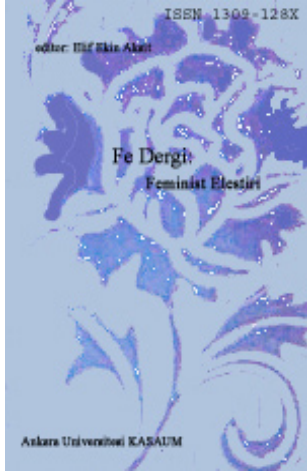


Yayınlayan: Ankara Üniversitesi KASAUM
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Çevrimiçi yayına başlama tarihi: 15 Aralık 2021

Yazı Gönderim Tarihi: 09.04.2021

Yazı Kabul Tarihi: 09.09.2021

Bu makaleyi alıntılar için: Cansu Aydın, “**Securing a Future with Social Capital: The Case of Syrian Refugee Women Working in Non-governmental Organizations-Refugees (NGO-Rs) in Turkey**” *Fe Dergi* 14, no. 2 (2021), 75-86.

URL: http://cins.ankara.edu.tr/26_7.pdf

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Securing a Future with Social Capital: The Case of Syrian Refugee Women Working in Non-governmental Organizations-Refugees (NGO-Rs) in Turkey

Cansu Aydın*

Aiming at shedding a light on refugee women's experiences with social capital, this article tries to answer the following questions: whether and how do Syrian refugee women utilize different forms of social capital to find jobs in NGO-Rs in Turkey? Investigating the role of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, a qualitative methods study was conducted with Syrian refugee women that work at NGO-Rs in Turkey. The data analyzed was generated by thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 16 Syrian refugee women working in NGO-Rs in Gaziantep, Turkey; and a key informant interview that was conducted for triangulation purposes with an office manager of an NGO-R that finds work for Syrian refugees in Turkey. Research findings reveal that Syrian women tend to rely on personal and professional ties to find jobs and survive in the sector; and it radically increases their employment prospects.

Keywords: social capital, Syrian refugee women, Turkey, NGO

Sosyal Sermaye ile Geleceğini Güvence Altına Almak: Türkiye'de Mülteci-Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarında (M-STK) Çalışan Suriyeli Mülteci Kadınlar Örneği

Sosyal sermaye çalışmalarında kadınların deneyimlerinin görünürlüğüne katkıda bulunmayı amaçlayan bu çalışma, Suriyeli mülteci kadınların köprü oluşturan, bağlayıcı ve birleştirici olarak geçen farklı türlerdeki sosyal sermayeleri Türkiye'deki M-STK'larda is bulmak için kullanıp kullanmadığını ve kullanıyorlarsa nasıl kullandıklarını nitel yöntemleri kullanarak incelemektedir. Analiz edilen veriler, Gaziantep'te M-STK'larda çalışan 16 Suriyeli mülteci kadınla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Ayrıca, Suriyeli mültecilere iş bulma amacıyla kurulmuş olan bir sivil toplum kuruluşunun. ofis müdürüyle de bir anahtar kişi görüşmesi yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, Suriyeli kadınların iş bulmak ve sektöre tutunmak için kişisel ve profesyonel bağlantılarını kullandıklarını göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: sosyal sermaye, Suriyeli mülteci kadınlar, Türkiye, sivil toplum kuruluşları

Background

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, more than 5 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (UNHCR 2018). With an explicit open-door policy, Turkey has been both a final destination and a transit country for millions of Syrian refugees. An estimated 3,670,717 Syrian refugees, of whom almost half are women and children, are registered with temporary protection status in Turkey (Directorate General of Migration Management 2021).

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Turkey, having seen waves of emigration, immigration, and transit throughout its history (İçduygu et.al 2012). Turkey is a state party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and it's 1967 Protocol, with a geographical limitation to the Convention. As such, Turkey only accepts refugee status applications from European countries. Syrians, being non-Europeans and arriving in mass and rapid influx, are not eligible for refugee status in Turkey. In this regard, the Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the 2014 Temporary Protection Regulation, which grants Syrians a temporary protection status, governs the protection of Syrian refugees. The temporary protection status provides Syrians with access to health services, education, social assistance, and translation and interpretation services. Work permits are also available to Syrians with the passing of Regulation 8375 in 2016, which outlines the necessary

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procedures. In order to be eligible for a work permit, Syrians need to be under temporary protection for at least 6 months and have a work contract with a potential employer who is willing to apply for the permit.¹ The official employment rates among Syrians are quite low, as only 31,185 Syrians had work permits according to the latest figures provided by the government offices (Ministry of Trade 2019). While the sex disaggregation of those who received work permits is unavailable, it is expected that women only consist of a small percentage of them as only 15% of women are engaged in income-generating activities (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018). There are four types of work that Syrian refugee women (hereafter referred to as Syrian women) are generally involved in Turkey, and those are namely, employment at NGOs or public institutions, self-employment, employment in jobs such as beauty salons or small stores, and lastly employment through piecework jobs performed from home (Körükmez et al. 2020).

As outlined, basic rights that can ensure the protection of Syrians are provided through temporary protection status. However, there are barriers to accessing available services that allow for the enjoyment of their rights. According to Barbelet et al. (2017), refugees without pre-existing networks experience further vulnerabilities within host communities; and the uncertainty with work permits, poor working conditions, and discrimination are of particular concern for refugees. Women face significant barriers, as almost 92% of the Syrian women are not informed about the work permits and the majority of women lack knowledge about rights and responsibilities when it comes to working or paying tax (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018). Additionally, lack of language fluency, low education, and skill levels along with the opacity of bureaucratic procedures seem to hinder the access of Syrian women to the labor markets (Ozturk et al. 2019). Considering these practical and structural barriers to survival, social capital becomes particularly crucial for Syrian women, especially for labor market integration.

Aiming at assisting refugees in claiming their rights, advocating on their behalf, and providing complementary services, there are many NGOs working with refugees in Turkey. While there are various terms used in the literature to define and differentiate between these civil society actors, this article focuses on NGO-Rs. NGO-R is used to highlight the refugee and migrant-focused work of the NGOs and is defined as “institutions and organizations willing to cope with the increasing gap between the state’s organizational capacity regarding the refugees and the actual social reality” (Sunata and Tosun 2018). With a dense population of these NGO-Rs, Gaziantep has become a hub for both cross-border and in-country operations. As of 2020, there were 2,739 civil society organizations registered in Gaziantep, with 279 of them providing humanitarian aid (Directorate of Civil Society 2020). Additionally, there were also 19 international NGOs registered in Gaziantep to provide humanitarian aid.

Given this introduction and background, this study will try to answer the following questions: whether and how do Syrian women utilize different forms of social capital to secure jobs at NGO-Rs in Turkey? The analysis will focus on all three types of social capital, namely bonding, bridging, and linking. By analyzing the experiences of Syrian women and the barriers they face, it can also be a practical guide for governments and NGO-Rs to tailor policies or services they provide to support the economic integration of refugee women. These experiences may not only show where the opportunities lie to support refugee women to accumulate more social capital, but also where their strength lies, and which type of social capital is more crucial for them. Considering the lack of research on the labor market integration processes and practices of Syrian women in Turkey, particularly of those with strong professional and education backgrounds, this research can be pioneering. In the following section, the literature on social capital is examined and the existing literature on refugee women’s experiences is visited. Following this, the research design and methods will be presented. Finally, findings are outlined and discussed within the existing literature, and conclusions are drawn from the findings.

Social Capital and Refugee Women

According to Portes (1998, 6), there is a consensus in the literature that social capital is “the ability of the actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures”. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) also defines the concept as the total sum of the actual or potential resources that come through a network of tight or loose relationships. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital accumulated through connections can turn into economic capital when the conditions are favorable. Hence, social capital is directly linked to economic and cultural capital, besides the context in which it is being used. Additionally, according to Bourdieu (1986), unless the social relationships are established and kept for a long period of

time, they can't always be utilized when they are needed. This article will use Bourdieu's approach to social capital to understand the experiences of Syrian women.

According to Woolcock (2001), there are three types of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. The source of bonding capital is the relationships between networks of groups who perceive themselves to have a bonding social identity (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). Bonding social capital comes from the kinship of families, close friends, and fellows, and even neighbors. Therefore, bonding social capital is the resource that stems from a person's primary network directly relating to the naturally acquired social identity. Although the naturally acquired identity constitutes a ground for membership in these primary networks, this membership is not acquired by birth. Bridging capital, on the other hand, depends on the memberships in the groups that are not established based on similar socio-demographics among members. Distant friends, colleagues, or broader community can be a source of bridging capital. Hence, these bridging networks are useful for reaching out to external opportunities and knowledge sharing such as through membership in civil rights movements or youth service groups (Putnam 2000). Lastly, linking social capital stems from the relationships with individuals or groups that are in a higher state in the hierarchy. These relationships could be with the service providers or formal institutions that people can use to access information and knowledge that could not be obtained through other networks. Furthermore, all these types of social capital and their different combinations are directly related to refugee and migrant integration outcomes; and do not necessarily always yield positive results. For instance, the ethnicity factor in social capital formation is perceived to be tricky as while it helps to ensure that the refugees have readily available support upon arrival, it can also be a barrier preventing them from making connections out of their ethnic group (Quetulio-Navarra, Niehof and van der Vaart 2013). This means, having more bonding capital at the expense of bridging or linking capital can in some instances prevent the integration of refugees.

According to Strang and Ager (2010), social connections become the driving force and play an essential role in local integration. Being an intermediary between labor markets and refugee women, social capital can help them to integrate better in the absence of nationwide integration policies. The research conducted in multiple contexts such as in Jordan, Turkey, and Vietnam with refugees and displaced populations, have shown a tendency to rely on existing networks as a survival strategy and to gain access to labor markets (Tran 2015; Barbelet et al. 2017). On the other hand, building social capital with host communities is a crucial part of integration efforts (Barbelet et al. 2017). Social capital also often being the only asset of refugees to access livelihoods or to act as a coping mechanism; it increases the resilience of refugees and thus enhances aid effectiveness (Uzelac et al. 2018). In other words, being used to access other assets such as loans, information, and accommodation, social capital promotes access to livelihoods (Farrington et al. 2002). This is also valid for educated Syrian refugees in Turkey, as those who had social connections and therefore, social capital managed to do better overall compared to those who didn't have these ties (Üstündağ 2020).

The literature on social capital overall tends to focus on the experiences of men, turning a blind eye to the gendered differences, with several recent exceptions (Molyneux 2002; Aguilera 2005; Allen 2009; O'Neill and Gidengil 2006). The focus on refugee women's experiences seems to be even less; even though women who belong to low-income groups are the ones who develop strong social connections, supportive community relations, and participate in civil society organizations including voluntarily (Molyneux 2002). Furthermore, by being primary caregivers and organizing how the money is spent at home, women can also be claimed to be the ones who determine the organization of primary networks. However, since the refugee context provides women with unusual circumstances, the impact of social capital on their experience is also different than the rest of the women. For instance, according to Boateng (2010), the women at refugee camps have fewer opportunities to develop social capital and therefore it is more limited. For out-of-camp refugee women, the situation might be different since they would have the opportunity to socialize with different groups or get involved in various networks. Lastly, Dion and Dion (2001) claim that it is important to address the gender dimension of refugee contexts in order to understand the challenges encountered by them. Building upon existing research and the theoretical framework of social capital, this article tries to fill a gap in the literature by examining the refugee women's experiences with social capital. This will help to ensure that challenges they face are understood better and the policy responses are tailored based on the gendered needs and capacities of the refugees.

Research Design and Methods

This article is written based on a thematic analysis of 16 semi-structured interviews with Syrian women who are working at various local and international NGO-Rs in Gaziantep in Turkey. For data triangulation purposes, a key informant interview was also conducted with an office manager of an NGO-R that assists Syrian refugees to find jobs. The interviews were conducted between the dates of 24 July – 1 August 2019 and were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The scope of the research was fully explained to the interviewees and their informed consent was obtained. All the interviews have been anonymized to ensure the privacy of the participants. The locations of the interviews were chosen with the participants to ensure that they would feel comfortable enough to speak. Additionally, the research followed feminist principles by trying to make the experiences of women visible; and promoting the agency of the refugee women who participated in this research as opposed to the tendency in the literature to show them as subjects rather than objects of the action. The interviews were also conducted by acknowledging the power differences between the interviewer and interviewees, and therefore trying to minimize them. The research was also driven by political motivation to empower Syrian women and help them challenge the injustices they face. The researcher was also driven with the curiosity to understand the experiences of educated and working Syrian women who are also drivers of change, and agents of civil society supporting their fellow Syrians in Turkey and through cross-border operations in Syria. Based on her experience and observations in the civil society and humanitarian aid sector, the researcher also wanted to understand whether there were deliberate attempts made by Syrian women to address the challenges they face around finding employment in Turkey.

The respondents of the interviews were between the age range of 26 – 52; and at the time of the interviews, while one was actively seeking a job, the rest worked in 11 different local and international NGO-Rs. While Sunata and Tosun (2018) differentiate between four different types of NGO-Rs, analyzing how Syrian women's experiences differ within those four types is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth mentioning that the participants of this research represented all four types of NGO-Rs: migrant operated, local, international and professional.

While the majority of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, the respondent with the lowest educational attainment had a high school diploma and the highest degree was a master's degree. All of them spoke English, besides their native language Arabic, and the majority of them either spoke some level of Turkish or were interested in learning Turkish. At the time of the interviews, 8 of the respondents were single, with one of them also having kids and was the primary caregiver; 2 of them were engaged; 4 of them were married with kids, and 2 of them were married with no kids. The average time the respondents have been in Turkey was around 4.5 years during the time of the data collection. The majority of the respondents (13 out of 16) either came to Turkey with their family members or had family members present in Turkey. The legal status of the respondents also varied among temporary protection, residency, tourist visa, and citizenship. Although many of them resided in Gaziantep at the time of the interviews, the city of their first settlement in Turkey also varied and included Sanliurfa, Istanbul, and Hatay. While the legal status of the women can directly impact their job prospects and future in the host country, for this study, it wasn't considered as a variable since the study solely focuses on the importance of social capital. However, it is worth mentioning the importance of legal status in finding jobs was highlighted by various participants of this research.

The city of Gaziantep was specifically chosen for this study, as it's the hub for humanitarian relief operations being conducted in both Turkey and Northwest Syria. Furthermore, Gaziantep also hosts 449,184 Syrian refugees, which constitutes 21.54% of the total population of the city (Directorate General of Migration Management 2021). Having worked at various local and international NGO-Rs in the field, including at Gaziantep, the researcher made the initial connections through personal contacts and continued via the snowball technique. The themes of the questions were pre-prepared, however using a semi-structured methodology, they were adjusted during the interview based on the responses of the participants. Having a semi-structured interview helped to encourage a deeper discussion with each participant and helped to create a more comfortable discussion rather than a question-and-answer session. Additionally, semi-structured interviews as a method seem to fit better with the purpose of this article which is to show the diversity of the refugee women's experiences,

their strengths, and where the opportunities lie to support their social capital accumulation which in return might lead to better job prospects.

Following the guidance of the Department for International Development (1999) three major areas of focus were used to investigate social capital during interviews. These areas were as follows: the nature of existing links and how they work; how these links contribute to livelihoods on different levels; and whether affiliation with certain groups hinders individuals from accessing income-generating activities. It is also worth mentioning that all participants were interested in the research piece and found it useful as they perceived it as an opportunity to address some of the issues they face searching for jobs at NGO-Rs in Turkey. Therefore, the discussions yielded valuable data and insights. The search for additional participants stopped when it was clear that similar themes were being repeated throughout the interviews.

There are several limitations of this research paper. Firstly, the interviews were conducted in English; and English is neither the researcher's nor the participants' native language. The citations provided below from the research participants were written exactly as they were stated by the participants. Secondly, even though Gaziantep is the hub of humanitarian operations, there are still other organizations operating in other major cities where dynamics might be different. Lastly, the key informant interview, which was conducted with triangulation purposes, remained limited in number, as the researcher did not have the resources to conduct further interviews.

Results and Discussion

Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital is acquired through connections with the groups that are similar in demographics and have similar characteristics. They are therefore among "people like us" and with who we have close relationships. (Claridge 2018). These relationships can be established among family members, close friends, and neighbors. In the case of Syrian women working in NGO-Rs, these links can take the form of family, close friends, and fellow Syrians. In countries like Turkey, where the social and ethnic polarization is high and social cohesion remains relatively low, it can be claimed that bonding social capital is much more important for refugee women compared to the other types of social capital.

Before the current crisis, there weren't many NGOs in Syria. Hence, with few exceptions, the respondents did not have prior experience in the sector. One of the respondents who had a voluntary job in Syria also said: "you can't say it is experience. I had some voluntary job in Syria. It is totally different than here.". Many Syrian women became familiar with NGO-Rs through their relatives and fellow Syrians. Furthermore, one of the respondents also chose Turkey as a destination because there were existing contacts at NGO-Rs. She explains this as:

My father had some connection, some people who was working in INGOs in Turkey. He said he referred me to this person and say like just apply your CV, maybe you will have a opportunity because I am, I am a fluent in English and that's another advantage for me and then I applied. Thanks God, I got the position. (...) So, I directly came to Turkey; from Syria to Turkey but with the job secured.

Since most of the social networks were disrupted upon arrival to a new country, the Syrian women established new friendships in Turkey. According to the participants of this research, most of these networks are established with fellow Syrians who are also colleagues. With colleagues, they meet every day, while with out-of-work friends they meet at least once a week. It should be noted that this was not applicable for women with children and women who are heads of their households as they claimed they had less time to socialize than their peers. Therefore, having small children can limit the social capital accumulation process for refugee women.

Having friends in the NGO-Rs is useful in many ways, such as getting informal references, recommendations, technical support, or insights from the organization. This supports the finding that 40.5% of Syrian women working in regular and irregular jobs found jobs through the assistance of other Syrians (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018). One of the interviewees referring to the importance of social connections said: "that is how you make sure your CV gets viewed and have actual opportunity." Furthermore, some of the participants also use their friendship networks to find extra work in their area of expertise. One of the participants explained this: "they [*friends*] actually just contact me there is something like this, do you want to

take it? I say yes or no. Sometimes I get asked more but if I have a lot of work, already I don't take it. It depends on the job." It also confirms the findings of Livingston (2006) who claimed that the more time migrant women spent in a foreign country, the more likely they are to use friendship networks to search jobs.

Being used to revive social networks, manage supportive relationships, and communicate with employers, mobile phones are extremely important for refugees (Göransson et al. 2020). Mobile phones are also extremely crucial for Syrian women as there are online groups set up by Syrians to advertise jobs. In these groups, people also support each other by providing information about their organizations, helping with writing CVs, providing potential interview questions, and helping candidates to pass CVs to the organizations. They refer to these groups to search for jobs or share potential jobs from their organizations.

Additionally, it was noted by the interviewees that being from a particular region or a city in Syria also helped to forge ties and to be considered for a position in certain local organizations. The key informant also noted that:

Now the organizations are known by the cities. This organization is for Deir ez-Zor people; this organization for Aleppo people; this for Hama; this for Hums. This is the situation; believe me.

However, according to the interviewees, there still seems to be open and hidden discrimination against women during the recruitment processes. Referring to local Syrian organizations working in the humanitarian sector, one of the respondents said:

They said "women are not clever, not focused to the work; so men are better than women.". So, I am officer, he is officer. He is becoming senior, then becoming coordinator, then becoming manager. But women stay officer and they give it benefits for 40 dollar, and men give it 200 dollar.

Another respondent also highlighted that it is very hard for women to survive in the sector:

You see that now the number of women already it is very few if you compare it number of men. In all organization, it is like maybe 20% or 10% maybe women. Because I used to work in Syrian organization and most of the staff are men. You see only 1 or 2 female working. So because when they come to the interviews, like men shows the more experience in this field and the women need to be introduced, and need to be stronger to be, to show that she is strong for the position and work.

While it seems that donor policies and regulations, besides a global emphasis on a need for gender balance in the sector, help the organizations to be accountable; there still seem to be few women in the sector who are senior managers. A respondent, referring to her migrant operated NGO-R, said that except her all women were either assistants or cleaners. This might make it harder for Syrian women to build bonding social capital, as the key informant noted that their non-profit organization also failed to place even one skilled person into the NGO-Rs, simply because they didn't have connections with the high-level managers of those NGO-Rs. The lack of women in high-level positions, who can support other women and set examples is an important issue in the sector.

In case of a lack of bonding social capital, the only way women secure jobs in the sector seems to be on conditions from donors around gender balance for the teams. An interviewee explain this as:

I know women they don't have any attitude or you know any background in political issues, and they came from Syria directly because they want to run out of this hell inside Syria; and they got good opportunities because there is a this gender equality issue inside organization and you know the fund need that, donors need gender equality inside. They are getting chances and job offers. This opened a lot for women specially a lot of opportunities. Not reaching the decision-making positions or senior management but at last they have job opportunity.

However, when the organizations hire women even for the sake of donors, bonding social capital seems highly important to be considered for a position. An interviewee referring to her own experience with a local organization said:

(...) for example, in the local organization, most of them are males. (...) we were only 2 in the organization with 50 men. So it was a little bit difficult and they are with religious background. So we faced some challenges in communication. Most of them don't reply us even. So imagine. I don't know if it is the religious background or revolution background or depends on their culture of the area that they come from. But really it was difficult. But after few months, they used to be some females to be at the office. Also, for example, most of this organization really, very, how to say, not neutral with dealing with women, discriminatory. So they don't like to work with women and if they see you wearing some clothes, unusual clothes to them, they annoyed.

Lastly, it is worth to mention that knowing the importance of high-level contacts in NGO-Rs, the participants of this research mainly seem to rely on their contact with fellow Syrians to find jobs in the sector. They therefore make deliberate attempts to connect with fellow Syrians, especially with those who come from the same cities in Syria.

Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital links groups that are not similar to each other based on race, class, or religion across communities, groups, or organizations (Claridge 2018). For Syrian women working in NGO-Rs, these links can be established with the host communities and work colleagues or colleagues in other organizations who are from different backgrounds.

Relationships with the broader community have a direct impact on making refugees feel at home since acts of friendship positively change their perceptions about the host community and their life in a foreign country (Ager and Strang 2008). Making friends from the host community takes multiple forms for Syrian women. For those who have kids, it is possible to connect with the other mothers at schools. For others who continue their education at university, meeting with other students from the host community is also an option. These kinds of relationships established out of the sector seem to be useful for the daily survival or finding jobs out of the sector, as around 22% of Syrian women working in regular or irregular jobs seem to report finding employment with the help of host communities (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018). One of the interviewees, married to a Turkish man, explained that: "(...) most of the host community that I know they are not familiar with the humanitarian work. Actually, to be honest, I was supporting them to inform them about these jobs, the humanitarian work.". However, for majority of the interviewees, the relationships with host communities are limited to those who work in NGO-Rs. The interviewees explained that most of the friendships with the host community are formed through work relations. An interviewee explained that her friends from the host community gave/gives her resources and materials, and she could seek their support when in need. For those who work for local Syrian organizations this way of meeting host community members is usually not possible since most of the employees in those organizations are Syrians. Overall, trying to establish connections with the host community members in the sector seems to be one of the least preferred forms of social capital.

Another source of social capital for Syrian women takes shape in connections with the expatriates in the sector. One of the interviewees highlighted this as "when you are hanging out with managers, with expats it helps with your current position." Another interviewee also explained that meeting an expatriate outside of work helped her to get her first position in the sector. Having expatriate contacts seems to be beneficial in terms of making sure that the CVs are taken into consideration, providing an informal reference or recommending the candidate. Particularly when the humanitarian sector bloomed in Turkey with the start of the Syrian crisis, managers of the humanitarian programs had heavily been expatriates. Being considered as the experts in their field and leading the recruitment of the local positions, expatriates have enjoyed a well-recognized privilege over local staff. While currently most of the positions are localized, having references or recommendations from expatriates seems to be advantageous for the Syrian women in the sector. Referring to the importance of references from host communities and expatriates, the key informant also noted that:

And when we come to choose our references, our references, it must be based in my experience, it must be on the people who we worked with; my manager, my general manager, my... But now we are choosing our references of European people, of American people, of other Turkish people who are

working in other NGOs, on other projects just to give us references. So, this is big mistake but the things, it is running like this.

Whether they wish to continue working for NGO-Rs or not, bridging social capital with expatriates or host communities seems to be crucial for better livelihoods outcomes for Syrian women.

Linking Social Capital

Linking social capital refers to the relations with groups that are in positions of power, such as with those working for the government or those who have other senior positions. Linking social capital hence is established among people who are not on the same level in a given hierarchy (Woolcock 2001). Except for one respondent, none of the participants of this study had any ties with the state or its services. Since only 1% of the Syrian women working in regular or irregular jobs confirm finding work through Turkish labor agencies (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018), this is not a surprising finding. One of the few respondents who had some form of connection with state institutions claimed to develop her ties with the institutions via her work. Ager and Strang (2008) note that circumstances of refugees such as not knowing the language or not being familiar with the context require both refugees and the wider community to give efforts to ensure equal access to services. Not having these ties, some of the respondents were confused about different kinds of registration options available to them, the documentation process, and how to apply for citizenship in Turkey. One of the respondents illustrated this by referring to available options:

They are not that clear for us in Turkey. There is no one giving us guidance about what we want to do. There are rules and they are changing each time. You need to follow them.

Even though it also has other complications, respondents were very secure with their short-term plans, which involved around staying in the sector. However, long-term plans of the respondents were mostly outside of the humanitarian sector and would highly benefit from linking capital. One of the respondents highlighted the fact that she was planning to leave Turkey in the long run:

Long term, I don't think that we have opportunities to work here in Turkey in the companies of, in the Turkish companies. Maybe the Turkish language will play its role. However, I know some Turkish, but I am not as fluent or native speaker in Turkish. So that Turkish itself has better opportunities. This is why after the organizations close, I will travel.

Another respondent also highlighted the fact that changing rules and uncertainty in Turkey also didn't allow them to plan for the long run:

(...) it is very complicated. So, don't ask me about long term. For us, Syrians, we are no living day by day. We don't have any long term. We don't see the light at the end of the tunnel, unfortunately.

Not having other options, higher salaries than the rest of the market, lack of Turkish language requirements, and helping Syrians were some of the reasons why Syrian women kept working in the sector. However, most of the respondents noted that they want to work in their area of specialization. This also confirms the findings of Üstündağ (2020), who stated that those educated and skilled Syrian refugees consider themselves lucky when they have social connections and can work in their field. The reason for them is very clear, as explained by a participant:

For the long term, I am really not planning to continue in the humanitarian work. To be honest with you, because like it is hard job when you have a family. It is very hard for you, when you have a family. Because like your time is not yours when you are working in the [NGO-Rs] ... And I am feeling also because not, because you are not, I am not planning to go abroad or travel to another mission or you know... As I have a family now. And to be honest, humanitarian work is not sustainable in Turkey. You

can't guarantee that for how long it will continue. So I really plan, dream actually, I am dreaming; hopefully it will be planning to have my own job.

Leaving the humanitarian sector on the other hand requires a good amount of linking capital that can allow the respondents to understand the changing rules, regulations, rights, and responsibilities that apply to other sectors. Furthermore, in many instances just to secure a job in an NGO-R, Syrian women might need to accept working informally (UN Women and SGDD-ASAM 2018), which in return doesn't allow them to build linking social capital. Linking social capital is not only necessary for business-related inquiries or working permits, but also on how to acquire equivalency of the previously obtained diplomas in Syria. One of the respondents highlighted the fact that she would need the following besides savings:

Legal advice, of course. So it is something that I need to be aware of it. My rights and even if I open my shop and employee rights, and how I will make sure to make the balance between the expenses and you know not being in the position that I am stuck and there is nothing to support me.

Developing interventions that are built on community-based approaches can foster existing ties and create new ones that can help to promote the self-reliance of refugees through the existing social networks (Uzelac et al. 2018). Both the government and humanitarian organizations responding to the crisis can fund activities that promote community dialogue through community-based approaches such as micro crediting or pooled funds. Furthermore, combining these approaches with legal support as indicated as a need by refugee women can yield the best results. Lastly, the key informant also noted that Syrians had to have ties to the government to find jobs in private and public sectors in Syria before the war. An opportunity for change hence also lies in working on creating a work culture where Syrian women and men are used to and trust merit-based recruitment systems.

Conclusion

Based on the responses of the interviewees, social capital appears to be highly important to finding jobs in NGO-Rs. Bonding social capital by involving close relations helps Syrian women to survive daily as well as obtain jobs in NGO-Rs. By connecting them to host communities and expatriates working in NGO-Rs, bridging social capital can help to improve integration and achieve greater career gains. For Syrian women, bonding capital appears to be easier to establish than bridging and linking forms. The links that yield benefits to the community are not only established on a personal level but also thanks to the advancement of technology via the internet and different online applications. There is a clear tendency among Syrian women to use online platforms and social media (i.e. Facebook and WhatsApp) for job prospects. This not only shows where the opportunity lies but also shows the gaps as unless set up by the refugees themselves, the online platforms only use Turkish or English languages.

Regardless of the type of accumulated social capital, there is both direct and indirect discrimination against women in the sector. Therefore, it is important to establish gender equality policies in organizations, address the issues that hinder women's labor force participation and encourage women to apply for managerial positions. This not only can help to foster different links, that in return can help more women to have managerial positions; but also, can increase the accountability of organizations. Additionally, nationwide gender-sensitive policies can help Syrian women to build different networks and can address some of the challenges they face in the labor market. Such nationwide gender-sensitive policies can also help to address direct and indirect discrimination against women in the sector.

Since most of the interviewees aim to run their own business or work in their fields of study, linking social capital might be important in the long run. The government, besides encouraging and supporting refugee women to work in their field of work, can also help them establish useful connections to achieve this. Although the accumulation of bridging capital with host communities seems to be the least preferred type of social capital for the Syrian women who work in NGO-Rs, it seems to be useful for finding jobs outside of the humanitarian sector. Supporting skilled and educated refugee women to work in their area of specialty can also bring benefits to the host communities.

While this article focuses on the experiences of Syrian women with NGO-Rs, it should be noted that being involved in labor markets in Turkey might be creating new challenges for them. For instance, the research

participants who have children indicated that having small children prevented them from socializing or establishing new connections and this was a barrier to accumulating social capital. Others also indicated a tendency among Syrians to hire fellow Syrians from their home cities, which also creates barriers to fair recruitment for them. Considering these, and other barriers and challenges listed in this article, there is a clear need for rights-based approaches and merit-based recruitments in the sector.



¹Exemptions for work permits are granted for those, who wish to work as seasonal agricultural worker or in animal rearing jobs.

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