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Qualitative research to understand behavioural barriers and drivers to school reintegration

Education Sector Working Group

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01
Overview of the study

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Purpose

This social and behaviour change informed research aims to provide an analysis that will contribute to an in-depth understanding of the social determinants affecting the education of children in migrant and host communities in Türkiye. The aim of this study is to explore the factors contributing to the absence of both migrant and host community children from educational institutions, as well as to identify the needs and services that could enhance school enrollment and attendance.

1.2 Background

Since 2014, the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), led by UNICEF, has implemented the annual Back to School (BTS) campaign in close collaboration with education sector member organizations. The campaign prioritizes increasing access to quality education for all children and youth, with a special focus on Syrian children under Temporary Protection (UTP). To support children in returning to school at the start of the current academic year, the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) in Türkiye launched the Back-to-School (BTS) campaign, aiming to reach 1 million children. This ongoing annual initiative by the ESWG lead by UNICEF takes place from August 15 to November 30, 2024, in partnership with education sector member organizations across the country.

As part of the back-to-school campaign, the ESWG conducts an annual parent survey, incorporating elements to assess social and behavioral barriers through focus group discussions with parents and direct engagement with children. The goal is to better understand the demographics of out-of-school children in Türkiye and the behavioral obstacles to their school enrollment.
This study seeks to explore the social and behavioral factors that impede school attendance and to formulate strategies that foster educational participation. By examining these dynamics, the ESWG aims to tackle the underlying reasons for non-attendance and contribute to broader improvements in the national education landscape.

1.3 Research objective

This research aims to gather high-quality qualitative data from a social and behavioral change perspective to explore the reasons behind children's non-attendance in school, with a particular focus on existing social and gender norms. It seeks to develop strategies for reintegrating these children into the educational system by examining key factors such as enrollment challenges, parental awareness, transportation barriers, peer bullying, economic hardships, child labor, early marriage within refugee communities, and the impact of prevailing social and gender norms on these issues. Additionally, the study will include a needs assessment to comprehensively address these challenges, promoting positive behavioral shifts that align with and challenge existing norms to enhance educational engagement and retention for all children.

1.4 Research Methodology

This research utilized qualitative methods, including focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. A total of six group discussions were conducted with migrants (primarily Syrians) in Hatay, Istanbul, and Izmir, as well as with the local population in Kahramanmaraş. Additionally, three in-depth interviews were held to gather success stories, also known as testimonies. The research sample was predominantly composed of parents with children attending elementary, middle, and high school, typically mothers aged between 25 and 40 years, coming from different socio-economic backgrounds as detailed below. All focus group discussions were moderated in accordance with the FGD Tools designed by the research team and approved by ESWG and SBC based at UNICEF Türkiye Country Office (TCO). FGDs were recorded with consent of the participants to be transcribed and then analyzed qualitatively.

Group Composition

In the FGDs, the sample consisted of mainly women and this over-representation of women can be attributed to the working status of many male participants, who were typically employed during the discussion times. For instance, during the FGDs in Istanbul, several male participants indicated that they had taken time off from work to attend the sessions. Notably, one participant had to leave the group before the end of the session due to time constraints, as he needed to return to work. Consequently, the discussions predominantly featured mothers, who articulated their perspectives on their children's educational experiences and the various challenges they encounter in accessing education.

Socio-Economic Status of Participants

During the discussions, it was noted that participants in Izmir exhibited a lower socio-economic status SES) compared to those in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Istanbul. This observation is particularly significant given that Izmir is typically perceived as a more developed urban center than the other cities in the study. It is especially noteworthy that, despite the significant earthquake that recently impacted Hatay and Maraş—events often associated with economic instability—the SES of individuals in Izmir remains disproportionately low. A critical factor contributing to this situation is the influx of migrants from the earthquake-affected areas into Izmir, which has further exacerbated existing economic challenges.

While there may be variations in the economic situations of migrants across different cities, the study revealed a notable lack of economic heterogeneity between refugees and local

residents. Both groups demonstrated a significant degree of economic similarity, reflecting a homogeneous economic landscape within the studied communities. This shared economic condition suggests that both locals and migrants face comparable challenges in accessing resources and opportunities.

Age Distribution

The focus groups were predominantly composed of parents with children attending elementary, middle, and high school, typically aged between 25 and 40 years. A noteworthy characteristic of the sample was the relatively higher representation of younger mothers compared to their elderly parents.

Living Conditions

The living conditions of participants revealed significant socio-economic disparities, particularly among those from lower socioeconomic status (mainly C2 DE SES) backgrounds. Many respondents resided in neighborhoods such as Sultanbeyli in İstanbul, characterized by limited access to essential services, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of recreational spaces. In contrast, relatively more affluent districts in Istanbul typically offer better amenities, including access to quality healthcare, educational institutions, and public transportation, which significantly enhance residents' quality of life. Additionally, several participants reported living in container cities in Hatay, a situation resulting directly from the recent earthquake, highlighting the precariousness of their housing situations. In Izmir, some participants indicated that they lacked stable housing altogether, describing their living conditions as unstable, including residing in ruins or on the streets.

1.5 Research Study Limitations

This study presents several limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting its findings. To begin with, the study is a qualitative one and has representation limitations as all qualitative studies have, due to research design based on a small sample and hence limited generalizability compared to quantitative research. The method of participant recruitment presents inherent challenges that warrant consideration. The recruitment process was facilitated through partnerships with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community organizations. While this approach proved to be efficient, it inadvertently introduced a selection bias into the study. The participants engaged through these organizations were predominantly individuals already registered within their systems, receiving either material or moral support. Consequently, the study primarily captured the experiences of individuals who are relatively well-connected to aid networks, potentially overlooking the realities faced by those who are more marginalized or isolated. There exists a substantial population of migrants and locals who remain outside these formal support systems—individuals who may lack access to essential resources, aid, or information. Their voices were not adequately represented in this research, creating a significant gap. This situation presents a paradox: while the study aims to identify barriers to schooling, it may have failed to include the perspectives of the most vulnerable groups, particularly those unregistered with NGOs and unable to access necessary assistance. As a result, the findings may offer an incomplete representation of the educational barriers encountered by the broader population, especially those in precarious circumstances.

Another limitation is about imbalance in gender representation within the focus groups, with fewer men able to participate. In many cases, men were unable to join the discussions due to their work commitments, especially in family-centered employment settings where their labor was essential.

A notable limitation of the study lies in the homogeneity of the migrant population that participated, which was largely composed of individuals of Syrian origin. While their experiences provide valuable insights, the predominance of one nationality creates a narrow lens through which to view the educational challenges of migrant populations more broadly. This lack of diversity hinders the ability to capture the multifaceted nature of barriers faced by other migrant groups, such as Afghans, Egyptians, Iraqis, and so forth, who may experience distinct cultural, social, and legal obstacles. Each of these groups may encounter unique cultural, social, or legal barriers that affect their access to education, and their absence from the study limits the depth of understanding of the overall migrant experience.

In addition to the limited diversity of nationalities, the study also did not adequately address the concept of overlapping identities, such as gender, age, injury and refugee status. They may interact to intensify an individual's vulnerability. While some participants mentioned specific vulnerabilities—for example, a migrant mother in Hatay described how earthquake-related injuries prevented her from working, and a migrant girl in Istanbul mentioned a workplace accident of her father that impacted her brothers' education—these issues were not consistently or comprehensively explored across all focus groups.

Finally, due to methodological considerations, parents of children with disabilities were distinguished from those of children without disabilities. This separation is based on certain factors:

Inclusion Needs and Experiences: Due to the unique challenges and experiences involved in raising a child with disabilities, parents require questions specifically tailored to them and a more sensitive moderation approach.

The Possibility of Discomfort and Hostility: Parents of children with and without disabilities may feel uneasy or offended when grouped together. While parents of children without disabilities might feel less prepared to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion, parents of children with disabilities may feel that their unique experiences are neither fully recognized nor valued.

Observed Participant Behaviour: In two cases where parents of children with disabilities were unintentionally grouped with parents of children without disabilities, limited participation. For instance, in Hatay, a mother mostly discussed her child without disabilities, while in Istanbul, a father disengaged from the discussion shortly after his initial comments. This supports the argument that meaningful participation and data collection are not feasible within the same focus group. Moreover, no specific questions were tailored for children with disabilities in the approved focus group questions.

02
Findings

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2. FINDINGS

2.1 Behavioural barriers and drivers to schooling (school enrollment) for migrant children

2.1.1. What does school and education mean to migrant parents?

It has been observed that the concept of school and education carries a multidimensional meaning for migrant parents. While reflecting on education and school, their initial thought is often the deprivation they experienced due to the war in their home country. They have a strong desire for their children to avoid facing the same challenges they encountered.

From a social and behavioral change perspective, education and schooling for migrants extend beyond simply acquiring a profession, earning income, or securing a stable future. They embody the goal of fostering individuals who can think independently, critically evaluate their surroundings, and nurture aspirations. Notably, some Syrian migrants interviewed cited "lack of education" and "ignorance" as fundamental causes of the conflict in their country, highlighting the transformative potential of education in addressing broader societal issues and promoting positive change.

"Let them learn, let them be aware, let them complete their education. My children see other children going to school, and it leaves a mark on them." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"The education of children is very important. I want my children to stand on their own feet." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"My father also says that one of the reasons the war broke out was that people were in an uneducated or ignorant state." (Istanbul, Success story father)

2.1.2. What do migrant parents want most for their children?

From a social and behavioral change perspective, parents' primary aspirations for their children center around three key areas:

1) Creating a safe and supportive environment—where children feel secure and valued, fostering their emotional and psychological well-being,

2) Ensuring equitable access to education—so that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to learn and succeed academically, and

3) Protecting their children from discrimination and peer bullying—which can severely impact their self-esteem and social development.

These desires not only reflect the individual hopes of parents but also signify the broader social norms and values that shape their decisions and actions regarding their children's well-being and development.

2.1.2.1. Providing a safe environment for all children including children with disabilities

It has been found that almost all interviewed parents have concerns about their children's overall safety, specifically regarding concerns about their children's lives. This fear manifests itself in their reluctance to send their children to distant schools and their excessive vigilance in ensuring that the children do not remain outside after dark. It has been determined that the root of this fear lies in the discrimination and peer bullying they have encountered. It has been observed that the issues of safety and peer bullying are most prevalent among male children and adolescents, who can become involved in fights due to discrimination on the streets and in and around schools, with parents often unable to intervene. Parents frequently express that they can tolerate the discrimination they face because they are adults and "fear deportation," but their adolescent sons are unable to tolerate such treatment and often engage in fights. As a result, it is common to encounter parents who do not allow their children to leave the house.

"I want them to be safe; that is, I want them to go out and come back and remain safe. No one should interfere with them because they can't even go outside. When there's a problem, we can't intervene." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"I don't allow my children, who are aged 15-17, to go outside; I'm afraid. What if they go out and don't come back? They get killed… So right now, the children are staying home alone and not going outside." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"The Imam Hatip school is quite far from our home, which makes us anxious. Some children cry on the way, and others face problems." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

“After the Kayseri incident, we have become quite fearful. We try to stay indoors and only go out when absolutely necessary.”

(Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

It has been noted that girls tend to be "calmer" compared to boys, even when faced with discrimination and peer bullying, and they handle such situations with more composure.

> **"The problems with boys never end. Girls are a bit calmer. I mean, the fights among boys never stop."** (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

2.1.2.2. Ensuring all children receive education

It has been observed that migrant parents, regardless of whether they have boys or girls, are eager to educate their children.

> **"Let all of them go to school and complete their education. Children who drop out of school are children without goals. I want them to have goals and secure their futures."** (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

The majority of the parents interviewed, emphasized the importance of their daughters' education. However, they also acknowledged the presence of community members who view girls' education as "shameful," adhering to the belief that a girl's primary role is to marry and have children at a young age. This includes practices such as arranging early marriages, reflecting entrenched gender norms that limit girls' opportunities and perpetuate traditional roles.

> **"A diploma is like a weapon for our girls. It is the most powerful thing. I want them to grow up the way I did, but right now, our situation doesn't allow for that."** (Izmir, Female migrant parent)
>
> **"I want them to not be dependent on any man or anything. I want them to become so strong that they can stand on their own..."** (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

Parents are aware that not sending their children to school could put them in a legally difficult situation, and they strive to avoid this as much as possible. It has also been observed that children who do not attend school envy those who do, which deeply saddens the parents.

Syrian parents, in particular, mentioned that they once had dreams of becoming doctors or lawyers, but these dreams were shattered due to the war in Syria. Similarly, they expressed that their children's dreams of getting an education in Türkiye are also hindered by bureaucratic obstacles, such as residence verification, or other factors like language barriers.

> **"I couldn't attend school in Syria because of the war. Now that I'm here, my children can't attend school because of address verification problems."** (Hatay, Female migrant parent)
>
> **"Our dreams were so big when we were in Syria. My children grew up with the dream of becoming doctors. I have a younger child, and when we ask him what he wants to be, he says, 'I will be a doctor, a heart doctor. I will heal heart patients,' because he himself has a heart condition. But now in school, sometimes the teachers lecture for hours, and my children just stare blankly. They still haven't overcome the language barrier and don't understand. They can't fully grasp what the teacher is explaining."** (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

2.1.2.3. Protecting all children from discrimination and peer bullying

One of the strongest aspirations of migrant parents is for their children to live free from discrimination. However, research indicates that discrimination is widespread, with children facing bullying from peers at school, as well as negative treatment from teachers and other neighborhood children. Even when children are not the direct targets, migrants often encounter discriminatory attitudes from landlords, particularly evident in urban settings like Istanbul. This situation underscores the need to challenge existing social norms that perpetuate discrimination, fostering an environment where all children can thrive without fear of bias.

> **"I would want them to be free from discrimination. The gentleman said he wants them to grow up peacefully and calmly, to be good people, and to get an education. Because every father wants the best for their children. I want them to be away from all troubles. I want them to live a happy life, like the Turks. I want all the children to forget the days of war because they still remember them to this day."** (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

It has often been noted that children are reluctant to attend school due to discrimination and bullying.

"Children face discrimination, which causes them to withdraw and start to dislike school. One of my sons used to go two years ago, but while he was coming down the stairs, he was pushed because he was Syrian and fell down. He was seriously hurt; he got five stitches. But he says they didn't even take him to the hospital." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"The teacher told them, 'Don't play with the Syrians; Syrians should stay apart from Turks.' This was particularly directed at the children there, as there was a Syrian who spoke very good Turkish, and the teacher mistook him for a Turk. They said the teacher told them not to play with the Syrians."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

Migrants interviewed in Izmir expressed significant concern regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse directed at children, leading to their reluctance to send them to school. This apprehension intensifies when schools are located farther away, as parents fear for their children's safety while traveling alone. Such fears reflect the broader social context that impacts parents' decisions and highlights the urgent need for measures that ensure a safe educational environment for all children.

"We cannot allow our children to go anywhere without us because there is so much harassment and abuse here. That's why we are afraid, and we never let them go."
(Izmir, Female migrant parent)

They believe that government officials are generally not very helpful and treat them in a "very strict" manner. The strict behavior of the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) has been frequently mentioned. Although there are individuals who are kind, it is noted that the level of kindness varies significantly depending on the person.

"They don't want to help in any way."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"The staff's role there is very important. Sometimes they greet us warmly, and other times poorly. Some employees provide guidance, saying things like 'do this, and it will work out.' Others simply turn us away at the door." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

2.1.3. Behavioural barriers to schooling for migrant children

2.1.3.1. Administrative bottlenecks related to residential address and identity card proofs

The majority of the interviewed parents reported that they are unable to register their children for school due to "address verification" issues, meaning their children do not appear at a registered address. This problem is particularly prominent among migrants in Hatay, who have been affected by the earthquake and forced to relocate. However, similar problems regarding the inability to register for school due to not being listed as a resident have also been encountered in other cities like Istanbul.

"After the earthquake, I lived in Moksan Industrial Site. Our registration remained there. I have rented a house here and wanted to transfer my address; however, we couldn't complete the transfer due to the system being closed. Because some neighborhoods are not open for transfers, children cannot enroll in the school corresponding to their new address." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"I actually experienced this problem: I have been living in the same house for four years, but they have deleted my address. I am still in the same house, as you would expect. I went to the school to enroll my child and said I wanted to register them. They told me, 'No, we can't register because you don't have an address.' I explained that I hadn't changed my home. They said they couldn't take the registration until it was updated. I waited for 40 days for an appointment to come. After that, I was able to go and update my address, and only then could I register my daughter."
(Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

Parents who are not listed at their addresses have stated that they need to make an appointment with the PDMM to rectify the situation, but due to the long wait times for appointments (usually around 40 days), their children are at risk of missing that period. The lack of identification for immigrants and children, or having their identities deactivated, is also one of the biggest challenges faced in the school registration process.

"We couldn't register them for school because they don't have identification. In the meantime, my house burned down, and all my belongings were lost. Right now, no school is accepting my children. They won't go anywhere without their mother due to the harassment and abuse they've faced. This is why the children are not going to school. We don't even have a home; we are living in ruins." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

"I entered Türkiye through illegal means; I crossed the border illegally. I have Turkish relatives here. Neither I nor my children have identification." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"My neighbor traveled to Syria and returned. They have been in Türkiye for 3 years now. Their children are unable to attend school because they don't have identification. They've hired a lawyer, but..." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

One of the biggest problems regarding school registration is that migrants cannot enroll their children in the nearest school due to their address registration or availability of schools. Sending children to a distant school raises safety concerns. Additionally, transportation fees are high, and due to financial constraints, it is not considered safe for the children to walk that distance alone.

"We used to reside here. There is a Cumhuriyet Primary School nearby. The houses were destroyed here due to the earthquake, and we had to move to Reyhanlı. My registration appears in the system, but it's not updated. I registered my children in a school in Reyhanlı, and we lived there for a year and a half after the earthquake. We came here to update the address verification and obtained an appointment from the Provincial Migration Administration. The children are left without schooling here due to the address verification issue. I spoke with the school principal, but I was unable to enroll my sons in the fourth and tenth grades." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"One of the reasons we, as Syrian families, do not send our children to school is that transportation fees are very high. Rent is 12,000. They charge 1,000 for each student. Each family has about four children, which totals around 15,000 to 16,000. We can't find jobs, and our spouses are not working. We have no choice but to keep the children from going to school; we simply don't have the money. My spouse can't work because he is injured from the earthquake. I have to send my son to work. My son earns 3,000 a week. We collect that money to pay our rent at the end of the month. A father alone cannot sustain this large family." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

Updating identity and address is particularly problematic for individuals who have been forced to migrate from one city to another, often remaining unresolved due to administrative reasons. This issue has been notably observed among those who have migrated from Hatay to Izmir. Some individuals lost their identity documents and papers due to the earthquake in Hatay and, as a result, are left without identification and are unable to obtain new ones.

"My identity card is from Hatay. We came from the earthquake zone, and they are not accepting it. They are refusing to accept the registration. We also did not obtain a travel permit." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

"It is very difficult to access services here for those who are unregistered, without identification, or have an identification in another city." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

"They requested a travel permit. We were in the earthquake zone, and after the earthquake, we came to İzmir. We were supposed to regularly obtain a travel permit and update it, but since they haven't updated it, we cannot apply for relocation. For instance, my ID is from Hatay. They have gone to Hatay five times. It is currently closed, and the relocation process cannot be completed." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

"For instance, some individuals lost their IDs and all their documents because of the earthquake. What are they supposed to do? People lost their houses and everything they had." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

2.1.3.2. Children's reluctance to attend school

Interviews conducted with migrants reveal a significant reluctance among children to attend school. It is noteworthy that the factors leading to this reluctance are multifaceted.

2.1.3.2.1 Discrimination and Peer Bullying

A key factor contributing to children's reluctance to attend school is the discrimination and peer bullying they experience. Feelings of exclusion by other children, both in and around school, along with instances of physical and psychological bullying, create significant hesitance about returning to school. The situation is further exacerbated by language barriers, which hinder their ability to defend themselves or express their feelings regarding bullying and discrimination.

In some provinces (ie. Izmir), reports of gender-based violence, including cases of sexual abuse and harassment experienced by migrants, highlight a significant issue: these circumstances contribute to children's reluctance to attend school. The fear and trauma associated with such violence create barriers to educational participation, particularly for girls, who may feel particularly vulnerable in these environments. Addressing these concerns is essential for ensuring that all children feel safe and supported in their pursuit of education.

"Due to the harassment and abuse they have faced; the children refuse to go anywhere without their mothers. This is the reason they are not attending school." (Izmir, Female migrant parent)

It has been observed that some teachers hold prejudices against migrant children, leading to discriminatory practices in the classroom. For instance, certain teachers have instructed Turkish and migrant students not to interact, and migrant children are often seated at the back of the classroom next to those labeled as 'lazy.' These actions not only reinforce negative social norms but also hinder the integration and educational experiences of migrant children.

"She came home a few times with her hair disheveled. Everyone kept saying, 'You're Syrian, you're Syrian.' After that, my daughter came and said, 'I would rather die than go back to school, even if it means returning to Syria. I don't want to be humiliated here; I don't want to keep fighting." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"At the primary school in the AFAD (Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) camp, my child would return home every time he went to school, beaten up by Turkish children." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"The teacher says, 'Don't play with the Syrians; keep the Syrians and Turks apart.'" (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"According to R.[1], there are confrontations when they encounter each other on the street after school. We talked to the teacher. We changed classes. We made sure to keep our child away from the student who was always beating him. He dropped out of school and started working because of this. My other child is experiencing the same thing." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"We went to talk to the teacher because of the conflicts. The teachers didn't accept it in any way. As a result, my children dropped out of school and started working. The problem doesn't happen inside the school; it happens outside." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

It is particularly evident that migrant children with disabilities experience greater bullying at school and are more likely to discontinue their education. Besides, economic and mental burden of taking care of disabled children also effect schooling and school attendance of these children.

"He talks, but he can't concentrate, and his speech is hard to understand. We tried to enroll him in school in Narlıca four years ago. He attended the first week, but other children started teasing him about the way he talks, so he didn't want to go back." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"Exactly, there is a lot of uncertainty. Because they come up with a new decision every day. Living here is really difficult. They increase the rent every three months. How am I supposed to survive? The rent was 5,000 TL before, and it was already increased three months ago: now it's 7,000 TL. I have two children, one of whom has a disability. I'm the only one working in the house. I wish my salary were better, or that I had another source of income." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

Some children have been found to dislike traditional education but express a desire to attend vocational schools, though they have not been able to register for these schools.

1 Note: For confidentiality, all names have been indicated using initials only.

"My son doesn't like studying. I wanted to take him to vocational schools. We thought he could learn a trade, so we tried to take him there. While we were in Antalya, he wanted to work in what they call ironwork, like making doors and windows. He didn't attend school at all. I couldn't enroll him in vocational schools or any regular schools." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

Some children who are sent to school against their will have been found to skip classes and develop psychological issues.

"Right now, I have one son who is not attending school, named M.[2]. He says he used to attend second grade before. He never liked school; the other kids would hit him, and the teacher would get very angry with him. Afterward, I forced him to go, saying that he had no other option and that he had to study. Then one day, I found out that the teacher had called me and said that my child was almost going to throw himself out of the window. He was nearly committing suicide. After that, I sent him to a psychiatrist, and he received treatment for five months. That's why he's not going to school now."
(Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"He has gone through so many things that when I eventually drop him off at school, he only goes inside after I leave. After I drop him off, the other kids come home, but he refuses to enter the school. He only goes in when I send him, and then he immediately leaves after I'm gone. He just waits outside until the other kids come out. It seems like he doesn't want me to know that he isn't actually going into the school..." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

2.1.3.2.2 Language barrier

Most migrant children struggle at school due to not knowing the language. They struggle both to understand lessons and to build relationships with their peers. This decreases their self-confidence and weakens their motivation to attend school. Parents, too, face challenges as they do not speak Turkish, making it hard to communicate with teachers, express their concerns, or help their children with their studies. Despite these issues, it has been noted that migrant families prefer to send their children to mixed Turkish-Syrian schools, as they believe that attending schools with only migrants would hinder their adaptation to life here.

2 Note: For confidentiality, all names have been indicated using initials only.

"For example, my son is in the first grade. He has some complaints about his teacher at school because the teacher doesn't give emphasis to the Turkish language enough. In our neighborhood, everyone speaks Arabic. My child cannot manage to grasp Turkish at the moment because he doesn't understand the lessons. Consequently, I have visited the school several times, asking them to focus more on Turkish since we're struggling with the language barrier. Our children cannot speak Turkish, yet you're teaching in Turkish, and my children don't understand."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"They are unwilling because they can't fully understand the lessons since their limited proficiency in Turkish."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

It has been observed that Turkish courses organized by associations such as Child and Youth Center in İstanbul (ÇOGEM) are very beneficial for children in overcoming the language barrier.

2.1.3.2.3 Uncertainty and hopelessness concerning future outcomes

One of the key factors contributing to the reluctance of migrant children to attend school is their sense of hopelessness about the future. Many children believe that due to their status in Türkiye, even if they pursue an education, they will not be able to achieve anything significant, secure a position, or find a job. They feel they will face discrimination in terms of employment and job placement because they are migrants, and thus, they do not see the benefit of attending school.

"Exactly, peer bullying. My son is quite intelligent, but he says, 'Why should I bother studying here?'. He believes there's no future for him here. Yes, he goes, but he asks, 'Why should I tire myself?' I forced him to go yesterday." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"She went to the Provincial Immigration Office and said, 'They told me that they will not grant citizenship to my sister and brother-in-law for those of us studying in school moving forward'. Their current mindset is that even if we graduate, there won't be any job opportunities or job placements for us. So, what's the point of studying? To make matters worse, the staff at the Provincial Immigration Office are telling them that they

are essentially studying for nothing since they won't be getting citizenship. Those who do not receive citizenship won't have any possibility of assignments either."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"Now we are trying to deceive our children with empty hopes. We tell our children to study and that they will become teachers or doctors, but in reality, we are just fooling them. They don't really have such chances. We are actually playing with their dreams."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

2.1.3.3 Parents apprehensive about safety concerns

It has been observed that parents are increasingly anxious about their children's safety due to incidents of discrimination and peer bullying, which can escalate to physical violence, as well as cases of sexual harassment and abuse. These concerns are often rooted in prevailing social and gender norms that dictate acceptable behavior and contribute to a culture of fear. As a result, many parents choose to keep their children at home rather than risk sending them to school.

"Some families do not send their children to school to prevent anything from happening to them, but some children simply don't want to go anymore. They have become disinterested." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"What if they go and don't come back? They are killing children… Right now, the children are left alone at home; they don't go outside. For instance, if my children need something, I say I will get it; you stay at home, and I will take care of it." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

2.1.3.4. Economic constraints

Some parents have indicated that they are unable to send their children to school due to monetary reasons. The costs of school supplies and, especially, the lack of transportation fees for distant schools are among the biggest financial challenges. However, many parents believe that if the issues of identification and transportation can be resolved, the financial aspect can somehow be managed. Furthermore, due to economic difficulties and the necessity for additional income in the household, it has often been noted that children are compelled to work.

"He says it might be due to the economic situation because some people really don't have the means. For instance, children attend school, but they still don't have the financial resources, which is why they have to work."
(Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"Some families have only one working member, which is why they can't afford to send their children to school. There are quite a few expenses. They really pay us very little, and they don't easily provide insurance or anything like that. Not everyone can manage it." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"It could be like this; yes, children are working, and there are families with financial difficulties, as you mentioned.. That's why they make their children work.. But let's say a working child earns this much as a salary. If you said that if they went to school, we would pay them the same salary, absolutely no one would work like this; everyone would be in school." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"House rents are very high. Some family heads have health-related physical problems. Therefore, we had to send their sons to work because the heads of families couldn't work. If the situation continues like this, we will probably have to take my son out of university and have him work."
(Hatay, Female migrant parent)

Parents express deep concerns about their children's safety when schools are far from home, leading many to believe that school-provided transportation is the safest option. This concern applies to both female and male children, reflecting broader social and gender norms influencing parental decisions on education and child protection. With limited affordable transportation options, parents often prioritize their children's safety by keeping them at home rather than risking an unsafe commute.

For girls, however, these restrictions are even stricter. In families with limited resources or where safety is a concern, daughters are often kept at home, depriving them of educational opportunities. This preference to keep girls at home instead of school is intertwined with societal norms that undervalue girls' education and reinforce traditional gender roles.

This illustrates how the lack of safe and accessible transportation limits educational access, particularly for girls, increasing their vulnerability to child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM). Additionally, societal norms often favor employment for boys, while girls are perceived as more suited to household roles or kept at

home. Such dynamics significantly limit girls' potential for both educational and economic advancement and reinforce gender disparities.

By addressing these transportation and safety concerns, particularly for girls, programs can help ensure safe access to education, empowering all children and reducing their susceptibility to early marriage and other gendered risks.

"I especially enrolled them in a shuttle service. They could take regular buses, but I chose the shuttle so they could come home early. We worry about our sons returning home early as well. Even if they are boys if the distance is far, we are not in favor of sending them too far." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"I have a neighbor, and they don't want to send their daughter to school. They are worried because there is no transportation support; they fear something might happen to her on the way. They have concerns like that. We had several discussions with her father, emphasizing that the girl is very intelligent and should attend school. However, he insisted he wouldn't send her. Now, the girl is engaged." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

There is a clear observation that societal norms favor the employment of boys, often perceiving girls as unsuitable for work. This belief leads to girls being either kept at home or sent to school, reinforcing traditional gender roles that limit their opportunities for economic participation. Such dynamics reflect entrenched social and gender norms that prioritize male employment and restrict the potential of girls in both educational and professional spheres.

"We have our sons working. Girls can't do all kinds of jobs in our community. A girl is expected to go straight to school and can work as a teacher or a doctor. They believe she can't pursue other professions, like working in agriculture. Our daughters are usually smart, and we value that." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

It has been noted that, because there are fewer people (7-8 individuals) in the places where the children work compared to schools, they do not experience discrimination or peer bullying; in fact, they are able to become good friends with their coworkers.

"Since there are many students in school, they can form friendships at work where there are only about 10 or 7 people. However, they can't make friends in school because everyone is together. Sometimes, if they experience something at work, for example, they can easily leave that job. But schools are not the same; they can change jobs, but they cannot change schools." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

In the provinces affected by the earthquake, it has been observed that economic hardships are more severe, as people have lost their homes and jobs, forcing them to move to other cities. Additionally, some parents have sustained permanent physical injuries, making them unable to work, which has negatively impacted their children's school attendance.

"Before the earthquake, we were doing relatively well financially, but our financial situation has worsened significantly since the earthquake." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"I was a hairdresser before the earthquake. I was injured during the earthquake. I have five children: three sons and two daughters. My son was attending university during the earthquake. I was injured in the earthquake, and some of my children were also hurt. After the earthquake, some of my children couldn't attend school. Right now, only my son is in university. My daughter is supposed to be in high school, but she was injured during the earthquake and cannot sit properly." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

"My husband does not work because he was injured in the earthquake. I have to send my son to work. My son earns 3,000 lira a week. We save that money, and at the end of the month, we use it to pay our rent. The father cannot support this family alone because it's a large family." (Hatay, Female migrant parent)

2.1.4. Behavioural drivers that facilitate schooling for migrant children

Several factors have been identified as influencing the school attendance of migrant children, with family or parental support emerging as the most critical behavioural driver. In addition, the role of associations working with refugees, teachers, and the child's character has been shown to have a significant impact on schooling. It has also been determined that Imam Hatip schools and Quran courses play a role in helping children integrate into society and ensuring children's continued education.

2.1.4.1. Parental support and parental characteristics

It has been observed that supportive, attentive, and encouraging parents play a significant positive role in the schooling of migrant children. These parents make efforts at home to ensure their children's academic success, occasionally studying subjects like "Turkish" together. They also enroll their children in online courses such as English. It has been noted that some homes even have a separate study area or a small library for the child. Additionally, it has been observed that these parents are also open to learning themselves.

"I think we will circle back to the family. Everything begins there. For example, if my family hadn't encouraged me to pursue my education since my childhood, I wouldn't have become the woman I am now. Everything truly starts with the family." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"Every child wants to watch cartoons. However, mine were in English so I could benefit from them. When we came to Türkiye, I actually had a program that required me to study Turkish, and Arabic, and also work on my English once a week." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"After that, my father was trying to provide me with educational opportunities that would contribute both to my personal development and to my Muslim identity. Of course, these trainings took place at home for me. I had my own corner at home; in fact, there was a study room. Additionally, we had a whiteboard at home." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"He always says, 'No matter what you want, I'm here to support you. I will stand by you until you achieve your goals.' My mother says the same thing." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"I completed the A1 level here; I was registered in a Turkish course. During the COVID-19 lockdown, I stayed home and tried to learn Turkish with my children. The teacher would come to our house, and I learned from my children's instructor." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It has been noted that these parents take a multifaceted approach to raising their children, also attempting to enroll their children in sports such as swimming and taekwondo.

"When I moved up to high school, my father signed me up for an English course before I started 7th grade and also ensured I learned how to swim. The swimming course was quite far from our home at that time. Going in the morning was more cost-effective, as evening sessions were more expensive. He would wake up at 6 AM and wait for me for an hour, regardless of whether it was summer or winter. He took me to swimming lessons for a year until I learned how to swim." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

It has been noted that families offer a type of psychological support to their children during times of hopelessness.

"The Provincial Migration Administration said that they will not grant citizenship to my sister and brother-in-law for those of us who are studying at school from now on. That's what they said. Their mindset now is that even if we graduate, we won't have any job opportunities or assignments. We are providing psycho-social support to my sister and brother-in-law, advising them to complete their education, become self-sufficient, finish their studies, and obtain their diplomas. The future is unpredictable. My sister is very intelligent and places a high value on education. After all, she is an engineer." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It has been noted that parents foster close relationships with school administration and teachers, actively monitoring their children's educational experiences. This engagement reflects social norms that value parental involvement in education, as these parents do not hesitate to voice their concerns to teachers and administrators when needed. Such vigilance underscores the expectation within the community that parents should advocate for their children's well-being and academic progress, reinforcing the importance of active participation in the educational process.

"I have been there once or twice, and I spoke with them (the school administration). But I regularly check on their situation. They always tell me that everything is fine, no issues. We have family support, and we also support our children who go to school. Of course, our expectation is to see our child in university; that's our goal. We have no worries; we send them to school with confidence. We live with the dream of them attending university." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It is observed that these parents often either have received an education themselves or have actively sought self-education, motivated by the hope that their children can achieve what they could not be due to the war in Syria. This reflects a social norm that values education as a key to personal and societal advancement. Even those without formal education recognize the importance of schooling as a powerful tool for transforming their children's futures. They believe that education can lead to significant changes, not just in terms of career opportunities, but also in fostering awareness and independence, reinforcing the community's expectation that education is essential for empowerment and growth.

"But everyone emphasizes the importance of education. They say, 'You should study, even if you're a girl, because in the end, the only thing that will save you is your education.' Money may not even be a factor. In the future, despite studying, you might still not find a job, or your financial situation could still be bad. At least your mindset will change, and you will become a better person. The more you study, the better you develop yourself. My family is actually like that too. For instance, my mother wouldn't let me waste a year by making me work at home. Then I started school." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"My dream was to go to university as well. But then the war broke out, and I couldn't go. We came here, and now my children are in high school, but their lives will be just like mine. My children won't be able to go to university either." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"I want them to study. I want them to go to university here, but my children say that they cannot have a future here. Sometimes I sit alone and wonder whether my children's future is here, whether they will be able to sustain their lives here, and I dream about it." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"Yes, since our father is a teacher and educator, we, as children, have a positive attitude toward education." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It has been observed that these parents are willing to challenge traditional norms and even confront their own parents in the pursuit of their daughters' education. Some have made the significant decision to relocate to more distant areas to escape familial and community pressures that oppose female education. This reflects a 'new' social norm that prioritizes educational opportunities for girls, signaling a shift in attitudes towards gender roles and the value placed on women's empowerment within their communities.

"My grandfather was really upset. He said, 'Why are you sending your daughter to school? You're in Istanbul and sending her to Uşak.' My sister completed her undergraduate degree in Uşak and then finished her master's in Ankara. My father was willing to take that risk. He said, 'Don't talk to me, but my daughter needs to be educated.' My father went through a lot for us and didn't pay attention to what other people said." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"But regarding where we live, my father preferred a place where there are not many Syrians. We don't have many relatives, and we don't need to associate with many people. My father always aims for this; we have our own goals and don't want to be affected by the mistakes of others." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"I value my daughter; I guide her. I instill in her the importance of education. I send her to school with confidence. I teach her that education is the most important weapon. If she has an education, she will be stronger; that's what I encourage her to do—go to school." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It has been observed that the education of girls is increasingly prioritized over that of boys, leading to occasional conflicts with parents or their surroundings. This shift in social norms reflects a growing recognition of the importance of female education. Notably, non-working mothers often refrain from assigning household chores to their daughters who attend school, choosing instead to encourage them to concentrate on their studies at home. This behaviour underscores a changing perspective within the community that values academic achievement for girls, reinforcing the idea that education is a critical pathway to empowerment and success.

"Moreover, there's a strong mother who has taken on all the responsibilities herself. I remember that during times when I had exams, my mother would pray; even that prayer was enough. My mother would handle all the chores—cooking, laundry, everything—just because I had an exam." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

It has been observed that, at times, fathers, mothers, or older siblings willingly sacrifice their own education and work

opportunities to ensure that younger children in the family can attend school. This behaviour reflects a prevailing social norm that emphasizes the importance of education for the younger generation, often prioritizing it over individual aspirations. Such sacrifices illustrate a collective commitment to fostering educational opportunities within the family, highlighting the value placed on education as a mean to improve future prospects for all members.

"My mother is 54 years old now and works in the fields. She works to ensure that my siblings can go to school; she goes to the fields to work. At her age, she should normally be at home, but she goes to the fields. She especially wants her children to have a profession and to be educated. My mother aims to meet their educational needs by working in the fields. She wants them to gain self-confidence and have the freedom to choose the field they want by studying and taking control of their own lives."
(Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"But still, we are trying to fulfill the dreams of my older brothers, who have given up on their education. At the same time, they did not neglect their own personal development either. They needed to work because my father was not able to support us."
(Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"Well, as I said, our family loves education. Since my childhood, I've thought, why would I take my daughter out of school to make her work? My father says, 'I can work now. I'm in a position to provide you with financial support. So don't miss this opportunity; go and study.' For example, my younger brother is in 10th grade now. Last summer, my father didn't make him work either. We actually need the money; sometimes we have debts, especially with the recent economic difficulties. But still, he didn't make him work. He said, 'Go find a course, learn to swim, develop yourself."
(Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

2.1.4.2. The child's characteristics: Emotionally resilient and prepared children

Interviews revealed that the character of children, plays a significant role in success stories. It has been noted that these success stories are supported by children who do not easily give up, and have a strong ability to face challenges, focus on the positive instead of the negative, and demonstrate a strong work ethic.

"I used to say, 'I came out of war, and I have achieved so much; I learned Turkish.' So, whenever I face difficulties, I remind myself that I can overcome them too. I also think about what my family does for me. That's why, even when my motivation is low, I can regain it. In the end, I have one desire: to reach my goals. I don't have anything else; this is what I will pursue, and I will achieve it."
(Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

It has been observed that these children encounter negative experiences such as discrimination and peer bullying both in their surroundings and at school. Nevertheless, their strong coping mechanisms enable them to deal with these challenges more effectively.

"In fact, a good neighbour helps us overlook the bad neighbours. For example, we have a good neighbour, while the other is not so good; she is actually the daughter-in-law. We focus on the mother-in-law and not on the daughter-in-law. We don't see her."
(Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

The most significant factor aiding children in coping with difficulties is their ability to overcome the language barrier. Many successful children have addressed this challenge early on, either by working at home or attending language courses, which enhances their ability to express themselves. This proficiency not only allows them to navigate challenges more effectively but also boosts their self-confidence and academic success. Notably, it reflects a social norm within families that values the importance of learning Turkish, demonstrating a collective commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to succeed in their studies and integrate into their community. This prioritization highlights a growing recognition of education as a key factor for empowerment and future opportunities for all children.

"As I said, my role as a father is to protect my children. The best way to do this is to culturally develop and raise their awareness while also guiding their education. For this reason, I created a plan and set a roadmap

for myself. The first step was to learn Turkish because we came to Türkiye and are living here. Learning Turkish was more of a priority than Arabic." (Istanbul, Male migrant father)

"Some people indeed struggled with the language. For instance, we went through that phase; we faced difficulties, but knowing that we could overcome them, we persisted. However, some could not tolerate it. They thought, 'I don't know Turkish, so why should I transition to a Turkish school?' and dropped out to find other jobs. Some don't enjoy it and prefer to work instead. They often give up rather quickly." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"For instance, if something happens, like experiencing racism or some other issue, they may not be able to express themselves. However, because we can express ourselves, we have made friends; we helped them, and they see us as better people, which brings us closer together." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

2.1.4.3. Support from non-governmental organizations

It has been observed that non-governmental organizations (such as Hayata Destek, ÇOGEM, Refugee Association, etc.) providing services to migrants in the region make significant contributions to both the enrollment and continued attendance of children in school.

One of the most significant contributions of these non-governmental organizations has been helping children overcome language barriers by offering Turkish language courses. In addition, through mentoring, tutoring, and psycho-social support, they have helped strengthen children emotionally. It has been observed that children and youth who frequently visit these organizations build connections with those there, and these connections not only provide various forms of support in their future lives but also ease their integration into society. Besides integration, it has been noted that children who have relationships with these organizations are better able to cope with discrimination.

"Certainly, our successes are partly due to our participation in this organization (Refugee Association). To be honest, it has been beneficial for my personal development, and I actually started my first journey to university here two years ago." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"We have Turkish courses available here, but they are primarily for adults, which can be challenging. They are held twice a week, which is not enough. Some individuals live far away and cannot make it here, which poses another problem. For instance, if I were to hire a teacher and pay a thousand lira for transportation, I would prefer to give that money to the teacher instead. This way, the teacher could come to my home and teach my child Turkish. In this sense, Hayata Destek offers substantial assistance, whether through mentors or school supplies." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"Our primary request to the Hayata Destek Association is to enhance the activities they offer for children. They play a crucial role in turning this negative environment into a positive one, offering support ranging from stationery supplies to psychosocial assistance." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"Yes, that person is one of the key figures at the institution here (Refugees Association). At first, I was hesitant, thinking maybe they wouldn't help. Then, two days ago, I passed by their office and thought I'd stop in. They were very attentive on this matter. Three or four days later, he called me and told me that he had found a better dormitory and a better scholarship for me. He also said he would help further. Without me even asking, he donated to support my university preparations. He also introduced me to the International Students Association, where I can volunteer and focus on my personal development." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"Actually, children learn the most outside. It works well alongside school. My children attend courses at ÇOGEM. The staff had a conversation with my son, asking him why he wasn't going to school and telling him that he should. He responded that he didn't want to because he had experienced certain things. They told him, 'Okay, then you can go there; you will learn Turkish and other subjects as well.' He agreed and said he would go." (Istanbul, Male migrant success story)

The stationery assistance provided to economically disadvantaged families, particularly those with multiple children, appears to have been beneficial.

"As Syrians, we experience financial difficulties. We come to the Hayata Destek Association to request stationery support. Here, we have mentor friends available two days a week. When the teachers assign homework, and our daughters are unable to complete it, the staff at Hayata Destek help them with their assignments. Hayata Destek also provides stationery support. I have four children, and I cannot provide stationery for all of them; I don't have that capability." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

The psychosocial support provided to migrant children in the earthquake-affected regions appears to have been very effective.

"Right after the earthquake, my children needed psychosocial support, and so did we. We came to the Hayata Destek Association. We experienced fear and anxiety, wondering if we would survive, especially with the aftershocks. Thus, we went through those worries. The Hayata Destek Association provided us with psychosocial support, and thanks to them, we began to look towards the future with confidence." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

It has been observed that children who receive support from non-governmental organizations do not sever their ties with the association in the future and continue to volunteer as mentors or teachers (in subjects like English, Turkish, sports, etc.). It is believed that their involvement in these activities contributes significantly to their resumes and future career success. It has also been noted that these contributions and connections continue even when young people move to different cities for university education.

"I worked both as a volunteer English teacher and as a taekwondo coach here, but all of it was on a volunteer basis." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

It has also been mentioned that the International Student Admission Examination (YÖS) courses provided by the associations are very beneficial for students preparing to enter university.

2.1.4.4. The effects of Imam Hatip schools

It has been noted that Imam Hatip schools are perceived to positively impact the education of migrant children and adolescents. Parents and students feel that these schools experience less discrimination and peer bullying. Additionally, it has been commonly reported that teachers at Imam Hatip schools are more empathetic and attentive, demonstrating less discrimination than teachers in other educational institutions.

"Imam Hatip schools are quite good. Everyone there is female. There is no discrimination, and the environment is clean, with a high standard of education." (Hatay, Female migrant success story)

"The education at Imam Hatip is excellent. There is no discrimination there; everyone is treated equally. The education they provide is very good."
(Hatay, Female migrant success story)

""I still didn't understand, as I had no idea about schools like Anatolian, Imam Hatip, or vocational schools. But after enrolling in that school, about two years later, I realized that it was exactly the type of high school I had always wanted to attend. That's when I started to understand. Otherwise, I didn't know either. But I'm very happy that I studied at Imam Hatip."
(Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"Imam Hatip might be better option for many Arab and Syrian students because I can say there is less racism there. This is largely due to the discipline imposed by the teachers. For instance, the teachers came and spoke. The class teacher addressed us strictly and seriously, holding the discipline papers in hand, saying, 'I could write you up right now. I don't want to jeopardize your future.' The administration supported this as well. So, the administration was helpful in this matter. Now, when we see our teachers, we are very happy." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

The Arabic language of the Quran plays a significant role in children's success and helps them avoid feelings of foreignness. Their knowledge of Arabic also helps in building relationships and socializing with their peers. Occasionally, children at school seek the help of immigrant children regarding Arabic, which fosters a sense of community among them.

“Because it is in Arabic there, they can communicate more easily and effectively. They know the answers whenever they are asked any questions related to the Quran.”

(Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

"They are successful because their native language is Arabic, and the Turks do not know it well. The Turkish students there do indeed need their assistance. Syrian students tend to make more friends due to their proficiency in Arabic." (Istanbul, Male migrant parent)

Besides, Imam Hatip schools are considered to be morally closer to the 'Muslim culture' in which immigrants have been raised compared to other schools, and it is believed that this contributes to the adaptation of children and young people.

"They used to say things like, 'Don't go to Imam Hatip; you'll be unsuccessful'. I didn't comprehend this because I was completely unaware of concepts like Anatolia, Imam Hatip, or vocational schools. Yet, after I enrolled in that school, two years later, I realized that it was indeed the high school I had always wanted to be in. That's when I began to understand. Otherwise, I didn't know either. But I am very happy that I studied at Imam Hatip." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

"Normal high school conflicts with my Muslim culture. For instance, there were discussions about alcohol, implying that the family drinks. There were also mentions of smoking and inappropriate dressing. Of course, everyone has their own opinions, but I chose not to participate." (Istanbul, Female migrant success story)

2.2. Behavioural barriers and drivers to the schooling of children of host community

2.2.1. What do parents want most for their children?

Parents residing in the container city of Kahramanmaraş often express a strong desire to raise their children in a "morally cleaner" environment, reflecting social norms that prioritize moral values and safety in child-rearing. This concern is particularly pronounced for families with adolescent daughters, who may feel pressured to restrict their daughters' movements due to perceived negative influences in their surroundings. Additionally, the challenges of living in close quarters within a container can exacerbate difficulties in relationships with neighbours, highlighting how these social and gender norms shape parenting practices and community interactions. The desire for a safe and supportive environment underscores the complexities of raising children under such conditions, where societal expectations and the realities of their living situation intersect.

"We are now in the Koç container here; I just arrived. I previously worked and lived in the airport container city. It feels like the community's morals and values are slipping away. It seems like people's mental states have deteriorated." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"Nobody speaks Turkish here; there is no one who speaks it. Everyone is using different dialects. The children, starting from the age of 3 or 5, are exposed to cursing and all sorts of things. I didn't want to expose my children to such a community. If I had the opportunity, I wouldn't keep them here."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

One of the parents' greatest wishes for their children is for them to receive an education and have a profession. They often dream of their children becoming doctors, teachers, police officers, lawyers, engineers, and similar professions.

"I want him to become a doctor; I want her to be a teacher. But they have to study to achieve that. If they don't study, they won't succeed." (Maraş, Female local resident)
"I want them to attend school. I want them to become teachers or doctors. But the children don't have the motivation."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.2. What does school and education mean for host community parents?

For the local community, school and education mainly represent the opportunity to acquire a profession, like becoming a doctor or an engineer.

"When I think of school, I imagine beautiful things, like a bright future for the children, with each of them having a profession. I wish the same for my other children. Two of them graduated from high school, while the other two dropped out of middle school."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

For parents, school signifies not only acquiring a profession and securing a future, but also the opportunity for children to develop themselves, understand life, and fulfill the dreams that their parents could not achieve.

"I believe that my children complete what I couldn't reach through the education they receive at school. Since we didn't have the chance to study, I can say that we received that education together with our children. They acquired the skills I couldn't achieve, and they have developed themselves. I, too, have grown alongside them." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"When I think of school, everything comes to mind. I live with dreams. I didn't go to school, but I hope my children will." (Maraş, Female local resident)

Some parents noted a prevailing negative perception within their community regarding children's education, reflecting a social norm that undervalues the importance and purpose of schooling. This mindset creates a prejudice that education is seen as futile, making it challenging for parents who recognize its value. Additionally, these parents are actively working to counter this mindset, highlighting their determination to advocate for their children's educational opportunities despite societal pressures. This situation may be further complicated by gender norms, as girls' education is often devalued in many communities, adding another layer to the parents' struggle to promote the importance of education for all their children.

"When I do this, sometimes those who are not interested in education say to me, 'Are you trying to make these kids into professors? They should just get a job in a factory and earn a living. Most educated people are currently useless.' I say, 'Look, not everyone who studies will necessarily get a job. However, at the very least, that child has experienced a university setting and interacted with professors. They've learned what things are and what they signify. I tell them, even if they end up as a street vendor, they should at least be a university graduate." (Kahramanmaraş, Female local resident)

For mothers who were unable to pursue their own education, school symbolizes the hope that their daughters can achieve what they could not, enabling them to "study and stand on their own feet." This aspiration reflects a social norm that associates education with independence and self-sufficiency. The belief that children should be able to "stand on their own feet" and "not need anyone" is often deeply intertwined with the value placed on education, reinforcing the idea that schooling is a pathway to empowerment. Additionally, these norms may carry gendered implications, as mothers may particularly emphasize the importance of education for their daughters in order to challenge traditional expectations and foster greater opportunities for future generations.

"Honestly, a lot of things come to my mind, but as I said, I want my daughters to study and stand on their own feet." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"I hope they will go to school so that they can stand on their own feet and not be dependent on anyone." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"Speaking of school... I wasn't able to go; my family didn't allow it. I want my children to have the opportunity to get an education. Education is a beautiful thing." (Maraş, Female local resident)

It has been noted that the local parents have a strong desire for learning and a willingness to pursue education themselves. They take pride in learning from their children who attend school and express interest in educational opportunities from external sources. This reflects a positive social norm that values lifelong learning and highlights a community culture where education is seen as beneficial not just for children, but for parents as well. Such attitudes contribute to a collective aspiration for knowledge and self-improvement within the community.

"When my son was studying through video lessons, I would ask him what certain movements meant when he was demonstrating the signs for the hearing impaired. I learned a lot from him, from my child who is studying child development. While he was searching for answers to his questions during class, I also learned along with him about those topics." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"I wasn't able to go to school. Back in my time, we only went to school until the 5th grade. I feel like I studied elementary school along with my children. I went to school with them. However, recently I was working at AFAD, but I lost my job. Back then, many of my friends who were quite older were attending high school or middle school. I wanted to enroll, but there were no spots left. Currently hope to obtain my middle school diploma if I can." (Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.3. Behavioural barriers to schooling for children of host community

2.2.3.1. Reluctance of children

Most parents interviewed in Kahramanmaraş indicated that their children are reluctant to attend school. It has been observed that this reluctance increases with age and has intensified after the pandemic.

"I have two kids; one is two years old, and the other is nine. The nine-year-old doesn't want to go to school very much; we have to force him to go." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"He doesn't go, and it's causing issues. He doesn't do his homework. I keep talking to him, but nothing changes; he doesn't do anything." (Maraş, Female local resident)

Some parents have reported that their children are facing bullying at school, instilling a fear of attendance. This situation is further complicated by the emergence of gang formations within schools, where stronger groups target those perceived as weaker. These behavioral patterns not only create a hostile environment but also reflect underlying social norms that condone aggression and peer victimization. Additionally, gender norms can influence the dynamics of bullying, as boys may feel pressured to adopt aggressive behaviors to assert dominance, while girls may be targeted differently based on societal expectations of femininity. This interplay of social and gender norms contributes to an environment where peer bullying is prevalent, making it crucial to address these issues comprehensively. Fostering a culture of respect and inclusion can help mitigate these behaviors, ultimately encouraging safer school environments that promote attendance and well-being for all students.

"There is extreme jealousy. Excuse me, but it's like a gang. For instance, let's say it's a group. Then, they exert pressure on those who are weaker." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"That's why we changed her school. There was a fight again; it was quite a big one. My daughter was really beaten up. The ones who formed that gang were five or six people. After changing her school, my daughter didn't want to go anymore."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

The children's reluctance to go to school is significantly influenced by their feelings of hopelessness regarding the future, believing that even if they study, it won't lead to anything, and that they won't be able to find jobs or earn money.

They withdrew from the classes. Many children are not pursuing education because of this. They think, 'Why should I study? What will it lead to?' Since they don't know what will happen tomorrow, many children have lost their desire to learn." (Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.3.2. Economic constraints

Economic difficulties and unemployment represent significant barriers to sending children to school. This challenge is particularly intensified in families with multiple children. It has also been observed that living in an earthquake zone exacerbates these financial challenges. Parents have expressed their concerns mainly about not being able to afford clothing such as tracksuits, shoes, lunch bags, and transportation fees for their children. Especially when enrollment in nearby schools is not possible, the high transportation costs become a burden for parents.

"In my opinion, financial factors play a major role in whether children go to school or not. Families with good financial standing can easily send their kids to school because they are in a different environment, so to speak. But those with lower incomes are at a disadvantage. I observe this. Whether it's in terms of clothing, lunch bags, or transportation to and from school, I know, for example, that many children have to walk to school." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"The economic situation is a bit challenging. My ex-husband is a tailor, but he doesn't have any insurance. As you know, tailoring work is only available when there is a demand; if there isn't, nothing gets done. While I was working, I was able to provide quite a bit of support to the girls. Even now, I want to help them, but I can't because I'm no longer employed. Supporting the education of three daughters is quite a challenge." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"So, most people here are facing economic difficulties. I'm not living in a rented place right now; I'm staying in a container, but we still encounter other problems." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"There are school expenses... And also, my daughter wants a tracksuit and shoes. There's quite a bit of pressure in that regard." (Maraş, Female local resident)

Most parents have been observed to desire to work in 'heavy labour' jobs for the sake of their children's education, as they do not want their children to have to work. Nonetheless, they struggle to find jobs in the region.

"Right now, the children cannot work; they must focus on their education. Of course, we need to contribute to their education as well. Just so you know, I worked in the earthquake zone for a year and a half. Thank God, I never felt resentful. But if anything happens again, I will work again. I am looking for a job, but finding one that suits me is quite challenging." (Maraş, Female local resident)

However, it has been observed that some adolescents are forced to complete high school through external programs due to financial difficulties.

"Her daughter has to work. She is 18 years old and has finished high school, but there are no opportunities. She is pursuing her studies externally." (Maraş, Female local resident)

It has been observed that the situation of mothers who are divorced and raising their children alone, as well as mothers living with husbands who have taken additional fellow wives, is even more difficult in economic terms.

"I currently don't have a job and no income. Of course, my daughters have many needs because they all go to school separately. They take two buses. Their father doesn't have a job either. I'm separated from my husband, but there's another woman living in the house. So, I don't have any support. As I mentioned, I used to work and was managing on my own; I was also helping them. As I said, my daughters have a lot of needs."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.3.3. Prevalent Attitudes Towards Girls' Education in the Community

Parents interviewed generally express strong support for their daughters' education. However, they face significant societal pressure, as prevailing norms in their communities often favor early marriage for girls instead. This reflects a gender norm that prioritizes traditional roles over educational aspirations. Notably, girls who are perceived as struggling academically are particularly vulnerable, as they are more likely to be withdrawn from school and married off. This situation underscores the tension between parents' desires for their daughters' educational advancement and the broader societal expectations that devalue female education (as the second quotation below, reflecting harmful discourses towards girls empowerment and equality, present evidently), highlighting the urgent need for cultural shifts that empower girls to pursue their education without the threat of early marriage.

"Their father wants his daughters to be educated; that's his aim. He says he will do whatever it takes to ensure they get an education. That's our goal. He insists that they should just focus on studying. At the very least, they should have a profession. But I think there are families in the community who can't afford to educate their daughters and think it's unnecessary for girls to go to school, believing they should just stay at home."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

"They say, 'Since you're not going to study, you'll find a match; we'll get you married too'. Some say such things. If a girl does not study, the end result is often marriage, whether the partner is older or younger. Some girls, during school, are deceived; they find excuses and run away. There are even those who are already married, but still go to school and do that. But, as I said, may God protect them from falling into bad situations and protect them from bad people."
(Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.3.4. "Schools are unsafe!"

The interviewed parents voiced significant concerns about the safety of schools, citing issues such as peer bullying and gang formation. This apprehension extends to the container city and its surrounding areas, where the environment feels similarly threatening. These concerns reflect broader behavioural patterns that normalize aggression among peers and perpetuate fear within educational settings. Moreover, the desire among parents to relocate to safer environments, often abroad, underscores a social norm that prioritizes children's safety and well-being above all else. This aspiration also highlights the influence of gender norms, as parents may feel an added urgency to protect their daughters from potential vulnerabilities associated with unsafe school environments. Ultimately, these findings illustrate the pressing need for communities to address the root causes of bullying and violence in schools, fostering a safer educational space where all children can thrive.

"I wonder if I should seek asylum in another place, in another country. The children don't act like children, and the adults don't behave like adults. It feels like no one knows what they are doing. It's a very different environment. I mean no offense to those here, so please don't take it personally." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"No, children are innocent and pure, I believe. A child grows up based on how they are treated. There is no malice or lies in a child. I feel like I'm trapped here. My children and I are stuck inside this container..." (Maraş, Female local resident)

Particularly parents who have not been able to register their children at a nearby school do not consider it safe for their children to distant schools "in the early morning darkness".

"Exactly, in the winter, we have to wake up very early in the morning, and it gets quite dark in the evening when we get off the bus. The buses are filled to capacity. I think transportation will be quite an issue." (Maraş, Female local resident)

2.2.4. Behavioural drivers that facilitate schooling for children of host community

Various factors influence the school attendance and continuation of children among the local community interviewed in Maraş, similar to those affecting migrant children.

One of these factors is the child's or adolescent's determination and resilience. Despite various adverse conditions (such as health of the mother who cannot manage household tasks/chores or economic hardships), they are observed to want to continue their education and even set goals for themselves.

"Right now, she says, 'My goal is to study and achieve something, to stand on my own feet.' She seems eager to pursue her education at the moment. I mean, she is determined to put in the effort and pursue that goal. She doesn't have a mindset of wanting to avoid work; she is driven." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"She expresses, 'I don't want to end up like my father or like you. Currently, I have very high aspirations. I want to accomplish at least something.' The middle child aspires to be a nurse, leaning towards the health field, while the youngest aims to become a police officer." (Maraş, Female local resident)

In addition, the willingness and determination of parents regarding their children's education are crucial factors. It has been noted that fathers often hesitate to reduce their work hours or stop working altogether to support their children's educational needs. This reluctance reflects behavioural patterns where economic stability is prioritized, potentially limiting the time and resources they can dedicate to their children's schooling. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating supportive strategies that encourage parental involvement in education without compromising financial security.

"I don't have it at home, but because their father wants his daughters to study, that's the direction of his goal. He insists, 'I will make sure they get an education, no matter what.' That's our goal. At the very least, he wants them to have a profession." (Maraş, Female local resident)

"No, I've never worked; I'm a housewife. Also, I have health problems, so it's not possible for me to work. That's why their father worked to provide for the children's education." (Maraş, Female local resident)

Strong relationships with teachers and the school administration, as well as support from the teachers and the principal, facilitate the process.

"For me, the most important thing is the relationship between the family and the teacher. When they build that connection, the child is guided both by the teacher and by the parent, and it all turns out well..." (Maraş, Female local resident)

03

Conclusion and actionable recommendations

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3. CONCLUSION AND ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Before presenting specific conclusions and recommendations for migrant and host communities, intersection between two communities is presented here briefly.

It has been observed that both migrants and the host community are willing to educate their children. For both groups of parents, education represents not only the fulfillment of dreams they could not achieve themselves but also a means for their children to acquire a profession and stand on their own feet.

Reluctance to attend school due to peer bullying is evident in both groups. For migrants, peer bullying is associated with discrimination, whereas among the local population, it appears as gang formation in schools, which causes children to lose interest in school. Additionally, both groups have a strong belief and sense of hopelessness, indicating that education in Turkey will not lead to meaningful change and that earning money as soon as possible would be better. This sentiment contributes to the reluctance of children in both groups towards school.

Economic difficulties, along with increased unemployment due to the earthquake, pose barriers to education for both groups. However, the low wages offered to Syrian migrants further complicate their situation.

The local community, especially those residing in containers, shares security concerns similar to those of migrants and perceives schools and their environment as unsafe.

There is a greater inclination among the host community to voice their reluctance to send girls to school.

For migrants, language and identity/address serve as significant barriers to education, while for the host community, economic conditions and security are more prominent concerns.

When examining the triggers, both groups share a common fundamental trigger: parental support and involvement, along with the child's resilience. However, it is evident that migrants benefit from greater civil society support, with parents being more supportive and open to learning, exhibiting a significant level of sacrifice.

Prejudices regarding the education of girls are among the social pressures faced by both groups. However, there is a perceived benefit in providing education and training related to the schooling of girls to the host community.

It is frequently observed in both groups that boys prefer to start working rather than continuing their education. This tendency also contributes to improving the family's financial situation.

3.1. Migrant children

To address the multifaceted barriers to education for migrant children, actionable recommendations should focus on enhancing awareness, building resilience, and creating supportive environments while considering the behavioural, social, and gender norms at play.

Implement Awareness Programmes: Organize seminars and workshops through non-governmental organizations that focus on raising awareness about discrimination, peer bullying, and coping strategies for both parents and children. These programmes should not only inform and educate families about their rights and available resources but also empower children to build resilience and self-advocacy skills.

Encourage Parental Involvement: Foster a culture of parental support and involvement in education by providing resources and training for parents. Programmes should highlight the importance of education in shaping children's futures, encouraging parents to actively engage in their children's schooling and combat feelings of hopelessness.

Support Emotional Resilience: Implement programmes that focus on building emotional resilience among children, helping them develop coping strategies for dealing with bullying and discrimination. This could involve peer support groups, mentorship programmes, or counseling services that create a safe space for children to share their experiences.

Promote Positive Gender Norms: Recognize the economic pressures that lead families to have boys work at an early age and address these through community discussions that emphasize the value of education for all children, regardless of gender, promoting positive gender norms through appropriate methods and channels. Engage communities in discussions about the value of education for all children, regardless of gender. This can shift perceptions and promote equal opportunities for girls, countering economic pressures that lead to early work for boys.

Enhance Language Support: Expand Turkish language courses offered by NGOs and the Ministry of National Education (MEB) to help migrant children overcome language barriers. Proficiency in Turkish will enable them to engage more fully in their education, defend themselves against discrimination, and enhance their overall academic performance.

Promote Inclusive Educational Settings: Strengthen support for Imam Hatip schools that are perceived by migrants to offer a culturally compatible and welcoming environment for their children. These schools can serve as safe spaces that minimize discrimination and facilitate social bonding among

peers, encouraging higher enrollment and retention rates. Similarly, children with disabilities need an inclusive educational environment for them to be able to minimize exclusion they experience. Ensure that inclusiveness in broader sense is a feature of school system.

Facilitate Registration and Enrollment: Streamline the enrollment process for migrant children, reducing bureaucratic/administrative obstacles such as identification issues and residency registration. Local authorities should collaborate with educational institutions to create more accessible pathways for migrant families, ensuring they can enroll their children in nearby schools.

Address Economic Barriers: Develop initiatives to subsidize transportation costs for migrant families, making school buses more affordable and alleviating parents' fears about sending their children to distant schools. This could include partnerships with local governments or community organizations to provide financial assistance.

By adopting a multi-layered and holistic approach based on a social-ecological understanding of migrants' experiences in Turkey that incorporates these recommendations, we can create an environment where migrant children feel safe, supported, and motivated to pursue their education, ultimately leading to improved schooling rates and better outcomes for their future.

3.2. Children of the host community

To effectively address the barriers to education faced by children in the local community, actionable recommendations should focus on behavioral, social, and gender norms. These may include the following:

Establish Community Mobilisation Campaigns: Launch campaigns that highlight the long-term benefits of education, using success stories from local role models to counteract pessimism about educational outcomes. These campaigns should target both parents and children to shift perceptions and reinforce the idea that education is a pathway to a better future, especially for girls. Different than the migrant communities, the host communities lack and need support from civil society organization on various issues including but not limited to such campaigns.

Promote Positive Gender Norms:. Engage communities in discussions about the value of education for all children, regardless of gender and especially for girls who could be subject to CEFM. Recognizing the economic pressures that force families to have their children work at an early age, employ methods to mobilize communities for demanding social support for fulfilling children's education rights, for both girls and boys.

Facilitate Parental Engagement Workshops: Organize workshops to educate parents about the importance of their involvement in their children's education. Encourage them to actively support their children's academic pursuits and address the barriers that may hinder schooling, fostering a culture that values education.

Address Peer Bullying and Gang Issues: Collaborate with schools to implement anti-bullying programmes and conflict resolution training. Engaging children in these discussions can empower them to create a safer school environment, reducing the fear associated with gangs and bullying. Work with trusted community influencers to tackle the norms that praise gang and peer bullying.

Encourage Peer Support Networks: Foster the creation of peer support groups within schools to help children discuss their challenges and aspirations. These groups can build a sense of community, reduce feelings of isolation, and encourage a shared commitment to education.

Implement After-School Programmes: Offer after-school programmes that focus on academic support, life skills, and emotional resilience. These programmes can help children feel more connected to their education and provide a safe environment to discuss issues like bullying and peer pressure.

Promote Flexible Learning Opportunities: Develop flexible education pathways, such as online classes or evening programmes, to accommodate children who need to work during the day. This allows them to pursue education while managing their economic responsibilities.

Create Economic Support Programmes: Develop initiatives that provide financial assistance or subsidies for transportation, clothing, and school supplies to alleviate economic burdens on families. This could include partnerships with local businesses to supply discounted or donated materials.

By implementing these recommendations, we can create a supportive environment that empowers both parents and children to overcome barriers to education, ultimately leading to improved schooling rates and enhanced future opportunities.

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