

Theirworld Brief

Building a better future: Syrian girls' education in Turkey

The Syrian conflict is now well into its sixth year. Around 8.7 million Syrians are predicted to be displaced within Syria itself and nearly 5 million women, children and men have been forced to flee their country and search for safe haven in the surrounding countries and beyond.¹ Turkey has become the world's largest host country for refugees and currently hosts over 2.7 million registered Syrian refugees. Of these, more than one-fifth, or over 21 per cent are girls under the age of 18.² These girls are at particular risks of not being able to complete their education with an estimated 370,000 Syrian refugee girls – over 60 per cent – still out of school in Turkey.³

In conflict, natural disasters, and other emergencies, girls face particular vulnerabilities and barriers that can frequently prevent them from realising their right to education. Displacement, poverty and the breakdown of familial and social protection mechanisms can place girls at higher risk of sexual abuse, violence, exploitation and early forced marriage. Where crises exacerbate poverty, girls can be pulled out of school or even forced into early marriages to alleviate economic burden, or because their parents perceive this option as a way to protect their daughters.

The Government of Turkey has taken admirable steps to broaden access to education for all Syrian refugee children, evidenced in a 50 per cent increase in child enrolment in formal education between June 2015 and June 2016.⁴

However the international community has failed to deliver much of the financial support needed to assist these efforts in a timely and transparent manner. According to President Erdogan, Turkey has spent a total of US\$25 billion to provide for Syrian refugees within its border, while receiving only US\$525 million from the international community.⁵ The Turkey education appeal in the Syria Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plan stood only 39 per cent funded as of June 2016 – leaving an existing funding gap of over US\$71 million to reach all targeted children with a quality education.⁶ Not only is funding for the existing appeal insufficient, it is also important to note that the education sector appeal must acknowledge gender differences in the barriers to getting into school. The current education sector plan has been given a gender marker of "0" indicating that it has "no visible potential to contribute to gender equity."⁷

While some strides are being made,¹⁰ more must be done to improve access to free, quality education for all Syrian refugees, and targeted action must be taken to overcome the specific vulnerabilities that are keeping Syrian refugee girls out of the classrooms.

Supporting Syria and the Region Conference

On 4 February 2016, the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations co-hosted a conference in London on the Syrian crisis. Among pledges totalling US\$12 billion, the co-hosts agreed to ensure that all Syrian refugee children and vulnerable host community children would have access to quality education by the end of the 2016/2017 school year, with equal access for girls and boys. In the co-hosts' statement issued at the conclusion of the conference, they acknowledged that this promise would require funding of at least US\$1.4 billion.⁸ Despite this promise, a Theirworld report released in August 2016 found "donor reporting systems are insufficiently transparent to track how much has been delivered, we have been unable to find evidence of increased disbursement."⁹ As the 2016/2017 school year begins, this will have significant consequences for the ability of education ministries to plan and deliver on promises to deliver education for all refugee children.

How are girls' needs currently addressed?

It is widely acknowledged that girls and women face unique vulnerabilities in crisis contexts compared to men and boys¹¹ – the Syrian refugee crisis is no different. In order for humanitarian response to be effective, programming and targeted interventions must be sensitive to gender-specific considerations. This need extends to interventions to provide education in crisis contexts, and gender-sensitivity is prominent within the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies (See box below). Despite the promise made by co-hosts of the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference in February 2016 to get "1.7 million – all refugee children and vulnerable host community children – in quality education **with equal access for girls and boys by the end of the 2016/2017 school year,**"¹² the planned education sector response does not include a gender equity focus.

Gender in the INEE Minimum Standards¹³

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Toolkit designates gender as a key thematic issue and includes gender equity standards among the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies. Among many gender guidelines within the Minimum Standards, emphasis is placed on the gender-balanced participation of girls and boys, women and men in education decision-making processes, the need for data disaggregated by sex and age, gender-sensitive education programming, and "the need to promote education policies and laws that protect against discrimination based on sex and ensure commitment from education partners to utilise standards on gender-sensitive project implementation and management."¹⁴ Additional guidance from INEE stresses the need to ensure that education facilities provide a safe environment for girls and boys, free from violence – especially sexual and gender-based violence.¹⁵

An IASC Gender Marker is a code on a scale of 0-2 required in all Strategic Response Plans (SRPs) and other humanitarian appeals and funding mechanisms.¹⁶ The Turkey country plan within the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) has an assigned gender marker in each sector response. **The education sector response in this plan has been assigned a gender marker of "0" indicating that it has "no visible potential to contribute to gender equity."**¹⁷ A reading of the education sector response indicates no targets that address the specific vulnerabilities of girls. The protection sector response, however, does explicitly recognise the challenges of child labour and child marriage and calls for strategies to curb their practice. The protection and education sectors should work together to build coherent strategies to prevent child marriage as a barrier to girls' education as well as promote education for girls to curb early forced marriages among Syrian refugee girls.

Case Study: Rima

Rima arrived in Turkey one year ago with her mother and 8 siblings, and she now lives in Sanliurfa, Turkey. Her father was killed by a sniper while gathering food for their family in Aleppo. Rima was in school in Syria but when she came to Turkey she had to drop out of school and has now been out of school for 4 years. Instead of going to school, Rima works in the streets selling tissues. She says her family needs the money to live, to pay rent, electricity, and water. She wants to be back in school and when she grows up would like to be a doctor.



Photo Credit: Theirworld/Rosie Thompson

Syrian Refugee Girls in Turkey

Turkey is currently host to the largest number of refugees worldwide. More than 2.7 million Syrians were registered as refugees in Turkey as of September 2016. Over 21 per cent of these refugees are girls under the age of 18.¹⁸ These girls have a right to receive a quality education and the hope for the future that it brings, but a number of factors continue to present barriers to education for these girls and young women.

According to SETA, only 36 per cent of Syrian school-aged girls are enrolled in school.¹⁹ In total, this enrolment rate exceeds the overall enrolment rate for Syrian school-aged boys, which stands at 32 per cent.²⁰ However, when examined at each school level, differences become apparent. Syrian girls attend secondary school at a higher rate than Syrian boys in Turkey, but for preschool and primary school enrolment this trend is reversed. **The main challenge is not necessarily that girls are out of school at higher numbers but that girls and boys face different barriers to their education that must be addressed.** SETA suggests that the main challenges to boys' school attendance is the need to work to support their families, while girls are often forced into early marriages which hinder their ability to complete their education.²¹

A recent report by Theirworld also highlighted the prevalence of early forced marriage among Syrian refugee girls in Turkey as a result of financial challenges: "One survey among Syrian women and girls in the city of Kirikhan found that child marriage was seen as more common among Syrian girls in Turkey than in Syria itself. The most common reason identified was financial hardship."²²

Further research from Human Rights Watch and the Migration Policy Institute have identified several additional barriers to education for Syrian refugee children in Turkey. Among those most frequently identified are language barriers, poverty, challenges of bullying and social integration, lack of access to information or inaccurate information about school enrolment, overcrowding in temporary education centres, and transportation costs or fears of safety.²³

Child and early forced marriage

Child and early forced marriage has been identified by UNHCR and other partners as a growing challenge among Syrian refugee girls.²⁴ Turkey has one of the highest estimated rates of child marriage in Europe with 15 per cent of girls married before the age of 18. The influx of refugees from Syria has resulted in a dramatic increase in child marriage prevalence in Turkey. A 2014 UNHCR survey found that the average age of marriage for Syrian refugees in Turkey was between 13 and 20 years old, with many pointing to economic restraints as a factor in the decision to marry their daughters off.²

Case Study: Maya

For 14-year-old Maya, living as a refugee in Turkey is not easy but brings at least one relief: She is in school, finally. In 2012, when fighting intensified in her hometown of Aleppo, her school closed. For the three years, she was shuttled between relatives' houses in the countryside. She tried to study at home, and occasionally entered the local schools, but the disruptions due to violence were constant. "I lost 5th, 6th and 7th grade," she says from her small apartment in Gaziantep. "We were moving from village to village and there were no books or schools."



Photo Credit: Elie Gardner

Maya is one of nearly 75-million school-aged children around the world whose education is disrupted each year by conflict and crisis. Maya considers herself one of the lucky ones. "There are lots of kids at my school who, as soon as the weekend comes, say 'Oh thank god, it's time for a break,'" she says. "For me, no—I want to keep going to school," she says.

Girls are often at increased risk of sexual violence, trafficking, and early forced marriage during times of crisis.²⁶ Families under economic constraints, frequently view marrying their daughters as a means to alleviate costs and provide for other family members. In an environment of insecurity and displacement, parents may perceive early marriage for their daughters as a means to protect them from sexual violence and provide for them.²⁷ Unfortunately, this practice frequently results in early and frequent pregnancy and health complications, domestic violence, less ability to participate in the economy and exclusion from education.²⁸ Although child marriage occurred in Syria prior to the war, evidence suggests that rates have increased dramatically among Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Human Rights Watch also identified child marriage and safety concerns as a disproportionate barrier to education among Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon.²⁹

Conclusion & Recommendations

The Government of Turkey has made admirable strides to expand access to education for all Syrian children within its borders. The UN-led education sector response plan visibly targets a number of identified barriers to education for Syrian refugees including language constraints, teacher incentives, social integration, transportation and access to temporary learning centres. However, constraints on financial resources and capacity as well as a lack of strategic focus on gender equity, threatens to leave Syrian refugee girls out of school. While international donors must step up to urgently close the US\$71 million existing gap in the education sector appeal for Turkey in the Syria Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plan, policymakers, programme implementers and UN agencies must ensure that plans and projects include targets to ensure gender-sensitive responses in their education sector plans.

To all Donors:

1. Ensure delivery of the US\$1.4bn in financing needed to get all Syrian refugee children and vulnerable host community children in school by December 2016, including the remaining US\$71 million gap for the Turkey 3RP education sector response. In particular, the World Bank should extend funding from the newly launched Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) to aid Turkey's refugee education response.
2. Support and fund the Education Cannot Wait Fund for education in emergencies with no less than US\$3.85bn over the next five years.

Country level actors, UN agencies and other implementing partners:

3. Include gender equity targets in all future education sector response plans and integrate strategies between protection and education sectors to curb the practice of child marriage and other forms of discrimination that affect girls.
4. Fully comply with INEE Minimum Standards on gender.
5. Collect comprehensive data on school enrolment disaggregated by sex and age to inform planning and policy.

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