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Syrian refugees in Turkey: exploring the role of I/NGOs in refugee crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the role that nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations play in managing Syrian refugees' basic needs and access to public services. This research is based on a qualitative approach. We collected information on the role of the NGOs through interviews (from 42 respondents, with NGOs and civil society organisations, selected on a snowball basis) in Turkey. We found that the NGOs play an important role in substantiating the government's efforts in providing various kinds of basic services to the refugees. However, these NGOs suffer from insufficient funds and uncertain funding commitments. On top of this, there has been a lack of cooperation between the NGOs. This study touches upon the importance of NGOs in terms of structural and practical difficulties. Cooperation and collaboration among the NGOs have appeared as important issues in dealing with the refugee crisis in Turkey. This research has crucial policy implications for the NGOs and the governments of the destination and origin countries.

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Introduction

More than 68.5 million people – roughly one in every 110 people in the world – had been displaced from their homes by the end of 2017, either as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) or refugees, as a result of armed conflict, persecution, famine or natural catastrophes (Braithwaite, Salehyan, and Savun 2019; Ullah 2014). This number is growing exponentially because the triggering factors are escalating, such as fomenting intolerance, rising volition to cling to power, and expanding forms of persecution (Bilici 2021). For many decades, wars and conflicts have been driving people out of their own countries, and, tragically, children and young people have been disproportionately affected (Ullah 2018b).

When anti-Assad protests erupted in 2011, they quickly turned into a full-fledged war between the Syrian government and opposition groups. Three independent campaigns

have fuelled the war: coalition attempts to combat the Islamic State, carnage between the Syrian government and opposition troops, and Turkish military measures against Syrian Kurds.

As a result, according to United Nations (UN) estimates, over 6.8 million Syrians became refugees or asylum seekers, with another 6.7 million internally displaced. The conflict has forced more than half of Syria's population to flee their homes. More than 11.1 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance. Children make up roughly half of those affected by the crisis (Ullah 2018a). A massive number of refugees have surged into Jordan and Lebanon, putting a strain on already overburdened infrastructure and resources. The great majority of the refugees have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, and Turkey hosts the largest population (UNHCR 2021). Turkey continues to host the highest number of refugees globally, presently hosting 3.6 million registered refugees and about 320,000 people of concern from other countries (Atar, Hossain, and Kumasey 2022).

External military participation in Syria, including the supply of guns and military equipment, training, airstrikes and possibly troops, is likely to prolong the fight (Dag 2018). The civil war in Syria has become more convoluted, with jihadis seeking a Sunni theocracy eclipsing the opposition party fighting for a democratic and pluralistic Syria and regional powers supporting varied local groups on the battlefields to advance their geopolitical goals. A coalition led by the United States conducted airstrikes against the self-proclaimed Islamic State, while some of its forces were rapidly withdrawn from the region ahead of a planned Turkish invasion of northern Syria (Laub 2021).

Turkey accepted the great responsibility of taking care of the huge population of Syria by opening its arms and offering all possible support to the Syrian refugees (Şenses 2017). The sociocultural and demographic pressures of such a vast Syrian presence include some Turks' fears that refugees pose an economic and/or security threat to their livelihoods. Handling this population requires resources (monetary, logistical, medical, legal, etc.) to provide better settlement and integration opportunities (İçduygu and Millet 2016). Therefore, Turkey welcomed any assistance extended in regard to managing the refugee crisis. Under this circumstance, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and civil society organisations have stepped in to lend a hand to the millions of people in crisis. Many NGOs and INGOs came forward as significant actors in the humanitarian field. This article aims to better understand the dynamics of the I/NGOs in providing critical services along with the refugee regimes and the government, particularly the cooperation between organisations and among NGOs/INGOs/CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) and the state. Thus, this study aims to find a comprehensive answer to the following research question: What role do the NGOs, INGOs and civil society organisations play in refugee crisis management and service delivery?

Methodology

We have applied a qualitative approach to this research. We selected 42 respondents from Turkey based on a convenient sampling technique. The participants were selected based on their membership in the following categories: Turkish- and Syrian-led I/NGOs (particularly those targeting the cause of Syrian refugees); directors and team members including Turkish and Syrian citizens (N=22) such as chairpersons, directors, chief executives, government and coordination bodies (N=20) like provincial immigration experts, doctors, teachers, and

translators. We chose these particular NGOs as they are to play an important role in providing humanitarian support. Hence, they were in a position to provide necessary information on the refugee crisis and service delivery. In addition, the other interviewees were significant stakeholders because they are either the providers or beneficiaries of the public service in Turkey. We collected data from January 2019 to April 2020.

We conducted face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions, and the interviews were semi-structured. The semi-structured interview guide was deemed an appropriate data collection instrument because it allowed us to elicit detailed information through in-depth probing of responses to generate a spur-of-the-moment deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell 2014). Among other questions, participants were asked questions related to their knowledge of Turkey's refugee crisis and public service delivery. Interviews were generally conducted in the workplaces of the subjects or in places arranged by the interviewees. In-depth interviews, each with a duration of around 1–1.5 hours, were conducted in the light of questions related to the topic of inquiry. The interviews were voice recorded, and the privacy of the interviewees was maintained throughout the research according to the directives of an ethical review board.

The genesis of the Syrian refugee crisis

Syria's civil war arose as a result of the domino effect of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring has not been an unexplained event in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Ullah 2014), which has had multiple experiences with its people's democratic aspirations. This region has fought and revolted against dictatorship and autocracy and has scored several key victories that shaped the regional political landscape (Hashemi and Postel 2017). MENA is one of the world's most complicated regions, with four countries currently in conflict. Everyone who has followed world politics knows that this region is rife with crisis and conflict (Ullah 2014; Ullah 2018b). An unprecedented popular movement began in Tunisia in December 2010, and many countries, primarily Syria, are still in the midst of it, expanding to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain. The main causes for the revolt (Ma'oz 2014) were anger, dissatisfaction and animosity towards authoritarian, oppressive and unpleasant rulers and regimes. The fight has been for freedom, justice, equal rights, economic opportunity and, most importantly, democracy.

The government response to the uprising was violent. The uprising spread fast all over MENA. However, the Syrian response has created the worst and longest humanitarian crisis of our time (Alhousseiny and Atar 2021). The country has turned into infrastructural rubble and is financially destitute, politically collapsed and diplomatically bankrupt. The number of people in need of assistance stands now at around 13 million, and more than half a million Syrians have been killed since the uprising in 2011. Turkey has embraced an 'open-door' policy as a state policy, and the displaced Syrians have been placed under 'temporary protection' (İçduygu 2015; Coşkun and Emin 2016) (Figure 1).

In terms of the demographic profile of Syrian refugees, the proportion of Syrian men (1,929,987) to the total number of Syrians is 53.8%, while the number of Syrian women (1,653,597) is 46.2%, and more than one million Syrian refugees are under the age of 10 (29%). According to the age chart, the average age of registered Syrians is 22.7, whereas the average age of the Turkish population was 32.4 in 2019 (UNHCR 2021).

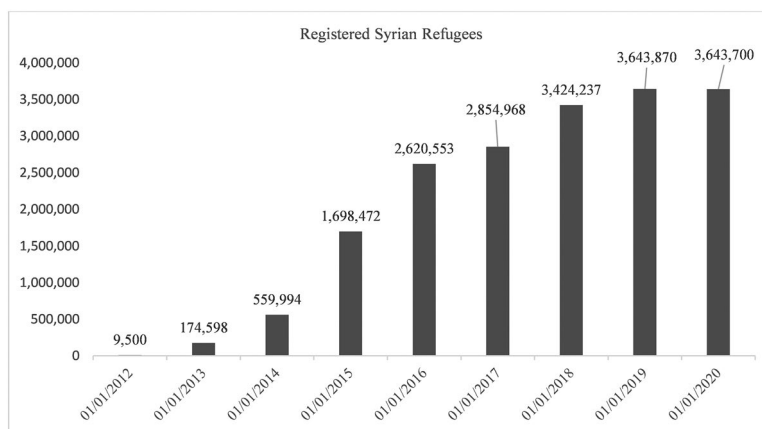


Figure 1. Total registered Syrian refugees.

Source: UNHCR (2020).

I/NGOs in handling refugee crisis

Health, education, shelter: In recent years, NGOs have played an increasingly significant role in providing services to refugees. A large number of individuals would have frozen to death or succumbed to disease and starvation if no charitable organisations were collecting and distributing supplies and warm clothing in transit or in camps, for example. While governmental services can assist asylum seekers in many ways, there are considerable gaps in the assistance they are able to provide. For the organisations, delivering services beyond those provided by the public purse is critical – aiding those who arrive in refugee camps after the government provides them with a place to reside (Lester 2005).

NGOs are ‘(a) organizations; that (b) are not-for-profit and, by law or custom, do not distribute any surplus they may generate to those who own or control them; (c) are institutionally separate from government, (d) are self-governing; and (e) are non-compulsory’ (United Nations Statistics Division 2003, 17; Malena 1995). One academic describes NGOs as a mechanism that ‘serves to balance the state’s power and safeguard individuals from the state’s power’ (Fukuyama 2001, 11). In fact, the scope of NGOs is quite vast. Malena (1995) investigates and categorises NGOs into two categories: (i) operational NGOs, whose primary goal is to plan and implement development-related initiatives; and (ii) advocacy NGOs, whose goal is to advocate for or support a specific cause in order to influence related policies and practices. Turkish NGOs have adopted these two primary definitions in the face of the Syrian crisis, and institutions have attempted to deliver services based on these two basic approaches. Most I/NGOs have gained experience in handling the crises (Appe and Pallas 2018; Rouhi, Gorji, and Maleki 2019) (Figure 2).

There are currently 119,780 nongovernmental organisations in Turkey, with over 150,000 including trade unions, professional chambers, and cooperatives (Ministry of the Interior 2020). Despite several humanitarian relief efforts, coordination among NGOs has been inadequate (Rouhi, Gorji, and Maleki 2019). After the civil war began, NGOs that had previously worked in Turkey continued to assist humanitarian initiatives and projects for Syrians (İçduygu, Meydanoğlu, and Sert 2011; Ullah 2018a). However, NGOs that started recently in Turkey found the situation complex. New NGOs have to go through a state approval

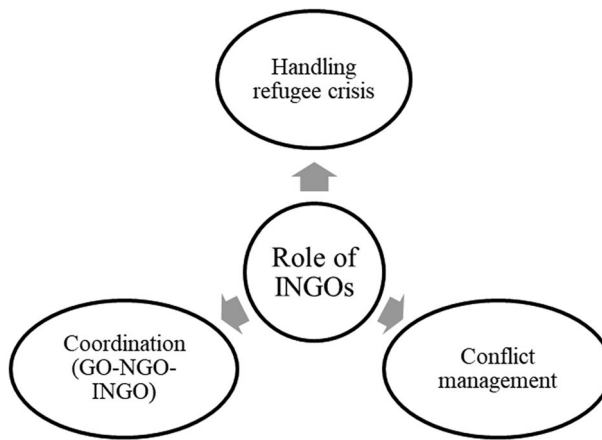


Figure 2. Role of INGOs in the refugee context.

Authors' elaboration.

process to work in certain areas, follow legal regulations for I/NGOs, and obtain work licences for their staff to work in Turkey (Aras and Duman 2019). Food, shelter, health, education, and hygiene are all major concerns for refugees. The government passed the Foreigners and International Protection Law in April 2013, and it went into effect in 2014, giving Syrians a special status under the temporary protection programme (Mackreath and Sağnıç 2017).

The vast majority of Syrians, however, live outside of the camps. Furthermore, the primary goal of local action at first was to give emergency shelter and supplies to families in need. When it became evident that the Syrian war would last a long time, the government, local and international NGOs devised a long-term strategy (Hoffmann and Samuk 2016). As a result of this, alternative methods of providing services have emerged, emphasising the importance of NGOs for the government, which is already struggling to meet basic needs (Atar 2021).

The Turkish government, though, has been trying its best to provide for the refugees' socio-economic, cultural, psycho-social and physical needs. The state expects NGOs/INGOs and civil society organisations to share in this enormous burden. Registered Syrian refugees (with an ID card) have access to health services. They are permitted to purchase drugs for 20% of the entire cost. Having free access to health services is a crucial opportunity and a valuable contribution for these people. Many Turkish nationals had to wait in long lines because of the large number of refugees and injured people in state hospitals. This was especially true in provinces where the refugee population is significant. The following extracts demonstrate the critical role played by NGOs and the strains placed on official health facilities as a result of the influx of refugees.

I believe that many people who travel to Turkey without the assistance of civil society organisations would perish. As civil society organisations, we play a critical role in the lives of Syrian citizens. Those who remain have no assets, no source of income, no human rights, and are treated as second-class citizens. As nongovernmental organisations, we are attempting to support the people who reside there in any way we can. (Fieldwork Interview)

In some cities, the Turkish government faced a lot of problems. It's simple to get into the system. However, there are far too many refugees in regional hospitals; unfortunately, this is insufficient. In addition, the state requires constructing additional hospitals. This is a significant

financial load on the government. Giving training to doctors and hospital staff is as well a financial burden and time-consuming issue. Some female patients prefer to see female doctors. Therefore, the government is working to recruit more female doctors, but we know that this may not be possible. (Fieldwork Interview Transcript)

More than 400,000 pupils are still not enrolled in school and hence are unable to take advantage of educational possibilities. This is because most Syrian refugee children live outside the camps and hence have no access to education. This is where the NGOs come in. Many NGOs have supplied stationery for children's education in several Turkish districts, volunteered to teach Turkish, and assisted children's education in newly opened centres (Ullah 2018a). They help by providing additional classes for students who want to continue their education and assisting the government in identifying pupils who cannot attend a school or drop out. 'Turkey has opened all of its schools to provide education to these individuals. We provide assistance in training for families and their children' (Fieldwork Interview).

Outside of the camps, refugees usually do not receive any assistance with housing and shelter. Occasionally, some families may rent an apartment and share it. In the poorest part of the regions we visited, the majority of Syrians live in leased apartments. It's difficult to find a stove to heat or a blanket to wrap themselves in. Of course, this is not a representative picture of Turkey's refugee situation as a whole. We found that many NGOs played a critical role in addressing the housing needs of those in great need. The majority of NGOs represent the state by assisting people in finding a home and paying their rent. A respondent from an NGO stated:

In Turkey, the majority of these people live in poverty, and thus they face numerous challenges with lodging, housing, and shelter. We used to assist them in locating and settling into new residences. Through our activities, we are attempting to assist these folks in surviving. We've assisted over a thousand families with their housing needs. Landlords are hesitant to rent the house even though they have money; landlords may raise their rent if they learn that these are Syrians. We're in the midst of a series of events. We are attempting to assist these individuals in obtaining a more comfortable living situation. We also grant cash assistance on occasion. (Fieldwork Interview)

One of the most pressing issues for the refugees in terms of food and nutrition is the prevention of malnutrition. For everyone, but especially for newborns and children, inadequate nutrition is a concern. Thousands of the refugees rely on help packages from municipalities and NGOs to feed their families. Regarding the basic food supply the NGOs provide to the refugees, one NGO and one INGO official say:

We provide foodstuff for Syrians. We try to locate the hungry families in the camps and supply food as our programme's mandate. (Fieldwork Interview)

We tried to support the families who came to this area as much as we could from the beginning of the conflict. We are now attempting to meet their demands by providing financial help. (Fieldwork Interview)

Although the Syrian refugees have the right to work, according to a Prime Minister's directive released in February 2016, they must first get work permits due to a lack of comprehensive regulation for temporary protection in Turkey that governs the working conditions. As a result, there are a lot of complaints of maltreatment by police. Some respondents indicated that some non-governmental organizations helped protect them from maltreatment, and some also supported them to find a job to work.

We assisted them in finding work. Many of them who were previously unable to work were able to find work as a result of our efforts. It seems that employers are no longer hesitant to offer them work without permission as a result of the work we've done. Because they are aware of the conditions in which these people live. (Fieldwork Interview)

Integration is another pressing issue that all refugees, irrespective of location, face. Syrian refugees in Turkey are no exception. They reside in the suburbs, where they have inadequate living conditions and are in danger. The language and culture in Syria are different from those of Turkey. This implies that the integration process may be difficult. NGOs have been trying to ease the integration process by holding seminars to assist refugees in becoming more active adapters. NGOs offer art workshops and psychological, health, and Turkish language support.

The majority of the refugees are low-income and low-educated people. They are having difficulty integrating. They try to maintain their own culture here. We've had many issues caused by people from undeveloped areas who are involved in anti-Turkish movements. We've had to deal with some serious events. Citizens of Turkey and Syria may have a tense relationship. We make pamphlets and handouts to help them integrate better, and we try to explain how their culture and Turkish culture vary in some ways. (Fieldwork Interview)

While training is needed, and working from the bottom up is, in many cases, the only immediately available option, the effect on the organisation as a whole is limited.

We offer educational services. We do language training. We are putting up courses for them so that they can become more knowledgeable and educated. The vast majority of them are salaried, and they arrive in better quality and condition, but we still require these pieces of instruction at times. (Fieldwork Interview)

The existing NGO institutional structures may have insufficient staffing, organisation, management, funding, mission, activities, and culture within the NGO community. In terms of staffing, several multinational NGOs use a mix of nationalities, with senior management coming from the NGO's home country and numerous operational positions coming from local employees.

We provide civil society organisations with the human resources they require. People appear to be eager to help in these regions. Some organisations rely on volunteer labour, while others might hire paid personnel. As I previously stated, one of the most significant issues that arise when we are in need of staff is the language barrier. While we prefer persons who can communicate in Arabic or English, Turkish or local units prefer to hire more knowledgeable people. (Fieldwork Interview)

NGOs in conflict management

The end of hostilities is not synonymous with peacebuilding. Even after a war, societal imbalances linger, and refugees face a range of social, ethnic and economic issues that need a range of responses. Should NGOs play a role in conflict resolution and prevention? If this is the case, how much involvement should they have? In order to properly respond to post-Cold War humanitarian crises, many NGOs must go beyond their traditional mandate of delivering food, water, and medical assistance to preserve political stability and fulfil governmental tasks in failed states. The question is whether these expanded responsibilities are suitable for them. NGOs have the potential to be very effective in conflict management

because they bring a number of unique qualities to peacebuilding, such as knowledge of different cultures, relationships with local partners, and understanding of the links between crisis management and long-term sustainable development. They should be encouraged to play a larger part in dispute resolution.

Some respondents recalled how NGO representatives frequently described their work as a continuum of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and long-term development. By incorporating all of these components, new and more successful peacebuilding paradigms and acceptable conflict resolution strategies can be produced. Peacemaking, in general, refers to the act of resolving disagreements, whereas peacebuilding refers to the process of strengthening the underlying social, economic and political structures that affect the lives of those involved. Peacemaking and peacebuilding procedures necessitate active engagement from refugee communities, and their participation is critical if long-term reconciliation and structural causes of violence are to be addressed.

NGOs/INGOs and other civil society groups focus on strengthening their operational capacities, given the importance of providing fundamental services in the field. Efforts for this purpose require a variety of actors, including management and administration. Still, in essence, it means ensuring that NGOs have the resources necessary to provide services to those in need. NGOs have not been silent in the face of the catastrophe, which is one of the most sensitive in human history. They have mobilised all of their resources and provided services to the best of their ability. All NGOs' representatives declare unequivocally that civil society organisations must have a strong capability and be prepared for harsher scenarios to achieve and offer services for persons living in these conditions. Personnel are the most critical resources required by civil society organisations to reach the intended population; NGOs make large investments to offer necessary training and support to achieve these objectives.

Government–NGOs–INGOs

NGOs have been active actors in the international refugee regime for many years. It is anticipated that they will become more active in the coming years, notably in the field of refugee protection. Hence, a collaboration between NGOs and the governments is critical in handling refugee issues. However, we found that NGOs in Turkey face difficulties dealing with one another and with government agencies.

Given the broadening variety of influencing factors among refugees, the growing needs of refugee regimes, and other basic hurdles such as a lack of resources, governments are not able to provide all of the care that individuals seek (Rajabi, Ebrahimi, and Aryankhesal 2021). As a result, NGOs and the government work together to provide care to a diverse spectrum of refugees. Because of the complexities of this connection, we attempted to identify the issues that NGO–government cooperation faces in providing services to refugees.

The relationship between the state and NGOs is not a bilateral relationship that means nothing but rather a continuous negotiation pitch in which power struggles operate in different ways depending on specific geographic contexts, actors, politics and other factors. There are two areas in which we can analyse relations. The first is recognition; they have accepted each other, trust each other, and understand the role each of them expects the other to play. Second, cooperation, collaboration and coordination are implemented in terms of how this specific person is in power.

NGOs are doing their utmost to engage the refugee issue by offering comprehensive social and physiological services in the area, either independently or in collaboration with local communities. NGOs are also attempting to integrate Syrian children and parents through various educational programmes involving the teaching of the Turkish language in order to integrate into Turkish society and bridge the gap between Syrians and Turks.

Because it inhibits an ideal degree of cooperation, competition among NGOs is considered a substantial barrier to overcoming these difficulties. NGO workers frequently complain about a lack of collaboration among their peers, which does not seem to be helping their work for the cause of refugee betterment. NGOs are having trouble figuring out who is doing what and where they are doing it, implying that the present degree of cooperation is insufficient among NGOs. Hence, NGOs recognise the necessity for increased cooperation.

INGOs working in Turkey are looking for local partners in the field due to several operational issues. In many instances, a collaboration between local NGOs and INGOs is mutually beneficial. The impact of local NGOs on capacity building is widely acknowledged as one of the most favourable outcomes of INGOs' existence. Local NGOs state that they have learned new concepts, strategies and other aspects from the international NGOs with which they have collaborated for years. In the long run, this leads to increased capability. One of the respondents (from a local NGO) said:

Our partnerships with foreign organisations are likewise quite stable. They assist and guide us in a variety of ways that we lack because they have international expertise. We are attempting to be more active in the field and reach out to a larger audience, both in the country and globally. In some circumstances, they also take advantage of our Indigenous knowledge. They are sometimes prohibited from providing services in Turkey, while at other times, they attempt to provide those services on our behalf. (Fieldwork Interview)

Assistance and protection issues are critical for the refugees. In order to deliver the best services possible, enhanced partnerships between NGOs and the government is crucial. NGOs and municipal governments are two key players in the field to promote social cohesion. Working in collaboration and cooperation with these stakeholders and organising events that bring locals and refugees together will aid in the faster resolution of the problem of cohesiveness. Due to a lack of collaboration and cooperation, there has been a duplication of services provided to the refugees by NGOs. For example, one student received two sets of a similar book.

Major challenges

Many NGOs struggle to secure appropriate, long-term funding for their activities for the refugees. Finding the appropriate donor is one of the most difficult aspects of this process. They may be unable to gather finances independently and rely on international benefactors to do it. Current donors' contributions may be revoked if their goals shift. Many NGOs struggle to carry out their missions because they lack a well-defined strategic plan. As a result, they are unable to effectively raise and utilise financial support.

NGOs are also frequently afflicted by a lack of effective leadership. Many of them do not understand why they need a board or how to set one up. Transparency is critical for NGO management, but a founder may be overly focussed on running the organisation for personal gain.

The inability to learn from prior mistakes may result in wasted time and money as a result of inefficient or disorganised networking. Many share the viewpoint that INGOs are a danger to local NGOs. Many NGOs have failed to fully utilise the resources available to them. By staying on top of regional, national and global challenges, NGOs can profit from greater use of technology. They generally lack the technical and organisational resources required to carry out their mission successfully. Undercapacity impedes fundraising, governance, leadership and technical expertise. In general, their development tactics are not as adaptive, long-lasting or community-relevant as they could be.

NGOs struggle to secure sufficient and consistent funding to carry out their missions. One of the most difficult aspects is finding appropriate donors. Because they may lack local resource mobilisation ability, they must rely on overseas donors. Current donors may change their priorities and withdraw their support. A general lack of project, organisational and financial sustainability may be a challenge for the NGOs. Their budgets may range from close to nothing to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Foreign NGOs must go through a different registration process than national ones. In the form of application and reporting of activity, foreign NGOs are subject to a variety of requirements and restrictions. They are aware that the permit application procedure might take up to 6 months and have negative effects on them in service delivery. Even if approval is obtained, the renewal process is a further waste of time.

Without the approval of the Turkish government, you are prohibited from engaging in any activity. The Turkish government does not want INGOs to play an active role. Because of the excessive bureaucracy, we are sometimes unable to receive or provide immediate assistance. By the time the warrant is issued, many of our contributors may have lost faith in us. As a result, as INGOs, we are encountering financial and permission challenges in Turkey. (Fieldwork Interview)

Many NGOs suffer from the lack of a cohesive, strategic plan that would facilitate success in their activities and mission. This renders them unable to raise and capitalise on financial support effectively.

Although planning is a must-have situation, many organisations are bothered by it. The records of the assistance supplied in and out are not always retained. We do not always know what is in store for us. Therefore, we make sure that assistance is supplied to families unexpectedly. This has both short- and long-term negative consequences. I believe that all NGOs should follow a mission-driven plan and programme. However, we are bothered by this issue because we are involved in it. (Fieldwork Interview)

Capacity building and training can help provide critical skills. NGOs can then more readily train staff and cultivate the necessary skills within the organisation to address challenges going forward.

Many NGOs lack the technical and organisational competence to carry out and fulfil their missions, and few are willing or able to invest in capacity-building training. Fundraising abilities, governance, leadership, and technical areas are all affected by a lack of capacity. (Fieldwork Interview)

In cooperation with public institutions in the local area, communication with institutions such as the Immigration Administration also faces challenges. They are caught in bureaucratic obstacles in cooperation with public institutions and organisations.

[The Immigration Administration is an] institution that was founded in response to the influx of Syrian refugees into the country. This institution performs instrumental work. However, we occasionally run into problems because it is a new organisation with many experienced employees. Furthermore, in order to overcome this challenge, a strong coordination structure must be established throughout Turkey. Otherwise, neither the state institutions nor we shall be able to come up with better answers; we would only be able to vent our concerns. (Fieldwork Interview)

According to interviews, Turkish civil society organisations hire Turkish citizens, whereas foreign organisations attempt to lessen the human load by hiring people who speak both Arabic and English.

Given the workload and number of cases in the field, the state, already employed by NGOs, will be successful in sharing the burden and effective to use of human resources by employing graduates of schools with the same curriculum, such as their social workers, to write social review reports, to provide accreditation in activities such as home visits, social work centres. One of the most significant advantages for us is that we have more staff in this connection than we require. (Fieldwork Interview)

Reaching those in need remains a challenge. Some of the refugees remain on the border (between Turkey and Syria). Some NGO employees cannot cross the border due to visa or border restriction issues. Hence, the government has facilitated that those who need to cross the border to deliver services to the refugees can do so.

The fact that we can cross the Turkey–Syria border whenever we want is our big advantage. The major issue for us is security, but we can follow the rules and carry out activities and services in Syria. Thanks to the Turkish government. However, the bureaucratic process within the country slows things down for NGOs. (Fieldwork Interview)

Discussion and conclusions

While the issue of Syrian refugees was being discussed, there was a lot of focus on what the NGOs were doing, especially in the field of health and education. One of the most widely discussed issues was the number of Syrian refugees, because without knowing the numbers, the government cannot provide essential needs. The sending of Syrian refugees to the provinces was the first major challenge in determining the number of refugees. The determination of these numbers is particularly important because the number of refugees can vary from province to province. To determine the number of refugees, initially, municipalities have to make sure that refugees are registered nationwide (Kale and Erdoğan 2019). This brings us back to the debate about registered and unregistered refugees. Many local governments have used non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to identify these displaced persons (Tallberg et al. 2018).

In this context, many local authorities have been in contact with other institutions to address the problems and needs of refugees, and all the data were collected, and real figures were put forward. With the increase in the number of people injured in disasters as a result of the increased incidence and consequences of disasters in recent years, NGOs have experienced remarkable cooperation with governmental organisations and agencies to provide humanitarian services in response to natural hazards (Rouhi, Gorji, and Maleki 2019; Newman and van Selm 2003). However, it was also inevitable that closer contacts were established

with NGOs and INGOs working at a more local level; thus, that necessary and sufficient work could be done. In general, although governorates and municipalities have worked hard to provide emergency response services, shelter, accommodation, food, heating supplies, clothing, household goods and furniture, these services remain frustrated. At this point, NGOs and INGOs play an important role (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder, and Beckmann 2017; Tallberg et al. 2018).

The Syrian refugee crisis highlights the shortcomings of today's international asylum and protection system. It provides an opportunity for the international community to put the concept of 'burden-sharing' into practice. States and I/NGOs should work together to address the Syrian refugee problem on a global scale. One of the major issues refugees face, whether in their home country or their host nation, is a lack of security.

Many NGOs conduct public education campaigns to raise awareness of the refugee crisis and its causes among the general population because the locals are not always sure why these foreigners are visiting their country. NGOs have been more involved in refugee repatriation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts in post-conflict scenarios. These programmes not only helped to repair the harm caused by disputes but also worked to prevent violence from resurfacing. Local cooperation and communication should be expanded, and Syria-based NGOs should be included in the process in order to overcome communication and organisation challenges in the field. Thousands of families in Turkey are relying on relief packages from municipalities and nongovernmental organisations to feed themselves.

This study found that INGOs and NGOs play a significant role in the refugee crisis, particularly in assuring the primary delivery of humanitarian services to individuals. INGOs and NGOs significantly impact health, education, housing, finding jobs and resolving social issues (Sunata and Tosun 2019). The I/NGOs services to the refugees in Turkey and Syria are provided with community assistance. We found that most of the INGOs and NGOs run their programmes with insufficient staff and finance for service. Hence, they have had to rely on volunteers to carry out their jobs, such as distributing relief materials, educational equipment and health services.

Obviously, NGOs are needed to supplement the government's efforts to handle the huge population. Most NGOs have had to adjust to the cultural issues of the refugees. However, getting approval for the NGOs to work and having their employees approved to work remains a difficult bureaucratic process. This study found some incoherence and discordance in the NGO work. This has primarily been caused by the NGOs' lack of cooperation and collaboration. Hence, some service duplications have raised doubts about NGOs' ability to work effectively in Turkey.

NGOs have been helpful in addressing bureaucratic issues of the government and integration issues of the refugees. The involvement of civil society actors and NGOs is crucial in determining how refugees are accommodated and accepted on a local level. NGOs are expected to collaborate closely with national and local government agencies and other NGOs in the same sector. Openness to policy innovation and the production of long-term and permanent solutions, rather than ephemeral answers, will enable NGOs to play a more active and productive role.

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