

IPC-MERCATOR POLICY BRIEF



THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS IN TURKEY: TEMPORARY EDUCATION CENTERS AND BEYOND

Bülent Aras and Salih Yasun

Executive Summary

This policy paper assesses the educational opportunities and challenges of Syrian refugees in Turkey and evaluates the role of Temporary Education Centers (TEC) in integrating Syrian students into the Turkish educational system. It is expected that about 65% of Syrians will remain in Turkey even after the war concludes, approximately 572,000 of which are children.¹ The integration of such a large number of students will be a critical component for Turkey's development trajectory. For this study, we have interviewed the leaders of 12 TECs located in four socio-economically diverse districts in Istanbul as well as bureaucrats and one NGO leader. We have observed the opportunities of students to access education as well as the quality of the educational software and hardware as defined in the literature. In light of our findings, we have provided assessments with recommendations. The goals of this study have been to help policy makers evaluate the current effects of refugee education policies on the integration process, to design the most effective policy interventions, and to serve as a guide to local administrators and NGOs in understanding and responding to the needs of Syrian refugee students. In addition, we hope that our study serves as a guide to leaders, local administrators, and NGOs in all countries around the world for developing mechanisms that can provide accessible and high quality education for refugees.

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Introduction

The uprising in Syria began with civic protests in 2011. The government's brutal military crackdown on protestors led to clashes with government officials, which quickly escalated into a civil war. As of March 2016, the conflict has led nearly 5 million Syrian refugees to flee their country.² Among these refugees, about 2.75 million currently reside in Turkey.³ Approximately 880,000 of the refugees living in Turkey are school-age (between ages 5 and 19), of whom 45% attend schools in Turkey.⁴

There are currently two main options for the continuation of Syrian students' education in Turkey. Syrian students can choose to attend either Turkish public schools or temporary education centers. Temporary education centers (TEC) are primary and secondary education centers that provide educational opportunities for school-age Syrian children in Turkey (MEB, 2014). These schools utilize Arabic as the medium of instruction and follow a curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government and modified by the Turkish Ministry of Education.⁵ Currently, approximately 78% of Syrian refugee students attend TECs, and 22% attend other schooling institutions, consisting of mainly Turkish public institutions.⁶ Through government mandate, Syrian students at the first grade and preschool level attend only Turkish schools.

For this study, we interviewed the leaders of twelve TECs located in four socio-economically diverse districts in Istanbul to investigate schools within a broad range of socio-economic levels. We chose four pilot regions in Istanbul based on a living quality index developed by Istanbul Board of Commerce. The index ranked all 39 provinces in Istanbul. We chose one district placed high on the index, one district in the middle, and two districts at the bottom. These districts are Fatih, ranked 5th;

Ümraniye, ranked 20th; Sultanbeyli, ranked 37th; and Esenler, ranked 39th. Two of the school leaders were of Turkish origin, and ten were of Syrian origin. In addition, we interviewed the leader of an NGO assisting Syrian schools to obtain a perspective on NGO-school relationships. We also interviewed bureaucrats from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Education to understand the perspectives of the government on refugee education. The methodology of the interviews was semi-structured, which is a mix of more structured, questionnaire-driven and less structured, open-ended conversational questions.⁷

We turned the interviews into a dataset through multiple mechanisms. Having divided the leader evaluations based on subjects, we requested leaders to distinctly evaluate certain issues according to whether they are satisfied or not satisfied. Then we coded and comparatively analyzed the evaluations. In addition, we requested certain hard facts about the schools based on the qualities defined by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) (2009), which we analyzed based on the fulfillment of these criteria. We also comparatively analyzed the open-ended questions.

This study has been divided into four sections. The first section examines government policies towards refugee education. The second section explains the current state of Syrian refugee children's educational opportunities and challenges. The third section provides an assessment of Syrian refugee children's educational opportunities and challenges, and the fourth section provides policy recommendations. In defining educational opportunities, we first present the case and then explain the current or expected government policies.⁸ In assessing educational opportunities and challenges, we first present the criteria from the literature⁹, then assess the situation and

explain the government's current or expected policy interventions.

The State of Government Policies Towards Refugee Education

Scholars have argued that education is a “central pillar” of humanitarian response to a refugee crisis in addition to the pillars of shelter, nourishment, and health services.¹⁰ Education benefits the refugee community, particularly refugee children, through increasing socio-economic status and by “mitigating the psychosocial effects of conflict and achieving protection related objectives.”¹¹

Education is a useful mechanism to reduce the psychosocial impact of displacement and trauma.¹² The personalities and coping skills of school-age children are shaped almost daily.¹¹ Due to the disruption of their physical, intellectual, cultural, and social development stemming from their refugee experiences, children often suffer from depression, engage in vengeful behavior and conflict, and experience anxiety and loneliness. However, education restores an element of hope and fosters a sense of normalcy as it is forward-looking, constructive, and signals a degree of stability.¹¹ In addition, schools are thought to provide the emotional and physical support needed for refugee children to face the challenges of and build a better future in their host country.¹³ By bringing the needs of children to the attention of teachers, education may also “reveal children subject to abuse, such as harmful labor, exploitation of foster children” and as a result prevent potential cases of trauma from developing.^{14, 11}

Education also provides the presence of adult supervision and a structured schedule, which can protect children from harmful activities such as vengefulness or joining militias.¹⁰ The Oslo-Hadeland conference on child protection,

conveyed in November 1998, claimed, “Education has a preventive effect on recruitment, abduction and gender based violence, and thereby serves as an important protection tool.”^{10, 15} Education also prevents children from being drawn into labor markets or forced marriage.¹⁶ In addition to trauma prevention and protection, access to education is associated with poverty reduction, as higher education provides stability, economic growth, and better lives for children, families, and communities.¹⁷ The educated will know how to read, write, and do basic math, which are essential skills for participating in economic activities.¹⁰ In addition, women with higher education levels tend to have lower child mortality rates and increased female labor force participation.¹¹

The overarching benefits of refugee education point to the need to put greater emphasis on refugee education in Turkey. Host countries must formulate policies that increase and improve the educational opportunities of refugees. Emin (2016) has summarized the policies of the Turkish government on the educational opportunities of refugee children.¹⁸ In 2013, the Turkish Ministry of Education published a circular that established a blueprint for the continuation of Syrian children's education.¹⁹ The circular stated that the Ministry of Education is responsible for providing educational opportunities for Syrian refugee children, and the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government is responsible for determining the curriculum for Syrian refugee education. The circular also indicated that Syrians who are high school graduates and have passed the “Baccalaureate” exam in Syria can enroll in universities in Turkey. In 2014, the government passed the “Law on Foreigners and International Protection” based on the guidelines of the circular.²⁰ The law identified the “the scope and implementation of the protection to be provided for foreigners who seek

protection in Turkey.” The law also broadly defined the educational rights of Syrian refugees by stating, “applicant or international protection beneficiary and family members shall have access to primary and secondary education.” According to the law, refugees could obtain an international protection ID with proper IDs from the home country and travel documents, and if the applicant has no IDs or travel documents from the home country, “information obtained from the comparison of personal data and from investigation shall be used for the identity. In case no information is obtained as a result of the identity determination investigation as well, the (personal) statement of the applicant shall be referred to.” Based on the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, the government passed “Temporary Protection Legislation” in 2014, which stated that the educational activities of refugee students at primary and secondary schools are regulated according to the Ministry of Education’s guidelines.²¹ In addition, associate, undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate level studies are regulated according to the Turkish Council of Higher Education’s guidelines. The students who participate in educational activities in Turkey receive certificates that can be accredited by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education. In 2014 the Ministry of Education published another circular, which provided the opportunity for Syrian students to attend either TECs or public schools in Turkey.²² The interviews with school leaders have indicated that students can physically attend classes at TECs even if they do not have IDs provided by the Directory of Police by providing basic information to school officials through personal statements. However, students still need to obtain IDs to be able to receive diplomas and grade reports.

To be placed in the appropriate classroom at TECs, students need to prove their academic trajectory in Syria or take a placement exam. These exams are not

uniform as each TEC has its own exam with different questions. The score of the exam determines the placement of the student into a grade level. Students wishing to transfer to Turkish schools are automatically placed in the nearest Turkish school in proximity of their residence. However, cases of transition remain significantly low. One school leader provided the statistics of students who transferred to the nearby Turkish school from the TEC, which revealed that among 260 students only 17 (6.5%) transferred to the Turkish schools in the past academic year. A debate among bureaucrats has emerged concerning whether or not to place Syrian students in the *kaynaştırma eğitimi* (fusion education) programs in Turkish public schools.²³ Currently “fusion education” programs are offered for students with certain identified deficits, such as lack of attention and hyperactivity. Through such programs, students receive private education in courses that they request help with.²⁴ The expansion of fusion education programs to Syrian students could help them receive additional help in courses that they struggle with and catch up with their peers.

Regardless of whether they continue their studies at TECs or Turkish public schools, refugee students have the chance to continue their education at Turkish universities. However, enrollment in Turkish universities requires them to successfully complete certain steps. First, Syrian students studying at TECs need to successfully pass their accreditation exams (baccalaureate) upon completing their high school studies. The accreditation exam was administered for the first time in the past year, which consisted of 180 questions to be completed in three hours. Second, Syrian students need to take the YÖS examination, an entrance examination designed for foreign students wishing to study in Turkey at the university level, which mainly tests the learning capacities of students. Universities have a 10%

quota for admitting foreign students. That means the percentage of enrolled foreign students among the total enrolled students cannot be higher than 10%. Universities are free to fulfill the quota as they wish: some choose to fill it to 10%, some choose not to admit any foreign students at all. A large proportion of students admitted to Turkish universities through the foreign quota are Syrian.²⁵ In addition, Syrian students are provided with scholarships through funds from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, and there are current plans to increase the attendance of Syrians in Turkish universities by providing a year-long Turkish course focused on learning academic Turkish.²⁶ Some of the TEC interviewed offered YÖS courses to students to help them prepare for the examination. These were mainly paid courses, with fees ranging from 50 TL to 100 TL per month.

The Current State of Syrian Refugee Children Education

Interviews with school leaders indicated that the support for TECs comes from different agents such as NGOs, local municipalities, the Ministry of Education, and private donations. The services provided by such agents have included scholarships, meals, transportation, activities for students, wages for teachers, and spaces for education. Although TECs are free, six school leaders indicated that their centers asked for donations from wealthy parents and third party benefactors but refrained from asking for donations from orphans or students whose parents cannot afford to pay school expenses. Three of these leaders indicated that they relied purely on donations made by parents and benefactors to supply students' education. The amount of donations asked per student changed from school to school, ranging between 35 TL to 250 TL per student per month. The scope of NGO support

for refugee education has remained significantly low. For instance, only three school leaders (25%) indicated that the school is coordinating with NGOs to improve the wages of teachers, and five (41.6%) indicated that the schools did not receive any teaching, counseling, or material support from NGOs to supply education.

The availability of teachers and educational materials can be considered as essential components of a high quality education. The provision of adequate wages is a necessity to maintain qualified teachers at TECs. Inadequate teacher compensation may lead to lowered teacher morale, teacher absenteeism, and lack of interest in the teaching profession.²⁷ In addition, with the lack of adequate financial opportunities, teachers may look for finding better paying jobs in other sectors or less demanding jobs with similar pay scales.²⁸ Currently, wages for teachers at TECs are provided through three main mechanisms: UNICEF, NGOs, and donations. UNICEF currently provides approximately 900 TL per month (approximately 316 USD) to teachers. Teachers begin receiving payments from UNICEF as soon as their school is registered in the Ministry of Education's system. In addition, UNICEF provides retrospective compensation to teachers in the case of missed payments. Other schools choose to provide wages to teachers through private donations and support from NGOs. Among the schools investigated, the wages for teachers provided through private donations ranged between 1,000 TL and 2,000 TL per month, and the wages of teachers compensated by NGOs between 1,200 TL to 1,500 TL per month. The opportunity costs of teaching may increase as recent legislature enables registered refugees the ability to legally work at the minimum wage, which is 1,300 TL per month.^{29, 30}

TECs are commonly located in office blocks, NGO buildings, and Turkish public school buildings. Classes at TECs utilizing public school buildings are conducted in the evenings, as the buildings become available after Turkish students leave. Most of the TECs located at the NGO buildings and office blocks run their classes from morning until afternoon, as they are flexible regarding the timeline for utilizing classrooms. However, a large segment of the schools visited lack recreational areas (50%), including backyards, where students can relax.

Many students reside far from TECs and, therefore, need to utilize transportation mechanisms. Among the ten school leaders who responded to the question about transportation, two indicated that the school only serves students in the region; hence, it does not provide any transportation. Three indicated that the municipality provides transportation, and five indicated that families pay for transportation costs, which ranged between 90 TL and 170 TL per month. The Ministry of Education is planning to cover the costs of shuttle services to schools in the near future, as well as student fares for bus tickets.

School leaders and bureaucrats identified the challenges preventing Syrian students from accessing TECs. Some of the challenges are as follows:

- Having to work to earn a living is a common explanation for the low level of school attendance among Syrian refugee children in Turkey.²⁹ The child labor problem is especially acute at the high school level. High school education was not mandatory in Syria,³¹ which may have contributed to the conception among Syrian refugee parents that the main priority of high school-age children is to help cover living expenses. One school leader explained the root cause of the child labor problem,

stating, “At least three people in a family need to work to survive in Turkey.” As a result, child labor is a common cause preventing access to education. As another primary school leader said, “Certain students do not attend schools during Fridays, and we know that on Fridays they sell tissues on the streets.” Government officials have indicated that there are currently no sanction mechanisms for families who do not send their children to schools.

- Students and parents may not know about educational opportunities in Turkey. The Ministry of Education has coordinated with UNICEF to provide brochures detailing educational opportunities to parents at migration offices.

- Some parents may be staying in Turkey temporarily before migrating to another country and may choose not to send their children to the school for this reason.

- School fees constitute another barrier preventing access to education for many students. Although education is free for refugee children, most schools are dependent on donations from students with wealthier parents. These school leaders have indicated that they do not charge any fees from orphans and students coming from poor families. However, in some cases these schools may choose to admit students whose parents could provide donations over those who could not.

- The absence of uniforms can be another barrier preventing children’s access to schooling. Children might be “reluctant to attend school if they do not have clothing that preserves their decency.” This problem is especially acute for older girls.³² A majority of TECs that we have visited did not provide uniforms to students. Among the schools visited, one school leader indicated that students have developed a hierarchy among themselves based on the quality of civilian clothes. In addition,

the school leader indicated that students wearing donated clothes could easily be identified, which could reduce the self-esteem of these students.

The Assessment of Syrian Refugee Children's Education

In this section, we evaluate the current state of Syrian refugee education by first assessing the ability of refugee students to access educational opportunities and then the quality of the educational "hardware" and "software" as identified in the literature.^{32, 33} Hardware qualities measure mainly the service delivery of education, while software qualities focus on other dimensions such as the outcome or the quality of education.

Assessing Access to Educational Opportunities

Refugee students may have missed years of education due to the closure of schools in their home countries and prolonged traveling. These students may be more reluctant to attend schools as their learning trajectory is often different and there can be large age gaps between them and other students in their grade levels. Therefore, special schools that focus on the educational attainment of such students may be required for refugees to fully integrate into the educational system. An example of such a specialized school, which opened through the private initiative of the Syrian community, can be found in the Fatih district. However, the school lacks counseling services and means of transportation, and the teachers had still not been provided with wages at the time that this article was written.

Refugee students may also face social barriers in their education.³⁴ In the case of Syrian students, these barriers may stem both from within the Syrian community and the host country. Among the Syrian community, long-held discriminatory views about girls' educational attainment exist, preventing girls

from accessing educational opportunities.³⁵ Among the Turkish community, some Turkish teachers and counselors do not pay proper attention to the education of Syrian students despite the fact that Syrian students, many of whom lack the proper Turkish language skills, require more attention than their Turkish peers to succeed in the classroom. In addition, deeply established discriminatory views exist among the Turkish community towards Syrians. As a result of the challenges present at Turkish public schools, some Syrian students have returned to the TEC after failing to integrate.

Structural and individual efforts to welcome refugees could prevent them from being isolated—even a nominally welcoming atmosphere in the school could have positive contributions to the adjustment phase of refugee students.³⁴ The Ministry of Education is planning to conduct orientation programs for Turkish teachers who currently have or who are expected to have Syrian students in their classrooms to ensure that Syrian students are properly welcomed into their new environments.³⁶

Assessing the Hardware Qualities of Education

UNHCR has defined three hardware criteria by which to measure the quality of education.³⁷ The first criterion is the number of students per teacher, with a goal of having at most 40:1. The second criterion is the percentage of qualified teachers, with a goal of having at least 80% of trained and certified teachers. The third criterion is the extent to which the studies of refugees are recognized. We asked school leaders questions regarding the fulfillment of these hardware qualities.

Investigating the first criterion revealed that among the twelve schools that we visited, eleven had a student/teacher ratio below 40; hence, they fulfilled the first condition of UNHCR's high

quality education. The only school with a student/teacher ratio above 40 had a 42:1 ratio. However, two school leaders emphasized that some of the individual classes within schools had a ratio above 40:1, with one school having 39:1 as an overall ratio.

Investigating the second criterion has revealed that at the schools visited all current Syrian teachers are university graduates, and an overwhelming majority of them (97.9%) were accredited teachers in Syria, with only a small group consisting of individuals who had other occupations, such as lawyers. However, interviews with bureaucrats indicated that the qualities of teachers at TECs are not deeply investigated by the Ministry of Education. The experts have reiterated the importance of teachers' education on concepts such as structured learning, use of student-centered methods, play and recreation, teaching life skills, and referrals, which will create a supportive environment and promote learners' psychosocial well-being.³⁸ The exposure of Syrian teachers to student-centered methods could be crucial for improving the quality of education, as both Syrian and Turkish school leaders have indicated that Syrian teachers utilize teacher-centered methodologies with great emphasis on memorization. Refugee education may require additional skills for teachers in order to cope with student trauma and provide psychological support to students. Hence, additional orientation programs may be needed for Syrian teachers. The Ministry of Education is currently offering orientation programs to Syrian teachers, which focus on providing psychological support for students who experienced war, managing crowded classes, coping with trauma, and performing reflective teaching and class-based activities. When asked whether teachers in the institution went through an orientation program, six out of twelve school leaders (50.0%) responded positively. However, the Ministry of Education is planning to expand

the orientation programs to all teachers in the near future.

Investigating the third criterion has revealed that the diplomas and certificates received in Syria and obtained from TECs are recognized by the Ministry of Education,³⁹ which provides the students the ability to continue their primary, secondary, and even university level studies in Turkey. This is a very significant accomplishment as previous studies have identified many host countries do not acknowledge the accreditation of refugee students.⁴⁰ In addition, the Ministry of Education issues special diplomas to students at TECs, providing the students the opportunities to receive accreditation of their studies in other countries. This can be crucial for the continuation of the studies of students migrating to Europe.

Assessing the Software Qualities of Education

We examined the mechanisms that influence the software qualities of education inside TECs. These include the provision of counseling services, teaching local languages effectively, the presence of high-level teaching skills, the quality of teaching materials, facilitating attendance to school, addressing the needs of students and families, and the provision of socio-cultural activities.

The provision of counseling services can be considered as an essential dimension of a high quality education. Refugee children's exposure to violence might lead them to consider themselves as less capable, to become fearful of their environment, and to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁴¹ Such factors may limit their capacities to learn. Therefore, refugee children often need mental health provisions to emotionally heal. However, it is challenging for refugee children to access mental health services. In some cases, parents do not notice that their children have

developed PTSD, and in some cases parents do not have the resources to have their children receive treatment.⁴⁰ One way for large numbers of traumatized children to access mental health provisions is to offer school-based treatment programs.⁴² However, such programs can only be carried out by trained staff members.⁴¹ School counselors might provide the support needed to carry out such programs.⁴⁰ Thus, TECs would need trained counselors to treat students dealing with trauma. Among the twelve school leaders interviewed, nine indicated that their schools had counselors and three indicated that their schools had no counselors. Among the leaders of schools that had counseling services, six out of nine indicated that the counseling services were not sufficient for students, mainly complaining that the number of counselors at the schools were too low to serve the needs of students effectively. The schools that did not have or had an insufficient number of counselors were mostly serving underprivileged students, who may have faced greater psychological obstacles. The student/counselor ratio among schools that had counselors was also substantially high, ranging between 128 students per counselor to 960 students per counselor. The counselors have received payments mainly through donations made to schools and the sources provided by NGOs. Some school leaders have emphasized that school counselors have not received the stipends provided by UNICEF to Syrian teachers. However, the interviews with bureaucrats have indicated that there will be training programs for Syrian counselors in the summer, and those who complete the programs successfully will be appointed to schools and included in the UNICEF payroll.

Another important dimension of the counseling provision is the gender distribution of counselors. One school leader indicated that the gender of

counselors mattered such that male students were more comfortable consulting with male counselors and female students were more comfortable consulting with female counselors. The same leader indicated that the sole counselor in his school was a female, which made it difficult for male students to approach her to receive counseling services. Among the majority of the schools that had counselors, there was no gender balance as some schools had all male and others had all female counselors. Responses regarding counseling services have indicated that an immediate action plan needs to be developed to ensure that the TEC receive the qualified counselors and ensure a gender balance among them.

The ability of the students to learn the language of the host country is an essential dynamic of a high quality refugee education. Refugee children who have acquired the language of the host country are more likely to successfully adjust to the education system of the host country, experience less isolation,⁴³ and participate in the labor force of the host country after graduation.⁴⁴ Currently, students at TECs receive four to five hours of Turkish education per week. Five of the twelve school leaders stated that Turkish language education is provided by volunteers free of charge. Four leaders stated that the schools cover the expenses of Turkish teachers, and three leaders stated that NGOs cover the expenses of Turkish teachers. Among the twelve school leaders that evaluated the quality and quantity of Turkish education, nine stated that the quantity and quality of language education were not sufficient, while three stated that the quality and quantity of language education were sufficient. A major reason indicated for the insufficiency of language education was related to the quantity of language hours. Another potential problem that the leaders indicated regarding language acquisition is that

students are unable to learn Turkish because they do not speak Turkish outside of the classroom and hence do not find any value in learning Turkish. The reliance on volunteers may also hinder the language acquisition process as the leader of an NGO stated, “volunteers promise to come and teach, however they stop teaching after the first couple weeks.” One school leader stated that the quality of Turkish education was low, because teachers were not equipped to teach Turkish to non-native speakers. However, the school was able to collaborate with a municipality partnership program with a Turkish university to improve the teaching methods of teachers teaching Turkish to non-native speakers, and the quality of Turkish courses had noticeably increased. According to the statements of the Ministry of Education, through a collaboration with the Yunus Emre Institute soon all Syrian schools will be assigned at least one paid Turkish teacher trained in teaching Turkish to non-native speakers. In addition, bureaucrats have stated that some topics in the Syrian curriculum that do not exist in the Turkish curriculum, such as psychology and sociology, could be replaced with extra Turkish language classes to increase the quantity of Turkish language education.

Craig (1995) states that the availability of books has a great impact on the quality of education for refugee students.⁴⁵ Currently, the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government provides the textbooks for courses other than Turkish free of charge to the students of TECs. Regarding Turkish language textbooks, seven leaders have indicated that Turkish textbooks have been provided to students free of charge. Two leaders have indicated that their schools charge fees for Turkish books, ranging from 15 TL to 50 TL. Three leaders have indicated that the schools have not provided any Turkish language books to the students. The Turkish Ministry of Education will

provide Turkish textbooks free of charge beginning in the spring term of the next academic year.⁴⁶

We asked the school leaders whether the existing educational system makes it easy for Syrian students to adjust to the Turkish educational system, and only two of the twelve school leaders (16.6%) responded positively. Five school leaders did not know, and another five school leaders claimed that the current educational mechanism did not make it easy for Syrian students to adjust. The contextual differences between the curriculums, the lack of information about the accreditation exams, and deficiency in language skills were raised as common reasons making the transition process difficult.

INEE (2010) states that in refugee situations, education experts should formulate a curriculum that ensures a transition to the host country and that is acceptable at the country of origin, which requires a significant level of cooperation between education experts on both sides.⁴⁷ However, the Syrian curriculum was designed almost single-handedly by the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government, with adjustments made by the Turkish Ministry of Education on culturally sensitive subjects. As a result, there are some discrepancies between the two curriculums. For instance, a subject might be taught at the 5th grade at TECs but at the 4th grade at Turkish schools, which could add extra challenges to the adjustment phases of Syrian students transferring to Turkish schools.

Another common problem in transitioning that school leaders addressed was the lack of information about the accreditation exams. Our interviews with school leaders and bureaucrats indicated that students were surprised with the content of the exam. One government official stated, “(i)n the exam they probably expected questions related to calculus, yet we asked them about more basic topics such as whole numbers.”

One school leader indicated that the last year's accreditation exam was a shock to students. He claimed that even some of the hardest working students could not pass the exam because the exam's content was very different from what was expected. Additionally, as the school leader claimed, students were given almost no information prior to the exam. Other school leaders also indicated that although there are few months remaining until this year's accreditation exam, the ministry has not yet provided any information about its content. As a result, students do not know exactly which topics they need to study. The distribution of handbooks that provide detailed information about the content and scope of the exam can help students to better prepare and ensure that more Syrian students can receive accreditation and thus continue their education at Turkish universities.

Financial contributions from NGOs can boost the quality of education. All schools receiving support from NGOs were able to offer teachers better wages than the amount previously provided by UNICEF. In addition, school leaders had a higher likelihood of indicating satisfaction with counseling services if NGOs were involved in providing counseling activities to students. However, among the four schools that have indicated that NGOs provide additional counseling services, three already had counselors of their own, which may indicate that the NGOs may be targeting some better-off schools. In one school visited, the NGO, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and the TEC coordinated conditional aid programs that have returned some children to school. However, the conditional aid program has been limited to only one school that we visited, and it reached a very limited number of students due to lack of resources. Bureaucrats have indicated that conditional aid programs remain very limited in scope nationwide.

The provision of socio-cultural activities is another essential component of a high quality refugee education. Students performing such activities may become more successful in their studies (Rogoff, 1990). In addition, such activities may raise awareness of the host society's culture, contributing to the integration process. The school leaders have indicated that many students are unable to attend socio-cultural activities due to financial reasons, and even unable to spend time with their friends in places other than classrooms, which negatively affect students' classroom performance. School leaders try to take students to socio-cultural activities as much as possible, with parks being the main destination. As one school leader stated, "Once or twice a year we take students to parks. Students release their energy at parks and have better performance once they come back." Many of the Syrian students also feel isolated from Turkish culture. As one leader stated, "Students live at the heart of Istanbul, yet remain distanced to the Turkish culture." The isolation from Turkish culture may also make students reluctant to learn the Turkish language.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have divided our recommendations into two categories: primary recommendations and secondary recommendations. Primary recommendations focus on the steps that require immediate attention, whereas secondary recommendations focus on the steps that can be completed in the long run.

Primary Recommendations

- Provide students with daily meals at schools to lessen the financial burden of families and incentivize them to send their children to schools. Meals are already provided at some schools through local municipalities.

- Supply TECs run by private donations with additional funds so that TECs can provide truly free education for all students and ensure that voluntary school fees do not prevent access to education.
- Open special TECs targeting students who have missed years of schooling. Turkey hosts many refugee students who have lost several years of education due to prolonged war.
- Increase the coordination between NGOs, local municipalities, TECs, and the relevant ministries to spread conditional aid programs.
- Open vocational training programs, which will enable refugee students to provide meaningful income for their families while earning valuable skills that they can transfer to their home countries. The Ministry of Education should follow through on their plan to offer vocational programs for Syrian refugees within the next academic year.⁴⁸
- Provide uniforms for students free of charge.
- Provide free transportation services such as the Ministry of Education has planned in the near future.⁴⁷
- Increase teacher wages above the minimum wage and provide them through 12-month contracts to ensure that highly skilled teachers continue practicing their profession.
- Increase the number of trained counselors at schools, with the goal of having at least one female and one male counselor per school to ensure that both male and female students can access counseling services. Once this is accomplished, the student/counselor ratio should be lowered.
- Ensure that counselors are included in UNICEF's payroll.
- Ensure that all Turkish teachers with Syrian students in their classrooms receive orientation programs and that orientation programs emphasize cultural differences such as "short response, unexpected nonverbal expressions, and embarrassment that teachers might misinterpret as deficiencies."⁴⁹
- Require all Syrian teachers to participate in orientation programs.
- Ensure that each high school can offer free YÖS courses to students.
- Remove contextual differences between Syrian and Turkish curriculums to ensure that the transition process occurs smoothly.
- Provide information to students about the accreditation exams in a timely manner.
- Inspect the quality of teachers working at TECs.
- Ensure that TECs have basic science materials.
- Help NGOs in targeting underprivileged schools.

Secondary Recommendations

- Establish an examination system that could ensure the transfer of Syrian students to Turkish schools based on their skill sets and knowledge.
- Increase the level of cooperation between municipalities and schools to ensure that the students can utilize green spaces regularly.
- Establish sister school projects to enable students to practice Turkish with their peers.

- Increase the visibility of Syrians within the Turkish community by providing public service broadcasts focusing on Syrians in Turkey.
- Replace courses in the Syrian curriculum not existing in the Turkish curriculum, such as sociology and psychology, with extra Turkish language hours to increase the quantity of Turkish language lessons.
- Investigate whether “Temporary Education Center” banners in diplomas could create problems for students in obtaining accreditation for their studies in other countries.
- Establish a mechanism that can evaluate the quality of Syrian teachers.
- Eradicate discriminatory views about girls’ education existing among the Syrian community.
- Provide Muzekart⁵⁰ to Syrian students at the same rate as it is provided to Turkish students to ensure that Syrian students can afford to access socio-cultural activities.

ENDNOTES

1 | Interviews with government officials in discussion with the authors.

2 | As of March 16, 2016, the exact number of identified Syrian refugees is 4,812,204 according to UNHCR's statistics.

3 | As of March 2016, the exact number of identified Syrian refugees residing in Turkey is 2,747,946.

4 | Interviews with government officials in discussion with the authors.

5 | The current curriculum mimics the curriculum utilized in Syria prior to the civil war. However, the material in favor of the Assad dynasty, the Baas party, and some controversial elements about Syria-Turkey relations have been excluded from the current curriculum.

6 | Estimations based on Emin, M. N., "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Çocukların Eğitimi, Temel Eğitim Politikaları," SETA, 2016.

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34 | McBrien, J. L., "Educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States: A review of the literature," *Review of educational research* 75 no. 3 (2005): 329-364.

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36 | Interviews with bureaucrats in discussion with the authors.

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50 | A mechanism through which the government could bolster Syrians' participation in socio-cultural activities is through the provision of Muzekart to students. Muzekart is a year-long access pass provided to both Turkish students and foreigners for museums and historical sites in Turkey. The cost of a Muzekart for Turkish citizens under 18 years old is 5 TL, and for citizens above 18 years old who are university students the price is 20 TL. The expansion of Muzekart to Syrian students would allow them to visit historical sites in Turkey and catalyze their integration into Turkish culture. To prevent overcrowding on busy days and at busy hours, the Muzekarts of Syrian students could be activated during the least busy hours.

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