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ACCESS TO EDUCATION REPORT

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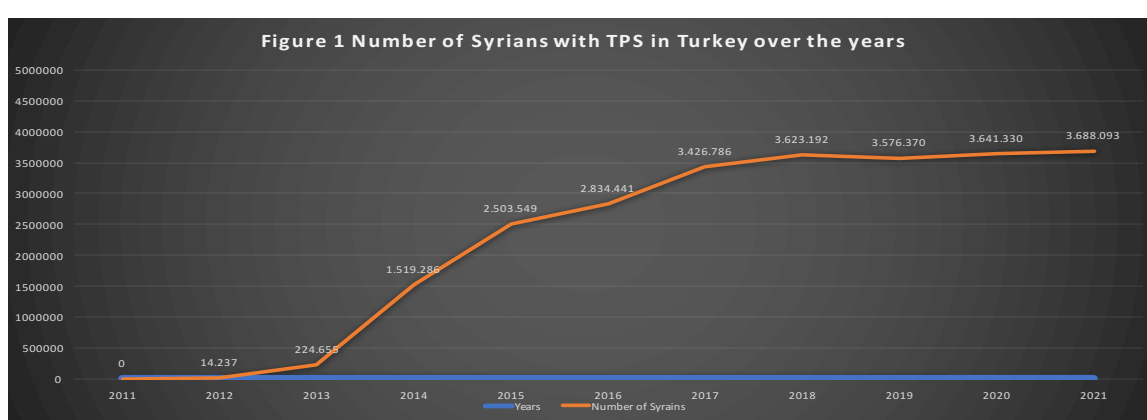
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1. Introduction

Turkey has a long history of receiving significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. Between 1920 and the mid-1990s, it received more than 1.5 million refugees from the Balkans (Kirişci, 2014) and over half a million people from Iraq between 1988 and 1991 (Kirişci, 2003). The country has also received asylum seekers from elsewhere in the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa (İçduygu, 2007), ranging between 3,000 and 13,000 applications for international protection per year between 2001 and 2010, mainly originating from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq (İçduygu, 2007).

Figure 1: Number of Syrians with TPS in Turkey Over the Years



Source: (DGMM, 2021a)

Today, Turkey hosts more refugees than any other country in the world, a position it has held since 2014 (UNHCR, 2020). By October 2021, it had 5,013,631 total foreign nationals, including 3,580,296 Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection and 541,042 refugees under International Protection from various countries of origin such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and others (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021). In stark contrast, in 2019 only 10,558 refugees were resettled out of Turkey to countries in Europe and other countries like the USA, of which 78% were Syrian refugees (AIDA, 2020). While the world's major economies have increasingly turned away from their responsibilities to host refugees, Turkey continues to provide an enormous global good in hosting more than four million refugees.

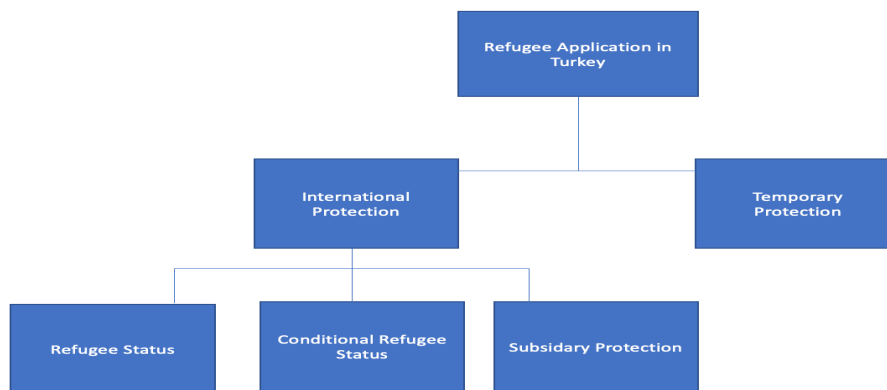
1. Asylum and Refugee Framework in Turkey

While Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, it continues to adhere to

the Convention's initial geographical limitation that only applies the Convention to refugees from Europe. Building on the foundation of an asylum system that was introduced in 1990 (Kirişci- Aydın, 2013), Turkey adapted its institutional, legal and policy frameworks quickly, allowing it to better respond to the needs of Syrian refugees.

The status of refugees and Turkey's obligations towards them are regulated under the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) (DGMM, 2013). The LFIP provides four main types of international protection: Refugee status, Conditional Refugee status, Subsidiary Protection, and Temporary Protection.

Figure 2: Statuses Concerning Refugee Application in Turkey



Refugee status refers to a person who as a result of events occurring in his/her country in Europe, and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her citizenship and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.

Conditional refugee status is granted upon the completion of the refugee status determination process to a person who as a result of events occurring outside European countries, and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. Conditional refugees are allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled to a third country.

Subsidiary protection can be given to a foreigner or a stateless person, who neither could be qualified as a refugee nor as a conditional refugee. This person shall nevertheless be granted subsidiary protection as their status determination because if returned to the country of origin or country of [former] habitual residence, he/she would: a) be sentenced to death or face the death penalty; b) face torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; c) face serious threat to himself or herself by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or nationwide armed conflict; and therefore is unable, or for the reason of such threat, is unwilling to avail himself/herself to the protection of his/her country of origin or country of [former] habitual residence.

Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a situation of mass displacement, seeking immediate and temporary protection. International Protection (IP) covers refugee, conditional refugee, and subsidiary protection statuses. Syrians, Palestinians, and other stateless people originating from Syria have Temporary Protection Status (TPS), which grants them with the right to legally remain in Turkey and access some fundamental rights and services. While ‘temporary’ indicates the expectation that they will eventually return to Syria, the status ensures access to health, education, and the right to work while in Turkey.

The rapid arrival of large numbers of refugees since 2011, now corresponding to 4.42% of the Turkish population, has caused difficulties in managing their inclusion in existing public services. This is especially so in the provision of education, given the rapidly increasing size of the refugee population of school-age. In the 2021-2022 period, there are 1.124.353 school-age (5-17 years old) Syrian children with TPS and 141.533 refugee children under IP status (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021).

2. Turkey’s national education system

Turkey has twelve years of compulsory education made up of four years of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education respectively (MEB 2020). The Ministry of Education (MoNE) stipulates with circular no 2014/21 on Educational and Training Services for Foreigners that all children in Turkey, including foreigners, have the right to access basic education in public schools free of charge (UNHCR 2015). If non-European and non-Syrian asylum-seekers apply for refugee status or conditional refugee status are accepted under IP, their children can enroll in primary and secondary public schools with their IP IDs in the city in which

they have been placed by law (DGMM 2021b)¹. Students with TPS can enroll in preschool², primary, and secondary public schools in the cities in which they are registered³.

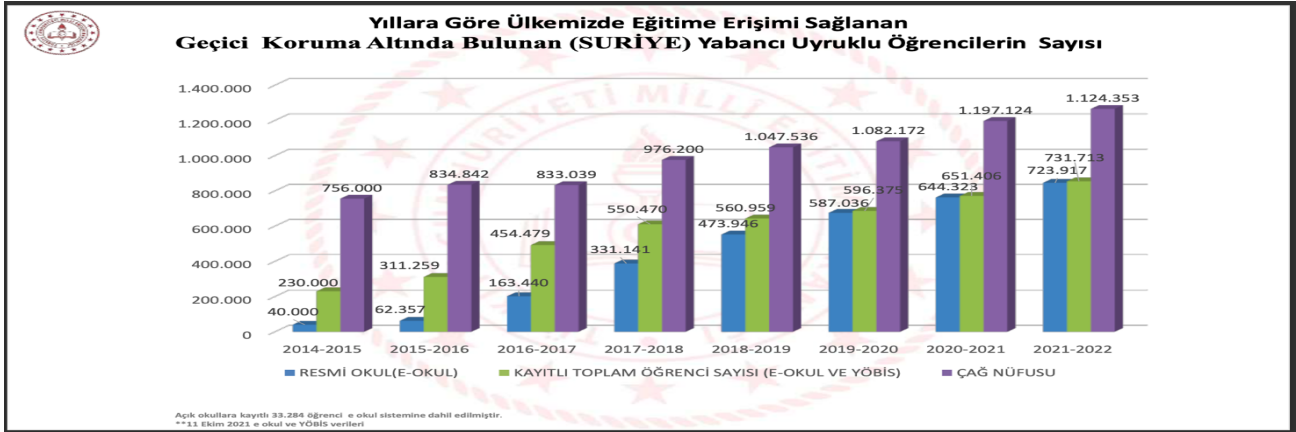
In the early years of the arrival of Syrian refugees, Turkey did not invest primarily in the integration of Syrian children into the existing education system in Turkey. Instead, it focused on establishing a parallel system in Temporary Education Centers (TECs) that used to work in accordance with the Syrian educational curriculum, modified and approved by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), with education conducted in Arabic (Stock et al., 2016). Graduates from these schools took the Open High School Exam to validate their certificates (Mülteci Hakları Merkezi, 2017). In 2016, MoNE established the Migration and Emergency Education Department under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, and adopted a progressive roadmap for the integration of Syrian refugee children into the Turkish education system. It then gradually channeled them from TECs to regular public schools to provide a uniform education for all children (Erdoğan 2019). This policy by MoNE for integrating Syrian students into public schools was important, as it signaled its shift from considering the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey as temporary to permanent. MoNE first piloted the policy of enrolling all preschool and first grade primary students to public schools in some provinces, and then proceeded to fully implement this policy in all provinces in 2016. It then stipulated that all students of preschool, primary, and secondary levels of education are required to be enrolled in public schools starting in the 2016/17 academic year (MoNE – UNICEF, 2019). With this policy, TECs both on and off camps have been gradually abolished, and the transfer of Syrian children to public schools is nearly complete (DGMM, 2021a).

3. Problems

3.1. Enrolment and attendance

With the policy of gradually closing the TECs and transferring its students into the public education system, the enrollment rate for Syrian students with TPS in public schools increased from 30% to 64,7% between 2014/15 and 2021-2022 (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: Number of Syrians with TPS in Education 2014-2015/2021-2022




Source: (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021)

By the 2021-22 academic year, 723.917 Syrian students have been registered in the E-school system, an information system developed by the Ministry of Education in 2007 to track the registration of all students in private and public schools in primary and secondary education levels. In contrast, only 7.796 students are in the Foreign Students Information Operation System (YÖBİS). YÖBİS covers students who do not yet have a foreigner identification number or are still in the process of receiving it. As the students receive ID numbers, they are transferred into the E-school system (Nur Emin, 2016). The decreasing number of students in the YÖBİS and the increasing number of students in the E-school is critical for showing the inclusion of students in the general education system with registration numbers.

While the rising enrollment rate is noteworthy with the transition to public schools over the years, 392.640 students, corresponding to 35,3% of school-age Syrians, remain out of education in the 2021-2022 academic year. Relatedly, there are significant variations concerning enrollment of Syrian children with TPS by educational levels. Figure 4 below compares the numbers and rates of Syrian children enrolled in schools with the total known population of school-age Syrian refugee children in Turkey, disaggregated by their grade level.

Figure 4: Number and Rate of Students with TPS by Grade Level in 2021-2022

 Geçici Koruma Altında Bulunan (SURIYE) Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrenci Dağılımı							
SINIF	E Okul Kayıtlı Öğrenci	YÖBİS Kayıtlı Öğrenci	Toplam	Eğitim Kademelerine Göre	Çağ Nüfusu Toplam	Kademelere Göre Toplam Çağ Nüfus	Kademeye Göre Yüzde
Okul Öncesi (5 yaş)	37.168	3	37.171	37.171	118.083	118.083	31,48%
1. Sınıf (6 yaş)	99.468	19	99.487	313.141	116.754	417.546	75,00%
2. Sınıf (7 yaş)	64.400	22	64.422		111.031		
3. Sınıf (8 yaş)	69.444	36	69.480		92.017		
4. Sınıf (9 yaş)	79.715	37	79.752		97.744		
5. Sınıf (10 yaş)	78.545	27	78.572	272.701	95.707	335.952	81,17%
6. Sınıf (11 yaş)	67.664	26	67.690		90.334		
7. Sınıf (12 yaş)	76.065	20	76.085		75.390		
8. Sınıf (13 yaş)	50.341	13	50.354		74.521		
9. Sınıf (14 yaş)	24.137	4	24.141	67.819	67.544	252.772	43,00%
10. Sınıf (15 yaş)	19.388	9	19.397		62.251		
11. Sınıf (16 yaş)	15.609	1	15.610		61.520		
12. Sınıf (17 yaş)	8.668	3	8.671		61.457		
Lise Hazırlık	21	0	21	21			
HEP (A, B, C ve D)	0	7.576	7.576	7.576			
Açık okullar	0	0	33.284	33.284			
Toplam Öğrenci Sayısı	690.633	7.796	731.713	731.713	1.124.353	1.124.353	65,08%

Okullaşan öğrencilerin **359.575 (%49,14) kız** , **372.138 (%50,86) erkek öğrencidir**.

*Ekim-2021 e okul ve YÖBİS verileri

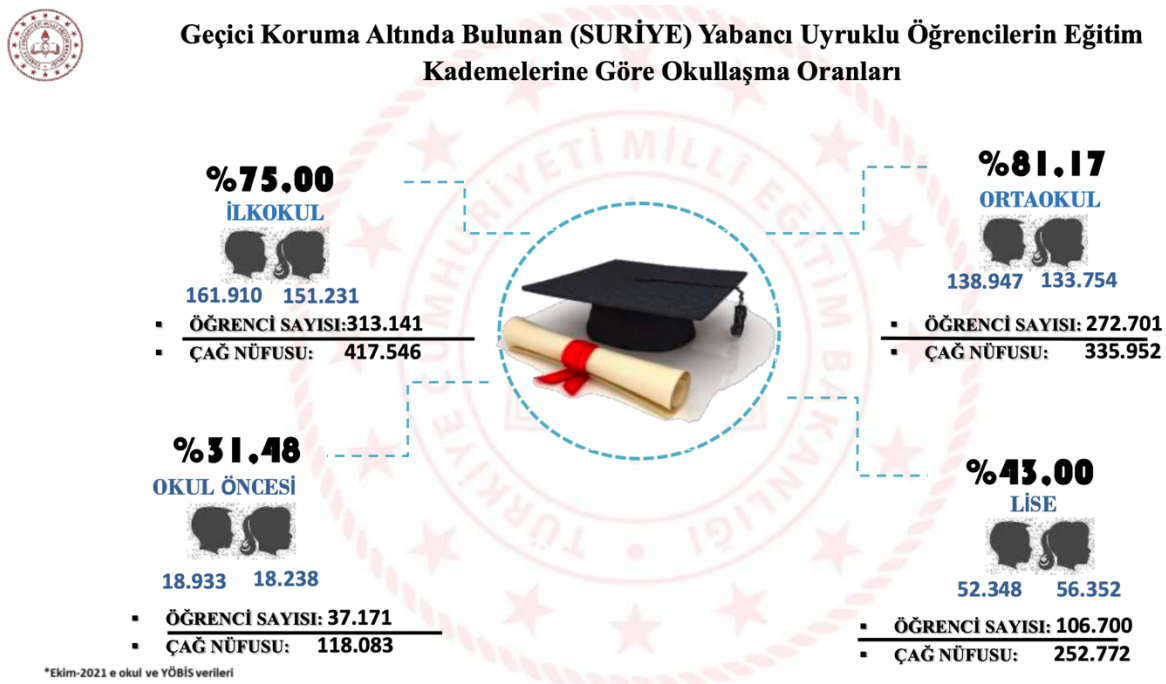
Source: (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021)

31.48% of Syrian students under five years old are enrolled in preschool. This figure rises to 75% enrollment at the primary education level, 81.17% at the lower secondary education level, and sharply drops to 43% for the upper secondary education level. Additionally, interviews with experts from the Ministry of Education suggest that a 43% enrollment rate for upper secondary education level is an optimistic figure⁴. In line with this view, the enrollment rate for upper secondary level in the figure above includes students enrolled in High School Preparation Programs, Accelerated Education Programs (HEPs), and Open High Schools. If students in these programs are omitted from the final figure, the enrollment rate for upper secondary education is at 26.83%. While early childhood education is critical for language acquisition and future integration, the low enrollment rate for preschool education is understandable considering the traditionally low rate in Turkey, which is at 58.53% for Turkish students of the same age group (five years old) (MoNE 2021). Enrollment in schools rises in the lower secondary level, and then sharply decreases by more than three times in the upper secondary level.

Looking at the enrollment rates by grade level in the same academic year using figures above, there are several massive drops in the number of students enrolled in education which take place across different grade levels. The total number of students is 99.487 at 1st grade and 8.671 at 12th grade.

The data below shows the enrollment rates and number of students in different educational levels by gender in proportion to the total number of Syrian refugee children of school age for the same educational level in 2021-2022.

Figure 5: Number and Rate of Students with TPS in Educational levels by Gender in 2021-2022



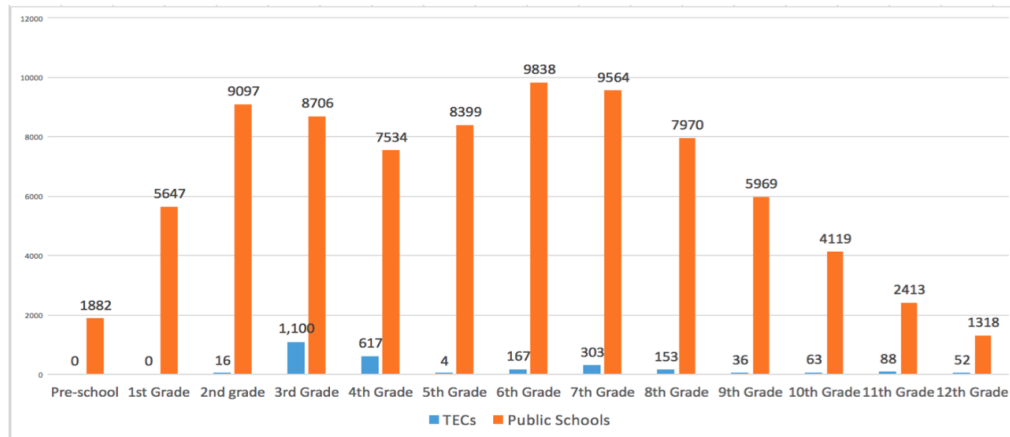
Source: (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021)

The enrollment rates by grade level and gender do not point to pronounced differences in enrollment by gender at the preschool, primary, and lower secondary education levels, in which boys are enrolled more than girls. However, male students detach from education at the upper secondary education level in much greater numbers than girls. As will be explained later, this gender gap is strongly associated with boys gaining access to paid employment as child workers.

As well as enrollment, regular school attendance is also a major concern for refugee students. Existing available data on attendance is scarce. Yet, figures from 2018 prove that enrollment does not necessarily mean regular attendance. The following graph shows the number of Syrian students with more than 10 days of non-attendance by grade level in 2018.

Figure 6: Number of Syrian Students with more than 10 Days of Non-attendance by Grade Level in 2018

Graph 3: Number of Syrian students with more than 10 days of non-attendance by grade level



Source: MoNE GDLL, 2018

Source: (Akyüz Arık et al., 2018)

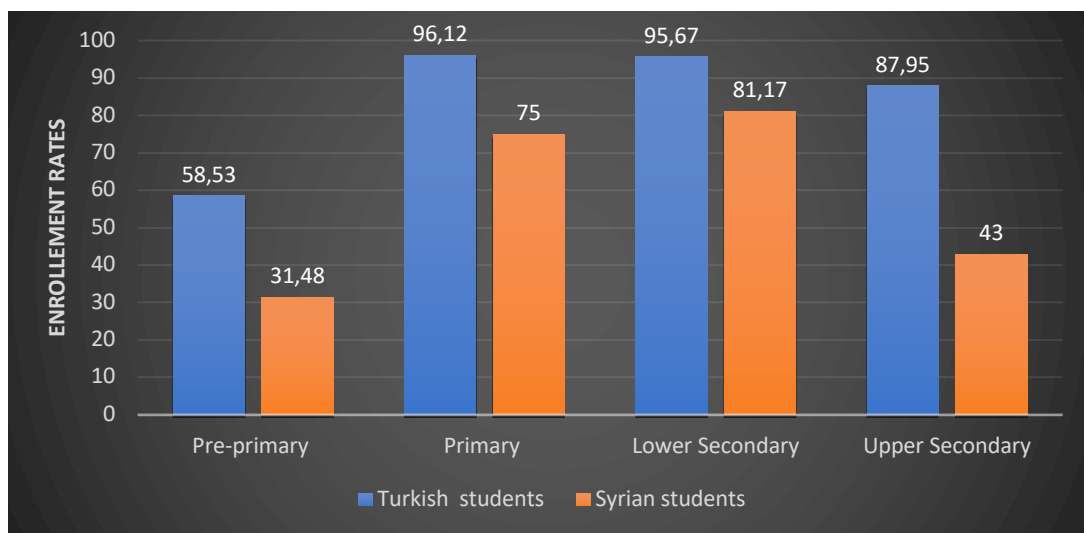
While the table on enrollment rates (Figure 4) and graph on attendance (Figure 6) are based on data from different years, they present to some extent a complementary picture, and verify a pattern of detachment of Syrian students from education in high numbers over the years. While the figure above suggests that absenteeism emerges as more prevalent issue among primary and lower secondary school students, it should be noted that the total number of students in upper secondary school is significantly lower, and positively selected as they are likely to be the most resilient group with higher resources.

With regards to enrollment and attendance rates, it is also worth noting that Syrian refugees are not a homogenous group and that there is a gap in reliable data on discrimination taking place in schools on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, economic conditions, disability, gender, age, race or religion, and how these factors might impact enrollment rates and the educational attainment of students at schools. Nevertheless, some qualitative studies suggest that Doms and Abdals, two Roma groups, are subjected to more discrimination and exclusion, and that their access to education is the lowest among Syrians (Yaprak Yıldız, 2015), a situation that is parallel to that of similar groups in Turkey (Karan, 2017).

3.2 Syrian and Turkish students in comparison

One of the key ways for evaluating the effectiveness of integration processes and policies is to draw comparisons between the migrant and local populations across various fields (Fitzgerald, 2015). An initial analysis demonstrates that there is a difference in access to education between Syrian children with TPS and Turkish children. Figure 7 puts enrollment rates in comparison by preschool, primary and secondary educational levels for the 2020-21 academic year. At the preschool level, the enrollment rate is 58.53% for Turkish and 31.48% for Syrian students, meaning that access to preschool education, which bears importance for learning capacities, language acquisition and future adaptation, is still a general problem for both Turkish and Syrian children. The enrollment rate at the primary school level is at 96,12% for Turkish and 75% for Syrian students; 95.67% for Turkish and 81.17% for Syrians in lower secondary education; and 87.95% for Turkish and 43% for Syrian students in upper secondary education.

Figure 7: Enrollment Rates of Syrian and Turkish students by Educational Level in 2021⁵



Source: MoNE 2021 and HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021

There are differences in the enrollment rates between Syrian and Turkish students, with enrollment rates being higher for Turkish students across every level of education. However, this gap in enrollment rate sharply widens at the upper secondary education level. This data is concerning because it shows that high enrollment rates for refugees do not last long, and that the education system is losing its capacity to keep refugee students in schools over the years, indicating the existence of some barriers that disadvantage Syrian children more than Turkish children.

3.3 Students with International Protection

As explored in the sections above, the government of Turkey's laws and practices on asylum differentiate between asylum seekers originating from Europe, Syria, and other countries outside of Europe. Non-European and non-Syrian asylum seekers who apply for refugee or conditional refugee status are accepted under IP. As of October 2021, there are 141,513 students of school age with IP in Turkey, of which 123.126 are enrolled in schools, making the enrollment rate for students with IP at 87% (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021).

Data on students with IP has not been available for long and there are challenges in analyzing this data. Though th MoNE began to publicly share this data recently, this data is not disaggregated by students with IP, but instead combined with existing data on Syrian students with TPS. The following two tables (Figure 8 and 9) reflect figures on IP students derived from the available mixed data. Figure 8 shows the distribution of students with IP by grade level. The enrolment rate at preschool is between that of Turkish students and Syrian students with TPS. These rates then follow a similar pattern to that of Syrian students with TPS in the subsequent grade levels, decreasing significantly at the upper secondary level.

Figure 8: Distribution of Students with IP by Grade Levels⁶

SINIF	E Okul Kayıtlı Öğrenci	YÖBİS Kayıtlı Öğrenci	Toplam	Eğitim Kademelerine Göre	Çağ Nüfusu Toplam	Kademelere Göre Toplam Çağ Nüfus	Kademeye Göre Yüzde
Okul Öncesi (5 yaş)	5.017	4	5.025	5.025	11.030	11.030	% 45,55
1. Sınıf (6 yaş)	12.390	56	12.446	47.729	11.125	46.220	% 103,26
2. Sınıf (7 yaş)	10.188	54	10.242		11.962		
3. Sınıf (8 yaş)	12.204	45	12.249		11.564		
4. Sınıf (9 yaş)	12.768	24	12.792		11.569		
5. Sınıf (10 yaş)	11.271	25	11.296	42.637	11.747	45.323	% 94,07
6. Sınıf (11 yaş)	11.263	37	11.300		11.576		
7. Sınıf (12 yaş)	10.922	24	10.946		11.451		
8. Sınıf (13 yaş)	9.079	16	9.095		10.549		
9. Sınıf (14 yaş)	6.395	35	6.430	21.946	9.712	38.940	% 71,22
10. Sınıf (15 yaş)	6.374	11	6.385		9.863		
11. Sınıf (16 yaş)	6.050	8	6.058		9.756		

12. Sınıf (17 yaş)	3.066	7	3.073		9.609		
Lise Hazırlık	7	0	7	7			
HEP(A,B,CveD)	0	533	533	533			
Açık okullar	0	0	5.249	5.249			
Toplam Öğrenci Sayısı	116.994	883	123.126	123.126	141.513	141.513	% 87

Source: The data was calculated from available data at HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021

Again, it must be noted that since 5,789 students are in High School Preparation Programs, Accelerated Education Programs (HEPs) or Open High Schools, the number of students at the upper secondary level is in fact 33,151, resulting in a 56.35% enrollment rate at the upper secondary level. While the enrollment rates of students with IP appears higher than that of Syrians with TPS across every level of education, the number of students being counted is relatively smaller (141,513 students in total) and the figures reflect gross enrolment rates.

Figure 9: Distribution of Students with IP Across Educational Levels by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Preschool	2.578	2.447	5.025
Primary	24.689	23.040	47.729
Lower secondary	22.331	20.306	42.637
Upper secondary	14.249	13.486	25.735

Source: The data was calculated from the data available at HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021

For students with IP, data on enrollment by gender and grade level is not available. It is nevertheless possible to calculate this using existing data by education level. Figure 9 shows the **distribution of students with IP in educational levels by gender**. The available data does not indicate a strong gendered dimension by educational level, but it reveals that almost half of both male and female students drop out of education over the years.

3.3 Reasons for dropping out of schools

Reasons for students with IP dropping out of education

There are no existing large-scale studies on the factors that impact withdrawal from education for students with IP. However, factors such as psychosocial distress, the language barrier, child labor, child marriage and other forms of exploitation and abuse suggest that this high rate of dropout is strongly linked to policies involving status and settlement. Refugees with IP are designated to certain satellite provinces determined by the state. They must obtain and maintain their legal status by registering every two weeks in their assigned city, cannot change their city of registration, and must obtain permits even for temporary travel (GAR, 2021). Rejections or delays in the registration process can result in a lack of identification cards, putting them at risk of detention and deportation, and reducing their access to work, humanitarian assistance, health and education (GAR 2021).

The children of parents with IP identification can enroll in primary and secondary public schools in the satellite cities to which they have been appointed to by law (DGMM, 2021b). However, these cities are mostly small- and medium-sized, meaning that refugees cannot often find jobs easily and thus move to larger cities for work and live informally (GAR, 2021). In such cases, the children of these individuals are unable to enroll in schools, as they are *illegalized* (a process that pushes them into marginalization and child labor).

MoNE instructs schools to allow children to attend classes as guests if they are in the process of obtaining status as asylum seekers, under the condition that they will not receive any documentation or diploma until they receive proof of their status (HRW and Van Esveld, 2017). While this regulation looks inclusive at first sight, there are a number of problems in its working and implementation. First, the fact that guest students do not get school reports that certify that they have finished the grade at the end of the school year can make education a pointless investment of time, energy and money. Second, though the regulation states otherwise, in practice, school authorities tend to not accept students with pending IP applications to their schools. The Afghan Refugee Solidarity Association (ARSA) highlights that the provincial branches of the DGMM and school management are not always aware of the law, and therefore often deny enrollment of children. A similar observation is reported in another study revealing that some school directors or local education ministry officials arbitrarily keep these children out of school, as most asylum seekers with IP or in the process of applying for IP are either not aware of their right to enroll, or had not been informed of this option by school staff (HRW and Van Esveld, 2017). Relatedly, ERG's (2017) study reveals the issue of public awareness on these problems among the majority of society, documenting that the Turkish public has minimal knowledge and understanding about the educational rights and problems of the children of asylum seekers in Turkey.

Equally important, a rejection of an IP application can cause immediate deletion of a student's registration from the school system. This prevents them from receiving certificates, even for the grades they might have attended before a decision was made on their family's IP application. While these families can still stay in the country, for instance, to reapply for IP, children are unable to continue attending school under these circumstances. As the rejection rate of IP applications is reportedly extremely high, this regulation can lead children into complete isolation and marginalization, and push them into irregular status, child labor and exploitation.

In addition to status, language barriers, poverty and peer pressure are other major barriers in the schooling of students with IP. A recent research study on Afghan refugees revealed that 76% of Afghans experienced difficulties in accessing education because of language barriers and educational expenses (MMC 2020). While Syrians with TPS have similar experiences, these impediments disadvantage students with IP more because of their fragile legal status that constantly leaves them at the risk of deportation (Buz, Canlı, and Aygüler, 2021).

Reasons for students with TPS dropping out of education

As documented earlier, 392,640 students, corresponding to 35.3% of school-age Syrians, could not access education for the 2021-2022 academic year. A Syrian Refugees Perceptions Survey (refs) points out that the primary reason for non-attendance is financial. One in five (21%) participating parents whose children are out of school reported that their child does not attend school because she or he must contribute to the household income. This is especially true for parents with male children who are out of school (31%), and for the 14-17 age group (31%). This affirms statistical data of low enrollment and high dropout rates from another perspective. The need to contribute to household income as a reason for not attending school was as high as 21% for the 10-13 age group and 4% for the 6-9 age group. Supporting this data, an expert interviewed also suggested that Syrian families tend to direct boys to work due to economic hardships and traditional gender roles, stating, "young male[s] [are] seen as a natural bread winner in the family"⁷. Another study conducted in Kızılay community centers in various cities also documented a gendered dimension of school dropouts, finding that 585 boys and 78 girls (in total 663 children) between the ages of 14-17 were working between 8 to 12 hours a day in various sectors such as in textiles, cafes, industries and as cotton pickers. Most of them were not attending school or had already fully dropped out of education (Toplum Temelli Göç Programları Koordinatörlüğü, 2019).

As for the schooling of Syrian girls, a needs assessment research paper released by UN Women (2018) reports that girls leave school without any certificate because (1) they prefer not to go to school (23.7%); (2) the family does not allow them to go (18.6%); (3) they are working (10.3%); (4) they find enrollment procedures complicated (8.1%); and (5) the large language barrier (6%). While the report does not unpack the rationale underlying the high number of Syrian girls who prefer not to go to school or the reasons why families do not allow them to attend school, some other research indicates that transport costs, safety issues (when girls walk to school, especially in rural areas, they may be exposed to abuse and attacks) and child marriage are potential reasons for such a preference (Carlier, 2018).

Child marriage is a serious concern for refugee girls, as low-income families in Turkey may see it as an economic survival mechanism for receiving bride wealth, and aim to provide a better life for their daughters with higher economic prospects (Çetin, 2016). Recently, a study revealed that Syrian refugee girls under 18 years old are statistically more likely to marry than Turkish girls. For example, in a representative study of Turkish women aged 25–49, 21% of women were married before the age of 18, and 4% were married before the age of 15, whereas 38% of the interviewed Syrian women were married before the age of 18 and 12% before the age of 15 (Sahin et al., 2020). These comparatively higher child marriage rates are likely to be a negative coping mechanism with poverty rather than a cultural characteristic. In any case, regardless of motivations behind them respectively, both child marriage and child labor may cause early adultification, trauma, exploitation, school dropouts, violence, and suicide.

In addition to socioeconomic background, parental education level also bears on school dropout rates for Syrian children, with the higher the level of education of the parents, the less there is propensity of a child dropping out of school (Uyan-Semerci and Erdoğan, 2018). As parental education is often a proxy variable indicating household socioeconomic status, this finding indicates a vicious cycle of exclusion of refugee children with lower socioeconomic status from education, as well as a generational transmission of social exclusion. These factors also handicap the majority group in accessing education. However, the strong association between leaving school, socioeconomic background and parental education is particularly concerning for the schooling of refugee students, as the general level of parental educational attainment is significantly lower for most Syrians residing in Turkey than the Turkish national average (Erdoğan, 2020)⁸. The language barrier, coupled with a disadvantaged socioeconomic background and a low educational profile prevent Syrian parents from being involved in their children's schooling and regularly communicating with teachers. 75% of Syrian students cannot get support or guidance from their parents concerning their schooling process, 74% of Syrian parents cannot communicate with teachers, and 62% of parents do not

participate in parent-teacher meetings due to lack of time, intense workload, and the language barrier (Shaherhwasli et al., 2021). As well as parental educational profile and socioeconomic status, there is also a strong association between size of households and dropping out of school, with students from more crowded households having a higher propensity to drop out from school (Uyan-Semerici and Erdoğan, 2017). This is again a worrying finding, given that refugees often live in crowded households to afford high rental costs.

In addition to these factors, refugee students can also suffer from trauma caused by war, immigration circumstances, and moving to a new country, all of which prevent them from adapting to schools. Existing research indicates that trauma often shows itself as a lack of trust toward teachers and classmates, as well as a suppression and refusal to talk about past events (Aydin and Kaya, 2017). These attitudes can harm learning in the long run, and thus necessitate the availability of professional help in schools.

The factors that hinder access to school and cause absenteeism not only stem from family and group dynamics, but may also be the result of organizations and systems within institutions. One such institutional factor is the stipulation concerning the location of school registration. The stipulation dictates that unregistered children can attend schools as 'guests' and can receive a certificate upon being registered under TPS and are officially admitted by the school. Syrian families with TPS used to be able to change their official residence to another province by showing the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) their children's school registration in the province they lived in previously. However, DGMM stopped this policy in 2019 and schools now do not accept students if their family is not registered under TPS in the same province. This is also a considerable problem for refugees, both with IP or in the process of application for IP, and will be examined later on.

Another set of institutional factors that hinder access to and attendance of education are the lack of inclusive policies and mechanisms, and existing institutional discrimination in the education system. *Institutional discrimination* refers to the policies and regulations that are systemically embedded in the existing structure of an institution in the form of norms and practices that are favorable to a dominant group and unfavorable to another group (Open Education Sociology Dictionary, 2021). Various studies have pointed out insufficient support systems to teachers and curriculum as important factors that push refugee students out of school (MMC 2020; Buz, Canlı, and Aygüler, 2021). The language barrier has a particularly detrimental effect on the students' regular attendance to school. Students often do not understand what is said in the classroom, and when they do attend, they cannot follow the course content. Consequently, they disengage from school over time (Shaherhwasli et al. 2021). The monocultural curriculum also hampers

integration of refugee students into the education system by portraying neighboring countries as potential threats and not creating a positive picture of refugees (Altinyelken, Çayır, and Agirdag, 2015).

The barriers to participation in education may also come from factors coming from outside of schools. A study on the majority group's perception of Syrians uncovers that more than 56% of Turkish parents do not want their children to befriend Syrian children in schools. This shows the societal sources of the potential discriminatory climate in schools (Çocuk ve Haklarını Koruma Platformu, 2016). In a recent study, 63% of surveyed Syrian parents reported that they and their children are negatively affected by hate discourses and campaigns, particularly those present on social media (Shaherhwasli et al., 2021). This discriminatory climate can also lead to bullying. Demir (2019) revealed that Syrian refugee students in secondary schools are at great risk of being bullied by their Turkish classmates and schoolmates because of the language barrier, cultural differences, and political prejudices. These phenomena lead to the formation of gang-like groups, which in turn exacerbates their struggle to adapt to schools. Gencer's (2017) research also attracts attention to the role of bullying in the schooling process and reveals that some Syrian families are reluctant to send their children to school due to potential bullying by Turkish students.

3.4. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on access to education

As stated above, numerous studies have highlighted various challenges that shape the educational experiences of refugee children, such as family socioeconomic background, societal prejudices, transportation costs, insufficient support systems for teachers to teach in diverse environments, a monocultural education system, and a lack of resources and equipment in schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated all these challenges for refugee children. The pandemic worsened refugee families' socioeconomic positions and pushed them into hyper-precarity (Nimer and Rottmann, 2021). *Hyper-precarity* refers to the layered insecurities and vulnerabilities concerning their restrictive status (Lewis et al., 2015), and in the context of the pandemic, their labor market position during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, during certain periods of the pandemic, the government supported tax-payer citizens through the Economic Stability Shield program, which included partial financial support and the postponement of loan repayments. Yet, together with one third of Turkish citizens, the majority of refugees are in the informal sector and do not pay income tax. As they are not registered as formal workers in the economy, they did not qualify for this financial assistance (Monshipouri, Ellis, and Yip, 2020). UNHCR's (2020) study reveals the layers of socioeconomic inequality during the pandemic further: 70% of refugees surveyed by UNHCR reported partial or full loss of income during the pandemic. Another layer involved the deepening of sociocultural inequalities

by the stigmatization of refugees as potential disease vectors (Yücel, 2021). The stigmatization thickened the sociocultural boundaries between refugees and the host society and limited help and support between locals, NGOs, and refugees. These deepened layers of inequalities made up the context of refugee children's access to, and ability to follow, remote learning.

With regards to access, the enrollment rate of Syrian children with TPS was 25,65% for pre-school, 79,77% for primary school, 79,13% for lower secondary school, and 43,40% for upper secondary level in 2020-2021 (MoNE DGLL DME, 2021). Comparing this data with that of 2021-2022 introduced above, we observe an increase at preschool, a decrease at primary school, and essentially no advancement at lower and upper secondary school levels. An almost 5% decrease in enrollment at the primary school level is extremely worrying, as this age group had the highest enrollment rate in earlier academic years, and it is in this age group that key knowledge and skills, critical for subsequent educational levels, are established. Unfortunately, it is impossible to compare students with IP as data on their enrollment before the pandemic is not available.

At the beginning of the pandemic, while the government of Turkey reacted quickly and transitioned into providing remote online education, this new approach to education came with extra difficulties for refugee children, since they could not easily access remote education (Akbulut, Şahin, and Esen, 2020). Research by SGDD- ASAM (2020) on the effects of COVID-19 on educational attainment documented that 48% of refugee children in their study could not follow remote learning. Another piece of research revealed that while 77% of surveyed refugee children in İzmir were attending school before the pandemic, only 15% of them actively followed remote learning (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2020). Remote learning is not fully accessible for Turkish students, either: 20% of them could not follow online education (Gazete Duvar, 2020). However, the difference between Turkish and refugee students based on available data is large and it points out to a stratification of inequalities related to remote learning between the majority society and refugees (Kollender and Nimer 2020).

The lack of necessary material and technical needs, such as an internet connection, TV, and computers commonly impedes Turkish and refugee children in following remote learning. However, refugee children suffer from extra impediments such as the language barrier and a lack of adequate knowledge of the structure and workings of the Education Information Network (EBA) platform, an educational content network in Turkey founded and run by MoNE. A recent study by Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) on the experiences of refugee children during COVID-19 in Istanbul disclosed that 1) even if refugee students possess the necessary digital tools, they repeatedly experience technical problems in accessing the EBA platform, 2) when they did have

access, they did not fully comprehend its contents, as the pre-recordings on the EBA system are difficult to understand without interacting with teachers, and the absence of this understanding directly impacts their ability to follow-up, and 3) those who understand the subject matter complain about the repetitive and boring nature and mismatch between the EBA schedule and their own course schedule (SPI, 2020).

The language barrier and the functionality of the EBA system dramatically minimized the parental involvement of Syrian families in their children's educational process. Recent research (Nişancı et al., 2020) drew attention to ways in which the language hurdle harms Syrian students' access to remote learning. First, it prevented Syrian parents from using relevant applications for their children's educational purposes, and second, it precluded Syrian students from receiving help and support from their Turkish counterparts. The students cannot compensate for lack of valid cultural capital by peer group-based social capital in remote learning. Given that refugee children mainly learn Turkish at school, the transition to distance learning disrupts their language acquisition process and creates several other difficulties while trying to adapt to their schools (Ozensoy, 2021).

3.5 Children with disabilities

Students with special needs used to receive education mainly in special schools and regular schools. According to 2015 data from MoNE 2015, 62,365 of the 259,282 students with special needs in Turkey attended special education schools, while 191,917 continued their education in regular schools, with inclusion practices. These figures show that only 25% of the total attended special education schools (ÖRGM, 2017). Unfortunately, the data on refugee students in special education is extremely scarce. The most up-to-date data indicates that the number of Syrian students who receive special education was 680 in TECs in 2016 (ERG, 2017).

The closure of special schools and rehabilitation centers during the pandemic and the fast transition to remote learning compounded the existing problems of students with special needs. The EBA platform and its presentation of its course contents are for average students, and do not include differentiated learning methods for students with special needs. The organization and system of the platform also excluded students with visual and hearing impairments, as there is no voiceover for graphs and shapes, or subtitles or sign language (Kollender and Nimer, 2020).

Experts working on the ground on refugee education report that a large number of students with disabilities and special educational needs remain at home and do not enroll in schools.⁹ In line with these observations, various qualitative studies suggest that many refugee students with disabilities are not in school, and face many disability-specific barriers such as stigmatization, absence of a curriculum tailored to their needs, and absence of special support and education (Gümüő et al., 2020). It is also reported that there is an urgent need for rehabilitation of students in border cities such as Őanlıurfa and Hatay, as these cities have a high number of traumatized students who cannot access the necessary psychological and social support, or rehabilitation (Tanrıkulu, 2017).

3.6 Children in rural areas

Language, an absence of relations with peers, and an absence of education tailored to the needs of refugee children are common barriers in both urban and rural areas (Őeker and Sirkeci, 2015). However, children in rural areas experience additional barriers to accessing education. Compared to urban areas, children in rural areas have fewer choices in schools, and this may demotivate students from attending and drive them out of school. The assistance and support for schooling is considerably less accessible in rural areas compared to urban areas (Yavuz and Mızrak, 2016). Also, the quality of education is often lower in rural areas compared to urban areas due to limited choices in schools and a lack of available resources.

As well as the above, the long distances and limited transportation options between home and schools in rural areas may discourage students from attending schools, as they often have to walk long distances to school. This specifically affects refugee girls, as long walks may expose them to attacks and abuse, and families may prefer not to send them to school as a result. This factor may increase early marriages for girls (Yavuz and Mızrak, 2016). Traditional gender roles and early marriage are an additional concern. Yavuz and Mızrak (2016) reveal that the early marriage of Syrian girls as second wives in exchange for money is common in rural and also partially urban parts of Urfa. Karademir and Dođan's (2019) research demonstrates that perceptions of girls are more traditional, and that early marriage is more common in rural areas compared to urban areas. This constitutes a considerable threat to the education of refugee girls.

3.7. Child labor

The Turkish Statistical Institute's (TURKSTAT) (2020) Child Labor Force 2019 survey shows that today, 720,000 children aged between 5 and 17, corresponding to 4.4% of the total child population in the same age range, are engaged in economic activities. 65.7% of these children continued their education while working but 34.3% of them stopped attending schools completely. This finding discloses the strong link between child labor and both interruptions from and leaving education. The TURKSTAT data is limited to Turkish children, and therefore does not say anything about refugee children who work.

While there was limited reliable representative data about child laborers among the refugee population in Turkey, a recent research by Dayioğlu et al. (2021) has filled this significant gap in the literature by using representative data from the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, which had a special module on Syrian refugees, to estimate the number of refugee child laborers and analyze the factors that affect child labor. They found that child labor is remarkably high among boys. Employment rates of boys between the ages of 12-14 is 17% and that of boys between the ages of 15-17 is 45%. That is, almost every second child in the latter age group is employed. This is striking given that the employment rate of Syrian men aged between 18-59 is 60.1%. The employment rate for girls is 4.7% for the first age group and 17.4% for the latter age group. This overall indicates a gendered dimension of paid child labor among refugees. Compared to child labor rates in pre-war Syria, which was 20.6% for boys between the ages of 15-17, the recent data shows that this has doubled for Syrian children who have refugee status, in response to dramatic income decline, poverty, and limited access to schooling.

The study by Dayioğlu et al. (2021) also points out factors that are strongly correlated with child labor, such as poverty, age of arrival, language, and region. Accordingly, poverty stemming from low payment and the precarious nature of available jobs in particular pushes boys to enter the labor market. This can be compared with the low labor market participation of Syrian women, which is only 5.9%. Also, children who speak Turkish and reside in industrial areas such as Istanbul and the broader eastern Marmara region are more likely to be employed than those speaking Arabic or Kurdish, as well as children living in rural areas. Importantly, the study also shows that child labor is particularly high among refugee children who arrive at the age of eight and later, reflecting existing problems in integrating and adapting to the school system for these children. The authors also detect strong negative correlations between schooling and child labor. Less than 3% of Syrian child workers between the ages of 12-17 are enrolled in school in Turkey. The researchers also observe strong correlations between dropping out of school and entering employment for boys in the 12-13 and 14-15 age groups, and do not make the same observation for girls. They point out that the gender pay gap becomes

remarkable at higher ages. Among 17-year-olds, the probability of entering the job market is 40% more for boys than for girls. This strongly correlates with data presented earlier about the increasing detachment of refugee boys from education towards the end of lower and upper secondary education levels. While the paid employment rate is low for girls, the strong association between household composition and employment reveals that girls often work at home in line with traditional gender roles. The availability of male adult laborers increases boys' employment and decreases girls' employment, and the existence of any elderly people in the household also decreases girls' employment, meaning that girls often undertake heavy care work.

Confirming the link between poverty and child labor, Support to Life Association found in its research in five districts of Istanbul that at least one child works in almost every third Syrian household in Istanbul, and that 28% of children surveyed cannot go to school because they have to work to contribute to the family income in the textile sector, shoe production, kiosks, grocer shops, catering facilities, cafes, furniture production, and automobile factories (Kaya and Kırac, 2016). Harunoğulları (2016) reports that a study conducted by the Kilis Union Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen in a small industrial area revealed that 100 Syrian children between the ages of 8-15 were working, whereas the number of Turkish children working at this age range was less than ten. 60% of Syrian children were Turkmen and 40% were Arab refugee children. In another study conducted by Support to Life on working children in Urfa, 79% of children in the research said that work is the major obstacle that prevents them from attending school (Yalçın, 2016).

As documented earlier, the pandemic exacerbated the economic situation of refugees and weakened their children's access to remote education. Recent research by Heinrich Böll Stiftung (2020) on refugee children in İzmir reveals that 58% of male refugee children who participated in the research worked part-time in the labor market, and another 9% stopped attending school completely and worked full-time. In addition to poverty, research by the Humanist Bureau points out the large informal economy, around 37%, and the inequalities fostered by economic policies of the government such as allowing expansion of the informal market, as driving forces of child labor (Center for Migration Research and Support to Life 2016). In the absence of preventive measures, policies, and strict control, employers tend to prefer children as they are cheaper laborers and can learn the host society language faster than adults.

The significant research by Dayıoğlu et al. (2021) successfully captures various aspects of refugee child labor with representative data, but it does not examine the issues of mobile seasonal child workers in the agriculture sector, as the data is based on household surveys. We know from earlier studies that refugee

children are more likely to undertake child labor as seasonal workers particularly after the “refugeeization” of the workforce in agriculture (Dines and Enrica 2015). In their research on seasonal workers around Adana, Uyan-Semerçi and Erdoğan (2017) found that while 79% of the children between the ages of 6 and 10 receive education in this group, 15% of them do not have access to education. Between the ages of 11-14, the rate of boys who do not go to school rises to 18% and girls to 32%. In the 15-18 age group, 59% of boys and 73% of girls have dropped out of school completely. When compared to the general enrollment rates presented earlier, two things attract attention. First, it seems that the enrollment rates are lower and that the dropout rate is higher, and second, the dropout rate is higher for females than males, in rural areas.

The *permanency* of temporary seasonal work in rural areas is a major barrier that stands before refugee children’s access to education. In other words, the seasonal work becomes permanent as refugees constantly move from one place to another to work in the fields. This prevents students from attending school. A recent study on Syrians working as agricultural workers reveals that Syrian children in this group constitute the most adversely affected members; they suffer from extreme poverty, face difficulties in accessing basic foods and necessities, and experience the worst forms of child labor defined by the International Labour Organization (Kalkınma Atölyesi 2021). Most of these refugee children lose their already limited access to education, and this increases the risk of dropping out of school permanently.

3.8. Regional differences in access to education

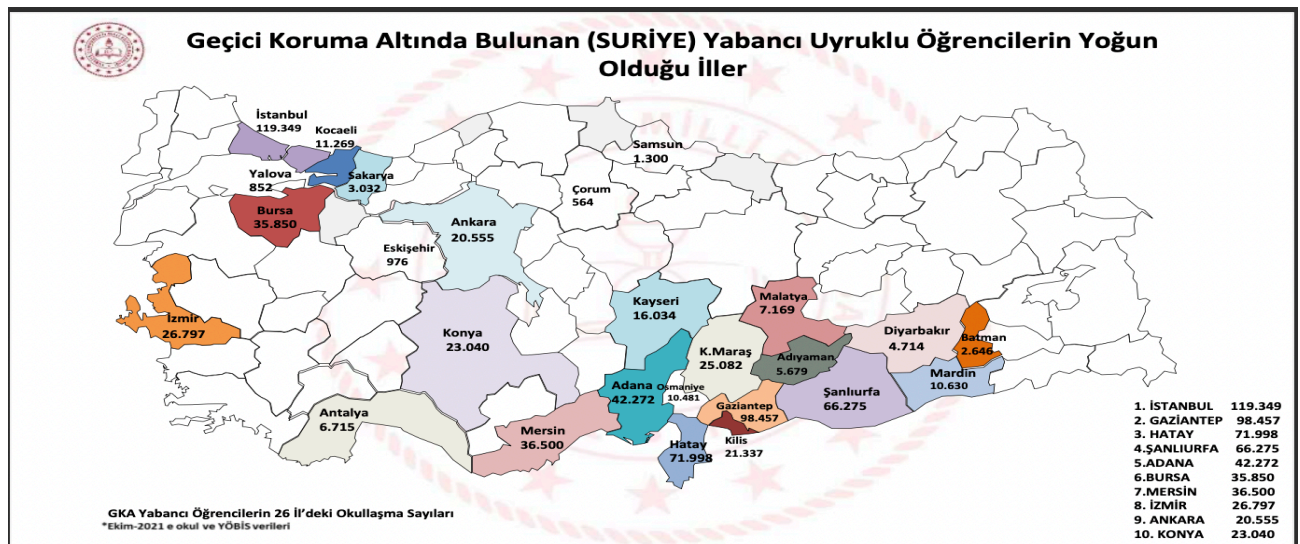
Syrian refugees are living in almost every province of Turkey, and refugee children’s educational access rates vary according to province. A study by ERG (2017) pointed out that Istanbul province had the most and Bartın province had the least number of Syrian refugee students in public schools in 2016. Istanbul had 29,147 students, Gaziantep had 19,025 students, Bursa had 12,614 students, and Izmir had 9,187 students enrolled in schools. These were the first four provinces with a total of around 73,000 students. The study reported Bartın, Ardahan, Artvin, Kars, and Iğdır as having the lowest number (between 2 and 14) of Syrian students in schools.

A MoNE-UNICEF (2019) study reveals, in line with earlier studies, that the provinces with the highest number of Syrian children of school age, meaning more than 100,000 in the study, were Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep and Istanbul in 2019. This study importantly provides enrolment rates; they are 43% for Şanlıurfa, 50.7% for Hatay, 60% for Istanbul, and 70% for Gaziantep. As stated in the study, the low enrollment rates show that

the high number of Syrian school age population puts pressure on the educational services in the Southeast and border provinces. Mardin, Muş and Van have low enrollment rates, ranging between 20 to 40%. The study also demonstrates that some provinces such as Afyonkarahisar, Elazığ, Bingöl and Uşak have enrollment rates of Syrian children over 90%. Yet one should note that this success is relative as these provinces have quite a small number of school-aged Syrian children (less than 2,000 in 2019).

In line with the MoNE-UNICEF (2019) study, MoNE (2021) shows that the highest enrollment rates were in Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Ankara, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, Kahramanmaraş and Izmir respectively on 09.01.2021. Figure 10, which is based on the most up-to-date data, presents a detailed distribution of students with TPS in 26 provinces in 2021-2022.

Figure 10: Concentration of Syrian Students with TPS in Provinces 2021-2022

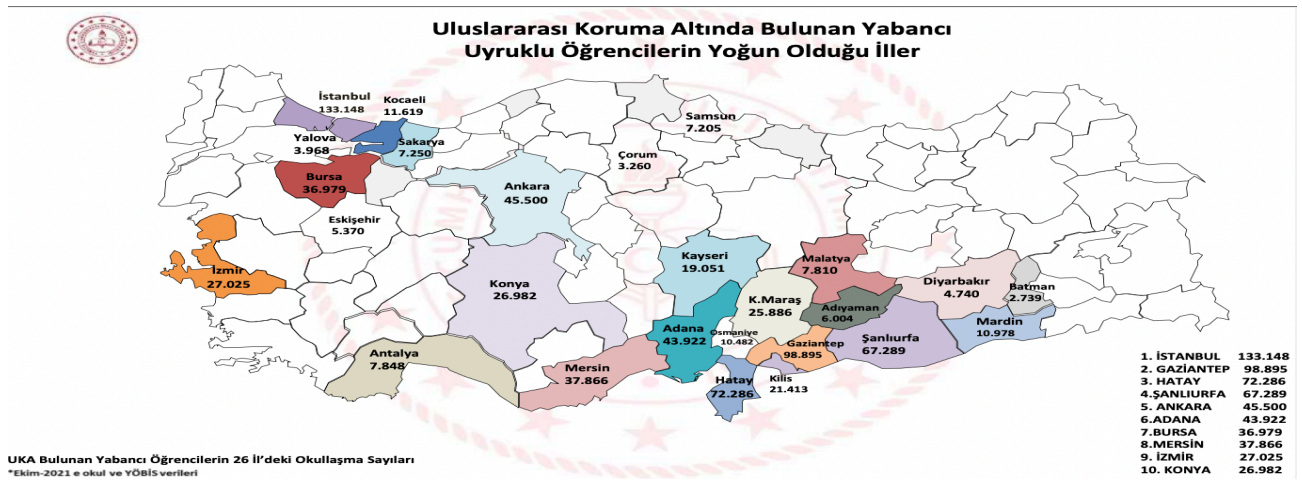


Source: The data was calculated from the data available at (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021)

It shows that Istanbul and Gaziantep still have the highest number of Syrian students enrolled in schools. Other provinces that have a significant number of students are Hatay, Şanlıurfa and Adana. This recent table also shows that provinces in different parts of the country accommodate a high number of students.

With regard to the situation of students with IP, the Figure 11 shows their distribution in 26 provinces in 2021-2022. Ankara, Istanbul and Samsun have the highest number of students with IP. The data was calculated from the combined statistics of students with TPS and IP in the provinces. Provinces like Kilis, Diyarbakır, and Osmaniye have the lowest number of students.

Figure 11: Concentration of Students with IP in Provinces 2021-2022



Source: The data was calculated from the data available at (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021)

Just like the figure above on the students with TPS, this figure also does not compare the enrollment numbers with total school age population in these provinces, and therefore, it is impossible to understand enrollment rates directly from this data. The figure on the enrollment of students with IP is informative, but does not include the number of other satellite cities to which refugees with IP are settled such as Trabzon and Van, among others.¹⁰ Also, while the last two figures present the most recent picture from 2021-2022 about regional differences in accessing education, it should be kept in mind that they reflect enrollment, not attendance.

4. Solutions

4.1 Government-led Projects and Programs for increasing attendance and preventing absenteeism/dropouts

MoNE's regulation and approach to the inclusion of refugee students in public education with the same standards as Turkish students is important for perspectives on future integration. The closure of TECs shows a national long-term inclusion goal concerning refugees. There are several projects by MoNE and many international and national NGOs aim to increase the access of refugee students to regular public education through a variety of approaches. These include investments in the infrastructure, provision of learning

materials, school maintenance, and activities for raising awareness about the importance of education. MoNE is building 220 schools in 19 provinces where Syrian students are mostly concentrated, and distributes learning materials such as alphabet cards to schools (Hürriyet, 2019).

MoNE strengthened Adaptation Classes that were set up in public schools for 11,500 students in the 2019-20 academic year, and organized Turkish language proficiency tests for various age groups at the primary school level to facilitate the transition of refugee students to public education (MoNE-UNICEF, 2019). These are important steps, but we need to also keep in mind that the Turkish language classes curriculum needs to be significantly improved for Syrian students to acquire Turkish language skills, since some students have poor Turkish language skills, and because in general, students come with very different language abilities in the same grade level (Koçoğlu and Yanpar Yelken, 2018).

MoNE, together with partners, organizes door-to-door visits to inform families about enrollment procedures and available educational opportunities for their children. Additionally, informative flyers about available educational opportunities for formal and non-formal education are distributed across all provinces (MoNE-UNICEF, 2019). This is an important intervention, as research shows that a lack of information about how the education system works continues to be one of the barriers to accessing education.

In conjunction with international and national actors, MoNE has developed programs to make education available to refugee students who are not enrolled in schools. For example, a Remedial Education Program is used to help third-year primary school students improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to ease their transfer to normal public schools (UNICEF, 2020). Catch-Up Training and the Accelerated Learning Program are two similar initiatives that have been deployed. These programs aim to provide refugee students with the fundamental skills they need to succeed in public schools. Around 16,000 students participated in the Catch-up Trainings, and 16,176 children (7,607 girls and 8,569 boys) participated in the Accelerated Learning Programs, implemented in Public Education Centers in Adana, Ankara Bursa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri, Kilis, Konya, Mersin, and Şanlıurfa before and during October 2019 (MEB–UNICEF, 2019).

The Syrian Volunteer Educational Personnel Program (SVEP)¹¹: Since 2016/17, approximately 13,000 Syrian Volunteer Educational Personnel have been working to provide education and support to Syrian children in schools (UNHCR-Turkey, 2019). The program was initially designed to respond to the emerging needs of

students in transition from TECs to public schools, but a year later in 2018, the Syrian Volunteer Educational Personnel Management Strategy was developed by MoNE to clearly define the tasks and responsibilities of SVEP for supporting Syrian children in public schools (MoNE-UNICEF, 2019). As of 2019, 4,000 extra personnel have been assigned to public schools to facilitate communication between students, teachers and parents. There are also some personnel assigned to various fields in educational institutions working with and/or affiliated with the ministry. While the impact of the SVEP program has not been measured yet, it will potentially generate important results for improving the integration of refugee students into regular public schools in the long-term. Nevertheless, there are significant issues where the functionality of the program is concerned. Some Syrian volunteer teachers, for instance, report that they are not welcome in the schools and are subject to exclusion and discrimination (İbrahimoglu, 2021). Furthermore, while funding for this program has been provided by UNICEF, the program was stopped in July 2021 without clear justification (Haksöz Haber, 2021).

Teacher trainings: In response to the increasing number of refugee students in public schools, MoNE organizes teachers and educational personnel trainings. As of 2019, more than 100,000 teachers and educational personnel received training on facilitating the adaptation of refugee children to education and on promoting social cohesion in the host society (MONE - UNICEF 2019). These trainings were supplemented by 40,000 handbooks for teachers who have foreign national students in their classrooms.

Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Program¹²: This program began in November of 2016. Through the cooperation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) with the Turkish Red Crescent Society, and with support from the European Union, the initiative provides cash aid to more than 1.5 million refugees living in Turkey. The ESSN is the EU's biggest humanitarian program in history and the IFRC's largest program to date. Each family member receives 155 Turkish Lira every month via debit cards, with the aim of allowing them to make their own decisions about how to pay for necessities such as rent, transportation, bills, food, and medicine. Additional quarterly top-ups are available depending on family size. The ESSN card works in stores just like a regular debit card. The program gives cash grants to refugee families who meet specific conditions. Female-headed households and the number of dependents are two of these specific categories, both of which are linked to child labor. While this is an important program, the monthly assistance is low, and the eligibility criteria narrow; for instance, it does not include other criteria that are shown to be strongly associated with child labor and educational attainment, such as parental education level, and the age of children at arrival in Turkey (Dayıoğlu et al., 2021)

Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Programme (CCTE)¹³: This program is designed to incentivize families with children of school age and with limited financial means to send their children to school. Payments within the scope of the dissemination of the CCTE program for foreigners started to be made via ESN cards as of May 2017. The CCTE program supports students from kindergarten to 12th grade on the condition that they do not miss school for more than 4 days in a month. In January 2019, 394,000 children received these payments (Türk Kızılay, 2019). In January 2021, CCTE reached 534,233 children (265,841 girls, 268,392 boys) of which 531,024 children (264,240 girls, 266,783 boys) benefitted from additional top-up payments as further support to respond to socioeconomic challenges and encouragement to continue learning during the pandemic (UNICEF Turkey 2021). Hopes are high for positive impacts from this initiative, particularly as it includes referrals of children to complementary protection services. However, the program is also reported not to sufficiently motivate families to send their children to school, as the cash support is low and insufficient to cover basic schooling expenses.

The Turkish Red Crescent developed and implemented intervention programs in 14 provinces to improve enrollment rates of refugee children in 2018 and 2019¹⁴ (Toplum Temelli Göç Programları Koordinatörlüğü, 2019). These programs included:

- a) A case-centered program. generating solutions for each case encountered in the field depending on their needs, and the provision of in-kind aid. More than 10,000 students were provided school uniforms, books, pens, and other consumable materials within this program;
- b) Information sharing and raising awareness about schooling. The program includes seminars and focus groups on themes such as children's rights and the importance of education, reaching approximately 7,000 people;
- c) Advocacy. This program includes several steps 1) documenting the hardships the refugees experience in enrolling their children in school, 2) communicating with school principals and vice principals to eliminate these hardships, and 3) providing training for 14 civil society organizations working on the ground about possible steps to take to ensure access of refugee children to education; and
- d) Capacity development. organizing seminars and training for actors who have critical roles in the protection of refugees, including international and national civil society organizations, teachers, religious leaders, and police forces.

Social and Economic Adaptation Project through Vocational and Technical Education¹⁵: The enrollment rates of Syrian children into upper secondary education are low. Many Syrian students drop out of school and enter

the labor market to help their families economically. This pushes them toward exploitation as a child laborer and harms their integration in the long run. In response to this issue, MoNE gives importance to vocational training to keep Syrian students in education, as well as to helping them gain necessary vocational qualifications and contributing to social cohesion between Syrians and Turkish citizens. The Social and Economic Adaptation Project through Vocational and Technical Education, for example, aims to promote social and economic cohesion, employability, and competence of Turkish host communities and Syrians with TPS by improving their vocational education. It seeks to stabilize the general situation in the provinces where Syrians are concentrated, and decrease poverty and social sensitivity.

The project more specifically seeks to increase access to inclusive quality vocational and technical education for Turkish students and for Syrian students with TPS (14-17 years) in jobs that receive high demand in the labor market. By July 2021, the pilot of this project has been implemented across 55 schools in Turkey, of which 13 were in Istanbul, seven in Bursa, five in Mersin, six in Adana, seven in Hatay, three in Kilis, seven in Gaziantep, and seven in Şanlıurfa¹⁶. The project provides equipment and workshop setups, support packages for both Syrian and Turkish students in need, and conducts communication activities to raise awareness and visibility to develop professional and technical infrastructures of schools, specifically in the fields of machine technologies, beauty and hair dressing services, installation technologies, carpentry, construction technologies, and fashion design.

Vocational Training Programme for Employment (VET4JOB)¹⁷: MoNE implemented this project, funded by the European Union Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), in cooperation with the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen. The project was further coordinated by Expertise France and EDUSER. The project aims to improve the employment prospects for the Syrian refugee and the host communities by providing high-quality VET and apprenticeships in Turkey. This 48-month-long program started on January 1, 2020 and aimed to support both Syrian and Turkish students' skills development through apprenticeship and VET in line with labor market needs in Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Gaziantep, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir, Kahramanmaraş, Kayseri, Kocaeli, Konya, and Mersin. It specifically targeted four groups; 1) Syrian and Turkish youth in the 14-17 age group not attending formal education, 2) Syrian and Turkish adults in the 18-45 age group who cannot access formal employment opportunities due to insufficient vocational qualifications, 3) Syrians receiving cash assistance through Emergency Social Safety Net, 4) Small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly trade and craft enterprises that are eligible to train apprentice students. The first target group was the program's primary target group; it aimed to increase the capacity of vocational education institutions by 50% for 14,400 new students, of whom 60% was Syrian. The program works with 35 vocational training institutions

providing apprenticeship and vocational training for young people and adults, sub-organizations of the Turkey Tradesmen and Artisans Confederation in the provinces where the program was implemented, and chambers in related fields and enterprises which are eligible to train apprentice students.

Project on Supporting the Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES)¹⁸: The PIKTES is an EU--funded project implemented by MoNE. The project's primary purpose is to promote access to education in Turkey for children with TPS, and support their social cohesion. The project started in October 2016 for two years, then was extended first to December 2018 and later to October 2022. Presently, it continues to be implemented in 26 provinces. Unlike many other small-scale projects, the PIKTES aims to improve the integration of Syrian children into public schools by targeting all relevant actors, such as children, families, and schools. The project has provided students with books, digital educational materials, and psychosocial support. It includes Turkish and Arabic language courses, catchup, and backup training. Thousands of students receive education in PIKTES summer schools, and many more benefit from school transportation services and the provision of stationary. The project also supports schools by providing training to teachers and principals, and provides equipment to schools. The program includes family visits and family information seminars for thousands of families. The PIKTES program is massive, and therefore, its impact evaluation is critical for informing other programs. Unfortunately, there is no evaluation of the impacts of PIKTES yet.

Support for School Enrolment (SSE) Program¹⁹: In early 2020, UNICEF, SGDD-ASAM and MoNE launched the 'Assistance Program for Registration to Schools' (Okula Kayit Icin Destek Programı) aiming to reach out to 65,000 Syrian students between the ages of 5-17 at risk of leaving the education system. The major objective of the program is to minimize the number of out-of-school refugee children by increasing their access to relevant and appropriate educational opportunities through Counselling and Referral Services and Child Protection Services. ASAM SSE program teams assess each child's educational needs, provide counselling about available educational opportunities, refer out-of-school children to appropriate educational pathways available in their area (including preschool education) and provide transportation, translation, and in-person support during the process when required. School bags and stationery kits are provided for enrolled children. Also, psychosocial support is provided to children and their families. As needed, families are referred to appropriate services offered by either ASAM or other service providers, including public institutions and NGOs.

4.2. NGOs and international organizations for increasing attendance and preventing absenteeism/dropouts

The recent high levels of refugee movements to Turkey and the protracted nature of displacement is increasing pressure for the long-term integration of refugees. This period is also characterized by the intense and unprecedented involvement of grassroots movements and NGOs with refugee issues in the country. As documented, MoNE has channeled Syrian students into public education as of 2016, and implemented various projects for meeting the wide variety of needs of this group and their families. However, the high number of school-age children among the refugee population may occasionally put a strain on its capacity and services. This was particularly the case in the early years of arrival of the refugees, as there was limited institutional setup and experience for integrating refugees.

National NGOs and international organizations were particularly active between 2012 and 2016 in the field of education for supporting and improving the situation of refugee students in collaboration with MoNE, mostly because refugees were seen as temporary, and the regulation was flexible for them to enter and work in the field. During this period, various NGOs such as AÇEV, ASAM, Support to Life and IGAM actively developed programs ranging from preschool education, language acquisition, to psychological support and trauma healing.

A shift can be observed in the close collaboration of MoNE with NGOs and international organizations with the transition of Syrian refugee children to public education. In the 2017-18 academic year, the government issued new regulations and centralized approval of the permissions and protocols of NGOs in order to monitor and limit their access to public schools and teacher educations (Akyüz Arık et al., 2018). Since refugee students transitioned to public schools in 2016-2017, NGOs are not allowed to run schools themselves. Some NGOs have signed protocols with MoNE for collaboration concerning only the provision of psychological support for trauma and some out-of-school help.

Despite the limitations in the scope of engagement, many NGOs still actively work to organize local after-school programs and extracurricular activities in community centers they operate in order to strengthen the academic development of refugee children. The following section describes a number of programs organized by NGOs, but this list is by no means exhaustive and representative of all programs operated by NGOs in Turkey.

AÇEV's Summer Preschools Education Program for Syrian Children²⁰ was implemented in 2017, with the aim to increase school readiness for disadvantaged Syrian children with limited access to preschool education.

AÇEV's Preschool Education Program (PEP) was developed originally in 2003, in regions where access to early childhood education remains low. The PEP was then adapted in 2016 to meet the needs of Syrian children and implemented as a pilot project in collaboration with the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education. 128 children attended the Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children, among with 52% were boys and 48% were girls. While 71 of these children were born in 2011, 39 were born in 2010, seven in 2012, and two in 2009. Of the children, 47% migrated to Turkey in 2012 and 2013, while 53% migrated in 2014 or later. 35% of the children lived in households with three to five people; 51% with six to nine people; and 11% with 10 to 13 people. 60% of the children had two or three siblings. Of the children's mothers, 31% were at least middle school graduates. Observations throughout the program reflect an improvement in the children's school readiness and their language, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills.

AÇEV's Reading Future program²¹ is for children between the ages of 5-8 from disadvantaged communities. It aims to instill the love and habit of reading, develop their language skills, and raise awareness with their parents on the importance of reading. As part of this project, volunteer group facilitators read books to children through animation and role-play, and each week's books are distributed for children to take home. Also, within the framework of the project, libraries are established in nearby available facilities, and seminars for parents are conducted on the importance of reading for child development.

SGDD-ASAM's Support for School Enrollment Program²² is carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with the financial support of the European Union. It aims to contribute to the access of Syrian boys and girls between the ages of 5-17 to formal and informal education opportunities and increase their schooling rates in Adana, Bursa, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya, Mersin, and Şanlıurfa. Mobile teams conduct field surveys to identify and evaluate children according to their risk levels in the program and inform their families about educational opportunities and other available social assistance. The program provides guidance services to Turkish language courses with the "Accelerated Education Program" to ensure children's access to education. There are ongoing programs such as activities to disseminate information and guidance for families to reduce school dropout rates. The program targets approximately 30,000 asylum seekers and refugee children who do not go to school, cannot attend school or are at risk of dropping out. The program includes activities to raise awareness about schooling, such as information sessions for parents and role model meetings for youth.

Refugees Association's Education and Mentoring Unit regularly carries out support programs for children both in and out of education²³. Primary and secondary school students are matched with mentors in the same age

group, who can support them within the program. The unit also organizes workshops to minimize the adverse effects of the language barrier, facilitating students' adaptation to the school environment by improving their communication skills with social adaptation activities and awareness-raising activities for families.

IGAM's Gulmakai Network: Champions Work for Girls Education Project²⁴ includes awareness-raising activities; mobilization of volunteer university students; and visits to Syrian families, schools, teachers, mukhtars, and opinion leaders. The program targets students, particularly girls, with chronic attendance problems. It aims to reconnect them to school life to ensure their continuity in education. The project is planned to last 36 months in Ankara and Gaziantep.

IGAM's Education Without Distance Project²⁵ started one week after the interruption of education due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey. The program seeks to minimize the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for refugee students in education and social life. The program includes online private lessons and training for refugee students, combines them with mentorships, MTE Talks, Volunteer Integration, and English-Speaking Workshops. The MTE Talks bring distinguished guests from different sectors within the migration area together with volunteers via Zoom meetings to improve the volunteers' knowledge about the issue of migration. In the Volunteer Integration events, the most experienced volunteers share their experiences with new volunteers weekly to guide them in preparing their lessons. The English-Speaking Workshop aims to improve the English-speaking skills of the students. By the end of 2020, the program had reached out to 116 volunteers, and 110 students. Presently, the program has 96 active volunteer teachers and 87 active students.

4.3. Measures taken in other countries to promote school attendance and prevent absenteeism/dropouts

Few studies have done comparative research on the effectiveness of policies and institutional regulations for the adaptation of refugee students into the education systems of different countries. While such studies may provide insights into potential policy options, they should be treated cautiously, given the significant contextual differences. Turkey's workload for integration is more critical, and transferring and implementing policies that worked in one context may not ensure similar success in Turkey due to the incomparably high number of refugees.

Crul et al. (2019) compared educational systems and support mechanisms for integrating refugees into Germany, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, and Sweden. They found that the systems that provide high-quality and

ongoing second language instruction at all school levels by adequately trained teachers using specifically developed teaching materials make a significant difference between the countries. It is a crucial observation for Turkey, given the intense and short-term nature of the supports provided by state and NGO actors in education, mainly stemming from the availability and short-term nature of funding flows for supporting access to education services for refugees in Turkey.

As stated above, various projects target the integration of Syrian children into education via vocational education in Turkey. It emerges as a new strategy for decreasing dropout and increasing attendance rates, particularly in the upper secondary level. The fact that the students in this program receive small payments motivates them to stay in education and gain vocational qualifications simultaneously (Expert interview, July 15, 2021).

While vocational education may be an effective approach to facilitating integration, the study on the role of tracking systems in Germany and Sweden suggests that early tracking and selection at age fifteen may work as a stumbling block for students in advancing non-compulsory education. Early selection for vocational education with weak language support may disadvantage refugee children in the long run and create an accumulation of disadvantages – as has sometimes been the case in Germany. It may also gather refugee students only to vocational schools with minimum opportunities for academic education and limited employment prospects in the future. TURKSTAT data shows that in 2019 the employment participation rate for the 15-24-year-old age group is 67.3% for primary school graduates, 58% for vocational high school graduates, 33.2% for general high school graduates, and 79.4% for higher education graduates (TURKSTAT, 2021a). As general high school graduates enter university more, these figures show that the employment prospects of vocational education graduates' are not substantial, and in fact lower than primary school and higher education graduates. Furthermore, when the data is broken down according to gender, the data shows that the employment participation from vocational high school is gendered; 69.3% for male graduates and 45.7% for female graduates (TURKSTAT, 2021b). Given the relatively weak and gendered future employment prospects of vocational high schools, vocational education needs to be supported by high quality and ongoing second language instruction. Also, it needs to be structured as gender-equal with flexible streaming, giving chances to switch into academic education.

Studies on the inclusion of migrant teachers in schools reveal that they play considerable roles in adapting refugee children to education in Turkey (Çelik, 2020). The students consider them as role models and this, by nature, inspires students for educational engagement. Additionally, the existence of teachers from refugee

backgrounds facilitates the involvement of the families in the school life and their children's education by minimizing language and cultural barriers and preventing communication of ethnic and stereotypical misunderstandings between teachers and between teachers and students. Therefore, one can assume that the Syrian Volunteer Educational Personnel Program is timely and bears importance for the integration of refugees in the long run. Conchas (2010) argues that students reproduce ethnic and racial relations in the way they are segregated in society and school. The program may work to change the ethnic-racial hierarchies present in Turkish society by lifting up Syrian teachers as role models and, therefore, may work to substantially de-ethnicize the relations between students and teachers. Studies such as those by Çelik and Erdoğan (2017), ERG (2017; 2018), and Kollender and Nimer (2020) also stress the importance of an inclusive curriculum that offers differentiated education such as practical and artistic regulations and training for traumatized children for increasing attendance and decreasing dropouts.

5. Conclusions

This report assesses refugee students' access to education in Turkey. The refugee population is exceptionally large, young and heterogeneous regarding their status, purposes, skill levels, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. Turkey has historically limited experience with the integration of permanent migrants, and the sheer size of the school-age refugee population has put pressure on the provision of educational services.

There have been, however, significant policy changes and progressive steps in facilitating the enrollment and attendance of students. The circular, Educational and Training Services for Foreigners, which dictates that all children, including foreigners, have the right to access basic education in public schools free of charge, is an example of such progressive policies. The transition from TECs to public education to end the parallel system and provide uniform schooling was another significant step towards integrating Syrian students in the long run – a policy that significantly increased the enrollment rates of refugees in a short period.

Despite this progress, a large number of refugee students are still out of education. Though the enrollment rate is high at the primary school level, these rates steadily decrease in the secondary level – and are lowest in the upper secondary education level. Enrollment also does not guarantee regular attendance to school, and absenteeism is a serious problem for refugee students. More than half of the students drop out of education from 1st grade to 12th grade. The high absenteeism and tremendous dropout rates reveal that the education system currently is not keeping refugee students in schools over the years.

There are significant differences between Turkish and refugee students in accessing education, particularly at the upper secondary level. This finding indicates that some barriers disadvantage Syrian children cumulatively more than Turkish children, such as poverty, child labor, early marriage, and the language barriers, among other factors. We also found that dropout from school is strongly gendered for refugee children, with boys detaching from education more than girls over the years. The gendered dropout, which is exceptionally high at the upper secondary school, signifies child labor as a negative coping strategy with poverty. Our investigation points out that child labor is common for refugee boys in urban areas and refugee girls in rural areas as agricultural workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened refugees' poverty and disadvantaged position, and has negatively affected their children's access to education. The available statistical data signifies an important drop in primary school enrollment, which is a key education level for future educational and career paths. Refugees were unable to benefit from the government's protection shield as they are not counted as taxpayers due to their primary employment in the informal sector. It has left them at the mercy of market conditions and forces without any safeguards. Various research shows that extreme poverty in the pandemic pushed a significant number of refugee children into work, which either weakened or completely dissolved their access to education. It also hindered families from being able to provide technical tools and access internet to enable their children to continue their education remotely. In addition to the lack of technological tools, the organization and workings of the EBA system made it difficult for refugee children to access and follow its contents. This has deteriorated refugee students' access to education, the quality of which had already decreased during the pandemic in general terms. This situation made refugee students doubly disadvantaged under the circumstances of the pandemic. There is a significant need for additional research programs on the effects of the pandemic and remote education on students' continued enrollment and attendance, and at what points they affect Turkish and refugee children differently.

Our investigation suggests that access to education and regular attendance to school are stratified by the complex intersectionality of legal status, socioeconomic factors, gender, and disabilities, among other factors. Syrian refugee students with TPS are more disadvantaged than Turkish students. Students with IP, or in the IP application process, suffer from additional hurdles compared to Syrian students with TPS, due to the potential threat of deportation and loss of access to formal education. Female students in rural areas are exposed to the risk of losing access to education more than their counterparts in urban areas. This probability increases further for those with special needs and disabilities. Therefore, policymakers should consider the

intersectional nature of exclusion from education in developing potential policies for eradicating group, societal and institutional barriers to schooling.

There is a need for policies that strengthen the connections between state and NGOs considering parallel practices in collecting data about refugees. It results in the emergence of fragmented, partial, and often misleading data sets that are not compatible with each other. The issue of limited data may also prevent the development of representative and realistic needs assessments and analyses regarding the situation of refugee students, which in turn acts as a barrier to the development of relevant and practical policies. Of equal importance is the lack of coordination between these actors resulting in an ineffective use of resources. Under transparent coordination, NGOs and CSOs can add value and fill gaps as the MoNE continues to improve the integration of refugee children.

Systematic data collection based on standardized criteria is an urgent need to understand the representative needs in education for discussing appropriate integration policies. Standardized data collection requires coordination among institutions and open communication between state institutions and NGOs working in the field.

Turkey has been, for some time, a refugee and asylum-seeker-receiving country. This is a structural issue, not a temporary phenomenon for Turkey. The adoption of this perspective by policymakers working in the refugee movement is of utmost importance for developing and designing policies and programs with a long-term impact. This also necessitates long-term funding systems for education programs, so that the majority society and refugee children can interact and get to know one another.

NOTES

¹As Turkey applies a Geographical Limitation, non-European and non-Syrian asylum-seekers who apply for refugee status enter the refugee status determination process at the end of which they can be resettled to a third country. They are allocated to certain satellite cities to fulfill their temporary stay in the country.

²Preschool education is carried out under the responsibility of the General Directorate of Basic Education and the General Directorate of Private Education Institutions in kindergartens, and practice classes opened for children aged 36-66 months (MEB 2020)

³Syrian families with TPS could change their residence to another province by showing DGMM the registration of their kids into a school in their new province. DGMM stopped this policy in 2019 – from an interview with a policymaker in September 2021

⁴ The interviews were conducted with experts working on refugee education in different units of the Ministry of Education in Istanbul and Ankara in July and August 2021.

⁵ This graph compares the enrollment rates of Turkish students from 2020-2021 (MoNE, 2021) with that of Syrian students from 2021-2022 (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021) as the data for Turkish students from the latter year is not yet available.

⁶ The number of registered students in the first, third and fourth grades is more than the total of school age children for these grades. This is most probably because these numbers are gross enrollment rates. Gross enrollment rates are calculated by dividing the total number of students in a specific level of education by the population in the theoretical age group. Net Enrollment Rates are calculated by dividing the number of students of a theoretical age group enrolled in a specific level of education by the population in that age group (MoNE, 2021)

⁷Policymaker interview on July 14, 2021

⁸Accordingly, 33% of Syrians residing in Turkey are illiterate, 13% are literate but did not graduate from any formal school, and another 26.6% did not indicate literacy level in the survey.

⁹Observations of an expert working in Gaziantep

¹⁰ For the most recent list of satellite cities, one can look to the following source. Yet, as it is stated in the source, there is no transparent process concerning settlement policy, and not all provinces listed were available in practice. For instance, Ankara and Istanbul are reported to have high number of students with IP (HBÖGM-GADDB, 2021), but are not on the list :

https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/reception-conditions/access-and-forms-reception-conditions/freedom-movement/#_ftn3

¹¹For more detailed information on the roles and tasks of volunteer trainers:

https://omerhumanizliilkokulu.meb.k12.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/27/01/735043/dosyalar/2020_07/01145529_pictes_gorev.pdf

¹² For a more detailed information about the program : https://ec.europa.eu/echo/emergency-social-safety-net-essn-offering-lifeline-vulnerable-refugees-turkey_en and

<https://www.ifrc.org/emergency-social-safety-net-essn>

¹³For more detailed information about the program: <https://www.unicef.org/turkey/en/conditional-cash-transfer-education-ccte-programme>

¹⁴These provinces are Adana, Ankara Bursa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Istanbul, İzmir Kahramanmaraş Kayseri, Kilis Konya Mardin, Mersin and Şanlıurfa.

¹⁵For more detailed information about the program: <https://mtegm.meb.gov.tr/www/mesleki-ve-tekNIK-egitim-yoluyla-sosyal-ve-ekonomik-uyum-projesi/icerik/2309>

For more information about the schools in which the program is implemented: <http://seuptr.com/projeler/>

¹⁷For more detailed information about the program: <http://imep.org/EN/>

¹⁸For more detailed information about the program: <https://piktes.gov.tr/Home/IndexENG>

¹⁹For more detailed information about the program: <https://www.unicef.org/turkey/en/support-school-enrolment-sse-programme>

²⁰For more detailed information about the program: <https://www.acev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/3.Syrian-Children.CaseStudy.pdf>

²¹For more detailed information about the program: <https://www.acev.org/en/project-reading-future/>

²²For more detailed information about the program: <https://sgdd.org.tr/projeler/okula-kayit-icin-destek-programi/>

²³For more detailed information about the program: <https://multeciler.org.tr/egitim-ve-mentorluk-birimi/>

²⁴For more detailed information about the program: <https://malala.igamder.org>

²⁵For more detailed information about the program: <https://igamder.org/TR/projelerimiz/-mesafe-tanimayan-egitim>

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