

# CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 10<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF SYRIAN MIGRATION:

Actors, Processes, and Insights

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# Civil Society in the 10th Year of Syrian Migration: Actors, Processes, and Insights

**Project Coordinators:** Dr. Besim Can Zırh, Dr. Esra Demirkol Colosio

**Project Researchers:** Dr. Cansu Akbaş Demirel, Dr. Lülüfer Körükmez, Dr. Didem Daniş

**Research Assistants:** Rüveyda Mercan, Mücahit Karaca, İlay Ertetik

**Proofreader (Turkish):** Deniz Aktan Küçük

**Proofreader (English):** Leslie Demir

**Translator:** Eda Sevinin

**Cover Photo:** Kemal Vural Tarlan

**Graphic Design:** Engin Aygün (Krafthane)

Association for Migration Research (*Göç Araştırmaları Derneği*, GAR)

Abbasğa Mahallesi, Üzengi Sok. No: 13 34022, Beşiktaş / İstanbul / Türkiye



<https://www.gocarastirmalariderneği.org/tr/>



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# Abbreviations

<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental organization
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>TEC</b>	Temporary Education Center
<b>DGMM</b>	Directorate General of Migration Management
<b>MHC</b>	Migrant Health Center
<b>HDP</b>	Peoples' Democratic Party ( <i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i> )
<b>TİHEK</b>	Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye ( <i>Türkiye İnsan Hakları ve Eşitlik Kurumu</i> )
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>PYD</b>	Syrian Democratic Union Party ( <i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</i> )
<b>SIHHAT</b>	Improving the Health Status of the Syrian Population Under Temporary Protection and Related Services Provided by Turkish Authorities
<b>LFI</b>	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
<b>AFAD</b>	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency ( <i>Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı</i> )
<b>GAR</b>	Association for Migration Research ( <i>Göç Araştırmaları Derneği</i> )

**Note:** Although Syrians in Turkey are not granted legal refugee status due to the geographical limitations of the 1951 Geneva Convention, throughout this report we use the term “refugee” because Syrians came to Turkey as a result of a mass forced migration and a majority of them have been granted temporary protection status since 2014.

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# 1. Scope and Method of the Research

This research aims to present a holistic framework and discuss the observations, views, and expectations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the field of migration that have varying aims, working methods, and collaborations in Turkey. It specifically analyzes the past 10 years of Syrian migration to Turkey, which began in 2011. The research design is based on a mutually reinforcing dual method. First, between March and April 2022, we carried out desktop research to define the research framework that would later be used while writing the report. In this period, we made an exhaustive list of institutions and organizations working directly in the field of migration in Turkey and compiled the reports written by these actors on the state of civil society in the country. Thanks to this preliminary research, we were able to produce a chronological breakdown of the important landmarks in the last decade of migration in Turkey. Subsequently, we prepared semi-structured interview questions.

In the next stage, we selected 40 NGOs from among the 52 civil society organizations that we identified in the course of the above-mentioned desktop research and had become familiar with thanks to relations established by the GAR-Association for Migration Research, which has been active since 2017. We conducted online and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a total of 44 representatives from those selected NGOs. Interviews were predominantly in Turkish, except for five interviews conducted in English. The interviewed NGOs were diverse in terms of their origins; while some of them originated and operated in Turkey, some others were international NGOs with headquarters abroad and some were established by Syrians in Turkey.

The cities in which the field research would be conducted were selected from among the top 10 provinces that, based on data from the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), host the largest numbers of Syrians with temporary protection status in Turkey. However, other important characteristics of the selected cities were also taken into consideration for this research. For instance, located near the Turkish-Syrian border, Hatay and Gaziantep were first-hand witnesses of Syrian immigration from the very beginning. Ankara not only hosts a large refugee population but is also the center of state bureaucracy as well as home to the headquarters of numerous NGOs working in the field of migration, while Izmir is one of the two most important transit points from Turkey to Europe. The criteria by which the NGOs were selected is discussed below in more detail.

Interviews were held between April and June 2022. Semi-structured interview questions were prepared with the aim of understanding the observations, views, expectations, and policy recommendations of NGOs operating in the field of migration from a holistic perspective. Questions focused on both the ongoing process and the future of migration in Turkey. Following the basic principles with which any research involving humans should comply, we obtained the informed consent of each participant and guaranteed their confidentiality. Interviewees were given full information about the research before, during, and after the interviews and were informed that their participation was on a voluntary basis and their statements would be used anonymously.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We obtained ethics committee approval for this research from the Middle East Technical University Human Research Ethics Committee on March 14, 2022, with protocol number 0137-ODTUIAEK-2022.

## **Focus 1: How to Classify Civil Society Organizations in the Field of Migration**

**(Dr. Cansu Demirel Akbaş)**

It seems that in migration studies in/on Turkey, civil society is conceptualized in two ways. While the first approach bases evaluations on “civil society” and “civil society actors,” the second considers “nongovernmental organizations.” The former categorization of “civil society and civil society actors” involves first and foremost associations and foundations, but it takes a broader view and also encompasses various entities such as professional organizations, trade unions and cooperatives, and all formal/informal refugee/migrant solidarity movements. Intergovernmental organizations and international NGOs active in Turkey are also included under the larger umbrella of this first conceptualization.

On the other hand, “civil society organizations” operating in the field of international migration in Turkey are considered as non-state actors. NGOs in this field are classified according to (1) their places of origin, (2) the areas in which they operate, and (3) the ways in which they address migration-related issues. As far as place of origin is concerned, NGOs are either (a) Turkey-originated associations and foundations or (b) foreign NGOs that are founded abroad but granted permission to operate in Turkey. Although a full listing of all such organizations does not exist, data from the Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Civil Society Relations show that there are 132 foreign NGOs allowed to work in Turkey. However, it is important to note that not all of these 132 NGOs operate in the field of migration.

In terms of the areas in which they operate, NGOs can be classified as (a) local, (b) national, and (c) international. Although this is one of the most established and frequently used classifications, it alone does not give a substantial account of NGOs. There are some local NGOs that, despite working in a limited geographical area, are highly effective in terms of their financial capacity and/or political influence. Therefore, this area-based classification only makes sense when it is taken into consideration together with other characteristics of civil society.

### **Rights-based NGOs vs. Service-based NGOs**

When it comes to the ways in which they address migration-related issues, NGOs can be categorized as (a) rights-based organizations and (b) service/aid-based organizations. The ways in which they address issues also determine the nature of their organizational activities. Rights-based NGOs see refugees as rights-bearing subjects and work to ensure that refugees live a dignified life while enjoy rights – especially fundamental rights – and services. Their main activities consist of advocacy, policy-making, monitoring, and reporting. Among these activities, legal consultancy services constitute the largest portion of the direct support provided to refugees. Rights-based organizations usually opt out of providing humanitarian aid, which they see as the state’s responsibility.

On the other hand, service/aid-based NGOs work with different motivations including faith, political views, and philanthropy to provide refugees with humanitarian aid such as food, blankets, clothing, and hygiene products within their own capacity. They also work to meet refugees’ needs in camps and camp-like settlements. These NGOs have played important roles by filling gaps in the field, especially as the number of refugees from Syria increased, in effect leading to insufficient provision of services. Because of these functions, their relationships with the state are closer compared to rights-based NGOs, which, by definition, are more critical of the state. Although the exact number of service/aid-based NGOs in the field is unknown, their total number and financial capacity are much higher than those of rights-based NGOs.

In this regard, considering their motivations for establishment, the ways in which they work with the state, and the functions they perform, some organizations, despite legally having NGO status, are far from being “civilian.” Daniş and Nazlı (2018) refer to such organizations as “pro-government organizations” to underline their close cooperation with the government. There are also, however, organizations that built close relations and cooperation with the state at the time of their establishment but have seen the interruption of that cooperation under current conditions. One of the suggestions for a valid classification of civil society organizations bears this situation in mind and suggests a more dynamic evaluation of the NGOs in Turkey, taking into consideration the networks they are in, the close cooperation they develop, and their specific conditions (Demirel Akbaş, 2022). Besides those listed above, we can also evaluate civil society studies in light of some new classifications such as studies pertaining to “associations established by migrants/refugees.”

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion: What Could Be a Valid Classification?**

Although some main ways to classify NGOs are summarized above, it is still very difficult to definitively classify civil society in the field of migration. As most organizations in the field operate in multiple areas, any classification based on specific fields of activity such as health, education, women, or children would be quite narrow. Furthermore, since civil society actors are usually not willing to share information about their funding sources (i.e., how much financial support they receive from which donors), classification based on funding seems to be unrealistic. In a similar vein, given the large number of actors involved in civil society and the interwoven and temporally and spatially differentiated collaborations among them, strict demarcations between actors could pose obstacles to comprehensive evaluations. Therefore, researchers in this field are compelled to apply mixed models where they simultaneously use multiple classifications. That said, further discussions of the criteria by which to determine new models would significantly contribute to the literature on migration studies.

## 2. Civil Society Views on the Turning Points of the Past Decade of Syrian Migration

The turmoil that started in Syria on March 15, 2011, spread across the country in a short time and escalated into a civil war, marking the beginning of the instability that continues to date. On April 29, 2011, the first Syrian caravan of 252 people crossed the Turkish border, to be followed by hundreds of thousands of other people within the next few years. According to data from the Presidency of Migration Management, as of 2022, the number of Syrians under temporary protection status in Turkey exceeded 3.6 million.

Considering the significance of evaluating the important landmarks of the past decade based on the perspective and experiences of NGOs in the field of migration in Turkey, we carried out a chronological study outlining the events that had wide-ranging consequences for the public agenda.

The participating NGO representatives, drawing on their own fields of activity and distinct experiences, emphasized different events; nonetheless, they largely agreed on the fundamental points of the periodization. For instance, our interviewees who had civil society experience in Turkey since the early 1990s underlined the importance of evaluating the periods before and after 2011 in relation to each other in order to understand the present. For them, three important events marked the development of civil society in Turkey: the Cairo Population and Development Conference held in Egypt in 1994, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996, and the Izmit earthquake of August 17, 1999. By the time that earthquake happened, international migration was already on the agenda for civil society. Iraqi Kurds fleeing the regime of Saddam Hussein had sought refuge in Turkey – first a group of 50,000 in August 1988 and later a group of approximately 400,000 in March 1991. In the summer of 1989, approximately 350,000 Bulgarians of Turkish descent, referred to as “ethnic kin” [*soydaş*], migrated to Turkey from Bulgaria. The first two waves of migrants from Iraq did not become settled populations in Turkey; they returned after the crisis ended. The third wave, on the contrary, was accepted as “kin” and established institutions to engage in various activities and lobbying centered around their Bulgarian Turkish cultural identity.

As the 2000s drew near, Turkey’s position in the international mobility scene began to transform from a country of emigration (or “sending country”) to one of transit and/or immigration (or “receiving country”). In this period, the countries from which Turkey received the largest numbers of migrants were Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Somalia. While the number of migrants in Turkey was still in the tens of thousands, Turkey was functioning as a “migrant warehouse,” as one NGO representative stated in our interviews. A few NGOs providing various services in cooperation with the UNHCR, such as receiving applications and following up on the process of third-country resettlement, were established in this period. After 2005, when negotiations began for Turkey’s EU accession, Turkey’s changing position in the field of international migration was brought to the agenda as a pressing topic, leading to efforts to solve the related problems with comprehensive regulations. In light of the “Accession Partnership Documents” issued by the EU and annual progress reports, a document titled “National Action Plan on Migration and Asylum” was approved in 2005. All these steps were later concretized within the legal framework of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), adopted by Turkey in 2013. As of February 2012, there were approximately 15,000 “refugees” registered to the UNHCR Turkey Office, mainly from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Somalia.

## 2. 1. 2011-2013: Early Days of Migration

With the arrival of the first refugee caravan from Syria in April 2011, the newly emerging civil society activities in the field of international migration in Turkey entered an important process of transformation. As of April 2011, a partially circular wave of migration, limited to the groups fighting against the Assad regime and their families, began with camps set up in the border provinces. All actors following the events in Syria had firm expectations for the collapse of the regime within a few years and thought that geographical mobility would be limited. Meetings such as the Antalya Conference for Change in Syria in April 2011 and the Istanbul Meeting for Syria in May 2011 brought together representatives of anti-regime forces in Syria and international actors from the USA, the UK, France, Jordan, and the Gulf countries to discuss expectations about Syria's future upon the end of the Assad regime.

However, after 2013, expectations about the course of the war in Syria began to change; it became increasingly clear that the conflict would be prolonged. Anticipations that the regime would be ousted in a short time began to decline following the spread of the war to the cities and the retreat of the opposition, and growing numbers of internally displaced people started to migrate across international borders.

In this early period of Syrian migration, the main activities focused on humanitarian aid to meet emergency needs. At the time, international institutions had capacity problems and needed the assistance of local associations both because they did not have approval to work in Turkey and because of the exponentially growing volume of migration. International organizations, and especially the United Nations, launching their operations and opening offices in Turkey while also requiring the help of local civil society networks to carry out operations in the field of migration constituted a starting point in this sense. It was not much different for the government, which in 2012 stated that the number of migrants reaching 100,000 would be its "red line" ([26.10.2013: CNN Türk](#)). By the end of 2012, as the opposition took control of most Syrian territory, 300,000 people had crossed international borders, primarily reaching the border regions of neighboring countries. The government of Turkey, unprepared for this great wave of migration that crossed its "red line" in such a short period time, needed help from both international institutions and NGOs working in cooperation with those institutions.

In this period, while some of the NGOs established in the 1990s adapted their activities to the new context, new ones were also founded to meet the mounting needs. Humanitarian organizations in eastern Turkey, and especially in the border provinces, and Islamic charitable organizations in major western cities mobilized to meet the urgent needs of refugees. Rights-based civil society organizations, in the face of these emerging needs, rapidly began the process of institutionalization.

## 2. 2. 2013-2015: Regulation of Migration Management

2013 was an important turning point in terms of migration management in Turkey. The efforts to regulate migration, which had come to the fore with Turkey's EU accession negotiations before the onset of the Syrian migration, became official and legally binding with Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), adopted in April 2013. Within the scope of this law, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was established, commencing a new phase of institutionalization concerning the subject of "foreigners" in Turkey, which, pursuant to two laws from 1950, had thus far been under the jurisdiction of the police. An important point underlined by our interviewees was that the government pursued a participatory process that was open to both civil society and local governments during and immediately after the establishment of the DGMM. In October 2014, the Temporary Protection Regulation was adopted via Council of Ministers Decision No. 2014/6883. At that time, migration from Syria was approaching half a million,

and with the arrangements made in this period, the Syrian population in Turkey was provided access to certain services. For instance, temporary education centers (TECs) where only Syrian children could access education were established by the Circular on Education Services for Foreign Nationals. These educational institutions, opened with emphasis on their “temporariness” due to the expectation that Syrians would return home, started to be gradually closed in the 2016-2017 academic year and were finally fully closed in 2018.

While Turkey was taking these steps toward migration management, the instability in Syria was intensifying and spreading throughout the region. In June 2014, the organization called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), founded in 1999 by groups affiliated with the Iraqi al-Qaeda, expanded its operations into Syria following the Mosul attack and declared the establishment of a caliphate. Subsequently, ISIS attacks on Sinjar (Shingal) in the Autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq in August 2014 and on Kobane, which was under the control of the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Northern Syria, in September 2014 forced different ethnic and religious communities, namely Yazidis and Kurds, to migrate to border regions of Turkey such as Midyat and Suruç.

As the instability in Syria spread, the year 2015 marked another turning point. As the conflicts intensified, a larger wave of refugee movement toward Europe began, not only from Turkey but also from countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan. According to the UNHCR database, the number of refugees entering Greece in 2015 increased twenty-fold compared to the previous year, reaching 862,000 ([30.12.2015](#): UNHCR). This unprecedented mobility in 2015 soon came to be known globally as the “refugee crisis,” triggering significant transformations in migration management around the world. In June 2015, Angelina Jolie visited refugees in Mardin in the capacity of UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, while in September five people lost their lives off the coast of Bodrum when a boat carrying 14 people was capsized. The body of a 2-year-old Syrian boy named Alan washed up on the beach after that shipwreck and shook the international public as a representation of what had been happening.

In September 2015, when Russia launched a military intervention in Syria to support the Assad regime in the war against ISIS, the expectations that the conflict would end quickly also collapsed. Russia’s intervention in the Syrian civil war was one of the most important turning points of the past decade–, a point confirmed by the fact that the refugees interviewed in different areas by different institutions largely came to Turkey in 2014 and 2015. Some interviewed NGO representatives who witnessed this period stated that the Geneva Convention lost its international validity at this point.

### **2. 3. 2016-2019: Monitoring of Migration Management**

Following the period briefly outlined above, the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, which is still problematic in terms of international law, was signed in March 2016. The agreement transformed the understanding of migration built on the “temporariness” of Syrian refugees in Turkey, which, in turn, made debates on the social cohesion required by the permanent settlement of Syrians a major topic of the political agenda. On the one hand, EU funds for civil society activities expanded with this agreement; on the other hand, expectations of civil society activities were reshaped in accordance with the recent realization that the Syrian presence in Turkey could be permanent. For example, with the gradual closure of the TECs, the enrollment of Syrian children in the Turkish national education system gained importance, as did the employment of adult Syrian refugees in different sectors.

On the other hand, with unrest in the sphere of Turkey’s domestic politics, such as the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the government began to adopt a stricter attitude toward civil society. Merged with rising security concerns about migration, this more controlling approach was felt by NGOs in the field of migration. Our interviewees often stated that after 2015, the government started to regulate civil society activities in the field of migration and determined their working frameworks

through various methods. The emergence of new pro-government associations to work in migration-related areas and the redirection of EU funds to those associations were some examples given by our interviewees. There was consensus among the NGO representatives that civil society activities in the field of migration in Turkey entered a period of contraction after 2013 and operating conditions became increasingly challenging.

Contraction notwithstanding, in the same period various steps were taken to ensure Syrians' access to certain services in parallel with the acceptance that Syrian refugees could permanently remain in Turkey. For instance, migrant health centers (MHCs) were established in 2015 with the aim of providing free primary healthcare services not only to Syrian refugees with temporary protection status but also to undocumented and/or non-Syrian refugees. Growth of the number of and services offered by MHCs was made possible with funds via the Facility for Refugees in Turkey provided by the EU after the signing of the Readmission Agreement in 2016. In December 2016, a project titled "Improving the Health Status of the Syrian Population Under Temporary Protection and Related Services Provided by Turkish Authorities", also known as the SIHHAT Project, was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the EU.

In this period, the daily needs arising from Syrians' permanent settlement in Turkey became diversified, leading again to the emergence of new civil society actors. Some metropolitan municipalities hosting large refugee populations established new associations to overcome the administrative framework that limited municipalities' capacity to provide services to refugees. In addition, Syrians began establishing their own associations.

The failed coup d'état of July 15, 2016, completely changed the course of civil society in the field of migration. The government's attitude toward NGOs had already become stricter after the 2013 Gezi Park protests, and the suspicion that some international aid organizations were involved in anti-government activities intensified the securitizing approach to migration-related civil society work. For instance, a "confidential" letter sent by the Council of Higher Education of Turkey to universities in April 2015 referred to the Ministry of Interior and notified the institutions that "studies concerning Syrians under temporary protection by foreign country representatives, universities/researchers, state institutions, international organizations, and civil society organizations will not be permitted without the approval of the relevant ministries" ([25.01.2016](#): Diken). Such notifications, the legal basis of which remains unclear, created uncertainty for studies and activities in the field of migration.

The news that various actors had instrumentalized some NGOs in the coup attempt of July 15th further raised suspicions of civil society activities, posing a challenge for work in the field of migration. In this period, the Turkish registration documents of some international NGOs were not renewed, and some NGOs in the field of migration became targets of pro-government media. As stated in our interviews, faced with this new political context, many NGOs gravitated toward aid-oriented activities that did not involve advocacy.

The appointment of trustees [*kayyum*] to most of the 65 municipalities (three metropolitan municipalities, five cities, 45 districts, and 12 townships) in which the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) had won in the March 31, 2019, local elections posed another important challenge for migration NGOs in those localities. At the same time, advocacy work for refugees who sought asylum in Turkey from countries such as China, Ethiopia, Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, and Sudan on the grounds of human rights violations became more difficult as Turkey established new relations on various international axes after the failed coup d'état. For purposes of confidentiality, we do not directly report any of those cases described in our interviews. However, on a more general level, the 2020 report titled "Unspoken Territory in the Deportation of Migrants and Refugees: Victims of the Restriction Code" [[Göçmenlerin ve Mültecilerin Sınır Dışı Edilmesinde Konuşulmayan Alan: Tahdit Kodu Mağdurları Raporu](#)] by Mazlum-Der and the report titled "[Deported Foreigners and Non-Refoulement](#)" completed in 2022 by the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) may be referenced. The uncertainty that

arose during this time still continues to this day, intensifying with further steps that allow associating civil society activities with terrorism, such as the example of Law No. 7262 on the Prevention of the Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction adopted in late 2020.

In parallel to these developments, “verification” emerged as an important topic that would shape activities in the field of migration. In particular, the recording of irregular entries and confirmation of the accuracy of identification records at the individual level can be seen among such verification efforts. Information on Syrians in Turkey was updated within the scope of a major project that the DGMM initiated in 2016 with the support of UNHCR and in cooperation with the Turkish police. The project was completed in 2019.

Some of the participating NGO representatives also underlined how donor expectations changed in this period. Our interviewees stated that, as a result of the uncertainties described here, issues deemed “convenient” were favored by donors and the evaluation of project success was reduced to the number of beneficiaries, further lowering the levels of motivation in civil society activities.

In addition to these changes that restricted civil society activities in the country, Turkey’s military operations in Northern Iraq and Syria became grounds for the issue of migration to be seen as a significant security problem. The Syrian opposition’s loss of Aleppo in December 2016 further weakened expectations for the end of the war. On top of that, the Assad regime’s forces seized Daraa in June 2018, causing the displacement of 200,000 people in a single week. All of these developments made it difficult for Syrian NGOs based in Turkey to operate within Syria. Within the scope of Operation Euphrates Shield, launched by the Turkish military in Northern Syria on August 24, 2016, and continuing until March 29, 2017, “safe zones” were established in cities such as Jarablus, Azaz, Mare’, Al-Bab, Ras al-Ayn, Tal Abyad, Afrin, and Al-Rai (Çobanbey). In the fourth round of the so-called Astana Meetings on May 3-4, 2017, a memorandum was signed among the attendees, namely Turkey, Russia, and Iran, to create four “de-escalation areas” in Syria, and especially in Idlib and its neighboring provinces. Some Syrians, particularly those living in Turkish border provinces such as Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, and Şanlıurfa, returned to those regions. According to data given by the Ministry of Interior, as of September 2022, approximately 500,000 Syrians had returned ([20.10.2022](#)).

## 2. 4. From 2019 to Present

Turkey’s migration agenda became sharply politicized during the local elections of March 2019. One representative of a Syrian NGO whom we interviewed stated that the opposition’s move to bring refugees onto the agenda during the election process was a result of the social discomfort created by the way in which the government handled the “Syrian question.” According to this interviewee, the government had been tackling it as an issue for which only the ruling party was responsible. However, when the ruling party lost three metropolitan cities in the 2019 local elections, the government started to speak more harshly about refugees. For example, in July 2019, the Istanbul Governorate announced that more than one million Syrian refugees were living in Istanbul and declared its “Action Plan to Combat Irregular Migration.” Accordingly, migrants who were not registered in Istanbul were required to return to the provinces in which they were registered by August 20, 2019. In this period, images of refugees being put onto buses in Istanbul found wide coverage in the media. In the meantime, Turkey’s largest refugee camp, Suruç Çadırkent, was shut down on June 23, 2019. The fact that NGOs rarely reacted to these cases of camp closure and the return campaign in 2019 is an important point to be noted in attempting to understand the characteristics of this period.

Russia’s military operations in Idlib began in April 2019, in the wake of the local elections in Turkey, making the importance of Turkey’s migration agenda all the more acute. According to a report published by Human Rights Watch, these Russian attacks, which lasted until March 2020,

claimed the lives of more than 200 civilians. The death of 34 Turkish soldiers in a Russian airstrike on a transport convoy in Idlib on February 27, 2020, was another critical turning point. The refugee issue being intensely revived by conflicts along the eastern border of Turkey was simultaneously felt on the western border with the events at Pazarkule (Edirne) in March 2020, where tens of thousands of migrants found themselves stranded on the way to Greece. In the interviews we conducted, it was stated that what happened in Pazarkule should be seen as the first concrete manifestation of Turkey's official discourse toward the EU of "we will open the borders" and that it should be considered in relation to the Idlib attack.

In this period, the question of migration came to be regarded as a serious security issue in the context of Turkey's regional and international relations. At the same time, it was turned into a legitimacy issue for the government vis-à-vis society. NGOs working in the field of migration in Turkey confronted the COVID-19 pandemic under these already challenging conditions. With the exception of some associations operating at the neighborhood level, civil society activities were largely suspended during this period and only remote services were provided. Despite the suspension of most services, however, NGO representatives were largely in agreement that migrants and refugees in Turkey did not experience any significant problems in healthcare services, especially in accessing vaccines.

With the beginning of the normalization period, when vaccination against COVID-19 started and the pandemic restrictions were gradually lifted, Turkey's migration agenda resumed the same tensions it had seen before the pandemic. In July 2021, Tanju Özcan, the mayor of Bolu and infamous for his anti-refugee views, announced that the water bills and solid waste taxes of refugee households in the city would be raised 10-fold. On August 26, 2021, the Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*), which essentially based its political position on anti-migration and anti-refugee sentiments, was founded. In this period, a novel political discourse gained strength; it portrayed academic studies and civil society activities in the field of migration as efforts against Turkey's national interests, supported by financial resources coming from abroad. Both individuals and institutions active in this field, and especially those working to reveal human rights violations, were stigmatized as "fund-seekers" and became targets of social media campaigns ([24.07.2021](#)).

According to an announcement by the Ministry of Interior and DGMM in May 2022, 781 neighborhoods were closed to the residence of foreigners (including those with temporary protection, international protection, or residence permits), with the exception of the registration of newborns and nuclear family reunification. In July 2022, the Istanbul Migration Assessment Meeting was held by the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Migration Management with the participation of Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu. After the meeting, it was announced that the Istanbul districts that had already been closed to those holding temporary protection status, such as Avcılar, Bağcılar, Bahçelievler, Başakşehir, Esenler, Küçükçekmece, Sultangazi, and Zeytinburnu, were to be closed to all foreign residence. It is under these conditions that Turkey's migration scene approaches the upcoming elections in 2023.

### 3. Research Findings

When we analyzed the 40 interviews that we conducted within the scope of this research, we identified certain topics that we could thematically focus on and that were shared among the research participants despite their differences. In this section of the report, we present the findings that we revised in light of the views and feedback received in a discussion panel organized on November 19, 2022.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Focus 2: The State: The “Ultimate Regulator” of the Field of Migration (Dr. Lülüfer Körükmez)**

It is hardly possible to claim that civil society anywhere in the world is a state-free realm, or an area free from the regulation and intervention of the state. In fact, we could even argue that states are at the center of almost every turning point in the field of migration and asylum. How, then, does this situation manifest itself in Turkey’s field of migration and asylum?

Recently, the public sphere in general and civil society in particular have shrunk in Turkey. Individuals and institutions not adopting activities and discourses in line with those of the government and taking critical and dissenting positions have become targets of direct and blatant pressure. In addition to shrinking, civil society organizations in the field of migration and asylum also find themselves stuck in an area in which the state attempts to ensure absolute control over civil society and develop policies to that end. This is because migration is one of the main issues of both domestic and foreign policy in Turkey. On top of that, there has been a remarkable increase in the financial resources channeled to this field. Surely, one of the primary responsibilities of the state is to devise current and future policies regarding the new populations entering the country. Finally, the reasons for restrictive, repressive, and even deterrent migration policies are inevitably linked to the wider political and social context in the country.

Although it is possible to trace the process even further back, what has essentially shaped the dominant attitude toward civil society actors in the field of migration and asylum is the ongoing political environment that emerged after the 2016 coup attempt and that was shaped during and after the state of emergency that officially lasted for two years along with the apparatuses for control and oppression that were devised in this period. Despite the increased number and enhanced capacity of civil society actors in the field of migration, their activities and freedoms are restricted. In particular, large NGOs must work in compliance with the political power while planning their activities. In other words, the condition of growth for NGOs basically lies in working in conformity with the state.

First of all, we should recall the limitations faced by civil society organizations in the field of migration and asylum: the access of both formal and informal organizations to the “field,” or to the individuals and groups who are the primary subjects of their work, is restricted. It should be noted that permission for fieldwork varies according to the local contexts, being primarily dependent on the attitude of the relevant governorate. Civil actors are excluded from healthcare and educational undertakings; house visits and out-of-office activities require permission with no exceptions.

In addition, the lack of transparency in the way in which permission procedures work

<sup>2</sup> On November 19, 2022, we organized a panel titled “Civil Society in the 10th Year of Syrian Migration: Actors, Processes, and Insights” at SALT Galata, where we presented the findings of this research. Among 52 participants, there were academics and representatives of 11 different NGOs. The panel was not merely a meeting in which research findings were presented; it was also an interactive discussion where the research team received valuable feedback on the findings. In this sense, the panel can be seen as a part of the methodological framework of this study.

reinforces the belief that permits are given only to organizations that closely work with the state. In other words, civil society activities are emphatically shaped by relationships with the government.

The pressure that rights-based advocacy organizations are subjected to is well known; however, service and aid-based organizations are not free from limitations and pressures. Organizations that have never faced pressure directly, and even those that work closely and in coordination with government agencies, feel compelled to take every step carefully.

The most notable source of concern for the NGOs we conducted interviews with in this research was uncertainty. In addition to trying to operate within the framework of the government's ever-changing and at times contradictory migration policy, they face cases where routine reviews can be and are used as tools for punishment. Any NGO can face punishment by judicial means and/or can be shut down at any time; this major uncertainty is a great source of anxiety for these organizations.

Access to public resources in Turkey is not open to all NGOs equally. While NGOs deemed "acceptable" have access to handsome public funds, others are wholly excluded. In other words, as Selin Altunkaynak stated in her 2019 report for the GAR-Association for Migration Research, the state provides a participatory environment only for the NGOs that cooperate with it, while restricting the activities of other organizations. On the other hand, funding sources can be a reason for being scrutinized, penalized, or shut down. NGOs therefore also experience considerable anxiety while choosing their funding sources.

These issues are not limited to Turkish NGOs. International organizations and organizations established by Syrians face similar problems. Problems related to international NGOs' operation permits and work permits for non-citizen employees are a good case in point.

After 2016, the healthcare and educational services provided by international institutions were terminated, and some organizations exited the country because their operation permits were not renewed. Such organizations can operate in Turkey and Syria only by signing protocols with state institutions.

### **Coping Strategies**

In an environment where the state does not transparently share information and resources, monopolizes the field, and closes the public sphere to civil actors, strategies for survival and/or for remaining "civilian" become essential for NGOs and they are compelled to allocate resources to these strategies.

The fundamental survival strategy for all civil society actors, including those who work closely, in compliance, or in cooperation with the state as well as those that are critical of the state, is to keep track of and carefully interpret the government's political agenda and attitude.

Another strategy, especially for Syrian and other international organizations, is to continue their activities by signing protocols with government agencies. We observed that the number of protocols is often more or less used as a measure of the size and capacity of an organization. These organizations sign protocols with virtually every possible government agency, ranging from governorates to the State Hydraulic Works, making it possible for them to work in the field. Being recognized by the state is the primary condition for being able to operate. The importance of this recognition became clear to us during interviews when contacts, close relations, and joint activities with various politicians and bureaucrats were emphasized.

The fact that some non-Turkish organizations we conducted interviews with did not share any information beyond what was already available on their official websites may also be

interpreted as a manifestation of the pressure they feel in Turkey.

As can be deduced from statements by these NGOs, with interviewees noting that censorship and self-censorship have been ongoing issues for civil society as a whole since the July 15th coup attempt, controlling not only what is said but also how it is said is another important strategy.

Finally, NGOs, and especially critical and dissenting ones, are well aware that bureaucratic and financial reviews can turn into tools for punishment, and they feel compelled to work more cautiously than is technically legally required. For instance, while the obligatory time to retain receipts of expenses is 5 years, some NGOs extend their document retention up to 8-10 years in case older information is requested during audits.

In short, some NGOs strive to work with limited resources in the field, where they are excluded and restrained, in order to serve migrants and refugees, which is their main function, while others carry out their activities by maintaining cooperation with the state. As is to be expected in such a highly politicized and uncertain setting, civil society organizations operating in Turkey link their expectations of the future to the outcome of the 2023 elections.

### 3. 1. The Development of Civil Society in the Migration Field in Turkey

In our interviews, NGO representatives who had begun working in the field of migration before 2011 stated that the internal displacement experienced since the early 1990s has created an important migration experience in the western metropolises of Turkey. It was expressed that although the scope of certain policies was not consciously shaped by it, this experience played a facilitating role at the beginning of the migration from Syria. In addition, since nearly 40% of the Turkish economy is based on informal employment, refugees were able to participate, albeit under precarious conditions, in the informal labor market in metropolitan cities. Syrian migration coincided with a period in which the cheap labor force that arrived in the metropolitan cities in the previous decades due to internal displacement had shrunk, which arguably created a relatively welcoming attitude toward Syrians at the beginning.

We should note that before 2011, civil society in Turkey had already gone through a process of institutionalization with the cooperation with international institutions, making it possible for the latter to provide certain services in cities of entry or satellite cities to migrants who came to Turkey from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Somalia to move onward to Europe. Some interviewees stated that prior to 2011, Turkey had identified and institutionalized certain tools for response in areas such as psychosocial support and the provision of basic needs, and these tools were then redefined to be inclusive of Syrian refugees.

In contrast to public and civil society organizations that had already developed such mechanisms, municipalities had to go through a learning process for receiving Syrians and for developing services for their emerging needs. Some municipalities noticed the refugee arrivals in their localities when they saw increased demands for periodic aid delivery such as food packages handed out during Ramadan. They have since become important actors for civil society by facilitating the establishment of associations to support the provision of services in the localities for which they are responsible.

As the number of people seeking refuge in Turkey increased in the process that started in April 2011, so did the need for civil society support in different areas such as the UNHCR's registration procedures, distribution of humanitarian aid on the local level, and provision of healthcare and educational services. In this period, not only did the NGOs active in the field of migration develop their institutional capacity and diversify their services, but new local NGOs were established.

As the government began assigning foreign ID numbers to refugees, we concurrently observed

a change in attitudes gravitating toward strengthening the role of public institutions in regulating the migration field. While some participating NGO representatives welcomed the increase in the regulatory role of the state, others thought that this policy shift narrowed the realm of civil society activities.

Most of our interviewees who had witnessed the migratory process from the outset concurred that the NGOs working in the field of migration in Turkey have gained tremendous experience and built significant capacity over the last 10 years. For them, working with donors from different countries and different fields of expertise, and especially building and implementing partnerships with international organizations such as the UN and the EU, has been an important learning process for migration-related civil society in Turkey and has contributed to the development of human resources in the field.

Another important aspect of this process is the mutual learning through which actors who, by virtue of their distinct positions, tend to offer different solutions to migration-related problems have learned from each other and have contributed to the expansion of civil society. For instance, a local association established with the aim of operating in the field of culture before the growth of migration came together with a doctor who aimed at facilitating Syrians' access to healthcare services, reached out to Syrian doctors in their area, and assumed responsibility for meeting local needs. In another city, organizations operating in areas unrelated to migration came together with university professors and organized festivals where they screened Arabic and Kurdish movies with the participation of the directors, which can be seen as part of this overall learning process.

Another important example of this learning process can be observed in how NGOs working with refugees with vulnerabilities and special needs, such as LGBTI+ refugees, shifted from voluntary activities to more professional work models and became implementing partners of the UNHCR in such areas. Before civil society activities in the field of migration began to contract, some of these NGOs were able to take part in consultation meetings on migration management issues and ensure that special vulnerabilities were represented. In our interviews, these experiences were described with statements such as “we learned by experience” and “we learned by trial and error.”

It should also be noted that the government's attitude toward Syrians is one of the most determinative factors in the development of civil society activities in Turkey. Some NGO representatives stated that they were able to launch their operations in some cities after the change in the “Syrians will return home” discourse that had dominated the entire field until 2015. With the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement signed in 2016 and the evacuation of tent cities, the notion of “social cohesion” ceased to be taboo, enabling many NGOs to begin working on the subject.

When we analyze the transformations that migration NGOs have experienced since 2011 in light of our interviews, we see that there has been a spontaneous cultivation of specialization in two main realms: (a) service provision in areas such as humanitarian aid, general protection, or protection for vulnerable populations and (b) specifying field operations based on provinces or groups of provinces in which the organization will operate. This specialization has been shaped both in parallel to the decisions and attitudes of the Turkish government and in accordance with the expectations of international organizations and donors with which to cooperate on varying scales.

However, turning to work in different fields in an effort to diversify funding sources may have negative impacts on organizations. Some NGO representatives stated in our interviews that one of the most crucial steps in their institutional development in the last decade was deciding which fields they would operate in. Furthermore, some participants noted that although they had begun with humanitarian aid activities in the early stages of migration, they had to shift to advocacy work in line with the changing needs over time.

In this sense, there has arguably been a major human resources transformation for migration NGOs. On the one hand, the number of people working in the field is increasing, and on the other, workers are gaining expertise in accordance with the diversified needs. On another note, one of the

most important achievements of the past decade is that those working in the field of migration have acquired the experience to build stakeholder relationships with different actors on an international scale and to lobby various institutions. For example, some NGO representatives told us that they visited nearby countries such as Moldova, Poland, and Romania to follow the refugee wave that started after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and met with NGOs there, and that the capacity development Turkey has achieved in the last 10 years was clearly visible in this new context.

Another change that can be viewed in this light pertains to employment practices: while in the early stages of migration, knowledge of Arabic for providing services to refugees and of English for building relations with international institutions was considered sufficient, today organizations look for employees with certain specializations and, in relation to this expectation, employees tend to gain expertise in certain areas. Another development that we should mention in the same area is that field employees are able to take responsibility for "cultural translation"; thus, they can improve their ability to comprehend differences and make adjustments in accordance with those differences in the provision of services.

These findings show us that the pool of human resources employable in the field of migration has been greatly advanced and organizations are further specializing in their own fields. These NGOs' ability to establish wide networks of "volunteers" in their own fields should also be underlined as an important outreach process whereby the experience gained in civil society is spread to society at large. Furthermore, the capacity building achieved in civil society affects local governments as well as the legal sphere via bar associations in Turkey. Bar associations assumed important responsibility from the very beginning and established commissions and centers to provide the legal support needed by migration NGOs. At the same time, the experiences that NGOs gained in the field have enhanced the mutual learning process for grasping the legal dimensions of migration and asylum from different perspectives. We observed that people who started working in the field of migration within the volunteer networks of NGOs and then took part in projects in expert positions became crucial actors who have been able to offer the expertise needed by municipalities and bar associations.

On the other hand, some NGO representatives from different localities stated that "professionalization" has negatively affected both service providers and beneficiaries. For instance, professionalization leads to more distant relations with refugees, and an employee's relationship to the field remains largely limited to the official job description.

A representative of a rights-based NGO stated that some international organizations, having gained work experience in regions where state authority is either non-existent or very weak, approached both state institutions and local NGOs with practices based on those foreign experiences when they first started their operations in Turkey. Some interviewees told us that government representatives recalled such situations at times, and especially during the period of the "shrinking of the civil space" in 2016 and 2017. As highlighted above in Section 2, where we presented a chronology of the developments in the field of migration over the last 10 years, the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, led to significant contraction in civil society activities. Although the state had already begun to take steps to influence and, in some cases, strictly centralize control of the field of migration before the coup attempt, many NGO representatives stressed the July 15th coup attempt as a clear turning point for the work of their organizations.

Some of the main points of concern arising in this period can be listed as follows:

- Advocacy work was made difficult, even in legally obvious cases, or advocacy activities were practically invalidated with resort to de facto methods such as "not being able to reach the addressee."
- Audits of financial resources were framed with suspicions or implications of "financing terrorism."

- Gray areas were exploited by frequently changing regulations to facilitate arbitrary punishment.
- Obligations to sign protocols with state/public institutions were imposed, especially for activities in the field of education and for house visits.
- In spite of obligatory protocols, uncertainty in application and implementation processes and complications in the division of jurisdiction among the state institutions with which these protocols are signed have impeded NGO activities on the practical level.
- Staff turnover in state institutions regulating the field of migration, variations in the implementation of regulations in accordance with the subjective interpretations of the authorities, and increasing gray areas have made it difficult to navigate the system.
- A radical change occurred in the attitude of many state institutions that were open to communication and cooperation up until 2015.

Consequently, despite the important processes of learning and capacity building that NGOs working in the field of migration underwent in the last decade, the realm in which they can make use of those experiences and their expertise has considerably shrunk since 2016.

### 3. 2. Challenges Faced by NGOs Working in the Field of Migration

Challenges faced by NGOs in the field of migration stood out as a key issue in our interviews. It is possible to assess the statements that we recorded in these interviews within a few particularly important categories.

#### 3. 2. 1. Challenges Rooted in the Social Realm and Economic Crisis

Among the main reasons for challenges rooted in the social realm and economic crisis are the spiraling anti-migrant and anti-refugee discourses in Turkey since the 2019 local elections, efforts to associate migration processes with the economic crisis that hit the country after the pandemic, and the inability of relevant state institutions, and especially the government, to assume a clear position in the face of these challenges. This situation proves to be particularly challenging for NGOs working in the field with authorities who could be called “street-level bureaucrats,” such as elected village and neighborhood representatives [*muhtar*], school principals, Removal Center personnel, and employees of Provincial Directorates of Migration Management. With anti-migration and anti-refugee rhetoric running rampant, the suspicion arising in society against migration NGOs is another challenge that needs to be seen in this light.

For example, representatives of NGOs working with families stated that there are difficulties in the participation of Syrian children in education in general. More specific problems reported by NGO representatives included the following: Syrian parents face pressure by school administrations about “enrollment fees,” which the parents were unaware of during the enrollment period; Syrian children are exposed to bullying by their peers at school; and there are no mechanisms defined for Syrian parents to report the problems they face. It was also noted that there are difficulties caused by teachers, who are in fact key actors in handling these problems. Practices such as punishing students by having them sit next to a Syrian student and explicitly stating this as punishment in the classroom or complaining about Syrian students in parents’ communication groups make the problems in the field of education more acute.

On the other hand, some NGO representatives reported that it is becoming harder to organize events that will bring together Syrian refugees and citizens and that during aid delivery activities in the field they more frequently encounter public reactions such as “Why doesn’t the state help us, why is this aid only for Syrians?”.

#### 3. 2. 2. Challenges Arising from Actors Regulating Migration Governance

Other frequently described challenges in our interviews were those arising from complications in the regulation of the migration field. For instance, one particular difficulty here pertains to the fact that Turkey-based NGOs are subjected to different regulations than international ones, especially regarding how funds are to be used, as well as employment conditions such as the “obligation to employ graduates of social work departments.” Other main challenges arising from public institutions can be listed as follows: communication problems and complications in jurisdiction among the institutions responsible for migration management; the lack of specialized personnel in public institutions; staff shortages in Provincial Directorates of Migration Management; and gray areas arising due to frequent turnover among public employees and changes in the application of legal regulations.

Some NGO representatives stated that certain intermediary actors have appeared in the gray areas formed as a consequence of the reasons mentioned above. For instance, in some cases where refugees cannot obtain a document despite following the official steps, these intermediaries enter the picture to obtain the document in return for a commission, but then the verification and confirmation of the document is tried to be done through NGOs. On the other hand, in parallel to the politicization of the migration agenda in Turkey, the government has taken a stricter stance in many ways, which is also reflected in activities in the field. To give an example, in the event that the breadwinner of a household is deported, the remaining members of the family are forced to sign a “voluntary return paper” while the state imposes arbitrary barriers on the family’s access to the legal support they may need.

The NGO representatives we interviewed stated that for all the reasons briefly outlined above, civil society actors have to navigate contradictory practices that vary from province to province. Due to lack of awareness in the field of migration, there are difficulties in accessing services in many cases. For example, even though the right to an interpreter is guaranteed to refugees, institutions are not obliged to employ interpreters. That being the case, NGOs have to cover the expenses of these services from their own budgets, even in cases where they face hostile attitudes from state institutions.

Another challenge pertains to accessing data and reliable data production. This issue, crucial for actors in the field of migration, also poses a challenge for NGO activities. Some NGO representatives reported that they face difficulties in accessing data in the field of migration and that the processes of data production, such as research design and analysis of findings, are not open to civil society participation.

It must also be noted that the challenges NGOs face are not only caused by the government, which is but one actor regulating the field of migration. Some difficulties stem from the fact that international donors, as the most important source of financial support for national NGOs in Turkey, do not have sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced personnel to work on the local level in Turkey. As reported by our interviewees, NGOs have a hard time explaining to international donors that the distribution of aid to only Syrians has sparked adverse reactions in some localities, and NGO employees have to justify themselves repeatedly when specifying the scope and content of projects or activities. A widespread tendency to review the success of projects by considering only the number of beneficiaries is also seen, and in some cases, this expectation leads to difficulties for civil society organizations in obtaining the desired project results. Some interviewees also noted that international organizations attract the personnel trained in NGOs in Turkey, which may bring about problems regarding the sustainability of local work.

### 3. 2. 3. Challenges Stemming from Political Turbulence

During the 2019 local elections, Turkey’s migration and asylum agenda became increasingly politicized, which brought about material repercussions in both domestic and international politics. These consequences were felt particularly strongly in the events in Pazarkule (Edirne) in March 2020

and Altındağ (Ankara) in August 2021. These transformations and their consequences have posed major challenges for NGO representatives. Moreover, in February 2022, the Ministry of Interior declared a “deconcentration” policy. Accordingly, regions where the Syrian population exceeded 25% of inhabitants were closed to registration for residence by foreigners. This policy, requiring NGOs to monitor whether a beneficiary is registered in the province in which they are located, led to concerns about related problems that might arise.

There are other political issues complicating the work of migration NGOs. First of all, the government publicizes how much aid it provides to Syrian refugees as part of its political program without disclosing that the aid actually originates from external sources, and especially the EU. Secondly, different opposition groups choose to frame Syrians in Turkey as a community under the absolute control of the ruling party, for which it is alleged that Syrians will automatically vote in the event of naturalization. All of these points render the work of migration NGOs more complicated. As was clearly seen, for example, in the efforts to close the Tarlabası Community Center ([13.04.2022: STGM](#)), the more the government’s oppressive control over civil society increases, the more NGOs refrain from expressing their views. NGO representatives stated that although they adopt a cautious attitude and inevitably resort to self-censorship as needed, they may still be targeted on social media.

The ways in which refugee-related incidents are portrayed on social media lay the foundation for the government’s response, and the summary deportations that may follow, regardless of legality, have become one of the most important challenges, especially for rights-based NGOs. For instance, when an NGO intervenes to take precautionary orders against deportations, it may be perceived as an anti-state activity by the personnel of the relevant institution.

#### 3. 2. 4. Challenges Due to the Global COVID-19 Pandemic

All of the NGOs we interviewed, except for those with a community center or soup kitchen in a certain neighborhood, stated that they had to either suspend their field services or switch to online services during the pandemic. It seems that the lockdowns and quarantining during the pandemic intensified the shrinking of civil society. For instance, access to Removal Centers, which had already been quite difficult, became virtually impossible on the grounds of pandemic measures. That said, there is widely shared agreement that Turkey has been successful in providing refugees with access to healthcare services and vaccination throughout the course of the pandemic. .

#### 3. 2. 5. NGOs and the Hierarchy of Deservingness Based on Ethnicity and Legal Status

The hierarchization of migrant communities, which is thought to be emerging spontaneously, was also underlined as a specific difficulty that NGOs face. Undoubtedly, this hierarchy is influenced by the legal status granted to migrants and their conditions of stay in Turkey, the government’s foreign policy choices, and the priorities of international donors. For instance, it was reported by interviewees that there are obstacles in reaching out to migrants from Afghanistan due to characteristics of the community itself, and for this reason, they are much less visible than Syrians in NGO activities. Migrants from North and West African countries or communities with vulnerabilities are in similar situations.

The experiences of the representatives of Syrian NGOs are particularly significant in grasping the past decade as well as the current situation. In interviews, they pointed to all of the above-mentioned problems stemming from the contraction of the civil sphere in Turkey and the political repositioning of the migration agenda in Turkey. More specific problems that can be added to that general framework are as follows:

- Syrian NGOs face increasing difficulties in obtaining permits to operate in Turkey.
- They are approached with suspicion and hindered from documenting human rights violations in Syria.
- The state began to replace civil society in providing humanitarian aid for Syria.

- The state demands that the delivery of food aid to Syria be organized through the Turkish Red Crescent even though the resources are provided by international institutions or individuals.
- All the work that Syrian NGOs carry out in Turkey must be based upon protocols signed with state institutions; however, they face various difficulties in the process of signing those protocols.
- When Syrian NGOs organize an activity, the speaker or trainer is expected to be a Turkish citizen.
- Syrian NGOs go through increasingly strict auditing and inspection processes for their work.
- Syrian NGOs are obliged to carry out all transfers of financial resources to Syria via the national postal service of Turkey, and they face charges for transactions done prior to 2018, when the relevant law was adopted.
- When Syrian NGOs utilize foreign funding sources, they are accused of engaging in intelligence activities for other countries.
- Syrian NGOs have started to be confronted with specific obstacles in their work for women in Syria.

Syrian NGO representatives also stated that due to these difficulties, some Syrian NGOs have moved their headquarters to other countries and some are considering closing their offices in Turkey.

### **Focus 3: Syrian Civil Society Organizations (Dr. Didem Daniş)**

Although they are not very visible in civil society, there are numerous NGOs established by Syrians in Turkey. Cross-border humanitarian aid and support offered to populations that remained in Syria constitute the main projects of these organizations, which are mostly located in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Istanbul. These organizations, which seek to develop solutions to poverty, healthcare needs, and educational problems faced by Syrians who were displaced within Syria due to the conflicts, also carry out aid activities geared toward the needs of Syrian refugees living in Turkey, albeit to a lesser extent, and provide them with materials such as food, clothing, and school supplies.

Hundreds of Syrians working in these NGOs, some of which have quite large capacities, have become highly professional and have acquired the skills demanded by international donors thanks to the professional training they have received and their experiences in these NGOs. Syrian NGOs most often engage in cross-border projects but have also gradually begun to articulate the needs of refugees in Turkey and to voice, most importantly, the demand for “a migration policy that is more stable and not implicated in contemporary politics.” Additionally, some Syrian NGOs carry out work that addresses the needs of not only Syrian people under temporary protection in Turkey but also the needs of people from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries who have applied for international protection status. These NGOs have opened branches in locations such as Sakarya and Elazığ where the population is relatively less dense.

#### **Landmarks in the History of Syrian NGOs**

Syrian NGOs began to be established with the intention of addressing humanitarian needs in regions of Syria in which the regime started to lose control beginning in 2012. Given that the oppressive regime had been in power for many years, civil society in Syria was rather weak before 2011. Some of these early organizations were founded by people who had been living outside Syria for many years to help the Syrian opposition, which was hit hard in the conflict with the Assad regime’s forces, and donations sent by the Syrian diaspora constituted their first revenues. Other early associations were grounded in neighborhood collectives that began being organized during the uprisings in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo.

Some of these organizations moved to Turkey with the great migration wave that accelerated

with the intensification of the conflict in Syria after 2012-2013. Three main factors played a role in the selection of Turkey and not other neighboring countries: (1) Turkey's permission for border crossings when other countries had closed their borders; (2) the fact that civil society legislation allowed foreigners with residence permits to establish organizations in Turkey; and (3) the Turkish government's supportive attitude toward the Syrian opposition.

The year of 2014, when the UN decided to carry out cross-border aid operations, was a critical landmark for these associations organizing aid and support activities for people who remained in Syria and were affected by the conflict. The UN decided to provide humanitarian aid funds to NGOs operating in regions where the Assad regime had lost control; the UN's Syria office was to be divided into the four sections of Damascus, Gaziantep, Iraq, and Jordan and aid was to be distributed via those centers. Thus, cross-border aid operations gained momentum and the number of Syrian associations in Turkey increased.

Another turning point for Turkey-based Syrian humanitarian organizations that sided with the opposition against Assad was Russia's military intervention in support of Assad in September 2015. The fact that some cities, and especially Aleppo, came back under the Assad regime's rule narrowed the scope and field of the activities of these organizations. After 2015-2016, some small independent organizations closed their operations in Syria and focused on projects addressing the needs of refugees living in Turkey. Other organizations continued their Syrian aid efforts in regions such as Idlib, where displaced people within the country live and opposition forces are in control.

Yet another important turning point was when Turkey seized control of cities such as Azaz, Jarablus, Al-Bab, and Afrin in Northern Syria as a result of a series of military operations carried out on Syrian territory. The first of these military operations was held in August 2016. Thus, Syrian NGOs, in order to conduct operations in Syrian territories controlled by Turkey, began signing protocols with the Turkish authorities.

Today, the organizations whose headquarters are mostly located in Gaziantep or Istanbul and which carry out humanitarian aid activities in Syria have formed associations such as Minbar Al-Sham, Alliance, and the Syrian Associations Platform. These are collectives established by organizations that share similar political views. For example, the International Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, which was established in 2022, includes 45 Syrian organizations founded by Syrians. While most of these organizations are based in Istanbul, there are also some founded in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Şanlıurfa. This federation, which recently issued a press statement addressing negative sentiments toward Syrian refugees in Turkey, demands that the presence of Syrians not be politicized, not be used for election propaganda, and be addressed from the perspective of human rights ([21.06.2022](#): INDYTURK).

One of the most critical issues for Syrian organizations in the upcoming period will be the UN decision on the management of cross-border aid funds. At the UN General Assembly meeting held in July 2022, it was decided that the Bab al-Hawa border crossing used for aid delivery would be closed in response to pressure from Russia. Thus, it is expected that cross-border humanitarian aid activities carried out via Turkey will end in January 2023 and those aid funds will be directly given to the Syrian administration instead ([11.07.2022](#): BIANET). This is a very important decision for NGOs working in Syria and for those working in Turkey, as well. As some Syrian NGO representatives said during our interviews, this decision will lead to a decrease of approximately 80% in their funds and will narrow down their fields of operation.

To summarize the development of Syrian NGOs in Turkey, with the arrival of large sums of funds from international donors in 2014 and 2015, aid activities for both refugees and internally displaced people in Syria increased rapidly. The humanitarian aid field began to

be centralized as of 2016 and 2017, following the coup attempt of July 15th, and with the contraction of civil society in Turkey, Syrian NGOs had to withdraw from activities pertaining to education and health and leave those areas in the hands of Turkish state institutions.

### **Problems Encountered**

As is the case for other civil society actors, the main problems that Syrian NGOs face stem from uncertainty about procedures, the addressees of requests in the field, and the arbitrary and volatile practices encountered in money transfers and bureaucratic procedures pertaining to cross-border aid work. Another important problem is related to financial resources. Currently, most Syrian NGOs carry out their work with funds from UN agencies and Western states. Additional resources are secured via donations made by the Syrian diaspora. Some funds are also provided by Muslim countries such as Qatar, Kuwait, and Malaysia. The fact that many of these flows of cross-border aid funds will be interrupted by the aforementioned UN decision as of 2023 and the changes in the interest of donors with the Ukraine crisis pose serious problems in terms of resources, particularly for Syrian NGOs that work on a project basis and do not have independent resources.

Close relations with Turkish government institutions such as ministries, governors, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), and the Red Crescent play crucial roles in the activities of Syrian NGOs. While NGOs with mindsets closer to that of the government have expressed satisfaction with this cooperation, those that are more distant from the government report having problems in terms of legislation as well as the permits and support that are necessary for carrying out field work. However, this year, almost all Syrian NGOs complained about similar problems, and everyone was worried about signing new protocols and obtaining renewals of the work permits of Syrian NGO workers in particular. Our interviewees described the difficulties of carrying out work in an opaque and volatile system where encountered problems can only be overcome through personal connections.

### **Conclusion**

The uncertainty described by Syrian civil society actors regarding the next 10 years, the rising anti-refugee sentiments in the country, and worries about not being able to see the end of the road due to hardening political discourse powerfully reflect the most crucial issues pertaining to the state, civil society, and refugees in Turkey today. It is necessary to develop cooperation between Syrian and Turkish NGOs in the upcoming period for the development of the civil sphere focusing on refugees.

## **3. 3. Cooperation in the Field**

One important topic that was emphasized in the interviews we conducted was the cooperation of NGOs operating in the field of migration with different actors. Here, though, we need to make a distinction between the official collaborations that NGOs must maintain to be able to carry out their work and the spontaneous collaborations among NGOs working in the same field or in the same locality to meet certain needs in the process of service provision.

Within the category of compulsory collaborations, we can list the protocols that NGOs must sign with ministries, directorates, AFAD, or the Turkish Red Crescent at national, provincial, or local levels to be able to carry out their activities. Even in cases where such protocols are not strictly required, relationships and personal acquaintances with institutions such as the relevant directorates or district governorates are still important for NGOs to be able to operate in the face of uncertainties stemming from changes in laws or regulations or the problems that may arise in school enrollment.

In some cases, an NGO that has developed good relations with local public authorities can facilitate another NGO's activities in the same locality.

Turkey-based Syrian NGOs working within the borders of Syria, on the other hand, can carry out their activities in the Syrian regions under Turkey's control only after signing protocols with the public institutions of the neighboring province in Turkey. For instance, to distribute aid or organize training in Al-Bab, an NGO must have signed a protocol with the Gaziantep Provincial Directorate of National Education and notify the Gaziantep Governorship. Syrian NGOs are also expected to work closely with institutions such as the Humanitarian Relief Foundation of Turkey, AFAD, or the Turkish Red Crescent. The NGO representatives we interviewed stated that the Turkish government frames this expectation as a security measure to prevent aid from "falling into the wrong hands."

In our interviews, we assumed that NGOs working in the field of migration in Turkey differ not only in terms of their activities but also regarding their worldviews or political positions, which were referred to using concepts such as "secular," "conservative," "faith-based," "religious," and "opposing/critical." These differences are important in building relations with the government, government institutions, or municipalities governed by different political parties. However, they do not pose particular problems when it comes to relations between NGOs.

Another point underlined in relation to cooperation pertained to municipalities, as municipalities that host large numbers of refugees have started playing roles in the field of civil society by establishing associations to overcome the difficulties posed by regulations that limit the provision of services to non-citizens. In addition to border provinces such as Gaziantep, Hatay, and Şanlıurfa, district-level municipalities in Istanbul such as Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli, Şişli, and Zeytinburnu were mentioned in this regard. Some interviewees also participated in city councils in their own localities in an effort to establish cooperation on migration for the NGOs that they represented.

However, more civil society cooperation along various axes is still needed. NGOs working in the same field seem to have developed an almost organic style of cooperation for providing services in different locales. For instance, when an NGO needs help with something in a locality where it does not operate, it may pursue case-based collaboration with another NGO in that locale. In a similar vein, rights-based refugee associations work in cooperation with the bar associations in their provinces of operation. Organizations such as the Platform for Solidarity with Refugees in Izmir or the Istanbul Child Protection Group were mentioned in this context. Another method of cooperation that we encountered was establishing a new association with representatives from different NGOs in order to carry out more comprehensive work in some localities. We also observed in relation to cooperation between NGOs that events such as World Refugee Day or International Women's Day are instrumental in strengthening inter-communal relations. However, representatives active in the field stated that cooperation with NGOs that do not work in the field of migration has been more difficult since 2016 with the shrinking of the civil sphere.

In addition to what we have discussed so far, NGO relations with international institutions and donors can be categorized in terms of cooperation. One example given in an interview is particularly enlightening in this regard. A new association established by experienced civil society actors began specializing on a particular migrant group in line with the needs of the international institution from which they received their initial funding, even though their purpose of establishment was unrelated to migration. The association, despite not setting its goals in this direction, became institutionalized in serving this migrant community and started working in other provinces neighboring the province in which its headquarters were based. In this process, it evolved into an institution from which other NGOs can request assistance regarding this particular migrant community. The organization's specialization thus originated from the demands of its funders but led to a broader repertoire of cooperation as the organization began entering partnerships with many different NGOs.

### 3. 4. Funding Regime

The above example is also key in understanding the importance of funding sources in migration NGOs' cooperation with international institutions. In our interviews, we observed the existence of an institutionalized funding regime that is crucial for the functioning of civil society activities in the field of migration in Turkey. The institutions referred to in the interviews as main sources of funding were as follows: (1) international organizations such as the United Nations, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, and their affiliates; (2) the European Union; (3) international NGOs of varying scales; (4) institutions based in EU Member States such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, or Sweden; (5) other states that can be considered as belonging to the Western bloc, such as the USA, Canada, and Japan; (6) Gulf countries such as Qatar and Kuwait; and (7) Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Of course, we cannot possibly assume that all NGOs have equal access to these resources. Characteristics such as the field and location of activity, previous experiences of collaboration, and organizational structure and capacity are determining factors in the ability to access funds. At the same time, there are also NGOs that, on principle, refuse to apply for certain funds or any funds at all.

In this respect, we need to consider multiple layers that determine one another in their totality to be able to understand this funding regime. First of all, a very large refugee population with urgent needs arrived in Turkey in a very short time, creating a need for massive human resources to provide different services in different regions. Civil society activities in the field of migration in Turkey were, first and foremost, shaped by those urgent needs. Since the funds funneled to the field of migration were large and the sources were diverse, many NGOs working in non-migration fields gravitated toward migration, and new NGOs, some independent and some in line with the needs of local governments, were established. Notwithstanding all the ongoing problems, the Syrian community has achieved a considerably settled status in the past 10 years and many services have started to be provided by public institutions.

It should be noted that as migration-related civil society organizations reached a saturation point, NGOs found themselves in a setting in which organizations are in competition for accessing resources, expectations for the sustainability of funds are low, and organizations are more hesitant to grow or expand their services. The interviewees also frequently mentioned negative trends such as the increasingly entrenched expectation that success in accessing funds will be measured solely by the number of beneficiaries and experienced NGOs being hindered from participating in the framework of project calls.

For instance, it is becoming more difficult for NGOs to find funds for long-term projects that aim to enhance human resources and are based on intensive follow-up work, such as language learning, which will be crucial for social cohesion. As reported by our interviewees, within the current funding regime, it is not possible to support the language education of personnel to provide psychosocial support and thus enhance organizational human resources and build capacity or to support personnel who do speak the desired language but require training to provide specialized services. In essence, donors expect these NGOs to work on one-year project cycles, which poses huge limitations for long-term activities. In the face of these limitations, some NGOs have been able to diversify their funding sources by improving their administrative structures and range of services.

The ability to access EU funds requires not only a high level of institutionalization but also defining and opening new positions within the organization, which, in turn, brings with it problems such as being compelled to spend the received funds on budget items other than the planned civil society activities. NGO representatives also emphasized that, in order to access different funding sources, their organizations had to make decisions about organizational growth in the face of significant uncertainties. One NGO representative told us that the number of paid employees varied between 7 and 30 depending on the project activities being pursued at any given time, a statement revealing that the project-based employment regime is another obstacle for the development of human resources.

Considering these issues addressed in our interviews, we can conclude that NGOs are currently dependent on external funds for sustaining their work. In addition, some NGO representatives stated that they saw the transparency they expected in neither the calls for grant applications nor the application evaluations. Furthermore, being based in a metropolitan area facilitates the lobbying of donors and, hence, the ability to access certain large funding sources, which, in effect, produces a geographical inequality in access to funds.

NGOs that, on principle, do not turn down any applications tend to find alternative solutions whenever their resources fall short due to the funding regime. In such cases, they collaborate with other NGOs working in the field of migration and any other actors they can mobilize, such as bar associations. NGOs can also collaborate with each other in applying for certain funds. NGOs that are not located in metropolises or that work on a neighborhood scale can serve as intermediaries in the distribution of donations that come from private donors in periods such as the month of Ramadan. Although these donations do not directly support the NGOs, they indirectly contribute to the NGOs' relations with the communities they serve. All of these examples show that cooperation among NGOs makes it possible to carry out various activities in the field of migration, even in the absence of sources of funding.

### 3. 5. What Should Be Done?

The final topic referred to in most interviews centered around the question of what should be done. We have seen, first and foremost, that a more realistic account of Turkey's migration agenda via inter-institutional cooperation would be an important and positive change for all work conducted in this field. Establishing an institution that would be responsible for the migration field in Turkey and would also be removed from any political positions could be an important first step in ensuring such cooperation. Some NGO representatives asserted that this institution should exist at the ministerial level. Upon attaining ministerial representation, this institution should first of all abandon the discourses of "they will return home" and endeavor to provide accurate information to the public as to why Syrians will inevitably stay in Turkey permanently and what needs to be done in this context.

It is of course inevitable that different actors will collaborate for the institutionalization of this endeavor. If achieved, it would become possible for civil society organizations, which recently experienced a process of contraction, to be empowered and make better use of the experiences they have accumulated in the past decade in the field. On the other hand, NGO representatives, pointing to the current national context, stated that they did not expect significant changes soon. In the current situation, it seems highly unlikely that the institutionalization initiative described here will begin in the foreseeable future, given the dominant media approach of spreading one-sided and misleading information about migration, the fact that Syrians still lack the means to represent themselves, and the increasing difficulty in expressing opinions that challenge the "they will return" discourse, even in social media circles, the realm to which civil society organizations are largely confined at present.

Offering a future to the younger generations who came to Turkey at young ages or were born there will stand out as another important topic in the future. Syrian youth in Turkey face uncertainties as to what they will do after graduating from high school, whether they will be able to continue their education at the university level, and how they will access the labor market without having citizenship, all of which are significant problems. These uncertainties constitute major obstacles for younger generations trying to envision a future in Turkey. In our interviews, it was stated that the first step to be taken to overcome this obstacle is to abandon the discourse of temporariness and provide spaces in which permanent settlement can be publicly discussed. According to our interviewees, to effectuate such a change, mechanisms that meet urgent needs, which are of vital importance in the early stages of migration, should be replaced with sustainable programs that strengthen the vision of a permanent stay. They further emphasized that the social cohesion required by permanent settlement in Turkey would be achieved not with an aid-dependent community but with a community that could

stand on its own feet, fully equipped for independent lives. That being said, in discussing these steps, other social segments that struggle with poverty in Turkey should also be taken into consideration.

To ensure such a holistic approach, all relevant actors need to maintain effective communication. However, our interviews showed that while these communication channels were relatively healthy up to a certain point in the last 10 years, a limited number of actors have been able to stay in touch with state institutions, especially after the civil society realm began shrinking in 2016. The role of public institutions will be determinative in the establishment of platforms where different actors can maintain regular communication at different levels. Communication networks allowing all civil society actors working in the field of migration to be informed about each other and share their experiences and knowledge would be particularly useful for establishing contact between Syrian and Turkish NGOs. The participating NGO representatives stated that if these two steps are taken, it would become possible to formulate realistic policy proposals based on experiences gained in the last decade. For instance, one NGO representative described gaining significant experience during a training session organized for district-level public officials and said that it would be valuable to disseminate that training model to different localities, but the organization could not implement such a plan on its own. Another NGO representative talked about an agricultural cooperative that was successful on a local scale, pointing to similar difficulties in offering that experience as a model and implementing it in other contexts.

In the light of our findings, we saw that the way the government handles civil society activities in the field of migration is restrained in an increasingly securitizing framework. Also, the funding regime does not allow for long-term project cycles through which implementation outcomes can be monitored in a healthy way. These are two of the main interconnected obstacles before the development of experience-based sustainable models by the NGOs. Therefore, the answer given to the question of what should be done ultimately depends on transformations in these two main areas.

The need for a healthy and reliable structure for the production of information in the field of migration is another issue that must be addressed in the context of what should be done, because answers to this question in this area might facilitate the work being carried out by NGOs. To that end, it is necessary to establish and support institutions that will produce knowledge beyond the limitations of the securitizing framework of the state and the aims of the funding regime. Although research centers working in the field of migration have been established in many universities and many students have written theses on migration studies, we observed that in some cases the research done in this field was not followed up for further work and/or the connection between NGOs and the knowledge produced in universities remains weak.

We want to emphasize that alongside all the issues mentioned in this report, there are still many steps to be taken to address the lack of actors representing the Syrian people. Such participation, whether in city councils or in knowledge production in the field of migration, will strengthen the efforts to produce solution-oriented policies. Two important sets of experience should be considered while taking the necessary steps to achieve this end. First, the migration organizations that were institutionalized over the course of labor migration from Turkey to Europe beginning in the 1960s would be able to offer valuable insight. Secondly, it would be beneficial to consider the experiences of other NGOs in countries such as Jordan and Greece, which have experienced migration from Syria in roughly the same period as Turkey.

When we look at the challenges described in Section 3B of this report, it is clear that a new governance model is required and could be run as a pilot program in specified localities first. A platform model providing the space to develop common ideas and pursue cooperation in practice with the participation of various actors such as relevant public institutions, universities, and community representatives is certainly not a novel idea, but it is a must for ensuring a sustainable and meaningful model that is not overly dependent on external funds. Turkey has accumulated immense experience in this field in the past 10 challenging years, and it is now necessary to think about new governance models to carry this process forward into the next 10 years.

## 4. In Lieu of a Conclusion: Expectations for the Next 10 Years

In response to our general question about how the migration agenda in Turkey might be shaped in the next 10 years, our interviewees generally agreed that we are standing at an important crossroads due to national, regional, and global developments. They further expressed worries stemming from deep uncertainties concerning the future.

To begin with, when we conducted these interviews, the war between Ukraine and Russia, which had begun in February 2022, was still continuing. Concerns were expressed about how the representation of the refugees who migrated from Ukraine to other European countries – mainly those on the western border – as “one of us” in the European media might buttress social and political resistance to the acceptance of other refugees, and particularly to Syrians. Interviewees stated that if the war does not come to an end soon, EU funds might largely shift to this new group of refugees, deemed to be “one of us” by Europe, which would create great uncertainty for NGOs working in the field of migration in Turkey. During the interviews, we also witnessed a broad consensus that the three years of global pandemic will continue shaping the efforts of civil society organizations in the field of migration in Turkey for the next 10 years.

The facts that the situation in Syria has come to a stalemate, that the US and Russia are keeping the tension in the region alive to periodically use it against each other, and that Turkey is in control of large areas in Northern Iraq and Syria all also contribute to the uncertainty about how the migration agenda might evolve over the next 10 years. Turkey’s role as the protector of a significant number of internally displaced populations in Northern Syria and its vision of restructuring that region as a buffer zone for “returns” indicate that the migration agenda will be seen as a security issue not only by the public but also at the level of regional policies. That said, the global strengthening of right-wing populist parties and the anti-migration sentiments that this new political wave nourishes may have unpredictable consequences – like the Readmission Agreement – with regards to Turkey’s relations with the EU. It is inevitable that the climate crisis, which makes itself felt strongly as another determining factor in all these issues, will also be added to the list of issues shaping the migration agenda for the next 10 years.

Another issue described by the participating NGO representatives concerned the political polarization of the migration agenda in Turkey and the anti-refugee sentiments that have been on the rise since the 2019 municipal elections, which have already culminated in violent attacks in the western part of the country. They told us that some refugee families had already moved to other locations due to the fear of such incidents. In an environment in which civil society work carried out in the field of migration has been gradually shrinking since 2016, such incidents of violence would negatively affect the field in the next 10 years. This situation will have consequences on both national and international levels. It is also quite possible that, compared to the first generation, people who came to Turkey at young ages or were born there may react differently to the discrimination they experience, and, in this case, the tensions between the communities would run the risk of becoming permanent. The migrants who have been part of the Syrian diaspora that has been growing since the 1970s, having formed diasporic groups in different counties, have developed strong transnational connections over the past 10 years. Incidents of violence emerging in Turkey can easily be brought to the international agenda through these networks of relations.

Representatives of the NGOs carrying out field activities at the local level pointed out that it was known for years that many refugees’ stay in Turkey would be permanent and that belated work addressing the reality of this permanent stay had finally begun to be carried out, especially after the Readmission Agreement signed between the EU and Turkey in 2016. They further added that

the government supports these efforts. In this context, the next 10 years constitute an important threshold, especially for the attainment of citizenship. Demands in this direction will rightfully increase in the upcoming period, but if the opposition continues to embrace the anti-refugee politics that it has actively pursued since the 2019 municipal elections, citizenship will be one of the most controversial issues occupying the migration agenda over the next 10 years. To resolve such tensions, it will be important to establish healthy communication and supportive relations between communities. For this reason, in the next 10 years, we can expect that civil society activities in the field of migration will focus on cultural activities geared toward inter-communal dialogue, participation in education, representation in traditional and social media, and advocacy.

However, if the opposition continues to use anti-migration politics as a trump card against the government and if this sentiment has political consequences in the 2023 elections, there is a strong possibility that the government will back down from its support for the permanent stay of refugees. The rapid implementation of deportation procedures in certain cases that found coverage on social media and the interventions by civil society organizations against violations of rights in certain locations such as Removal Centers confirm the likelihood of this possibility. If the central government alters its stance, it will be difficult for local governments, which often support NGOs working in the field of migration, to continue sustaining this rather narrowed field, which they have protected to date despite public reactions. In recent years, the fact that NGOs working in the field of migration in Turkey have been labeled as “fund seekers” and the occasional targeting of actors working in this field can be considered as concrete reflections of the worries pertaining to this area today. Some of the NGO representatives we interviewed pointed at the increasing hostility toward migrants in Britain after the country’s EU membership was ended with the Brexit Referendum in 2016 and emphasized that the utilization of the migration agenda for purposes of domestic conflict does not lead to positive results in any case.

Most of the NGO representatives we interviewed mentioned the labor migration from Turkey to Europe, which began in the late 1960s, and stated that integration could be seen as a process that necessitates certain stages and extends over time. In this process in Turkey, one important indicator will be whether Syrians are forced to live in closed communities within their own neighborhoods or are an accepted community living together and forming social relationships with their neighbors. Furthermore, it is important to note that one NGO representative stated that the increasing emigration of Turkish citizens with certain professional qualifications, especially medical doctors and particularly to Europe, could constitute an enormous loss of human resources that might contribute to the process of refugee integration in Turkey. In this context, the developments in Turkey’s migration agenda over the next 10 years cannot be discussed independently of the other events taking place in the country.

Despite these negative predictions, in our interviews, the experiences of Syrian students participating in higher education and the experiences of agricultural cooperatives in certain localities were mentioned as valuable examples for establishing healthy inter-communal relations and cooperation. Thanks to such experiences, it could be expected that, in the next 10 years, Syrian refugees might produce their own representatives, these people might be accepted by society, and local and refugee communities might come together around common issues within the framework of various legally accepted principles.

## 5. References 1: Academic Studies on the Subject

Without attempting to present the whole body of literature here, the following academic studies on the role of civil society in the context of migration from Syria were selected for review while aiming for diversity in terms of subject and country/region.

Year	Title	Country/region
2015	Mitri, D. (2014). Challenges of aid coordination in a complex crisis: An overview of funding policies and conditions regarding aid provision to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. <i>Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support</i> .	Lebanon
2015	Ostrand, N. (2015). The Syrian refugee crisis: A comparison of responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. <i>Journal on Migration and Human Security</i> , 3(3), 255-279.	Germany
2016	Türk, G. D. (2016). Türkiye’de Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik sivil toplum kuruluşlarının faaliyetlerine ilişkin bir değerlendirme. <i>Marmara İletişim Dergisi</i> , 25, 145-157.	Turkey
2016	Apak, H. (2016). Uluslararası Göç ve Sivil Toplum: Suriyeli Göçmen STK’lar, <i>Sosyal Bilimler Genç Akademisyenler Sempozyumu 1 Bildiriler Kitabı</i> , 8-9 Mayıs 2016, Mardin, 274-282.	Turkey
2016	Yiğitbaşı, K. G. (2016). Medya ve mültecileri sivil toplum üzerinden okumak: Mülteci-Der örneği. <i>Marmara İletişim Dergisi</i> , 25, 53-76.	Turkey
2016	Stevens, M. R. (2016). The collapse of social networks among Syrian refugees in urban Jordan. <i>Contemporary Levant</i> , 1(1), 51-63.	Jordan
2016	Tobin, S., & Campbell, M. O. (2016). NGO governance and Syrian refugee ‘subjects’ in Jordan. <i>Middle East Report</i> , 278.	Jordan
2016	Welander, M. (2016). <i>Civil society in exile, reconciliation and the future of Syria: The role of the emerging Syrian civil society in Lebanon</i> [Doctoral dissertation]. Saint Joseph University, Beirut.	Lebanon
2016	Aksaz, E., & Pérouse, J. F. (2016). Guests and aliens: Re-configuring new mobilities in the Eastern Mediterranean after 2011–With a special focus on Syrian refugees. IFEA: Istanbul.	Global
2016	Yakobi-Shvili, M. (2016). Effects of conflict zones on two western healthcare systems: Italy and Israel. <i>The Columbia University Journal of Global Health</i> , 6(1), 3-9.	Italy and Israel
2016	Kousoulis, A. A., Ioakeim-Ioannidou, M., & Economopoulos, K. P. (2016). Access to health for refugees in Greece: Lessons in inequalities. <i>International journal for equity in health</i> , 15(1), 1-3.	Greece
2016	Flanigan, S. T., & Abdel-Samad, M. (2016). Syrian diasporans as transnational civil society actors: Perspectives from a network for refugee assistance. <i>Contention</i> , 4(1-2), 51-66.	Lebanon
2016	Hinger, S. (2016). Asylum in Germany: The making of the ‘crisis’ and the role of civil society. <i>Human Geography</i> , 9(2), 78-88.	Germany
2017	Akpınar, R. (2017). Metropollerde yaşayan Suriyelilerin yaşamlarında sivil toplum kuruluşlarının rolü: İzmir örneği. <i>Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi</i> , 22(Göç Özel Sayısı), 1355-1367.	Turkey
2017	Tamer, M., & Bırvural, A. (2017). Mültecilerin uyum sürecinde yerel yönetimler ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarının rolü. <i>TURAN: Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi</i> , 9(35), 21.	Turkey

2017	Memisoglu, F., & Ilgit, A. (2017). Syrian refugees in Turkey: Multifaceted challenges, diverse players and ambiguous policies. <i>Mediterranean Politics</i> , 22(3), 317-338.	Turkey
2017	Çebi, E. (2017). The role of Turkish NGOs in social cohesion of Syrians. <i>Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i> , Special Issue, 135-170.	Turkey
2017	Ozcurumez, S. (2017). Lessons from Turkey: Syrians under temporary protection, health services and NGOs. <i>European Journal of Public Health</i> , 27(Issue suppl_3).	Turkey
2017	Wagner, A. C. (2017). Frantic waiting: NGO anti-politics and “Timepass” for young Syrian refugees in Jordan. <i>Middle East-Topics &amp; Arguments</i> , 9, 107-121.	Jordan
2017	Fourn, L. (2017). Turning political activism into humanitarian engagement: Transitional careers of young Syrians in Lebanon, Working Papers 28, Power2Youth.	Lebanon
2017	Borri, G., & Fontanari, E. (2017). Introduction: civil society on the edge: actions in support and against refugees in Italy and Germany, <i>Mondi Migranti</i> , 3, 23-51.	Germany
2017	Beramendi Heine, V. (2017). <i>21<sup>st</sup> century citizenship: Human rights, global civil society and the pushing of boundaries: The role of civil society in the refugee crisis: The case of the Swedish Red Cross</i> [Masters thesis]. Stockholm University, Stockholm.	Sweden
2017	Simsa, R. (2017). Leaving emergency management in the refugee crisis to civil society? The case of Austria. <i>Journal of Applied Security Research</i> , 12(1), 78- 95.	Austria
2017	Chtouris, S., & Miller, D. S. (2017). Refugee flows and volunteers in the current humanitarian crisis in Greece. <i>Journal of Applied Security Research</i> , 12(1), 61- 77.	Greece
2017	Mackreath, H. & Sağınç, S. G. (2017). <i>Civil Society and Syrian refugees in Turkey</i> . Istanbul: Citizens Assembly.	Turkey
2018	Demirdağ, Z. S. (2018). <i>Suriyeli mülteci krizini yönetmede Türkiye’deki ulusal sivil toplum kuruluşlarının rolü</i> [Master tezi]. Orta Doğu ve İslam Ülkeleri Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, Marmara Üniversitesi, İstanbul.	Turkey
2018	Akman, K. (2018). <i>Göç yönetiminde yerel yönetimler ve STK işbirliği</i> . <i>Uluslararası Yönetim Akademisi Dergisi</i> , 1(3), 452-466.	Turkey
2018	Terzioğlu, A. (2018). The banality of evil and the normalization of the discriminatory discourses against Syrians in Turkey. <i>Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia</i> , 4(2), 34-47.	Turkey
2018	Soykan, C., & Şenses, N. (2018). The problem of representation: Civil society organizations from Turkey in the GFMD process. <i>Globalizations</i> , 15(6), 824- 837.	Turkey
2018	Bilecen, B., & Yurtseven, D. (2018). Temporarily protected Syrians’ access to the healthcare system in Turkey: Changing policies and remaining challenges. <i>Migration Letters</i> , 15(1), 113-124.	Turkey
2018	Hohberger, W. (2018). <i>Opportunities in higher education for Syrians in Turkey: The perspective of Syrian university students on the educational conditions, needs and possible solutions for improvement</i> . Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center.	Turkey
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2020	Cuttitta, P. (2020). Non-governmental/civil society organisations and the European Union-externalisation of migration management in Tunisia and Egypt. <i>Population, Space and Place</i> , 26(7), e2329.	Tunisia and Egypt
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2021	Irmak, H. (2021). Rethinking civil society in Turkey: The relationship between the Syrian NGOs and Turkish state [Doctoral dissertation]. Sabancı University, İstanbul.	Turkey
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2022	Carpar, M. C., & Goktuna Yaylaci, F. (2022). The challenges faced by professional asylum seeker-related NGO workers in Turkey. <i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i> .	Turkey
2022	Aksel, D. & Boşnak, B. (2022). Sivil toplum ve göç çalışmalarında köprüler kurmak: Türkiye örneği. <i>İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi Türkiye’nin Göç Siyaseti Özel Sayısı</i> , 21 (Özel Sayı), 159-182.	Turkey
2022	Casanovas i Oliveres, A. (2022). The external relations of mediterranean cities with civil society organisations in migration governance, <i>EuroMedMig Working Paper Series</i> , 9.	Global

## 6. References 2: Research-Based Reports on the Topic

The following reports were selected from among research on the role of civil society in the context of migration from Syria to Turkey.

Year	Title	Author	Institution
2010s	Suriye Raporları	---	AFAD
2013	Sivil Toplum Örgütlerinin Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler İçin Yaptıkları Çalışmalar ile İlgili Rapor	---	IGAM
2013	İstanbul Örneği Üzerinden Türkiye'de Suriyeli Mülteciler Raporu	Halim Yılmaz	MAZLUM-DER
2013	Syrian Refugees in Turkey	Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency	AFAD
2014	Suriyeli Mülteciler Alanında Sivil Toplum Çalıştayı Raporu	---	Mavi Kalem Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği
2014	Syrian Guests in Turkey	Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency	AFAD
2014	Population Influx from Syria to Turkey: Life in Turkey as a Syrian Guest	Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency	AFAD
2015	Bekleme Odasından Oturma Odasına: Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarına Dair Kısa Bir Değerlendirme Raporu	Zümray Kutlu	Anadolu Kültür and Açık Toplum Vakfı
2016	Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türkiye'deki Sivil Hayata İntibakına Yönelik Envanter Çalışması	Emine Uçak Erdoğan, Kemal Vural Tarlan	Yurttaşlık Derneği and Açık Toplum Vakfı
2016	Sığınmacılar ve Mülteciler Raporu	Uğur Altın, Özge Görel	Türkiye Barolar Birliği
2017	Türkiye'de Sivil Toplum ve Suriyeli Mülteciler	Helen Mackreath, Şevin Gülfer Sağnıç	Yurttaşlık Derneği
2017	Suriyeliler Barometresi 2017 - Suriyelilerle Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi Yönetici Özeti	Murat Erdoğan	IGAM
2017	Sivil Toplum Diyaloğu Mültecilerin Uyum Projesi, Türkiye ve AB Ülkeleri arasında Karşılaştırma: Bir Koruma Biçimi olarak Uyum	Thomas Huddleston & Judit Tanczos	Migration Policy Group (MPG) and IGAM
2017	Civil Society and Syrian Refugees in Turkey	Helen Mackreath, Şevin Gülfer Sağnıç	Citizens' Assembly-Turkey
2018	Uluslararası Mülteci Kongresi 2018 İstişare Raporu	Evan Easton-Calabria, Mia Tong, Ceren Topgul	IGAM

2018	Mülteciler ve Sosyal İçerme Çalıştayı Raporu	---	Bir İz Derneği, Yuva Derneği, and Oyun Terapileri Derneği
2018	Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler	Gabriele Cloeters, Souad Osseiran, Kristen Biehl, Wiebke Hohberger, Emre Üçkardeşler, Hande Paker	IPM (İstanbul Politikalar Merkezi)
2018	Exchange of Experiences for the Future: Japanese and Turkish Humanitarian Aid and Support Activities in Conflict Zones	A. Merthan Dünder	Ankara University - APAM
2019	Türkiye'de Mülteciler ve Toplumsal Kabul Çalıştayı Ankara Raporu	---	Dünya Evimiz Uluslararası Dayanışma Derneği
2019	Suriyeliler Barometresi 2019	Murat Erdoğan	IGAM and UNHCR
2019	Suriyeli Mültecilerle Çalışan Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarının Kapasitelerinin Geliştirilmesi Projesi İhtiyaç Analizi Raporu	Pınar Şimşek, Betül Bozkurt, et al.	Bir İz Derneği and Müşterek Proje
2019	Türkiye'de Mülteciler Bağlamında Sivil Topluma Yönelik Tespit ve Öneriler	Selin Altunkaynak Vodina	Göç Araştırmaları Derneği
2019	Göç, Uyum ve Sivil Toplum	---	IMRA (International Migration and Refugee Association)
2019	Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteciler	Murat Erdoğan	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
2020	COVID-19'un Mülteciler Üzerindeki Etkisine İlişkin Raporlara Dayalı Sistemik Bir Derleme	---	SGDD
2020	Mülteciler Alanında Çalışan STK'lar Saha Araştırması Raporu	---	KADEM and CEIPES Derneği
2020	Good Practice Examples in Refugee Hosting in Turkey	---	İGAM
2021	Suriye Yaşanabilirlik Raporu Geri dönebilmek mümkün mü?	Merve Özçelik, Nazlı Metin, İrfan Tatlı, Riad Domazeti	INSAMER
2021	Türkiye'de Engelli Mültecilerin Koruma İhtiyaçları	---	IGAM
2021	Türkiye'de Mülteci Savunuculuğu: Yerelden Küresele Doğru	---	HPG (Humanitarian Policy Group) and ODI
2021	Refugee Advocacy in Turkey: From Local to Global	Amanda Gray Meral, Mia Tong, Josephine Whitaker-Yılmaz, Turker Saliji, Ceren Topgül, Meryem Aslan	Türkiye Mülteci Konseyi and HMP





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## CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 10<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF SYRIAN MIGRATION:

Actors, Processes, and Insights