

REFUGEE CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

MARCH, 2021



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İzmir, March, 2021

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"This publication was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union provided under Etkiniz EU Programme. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Konak Mülteci Derneđi and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union."

General Evaluation

With the declaration of a pandemic by The World Health Organization (World Health Organization - WHO) after the coronavirus outbreak, distance education has been applied by stopping the formal education within the context of the measures taken in Turkey, too. While one year is behind in distance education, the Ministry of National Education (MEB) announced that in the second term of the 2020-2021 academic year, education will continue face-to-face two days a week, on other days distance education will be. However, the distance education process that had to be experienced deepened the "digital gap" and inequalities that have already existed.

In its report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) pointed out that half of the refugee students in the world disjoin their education during the pandemic process. The report emphasized that there is even more danger for refugee girls. According to the report, which stated that refugee girls' access to education is at a lower level compared to boys, it was noted that the enrolment rate of girls who are about to start secondary education falls by half in comparison with boys.

UNHCR estimates that half of the refugee girls in secondary education will not return to school when schools reopen. The detachment of refugee students from education also strengthens the possibility of their involvement in working life due to the economic losses during the pandemic process.



According to the data of the Directorate General of Migration Management, only 63% of school-age refugee children were continuing their education before the pandemic. While the enrollment rate among refugee children is already low, additional problems with access to distance education after the pandemic increased the risk of refugee children dropping out of school.

According to the results of our interviews and surveys with 50 children and their families in our district to determine the situation regarding the access of refugee children to distance education after the pandemic, only 30 families stated that their children could benefit from distance education. It is said that unfortunately only 5 of the children who can access distance education can attend classes all the time.

It is possible to list the factors that prevent participation in the classes as lack of sufficient technical equipment at home, lack or insufficient internet access at home, language barrier of refugee children, insufficient conditions at home, the indifference of teachers and finally the problem of access to Education Informatics Network (EBA TV). Again, one of the striking results of the interviews with these 50 families is that there is not even television at the 26 children's homes.

Therefore, it is possible to say that refugee children are much more suffered from access to education than their peers whose mother tongue is Turkish, due to inadequate home conditions, lack of technical equipment, and language barriers.

Besides, it is possible to say that in families who lost work and income after the pandemic, the expectations of children about contributing to domestic labour or the household budget have increased. Therefore, this situation establishes a ground for an increase in child labour rates among refugee children.

The achievements of efforts to increase the schooling rate of refugee children before the pandemic are also at risk of being lost due to the problems which refugee children experience in accessing distance education.



What Do International Treaties Say?



According to the 14th article of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed in 1948, while it is regulated that everyone has the right to take refuge in other countries in case of oppression, the 26th article deals with the right to education.

Article 26 states that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.”

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention relating to the Legal Status of Refugees, to which Turkey is a signatory, imposes an obligation on the contracting countries in providing equal education rights.

It is said that “ The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.” in article 22 of the Convention.

The 'principle of adaptability of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, imposes an obligation on the state to provide education appropriate to the special needs and abilities of the child (especially the minority, employee, disabled and refugee). In other words, it suggests that education should be flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of society and the different cultural and social characteristics of the students.

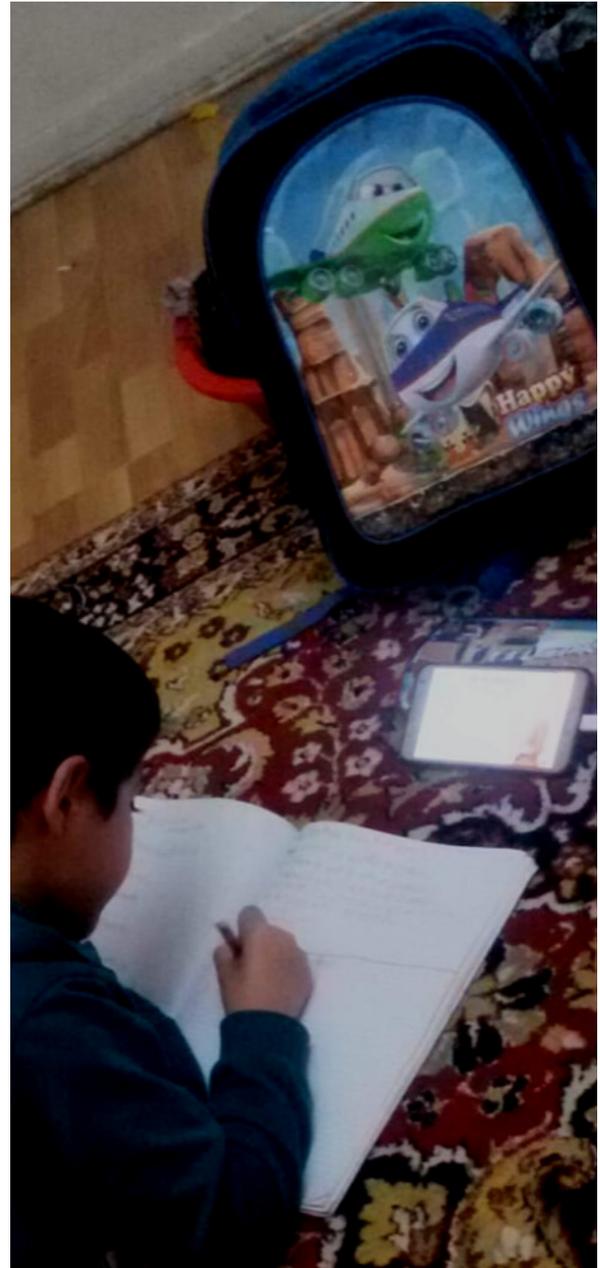
According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, the contracting parties accept that they have adopted and declared that In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Conventions of Human Rights of the United Nations, everyone has the right to enjoy the rights and freedoms being in these texts without any discrimination, including any discrimination arising from race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

In Article 2 of the Convention, it emphasizes that children's rights are the rights of all children and says: "Their place of birth doesn't matter whatever language they speak. No child is discriminated against because of the beliefs or opinions of their elders."

Again, in the 28th article of the convention, it states that the contracting countries accept the child's right to education and this right should be established within the framework of equal opportunity.

In the Article 30th of International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families signed by Turkey on January 13, 1999, it says:

"Each child of a migrant worker shall have the basic right of access to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the State concerned. Access to public pre-school educational institutions or schools shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment."



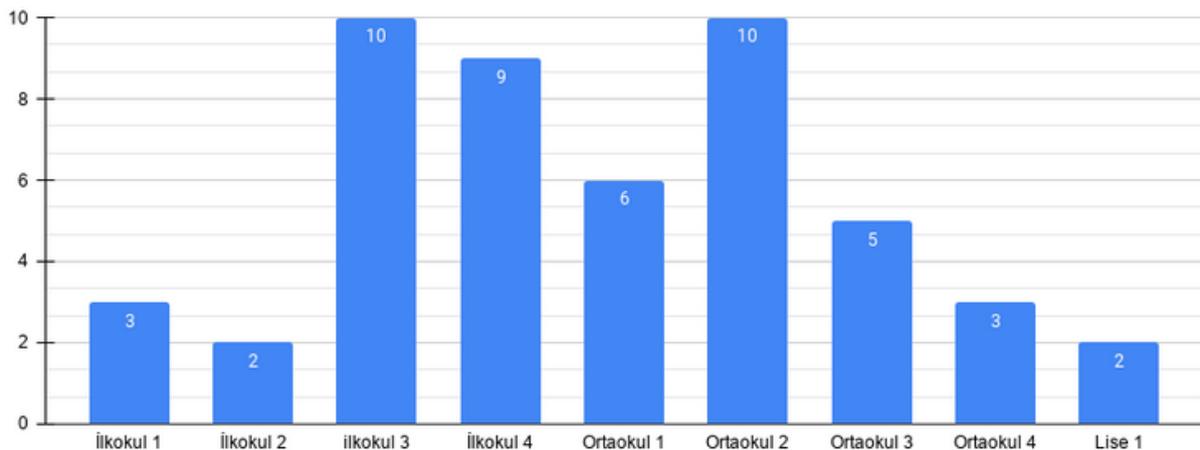
OUR SURVEY RESULTS

Gender Distribution

The survey was conducted face-to-face with Syrian children of school age with Temporary Protection Status and their families living in 50 different houses in the Basmane Kapilar region, where Syrian refugees dwell intensively. The survey aims to find out the rates of Syrian refugee children following distance education and the obstacles to access distance education. Survey interviews were carried out between 18-30 January 2021. Mask and distance rules were taken into consideration during the survey studies. Gender distribution was paid attention to in the interviews.



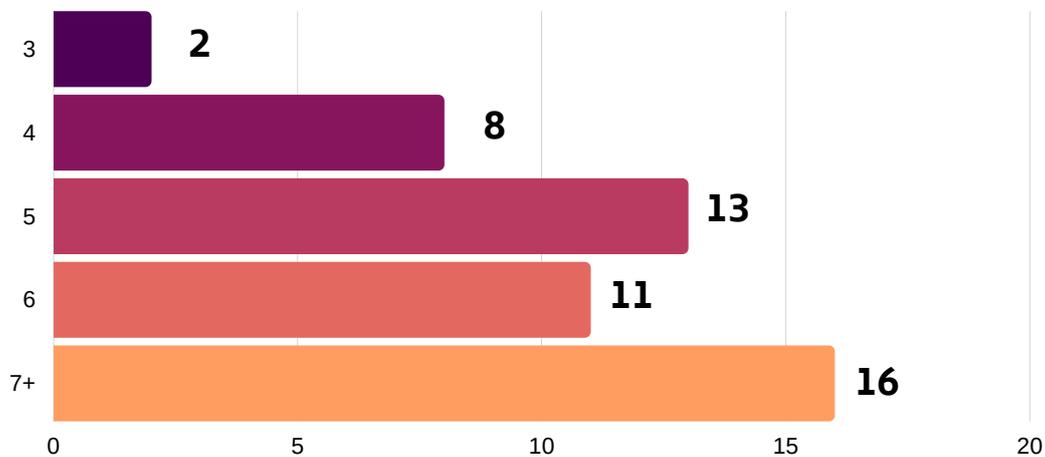
Distribution by Grades



During the survey study, in primary school, 3 students in 1st grade, 2 students in 2nd grade, 10 students in 3rd grade, 9 students in 4th grade; in secondary school 6 students in 1st grade, 10 students in 2nd grade, 5 students in 3rd grade and 3 students in 4th grade were interviewed. Only 2 students in high school could be interviewed. Since the schooling rate of Syrian refugees of high school age is low, the participation rate remained low.

Distribution Of Households By Size

How many people live in the house was asked per families. 2 families said 3 people, 8 families said 4 people, 13 families said 5 people, 11 families said 6 people and 16 families said 7 and more people.



5,5

Average household size (number of members): 5,5

Distribution Of Students Per Household

To the question 'How many students are enrolled in school at home', 9 families answered 1, 15 families said 2, 16 families answered 3, 6 families said 4, 4 families said 5 or more.

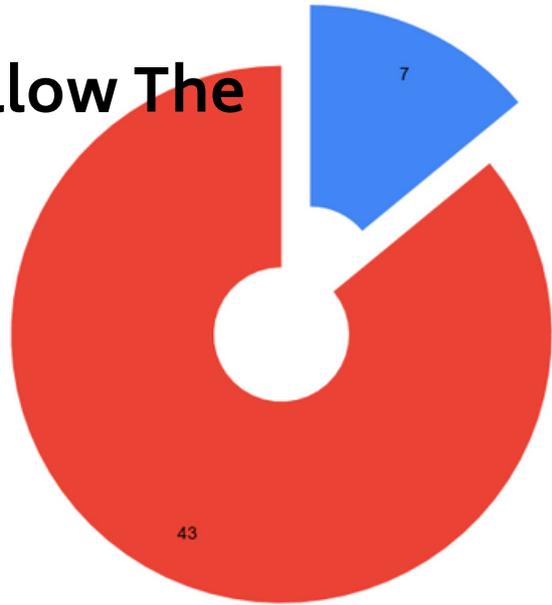


2,6

The average number of students per household: 2,6

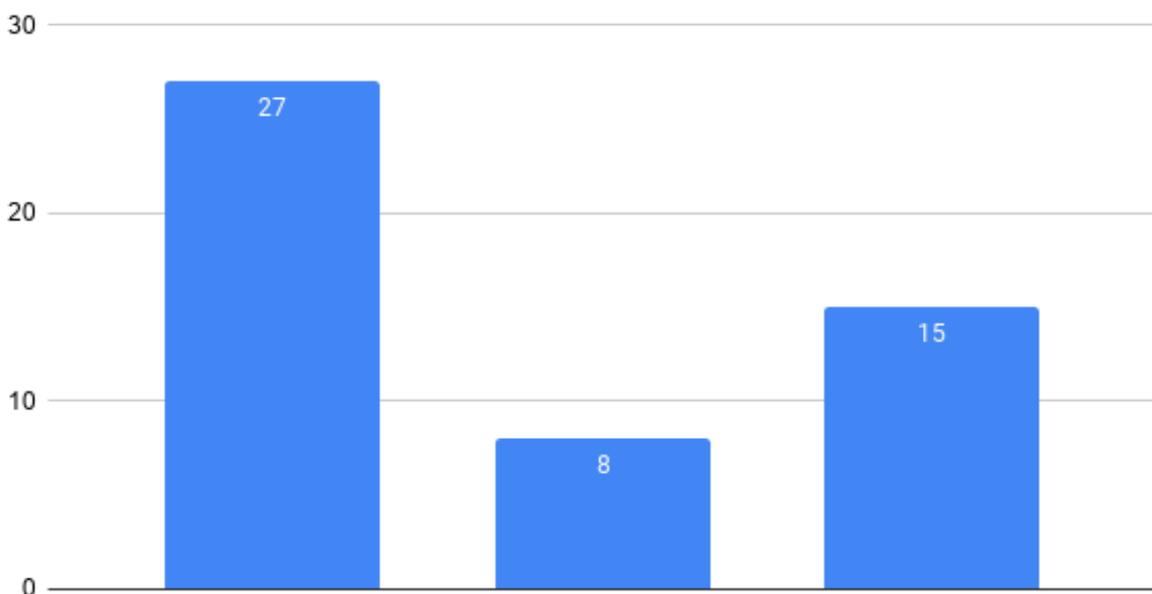
Is There A Suitable Environment To Follow The Lessons At Home?

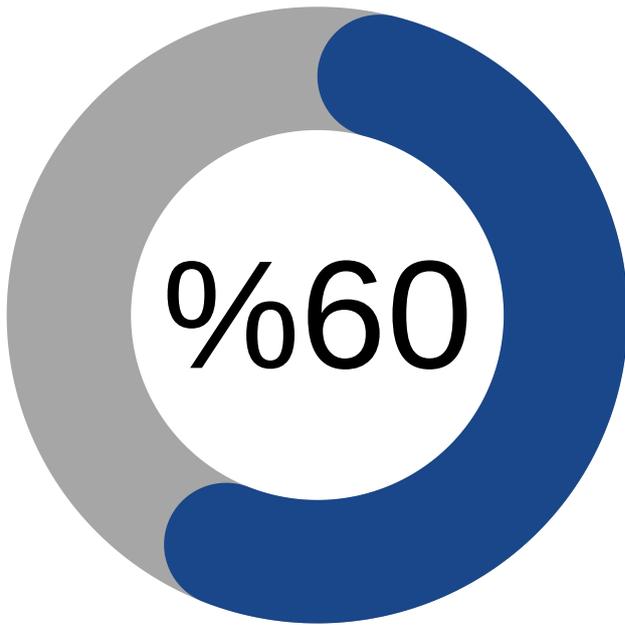
'Is there any place at home that children can use alone during class hours?' Only 7 families could answer 'yes' to the question. 43 families stated that there is not an area where children can listen to the classes.



Internet Status at Home

To the question of 'do you have access to the internet (wi-fi)', 27 families answered 'yes' and 15 families answered 'no'. 8 families stated that they use the internet with their neighbours.



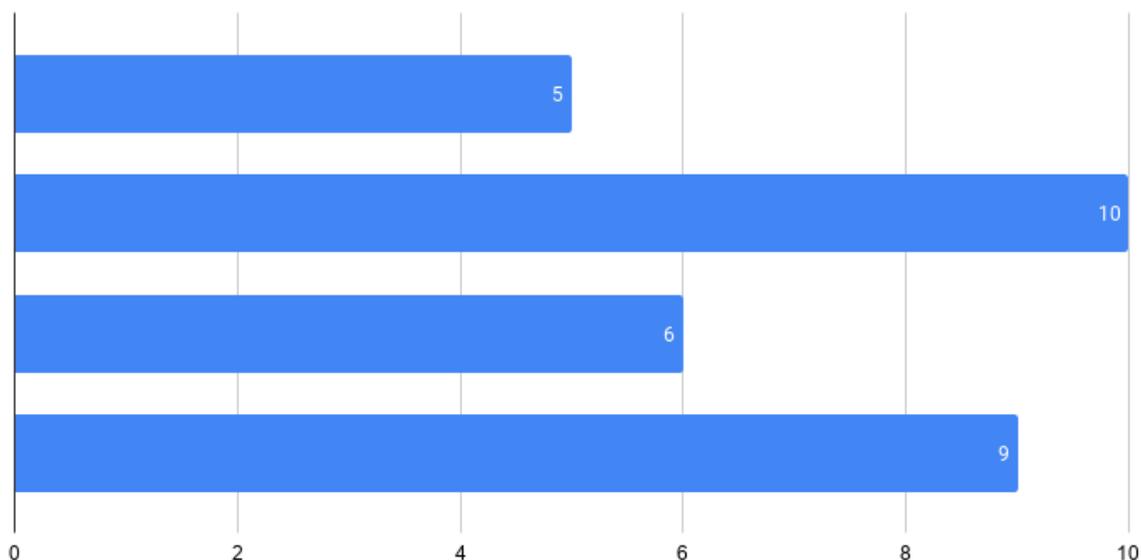


Rates of Access to Distance Education

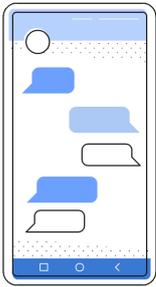
To the question of 'Can your child follow the lessons in distance education?' While 30 families answered yes to the question, 20 families answered no.

'How Often Can Children Attend Classes In The Distance Education Process?'

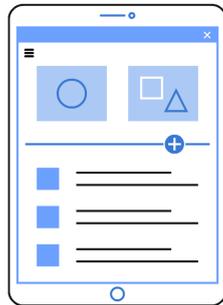
5 families answered the question 'always', 10 families said 'usually', 6 families said 'sometimes', 9 families said 'rarely'.



What Tools Do Your Children Follow The Classes With?



22



5



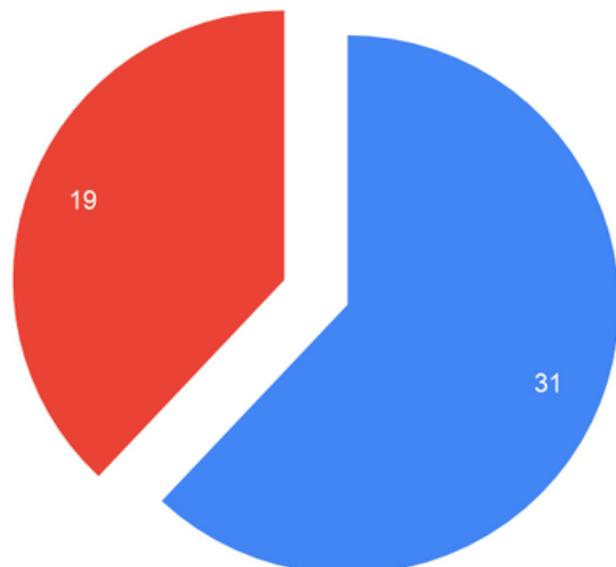
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Of the 30 families who stated that their children follow the classes, 22 families replied that they followed the lessons with mobile phones, 5 families said tablets and 1 family state a computer. Two families stated that they followed classes with both a mobile phone and a tablet.

'Has any institution provided computer or tablet support? ' Only 3 families answered positively to the question. It was stated that 1 family received tablet support from the municipality, another family received from the Ministry of National Education and the other one took from a non-governmental organization. Other families stated that although they applied to the municipality and local governments, they could not receive positive feedback.

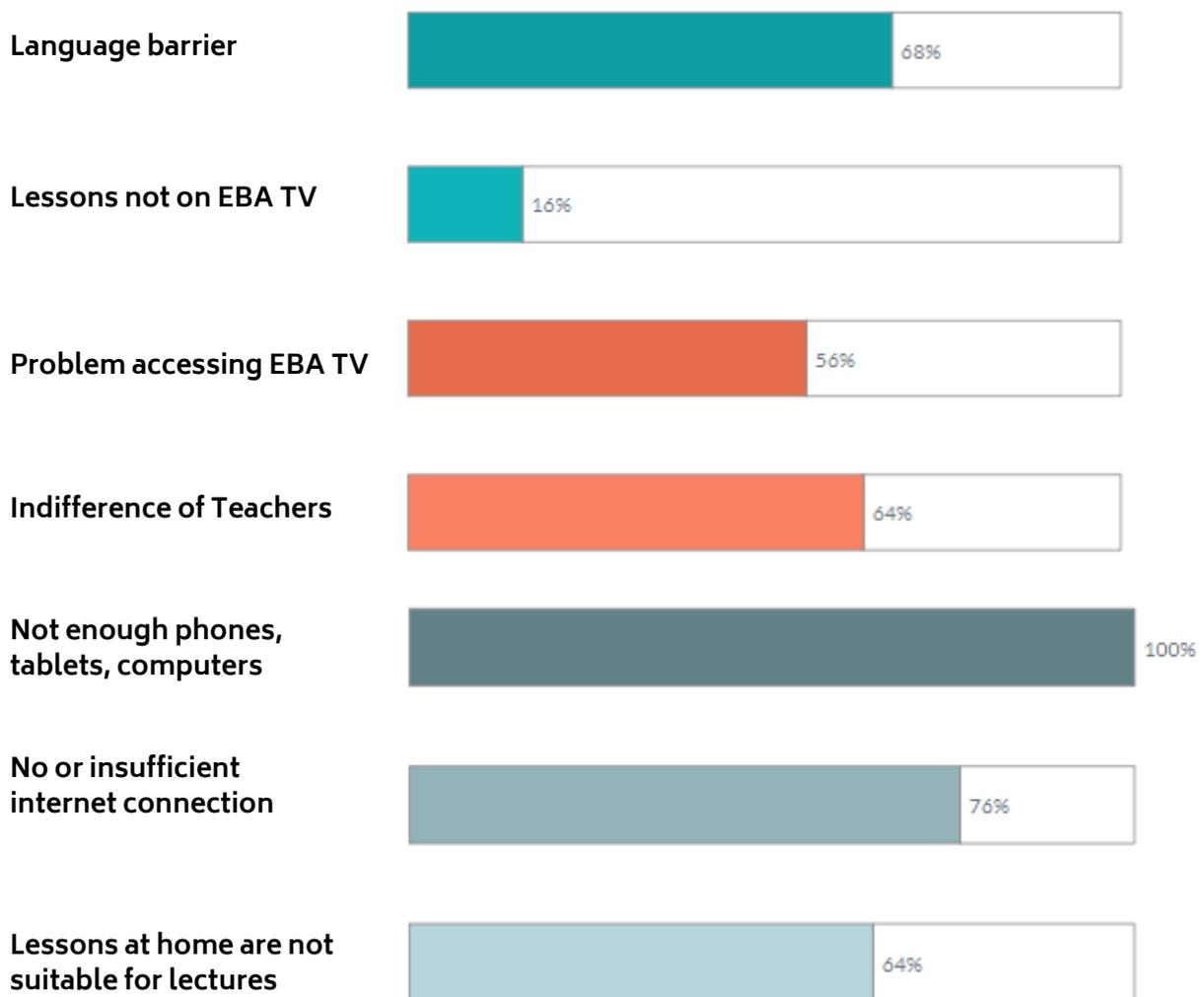
Did The School Management Or Teachers Communicate?

To the question of " have school management and teachers contacted you about your children's need during distance education?" 19 out of 50 families answered yes. 31 families stated that school management or teachers did not contact them during distance education.



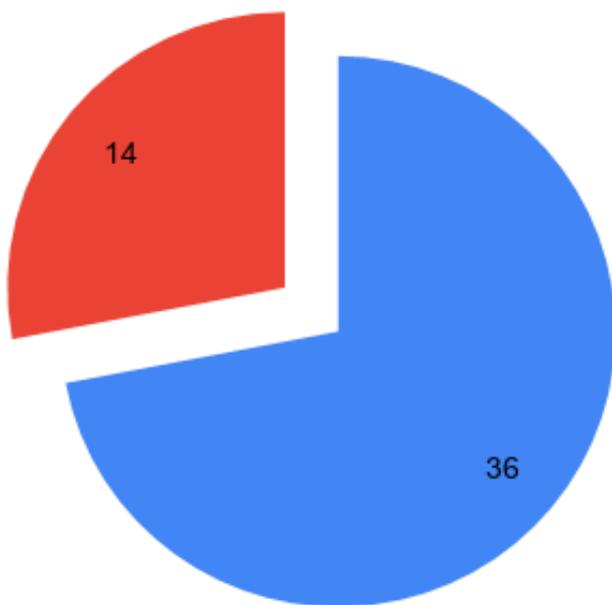
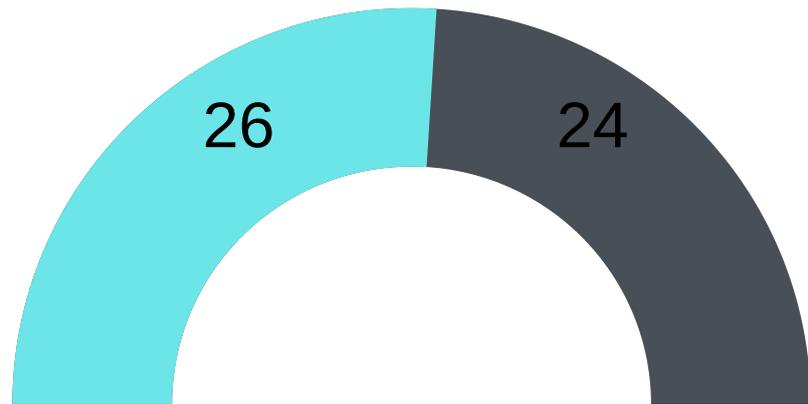
If Your Children Cannot Follow The Classes Regularly, What Are The Reasons For This?

'If your children cannot follow the lessons regularly, what do you think are the reasons for this?' 25 families said 'Not having enough cell phones, computers, tablets', 19 families state 'lack or insufficient internet access', 17 families mentioned 'language barrier', 16 families said 'unsuitable conditions at home for listening to lectures' and 'indifference of teachers', 14 the family replied as ' problem to access EBA'. (This question was asked to 25 families whose children did not attend the classes regularly)



Is There Any Television At Home?

26 families answered 'no' to this question.



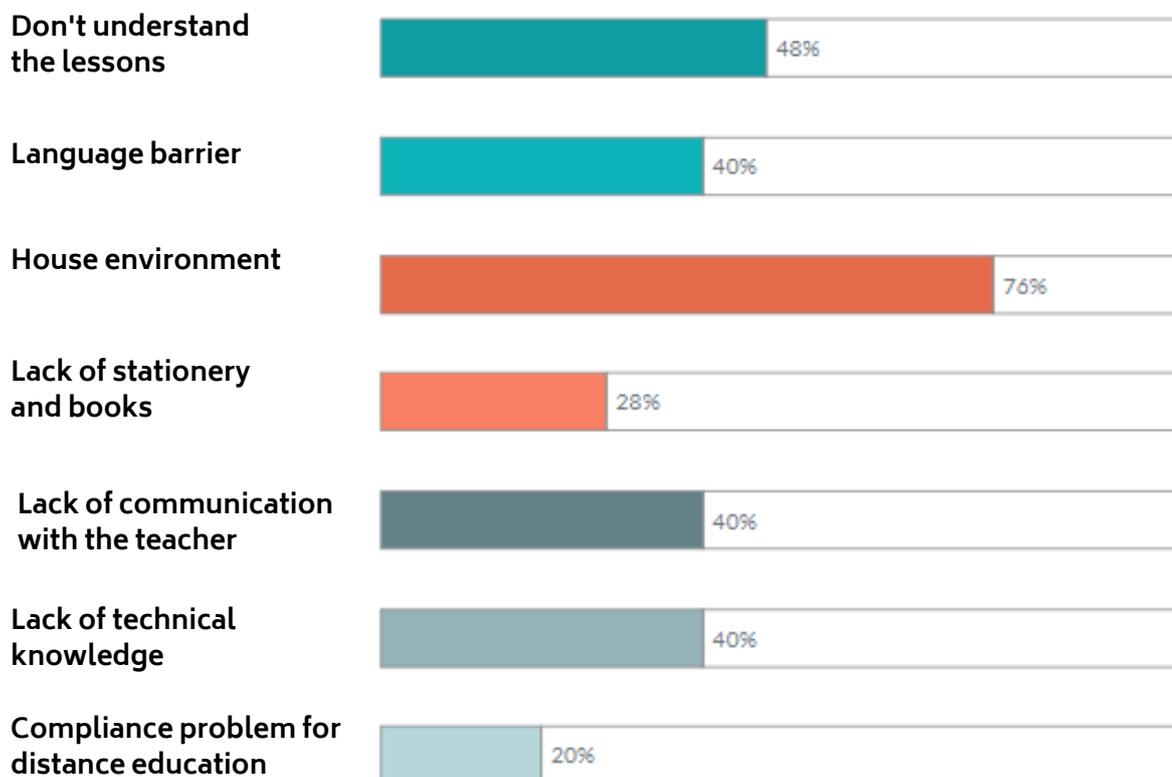
Do Your Children Follow TRT EBA?

Only 14 families answered 'yes' to the question 'Do your children follow TRT EBA'. Families who answered yes were also asked about how often they follow. 4 families answered 'usually', 6 families answered 'sometimes' and 4 families answered 'rarely'. 12 out of 14 families answered that TRT EBA is beneficial for their children's education.

'If you need to make a general assessment, do you think the education your children receive through distance education is sufficient?' was posed. Only 5 families stated that the education which was provided was sufficient.

The Reason Why Education Is Not Sufficient

"Can you explain the reasons for this?" was posed to 25 families who did not find the given education sufficient. To the question which has more than one choice can be marked, 19 families marked 'home environment', 12 families marked 'not understanding the lessons', 10 families marked 'language barrier', 'lack of communication with the teacher', 'lack of technical knowledge, 7 families marked 'lack of stationery, books' and 5 families replied 'the problem of adapting to distance education.



POLICY PROPOSAL

It should be our priority to ensure that all school-age refugee children continue their education. As we brought forward before the pandemic, it is crucial that refugee children who continue their education should be supported in their mother tongue to have the same opportunities as their peers and to increase their academic success. For this purpose, it is necessary to work on the access of more children to the educational materials already prepared and to produce new educational materials.

Besides, to eliminate the inequalities that became more evident in the distance education period, the deficiencies of the refugee children in technical equipment such as the internet, television, tablet and computer should be overcome.

It is important that teachers with refugee students in their class are informed about the special needs of these children, as well as psychosocial support for the socioeconomic problems and adaptation problems of refugee students. In some studies conducted with teachers with refugee children in their class, teachers stated that they do not feel themselves competent in the education of refugee children, that they do not organize their education environment in line with the needs of refugee children, and that they do not think that the curriculum is sufficient for the education of refugee children. Also, they stated that refugee children should be supported to learn Turkish and attend school support classes to solve their adaptation problems.



Lastly, while conducting these studies, it is necessary to look at the concept of adaptation from a holistic perspective, not only for the adaptation of refugee children to school but also for the adaptation of teachers and other students in the classrooms of refugee children. For this purpose, psychosocial support studies to be carried out on adaptation in these classes will be of great benefit.

One of the main factors that cause refugee children to leave their education life is the economic difficulties experienced by their parents. The majority of the refugee population in Turkey live in the city and under adverse conditions. One of the groups most affected by the Covid-19 process has also been the refugee population. According to the results of many studies, before the pandemic, while the vast majority of refugees had difficulties in spending their rent and food expenses, there were also refugees who lost their jobs and income with the pandemic.

Due to the economic difficulties experienced by their parents, many refugee children are dropping out of education because they have to work or help with domestic work to contribute to the income of the home.

For this reason, parents' participation in working life, having a regular income and supporting them socio-economically is also important for children to continue their education.

Besides, parents hardly have the opportunity to help their children with their lessons due to the language barrier. Children are trying to continue their education without any adult who can help with their lessons.



Much as there are children who can speak Turkish fluently among the refugee children who continue their education, they cannot grasp the lessons as well as their peers whose mother tongue is Turkish. Therefore, bilingual learning materials should be developed to enable refugee children to receive education in their language in their classrooms. In addition to school lessons for refugee children, they need to be supported by supplementary studies and Turkish language learning.

Teachers who have refugee students in their classes should also be informed about the special needs of these children, it should be carried on works that include reorganization of the curriculum to involve refugee students, meeting that teachers will have with the families of refugee children and translation support at parents' meetings.

Finally, with the reopening of schools within the scope of normalization steps, it would be appropriate to inform refugee children and their families in their language about the measures to be followed during the Covid-19 process.

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