Emergent educational policies towards mainstreaming migrants in public education: The case of Turkey

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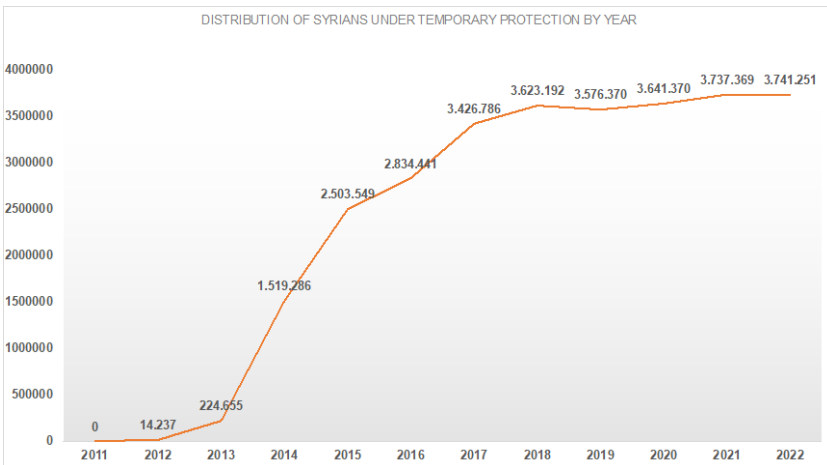
1 Introduction

Massive movements towards the southeast of the Turkish Republic due to seeking safety in neighboring countries starting almost more than a decade ago have brought about massive challenges to nations at social and economic levels. After the first humanitarian aid had been accomplished, the education of children at schooling age became the utmost important issue to be tackled with. Fluctuations in student population, change in the language of instruction, and the preparedness levels to the curriculum offered in the host country triple the available challenges for policy-makers as well as practitioners. They should consider emergent educational policies to enable equal educational opportunities for migrant children as do their counterparts receive at the national level as a human right. Therefore, the decision-making and the enactment process to develop such educational policies is of deep concern. Given the ongoing complexities on a global scale, good practices or lessons learned from nations that could take bold measures and change their educational policies accordingly to meet the educational needs of displaced or forced immigrants matter.

As a result of catastrophic natural or human-made disasters such as conflicts, and economic and social crises in the eastern and south-eastern countries, the Republic of Turkey has become perhaps the most vulnerable country as she has been subjected to massive figures of immigrant movements as of 2011 onwards. The term "refugee" is not used explicitly in the Turkish political context due to the legislation that only identifies individuals from the Western European countries as a refugee, and therefore the rest are recognized as individuals under "international protection" such as the Syrian, Afghani, Palestinian, Somalian, and Yemen's and the refugee Syrians granted "Temporary Protection". The policy behind this is rooted in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with a geographical limitation. The Regulation limits the rights to receive refugee status to asylum seekers from Europe. Those outside Europe would be granted only a temporary stay

until they are resettled to a third country (Kirişci, 2014). In 2013, Law 6458 relating to Foreigners and International Protection (Foreigners and International Protection Law 2013) includes articles that enable students and families from non-European countries to receive settlement opportunities from 5 up to 10 years based on specific regulations. We, therefore, use the terms displaced or forced migrants to refer to refugees.

Not surprisingly, Turkey was identified as the highest refugee receiving country globally in the last decade (McAuliffe and Khadria, 2019). As of 2020, it was identified as the largest host country for the fifth consecutive year, with over 3.6 million immigrants that mainly consisted of Syrian nationality (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021). Figures currently reveal that 27.24 percent (*N*=1.365.884 out of 5.013.631) of foreigners, including immigrants with international protection holders and Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey, are of schooling age (Ministry of National Education, 2021). Figure 1 depicts the magnitude of the numbers of Syrian forced immigrants in the case of Turkey.

Figure 1. Distribution of Syrian nationals under temporary protection by year

DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIANS UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY YEAR

Source: Directorate of Migration Management (DGMM), As of 3 Feb. 2022. Data from https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27#

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the case of the Republic of Turkey as a transition as well as a high receiving country for replaced or forced migrants as of 2011 that took place as a result of the so-called Syrian crisis, and describe the ad hoc educational policy changes that progress towards mainstreaming forced immigrants' education into public education. Turkey, which may well be identified from an economic perspective as a developing nation

has released and implemented stringent work packages based on those ad hoc policies that go beyond mainstreaming immigrant children at schooling age into the formal education, and aims at developing social adaptation within the community they reside since there was no or little observation of return to the home countries they came from. This chapter attempts to provide a descriptive overview of the educational policy changes relying on a synthesis of available literature from peer-reviewed journals in databases such as the Web of Science, Scopus, and the Turkish Index. We also used grey literature from national and international organizations' research reports to provide a neutral perspective of our synthesis. More specifically, we attempted to shed light on the magnitude of changes, practices and the challenges towards offering equal educational services for all children at schooling age so that the lessons learned from the practices and experiences of the case of Turkey as a high receiving country can be transferable to other high receiving countries in times of complexities and massive human movements.

2 The educational context in Turkey

Transitional processes in the context of refugee education, as the title of the book depicts, inquires for the elaboration of the case of the Republic of Turkey as a receiving country to understand the processes in the context of education of displaced or forced migrants and consider transformative lessons from practice and research for nations who may become vulnerable as well due to diverse catastrophic events simultaneously or in the future. To consider transferable policies that aim to embrace the children to educate them towards a healthy and safe future as a basic need, a detailed description of the case is considered compulsory.

The education system in Turkey is operated by a central authority, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), which is responsible for mandating all formal and non-formal educational activities. The Fundamental Law on National Education describes its objective as "education to become constructive, creative, and efficient individuals, well-prepared for life with essential interests, aptitudes, and capabilities and is free of charge for all compulsory and tertiary education." Education is stated that it shall be operated under principles that highlight modernity, scientific and secular education, and shall provide equal opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity, background, or other. The Educational Law also explicitly describes that the official language of the Republic of Turkey is Turkish, and that the medium of instruction in public schools shall be in Turkish, indicating the mono-linguistic perspective of education.

Formal education covers pre-school, primary, middle, secondary, and higher education. Compulsory education lasts 12 years, starts at the age of 69 months, and ends at the age of 18. Despite many policy investments in increasing figures for preschool education, it is not compulsory (MoNE, 2014). While twelve-year compulsory education is free of charge in primary, middle, and secondary schools, preschool is mainly privately run, not allowing for equal access opportunities for all children at pre-school age. Primary education lasts for four years, and schools have a formal curriculum to follow. Middle school education, which is also identified as lower secondary education, lasts for four years, and requires no passing grade in an exam to be enrolled or transit to a public middle school. Secondary education lasts for four years (Basic Law of National Education). There are various types of secondary education models across Turkey, such as high schools of science, high schools of social sciences, public high schools, vocational and technical high schools, high schools of fine arts and sports, and religious high schools identified as imam hatip schools (Eurydice, 2019; MoNE, 2014). Students' pursuit toward academic or vocational career tracks depends on their high-school choices. Students take a high-school entrance exam to be placed in a high school based on their exam scores, overall performance, and preference (MoNE, 2016).

Figure 2. Distribution of total population, school-age population, and student population
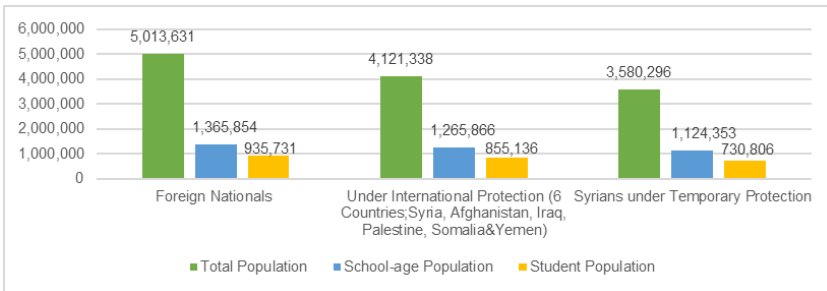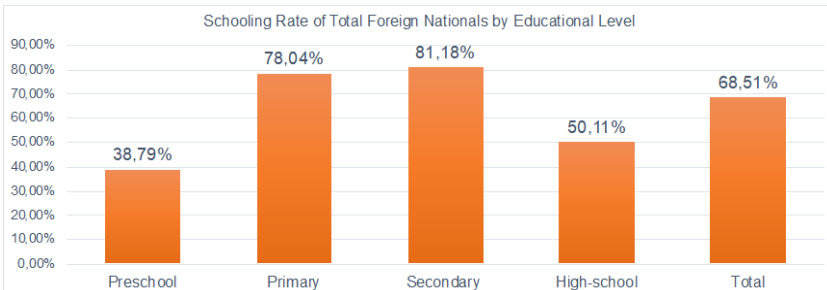

Source: Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Lifelong Learning Department of Education in Immigration and Emergency Situations (January 2022). https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2022_01/26165737_goc2022sunu.pdf

Demographic-wise Turkey is a nation holding a large generation of children at schooling age. Based on the annual statistics provided by the Ministry of National Education (2022), the figures for non-local migrants from 2011 onwards reached some 12,715,265. The foreign population of children of schooling age as of 2022 is depicted in Figure 2. Figures reveal that a little more than one-third of the children, or 3,756,073 children are foreign nationals or under protection. At the same time only two-thirds of them (*n*=2,521,673) attend formal schooling, and the rest, as many as 1,234,400

schooling-age children out of school are not attending education due to several reasons such as economic reasons. As of January 2022, figures provided by MoNE (2022) also indicate that male migrant or foreign students outnumber (% 50,93) female students (% 49,07).

The schooling of migrants or foreign nationals happens mostly at the primary and lower secondary school levels and dropout trends can be observed for high school educational level (see; Figure 3). Alongside the magnitude of increasing student populations, the diversity in the classroom contexts caused additional challenges for the teachers and the school administrators. Carter and Darling-Hammond (2016) call this diversity "a web of social identities" (p. 593) as each student is a unique individual and brings in their dispositions, their social, cultural, and political realities. In the case of receiving displaced children, the diversity includes nationalities, languages, religions, and dress codes, which may all be represented disproportionally in time and space depending on the location of the school. Teacher training and development to teach for quality education for all has become more challenging than ever, and teachers who were dramatically exposed to such learning environments should be granted a well-deserved appreciation.

Figure 3. Distribution of schooling rate of total foreign nationals by educational level


Source: Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Lifelong Learning Department of Education in Immigration and Emergency Situations (January 2022). https://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2022_01/26165737_goc2022sunu.pdf

3   Journey of mainstreaming migrants into public education

The changing political, social, and economic forces such as the case of increasing unexpected culturally and nationally diverse student numbers in a country urge policymakers to resolve the needs and complexities (Heck,

2004) of the schooling of children who are uprooted from their placements. For every child, regardless they are local, migrant, refugee, or displaced, education is emergent and the most essential priority to tackle for their well-being. Thus, the initial concern for policy formation for the education of displaced or forced migrant children at schooling age is related to the human-istic dimension and mostly related to non-formal dimensions. Ultimately, it is expected to gradually progress towards educational transitions from the emergency humanitarian needs-oriented contexts towards the academic-oriented learning contexts. Emergent ad hoc policies, the trajectories, and the experiences gained from the policies put into practice provide transforma-tional lessons from the knowledge learned in the Turkish case are elaborated on from the perspective of five transitory loops, the Temporary Education Centers in temporary settings, the intensive language programs PIKTES I and PIKTES II, Cohesion and adaptation classes, and finally the mainstreaming process via inclusive education (see; Figure 4). The Temporary Education Centers were places identified as places to educate uprooted children.

Figure 4. Models for the transition from language and social cohesion programs to official schools for the uprooted children as a result of forced migration.
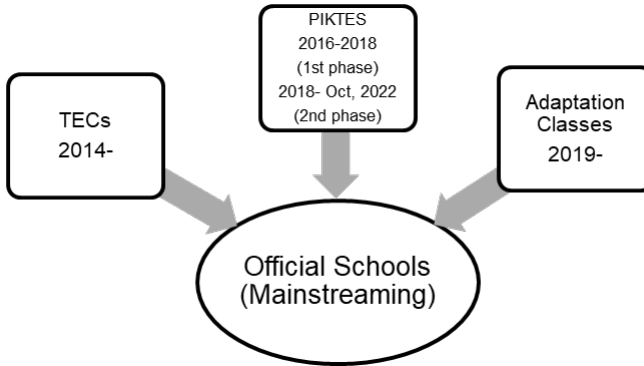
The former three models were primarily financed by international funds, especially the European Union, and served mainly to invest in the language development of migrant students in the host country to facilitate their transi-tion into public general or vet schools. Next, the cohesion and adaptation classes model was embedded in public schools and they led toward full at-tendance in k-12 and higher education. There is evidence that the academic track offered in lower middle schools and the lack of development of em-ployability skills at this level are one of the primary reasons for children with poor backgrounds to drop out early. The UNHCR highlights higher education as a vital level since higher education has a global priority and aligns its goals with the 2030 Global Agenda for Education (UNHCR, 2019); therefore, the

chapter includes the presentation of migrant education in emergent times from all educational levels.

3.1   Temporary education centers

Practices based on the emergent education policies for foreign migration children became effective, and started to be implemented widely and were regulated closely with MoNE since the forced migrants stormed into the nations with their school-age children. To help foreign school-age children living in Turkey to benefit from primary and secondary education, Temporary Education Centers (TEC) were founded after Regulation Article 2014/21 (MoNE, 2014) was released. The idea behind the TEC was to help foreign students who had come to Turkey through a mass influx to be able to continue their education that was interrupted in their home countries and help them to prevent losing years of study when they would return to their home countries or when they wish to move on to any type and degree of education institution officially run by the Ministry of National Education and to continue their education in their country of origin.

The curriculum offered at the TECs had been prepared by the Ministry of National Education with the approval of the Board of Education and was also aligned with the Syrian curricula. The language of instruction at these centers was primarily Arabic at that time. Teachers of Turkish Language and Literature were also working at the TECs; nevertheless, they operated under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey. Along with the schools offering services at the temporary accommodation centers, the education activities carried out by the Syrian and Turkish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at school buildings in the Turkish context were included (Coşkun and Emin, 2016).

In light of all these developments, TECs were established with the Regulation issued in 2014 and were, as planned, closed down before 2020. As made clear with the above statements, it was ensured that the foreign individuals who came via forced migration settled at the temporary accommodation centers with emergent policies developed right after the first dramatic influx of human movement took place, and attempted to primarily offer Turkish initially as the official language of the nation immigrated, followed by Arabic education. The ultimate purpose of the education received at the TECs enabled schooling-aged migrants to enroll in the schools closest to the neighborhoods they settled down upon entering the country. To put it bluntly, TECs functioned as a bridge for foreign or migrant school-aged children, and in case their families were determined to reside longer, they would be able to apply and register for formal schooling based on the integration policies.

3.2   Project for promoting integration of Syrian kids: PIKTES I and II

The Project for Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES)" was established as an emergent education project carried out by the Ministry of National Education to enable the access of children under Temporary Protection to formal education. The emergent model was implemented in 26 PIKTES programs in provinces with highest numbers of receiving provinces, which are Adana, Adıyaman, Ankara, Antalya, Batman, Bursa, Çorum, Diyarbakır, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir, Kahramanmaraş, Kayseri, Kilis, Kocaeli, Konya, Malatya, Mardin, Mersin, Osmaniye, Sakarya, Samsun, Sanliurfa, Yalova (PIKTES, 2022).

The entire budget of PIKTES was covered by the European Union with a direct grant method within the framework of the "Financial Assistance Program for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT)" agreement. The project that started on 03.10.2016 was operating in 26 provinces of the country at that time and transferred to PIKTES II Project in December 2018, and is supposed to continue until October 2022. Phases I and II in the project are dependent on the funding process and do not include or reflect significant changes in the implementation process.

The primary purpose of the PIKTES project is to promote children's access under temporary protection towards formal education and support, especially for Syrian children's Turkish language development and social cohesion. In this scope, PIKTES also aims to support the efforts of the Ministry of National Education on formal education and social cohesion. The gains of the project are multiple and reveal that the model enabled increased access to formal education by Syrian students in provinces that were supported by PIKTES. Next, the quality of education offered to Syrian students increased. especially, after the first trials in the TECS, the operational quality of educational institutions and staff in PIKTES improved. Consequently, it was observed that the social integration of Syrian students and parents increased as well (PIKTES, 2022).

Although the PIKTES model has been granted with good practices, there were major challenges that especially PIKTES teachers or trainers had to cope with. In the early stages, a lack of instructional resources and curricular material, especially for teaching Turkish as a second language, was the main barrier to running effective Turkish language classes, which also doubled the challenge for teachers who were not equipped with the essential knowledge and skills to teach diverse student population with no Turkish language backgrounds at all (Boylu and Işık, 2019). Building the capacity of teachers simultaneously was mostly left to the teachers in the field, indicating that they needed to sink or swim. On the other hand, another challenge stemmed from

the student population themselves. They were reluctant to invest in Turkish language development at that time thinking they would stay temporarily and would likely return to their home countries when the conflict in their home countries would end. Alternately, they were planning to transit to more prosperous countries in the Western countries. Nevertheless, the displaced families and their children remained to reside in the places they immigrated to in Turkey with no plans to return to their home countries (Ertong-Attar and Küçükşen, 2019) that accelerated the establishment of emergent policies toward mainstreaming the migrant students into formal education and the ad hoc policy need for establishing cohesion classes was inevitable.

3.3 Cohesion classes model

Cohesion classes were established in 2019 after the Temporary Educational Centers closed systematically and in cases where there are no PIKTES programs available in the cities where emergent migrants started to reside. This inclusive program has two main purposes. Initially, it intends to provide an opportunity to help the students adapt to the Turkish education system, the school community, and society overall. Secondly, it aims to provide intensive Turkish education to all foreign or migrant students who do not use Turkish properly to follow classes, and for those who need to improve their Turkish language skills towards investment in further academic tracks. Cohesion classes are offered in schools starting from 3rd grade up to 12th grade, and most of them are offered by contracted or part-time teachers. They are only open under the condition that there are at least 10 students in need to attend these classes and a teacher can be hired. However, each class can be formed with a maximum number of 30 students. Student language needs are identified through a standardized exam. If the number of students at the same grade levels is not sufficient to offer these classes, there are possibilities to enroll the migrant students in combined classes with subsequent grades, such as 3rd and 4th grades in one group, or even enable them to take the classes in a school in the same localities.

The lessons learned were multiple from the cohesion classes. The language barrier reveals to be the main obstacle to all integration-related education models being effective. While Kapat and Şahin (2021), Karabacak (2020), and Başar, Akan, and Çiftçi (2018) mainly refer to the need for instructional instruments concerning language development, Çelik and Bozan (2020) refer to the integration challenge of migrant children into the sociocultural context of schools. The latter highlight that the cohesion classes have flaws as they may label the children as cognitively ineffective and may draw them towards psycho-social isolation. Similarly, Başar, Akan, and Çiftçi

(2018) consider that the isolation problem may result from a lack of effective communication skills and social adaptation. As a result, cohesion classes needed to be considered beyond language development classes, and educate the migrant as well as the native local students toward developing social adaptation, intercultural, and communication skills.

Despite the attempts, the dropout rates of migrant students outnumbered the rates of the native disadvantaged students. Alongside promoting capacity for resources fit to use in cohesion classes, the Ministry of National Education adopted policy implications from international organizations and provided incentives for migrant students to enroll in VET education to hinder their dropout levels and promote employability skills (Özer, Suna, and Numanoğlu, 2021). Since parents play a vital role in the development of their children, Demir-Başaran (2020) and Şensin and Yılmaz (2021) suggest promoting effective cooperation between parents and schools for all children may bring a change in the cohesion classes implementation. As a result, regardless of public or VET schools, access and attendance of migrants to education can be promoted if the policies can simultaneously produce the instruments and practices necessary to receive quality and meaningful education and also promote the social adaptation of the migrant children.

# 4   The context of higher education for displaced students

University education is non-compulsory and exists in three cycles in the Turkish context. We indicate only the associate degree (which lasts two or four years depending on the field of study) and undergraduate education (four years). As may be revealed from the statistics, the number of foreign students enrolling in Turkish universities is increasing year by year, and so do Syrian students. (see; Figure 5). University education can only be pursued after taking the Higher Education Placement Exam. Placement is realized based on several scores beyond the test results; high school graduation scores, the placement or entrance exam score, and ultimately the personal choices that align with the scores examinees received. There are also conditions that special-purpose exams are held to study in some departments such as high technology institutes, police academies, and military academies (CoHE, 1981; UNESCO, 2012).

Students are granted an undergraduate degree following four or six years of education depending on the department they study in. Students are also granted an associate's degree following a two-year education in vocational high schools, which may offer based on the credentials of four-year college

degrees. The legislation on practices that foreign students are subject to for transition to higher education is based on Article 45/f of the Law No. 6287 amended by the Higher Education Law No. 2547 of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) states: "Procedures and principles of admission into higher education institutions for students of foreign nationality and students who spent their entire secondary education abroad shall be set by the Council of Higher Education". In addition, the regulatory principles announced by the CoHE (2019) on the admission of students from other countries necessitate taking the placement test as well.

A barometer study by Erdoğan (2020) reveals Syrians Barometer-2019 research on increased figures of educational attainment level of the Syrian households, before 2011 the average schooling rate in Syria was 62,3%, it was 87,3% in Turkey at that time, and the schooling rate was even lower in North Syria, from where the majority of the Syrians migrated to Turkey had low levels of education. While the current figures show a steady increase in access to higher education which is free of charge to study in state universities for Syrian nationals, who turned out to be on the top of foreign university students list in Turkey with figures around 140 thousand university students. Şimşek and Çorabatır (2016) reveal that the Turkish educational policies enacted facilitate the access process to higher education by Syrian youth living in Turkey, especially, since it enables the waiver of tuition fees in state universities and the provision of over 1,000 scholarships from 2015 onwards at the national level and also the financial support systems international institutions alongside these grants play an important role in the numbers increased (Figure 5). Erdoğan (2020) asserts that this role needs to be strengthened and made sustainable to prevent "lost generations from emerging and developing human capital are common interests for everyone concerned" (p.39). The increase in student numbers in higher education is crucial since tertiary education is a cornerstone towards receiving education and being employed in a position to enable higher living standards. In addition, gains in economic and cultural capital may also impact the social capital of migrants and receive social cohesion in the communities they live. Consequently, it can be argued that the significant efforts and investments done to promote Syrian refugees or other displaced students' access to universities in Turkey can be called to have been effective and the policy enabled to integrate the largest group of Syrian immigrants into the higher education system in the European Higher Education Area (Ergin and Wit, 2020).

Figure 5. Number of Syrian students enrolled in Turkish universities by academic year
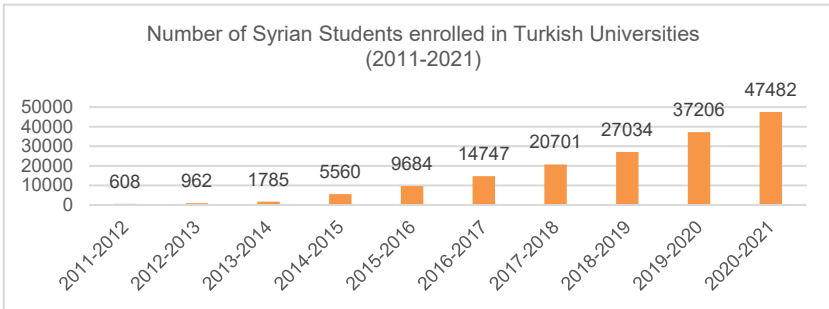
Source: Data compiled from Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2022) statistics of January 2022. https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr

5 Discussion

Given the surrealist high numbers of emergent migrants at the schooling age, Turkey was urged to take immediate measures towards hosting the displaced migrants and making adjustments in the educational context to bring about new models to educate the children via ad hoc policies as the initial emergent solution step to take with little or inadequate resources available and the lack of capacity of educators to teach migrants. The establishments of Temporary Education Centers and the intensive language programs via PIKTES were first-hand solutions. They were effective in hosting the children and complementing their basic educational needs, both in learning the language of the host country and also in complementing the official curriculum from the home country as an emergent solution for that time. In the case of Turkey, the Syrian curriculum was offered in the Arabic language; the teachers who were also among the communities of forced migrants were empowered with teaching opportunities as part-time teachers and received some monetary incentives.

Notwithstanding the remedy provided to solve children's educational basic needs, in the long run, as the migrants continued their stay or reside in the country, the children who accomplished the training through these solution-raising programs fell short and urged policymakers to bring new solutions. Inevitably the temporary solution raising programs needed to be transformed and ultimately closed down so that all migrants of schooling age could pursue their educational aspirations in mainstream public schools. In the case that the educational system needs to bring change as it necessitates urgent solutions to the problems recognized the incremental mode of policy-

making can be adopted (Haddad, 1994). In the current case, it was the educational policy change introduced in public schools that aimed at integrating cohesion and adaptation courses into the official curriculum so that the diverse student populations could fit into the formal schooling process. Nevertheless, as could be observed from the final model, cohesion classes were effective in compromising immediate solutions to the challenges at that moment, but as Johnson and Clark (1982, cited in Haddad, 1994) put it, policies at incremental mode may not promote solutions for challenges that may be anticipated in the schooling contexts for the future, and policymakers need to consider transformative policies so that all children have access to quality education. The factual figures presented in the text show that the political economy of a nation may influence the educational attainment of its population. Nevertheless, the emergent policies toward mainstreaming migrant children may become a turning point for those children's lives and transform the educational opportunities beyond their socio-economic capitals as there is evidence that the life chances of immigrant children from Syria have increased their educational levels compared to the original figures back in their home countries (Erdoğan, 2020). Considering Syrian do not hold an Official Refugee status by Law, they have been able to benefit from the educational services free of charge (Erdoğan and Erdoğan, 2020). Yet, Arar et al. (2020) warn against the ongoing challenges of modifying, transforming, and adding policies in higher education that may develop a reaction towards the incentives granted to higher education student admission policies for migrants, and they warn against the recognition of language barriers, guidance, and lack of documentation during admissions.

Despite the fact that the models introduced above have proven successful to an extent in remedying the challenges that needed to be tackled at that time, future educational policymaking processes need to rely on scientific decisions as a result of evidence-driven data. However, the experience and lessons learned in the case of hosting and educating the large numbers of emergent migrant student populations, the investment in educating the children can provide transformative lessons for nations that may become vulnerable to emergent situations, as in the case of Turkey.

To sum up, we tried to shed light on the magnitude of student population sizes and the emergent policies implemented due to large numbers of displaced children and how they are mainstreamed into public education from the case of Turkey to offer transferable lessons learned or unlearned in more than a decade. The audience of this chapter should be well aware of the policy practice dichotomy in formal schooling in emergent situations, especially from the context of monolingual policy implementation and a country with a highly centralized educational system. Like Napier (2005) put it, implementing educational transformation policies in developing countries, rapid changes with inadequate training and support, and lack of capacity on the side of

practitioners may result in unexpected outcomes. We did not focus on teacher professionalism, teacher education, and their development at this stage, nor did we mention school administration challenges and capabilities of school infrastructures in such emergent educational contexts or refer to the economic challenges that displaced students may bring to nations from multiple dimensions, let alone for a developing country. However, we believe all aspects are crucial and need to be discussed and researched further through uncovering the veil of ignorance of the socio-political context and the willingness of policymakers and practitioners to reach all children equally in the educational arena.

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