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## The Policy of Inclusion: A Comparative Analysis of Refugee Education Policies in Germany and Turkey

### Abstract

Due to recent unrest around the world, the number of refugees has increased dramatically in the last decade. In order to meet the needs of this population, host countries have had to quickly adapt to provide these refugees with basic needs. One such need is to have quality education for refugee children. The aim of this paper is to compare the policies of educational inclusion in Germany and Turkey that have accepted a large influx of refugees.

Our findings suggest that both the German city-state of Hamburg and Turkey have made major strides over the past ten years to accommodate and provide for refugee children's educational needs. We list some of the policies that have led to greater inclusion and accessibility for refugee children in mainstream education. Key findings from the comparative document analysis show that although the two countries are distinguished by different levels of income and development, both have similarities in terms of (1) providing compulsory education for all children, (2) the delay in preparing and applying policy-based legislations for refugee education, and (3) the main activities such as additional language support and teacher training for the purpose of social inclusion of refugee students. Furthermore, both countries have had similar challenges such as the necessity of improvements in second language instruction and teacher training, thus highlighting the need for refugee education-oriented global solutions for the host countries. We recommend continued efforts to include multiculturally rich school curriculums to create educational settings that feel inclusive and comfortable for refugee children.

Keywords: refugee education, refugee children, integration policy, Germany, Turkey, Hamburg

### Introduction

Over the last few years, the forced migration movement has reached peak levels and generated ubiquitous challenges on a global scale. It has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that affects both refugee communities and host countries, thus, requiring innovative and progressive responses. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) statistics (2022), 42% of asylum-seekers are children whose education has been interrupted and at risk of child labour, child-marriage, violence, and mental health disorders. Integration of refugee youth into the respective educational systems has become a priority for host countries so that uprooted children can return to a sense of normalcy in a safe and healthy environment. However, education policies and practices are subject to change according to the resettlement countries, creating different experiences for each refugee child.

This paper invests in the comparative analysis of refugee education policies of two countries, Germany and Turkey, which are among the five countries receiving

the largest number of refugees (UNHCR, 2022). We have chosen the respective countries based on The World Bank country income level classifications. Accordingly, Germany, which hosts 1.2 million refugees, is a high-income country among the most developed countries in the world, while Turkey, which receives the largest number (3.7 million) of refugees, is an upper middle income country among the developing countries. By choosing different countries which are distinguished by income and level of development, we aim to pinpoint the similarities and differences in education policies for refugee youth and explore distinctive perspectives that might shed light on the pressing need to determine the role of educational practices in providing the smooth transition of uprooted children to new educational systems and to the societies. Thus, we aim to answer the following research question:

What are the educational policies for refugee children in Germany and Turkey?

## Methodology

The present conference contribution is based on a comparative documentary analysis of government documents, policy papers, and scholarly articles. For Germany, policy reports from School and Vocational Education Authority (Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung) and the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration) were included. Regarding Turkey, circular letters issued by MoNE (Ministry of National Education) as well as UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), UNHRC, and UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) reports related to refugee students were collected and analyzed. We also included Korntheuer and Damm (2020) and Crul et al. (2019)'s scholarly articles on refugee education to interpret the government documents and policy papers more precisely and to identify the policy gaps.

## Results

### *Germany*

Since 2015, Germany has accepted a large number of refugees, thus requiring the decentralized education system to quickly adjust to accommodate the needs of refugee students. Due to the vast differences in the educational practices across sixteen German federal states, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to present the refugee education policies across the country. Thus, we have chosen to focus on Hamburg, which is one of the three major city-states with almost 1.8 million residents. It has also been one of the major areas into which refugees arrive, with over 400 refugee children entering into the Hamburg education system every month throughout 2015 and 2016 (Crul et al., 2019).

According to the national statistics, there were over 100,000 asylum seeking children under the age of six, who arrived in Germany in 2015 (SVR, 2017). To bring a sense of normalcy, it is important for those children to have a legal entitlement to education from an early age. Accordingly, early childhood education in Hamburg starts at the age of one and lasts till the age of six in day care centers that are known as 'Kita'. All children residing in Hamburg are entitled to enroll into Kitas up to five hours a day without any cost, including the offspring of refugee

parents from the day of entry into the country. Furthermore, Germany has made notable and progressive changes with the whole-of-government approach such as opening up Sprach-Kitas to provide second language instruction from critical ages by investing up to 400 million euros to improve the program and increase the number of staff between the years of 2017 and 2020 (Park, Katsiaficas & McHugh, 2018).

According to the Hamburg Education Act, compulsory formal education starts at the age of six with four years of primary school, then continues with the selection of secondary schools for the various educational tracks (e.g., academic and vocational) and lasts until the age of eighteen. The city-state does not distinguish between those who are officially born and raised in Germany and those who are asylum-seekers. Unlike other German federal states, such as Lower Saxony, refugee hosting centers are recognized as primary residence places, thus allowing refugee children in Hamburg to be directly eligible for compulsory education regardless of their residency status (BSB, 2018). This is important in many ways since the length of asylum procedures may possibly affect the refugee students' mental well-being and educational practices. Accordingly, those who stay in shared households at reception centers lack privacy, restricting the play time and physical activities for minors. Moreover, the quality of education provided in reception centers were found to be lower than mainstream education (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020).

It should be highlighted that Hamburg was one of the few cities which had not established refugee-related specific regulations for formal education until 2015 (Weiser, 2016). The legislative changes were made relatively late after the rapid rise in the number of refugee youth. Accordingly, the Hamburg Education Act has granted the legal right for school authorities to place refugee students into the schools to prevent possible refugee overpopulation in particular places, as well as establishing a five-level program for the entrance of refugee students into the educational system. The above mentioned five-levels are listed as follows: (1) Entrance into the nearest reception centers, allowing refugee youth to have an immediate access to study groups; (2) Transferring to the accommodation at a shelter or flat in the city, allowing students to be assessed for eligibility of international preparatory or basic classes; (3) Education given in basic classes for illiterate refugee children for a year; (4) Education given in international preparatory classes for a year; and (5) Additional second language acquisition support for up to a year (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020). Furthermore, in 2018, the city-state published a more detailed framework for the integration of refugee youth into formal education, discussing the school curriculum and various versions of basic and international preparatory classes that are designed to meet specific needs of children (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020).

### *Turkey*

Thanks to its 'open door' policy, Turkey has welcomed a record number of refugees fleeing from the outbreak of conflict in Syria since 2011. The Turkish government started to grant refugees 'under temporary protection' status (UTP). According to the welcoming policy, Syrians were 'temporary guests' who would return back to their country soon after the problems were solved in Syria. The Turkish government had not necessarily applied systematic policies for Syrian

refugee children to integrate into mainstream education, therefore, education was provided in refugee campsites at first. In 2013, the very first circular letters were issued by MoNE, which firstly focused on identifying existing and possible educational centers for refugee children residing out of campsites, then focused on the educational needs of Syrian children in the campsites, the teacher supply in the Arabic language, and the possible solutions for those who were invested in learning the Turkish language (MoNE, 2013a, 2013b). However, the increased refugee influx required further actions to ensure quality integration procedures. Accordingly, all children in Turkey are subject to compulsory education of twelve years, starting at age six (i.e., the age of starting primary school) until eighteen years old (i.e., the age of finishing high school). However, Syrian children's enrollment rates were rather low due to the legal obligations of the need to have a student residence permit to access education. It initiated MoNE to lift legal restrictions by granting the right to education for every refugee child UTP as of 2013. Additionally, with the support of the new framework published in 2014, the Turkish government secured and centralized the educational practices for refugee children in general (MoNE, 2014).

With the support of UNICEF, temporary education centers (TECs) opened in over twenty cities across Turkey, providing education for school-age refugees in and out of campsites. TECs adapted the national curriculum of education in Syria and provided education in Arabic. Meanwhile, the Turkish government allowed Syrians to migrate to urban places in Turkey, thus allowing them to enroll in Turkish public schools (TPSs). The transition from TECs to TPSs led to high levels of success in terms of school enrollment rates particularly between 2014 and 2018 (UNICEF, 2019). Despite the increase in enrollment rates, 40% of children UTP still had no access to education, therefore, the Turkish government began to apply its newly established policy of full integration to prevent the 'lost generation' of refugee children. It was, then, declared that TECs no longer accepted new students as of 2018, making inclusive education the priority of the government.

To ensure the integration of refugee children into to mainstream education, the MoNE implemented a European Union funded project, namely, PIKTES (Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System) across twenty-six cities in Turkey under the guidance of MoNE 2023 vision (Tuğrul, 2019). The main activities of PICTES included providing Turkish language courses, transportation and stationery support, training for school teachers and principals, catch-up and remedial courses, and increasing school attendance.

### *Comparison of countries*

Although there have been some distinct differences between the two countries in terms of refugee educational policies, they both strive for the social inclusion of refugee youth into the host countries' educational systems. With projects supported by the governments and the EU, these countries have attempted to eliminate their common challenges (e.g., language support, teacher training, attendance rates, guidance and counseling incentives). In the present comparative analysis, we identified three main similarities between Turkey and the German city-state of Hamburg: (1) providing compulsory education for all children, (2) the delay in preparing and applying policy-based legislations for refugee education, and (3) the

main activities such as additional language support and teacher training for the purpose of social inclusion of refugee students.

Based upon the Hamburg Education Act, all children residing in Hamburg are required to attend compulsory education that lasts eleven years in total between the ages of six and eighteen. Similarly, as of 2013, the Turkish government gave the legal right to all refugee minors UTP to be subject to twelve years of compulsory free education as their Turkish counterparts.

Both Turkey and the German city-state of Hamburg, in particular, have experienced delays in preparing and applying policy-based inclusion of refugee students into the respective educational systems. Accordingly, since the beginning of 2015, Hamburg experienced a visible rise in the upcoming students in need of preparatory classes and counseling support. However, in 2012, the city had already published a framework for newly arrived students and their transition into formal education, thus they had not necessarily implemented new legislations up until 2017 and 2018 when the changes were highly needed at both federal and national level (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020). Similarly, Turkey did not take an immediate action to accelerate integration procedures at the beginning. The main reason being anticipation that the conflict in Syria would be short-lived and thus, it would be feasible to accept refugees temporarily in camps (Akyuz et al., 2018). However, by the end of 2013, the Turkish government started to make progress in refugee education with the help of the United Nations, and the official integration procedures began in 2016 with the newly established policies (Akyuz et al., 2018).

Despite the differences in level of income and development, both countries have had similar goals to achieve in reaching out to refugee students' educational needs. For instance, the additional language support for second language acquisition has been one of the pivotal foci to ease the adaptation procedures of minor students to new cultures, societies, and mainstream educations. Another focus was given on preparatory classes in Germany in which refugee minors were required to attend up to one year. In Turkey, TECs served as preparatory schools for smooth transition to mainstream education. As of 2017, first, fifth, and ninth grade minor refugees were subject to enter the Turkish educational system for the purpose of a full integration mission of the government. Guidance counseling services have been given for the direct transition procedures in addition to remedial and additional classes. Lastly, both hosting countries have greatly invested in teacher recruitment and training services to meet the high educational demands of minor asylum-seekers.

## **Conclusion**

The present study highlights how Germany and Turkey's vigorous initiatives in integrating the largest refugee minor inflows into the mainstream education systems have been remarkable. Accordingly, a number of thoughtful and policy-based approaches have been implemented in both countries to ensure equality in educational opportunities for underprivileged refugee minors. Despite the differences in the levels of income and development between the two countries, similar attempts, outcomes, and challenges have been identified in refugee education practices, thus showing the need for global and sustainable solutions for the educational needs of refugee minors.

Based on the findings, future research is recommended for a more comprehensive and detailed analysis, particularly among the five countries hosting the largest number of refugees: Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan, and Germany respectively, each with differing levels of income and development. We also suggest that future research be required to focus on rigorous research methods such as longitudinal studies to measure the effectiveness of the currently applied policies and project-based activities.

We recommend that both countries enforce structural approaches to identify and analyze the attendance rates of refugee minors who are most likely to be exposed to child-labor, child-marriage, and mental health disorders. Furthermore, government and school-based refugee awareness activities should be provided for school staff, families, and local students to foster social inclusion and to prevent bullying and discrimination towards refugee students. Lastly, multiculturally inclusive school curriculums should be utilized to create a welcoming and healthy environment for all minority students.

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