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Türkiye's Efforts for the Education of Syrian Children: Ministry of National Education Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, Türkiye has pursued an "open door" policy for humanitarian purposes. Currently, 3,500,964 Syrians are being hosted in Türkiye. Education policies are at the center of the policies developed to meet the shelter, health and security needs of Syrians. The Ministry of National Education has carried out important and various activities to ensure their access to education and 67% of 1,365,884 school-aged Syrian children have been schooled. In this study, a case study, was used to examine the studies on the education of migrant children in Türkiye.

Keywords: Education of Syrians in Türkiye, migrant education, PIKTES, refugee education, social cohesion of migrants

Introduction

In the 20th century, the phenomenon of international migration deeply affects societies as an important policy area. The internal turmoil in Syria in 2011 was followed by the requests of Syrian asylum seekers to take refuge in Türkiye en masse as a result of the open-door policy implemented due to both historical ties and being a border neighbor (Dryden Peterson, 2016). While Türkiye is facing the biggest and most massive migration movement in its history, it has taken a serious responsibility in basic service areas such as education, health, accommodation, and safety. Many studies have been carried out to satisfy the educational needs of Syrian adults and children granted temporary protection legal status within the scope of the Temporary Protection Regulation, which came into force in 2014.

Türkiye produces policies for access to education as one of the fundamental rights in line with its national legislation and international agreements to which it is a party. Türkiye has implemented significant education policies and relevant practices in terms of access to education and social integration in the face of an unexpected and intense migration wave. However, such a large immigrant population has put pressure on resources and infrastructure and has left the education system facing serious difficulties (Arar et al., 2019b).

As of February 2023, 3,500,964 under Temporary Protection (SuTP) are being hosted in Türkiye. Among them, 1,124,353 are school-age children. Additionally, 141,513 children from other foreign nationalities (Iraq, Afghan, Palestine, Somalia, Yemen) are also being hosted (Directorate of Migration Management, 2023). The number of students studying at the pre-school, primary, and secondary education levels affiliated with the Ministry of National Education is approximately 19 million (MEB, 2022) and the burden on the education system becomes more visible, considering the number of immigrant children

in this context. In this respect, the migration process has brought up the need for highly sensitive and effective policies. Coordinated studies are jointly carried out with various national and international institutions and organizations, especially the European Union, for facilitating Syrian children's access to education, improving their educational environment and ensuring their social cohesion.

Within the scope of the policy of integrating Syrians living in Türkiye into the Turkish education system, it was decided to direct Syrian children to public schools as of the 2016–2017 academic year. About 993,336 (68.57%) of the SuTP population of school age were included in formal education. Table 1 shows the number of school-age and schooled SuTP students by education level.

The schooling rates of Syrian children in educational institutions affiliated with the Ministry are 45.27% in pre-school, 78.99% in primary school, 80.25% in secondary school, and 47.43% in high school (Ministry of National Education (MoNE), Directorate General of Life Long Learning—DGLLL, 2022). However, economic, linguistic, cultural, and social problems continue to exist against Syrian children's participation and access to education (Avcı, 2019; Bilecik, 2019; Block et al., 2014; Börü & Boyacı, 2016; Gümüşten, 2017; Hodes, 2000; Kaya & Çolakoğlu, 2020; Nar, 2008; Tanrıku, 2017). These

Table 1.
Number of School-Age and Schooled SuTP Children (2022)

	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Number of school-aged children	141 849	519 846	442 350	344 593
Number of schooled children	64 218	410 654	355 019	163 445

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problems have been identified by MoNE, and the 2019–2023 Strategy Plan includes the aims of both increasing the schooling rates of Syrian children and improving their educational environments (MoNE, 2019, pp. 61–87).

Schools act as safe havens by providing protection, rehabilitation, and educational support as the first official safe point of contact for immigrant children and adolescents suffering from trauma of war and loss (Arar et al., 2019a, 2019b). In other words, school is an important factor that facilitates the adaptation of immigrant families (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Education provides an important psychological support in terms of maintaining normal life even in crisis situations (Stainburn, 2002). This study deals with educational policies, plans, practices, and results developed for SuTP children were handled holistically, considering that education is the most important tool to facilitate integration, and compiles Türkiye's specific efforts in this field in the education ecosystem.

Methods

In this study, a case study, which is a qualitative research method, was used. A case study is a method that involves in-depth description and examination of a limited system (Chmiliar, 2010; Merriam, 2013), and reveals the real environment by using multiple sources with data collection tools such as observation, interview, document scanning, and examination of reports (Davey, 2009). In a case study, the system analyzed is described comprehensively in the context of a specific time and place (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This study analyzes the activities carried out by the Ministry of National Education for the children of SuTP who started to migrate to Türkiye since 2011 as a result of the civil unrest in Syria. The research data were collected by the document scanning method. Since this study was conducted by document scanning method, it does not require ethics committee approval. Data were derived from reports prepared by the Ministry but not published outside the institution in digital or printed format, as well as those available on Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System's (PIKTES) website and official posts on social media accounts. The data collected in the research were analyzed with descriptive analysis technique. Descriptive analysis includes summarizing and interpreting the data obtained through various data collection techniques according to the determined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003). This study is expected to fill an important gap in the literature by containing detailed and comprehensive information on the education of SuTP children in Türkiye.

Results

Studies carried out within the Ministry of National Education

In the first years when Syrians started to come to Türkiye, it was thought that this situation was temporary, and although the Ministry provided support for the education of children, the main responsibility rested with the Syrians themselves. After the Syrians were settled in the camps, tent schools were established, where education was provided by Syrian volunteer teachers. However, with the prolongation of the war, the number of Syrians in Türkiye rapidly increased and spread to all cities, necessitating measures and responsibility for children's education. MoNE implemented the first institutional regulations regarding the Syrians' right to education with two circulars issued in 2013. On April 26, 2013, a circular on "Measures for Syrian Citizens hosted outside the camps in our country" was issued for children in temporary accommodation centers. However, with the rapid accumulation of SuTPs in the cities, it was necessary to urgently work on the education of Syrians living outside the camps. In this context, with the circular on "Education Services for Syrian Citizens Under Temporary Protection in Our Country," more comprehensive steps were taken for the schooling of Syrians living in urban areas.

The rights and obligations provided by the temporary protection status recognized within the scope of the Foreigners and International Protection Law (FIPL) are regulated in detail with the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), which entered into force in October 2014. With this regulation, the work toward Syrians was placed on a more solid ground and an important step was taken to develop long-term approaches and policies. The TPR states that Syrian individuals will be provided with health, education, access to the labor market, social assistance and services, interpretation, and similar services. Within the scope of the TPR, it is stated that education activities both inside and outside the shelter centers will be carried out by MoNE. In this respect, the TPR has constituted an important reference point in domestic legislation for studies on Syrians' right to education. The regulation states that pre-school education services can be provided to children aged 36–66 months; education and training activities of primary and secondary school-aged children will be carried out within the framework of the relevant legislation of the Ministry of National Education; personal development, social-cultural, vocational and technical, artistic and sportive courses can be organized for SuTP individuals; and studies will be carried out by the Council of Higher Education on associate, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral education.

Another important regulation for Syrians was provided by the circular of the Ministry of Education Directorate General for Basic Education, entitled "Education and Training Services for Foreigners." Accordingly, education services for Syrians have been standardized and ensured to a great extent. Within the scope of this circular, those under temporary protection in Türkiye are legally entitled to enroll not only in Temporary Education Centres (TECs) but also in public schools in Türkiye. In addition, it was decided that TECs would be opened with the permission of the governor's office under the provincial and district Directorates of National Education and that they would be based on the schedule and program determined by the Ministry. Thus, it is aimed to ensure unity in practice in the education of SuTP children and to integrate them into the Turkish education system. Integrating Syrians into public schools has been an important step in rescuing the right to education from the shadow of the migration/permanency debates. As a matter of fact, integrative education models facilitate integration (Sakız, 2016; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). As a result of the special efforts of the Ministry of National Education for migrant education, some administrative regulations have also been implemented. One of these regulations is the establishment of the Migration and Emergency Education Department under the MoNE Directorate General for Lifelong Learning (DGLLL). Implementation of a specialized administrative structure for migrant education is an important step in Türkiye's migration management.

Syrians under Temporary Protection are provided with Turkish language courses, general courses, vocational courses and Turkish literacy courses at Public Education Centers (PECs) within the scope of non-formal education regardless of age limit. Between 2014 and 2021, a total of 515,469 Syrians benefited from Turkish language teaching courses, 1,049,897 from general courses, 198,146 from vocational courses, and 134,948 from Turkish literacy courses (MoNE - GLLL, 2022).

PIKTES, launched in 2016 under the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye¹ agreement, plays a critical role as an important focal point for the education of SuTP children in Türkiye. In this respect, the project has been addressed under a separate heading.

¹ In 2016, the European Union decided to support Türkiye by adopting the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT). FRIT has been a tool developed to assist the Republic of Türkiye's refugee crisis in education, health, and economy (European Commission, 2019). In the first phase of the project 300, in the second phase 400, and in the third phase 300 million Euro grants were provided.

Table 2.

Project Team

	PMO	PCT	Turkish Language Teachers	Arabic Language Teachers	Guidance Counselors	Security Staff	Cleaning Staff
PICTES	51	103	5505	93	500	300	900
PIKTES II	70	126	3200	31	303	383	1449

Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System

The project, established within the Ministry of National Education, has continued continuously in three phases as PICTES, PIKTES II, and PIKTES+.² The project carries out activities to ensure access to education and integration of SuTP children in Türkiye.

The PIKTES structure includes Project Management Office (PMO) staff, Provincial Co-ordination Team (PCT) members responsible for the overall coordination and operation of the Project in their provinces, Turkish language teachers, Arabic language teachers, and guidance counselors in schools, as well as cleaning and security staff. Table 2 shows the Project team and their numbers throughout the Project.

Turkish Language Instructors are assigned to teach Turkish to Syrian children, Arabic Language Teachers are assigned to teach Arabic, their mother tongue, academically, and Counselors are assigned to provide psychosocial support as a team specialized in migration and war trauma. Cleaning and security personnel are also employed in schools to meet the needs arising from the increasing student population.

Project Activities

In the first phase of the project, there were three main outputs, namely increasing the access of Syrian students to education and the quality of education provided to them, improving the operational capacity of educational institutions and their staff, and 15 activities under these outputs. In the second phase, improving the social integration of Syrian students and parents was added to these outputs, and the number of activities was increased to 24. In both phases of the project, Turkish and Arabic language education, catch-up and back-up training, transport service, stationery and clothing aid, awareness-raising activities, material support, measurement and evaluation studies, guidance and psychological support service, cleaning and security service, provision of educational equipment, training of trainers, training of administrative staff, monitoring and evaluation studies were carried out.

PIKTES II differs from the first project in that it includes an early childhood education program, scholarships for students attending vocational and technical education institutions, social cohesion activities, establishment of e-examination centers, and container classrooms for early childhood education. In addition to these activities, Turkish students were also included in the scope of the Project and social cohesion activities involving students and families were included. The inclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged host community children and parents in some of the activities under PICTES II is a critical step taken in the second phase to minimize negative reactions from the host community for not being included during PICTES. Another important change in the PIKTES II implementation is the inclusion of a significant number of migrant children of other nationalities (Iraqi, Afghan, Palestinian, Somali, Yemeni) in addition to Syrian children. These children face the same difficulties as Syrian students due to their disadvantaged living conditions.

Turkish Language Education

One of the main activities of the project is the Turkish language training provided to overcome the language barrier (Arabacı et al., 2014; Bulut et al., 2018; Er & Bayındır, 2015; Erdem, 2017;

Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2021; Topal & Uluçınar Sağır, 2021; Keskin & Okçu, 2021; Zayimoğlu Öztürk, 2021), which is the biggest obstacle to Syrian students' adaptation to school and following the curriculum. Syrian students state that they cannot communicate with their teachers and peers due to the language barrier and that this situation negatively affects their adaptation to school (Yiğit et al., 2021).

Temporary Education Centres, which were established with the idea that they would be in Türkiye for a short period of time, played an important role in the inclusion of SuTP children in education life initially. In order to ensure that children continue their education without interruption, the Syrian curriculum in Arabic was used in TECs. However, in the process, TECs started to be closed gradually as they created a significant disadvantage in terms of social cohesion, and a policy was followed to direct Syrian students to public schools and integrate them into the Turkish curriculum. In this way, the inclusive education model, which facilitates integration, came to the fore (Sakız, 2016; Sunata & Abdulla, 2019; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Again, steps to support social cohesion outside formal education were taken by opening Turkish language courses for Syrians in PECs under the MoNE DGLLL (MoNE, DGLLL, 2022).

Prior to PICTES, Syrian children were not given any additional Turkish education by MoNE, considering that they would not stay in Türkiye for a long time. With the decision to transfer students receiving Arabic education in TECs to the Turkish education system, Turkish language teachers were employed in TECs and public schools with a large number of Syrian students within the scope of PICTES. Turkish language education was provided by Turkish Language Teachers for 10–15 hours per week for all levels, prioritizing those at the basic education level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For 30 months, students in TECs received 15 hours of Turkish language education per week, while those in public schools received 10 hours of Turkish language education per week. In addition, Turkish language trainings continued to be provided by Turkish Language Teachers in the form of summer courses in three-month periods during the summer period. In the first phase, 390,000 Syrian students were targeted to receive Turkish language education and 449,634 students were reached in total (PICTES, 2019b).

In the impact analysis conducted at the end of the first phase of the project, it was observed that the Turkish language training provided to SuTP children within the scope of the project significantly increased the academic achievement levels of Syrian children, as measured by their end-of-term Turkish and Mathematics grades. Turkish language education was also found to improve the tendency of absenteeism and the likelihood of passing the class, as well as enhancing their school engagement. It was also observed that academic achievement increased with the intensity of language education (PICTES, 2019a). Accordingly, language teaching activities were updated in the second phase of the Project in order to provide longer and more intensive language education to SuTP children.

With the launch of PIKTES II, the Adaptation Classes model was developed. In September 2019, foreign students from third to 12th grades at primary and secondary education levels, who had insufficient Turkish language skills, were enrolled in adaptation classes and received intensive Turkish language education. In the adaptation classes, which were formed according to age and level groups by taking into account

² Since PIKTES+ had just started at the time of this study, it was excluded from the scope of the study.

the results obtained from the Turkish Language Exam conducted by the project, students were given 24 hours of intensive Turkish language education weekly, supported by courses such as visual arts and sports. Approximately 100,000 students received face-to-face language training in adaptation classes until March 2020 when distance education was switched to with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Live lessons have been started over the Education Information Network in Türkiye in the distance education process (EBA), and lesson broadcasts have been made for different grade levels via television. In this context, PIKTES has prepared “Turkish for Foreign Students” lesson videos for primary, secondary, and high school-level groups (PIKTES, 2023).

As of October 2020, adaptation classes have been implemented only at the third grade level of primary school. At the beginning of the academic year, 39,663 students were admitted to the adaptation classes based on evaluations made by the commission formed by the school administration within the framework of the criteria measuring the four basic language skills prepared by PIKTES. In the adaptation classes, education is provided for two consecutive terms, 30 lesson hours per week. During the first semester, students receive 20 hours of Turkish instruction and 10 hours of mathematics, life science, music, etc. courses. In the second semester, they receive 15 hours of Turkish and 15 hours of mathematics, life studies, music, etc. is. The success of the students studying in the adaptation class is evaluated by the teacher teaching the course. At the end of the academic year, these students are transferred to the next grade. In the academic year 2021/22, 33,144 SuTP students received education in adaptation classes. In addition, 6-hour weekly Turkish language courses have been opened for foreign students who need to improve their Turkish language level by learning and seeing at all levels from fourth to 12th grade. Turkish Language Courses and Summer Language Courses were attended by 479,112 students. As an important output of the project, a total of 551,919 students received Turkish language education under PIKTES II (PIKTES, 2023). In addition, the “Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language Programme” was developed in order to carry out the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language within the framework of a special program.

Arabic Language Education

Arabic language trainings are provided within the scope of the Project in order to prevent Syrian students from worrying about forgetting their mother tongue Arabic while learning Turkish (Eryılmaz, 2022) and to enable them to understand and speak Arabic at a basic level. Since Syrian children cannot use their mother tongue sufficiently at a young age, Arabic language education is provided in grades 2–12, with priority given to primary education level students (pre-school and grades 1–4). During the summer period, Arabic language education is organized in the form of summer courses. In the first phase of the project, 11,496 Syrian students and 9958 Syrian students received basic level Arabic language education. In addition, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) decided that Arabic will be taught as an elective course for 2–4 hours per week in the 2017–2018 academic year, like other languages (English, German, and French), in order for Syrian children living in Türkiye to learn Arabic. Thus, Syrian students also had the opportunity to learn their mother tongue from teachers in the MoNE norm staff.

During periods when schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Arabic lessons were also given by the Ministry of National Education via EBA-TV. All Syrian and other migrant students were able to follow the lessons according to their Arabic level (PIKTES, 2023).

Catch-up Training

Children who have to interrupt their education during times of crisis face risks such as child labor, early marriage, alienation, psychological and social problems if they are not brought to school (Levent & Çayak,

2017). Compensating for learning losses with an intensified and accelerated program can be a solution for re-enrolling these out-of-school children (Kılıç & Özkor, 2019). In 2018, MoNE, in cooperation with UNICEF, launched the Accelerated Education Program (ALP) to provide out-of-school Syrian children with the opportunity to learn at the same grade level as their peers by providing them with the basic learning outcomes of the curriculum in a short period of time. Syrian children between the ages of 10 and 18, who have been away from education for 3–6 years or who cannot access formal education opportunities, are enrolled in the program run by PECs. Children who successfully complete the relevant levels of the ALP are directed to age-appropriate formal and non-formal education opportunities (MoNE and UNICEF, 2019). This work is one of the most important activities carried out within the scope of PIKTES.

In the first phase of the project, a special intensive program prepared by PIKTES was implemented in this study, which is called Catch-up Training. Catch-up trainings were planned for 30 hours per week for 80 days (480 hours in total) during the summer holiday period. Within this scope, 15,377 students in the first phase and 9423 students in the second phase of the project were included in formal education (PIKTES, 2019b, PIKTES, 2023).

In the second phase of the project, two more models were added to the catch-up training implemented in the first phase. The second model, Post Adaptation Class Catch-up Training, was launched in the 2019–2020 academic year to compensate for the learning losses that may occur due to the transition of children studying in adaptation classes to the next grade. The third model is the Turkish-language catch-up training, which was organized to compensate for the learning losses that occurred when schools were closed for a longer period of time due to inadequacies in internet access and technological facilities of SuTP students during the pandemic process that started in the 2019–2020 academic year. In the second phase of the project, 78,572 students received catch-up training.

Back-up Training

Support education measures implemented for migrant students in line with their needs in certain areas of the curriculum in European education systems (İşigüzel & Baldık, 2019) are also implemented in Türkiye. Back-up training aims to ensure the continuation of education of SuTP students who have not been academically successful in public schools or who have repeated grades, and to reach average academic standards in order to minimize the risk of dropping out of school. In the first phase of the project, back-up training was organized for a total of 300 hours (8 hours per week) in Turkish, Mathematics, and Science, and in the second phase, it was revised to 200 hours (4–8 hours per week). Within the scope of the activity, 80,043 and 71,299 SuTP students received back-up training in the first and second phases, respectively (PIKTES, 2019b).

In the impact analysis evaluation conducted at the end of the first phase of the project, it was observed that the back-up training provided within the scope of the Project had a significant positive impact on Syrian children's school achievement levels (overall grade point average and end-of-term Turkish/Math grades), and also had a significant positive impact on variables such as the number of days of absenteeism and the likelihood of grade repetition, which measure school engagement (PIKTES, 2019a).

Guidance and Psychological Support Service

Counseling and psychological support services are provided to support the educational and psychological development of traumatized SuTP students who are learning a language other than their mother tongue and are struggling to integrate into their new educational environment. This is because the traumatic experiences of migrant children

also affect their access to education by damaging their well-being. Violence at school (Altıntaş & Gelişli, 2015; Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2020; Yiğit et al., 2021), psychological problems (Aytaç, 2021) and problems in peer relations (Saklan, 2018; Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2020; Topal & Uluçınar-Sağır, 2021) are the main problems experienced by SuTP children in their adaptation to school.

In order to repair the devastating psychological effects of war and migration on the SuTP children and to ensure their school adaptation, 500 Guidance Counselors, who are experts in the field, were employed in the first phase of the Project, with 303 in the second phase. Guidance counselors received orientation training on topics such as approaches and psychological support for students exposed to trauma, conflict management, cultural and social adaptation. The number of students receiving psychological counselling and guidance services was 194,158 in the first phase and 500,242 in the second phase (PICTES, 2019b; PIKTES, 2023). SuTP students also receive support from the Guidance and Psychological Counselor staff in the MoNE norm staff.

Early Childhood Education for Syrian and Turkish Students

Early childhood education is one of the critical periods in motor, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development (Tunçeli & Zembat, 2017; Uyanık & Kandır, 2010). Language, social-emotional, and cognitive development areas develop holistically by influencing and feeding each other (Yeşilyaprak, 2013). This period is very important for the learning and socialization of Turkish from early childhood, social adaptation, and academic achievement of the SuTP children. It has been observed that Turkish language acquisition, integration into Turkish schools and the education system, learning and applying classroom rules, making friends with Turkish children, maintaining friendship, quality of communication with the teacher in the classroom, and academic achievement are much more effective in the early period. The implementation of these interventions in the preschool period and the adaptation of migrant children to the system starting from preschool education is a highly effective and low-cost strategy.

In the second phase of the project, schools where Syrian children study were supported in terms of educational materials, stationery, and equipment. This study aims to provide the infrastructure support needed due to the increase in the capacity of our schools and to meet the educational needs of the children of economically disadvantaged families.

During the summer period, two months of intensive pre-school education are provided in free public schools. The aim of the Summer Early Childhood Education activities is to increase the level of readiness of children who will start primary school in September (5–6 age group) but have not benefited from pre-school education, and to ensure that they start primary school on equal terms with their peers. The trainings are carried out in mixed classes with Turkish and Syrian children for 30 hours per week over an 8-week period in July–August in order to increase their Turkish language level and social cohesion. An education plan was prepared for summer education, with an emphasis on language development and social-emotional learning outcomes and activities that emphasize the unifying elements of different cultures. In addition, this program provided opportunities for children to meet the school culture, experience the school and classroom environment, express themselves and their needs, develop their social skills, acquire self-care skills, and increase their motor and cognitive skills. During the trainings, the basic needs of all children in the 26 provinces where the Project was implemented, such as nutrition, transport, and stationery, were met, and basic equipment and educational material support were provided to the summer schools/classes they attended. Although the Summer 2020 ECE could not be organized due to pandemic conditions, a total of 155,354 students benefited from early childhood

education support in PIKTES II, including 62,943 SuTP and 58,677 Turkish students.

A qualitative research study was conducted to assess the impacts of the ECE activity and to improve the activities accordingly. The qualitative impact analysis revealed that the Summer ECE activity had a significant impact on children's Turkish language learning and language development. According to the results of the research, the program supported children's readiness for primary school and their adaptation to school, and contributed to children's social skills, hand skills, self-care skills, and cognitive development (PIKTES, 2019).

Within the scope of early childhood education, five-year-old Turkish and foreign children who do not have access to pre-school education are supported with a game chest set. In this context, 6000 families received "My Game Chest" sets containing educational materials, age-appropriate educational games, and hygiene kits. In addition, 15,920 children benefited from the nutrition service piloted in three provinces within the scope of early childhood education. On the other hand, written and digital educational materials are being developed for use in pre-school education.

Teacher and Administrative Staff Trainings

Attitudes of school administrators and teachers toward discrimination and prejudice are among the important dynamics that constitute the school climate. School staff who are aware of multiculturalism and sensitive to discrimination play a critical role in creating a positive school climate. In this respect, supporting the professional and personal development of school administrators and teachers in working with migrant children is important for the quality and inclusiveness of education (Dryden-Peterson, 2011, pp. 54–57). Professional development trainings are provided in the Project in order to prevent negative situations that may arise if teachers and administrative staff, who are among the most important components of education, are not aware of the specific situations and needs of migrant children (Trueba et al., 2004). Indeed, studies (Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2020; Topal & Uluçınar-Sağır, 2021) identifying the basic needs and problems in the education of migrant children highlight the training needs of teachers. These trainings, conducted to provide necessary professional development support in working with migrant children, are organized in face-to-face and online environments for teachers and administrative staff in the MoNE norm staff, Turkish and Arabic Teachers, and Guidance Counselors employed within the scope of the Project.

The 60-hour orientation trainings for Turkish and Arabic language teachers and guidance counselors employed within the scope of the Project are the trainings that PICTES teachers receive before they start their duties in the Project in order to inform them about the Project, prepare them for the field, and increase their readiness to work with migrant groups. These trainings were organized on topics such as migration and education, psychological support for migrant children, conflict management, teaching techniques, social cohesion, and communication with families. Orientation trainings were attended by 7504 Turkish Language Teachers, 706 Guidance Counselors, and 95 Arabic Language Teachers.

In order to improve their skills in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, all Turkish language teachers, who are project staff, were provided with 60-hour Turkish Language Teaching to Foreigners Central Certificate Program courses within the Turkish Language Teaching Centers of universities. In addition, "Psychosocial Intervention Certificate Program" training was given to all Guidance Counselors. In the process of interrupting education within the scope of COVID-19 measures and switching to distance education, online professional development trainings were initiated in which teachers working within

the scope of our project can support students' learning and well-being with different methods and tools that can be used in distance education.

Within the scope of the Project, trainings are organized for teachers and administrative staff in the MoNE norm staff in order to work with SuTP students, to raise awareness about the Project, and to develop the operational capacity of educational institutions and staff. In the first phase of the project, 8661 teachers and 4234 administrative staff working in public schools, and in the second phase, 33,528 public teachers and 8154 administrative staff were trained on different themes, with priority on topics such as posttraumatic psychosocial support types and practices, adaptation and feeling of belonging in SuTP children, teaching methodologies. Thus, the professional skills of our country's human resources in the field of education in working with migrant groups were supported (PICTES, 2019b; PIKTES, 2023).

In addition to the vocational training provided in the project, in-service trainings organized by the Directorate General of Teacher Training and Development (DGTDD) for teachers affiliated with Ministry, in the context of inclusive education, were developed to cover education of immigrant children (MoNE-DGTDD, 2023). The aim of trainings on the topics, namely, teaching Turkish as a second language, working with children affected by migration and terrorism, and working with SuTP, is to support teachers professionally in ensuring the social cohesion and academic development of immigrant children.

Materials Support

Within the scope of the project, educational materials in Turkish and Arabic are being developed, revised, and delivered to schools in order to improve the quality of education in line with the specific needs of SuTP students. In this context, plans and program preparations for the specific needs of students under temporary protection, material development such as story sets, workbooks, digital contents, EBA course videos, Turkish dictionary for foreign students, exercise books, and pull-out leaf tests are carried out.

Measurement and Assessment

An examination system is being developed and implemented to determine the academic level of Syrian students, their Turkish and Arabic language skills, and their success in catch-up and back-up trainings. For the first time, a study was conducted within MoNE to determine language proficiencies in Turkish and Arabic. Language proficiencies were determined in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and the language proficiency levels of SuTP students were determined by conducting a central examination according to these proficiencies. Table 3 shows the exams organized throughout the Project and the number of students participating.

With these exams, it was measured whether SuTP students could reach the targeted competences with the education they received.

Table 3.
Exams Implemented within the Scope of the Project

	Exam	Number of Participants
Phase 1 of the Project	Turkish Proficiency Exam	395,076
	Arabic Proficiency Exam	11,544
	Back-up Training Exams	15,072
	Catch-up Training Exams	6979
Phase 2 of the Project	Turkish Language Exam	941,499
	Catch-up Training Exams	75,501
	Back-up Training Exams	69,776
	Arabic Proficiency Exam	27,691
	Adaptation Classes	96,161
	Evaluation Exam	

PIKTES, 2023; PIKTES, 2023.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, some of the exams were conducted online. Since the beginning of the project, 428,671 students participated in the first phase and 1,210,628 students in the second phase (PIKTES, 2023).

Social Cohesion Activities for Syrian Students and Their Turkish Peers

Adaptation problems negatively affect the academic achievement of SuTP children as well as their psychological status and well-being. Adaptation activities, where the children of SuTP and the host community are together and sociocultural exchanges are made, play a very important role in establishing positive communication, breaking down prejudices, and strengthening their relationships (Yigit et al., 2021).

Within the scope of PIKTES II, peer-focused social cohesion activities are organized to promote social cohesion and positive interaction between SuTP children and their Turkish peers. In the second phase of the project, sports activities (outdoor sports tournaments, table tennis, chess, etc.), artistic activities (theater, painting/craft exhibitions, folk dances, etc.), sociocultural activities (cultural excursions, kite festivals, April 23rd children's festival, PIKTES gardens, etc.) are carried out between SuTP students and their Turkish peers. A total of 130,025 students, 60,850 SuTP and 69,175 Turkish students, participated in the activities carried out within this scope (PIKTES, 2023).

Social Integration Activities for Syrian and Turkish Families

Ensuring the social cohesion of migrants requires multidimensional efforts by many institutions and organizations. The relationship between Syrian parents and the school through their children's education includes important opportunities for Syrian parents to meet with the host community, to make cultural transfers, to feel a sense of social acceptance, and to develop positive communication. Accordingly, in the second phase of the Project, social cohesion and guidance activities such as breakfast, iftar, bazaars, neighborhood festivals, parent meetings, etc. were started to be organized to support the social cohesion of foreign and Turkish parents. These organizations brought together 54,526 parents, including 27,649 foreign nationals and 26,877 Turks (PIKTES, 2023).

In order to facilitate the adaptation of Syrians and other foreigners in Türkiye to social, economic, and cultural life, the Social Cohesion and Life Education program (SCLE) was launched in 2019 in cooperation with DGLLL and the Directorate of Migration Management. In the program where 1 million 368 thousand people attended in 2022, eight hour trainings are given in PECs on the cultural structure of Türkiye, traditions and customs, rights and obligations, information on social life, education and health opportunities, civil code, legal issues, and access to livelihoods (MoNE-DGLLL, 2023).

Scholarship Support for Students Attending Vocational and Technical Education

The Vocational and Technical Education scholarship, which started to be provided in the second phase of the project, was identified as a possible solution to increase the enrolment rates of SuTP students, especially in high school. The scholarship aims to combat child labor by motivating students to acquire a profession and obtain a diploma. Under this activity, it is planned to provide scholarships to Turkish children attending the 9th and 10th grades of vocational high schools and Vocational Education Centers, where enrolment rates are very low and drop-out rates are high. During the academic year, a regular payment is made to each student every month on condition of regular attendance. In addition, a "back to school" support payment is made at the start of each academic year. A total of 42,709 students, 22,799 SuTP students, and 19,910 Turkish students benefited from the scholarship (PIKTES, 2023).

In 2017, children of Syrian and other refugee and asylum-seeker families with low socioeconomic status were included in the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program, which was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Family and Social Services to increase school enrollment rates across the country. Within the scope of the aid, Syrian families are provided with cash aid every month, provided that they send their children to school regularly.

Within the scope of vocational and technical education, “The Project for Social and Economic Cohesion through Vocational and Technical Education (SEUP),” carried out by Directorate General of Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE) within the body of the MoNE is one of the other important studies in this field. In the Project, which is carried out with the aims of improving the social and economic adaptation, employability, and competence of SuTP and Turkish children and encouraging them to vocational education, equipment and infrastructure support is provided to vocational and technical education institutions, along with the transportation, nutrition, clothing, bags, and stationery support provided to students. On the other hand, new graduates of Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools are employed for 1 year, with all costs covered by the SEUP Project. With the program aiming to employ 1500 people until the end of the project, graduates’ participation in the job market is ensured. (MoNE-DGVTE, 2023).

Conclusion

Türkiye is a signatory to the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, which protect the right to education of refugee children. However, the education of Syrian children is considered not only as a fundamental right, but also as a critical issue in the process of rebuilding their lives, and education policies are produced to ensure this. Since 2011, when Syrian migrants arrived in Türkiye, important and various activities have been carried out to ensure their access to education, and 67% of 1,365,884 Syrian children of school age have been schooled. MoNE provides Syrian children with access to education services in public schools, private schools opened by Syrians, Higher Education Institutions (with special quotas designated for SuTP students), TECs, orphanages and PECs (MoNE, 2015, p. 37).

For children who have experienced trauma, being at school is very important for the well-being of children who were exposed to times of crisis, as it supports the formation of life routines and normalization accordingly (Kılıç & Özkor, 2019; Stainburn, 2002). Educational institutions are the first official safe contact point for migrant children and serve as a safe haven where they can receive protection, rehabilitation, and educational support for children who come with the trauma of war and loss (Arar et al., 2019a, 2019b).

In the first 3 years since 2011, when Syrians started to seek refuge in Türkiye, the focus was on temporary solutions, assuming that this situation was temporary and that Syrians would return to their country after the end of the civil war. During this period, the Ministry of National Education supported the efforts made by Syrians to ensure that Syrian children’s education continues uninterrupted and that they can continue their education from where they left off when they return to their country. Accordingly, TECs were opened in camps to provide education to Syrian children in their mother tongue. However, with the ongoing civil war in Syria, it was realized that the increasing Syrian population in Türkiye would not be able to return to their country in a short time, and in this context, approaches and policies aimed at ensuring social cohesion began to be developed. In the field

of education, a series of legislative, structural, and academic preparations have been made and studies have been initiated for the full inclusion of SuTP children in the Turkish education system. In this process, PIKTES, which was initiated to support MoNE in this endeavor, plays an important role.

PIKTES was implemented at a time when migration in our country was intense, and a crisis could occur. The project set out to prevent the formation of a lost generation, provided added value with the breadth of its fields of activity, and achieved great success in many areas. Researches (Arabacı et al., 2014; Bulut et al., 2018; Er & Bayındır, 2015; Erdem, 2017; Keskin & Okçu, 2021; Özer et al., 2016; Taştan & Çelik, 2017; Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2020; Topal & Uluçınar Sağır, 2021; Yurdakul & Tok, 2018) on Syrian children’s access to education reveal obstacles such as language and communication problems, structural barriers, lack of interest in education, families’ evaluations of the benefits of education, early marriage, negative views on mixed education for girls and boys, transportation problems, uncertainties about the future, physical inadequacies such as classrooms and laboratories, overcrowding in schools, lack of information, child labor, social acceptance and adaptation problems, socioeconomic inadequacies, population mobility, gender roles, etc. Within the scope of PIKTES, with the educational services provided in the context of children’s rights, it is aimed to support SuTP children not to be a lost generation and to build a good future for themselves by working toward eliminating these obstacles.

Project activities consist of a comprehensive chain of activities such as Turkish and Arabic language teaching; preparation of educational materials; early childhood, catch-up, and back-up trainings; transport service; psychosocial support to students; social cohesion activities; stationery support; vocational training scholarship; family visits, awareness raising, and information activities; teacher employment and training; administrative staff training; educational material and equipment support to schools; employment of cleaning and security personnel; construction of container classrooms. With these activities, efforts have been made to create an institutional culture on migration studies, to make the practices sustainable in the country, and to ensure that integration is realized effectively in every field.

Schools are the second most important institution for children after the family, where their needs such as socialization, belonging, and security are met in addition to academic development. Therefore, it is very important for the education of SuTP children in Türkiye in public schools together with their peers in the host community in terms of their adaptation to Türkiye (Emin, 2018). Türkiye recognized that the duration of Syrians’ stay in the country would not be short and transferred Syrian children to public schools following the national curriculum. Indeed, in cases where asylum-seekers stay in the country of origin for up to 20 years, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supports the transition of children to the curriculum of the country of asylum (UNHCR, 2015). With the transfer of migrant children to official schools, the most important activity of the Project, language teaching, is carried out with the Turkish Language Teachers employed to solve the language problem (Aytaç, 2021; Yiğit et al., 2021), which is the biggest obstacle to the adaptation and following the national curriculum. The Turkish Language Teachers employed within the scope of the project are competent in this field with their training on teaching Turkish to foreigners and their professional experience of more than 5 years. Teachers have a great role in helping migrant children overcome obstacles such as traumas, poverty, and uncertainty about the future as well as language-based communication problems (Candappa & Eghrevba, 2000). In this respect, PIKTES teachers play an important role in schools, not only in the language learning of migrant children but also in promoting their holistic well-being.

The project increased the professional achievements, awareness, and consciousness levels of staff and participants working with migrants in educational institutions. Thus, an accumulation of knowledge on migration studies, which occupies an important place on Türkiye's agenda, has been created that can be transferred to the future. On the other hand, all kinds of outputs, data, and analyses obtained within the scope of the Project constitute a great resource for determining official policies in the upcoming period, shedding light on all migration-related studies, and solving problems quickly and effectively.

Organizations such as IOM, SGDD-ASAM, Turkish Red Crescent, and UNICEF are also making efforts to increase the schooling of Syrian children and solve problems related to access to school. The experience formed in all stakeholders, beneficiaries, and implementers; the infrastructure formed in the personnel employed within the project and its future use in the same field; the systematic structure/institutional culture created in public and private institutions related to the subject, change in perspective are among the positive and productive results. In the third phase of the project, work on children of seasonal agricultural workers and children in need of special education was added to the chain of activities.

In Türkiye, both the intensity of the migrant population and the high birth rate of Syrians are putting pressure on the education system day by day. In particular, the inadequacy of resources such as physical infrastructure and educational materials in the face of the increasing number of children necessitates extra investments in the field of education. In addition to this material dimension, there is still a need for studies to improve the quality of education in the dimensions of philosophical infrastructure, teacher competences, curriculum adaptations, and parental support in the integration of migrant children into the education system. In this respect, the international community needs to take more responsibility for Türkiye's ability to cope with the heavy burden of migration flows.

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