TRANSFORMING ACCESS TO EDUCATİON FOR REFUGEE AND EARTHQUAKE-AFFECTED CHİLDREN İN TÜRKİYE

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2025
Uluslararası Sanat Eğitimcileri Derneği

1. Strengthening Access to Education and Enrollment

According to the laws in Türkiye, all children in the country, including non-Turkish citizens, have the right to benefit from basic education.

- **Transition from Temporary Education Centers (TECs) to the National System:** Starting in 2018, all school-age Syrian students began enrolling in the public schools closest to their residences. These centers were gradually closed over time, allowing students to transition into the national education system.
- **Efforts to Increase Schooling Rates:** Field studies were conducted to identify and follow up on children who were not attending school and to include them in formal and non-formal education programs appropriate to their age.
- **Conditional Education Assistance (CEA) Program:** This national social assistance program, implemented to increase the schooling and attendance of the most vulnerable children, has been expanded to include refugee families since the beginning of 2017.

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2. Adaptation to the Turkish Education System and Language Teaching

Accelerating the integration of refugee children into Turkish schools and overcoming language barriers has been a key priority.

- **Integration (Support) Classes and the PICTES/PIKTES Project:** The "Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System" (PICTES, later PIKTES) project was implemented to facilitate the integration of Syrian children into the Turkish education system. Within the scope of this project:
    - Special classes or programs have been created for refugee children in schools.
    - , the majority of whom are Turkish teachers, were assigned to work **in "adaptation classes" in schools** .

- **Turkish Modular Programs for Foreigners:** Thanks to these programs developed by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, immigrant students and adults have the opportunity to learn Turkish in local schools and Temporary Education Centers (formerly known as Temporary Education Centers).

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3. Psychosocial Support and Trauma Management

Providing education to children who have gone through psychologically difficult times such as war, conflict and migration is critical for their adaptation to society.

- **Psychological Support Programs:** Psychological intervention programs against trauma implemented in schools have made significant contributions to reducing the psychological problems related to the trauma experienced by immigrant students.
- **Holistic Support:** The creation of child-friendly spaces, libraries and the provision of psycho-social support to children and young people are among the significant achievements recorded.
- **Development of Resilience Capacity:** In the development of the resilience capacity of immigrant children, it is important to understand the potential risk and supportive elements of the immediate environment, including family and schools, and to support them in this direction.

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4. Inclusion and Peer Support

- **Collaborative Learning and Peer Support:** It is recommended that collaborative learning and peer-supported learning strategies be implemented for children in schools.
- **Multicultural Perspective:** Practices that aim to strengthen multicultural perspectives in schools help children see their cultural differences as an asset.

Suggestions for the Future

- Diversifying the support program to be developed according to the needs of the students will be beneficial in terms of psychological support.
- Practices such as supporting, funding and rewarding projects developed to address education issues pave the way for more projects to be implemented.

Findings on Refugee Education in Türkiye from UNICEF, MEB and UNHCR Reports

These reports document the interventions developed by the Turkish Government in response to the educational problems of Syrian refugees, particularly those under temporary protection, and provide important statistics on the current situation.

1. Access to Education and Schooling Statistics (UNICEF & MEB)

As of 2021, Türkiye hosted approximately 1,124,353 Syrian children of compulsory education age. Significant progress has been made in providing these children with access to the education system:

Indicator	Status and Statistics	Source
General School Enrollment Rate	As of November 2021, **65 percent of school-aged Syrian children** were attending public schools.	**UNICEF & Ministry of National Education**
Number of Out-of-School Children	As of November 2021, approximately **400,000 Syrian children** were not attending school.	**UNICEF & Ministry of National Education**
Inter-Level Registration Rates	As the educational level increases, the enrollment rate of Syrian children in schools decreases: While **the enrollment rate in primary school is 75 percent** , **this rate** is 43 percent in high school.	**UNICEF & Ministry of National Education**
Gender Distribution (January 2022)	Of the students enrolled in countries under international protection (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.), **49.09% are girls** and **50.91%** are boys.	**UNICEF & Ministry of National Education**
Reason for High School Dropout	One of the main reasons for the decline in high school attendance is that children **drop out of school to contribute to the family budget** .	**UNICEF & Ministry of National Education**

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2. Critical Programs and Policies

The reports highlight the largest projects implemented during the integration of Syrian children into the national education system:

- **PICTES/PIKTES Project:** The "Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System Project" (PICTES/PIKTES) was implemented with European Union funds (within the framework of FRIT protocols). The main objectives of this project are:

    - To contribute to Syrian children's access to education and their integration into society.
    - **Turkish teachers (up to 6000 in number)** to work in adaptation classes .
- **Conditional Education Assistance (CEA): This program, implemented in collaboration with** UNICEF, the Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Red Crescent and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, aims to increase the school attendance of the most vulnerable refugee children.
- **Referral to Vocational High Schools: To prevent high school-age children from dropping out, referral to vocational high schools was encouraged under PİKTES 2. These children are expected to receive financial support from European Union funds** in the same amount as that provided to Turkish children .

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3. UNHCR's Global and Local Observations

UNHCR reports highlight global challenges of refugee education and progress in Türkiye:

- **Global Challenges: Globally, primary school-age refugees are only** 61% enrolled , dropping to 23% by high school. In higher education, this figure is only **1% of the global refugee population** (2017 data).
- **Praise for Turkey: International reports have praised** the Government of the Republic of Turkey for consistently pursuing its policies and generously hosting the refugee population since the beginning of the Syrian crisis .
- **Reasons for Being Deprived of Education:** The main reasons why refugee children are deprived of education include factors such as **insecurity, lack of inclusive education policies, limited capacity and language barriers** .
- **Recommendations:** UNHCR recommends establishing curricula focused on developing the academic and vocational skills of refugee children and providing professional development opportunities for teachers to work with refugee students.

The major earthquakes that struck Turkey on February 6, 2023, profoundly impacted millions of people living in the region, particularly the Temporary Protection Status (TPS) refugee population. Nearly half of the TPS-holding Syrians residing in the 11 provinces affected by the earthquake (more than 1.7 million individuals) were directly harmed by the disaster, and the vast majority were displaced and forced to migrate to other cities.

accelerated and comprehensive interventions were implemented to address the access to education and psychosocial support (PSS) needs of refugee children in cooperation with UNICEF, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

1. Barriers to Education and Access

The earthquakes caused extensive structural damage to schools and other educational institutions, displacing students and educators, and severely impacting the region's education system.

- **Displacement and Migration:** Problems of continuity and access to education continued for the children of refugee families who migrated from the earthquake zone to different cities, especially Istanbul.
- **Transportation Support:** The need for dedicated investments to address transportation needs, one of the biggest barriers to accessing education for refugee and earthquake-affected children, was highlighted. Investments in school transportation are seen as a strategic investment to empower marginalized communities.
- **Registration and Enrollment Problems:** Through mechanisms such as the Back to School Campaign and the 'Problem Enrollment System', the registration and enrollment problems of earthquake-affected children and the barriers to accessing education have been continuously monitored and documented.
- **Child Labor Risk:** Especially due to economic difficulties following the earthquake, the risk of high school-aged refugee children dropping out of school to contribute to the family budget has increased.

2. Executed Support Programs and Best Practices

Immediately following the earthquakes, comprehensive efforts were initiated to support education and psychosocial recovery:

- **Temporary Learning Spaces and Child-Friendly Spaces:** In earthquake-affected areas (such as Hatay), civil society organizations (NGOs) quickly established Child-Friendly Spaces. These spaces aim to both support children's education and enhance their well-being.
- **Psychosocial Support (PSS) and Emotional Well-Being:** The earthquake caused psychological distress among children and educators who lost loved ones and caregivers or experienced traumatic experiences. Therefore, there is an urgent need to implement specialized PSS programs to support recovery and resilience.
- **Education and Mentoring Support:** Special projects were implemented to ensure equal educational opportunities for children affected by the earthquake. These projects include:
    - Distributing school supplies and supporting school registration processes.
    - **mentoring support** to contribute to academic success .
    - **Turkish Workshops** to minimize the negative effects of the language barrier (to teach reading, writing, speaking and listening skills).

    - Creating support courses and EBA Support Points for preparation for exams such as LGS.

- **Special Needs Fund:** Methods such as individualised support and special needs funds have been used to eliminate the protection risks faced by children.
- **Teacher Support:** Continuity of the teaching staff was aimed through practices such as granting teachers who left the region due to the earthquake the right to return without any time restriction.

Sources:

- **UNICEF:**
    - Transforming Access to Education through Transportation Support for Refugee and Earthquake-Affected Children in Türkiye Report
    - Back to School Campaign Report
- **Refugees Association:**
    - Status Report on Access to Education for Refugee Children After the February 6 Earthquake
- **Support for Life:**
    - So That Spring Can Read (The Story of the Earthquake-Affected Children's Continuity of Education Project)