

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN TÜRKİYE: A FIELD OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN TURKISH RED CRESCENT AND THE EU\*

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### Abstract

Türkiye has been hosting approximately 6 million migrants, according to the World Migration Report published by the International Organization for Migration in 2022. To manage the migration flows, the EU has provided financial assistance to Turkish civil society organizations working on the integration of migrants. One of those organizations has been the Turkish Red Crescent. The migration literature criticizes the externalization approach of the EU and the instrumentalization approach of Türkiye in the 2000s. However, this paper focuses on the good practices of those actors and argues that the EU-Turkish Red Crescent collaboration has directly served the social integration of refugees. The migration-related programs and activities of the Turkish Red Crescent allow the religious and cultural similarities between the societies to contribute positively to the integration. It is concluded in the paper that collaborative actions among the regional actors, state, and civil society to overcome problems between refugees and the host community and contribute to producing a peaceful environment for social integration.

**Keywords:** Social Integration, Refugees, Turkish Red Crescent, European Union, Türkiye.

**JEL Codes:** F22, K37.

## TÜRKİYE'DEKİ MÜLTECİLERİN SOSYAL ENTEGRASYONU: TÜRK KIZILAY VE AB ARASINDA BİR İŞ BİRLİĞİ ALANI

### Öz

2022 yılında Uluslararası Göç Örgütü tarafından yayınlanan Dünya Göç Raporu'na göre Türkiye yaklaşık 6 milyon göçmene ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Göç akınlarını yönetebilmek amacıyla AB, Türkiye'de göçmenlerin sosyal entegrasyonu üzerine çalışan sivil toplum örgütlerine yönelik olarak finansal destek sağlamaktadır. Bu örgütlerden biri de Türk Kızılay'dır. Göç yazını 2000'li yıllarda AB'nin göçü dışsallaştırdığı ve Türkiye'nin göçü araçsallaştırdığı yönünde eleştirilerde bulunmaktadır. Fakat bu çalışmada söz konusu aktörlerin iyi uygulamaları değerlendirmeye alınmış, AB-Türk Kızılay iş birliğinin mültecilerin sosyal entegrasyonuna doğrudan katkı sağladığı ifade edilmiştir. Türk Kızılay'ın göç ile ilgili program ve aktiviteleri toplumlar arasındaki dini ve kültürel benzerliklerin entegrasyona olumlu katkı sağlamasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Çalışmada bölgesel aktörler, devlet ve sivil toplumun ortak hareket etmesinin mülteciler ve ev sahibi toplum arasındaki problemlerin aşılmasına ve sosyal entegrasyon için barışçıl bir ortamın sağlanmasına katkı sağladığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Entegrasyon, Mülteciler, Türk Kızılay, Avrupa Birliği, Türkiye.

**JEL Kodları:** F22, K37.

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## INTRODUCTION

In migrant-receiving countries, social integration has become one of the primary needs, along with food, shelter, and health, to prevent conflicts in society. When the commonly shared values built between the host society and migrants are combined with efforts to improve the living standards of migrants, it is possible to develop a peaceful environment in society.

Türkiye has become not only a transit country but also a host country for asylum seekers, especially in the 2000s with the impact of changing geopolitics. Especially in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war, the number of refugees in Türkiye has increased significantly, and the phenomenon of migration has brought about changes in social, legal, political, and economic spheres. Asylum-seekers leave their first country of asylum and migrate towards countries with higher levels of social welfare; however, they often remain on the migration routes and are pushed back, especially from the borders of European countries.

Currently, 3.4 million refugees in Türkiye continue their lives under temporary protection status. In addition to their legal status, various practices are also needed for the social integration of refugees. Especially Syrians, who outnumber other refugees, do not face any significant obstacles in Türkiye in terms of their cultural and religious characteristics. The state and civil society organizations are developing various projects based on commonalities between Turks and Syrians. The EU, as an important actor in migration, contributes to migration management in neighboring countries through various programs and financial support mechanisms. These programs and mechanisms have been criticized in the migration literature, and it is argued that the EU has been securitizing and externalizing migration (Huysmans, 2000; İçduygu and Yüksek, 2012; Yüksel Çendek, 2014; Üstübcü and Ergün, 2020). Huysmans (2000) argues that the migration issue has been socially constructed in the EU since the 1980s, and it is perceived that migration poses a threat to the national identity and European integration. İçduygu and Yüksek (2012) agree with this approach and emphasize that Europe has both economized and securitized migration even in its candidacy relations with Türkiye. Yüksel Çendek (2014) also emphasizes the role of political excuses used by the EU in its migration policy. On the other hand, Üstübcü and Ergün (2020) argue that the EU has undermined its focus on development and broadened its perception of migration through its securitized policies. The literature has also criticized Turkey's migration policy for instrumentalising migration through the readmission agreement, using the migration card to speed up the full membership process, achieving a free visa regime, and benefiting from EU financial support (Saatçioğlu, 2020; Kaya, 2022; Yüksel, 2023). Saatçioğlu (2020) emphasizes that the Readmission Deal has opened a functional field of cooperation between Türkiye and the EU; however, it cannot bring the full membership to Türkiye. Kaya (2022) shares this approach and argues that Türkiye has followed a profit maximization policy on migration and used it



as a tool in its relations with the EU in the 2000s. Yüksel (2023) approaches from a different angle and draws attention to the politicization and instrumentalization of migration literature and the under-researched subfields in Türkiye.

This paper aims to contribute to migration literature with its difference from the critical perspectives and its focus on the positive effects of the migration relationship between Türkiye and the EU. There are a limited number of academic papers in Türkiye on the good practices and the contributions of non-state actors to the social integration of refugees. In one of those studies, Hoffman and Samuk (2016) emphasize that the success of migration management is directly related to the roles of local governments, NGOs, and UN agencies. The book titled “Syrian Migration and Municipal Experiences in Turkey”, edited by Kaya (2021), shows the good practices of the municipalities in Bursa, Kocaeli, Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli, and Şahinbey. It is concluded in the book that the stress on positive developments rather than negative narratives promotes social peace after a mass migration. Özçürümez and Hoxha (2023) also emphasize the role of local actors and argue that municipalities can quickly adapt themselves to new situations and find specific solutions to migration-related problems. Yüksel (2023) sheds light on the outputs of local-level projects in the case of Düzce in her research. It is observed that those studies do not focus on the role of the EU and its collaboration with non-state actors. To fill the gap in the literature, this paper aims to investigate the contributions of the EU's relations with the Turkish Red Crescent within the framework of various programs and the contributions of joint programs to social integration. It is argued in the paper that significant progress in social integration can be possible by increasing the best practices in society.

The methodology of the paper is based on the qualitative research method, which involves analyzing the official documents and reports on the social integration of refugees undertaken by the parties, Turkish Red Crescent and the EU, on their official websites since 2016, after the Readmission Deal was signed. In the first section of the paper, the transboundary character of the refugee concept is defined; international migration law, EU, and Turkish migration policies are evaluated. In the second section, the historical characteristics of the Turkish Red Crescent, its role in Türkiye's migration policy, and its contribution to the social integration of refugees through religious and cultural elements are evaluated. In the third section, the programs implemented by the Turkish Red Crescent in partnership with the EU in the field of migration are explained. Lastly, in the fourth section, the contributions of the Turkish Red Crescent and the EU partnership to the social integration of refugees in Türkiye are evaluated.

## **TODAY'S REFUGEE AS A TRANSBOUNDARY PHENOMENON AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

“A border is a line that separates one nation from another, or in the case of internal entities, one province or locality from another” (Martinez, 1994, p. 5). Where do migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers stand on the borders? Since it is difficult to determine their position, naming those people with the adjective ‘transboundary’ will not be wrong. Migrants in the world make up 3,6 percent of the world’s population. Within this 3,6 percent, there are internally displaced migrants, immigrants with the goal of better jobs and better living conditions, asylum-seekers, and refugees. Asylum-seekers and refugees make up just 1 percent of the world population (UN DESA, 2020). Today, there are 110 million forcibly displaced people in the world. 36,4 million people are refugees; 62,5 million people are internally displaced persons; and 5,3 million people are asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2023).

The concept of refugee was first written in an international convention, namely the United Nations (UN) Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, in 1951. According to the Convention, refugees were persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion because of events in Europe before 1 January 1951. With the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention adopted in 1967, geographical and time restrictions were lifted (Mültecilerin Hukuki Statüsüne İlişkin Cenevre Sözleşmesi, 1951). Although Türkiye has been one of the signatories of the Convention, it has implemented a reservation until recently. Accordingly, refugee status in Türkiye is only granted to asylum seekers from the Council of Europe member states. The Syrian civil war that erupted in 2011 has directly influenced the migration policies of Türkiye. Türkiye has put into practice the temporary protection status for Syrians in the country since any person out of Council of Europe member states seeking asylum in Türkiye cannot apply to Turkish authorities for refugee status.

For a considerable number of refugees, Türkiye has been regarded as a transit country to arrive in European countries. However, as Persdotter, Rind, and Linghard (2021) argue, European countries have followed restrictive bordering policies, which resulted in the deportation of asylum-seekers most of the time. Since the 19th century, border studies have provided huge literature on bordering policies, construction, and reshaping of borders. Externalization of borders has been used by the EU, especially since the Syrian civil war to stop migrants in neighboring countries such as Libya and Türkiye (Persdotter, Rind, and Linghard, 2021). The following words of Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, in 2020, illustrate the determinants of the social construction of the EU borders: “Greece is now the shield, the real external border of the European Union and the guarantor of stability for the entire European continent” (Rankin, 2020). This EU policy can also be evaluated in terms of the models of the borderland interaction proposed by Martinez (1994); alienated borderlands, coexistent borderlands, interdependent borderlands,



and integrated borderlands. In this context, it can be argued that the EU member states have integrated borderlands. Especially the Schengen regime, the free movement of persons in the EU provided a deep integration among the member countries. However, the member states have followed strict rules against the neighboring countries in terms of migratory issues. Therefore, it can be argued that this approach can be evaluated under the alienated borderlands category. The refugees try to arrive in mostly southern, northern, and central European countries, however, they are deported, punished, and attacked by the security forces which let them be transboundary persons.

The huge migration flow to Europe, especially in 2015, resulted in readmission agreements between the EU and neighboring countries. The 2016 Türkiye-EU Readmission Deal limited to only the Syrian refugees was agreed upon by the two parties to manage this migration flow and to accelerate the EU membership process of Türkiye. Within the scope of the Deal, the EU promised to disburse 6 billion euros through funding refugee-related projects in Türkiye. However, the 2023 UNHCR Report proves that Türkiye has not been just a transit country. The top 5 countries in the world, namely Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Columbia, and Pakistan, host approximately 14 million refugees in the world. In this list, Türkiye and Iran have been the first countries with 3,4 million refugees for each (2023 UNHCR Mid-Year Trends Report). Syrians are the most populated group of refugees in Türkiye. Because they are under temporary protection, they are not considered asylum-seekers, but refugees according to the UNHCR.

Although Türkiye has not removed the reservation to the Geneva Convention, it had to produce new regulations and new policies on migration after the events in 2011. Those facts illustrate the significance of social integration for refugees in Türkiye. Social integration is related to the participation of “individuals in different social activities and relationships” (Holt-Lunstat and Lefler, 2019). Hence, it covers taking part in the fields such as education, sports, employment, and cultural activities (Dictionary Law Insider, n.d.). As a first step for the social integration of refugees, Turkish legislation 6458 No. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection came into force in 2013. In the law, different statuses for migrants have been defined. Accordingly, the refugee status has been determined only for the migrants from the Council of Europe member states because of the geographical reservation of Türkiye. Another status in the Law, conditional refugee is the status of the people who are not granted refugee status and live in Türkiye until they are resettled in a third country. There exist Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, and African people in Türkiye who have been under this status. Secondary protection status in the Law is provided to the migrants who do not have refugee and conditional refugee status; however, their lives are under threat in their countries. Article 91 of the Law informs about temporary protection status which provides short-term protection. It has been a status provided to Syrians and Palestinians in Türkiye since 2014. It includes shelter, health, psychological



support, education, social assistance, and access to the labor market. It is a universal rule that temporary protection lasts until a more permanent humane solution is found (Mültecilerin Hukuki Statüsüne İlişkin Cenevre Sözleşmesi, 1951).

The statistical data provided by UNHCR (2023) shows that migrants using Türkiye as a transit country have been abundantly from Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq as well as Afghanistan, and Syria. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there are approximately 6 million migrants in Türkiye (IOM, 2022). 3,4 million of them are registered Syrian refugees and 320.000 irregular migrants are from other nationalities (UNHCR Türkiye, 2022, 2023). Around 230.000 Syrians in Türkiye have acquired Turkish citizenship. Around 130.000 of them are adults, and 100.000 of them are children (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2023). Kilis and Hatay are the cities in Türkiye that host the densest Syrian population. Cities with the highest numbers of Syrians are İstanbul, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa (Mülteciler Derneği, 2023).

Those developments and numbers have led Türkiye to reform its integration policies since 2011. While the social integration policies were slightly unfavorable (26/100) in 2011, they became halfway favorable (43/100) in 2019. Türkiye reformed family reunification procedures; provided permanent residence, access to nationality, educational and health care needs of refugees, and promoted anti-discrimination (MIPLEX Türkiye Report, 2019). However, in terms of political participation and labor market mobility, Türkiye is expected to implement new policies. Turkish Red Crescent has had a considerable impact on the progress of meeting the educational needs of refugees and fighting anti-discrimination. In the section below, the contribution of the Turkish Red Crescent to the social integration of refugees is shed light on.

## **TURKISH RED CRESCENT AND THE ROLES OF CULTURE AND RELIGION IN SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

The concepts of culture and religion are intertwined in the sense of their communication on social values, beliefs, and attitudes. Culture is built upon collective behaviors including religious practices (Edara, 2017, p. 273). According to Geertz (1993, p. 90), culture is composed of symbols that have been “historically transmitted” and a considerable amount of these symbols arise from religion.

Religion has been considered in identity literature as a phenomenon that can increase distinctions or otherings like ‘us’ and ‘others’. Since it has been a thick element of culture, it is given, and different religions may perceive each other as threats to their existence (Walzer, 1994). However, history is full of differentiating cases. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has



been one of those cases. IFRC has been in collaboration with the Red Cross and Red Crescent all around the world together with approximately 15 million volunteers (IFRC, n.d.). IFRC was established in 1919 to protect human dignity. Organizations under the umbrella of the Federation have been the oldest organizations in the world that have maintained humanitarian aid activities.

Before the establishment of the Federation, the International Committee of the Red Cross met for the first time in Geneva, in 1863 and many European countries signed the Geneva Convention in 1864. This Convention indicates that religion has been the key determinative factor for the general commitment to the missions of the Red Cross. European countries have gathered around the flag of the Red Cross for humanitarian reasons. This flag symbolizes the commonality of religion in Europe and its healing power which supersedes national interests. The Red Cross has been one of the products of European pacifists who have believed in the uniting power of religion. It was agreed by the European countries that the warring states would be considered neutral if the medical personnel had been working in the army. In addition, if the symbol of the Red Cross can be seen in the form of a flag, that region will be considered neutral (Türk Kızılay, 2021, pp. 36-37).

Within the framework of the Geneva Convention, the member states established the Red Cross organizations in their own countries. The Ottoman Empire became one of the parties to the Convention in 1865, and the ‘Ottoman Wounded and Sick Soldiers Aid Society’ was established in 1868. Therefore, the Red Crescent has also been a founding member of this international humanitarian network. Since the Red Cross organization bears the cross on its flag and name, the Ottoman Empire proposed the use of the red crescent symbol and name on its flag. The proposal was positively received by the Federation to include the participation of all the Muslim countries in this movement (Türk Kızılay, 2021, pp. 36-37). This attitude is an indication of the universal nature of the movement. Therefore, the establishment of the Red Crescent became a turning point, and the missions of the Red Cross have not been limited to Christian societies. The foundation of the Red Crescent has been supported by other Muslim countries. Recently, there have been 23 Red Crescent organizations in various Muslim countries including the Turkish Red Crescent, and there have been 96 Red Cross organizations in different countries<sup>3</sup>.

Since the establishment of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, religious symbols have been shown in the institutional flags. Even though the symbols have religious features, the Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations do not discriminate against people who need food, shelter, or protection. These organizations cannot be named just religious organizations; however, the Christian and Muslim societies

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<sup>3</sup> Please check for the links of organizations from (Türk Kızılay, n.d.) <https://www.kizilay.org.tr/Link?id=1> (Accessed on 10.08.2023).



have an organic relationship with those organizations and a sense of belonging to them which originates from their religion. Therefore, in the cases of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, religious symbols play a cultural role in the sense of belonging. Bäckström argues that religion can be a “source of conflict or cohesion” (Bäckström, 2012, p. 28). The mission of the Turkish Red Crescent is "to provide assistance to the needy and the vulnerable in disasters and ordinary times, to improve cooperation in the society, to ensure safe blood supply and to reduce vulnerability" (Türk Kızılay, 2021, p. 50). Therefore, improving cooperation in society and reducing vulnerability have been key missions of the organization in migration management. The programs adopted since 2011 have been raising the awareness of society on the migration phenomenon and promoting social cohesion among the refugees.

According to Kaya, Sunni Muslims in Türkiye have had privileges in social relations. However, non-Muslims and Muslims who do not have Turkish identity have faced exclusionary approaches (Kaya, 2014, p. 14). The migration literature stresses the significant role of civil society organizations. The organizations including refugee members contribute to refugees' social integration, social recognition, and political participation. In his field research, Kaya observed that voluntary organizations established by Muslims in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands contribute to social trust, whereas French Muslims cannot participate in society since their participation is restricted by the French government (Kaya, 2016, p. 259). In that sense, it can be argued that the Turkish Red Crescent with its cultural and religious character has been perceived as a trustworthy civil society organization in the eyes of both the refugees and the host community. Muslim refugee women, for instance, do not hesitate to participate in Turkish Red Crescent events since their headscarves and religious practices are not humiliated by the organization's staff and volunteers. Those cultural or religious commonalities between the refugees and the host society have contributed to the social integration efforts.

## **THE EU-TURKISH RED CRESCENT COLLABORATION ON SOCIAL WELFARE OF REFUGEES**

The increasing number of refugees in European countries and Türkiye especially after the Arab Spring resulted in a Readmission Agreement between the two parties in 2013. A great number of drowned refugees in the Mediterranean Sea brought Türkiye and the EU to agree on a Readmission Deal in 2016 just for the Syrian refugees. The EU has also collaborated with IFRC for the social welfare of refugees in member, neighbor, and refugee-hosting countries. As a part of IFRC, the Turkish Red Crescent has been the organization where the EU directs funds for refugees in Türkiye. The reason why the EU transfers funds to the Turkish Red Crescent has been based on several points such as the global character of the organization, its organic relations with the IFRC, and its strong collaboration with the Turkish state. Especially after the





Readmission Deal, a considerable quantity of the 6-billion-euro funds from the EU were transferred to the organization.

Turkish Red Crescent, which was established in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, has had a uniting force over the Muslim people. As a symbolic non-profit humanitarian organization of the Muslim world, the Turkish Red Crescent has been a familiar organization for both Turkish citizens and many refugees. Even though the payment of 6 billion euros was completed by the EU in 2020, the EU has decided to provide additional funds for the integration of refugees in Türkiye. Cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent has been maintained, and the funds for health, food, education, and infrastructure fields have been provided by the EU. To promote religious pluralism and protection of human rights, the EU has also motivated the collaboration between the Red Cross and Red Crescent in migration-related projects in Türkiye.

The collaboration between the EU and Türkiye on migration management has not only touched upon the lives of many refugees but also contributed to the legitimacy of the Turkish Red Crescent. Legitimacy necessitates acting within social norms, values, and expectations (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975). Sayın and Erdoğan (2020) argue that the most significant legitimacy crisis in the Turkish Red Crescent has been during the 1999 Marmara earthquake in Türkiye because of its inefficient and late actions. With the modernization of its management structure, an important step was taken in terms of legitimacy. However, in the 2000s, the Turkish Red Crescent was criticized by several media groups and opposition political parties and has been alleged to lack transparency on donations, its budget, and actions. This appeared a new legitimacy crisis for the organization. The inefficient policies of the organization after the 2023 earthquakes in the eastern part of Türkiye have also damaged the social trust in it. However, it should be underlined that the collaboration between the Turkish Red Crescent and the EU since 2016 has resulted in a new transparent management structure and rules specifically in the migration field of the organization. Therefore, it can be asserted that the EU has a positive contribution to the vision of the Turkish Red Crescent through collaboration in the field of migration. This positive contribution has been provided through the specific EU programs and financial instruments with the goal of promoting the social welfare of refugees in Türkiye. The section below covers those collaborative programs and instruments and their results in the field.



## **Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN) and ‘Kızılaykart’ Platform**

Since 2016, the Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)<sup>4</sup> of the European Commission has funded the Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN), which has been the largest cash-based fund with 325 million euros in the world. This fund has aimed to protect vulnerable people by providing food, shelter, clothing, transport, medicine, and rent. The execution of this program in Türkiye has been the result of a collaboration of the EU with the Turkish Red Crescent and the state institutions. The Program known as the SUY Program (Sosyal Uyum Yardımı) under the Turkish Red Crescent provides a ‘Kızılaykart’ debit card to each refugee whose application is accepted (Emergency Social Safety Net Program, 2019).

The Kızılaykart Platform has provided humanitarian aid programs such as meeting basic needs, education, and vocational training. It was first used for Turkish beneficiaries in 2011. However, with the Syrian civil war, the use of Kızılaykart has broadened to Syrian people who migrated to Türkiye for emergency food support. In 2012, Kızılaykart was started to be used for the basic needs of vulnerable people under the Camp Food Assistance Program. In 2021, Kızılaykart started to cover different programs for the social integration of refugees (Kızılaykart Cash Based Assistance Programmes, 2019). Under the Platform, the Turkish Red Crescent provides periodic payments for the refugees through the Kızılaykart debit card through the state bank, Halkbank. Those programs under the Kızılaykart Platform are financed by various NGOs, UN Offices, Turkish Red Crescent Community Centers and public institutions (Turkish Red Crescent, Frequently Asked, 2019).

## **Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Program (CCTE) and Turkish Red Crescent**

The EU and UNICEF agreed to start the ‘Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Program’ in 2017. The Turkish Red Crescent has been one of the contributors to the execution of the Program. It aims to increase the number of students under temporary protection and refugee students in Turkish schools. It aimed to reach 230.000 refugee students in 2017. Vulnerable children are the target of the program. Türkiye has also been providing educational support to vulnerable refugee students since 2003. With this program, the target group has been extended to vulnerable refugee students in both Turkish public schools and temporary education centers (UNICEF Press Release, 2017). The Program provides cash support to families

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<sup>4</sup> The EU has been aiding people in need through the ECHO department since 1992. Its annual humanitarian budget is just over €1 billion and helps millions of people across the globe each year. For details, please check European Commission (n.d.), European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/who/about-echo\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/who/about-echo_en) (Accessed on 10.11.2023).



with children through a Kızılaykart debit card. Receiving the fund depends upon the 80 percent school attendance of the children (UNICEF, The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) Program, 2022).

The Program is executed in collaboration with specific ministries in Türkiye, the Turkish Red Crescent, and UNICEF. The EU's ECHO contributed 34 million euros to the Program. Around the world, this contribution has been the largest contribution of any state or organization to education in emergencies. In 2017, almost 500.000 refugee children were enrolled in formal education both within schools and temporary education centers in Türkiye. However, 370.000 of those remained out of school. EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, stated that the Program had been in contact with the families of 56.000 refugee children in 2017 (UNICEF Press Release, 2017). In recent years, more than 770.000 children have been enrolled in schools. The Child Protection Component of the Program reached 135.451 children enduring their enrollment in the schools, preventing child labor, child marriage, and violence (UNICEF August 2022 Report). Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe, has also stated that the integration of refugees into the national educational systems has been a noteworthy contribution to the lives of the children out of school (UNICEF Press Release, 2017). According to the August 2022 UNICEF Report, the total number of beneficiary students from CCTE Program is 803.697.

In recent years, Türkiye has been hosting more than 3,4 million refugees, and 1,8 million of them are children. CCTE Program beneficiaries in Türkiye have the right to apply for ESSN Program and Complementary ESSN Program (C-ESSN) which provide cash transfers each month. While ESSN Program provides 230 TL (12 euros) for a family member each month, C-ESSN Program provides 350 TL (18 euros) for each family member. C-ESSN Program was put into force to support the most vulnerable groups in Türkiye. 16 percent of CCTE beneficiaries receive financial assistance from the C-ESSN Program (UNICEF August 2022 Report).

One of the recent initiatives of the Program has been 'Social Cohesion through Education' in collaboration with Maya Foundation in Istanbul and Şanlıurfa to help children fight bullying or social tension, especially in schools. This pilot project reached 11,844 children, helped to increase their awareness, and contributed to social integration (UNICEF August 2022 Report).

### **The EU Facilities for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT) and Turkish Red Crescent Community Centers**

The EU has supported Türkiye in refugee protection since the start of the Syrian civil war. The results of the war have been devastating and the Union had to propose financial instruments for fighting the crisis. The instrument of EU Facilities for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT) was established in 2016 as a product of the



Readmission Deal between Türkiye and the EU. The main areas that the EU has supported are education, health, infrastructure, socio-economic development, and migration management (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014). The total budget of the instrument has been 6 billion euros as agreed in the Readmission Deal on 18 March 2016. The projects related to the refugees in Türkiye were financed by the EU between 2016 and 2021.

In 2021, the EU promised to maintain financial support to Türkiye on “migration management and border protection” (European Commission, 2021). As agreed by the European Council in June 2021, the EU will provide 3 billion euros as extra financial support for Syrian refugees in Türkiye. It is underlined by the EU that the function of the financial instrument is firstly for “the access of accommodation and quality services to Syrian refugees” and secondly for “coordinated border management services in the airports”. This plan shows three faces of the EU. Firstly, it has limited the program to Syrian refugees, therefore it did not include refugees with different nationalities. Secondly, the EU considered the Syrian refugees from social welfare and security perspectives. And thirdly, the EU has implemented the program within the boundaries of Türkiye (European Commission, 2021). The international community and human rights defenders criticized this viewpoint of the EU, named as securitization and externalization of migration, for more than ten years (Üstübcü and Ergün, 2020).

The Turkish Red Crescent has been one of the intermediary organizations that provide the distribution of EU funds through well-defined structures. One of the projects financed by the FRIT has been Red Crescent Community Centers. Community Centers are established for refugees in Türkiye. The idea of establishing those Centers belongs to Denmark Red Cross which has provided 50 million euros to the Mediterranean region including Türkiye since 2016. Community Centers in Türkiye have been established through a collaboration between the Denmark Red Cross and the Turkish Red Crescent, and it has a 32-million-euro budget to fund the services. It aims to host more than 200.000 refugees living in Türkiye (Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye, 2019).

This project includes the establishment of Community Centers in İstanbul, Ankara, Konya, Kayseri, Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Mardin. Those are the most refugee-populated cities in Türkiye. The Community Centers aim to improve the psychological and social conditions of Syrians in those cities. It is aimed to enhance the self-sufficiency of refugees and the host society. Within the scope of the project, the Community Centers have held vocational skills training activities, informative activities, and psycho-social support services for the host community and refugees. The main programs implemented in Community Centers are protection, development of a source of living, health and psycho-social support, and socialization (The Red Crescent Community Centre Implementation Manual, 2021). As stated by Christian

Berger, the then Head of the EU-Türkiye Delegation, Community Centers both help people with trauma to overcome their problems and make them achieve societies that accept them in their cities (Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye, 2019).

### **MADAD Fund and Turkish Red Crescent**

MADAD Fund is the financial instrument of the ‘EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis’. Its budget has increased since the establishment of the instrument in 2014. The Turkish Red Crescent has been in collaboration with the EU through the EU Regional Trust Fund to support the Syrian people. A large share of the MADAD Fund has been provided to Türkiye since the number of Syrian refugees is comparatively higher than the other countries. The fund has also been provided to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (Türk Kızılay, 2019).

MADAD Fund has a financial capacity of 49 million euros agreed upon by the European Commission. It has provided livelihood, risk management, health, psychological, economic, and educational support for Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries. In Türkiye, the Fund has been supported by 23 donors, the European Commission and FRIT. The Danish Red Cross is a nongovernmental organization that received the largest amount of funds from the EU. It is the coordinator of the MADAD Fund in collaboration with 15 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies<sup>5</sup>.

### **THE EU-TURKISH RED CRESCENT COLLABORATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

The Turkish Red Crescent and the EU have been in collaboration for the social integration of refugees for more than ten years. In 2021, The Turkish Red Crescent identified 7 goals to achieve in the Turkish society. The goals are related to fighting hunger and poverty; supporting refugees/asylum seekers; increasing the resilience of society against disasters; working for a healthy society; ensuring blood for survival and increasing life quality; supporting access to education; and environmental protection (Türk Kızılay, 2021, p. 57). As can be seen from the main goals of the organization, the social integration of refugees needs special attention together with contributions from internal and external actors such as the state, society, the EU, the UNHCR, and the neighboring countries.

The Turkish Red Crescent and the EU collaboration in migration management covers various areas such as financial support, food support, education, psycho-social support, conflict resolution, and vocational

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<sup>5</sup> The collaborators are The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Egypt Red Crescent Society, French Red Cross, German Red Cross, Iraq Red Crescent Society, Jordanian Red Crescent Society, Lebanese Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Palestine Red Crescent, Spanish Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross, Turkish Red Crescent Society. For details, please check the Red Cross EU Office (n.d.), <https://redcross.eu/projects/madad-responding-to-the-syrian-crisis-together> (Accessed on 10.11.2023).



training. These collaboration themes indicate that the Turkish Red Crescent and the EU share the same goals of social integration. The organization chart of the Turkish Red Crescent has gained a new structure with the migration flow since 2011. In this chart, the Immigration Directorate has a significant status. The Directorate is composed of Syria Humanitarian Aid Department, Child Programs Department, Kızılaykart Cash-Based Assistance Programs Department, and Community-based Migration Programs Department. Kızılaykart Department maintains a social cohesion program (Sosyal Uyum Programı - SUY) through EU funds. The program provides 230 Turkish Lira (approximately 12 euros) per person for refugees under temporary protection and refugees under international protection (Türk Kızılay, 2022). The organization does not only transmit the financial support of the EU but also manages a great deal of projects for the Turkish people and the refugees.

Melisa Şentürk Akman, the Beneficiary Relations and Communication Officer of The Turkish Red Crescent Izmir Office, states that the organization provides conflict resolution and mediation training in and outside of the organization to overcome the prejudices of both Turkish people and refugees against each other and to promote intercultural exchange as a tool to fight with xenophobia (Şentürk Akman, 2021). For instance, the participants are divided into groups and engage in activities to empathize with people from disadvantaged groups and perform role plays during the conflict resolution training program. Refugees can also participate in Turkish-speaking clubs and training programs in the organization, such as handicraft production and entrepreneurship. These types of training programs promote peaceful transformations of societies after events affecting a fairly large area such as migration flows.

The collaboration between the EU and the Turkish Red Crescent has a considerable influence not only on the lives of refugees but also on Turkish citizens. The Turkish Red Crescent volunteers and the host community participants in training programs increase their awareness of refugees, develop empathy for each other, and learn about the migration policies of Türkiye, the EU, the UNHCR, and neighboring countries.

## **CONCLUSION**

The social integration of refugees necessitates well-organized programs together with various actors within and outside of a country. Türkiye both as a transit and host country for the refugees has needed urgent social integration programs since the Syrian civil war directly influenced Türkiye as a border country. The refugees as transboundary actors who are between leaving Türkiye or staying in the country have been on the agenda of Türkiye-EU high-level meetings, especially since 2015. The 2016 Readmission Deal increased the significance of the contributions of civil and local actors to social integration programs. State-led programs have been insufficient to produce sustainable results for social cohesion and peace in society.



However, civil society organizations draw a secure and safe interconnection between the host society and refugees. Among those organizations, the Turkish Red Crescent is an important actor for its organic relationship with the state and Turkish society.

The universal characteristics of the Turkish Red Crescent as a non-state actor make Turkish people and refugees meet at the same table for the same goal. The programs adopted by the collaboration between the organization and the EU touch the lives of many refugees in Türkiye. However, Türkiye has been a homeland for the highest number of refugees in the world and the need for services exceeds the financial support of the EU. It is a fact that even though Türkiye and the EU are not the only actors in the region that can propose programs for migration management, they have been the most functional actors until this time. Because the Syrian civil war has not ended; the Russia-Ukraine war has continued since 2022; Israeli and Hamas attacks restarted in 2023, Türkiye, as a neighbour country to those crises, has been face to face with new migration flows. New types of approaches seem to be necessary to be followed by Türkiye and the EU. Accordingly, the EU can be a motive power for Türkiye to collaborate more with various non-state actors in addition to the Turkish Red Crescent. It can be concluded that if the regional and local needs are prioritized, transparency of programs is secured, best practices are promoted and the host country nationals are well informed about those practices, then durable solutions will be found to the newly emerging problems related with social integration.

#### **AUTHOR STATEMENT / YAZAR BEYANI**

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