ACCESS & SURVIVAL OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Art: Jacob Lawrence

IMPORTANCE

- The increase in the international migration
  - 3.3% of the world population is in migrant status, while 2.3% in 1970 (IOM,2018).
  - 2019: 70.8M FDM
  - 2023: 117.3M FMD
  - 37.6M refugees (UNHCR, 2023).

IMPORTANCE

- Limited resources, stigmatization, lack of access to public services
  - Marginalization
  - Radicalization
    - Become a pool of members for radical groups in the region
  - Lost generation
- Higher education (HE) as a tool for the integration of displaced people (Banks, 2017; Bauder, 2016; Zeus, 2011; Arar et al., 2019).

Art: Nuri Iyem

IMPORTANCE

- HE for self, social and *souk* (Al-Fattal & Ayoubi, 2013).
  - Economic
    - Employment (Brown & Scase, 1994; Saiti and Prokopiadou, 2008; Street et al., 2006; Townsend 2003).
  - Social
    - Empowerment and improvement of social options (especially women)
    - Promote the development of active social networks,
    - Facilitate refugees' social integration into the host society (Antonio, 2004; Mullen, 2009).
  - Psychological
    - Personal satisfaction,
    - Promote the process of self-actualization,
    - Combat the feeling of stagnation and hopelessness (Collier et al., 2003; Pasternak 2005).

IMPORTANCE

- For governments,
  - Foster social stability, cohesion, growth and sustain the economy.
  - Well-educated and skilled labor force that the business sector can access (UNHCR, 2016).
  - Rebuilding local, national, and regional institutions (Sheehy, 2014).

THE PROBLEM

- Lack of a clear policy in host countries for the enrolment of migrants in HE (Jungblut, Vukasovic & Steinhardt, 2018).
  - Need for a broad, well-informed HE policy (Bryce, 2017; de Wit & Altbach, 2016).
  - Access is severely limited (Ward, 2014).
- Special case of displaced people in access to HE.
  - Treat them as typical international students; however, they have common problems,
    - Language barrier,
    - Documentation,
    - Cultural distance,
    - Financial problems,
    - System incompatibility
- Imbalance in hosting FDMs
  - Syrian FDMs: Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Germany
  - Ukrainian FDMs: Germany, Poland, Czechia

"the influx of refugees and the expectation to enable them to access HE go beyond 'business as usual' and pose new, salient and urgent challenges for HE systems that need to be addressed." (Jungblut, Vukasovic & Steinhardt, 2018, p. 2)

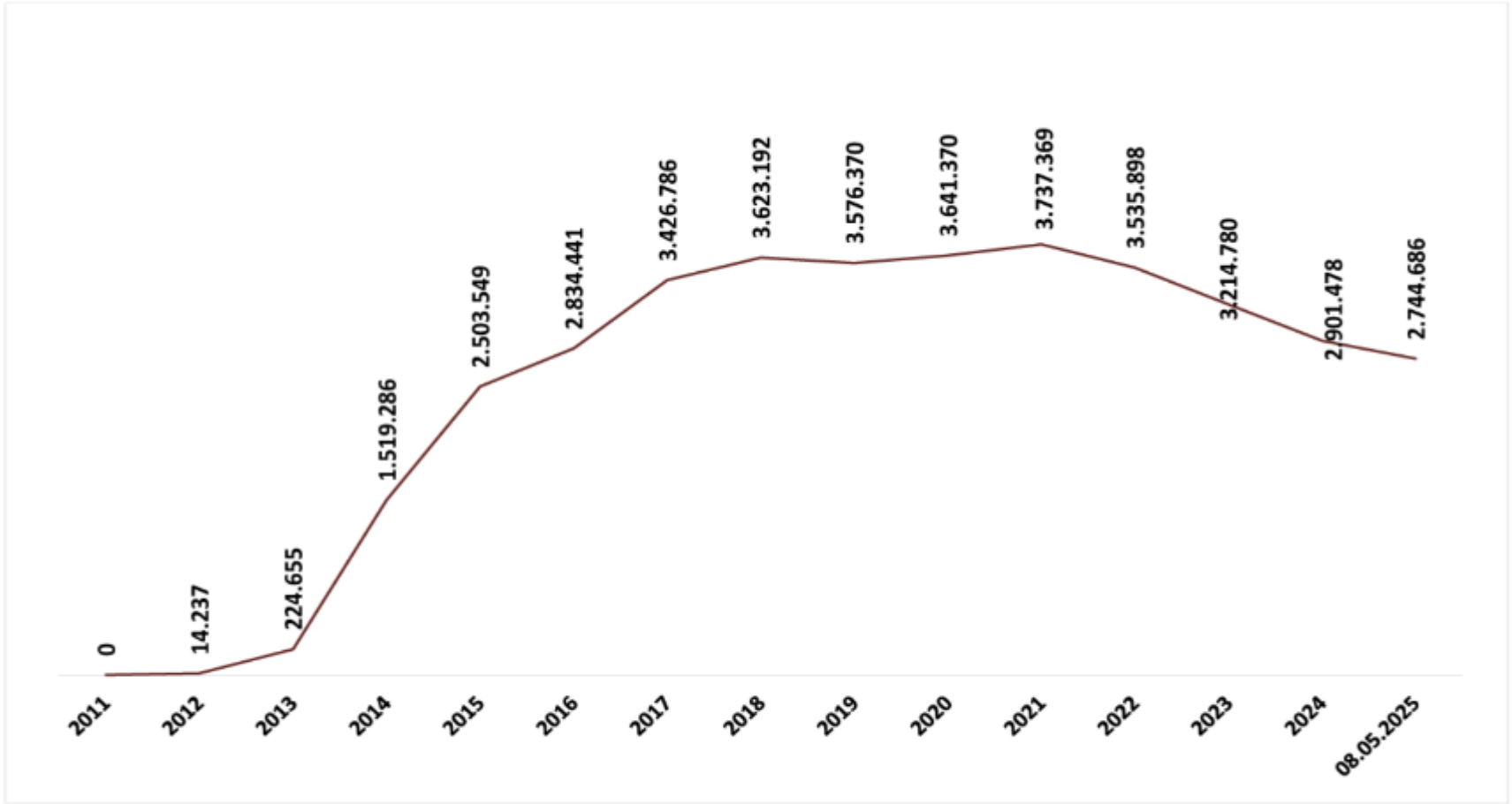
THE PROBLEM

- Problems with FDMs
  - Cultural mismatch
  - Structural differences related to gender, class, ethnicity
  - Social norms and value attributed to education

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

- Contextualization of Turkey's HE policy for SRSs,
- Regional hub
  - geopolitical,
  - historical,
  - cultural and,
  - economic characteristics
- Legal
  - The Genova Convention
  - Mismatch between the policy for Syrian refugees and legal base
  - Law 6458 (temporary protection)

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY:
The Size of the Flow



T.C. İÇİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI GÖÇ İDARESİ BAŞKANLIĞI
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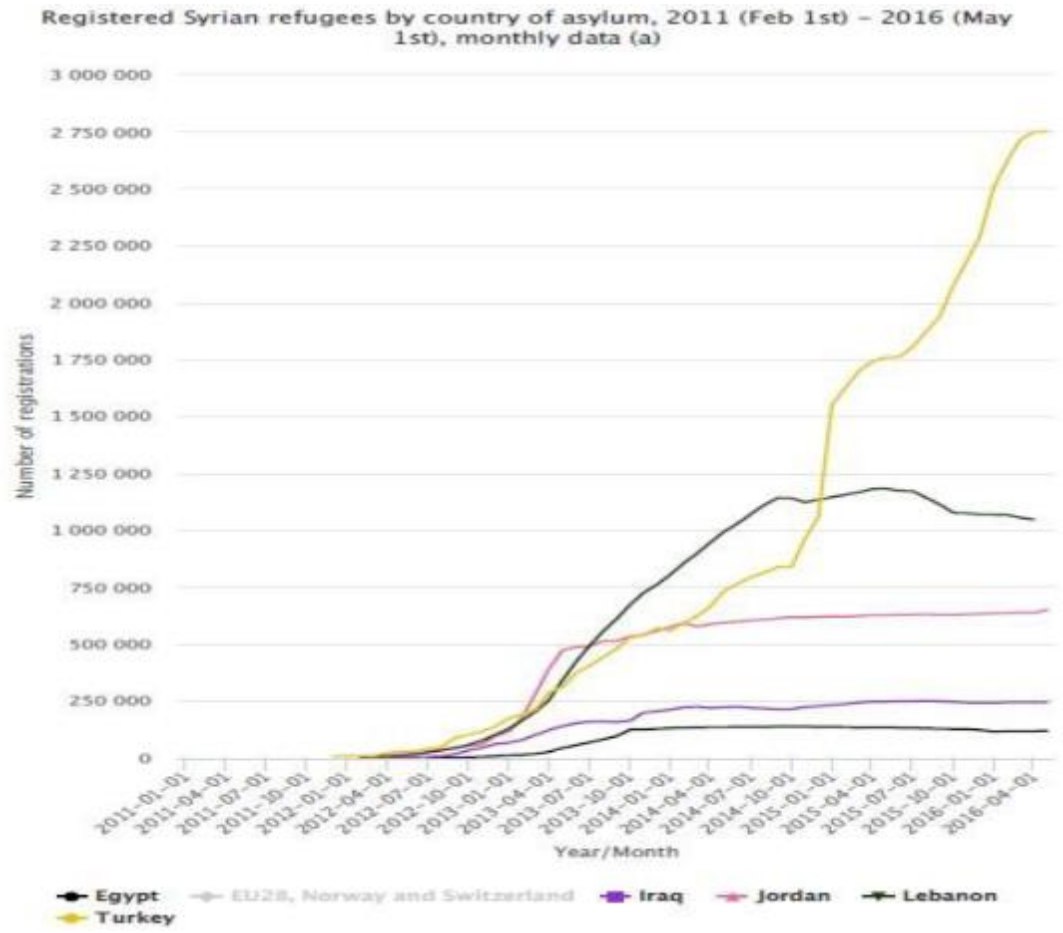
*08.05.2025 tarihi itibariyle

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY: The Size of the Flow



- Turkey is more favored,
  - Relatively economic developed
  - Relatively political stability
  - Clashes in the Northern Syria
  - Widening key public services
  - The prospect of moving to Europe
    - Turkey as a step-stone of station on the move to Europe.

Figure: Yavcan & El-Ghali (2017)

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

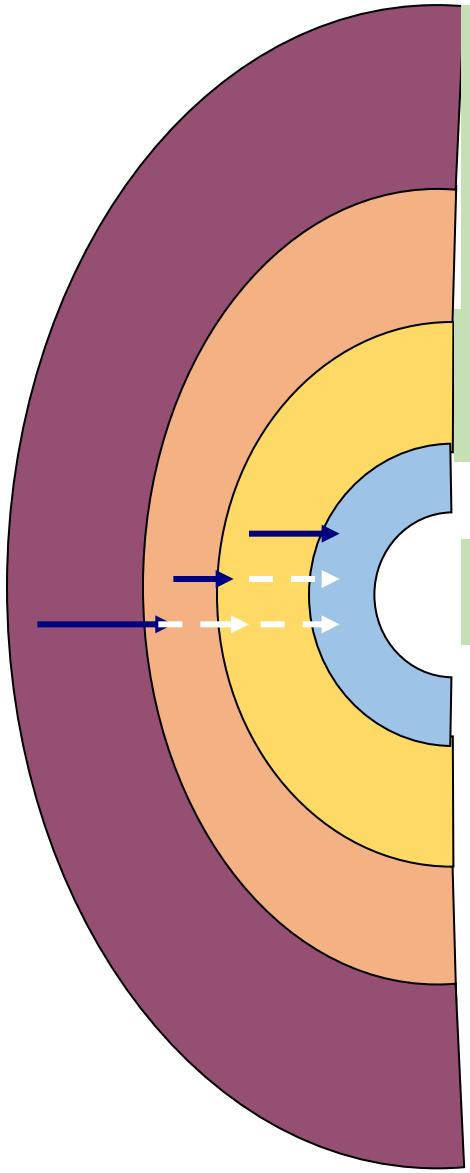
- Refuges as the epitome of three crises (Bélanger & Saracoglu, 2019, p.1).
  - *Islamist-nationalist policy and the neo-Ottomanist vision for the Middle East*
  - *The local ideological crisis in Turkey*
  - *The contentious relationship between TR and the EU*

Art: Nedim Gunsur

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY
Key Question 1

- What higher education opportunities are currently available for refugees?

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY

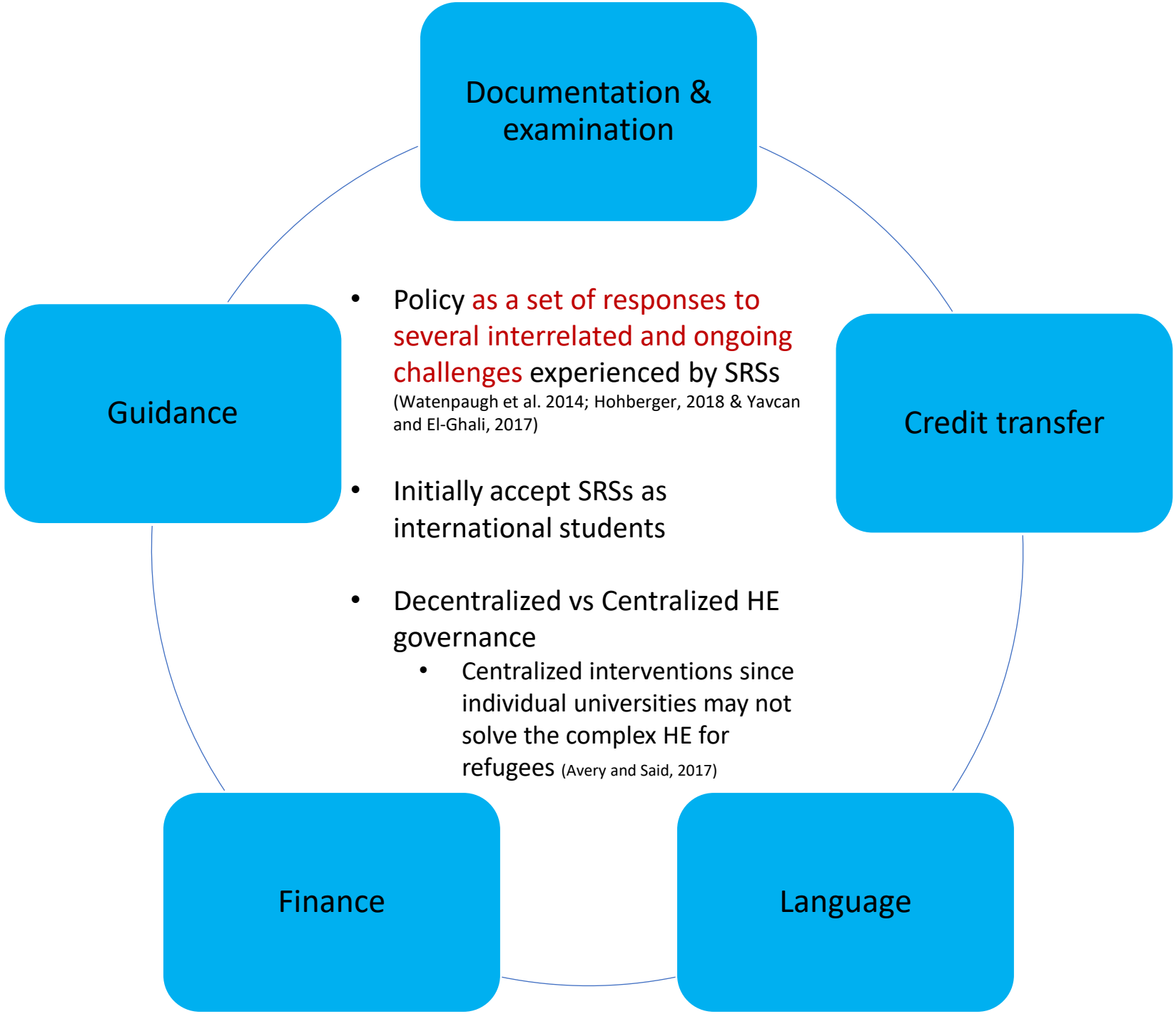


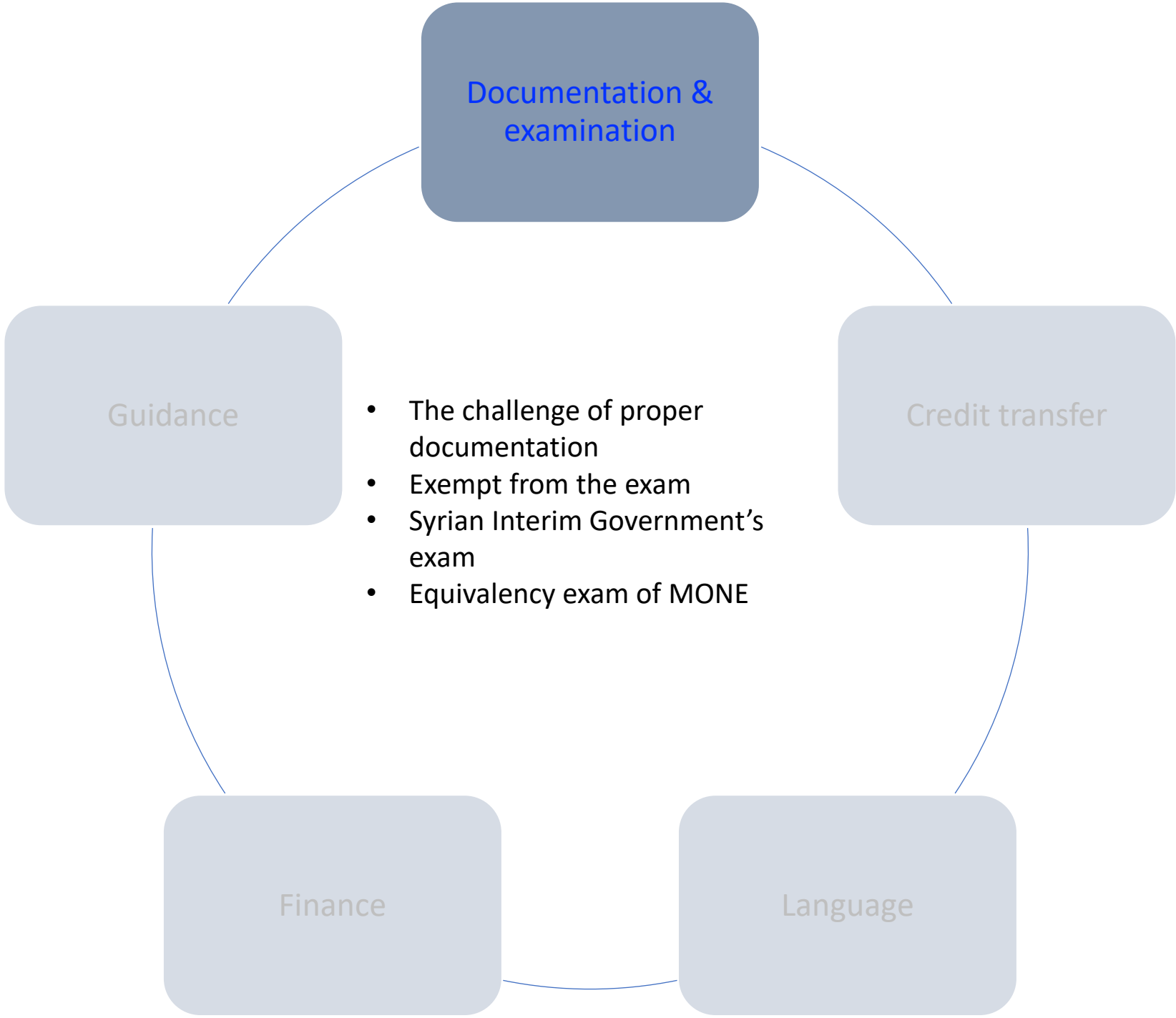
National-level policy empowered by a political will for the access of these people to the country.
Governmental organizations and NGOs contribute to inhabiting FDMs in HE (Unangst & de Wit, 2020).

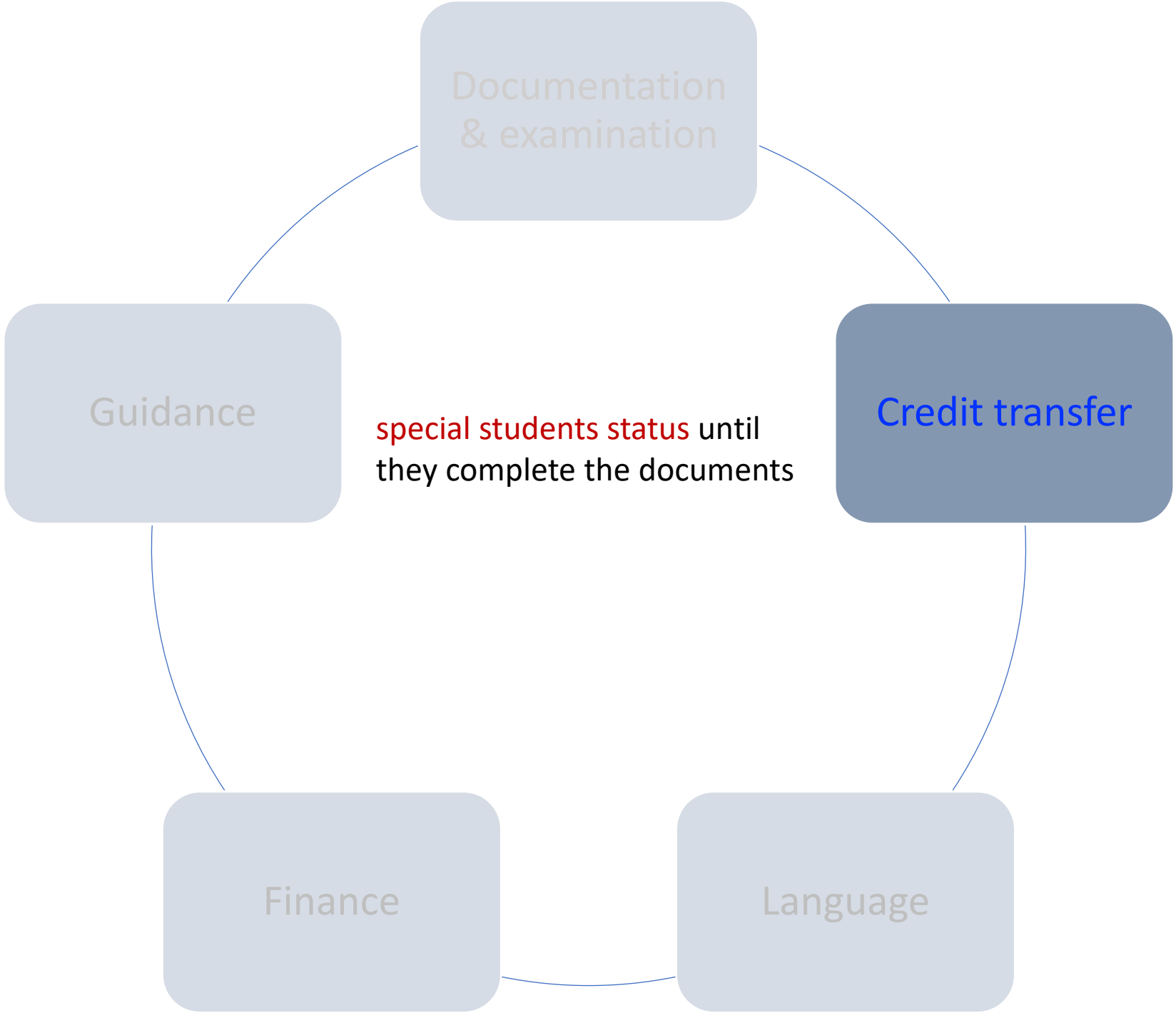
Institutional-level actions and programs.
Scholarships, language barriers, recognition of credentials, and absence of necessary documentation for enrollment (Steinhardt & Eckhardt, 2017).

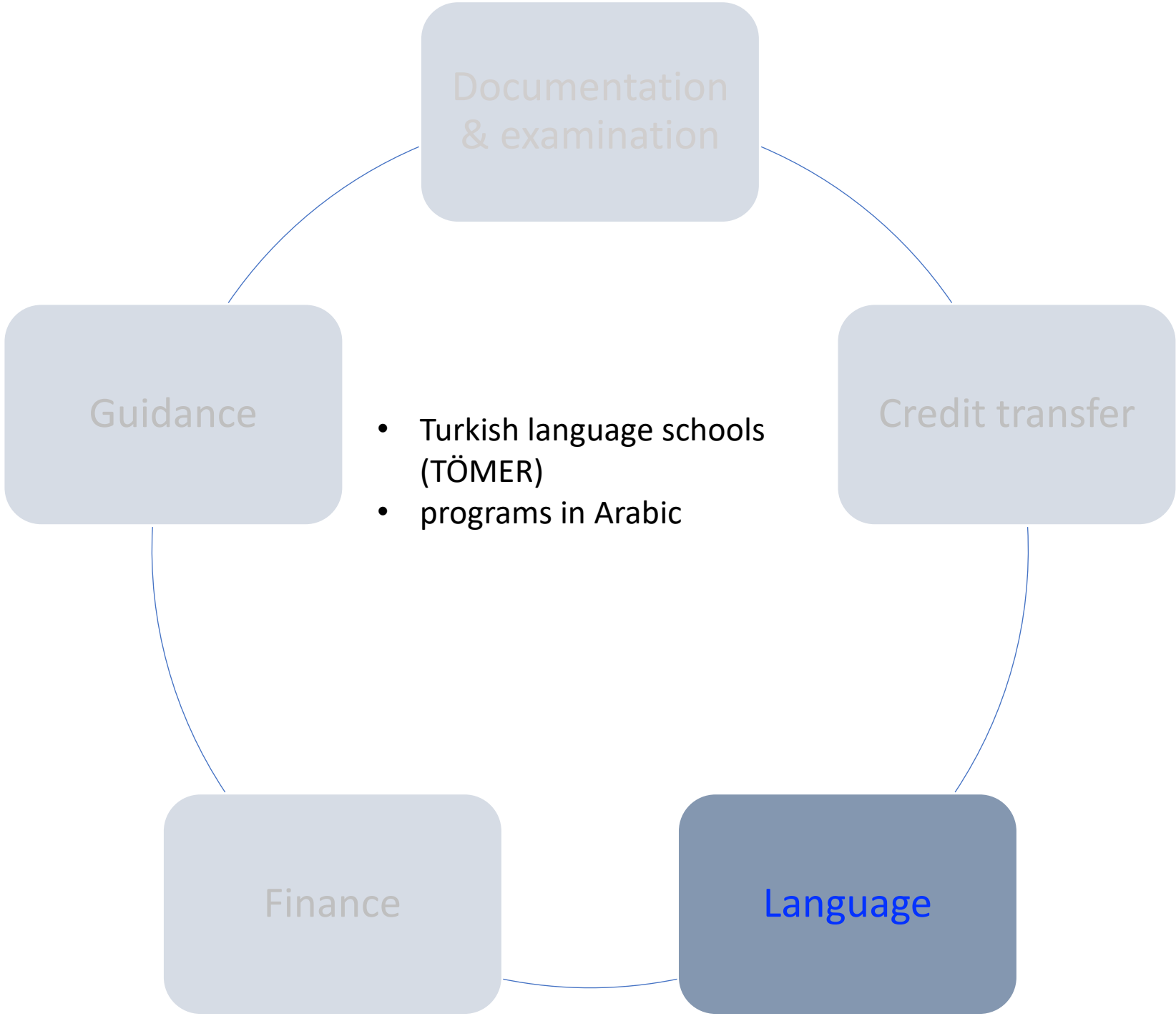
Social support, mentoring, and integration into the local environment

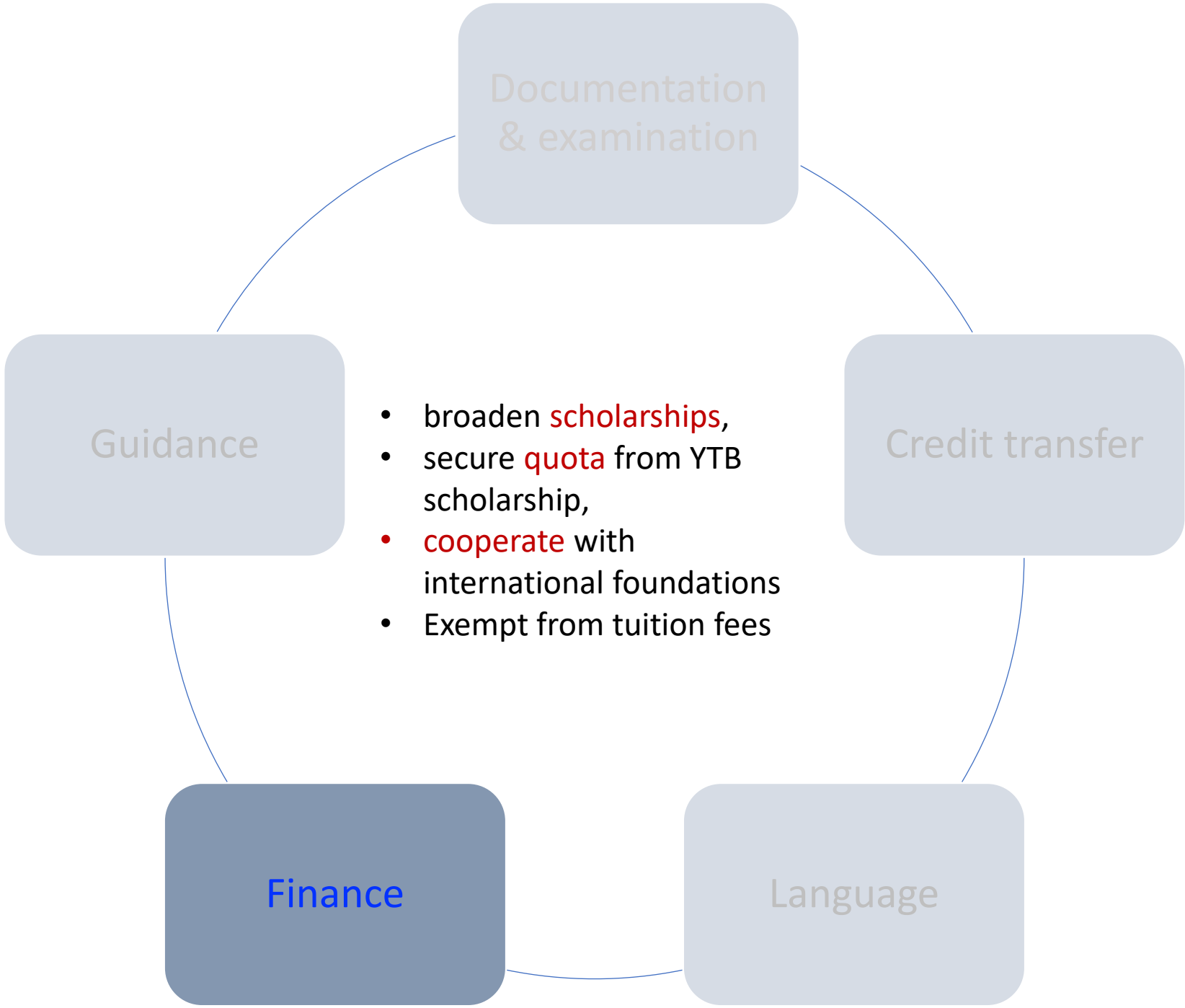
Access of students

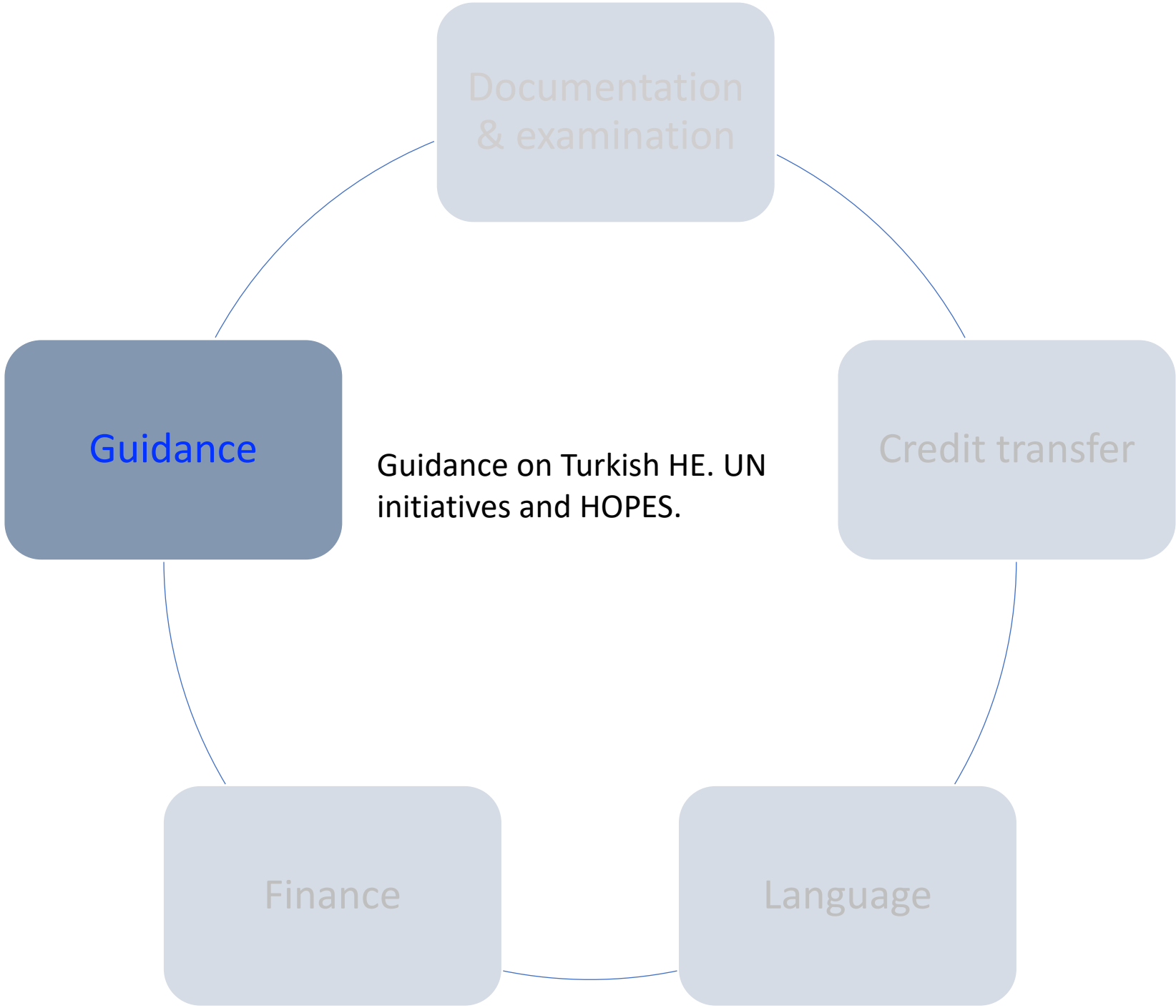

Documentation & examination
Credit transfer
Language
Finance
Guidance
• Policy as a set of responses to several interrelated and ongoing challenges experienced by SRSs (Watenpaugh et al. 2014; Hohberger, 2018 & Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017)
• Initially accept SRSs as international students
• Decentralized vs Centralized HE governance
• Centralized interventions since individual universities may not solve the complex HE for refugees (Avery and Said, 2017)


Documentation & examination
Credit transfer
Language
Finance
Guidance
• The challenge of proper documentation
• Exempt from the exam
• Syrian Interim Government’s exam
• Equivalency exam of MONE

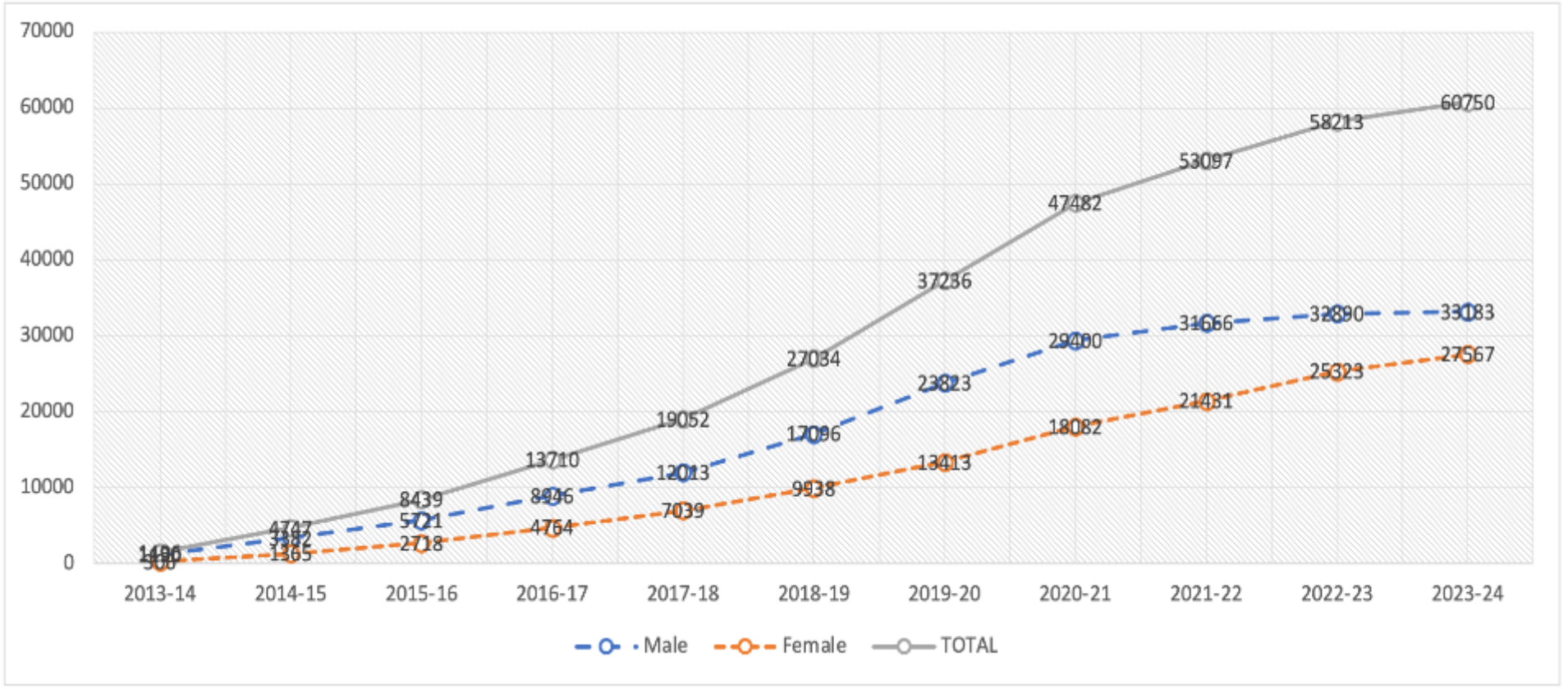

Documentation & examination
Guidance
special students status until they complete the documents
Credit transfer
Finance
Language


Documentation & examination
Credit transfer
Language
Finance
Guidance
• Turkish language schools (TÖMER)
• programs in Arabic


Documentation & examination
Credit transfer
Language
Finance
Guidance
• broaden scholarships,
• secure quota from YTB scholarship,
• cooperate with international foundations
• Exempt from tuition fees


Documentation & examination
Credit transfer
Language
Finance
Guidance
Guidance on Turkish HE. UN initiatives and HOPES.

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY



HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY
Key Question 2 & 3

- How do refugees engage with these opportunities?

- To what extent are these opportunities serve the desired social, economic, and self-development?

Art: Ibrahim Balaban

Fincham, 2020

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY
Challenges & Needs

- Their journey to Turkey followed the stages of,
  - calculating the push and pull factors,
  - overcoming the barriers in access to HE
  - struggling with the challenges during their studies,
  - dealing with public pushback and integration into society,
  - using HE to reconstruct their futures (Kondakci et al., 2023).

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY
Challenges & Needs

- Problems in access, finance, and quality of education
  - Research findings challenge two stereotypical assumptions:
    - Cultural proximity or cultural mismatch
    - Sociological & political conflict
      - Turkey's experience of Syrian refugee crisis is fundamentally different one.
      - Economic crisis multiplied the xenophobic reaction (Kondakci & Onen, 2019).
      - The fundamentalist and populist politics endanger the state of migrants and refugees (Kondakci et al., 2023)
  - Access to labor market?

Art: Jota Lañas Garibay

HE FOR SYRIAN FDMs in TURKEY
Challenges & Needs

- *“Nobody hears our voice here. There is no place to make a complaint. There is no institution, association or voluntary organization. We felt vulnerable, because though we tried to keep in contact with many people, nobody guided us. This strategy didn’t work, nobody helped us although we had lots of problems with the immigration authority or registration offices in Turkey”.*

- *“They didn’t want us and didn't want to study together, because Syrian students came and took much money and higher grades. They thought that the government helped us but it didn’t give support for them, because they received less money than we did. They behaved us badly when government helped us as lecturers did. But we didn’t have any other economic support”.*

(Arar et al., 2020; Kondakci et al., 2023)

A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

- HE for refugees is becoming increasingly available, the accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability of these opportunities remain problematic
- Neoliberal discourse, the overarching aim is to improve employment outcomes, produce a skilled workforce and drive post-conflict reconstruction.
- One-size-fits-all approach to HE fails to address the nonfinancial aspects of welfare and refugees' HD (e.g. being part of a community, being respected, etc.)
- Fall short of enabling young people to live lives that they have reason to value (Fincham, 2020).

A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

- Less focus on complex processes and the push/pull factors within households, communities and institutions (Hunt, 2008).
  - Different people have different motivations for undertaking higher education, as well as different educational needs within it.
- Social norms and discriminatory practices that may hamper an individual from realizing valuable states.
  - Structural differences related to gender, class, ethnicity, etc..
  - Sensitivity to social context and individual differences to capture how free to participate in HE and to gain from it
- Individual refugees differ in their ability to participate in education; equal availability of HE resources is not the same thing as equal opportunity to benefit from them.

Cin & Dogan, 2021; Fincham, 2020;

A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Availability	• Existence of HE opportunities within a host country contexts.
Accessibility	• Direct and indirect barriers faced by refugees in accessing HE that are available
Acceptability	• How HE can actually be of use to refugees, not only in employment, but also in supporting their overall well-being and enabling them to achieve desired states.
Adaptability	• The efforts of HE systems, institutions, and providers to promote inclusiveness and to be flexible towards the particular needs of refugees; to enable them to turn education resources into capability sets.

Fincham, 2020

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THANK YOU

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