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BEING A CHILD IN SULTANBEYLI

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILDREN, ADVOCACY FOR RIGHTS (ACAR) PROJECT
CIVIL SOCIETY COLLABORATION PROGRAMME FOR KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND MONITORING

REFUGEES ASSOCIATION

acar
Accountability for Children
Advocacy for Rights
Çocuklar için Hesap Verebilirlik
Haklar için Savunuculuk

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The **“Being a Child in Sultanbeyli”** Report was prepared within the scope of the **“Accountability for Children, Advocacy for Rights (ACAR) Project Collaboration Program with Civil Society Organization”** conducted by UNICEF Türkiye and co-financed by the European Union. The content is the sole responsibility of the Refugees Association and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union and UNICEF.

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> ABBREVIATIONS

UN	: *United Nations*
UNCRC	: *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*
MoLSS	: *Ministry of Labour and Social Security*
RC	: *Removal Center*
ILO	: *International Labour Organization*
IMM	: *Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality*
IMEP	: *Vocational Education Programme for Employment*
OHS Assembly	: *Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly*
Ombudsman Institution	: *The Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye*
KESK	: *Confederation of Public Workers' Unions*
VETC	: *Vocational Education and Training Center*
RASAS	: *Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (Refugees Association)*
GRC	: *Guidance and Research Center*
OECD	: *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*
SHM	: *Social Service Center (Ministry of Family and Social Services)*
CSO	: *Civil Society Organizations*
SUKOM	: *Refugees Association Data Management System*
TIHEK	: *Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye*
TurkStat	: *Turkish Statistical Institute*
YEDAM	: *Green Crescent Counseling Center*
ICESCR	: *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*
UNICEF	: *United Nations Children's Fund*
UN WOMEN	: *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*

> ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research, which focuses on Syrian children and Turkish citizen children living in the Sultanbeyli district, has been made possible with the support of many individuals and institutions. First and foremost, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Syrian and Turkish children who shared their emotions and thoughts with us. In this report, we have strived to reflect their lived experiences, the challenges they face, their views on child rights, their expectations, and their current circumstances. We hope this report will contribute to the planning of future programmes and activities for children and youth living in Sultanbeyli.

We would like to express our gratitude to the UNICEF Türkiye Country Office for making this research possible. We also thank the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (Refugees Association), the implementing partner of the project, and Project Coordinator Rümeysa Kahraman, who supported every stage of the research process from beginning to end.

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> EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *"Being a Child in Sultanbeyli"* study was conducted to assess the level of access to fundamental rights among Turkish citizen and Syrian children aged 12–18 living in Sultanbeyli—one of the youngest districts in Istanbul in terms of population demographics—and to shed light on the barriers these children face. The research was implemented by the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (Refugees Association) within the scope of UNICEF's "Accountability for Children, Advocacy for Rights (ACAR) Project – Civil Society Collaboration Programme for Knowledge Generation and Monitoring."

The study comprehensively examined the experiences, perceptions, and needs of children in areas such as education, health, safety, access to social services, participation, discrimination, and living conditions. A mixed-methods approach was adopted in the research process, which included surveys with 489 children, 23 in-depth interviews, 6 focus group discussions (with both children and parents), and a consultative workshop with representatives from public institutions and civil society organizations.

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The findings reveal that Syrian children face structural barriers such as language obstacles, lack of legal identification, discrimination, and economic deprivation in accessing their basic rights. Turkish citizen children, on the other hand, primarily struggle with issues related to the quality of the education system, family pressure, and anxiety about the future. Common risk areas identified for both groups include school dropout, child labor, abuse, social exclusion, and the lack of psychosocial support. While discriminatory attitudes and behaviors were particularly observed among Syrian children, peer bullying was found to be a widespread issue affecting both Syrian and Turkish children.

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The children's narratives reflect multi-layered needs that are not only personal but closely linked to their social environment, school atmosphere, and the inclusiveness of public services. Notably, both Syrian and Turkish girls face intersectional vulnerabilities stemming from gender-based inequalities, child and forced marriage, social exclusion, and restricted freedom of movement.

The research highlights the urgent need for rights-based, interculturally sensitive, and holistic service models at the local level, grounded in children's lived experiences.

The research highlights the urgent need for rights-based, interculturally sensitive, and holistic service models at the local level, grounded in children's lived experiences. Based on participatory data collection processes, the study has the potential to provide a concrete roadmap for designing social policies and services that prioritize the best interests of the child.

In addition to common challenges, Sultanbeyli faces structural difficulties that are unique to the district. The integration of migrant children, their participation in

education, and their social cohesion processes are particularly prominent issues. Language barriers, cultural differences, and economic hardship—factors often associated with migration—directly affect children's access to education and their academic performance. Ensuring equal opportunities in education and reducing school dropout rates are therefore of critical importance for the future of children in Sultanbeyli.

Access to healthcare is another key issue for children in the district. While improvements in health infrastructure have been observed, there remain notable gaps in psychosocial support services. The decrease in support from international NGOs working with refugees, combined with the lack of other active and professional civil society structures beyond the Refugees Association, may limit children's access to adequate support systems.

Children's participation in social life and in decision-making processes also remains a domain that needs strengthening. The representation of children in local governance and civil society is limited, and mechanisms such as children's councils have yet to be implemented in an effective and widespread manner. Establishing child-friendly mechanisms, expanding participation initiatives, and increasing access to socio-cultural activities are critical needs for children's overall development.

In conclusion, this study makes **visible** the multi-layered rights violations experienced by children living in Sultanbeyli and offers a strong evidence base for local authorities and relevant stakeholders to develop targeted policies and services.

1 INTRODUCTION

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Türkiye has long undertaken efforts to protect and implement children's rights. Despite these efforts, discrepancies remain between legislation and practice, and regional disparities continue to persist. Furthermore, access to rights is often hindered by limited resources as well as cultural, social, and economic barriers (Yazıcı, 2019). For instance, although primary and secondary education is legally compulsory in Türkiye, children—especially in disadvantaged regions—are still found to be out of school or at risk of dropping out.

Child labour, though regulated by law in Türkiye, remains a persistent and serious issue. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), 4.4% of children aged 5–17 are engaged in the labour force. Those working in agriculture and service sectors are particularly exposed to hazardous conditions and lack of oversight, putting them at significant risk of rights violations. Similarly, gender-based inequalities continue to impact girls disproportionately, often leading to early school dropout and increased vulnerability. For example, the school attendance rate for girls is lower than that of boys; in 2023, official statistics recorded 11,177 child marriages involving 10,471 girls and 706 boys aged 16–17 (TurkStat, 2023).

This research aims to identify the underlying causes of the barriers children in Sultanbeyli face in accessing their fundamental rights, and to develop policy recommendations that will promote their well-being and help create an environment in which every child can thrive and reach their full potential.

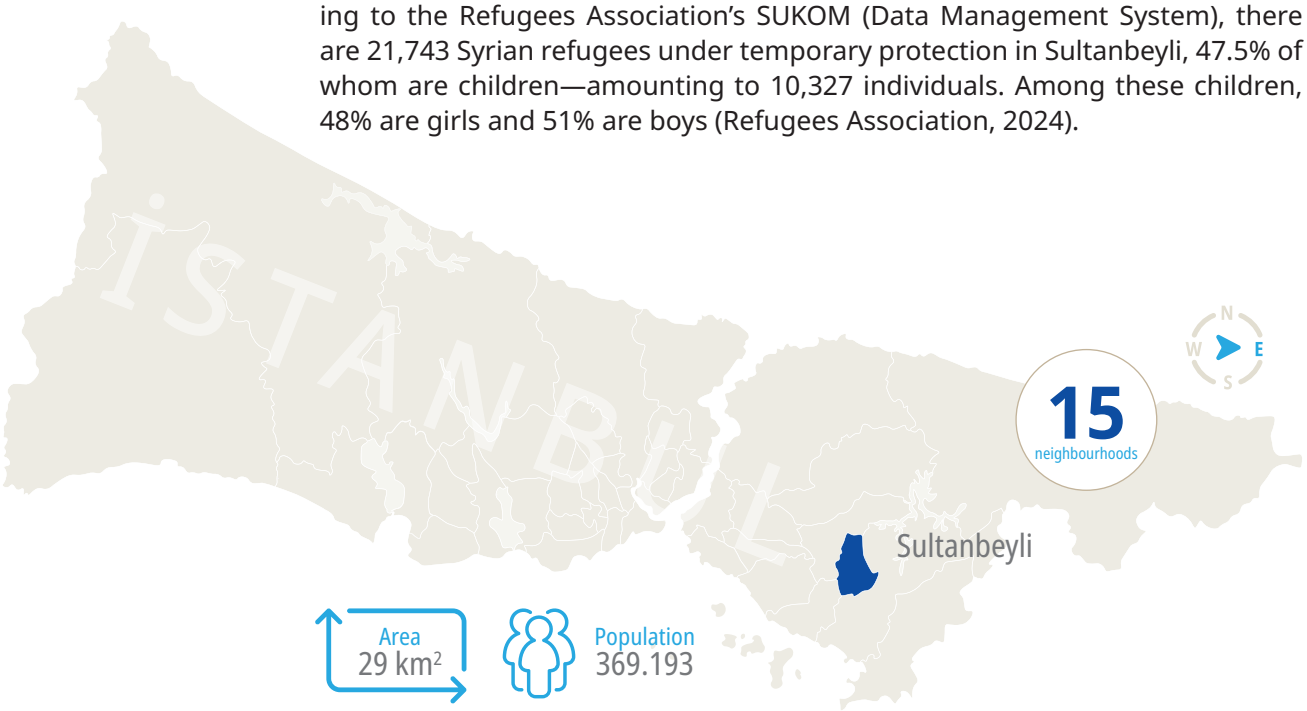
Among the most disadvantaged groups in terms of access to rights are refugee children. Having experienced war, conflict, and displacement, they are among the most vulnerable populations. Refugee children face serious challenges in accessing basic services, especially in education and health. Global crises such as climate change have also emerged as new dynamics threatening children's living conditions and fundamental rights (Şahin-Taşğın, 2017; Doğan & Kağnıcı, 2020).

The living conditions and rights of refugee[1] children in Türkiye remain a critical and contested topic, both in academic and policy spheres. This issue has gained even greater significance following the large-scale influx of Syrian refugees since 2011. Academic studies and reports consistently emphasize the urgent need for protective mechanisms to ensure the physical and psychological safety of refugee children; the development of targeted policies that pro-

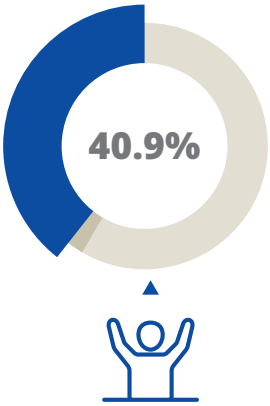
[1] Although the term "refugee" is legally restricted in Türkiye to individuals seeking asylum from European countries, this report adopts a broader and more inclusive understanding of the concept. Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye are not legally recognized as refugees; however, given that they have fled their country due to the risk of persecution and violence, they can be considered within the scope of the universal definition of refugee status.

mote child well-being; and effective intervention in cases of domestic violence, neglect, and abuse. Achieving these goals requires coordinated efforts across societal, legal, and institutional levels (UNICEF, 2013; Şahin-Taşğın, 2021; Yükseker, Taşğın & Tekin, 2022; Kalender-Aybakan, 2024).

As of December 2024, a total of 506,086 Syrians under temporary protection reside in Istanbul, constituting 3.13% of the city's population (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2024). On the Asian side of Istanbul, Sultanbeyli has the highest number of Syrian refugees (Refugees Association, 2021). According to the Refugees Association's SUKOM (Data Management System), there are 21,743 Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Sultanbeyli, 47.5% of whom are children—amounting to 10,327 individuals. Among these children, 48% are girls and 51% are boys (Refugees Association, 2024).



Understanding the structure of Sultanbeyli is vital for contextualizing children and their rights. Located on the eastern edge of Istanbul and granted district status in 1989, Sultanbeyli spans 29 km² and consists of 15 neighbourhoods. According to 2024 TurkStat Address-Based Population Registration System data, Sultanbeyli's population is 369,193 (TurkStat, 2025). Since its establishment, it has been one of Istanbul's key hubs of internal migration. Due to the high rate of migration from other provinces, only a small proportion of Sultanbeyli's residents are originally from Istanbul—just 10,619 individuals, or 3% of the district's population (TurkStat, 2022). The child population makes up 40.9% of the district, significantly higher than the national average of 26%. With an average household size of 3.93, Sultanbeyli ranks highest among Istanbul districts. The district also ranks sixth in Istanbul in terms of child and forced marriages among 15–17-year-olds. A total of 7,418 residents aged six and above are illiterate (Istanbul Governorship, 2023). These indicators highlight the urgent need for careful and targeted policy development and service provision to promote and protect children's rights in Sultanbeyli.



The child population in district *(TÜİK, 2022)*

Sultanbeyli is one of Istanbul's fastest-growing and most demographically diverse districts. With a notably high proportion of children and youth, the district presents a unique profile shaped by both its demographic structure and social landscape. It has received large waves of internal

and international migration, and now hosts families from varied socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, creating a multicultural and cosmopolitan environment. However, this diversity also brings complex social and economic challenges. In Sultanbeyli, being a child is influenced by a multitude of intersecting factors—migration, economic hardship, access to education and healthcare, social participation, integration, and experiences of discrimination.

Refugee children, especially those without legal registration, are often positioned outside the system and are highly vulnerable to discriminatory practices and marginalization. According to SUKOM data, there are 2,177 vulnerable refugee children currently residing in Sultanbeyli. Their specific vulnerabilities are as follows: 53% are out of school, 16% have disabilities, 9% are engaged in child labour, 7% require mental health and psychosocial support, 2% are survivors or at risk of violence, 1% are child brides or at risk of early/forced marriage, 1% are separated from their families, 1% are earthquake survivors, 1% are unvaccinated, and 9% have other vulnerabilities. These figures pertain only to those who are currently under the age of 18, although many individuals over 18 may still be experiencing the long-term impacts of such vulnerabilities encountered during childhood (Refugees Association, 2024). Notably, financial hardship is an almost universal dimension accompanying these vulnerabilities (Kalender-Aybakan, 2024).

This research aims to identify the underlying causes of the barriers children in Sultanbeyli face in accessing their fundamental rights, and to develop policy recommendations that will promote their well-being and help create an environment in which every child can thrive and reach their full potential. The study explores the relationships and differences between Syrian refugee children and children from the host community, analyzing how these differences affect access to rights and services. Based on the findings, the report proposes targeted interventions to foster social cohesion, promote the protection of children's rights, and ensure equal opportunities for all children. In this sense, the *"Being a Child in Sultanbeyli"* study is expected to contribute to improving the quality of life for children in the district and advancing a rights-based approach.

The findings reveal that children in Sultanbeyli face a variety of limitations in accessing their fundamental rights, stemming from diverse and intersecting factors. For refugee children, those without legal documentation, and children from low-income families, structural barriers in education, health, and social services frequently hinder safe and consistent access to public services.

Participants also reported that experiences of discrimination, safety concerns, and lack of involvement in decision-making processes negatively affect children's interactions with both institutional services and their social environments. Delays in accessing psychological support and parental hesitation toward support services sometimes present further obstacles—particularly for adolescents in need of timely intervention.

The reflections shared regarding the safety of public spaces suggest that children's opportunities for socialization can at times be limited, and that young people do not always feel secure in such environments. Sustainable participation in social and cultural activities is often not attainable for refugee children due to various barriers.

Interviews conducted with parents revealed that Syrian families, in particular, face challenges related to language, access to information, and legal status.

Overall, there is a recognized need to strengthen a rights-based, holistic approach that prioritizes child participation. In this regard, the development of inclusive mechanisms that uphold the best interests of the child and recognize them as active agents can enhance the effectiveness of local-level practices.

The findings also indicate that both Turkish and Syrian women face limitations in accessing employment and social life due to domestic responsibilities. This dynamic can increase the need for support in both children's development and women's self-care processes.

Overall, there is a recognized need to strengthen a rights-based, holistic approach that prioritizes child participation. In this regard, the development of inclusive mechanisms that uphold the best interests of the child and recognize them as active agents can enhance the effectiveness of local-level practices.

Within the scope of the Being a Child in Sultanbeyli project, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the differences and obstacles experienced by Syrian and Turkish children in accessing health, education, and social services. Among Syrian children, experiences of discrimination and challenges related to integration emerged as key themes, while among Turkish children, school environment, safety concerns, and future planning were the predominant topics.

2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

> 2.1 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to understand the level of access to fundamental rights among Turkish citizen and Syrian children living in Sultanbeyli, to identify the barriers and needs they encounter, and to present their lived experiences in areas such as education, health, and social services—in their own words. The research aims to examine the challenges children face on both individual and societal levels, analyze the sources of these challenges, and contribute to the design of policies and services rooted in the best interests of the child. Furthermore, by centering the right to participation, the study seeks to amplify children's voices regarding their everyday lives, aspirations, integration processes, and social relationships.

The sub-questions guiding the research are as follows:

- How do children living in the district access fundamental rights and services (such as the right to identity and registration, education, healthcare, protection, freedom of thought and expression, and participation)?
- What are the similarities and differences in access to these rights between refugee children and those from the host community?
- Do children experience exclusion or discrimination when trying to access their rights and services?

In summary, the Being a Child in Sultanbeyli study seeks to examine the existing level of rights access among Turkish and Syrian children living in a district with a high rate of disadvantage. It aims to identify the underlying causes of inequalities in access to healthcare, education, social services, and socio-cultural activities, and to develop policy recommendations based on the research findings.

> 2.2 Research Design and Methodology

The study was conducted using a comprehensive methodological approach based on multiple data sources. The foundation of the research consists of an analysis of the Refugees Association's SUKOM data system and the quantitative findings gathered within the scope of the project. The quantitative data, which

includes responses from Turkish and Syrian children aged 12–18, was used to identify general trends in access to essential rights, utilization of public services, life satisfaction, and perceptions of safety. The qualitative component of the study aimed to deepen these findings through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews provided a more nuanced understanding of key thematic areas such as rights, needs, discrimination, and security based on children's personal experiences and perceptions..

Additionally, interviews with parents—who are directly responsible for the care of the children—were conducted to incorporate the family perspective on children's living conditions and access to services. A stakeholder consultation workshop was also held with representatives from public institutions and field professionals to collectively reflect on the findings and gather insights from policy-makers, practitioners, and experts. This multi-layered data collection strategy enabled a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and the development of evidence-based recommendations grounded in the best interests of the child.

In the quantitative phase of the research, data was collected through a questionnaire developed by the research team and administered to children aged 12–18. The sample was determined using data from SUKOM and TurkStat. According to TurkStat, 129,262 children live in Sultanbeyli. SUKOM data indicates that the number of Syrian refugee children in the district is 10,327 (TurkStat, 2023; Refugees Association, 2024). Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size formula—with a 95% confidence level, 80% response rate, and 5% margin of error (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)—the required sample size was calculated to be approximately 450 children. Accordingly, the quantitative sample comprised 450 children from both refugee and host communities, aged 12–18 and residing in Sultanbeyli. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure an equal number of Turkish and Syrian children were included in the survey. Nationality, age, gender, and neighborhood distribution were also taken into account in the sample design to explore similarities and differences in access to rights.

129,262

Number of children in the district

▼

10,327

Number of refugee children in the district

Two separate questionnaires were developed: one for Turkish citizen children and one for Syrian refugee children. Informed consent/assent forms were also prepared for both children and their parents (Annex 1 and Annex 2). All forms were reviewed by field experts and UNICEF, and finalized based on their feedback.

As data collection tools, informed consent/assent forms were prepared for both children and parents (Annex 1 and Annex 2), along with two separate questionnaires—one for Turkish citizen children and one for Syrian children (Annex 3 and Annex 4). All survey instruments were reviewed by field experts and UNICEF, and finalized based on their feedback. The questionnaire for Turkish children consisted of 62 questions in total, including both multiple-choice and open-ended items. The first section gathered demographic information, while the subsequent sections focused on children's rights related to nutrition, education, health, safety, participation, and work experiences. In addition to multiple-choice questions, four-point Likert scale items were used. All questions were designed to be simple, clear, and age-appropriate to ensure children's full understanding.

The questionnaire for Syrian refugee children included 71 questions, also in multiple-choice and open-ended formats. This version contained additional

items regarding native language and legal registration (i.e., temporary protection ID). The questions were designed in both Turkish and Arabic using plain, accessible language. The surveys were administered by trained enumerators who spoke the preferred language of each child and conducted the surveys in a participatory manner. For some questions, five-point Likert scales were used to assess children's level of agreement or satisfaction. Before the survey administration, children were informed about the purpose of the study, the duration of the process, and the confidentiality of their responses. The *"Informed Consent Form for Children"* was signed by both children and their parents. In cases where parents were not physically present, digital consent was obtained. The final version of the questionnaires was shaped based on feedback from enumerators and insights from pilot applications with children.

In the qualitative phase, the goal was to deepen the insights gained from SUKOM data and the quantitative findings. Accordingly, the research team conducted 23 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions. Four of the focus groups were held with children, and two were conducted with parents of children aged 6–12 to understand the needs of younger children. These parent groups involved 14 participants (6 Turkish citizens, 8 Syrians). Although the initial plan was to include 12 parents in each group, adverse weather conditions on the day of the sessions prevented some pre-confirmed participants from attending. The child and parent focus groups were divided by age and nationality, resulting in six distinct sessions:

- *Turkish children* aged 12–15
- *Syrian refugee children* aged 12–15
- *Turkish children* aged 15–18
- *Syrian refugee children* aged 15–18
- *Parents of Turkish children* aged 6–12
- *Parents of Syrian refugee* children aged 6–12

Each focus group was designed for 10–12 participants, and a total of 31 children took part. In addition to the focus groups, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with children who had previously experienced rights violations, were considered vulnerable, or could not participate in group sessions for various reasons. Semi-structured interview and focus group guidelines (Annex 6 and Annex 7), developed by the research team, were used during these sessions. A purposive sampling approach ensured equal inclusion of children from both local and refugee communities, with nationality, age, gender, and neighborhood taken into account. The research was carried out with ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences at Maltepe University, dated 20 February 2025, decision number 2025/15-08.

As one of the key components of the research, a stakeholder consultation workshop was held on 9 April 2025 at the Sultanbeyli Community Center. This workshop supported the evaluation of both qualitative and quantitative data findings and enriched the study through the insights of local professionals working with children. The institutions represented by participating professionals included: Sultanbeyli District Directorate of National Education, Sultanbeyli District Health Directorate, Sultanbeyli Enhanced Migrant Health Center, Sultanbeyli Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, Sultanbeyli Public Education Center, Sultanbeyli Social Service Center, Sultanbeyli Guidance and Research Center (RAM), Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Sultanbeyli Social Cohesion

and Support Center (SUDEM), Turkish Red Crescent Anatolian Side Community Center, Üsküdar Green Crescent Counseling Center (YEDAM), Sultanbeyli Municipality Directorate of Strategy Development, Sultanbeyli Municipality Directorate of Social Support Services, Sultanbeyli Municipality Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Sultanbeyli District Police Department Child Protection Unit, Sultanbeyli District Mufti's Office, and local civil society organizations working with children.

During the workshop, the research team shared the preliminary findings from the quantitative phase of the study. This was followed by in-depth discussions with participants on themes such as children's rights, the risk of school dropout, access to health services, participation in socio-cultural activities, and access to social services. Thematic guide cards were distributed to institutional representatives, and small group discussions were facilitated with the support of moderators. As a result of these discussions, situational analyses and improvement suggestions were developed. In this way, the study's findings were not only grounded in field data but also strengthened by local knowledge and the practical experiences of implementing professionals.

> 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout both the quantitative and qualitative data collection processes, the best interests of the child were prioritized. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was carefully maintained. Age-appropriate communication techniques were employed during surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews to ensure that children felt comfortable and safe. Interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants and were documented either through audio recordings or note-taking, always respecting participants' privacy. All identifying information was kept confidential, particularly in the case of children, whose data were anonymized. For the semi-structured interviews, participants were coded numerically (e.g., Participant-1), while pseudonyms using colors or symbols (e.g., Sparkle, Black, Sky) were used in focus groups to preserve anonymity. At every stage, the research remained grounded in the principle of serving the best interests of the child, and findings were handled with a focus on promoting children's rights and well-being.

The quantitative phase aimed to assess the living conditions, access to fundamental rights, and daily experiences of children residing in Sultanbeyli. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed to measure children's standards of living and their access to education, healthcare, safety, participation, and leisure activities.

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants from both refugee and host communities. In purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects specific settings or individuals who are most relevant to the research questions based on theoretical knowledge and previous experience (Erdoğan & Uyan Semerci, 2021: 86). Within this framework, equal numbers of Turkish and Syrian children were included in the sample to explore both the commonalities and differences in access to rights in a district where local and refugee populations live side by side. Age, gender, and neighborhood distribution were also considered. The survey was administered to children aged 12–18 living in Sultanbeyli. The sample ensured diversity across age, gender, and nationality (Turkish and Syrian) and drew from different neighborhoods to enhance representativeness.

To support the survey phase, university-level volunteers from the Refugees Association received both theoretical and practical training on research ethics and survey implementation. During the fieldwork, enumerators used age-appropriate communication techniques to create a safe and respectful environment. Based on feedback from volunteers and pilot tests with children, the questionnaires were finalized and implemented accordingly.

To ensure that children could fully exercise their right to participate, the surveys were conducted in the children's preferred language, with the support of trained bilingual volunteers. Informed consent forms were reviewed and approved by UNICEF and then distributed to parents online. Signed forms were securely stored in cloud-based folders by the research team. The data collection process coincided with the school break and adverse weather conditions in Istanbul, which posed challenges in reaching some participants. In particular, some children were unable to travel to the center due to weather or financial constraints, such as transportation costs.

To expand reach during the fieldwork, the sampling frame was adjusted and outreach was extended to local schools. An online application for permission was submitted to the Ministry of National Education, which enabled survey administration in secondary education institutions. Despite challenges posed by the winter break and severe weather conditions, the survey was successfully completed on time through an intensive effort. The dedication and interest of the volunteer enumerators were seen as key to this success.

Access to participants was supported by the SUKOM database, secondary schools in the district, Sultanbeyli Municipality, and relevant departments. Within this framework, the survey targeted 450 children aged 12–18, with a quota sample of 225 Turkish citizens and 225 Syrians. In addition to distinguishing between refugee and host community participants, attention was also paid to gender, age, and neighborhood distribution. The final survey was conducted between 12 January and 28 February 2025, with a total of 489 children participating. For the analysis of survey data, SPSS 25 statistical software was used to conduct both descriptive and inferential analyses.

GENERAL	SYRIAN CHILDREN				TURKISH CHILDREN				TOTAL
Target	225				225				450
Actual	224				265				489
Percentage Achieved	100%				118%				
BREAKDOWN	Girls	Boys	12-15	16-18	Girls	Boys	12-15	16-18	
Target	113	112	113	112	113	112	113	112	109%
Actual	126	98	129	95	128	136	147	118	
Percentage Achieved	112%	88%	115%	85%	113%	121%	130%	105%	

➥ Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Surveyed Children

In the qualitative phase, 6 focus group discussions and 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The focus groups and interviews were carried out with refugee and host community children at the Sultanbeyli Community Center and in secondary schools across the district, facilitated by the research team and trained volunteers. Four of the focus groups were held with children aged 12–18, while two were conducted with the parents of children aged 6–12.

Throughout the research, the following thematic areas were examined in relation to access to rights, and corresponding questions were posed:

- *Sociodemographic Information:* The aim was to analyze the general demographic characteristics of the children and how these characteristics affect their access to rights.
- *Access to Education:* The goal was to assess children's school attendance status and the barriers and opportunities they encounter in the education system.
- *Health, Development, and Nutrition Rights:* The study examined children's access to health services, conditions for healthy development, and adequate nutrition.
- *Participation in the Labour Market:* The phenomenon of child labour, along with its causes and consequences, was explored.
- *Perceptions of Safety:* The research aimed to understand children's perceptions of their personal safety and the security problems they face.
- *Participation and Freedom of Expression*: This section focused on children's involvement in decision-making processes and their ability to express themselves freely.
- *Access to the Right to Play:* The study sought to examine children's access to their right to play and rest, and identify shortcomings in this area.
- *Awareness and Use of Rights:* The analysis aimed to assess children's awareness of their basic rights and their ability to exercise them.
- *Experiences of Discrimination:* The study explored the types and frequency of discrimination that children face.

The narratives of children who participated in the survey and responded to open-ended questions are presented alongside their age and gender. For semi-structured interviews, quotes are accompanied by the participant number, age, nationality, and gender. For focus groups, children's narratives are presented using the pseudonyms (colors or fruits) they chose for themselves, along with descriptive identifiers.

In addition to the topics above, the guide cards prepared for the consultation workshop were used to collect the views, reflections, and recommendations of field actors on the research topic as it pertains to the public sphere.

During this stage, several challenges were encountered in conducting the semi-structured and focus group interviews due to adverse weather conditions in Istanbul, exam periods in schools, and the overlap with the month of Ramadan and the Eid holiday. Factors such as children's inability to travel to the center due to the weather or lack of access to transportation due to financial hardship made it difficult to reach participants. While reaching children who were enrolled in school was relatively easier with the approval of the Provincial Directorate of National Education, it was more difficult to reach working children or those not engaged in either education or employment. Reaching Syrian children aged 16–18 was particularly challenging due to their lower representation in schools, and working children in this age group were only available on Sundays and were often unwilling to participate on their only day off. For this reason, the sample was revised throughout the implementation phase to improve outreach, and contact was established with other educational institutions, municipal directorates, and civil society organizations in the district to reach previously inaccessible groups. In the third phase of the study, semi-struc-

tured interviews were conducted in secondary schools within the scope of the existing research permit.

The focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted between 21 March and 21 April 2025. For the analysis of qualitative data, thematic analysis was carried out using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. A word cloud summarizing the most frequently used words by the children during interviews is provided in the visual below.

➥ **Graph 1.** Most Frequently Used Words by Children Participating in the Interviews

Within the scope of the semi-structured in-depth interviews, a total of 23 children—9 Syrian and 14 Turkish citizens—aged between 13 and 18 were interviewed. The majority of the children who agreed to participate were girls (69.5%). The participants were enrolled in various types of schools (Imam Hatip High School, Anatolian High School, Vocational High School, and Middle School), with the 11th grade (30.4%) and 8th grade (26%) being the most represented levels. Efforts were made to ensure equal participation of Syrian and Turkish children, and the distribution of participants is presented in Table 2. During the interviews, various topics were discussed, including children's perceptions of child rights, their school experiences, social relationships, how they spend their free time, their sense of safety in their living environments, future expectations, and the challenges they face.

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Neighborhood	Number of Siblings
1	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Ahmet Yesevi	3
2	Girl	17	Turkish Citizen	Orhangazi	3
3	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Abdurrahmangazi	3
4	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Mimar Sinan	4
5	Girl	14	Syrian	Necip Fazıl	3
6	Girl	14	Syrian	Necip Fazıl	3
7	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Mimar Sinan	3
8	Boy	13	Syrian	Yavuz Selim	6
9	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Mehmet Akif	4
10	Boy	14	Syrian	Mehmet Akif	3
11	Boy	14	Turkish Citizen	Abdurrahmangazi	3
12	Girl	14	Turkish Citizen	Abdurrahmangazi	2
13	Boy	14	Turkish Citizen	Mehmet Akif	4
14	Girl	16	Turkish Citizen	Mimar Sinan	4
15	Girl	18	Turkish Citizen	Battalgazi	3
16	Girl	18	Syrian	Turgut Reis	4
17	Girl	18	Turkish Citizen	Adil	2
18	Boy	15	Turkish Citizen	Necip Fazıl	2
19	Boy	16	Syrian	Hamidiye	4
20	Boy	16	Turkish Citizen	Akşemsettin	3
21	Boy	17	Syrian	Fatih	3
22	Boy	17	Syrian	Akşemsettin	5
23	Boy	17	Syrian	Adil	4

➥ Table 2. Descriptive Information of Semi-Structured Interview Participants

As part of the focus group discussions, two sessions were held with Turkish citizen and Syrian children aged 12–15, two sessions with Turkish and Syrian children aged 16–18, and two additional sessions with Turkish and Syrian parents of children aged 6–12. The descriptive information of the children who participated in the focus group discussions is presented in Table 3.

Dropped Out of Middle School	Gender	Age	Nationality	Grade/School	Number of Siblings
Child 1	Kız	13	Turkish Citizien	8th grade	3
Child 2	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	1
Child 3	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	4
Child 4	Oğlan	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	5
Child 5	Oğlan	15	Turkish Citizien	Open High School	2
Child 6	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	1
Child 7	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	4
Child 8	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	2
Child 9	Kız	14	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	4
Child 10	Kız	17	Syrian	Dropped Out of Middle School	4
Child 11	Kız	16	Syrian	Dropped Out of Middle School	4
Child 12	Oğlan	17	Syrian	11th grade	5
Child 13	Oğlan	17	Syrian	10th grade	4
Child 14	Oğlan	16	Syrian	10th grade	4
Child 15	Oğlan	16	Syrian	9th grade	No data
Child 16	Kız	15	Syrian	9th grade	4
Child 17	Oğlan	15	Syrian	8th grade	4
Child 18	Oğlan	15	Syrian	8th grade	4
Child 19	Kız	15	Syrian	9th grade	0
Child 20	Kız	14	Syrian	9th grade	2
Child 21	Kız	14	Syrian	9th grade	5
Child 22	Kız	15	Syrian	9th grade	5
Child 23	Kız	15	Syrian	9th grade	2
Child 24	Kız	17	Turkish Citizien	12th grade	4
Child 25	Kız	17	Turkish Citizien	12th grade	3
Child 26	Kız	17	Turkish Citizien	12th grade	2
Child 27	Oğlan	17	Turkish Citizien	12th grade	3
Child 28	Oğlan	15	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	3
Child 29	Oğlan	15	Turkish Citizien	9th grade	1
Child 30	Oğlan	16	Turkish Citizien	10th grade	3
Child 31	Oğlan	16	Turkish Citizien	Open High School	6

➥ **Table 3.** Descriptive Information of Children Participating in Focus Groups (Ages 12–15 and 16–18)

The thematic analysis of qualitative data obtained from the four focus group discussions conducted with children aged 12–18 enabled an in-depth examination of participants' statements and the systematic identification of recurring themes, patterns, and frequently used codes. As clearly illustrated in the visual presented below, the analysis results reveal a distinct divide between Syrian and Turkish citizen children within the 12–18 age group. This divide emerges as a significant factor shaping the children's experiences and perceptions across various aspects of life. The statements of the children who participated in the focus group discussions contain strong codes that indicate intergroup differences and will be further elaborated upon in the findings section.

➥ **Graph 2.** Topics Raised by Children Participating in the Focus Group Discussions

The findings obtained were not only examined from a socio-demographic perspective but also provided detailed insights into children's views on education and working life. The interviews offered valuable understanding of children's expectations regarding their educational journeys, the challenges they encounter, and their hopes for the future. Similarly, their statements about work experiences or perceptions of working life were analyzed, offering important information about the participation of this age group in economic life. Additionally, the children's statements about their involvement in social life and decision-making processes formed a significant dimension of the analysis. These narratives reflect children's desire to have a say in matters affecting their lives, their awareness of participation mechanisms, and the potential barriers they face in this area.

As part of the study, no direct interviews were conducted with children aged 6–12. Instead, two focus group discussions were held with the parents of Turkish and Syrian children in this age group in order to better understand the children's situations and needs. Children aged 6–12 are generally considered to be at a transitional developmental stage: while they are partially capable of protecting themselves from harm, they still require care and support as they are not yet fully mature. Research suggests that children from age 9 onward are capable of understanding risk/benefit assessments in studies, though they may have difficulty grasping conflicting interests or abstract concepts. For this reason, the difficulties that children aged 6–12 face in accessing rights and services were explored through semi-structured interviews with their parents. Considering the developmental stage and age-related sensitivities of this group, ethical and methodological considerations played a decisive role in choosing to collect data indirectly. Parents' perceptions, drawn from their own observations and

experiences, were examined in depth in line with the principles of child rights. This approach helped overcome limitations that might arise from direct interviews with younger children and allowed for the collection of valuable information about the daily needs and barriers faced by children as reported by their caregivers.A total of 8 Syrian parents—6 women and 2 men—participated in the Syrian parent focus group, while the focus group with Turkish citizen parents included only 6 female participants. The analysis of the parental interviews was carried out using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. A visual showing the most frequently used words by parents is presented below. Throughout the interview process, principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality were strictly upheld, which contributed to the reliability and validity of the data obtained.

The findings comprehensively reveal the status of rights access among children in this age group and the areas in need of improvement. Across the parents' statements, there was a notable emphasis on children's needs, education-related concerns, and specific requests for support.

➥ **Graph 3.** Topics Raised by Parents Participating in the Focus Group Discussions

An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the Syrian parents reveals diversity in terms of age, gender, educational background, employment status, and family structure. The age range of the Syrian parents who participated in the study varies between 26 and 49. Seven of the participants are married, while one reported having lost their spouse. One couple also expressed their wish to participate together and shared their experiences separately based on their daughter and son. The number of children per family ranges from one to six. While some children are actively enrolled in formal education, others are unable to attend school for various reasons, such as young age or health conditions. The educational background of the participants ranges from completion of fifth grade in primary school to holding a university degree.

While most participants have been living in Sultanbeyli for an extended period, one participant who migrated to Istanbul from Antakya due to a natural disaster had a shorter residence period compared to others. Two participants are currently employed, whereas the remaining participants are not working due to health issues or caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, two participants reported experiencing difficulties in accessing public services for themselves and their children due to identity-related issues.

The narratives of the Syrian parents point to various structural challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and social services, shaped by their migration

experiences. While overall educational levels tend to be low, access to education for their children varies significantly. Participation in the labor market among parents appears to differ based on gender, health conditions, and caregiving duties.

The six Turkish mothers who participated in the focus group discussions were between the ages of 27 and 42. Their family structures varied depending on the number of children they had. The participants' educational levels ranged from being non-literate to holding an associate degree. Two of the participants are actively employed in a social enterprise called Marifet Mutfağı. The remaining participants stated that they were not currently employed in income-generating work aside from household responsibilities, or that they were actively seeking employment.

The shared concerns among participants included their children's education, caregiving responsibilities, and access to livelihood resources. Prominent themes in their narratives included migration, loss of a spouse, financial hardship, and barriers to accessing education. The expressions of Turkish citizen participants highlighted the intersections of motherhood with economic challenges and limited access to education and services. While some women were working or seeking jobs, others remained disconnected from the labor force due to their caregiving roles within the home.

Their experiences of parenting revealed unmet needs for social support, a lack of guidance, and inequalities in access to services. In particular, children's education and social development emerged as a common priority among all participants. Both Turkish and Syrian women described the emotional and physical burdens associated with their parenting roles. Unequal distribution of household responsibilities, lack of social support mechanisms, and limited personal time negatively affect the mental well-being of mothers. Participants emphasized the need for psychological support programs for mothers, spaces for social solidarity, and family education initiatives.

3 FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, including selected quotes from children and adults. Statements from children who participated in the survey and responded to open-ended questions are presented alongside their age and gender. Quotations from children who participated in semi-structured interviews are accompanied by participant number, age, nationality, and gender. For focus group participants, children's narratives are shared along with descriptive identifiers such as the color or fruit pseudonyms they selected for themselves.

The research findings have been evaluated within the framework of the rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In this context, the levels of access to rights among Turkish and Syrian children are examined and presented under 17 main headings.

> 3.1 Socio-Demographic Information

UNCRC Article 2 - Non-Discrimination;
Article 6 - Right to Life, Survival, and Development

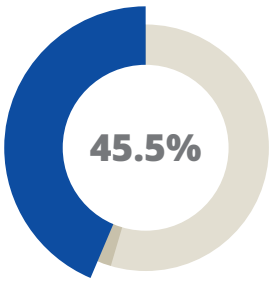
As part of the quantitative research, surveys were conducted with a total of 489 children—224 Syrian and 265 Turkish citizens—between 12 January and 28 February 2025. Participants were aged between 12 and 18. A portion of the surveys was administered in schools with children currently enrolled in education, while the remainder was carried out at the Sultanbeyli Community Center with children not currently in school or with limited access to education.

The most represented age groups were 14 and 16 years. The age distribution of Syrian and Turkish children was relatively similar. In terms of gender distribution, the proportion of boys was higher among Turkish children, whereas girls made up a larger share of Syrian respondents. One Turkish participant chose not to disclose their gender.

In the semi-structured interviews, efforts were also made to ensure a balanced distribution across age, nationality, and gender. Due to the high willingness of Turkish girls to participate in individual interviews, the targeted number was exceeded, and a total of 23 children (9 Syrian and 14 Turkish citizens) were interviewed. A significant majority of those who agreed to participate were girls (69.5%). The children were enrolled in different types of schools, including Imam Hatip High Schools, Anatolian High Schools, Vocational High Schools, and Middle Schools. The 11th grade (30.4%) and 8th grade (26%) were the most frequently represented educational levels.

> 3.2 Place of Birth and Neighborhoods in Sultanbeyli

Notably, 45.5% of Syrian children reported not knowing their place of birth. When the neighborhoods of residence are examined (Graph-4), it is evident that children have different socio-spatial distributions based on their nationality.



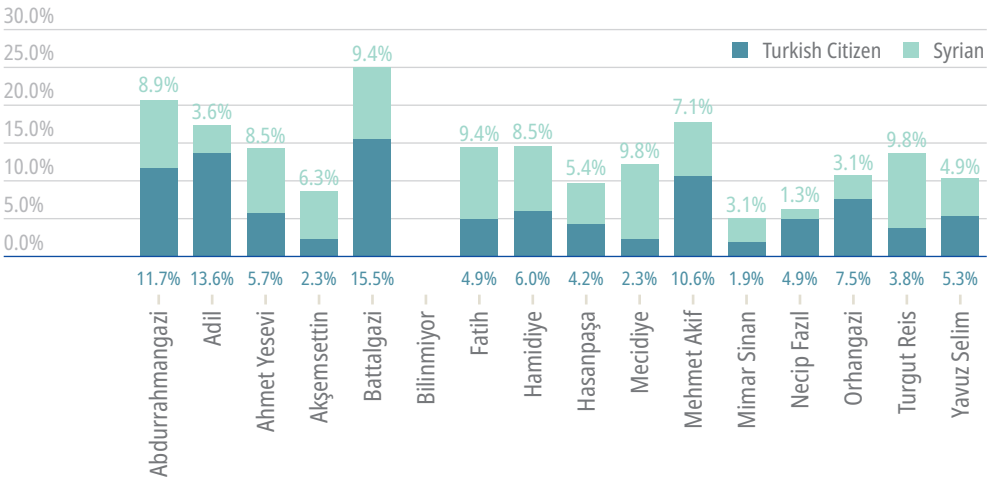
According to the data on place of birth, 43.6% of Syrian children were born in cities in Syria, 3.1% were born in cities in Türkiye, and a small number were born in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and Afghanistan. The most frequently reported birthplace was Aleppo (40.6%). Notably, 45.5% of Syrian children reported not knowing their place of birth. Among Turkish children, 84% were born in Istanbul, while the rest were originally from eastern provinces such as Erzurum, Bitlis, and Bayburt.

➥ Table 4. Distribution of Syrian Children by Province of Birth

Province of Birth	Number of Children	%
Adana	1	0.4
Bursa	1	0.4
İstanbul	5	2.2
Unknown	102	45.5
Binnish	1	0.4
Deir ez-zor	2	0.9
Al-bab	1	0.4
Aleppo	91	40.6
Hama	1	0.4
Al-Hasakah	1	0.4
Idlib	6	2.7
Raqqa	3	1.3
Damascus	9	4
Children Participating in the Study	224	100

When the neighborhoods of residence are examined (Graph-4), it is evident that children have different socio-spatial distributions based on their nationality. The neighborhoods where Turkish citizen children most commonly reside are Battalgazi (15.5%), Adil (13.6%), and Abdurrahmangazi (11.7%), while Syrian children most frequently live in Mecidiye (9.8%), Turgut Reis (9.8%), Battalgazi (9.4%), and Fatih (9.4%). Adil Neighborhood is more densely populated by Turkish citizens, whereas Mecidiye is predominantly inhabited by Syrians.

➥ Graph 4. Distribution of Neighborhoods Where Children Live by Nationality



When the participants' demographic information and family structures are examined, the sub-codes were grouped under the following categories: children's age and grade levels, places of birth and neighborhoods, number of siblings and family structures, employment status of household members, parents' marital status, and family relationships. Turkish children who participated in the qualitative study stated, similar to those in the quantitative part, that they were born in Istanbul and have been residing in Sultanbeyli for many years.

"My family... well, they've been here for a very long time, almost 30–40 years. They moved here from our hometown, Ordu. I was born here." *(Participant 15, 18 years old, Turkish citizen, female).*

The household structures and socio-economic levels of the children vary, with the number of siblings ranging from 2 to 6. While Turkish participants tend to be close in age to their siblings, Syrian children often have larger age gaps among siblings. When examining the family structures, most children live with both parents, though there are also children living in different family arrangements. One of the Syrian participants described her family situation as follows:

"I'm 18, we are four siblings. I'm the youngest, I have three older brothers. I'm studying, currently at an Imam Hatip school. My parents are separated. They split up when I was six months old. I don't speak to them." *(Participant 16, 18 years old, Syrian citizen, female).*

Although children are aware of the different attitudes and behaviors shown toward boys and girls in the family, they do not necessarily associate these with gender-based inequality. One child, for instance, expressed how girls are expected to mature earlier and protect themselves to avoid bringing shame to their mothers, indirectly revealing internalized gender roles within family dynamics.

"The mother is afraid of the outside. The father is afraid. We are girls. We are not boys. We can never be seen the same as boys — that's the first thing. A girl is like a curtain. Once you spill sour cherry juice on it, you can never use it again. It becomes trash. And a girl is like that. If she gets a stain or people start talking, no matter how much the mother tries to protect her... the community never stops. They'll talk. That's why, even if a mother fully trusts her daughter, she still won't let her go out — not because of the daughter, but because she doesn't trust the people outside. ...If a boy makes a mistake, they say 'he's a boy' and just brush it off. But if a girl makes a mistake... oh my God. They immediately blame the mother. That's such a harsh accusation. The criticism is directed at the mother. But with a boy, it's just about him personally. Girls are fragile. They should be held in the highest regard. Like I said, a girl can never be the same as a boy." *(Participant 17, 18 years old, Turkish citizen, female).*

Evaluation and Discussion

Syrian children, fragmented family arrangements, remarriages, and family members migrating abroad are more frequently observed, reflecting the strain of displacement on family unity.

The data on place of birth and family structure reveals how deeply the migration experience shapes the life stories of children. A significant proportion of Syrian children (45.5%) cannot recall or do not know their place of birth, pointing to the memory gaps left by war and forced displacement in childhood. This uncertainty is not merely a matter of documentation; it is closely tied to the erosion of one's sense of belonging, identity, and continuity. The prominence of Aleppo as a reported birthplace indicates that many Syrian children come directly from conflict zones. In contrast, the fact that the majority of Turkish children were born in Istanbul and have lived in Sultanbeyli since birth suggests a stronger spatial and cultural sense of belonging. This relative stability appears to reduce the uncertainty and vulnerability they face in accessing services and navigating neighborhood life.

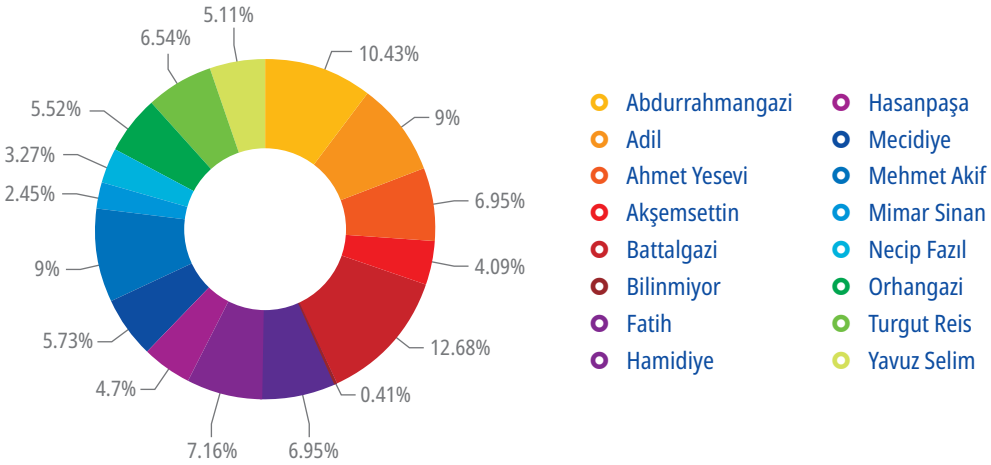
The noticeable age gaps among Syrian siblings reflect the long-term impacts of the migration process and the challenges in accessing family planning. In some cases, these gaps lead to older children—especially girls—taking on caregiving responsibilities, increasing the risk of educational dropout and early assumption of adult roles. This restructuring of family roles is a key indicator of the deepened vulnerabilities experienced by migrant children.

Qualitative data also highlights substantial differences in family structures. Among Syrian children, fragmented family arrangements, remarriages, and family members migrating abroad are more frequently observed, reflecting the strain of displacement on family unity. Such dynamics may result in loneliness, shifts in dependency relationships, and a lack of emotional support for children. In comparison, Turkish children are more likely to live in households with both parents, and typically have three to four siblings.

> 3.3 Distribution of Children by Residence

Considering the duration of residence in Sultanbeyli, 72.96% of Turkish children were born in the district and have lived there since birth. This indicates a strong sense of spatial rootedness and settlement. Among Syrian children, the length of residence typically ranges between six and ten years. Approximately 89.7% of Syrian children migrated to Sultanbeyli after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, and 84.83% settled in the district before the Istanbul Governor's 2019 directive[2] on return to registered provinces. This relatively long duration of residence has had a positive effect on rights access: 96.4% of Syrian children possess temporary protection identity cards, and 85.3% hold identification documents issued by the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Migration Management.

[2] Republic of Türkiye, Governorship of Istanbul, Provincial Directorate of Migration Management, Announcement on Procedures Regarding Syrian Nationals, 14.09.2019.



➥ Graph 5. Distribution of Children Living in Sultanbeyli by Neighborhoods of Residence

Evaluation and Discussion

These findings indicate that the vast majority of Syrian children have been living in Sultanbeyli for an extended period and are de facto integrated into the district. Despite their migration background, the fact that 85.3% of these children possess identification documents issued by the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Migration Management suggests a relative advantage in terms of access to education, healthcare, and social services. However, the sustainability of this advantage depends on the continuity of inclusive local policies.

> 3.4 Native Language and Other Known Languages

CRC Article 29 - Aims of Education;
Article 30 - Rights of Minority and Indigenous Children

➥ Table 5. Native Languages of Children by Nationality Status

	Distribution of Turkish Citizen Children		Distribution of Syrian Children	
Native Language	Number	%	Number	%
Turkish	242	91.3	5	2.2
Arabic	1	0.4	137	61.2
Kurdish	5	1.9	2	0,9
Bilingual	17	6.4	80	35.7
Total	265	100	224	100

As part of the study, all children were asked about their native languages and other languages they speak. Among Turkish children, 91.3% identified Turkish as their native language, while 6.4% reported being bilingual. In contrast, multilingualism is more common among Syrian children. In this group, 61.2% reported Arabic as their native language, while 35.7% identified both Arabic and Turkish. Only 2.2% stated Turkish as their sole native language.

92.4% of Syrian children reported being able to speak Arabic, while the percentage of those who can write in Arabic drops to 49.6%. Additionally, 83.5% of this group stated they can speak Turkish. This indicates that a significant proportion of Syrian children are integrated into the Turkish education system. However, their limited writing skills highlight the need for native language-based support.

92.4% of Syrian children reported being able to speak Arabic, while the percentage of those who can write in Arabic drops to 49.6%. Additionally, 83.5% of this group stated they can speak Turkish.

➥ Table 6. Language Skills of Syrian Children in Their Native Language and Turkish

	Ability to speak in native language		Ability to write in native language		Ability to speak Turkish	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	207	92.4	111	49.6	187	83.5
No	3	1.3	60	26.8	6	2.7
A little	14	6.3	53	23.7	31	13.8
Total	224	100	224	100	224	100

Moreover, children were also asked in an open-ended format about other languages they know. 60% of Turkish citizen children stated that they only know Turkish, while 22.1% reported knowing both Turkish and English. Among Syrian children, 28.1% indicated knowledge of additional languages such as German, English, Kurdish, and Persian, alongside Arabic and Turkish. This can be interpreted as a reflection of family aspirations for resettlement in a third country.

Evaluation and Discussion

The high rate at which Syrian children are learning Turkish indicates that education contributes significantly to their social integration. However, this also leads to a gradual weakening of their reading and writing skills in their native language. Among children whose first language is Arabic, the fact that less than 50% can express themselves in writing suggests a lack of supportive educational programs in this area.

___Because my son doesn't know Arabic. When some Syrian children speak Arabic in class, he doesn't understand. No matter how much we speak to him, he doesn't really listen to us. Even though we speak Arabic at home, he ignores it. He's learned Turkish since he was little. I enrolled him directly in kindergarten when he was two and a half, and he's always been around Turkish children and teachers. My husband is also a Turkmen. We mostly speak Turkish at home too. So I don't know if he understands Arabic. From what I can tell, he neither understands nor speaks it. If we went to Syria, I know he wouldn't be able to live there (Participant 1, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

Inability to write in Arabic or pronounce it correctly becomes a source of shame and exclusion within their own community. Meanwhile, speaking Turkish with an accent or using Arabic in public spaces often leads to exclusion or othering.

The qualitative data show that language deficiencies affect children not only technically, but also emotionally and socially. Inability to write in Arabic or pronounce it correctly becomes a source of shame and exclusion within their own community. Meanwhile, speaking Turkish with an accent or using Arabic in public spaces often leads to exclusion or othering. This indicates that the lack of native language proficiency is not just an individual academic issue but a broader identity crisis and source of social exclusion. Limited language skills deepen both the sense of non-belonging associated with refugee identity and the discrimination experienced in social settings. Many children report that they choose to speak Turkish in public spaces to avoid discriminatory behavior, but feel hesitant to use their native language because their parents cannot speak Turkish.

___I look at the setting and speak accordingly. If everyone is quiet, looking at their phones or something, I speak, but very quietly and after checking my surroundings. They call me "keko," and I don't really respond. I just stay quiet, put on my headphones, and don't talk. Sometimes I speak Turkish. My mom doesn't understand much. She's like, "What are you saying, son?" and I say, "Okay, I'll call you," and then I call her after I get off the bus. I don't speak my language so I won't face anything negative (Participant 23, 16-year-old Syrian boy).

The data above show that for Turkish language instruction targeting children to be effective, families must also have the means to overcome language barriers. Limited Turkish language skills among parents can restrict children's access to out-of-school learning support and negatively affect long-term educational success. Therefore, language acquisition should be approached through a multi-level strategy that extends beyond the child to include their immediate environment, while also preserving the child's mother tongue. One Syrian parent participating in the focus group highlighted the critical role of both family and school environments in children's language learning and social adaptation. She emphasized that what children hear and learn at home is reflected in their behavior at school. In particular, the lack of Turkish among Arabic-speaking children aged 8–9 poses a significant challenge in schools. This indicates that the absence of Turkish in the home environment negatively impacts children's integration into school life.

___I'm just saying, usually in schools, children repeat what they hear from their parents. Children—8 or 9 years old—speak Arabic, they don't know how to speak Turkish. If Turkish isn't spoken at home, it becomes a big problem in schools. That's why schools need to offer information about social life. If a school provides such information—even through small events or something like that—it's much better. Because kids do in school whatever they see at home. If we start with the younger ones, they begin to pick it up and learn it (Participant 1, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

As the participant suggested, incorporating information about social life and organizing small-scale activities in schools would help children's language development and cultural adaptation. The phrase *"In schools, children repeat what they hear from their parents"* reinforces the idea that children's social behavior and language skills are largely shaped within the family. Therefore, support programs that start at an early age are likely to contribute positively to children's social and linguistic development. This recommendation highlights the necessity of school-family cooperation, the importance of overcoming language barriers, and the need to foster social integration for the academic success of refugee children.

Recommendations

To overcome the language-related challenges faced by Syrian children in education and to support their development in a multicultural society, comprehensive strategies must be implemented. Expanding mother-tongue-based support programs (such as Arabic reading-writing clubs and community classrooms) is essential. According to Articles 29 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child, children's rights to preserve and develop their native languages must be safeguarded[3].

Additionally, it is critical to launch pilot programs that promote bilingual education—such as Arabic-Turkish children's books and play workshops—and to systematically monitor children's development in both languages. Moreover, Arabic language courses should be made available for Syrian children who are unfamiliar with their mother tongue, especially in light of potential return programs.

Providing psychosocial support services to children who feel inadequate due to their language skills and strengthening them against social exclusion are vital for their mental well-being. Organizing multilingual awareness training for school staff and peers can help reduce language-based discrimination and contribute to creating an inclusive school environment for both Turkish and Syrian children.

To support adults' participation in social life, increasing access to Turkish language courses and promoting neighborhood-based language workshops will also help children improve their language skills at home. Finally, expanding foreign language learning opportunities for Turkish children—especially by promoting multilingualism beyond English and establishing second-language courses in the district—will enhance the global competencies of all children and deepen their cultural understanding. Implementing these recommendations will help remove language barriers, enable Syrian children to reach their full educational potential, and frame multilingualism as a societal asset.

In line with suggestions made by children during the research, the opening of foreign language courses (e.g., English) in the Sultanbeyli district is considered important. As part of the study's aim to foreground child participation, a key policy recommendation is: *"to open language courses in the district,"* with support from relevant stakeholders.

I want to say something. There are no spaces where young people are required—or even able—to participate. There are no age-appropriate places. I wanted to receive language training. I go all the way to Kadıköy for it. Why? Because I can't access appropriate language education, or I don't get enough of it. Even the pricing isn't clear. The level of language education in Türkiye is uncertain. So, only English remains an option. I'm trying to learn Spanish. My English is at B2 level—I managed that—but with other languages, we're stuck." *(Child 25, 17-year-old Turkish citizen, female).*

> 3.5 The Right to Identity and Recognition

UNCRC Article 7 - Right to a Name and Nationality;
Article 8 - Preservation of Identity;
Article 2 - Non-discrimination;
Article 28 - Access to Education;
Article 24 - Access to Healthcare

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that every child has the right to a name, nationality, and recognition by the state from birth (Article 7).

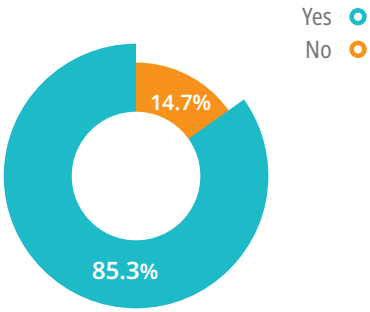
Identity is not only a matter of legal status for children—it is also a fundamental right that directly impacts their access to rights and services, their educational journeys, and their sense of belonging. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that every child has the right to a name,

[3] The Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Turkey in 1995, with reservations to Articles 17, 29, and 30 of the Convention.

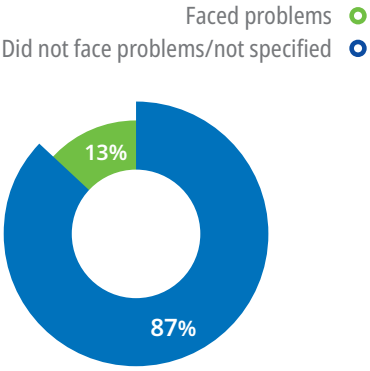
Table 7. Status of Identity Document Ownership among Children

Temporary Protection Identity Possession among Syrian Children		
	Number	%
Yes	216	96.4
No	8	3.6
Total	224	100

Graph 6. Children Who Faced Problems During the Period They Lacked an Identity Document



Graph 7. Inaccessibility of Basic Rights Due to Lack of Identity Document



nationality, and recognition by the state from birth (Article 7). Furthermore, the child's identity, including name, nationality, and family ties, must be preserved and protected under Article 8 of the Convention. For Syrian children in Türkiye, this right was confronted with significant uncertainties, especially in the early years of displacement. Changes in status regulations, shifts in registration systems, and delays in implementation resulted in many children living without identity documents for extended periods, creating serious barriers to accessing essential services such as education and healthcare (Sallan-Gül, Türkmen & Kahya Nizam, 2019). Within this framework, the study included questions directed at Syrian children regarding identity documentation. A large majority -96.4%- of participant children stated that they possessed a temporary protection identity document.

In the conducted study, it was found that eight out of the 224 children examined did not possess a temporary protection identity document. Among the 216 children who currently hold such documents, 33—equivalent to 14.7%—reported having experienced difficulties accessing essential services at some point in their lives due to the lack of identification. Considering the mass migration that began in 2011, the findings clearly show that access to the right to legal identity—one of the fundamental rights of children—is still being violated for a specific group. The continued lack of identification among some children confirms this rights violation, as it significantly hinders their access to basic public services such as education, healthcare, and social assistance.

When the 33 children who reported facing challenges during the period they were undocumented were asked in which areas they experienced difficulties, 13% stated that they encountered direct obstacles in accessing essential services—particularly education and healthcare—while lacking an identity document. Although the findings indicate that the majority of Syrian children have now obtained legal identification, their past experiences of being undocumented appear to have had lasting negative impacts on their continuity in education, access to healthcare, and trust in institutional structures.

Some children participating in the study reported inconsistencies between their registered age and their actual age, which caused complications during school enrollment and class placement.

Additionally, **some children participating in the study reported inconsistencies between their registered age and their actual age, which caused complications during school enrollment and class placement.** Delayed registration, the absence of birth certificates, or errors made during registration are among the primary reasons for these mismatches. In Erdoğan's (2017) study, the most common reason cited by children aged 5–23 for not attending school was being over the school age (Sultanbeyli Municipality, 2017). Among children living in

Sultanbeyli, late school enrollment and being older than classmates emerged as key findings for Syrian children in this study. Comparing Erdoğan's findings to those of this research suggests that the consequences of this issue have persisted over the past eight years.

—My ID says I was born in 2010, but I was actually born in 2009. So I'm 15, but really 16." (Child 21, Syrian, 15-year-old girl).

—What grade are you in?

9th grade. I failed last year. I had missed two years of school, so I was behind. That's why." (Participant 16, 18-year-old Syrian girl).

—No, I never went to school in Syria. I was already out of Syria by the time I was six. When we came to Türkiye, they enrolled me directly into first grade. I was six. But then... something happened. I started late too. After my grandfather died, I dropped out. Then I didn't go to school for two years. In the third year, I failed the 9th grade." (Participant 16, 18-year-old Syrian girl).

Following the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, individuals residing in the Southeastern Anatolia Region were forced to relocate within Türkiye. As a result, due to post-disaster registration challenges, many children were unable to update their identity records in their new provinces of residence, which restricted their access to essential services. This study includes an interview with a participant who moved to Sultanbeyli after the earthquake. A Syrian woman, who participated in the focus group discussions and emphasized the importance of her disabled child's access to education, explained that both her and her child's identity records were deactivated after the disaster. Consequently, her child was unable to resume schooling in Istanbul. This situation presents a serious barrier to refugee children's right to education.

—We searched a lot for schools and eventually they accepted my daughter, but not my son. The report had to be renewed, and it hasn't been updated in three years. We tried to register him, but since our ID still says Antakya, we couldn't get the report renewed here. We tried everything—we got an appointment through the app, and then they said, 'we'll let you know in 10 days' or something. They're stalling us. They said, 'we've already registered one of them.' They told us to come back in the second term, to bring him, that they'd inform us—but they never did. It's like they didn't want to take him, like they were just brushing us off (Participant 5, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

Such inconsistencies in identification lead to mismatches between official age and developmental level, resulting in problems like grade repetition, late school enrollment, or age-grade imbalance. These issues also have indirect effects on teacher attitudes, social interaction, and school belonging, making them a risk factor that threatens educational continuity.

—They came from Syria, right? Back there, they were in fifth grade. But here, because they didn't know the language, they were placed two grades lower. They get bored. 'I'm tall. The other kids are smaller than me.' They face discrimination because they don't know the language... Language is the biggest problem. Most kids drop out, especially in middle or high school (Participant 1, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

Moreover, identity is not limited to official documentation; it also involves a sense of belonging and social acceptance. In qualitative interviews, children shared that their inability to write in their native language, Arabic, made them feel inadequate and excluded—not only within Turkish society but even within their own communities. This experience deepens their sense of identity conflict.

I can't write Arabic. Sometimes I say a word wrong and even my family laughs at me. I don't want to go [to Arabic class] because I'm scared I'll embarrass myself (Child 21, 16-year-old Syrian girl).

This statement highlights the multidimensional identity struggles children face. A child who cannot write in Arabic is seen as "lacking" within her own cultural group and remains at risk of social exclusion in Turkish settings until she gains fluency in Turkish. This dual sense of non-belonging shows that identity is not merely a legal category—it is also a cultural, linguistic, and psychosocial matter.

Evaluation and Discussion

Although the vast majority of Syrian children are currently registered under temporary protection, the fact that they lived without official identification during certain periods of their childhood has had lasting effects—especially considering that this period coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic. Even as these experiences fade from memory, their impact on children's access to fundamental rights remains significant.

As highlighted in UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card, "disruptions in access to education and healthcare, particularly in the post-COVID-19 period, have deepened inequalities and led to the denial of rights for groups such as children without temporary protection status" (UNICEF, 2025, p. 5). The effects of these disparities are still being felt today. In particular, the inability to access healthcare services, delays in school enrollment, or starting school later than peers are direct consequences of lacking official identity documentation.

In this context, identity is not merely a bureaucratic document—it is a fundamental prerequisite for a child to be recognized as an individual and to form connections with the broader social system. According to Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states are obligated to protect the child's identity. Furthermore, situations of identity absence or mismatch must not obstruct a child's right to education or healthcare (Articles 28 and 24).

Recommendations

To ensure the full participation of children facing documentation issues in social life, it is essential to develop comprehensive and multidimensional legal and social support mechanisms. In this regard, while resolving registration problems at both local and national levels is critical, psychosocial counseling services and accessible guidance tools should also be created for children who currently face educational and social services that are not suited to their age or developmental stage.

Until a child is officially registered, uninterrupted access to basic rights and services—particularly education and healthcare—must be guaranteed. Children without official identification should be able to access services through documents brought from their country of origin. For children without any documentation, alternative solutions must be developed in line with the best interests of the child principle to ensure access to basic rights.

Recognizing that possessing identification is not merely a bureaucratic formality but a crucial factor in accessing fundamental rights, comprehensive awareness campaigns should be conducted for both children and their parents—including those who currently lack documentation. To strengthen the psychosocial resilience of children experiencing identity conflicts and to support their cultural identity, programs such as mother-tongue education and cultural activities should be introduced.

Finally, in order to accelerate the identification and system integration of undocumented children, effective collaboration and joint initiatives between civil society organizations and local authorities should be encouraged. This holistic approach will contribute to a safer and healthier developmental process for children facing identity-related challenges.

> 3.6 Family Information

UNCRC Article 5 - Parental Guidance;
Article 9 - Family Unity;
Article 18 - Parental Responsibilities

In the quantitative section of the study, children were asked questions about their family structures and the individuals with whom they share their households. The majority of participants—82.42% (403 children)—stated that they live with both their mother and father. The remaining 17.58% (86 children) reported living apart from either their mother or father, or with extended family members (such as a grandmother, uncle, or aunt) rather than with their nuclear family. Among these, one Turkish citizen and five Syrian children were reported to be living apart from both parents, indicating the impact of displacement on family separation within the Syrian population.

The proportion of children living with only one parent is notably higher among Syrian children. When examining the situations of children who do not live with both parents, 2.67% of Syrian children reported living only with their father, while 25.44% lived only with their mother. In contrast, among Turkish citizen children, these rates were 1.88% and 4.52%, respectively. These findings point to a higher prevalence of fragmented family structures among Syrian children due to their migration background.

> 3.6.1 Household Size

Data on household size reveal that the number of people living in a household tends to be higher among Syrian children. Approximately 39% of Syrian children live in households with 6–7 members, and 15% in households with 7–8 members. In comparison, 61.9% of Turkish citizen children live in smaller households

with 4–5 members. Notably, 7.1% of Syrian children live in households with 10 or more people, while this figure is only 1.1% among Turkish citizen children.

According to Table 8, 44.6% of all children in the study live in 4–5 person households, and 30.3% live in 6–7 person households. **This distribution indicates that the majority of children in Sultanbeyli reside in relatively large household settings**...

Number of People in the Household	2-3 People		4-5 People		6-7 People		7-8 People		8-9 People		10 +	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Syrian Children	10	4.5	54	24.1	88	39.3	35	15.6	21	9.4	16	7.1
Turkish Citizen Children	21	7.9	164	61.9	60	22.6	9	3.4	8	3.0	3	1.1
All Children	31	6.3	218	44.6	148	30.3	44	9.0	29	5.9	19	3.9

Table 8. Distribution of Children by Number of People Living in the Household

When the participants' demographic backgrounds and family structures were analyzed qualitatively, the codes clustered under themes such as children's age and grade level, place of birth and neighborhoods, number of siblings and family dynamics, employment status of household members, parental relationship status, and overall family relations. Turkish citizen children who participated in the qualitative study stated—consistent with the quantitative data—that they were born in Istanbul and have lived in Sultanbeyli for many years. In this context, where a strong sense of rootedness and spatial belonging is evident, one participant expressed:

"We've always been here, as long as I can remember. I was born here. We've been living in Sultanbeyli for over twenty years (Participant 14, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Among the 23 children who took part in the semi-structured interviews for the qualitative research, 16 were girls and 7 were boys. Their ages ranged from 13 to 18, and most had 3 to 4 siblings. Among Syrian children, the number of siblings reached up to 6, with more pronounced age gaps between them. While the majority of participants stated they lived with both parents, some—especially Syrian children—stood out for having fragmented, restructured, or migration-separated family structures. A Syrian boy described his family situation as follows:

"I'm 17—almost 17 in two months. I'm Syrian, born in Syria, in Aleppo. My parents are separated. My dad was married before and had three kids before marrying my mom. Then he married my mom and I was born. Now my mom remarried someone else after separating from my dad. She had a child with him, so I have one sibling. But it's not the same—different parents. One of my siblings shares the same mother, the other the same father. Right now, I live with my stepfather and my mother. I don't see my dad or my older brothers. My dad, my sister, and one of my brothers are in Canada. Another brother went abroad to France (Participant 23, 16 years old, Syrian boy).

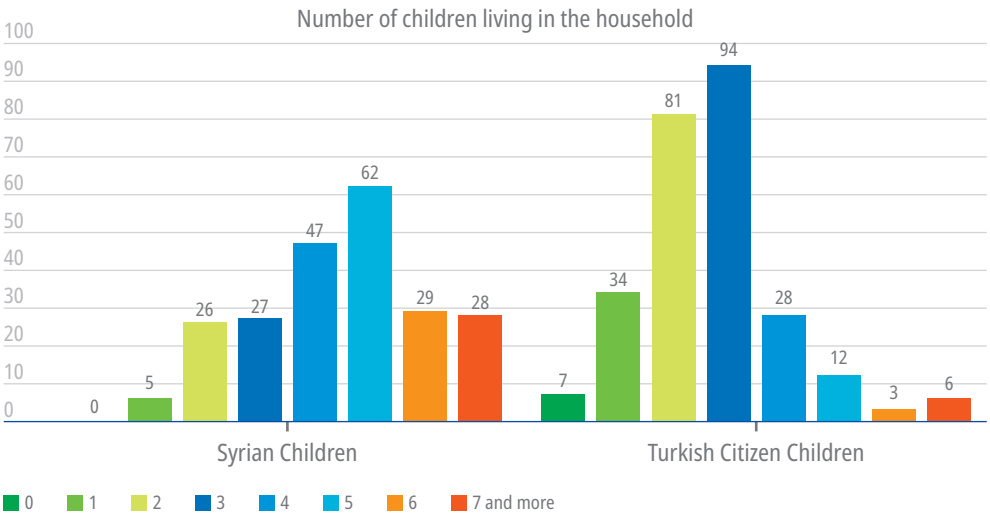
Children's perceptions of family relationships reveal a clear influence of gender roles. Participants noted that attitudes toward girls and boys differ, though they

did not explicitly associate these differences with the concept of gender inequality. In particular, girls expressed feeling that they had to be more protected by their families, attributing this to social pressure and external judgment. A powerful and extended reflection by a Turkish citizen girl sheds light on both internalized gender norms and family dynamics:

___Mother is afraid of the outside world. Father is afraid. We're girls, not boys. We can never be treated the same as boys—that's a fact. A girl is like a curtain: if you spill sour cherry juice on it, you can never use it again. It becomes trash. And a girl is the same. If there's a stain or a rumor, no matter how much your mother tries to protect you... People will talk. They'll say what they want. That's why even if a mother trusts her daughter, she won't let her go out—because she doesn't trust the community... A boy makes a mistake? People just say, 'He's a boy,' and move on. But if a girl makes a mistake—Oh my God—they say, 'She's just like her mother.' That's a very harsh statement. The blame goes directly to the mother. But with a boy, it's different. They criticize the boy himself. A girl, though—she's delicate. She has to be cherished. As I said, a girl is not the same as a boy (Participant 17, 18 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

This account clearly illustrates how girls grow up under cultural pressure and how this pressure shapes their decision-making power and freedom within the household. Such gender-based discrimination in the family setting is likely to negatively impact children's self-esteem, sense of security, and ability to participate socially.

> 3.6.2 Number of Siblings



➥ Graph 8.
Number of Siblings by Nationality

As shown in Graph 8, the number of siblings among children participating in the focus group reveals that Syrian children tend to have more siblings, often with wider age gaps. This may result in children taking on more responsibilities within the household, which could in turn affect their personal development, access to education, or social participation.

Children with one or two siblings are mostly among the Turkish citizen group, indicating that smaller family structures are more prevalent among Turkish households. Children with three siblings are also predominantly Turkish citizens. Children with four siblings are common in both groups; however, the proportion is noticeably higher among Syrian children (7 children). Children with

five or more siblings are particularly found among Syrian participants (3 Syrian children, 1 Turkish child).

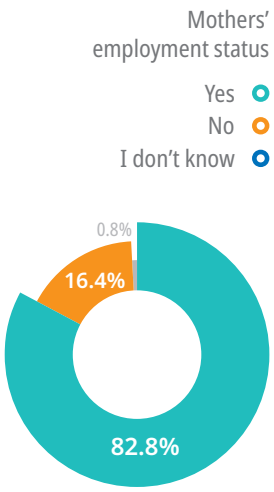
___I'm 17 years old. I study plumbing at a vocational high school. We've lived in Sultanbeyli for 10 years. We are exactly 5 siblings (Child 12, 17 years old, Syrian boy).

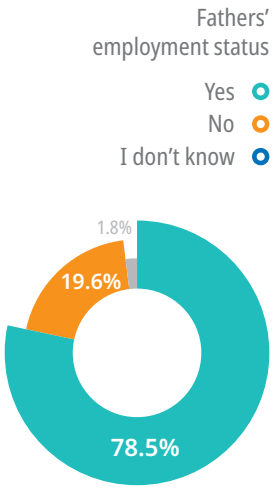
___My name is... We've been living in Sultanbeyli for 16 years. We are 6 siblings. I'm the youngest (Child 31, 16 years old, Turkish boy).

___We are four siblings. I live with my family. We've been in Istanbul for 9 years. We're settled here now (Child 10, 17 years old, Syrian girl).

It is evident that Syrian children generally come from larger families. This may reflect a trend of higher child numbers among migrant families and the persistence of extended family structures. In contrast, smaller nuclear family patterns are more common among Turkish citizen children.

> 3.6.3 Employment Status of Parents





➥ Graph 9.
Parental Labor Force Participation in Sultanbeyli

Children participating in the study were asked about the employment status of their parents. In both the Turkish citizen and Syrian groups, fathers were found to have significantly higher employment rates compared to mothers. **A marked difference was observed in maternal employment: the employment rate of Turkish mothers (22%) is more than double that of Syrian mothers (10%). However, in both groups, maternal employment rates remain below the national average of 36.7% for mothers in Türkiye (TÜİK, 2023).** According to the 2023 Household Labour Force Survey[4] the employment rate among those aged 15 and over is 48.3%; this rate is 31.3% for women and 65.7% for men. These figures indicate that mothers in the study population have substantially lower labor force participation compared to national averages.

Findings suggest that in both Turkish and Syrian households, the role of the father continues to be primarily associated with being the main breadwinner, while mothers largely assume domestic responsibilities. Fathers in both groups show high employment rates, whereas mothers' employment remains low and falls short of the national average (31.3%). The employment rate for Syrian mothers is particularly low, at just 10%. As highlighted in a 2022 report by UN Women and KESK, the main reason women do not participate in the labor force is engagement in domestic tasks (55.7%). For refugee women, barriers such as having many children, lack of social support,

[4] data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Kadin-2024-54076

and language difficulties make access to employment even more challenging (KESK & UN Women, 2022, p. 5). The employment rate among Turkish mothers in the study stands at 22%—relatively higher, yet still reflecting persistent gender-based divisions of labor.

This issue is noteworthy not only for women's economic independence but also for the well-being and development of children. In low-income, large households, the mother's inability to work places the financial burden solely on one parent, which may limit children's access to education, nutrition, and opportunities for social participation.

The opinions expressed by both parents and children in focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews support the finding that gender-based divisions of labor are internalized by some children living in Sultanbeyli.

___I'm saying this especially for people living in a place like Sultanbeyli. Usually women don't work. Generally, only men work, and it's very hard to grow up as a man (Pembe, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___Yes, the roles are different. For example, in our religion, it's seen as good and acceptable for women to be housewives. But some people force it—there are people who push themselves to work and wear themselves out (Child 29, 16 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

Recommendations

Based on the employment status of Turkish and Syrian parents, it is evident that gender-based unequal division of labor within households persists, adversely affecting children's well-being. In this context, it is recommended to develop various policies aimed particularly at supporting the labor force participation of women.

First, neighborhood-based employment programs should be developed to increase women's labor force participation. These programs should include components tailored to the cultural and social needs of refugee women and be designed to minimize barriers such as language, childcare responsibilities, and transportation. Programs supported by initiatives like microcredit, entrepreneurship training, and cooperative models will accelerate women's integration into the local economy. In addition, practices that facilitate access to social security for women working informally should be expanded. In this regard, incentive-based insurance systems and guidance services offered through municipal employment offices should be strengthened. Evaluating flexible working models and part-time employment contracts within the framework of social security will allow women to participate in the labor market in a more secure manner.

As a comprehensive service to also enhance child well-being, Turkish language courses should be integrated with vocational training programs for refugee women. These integrated programs will help women improve their language proficiency while also acquiring practical skills to meet labor market demands in specific sectors. Programs offering employment guarantees or internship opportunities should be prioritized. A crucial step for supporting the employment of both Turkish and refugee women is the expansion of childcare services.

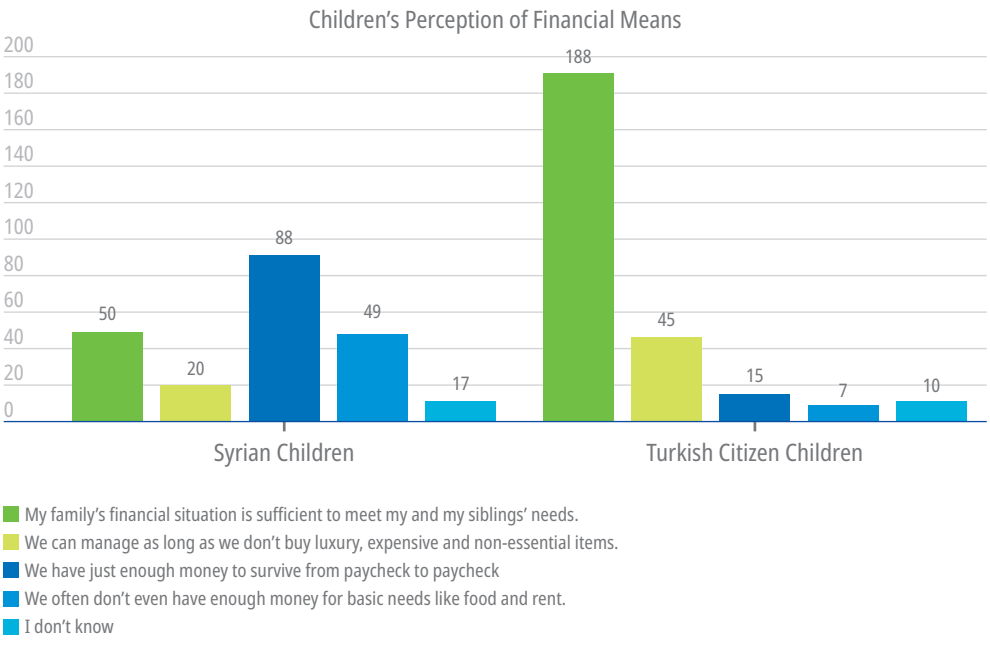
The number of affordable, accessible, and high-quality daycare centers should be increased, and flexible childcare alternatives should be developed to align with non-traditional working hours. Offering incentives to employers for providing childcare support would also contribute positively to women's employment. These policies will improve not only the quantity but also the quality of women's labor market participation.

These recommendations align with Türkiye's international commitments under Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which guarantees equal participation of women in working life and aims to eliminate gender-based inequalities. Moreover, in accordance with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26, which highlights the multiple vulnerabilities of migrant women, it is a priority to develop equitable policies in areas such as social security, childcare services, and language education—both for their well-being and for improving the living conditions of their children (CEDAW, 2008).

> 3.7 Families' Economic Situation and Children's Perception of Financial Well-Being

The research findings indicate that poverty levels are particularly high in households of Syrian children. While Turkish citizen children reported a relatively better perception of their financial situation, class-based similarities between the groups are also notable. Among Syrian children, 39.3% stated that their families "barely manage from one paycheck to the next," whereas 70.9% of Turkish children reported that their families were able to meet their and their siblings' needs. However, this does not imply that all Turkish citizen children are free from poverty. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions revealed that low-income families from both groups experience similar challenges and that inequalities are particularly visible in terms of children's participation in social life.

The average declared income of families registered in the SUKOM database is 10,999 TL, which is less than half of the 2024 poverty line of 23,356 TL (KESK and UN Women, 2022, p. 7). This indicates a structural inequality not only in economic terms but also in children's access to fundamental rights.



➥ Graph 10. Comparison of Children's Perceptions of Financial Situation

A parent's testimony illustrates how children's right to participate in activities and social life is hindered by financial constraints:

___There are a lot of activities organized at school—fun events, for instance—but they usually require payment. I don't want to participate in all of them. When my children can't attend, they say things like, 'Mom, there's an event today, I don't want to feel ashamed, so I'd rather not go.' They can't participate in all. If there are ten activities, I can send them to only two or three (Mavi, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

Similarly, another parent expressed that their children could not go anywhere during school holidays, stating that even transportation was a major barrier:

___The children can't play outside. I can't take them anywhere during the winter break. Even when the event is free, we still have to pay for the transportation. Municipalities should plan activities for children during the school break. I can't take them anywhere because of the cost of transportation (Yeşil, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

In contrast, an institutional representative shared the following during the consultation workshop:

___Religious education, sports activities, cultural events, and homeland days are organized at the youth center. Summer festivals are held in the most accessible schools across 15 neighborhoods. During the summer, neighborhood-based open-air cinema screenings and children's theater performances are arranged. Theater events for children are offered at three different centers. Announcements are made via social media and mobile phone messages (Search Workshop – Participant from the Social and Cultural Rights Table).

Although institutions reported organizing cultural and sports activities at the neighborhood level, parents' feedback suggests that these programs are not accessible for some families, especially due to economic and spatial barriers. This indicates a gap between the availability of services and actual access to them.

These accounts show that economic deprivation directly hinders children's participation in social life, obstructing the realization of rights guaranteed by Article 31 (rest, play, and participation in cultural life) and Article 27 (standard of living) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Focus group discussions also reveal that material deprivation creates seemingly technical barriers—such as transportation costs—that directly affect children's right to education. **In low-income and disadvantaged families, the high cost of school transportation services can prevent regular school attendance, highlighting transportation as a serious axis of inequality in access to education:**

___I think... the school shuttle is a problem. The fees are too high. My children are orphans. Especially this year. The school doesn't provide it. There's a serious issue with transportation. Some can afford it, others can't (Black, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

This statement reveals that children who have lost a parent and those living in single-parent households face a dual disadvantage—both economically and in terms of access to services. In areas where transportation support is insufficient, the distance between home and school becomes a critical factor in determining a child's ability to continue their education. **For Syrian parents, socioeconomic difficulties often lead to a perceived sense of inadequacy, which adds a psychological burden to the already challenging conditions of displacement. This burden is frequently tied to the feeling of not being able to fulfill their parental role.** The following remarks from a Syrian father who participated in a focus group discussion clearly illustrate how the economic challenges refugee families face can undermine their capacity to meet their children's needs, leading to emotional strain. This situation highlights the profound impact of economic disadvantage on how parents perceive and experience their caregiving roles.

I feel inadequate in this matter. I'm way behind when it comes to pocket money for my kids. I keep going back and forth emotionally. But I really do feel inadequate about this (Participant 4, Focus Group, Syrian father).

Article 28 of the UNCRC clearly states that every child has the right to education and that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure access to it. This obligation extends beyond the mere availability of education; it also includes creating the necessary conditions for children to physically reach educational institutions. As emphasized in General Comment No. 1 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, access to education must be assessed within the framework of four principles: *acceptability, accessibility, adaptability,* and *availability.* Furthermore, every step taken to facilitate children's access to education must be guided by the best interests of the child, as elaborated in General Comment No. 14.[5]

During the roundtable discussion on the impact of financial hardship on children, consultations with public institutions, local service providers, and civil society representatives revealed that there are significant gaps in information dissemination and persistent inequalities in children's access to social assistance and services.

Recommendations

Interviews conducted with children and parents—although more numerous among Syrian families—revealed that both Syrian and Turkish children face shared material constraints. These constraints negatively affect children's participation in social life, access to education, and psychological well-being. While 39.3% of Syrian children reported that their families "barely manage from paycheck to paycheck," 70.9% of Turkish children stated that their families could meet their and their siblings' needs. In light of these findings, an inclusive and rights-based approach is essential. Support for parents should not be limited

[5] General Comment No. 1 of the UNCRC, "The Aims of Education (Article 29)", CRC/GC/2001/1.
General Comment No. 14, "The Right of the Child to Have His or Her Best Interests Taken as a Primary Consideration (Article 3, paragraph 1)", CRC/C/GC/14.

to direct financial aid but should also include access to education, information about social services, and multidimensional support through child-friendly programs.

It is critical for local governments—especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods—to ensure the accessibility of free cultural, artistic, and sports activities to guarantee children's right to equal participation. Strengthening information mechanisms about social services is also essential. These should not rely solely on teachers or other adults but must also target children directly, using age-appropriate communication materials. Organizing rights-based awareness sessions in schools—led by guidance counselors and social workers—will help children develop awareness of their rights. Lastly, municipalities, Social Service Centers (SHMs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should carry out joint, child-friendly outreach and referral initiatives. As part of this cooperation, application guides, child consultation points, and confidential communication channels should be developed to ensure children can easily access the support and information they need. Implementing these recommendations will be a meaningful step toward enhancing child well-being and strengthening social inclusion.

> 3.8 Protecting the Right to Education: Children's Participation in Schooling

CRC Articles 28, 29, 2

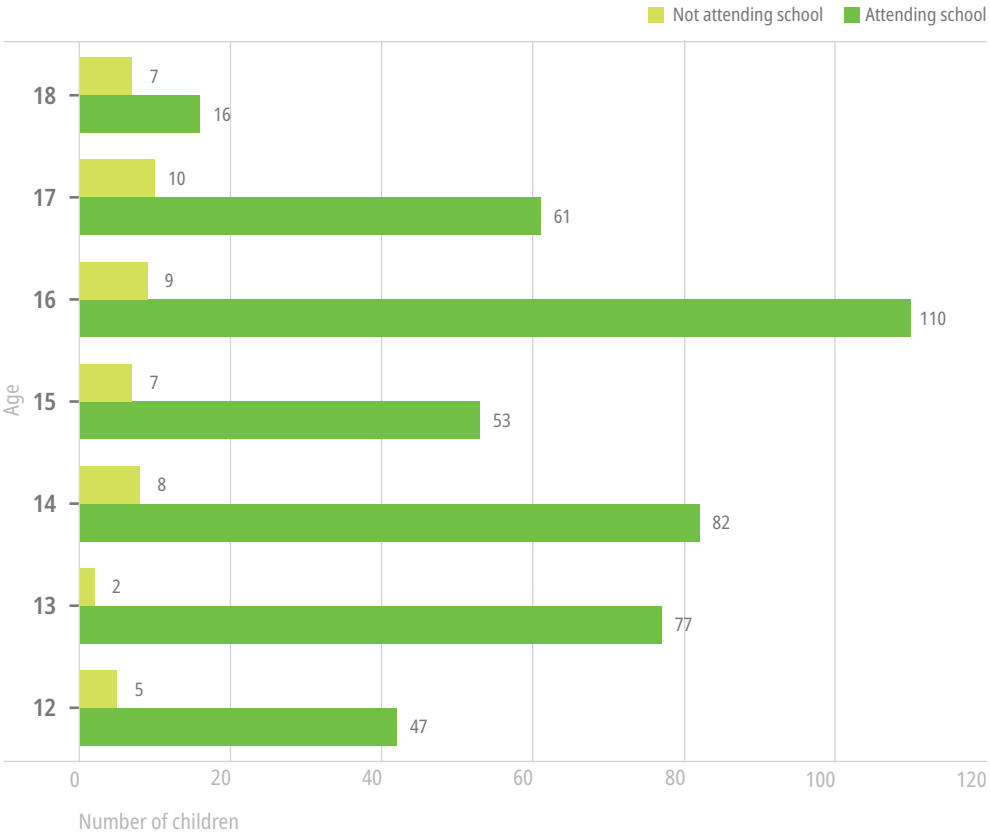
While only 0.8% of Turkish children said they were not enrolled in school, the rate was significantly higher among Syrian children at 20.5%. Among those attending school, over 90% stated they participated regularly. However, irregular school attendance patterns such as late enrollment, transition to open education, and absenteeism were found to be more common among Syrian children.

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees every child's right to free and compulsory education. Article 29 emphasizes that education should aim to develop each child's personality and mental potential to the fullest, while Article 2 states that this right must apply to all children without discrimination. In establishing the right to education, equal opportunity for all children is underlined, and primary education is to be compulsory and free of charge for everyone. In this context, General Comment No. 1 (2001) by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child underlines that education must not only be accessible but also of quality, supportive of children's development, and child-centered. Additionally, General Comment No. 14 (2013) highlights that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all education policies, while General Comment No. 12 (2009) defines children's right to be heard and participate in decision-making as a critical component of educational quality.

According to a 2024 report by the Education Reform Initiative (ERG), disparities in access to education across regions in Türkiye remain significant. The report highlights that many learning environments are physically inadequate, guidance services are limited, and incidents of peer bullying are increasingly reported. In light of this literature, the current study examined the educational participation of both Turkish and Syrian children living in Sultanbeyli through surveys and semi-structured interviews, further supported by focus group discussions with parents and a participatory consultation workshop.

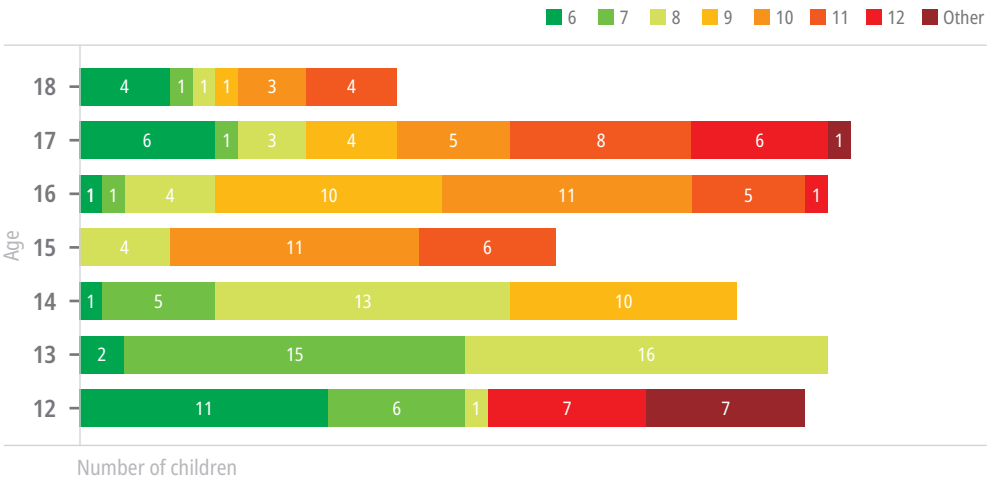
In a survey conducted with 489 children between January 12 and February 28, 2025, 90.2% reported attending school. While only 0.8% of Turkish children said they were not enrolled in school, the rate was significantly higher among Syrian children at 20.5%. Among those attending school, over 90% stated they participated regularly. However, irregular school attendance patterns such as late

enrollment, transition to open education, and absenteeism were found to be more common among Syrian children.



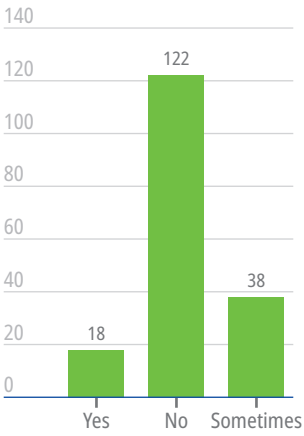
➥ Graph 11.
School attendance by age group

When semi-structured interviews and quantitative data are evaluated together, it becomes evident that many Syrian children are not placed in classrooms appropriate for their age and development, with children of different age groups continuing in the same education level. This study confirms that this mismatch is one of the key factors hindering Syrian children's continued participation in education. **One of the major challenges faced by Syrian children in their educational journey is the misalignment between age and grade, which leads to both academic and psychosocial consequences.** Children who are not enrolled in age-appropriate classrooms often lose motivation for learning and become reluctant to continue their education (UNICEF, 2023).



➥ Graph 12.
Class Level of Syrian Children by Age

These children often struggle to adapt to school and experience academic failure. This leads to a loss of motivation and, in some cases, results in school dropout. Placement decisions made without considering children's developmental levels are among the most significant barriers to school participation—particularly for refugee children. For girls, access to education becomes even more fragile due to intersecting factors such as the menstrual cycle, domestic responsibilities, economic obstacles, and gender roles (ERG, 2024, pp. 11–14). According to the *Being a Child in an Age of Crises* report, there is a 13-point gap in internet access and a 33-point gap in computer/tablet ownership between the lowest and highest socioeconomic groups (Bilgi University & UNICEF, 2025, p. 71). Especially for girls, the digital world is perceived as a space for learning and socializing—"*being outside while staying inside the home*" (p. 72). This highlights the need for education policies to focus not only on physical access to schools but also on digital inclusion (Bilgi University & UNICEF, 2025, p. 72). Another barrier to regular school attendance among Syrian children is the language barrier. As shown in Graph 13, 56 children (31.4%) reported facing difficulties due to language.



➥ Graph 13.
Challenges faced by syrian children due to turkish language skills

When comparing school attendance by nationality, it was found that 20.5% of Syrian children participating in the study did not attend school, while this rate was only 0.8% among Turkish citizen children. Among the 48 children not attending school, only 2 were Turkish citizens. The mismatch between Syrian children's age and educational level appears to be one of the reasons for school dropout. The specific reasons for non-attendance among children will be discussed in the following sections.

In focus group discussions, both Turkish and Syrian children emphasized the importance of education in their lives but expressed that the opportunities provided by the system were neither equal nor sufficient. While Syrian children often referred to a delayed, fragmented, and interrupted educational journey, Turkish children focused more on exam pressure, lack of extracurricular activities, and transportation problems.

___Since I'm a university entrance exam student (YKS), I don't have time for my hobbies. I'm constantly studying (Child 24, 17 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

___I'm in 9th grade, but I'm three years behind. I repeated last year. I had been out of school for two years, so that's why I'm behind (Participant 16, 18 years old, Syrian girl).

___School is just exams, exams, exams. No social activities... Too many classes. Even if we study, it doesn't always stick (Child 6, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Children view education not only as an academic requirement but also as a space for socialization, personal growth, and talent discovery. However, they feel the system fails to respond adequately to these needs. They criticize the exam-centered structure, rote learning, lack of social engagement, and short breaks.

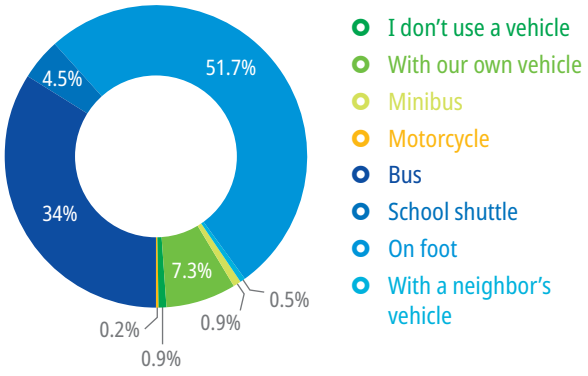
___Our teacher gives exams, and those who score below 60 are not allowed to go out for recess. Not just during her class—throughout the entire day, for the whole week, they are banned from going out for recess (Child 3, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Student experiences regarding the current education system point largely to the limitations created by an exam-oriented curriculum and the lack of social activities. Children emphasize that the school process has been reduced to a cycle of exams, and the inadequacy of extracurricular activities, along with the intense class schedules, make learning more difficult and negatively affect knowledge retention.

___I think what needs improvement in education is the pacing of lessons... Lessons are 40 minutes. During that time, lessons should be explained in a way that keeps students engaged—without overwhelming them. Other than that, I think recess times need to be reorganized. For example, at our school, the short recesses are really hard on us, honestly. We even had 5-minute recesses. Like, if you go out, you can't come back in time, and then you get scolded—it's directly reported to the vice principal. So I think more importance should be given to education. Because every child needs education to build a future. That's why I believe more contributions can be made for education (Child 2, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Based on the child's statements, the insufficiency of lesson durations and recess intervals is seen as a critical issue in education. Short recess periods fail to meet students' physical and mental rest needs, leading to practical challenges such as being late to class and disciplinary problems.

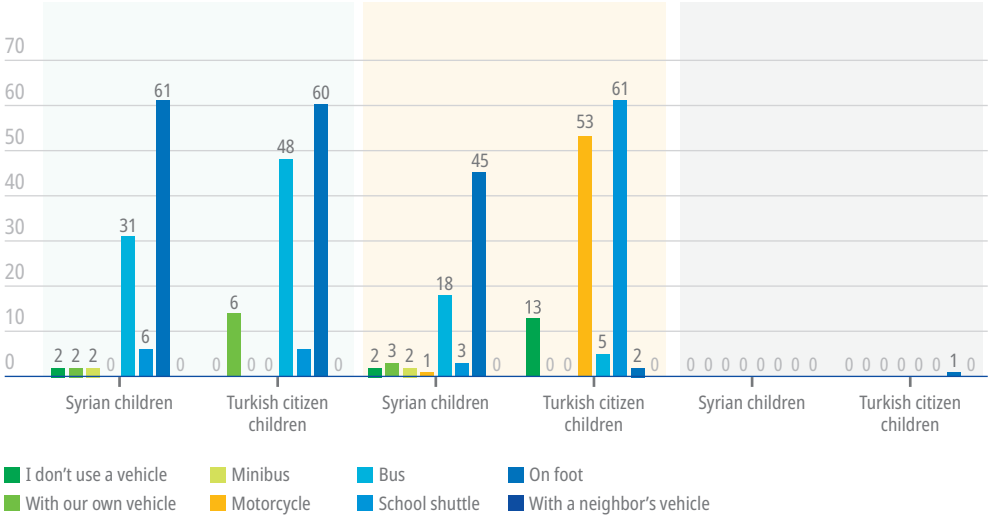
Improving the current system in terms of educational quality and student well-being is considered important, and there is a need for a holistic approach that, in addition to academic success, takes into account students' motivation, physical health, and psychosocial development.



Graph 14. Means of transportation used by children to reach school in Sultanbeyli

Another important parameter in children's access to education relates to how they get to school. When children were asked how they commute to school, it was found that 4 students were enrolled in open education and did not use any transportation; 5.4% used school shuttles, 7.93% used their own or a neighbor's vehicle, 35.46% used public transportation, and 51.70% walked to school.

It was found that there is a proportional difference between Syrian and Turkish citizen students in terms of the means of transportation they use to reach school. While 54% of Syrian students go to school on foot, this rate is 46% for Turkish citizen students. It was also observed that those attending open education are Syrian girls.



➥ Graph 15. Means of transportation used by children in Sultanbeyli according to nationality

Serious concerns about transportation were also raised during the focus group discussions. Children who leave home early in the morning reported being physically and mentally exhausted due to long transfer times, overcrowded buses, and expensive shuttle fees.

___It takes me at least two hours to get home. The bus is very crowded. If you're late, they mark you as absent for half the day (Child 6, 14-year-old Turkish girl).

___It's a very short distance to my sibling's school. They asked for a fee of around 3,800. They wanted it monthly. And they also ask for an annual down payment. Shuttle fees are very high. If I wanted to take the shuttle, they said they would charge a similar amount. My dad drops me off in the morning. The route isn't very safe because I have to pass under the bridge near Ekol (a local store). On the way back, I walk because it's bright (Child 26, 17-year-old Turkish girl).

The challenges students face in reaching educational institutions have significant impacts on their academic participation and overall well-being. The interviews pointed to multidimensional issues such as long commute times, overcrowding on public transport, high transportation costs, and insufficient frequency of public transit. These factors cause students to arrive late or miss school altogether and introduce additional difficulties such as safety concerns (especially for girls) and financial burdens. Accordingly, these student statements underscore the need for comprehensive policies and practices to improve transportation infrastructure, provide accessible and safe transportation options, and remove financial barriers to ensure equal educational opportunities and enhance student motivation.

___I wake up at 7:00, leave at 7:45. I take two buses and arrive at school by 8:30 (Child 22, 15-year-old Syrian girl).

___We missed one bus. We had to wait an hour. So if we miss it, there's no bus for a while. They run very infrequently. That's a problem for us. We're late every time. And there's always traffic for some reason there. Wait, wait, wait – we keep waiting forever. We're always five or ten minutes late. The buses take a very roundabout route (Child 27, 17-year-old Turkish boy).

On top of the problems caused by financial difficulties, mismatched schedules, and lack of sufficient public transport, parents also expressed safety concerns.

I also enrolled my children in the school shuttle. If the school close to me is here (points), I can't send them there because of that street. I have no choice but to send them to a school that's twenty minutes away. Why? (Because of the address-based registration system.) Just because of that street (their address falls under a different school, one that's farther away). We've been wronged. I feel really wronged about this. I want this system to change. If I didn't use the shuttle, they'd be coming home alone at a late hour and I'd be scared. I can't always go pick them up. My other child finishes school and comes home around six in the evening (Purple, Focus Group, Turkish mother).

My daughter is starting middle school. I want her to go to a good school. There are two middle schools nearby, but I don't want to send her there. Because, like I said earlier, it's dangerous. We've seen people using drugs, carrying knives, even extorting others. I want to send my child to a school in the center. But like the other woman said, that means we need a shuttle. And it's expensive. I think it's going to be difficult. We're waiting (Pink, Focus Group, Turkish mother).

This situation highlights that access to education must be assessed not only through school enrollment data, but also by considering transportation, safety, and daily life practices. The study conducted in Sultanbeyli reveals that numerous intersecting factors—including nationality, gender, age, economic status, and transportation options—play a critical role in determining children's access to education. **For Syrian children, structural challenges such as language barriers, age-grade mismatches, interrupted or late-starting educational paths, reliance on open education, and absenteeism are prominent. In contrast, Turkish children more frequently report issues such as exam pressure, lack of extracurricular activities, inadequate physical infrastructure, and psychological stress.** Similar to the findings of the child surveys, Syrian parents of children aged 6–12 also stated that their children face difficulties in education due to language, often perform poorly academically, and even those eager to attend school struggle to communicate with their teachers.

Sometimes when the child is at school, they ask the teacher something like, "I didn't understand this question, can you explain it?" And the teacher replies, "You should've listened to the lesson." But if a Turkish child asked the same question, the teacher would explain it. Just because the child is Syrian, the teacher doesn't explain and instead says, "You should've listened" (Participant 2, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

The teacher is not patient. They don't speak clearly. They brush them off. Syrian children often face this difficulty (Participant 4, Focus Group, Syrian father).

The focus group and semi-structured individual interviews with both children and parents demonstrate that transportation challenges, high shuttle fees, safety concerns, and complications in the registration system can indirectly violate children's right to education. Furthermore, access to education for girls is more fragile due to gender roles, the menstrual cycle, and pressures within the family.

In the focus group discussions with Syrian parents, one participant explained that due to cultural codes, it is often harder for Syrian girls to access education compared to boys. Fears related to safety and early or forced marriages lead some mothers to hesitate about sending their daughters to school.

Usually, mothers are especially afraid to send their daughters to school. You know there's a cultural difference. They'll learn new things; there are things that don't align with our culture. There's mixing of boys and girls. That's why some mothers don't want to send them—sometimes girls and boys mingle at school. Sometimes they want to marry other students (Participant 3, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

> 3.8.1 Vocational Orientation and Educational Aspirations in Education

The study findings reveal that Turkish citizen children are strongly motivated toward the university entrance exam (YKS) and higher education, while among Syrian children, there is a more prevalent tendency to acquire a profession and enter the workforce at an early age

The study findings reveal that Turkish citizen children are strongly motivated toward the university entrance exam (YKS) and higher education, while among Syrian children, there is a more prevalent tendency to acquire a profession and enter the workforce at an early age. This difference is shaped not only by nationality but also by the children's socio-economic conditions, school type placements, and gender roles.

I got placed in an Anatolian high school because my score was good. But my family didn't want it because it was mixed-gender. They didn't want a co-ed school. They told me to go to an Imam Hatip school instead. I didn't want that either. So, I chose a vocational school. But it's far away. I barely convinced them to let me go. I managed somehow, and now I'm attending that school (Child 22, 15 years old, Syrian girl).

I'm a YKS student. I study from 8 in the morning to 8 in the evening (17-year-old, Turkish citizen girl).

Tan's (2021: pp. 21, 71) assessment points out that the 2017 policy directing married students from formal education to the open education system has particularly disrupted educational continuity for girls. This regulation has been criticized for facilitating early/forced marriage and school dropout. The findings of this study also show that some Syrian children are directed toward Imam Hatip schools, influenced by families' language preferences, cultural values, and religious sensitivities. Statements in the semi-structured interviews suggest that especially for girls, school choices are largely shaped by family decisions, often at the expense of the children's own wishes and aspirations. This underlines the importance of supporting children's right to participation and freedom of choice in education.

Participants' qualitative reflections on their career goals suggest that motivation in education is shaped not only by academic interests but also by broader social values. Some youths wish to pursue fields like the arts, yet these fields are often seen by families or society as mere hobbies.

___In our culture, it's like the child must become an engineer, architect, or doctor. Art is seen as just a hobby. There are people who do art as a hobby, but it's actually a profession. You can become a painter or a designer. I don't think families provide much support in this area (Child 24, 17-year-old, Turkish citizen girl).

___For example, I wanted to study music. That's why I didn't care much about the LGS, because it didn't affect the music school admissions. But both my family and my teachers kept saying things like, "What are you going to do with music?" They didn't support me. So last year I took the exam, and just a week before, they told me, "Go ahead if you want, but you won't make it." And I didn't (Child 8, 14-year-old, Turkish citizen girl).

This testimony demonstrates the extent to which children's vocational orientations are influenced by family and societal value systems. Among Syrian children, vocational aspirations tend to focus more on health, security, and technical professions, which often stem from economic concerns and the need to enter the labor market early.

___I'm not entirely sure. Hopefully I'll get what I want—law. I want to be good in that profession, to specialize. Or maybe an interpreter or police officer. I could also be a teacher (Participant 5, 13-year-old Syrian boy).

___Architecture or computer science (Participant 22, 17-year-old Syrian boy).

___I want to be a dental technician or a dentist (Participant 1, 16-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Children's future career choices and aspirations reveal both diversity and uncertainty. **These findings underscore the need for an education system that provides comprehensive career guidance services and diverse learning opportunities to support students' vocational development and nurture their interests.**

> 3.8.2 Parental Expectations on Education and the Future

Parents' hopes and concerns regarding their children's future careers directly shape children's motivation and aspirations. Most parents participating in the focus groups expressed a strong desire for their children to obtain a "*good profession*," yet they also emphasized the barriers posed by current economic hardships.

___Of course, above all, I wish for them to be healthy. That's the most important thing. I hope they become well-mannered, decent, and pursue respectable professions (Mor, focus group, Turkish citizen mother).

___I have four kids. How can we manage them all? My husband works for minimum wage. We'll have to put things on hold. The child will work, save up. But by then, their excitement is already gone (Mavi, focus group, Turkish citizen mother).

___Like any mother, I want my child to finish school, get their dream job, and feel proud saying, "I did it." But sometimes, all that effort ends in disappointment (Sarı, focus group, Turkish citizen mother).

One of the issues raised during the focus group discussions with parents was the discrimination Syrian children face in education and its negative impact on their future expectations. **Due to the mobility restrictions imposed by their temporary protection status, students are unable to participate in out-of-city or international educational trips, which deprives Syrian students—unlike their Turkish peers—of opportunities and access to "good professions."** Despite their academic success, children are denied equal opportunities due to their legal status, which negatively affects both parents' and children's future expectations and motivation. The following statement by one Syrian parent clearly illustrates the bureaucratic barriers encountered in the integration of refugee children into the education system and how these obstacles restrict the academic and social development of the children:

"My brother is 13 years old. His class is labeled as an English class, since it is a high-level class. Sometimes they organize trips abroad. Last time, his classmates went to Italy, and some even went to London. But my brother couldn't go because he's Syrian, because he holds a temporary protection ID. He was actually selected. Because he's hardworking and speaks English well—he was selected for that reason. But he couldn't go. There's another student who experienced the same, in the same class as my brother. He also couldn't go because he's Syrian. I think this is a right... He should have that right (Participant 1, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

The statements of participants in the focus group discussions with parents reveal that their children face various structural and pedagogical problems throughout their education. These issues are mostly teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, financial barriers, and lack of psychosocial support.

Parents emphasized that frequent teacher changes negatively affect children's motivation. They also noted significant differences in teacher quality and said that while some teachers were more successful, access to those teachers was not provided in a fair or transparent way. According to the statements of Turkish parents, the distinction between permanent and contracted teachers undermines the sense of justice in education.

"My child misses the first lessons, and it upsets me. There is an option to choose the teacher. They ask for a fee to attend the better teacher's class. My child started elementary school with excitement, but gradually lost that enthusiasm. Education should be equal. In the first grade, we changed teachers four times. For example, in our school, there's an option to change teachers. There is also a teacher who provides better education. In our case, there are contracted rather than permanent teachers, and I don't have the chance to send my child to the better one. Teachers are absolutely important. The school administration can make changes secretly, informally. As I said—there's no justice. I really believe there's no equality (Mavi, Focus Group, Turkish mother).

From the perspective of Syrian parents, the situation differs. Parents emphasized that teachers' attitudes significantly shape refugee students' educational experiences and academic success. They noted that behaviors such as ignoring or refusing to listen to newly arrived or minority students can lead children to feel marginalized. They also shared that the presence of only a few foreign

students in a classroom often fosters discriminatory behaviors and attitudes from both peers and teachers. The fact that teachers show attention to certain groups of students while neglecting others may indicate a conscious or unconscious form of discrimination. Such treatment can result in decreased motivation and poor academic outcomes, even if students are willing to engage in learning. Therefore, **inclusive and supportive attitudes from teachers toward refugee students are of critical importance in ensuring their right to education and academic achievement.**

___The teachers ignore him too, and they seem to think, "Don't send him anymore." A new teacher came this year—fourth grade. That teacher really ignores him, doesn't listen. He's already the only Syrian student in the classroom, and because he's foreign, they make things difficult for him. He really wants to go to school and study, but the teacher seriously ignores and pretends not to hear him. When a Turkish student speaks to the teacher, the teacher pays full attention. But because my child is Syrian, the teacher ignores him (Participant 2, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

According to parents' accounts, many children are becoming increasingly disengaged from school and reluctant to study. It was particularly noted that adolescent children skip school without their parents' knowledge. The lack of psychological counseling services in schools was emphasized, and the need for pedagogical support was raised. In addition, the fact that most social activities organized in schools are fee-based makes it difficult for low-income families to participate. This creates feelings of embarrassment and exclusion among children.

___Yes, I've experienced this myself. Sometimes schools hold events. The children just watch from afar—like the flight simulation, which is fee-based. But once they're inside, it's a whole different experience. These should be free. They should be held for free once a month or so. There could be smart solutions that allow children who can't afford it to also participate (Mor, Focus Group, Turkish mother).

The narratives of both Syrian and Turkish parents illustrate that there are inequalities in access to educational services in public schools in Sultanbeyli. **Economic constraints, differences in teacher qualifications, and structural shortcomings are lowering children's academic motivation and creating a sense of helplessness among parents.** When school environments reinforce class-based divisions, they deepen educational inequities and fuel social exclusion among students. For Syrian families, the experience of forced migration further alters expectations around education and the future. One participant in the focus group highlighted the difference between university entrance systems in Türkiye and Syria, stating that the high difficulty level of entrance exams in Türkiye and the fact that not everyone is accepted into university pose a major challenge for Syrian children. In contrast, the relatively easier university admission process in Syria—along with uncertainty about returning—makes planning for education and the future more complicated for refugee families.

___My sister studied in Türkiye. The exams are very hard. Not everyone here can get into university. That's why getting into university in Syria is easier. Getting into any university here in Türkiye is more difficult (Participant 1, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

These accounts demonstrate that education policies must not only address children directly but also include awareness-raising and support programs for families. Economic pressure and lack of equal opportunity constrain children's educational aspirations, ultimately reinforcing long-term structural inequalities that undermine the principle of fairness.

Evaluation

Parents' expectations regarding their children's future and the economic and structural concerns that accompany these expectations have a significant impact on children's motivation to pursue education. Current economic conditions make it difficult for families to fulfil their desire to provide their children with a "good profession" and in some cases, create a sense of helplessness. Discriminatory practices faced by children under temporary protection status in education, as well as opportunity inequalities stemming from their legal status, negatively affect their future expectations and motivation despite their academic achievements. Structural issues observed in access to education include teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, economic barriers, and lack of psychosocial support. Teacher turnover and differences in the quality of permanent and contract teachers can undermine the perception of fairness in education. In addition, teachers' exclusionary attitudes towards refugee students can cause these students to feel marginalised at school and lead to low motivation.

The lack of free social activities at school contributes to children feeling excluded, and financial constraints contribute to truancy and a lack of motivation to study, particularly among adolescents. Lastly, differences between the university admission systems in Türkiye and Syria stand out as an important factor directly affecting Syrian children's education and future plans. All these factors highlight that the observed inequalities in access to education services negatively affect children's academic achievement, social integration, and overall well-being, underscoring the need for comprehensive policy interventions.

Recommendations

To develop comprehensive solutions to the current educational challenges, support programs should be established to ensure that children are placed in classes appropriate to their age and developmental levels. For Syrian refugee children in particular, preparatory and remedial classes should be prioritized to facilitate age-appropriate placement. A holistic approach to Turkish language education must be adopted to overcome language barriers, incorporating family engagement in the process. Language acquisition should also be supported through peer mentoring systems and school-based guidance activities.

To enhance access to education for all children, school social services should be expanded, and accessible, free transportation solutions should be provided to address mobility-related challenges. Publicly funded transportation models should be developed for children who are unable to attend school due to financial hardship. Gender-sensitive policies should be implemented to meet the specific needs of girls in school environments, including access to menstrual hygiene products, safe toilets, and secure school settings. In this regard, guidance mechanisms that prioritize girls' own preferences in school selection should be developed, respecting the child's right to participation.

Rather than relying on rote learning and exam-centered models, pedagogical methods that emphasize children's individual development should be promoted. Guidance counselor staffing should be strengthened, extracurricular activities encouraged, and school-based programs supporting psychosocial development scaled up. In addition, parental involvement should be fostered through increased parent education programs and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing parental pressure in the education process.

Transitions to open education must be closely monitored to prevent this option from becoming an "exit route" from the formal education system. Child protection professionals should not automatically consider children in open education as fully engaged in schooling. Attendance, exam participation, re-registration, and overall engagement should be carefully tracked, as some families may view enrollment documents as sufficient and deprioritize actual participation. Therefore, the status of children enrolled in open education must be addressed systematically within the child protection framework, ensuring their genuine access to the right to education/

Ensuring that refugee children are directed to education without experiencing discrimination, and preventing citizenship- or faith-based segregation in school placement, is vital for establishing a rights-based and equitable education system. In sensitive areas such as religious education, the varying needs and sensitivities of children must be respected, and school guidance mechanisms must be inclusive and non-discriminatory..

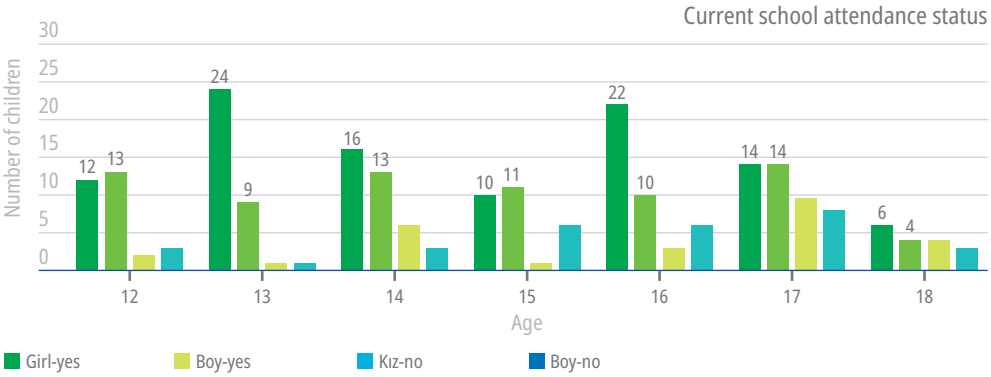
To mitigate the impact of gender inequalities on access to educational opportunities, digital support programs and role model content specifically targeting girls should be increased. As part of the effort to combat digital inequality, tablets, internet access, and digital literacy programs should be made widely available, with attention to socioeconomic disparities.

Finally, to promote equal educational opportunity for both Turkish and refugee children, education scholarships, after-school support programs, and free cultural and social activities should be expanded. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be established to determine whether transitions to open education are based on voluntary choice or structural exclusion. Children with talents or interests in specific areas should be provided with specialized guidance programs focused on the arts, design, sports, and creative industries, offering alternative developmental pathways.

Implementing these recommendations would contribute to building a more inclusive, equitable, and child-centered educational system.

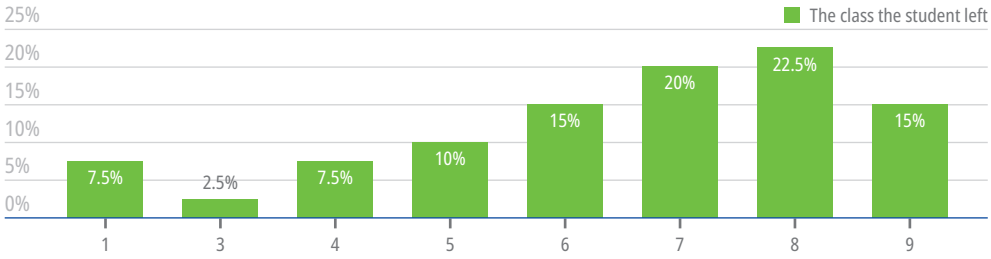
> 3.8.3 Status of Out-of-School Children

According to the survey, 79.5% of the participating children (389 children) reported that they were currently attending school, while 20.5% stated that they were not. Among the Syrian children who were not attending school (46 children), six reported that they had never attended school at all, whereas 40 had dropped out after attending for at least one term. The remaining two out-of-school children were Turkish citizens—one dropped out in 6th grade and the other in 8th grade. **When school attendance is examined by age groups, it appears that children aged 12–15 are more likely to be in school compared to those aged 16–18. The group most affected by school dropout is concentrated in the 16–18 age range.** Additionally, a higher number of boys are found among those out of school, indicating that age 16 may represent a critical threshold in terms of school discontinuation.



➥ Graph 16. Distribution of Out-of-School Children by Gender and Age

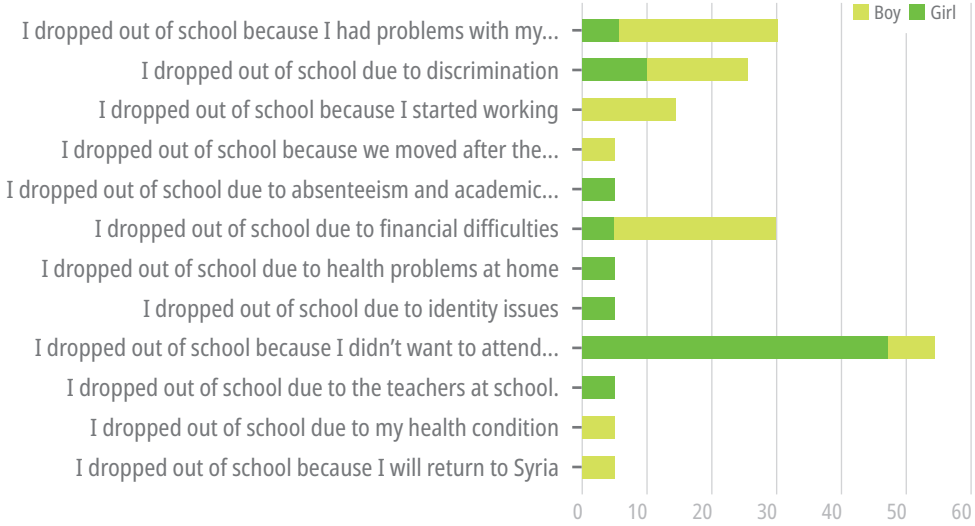
The information on the grade levels at which out-of-school children dropped out is presented in Graph 17.



➥ Graph 17. Grade Levels at Which Children Dropped Out of School in Sultanbeyli

The two Turkish citizen children who dropped out of school did so in the 6th and 8th grades. Regarding their reasons for leaving, one cited relocation, while the other stated a lack of desire to continue school.

Among Syrian children, the reasons for school dropout vary: 25% reported they simply did not want to attend school, while other significant reasons included peer-related problems (15%), discrimination (12.5%), and starting work (7.5%). These findings highlight that most dropouts occur by 8th grade, indicating that transitions between educational levels—such as from middle to high school—are critical points where dropout risk intensifies. This underlines the need for multi-dimensional support mechanisms during transition periods, including effective guidance services, strengthened individual follow-up, and active family involvement.

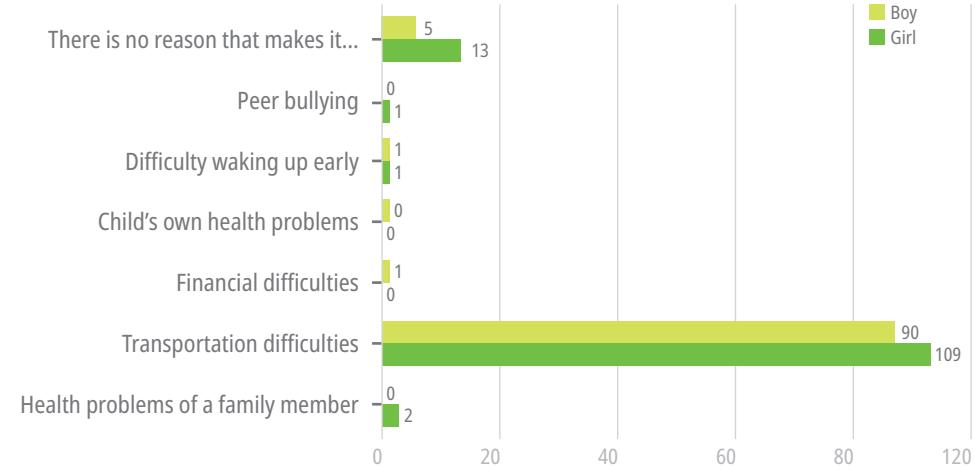


➥ Graph 18. Distribution of Reasons for School Dropout Among Syrian Children by Gender

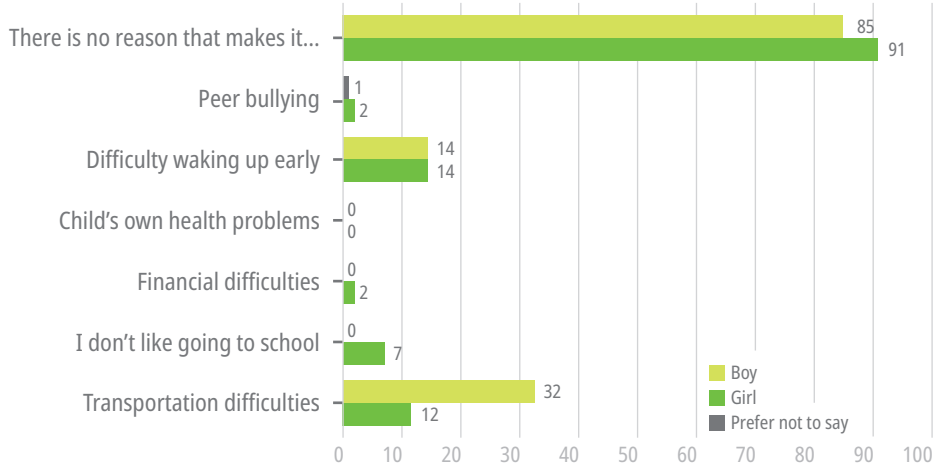
According to Article 13(2) (a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 28(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), "*fundamental education shall be encouraged and intensified for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of primary education.*" In addition, as emphasized by Human Rights Watch, "taking measures to ensure regular attendance at schools and reducing dropout rates" is among the obligations of the Republic of Türkiye as a signatory state (Human Rights Watch, 2015). **However, despite these obligations, field data reveals that regular school attendance cannot be ensured—particularly among disadvantaged groups of children—and that school dropout rates remain high, especially during certain age periods and transition phases.**

> 3.8.4 Views on Continuity in Education: *Risks and the Need for Early Warning*

When all children were asked whether there was any reason that made it difficult for them to attend school, it was found that 40% of the children had no such reason, while the reasons that made it difficult for Syrian and Turkish citizen children to attend school are listed below. As seen in Graph 19, among the reasons that made it difficult for Syrian children to attend school, the health problem of a family member stands out, while among Turkish citizen children, disliking school is one of the reasons that makes it difficult to attend school (Graph 20).

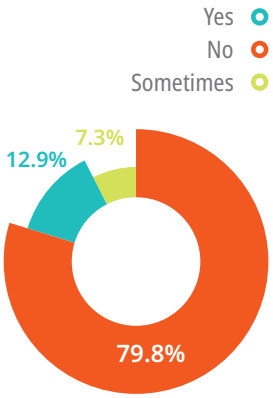


➥ Graph 19. Reasons That Make It Difficult for Syrian Children to Attend School



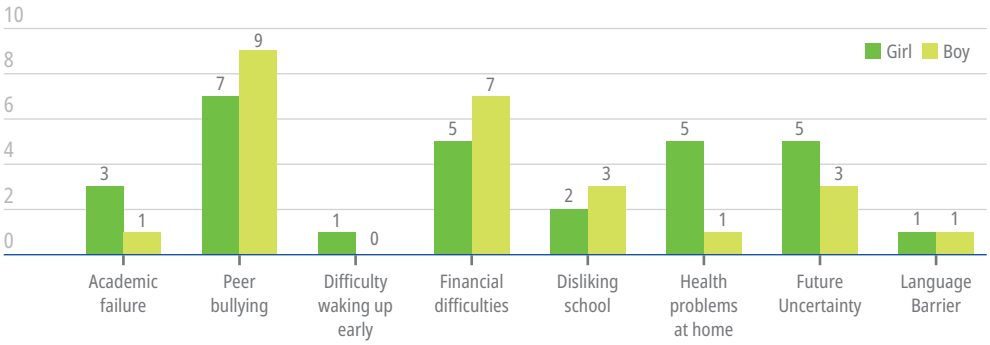
Graph 20. Reasons That Make It Difficult for Turkish Citizen Children to Attend School

Among Syrian children, the reasons that make it difficult to attend school are largely concentrated in transportation problems, and this situation is observed at a higher rate among girls. Among Turkish citizen children, on the other hand, the highest rate corresponds to the response "there is no reason that makes it difficult to attend school." The most evident difficulties are "waking up early" and "transportation" problems; the transportation problem among Turkish citizen children is more often mentioned by boys.



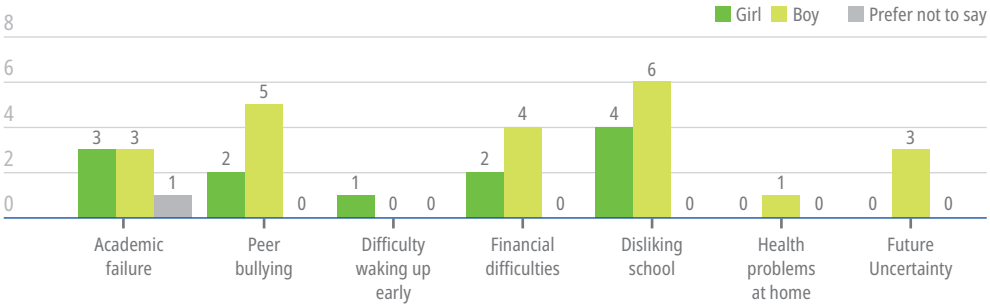
Graph 21. Children's Thoughts on Dropping Out of School in Sultanbeyli

The data presented in Graph 21 reveal children's overall commitment to education, while the fact that approximately 1 in every 5 children is considering dropping out should be carefully assessed, emphasizing the importance of activating early warning systems for these children. In particular, supporting the group that answered "sometimes" can prevent the risk from growing. When looking at the overall group of children, 79.82% (311 children who are still attending school) stated that they do not want to drop out of school, while this rate differs between Syrian and Turkish citizen children. 69.6% of Syrian children stated that they do not want to drop out of school, while 86.69% of Turkish citizen children stated that they do not want to drop out. When children were asked why they would consider dropping out, it was seen that the reasons for dropping out differed between Turkish citizen and Syrian children.



Graph 22. Distribution of Syrian Children's Thoughts on Dropping Out of School by Gender

➥ Graph 23.
Distribution of Turkish Citizen Children's Thoughts on Dropping Out of School by Gender



When the reasons for thinking about dropping out of school are examined according to the gender and nationality of the children, peer bullying appears to be a significant factor for Syrian boys, while disliking school is seen as an important factor for Turkish citizen boys. When evaluating the situation for girls, peer bullying stands out as the main reason for Syrian girls, and similarly, disliking school ranks first among the reasons Turkish citizen girls consider dropping out. A Syrian parent who participated in the focus group interviews stated that this situation caused her own child to shift towards open education and working life, thus moving away from education, and emphasized that this changed the child's perception of childhood and led to a distancing from social life.

___Every mother wishes the best life for her child. She doesn't want her child to struggle, to be subjected to violence. I wanted to send my child to school, but he wanted to go to open high school. Why? Because he had been beaten before. What's in open high school? Nothing. No friends or outings or anything (Participant 5, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

OIn the focus group and semi-structured interviews, children expressed their experiences of discrimination as follows:

___I hated school. Let me pass over those things. I used to go home crying every day. (...) But I went through so much. It was really hard. And when I went to the administration, I couldn't get any results. Right now, in fact, because I'm Syrian, I used to go home crying because of all those things (Child 10, 17 years old, Syrian girl).

___Because people joke about me a lot, but I really don't like it (Participant 11, 14 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

___We do get bullied by boys sometimes. Sometimes in our class too, not always... but it happens. But not by everyone (Participant 5, 14 years old, Syrian girl).

Discrimination and bullying encountered by students in educational settings are serious problematic areas that negatively impact their participation in academic processes, psychological well-being, and connection to school. These experiences particularly deepen inequality among students from certain identity groups, and when sufficient support cannot be obtained from the school administration, they reinforce feelings of helplessness. Cases of peer bullying can threaten students' physical and psychological health, and in some cases, such bullying manifests as discriminatory attitudes towards certain student groups. Systematic discrimination and experiences of racism can lead to

students dropping out of school and disrupt their educational journey, resulting in lasting consequences that may cause them to lose their future goals. This shows that discrimination and bullying experienced in the school environment are not only individual traumas but also structural issues that directly affect equal opportunities in education. In this context, **it is critically important for schools to provide an inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environment for all students, develop effective mechanisms to combat discrimination and bullying, and strengthen psychosocial support services for students.**

___For example, right now there is such a problem in Sultanbeyli. Some Arab or Syrian students in middle schools experience quite a bit of racism. That's why they have to drop out of school. I was one of them too. After that, I changed schools. I went to another school. They even tried to attack us with weapons. The police came. It was a really big incident. At that time, I had five friends. All five of them also dropped out of school. Now they have started working in the industrial sector and have disappeared. I mean, they also had goals. They had quite a few things. All of it is gone. But now in high school, I don't see such things anymore (Child 15, 16 years old, Syrian boy).

___Similarly, discrimination is not limited to peer relationships; it is also observed in the attitudes of teachers. Syrian parents participating in focus group interviews expressed that conflicts among children increased because teachers did not intervene in the situation, and Syrian students felt less safe in classrooms and were unable to voice complaints, as expressed in the following statements: Because he didn't know Arabic, his teacher was being very discriminatory. I visited both of his teachers, I wanted them to know I was involved (Participant 3, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

___Sometimes the child goes to the teacher and tells them the problem. The teacher says there's nothing I can do. These things happen between students. So the teacher says it's not their fault. They say it's between students. The teacher is also tired of this situation. I mean, the teacher warns the students. But still, no progress is made (Participant 2, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

In cases where teachers do not intervene or ignore the situation, it has been determined that conflicts among students deepen and students from migrant groups in particular feel less safe at school. Language barriers and teacher negligence negatively affect the educational experiences of Syrian students and undermine their sense of belonging. In this context, it has been found that discriminatory attitudes displayed by teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, reduce students' motivation for education and lead to their withdrawal from school.

___As far as I've observed in my son, inevitably, we are all human. It happens to all of us. Teachers also differentiate among students... Even if they try not to show it, they reflect it unconsciously. Toward students who are successful or not successful (Pink, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

Experiences of discrimination link students' decisions to drop out of school not only to academic difficulties but also to multilayered factors such as social exclusion, insecurity, and teachers' attitudes.

I want to give my older sister as an example for this topic. (...) She was bullied because she spoke Arabic (...) Because of that, my sister didn't attend school much. So she had to repeat a year. Then she went to open education. That's why my sister supports me a lot (Child 9, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Especially due to the sensitivities stemming from refugee students' legal status, they tend to remain silent out of fear of facing serious consequences in the event of a complaint, which creates an environment where incidents of harassment/provocation increase. As stated in the Search Workshop, it can be said that adults' opinions are reflected in children.

The impression of the Turkish child's family determines that child's behavior towards Syrian children (Search Workshop, Education Table Participant).

At times, parents' use of discriminatory language can be modeled by children. In the example below, such prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes are visible. This situation leads to children being directly exposed to discrimination in the school environment and experiencing inequalities in accessing the right to education.

They're not human anyway. (...) For example, there's a Gypsy in front of the door. They're all the same... thieves. I already know all of them (Child 30, 16 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

In the Search Workshop, the following statement drew attention regarding children's inability to cope with such situations and their silence:

For Syrians, whether guilty or not, a complaint is enough. If a complaint is made and they can't find a lawyer within 3–5 days, they are sent to the Removal Center (GGM). That's why Syrians remain very silent. Even if they're right, they stay silent. That's why harassment and provocation are very common. Especially provocation (Search Workshop, Participant).

There is a lot of discrimination. For example, "You Syrian, sit at the back" (Search Workshop Participant).

In individual interviews, inequalities and adaptation problems in access to education, health, and social services for Syrian and Turkish citizen children come to the forefront. **When asked about the causes of problems between Turkish citizen students and Syrian students included in education, the children point out that school administrations and societal structures do not adequately support this integration process.** In the semi-structured interviews, it is observed that some Turkish citizen children express implicit discriminatory attitudes towards their Syrian peers; communication problems, mistrust, and misunderstandings lead to physical and emotional conflicts. Participant 2 feels accused of racism in an incident; this situation highlights the need to strength-

en intercultural communication in the school environment and to carry out efforts aimed at transforming prejudices. On the other hand, different narratives of events and mutual distrust among children may indicate structural deficiencies regarding inclusivity in the school environment.

—I'm definitely not being racist. But it's perceived as if I am. And it's constant—like, for example, I say this, right? My name is mentioned. They speak Arabic. I say, tell me too. It makes me angry. Or, for example, don't speak Arabic in class. Don't talk in Arabic in a way that we can hear, especially mentioning our names. Once, I got into a fight with a girl over this. My nose bled. But I mean—I never touched the girl. I didn't do anything. While we were arguing verbally, my nose bled. The girl broke her own arm. And she told the administration that I broke her arm. Then she never came to school again. That was really frustrating. But all Syrians are like this. For example, I had a friend who was a class president. I can't remember whether it was 9th or 10th grade. A girl was telling others to sit in their places. One girl threw herself on the ground and said he pushed her. They make things up out of nowhere (Participant 2, 17 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

On the other hand, it has been observed that Syrian children understand this situation, but occasionally, when they come together with their own community, switching back to the native language happens spontaneously

—We don't have such a thing in our class, but just in lessons, sometimes when we speak Arabic, they say don't speak Arabic, because they don't understand and think we're saying bad things about them. It's just sometimes a habit, so we accidentally speak Arabic, and then we say it was a joke to the teacher. But I don't speak Arabic much anyway. I only speak it temporarily when my friends do (Participant 16, 18 years old, Syrian girl).

As a way of connecting with school, children's interest in classes is largely shaped by the type of school they attend and the departments they choose. Particularly among children attending vocational high schools and Imam Hatip high schools, interest in field-specific courses becomes more pronounced; this can affect interest and success in general academic subjects.

—Right now, I can't say what my favorite class is because I think I chose the wrong department. I'll change departments next year. That's why I'm not doing very well in classes right now (Participant 2, 17 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

—I usually like religion class more. Then I like things like that—I usually recite hymns or ilahi at home when I find free time (Participant 11, 14 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

Some children, especially those attending Imam Hatip high schools, stated that due to the intensity of their class schedules, they had difficulty focusing enough on general academic classes and that the homework load sometimes overwhelmed them.

___There are useful assignments, but there are too many. We've already dedicated our whole lives to school. And we literally devote our home life to homework. I can't find time for myself at home. (...) Each teacher gives heavy assignments for their own class (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

___Since we're in Imam Hatip, we also have Quran, creed (akaid), and tafsir classes. So our number of courses is higher. For example, I'm in the science track (...) We want chemistry instead of akaid because we can't keep up with the topics (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

This intensity reduces some children's interest in classes and negatively affects their academic performance. On the other hand, factors such as the educational environment and family support also shape participation in lessons:

___My family considers my classes important. For example, we are now preparing for the university exam. (...) My grandmother and uncles make me study hard. They've always helped me study. They support me (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

However, these support mechanisms do not function equally for every child. Among Syrian children, expressions indicating more frequent dropouts and absenteeism stand out:

___So. How many students are in your class?

- Ten. Normally there are more, but many don't come and have dropped out (Participant 19, 16 years old, Syrian boy).

All these findings show that children's educational experiences are closely related not only to the type of school but also to family support, course intensity, the structure of class programs, and individual areas of interest. **In education policies, flexibility and a student-centered approach should be emphasized by taking this multi-layered structure into account.**

Evaluation and Discussion

This section presents in detail the structural and individual factors affecting children's levels of commitment to education. Quantitative data show that one in five children tends to drop out of school, while qualitative findings allow us to understand the reasons behind this tendency in depth. Especially among Syrian children, exposure to peer bullying and discrimination weakens their ties with school and leads them to alternatives such as open education. Similarly, among Turkish citizen children, factors such as a decrease in love for school and intense academic workload can trigger thoughts of dropping out. In addition, teacher attitudes, parental expectations, school inclusivity, and lack of intercultural communication have been cited as key factors influencing school dropout. Particularly, the tendency of teachers not to intervene and, in some cases, to exhibit discriminatory behavior, weakens children's connection to school.

Recommendations

Under current conditions, it is observed that children face various challenges in feeling a sense of belonging to school. This increases students' tendency to distance themselves from education and brings with it the risk of potential dropout. In order to support children's retention in education, strengthen their connection to school, and ensure equal opportunities, multidimensional and strategic interventions must be implemented.

First and foremost, transparent, accessible, and safe complaint mechanisms should be developed to prevent and effectively respond to peer bullying occurring in the school environment. These systems should ensure the protection of victimized children and create a safe learning environment for all students. At the same time, it is important to establish internal school ethics committees and student support mechanisms that will combat discrimination and exclusion.

Teachers' awareness levels must be increased so that students from different cultural and social backgrounds can receive education in an inclusive learning environment. Regular and high-quality training should be provided to teachers on the use of inclusive language, intercultural sensitivity, and dealing with bias.

!

Individual and group-based guidance services should be provided to students with low sense of belonging or high risk of dropping out. These services should be sensitive to students' psychosocial needs and support their active participation in school life. In this process, coordinated work between school guidance services and social workers should be prioritized.

Early warning systems should be developed to identify students at risk of dropping out at an early stage, taking into account multidimensional indicators such as absenteeism, grade repetition, decline in academic performance, and teacher feedback. Through these systems, timely and effective interventions can be made for children at risk.

!

An inclusive school climate should be strengthened to cope with social factors such as discrimination, exclusion, and peer bullying. Creating learning environments in which students are accepted with their differences and feel valued and safe forms the basis of this process.

For children who have never attended school or received only short-term education, primary education completion and accelerated learning programs should be implemented. Such programs are in line with the obligation to promote education for children who have not received primary education as stated in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and support the universality of the right to education. Support for children who are distanced from education due to financial constraints should be strengthened. Especially for girls, safe transportation to school should be ensured; support for transportation, stationery, clothing, and food should be expanded. At the same time, flexible schooling models should be offered to facilitate children's retention in the education system.

Open education systems should be presented not only as a last resort but as a supported and structured option. In these systems, it is of great importance to integrate vocational guidance, life skills training, and psychosocial support services. Especially for children aged 16 and above, vocational guidance and individual development programs should be expanded to support the maintenance of their connection to education.

The holistic implementation of these strategic recommendations will facilitate children's access to education, strengthen their sense of belonging to school, and contribute to their development as healthier individuals by reducing the risk of school dropout. At the same time, these interventions are based on the principle of the best interests of the child, in line with Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comments No. 1, 12, and 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

> 3.9 Work Experience - Working While Attending School

When asked about their working status, a Syrian youth attending the tenth grade of a vocational high school stated that he receives education at school one day a week and works on the remaining days to contribute to the household income. This child's experience serves as an example of the experiences of children who participate in the Vocational Education Program for Employment (IMEP), which was established for both local and refugee children.

"My mother doesn't work, my stepfather does. And I work too, by the way. I work with PVC window systems – I both study and work. Vocational school is four days of work, one day of school, it's a hard thing but..." *(Participant 23, 16 years old, Syrian boy).*

While vocational high schools are considered an opportunity for children in terms of both education and participation in employment, one student in the hairdressing department summarizes her experience as follows:

"Well, it's actually a system offered by our school. It's better for us both to have a profession in the future and as a better experience in general. You come to school one day a week, and on the other days, you go to the workplace." *(Participant 14, 18 years old, Turkish citizen girl).*

The current situation of students attending Vocational Training Centers (MESEM) is associated solely with continuing education. These children, who are part of the labor market, consider the difficulties of working conditions and the insufficiency of wages as a trade-off for gaining a profession, but it is also observed that they gradually distance themselves from their student identity.

"None of my siblings work, just me. But that doesn't even count. I'm a MESEM student, I've been working in a hair salon for a full four years. Thank God, we're like a family there, there's no tension or anything in the work environment. As long as there's respect and no lies, you won't need anything else,

so I'm comfortable. I go in at nine in the morning and leave around eight-thirty or seven-thirty in the evening. I get paid, about six thousand from school, and over eleven from my workplace. As our class level increases, so does the wage. We get more than they do, since it's our final year." (Participant 17, 18 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

For children attending open high schools, the situation is slightly different. Due to their very limited physical participation in school (e.g., only two lessons on Saturdays), these children tend to engage more in out-of-school activities or part-time jobs. This may lead to a weakening of their ties with formal education.

I study through open high school, I don't really have much of a connection with school. I only go to school on Saturdays for two lessons or so. Like I said, during the week I spend one or two hours working on phones. The rest of the time, I take care of birds. I feed them, let them fly. I don't really do anything else. That's how my life goes (Child 5, 15 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

In general, children's experiences with education and work reveal both the opportunities provided by vocational training programs and the flexibility of open education, while also highlighting the challenges of entering the labor market at an early age and the accompanying risks of disengagement from education.

Evaluation and Discussion

Children's participation in education and working life presents a differentiated picture, especially in the context of vocational education programs. Students attending vocational high schools spend certain days of the week at the workplace, and this allows them to gain practical experience and contribute to their family's economy. These types of programs – supported by initiatives like IMEP – have the potential to offer employment opportunities after graduation.

Students within MESEM, on the other hand, mostly act with the motivation to continue their current education. Although these children are integrated into the labor market, they tend to view the hardships of working conditions and low wages as part of the process of gaining a profession. However, during this process, long working hours and limited wages may lead to a distancing from their student identity. On the other hand, positive relationships in the work environment can help them overcome these difficulties.

Vocational education practices implemented within this framework should also be designed in alignment with child labor prevention policies. Indeed, some studies indicate that due to reasons such as lack of supervision or insufficient support mechanisms, such structures may pave the way for early entry of children into the labor force (Sallan-Gül, 2023). Therefore, when implementing similar systems, it is important to uphold the principle of the best interests of the child and to consider children not only as economic actors but as individuals with the right to learn, develop, and be protected.

> 3.10 Protection of the Right to Health, Development, and Nutrition

UNCRC Article 24 and Article 27

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly states that every child has the right to attain the highest standard of health possible. Under this article, state parties are obliged to ensure children's access to health services, to develop preventive and curative health services, and to meet the basic health and nutrition needs of children, especially those living in poverty. Additionally, Article 27 guarantees the child's right to an adequate standard of living for physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. This section presents a comparative analysis between national data on the health and nutrition status of children in Türkiye and the findings of the field research conducted in Sultanbeyli district; it evaluates the inequalities in children's access to these rights and the existing implementation gaps.

In Türkiye, children under the age of 18 can benefit from outpatient health services regardless of whether they have health insurance. Legally, all children in our country—being a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child—have the right to access health services regardless of their legal status. In the research, questions were asked to understand children's access to health services, their self-perception of health, and the situations they encountered while receiving services.

> 3.10.1 Children's Health Status and Levels of Knowledge

When asked whether they have knowledge about healthy nutrition and hygiene, 84.4% of Syrian children stated that they do, while 67.9% of Turkish citizen children reported having such knowledge. As shown in Table-9, it was found that a total of 32.1% of Turkish citizen children stated they either did not have knowledge or had limited knowledge about healthy nutrition and hygiene, while this rate was 15.7% among Syrian children. These data clearly indicate the strong need for educational institutions to carry out work on health, healthy nutrition, and hygiene.

	All Children		Syrian Children		Turkish Citizen Children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	369	75.5	189	84.4	180	67.9
No	19	3.9	8	3.6	11	4.2
A little	101	20.7	27	12.1	74	27.9
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100

➥ Table 9. Children's Knowledge of Healthy Nutrition and Hygiene in Sultanbeyli

Recent official studies on the health status of children across Türkiye show that the vast majority of children perceive themselves to be in "good" or "very good" health. According to TÜİK's 2024 "Child Health and Deprivation" study, 95.1% of children aged 0–5, 94.7% of children aged 6–11, and 93.5% of children aged

12–15 reported their health status as "good or very good." On the other hand, the percentage of those who said "bad or very bad" was below 1% across all age groups (TÜİK, 2024).

However, in the field study conducted in Sultanbeyli, the children's self-perceived health assessments were lower compared to TÜİK data. In the study, the rate of children who felt healthy was found to be 67.9% in the overall sample, 66.5% among Syrian children, and 69.1% among Turkish citizen children. When combining the "no" and "sometimes" responses, it appears that approximately 30% of children do not feel healthy or that their health status varies. This difference indicates that the health perceptions of children living in regions with concentrated socio-economic inequalities may fall below national averages. Moreover, this situation suggests possible disparities in access to healthcare services, living conditions, and psychosocial well-being among children.

➥ Table 10. The State of Children in Sultanbeyli Feeling Healthy

	All children		Syrian children		Turkish citizen children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	332	67.9	149	66.5	183	69.1
No	46	9.4	17	7.6	29	10.9
A little	111	22.7	58	25.9	53	20
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100

When focusing specifically on children aged 12–18 in Sultanbeyli, it is recommended that cause-effect analyses be conducted to more deeply examine both their physical and mental health conditions. The particularly low health perception among refugee children may be associated with issues such as discrimination, housing, and access to services.

It is known that another important parameter related to children's health status is their access to adequate and quality food. The importance of healthy nutrition for children in their developmental years is evident, and nutrition is a fundamental human right. The responses provided by children from both groups in Sultanbeyli to the question about their perceptions of healthy eating deserve reflection**. While 56.7% of Syrian children and 32.5% of Turkish citizen children reported having a perception of eating healthily, the low percentages are noteworthy.**

➥ Table 11. Perceptions of Healthy Nutrition Among Children Living in Sultanbeyli

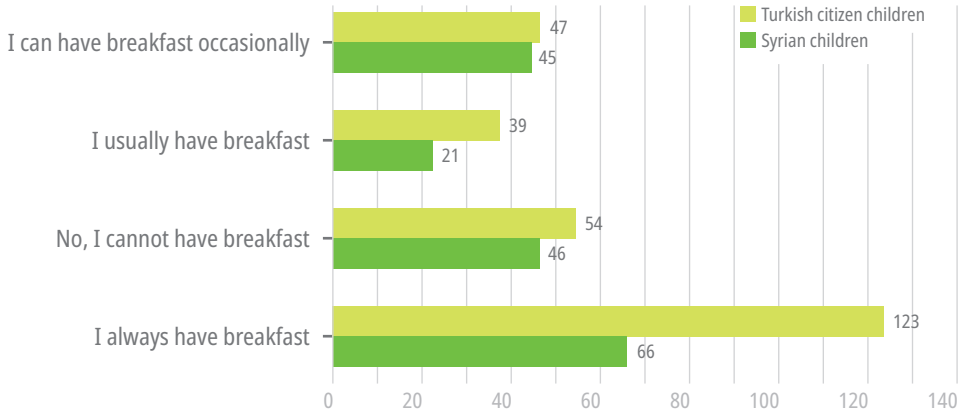
	All children		Syrian children		Turkish citizen children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	213	43.6	127	56.7	86	32.5
No	97	19.8	30	13.4	67	25.3
A little	179	36.6	67	29.9	112	42.3
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100

The perception of healthy eating among children was further explored with additional questions, and all children were asked about their breakfast habits, whether they ate meat, chicken, and fish a few times a week, their access to fresh fruit, and their consumption of dairy products.

> 3.10.2 Children's Access to Breakfast and Lunch

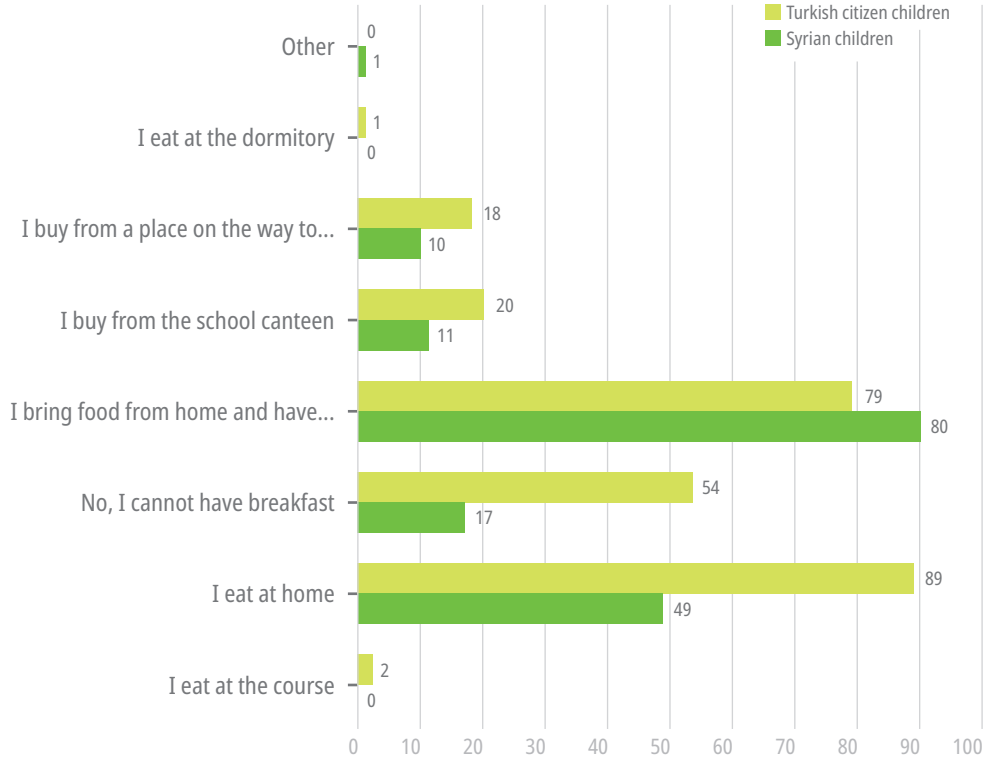
When asked about their access to breakfast and lunch on school days, it was found that 33.14% of Syrian children never had breakfast on school days, and 25.84% never had lunch. In comparison, 20.53% of Turkish citizen children stated that they never had breakfast, while 15.96% reported that they never had lunch. In the guide "Nutrition Recommendations and Menu Programs for Preschool and School-Age Children" prepared by the Ministry of Health, it is emphasized that school-going children need breakfast to start the day well and should receive at least two-fifths of their daily nutritional intake while at school (Ministry of Health, 2013). In this context, considering that the children included in the study were between the ages of 12–18, it is striking that 29.49% of Syrian children and 18.24% of Turkish citizen children did not consume at least two meals on school days. It is evident that these school-age children may face problems in growth, development, physical activity, and basic body functions due to an inability to meet their unique energy and nutrient requirements, which poses a risk not only to their physical health but also to their psychosocial well-being.

When asked about breakfast habits, it was found that 37.07% of Syrian students always had breakfast, while 43.90% of Turkish citizen students always had breakfast. The access of school-going students to breakfast is shown in detail in Graph 24.



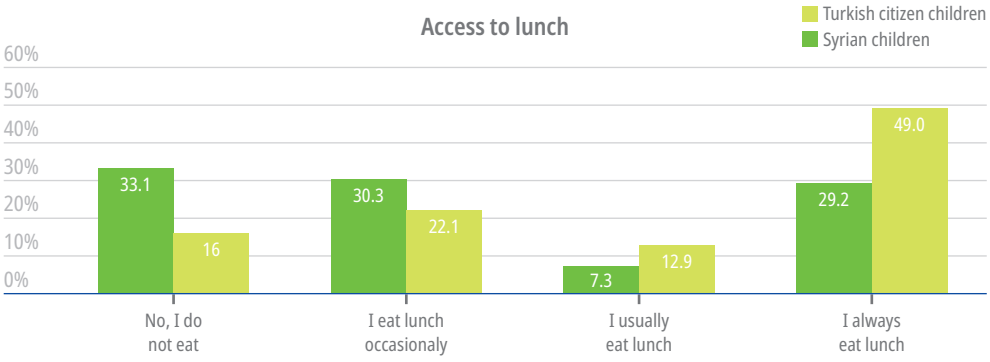
➥ **Graph 24.** Children's Ability to Have Breakfast by Nationality

When asked how they accessed breakfast, it was observed that Syrian children mostly brought food from home and had breakfast at school, while Turkish citizen children were more likely to have breakfast through the school canteen.



Graph 25. Children's Place of Access to Breakfast by Nationality

When asked about their ability to eat lunch, it was found that 29.2% of Syrian children did not eat lunch, whereas 49% of Turkish citizen children always ate lunch.

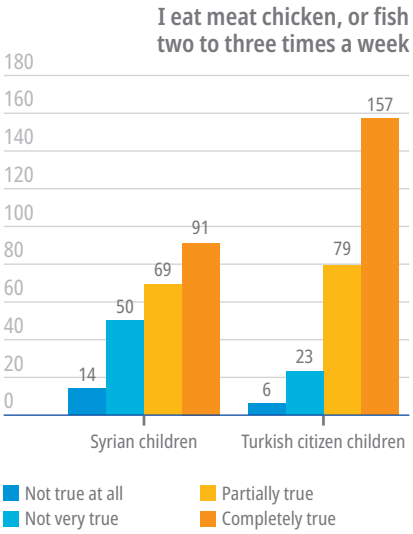


Graph 26. Children's Ability to Eat Lunch by Nationality

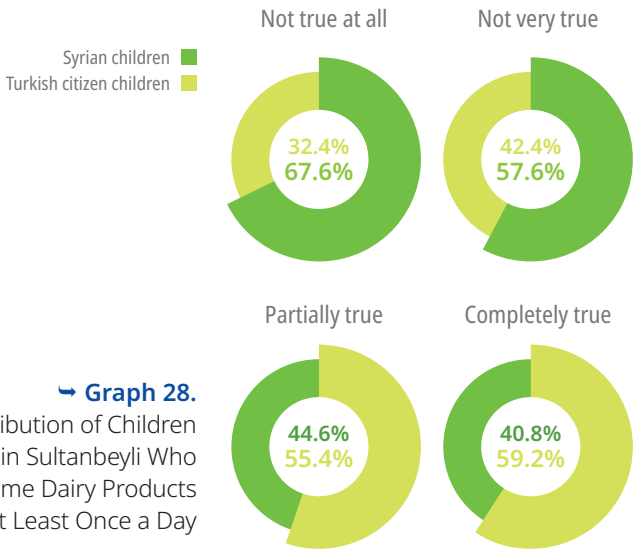
When asked how they accessed lunch, it was observed that Syrian children either brought lunch from home or accessed it at home, while Turkish citizen children were able to obtain lunch from both home and the school canteen.

When the findings related to breakfast and lunch are evaluated together with the responses given by Syrian children to the question about their families' perceived financial status, it can be inferred that the poverty levels of Syrian children are higher than those of Turkish citizen children. Additionally, the responses of all children to questions about breakfast and lunch indicate that they are at risk in terms of their development during this growth stage and the protection of their right to nutrition, and that necessary measures should be taken regarding this issue.

> 3.10.3 Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for Children



➥ Graph 27. Access to White and Red Meat Among Children in Sultanbeyli



➥ Graph 28. Distribution of Children in Sultanbeyli Who Consume Dairy Products at Least Once a Day

It is known that the consumption of meat, chicken, and/or fish by school-age children provides the proteins, iron, and certain minerals necessary for muscle development and blood values. It is recommended that children consume 2–3 servings of these foods per day if possible (Ministry of Health, 2013). When asked whether they ate meat, chicken, or fish two to three times a week, 50.7% of the children living in Sultanbeyli stated that this statement was completely true, but access to white and red meat varies significantly by nationality. While 40.6% of Syrian children stated that they could access white and red meat two to three times a week, this rate was 59.2% among Turkish citizen children. In addition, the distribution by nationality of children who stated that they did not consume any white or red meat within a week is noteworthy. While 2.3% of Turkish citizen children stated that they did not consume meat at all during the week, this rate was 6.3% among Syrian children.

It is considered important that children receive the protein, vitamins, and minerals they need for adequate and balanced nutrition, and the consumption of milk, cheese, and yogurt is seen as important for school-age children to have strong bones, teeth, and muscles. It is recommended that foods from this group be consumed in 2–3 servings per day (Ministry of Health, 2013). In this context, when children living in Sultanbeyli were asked whether they consumed dairy products such as milk, yogurt, or ayran at least once a day, 39.2% of them stated that they could not consume dairy products at least once a day. When examining the rates of milk consumption among Syrian and Turkish citizen children, 50.4% of Syrian children said they could not consume dairy products at least once a day, while this rate was 39.2% among Turkish citizen children.

It is known that children get the vitamins and minerals needed for skin, eye, and dental health from fruits, and it is recommended that they consume 2–3 servings of fruit per day (Ministry of Health, 2013). In this context, when children living in Sultanbeyli were asked whether they consumed fresh fruit every day, 48.7% of Turkish citizen children stated that they could access fresh fruit daily, while this rate was 40.2% among Syrian children. The fact that this rate is approximately half in both groups confirms that children are not adequately nourished in terms of access to fresh fruit.

Considering the economic conditions in Türkiye, it is seen that the number of children who do not have access to adequate and healthy food is increasing. According to TÜİK reports, the proportion of families who cannot afford meals with meat, chicken, or fish every other day is measured at 37.3%, indicating that only one out of every eight children in Türkiye can consume meat, chicken, or fish daily, and only one out of every two children can consume cheese and yogurt daily. The findings of this study conducted in Sultanbeyli also confirm this statistic regarding children's access to food.

The inability of children to access sufficient food not only causes health problems but also paves the way for chronic diseases, school dropout, and child labor. It is known that insufficient nutrition affects the physical and mental development of children, which in turn impacts their academic success, leading to learning difficulties, lack of concentration, delays in cognitive development, and behavioral problems.

When examining the reasons why children consider dropping out of school and the reasons why those who have already dropped out did so, similar themes are found. Based on the children's statements, it can be said that inadequate nutrition also affects education. The responses of children participating in the survey were further explored through semi-structured and focus group interviews, and it was observed that children's access to breakfast and lunch at school directly impacts their academic performance, psychosocial well-being, and development during the day. In the field research conducted in Sultanbeyli, children's views on breakfast and lunch habits varied. Some children had the opportunity to eat at school, while others could not access this opportunity due to physical, economic, and time-related reasons. The statements obtained particularly during focus group discussions clearly reveal this situation. For example, one participant expressed the limitation of lunch periods at school as follows:

"If there was food at our school, recesses are 15 minutes long, and it already takes 5 minutes to go downstairs. So usually we end up being late to class. Our teachers are not very tolerant about it either. So that causes some problems. I can't say that everyone eats there (Child 24, 17 years old, Turkish citizen, girl).

Similarly, another child expressed both the difficulties in accessing breakfast and the inadequacy of the school canteen as follows:

"We need to wake up early to eat breakfast in the morning. You can't eat right after waking up. It's nauseating. Because of how hectic things are, you also go to bed late and wake up early. That messes with the balance. I don't usually eat in the morning. I go to school. I don't feel like eating anything there either. When I do eat lunch, it's something more filling. (...) Our canteen isn't really a canteen—students manage it. There's only junk food. We don't have anything else (Child 26, 17 years old, Turkish citizen, girl).

Among the children interviewed for the study, 67.9% stated that they felt healthy, while 22.7% answered "sometimes," and 9.4% said "no." Especially among Syrian children, the rate of those who felt healthy remained at 66.5%, which points

to a strong link between nutrition and access to healthcare. Situations where meals could not be provided outside of school due to economic constraints were also observed. One child described not being able to have breakfast and not finding a satisfying option at the school canteen as follows:

"We wake up really early, and there's traffic and all. When we have to go to school early, we can't eat breakfast. There's no specific time slot for it. Our school ends at noon since it's a double-shift system. We don't have lunch in the canteen. I haven't gone in a long time. Last time I went, the small hamburgers were something like 55 lira (Child 25, 17 years old, Turkish citizen, girl).

On the other hand, some children said that they were able to receive meal services at school and were satisfied with it:

"I eat lunch every day during break. The meals are quite filling. There's soup, two main courses, and sometimes dessert and drinks.

"Our teachers donate to our cafeteria. That way, the amount we pay drops significantly. Since we know where our food comes from and that it's high-quality—prepared by a chef—we feel comfortable eating it. It comes from our old school. Knowing that, we can eat it with peace of mind (Child 28, 15 years old, Turkish citizen, girl).

This diversity reveals the spatial and economic inequalities in children's access to their right to nutrition. **Especially the inadequacy of canteens, high meal prices, and time constraints make it difficult for children to be adequately and properly nourished.**

> 3.10.3.1 Perception of Nutrition and Environmental Health

Children's evaluations regarding nutrition and environmental conditions indicate that their perception of health is shaped within a broader context:

"For example, in outdoor areas—let me talk about clean air. I mean, when we go to the forest, for example, there's Aydos Forest in Sultanbeyli, when I go there, there's a difference, it feels different to me. But in my daily life... (...) In general, I like greenery (Child 7, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

"So, when we say healthy nutrition, there's a bit of industrial areas here and too many exhaust fumes, so I don't think it's very healthy. But now, people have gotten used to it. For example, someone who's used to the village, when they come here, they feel like they're inside a box. But when someone from here goes to the village, they always want to stay in the village. Because the air is different there, the air is cleaner, and I think there are healthier foods there (Child 9, 16 years old, Syrian boy).

In interviews conducted in Sultanbeyli, children's assessments of health—both physical and psychosocial—enabled an understanding of how well this right is met in practice. These statements show that children reflect on health not only in terms of their personal well-being but also through environmental factors and eating habits. Structural issues such as urbanization, concretization, and lack of access to healthy food are also embedded in children's perceptions.

> 3.10.3.2 Parental Views on Health and Adequate Nutrition

In focus groups with parents, high canteen prices and the inaccessibility of school meals were frequently emphasized. The absence of food services in public schools or the fact that they are offered for a fee stands out as a factor increasing inequality. Participants highlighted that this creates a structural discrimination between public and private schools.

___I've been thinking about what kind of solution could be found. At the high school, we had enrolled in school lunch during lunch breaks, but we couldn't enroll this month because it's become too expensive. Yes, the price has gone up. We used to be able to register. If it was 20 TL last year, now it's 65 TL. At first, I was very happy about having a cafeteria inside the school, but such a price also affects me. I have three children. For example, if I prepare something for my daughter, I often can't include a banana in her lunch. But when my daughter says, 'Mom, this friend has a banana, this one has this, that one has that,' we inevitably feel embarrassed. I mean, just like every private school provides meals, so should state schools. Why is there discrimination specifically in public schools? For example, even if I buy a banana for my daughter, I don't want to include it that day. Because I say, 'Sweetheart, you want it, but think about your friends too.' So I consider it on that day too." (Green, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

A Syrian parent participating in the focus group summarized the school nutrition policies and their efforts to adapt to them. Despite standard nutrition expectations by schools, the participant stated that they provide alternative meals due to limited economic resources. The statement, "*Our financial situation is weak, but we still send something,*" highlights the parents' efforts and priorities to meet their children's nutritional needs even amid socio-economic hardships. It also reveals the gap between schools' standard nutrition expectations and disadvantaged families' realities, as well as their motivation to ensure their children's well-being.

___Schools ask for food to be brought, each school wants a lunchbox, and we don't prepare a separate one for them, we just send what we can. Our situation is weak, but we still send something (Participant 2, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

It was frequently mentioned that school-aged children go to school without breakfast or remain hungry until lunch. Families referred to past practices and emphasized that the reintroduction of services like free soup, milk, or basic food assistance in schools is necessary.

___Just like in private schools—maybe not as luxurious—but small things could also be provided in public schools for our children. For example, morning soup. They go very early. Actually, back in our day, they used to give roasted chickpeas and raisins. Now schools have them, but they're sold for a price. Actually, we don't like everything from the past, but some things were better then. Now kids eat too much junk food. How much can we prevent it? (Purple, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___Yes. Milk used to be distributed. Actually, everything was better back then (Blue, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

It was also reported that support provided by public institutions and organizations is insufficient and that there is no standardized practice for school-based nutritional support. The idea that creating a common nutrition list or distributing free meals at schools would support not only physical but also social equity was prominently expressed.

Even the food schedule at home is a problem. For example, the child needs to eat meat, but you can't buy it. Fish—some don't like it, but others do. They say once a week, but we can only do that once a month. We can only give chicken—maybe once or twice a week, or once every two weeks. Fruits and vegetables too. The child needs to have all of them regularly, even if just a little (Black, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

It's harder to buy now, depending on your situation. My daughter only eats fruit—she doesn't eat anything else. Even getting that is hard now (Participant 5, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

When it comes to in-home arrangements to meet children's needs for balanced nutrition, the consumption of meat, fish, fruits, and vegetables is often irregular and insufficient, and families' capacity to compensate for these deficiencies is limited. In conclusion, the findings show that children's right to nutrition is directly affected by social and economic inequalities, and the existing public support is insufficient to meet this need. In this context, access to children's fundamental rights should be addressed as a priority area in public policy.

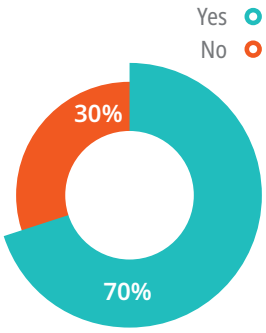
> 3.10.4 Access to Healthcare Services

While various questions were asked to understand the physical well-being of children, further questions were posed to understand the extent to which the health rights of children experiencing any health problems were protected. These questions addressed children's access to doctors and medicine, as well as their perception of being treated with respect at health institutions.

Ability to Easily Access a Doctor						
	All children		**Syrian children**		**Turkish citizen children**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Yes	438	89.6	194	86.6	244	92.1
No	51	10.4	30	13.4	21	7.9
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100
Perception of Being Treated with Respect in Healthcare Institutions						
Yes	449	91.8	198	88.4	251	94.7
No	40	8.2	26	11.6	14	5.3
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100
Ability to Easily Access Medication						
Yes	461	94.3	202	90.2	259	97.7
No	28	5.7	22	9.8	6	2.3
Total	489	100	224	100	265	100

Table 12. Access to Healthcare Services among Children in Sultanbeyli

As summarized in Table 12, the responses of Syrian children to all three questions were similarly high compared to their Turkish peers. As previously identified, 12.9% of Syrian children were reported to face difficulties in accessing healthcare due to not having identification documents. In line with this, 13.4% of the children also reported difficulty in accessing a specialist doctor, further confirming this finding. The high percentage of negative perceptions among Syrian children regarding access to doctors, medication, and respectful treatment in healthcare settings necessitates consideration not only of the general issues in Turkey's healthcare services but also the effects of growing poverty and discriminatory discourse targeting Syrians, which permeates all areas of daily life. In addition, as language is a significant determinant of access to healthcare, Syrian children were asked whether they faced difficulties due to the language barrier. 30% of Syrian children reported having problems accessing healthcare services because of this barrier.



➥ Graph 29. Difficulties in Accessing Healthcare Services Due to Language Barriers

In the semi-structured interviews conducted in Sultanbeyli, children's assessments of health—both physical and psychosocial—provided insight into the extent to which this right is fulfilled in practice. In this context, questions were asked regarding children's use of nutrition and healthcare services, as well as whether their schools—where they spend most of their day—had infirmaries or health rooms. **Interviewed children reported that there were no infirmaries or health rooms in secondary schools, and even where they existed, these facilities were inadequate, lacked hygiene, or were used for other purposes.** Although no major problems were reported regarding access to healthcare services, language barriers and system overload were noted as recurring issues, just as in all other public service areas. Responses related to health were coded in connection with perceptions of physical health, health concerns/complaints, personal improvement aspirations, dietary habits, and states of mental well-being.

___I eat healthy, but sometimes suddenly I crave fast food. I sometimes make it at home. I mean, in general, healthy things don't really interest me (Participant 20, 15 years old, Turkish male child).

The accessibility, quality, and appropriateness of healthcare services offered to children are key determinants of their effective use of the right to health. In general, once access is secured, the approach to service delivery appears to be in line with human rights and free of discrimination.

___When we go to the doctor in Turkey or Istanbul, I want to say this for myself—we can receive our rights. The doctor treats us well. I think there is no racism in these matters (Child 9, 16 years old, Syrian male child).

Children's statements point to the existence of many systemic issues in healthcare access, such as waiting times, understaffing, and lack of specialist care. These problems become more critical in emergency situations and with chronic health issues.

___We struggle a bit in hospitals, yes. For example, when there's an emergency, how should I say it—there are so few doctors that we don't get our turn. We wait there for hours (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish female child).

___On my father's side, we have an ear condition. We have a lot of trouble hearing. No matter how many times I go to the hospital, they always just clean my ears and send me away. Every time it's like that—cleaning and then go. So I use ear drops. I'll go again in two months for 1a check-up (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish female child).

Children's repeated and unresolved visits consume their time as students and cause them to remain untreated, leading to victimization. Overall, these statements suggest that limitations in healthcare system capacity and the lack of adequate monitoring for chronic conditions restrict children's effective access to healthcare and negatively affect their quality of life. This situation highlights the need to revisit the right to health in terms of both accessibility and quality.

> *3.10.4.1 Children's Body Image and Psychosocial Health*

Health is not only about the absence of physical illnesses but also about psychological and social well-being. In particular, body image is important for adolescents' self-esteem and mental health:

___I'm very overweight. I mean my cheeks are too big. No headscarf suits me. I mean, I have a belly (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

This statement shows how the internal distress experienced due to body image directly affects mental health. Such statements reveal the need to strengthen support mechanisms for adolescent girls and boys in coping with their body images. Statements from children who participated in the semi-structured interviews emphasize that although there is health education in the curriculum, this course should be more practice-oriented and qualitatively delivered.

___I mean generally, in terms of health, how should I say, the new generation is not very interested. Because there are packaged foods and meals we use to take the easy way out. (...) That's why I think organic foods should be increased more and that such education should be provided for health reasons too (Child 2, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

The functionality of health education provided in schools and whether it meets children's needs was also expressed by one participant as follows:

___When it comes to health, we have a health class. Our teacher doesn't teach the lesson. He wants us to read the book and later says, for the exam, read these parts, questions will come from here. (...) I think it would be better if a teacher who knows the subject teaches the class (Child 7, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

This statement shows that children associate their health knowledge not only with the course content but also with the teacher's approach and the quality of the education. It is considered important that increasing health literacy be carried out not only with book knowledge but also with an interactive and participatory pedagogical approach.

Evaluation and Discussion

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees all children the right to benefit from health services equally, without discrimination, and effectively. Especially Article 24 of the Convention defines the right to health not only by the existence of the service but also by its accessibility, quality, and provision in a way suitable for the child's needs. Findings from the exploratory workshop held in Sultanbeyli, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions indicate that there are certain difficulties in ensuring the right to health. These findings align not only with local data but also with general trends in the literature regarding refugee children's access to health services (Spahl and Österle, 2019; Genç and Elitsoy, 2024).

Field findings revealed that the level of children feeling healthy is below national averages. While 94% of children in Türkiye rate their health as "good" or "very good" (TÜİK, 2024), this rate is 67.9% in the Sultanbeyli sample. This difference shows that health perception at the local level is shaped by multilayered factors such as social environment, living conditions, and access to services. This suggests that although there is a strong policy framework at the central level, the aspects of local practices reflected in children's perceptions should be monitored more carefully.

Discussions on the right to nutrition showed that children's access to breakfast and lunch at school is limited due to economic reasons, and in some cases, children refrain from benefiting from meal services due to the risk of stigmatization. This is a sensitive issue that highlights the effect of social conditions on the use of services rather than a direct lack of services. **Although public authorities are sensitive about school nutrition, universal, free lunch practices in secondary education institutions will both contribute to children's right to development and support social integration.** Spahl and Österle (2019) draw attention to the unequal reflections of such social barriers on services through the concept of "layered membership" in access to health rights.

Finally, the lack of coordination and fragmented data sharing and referral mechanisms between institutions can lead to some children's health measures not being properly monitored. This situation can reduce the effectiveness of preventive and protective services; in fact, it can cast a shadow over the functionality of the existing system. Strengthening coordination through digital systems will directly contribute to the protection of the best interests of the child. All these findings show that Türkiye's strong legal and structural framework on child health can enable children to access their right to health and development more equally and effectively with stronger support at the local level. Every improvement in this regard will create a lasting impact not only in the field of health but also in the overall well-being of children.

Recommendations

The language barrier is a significant obstacle in refugee children's access to the right to health. Therefore, it is a critical need to provide qualified and continuous interpreter support in health institutions. When providing interpreters, it will be beneficial to offer a more sensitive and safe service by considering the child's gender and psychosocial condition. In addition, in order to facilitate refugee families' access to services, it is recommended to develop multilingual informational materials and guiding brochures.

Early detection of children's mental health needs will increase the effectiveness of intervention processes. In this regard, conducting mental health screenings in schools for early diagnosis and support will be both developmental and protective. To reduce families' prejudices toward mental health services, informative seminars and guidance activities can also be expanded.

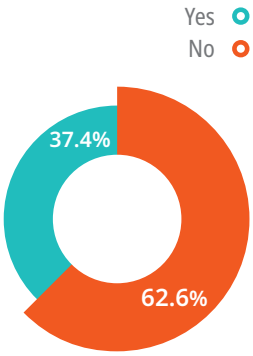
In this process, strengthening the relationships between school guidance services and social service professionals with families and supporting counseling systems stands out as an important need. Especially for children living in disadvantaged households, it is necessary to develop practices that support access to healthy and adequate nutrition in schools. Free lunch programs should be expanded, especially at the secondary education level; these programs should be structured within the framework of restorative and child-dignity-respecting social protection measures that are non-stigmatizing. Developing school-based nutrition models that guarantee every child's access to sufficient and healthy food supports children's academic success and developmental integrity. It is recommended to implement regulations to offer healthy, nutritious, and accessible food options instead of junk food in school canteens.

Using applied and interactive methods that attract children's interest in the content of health education courses will contribute to increasing health literacy. In this context, encouraging club activities, visual campaigns, and peer support activities in school settings will increase children's awareness of their own health.

To increase the effectiveness of services, establishing a child referral and monitoring system between health, education, and social service institutions will strengthen holistic intervention opportunities. Especially the clear definition of information obligations regarding health measures taken within the scope of judicial referrals between institutions will prevent disruptions in implementation. Local child coordination boards can be assigned duties to monitor the best interests of the child and ensure inter-institutional cooperation. Preparing regular monitoring and evaluation reports through sub-commissions affiliated with these boards will increase the traceability of child-oriented services at the local level.

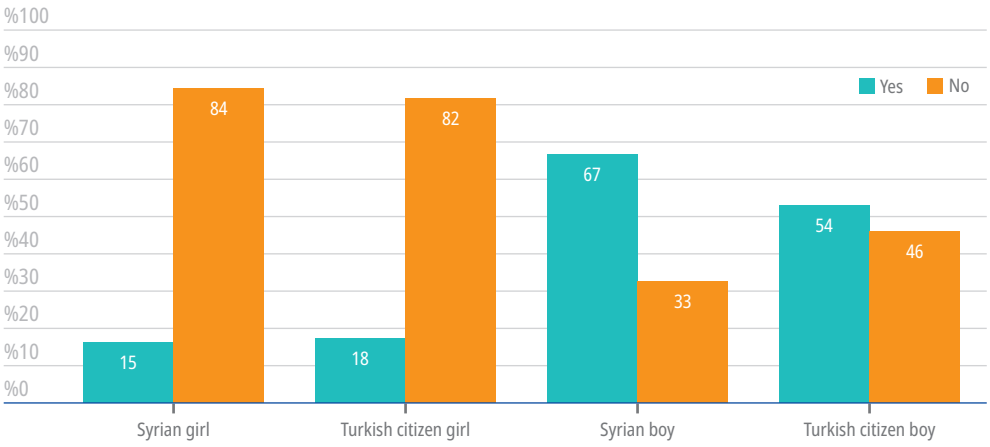
Ensuring all children's equal and unconditional access to basic health services regardless of their legal status is a requirement under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this context, it is recommended to develop flexible procedures and exceptional regulations that will enable undocumented refugee children to benefit from health services. Structured family support programs accompanied by social service professionals should be established to raise family awareness and increase active participation in psychological support processes, contributing to the empowerment of both children and parents.

3.11. Findings on Children's Work Experience (CRC Article 32)



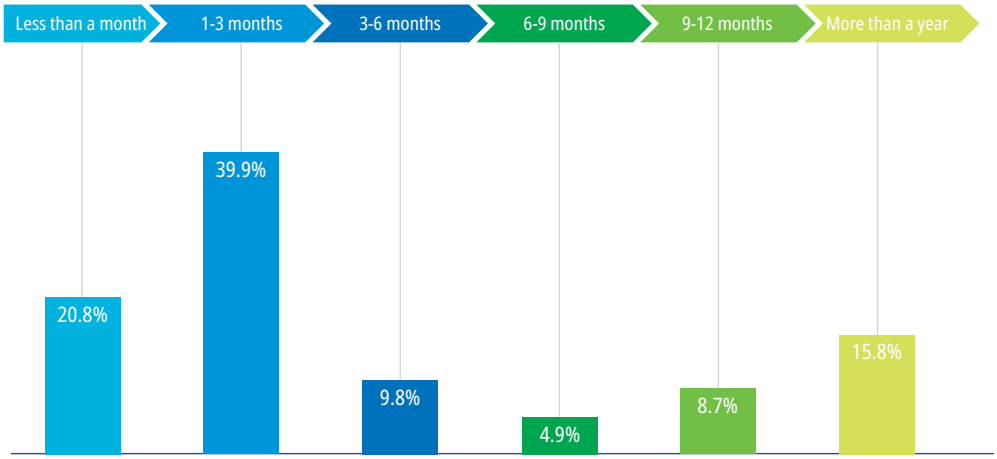
➥ Graph 30.
Children's Work Experience in Sultanbeyli

Among the 489 children who participated in the study, 37.4% (183 children) stated that they had had at least one work experience so far, while 62.6% (306 children) stated that they had never had any work experience. This rate shows that child labor is a significant issue in Sultanbeyli. **Although the majority of participants are experiencing their childhood without working, it is noteworthy that more than one-third of the children have had at least one income-generating work experience in their lives.**



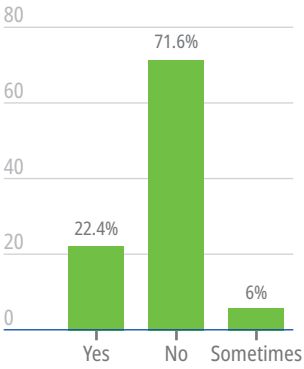
➥ Graph 31.
Children's Work Experience by Nationality and Gender in Sultanbeyli

When the work experiences of girls and boys living in Sultanbeyli are examined, the rate of those who answered "No" is quite high among girls, which appears to be a positive situation for girls. The rate of children who do not work is close in both groups of girls: 84.13% among Syrian girls and 82.17% among Turkish citizen girls. However, it is seen that in both groups, 15–17% of girls have work experience. Among boys, 67.35% of Syrian boys answered "Yes" to having worked at least once, while this rate is 54.41% for Turkish citizen boys. The "Yes" rates of Syrian and Turkish citizen boys are significantly higher than those of girls. This suggests that certain trends emerge differently in terms of gender and ethnicity.



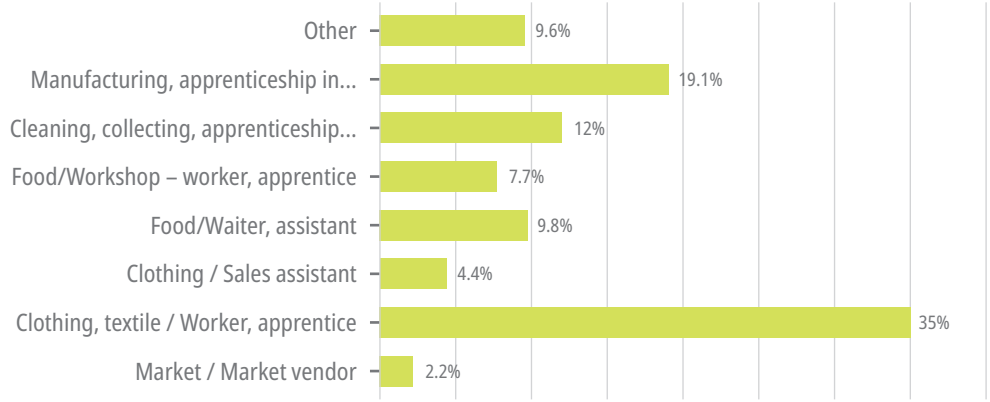
➥ Graph 32.
Duration of Work for Children with Work Experience in Sultanbeyli

When the duration of employment of children living in Sultanbeyli with work experience is asked, it was found that 39.19% of the children remained in employment for 1–3 months, and when Graph 32 is examined, this suggests that many children may be working during school holidays. The rate of those employed for less than 1 month is 20.80%, indicating that short-term/trial work plays a significant role in children's lives. The rates of employment duration being 3–6 months (9.80%), 6–9 months (4.90%), and 9–12 months (8.70%) are relatively lower than other experiences. **However, the rate of those who continued working for more than a year is 15.80%, which indicates that the number of children who may transition into full-time work and drop out of school is not negligible.**



➥ Graph 33. Current Work Status of Children in Sultanbeyli

According to TÜİK's 2023 data, the labor force participation rate of children aged 15–17 was recorded as 22.1% (TÜİK, 2024). This rate was 18.7% in the previous year, showing that children's participation in the labor force has increased recently. When TÜİK data is evaluated by gender, the labor force participation rate is 32.2% among boys, while this rate is 11.5% among girls. In light of this information, when the situation of children living in Sultanbeyli who are still employed is examined, even though the rate of children not working is 71.6%, Graph 33, showing that a total of 28.4% (Yes + Sometimes) of Syrian and Turkish citizen children are working, suggests that the child labor rate in Sultanbeyli may be above the national average. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that more effective policies need to be developed to prevent child labor and to ensure that children continue their education without interruption.



➥ Graph 34. Fields of Work for Children in Sultanbeyli

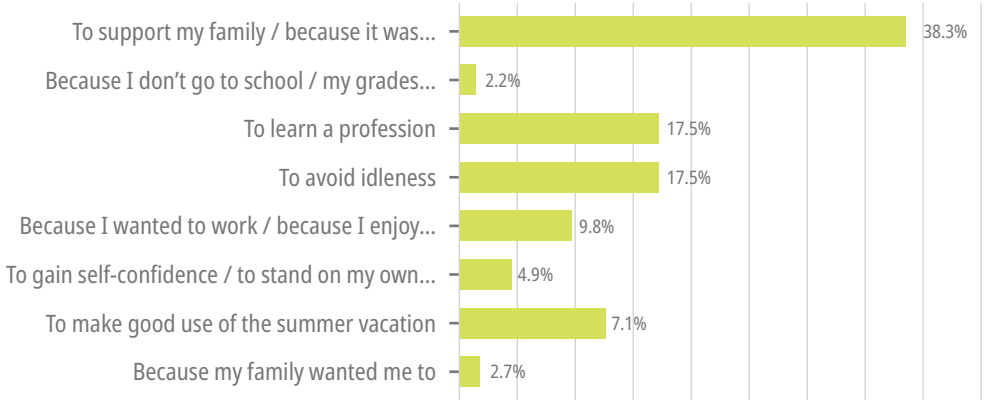
When children participating in employment were asked about their fields of work, it was observed that children participated in the workforce in various sectors. According to children's responses, the most commonly worked sector is the clothing and textile industry (35%), where children work as laborers or apprentices. This is followed by the industrial sector (19.10%), including areas such as auto repair, electricity, and construction, where manufacturing and apprenticeship jobs are also commonly performed by children. Children working as cleaners, collectors, or apprentices alongside tradesmen make up 12%, while the rate of children working as waiters or assistants in the food industry is 9.80%.

When child labor is considered within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Türkiye's Child Labor Elimination Strategies, it is ob-

served that a significant proportion of children work in hazardous jobs (MoLSS, 2023).

In particular, children working in the industrial and construction sectors are at risk in terms of physical and mental health, and these areas are classified as hazardous work categories where the employment of children under 18 is prohibited (Labor Law No. 4857, 2003).

Children working as apprentices alongside tradesmen and as laborers in the textile industry usually work long hours and have difficulty balancing their education and work lives**. In order to prevent the apprenticeship system from turning into child labor, inspections need to be increased, and current regulations should be reviewed to ensure that children fully benefit from their right to compulsory education.** 2.20% of working children work in street markets, while 9.60% are employed in unlisted jobs. Although these rates may seem low, considering that children are often employed informally, it is thought that tightening inspections, increasing educational support programs, and expanding social assistance will have a protective-preventive effect in preventing child labor.



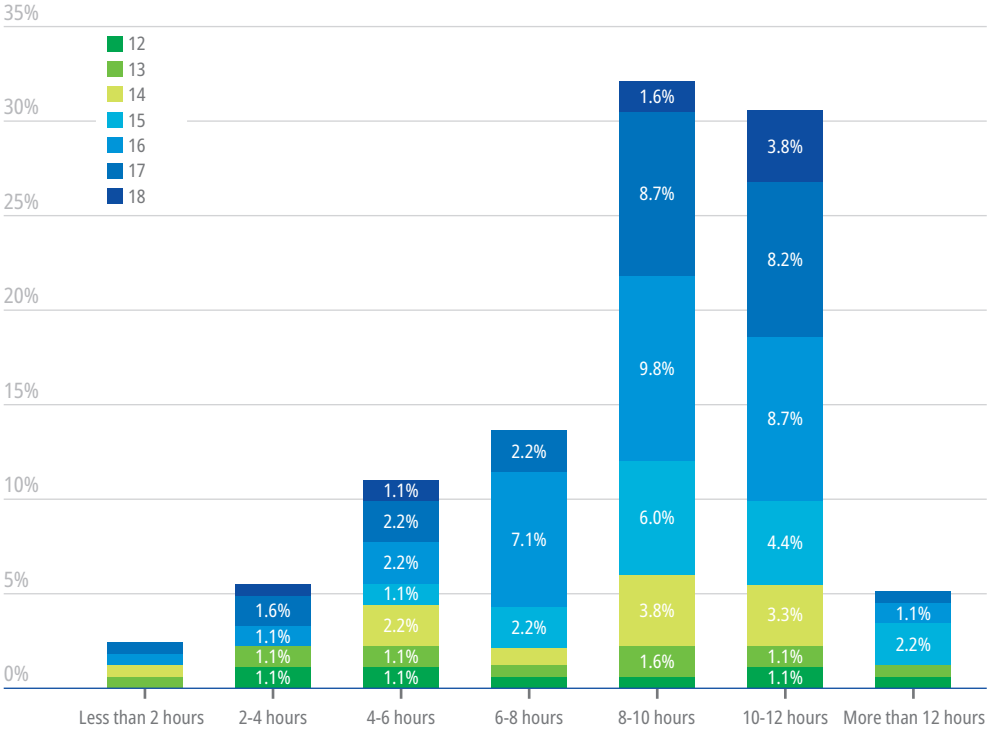
Graph 35. Reasons for Children's Employment in Sultanbeyli

When children in Sultanbeyli with work experience were asked why they were employed, 38.30% of children stated that they joined the workforce to provide economic support to their families. Employing children for economic reasons is contrary to Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). According to this article, children's right to education is a priority, and they should not be employed in economically exploitative or developmentally harmful jobs. However, the loss of parents and the transfer of caregiving responsibilities to the child may lead to child labor.

For example, I had a friend in middle school. She was someone I loved very much. Her father abandoned them. After that, she started working. She had to drop out of school in middle school. At a very early age (Participant 14, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

When the reasons for working are examined, one of the lowest rates is "*I work because I don't go to school / my grades are bad*" (2.20%). This shows that keeping children within the education system prevents early participation in the workforce. However, it is still considered

important that children who fail in education or do not attend school should be encouraged to return to school through guidance, supportive educational programs, and social assistance instead of being directed toward working life.



➥ Graph 36.
Distribution of Work Duration by Age Among Children in Sultanbeyli

Children who reported having work experience were asked how many hours they worked per day during their employment. Their responses are summarized in Chart 36. When analyzed by age, the data shows that a significant proportion of children aged 15–17 worked 8 hours or more per day. As seen in Chart 36, among 16-year-olds, 7.10% worked 6–8 hours, 9.84% worked 8–10 hours, and 8.74% worked 10–12 hours daily.

In Türkiye, regulations regarding child labor are shaped by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national legislation. According to Article 71 of the Labor Law and related regulations, children who have completed primary education and are at least 14 years old may be employed in light work. These children may work a maximum of 7 hours per day and 35 hours per week. For children aged 15 or older, the legal limits are 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week. Within this framework, the working hours presented in Chart 36 indicate that children, particularly those aged 15–17, often exceed these legal limits. Specifically, among 16-year-olds, 9.84% reported working 8–10 hours and 8.74% reported working 10–12 hours daily, both of which exceed the 8-hour legal limit.

In terms of children's right to development and workplace safety, being exposed to long working hours can negatively affect their physical, mental, and social development (İSİG, 2024). Long hours also increase the risk of workplace accidents and adversely affect children's educational trajectories. In line with Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Türkiye has ratified, children must be protected from economic exploitation and work that is hazardous to their well-being. Special precautions must be taken to protect children from occupational hazards and ensure their development is age-appropriate. Focus

group discussions revealed that Syrian parents believe child labor alters the very notion of childhood and deprives children of their fundamental rights.

A child is a child, regardless of disability or not. If a child is made to work, they remain in that system and cease to be a child. At this age, a child should live their childhood. My child works, but only because he's enrolled in open high school. He's 17 and thinks of working as hanging out with a friend, like an activity—but it's a misconception. Why? Because he doesn't know school, doesn't know what childhood is (Participant 5, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

Evaluation and Discussion

Findings obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions show that children's work experiences are influenced not only by economic conditions but also by cultural norms, family structure, and individual developmental expectations. The statement by Child 29 (16 years old, Turkish boy), "*On Saturdays I go to work with my father. I do engine repair except mechanics in the organized industrial zone. I attend a Vocational High School,*" indicates that a student receiving technical education participates in the labor force outside school hours to support his family. This example shows that, in some cases, vocational development and work experience may overlap, while the question of whether this participation is voluntary or a familial obligation remains unclear.

Similarly, Child 27 stated, "*When I'm not at school, I help my uncle... the pay isn't regular, he gives me 'pocket money'*," expressing that there is no expectation of regular income, yet he feels the responsibility (17 years old, Turkish boy). The contribution of children to family businesses as a form of "help" may, in reality, mean taking on an economic burden. According to the International Labour Organization, such unregistered work may fall under the scope of child labor (ILO, 2021).

Child 30 said, "*I'm studying motor mechanics... the school provides a wage, and I also get paid beyond that*" (17 years old, Turkish boy), indicating that for some children, working life can be a space for acquiring skills. In contrast, participant Child 13 (17 years old, Syrian boy) commented: "*If a child is working to improve themselves, it may be appropriate... but if they're working due to family pressure, it's not.*" This assessment shows that the distinction between child labor and children's vocational orientation is recognized in the field, but this distinction is not always clearly defined in practice. Elements such as whether the work is voluntary, its duration and nature, and its impact on the child's physical and psychological development are critical in making this distinction (UNICEF, 2023).

In this context, General Comment No. 1 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (regarding the right to education) emphasizes that the right to education is not limited to formal access, and children should regularly participate in education and lead a life compatible with it. Similarly, according to the principle of "*the best interests of the child*" included in General Comment No. 14 of the same Committee, all situations that threaten a child's development must be carefully addressed. In such cases, prioritizing children's individual development, physical safety, and psychological well-being is essential. Furthermore,

within the scope of General Comment No. 12, children's opinions regarding their working conditions and educational participation must be taken into account and actively included in decision-making processes.

Child 13's further comments reveal how work becomes a burden when carried out under family pressure: "*Some kids work, okay, it might be hard... but for a child to take on such responsibilities at this age is tough... some families don't even face difficulties but make them work saying there's no need to educate them*." This narrative shows that in addition to poverty, cultural and educational preferences can also direct children into working life at an early age. This is clearly seen in participants' statements regarding the appropriate age to start working. For example, Child 10 (17 years old, Syrian girl) said, "*7-8 years old... way too young... let it be 18, let them finish their classes and then work*," drawing attention to the risks of early work. In contrast, Child 14 (16 years old, Syrian boy) said, "*I've been working since I was 10... started working full-time three years ago*." This shows that some children encounter the labor market at a very early age, and that this becomes a permanent situation.

Participant Child 15 (16 years old, Syrian boy) said, "*Carrying loads in industrial work can damage growth... it could cause trauma*," drawing attention to the physical and psychological harm of heavy labor. This observation directly aligns with the health risks for children working in hazardous jobs, as reported in the ISIG Assembly's (2024) report on child labor.

Recommendations

To prevent child labor and secure children's right to education, multi-dimensional strategies must be developed. In this regard, local-level guidance and monitoring mechanisms should be developed to prevent long-term and irregular labor disguised as "help" in family businesses. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security (ÇSGB) and social service units should periodically assess the conditions of these children.

A clear distinction must be made between children in vocational training and those working in truly hazardous jobs. **School-based internships should be strictly supervised to ensure that children are directed toward these areas with genuine learning goals and not due to obligation.** The frequently expressed "family pressure" and "sense of obligation" in children's own narratives highlight the need to prioritize parental counseling and awareness programs. Such programs may be particularly effective in preventing child labor among refugee and low-income households.

To identify children working informally, early warning systems based on data sharing among school attendance records, local health centers, and municipal units should be established. Lastly, for children who say "I want to work for self-development," child rights-oriented, safe, and supervised youth work programs should be created, and these programs must be compatible with education. The integrated implementation of these recommendations will lead to significant progress in preventing child labor and supporting children's healthy development.

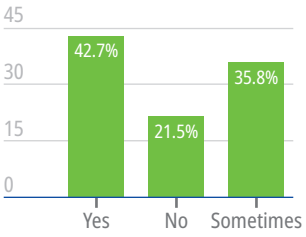
> 3.12 Right to Security

Protection of the Child in the Context of **UNCRC Articles 19, 37, and 39**

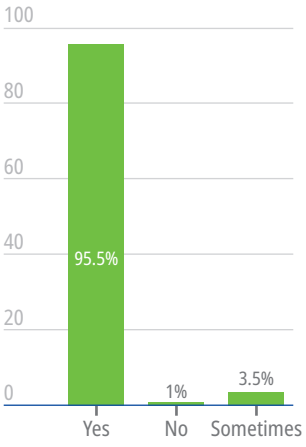
Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the protection of the child from all forms of physical or mental violence; Article 37 ensures protection against torture, cruel treatment, and unlawful deprivation of liberty; and Article 39 guarantees the support of physical and psychological recovery of children affected by traumatic experiences such as abuse, neglect, or armed conflict. In this context, the right to security of children encompasses not only physical protection but also a multidimensional area including psychosocial well-being, a safe living environment, the ability to move freely in public spaces without threat, and protection from violence at school and in the neighborhood.

In this study conducted in Sultanbeyli, the evaluations of children and parents regarding the security problems they face in daily life, the threats they perceive, and the protection mechanisms against these threats provide important data to assess the extent to which the children's right to security is fulfilled. The following findings reveal how structural and social barriers to this right are embodied through the experiences of children.

➥ Graph 37. Children's Perception of Feeling Safe Outside in Sultanbeyli

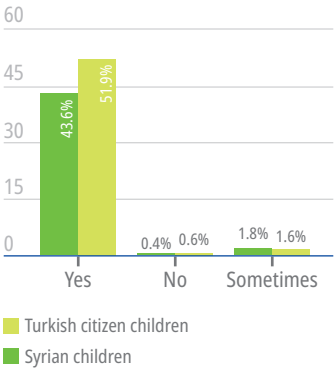


➥ Graph 38. Children's Perception of Feeling Safe at Home in Sultanbeyli

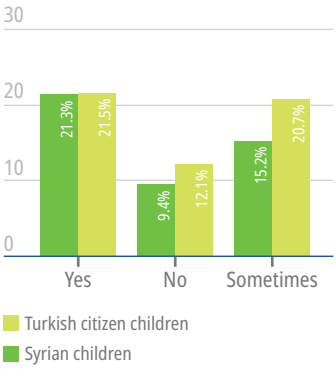


The levels of feeling safe at home and outside for all children living in Sultanbeyli who participated in the study were analyzed in Graph-37 and Graph-38. While the rate of children who feel safe at home is 95.50%, this rate drops to 42.70% outside. The rate of those who do not feel safe at home is 1.00%, while the rate of those who do not feel safe outside is 21.50%. The rate of children who say they sometimes feel safe is 3.50% at home and increases to 35.80% outside.

This comparison shows that children largely feel safe in their home environment but their sense of safety significantly decreases in the outside world. **The high rate of not feeling safe or occasionally feeling unsafe outside indicates that the risks and concerns children are exposed to in public spaces are more prominent. The possible reasons for this difference are considered to be the lack of adequate protection mechanisms in public spaces (such as insufficient safe play areas, traffic safety issues, risks of violence or bullying), as well as the children's high awareness of potential dangers in the outside world.** For refugee children, socio-economic uncertainties and a sense of exclusion may further negatively affect their perception of safety. With this assumption in mind, the rates of "feeling safe" among Syrian and Turkish children were compared in Graph 39.



➥ Graph 39.
Perceptions of Feeling Safe at Home by Nationality of Children



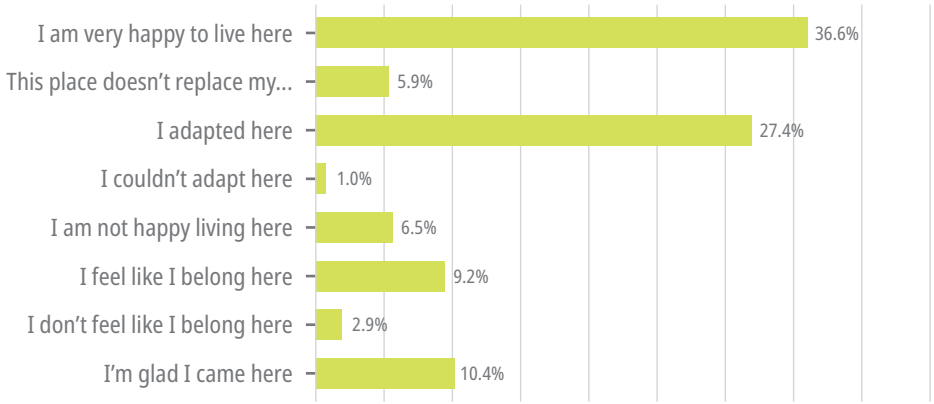
➥ Graph 40.
Perceptions of Feeling Safe Outside by Nationality of Children

Children living in the district of Sultanbeyli were asked whether they felt safe at home, and Graph-40 summarizes the home safety perceptions of these children. According to the data, 43.56% of Syrian children and 51.94% of Turkish children reported feeling safe at home. The rate of those who said they sometimes felt safe is 1.84% among Syrian children and 1.64% among Turkish children.

In both groups, the rate of children who feel "safe outside" is almost equal (around 21%). This shows that the home is perceived as a safety zone at a basic level. As for the uncertainty in the perception of safety (Sometimes); the rate of those who said they "sometimes feel safe" is higher among Turkish children (20.7%) compared to Syrian children (15.16%). This difference may suggest that Turkish children more frequently experience emotional fluctuation, conflict, or uncertainty regarding their perception of domestic safety.

For those who do not feel safe (No); although the difference is small, the rate of children who said "no" is slightly higher among Turkish children (12.09%) than among Syrian children (9.43%). While this does not directly indicate anything, it may point to the presence of emotional neglect, pressure, or violence in the home environments of some Turkish children. **The perception of safety at home is related not only to physical safety but also to emotional support, a sense of acceptance, and freedom of expression.**

The significant difference in the rates of feeling safe at home and outside among children living in Sultanbeyli reveals that children may have a high perception of threat in public spaces. Although the rate of those who feel safe at home is quite high, the serious drop in this rate in the outside world shows that social environment, urban safety, traffic, and peer bullying are among the factors shaping children's perception of outdoor spaces.

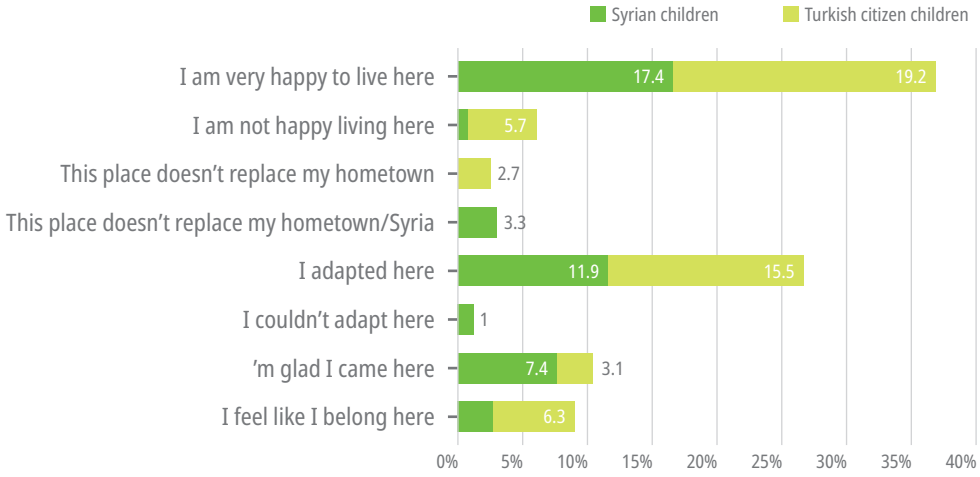


➥ Graph 41.
Adaptation and Sense of Belonging among Children Living in Sultanbeyli

This question was asked to understand whether Turkish and Syrian children feel a sense of belonging to the place they live in, their adaptation processes, and overall life satisfaction. According to the results, 36.6% of children reported

being happy with where they live, and 27.4% stated they have adapted to life in Sultanbeyli. These figures suggest that a significant portion of children have embraced their environment and feel positively about it. However, 6.5% said they are not happy living here, and 5.9% said this place does not feel like their hometown. Additionally, 1% stated they could not adapt at all. These results indicate that some children have a low sense of belonging and may face difficulties in their adaptation process.

Looking at other statements measuring belonging, 9.2% said they feel a sense of belonging, while 2.9% said they do not. This shows that some children may struggle socially and psychologically to integrate with their environment. On the other hand, 10.4% expressed "I'm glad I came here," reflecting satisfaction among a specific group. These findings suggest that children's adaptation to their environment depends on individual differences and various socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors. Strengthening social support mechanisms, encouraging children's active participation in social life, and implementing psychosocial support programs are expected to increase feelings of belonging and satisfaction and accelerate the mutual adaptation process.



Graph 42. Sense of Belonging and Adaptation Levels by Nationality among Children Living in Sultanbeyli

Among Syrian children, 11.86% said they had adapted to life in Sultanbeyli, but only 2.86% stated they felt a sense of belonging. This gap suggests that social acceptance and a sense of belonging are not yet fully established in integration processes. Among Turkish children, 5.73% said they were not happy living in the district, whereas this rate was only 0.82% among Syrian children. This indicates that dissatisfaction is not solely related to integration but may be affected by broader living conditions. The percentage of children who said "this place doesn't replace my hometown/Syria" was 3.27% among Syrians and 2.66% among Turkish children. These rates, observed in both groups, may reflect emotional attachment to one's roots and past experiences. The distinction between adapting and feeling a sense of belonging is evident in both groups.

!

The overall pattern of fragility is similar across children. The fact that only 2.86% of Syrian children feel a sense of belonging points to the superficial nature of current integration policies and highlights the need for stronger social inclusion targeting children. This confirms that belonging is not merely about physical adaptation but a psychosocial experience built on acceptance, connection, and access to rights (UNICEF, 2017; Save the Children, 2020). Nevertheless, the fact

that both Syrian and Turkish children expressed dissatisfaction and said "it doesn't feel like my hometown" shows that spatial and social conditions generally affect children's life satisfaction.

These findings underline that not only physical safety but also psychosocial well-being must be a focus of public policy. Creating safe, inclusive, and belonging-oriented environments for children at the neighborhood level is critical for ensuring children's rights. Based on these findings, focus group discussions with parents and children explored this issue further. **Mothers, in particular, emphasized that widespread media coverage of child abuse, abduction, and security threats affects their and their children's daily lives.** Children expressed fears such as reluctance to ride the school shuttle or go out alone, leading parents to closely monitor their children and provide them with mobile phones at an early age.

The common concern shared by both Syrian and Turkish parents is the physical safety of their children. Regardless of gender, children are afraid to go out alone, fear strangers, and need to stay in constant contact with their parents through digital devices. Parents reported frequently discussing neglect and abuse with their children, which also shows the extent to which children's time in public spaces is restricted. Additionally, the lack of safe spaces suppresses children's self-confidence and results in overprotective parenting.

Yes, we talk a lot about these things with the children. I talk a lot. My son had previously experienced physical abuse, so he talked about it with his father. Now he can't go outside anymore (Participant 3, Focus Group, Syrian Mother).

Qualitative interviews in Sultanbeyli show that children's and parents' perceptions of safety are shaped by both the physical environment and broader social transformations. The feeling of "not being safe in the neighborhood" can be interpreted not only as an individual issue but also as a sign of collective social breakdown. Children's references to "silence," "darkness," and "insufficient lighting" point to physical deficiencies in their environment.

Silent. Very silent. For example, there are streetlights in our neighborhood. If there are three lights, only one works, and since our house is on a side street, there's no light at all on the way. We get very scared. We use flashlights or our phone's flashlight to get there (Participant 1, 16 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Dark streets significantly harm children's sense of safety. This finding is not aligned with the "safe and accessible living spaces" principle emphasized in UNICEF's *Child Friendly Cities* initiative (UNICEF, 2004). **Parents and children frequently voiced concern over open public spaces, citing reasons such as drug dealing, addicts, fights, and cemeteries.**

They sell drugs at the park. My father doesn't let me walk past that park." (Child 8, 14-year-old Turkish citizen girl)

___The school is across from a cemetery. Children can see funerals from the classroom window." (Purple, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___I never feel safe in my neighborhood (Participant 1, 16-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

___For example, in the afternoons, the parks are full of boys. Really full. Like, I understand now why my family doesn't let me go to the park — because there are so many delinquents. So I understand why they don't let me go. But I think it's unfair not to let me go to the mall or lake area too (Child 22, 15-year-old Syrian girl).

The failure to design public spaces that support children's right to play, learn, and socialize (UNCRC Article 31) causes children to associate these areas with fear, pushing parents toward hyper-controlling behavior. Parents who value protective parenting and security education say they teach their children safety techniques they learn from social media. Especially Turkish parents frequently advise their children to "shout," "stay in crowded areas," and "stay away from strangers." While these warnings may raise safety awareness, they may also create a lasting sense of threat in children's worldview.

___Don't stay silent. If you stay silent, they can take advantage of you (Black, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___I just tell them to shout. Don't expect help from anyone. Shout. If you're silent, they'll come after you. But if you speak up, shout, make noise, no one will dare approach you (Purple, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___If someone tries to lure you with chocolate, just run and scream (Green, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___She doesn't want to ride the school shuttle because the driver is a man. My daughter is more anxious than I am (Pink, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

These statements show how parental safety strategies can evolve into behaviors that suppress children's independence and confidence. This phenomenon is defined in the literature as "protective yet limiting parenting" (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Media, social networks, and the widespread dissemination of fear play a role. TikTok and TV news that include stories of child abduction, abuse, and violence heighten children's fears and lead parents to maintain constant control over their children.

___Even though it's supposed to be a joke on TikTok, it affects children deeply (Pink, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___We are aware that our children's mental health is deteriorating, but we feel we have no choice. Sorry, but we now suspect everyone. We wonder, 'Will they do something to my child?' even with those around us (Blue, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

Parents' remarks reflect the deep anxiety stemming from digital media's impact on children's psychological well-being and safety. Content shared on platforms like TikTok, even as jokes, can have serious psychological consequences on children during sensitive developmental stages. This fuels parental distrust and constant vigilance, where even relatives are viewed with suspicion.

___I get upset even when my child goes to his uncle's house—whether it's his paternal or maternal uncle. I say, 'Why are you letting him go?' I even get angry at other people. For instance, someone says, 'Let the child go to his uncle's,' and I say, 'Why are you sending him? Why are you leaving the child with someone else?' You even fight with people over it. Yes. That's the point we've reached. Society has reached this point. Morality..." *(Purple, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).*

___We keep asking ourselves where we went wrong. When my child thinks about this, he says, 'It's my uncle, it's my family,' and I say, 'Even if it's your grandfather, be careful.' I believe this is one of the dangers that mobile phones have brought. People become like this because of the disgusting things they watch online. These shows—whether on TV or the internet—should be banned *(Mavi, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).*

There is a widespread belief among parents that shifts in the moral structure of society have increased threats to children's safety. In this context, families often feel helpless when faced with these risks and attribute them to the harmful content circulating in digital media. It is believed that inappropriate material shared on the internet and television affects individual behavior and contributes to rising risks, especially toward children. As a result, many parents are calling for stricter regulations or bans on such content. These findings highlight the urgent need to develop comprehensive policies to ensure children's digital safety and to address parents' growing concerns. Due to social breakdown and a collective loss of trust, children can no longer safely play in the streets. Meanwhile, parents feel they are living in a society where, as they say, "no one trusts anyone anymore."

___People used to help each other. Now everyone is isolated... There are addicts and armed people in the neighborhood. You can't let your child go outside *(Pink, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).*

According to General Comment No. 14 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, a child's best interests can only be truly safeguarded in environments where both social and environmental safety are ensured. In this regard, the weakening of social capital should be considered a structural threat that increases developmental risks for children (UNCRC, 2013).

Recommendations

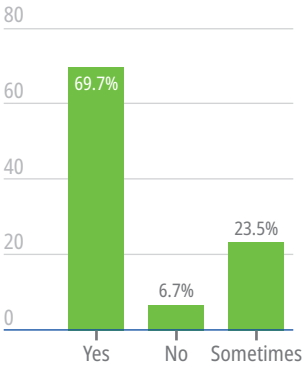
In order to ensure the physical and psychological safety of children and to support their social development, a series of strategic interventions are proposed at the local and community levels. First, neighborhood lighting should be improved and dark streets should be addressed; this will especially enhance the perception of safety in outdoor spaces and support children's freedom of movement. In addition, parks and areas around schools should be regularly monitored in terms of safety, and child-friendly safe play and socialization areas should be increased. These spaces should provide opportunities for peer interaction and physical activity—both essential for children's healthy development—within a secure framework.

Based on the participants' statements as well, guidance should be provided to parents on media literacy and safe communication with children in order to

raise awareness about the risks of the digital age. This will help families protect their children from potential dangers in online environments. In schools, educational programs that include safe behavior practices for children should contribute to their acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure their personal safety. Finally, voluntary networks sensitive to social solidarity and child safety should be established at the neighborhood level. These networks will encourage communities to actively participate in child protection mechanisms and enable the creation of safer and more supportive environments for children. The integrated implementation of these recommendations holds the potential to strengthen both children's safety and their overall well-being.

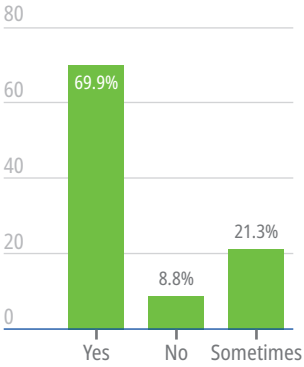
> 3.13 Children's Participation, Freedom of Expression, and Help-Seeking Attitudes – Parents' Approach

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes children's right to freely express their views on all matters affecting them and to have those views taken into consideration. Likewise, Article 9 guarantees the child's right to grow up in a family environment and to maintain regular personal relations with their parents. **Fieldwork conducted in Sultanbeyli reveals that while children sometimes have a say in family relationships, they are often excluded from decision-making processes.** In this section, children's level of participation within the family, communication problems they experience, parental attitudes, and the influence of socio-cultural conditions on this process are evaluated through survey data, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.



➥ **Graph 43.** The Extent to Which Children Living in Sultanbeyli Feel Their Families Listen to Their Opinions

When asked whether their families listen to their opinions, 69.70% of children living in Sultanbeyli stated that their families listen to them. While 23.50% said that their families sometimes consider their opinions, 6.70% reported that their families never listen to them. These results show that a large majority of children feel heard by their families. However, given that nearly one in four children feel only occasionally listened to, it can be inferred that children's views are not always taken into account in family settings. Particularly the 6.70% who say their opinions are never heard points to an area of concern in terms of child participation and family communication.



➥ **Graph 44.** The Extent to Which Children Living in Sultanbeyli Participate in Family Decision-Making

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes that children have the right to express their views on matters that concern them. Although it can be said that families generally value their children's opinions, the fact that some children feel unable to express themselves fully indicates a need for greater awareness and education to ensure the realization of this participation right.

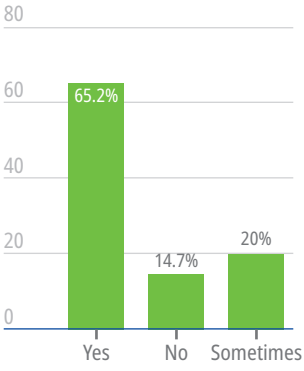
When children living in Sultanbeyli were asked about their participation in family decision-making, 69.90% stated that they are involved in family decisions, while 21.30% said they "sometimes" participate. A total of 8.80% reported that they never participate in family decision-making. These findings indicate that the vast majority of children believe they are included in decision-making processes within their families. However, nearly one in four children report participating only occasionally, and 8.80% are completely excluded from such processes. Especially for children who are not included at all, it is considered important to strengthen family communication and create spaces where they can express themselves.

Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that children need to be supported in the family environment. In qualitative interviews, many children requested that their parents be informed about how to communicate with children. This indicates how critical it is not only to support the child but also the family.

"If I were in charge, I would organize social activities or development courses. Parents should be given lessons to help them develop empathy." (Child 15, 16 years old, Syrian boy).

"I think adults should be given more education, and they should be more effective in understanding and listening to us—in being more receptive to our ideas." (Child 2, 14 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

According to a study conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University (2025), involving children in family decision-making positively influences their development. The study notes that while parental involvement in children's education is limited, communication with children is crucial. It is also emphasized that children should be seen not only as passive recipients but as individuals with agency who can actively speak for their rights and needs.

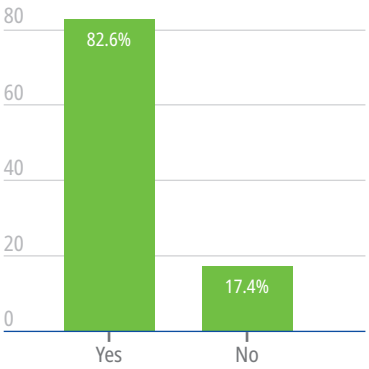


➥ Graph 45. Distribution of How Freely Children Living in Sultanbeyli Feel They Can Express Themselves at School and in Their Neighborhoods

In response to the question of whether they can freely express themselves at school and in their neighborhoods, 65.20% of the 489 children surveyed answered "Yes," indicating that they feel able to express themselves. The fact that the rate exceeds half points to a majority who feel confident in expressing themselves. 20% of children stated that they could express themselves "sometimes," which shows that some children are hesitant or influenced by certain conditions. While the answers suggest that many children feel confident in expressing themselves in their environments, the fact that 20% are uncertain and 14.70% report being unable to express themselves should not be overlooked. Considering the 20% who answered "sometimes," it can be inferred that children's freedom of expression is affected by their environment or the reactions they encounter. The 14.70% who answered "No" indicates that some children do not feel comfortable in their social or school environments and cannot express their thoughts freely.

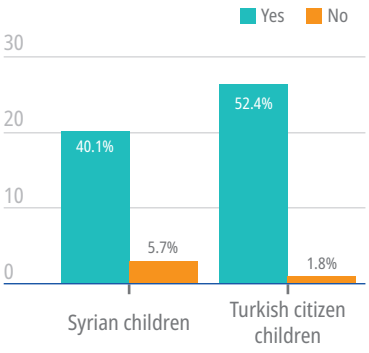
Although the majority of children believe they can express themselves, it is necessary to strengthen safe and supportive environments for everyone. Especially the percentage of children who answered "No" suggests the need for more inclusive policies to promote child participation and freedom of expression.

In parallel with the findings of the "Being a Child in an Age of Crises: Rethinking the Well-Being of Children in Post-Pandemic Türkiye" final report prepared by Istanbul Bilgi University (2025), this study also underscores the importance of strengthening guidance services, social activities, and participation mechanisms to enhance children's freedom of expression at school and in their neighborhoods.



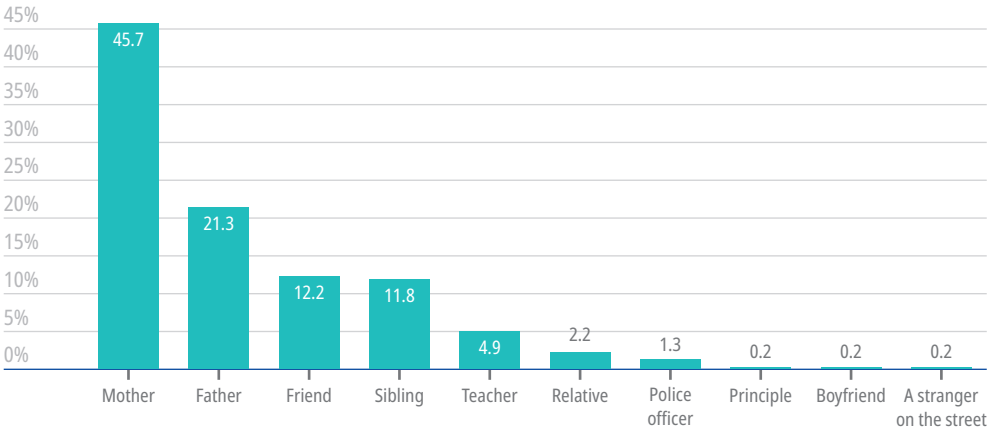
➥ Graph 46. The Status of Children Living in Sultanbeyli Seeking Support at School/Neighborhood

Graph 46 shows whether children seek help when they experience problems at school or in their neighborhood. 82.60% of children answered "Yes," stating that there is someone in their environment from whom they can seek support, while 17.40% of children said that they do not have anyone to turn to for help if they experience a problem in the neighborhood or at school. These results indicate that a significant portion of children have access to a support mechanism in their social environment. However, the fact that 17.40% of children reported not being able to get support suggests that these children may feel lonely and may face problems in accessing support mechanisms. For children who answered "No," it is necessary to increase school guidance services, social support mechanisms in neighborhoods, and child-friendly spaces. It is important to strengthen reliable adults, teachers, and peer support systems that children can turn to for help. These findings show that while the majority of children have someone to seek help from, a certain portion do not have access to this opportunity. Especially for children in more vulnerable positions in the process of social integration, it is necessary to understand whether support mechanisms need to be increased and strengthened. Therefore, the status of seeking support by nationality and gender was examined, and the differences among children are summarized in Graph 50.



➥ Graph 47. Distribution of Children Living in Sultanbeyli Having Access to Support Mechanisms

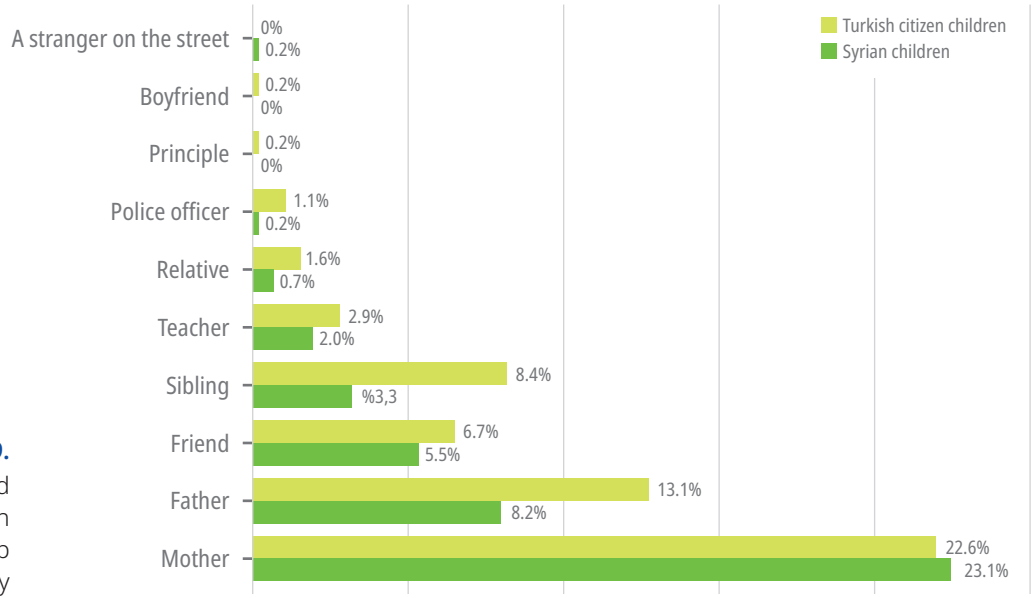
Graph 47 shows whether the 489 children participating in the study have someone to ask for help in case they experience a problem. 52.35% of Turkish citizen children and 40.08% of Syrian children stated that they have someone they can ask for help. These rates indicate that a large portion of both groups have someone they can seek support from. However, the rate of Syrian children who reported having someone to ask for help is approximately 12% lower than that of Turkish citizen children, which may indicate that Syrian children face relatively greater difficulties in accessing social support mechanisms.



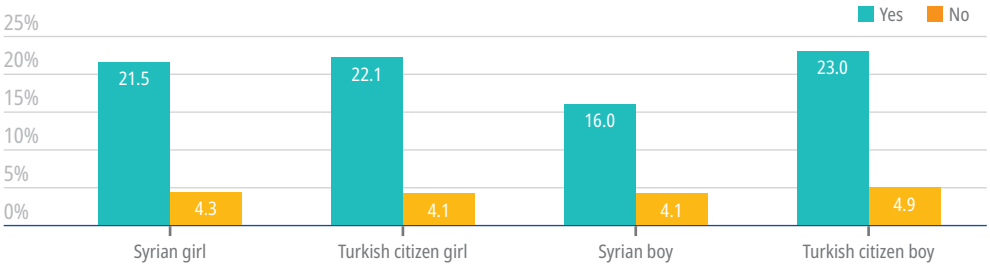
➥ Graph 48.
Individuals and Institutions Children Living in Sultanbeyli Prefer to Seek Help From

Graph 48 shows the individuals or officials children residing in Sultanbeyli would turn to for help if they experience a problem. Mothers were the most preferred individuals, with 45.70% of children stating that they would go to their mothers in such cases. The rate of children turning to their fathers was 21.30%. 12.20% of children said they would ask their friends for help, while 11.80% said they would turn to their siblings.

These findings show that children primarily seek support from family members and close social circles. The proportion of children who said they would ask their teachers for help was 4.90%, which is higher compared to relatives (2.20%) and the police (1.30%). Only 1.30% of children said they would ask the police for help, and 0.20% said they would turn to the school principal. **The answers indicate that children prefer to turn to their family and close circles rather than official authorities or institutional support mechanisms when seeking help. The particularly low orientation toward teachers and security forces suggests that guidance and awareness efforts should be increased to strengthen children's trust in these institutions. On the other hand, the parallelism observed between Syrian and Turkish citizen children in Graph-49 is striking. The fact that children turn to the same people at nearly the same rates may indicate that this behavior stems more from developmental characteristics than nationality.**



➥ Graph 49.
Individuals and Institutions Children Prefer to Seek Help From, by Nationality



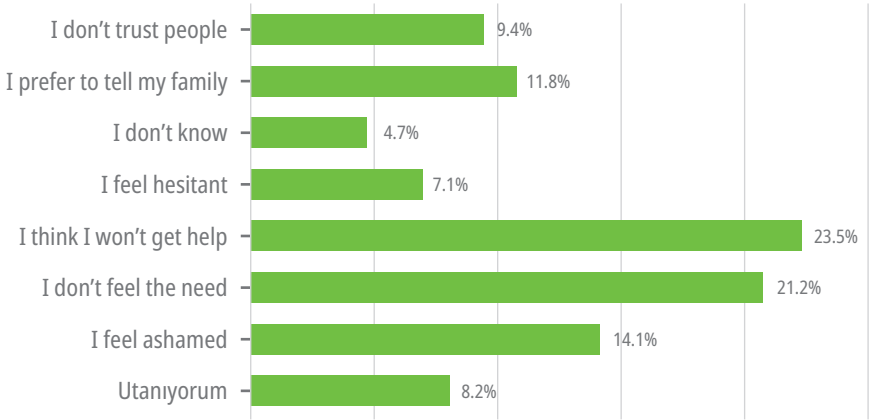
Graph 50. Status of Seeking Support at School/Neighborhood by Nationality

As shown in Graph 50, the rate at which Turkish citizen children seek support (girls: 22.13%, boys: 22.95%) is slightly higher than that of Syrian children (girls: 21.52%, boys: 15.98%). When evaluating the tendency to seek support in case of a problem at school or in the neighborhood, Syrian boys have the lowest rate (15.98%). Although the proportion of children who do not seek support is low across the general child population, the rate is slightly higher among Syrian children. No significant difference is observed between the two groups.

Syrian boys, with a rate of 15.98%, were found to be the group least likely to seek support when experiencing a problem. This may suggest that Syrian boys do not have sufficient support mechanisms in their social environment or that they are more hesitant to ask for help. The rate of support-seeking among Syrian girls (21.52%) is higher than that of Syrian boys, though it is slightly lower compared to Turkish citizen children.

!

There may be deficiencies in Syrian children's—particularly boys'—access to social support mechanisms. It is therefore important to strengthen support systems to ensure accessibility for all, and to encourage support-seeking behavior among Syrian children in school and neighborhood contexts. This indicates the need for preventive and protective programs across both groups and underscores the urgent need for the implementation of school social work in Türkiye, which has been increasingly lacking.



Graph 51. Reasons Children Living in Sultanbeyli Do Not Seek Support at School/Neighborhood

The reasons why children living in Sultanbeyli do not seek support are summarized in categories in Graph-51. The responses reflect children's trust in support systems, perceptions of independence, and social anxieties. 23.50% of children do not seek help because they think they will not receive support, and 9.40% do not ask for help because they do not trust people. These rates indicate the need to strengthen children's perceptions of their social environment and support mechanisms. 21.20% of children stated that they do not feel the need to seek

support, while 14.10% said they prefer to solve their problems on their own. This shows that children try to handle problems individually, though this may sometimes lead to social isolation. 11.80% of children said they prefer to talk to their families; 8.20% do not seek help due to feeling ashamed, and 7.10% due to shyness. **For children who avoid asking for help due to embarrassment or hesitation, more trustworthy and supportive social mechanisms should be established.** Additionally, 4.70% of children stated that they do not know whether or not they should ask for help, suggesting that children may lack sufficient knowledge about available support mechanisms

Semi-structured interviews conducted in Sultanbeyli reveal that children are sometimes able to exercise their right to participate in the family, and sometimes they are excluded. Some children stated that decisions at home are made by consulting them, while others said they were not involved in the process at all. For instance, Participant 1 shared, "If my parents have an idea, they also ask us," expressing an inclusive family environment, while also noting that this is not common in their peer group. Similarly, Child 4 mentioned that they collectively organized a petition at school with friends, formed their own opinion, shared it with others, and presented it to the administration, which then established a football field. This is one of the examples where a child was able to play an active role in decision-making processes. However, there are also contrary examples:

___When I was in the eighth grade, we didn't have physical education class because our class was mostly focused on LGS [high school entrance exam] projects. When we told this to the school administration verbally, they didn't really care. So this time, we wrote it down as a class and put it in the petition box, but still nothing changed (Child 7, age 14, Turkish citizen girl).

Parental interviews also show diversity in attitudes toward child participation. Some parents stated that they value their children's opinions, make decisions together, and have been allowing room for their children's choices from a young age. For example, the yellow-coded parent stated, "They design their own rooms and make their own choices," reflecting this mindset:

___I listen to my children, and I care about their opinions. One is 7 and the other is 5 years old. Of course, like all children, mine also have their own wishes. When we make decisions—for example—they design their own rooms. 'Mom, I want my bed like this.' Yes, since they will be using the room, a mother shouldn't say, 'Pick whichever one.' Of course, within our budget, I say, 'We're going to buy this or that—choose the one you like.' The final decision belongs to the family, but the child should be happy too. When they go into that room, they should feel it's their own space, their home. The child must know this, so that they can gradually learn to make decisions throughout their life. And we need to teach that from an early age (Yellow, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

The statement of the parent coded as Black—"We talk and make decisions together"—also illustrates a horizontal relationship formed with the child. In these examples, child participation is internalized as a part of daily life.

___I do the same. My spouse passed away, and when I do something about the house with my two children—one is 8 and the other is 9—I sit them down and we talk together, the three of us. I tell my son: we'll do this, we'll do that, we'll do it this way. We talk together. For example, "Mom, can we go to the cinema this month?" I say, "Even if not this month, we'll go next month." Or "Can you buy this for me?" If I can afford it, I say, "Yes, son, I can buy it." We talk to each other like that. We chat. We spend good times together, my children and I (Black, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

However, alongside these inclusive attitudes, there are also situations where economic difficulties or societal norms make it harder for children to have their voices heard within the family. The testimony of the mother coded as Blue illustrates how financial limitations can push children's demands to the background, and how the expectation for children to be "understanding" in fact reflects a silent exclusion from participation.

___I have four children. Which of their requests can I fulfill, really? We can't do things comfortably. Even if we don't talk, the children already understand. They understand and they act accordingly. They're not dominant kids. They respond with understanding. You can see it. They want things, but when they see our situation, they give up. They can let go of their wishes (Blue, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

___Before, my children weren't very old, but we didn't have an allowance system. But since they really wanted it and saw it around them, one of them said, "I want regular allowance." So I give them an amount that fits our weekly budget. I say, "This is your decision. Spend it today, spend it tomorrow, or save it. But I'll give it to you for this time frame. I won't give you any more allowance before that." I'm trying to raise them with that awareness (Pink, Focus Group, Turkish citizen mother).

This narrative offers a noteworthy example of child participation in household decision-making. The allowance approach shared by the parent coded as Pink can be seen as a form of participation that creates room for the child's individual preferences while teaching responsibility and freedom together. The parent's statement—"This is your decision; you can spend it or save it"—allows the child to make decisions about how to manage their own resources. This aligns with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines the principle of considering the child's views. Moreover, this practice not only grants children the right to speak but also offers a practical decision-making environment that fosters active participation skills. The parent's comment—"I won't give you any more allowance before that time"—clearly defines the boundaries of the child's right to decide and establishes a structure that allows the child to face the consequences of their decisions. In this sense, it creates a space for learning about rights, responsibilities, and planning—beyond simply fulfilling desires.

In conclusion, this example shows that the right to participate can be supported not only in major decisions (such as school choice), but also through micro-decisions in daily life, like financial choices. Such practices lay the foundation for children's future autonomy, self-confidence, and life management skills. These narratives found expression in a different way during the search workshop. It was mentioned that some families do not want their children to know about their rights, that the understanding of "The father's word is law at home" is common, that children can only defend their rights within their own neighborhood, and

that they learn about these rights in distorted ways on social media. Children who called 112 for help reflect cases of domestic violence and abuse, and indicate situations where children's voices are silenced and where they cannot access rights-based support. These narratives show that the right to participate can be limited not only individually but also by cultural and structural barriers.

In conclusion, the statements from the semi-structured and focus group interviews in Sultanbeyli reveal that while some children are partially able to exercise their right to participate within the family, this right is often either suppressed or only formally acknowledged due to socioeconomic inequalities, authoritarian parenting approaches, and cultural norms. This underscores the need for awareness-raising, support, and empowerment efforts for both children and families to ensure the local implementation of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Evaluation and Discussion

In order to realize the right to participation, to internalize it, and to strengthen trust in support systems, social work, guidance, and psychosocial support mechanisms in schools must be reinforced. General Comment No. 12 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child defines respect for the child's views not merely as listening, but also as taking those views into account in an appropriate manner. In this context, it is understood that children's help-seeking behaviors are not solely related to individual tendencies, but also shaped by environmental safety, the availability of accessible information, and the presence of expressive spaces.

For children who tend to solve problems on their own, it is important to conduct awareness-raising activities through guidance programs that promote the understanding that "seeking help is not a weakness, but a right." For children who refrain from asking for support due to shyness, shame, or a need for privacy, the establishment of secure and anonymous consultation mechanisms via school social work is of critical importance for enabling freedom of expression both at school and within the family.

Furthermore, in order to foster entrepreneurial personality traits, individualized implementation plans should be structured, and for children who are unaware of existing support mechanisms, informative guides and school-based awareness projects should be implemented. These are essential steps for ensuring a healthy childhood and adulthood experience.

Recommendations

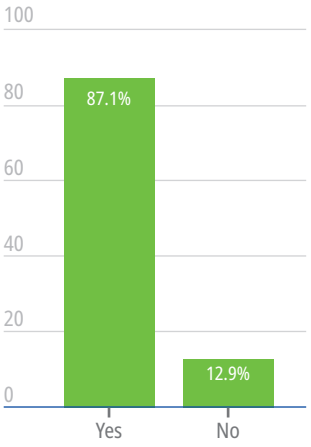
To promote children's well-being and encourage their active participation in social life, it is essential to strengthen participatory and supportive mechanisms at various levels. First, it is of great importance to expand participation mechanisms that encourage the inclusion of children's views within families and school environments. In this regard, in line with General Comment No. 12 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, spaces should be created where children can freely express their opinions, and those opinions should be reflected in decisions in a manner appropriate to their age and maturity level. This approach will allow children to gradually develop autonomy and self-expression skills, starting with small-scale decisions.

Second, considering the low rate of help-seeking particularly among Syrian boys, **social support systems that foster intercultural trust should be established in schools. These systems will enable children from diverse cultural backgrounds to feel safe and not hesitate to seek help when needed.** The fact that some children avoid seeking support due to perceptions such as "I won't receive help" or "I don't trust others" indicates the necessity of strengthening school guidance services and expanding school-based social work.

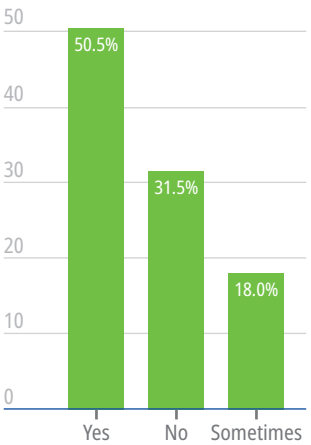
Third, the formation of peer support systems, establishment of reliable teacher connections, and development of child-friendly counseling points at the neighborhood level should be prioritized to facilitate safe help-seeking behavior among children. Finally, parents and teachers should be informed about recognizing children's emotional needs and engaging in supportive dialogue. Guidance programs that reinforce children's emotional and social safety should be increased. Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance children's individual well-being but also support their safer and more active participation in social life.

> 3.14 Right to Rest, Leisure, and Play

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31



➥ **Graph 52.** Children's Affection for Their Neighborhoods in Sultanbeyli

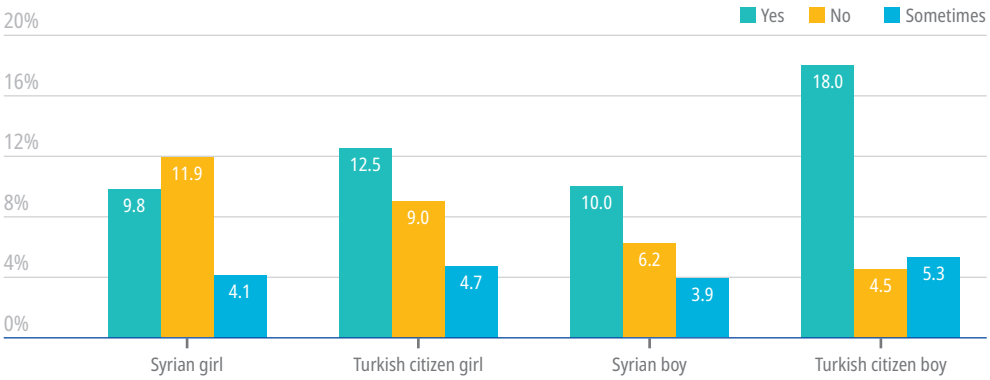


➥ **Graph 53.** The Status of Children Living in Sultanbeyli Being Able to Play/Spend Time or Do Things They Enjoy in Their Neighborhood During Their Free Time

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees every child's right to rest and leisure, to engage in age-appropriate play and recreational activities. This right is not only about entertainment; it is also essential for supporting children's physical, mental, emotional, and social development. The fieldwork conducted in Sultanbeyli provides insights into how children spend their free time, their access to play areas, and the spatial and social barriers they encounter in exercising this right. This section evaluates children's experiences of play and leisure through both quantitative and qualitative data and offers policy recommendations to support the realization of their right to play.

When asked whether they like the neighborhood they live in, 87.10% of the children reported that they do, while 12.90% said they do not like their neighborhood. These findings indicate that a large majority of children hold positive feelings toward their neighborhoods, feel a connection to their surroundings, and experience a sense of comfort within their communities. However, the fact that 12.90% of children reported disliking their neighborhood suggests that these children may be dissatisfied with their social environment, physical surroundings, or available amenities—and that they may be less likely to use their neighborhood spaces for leisure activities.

50.50% of children living in Sultanbeyli stated that they could play, spend time, or do the things they enjoy in their neighborhood, while 31.50% said they did not have access to such opportunities. Another 18% noted that this was sometimes possible. **Although the responses indicate that a majority of children do have access to recreational spaces, the fact that approximately 50% experience limitations reveals significant barriers.** Especially the combined 49.50% who answered "no" or "sometimes" suggest that factors such as lack of safe or adequate play areas are impeding their ability to use their free time meaningfully. This underscores the need to improve child-friendly neighborhood infrastructures.



Graph 54. The Status of Children Living in Sultanbeyli Being Able to Engage in Activities

Graph 54 compares children's ability to spend leisure time in their neighborhoods through play or preferred activities by nationality and gender. Among them, Turkish citizen boys were the most likely to say they could spend time in the neighborhood (18.03%). This was followed by Turkish citizen girls (12.50%) and Syrian girls (9.8%). Syrian boys, at 10.04%, were one of the least likely to report being able to do so. Syrian girls, with 11.89%, reported the highest rate of being unable to spend time in their neighborhood. The proportion of children who responded "sometimes" across all groups ranged between 3.89% and 5.3%.

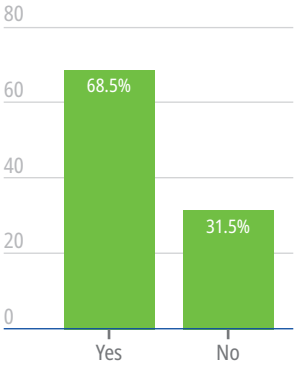
Findings show that Turkish citizen children generally have more access to neighborhood recreational time than Syrian children, possibly due to more limited access to play and social spaces among the latter. Girls, across both nationalities, also reported less neighborhood leisure time than boys—likely influenced by neighborhood conditions, perceived safety, and gendered social norms. Notably, Syrian girls emerged as the most disadvantaged group in terms of engaging in leisure activities in their neighborhoods (9.8%). The overall higher rate of complete inaccessibility among Syrian children suggests greater barriers in accessing social and physical spaces in the neighborhood.

In the focus group discussion conducted with Syrian parents, their statements clearly reveal the diversity of children's social interactions and the factors affecting these interactions. In particular, limited access to social environments outside the home restricts children's potential to establish new relationships with their peers. However, thanks to the school environment and modern communication tools (for example, phones), the bonds established with both Syrian and Turkish friends play an important role in the social development of these children. This situation highlights the importance of family practices that support social integration and children's ability to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, while the lack of spaces outside school where children

can come together can be seen as one of the main factors that restrict peer support and hinder social cohesion.

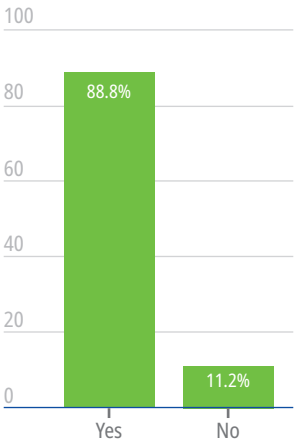
___My child doesn't have friends outside of school. But if they went somewhere, they would meet others. If they played in the park, they would get to know each other. Since I don't let them go out much, they can't meet others. At school, they have Turkish friends; they talk about them when they come home, their communication is quite good. They also keep in touch by phone. With both Syrian and Turkish friends (Participant 3, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

It is considered important to create safe spaces and implement sustainable local projects on gender perception through social awareness efforts, so that especially girls can spend time more comfortably in the neighborhood. As stated in the report published by UNICEF (2011), "*gender stereotypes impose domestic roles and low expectations on girls, and this affects girls' education and use of free time*." Therefore, starting the work with the children's parents and structuring the activities in a way that is appropriate in terms of duration and content to lead to a change in thoughts and behaviors is believed to yield results in the long term. Organizing community-based activities to increase the social cohesion of Syrian children in the neighborhood and ensuring that children feel more comfortable in their neighborhood will serve the best interests of the children.



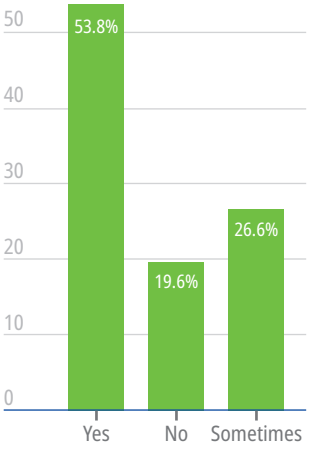
Graph 55. Perceptions of Safe Spaces in the Neighborhood by Children Living in Sultanbeyli

When looking at children's views on whether there are safe areas in the neighborhoods they live in, 68.50% of children stated that they found their neighborhood safe. In other words, the majority of children think that there are safe areas in the neighborhood they live in. On the other hand, 31.50% of children answered "No," stating that there are no safe areas in the neighborhood they live in. **Identifying unsafe areas and improving lighting, infrastructure, and social security measures in these regions, as well as carrying out neighborhood-based work with the participation of local governments to help children feel safer in neighborhoods they currently feel unsafe in, will support children's well-being.**



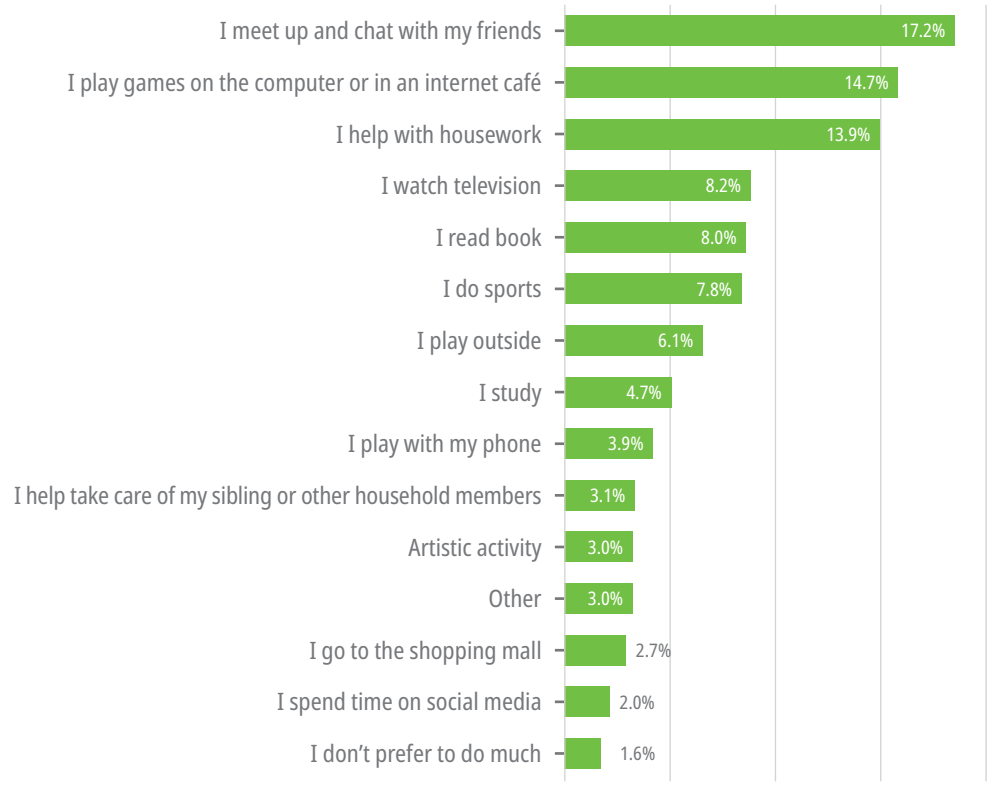
Graph 56. Parental Attitudes Towards Children Living in Sultanbeyli Meeting with Their Peers

Graph 56 shows whether children's families allow them to meet with their peers. 88.80% of children stated that their families allow them to meet with their peers, indicating that the vast majority are permitted to do so. On the other hand, 11.20% of children reported that their families do not allow them to meet with peers. In general, most families allow their children to interact with peers. However, the fact that 11.20% of children are not given this opportunity could result in unmet needs for peer relationships, which increase during adolescence (ages 12–18), and may limit children's social interactions and peer support.



➥ Graph 57. Participation of Children Living in Sultanbeyli in Artistic and Cultural Activities

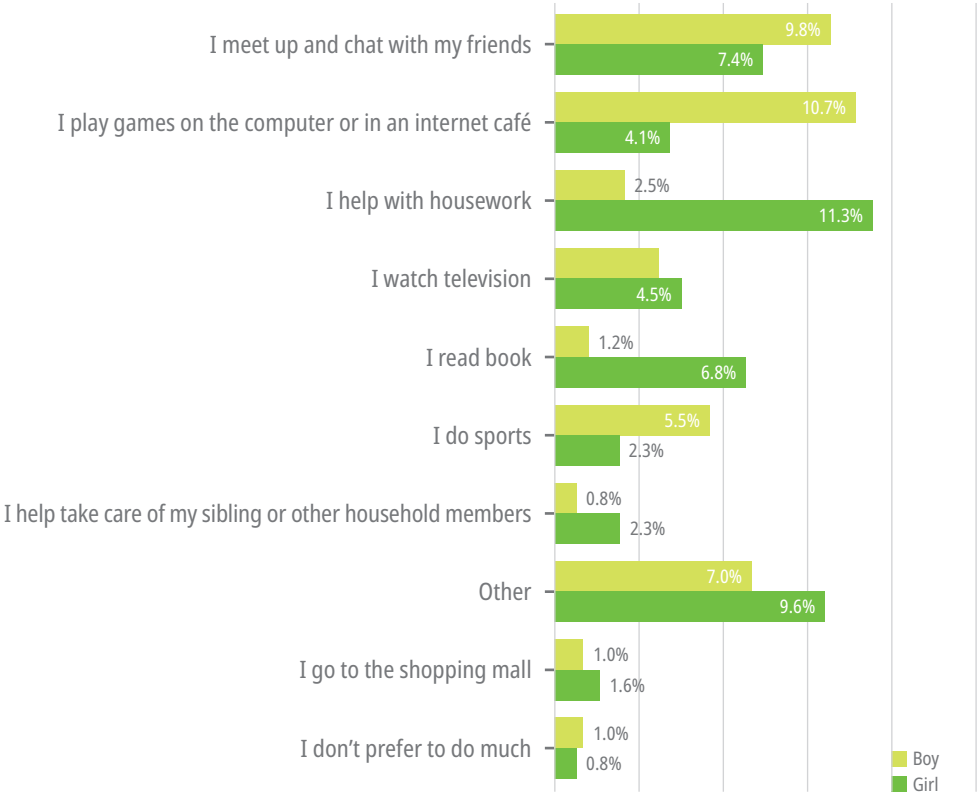
Children's participation levels in artistic and cultural activities are shown in Graph 57. Among responses, 53.80% of children answered "Yes," 26.60% answered "Sometimes," and 19.60% answered "No." While one out of every two children (53.80%) stated that they participated in artistic or social activities, the fact that 19.60% did not participate at all is considered a significant shortcoming. Meanwhile, children in the 26.60% who answered "Sometimes" seem to participate when they find the opportunity, but sustainability in this regard has not been achieved. As emphasized in the report by Istanbul Bilgi University, artistic activities "offer an important window into understanding the inner worlds of children and youth and their perspectives on being a child, while also providing a space to express emotions and thoughts and facilitating open discussion" (Istanbul Bilgi University, 2025:94).



➥ Graph 58. Ways Children Living in Sultanbeyli Spend Their Free Time

According to the responses children gave to survey questions, the most common leisure activity is meeting and chatting with friends, ranking first with 17.20%. In second place is playing games on the computer or at an internet café with 14.70%. Helping with household chores ranks third at 13.90%. This is followed by watching television (8.20%), reading books (8.00%), and doing sports (7.80%). The proportion of children playing outdoors is 6.10%, which may be associated with the lack of playgrounds or distrust in outdoor environments. Studying (4.70%) and playing on the phone (3.90%) have lower percentages. The rate of those who responded "I don't do much" is 1.60%, indicating that the vast majority of children actively spend their free time.

Looking at Graph 58, spending time with friends is one of the most common leisure preferences among children. This may suggest that children value strengthening social ties and socializing. The high rate of playing games at computers or internet cafés (14.70%) reflects children's interest in the digital world. However, it should be considered that this may reduce physical activity and increase behavioral addictions. The high rate of helping with household chores (13.90%) shows that children take on responsibilities at home. The similar rates of reading and playing sports (8.00% and 7.80%) indicate that encouraging these areas may support children's academic and physical development. Participation in artistic activities is quite low (3.00%). This confirms, as seen in Graph 57, that children face challenges in accessing cultural and artistic events.

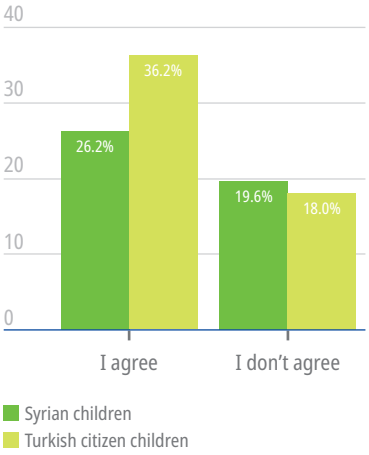


➥ **Graph 59.** Ways Children Living in Sultanbeyli Spend Their Free Time by Gender

When leisure time data is analyzed by gender, watching television is the most common leisure activity for both genders, and is slightly more common among girls (52.05%) than boys (47.95%). The rate of doing sports is 3.46% among boys, while it is lower for girls at 2.55%, indicating that girls are less involved in physical activities. The rate of reading books is higher among girls (2.76%) than boys (1.22%). Helping with the care of siblings or other household members is significantly higher among girls (2.04%) than boys (0.82%). The rate of helping with household chores is 11.27% for girls, compared to 4.89% for boys. This suggests that gender roles shape this distribution, and that girls are more likely to be assigned domestic caregiving roles.

Playing games on computers or at internet cafés is more common among boys (10.66%) than girls (3.06%). Meeting and chatting with friends is less frequent among girls (3.06%) than boys (9.84%). Visiting shopping malls is less common among boys (1.02%) than girls (3.06%). As seen in Graph 59, girls spend more time on indoor activities such as watching TV, reading books, and helping with

housework. Boys, on the other hand, tend to engage more with digital games and spend time with friends outdoors.



➥ Graph 60.
Participation of Children Living in Sultanbeyli in Activities Related to Their Own Culture

The participation rate of Turkish citizen children in cultural activities (36.20%) is higher than that of Syrian children (26.18%). However, the rate of children not participating in activities related to their own culture is notable in both groups. Among Syrian children, this rate is 19.63%, while among Turkish citizen children, it is 18%. This shows that although Syrian children participate less in cultural activities, there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of non-participation rates.

In interviews conducted with Turkish citizen and Syrian children living in Sultanbeyli, when asked how they spend their free time, the responses were coded according to activities, artistic and sports interests, team activities, technological interests, and cultural interests. While children mostly stated that they spend time at home or go on mosque visits with their families on weekends, they conveyed out-of-home activities in connection with their perceptions of feeling safe in their neighborhoods. The inadequacy of social and sports activities at school and in the neighborhood was striking for the children, who reported not being able to spend enough face-to-face time with their peers. The findings from the quantitative study were also discussed with parents of children aged 6–12, and Syrian parents stated that their children mostly spend time at home using digital tools. Additionally, they mentioned that due to cultural norms, their children often cannot meet with their peers.

—There's remote gaming on the phone. And he also attends things like Qur'an courses (Participant 4, Focus group, Syrian father).

—I want to say something. In our culture, if a child doesn't have friends and doesn't go out, it means they are very smart and well-behaved. That's how it usually is in Syria. If they don't have friends around, they are seen as very intelligent (Participant 1, Focus group, Syrian mother).

Among children aged 12–18, when asked in focus and semi-structured interviews how they socialize with their peers, most emphasized that they stay connected with friends via phone and that there are not many green areas, football fields, or open spaces in their neighborhoods or in Sultanbeyli where they can spend time.

—We meet outside school too. We don't really go anywhere, but we play games on the phone. Sometimes we play ball after school here. I mean, we chat. We play ball in the schoolyard. But other places where we could play ball are always taken by grown-ups. For example, our neighborhood is a bit rough... I live in ... Neighborhood. That street we live on is kind of dangerous. It's an underdeveloped street. Mostly houses with gardens. There's just one place where we can play – it's called ... Neighborhood in Sultanbeyli. We go there. It's about half an hour away from my house. That's the only place. That's where we can play. We have nowhere else to play ball (Participant 18, 15-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

Girls living in Sultanbeyli stated that there are not enough play and rest areas in their neighborhoods for themselves or for other children. They also noted that because youth centers are far away, they cannot access safe and reachable spaces to spend their free time.

___There's nothing. Empty. I mean, there really isn't much. I think there should at least be a park or something. Even if not for us, at least for the kids. Usually there's a forest park nearby or something, right? There's nothing like that here. Places like youth centers or cultural centers are also quite far from us (Participant 3, 16-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Another girl stated that she doesn't spend time outside because her neighborhood isn't safe, while a Syrian girl said she doesn't know her neighborhood because her father doesn't allow her to go out.

___I never feel safe here, and it's not a place that feels safe. Let's speak openly and honestly. A guy can protect himself, not the neighborhood. No one should say Sultanbeyli is a safe place — that would really be a lie. It's not. Not safe for youth, not for adults either, sir. Let's be honest (Participant 17, 18-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

___I don't go down to play in my neighborhood... because my dad doesn't let me, so I don't go. Honestly, I don't know my neighborhood. I don't play with the kids in the neighborhood (Participant 5, 14-year-old Syrian girl).

This situation shows the impact of gender-based discrimination on girls' ability to know and spend time in their neighborhoods in Sultanbeyli. While parents restrict their children from spending time in public neighborhood spaces, children's statements show that there are very limited safe green areas. Moreover, concerns around gender and safety can obstruct especially girls' right to play.

___Because I grew up in a restrictive family. I'm originally from ... (a province in Eastern Anatolia). When you grow up restricted... I mean, going outside... I never had a childhood of hanging out and playing ball with friends. I'm being honest. A child's right is to go out, run around the fields, play with friends, but we used to do housework. Tidy here, clean there. To me, that's what childhood rights are. So I couldn't really use those rights. If I had, I wouldn't seem this mature. Let's be honest. I'm 19 years old. I look this mature (Participant 18, 18-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

From the perspective of boys, one child stated that he participated in religious activities during his free time and mostly spent time apart from his peers in public spaces.

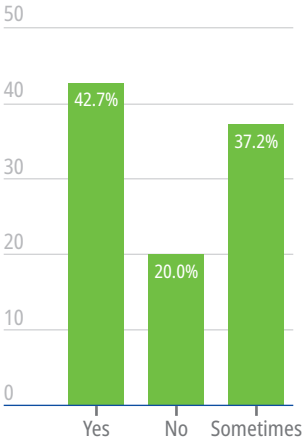
___The thing I do most is reading the Qur'an. I go to Qur'an courses outside of school. I go to zikr gatherings. I walk around and go out (Participant 13, 14-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

As these narratives show, it is important to plan activities where children can spend time with their peers in safe spaces suited to their age and developmental needs, and to guide children toward these areas.

> 3.15 Children's Awareness and Use of Their Rights

UNCRC Article 42

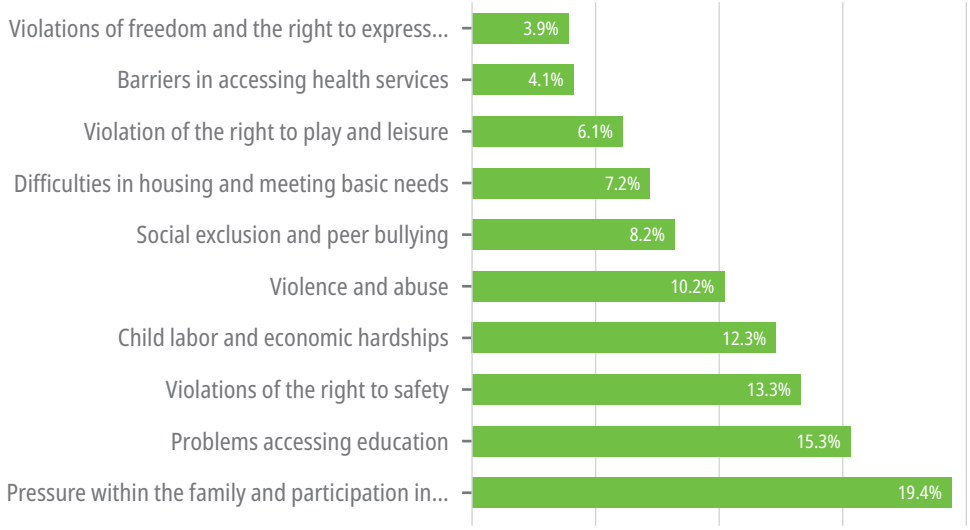
Article 42 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines it as the duty of states to actively disseminate and teach the rights enshrined in the Convention to both children and adults. According to this article, children are not only right-holders, but also actors who must be supported in accessing information about their rights and in exercising them. The study conducted in Sultanbeyli provides data aimed at understanding children's levels of awareness about their rights, their perceptions of these rights, and their experiences in using them in daily life. This section evaluates children's knowledge, modes of expression, and access to support mechanisms through both qualitative and quantitative data.



➥ **Graph 61.** Level of Knowledge of Children Living in Sultanbeyli Regarding Children's Rights

In the survey conducted, specific questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of children's perceptions and interpretations of child rights. These questions focused on how children define the concept of rights, which rights they believe they possess, the reasons behind these beliefs, and their ability and manner of exercising these rights. Visualizing the collected data through word clouds reveals the most frequently mentioned associations with child rights in children's minds in a concrete manner. This method provides qualitative depth in identifying the meanings and priorities children assign to rights (See Graph 63).

The proportion of children who stated that they know about child rights is 42.70%, indicating that a significant portion of children are aware of their rights. The rate of those who know "a little" is quite high at 37.20%. This suggests that while children may be familiar with some rights, their knowledge might be incomplete or superficial. **The rate of children who reported having no knowledge about child rights is 20%, meaning one in five children is unaware of their rights.** Although the high percentage of children who claim to know their rights is a positive indicator, the extent and accuracy of this knowledge appear to be a subject worthy of further research.



➥ **Graph 62.** Issues Prioritized by Children Living in Sultanbeyli Concerning Children's Rights

The most prominent issue concerning child rights is "family pressure and decision-making" (19.43%). This reveals that children experience pressure within the family and face challenges in making their own decisions.

- Child labor and economic hardship (12.27%) are highlighted as major issues, indicating that financial difficulties directly affect children's lives.
- Access to education (15.34%) reflects the obstacles children encounter within the education system.
- Violence and abuse (10.22%) appear as a serious concern, showing that children have safety-related anxieties.
- Social exclusion and peer bullying (13.29%) are also among the notable issues.

Children are clearly experiencing severe problems regarding fundamental rights violations such as family and social pressure, economic challenges, barriers to education, and safety concerns. These findings indicate the need for more support and solutions focused on protecting children's rights.

➥ **Graph 62.** Most Important Issues Related to Children's Rights According to Children

When analyzing children's one-sentence responses about the most important problems they see related to child rights, certain themes stand out. Issues such as safety, education, family, violence, discrimination, shelter, and child labor emerge as the most frequently expressed key concerns. Below, each theme will be elaborated under headline categories, supported with direct quotes from children.

Children's Perception of Rights:

Expressions Centered on Safety, Participation, Discrimination, and Violence

The surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions conducted with children in Sultanbeyli revealed that their perceptions of rights are clustered around several key themes: safety, participation, education, violence, discrimination, and economic deprivation. **Among the most commonly repeated expressions were:** ***"I don't feel safe," "our opinions aren't valued," "there's violence," "we have to work," and "we are discriminated against."*** These qualitative findings clearly demonstrate the fundamental rights violations and pervasive feelings of insecurity experienced by children in their daily lives, highlighting the urgent need for interventions that promote their well-being on both individual and societal levels.

___Aside from that, there are many young people around me who are subjected to not only physical but also psychological violence from their families. In today's world, forget the protection of child rights — even youth and basic individual rights aren't protected anymore, unfortunately *(Participant 14, 16-year-old, Turkish citizen, girl).*

While children may have limited knowledge of their rights, their narratives show they recognize violations through lived experience and often propose solutions. Particularly in areas such as safety, participation, protection from discrimination and violence, and the right to education, children report not feeling sufficiently safe or valued within their families or schools. This indicates that children are not merely passive victims of rights violations — they are also observant, evaluative, and capable of generating ideas for change.

___It's always the adults' opinions that are taken into account. Children are left behind. That's how it is. I don't think children's views are really considered *(Participant 1, 16-year-old, Turkish citizen, girl).*

This expression, in the context of UNCRC Article 12 on the right to participation, underscores how children feel excluded from decision-making processes and perceive the system as inaccessible.

___I don't think I know my rights, but I do have the mindset to defend myself *(Child 29, 15-year-old, Turkish citizen, boy).*

This highlights a pattern where children attempt to assert themselves despite lacking formal knowledge of their rights, showing a blend of information gaps and individual agency.

___Yes, there were 600 of us at the time. It was the size of a regular school. The teachers were quite harsh to maintain discipline. We'd all be running to our places. A teacher grabbed me by the ears, and another threw a friend of ours. Weird stuff happened *(Child 27, 17-year-old, Turkish citizen, boy).*

___At our school, teachers would kick out students just because they were Syrian. We even filed a complaint once, but the principal did nothing. I couldn't participate in certain classes either. The teachers would say things like 'you can't do it, wait outside,' and make us stand by the door *(Child 10, 17-year-old, Syrian girl).*

This statement clearly contradicts the core principle enshrined in Article 19 of the UNCRC, which asserts that children must be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence. Child 24 (a 17-year-old Turkish girl) voiced serious concerns about sexual abuse and the culture of impunity surrounding such cases:

I've seen young children and teenage girls — and boys too — subjected to abuse and violence. I've seen 10-year-old children. I've seen too many cases. When the victim is over 15, they say 'it was consensual' and close the case. Something must be done about this. Not just in Sultanbeyli, not just in Istanbul...

There should be no beating (Child 27, 17-year-old Turkish boy).

These testimonies reveal that children are affected not only as victims, but also as witnesses to abuse, and that gaps in the justice system deeply undermine their sense of safety. Child 25 (17-year-old Turkish girl) emphasized the need for a systemic response to child development by proposing parenting education to prevent early marriages:

During that pre-marriage preparation process, I think there should be parenting lessons. So when they have children, they know how to treat them. They should learn not to discriminate between girls and boys. This isn't just our problem — it's a global issue.

In the context of freedom, Child 25 continued:

Freedom means being able to receive an education freely. To be able to play outside freely. And also — unfortunately — there are girls who are married off at a young age. Child brides. Their rights are taken away. I believe they should be free. Because all children, even all people, should be free — as long as they don't violate other people's space or cause harm.

This shows that children not only perceive rights at the individual level but also observe and critique patterns of structural violation, connecting freedom, equality, and safety in meaningful ways. Child 26 criticized how the education system focuses only on children's shortcomings rather than their strengths:

I don't think they really discover what children are good at. If a child is bad at math, they give them extra math lessons. But if they're good at science, there's no encouragement to develop that. It's always about filling in the gaps (17-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Finally, Child 29 (a 15-year-old Turkish citizen boy) shared his views on gender roles:

I don't think we have equal rights. Because there are things men are supposed to do, and things women are supposed to do. I think our religion also outlines this.

This reflects how children sometimes internalize gender-based discrimination, leading to conflicting or contradictory interpretations of the concept of rights. It reinforces the need for rights education that goes beyond factual information to include values-based learning and critical thinking.

Children expressed that both their physical and psychological safety were under threat. Statements such as "I don't feel safe," "I can't play outside," "There's no security," and "I'm scared when I go out" reveal that many children feel unprotected in public spaces. Even basic activities like playing in the street or spending time with peers have become anxiety-inducing for some. Moreover, comments like "Parks are not safe," "We're harassed in the streets and parks," and "There's too much bullying" emphasize the lack of safety in outdoor spaces.

A 16-year-old Turkish citizen girl expressed her view on the right to security with the following words: "*I don't feel safe outside. What's reflected in the news affects me. That's why I'm scared. I was really scared by that last incident, the one at the fortress. That's how it is"* (Participant 1). Another girl said:

___..well, there are too many thugs. Always fights with knives and stuff. Lots of butterfly knives and all. Sometimes they spin them. They think they look cool. We see them spinning." (Child 20, 14-year-old Syrian girl).

This statement also summarizes the reason why security and public outdoor spaces have become inaccessible.

___I also think that people should be educated. Because they don't know what to base their actions on. In the past, for example, people used to help each other. They were the kind of people who would ask, "How will we raise our children?" or "How will we overcome this illness?" They were united, in communication. Now they are not. People live separately. Children don't play outside anymore. For instance, you go outside to play. Or let's say you did go out. On average, there are very few people around. And in this day and age, who can send their child outside freely? There's a safety problem. People have changed too. As I said, people... (Child 25, 17-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Participant Child 25 illustrates how the feeling of safety is intertwined with the weakening of social relationships and the shrinking of children's living spaces. **Her statements point not only to physical threats but also to an environment of insecurity caused by the erosion of social bonds.** What used to be defined as "people living together and helping each other" in neighborhood relationships has now dissolved, making it harder for children to safely go outside. The right to education emerges as the second most frequently mentioned core issue after safety when children were asked to express their thoughts on child rights in a single sentence. Some children stated that the education system is inadequate for them, that teachers are not supportive enough, or that they had to leave school due to financial reasons. In addition to problems in accessing education, children also emphasized that the content of education is not delivered under fair conditions. They especially highlighted the disparity between the education provided in private and public schools:

___Children in private and public schools not having the same right to education (Participant 13, 14-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

Another inequality in a different area was described by a 14-year-old Syrian girl as *"the bullying and discrimination that foreign students face in schools"*.

___The right to education being denied due to financial difficulties or societal pressure (Child 10, 17-year-old Syrian girl).

___The most common issue reported was that children could not attend school due to financial hardship and had to work instead (Child 15, 17-year-old Syrian boy).

___Children being unhappy because their families cannot afford what they want (Child 1, 13-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Through such statements, **it becomes evident that financial problems, poverty, discrimination, and gender-based pressures are the main issues prioritized by children.**

___Education is defined as a fundamental right. In response to the question about education, one child said: "I think education is a right, and a very important one. Because a person uses the knowledge, experience, science they have to make decisions. I mean, today I can make decisions based on whatever knowledge, science, or learning I have" (Child 6, 14-year-old Turkish citizen girl). In response to the question of what kind of education one should receive, a different child said: "A person should receive the kind of education they enjoy. For example, let's say I want to be a mechanic. Then I should have a job that suits me. A vocational school in mechanics. It can be at school, or you can do it in school too. Like that. I mean, I don't have to study mechanical engineering to be one" (Child 13, 17-year-old Syrian boy).

On the other hand, interviews with parents also included statements in support of children. Syrian parents prioritized education as the first issue when it came to child rights, emphasizing that children had become disconnected from education due to migration, that school and education had lost their meaning, and that children were unable to experience a quality school life.

___...they are going through many difficulties. They also experience many challenges at school. There's a lot of bullying and such at school. Not going to school becomes a problem. If we are going to talk about child rights, we need to talk about school. But for Syrian children, what does school even mean? It's like it has disappeared. No, like my child says, the teacher brushes it off. And then the same problem happens again the next day. No solution is found to any problem. I mean, sometimes even people pull a knife on children and attack them. So, the parent becomes afraid to send them to school. They start considering not sending them anymore. In such cases, I also consider not sending my child to school, even though my child loves learning (Participant 5, Focus Group, Syrian mother).

___Regarding Family Issues and the Right to Participation, while the concept of family holds an important place in children's lives, some children stated that their families adopt a controlling and dismissive attitude. Statements such as "Parents don't listen to children," "My opinion isn't asked," and "My family pressures me" show that children are not included in decision-making processes within the family and that their views are not taken into consideration.

___There are many of my peers who have no say in their families. That also relates to how their own parents were raised. Because their parents also had no say in the past, they now impose the same thing on their children, thinking it's the right way (Child 24, 17-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

Some children stated that their parents disregard their rights and impose strict rules about education, household responsibilities, and freedoms. Statements such as "*I can't go out because of my family's pressure*" point especially to the restrictions girls face in participating in social life.

Rather than pressure, it would be better if they warned us in a gentler way. I mean, sometimes families yell or get angry. It's not really about that—more like, being kinder would be better (Participant 12, 14-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

A mother, for example, should be close friends with her daughter in my opinion. But nowadays, it's not like that (Participant 18, 18-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

When examining children's statements about participation in family decision-making, it can be seen that some are indirectly involved in the process. The following statement indicates that decisions are made between the parents and only subtly conveyed to the children, showing that although children have access to information, they cannot meaningfully participate:

They make joint decisions. For example, if my mom has an opinion, she tells my dad. If my dad agrees, they kind of hint it to us. Like that (Participant 1, 16-year-old Turkish citizen girl).

When it comes to fathers, it can be inferred from the following statement that the mother figure is left in a secondary position in the decision-making process. This situation suggests that within the family decision-making mechanisms, the views of both children and women are undervalued, and decisions are shaped more through the father, who represents the authority figure in traditional society:

It's usually whatever the father says. They don't really ask the mother for approval. That's how it is (Participant 18, 15-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

These kinds of experiences, when evaluated in the context of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, suggest that children's opinions are considered only at a superficial level and that their meaningful and equal participation in decision-making processes is limited. For children to become subjects of decisions, it is not enough to inform them; their views must be genuinely taken into account in a way that shapes the process.

On the topic of violence and bullying, a significant number of children reported being exposed to physical and psychological violence. Statements like "*There shouldn't be beatings,*" "*I don't want to experience violence,*" and "*There's too much bullying*" reveal that children have had serious experiences in this regard. Children's perception of violence was not limited to physical violence but also included verbal abuse, neglect, and psychological pressure. Phrases like "*My family yells at me,*" "*My classmates make fun of me at school,*" and "*No one believes me*" indicate that children feel unsafe both within the family and in their social environments.

When I started ninth grade, the teacher came and slapped me on the head. (...) Because I hit the teacher back, they took me to court. He dropped the complaint. They let me go. I was released (Child 30, 16-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

Well sir, back then there was this saying: 'Where the teacher hits, roses grow.' So we just stayed in our place. Otherwise, we couldn't do anything because of the authority. There were people of all ages. Even people going to university. The school was actually a religious congregation school. We used to go to and from school (Child 27, 17-year-old Turkish citizen boy).

Children should not be subjected to violence (15 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

Children being subjected to disturbing behavior and violence (17 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

Children being exposed to violence by their families (13 years old, Turkish citizen girl).

Making children do things by force, shouting, or violence (16 years old, Turkish citizen boy).

Children identify violence as the most important issue concerning child rights—not only the violence occurring in their immediate surroundings but also the violent events taking place in the world affect them.

Through such statements, children identify violence as the most important issue concerning child rights—not only the violence occurring in their immediate surroundings but also the violent events taking place in the world affect them.

Children being subjected to violence by their families or being kidnapped by others (14-year-old girl, Turkish citizen).

The idea that children should not be exposed to violence, and that children living in war zones, such as Syria and Palestine, are deprived of their rights (17-year-old girl, Turkish citizen).

Children, especially refugee children and those from different social groups, stated that they experience discrimination. Phrases such as "There is racism," "They exclude us," and "They treat me differently because I'm Syrian" reveal the integration problems and social exclusion faced by refugee children. Children also frequently shared experiences of being labeled and excluded in schools and neighborhoods. Statements like "My friends don't play with me," "They don't understand me," and "We are treated differently" show that children feel they do not have equal opportunities in social life. Almost all of the children who spoke about racism and discrimination were Syrian, and the content of their statements suggests that they have personally experienced or witnessed these incidents.

Not being mocked for their appearance, not being subjected to racism (16-year-old girl, Syrian).

I want racism to end (15-year-old girl, Syrian).

There are differences between being a Syrian and a Turkish child. Especially Syrian children can be subjected to racism. In general, all children face difficulties in education (15-year-old girl, Syrian).

Children's emphasis on child labor and economic difficulties highlights the violation of rights in these areas. It is evident that they are informed about and have observed the challenges faced particularly by school-aged children who have to work, or by those facing difficulties due to their gender.

___Young children have to work, even at school age. In our neighborhood, girls face problems (14-year-old boy, Turkish citizen).

___Removing open education because some want to work (16-year-old boy, Turkish citizen).

___Children not having to work (14-year-old girl, Syrian).

___Families sending their children to work at a young age, children having to work (16-year-old girl, Syrian).

___The most common issue is that children cannot attend school due to financial problems and have to work (17-year-old boy, Syrian).

As a result, issues such as safety, education, family pressure, violence, discrimination, housing, and child labor stand out as the most frequently emphasized matters in children's statements. These findings clearly demonstrate the obstacles children face in accessing their fundamental rights. A large number of children are aware that their rights are being violated, and some even offer suggestions for solutions. **Creating safe environments, increasing access to education, preventing child labor, and strengthening communication within the family stand out as priority areas for work in terms of children's rights.**

> 3.16 Prohibition of Discrimination and Ill-treatment

UNCRC Article 2 and Article 19

In the semi-structured interviews, children stated that they had been exposed to discrimination either directly or indirectly, or that they had observed their peers experiencing discrimination. Particularly in the case of Syrian children, inequalities were reported in the attitudes of both teachers and peers. **Experiences of discrimination directly affect children's daily lives, damaging their social relationships, self-esteem, and sense of security.** Some children stated that they developed strategies such as remaining silent, adapting, or responding in kind when faced with peers who asserted superiority over them. The account of a Syrian girl clearly reveals this dilemma:

___She doesn't use offensive words, but there are classmates who see themselves as bigger, superior... Sometimes we get along well, but I do what she wants so we can get along. Sometimes we argue. Sometimes I push back... She sides with the boys. In our class it happens sometimes, not always. But not with all people, just some. Sometimes I try to silence them. Sometimes I try to show myself as superior to them (Participant 5, 14 years old, Syrian girl).

Discrimination was reported not only in the form of verbal or physical exclusion but also as unequal representation in decision-making processes and being unheard. A Syrian boy stated that during conflicts with his classmates, teachers did not act objectively and took the side of his peers:

___I talk about it. In 7th or 6th grade, once someone picked on me. Then I did the same back, the whole class jumped on me. Not the whole class, but three-quarters. After that, nothing happened. I didn't tell

anyone. The others did, and they lied too. Then I got punished. I got a disciplinary punishment... A few days ago, when I was in the bathroom, a student from another class came and started provoking me. Then I called him disabled, and he cursed at my mom. I didn't do anything to him. I went back to class. He came and hit me. Then we both went to the disciplinary board. They write everything on a form there. If it builds up, you get suspended. I can't explain myself. The other kids lie. The teachers believe them (Participant 10, 14 years old, Syrian boy).

These accounts are directly related to Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits discrimination. According to this article, state parties undertake to ensure that a child's rights are not limited on grounds such as the child's or their family's ethnic origin, language, or legal status. However, the children's narratives reveal that this principle is often not upheld in practice and that power dynamics within schools reinforce discrimination. The annual reports of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) also highlight complaints about discriminatory practices, especially against refugee and disabled children in the field of education. The 2022 TİHEK report noted numerous complaints that children are subjected to social exclusion, peer bullying, and discriminatory attitudes from school staff (TİHEK, 2022). Similarly, child rights-based reports published by the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) also identify key problem areas, such as children being unable to express themselves, violations at school not being effectively addressed, and the absence of an effective monitoring system against discrimination (KDK, 2021).

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The silencing of children, their inability to explain themselves, and their lack of fair representation in the system signify not just individual but systemic rights violations. This situation relates not only to Article 2 of the Convention but also to Article 12, which clearly states that a child's views should be taken into account. However, in the narratives shared above, children express that their voices are not heard and that others make decisions on their behalf.

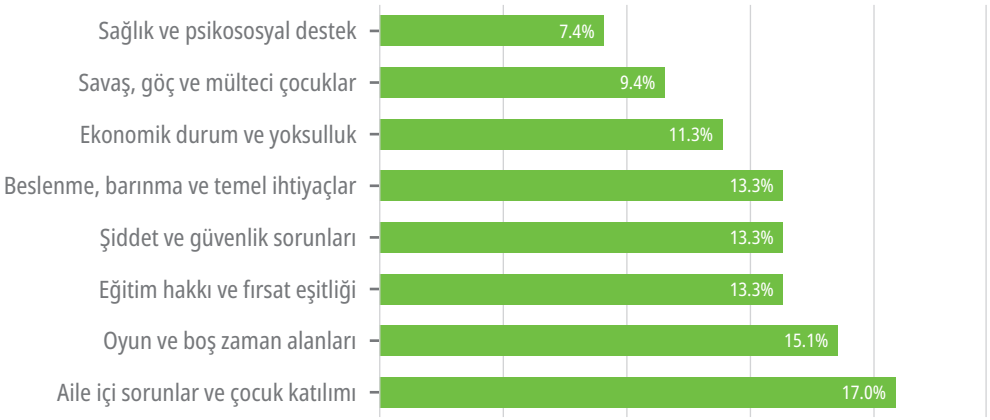
Combating discrimination should not be limited to raising awareness; it must be supported by structural reforms that transform in-school attitudes, inclusive guidance practices, and mechanisms where children can express themselves safely. Furthermore, **children's access to complaint and application systems should be strengthened, and these mechanisms should be restructured in a child-friendly manner.**

> 3.17 Dreams, Future Expectations and Well-being

➥ **Graph 64.** Topics Children Would Like to Change If They Had a Magic Wand

The mapping above (Graph 64) highlights the recurring words mentioned by children when asked what they would like to change if they had a magic wand. Among the most frequently used words are "children," "education," "safe," "family," "pressure," "play," "happy," "bullying," and "rights." This indicates that children mainly focus on issues such as family relationships, the right to education, safe spaces, the right to play, violence, and peer bullying.

> 3.17.1 Dreams

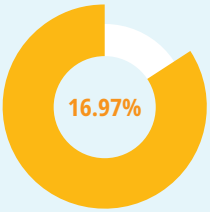


➥ **Graph 65.** Things Children Living in Sultanbeyli Would Like to Change If They Had a Magic Wand

Graph-65 categorizes the responses given by children to the question "If you had a magic wand, what would you change?" based on the recurring themes identified in Graph-64. The changes envisioned by children also shed light on the societal and individual issues they consider most important.

The classification based on frequently used words is supported by detailed content and sample statements. The topics that children would like to change "if they had a magic wand" show that their awareness of both personal and social issues is quite high. Their demands for change span a wide range—from family relations and the education system to playgrounds and economic inequality. Particularly, the sensitivity toward violence, poverty, war, and security appears to be prominent, likely due to the direct link with their living conditions.

Family Problems and Child Participation

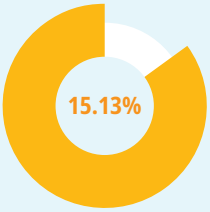


Children emphasize the need to have more say within the family, and that their families should listen to and support them more. Family pressure, the lack of importance given to children's opinions, lack of discipline, or overly authoritarian attitudes are among the issues they most want to change. Children complain about not being listened to and about authoritarian behaviors within the family.

I would want trust to be established within the family (16 years old, boy, Turkish citizen).

I would want to fix problems like fighting in the family or financial issues (13 years old, girl, Turkish citizen).

Play and Leisure Spaces

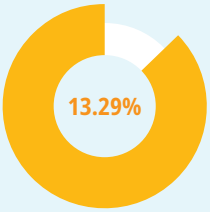


Children see the lack of safe play areas in their neighborhoods as a major deficiency and request the creation of more such spaces. The right to have fun, socialize, and spend time freely is among the most desired changes. The absence of safe play areas is one of the most frequently voiced shortcomings.

I would build play areas for children (14 years old, boy, Syrian).

I would make the playgrounds nicer. I would help those in need. I would ensure their safety (16 years old, girl, Turkish citizen).

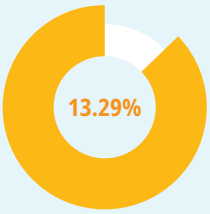
Right to Education and Equal Opportunities



Children want everyone to have equal access to education, for children who cannot go to school to be able to access education, for the exam systems to be changed, and for better opportunities to be offered in education. Special sensitivity is shown toward children who cannot access education due to economic barriers. Children also emphasize the presence of injustice in access to the right to education.

___I would want children to receive regular education. I would ensure that children who cannot study receive education (12 years old, girl, Turkish citizen).

Violence and Safety Issues

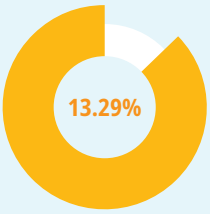


Children stated that they want physical and psychological violence to end and that they wish to feel safer. Peer bullying, domestic violence, and the sense of insecurity in their neighborhoods are among the most important issues they wish to change. Children want to be protected from both physical and psychological violence.

___I would rescue children under pressure and end child abuse (16-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

___I would end peer bullying (16-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

Nutrition, Shelter, and Basic Needs

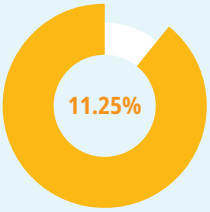


Helping children who suffer from hunger, providing shelter for homeless children, and increasing access to basic needs are among the most frequently mentioned issues in children's dreams. Children want all their peers to be well-fed and to live in healthy conditions. Meeting shelter and basic needs is seen as critical for children.

___I would find them a place to stay (15-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

___I would want all children to live happily (12-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

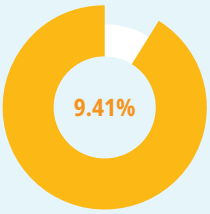
Economic Conditions and Poverty



The end of poverty, families not experiencing financial hardship, and children being able to meet their basic needs comfortably are important issues for children. Expressions such as "everyone should be rich" and "no one should be left without money" reflect their sensitivity toward economic inequality. At the same time, their statements indicate that financial difficulties negatively affect children's lives.

I would eliminate financial problems. I would eradicate poverty. I think families would spend more time with their children if they didn't have financial difficulties (15-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

War, Migration, and Refugee Children

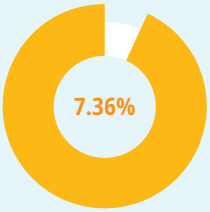


Especially Syrian children dream of the end of wars, returning to their homes, and living in peace. Statements like "let the war in Palestine end," "children should not die in Palestine," and "I would like to return to Syria" reveal the impact of war on children.

I would stop the war in Palestine. I would make sure they live comfortably (12-year-old, girl, Syrian).

I would end wars and provide children a life of peace (15-year-old, girl, Syrian).

Health and Psychosocial Support



Children want diseases to end and for everyone to have access to health services. Statements such as "I would help sick children" and "I want to become a doctor" indicate their awareness of the right to health.

I would help children who are ill (15-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

I would make sure they could travel safely and feel secure (13-year-old, boy, Turkish citizen).

These findings offer important insight into the changes children want to see in their own lives and in the world. They can be used to guide improvements in the field of children's rights.

> 3.17.2 Future Expectations

In interviews with children, a significant difference was observed in career preferences between those studying in vocational and religious high schools and those attending other types of schools. It was found that young people in vocational education, in particular, do not have a strong desire to attend university and instead want to enter the workforce more quickly.

After high school, I plan to continue in my current field. I've been working in this place for four or five years now. Then I plan to open my own business. No, I'm not considering university because there is

no public university here, only private ones. And I can't afford private. There is one in Ankara, but I can't leave my family and move to Ankara. The best thing is when I get my high school diploma and my master and journeyman certificates, there will be no need for it (Participant 17, 18-year-old girl, Turkish citizen).

This account suggests that children under 18 in Türkiye shape their expectations for the future based on the country's economic conditions and tend to see university not as a period that contributes to their intellectual and social life, but as a phase involving additional expenses. Similarly, a 15-year-old Turkish citizen boy who participated in the study stated that he enjoys working and is happy to be earning a small allowance while attending school.

___After that, I work. I like my job. I like working. I work in a place run by someone like an older brother. I help out there. It's like an industrial area, but not quite. It's a service unit of a place. I'm learning a trade there, related to motorcycles. I get a small allowance. I only go on Saturdays and during school holidays (Participant 18, 15-year-old boy, Turkish citizen).

> 3.17.3 Opinions on Türkiye and Syria

Sultanbeyli is a district known for its low socioeconomic profile and dense refugee population. Within the scope of this qualitative study, the opinions of both Syrian and Turkish citizen children about their neighborhoods and district were collected to better understand their needs. While Syrian children shared their experiences of living in Türkiye, they also spoke about their families' thoughts on returning to Syria in relation to current developments. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interviews also shed light on the feelings and thoughts of Turkish children regarding the return of their Syrian peers. Children's opinions were shaped by their contact with Syrian students, close friendships, and images portrayed in the media. There were also students who did not express any opinions about discrimination or peer bullying. The responses were coded under the themes of experiences of living in Türkiye, thoughts on returning to Syria, adaptation process, and intergroup relations.

Turkish citizen participants stated that there was no systematic discrimination against Syrian students at school, while Syrian participants, even if not directly affected, said they observed discriminatory behavior toward some of their Syrian friends.

> *3.17.3.1 Experiences of Living in Türkiye*

In the focus group interview conducted with parents, they shared the experiences of Syrian families living in Türkiye in the context of social integration and the cultural changes brought about by this process. Families stated that participation in social life provided them with a new cultural experience and, in a sense, an "enlightenment," especially for those coming from rural areas of Syria. Participants emphasized that, in Syria, families from rural areas often restricted girls from receiving an education or going outside. In contrast, the relatively freer lifestyle in Türkiye—especially for girls—illustrates a shift in social norms.

___We adapted to the environment here, our families went outside, we saw a different culture. It felt like a kind of enlightenment. Especially for those from the villages, not the center. In our villages, girls don't study or go out. But here, they felt a bit freer. That's why they don't want to return to Syria, really *(Participant 1, focus group, Syrian mother).*

This perceived sense of liberation from the perspective of parents also emerges in narratives as one of the main reasons for Syrian children's unwillingness to return.

___There's more freedom here in Türkiye, especially for young girls. They've learned the education system. They've learned about the presidential system in Syria. They know it's hard, and now they ask questions *(Participant 4, focus group, Syrian father).*

Among the interviewed children, Syrian children stated that they like Istanbul, but noted that they can only explore the city when accompanied by their families.

___I love Istanbul. It's a big city with many beautiful places. It also has very nice views. Sometimes when my dad has free time, he takes us out *(Participant 5, 14-year-old Syrian girl).*

> 3.17.3.2 Thoughts on Returning to Syria

This study examined Syrian children under topics such as their access to existing rights, sociodemographic data, access to education, realization of their rights to health, development, and nutrition, the risks they face and their protection needs, their sense of safety, their ability to exercise participation and freedom of expression, access to play, awareness and use of rights, and experiences of discrimination. Although the main focus of the study was not on the return intentions of Syrian children and their parents, the research period coincided with developments in Syria, especially after December 8, 2024, which prompted both children and parents to express a willingness to discuss the possibility of return during the interviews. This reflects the impact of current sensitivities and recent developments on individuals under temporary protection. While Turkish and Syrian children expressed different views on the possibility of returning to their country of origin, Turkish citizen children noted that the instability in Syria may still be ongoing and that returning children could be harmed:

___I think they shouldn't go back. Because it's not safe. I mean, if someone did it once, why wouldn't they do it again? That's how it is *(Participant 1, 16-year-old girl, Turkish citizen).*

Focus group interviews with Syrian parents revealed concerns and factors shaping their reluctance to return. Parents stated that due to the current lack of a safe living environment and the continuation of their children's education, they were not willing to return. However, they expressed a more positive attitude

toward the possibility of returning during the summer vacation. Additionally, parents mentioned their concerns about their children adapting to a country they have never experienced and the risk of being deprived of educational opportunities there. These findings highlight the complex socioeconomic and psychological factors affecting refugee families' decisions to return.

___My children don't want to return to Syria. After feeling free, they asked if we would be going back. We told them they must finish school, not drop out. So now they're not skipping school, they're studying harder. They want to continue their education in Syria, but they say let's finish here first, and then there. No dropping out halfway (Participant 6, Focus group, Syrian mother).

___I've gotten used to being here. If I go back, it would be like returning to hardship again—like starting from scratch. It's the same for our children. We've been in Türkiye for more than six years, and Türkiye is very different from Syria (Participant 4, Focus group, Syrian father).

The parents' statements also reflect uncertainty about the future and concerns about education. Although there is a temporary expectation of staying in Türkiye for "at most one more year," there is no clarity on what returning to Syria would mean for the children. Especially the uncertainty around girls' education, such as whether they can continue to university, is a serious concern. While there are some claims that records made in Türkiye can be transferred to Syria, doubts are expressed regarding the reliability and applicability of this information. This situation resembles the uncertainty experienced during the initial migration period of Syrian refugees. These statements clearly reveal the legal and bureaucratic obstacles faced by refugees, as well as the challenges in making long-term plans and the potential limitations in children's access to education.

___Yes, apparently there's an option—we could stay here for at most one more year. After that, we'll go to Syria, of course with the children. Maybe things will become clear in the next year. Right now, my daughter is in school, and it's uncertain whether she'll be able to continue or attend university. Some say you can register for university here and transfer your records to Syria, but it's uncertain. Just like when we first arrived. Maybe things will become clearer within a year (Participant 2, Focus group, Syrian mother).

Another participant explained Syrian families' desire to stay in Türkiye and the factors influencing this decision. The participant claimed that those wanting to return to Syria typically have financial assets there (a house, car, etc.), otherwise they would still be refugees even in their own country. The uncertainties surrounding legal identity and status indicate that "things are very complicated" and most of the information is merely "spoken words." This suggests that the final decision will likely depend on real-life conditions. The children's reluctance to return stands out as a key factor shaping family plans for the future.

___We want to stay here, and the kids do too... My wife says that if a Syrian wants to return, it means they must have something there—a house, rental income, a car, whatever. That means they have the means. But if not, even in their homeland, they'll still be refugees. They're saying that the ID issue and

such will not be suspended, but we don't know—it's very complicated. Everything is just talk here. But... circumstances will determine it. Of course, our kids don't want to go (Participant 5, Focus group, Syrian mother).

On the other hand, another participant explained her children's desire to return to Syria and the core reasons for this desire through a sense of belonging. Although the children have never experienced Syria personally, strong kinship ties create a strong motivation to return. The parent stated that the children face social isolation in Türkiye and have limited opportunities to go out. This shows that in their current situation, the children are deprived of social interaction, with the park being the only outing and no relatives nearby. In the case of return to Syria, the possibility of constantly being in touch with relatives, socializing together, and being in a community that speaks the same language is cited as the main reason behind the children's desire to return. This analysis reveals the significant impact of the lack of social capital on the psychological well-being and future outlook of refugee children.

My kids want to go back. They're very excited. They don't know Syria, but because they have relatives there, they really want to go. The biggest reason is that here they can't go out easily. At most, they go to the park. They have no relatives here. But in Syria, they'd be in constant contact with relatives. They'd go out together... They feel the absence of relatives, friends, and people who speak the same language (Participant 3, Focus group, Syrian mother).

> 3.17.4 Findings Based on Parent Interviews

- Structural problems in accessing education, health, and social services were clearly expressed by refugee parents. Syrian families face multifaceted barriers to accessing public services, especially due to language, legal status, and lack of information.
- Although the educational attainment levels of Syrian parents are generally low, the school attendance of their children varies. While some children continue with formal education, others drop out due to absenteeism, open education, or early entry into the workforce.
- Syrian parents' participation in working life is significantly limited by gender, health conditions, and caregiving responsibilities. In particular, women remain distant from income-generating activities due to household caregiving duties and are unable to achieve economic independence.
- Among Turkish female participants, education levels vary significantly, ranging from illiteracy to associate degree level. This indicates an unequal distribution of parental guidance capacity regarding their children's education.
- A majority of the women stated that they are housewives; those who are working or wish to work cannot fully participate in the labor force due to a lack of social support. Especially social initiatives (such as Marifet Kitchen) play a supportive role in helping women access the public sphere.
- The participant mothers' responsibilities for their children's care and education are distributed unequally within the household, negatively affecting women's time and resource management.
- Both Turkish and Syrian women participants stated that they carry a

heavy physical and emotional burden in their parenting roles. The unequal gender-based distribution of domestic roles negatively affects women's mental well-being.

> Parents have a high need for psychological support, social solidarity spaces, and family guidance services. Limited access to counseling and guidance services poses risks for both children's development and parents' self-care processes.

4 FINDINGS FROM THE EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

4.1. Participating Institutions

Comprehensive information on the exploratory workshop is provided in the methodology section of the report. This section only briefly recalls the multi-stakeholder structure of the participating institutions and delves into the themes discussed during the sessions. The group work conducted under the themes of education, health, social services, socio-cultural participation, and children's rights revealed both the visibility of children's rights at the local level and the need for inter-institutional cooperation.

4.2. Thematic Areas

During the workshop, participants were divided into five thematic working groups (education, health, social services, socio-cultural participation, and children's rights) to discuss the current situation, identified problems, and proposed solutions. Below is a summary of the key issues and proposals that emerged from each table:

> 4.2.1 Thematic Analysis of the Education Table

At the education table, it was observed that issues such as safety or transportation were not brought up; instead, the focus was on teacher-student behavior, educational content, and the social dimension of education. **Participants frequently emphasized that education should not be reduced to academic success alone, but should also encompass the child's relationship with their social environment, family, and teacher as part of their right to education. The discussion topics at the table are thematically categorized and evaluated below.**

> *Discrimination, Inequality, and Social Exclusion*

Discrimination was among the most frequently mentioned themes at the education table. Participants stated that Syrian children are excluded at schools by teachers and other students, and even that some teachers exhibit discriminatory behavior. It was noted that this situation is not limited to individual attitudes, but is reinforced by systemic inequalities and cultural prejudices.

___The teacher, if we're talking about discrimination, must control it. For example, the teacher calls them 'Syrian' and reports them to the principal, but nothing happens.

___There are cases where a teacher uses a refugee child as punishment by making another child sit next to them.

It was emphasized that the negative attitudes of Turkish children toward their Syrian peers stem from behaviors observed within their own families.

___A Turkish child's attitude toward Syrian children is shaped by what they see from their parents.

In the face of this social exclusion, it was stated that Syrian children tend to fall silent and are unable to develop rights-claiming behavior. It was reported that children are rendered defenseless by fears of being silenced, blamed, or deported.

___For Syrians, it doesn't matter whether you're guilty or innocent—a single complaint is enough. If a complaint is filed and they can't find a lawyer within 3–5 days, they are sent to a removal center. That's why Syrians stay quiet. Even when they're right, they stay quiet. That's why harassment and provocation happen a lot. Especially provocation.

___There's a lot of discrimination. For example, they say, "You're Syrian, sit in the back."

> *Educational Content and Behavioral Issues*

Participants highlighted that educational content is inadequate and does not meet children's developmental needs. It was reported that teachers are struggling with classroom management, disciplinary mechanisms have weakened, and behavioral problems among students have increased.

___For example, among Turkish children, one child curses so much that the teacher simply can't stop them. Then there's no punishment, no discipline for the kids. This might not be directly related, but even teachers are being bullied. Violence against teachers has reached middle schools, and in high schools, it's rampant—students beating teachers, insulting them, there's no respect anymore.

Children's behavioral addictions (especially screen addiction) were said to seriously hinder learning, even at the elementary school level. It was emphasized that early exposure to screens causes delays in reading and writing skills.

___We can add screen addiction—it's a problem for both Turkish and Syrian children. Families give kids a phone to calm them down.

___Because of screen addiction, kids in elementary school can't learn to read and write.

Participants noted that social media and digital content influence children's thought patterns and behaviors, shaping perceptions of gender, privacy, and identity in schools.

___There are crazy trends now—one Turkish child shaved off his eyebrows. Apparently, some models are doing it. Social media brings LGBT into schools. For example, one girl hugged her friend affectionately, and another girl complained to the administration. Kids' minds are working differently now because of what they see on their phones.

> *The Role of Families and Lack of Information*

At the education table, it was emphasized that families lack information regarding their children's education and that their capacity for guidance is weak. In some cases, the authoritarian or indifferent attitudes of families were reported to negatively impact children's academic success and social integration.

It was suggested that NGOs should be involved in parental education, information activities, and combating domestic violence. These suggestions highlight that education should be structured not only for the child but also through support mechanisms targeting their environment.

> *Inequality of Opportunity in Education and Systemic Issues*

Participants stated that supportive mechanisms for children who fall behind, are frequently absent, or underachieve within the education system do not function adequately. Overcrowded classrooms, dispersed teacher attention, lack of educational materials, grade repetition, and language/communication problems create deeper inequalities especially for refugee children. **It was noted that most children directed to open education entered the system due to structural reasons, and this shift is not a right or choice but an obligation.**

> *Suggestions Brought Forward at the Education Table*

Participants' suggestions for solutions focus not only on academic success but also on the social, emotional, and rights-based development of children. These suggestions include strengthening children's ability to engage with learning channels, increasing teacher capacity, establishing systems to monitor student achievement, combating discrimination, raising awareness of rights and support mechanisms, and making role model figures more visible.

- Strengthening children's ability to engage with learning channels
- Increasing social guidance and affirmation
- Educating/informing parents
- Collaborating with NGOs and local authorities to address issues such as domestic violence and pressure
- Parenting education programs
- Establishing systems to monitor student achievement
- Reducing discrimination in classroom environments
- Making role models in society more visible
- Awareness on rights and support mechanisms

- Increasing teacher capacity
- Parenting activities

These suggestions offer a holistic approach to strengthening educational environments at both individual and societal levels in line with the principle of the best interest of the child.

4.2.2 Thematic Analysis of the Health Table

Structural Barriers in Access to Health Services

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes the right of the child to attain the highest possible standard of health and obliges State Parties to make health services accessible without discrimination. However, findings from the workshop indicate that especially refugee and undocumented children living in Sultanbeyli occasionally face difficulties in exercising this right. **The language barrier and uncertainty regarding legal status hinder children's access not only to physical but also to mental health services.** Additionally, both local and refugee communities reportedly experience delays in accessing healthcare due to systemic intensity. Institutional representatives stated that the language barrier in healthcare services not only creates communication difficulties but also undermines essential principles such as privacy, trust, and effectiveness.

We experience language barriers with children under foreigner status. Especially when the interpreter is of a different gender, the children may feel embarrassed. The same problem can disrupt the treatment process in psychotherapy. Sometimes it's necessary to speak with the parent for therapy, and in some cases, the child takes on the role of interpreter. This is very wrong, but we have no other choice.

Undocumented children, although they can receive limited emergency care, are unable to access specialized services, and those services become paid. This results in children being deprived of equal healthcare rights.

When undocumented children go to institutions, they face problems. Even if they benefit from emergency services, access to specialized care is blocked.

Even when emergency appointments are made for undocumented children, they are not assigned an ID, and the treatment becomes paid. Most families cannot afford this.

This situation constitutes a clear violation of both Article 2 of the CRC, which prohibits discrimination, and Article 24, which defines the right to health.

Psychosocial Support and Mental Health Services

When children's mental health needs are not identified early, interventions only occur at advanced stages. This delay not only complicates the treatment process but also increases children's psychological burden. Families' prejudices against psychiatric treatment and lack of knowledge reduce the number of applications to the healthcare system.

___Those in need of psychological support do not apply until symptoms are very advanced, and by then psychiatric intervention is required. We have limited means for early intervention.

Due to families' negative perception of psychotherapy and psychiatric treatment, applications may decrease. For example, OCD [Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder] is very common among children, but it goes undiagnosed solely due to hesitation.

These statements are directly related to Article 24 of the CRC, which includes obligations for preventive health services. Moreover, the failure to address these needs in a timely manner directly affects children's right to education, social participation, and personal development.

> *Lack of Inter-Agency Coordination*

Another frequently emphasized issue at the workshop was the lack of effective information flow between institutions and the fragmented implementation of services. Failure to share critical decisions, such as health measures, with other institutions hinders the effective functioning of the child protection system.

___There are problems in inter-agency coordination. For example, we have no information about the health measure taken for an OCD case. We have never encountered it.

___We informed the institutions about our services so they could make referrals. But we never received any requests.

This picture reveals a lack of a holistic service approach based on the best interests of the child and indicates a situation that contradicts Article 3 of the CRC, which prioritizes the best interests of the child/

> *Nutrition and Food Security Issues*

Children's inadequate nutrition negatively affects not only their health but also their learning capacity and social development. At the workshop, factors such as high school canteen prices and the fear of stigma among children who bring food from home were cited as reasons that elevate food insecurity into a dimension of social exclusion.

___This is one of the most basic rights to life, and when lacking, everything is affected.

___Because of the stigma of being poor in society, children sometimes cannot bring food from home to school.

This issue is directly related to the "right to an adequate standard of living" defined in Article 27 of the CRC. It also shows that social assistance must be provided not only materially but also in a manner that protects dignity and is inclusive.

> *The Situation of Undocumented Children and the Applicability of Legislation*

Undocumented children face serious difficulties in accessing basic rights such as healthcare and education. These issues are addressed only through individual efforts, while institutional solutions remain inadequate. Identification efforts often yield no results, and treatment costs are attempted to be covered through donations and funds.

___Last year, we had an identification initiative for undocumented children through their health problems. But unfortunately, the success rate was very low. We received no feedback from institutions. We carried out the work through personal relations but unfortunately couldn't continue.

___Another issue is with cancer cases—medications are not covered by SGK [Social Security Institution]. Our solution is to look for funds and donations.

This demonstrates that the child's right to health must be defined not as a favor, but as a legal and systematic obligation. It emphasizes the need for social protection systems to operate through institutional and sustainable policies rather than through funds.

> *Examples of Good Practice*

Despite all these problems, there are examples of early intervention and support on the ground. Early diagnostic efforts such as autism screenings and vocational orientation support for children over 15 years of age were cited as positive examples.

___Family health centers administer a five-question test for children. They assess issues like autism screening and articulation problems.

___For children over 15 receiving journeyman training, Girlılay covers the tuition fees and supports vocational development.

These practices are promising steps toward reinforcing equality and early intervention principles in healthcare services. However, such practices need to be institutionalized and mainstreamed, not merely project-based. Furthermore, vocational training programs like journeyman education should be monitored by the relevant authorities in terms of the child's biopsychosocial development, and the best interests of the child should always be prioritized.

> 4.2.3 Thematic Analysis of the Children's Rights Table

The discussions held at the children's rights table during the participatory workshop revealed the individual, institutional, and societal barriers to children's access to fundamental rights in a holistic manner. **Participants agreed that children do not have sufficient knowledge about their rights, that awareness of rights is not systematically instilled, and that there are serious structural shortcomings in children's access to support mechanisms.**

> *Children's Level of Knowledge and Awareness on Rights*

Participants stated that the majority of children do not sufficiently know their rights, and even if they do, they struggle to exercise them. It was emphasized that children can access only limited information through guidance counselors, and these trainings are generally superficial and short-term.

I don't think they know enough. For instance, when we talk about healthy nutrition and their basic access to food, how much access do they really have? When exposed to violence, do they know who to turn to for help? These are often addressed through guidance counselors at schools, but they should be dramatized, based on real-life cases, and more long-term.

It was stated that children who want to learn about their rights often fail to do so due to lack of self-confidence, family pressure, or absence of support mechanisms. Particularly children under pressure tend to distrust external institutions due to not receiving trust from their families.

A child under pressure doesn't even trust us. They can't get trust from their own family first.

> *Family Dynamics and Cultural Barriers to Learning Rights*

Participants emphasized that one of the main barriers preventing children from accessing information about their rights is the attitude of families. Traditional value judgments and authoritarian parenting styles were identified as suppressing children's pursuit of rights.

Some families don't want their children to know their rights. There's a common understanding of 'the father has the final say at home, and the child should act like a child.' Some children in Sultanbeyli can only defend their rights within their own neighborhood due to a belief in "geography is destiny." They can't integrate, and ghettoization occurs.

Some families prefer to hide severe cases such as abuse rather than protecting their children directly. This leads to children falling into a helpless state where they can't even defend their own rights.

A mother of a girl abused by her brother said, "let's ignore it so she won't get divorced from her husband."

> *Institutional Mechanisms, Trust Issues, and System Gaps*

Some participants expressed that the institutional structures created to protect children's rights sometimes fail to function effectively and do not instill trust in children. **Particularly, children staying in institutions reportedly feel unsafe, and those who run away are often returned to the same environment, with no accountability among responsible parties.**

___There are children who run away from institutions—some have run away 15 times. But there's no investigation into those responsible.

___I'm a police officer today but I might not be tomorrow. I hate that I can't fix things. The person responsible for the child who ran away isn't held accountable.

Some children who are unable to access support mechanisms express their sense of helplessness through depression, suicidal thoughts, and withdrawal. **It was highlighted that refugee children, in particular, refrain from turning to state institutions due to language and legal status issues, increasing their risk of neglect or abuse.**

___Migrant children may avoid going to the police out of fear of deportation.

___Syrian children, having witnessed war, are more familiar with weapons and knives. Harassment videos are being watched. Due to living in overcrowded homes, the risk of abuse is high.

> *Access to Public Spaces and Services*

Participants noted that public spaces are not safe or inclusive for children and that existing areas do not meet the physical and social needs of children. It was highlighted that youth aged 12–18 do not use parks and that there is a lack of dynamic, socially engaging spaces suited to this age group.

___Open spaces aren't safe. The 12–18 age group already doesn't go to parks. They want places like 'Millet Garden.' There isn't a proper café in Sultanbeyli to sit. They want something like the gastronomy street in Üsküdar.

> *Policy and Service Recommendations*

The proposed solutions at the table focused on both increasing awareness and strengthening support systems for children. Suggestions included introducing more deterrent penalties, raising awareness through public space activities, expanding educational and social programs, increasing financial support in high-risk areas, and ensuring the safety of children in institutions.

The lack of knowledge children have about their rights is not merely an issue of individual awareness; it is a structural problem directly linked to family structure, access to public services, and societal value systems. Therefore, it is necessary to develop integrated intervention mechanisms targeting not only children but also families, institutions, and local authorities. In this context, it was considered important that institutions such as the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) take a more active role, and that the activities of the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) become more well-known, particularly among children.

> 4.2.4 Thematic Analysis of the Social Service Desk

The discussions held at the social service desk revealed significant structural and practical issues regarding children's access to social support mechanisms. In particular, the fact that services targeting children are conducted through a family-based approach often causes children's individual rights and needs to be sidelined. During the workshop, topics such as the promotion of services, informing children, child labor, the visibility of at-risk groups, and inter-institutional cooperation came to the forefront.

> *Inequality in Knowledge and Awareness of Services*

Institution representatives stated that social services provided to children are mostly structured through families and that children have difficulty understanding the content of the services. Social assistance is often perceived as temporary support provided only during times of economic crisis, and children may interpret these supports as a "sign of poverty."

Are we poor? Why did they come to our house?

Such experiences demonstrate that social services should not only be accessible but also delivered in a restorative and empowering manner. **While the involvement of teachers and public officials as intermediaries in promoting services is a positive effort, the lack of informative content and reliable communication channels directly targeting children is a noticeable gap.**

One institution representative stated that they had been working in the field for a long time and had reached many children, yet families did not even know which institution had provided the assistance. Social assistance, particularly for children, should be considered as part of every child's right to social security and an adequate standard of living, as stated in Articles 26 and 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A rights-based approach to social assistance frames individuals not as aid recipients but as rights-holders, and the state as the duty-bearer. This approach is important in reminding us that social support should not be arbitrary or charity-based, but instead transparent, traceable, accountable, and grounded in a legal framework. At this point, it is considered more important to evaluate how social assistance is provided rather than by whom it is provided.

> *Challenges in Identifying At-Risk Groups*

Participants noted that Syrian children, children with disabilities, girls, younger age groups who cannot access preschool education, and undocumented children remain largely invisible within the social service system. It was expressed that the system remains fragmented and limited in both identifying and monitoring these children.

It's difficult to detect undocumented children.

Issues such as substance use, risk of abuse, and peer bullying are often only noticed through indirect means. Although tools such as routine field scans, home visits, and social media monitoring can help with early risk detection, these practices are not systematic or comprehensive. In particular, the lack of reporting in severe cases such as incest among girls demonstrates how social norms and the culture of silence act as barriers against protective systems.

> *Children's Right to Apply and Institutional Practices*

Children have limited capacity to apply for social services on their own. Legal processes like protective counseling measures often bring children into the system, whereas the number of children who apply voluntarily is very low. Institutions stated that they rarely receive direct applications from children, and that service processes are generally parent-centered.

The counseling process can begin with a court order. If the child doesn't show up, they can be brought in by police force.

This approach does not promote voluntary participation by the child; instead, it reflects a model based on compulsory intervention. To ensure services are designed in line with the best interest of the child, new mechanisms that prioritize children's consent and participation must be developed.

> *Child Labor and Transferred Family Responsibilities*

Examples raised during the workshop indicated that the concept of child labor goes beyond formal economic activity. It also manifests in indirect forms such as "taking on household responsibilities" or "sharing the family burden" from a young age.

There are preschool-aged children who feel they must work because their older brother is working. A six-year-old child should not be worried about their mother being unable to pay the rent.

Such examples show that child labor is not only a legal violation but also a violation of the right to childhood. These conditions, shaped by the transfer of responsibilities within the family and economic pressures, result in early maturity, educational disengagement, and emotional burdens. The solution lies not only in strengthening inspection mechanisms but also in diversifying social support systems according to the unique needs of children.

> *Institutional Coordination and Public Responsibility in Service Delivery*

Another prominent theme was the lack of inter-institutional cooperation. Social services, social assistance, religious services, and security personnel often

intervene in the lives of the same children through differing methods, and these processes are not carried out in coordination. Participants emphasized the need to strengthen mobile teams, communication offices, and guidance mechanisms.

Public responsibility is not limited to identifying or referring children but also includes implementing and monitoring interventions that will transform children's lives. Therefore, all practices within the field of social services must be restructured with a perspective that does not "shift the burden onto others" but embraces the state's obligation. Every point of contact with children should adopt a supportive, protective, and restorative approach.

> 4.2.5 Thematic Analysis on Participation in Social and Cultural Activities

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children's right to rest, leisure, play, and to participate in cultural and artistic activities (Article 31), the right to express their cultural identity (Article 30), and the right to access information (Article 17). Article 29 further emphasizes that education should aim to develop the child's personality, talents, and cultural identity. However, the Republic of Türkiye still maintains its reservations on Articles 17, 29, and 30. In its most recent Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child once again called on Türkiye to lift these reservations. Discussions during the participatory workshop revealed that social and cultural rights remain limited for children living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, low-income families, and refugee backgrounds, failing to provide equal opportunities. This situation highlights both the effects of legal reservations and the structural shortcomings in implementation.

> *Exclusion Based on Preschool Access and Language Barriers*

Particular emphasis was placed on inequalities in preschool education and language barriers as structural obstacles to children's participation in social life. Participants pointed out that preschool education is insufficient due to both physical capacity and cost, and that refugee children's lack of Turkish proficiency prevents them from fully accessing their right to education.

___It's difficult for refugee children to access preschool education. Having 30 students in a class lowers the quality of education. Parents rush to register their children. Those who arrive in time get in; others are left out.

___No Arabic is spoken in class. We teach in Turkish. In fact, children need to receive Turkish language education during preschool so that they can understand the first grade. If they fail to learn it, teachers can't give them attention in the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade.

This situation constitutes a violation of the principle of providing education in an equal and inclusive manner as defined in Article 28 of the UNCRC. **The language barrier becomes not only a pedagogical but also a social barrier to participation.**

> *Barriers to Cultural Participation and Lack of Continuity*

Although the number and variety of cultural activities organized by local institutions such as municipalities and the office of the mufti have increased, children reportedly cannot participate in these events regularly or equally. Key barriers in this area include transportation, membership fees, lack of social awareness, and language barriers.

___Participation is very high at the opening of events, but continuity is low.

___Turkish women attend the courses, but Syrians don't. The language barrier prevents participation.

These findings are directly related to Article 31 of the UNCRC, which guarantees children's right to participate in artistic and cultural activities. The existence of such activities is not enough; children's sustained and dignified participation must be ensured.

> *Demand for Safe Spaces and the Spatial Dimension of Social Cohesion*

It was noted that children cannot access public spaces, existing parks are unsafe, and there is a lack of social spaces where youth can spend their free time.

___Turks don't go to Ziyaülhak Street. Turks don't shop at Syrian-owned stores.

This prevents children from accessing spaces where they can form social identities and develop a sense of belonging.

___The Roma population is in the Mecidiye neighborhood. Migrants are concentrated in the Adil neighborhood. The first settlements were in Turgut Reis, Hamidiye, and Mehmet Akif. These are still the most densely populated areas.

These comments indicate that cultural separation is being reproduced spatially, narrowing common living spaces. According to Article 15 of the UNCRC, children have the right to peaceful assembly and association. Yet, it appears that physical spaces are not planned in a way that supports these rights or facilitates social integration. On the other hand, some participants stated that the perception of insecurity in the district is often fueled by narratives and does not reflect reality.

___Community bonds are still strong. People know each other. The district is small, and its closed zoning prevents crises. Development is controlled. There are many security checkpoints. Apartment prices are low in Esenyurt due to security issues. In Sultanbeyli, prices are high because it is safe.

In this case, it seems necessary to identify and correct the root causes of perceived insecurity in the district.

> *Representation and Lack of Co-Production in Social Cohesion*

Although some institutions are making efforts to contribute to social cohesion, these efforts are reportedly not designed professionally enough or fail to ensure the active participation of refugee children. **The lack of cultural co-production spaces that include both local and refugee children prevents the development of shared living practices.**

___As part of social cohesion, children's choirs could be held in their native languages. Theater clubs could be mixed. Events could be carried out with shared stakeholders. It was done in three languages before, but it wasn't professional enough.

Such good practices are directly related to the principles in Articles 29 and 30 of the UNCRC on preserving cultural identity and active participation in social life. However, current practices show that participation is mostly "performative" or "based on voluntarism," and fragile groups have limited access.

> *Social Capital, Neighborhood Support, and Privacy*

Another striking point raised during the workshop was that trust at the neighborhood level is still preserved, and that these local relationships carry both protective and exclusionary potential. It was emphasized that while community bonds preserve traditional social capital, they may also function as invisible borders for out-groups.

___Sultanbeyli is a safe place. Because it hasn't been opened to zoning, its development is planned.

___Community ties are still strong. People know each other.

However, despite the emphasis by local authorities on safety and neighborhood relations, residents' perceptions regarding security and solidarity differ. In this context, it becomes clear that social services and cultural activities must consider not only physical access but also the experience of social acceptance and inclusion. Access to social and cultural rights should not be limited to simply reaching an activity—it must also include being represented and feeling a sense of belonging within that activity.

> 4.3 Institutional Opinions and Common Emphases

- Access to education, healthcare, social services, and cultural rights takes place unequally among children. In particular, refugee, undocumented, and poor children benefit less from the system; this may reinforce structural discrimination.
- The language barrier directly limits refugee children's access to both education and health services. The lack of interpreters leads to multidimensional consequences such as violations of privacy, learning difficulties, and social exclusion.
- Support mechanisms for children are mostly conducted through a family-based approach, and children's individual needs and voices remain in

the background. This points to the existence of a system that does not recognize the child as a direct rights-holder.

- Institutional support and services are not sufficiently promoted, and children and families cannot access rights-based information. Social assistance is still perceived as "aid" or "charity," and the rights-based approach is not sufficiently internalized.
- Communication and coordination among institutions remain weak, and interventions aimed at children lack coherence. This leads to gaps in the child protection system and causes some risky situations to be overlooked.
- Discrimination is particularly widespread in educational settings and is reflected in the discourse and attitudes of some adults, including teachers. Certain groups, especially Syrian children, are subject to systematic exclusion, and children who cannot develop rights-claiming behavior become silent.
- The need for psychosocial support is widespread, but applications are late and insufficient. Families' concerns about stigmatization, false beliefs, and lack of knowledge, as well as unawareness of application mechanisms, hinder psychological support processes.
- Screen addiction, the influence of digital content, and gender-related issues negatively affect children's value systems and social cohesion. It has been noted that the education system needs comprehensive and contemporary approaches to these issues.
- A group of families have low levels of knowledge and guidance capacity; certain parental attitudes prevent children from learning and defending their rights. Parenting education, awareness-raising efforts, and NGO cooperation have emerged as basic needs in this area.
- Public spaces are perceived as limited in terms of their suitability, safety, and inclusiveness for children. Especially for the 12–18 age group, there is a noticeable lack of safe, accessible, and encouraging spaces for socializing. Efforts are needed to change this perception.
- Social services cannot adequately fulfill their protective role regarding indirect violations such as child labor and intra-family burden sharing. The visibility of girls, children forced to work at a young age, and those bearing household responsibilities remains low.
- The rights-based understanding of social assistance remains institutionally weak; support is mostly provided on a short-term and project-based basis. This creates problems in terms of both sustainability and children's sense of belonging and dignity.
- Children's right to application and direct access to institutions is limited. Most services are still carried out with a parental focus, and voluntary participation and active consent of children are not sufficiently included in the system.
- In participation in social and cultural activities, refugee children face issues of accessibility and continuity. Joint production spaces and practices that consider multilingualism and cultural representation remain limited.
- Although social relations appear to be preserved at the neighborhood level, these relationships may produce exclusionary mechanisms. While fellow-villager relations serve as supportive social capital on one hand, they may become a boundary line for out-group children on the other.

> 4.4 Intersection of the Workshop and Research Findings

When comparing the quantitative and qualitative data analyses conducted within the scope of the *"Being a Child in Sultanbeyli"* research with the findings of the workshop held on April 9, 2025, it is observed that there are strong points of intersection between the structural and practical problems children face in accessing their fundamental rights and the proposed solutions. This section thematically integrates the research findings with the workshop data and evaluates them in line with the relevant articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

> **Unequal Access to Services and Structural Discrimination**

The research and workshop findings revealed that there are some inequalities among children in access to education, health, social services, and cultural rights. Especially Syrian, undocumented, and poor children are at risk of systematic exclusion. This clearly contradicts Article 2 of the UNCRC, which regulates the prohibition of discrimination. Both public representatives and children point out that discrimination is reproduced not only on an individual level but also on institutional and societal levels.

> **Language Barriers and Violations of Privacy**

The language barrier, frequently mentioned in the workshop, is also confirmed by the research findings. Due to the lack of interpreters, Syrian children are unable to receive support in child-friendly environments when accessing education and health services, which undermines the right to expression, access to information, and health as defined in Articles 12, 13, and 24 of the UNCRC. Violations of privacy were also mentioned, especially in cases where interpreters of mismatched gender were used in therapy processes.

> **Children's Voices Being Overlooked**

Both child interviews and workshop discussions have shown that support mechanisms are still largely family-based, and children's individual needs and voices are not sufficiently heard. This contradicts Article 12 of the UNCRC – the Right to Participation. Especially considering that children should be protected and supported in expressing their views on matters that concern them, it is important to ensure children's direct right to application. In this regard, children's voluntary participation and influence on institutional processes are quite limited.

> **Weakness of Rights-Based Approach in Social Assistance**

The perception of social assistance, also emphasized by various institution representatives during the workshop, is exemplified in the research through children's question, "Are we poor?" Preventing the transformation of aid into charity and grounding social security as an obligation is necessary. In this context, the necessity of rights-based provision of social assistance is emphasized in line with Articles 26 and 27 of the UNCRC.

> **Lack of Coordination Among Institutions**

Both research data and workshop discussions reveal that services aimed at children are sometimes carried out in a scattered, uncoordinated, and challenging manner. This can lead to risky children being overlooked or delayed in accessing services, or not accessing them at all. This deficiency demon-

strates the need for effective implementation of the principle of the Best Interests of the Child as outlined in Article 3 of the UNCRC. It is important to take the UNCRC as a framework in ongoing efforts to protect field workers and prevent burnout, to protect the best interests of the child, and to adopt child-friendly and facilitative approaches.

- **Failure to Meet the Need for Psychosocial Support**

  The limited and delayed accessibility of support systems for children's psychological well-being also emerged in the research findings as being associated with parents' biases, lack of knowledge, and fear of stigmatization. This deficiency points to the need to address the gaps in fulfilling the obligations related to child protection and Article 24 of the UNCRC.

- **Digital Dangers and Difficulties in Social Cohesion**

  Screen addiction, the impact of digital content on perceptions of gender, and its disruptive effects on social cohesion have attracted the attention of both children and public officials. The fact that these risks have not yet translated into awareness in the education system negatively affects children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. This contradiction is open to debate in light of Article 29 of the UNCRC – the Aims of Education.

- **Insecurity of Public Spaces**

  The lack of safe, accessible, and inclusive public spaces for children was strongly expressed in both the research and the workshop. The lack of spaces where children, especially those aged 12–18, can socialize, and the difficulty in accessing existing ones, negatively affect not only the right to leisure but also the feelings of participation, belonging, and representation (UNCRC Articles 15 and 31).

- **Invisibility of Vulnerable Groups and Lack of Intervention**

  Issues such as child labor, intra-family burden sharing, and restriction of girls' mobility were addressed in both the research and the workshop. The inability to systematically monitor and recognize these groups highlights the need to redesign social services in line with the best interests of the child.

- **Participatory Service Design and Children's Rights Literacy**

  During the workshop and research process, it was observed that children's level of rights knowledge was low, guidance services were insufficient, and there were gaps in promoting support mechanisms. This finding suggests that the obligation to promote rights under Article 42 of the UNCRC is not sufficiently fulfilled at the local level.

5 GENERAL EVALUATION

The study *"Being a Child in Sultanbeyli"* examined the access of Turkish citizen and Syrian children aged 12–18 living in the Sultanbeyli district to their rights from a holistic perspective, in line with the principle of the best interests of the child, which forms the foundation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Conducted by the Refugees Association within the scope of UNICEF's "Accountability for Children, Advocacy for Rights (ACAR) Project," this study aimed to make the obstacles children face more visible and contribute to the development of rights-based local policy proposals, eventually turning these proposals into a policy document to enhance children's access to rights.

Using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the research presented systematic findings on multidimensional areas of children's lives, including living standards, health, education, access to social services, safety, participation, experiences of discrimination, and cultural rights. The data clearly show that the challenges children face are structural and systemic rather than individual. **While Syrian children mainly encounter barriers such as language, lack of identification, discrimination, poverty, and difficulties in accessing services, Turkish citizen children face issues related to the quality of the education system, family pressure, and social exclusion. Common vulnerabilities were also identified across both groups, including child labor, school dropout, lack of psychosocial support, and risk of abuse.**

Sociodemographic analyses revealed that although Turkish and Syrian children come from different cultural backgrounds, they grow up under similar socio-economic conditions. The majority of children interviewed lived in crowded households, with an average of three to six siblings, which may lead to increased household responsibilities and the neglect of individual needs. While fragmented family structures were more apparent among Syrian children, many Turkish citizen children were also observed to be facing similar socio-economic difficulties with limited resources. This highlights the class-based commonalities and shared vulnerabilities in their daily life experiences.

Research findings emphasize that informing parents about children's rights, effective communication, and conflict resolution methods will both support the protection and development rights of children and help establish healthy family relationships. These findings are directly related to Articles 5 (parental guidance in the exercise of child rights) and 18 (shared parental responsibility and state support) of the UNCRC. Moreover, statements related to gender-based discrimination indicate that children internalize gender roles at an early age, which

leads to restricted living spaces and limited educational and social participation opportunities, particularly for girls. This social norm pressure constitutes a structural barrier that limits children's individual development and potential.

This research highlights the critical importance of not only ensuring access to services for children but also preserving dignity, enabling equal and inclusive participation, and involving children in decision-making processes. Participatory data collection processes allowed for a deeper understanding of childhood by centering children's own experiences, and the children's positive feedback on the interviews demonstrated the value of this approach. The dialogue workshop held with local institutional representatives enabled discussion of findings and the development of multi-stakeholder solutions.

This analysis, specific to Sultanbeyli, serves as a guide for local governments, public institutions, and civil society organizations to act collaboratively in creating safe, inclusive, and fair living environments for children. **While the study emphasizes that services for children should go beyond mere quantitative access and be grounded in principles of quality, dignity, participation, and safety, it also draws attention to the necessity of social policies shaped by intercultural sensitivity, promotion of social cohesion, and the fight against discrimination.** One of the key outcomes of this study is its identification of not only shared problems in accessing rights but also distinct vulnerabilities based on citizenship status, gender, and age. In this respect, it becomes evident that a child-focused and rights-based social policy approach must take into account the unique needs of different groups. This report serves as a guiding resource for policymakers, implementers, and all institutions engaged in advocacy, as it not only identifies existing problems but also includes concrete, field-based recommendations for overcoming them.

6 POLICY AND SERVICE DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

The inequalities observed in children's access to education, health, and social services result in reduced benefit from the system, especially for refugee, undocumented, poor, and disabled children, thereby reinforcing structural discrimination. Developing holistic solutions for these problem areas is of great importance.

Overcoming the Language Barrier and Supporting Multilingualism: To overcome language-based difficulties faced by Syrian children in education, mother-tongue support programs should be expanded. In this context, practices such as Arabic literacy clubs, bilingual (Arabic-Turkish) children's books, and play workshops should be promoted, and children's development in both Arabic and Turkish should be systematically monitored. Articles 29 and 30 of the UNCRC safeguard children's right to preserve and develop their mother tongue. Accordingly, Arabic courses and psychosocial support programs should be offered to children with insufficient mother tongue skills, and feelings of exclusion caused by language deficiencies should be reduced.

Teachers and peers should also gain awareness of multilingual environments through school-based awareness programs and school social work practices. Similarly, to facilitate the participation of adults in social life, accessible Turkish language courses should be increased and neighborhood-based language workshops supported. Moreover, Turkish citizen children should also benefit from second-language education opportunities, and the quality and accessibility of existing language courses should be improved.

In this regard, the Turkish Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (2023–2028) identifies supporting children's psychosocial development, increasing rights awareness, and expanding access to protective-preventive services as strategic goals (MoFSS, 2023). However, the lack of specific and systematic strategies addressing multilingualism, access to mother-tongue education, and overcoming language barriers in the document is notable. Within Strategic Goal 1.2, which focuses on "implementing activities to promote children's rights," policies tailored to the special needs of children living in multilingual environments must be developed. These strategies should be supported not only for children but also through training and awareness efforts targeting teachers, parents, and school personnel, which will be decisive in creating an inclusive school climate.

Raising Awareness of Child Rights and Strengthening a Culture of Seeking Rights: The Ministry of Family and Social Services' Strategic Plan for 2024–2028

includes the expansion of protective and preventive services for children, the development of psychosocial support practices, and the implementation of awareness activities on children's rights (MoFSS, 2023: pp. 110–112). However, the plan does not include a unique strategy for fostering a "culture of seeking rights," particularly when children experience violations, to help them recognize the violation, access remedies, and receive support during the application process. Yet, General Comment No. 12 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasizes not only the right of children to express their views but also the importance of incorporating those views into decision-making processes and enabling individual access to complaints mechanisms when needed (CRC/C/GC/12, 2009).

In this context, mechanisms such as the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) and the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) should be made more child-friendly, with simplified application processes and expanded awareness campaigns. Although child-friendly access is available within the KDK, it is believed that awareness among children remains low. Structuring all access in a multilingual format is expected to further enhance accessibility. Additionally, preparing "rights-based awareness and application guides" for children and parents and conducting informative activities at schools, social service institutions, and community levels using these guides would be valuable. These recommendations will contribute to the realization of children's right to participation and the dissemination of a rights-based culture in line with Articles 12, 17, and 42 of the UNCRC.

Legal Documentation and Access to Rights: Comprehensive legal and social support mechanisms must be developed to ensure the full participation of children without legal documentation in social life. Registration issues should be resolved both locally and nationally, and for children encountering educational or social support services that are not age- or developmentally appropriate, psychosocial counseling services and facilitative guidance tools should be established. Until the child's legal presence is documented, uninterrupted access to essential rights and services (education and health) must be guaranteed. Children without identification should be enabled to benefit from these services through documents brought from their country of origin. In cases where the child has no documentation, alternative solutions should be developed considering the principle of the best interests of the child. With the awareness that having legal identification is critical for access to fundamental rights, comprehensive awareness campaigns should be conducted for children and parents. Programs such as mother-tongue education and cultural activities should be developed to enhance the psychosocial resilience of children facing identity conflicts and to support their cultural identities. Effective collaborations should be encouraged between civil society organizations and local governments to accelerate the identification and integration of undocumented children into the system.

Development of Psychosocial Support Programs: Special psychosocial support programs must be developed for children who experience difficulties due to migration processes and fragmented family structures. In particular, emotional challenges and the loss of familial bonds experienced through family reunification processes should be addressed through holistic and individualized support mechanisms. In this direction, school social work practices should be expanded and strengthened. School social workers should directly support children in areas such as post-trauma care, fostering belonging, crisis intervention, combating social exclusion, and coordinating with families.

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defines school social work as one of the key fields of practice that plays an equalizing role in children's access to academic achievement. According to IFSW, social workers are responsible for developing rights-based, culturally sensitive, and participatory models within educational institutions to enhance children's well-being (IFSW, 2022). In this framework, strengthening school social work means not only providing individual support but also addressing structural inequalities at a systemic level. These recommendations are directly related to children's rights to "physical and psychological recovery" and "reintegration into society" as stated in Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, they are in line with the objectives set forth in the Ministry of Family and Social Services' Strategic Plan 2024–2028 to support children's psychosocial development (MFSS, 2023).

Parental Employment and Child Welfare: Considering the ongoing gender-based unequal division of labor within households and its negative impact on child welfare, policies should be developed to support especially women's participation in employment. Neighborhood-based employment programs for women should address the cultural and social needs of refugee women in particular and minimize barriers such as language, childcare, and transportation. Integration into the local economy should be accelerated through microcredit, entrepreneurship training, and cooperative models, and practices that facilitate access to social security for women working informally should be expanded. Alternative working models such as flexible and part-time work contracts should be recognized under social security to ensure secure participation in employment. Turkish language courses should be integrated with vocational training, and the expansion of childcare services should be prioritized. The number of affordable, accessible, and high-quality nurseries/daycare centers should be increased; childcare alternatives compatible with flexible working hours should be developed, and incentives should be offered to employers to provide childcare support.

Establishment of Child-Friendly Spaces/Centers: The current findings and international principles on children's rights show the need for comprehensive interventions to support children's welfare and development. In this context, it is crucial to develop neighborhood-based social service models and to establish accessible child centers based on the unique demographic profiles of neighborhoods. Finally, **to promote active participation of children in decision-making processes, it is essential to establish neighborhood forums and children's councils, and to encourage children to have a say over their living environments, which is indispensable for their active integration into social life.**

Establishment of Parental Support Programs: In line with Articles 5 and 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is essential to expand parenting education programs. These programs should include workshops on children's rights, positive parent-child communication, and gender equality, thereby enhancing families' child-rearing capacities through a rights-based approach.

Reducing Financial Constraints and Supporting Social Participation: To dress the negative effects of common financial constraints on children's participation in social life, access to education, and psychological well-being, an inclusive and rights-based approach must be adopted. **Support to parents should not be limited to financial aid; instead, it should include multidimensional support through access to education, information about social services, and child-friendly programs.** Local governments should ensure access to

free cultural, artistic, and sports activities in disadvantaged neighborhoods to guarantee children's equal right to participation. **Information about social services should be provided directly to children through age-appropriate communication materials, and rights-based awareness sessions should be held in schools by guidance counselors and social workers.** During social service interventions, children's consent should be obtained, and a reassuring, non-stigmatizing communication style should be used regarding home visits and aid processes. Municipalities, Social Service Centers, and NGOs should conduct joint promotional and referral activities with a child-friendly focus, and develop application guides, help desks, and confidential counseling channels for children. Neighborhood-based social service models should be developed, and accessible child centers should be established in consideration of neighborhood profiles. Parenting education programs should be expanded, and families should be supported through workshops on children's rights, positive communication, and gender equality. Gender awareness programs targeting girls should be planned both in schools and at the community level, and safe mobility spaces should be strengthened. Special psychosocial support programs should be developed for children living in fragmented family structures and affected by migration. Neighborhood forums and children's councils that encourage child participation should be established, and children should be encouraged to have a say over their living environments.

Enhancing Equity and Quality in the Education System: In order to increase girls' agency in school selection processes, family-based information and guidance programs should be developed. Areas with high rates of transition to open education should be monitored to assess whether such transitions are voluntary and informed. Discriminatory practices based on nationality, language, or religion should be prevented in the placement of refugee children in schools, and children aspiring for careers in arts, design, and creative fields should be provided with guidance and support. To ease the economic concerns of parents, scholarships, transportation support, and free extracurricular activities should be increased for children. Early warning systems should be developed to prevent school dropout, using multiple data such as absenteeism, grade repetition, and teacher feedback (OECD, 2020). Considering social factors such as discrimination and peer bullying as reasons for school disengagement, inclusive educational environments should be established to enhance children's sense of belonging. Accelerated and remedial education programs should be developed for children who have never attended school or who attended for only a short period, and awareness programs should be implemented for families and teachers. Special attention should be given to ensuring safe school transportation for girls, and transportation and school supply support should be provided to children who leave school due to financial hardship. For children aged 16 and above, vocational guidance, life skills training, and reforms to open education systems should be made, making open education a more structured and meaningful alternative. Planning gender awareness programs and strengthening safe spaces for girls both in schools and at the community level are critical steps toward girls' empowerment.

Access to Health Services and Psychosocial Support: Since the language barrier is a major obstacle to refugee children's access to health rights, continuous and qualified interpreter support should be provided in health institutions, considering the child's gender and psychosocial condition during interpreter assignment. Multilingual informational materials and guiding brochures should

be developed to facilitate refugee families' access to services. **To identify children's mental health needs early, mental health screenings should be conducted in schools, and informative seminars and guidance activities should be expanded to reduce families' stigmas around mental health services.** The relationship between school guidance services/social workers and families should be strengthened, and counseling systems should be supported. Free school lunch programs should be expanded for children living in disadvantaged households to ensure access to healthy and adequate nutrition, and healthy food options should be offered in school canteens. Health education curricula should include interactive and practical methods to increase children's interest and health literacy. To increase the effectiveness of services, a child referral and monitoring system should be established among health, education, and social service institutions, and local-level child coordination boards should be formed. Flexible procedures and exceptional arrangements should be developed to ensure that all children, regardless of legal status, can access basic health services equally and unconditionally. Structured family support programs should be created with the accompaniment of social workers to increase family awareness and active participation in psychological support processes.

Prevention of Child Labor and Safe Working Environments: To prevent child labor and safeguard children's right to education, local-level guidance and monitoring mechanisms should be developed to prevent long-term, irregular, and informal child labor within family businesses. In this regard, **the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and social service units should cooperate to periodically assess children's working conditions.** The distinction between children in vocational training and those in hazardous work should be clearly defined; school-based internships and skills training programs should be strictly supervised to ensure they do not disrupt children's learning processes. Children's frequent references to "family pressure" and "sense of obligation" as reasons for working should be addressed through parental counseling and awareness programs. Such programs should prioritize refugee and low-income households to enhance effectiveness in combating child labor. Early warning systems based on shared data among school absenteeism records, healthcare service data, and municipal field observations should be established to identify children working informally. For children who express a desire to work "for development," child rights-based, safe, and supervised youth employment programs should be designed, structured to complement and support their education. In this context, the fact that the National Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (2013–2017) has expired and has not been updated indicates a significant policy gap (MLSS, 2017). Türkiye must urgently prepare a new National Action Plan and develop intervention strategies tailored to changing conditions and especially to new vulnerable groups (e.g., migrant children). Despite this gap, the Strategic Objective 1.2 defined in Türkiye's Children's Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (2023–2028)—"supporting children's psychosocial development, protecting them from risks, and promoting children's rights"—can provide a holistic framework for combating child labor (MFSS, 2023). However, it is critical that this strategic objective be implemented in a way that directly covers risk assessment, monitoring, and prevention areas related to child labor.

Physical Safety and Social Integration: To ensure children's physical and psychological safety and to support their social development, neighborhood lighting should be improved and dark streets should be addressed. **Parks and school surroundings should be regularly monitored for safety, and safe,**

child-friendly play and socialization areas should be increased. However, in addition to physical arrangements, children's perceptions of public spaces must also be considered. Within the scope of this study, public officials stated that the feelings of insecurity expressed by children in Sultanbeyli were shaped more by social media and parental concerns than by concrete threats. This situation particularly limits girls' access to social spaces and indirectly hinders children's participation in social life. The rights to participate in social life and to rest and leisure, guaranteed by Articles 15 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, require that children feel safe in public spaces not only physically but also perceptually. Therefore, in addition to enhancing security measures, social awareness activities should be conducted to support children's positive perceptions of public spaces and to strengthen their sense of safety. Parents should be guided on media literacy and safe communication with children, and schools should implement educational programs that teach children safe behaviors. Neighborhood-level volunteer networks sensitive to social solidarity and child safety should be established. Mechanisms that encourage children to express their views at home and in school should be expanded, beginning with small decisions to strengthen their voice. Considering the lower rates of help-seeking among Syrian children—especially boys—social support systems that foster intercultural trust should be established in schools. Children's avoidance of seeking help due to reasons such as "not being able to get support" or "not trusting" indicates the need to strengthen school guidance services and expand school social work. Peer support systems, trusted teacher contacts, and child-friendly consultation points at the neighborhood level should be established to facilitate safe help-seeking by children. Parents and teachers should be informed about recognizing children's emotional needs and establishing supportive dialogue; guidance efforts that strengthen children's social and emotional security should be expanded.

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APPENDICES

> Appendix-1 Informed Assent form for Children

Dear ……,

My name is…… We are a research team consisting of Suzan Oktay Erol, Neşe Şahin Taşğın, and Gökçe Ceylan, and we are conducting this research as part of the *"Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project"* with the support of the Association for Solidarity with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. As part of this research, we will conduct surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with children between the ages of 12 and 18. Through these activities, we aim to identify the root causes of the challenges faced by children living in Sultanbeyli and to develop policy recommendations for creating a child-friendly environment where children can access their rights and feel better. If you agree to participate in this research, we will ask for your help with the …… part of the study.

Before reaching out to you, we obtained ethical approval for this research from the Non-Invasive Research Ethics Committee of Maltepe University. Participation in the study is entirely ***voluntary.*** Before deciding whether to participate, you should talk with your mother or father and ask for their opinion. We will also inform them about the study and get their permission. Even if your parents say "yes," you can still say "no." It is completely your choice, and if you do not want to participate, you don't have to. No one will be upset or angry with you. Even if you say "yes" now, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study later. It is entirely up to you. Refusing to participate will not change how we or your family treat you.

You can ask me any questions you have now or later. My phone number and email address are written on this paper. If you agree to participate in the study, please write your name and surname below. You and your family will be given a copy of this form.

Thank you very much for contributing to our study and to the world of science by participating.

Participant Statement

I have been informed about this research conducted by Suzan Oktay Erol, Neşe Şahin Taşğın, and Gökçe Ceylan as part of the "Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project." I have received explanations about the purpose of the study, how it will be conducted, and the confidentiality of the collected data. I was informed that I can reach the researchers via the email addresses provided below if I have any questions. I have been told that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point and that I will not be held responsible if I choose to do so. I declare that I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research.

If you agree to participate in the study and allow audio recording, please mark the box below with an "X" and continue.

☐ I agree.

Child Participant:

Name Surname:

Date:

Parent/Guardian of the Child:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

(If Applicable) Interpreter Present During Interview:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

Research Team:

Researchers: Suzan Oktay Erol, Neşe Şahin Taşğın, Gökçe Ceylan

Address: Maltepe University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
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E-mail: suoktay@hotmail.com, nesetasgin@maltepe.edu.tr, gokceceylan@maltepe.edu.tr

Researcher Conducting the Interview:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

> Appendix-2 Informed Consent form for Adults

Dear Participant,

This research is conducted as part of the *"Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project"* by a research team consisting of Suzan Oktay Erol, Neşe Şahin Taşğın, and Gökçe Ceylan, with the support of the Association for Solidarity with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. As part of the study, focus group discussions will be held with local community members and refugee parents who have children between the ages of 6 and 12. The aim of this research is to identify the root causes of the difficulties faced by children living in Sultanbeyli and to develop policy recommendations for creating a child-friendly environment where children can access their rights and feel more secure.

Before contacting you, the research received Ethical Committee Approval from the Non-Invasive Research Ethics Committee of Maltepe University to ensure its compliance with ethical standards. Your participation in this study is entirely **voluntary.** If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any stage. Should you withdraw, you will not bear any responsibility, and your decision will be fully respected. If you agree to participate, and give your explicit consent, your interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed for content analysis. If you do not consent to audio recording, no recording will take place and your responses will be noted manually. The audio files and transcripts obtained from the interviews will be encrypted, not shared with any institution or individual, and used only for scientific purposes in an anonymized format. The study does not include any questions that would reveal your identity. All personal and identity-related information gathered during the research will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. The interviews will last approximately 150 minutes. During the session, you are expected to answer all questions sincerely, without any external pressure or guidance, and in the way that feels most accurate to you.

If you have any questions before, during, or after the research, you are welcome to ask the research team. You may also request information about the results after the study concludes. We thank you for taking the time to participate in our research.

Participant Statement

I have been informed about this research conducted by the research team consisting of Suzan Oktay Erol, Neşe Şahin Taşğın, and Gökçe Ceylan as part of the "Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project." I have received explanations regarding the purpose of the research, how it will be conducted, and the confidentiality of the data collected. I have been provided with the email addresses of the researchers in case I have any questions. I have been informed that I have the right to withdraw from the research at the beginning or any stage, and that I will not bear any responsibility if I choose to do so. I declare that I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research.

If you agree to participate and to be audio recorded, please mark the box below with an "X" and proceed.

☐ I agree.

Child Participant:

Name Surname:

Date:

Parent/Guardian of the Child:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

(If Applicable) Interpreter Present During Interview:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

Research Team:

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Researcher Conducting the Interview:

Name Surname:

Date:

Signature:

> Appendix-3 Children's Rights Access Survey for Refugee Children Aged 12-18

Introduction

Hello! This survey has been prepared to understand how well children and youth aged 12–18 living in Sultanbeyli can access their rights, needs, and expectations. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. Please answer the questions sincerely and accurately. Thank you!

Date of the Survey :

Name of the Surveyor :

Section 1: Introduce Yourself

1 How old are you? _____

2 Your Gender: [ ] Girl [ ] Boy [ ] Prefer not to say

3 Which city were you born in? .....

4 How long have you been living in Sultanbeyli? .....

5 Which neighborhood do you live in? .....

6 What is your mother tongue? (You may select more than one)

[ ] Kurdish [ ] Arabic [ ] Turkish [ ] Other *(please specify)* .....

7 Can you speak your mother tongue? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

8 Can you write in your mother tongue? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

9 Can you speak Turkish? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

10 Which languages do you know? (You may select more than one)

[ ] Kurdish [ ] Arabic [ ] Persian

[ ] Turkish [ ] Other *(please specify)* .....

11 Do you have an official identity card? [ ] Yes [ ] No

12 Have you ever faced a problem because you didn't have an ID card?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

13 Have you ever been unable to go to school or the doctor because you didn't have an ID?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

14 Do you live with your family? [ ] Yes [ ] No

15 (If no) Who do you live with? .....

16 How many people live in your home including yourself?

[ ] 2-3 people [ ] 4-5 people [ ] 6-7 people
[ ] 7-8 people [ ] 8-9 people [ ] 10 +

17 How many siblings live with you in the house?

[ ] 0 [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6 or more siblings

18 Do you live in the same house as your mother? [ ] Yes [ ] No

19 Do you live in the same house as your father? [ ] Yes [ ] No

20 Does your mother work? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know

21 Does your father work? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know

22 Thinking about your family's financial situation, please select the option that best describes your situation:

[ ] My family's financial situation is sufficient to meet my and my siblings' needs.

[ ] We often don't have enough money even for basic needs like food and rent.

[ ] We can barely get by from paycheck to paycheck.

[ ] We can manage as long as we don't buy luxury or unnecessary items.

[ ] I don't know.

Section 2: Right to Education

23 Do you go to school?

[ ] Yes *(If yes, proceed to question 24)*

[ ] No *(If no, start from question 23.1)*

23.1 Have you ever attended school before?

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

(If no, skip to the Health section, question 37; if yes, continue to 23.2)

23.2 Which grade did you leave school?

[ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6

[ ] 7 [ ] 8 [ ] 9 [ ] 10 [ ] 11 [ ] 12

23.3 What was the main reason you left school? *(You may select more than one. After this question, continue with the Health section, question 37)*

[ ] I left school due to identity issues.

[ ] I left school because my school changed location and the new one was too far.

[ ] I started working, so I left school.

[ ] We moved to a different city/district/neighborhood.

[ ] I left because I didn't want to go to school.

[ ] I left school because my family didn't want me to attend.

[ ] I left school due to financial difficulties.

[ ] I had problems with my peers..

[ ] I left because I was subjected to discrimination.

[ ] I left school because I didn't know Turkish / had difficulty understanding it.

[ ] I left due to health issues.

[ ] Other: .....

24 Do you attend school regularly? [ ] Yes [ ] No

25 Which grade are you in?

[ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6 [ ] 7 [ ] 8 [ ] 9 [ ] 10 [ ] 11 [ ] 12

26 Do you have difficulty at school because of language?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

27 Do you enjoy going to school?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

28 How do you get to school?

[ ] On foot
[ ] Minibus
[ ] Bus
[ ] School shuttle
[ ] Our own vehicle
[ ] Other: .....

29 Do you eat breakfast on school days?

[ ] No, I don't eat breakfast.
[ ] Sometimes I eat breakfast.
[ ] I usually eat breakfast.
[ ] I always eat breakfast.

30 How do you get your breakfast?

[ ] I eat at home.
[ ] I buy something on the way to school (from a bakery, simit seller, etc.)
[ ] I buy from the school canteen.
[ ] I bring food from home and eat at school.
[ ] Other: .....

31 Do you eat lunch at school?

[ ] No, I don't.
[ ] Sometimes I do.
[ ] I usually do.
[ ] I always do.

32 How do you get your lunch?

[ ] I eat at home.
[ ] I buy something on the way to school (from a bakery, simit seller, etc.)
[ ] I buy from the school canteen.
[ ] I bring food from home and eat at school.
[ ] Other: .....

33 Please read the following statements and mark the option that best describes your situation:

	Completely True	Partially True	Not very true	Not true at all
I prefer staying home instead of going to school.				
I prefer working instead of going to school.				
I prefer spending time with friends in the neighborhood instead of going to school.				
I feel happy when I am at school.				
I feel safe when I am at school.				
I believe I will have a good future because I am studying.				
Compared to others, I see myself as a successful student.				
When I have a problem at school, I know whom to ask for help.				
If I have a problem at school, I can share it with my friends.				
When I have a problem at school, I can go to the guidance counselor.				
I have close friends at school.				
I am someone who is liked among my friends.				
There are school staff members who treat me in unwanted (disturbing) ways.				
There are friends at school I have problems with.				
My family wants me to continue my education.				
My family visits me at school.				
My family comes to meet my teachers.				
I spend time with friends I made at school after school hours.				

34 If there is anything that makes it difficult for you to go to school, can you explain it in one sentence?

.....

35 Do you ever consider leaving school for any reason?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

36 *(If yes)* Can you briefly explain why you are considering leaving school?

.....

Section 3: Right to Health

37 Do you have sufficient knowledge about healthy eating and hygiene?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

38 Do you feel healthy?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

39 Do you think you are eating healthily?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

40 Can you easily go to the doctor when you are sick?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

41 Are you treated with respect in healthcare institutions?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

42 Do you have difficulty communicating with healthcare staff because of language?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

43 Can you easily access your medication?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

44 Please read the following statements and mark the option that best describes your situation:

	Completely True	Partially True	Not Really True	Not True at All
I take a bath once or twice a week.				
I have breakfast every morning.				
I eat meat, chicken, or fish two or three times a week.				
I eat fresh fruit every day.				
I consume dairy products (milk, yogurt, ayran, etc.) at least once a day.				
I brush my teeth twice a day.				
I do sports/training at least twice a week.				

Section 4: Work Experience

45 Have you ever had any work experience?

[ ] Yes [ ] No *(If no, skip to question 51)*

46 *(If yes)* How long have you worked?

[ ] Less than 1 month [ ] 1-3 months [ ] 3-6 months

[ ] 6-9 months [ ] 9-12 months [ ] More than 1 year

47 Are you currently working?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

48 Thinking about your most recent job, where did you work?

[ ] Street market / Vendor
[ ] Textile, garment / Worker, apprentice
[ ] Clothing / Salesperson
[ ] Food / Waiter, busboy
[ ] Food / Factory worker, apprentice
[ ] With a tradesperson / Cleaning, sorting, apprentice
[ ] Industrial work (auto repair, electrical, construction, etc.)
[ ] Hair salon / Apprentice
[ ] Car wash / Apprentice
[ ] Home-based work (e.g. balloon tying, sewing footballs)
[ ] Other: .....

49 Thinking about your most recent job, how many hours a day did you spend at work?

[ ] Less than 2 hours [ ] 2–4 hours [ ] 4–6 hours [ ] 6–8 hours

[ ] 8–10 hours [ ] 10–12 hours [ ] More than 12 hours

50 What do you think is the main reason you started working? *(You may select more than one)*

[ ] To support my family / We needed it / To earn money

[ ] Because I wasn't going to school / My grades were poor / I didn't like school

[ ] To learn a profession

[ ] To avoid staying idle

[ ] Because I wanted to / I enjoy working

[ ] To gain self-confidence / Be independent

[ ] To make use of the summer holiday

[ ] Because my family wanted me to

[ ] To help pay for my siblings' school expenses

[ ] I don't know

[ ] Other: .....

Section 5: Right to Protection and Safety

51 Do you feel safe at home?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

52 Do you feel safe outside?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

53 Which of the following feelings best describes your thoughts about the district you live in?

[ ] I am very happy to live here.
[ ] This place does not replace my homeland/Syria.
[ ] I have adapted to this place.
[ ] I have not been able to adapt to this place.
[ ] I do not enjoy living here.
[ ] I feel a sense of belonging here.
[ ] I do not feel a sense of belonging here.
[ ] I am glad I came here.

54 If someone treats you badly, is there someone you can ask for help?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

55 (If yes) Who can you ask for help?

[ ] Mother [ ] Father [ ] Sibling [ ] Friend

[ ] Teacher[ ] Principal [ ] Police [ ] Mukhtar

[ ] Other: .....

Section 6: Right to Participation

56 Are your opinions listened to in your family?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

57 When something is done about you in your family, are you asked for your opinion?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

58 Can you freely express your thoughts at school/in your neighborhood?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

59 When there is a problem at school/in your neighborhood, can you tell your teacher, principal, mukhtar, or another staff member?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

60 *(If no)* Can you explain in one sentence why you cannot express it?

.....

61 Do you like your neighborhood?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

62 In your neighborhood, during your free time, are you able to play, spend time, or do things you enjoy?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

63 Are there safe places in your neighborhood where you can play/spend time/be with your peers?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

64 Does your family allow you to meet and spend time with your friends?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

65 Are you able to participate in activities or artistic events at school or in your neighborhood?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

66 What do you mostly do in your free time?

[ ] I go to the shopping mall.

[ ] I play games outdoors.

[ ] I play games on the computer or in internet cafes.

[ ] I help with household chores.

[ ] I help take care of my sibling or other household members.

[ ] I meet and chat with my friends.

[ ] I watch television.

[ ] I do sports.

[ ] I read books.

[ ] I don't prefer doing much.

[ ] Other: .....

67 Are you able to participate in activities related to your own culture?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

68 Do you have knowledge about children's rights?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

69 In your opinion, what is the most important issue related to children's rights? Can you express it in one sentence?

.....

70 If you had a superpower, what would you change in all children's lives? Can you express it in one sentence?

.....

Thank you!

Thank you for answering the questions. Your answers will help improve access to children's rights!

> Appendix-4 Children's Rights Access Survey for Refugee Children Aged 12-18

Introduction

Hello! This survey has been prepared to understand to what extent children and young people aged 12–18 living in Sultanbeyli can access their rights, needs, and expectations. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Please answer the questions sincerely and accurately. Thank you!

Date of the Survey :
Name of the Surveyor :

Section 1: About You

1 How old are you? _____

2 Gender: [ ] Girl [ ] Boy [ ] Prefer not to say

3 Which city were you born in? .....

4 How long have you been living in Sultanbeyli? .....

5 Which neighborhood do you live in? .....

6 What is your native language? (You may check more than one)

[ ] Kurdish [ ] Arabic [ ] Turkish [ ] Other *(please specify)* .....

7 What languages do you speak? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

8 Do you live with your family? [ ] Yes [ ] No

9 *(If no)* Who do you live with? .....

10 How many people live in your home including yourself?

[ ] 2-3 people [ ] 4-5 people [ ] 6-7 people
[ ] 7-8 people [ ] 8-9 people [ ] 10 +

11 How many siblings live with you in the house?

[ ] 0 [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6 or more siblings

12 Do you live in the same house as your mother? [ ] Yes [ ] No

13 Do you live in the same house as your father? [ ] Yes [ ] No

14 Does your mother work? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know

15 Does your father work? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know

16 Thinking about your family's financial situation, please select the option that best describes your situation:

[ ] My family's financial situation is sufficient to meet the needs of me and my siblings..
[ ] We often don't have enough money even for basic needs like food and rent.
[ ] We can barely get by from paycheck to paycheck.
[ ] We can manage as long as we don't buy luxury or unnecessary items.
[ ] I don't know.

Section 2: Right to Education

17 Are you currently attending school?

[ ] Yes *(If yes, proceed to question 18)*

[ ] No *(If no, start from question 17.1)*

17.1 Have you ever attended school before?

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

(If no, skip to the Health section, question 30; if yes, continue to 17.2)

17.2 Which grade did you leave school?

[ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6

[ ] 7 [ ] 8 [ ] 9 [ ] 10 [ ] 11 [ ] 12

17.3 When you think about why you dropped out of school, which of the following reasons is most accurate for you? *(After answering this, continue to the Health section from question 30. You may check more than one)*

[ ] My school location changed and the new school was too far.

[ ] I started working, so I dropped out.

[ ] We moved to a different province/district/neighborhood.

[ ] I didn't want to go to school.

[ ] My family didn't want me to go to school.

[ ] I dropped out due to financial difficulties.

[ ] I had problems with my peers.

[ ] I dropped out due to health problems.

[ ] Other: .....

18 Do you attend school regularly? [ ] Yes [ ] No

19 Which grade are you currently in?

[ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6 [ ] 7 [ ] 8 [ ] 9 [ ] 10 [ ] 11 [ ] 12

20 Do you enjoy going to school?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

21 How do you get to school?

[ ] On foot

[ ] Minibus

[ ] Bus

[ ] School shuttle

[ ] With our own vehicle

[ ] Other: .....

22 Are you able to have breakfast on school days?

[ ] No, I don't have breakfast.

[ ] I occasionally have breakfast.

[ ] I usually have breakfast.

[ ] I always have breakfast.

23 How do you meet your breakfast needs?

[ ] I eat at home.
[ ] I buy something on the way to school (e.g., bakery, bagel shop).
[ ] I buy from the school canteen.
[ ] I bring food from home and eat at school.
[ ] Other: .....

24 Are you able to have lunch at school?

[ ] No, I don't eat lunch.
[ ] I occasionally eat lunch.
[ ] I usually eat lunch.
[ ] I always eat lunch.

25 How do you meet your lunch needs?

[ ] I eat at home.
[ ] I buy something on the way to school (from a bakery, simit seller, etc.)
[ ] I buy from the school canteen.
[ ] I bring food from home and eat at school.
[ ] Other: .....

26 Please read the following statements and mark the option that best describes your situation:

	Completely True	Partially True	Not very true	Not true at all
I prefer staying at home instead of going to school.				
I prefer working instead of going to school.				
I prefer playing/spending time with my friends in the neighborhood over school.				
I feel happy when I am at school.				
I feel safe when I am at school.				
I believe I will have a good future because I study.				
Compared to others, I see myself as a successful student.				
When I have a problem at school, I know whom to ask for help.				
If I have a problem at school, I can talk to my friends about it.				
When I face a problem at school, I can go to the guidance counselor.				
I have close friends at school.				
I am someone who is liked by my friends.				
There are staff at school who treat me in a way I don't like (disturbing).				
I have friends at school with whom I have problems.				
My family wants me to continue my education.				
My family visits me at school.				
My family comes to meet my teachers.				
I spend time with my school friends outside of school too.				

27 If there is something that makes it difficult for you to attend school, can you explain it in one sentence?

.....

28 Do you ever think about dropping out of school for any reason?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

36 *(If yes)* Can you explain in one sentence why you are thinking about dropping out?

.....

Section 3: Right to Health

30 Do you have enough information about healthy eating and hygiene?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

31 Do you feel healthy?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

32 Do you think you eat healthily?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A litlle

33 Can you easily go to the doctor when you are sick?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

34 Are you treated respectfully at healthcare institutions?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

35 Can you easily access your medications?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

44 Please read the following statements and mark the option that best describes your situation:

	Completely True	Partially True	Not Really True	Not True at All
I take a bath once or twice a week.				
I have breakfast every morning.				
I eat meat, chicken, or fish two or three times a week.				
I eat fresh fruit every day.				
I consume dairy products (milk, yogurt, ayran, etc.) at least once a day.				
I brush my teeth twice a day.				
I do sports/training at least twice a week.				

Section 4: Work Experience

37 Have you ever had a job?

[ ] Yes [ ] No *(If No, skip to Question 44)*

38 *(If yes) How long have you worked?*

[ ] Less than 1 month [ ] 1-3 months [ ] 3-6 months

[ ] 6-9 months [ ] 9-12 months [ ] More than 1 year

39 Are you still working now?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

40 Considering your last job, where did you work?

[ ] Market / Street vendor
[ ] Clothing industry / Worker, apprentice
[ ] Clothing store / Salesperson
[ ] Food service / Waiter, busser
[ ] Food production / Worker, apprentice
[ ] With a tradesperson / Cleaning, collecting, apprentice
[ ] Industrial work *(car repair, electrical, construction, etc.)* / Production, apprentice
[ ] Hairdresser apprentice
[ ] Car wash apprentice
[ ] Home-based work (e.g., balloon tying, football stitching)
[ ] Other: .....

41 Considering your last job, how many hours a day did you work?

[ ] Less than 2 hours [ ] 2–4 hours [ ] 4–6 hours [ ] 6–8 hours

[ ] 8–10 hours [ ] 10–12 hours [ ] More than 12 hours

42 When you think about your reasons for starting to work, which of the following options is the most accurate for you? *(You may check more than one)*

[ ] To support my family / because of need / to earn money
[ ] Because I didn't go to school / I was failing / I didn't like school
[ ] To learn a profession
[ ] To avoid being idle
[ ] Because I wanted to / I enjoy working
[ ] To gain self-confidence / become independent
[ ] To make good use of the summer holiday
[ ] Because my family wanted me to
[ ] To help cover my siblings' school expenses
[ ] I don't know
[ ] Other: .....

Section 5: Right to Protection and Safety

43 Do you feel safe at home?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

44 Do you feel safe outside?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

45 Which of the following feelings best describes how you feel about the district you live in?

[ ] I'm very happy to live here.
[ ] This place does not replace my hometown.
[ ] I've adapted to living here.
[ ] I haven't been able to adapt to this place.
[ ] I don't enjoy living here.
[ ] I feel like I belong here.
[ ] I don't feel like I belong here.
[ ] I'm glad I came here.

46 If someone treats you in a way you don't like, is there someone you can ask for help?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

47 *(If yes)* Who can you ask for help?

[ ] Mother [ ] Father [ ] Sibling [ ] Friend

[ ] Teacher[ ] Principal [ ] Police [ ] Mukhtar

[ ] Other: .....

Section 6: Right to Participation

48 Are your opinions listened to in your family?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

49 Are you asked for your opinion when something about you is being decided in your family?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

50 Can you express your thoughts freely at school/in your neighborhood?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

51 When there is a problem at school/in your neighborhood, can you tell your teacher, principal, mukhtar, or another staff member?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

52 *(If no)* Can you write one sentence about why not?

.....

53 Do you like the neighborhood you live in?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

54 In your neighborhood, can you play, spend time, or do the things you enjoy in your free time?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

55 Are there safe places in your neighborhood where you can play or spend time with your peers?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

56 Does your family let you meet and spend time with your friends?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

57 Can you join activities or artistic events at school or in your neighborhood?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes

58 What do you mostly do in your free time?

[ ] I go to the shopping mall.
[ ] I play outside.
[ ] I play games on the computer or at an internet café.
[ ] I help with chores at home.
[ ] I help take care of my sibling or other family members.
[ ] I meet and chat with friends.
[ ] I watch TV.
[ ] I do sports.
[ ] I read books.
[ ] I don't really do much.
[ ] Other: .....

59 Can you participate in activities related to your own culture?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

60 Do you know anything about children's rights?

[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] A little

61 In your opinion, what is the biggest problem related to children's rights? *(Please write one sentence)*

.....

62 If you had a magic wand, what would you change in children's lives? *(Please write one sentence)*

.....

Thank you!

Thank you for answering the questions. Your answers will help improve access to children's rights!

> Appendix-5 Semi-Structured Interview Form for Children Aged 12-18

Interviewer Name Surname :

Interviewee Name Surname :

Date of Interview :

Place of Interview :

Duration of Interview :

Interview Record No :

Instructions

I am curious about the daily lives, opinions, and experiences of children your age. That's why I'm conducting interviews. I also wanted to talk with you now. I'd like to get to know you a bit and ask some questions about your school. If there is a question you don't want to answer, you don't have to. We can stop whenever you want. I need to record the audio so I can accurately note your answers, but no one else will listen to it. I will not share your name or personal information with anyone. There is no right or wrong answer to any question. I'm just interested in your thoughts and experiences. Do you have anything you'd like to ask?

Introduction

Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Where were you born, how old are you, how many siblings do you have, what do you enjoy doing, what is your favorite subject, which football team do you support?)

Information about migration experience

When did you/your family come to Türkiye/Istanbul? How long have you been living in Türkiye/Istanbul?

Information about family composition

Who is in your family? Do your mother and father work? Where do they work? Do any of your siblings work? Where do they work? Do any of your siblings go to school? Do you have any siblings who don't live with you?

Questions on children's rights

What do you think children's rights are? Do you think you have rights as a child? Which of these rights do you have?

Information about educational life

Do you go to school? What grade are you in? Have you ever changed schools since coming to Türkiye? How do you get to and from school? At school, where, with whom, and while doing what do you feel good and happy? How is your relationship with school? Are there any problems with school? What makes you happiest at school?

Information about relationships with teachers

Is there a teacher you feel close to / feel safe with / like? Why that teacher(s)? Can you give an example or describe a situation you witnessed or experienced? Are there any teachers you don't get along with or don't like? Why that teacher(s)? Can you give an example or describe a situation you witnessed or experienced?

Information about peer relationships

How many students are in your class? Do you have a friend among them whom you feel close to / like / meet outside school? Why that friend? Do you meet outside of school? What do you do together? Where do you go? Are there students in your class that you don't like, who treat you or others badly / mock / use hurtful words? Some children have said they or their friends were subjected to discrimination at school. Does that happen at your school too? Has anything like that happened to you or your friends? (If yes: What would you like to be done to resolve such situations?)

Information about academic achievement

How are you doing in your classes? What are your favorite subjects? What are your least favorite subjects? Why? What do you think about the homework given at school? Is academic success important to you? In what areas do you want to succeed? Do you have trouble keeping up with lessons because they're in Turkish? Is your level of Turkish sufficient for expressing yourself comfortably in exams? How/where did you learn Turkish? Would you like to get support in this area? What kind of language support would help you?

About school facilities/conditions

What kinds of facilities does your school provide for you? What are some things you think should exist at school or that you wish there were more of? Where do you play during recess at school? Does the school have a yard? Is it adequate? Do you bring your lunch from home? Does the school have a canteen or cafeteria? Are you satisfied with the cleanliness/heating of the school? In case of an accident or illness, is there a place you can go within the school? Is there an infirmary at school? Is there a guidance counselor at school? Are there any extracurricular activities at school (like study hours, joining social clubs)? Can you tell me a bit about those? What do you do? What do you enjoy doing?

Information about work life

Do you work anywhere outside of school, either for pay or not, to support your family or earn your own pocket money? (If not working) Have you ever worked anywhere before? Based on your work experience, can you tell us a bit about your work environment?

Information about the home and neighborhood

What do you do outside of school / after school / when you don't go to school? Can you tell me a bit about those? What do you do? What do you enjoy doing? Are there any places you go to regularly? Courses? Sports? Where do you live? Can you describe your home for me? (apartment/standalone house) Do you have books, notebooks, pens, toys, etc., at home? Do you have a place at home

where you can study? Do you like your neighborhood? What do you enjoy doing in your neighborhood? Is your school/workplace close to your neighborhood? How do you get there? How are your relationships with friends in your neighborhood? Are you able to meet with them? What do you do together? Do you have any relatives in your neighborhood/district? Do you like the city you live in? Why?

Information about health

How is your health? How do you feel physically? Do you have any complaints or concerns about your health? Do you get sick often? Do you have any illnesses that affect you and your daily life? If so, what kind of treatments are you receiving? How does this process affect you?

Information on things they would like to change

If you had a magic wand, what would you change to make yourself happier? Why?

Closing

What is your favorite trait about yourself?

What do you want to be in the future?

This was a very nice interview. Thank you.

Is there anything you would like to add?

> Appendix-6 Focus Group Discussion Guideline with Parents of Children Aged 6-12

Hello and welcome, everyone. Today, we are gathered here as part of the "Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project." Through this project, we aim to identify the root causes of the challenges faced by children living in Sultanbeyli, and to explore what kind of policies are needed to create a child-friendly environment where children can access their rights and feel better. As part of this study, we are conducting interviews with Turkish and Syrian children living in Sultanbeyli, as well as their parents. Today, we will be conducting a focus group discussion with you. The answers you give to our questions during this session will be kept strictly confidential and used only for research purposes. Thank you in advance for your participation. If you're ready, we can begin.

1 Could you please introduce yourself? (age, education, profession, how long you have been living in Sultanbeyli, number of children, etc.)

2 What comes to your mind when you hear the term "children's rights"? How do you evaluate your child's/children's access to their rights? / As a parent, do you think your child is able to exercise the rights they have? Why/How?

3 We'd like to ask you a few questions about your children's education. How many of your children are currently attending school, and how many are not?

   a Does your child who is attending school go regularly?

   b What are the main challenges your child faces in their educational journey?

   c Do you think your child's needs are being met at school? How are their relationships with teachers and friends? Are they happy to go to school?

   ç Do you face any challenges communicating with the school and teachers during the educational process?

   d Are you well-informed about the resources that can support your child's education?

   e How long has your child/children not been attending school? What kind of resources would you need to help them continue their education? Is your financial situation sufficient to meet your child's educational needs? Are you benefiting from any support programs to help your child stay in school?

4 What do you do to ensure your child exercises their right to healthy living, housing, and nutrition in the best way possible? Can you explain?

   a Are you able to receive sufficient support from public institutions and organizations? Can you tell us about these supports?

5 So far, we've discussed your child's access to education and health services. Now we'd like to ask about other needs of children.

   a At home, do you consult your child when making decisions that affect them and include them in decision-making processes? Why/How?

   b Are there situations where you worry about your child's physical or emotional safety? Do you think there are threats to your child's safety in the neighborhood or community?

c Do you inform your child about how to protect themselves from neglect, abuse, and harmful behaviors? Why/How?

ç How are your child's social relationships with peers? Do you think your child is excluded or discriminated against in the neighborhood or at school?

d Are you aware of any programs or activities that support your child's development?

6 Finally, we would like to hear your vision of the future for your child from a parent's perspective, and your suggestions. What are your expectations from the public sector, local governments, or civil society organizations to ensure your child has better access to education, health services, and social life?

> Appendix-7 Focus Group Discussion Guideline with Children Aged 12-18

Hello friends, welcome all. Today, we are gathered here as part of the "Accountability for Children's Rights Advocacy (ACAR) Project." Through this project, we aim to identify the root causes of the challenges faced by children living in Sultanbeyli and to understand what kind of policies are needed to create a child-friendly environment where children can access their rights and feel better. Within this study, we are conducting various activities with Turkish and Syrian children living in Sultanbeyli. Today, we will hold a group discussion with you. All responses you provide during this session will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. Thank you very much in advance for your participation. If you're ready, let's begin.

1 Can you introduce yourself? Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your family, and your friends? (How old are you? How many siblings do you have? How long have you been living in Sultanbeyli?)

2 How do you spend your day? What do you enjoy doing in your free time? Where do you spend most of your time? What are your favorite and least favorite things about your home and your neighborhood?

3 What comes to your mind when you hear the term "children's rights"?

   a If you were to describe children's rights in one sentence, what would it be?

   b Which of these rights do you think you have? Why do you think that?

   c Do you think you're able to exercise your rights as a child? How do you use them?

4 Are you able to speak freely and express your thoughts on matters that concern you? How?

5 When we talk about children's rights, education often comes to mind. What do you think about this? Do you think attending school and receiving education is a right? Why? In your opinion, what kind of education should children receive?

6 Another important topic when discussing children's rights is healthy development and access to healthcare. What do you understand by the right to nutrition?

7 Do you think children can work at a young age? Why? Can you explain?

   a At what age do you think children can start working? Why?

   b What types of jobs do you think children can do? What types of jobs should they not do? Why?

8 Let's talk a bit more about how you spend your free time. Do you think playing and resting are children's rights? Are children able to exercise this right?

9 Apart from home and school, where else do you spend most of your time? Do you like the neighborhood you live in?

   a Do you use the parks, playgrounds, or libraries in your neighborhood?

   b Do you find the parks, playgrounds, or libraries in your neighborhood safe? In your opinion, what kinds of situations should children be protected from?

c Do you have difficulty making new friends?

ç Do you have friends from different cultural backgrounds? How do you spend time with them?

10 Do you think everyone in society has equal rights? What do you think is needed to ensure everyone has equal access to their rights?

a What can adults do in this regard?

b What can children do in this regard?

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