



**PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, MIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLITICS: THE CASE OF TÜRKİYE**

*Kamu Diplomasisi, Göç ve Mülteci Siyaseti: Türkiye Örneği*

**Ali ÇİÇEK**

Asst. Prof. Dr., Cumhuriyet University, Yıldızeli Vocational School, Department of Marketing and Advertising, [alicicek@mail.com](mailto:alicicek@mail.com), Sivas / Türkiye  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9875-2400>

**Abdullah TURAN**

Lecturer Dr., Aksaray University, Ortaköy Vocational School, [aturan40@hotmail.com](mailto:aturan40@hotmail.com), Aksaray / Türkiye  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2743-6798>

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**ABSTRACT**

Public diplomacy, which is a candidate to replace the classical understanding of diplomacy, is based on the idea of explaining the ideas, ideals, values, institutions, culture, and policies of a country or nation to the public opinion of other countries. The aim here is to create a sphere of influence on other peoples and win their hearts and minds. Through public diplomacy, which is based on strategic communication logic, countries' foreign policies can find a wider area of legitimacy. Türkiye has a strong soft power reserve with its ancient history, culture, language, political system, geography, various TV series, and movies. It is also among the most generous countries in the world in terms of humanitarian diplomacy, which is a sub-dimension of public diplomacy. After the civil war in Syria, Türkiye has hosted more than 3.5 million Syrians and has been hosting more than a million irregular migrants and refugees from different countries. Türkiye's migration policies based on humanitarian values are supported by a kind of public diplomacy. Türkiye has been hosting millions of Syrian refugees for more than 12 years. During this endless process of hosting Syrians, Türkiye has been faced with significant economic, political, social and cultural problems. Türkiye, which has to bear the economic, political and social costs of migrants and refugees on its own, has to create public opinion both for the global sharing of this burden and for the establishment of a peaceful environment in Syria and the repatriation of refugees. Public diplomacy activities are a holistic approach that includes the aforementioned public opinion building. This study analyzes Türkiye's migration and refugee policy from a public diplomacy perspective.

**Keywords:** Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Migration, Refugees, Türkiye.

## ÖZ

Klasik diplomasi anlayışının yerini almaya aday olan kamu diplomasisi, bir ülkenin ya da ulusun kendi fikirlerini, ideallerini, değerlerini, kurumlarını ve kültürünü, politikalarını başka ülkelerin kamuoylarına anlatmak fikrine dayanır. Burada amaç, başka halklar üzerinde etki alanı yaratmak, onların gönüllerini ve aklını kazanmaktır. Stratejik bir iletişim mantığına dayanan kamu diplomasisi sayesinde ülkelerin dış politikaları daha geniş meşruiyet alanı bulabilir. Türkiye kadim tarihi, kültürü, dili, siyasal sistemi, coğrafyası, çeşitli dizi ve filmleriyle güçlü bir yumuşak güç rezervine sahiptir. Kamu diplomasisinin alt boyutu olan insani diplomasi konusunda da dünyanın en cömert ülkeleri arasında yer almaktadır. Nitekim Suriye’de meydana gelen iç savaş sonra 3.5 milyondan fazla Suriyeli ev sahipliği yapan Türkiye, sayıları milyonu geçen farklı ülkelere düzensiz göçmene ve mülteciye de ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Türkiye’nin insani değerleri temel alan göç politikaları, bir tür kamu diplomasisi faaliyeti ile desteklenmektedir. Zira Türkiye, yaklaşık 12 yıldan uzun bir süredir milyonlarca Suriyeli mülteciye ev sahibi yapmaktadır. Suriyelilerin bu bitmeyen misafirlik süreçlerinde Türkiye ekonomik, siyasal, sosyal ve kültürel alanlarda önemli sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Göçmenlerin ve mültecilerin ekonomik, siyasal ve sosyal maliyetlerini tek başına üstlenmek zorunda kalan Türkiye, gerek bu yükün küresel ölçüde paylaşılması gerekse Suriye’de barış ortamının tesis edilerek mültecilerin ülkerine geri gönderilmesi için kamuoyu oluşturmak zorundadır. Kamu diplomasisi faaliyetleri, tam da bahsi geçen kamuoyu oluşturmayı da içeren bütüncül bir yaklaşımdır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye’nin göç ve mülteci siyasetini, kamu diplomasisi perspektifi ile analiz etmektedir.

**Keywords:** Kamu Diplomasisi, Yumuşak Güç, Göç, Mülteci, Türkiye.

## INTRODUCTION

With the impact of globalization, migration continues to exist as a global problem at an extraordinary pace, mostly to developed world countries, and is intensively discussed on the agenda of countries. The first quarter of the 21st century revealed one of the highest statistics in history in terms of international migration. According to the 2022 data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 70% of all refugees and individuals in need of international protection worldwide originate from Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (5.6 million), Ukraine (5.4 million), Afghanistan (2.8 million), and South Sudan (2.4 million) ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)). People who believe that they lack security in these countries due to reasons such as war, civil conflict, terrorism, or human rights violations seek refuge in large numbers. Initially, neighboring countries serve as safe havens for migrants who do not feel secure in their own country or who are forcibly displaced. However, as the duration of forced migration lengthens, migrants' desire to relocate to another place where they envision a secure future or to seek asylum may also arise. The opportunities, tolerance, and social peace that migrants are offered by the neighboring countries where they seek safety compel them to either remain in those countries or to explore new possibilities. For migrants of various statuses who must leave their homeland due to a lack of security in their own countries, nations that treat them with tolerance, provide opportunities that uphold human dignity, and do not marginalize them become preferred destinations for migration.

The fact that a country is perceived as a desirable place to live by citizens of other nations, or as an ideal immigration destination due to its better opportunities, can be considered among the significant soft power assets of that country. Furthermore, countries that extend their hospitality to forcibly displaced refugees or asylum seekers and allocate their resources according to their economic capabilities, even if they cannot offer these migrants extensive economic prospects, cultivate a positive image in the eyes of other nations and individuals. This

allows them to establish their own reserves of soft power. Nations that provide a secure haven for refugees and asylum seekers, compelled to leave their homelands due to a lack of life security, earn admiration from the international community.

Countries that open their doors to refugees and asylum seekers and provide them with a safe place and decent opportunities in the short or long term will have a strong image in the eyes of both migrants and the international community. Opening borders to refugees and asylum seekers with an open-door policy is a manifestation of an approach that glorifies human values. Such an approach will ensure that any country that prioritizes human rights will be appreciated and sympathized with by the international community. This will increase the soft power potential of the country in question.

Türkiye, with its strategic location, has been subject to numerous migratory flows from ancient times to the present day, and it maintains a tradition of generosity that consistently provides shelter to displaced masses. Türkiye's accommodating stance toward migration and migrants can be regarded as a significant soft power asset. Currently, Türkiye hosts the world's largest refugee population, with 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection and over 320,000 refugees and asylum seekers under international protection, as indicated by UNHCR's 2022 data (UNHCR Türkiye Fact Sheet, February 2022). It's important to note that the figures for Syrians under temporary protection and refugees and asylum-seekers under international protection, as reported by UNHCR, pertain solely to registered migrants of varying statuses. Considering the substantial number of unregistered migrants, particularly Afghan migrants, who have settled in Türkiye due to adverse conditions or human rights abuses in their home countries, it becomes evident that Türkiye is hosting a significantly higher number of migrants with diverse statuses.

Türkiye's humanitarian perspective and generous approach to hosting migrants, particularly Syrians under temporary protection, who are compelled to migrate from various parts of the

world due to compelling circumstances and seek refuge in Türkiye, can be regarded as one of the soft power assets of the country. This study evaluates Türkiye's migrant hosting policies within the framework of public diplomacy. The central premise of this study is that Türkiye's migration policies hold the potential to enhance its soft power influence in this realm and provide opportunities for conducting public diplomacy initiatives through the lens of migration. Undoubtedly, mass migration brings along several adverse consequences for Türkiye (Özdağ, 2019; Özdağ, 2020; Öztürk & Çoltu, 2018). However, in spite of these challenges, Türkiye also possesses the potential to formulate public diplomacy strategies that bolster its image as a nation that upholds humanitarian values and elevates its standing in international public sentiment. In simpler terms, Türkiye can potentially transform the refugee influx crisis into an opportunity through strategic public diplomacy endeavors.

This study aims to evaluate refugee migration to Türkiye from the perspective of public diplomacy. Its objective is to provide recommendations on how Türkiye can utilize the migrant and refugee issue, a critical global challenge, as an opportunity for public diplomacy in line with Türkiye's humanitarian approach. To achieve this, the study begins by elucidating the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy. Subsequently, it delves into the interplay between these concepts and migration. The study then examines the repercussions of the Syrian crisis and civil war on Türkiye and assesses Türkiye's strategies for managing migration. Lastly, the study endeavors to outline how Türkiye can leverage the phenomenon of mass migration to its advantage through strategic public diplomacy initiatives.

### **SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

The concept of soft power was originally introduced by Joseph S. Nye (1990) in his work “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”. Nye posits that the United States possesses not only military and economic might but also a third dimension, which he terms soft

power. He further contends that, at that time, the US held the highest capacity for soft power globally. Following the publication of Nye's book, the concept of soft power sparked extensive debates across various disciplines, including political science, international relations, and public relations. Nye later authored "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (2005), where, alongside explaining the concept of soft power, he addresses the concept of hard power. Hard power can be exercised through inducements (carrots) or threats (sticks). However, at times, desired outcomes can be achieved without explicit threats or rewards. This indirect approach to achieving objectives has been referred to as "the second face of power" (Nye, 2005: 5). Countries aspiring to maintain a balance of power on the global stage and achieve desired outcomes in international relations can exemplify the second face of power through their soft power. In essence, soft power entails influencing others to embrace the outcomes you seek, co-opting rather than coercing individuals (Nye, 2005: 5). Soft power encompasses a country's cultural appeal, political structure, economy, and other policies, resonating with citizens of other nations. Gaining the empathy of foreign citizens not only elevates a nation's international standing but also legitimizes its policies. Furthermore, this doesn't necessitate military-centric hard power measures or hefty economic pressures. Soft power operates independently of force, coercion, or threats, deriving strength from spontaneous factors such as fostering empathy or becoming a center of attraction (Çiçek, 2023a: 59). Consequently, we interpret soft power as the ability to portray oneself positively, influencing the actions, viewpoints, and convictions of others by instilling a sense of confidence, attraction, and prestige (Carbo-Catalan and Roig-Sanz, 2022: 8).

The soft power capacities of countries unveil the potential effectiveness of their policies within the realm of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy, characterized as a government's endeavor to communicate with foreign publics in order to foster comprehension of its nation's concepts and values, institutions, culture, as well as its national objectives and present policies

(Tuch, 1993: 3), necessitates engagement with diverse populations, employing tools and stakeholders that extend beyond traditional diplomatic methods. Consequently, public diplomacy has led to a transformative shift within the field of diplomacy. Public diplomacy functions as a strategic communication approach that governments employ to convey their ideals, concepts, culture, political framework, national objectives, and, succinctly, their narrative to other populations (Çiçek, 2023b: 110). Nations aspiring to secure a formidable position in global politics strive to sway foreign populations through their soft power resources and the implementation of public diplomacy initiatives. As a result, these nations share their narratives with other societies, amplify their countries' appeal, and endeavor to garner sympathizers for their causes on a global scale. The key to achieving this objective lies in the adept utilization of public diplomacy tools and techniques.

Public diplomacy refers to the governmental process of engaging with foreign publics or public opinion in order to persuade them to support its foreign policy objectives. This can be achieved through non-governmental organizations, international bodies, or individual actors. According to Cull and Jimenez (2015), this process involves information campaigns that encompass listening to, understanding, informing, and persuading foreign audiences that are targeted for persuasion. At its core, public diplomacy is built on the notion that a nation can effectively communicate its values to the world and evoke admiration from others. The prudent utilization of elements such as culture, art, science, sports, and education is essential to realizing this principle. Public diplomacy can be wielded as a foreign policy instrument in various capacities. Its scope encompasses an array of activities including lobbying, cultural diplomacy, citizen diplomacy, and religious diplomacy. Through strategic public diplomacy initiatives, a nation's national identity and reputation can be bolstered across various domains.

Nye, the originator of the concept of soft power in literature, contends that states can employ soft power as a means to garner public backing (Nye, 2008). Nations have the capability to



translate their soft power resources into effective policies within the framework of public diplomacy. The objective here is to secure support from the public opinion of other countries. Countries capable of cultivating a sense of admiration among the citizens of other nations can legitimize their policies on the global stage and align their aspirations with those of others. This circumstance underscores the significant connection between soft power and public diplomacy, as both concepts converge in their aim to secure public opinion support.

As previously mentioned, nations aspiring to attain global or regional prominence endeavor to render their political, economic, legal, and cultural systems, as well as future aspirations appealing to other countries. Public diplomacy serves as one of the means to achieve this goal. Image management stands out as one of the most potent techniques within public diplomacy endeavors. In the context of international relations, image signifies the influence and perception of a country's reputation and stature on other states and societies. Furthermore, within international relations, image is also synonymous with a nation's distinctive identity. In the 21st century, states have begun harnessing image and prestige resources characterized by distinct attributes. Through these resources, nations aim to legitimize their policies in the eyes of public opinion in other countries, and even emerge as centers of attraction. The key sources contributing to image and prestige include the following (Ekşi, 2023: 268-269):

- Global TV channels: The presence of globally recognized television channels originating from the country.
- Ownership of social media companies and applications: The country's ownership or development of influential social media platforms and applications.
- The geopolitical position of the country: The strategic significance and influence of the country's geographical location.
- Military strength: The power and capabilities of the country's armed forces.
- Economic vitality: The strength and stability of the country's economy.

- International trade network and partnerships: The extent and effectiveness of the country's international trade relationships and partnerships.
- Civil society: The robustness and engagement of the country's civil society in global issues.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): The impact and outreach of the country's non-governmental organizations at the international level.
- Democracy and identity: The country's commitment to democratic principles and its identity as a democratic nation.
- Welfare level: The quality of life and well-being for citizens within the country.
- Cultural appeal: The attractiveness of the country's way of life to others.
- International achievements: The accomplishments of renowned individuals from the country on the global stage.
- Education standards: The overall quality and level of education in the country.
- Prestigious educational institutions: The prominence of the country's universities, institutes, and think tanks.
- Scientific advancements: The level of scientific research and innovation within the country.
- Technological advancement: The country's technological progress and innovation.
- Foreign policy and diplomacy: The effectiveness and attractiveness of the country's foreign policy and diplomatic efforts to others.
- Cultural and artistic achievements: The country's accomplishments and contributions in the fields of culture and arts on the international stage.
- Respected leadership: The international respect and admiration for the country's leaders.
- Hosting international organizations: The hosting of significant international organizations and events within the country.

- World-renowned brands: The presence and recognition of globally recognized brands originating from the country.
- Historical and cultural richness: The depth and significance of the country's historical and cultural heritage.

The image and prestige resources mentioned here determine soft power capacities. Moreover, these sources of image and prestige are used for public diplomacy activities. In relation to the image and prestige resources mentioned here, a country's migration policies also strengthen its soft power capacity. Moreover, migration policies can be used as a tool in public diplomacy.

### **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND MIGRATION RELATIONS**

Migration, a phenomenon as old as human history itself, encompasses individuals or societies departing from their current geographical locations and relocating to new ones. It's important to note that migration is not a concept confined to the annals of history. Thanks to the advanced transportation and communication technologies of the 21st century, migration has expanded to unprecedented levels. Castles and Miller (1998) have aptly termed the 21st century as the “age of migrations”, characterized by unparalleled levels of human mobility in global history. Migration, which entails people relocating for social, economic, political, or environmental reasons, can be categorized as internal migration when it occurs within national borders, and as international migration when it spans international boundaries. Additionally, migration can be classified based on the voluntariness of the migration process. Voluntary migration occurs when individuals migrate of their own accord, while forced migration refers to situations where individuals are compelled to move involuntarily due to external factors (Çiçek, 2022: 12). Both voluntary and forced migration can be directly or indirectly linked to the domain of public diplomacy.

Voluntary migration predominantly occurs towards countries boasting substantial soft power potential. These nations are often regarded as magnets for voluntary migrants due to their robust economies, democratic institutions, effective governance systems, and high-quality education and healthcare systems. Individuals who perceive their home countries' opportunities as insufficient seek to migrate to these countries in pursuit of improved living conditions. Voluntary migrants consider these countries as exemplars for their own nations and hold them in high esteem. Countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Australia serve as prime examples of destinations desired by voluntary migrants from various corners of the globe. These nations provide favorable living conditions for migrants, owing to their well-developed social, political, legal, and economic landscapes. As a result, these countries enjoy a commendable reputation within the global public opinion. In this light, the countries attracting voluntary migrants can be regarded as noteworthy instances of successful public diplomacy.

The situation is slightly different in forced migration. Forced migration can be caused by political reasons such as wars, revolutions, totalitarian governments, exile from the country of origin (Tamer, 2019: 18) as well as natural causes such as earthquakes, floods, famine, drought or environmental disasters (Çiçek, 2022: 18). When people are forced to migrate to another country against their will due to political or natural reasons, it shows that the country that responds positively (to this migration mobility) glorifies humanitarian values. In other words, countries that accept as refugees migrants who have to protect their lives or flee from persecution, who cannot live in their country for political reasons, or who have to leave their country for natural reasons, also serve humanity. This will gain the appreciation of the international public opinion as a behavior that glorifies humanitarian values. As a result, countries that provide a safe home for refugees can become respected and appreciated by other countries and peoples.

Particularly, topics like forced migrations and the treatment of refugees with the dignity they deserve can be elucidated through humanitarian diplomacy, serving as a subset of public diplomacy. The term “humanitarian diplomacy” was coined in the early 20th century by American diplomat Oscar Straus, who set it apart from the conventional repertoire of diplomatic activities (Bogatyreva, 2022: 1350). Humanitarian diplomacy entails persuading global decision-makers and leaders to consistently prioritize the best interests of vulnerable populations and uphold fundamental humanitarian principles under all circumstances (Ayasreh, 2023: 176). Humanitarian diplomacy functions as a facet of public diplomacy that seeks to win over the hearts and minds of people through aid initiatives. Its purpose is to cultivate connections between societies via humanitarian assistance, which gradually evolves into enduring friendships (Ekşi, 2023: 448). The provision of humanitarian aid also shapes the international public opinion, thereby extending broader legitimacy to the policies of the nation supplying aid. At present, humanitarian diplomacy plays a vital role in offering humanitarian responses to situations marked by armed conflicts, mass displacement, epidemics, or natural disasters (Bogatyreva, 2022: 1350). Hosting individuals during times of warfare, disasters, or life-threatening scenarios, and ensuring their safety until the peril has subsided, is also a fundamental aspect of humanitarian diplomacy.

Among the various wars and conflicts gripping many parts of the world today, the Syrian civil war takes precedence due to the extensive migration of asylum seekers and refugees it has engendered. Nearly half of Syria's population has been uprooted, with a significant portion seeking refuge beyond its borders. Notably, Türkiye, boasting the longest border with Syria and situated along the corridor to Europe, has shouldered the weight of the highest number of asylum requests and migrations (Köksoy, 2015: 79). The prevailing crisis in Syria stands as the pivotal catalyst for Türkiye's recent humanitarian aid endeavors. Operating within the ambit of its obligations rooted in international humanitarian law, Türkiye has steadfastly upheld its open-

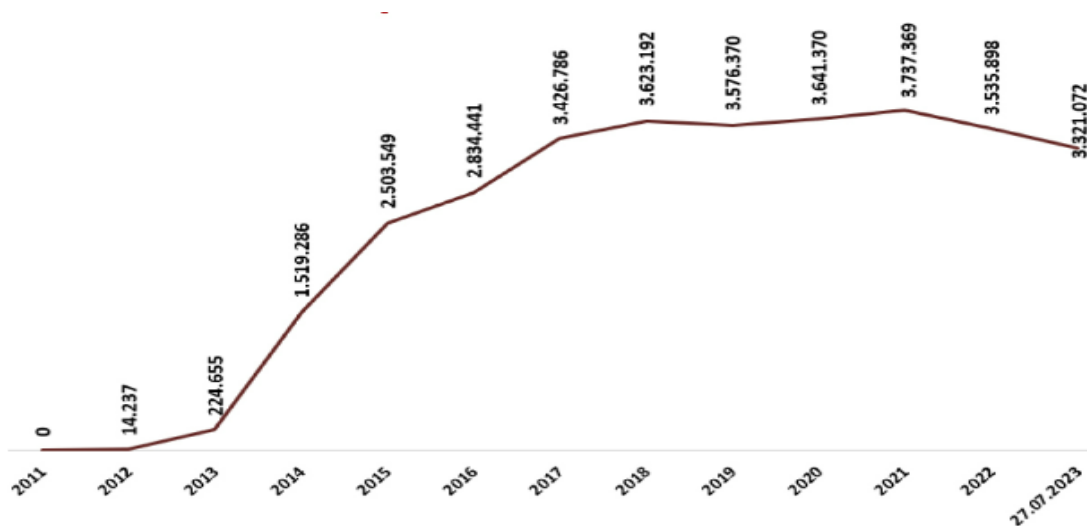
door policy towards Syrians escaping the ravages of war in their homeland. The nation has consistently offered temporary protection to all Syrians seeking sanctuary within its borders, without any form of discrimination (Türkiye's Friendly Hand: Humanitarian Diplomacy, 2022: 62).

## **TÜRKİYE'S MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND AFTERMATH**

The anti-regime movements in Syria, catalyzed by the Arab Spring, emerged in March 2011. Attempts to suppress these movements through military operations and heavy weaponry proved ineffective. Allegations even surfaced suggesting that the Syrian regime resorted to chemical weapons, plunging the nation into a protracted civil war. The conflict swiftly engulfed the entire country. By 2012, the Syrian regime's bombardment of major cities accelerated the populace's displacement. During this period, the Syrian coast, which had initially enjoyed a degree of relative safety, transformed into a sanctuary sought by millions of civilians. Those residing in regions distant from the coast sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Türkiye (Baczko et al, 2018: 186). Throughout the civil war, Türkiye emerged as the foremost refuge for Syrian civilians striving to escape the conflict and safeguard their lives. Guided by an open-door policy, Türkiye welcomed these individuals within its borders (Arslan et al, 2021: 101).

Türkiye, boasting a 911 km border with Syria, extended a welcoming hand to Syrian refugees fleeing the perils of the civil war that erupted in Syria, ensuring their safety and survival. On April 29, 2011, the first substantial influx of Syrian refugees arrived in Hatay, marking the initial phase of migration from Syria to Türkiye. By the close of 2012, due to the initially less intense phase of the Syrian civil war, the number of refugees entering Türkiye stood at a modest 14,237. However, the intensity of the civil war escalated in 2013, resulting in numerous

casualties among Syrian civilians. Fleeing the escalating violence and seeking safety, Syrians turned to Türkiye as a secure haven. By the culmination of 2013, the number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye had surged to 224,655. The year 2014 saw the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which initiated a wave of terrorist activities. Consequently, by the close of 2014, the count of Syrians in Türkiye, desperately seeking refuge and safety, had swelled to 1,519,286. By the conclusion of 2018, the official count of registered Syrian refugees in Türkiye had grown to 3,623,192. The year 2021 witnessed a further increase, with officially registered Syrians under temporary protection status reaching 3,737,369. As of 2023, this number stands at 3,321,072 (source: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>). Notably, these figures exclude individuals who have obtained citizenship and those who remain unregistered. Consequently, the actual number of Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye surpasses the total populations of many European nations. In addition to Syrians, Türkiye has also welcomed hundreds of thousands of Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians who have fled their homelands due to security concerns, contributing to the diverse migrant population within the country.



**Chart 1.** Distribution of Officially Registered Syrians in Türkiye by Year

**Source:** <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

The extended stay of Syrians in Türkiye has given rise to significant challenges. Initially embraced by Turkish citizens through the Ansar-Muhajir law, Syrians' prolonged presence has prompted more pronounced grievances over the past eleven years. The question of whether Syrians will ultimately settle in Türkiye or return to their homeland remains shrouded in uncertainty. As this ambiguity persists, concrete political initiatives for the secure repatriation of Syrians have yet to be established. The duration of this unresolved state has hindered the formulation of plans for Syrians' eventual return. Despite the toll inflicted by Syrian terrorist organizations and Türkiye's internal economic struggles, the Republic of Türkiye has refrained from forcibly repatriating Syrians, as well as irregular migrants from other countries and refugees, to their respective nations. Türkiye has undertaken substantial efforts to ensure dignified living conditions for migrants of diverse statuses. These efforts entail significant financial commitments and encompass an array of policies such as providing free education, healthcare, employment opportunities, housing assistance, and access to medicines. Notably, Türkiye's commitment to furnishing over 5 million migrants, particularly Syrians under temporary protection, with complimentary education, healthcare, medicines, and housing has remained steadfast, even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Türkiye's implementation of migration management characterized by a humanitarian outlook stands as an exemplary model for the global community. It showcases the nation's dedication to fostering humane living conditions for migrants while facing multifaceted challenges.

Türkiye's unparalleled dedication to humanitarian values should not only serve as a guiding principle but also be harnessed as a compelling public diplomacy endeavor to be shared with the global community. Türkiye's distinctive soft power sets it apart from other nations both in its manifestation and essence. Its reservoir of soft power spans across regions from the Balkans to the Middle East and into the expansive realms of Central Asia, drawing from its rich cultural and historical heritage (Kalın, 2011: 10). Türkiye's existing reservoir of soft power should be



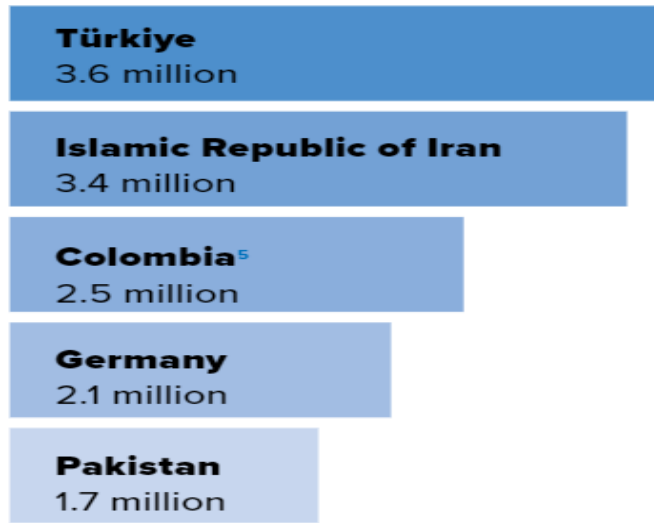
further enriched through its role as a refuge for displaced populations and its pivotal engagement in the humanitarian narrative following the culmination of the Syrian civil war. This entails ensuring that Türkiye's role as a safe haven for refugees, as well as its contributions to humanitarian efforts, become integral components of its current soft power repertoire. To bring this vision to fruition, Türkiye should embark on a public diplomacy campaign aimed at communicating its migration management policies to a global audience. By proactively sharing its humanitarian endeavors and showcasing its commitment to providing sanctuary and support for refugees, Türkiye can enhance its international image and fortify its role as a leader in the realm of humanitarian diplomacy.

### **TÜRKİYE'S MIGRATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY POLICIES**

Throughout history and into the present day, Türkiye has consistently been regarded as a safe haven, offering refuge during times of international crises, and it has warmly welcomed refugees during various waves of migration. Today, Türkiye continues to demonstrate its compassionate stance by extending a helping hand to migrants seeking shelter from humanitarian emergencies worldwide, notably including the 3.5 million Syrian refugees. Embracing a humanitarian ethos towards refugees, Türkiye actively harnesses its resources to provide comprehensive support across crucial domains such as education, healthcare, housing, and employment, primarily to those in need from Syria. Additionally, Türkiye is not only responsive to its immediate surroundings but also takes a proactive approach to addressing humanitarian crises on a global scale. Its development assistance efforts encompass a wide range of sectors, spanning from education and healthcare services to clean water provision and agricultural support. Notably, Türkiye's dedication to humanitarian and development aid positions it as the world's most generous nation across five continents (<https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/>). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR), an estimated 6 million Syrians have been compelled to flee their homeland. Türkiye, in a remarkable display of solidarity, has welcomed two-thirds of this staggering population displacement, allocating a substantial "40 billion dollars" in assistance to Syrians thus far (Altun, 2020: 6). The presence of Syrian refugees has left a discernible impact on Türkiye's social, economic, political, and security landscapes. On various international platforms, Türkiye has fervently called upon influential nations to share the responsibility for Syrian refugees. However, despite these calls, a comprehensive global response has yet to materialize.

While the refugee issue should inherently be a shared concern of humanity, a disheartening reality prevails in which numerous states worldwide exhibit reluctance to collaborate or shoulder the burdens associated with eradicating the refugee crisis and fulfilling the needs of displaced individuals. Given that migration, particularly the refugee predicament, transcends national borders and stands as a global challenge, there is a rightful anticipation for influential nations to assume a pivotal role in devising solutions. However, it is evident that certain countries, often those asserting global influence and wielding robust economies, demonstrate hesitance in embracing migrants or refugees underpinned by humanitarian principles. By UNHCR's 2022 data, Türkiye has extended its hospitality to a staggering 3.6 million refugees, marking it as the world's largest host nation, closely followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran with 3.4 million. An illustrative representation of the five countries harboring the largest refugee populations globally is depicted in Chart 2.



**Chart 2.** Five Countries Hosting the Most Refugees

**Source:** UNHCR Global Trends Report 2022.

Türkiye, home to the largest refugee population globally, has undertaken strategic measures to engage in public diplomacy endeavors aimed at elucidating these policies on a global scale. Orchestrating Türkiye's public diplomacy initiatives, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications endeavors to communicate to the international community that Türkiye serves as an exemplar in migration management. By showcasing policies that exalt human values and uphold human dignity, the country aims to shape international public opinion. Through the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, emphasis is placed on Türkiye's unmatched sense of responsibility in the realm of migration and refugees. This communication platform accentuates that Türkiye holds the mantle as the world's most conscientious nation in this regard, substantiated by a plethora of statistics that underscore the roles of various countries in shirking responsibility (Safe Harbor Türkiye's Call to the World, 2020: 85):

- Developed countries have only accepted a mere 6% of the global refugee population.

- Inhabitants of high-income countries accommodate an average of 2.7 refugees per thousand individuals, whereas middle- and low-income nations house an average of 5.8. Notably, the world's poorest countries bear the weight of a third of all refugees.

- At present, Türkiye holds the distinction of harboring the largest refugee population worldwide, with approximately 4 million refugees finding sanctuary within its borders—an escalating figure.

- Türkiye emerges as the primary haven for over half of all displaced Syrians across the globe.

- The United States shelters 271,000 refugees, Sweden hosts 169,000, Canada provides refuge for 153,000, and the United Kingdom accommodates 119,000.

- Syrian refugees are dispersed across 127 nations spanning six continents, yet the Middle East still houses 85% of them.

- Globally, there exist 6.7 million Syrian refugees, with a striking 52% of this total finding shelter in Türkiye. Meanwhile, Canada's accommodation of Syrian refugees stands at a mere 6%.

- The entirety of the European continent shelters 1 million 387 thousand refugees. Significantly, Türkiye singlehandedly exceeds this count by hosting more than double the number of refugees.

The provided data distinctly underscores Türkiye's humanitarian stance on migration and refugees, elevating the primacy of human life and dignity above political considerations. In the face of substantial economic and security challenges, Türkiye adeptly manages its migration and refugee policies with a steadfast commitment to the exaltation of humanitarian principles. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the predicament of migration and refugees transcends national boundaries, representing an international and worldwide concern. For the attainment of a comprehensive solution, it is imperative that nations endowed with advanced economies

and influential power shoulder their due responsibility. Regrettably, certain nations appear to shirk this obligation, opting to conflate the migration and refugee dilemma with Islam and cultural differences, particularly in the case of Syrian and Afghan refugees. Consequently, these countries display a hesitancy to proactively address the issue. Contrarily, Türkiye consistently voices its concerns on diverse platforms, striving to amplify its prestige within the global community by expounding upon its policies.

Türkiye has been actively engaged in shaping the public perception of other nations concerning migration and refugee matters by disseminating a range of messages. These messages have been communicated through international gatherings and media channels. One illustrative instance is President Erdoğan's pronouncement on the occasion of World Refugee Day in 2023. In this address, he affirmed Türkiye's unwavering commitment to safeguarding human life and dignity within its migration framework. Simultaneously, he highlighted a perceived shortfall of proactive action on the part of Western nations with regard to this issue (<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/147560/world-refugee-day-message>):

*“Our stance regarding the refugee issue and irregular migration, which present a global challenge, is to protect human’s life and honor along with our country’s security. Our nation, which had for centuries embraced without any distinction those fleeing oppression, has once again displaced the same conscientious stance in the face of the crises in our region from Syria to Ukraine. Türkiye, which has always fulfilled its humanitarian and neighborhood responsibilities, advocates the safe, voluntary and honorable return of asylum seekers to their homelands, and implements projects to this end.*

*We reject Islamophobia and xenophobia, neo-Nazi ideology and hate speech, which have spread to other communities just like a poison ivy after having taken root in western countries. We see these pathological trends, which do not consider*

*anyone other than those from their own race, culture and faith to be a human being, as a threat to humanitarian values and the common future of humanity”.*

In his message, President Erdoğan also strongly criticized European countries for leaving refugees to die instead of ensuring their safety. Drawing attention, especially to Greece's attitude in this regard, Erdoğan stated that the European Union should act with a perspective based on humanitarian values regarding refugees (<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/147560/world-refugee-day-message>):

*“The arrogant mentality, whose roots date as far back as to colonialism, plays a big role in the fact the Mediterranean, which had served as a cradle of civilization throughout history, has turned into a big graveyard of refugees in recent years. The humanitarian tragedy that took place in plain view last week in the Aegean Sea in which hundreds of innocent people, most of them children, lost their lives has become the most recent and most shameful example of this”.*

Indeed, Türkiye's efforts to promote its humanitarian policies on migrants and refugees have garnered attention from diverse segments of society, including academics, politicians, ordinary citizens, and even celebrities. Notably, the renowned actress Angelina Jolie, who serves as the Special Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), visited Türkiye in 2012 to tour the accommodation centers constructed for Syrian refugees. During her visit, Angelina Jolie conveyed a compelling message to the global public, which can be regarded as a significant achievement for Türkiye's public diplomacy. Standing before the Turkish flag, she made a statement that left a lasting impression on the World (Anadolu Agency):

*“The Turkish people, the government, and the Turkish Red Crescent are doing an exceptional job hosting the refugees. The camps are some of the best I have ever seen. There is a lot of care in the details, and I am deeply grateful to the people of*

*Türkiye and all of those volunteers who are making these refugees feel at home and safe. I have been watching for some time and I admire how Türkiye, a country that itself has suffered through a crisis, is now providing such crucial help to the people of Syria”.*



**Picture 1.** Angelina Jolie Visits Refugees in Türkiye

Angelina Jolie returned to Türkiye in 2015 and once again expressed her appreciation for the country's sensitivity towards refugees, thanking the Turkish people. One of the most important methods of public diplomacy is the use of celebrities to attract the attention and sympathy of the public opinion of other countries. Türkiye has successfully used this method in the case of Angelina Jolie. Türkiye has not always been as successful as Angelina Jolie in explaining its people-oriented policies towards Syrian refugees to the world. For example, TRT World's programs on Türkiye's refugee policy did not reach a wide audience. The documentary "Second Home," produced by the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Directorate of Communications, only reached 6.6 thousand views on YouTube. Another short documentary produced by the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, titled "Türkiye: The Most Generous Country in the World," was viewed only 964 times on YouTube

over a four-year period<sup>\*</sup>. This shows that Türkiye has not been able to utilize digital diplomacy, one of the methods of public diplomacy, strongly enough. On the other hand, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications' public diplomacy activities on migration and refugees are very limited.

Türkiye's public diplomacy activities in the field of migration are generally based on humanitarian diplomacy, emphasizing sensitivities to humanitarian values through various messages. Additionally, Türkiye consistently emphasizes the message that other countries should also take the initiative on migration and refugees. Although these messages attract the attention of world public opinion from time to time, in general, it is observed that the messages lack continuity. Furthermore, Türkiye appears to lack the means to effectively convey the messages it intends to the global public opinion on migration and refugees. On the other hand, the ongoing process of hosting Syrians and other migrant and refugee groups seriously impacts domestic public opinion in Türkiye. Türkiye's open-door policy towards refugees does not seem to have been well received by Turkish society. Because people in third world countries who are inclined to migrate are encouraged by this migration management approach. As a result of these policies, more than five million refugees and irregular migrants have settled in Türkiye. If Türkiye does not send a strong and clear message to the world through public diplomacy activities, it may face more migrant and refugee problems, and its current issues may become even more challenging to resolve.

## RESULT

Migration, a phenomenon as old as the history of mankind, describes the process of people changing their locations over time. In the 21st century, mass migrations are occurring at an unprecedented pace, unlike any seen before. The motivations for these migrations are diverse,

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<sup>\*</sup> This data was obtained on 05.08.2023 (Youtube).



but in recent years, millions of individuals have been compelled to abandon their homes due to factors such as wars, civil conflicts, and natural disasters. The Syrian civil war, in particular, has triggered an unparalleled wave of refugee migration, predominantly towards neighboring nations. Over 6 million Syrians have been forced to migrate to other countries due to the absence of safety and security in their home country. Türkiye has borne the brunt of this migration crisis. The country hosts around 3.5 million officially registered Syrians, who are granted temporary protection status. These Syrians have been residing in Türkiye for more than 12 years, with no immediate prospects of returning to their homeland.

Türkiye needs to support its migration and refugee policies, which are built on a humanitarian perspective, through public diplomacy. Türkiye, which conducts relatively more effective public diplomacy activities in other areas, has the potential to serve as an example or model for the entire world with its assistance to migrants and refugees and its open-door policies toward them. It is crucial that Türkiye's policies on migration and refugees are effectively communicated to the global public opinion. Türkiye is the most generous country in the world in terms of hosting refugees, addressing their needs, and providing humanitarian aid. Raising awareness of this situation will have a positive impact on people's perceptions of Türkiye in other countries. Despite Türkiye's limited resources, the fact that powerful and wealthy nations evade their responsibilities despite Türkiye's perspective based on humanitarian values is an issue that Türkiye should consistently highlight. Developing Turkish public diplomacy in this direction will not only garner greater support for Türkiye from the international community but also enable Türkiye to more swiftly promote its policies and aspirations to other countries.

Türkiye's people-oriented policies towards migration and refugees, which should serve as an example to the world, do not appear to be adequately explained to the international community. Türkiye has incurred a financial burden of over 40 billion dollars due to Syrian refugees. Hosting more than 5 million irregular migrants with different statuses, Türkiye has become a

focal point for migrants and refugees from a humanitarian perspective. This situation places additional social, political, and economic burdens on Türkiye. Through the Directorate of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, it is crucial for Türkiye to effectively communicate the migration and refugee issue to the world using more robust methods and strategies.

Helping refugees based on humanitarian values will undoubtedly win the sympathy of the international community. Countries, especially Türkiye, that view migration and refugees as a humanitarian crisis will undoubtedly serve humanity. Explaining this situation to the entire world will also win the hearts and minds of people in other countries. However, beyond winning hearts and minds, public diplomacy should also aim to generate public pressure to resolve international problems. When this objective is achieved, we can consider a country successful in the field of public diplomacy.

Besides its existing public diplomacy policies, Türkiye needs various tools to influence public opinion in different countries worldwide. Additionally, while engaging in public diplomacy efforts concerning migration and refugees, Türkiye should avoid appearing as an attractive destination for the masses contemplating apostasy. Otherwise, the number of refugees, which is already beyond Türkiye's capacity, will increase further. Consequently, a migration and refugee policy built on a humanitarian perspective might exacerbate many of Türkiye's existing problems. Hence, Türkiye's migration and public diplomacy activities should be geared towards shaping international public opinion that exerts pressure to end the ongoing state of war in Syria.

Finally, Türkiye should focus its public diplomacy efforts on building global public opinion for the safe return of Syrian refugees. This is because Syrian refugees' never-ending stay as guests has become a burden that Türkiye cannot bear. Moreover, the open door policy for refugees makes Türkiye a target country for any migrant or refugee candidate. It is frequently

stated that these refugees, whose number has exceeded 3.5 million in a short period of time, have brought economic costs to Türkiye as well as problems in the social, political, cultural and judicial spheres. This situation has the potential to condemn Türkiye to an unsustainable migration management. Therefore, Türkiye should design its public diplomacy activities in a way to manipulate international public opinion on the return of Syrian refugees and peace in Syria.

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