


Chapter 10

Integration of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Social Entrepreneurship Case Study

Ozgur Ates

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4096-4376>

Ankara University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The consequences of the Syrian Civil War that started in March 2011 have been tragic and devastating for the Syrian people. Many of them have fled their country and sought asylum in other parts of the world, especially in Turkey. The unofficial figures suggest that there are close to six million Syrian refugees living in Turkey, yet over two million of them are not registered to work under the temporary protection provided by the Turkish government. As a result of this, it is impossible for many refugees to get a legally paid job. Refugees usually work in informal sectors for extremely low wages. This makes refugees vulnerable to exploitation at work and get employed at jobs that locals are reluctant to do. This chapter highlights the case study of two non-profit companies that have been launched by two young Turkish social entrepreneurs in Turkey to create employment opportunities to provide regular and sustainable income to Syrian refugees that public and private sectors have failed to meet and address.

INTRODUCTION

*you broke the ocean in half to be here.
only to meet nothing that wants you.
-immigrant*

The Middle East has always been a region of turmoil throughout history however, the civil war in Syria breaking out in 2011, changed the region for many years to come, causing millions of Syrians to be displaced to neighboring countries becoming refugees. Many of the Syrian refugees have fled to and resettled in Lebanon, Jordan, and mostly in Turkey.

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Turkey being a transit hub between Asia and Europe, its proximity to Syria, its satisfactory economic conditions and stable government system, and most important refugees feeling safe there impacted the movement of migration to Turkey. However, after European Union (EU) countries closed their borders to Syrian refugees, Turkey was no longer a transit country. The majority of Syrians who arrived to Turkey stayed in Turkey. The border cities of Turkey to Syria, such as Kilis had significant changes in the population. For example, 78.71% of the city's population is now comprised of Syrian refugees (Mülteciler Derneği, 2020). By March 2020, the officially registered number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is 3 million and 600 thousand. Yet, there are over 2 million undocumented refugees all over Turkey as well.

The objective of this case study is to illustrate that through social entrepreneurship there are several opportunities to create employment, sustainable income, and a viable and growing business for refugees in Turkey. The chapter first provides a background contextualizing the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey as well as addresses the issue of refugees in Turkey not being able to find employment due to their legal status. It further presents the relevant role that two young social entrepreneurs came to occupy in the search for entrepreneurial solutions for refugees based on their abilities and skill sets. It shares the stories of two companies and the roles it played in refugees' lives. The findings suggest that the entrepreneurs' model provides entrepreneurial solutions for refugees not only in Turkey but in other countries as well.

BACKGROUND

Refugees in definition are people seeking for a safe haven in other countries from their country of origin escaping from the uninhabitable region of fear and hatred as a result of war or violence. Refugees are entitled to rights specified by international law, mainly the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The countries that are state parties to the Convention are required to protect refugees that are in their territory and to adhere to the principle of non-refoulement, meaning to not return the refugees to places where their life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011).

World War II caused an intensity of change in the international arena, apart from the tensions and conflicts of war, it created refugees (Carlin, 1982). Over the six years following the end of the war (1946-1952), the international community helped the refugees from Europe settle down in the United States, Canada, Australia and Brazil in massive numbers. Carlin (1982) argued, "This was not by any means the end of the problem. Unfortunately, events throughout the world produced a new and continuing flow of refugees, either single or in large groups" (p.3).

Seventy-four years after World War II, the mass departure of people fleeing their countries has reached an alarming number which according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2018) report, 37,000 people a day are forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. This is the highest levels of displacement in record. According to UNHCR, today there are 70,8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide and 25,9 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate. Fifty seven percent of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate come from Syria (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million) and over half of the refugees are under the age 18. There are also millions of people who have been denied a nationality, and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

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