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SYRIAN CHILDREN OUT OF EDUCATION: AN EVALUATION FROM PROFESSIONALS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study aims to understand and explain why Syrian children cannot attend school based on the narratives of professionals working with immigrants in Konya province within the socio-cultural context. A qualitative research design is conducted by interviewing 15 professionals working in public and non-governmental organizations and carrying out one-to-one studies with Syrian children and their families in Konya. As a result of the interviews, six themes (economic challenges, cultural barriers to education, uncertain environment, reflections of ghettoization, failure to enroll in school, and handicaps in the education system) are found to play a role in the low schooling of Syrian children. The study points out that more efforts are needed to include Syrian children who are out of school in the educational system. In this direction, we emphasize the importance of developing the capacity of schools, expanding vocational education, establishing a multi-sectoral and multi-actor working mechanism, and starting school social work practice.

Key Words: *Syrian children; school system; schooling; inability to attend to school; social adaptation*

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OKULLAŞAMAYAN SURİYELİ ÇOCUKLAR: PROFESYONELLER PERSPEKTİFİNDEN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Konya'da göçmenlerle çalışan profesyonellerin anlatılarına dayanarak Suriyeli çocukların okula gidememe nedenlerini anlamak ve açıklamaktır. Nitel araştırma prosedürüne göre tasarlanan bu çalışmada, Konya›daki Suriyeli çocuklar ve aileleriyle birebir çalışmalar yürüten kamu ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarında çalışan 15 profesyonel ile görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerin sonucunda, ekonomik zorluklar, eğitimde kültürel engeller, belirsizlik ortamı, gettolaşmanın yansımaları, okula kaydolmada başarısızlık ve eğitim sistemindeki engeller olmak üzere altı tema belirlenmiş ve bu temaların Suriyeli çocukların düşük okullaşmasında rol oynadığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Çalışma, okula gidemeyen Suriyeli çocukların eğitim sistemi içinde yer alması için daha fazla çaba gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, okulların kapasitesinin geliştirilmesi, mesleki eğitimin genişletilmesi, çok sektörlü ve çok aktörlü bir çalışma mekanizması oluşturulması ve okul sosyal hizmet uygulamasının başlatılması önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriyeli çocuklar, okul sistemi, okullaşma, okullaşamama, sosyal uyum*

INTRODUCTION

Approximately seven million Syrians have had to leave their country in the 11 years since the beginning of the civil war in Syria. As a result of this forced migration, the vast majority of Syrians came to Türkiye and started to live under temporary protection. As of July 2022, the Syrian population living under temporary protection (SUTP) in Türkiye reached 3.652.633 (Directorate of Migration Management, 2022).

Very few of the SUTPs (1.3%) live in Temporary Housing Centers in the border provinces; most of them (98.6%) live in their preferred provinces in a scattered manner (Directorate of Migration Management, 2022). Studies reflected in the literature show that even if the civil war in their countries ends, a large part of the SUTPs will not return to their countries (Erdogan, 2019; Haliloglu-Kahraman, 2022; Orselli and Bilici, 2018). This situation requires that the planned migration policies for SUTPs should be multisectoral and multidimensional and that the policies should focus on ''social cohesion''.

Nearly half (47.5%) of the SUTPs living in Türkiye are children (Directorate of Migration Management, 2022). It is suggested that including Syrian children in the education system is a key factor in building social cohesion (Baak, 2019; Tezel-McCarthy, 2018). Schools are physical environments where children can access information and where needs such as socialization, integration, and security are met (Sakiz, 2016). To the extent that Syrians have access to education, the opportunity to experience a faster adaptation process with the local community and to establish constructive relationships will increase (Orakci and Aktan, 2021). However, it can be mentioned that schooled Syrian children can be protected from social risks and can build their future safely (Dolapcioglu and Bolat, 2021; Ozer et al., 2016).

According to the data published by the Ministry of National Education in January 2022, the number of Syrian children aged 5-17 years old is 1.124.353: 65% (730.806) of these children have been schooled, and 35% (393.547) have not yet been schooled. Schooling has been achieved by 34.34% in preschool, 75.13% in primary school, 80% in secondary school, and 42.65% in high school. The gender distribution of schooled students is very close to each other (49.33% female, 50.77% male). It is stated that a total of 47,482 Syrian students

continue higher education as of the academic year 2021-2022: 62% of these students are male, and 38% are female (Higher Education Information System, 2022). These statistical data show that schooling increases proportionally in primary and secondary schools, decreases in high schools, and drops significantly in higher education.

It is noteworthy that the studies reflected in the domestic literature focus more on schooled children and less on children who cannot go to school (Aydin and Kaya, 2019; Gezer, 2019; Sunata and Abdulla, 2020; Turnbull et al., 2022). However, in order to plan and manage social cohesion correctly, children who do not go to school should be examined in different ways, and forced migration should be examined thoroughly together with the factors arising from the school, family, and cultural system that make it difficult for the child to connect with the school.

This study focuses on "non-schooling Syrian children." Bourdieu's (as referenced in Bhugra et al., 2020) "cultural capital theory," which views education as a determining factor in an individual's familiarity with society, has been used as a reference in understanding the social background of the issue. Moreover, migration is a determinant of social change. Immigrants, unable to integrate into the society they have moved to, build their own living spaces, leading to the formation of ghettos. Immigrants in ghettos form strong ties to their traditions due to low education levels and a combination of cultural, social, and economic factors (Talalaeva and Pronina, 2020).

Furthermore, in ghettos, which are areas of spatial concentration of groups with similar socio-cultural characteristics, there is a tendency for school dropout behavior to occur (Wacquant, 2015). This disconnection from the education system can lead to social exclusion. On the other hand, while first-generation immigrants may struggle to adapt, subsequent generations may identify more with the host country but still preserve elements of their heritage. This generational difference can influence the extent to which traditions are maintained or adapted (Sotto, 2022). Therefore, within the framework of cultural capital theory, this study explores how the difficulties and mismatches experienced by individuals with migration experience—whose cultural capital, such as language, education, and lifestyle, may not align or may conflict with

the practices of a new society—are reflected in the education of migrant children. It is believed that integrating children into the educational system may play a strengthening role in social integration. The views of professionals working in relevant public and non-governmental organizations who carry out educational, empowering, and guiding activities with Syrian children and their families and closely observe their life patterns have been consulted to understand the issue better. The study aims to try to understand and explain the reasons why Syrian children cannot go to school in a socio-cultural context based on the narratives of the professionals working with immigrants in Konya. In this study, we focused on two key questions derived from the predictions of cultural capital theory regarding Syrian children excluded from education:

1. What socio-cultural factors contribute to their lack of school enrollment, and how do they influence this situation?

2. What school system-related factors are significant in their lack of enrollment, and how do these factors exert their influence?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Design and Procedure

This study adhered to the qualitative research procedure. It employed a descriptive phenomenological approach (Smith et al., 2012) to investigate the perceptions, thoughts, and professional evaluations of non-schooling Syrian children by professionals. The descriptive phenomenological approach aims to comprehend how individuals make sense of their life events (Giorgi, 2018; Sundler et al., 2019).

In-depth interviews were conducted with professionals who directly interacted with SUTPs through field studies in Konya. As of July 28, 2022, Konya is home to 123,799 SUTPs, ranking as the ninth province in Türkiye regarding SUTP population density (Directorate of Migration Management, 2022). Given the vast employment opportunities for labor-intensive jobs and numerous NGOs assisting immigrants in Konya (Alptekin et al., 2018), the research was deemed appropriate to be conducted in this city. Public institutions and NGOs play a prominent role in providing institutional services

for SUTPs in Konya, with social workers being particularly noteworthy among other professionals.

The study's participants were determined using maximum diversity sampling (Patton, 2017), a derivative of the purposeful sampling method. The research group established connections during field studies in Konya, reaching out to participants through various stakeholders in the field of migration.

Before the interviews commenced, participants were informed about the study's purpose, focus, confidentiality, and privacy protection. The interviews began after obtaining approval through the Voluntary Consent Form and completing the Personal Demographic Information Form. Throughout the interviews, guided by two participants from different public institutions, household, and school visits were conducted on different days in neighborhoods with a high concentration of SUTPs in Konya, allowing for observations.

The study's procedures and all materials used were approved by the ethics committee decision of KTO Karatay University, numbered E. 14800, on September 3, 2021.

Participants

To select research participants, criteria were established, including employment in a public sector organization or non-governmental organization providing regular and systematic services to migrant groups in Konya, a minimum of two years of experience in field studies for SUTPs, holding at least a bachelor's degree, and voluntary participation. Maximum diversity sampling was employed to identify participants meeting these criteria. Candidates were contacted via phone, and pre-interviews were conducted. Following these preliminary interviews, a sample group of 15 professionals who agreed to participate was determined for the study.

Interviews and Design of the Interview Form

Between October and December 2021, 11 face-to-face interviews were conducted in participants' offices, and four were held online (via Zoom) per their preferences. The second author joined the interviews led by the first author, who had extensive fieldwork and interview experience. Of the interviews, which ranged from 48 to 84 minutes, nine were recorded using a

voice recorder, four using online tools, and three were documented through note-taking with participants' consent. The interviews were concluded based on consensus and when saturation (repetitive responses) was achieved, as determined by the research group (Liehr et al., 2005).

Semi-structured interview forms, divided into two main sections, guided the interviews. The first section covered questions regarding the family characteristics and living conditions of Syrian children unable to attend school. In contrast, the second part focused on participants' observations, determinations, and comments regarding the reasons for non-attendance. Three social work academics with doctoral degrees also researched migrant children, reviewing and providing feedback on the interview form. After incorporating the suggestions from these academics, the interview form reached its final version.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed the seven steps proposed by Colaizzi (1978) for descriptive phenomenological data analysis, as outlined by Shosha (2012). Initially, each interview transcript was carefully read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. In the second step, two authors identified vital phrases and statements related to Syrian children's inability to attend school. The underlying meanings of these identified statements were formulated in the third step.

Moving to the fourth step, thematic coding began based on the formulated meanings, creating categories and sub-themes. By consolidating themes related to each other, broader themes were developed to comprehensively define the phenomenon of non-schooling Syrian children.

In the fifth step, the other two research team members joined the analysis process, reviewing the thematic coding generated by the initial two researchers. Considering their suggestions, a new detailed and inclusive thematic coding was created.

For the sixth step, the team aimed to streamline the highly detailed thematic framework by refining and simplifying theme sets perceived as weak, ambiguous, or closely related. In the final step, the suitability of the thematic

coding was confirmed by sharing a detailed and comprehensive initial and final version with the three research participants. Thematic coding was ultimately solidified following the feedback received from the participants.

RESULTS

Settlement of Syrian Under Temporary Protection (SUTPs) in Konya

During the data collection process of the study, observations conducted in neighborhoods and areas with a high concentration of SUTPs in Konya revealed the following insights:

Families of SUTPs who migrated from rural regions of Syria, primarily those previously engaged in farming or day labor, tend to settle with their relatives in neighborhoods identified as urban decay areas. These areas are either undergoing or are planned for urban regeneration and are characterized by a cosmopolitan population (e.g., Aydogdu, Sahibiata, Sems Tebrizi, Sedirler, Telafer). This group predominantly exhibits large, extended family structures with low socioeconomic and educational levels. Some families are single-parent households.

Most of the residences they inhabit are of low standards in terms of physical and health conditions, yet the rental costs are high. SUTPs often prefer living in semi-isolated, ghetto-like communities. Their interaction with the local population appears to be limited.

Participants' Profile

Within the research scope, 15 professionals were interviewed in-depth, with six from the public sector (four from the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services, one from the Immigrant Health Center, and one from the Provincial Mufti of Konya) and nine from non-governmental organizations (four at the international level and five at the national level). Eight male and seven female participants, aged between 26 and 62. Their work experience in migration varied between 2 and 10 years. Ten participants held a bachelor's degree, while five had a master's degree. The professional backgrounds included seven social workers, three sociologists, two civil society managers, one psychologist, one psychological counselor, and one imam. Participants were actively involved in practices related to child protection, child labor,

early marriage, educational support, vocational training, schooling, language education, psycho-social support, legal support, etc., particularly for migrant children in Konya.

Thematic Framework

The data analysis of the research revealed six themes (Table 1). This study has revealed the need to examine Syrian children who are unable to access education in two distinct groups: those who have "never been included in the school system" and those who, despite being enrolled, "dropped out of school after some time." Accordingly, theme number five (failing to enroll in school) and its sub-themes pertained solely to children excluded from the school system. In contrast, theme number six (handicaps in the education system) and its sub-themes were specific to children initially included in the school system but later dropped out. However, it was noted that all other themes applied to both groups of children. Interconnections and transitions between themes were intricate, with the first, second, third, and fourth themes mutually influencing each other while affecting the fifth and sixth themes unilaterally (Figure 1).

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Economic challenges	(1) Deep poverty (2) Inevitable end: Child labor
2. The 'culture' barrier to education	(1) Perception of child in the rural area (2) Distance relationship with the school
3.Uncertainty	(1) Tension between return and stay (2) Lack of expectations and goals
4. Reflections of ghettoisation	(1) Frequent address change (2) Stacking in the same school
5. Failing to enroll in school	(1) Age mismatch (2) Being a stranger to the schooling procedure (3) Absence of identity certificate
6.Handicaps in the education system	(1) Language barrier (2) Errors in equivalence and level determination (3) Monitoring and coordination problem

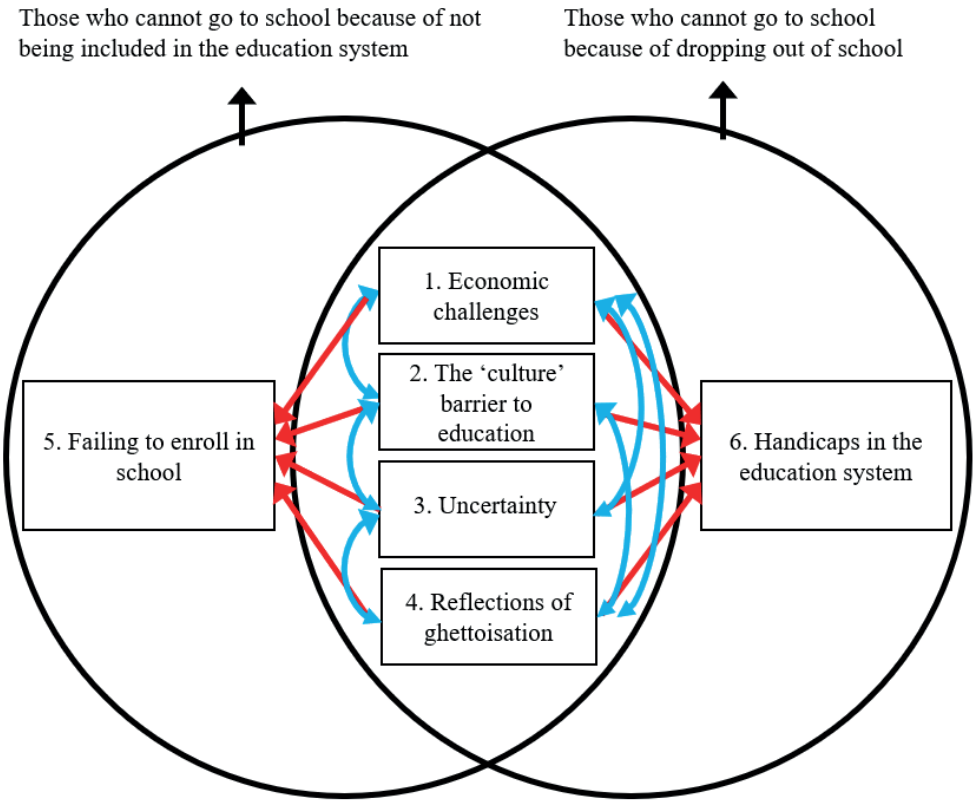

Figure 1. Connections Between Themes

The themes and sub-themes are explained below with excerpts from the interview transcripts.

1. Economic challenges

Deep poverty

Poverty emerged as a predominant factor in the narratives of all participants, uniformly impacting the schooling and attendance of Syrian children. Narratives indicated that Syrian children faced challenges in accessing the free education services provided by the state. Participants stressed the difficulty Syrians experienced in rebuilding their lives after forced migration,

highlighting the struggle with deep poverty, particularly for families with large populations relying on a single salary below the minimum wage. Enrolling in or sustaining long-term education for children becomes exceedingly challenging in such circumstances.

> *"Believe me; sometimes we go to the houses; the children spread butter or chocolate on Syrian bread. This is the only breakfast. I mean, I do not think that parents especially tell their children not to go to school, but as I said, parents do not send them for economic reasons. Because they have to give pocket money to the child, buy a notebook, buy a pen..." (P11)*

Participants who witnessed the experiences of SUTPs indicated that poverty prevented meeting even primary school needs, and parents did not prioritize education under these conditions.

> *"Since people cannot meet their basic needs, education is considered a luxury, a different need, a higher need, and children cannot be sent to school. Because the resources are minimal, it can be quite challenging for us to convince a family for education when they struggle to get food." (P15).*

Inevitable end: Child labor

In Syrian families with multiple children, 'child labor' may become unavoidable, particularly for older boys, when parents have low education levels, lack qualified professions, are single parents, or face health problems and disabilities. A fundamental strategy in such families is to reduce the number of consumers and increase the number of workers; hence, hiring children as employees becomes a primary consideration, regardless of the nature of the work. Parents themselves request and encourage the child's contribution to the family budget, often at the expense of the child's education. Child labor emerges as a direct consequence of the economic challenges experienced.

> *"Because when they go to school, they will be consumers. However, when they do not go to school and go to work instead, they become a production tool. What is more important for families than whether the child has received education is how much the child contributes to the family income. Whether he works on the street or in the industry." (P3)*

2. The 'Culture' Barrier to Education

Perception of child in the rural area

Many Many Syrians who have settled in Konya originated from rural areas, particularly Aleppo, Al-Bab, and Latakia. They maintain a closed, ghetto-like lifestyle, preserving their traditions and customs. Some participants identify the resistance to change observed in this group's traditional culture and their perception of children within this cultural framework as crucial factors leading to children's inability to attend school.

Participant 5 described SUTP families dominated by religious beliefs rooted in oral culture and characterized by male authority as "a structure typically led by a single breadwinner, where the head of the household sets the rules, all tasks are performed with the head's approval, and family relations are regulated." In this family structure, children are passive entities, with parents making decisions for them, and they define themselves based on gender. Girls are associated with roles as household caretakers, extending the mother figure, kept at home, and married off early. Conversely, boys represent authority and support the family's livelihood, extending the father figure. According to Participant 2, in this cultural perspective, the child essentially becomes the 'economic income channel.' Although the impact of SUTP families' perception of children on schooling varies by gender, the commonality is that, as they age, schooling loses significance and takes a backseat for both girls and boys due to their gender roles.

> *"The boy is getting old enough to help the family support the family economy, and schooling stops at high school because girls are getting married. These are cultural traits, as far as I can tell. When the girls turn 13-14, they are removed from school." (P7)*

In single-parent families, the school enrollment of the eldest male child is particularly challenging, as he is often regarded as the 'head of the household.' Being the head of the household at a young age and during school years often means that education takes a back seat, leading to an increased likelihood of child labor.

> *"Boys between the ages of 15-18 support the household's economy, but if they are single parents, that child becomes the head of the household. When we*

go to the interviews, the mother does not talk much; for example, children talk to us more often. A 16 to 17-year-old boy. He acts like he is the head of the house. In other words, he has taken over the load." (P4)

Distance relationship with the school

The participants' narratives reveal that SUTPs show a distant attitude towards education and school. Schooling is limited to the early stages of children's development, and the cultural influences from rural areas, along with their living conditions and beliefs, diminish the importance of formal education. Consequently, SUTP families often need help comprehending the compulsory education system in Türkiye and resist integration into the system. Narratives frequently highlight that polygamous and larger families do not seek assistance for their children's education and lack motivation in this regard. When SUTPs encounter problems, their tendency to rely on belief systems for solutions becomes evident.

"His economic situation is perfect; he has no economic problems. He lives in a villa. However, he had previously married off his 14-year-old daughter. He was going to marry off his other daughter, who was also about to turn 14. After we warned this person, he reconsidered. I did not delve into family planning, but I asked about the kids' schooling: Where would they study? He responded: Allah is the Beneficent. God Almighty said, 'Goodness gracious.' He left everything up to God and avoided the issue." (P2)

While a few SUTP families possess a higher level of education and hold positive attitudes towards schooling, the majority, as expressed by Participant 14, lack a "consciousness" of education. According to Participant 13, residing in a closed community leads other families to model the behavior of those who do not send their children to school.

3. Uncertainty Environment

Tension between return and stay

It has been 11 years since the arrival of SUTPs in Türkiye. However, the temporary label still defines their status, and a clear definition remains elusive. Participants believe that the majority of SUTPs have established a permanent

presence in Türkiye, with some suggesting that the prospect of their return to Syria is practically non-existent.

"They have not been given a designation for 11 years, and these people will not be going back to their countries now. They are aware of that. Unfortunately, the chances of returning are zero." (P10)

SUTPs adopt an indecisive stance regarding returning to Syria or staying in Türkiye, leading to a pervasive sense of uncertainty in their circumstances. Some harbor dreams of relocating to a third country. This uncertainty significantly impacts SUTPs, affecting their adaptation to education, work, and social life. In this context of uncertainty, the preference for sending children to work instead of school becomes prominent.

"Most importantly, I just remembered uncertainty! I mean the uncertainty we observe, especially among Syrians. Some want to send their children to school, but they ask themselves: Will I go to a third country, return to Syria, or stay here and prepare my children for university exams? Due to this high uncertainty level, they often send children to work to meet basic needs." (P4)

Lack of expectations and goals

SUTP families care about schooling only for their young children. In the uncertainty they experience, they do not seem to favor their older children attending school. Because for them, this long-term and costly effort has no value. Therefore, there is no expectation or goal for schooling. When there is no goal, the schooling efforts also lose meaning.

"People only care about saving the day. Because of uncertainty; they cannot care about the child's university education. School has no value in this uncertainty." (P13)

"Even if they go to school, the perception of how far I can study is predominant. They experience the absurdity of dropping out of school at 13-18. There's despair. Even if they go to university, they ask whether the Turks will be the priority. The idea of hiring Turks is dominant." (P9)

4. Reflections of ghettoisation

Frequent Change of Address

Challenging socioeconomic conditions prompt SUTPs to relocate within the city frequently. The 'frequent address changes' strategy is employed to cope with economic hardships. The desire to settle in areas near workplaces, where they have relatives for better support or where higher income is attainable, results in changes in address and school. However, it is noted that SUTPs often need to inform the relevant authorities about their address changes. When the procedure for changing the address is not completed, children who are affected by the address-based school enrollment system cannot attend schools in the new residential area.

As a result, as Participant 13 stated, *"Frequent address change does not connect the child to the school, the child cannot go to school, and the school is interrupted. Under these conditions, schooling is left to miracles."*

Stacking in the same school

The concentration of SUTPs in specific neighborhoods and their preference to enroll their children in local schools leads to excessive overcrowding. Syrian children sought to be enrolled in bulk at the same schools, further straining the educational institutions. Tensions arise, particularly in schools within neighborhoods with a high SUTP population, due to overcrowded student quotas. School administrators, teachers, and parents hesitate to admit new students when these quotas are packed. Simultaneously, SUTP families are reluctant to send their children to distant schools. When the problem escalates, and a solution cannot be found, some families of SUTPs see the solution as not sending their children to school.

> *"For example, school A in Konya center is full. Moreover, these people insist on settling in the same neighborhood. They have to go to schools close to this neighborhood. The school principal tells the parent that our quota is full to find another school. There, the principal does not lie because the quota is full, but according to the law, no child is turned down, and a solution should be found. "(P10)*

5. Failing to enroll in the school

Age mismatch

Some children of SUTP families do not pursue education beyond primary school due to cultural reasons prevalent in their rural origins. Additionally, another group of children still needs to be included in the formal education system, either staying at home or entering the workforce directly upon their arrival in Türkiye, resulting in a significant loss of educational years. Typically aged 14 or older, these children's educational levels do not align with their chronological age. Having been absent from school for a specific period, these older children refrain from attending as they cannot join classes with their peers. Consequently, they choose to abstain from formal education.

Being a stranger to the schooling procedure

The education systems of Syria and Türkiyediffer significantly. In Syria, only primary school education is mandatory. Upon settling in Konya hastily and without proper guidance, SUTP families encountered challenges in understanding the Turkish education system, particularly in the initial stages of migration. As most do not speak Turkish, language barriers further complicate their efforts to enroll their children in Turkish schools. Additionally, the address-based registration system in Türkiyepresented difficulties, with schools needing to be farther from their residences.

> *"They are unfamiliar with the Turkish education system. Either they are not making an effort to learn, or there is no one to guide them. Their educational background also hinders their understanding." (P14)*

> *"Another issue is that children are registered in schools based on their address, but families are unaware of this. When families voluntarily attempt to register their children, they are often redirected to another school due to prior registrations. The families give up when the suggested school is too far from their home." (P15).*

Absence of identity certificate

Some Syrian children face challenges in accessing education due to the absence of an identity certificate. Families unaware of the application process or unable to complete it commonly encounter this issue. Moreover,

families experiencing difficulties in maintaining family integrity, such as the disappearance or death of the father, family dissolution, or spousal separation, may face prolonged identification procedures upon arriving in Konya from Syria. These delays in identification procedures can contribute to the postponement of children's enrollment in schools.

> *"When examining the reasons for non-attendance at school, it becomes apparent that families often lack information, leading to identity-related problems. This issue is not solely dependent on the family's intentions; families with complex situations may face challenges in applying to authorities and receiving a positive response. In essence, the absence of an identity certificate can be a contributing factor." (P15)*

6. Handicaps in the education system

Language barrier

Syrian children who encounter significant challenges in accessing education also face difficulties within schools. Some of these children either lack Turkish knowledge or possess insufficient language skills, creating a notable 'language barrier'" that hinders their educational experience. Participant 10 links this language barrier, observed in children, to the absence of infrastructure and adaptation studies conducted during the initial stages of migration.

> *"We have never conducted infrastructure and other adaptation studies for Syrians. So this child comes in; he has given an equivalence. He is in National Education. He was assigned to an age-appropriate class. However, this child started in the seventh grade. He did not learn anything about the Turkish language until the seventh year." (P10)*

Some Syrian children's inability to communicate effectively in Turkish poses a significant challenge in understanding and participating in courses and engaging in social interactions. The persistence of the language barrier and some schools' reluctance to provide additional Turkish education diminish these children's motivation to attend school.

> *"Since Turkish education is not offered in schools, when the child returns to school, he/she thinks, 'I will not understand the lesson anyway, I will not be*

able to communicate there anyway, I am fine here, why should I go back to school?'." (P11)

Errors in equivalence and level determination

Differences in the two countries' education systems require a careful assessment of equivalence and academic level for Syrian children entering the school system. However, evident mistakes in this process stem from various factors such as language barriers, curriculum disparities, and the mismatch between academic level and age, as highlighted in the following quotes:

"Even if a child speaks Turkish, adapting to the local high school curriculum can be challenging due to the differences in our education system. The student may struggle to adjust." (P 1)

"Is that accurate when you place them solely based on age, like starting an 11-year-old in the 6th grade? Some kids do not need to learn basic elements like spelling or typing. Based on their abilities, it might be more appropriate to start them at a lower grade level, say 2nd or 3rd grade. However, these children face difficulties adapting, lacking language skills and opportunities to integrate into that class." (P 12)

Monitoring and coordination problem

Participants indicate that schools need to be more proactive in monitoring studies. Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in addressing this inadequacy; however, effective coordination between schools and these institutions is essential to ensure timely and complete information exchange regarding absent children. Delays in providing non-governmental organizations with knowledge about absent children can complicate monitoring efforts.

Participants express dissatisfaction with the limited monitoring work in schools with a significant population of Syrian children. The lack of proper monitoring may result in these children being reintegrated into the group of non-schooling individuals, necessitating additional efforts.

"However, since there is not much follow-up in the Ministry of National Education, that child is still walking around and coming to us as a case, again, as a child who cannot attend school and cannot go to school. At this point, I think we are having a problem together because the institutions do

not follow up. When the institutions we referred to do not follow much, we return to the beginning again." (P5)

Interviews reveal that participants emphasize the importance of monitoring work to evaluate the effectiveness of the provided training. However, some participants perceive a 'lack of motivation' in institutions, a lack of awareness among institutions, and a failure to cooperate, contributing to an increase in the number of children who cannot attend school.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A range of overlapping and complex processes influences Syrian children's ability to attend school. In some cases, for certain children, access to education seems almost reliant on miracles. The study shows that some of the Syrian children unable to attend school have never been included in the school system and could not persist in school. Others, despite being included in the school system, faced challenges within the school environment that led them to eventually drop out, meaning they could not remain in school. Syrian boys who fail to remain in the school system are often subjected to child labor, while girls are typically exposed to early marriage.

This study aims to elucidate why Syrian children cannot attend school through the thematic framework obtained from data analysis. In this regard, it is understood that deep poverty, conceptualized as 'economic challenges,' has a significant impact on schooling within six themes following forced migration. The crowded and multi-child family structures of SUTPs, who left behind all their resources with forced migration, suggest that children's school lives need to be overlooked when combined with the shortage of livelihood. Harunogullari's (2016) emphasis on the difficulty Syrian children face even in benefiting from the state's free education services supports this study's findings.

Parents force Syrian children into labor due to economic challenges, making 'child labor' a prominent means of coping with income insecurity and poverty (Sahin et al., 2021). The effort to send children to school in the struggle for daily life and survival is not perceived as a mandatory situation (Kim et al., 2020; Krafft et al., 2022); on the contrary, families personally urge them to transition

from a consumer position to a producer position. Therefore, social aids offered as educational support to prevent the child from becoming disconnected from school fill a crucial gap (Uyan-Semerci and Erdogan, 2018).

The study's primary findings underscore that socio-cultural patterns are as crucial as economic challenges for Syrian children facing barriers to education. Despite the geographical proximity of the two countries, significant differences exist in cultural dynamics. SUTPs form a closed group tightly bound to traditional life patterns, attributing distinct meanings and roles to children based on gender. Research indicates that patriarchy and traditional cultural practices within Syrian families render girls vulnerable and impede their right to make independent decisions regarding marriage and education. Typically, boys are tasked with providing economic support for household livelihood, while girls are often assigned caregiving roles for the elderly or infants at home (Bartels et al., 2021; Habib et al., 2020). Perceived as a 'burden' on the household economy, girls face hindrances to continuing their education due to early marriage (Bartels et al., 2018; Hamad et al., 2021; Roupetz et al., 2020).

Despite the 11 years since April 2011, the status of Syrians who arrived in Türkiye en masse due to forced migration remains unclear. Even if the 'temporary' status has transformed into permanence for some, a lingering uncertainty persists regarding where they will ultimately settle. This uncertain environment hinders individuals regarding future anxiety and the establishment of life goals (Tekin and Yukseker, 2017). The aspiration for a potential third country, often oriented towards Europe, further postpones Syrians' adaptation to Türkiye and complicates the adaptation process. The combination of their temporary protection status, ongoing legal uncertainties, and the expectation of returning to their home country contributes to the prevailing uncertainty, creating a continuous state of ambiguity (Coskun and Emin, 2016).

A significant observation is the prevalent preference among SUTPs for a closed, ghetto-type lifestyle. This preference is influenced by socioeconomic conditions in the city, where ghettoization occurs, and the desire to cohabitate with relatives or people of the same ethnicity. Ghettoization unfolds when SUTPs frequently change their settlements. Since Türkiye's school registration

system is based on the reported residence address, frequent displacement interrupts children's education. It also brings about challenges in adapting to new school environments, along with potential reactions from administrators and teachers in some schools. Consistent with the findings of this study, another research indicated that school administrators, for various reasons (personal, structural, etc.), were hesitant to have immigrant children educated in their schools and tended to maintain a homogeneous student structure (Sakiz, 2016). Ghettoization has increased population density in specific neighborhoods, notably in Konya. This influx of Syrian students to schools in these areas redirects new students to different schools. The main challenge in breaking this cycle is Syrian families' reluctance to send their children to schools in remote areas due to the extended transportation distance, particularly impacting girls' school attendance.

Regarding immigrants, some children reaching school age in various countries struggle to exercise their right to education and face challenges integrating into the school environment (Crul et al., 2019). This study highlights that the inability to enroll in school is a significant factor in not integrating into the school system. As illustrated in Figure 1, economic challenges, socio-cultural attitudes, an uncertain environment, and ghettoization contribute to difficulties in school enrollment. Additionally, age mismatch, unfamiliarity with the schooling procedure, and lack of identity certificates impact children's inability to enroll. Procedures not fully met during school registration make the process impossible, hindering the child from being included in the school system. This is particularly true for children without identity cards, and 'age mismatch' poses a barrier to school enrollment. Families with older children may resist schooling due to concerns about adaptation issues and potential failure arising from age differences in the classroom.

Despite challenges such as economic difficulties, socio-cultural attitudes, uncertainty, and ghettoization affecting children who enroll in school and participate in the education system, additional difficulties arise within the school environment. As highlighted by Crul et al. (2019), there are various areas for improvement, including insufficient materials and trained educators, in establishing and sustaining quality education in the second language (Kanj

and Khamis, 2021). This is particularly crucial for assisting immigrants in overcoming educational challenges, especially in countries with a significant immigrant population. Although language learners generally adapt quickly (Nieuwboer and van't Rood, 2016), many migrant children face language barriers, as evident in this study. According to Kaysili et al. (2019) and Gumus et al. (2020), the language barrier is a crucial global issue preventing migrant children from accessing education, increasing school dropout rates, and leading to various challenges with teachers and peers due to communication difficulties. A study conducted in Gaziantep emphasized the language issues of Syrian children in the school environment, revealing their struggles to attain proficiency in the Turkish language. The study suggested that desired outcomes from various programs and interventions for children might not be achieved unless proficiency in the Turkish language is attained (Sarmini et al., 2020). As stated by Mencutek et al. (2021), a lack of language proficiency can also lead to negative attitudes such as discrimination, exclusion, and bullying in schools.

The educational status of Syrian families influences children's school continuity, with parents' attitudes impacting motivation. However, the language barrier disrupts family-led academic success monitoring. Teacher involvement is crucial for Syrian children's continued school participation, especially in ensuring school attendance. Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in expediting schooling. Challenges include grade-level disconnections, unfamiliarity with education equivalency in Türkiye, linear age-based equivalence, and school follow-up inadequacies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The findings suggest the need for increased efforts to integrate non-formal Syrian children into the school system and ensure their access to compulsory education, which is a fundamental right. As Erdogan (2019) recommended, steps should be taken to enhance school capacity, classrooms, teachers, and resources without adversely affecting local children.

Expanding vocational education, opening high schools, and offering online courses could improve educational levels. Language courses provided by the Ministry of National Education could support the linguistic integration of

children in the school system. In promoting vocational education, explaining the state's contributions (such as insurance premium payments) to children balancing school and work for professional development is crucial. Informing Syrian families about the legal ramifications of early marriage for girls and employing boys in jobs is essential.

Though not officially implemented in Türkiye, the introduction of 'school social work' is an option to address Syrian students' educational, psychosocial, and economic challenges, facilitating maximum engagement in the education process, akin to Turkish students. School social work is a specialized field of the social work profession that focuses on addressing bio-psycho-social issues arising from the interactions between school, family, and community, which impact the student's academic performance and success. Implementing this option is anticipated to expedite schooling and social adaptation efforts.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. It focused on a single province with a high Syrian population, and participants were exclusively drawn from expert personnel in public and non-governmental organizations. Due to these circumstances, the pandemic's impact on the schooling of Syrian children was not thoroughly discussed. Data loss for interviews recorded by note-taking also hindered comprehensive data access. While these limitations restrict the generalizability of the study's results, they provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by Syrian children in other provinces who struggle to access education.

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding Statement

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Approval Statement

All subjects gave informed consent for inclusion before participating in the study. The study was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of KTO Karatay University on 03.09.2021 and numbered E.14800 Project identification code.

Patient Consent Statement

We used the attached Voluntary Participation Form throughout our research.

Permission to Reproduce Material From Other Sources

As the authors, we declare that the article is original and that there is no plagiarism, that all authors have participated in the study and have taken the necessary responsibility for the study, that they have approved the final version of the submitted article, and that the article has not been presented or published elsewhere. All figures, tables, graphics, and other materials used in the article belong to the authors, are original, and no copyright is violated. If the article is accepted for publication, we accept the entire article (including figures, tables, and graphics) to be published in the International Journal of Social Welfare, and we transfer the copyright to the journal. Regarding the publication stage, the form regarding the transfer of relevant rights will be filled out and signed by the authors.

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