



SAFETY, WELL-BEING, & LOCAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN



A REPORT BY KIDSRIGHTS¹

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ABOUT KIDSRIGHTS

KidsRights is an international non-governmental organization that promotes the well-being of vulnerable children across the world and advocates for the realization of their rights. We strive for a world where all children have access to their rights and are empowered to realize the great potential, they carry within them. Children are changemakers who have the power to move the world. KidsRights goal is to aid these changemakers in voicing their opinions and in taking action to bring about change. We support children by commanding global attention for the realization of children's rights and acting as a catalyst to ignite change, together with children and youth. To achieve this goal, our advocacy is supported with research and action. We finance local projects developed by children aimed at directly improving the rights of children and stimulating child participation and change-making by youths.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 21st century has witnessed a significant rise in forced displacement, leading to a critical refugee crisis. Among the vulnerable populations affected, refugee children face substantial threats to their safety and well-being, with an alarming increase in their numbers due to global conflicts. A staggering 43.3 million children have been displaced by conflict and violence, constituting 41% of the entire displaced population.¹ Hosted predominantly in low- and middle-income countries, the refugee children, especially the unaccompanied ones, encounter magnified vulnerabilities due to the lack of guidance and support. The winners of the International Children's Peace Prize 2023, Anastasiia Demchenko, Sofiia Tereshchenko and Anasatsiia Feskova from Ukraine, recognize these challenges and are actively working through their mobile apps – Refee and Svity, to enhance access to essential services for refugee children.

This report critically examines the status of refugee children's rights in host countries and assesses the adequacy of integration measures. Employing desk-based and socio-legal research, it analyzes international legal frameworks, national integration policies, and utilizes Turkey as a case study to provide an in-depth analysis.

The Refugee Convention of 1951, while comprehensive, lacks specificity in addressing the unique needs of refugee children, especially in areas of discrimination, education, and healthcare. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the New York Declaration, and the Global Compact on Refugees recognize these needs, providing a more robust framework for the rights and integration of refugee children.

Case Study - Turkey: With the largest refugee population globally, Turkey faces challenges due to economic strains and earthquakes in 2023. Child labor, begging, and early marriages are increasing among refugee children. The EU provides funding to provide humanitarian assistance and protection services for the refugees, but negative perceptions about refugees among the local population and registration issues persist.

Education initiatives like PIKTES (Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System) and cash transfer programs ESSN (Emergency

¹ Child Displacement, UNICEF, June 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

Social Safety Net) and CCTE (Conditional Cash Transfer for Education) have proven beneficial. However, a lack of transparency, drop-out rates, and absence of a long-term integration strategy are concerns. Turkey's social cohesion programs are primarily led by civil society organizations, with a need for a coordinated national strategy.

In conclusion, there is a significant gap between the rights of refugee children on paper and their implementation. Collaboration and resource allocation are imperative to uphold these rights. The initiative of the International Children's Peace Prize winners - Refee and Svity apps, exemplifies the need for a focus on safety and well-being through innovative solutions. Building on this, recommendations include strengthening international cooperation, enhancing legal protections, promoting access to quality education and healthcare, fostering social inclusion and community engagement, and economic integration. Attention to mental health support and guardian assistance for unaccompanied minors is crucial. By addressing these aspects in alignment with international conventions, governments, humanitarian organizations, and host communities can collectively create an environment that ensures the tangible realization of the rights of refugee children, enabling them to grow, learn, and thrive in their host countries.

The following recommendations are made to ensure safety and well-being of refugee children and to enhance their local integration:

- a. ***Strengthening International Cooperation:*** Encourage adherence to international agreements, establish global funding mechanisms, and invest in capacity-building.
- b. ***Enhancing Legal Protections:*** Develop comprehensive national legal frameworks on the safety and integration of refugee children to enforce anti-discrimination laws, provide legal assistance, and access to essential goods and services.
- c. ***Promoting Access to Quality Education:*** Adopt inclusive education policies, train teachers, and ensure accessible school transportation.
- d. ***Improving Healthcare Services:*** Implement regular health screenings, culturally competent healthcare, and affordable healthcare services.

- e. ***Fostering Social Inclusion and Community Engagement:*** Develop integration programs, conduct community outreach, provide language support, support economic integration, and establish mental health programs.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The International Children’s Peace Prize winners of 2023, Team SVIT from Ukraine – comprising of Anastasiia Demchenko, Sofiia Tereshchenko, and Anastasiia Feskova, understood the dire situation of refugee children and are working towards safeguarding their rights. Through their apps – Refee and Svity, they are enabling easier access to basic amenities in the host countries and are facilitating the integration of refugee children in the host communities.

The refugee crisis has become one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of the 21st century. Among the vulnerable populations affected by forced displacement, refugee children are particularly at risk, facing numerous threats to their safety, well-being, and fundamental rights.

In fact, children are increasingly becoming refugees and asylum seekers around the world due to wars and conflicts. It is reported that around 43.3 million children have been displaced, internally and externally, due to conflict and violence at the end of 2022.² The percentage of children among the total displaced population has increased from 18 percent in 2005 to 41 percent in 2022.³ 17.5 million children among them are either refugees or asylum seekers. Further, the percentage of unaccompanied minors among them is as high as 19 percent.



Figure 1: Sofiia, Anastasiia & Anastasiia-Winners of the 2023 International Children's Peace Prize

² Child Displacement, UNICEF, June 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

³ id.

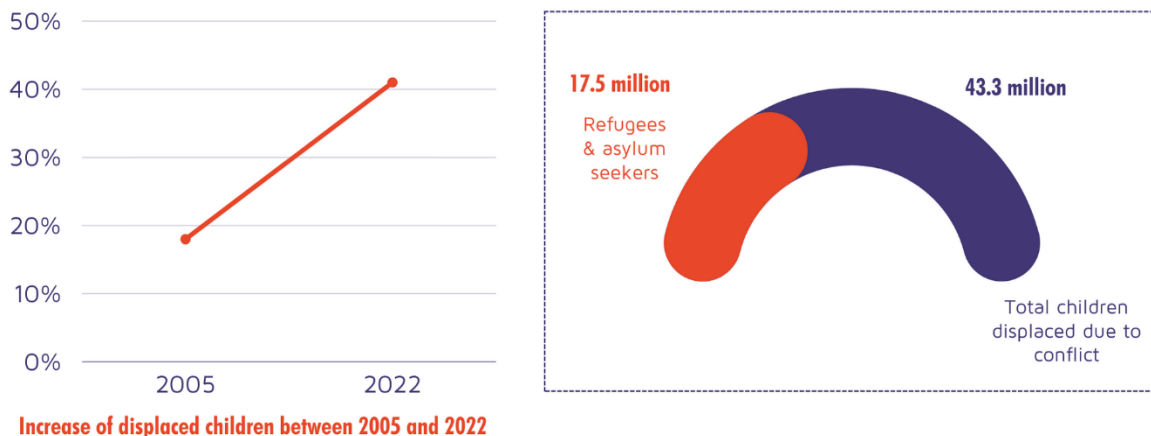


Figure 2: Total displaced children due to conflict between 2005 to 2022

Around 75 percent of the entire refugee population is hosted in low- and middle-income countries, which further adds on to the vulnerabilities of refugee children and the hosting States' ability to adequately safeguard the rights of refugee children.⁴ The vulnerabilities of refugee children are magnified in the case of unaccompanied children due to lack of appropriate guidance and support.

Countries are often not adequately prepared to host large numbers of refugees who are in need of protection,⁵ especially considering that the influx is often sudden, leaving little to no time to adapt the policies regarding aspects such as education, sanitation and health to be able to cater to the refugee children.⁶ To understand the long-term implications on the rights of refugee children in the host countries, it is essential to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of the integration measures.

2.2 Research Objectives

This report delves into the status of refugee children's rights in host countries and critically examines the adequacy of integration measures adopted and implemented by these countries.

⁴ Classifying refugee host countries by income level, UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/refugee-host-countries-income-level.html.

⁵ Cerna, Lucie. "Refugee Education: Integration Models And Practices In OECD Countries", *OECD Education Working Paper No. 203*.

⁶ id.

The report analyses the international legal framework and the refugee integration policies, to understand the extent to which they are adequate in safeguarding refugee children's rights in the host countries.

2.3 Methodology

This report employs desk-based research and anchors itself to socio-legal research. It is based on a combination of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include international and regional human and child rights conventions, frameworks and declarations. It also includes national integration policies of the selected host countries. Secondary sources comprise of academic articles, data and other literature on integration of refugee children in host countries.

The report also utilises case-study of Turkey to provide an in-depth analysis of the national integration policies and their implications on various children's rights. The selection of country for the case study is based on 2 factors – being among the Top 3 countries which host the highest refugee population, and availability of sufficient data to conduct the analysis.

2.4 Overview of the report

Section 2 of the report outlines the international legal framework on the rights of refugee children and their integration in host countries. In addition, it highlights the various vulnerabilities of refugee children which impact their rights.

Section 3 of the report delves into case studies from selected host countries to provide an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by refugee children and evaluates the effectiveness of existing integration policies. Best practices from across the host countries to effectively integrate refugee children are highlighted in this section.

Section 4 concludes the report by providing policy recommendations to bridge the gaps in integrating refugee children in the host countries to effectively safeguard their rights.

3. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON RIGHTS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

The international framework on rights of refugee children covers the human rights instruments that provide for the rights of refugee children to safeguard their well-being in the host countries. The report delves into the following conventions and declarations which are instrumental for a sound understanding of the rights and commitments of and towards refugees - the Refugee Convention 1951, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants 2016, and the Global Compact on Refugee 2018.

An examination of these instruments will help in gauging the adequacy of international legal framework in safeguarding the rights of refugee children and facilitating their local integration.

3.1. 1951: The Refugee Convention

The 1951 Refugee Convention, along with its 1967 Protocol, is a fundamental international treaty that outlines the rights and protections of refugees, including refugee children. Following are some of the rights that it provides for refugee children.

- a. ***Non-Discrimination (Article 3)***: The convention prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, or country of origin. However, it does not explicitly address other forms of discrimination, such as gender or age. Refugee children, especially unaccompanied minors, often face specific challenges and vulnerabilities, and a more explicit protection against discrimination related to age is needed.
- b. ***Education (Article 22)***: The convention states that refugees should have access to elementary education, but it does not specify secondary or higher education. It falls short in ensuring their access to a complete and quality education. Providing access to secondary and tertiary education is vital for the future of refugee children, their mental build-being, and their integration in the host countries.

The Refugee Convention also fails to provide adequate legal protection safeguards tailored for children, access to healthcare and protection from exploitation. The Convention can be seen to be broadly providing for various rights, but not specifically catering to the needs of children.

3.2. 1989: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989 and achieved near universal ratification,⁷ outlines comprehensive rights for children. The rights of refugee children, a vulnerable subset of this demographic, are of particular concern and merit critical examination.

- a. ***Protection and Non-Discrimination:*** The CRC, under Article 2, mandates that all children have the right to protection from all forms of discrimination. Article 22 of the CRC specifically states that refugee children are entitled to appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in international instruments. Despite these provisions, the reality often falls short. Discrimination against refugee children persists, hindering their access to education, healthcare, and social services in host countries. Their inclusion in the host communities is further marred with stigma and xenophobia.⁸
- b. ***Right to Education:*** Article 28 of the CRC recognizes the right to education for every child. However, refugee children face significant barriers in accessing quality education. Forced displacement often disrupts their schooling, leaving them without adequate educational opportunities. Data from 70 countries shows that more than half of all refugee children are out of school.⁹ Limited resources, language barriers, and social integration challenges further impede their access to education.¹⁰ Efforts to ensure

⁷ USA is the only country which has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁸ Easton-Calabria, et al. “30 Years of Research on Migration and Displacement at UNICEF Innocenti, Reflection and Next Steps”, 10 May 2023.

⁹ The Right to Education and Opportunity, 2023 UNHCR Education Report, page 6.

¹⁰ id, page 12.

access to quality education for refugee children must be prioritized to uphold their rights under the CRC.

- c. ***Healthcare and Adequate Standard of Living:*** Article 24 of the CRC emphasizes the right to health and healthcare services. Refugee children, especially those living in overcrowded camps or temporary shelters, often lack access to essential healthcare facilities and services. Inadequate living conditions, limited access to clean water, sanitation, and nutrition increase their vulnerability to diseases. Adequate healthcare and a decent standard of living are crucial for refugee children's physical and mental well-being, yet these rights are frequently compromised due to the challenges posed by displacement. It is widely reported that vaccination rates among refugee children are extremely low, which makes them highly susceptible to preventable diseases.¹¹ Refugee children also exhibit high levels of stress, especially due to repeatedly facing adverse events in the absence of a support giver.¹² Refugee children from Myanmar, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran are also reported to be prone to development disorders due to lack of access to safe and sufficient nutritional food.¹³
- d. ***Family Reunification:*** The CRC, under Article 10, recognizes the right to family reunification. For refugee children separated from their families due to conflict, persecution, or disaster, family reunification is a fundamental right essential for their emotional and psychological well-being. However, bureaucratic hurdles, legal complexities, and inconsistent international policies often hinder family reunification efforts, leaving many refugee children isolated and traumatized. While standards and processes for facilitating family reunification are provided in various other international and regional human rights instruments, many refugee children are often dependent on extremely intricate application processes, and prolonged adjudication process. These processes vary across regions and countries but

¹¹ Klas, Jakub et al. "Challenges in the Medical and Psychosocial Care of the Pediatric Refugee-A Systematic Review." *International journal of environmental research and public health* vol. 19,17 10656. 26 Aug. 2022, doi:10.3390/ijerph191710656

¹² id.

¹³ Newman, Katie et al. "Nutritional assessment of resettled pediatric refugees in Western Australia", *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, vol. 55,1. 05 October 2018, doi:10.1111/jpc.14250

also reflects similar importance accorded to family reunification of refugee children, and the obstacles in finding an appropriate balance between States' prerogative to allow foreign nationals into their borders and the best interests of the children.¹⁴

- e. ***Protection from Exploitation and Violence:*** Refugee children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and recruitment into armed forces or illicit activities. The CRC, through Article 32, emphasizes the right to protection from economic exploitation and harmful work. Despite these protections, refugee children are often forced into child labor or subjected to various forms of exploitation due to their vulnerable status.¹⁵ Ensuring their protection from exploitation and violence requires stronger enforcement of international laws and robust support systems.

3.3. 2016: New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants acknowledges the need to adopt measures for effective integration of refugees in the host countries. It specifically states the following-

“We commit to combating xenophobia, racism and discrimination in our societies against refugees and migrants. We will take measures to improve their integration and inclusion, as appropriate, and with particular reference to access to education, health care, justice and language training. We recognize that these measures will reduce the risks of marginalization and radicalization. National policies relating to integration and inclusion will be developed, as appropriate, in conjunction with relevant civil society organizations, including faith-based organizations, the private sector, employers’ and workers’ organizations and other stakeholders. We also note

¹⁴ Palander, Jaana, et al. “International Human Rights Frameworks in Relation to National Family Reunification Policy and Administrative Practice”, M. Tiilikainen et al. (eds.), *Forced Migration and Separated Families*, IMISCOE Research Series, doi:10.1007/978-3-031-24974-7_2

¹⁵ Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children, 2016, Page 37

the obligation for refugees and migrants to observe the laws and regulations of their host countries.”¹⁶

Though the Declaration does not specifically speak about integration of refugee children, it acknowledges the need to integrate all refugees to combat marginalization and radicalization. The Declaration also commits *“to provide for basic health, education and psychosocial development and for the registration of all births on our territories. We are determined to ensure that all children are receiving education within a few months of arrival, and we will prioritize budgetary provision to facilitate this, including support for host countries as required. We will strive to provide refugee and migrant children with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities.”*¹⁷

The Declaration pays greater attention to the specific needs of children and sets the tone for the international refugee instruments to acknowledge and attempt to address the needs of refugee children and to undertake measures to integrate them in the host countries.

3.4. 2018: Global Compact on Refugees

Following the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Global Compact on Refugees puts forth ‘local integration’ as one of the solutions to the refugee crisis, apart from the widely endorsed solution of voluntary repatriation. The Compact highlights that local integration is hinged on the efforts of all parties, including the refugees who need to be prepared to adapt to the host society. It also acknowledges the need to extend financial and technical support to host countries from the international community to facilitate effective local integration.¹⁸ The Compact also commits to develop a strategic framework for local integration in cooperation with the national authorities of host countries.

¹⁶ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, UN Doc. A/RES/71/1, 2016, Page 8, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57ceb74a4.html>

¹⁷ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, UN Doc. A/RES/71/1, 2016, Page 7, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57ceb74a4.html>

¹⁸ Global Compact on Refugees, 2018, Page 39, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>

Sports and cultural activities are considered to be one of the effective ways to facilitate social cohesion for refugee children.¹⁹ Further, the Compact also proposes establishing multi-stakeholder response teams for identification and referral of refugee children, including unaccompanied minors, for best interests assessments along with providing care and other services.²⁰

The compact commits to improving inclusiveness of the education systems for refugee children and of providing additional support for teacher training, overcoming obstacles to the enrolment of refugee children, and adopting specific measures to provide access to education for girls and children with disabilities.²¹ Similarly, it commits to expand national health systems to provide healthcare for all refugees, including children and youth who often face discrimination, trauma and violence. It identifies “*disease prevention, immunization services, and health promotion activities*” as integral to extend healthcare services to refugee children.²²

The Global Compact specifically emphasizes on the needs and vulnerabilities of refugee children and commits to develop policies and programmes that consider the specific protection needs of children, unaccompanied minors, child survivors of various forms of violence, and at-risk refugee children.²³

Overall, while the Refugee Convention itself is mostly silent about the specific needs and vulnerabilities of refugee children, the UNCRC, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and the Global Compact on Refugees acknowledge them. They provide for a range of rights, which are also crucial for the effective integration of refugee children in the host countries. In fact, the Global Compact on Refugees should act as a framework for the hosting countries to develop laws, policies and programs that can better safeguard the rights of refugee children.

¹⁹ id, page 16.

²⁰ id, page 22.

²¹ id, page 26.

²² id, page 28.

²³ id, page 29.

4. CASE STUDY - TURKEY

Out of a total of 35.8 million refugees worldwide, nearly 14 million are just hosted in 5 countries – Iran, Turkey, Germany, Colombia, and Pakistan.²⁴

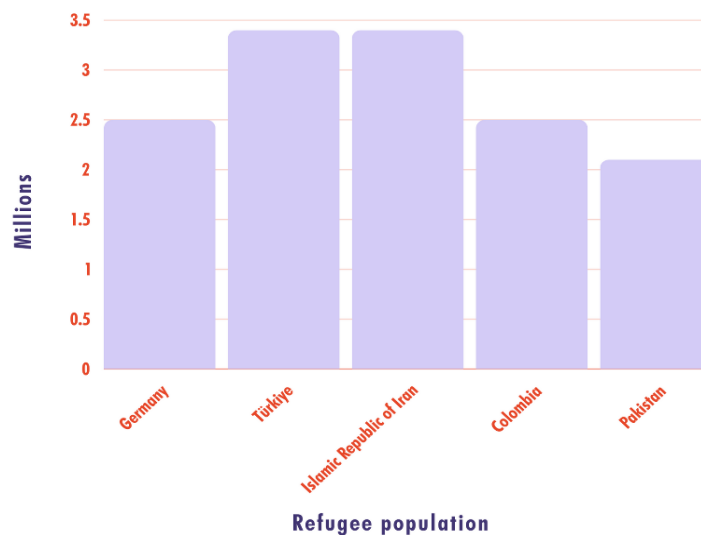


Figure 3: Refugee population in the top 5 host countries (UNHCR Refugee Data Finder)

It is also reported that more than 66 percent of the refugees are in protracted situations – a situation in which the refugees live in low- and middle-income countries for over five consecutive years.²⁵ It reflects the need for implementing policies and programmes aimed at safeguarding the rights of refugee children and their integration in the host countries.

This section briefly examines the situation of refugee children in Turkey by undertaking research of the applicable laws, policies, and programmes in its jurisdiction, coupled with the on-ground status of the rights of refugee children in the country.

²⁴ Key facts for countries hosting the world's refugees, Refugee Data Finder, UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/

²⁵ Protracted situations are defined as those where more than 25,000 refugees from the same country of origin have been in exile in a given low- or middle-income host country for at least five consecutive years, See www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/refugee-hosting-metrics.html

Turkey hosts the largest population of refugees in the world with nearly 4 million of them living in the country.²⁶ Due to the ongoing increase in cost of living, coupled with the two earthquakes in early 2023, the refugees are struggling to access basic amenities.²⁷ It is reported that they are forced to resort to child labour, street begging and child marriage to cope with the situation.²⁸ Evidently, children's rights are impacted the most in these dire situations, as they cannot access basic amenities and are in turn forced to undertake activities that directly violate their rights, as enshrined in the UNCRC – including right to life and development, right to adequate standard of healthcare, right to education, right against economic and sexual exploitation among others.

Since 2012, the EU has extended humanitarian funding to Turkey of 3.46 billion Euros so that the refugees and host communities receive adequate support and services.²⁹ However, the negative perception about refugees among the host communities, especially with regards to the already scarce employment opportunities, act as a major obstacle for the refugees and their children in effectively integrating in the country.³⁰ The Syrian refugees in the country are also reportedly reluctant to register themselves officially due to concerns of this data reaching Syria, which in turn impacts their access to benefits.³¹ Importantly, the refugees focus on sending their children to work, rather than to school, in the hope of saving up some money in anticipation of a demand to leave the country as they are only considered as guests in Turkey.³²

It is evident that host communities are reluctant to facilitate integration of refugees due to fears about their own livelihoods. This situation can be addressed by ensuring effective policy and awareness campaigns aimed at educating the host communities about the source and purpose of funds acquired specifically for the refugees. It would require transparent budgeting in a manner that addresses the fears of the host

²⁶ Türkiye, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, www.civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/europe/turkiye_en

²⁷ id.

²⁸ id.

²⁹ id.

³⁰ Imrie-Kuzu, "Durukan, Keeping Syrian refugees in Turkey is not a good idea: a new concept of 'reluctant local integration' ", *Third World Quarterly* 2023, Vol. 44, No. 7, page 1608, doi:10.1080/01436597.2023.2197205

³¹ id, page 1615.

³² id.

communities about the funds allocated for the refugees as they feel that it is done at the expense of their own situation.

Integration policies and measures were initially not considered to be important, either by the host country or by the Syrian refugees as they did not expect a prolonged crisis.³³ Migration and Social Cohesion Plan (2020-24) implemented by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) has reportedly enhanced refugee self-reliance by offering improved municipal services, promoting social cohesion among the refugees and host communities, and by promoting co-existence practices.³⁴

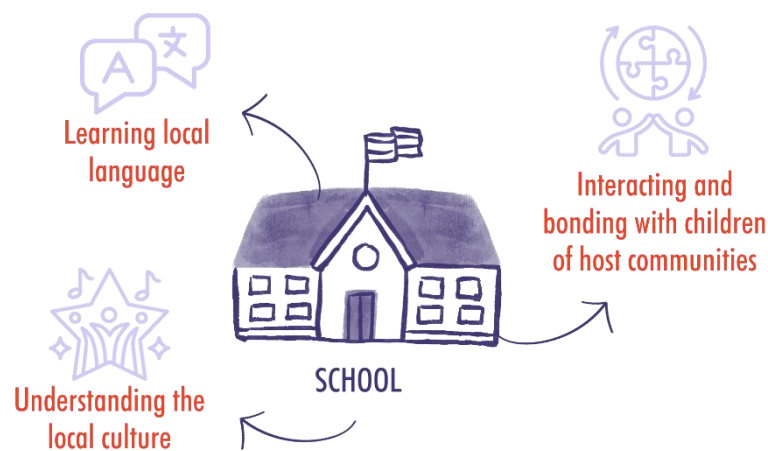


Figure 4: Role of schools in local integration of refugee children

Schools are considered to be the most effective way of integrating refugee children as it enables them to understand and learn the local language, culture and practices.³⁵ Proper integration of refugee children in schools, as against the temporary and disorganized education centers, began only in 2016 through the project - “Promoting

³³ S. Tumen, “The case of Syrian refugees in Türkiye: Successes, challenges, and lessons learned”, *Background paper to the World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies April 2023*, page 6.

³⁴ Migration and Social Cohesion Plan (2020-2024), www.globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/migration-and-social-cohesion-action-plan-2020-2024.

³⁵ Açıköç, Meral, et al. “Immigrant integration in small and mediumsized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations in Turkey Country Reports on multilevel dynamics”, *WP3 Report – Turkey*, September 2022, page 30.

Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System” (PIKTES), which aimed to integrate Syria refugee children in the education system.³⁶

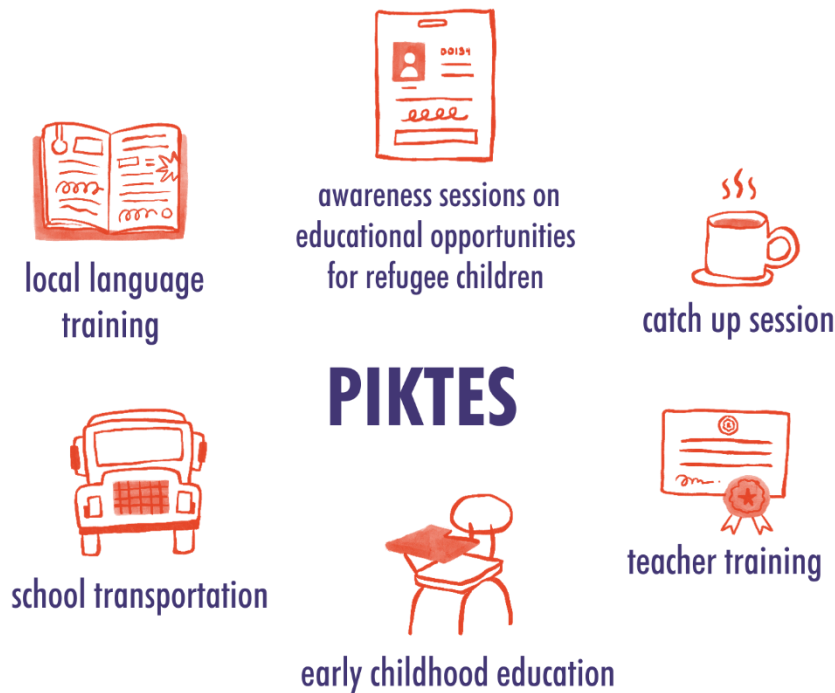


Figure 5: Various components of “Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System” (PIKTES)

The project included local language training, catch up sessions, school transportation, early childhood education, awareness raising sessions about educational opportunities for Syrian children, and teacher training.³⁷ However, there are concerns regarding the drop-out rates, lack of transparency in budgeting, and lack of a well-planned and long-term strategy to integrate refugee children in the education system.³⁸

The two cash transfer programs for refugees - Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) and Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programs, have also proved to be useful to alleviate the situation of refugee children in Turkey.³⁹ One of the four objectives of ESSN is to “Reduce/stabilize families’ use of coping strategies such as

³⁶ Tumen, Semih, “The case of Syrian refugees in Türkiye: Successes, challenges, and lessons learned”, *Background paper to the World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, April 2023, page 8.

³⁷ id.

³⁸ id.

³⁹ id.

sending children to work instead of school".⁴⁰ Under this EU funded cash transfer scheme launched in 2016, nearly 1.5 million refugees receive monthly assistance through debit card, which they can use to avail essential needs and services such as accommodation, utilities, food and medicines. In addition, the CCTE program provides bi-monthly payments to vulnerable refugee families to help the families in sending and keeping their children in school.⁴¹

The registered refugees also have access to health centres in the province they are registered in and can also be referred to health centres and hospitals in other provinces if required.⁴²

It must be highlighted that social cohesion programs in Turkey are primarily led by international and national civil society organisations, while the local migration management authorities are also gradually implementing integration services for refugees.⁴³ The national authorities are still lacking a coordinated and planned strategy for integration of refugees and their children, as they continue to rely on one-off and temporary initiatives covering aspects such as education, health and social assistance.⁴⁴ The need of the hour, for Turkey and all host countries, is to develop and implement a national action plan for safeguarding the rights of refugee children and facilitating their integration in the host countries.

⁴⁰ The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), World Food Programme, Q3 2019, www.docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000104792/download/

⁴¹ Açıkcı, Meral, et al. "Immigrant integration in small and mediumsized towns and rural areas: local policies and policymaking relations in Turkey Country Reports on multilevel dynamics", *WP3 Report – Turkey*, September 2022, page 26.

⁴² Tumen, Semih, "The case of Syrian refugees in Türkiye: Successes, challenges, and lessons learned", *Background paper to the World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, April 2023, page 10.

⁴³ Supra note 41, page 6.

⁴⁴ id.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a comprehensive framework for safeguarding the rights of all children, including refugees, there remains a significant gap between these rights on paper and its implementation in practice. It is imperative for the international community, governments, and humanitarian organizations to collaborate effectively, allocate resources, and implement policies that uphold the rights of refugee children as outlined in the CRC. By addressing these challenges, societies can move closer to providing a secure, nurturing environment where refugee children can grow, learn, and thrive, ensuring that their rights are not just a theoretical concept but a tangible reality.

The initiative of the winners of the International Children's Peace Prize 2023 - Anastasiia Demchenko, Sofiia Tereshchenko, and Anastasiia Feskova, to develop Refee and Svity apps for refugee children, highlights the need to focus on the safety and well-being of the refugee children in the host countries. The apps enable refugee children and youth to access basic amenities and to also interact and connect with the host communities. The Refee app enables refugee children to readily contact the hotlines of the host country in any emergency and provides access to some important phrases that can be directly translated by the children into the language of the host community. The Svity app provides a group chat interface to facilitate communication between refugee children and children from host communities. Through their apps, the winners of the International Children's Peace Prize are bridging the language and cultural barriers faced by refugee children, and are addressing the information gaps in accessing much needed support and resources for their safety and well-being.

Building on this, the focus of the international community must be drawn to the barriers faced by refugee children in integrating in the host communities, such that they are able to readily access social and moral support, far away from their home countries. The following aspects must be taken into consideration, in line with the UNCRC and the Global Compact on Refugees, in order to facilitate enhanced local integration of refugee children:

5.1. Strengthening International Cooperation

- a. **Multilateral Agreements:** There is need to encourage host countries to adhere to international agreements and conventions related to protection and local integration of refugee children, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Global Compact on Refugees, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and most importantly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Promote coordination and information-sharing among host countries.
- b. **Global Funding Mechanisms:** The international community must advocate for the establishment and support of global funding mechanisms that can provide financial resources for refugee integration programs, especially in host countries that receive the most refugees and are in dire need of financial support to be able to safeguard the rights of refugee children. This could include contributions from donor countries, international organizations, and the private sector.
- c. **Capacity Building:** The international community must proactively invest in the capacity-building of organizations and governments working with refugee children to enhance their ability to provide protection services and integration support effectively.

5.2. Enhancing Legal Protections

- a. **Comprehensive National Legal Frameworks:** In line with the international legal framework, the host countries must develop and implement comprehensive national legal frameworks that clearly outline the rights and responsibilities of host countries in relation to refugee children. These frameworks should address issues such as access to education, healthcare, employment, and legal residency status based on the status of these aspects within their jurisdiction.
- b. **Non-Discrimination:** There is a need to enforce strict anti-discrimination laws and policies to protect refugee children from discrimination and stigma based on their nationality, ethnicity, religion, or other factors. Integration of refugee

children in host countries will remain a distant dream if the children continue to face obstacles in accessing basic amenities, public spaces and basic human rights due to discrimination.

- c. **Legal Assistance:** The host countries must provide free or low-cost legal aid services to refugee children and their families to help them navigate the legal system and access their rights.

5.3. Promoting Access to Quality Education

- a. **Inclusive Education:** The host countries must adopt and implement inclusive education policies that enable refugee children to attend mainstream schools alongside local children. It will require providing language support, and culturally sensitive curricula when needed. The host countries, with the support of international community, will also need to undertake advocacy campaigns to facilitate enrolment of all refugee children in schools.
- b. **Teacher Training:** Considering that teachers are the primary contact for children in the schools, it is essential to train teachers and school staff in intercultural competency. The teachers will also need to be trained in trauma-informed teaching methods to better support refugee children's learning and well-being.
- c. **Accessible School Transportation:** The host countries must also ensure that transportation to and from schools is available and affordable for refugee children, especially if they live in remote areas.

5.4. Improving Healthcare Services

- a. **Health Screenings:** Implement regular health screenings for refugee children to address immediate health needs and ensure they receive necessary vaccinations and medical care. The screenings must be held immediately after their entry into the respective country's jurisdiction and must be followed up periodically. Such measures will enable easier and timely access to vaccinations against preventable diseases, early identification of treatable diseases and appropriate treatment of all illnesses for the refugee children.

- b. ***Culturally Competent Healthcare:*** The healthcare providers must also be trained and informed to be culturally sensitive and competent in treating the unique physical and mental health needs of refugee children.
- c. ***Affordable Healthcare:*** Make healthcare services accessible and affordable for refugee children and their families, including access to professional mental health services, and counselling sessions.

5.5. Community Engagement and Inclusion

- a. **Integration Programs:** The host countries must develop programs that specifically facilitate interactions between refugee children and local children through sports, cultural exchanges, and other activities to foster friendships, mutual respect and understanding.
- b. **Community Outreach:** The local communities must be encouraged to participate in welcoming and supporting refugee families through volunteer programs and cultural events that promote interaction and understanding. The local communities can be supported by the governments in devising appropriate outreach activities for the benefit of refugee children and their families.
- c. **Language Support:** Providing language classes for refugee children will help them learn the local language, and connect with the local community members, which is essential for social integration.
- d. **Economic Integration:** The host countries can also support vocational training and job placement programs for refugee parents to enhance their economic self-sufficiency, which can positively impact their children's integration.
- e. **Mental Health Support:** Establish mental health programs for both refugee children and their parents to address the trauma and stress associated with forced displacement and facilitate their emotional well-being. Special measures must be undertaken to provide adequate support and care for unaccompanied refugee children.
- f. **Guardian support:** Unaccompanied refugee children need additional support from the host countries. appropriate steps can be undertaken to allocate

guardian/care giver to the unaccompanied minors, either from their own community or from the host communities, subject to legal vetting of such adults in line with child protection measures.

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