



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Migration Management in Turkey Structures Supporting Social Cohesion

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## ABSTRACT

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Turkey has called Syrian refugees as guests and adopted social policies. Within the scope of these policies, basic services such as shelter, education and health have been provided to refugees, but steps such as citizenship or full economic participation, which appear in integration strategies, have not been taken. The fact that Turkey sees this process as a temporary humanitarian crisis, the hope that the war will end and Syrian refugees will return to their homeland, and the fact that citizenship or permanent status is not included in the plans have caused Turkey to prefer social cohesion policies rather than integration. The study examined the legal regulations, the practices of central and local governments and the contributions of NGOs within the framework of integration policies through descriptive content analysis method. The study revealed that local governments need to be more authorized in migration policies, lack of coordination, ensuring the sustainability of NGOs' funds, increasing international cooperation, interaction with local people, breaking prejudices and overcoming the language barrier.

## INTRODUCTION

Migration has been a phenomenon that has had profound effects on the economic, social and cultural structures of societies throughout history. Today, especially due to conflicts, wars and economic crises, mass migration movements have become an important problem worldwide. The 2011 civil war in Syria caused a major humanitarian crisis and millions of Syrians crossed borders to seek asylum in other countries in order to survive. Turkey is the only country that has hosted Syrian refugees with an open-door policy and developed a comprehensive migration management strategy. Turkey's migration policies are implemented in a wide range of areas, from meeting the basic needs of refugees to long-term integration policies.

While Turkey's policies towards Syrian refugees were initially shaped with a humanitarian aid-oriented approach, these policies have evolved over time to include cohesion processes. The difficulties encountered in this process have required not only the state, but also local governments and civil society organizations to play an active role. Turkey prefers social cohesion policies over integration policies for Syrian refugees. Cohesion policies in Turkey have been determined as strategies aiming at the long-term adaptation of refugees to the social structure, not for a temporary period. Accordingly, in addition to the policies formulated by the central government, local governments and civil society actors have also been involved in the process and have developed various projects to improve the living conditions of refugees.

An important element of migration policies in Turkey is the social and economic integration challenges faced by Syrian refugees in their settlements. A large number of Syrian refugees have

settled in Turkey's major urban centers, where they face both physical and social isolation. In order to facilitate the integration process of refugees, the state and local administrations provide various services in areas such as health, education, housing and employment. In addition, interaction and understanding between the local community and refugees play a critical role in ensuring social cohesion. The success of this process requires not only infrastructural support but also the promotion of cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

In this study, the term “refugee” will be used for Syrians under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey in order to avoid any ambiguity. The adaptation processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey will be discussed in the context of the migration policies of the state, the role of local governments and the contributions of civil society organizations. Emphasizing that migration management is a multilevel process and the importance of all stakeholders acting in cooperation, this research aims to discuss the effectiveness of Turkey's cohesion policies regarding Syrian refugees and to make recommendations for strategic improvements in this field. This study is a research based on the review and analysis of relevant documents, reports, legislation and literature. At the same time, the international dimension of Turkey's migration policies and long-term solutions for the sustainability of the integration of refugees into society will be emphasized.

## 1. Syrians Under Temporary Protection in Turkey

Migration is a fundamental movement of mankind that has been going on for about four million years. In the early ages, this movement was shaped by basic needs such as finding food, protection from wild animals and shelter. With the Industrial Revolution, migration has gained a different dimension within the framework of finding a job in cities as an extension of the purpose of finding food. After the 19th century, compulsory situations such as wars, invasions and political pressures came to the fore among the reasons for this mobility. Today, a large part of migration mobility takes place due to similar situations that require necessity.

The wars and crises that started in the Middle East, which have been intermittent for the last century, were triggered again in 2010 and turned into a civil war in Syria in 2011. Since then, more than 13 million Syrians have been displaced and around 6.6 million have become refugees outside their borders (UNHCR, 2022). This mass displacement has led to a humanitarian crisis spanning several continents. Syrians have arrived en masse at the border crossings of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. Although the obligation of countries to open their border gates is not directly mandated by an international convention, the ‘principle of non-refoulement’ in the Refugee Convention, 1951 (Art. 33)<sup>1</sup>, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 14)<sup>2</sup> and the right to asylum in the 1969 African Refugee Convention (Art. 2[3])<sup>3</sup> point to the obligation of countries not to close their borders in times of crisis. In this sense, Turkey, which has a 900-kilometre border with Syria, has been one of the most accessible escape routes for Syrians fleeing from the regions where the civil war is intense. Moreover, Turkey's Temporary Protection Regulation, which was put into effect in 2014, is one of the most important legal arrangements enabling Syrians to seek temporary asylum in Turkey. Within the scope of this regulation, Syrians have been provided with legal protection and have been allowed to benefit from services such as education and health.

Individuals fleeing the civil war in Syria and coming to Turkey are not only Syrian citizens. There are three hundred thousand stateless people in Syria who are not given identity cards by the oppressive regime and who cannot prove their existence (UNHCR, 2024). In addition, Palestinians fleeing from the Israeli-Palestinian war, which has been the most widely used refugee concept in the world since 1948, also live in Syria as refugees. According to the records of UNRWA<sup>4</sup>, the number of Palestinians living as refugees in Syria before the Syrian civil war started was 575,234. Residing in 12 camps,

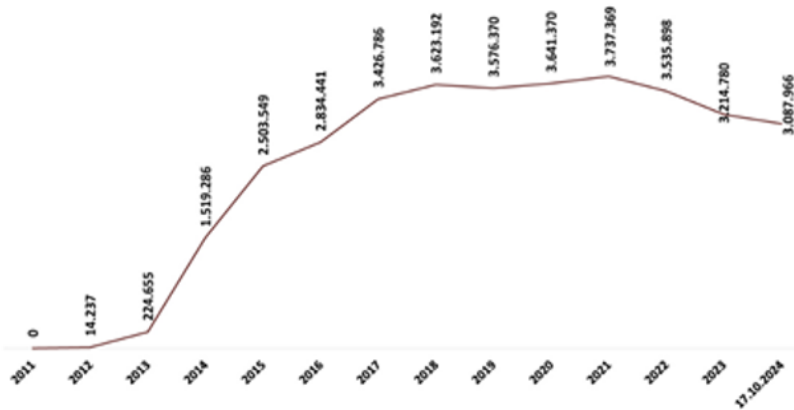
<sup>1</sup> The principle of non-refoulement applies not only to migrants entering the country but also to migrants arriving at the border crossing. For the original Geneva Convention, see: [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/KM\\_d00/c002/km\\_00002024ss0053.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/KM_d00/c002/km_00002024ss0053.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Article 14 states that everyone who is persecuted has the right to seek asylum in another country and to be recognised there as a refugee. This right is recognised as an important part of human rights. For the Turkish version of the Declaration of Human Rights, see: <https://www.hsk.gov.tr/eklentiler/dosyalar/9a3bfe74-cdc4-4ae4-b876-8cb1d7eeae05.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For the definition of asylum seeker in the African Refugee Convention, see: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36400-treaty-0005\\_-\\_oau\\_convention\\_governing\\_the\\_specific\\_aspects\\_of\\_refugee\\_problems\\_in\\_africa\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36400-treaty-0005_-_oau_convention_governing_the_specific_aspects_of_refugee_problems_in_africa_e.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, appeals to the Palestinian people who have been refugees all their lives and to Palestinians in Lebanon today. <https://www.unrwa.org/>

these people were displaced both within the country and towards neighbouring countries with the war. In this case, temporary protection was established to cover Palestinian refugees from Syria (Sezer, 2019: 136).



**Graph 1. Syrians under Temporary Protection by Years**

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

According to the data of the General Directorate of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior, as of 17.10.2024, there are 3,087,966 Syrians under Temporary Protection in Turkey. 94% of them live in urban centers ([www.goc.gov.tr](http://www.goc.gov.tr)). This situation is considered as a factor that complicates the integration of Syrians into the social and economic structure of Turkey. Since the services and aids provided to Syrian refugees trying to live ghettoized in urban centers are not sufficient, national, local, international and non-governmental organizations are trying to provide positive developments in the lives of refugees by filling the gap of the state in their own service areas.

Turkey's open-door policy has gradually increased the number of Syrians arriving in the country, as can be seen in Graph 1. This situation, which has exceeded expectations, has made the number of Syrians in the country equal to the population of an average Balkan country. However, with the increase in the permanence of this population, new social dynamics such as living rates in urban and rural areas and adaptation problems have emerged (Erdoğan, 2022: 9). In this sense, policy makers have been in dialogue with stakeholders in order to define problems, develop solutions, determine implementation steps and evaluate the effectiveness of these policies, and have presented the most appropriate strategic solutions for the benefit of society by making changes to the policy when necessary. In the following sections of the study, the steps taken by policy makers in adaptation policies will be discussed.

## 2. Compliance Policies Implemented by the Central Government

Public policy is the set of decisions and regulations that a government makes and implements in order for a society to achieve a particular goal. Dye (2001) defines public policy as “*what the state does, why and how*”. Within the scope of Dye's definition, it is also defined by Akman (2023: 7) as all kinds of transactions and actions carried out by public institutions or public officials where the state has the authority arising from the laws. Public policies include regulations that aim to increase the economic, social, cultural and environmental welfare of the society. Especially in our age of globalization and increased migration movements, public policies play a critical role for the integration, cohesion and contribution of individuals with different cultural and social backgrounds to society.

In the first years of the massive influx of Syrian asylum seekers into Turkey (2011-2014), Turkey focused primarily on meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of asylum seekers. Due to the geographical reservation to Article 1, Paragraph B, Clause 1 of the Refugee Convention, asylum-seeker applications from outside European countries cannot be received. In this sense, Turkey has taken the step of social cohesion by enacting the Foreigners and International Law (YUKK) in 2013 and the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014 in order to offer international protection to Syrians (İçduygu, 2015: 6). Temporary protection status granted Syrians the right to legally stay in

the country and ensured their access to basic needs. In this framework, Temporary Accommodation Centers were established in border regions for the accommodation needs of Syrians and access to basic health and education services was provided (Erdoğan, 2017: 21).

Social Cohesion policy refers to various policies implemented to ensure that migrants or refugees adapt to the basic social and cultural norms, language and traditions of the country of origin. These policies are important to ensure that migrants do not feel alienated from the society they come from and to prevent social conflicts. In Social Cohesion policies, ensuring refugees' access to basic rights and services, providing language training and raising cultural awareness are prioritized. Penning and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016: 15-16) define social cohesion policies as an approach to preserving cultural differences and point out that these policies allow migrants to learn and accept the basic values of society while allowing them to maintain their unique identities. However, integration also includes assimilation as it legitimizes the adaptation of newcomers to the local population (Abadan-Unat, 2017: 321).

In this sense, integration policies are more comprehensive than Social Cohesion policies; they cover not only cultural adaptation but also economic and political participation. For example, Canada, as part of its integration policies for refugees, provides language training as well as employment support and access to social services (Cetrez, et al, 2020: 23). Germany is one of the leading countries in refugee integration. The country offers comprehensive language courses and vocational training programmed for refugees to learn German. Within the scope of policies called 'Integration durch Bildung' (Integration through education), language training and vocational training programmed are organized to enable refugees to participate in the labor market. These programmed provide a comprehensive model for the integration of refugees into society, especially in terms of employment and education (Heckmann, 2016: 15). Such policies aim to make migrants feel more involved in the social structure and become active citizens. Australia supports the integration of refugees into the local society through the 'Humanitarian Settlement Programmed'. In this programmed, refugees are encouraged to improve their language skills, find jobs and cultural adaptation processes. In addition, Australia encourages the participation of local people in the process with the 'Community Support Programmed' to ensure the adaptation of refugees to the community. This programmed helps refugees to expand their social support networks and establish stronger ties with the local community (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013: 36). As seen in the world examples, the aim of integration policies is to ensure the active participation of refugees in the social and economic structure (Penninx, 2003).

Why was social cohesion, rather than integration, preferred with the YUKK, the legal foundations of which Turkey established in 2013? The most important reason for this is that Syrians are labelled as guests. In other words, they are planned to stay in Turkey until they return to their country or until they are sent to a third country. In the YUKK, the integration process of Syrians under Temporary Protection is referred to as social cohesion and social cohesion is defined as '*activities to provide foreigners with knowledge and skills that will facilitate their independent movement in all areas of social life in our country, in the country where they are resettled or in their country of return without the mediation of third parties*' (YUKK, 2013). As it is understood from this definition, there is no future for them in Turkey and there is no such phenomenon as assimilation, integration or granting citizenship. Social cohesion is a practice that provides many facilities for foreigners to continue their daily lives while indicating that they are not permanent (Güler, 2020: 265).

In European countries, immigrant integration policies are generally carried out in a planned framework. Countries such as Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada and the UK apply 'selective admission' policies during the admission of immigrants and refugees. These countries accept immigrants by taking into account criteria such as their professional skills, level of education and their potential to contribute to the country. The selective admission of migrants allows for a more comprehensive implementation of integration policies. Selected migrants are employed in the labor market of these countries in the areas they need and are actively integrated into the society through services such as education and social support (Castles & Miller, 1998:192). Unlike the integration strategies of European countries, the cohesion policies implemented in Turkey have a more urgent needs-oriented structure. Turkey has not been able to implement a selective immigration policy due to the sudden and massive influx of Syrians. This situation has led Turkey to prefer cohesion policies instead of integration (İçduygu and Şimşek, 2016: 65).

While these cohesion policies enable Syrians to adapt to Turkish society, they do not include an integration phase such as the granting of citizenship status. Turkey has not planned to grant citizenship to Syrians, but has adopted cohesion policies to ensure their temporary stay in the country. This is due to the necessary differences in Turkey's refugee reception process and the need to respond quickly to a group of refugees arriving at the borders in masse.

Syrians admitted to Turkey under temporary protection status are provided with basic health, education and shelter services, and cohesion policies aim to ensure their survival without alienating them from society. Education and health services have an important place in the integration process of Syrians. For example, various projects are implemented by the Ministry of National Education to integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system, while access to health services is provided through temporary health centers (Erdoğan, 2019).

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## 2.1. Directorate of Migration Management

The Directorate General of Migration Management was established on 11 April 2013 with the Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection. The institution, which was established under the Ministry of Interior in order to effectively carry out Turkey's migration management policies, operates to regulate migration management, determine the rights and obligations of migrants and develop policies in line with international standards. With the Presidential Decree No. 85 published in the Official Gazette dated 29 October 2021 and numbered 31643, the status of the Directorate General was changed to the Presidency in order to comply with the amendments made to the Constitution (<https://www.goc.gov.tr/>). The main objectives of this institution include combating irregular migration, providing international protection and supporting the integration processes of foreigners.

In this sense, Turkish language courses organized in Public Education Centers to enable refugees to learn Turkish have been extended with the support of the Directorate of Migration Management. Courses were organized for different migrant groups, especially for Syrian migrants under temporary protection. In these courses, basic Turkish language training was provided at 'A1' and 'A2' levels. Similarly, language courses were organized in cooperation with UNICEF, UNHCR and TIKA (Bulut, 2022: 128). A cooperation protocol was signed between the Directorate of Migration Management and the Ministry of National Education General Directorate of Lifelong Learning. Within the scope of this protocol, a social adaptation and life education programmed was designed to facilitate the adaptation of foreigners under temporary protection and international protection to social, economic and cultural life in Turkey. The programmed is implemented in the form of trainings covering topics such as Turkey's cultural structure, social life rules, access to livelihoods and basic rights and services. The programmed was launched in 2021 by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) under the coordination of the Directorate of Migration Management. In this 12-month period, launched with the financial support of the British Embassy, a total of 55,000 people were trained in Istanbul, Çankırı, Yozgat, Karabük and Ordu (<https://sgdd.org.tr/>).

The Directorate of Migration Management guided the Red Crescent card project, which aims to improve the living standards of migrants in Turkey by providing cash assistance. Joint projects were carried out with many municipalities, especially Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipalities, where the largest number of Syrians reside. For example, the 'Migrant Service Centre' is an example of this cooperation (<https://www.gochizmetlerimerkezi.com/>).

According to the 2023 Annual Report, compared to the 2022 data, there was a 111% increase in the number of training activities and 2064 trainings were carried out. In the same year, 12 projects were completed, a victim support line was established, and the overseas organization of the Presidency, which filled a big gap in migration, was completed. Migration net, e-residency, YIMER 157 were completed. Due to the earthquakes of 6 February, the targeted number of returns could not be



reached, but the number of personnel increased in order to carry out services more effectively and efficiently within the Presidency (GİB, 2023: 110-113).

The success of these policies has not only improved the quality of life of Syrians, but also encouraged peaceful and harmonious coexistence with migrants in host communities. Given Turkey's intensive migration dynamics, the cohesion policies of the Directorate of Migration Management play a critical role in terms of social integration, economic contribution and social peace.

## 2.2. AFAD's Contribution to Cohesion Policies

Many institutions are actively involved in the formulation of public policies for refugees in Turkey, with the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) playing a fundamental role in this process. With the Temporary Protection Regulation, AFAD is entrusted with the coordination of all services provided to Syrians under temporary protection. Various services such as security, education, shelter and health are provided in cooperation with relevant institutions in and outside temporary accommodation centers (AFAD, 2017: 11).

AFAD has been a central institution in the policy-making process for refugees and has assumed important responsibilities in meeting the basic needs of refugees. The establishment of Turkey's first refugee camps and the organization of basic services such as shelter, health and education provided to refugees were coordinated by AFAD (Kahraman and Taniyıcı, 2018: 245). This process both meets the humanitarian needs of refugees and provides important data for the field implementation of public policies. The data obtained on how to implement policies for refugees in the field serve as a guide for AFAD in formulating new policies. For example, the quality of services provided in temporary accommodation centers is continuously improved to help refugees integrate into society (AFAD, 2020).

In terms of education, which is the most important step of cohesion policies, AFAD has implemented the "Al Farah Child and Family Support centers" project in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). These centers aim at emotional empowerment of vulnerable asylum-seeking children, youth and families, promoting social cohesion and providing them with the knowledge and skills needed in daily life. The centers are staffed by child protection officers, health educators, psychologists and other experts (<https://sgdd.org.tr/>). In provinces such as Adana, Bursa, Gaziantep, İstanbul, İzmir, Konya, Mersin and Şanlıurfa, projects are being carried out to bring refugee children into education. Within the scope of these projects, it is aimed to enroll approximately 65 thousand Syrian children between the ages of 5-17 who have never attended school, cannot continue their education and are at risk of dropping out of school. In field studies, children who do not go to school are identified and followed up, and they are included in formal and non-formal education programmed carried out by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports in accordance with their age (<https://www.meb.gov.tr/>). Efforts to increase schooling rates for refugees reveal the importance of supportive policies for child refugees to gain a place in society, but not only for children. Under the coordination of AFAD, vocational courses in various fields such as hairdressing, sewing, embroidery, computer, weaving, handicrafts, English and Turkish have been opened for Syrian refugees in temporary accommodation centers. Thanks to these courses, asylum-seekers gained knowledge and skills, acquired professions and had the opportunity to overcome their economic inadequacies. Female asylum-seekers who can speak Turkish were offered the opportunity to work in hospitals and schools opened in temporary accommodation centers (AFAD, 2014: 63). In addition, in order to meet the personal needs of asylum-seekers, AFAD provided cash aid per person and developed the Electronic Aid Distribution System (EYDAS) to facilitate the distribution of these aids. These activities aim to ensure the economic security of asylum seekers (AFAD, 2014:116-117).

AFAD's health and hygiene services for Syrians have been carried out within the framework of comprehensive protection and support. According to AFAD Syria Coordination Working Group, Syrians inside and outside temporary accommodation centers benefited from basic health services free of charge. Field hospitals were established in the centers; free medicines were provided through pharmacies and systematic health checks were carried out. In addition, basic vaccinations such as polio and measles were made accessible to children living in and outside the centers (AFAD, 2013: 40).

Special feeding arrangements have been made for pregnant women and asylum-seeking women at risk of premature birth, and reconnaissance vehicles have been deployed at the border for border security against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risks. Cleaning and hygiene facilities have been strengthened to prevent infectious diseases; washing machines, dishwashing facilities and separate bathrooms for men and women have been provided. Sufficient clean water per person was provided for drinking, cooking and sanitation needs and water analyses were carried out regularly (AFAD, 2014; AFAD, 2016). These comprehensive measures provide an important basis for meeting the health and hygiene needs of asylum-seekers.

The cohesion of refugees into society forms the basis of Turkey's long-term cohesion policies. AFAD has developed different social cohesion projects for the integration of refugees into the society (İçduygu and Şimşek, 2016: 64). These projects both ensure that refugees feel safe and contribute to their living in harmony with the local people. AFAD uses the data obtained from studies on refugees in public policy-making processes. Data such as surveys conducted in refugee camps, data on access to health and education services, and needs analyses provide important inputs to AFAD's policy development processes (Erdoğan, 2022: 141). In this way, it is ensured that policy makers base their decisions regarding refugees on concrete data.

### 3. Cohesion Policies Implemented by Local Authorities

Turkey has not taken a real step forward in the migration administrative structure of the central government until the arrival of Syrians. Just as it has been late in formulating public policy, it has also been late in establishing the legal basis for what local administrative systems should implement, or want to implement, in relation to foreigners. It is widely accepted that there is still a serious uncertainty about the principles according to which local administrations in Turkey, and municipalities in particular, will operate with regard to refugees (Erdoğan, 2017: 39).

The activities of local governments on refugees are implemented within the framework of the Municipal Law No. 5393 and the YUKK No. 6458. In the Municipality Law, foreigners or refugees are not addressed separately, and the concept of "citizen" refers to all local people. For non-citizens, the concept of fellow citizenship is used. *"Everyone is a fellow citizen of the municipality where they reside. Citizens have the right to participate in municipal decisions and services, to be informed about municipal activities and to benefit from the assistance of the municipal administration. Assistance must be provided under conditions that do not harm human dignity"* (Municipal Law, 2005, Art.13). In this framework, Municipal Law No. 5393 allows municipalities to provide services to refugees within the framework of "fellow citizenship law". However, these services are not compulsory, but are provided at the discretion of the municipalities.

Under the law, the role of municipalities in providing services to refugees remains unclear and the legislation does not include specific provisions for refugees, limiting municipalities' activities in this area. Since the duties of municipalities towards refugees are not clearly defined legally, there is a risk for audit mechanisms such as the Court of Accounts audit, especially in the use of financial resources and the provision of services. The study states that the main problem faced by municipalities in providing support and services for refugees is this legal uncertainty and administrative limitations (MBB, 2015: 7). However, in academic studies, it is evaluated that this situation is shown as an excuse, especially in western provinces. Çamur (2017) conducted a study titled "Syrian Refugees and Responsibility of Municipalities: The Case of Izmir" by Çamur (2017), it is stated that the services provided will attract refugees to Izmir and its districts more, and therefore services are avoided. When the Court of Accounts reports are analyzed, the services provided to refugees are not reflected in any Court of Accounts report (Çamur, 2017: 127).

Similarly, the YUKK No. 6458 does not provide sufficient basis for municipalities or local administrations to provide services for refugees. The fourth chapter of the YUKK includes cohesion policies and Article 96 reads as follows Article 96 states that *"The Directorate General may, to the extent of the economic and financial means of the country, plan adaptation activities by making use of the suggestions and contributions of public institutions and organizations, local administrations, non-governmental organizations, universities and international organizations in order to facilitate the mutual adaptation of the foreigner, applicant or international protection status holders with the society in our country and to provide them with the knowledge and skills that will facilitate them to act independently in all areas of social life in our country, in the country where they are resettled or in their*

country of return without the mediation of third parties" (YUKK, 2013, Art. 94) implies that the activities required for adaptation will be carried out within the framework of initiative.

There is no systematic and planned approach to the services to be provided to refugees by municipalities across the country. The refugee issue is handled differently by each municipality and while some municipalities do not distinguish refugees from their citizens, some municipalities apply policies that are marginalizing, discriminatory and against human rights, which may lead to the marginalization of refugees.

In Konya, with the decision taken by the Governorship, it was decided to carry out the aids to be provided especially to Syrians through the metropolitan municipality and enabled the refugee procedures to be carried out in a systematic manner (Aslan and Tekin, 2017: 427). Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality has established a special unit on migration. In addition, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality received USD 6.83 million from the special activity funds developed by AFAD (UCLG-MEWA, 2016: 21). Adana Metropolitan Municipality and Kilis Municipality have established units that can be the closest in solving refugee problems (Woods and Kayalı, 2017: 18). In these units, especially Arabic-speaking personnel are employed. Sultanbeyli district municipality has established a databank with the central administrative organisation. Legal support is provided (Elicin, 2018: 88). In addition, Sultanbeyli Municipality is a municipality that works in contact with NGOs. Esenyurt Municipality has established a liaison office with an Arabic-speaking staff. Şanlıurfa is one of the municipalities in border cities. It supports refugees to reach healthy living standards by providing health and psychosocial support. However, the lack of funding and personnel is an important challenge for the sustainability of these services (Erdoğan, 2017: 6).

There are three difficulties that municipalities face in dealing with Syrian refugees. The first and most important one is the lack of a legal and administrative base. The second is financial problems. The fact that municipalities face budget shortfalls in services for refugees directly affects the quality and scope of services. The financial burden of local governments increases with the increase in the number of refugees, but no direct funding support is provided by the state. This deficiency makes municipalities dependent on temporary funds from AFAD and other organizations, which makes long-term planning difficult. Thirdly, the lack of information on services for refugees prevents municipalities from planning for the refugee population and makes it difficult to allocate resources effectively.

#### 4. Impact Of NGOs on Cohesion Policies

CSOs are non-profit institutions and organizations with an autonomous structure separate from the state (Willetts, 2011:22). With the intensification of the refugee influx in Turkey, NGOs have had a supportive and complementary function to the work of the state in terms of ensuring social cohesion and refugees' access to basic services. They have been supportive in the work of both central and local governments and complementary in many areas. In particular, international and national NGOs identify the needs of refugees and contribute to the shaping of integration policies by cooperating with local administrations and the central government and sometimes by using their sanctioning power. Some of the NGOs providing education, shelter, health, economic-social and legal assistance to refugees is given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Some National and International NGOs Providing Services to Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkey**

<b>Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent)</b>	As Turkey's largest and longest-established aid organization, it provides shelter, health services, food aid and social cohesion projects. It meets the needs of refugees through programmes such as the Red Crescent Card and Community centers.
<b>Human Rights and Freedoms Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH)</b>	IHH provides health, education, food and shelter support in refugee camps in Turkey and across the border.
<b>Migration Research Foundation (GAV)</b>	It was established in 2010 to create data in the fields of migration, diaspora and Muslim minorities, to train qualified human resources for the literature, to



	draw attention to existing problems and to provide policy recommendations.
<b>Refugee Association</b>	Based in Istanbul, this association provides information, health, education and counselling services for refugees.
<b>Refugee Rights Association</b>	It was established with the aim of protecting the right to life of refugees and asylum seekers and preventing their return to an environment of torture, oppression and persecution.
<b>Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)</b>	It carries out health, education, legal aid and social cohesion projects for refugees and asylum seekers with more than 50 offices across Turkey.
<b>International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC)</b>	The Blue Crescent Foundation provides health, food, education and psycho-social support to refugees.
<b>Support to Life</b>	Support to Life provides services for refugees in the areas of shelter, health, education and child protection.
<b>Refugee Rights Turkey (Mülteci Hakları Merkezi)</b>	This association provides counselling and support services on the legal rights of refugees and asylum seekers.
<b>AAR Japan (Association for Aid and Relief, Japan)</b>	This Japan-based humanitarian organisation provides health, education and disability support services to Syrian refugees in Turkey.
<b>Istanbul Migrant Assistance and Solidarity Association (IGYDD)</b>	It is an association that provides social cohesion, education and legal support for refugees and migrants in Istanbul.
<b>International Solidarity Association for Migrants</b>	It provides support to migrants and refugees in the areas of accommodation, basic needs and integration.
<b>Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV)</b>	Monitors and reports human rights violations against refugees; provides legal support.
<b>Oppressed Association (Mazlum-Der)</b>	It raises awareness about human rights violations and provides legal support to refugees.
<b>Health and Education Association for Asylum Seekers (SADER)</b>	It carries out projects to meet the needs of refugees, especially in the fields of health and education.
<b>Refugee Support Association (MUDEM)</b>	MUDEM was established in Ankara in 2014 to carry out activities in Turkey and abroad to address the problems of forcibly displaced persons.
<b>International Association for Migration and Solidarity</b>	Founded in 2011 in Konya by a civil society worker, academician and social responsibility volunteer.
<b>International Organisation for Migration (IOM)</b>	IOM carries out projects to meet the needs of refugees in areas such as health, shelter, humanitarian assistance and voluntary return.
<b>United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)</b>	UNICEF runs projects to ensure that refugee children have access to education, health and protection services. It also encourages children to attend school through programmes such as the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (SEY).
<b>World Food Programme (WFP)</b>	In cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent, the Red Crescent Card Programme is implemented. This programme provides cash assistance to refugees to meet their food and basic needs.
<b>Save the Children (Çocukları Kurtarın Vakfı)</b>	With a particular focus on refugee children, this organisation works in the fields of child labour and child protection by providing education, health and protection services in Turkey.
<b>The World Health Organisation (WHO)</b>	Supports refugees' access to health services and contributes to strengthening the health infrastructure in Turkey. It conducts vaccination campaigns and epidemic prevention programmed.

Source. Created by the authors.

These foundations, associations and international NGOs provide support to refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey in various fields. Each of them provides a wide range of services by contributing to humanitarian aid and social cohesion projects, and works to improve the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey in cooperation with state and local institutions in Turkey. The KIZILAY (Red Crescent), UNHCR and IOM have been selected for the study, as they stand out for their wide-ranging and effective work in services for refugees. The Red Crescent provides direct support at the local level and plays an active role in the harmonization process. UNHCR, on the other hand, operates on a global scale as a body affiliated to the UN and is the leading organization in the protection of refugee rights. It sets the international legal framework and develops sustainable policies with all countries of the world. IOM, on the other hand, specializes in logistical support in crises, migration management and shaping policies. In this sense, these organizations have been preferred in this study as important institutions that undertake complementary roles.

#### 4.1. Kızılay

The European Union-funded Kızılay Card Programmed, Social Cohesion Assistance (SUY) is the world's largest cash-based humanitarian assistance project with the number of beneficiaries reached and regular and long-term support planning. The SUY Project has been implemented in Turkey under the European Union's FRIT (Facility for Humanitarian Assistance for Refugees in Turkey) since 28 November 2016. This project aims to support vulnerable groups with Temporary Protection, International Protection or Humanitarian Residence Permit status to meet their basic needs (<https://kizilaykart.org/>). In the field study conducted by Erdoğan (2021) in the Syrians Barometer, when Syrians were asked from which organizations they received assistance, the Kızılay Card/SUY came out with a rate of over 90% (Erdoğan, 2021: 265). This programmed is a model of social support that sets an example for public policies.

However, in 2017, immediately after the launch of this programmed, the perception among the local population that this aid was only for refugees spread due to economic difficulties. Especially on social media, allegations that the Kızılay's aid 'ignores local people in need' began to circulate and some local groups made statements that 'Turkish citizens need more aid'. In a neighborhood in Gaziantep, during the distribution of aid cards, a group of local people went to the distribution point and reacted to the aid given to Syrians. When the reactions were combined with the perception of inadequacy of social cohesion projects and economic inequality, some people verbally attacked the refugees in the aid queues (<https://www.haberturk.com/>). In response, the Turkish Kızılay announced that the aid was directed not only to refugees but also to all individuals in need, a decision was taken to strengthen cohesion policies and projects, and it was announced to the public that the aid programmed was covered by international funds and was independent from Turkey's general budget in line with the transparency policy (Kızılay, 2021: 39). Similar incidents took place in many cities across the country, but the Kızılay's struggle against these difficulties ended with accountability and transparency statements.

The Turkish Kızılay, which is known for its successes rather than only its negativities, provides educational and social services by establishing Community centers in order to support the adaptation of Syrian refugees. These centers organize Turkish language courses, vocational trainings and social activities that help refugees adapt to Turkish society (Doğan and Taylan, 2022: 88). The Conditional Education Assistance (ŞEY) programmed, which has been in place since 2003 and was extended to Syrian and other refugee children in 2017 in cooperation with UNICEF and the Turkish Kızılay, provides financial support to encourage children to attend school and offers additional support to girls. ŞEY payments are made every two months for each child from kindergarten to grade 12, provided they attend school regularly. As of September 2019, the number of Syrian students benefiting from this assistance reached 525,000 (Erdoğan, 2021: 72). The Kızılay also provides psychosocial support services to alleviate the traumas refugees experience after war and forced migration. These services make a significant contribution to protecting the mental health of refugees by supporting social cohesion.

Such support provides a guiding model for public administrators as part of social cohesion policies. The Kızılay's programmed facilitate Syrian refugees' interaction with the local community. Events and community projects organized with the local community help to reduce social barriers between

refugees and host communities. Such activities are considered important in terms of accelerating social cohesion and creating a harmonious structure in the society.

#### 4.2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR is an international organization established in 1950 to protect and assist refugees. It works to protect the safety, rights and well-being of forcibly displaced persons and to provide them with long-term solutions. The main objectives of the organization include the resettlement and integration of refugees, supporting their return processes and ensuring their protection in accordance with international law (UNHCR, 2023). The organization was established for only three years to help European refugees during World War II, but after 200,000 people fled to Austria during the Hungarian Revolution, it led the Austrian state to grant citizenship to these asylum seekers. In this sense, the role of NGOs in intervening in refugee crises and providing counselling in policy-making processes has taken shape.

UNHCR is one of the largest organizations in the world, with 336 Turkish and 62 foreign staff in its headquarters in Ankara and regional and field offices in Istanbul, Izmir, Edirne, Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa and Van (UNHCR, 2024: 2). The Government of Turkey is the main partner of UNHCR. In other words, the Commissionerate carries out joint projects with local administrations, relevant ministries and other NGOs to help refugees obtain work permits, participate in the labor market, and access services such as housing, education and health. However, on 10 September 2018, Turkey largely restricted UNHCR's operational activities in Turkey. In this context, UNHCR's authority in processes such as the resettlement of Syrian refugees to third countries was reduced and transferred to the Directorate General of Migration Management. Turkey has stated that it wants to run refugee management through a national system and that this process is part of the principle of sovereignty. However, in close liaison with GİGM, it continues to examine cases in the context of resettlement (<https://www.unhcr.org/tr/>). It is also a joint project coordinator with the Turkish Red Crescent in the European Union-funded Social Cohesion Assistance project.

Another problem, budget and service activism, has been criticized by Turkey. While Turkey has allocated a large budget for refugees, it has criticized the international community and UNHCR for insufficient funding. Especially after the European Union's Readmission Agreement<sup>5</sup> with Turkey, the effectiveness of international funding and assistance has been a matter of debate. UNHCR, while coordinating international aid to Turkey, criticized that some resources were insufficient or delayed, while Turkey claimed that the financial assistance promised by the international community was not provided quickly and effectively enough (Erdoğan, 2019).

The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), coordinated by UNHCR, is a coordination mechanism to address the needs of refugee and host communities in Turkey. It aims to ensure that support to refugees and national systems is effective, holistic and without duplication. At the same time, under the leadership of the Government of Turkey, in cooperation with international organizations and humanitarian partners, resource mobilization, sustainability of services and strengthening social cohesion are ensured. The 3RP contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, generating strategic solutions for the benefit of both refugee and host communities. UNHCR, together with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), undertakes the overall coordination of the 3RP (3RP, 2024: 28).

In addition to the guidance and counselling services provided by UNHCR and its partners in the field, UNHCR continues to provide guidance, follow-up and counselling services with special counsellors on the rights, obligations, services and related processes of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey through the hotline established in July 2019. The hotline is staffed by 50 multilingual operators (UNHCR, 2024: 2).

In the field of education, it works with the Ministry of National Education to support children to learn Turkish and offers free language courses and vocational training programmed for adults through Public Education centers. In the field of higher education, in cooperation with the Council of Higher

<sup>5</sup> For the Turkish version of the Readmission Agreement see.

[https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ab\\_iliskileri/18\\_mart\\_2016\\_turkiye\\_ab\\_zirvesi\\_bildirisi\\_.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ab_iliskileri/18_mart_2016_turkiye_ab_zirvesi_bildirisi_.pdf)

Education (YÖK) and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), it facilitates the transition of refugee youth to university and provides educational support to refugees at undergraduate and graduate level through the DAFI scholarship programmed in Turkey. UNHCR carries out comprehensive education and social cohesion projects to support refugees to integrate into society and live a dignified life (<https://www.unhcr.org/tr/>).

UNHCR and GİGM work in cooperation to implement numerous actions to strengthen social cohesion with an inclusive approach to refugees, host communities, local authorities, academia and civil society. In this framework, awareness-raising activities and socio-cultural events are organized for different stakeholders to formulate local policies, share information and create a friendly environment between refugees and host communities.

#### **4.3. International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

IOM, like UNHCR, was established in Europe to support victims of war, but its service network became globalized after the stabilization of Europe. Founded in 1951, the organization has managed to anchor itself in the system as one of the important actors of international migration governance (Pécoud, 2018: 1626).

IOM opened its first offices in Turkey in Ankara and Istanbul after the first Gulf War in order to resettle Iraqi refugees to Western countries. The most basic strategy of international organizations to exist is to produce services in cooperation with other organizations, institutions and local institutions (Korneev, 2018: 1680). In this sense, IOM has rapidly started to produce joint projects with all organizations in Turkey. The ALO 157 emergency hotline for victims of human trafficking was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 2005 and 2014, support was provided to victims through this hotline and safe return processes were organized. Projects such as “Strengthening and Expanding Technical Cooperation on Migration with Turkey’s Area Regions” and “Combating Illegal Migration through Fraud Detection” have been implemented with a focus on training law enforcement officers and providing assistance to address challenges encountered in border control (İçduygu and Aksel, 2012: 57). This project aimed to increase the migration management capacity of the Turkish authorities. Trainings focused on strengthening border security and improving administrative skills, particularly in the fight against illegal migration. It aimed to increase the technical capacity to detect forged documents at border crossings. During the same period, IOM also cooperated with the state in training public personnel and conducted a “training of trainers Programmed” for 64 experts. After 2014, these activities carried out with IOM yielded results and the number of victims of human trafficking decreased (GİGM, 2019: 55).

IOM Turkey provides a wide range of support activities for refugees. These include community centers, cash support programmed, emergency management, mobile psychosocial support teams, livelihood support, school transport, shelter support, municipal integration centers and health services. Since 2014, a total of 2,833,832 refugees has benefited from IOM’s services (IOM, 2022: 2).

The Family Assistance Programmed (FAP) for Syrians provides support in visa application processes to facilitate the reunification of asylum seekers in Germany with family members in Turkey. Since 2016, around 38,000 people have benefited from this programmed in Turkey. The FAP aims to prevent Syrian families from choosing irregular migration routes and support their integration in Germany. Funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the programmed is implemented in partnership with organizations such as Caritas, the German Red Cross and Diakonie, and is a successful example of international cooperation (IOM, 2021: 2).

IOM continues its activities in Turkey through technical assistance in the drafting of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and through various partnerships. One of the most important steps in strengthening its relations with the Republic of Turkey is the agreement signed on 3 January 2017 between IOM and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. This agreement established IOM’s legal status, privileges and immunities in Turkey, thereby putting the organization’s presence in Turkey on a firmer footing. IOM also introduced itself as a “*close institutional partner of the Government of the Republic of Turkey*” within the framework of the services provided to refugees under the 3RP and emphasized that it would expand its activities in the country with the support of the state (IOM, 2018: 8).

IOM carries out its activities in Turkey through strong partnerships with state institutions and local administrations at national level. In this framework, it carries out comprehensive projects in many fields such as migration management, combating irregular migration, social cohesion, education, health and economic support. While IOM Turkey has had a limited field of activity since its establishment, today it has become one of the largest country offices on a global scale. In its early years, IOM Turkey was only a service provider engaged in anti-human trafficking and voluntary repatriation projects, but it has expanded its activities to include refugee support, migration management, refugee resettlement and support to cross-border humanitarian response programmed.

## CONCLUSION

The outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011 brought Turkey to the center of the international migration crisis. Adopting an “open door” policy towards Syrian refugees, Turkey accepted this population under temporary protection status and developed a comprehensive migration management strategy. In this process, not only the state, but also local governments and civil society organizations have played important roles in meeting the basic needs of Syrians and supporting their integration into society.

Turkey's cohesion policies have gone beyond providing services to Syrian refugees in basic areas such as temporary shelter, health, education and employment, and have aimed to facilitate their social and economic cohesion. In this context, a “cohesion” rather than integration-oriented approach has been adopted. This approach is based on the assumption that Syrians will remain in Turkey temporarily until a permanent solution is found in their country or in a third country.

Local administrations have played a vital role in ensuring refugees' access to social services and developing projects to support social cohesion. However, legal and administrative deficiencies, lack of financial resources and lack of information are factors that make it difficult for local governments to effectively carry out harmonization processes.

Civil society organizations have complemented the state and local administrations and have made significant contributions, particularly in the areas of education, health, psychosocial support and legal aid. Projects involving international organizations have had a significant impact by creating a comprehensive support network to improve the living standards of refugees.

Overall, Turkey's cohesion policies towards Syrian refugees have achieved significant successes in terms of both providing humanitarian assistance and promoting social cohesion. However, for harmonization processes to be sustainable, long-term strategies need to be developed, resources need to be managed effectively and social barriers between the host community and refugees need to be removed. Turkey's experience in this field provides a comprehensive and effective migration management model that can serve as an example for other countries. These experiences hold valuable lessons and practical examples for countries that may have to deal with similar crises in the future.

## Authors' Contribution Statement

- Designing of the study: Ç.A.
- Literature research: G.E., Ç.A., M.A
- Fieldwork, collection/compilation of data: G.E., Ç.A., M.A
- Processing/analysis of data: G.E., M.A.
- Preparation of figures/tables/software: G.E.
- Interpretation of findings: G.E., M.A.
- Writing, editing and checking of manuscript: G. E., Ç.A., M.A.

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