



The Role of Turkish NGOs in Social Cohesion of Syrians

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Abstract

Turkey is struggling with the fast and increasing flow of refugees accompanied by internal disputes and involvement in the unfortunate war of Syria. The complexity of the situation put the government in difficult situation in developing social projects and strategies to meet the need of the refugees. Cultural differences and language barriers create different problems compared to previous migrations at the societal level. The most important challenge is the spread of Syrian disputes to Turkish territories, which has resulted in the loss of many lives. This has stirred unrest amongst citizens who are affected against Syrian refugees who they see as complicit in the ongoing war. While there are remarkable projects and facilities initiated by governmental agencies and NGOs on the ground, there are still obstacles to meaningful integration and the creation of a cohesionary process for the Syrians. The effectiveness of NGOs' inputs and contributions cannot be measured because of intensive flow of refugees and Turkey's internal problems. NGOs- especially faith based NGOs- recently started to criticize their work area, which focused on humanitarian aid rather than social cohesion, which is urgently needed. The unknown course of the war does not allow people to settle down and attain some stability, however, in spite of the challenges posed by the influx of migrants and Turkey's internal problems, most people in the society tolerate the migrants largely from the compassion of their religious beliefs and because of the committed efforts of NGOs which play a crucial role in dealing with migration and the problems it presents in Turkey. This paper focused on the projects, programmes, campaigns, and discourses of some NGOs in order to display their role in the social cohesion process of Syrians. IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation that has the enormous relief projects for Syrians has been introduced as an example in showing the peoples' awareness in supporting the relief projects, which are run only by donations. According to findings of this paper, faith based Turkish NGOs are very crucial mechanisms in moderating huge differences between Syrians and Turkish. They ease the works of other governmental or semi governmental agencies by conducting huge relief projects by mobilizing Turkish people.

Keywords: Civil Society, NGOs, Syrian Refugees, Cohesion, Aid campaigns, Aid projects, IHH

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Suriyelilerin Uyum Sürecinde Türk STK'larının Rolü

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Öz

Türkiye hızlı ve artan mülteci akınıyla, iç problemleri ve bu talihsiz savaşa dahil eşliğinde mücadele etmektedir. Problemin çetrefilliği hükümeti mültecilerin ihtiyaçlarına cevap verebilecek sosyal proje ve stratejiler geliştirmede zor bir duruma sokmaktadır. İki halk arasındaki kültürel farklılıklar ve dil bariyeri önceki göçlerle karşılaştırıldığında sosyal boyutta daha ciddi problemler yaratmıştır. Buradaki en önemli problem ise Suriye iç savaşının Türkiye topraklarında birçok hayata mal olan saldırı ve patlamalarla yansımaları olmuştur. Bu olaylar Türk kamuoyunda, Suriyeli mültecilerin devam edegelen bu savaşın taşıyıcıları olarak algılanmalarına sebep olmakta ve buna bağlı huzursuzluklar yaratmaktadır. Hükümet organları ve STK'lar tarafından gerçekleştirilen dikkate şayan projelerle mültecilere olanaklar sağlanırken, halklar arasında anlamlı bir bütünleşme (entegrasyon) ve Suriyelilerin uyum sürecininin başlatılmasına engel unsurların da varlığı devam etmektedir. STK'ların faaliyetlerinin ve bu sürece katkılarının verimliliği/etkililiği yoğun mülteci akımı ve eş zamanlı gelişmiş olan Türkiye'deki iç sıkıntılardan dolayı odaklanılıp ölçülememektedir. Tüm bunlarla birlikte SKT'lar-özellikle de inanç temelli STK'lar-genel olarak acilen ihtiyaç duyulan sosyal uyum sürecine yönelik projelerden ziyade insani yardıma odaklı çalışma alanlarını kritize etmeye başlamışlardır. Savaşın bilinmeyen kaderi ve gidişatı mültecilerin yerleşik bir hayata geçip bir düzene kavuşmalarına izin vermezken, bununla birlikte Türkiye iç problemlerine de rağmen toplumdaki birçok insan genel olarak dini hüviyetlerinin verdiği sorumlulukla ve de mülteciler ve problemleriyle ilgilenmede hayati öneme sahip STK'ların muazzam çabalarıyla mültecileri kabullenebilmiş ve hoş görüşle yaklaşmıştır. Bu çalışma Suriyelilerin uyum sürecinde SKT'ların rolünü gündeme getirmek üzere bunlardan bazılarının proje, kampanya ve kampanya söylemlerine odaklanmıştır. Sadece başlıklarla yürütülen yardım projelerini desteklemede halkın farkındalığını göstermek üzere, Suriyelilere dair devasa projeler gerçekleştiren İHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı, bu çalışma çerçevesinde tanıtılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bulgularına göre Suriyeliler ve Türk halkı arasındaki önemli farklılıkların –yaratacağı problemleri en aza indirmede- inanç temelli Türk STK'lar hayati bir rol öneme sahip mekanizmalardır. Bu kurumlar ayrıca diğer devlet ve devletin yardım kurumlarının çalışmalarını, Türk halkını mobilize ederek gerçekleştirdikleri dev projelerle kolaylaştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sivil Toplum, STK'lar, Suriyeli Mülteciler, Uyum, Yardım Kampanyaları, Yardım Projeleri, İHH

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1. Introduction

Anatolia has witnessed huge migration waves from the ancient times that brought thousands of cultural diversities together. However, the modern era brought many casualties to the whole world as happened in these territories. Since the mid-19th century until the present day, because of the ongoing wars and internal disputes, forced migration became a regular phenomenon in the Ottoman and Modern Turkish Republic. The most important mass migrations to Turkish territories are migrations of 19th century, mass migrations after WWI, migrations following the establishment of Turkish Republic and 21st century migrations.¹

Final migration flow created a new agenda for Turkish society. According to data given by 15.06.2017, the number of registered Syrian refugees is 3,049, 879 (İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü). The number fluctuates on a daily basis and there is uncertain number of unregistered refugees. Whilst most of the refugees have been settled in the southern part and in Istanbul, there are still significant numbers of Syrians who have been dispersed all over Turkish cities.

Despite many concerns, people are still performing at their best to overcome the refugee crisis. Specifically, media outlets impose negative images of refugees and stimulate a sense of refugee occupation. These feelings have been accompanied by violent explosions in many cities. These stirred sense of horror, and intensified tension against refugees. Despite these negative inputs, specifically escalated by the media, the Turkish peo-

¹ Some examples of prominent migrations such as migration of Albanians who were placed in Arnavutköy in 1468, migration of Polish villages during 19th century upon their annexation by the Russian Empire, migration of Crimeans after the invasion of Russia in 1783, migration of 2.5 million Circassians, migration of Azeri people to Anatolia after 1877-1878, migration of Bosnians, Pomaks and other muslim ethnicities. Georgian migrations started during Ottoman-Russian war between 1828-1829 and continued until 1921. After the establishment of Turkish Republic migrations to Anatolia did not stop and Greek Turkish population exchange took place in 1923 and 384 thousand people migrated to Anatolia between 1922 and 1938. Mass migration from Macedonia is another important migratory movement in 1924 and followed by the third wave in 1953. With Turkish-Bulgarian residence agreement in 1925, 218,998 people migrated to Turkey and these migrations continued till 1989. With the occupation of East Turkistan migration from these lands started by 1950s and still continues. Iranian Revolution, invasion of Afghanistan by Russia, Gulf war in 1991 war in Bosnia brought many new migrants to Turkey. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik/hakkimizda_308_309.

ple are still willing to host the migrants into their territories. According to a study, which has been published in 2015, 30 percent of Turkish people have helped Syrians directly or indirectly.²

NGOs play a big role in overcoming the refugee crisis in two aspects. While they are very active in meeting the refugees' basic needs, they also help them to adapt to the society. Another role of NGOs is their help Turkish society to embrace Syrians.

This paper generally aims to understand the role of civil society in managing smooth transition of refugees' existence in the country, by focusing on some projects and initiations of Turkish NGOs. I have chosen NGOs with easy access. My involvement in an NGO named as IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation has helped me in observing the process more closely.

2. Methodology

The study based on survey of the reports, thesis, and articles. The website of Development Workshop (Kalkınma Atölyesi) that collected 233 studies from 2011 till 2016 related to Syrian refugees helped a lot in reviewing the materials. Additional to written materials, telephone conversations and face-to face interviews have been made for the study.

Visuals of aid and awareness campaigns have been collected via Internet. The campaign discourses also has been included in the study in order to see how the NGOs carries the awareness to the society via campaigns. Finally some educational projects that are the result of social awareness have been chosen.

3. Literature Review

There is three important works that related to the subject of this study, have been come across during literature review.

One report about NGOs activities toward Syrians is a report of a workshop made on 28.05.2014. Twenty-one NGOs has joined the workshop and the

² Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015, pp. 180.

report includes brief information about activities of participant NGOs, the problems they faced, and summary of similar workshop, which took place in Ankara (Mavi Kalem Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği).

Another study with the name “Report on the Activities of NGOs for Syrian Refugees in Turkey, has been prepared on 2013 by İGAMDER (Research Centre on Asylum and Migration). The report is a product of short time duration and introduces the works of some national, international and local NGOs. This report has been prepared with participant observation and semi-structured interviews in three cities as Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Kilis. The aim of this study has been stated as analysing the role of NGOs in solving the problems of Syrian refugees. These cities have been chosen because of their intense Syrian population and the high number of refugee camps.³

Among these studies, the largest scale study has been prepared on December 2014 by Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center HUGO with the title “Syrians in Turkey Social Acceptance and Integration Research”. Data has been collected through interviews with Turkish and Syrian interviewees on media and NGOs. This study has become a book and been published on February 2015. One section of this study has analysed the situation and the role of NGOs.⁴

According to this report while the capacity of NGOs and their approach are different from each other they spend massive effort in the case of Syrian and these efforts contribute the social acceptance enormously. The most active NGOs are the faith-based NGOs working in first aid, whilst human right-based NGOs are more active outside of the region. While there are professional NGOs, there are other NGOs, which are newly established.⁵ According to information given in the research, thirty-eight NGOs have been visited and interviewed. Their approaches to social acceptance and cohesion, activities, report, press statements have been reviewed.⁶ But the

³ Metin Çorabatır ve Fikret Hassa, “Report on the Activities of Non Governmental Organisations for Syrian Refugees in Turkey”, Retrieved June 29, 2017, from <http://www.igamder.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Suriye-STK-Raporu.pdf>, p.2.

⁴ Erdoğan, Ibid, pp. 165-172.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 213.

⁶ Ibid, pp.104.

study does not contain these analyses. According to the study more than ninety Syrian NGOs have been established during this process. In terms of the subject of the paper, the other important analyses are about NGOs' approach concerning temporariness of Syrians and reflection of this idea on the projects and activities.⁷ Other important point according to information given by NGOs is the readiness of Syrians for the cohesion, while the hesitation still continues among Turks.⁸

4. Brief Background of the Increasing Importance of NGOs in Turkey in terms of Their Works toward Refugees

Growing role of NGOs in the refugee issue in Turkey starts 1960's. UN-HCR and Turkish offices had worked in close contact on asylum seekers who arrived Turkey specifically from former Soviet Union and her surrounding countries to seek asylum in a third country. The intensive years that Turkey received refugees from Middle East and African countries mostly were during 1988, 1989, and 1991 and Turkey prioritized internal security and had not applied non-refoulement policy. From 1996's UN's initiatives and the efforts of Turkish police department had entered a new reform process that had three main focuses as allowing the asylum seekers filing appeals against deportation, initiation of Turkish authorities' cooperation with NGOs and training of bureaucrats on the refugee issue.⁹

Turkey stood as model country in the process of asylum seeking following years and worked compatible with EU Legislations between 2002-2003. But Turkey could not display further development in the process because of Turkey-EU negotiation process has entered a halt from 2005. Besides, change in regulations on June 2006 has shown negative reflections in implementation procedures toward refugees. With 2006, EU regulations which are defined as building *European Stronghold* implemented strict control on entrance of asylum seekers. This has created tension between Turkey and EU specifically with intensification of war in Iraq, hunger in

⁷ Ibid, pp.168.

⁸ Ibid, pp.170.

⁹ Murat Kirişçi, "Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Göç ve Sığınma", *Düşünce Gündem*, 2008, vol. 44., pp.29.

Somalia and etc. Therefore before Syrian War broke out, ambiguity of the refugee issue had remained with many question marks.¹⁰

At the legal level of the problem while the solutions could not be found because of international controversies. The problem was very serious in affecting big amount of people at the humanitarian level. At this point NGOs and civil platforms played very crucial role in helping refugees whose status remained unclear and NGOs carried important initiatives to overcome the problems of those years.¹¹

While the NGOs played important role in meeting basic needs of refugees such as food, accommodation, education, employment, and etc, they also played a big role in supporting refugees for the judicial support. Especially parallel to the increase in asylum seeking 2006 onward, NGOs activities have been intensified in raising awareness in the protection of refugees. They have organized symposiums on refugee issue and future developments. Main NGOs which were working on these issues were; Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Amnesty International, The Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed -known as MAZLUMDER-, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Human Rights Association İHD, Deniz Feneri, The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants SGDD (Sığınmacı ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği) The Association for Solidarity with Refugees-Mülteci Der, Human Rights Research Association İHAD, Human Resource Development Foundation.¹²

¹⁰ İbid.

¹¹ Türker Kılıç, "Mültecilik Mevzuatından Kaynaklanan Sorunlar ve Çözüm Önerileri", *Düşünce Gündem*, 2008, vol. 44., pp. 29.

¹² For example in 2008 number of NGOs make news release about refugees who lost their life in Tigris, and deportation of Uzbek refugees. They call for an action to the government authorities and tried to get attention of public opinion. They started to work on some specific areas such as Kırklareli Refugee camp, İstanbul Kumkapı Hostel, transit zones in airports to deal with the problems refugees faced. *Mültecilik Sorunlar, Sorunlar Tanıklıklar ve Çözüm Önerileri, İHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı İlmî Seriler Toplantısı 2, Haziran 2009*, p.88

5. Why is there a Need for Cohesion?¹³

On January 2016 Pakistani journalist *Javid Siddiqi* gave an interview to a news agency and evaluated the flow of Syrians to Turkey. He identified the similarities that faced both countries dealing with refugee crises. Siddiqi's use of the term *Pakistanization* of the country was used to depict what Turkey can face in the future if long-term refugee policies are not put into place. According to Siddiqi, Pakistan coped well and managed with the refugees for as long as aid arrived from the Muslim world and from international organizations. The economic assistance that has been utilized by Pakistan to manage the Afghan migrants, delayed for almost 30 years from developing social policies that would form a basis for future management.¹⁴ Siddiqi's this comment needs to be considered upon the repatriation of Afghan refugees that stands as a major catastrophe for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the international community.

Pakistan is hosting approximately 3 million Afghans for 30 years. During the 30 years of stay, Afghans had settled their houses, set up their businesses, and even married local people. Nonetheless, by the increasingly devastating attacks in Pakistan following the US invasion of Afghanistan, the country decided to repatriate Afghans. Should this happen it will possibly be considered as the biggest migration of modern history.

What makes this last repatriation crucial that is that it has created a great deal of controversy and hatred among two peoples. While Pakistani people had criticized the Afghans for having created social disorder, their Islamic identities have managed to live together because of their common cultural background. A similar situation is occurring in Turkey. Although NGOs responded effectively to meet the basic needs of the Syrians, the prolonged war and the ambiguity of the return of refugees require developing policies in order to facilitate a meaningful and cohesive integration of Syrians

¹³ Turkish authorities prefer the term "uyum" which is the exact translation of "cohesion" instead of "integration" that associates with assimilation. This study emphasizes the importance of giving highest possible initiative to the civil society https://www.academia.edu/11575259/Syrians_in_Turkey_Social_Acceptance_and_Integration_Türkiyedeki_Suriyeliler_Toplumsal_Kabul_ve_Uyum, p.5

¹⁴ F. Çarpar, "Mülteci Sorunu Türkiye'yi de Pakistanlaştırabilir", interview with C. Siddiki, Retrieved September 21, 2016, from <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/dunya/multeci-sorunu-turkiyeyi-de-pakistanlastirabilir-1040754>.

into Turkish society. A major obstacle to the integration policy is the fact that Turkey has many restrictions and limitation on migrants and refugees because of the excessive influx of people seeking asylum due to prolonged conflicts on its borders. As a result, many migrants and refugees opt to migrate to Europe instead of Turkey, knowing full well that Turkish policies are very restrictive. For the Syrians, the restrictions and limitations pose as a barrier to meaningful integration and an acknowledging of Turkey's generosity because they struggle to identify with the policies of the state.

6. Some Samples of Campaigns and Discourses Involved

Relief campaigns are important carriers of messages and serve as tools to accomplish what is being targeted. In fact, there is a need for a professional focus for the campaigns in terms of capability in reaching a wide audience. Scientific measurements of the effects of campaign discourses and visuals in presenting Syrians to the society can yield significant results. Whilst most of the visuals contain of images of women and children, the basic message is to display the vulnerability and disadvantageous conditions of the people. While the "helplessness" mobilizes the public more in raising awareness and assistance, this situation may be coded in the minds that Syrians always "deprived and needy", causing us to ignore the potential of contribution to Turkey. Appreciation of those qualified Syrian population would ease social acceptance and cohesion.¹⁵



Figure 1: Syrian muhajirs are our brothers and sisters

¹⁵ Erdoğan, *ibid*, pp.171.

While the Turkish government formalizes some judicial arrangements for Syrians to benefit from governmental services, in the meantime it considers the sensitivity of the issue and this can be observed from official statements. For instance, on 18 January 2013, government officers sent an issue to the governors of 11 cities stating that Syrian *guests* must be provided with health services.¹⁶ The usage of the term “guest” is an important indicator as the state’s intention to create a positive attitude in the society about the Syrians even though they are defined by the status of temporary asylum seekers. According to this status, while Syrians cannot have the rights of refugee such as traveling to a third country, they cannot be sent back to Syria unless they themselves give consent or desire to return. The implementation has been applied only to Syrian refugees fleeing from the trauma of a violent and brutal war.

The terminology that have been used for Syrians are as *refugee*, *asylum seeker*, *migrant*, *stateless* and *internally displaced person*. Migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, and guests constitute the terminology used to describe the legal status of Syrians inside Turkey.¹⁷

When it comes to the general reflections on migration in the society, one additional term has been included in this paper - that is *muhajir*. The term *muhajir* which is an Arabic word from within the Islamic tradition, means a Muslim who migrates from one place to another because of oppressions and tyranny that prevent him/her to practice his/her Islamic way of life.¹⁸ Early usage of *muhajir* goes back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad when the Muslims migrated to another place by giving up their settled life, homes, and business just to follow the principles of Islam as a whole without any confrontation.

¹⁶ Halim Yılmaz, Türkiye’de Suriyeli Mülteciler-İstanbul Örneği Tespitler, İhtiyaçlar ve Öneriler, Retrieved October 5, 2016, http://istanbul.mazlumder.org/webimage/suriyeli_multeciler_raporu_2013.pdf.

¹⁷ According to a research, the percentage of the term *Asylum-seeker* %26, *Migrant* %15, *Syrian* %8, *Refugee* % 4, *Guest* %3 in the academic papers. Erdem Selvin, *Göçün Bilimsel Anlatısı: Türkiye ‘Akademiya’sının Suriyeli ‘Mülteciler’ ile İmtihanı Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Avrupa Çalışmaları Merkezi Öğrenci Forumu Bülteni, Mayıs / 2016, p.20, v:5, Dosya: Suriye Krizi, Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye*, retrieved from; <https://acmof.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/bc3bclten-dosya-5-suriye-krizi3.pdf>

¹⁸ İHH Araştırma ve Yayınlar Birimi, *Mültecilik Sorunlar Tanıklıklar ve Çözüm Önerileri Sempozyumu, Tanımlar*, 2009, pp.13, İstanbul: İHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı.



Figure 5: Do not ignore! Let's look after Syrians who are under difficulties and let's together heal their wounds



Figure 6: “I am freezing, help!” “Winter is cold and freeze but brotherhood of Istanbul warms. Help for our Syrian refugee brothers and sisters”.



Figure 7: Protest about attack and discourses against Syrians

In an interview with one of the NGOs representative in Şanlıurfa, which hosts the largest Syrian population in Turkey, the representative expressed that the concept muhajir reminds people the generosity of the ansar who hosted the first Muslims migrants in their homes. For this reason, there may be significant benefits in using such terminologies. The spread of these uses may encourage harmony, compassion, empathy, generosity and compassion in society.²⁰

Ansar means “helper” in Arabic and the word refers the people of Medina who welcomed Muhajirun from Mecca. After the migration spiritual brotherhood had been established between Muhajirun and Ansar by the prophet. Ansar hosted muhajirun as their family members and shared with them their houses, properties. Qur’an defines Islamic brotherhood as “Those who believed, and adopted exile, and fought for the Faith, with their property and their persons, in the cause of Allah, as well as those who gave (them asylum and aid-these are (all) friends and protectors of another (Al-Anfal 8/72).

A group of students who visited Syrian camps in the frame of IHH projects, decided to start a project which was named as *Weaving for Brotherhood* (Kardeşlik Örgüsü). The project was launched in October 2013 with the support of IHH. It was announced in the cities and universities and received remarkable support.²¹ The project was also supported by other NGOs. Handmade sweaters were sent to the refugee camps at the beginning. The cost of materials which have been distributed to volunteers to weave, has been provided by the income from the bookmarks which are prepared by a university student. In the second stage of the project Syrian women were provided with wools and knitting needles to weave sweaters for their children and people. The project received cash donations and this led to the purchasing of first-hand clothes for Syrians who were settled in refugee camps.²²

²⁰ E. Çebi, *Social Cohesion Works of IHH*, personal interview with Behcet Atilla, 16 November 2016.

²¹ E. Çebi, *Kardeşlik Örgütü*, personal interview with Nurgül Karagül, 16 November 2016.

²² İki Tır Dolusu Kardeşlik Örgüsü, Retrieved November 15, 2016, from Yeni Şafak: <http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/iki-tir-dolusu-kardeslik-orgusu-594081>.



Figure 8: “The project aims to help a tiny bit our Syrian brothers and sisters who experience the war very painfully, to protect them from freezing colds of the winter and the most importantly to show that we never forget them and we will not allow the world to forget.



Figure 9: Weaving for brotherhood! We are weaving weal and muffler for our Syrian brothers/sisters.



Figure 10: Bookmarks prepared and sold by university students to purchase equipment for weaving



Figure 11: Announcement is about collecting winter clothes in Üsküdar square between certain hours of the day related too Weaving for Brotherhood.

The important detail about the project was that volunteers came together from different ages and even different countries. This has been an important contribution in fostering the idea of the “humanity for all” and for improving the sense of brotherhood and awareness about Syrians.

The project further stimulated individuals to improve some other ideas through social media and resulted forming a platform that collected two trucks of winter clothes.²³



Figure 12: About announcement of the event which composes few social formations, in Istanbul Bilgi University

7. Foundations, Projects, Platforms

While there is a clear division in the society in general about the war in Syria, division has also had a strong impact on the religious and conservative population of Turkey. This has resulted in a stagnation in relief campaigns which are mostly run by faith based NGOs, for a long time. With the intensification of the war, people became aware of the issue and NGOs increased their relief effort, which focused largely on humanitarian aid. While 5 years of drastic war exhausted much of faith based NGOs, many local and small scale organizations had to stop their projects because of lack finance and staff during this period. However there are NGOs which

²³ Ibid

still persist and continue in their efforts from the first day of war to meet the needs of Syrians.

First aid is being provided mainly by local faith based NGOs in many cities. Human rights organizations focus on reporting the conditions, observing the refugee problem and offering solutions to state or international authorities. International organizations have remained unwilling or incapacitated to resolving the Syrian- refugee's crises.²⁴

Faith based NGOs mostly do not have a connection with international foundations such as UNHCR whose activities have been allowed in 2012. However UNCHR has positioned itself very hesitantly and only joined the process for observation and education for the volunteers. By 2014 International NGOs and UNHCR operated some projects, specifically in the field of education. UNICEF cooperated with mostly secular NGOs²⁵, which were not active on the ground and reached a limited number of Syrians and had little acted for refugees in the cities.²⁶

NGOs generally are not allowed to conduct any relief projects inside the 23 refugee camps all over Turkey. *AFAD Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency* which is the governmental entity takes care of all the processes inside the camps. However, the majority of refugees live outside of the official camps and most of them were not registered. The low levels of registration prevented Syrians from being recognized officially and deprived them from benefiting official facilities. In this regard, refugees outside the camps need aid more. However *Directorate General of Migration Management* has set up a law enforcement as *Foreigners and International Protection* which was published on 11.04.2013 with law no. 6458; *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* which is an assurance for the rights of migrants and international protection seekers. "The legal framework of the rights of migrants and refugees has been brought in line with the international standards". Directorate General of Migration Management aims to be structured in 81 provinces, 148 districts and outside Turkey. This protection law is considered "as an assurance of the

²⁴ Sivil Düşün, "Sivil Toplum Örgütlerinin Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler İçin Yaptıkları Çalışmalar İle İlgili Rapor", Retrieved September 26, 2016, from <http://www.igamder.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Suriye-STK-Raporu.pdf>, pp.13.

²⁵ Sivil Düşün, Ibid, pp. 18-19.

²⁶ E. Çebi, *Porject of Olive Branch*, personal interview with Tuğba Öztürk, 16 November 2016.

rights of migrants and international protection seekers by basing an effective asylum and migration management on a strong legal ground”.

While there is significant progress in the field, there is insufficient coordination between NGOs. ²⁷ Since the catastrophe of the war has escalated, the need for cooperation between the various NGOs have come into the spotlight in order to initiate a system that would help to disperse relief more effectively and ensure that families are not overlooked.

The platform composition of eleven NGOs and two individuals in Ankara aims to gather all activities and relief organizations to ensure coordination between those NGOs. According to the project organizers Syrians who are living in Ankara will be determined and their addresses will be collected in one particular software program. These families will be supported financially to ensure that they are able to send their children to the schools. Another aim is to determine professions of Syrian society in Ankara for future projects and coordination. Coordination between those NGOs is important in terms of preventing any chaos on the ground, work definition of each NGOs and involvement of civil society in the relief and cohesion process. ²⁸



Figure 13: Announcement about “Neighborhood talks” with Syrian Youths

²⁷ Mustafa Tutkun, ”Sivil Tolumun Sürece Sistemik Şekilde Dahil Edilmeli”, *Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Çocukların Eğitimi Paneli*, Ankara, Retrieved November 8, 2016, from <http://setav.org/tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-cocuklarin-egitimi/etkinlikler/36907>.

²⁸ Tutkun, Ibid.

Şanlıurfa branch of IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation founded another humanitarian relief platform which is composed of local NGOs and it has implemented full-scale projects. The platform maintains contact with the governorship, municipality, and with office of religious affairs in the city. Platform functions as bridge between refugees and the various official and non-governmental structures. NGOs platform of Şanlıurfa also initiated cooperation with other cities' and countries' NGOs in conducting relief projects.²⁹

There are noteworthy efforts in Şanlıurfa such as weekly meetings of Turkish and Syrian youths in the houses of volunteers or Syrian madrasas in the city. Conversations between the two nations' youth are based on the problems, solutions and projects needed. IHH representative of Şanlıurfa states that during the meetings, Turkish participants introduce themselves by adding names of cities in Syria after their own names and try to make their names sound like Syrians -such as *Behcet Abu Muhammed Shami*- with the aim of honoring their guests. Other activities that contribute to the cohesion of the society, include initiating seminars under the name Ansar and Muhajir, participating in funerals, condolences gatherings and wedding ceremonies of Syrians and meeting the expenses of those events. A noteworthy incident narrated by IHH Şanlıurfa representative is an important example in seeing the importance of aid activities. A boy from Deir-ez-Zor was mistakenly shot by Turkish gendarmerie and Syrian youths in the city were planning to organize a protest. Nonetheless the family of the victim opposed the protests and prevented youths from gaining momentum by explaining the good intention of the local people from whom they received a warm welcome when they arrived the city. This is a very sad and touching story about how people mutually try to overcome many sorrows. IHH offers important services such as assisting individuals to find the families of missing persons in the city and to help them to meet. IHH uses Arabic banners in their activities and programs to indicate their inclusive intentions.

Additionally, refugees are not asked to come to the offices to fetch their aid, rather relief materials are delivered to the homes of refugees to avoid any unintentional harm and disrespect. Women officers of the branches invite Syrian women to help with handmade foods for selling in charity

²⁹ Sivil Düşün, Ibid.

bazaars for Syrians. This environment allows women to socialize and to get to know each other. Turkish students in the faculty of theology teach Turkish to the Syrian students in Syrian madrasas while Syrians teach Arabic to their Turkish friends. Fifty percent of the 14 staff are Syrians. IHH office initiated the foundation of Syrian NGOs in the city and maintain regular contact with the NGOs to generate a close understanding and feeling of togetherness which helps in the relief planning and execution. They support 21 madrasas in the city.³⁰

From the first day of the disputes IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation which was founded in 1995 during Bosnian War, exerted efforts to create an awareness in the society about its' relief projects. It was the first Turkish NGO that provided aid materials and had been transferred to AFAD to be used inside the camps.³¹

The foundation has spent 307.601.725 USD for Syria relief projects which are categorized under social, food, accommodation and health relief between 2011-2016. The foundation has settled specific offices and hired staff only for projects in Syria. IHH is working with 643 volunteers of whom 360 of them are Syrians. The Organization also works with over 100 Turkish and 100 international and 92 Syrian civil structures in conduction projects. Total activities are based on 200.000m² open area. Administrative centers, schools, university, storages for materials, bakeries, public kitchens, offices, houses for orphans and widows, social reinforcements have been established on 95.000m² (Provided data is limited to December 2016).

There are 5 operation centers which are based in Reyhanlı, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Yayladağı, Karkamış and four in as Syria as Bab-ul Hava, Bab-us Selam, Türkmendağı, Cerablus. In total there are 8100 containers in Siccu, Reyyan, Bab-ul Iman, Shuheda, Bab-u Nur, Öncüpınar, Elbeyli Bab-us Selam container towns. Total 60.000 Syrians are living in those containers. There are 22 tent camps which compose 12.500 tents and 90.000 Syrian, in Yayladağı, in districts of Idlip, Halep, Azez.³²

³⁰ Çebi, Ibid.

³¹ Sivil Düşün, Ibid.

³² İHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı, *Advertisement Movie of Damascus*, Unpublished Internal Document, 2016.

While the emergency relief projects are the first agenda of IHH, there are very important long term projects which should be instituted to support the welfare of the people. In the first years of war, when the number of refugees increased in the camps as well as out of the camps, education centers and clinics, have been set up.

Recently there are very impressive projects are under preparation such as the *Children Living Center* which has been built in Reyhanlı, district of Hatay. The center has been designed by professional architects with the aim of providing a warm environment rather than hosting the children and their mothers in the shelters. Almost 990 children who are the victim of ongoing war will be accommodated with their mothers in the complex.³³



Figure 14: Final condition of the project



Figure 15: Final condition of the project

³³ There are 20 villa-type houses, and 3 clinics, meeting and entertainment buildings, mosque, administrative building, playgrounds, green areas for plantation is taking place. The aim of the project is to take care of the children's physical and spiritual well-being, providing them with accommodation, education, healthcare, food, cloth, counseling for their traumas and protecting them against criminal organizations.

Since the beginning of war from 2011, 10.000 trucking rig of food were sent to Syria with the help of countrywide campaigns. 17.400 ton of flour, 7840 dry food 19.790-ton stable food, and 266.190.000 unit of bread sent Syria only during 2015. Beside first aids, there are other important relief activities such as orphan protection and education. 6.450 orphan children are under sponsorship. 11 orphanages have been established inside Syria and 2.940 children are taken care under those orphanages with their mothers.³⁴

Over 10.000 orphans receive stationery, rent allowance, psycho-social rehabilitation. 11 schools in Turkey and 18 schools have been established in Syria. 347 schools and 157.000 students who are studying in these schools are supported logistically. The University of Damascus which is composed of four faculties and with the capacity of 1.750 students, started its education in Azez's camps regions.³⁵ As a result of protocols with the Ministry of Education, students who study in vocational courses can have training certificates. Syrian university students are given scholarships. Reports and workshops on education problems and solutions are being prepared on regular basis.³⁶

8. Joint Campaigns of NGOs

I need you was an important joint campaign which was composed of local NGO's and governmental relief organizations.³⁷The campaign which was very impressive in the society created awareness and received a huge amount of relief. Another campaign which was initiated by Turkiye Diyanet Foundation has been named as Winter came...a bread, a blanket for Syria!. This campaign has also been supported by many NGO's.

In the press conference of the campaign, this platform has been described as state, nation, NGO and media cooperation. Head of Religious Affairs Mehmed Görmez expressed the relief as "*mobilization that is not the help*

³⁴ IHH, Ibid.

³⁵ IHH, Ibid.

³⁶ IHH, Ibid.

³⁷ Presidential Office Press and Public Relations AFAD, Retrieved September 25, 2016, from <https://www.afad.gov.tr/tr/2987/Sana-Ihtiyacim-Var-Yardim-Kampanyasi-Tanitim-Programi>

for a friend, brother, neighbour, relative; we are as a nation going to save the mankind from being hostage”. He stated that death of a human being in Syria means the death of all humanity” “death of our humanity”. He again addressed the common consciences of the Turkish nation which responded earlier from the state and from any other public enterprises. These words are very inclusive and supportive.



Figure 16: Campaign for winter clothes “Make the six missing”

His speeches were very detailed and clear about the challenges and difficulties faced by the Syrians and he gave examples of previous campaigns launched by the NGOs. He stated that it did not matter to which faction the Syrians belonged or what ideology they espoused, what mattered was that the nation was being called upon to assist and provide relief. Accordingly therefore, he declared that this was not an issue of Muslims only, this was an issue of all humanity.³⁸

³⁸ Suriye İçin Başlatılan Yardım Kampanyasının Tanıtımı, İstanbul’da Yapıldı. Retrieved October 3, 2016, from <http://arsiv.diyanetvakfi.org.tr/200/guncel/suriye-icin-baslatilan-yarim-kampanyasinin-tanitimi-istanbulda-yapildi>.



Figure 17: Campaign visual of “I need you”



Figure 18: Winter came! A bread and a blanket for Syria!



Figure 19: Turkish Red Crescent relief truck which is covered with word that “you are not alone”

9. Some Examples of the Educational Project

Education is an important factor in the healing, cohesion and development of the Syrians. Currently there are 1,395,455 0-18 aged Syrians in Turkey and total number between 5-18 is 1,020,598. The 0-4 years old population is about 374,847 (İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü). While 311.526 Syrian children have a chance to study in temporary education centers and governmental schools since 2012, 523.583 children could not continue their schooling process.³⁹

9.1. Zeytin Dalı- Olive Branch

The project which has been named as “Olive Branch” launched in June 2015, with the cooperation of Muntada AID which is an England-based medical relief organization and AID Alliance of International Doctors. This project aims to promote “response” programs, to diminish risk factors and to develop supporting life factors for Syrian children and women (Project of Olive Branch).

A Moroccan teacher who lived in Syria for 12 years before the war and migrated to Turkey collected a group of children who were selling paper tissues in the streets of Fatih, a district of Istanbul. She organised a class with these students and asked for help from AID regarding class materials. Later the children who were mostly from rural areas of Aleppo were taken for psychological support under AID supervision. The program has been planned for six months of therapy for 36 children. Those who show positive development complete the program while those who need more therapy continue for other six months until the therapist decides positively. Until now there 60 physiotherapies have been completed with 73 children and 80 women.⁴⁰ The fourth period of the project was completed between 01.12.2016 and 31.05.2017 with 61 children and 154 women (Project of Olive Branch).

Within this project volunteers are playing an important part in the supervision of professionals. While there are professional therapy programs sup-

³⁹ Coşkun İpek ve Müberra Nur Emin, Retrieved November 7, 2016, from http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20160906135243_turkiyedeki-suriyelilerin-egitiminde-yol-haritasi-pdf.

⁴⁰ Öztürk, Ibid.

ported by handmade workshops, playgroups, cultural tours for children, mothers are joining Turkish language courses, needlecraft, calligraphy, marbling art and etc. These activities are considered as part of the treatment process and based on feedback from these activities helped with the healing of both groups' social relationships. While these efforts are paid for in terms of the refugee children, there are some obstacles psychologists and volunteers face. Syrian women consider therapies as a process which are applied only by mentally disturbed people. Therefore at the beginning they agreed to send their children and hesitated to meet with psychologists. They considered releasing their sorrows as complaining about their fate and a react against God's will. Another pressure on them was their concern about confidentiality. It has taken time for them and for the volunteers to trust each other and to start the rehabilitation process. Another obstacle is their temporariness in Istanbul since Turkey is considered as a transition center. Therefore the center focused more on making vocational courses for women to be able to stand on their own. Aside from all of these obstacles, there are participations, which are ongoing and increasing on a daily basis. These activities are considered as treatment processes and provide some means of relief and healing but they need a lot of interaction and opportunities to spend more time with each other. Specifically Turkish language courses attracted women participants and directors of centers needed to develop extra backup lists (Project of Olive Branch). In the center there is very meaningful harmony between Syrian and Turkish teachers, translators, even Turkish orphans who took therapies in previous times and are now involved in the process as group sister/brother. The center also provides translators for women and children when they need to go to hospitals, schools or governmental offices. Volunteers in AID also took professional seminars especially from lawyers who are interested in refugee and migration issues in Turkey. They are provided with the information on the rights of refugee, and their access to social services.

While the center dedicates huge efforts to meet the most important needs of those people, it has to deal with the complexity of Syrian society. The director of the center gives interesting information that Syrian society has many factions inside and they had to spend quite a time to overcome serious difficulties of this complexity. While the center hires translators for therapies from Aleppo, a patient who is from Damascus may not feel comfortable with this. While the center directs refugees to other relief organiza-

tions, which are funded, by non-Arab refugees of Syria, to receive relief, non-Arab NGOs may not agree in helping Syrian Arabs. Therefore another issue of cohesion among Syrians has emerged as a major concern. AID officers warn about not the mistake of identifying the Syrians as a homogeneous community and has directed that the developing projects must respond to this complexity.⁴¹

9.2. Onun İşi Okumak- Labour of the Child is Education

The project which was initiated in January 2016 gave birth to the association named as *Children of the Earth* (Yeryüzü Çocukları). This was an initiation upon hearing the news of a Syrian child named Muhammed Girrez who lives in Istanbul. Muhammed lost his father in Syria and had to work for a livelihood. He stated in the interview that he would like to be a doctor if he could have a chance to study. Many people tried to reach Muhammed to donate his education and support his family. Upon the news about Syrian child labors, Turkish NGOs and civilians initiated projects to reintegrate these children with education.⁴²

A group of volunteers decided to help these children who are deprived of education because they have to work. While the project received remarkable support from the society, the idea needed to be projected and this led to formation of the foundation of Children of the Earth. The project was named as *Labour of the child is education* (Onun İşi Okumak). The aim of the project is to prevent the children from giving up their studies to earn an income for their families. The first target of the project was Syrian children who are between 6-18 in Istanbul. 96 children have rejoined the schools and 13 families have been provided financial aid to be able to maintain their children's study (Data limited to 2016). The project is also being supported by other NGO's such as IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, ÖNDER Association of Imam Hatip High Schools, Turkish Red Crescent, Zeyd Bin Sabit Association in the context of joint cooperation. Ministry of Education is also involved in the process.

⁴¹ Öztürk, Ibid.

⁴² Sümeyye Ertekin, "Suriyeli Muhammed Artık Çalışmıyor", Retrieved November 7, 2016, from <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/suriyeli-muhammed-artik-calismiyor-okullu-oldu>.

With the help of cooperating foundations children are determined and are settled in official schools. The registration process of these children has been accompanied by volunteers and their study is being supported by additional courses that are basically Turkish language courses. Volunteers have an important role in communication between families and the schools, between children and teachers. There are a certain number of volunteer supervisors for each family of a sponsored child. Volunteers are also in the position to audit the family should they abuse the given scholarship for the child and send him/her back to work. Long term targets of the association is to spread the idea in Turkey and to reach as many refugee children as possible who are forced to work. The association set up a center for children to recover their educational loss and speed up their Turkish language learning process while trying to register the children for the school at the same (Yeryüzü Çocukları).

9.3. Farkındayım Yanıbaşındayım-“I am aware of you, I am with you”

The Woman, Family and Youth Center KAGEM has launched a project to ensure the maintenance of the education of Syrian orphan girls via informal education. Successful students according to their demand will be supported by transferring them to governmental schools. At the same time Türkiye Diyanet Foundation provided informal Qur’anic and religious education in the mosques. The main target of the project is girls who are between 10-25 years. The pilot scheme was planned for Ankara and 150 girls have been chosen for the project in the beginning. Syrian girls who are living in Ankara are provided transportation during weekends to go their homes during their participation in this project. Social and cultural activities are being planned for those girls to improve their social and psychological developments.⁴³

⁴³ “Suriyeli Yetim Kızlara Eğitim Desteği”, Retrieved November 13, 2016, from <http://arsiv.diyanetvakfi.org.tr/527/guncel/suriyeli-yetim-kizlara-egitim-destegi>



Figure 20: Do you want to be involved by Ansar

The campaign, named as *Farkındayım Yanı Başındayım - I am aware of you I am with you* has been run in Ankara, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa. The Ministry of Education assigned 17 schools in which 12.978 benefited. In the website of the project launch it is stated that the values of the brotherhood of Ansar and Muhajir was the fundamental principle in launching the project. The aim of this approach has been explained as a tool to educate “our young brothers and sisters who take refuge in our country, hold their hand and launch projects that will allow them to meet knowledge and learning” (Farkındayım Yanıbaşındayım).



Figure 21: Humanity do wear mercy! Relief Campaign for our Syrian brothers and sisters.

10. Conclusion

Civil Society in modern conceptualization- has a strong base as an extension of religious motivation and a long history of *Waqf* tradition in Turkey. Turkish society has had to confront tough and severe repressive systems and institutional policies that attempted to erase their Islamic identity. This process strengthened the people's awareness of social and educational services which were first initiated by building thousands of mosques and supporting the religious educational process by building Islamic High Schools, hostels for students, Qur'anic teaching centers etc. all over the country. The struggle of existence and identity is reflected reflections in the foundation of most NGOs, which contribute the largest part to social welfare work today.

The war in Syria depolarized Turkish society, which is a reflection of Syrian deterioration. While NGOs had to struggle with this situation, the ongoing war economically exhausted many small scale Turkish NGOs. The Government agencies and some NGOs have persisted providing relief to Syrians whilst Turkey is holding more than 3 million refugees as the war continues and expands on its borders. The 15 July Coup shocked the country and Turkey entered another very critical period in its existence which drastically shook up many institutions. The effect of the coup still lingers. The war in Syria is playing out across the borders as well as inside Turkey due to the attacks by ISIS. The battle with the PKK has also caused many internal displacements plus the displacement of the Syrians.

Remarkable efforts by Turkey with her civil society which includes NGOs, platforms, schools, municipalities, semi-governmental agencies and individuals are being made and are very important in repulsing countless dangers. But there is a lot more to do for the future due to the uncertainty and escalating conflict on the ground.

NGOs, which represent the concrete form of civil society, meet the humanitarian needs for a social cohesion process. However other elements such as education, language, protection of Syrian identity and Turkish identity stand as important essentials of the cohesion. Many Syrians have been settled in cities, started their business, or have been employed, and many of them register in schools. The local people encounter Syrians everywhere. Turkey needs to transform this situation to its advantage, which will help

both the people (Syrians and Turks). The NGOs are playing a critical role in this episode of Turkey's history of Waqf and generosity of Ansar and Muhajir relations. There is a need to improve long-term strategies as a matter of urgency even as the primary forms of humanitarian aid, which are necessary, continue.

This paper aimed to present some of the works that are implemented by NGOs by showing their vitality in preventing social chaos in our country, which is encountering significant challenges and efforts to destabilize the nature and essence of the Turkish society. While NGOs have many drawbacks and can be weak in professional approaches to the conditions they find themselves in, their practical experiences should be considered in the development of policies and plans by the state and by the academic world as well. As a community of the history of the Waqf, we must reflect on these experiences if we are to engage in bigger discussions about cohesion, brotherhood and Islamic spirit. Finally, we must pay attention to the internal dynamics of communities and how we label their experiences if we are truly committed to the work of serving humanity.

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