

Annual Report 2024

Den Haag, 10 February 2025

1. Introduction

Simurgh Academy marked a significant milestone in its journey in 2024 with the *Young Leadership in Action* program, aimed at empowering refugees, migrants, and people on the move in Türkiye. This pioneering initiative consisted of three separate courses, each with multiple modules. Participants were primarily from the Afghan community in Türkiye.

Simurgh Academy was officially established in 2023 in The Hague as *Stichting Simurgh Academy*. It builds on the experiences and work of Simurgh Leadership Academy, which was founded in 2022 in Istanbul to offer leadership development programs in Türkiye.

The *Young Leadership in Action* program provided invaluable insights and lessons that will shape future courses and further strengthen the Academy's mission to support young leaders in challenging circumstances and the unique realities of people on the move.

2. Program Overview: Young Leadership in Action

In Partnership with Lacivard Yolu Research Centre

The *Young Leadership in Action* program was delivered in collaboration with Lacivard Yolu Research Centre, an organisation of Afghan scholars and social leaders. It targeted Afghan refugees and migrants, focusing on leadership capacity-building through a structured and comprehensive curriculum.

Core Curriculum Areas:

- **Enhancing Self-Awareness for Personal Growth:** Helping participants identify and develop their strengths and potential.
- **Deepening Understanding of Local and International Contexts for Informed Leadership:** Offering knowledge about the social, political, and economic contexts shaping their lives.
- **Developing Essential Leadership Skills:** Focusing on practical capacities such as teamwork, effective communication, strategy development, and conflict management.

The program empowered participants to become active agents of change in their communities, make informed decisions in uncertain environments, and build resilience through new networks and peer learning.

3. Program Schedule

Course: Young Leadership in Action 2023-I

- **Module 1:** August 22–24, 2023, Istanbul (15 participants)
- **Module 2:** March 28–31, 2024, Antalya (11 participants)
- **Module 3:** August 14–18, 2024, Istanbul (17 participants from both groups)

Course: Young Leadership in Action 2024-I

- **Module 1:** February 1–4, 2024, Antalya (13 participants)
- **Module 2:** April 24–26, 2024, Isparta (11 participants)
- **Module 3:** August 14–18, 2024, Istanbul (17 participants from both groups)

Course: Young Leadership in Action 2024-II

- **Module 1:** December 12–14, 2024, Konya (18 participants)
- **Modules 2 and 3:** Planned for February 26–28, 2025, and May 1–5, 2025, both in Antalya.

The final module for the first two courses brought participants together, encouraging collaboration, reflection, and shared learning. This approach fostered a strong sense of community and mutual understanding among participants.

4. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Language Barriers

The program was primarily conducted in Persian/Dari, but some guest lectures were delivered in Turkish. Although most participants had some knowledge of Turkish, a few struggled with language challenges, requiring additional translation support to ensure full engagement.

Legal Restrictions

Participants' precarious legal status in Türkiye posed significant challenges:

- One participant was arrested and detained before the course but joined the second module after receiving legal assistance.
- Three participants left Türkiye during the course to seek asylum in other countries.

- Two participants missed the final module due to expired residence permits and had to return to Afghanistan.
- Two others could not attend because they were unable to obtain travel permits within Türkiye.

These challenges required flexibility in the program's structure, reducing the number of modules from four to three and extending the final module to five days. Future courses will condense sessions into 4–5 months and prioritise regional delivery to minimise travel difficulties.

Funding Challenges

Limited resources for initiatives in Türkiye delayed the launch of Arabic-language courses for Syrian refugees. Recruiting and compensating Arabic-speaking moderators remains a significant challenge.

Group Diversity

The program prioritised gender and ethnic diversity in participant recruitment. For many participants, this was their first experience working in mixed-gender and multi-ethnic teams. This experience fostered meaningful dialogue, promoted inclusive leadership practices, and encouraged mutual understanding.

5. Reflections on Impact

The impact of the *Young Leadership in Action* program is primarily reflected in participants' personal growth, new ways of thinking, and adaptive leadership approaches. The program's success is best expressed through their voices:

- “These three modules helped me develop resilience, decision-making, and value-based leadership skills.” – Ahmad Tamim Azizi
- “Practical activities and discussions helped me apply my leadership skills in real life.” – Osman Sefati
- “What I learned, I wish I had known earlier while leading an organisation in Afghanistan.” – Najib Paikan
- “Participation, mutual acceptance, and flexibility were the most important skills I developed.” – Setare Setayesh
- “We progressed through shared decision-making and teamwork, overcoming initial differences to achieve balanced, effective results.” – Safura Moradzay

6. Organisational Developments

In November 2023, Simurgh Academy transitioned from a local entity in Türkiye to a Dutch foundation (*Stichting Simurgh Academy*), strengthening its operational and financial framework.



With its newly acquired ANBI (Public Benefit Organisation) status, the Academy is now better positioned to develop sustainable partnerships and secure long-term funding for its programs.

7. Conclusion

Inspired by *The Conference of the Birds* by **Farid ud-Din Attar (c. 1145–1221)**, Simurgh Academy reflects the collective strength and resilience of its participants. Attar was a Persian Sufi poet and mystic of the 12th century, known for his profound allegories and spiritual teachings. His work is deeply rooted in Persian literary and Sufi traditions, exploring themes of self-discovery, unity, and transcendence.

The Conference of the Birds tells the story of a group of birds in search of their king, the Simurgh, symbolizing the journey toward self-realization and enlightenment. Each bird represents a different human flaw or struggle, but together they embark on a transformative quest. In the end, they discover that the Simurgh is not an external being but a reflection of their own collective strength and unity.

Similarly, the Academy embodies this journey of self-discovery and transformation. The *Young Leadership in Action* program has demonstrated the power of leadership programs to create new dynamics and foster personal and community growth.

Together, Simurgh Academy and its participants continue to embark on a journey of empowerment and hope, building stronger communities and inspiring future leaders.