

Educational Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

TUBA BIRCAN *
ULAŞ SUNATA †

Abstract

In political, social and economic terms, Turkey is the most affected country of the Syrian crisis. More importantly, Turkey as a host country of Syrian refugees has been living a dramatic demographic change. The most marginalized group living in Turkey is children. Refugee education has hence become of top priority. The global report in refugee education is below the critical level, but Turkish report is even worse in the contexts of not only accessibility and quality. This work refers to uniquely gathered dataset from AFAD and UNHCR in order to portray the current demography of Syrian refugees in particular concentrating on the ones living in camps. Main purpose is elaborating the current educational assessment of Syrian child refugees in Turkey. Our findings indicate the significant number of refugee children in need of access to basic education at all levels and underlines the magnitude of scarce of education program development mainly due to lack of financial matters. Hence, it advises a kind of collaboration among implementing public and private partners at the local, national and international levels.

Keywords: Refugee education; Syrian crisis; Turkey.

Introduction

Syrian crisis is about to reach its fifth year and no end to foresee yet. Since the outbreak of the crisis in March 2011, almost half of the Syrian population (around 7.65 million) has been forced to leave their home country (UNHCR, 2014a). Over 40 per cent of these refugees have sought a remedy in neighbouring countries. The most striking and marginalized group in this refugee group is again children whose size is at least 1.7 million. Their educational need is obvious and should be of top priority and identified by the host countries.

In political, social and economic terms, Turkey is the most affected country of the Syrian crisis. More importantly, Turkey as a host country of Syrian refugees has been living a dramatic demographic change. Over 1.7 million Syrians have fled to Turkey since then and around 15 per cent of these live in 22 government-run camps that are scattered mainly along Turkey's 900

* University of Leuven, HIVA Research Institute for Work and Society, Belgium. E-mail: bircantuba@gmail.com.

† Bahçeşehir University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: ulas.sunata@eas.bahcesehir.edu.tr.



km (560-mile) the Syrian-Turkish border. The rest do their best to make ends meet in urban areas across the country. Women and children make up 75 per cent and those under 18 accounts for 50 per cent of them, according to the United Nations (UN). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Syrian population in Turkey is 1,805,255 as of 28 July 2015.

By January 2015 the Turkish government had spent around USD 5.6 billion (EUR 5.1 billion) on accommodating Syrian refugees. International funding, donations and help make up only USD 356 million (EUR 325 million). So the cost of Syrian crisis and Turkey's "Open Door Policy" is above the expectations. Since 2010, due to influx of refugees, Turkey operational budget funded by UNHCR has steadily increased from USD 17.7 million (EUR 15.8 million) in 2010 to USD 320.16 million (EUR 294.4 million) in 2015, USD 291.8 million (EUR 268.4 million) of whose corresponds to the planned activities to provide support to Syrian refugees. The foreseen funding requirement for Turkey in 2015 is over USD 624 million (EUR 560 million) only 20 per cent of which is funded by international organisations such as UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNHCR, WHP and WHO. Therefore the rising price tag has now forced the Turkish government to seek international support for an operation that, at the beginning, was guarded as a government responsibility. In spite of Turkey's "generosity", the government has not been fulfilled to the needs in the education sector, "where 70 per cent of the 550,000 Syrian children are estimated to be out of school" (UNHCR, 2014a).

Refugee education has become high on Turkish educational agenda with the mass influx of Syrian refugees in the last five years. Turkey has not comprehensively identified educational needs of the refugee children yet, but the government started to concentrate on the matter in the end of 2013 (Seydi, 2013; Seydi, 2014; Kirişçi and Karaca, 2014). This work will focus on the current educational assessment of Syrian child refugees in Turkey.

Legal Framework and Problematic Issues in Refugee Education around the World

Right to education has been established and developed after the World War 2. According to the Article 26(1) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) enforced in 1948, everyone has the right to education. The scope of this right is elaborated in the Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) in 1966. This article requires that "primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all"; "secondary education . . . shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education"; and "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity". Under the ICESCR, states should take progressive steps "to the extent of available resources to protect the rights of everyone, regardless of nationality" (Weissbrodt and Divine, 2012: 171). In conclusion, every state has

a duty to a significant range of human rights, including education. Specifically, every state has a duty to provide universal, free and compulsory education for all individuals residing in its territory.¹ The *Convention against Discrimination in Education*² complementarily protects non-nationals' same access to education as nationals (Weissbrodt and Divine, 2012: 174). More importantly, the Article 30 of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* (1990) restates the children of both regular and irregular migrants have the same basic right to education as nationals, by emphasizing access to schools "shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment." In summary, according to the international legal framework, right to education for all persons of school age around the world, regardless of their migrant status, should be protected by the related state.

Refugee education at the global scale is still not successful due to its access limitation and low quality. According to the UNHCR data, globally access to education for refugees is 76 per cent at primary levels and 31 per cent at secondary levels (Dryden-Peterson, 2011: 6). Accessibility is more limited for girls. Shortage of human resources, particularly of educational expertise, and lack of financial resources as well as their inconsistency make global refugee education be neither of high quality nor protective.

Refugee education situation varies from state to state (Bhabha, 2012: 213). To the Turkish national laws, all children in Turkey including foreigners have right to education at primary and secondary levels. There is a growing emphasis on the right to and the benefits of education for young people within refugee camps. Syrian refugee children and youth living in camps have access to pre-school, elementary and high school education. The current refugees in the school ages living in the camps in Turkey have access to camp schools carrying out Syrian curriculum in Arabic. The refugee students out of the camps having residence permit can enrol in public schools. The refugee students living in the city without residence permit can attend to the schools as guest status and go without official registration. Syrian refugee education is not limited with formal education refugee camps also enable Syrians access to informal education. In some regions there are some opportunities of informal schools, promoted by local authorities or NGOs, where Syrian teachers work voluntarily. In brief, school-age Syrian refugee children have three different educational alternatives in Turkey. First one is the schools in the camps operated by the Turkish Ministry of Education and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD); second option is Syrians living outside of camps with residence permits are able to enrol in Turkish schools and the last alternative is

¹ *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, General Comment No 13: The Right to Education, 21st sess, UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 (8 December 1999)

² *Convention against Discrimination in Education*, opened for signature 14 December 1960, 429 UNTS 93 (entered into force 22 May 1962)

for Syrians outside of camps without residence permits which enables them to attend Syrian schools operated in Arabic by different NGOs, individuals, and community organizations (Dorman, 2014).

Pinson and Arnot (2007) discuss “wasteland” of refugee education from the sociological point of view, reminding that Bauman (2004) introduces the refugee, in the handicap of “being stateless and statusless” as “human waste” of globalisation. More importantly, they criticize the British model of successful integration for refugees distinguishing “those who deserve to be integrated” from the undeserved and question the concepts of temporality and permanence in this context (Pinson and Arnot, 2007: 404-405). A similar nationalist discourse against Syrians refugees by interrogating their “deserving” is available, perhaps dominant, in Turkey (Sunata, 2015). This discourse lied behind a specific critic of Turkish refugee admission policy in the period of Syrian crisis. Still, it indicates a necessity of development of positive strategies in education to combat racism and xenophobia. Therefore, the inherently political nature of refugee education and its social consequences should be taken into consideration.

Matthews (2008: 31-32) argues that refugee education should stabilize the unsettled lives of children and “provide safe spaces for new encounters, interactions and learning opportunities.” However, she criticizes in the Australian experience the domination of psychological approaches and overemphasis on the home country conditions of trauma rather than the socio-political conditions of the country of asylum.

In this work, we will focus on refugee education issue of the Turkish case as the receiving state after the Syrian crisis of 2011. We will determine the refugee education situation in Turkey. Also, we will try to understand the relevant critical parameters and paradigms.

Data and Methodology

The quantitative data is gathered from multiple sources. Main source is the AFAD, which is founded in 2009 under the Prime Ministry as being the principle responsible and coordinator to exercise legal authority in cases of disaster and emergencies.³ Temporary accommodation centres with required facilities such as schools, hospitals, cultural centres, etc. for Syrian refugees are constructed and have been managed by AFAD along Turkey-Syrian border. Unique demographic data regarding Syrian refugees residing at these camps is only available at AFAD therefore we gathered demographic specifically educational status data of Syrian refugees from AFAD.

Second source we referred to is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As stated on the official website⁴ of the organisation,

³ Detailed information is available on the official website of the institute: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/EN/>

⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org/>

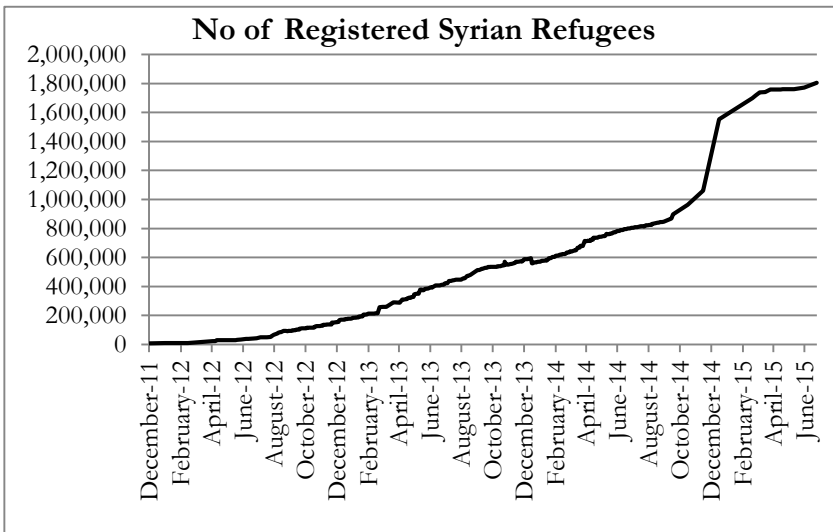
UNHCR contributes in “coordination and informed decision-making in refugee operations by providing accurate, relevant and timely data and statistics”. Syrian Regional Refugee Response (SRR) is regularly updated information source for the hosting countries. Turkey SRR Report provides recent demographic information regarding registered Syrian refugees.

In order to shed a light on educational assessment of Syrian refugees, we start with draw a descriptive picture of Syrians have fled to Turkey since 2011 and then continue with a comprehensive evaluation of educational distribution at the refugee accommodation centres. Although extensive data regarding education is available from AFAD for the Syrian refugees residing at the camps, it is crucial to mention that 85 per cent of the Syrians fled to Turkey live in several cities with their own effort and no data is available for these people. In order to overcome this obstacle we rely on existing data assuming that it yields approximate estimations for the overall Syrian refugee population in Turkey.

Syrian Refugee Population in Turkey

Unexpected continuation of the Syrian crisis threatening the lives of civilians led hundreds of thousands of people leaving all the belongings and their homeland. Southern Turkey, especially the neighbouring provinces have been hit by the arrival of substantial number of Syrian refugees and Turkey has become the neighbour country that hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees among Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

Figure 1. Number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey



Source: UNHCR

Towards the end of 2011, Turkish government clarified its opposed standing against Assad’s regime. During the period heading to this affirm, first in late April 2011, Turkish former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held a

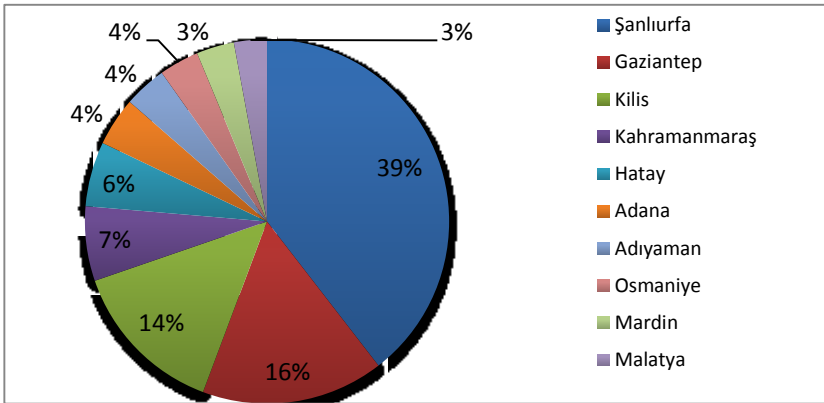
meeting and announced that Turkey is ready to allow those Syrians in “who are not happy at home” (Özden, 2013). Then in October 2011 Turkey officially declared an open door policy towards Syrian refugees and following the influx of increased number of refugees fleeing Syria to Turkey within a legal framework known as “temporary protection” their basic needs such as accommodation, healthcare and education are provided via constructed refugee camps in the region (Kirişçi, 2014). As illustrated in the Figure 1 above, by early September 2011, Turkey had set up six refugee camps that were hosting about 7,000 refugees. At the end of 2011 there were only 8,000 registered refugees in Turkey. This number continued steadily increase and by the end of December 2012 the number reached 138,579; by June 2013, the numbers had more than doubled to reach 400,000. By January 2014, there were 580,000 registered Syrians. This, then, shot up to 795,000 by the end of June 2014. Increase in the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey became sharper as of the fourth trimester of 2014. Between October and December 2014 more than 200,000 refugees arrived. Increased violence in Syria and neighbouring Iraq fed this escalation in people fleeing Syria and by late 2014, 55,000 people were seeking asylum in Turkey every month (İçduygu, 2015) and Syrian refugee population amounted to 1,552,839 in December 2014. The latest figure is for 1,772,535 registered Syrians in Turkey by 15 June 2015 and there are more than 70,000 Syrians waiting for registration

Almost half of 3.2 million refugees fled Syria has been accommodated in the southern Turkish provinces along the Syrian border both at camps and city centres. As Cagaptay and Menekşe (2014) summarised, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Şanlıurfa making up 8 per cent of Turkey’s population and 5.25 per cent of its area, host almost 85 per cent (1,275,000) of Syrian refugees fled to Turkey. In these provinces at 12 tent cities and five container cities 281,196 refugees (75.5 per cent of the refugee camps total population) reside. When the total number of Syrian refugee population in these provinces considered, the magnitude of inner city inhabitants comes into prominence. Şanlıurfa 50 km away from Syrian border (Ayn Al’arab) and both this proximity and its economic potential are two of the main reasons of easy access from Syria. Şanlıurfa has around 500,000 Syrians living all through the province (Concern Worldwide, 2013); 106,716 of those settled at refugee camps. Second highest Syrian population (more than 400,000) -53,168 of which are based at five camps- is at Gaziantep. Gaziantep is the 6th biggest province in Turkey. Statistics from Gaziantep Chamber of Industry indicates that besides Gaziantep’s being counted as one of the agricultural (based on olive, grape and pistachio) centres, it also has Turkey’s largest organised industrial area and the export volume exceeds USD 6.5 billion (EUR 5.9 billion). This economic importance brings Gaziantep forth as a preferred destination for Syrian refugees. Kilis is another interesting case as the Syrian population (110,000) is almost 1.1 times of the province population (100,000). 34,877 Syrian refugees live at refugee camps here. Kilis was used to be a part of Aleppo province in former times and is one of the region’s nearest settlement to Syria and thus

travels between Syria and Kilis is not a recent phenomenon at all. Hatay, which was also part of the former Aleppo province of Syria, is another trans-passing points between Turkey and Syria. Due to its highest Arab population in Turkey, bilateral cross-border policy agreements between Syria and Turkey allow people living at both sides of the border visiting families, relatives and friends on a regular basis. As of Syrian crisis more than 300,000 Syrians have come to Hatay and only 14,873 residing at camps. According to Ministry of Interior other cities in the region with significant Syrian refugee population are Kahramanmaraş, Mardin, Adana, Adiyaman, Osmaniye, and Malatya. They host 61,873 Syrians in total at refugee camps.

The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) maintains the efforts related to the problems and needs of the Syrians in Turkey. AFAD carries on its work in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local civilian authorities. According to the latest official data published by AFAD (June 03, 2015), there are 281,196 Syrians in nineteen tent cities, one transitional reception centre and six container cities that are established in ten different provinces of Turkey. Also, AFAD stated that more than 600,000 Syrian citizens settled in sheltering centres and more than 360,000 of them returned to Syria.

Figure 2. Provincial share of registered Syrian refugees in camps



Five provinces along Turkey-Syria border, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay and Mardin host fifteen tent cities, 5 container cities where more than 225,000 Syrian refugees reside. 106,716 refugees, almost half of the total Syrian refugee population at camps in Turkey, reside at 5 tent cities in Şanlıurfa. Figure 2 demonstrates that almost 76 per cent of the registered refugees living in camps are located in these five provinces. Rest 24 per cent of Syrian refugees spread among Kahramanmaraş, Adana, Osmaniye, Adiyaman and Malatya provinces.

To conclude, only 17.3 per cent of Syrian refugees (260,684) reside at refugee camps located at southern provinces. Rest about 83 per cent

(approximately 1,240,000) have spread throughout city centres and try to survive mainly in their own right.

Educational Demographics at Refugee Camps in Turkey

A recent report on education needs assessment by Dorman (2014: 2) gives a run down to current educational situation of Syrian refugees by reviewing relevant reports of AFAD (2014) and UNICEF (2014) where AFAD (2014) emphasizes the disparities between camp-resident Syrians and out-of-camp-resident refugees specifically in access to basic education being as the most noteworthy aspect of inequalities between two groups. According to UNHCR (2014b: 28), current number of registered school age (6-17 years old) but out of school children in refugee-hosting countries is approximately 500,000 and in Turkey 70 per cent of school age Syrian refugee children who live out of camps do not have access to basic education. In Global Appeal Update Report for Turkey, UNHCR (2014b: 3) claims to “provide cash and educational support to asylum-seeker and refugee children in urban areas to encourage their school enrolment” and thus refugee children will be granted for access to national education system.

According to UNHCR’s plans for 2015 (see ‘The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2016’), although comprehensive target of number of teachers who received supplementary training among Syrian refugees are expected to be 3,000; based on Turkey operation’s own assessment of the likely impact of a global funding shortfall, the potential gap is estimated to be 1,500 teachers. For 2015 UNHCR’s education budget for Turkey is planned to be about USD 15 million (EUR 13.7 million).

By 3RP United Nations targets in all neighbouring countries - Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey - 830,000 boys and girls (5-17) enrolled in formal education (primary or secondary); 423,000 boys and girls (5-17) enrolled in non-formal or informal education; 41,000 educational personnel trained and 482 educational facilities constructed, renovated or rehabilitated. Within a consolidated framework to address refugee protection needs, the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable, and the longer-term socio-economic impacts of the Syria crisis on Turkey, the estimated education funding for Syrian refugees is around USD 60 million (EUR 54 million).

According to the latest AFAD report (2015), for educational assessment at the refugee camps 934 classrooms have been facilitated and 2,576 Syrian, 373 Turkish teachers have been assigned. By May 2015, as seen in Table 1, 76,107 students have received formal education. In 2015, Turkish Ministry of Education aims to reach out 10,000 children at camps and 10,000 children in the cities having pre-school education. One significant aspect about pre-school education is the Syrian refugee children with special needs. So far not any particular special care and education could be provided to those children but the topic keeps its place in the agenda of Ministry of Education in Turkey for 2015.

Table 1. Formal education at Syrian refugee camps in Turkey

Pre-School	Primary School	Secondary School	High School	Total
7,798	38,938	20,307	9,064	76,107

There are 38,938 students attending primary school at the camps, when there exist more than 50,000 Syrian students out-of-camps attending primary schools. For 2015 the targeted total number of students is 145,000 for this education level, when 2016 projection points 170,000 students to be provided primary school education. For the already studying primary school children special language programs are considered. In addition, for the students who gave a break or have not had the opportunity to start education intense preparatory/compensatory programmes are to be coordinated.

It is crucial to emphasize the significance of secondary school students among Syrian refugees. This group of children is determined as the most vulnerable age group by the Turkish Ministry of Education. The children from this group who do not attending secondary school education are said to be under serious risk in terms of both their own future and also security. In and out camp students attending secondary schools in Turkey are around 54,000. 20,000 additional students are aimed to attend secondary school education in the coming year. An extra effort will be required for providing support, orientation and assistance to bring these children in formal education. This specialized endeavour will lead to an increase in the educational costs.

8,412 Syrian refugee students residing at the camps are getting education at high schools. Ministry targets 30,000 more students of this age to be melted in high school education. Prospective high school students are considered to be the hardest group to be integrated in the formal education system. Not only due to the insufficiencies related to the educational facilities and language barriers but also family matters seem to have a significant role as when most of these young males are expected to work and contribute to the family budget by their parents, most of the young girls of this age get marry willingly or with family pressure. When adolescent Syrians who have never had opportunity to study or had to stop their education are considered to be a precious group of young people who could be brought in the community with the help of informal education, training programs, courses with social and cultural contents and socializing events. Another valuable solution for the vulnerable group of Syrian youngsters within high school age band is open high schools, by which these young people can benefit from the education system.

In terms of informal education (Table 2), almost 40,000 refugees attended more than 1,300 courses and there are 210 still ongoing courses, which serve 11,717 Syrians at the camps. The cost of the educational materials for these courses can be supposed as TRY 50 (EUR 17) per person. These courses,

including Turkish language courses, have been held by Public Training Centres. With the support of NGO's, more attendants aimed to be reached. However it is not feasible to foresee an exact number of prospective attendants today.

Table 2. Informal education at Syrian refugee camps in Turkey

	No of Courses	No of Attendants
Ongoing	210	11,717
Completed	1,273	39,598
Total	1,483	51,315

A crucial but missing piece in offered formal education for Syrian refugees is special education and psychological inquiry and guidance. When the impacts of war and the fleeing process anticipated, Syrian refugees at school age can all be treated as in need of special care. Following deep and thorough investigations children with special needs can be diagnosed and thus necessary education can be provided. Although there is still not a systematic approach to this matter there are some 'special classes' are formed. This aspect of formal education for Syrian refugees is in progress especially for the students with mental disabilities. Current state of matter is not promising as Syrian refugee children do not have access to private 'special care and rehabilitation' centres yet. Very first foreseen step is educational diagnosing of the children with special needs. This ignition can be beneficial for starting project-based exercises for the most needy school children.

Conclusion

The concentration of literacy and primary education limits progress in refugee education. Language problem in refugee education is very important but refugee education should not be restricted with literacy delivering (Matthews, 2008:42). In the context of refugee education, one challenge determined by UNHCR is that restricted access to post-primary education for refugees in and out of camps has immense economic and social consequences, for both individuals and societies (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). It indicates the significance of secondary and higher education levels. Unlike Australian case above mentioned, necessities of Syrian child refugees in psychological support are still at issue. Turkey's special education possibilities fall even further behind. The emergency and the significance of their specific and complex educational needs cannot be belittled or ignored. The significance of 'successful partnerships' between community and religious organisations, schools, and local and state governments has been underlined by several research on capacity building and integrated service delivery models (Crawshaw and Simpson, 2002; INEE,2004; Larner and Craig, 2005; Rose, 2000; Sindhu and Taylor, 2007). Therefore, although refugee education is considered in coordination within national education system, the government should work together with international, national and local institutions.

Educational needs are not limited within the refugee camps. Although current school circumstances in camp settings enable a general projection, there are different educational approaches for the camp schools and for urban refugee education (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). For instance; the home-school liaison is critically important for urban refugee education.

Gender differences should also be evaluated in refugee education. For instance, in the Syrian case in Turkey, boys are more disadvantaged group in terms of participating to labour market, but girls have in risk of early marriage. Local authorities should make provisions for refugee education against the social problems of child labour and kid brides.

The last, but not the least, dimension of refugee education is the budget. More than half million school-age children of Syrian refugees are in need of education in Turkey for the next year. Taking this projection into account, the Turkish government should not go to respond the needs of schools and teachers alone. However, as reported by Dryden-Peterson (2011, 2012) as being the largest organisation aiming to support refugees globally, UNHCR allocated only 4% of UNHCR's total comprehensive budget to 'education' in 2012. In an environment where resources are so limited, investment in refugee education requires the financial commitment of international donors for expending the budgetary and institutional capacity of Turkey's Ministry of Education for primary, secondary and higher education of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, due to a lack of policy framework and budget support targeting refugees, not only accessibility to refugee education in Turkey but also its satisfied quality for not losing this Syrian generation requires monetary cooperation of different implementing partners.

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