

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### The Role of Immigrant Physicians and Scientists in the Establishment Process of Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine

#### Abstract

University reform was carried out in Turkiye in 1933. Many people of Jewish heritage, opposition doctors, and others who had fled Nazi persecution in Europe sought safety in Turkiye between 1933 and the end of World War II. Having examined the relevant official state archive documents, we, as our main objective, aimed to share the information obtained about immigrant physicians and scientists who worked at Istanbul University, contributing to establishing the Faculty of Medicine from 1933 until the end of World War II.

The study was designed as a qualitative-multiple document analysis. Documents found by scanning the catalog of the Turkish Presidency State Archives Republic Archive Catalog were examined. In addition, other publications on the subject have been read.

Seventeen original archival documents on physicians and other scientists who fled Nazi Germany and took refuge in Turkiye are examined. The names of 16 physicians and scientists are mentioned in the documents. They worked at the institute, clinic, School of Dentistry, and School of Pharmacists incorporated in the Faculty of Medicine. In addition to the advantages Turkiye provided for the scientists who took refuge, the country made it simple for their relatives to move and live there. Some of these scientists even acquired Turkish citizenship.

It is found that immigrant physicians and scientists who took refuge in Turkiye have made a significant contribution to the development of Turkish medical education and medicine.

**Key words:** Turkiye, Universities, Medical Education, Istanbul, Immigrants, History of Medicine

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## Introduction

An enormous transformation in the Turkish educational system occurred in 1933. Darulfunun, established in 1863 to provide modern higher education amid the last period of the Ottoman Empire, was no longer able to fulfill what was expected of it. Hence, Professor Albert Malche, an eminent educational scientist from Switzerland, was invited to Türkiye to conduct a study in Darulfunun and prepare a report on education (Namal, and Karakok, 2011, pp. 27-35). In accordance with Malche's report, who arrived in Türkiye at the beginning of 1932, the University Reform was introduced in 1933 (Dinc, 2007, pp. 239-242). With the reform, Darulfunun was abolished and Istanbul University (IU) was established on 1 August 1933. The university established faculties of medicine, law, literature, and science, which were modeled after the German university system. (Namal, and Karakok, 2011, p. 33)

In the same years, many physicians and scientists of Jewish origin and opponents, who were distressed by the pressures and persecution of the National Socialist-Nazi regime in Germany, together with others from other countries under Germany's influence, especially Austria and Hungary, sought ways to take refuge in other countries. A significant number of them took refuge in Türkiye (Reisman, 2008, pp. 57-79).

"Emergency Association of German Scientists Abroad" founded in Switzerland by Dr. Philipp Schwartz, a professor of pathology, one of the first victims of the Nazis, played a very important role in the migration of Jewish physicians and scientists escaping from Europe to Türkiye (Keser, 2020, pp. 75-89). The renowned scientist, Prof. Dr. Albert Einstein requested, in his letter dated September 17, 1933, that Türkiye admit forty professors and doctors who had to leave Germany (Einstein, 1933). There is, of course, some controversy over the authenticity of the letter written by Einstein. However, the document included in the study was taken directly from the Turkish State Archive. For this reason, the discussions about the letter were not taken into account. (Figure 1)

Physicians and professors migrating to Türkiye worked not only at the newly opened Istanbul University but also in the hospitals of educational institutions opened in Ankara. These people, in turn, improved and developed the institutions they worked in (Bayat, 2016, p.333). Other academics, nurses, and people, including engineers and technicians, were also allowed to seek refuge in Türkiye (Erichsen, 2016, pp. 42-46).

After the University Reform, the activities in the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine were carried out in accordance with the institute and clinical structure. The School of Dentistry is also structured under the Faculty of Medicine. The School of Pharmacy, which was previously affiliated with the Faculty of Medicine, was later affiliated with the Faculty of Science and Mathematics, but it joined the Faculty of Medicine again in 1944. The study conducted by Horst Widman manifests the positions of immigrant physicians working at the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine (Widman, 2000. p. 119-143).

The following notable professors joined the institutes between 1933 and the end of World War II (WWII): Philipp Schwartz, Siegfried Oberndorfer, Hans Winterstein, Julius Hirsch, Hugo Braun, Wilhelm Lipschitz, Felix Havrowitz, Friedrich Dessauer, Max Sgalitzer, Karl Löwenthal, Tibor Peterfi, Uvesis Maskar, Peter Ladenvig, Werner Laqueur, and Friedrich Reiman. During this time, notable professors, Erich Frank, Rudolf Nissen, Wilhelm Liepmann, Joseph Igersheimer, and Karl Helman worked in clinics.

Also, Dr. Steinitz, accompanied by Erich Frank, worked as the laboratory chief at the





Internal Medicine Clinic. Dr. Rössler first worked at the Institute of Pathological Anatomy for about ten years with Philipp Schwartz and then with Erich Frank at the Internal Medicine Clinic; Dr. Edward Löwenthal and Dr. Lily Frankel worked at the First Surgery Clinic with Rudolf Nissen; Dr. Hatschek and Dr. Stein worked with Joseph Igersheimer at the Stein Eye Disease Clinic; and Dr. Erich Rutin worked in Capa Ear, Nose, and Throat Clinic.

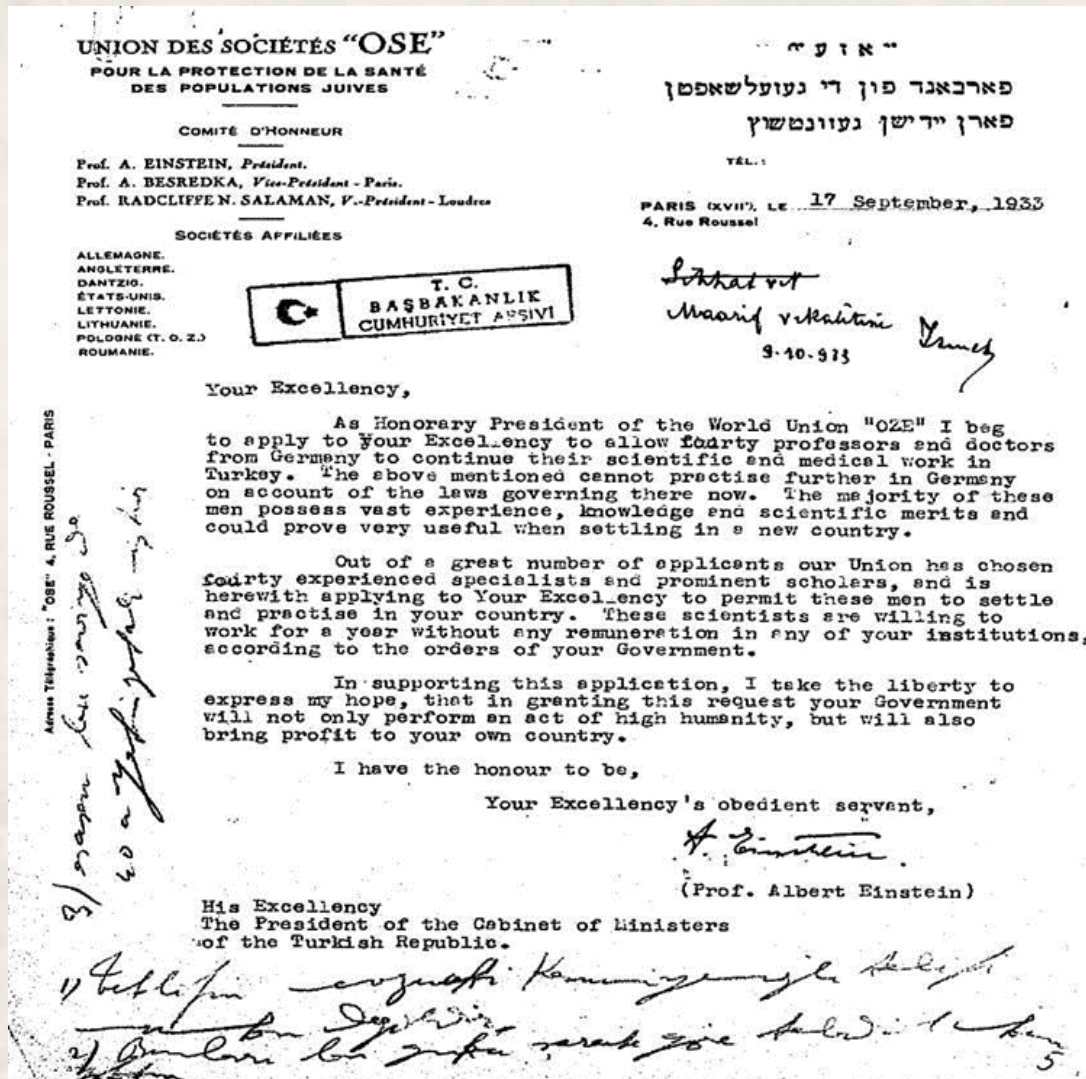


Figure 1. Letter of Albert Einstein to the Turkish Government (Einstein, 1933).

In addition to those mentioned above, Dr. Leuchtenberger worked in the Internal Medicine Clinic with the Turkish Professor Neset Omer Irdelp; Dr. Salomon worked in various clinics, and Dermatology Associate Professor Berta Ottenstein, worked in Dermatology Clinic, together with the Turkish Professor Hulusi Behcet. Distinguished Professor Alfred Kantorowicz served in the School of Dentistry. And Dr. Leopold Rosenthaler served at the Department of Galenic Pharmacy, the School of Pharmacy.

This study aims to give information about immigrant doctors and scientists who con-





tributed to the development of the Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine between 1933 and the end of World War II by inspecting relevant official state archive records.

### **Methods**

The study was designed as a qualitative multiple-document analysis. Turkish Presidency State Archives Republic Archive Catalog was scanned between April 2020 and November 2021 and relevant original documents were found and analyzed. In addition, books and other related publications were examined within the scope of the study. Due to the diversity of the sources obtained, the study was limited to the Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine.

### **Results**

From 1933, when the University Reform took place, to the end of WWII: as a result of the search made in the Turkish Republic Archive Catalog about immigrant physicians and other scientists working in the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine, 17 archive documents were found and examined. Archive documents were in the form of Government Decrees and were approved by the Presidents of the time, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü.

The decrees are related to the appointments, extension of the term of office, participation in the International Congress, the permission of family relatives to move and reside in Türkiye, as well as Turkish citizenship allocated. The information about Georg Fuchs, Hans John, and Erika Bruck, who were found to work at the IU Faculty of Medicine, was disclosed in this study after the state records were examined.

Documents about the original archive documents and their contents are shared below in chronological order.

### **Documents Regarding the Appointment, Assignment, and Extension of Duty**

The appointment, assignment, and duty extension of foreign physicians and scientists working at the IU Faculty of Medicine were regulated by Government Decrees.

The first archive document examined is the Decree dated 8 March 1939, numbered 2/10535. According to that document, it was decided to appoint Dr. Felix Havrowitz, a professor of vital chemistry, from the German University of Prague, as a professor of vital and medicinal chemistry at Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine (İnönü, 1939, No. 18-1-2/86/20/9). (Figure 2)

With another Decree, dated 25 April 1939 and numbered 2/10840, it was decided to appoint Dr. Georg Fuchs, of Jewish origin, residing in Brussel, as a specialist for the Second Internal Diseases Clinic for X-Ray assistance (İnönü, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/35/8).

Decree 2/11731 of 10 August 1939 is about German Prof. Dr. Hans John. Accordingly, it was decided to appoint John, a German citizen from Amsterdam, as the professor of pharmaceutical chemistry at the School of Pharmacy within the Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine (İnönü, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/88/79/16).

Decree No. 22131, dated 2 December 1948, is about Philip Schwartz who contributed greatly to the Jewish-immigrant physicians and scientists coming to Türkiye. According to the document examined, Philipp Schwartz, who became a Turkish citizen, was appointed as the professor of the Institute of Pathological Anatomy. In the document, it was stated that Schwartz was elected by the Faculty Professors Board in accordance with





Article 28 of Law No. 4936 of Universities, and this election was approved by the Senate (Inonu, 1948, No. 30-11-1-0/202/32/4).

**T. C.**  
**BASVEKALET**  
**KARARLAR DAİRESİ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ**  
Karar sayıları  
2

Kararname

10535

İstanbul Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesinde sık bulunan Hayatî ve Tıbbî Kimya profesörlüğüne tayin edilen Prag Alman Üniversitesi Hayatî Kimya Profesörü Dr.F.Havrowitz'ın 2/9498 sayılı kararname hükmünden istisnaen Türkiye'ye gelmesine izin verilmesi; Mezarif Vekilliğinin 17/2/939 tarih ve 4109/54/630 sayılı teklifi ve Dahiliye Vekilliğinin 4/3/939 tarih ve 11039 sayılı mütaleanesi üzerine İcra Vekilleri Heyetince 8/3/939 tarihinde onanmıştır.  
8/3/939

REİSİCUMHUR  
İsmet İnönü

Bg. V. *H. F. Ayday* Ad. V. *H. İzzet* M. M. V. *H. İzzet* Da. V. *F. İzzet*

Ha. V. *H. İzzet* Ma. V. *H. İzzet* Mf. V. *H. İzzet* Na. V. *H. İzzet*

İk. V. *H. İzzet* S. İ. M. V. *H. İzzet* G. İ. V. *H. İzzet* Zr. V. *H. İzzet*

050 18 21 02 86 20 9

Figure 2. Archive document about Felix Havrowitz (Inonu, 1939, No. 18-1-2/86/20/9)

The document regarding the extension of the term of office is related to Karl Helman from Capa Hospital Ear, Nose, and Throat Clinic. With decree No.2/14479 of 28 September 1940, it was decided to extend the contract of Dr. Karl Helman, which would expire on March 3, 1941, until May 31, 1942, to complete a training period in his clinic (Inonu, 1940, No. 30-18-1-2/92/95/19).

### Document Regarding Sending the Professors to the International Congress

The only archive document found on this subject is Decree No. 2/5311 of 5 September 1936. According to that document, from September 4–8, 1936, the eminent professor Dr. Dessauer and his assistants Uhlman and Kurt Lion were dispatched to Vienna for the X-Ray Congress. (Ataturk, 1936) (Figure 3) The assistants of Dessauer, a world-renowned physicist, were Dr. Erich Uhlman, a dermatologist, and Kurt Lion, a physicist (Dinc, 2007, pp. 239-242).

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| T. C.<br>BAŞVEKÂLET<br>KARARLAR MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ<br>Karar sayı<br>2<br>5311   |                                | Kararname                   |                               | T. C.<br>BAŞVEKÂLET<br>CUMHURİYET ARŞİVİ |  |
| <p>4-8 Eylül 1936 tarihinde Viyanada toplanacak olan röntgen kongresine, İstanbul Üniversitesi Radyoloji ve Biyofizik Ord. Prof. Dessauer ile öğrencileri Tefvik Önder ve Muhterem Gökmen ve yardımcıları Uhlmann ve Kurt Lion'un gönderilmeleri ve kongrede yapacakları masraflar için yalnız Dr. Tefvik Önder ile Muhterem Gökmen'e Maarif Vekâleti bütçesine mevzu 621 inci faslın I inci maddesinden ikişer yüz lira verilmesi ve bunun Avusturya kliringi ile tediyesi ve iki doğente siyasal pasaport verilmesi; adı geçen vekillik 28/8/1936 tarih ve 8724 sayılı tezkere-sile yapılan teklifi ve Maliye Vekillığının 4/9/1936 tarih ve 54246/3/-12368 sayılı mutaleanamesi üzerine İcra Vekilleri Heyetine 5/9/1936 da onanmıştır.</p> |                                |                             |                               |  |  |
| 5/9/1936   |                                |                             |                               |  |  |
| REİSİCUMHUR  |                                |                             |                               |  |  |
| <i>K. Atatürk</i>  |                                |                             |                               |  |  |
| Bs. V.<br><i>F. İnci</i>   | Ad. V.<br><i>S. Sancar</i>     | M. M. V.<br><i>K. Ö. Ö.</i> | Da. V. V.<br><i>S. Akıncı</i> |  |  |
| Ha. V. V.<br><i>S. Sancar</i>  | Ma. V.<br><i>A. Ö. Ö.</i>      | Mf. V.<br><i>S. Akıncı</i>  | Na. V.<br><i>A. Ç. Ç.</i>     |  |  |
| İk. V.<br><i>C. Ç.</i>   | S. I. M. V.<br><i>S. Ç. Ç.</i> | G. I. V.<br><i>R. R. R.</i> | Z. V.<br><i>C. Ç.</i>         |  |  |
| 030 18 01 02 65 25 10  |                                |                             |                               |  |  |

Figure 3. Archive document about Dessauer, Uhlman, and Lion (Ataturk, 1936)

It was decided that Turkish associate professors, Tefvik Onder and Muhterem Gokmen, who were working at the same institute, participated in the congress in question, and the Ministry of Education allocated 200 Turkish Liras, equivalent to Austrian currency, to the Turkish associate professors, from the Ministry of Education budget in accordance with Article 621 of Chapter 1, in order to cover the costs of the congress and also a political passport (Ataturk, 1936).

#### Documents Regarding the Relatives of the Family to Move and Reside in Turkiye

The first archive document examined on this matter is the Decree dated 30 December 1938, numbered 2/10141. Accordingly, the general and Experimental Institute of Pathology permitted the brothers of Cancer Professor Oberndorfer (73-year-old Anna, 71-year-old Henrietta, and 69-year-old Adolf), living in Munich, to move and reside in Turkiye during his contract period (Inonu, 1938).

With the Decree, dated 10 February 1939 and numbered 3/10343, the brother and wife of Dr. Sgalitzer, the Distinguished Radiology Professor were allowed to come to Turkiye for a period of two months (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/85/119/17).



Another Decree, dated 10 February 1939, numbered 2/10344, is about Helman. According to the records inspected, Bruno Helman, residing in Germany, the brother of the distinguished ENT professor, Karl Helman, was granted permission to relocate to Turkiye for three-month period by the Decree No. 2/10588 issued on 14 March 1939. This is the second archival record pertaining to Helman (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/82/119/18). This time, Helman's father-in-law, a German Jewish, residing in Munich, and Dr. Felix Hezfelder and his wife, Emma, were allowed to move and reside in Turkiye (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/23/2).

Manelok Olga, a German Jew who worked as a laboratory assistant for Dr. Werner Laqueur in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic in Breslau, was granted permission to live in Turkiye by Decree 2/10516, dated March 6, 1939. (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/19/10) In this document, the name and surname of Dr. Werner Laqueur were written as Verner Laquesir.

Upon the Decree, dated 14 March 1939 and numbered 2/10585, the Jewish mother of the Hungarian citizen, Dr. Peterfi, who had been assigned to Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine professor of Histology and Embryology, while being a professor at Copenhagen University, was allowed to come and reside in Turkiye (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/22/19).

After the acceptance of Lawyer Fröchlich, the brother-in-law of Dr. Nissen, the Cerrahpaşa Hospital First Clinical Chief Professor (December 15, 1938) to Turkiye, it was decided to apply for the visa for the mentioned person's Jewish wife and two children in Germany with Decree No. 2/10589 dated 14 March 1939 (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/23/3).

By the Decree, dated 27 April 1939, and numbered 2/10854, the deputy of the Institute of Medicine Curriculum and Pharmacodynamics, Dr. Erika Brucker's mother in Breslau, was allowed to come to Turkiye and stay with her daughter, as long as she stayed in Turkiye (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/86/36/2).

By decree No. 2/12945, dated 4 March 1940, the eminent professor, Dr. Kantorowicz's sister Elsa Levin Kantrowitz of German Jews was later permitted to cross Turkiye on their way into the United States of America (Inonu, 1940, No. 30-18-1-2/90/19/7). In this document, Kantorowicz is written as Kantrowitz.

#### **Documents regarding the acceptance of Turkish Citizenship**

Rudolf Nissen, the son of Frans, was granted Turkish citizenship by the Decree, dated 3 July 1939 and numbered 2/11384. Rudolf was a distinguished professor at the First Outpatient Clinic of the Faculty of Medicine at Istanbul University and also served as the director of the Cerrahpasa Hospital External Clinic. He was born in 1896 and lived in Turkiye since 1933. Likewise, Ruth Nissen, and his wife, Varter, were granted Turkish citizenship. (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/87/62/12) (Figure 4)

In addition, in the document regarding the appointment of Schwartz mentioned above, it is stated that this physician also took Turkish citizenship (Inonu, 1948, No. 30-11-1-0/202/32/4).



T. C.  
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Karar sayısı

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11384

1933 yılında Türkiye'ye gelerek vatandaşlığa alınmalarını isteyen ve halen İstanbul Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi birinci hariciye kliniği Ordinaryüs Profesörü bulunan ve aynı zamanda Cerrahpaşa hastahanesi hariciye kliniği şefliğini yapmakta olan Prf. Dr. 1896 doğumlu Frans oğlu Rodolf Nissen ile karısı 1906 doğumlu Varter kızı Ruth Nissen'in Türk vatandaşlığına alınmaları; Dahiliye Vekillığının 27/ - 6/1939 tarih ve 42065/6548/57c3 sayılı tezkeresiyle yapılan teklifi üzerine İcra Vekilleri Heyetince 3. TEMMUZ 1939 tarihinde kabul olunmuştur.

REİSİCÜLHUR

İsmail İnönü

Bş. V. Ad. V.  
S. F. Kaya

M. M. V. Da. V.  
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S. S. S.

Ti. V.  
S. S. S.

30 18 01 02 87 62 12

Figure 4. The archival document exhibiting Nissen's Turkish citizenship (Inonu, 1939, No. 30-18-1-2/87/62/12)

### Discussion

From the original documents scrutinized, some information was found about 16 immigrant physicians and scientists who worked in the Istanbul Medical Faculty from 1933 until the end of WWII. In addition to physicians, there were also dentists, pharmacists, and physicists who migrated to Türkiye. This indicates that individuals from other professions also worked in hospitals and clinics, along with the best medical professionals in their respective disciplines.

During this period, the Government's decree, allowing non-citizen doctors and sci-



entists to work in Turkiye, was notable for demonstrating how seriously the matter was taken.

An agreement was made with the physicians and scientists who took refuge in Turkiye for a certain period of time. On the one hand, this gave the Turkish government the upper hand, but on the other hand, it gave a chance to the people who took refuge in Turkiye to move freely. As a matter of fact, after the expiry of the contract period, if mutually agreed upon, the contracts would be renewed.

Considering the conditions of that period, the Turkish government sent scientists to the international congress. Continuous self-development of the scientists who took refuge in Turkiye were encouraged to share the studies they did in Turkiye with other colleagues. Turkish doctors who worked with these experts were also dispatched to congress alongside them in order to obtain experience.

It was very important for physicians and scientists who took refuge in Turkiye to feel comfortable in order to work efficiently.

It was also understood that the demands of the surgeon, Rudolf Nissen and his wife, for Turkish citizenship were approved in 1939. It was stated in a document, dated 1948, regarding the assignment of Philip Schwartz, who had been living in Turkiye since 1933, that this valuable physician had also acquired Turkish citizenship. In addition to the fact that these people felt safer in Turkiye, despite the circumstances of the time, it is also clear how strong their sense of belonging was.

### **Conclusion**

In 1933, with the University Reform, which was made at the request of Ataturk, Turkiye embraced many immigrant physicians, scientists, and other qualified staff who wanted to escape from Nazi Germany as well as many other countries it dominated. Those dealing with medical sciences were employed in the IU Faculty of Medicine, and newly opened hospitals and health institutions in Ankara.

Also, before WWII and after the war started, the demands of these people who were worried about the lives of their relatives were met as a humanitarian demand according to the records analyzed; Turkiye permitted the scientists' family members to temporarily reside or travel through Turkiye to other countries as per their inclinations.

It can be said that medical education and medicine in Turkiye have significantly benefited from the efforts of these scientists, who held the positions of administrator, lecturer, teaching assistant, scientific assistant, assistant, specialist, laboratory assistant, and physician.

It is assumed that it would be important to share the information recorded about these eminent people who took refuge in Turkiye and worked at the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine and other hospitals after WWII.

### **Conflict of Interest**

None.

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