

**T.C.**  
**İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE SITUATION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN TURKEY: CHALLENGES TO  
THE INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN INTO THE TURKISH  
SOCIETY**

**MA Thesis by**

**HIND KASMI**

**2100007388**

**Department: International Relations**

**Programme: International Relations**

**Supervisor : Asst. Prof.Dr. Nazlı Çağın Bilgili**

**FEBRUARY 2025**

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**Members of Examining Committee:**

**Prof. Dr. İbrahim Mensur Akgün**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Emin Erendor**

**FEBRUARY 2025**

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**Enstitü : Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü**

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## **ÖZET**

### **HIND KASMI**

Bu çalışma, Suriye çatışması nedeniyle yerlerinden edilen Suriyeli mülteci çocukların Türk toplumuna entegrasyonunu incelemektedir. Araştırma, onların karşılaştığı zorluklara ve bu engelleri ele almak için uluslararası hukuki çerçeveler ile ulusal politikaların kesişimine odaklanmaktadır.. Çalışmada Tanımlayıcı-Analitik bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş; hukuki metinler, uluslararası sözleşmeler, ulusal politikalar, akademik literatür ve uluslararası kuruluşlardan elde edilen ikincil veriler sentezlenmiştir. Ayrıca, bağlam sağlamak ve analizi desteklemek amacıyla istatistiksel bilgilerden yararlanılmaktadır. Temel bulgular, dil engelleri, ayrımcılık, eğitime sınırlı erişim ve sosyo-ekonomik kırılganlıkların entegrasyon sürecini önemli ölçüde engellediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Türkiye, çeşitli hukuki ve eğitimsel girişimler başlatmış olsa da mülteci çocukların özel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamakta eksiklikler devam etmektedir. Bu çalışma, uluslararası kuruluşlar, STK'lar ve ev sahibi hükümetler arasında iş birliğini içeren kapsamlı ve kapsayıcı bir entegrasyon stratejisinin kritik rolüne vurgu yapmaktadır. Mevcut eşitsizlikleri gidermek, sosyal uyumu artırmak ve Suriyeli mülteci çocukların Türk toplumuna başarılı bir şekilde dahil edilmesini kolaylaştırmak için hedefe yönelik müdahaleler önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriyeli Mülteci Çocuklar,Türkiye'nin Mülteci Politikası,Hukuki Çerçeve,Entegrasyon Zorlukları,Eğitime Erişim,Çocuk Refahı,Çocuk Kırılganlıkları.

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**Institute: Institute of Graduate Studies**

**Department: International Relations**

**Programme: International Relations with Thesis**

**Supervisor: Asst.Prof.Dr. Nazlı Çağın Bilgili**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**HIND KASMI**

This study examines the integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society following their displacement due to the Syrian conflict. It focuses on the challenges they face and the intersection of international legal frameworks with national policies in addressing these obstacles. The research employs a Descriptive-Analytical Approach, synthesizing legal texts, international conventions, national policies, academic literature, and secondary data from international organizations. It also benefits from statistical information to provide context and support the analysis. Key findings reveal that language barriers, discrimination, limited access to education, and socio-economic vulnerabilities significantly impede the integration process. While Turkey has introduced various legal and educational initiatives, gaps persist in meeting the specific needs of refugee children. This study emphasizes the critical role of a comprehensive and inclusive integration strategy that involves collaboration among international organizations, NGOs, and host governments. It advocates for targeted interventions to address existing disparities, enhance social cohesion, and facilitate the successful inclusion of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society.

**Key Words:** Syrian Refugee Children, Turkey's Refugee Policy, Legal Framework, Integration Challenges, Access to Education, Child Well-being, Child Vulnerabilities.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....i**

**ÖZET.....ii**

**ABSTRACT.....iii**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....vi**

**LIST OF FIGURES.....vii**

**INTRODUCTION .....1**

**1: UNDERSTANDING REFUGEE CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW .....4**

**1.1 Who is a Refugee?.....4**

**1.2 The Significance of Refugee Discourse in International Law.....5**

**1.3 Refugee children.....8**

**1.3.1 Definition of Refugee Children.....9**

**1.3.2 Refugee Children’s Rights.....10**

**1.3.2.1 Introduction to Children’s Rights.....10**

**1.3.2.2 International Legal Framework.....12**

**1.3.2.3 Importance of Protecting Refugee Children.....17**

**1.4 Refugee Children’s Integration.....19**

**1.5 Challenges to Refugee Children’s Integration.....20**

**2: SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY’S RESPONSE.....24**

**2.1 The Syrian Civil War and Emergence of The Refugee Crisis: Turkey’s Role and Response.....24**

**2.2 Turkey’s Legal Landscape: International Agreements and Refugee Implications.....25**

**2.3 The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Contextual Analysis of Their Journey to Turkey.....28**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 2.4 Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey.....   | 33         |
| <b>3: NAVIGATING INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES FACED BY SYRIAN<br/>REFUGEE CHILDREN IN TURKISH SOCIETY .....</b> | <b>37</b>  |
| <b>3.1 Well-Being of the Refugee Children.....</b>   | <b>38</b>  |
| 3.1.1. Housing.....  | 38         |
| 3.1.2 Health Care .....  | 40         |
| 3.1.3 Psychological Support.....   | 43         |
| <b>3.2 Access to Education .....</b>   | <b>45</b>  |
| 3.2.1 Language Barriers.....   | 53         |
| 3.2.2 Discrimination .....   | 59         |
| <b>3.3 Intersecting Vulnerabilities.....</b>   | <b>63</b>  |
| 3.3.1 Unaccompanied Children .....   | 63         |
| 3.3.2 Child Labor.....   | 68         |
| 3.3.3 Child Marriage.....  | 74         |
| <b>CONCLUSION.....</b>   | <b>80</b>  |
| <b>REFERENCES .....</b>  | <b>86</b>  |
| <b>ARABIC REFERENCES.....</b>  | <b>100</b> |

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**AFAD:** Disaster and Emergency Management Authority

**ESWG:** Establishment of Education Sector Working Group

**LFIP:** The Law on Foreigners and International Protection

**MHCs:** Mental Health Centers

**MoFSS:** Ministry of Family and Social Services

**MoLSS:** Ministry of Labor and Social Security

**MONE:** Ministry of National Education

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization

**OCHA:** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**PTSD:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund

**WFP:** World Food Programme

**WHO:** World Health Organization

## LIST OF FIGURES

**Figure 1:** Syrian Under Temporary Protection in Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Presidency of Migration Management,2023)

**Figure 2:** Evaluation of the Level of Syrian Students in the Turkish Language (Syrian Dialogue Center,2020, Hawasli,2020).



## INTRODUCTION

In a world increasingly defined by displacement, the plight of refugees has become one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time. By the end of 2023, over 117.3 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide (Global Trends|Joint Data Center,2023) a staggering figure nearly double that of 2014 (Forced Migration or Displacement, 2024). Among these, children constitute roughly 40%, representing the most vulnerable group caught in the crossfire of wars, persecution, and natural disasters (Global Trends|Joint Data Center,2023). Their stories of resilience are often overshadowed by the profound difficulties they face, from the disruption of education to the struggle for basic rights and dignity.

Within this global crisis, Turkey has emerged as a pivotal nation, hosting one of the largest refugee populations in the world. With over 3.47 million refugees as of late 2023 (Number of Syrians in Turkey,2023), Turkey's unique position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, coupled with its historical and cultural ties, has made it a critical sanctuary for those fleeing conflict, particularly the Syrian Civil War. The war's devastating impact has displaced millions, with Turkey becoming a primary destination due to its geographical proximity and temporary protection policies (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2020).

Of the displaced population, Syrian refugee children comprise a substantial demographic, with approximately 1.6 million children under temporary protection in Turkey (Turkish Presidency of Migration Management,2023). These children face complex and multifaceted challenges, from barriers to education and integration to heightened risks of poverty, exploitation, and psychological trauma. Education, a cornerstone of empowerment and social cohesion, emerges as a particularly vital pathway for their integration into Turkish society. Yet, despite concerted efforts to include Syrian children in formal education, persistent obstacles such as language barriers, societal discrimination, and the enduring impacts of trauma continue to hinder their access and success in school (Taskin, & Erdemli,2018).

The challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkey are not merely logistical but are deeply rooted in legal, social, and institutional dimensions. Despite international legal frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and Turkish domestic laws aimed at protecting refugee rights, gaps remain in addressing the specific needs of these children. This situation raises fundamental questions about the effectiveness of international and national legal measures in safeguarding the rights of refugee children, as well as the adequacy of Turkey's policies in overcoming integration challenges (Giovetti,2022).

The complexity of these issues highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis of the legal, social, and institutional frameworks involved, alongside the exploration of sustainable solutions to ensure the well-being and inclusion of Syrian refugee children in Turkish society.

To address these pressing concerns, this research seeks to answer the central question: *What are the primary challenges to the integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society, and how do international and national legal frameworks address these challenges?* To provide a nuanced understanding, the study is guided by several sub-questions:

1. **Legal Framework:** How does the international legal framework, including the CRC and other conventions, protect the rights of refugee children, and to what extent do Turkish domestic laws align with these international standards in addressing the needs of Syrian refugee children?
2. **Rights of Refugee Children:** What particular rights are ensured to refugee children under international law, and how effectively are these rights maintained in Turkey? How has Turkey responded to the Syrian refugee emergency, and what legal frameworks apply to refugee children in Turkey?
3. **Challenges to Integration:** What are the primary obstacles to incorporating Syrian refugee children into Turkish communities, such as language barriers, discrimination, and access to education? How does the Turkish legal and social framework tackle concerns like child labor, child marriage, and psychological trauma?

The primary objective of this thesis is to thoroughly analyze the challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in their integration into Turkish society. This research seeks to explore these challenges within the framework of international legal instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant conventions, as well as Turkey's domestic laws and policies addressing refugee rights. By examining the experiences of Syrian refugee children in Turkey and comparing these findings with the integration efforts in other countries, this research endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to integration and evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the field of refugee studies by shedding light on the distinct challenges faced by Syrian refugee children during their integration into Turkish society. While numerous studies have explored refugee integration, this research focuses specifically on the multifaceted experiences of children, encompassing

educational, social, and psychological dimensions. By addressing these challenges, the study seeks to enrich the understanding of integration processes for refugee children and provide a nuanced analysis of the barriers they encounter. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of education as a critical pathway for integration and highlights how these challenges intersect within the broader context of child refugee rights. This comprehensive analysis aims to offer valuable insights that can inform future policies and initiatives supporting refugee children in host societies.

To achieve its objectives, this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating conceptual analysis, case studies, and comparative research. The research employs a Descriptive-Analytical Approach, synthesizing information from diverse sources, including reports from international organizations, governmental agencies, and academic publications, to provide a comprehensive understanding of integration challenges. This approach benefits from statistical data to contextualize and support the analysis, offering insights into trends and patterns related to issues such as access to education, child labor prevalence, and the socio-economic conditions of refugee families. By integrating data from multiple sources and disciplines, the research identifies recurring themes and interconnections between the various challenges faced by Syrian refugee children.

This study's outline is structured to systematically address the research questions and objectives. Chapter One provides a comprehensive overview of child refugee rights under international legal frameworks, establishing the foundation for understanding the global and contextual challenges faced by refugee children. Chapter Two examines the Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey's response, focusing on legal landscapes and policy measures that contextualize the experiences of Syrian refugee children. Chapter Three delves into the integration challenges specific to Syrian refugee children in Turkish society, addressing critical issues such as education access, language barriers, social discrimination, and psychological well-being. The concluding section synthesizes the findings, offering actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

Through this comprehensive approach, the study aspires to contribute to the broader understanding of refugee integration, emphasizing the critical role of education, legal protections, and social frameworks. By focusing on the unique circumstances surrounding Syrian refugee children in Turkey, this research highlights the intricate dynamics of integration, underscoring that it is a mutual endeavor requiring commitment from both refugees and host societies.

# **1: UNDERSTANDING REFUGEE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW**

The problem of forced displacement has emerged as one of our most urgent humanitarian challenges. With millions of people being forced to leave their homes because of conflict, persecution, or natural disasters, it is the responsibility of the international community to provide protection and ensure that the rights of those displaced are respected. In response to these difficulties, international legal frameworks have established clear definitions and criteria to identify who is considered a refugee, influencing the level of protection and aid they receive. Grasping the specific legal definition of a refugee is crucial not only for protecting their rights but also for informing responses to refugee situations at both national and international levels.

## **1.1 Who is a Refugee?**

Refugees are individuals who are compelled to leave their home countries due to well-founded fears of persecution, rooted in factors such as race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as people who have fled war, violence, or conflict, crossing international borders in search of safety and protection. This displacement often forces individuals to abandon their homes, livelihoods, communities, and personal possessions, highlighting the profound disruptions caused by such crises (What Is a Refugee?, n.d.[www.unrefugees.org.au](http://www.unrefugees.org.au)). The phenomenon of forced displacement holds critical importance within the domain of international law, both as a legal and humanitarian concern. Foundational legal instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol establish a framework for the protection of refugees, mandating states to uphold specific rights and prevent refoulement, the return of refugees to countries where they may face persecution. These legal provisions not only offer refugees protection but also reinforce the global commitment to justice, equity, and human dignity (UNHCR,2013, The Integration of resettled Refugees,[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)). Beyond legal protections, international law emphasizes shared responsibility among nations in addressing the multifaceted challenges of large-scale refugee movements. This principle of burden-sharing calls for global solidarity in providing resources, expertise, and solutions to mitigate the strain on host countries, particularly those that bear a disproportionate share of the refugee burden. The cooperative framework aims to ensure that responses to displacement crises are not only effective but also equitable. (Refworld – UNHCR, 2024b). Addressing refugee issues also involves navigating complex diplomatic, social, and humanitarian challenges. Solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, and

resettlement are key pathways identified by the UNHCR to ensure durable outcomes for displaced populations. These measures require extensive collaboration across international, national, and local levels to address the root causes of displacement while safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees during and after their journey. (UNHCR,2013, The Integration of resettled Refugees,www.unhcr.org). At its core, the global significance of refugees extends beyond legal frameworks to align with the broader human rights agenda. Refugees are entitled to the same fundamental rights as any individual, as articulated in international human rights treaties. Recognizing their humanity is not only a legal obligation but also a moral imperative, ensuring that those displaced by conflict and persecution can rebuild their lives with dignity and security, The plight of refugees serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of global stability and the interconnectedness of societies. Understanding their experiences and the international frameworks designed to protect them provides a crucial foundation for addressing the broader implications of forced migration, making it an essential issue for governments, international organizations, and civil societies alike.

## **1.2 The Significance of Refugee Discourse in International Law**

The discourse surrounding refugees has become increasingly significant in international law as the global community grapples with the complexities and challenges associated with the displacement of millions of individuals worldwide. The protection of refugees under international law originates from the fundamental understanding of human rights, which stipulates that all humans possess equal rights and obligations (Supriadi, 2021). These principles are further reinforced by the adoption of the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) concept, a framework that gained prominence in the international agenda. During the 2005 United Nations Summit, heads of state and governments from 150 countries endorsed R2P, agreeing that sovereign states bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. However, when states fail to fulfill this responsibility due to incapacity or ill will, the broader international community is obligated to take timely and decisive action through the United Nations Security Council, per the UN Charter (Refworld - UNHCR, 2024b; Evans, 2008).

The issue of refugees is deeply intertwined with the debate on state sovereignty, as nations increasingly recognize the need for international cooperation to address refugee movements across borders. While each country may have its policies and systems, a fundamental framework of international law and human rights principles underpins the treatment of refugees. Central to this framework are the **1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol**, which

serve as key pillars in shaping global responses to refugee crises. The 1951 Convention provides a specific definition of a refugee, focusing on individuals with a “well-founded fear of persecution” based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. This definition is critical for determining who qualifies for protection under the Convention (The Global Refugee Crisis| Martin, 2016).

A cornerstone of the 1951 Convention is the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in Article 33, which prohibits states from returning refugees to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened. This principle is fundamental to refugee protection, ensuring that refugees are not forcibly returned to unsafe environments. It reinforces access to the Convention’s guarantees, safeguarding their right to safety and dignity as they seek stability in host countries (GORLICK, 2000).

The Convention also outlines the rights and obligations associated with refugee status. For instance, Article 22 mandates that states provide refugees with access to education, ensuring treatment equal to that of nationals for elementary education and as favorable as possible for higher education (Weis, n.d.). Article 3 prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, or country of origin, while Article 21 requires states to ensure refugees receive fair access to housing. Furthermore, Article 27 addresses the issuance of identity papers, enabling refugees to participate fully in host societies and access public services. Collectively, these provisions promote the integration, dignity, and security of refugees.

In addition to these rights, the Convention imposes obligations on states. While not mandatory, Article 34 encourages states to facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees, aiding their path to citizenship. Article 35 emphasizes cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), requiring states to provide information on refugee conditions and related laws to assist in implementing the Convention’s provisions. The preamble of the Convention further underscores the UN’s role in overseeing refugee protection and highlights the importance of international collaboration with the UNHCR (UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.-a).

Although the 1951 Convention focuses primarily on the rights of refugees and the obligations of states, it also outlines refugees’ responsibilities. Article 2 stipulates that refugees must conform to the laws and regulations of their host country and respect measures taken to maintain public order (Supriadi, 2021). This balance underscores the mutual responsibilities of refugees and host states in fostering order and cooperation.

Beyond the 1951 Convention, regional instruments address unique challenges in specific contexts. For example, the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention broadens the definition of refugees to include individuals fleeing external aggression, occupation, or events disrupting public order. It establishes principles such as solidarity, international cooperation, non-refoulement, and voluntary repatriation, which collectively address the distinct realities of displacement in Africa (Abebe et al., 2019). Similarly, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration in Latin America expands the refugee definition to encompass those fleeing generalized violence, internal conflicts, and massive human rights violations. It promotes inclusive policies and international cooperation to safeguard refugee rights amidst regional challenges (Reed-Hurtado, 2017).

In concluding this section, it is essential to recognize the foundational influence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 on international refugee protection frameworks. The UDHR establishes fundamental human rights applicable to all individuals, underscoring every human's inherent dignity and equality. These principles are crucial for the protection of refugees, who frequently endure significant rights violations. First, the UDHR articulates essential rights, including the right to seek asylum from persecution (Article 14), directly addressing the vulnerabilities refugees face by legitimizing their need for safety in the face of persecution. Subsequently, the UDHR inspired the development of key international conventions (Sener, 2021), including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which expanded on the UDHR's framework by providing specific definitions and protections for refugees. These conventions emphasize the principle of non-refoulement, aligning with the UDHR's commitment to preventing the forced return of individuals to danger. This principle is implicitly supported by Article 5 of the UDHR, which states, "*No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*" Moreover, the UDHR sets universal standards for human rights that states are encouraged to respect, including those hosting refugees. These standards have fostered regional human rights agreements, such as the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration, as well as national legislation aimed at protecting displaced individuals (Sener, 2021). The UDHR's influence extends to advocacy and awareness, driving global efforts by non-governmental organizations and international entities to uphold and promote refugee rights (Preamble and Article 26, Paragraph 2, UDHR, 1948). Thus, the UDHR not only serves as the foundation for recognizing refugee rights but also continuously informs the international legal framework and regional conventions designed to protect those displaced by violence and persecution.

The protection of refugees under international law is rooted in principles of human rights, reinforced by frameworks such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol. These instruments, complemented by regional agreements and inspired by the foundational principles of the UDHR, establish essential protections and obligations, fostering a collaborative approach to addressing refugee crises worldwide. By balancing the rights and responsibilities of both refugees and states, these legal frameworks aim to ensure safety, dignity, and stability for displaced individuals while promoting international solidarity and cooperation.

### **1.3 Refugee Children**

The global displacement crisis has reached unprecedented levels, with children making up a significant and highly vulnerable proportion of forcibly displaced populations. By the end of 2022, approximately 43.3 million children were displaced due to conflict, violence, and natural disasters. This number encompasses 17.5 million child refugees and asylum seekers, including 14.2 million children under the mandate of UNHCR, 1.8 million registered as refugees with UNRWA, and approximately 1.5 million children seeking asylum. Additionally, an estimated 25.8 million children are displaced within their own countries due to violence and conflict, with a further 3.8 million affected by natural disasters (UNICEF,2023,Data.unicef.org). The number of forcibly displaced refugee children and asylum seekers has more than doubled in just over a decade, increasing from around 20.6 million in 2010 to the current total of 43.3 million. By comparison, no refugee child migrants grew only 10 percent over this period. UNHCR data reveals that between 2018 and 2022 alone, over 1.9 million children were born into refugee status. These figures underscore not only the growing magnitude of child displacement but also the enduring instability in regions affected by conflicts, violence, and climate-related crises (UNICEF,2023,Data.unicef.org). Within the landscape of forced migration, refugee children face distinct challenges, unlike adults, children experience displacement in ways that magnify their vulnerabilities, as they depend on family structures and stable environments of their well-being and development, disruptions to these support during forced migration can expose children to risks of exploitation, deprivation, and trauma requiring special protection within the refugee framework (UNICEF,n.d.-b,www.unicef.org). In addition, the forced displacement of children has significant, multifaceted impacts on their developmental trajectories. Physically, children in refugee situations are especially susceptible to poor living conditions, as resource limitations in host areas often restrict their access to necessities, including healthcare, sanitation, and adequate nutrition (McEwen et al .,2023). This leaves children at heightened risk of health complications and malnutrition, exacerbated by overcrowded and resource-

strapped refugee settings (IMSEA & UNICEF,2021). Beyond physical needs, refugee children frequently encounter barriers to education, which impacts their cognitive and social development (Turkiye, n.d.-b). Without consistent schooling, children lose critical learning opportunities, which can delay intellectual and emotional growth and limit prospects (Horswood et al.,2019). Besides these material challenges, refugee children often find themselves in complex legal situations, lacking recognized identity documentation and experiencing restricted access to essential services, these legal vulnerabilities stem from their previous status and the lack of a stable protective framework, which often leaves them without a clear path to full participation in their host countries ( Vulnerability of Unaccompanied and Separated Child Migrants,2024).

### **1.3.1 Definition of Refugee Children**

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as a person with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Although the Convention does not specifically categorize children separately, its provisions encompass children who face displacement under comparable circumstances. Recognizing the distinctive experiences of children—shaped by their dependency on caregivers and heightened exposure to risks such as separation from family, forced labor, and inadequate protection (Hazer& Gredeback, 2023), the international community has increasingly emphasized the necessity of tailored safeguards to address these vulnerabilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989, complements this framework by defining a child universally as any human being below the age of 18 unless the majority is attained earlier under applicable law (Article 1, The UNCRC, 1989). While the UNCRC does not explicitly define “refugee children,” it underscores the need for special attention to children living under exceptionally difficult conditions, particularly those affected by displacement and armed conflict. Articles 38 and 39 highlight the importance of protection and rehabilitation measures for these children, reinforcing the broader legal obligations established by the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Building on these international frameworks, Lawrence et al. (2019) identify refugee children as a distinct group requiring specialized protections due to the compounded challenges they face. Article 22 of the UNCRC is pivotal in this regard, mandating that refugee children receive the same rights and protections as those afforded to children who are citizens. This provision

affirms their role as active rights-bearers, emphasizing equality in treatment and underscoring their entitlement to education, healthcare, and safety. However, Lawrence et al. (2019) also highlight the complexities of defining and protecting refugee children, noting variations in the interpretation of ‘child’ and ‘refugee’ across disciplines, which often hinder the consistent implementation of these protections. Their analysis advocates for a nuanced perspective that considers the intersection of a child’s developmental stage and refugee status. This dual lens is essential for understanding the profound influence of displacement on children’s well-being. Crucially, the authors caution against narratives that solely depict refugee children through the prism of suffering. Instead, they emphasize the importance of acknowledging children’s active agency and their ability to participate meaningfully within their social environments. This balanced approach reframes refugee children not merely as recipients of aid but as individuals with inherent dignity, resilience, and the capacity for contribution (Lawrence et al., 2019; Vaghri et al., 2019).

In this regard, holistic and tailored strategies are imperative. Effective frameworks must address the legal, social, and developmental dimensions of refugee children’s experiences, ensuring their rights are protected while fostering their agency and integration. These considerations are rooted in the broader discourse on children’s rights, providing the foundation for understanding the specific entitlements and protections afforded to refugee children.

### **1.3.2 Refugee Children’s Rights**

Refugee children constitute a particularly vulnerable group within the broader refugee population, facing risks related to their age, dependency, and developmental needs. Recognizing these unique challenges, the international framework emphasizes special protections for refugee children that extend beyond the rights granted to all refugees. This section explores the foundational principles of children’s rights within the context of refugee protection, focusing on the legal and ethical obligations to safeguard their well-being, development, and prospects.

#### **1.3.2.1 Introduction to Children’s Rights**

The concept of children’s rights has evolved significantly over the past century, shaped by growing recognition of children’s unique needs and their essential role in society. Early efforts to protect children emerged in response to social and economic conditions that left many young individuals exposed to challenges such as neglect and insufficient care. One of the first milestones in this journey was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924, which

affirmed and recognized children's rights to optimal care and support regardless of race, nationality, or creed. It provided essential guidelines for the protection and development of children, emphasizing their rights to normal growth, adequate nourishment, healthcare, education, and safeguarding from harm.

The Declaration underscored the importance of fostering children's well-being and encouraging their development within society. Article 5, in particular, highlighted the necessity of nurturing a child's awareness of their talents and motivating them to use these abilities for the benefit of others, thereby promoting social responsibility and community engagement (Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1924 - Text - Humanium, 2017). This foundational document laid the groundwork for future developments, ultimately leading to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989.

With the UNCRC, children's rights were codified into a comprehensive, legally binding framework designed to protect and promote their well-being globally. Ratified by 196 countries as of July 2022, the UNCRC sets an internationally recognized standard for safeguarding children's development and welfare (UNICEF UK, 2024). Its 54 articles address civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, emphasizing their interdependence and equal importance. The Convention asserts that these rights apply universally and outlines the responsibilities of adults and governments to ensure children's full access to them.

Specific provisions, such as the right to education (Article 28), healthcare (Article 24), and protection from violence (Article 19), reinforce this holistic framework. These rights ensure children have access to vital services and protections necessary for their well-being and development. Moreover, the Convention emphasizes four guiding principles that inform the interpretation and implementation of all other rights: non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life and development (Article 6), and the child's right to express their views (Article 12). Together, these principles aim to create environments where children's rights are universally respected, safeguarded, and fulfilled.

While the UNCRC primarily establishes universal standards, it also accounts for the specific circumstances of certain groups. Article 22 explicitly addresses the challenges faced by refugee children, mandating that they receive protection and access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and shelter (Vaghri et al., 2019). It emphasizes the importance of international collaboration, urging states and organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide comprehensive support. This provision

reflects the necessity of tailored interventions to uphold the rights of children experiencing displacement and other adverse conditions (Gorlick, 2000).

Additionally, the UNCRC acknowledges the unique position of children as individuals with evolving capacities, requiring specific protections tailored to their developmental stages. For example, Article 3 mandates that the child's best interests remain a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them, while Article 5 outlines the responsibilities of parents and guardians to provide guidance appropriate to their child's needs. Article 12 ensures children can express their views in matters concerning them, with their age and maturity determining the weight of these opinions (Lawrence et al., 2019). This distinction reflects the unique position of children as individuals requiring targeted interventions to ensure their rights are fully realized. In this regard, the UNCRC not only establishes a universal framework but also highlights the need for inclusive, context-sensitive protections to address the specific challenges children face, such as those encountered by groups like refugee children (Changing the Odds for Vulnerable Children, 2019).

### **1.3.2.2 International Legal Framework**

The international legal framework safeguarding the rights of refugee children is rooted in the foundational principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Established in the aftermath of World War II, the 1951 Refugee Convention responded to the urgent need to protect those displaced by conflict, introducing essential protections such as the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning refugees to places where their lives or freedoms are at risk (GORLICK, 2000).

Decades later, the adoption of the UNCRC in 1989 broadened this framework by affirming children's status as rights-bearers entitled to protection, care, and support for their development (Lawrence et al., 2019). While the Refugee Convention primarily addresses protections against persecution specific to refugee status, the UNCRC establishes a comprehensive framework ensuring that refugee children are treated as equal beneficiaries of universal children's rights. Collectively, these conventions play complementary roles in addressing the needs of refugee children, with the Refugee Convention providing the foundation for legal protection and the UNCRC expanding these safeguards to promote broader development and well-being. The 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention removed geographic and temporal limitations, enabling protections to apply universally (Hathaway, 2021.), while UNCRC has introduced optional protocols to address pressing issues specific to children, including refugee children,

these **Optional Protocols** further solidify the UNCRC's protective scope, the first optional protocol raises the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces, protecting children under 18 from direct participation in a conflict a safeguard of particular relevance for children from conflict-affected regions. The second optional protocol targets the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, requiring countries to prevent child exploitation in all forms, including forced labor, illegal adoption, and organ trafficking, The third optional protocol enables children to bring complaints to the UN when national legal avenues fail, underscoring the international community's commitment to upholding children's rights robustly and independently of the national system (UNICEF UK, 2024, [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org/uk)). Together, these protocols extend the scope of the UNCRC, acknowledging the need for additional protections specific to children's vulnerabilities. Foundational principles across both conventions, such as discrimination, the best interest of the child, and the right to life, survival, and development, underscore the ethical commitments shared between these legal instruments. Non-discrimination ensures that all children, regardless of their refugee status, have equitable access to protection, while the "best interest of the child" principle requires that children's welfare be a primary consideration in all relevant actions particularly essential for refugee children who often face complex vulnerabilities (Vaghri et al., 2019). These principles are integral to the convention's shared objective of safeguarding the most at-risk populations, especially in the context of global displacement. The near-universal ratification of the UNCRC and the widespread endorsement of the Refugee Convention reflect a profound international commitment to upholding these rights, ratification obligates states to incorporate the Convention provisions into their domestic laws, ensuring that refugee children receive consistent protection globally. The commitment of these international bodies creates a powerful framework for collaboration among nations, encouraging natural responsibility to address the complex challenges facing refugee children (Hathaway, 2021). In Summary, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the UNCRC, and the respective protocols offer a comprehensive, interdependent system that emphasizes the protection and promotion of rights tailored to the specific needs of refugee children, reinforcing both the fundamental and expanded rights necessary to uphold their well-being and development across diverse contexts.

In addition to the foundational frameworks provided by core International conventions like the 1951 Convention and UNCRC, the implementation and oversight of refugee children's rights depend significantly on the active roles of various international organizations, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and The United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF) are two key agencies driving efforts to protect and uphold the rights of refugee children. UNHCR provides vital support, focusing on the protection, shelter, and humanitarian assistance for refugees, including children, within camps and host communities. It collaborates with other UN entities to integrate human rights principles into all aspects of its work ensuring that refugee children receive essential protections and access to resources like education, healthcare, and legal assistance. UNICEF, on the other hand, is dedicated to advocating for the right to all children, emphasizing the needs of vulnerable and forcibly displaced children (UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.-c, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)). Together UNHCR and UNICEF, along with their partner agencies, reinforce the international legal framework through direct support and capacity-building programs with host governments, aligning closely with Conventions such as the UNCRC. Furthermore, other agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), play integral roles in addressing specific needs, and collaborate with UNHCR to ensure refugee children's health needs are met, while WFP delivers essential nutritional support, and OCHA coordinates humanitarian response efforts, these organizations work alongside states to advocate for comprehensive policies that uphold international standards and meet the unique needs of refugee children. This collaborative approach reflects a global commitment to translating legal frameworks into tangible protections and services that safeguard the rights and well-being of displaced children worldwide (UNICEF-UNHCR Collaboration, 2023, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).

Building on the foundational frameworks established by international organizations, regional conventions, and agreements is indispensable in enhancing and localizing refugee children's rights protection. While international conventions lay out broad, universal principles, and regional agreements, crafted within specific geographic content, these principles align with local cultural, social, and political realities. Such agreements, including instruments like the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights, do not merely echo international standards but contextualize them, creating a framework for cooperation that is particularly responsive to the needs of each region (The Role of Regional Human Rights Mechanisms, 2010), by fostering a sense of shared responsibility among neighboring states that face similar challenges related to displacement, these agreements promote solidarity and facilitate the effective sharing of resources and best practices in refugee protection. Additionally, regional conventions often incorporate mechanisms for monitoring compliance, such as regional courts or commissions, which enhance localized accountability

and provide legal recourse for addressing rights violations. An example of this tailored protection can be seen in Article 23 of the African Charter, which mandates specific provisions for the humanitarian assistance and family reunification of refugee children, ensuring that these vulnerable groups receive both immediate support and long-term protection (African Charter | African Union, 1990). In this way, regional conventions not only complement international efforts but also reinforce them, establishing layers of oversight and tailored protections that bolster the resilience of refugee rights within a specific context. After examining the regional agreement, it is essential to delve into how international human rights frameworks, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), contribute to rights and protections of refugee children. These covenants play a critical role in ensuring that refugee children are safeguarded within a broader legal structure that emphasizes core principles such as non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, and the right to life and development (GORLICK, 2000). The ICCPR specifically advances protections by mandating non-discrimination, requiring states to apply legal protections to all individuals, including refugee children, regardless of nationality or status. This ensures their access to fundamental rights on an equal basis with other children in the host country. Additionally, Article 13 provides the right to due process, which is essential for refugee children in legal matters such as expulsion, allowing them to seek representation and defend their interests in court (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)). The convention also prohibits incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred, providing crucial protections for refugee children who may be vulnerable to discrimination or hostility. Similarly, the ICESCR strengthens these protections by addressing economic, social, and cultural rights that are essential for refugee children's well-being. Article 10 highlights the need for special measures to prevent the economic exploitation of children, a significant concern for displaced populations. The ICESCR also enshrines rights to adequate standards of living (Article 11), health (Article 12), and education (Article 13) (Refworld - UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, 2024a), all of which are vital for supporting refugee children in establishing a stable and dignified life in host countries. The emphasis on these rights aims to create conditions that foster their holistic development, enabling refugee children to adapt to and thrive within their new environments, by linking these international covenants with the provisions of refugee law, a comprehensive framework emerges; one that obliges states to respect and supports the rights of refugee children on multiple fronts, ensuring both their immediate protection and their long-term development needs, the principles of non-discrimination, as highlighted in the ICCPR and ICESCR, asserts

that all children, irrespective of nationality or status, deserve equal access to essential protections and services. This approach ensures refugee children benefit from the same educational, healthcare, and social services available to others, reducing the risk of exclusion based on their refugee status (Supriadi, 2021). Meanwhile, the UNCRC emphasizes that a child's best interests should guide all actions affecting them, a priority that is crucial for policies aimed at safeguarding refugee children, practical applications of these principles include protective measures against child labor and the provision of culturally sensitive education aligns with each child's background and needs (Jones, 2001).

Several countries exemplify these commitments through national policies that grant refugee children access to education and other essential services, for instance, **Uganda's** national education system integrates refugee children alongside local students, fostering inclusivity. In **Canada**, section 30 (2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) allows children without permanent status to attend school until their immigration process is complete, after which school attendance is required, **Turkey**, which hosts a large population of Syrian refugee children, has implemented policies that enable their access to education, creating opportunities for social integration (Vaghri et al., 2019), through these approaches, countries actively demonstrates the alignments of their legal frameworks with international standards, affirming the rights and well-being of refugee children. While the principles of non-discrimination and prioritizing the best interest of the child set essential standards, translating these commitments into actionable protections remains challenging. These complexities underscore the need to address significant implementation obstacles and consider mechanisms available to ensure that refugee children's rights are not only acknowledged but actively upheld, implementing international frameworks to protect refugee children's rights presents persistent challenges, even with established enforcement mechanisms. Among the primary obstacles are limited resources, which restrict many host countries' capacities like education and healthcare. National laws may also fail to fully align with international standards, leaving gaps in legal protections specifically tailored to the needs of refugee children, such as those for unaccompanied minors (GORLICK, 2000). Cultural and social biases compound these challenges, as Xenophobia and discrimination hinder children's access to services and their integration into host communities (Seeberg and Gozdzia, 2016).

Additionally, monitoring compliance remains difficult due to inadequate data collection and reporting mechanisms, which can obscure the actual situation of refugee children. Variability in politics will further complicate enforcement; a government facing instability or shifts in

public opinion may deprioritize refugee children's rights, barriers to justice, including language obstacles and fear of deportation, add yet another layer of difficulty for refugee children seeking redress for refugee children rights violations. Despite these challenges, several enforcement mechanisms aim to uphold children's rights, monitoring bodies such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and (UNHCR), oversee state compliance through reporting requirement feedback. Regional Human Rights Courts, like The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, provide judicial resources for rights violations, and National Human Rights (Institutions )(NHRIs) promote accountability at the local level. Civil Society organizations and international accountability mechanisms further bolster these efforts, advocating for refugee children's rights and raising awareness of violations (The Role of Regional Human Rights Mechanisms,2010). These implementation challenges illustrate the complex efforts needed by governments, International Organizations, and civil society to protect the rights of refugee children.

### **1.3.2.3 Importance of Protecting Refugee Children**

The importance of protecting refugee children is rooted in both immediate and long-term considerations, as their unique vulnerabilities demand urgent attention. Refugee children face heightened risks, including psychological distress due to traumatic experiences, family separation, and the sudden cessation of stable schooling environments. Unlike other immigrant children, refugee children often face compounded obstacles like discrimination, language barriers, and the absence of social support networks, which further hinder their adjustment. Without early intervention, the psychological and physical risk encountered can lead to persistent developmental issues, obstructing their educational progress and impairing their ability to contribute meaningfully to society (Horswood et al., 2019). These challenges are particularly evident in academic settings, where refugee children's disrupted education impacts their performance and aspirations. The research underscores the critical role of early and continuous support to nurture resilience and academic success, which can only be achieved through community-based interventions. Such efforts, particularly through social work and psychological support, significantly enhance these children's resilience, counteracting the long-term impact of their vulnerabilities and fostering a renewed sense of hope and belonging (O'Leary et al., 2015). Beyond moral and humanitarian reasons, the duty to protect refugee children aligns with universal human rights principles. These children, having often endured significant trauma, merit special consideration under a framework like the UN Convention on the Rights of Child. The moral obligation of host countries thus extends beyond legal mandates

to ensuring an environment where refugee children can access education, healthcare, and mental health services, free from harm and exploitation, such measures not only foster individual well-being but also resonate with broader principles of human dignity and equality, host countries, supported by international organizations, hold the responsibility of adhering to these principles, creating inclusive policies that honor the rights of all children within their borders(Norwegian Refugee Council,2021). The consequences of neglecting refugee children extend to social and economic domains as well. Children from refugee backgrounds often face educational and socioeconomic disparities, lacking the established support networks available to native-born children, studies illustrate how investments in these children's education and well-being contribute not only to individual resilience but also to stronger, more cohesive societies. Programs like Germany's Schalv-Schule initiative demonstrate how targeted educational support can bridge performance gaps, preparing immigrant and refugee children for constructive societal roles (Changing the Odds for Vulnerable Children, 2019). Ensuring such children have access to tailored educational and social services thus proves mutually beneficial, contributing to a more inclusive and resilient society.

Furthermore, the protection and integration of refugee children are critical to both regional security and future stability. Unmet needs may foster a sense of alienation, increasing the risk of radicalization or involvement in criminal activities, which can destabilize communities (Hawasli,2020), without adequate support and integration, these children may grow up feeling disconnected from the broader society, which can perpetuate poverty cycles and reinforce social divides, investing in refugee children's education, mental health, and social integration counter these risks, fostering social cohesion and reducing tension between refugee local populations. This proactive approach not only enhances individual futures but also contributes to the collective peace and stability of host regions(Guvençer and Hawasli,2021).

In Summary, Safeguarding refugee children is not merely a legal or ethical mandate but a strategic investment in future generations by equipping these children with the tools for resilience, education, and social integration societies can cultivate a generation of resilient, hopeful individuals capable of contributing positively to both their host countries and eventual home communities. The effectiveness of these efforts relies on understanding and addressing the specific challenges refugee children face in integrating into their new environment, as well as ensuring they receive the social and educational foundations needed to thrive, this comprehensive approach to protection and integration not only empowers refugee children individually but also promises a far-reaching, positive impact on both societal and cohesion.

## 1.4 Refugee Children's Integration

Integration for refugee children is a complex, multifaceted process that extends beyond simply sitting in a new location, it aims to cultivate full participation in the host society while respecting each child's unique cultural identity (Chilingaryan & Zvereva, 2019). Unlike assimilation, which requires adopting the host culture, often at the expense of one's original identity, integration promotes a balanced approach it values cultural preservation and adaptation (Cormoş, 2022), allowing children to maintain their roots while adjusting to their new environment. Other processes, such as separation and marginalization highlight the challenges refugee children face when barriers in the host society exclude them from meaningful participation, leading to isolation and reduced opportunities (Kuhlman, 1991).

Effective integration counters these issues by bridging gaps and fostering inclusion, allowing refugee children to feel both valued and connected. For refugee children integration ideally means experiencing safety, belonging, and support in their host country while retaining elements of their original culture. It involves access to education, community engagement, and support systems that cater to both physical and psychological needs, education for example, offers not only academic knowledge but also essential language skills that allow children to connect with their peers and participate fully in society, community engagement fosters mutual understanding and cultural exchange, reducing marginalization and nurturing respect across diverse groups (Habib et al., 2020). Language acquisition empowers children to navigate their new environment, while legal protections ensure their rights are upheld, enabling them to access services without discrimination, mental health support addresses both trauma and adaptation challenges, offering a safe space for healing and emotional growth (Lau & Rodgers, 2021), the benefits of integration extend beyond the individual, enhancing the host society as well, Culturally, integration fosters diversity, enhancing the social fabric by valuing various perspectives and traditions. Economically, children who feel integrated are more likely to grow into skilled contributors within their communities, whether as professionals, entrepreneurs, or active citizens. Socially, integration strengthens community cohesion, fostering empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect. Globally, successful integration models including bilingual education programs and community-based initiatives, demonstrate the value of localized, family-oriented support (Güvençer and Hawasli, 2021). Integration, therefore, represents a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while promoting participation and cohesion. According to the UNHCR, successful integration is a “mutual, dynamic and continuing process” (UNHCR, 2013, The Integration of Resettled Refugees, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)), that requires

active efforts from both refugees and host societies to create an inclusive environment where refugees can rebuild their lives, contribute to the community, and exercise their rights. This process of integration for refugee children not only supports their immediate adaptation but also serves as a foundation for their long-term, well-being and development within the host country. However, achieving successful integration is complex, as it demands ongoing support across multiple areas, from education and language acquisition to mental health. Despite the significant benefits of integration, various obstacles can hinder refugee children's ability to fully participate in their new communities.

### **1.5 Challenges to Refugee Children's Integration**

Integrating refugee children into host societies poses numerous challenges that significantly impact their educational, emotional, and social development. These challenges are multifaceted, interlinked, and extend beyond the children themselves, affecting their families and the communities they join. The barriers to successful integration encompass language and cultural differences, socioeconomic constraints, and educational limitations, among others.

A major obstacle is the *language barrier*, which often serves as a fundamental hurdle for refugee children. For instance, Syrian refugee children in Turkey face significant difficulties due to limited Turkish language skills, which hinder their participation in academic and social activities (Kardes & Akman, 2022). Furthermore, studies conducted in Europe on Syrian and Roma refugee children revealed that over half were not attending school as of 2015. Those who did attend faced challenges such as language difficulties and social isolation within classroom settings (Radhouane, 2023). These barriers contribute to feelings of exclusion, as children struggle to communicate with peers or participate in classroom discussions. Consequently, language gaps not only impede academic progress but also exacerbate social exclusion, leaving children marginalized or ridiculed by their peers for their linguistic limitations.

*Psychological trauma* presents another significant challenge, as many refugee children suffer from the emotional scars of war, displacement, and loss. Experiences of violence, family separation, and traumatic migrations often result in conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Aliyev, 2021). In Turkey, studies indicate that Syrian refugee children face heightened socio-emotional difficulties, including aggression and challenges in adapting to school routines. Teachers have observed that such behaviors frequently stem from underlying trauma, underscoring the urgent need for psychological support (Sualp et al., 2021; Kardes & Akman, 2022). Without adequate mental health resources,

these emotional struggles hinder children's ability to build relationships and perform academically.

*Socioeconomic challenges* further complicate integration efforts, as financial instability often plunges refugee families into poverty. This economic hardship can directly impact children's education, forcing them to work or enter early marriages to alleviate their families' financial burdens. Such circumstances disrupt schooling and diminish academic aspirations (Concern Worldwide US, 2020). Moreover, economic constraints limit access to adequate housing, nutrition, and educational resources, all of which are critical for a stable and supportive learning environment (Donelli, 2018).

Another barrier lies in *discrimination and social exclusion*, which refugee children frequently encounter in host communities. Negative perceptions of refugees among host societies foster stigmatization and bullying, making it difficult for children to feel accepted or form meaningful connections in their schools. These biases not only deepen feelings of alienation and isolation but also hinder refugee children's ability to experience a sense of belonging (Shared Futures | INEE, n.d.).

The role of *educational system barriers* cannot be overlooked, as many host countries' educational systems are ill-equipped to handle the unique needs of refugee students, issues such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and untrained teachers contribute to a challenging academic environment (Anderson,2020; AL-Shatnawi et al.,2023). According to the UNHCR's 2022 report, only 68% of refugee children are enrolled in primary education, compared to over 90% of children worldwide, while at the secondary level, enrollment is only 37% compared to over 80% globally. The report also highlights gender disparities, with girls slightly lagging behind boys in attendance. These statistics underscore the system gaps in educational access and support for refugees, which create significant obstacles for children who may already face educational disruptions due to their migration experiences (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency,2023). *Structural and social barriers* also play a critical role, as outlined by Ager and Strang's (2008), conceptual framework for integration. Structural barriers such as restrictive immigration policies and bureaucratic hurdles limit access to essential services, including healthcare and housing. Without these foundational supports, refugee children struggle to achieve stability and maintain well-being in their host countries. Socially, cultural differences and discrimination further compound these challenges. Prejudice or misunderstandings from host communities can isolate children, making it difficult for them to adapt to new environments. Additionally, economic limitations and restricted employment

opportunities for refugee families contribute to marginalization, preventing them from achieving the economic stability necessary for successful integration (Shared Futures | INEE, n.d.).

Despite these challenges, *adaptation and resilience* among refugee children are crucial for integration. With appropriate support systems, these children can overcome significant obstacles and gradually adjust to their new environments (UNHCR Assessment and Monitoring Resource Center, 2024). Programs offering language training, psychological support, and culturally inclusive educational frameworks are pivotal in bridging the gap between past experiences and their current lives. Additionally, involving host communities in orientation and awareness programs fosters mutual understanding, reducing social distances between refugees and residents. Creating inclusive environments that are inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of refugee children can enable these young individuals to build a sense of belonging and contribute positively to their host societies (Chilingaryan & Zvereva, 2019). In essence, adaptation is viewed as the foundational step toward successful integration into the host society. For refugee children, this process entails adjusting to the structures, rules, and values of their new environments, laying the groundwork for a sense of belonging and functionality, when adaptation is achieved effectively it creates a pathway for smoother integration by addressing key barriers and enabling these children to navigate the cultural, social and institutional landscapes of their host communities. This interplay between adaptation and integration highlights the significance of supporting refugee children in the early stages of their transition, as success in adaptation facilitates their ability to thrive and participate meaningfully within their new environment (Cormoş, 2022).

Chapter One established the foundational context for understanding the challenges and rights of refugee children within the framework of international law and societal dynamics. It highlighted the broader significance of the refugee crisis while emphasizing the unique vulnerabilities of children, underscoring their rights and the essential frameworks necessary for their integration. Key discussions focused on the legal provisions safeguarding refugee children, the role of adaptation as a crucial precursor to integration, and the challenges these children face in navigating cultural, societal, and institutional structures. Central to integration is addressing the diverse challenges shaped by societal, legal, and cultural dynamics. The experiences of Syrian refugee children in Turkey illustrate how integration is influenced by the host society's policies and the specific needs of these children. Building on this foundation, Chapter Two will explore the specific context of the Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey's response,

examining the origins of the crisis, the legal and policy frameworks implemented by Turkey, and the unique experiences of Syrian refugees, with particular focus on the challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkish society.



## **2: SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY'S RESPONSE**

The Syrian refugee crisis stands as one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, shaped by the devastating impacts of the Syrian civil war. This Chapter examines the origins of this crisis and its profound consequences, with particular focus on Turkey's role as a host country. As a pivotal actor in the region, Turkey has been at the forefront of the refugee response, navigating complex legal, social, and political dynamics to address the needs of millions of displaced Syrians. This analysis seeks to explore how the conflict gave rise to the crisis and the multifaceted responses adopted by Turkey to manage the influx.

### **2.1 The Syrian Civil War and Emergence Of The Refugee Crisis: Turkey's Role and Response**

The Syrian refugee crisis, one of the most significant humanitarian disasters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, arose from the convergence of political unrest, escalating violence, and deepening societal divisions during the Syrian Civil War. This conflict, which began in 2011 as part of the Arab Uprising, transformed into a protracted war that has displaced millions of Syrians, both internally and across borders. Among these refugees, children represent one of the most vulnerable groups, bearing the brunt of displacement, loss, and interrupted development (Laub, 2023).

The origins of the Syrian Civil War were ignited by widespread political unrest linked to the Arab Uprising. Protest in the southern city of Deraa escalated after the Syrian army responded with violence, including the detention and reported torture of demonstrators. This suppression, combined with growing economic and social grievances, deepened public resentment against the regime. What began as peaceful protest evolved into armed conflict, with factions opposing President Bashar al-Assad's government (Baltes,2016). The war exacerbated existing sectarian divisions, the predominantly Alawite regime faced opposition from Sunni-majority groups, with extremist factions exploiting these divisions. Government tactics, including the use of chemical weapons and sieges on rebel-held areas, further devastated civilian populations, compounding the humanitarian crisis (Laub, 2023).

As violence escalated, the humanitarian toll grew exponentially. The war's destruction forced millions of Syrians to flee their homes, creating a displacement crisis of unprecedented scale by 2023, Turkey hosted over 3.3 million registered Syrian refugees under temporary protection (Number of Syrians in Turkey, 2023 ) the largest number globally. These individuals sought safety from relentless violence, loss of infrastructure, and restricted humanitarian aid within

Syria. The mass exodus was not only a survival strategy but a direct response to the war's indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

Turkey's geographical proximity and historical ties positioned Turkey as the primary destination for fleeing Syrians (Kaya,2023).In the early years of the crisis, Turkey adopted an open-door policy, allowing refugees to enter without stringent border controls (International Crisis Group,2016). Temporary camps were swiftly established to meet the immediate needs of displaced populations, offering shelter, medical care, and food (AFAD,2013). This humanitarian approach highlighted Turkey's initial commitment to providing refuge amid the chaos. However, as the refugee population grew, Turkey's response evolved, by 2014, the introduction of the Temporary Protection Regime provided legal recognition and expanded rights for refugees, including access to healthcare and education (Donelli,2018). This shift marked the beginning of a more structured and sustainable approach to managing the long-term implications of refugee influx. Hosting millions of refugees required substantial financial resources, with estimates that Turkey spent approximately \$ 50 billion between 2011 and 2022 on refugee-related initiatives(Tumen,2023). This expenditure encompasses direct government costs but excludes broader indirect opportunity costs, highlighting the scale of the humanitarian and administrative effort. On the international stage, Turkey leveraged its role as a host country to strengthen its position as a regional actor in partnership with the European Union, particularly under the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, facilitated financial aid and technical assistance (Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020). Despite these collaborations, challenges persisted, underscoring the need for global solidarity in addressing the crisis.

## **2.2 Turkey's Legal Landscape: International Agreement and Refugee Implications**

Turkey's legal framework, shaped by national policies and international agreements, plays a crucial role in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly for vulnerable groups like children. This section examines the legal mechanisms governing the rights and protections afforded to Syrian refugees, focusing on how international conventions influence Turkey's approach. Understanding these legal provisions sheds light on the challenges and opportunities in ensuring the safety, well-being, and integration of refugee children within Turkish society.

Turkey's domestic legal framework for refugees is primarily shaped by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), enacted in April 2013 and implemented in 2014. This comprehensive law was developed to manage the mass influx of refugees, particularly those fleeing the Syrian conflict, and establish the procedures and rights associated with protection in

Turkey (Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020). The LFIP introduced significant reforms, including the creation of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) as the central authority responsible for implementing asylum policies. It provides temporary protection for Syrians, enabling them to reside in Turkey without the threat of forced return. This status is specifically designed for those fleeing mass influx situations, offering immediate and temporary relief(Turkey’s Asylum Law and Policies | Heinrich Böll Stiftung,2019). The law also categorizes refugees into classifications: those arriving from the West are designated as “refugees”, while individuals from non-European countries are classified as “conditional refugees”, granting them temporary settlement rights while they seek resettlement in a third country (Ayak,2018). The LFIP outlines rights for individuals under temporary protection, including access to healthcare, education, social assistance, and the labor market. These provisions are critical for ensuring the well-being and potential integration of refugees, especially Syrians (Tumen,2023).

Despite its comprehensive framework, the LFIP faces several implementation challenges. Bureaucratic inefficiencies have slowed the registration and processing of asylum claims, leaving many refugees in a state of legal and social uncertainty. The temporary protection status, while offering safety, does not equate to full refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention, highlighting the law’s limitations in providing long-term solutions(EU Support to Refugees in Turkiye, 2023) Furthermore, practical implementation of rights, such as legal aid and interpreter services, has been hindered by resource constraints. Regional disparities in service access exacerbate these issues, leaving many refugees unable to fully benefit from the rights guaranteed under the law. Concerns about deportations and detention practices have also been raised, with critics arguing that procedural guarantees for asylum seekers are not always upheld, undermining the protection objectives of the LFIP (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024d).

Another key component of Turkey's domestic legal framework is the Settlement Law of 1934, updated in 2006, which restricts citizenship eligibility. This law, combined with the temporary nature of the protection regime, limits the long-term integration and security of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The emphasis on “harmonization” rather than full integration reflects Turkey's strategic framing of refugees (Hacioglu,2018). Initially referring to Syrian refugees as “guests,” this terminology served to frame the crisis as a short-term issue, implying that their stay in Turkey would be transient and that they would eventually return to Syria when conditions allowed. This notion of “selective humanitarianism” aligns with Turkey’s broader political

strategy, which aims to manage the refugee crisis without fully committing to the integration of refugees into Turkish society (Korkut,2016).

Turkey's legal framework for refugees is also influenced by international agreements. At the international level, Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define refugees' rights and the legal obligations of states to protect them. However, Turkey has imposed unique geographical limitations on the 1951 Refugee Convention, granting full refugee status only to individuals from European countries (UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency, 2013-d) This limitation means that Syrians, along with other non-European refugees, do not receive full refugee status in Turkey but instead are granted "Temporary Protection" under the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), established in 2014 (Hacioglu,2018). The TPR offers Syrians basic rights, such as access to food, shelter, and education, and protection from refoulement (forced return). However, it does not provide a pathway to permanent settlement or full integration into Turkish society. While the TPR allows refugees to access essential services, it restricts their long-term prospects by emphasizing temporary protection over permanent residency or citizenship (Icduygu,2015).

In addition to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Turkey has ratified several international conventions that indirectly support refugee rights. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which ensures protection for refugee children, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)(Turkey Factsheet, 2020), which guarantees fundamental rights for all individuals, including refugees. Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plays a critical role in supporting Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. A Host Country Agreement signed in 2016 formalized cooperation between Turkey and the UNHCR on asylum and refugee issues. The UNHCR's role in Turkey includes coordinating humanitarian aid, improving social support systems, and enhancing the capacity of Turkey's national asylum system (Türkiye, n.d-a, [www.reporting.org](http://www.reporting.org)).

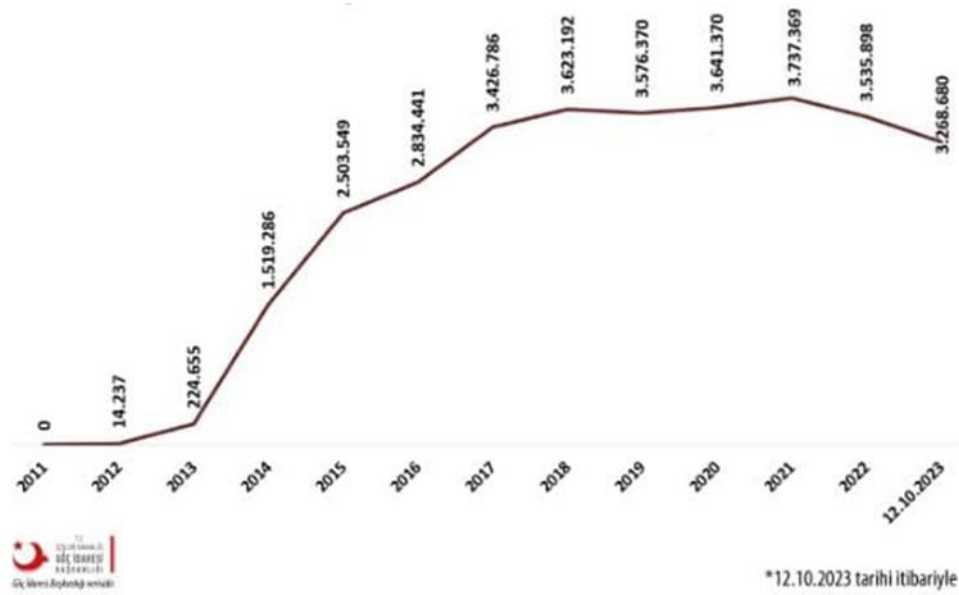
Turkey's approach to managing the refugee crisis has also been shaped by cooperation with international actors, particularly the European Union. The 2016 EU-Turkey Deal was a pivotal moment in Turkey's refugee policy (International Rescue Committee,2022). Under this agreement, Turkey accepted the return of migrants who crossed into Greece illegally, while the EU pledged to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey and provide financial assistance. This agreement was framed as a solution to reduce irregular crossings and improve conditions for refugees in Turkey, but it has been criticized for its lack of comprehensive integration policies

and reliance on a temporary protection regime (Saylan&Aknur,2023). Since 2011, the EU has allocated nearly €10 billion to support refugee and host communities in Turkey, focusing on humanitarian assistance, education, healthcare, and socio-economic support(EU Support to Refugees in Turkiye, 2023). However, this financial aid underscores Turkey's obligations under international law to protect refugees, especially in light of its geographical limitations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis demonstrates significant strides in addressing the needs of displaced populations, yet critical gaps persist. While international cooperation and agreements have strengthened Turkey's capacity to manage the crisis, the temporary protection framework still poses challenges for refugees striving to build stable lives. Bureaucratic obstacles, limited access for unregistered individuals(Turkey's Asylum Law and Policies | Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2019), and economic hardships in the informal labor market expose refugees to precarious conditions and strain relations with host communities (Donelli,2018). The shift from referring to refugees as 'guests' to formally recognizing them underscores progress in acknowledging their rights and needs. Yet, the absence of a clear pathway to permanent residency or citizenship perpetuates legal and social uncertainty, highlighting the pressing need for a more comprehensive and sustainable framework to support their integration (Makovsky,2019).

### **2.3 The Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Contextual Analysis of Their Journey to Turkey**

The migration of Syrian refugees to Turkey was shaped by a convergence of logistical challenges, evolving migration waves, and diverse demographic profiles. Refugees predominantly used informal land routes along Turkey's southern border, with provinces such as Hatay, Gaziantep, and Sanliurfa serving as key entry points due to their proximity to conflict zones, many relied on smuggling networks to navigate the dangerous terrain and avoid detection (Samuk,2016), but this often came at high financial costs and significant risks of exploitation. Early waves of migration (2011-2013) consisted primarily of smaller groups fleeing immediate violence and political persecution, often utilizing unregulated border crossings. In contrast, later waves(2014 onward) were marked by a substantial increase in numbers, reflecting the intensification of the conflict and the emergence of new threats, such as extremist violence(Tumen,2023; Samuk,2016). This later influx included a broader demographic, with families and vulnerable groups, such as women and children, comprising a significant proportion of the refugees (Donelli,2018).



**Figure 1: Syrian under Temporary Protection in Turkey**

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Presidency of Migration Management,2023.

The demographic makeup of refugees profoundly influenced their experiences during the journey and their subsequent integration challenges in Turkey. Women and children represented a substantial of arrivals, with children alone constituting a significant demographic, these groups faced heightened vulnerabilities, including exposure to exploitation child labor, and girls or women, risk of gender-based violence (Aliyev,2021). The absence of male breadwinners in many families intensified economic pressures, forcing many children into informal labor markets(Safak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2020). The journey of Syrian refugees was further shaped by the geographical and logistical realities of crossing the Syrian-Turkish border. This border, marked by a blend of formal and informal crossing points, becomes a critical threshold where the challenges of escape intersect with the complexities of entry into Turkey, the dynamics of border management between Syria and Turkey have undergone significant transformations, reflecting a balance between humanitarian considerations and security concerns(Mustfa&Alsaad&Barro,2020).In the early stages of the Syrian conflict, Turkey adopted an open-door policy, allowing refugees to cross freely and granting them “temporary protection” status, this approach facilitated immediate refuge for those fleeing violence, with temporary camps established near border region to accommodate the initial influx (International Crisis Group,2016). However, as the conflict intensified and the refugee population surged, Turkish authorities began to implement more structured border management practices. By 2016,

heightened security concerns, including the potential infiltration of extremist elements, prompted a shift toward stricter border controls, official entry points were established, and amendments to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection permitted the deportation of individuals deemed security threats, these measures, combined with increased surveillance and forceful border closures, significantly reduced the number of registered refugee arrivals. Despite these restrictions, Turkey remains the host of the largest Syrian population globally, with millions registered and many more unregistered (Makovsky,2019, [www.AmericanProgress.org](http://www.AmericanProgress.org)). These policies reflect Turkey's pivotal role in migration management. Although stricter measures have been implemented Turkey continues to serve as a critical transit and destination country, a position shaped by its strategic location and historical and cultural connections with neighboring regions, Turkey occupies a unique position in the global migration landscape, acting simultaneously as a transit point and a destination country for refugees. This dual role stems from its strategic location between regions of conflict in Asia, the Middle East, and the economically developed countries in Europe (Aygun,2021), this geographical position has made Turkey a focal point for migration flows, significantly shaping its domestic policies and international relations, as a transit country, Turkey serves as critical gateway for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. These individuals often aim to continue their journey toward Europe seeking better living conditions and stability (Kaya,2023). Transit migration, often irregular, has drawn considerable international attention, especially from the European Union (EU), due to associated security concerns. For refugees, the transit journey is fraught with challenges, ranging from harsh physical conditions and psychological trauma to the social isolation experienced in unfamiliar and other hostile environments (EU Neighbours, 2022).In addition to being a transit hub, Turkey has also become a destination country, hosting the world's largest refugee population with over 3.3 million Syrian refugees and others from various regions (Number of Syrians in Turkey, 2023 ). This shift is attributed to Turkey's relative economic development compared to its neighbors and historical, religious, and cultural ties with regions experiencing turmoil,(Safak-Ayvazoglu.,2020) over time, Turkey's policies evolved from an initial open-door approach to more restrictive measures to manage the influx and mitigate domestic pressures(Icduygu,2015), Turkey's dual role has had profound implications for its policy responses and international relations, Domestically, the need to address both transit and destination migration has led to the development of comprehensive migration management strategies, including border security, humanitarian assistance, and integration initiatives(Makovsky,2019, [www.AmericanProgress.org](http://www.AmericanProgress.org)). Internationally, Turkey's position

has necessitated collaboration with global entities such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (International Organization for Migration,2013) its agreement with the EU, such as the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, underscore its pivotal role in regional migration governance, balancing financial support and pivotal leverage (Why Turkiye Matters | Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2024).The decision of many refugees to seek asylum in Turkey is deeply influenced by the historical and cultural ties shared between Turkey and the regions they flee, these ties are rooted in shared Ottoman history, common religious affiliations (primarily Islam), and overlapping ethnic connections, particularly among Arab and Kurdish populations.(Safak-Ayvazoglu et al.,2020),such bonds create a sense of familiarity, making Turkey a more appealing refuge compared to other neighboring countries.Additionally, established Syrian communities in Turkey offer a crucial support network, simplifying the integration process for new arrivals, These connections make Turkey a more appealing destination compared to countries like Lebanon or Jordan, where social dynamics and resource constraints might present greater challenges (Aygun,2021).As Turkey navigated the multifaceted implications of its dual role as both transit and destination country, the economic infrastructural pressures from the refugee influx became increasingly evident, while cultural and social factors shaped migration patterns, the economic strain on border regions and resource challenges significantly influenced Turkey's response strategies. The arrival of millions of refugees, particularly in provinces like Hatay, Gaziantep, and Kilis, has placed immense economic pressure on Turkey's border regions. These areas faced a sudden and dramatic population increase that escalated demand for public services, housing, and employment opportunities. Local economies struggled to adapt to these rapid demographic changes, experiencing immediate strain and longer-term instability (International Crisis Group,2016).

Furthermore, the rapid influx of refugees overwhelmed the existing infrastructure in border regions. Schools became overcrowded as they integrated Syrian children (Kardes&Akman,2022), while healthcare facilities experienced increased patient loads, necessitating additional staff and resources, housing shortages further compounded the issue, forcing local government to invest heavily in expanding and upgrading facilities to accommodate both refugees and host populations, These efforts placed considerable strain on the national budget and highlighted the need for sustainable infrastructure solutions (Icduygu&Simsek,2016).

Initially, Turkey's open-door policy demonstrated a strong humanitarian commitment, with the rapid establishment of temporary camps to provide immediate shelter and assistance. However, the prolonged nature of the crisis and escalating economic challenges prompted a strategic shift balancing humanitarian obligations with domestic economic realities. Turkey gradually adopted more structured integration policies aimed at addressing both short-term relief and long-term sustainability (Tsarouhas,2023; Kaya,2023). Despite the significant challenges, the influx of refugees has yielded some economic benefits. Syrian entrepreneurs have established businesses, contributing to local economies and stimulating consumer spending. Nevertheless, these benefits are often overshadowed by competition for jobs and public assistance, particularly among unskilled workers. Perceptions of economic competition have heightened social tensions, complicating integration efforts and emphasizing the need for balanced policy solutions (International Crisis Group,2016). Turkey's handling of the Syrian Refugee crisis has exemplified the complex interaction between domestic policies and international engagement, shaping its role as a pivotal actor in global refugee governance. This interplay reflects a blend of humanitarian initiatives, strategic geopolitical decisions, and ongoing challenges in balancing domestic priorities with international expectations.

Moreover, Turkey's position as the world's leading host of refugees, accommodating approximately 3.3 million registered Syrian refugees along with close to 222,000 persons of concern from other nationalities (Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkiye - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d.) has garnered both praise and criticism from the international community. Initially, Turkey's response was framed as a compassionate and independent effort, showcasing its capacity to manage a humanitarian crisis without external dependency. However, the sheer scale of the influx soon revealed significant resource and logistical challenges, necessitating international collaboration (Efe & Jacoby, 2022) while Turkey's open-door policy highlighted its humanitarian approach. It also sparked debates about its motivations. Critics argue that Turkey leveraged its hosting role as a bargaining tool in geopolitical negotiations, most notably with the European Union (EU) (Nas, 2019). The 2016 EU-Turkey agreement, aimed at curbing irregular migration to Europe, epitomized this dynamic, while the agreement provided financial aid and support for refugee management. It also underscored tensions between Turkey's expectations of burden-sharing and the EU's focus on reducing migratory pressures on member states (Lüleci-Sula & Sula, 2021).

In the early stages of the crisis, Turkey demonstrated hesitance to involve international organizations, reflecting a desire to maintain its refugee management policies, however, as the situation escalated, this stance evolved into more collaborative engagements and partnerships with organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) became instrumental in addressing gaps in legal aid, asylum procedures, and basic services for refugees, the host country of 2016 formalized this cooperation, allowing for more structured and sustained international support (Turkiye, n.d, www.reporting.unhcr.org). Such partnerships aimed to strengthen Turkey's institutional capacities, particularly as the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) assumed responsibility for refugee status determination (Efe & Jacoby, 2022). Despite these advances, challenges in coordination persisted, occasionally leading to delays and inefficiencies in service delivery.

The growing scale of the Refugee population has significantly shaped Turkey's domestic landscape, influencing its international collaborations. Public sentiments towards refugees have increasingly turned towards skepticism, with many Turkish citizens perceiving them as economic competitors or contributors to social strain. This domestic discontent has complicated the government's ability to fulfill international commitments, as political pressures push for stricter policies on integration and potential repatriation (Makovsky, 2019, www.AmericanProgress.org). Simultaneously, Turkey has faced criticism for gaps in its refugee protection framework, particularly concerning the adequacy of its temporary protection measures, while these measures align with international standards on paper, implementation challenges stemming from resource limitations and rising economic difficulties have raised concerns among human rights advocates (Turkey's Asylum Law and Policies | Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2019). The interplay between domestic management and international cooperation has Turkey's evolving refugee policies, initially driven by humanitarian imperatives, these policies have increasingly incorporated strategic and geopolitical considerations. Turkey's role in hosting refugees has allowed it to assert itself as a critical actor in regional migration dynamics, using this position to negotiate for greater support and recognition on the global stage (Nas, 2019).

#### **2.4 Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey**

The demographic significance of refugee children in Turkey underscores the urgency of addressing their unique vulnerabilities. Out of 3.3 million Syrians under temporary protection, 1,610,006 are children (Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkiye - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d; Turkish Presidency of Migration Management, 2023), with an estimated 700,000 born in Turkey (Duvar English, 2022) since the onset of the Syrian conflict. This highlights the growing

generational impact of displacement and the need for robust policies to support their integration and well-being. Refugee children in Turkey face multifaceted challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and protection services. Despite legal frameworks ensuring their rights, implementation often falls short, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation, neglect, and psychological trauma (McEwen et al., 2023) unaccompanied minors, in particular, are at heightened risk, necessitating targeted interventions such as safe housing and developmental support programs led by the Ministry of Family and Social Services (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024c), additionally, education is a cornerstone of integration efforts, yet significant gaps remain, refugee children are entitled to public education, but only 45% of Syrian under 18 are enrolled in schools, Temporary Education Centers (TECs) were initially established to provide mother-tongue education, but their scope has diminished, with only 13,000 students enrolled as recent counts (Gibárti, 2021). To foster longer-term integration, the Turkish government has transitioned towards a framework prioritizing enrollment in public schools. Initiatives such as the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey support this effort by funding conditional cash transfers and non-formal education schemes to address out-of-school children (EU Neighbours, 2022). The healthcare needs of refugee children are another critical area of focus under temporary protection, refugees have access to healthcare services, including preventive and curative care, Collaboration between the Turkish Ministry of Health and International Organizations like UNICEF aims to address both physical and mental health concerns, however, the provision of psychological social support remains a challenge, as many children grapple with trauma stemming from displacement, conflict, and uncertain futures (UNICEF|Humanitarian Action For Children,n.d, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).

The integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkey's educational and social systems presents complex challenges. These include language barriers, cultural differences, socioeconomic instability, and psychological trauma, successfully addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates education, healthcare, and community-building initiatives while ensuring adherence to international standards of child protection, Turkey's efforts are grounded in both domestic legislation, such as the Child Protection Law (No.5395), and its commitment to international agreements, including The Convention on the Rights of Child, these frameworks aim to safeguard the rights of all children, including refugees, and provide the basis for addressing vulnerabilities (Protection - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d). However, translating these frameworks into effective action often meets challenges, such as limited

resources and societal biases, which impact the practical implementation of integration strategies.

The tragic case of a 2-year-old Syrian boy found on the shore in 2015 starkly illustrates the vulnerabilities faced by refugee children (Aliyev,2021) while this incident primarily highlighted the perils of unsafe migration, it also underscored the broader consequences of systemic gaps in support systems, it serves as a reminder of the urgency in addressing both immediate and long-term needs of refugee children to ensure their safety and successful integration. This tragedy has become a symbol of the states involved, amplifying calls for comprehensive measures that bridge humanitarian aid and policy implementation (Cole, 2017).

In light of this urgency, effective integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society hinges on addressing several interconnected needs. Proficiency in Turkish serves as a cornerstone for educational access and social inclusion, enabling children to participate fully in classroom activities and interact with peers (Taş & Minaz, 2022). However, the process extends beyond language acquisition. Refugee children often grapple with the psychological scars of conflict and displacement, necessitating comprehensive psychological support to aid emotional well-being and foster resilience (Safak-Ayvazoglu et al.,2020). Equally important is the role of community-building initiatives, such as cultural exchanges and collaborative activities (Heldal,2021), in bridging gaps between refugee and host communities, these interconnected dimensions collectively illustrate the complexity and significance of integration efforts for refugee children.

This chapter explored the Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey's comprehensive response to one of the most significant humanitarian challenges of the 21st century. It began by examining the origins and scale of the crisis, providing essential context for understanding the displacement of millions of Syrians. Turkey's legal and policy frameworks were analyzed, with a focus on the Temporary Protection Regulation, which grants Syrian refugees access to fundamental rights and services, including education, healthcare, and legal residency. Additionally, the chapter addressed the European Union's policy measures, such as the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016, which aimed to manage migration flows and strengthen cooperation. The role of the UNHCR was highlighted for its contributions to addressing critical needs and fostering long-term solutions.

The discussion also emphasized the unique vulnerabilities of refugee children, exploring integration challenges stemming from societal, educational, and psychological dimensions. Key

aspects included the importance of Turkish language proficiency for educational and social inclusion, the provision of psychological support to address trauma, and the significance of community-building initiatives to bridge divides between refugee and host communities. These interconnected elements illustrated the multifaceted nature of integration efforts, many of which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Three. Building on these foundational insights, the next chapter delves into the specific challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkey, offering a more detailed analysis of their access to education, psychological well-being, and social adaptation as critical components of successful integration.



### **3: NAVIGATING INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES FACED BY SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN TURKISH SOCIETY**

The process of integrating Syrian refugee children into Turkish society is a pivotal yet challenging aspect of the broader discourse on forced displacement and refugee resettlement. As one of the largest hosts of refugees globally, Turkey's unique geographical, socio-political, and cultural context profoundly shapes the integration experiences of Syrian refugee children. These children represent a particularly vulnerable demographic, requiring focused attention to address the multifaceted barriers they encounter while rebuilding their lives in a new environment. This chapter delves into the critical dimensions of integration, examining systemic challenges and emphasizing the interconnected nature of housing, health, education, language acquisition, and safety in fostering their well-being and inclusion within Turkish society.

The chapter begins with Housing and Health Issues Faced by Syrian Refugee Children, analyzing how inadequate living conditions and limited access to healthcare exacerbate the challenges of integration. These issues not only undermine the well-being and stability of refugee children but also strain host communities, creating a cycle of shared challenges that require cohesive strategies. Furthermore, the lack of psychological support services compounds these difficulties, as the mental health needs of refugee children often go unmet, intensifying the obstacles to integration. Housing instability, health issues, and psychological vulnerabilities collectively constrain educational opportunities, illustrating the interconnected nature of these challenges and their ripple effects on integration.

This section lays the groundwork for understanding how addressing foundational needs is essential not only for the well-being of refugee children but also for fostering stronger cohesion within host communities.

Central to the integration process is the focus on Access to Education, which emerges as the primary mechanism for fostering long-term inclusion and empowerment. This section examines the educational challenges faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkish schools, including their struggles to adapt to a new academic environment and the cultural disparities that may arise within the classroom. Additionally, it highlights the efforts of the Turkish government to integrate these children into the host society through inclusive educational policies and programs aimed at ensuring equitable access to schooling. By addressing these challenges, this section underscores the pivotal role of education in bridging gaps and promoting cohesion between refugee and host communities.

Following the exploration of education, the chapter delves into Language Barriers and Discrimination, two interrelated factors that significantly influence the integration experience. Limited language proficiency not only hinders access to education but also deepens social divides, often leading to experiences of discrimination. This section investigates how these challenges intersect and amplify one another, proposing strategies to address these barriers holistically.

The chapter concludes with Intersecting Vulnerabilities, addressing specific vulnerabilities such as child labor, early marriages, and the plight of unaccompanied children. These issues, while seemingly distinct, are often consequences of the broader systemic challenges discussed earlier, such as inadequate housing, limited healthcare, and restricted educational opportunities. By examining these vulnerabilities within a cohesive framework, the chapter emphasizes the importance of comprehensive policies and interventions to safeguard the rights and dignity of Syrian refugee children.

By presenting a holistic analysis of these dimensions, this chapter underscores the interconnected nature of integration challenges faced by Syrian refugee children. It advocates for coordinated and inclusive approaches that recognize the interplay between foundational needs, systemic barriers, and protective measures. Ultimately, this chapter aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on fostering an environment where Syrian refugee children can thrive within Turkish society.

### **3.1 Well-Being of the Refugee Children**

#### **3.1.1 Housing**

Housing remains one of the most pressing challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey, directly impacting the well-being of children, the stark contrast between life in refugee camps and Urban settings highlights the complexities of ensuring adequate shelter for displaced families. Refugee Camps in Turkey, managed by the General Directorate of Migration Management in collaboration with organizations like the Turkish Red Crescent, provide temporary shelter for a small fraction of Syrian refugees (Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020,p.18). As of May 2023, nine large-scale camps in southern Turkey housed approximately 62,489 individuals, representing less than 2% of the Syrian refugee population, these camps offer basic facilities such as food, services, and healthcare, ensuring a degree of safety and access to essential services (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024f). However, life in these camps is far from ideal. Overcrowding remains a significant

issue, with limited personal space and inadequate sanitation facilities posing severe health risks. Families often struggle with insufficient showers and toilets, creating unsanitary conditions that disproportionately affect children. While camps aim to provide stability, the discomfort and lack of privacy lead many refugees to seek alternatives elsewhere (Akar&Erdogdu,2019).

For the vast majority of Syrian refugees residing outside camps, Urban settings present a new set of challenges. Financial constraints force many families into substandard housing or informal settlements, often in overcrowded apartments or unfinished buildings. The surge in rental demand, exacerbated by the influx of refugees, has caused rental prices to skyrocket rising to 583% between 2019 and 2023 (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024f). This financial burden disproportionately affects refugee families, forcing them into precarious living arrangements that lack basic amenities like clean water, proper heating, and safe infrastructure, The consequences of such conditions are profound. Poor housing exposes children to environmental hazards, such as dampness and inadequate ventilation, which can lead to respiratory issues, additionally, the fear of eviction and exploitation by landlords-whose raise rents unlawfully-leaves many families in a state of constant instability (Donelli,2018) further impacting children's sense of security.

The housing challenges faced by Syrian refugee families have far-reaching implications for children, profoundly shaping their lives through the stability and safety of their living conditions. Poor housing conditions directly impact children's health, emotional well-being, and social opportunities, intertwining with broader issues such as education, healthcare, and community integration.

Firstly, the *health risks* associated with overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in camps and urban housing increase exposure to diseases, with children being particularly vulnerable due to their developing immune systems (Sahin et al., 2021). In addition to these physical health concerns, *the psychological distress* stemming from the instability of transit housing fosters anxiety and emotional stress, which hinders children's emotional development and ability to form a sense of normalcy (Yonis et al., 2021).

Moreover, frequent relocations or financial struggles often lead to *educational disruptions*, resulting in higher dropout rates and limiting future opportunities for refugee children (Syrian Refugees in Turkey | PODEM, n.d). These challenges are further compounded by *safety concerns*, as children living in informal settlements face a heightened risk of exploitation and abuse due to the lack of a secure housing environment (Joint Learning Initiative, 2018, p.16).

Furthermore, the segregation of refugee communities, particularly in urban areas, isolates children from local populations. This *social exclusion* deepens their marginalization and reduces opportunities for meaningful integration into Turkish society (Ayak, 2018). Collectively, these intertwined issues illustrate how housing challenges are not isolated but rather part of a broader struggle that shapes the daily lives and long-term prospects of Syrian refugee children in Turkey.

Recognizing the gravity of the housing crisis, both the Turkish government and international organizations have initiated programs aimed at alleviating the burden on refugee families. For instance, the Turkish government provides temporary shelters and subsidized housing. However, while these initiatives exist, they frequently fall short, leaving many refugees in suboptimal conditions and struggling to adequately meet the diverse and comprehensive needs of the refugee population (Penbecioğlu, 2022). Organizations support as UNHCR play a critical role, offering housing subsidies and community support programs to help refugees secure stable accommodations. These initiatives are vital for mitigating the challenges posed by rising living costs (Istanbul's Syrian Children and Youth, 2020). While housing is a fundamental need that directly affects the quality of life for refugee families, it is intricately linked to other essential services, particularly healthcare. The living conditions faced by Syrian refugees, such as overcrowded shelters and inadequate sanitation, significantly contribute to the prevalence of health issues among children and families. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a holistic approach, as ensuring proper housing lays the groundwork for improving outcomes. The following section explores the healthcare challenges faced by Syrian refugee children and the collaboration efforts aimed at addressing these pressing issues.

### **3.1.2 Healthcare**

The health care services available to Syrian refugees, particularly children, in Turkey, highlight both commendable efforts and persistent challenges. Turkey hosts over 3.3 million Syrian refugees placing immense pressure on its healthcare System (Number of Syrians in Turkey, 2023). The influx has led to systemic limitations, including long waiting times, insufficient resources, and disparities in service quality across regions, refugee frequently encounter language barriers, financial constraints, and a lack of awareness regarding their healthcare rights, further complicating access to essential services (Country Story, n.d, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)).

Under the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) established in 2014, Syrian refugees are granted access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and employment

opportunities. The TPR outlines the provision of free primary and emergency healthcare services at public hospitals for registered refugees, although, equitable access to these services remains a significant challenge due to resource disparities between urban and rural regions, as well as operational inefficiencies within the healthcare system (Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020). Emergency health services under the TPR address urgent medical needs, while the Turkey General Health Insurance (GSS) program initially extended free healthcare and medication to registered refugees. This policy changed on December 25, 2019, requiring a contribution fee for accessing primary and emergency services, as well as medications (Strategic Mid-Term Evaluation,n.d). Vulnerable groups are exempt from these fees, and inconsistent implementation across provinces creates accessibility challenges, Additionally, refugees can only access healthcare in their registered provinces unless faced with emergencies or diseases requiring specialized care. This geographical restriction can delay treatment for refugees residing in underserved areas (Ergonul et al.,2019; Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024b).

Among the most pressing concerns faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey is the health of Syrian refugee children, who face unique health challenges arising from displacement and poor living conditions. Malnutrition, respiratory infections, and outbreaks of diseases such as diarrhea and skin infections are prevalent among this population. Limited access to clean water, inadequate sanitation, and substandard housing exacerbate these health risks. Despite the severity of these issues, specialized care for refugee children remains insufficient, and gaps in screening for chronic illness and developmental disorders further hinder early intervention, potentially leading to long-term health consequences (Sahin et al.,2021). The Turkish Ministry of Health in collaboration with organizations like WHO and UNICEF, has implemented vaccination programs to address preventable diseases (Ergonul et al ., 2020). Since 2011, Syrian children in Turkey have received free vaccinations under the national immunization schedule. Between January and June 2020, over 453,000 doses were administered to Syrian infants, reflecting a 13% increase in vaccination rates since December 2019 (European Commission |The Facility Results Report,2020,p.25). These efforts have been bolstered by UNICEF campaigns promoting COVID-19 vaccines and routine immunizations among refugee families (UNICEF Syria Crisis Humanitarian Situation Report, 2023).

While initiatives such as vaccination programs and collaborations with international organizations have mitigated certain issues, significant barriers to access persist. These challenges are compounded by systemic inefficiencies and operational difficulties within the

Turkish healthcare system, particularly in addressing the needs of Syrian refugees, including children.

One critical issue is *language barriers*, as many refugees struggle to communicate with healthcare providers due to language differences. Although interpreters and Syrian healthcare workers are available in some Migrant Health Centers, these resources remain insufficient, and inaccurate translation further undermines the quality of care provided (Cloeters & Osseiran, 2019). Additionally, *financial constraints* pose a significant challenge. Despite provisions for free primary care, refugees are required to cover 20% of prescribed medication costs, which creates a financial burden for low-income families. This cost-sharing mechanism severely limits access to necessary treatments and medications (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024b). Lastly, *resource overburden* further exacerbates the situation. The sheer volume of refugees has overwhelmed Turkey's healthcare infrastructure, resulting in long waiting times and shortages of medical personnel and supplies (Country Story, n.d, www.who.int).

To address these persistent challenges, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international bodies, and government initiatives have stepped in to complement healthcare provisions for Syrian refugees in Turkey. NGOs such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF have played a pivotal role in bridging healthcare gaps by delivering culturally sensitive care through initiatives like the WHO's Refugee Health Programme, which has facilitated over 720,000 consultations. These programs prioritize community-based approaches, including mobile clinics and health education campaigns, to enhance healthcare access and literacy among refugee populations (Country Story, n.d, www.who.int). Complementing these efforts, the Turkish Ministry of Health has undertaken significant projects to address healthcare disparities and improve service delivery. Among these is the "SIHHAT" project, launched in 2016 in collaboration with the European Union (EU) and funded through the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT). This initiative aims to strengthen both primary and secondary healthcare services for Syrian refugees, with a focus on reproductive health, mental health, psychological support, immunization, and mobile healthcare services. Moreover, the SIHHAT project incorporates health literacy training to empower migrants to navigate healthcare systems effectively (Hatipoglu, 2024). By addressing critical areas of healthcare inequality, the project serves as a global example of comprehensive health policy aimed at marginalized populations. A notable innovation under the SIHHAT project is the establishment of Empowered Migrant Health Centers, these centers provide specialized services in fields such as internal medicine,

pediatrics, gynecology, and mental health, along with imaging and dental care. Some centers also function as Migrant Health Training Centers, equipping Syrian healthcare workers with the skills needed to contribute within these facilities (Hatipoglu, 2024). Such initiatives not only enhance service capacity but also foster the inclusion of refugees within Turkey's healthcare workforce. In addition to immediate healthcare interventions, these collaborative efforts highlight a deeper connection between health issues and broader societal dynamics affecting Syrian refugee children. Health problems, including malnutrition, chronic illness, and inadequate access to preventive care (Sahin et al., 2021), often lead to school absenteeism or dropouts, disrupting educational progress and limiting opportunities for social mobility (UNICEF Syria Crisis Humanitarian Situation Report, 2023). These health-related barriers can also constrain children's ability to engage meaningfully in their communities, amplifying challenges to social inclusion and exacerbating feelings of marginalization within the refugee populations. The interplay between healthcare and other dimensions of refugee children's lives underscores the interconnected nature of these challenges. Initiatives such as the SIHHAT project and NGO-led programs reveal how addressing healthcare gaps can influence broader efforts towards integration. For instance, improved access to healthcare may indirectly affect educational attendance and participation, while also shaping the broader social dynamics between refugees and host communities, this highlights the multifaceted role healthcare plays in shaping not only immediate well-being but also the broader societal experiences of Syrian refugee children in Turkey.

### **3.1.3 Psychological Support**

Syrian refugee children face profound psychological challenges, deeply rooted in the traumatic experiences of war, displacement, and loss (Forced Migration Review, 2014). Studies reveal that nearly 39.6% of these children meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a significant prevalence of anxiety (47.8%) and depression (20.1%) (McEwen et al., 2023). Exposure to violence and the upheaval of displacement contribute to emotional and behavioral issues that manifest in various settings, particularly schools. For instance, educators report that themes of war often surface in children's play, with some engaging in aggressive games reflective of their exposure to conflict, in contrast, Turkish children participate in more conventional games, underscoring the psychological scars carried by refugee children (Kardes&Akman,2022), *"The war is a recurring theme in their games; I mean, they are sometimes very aggressive, so you can see that in their games, too. For example, they slap each other on the back and run away. Turkish students just play jump rope, or, I don't know, games*

*that are appropriate to their age, but Syrian students play violent games, so, this shows that they've been affected by the war, even if they didn't witness it in person.*" (Classroom teacher of a TEC in Altındag/Ankara, Turkey| Kardes&Akman,2022,p.156).

Additionally, some Syrian children display difficulties in social interaction, with behaviors marked by aggression and challenges in forming connections with peers *" I especially observe that some children are prone to violence and have trouble adjusting to their classmates and interacting with them."* (Classroom teacher of a TEC in Altındag/Ankara, Turkey| Kardes&Akman,2022,p.157).

These tendencies highlight the lasting impact of trauma on their emotional and social development. Research shows that prolonged exposure to such stresses not only impedes learning but also exacerbates the feeling of alienation and worthlessness, complicating their ability to integrate into host communities (McEwen et al., 2023).

Efforts to address these challenges have emerged through governmental and non-governmental programs aimed at providing mental health support tailored to the needs of Syrian refugee children. Initiatives like Migrants Health Centers( MHCs) in Turkey offer access to trained psychologists and counselors, while NGOs such as UNICEF and WHO facilitate psychological programs designed to alleviate stress and foster resilience, these include safe spaces and community activities aimed at improving emotional well-being (Scherer et al., 2020). Schools play a pivotal role in addressing the psychological needs of refugee children .by integrating mental health services into the educational environment, schools serve as safe havens where children access counseling and participate in peer support groups, this approach not only normalizes mental health discussions but also facilitates early identification of psychological issues. Parental involvement further enhances these efforts, as workshops and training sessions equip caregivers with the tools to recognize signs of distress and provide support at home (Yonis et al., 2021), notwithstanding, access to psychological support remains hindered by several barriers, including cultural stigma surrounding mental health, a shortage of trained professional, and logistical challenges, many families hesitate to seek help due to social perceptions of mental health issues as a sign of weakness, while others struggle with availability or accessibility of services in underserved areas (Sualp et al., 2021).

### 3.2 Access to Education

Education is a critical component in the integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society, offering both an essential human right and a pathway to long-term inclusion and stability. The Turkish government, in collaboration with international organizations, has implemented numerous policies and programs to ensure that these children can access education despite the challenges they face.

The education of Syrian refugee children in Turkey is underpinned by a robust legal and policy framework that aligns with both national laws and international conventions. The Turkish Constitution explicitly guarantees the right to education for all children, stating that “*no one shall be deprived of the right of learning and education*”(Article 42). The Law reinforces this principle of primary education, which mandates free and compulsory primary education for all children aged 6 to 13, regardless of nationality or legal status (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024a). Additionally, Turkey’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 underscores its commitment to providing education for refugee children as part of its international obligations (Turkey Factsheet, 2020). Turkey’s legal framework also aligns with the 1951 Refugee Convention, which emphasizes the right to education for refugees. Under Turkish law, all children—including those under temporary protection—are entitled to free access to primary and secondary education(Yayın - Mülteci Hakları Merkezi, n.d.). This adherence reflects Turkey’s recognition of education as a cornerstone for fostering social cohesion and integrating refugee populations into society.

As of June 2023, approximately 997,243 Syrian refugee children were enrolled in formal education in Turkey, representing a gross enrollment rate of 64%. This marks a notable increase compared to previous years, with an enrollment rate of 69% across various educational levels in 2023. (Turkiye: Back to School, 2024) However, substantial gaps persist, especially at the secondary level, where enrollment rates drop significantly to 39%, compared to 80% for primary and lower secondary school-aged children. Additionally, 11.1% of refugee children aged 8-17 have never attended school, compared to just 1.1% of their native Turkish counterparts. These disparities underscore the urgent need to address systemic barriers to education (Kırdar et al., 2023). Several interrelated factors contribute to the low enrollment rates and inconsistent attendance among Syrian refugee children, creating a complex web of challenges that impede their access to education. ***Economic Challenges*** form a significant

barrier, as many refugee families face severe financial constraints. These hardships often prevent them from affording transportation, uniforms, and school supplies. With limited cash assistance and heavy reliance on informal labor, families are frequently compelled to prioritize immediate income over their children's education (Forced Migration Review, 2024b). Adding to these financial difficulties are *administrative hurdles*, which further restrict access to schooling. Many families encounter school administrators who either refuse enrollment or impose prohibitive fees. Legal obstacles, such as registration in a different province, exacerbate this issue. For instance, provinces like Kilis and Hatay report numerous cases of enrollment denials due to such administrative complexities (Turkiye: Back to School 2024, p.35). Moreover, *mobility issues* stemming from frequent relocations disrupt children's educational continuity. In their search for better living conditions, many refugee families face repeated school enrollment interruptions, further complicating access to stable education (Atalay et al., 2022).

*Cultural and social dynamics* also play a pivotal role in shaping these barriers. Negative perceptions toward refugees within host communities discourage some families from sending their children to school. Compounding this are cultural differences and unfamiliarity with the Turkish educational system, which foster a sense of alienation among both children and parents (Guvencer & Hawasli, 2021). Additionally, *child labor and gender-specific challenges* exacerbate the situation. Many Syrian children are forced to work to support their families, leaving little room for education. Meanwhile, girls face distinct obstacles, including early marriage pressures and societal expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over schooling. These factors collectively undermine their educational prospects (REPORT ON ANALYSIS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL SYRIAN CHILDREN, 2023).

To address the immediate educational needs of Syrian children, the Turkish government established Temporary Education Centers (TECs) in 2014. These centers provided instruction in Arabic, ensuring continuity for children who had experienced disruptions in their education due to conflict and displacement. By 2017, 404 TECs were operational, accommodating a significant number of school-age Syrian children. TECs were instrumental in providing a culturally and linguistically familiar environment during the initial stages of displacement. Recognizing the long-term presence of Syrian refugees, Turkish authorities began phasing out TECs and integrating refugee children into the national public school system. This transition reflects a sustainable approach to education, enabling children to learn in Turkish and alongside

their Turkish peers. Integration into public schools fosters linguistic proficiency and cultural adaptation, both essential for broader societal inclusion (Makovsky,2019, [www.AmericanProgress.org](http://www.AmericanProgress.org)).

From the beginning, Turkey welcomed refugees into its schools, but initial attendance rates were low. The Circular 2014/21 facilitated the enrollment process by allowing Syrian children to enroll without a residency permit, provided they had a foreigner identification document. Over time, as the government acknowledged the long-term stay of Syrian refugees, integrating these children into public schools became a pivotal strategy to promote societal cohesion and inclusion (Hacioglu,2018).

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) plays a central role in facilitating access to education for Syrian refugee children. MoNE oversees policies that allow children to enroll in public schools or TECs based on their registration status. To support integration, the ministry provides language instruction and cultural orientation programs to help refugee students adapt to the Turkish education system (Education - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d).

International organizations such as UNICEF and UNHCR are key partners in these efforts. UNICEF has collaborated with MoNE to implement large-scale projects, including the construction and furnishing of approximately 245 schools and kindergartens, creating over 100,000 additional school placements. These inclusive schools feature modern facilities such as libraries and cafeterias are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of refugee students (Schools for Syrian and Turkish Children | KfW Development Bank, n.d).UNHCR provides expertise, funding, and policy guidance to ensure that educational initiatives align with international standards (Education - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d).

Collaborations between local NGOs and international entities further strengthen educational access for Syrian refugee children. These partnerships focus on teacher training, community-based support programs, and the provision of resources to overcome barriers such as language differences and resource limitations. Additionally, the role of NGOs and international organizations extends to broader collaborative efforts. The UNICEF-led Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) in Turkey involves partners such as Care International, Save the Children, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These organizations work collectively to address the educational needs of refugee children through initiatives aligned with the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP). Their interventions tackle barriers such as

financial constraints, lack of resources, and administrative challenges while fostering inclusive and supportive educational environments(Türkiye: Back to School, 2024).

The challenges faced by Syrian refugee children and their teachers, particularly concerning curricula, are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with language barriers, pedagogical methods, and the overall educational environment. A significant issue arises from the *language barrier*, as Syrian children often struggle with Turkish, making communication with teachers and peers difficult. Likewise, teachers encounter challenges in teaching reading and writing in Turkish as a foreign language, further complicating the learning process.

Another key difficulty pertains to *curriculum misalignment*, which Syrian refugee children frequently encounter. These students face notable challenges in adapting to the Turkish curriculum, which substantially differs from the educational system they experienced in Syria. Variations in teaching methods, subject matter, and educational expectations create obstacles that impact learning outcomes and hinder integration efforts. Moreover, the curriculum appears to lack culturally relevant content that aligns with the experiences and backgrounds of these students, potentially reducing their engagement and motivation to fully participate in the classroom environment (Aydin et al., 2019).

In addressing these challenges, Aydin and Kaya suggest that the Turkish curriculum could be adapted to better address the unique needs of Syrian refugee children. They propose incorporating elements that reflect the cultural and educational experiences of these students to foster a stronger sense of connection and relevance. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of providing targeted support for language acquisition and cultural integration to bridge the gap between the student's previous education and the expectations of the Turkish system (Aydin & Kaya, 2019).

Furthermore, the issue of *insufficient supportive materials and overcrowded classrooms* adds to the complexity of integrating Syrian refugee children. Teachers report a lack of teaching materials tailored to the specific needs of refugee students, which limits their ability to design effective and inclusive lessons. Compounding this issue is the challenge of overcrowded classrooms, which significantly impact the integration and educational success of Syrian refugee children in Turkey. High student-to-teacher ratios compromise the quality of education, as teachers often struggle to provide the individualized attention necessary for students, particularly those grappling with language barriers or emotional trauma stemming from conflict

and displacement (Atalay et al., 2022). Without personalized guidance, these students risk falling behind academically and encountering difficulties in adapting to the Turkish curriculum, further complicating their learning journey.

This lack of individual attention is further exacerbated by the emotional and psychological strain experienced by many Syrian children. Overcrowded classrooms often leave students feeling neglected, as overwhelmed teachers are unable to meet their needs effectively. Consequently, these children face intensified feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation. These emotional challenges further intertwine with barriers to social and academic integration, as overcrowding limits opportunities for meaningful interactions between Turkish and Syrian peers. The absence of inclusive teaching strategies tailored to diverse learning needs exacerbates this issue, isolating Syrian students within the classroom and reinforcing social divisions (Hawasli, 2020).

Additionally, *communication challenges* in overcrowded settings further hinder academic and social integration. Teachers struggle to ensure all students comprehend lessons, leaving Syrian children, particularly those lacking proficiency in Turkish, feeling excluded. This communication gap not only impedes their academic progress but also deepens their sense of isolation, making it harder for them to establish meaningful connections within their new environment. Behavioral issues often arise as a result, with some Syrian students exhibiting disruptive behaviors as a response to these overwhelming circumstances (Horswood et al., 2019). Such disruptions further alienate these children from their peers, complicating efforts to foster integration.

Teachers are not immune to these challenges, as many experience burnout due to the demands of managing large class sizes. This burnout diminishes their effectiveness and enthusiasm for addressing the unique needs of refugee students, thereby undermining the overall educational experience. Systemic resource constraints, including insufficient funding and limited physical infrastructure, further hinder efforts to recruit additional teachers or expand school facilities. These limitations reflect broader challenges within the Turkish education system in adequately supporting the influx of refugee students (Zehra, 2020). Addressing these issues necessitates targeted interventions. Increasing resource allocation, enhancing infrastructure, and providing support for educators is essential to creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment that facilitates both learning and integration for Syrian refugee children.

Moreover, the challenge of *inadequate teacher training* significantly undermines the educational success of Syrian refugee children in Turkish schools. Many educators lack the necessary preparation to address the unique challenges of teaching refugee students, such as managing multicultural classrooms and addressing language needs. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of specialized training in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and designing inclusive lesson plans, a systemic lack of institutional support leaves teachers unprepared. This gap, combined with their limited experience in selecting and applying effective teaching methods tailored to the needs of Syrian children, further complicates efforts to support students' academic and social integration (Sarmini et al., 2020; Atalay et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Gürel and Büyükşahin (2020) highlights the significant challenges teachers face in classroom management, primarily due to insufficient training. As one educator explained, "*As teachers feel insufficient in managing classes, the education process becomes more problematic*". This inadequacy not only hampers the creation of a conducive learning environment but also intensifies behavioral issues among students, particularly those who have experienced trauma. The study highlights that many refugee children are accustomed to traditional disciplinary methods from their previous educational experiences, which can clash with the approaches employed by Turkish teachers. The teacher noted, "*That positive practices don't have any effect on these children as they are used to being punished.*" This disconnect creates misunderstandings and conflicts in the classroom, further complicating the learning process.

In addition to classroom challenges, teachers struggle to address the cultural and social expectations of refugee children due to insufficient training. This lack of understanding of cultural differences can hinder the development of a supportive learning environment. As one teacher remarked, "*It is understood that participant teachers have difficulty in making plans and arrangements in curriculums according to refugee students who have both psychological and educational difficulties.*" The differences in educational philosophies between Turkish and Syrian teachers further compound this issue, creating confusion for students and making it harder for them to adapt to their new educational settings.

Psychological and emotional support is another area where teachers feel ill-equipped to assist Syrian students and their families. While teachers recognize the importance of providing such support, they lack the training to do so effectively. One educator explained, "*Teachers who receive proper, specifically designed training will surely be more fruitful and establish better*

*communication with refugees.*” Without this preparation, teachers may fail to recognize or address the psychological needs of their students, which are critical for their successful adjustment and integration into Turkish schools.

The absence of institutional policies to support teachers working with refugee children compounds these challenges. Educators often find themselves navigating the complexities of refugee education without adequate guidance or resources, Gürel and Büyükşahin (2020) emphasized that despite this fact, previous research and this study indicate that teachers who give education to refugees didn’t receive any kind of qualified training and they have to start giving education to their students after a very brief training process. This lack of preparation leaves teachers unable to employ effective strategies, further highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive training programs and policy reforms to support educators.

These inadequacies in teacher training have tangible consequences for both educators and students. The study underscores the necessity of implementing specialized training programs and supports policies to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge required to address the unique needs of refugee children.

Syrian refugee students in Turkish schools encounter significant emotional and social challenges that affect their integration and educational outcomes. Many of these students grapple with the psychological impact of trauma and displacement, which complicates their ability to adapt to new environments. Teachers often find it difficult to balance addressing these emotional needs with academic responsibilities, further hindering the students’ adjustment.

A key challenge lies in the multi-layered exclusion that refugee students experience. Within their peer groups, socioeconomic differences can create divisions, leaving some students feeling isolated even among their communities. Outside of their refugee networks, interactions with local students and families are sometimes strained due to cultural misunderstandings or negative perceptions (Safak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2020). The role of teachers is also pivotal; while some educators actively foster inclusion, others may inadvertently marginalize refugee students by not adopting practices that support their unique needs.

Despite these challenges, schools have the potential to be transformative spaces for healing and adaptation. By implementing trauma-informed practices, educators can help create a supportive environment where students feel safe and valued. One teacher noted, “*We have not come across*

*any problems since classroom teachers are trying to integrate them and create an atmosphere of solidarity starting from the very first day of school.”* Such inclusive practices not only build solidarity among students but also promote a collective sense of responsibility for integration (Özel & Erdur-Baker, 2023).

Addressing behavioral issues linked to trauma is equally important. Refugee students may exhibit behaviors such as aggression or withdrawal, which, if unaddressed, can disrupt their learning and social interactions. Schools that focus on fostering emotional well-being can help students overcome these challenges, improving their overall educational experiences and supporting their long-term integration into the host community (Horswood et al., 2019).

The Turkish government, with substantial support from international partners, has implemented several initiatives aimed at addressing the financial, logistical, and systemic barriers to education faced by Syrian refugee children. These efforts not only alleviate economic burdens but also foster integration and social cohesion. To reduce the economic pressures that often prevent families from enrolling their children in school, the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program was launched in 2017 with funding from the European Union. This initiative provides financial assistance to refugee families, encouraging school attendance and mitigating dropout rates. (Makovsky, 2019, [www.AmericanProgress.org](http://www.AmericanProgress.org)). In addition to cash transfers, free educational materials, including textbooks, are distributed to all refugee students attending public schools or Temporary Education Centers (TECs) (Hawasli, 2020), ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder learning opportunities. Complementing these efforts is the Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES), a landmark initiative launched in December 2018 and implemented by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) with funding from the European Union. PIKTES seeks to enhance access to quality education for Syrian children and youth by increasing enrollment and attendance rates, extending its scope to early childhood education, and promoting social cohesion.

Through PIKTES, the Turkish government has adopted a holistic approach to addressing educational challenges. Family engagement has been a central focus, with informative seminars and home visits conducted to encourage families to send their children to school. Scholarships, such as "Back to School" and "School Attendance," have been provided to students in vocational and technical education programs, addressing socio-economic barriers that might otherwise hinder attendance (Tuğrul| Global Compact on Refugees, n.d).

Recognizing the specific challenges faced by Syrian girls, including early marriage and family reluctance to prioritize their education, PIKTES has organized awareness-raising meetings and family visits to underscore the importance of education for girls. Educational materials and brochures in Turkish and Arabic have also been distributed to inform families about available educational services and resources, including support for distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the project's effective implementation, PIKTES has established a project monitoring web portal and conducted in-service training for Turkish language trainers. These measures enhance the capacity of educators to support Syrian students effectively, furthering the project's goals of fostering social cohesion and improving educational outcomes (Tuğrul| Global Compact on Refugees, n.d).

Together, programs like CCTE and PIKTES exemplify the collaborative efforts of the Turkish government and international partners in creating inclusive educational environments. By addressing economic barriers, engaging families, and providing targeted support, these initiatives aim to ensure that Syrian refugee children not only access education but thrive within the Turkish education system, paving the way for their successful integration into society.

However, as already mentioned, critical challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to education for refugee children. Among these, the most pressing barriers will be explored in detail, shedding light on their profound impact on integration and educational outcomes.

### **3.2.1 Language Barriers**

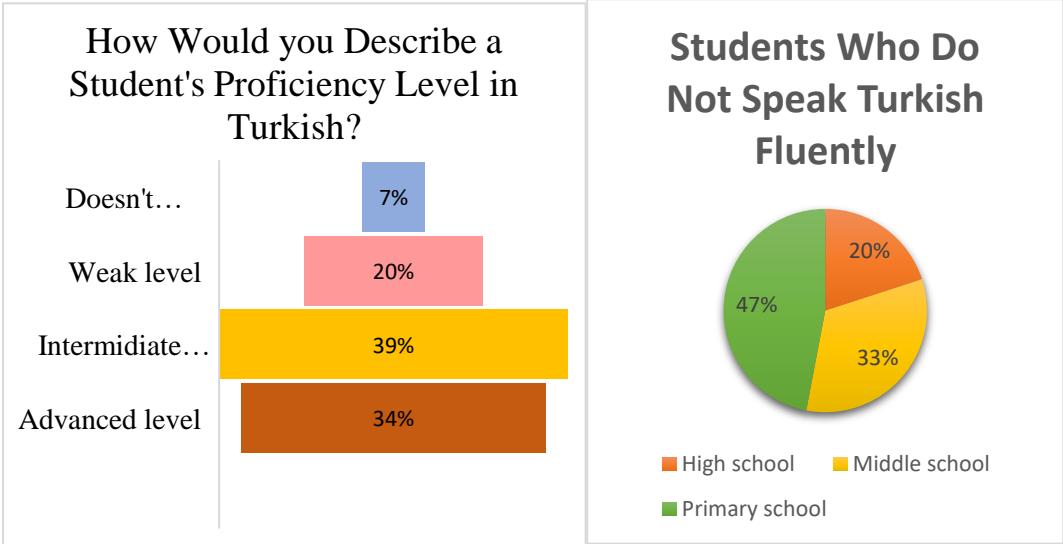
Language teaching serves as a cornerstone in education, playing a vital role in facilitating the integration of refugee children into the host country while also shielding them from potential risks. Language possesses unique characteristics, such as its ability to interpret the world and enable the generation and transfer of ideas, making it a fundamental prerequisite for learning. Language proficiency enhances the capacity for effective communication and contributes to overall academic success, strong language skills are closely linked to opportunities for higher education and upward social mobility, as they lay the foundation for learning across various disciplines. Thus, students' educational achievement is intricately connected to their level of language proficiency (Taş & Minaz, 2022).

Language barriers represent a significant obstacle for Syrian refugee children, profoundly affecting their educational experiences, social integration, and overall ability to adapt to life in Turkey. As the primary means of communication, language is critical not only for academic

success but also for fostering meaningful interactions with peers and teachers. The inability to speak Turkish is widely recognized as a central challenge for refugee children, severely hampering their academic performance, without a strong grasp of the language, these students struggle to comprehend lessons, participate in classroom activities, and engage with the curriculum. As a result, many fall behind academically, becoming passive in the learning process and missing critical educational opportunities (Babayiğit & Karsantik, 2024). Language barriers also extend beyond academics, influencing the emotional and social well-being of Syrian children. Limited communication skills can lead to feelings of isolation, frustration, and diminished self-confidence (Zehra, 2020), for some, this struggle is compounded by instances of mockery or exclusion from classmates, which further exacerbates their difficulties in adapting to the school environment.

Teachers face significant challenges in addressing these language barriers, often citing a lack of training and resources as key obstacles, many educators report feeling unprepared to teach Turkish as a second language and struggle with creating lesson plans that accommodate the diverse language proficiency levels of their students. One teacher noted, “*As teaching Turkish to foreigners is a new field, there aren’t resources in the market; we are trying to find resources*”, (Gürel & Büyükşahin, 2020), this shortage of specialized materials and tools makes it difficult to support students effectively. The diversity of language proficiency among refugee children presents additional complications in classroom management. Teachers must navigate varying levels of comprehension and fluency, which can hinder lesson planning and individualized instruction. Without proper training in second language acquisition, educators often find it challenging to address these differences and meet the needs of all students (Sarmini et al., 2020), cultural and linguistic differences further complicate the teaching process. Teachers often lack an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of refugee students, which limits their ability to connect with them and adapt teaching methods accordingly. This disconnect underscores the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with strategies for managing multicultural classrooms and teaching Turkish as a second language (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Gürel & Büyükşahin, 2020). Statistics reveal the tangible effects of these language barriers on academic outcomes. Refugee boys, for instance, are **5.3** percentage points less likely to progress to the next grade compared to their native peers, and both refugee boys and girls are, on average, **0.7** grades behind their Turkish counterparts. These disparities highlight the critical role of language in educational advancement and underscore the urgency of addressing these barriers (Kırdar et al., 2023). Efforts to improve language

proficiency among Syrian refugee children are crucial for their integration into Turkish schools and society, studies indicate that it generally takes approximately one year for foreign students to achieve an intermediate level of Turkish proficiency. At this stage, students can participate more confidently in classroom activities and complete a significant portion of their homework. However, progressing to an advanced level of Turkish proficiency often requires up to two years, with the pace of acquisition influenced by individual circumstances and the availability of targeted language support programs(Hawasli,2020). Insights from a 2020 questionnaire conducted by the Syrian Dialogue Center shed further light on this issue, the study explored the extent to which linguistic barriers were overcome by Syrian refugee students through their enrollment in Turkish schools. According to responses from parents, 27% of the students surveyed continued to face significant challenges with the Turkish language, even after attending school for an extended period. These findings underscore the persistent nature of language barriers and the critical need for enhanced and sustained language support mechanisms within the educational system. Given the absence of more recent statistics assessing the language proficiency of Syrian refugee children in Turkey, this 2020 figure remains the most relevant and reliable source available. This limitation underscores the need for updated assessments to gain a clearer understanding of the current linguistic challenges refugee students encounter and to inform more effective policy interventions.



**Figure 2: Evaluation of The Level of Syrian Students in the Turkish Language**

Source: Syrian Dialogue Center,2020,www.Syriadialogue.org, (Hawasli,2020)

Efforts to address language barriers among Syrian refugee children in Turkey have been supported by various initiatives aimed at improving their language skills and facilitating their integration into the Turkish education system. These programs have achieved measurable progress but continue to face limitations that impact their overall effectiveness.

One of the most prominent initiatives is the Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES), which has implemented a range of interventions to support language acquisition. The program aims to provide Turkish language training to 400,000 Syrian children, a critical step in helping them communicate effectively and follow academic courses in public schools. Adaptation classes, established through PIKTES, offer tailored language instruction based on a “Turkish Language Proficiency Exam” ensuring students receive support that aligns with their skill level. (Tugrul|Global Compact on Refugees,n.d.-b).In addition to language courses, supplemental educational programs such as homework assistance, catch-up classes, and tutoring services have been introduced to address gaps in knowledge and help refugee students keep pace with their peers. However, schools frequently report insufficient resources, including a shortage of trained teachers equipped to teach Turkish as a second language and limited materials designed for this purpose (Atalay et al., 2022). As of 2021, approximately 422,867 Syrian children remained out of school, highlighting the limited reach of existing interventions (UNICEF| Inclusion of Syrian refugee children into the national education system (Turkey),2021). Cultural and psychological barriers further compound the challenges. Language barriers often lead to social isolation and frustration for students, negatively impacting their emotional well-being and ability to engage with learning environments. Teachers participating in PIKTES have noted some positive impacts on students' language skills but emphasize that the program's scope is insufficient to address these issues fully. They stress the need for a holistic approach integrating emotional and social support alongside language instruction (Sarmini et al., 2020).

Innovative solutions, such as the mobile application *Kayıp Sesler Ülkesi* (The Land of Lost Sounds), have been developed to make language learning more engaging. Designed for first-graders, this interactive tool uses animations, songs, and games to teach Turkish in an enjoyable and accessible way (Tugrul|Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.-a)While such methods show promise, continuous support throughout the educational journey remains essential, regular assessments and tailored interventions are needed to ensure each child progresses in both language skills and academic content. Despite these efforts, limitations persist. Existing programs do not fully address the complex needs of Syrian students, and many teachers report

feeling unprepared to manage the diverse language proficiency levels within their classrooms. Additional training and resources are critical to creating an inclusive learning environment that supports all students effectively (Özel & Erdur-Baker, 2023).

Language barriers also significantly impact the involvement of Syrian parents in their children's education, creating challenges that affect both academic progress and integration into the school community. Many parents struggle to communicate with teachers or participate in school meetings due to limited Turkish proficiency (Sarmini et al., 2020), this lack of engagement often hinders their ability to provide meaningful support for their children's education. To address these challenges, initiatives encourage refugee families to participate in the language learning process. Families are urged to practice Turkish at home and attend seminars or training sessions designed to enhance their understanding of the language, such involvement not only strengthens the children's language development but also fosters a sense of inclusion within the educational system (Babayigit & Karsantik, 2024). However, parental concerns about the potential loss of native Arabic language skills often complicate these efforts, many parents fear that their children's immersion in Turkish schools might erode their connection to their cultural and linguistic heritage, and this concern has led some families to favor at-home education based on Arabic curricula, limiting their children's exposure to Turkish language acquisition and integration opportunities (Aydin et al., 2019). Recognizing these concerns, PIKTES has focused on engaging families through home visits, informational seminars, and awareness-raising campaigns. By addressing socio-economic and cultural barriers, the program aims to bridge the gap between schools and refugee families, ensuring that parents can play an active role in supporting their children's education (Tugrul|Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.-b)

Building on such initiatives, successful strategies implemented both in Turkey and internationally highlight the critical role of tailored language programs in overcoming educational barriers, these strategies not only facilitate linguistic integration but also promote academic success and social inclusion, serving as valuable models for addressing the needs of refugee children. Taking into account the critical need to address educational disruptions among Syrian refugee children, Turkey has expanded its efforts beyond traditional programs such as Temporary Education Centers (TECs) and the Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES). At the same time, these initiatives have laid a strong foundation for supporting linguistic and academic integration, targeted solutions are essential for addressing the specific challenges faced by children with significant gaps in their

schooling. The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) exemplifies a targeted approach to addressing educational disruptions among refugee children. Designed for children who have been out of school for extended periods or have never attended formal education, ALP offers a modular 16-month curriculum to help students catch up academically. Since its inception in 2018, the program has contacted 63,725 Syrian children, with 29,037 enrolled as of June 2021. This initiative underscores the importance of adaptive strategies in bridging educational gaps, providing a pathway for children to re-integrate into structured learning environments and improve their academic outcomes (UNICEF| Documentation of the Education Response for Syrian Children Under Temporary Protection in Turkey -Report, 2022,p.65).

Efforts beyond Turkey demonstrate that international models provide valuable insights into addressing language barriers through innovative strategies. For example, in *Sweden's Immersion Classes*, refugee children participate in immersion classes that combine intensive language support with regular academic lessons. This dual approach equips students with the linguistic skills needed to succeed academically while fostering social integration. Comprehensive teacher training enhances the program's impact by ensuring that educators are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of refugee students (Abu-Ghaida et al., 2024), similarly, *Uganda's Bridging Program*, focuses on language acquisition for refugee children through transitional classes tailored to their needs, this initiative, developed in collaboration with organizations such as Save the Children, facilitates a smoother transition into the national education system by addressing foundational language barriers (Digital, n.d.). In contrast to these focused approaches, European countries hosting Ukrainian have adopted *Multilingual Education Strategies*, that balance maintaining native language proficiency with acquiring the host country's language (Krompák&Marina|UNICEF,2023). These programs emphasize intensive, individualized language instruction, supporting both cultural identity and educational integration. Effective language support for refugee children hinges on a combination of tailored instruction, inclusive educational environments, and community engagement. Turkey's TECs and PIKTES programs, alongside initiatives like Sweden's immersion classes, Uganda's Bridging Programme, and Europe's multilingual strategies, illustrate best practices in addressing linguistic challenges. By adopting such comprehensive approaches, countries can empower refugee children to achieve academic success and integrate seamlessly into their host societies.

### 3.2.2 Discrimination

Discrimination presents a significant obstacle to the successful integration of Syrian refugee children into Turkish society, particularly within the education system. Negative attitudes, prejudices, and unequal treatment by peers, teachers, and the broader community hinder their participation in academic and social settings. Bullying, a pervasive manifestation of discrimination, is often directed at school-aged youth who are perceived as vulnerable. It typically involves repeated aggressive behaviors, characterized by a real or perceived imbalance of power. Refugee children are particularly susceptible, as their status as migrants, combined with socio-economic disadvantages, cultural differences, or disabilities, makes them frequent targets. For many Syrian refugee students, the reality of discrimination and bullying is a daily experience, intensifying their sense of exclusion and alienation (Uscari, 2024). The prevalence of such discriminatory behaviors undermines the broader goals of integration by affecting not only the educational outcomes of refugee children but also their social and emotional well-being.

Discrimination poses a significant challenge to the integration of Syrian refugee children in Turkish schools, manifesting in various forms that deeply impact their educational and social experiences. Peer bullying, classroom exclusion, and teacher biases create environments where these children often feel unwelcome, hindering their ability to fully participate in academic and social settings. One pervasive form of discrimination is bullying, which often stems from negative stereotypes and prejudices held by Turkish students and their families. Refugee children frequently face verbal harassment, social exclusion, and, in some cases, physical confrontations (Hawasli, 2020). Teachers report instances of Turkish students refusing to interact with their Syrian peers, labeling them as outsiders or unfairly blaming them for unrelated issues, such interactions foster a sense of isolation among Syrian students, reinforcing their marginalization within the school environment. (Şafak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2020) Discrimination extends to classroom activities, where Syrian children are often excluded from group work and collaborative projects. This exclusion limits their opportunities to engage with peers, thereby hindering both social integration and their ability to benefit from the educational process. One teacher recounted: *“At first, I had problems, such as students not wanting to sit in the same row with Syrian students or play games with them. While we managed to overcome this partially, they still don’t include them when playing games and rarely talk to Syrian students”* (Atalay et al., 2022).

Teachers play a critical role in either perpetuating or mitigating these behaviors, while many educators strive to create inclusive classrooms, unconscious biases can lead to differential treatment, such as lower expectations for Syrian students or a lack of support in addressing bullying incidents. Language barriers exacerbate these challenges, further isolating refugee children from their educational environment (Zehra, 2020). Cultural misunderstandings and prejudices also significantly contribute to discriminatory behaviors in schools. Negative stereotypes, often perpetuated by Turkish families, paint Syrians as burdens or disruptors. Such biases shape children's perceptions, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and discrimination. Parental reluctance to allow their children to interact with Syrian classmates reinforces these divides, further alienating refugee children (Hawasli, 2020). Furthermore, the consequences of discrimination extend beyond social alienation, profoundly affecting Syrian children's mental health and educational outcomes. Feelings of isolation, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem are common among those subjected to negative treatment (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023); for example, one teacher noted: *"It is impossible to separate Turkish students from their Syrian classmates today. Discriminatory attitudes initially shaped by parents or societal norms can change through direct interaction"* (Özel & Erdur-Baker, 2023). However, where such interactions remain limited, the negative effects intensify. Refugee children may internalize their experiences of discrimination, leading to emotional distress, behavioral issues, and even aggression. One educator observed: *"Violence has turned into a form of communication among students, reflecting the psychological toll of their struggles"* (Özel & Erdur-Baker, 2023). Many Syrian children lack access to structured coping mechanisms or school-based support systems, leaving them vulnerable to the long-term effects of discrimination. While some find solace in familial or community support, others face challenges navigating these experiences alone (Dehnel et al., 2021).

Additionally, discrimination significantly impacts educational outcomes for Syrian refugee children. Many struggle with absenteeism, avoiding school environments where they feel unsafe or unwelcome (Hawasli, 2020), this disruption to their education affects their academic performance, as emotional distress and exclusion make it difficult to concentrate or engage in lessons. Over time, these challenges contribute to higher dropout rates. The cumulative effects of bullying, exclusion, and lack of support foster feelings of alienation, pushing many refugee children to abandon their education altogether (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023).

Children are not inherently predisposed to discriminatory behaviors; rather, they absorb cultural norms shaped by systemic racism and prejudices. These biases are often reinforced by parents, schools, media, and the broader community. For instance, some Turkish parents actively discourage their children from befriending Syrian classmates, labeling them as “dirty” or “bad” One teacher shared: *“At first, the children did not discriminate against their Syrian classmates. They simply saw them as friends to play with. However, some parents intervened, instructing their children to avoid Syrian students, which influenced their perspectives negatively”*(Kardeş & Akman, 2022,p.157). These parental attitudes significantly shape Turkish students’ behaviors, perpetuating peer bullying and fostering hostile environments. Refugee children subjected to such treatment often face barriers to meaningful engagement in educational and social activities, further isolating them and exacerbating feelings of exclusion.

Teachers and school administrators play a pivotal role in shaping the school environment, serving as key actors in either perpetuating or mitigating discriminatory behaviors. Inclusive educators who model respect and actively address incidents of bullying and exclusion create supportive atmospheres where all students, including Syrian refugee children, feel valued. Conversely, the lack of intervention not only reinforces prejudices but also fosters a culture of division, exacerbating the marginalization of refugee students. Professional development programs focusing on multicultural education equip teachers with the skills to recognize and counteract biases, address parental concerns, and create environments that foster empathy (Babayiğit & Karsantik, 2024). As one teacher explained, *“Parents didn’t want their kids studying together with Syrian students, but I didn’t let that happen. I spoke with them directly and addressed their concerns.”*(Kardeş & Akman, 2022,p.157). These efforts underscore the critical role of educators in challenging prejudices and building bridges between communities.

Administrators also have a significant responsibility in implementing policies that combat discrimination. Establishing and organizing cultural awareness campaigns, and fostering dialogue between Turkish and Syrian families are crucial strategies (Zehra, 2020). By proactively addressing these challenges, schools can reduce the stigma surrounding refugee status and promote a culture of acceptance and understanding. At a broader level, collaborative efforts led by organizations like UNICEF's Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) have introduced key initiatives to prevent discrimination and promote inclusivity in Turkish schools. These include: ***Cultural sensitivity training for teachers*** plays a pivotal role, equipping educators with the necessary skills to address the diverse needs of students from various

nationalities. These programs not only aim to foster an inclusive learning environment but also empower teachers to bridge cultural gaps effectively. In tandem with these efforts, *peer support programs* encourage friendships and collaboration between local and refugee students, enhancing mutual understanding and reducing the feelings of isolation often experienced by refugee children. Additionally, *awareness campaigns* directed at both students and parents emphasize the value of diversity and the importance of inclusivity, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more harmonious school environment. To further ensure a supportive educational experience, *monitoring, and reporting mechanisms* have been established to address incidents of discrimination promptly (Turkiye: Back to School, 2024).

Beyond individual schools, systemic interventions are necessary to address discrimination comprehensively. Anti-bullying programs and inclusive education policies lay the groundwork for equitable learning environments, while cultural awareness campaigns target both students and parents to foster mutual understanding. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based initiatives complement these efforts by providing critical resources and training. Through teacher workshops, family engagement seminars, and mental health support initiatives, these organizations help bridge cultural gaps and enhance social cohesion within schools, their advocacy efforts also push for systemic changes to promote inclusivity and address the challenges faced by refugee children (Forced Migration Review, 2014).

Discrimination in schools significantly affects the mental health and overall well-being of Syrian refugee children. The intersection of exclusion, bullying, and social isolation creates a challenging educational environment that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. Emotional and psychological challenges, such as feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem, are common among these children. Studies have documented high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression in this demographic (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023), with nearly half of the surveyed students displaying symptoms that reflect the psychological toll of their experiences (Dehnel et al., 2021). A study conducted by the Syrian Dialogue Center (Hawasli, 2020) involving direct interviews with Syrian students, sheds further light on this issue. The findings indicate that a considerable portion of Syrian students in Turkish schools do not feel comfortable in their educational environment. Specifically, **22%** of these students reported a lack of comfort, while an additional **31%** expressed feelings of discomfort or anxiety while at school. The study also provides insights into gender disparities in comfort levels, revealing that **56%** of boys face difficulties in Turkish schools, compared to **48%** of girls.

Discrimination poses a significant barrier to the educational opportunities available to Syrian refugee children. The prejudice they encounter, both within and outside the classroom, not only impacts their ability to thrive academically but also influences their broader integration into Turkish society. Negative stereotypes, social exclusion, and unequal treatment exacerbate feelings of isolation among refugee children, creating an environment where education, rather than serving as a bridge to inclusion, becomes another site of marginalization. Addressing such discriminatory practices is, therefore, not merely a matter of educational policy but a foundational step toward fostering a more cohesive society (Can & Baran, 2023). However, education, while central, does not operate in isolation as a tool for integration. It intersects with broader vulnerabilities that compound the challenges faced by Syrian refugee children. Issues such as economic hardship, societal alienation, and exposure to risks like unaccompanied status, child labor, and early marriage significantly influence their capacity to engage with and benefit from educational opportunities. These vulnerabilities not only hinder access to education but also perpetuate a cycle of marginalization, making meaningful social integration increasingly difficult. The interplay between these challenges underscores the necessity of a holistic approach, one that addresses both the structural and social barriers Syrian refugee children encounter. The following section delves into these intertwined vulnerabilities, examining how they deepen the divide between Syrian refugee children and their host society, and exploring the multifaceted strategies required to bridge this gap.

### **3.3 Intersecting Vulnerabilities**

The vulnerabilities faced by Syrian refugee children in Turkey often overlap, creating compounded risks that hinder their ability to integrate into society. Among these, unaccompanied children, those forced into child labor, and victims of early marriage are particularly affected. These intersecting challenges not only expose them to exploitation and instability but also exacerbate their marginalization, requiring comprehensive interventions to address their unique needs effectively.

#### **3.3.1 Unaccompanied Children**

Unaccompanied children, defined as minors who arrive in a country without an adult responsible for their care, represent one of the most vulnerable groups within refugee populations. **The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** defines unaccompanied children as those separated from both parents and relatives and lacking the care of a legal guardian. This

definition also extends to "separated children," who may be accompanied by extended family members but do not have a designated legal caretaker (Maioli et al., 2021). In Turkey, this definition is in alignment with international standards, recognizing unaccompanied children under the same framework and entitling them to protection under both domestic and international laws, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 1951 Refugee Convention (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024c). During refugee crises, unaccompanied children are disproportionately affected by the compounded vulnerabilities of their circumstances. The absence of family support exacerbates their challenges, as they struggle to secure essential needs such as shelter, food, and education. Without the protection and guidance of a responsible adult, these children face a significantly higher risk of exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Additionally, the psychological impact of family separation and exposure to conflict can lead to profound emotional distress, manifesting as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These emotional and psychological burdens further intensify the vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors, placing them at a critical intersection of risk and hardship (Hawasli,2021).

The plight of unaccompanied children is a pressing global issue, with alarming statistics underscoring their vulnerability. In 2015, UNICEF reported that at least 100,000 unaccompanied migrant and refugee children were documented globally, including 10,000 who went missing after arriving in Europe (Apap, 2016). More recently, data from the European Union revealed that in 2023, 41,000 asylum applications were submitted by self-identified unaccompanied minors—the second-highest figure recorded since 2015 (4.6.1. Data on Unaccompanied Minors, n.d.).Conflicts remain a primary driver of these figures; for example, in 2015, approximately 98,400 asylum applications from unaccompanied or separated minors were filed across 78 countries, with significant numbers originating from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, and Somalia (Hawasli,2021). This trend is similarly reflected in Turkey, where thousands of unaccompanied Syrian refugee children have been reported, mirroring the global increase in unaccompanied minors arising from conflict zones.

The absence of a protective familial environment leaves unaccompanied children acutely vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation, and physical abuse. Their isolation makes them easy targets for coercion into child labor or other exploitative activities, which many undertake as a desperate means of survival. These risks emphasize the critical need for tailored protective

measures to safeguard this at-risk population. Additionally, the lack of family networks significantly impedes their ability to meet basic needs. Without the guidance and support of caregivers, many face inadequate shelter, food insecurity, and restricted access to education. Bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of proper documentation further exacerbate these challenges, creating substantial barriers to accessing essential services and opportunities. Family separation and exposure to violence frequently result in profound psychological distress for unaccompanied children. Conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are prevalent, often stemming from traumatic experiences during displacement and in their host countries (Radjenovic, 2024). These emotional scars hinder their ability to adapt to new environments and impede their long-term recovery and personal development. Moreover, cultural and language differences compound the difficulties they face in integrating into host communities. Many struggle to overcome social and linguistic obstacles that impede their ability to form connections or participate in community life. Discrimination and stigmatization further heighten their sense of isolation, leaving them marginalized and excluded from meaningful social interactions. To address these multifaceted challenges, a robust legal and policy framework is essential to safeguard the rights and well-being of unaccompanied children, providing them with the protection and support necessary to rebuild their lives and integrate into host societies effectively. International conventions provide a solid foundation for the protection of unaccompanied children, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) serving as the primary instrument. The CRC emphasizes the principles of the child's best interests, non-discrimination, the right to life and development, and family unity. Importantly, General Comment No. 6 of the CRC specifically highlights the heightened vulnerabilities of unaccompanied children, urging States to adopt special protective measures, this comment underscores the need for a holistic approach to child protection, focusing on the multifaceted challenges these children face and guiding States and other actors in ensuring that unaccompanied children can fully access and enjoy their rights. It particularly stresses the importance of principles such as non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, and the child's right to express their views freely (Legal Framework and General Principles, n.d).

In alignment with these international standards, Turkey has developed a range of legal frameworks and mechanisms to safeguard the rights of unaccompanied children. One of the key pieces of legislation is Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection, which ensures that unaccompanied minors seeking protection are treated by established child protection principles. This law lays the groundwork for a coordinated response to the needs of

unaccompanied children, ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect (Project, 2023). Further complementing these legal safeguards is Law No. 5395, the Child Protection Law, which mandates that the state be responsible for ensuring the welfare of all children, including refugee minors. Although the law does not explicitly include provisions for unaccompanied minors, its significance lies in its prohibition of child detention and its emphasis on considering the child's views in decisions that affect their welfare. This progressive approach to child welfare recognizes children as rights-holders, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in matters impacting their lives. The Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) offers additional protections for unaccompanied minors, further expanding their rights by detailing specific procedures for identifying and caring for them. Under this regulation, unaccompanied children are entitled to shelter, healthcare, and education, and they are accommodated in appropriate facilities until they reach adulthood or are placed in suitable alternative care arrangements (Habip, 2018). This regulation ensures that the best interests of unaccompanied minors are prioritized and that their basic needs are met in a safe and supportive environment. These regulations not only establish a framework for addressing the immediate needs of unaccompanied children but also delineate the responsibilities of various stakeholders in implementing these protections, **the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS)**, plays a pivotal role in ensuring the welfare of unaccompanied children. These efforts include housing them in specialized Child Support Centers where their basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and education, are addressed. The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) oversees the identification and registration of unaccompanied children, while non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Türk Kızılay provide psychosocial support and educational programs. International organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), collaborate with local authorities to improve child protection measures, conduct best-interest assessments, and offer technical assistance (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024c).

Within these frameworks, unaccompanied children are provided with essential services that prioritize their safety and development. These include access to free shelter, legal representation through appointed guardians, and psychosocial support to address the trauma and emotional distress that many have endured. Education is a cornerstone of these services, with learning opportunities offered within the centers to promote personal and intellectual growth. Moreover, specialized child protection programs focus on critical issues like early pregnancy, child marriage, and sexual harassment, empowering children with knowledge about their rights and

available resources (Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024e).

Nevertheless, significant challenges continue to hinder the effectiveness of these frameworks. Resource limitations lead to overcrowded facilities and insufficient service provision. The lack of adequately trained personnel complicates efforts to address the complex needs of unaccompanied minors, while gaps in legal enforcement, stemming from bureaucratic inefficiencies and limited awareness among officials, further exacerbate the situation. Access to essential services also remains a critical obstacle. Unaccompanied children often face educational barriers such as documentation requirements, language difficulties, and instances of discrimination, limiting their integration into formal schooling systems. In healthcare, the lack of access to mental health services is particularly concerning given the high prevalence of trauma among these children. Geographic and bureaucratic hurdles further complicate their ability to access services, particularly in underserved areas. Reports emphasizing these gaps call for enhanced coordination among government bodies, NGOs, and international organizations to ensure that unaccompanied children can fully exercise their rights and access necessary services (Protection - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d; Habip, 2018).

Comparative analysis provides valuable insights into Turkey's efforts to support unaccompanied minors. While countries like Greece and Italy face similar challenges with overcrowding and detention, they have developed specific programs to address these issues, including initiatives to support education and legal guardianship (Habip, 2018). Germany stands out with its comprehensive framework emphasizing mental health services, community-based care, and family reunification efforts. These comparative perspectives highlight potential strategies that Turkey could adopt to strengthen its approach (German Government Recognizes, n.d).

The experiences of unaccompanied children themselves underscore the critical need for targeted interventions. Testimonies collected by organizations like Refugee Rights Turkey reveal the hardships these children endure, from exposure to violence during migration to struggles with discrimination and precarious living conditions. For instance, one child recounts *“working long hours for minimal pay at a young age, experiencing homelessness, and eventually finding refuge through NGO support”* (Refugee Rights Turkey, n.d). These narratives not only highlight the resilience of unaccompanied minors but also emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive support systems. Successful interventions demonstrate the potential for

meaningful impact. Legal assistance programs, such as those provided by Refugee Rights Turkey, help unaccompanied minors navigate bureaucratic systems, secure shelter, and access essential services. Educational initiatives led by UNICEF and the Turkish government aim to integrate refugee children into the national education system, addressing barriers like language difficulties and bullying. These efforts, while promising, must be scaled and sustained to ensure broader access and effectiveness (Protection - UNHCR Turkiye, n.d.; Lelliott, 2022).

The vulnerabilities of unaccompanied children extend into various aspects of their lives, revealing systemic challenges that perpetuate cycles of exploitation. Among these, the prevalence of child labor emerges as a particularly pressing issue, reflecting the broader socioeconomic struggles faced by refugee populations.

### **3.3.2 Child Labor**

Child labor, as defined by international law, encompasses work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, while obstructing their physical and mental development. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) underscore the imperative to shield children under 18 from economic exploitation and any labor detrimental to their education, health, or well-being. The ILO Minimum Age Convention (**No. 138**) establishes 15 years as the minimum employment age, with provisions for light work between ages 13 and 15 under regulated conditions (International Labour Organization, n.d). In addition, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (**No. 182**) categorically prohibits hazardous labor, including child prostitution and slavery, for individuals under 18. These conventions constitute the cornerstone of global initiatives to eradicate child labor (United States Department of Labor & Verité, n.d).

In Turkey, the legal framework aligns with these international standards through the ratification of ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182. National legislation includes the Turkish Labor Law, which prohibits employment for children under 15 and regulates working conditions for minors aged 15-18 (Müdürlüğü & Başkanlığı, n.d.), as well as the Constitution (Article 50), which ensures special protection for children in the workforce (Koçali, 2022). Further, the Child Protection Law (**No. 5395**) outlines comprehensive safeguards for children's welfare, emphasizing their right to a safe and nurturing environment, also the Labor Law (**No. 4857**) sets 15 years as the minimum employment age while restricting hazardous work for anyone under 18, though this falls short of international standards recommending 18 as the minimum

age for hazardous labor (INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE, 2018; Koçali,2022). Nevertheless, several gaps persist in policy implementation and enforcement, particularly concerning vulnerable populations such as refugee children. Many child workers, including Syrian refugees, are employed in informal sectors that remain beyond the reach of labor laws, leaving them exposed to exploitation and unprotected by the legal system. Ambiguities in legislative provisions also undermine the effectiveness of enforcement efforts, with mechanisms such as labor inspections proving insufficient to monitor and address violations comprehensively (PDF.js Viewer, n.d). Despite the existence of a robust legal framework, the persistence of child labor reveals the complex realities that extend beyond policy and enforcement. For many refugee children in Turkey, the gap between legal protections and lived experiences remains striking, shaped by a confluence of socio-economic pressures, systemic barriers, and precarious living conditions. These dynamics not only influence the prevalence of child labor but also define the nature of work and the often harsh environments in which these children are employed. Recent data reveals that child labor remains a pressing issue in Turkey, with approximately 1 million children engaged in various forms of labor. Among this population, a significant number are Syrian refugees, compelled into the workforce due to economic hardship (International Labour Organization|ILO's programme in Turkey,n.d). Child labor is particularly concentrated in agriculture, construction, and the informal economy, where hazardous working conditions expose children to exploitation and physical harm. The lack of reliable data exacerbates the challenge of addressing child labor comprehensively, particularly within refugee communities. Many Syrian refugees lack formal documentation, and language barriers impede accurate data collection. Additionally, the transient nature of refugee populations complicates efforts to map labor patterns effectively (International Labour Organization, n.d; International Labour Organization|ILO's programme in Turkey,n.d).

Economic pressures are the principal driver of child labor, especially among refugee families. Poverty forces many families to prioritize immediate survival over long-term development, often compelling parents to send their children to work. In such circumstances, the income generated by children is not a matter of choice but a necessity for family survival. Refugee children, many of whom are engaged in labor-intensive and low-paying jobs, contribute to their household incomes under exploitative and unsafe conditions (International Labour Organization, n.d; Dayıoğlu et al., 2023). This reality perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability, compromising their well-being, health, and access to education.

Refugee children are employed across a range of labor-intensive sectors, primarily within the informal economy. Among the most common types of work is *agriculture*, where seasonal labor involves tasks such as harvesting fruits and vegetables under physically taxing conditions. Similarly, the *textile industry* employs many children in factories or informal workshops, often exposing them to repetitive tasks and substandard safety measures ( Syrian Workers in Turkey, n.d). In addition, *construction* remains a significant sector, requiring children to perform physically demanding roles, frequently without adequate safety provisions, which heightens their risk of injuries (Syrian Child Workers in Turkey, n.d). Furthermore, a smaller proportion of children are engaged in *domestic work*, a field fraught with the risks of exploitation and abuse. Lastly, many children take on *street vending* and *service roles*, selling goods in public spaces or working in restaurants and cafeterias to supplement their family income(Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020). While these roles are vital for the survival of their families, they take a profound toll on the children's physical, mental, and social development.

Working conditions for refugee children often violate legal labor standards. Their working hours frequently exceed the prescribed limits, with reports indicating that many children labor for up to 12 hours daily, particularly during peak agricultural seasons. Even shifts of 8 hours are marked by minimal breaks and harsh conditions(Fehr & Rijken, 2022). Wages are generally meager, with most children earning significantly less than the minimum wage. Surveys show that around **61%** of working children earn less than 100 Turkish lira per week, an amount insufficient to address their families' financial struggles. Delays in payment and instances of non-payment are commonplace, leaving children vulnerable to economic exploitation with no legal recourse (Syrian Child Workers in Turkey, n.d).

The general working conditions for refugee children are characterized by widespread neglect of safety and welfare. While the absence of Safety Standards poses significant risks many children work in environments devoid of basic safety measures, particularly in high-risk sectors such as construction and agriculture, the lack of benefits or protections further exacerbates informal employment and deprives children of essential protections, such as health benefits and job security. Similarly, exposure to harassment and discrimination amplifies the challenges faced by children, compounding their vulnerability and psychological distress (Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020).

The grueling conditions under which refugee children work have profound implications for their physical and mental health. Prolonged exposure to hazardous environments leads to

injuries, musculoskeletal issues, and chronic health problems. The physical demands of heavy labor render children susceptible to fatigue and long-term impairments. Additionally, the psychological toll is significant, with many children experiencing anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness stemming from exploitative conditions and the burden of supporting their families(Koçali,2022). These challenges are further exacerbated by their lack of access to education and social support systems. Documented cases highlight the extent of exploitation and abuse faced by refugee children in the labor market. Reports reveal incidents such as *verbal and physical abuse*, as many Syrian child workers report mistreatment from their employers, further undermining their safety and well-being. Additionally, *sexual exploitation* poses a serious threat, particularly for children in unregulated work environments, such as domestic labor or informal sectors, where they face heightened risks of abuse (Syrian Workers in Turkey, n.d; Fehr & Rijken, 2022). Another pressing concern is *fatal workplace accidents*, with alarming statistics indicating that at least 194 child workers have died in workplace incidents, including 19 Syrian refugee children. These instances of exploitation highlight broader systemic issues that perpetuate child labor among Syrian refugees, particularly the lack of adequate legal protections, economic stability, and access to education (Syrian Child Workers in Turkey, n.d). Addressing these root causes requires not only safeguarding children from immediate harm but also creating pathways for their long-term integration into society. In this context, Syrian refugee children face numerous barriers to education, which present significant challenges to their successful integration into Turkish society, Language barriers, financial constraints, and a lack of culturally inclusive educational programs are among the most pressing obstacles. These are further exacerbated by social stigma, discrimination, and inadequate integration initiatives, which collectively discourage school attendance and perpetuate reliance on child labor (Caro, 2020). Compounding these challenges, the absence of legal residency permits often excludes families from essential social services and formal employment opportunities, forcing many into the informal economy. This unregulated sector exposes children to heightened risks of exploitation and dangerous working conditions(Fehr & Rijken, 2022). Cultural and familial expectations also contribute to the normalization of child labor. In some refugee communities, children working is seen as a practical necessity during times of economic hardship. Parents, particularly mothers, may feel compelled to permit their children to work to support household survival, despite concerns for their safety and long-term well-being(Mustafa&Alsaad&Barro,2020).

Addressing child labor requires a holistic approach targeting its root causes. Alleviating economic pressures through financial aid to families and enhancing adult employment opportunities can diminish the necessity of child labor. Concurrently, tailored educational initiatives, such as language-support programs and financial assistance for school-related expenses, can help refugee children re-enter and remain in school. Legal reforms are equally crucial—providing refugees with access to residency permits and social services would enable families to seek stable, lawful employment, reducing their dependence on informal labor markets (International Labour Organization, n.d; Fehr & Rijken, 2022).

Education is a cornerstone of societal integration, offering Syrian refugee children a pathway to build essential skills and future opportunities. Yet, administrative hurdles, such as the inability of undocumented children to register for school, and systemic barriers, including insufficient support mechanisms, hinder this process. Without intervention, the intersection of child labor and educational deprivation threatens to entrench cycles of poverty and marginalization (Caro, 2020). The transformative power of education is evident in comparative case studies. For example, **Jordan** has implemented programs that provide refugee children with formal schooling and vocational training, effectively reducing child labor (Rashid | Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.) Similarly, in **Lebanon**, collaborations between NGOs and the government have resulted in awareness campaigns and flexible education programs that accommodate working children (International Labour Organization, 2012). In **Bangladesh**, microfinance initiatives have alleviated financial burdens on families, enabling children to prioritize their education. These approaches underscore the critical role of integrated solutions combining educational access with economic and social support (Zohir et al., | UNICEF, 2024). Personal narratives further highlight the plight of refugee children. *Khalil*, a 13-year-old boy in Istanbul, works extensive hours in a tailor shop, having abandoned his education to support his family after fleeing Syria. *Aras*, an 11-year-old girl employed in a textile factory, attends weekend classes offered by an aid organization, balancing her aspirations for education with the harsh realities of exploitative labor (Small Hands, Big Profits, 2017). Their stories reflect the dual burdens borne by many refugee children: striving for an education while being trapped in circumstances that compromise their safety and development.

The concerted efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international bodies, and the Turkish government play a pivotal role in addressing the pressing issue of child labor among Syrian refugee children. These collaborative initiatives are designed to raise awareness, provide

legal protection, and implement strategic measures in alignment with international standards. Awareness campaigns are foundational to shifting community attitudes toward child labor and fostering an understanding of children's rights. By mobilizing Turkish authorities, NGOs, and international organizations, these campaigns aim to dismantle misconceptions about child labor and highlight the critical importance of protecting the rights of refugee children.

Legislative reforms have been equally vital in addressing the legal dimensions of child labor, Turkey has made significant strides in advancing children's rights through international treaties and agreements. Notably, the Child Protection Law of 2005, followed by the National Child Rights Strategy and Action Plan and the National Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (2017–2023), marked key milestones in aligning Turkey's legal framework with international standards, all within the broader context of its EU accession efforts. Moreover, legal aid programs play a crucial role in ensuring that Syrian refugee children's rights are upheld within Turkey's legal system. These programs are vital for refugee families who may lack awareness of their entitlements or face barriers in accessing justice, thereby ensuring a more equitable support system (INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE, 2018;PDF.js Viewer, n.d).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been a central player in addressing child labor in Turkey since 1992. Its updated 2021–2025 program emphasizes combating child labor through quality education, social protection, and rigorous enforcement of existing legislation. The ILO's efforts, which align with national priorities such as the National Employment Strategy (2014–2023), are further supported by initiatives targeting child labor in seasonal agriculture across 21 provinces, in partnership with various national stakeholders, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS) and the Ministry of National Education. Turkey's approach to combating child labor is characterized by a multi-sectoral strategy that brings together ministries, universities, private sector stakeholders, and NGOs. This collaborative framework emphasizes the importance of advocacy, education, social protection, and vocational training to tackle child labor comprehensively. Through such partnerships, Turkey demonstrates a robust commitment to not only addressing immediate challenges but also creating long-term solutions that align with global child protection standards (International Labour Organization|ILO's programme in Turkey, n.d).

While child labor highlights the economic vulnerabilities that many Syrian refugee children face, another equally pressing concern is the prevalence of child marriage within this

population. Both practices stem from systemic inequalities, cultural pressures, and limited access to resources, underscoring the multifaceted challenges that threaten the well-being and prospects of refugee children.

### **3.3.3 Child Marriage**

Child marriage, defined as a formal or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18, is a persistent issue with deep socio-economic and cultural roots (Archives, 2019). This practice is widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a form of gender-based violence, disproportionately affecting girls and resulting in adverse consequences for their health, education, and future opportunities. Among Syrian refugees in Turkey, child marriage has emerged as a critical challenge, exacerbated by displacement and socio-economic instability (Tasker, 2018).

The prevalence of child marriage among Syrian refugees in Turkey is alarmingly high compared to the national average. According to the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, **45%** of Syrian girls in Turkey were married before the age of 18, with **9%** married before age 15. These figures stand in stark contrast to the national average, where **15%** of Turkish girls marry before the age of 18, and only **2%** before 15. This disparity underscores the vulnerability of refugee communities, where child marriage is often perceived as a survival mechanism amidst challenging circumstances (Turkey, 2019).

A major driver of child marriage among Syrian refugees is economic hardship. Refugee families, often stripped of their livelihoods and facing dire financial insecurity, may view early marriage as a strategy to reduce their economic burden. In such contexts, marrying off a daughter may appear to offer financial relief, either through the receipt of dowries or by shifting her financial responsibility to her husband's household. The lack of access to stable income, education, and employment opportunities further entrenches this practice, leaving families with limited alternatives (Tasker, 2018). Cultural and traditional norms also play a significant role in perpetuating child marriage. Within many Syrian refugee communities, patriarchal traditions and societal expectations prioritize the roles of girls as wives and mothers. These cultural norms, deeply rooted in pre-conflict Syrian society, have been carried into refugee contexts, where pressures to conform to traditional practices are heightened by displacement and instability. Early marriage is often seen as a way to preserve family honor and ensure the chastity of daughters, despite the detrimental impacts on the girls' well-being and future (Elnakib et al., 2021). Displacement intensifies the risks associated with child marriage, further

complicating the lives of vulnerable families. The ongoing conflict in Syria has forced millions into refugee status, dismantling support systems and limiting access to essential services such as education and healthcare. In refugee camps and other precarious living conditions, families often face heightened concerns over the safety of their daughters, including the risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In the absence of adequate protection mechanisms, child marriage is perceived by some as a protective measure against these threats. However, this coping mechanism only perpetuates cycles of vulnerability and inequality, as girls married early often face increased risks of exploitation, domestic violence, and limited autonomy (Öztürk et al., 2021). Addressing the root causes of child marriage reveals an intricate interplay of economic hardship, cultural norms, and socio-political challenges. These factors, deeply ingrained in societal structures, often drive families to perceive early marriage as a means of ensuring stability and survival, particularly in refugee communities. However, tackling such entrenched issues necessitates robust legal frameworks and coordinated interventions.

In Turkey, child marriage is legally prohibited under the Turkish Civil Code, which stipulates 18 as the minimum marriage age. Exceptions, however, allow marriage at 17 with parental consent or at 16 under special circumstances approved by a court. Complementing domestic laws, Turkey has ratified international conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), both of which advocate for a marriage age of 18 without exceptions (Turkey, 2019). Despite these legal provisions, implementation challenges and gaps in enforcement undermine their effectiveness. Economic difficulties, cultural pressures, and inadequate awareness within communities often overshadow legal stipulations. Among refugees, where survival strategies dominate daily life, child marriage is frequently used as a coping mechanism. The informal nature of many unions—often solemnized through clandestine religious ceremonies—complicates enforcement, these marriages bypass official registration, rendering them invisible to authorities and limiting intervention opportunities. Furthermore, the precarious legal status of many refugee families exacerbates the problem. Without proper documentation, refugees may hesitate to report violations due to fear of deportation or legal repercussions. This legal limbo leaves families vulnerable and heightens the risks for young girls, as families prioritize immediate survival over long-term well-being and rights. The lack of comprehensive data on child marriage within refugee populations further hampers targeted policy responses and interventions (Tasker, 2018).

Recognizing child marriage as a violation of fundamental human rights, international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasize that marriage must be entered into freely and with full consent. This underscores the urgent need for robust protections to safeguard children from early and forced marriages (Nour,2009).

Numerous NGOs and international organizations are addressing these challenges through multifaceted approaches. UNICEF, for instance, collaborates with the Turkish government and local entities to implement a prevention and response model targeting child marriage. This comprehensive approach focuses on identifying and addressing root causes, enhancing local capacities, and promoting awareness through education and community engagement. Key interventions include: Developing training programs for educators, religious leaders, and civil servants to create protective environments. Conducting community-based training to foster positive social norms and encourage behavioral change. Supporting the formulation of the “National Strategy Document and Action Plan for Combating Early and Forced Marriages.” Additionally, international initiatives like the “*UN Joint Programme on the Elimination of Child, Early, and Forced Marriage*” adopt a multi-sectoral strategy to address the issue (UNICEF| Child Marriage, n.d, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)) Awareness campaigns, counseling services for young brides, and financial support for families are instrumental in mitigating the factors that drive child marriage. Educational programs, in particular, play a central role, as keeping girls in school is one of the most effective strategies to delay marriage and promote empowerment (Irani & Roudsari, 2019). Turkey’s commitment to combating child marriage is evident in its co-sponsorship of several Human Rights Council resolutions and its active participation in initiatives that frame child marriage as a human rights violation. These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the need for collaborative action at both policy and community levels to address the complexities of child marriage and its profound implications for young girls and society (Turkey, 2019). Efforts to address early marriage underscore its far-reaching implications, not only as a human rights concern but also as a multidimensional issue intertwined with societal and cultural dynamics. These complexities include the compounded vulnerabilities faced by young girls, particularly those grappling with social isolation and challenges in integration.

Child marriage often results in severe health consequences, particularly for young brides. Early pregnancies, a common outcome, impose significant physical risks due to the physiological immaturity of adolescent girls. Statistics reveal that mothers under 18 face a **35% to 55%** higher likelihood of delivering preterm or low-birthweight infants, with maternal mortality rates

disproportionately high among this group. Complications such as obstetric fistulas and heightened vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections further compound these challenges (Nour,2009). Psychological consequences, including depression and anxiety, are exacerbated by the loss of autonomy and forced assumption of adult roles. These health risks not only undermine individual well-being but also strain healthcare systems in host communities, complicating efforts toward integration (“Psikoloji Penceresinden Çocuk Evlilikleri,” 2018).

Social exclusion is another profound outcome of child marriage. Married girls often lose access to familial and peer support systems, especially when relocated to their husband’s household. This isolation curtails their participation in community activities, depriving them of opportunities for social integration. The stigma associated with being a child bride further marginalizes these young women, preventing them from forming meaningful relationships or accessing communal resources (Hutchinson, TDH, 2023).

The disruption of education emerges as a critical driver and consequence of child marriage. Girls who marry early are often compelled to leave school, truncating their educational prospects and perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency. Education, a cornerstone of empowerment and societal contribution, is frequently deprioritized in the face of economic instability and cultural pressures. Among Syrian refugees, the lack of educational opportunities due to conflict and displacement has been a significant factor propelling families toward early marriages as a perceived means of security (Mourtada et al., 2017). Changes in marriage practices, such as shorter engagement periods and lower bride prices, further reflect the urgency of economic survival at the expense of young girls’ futures (Hutchinson, TDH, 2023). Employment barriers are also evident among married girls, who often lack the education and skills necessary for meaningful labor market participation. The expectation of domestic roles entrenches economic dependency, leaving young women financially vulnerable (Öztürk et al.,2021). This exclusion not only affects individual livelihoods but also reinforces systemic inequalities within refugee communities, undermining their collective integration prospects.

Case studies provide a vivid and compelling lens through which the devastating realities of child marriage can be understood, particularly within refugee contexts. Fatima, a 16-year-old Syrian refugee living in an impoverished district of Istanbul, was married off by her family as a last resort to escape hunger and alleviate the strain of poverty. Rather than securing a better future, her marriage subjected her to relentless cycles of abuse and despair. Fatima recalls her suffering with stark detail: *“When he beat me, his family just watched as though it didn’t matter. When he put his hands around my neck, I couldn’t breathe.”* Her story not only underscores the

physical and emotional violence that many child brides endure but also highlights the systemic vulnerabilities that drive families to make such desperate decisions (From Child to Bride - Fatima's Story, n.d.).

Further insights are provided by a public officer who describes the systemic and societal factors contributing to child marriage among Syrian refugees. In the densely populated neighborhoods where many refugees reside, educational opportunities for girls are severely constrained by overcrowded schools, language barriers, and peer violence. These challenges often force families to pull their daughters out of school, leaving marriage as one of the few remaining options. This decision is compounded by a utilitarian view of daughters, who are seen as economic assets within struggling households (Öztürk et al.,2021). Such perspectives perpetuate cycles of early marriage, poverty, and marginalization, demonstrating how individual tragedies like Fatima's are deeply rooted in broader socio-economic and cultural frameworks. Additionally, Comparative insights and best practices from neighboring countries offer promising frameworks for addressing the pervasive issue of child marriage within refugee populations. **Jordan** has adopted an integrated approach, recognizing the interplay between educational access and cultural attitudes. Through community awareness campaigns, the country challenges traditional views on early marriage and highlights the transformative power of education. Such initiatives not only aim to shift perceptions but also to create environments where girls are encouraged to pursue schooling as a viable path to empowerment(Rashid|Global Compact on Refugees, n.d; Tasker, 2018).

In **Lebanon**, NGOs have taken a more individualized approach, providing counseling services and educational support tailored to at-risk girls. These programs equip young women with skills training and resources, enabling them to achieve economic independence and resist the pressures of early marriage (Bartels et al., 2020). By fostering empowerment through targeted interventions, these initiatives demonstrate the potential to mitigate the socio-economic and cultural drivers of child marriage. Together, these strategies underline the importance of addressing child marriage through multi-dimensional efforts that combine education, community engagement, and policy-level support. By learning from these practices, Turkey can strengthen its frameworks to combat child marriage within refugee communities, aligning humanitarian responses with sustainable solutions for integration and empowerment.

Efforts to integrate Syrian refugee children into Turkish society reveal both significant strides and persistent challenges, particularly within the realm of education. The Turkish government has introduced targeted strategies aimed at fostering inclusion, such as enhancing language

programs and implementing policies to address the cultural and social needs of refugee students. Teachers and school staff have become pivotal actors in this process, striving to bridge divides by managing diversity in their classrooms, eliminating discrimination, and fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. These efforts, while commendable, remain constrained by deep-rooted challenges. Language barriers continue to hinder meaningful participation, while socioeconomic hardships and vulnerabilities often lead to absenteeism and limited engagement. Beyond the school gates, the integration process becomes even more complex, as many refugee children face significant obstacles to social inclusion. Bridging these gaps requires not only effective educational initiatives but also community-driven efforts that promote interaction between Syrian children and their Turkish peers.

This chapter illuminated the intricate web of challenges intertwined with integration, emphasizing that true inclusion extends beyond policy into the lived experiences of children navigating a new society. It called for a cohesive and multifaceted approach that empowers refugee children to overcome barriers, thrive academically, and find a sense of belonging in Turkish society.

## CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine the intricate challenges confronting Syrian refugee children in their journey toward integration within Turkish society, with a particular focus on the interplay between international and national legal frameworks. The study explored how these frameworks address critical issues such as access to education, social inclusion, and protection against risks like child labor and exclusion. By evaluating Turkey's policies through the lens of international conventions, it sought to uncover the extent to which global legal standards influence local measures and their effectiveness in safeguarding refugee children's rights and fostering sustainable integration. Academically, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on refugee integration, emphasizing the specific challenges faced by children and offering a nuanced perspective on the multidimensional nature of their experiences, paving the way for further research in this area.

Beyond the legal frameworks, this study underscores both the strengths and persistent challenges of Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly in education, social inclusion, and economic stability. While international legal instruments, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UNCRC, establish fundamental protections, their implementation remains inconsistent. The Refugee Convention, though essential in defining refugee rights, lacks specific provisions for children, while the application of the UNCRC varies across states, leading to uneven protections. Unaccompanied minors face additional difficulties due to gaps in legal representation and restricted access to essential services. Furthermore, cultural biases and social barriers continue to hinder integration, limiting refugee children's ability to access resources and fully participate in their host communities.

Education remains a critical area of concern. While Turkey's Temporary Protection Regime, introduced in 2014, provided Syrian refugees with legal recognition and access to services such as healthcare and education, challenges persist in implementation. Temporary Education Centers were established to address immediate educational needs, and long-term integration into public schools has been prioritized (Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). However, systemic barriers, including language difficulties, overcrowded classrooms, and bureaucratic obstacles, continue to restrict educational access. Additionally, the lack of specialized training for educators further complicates learning environments, as teachers are often unprepared to support students facing linguistic and psychological challenges. Expanding teacher training programs and enhancing tailored educational support could significantly improve learning outcomes.

Outside the classroom, social integration remains a complex challenge. Many refugee children have limited opportunities for extracurricular engagement, an essential component of cultural adaptation and peer interaction. Strengthening community programs that foster interaction between refugee and host-community children could help build a stronger sense of belonging. Economic hardships further exacerbate these challenges, as financial pressures push some children into child labor, disrupting their education and limiting their long-term prospects. Expanding social protection measures and vocational training programs could provide alternative pathways to economic stability.

Healthcare access also presents disparities. While Turkey has expanded healthcare services for Syrian refugees, including free medical care, regional inconsistencies and resource limitations continue to create barriers. Mental health support remains underdeveloped, despite the high prevalence of trauma among refugee children. Integrating psychosocial support within schools and expanding community-based mental health initiatives could help address this gap more effectively.

Policy inconsistencies further complicate integration efforts. While Turkey's legal frameworks align with international standards, variations in implementation across provinces and municipalities create disparities in access to education, healthcare, and legal protections. A more coordinated approach is necessary to ensure equal opportunities for all refugee children, regardless of their location. Additionally, the absence of a clear long-term integration framework, including pathways to permanent residency or citizenship, creates uncertainty for refugee families, affecting their ability to make long-term decisions about their future in Turkey.

Despite these ongoing challenges, Turkey's response to the refugee crisis has demonstrated adaptability and a commitment to international legal obligations. By June 2023, nearly a million Syrian children were enrolled in formal education (Turkiye: Back to School, 2024), while expanded healthcare services have contributed to improved health outcomes. Collaborative efforts with international organizations, particularly through the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, have secured funding and strengthened integration initiatives.

These findings reaffirm that integration is a complex and evolving process requiring a balance between addressing the needs of refugees and fostering harmony with host communities. Overcoming socio-economic disparities, cultural differences, and systemic barriers is essential to promoting mutual acceptance and creating an inclusive society. The results align with initial expectations that integration challenges stem not only from structural inadequacies but also

from deep-rooted social and cultural dynamics. Achieving sustainable integration requires a coordinated, long-term strategy that prioritizes both legal protections and social cohesion, ensuring that refugee children can fully participate in and contribute to their new communities.

The study underscores the importance of responsibility-sharing among governments, NGOs, and international organizations like UNHCR and UNICEF. Collaborative efforts should focus on ensuring access to quality education, creating economic opportunities, and securing sustainable funding for integration programs. Prioritizing vulnerable groups, monitoring the impacts of integration policies, and developing evidence-based interventions are essential to addressing the unique needs of refugee children effectively (Tumen, 2023).

Turkey's experience highlights transferable best practices, such as enhanced language support and community engagement, observed in other contexts. For instance, some nations have successfully implemented multilingual education strategies that balance maintaining native language proficiency with acquiring the host country's language. These approaches promote both cultural identity and educational integration, fostering a sense of belonging among refugee children (Krompak & Marina | UNICEF, 2023). Incorporating psychosocial support within educational settings has also demonstrated positive outcomes, helping address the emotional and social challenges faced by refugee children. Moving forward, policies in Turkey should prioritize expanded language education, targeted support for vulnerable groups (Masri & Abu-Ayyash, 2020), and strategies to combat discrimination. Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also essential to assess and refine these initiatives.

From a broader perspective, the study underscores the importance of aligning national policies with international legal frameworks to uphold the rights of refugee children. Turkey's experience provides valuable lessons for other countries hosting large refugee populations, particularly in designing adaptive legal and educational systems. The findings of this thesis extend beyond the Turkish context, offering valuable insights into the global refugee crisis and the challenges faced by host nations in integrating refugee children. The integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society was a complex and multi-dimensional process, shaped by initial perceptions of the crisis as temporary. For more than four years, both Turkey and the European Union treated the influx as a short-term challenge, delaying the implementation of serious integration policies. This late response resulted in unmet needs for many refugees, particularly children, and created gaps in socio-economic and educational services. These delays not only affected refugees but also placed additional strain on host communities, demonstrating the critical importance of timely, proactive planning in managing refugee integration

(Tumen,2023). By examining Turkey's approach, other nations can draw valuable insights into the consequences of delayed action and the necessity of addressing refugee needs comprehensively and promptly. This case study highlights the need for governments to balance immediate humanitarian responses with long-term integration strategies, ensuring sustainable outcomes for both refugees and host societies. Turkey's experience with Syrian refugees underscores the critical importance of developing flexible legal frameworks, ensuring access to education and healthcare, and addressing cultural and societal barriers to integration. These lessons are particularly relevant for other nations grappling with large-scale refugee inflows, such as Germany, Uganda, and Sweden, which have adopted varied approaches to refugee integration. For instance, comprehensive language support programs and community engagement strategies in these countries have shown promising results, demonstrating the value of cross-national learning and policy adaptation. By examining Turkey's successes and persistent gaps, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how host countries can create more inclusive and sustainable integration pathways for refugee children, fostering resilience and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their new communities. The Turkish government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis represents a significant effort to address the challenges posed by a large-scale humanitarian emergency. While not without its shortcomings, Turkey's approach has demonstrated an ability to adapt and build foundational policies that align with international frameworks. The introduction of the Temporary Protection Regulation and the alignment of domestic legislation with conventions such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UNCRC highlight Turkey's commitment to upholding refugee rights within its borders. However, the experience of managing this unprecedented influx has been a learning process for Turkey. The Syrian refugee crisis has underscored the importance of establishing flexible and comprehensive legal frameworks capable of addressing the unique needs of refugees, particularly children. By navigating gaps in education, healthcare, and social integration, Turkey has gained critical insights that will shape its future responses to similar crises. These experiences have provided a foundation for more robust strategies, enhancing the government's capacity to respond effectively to future refugee movements. Moreover, Turkey's proactive engagement with international organizations and collaboration with entities such as the European Union have underscored the value of shared responsibility and international solidarity in addressing refugee crises. The lessons learned from this exodus position Turkey as a key actor in regional and global discussions on refugee policies, with the potential to influence best practices and contribute to the development of innovative strategies for integration.

while both achievements and challenges have marked Turkey's journey in managing the Syrian refugee crisis, it has laid the groundwork for more effective policy-making and crisis management in the future. This experience not only strengthens Turkey's resilience but also offers a model for other nations to consider as they face the complexities of refugee integration in an increasingly interconnected world.

This study faced several limitations that highlight the need for further exploration in key areas related to the integration of Syrian refugee children. A significant gap lies in data availability, particularly regarding unaccompanied minors and child marriage. Limited resources and incomplete statistics in Turkey have constrained an in-depth understanding of how these issues uniquely affect refugee children's educational and social outcomes. While broader research exists on child labor and early marriages, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis examining how refugee status intensifies vulnerabilities, such as disrupted schooling and socio-economic marginalization.

Future research should address these gaps by focusing on long-term studies that track the educational, psychological, and social outcomes of refugee children over time. Such longitudinal research would offer insights into the sustained impacts of early interventions, including access to education and healthcare, on integration outcomes. Tracking these factors would enable policymakers to design adaptive strategies that evolve with the needs of refugee children and their families.

Additionally, comparative analyses of integration strategies across different host countries can yield valuable lessons. Examining diverse educational models, legal frameworks, and community-driven initiatives in contexts such as Germany, Sweden, and Uganda could uncover transferable best practices. Understanding how various socio-economic and cultural environments shape integration outcomes can help refine approaches in Turkey and beyond.

Innovation through technology presents another promising avenue for enhancing integration efforts. Digital tools, such as e-learning platforms tailored to overcome language barriers and telehealth services designed for refugee communities, could significantly improve access to education and healthcare. Investigating how technology can be leveraged to bridge gaps in resource-limited settings would provide practical solutions for facilitating integration.

Moreover, research exploring the intersection of socio-economic vulnerabilities—including child labor, housing instability, and financial insecurity—and their impact on integration processes is critical. Such studies could identify how these challenges limit access to education,

healthcare, and social services, enabling the development of targeted interventions that address root causes. Complementing this, understanding the perspectives of both refugee families and host communities would foster mutual understanding and support, creating opportunities for social cohesion. Evaluating existing policies, such as Turkey's Temporary Protection Regulation, is equally important. Systematic reviews of these frameworks would help identify their strengths and weaknesses, informing policy adjustments to better meet the needs of refugee populations. Comparative case studies of successful and less effective initiatives in different regions could serve as guidelines for scaling impactful solutions.

Strengthened collaboration among governments, international organizations, and academic institutions is essential to addressing these challenges effectively. Coordinated efforts to share data, resources, and expertise would enable more robust and actionable research. Enhanced funding mechanisms should prioritize comprehensive studies that integrate longitudinal tracking, comparative analyses, and technological innovations.

By adopting a holistic and multi-dimensional approach, future research can contribute to designing inclusive and sustainable integration strategies. The lessons learned from the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey hold broader implications for global refugee policies, providing a foundation for addressing the needs of refugee children worldwide. Strengthening research and collaboration will ensure that integration efforts are both equitable and effective, fostering environments where refugee children can thrive and contribute meaningfully to their new communities.

All in all, the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey began as a humanitarian response but has since evolved into a transformative journey, underpinned by the establishment and regulation of laws aimed at safeguarding refugee rights. This evolution not only highlights Turkey's commitment to addressing the challenges of integration but also underscores the critical role of legal and social frameworks in fostering sustainable solutions. Moreover, it has enriched the Turkish academic and policy landscape, inspiring research and dialogue that contribute to advancing the social, legal, and international dimensions of refugee protection and integration. As the world continues to face displacement crises, the lessons learned from Turkey's experience serve as a vital blueprint, reminding nations of their moral and ethical responsibilities to uphold human dignity and promote cohesive, inclusive societies.

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