

REFUGEE INCLUSION AND THE ROLE OF ARTS EDUCATION IN TURKISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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*The interpretations and conclusions in this report belong solely to the author and do not reflect IPC's official position.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Turkey continues to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world, with a population of 3.1 million Syrians under temporary protection and 194,637 refugees and asylum seekers under international protection.[1] Of all refugees in Turkey, Syrians are the only group to receive the official government status of temporary protection, which affords them a number of benefits such as access to healthcare, education, social assistance, psychological support, and the labor market.[2] Still, despite these rights being recognized, studies indicate that Syrian refugees face serious problems with local integration.

Some of the continuous challenges identified are Syrians' unstable legal status, unemployment, poor living conditions, and housing and health problems.[3] In addition, even though the government has made significant efforts to reduce the social marginalization of Syrians under temporary protection in recent years,[4] studies have shown that the worsening economic downturn in Turkey has led to growing hostility toward Syrian refugees as well as a related shift and negative discourse in Turkish politics and media.

Despite significant progress in school integration, further problems and challenges can be encountered in the education of Syrian refugees in Turkey. While a considerable number of Syrian refugee children have difficulty accessing education, others have been exposed to numerous obstacles in everyday school life since their integration into Turkish public schools: existing prejudices among students, discrimination, social isolation due to post-traumatic stress disorder, language barriers, and socioemotional and "adaption problems" are among the factors that make shared learning in everyday school life difficult and increase the risk for social and cultural conflict.[5] Moreover, the growing social polarization and anti-refugee sentiments in Turkish society have meanwhile also reached classrooms, and peer bullying and discriminatory attitudes toward refugee children have been increasing.[6]

As the foundation for constructive social cohesion and equal participation in social processes in adulthood is laid while at school, well-developed skills such as the ability to adopt other perspectives, empathy, flexibility, or self-initiative are significant to not only building cohesive and equitable classrooms but also communities and societies. Therefore, in times of rising social tension, disinformation, and anti-immigrant resentment against refugees, the question of how to reinforce a comprehensive education system for inclusion and social cohesion must be addressed.

1 UNHCR Türkiye Homepage, accessed November 11, 2024, https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/factsheets-and-dashboards.

2 UNHCR Türkiye Homepage, accessed October 20, 2023, https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye.

3 M. Mustafa Erdogdu and Sevda Akar, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Integration Problem Ahead," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20, no. 3 (2018): 925–940, doi: 10.1007/s12134-018-0639-0.

4 Türk Kızılay, *Support to Harmonization in Turkey Project: 4th quarter of 2021 progress report* (Türk Kızılay, 2021), https://toplummerkezi.kizilay.org.tr.

5 See also Zehra Kiliç Özmen, "The problems that Syrian refugee children, class teachers and Turkish children face in the school environment from the standpoint of trainee teachers," *Academic Journals* 15, no. 9 (2020): 554–563, doi 10.5897/ERR2020.3959; Servet Kardeş and Berrin Akman, "Problems Encountered in The Education of Refugees in Turkey," *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 9, no. 1 (2022): 153–164.; Nurhan Atalay et al., "Syrian refugee children's education in Turkish public schools: Primary school teachers' experiences," *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education* 29: 265–281, doi: 10.14689/enad.10.

6 UNFPA, *Regional Situation Report for the Syria Crisis* (UNFPA, 2022), https://syria.unfpa.org.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this report is to analyze the role of (extra)curricular arts education practices in the strengthening of inclusive and equitable quality learning processes in Turkish primary schools. In addition to the question of the impact of arts education activities on the development of inclusive learning spaces for students from refugee and host communities, this study looks at the structural and educational challenges and problems Turkish primary school actors and non-school partners face in creating arts education practices for all primary school children, especially those affected by forced migration.

Relating thereto, a special emphasis is also placed on the significance of actively involving not only schools but also partners from the arts, cultural institutions, and civil society in driving forward inclusive and diversity-sensitive learning in and outside of the classroom. The report argues that not only the political and social awareness of arts education and its positive effects on inclusive transformation processes in education must be raised in times of forced migration, but also governance structures must be created at both the municipal and national level to facilitate long-term cooperation between schools and extracurricular partners to involve the expertise and experiences of the communities on the ground.

The report outlines, first, the educational policy framework in view of the current integration process of Syrian refugee students into Turkish state schools and the resulting discussion about the need for more inclusive public schools. It then highlights the important role of arts and cultural learning in creating an inclusive and diversity-sensitive school culture. The principal part of the report touches on my research project as a Mercator-IPC Fellow[7] and will present the results of the workshop "Primary School and Refugee Inclusion: Improving Social Cohesion in Schools with Arts, Cultural and Civil Partners in the Community," held at İKSV Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space on June 19, 2019.

This section offers an overview of good practices of cross-sectoral and community-based arts education programs from Istanbul, which were presented during the first part of the workshop. It then emphasizes key ideas and suggestions that were discussed by the workshop participants including the main challenges in advancing quality education and creating culturally inclusive environments through arts education practices. Following a section on the worsening of existing problems in the field during (post-)pandemic times, the conclusion will offer policy recommendations for a more sustainable incorporation of inclusive and diversity-sensitive arts education programs into Turkish primary schools.

The report aims to pursue the following objectives:

(1) To enhance the role of arts education as an integral part of inclusive learning practices within the scope of the integration process of refugee children in Turkish primary schools.

(2) To identify the main obstacles that impede the realization of equitable quality and inclusive arts education practices for primary school children with and without refugee backgrounds, as well as to provide relevant policy recommendations on how to overcome these challenges.

(3) To raise awareness of the significance of opening schooling and collaboration between schools and art, cultural, and civil partners in driving forward diversity-sensitive and inclusive learning in primary schools

(4) To identify and share good practices of cross-sectoral and community-based arts education programs that advance the development of more inclusive schools.

7 This research took place within the framework of my 2018/19 Mercator IPC Fellowship project titled "Refugees and Elementary Schools in Istanbul—The Inclusion of Young Refugees through Cultural Education."

METHODOLOGY

The half-day workshop was designed as a cooperative event between Istanbul Policy Center (IPC), the Education Reform Initiative (ERG), and the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSV). It included 37 participants representing a broad variety of key stakeholder positions, including actors working in education, arts and culture, and civil society.

During the first part of the workshop, arts education projects were presented by organizations that have initiated cooperation with primary schools and other partners in the community with the aim to foster inclusive learning and social cohesion processes between children from refugee and host communities inside and outside of the classroom. Presentations on good practices in the field were given by İKSV Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space, Small Projects Istanbul, Koç University Global Aid Volunteers, Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Contemporary Drama Association, Yuva Association, and the Maya Foundation.

The second part of workshop offered a platform for dialogue and multidimensional exchange with all workshop participants discussing the main challenges and problems that school and non-school actors face in realizing quality and inclusive arts learning practices inside and outside of the classroom. As the project activities of the presented good practices include learning methods and practices at the intersection of arts education and intercultural learning or environmental pedagogy, the discussion part of the workshop focused exclusively on artistic and creative practices in informal and (non-)formal education settings.

To complement the outcomes of the workshop, interviews were also realized with a variety of actors working in the field. During the six months of my field research in Istanbul, semi-structured interviews were conducted with different actors from civil society organizations providing arts education programs for both refugee and Turkish children. The range of organizations included grassroots organizations, international NGOs, humanitarian foundations, nonprofit cultural institutions, and other civil society organizations and initiatives that are active in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion in several socioeconomically and demographically diverse districts of Istanbul (including Beyoğlu (Tarlabaşı), Fatih, Ataşehir, and Avcılar). These interviews focused mainly on the experiences, everyday problems, and structural challenges relating to the implementation of providing inclusive arts education programs on the ground. To understand the perspectives and challenges of the various actors both during and after the pandemic, I also conducted online interviews after my fellowship project ended in the period from 2020 to 2021. During this period, I conducted interviews with academics and teachers that focused on the main problems and obstacles concerning the development of quality music and visual arts lessons in Turkish primary schools.

The report also made use of desktop research to examine the literature and documents focusing on the integration process of Syrian refugee children into public schools as well as studies that advocate for an inclusive education framework for Turkey's native and refugee children. While the study describes the educational situation of Syrian children more specifically, it strongly claims to ensure inclusive and equitable education opportunities for all children and youth, including the significant

number of non-Syrian refugee children and asylum seekers. As the Ministry of National Education has made systematic changes for enabling the integration of the large influx of particularly Syrian refugee children into the education system, the greater part of this study exclusively focuses on the educational challenges Syrian refugee children have faced during the course of the transition process. The study echoes other voices within the research community who advocate for a more holistic approach to education within the Turkish education system, embracing and promoting the cultural diversity of all refugee children in Turkish society and schools.

Moreover, to complement the interviews that were conducted with academics and teachers, the report also analyzes the literature on music and visual arts education in Turkish schools.

Since I was only able to work with English-language literature and most English sources are focused on visual arts education, my findings are hereof limited, particularly with a view to music education. Despite this limitation, however, the report emphasizes significant gaps as to the importance, organizational structure, and daily teaching practices of artistic-creative subjects in schools. Furthermore, the report makes use of relevant documents and reports that examine the negative consequences of COVID-19 in the field. Finally, the study is also based on literature and reports from international organizations and UN institutions, which outline the important role of culture and arts for inclusive and diversity-sensitive schools.

Since the report analyzes arts education in the Turkish context, with the literature and practitioners in Turkey focusing on the role of artistic and creative learning practices for the strengthening of inclusive and equitable schools, I use the phrasing "arts education" instead of UNESCO's updated term "arts and cultural education" throughout the document. However, by highlighting the particular significance of artistic-creative learning practices and experiences post-forced migration, the report strongly endorses UNESCO's recommendation to "[e]nhance awareness of the value of [both] culture and arts education for holistic development by bringing it forward within education systems and recognizing it as integral to achieving quality education."[8]

8 UNESCO, "UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education," accessed December 8, 2024, https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf.

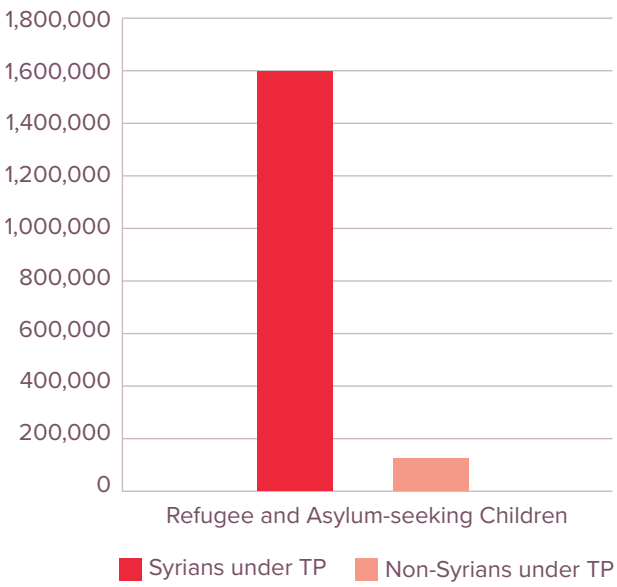
BACKGROUND

THE NEED FOR AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

Over the last few years, the Ministry of National Education has made considerable efforts and systematic changes to enable the integration of Syrian refugee children into the education system. A significant step was taken with the 2014/21 Circular on Educational and Learning Services for Foreigners, allowing Syrian children with a foreigner identification document and without needing a residency permit to attend school lessons together with Turkish students.[9] Significant progress has been made since the year 2016, with Turkey's turn in its educational polices toward long-term development. Aiming at integrating all Syrian school-aged children into the national education system, a wide range of support measures have been initiated that facilitate children's enrollment and regular attendance. Programs such as the Project for Promoting the Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System (PICTES) or the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) Program provided financial support and a wide range of other services, including Turkish language classes, remedial courses, school transportation, psychosocial support services, or teacher training.[10]

There is still a large number of Syrian refugee children experiencing difficulties in accessing education. An estimated 400,000 Syrian children remain out of school and face difficulties such as a lack of awareness of available services, language barriers, and socio-economic obstacles.[11] There is also a considerable number of school-aged refugees and asylum-seekers from countries other than Syria in Turkey. Government statistics indicate that are 42,221 school-aged non-Syrian refugee and asylum seekers in Turkey. However, there is no official data on the number of non-Syrian refugees enrolled in schools.[12]

Figure 1. Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in Turkey[13]



9 Pelin Taskin and Ozge Erdemli, "Education for Syrian Refugees: Problems faced by Turkish Teachers in Turkey," *Euroasian Journal of Educational Research* 18, no. 75 (2018): 155–178.

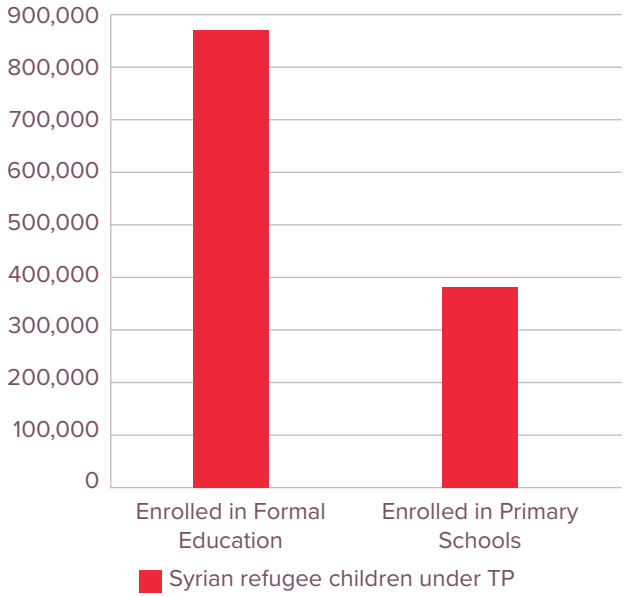
10 Gabriele Cloeters et al., *Syrians in Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2018).

11 UNICEF Türkiye Homepage, accessed October 22, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en.

12 ReliefWeb Homepage, accessed October 25, 2023, https://reliefweb.int.

13 UNICEF Türkiye Homepage, accessed October 22, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en.

Figure 2. Syrian refugee children under Temporary Protection enrolled in school[14]



Notwithstanding the major progress in (education) integration policy over the last few years, voices from the research community (and civil society) have been increasingly declaring themselves in favor of the strengthening of an "inclusive education framework"[15] in Turkish public schools. It is apparent in much of the literature that despite the well-intentioned and comprehensively introduced integration measures, the rising educational problems and challenges in everyday school life not only make joint learning processes for Syrian and Turkish school children more difficult but also increase the risk of Syrian children dropping out of school and becoming isolated from society.[16]

Çelik and İçduygu note the importance of reconsidering the "exclusionary institutional habitus" of Turkish public schools, which with its monocultural and monolingual organizational practices and expressive orders, significantly facilitates the materialization of unfair practices toward Syrian students and increases children's alienation, depression, and disengagement from school.[17] In this respect, Şengül stresses that despite major developments due to the structural inclusion of Syrian refugees in the Turkish national system, the current policy appears to ignore the relational elements of integration, which refer to sociocultural processes and individual-level factors such as belonging and connectedness to the host country or group-level factors such as the social cohesion of communities.[18] Moreover, a number of academics question the one-sided focus on Syrian refugee children with a view toward the current refugee education integration policy in Turkey, which has resulted in the exclusion of non-Syrian children from education. Arık et al. report on "community building through inclusive education" and encourage others to rethink the way that the Turkish education system can best serve its multiethnic, multilingual student body in a more inclusive way.[19]

This report takes up those thoughts and argues that we must also rethink and enhance the role of arts education as an integral part of inclusive school development practices with a view toward the integration of refugee children into the education system. In order to meet the needs of all children and develop a welcoming and safe learning environment within a heterogenous school reality, it is not only necessary to equip refugee or immigrant children with (additional) resources for being able

14 ReliefWeb Homepage, accessed October 25, 2023, https://reliefweb.int.

15 Madra Aysel et al., *Community building through inclusive education* (Istanbul: Education Reform Initiative, 2020), http://en.egitimreformugirisimi.org.

16 Coşkun Taştan and Zafer Çelik, *The education of Syrian children in Turkey: Challenges and Recommendations* (Ankara: Eğitim-Bir-Sen Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, 2017), https://www.ebs.org.tr/ebs_files/files/Suriye_Rapor_ENG.pdf.

17 Çetin Çelik and Ahmet İçduygu, "Schools and refugee children: The case of Syrians in Turkey," *International Migration (IOM)* 57, no. 2 (2019): 253–267, doi: 10.1111/imig.12488.

18 Baran Şengul, *Secondary Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Syrians' Education in Turkey* (Izmir: Yaşar University, 2020), https://unescochair.yasar.edu.tr.

19 Madra Aysel et al., *Community building through inclusive education*.

to thrive in the classroom. It is equally important to develop an identity-promoting and participatory school culture that acknowledges all children's multilayered diversity dimensions and their physical, emotional, and social experiences during the shared learning process.

THE ROLE OF ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Literature[20] and reports from international organizations[21] and UN institutions[22] show that arts education can play a beneficial role in promoting a diversity-sensitive and multicultural school culture. There is a range of reasons why informal and non-formal artistic and cultural activities empower children, promote their motivation to learn, and enhance social cohesion processes between children from refugee and host communities as well as students' feelings of belonging in school. Some of these reasons are:

(1) Young people's capacity for learning, imagination, and intuition within these playful and creative learning contexts gives them the courage and self-confidence to master upcoming challenges in everyday (school) life and motivates them to engage in school subjects. "Cultural and artistic projects [...] often reveal previously undiscovered or underestimated abilities. Giving them space and time to grow strengthens the further development and self-awareness of young people."[23]

(2) Artistic and cultural activities not only give each child the opportunity to articulate themself, reflecting their unique personality, capabilities, and diverse (cultural, social, etc.) affiliations, but also to perceive the diversity of other students as a valuable part of their school (culture). "Artistic-cultural educational practice[s] enable experiences that encompass and combine emotional-affective, cognitive-intellectual, physical-sensory, and social-cultural processes."[24]

(3) Artistic and cultural activities give space to non-verbal and creative communication. It allows (refugee) children to express and share their feelings, experiences, thoughts, and fears without the use of words, but in their own "imaginative language." In this way, artistic-creative learning activities can help (refugee) children to overcome language barriers and to reduce the fear of contact with other classmates.

(4) Artistic and cultural activities create different channels that allow children to gain a better understanding of each other's perspectives and to develop relationships. "Particularly in the process of artistic creation it becomes again and again evident that there exist numerous possibilities to answer one question, manifold ways to achieve an aim, and that different competences and personalities are needed to solve a problem. Getting to know this diversity, produces tolerance and acceptance [among the students]."[25]

(5) The inclusion of artistic-creative learning methods can also contribute to a playful and creative lesson design with a view toward non-artistic school subjects (such as

20 Elizabeth Lasley and C. Miki Henderson, "Creating Inclusive Classrooms through the Arts," *Dimensions of Early Childhood* 42, no. 2, (2014): 11–17, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1045923.pdf.; DKJS Homepage, accessed November 25, 2023, https://kulturagenten-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/10-gute-Gruende-fuer-Kulturelle-Bildung.pdf.; Barbara Brokamp et al., *Allerart – Inklusion und Kulturelle Bildung Erfahrungen, Methoden und Anregungen* (Remscheid: Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Kinder- und Jugendbildung e. V., 2017), https://www.bkj.de.

21 UNESCO, "UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education," accessed December 8, 2024, https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf.

22 UN Human Rights Office, accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage.

23 DKJS Homepage, accessed December 8, 2024.

24 Barbara Brokamp et al., *Allerart – Inklusion und Kulturelle Bildung Erfahrungen, Methoden und Anregungen*, accessed December 8, 2024.

25 DKJS Homepage.

Turkish, math, or physics). The inclusion of artistic-creative methods into these school lessons can help to meet the diverse capabilities and needs of all students in the classroom, particularly of students who have problems in fully participating and feeling safe at school.

(6) Artistic-creative activities enable self-directed and explorative learning experiences; children can become active producers of the artistic-creative process and bring in their interests, life words, and topics that are relevant to them. In this way, they develop curiosity and commitment to artistic-cultural co-creation and learn also to take full responsibility for their actions. [26]

(7) Artistic-creative creation processes open up spaces for children to be the storytellers of their manifold ideas, stories, and forms of cultural and linguistic expressions, traditions and world views, and create in this way a positive and appreciative image of all children with their cultural and linguistic identities.

Furthermore, according to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights the Child, all children have the right to artistic-cultural participation. Therefore, all children should be guaranteed access to arts and cultural activities. As Turkey has ratified this treaty, it should work to protect this right. The text of this treaty is outlined in the information box.[27]

According to **Article 31** of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**,[26] all children have the right to artistic-cultural participation:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The UN Committee on the Child, which was established to monitor and promote the implementation of the convention, emphasizes in their **General Comment Nr. 17 (2013)**[27] on the right of the child to take part in rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life, and the arts (art. 31).

27. Articles 28 and 29: Education must be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential. [...] For children to optimize their potential, they require opportunities for cultural and artistic development as well as participation in sports and games. The Committee also emphasizes that the rights under article 31 are of positive benefit to children's educational development; inclusive education and inclusive play are mutually reinforcing and should be facilitated during the course of every day throughout early childhood education and care (preschool) as well as primary and secondary school. While relevant and necessary for children of all ages, play is particularly significant in the early years of schooling. Research has shown that play is an important means through which children learn.

28. Article 30: Children from ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities should be encouraged to enjoy and participate in their own cultures. States should respect the cultural specificities of children from minority communities as well as children of indigenous origin, and ensure that they are afforded equal rights with children from majority communities to participate in cultural and artistic activities reflecting their own language, religion and culture.

26 UNHCR, Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly Resolution 44/25, adopted November 20, 1989, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

27 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), April 17, 2013, CRC/C/GC/17, https://www.refworld.org/docid/51ef9bcc4.html.

CROSS-SECTORAL ARTS EDUCATION PROJECTS IN ISTANBUL

Over the last few years in Istanbul, a number of civil society actors have entered partnerships with primary schools and other actors from the community in order to enhance the equal participation and social-educational inclusion of refugee children with the help of a broad spectrum of arts education approaches and projects.

The opening of primary schools to cooperation with outside actors and building alliances in the field can constitute a meaningful contribution to promoting community-based and diversity-sensitive (school) transformation processes. The involvement of partners from arts, culture, and local society allows different members from both the refugee and host society to learn from each other at eye-level and contribute to their experiences to the development of a shared project. In this way, cooperating actors, e.g., the parents of the refugee students or refugee-led organizations and initiatives, remain not only "passive beneficiaries" of local communities but act as active co-creators and experts in local school development.

Additionally, the integration of diverse actors and partners can play a major part in responding to the everyday realities and manifold needs, interests, and multiple affiliations of the children involved. Extracurricular players can provide a wealth of knowledge and resources, which can help students feel empowered through the joint creation process, which, in turn, results in their increased learning motivation and openness toward their classmates and learning environment.

The different stakeholders and alliances that I observed during the six months of my fellowship involve many actors at different levels in shaping and realizing arts education practices together. Volunteers, psychologists, (environmental) pedagogues, artists, performers, students, diversity trainers, and the families of children from the host and refugee communities, among others, worked together to jointly realize a wide range of artistic-creative, intercultural, and environmental-pedagogical activities in informal and (non-) formal education contexts.

The following section provides an overview of some selected examples, which were presented as good practices during the first part of the workshop: (1) Yuva Association (2) Small Projects Istanbul/Koç University Global Aid Volunteers (3) İKSV Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space (4) Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden/Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (RASAS) (5) Maya Foundation (6) Contemporary Drama Association.

UÇAN KÜTÜPHANE PROJESİ – FLYING LIBRARY PROJECT

The Flying Library Project was a cooperative project between the Yuva Association (Yuva Derneği), the Goethe-Institute Istanbul, the municipality of Avcılar, and the Leyla Bayram primary school (Leyla Bayram İlkokulu).



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Flying Library Project
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What was the project about?

The "Flying Library" was a mobile learning and interactive space located in a public park next to the Leyla Bayram primary school in the district of Avcılar. It offered children from refugee and host communities a wide range of (in)formal learning activities, including theatre, painting workshops, specially tailored creative reading courses in Arabic and Turkish, and experimental laboratory courses for a playful approach to math and science. The project aimed to enhance social cohesion between host and refugee children and to strengthen their resilience, learning motivation, and school attendance.

ANLAŞ, PAYLAŞ, BERABER KAYNAŞ PROJESİ – UNDERSTAND, SHARE, UNITE TOGETHER PROJECT

The Understand, Share, Unite Together project was a cooperative project between Small Projects Istanbul – Zeytin Ağacı Derneği (SPI), Koç University, and Uzun Yusuf Middle School (Uzun Yusuf Ortaokulu) in Fatih (Istanbul).

What was the project about?

The SPI team, together with volunteers from the international service-learning certificate program



Understand, Share, Unite Together Project
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KUGlobalAid of Koç University, developed a seven-week school project for a group of 60 students ages 10–12 from refugee and host communities.

The project comprised practical and content-related activities including music, theatre, art, and handcraft workshops or seminars encouraging reflections on topics around youth rights, gender, and discrimination. Its main purpose was the strengthening of exchange and empathy between young people and the empowerment of their self-confidence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.



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BİRLİKTE GÜÇLÜ SESLER KOROSU II PROJESİ – STRONGER TOGETHER VOICES CHOIR II PROJECT

The Stronger Together Voices Choir II project was a cooperative project between the Istanbul Foundation of Culture and Arts (İKSV), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM, Sosyal Gelişim ve Dayanışma Derneği), the Mavi Kalem Association for Social Assistance and Solidarity (Mavi Kalem Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği), the Human Resource Development Foundation, the World Academy for Local Government and Democracy (WALD), and the Istanbul Music Festival, Istanbul Development Agency.



Stronger Together Voices Choir II Project
©Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts



Stronger Together Voices Choir II Project
©Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

What was the project about?

The Stronger Together Voices Choir II was a long-running, extracurricular choir project that brought together immigrants and refugees with Turkish primary school-aged children to enhance their social cohesion through the universal language of music. Supported and guided by a qualified choirmaster, the children learned to sing songs in different languages and to perform accompanying sign-language translation. At the end of the project, the children posted their multilingual repertoire on the İKSV YouTube channel within the scope of the 48th Istanbul music festival.

GÜNLÜK (SIĞLA) AĞACIM YEŞERİYOR PROJESİ – MY (SWEETGUM) TREE IS GREENING PROJECT

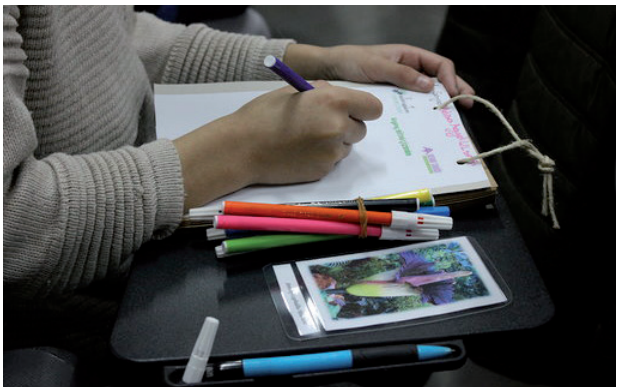


My (Sweetgum) Tree Is Greening Project
©Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden

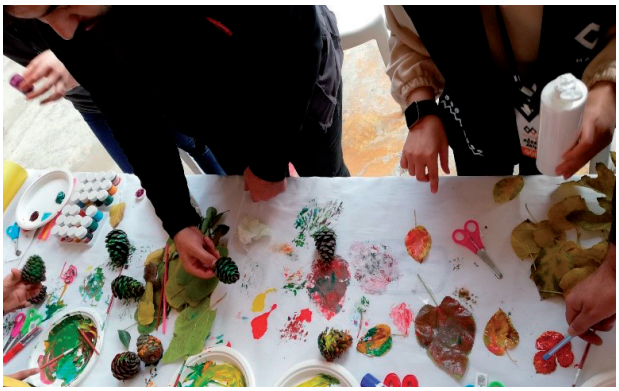
The project My (Sweetgum) Tree Is Greening was a cooperative project between the Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden (Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanik Bahçesi), the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (Mülteciler ve Sığınmacılar Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği), and the Zübeyde Hanım primary school (Zübeyde Hanım İlkokulu).

What was the project about?

The project My (Sweetgum) Tree Is Greening aimed to foster educational participation and



My (Sweetgum) Tree Is Greening Project
©Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden



Trauma-Informed School Programs & Project Lift
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social cohesion between Turkish and Syrian primary school children through "the unifying power of nature." The workshop series, consisting of a total of thirteen lessons, had been carried out once every two weeks with a mixed class of Turkish and Syrian fourth grade students of the Zübeyde Hanım primary school. Under the guidance of different environmental instructors from the botanical gardens, the project offered various creative and participatory activities for the children such as discovering interesting plants, drawing fossils, making handcrafts with natural materials, and participating in playful games and drama activities.

TRAVMAYA DUYARLI OKUL PROGRAMI PROJESİ - TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL PROGRAMS & PROJE LIFT - PROJECT LIFT

Project Lift was realized by the Maya Foundation (Maya Vakfı). It was further developed into the Trauma-Informed School Program, which is a cooperation between the foundation and the Ministry of National Education.

What was the project about?

Project Lift was designed to help refugee children ages 10 to 14 recover from their traumatic experiences and increase their resilience by means of artistic, music, and dance-based therapy methods. The project started as a small-scale psychosocial support program before the establishment of the foundation itself. As the need for more workshops rapidly grew and had positive effects on children, this led to the establishment of a foundation and to the development of the trauma-informed school program. In this program, teachers and school counselors were trained by qualified psychologists to identify trauma and psychological stress and to use appropriate interventions and art therapy-based methods to overcome difficult situations in class and create a trauma-sensitive school climate.



Trauma-Informed School Programs & Project Lift
©Maya Foundation

YARATICI DRAMA İLE OKULLARDA SOSYAL UYUMUN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ PROJESİ – STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION IN SCHOOLS WITH CREATIVE DRAMA PROJECT

Strengthening Social Cohesion in Schools with Creative Drama project was organized by the Migration Studies Group (Göç Çalışmaları Grubu), which is part of the Contemporary Drama Association (Gençlik Kulübü ve Çağdaş Drama Derneği). It was realized in cooperation with the Şişli District for National Education and various neighborhood associations and primary schools.



Strengthening Social Cohesion in Schools with Creative Drama Project
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Strengthening Social Cohesion in Schools with Creative Drama Project
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What was the project about?

The Strengthening Social Cohesion in Schools with Creative Drama project offered drama workshops for schoolchildren from refugee and host communities in various districts of Istanbul. The children came together in mixed groups for five to six weeks and participated in various playful and drama activities that helped them to overcome language barriers and uncertainties and to build trust, mutual understanding, and a feeling of belonging. Further workshops have been designed exclusively for refugee children in order to empower their speech-motivation and Turkish language skills through playful drama methods.

ADVANCING QUALITY EDUCATION AND CREATING A CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH ARTS EDUCATION: MAIN OBSTACLES AND PROBLEMS

During the second part of the workshop, the participants—including primary school teachers and principals, (refugee-oriented) NGOs, cultural institutions, foundations, and partners from academia—were asked to come together into groups according to school and non-school sectors to identify major obstacles and challenges faced in initiating and implementing quality and inclusive arts education practices for primary school children. As a second step, the results were brought together in the plenary and discussed with all parties involved.

In structuring this report, I relied not only on the challenges and problems the participants articulated in the joint discussion and presentations of good practices during the workshop but also included obstacles and problems that were mentioned during my project visits and (online) interviews with academicians, school actors, and various non-school partners. To complement those outcomes with relevant background info, this section is also based on secondary literature.

FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS IN FORMAL EDUCATION

The participants initially emphasized challenges arising from the state's educational policies and structure as well as daily school practices. Participants claimed that sufficient importance is not given to artistic-creative learning in society and education in Turkey. One of the root causes for this present situation can be attributed to long-term neoliberal tendencies in education and the resulting centralized exam system.

The participants identified relevant burdens such as the curriculum development, organizational structure, and daily teaching practices that obstruct the implementation of quality and student-oriented artistic-creative school subjects and impede processes of opening and change in schools with arts, cultural, and civil partners from the community.

Neoliberal Educational Policy Reforms and Centralized Exam Systems

Studies show that the neoliberal reform of the Turkish education system after the 1980s brought not only financial cuts in public education but also created changes in the curriculum and a new understanding of schooling, one in which the primary objective is to prepare students for the state's standardized tests.[28] Teachers have been largely redefined as professionals or technicians tasked with contributing to economic development by raising competent and able individuals in accordance with market demands.[29] Students have been learning, together with the testing system, how to compete with each other instead of cooperating and collaborating.[30]

Declining public resources and lower quality education at public schools have led to an explosive increase in the numbers of private tutoring institutions preparing students for entrance exams to secondary schools and universities.[31] This trend

28 Hülya Kosar Altinyelken et al., "Turkey at a crossroads: critical debates and issues in education," *Comparative Education* 51, no. 4 (2015): 473–483, doi: 10.1080/03050068.2015.1089076.

29 Ibid.

30 Aslıhan Zengin, "Neoliberal Educational Policies after the 1980s in Turkey," The Ataturk Institute for Modern Turkish History, Bogazici University, https://www.ippapublicpolicy.org/file/paper/1435167033.pdf.

31 Aysit Tansel and Fatma Bircan, "Demand for Education in Turkey: A Tobit Analysis of Private Tutoring Expenditures." *Economics of Education Review* 25 (2006): 303–313, quoted in Kosar Altinyelken et al., "Turkey at a crossroads," *Comparative Education* 51, no. 4, (2015): 476.

has intensified educational inequalities based on socioeconomic background.[32]

Placement into tertiary education is exam-based and highly competitive. The first stage for students, which determines their access to tertiary education, is the Basic Proficiency Test (*Temel Yeterlilik Testi* (TYT)), a multiple-choice assessment on subjects such as Turkish, social sciences, mathematics, and science.[33]

Some of the workshop participants indicate here that the acceptance of high school students into universities by a central exam and the related increased emphasis on core subjects in the school curriculum leads to a marginalization of visual arts and music courses in high schools. Although students are no longer obliged to take an examination while passing from primary to secondary school, and there is now a growing number of teachers who encourage inquiry-based and student-centered learning required in the curriculum, many teachers remain reliant on multiple-choice exams, and exams are continuing to be a source of pressure on students and their families.[34]

Social Awareness

Relating to these developments in education, many workshop participants stated that there is a strong societal tendency to applaud academic success while not giving importance to students' self-development in the arts. According to observations, there is a lack of awareness toward the educational value of artistic-creative learning processes in schools and society. Özsoy stresses in this context that art lessons, for instance, are seen until nowadays as second grade lessons.[35] In analyzing the main problems of art education and art teacher training in Turkey, he notices, "Some government notables, the authori[ties] of [the] Ministry of Education, politic[al] parties, the dons of the universities, school managers, pre and primary school teachers, some visual arts teachers, students and parents [are] still not getting the aims of the courses, or not believing or being convinced for the benefits of art courses and the necessity and the reason of its education in schools."[36]

Curriculum, Organizational Structure, and Resources

In primary (four years) and middle school (four years), visual arts and music classes are compulsory in the curriculum. Other subjects such as arts and crafts, technology, and design are offered as optional subjects if schools have designated time for elective courses. Further areas of visual arts such as drama and dance are not generally taught as a subject, but some schools have clubs or afterschool activities for these.[37]

Over time, far-reaching curriculum reforms have been made that brought about positive developments by helping teachers apply more contemporary teaching models in middle and high schools. Both the visual arts and music education programs in Turkish public schools are prepared with a constructivist learning approach, which gives increased importance to active and explorative

32 Erkan Aydoğan, "Egitim sisteminde yeniden yapılanma ve özellestirme adımları. [Measures to reconstruct and privatise education system]," *Memleket, siyaset, yönetim* 3, no. 6 (2008): 166–187, quoted in Kosar Altinyelken et al., "Turkey at a crossroads," *Comparative Education* 51, no. 4, (2015): 476.

33 OECDiLibrary Homepage, accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/71ee93b4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/71ee93b4-en.

34 HürriyetDaily News Homepage, accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/.

35 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

36 Vedat Özsoy, "History of Art Education in Turkey: A Brief History of Art Education and Art Teacher Training in Turkey," *InSEA Newsletter* 4, no. 1 (2012): https://www.vedatozsoy.com/diger-yayinlar.

37 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

learning and also supports the idea of cross-curricular education and learning in a social environment. Yet, some studies emphasize that there are still existing shortcomings and misunderstandings of the music and visual arts curricula that lead to difficulties in applying these curriculum reforms into everyday school practices.

A further challenge, mentioned by some primary school teachers, is the limited time for music or art classes prescribed in the curriculum. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, there has been a significant change in the number of lessons and time for art. In the 1920s, art was still highly valued and occupied a significant number of lesson hours per week compared to today, with students engaged in arts courses during 12.3% of the total school hours.[38] As the number of art lessons was gradually reduced from the curriculum, the scarcity of art classes is nowadays at an all-time low. In the 2014 weekly curriculum for primary schools, visual arts and music lessons were reduced to one hour per week for all grades, and two to four additional hours of art courses were offered to students between the 5th and 8th grades as elective classes.[39] According to Münevver Meltem Yige, the reduced lesson hours per week and the introduction of the elective option show that art education was no longer a priority within the Turkish education system.[40]

The same applies to music classes in schools. In primary education, only one hour of music lessons is required from 1st to 8th grade, and there are additional two-hour elective music lessons from 5th to 8th grade.[41] Workshop participants reported that even despite the lack of visual arts and music class hours per week, some music and art teachers in primary schools use these lessons in order to teach core subjects rather than art or music if they have not finished the educational content during the scheduled teaching units.

Some of the school actors emphasized the inadequacy of resources and infrastructure as one of the key challenges for the development of artistic-creative learning spaces in schools. Many schools lack not only time but also sufficient space and materials to comply with participatory and interactive learning concepts.

Qualification and Attitude of Principals and Teachers

Various workshop participants and stakeholders mentioned the lack of experience and inadequate knowledge or skills of many public primary school teachers in the field of arts education. With the introduction of the new 4+4+4 education system in 2014, the number of years that classroom teachers were required to teach art and music increased from three to four years.[42] At first glance it may seem reasonable that classroom teachers teach music and visual arts classes, because classroom teaching requires specialization. But there are serious studies showing that classroom teachers are not trained to teach visual arts and music lessons in pre-service education. Furthermore, in research based on interviews and questionnaires with classroom teachers, teachers themselves

38 Munevver Meltem Yige, "Visual arts education provisions for primary schools in Turkey," *Arts Education Policy Review* 120, no. 1 (2017): 5. https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2017.1342107.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 MEB (2023), "İlkokullar ve Ortaokullar Haftalık Ders Çizelgesi [Weekly timetables for Elementary school and lower secondary school]," http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/www/haftalik-ders-cizelgeleri/kategori/7/1/, (2016), quoted in EAS European Association for Music in Schools Homepage, accessed November 30, 2023, https://eas-music.org/countries/turkey/music-education-in-schools-tr/.

42 Munevver Meltem Yige. *A comparative case study of teaching Art in inclusive classrooms in Turkey and the UK* (Reading: University of Reading, 2016), 36.

also state that they do not have the required skills to teach visual arts and music education.[43]

According to many of the school and non-school actors, the cultivation of a school culture that does not focus on arts education is one of the main barriers hindering the implementation of progressive and contemporary artistic-creative learning approaches into everyday school practices. Özsoy argues in this context that the only goal for arts education in schools is to develop drawing and painting skills. Apart from that, class teachers are extremely ignorant about the existence of the potential of arts education and the skills it can offer. Art classes aiming to develop students' abilities such as aesthetic sensitivities, visual perceptions, high-level critical thinking skills, artistic creativity, and social skills are therefore almost never taught.[44] Most of the participants from the education sector stated also that many teachers and principals are simply not aware that artistic-creative learning has the great potential to foster the motivation for learning, self-esteem, and collaborative action between students.

UNEQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY ARTS EDUCATION

Another problem identified by participants is the continuous unequal access to and participation in quality arts education practices for socially and educationally disadvantaged children. Some of the teachers and principals mentioned in this context that the ongoing neoliberal trend to increase privatization in the education system and to allocate public resources to private schools reinforces inequality for socially disadvantaged children in education in general and their participation in arts education activities in particular.

Although there are private schools with qualified teachers and staff that care about quality arts education and provide the required resources for its development, a significant part of private schools (which are often called *colleges*) are first and foremost focused on profit. The administrators and teachers of these schools, who prepare their students for the central exams, do not emphasize arts education, because they want their students to contribute to the positive advertisement of the school by getting good grades in the centralized exams.[45] Similar to public schools, artistic subjects are of secondary importance and serve rather as leisure and recreational activities. Some of the academicians and teachers stated that particularly because of this profit- and status-oriented attitude, many of these schools are neither interested in using their capacities for the benefit of disadvantaged groups nor for the development of arts education programs that aim to foster social and educational inclusion.

Some of the civil society players highlighted that beyond the limited opportunities at most state and private schools, access to extracurricular arts education activities depends very much on the educational and economic status of the families. It is primarily children from socially privileged backgrounds who benefit from private and extracurricular offers such as, for example, private piano or dance lessons. The workshop attendees underlined in this context that quality arts education is still associated with "cultivated forms" of artistic-creative learning, which signify a particular social group or status.

43 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

44 Ibid.

45 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

COOPERATION

Next, participants pointed out the main impediments to the realization of inclusive arts education programs between schools and extracurricular partners. Some of the key challenges mentioned, which have a decisive influence on the actors' ability to act and cooperate, are barriers concerning the financial and legal conditions, communication problems, and hurdles in building sustainable relationships, such as logistical deficiencies and lack of appropriate resources.

Various non-school actors pointed out that despite all the positive efforts of a number of cross-sectoral initiatives and partnerships that aim to integrate a participatory and inclusive approach to arts education, this type of educational programs can only reach a limited number of students across the country. The decisive reason for this situation is mainly attributable to the lack of public support. Until now, no public funds have been allocated for arts education programs that target socially disadvantaged or marginalized children.[46] The projects currently organizing such activities are primary financed through private or international funding.

In addition to the financial challenges, the participants also mentioned legal burdens that impede cooperation between both sides. In order to realize arts education programs together with schools, extracurricular partners must be recognized by the Ministry of National Education. Affiliation and assistance protocols must be signed to ensure that the organizations are suitable to cooperate on such projects.[47] Civil society actors reported here of administrative obstacles when seeking permission with corresponding municipal authorities and school directors for local projects. Some of the civil society actors emphasized, for instance, that even though all the project members from the school and non-school side were motivated to jointly realize a project, it failed in the end because of the arbitrary disapproval of the school administration.

Another topic that participants from non-school sectors drew attention to is the difficulty in finding schools with which to partner and the rather passive role of most of the schools in already established partnerships. Although there are very engaged school partners that are enthusiastic in co-shaping projects together with extracurricular partners, the majority of schools are rather uninvolved in this process. A wide range of educational activities takes place after school, where teachers either undertake a caretaker role or do not attend at all. The extracurricular actors stressed that including the resources and pedagogical qualifications provided by teachers would be an asset to the project. According to the opinion of some teachers, the reasons for the difficulties in acquiring and involving schools result from schools' strict curriculum guidelines and the staff's insufficient qualifications in the field.

The attendees also discussed the lack of information flow and concrete arrangements between the partners from the school and non-school sides. Most of the joint projects are realized without regular exchange on planning, implementation, and evaluation and without any clarification regarding the logistics, management responsibilities, or emerging problems. The participants highlighted that implementing transparent and binding communication processes between both sides as one of the most important steps for ensuring connectivity and cohesiveness during the realization of the projects. Some of the attendees said that these obstacles can be attributed to the lack of personal—i.e., time—and financial resources.

46 Zülal Fazlıoğlu Akın and Ece Özlem, *(Re)thinking arts education in Turkey* (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2014), 123.

47 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

Another problem that was mentioned particularly by stakeholders from cultural institutions and NGOs is the transportation between schools and extracurricular places of learning. Institutions and associations that initiate small-scale projects are in general not able to pay for school buses or public transportation because of limited financial resources. Related to this, most of the workshop attendees also considered the school environment and the given spatial conditions for the implementation of participatory arts education activities as inadequate.

PARTICIPATION

Another key point that was mentioned during the workshop in reference to the main obstacles to the implementation of inclusive arts education was the difficult conditions and the lack of motivation from children and parents to participate in these projects.

Many participants in the workshop agreed that the involvement of children's families from both the refugee and host communities in the projects is a key component in enhancing inclusive learning processes. The more parents feel welcomed, trusted, and heard, the more they support the participation of their children in these activities and show motivation to contribute with their ideas and recourses to the projects. A number of attendees reported here on the difficulty of reaching families.

On the part of Turkish parents, not only the lack of time or energy was mentioned as a reason that hinders parents from getting more involved, but also reservations and unwillingness to participate in joint learning between their children and those with refugee backgrounds were observed. In turn, for parents from refugee communities, active engagement often appeared to be an insurmountable obstacle. The workshop participants highlighted here obstacles such as unfamiliarity with the education system, language barriers, or further bureaucratic difficulties that make it almost impossible to actively co-shape these projects.

As some pedagogues and project leaders noted, these difficult conditions and attitudes of the adults also have an impact on the children's motivation and openness for projects and activities. They observed here that the reservations and fears of grown-ups are mirrored in the attitudes and behaviors of the children, resulting in disinterest, prejudices, or bullying. Some of the participants stated, moreover, that refugee children also stay away from the joint activities because of their obligation to work to support their families in their difficult economic situations.

Another main problem mentioned by civil society actors is the fact that they cannot always provide appropriate translation services during common activities. Particularly small and medium-sized associations have difficulties in guaranteeing the presence of a qualified translator due to limited financial resources and are therefore mostly dependent on the support of volunteers. Some of the workshop attendees drew attention to the "unequal treatment of languages" when it comes to translation. Whereas some of the languages such as, for example, Arabic can be easily integrated in educational programs, the translation of other languages such as Kurdish is not always welcome in some schools and extracurricular learning environments.

SUSTAINABILITY

Finally, many participants also highlighted the difficulty of achieving sustainability in their programs. The main reason here is insufficient public funding, which impedes long-term programs and structural development processes of local cultural and educational landscapes.

Some of the small-scale association and initiatives stressed that the knowledge transfer, information flow, and interaction level between them, the schools, and governmental institutions remain relatively limited and mostly at the bureaucratic or monitoring level due to the hierarchical system and lack of mutual trust. This, in turn, leads to the absence of a profound exchange and evaluation concerning the daily practices, experiences, and lessons learned of the civil society actors in the field and aggravates the sustainable incorporation of processes of communal change. Vedat Özsoy notes in this regard that on the national level, "there are until nowadays no roundtables initiated or strategic guidelines developed between the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Directorate General of Migration Management, and further relevant art, culture, and civil society actors which aim to structurally incorporate inclusive arts education programs in Turkish public schools."[48]

48 Interview with Vedat Özsoy in correspondence with the author, January 6, 2021.

INCLUSIVE ARTS EDUCATION AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The following section outlines problems and challenges that have arisen in the field of inclusive arts education with the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas my research project in Istanbul took place before the pandemic, the report itself was prepared after the outbreak of Covid-19. Since many aspects of accessibility and education have changed and worsened during the pandemic, a note on the most significant emerging changes has been added within the framework of this study.

COVID-19 and related measures hit the most vulnerable members of our society—children and young people—particularly hard. In Turkey, as well as in countless other countries, millions of children could not attend schools in-person and share common experiences with peers. All children and youth have been severely affected by pandemic-related measures and have suppressed their needs and desires to a high extent since its outbreak. Children from refugee families, however, have been disproportionately disadvantaged in multiple ways.

Nearly 48% of refugee children could not access distance learning in Turkey during the pandemic[49] due to several reasons such as a lack of technical equipment and information about distance education programs, or the fact that they could not access regular education from their homes.[50] As a result, many refugee children have been hindered not only from attending formal education but also participating in extracurricular activities and programs. Most of the actors whose arts education programs I accompanied during my fellowship in Istanbul reported of a strongly diminishing number of participants since their programs switched to online platforms.

In addition to the worsening of preexisting educational inequalities, refugee children also suffered more heavily from the health effects resulting out of the months-long lockdowns. Their difficulty in accessing education resulted not only in educational gaps but also increasing dropout rates, furthering the negative consequences of children's academic life. Considering refugee children's widespread experiences of war, plight, and precarious living conditions, many of them were already particularly vulnerable before the outbreak of the pandemic. Therefore, months of isolation and lack of social relations with peers and classmates during shared activities also increased rates of depression, anxiety, and other psychological difficulties.

Factors such as the enduring economic crisis and larger societal emphasis on survival during COVID-19 exacerbated social polarization and xenophobic tendencies throughout the country.[51] Additionally, programs strengthening social cohesion between refugee and host communities shrank significantly with social distancing measures.[52] Actors emphasized that the rising

49 Ellen Kollender and Maissam Nimer, *Long-Term Exclusionary Effects of COVID-19 for Refugee Children in the German and Turkish Education Systems: A Comparative Perspective* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2020).

50 Refugee Support Center/Multeci Destek Dernegi, *Situation Analysis of Refugees in Turkey During Covid-19 Crisis* (Refugee Support Center/ Multeci Destek Dernegi, 2020, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76479.

51 Doğan Erhan and H Deniz Genç, "Early-Responding Civil Society and a Late Coming State: Findings from Turkey during the Pandemic," *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 12, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1515/npf- 2020-0049.

52 Joint Data Center of Displacement, *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Forcibly Displaced People: A Primer on Research Activities* (UNHCR and Word Bank Group, 2021).

mistrust and social divide have not only increased the risk of refugee children's psychological suffering and social exclusion, but they noticed also that it has become even more difficult to involve the families of refugee and host communities in their work and projects.

Yet, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have not only dramatically aggravated the already precarious psycho-social and educational situation of displaced children and their families in many ways. They have also affected initiatives and associations that advocate for these concerns, presenting existential hurdles.

Studies show that for NGOs working mainly with refugees and irregular migrants around Turkey, it became much more difficult to receive funding of any kind from the central government during the lockdown.[53] Associations and initiatives from the arts, culture, and civil society sectors, whose resources were already severely limited before the outbreak of the pandemic, were faced with even greater challenges in the field. Particularly, the small and medium-sized NGOs that I accompanied in 2019 emphasized in this context that they first had to fight for their own existence and the maintenance of their basic programs; thus, the initiation of further artistic-creative activities and programs finances through additional international or private project funds were in most cases not feasible in view of the limited personnel and time. Despite these immense barriers, many of the associations and initiatives reacted quickly to the lockdowns and tried to maintain their running arts education programs through digital or hybrid formats. Others, in turn, had to stop their activities entirely.

Furthermore, extracurricular school partners that cooperated with primary schools in the field have faced enormous challenges over time. The value and significance of music and art lessons at schools shrank significantly during the course of the pandemic. The focus on the supposedly "more important" core subjects such as mathematics or natural sciences, which were already dominant in pre-pandemic times, was even more intensified, whereas the teaching of art and music in schools has been pushed back.

In Turkey, only core subjects were supported by the governments' online platform Educational Information Network (EBA) and the educational television network TRT Okul during the lockdown until the fall semester of 2020.[54] The adaptation process to online education for music teachers, for instance, was much more demanding as they were asked to use alternative platforms as Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet instead. In addition, when schools switched to hybrid education, only music, art, and physical education classes were excluded from the face-to-face hybrid system, and teachers had to continue to give lessons online.[55] Although all school lessons were equally shortened in duration to 30 minutes during this time,[56] the one-sided prioritization of core subjects and the further scarcity of arts and music class hours amplified the negative view of the educational value of artistic-creative learning in schools.

After months of lockdown and with the reopening of schools, the resurgence and strengthening of artistic-creative learning opportunities was more important than ever. For refugee students, the negative consequences of the pandemic, their

53 Erhan and Genç, "Early-Responding Civil Society."

54 Mitsi Akoyunoglou et al., *Perspectives for music education in schools after the pandemic* (Network of Music Teachers Associations in Europe, 2021).

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

experiences of isolation, and the resulting feelings of fear and helplessness have had a negative impact on the psychological well-being and learning motivation of these children. This, in turn, has continued to impede their equal participation and access to education.

Therefore, it has become increasingly important to put the socio-emotional needs and experiences of children into focus and to create more inclusive learning spaces that strengthen active participation, self-initiative, and mutual exchange between children. However, after more than two years of the pandemic, it seems that arts education in schools has developed in the opposite direction. In Turkey, as well as in many other countries all over the world, with the return to face-to face learning and in view of the fact that many children have missed many hours of lessons due to months of lockdown, there has been a tendency for schools to increase the pace of learning in order to catch up on the missed subject matter as quickly as possible and to close the learning deficits of the students through catch-up programs or additional homework rather than allocating time for artistic-creative endeavors.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In its policy report *Re(thinking) Arts Education in Turkey* (published in 2014), the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts stresses the need to see arts education policy as a priority issue in national education and cultural policies and advocates for investing in the field by implementing a long-term comprehensive strategy.[57]

In consideration of the continually growing social polarization and anti-refugee sentiments in Turkish society and schools, it is of crucial importance to overcome the low recognition of arts education in politics, education, and society and to see its relevance in light of the current integration process of refugee and asylum-seeking children in the Turkish education system. This means ensuring that both Turkey's native and refugee children have access to quality arts education in and outside of the classroom, which requires developing concrete policy strategies, action plans, and local and (inter)national support measures for enhancing inclusive school development.

This last section lays out the main suggestions and recommendations of the workshop discussion, which focused on how to strengthen inclusive arts education practices for all primary school children. The key suggestions and recommendations are complemented by the ideas and statements of the various stakeholders that I interviewed during and after my field research in Istanbul, as well as secondary sources/literature.

The main suggestions and recommendations identified are grouped under the following headings: (I) Implementing Inclusive Educational Policies; (II) Increasing Funding and Sustainability; (III) Enhancing International Support and Cooperation; (IV) Improving Curriculum Design; (V) Continuous Professional Development and Learning for Teachers; (VI) Advancing Extracurricular Projects; (VII) Cooperation among Like-Minded Organizations; (VIII) Ensuring Access to Quality Arts Education.

IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

- A comprehensive and long-term cultural and educational political strategy to enhance the role of arts education as an integral part of inclusive learning practices in Turkish primary schools should be developed.
- The Ministry of National Education (MEB), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (KTB), and other relevant partners from education, arts, culture, academia, and civil society should initiate roundtables and other platforms to formulate concrete development strategies and action plans that draw on sustainable and crisis-proofed inclusive arts education practices.
- Decentralized structures to promote inclusive cultural and educational landscapes should be developed to include local associations and communities on the ground to help shape all relevant levels of migration, cultural, and educational policy and administration. Cross-sector initiatives and networks that have already initiated inclusive arts education projects with Turkish schools for many years could play a key role here.
- Turkey's Education Vision 2023, proclaimed by Health Minister Ziya Selçuk back in 2018, formulated a paradigm shift from a quantity-

57 Akın and Özlem, *(Re)thinking arts education in Turkey*, 114.

oriented educational system to a quality-oriented and human-centered framework. Based on a holistic view of education, the vision focuses on skills like creativity, social skills, and a simpler curriculum or personalized education.[58] This document should be revised, and more detailed guidelines should be added to help implement artistic-creative learning activities as an integral part of inclusive learning practices in Turkish primary schools. Concrete action plans and approaches should be developed together with relevant partners on the ground to put these guidelines into everyday practice. The agenda should be revised with the following goals in mind:

(a) Content and implementation: Design-skill labs are planned at all levels of education to equip children with practical skills associated with the talent sets they have. In addition to the design-skill labs, a wide spectrum of optional (extra)curricular arts education activities can be taken into consideration that consider the needs and actual living conditions of the students and enable emotional-affective, cognitive-intellectual, physical-sensory, and social-cultural learning.

(b) Special education: Revise the one-dimensional perception of inclusive education, which focuses only on the aspect of mental/physical abilities and characteristics, to reflect a multi-dimensional understanding of inclusion that takes into consideration further diversity perspectives such as ethnicity and religion or the socio-economic status of the children, etc.

58 UNESCO Homepage, accessed November 15, 2023, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2019/turkeys-education-vision-2023-6564.

INCREASING FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

- The federal (i.e., Ministry of National Education or the Ministry of Culture), state, and local government can allocate part of the public budget at the national, regional, and municipal level toward developing inclusive arts education programs both in and outside the classroom by targeting all children, young people, and their families, particularly those from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Local agencies—for example a department of the local government, a non-profit organization, or a public-private partnership—can develop and administer grant programs for arts education programs and small-scale projects realized by cross-sectoral partnerships, such as public schools and non-school partners, on the ground.

- National, regional, or international grant agencies and humanitarian organizations can support programs of non-governmental organizations that focus on arts education as their principal mission and develop diversity-sensitive and participatory learning activities for students. Organizations such as the Visual Arts Education Association (Görsed), the Music Educators Society of Turkey (Müzed), the Theatre Education Association (Tiyed), and the Contemporary Drama Association are limited due to the small number of members and their economic potential and, therefore, would be good candidates for such a partnership.

- The Ministry of National Education can develop grant support models to enable professional development for music and art teachers, arts educators, and pedagogues to acquire basic and in-depth knowledge

of current artistic and art didactic positions at the intersection of arts education and refugee inclusion and improve instruction in the field.

- National, regional, or international grant agencies and humanitarian organizations can support inclusive arts education programs realized by independent initiatives and small and medium-sized associations that are particularly in an economically vulnerable situation in (post)pandemic times with public and private funding.
- The federal government, private companies, or non-profit organizations can provide funds for research to be conducted at the intersection of arts education and inclusive learning.
- The Ministry of National Education can allocate public resources for training programs and further education in the field. Experienced civil society organizations such as the Yuva Association, for example, which have already established collaborations with local municipalities and partners from the community in order to realize inclusive arts education programs with primary schools, could receive financial support to extend their training programs and to disseminate their knowledge to municipalities, schools, and extracurricular partners across the country.
- Schools can run pilot studies of good practice programs with the support of partners from the arts, cultural organizations, and civil society. Learned experiences can be drafted into reports that can serve as recommendations to the Ministry of National Education for the proliferation of similar practices.
- Foundations, museums, or other arts and cultural institutions can establish "learning and interaction spaces" for children, teenagers, and groups with limited access to arts and culture. This could be based on the model of İKSV Alt Kat,[59] which offers a wide range of activities, including workshops, talks, screenings, exhibitions, and other events.

ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND COOPERATION

- There are several (cross-sectoral) initiatives and institutions in Turkey that already realize inclusive and diversity-sensible arts education programs and bring valuable experiences and expertise in the field. International (funding) programs and partners should therefore primarily support local actors in scaling up and disseminating their programs within and outside Turkey instead of "importing" (Eurocentric) concepts and good practices.
- The continuation of international programs and collaborations is crucial, since the responsibility for the wellbeing and equal participation of refugee children is a cross-border responsibility that should be shaped through joint solidarity processes and international dialogue. With the outbreak of the pandemic, many actors in the field had to deal with the maintenance of their organizations and basic programs. Before the pandemic, many international cooperation and (funding) programs had been frozen or even completely interrupted. International programs and collaborations, e.g., the German-Turkish Initiative for Cooperation in Refugee Assistance/ALL TOGETHER (II)[60],

59 İKSV Alt Kat, accessed September 15, 2023, https://www.iksv.org/en/iksv-alt-kat

60 German-Turkish-Initiative Homepage, accessed September 15, 2023, https://www.germanturkishinitiative.org/de.

which ended during the course of the pandemic, should receive increasing (financial) attention again and continue to develop.

- International humanitarian aid organizations (such as UNICEF) should provide long-term (financial) support for professional organizations, such as the Maya Foundation or the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, to establish long-term and comprehensive programs and trainings in the field. However, the sole focus and support of already established and professional players overshadows small and medium-sized organizations and initiatives. Therefore, international aid organizations should ensure that smaller organizations are equivalent beneficiaries of international humanitarian aid programs.

IMPROVING CURRICULUM DESIGN

- The Ministry of National Education should ensure that artistic-creative subjects are offered in primary schools in all grade levels on a mandatory and continuous basis per week.
- In developing and implementing the curriculum, the Ministry of National Education and schools should allocate part of the curriculum time to artistic-creative learning in relation to other curriculum areas and enforce student-centered, explorative, and (inter)active learning.
- Curriculum developers, such as the Ministry of National Education's central organization and other contributing education stakeholders, can develop curriculum materials and methods based on artistic-creative and playful learning, which help teachers to motivate students to learn, promotes equal participation of educationally disadvantaged students, and strengthens social cohesion processes between students from refugee and host communities in the classroom.
- Education specialists and academics can develop curriculum models that enable schools to facilitate learning across the curriculum and integrate artistic-creative and playful learning approaches and methods into the teaching of other curriculum areas.
- Good practices such as the GÖÇMAT Projesi,[61] which supports teachers working with refugee and immigrant children in mathematics classes using artistic-creative learning methods, can be applied to other school subjects and reviewed by the Ministry of National Education in its curriculum design.
- Lessons learned and good practices of online or hybrid music and visual arts lessons can be published in reports and be shared with the Ministry of National Education.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

- A separate class on inclusive arts education can be taught in teaching bachelor's programs.
- Schools should provide in-service training for primary school teachers and principals to share good practice models in arts education programs in schools and to improve the understanding of the importance of arts education for the creation of inclusive learning environments in class.
- School training programs based on the

61 GÖÇ – MAT PROJESİ Homepage, accessed September 15, 2023, https://gocmat.com/

model of the trauma-informed school program[62] of the Maya Foundation can be disseminated throughout the country to support teachers in empowering children who suffer from trauma with the help of artistic and playful learning methods.

ADVANCING EXTRACURRICULAR PROJECTS

- Educational institutions, foundations, or associations that play an active role in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion can develop guidelines or work aids highlighting good practices and examples of successful cooperation between primary schools and extracurricular partners as well as give practical advice on how to initiate collaborations and conceptualize, plan, organize, and implement inclusive arts education projects.
- Schools can more strongly enhance inclusive learning at extracurricular venues (for example, museums or theatres). Good practice programs with extracurricular partners can be made into (research) reports and reviewed by the Ministry of National Education for curriculum design.
- Educational administrations (on the central, provincial, district, or institutional level) and foundations or associations that play an active role in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion can organize individual or collective training programs and workshops for principals, teachers, arts-culture professionals, arts educators, and actors from the inclusive educational field to teach various actors how to cooperate in joint projects.
- Educational institutions and foundations or associations that play an active role in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion can establish new collaborations for developing training programs or seminars for art-culture professionals to support their artistic-pedagogical work with children from refugee and host communities in (extra)curricular school projects.

COOPERATION AMONG LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS

- More experienced organizations in the field (of arts education and refugee inclusion) can develop platforms and network initiatives among actors from arts, culture, education, academia, and civil society to ease communication and increase knowledge about concepts and programs.
- Civil society actors and initiatives that play an active role in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion can reinforce exchange and long-term cooperation to pool resources and create development strategies and content together.
- Civil society organizations that play an active role in the field of arts education and refugee inclusion should intensify collaborations with refugee-oriented networks and organizations, such as Arthere Istanbul,[63] to actively incorporate the expertise, experiences, and perspectives of people with refugee backgrounds in the process of developing and shaping arts education activities for children and youth.

62 Maya Vakfı Homepage accessed September 15, 2023, https://mayavakfi.org/en/education-programmes/.

63 Arthere Istanbul Homepage, accessed September 15, 2023, https://www.arthereistanbul.com/home.

ENSURING ACCESS TO QUALITY ARTS EDUCATION

- Education policymakers and authorities should create sustainable conditions in times of crisis and future pandemics to guarantee continuous access to arts education for all children and young people.
- In times of crisis and future pandemics, educational administrations (state, autonomous communities, and municipalities) should establish reliable support (structures) and provide spatial and personnel resources for children and young people from families who live in very cramped conditions, do not have Wi-Fi at home, or cannot provide learning support for their children.
- Private or joint government-private sponsors can provide public funds to ensure that all students have the technical equipment they need to participate in distance learning.
- Multilingual games and linguistic animation methods can be developed and disseminated following the example of the memo game project of the Hep Beraber program.[64] Arts-culture professionals and teachers can be trained in inclusive and multilingual language animation.
- Civil society actors and primary schools that initiate inclusive arts education programs for school students should work to empower community development among families by creating spaces for meetings, shared activities, and dialogue.
- Funding institutions, experts, and actors from the field can develop long-term strategies, concepts, and programs to critically engage with discrimination and structural exclusion in cultural and educational institutions.

64 German-Turkish-Initiative Homepage, accessed September 15, 2023, www.germanturkishinitiative.org/de/learning-multilingualism-de.

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APPENDIX I. PROJECT WEBSITES

Good Practices Presented during the Workshop:

Yuva Association. https://www.yuva.org.tr/en/

Istanbul Foundation of Culture and Arts. https://www.iksv.org/en/iksv-alt-kat

Small Projects Istanbul. https://www.facebook.com/smallprojectsistanbul

Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden. http://www.ngbb.org.tr/en/index.html

The Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association. https://multeciler.org.tr/

Maya Foundation. www.mayavakfi.org

Contemporary Drama Association. http://yaratici-drama.org/

Good Practices Referenced in the Conclusions and Policy Recommendations:

German-Turkish-Initiative-Hep Beraber. https://www.germanturkishinitiative.org/de

MIGRA-MATH Project. https://gocmat.com/en/home-page/

Arthere Istanbul. https://www.arthereistanbul.com/home

APPENDIX II. WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Primary School and Refugee Inclusion: Improving Social Cohesion in Schools with Art, Cultural & Civil Partners in the Community

Date: Wednesday, June 19, 2019, 13:00–18:30

Venue: Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space**,** Salon İKSV

The workshop was a cooperative event between the Istanbul Foundations of Culture and Arts (İKSV), the Education Reform Initiative and the Istanbul Policy Center.

PROGRAM

12:30–13:00	Welcoming guests & light lunch
13:00–13:15	Opening remarks
	Joanna Krzemińska 2018/19 Mercator-IPC Fellow
13:15–13:45	**Burcu Meltem**, Education Observatory Coordinator, Education Reform Initiative/Eğitim Reformu Girişimi (ERG)
	Primary school and refugee inclusion
	Ebru Kılıç Arguç, Selim Sırrı Tarcan Primary School (Gülbağ Selim Sırrı Tarcan İlkokulu)
	Inclusive learning in primary education – a practical perspective
	Özlem Ece, Director of the Department of Cultural Policy Studies, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts/İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı (İKSV)
	Arts education and refugee inclusion
13:45–14:15	**Discussion**
14:15–14:30	**Coffee break**
14:30–16:00	**Good practices presentations**
	Presentations on good practices in the field were given by İKSV Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space, Small Projects Istanbul, Koç University Global Aid Volunteers, Nezahat Gökyiğit Botanical Garden, Contemporary Drama Association, Yuva Association/Goethe Institute, and Maya Foundation.
16:00–16:30	**Snack & coffee break**
16:30–18:30	**Moderated discussion & conclusion**

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