



Türkiye Üçüncü Sektör Vakfı
Third Sector Foundation of Turkey

MEMBERS MEETING SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

MEETING NOTES

24.11.2015

This event was organized by TUSEV in cooperation with Aydın Doğan Foundation, Sabancı Foundation and Vehbi Koç Foundation with an aim to provide information on the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and share an overview of the work carried out by civil society organizations in providing support to refugees.

1st Panel: SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

Moderator: Tevfik Başak Ersen, TÜSEV
Panelists: Prof. Dr. Ahmet İçduygu, Migration Research Center at Koç University
Selen Elif Ay, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Damla Taşkın, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Prof. Dr. Ahmet İçduygu, Migration Research Center at Koç University

Migration is defined as the movement of one country's citizens to another country. People migrate due to economic causes (to find a job) or within the framework of a certain status (as asylum seeker or refugee). Although different terminology is used for defining people who migrate (migrant, asylum seeker, refugee, guest etc.), migration is a continuum of relations between the migrant and the host society and the status given by the host state is a significant determinant of these relations.

Syrian Refugees

Based on data from August, 2015, 43% of Syrians living outside the Syrian borders reside in Turkey. Despite the fact that this number had raised between 2011 and 2015, since 2015 a decline in the number of Syrian refugees has been observed. Turkish policy towards Syrian refugees differs between 2011-2015 period and post-2015 period. Despite some exceptional cases, between 2011 and 2015 "open doors" policy was implemented in Turkey, but during the post-2015 period this policy was abandoned except some emergencies. During both periods, Turkish government followed the policy based on selective humanitarianism, determined by certain religious and ethnic criteria. After 2015, selective humanitarianism has been increased. Turkey follows non-refoulement policy towards Syrians, but exit and entries are allowed. After 2015, the number of voluntary returns to Syria has increased. Turkey defines refugees from Syria as "guests." Since the notion of "guest" does not have a legal basis, temporary protection has recently been recognized in order to provide refugees a legal status. The status of temporary protection is defined within the "Regulation on Temporary Protection" in 2014.

Turkey's policies on the Syrian refugee issue have been ambiguous since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011. The most important reason of this ambiguity is the unintended nature of this migration wave. Syrian refugees' willingness to migrate to European countries and the common belief among Turkish society about the return of refugees to their homelands strengthen the notion of unintended migration. Within the existing situation being a refugee in Turkey creates ambiguity, insecurity and irregularity. In order to create better integration process for both the Turkish and the Syrian, this environment of ambiguity, insecurity and irregularity needs to be changed.

There are four crucial areas for the integration of Syrians. These are (1) accommodation, (2) employment, (3) education and (4) health services. Although the ranking among those areas may change based on the priorities of societies, the government should give a clear message to fulfill these services. Unless this message is given through the change of policy or legislation, these services cannot be fulfilled legally.

Selen Elif Ay, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Syrian crisis is the biggest refugee crisis that has happened since the World War II. It is ascertained that 11 million Syrians were forced to migrate and 4 million of those live in neighboring countries. Turkey is one of the countries that host the highest number of refugees. The number of documented Syrian refugees is 2,2 million. Only 260.000 of those refugees live in camps. It is determined that Turkey has spent more than 8 billion dollars for refugees since the start of the crisis. Refugees outside camps prefer to migrate to the Marmara region due to the employment opportunities. For instance, it is confirmed that the number of documented refugees is 340.000 in İstanbul and this number increases to 400.000 with those who are undocumented.

Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority has the sole responsibility of the camps in Turkey. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also been active in the camps. The camps have been successful in meeting the accommodation needs of the refugees. However, as the refugee crisis gets urbanized it becomes more difficult to reach undocumented Syrians living in cities and ascertain where and under which circumstances they live. The biggest flow of migration from Syria has been to countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. Considering the ambiguousness of Turkey's policies and the ongoing conflicts both in Egypt and Lebanon the refugees tend to migrate to Europe.

Adoption of a rights-based approach by institutions and organizations working with Syrian refugees is crucial in terms of their integration. UNHCR works in that field to increase the operational capacities of states and cooperate with institutions and non-governmental organizations working with refugees.

The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Education: Children's access to education is one of the most problematic areas. The percentage of school enrollment is very low due to the language barrier (Turkish) and problems that arise during the registration processes (need for documentation etc.). Since most of the refugee families face financial constraints (esp. due to lack of work permits) children are obliged to work as well. The rate of child labor is relatively high among the Syrian refugees. Integration of those under schooling is turbulent since neither the schools nor the temporary education centers have know-how on integration and dealing with war wearies.

Language education continues to be one of the most important needs described by the refugees. There is need for vocational trainings which can increase refugees' access to job market.

Health: Although the laws enable the payment of first and second grade health costs, in practice there are many instances where these costs are not covered. Due to language barrier, refugees have difficulties getting appointments from hospitals or access health services. Since hospital personnel do not know Arabic and are not familiar with the regulations related to refugees, it becomes harder for refugees to access health services.

Employment: Syrian refugees do not have working permits. The absence of working permit increases undocumented labor and exploitation. Working accidents, harassments, low wages, irregular payments and insecure working are problematic. It is observed that women and children are exposed to those problems more.

Women's rights: Half of the population of Syrian refugees in Turkey is composed of women and children. There is violence against women due to social and economic reasons. Forced marriages, child brides, limited labor market, harassment are the most prevalent problems that women face. Additionally, accommodation needs and vocational trainings for single mothers are necessary.

Access to social aid: According to the regulation Syrian refugees can get social aids. However, different practices exist in terms of the distribution of social aid. It is observed that public institutions interpret the regulations in different manner. For instance, there are differences among municipalities about the provision of social aid. Residential cares, providing salary for the disabled are some of the problematic areas.

Damla Taşkın, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Main aim of the UNHCR is to help Syrian refugees to have a dignified life where they have access to basic rights. Thus, UNHCR adopted a strategy that will provide self-sufficiency rather than having an aid-based approach. Cooperation between the UNHCR, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector is shaped around lobbying, creating employment and funds, scholarships for education and execution of funds provided by the UN.

Main problems that Syrian refugees encounter are the difficulties of life standards, hardships due to the interpretation of laws, xenophobia, economic difficulties and obstacles to access education. It is observed that these problems result in the lack of hope and security among them.

Main activities of UNHCR, which prioritizes the education of refugees and provision of access to means of living, in Turkey are as the following:

Employment

- Regulating the legal framework and practices,
- Determining the skills of refugees in order to place them in right jobs,
- Evaluating the suitable sectors that Syrian refugees can work at (such as textile, machinery and automobile industry),
- Analyzing the value chain and
- Creating programs based on right focals.

Education

- Providing Turkish courses to Syrian refugees,
- Preventing hardships that the Syrian youth experience in terms of the higher education (equivalence of diplomas, providing scholarship to those who have to leave their education unfinished, special quotas etc.).

2nd Panel: Field Works of NGOs

Moderator: Seçil Kınay, Vehbi Koç Foundation

Panelists: Alp Biricik, İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı (Human Resource Development Foundation)
Burcu Kuğu, Hayata Destek Derneği (Support to Life)
Erdem Vardar, Yuva Derneği (Yuva Association)
Gizem Demirci Al Kadah, Sığınmacılar ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants)

Activities of CSOs Working with Syrians

Sığınmacılar ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği-SGDD (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants): SGDD operates through multipurpose centers in order to find the best solutions to the needs of refugees. At multipurpose centers, health and psychological support services are provided and consultancy on legal issues are given to Syrian refugees. SGDD also works for peace-building. Association provides food and in kind aids to the refugees. More than 50.000 refugees have been consulted and 85.000 refugees have been provided services only in the Istanbul office of the association.

For more information: www.sgdd.org.tr

Hayata Destek Derneği (Support to Life): The Association, which actively works in five cities, has programs for financial aid and protection. The Association is active in Urfa (400.000 documented Syrians; some of them at camps, remaining is either in cities or rural), İstanbul (400.000 documented Syrians; the number of the undocumented Syrians is not predictable), Hatay (200-250.000 Syrians), Diyarbakır and Batman provinces. It is determined that poverty is the main problem faced by the refugees. As a short term solution to this problem Support to Life developed financial aid programs. Through this program, refugees are provided with food aids of 13 Euros per person and hygiene package aids of 15 Euros per family through electronic cards. It is determined that these aids satisfy only the half of the needs of families. Due to budget limitations of the CSOs, it is observed that these aid programs are not likely to be sustainable.

For more information: www.hayatadestek.org

Yuva Derneği (Yuva Association): Yuva Association, addresses the poverty issue by supporting Syrian refugees to become economically self-sufficient. The Association has two community centers in Gaziantep and Hatay provinces. At community centers, psycho-social and legal services are provided. To increase the self-sufficiency of the refugees' lingual, vocational and skills based trainings are provided. The association also organizes activities to support children's education.

For more information: www.yuva.org.tr

İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı (Human Resource Development Foundation): The Foundation started working on refugees with psycho-social and legal consultancy services. With the support of UNHCR, Foundation's work evolved into community centers. The Foundation has a center in Esenler, İstanbul which provides services for Syrian refugees. Single women and their children are the main target groups of the center. The beneficiaries of the Foundation receive Turkish courses, trauma groups and skills based trainings.

For more information: www.ikgv.org

Is there any coordination between CSOs?

There are different initiatives to establish coordination between CSOs working on Syrian refugees. However, a comprehensive coordination group gathering all actors has not been established yet. In different cities or regions (Gaziantep, Istanbul, Ankara etc.) coordination meetings are being held and CSOs try to participate in these meetings regularly. However, due to budgetary limitations and lack of human resources it is more difficult for some organizations to follow up on these meetings.

What is the main problem in the field and what can be done to solve this problem?

YUVA: The most crucial problem is the lack of working permits. In order to certificate the skills trainings that we provide, we have to work with the Ministry of the National Education, but certain protocols have not been signed yet.

Human Resource Development Foundation: Main problem is the registration of refugees. For refugees to benefit from education and other services, they have to register to the police. However, arbitrary practices during the registration process create problems. The other problem is the lack of working permits and unemployment problems caused by it. The situations of Syrian women, who live in cities alone or with their children, are also quite problematic. There is a need for temporary shelters for these women. One of the main solutions could be the creation of a pooled fund that can support CSOs who are working around these issues. Within this framework a microcredit fund may be established. Especially for Syrians, who participate in vocational and skill trainings, those microcredits will be beneficial.

Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants: Lack of working permits is one of the most important problems that are encountered in the field. Working permits will be beneficial in certain areas, such as the prevention of child labor, marriage at early ages, harassments at working place and working accidents. Due to the absence of working permits and other integration policies in Turkey, Syrians want to migrate to Europe. Under these circumstances, Syrians cannot foresee a regular life in Turkey.

The temporary protection regulation also results in problems. According to this regulation, only refugees who directly come from Syria can apply for temporary protection. Syrian refugees, who come through other countries, do not have the right to apply for the temporary protection status. Unless refugees get the temporary protection status, they do not have the access to health and education services. It is foreseen that the number of Syrian refugees, who cannot access basic services due to the lack of temporary protection status, and problems related to this issue will increase in the near future.

Support to Life: One of the most important problems in the field is poverty. Unless there is a structural struggle against poverty, there cannot be sustainable solutions. Discrimination against Syrians is another problem. Syrians should have the access to basic services. Regarding public funds that are used for providing basic services to Syrians, transparency appears as a problem. To ease the problems, CSOs can do lobbying and advocacy targeting the state and even the private sector.

What are the sources of funds for CSOs working with Syrians?

YUVA: UNHCR, UNICEF and foreign aid usually coming from the United States and Germany through international CSOs are the main sources of funds. The number of Turkish organizations that provide funding for this area is very low. Considering the priorities of the international organizations may change, it is important for Turkish philanthropists and grantmakers to invest in this area to develop a more sustainable funding mechanism.

Human Resource Development Foundation: Philanthropic organizations in Turkey do not necessarily invest in the rights based organizations as well as the refugee issue. At this point, corporations are likely to provide in kind donations (clothes, food etc.). Grantmaking organizations that are supporting the local CSOs should provide funding for capacity development administrative costs of the CSOs.

Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants: UNHCR, international medical organizations, short run projects through EU, and funds from the Embassies (renewable or non-renewable funds) are the main sources of funds. In kind or cash aids may come from the institutions or private sector, but those aids are not long term funds or grants.

Support to Life: Associations are able to create resources through international organizations. In kind donations are more common for corporations and individual donors. Although in kind support such as clothes is important, they are usually not very effective because it creates an additional burden for CSOs in terms of logistics.

DISCUSSION SESSION: WHAT CAN Foundations and Philanthropic Sector DO?

It is important to create a sustainable dialogue and relationship between the philanthropic sector and CSOs working in the field. It is stated that the philanthropic sector have been reluctant to work on the refugee issue due to the lack of a comprehensive state policy addressing the basic needs and integration of refugees. On the other hand, as the development and implementation of policies take considerably more time it was emphasized that foundations and philanthropic sector needs to take risks and start supporting the work of CSOs.

Some of the areas that foundations can support:

Supporting CSOs: Financial support provided to the CSOs should be developed strategically following a needs assessment. Foundations should prefer to give grants to CSOs working in the field rather providing services directly to the refugees. Building the capacities of the local CSOs will create more impact in the long run. Within this framework, developing financial resources and supporting the dialogue should be prioritized.

Lobbying: CSOs should be included in the making and implementation of any policies related to refugees. Foundations can play a catalyst role in bringing together CSOs and public institutions. If and when the work permits are legalized, foundations can play a mediator role between the CSOs and the private sector to enable refugees' access to job market.

Conditional Support: Conditional aids have been successful in providing support to the refugees in the short run. For instance, some CSOs are providing financial aids to the refugees under the condition that they will enroll their children to school. The number of beneficiaries could be increased if the philanthropic sector provides financial support for such programs.

Education: The most important need addressed by the refugees is the need for Turkish training/education. Almost all of the centers that are run by the CSOs provide Turkish trainings as part of their programs. Yet, with the help of the philanthropic sector these training programs could be implemented in a more systematic way enabling more people to participate. School reparation (to serve the Syrians) initiatives taken by the CSOs can also be supported by the philanthropic sector. Since most of the Turkish foundations have scholarship programs, a special quota for Syrian refugees can be developed.

Supporting the CSO centers: Many CSOs carry out their activities with refugees at community centers. At these centers, along with psycho-social and legal supports, language training, vocational and skill trainings are given. Centers play a crucial role regarding the integration of Syrian refugees to the society. Supports provided by the philanthropic sector can advance centers and extend the scope of the activities.

Volunteerism: CSOs usually need to work with volunteers in implementing their programs and providing services. It is observed that short term volunteering is more common in this field due to the hardships. Based on the available studies, the volunteer group with the highest persistence is consisted of Syrians. Syrian volunteers have also been an important catalyzer for developing trusting relations and attracting more refugees to the community centers and CSOs. The philanthropic sector can provide per diems to volunteers covering their needs such as transportation, food etc.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Academic Articles

İçduygu, Ahmet. 2015. *Syrian Refugees in Turkey the Long Road Ahead*. Migration Policy Institute. www.migrationpolicy.org/research/syrian-refugees-turkey-long-road-ahead

Kirişçi, Kemal ve Ferris, Elizabeth. 2015. *Not Likely to Go Home: Syrian Refugees and the Challenges to Turkey and the International Community*. Brookings Institute. www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/09/syrian-refugee-international-challenges-ferris-kirisci/turkey-policy-paper-web.pdf

Reports by International Organizations and NGOs

United Nations. 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-2016. www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/3RP-Report-Overview.pdf

Human Rights Watch. 2015. Turkey: 400,000 Syrian Children Not in School. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/08/turkey-400000-syrian-children-not-school>

Kutlu, Zümray. From the Ante-Chamber to the Living Room. A Brief Assesment on the NGO's Doing Work for Syrian Refugees. Anadolu Kültür. http://www.anadolukultur.org/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/From_The_Ante_Chamber_to_the_Living_Room.pdf

Amnesty International. 2014. *Struggling to Survive: Refugees from Syria in Turkey*. http://amnesty.org.tr/uploads/Docs/struggling_to_survive_refugees_from_syria_in_turkey811.pdf

Mapping Studies

Cilga, Melih. Syrian Refugees and CSOs: National and International Organizations that Provide Support for Syrian Refugees in Turkey. <https://graphcommons.com/graphs/0711e621-a8c5-4651-a1d6-33106c7bb3f1>