

## **No lost generation? Education for refugee children.**

### **A comparison between Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey**

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“Despite broad agreement on the fundamental role of schools, varied standards of reception for newly arrived students, which result from a lack of policy, guidelines, and resources, are undertaken, and they seem to be an endemic problem that transcends national borders”

(Jenny Nilsson and Nihad Bunar, 2016, 400)

## **Introduction**

The research debate covering the so-called ‘refugee crises in Europe’ has largely been addressing issues like border control, EU policies – or the lack thereof – and the political backlash in the form of anti-immigrant sentiments. Follow-up questions about the integration of refugees and their children into society, education and work are now slowly appearing on the agenda too.

Although the current attention to the issue of the integration of the children of refugees into education is recent, several researchers in Europe have addressed the question for previous waves of refugees children. The findings of one of the largest European studies on the topic, *Integrate*, a comparative study which includes Sweden and the Netherlands among other EU Member States, will figure prominently in this paper. Next to this study there are smaller national and local studies that are often descriptive or evaluate examples of so-called good practice in cities and schools. We do not claim to have a full overview of the studies

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conducted, but our first impression is that compared to the huge number of studies on the education of the children of immigrants, attention to refugee children in education has been somewhat limited and often refugee children are not distinguished separately (Bloch et al. 2015). While, for instance, data on the school results of the children of immigrants are usually readily available at a national or city level, this sort of data is lacking for refugee children. Sometimes groups can be identified because of their national origin, knowing that most of the people in that particular group came as refugees. The limited data show that refugee children usually face more barriers than the children of immigrants (Mc Brien 2009; Bloch et al. 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011).

A further observation is that most studies on refugee children fail to differentiate between those who are born in the country of migration and those who came during the compulsory schooling period (the in-between generation). However, education research has shown time and again that this distinction is important when seeking to explain variations in outcomes, both within groups and between them (Bloch et al. 2015, 15; Crul et al. 2012; Heath and Brinbaum 2007; Holdaway et al. 2009; OECD 2010). Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of attention to the development of school careers over time. Often researchers take a snapshot of the treatment of refugee children in so-called *welcome, introduction or submersion classes*. Of course, this is a crucial element for these children to be able to successfully start in education, but it only tells part of the story. What happens after these classes is equally fundamental. Into what sort of educational track are they admitted? Do they still get second language support or other additional support? Are they allowed to continue their studies after compulsory education? An overview of the literature shows that most studies do not answer many of these crucial questions.

Furthermore, this paper is an attempt to draw away from what Nilsson and Bunar (2016, 401) call singular factors, such as trauma or individual background factors. Instead, we will focus on institutional factors that influence the opportunities that refugee children have in education at the macro, meso and micro levels (for studies on the children of immigrants, see Crul et al. 2012; Crul et al. 2013; Keskiner 2013; Schnell 2012). We analyse institutional educational arrangements comparatively across countries as formulated in Integration Context Theory (Crul and Schneider 2010; Crul and Mollenkopf 2012; Crul et al. 2012; Crul et al. 2013; Crul 2016). This theory has its roots in research into the effects of differences in school systems on the educational and labour market careers of the children of immigrants. We make a cross-country comparison of seven important institutional arrangements that we identify as having

an influence on the school careers of refugee children: (1) entrance into education; (2) so-called welcome, submersion or introduction classes; (3) pre-school arrangements; (4) second language instruction; (5) additional support; (6) tracking; (7) education after compulsory schooling.

We identify both similar and different institutional arrangements at work in the case of refugee children. Institutional arrangements differ because of differences in school systems, the time lapse before entering formal education, the specific legal arrangements in terms of accessing pre-school, and the options for attending school after reaching the age when compulsory schooling ends.

For our analysis of the impact of these institutional arrangements we make a literature overview, looking specifically at Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey. We choose the three European countries because they have received the highest numbers of refugees and thus also have the highest numbers of refugee children entering their education systems. In addition, they have very different institutional arrangements for integrating refugee children in education. This makes it interesting to compare them. We additionally choose Turkey because we wanted to broaden the perspective beyond Europe by including a country that has also received thousands and thousands of refugee children over the past few years. It is important to note that *most* refugee children that fled Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea or Iraq reside outside Europe, and are entering – or not – the education systems in Jordan, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Turkey. Whether Turkey is able to cater for the educational needs of refugee children is of crucial interest to a European audience considering the Turkey-EU deal, which enhanced Turkey's responsibility as a receiving country.

This chapter addresses the importance of the seven institutional arrangements we have identified as key in separate sections. In the discussion at the end we try to tie together their effects on the school careers of the children of refugees.

The challenges for the four countries are very different in scope. The numbers of refugees entering Turkey and Germany are much higher compared to those arriving in Sweden and the Netherlands. To exemplify this with some numbers on the Syrian refugees in Turkey, according to a report by HRW (2015) as of October 2015, more than 1.9 million Syrian asylum seekers/migrants were registered in Turkey, of whom nearly 1.7 million reside outside the refugee camps. Children from 5 to 17 years old make up around 780,000 of this

population.<sup>2</sup> While in the refugee camps 90 percent of the children attend school, these children only represent 13 percent of the Syrian children of school age living in Turkey. The huge influx has resulted in much greater demands on the existing school facilities and in many temporary solutions to deal with the reality on the ground.

Different refugee populations have come to the four countries, creating different challenges for education. In Sweden, for instance, an additional challenge is that about half of the refugee children are unaccompanied minors (Rydin et al. 2012, 185; Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2015). Children from different countries of origin also differ because some children have not been going to school for two or three years before reaching Europe. Integrating these children into schools requires additional measures. In addition to learning a new language of instruction and adapting to a new curriculum, they also need to adapt to being in a school environment again. Furthermore, they often lag behind in school subjects relative to their own age cohort, which means that they have to be in classes with children that are sometimes up to two or three years younger.

A proper comparison would therefore require a comparison of similar groups that arrived in the same time period with similar educational histories in the countries of origin. Such detailed studies are not yet available for the countries studied in this paper.<sup>3</sup> We are aware of these limitations but at the same time we think this should not prevent us from looking into differences across countries in terms of both the opportunities and the barriers that school systems and legal regulations present.

### **Entrance into Compulsory Education**

Compulsory schooling covers different age groups in the four countries under comparison. In the Netherlands, compulsory schooling targets four- to sixteen-year-olds, but if students at the age of sixteen have not obtained a minimum lower post-secondary vocational education yet they have to stay in education until the age of eighteen. In Germany and Sweden compulsory education covers the age range between six and sixteen. The right of entrance into compulsory education in all three European countries is guaranteed by law. All three of these countries

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<sup>2</sup> Before the war in Syria broke out, the primary school participation rate was 99 percent, for secondary school the rate was 82 percent. Participation was equal for male and female students. Today, according to UNICEF, approximately 3 million Syrian children in and outside Syria cannot go to school.

<sup>3</sup> See Bloch et al. (2015) for a comparison of the same refugee group in France, the UK and Switzerland.

have a policy that children of compulsory schooling age should have access to education as soon as possible. European regulations stipulate that children should be included in education within three months (article 14 paragraph 1 European Regulations 2003/9/EG). Sweden has put a further time limit of one month after arrival as the legally binding limit for entrance into school (Rydin et al. 2012, 193). In Germany and the Netherlands no such further legal binding limits exist. In practice, the time lapse between entering the country and entering school ranges from three months to even half a year in all three countries (for Sweden, see Rydin et al. 2012, 199). Especially in the last two years, when many refugee families have been housed in temporary shelters and camps and people have had to move several times before being housed in more permanent asylum seeker centres, education for children of school age has often been arranged in an improvised manner.

In the Netherlands, participation in education is compulsory for refugee children of compulsory school age regardless of their status. In Sweden and Germany, however, there is no obligation to attend school for those who are still in the process of status definition and who therefore do not yet have a residence permit (Rydin et al. 2012, 191; Bourgonje 2010, 47), although in Germany language courses in the reception centres are in theory obligatory. This results in small groups of children not attending school in Germany and Sweden (for Sweden, see Rydin et al. 2012, 193) but it also affects the quality and amount of schooling children receive in these two countries (idem). In Germany, for instance, in some cases children will receive language education for only a few hours a day in the asylum seeker centres rather than going to a regular school for regular school hours. Nilsson and Bunar report that also in Sweden children who are still in the asylum procedure are often offered 10 to 50 percent less schooling, and often only for a more limited number of school subjects than regular school children study (Nilsson and Bunar 2016, 403).

Turkey is also legally bound to provide schooling to refugee children, irrespective of their status.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in October 2014 a new regulation was published called the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), which became the main domestic law governing Turkey's *de facto* temporary protection of Syrian refugees in the areas of education, health and social protection. TPR should ease the process of enrolment in schools, allowing refugee children who are registered in Turkey to enrol in public schools and in temporary education centres

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<sup>4</sup> Turkey is party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, where article 22 obliges the signatory countries to provide protection and schooling to all asylum seeking and refugee children. In addition, Turkish law (5395) obliges the Turkish state to provide education and protection to minors, irrespective of their nationality.

established for Syrian children (ÇOÇA 2015).<sup>5</sup> However, research shows that most of the Syrians are not well-informed about their children's right to education (idem). Furthermore, the registration procedure does not always run smoothly due to a lack of infrastructure and many refugees are not able to register themselves. Because of lack of financial support, the majority of the Syrian refugee families experience severe economic hardship, which forms one of the major impediments against Syrian children participating in education (HRW 2015). The fact that Syrian refugees do not have permission to work has created a huge black labour market in Turkey, and this, in combination with the poverty of the families, has resulted in a situation where child labour has become common among Syrian children (Mutlu et al. 2015).

### **Welcome, Submersion, Preparation, International or Introduction Classes**

As the title of this section reflects, the names used for the classes in which refugee children are placed before going to regular classes differ between countries and, over time, also within countries. The actual pedagogical practices also differ greatly. When the children enter education they usually do not yet have any command of the national language. In all three European countries special provisions allow them to learn the second language, either in special classes or in special schools.

In the Netherlands, during the period when the children are still in the asylum procedure, they are often taught in a special elementary school established on the premises of an asylum seeker centre (Ingleby and Kramer 2012, 263). Depending on how long they are in the procedure for being granted legal status as recognized asylum seekers, this can take up to two years. In other cases, for instance in the case of small-scale asylum seeker centres or when the centre is not located in a remote area but within a city or larger village, they will attend a regular elementary school. Depending on the number of refugee children in the school, they will first go to an immersion class for one year, although for some children, depending on their second language progress, this can be extended to two years. The timing of entering education is crucial, as in the Netherlands children are selected for different school tracks at age twelve. Children older than twelve are directed to international transfer classes (ISK) in a

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<sup>5</sup> Local authorities are held responsible for monitoring the registration of Syrian refugees in public schools to ensure their access to education (ÇOÇA 2015). In order to enrol, the children have to be registered with the local police office or the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, the state institution running the majority of the refugee camps for Syrians.

local secondary school for one or two years (Ingleby and Kramer 2012, 263; Stavenuiter et al. 2016, 7).

In Germany, children attend so-called preparation or introduction classes for one or two years before they are transferred to regular classes. Depending on the *Land*, city, or even the school, this can be followed by more assistance with German as a second language if their German proficiency still lags behind. There are some preparation classes attached to *Gymnasiums*, but in general pupils attending preparation classes in secondary school are in *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*, i.e. lower- and middle-level vocational education. In Germany in the past two years, the sheer number of refugee children has been overwhelming and the task at the *Länder* and city levels has therefore been gigantic. In Hamburg, for instance, about 400 additional young children had to be placed in education each month up to the summer of 2015. Also at the level of secondary vocational education, every month four to five new classes had to be added in Hamburg alone. Over a period of about a year, 143 new teachers had to be hired to teach the children in these new vocational classes (Pressestelle Senat Hamburg, November 2015).

The situation in Sweden varies between schools. However, the general policy in Sweden is to keep children in international or immersion classes for only a very short period. Examples of schools keeping children in such classes for only two or three weeks are described as ideal cases (Rydin et al. 2012, 204). Pupils are then transferred as quickly as possible to regular classes, often with additional courses in second language education. This is partly enabled by the fact that Swedish schools offer second language education as a regular subject from elementary school up to the end of upper-secondary school, making it easier to incorporate students with a migration background – both refugees and others – into regular classes after a short period of time.

In Turkey, *temporary education centres* have been established to provide education to Syrian children both inside and outside the refugee camps (HRW 2015). Although these centres began as private initiatives, some have signed a protocol with the Turkish government and receive financial support and are free of charge, while others remain private with low fees, which are nevertheless unaffordable for many Syrians struggling with economic hardship. Furthermore, the temporary education centres are insufficient in number and capacity to cater for migrants' educational needs. Of the 81 municipalities where refugees are registered, the centres only exist in 19 cities. According to the HRW report (2015), in the academic year

2014-2015 there were 34 centres inside and 232 centres outside the refugee camps. Operating at the primary and secondary school levels, in 2014-2015 more than 170,000 students were enrolled in temporary education centres, as opposed to only around 36,000 in Turkish public schools. This shows that the majority of Syrian refugee children receive their education in these centres. However, due to lack of sufficient funding many centres face closure, since the Syrian refugee population is not able to pay for the courses. For example, 19 schools opened in Reyhanli in 2014 but only three were left by August 2015 due to lack of funding (Amos 2015). The centres follow an almost identical curriculum to that of Syrian schools – and the pupils receive classes in Arabic – which is prepared in cooperation between the Syrian Interim Government’s Ministry of Education and the Turkish Ministry of National Education (HRW 2015). It is unclear how the students who attend these centres will be integrated into the Turkish education system to further their education.

### **Pre-school Arrangements**

For very young refugee children it is important how access to pre-school is arranged. Compulsory schooling starts at different ages in the three European countries: in Sweden at seven; in Germany at six; and in the Netherlands at four. Especially in Sweden and Germany, access to pre-school is therefore very important because of the larger age group – and thus larger numbers – of young refugee children affected.

In Germany, the development of pre-school facilities for disadvantaged children and the children of immigrants has been strongly stimulated in the last decade. However, as far as we know there are no figures available on the inclusion of refugee children in pre-school facilities. As soon as parents receive official asylum status they are treated like other parents in Germany and have access to pre-school under the same conditions. Costs for child care differ between Länder and even between cities. A special effort is made to include children in the last year before compulsory school starts at age six. In some Länder you can enrol your child in pre-school during this last year without any cost.

In the Netherlands, pre-school education is generally organised very differently to that in Sweden or Germany. Middle class families with both parents working usually send their children to either private or publicly founded pre-school facilities five days a week for the full day. The considerable costs of attending these pre-school or so-called crèche facilities are



paid partly by the parents and partly by the employer. Children from disadvantaged families, many of them with an immigrant background, can attend special subsidized pre-school facilities with an emphasis on second language learning three mornings or afternoons a week. This means that they spend many fewer hours a week in day care and are also mostly segregated from children whose first language is Dutch. Places in these subsidized pre-school facilities, which also only exist in the larger cities, are limited. It is not known how refugee families can secure places for their young children in these facilities.

In Sweden, refugee children of pre-school age, regardless of their status, are treated equally to children who have Swedish citizenship (Niemeyer 2014, 17). This is interesting, since in Germany and the Netherlands access is linked to legal status. If a pre-school age child arrives in Sweden, he/she may attend what is called *open pre-school*, which is free of charge. In the larger cities with a high proportion of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, there are special pre-schools focusing specifically on Swedish language acquisition (Rydin et al. 2012, 197). However, not all refugee parents are aware of this option to send their children to pre-school without paying.

In Turkey, pre-school is mostly private and in our literature review we have not been able to find any provisions for refugee children.

### **Second Language Instruction**

The provision of regular second language instruction is, again, very different across countries. In the Netherlands, refugee children in elementary school attend welcoming classes and children in secondary school in international classes get intensive training in Dutch as a second language for one or two years (Stavenuiter et al. 2016, 7). In most cases, this takes place in small classes (15 children) and the teacher is trained in second language education and special teaching material is used. When the children are transferred to regular classes in elementary school, some extra second language instruction is often still provided by the regular teacher. In regular secondary education, however, second language instruction is not available. This obviously has negative consequences for the further school career (Van Hasselt and De Kruijff 2009, 9).

In Germany, there is second language support in elementary school (up to age ten or twelve, depending on the Land). Niemeyer (2014, 57) emphasizes that “*it is nowhere stated that*

*German as a second language has to be taught in school.*” The Mercator Foundation recently released a report saying that teacher training in second language education is still insufficient in Germany (also see Niemeyer 2014, 47). Study methods and techniques for second language education were often lacking in the past (Niemeyer 2014, 48). In some German schools there is a separate second language teacher available; in others, school teachers are given additional training in second language teaching but this training usually lasts for only one day (idem). In daily practice, it is these regular teachers with little training that provide additional second language instruction in the classroom (Niemeyer 2014, 57). However, new programmes of second language education are quickly expanding. In 2014, second language teacher training was only compulsory for school teachers in one Land. Today, this is true for five Länder.

In Sweden, Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) is offered in both elementary and upper-secondary school (up to age 18). The head teacher decides which students need to study SSL (Rydin et al. 2012, 196). The fact that second language education is also offered in upper-secondary schools is particularly important for refugee children who arrive aged twelve or more. This age group attends regular classes with extra support in Swedish as a second language very soon after entering the education system. Because regular second language instruction is absent in secondary education in Germany and the Netherlands, these pupils are taught in special submersion or introduction classes, which sets them back with their academic options. It is important to note that in Sweden Swedish as a second language is a subject with separate teaching materials (syllabus) and instruction, equal to teaching Swedish as a first language (Bourgonje 2010, 48 and 50), and SSL is taught by specially trained teachers (Nilsson and Bunar 2016, 409). Some reports, however, stipulate that the status of these teachers is considered lower than that of regular teachers of Swedish as a first language (Bourgonje 2010, 50; Nilsson and Bunar 2016, 409). However, one can choose to take Swedish as a second language as an exam subject in Gymnasium and the mark for the subject is counted as a normal entrance mark for university (Rydin et al. 2012, 196). In Germany and the Netherlands, second language instruction is seen as additional to regular language instruction. As a result, the extent to which extra materials are used and the quality and number of hours of second language instruction differ from school to school and from teacher to teacher.

For Turkey, our literature review shows that, next to economic hardship forcing many children into the black labour market, lack of language proficiency is the main obstacle Syrian children face in accessing education. While the Turkmen ethnic minority speak Turkish,

Syrian refugee children do not; the most common languages among them are Arabic and Kurdish. The only possibility of receiving education in Arabic is at the temporary education centres discussed above. For the rest, the Turkish education system is highly centralised and leaves no room for public schools to cater for the urgent need for Turkish language training. Some Turkish language courses seem to be provided at the local level through initiatives by municipalities or NGOs, but these efforts remain very limited. In theory, Syrian children have the right to enrol in public schools, but there is no infrastructure for them to learn Turkish or attend any form of transition classes. In a report by the Istanbul Bilgi University Children Studies Department on the educational situation of Syrian children in Istanbul (where more than 300,000 Syrians reside), the researchers found three schools in three districts where no Turkish language courses were provided for the limited number of Syrian children attending the schools (ÇOÇA 2015). This situation also leads to differential results for younger and older children. In its 2015 report, HRW underlined that younger Syrian children learn Turkish faster (and hence do better at school and are integrating faster), while the lack of language proficiency of older children leads to their isolation in classrooms, dropping out of school, or even not being accepted for enrolment in the first place. Many of these older children end up entering the labour market working in very poorly paid and difficult conditions. Therefore, the HRW 2015 report called for more flexible administration procedures to cater for the needs of refugee students (such as enrolling a 10<sup>th</sup> grader in 9<sup>th</sup> grade) and emphasized the urgency of launching Turkish language courses on a national scale.<sup>6</sup>

### **Additional Support**

Most educational research has focused on gaps in the cognitive and language skills that the children of refugees suffer from because of the disruption of their school careers in their countries of origin and during their – sometimes long – travels to the destination country. They need to learn a new language, adapt to a new curriculum and sometimes also to a new learning style. Additionally, refugee children have often experienced traumatic events and sometimes lost close relatives and friends. A recent study showed that 79 percent of the Syrian children in a Turkish refugee camp had lost someone in their family in the war, and more than 60 percent had seen someone being kicked, shot or otherwise physically hurt. Nearly half (45 percent) of the children surveyed experienced PTSD symptoms (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015, 13). Emotional and psychological help is often provided on an individual

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<sup>6</sup> HRW 2015

basis through the regular health care system, both within and outside schools (for the Netherlands, see Ingleby and Kramer 2012, 266).

It is important that there are staff members in schools that act as confidants for refugee children to help and support them. This person can be the assigned class mentor, a specially assigned member of the school staff, a social worker or a guardian in the case of an unaccompanied minor. In all three European countries, a person performing this particular role can usually be identified. These people usually intervene when school results drop or fail to meet expectations, when pupils show emotional or psychological problems, when important decisions need to be made about school or subjects in the curriculum need to be chosen, or, most importantly, when legal factors hinder access to schooling opportunities.

In Germany and the Netherlands, there is no obligation for schools to assign such a support person to refugee children. Support therefore varies and is dependent on the regular existing support structure in schools. In Germany, it seems that this role is often taken by a teacher (Niemeyer 2014, 47), while in the Netherlands it is either the school mentor, someone from the school's support staff or, in the case of an unaccompanied minor, the guardian.

In Sweden, a person is assigned to support pupils that have attended an international class. Schools are obliged to allocate this additional support in the form of a support teacher. The support teacher starts giving support once pupils are transferred to a regular class (Bourgonje 2010, 48-50; Niemeyer 2014, 23 and 55). This could be individual support or support in a small group or even in the regular class (Niemeyer 2014, 23). Although this comes across as the ideal situation, reports note that in practice support teachers often lack the time to give proper guidance (*idem*).

In Turkey, counselling facilities are available in public schools, but these facilities do not seem to be equipped to support Syrian children who have suffered serious traumas. The study by Istanbul Bilgi University Children Studies Department shows that the language barrier and a lack of motivation or qualifications of the already overloaded student counsellors are the major reasons for lack of support (ÇOÇA 2015). While school staff stated that they expected such help to be provided outside the school by NGO groups, none of the Syrian students who participated in the study mentioned receiving any support outside school. Nevertheless, focus groups with Syrian children and students underlined the necessity of psychological support because of the serious war traumas experienced (*idem*).

## Tracking

The way the various school systems track pupils in secondary school is very different across the three countries. The effects of tracking have been extensively documented for children of immigrants (see Crul et al. 2012; Crul et al. 2013). The strongly stratified German school system with early selection makes it much more difficult for children of disadvantaged immigrant origin to pursue an academic track which prepares for higher education. The more open meritocratic school system in Sweden with its late selection and less selective tracking system offers many more possibilities of continuing into some sort of post-secondary or higher education. The Netherlands lies in between, with rather early selection at age twelve and a tracking system that is comparable with the German system, but with ample opportunities to move from a vocational track to an academic track through alternative routes. Turkey has a comprehensive education system, slightly similar to the Swedish one, where there is no overt form of tracking in the compulsory education system. However, there are differences in prestige between selective and non-selective educational institutions in both the public and private domains which act as a covert stratification system with regard to access to higher education.

The starting situation of refugee children is crucial because of the effects of tracking and early selection. In general, it can be said that age at arrival determines how much these children are blocked by the general institutional arrangements of early selection and tracking. Students who arrive in the Netherlands at age twelve or later have already missed the crucial national test that determines their tracking advice. They are placed in an ISK submersion class for one or two years (Dourelijn and Dagevos 2011, 95; Stavenuiter et al. 2016, 7). By the time they are admitted to regular classes they often lag far behind in terms of their level of instruction in subjects in the academic track. Regardless of their intellectual capacities, this will *de facto* mean placement in one of the vocational tracks in year 3 or 4. Year 4 is the exam year. Because of the short period they spend in regular classes, most of these pupils are then assigned to one of the lower levels of vocational education. According to a recent survey, 70 percent of the children attending ISK submersion classes go from there to the lowest forms of vocational education. For the average student of Dutch descent, the proportion is the inverse: only 30 percent attend this lowest track (VO raad 2016; for similar results on ISK classes from an earlier period, see Van Hasselt and De Kruyf 2009, 6). These levels only give access to short one- or two-year post-secondary vocational tracks aimed at making the transition to manual jobs in the labour market. In the Netherlands, children with learning or behavioural

problems are commonly assigned to these tracks and they are known for high levels of disruptive behaviour in class and high dropout rates. In certain tracks, the dropout rates reach 40 or 50 percent. This school climate is hardly conducive for refugee children, who often have to deal with trauma and whose intellectual capacities often far exceed those of the other children in these tracks. Among those who are already older than 15 or 16 and cannot enter secondary education, 80 percent enter the lowest forms of post-secondary vocational education (VO raad 2016; for similar results on ISK classes from an earlier period, see Van Hasselt and De Kruijff 2009, 7). These one- or two-year tracks aim at direct transit to unskilled jobs in the labour market. One of the factors related to poor educational outcomes is a lack of second language teaching after the students have been transferred from the international classes to the regular classes (Van Hasselt and De Kruijff 2009, 9). Another problem is that the international classes continually take in new students, which disrupts the learning environment (idem, 11). A broader study on refugee groups, not only those who have been to an international class, shows the same poor educational outcomes for refugee groups. Less than half of the young Iraqi and Afghani adults between the ages of 20 and 34 studied obtained a diploma for short post-secondary vocational education. The majority of the remaining students did not even manage to obtain what are considered the lowest vocational certificates. Of the Somali refugees in this age group, only about a quarter attained this very low level of education (Dourelijn and Dagevos 2011, 93), making their prospects in the labour market very bleak. The good news is that the younger cohorts who started their educational careers in the Netherlands in elementary school (after an introduction class) do much better. Children of Afghan and Iraqi origin are now almost on a par with children of Dutch descent when it comes to attending academic tracks (idem, 98). This only goes to show that it is particularly refugee children entering the Netherlands around or after age twelve who are getting crushed between the tracking wheels of the Dutch school system.

In Germany, the situation is similar to the Netherlands, with the exception of some Länder where selection happens even earlier at age ten. Most of the refugee children arriving after elementary school age will be placed in *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*, the two vocational tracks. A brochure for unaccompanied minors in Germany is quite telling:

*“In Germany all children and teenagers under the age of sixteen have the right and duty to go to school. This is called compulsory attendance. Usually you would start off with the “Hauptschule” where you have the possibility to get a “Hauptschulabschluss” (secondary school qualification).*

Only a small proportion of pupils of German descent go to *Hauptschule* and many German parents will avoid this school at all costs. In the case of refugee children, however, for many teachers and policymakers this seems to be the highest aim (see also Niemeyer 2014, 46).

At age sixteen, and in some cases even a year earlier, *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* pupils should enter an apprenticeship track. However, second language difficulties often impede refugee children from finding an apprenticeship. For children of immigrants who were born in Germany (the second generation), discrimination in finding an apprenticeship has already been clearly established (Crul et al. 2012). For refugee children, who are mostly not born in Germany, the chances of finding an apprenticeship place are often even lower because of German language weaknesses, lack of experience with the system and the resulting poor grades (Niemeyer 2014, 16). Furthermore, there is competition for apprenticeship places among students who have diplomas at different levels. It comes as no surprise that those who have a *Gymnasium* diploma are most favoured by employers, followed by those who have a *Realschule* diploma. Children with a *Hauptschule* diploma have the least chances of getting an apprenticeship position (Crul et al. 2012). The negative consequence is that students who leave school without doing an apprenticeship, in a system that relies so heavily on apprenticeships, also have great difficulties in entering the labour market and finding a steady job. More often than not, apprenticeships are the door to the first paid job.

In Sweden, the first selection point is at age fifteen, when students choose, or are recommended to take, different programmes within *Gymnasium*. Although the choice made here limits options in further education, all programmes give access to higher education. However, the students who at fifteen go to more vocationally oriented programmes often continue a form of post-secondary vocationally oriented education which is not part of the higher education system at age eighteen. A report by Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö focusing on unaccompanied minors presents some educational outcomes of refugee children. The group of unaccompanied minors is more at risk than children who came with their parents.

Nevertheless, even for them the educational results for refugee children far exceed those in Germany and the Netherlands. Among 19-year-olds, 77 percent of females still follow education in Sweden and 88 percent of males (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2015, 15). Even among 21-year-olds, about half of this group are still in education. Among men aged between 24 and 27, about 40 percent are in undergraduate training and another third are in adult education. Among women, about a quarter are in undergraduate education and about a half in

adult education (idem, 16). These figures show that a considerable proportion of these refugee children, who are to be considered highly at risk, reach higher education in Sweden.

Since the Swedish system is geared towards getting as many students as possible into higher education by keeping opportunities open until the age of eighteen, those who do not manage to get into higher education, or fail in higher education, often find themselves in a precarious situation. They have two options to choose from: either continuing in adult schools (Komvux) or participating in some of the courses provided by employment offices to learn some practical skills to enter the labour market. In Germany and the Netherlands, many of those unable to access an academic track are able to follow apprenticeship tracks offering them entrance to the labour market. They can show a potential employer their apprenticeship track record. And, again, many indeed get their first paid job via an apprenticeship.

In Turkey, the newly adopted 4+4+4 system, requires young people to go to school until the age of eighteen. While the system has no specific tracking moment as in the Netherlands or Germany, there are significant distinctions between selective and non-selective educational institutions and the quality of education, both in the private and the public domains. These distinctions become crucial when gaining access to higher education. The studies reviewed for this chapter only mention participation by Syrian children in non-selective public education and in temporary education centres (ÇOÇA 2015; HRW 2015; Mutlu et al. 2016). While the experience of Syrian children varies in individual cases, younger children seem to have a more positive experience as they learn Turkish faster than older children, who seem to suffer more from the lack of Turkish language courses and problems of adaptation (ÇOÇA 2015). The studies underscore how Syrian children suffer from serious stigmatization and discrimination by other pupils, and also occasionally by school staff and other parents. The studies call for increasing awareness that education should be perceived as a ‘right’ for Syrian children rather than a ‘favour’ (Mutlu et al. 2015) and that school staff need further assistance in dealing with conflicts between pupils and providing a more peaceful school environment. Given these harsh conditions, the very few Syrian children who manage to attend a non-selective public school might face serious difficulties in accessing higher education.

### **Education after Compulsory School**



The three European countries differ when compulsory schooling ends (at sixteen or eighteen), but they also differ in terms of rights and opportunities to continue studying. The Netherlands provides an extensive loan system for studying after compulsory schooling. The right to a study loan applies to all whose asylum request has been granted and who have official refugee status. For others who do not have an official status yet, the right to study ends at age eighteen. Those who do not yet have the (temporary) residence permit granted with refugee status at age eighteen cannot start to study in post-secondary or higher education. The process of obtaining this status takes up to a year or more, depending on the country of origin, after requesting asylum. Many of the refugees who started late in the Dutch education system are in level one of a two-year post-secondary vocational track, finishing it when they are around eighteen years old. If they have not obtained their status yet, they lose their right to further education. Even if they obtain the right to study again in the near future, it disrupts their studies and prospects. Another potential obstacle is the Dutch system of study loans. Youngsters get a study loan when they attend post-secondary vocational training. By the time they can finally climb up from post-secondary vocational training to higher vocational education (four or five years later) their student loan credit is already mostly or completely used up, meaning they can only continue their studies by relying on their own resources. In practice, this means they have to work at the same time as studying, which increases the chances of dropping out.

Students who want to study in higher education first have to complete four language courses to obtain a Dutch language certificate at the level of academic Dutch (B2). This means that on average students can only start their studies after two or more years (Ingleby and Kramer 2012, 266). Taking into consideration that much of the curriculum nowadays is in English, especially in Masters' programmes, this seems an obstacle the students could do without.

In Germany, compulsory schooling ends at the age of sixteen. For those who arrive later and do not have a high school diploma, most of the possibilities are in the field of vocational training. In most Länder there are now programmes to open more opportunities for these youngsters to be included in vocational education. The most problematic part is finding enough internship and apprenticeship places in the private sector, since this practical part is an important element in the so-called 'dual system' of vocational training in Germany.

In Sweden, compulsory education ends at age sixteen, but pupils who are still in upper-secondary school when they turn seventeen or eighteen have the right to continue their

education like regular students, even when they do not have recognized asylum seeker status. This is important, because particularly unaccompanied minors often arrive between the ages of fifteen and seventeen (Çelikaksoy and Wadensjö 2015, 14). Young adults arriving after the age of eighteen can attend general adult education or Swedish for Immigrants (FSI), i.e. classes for adults to learn basic Swedish.

Adult education is an important route to educational qualifications for students who arrive at a later age. In the Netherlands, this route is often used by students who are too old to thrive in common secondary education but need a diploma from an academic track before they can enter higher education. Adult education in the Netherlands is quite marginal compared to mainstream education. Many refugee children and students are therefore not aware of the possibilities it can offer them. The big advantage is that in adult education they are often the younger students in the class, instead of being much older, and they meet people who are equally motivated to succeed.

In Germany too, there are plenty of possibilities of programmes for adult education, including ones leading to school qualifications and language certificates. The main problems in the German system are a lack of information and costs. In the face of the refugee crisis, many adult education institutions have started to offer free courses, at least at the basic level, but sometimes the costs are also covered by the government. Especially the state-owned *Volkshochschulen* have played an important role in this – as they did before for previous waves of immigrants and refugees. There has been a quite new initiative by universities to offer free language courses to refugees (often organized by student organizations), to provide voluntary help to refugees as internships, and to establish mechanisms for the recognition of foreign diplomas and school certificates.

In Sweden, adult education is a much more mainstream institution than in the Netherlands and Germany. Awareness of this option is therefore much greater. In the past too, adult education was an important entrance route into the education system for migrants. Many first-generation Turkish and Yugoslavian migrants went to adult education to learn Swedish as a second language. Therefore, adult education in Sweden is now very much attuned to the needs of new arrivals. An adult education diploma can be used to enter higher education or a form of post-secondary education.

In our literature review, we have not come across adult education opportunities for Syrians in Turkey since the existing research concentrates mainly on the pressing situation concerning

(the lack of) education for Syrian children. Regarding higher education in Turkey, there are provisions which allow Syrian university students to enrol in seven higher education institutions near the Syrian border with a ‘special student’ status. According to the Turkish Higher Education Institutions (YÖK), in the academic year 2014-2015, 3397 male and 2163 female Syrian students were enrolled in a higher education institution (Mutlu et al. 2016, 42). Participation by Syrian university students in Turkish higher education is, however, not widespread and these developments are merely seen as first steps, despite difficulties.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This overview of the differences in these seven key institutional arrangements and their effects on school outcomes shows a clear distinction between favourable and less favourable institutional arrangements. High quality continuing second language instruction offered at all school levels – by properly trained teachers and using specifically developed teaching materials – is probably the most important institutional arrangement. Apart from this, accommodating access to all types of educational tracks (regardless of the age you enter education) is important. As we have seen, in Germany and the Netherlands only vocational tracks are open to many refugee children. For very young refugee children, immediate open and free pre-school arrangements are especially important. For refugees in the age group around the end of compulsory schooling, adult education – which also gives access to pre-academic secondary school diplomas and thus to higher education – is especially important.

In a way, the most difficult group to integrate into the education system of the host country are pupils arriving at the end of elementary school or during secondary education. This is the time when important tracking decisions are made. School systems characterized by early selection and a strong stratification seem to waste much talent, because they direct the majority of these pupils along a vocational route. Because of second language problems, these children are often streamed towards the lower end of the vocational training system – a track that hardly suits the majority of these students given their intellectual capacities. Also in comprehensive systems, such as in Turkey, a lack of second language training denies children the full participation in the education system they need to realize their potential.

To evaluate the impact of different institutional arrangements it is important to see them in relation to each other, for instance the more poorly organized second language instruction in

Germany and the Netherlands (compared to Sweden) in relation to the early selection and tracking that results in an over-representation of refugee children in vocational tracks. These factors in combination create an accumulation of disadvantage. This also means that the Swedish good practice of limiting the time in immersion classes cannot be transplanted as such to Germany or the Netherlands. In Sweden, the transfer to regular education is combined with continued instruction in the second language. Since this is not offered in Germany and the Netherlands, children would be destined to fail if they were transferred to regular classes too quickly.

It seems that there is also an important difference across countries in terms of their *vision* of what it takes to include newly arrived refugee children in education. In Sweden, it is clearly stated that the ambition is to give refugee pupils an equal chance to reach school outcomes on a par with children of native descent. This means that the aim should be for refugee children to also reach higher education, of course depending on their intellectual capacities.

In Germany and the Netherlands, the aim seems much more limited and short-term. Most policy measures are aimed at, and limited to, the transition or immersion phase. The fact that most refugee students end up in the (lowest) vocational tracks as a result of how things are organized within the school systems seems to be more or less accepted as a given. In Germany, however, there is a hopeful recent development of also accommodating refugee children in immersion classes in *Gymnasium* schools.

In Turkey, an excruciating two thirds of refugee children do not participate in education. Among those who do, the majority attend temporary education centres where they follow a Syrian curriculum. This shows that Turkey does not yet wish to see the refugees and their children as long-term inhabitants who must be enabled to build a future. Of the 780,000 Syrian refugee children, only around 36,000 attend public schools. Studies on these public schools show that education is seen more as a ‘favour’ to these children, rather than there being the aim of providing them with equal chances to participate in education.

The Swedish example, although not perfect, shows that support has to be given throughout the school career – the clearest example being second language instruction. Sweden has formulated ambitions for second language learning in the standard curriculum starting at pre-school and continuing all the way up to the end of upper-secondary school and even into adult education. In the Netherlands and Germany, the ambitions are much more limited, with only a little amount of additional training in pre-school, elementary school and during the immersion

or introduction year in secondary school. However, to learn a language to an academic level, one or two years of additional instruction are usually not enough.

To expect governments to fundamentally change the school systems they have in place because of this relatively small group of pupils is, of course, unrealistic. Both in Germany and the Netherlands, alternative scenarios have to be developed to accommodate this particular group. Adult education could, for instance, play a much more prominent role in preparing talented students for high school exams. In post-secondary vocational education, shorter and faster routes could be offered to accommodate students that have the ambition to continue into higher education. Pre-school education should be made available to the very youngest group (0-4) of refugee children immediately, regardless of their status, so that they are already fluent in Dutch or German before entering elementary school. Secondary schools should be offered the opportunity to extend the time they give additional second language instruction to bring it up to the level of academic Dutch or German. These measures can be taken keeping some of the Swedish good practice in mind.

A last observation is that more researchers seem to be working on the topic of refugee children in education in Sweden than in Germany or the Netherlands, and they are also more critical of the specific educational policies developed in Sweden than their German and Dutch peers. Swedish researchers critique, for instance, the segregation of refugee children and the fact that not all pupils who have the right to mother tongue teaching receive it (see, for instance, Nilsson and Bunar 2016). The irony is that in Germany and The Netherland mother tongue teaching is simply unavailable and therefore also mostly remains undiscussed in research. In Germany and the Netherlands, refugee children are far more often segregated from regular pupils and for a much longer period than in Sweden but researchers seem far less critical about it than in Sweden. What is considered normal in a country's policy also seems to extend to what researchers find normal. In Turkey, the studies we have been able to find on Syrian children are critical of the government. These studies do acknowledge the difficulty in accommodating the sheer numbers of Syrian refugee children, but nevertheless they also critique the gaps and provide concrete policy suggestions to improve the schooling situation. By comparing the four counties in detail both gaps and successful interventions become apparent. This is precisely why comparisons across countries are so valuable.

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