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Towards an Inclusive Education for Refugees: Educational Policies of refugees in Turkey

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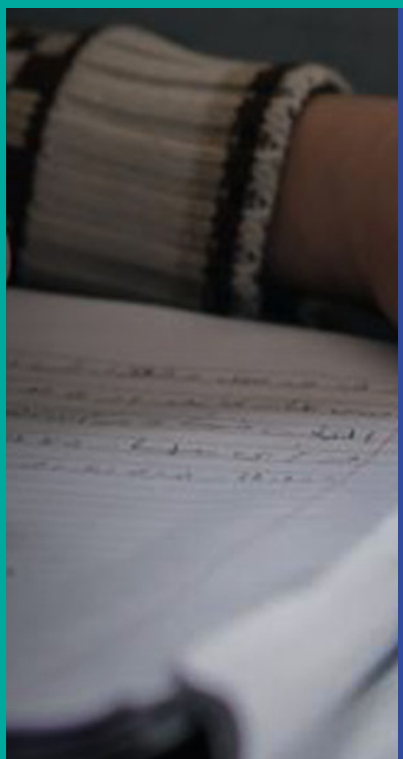

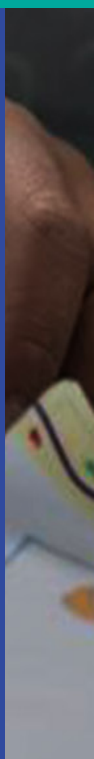

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Contents

List of abbreviations

AFAD	*Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency [Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı]*
JDP	*Justice and Development Party [Adalet Kalkinma Partisi]*
CCTE	*Conditional Cash Transfer for Education*
CSO	*Civil Society Organization*
DGMM	*Directorate General of Migration Management*
ECHO	*European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection*
ESSN	*Emergency Social Safety Net*
EU	*European Union*
FRIT	*EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey*
ILO	*International Labor Organization*
INGO	*International Non-Governmental Organization*
IO	*International Organization*
IOM	*International Organization for Migration*
MoNE	*Ministry of National Education*
NATO	*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*
NGO	*Non-Governmental Organization*
PICTES	*Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into Turkish Education System*
TP	*Temporary Protection*
TPR	*Temporary Protection Regulation*
UN	*United Nations*
UNHCR	*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*

About the project

In 2018, CLS was awarded the prestigious Lyle Spencer grant to conduct a comparative and longitudinal study of refugee education. The study, "My future five years from now" examines and contrasts education programs and practices for refugees in Australia, Lebanon and Turkey over a five-year period (2018-2023). These countries offer a spectrum of asylum options – from temporary (and precarious) asylum to legalized pathways for permanent resettlement and citizenship. The research team is interested in how these macro contexts shape meso-level education policies and practices and the micro level experiences of students and educators. The study aims to better understand the structural, bureaucratic and socio-cultural dimensions of refugee education and to provide rigorous evidence for coherent and holistic education opportunities for refugee and national children. To achieve this, data is being collected via student surveys, interviews with educators and parents and, in depth analysis of policy documents in each country.

The goal of the policy analysis paper is to examine the education policies and outcomes for refugees related to the specific to the Turkish context between 2018 and 2020. It outlines the major thematic priorities that emerged from the policy analysis research, which are also organized chronologically to cover the period from 2018 to 2020.

This report, based on desk research, which consisted of examining various sources related to refugee education in Turkey. This includes refugee education-related reports, articles, monographs, legislative documents, national and international publications, regulations, agreements, newspaper articles, political and ministerial statements. We examnined a variety of sources, including state institutions as well as those from non-governmental organizations, data from Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) and Ministry of National Education (MoNE), as well as the Lifelong Learning Directorate General – LLDG.

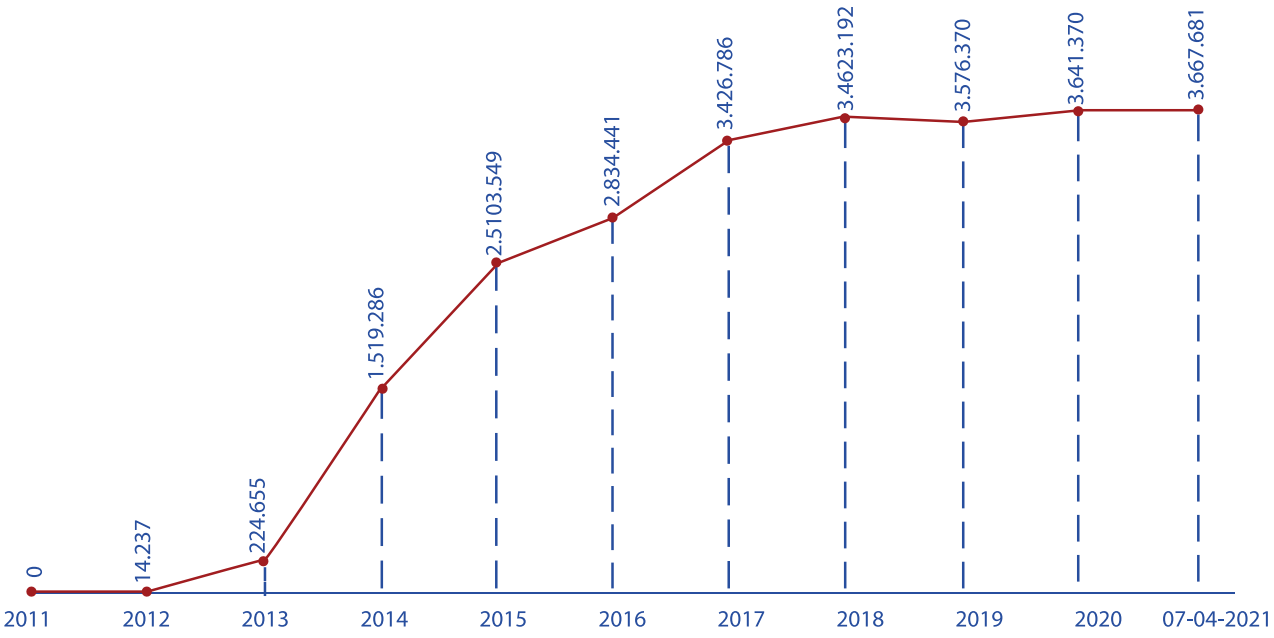
The paper focuses on the following aspects: It first offers a general overview of the situation in Turkey, in terms of refugees. It then different aspects of refugee education in Turkey and how it has developed since the arrival of refugees to Turkey. This includes a description of the transition from Temporary Education Centers to public schools; increasing school enrolment; economic barriers, and opportunitives for native language education. Following that, this paper examines the impact of the legal and economic aspects and public opinion on education. It then examines the segregative practices that are put in place towards refugees from enrolment in religious imam hatip schools to the most recent creation of 'integration classes'. It ends with a discussion about the effect of the pandemic on the education situation, and concludes with recommendations.

General Background

As the Syrian war started in 2011, Turkey initially held an open-door policy and allowed Syrians to seek refuge across its neighboring border. Both the Turkish government and the refugees themselves anticipated that the war in Syria would not last long and that the Syrians would return to their home country. However, as it became clearer that their stay was going to be long-term, the state, with the help of humanitarian assistance organizations, started to focus on developing strategies to improve their situation. Though a signatory of the 1951 Convention, the Turkish government interpreted the original geographical focus on Europe and did not give Syrians an official refugee status. The definitions of Syrians' status and rights were specified in the Law on Foreigners and International protection passed on 11 April 2013 and Syrian refugees in Turkey became recognised by the status of Temporary Protection that is defined under Article 91 of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458). The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) issued by the Council of Ministers on 22 October 2014 further specifies this status[1]. This status provides them access to basic rights such as education, employment and health services, but it does not lead to permanent residency or citizenship. Yet, accessing the services that the laws guarantee for them is often impeded by numerous obstacles.

The number of refugees in Turkey increased significantly since 2011 as demonstrated in Figure 1, and today, Turkey currently hosts more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees registered under Temporary Protection status (TP).

Figure 1: Distribution of Syrians under Temporary Protection by Year

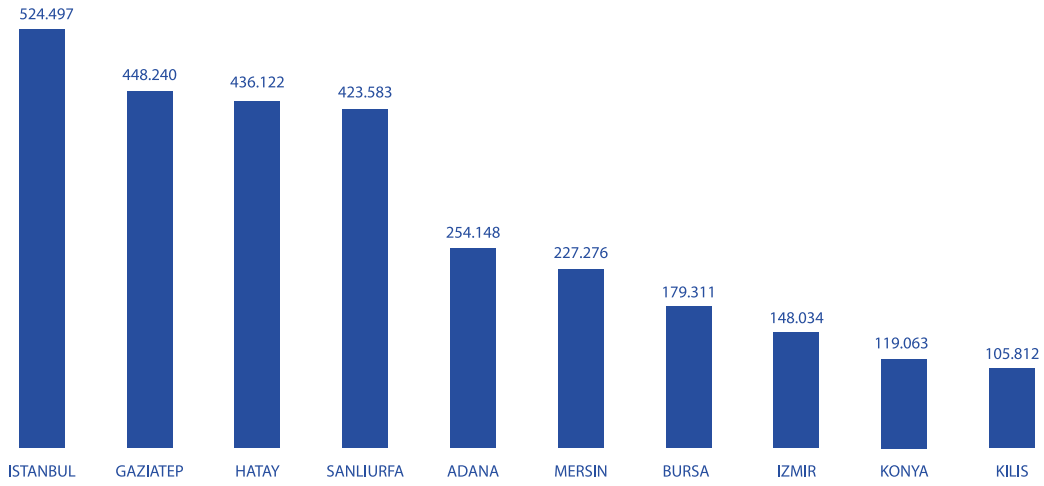


Source: *Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), 2021. Accessible from: https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27 [last accessed April 18, 2021].*

[1] European Commission. June 2016. Needs assessment report for the preparation of an enhanced EU support to Turkey on the refugee crisis. Technical Assistance for a comprehensive needs assessment of short and medium to long term actions as basis for an enhanced EU support to Turkey on the refugee crisis. Service Contract No. 2015/366838

The Turkish government initially adopted an encampment policy under the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD or Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı) with the support of the Red Crescent (Kızılay), but as the number of arrivals continued to increase they could not accommodate them further. Only 7 camps remain in 2020, situated in the provinces of Turkey's southern borders (3 in Hatay, 1 in Adana, 1 in Osmaniye, 1 in Kilis and 1 in Kahramanmaraş)[2]. These camps generally contain a health clinic, a school, a mosque and sport fields as well as other equipments. Currently only five per cent of the refugees are in camps in Turkey, while the vast majority (95%) live outside camps, mostly in the cities. More than half a million currently live in Istanbul, closely followed by Gaziantep, Hatay and Sanliurfa as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Distribution of Syrians under Temporary Protection by Top 10 Provinces



Source: *Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), 2021.*
Accessible from: https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27 [last accessed April 18, 2021].

As a response to the summer of 2015, as the European countries facing refugee 'flows' were trying to protect their borders, the Turkey-EU deal was put in place in March 2016[3]. This deal offered Turkey financial assistance to help it in setting up a migration governance system in return for a promise of lessening visa restrictions for Turkish citizens. Based on this, Turkey would set up stronger border controls to stop the arrival of refugees to European border countries. The EU committed to re-settle a fixed number of refugees that it would select.

[2] UNHCR Turkey: Syrian Refugee Camps and Provincial Breakdown of Syrian Refugees Registered in South East Turkey – 5 Sept. 2019 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/71510.pdf
[3] Ahmet Içduygu & Maissam Nimer (2020) The politics of return: exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, Third World Quarterly, 41:3, 415-433, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503.

Refugee Education in Turkey

Among the 3.6 million Syrian refugees who arrived to Turkey following the start of the war in Syria in 2011, more than 1 million are between the 5 and 18 years old and are therefore of school age as in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Distribution by Age and Gender of Registered Syrian Refugees

Year	Year	Year	Year
Total	**1.972.815**	**1.694.866**	**3.667.681**
0-4	259.417	242.169	501.586
5-9	289.091	271.515	560.606
10-14	217.280	204.115	421.395
15-18	137.218	117.519	254.737
19-24	281.814	212.316	494.130
25-29	219.723	159.462	379.185
30-34	165.691	120.253	285.944
35-39	124.324	97.363	221.687
40-44	84.956	74.069	159.025
45-49	57.585	56.297	113.882
50-54	45.682	44.558	90.240
55-59	34.759	34.810	69.569
60-64	22.914	23.660	46.574
65-69	14.925	15.757	30.682
70-74	8.820	9.715	18.535
75-79	4.337	5.376	9.713
80-84	2.376	3.171	5.547
85-89	1.130	1.670	2.800
90+	773	1.071	1.844

Source: *Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), 2021. Accessible from: https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27 [last accessed April 18, 2021].*

From Temporary Education Centers to Public Schools

To accommodate for their educational needs, Temporary Education Centers (TECs) started opening across the country. These centers charged varying tuition fees, received funding from a wide range of institutions and were diverse in terms of quality of instruction. Their tuition ranged from 440 TL ($158 USD in 2014) to 650 TL ($234 in 2014) per year, and required additional bus fees for transportation (ranging from 60 TL ($22 in 2014) per month to 120 TL ($43 per month in 2014). They were staffed mostly with Syrian teachers who taught according to the Syrian curriculum, modified to exclude partisan references to the Syrian government. The language of instruction in these centers is Arabic. It was the first time in history since the creation of the republic of Turkey that education was provided on Turkish territory according to a separate curriculum independently from the Ministry of

National Education (MoNE). As the stay of the Syrians was perceived to be temporary, this solution was perceived to be for a short-term only. Stakeholders in the government felt progressively uncomfortable with the fact that it had become uncontrollable. As the situation became protracted, the Ministry of Education took over control progressively with the goal of closing them eventually for Syrian children to join the public schools instead. Indeed, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) which was drafted in 2013 formalized the Syrian refugees' legal status, also gave them educational rights with access to primary and secondary education.

A circular issued in September 2014 provided a legal framework for the supervision and monitoring of the TECs by the Ministry of National Education (Aras & Yasun, 2016). The Ministry of National Education started to regain control over the education landscape. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has certified TECs to function both in and outside of refugee camps (Jalbout, 2015). Unregistered TECs (which did not meet requirements) were progressively closed, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were required to obtain a 'sponsor' status in order to continue to provide education services. As efforts to close these TECs with the goal of integrating the students into the school system continued, the Turkish Ministry of Education introduced more Turkish classes into their curriculum and worked in collaboration with UNESCO to train teachers in these centers (UNHCR, 2017), during the transition period.

The initial low enrolment rates in public schools were attributed to the lack of knowledge of Turkish, with the exceptions of ethnically Turkmen individuals from Syria (Biehl et al., 2016; Gee & Bernstein, 2015). The Syrian students in public schools also felt that they lacked support, in addition some parents feared that their children may lose their identity and their language (Biehl et al., 2016) and thus preferred to send their children to the TECs instead. Many Syrian children also faced the problem of inability to prove their levels of education or the lack of recognition of their school diplomas (Ozpinar, Cilingir, & Dusundere, 2016; Watenpaugh, Fricke, & King, 2014).

Increasing School Enrollment

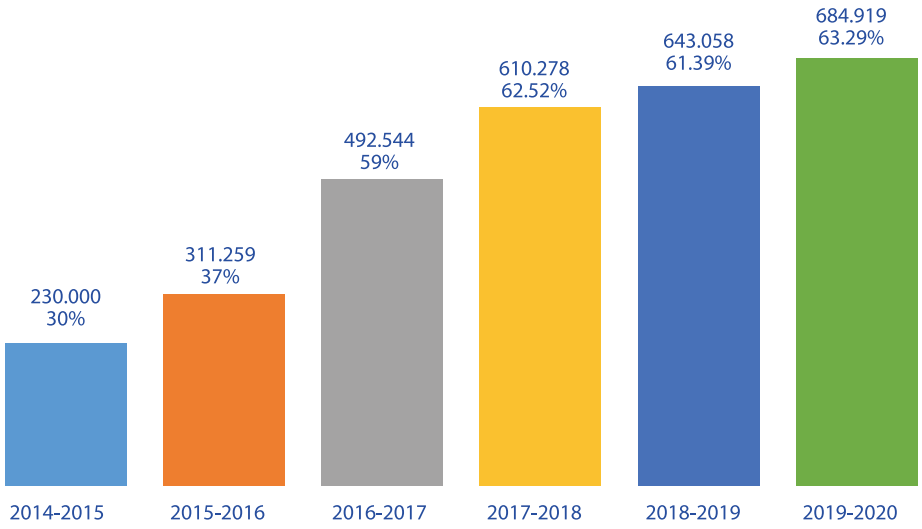
Extensive efforts were invested to integrate a large number into the public schools by the Ministry of National Education with support from EU funds. Namely, projects were implemented to increase the enrolment of Syrian refugees in schools, through a variety of programs, such as Promoting Integration of Syrian Children to the Turkish Education System (PICTES) and Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE).

The state launched a 300 million euros initiative with the European Union (European Union, 2017) entitled 'Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System' – PICTES which aimed to ensure that Syrian children have access to education with Turkish children. This program included training and employing 5,600 Turkish Language teachers to cater for 390,000 children in terms of language training and 30,000 students who are out of school in terms of catch-up. It also included guidance and counseling services for children who experienced trauma, support to overcome cultural and social barriers.

Further, the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program was launched. This is a national social assistance program implemented by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services since 2003. It was extended to Syrian and other refugee families with the support of the EU in mid-2017. The program aims to encourage enrolment and improve school attendance of children by providing a limited amount of financial support to the families (from 35 to 60 Turkish Lira per month). All of these efforts had a significant impact on increasing the enrolment of Syrian children in schools.

Besides the projects initiated by MoNE, other bodies, including governmental agencies, national and international NGOs, and local municipalities, have supported the education of Syrian child refugees in different ways (Coşkun et al., 2017; Emin, 2016; Taştan & Çelik, 2017). As a result, there was a steady increase in the number of students enrolled from 2014 to 2020 (as per Figure 4). The UNHCR (2018a) has calculated that the number of Syrian refugee students in formal education in Turkey has passed 600,000, which is more than 60% of all school-aged refugee children.

Figure 4: Number of Syrian Students who have Access to Education in Turkey



Source: *Ministry of National Education. January 2020. Accessible from: https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_01/27110237_OCAK_2020internet_BulteniSunu.pdf [Last accessed April 25, 2021]*

If we break down these figures per type of school (Figure 5) we can clearly observe a trend, whereby the number of students in Public Schools increase while that in Temporary Education Centers decreases as time passes, and as more of these centers are being closed. All were closed by 2019-2020.

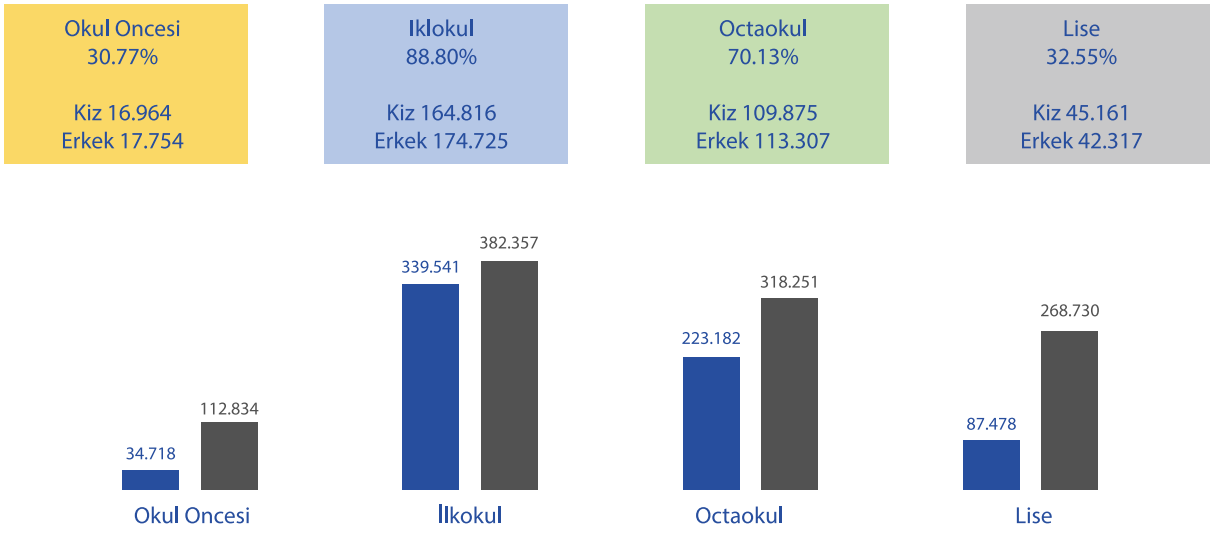
Figure 5: School Enrollment Numbers and Rates of Syrian Refugees per School Type

Year	Public School	TEC	Number of Students
2014-2015	40.000	190.000	230.000
2015-2016	62.357	248.902	311.259
2016-2017	201.505	291.039	492.544
2017-2018	350.000	250.000	610.278
2018-2019	-	-	643.058
2019-2020	-	-	684.919

Source: *TC Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Hayat Boyu Ogrenme Genel Mudurlugu - Goc ve Acil Durum Egitim Daire Baskanligi - Ekim 2019 Accessible from: https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2019_11/06141131_11Ekim2019internetBulteni.pdf and Multeciler Dernegi https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/ [last accessed on 20 April 2021].*

Looking at the distribution per education level, it appears that enrolment rates decrease from 88.80% in Primary School, to 70.13% in Elementary school to 32.55% in High School, as per Figure 6.

Figure 6: Enrolment Rates based on Education Levels



Source: *Ministry of National Education. January 2020.*
Accessible from: https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_01/27110237_OCAK_2020internet_BulteniSunu.pdf [Last accessed April 25, 2021]

In order to put these into perspective these enrolment rates, we compare them to those among their Turkish counterparts. The latter appear significantly higher especially in Elementary and Secondary school levels.

Figure 7: Net Enrolment Rates based on Education Levels

Year	Primary School	Elementary School	Secondary School
2017-2018	91.5	94.5	83.6
2018-2019	91.9	93.3	84.5
2019-2020	93.6	95.9	85

Source: *Ministry of National Education. National Education Statistics. 2019/'20.*
Accessible from: http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_09/04144812_meb_istatistikleri_orgun_egitim_2019_2020.pdf [Last accessed April 25, 2021]

There was an effort by the state to regain control and centralize the education of Syrians along with that of the rest of the population. The education system remains the most active state apparatus in terms of reproduction of national identities (Gok, 2002), and integrating Syrians into that system is a guaranteed way to serve the functionalist purpose to create a homogenous society. However, public schools, as they are, serve an "imagined" homogenous community and, therefore, can potentially result in pushing Syrian children out of school (Celik and Icduygu, 2018).

The Syrians were officially integrated into the regular classrooms. A growing body of literature suggests that teachers lack resources to communicate and teach Syrian children due to the language barriers in the absence of proper in-service-training programmes and activities (Cetin and Icduygu, 2018). More specifically, administrators pointed out the fact that several students have joined despite the fact that they do not know Turkish which hinders their ability to follow studies in their classes. This already indicates that their inclusion into the regular programs was problematic and that the school is not ready to receive them.

Economic barrier as focus for policy and programs

The most significant barrier that continues to exert an impact is the economic barrier. Indeed, school enrolment highly depends on the economic dimension. The number of work permits issued continues to be very low. A total of 132,497 work permits have been issued to Syrian nationals between 2016 and 2019[4]. This can be attributed to the unwillingness of the employers to apply for work permits, preferring to hire refugees informally and pay them less. In addition, there are numerous restrictions that fall under this legislation such as a limit on the number of non-Turkish employees. Other limitations include ones that prohibit non-Turkish citizens from practicing certain professions such as positions in healthcare and legal services[5]. This results in long working hours and payment below minimum wage, among main breadwinners of the families, more commonly men. Reports have documented child labour and early marriages that result from the financial deprivation among refugee families[6] which in turn is likely to strongly impact on school drop-outs.

There has been significant social assistance offered to refugees. Indeed, a program called the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) was the largest portion of this financial aid received from the EU. Launched in December 2016, it offered "a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey"[7]. There were a wide variety of additional projects in terms of other aspects of the integration of refugees such as vocational training, language education, among many others to facilitate access to the labour market and therefore increase enrolment and reduce drop-out rates.

Opportunities for Native Language Education

Furthermore, as a result of reforms, Arabic language instruction and entry-level Islamic courses had been introduced to the general public education curriculum as elective courses starting from primary level onward. There are thus existing structural frameworks for teaching Arabic in schools, which was a good opportunity for Syrian children, as they came into such a context. The arrival of Syrians coincides with a time when the status of Arabic language has changed for the better for two reasons. First, during their arrival (in 2011) the accession process of Turkey into the EU led to the introduction of many reforms towards increased democratization, benefiting minority groups. Some relevant changes are a state-run TV channel (TRT Arabi), Arabic elective language classes in public middle schools, and Arabic language and literature departments in several public universities. While these were aimed at the already existing Arabic speaking minority population in Turkey, Arabic-speaking Syrians could also benefit

from these. Furthermore, Arabic language services are funded, advised, and organized by the EU funds or funds from international bodies. Some of the international funding (PICTES) was allocated for teaching Syrians their native language. This offer has also emerged among NGOs who offer Arabic classes with projects funded mostly from international organizations and the EU. This has represented factors that encourage students enrolment.

[4]*Bastien Revel. (2020) Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey. The Atlantic Council in Turkey.*

[5]*Meltem Ineli-Ciger, PhD, LLM, Protecting Syrians in Turkey: A Legal Analysis, International Journal of Refugee Law, Volume 29, Issue 4, December 2017, Pages 555–579.*

[6]*Ayşen Üstübici and H. Berra İnce (2020). Syrian Refugees in Turkey: What Existing Data Implies for Gender and Displacement. Kockam. Accessible from: https://kockam.ku.edu.tr/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-what-existing-data-implies-for-gender-and-displacement-aysen-ustubici-h-berra-ince/*

[7]*European Commission. 25/06/2020. The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN): Offering a lifeline to vulnerable refugees in Turkey. Accessible from: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/essn_en#:~:text=Coming%20up-,The%20Emergency%20Social%20Safety%20Net%20(ESSN)%3A%20Offering%20a,to%20vulnerable%20refugees%20in%20Turkey&text=Refugee%20families%20currently%20receive%20120,%2C%20bills%2C%20food%20and%20medicine. [Last accessed: 6 December 2020]*

Legality & Public Opinion

Precarious Legal Status and Hopes of Citizenship

As of 2018, Istanbul, along with 11 other provinces on the Syrian border in which numbers of refugees are high, stopped registering Syrians. This meant that an important number of Syrian families either register in another province than the one in which they reside, or live in a province without registration. This hinders the access of Syrian children to school as they need to be registered in order to be entitled to services.

An important turning point regarding the legal status of Syrian refugees has come with recent amendments to the Turkish citizenship law in 2003 by creating a naturalization option for foreign nationals who meet certain criteria. Namely, this includes naturalization for adults in possession of immoveable property in Turkey, making investments in Turkey and transferring their workplace to Turkey (Article 15 (a)(b)(c)). In December 2016, another amendment to the Turkish citizenship law was introduced (Decision number: 2016/9601), according to investment and capital criteria, in addition to those who stay in the country legally and have already contributed and/or have the potential to contribute to the Turkish society. Applications are thus evaluated and analyzed based on the following criteria: 1) Entering Turkey legally; 2) Staying under temporary protection and/or with a valid residence permit; 3) Having higher education—an undergraduate degree or above; 4) Having a profession; and 5) Not being involved in any criminal activity. The citizenship option is used both as a reward for skilled migrants with economic and cultural capital and as a tool to integrate[8]. In the latest statement, the Ministry of Interior declared that 110 000 Syrians acquired Turkish citizenship in February 2020[9]. Citizenship obtention is a factor that favors students' investment in school education, as it allows refugee children and their families to envision a long term life in Turkey. Similarly, obtaining education in the Turkish system renders their skills more valuable and thus renders them more likely to obtain citizenship. This also acts as a factor that promotes education achievements.

Economic Crisis, Social Tensions and Forced Returns in 2019

Initial state-directed hospitality was progressively diluted and replaced by the securitization of borders and a discursive shift towards a discourse of return to Syria. The changing political discourse is closely linked to growing discontent within host communities and rising xenophobic tendencies (Erdogan, 2017; ICG, 2018). Over time, the state continuously developed strategies to integrate refugees, giving them access to education, work permits, health services and even citizenship (for skilled migrants). Yet, this was never accompanied by a strong integration discourse (Utku et al., 2017), which could have had the potential to ease societal tensions.

[8]*Koser Akcapar, S. and Simsek, D., (2018). The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship. Social Inclusion, 6(1), 176-187. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i1.1323*

[9]*The Asylum Information Database (AIDA). Naturalisation Turkey. Accessible from: https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/naturalisation-0 [Last accessed: 6 December 2020]*

In the meantime, Turkey has entered a 'steep' recession as its economy contracted by as much as 4% in the fourth quarter of 2018, before stagnating in 2019. Unemployment rates increased significantly between 2018 and 2019 to a culmination point. The public perceived Syrians as competing for the same resources, which was further exacerbated as an economic crisis hit Turkish markets and turned refugees into scapegoats during the summer of 2019.

According to an opinion survey published in July 2019 by Kadir Has University, there is a significant increase in the rejection of Syrian presence in Turkey: 67.7% of the Turkish population is unhappy with the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey, 10 points more than in 2016 (57.7%), and while 46.4% refused to receive more refugees on Turkish territory in 2017, this figure went up to 57.6% in 2019[10].

This situation reflected on the municipal elections in 2019, as the dominant part of the president Erdogan (AKP or Justice Developement Party - JDP) was defeated in the municipal elections, for the first time, in its stronghold, Istanbul. As a result, Syrians were used as scapegoats, and the government put in place new measures against the Syrian population. The Ministry of Interior announced that Syrians not residing in the provinces in which they were registered would be sent back to these provinces. Later on, in August, the Syrian population was called to regularize its situation before October 2019 at the risk of getting expulsed. Given that Istanbul had stopped registering Syrian since 2018, this announcement was urging Syrians who are registered elsewhere or who are not registered to leave the city. It was followed by intense ID control on the streets, putting Syrians at risk of detention and risk of expulsion. It was reported that 16,423 persons were held in detention centers as a result[11]. This resulted in a very tense situation, whereby Syrians avoided to leave their homes for weeks at end, not to run the risk of being detained or deported, especially among the rumours of forced returns. This affected the general climate and tensions in other places in which Turkish and Syrian populations interact. There were several incidents whereby crowds attacked Syrian shops and businesses, throwing stones and breaking windows among others in working-class district Kucukcekmece, Istanbul[12]. Similarly, there were tensions in education institutions. Notably, there was a case of suicide by Wael al-Saud who was ostracised and bullied by his peers[13]. His case is not an isolated incident, but rather a common trend, as reported by ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) MP Mustafa Yeneroglu who said that refugee children are being excluded in schools, in less extreme cases than drop-outs[14].

[10]«Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy, #TDP2019 », July 2019, Center of Turkish Studies, Kadir Has University, Istanbul. Accessible from: https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TDP-2019_BASINENG_FINAL.PDF [Last accessed May 4, 2021]

[11]Evrensel. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/394637/istanbul-valisi-2019da-37-bin-multeci-sinir-disi-edildi?a=37cf0

[12]France 24 (2019) https://www.france24.com/en/20190712-attacks-against-syrians-turkey-raise-fears-escalation

[13]BBC https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-49959947

[14]BBC https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-49959947

Segregative Practices

Enrolment in Religious Imam Hatip Schools (2017 onwards)

Upon the arrival of Syrians, there was already a proliferation of Imam Hatip schools (where students were to be trained as preachers and ministers or prepared for higher education) in Turkey, as the religious conscience and the Turco-Muslim faith started to gain saliance. The new conservative elites started to restructure the education system. The Youth and Education Service Foundation in Turkey (TÜRGEV) which initiated the expansion of imam-hatip school and the courses dedicated to religion increased significantly as of 2002. The number of these schools increased by 73% between 2010 and 2014 (Ackerman and Calisir 2015). AKP has been fiercely criticized by the secular opposition for systematically turning public schools into Imam Hatip schools in which religious courses are integrated with general/secular education. These schools teach Islamic history, Islamic law, Arabic and Quran along with general courses like Mathematics.

According to some Turkish media reports, under a scheme introduced by the government in 2014, about 40,000 Turkish pupils were forcibly enrolled in religious Imam Hatip schools (Letsch, 2015) in districts where religious schooling was the only alternative for parents unable to pay for private schooling. They also urged Syrians to enrol in these schools. According to the report by Karaca (2017), an interview with a national NGO in Sanliurfa, revealed that students especially in ninth grades are only allowed to register in vocational and imam hatip schools. This created a feeling of being stuck and lacking alternatives among Syrian students. As a result, even students who completed their 8 years of education and successfully face a difficult situation are hindered from pursuing their studies in regular high schools. Some Syrians, on the other hand, choose these schools believing that they will benefit from the Arabic language instruction and religion classes. Furthermore, in these schools, their Arabic language skills would give them an advantage over their peers in these two subjects. There are no statistics as to what percentage of Syrians are in Imam Hatip schools compared to the general population, however, this condition will likely have future implications.

All in all, while studying at an Imam Hatip vocational school can be perceived as advantageous for students, as knowing Arabic gives them an advantage over their peers in several subjects; the vocational school route is generally considered less valuable and offers fewers routes for success in higher education than the general route. Furthermore, as Syrians continue to be funnelled into this system, the Imam Hatip schools become spaces of segregation of Syrians away from the regular Turkish public schools.

New System of Integration Classes (2019)

As of September 2019 onwards, a new model was introduced, a parallel model, which legitimized and officialized the unofficial separation. Some Syrians were separated into what were called “Cohesion Classrooms” [Uyum Sınıfları]’ in public schools. This practice is also adopted in Germany under the name of “International Classes” and are widely criticized[15] for being a segregative practice with indefinite criteria to keep international (understood migrant) students away from regular classes and for causing delays in the study of other subjects’ content.

In a statement on 04.11.2019, the minister Ziya Selçuk justified this decision as follows:

“Foreign students are experiencing difficulties in adapting to the education systems due to their Turkish language barriers. The opening of cohesion classes was seen as a suitable solution to improve these students’ adaptation to the Turkish education system”.

Syrian students were required to do a written and oral exam and those who scored lower than 66% on average were placed in these cohesion classes. According to one of the teachers, if those later become successful, they are transferred to normal classes. Here, the definition of “successful” is maintained as very vague and the duration of their stay in these classes is not specified. The families are also kept in the dark about these decisions. We interviewed a mother whose children had just been moved to such a classroom. After having struggled to decide on which level to put them, they were taken out of the regular classrooms the following year to be in a separate classroom, in which they would only study Turkish language. All she knows is that they had been separated from the regular class to take a Turkish course and that her children did not pass it from the first semester and had to repeat the course one more time. But there is a lack of clarity on what the curriculum is and the mother seemed worried about her children’s progress. As Syrian students are separated from others, their classes focus on the language aspect of their education and delays them from studying general education.

[15]*Karakayali, Juliane. 2020. Spot the difference: Differenzwissen im Kontext von Segregation in Vorbereitungsklassen für neuzugewanderte Schüler*innen. In: Lingen-Ali, U., Mecheril, P. (Hg): Geschlechterdiskurse in der Migrationsgesellschaft. transcript, S. 119-141.*

Integration policies undermined by the pandemic crisis (2020-21)

While the adopted measures had led to a strong stabilization in terms of politics of integration for refugees, the COVID-19 pandemic shook its foundations. The living conditions and handling of refugees in the context of the pandemic revealed limited access to secure employment, education and health services.

The Ministry of National Education's response to COVID-19 has consisted of closing schools of all levels starting March 16. An online distance learning program known as Eğitim Bilişim Ağı (or EBA) website was launched shortly after, during the week of March 23, for all students across the country. These target an estimated 16,529,169 students in regular education and 1,579,691 students in open education according to the 2018-19 data[16]. Further, TRT TV channel has run pre-recorded videos by public school teachers for students of all levels. In addition, a hotline was created to provide support to distance learning, and all operators provided free access to the EBA website. In the second week of school closures due to COVID-19, specific Turkish language programs were added to EBA TV for Syrians who attend "cohesion classes" (uyum sınıfları). However, there have not been any initiatives to support families or children during this period, neither in terms of financial support nor technological support. After a long period of uncertainty about the opening of schools and grades, the government's latest decision was not to re-open schools at all for the remaining part of the 2019/20 academic year, nor the following year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on schooling of refugee children and put their families at a larger disadvantage, exacerbating preexisting inequalities in Turkey. Indeed, the pandemic increased the economic precarity of refugee families. Around 89% were unemployed in May 2020[17]. The only assistance available for refugee families was that from the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay), whereby around 1.7 million Syrians receive around 1000 Turkish liras per family per month. This amount is not sufficient for meeting their daily needs, especially in a context of increased inflation[18] and they did not receive any additional support to account for the effects of the pandemic. In addition to financial precarity, refugees were at high risk of infection of Covid, especially for those who were able to go back to work after the first lockdown. In addition, Several studies account for the living conditions which put them at risk, such as overpopulation, limited ventilation and basement apartments[19].

[16]Ministry of National Education in Turkey: http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2019_09/30102730_meb_istatistikleri_orgun_egitim_2018_2019.pdf

[17]"Sectoral Analysis of the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Refugees Living in Turkey," Ankara: SGDD – ASAM, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76640.

[18]Özkul Derya. (2020). Covid-19 Salgini Süreci Ve Sonrasi Için Düzensiz Göçmen, Siğinmaci Ve Mültecilere Yönelik Politika Önerileri. Istanpol Politika Raporu

[19]Balciogly Z., Erdogan M. Open Democracy, 1 May 2020: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/what-does-it-mean-be-urban-refugee-turkey-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR0eztSK77ENwM3ZZHx6fH-oPJptI6BGISLTl6HVydGAR6NzzSwyRYTXrzE

This situation was further exacerbated with accusations pointing at the responsibility of refugees in the propagation of the virus[20]. The financial precarity and health risks were considered family priorities and overshadowed the education of children. This is not to mention the extremely precarious conditions with regards to access to education. More directly, according to several reports, a large proportion of children enrolled in school cannot access online education[21]. This is particularly the case for refugee students.

The lack of access to technological devices and an internet connection emerges as the main priority in helping refugee children access online education. While this issue affects a significant proportion of students, who do not have internet access or do not possess a TV at home[22], a phone, a tablet or a computer[23] leading to the inability of teachers to reach students digitally, this situation particularly affects refugee children as compared to the general public in both contexts. According to a study by ASAM, among 1,162 refugees, in May 2020, around a half of interviewed refugees (48%) could not access online learning due to a lack of technical means In Turkey, about half of refugee children (48%) cannot access distance learning[24] due to not having access to technical means such as a television or computer, but also the language barrier and the surpopulated housing[25].

Language barriers emerge as a difficulty for refugee students in Turkey. The pre-recordings (on the EBA system) are difficult to understand without interacting with teachers. Further, information about schooling is not made available in other languages, which leads to confusion about school openings and about the system in general. The contact of students with their teachers is often limited among children. The contact varies from one teacher to another and is mostly through communication applications.[26]

Lack of communication between parents and teachers is prevalent. When schools were open, there were translators for refugee children and their families. In this situation, parents who do not know the language struggle to fill the gap for their children's education.[27] This directly impacts their follow-up process. Children are given a lot of homework, and parents who are unable to help experience psychological stress and anxiety.[28] NGOs or community centers that usually play an important role in terms of access to education for the most underprivileged groups were not able to pursue their activities as their centers had to close for most of the duration of the pandemic. [29]

Special schools and rehabilitation centers for special needs students closed during the pandemic. Online courses are not appropriated for students with special needs.[30]These types of programs also exclude students who have visual impairment, as there is no voiceover for graphs and shapes, and hearing impairment, because there are no subtitles or sign language. These precarious situations risk to outlast the pandemic crisis, as no protection policy was developed towards refugees and their children.

[20]*Sozcu. Suriyelilerin getirdigi salgin ! 26 Mart 2017.* https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/yazarlar/pinar-turan/suriyelilerin-getirdigi-salgin-1756271/
[21]*Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), "Impact of Covid-19 on Refugee Populations Benefitting From The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Programme. Assessment report Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) – 2020,"* https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/impact-covid-19-refugee-populations-benefitting-emergency-social-safety-net-essp*; Small Projects Istanbul, "Covid-19 sürecinde İstanbul'un Farklı Yerleşimlerinde Çocukların Haklarına Erişimi,"* https://www.smallprojectsistanbul.org/.
[22]*"Bakan Selçuk: Öğrencilerin yüzde 20'sinin internete erişimi yok," Gazete Duvar, March 29, 2020,* https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2020/03/29/bakan-selcuk-ogrencilerin-yuzde-20sinin-internete-erisimi-yok/.
[23]*Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (ERG), "Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri – III | Uzaktan eğitimin ilk iki haftası nasıl geçti?" April 5, 2020,* https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/.
[24]*Survey of 1,162 of its beneficiaries on the phone by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD - ASAM) May 2020. See, "Sectoral Analysis of the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Refugees Living in Turkey," Ankara: SGDD – ASAM,* https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/76639.
[25]*"Sectoral Analysis of the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Refugees Living in Turkey," Ankara: SGDD – ASAM,* https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76640.

[26]*Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (ERG), "Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri."*
[27]*Multeci Mediyasi, "EBA TV'de mülteci çocukların ana dilini bilen öğretmenler görevlendirilmeliydi," 2020,* https://multecimedyasi.org/2020/05/25/pandemi-surecinde-multecilerin-ana-dilini-bilen-ogretmenler-gorevlendirilmeliydi/.
[28]*Small Projects Istanbul, "Covid-19 sürecinde İstanbul'un Farklı Yerleşimlerinde Çocukların Haklarına Erişimi," 2020,* https://www.smallprojectsistanbul.org/.
[29]*Kollender, Ellen et Nimer, Maissam "Long-Term Exclusionary Effects Of Covid-19 For Refugee Children In The German And Turkish Education Systems: A Comparative Perspective (2020) IPC Policy Brief.*
[30]*Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (ERG), "Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri."*

Challenges and Recommendations

- As the situation shifted from a humanitarian to a long-term permanent one, the policies with regards to the education of refugee children started to be planned centrally.

- The temporary education centers were progressively closed and refugees were slowly registered into public schools and efforts were exerted to increase school enrollment rates with initiatives in coordination between state and international organizations.

- Yet the economic factor continues to dominate as a barrier to entry to school despite efforts in that direction due to the underlying structural issue of informal employment.

- There are some opportunities for refugees to receive education in their native language as their arrival coincides with a time during which the status of the Arabic language has changed for the better. This has influenced school experiences of children.

- The precarity in terms of legal status of refugees who in many cases cannot register in the city in which they reside is an essential barrier to access to education.

- In contrast, chances of obtaining citizenship improve the drive towards seeking education, as families envisage a long-term future in Turkey. Vice versa, obtaining a higher education diploma improves their chances of becoming citizens.

- As time passed, initial state-directed hospitality was progressively diluted and replaced by the securitization of borders and a discursive shift towards a discourse of return to Syria along with increased xenophobia tendencies within the host communities. This made the lives of Syrians in Turkey difficult. They became at risk of deportation and violent incidents. This impacted on children's education experiences.

- As refugees joined the education system, they were progressively funneled towards the Imam Hatip schools (vocational schools where students are trained as preachers). This gave refugees advantages in Arabic, but it is generally a less valuable route towards higher education.

- After 2019, a parallel model of 'integration classes' was introduced, whereby Syrians are separated from the others. Yet this process lacks in clarity regarding the curriculum of these classes and the process of going back to the general education branch.

- As the pandemic crisis hits in 2020, the efforts in terms of education of refugees by the state and organizations found itself reversed to a large extent. Refugees, in particular, faced significant difficulties in accessing education. They faced, to a larger extent, economic precarity, lack of access to technological equipment, exacerbated by language barriers, difficulties in receiving support from parents, limited parent-teacher relations, closure of community centers, and difficult living conditions.

As soon as the pandemic crisis subsides, the main priority of the state and funders should be to address the disadvantage of Syrian refugees compared to their counterparts, due to lack of access to online education for one and a half year, which will lead to significant drop-outs when school starts again.

In addition, there is a need for a more inclusive long-term plan for refugees in integration classes to eventually rejoin the regular curriculum through a clear evaluation mechanism and well-communicated goals to students and families to reach.

Further efforts need to be invested to address underlying factors, such as legal status (temporary protection in all cities, and eventual citizenship), and promote formal employment among refugee families, to ensure the required basis for students to be registered in schools and improve enrolment rates.

An inclusive state discourse, rather than one that focuses on return, would help in reducing local tensions and improve well-being of children in schools.

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