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ACCELERATING
RESULTS

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Working Across Sectors in Turkey Accelerates Learning for All Adolescents



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Programming Objectives:

Work alongside the government and other partners across sectors to support adolescents who never enrolled in school or dropped out, to acquire the adequate knowledge and skills required to enter or return to formal education, with a focus on the Syrian refugee population.

UNICEF Turkey's Approach:

Cultivate, leverage, and strengthen long-term, cross-sectoral partnerships to improve access to formal education for all adolescents living in Turkey; ensure every child receives a quality education; and support educational success through literacy, numeracy, and life skills training.

Context

The availability of basic education is high in all regions of Turkey, as supported by the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) commitment to universal access to inclusive, quality education that equips all students with the skills and competencies needed to thrive in modern society.

This commitment was further strengthened by the Turkish government in 2017 with a policy decision to integrate Syrian refugees¹ of school age into the Turkish public school system. MoNE undertook supportive measures to ensure that Syrian refugees could meet the requirements for enrollment. For instance, the MoNE transformed Temporary Education Centers (TECs) into alternative learning hubs

that offer adaptation and bridging programmes to formal education. Approximately 96 percent of refugee children and adolescents are now studying in Turkish public schools. All TECs were closed by 2020 as refugee students were mainstreamed into the public school system. Syrian learners' academic achievements are also assessed along with the other students at classroom, national, and international levels.



This case study series shows how to accelerate outcomes for adolescents in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Quality Education (SDG 4); Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8); Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10); and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

Almost 1.7 million Syrian children live under temporary protection in Turkey—nearly 45 percent of the total population of Syrian refugees living in Turkey.

Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), November 2019

This attention on integrating refugee students into formal education systems has been shown to contribute to an increase in social solidarity that is helping to reduce conflict between Turkish host communities and Syrian refugees.²

Challenges, however, still exist in ensuring that every child and adolescent can equally access education, as well as receive an equitable quality level of education in Turkey. For instance, as of October 2019, only 63 percent of Syrian refugee children and adolescents were enrolled (Gross Enrollment Ratio) in public schools; with over 70 percent in lower secondary and fewer than 33 percent in upper secondary.³ While the percentage represents a significant increase from previous years, it equates to an estimated 400,000 Syrian refugees of school age not in school. Given that attendance in primary and early secondary school is relatively high nationwide, the majority of those out of school are adolescents and the hardest to reach.

Entering the Turkish public-school system is not always easy for Syrian adolescents due to registration issues, language difficulties, financial problems, poor school performance, lack of peer support, personal discouragement due to long periods of being out of school, and other factors. For girls, they are largely out of school due to domestic responsibilities, perceived danger of being in public spaces, cultural or personal concerns in attending mixed classes with both boys and girls, or early marriage (approximately 45 percent of Syrian refugees marry before age 18; 9 percent by age 15).⁴ While girls also work, child labour is the main reason Syrian refugee boys are out of school in adolescence. This is often a result of families being forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as child labour to generate income or to alleviate family poverty.

UNICEF Response: Key Programmes and Outcomes

In 2016, UNICEF Turkey integrated its humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis across multiple sectors, including education. Here, it leveraged long-standing partnerships to support national education efforts and to strengthen systems for education for refugees. For instance, MoNE's *Education Vision 2023* report⁵ set specific goals, priorities, and targets to improve educational opportunities and learning outcomes, including for the most vulnerable adolescents. UNICEF Turkey developed its programming with the government by building on its vast experience working with the most disadvantaged such as adolescents living as migrants or refugees; with disabilities; involved in economic activities; in contact with the law; or facing violence, stigma, or cultural norms that can interrupt, diminish, or end their chance for a formal education.

To increase the number of Syrian refugee adolescents in formal education and integrate them into the national education system, UNICEF Turkey supported the design of a Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme that acts as a bridge between alternative and formal education systems. The programme's two components most relevant for adolescents are the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and Turkish Language Courses (TLC). National geographic reach of the programmes was achieved by leveraging the wide network of Public Education Centers run by the MoNE and Youth Centers run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) to implement NFE activities throughout the country. The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) also implements NFE in one province.⁶

Through these partnerships, Syrian refugee families were informed about NFE, thus increasing student engagement. The NFE programme (together with other education sector interventions) contributed to:

- Accelerating education access;
- Increasing school attendance of Syrian refugees by 28 percent between 2016-2020; and

- Improving learning outcomes with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education delivered through teaching and learning approaches that match learners' level of cognitive maturity.

Increasing Education Access and Improving Learning Outcomes

Syrian adolescent refugees often face multiple challenges—such as poverty, discrimination, language barriers, protection concerns, and psychosocial trauma—that can contribute to non-attendance at school and reinforce the need for accelerated learning programmes. Working across sectors and with the MoNE, ALP acted as a bridge to bring out of School (OOS) children and adolescents into or back to the formal public education system, which includes Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). UNICEF Turkey and the Government of Turkey also developed the Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module to build the capacity of the school system to provide safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for Syrian refugee students in their transition to Turkish public education. Ensuring adolescents attend and stay in school not only helps them to receive a formal education and ideally to graduate, it also helps them in terms of employability, contributing to the long-term economic growth of Turkey.

Accelerated Learning Programme

The ALP⁷ is a complementary education programme established by the MoNE with support from UNICEF. It provides a certified alternative learning pathway for Syrian and other non-Turkish speaking OOS adolescents aged 10-18 who have lost school years due to displacement. Turkish educational regulations stipulate that students who lost at least three years of school cannot be automatically entered into the last grade they attended in school due to their age compared to the other students. The ALP helps bridge this gap so that learners can enter formal schooling at a grade appropriate to their age; and is a certified learning programme

with a curriculum approved by the MoNE. As the main authority for education in Turkey, working with MoNE in the programme assures that ALP students are provided with a quality education and that their transition to formal schools is being supported by the relevant authorities.

The ALP curriculum allows adolescents who successfully complete the two learning levels covered over 16 months—the Primary School Equivalency and the Lower Secondary School Equivalency—to apply to Provincial Directorates of National Education to receive their grade equivalencies. Learners can then enter Turkey's public schools, and access certified and age-appropriate learning opportunities, including technical and vocational training within the formal education system through TVET. The ALP is a transitional programme and will ultimately phase out as all children and adolescents in Turkey are able to equitably integrate into the Turkish public school system.

By 2020, ALP was being offered in 12 of 81 provinces (where nearly 80 percent of Syrians under temporary protection live) through 75 Public Education Centers. These centers are public buildings in every neighborhood and city designed to encourage lifelong learning by Turkish citizens. The government opened these centers to ALP as their contribution reduces costs, ensures national coverage, and makes the programme more sustainable in the long term.

Nearly **15,000** boys and girls graduated from ALP in 2019

In working across sectors, ALP students were also provided access to the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programme,⁸ which normally only covers students enrolled in formal education. CCTE is a national social assistance programme implemented by the Government of Turkey since 2003 that helps to address financial barriers families may face, with the aim to improve school attendance and reduce drop-out rates of children and adolescents nationwide.⁹

This programme was extended to refugee families in 2017 through a partnership between the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, MoNE, the TRC, UNICEF and the European Union. CTE strategically takes a cross-sectoral approach across the education, social protection, and child protection sectors.

A focus on child protection is a rare feature in traditional cash transfer programmes and has proven valuable when working with vulnerable populations. In CTE, as a complement to cash payments in the 15 provinces with the highest number of refugees, dedicated outreach teams visit households where children and adolescents are most at risk of low school attendance, assessing the child protection risks in the household and referring families for further services as required.

The Inclusive Education Training Module

As Syrian refugee students increasingly entered into Turkey's formal education system, the Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module¹⁰ aimed to equip MoNE and teachers in Turkish public schools to better understand the Syrian adolescents' experiences of trauma and culture. The programme started in 2018 to improve teachers' abilities to provide high quality and sensitized learning and participation by Syrian refugee students that help them stay in the formal education system until

155,000 teachers and school administrators

received the **Inclusive Education Teacher Training** in all 81 provinces by December 2018, approximately **70,000** women and **85,000** men

completion. Its 10 training modules (ranging from 10-40 hours for completion) have been incorporated into a professional development platform offered free to teachers by MoNE three times a year in Turkish public schools.¹¹

The modules include face-to-face and self-learning that equip teachers to consider how language, trauma, and other factors related to gender, disability, ethnicity, citizenship, socioeconomics, culture, etc. might affect school participation for Syrian refugees. The curriculum offers lessons for teachers to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable students, including Syrian refugees, counselling methods to work with adolescents traumatized by migration, terror, and natural disasters, teaching the Turkish language, and how to create a more inclusive school environment. UNICEF Turkey has funded several training of trainers sessions on the modules, and continues to do so when MoNE requests the training. MoNE monitors the impact of each training on their teachers and students through its inspection system.

After her home in Syria was destroyed due to fighting, Esra and her family came from Aleppo to take refuge in Turkey in 2013. She is 13 years old, studies in a local school, loves to draw, and dreams of becoming a designer.



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Increasing School Attendance and Retention through Language Study

Parents, students, teachers, and administrators have consistently identified language as one of the main barriers to school participation for Syrian adolescents. Unlike younger children, who may have been born in Turkey, most adolescents speak Arabic—the mother tongue of most people in Syria—rather than Turkish. In response, government partners with UNICEF's support scaled up the supply of standardized, certified language classes designed for children and adolescents through the Turkish Language Courses (TLC) programme.¹² TLC, along with ALP, is a component of the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme.

To help Syrian students succeed in formal schooling in Turkey, UNICEF supported its partners to provide basic TLCs. Students who complete the language courses and pass their exams are provided with MoNE-accredited A-1 and A-2 level¹³ certificates and registered in a national database that tracks their linguistic education gained through NFE programmes.

The MoYS teams of the TLC programme conduct outreach activities when needed and identify the OOS children and adolescents who need language support. After identification, the teams group participants based on their school status, language level and age, and call families to invite those children to a TLC. If they are out of school, they attend classes during the day. If in school, they will attend on weekends. Basic Turkish language is not a requirement to enrol in Turkish public

schools but not being able to speak and understand some Turkish is considered to be a risk factor for retention and completion.

The partnership with the MoYS was invaluable for the success of the TLCs. MoYS was established in 2011 as an independent Ministry and has a nationwide reach of more than 300 Youth Centers in all 81 provinces. The centers offer a variety of services, learning and participation opportunities, including sports, arts classes, social cohesion activities, forums and language and skills courses. The Syrian students attending TLCs at the youth centers have benefitted from being able to participate in social and recreational activities with their Turkish peers, which can help with their transition to public school learning and promotes social cohesion. UNICEF has provided funding for staff, materials, transportation, and basic refurbishment of Youth Centers to create classrooms especially for younger children. The programme staff has received numerous trainings on child protection, education, outreach, and more.

Building Skills for Social Cohesion in Schools and Communities

In Turkey, promoting social cohesion and peer support and reducing bullying, discrimination, and other forms of violence are a key part of UNICEF Turkey's adolescent development and participation programming. Here—working alongside government and local partners—it supports a variety of community-based, capacity- and skills-building activities and trainings that help adolescents grow and develop their potential; collaborate with adults, organizations, and agencies; and take an active role in pursuing their priorities and goals.

For instance, in the programme Turkish, Syrian, and other adolescents learned collaboration skills and conflict resolution strategies that they could use to reduce tensions or change situations that might keep

From 2018-2019, the TLC programme reached nearly

15,000 non-Turkish speaking adolescents | **47%** girls

with a completion rate of **92%** in 50 MoYS Youth Centers across **24 of the 81 provinces**.

them from attending and learning in school. Having such skills helps to create more inclusive learning environments and improve student retention, especially for girls and refugee students living in host communities.

Reaching adolescents most at-risk of leaving school has involved implementing integrated strategies across sectors. This includes at MoYS centers through non-formal education (TLCs), social cohesion activities, and child protection support (i.e., psychosocial support and identification and referral by trained social workers). Focusing activities beyond schools in local MoYS youth centers was also intentional as this helped to strengthen social cohesion within neighborhoods and communities. A recent report *Syrians Barometer 2019: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Turkey*¹⁴ explored inclusivity and conflict between Turkish host communities and the Syrian refugee population over a nine-year period starting in 2011. It showed that providing key services—especially education and youth services—has been critical. It has contributed, in part, to an “extraordinarily high” level of social acceptance and social solidarity in Turkey.

Using a cross-sectoral approach, UNICEF Turkey supports multiple partners in the Social Cohesion Programme. This includes the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MOFLSS), the MoYS, the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) Administration, and national NGO partners. The multiple partnerships serve to expand the reach of the programme through a robust and extensive network for adolescents in host communities to draw upon as they develop.

Partnerships between adolescents and youth-led entities in the country have also led to growth in human centred- approaches to programme design. For UNICEF Turkey, this has led to new collaborations and activities that support adolescents to engage and co-create solutions to issues affecting them in their communities—especially in education settings where most adolescents in Turkey spend their time.

Since the programme began in 2015, more than **150,000 adolescents** a year have engaged in social cohesion peer-to-peer activities and training sessions.

For example, UNICEF and others are expanding efforts to integrate "design and skills" spaces in secondary schools and communities that will better enable young people acquire key employability skills.

Lessons Learnt

Mainstream Inclusive Education for All Through Systems Strengthening and Partnerships

Addressing the educational needs of a country's most vulnerable adolescents can be a challenging task. However when the Turkish Ministry of Education decided to include all Syrian refugees in formal education systems, having a system strengthening and capacity development model was seen as more beneficial than a service delivery approach as it provided the flexibility to adapt and better support the government. This focused accelerated learning in areas critical to mainstreaming inclusive education. For instance, in addition to its work on NFE programming, UNICEF Turkey created opportunities for government staff to improve performance-based budgeting and planning, increase efficiency in the use of financial and material resources, and strengthen management information systems to monitor refugee students in the education system. These skills and systems were vital in efforts to integrate all students into Turkish public schools.

Incorporate Child Protection into Programming Supports School Enrollment and Retention

Through a cross-sectorial approach to programming, MoNE, MoYS, the MoFLSS, child protection actors, and UNICEF Turkey were able to leverage effective actions aimed at reducing barriers to education for at-risk adolescents. This includes Syrian refugees who have experienced multiple challenges.

Working together, the partners set out to first identify out of school children, which was critical for knowing who they needed to reach. In their different capacities, the Ministries and organizations then offered complementary and supportive child protection and counselling services through programmes aimed at reaching adolescents. In doing so, they learned that adolescents being able to access services is only one part of a holistic approach; they also require greater protection and various types of support. The partners thus began to simultaneously provide capacity-building training to national and provincial child protection authorities to expand the coverage of outreach, identification, and case management services.

Integrating strategic child protection activities into programmes aimed at the most vulnerable populations (such as into ALP) more easily allowed social workers and translators to refer adolescents and families to complementary social services. They could then act to address psychological problems, violence, and other issues in the home, and/or the loss of motivation by adolescents to enrol and remain in school.

Conclusion

Through strong working relationships and a responsive approach for systems strengthening, UNICEF Turkey has been able to effectively integrate its humanitarian and refugee-related programmes into its wider strategic approach to increase the potential for every child to learn. In doing so, UNICEF has worked closely with the government and NGO partners to adapt national and local systems to better meet the needs of Turkish and non-Turkish adolescents, including the 400,000 Syrian refugee children and adolescents identified as out of school.

Additionally, through shifting to a cross-sectoral approach to delivering on adolescent education and learning outcomes and strengthening social cohesion, UNICEF Turkey has been able to achieve at-scale results for adolescents to enable them to achieve their right to an education. This includes

institutionalized investments that prioritize inclusive learning. The approach has led to greater gains in school attendance and completion by adolescents nationwide, especially for Syrian refugees. The strategic efforts support the Government of Turkey's vision for preventing a lost generation in the country through access to education for all children.

Further Readings and Information

- Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)
- Approaches to Providing Cash Based Assistance to Meet the Needs of Children in Protracted Crises – Lessons from Turkey
- Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module
- Turkish Language Courses (TLC)
- Robotics Workshops

Acknowledgments and Contacts

- Kamil Kurtul, Education Specialist, kkurtul@unicef.org
- Jairus Ligoo, Adolescent Development Specialist, jladoo@unicef.org
- Nona Zicherman, Deputy Representative, nzicherman@unicef.org

Endnotes

- 1 According to Turkey's Directorate General of Migration, Turkey registered more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey from 2011-2020. The term "refugee," as used in this document, does not imply a specific legal status.
- 2 www.academia.edu/44061492/a_framework_for_achieving_social_cohesion_with_syrians_in_turkey
- 3 According to the Turkey Ministry of National Education.
- 4 <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/13900/pdf/child-labour-report-2016-english.pdf>
- 5 https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/turkey_education_vision_2023.pdf
- 6 The programmes have been funded by a variety of donors, including the European Union and the Government of the United States of America.
- 7 www.unicef.org/turkey/media/8011/file
- 8 www.unicef.org/turkey/en/conditional-cash-transfer-education-ccte-programme
- 9 www.unicef.org/turkey/en/media/9006/file
- 10 www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/2019-03/ToT_Intro_Module.pdf
- 11 www.unicef.org/eca/education
- 12 www.unicef.org/turkey/media/8011/file
- 13 www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching-assessment-cefr
- 14 www.academia.edu/44061492/a_framework_for_achieving_social_cohesion_with_syrians_in_turkey