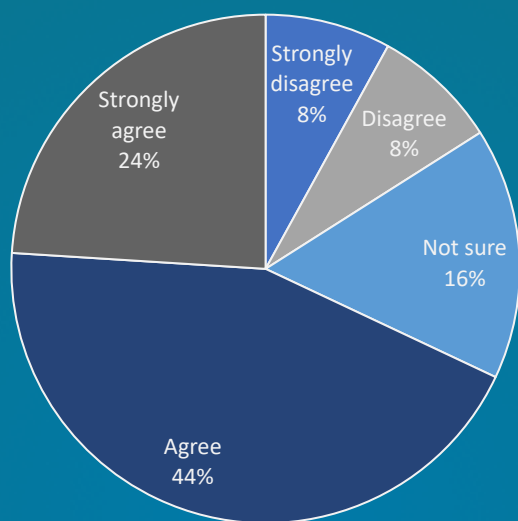


The majority of the participants (68%) think that international students have more academic difficulties than domestic students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Quite few of the participants (16%) do not agree with the statement.

Migrant students experience much more difficulties than native students in the pandemic period. 52% of the participants approved the statement that international students had faced more difficulties in accessing distance education opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic period than native students, 32 % stated that they did not agree with this opinion.

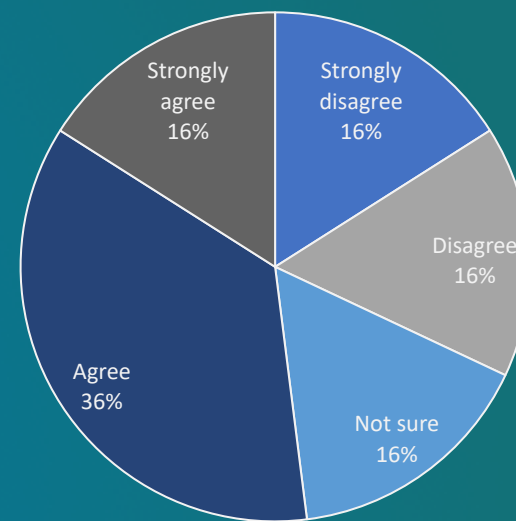
**Figure 3.23.**

International students experienced more academic difficulties than domestic students during the COVID-19 pandemic



**Figure 3.24.**

International students had more difficulty accessing distance education opportunities than domestic students during the COVID-19 pandemic period

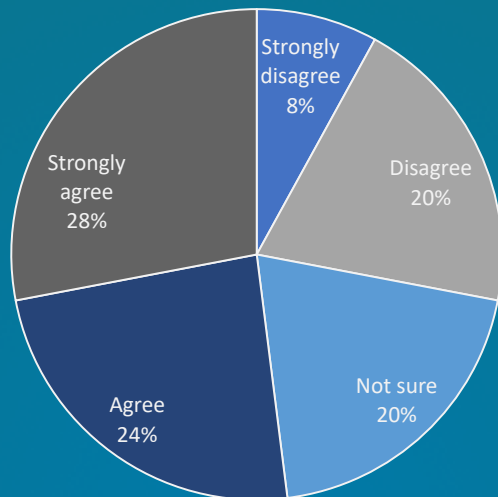


While more than half (52%) of the participants agree with the statement “I think that international students have more difficulties socially than domestic students during the COVID-19 pandemic period”, 28% do not. The rate of those who are undecided about the subject is 20 %.

While 52% of the participants agree with the statement that international students have faced more difficulties economically than domestic students during quarantine periods, 36% state that they do not agree. 12% are undecided.

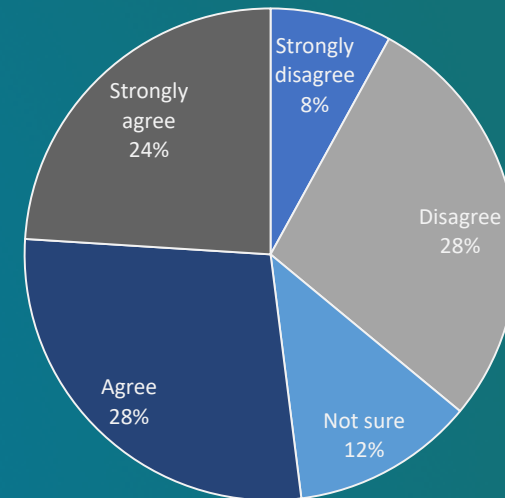
**Figure 3.25.**

International students faced more social difficulties than domestic students during the COVID-19 pandemic



**Figure 3.26.**

International students faced more economic hardship than domestic students during quarantine periods

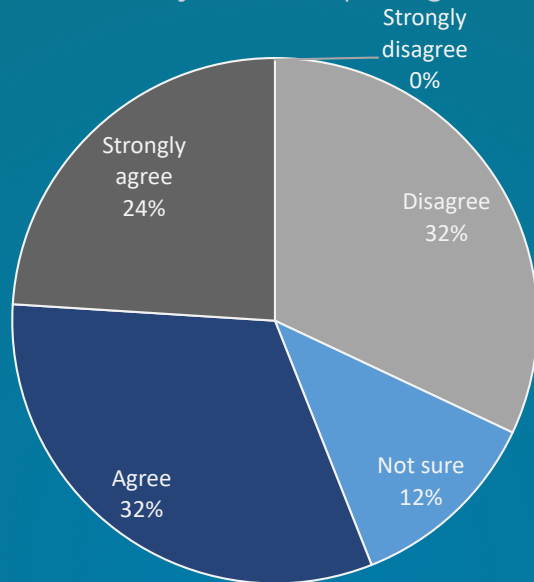


56% of the participants think that it would be better for international students to return to their home country after they graduate in Turkey, 32% of them stated that they did not agree with this statement.

While 24% of the participants think that it would be better for international students to stay in Turkey after completing their education, 44% think otherwise. The rate of those who are undecided about the subject is 32%.

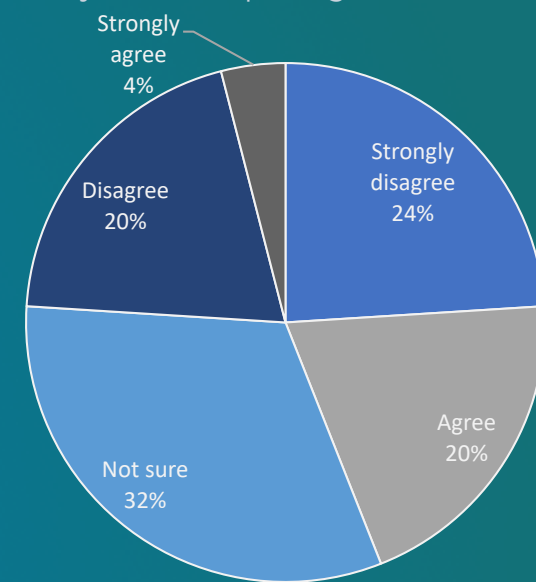
**Figure 3.27.**

It will be better for international students to return to their home country after completing their studies



**Figure 3.28.**

It will be better for international students to stay in Turkey after completing their education

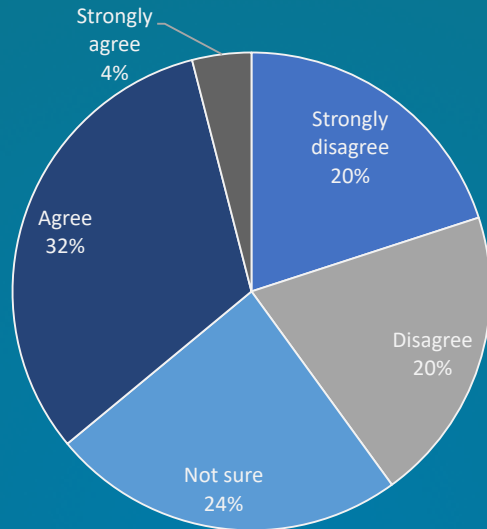


Nearly one-third of the participants find Turkey's international student policy to be correct, one-fourth declare that they are undecided. It is worth investigating why the remaining 40%, who do not find these policies correct, think that.

Many participants declare that their behaviors towards international students is friendly. The majority of the participants (68%) states that international students could easily communicate with them, while one-fourth declares that they could not.

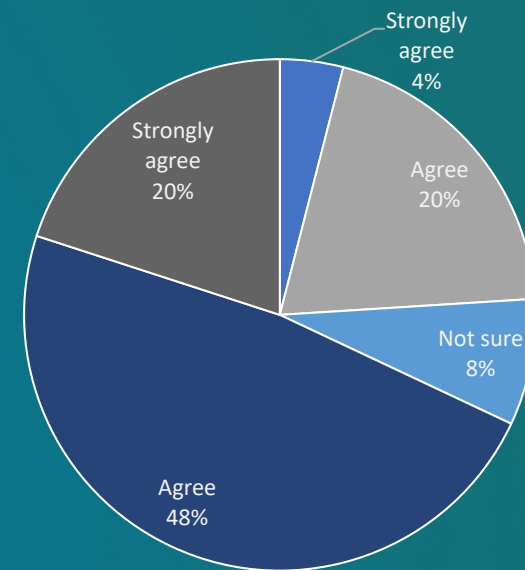
**Figure 3.29.**

Turkey's policies regarding international students are correct



**Figure 3.30.**

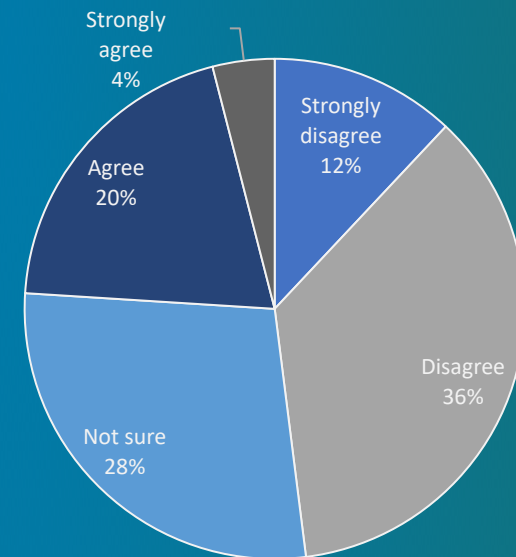
International students can easily contact me



While 24% of the participants agree with the statement that “International students’ participation in lectures is very high”, nearly half (48%) do not. The extreme absence ratio of international students must be searched.

**Figure 3.31.**

The course participation of international students is quite high.



# Conclusion and Recommendations



**Bridging Youth and Young Professionals**  
In a Migrational Context via Digitalization



**T**his report is one of the other components of the Youngmig project. While other reports focused on the issues of young immigrants and young professionals in the labor market and social services, this report centered on the field of high education.

As an emerging receiving country, Turkey has developed a considerable road for international students in recent years. The current numbers indicate that the number of international students in Turkish universities is the preset target for 2023, 250 000.

The Youngmig, Bridging Youth and Young Professionals focus on young migrants and young professionals. This project, on the one hand, describes the relationships between international students and young professionals, on the other hand, focuses on their hardships and especially their experiences during the covid period. The project is searching for a way to cope with the problems and strengthen the links and bridges between the students and professionals. In this regard, the way of thinking and feeling of international students about Turkey, Turkish people, quality of life and education, attitudes of the people and professionals (lecturers, officials etc) were asked. Similarly, the opinion of professional lecturers on international students' performance, aspirations, intercultural relations and plans. Besides the policies of the Turkish government for the internationalization of higher education in Turkey were also queried.

Social life, and especially daily life, is based on routines. Unexpected and unplanned state of affairs may turn our lives upside down. The interruption of ongoing routine life by an emerging deadly virus extremely left people in a vulnerable situation. The COVID-19 Pandemic, which emerged in the recent months of 2019 and spread rapidly all over the world, has created an atmosphere of fear and panic. In this time course, the individual and social life of people has been deeply affected by many interruptions. Different social groups have been affected in different ways. Although all social groups have common problems, it is clear that some are more disadvantaged than others. It is known that especially disadvantaged groups and vulnerable people are more deeply affected by the emerging inequalities and helplessness.

Among the young migrants, international students occupy a special place among these disadvantaged

groups. The fact that international students are not among the first groups that come to mind among those who try to cope with many economic, social and psychological problems in the process places them makes them much more vulnerable. The project allocates a special place to experiences of both young migrants and professionals in the pandemic period.

Turkey has a “sui generis” place among the international student population in the world with some characteristics. Many international students prefer Turkey to study because of the geographical and cultural proximity of Turkey to their country and culture, as well as the cheapness of the services and living conditions (Ullah, 2019, 61). The fact that the families of incoming students see Turkey as a “safe” country has an important role in the preference of Turkey (Ghanbarlou, 2019, 90).

On the other hand, it become a more obvious fact in the pandemic period that the customized issues of international students required more attention. One of the most important results of this study, which focuses on the pandemic times experiences of international students studying in higher education institutions in Turkey, emerges as the socio-psychological problems experienced by the students. Although the psychological needs of the participants in the sample of this study were not as high as in other studies in the literature, their level and chance of socialization are high. Since the majority of the participants within the scope of this study have been residing in the student dormitory environment, that is a supportive factor in terms of socialization during the protracted Pandemic time course.

Faculty members mostly favour that the international students studying in Turkey should return to their countries after graduation. Remarkably, most of the faculty members emphasize that Turkey’s policies for international students should be reviewed. It is recommended by the faculty members to make an impact analysis of the international student policies in Turkey. During the pandemic process, international students’ problems lie down from accessing the required tools for distance learning to language problems, from economic difficulties to psychological problems. As one of the most disadvantaged groups among all higher education students, international students deserve more qualified research. More specific policies should be developed in line with the results of reliable data sources.

As the results of the research-based report, the following recommendations are proposed;

- The customized explorative research should be made for international students,
- The impact analyzes of the internationalization policy of the Turkish government should be done.
- The specific problems among international students emerged in the pandemic period should be searched and solved.
- The infrastructures of the universities in distance and /or digital education should be developed,
- The technical digital accessibility of the international students for distance and /or digital education should be developed,
- The language capability of the international students should be strengthened,
- The academic inculpabilities of the international students should be determined and related and required make-up programs should be developed,
- The young professionals on international education should be supported.

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**Bridging Youth and Young Professionals**  
In a Migrational Context via Digitalization

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