



STRENGTHENING SOCIAL ADAPTATION AND MULTICULTURALITY THROUGH ART



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



*Refugee and Turkish Children Brought Together by Music:
Case Study “Together Stronger Voices Choir II”*

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December 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2. INTRODUCTION	4
2.1. Social Adaptation of Refugee Children	4
2.2. Importance of Social Contact in Establishing Intergroup Relations	4
2.3. Multicultural Educational Program Approach	5
2.4. Programs to Support Social Adaptation through Art	6
3. METHODOLOGY	8
4. CASE ANALYSIS: Together Stronger Voices Choir II	9
4.1. Information About Participant Children Based on Survey Data	9
4.2. Stages of Planning and Conducting the Choir	12
4.3. Interview with the Conductor	13
4.4. Interviews with Parents of Chorist Children	15
4.5. Interviews with Chorist Children	20
4.6. Interviews with Non-Governmental Organizations	24
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	27
6. REFERENCES	30

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the Global Trends report published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2019, Turkey is the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world.ⁱ According to the most recent data, there are 3 million 635 thousand Syrian refugees registered under temporary protection status in Turkey. There are also over 300 thousand registered refugees and asylum seekers from other nationalities. 47% of this refugee population, which is approximately 4 million, consists of infants, children and young people. A closer look at these numbers reveals that there are a total of 500,000 children between the ages of 0-4 and over 1 million children of school age.ⁱⁱ

Research indicates that refugee children are the most disadvantaged group affected by forced migration.ⁱⁱⁱ The migration process experienced by refugee children includes many risk factors. The United Nations and other organizations support the migrant crisis in Turkey under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan.^{iv} Nevertheless, many refugee children live with serious financial problems, have difficulty in accessing services and they are at risk of violence and neglect within the family. According to a UNICEF report published in 2018, 12% of refugee families in Turkey live in conditions of extreme poverty and 59% in moderate poverty.^v Despite legal regulations, most of the refugee children of secondary school age are excluded from the education process due to reasons such as language barrier, having to work at an early age, gender norms, and disability. In addition, refugee children are frequently exposed to discrimination and peer bullying, which deeply affects their mental health and social adaptation process.^{vi} Therefore, programs that aim to reduce the difficulties experienced by refugee children, support their psychological well-being as well as social adaptation process, and breaking down prejudices against refugee groups in the host country are warranted.

While art programs have the potential to create opportunities for cohesion and integration between refugee and local children, most of them are one-off or for a certain period of time. Thus, continuity and availability of these programs to larger numbers of children cannot be ensured. However, art activities such as painting, music, and dance are enjoyable activities for children who are in constant state of curiosity and exploration since the first years of life. Children make discoveries by using all their senses and express themselves naturally as they like. At the same time, art is symbolic and offers children opportunities to express themselves in non-verbal ways.^{vii} Therefore, artistic activities help them overcome language barriers, providing opportunities to develop friendships with their peers in their precinct and to demonstrate their creative potential. Accordingly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes the important role of the arts and art education in child development and advocates access to art as a universal human right for every child in society, regardless of socioeconomic, refugee, cultural minority or disability status.^{viii}

Together Stronger Voices Choir II, discussed in this report, is the result of an art workshop offered by the Alt Kat: Learning and Interaction Space of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSV). The space aims to improve access to and participation in art and culture events by children and young people. Zeynep Eren Kovankaya is the conductor of Together Stronger Voices Choir II, which was planned by the teams of İKSV Alt Kat and the Istanbul Music Festival and was realized with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The choir began in February 2020 with the children who have been referred from the Human Resources Development Foundation (İKGV), Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation, and the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) programs for refugees. The Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul provided a venue to the project for pre-concert rehearsals. Following the rehearsals, the choir performed a concert with a multilingual repertoire on October 2, 2020, on İKSV YouTube channel under the scope of the 48th Istanbul Music Festival, which held online due to the pandemic.

This report carries out the impact assessment of Together Stronger Voices Choir II, which represents an example of multiculturalism and inclusive education. The first part of the report reviews music-based social adaptation programs for refugee children and youth. The second part of the report includes the case analysis of Together Stronger Voices Choir II project. In light of all the interviews and observations made, the report provides findings regarding the basic ideas and approaches of choral work and the developmental gains of children.

The project owes its success to the facts that each of the Turkish, Syrian, Afghan and Moroccan children who were together in the choir met equally in their “chorist” identity; they came together for a common goal to record a digital concert at the end of the workshop; the conductor supported their development in the field of music by focusing on the strengths of the children; and the non-governmental organizations provided children with access to the workshop even during the pandemic. In the last part of the report, there are recommendations for the planning, development, and implementation of multicultural programs that aim to increase the sociocultural adaptation of refugee children and reduce discrimination through the example of the Together Stronger Voices Choir II project. The data presented in this case study is intended to contribute to the knowledge of various institutions and individuals working in this field and developing similar social adaptation projects.

2. INTRODUCTION

Acculturation is defined as the process of refugee children adapting to the culture of the host country. Many factors affect the acculturation process, from individual characteristics such as the age of children, time spent in the country of immigration and the quality of their environmental experiences to economic and political conditions.^{ix} Migrant and refugee children can combine both the identity of their own culture and the cultural identity of the host country in different ways. The complete loss of one's own cultural values and the adoption of the culture of the host country is defined as assimilation. Integration, on the other hand, is when certain elements of the refugee's own culture is preserved while the language and basic cultural characteristics of the host country are learned. The healthy integration of refugee children is of great importance, not only for their psychological, social and cultural development, but also for the individuals in the host society.^x The sociocultural adaptation of refugee children also points to the success of the social and educational policies of the host countries.^{xi}

2.1. Social Adaptation of Refugee Children

The forced migration process experienced by refugee children includes many risk factors. The child's traumas such as war, conflict, violence *before migration*, long or short-term separations or even losses in the family, migration under difficult conditions, having to stay away from education *during migration*, and having limited opportunities in the family, living with parents who have mental health problems, language barriers, discrimination in the school and neighborhood, as well as having to work at an early age *after the migration* are among the risk factors that negatively affect children's social adaptation.^{xii} When such adverse conditions that may occur before, during, and after migration accumulate, they play a negative role on children's physical and psychological health and social cohesion.^{xiii}

Although refugee children are at high risk of experiencing psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and stress,^{xiv} research suggests that positive conditions after migration can facilitate the adaptation process of refugee children and reduce the negative effects of traumas.^{xv} A warm and sensitive family environment, friendships with peers in the host country, schools that embrace multiculturalism and culture-sensitive education play a protective role for the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of refugee children.^{xvii} Research also shows that children with positive expectations for the future are more likely to overcome difficult and traumatic times more easily.^{xvii}

2.2. Importance of Social Contact in Establishing Intergroup Relations

Among the factors that affect the acculturation process, the host country's position and policies towards refugees also play an important role. In this sense, it is critical for a healthy integration that refugee children are accepted by adults and their peers in their newly settled society.^{xviii} These findings can be explained by social contact theory in psychology. According to the social contact theory, increased social interaction between minority and majority groups contributes to the decrease of negative prejudices and increase of positive attitudes towards the minority

group.^{xix} Breaking down prejudices occurs due to reduced intergroup anxiety and individuals' empathy towards cultural differences.^{xx} Thus, as refugee children establish social ties with their peers who are settled in their host society, the acculturation process involves not only refugee children but also the children of the host country they are friends with.

However, social contact theory draws attention to four conditions for the interactions between children of the refugee and host communities to reduce prejudices and improve intergroup relations:^{xxi}

- Equal status of individuals in majority and minority groups
- Setting common goals
- Organizing activities that require cooperation between groups
- Supporting the process by the authorities

Growing research also supports this theoretical approach by showing that a positive change in intergroup attitudes is likely to emerge when children with different identities come together under equal conditions to achieve a common goal, have the opportunity to work and learn in cooperation and that the whole process is supported by a high-level authority (e.g. school management, NGO).^{xxii}

Recent research also reveals the positive role of even “indirect” contact between groups.^{xxiii} In other words, if a Turkish child shows up with refugee peers in a program and this program is watched by other Turkish children, such indirect contact has the potential to reduce prejudices against the refugee group by the children of the host country.

As a result, both theory and research findings in psychology emphasize the importance of conducting activities that bring different groups together under suitable circumstances in order to support the psychological well-being and social adaptation of refugee children, to break down the prejudices of resident children in the host country and to eliminate discrimination. Programs that bring refugee children and the children of the host country together are also expected to have a multicultural education approach.

2.3. Multicultural Education Approach

Social adaptation programs that bring refugee children and children of the host country together should be planned and implemented with a “multicultural” education approach. Valuing cultural diversity, this approach aims to ensure equal opportunity for every individual in education, regardless of socioeconomic status, refugee status, cultural minority or disability status.^{xxiv} Programs with a multicultural education approach include activities that will strengthen social ties within the group in order to develop tolerant, respectful and cooperative existence of children who speak different languages and have different cultural or developmental characteristics. In this approach, it is a priority to learn both the children's own culture and the cultures of the other children in the group. In this learning process, it is important to create the understanding that individual or intergroup differences reflect pluralism and cultural richness. With the multicultural education approach, children should also have the opportunity to learn about their common characteristics as they gain awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity.

2.4. Programs to Support Social Adaptation through Art

Some of the activities aimed at increasing social adaptation include programs where children can express themselves through art. However, it has been found that the number of programs that bring refugee and resident children together through art is limited in number. The paucity of such programs is striking, as various art activities such as music, drama and painting are all relaxing and enjoyable activities for children. Through art activities, children can stimulate their imagination while having fun and make discoveries using all their senses, and accomplish things they have never done before. At the same time, art includes symbolic language, which makes it easier to overcome language barriers in communication, and children can express themselves naturally as they like. Considering all these factors, it is obvious that art programs have the potential to increase contact between refugee children and their peers in the host community and enable them to get to know each other and develop friendships.

Music and movement-based programs are among the most studied fine arts programs. In these programs, children sing with a music instructor, play an instrument or move and dance to accompany the rhythm of the music. Aside from relaxing, calming and sometimes cheering up the children, the rhythm and tempo of the music provide children with numerous opportunities to slow or speed up their movements and control their bodies. There are also situations in musical activities that require children to make the right decisions between different reactions, for example, where children make a choice between clapping hands and playing their instrument in due time. These situations improve children's ability to remember different instructions and act on them.^{xxv}

Studies reveal that children who move synchronously in activities involving rhythmic music, song and dance, cooperate more with each other and have stronger social relationships with children who know the same songs. These results show that music enhances a child's sense of belonging to a group.^{xxvi xxvii xxviii} Finally, music has been found to help in the recovery from psychological trauma.^{xxix} In light of all these findings, it is possible to say that music, rhythm and movement-based activities contribute not only to the musical development of children but also to their physical, cognitive (for example, language and attention), social and emotional development as a whole.

There are exemplary programs that use music as a means of interaction in social adaptation. These programs aim to facilitate the acculturation process of migrant and/or refugee children by using music as an educational tool rather than an educational topic. While some of these programs provide inclusive education to increase contact between refugee and resident children, there are also programs for migrant/refugee children only, as reviewed below.

Current studies reveal the contribution of music-based art activities to migrant and refugee children in language acquisition, which is critical in the acculturation process. For example, in a study conducted in Germany, migrant children between the ages of 4-6 were randomly assigned to either a music, sports or a language education program. For 14 weeks, each group worked for 20 minutes, 3 times a week. It was observed that children in the music program, which included song, rhythm and percussion activities, acquired phonological awareness skills similar to the children in the language education program.^{xxx} The ability to recognize and distinguish sounds, known as phonological awareness, forms the basis for children's literacy skills and contributes to school success. The findings of this study indicate that migrant children can acquire this literacy skill, which is of great importance for school success, through music,.

The program named *An Instrument for Every Child (Jedem Kind ein Instrument-JeKi)*, implemented in Germany, brings together migrant children between the ages of 7-11 from countries such as Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and Poland with their German peers studying at the same school for about 2 years. Research findings on the impact of this program indicate that migrant children who participated in the music program perceive friendship more positively and show more social adaptation than their peers who did not participate in the program.^{xxxii}

A study conducted in Australia points out that migrant children, especially those who do not speak the language of the host country, are more likely to participate in games that contain melodic words that match with certain movements, and do not have a specific meaning (such as *Ole, Mella*). These findings suggest that even if they do not yet know the language of the country of immigration, migrant or refugee children can establish social bonds with the children of the host community through such games.^{xxxiii}

In Australia and Canada, there are exemplary choral music programs that are shared collectively and strengthen social bonds of children of different languages, cultures and beliefs. For example, a project called the *Lullaby Choir* was implemented in a multicultural suburban area near Melbourne, Australia where 10 different languages are spoken. This choir, which was planned to increase social contact between groups and bringing together individuals from different cultures, was designed for adults. The repertoire of the choir consists of lullabies, given that lullabies are relaxing and facilitate emotional communication, as well as the transfer of cultural memory. Another reason why the repertoire consists of lullabies from different cultures is to draw on the adult participants' experience of shared identity of parenthood.

The choir, called *Nai Kids* in Canada, was established by the voluntary efforts of the employees of a settlement organization, migrant Arab and resident Canadian musicians and the managers of the art institution. This choir primarily seeks to offer meaningful activities during the first transition period to the children of families who migrated to Canada. The choir, which has gained an official identity with the financial support it receives from the organizations that fund public benefit projects, provides free training in three different regions of Canada (www.naikids.com). The transformation created by the choir, which aims to facilitate the social adaptation of refugee children from Syria and Africa between the ages of 5 and 17 years, is analyzed with an ethnographic approach. During the choral music program, children's interactions are observed, sound recordings are taken, children's drawings and storytelling are examined, and group interviews are made. According to children and young people, working together through music, developing cooperation, and being able to express their ideas in a multicultural environment are among the most important achievements of the choir. Besides English and French songs, the choir's repertoire also includes songs that children are familiar with in their own languages.

In the selection of songs, priority is given to the preferences of the young people in the choir and the songs that the audience can accompany. Music instructors also include musical instruments that reflect the cultural heritage of the participating children and young people in choral training. In this way, children are encouraged both to protect their own cultural identity and get to know different cultures through music.^{xxxiii}

3. METHODOLOGY

Together Stronger Voices Choir II was a long-running art workshop project that took place between February and October 2020. For the impact assessment of this workshop, data were collected mainly by in-depth interview method. These in-depth interviews, which included open-ended questions, enabled the participants to share their wishes, values and ideas in detail and reflect their emotions. Qualitative data created with direct quotations in this case analysis provides the reader with the opportunity to grasp the real meaning in the expression of the interviewees rather than in researcher's words.^{xxxiv}

For the case analysis, interviews were made with the conductor, refugee and Turkish children participating in the chorus, parents of the children, NGO officials and İKSV Alt Kat team:

- i. Individual or focus group meetings were held with the conductor, 16 refugee and Turkish chorist children, and 9 mothers. In these interviews, the aim was to discuss children's experiences in choral work and their achievements.
- ii. Individual interviews were held with 3 different NGO officials, who play a critical role in refugee children's access and participation to choirs.
- iii. The workshop process was evaluated with the İKSV Alt Kat team.

A total of 24 interviews were held online. Following the deciphering process of the interviews, the main themes of the participants' speech contents were determined after the detailed, careful and repetitive reading of all the data. In this project, MAXQDA software was used, which makes it easier to store, organize, encode, recall and combine qualitative data for analysis.

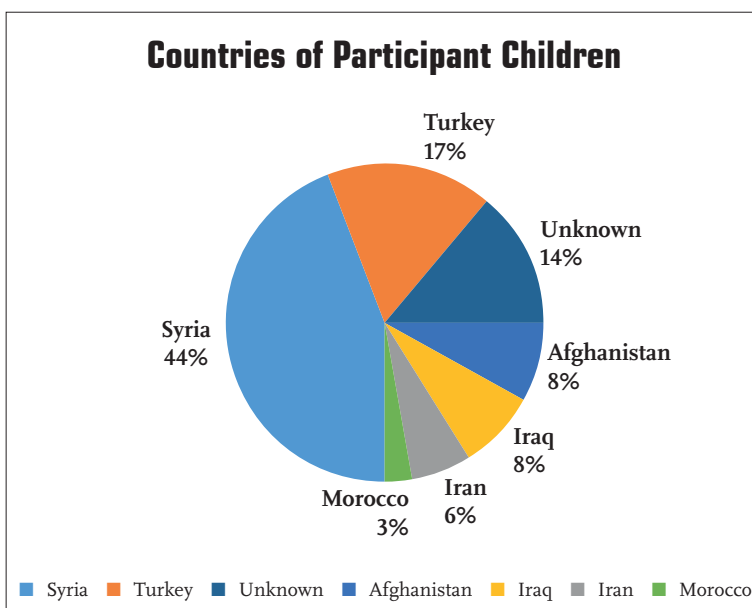
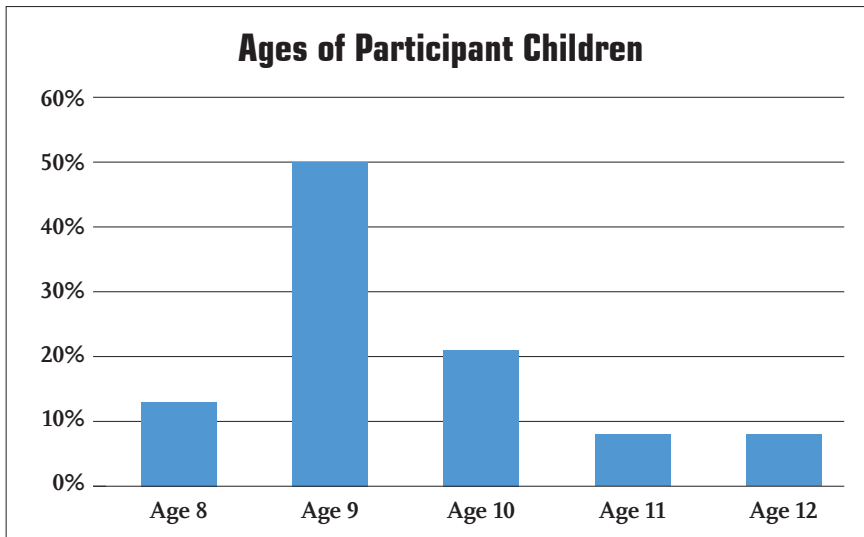
In addition to the in-depth interviews, data on children's demographic information, access to cultural and artistic activities, and social adaptation were collected through a short questionnaire they filled out at the beginning of the choir workshop. Finally, online rehearsals were observed to better understand children's participation in the choral work during the pandemic.

4. CASE ANALYSIS: Together Stronger Voices Choir II

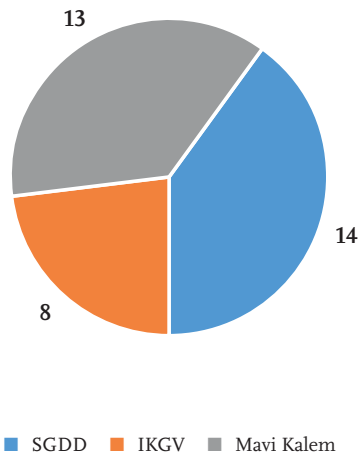
4.1. Information About Participant Children Based on Survey Data

Together Stronger Voices Choir II works started in February 2020 with 36 children in İKSV Alt Kat. In the first week of the workshop, the children were asked to fill out a short questionnaire. According to data collected from 24 children who filled out this questionnaire, the ages of the children participating in the chorus ranged from 8 to 12. Of all participant children, 44% of them were born in Syria, 17% in Turkey, 8% in Iraq, and 6% in Iran. There were relatively few children born in Afghanistan and Morocco in the chorus.

13 children from Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation, 13 children from the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, and 8 children from the Human Resources Development Foundation participated in the chorus. They lived in the districts of Tarlabaşı, Beyoğlu, Fatih, Balat, İsmailağa, Kurtuluş and Taksim.



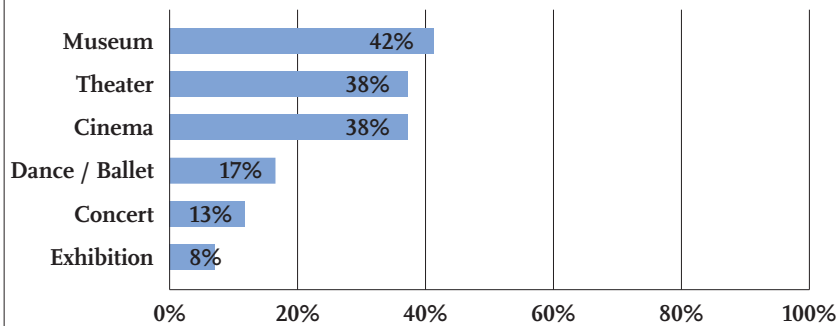
Organizations of Participant Children



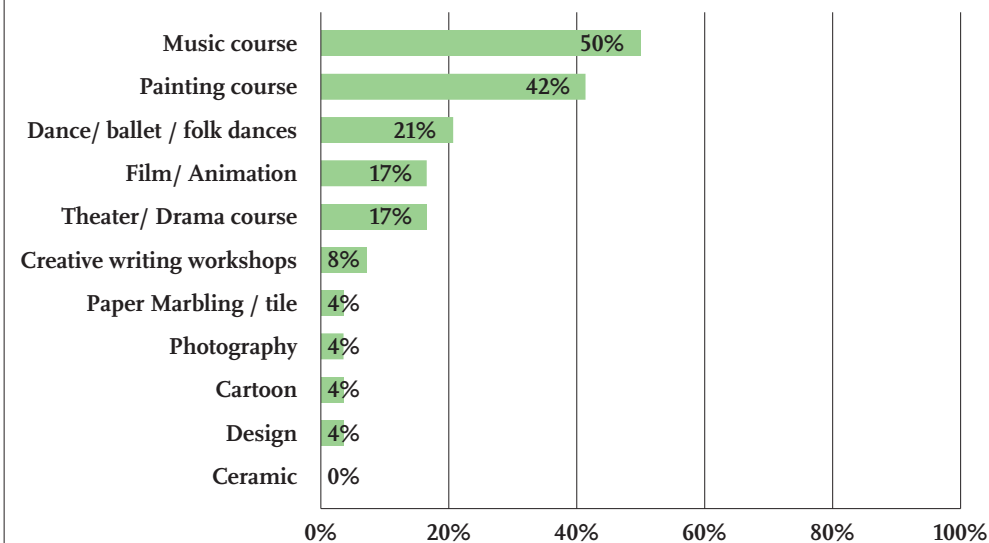
Children's participation in culture and art activities as an audience were examined. According to the data collected from 24 children, 42% of them went to the museum and 38% to the cinema and theater. Fewer children attended exhibitions, concerts or dance performances as an audience.

Children's participation in culture and art activities as an active audience was also examined. According to the data collected from 24 children, 50% of them had previously attended a music course and 42% had attended a painting course. Dance/ ballet/folk dance courses were in third place.

The activity you participated in as audience?



The activities you have participated in?

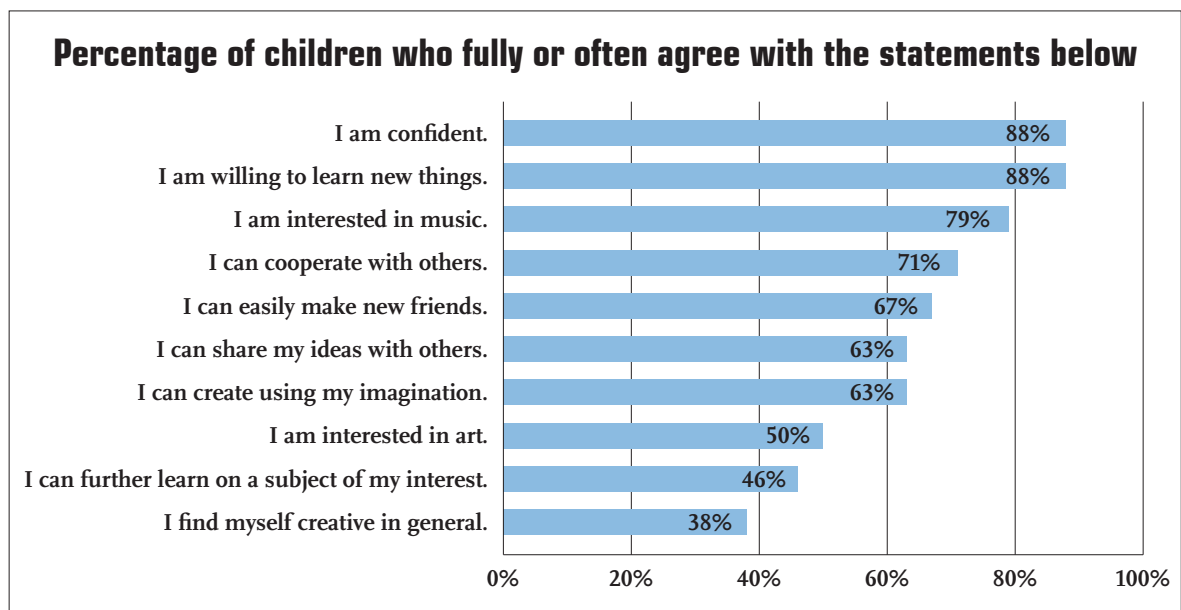


Finally, children responded to 10 questions about how they perceived themselves and on a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=partially agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

In the chart below, the percentages of children who answer the questions with a response of *Agree* or *Strongly Agree* can be seen.

According to this, 88% of children answered that they are confident and willing to learn new things, 79% are interested in music, 71% are cooperative, 67% can easily make new friends, 63% share their ideas with others and create new products using their imagination, 50% are interested in art and 38% found themselves creative in general.

These findings show that half of these refugee children, who have been living in Turkey for an average of 5-6 years, are interested in culture and art, and that they do not experience significant problems in terms of social adaptation based on their self-report.



4.2. Stages of Planning and Conducting the Choir

Two choral projects that will touch children's lives and strengthen their social adaptation through the universal language of music were planned by the İKSV Alt Kat and Istanbul Music Festival teams under the consultancy of Dr. Yeşim Gürer Oymak, the former director of Istanbul Music Festival and Deputy General Manager of İKSV. The first of these choral projects is the Together Stronger Voices Choir I, which was implemented between February and June 2019, inspired by the White Hands Choir within El Sistema. This chorus, where visually and hearing-impaired children and participants from the Music for Peace Foundation Youth Choir sang together, was an exemplary practice for inclusive education. The second project Together Stronger Voices Choir II was inspired by the participation of refugees in many İKSV events, following İKSV's ongoing cooperation with UNHCR for nearly five years¹, and was implemented between February and October 2020.

In light of research showing that artworks strengthen communication and social cohesion among children, the children of families who have settled in Turkey from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Morocco were reached with the Together Stronger Voices Choir II project. The choir aimed to bring refugee and Turkish children together and strengthen their social cohesion through the universal language of music. In addition to enabling children to express themselves and communicate better through songs, this project also aimed to develop children's sense of belonging to a group, increase their social skills and enable them to make new friendships. Together Stronger Voices Choir II provided an opportunity for participants to increase their communication with their community and to strengthen intergroup contact.

The project was realized with the contributions of İKSV Alt Kat team, UNHCR and UNHCR's three local partners, Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation, the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, and 8 children from the Human Resources Development Foundation, and conductor Zeynep Eren Kovankaya:

- *İKSV Alt Kat team* ensured the implementation of the project within the specified period by designing the project, bringing together appropriate partners, experts and supporters, ensuring that the choral work is carried out by a conductor with the necessary competencies in a musically and pedagogically appropriate sense with Istanbul Music Festival team, establishing cooperation with a university for the academic follow-up of the project, by organising physical and online rehearsals and creating concert opportunities.
- *UNHCR* has provided support to reach refugee children with limited financial means who are willing to participate in artistic activities, provide translators and volunteers to take part in the project, and provide tablets and internet packages to increase children's access to the works during the pandemic.

¹ The cooperation between İKSV-UNHCR, which started in 2016 with the opening concert of the 23rd Istanbul Jazz Festival, Damon Albarn and Syrian Musicians Orchestra, hosting nearly 300 refugees in 2016, has been continued with various workshops, guided tours, concerts and events within the scope of the Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul Design Biennial and Istanbul Jazz Festival programs until 2021. While many workshops were held with the participation of refugee children within the Istanbul Biennial and İKSV Alt Kat, children's books were published in Turkish and English as well as in Arabic and made available to refugee children and their families by İKSV between 2017-2019. Within the scope of İKSV Cultural Policy Studies, a report titled "Living Together: Developing Cultural Pluralism Through Art" was published in July 2018 by Dr. Feyzi Baban and Dr. Kim Rygjel. The report focuses on the role of culture and arts in facilitating the long-term coexistence of refugees and migrants and local populations. <https://www.iksv.org/tr/raporlar/birlikte-yasamak-kulturel-cogulculugu-sanat-yoluyla-gelistirmek>.

- *The conductor, Zeynep Eren Kovankaya, was interested in the choral education of the children, the officials of three local partners of UNHCR, Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation, the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, and from the Human Resources Development Foundation invited the families to the project and ensured the continuity of the work with their regular follow-up, as well as accompanying the families and children in the pre-concert rehearsals held in the garden of the Swedish Consulate General in September.*

In line with the spatial capacity of İKSV Alt Kat, the choir started initially with approximately 36 children in February 2020. However, once the choral sessions were switched to online sessions due to the pandemic, some children left the program because of technical inadequacy, while other children dropped because they were not interested or because they could not adapt to online sessions. As a result, the project was completed with 22 children with the comprehensive support mentioned above. The choir, which continued its sessions online once a week for six months due to pandemic, participated in the 48th Istanbul Music Festival program with an online concert.

At the end of the project, the individual voice recordings of the children were taken in İKSV Alt Kat in accordance with the pandemic measures, and the collected voice recordings were combined in the studio. The footage was shot in the garden of the Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul. Chorist children had the opportunity to share this special concert with their families and friends free of charge on the İKSV YouTube page, accessed through: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJGnrUgtqbg>

4.3. Interview with the Conductor

Zeynep Eren Kovankaya, who studied music theory at the Istanbul Technical University Center for Advanced Studies in Music, completed her choral conducting training with the certificate program of choral conducting at Bahçeşehir University for three years. Kovankaya, who was the conductor of the choir of the university during her studies at the Department of Sociology at Boğaziçi University, continued her conducting experience in the choir named Folya, that she founded.

Zeynep Eren Kovankaya, who started working with children in 2014 at the Antalya Piano Festival with a project where she taught music to young children from disadvantaged regions, has been working as a choral teacher and piano teacher at TED Istanbul College since 2018. Conductor Zeynep Eren Kovankaya took part in the first choral project of İKSV Alt Kat, Together Stronger Voices Choir I, with sign language consultants and trainers Buket Ela Demirel and İpek Aktaşlı, between February and June 2019. She has recently translated the work entitled *Collective Speaking* published by the European Choral Association on the methods of working with refugee choirs into Turkish. The conductor noted that she had the opportunity to apply all the working methods and theory she had learned with this translation for the first time within the choral music program of *Together Stronger Voices Choir II*.

The choral music program at İKSV Alt Kat started in February but paused due to the refugee movement at the border a month later, and stopped completely in March with the COVID-19 pandemic. Online sessions and a digital concert followed in April. The conductor describes this period as a *diligent process* both for herself and the children. She shares that the children who performed in the choir worked very hard and she tried to help them as much as she could, despite all the conditions.

The conductor stated that she worked with children who had very different levels of music knowledge. While some of the children in the choir had a very good voice, some of the children's sense of hearing were still developing and they could not make the sounds they wanted. She stated that she tried to attend and listen to all of them individually in online sessions to enhance their musical development. The conductor sees children's enthusiastic singing as an important step, even if their sense of hearing has not developed yet. On the other hand, she shared that some children quickly memorized all the songs and she showed a more individual approach to these children even though it was not compatible with choral philosophy.

The conductor noted that there were very few children who experienced language barriers in the choir and that the main language was the language of music in the choral music program. The conductor thinks that in case of a language problem, the basic concepts can be taught with the interpreter for the first month and a half, and then the interpreter can help less frequently. Zeynep Eren Kovankaya underlines that when there is an interpreter, one and a half hour's work should actually be considered as 45 minutes. When working with the Zoom app, she estimates that the language barrier is more easily overcome since the text is on the screen and the music is in the back.

The conductor determines the repertoire by taking into account the criteria of *easy lyrics, easy melody, and choreography*. According to the conductor, the most important reason why the song "Epoi Tai Tai" is a favorite among children is that its lyrics are so easy, its movements are so fun, and it creates a circle effect by starting over every time. Because of all these qualities, she observes that the children are very happy with the feeling that "I can sing this song."

On the other hand, the conductor explains the importance of including melodically more challenging songs in the repertoire in a balanced way, saying, *"If we do not challenge children, then they can get bored quickly."* In conclusion, Zeynep Eren Kovankaya stated that she aimed to catch the audience in Turkey by adding a few Turkish songs ("Oynar Mısın Benimle" [Would you Play with Me?] to begin with). And since there are many Turkish-speaking children in the choir, she also added the song called "Tebessüm" (Smile) and children loved the choreography of this song. She believes that the online rehearsals did not provide as much excitement as those in Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul, where the last two physical rehearsals were held, but that online sessions laid the groundwork for pre-concert rehearsals. *"They said 'Okay, I will do it one day,' and they were amused at the Swedish Consulate General. So, we had actually invested in the future, it was good in that sense."*

Finally, the conductor emphasizes the importance of keeping the lyrics and choreography as consistent as possible, which makes it easier for children to memorize the lyrics. For some children who can speak but cannot read Turkish, the conductor reported that she sent audio recordings or YouTube videos to all children to hear and memorize the songs.

The conductor emphasizes that expressing care and providing genuine support contributes to emotional safety in the group. She also notes that it is important to encourage children to learn from mistakes and setbacks to help students experience success. The conductor adds that she always tried to listen to the children one by one and gave them opportunities to express themselves. *"Because if they can feel a space for themselves, if they can reflect themselves to that screen, they will feel like they are already at home. They will think that it is a community and they belong here. I always paid attention to these issues."*

According to Zeynep Eren Kovankaya, one of the hardest things about working online is that children cannot experience physical contact.

“Singing is a work of vibration, a little bit. The voice of the person next to me vibrates in my body, my voice vibrates in their body. This resonance is actually important.”

In addition, the conductor, who defines the choir as a socializing environment, expressed that children longed to sing together with their friends in person rather than holding online rehearsals during the pandemic. Finally, the conductor described that children were singing songs one by one during the online sessions; and not being able to sing at the same time during online rehearsals was another challenge.

“Singular voice is useless for us in the choir. So if there are ten children, it should be heard like a single child, it should be heard like a single choral voice. You know, we normally don’t want A’s and B’s voices to be heard separately. But it was impossible on Zoom. This was the challenge.”

Regarding the achievements of the children, the conductor says, *“They have learned what it means to start and finish a song”*, stating that even if they are challenged or bored, children experienced the process of singing in the best way. In addition, she adds that children acquired skills such as waiting when necessary, speeding up, or slowing down according to the melody. Thirdly, she states that the self-esteem of the children has improved and she noticed that they sang more easily over time by looking at each other on the screen without turning off their cameras.

Finally, the conductor emphasizes the importance of goal-oriented work in such activities. She states that working towards a goal, such as a concert, motivates children, but when the pandemic began, they were worried that the goal they set for them would disappear. Stating that the children were motivated again when they learned that they were going to give a digital concert in July, the conductor reflects the feelings of the children by saying *“they felt as if they were completed”*. Conductor Zeynep Eren Kovankaya said, *“If we lead the way to a child and then block that road, the child cannot know where to go, they are little and inexperienced. We need to continue to guide them as much as possible”* by emphasizing the importance of sustainability in choral work.

4.4. Interviews with Parents of Chorist Children

During the assessment process, an individual interview with six mothers and a group interview with three Persian-speaking mothers were conducted. Interviews with Arabic and Persian speaking mothers were conducted through an interpreter.

One of the three Turkish mothers stated that she had no migration story and lived in Istanbul, while the other two mothers migrated from Mardin to Istanbul about 15 years ago and their children were born in Istanbul.

Two of the Arabic-speaking mothers had migrated from Syria and one from Morocco. The first of the Syrian migrant mother’s child was 3 years old when they came to Turkey, and the second mother’s child was 4. Both mothers’ children spoke Turkish well and they are successful in school too. The Moroccan mother had been living in Turkey for the last 2 years.

Two of the Persian-speaking mothers had migrated from Iran and one from Afghanistan. The child of the first Iranian mother living in Turkey for the last six years were 4 years old when they came to Turkey, and the second mother's child was 2. The Afghan mother had been living in Turkey for the last 5 years and her daughter was born in Afghanistan. She had migrated to Turkey when her daughter was 7 years old.

Mothers who had migrated from Syria and Morocco stated that children's access to cultural and artistic activities is limited to activities at SGDD-ASAM and music lessons at school, while Persian-speaking mothers said that their children are very interested in the arts, show success in music lessons at school, and have learned to play instruments at home via YouTube.

Most of the mothers stated that they learned about Together Stronger Voices Choir II through NGOs and that the project managers in NGO offices gave information about the project and invited the children to choral music program. Three mothers learned the program from the İKSV Alt Kat team.

When asked about their expectations when enrolling their children in the program, the most frequently reported reason by both Turkish and migrant families was that **children have new experiences and make new friendships in a new environment**. Families noticing their children's interest and curiosity in music also expressed their expectations for a **qualified musical education**, and the expectation that choral activities would be **fun** was in the third place. Less cited reasons were to protect the child from the risks in the neighborhood they live in or to increase the self-confidence of the child, who is defined as an introvert.

"My favorite points are those: First, he will leave the house, so I think leaving the house and making new friends will be good for him as he already loves music."

"I think music is a common language, it doesn't need translation, and all people in the world can understand music without translation. And in our case, a group was formed in a foreign country from children from different countries. They would all sing a song in the common language. This excited me very much. It was very interesting that they did not speak the same language but sing the same song together."

About a quarter of the mothers reported that their children attended the choral work irregularly because they went to their hometown in summer and had internet problems. Most of the mothers stated that their children regularly participated in the choral work for about 6 months with great enthusiasm, interest and curiosity, this interest did not decrease after the COVID-19 pandemic started, and even their children were very happy when they started again after a break for about 1 and a half or 2 months. The mothers of the children who attended regularly stated that their children missed class only 1-2 times due to travel or illness, or because of technical problems such as telephone/internet connection. They also added that the staff in NGOs reminded them by phone or by sending a message before the rehearsals.

The close attention of NGOs and İKSV Alt Kat officials seems to play an important role in the regular and timely participation of children. However, the relationship between the conductor and her teaching pedagogy are of particular importance for the children to show interest in this program and to wait for each lesson with curiosity. All mothers agree that the children love the conductor so much and have a great time in choral work. Particularly, mothers who watched their children in the same room while their child participates in the choral sessions via Zoom, stated that the conductor was very successful in communicating with the children and keeping their attention on the work. They also stated that the conductor was able to provide the necessary assistance to children who do not speak Turkish very well and that she patiently worked on the parts that were difficult for them, when necessary.

“My daughter Eren has admired her teacher. You know, it was something we would not have guessed at first, but she has quickly attached herself to her teacher. So, she does not want to miss her classes at all.”

“I mean, she was trying very hard to keep them from getting bored and to listen to her for an hour and to continue with this group. Because this is not easy. Maybe it was easier when they worked close to each other, but it is very difficult for children to attend a program only by video, to listen without movement, to participate actively for an hour. I think the conductor was very successful in this sense.”

“It was very important for the conductor to make them feel valued while working with children without losing their self-confidence. And I think that was how she enabled them to actively attend the class for an hour.”

Despite internet access problems, two mothers' collaboration with their neighbors, as detailed below, in order for their child to participate in the choir regularly indicates that the choir plays a role in increasing intergroup contact not only among the children in the group but also in the environment in which they live. For example, a mother who did not have an internet connection at home stated that she asked her neighbor to enter her internet password on her phone before the lesson so that her child can attend the class.

Another mother reported that her phone broke down before Zoom lessons started, and her son was very upset and cried because he was going to miss the session. In order to help her son, this Turkish mother suggested her upstairs neighbor, who is a Syrian migrant and whose daughter was also in the Together Stronger Voices Choir II, that children participate in the choir work together.

Mothers stated that their children worked with a serious discipline throughout the program, regularly listened to and practiced the voice and video recordings sent by the conductor through the NGO officer, and even taught both the songs and the choreographies they learned to their siblings, singing and dancing together at home.

The issues that families had difficulties with during choral work were as follows:

- Technical problems such as phone breakdown and internet connection problems
- Coinciding with the school lessons of other children in the house at EBA and the choral lessons at the same time.
- The child's choral work disrupts when a guest comes home

General evaluations of mothers about the choir:

Regarding the achievements of the choral work, mothers stated that their children experienced the feeling of belonging to a group, received a qualified musical education, gained new experiences, relaxed, and a love for music was formed within the family.

i. Sense of Belonging to a Group

At least one mother from each group said that the children gained a unique experience in working towards a common purpose and realizing that they were a group despite differences.

“The children have learned something. There is a group, all of them are members of that group, they are all on that path, they accept each other. They all have a common goal, they sing a common song, even if they speak in different languages. It is very important for them to learn this in their childhood. So, it is very important for them to learn to act and move forward together. Even if there is a language barrier, I think children can relate very well to each other. Even if it’s just a smile or a gesture...So they get along with each other somehow, and I think it’s a very valuable, very important thing.”

“Well, differences actually do have a lot of contribution. My daughter used to see certain people at school, but when she goes there, she also sees people speaking different languages. That way, later she will understand that people are all the same. So even if our colors and cultures are different, we are the same. So, she’s learning this. Also, differences can teach my daughter something new, it can be a new word, a new culture, or a new friend. In this respect, it is positive.”

“It has a texture that enriches my daughter’s small world in Istanbul. Attending children, her teacher, her translator, her coming and going to the foundation, the sisters who helped her there.”

ii. Music Education

Regarding music education, mothers reported that their children sang more clearly and beautifully and learned certain rules. One Syrian mother described the choral work as *“it was like a training for my daughter.”* Having participated in each rehearsal, İKSV Alt Kat team members stated that the vocal warm-up exercises were especially beneficial for children. They stated that they had observed children’s improvement in lowering and raising their voices, and even after a while, when talking to the conductor, they started to comment *“Wasn’t that voice thicker, didn’t we make this voice from here before? I listened to this song the other day but how deep it was singing.”*

“Before, she couldn’t understand the words well while listening to a song, but now her sense of hearing is better, so she understands better. Because of, you know, language difference. She has also performed better while singing.”

“He started music with this group for the first time. He was telling me that he had difficulty singing some songs. But gradually he overcame these problems and liked it very much in general.”

“He asked ‘we were only going to sing, why we should learn the rules?’ But gradually he learned the rules and saw that she could read better.”

“It was a good experience for him. He even met to the piano, but he did not like it. He said to his teacher that ‘I am good at guitar, so I will continue with the guitar’.”

iii. New Experiences

Mothers expressed that their children had the opportunity to have different experiences, such as working with children they did not know before, going to a place for rehearsals very different from where they lived, recording for a concert, and seeing a piano for the first time at İKSV Alt Kat.

“Well, he loved it, he said, I met different friends, it was, you know, very nice.”

“At least the child sees something he has not seen before, and everything he sees and learns at a young age is beneficial for the child.”

“He felt like he was going somewhere. So, there was a bus there, they were getting on the bus, they were seeing things on the road.”

iv. Environment Where Children Feel Safe and Comfortable

Mothers, like children, were very happy that the choir did not end after COVID-19 started, and emphasized that the choir in this period provided comfort and entertainment to children, raised their spirits, and brought them together with their peers, albeit from a distance. They added that it made them feel good when the teachers at NGOs called every Wednesday for the choral work and stayed in touch with the families.

“It was so good for children during this period of pandemic. It just hit the spot.”

“Choir was like a recess in school. So, EBA application and lessons, as well as the teachers at the school sending homework and assignments on WhatsApp, somehow put pressure on the child. The choir seemed quite comforting to him.”

“One of the most important parts of the routine during the pandemic was the choir. In other words, it was very hopeful to be able to maintain the choir in this sense. Because, it was a channel for my daughter, another channel opening up to the world.”

One of the mothers stated that her daughter was bullied by her peers at school and she was worried about her self-esteem problem. After she observed her daughter express herself easily in the choir, she concluded that children feel emotionally safe in the choir:

“Actually, my daughter had some problems at school, so I was very worried that she would not be confident, but after participating in this choir group, I realized that she has good self-confidence. She is not hesitant, she can speak her thoughts and beliefs clearly. I think the choral group has been very effective in regaining her self-confidence and building their self-reliance. I think children feel safe in this group. That’s why they can express themselves very well and they feel good.”

v. Strengthening Emotional Bonds in the Family with the Love of Music

In some families, mothers stated that the children sing and work together not only with their siblings but also with their mothers. The choir has been defined as an experience that children share with their siblings and mothers in the family, enriching their relationships.

“There are four or five songs they sing, we sing them together for fun at home, not like homework, you know, we sing almost every day. Because the choir is not just a music lesson, it is an incredible space for us to be able to talk and try many other things.”

“Not only my daughter but her brother also took advantage of it, but you did not see it. I mean, he was imitating her from behind the camera.”

At the end of the interviews, all mothers expressed their gratitude to everyone who developed, implemented, and contributed to the program and expressed their wish to continue the choral work.

4.5. Interviews with Chorist Children

In order to provide data for this evaluation report, individual interviews with 12 chorist children and a group interview with 4 chorist children were conducted. In these interviews, children shared their views about the choral music program, what they liked most, what they learned, and the easy as well as difficult aspects, their relationship with the conductor, and the place of the choral program in their lives during the pandemic. As children introduced themselves at the beginning of the interviews, they also expressed what they like to do in their free time and how much they had participated in art activities before.

It is seen that the Together Stronger Voices Choir II reached children who have limited access to and participation in culture and arts, and that the participating children have quite different profiles in terms of their musical backgrounds. For the vast majority of children participating in interviews, the choir could be described as the first long-term and structured music education opportunity. Five of the interviewed children stated that they took lessons to play a musical instrument (violin, piano, flute, guitar), while the rest of the children stated that they had not been in any choir or played no musical instruments before, but only singing within the scope of the music lessons at school. While the two children reported that they started violin and piano at SGDD-ASAM, a Persian boy said that he was trying to learn to play the instrument from YouTube at home: *“It was a bit difficult because I always had to play it back. So, I played the piano and listened to it at the same time. I mean, it was difficult.”*

Activities Children Like to Do in Their Free Time

film painting
studying

playing **book** **ball** **game**

Studying and playing games are the most common activities that participating children do in their free time. Painting, watching movies and reading books follow these two activities. Activities such as going to the park and taking part in a sports team are among the least mentioned activities.

The high frequency of children's participation in the program suggests that the children were quite invested in the choir. Although the initial number of children decreased due the pandemic, it seems that the remaining children participate in all the online sessions except for a few times in the 6-month period between April and October. The reasons for not being able to participate were as follows: their mother's phone was broken or the battery was out, the internet connection was lost, the Zoom application was deleted, one of the siblings was sick, or they were in the hometown for vacation.

Things Children Liked the Most about the Choir

fun **dance** **epoitaitai**
singing

music **places we travelled** **everything**

When asked what they liked most in their choral work, children shared that they liked all the songs in the repertoire, had a lot of fun while singing and doing choreographies accompanying the song, and they were very impressed by the venue they went to for concert rehearsals. The most popular song especially mentioned by children was Epoi Tai Tai, a Maori folk song.

Children's Impressions of Choral Work and Their Favorite Aspect of the Choir

The children stated that they enjoyed all the songs in the repertoire but described the song "Epoi Tai Tai" as their favorite song because it was "both fun and beautiful to dance to". Apart from that, the other popular songs among children were "Hallo Django", "Oynar Mısın Benimle" and "Tebessüm". The children said that they did not know most of the songs in the repertoire and that the most familiar song was "Arkadaşım Eşek", and it was not that difficult to learn new songs. Among all the songs, they said that they found the song "Hallo Django" relatively difficult, while some children attributed the difficulties they experienced to their incomplete

voices or their inability to control their breathing well. In order to learn new and more difficult songs, children mentioned that they studied by writing, repeating and watching them again from the video.

“I read the song five times to memorize it, then my mom takes the paper and I read aloud without looking it. So, I learn it. When I write, I memorize the song completely as if I composed it.”

Expressing their love for the choir teacher, all children describe Zeynep Eren Kovankaya as a “very helpful”, “entertaining” and “very good teacher.” Among the participants, one child who had no musical experience before stated that he found it beneficial to “improve until the end of the work” while learning a new song. He described the general choir working process as, “We first learned songs, and improved them on the second day. On the third day, we learned new songs again, and on the fourth day, we improved all those songs. And it was like that.” This statement reflected his feeling of completing a job and gaining responsibility that the conductor also expressed in her interview.

The children stated that they learned to sing new songs in different languages, how to make their voices better, how to make different voices by imitating “child, fat uncle and old witch” and the correct breathing techniques. They emphasized that although they could not sing the songs at first, the teacher encouraged each child and accompanied them one by one and that they could learn songs more easily when singing with the teacher.

“I said that I did not know. The teacher said that ‘I’m singing along with you, come on, sing.”

“Teacher Eren was very good. She was teaching us everything. For example, she showed us again what we did, showed it again if we forgot, even if we did not remember it.”

“She is teaching us very nice things. She also creates very nice things, I mean, the songs and dances.”

“She sends videos to sister Rahil and she sends them to us.”

The children, who can remember the sessions that started in January and carried out in İKSV Alt Kat for four consecutive weeks, stated that they were pleased to come to İKSV Alt Kat. The best memories of İKSV Alt Kat included playing games during breaks, the piano and accompanying the piano during the rehearsals, and watching videos of children singing in sign language.

“We were taking a break and chatting there.”

“We were playing hide-and-peek or tag on breaks.”

“We were taking a lunch break or playing games.”

“That was so fun.”

When asked what changed in their lives during the pandemic, the children stated that they spent more time at home playing games or painting with their siblings. However, they expressed that they did not have much fun at home, they were bored and missed school very much. The children, who said that they were not bored at home during the pandemic, said that they read books, went to the park or the mosque with their friends to play ball, and kept themselves busy by watching music videos on the phone.

“We started to use Zoom because of the virus.”

Describing the other children as “friends” by saying *“We are waiting for our friends first, and then we warm up when they all come”* while explaining the sessions done via Zoom, suggested that the choir improved the sense of group belonging. Children who said that they liked the online sessions in general, stated that they found it especially useful when the teacher shared the lyrics on the screen. In addition, it was beneficial for them that the teacher accompanied the songs with the piano and sent YouTube videos to them.

Given that children participated in the online sessions by sitting in front of the screen, they stated that they particularly enjoyed songs that were accompanied by dancing. These comments from children point to children’s need to move frequently while doing workshops via software such as Zoom and underscores the importance of adding choreography to songs with rhythmic movements.

When asked about their preferences between İKSV Alt Kat and online work, all of the children stated that they would rather prefer to have lessons together and face to face in İKSV Alt Kat or outside in the garden.

Except for one child, all other children interviewed reported that their siblings and parents also started to accompany the songs while they were singing. Some children stated that they connected from the living room due to the better internet connection, so the family members also listened to their sessions. These comments suggest that the choir sessions act to increase interactions within the family.

“I sing it first, then my siblings sing it, and then they learn the movements.”

“I sang the songs in the village, my hometown, when they came to my mind. And sometimes, I sang them with my siblings. And they accompanied them. They sang along with me. We sang together.”

“We sing the songs at home, I sing them everywhere, I taught them, my friends, as well.”

When asked *“There were children you did not know in the group. Would you like to be friends with them?”*, all children answered positively to this question and stated that they wanted to continue with the choral music program.

All of the children stated that they would recommend the choral work to their friends. According to children, they would mention their friends that they would have a lot of fun in the choir and learn new songs in different languages, improve their voices, and have opportunities to go to a music festival as well as make new friends.

“I would say that we are memorising songs. We are singing and dancing, and once we learn the songs, we will go to the festival.”

“I would recommend them to participate in the choir because it is fun, and we sing.”

“Because her voice is very nice”.

“I think they can learn more songs in foreign languages such as English and German.”

“They can learn new songs, make new friends.”

Finally, the children described the feelings they felt because they were going to give a concert at the festival as “excited, curious, and a little nervous.” The younger chorister said that she was afraid that the recording could have been bad, but it was very nice and easy. The children, who were interviewed after the concert, said that they were excited while watching the concert, and some of them watched the digital concert with their chorist friend.

4.6. Interviews with Non-Governmental Organizations

İKSV Alt Kat collaborated with Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation, the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, and the Human Resources Development Foundation for Together Stronger Voices Choir II project.

Manolya Sahilli, a member of *Mavi Kalem Social Aid and Solidarity Foundation*, who participates in the choral project, stated that the foundation primarily works to empower women and children. With the Child Protection Project, which the foundation has been conducting since 2017, the foundation carries out case monitoring to reduce the risk factors such as violence, abuse and neglect that can be experienced in the lives of refugee children and their families, provides informational sessions to families and directs them to receive legal or psychological support services when necessary. Manolya Sahilli stated that the activities for children carried out by the foundation in the office before the pandemic and online during the pandemic were usually one-day.

The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) is an association that conducts many awareness and social cohesion projects in order to break down prejudices against asylum seekers and migrants and support intergroup interaction. Ferbiya Husini, who conducts Together Stronger Voices Choir II project within the association, works as an instructor in the children’s department at ASAM. She stated that they organised music-based art activities with children, which include teaching them how to play musical instruments such as guitar, violin, piano, but due to the pandemic, they are currently supporting only by the phone and continue activities on Zoom.

The *Human Resource Development Foundation (İKGV)*, another of the partner institutions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, carries out advocacy activities and provides psychological and social rehabilitation support to strengthen families at risk who are affected by the problems caused by urbanization and migration. İris Bilen, who conducts Together Stronger Voices Choir II project within the association, is responsible for all social cohesion activities and training in the offices of the association operating in seven different cities as

well as Istanbul. Stating that in addition to programs for women and families, the association has conducted 8-week or one-day workshops (e.g. child yoga, movement workshop) on much psychosocial support for children and specific issues (e.g. anger control, children's rights), İris Bilen said that the workshops continue online.

Among the ongoing children's activities of these associations, which are project partners, the choral work differs in that it is the longest-running project that started in February and lasted about 7 months despite the pandemic. In addition, the project managers emphasized the importance of the cooperation with İKSV Alt Kat, stating that their own associations are insufficient in terms of technical, logistical, and financial resources in bringing together children from so many different places and finding a qualified choral teacher.

For Together Stronger Voices Choir II project, the project officers in the association stated that they called the families of all the children of eligible age from the lists in their centers to explain the choral work with the purpose of offering everyone an equal opportunity and that the families generally viewed the choral work positively. The project managers brought the children to İKSV Alt Kat during the period of face-to-face sessions and accompanied the families and children to the Consulate General of Sweden in Istanbul for two open-air rehearsals before the concert. İris Bilen who accompanied the children to İKSV Alt Kat every week, explained that mothers who came to İKSV with their children started to form solidarity and friendship although they were very different from each other in terms of education and culture.

When the association officials called again about the possibility of online sessions, many of the families they could reach were so eager and excited that they asked questions such as *"Let's start now, when does it start?"* Even the children asked many times when the choral works would start again by WhatsApp messages.

During the pandemic, the project managers not only taught families the Zoom application so that children could participate in the choral program online, but they also sent the video links from the conductor to the participants, and called each family before the weekly works and enabled the children to open the application and connect to the activity. During this period, some children could not continue to online sessions, especially children with limited internet access.

The officials stated that the families who were given tablets and internet packages by UNHCR in line with the needs benefited greatly from this and their children could continue with the choral program.

They reported that the online sessions of the choral music program started when children were schooled at home during the pandemic. Their comments suggested that the choir provided relaxation, contributed to the best use of children's time and increased their self-confidence, especially for children who are exposed to academic pressures from their social environment.

Finally, NGO officials agreed that the choral activities were conducted very effectively, both during the face-to-face and online sessions, and added that many children expressed that they had a lot of fun in the choir. Even NGO officials sometimes attended online classes themselves.

“I sang the songs, too. I turned off the microphone, but I sang with them. It was really nice.”

“For example, I was noticing how happy the children were leaving despite coming there exhausted. They were leaving happily, very energetic.”

Observing that the children were eagerly awaiting the sessions and they gained the habit of charging the phone before the lesson, NGO officials think that the choral work has given the children a sense of responsibility.

“I mean, the children were waiting for it. So, the phone was charged immediately, or if mother was on the phone, they said ‘Mom, come on, can you give me the phone, so that I can charge it before the lesson starts.’ The children took responsibility for choral work by saying ‘I will attend this lesson at that hour.’”

All NGO officials agreed that the children were happily participating in the choral work and that they liked the conductor very much. The conductor’s individual attention to children the way she challenged their growth by sending videos and commenting on videos sent by the children were identified as effective teaching techniques exhibited by the conductor.

“And the nice thing is that the conductor is older than them and a teacher, but she is also very young. I think Eren can understand them and empathize with them. That’s why the children love her very much.”

It has been shared that there was no negative experience involving conflict or discrimination among children throughout the choral program, and that the program played an important role in reducing the perception of “they marginalize me” among refugee children.

“They got along well, they had nice conversations. Thank God, we never got a reaction like ‘You came from a different country’ for example.”

“I think it is very nice that all children, for example from Turkey or other countries, are always together. This is how we do our workshops as ASAM. We come together with people from different countries. This is really nice. We want to set an example for adults by enabling children to learn such things at this age.”

They stated that the families were satisfied with the project and made requests for it to continue when the choral work ended. They underlined the requests they received for the continuity of the choir, stating that families even those who had technical difficulties in participating in online activities said, “No matter if it will be face-to-face or online, as long as we continue.” NGO officials stated that they are very happy to have conducted a successful project together by coming together under the leadership of İKSV Alt Kat and express their willingness to cooperate again in new projects that will ensure the development of children through art.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Together Stronger Voices Choir II can be considered a successful choral music program as it brought together Turkish children with refugee children living in districts of Istanbul such as Beyoğlu and Fatih and provided them the experience of working and learning together through the universal language of music. Considering that refugees are the leading group deeply affected by the inequalities created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the benefits of this project outlined below becomes even more important.

- In *Together Stronger Voices Choir II* program, which adopts a multicultural education approach, refugee and Turkish children with relatively limited access to culture and art have experienced meeting in the chorist umbrella identity, even if they have different identities, lifestyles, and traditions,.
- The children united in the goal of making a digital concert recording at the end of the workshop, gained the skills of taking responsibility, showing determination and effort.
- The fact that the conductor supported the children's development in music by focusing on their strengths, and that the NGOs provided children with access to the workshop even during the pandemic, played a major role in the success of the project.
- The selection of songs from different cultures with easy lyrics and fun choreographies, besides Turkish songs, reflects one important characteristic of the multicultural education approach.
- According to the mothers, choral work gave their children the feeling of belonging to a group, provided opportunities for new experiences, provided a quality music education, and allowed children to have fun and relax, especially during the period of COVID-19.
- Choral work, according to the children, helped them learn new songs in different languages, use their voices more efficiently, and learn correct breathing techniques. While recommending this choir to other friends, they also mentioned topics such as having fun and making new friends in the choir.
- Throughout the choral work, the children not only improved themselves in terms of musicality, but also developed the self-confidence to make their voices heard within the group, and their need for belonging and acceptance to the group was fulfilled.
- Thanks to the choral work, positive social solidarity experiences took place between families and neighbors, civil society organizations and families, parents and their children, İKSV Alt Kat and CSOs working with refugee groups.

Recommendations for Planning and Implementing Art Workshops for Refugee Children:

Considering that the refugee population residing in Turkey is increasing day by day and this increase will accelerate in the coming years,^{xxxv} concrete suggestions for the development and implementation of art workshops similar to Together Stronger Voices Choir II project are listed below:

1. The exemplary application of Together Stronger Voices Choir II project should be promoted, and its visibility should be increased in order to plan and implement choir and similar art workshops.
2. As in the case of Together Stronger Voices Choir II, stakeholders such as humanitarian organizations, educators, artists, civil society organizations, and art institutions should participate in the preparation and execution of the workshops.
3. The content of the workshops should be created in line with the goals of multicultural education, especially for choral work and art programs in general.
4. Regardless of their previous art education/experience, all refugee children should be provided with equal opportunities for access to the workshop, under the multicultural program.
5. The following conditions should be considered when refugee and local children come together to reduce prejudices and improve intergroup relations:
 - Although the workshop mainly includes artistic work, age-appropriate games and activities should also be included in order for children from the minority and majority groups to strengthen friendship bonds,
 - Particularly when doing workshops with online platforms such as Zoom, choreography with rhythmic movements should accompany the songs, taking into account the need for children to move frequently,
 - A performance for the audience at the end of the workshop should be determined as a common goal,
 - Activities that require cooperation between groups should be organised,
 - A strengths-based focus should be embraced to improve children's learning and performance.
6. Peer support and development programs should be organised that bring together educators who have experience in working with refugee groups with workshop leaders who are willing to work with these groups.
7. In the future when face-to-face workshops resume, NGOs might plan workshops for adults/caregivers who accompany children to the music program to make the most out of their waiting time.
8. When necessary, an interpreter should be present in the workshops.

9. The institutions that organize and support these projects should assess and report the gains that children make on a regular basis. Besides targeting the developmental gains of children, the assessments should also identify the factors that affect children's regular participation in workshops, and systematically examine the positive learning and interaction environment in the workshops. Finally, it is important to work on dissemination strategies to ensure that successful project implementations reach a larger number of participants.
10. In the long term, research, collaborations, and advocacy activities for exemplary art programs to strengthen social adaptation of refugee children, may even shape cultural policies in Turkey.

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