



Volume 11, Issue 4, July 2024, p. 135-144

Article Information

Article Type: Research Article

This article was checked by iThenticate.

Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17121/ressjournal.3574>

ArticleHistory:

Received

10/06/2024

Accept

22/07/2024

**Available
online**

23/07/2024

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE IHH HUMANITARIAN RELIEF FOUNDATION IN SYRIA

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Abstract

Due to the internal conflicts and turmoil in Syria, the first group of 252 Syrians entered Turkey in 2011, and since then, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been steadily increasing. With Turkey creating a safe zone, Syrian refugees are returning to their homeland and resuming their daily lives. In this study, we examined the educational activities carried out by IHH, Turkey's largest NGO, for Syrians in the safe zone to achieve the sustainability goals of the UN. While IHH conducts humanitarian aid in line with its mission and vision, it also fulfills the 16 sustainability goals of the UN.

Keywords: Syria, Education, IHH, United Nations

Özet

Suriye'de yaşanan iç çatışmalar ve karışıklıklardan dolayı Suriye'den Türkiye'ye ilk olarak 2011 yılında 252 kişi giriş yapmış ve bu tarihten itibaren Türkiye'ye sığınan Suriyeli sayısı giderek artış göstermiştir. Türkiye'nin güvenli bölge oluşturmasıyla birlikte Suriyeli sığınmacılar ülkelerine geri dönmekte ve günlük yaşamlarına devam etmektedirler. Biz de bu çalışmamızda, BM'nin sürdürülebilirlik olgularının oluşması için Türkiye'nin en büyük STK olan İHH'nin güvenli bölge genelinde Suriyeliler için yaptığı eğitim faaliyetlerini ele aldık. İHH bir yandan misyon ve vizyonu doğrultusunda insani yardımları yaparken bir yandan da BM'nin 16 maddelik sürdürülebilirlik olgusunu gerçekleştirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, Eğitim, İHH, Birleşmiş Milletler

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Introduction

People desire to live in places where their basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, security, and education are met, and where they believe they can have better conditions in the future. However, these conditions may not always be fully or partially provided due to individual, political, economic, social, or cultural reasons (Ünal, 2014; Sevinç, Davran & Sevinç, 2018). When people cannot meet these needs, they are forced to migrate.

Before discussing the effects of migration on societies and individuals, it is beneficial to define the concepts used alongside migration in the literature. The differences between the concepts of migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker, often used interchangeably in the literature, are generally overlooked. Although these three concepts refer to people who have relocated, they describe different situations. While there is no internationally accepted definition, it is acknowledged that migrants relocate for personal reasons without any coercion. The concept of a migrant is distinguished from refugee and asylum seeker by this characteristic. Refugees are people whose asylum applications have been accepted because they do not want or cannot return to their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, are individuals who have applied for refugee status but whose applications have not yet been accepted (Efe & Ulusoy, 2013).

Due to the internal conflicts and unrest in Syria, the first group of 252 Syrians entered Turkey in 2011, and the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey has been increasing ever since (AFAD, 2016). Millions of people have been affected by these conflicts. Thousands were injured, and many lost their lives. By 2015, more than half of Syria's population had left their homes and migrated to different countries. Most of the migrating Syrians sought refuge in neighboring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt (UNHCR, 2015). Turkey's position has been significant for Syrians during this migration process. Since the start of the civil war and conflicts in Syria in 2011, Turkey has hosted a large number of Syrian refugees. Since the first migration movement, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been increasing. As of 2017, the number of registered Syrians in Turkey exceeded three million. Initially, there was a belief in Turkey that the conflict in Syria would not last long and that the Syrians who migrated would not stay long; thus, short-term solutions were planned for them. In this context, temporary accommodation centers were established in provinces and districts near the Syrian border to meet the basic needs of Syrians. Syrian refugees were placed in these centers, and even Syrians in different provinces of Turkey were directed to these camps by provincial migration administrations. However, the ongoing war and worsening situation in Syria led to the realization that Syrians would stay in Turkey for an extended period. Attempts were made to increase the number of temporary accommodation centers, but it became clear that these centers could not accommodate all migrating Syrians.

Organizations known as Public Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) in the USA and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Europe are referred to as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Turkey. Civil society organizations, lobbies, political groups, associations, unions, chambers, bar associations, and societies are generally known as pressure or interest groups in the political decision-making process.

One of the most influential areas of multinational organizations and civil society organizations is education. These organizations contribute to all levels of education

and training, from pre-school to university and even adult education. They also operate in thematic areas such as human rights, children's rights, environmental education, education for migrants, disadvantaged groups, and girls' education. Additionally, there are civil society organizations specializing in specific fields such as mathematics, science, arts, and physical education.

In this study, we examined the activities of IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, which has been providing humanitarian aid without discrimination based on region, language, race, or sect to people in distress, affected by disasters, oppressed, hungry, and homeless due to war or natural disasters worldwide since 1992. Starting with voluntary work and institutionalizing in 1995, these activities quickly spread to 123 countries, establishing a bridge of aid from Turkey to the world.

While carrying out its mission, the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation operates in the following priority areas worldwide:

- Regions affected by war and its aftermath,
- Disaster zones,
- Countries and regions experiencing poverty.

The Mission of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation;

- To establish justice and goodness on earth by providing the necessary humanitarian aid to all needy and oppressed people, wherever they are, with a sense of universal brotherhood, ensuring a dignified life.
- To work towards preventing any policies and activities that cause people to become needy and oppressed, ensuring that the fundamental rights and freedoms of all people are not violated.
- To maintain unchanging values in a changing world.
- To sustain goodness always and everywhere.

The Vision of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation;

- To support individuals and communities to stand on their own feet by alleviating the adverse effects of war and natural disasters.
- To lead in the field of cooperation worldwide by fostering collaboration and creating a common consciousness among countries and institutions.
- To empower the people and organizations of communities that have fallen into need.
- To reach crisis areas quickly and effectively to minimize damage.
- To produce lasting solutions with permanent projects.
- To contribute to the elimination of poverty and the achievement of social justice.

The Working Principles of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation;

- To be a pioneer.
- To act as a bridge between communities.
- To serve as an arbitrator.
- To be the voice of the oppressed.

- To contribute to the rebuilding of a just world without exploitation.
- To use the trust placed in it in the most appropriate way.
- To be transparent.
- To highlight the service, not the brand or name.
- To help without discrimination based on religion, language, race, or sect.

Method

Research Design

The study used the case study design, one of the qualitative research designs. A case study deeply examines a phenomenon or event that the researcher cannot control, based on 'how' and 'why' questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this research, educational activities in Free Syria were examined based on the reports of the Syrian Education Coordination and the Humanitarian Relief Foundation.

Reports Examined in the Research

The research examined the reports of the Syrian Education Coordination and the Humanitarian Relief Foundation.

Data Analysis

Document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to analyze the data obtained in the study. Document analysis is a qualitative research method used to meticulously and systematically analyze the content of written documents. It is a systematic method used to examine and evaluate all printed and electronic materials (Kıral, 2020).

Findings

The findings in this section of the research were prepared based on the 2022 Activity Report of the Syrian Education Coordination. The humanitarian drama in Syria continues in its 11th year. This drama persists in the field of education as well. The inability to meet school needs and the inability to pay teachers' salaries are among the biggest needs in education. Although the contributions of humanitarian aid organizations to education have increased recently, these aids are not sufficient to meet the needs in the region. The Humanitarian Relief Foundation is the most active aid organization working in the region. This foundation continues its activities in many parts of Free Syria, from pre-school to university. Besides formal education, the foundation also supports vocational training for women, education for the mentally and visually impaired, Quran courses, and religious education centers within the scope of non-formal education activities.

Table 1. Educational activities in Free Syria

| Type | Student | Staff |
|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Şam Üniversitesi | 1.850 | 101 |
| Hayat Üniversitesi | 750 | 31 |
| İdlib Okullar | 11.500 | 442 |
| Kilis | 835 | 51 |
| Halakalar | 6.138 | 360 |
| Total | 21.073 | 985 |

Educational activities in Syria are currently conducted in two main regions. The first region starts from Afrin and includes Azez, Jarablus, Bab, Cobanbey, Ras al-Ayn, and Tel Abyad. Educational activities in these regions are carried out under Turkey's consultancy and funded by the Maarif Foundation. In this region, 13,000 teachers serve 300,000 students from pre-school to high school.

The second educational region is Idlib. The activities in this region are managed by dividing it into four educational directorates (Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, Coast). A total of 23,000 teachers work in the region, 3,000 of whom are in private schools. The limited economic power of the local administration and the limited support from the UN and international aid organizations cause about 6,000 of these teachers to work voluntarily without any income. Currently, over 410,000 students are receiving education from pre-school to the final year of high school in the region. Approximately 250,000 students of school age are not attending school, and this number does not include students of high school age.

There are about 30-35,000 university students in Free Syria. Aleppo and Idlib Universities serve as state universities in Free Syria, and Turkey has granted activity permits to Gaziantep University and Health Sciences Universities in the region, opening various faculties and vocational schools. The educational institutions supported by the Humanitarian Relief Foundation are listed in Table 1.

Table 2. Educational institutions supported by the Humanitarian Relief Foundation

| Institution Name | Region | Number of Students | Number of Staff |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Marmara Okulu | Akrobat | 1.700 | 64 |
| Risale Okulu | Kerame | 1.800 | 72 |
| Adnan Demirtürk Okulu | Keferlusin | 117 | 9 |
| Rahmet Okulu | Keferlusin | 658 | 27 |
| Ensar Okulu | Meşhed | 1.023 | 33 |
| Yeryüzü Okulu | Meşhed | 618 | 28 |
| Firdevs Okulu | Babıska | 493 | 25 |
| Ahmet Sarıkurt Okulu | Babıska | 900 | 25 |
| Menderes Okulu | Haleplebbeyh | 810 | 23 |
| Şeyhmuz Vefa Okulu | Sarmada | 655 | 28 |
| Radva Okulu | Radva | 450 | 18 |
| Kefer Haya Okulu | Eriha | 430 | 25 |
| Alooka Okulu | İdlib | 450 | 16 |
| Eren Bülbül Okulu | Hirbetülceviz | 1.240 | 59 |
| Aliya İzzetbegoviç Okulu | Akrobat | 1.247 | 41 |
| Erbakan Okulu | Killi | 810 | 27 |
| Şemmarin Anaokulu | Azez | 153 | 6 |
| Siccu Anaokulu | Azez | 163 | 7 |
| Reyyan Anaokulu | Azez | 175 | 7 |
| Rufeyda Halk Eğitim Merkezi | Azez | 103 | 14 |
| Bab Rehabilitasyon Merkezi | | 120 | 12 |
| Azez Rehabilitasyon Merkezi | Azez | 20 | 6 |
| Azez Görme Engelliler Kursu | Azez | 30 | 4 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|-----|
| Şam Üniversitesi | Azez | 2.400 | 123 |
| Hayat Üniversitesi | Atme | 392 | 17 |
| Azez İslami Eğitim Noktaları | Azez | 609 | 47 |
| İdlib İslami Eğitim Noktaları | İdlib | 6.000 | 200 |
| Total | | 23.566 | 963 |

Note: Partial support is provided to Life University, while only social cash support is provided to Islamic education points.

Table 1 shows that the Humanitarian Relief Foundation supports 23,566 students and 963 staff at various school levels. The details of these supports provided by the foundation are explained in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Support Provided to Educational Institutions, Staff, and Students

| Distribution Materials | Unit | Total |
|---|---------------|------------|
| Food Package | Package | 5.581 |
| Vegetables Fruits | Kg | 23.600 |
| Sahurluk | Meal | 2.381 |
| Frozen Meat | Kg | 2.736 |
| Sugar | Kg | 1.642 |
| Biscuits | Kg | 2.715 |
| Beverages | Liter | 380 |
| Ready Meals Distributed to Students | Meal (Person) | 9.445 |
| Bread | Package | 37.890 |
| School Furniture and Equipment | Item | 3.678 |
| Clothes - Shoes | Item | 15.329 |
| Sponge | Item | 59 |
| Blanked | Item | 1.169 |
| Carpet | Item | 757 |
| Mat | Item | 30 |
| Stationary | Item | 412.682 |
| Desk – Table | Item | 4.594 |
| Education Materials | Item | 4.798 |
| Kitchen Set | Package | 2 |
| Kitchen Set Item | Item | 80 |
| Heating Materials | Kg | 65.132 |
| Cleaning Materials | Item | 13.213 |
| Fuel | Liter | 5.650 |
| Paint | Kova | 336 |
| Toys | Item | 1.245 |
| Cleaning Material Packages | Package | 187 |
| Cash Support | TL | ₺5.585.437 |
| Supported Educational Institutions | Item | 27 |
| Average Monthly Beneficiaries from Various Activities | Person | 22.437 |

It is observed that the Humanitarian Relief Foundation supports 27 educational institutions and a total of 22,437 individuals benefit from these aids. Six years ago, the foundation established Damascus University in the Azez region. These

universities are considered significant and leading institutions in the region. Founded in 2015, Damascus University currently serves 2,400 undergraduate and graduate students with 150 academic and administrative staff. It continues its activities with faculties such as Engineering, Theology and Law, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Education, Health Sciences, and the Institute of Graduate Studies. Additionally, it provides services to students and the local community with its Construction Laboratory, Mechatronics Laboratory, Chemistry Laboratory, and Computer Laboratory. In 2023, a laboratory will be established for the Faculty of Health Sciences. Of the 2,400 students studying at the university, 600 stay in dormitories. Two dormitories with a capacity of 320 each for male and female students have been constructed at a cost of \$500,000. In 2022, the construction of the Damascus University Mosque and Theology Faculty Complex began, with the classrooms completed and the mosque construction still ongoing. As the number of students increased, the existing land could not meet the needs, so adjacent land was purchased, expanding the campus area to 90 acres.

In various projects, excluding in-kind distribution materials, the operational budget reached 6,395,000 TL for Damascus University and 5,585,000 TL for other educational institutions, totaling 11,980,000 TL. Apart from operational expenses, 500,000 dollars were used for dormitories at Damascus University, 225,000 dollars for the mosque and Theology Faculty, and approximately 450,000 dollars for landscaping, land purchase, and other activities. The works carried out by the Humanitarian Relief Foundation for Damascus University include:

- A library has been established.
- Students pursuing master's degrees in Turkey have begun their thesis period.
- Negotiations have been conducted with universities in different cities for master's admissions.
- A Mechatronics and Telecommunications Laboratory has been established.
- 16 computers were purchased for the Computer Laboratory.
- Laboratories have been strengthened.
- Fitre (almsgiving) has been distributed to 279 needy students.
- 23,330 meal vouchers have been distributed to 110 students for 106 days, providing two meals daily.
- Social cash assistance has been distributed to graduate students.
- 7 acres of land adjacent to the university have been purchased.
- A vehicle has been purchased for the use of the rectorship.
- An agricultural engineering program has been opened, with approximately 50 hectares of chickpeas planted. Due to drought, the desired yield was not achieved, but 5.5 tons of seed chickpeas were obtained.
- Efforts have been initiated to strengthen the institutional structure of Damascus University, and regulations have been created in five main areas, including internal regulations, directives, and guidelines.
- The ÜBYS system has been prepared.

- An agricultural laboratory has been established.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ensuring that quality education reaches all segments of society is the responsibility of both formal education institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and non-formal education institutions such as civil society organizations (CSOs) and municipalities. It is aimed that everyone benefits equally from educational opportunities and that transformative education is provided free from all kinds of discrimination. To achieve these goals, appropriate educational policies must be formulated, necessary regulations and changes must be made, and it must be ensured that no one is left behind in education. This is a goal committed to by all states under the heading of quality education (Altunkaynak, 2020).

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) member states presented a common plan to ensure peace and prosperity globally now and in the future. For Turkey and other UN member states, 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) were set for 2030. These goals aim to address issues such as ending poverty worldwide, reducing inequalities in health and education, taking measures against the climate crisis, and sharing prosperity fairly. These goals are as follows: 1. No Poverty 2. Zero Hunger 3. Good Health and Well-being 4. Quality Education 5. Gender Equality 6. Clean Water and Sanitation 7. Affordable and Clean Energy 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth 9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure 10. Reduced Inequality 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities 12. Responsible Consumption and Production 13. Climate Action 14. Life Below Water 15. Life on Land 16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions 17. Partnerships for the Goals. The 4th goal related to quality education includes supporting lifelong learning.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is a fundamental objective. It aims to ensure that everyone has access to quality and inclusive education. In this context, it is aimed that all children, including pre-school education, can participate in free and quality education. It is also emphasized that quality technical and vocational education should be equally accessible and the importance of lifelong learning (UN, 2024).

Through its projects, IHH carries out education projects in line with the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the UN member countries. The projects in the field of education are conducted in accordance with the following development goals:

- a) Cash aids provided to students align with “No Poverty,” “Zero Hunger,” and “Good Health and Well-being.”
- b) Food packages, vegetables and fruits, Suhoor meals, frozen meat, sugar, biscuits, beverages, ready meals distributed to students, and bread align with “No Poverty,” “Zero Hunger,” and “Good Health and Well-being.”
- c) Distribution of school furniture and equipment, clothing and shoes, sponges, blankets, carpets, mats, stationery, desks and tables, educational materials, kitchen sets, heating materials, cleaning materials, fuel, paint, toys, and cleaning material packages align with “No Poverty,” “Zero Hunger,” and “Good Health and Well-being,” “Quality Education,” “Reduced Inequalities,” “Sustainable Cities and Communities,” and “Decent Work and Economic Growth.”

- d) Courses for women align with “Reduced Inequalities,” “Responsible Consumption and Production,” “Quality Education,” “Partnerships for the Goals,” and “Decent Work and Economic Growth.”

It is clear that IHH's activities in the safe zone are in line with the same direction and purpose as the UN's sustainable development goals.

On the other hand, it is not correct to say that the impact of migration on education is always negative. For example, student mobility for education in higher education, i.e., migration for educational purposes, is known to provide significant contributions both to the host country and to the home country upon return (Wurm & Kohlenberger, 2018). It is known that Jewish scientists, who made significant contributions to scientific advances in Turkey post-1933 University Reform and thereafter, were migrants fleeing Nazi persecution (Namal, 2012; Sofracı, 2018). These migrant scientists continued their work in fields ranging from medicine to literature, engineering to law in Turkey, taking important steps towards modernizing higher education in the Republic of Turkey (Namal, 2012; Sofracı, 2018).

Suggestions for CSOs;

Prioritize meeting the basic needs of families, such as shelter and nutrition. Such support can be provided through the contributions of civil society organizations.

Organize Turkish language courses or literacy courses and provide this education to children. Once the language barrier is resolved, students can participate in formal education.

Provide training to school administrators, teachers, and school staff about the challenging living conditions, rights, and services available to Syrians. Frequent meetings with families can be arranged by inviting them to schools or organizing home visits. Civil society organizations can play a more active role in children's education. Projects can be conducted in collaboration with the governor's offices, municipalities, education directorates, foundations, and civil society organizations.

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