

Turkish Local NGOs Social Protection Programs for the Refugees during the Covid-19 Crisis: A SWOT Analysis

Hamidou Taffa Abdoul-Azize

Faculty of Applied Sciences, Istanbul Gelisim University, Istanbul, Turkey, Cihangir, Şehit Jandarma Komando, J. Kom. Er Hakan Öner Street No: 1, 34310 Avcılar, İstanbul.

Abstract

For several decades, many countries implemented a variety of social protection to respond to various socioeconomic challenges and crises. Recently, there is an increase in the implementation of social protection due to the pandemic crisis to support the poor and vulnerable groups to cope with deprivation, poverty, and social exclusion. In some countries, both the government and NGOs execute such programs whilst in others; the NGOs are key actors in delivering social protection support. In the context of the covid-19 pandemic, NGOs could face numerous challenges such as restricted funding due to the global crisis and restriction measures enforced by the countries. This could affect NGOs activities and therefore worsen the living conditions of some vulnerable groups such as the refugees during the pandemic crisis. This study investigates Turkey's local NGOs implementation of Social Protection measures to support the refugees particularly in Istanbul during the covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, a SWOT analysis was carried out to point out the external and internal factors of local NGOs in implementing the protection measures in the benefit of the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic. The findings showed that local NGOs encountered numerous challenges in implementing social protection measures, which could reduce the effectiveness of executed programs to satisfy the targeting beneficiaries. However, these local NGOs could be key legal instruments for future crises as they have received many volunteer employees, obtained donations from Turkish citizens, and established collaboration with some private and public institutions during the covid-19 crisis.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, local NGOs, social protection, SWOT analysis, Istanbul, Turkey

1. Background

Recently, the globe experiences a new epidemic namely called the COVID-19 pandemic originated in the province of Wuhan in China (Wu et al., 2020) that poses many challenges and poses several concerns over the world. These challenges affected many social groups such as refugees who experienced numerous obstacles in the host countries and regions (World Health Organization, 2018; Mangrio et al., 2020). Many factors such as language barriers, stigmatization, and high density of refugees, lack of hygiene and sanitation equipment and

materials in the living areas enlighten the vulnerability of the refugees to the covid-19 pandemic (Grewal and Koul, 2021; Eiset et al., 2020). Moreover, mostly the refugees live in populated camps and face a lack of access to proper healthcare and individuals' protective equipment such as gloves and facemasks especially those hosted in rural areas (Mootz et al., 2019). Hagen-Zanker and Both (2021) note that most refugees are highly exposed to the pandemic as they lack access to healthcare and other social protection measures and supports like the citizens of the host countries. For instance, Valeriani et al. (2020) and Mangrio et al. (2020) mention that many Somalian and Eritrean refugees deceased from the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden.

In fact, the covid-19 pandemic pushed many vulnerable groups into poverty and deprivation as they lost their jobs. Most refugees are daily and informal employees and varieties of restrictions imposed by the country could deteriorate their living conditions. In this view, Dempster et al. (2020) emphasize that the refugees are vulnerable to various hostile effects of pandemics such as job losses and expulsions. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic as global health and economic concerns affects the amount of funding commonly allowed by International institutions to the governments and non-government organizations for humanitarian support purposes (Alemi et al., 2020).

On the other hand, with about 3,700,000-hosted refugees, Turkey is the country with the highest population of refugees in the globe. Most of these refugees live in some specific cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hayat, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, İzmir, Konya, and Kilis (UNHCR, 2021). In the context of the covid-19 pandemic, Turkey's government called its citizens to reduce their movement outside unless it is mandatory as a recommendation after that, the country registered the first case of covid-19 on 11 March 2020 (T.R. Ministry of Health, 202a). However, the increasing number of confirmed cases of covid-19 and deaths forced the country to enforce gradually some measures (restricted access to some public areas, lockdowns), closure of schools, prohibition of collective gatherings such as scientific, cultural, or artistic meetings and conferences. The country imposed remote work for public institutions and organizations, travel restrictions, bans on traveling to many countries, especially European countries. Additionally, curfews were imposed especially for the elderly over the age of 65 and under the age of 20 years and then for the entire population in some cities (World Health Organization, 2020).

Earlier to the covid-19 pandemic, Budak et al. (2018) highlighted that most Syrian refugees living in Turkey such as women, elders, and children represent vulnerable groups, especially the women and elderly people who constitute a risk group in terms of social, mental, and physical health compared to the population of the country. Like in other countries, the enforced measures to curb the spreading of the virus could worsen the socio-economic conditions of the vulnerable groups, especially the refugees. Accordingly, ASAM (2021) mentioned that the refugee students faced challenges such as language barriers, and internet connections attending the online education executed in Turkey during the covid-19 pandemic crisis. Nisanci et al. (2020) noted that the lack of preparation for tele-social work posed challenges to nongovernmental organizations to provide psychosocial support services to refugees in Turkey during the pandemic. Additionally, Açıkalın et al. (2021) clarified that the COVID-19 has prevented the women refugees from daily jobs, and access to health services and made their

integration into Turkey society more complex. Abdoul-Azize and ALIYEV (2022) indicated that most Turkey local NGOs faced high demand for social protection support from the refugees during the pandemic whereas these NGOs have experienced limited budget to respond efficiently to satisfy the needs of refugees. Furthermore, Ahmed (2022) underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the nutrition, education, the physical and mental health of Syrian refugee children in Turkey.

It is obvious that the covid-19 pandemic posed serious threats to refugees living in Turkey. In addition, local and international NGOs have contributed to supporting the refugees to overcome the adverse effects posed to them. However, there is a lack of noticeable studies analyzing the strength, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities faced by local NGOs in implementing social protection measures to support the refugees during the pandemic crisis in Turkey. Such a study could however contribute significantly to reviewing the weaknesses and threats that faced the NGOs in responding to unpredictable crises. Accordingly, the current study investigates Turkey's local NGOs implementation of social protection programs to support the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic particularly in the province of Istanbul.

Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the main internal factors (Strengths and Weaknesses) of local NGOs in executing the social protection measures to assist the refugees during the covid-19 crisis?
2. What is the key external factor (Threats) that affect adversely local NGOs in assisting the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic?
3. What is key external factor (Opportunities) that could enhance the ability of local NGOs to execute social protection measures to support the refugees for future unpredictable crises?

2. Material and method

2.1. Material

2.1.1. Study area

This study was conducted in Istanbul, the biggest province of Turkey located between 28° 01' and 29° 55' eastern longitudes and 41° 33' and 40° 28' latitudes. With a population of 16,310,652 Istanbul represents approximately 16.3% of the country's population (TÜİK, 2021). Choosing Istanbul to carry out this study is due to it being the most populated city in Turkey and located between European and Asian sides. Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city, which attracted a huge number of refugees from Syria, Georgia, Armenia, Afghanistan, and more recently Ukraine. Further, the importance of economic activities makes the city more attractive for refugees and asylum seekers as they can find certainly jobs and the city distinguished by a great location for those who plan to join Europe later on. Moreover, they can also benefit from social protection benefits, as many public and non-government Institutions organizations that support refugees and asylum seekers.

2.1.2. Study data

The data of this study consisted of primary data collected from ten local NGOs targeting to support refugees and asylum seekers and located in Istanbul. These local NGOs were contacted through email and then by phone to enlighten their responsible for the study. Five of them approved their availability to participate in online interviews due to the country's imposed covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The interview included the types of programs executed by local NGOs, channels for applying for social protection support, the duration of the evaluation of the application for social benefits, the channels used by local NGOs for delivering social protection benefits, the data management system of local NGOs, the relation of local NGOs with other private and public institutions. Moreover, the questions target to explore the follow up system of local NGOs after delivery of social protection benefits, the funding sources of local NGOs, the legal basis and laws regulating the functioning of local NGOs as well as the key barriers encountered by local NGOs in implementing social protection support to assist the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Data analysis

SWOT technique was used in this study. It is an analytical method that focuses on organization strategic planning and analyzing the internal (S, W) and external (O, P) factors to frame a consistent and comprehensible plan to strengthen the organization. Weihrich (1982) indicates SWOT analysis involves internal factors controlled by the organization and external ones that are exogenous beyond its control. SWOT analysis allows selecting these internal and external factors and synthesizing them into a matrix to utilize the strengths to maximize opportunities while balancing out weaknesses and offsetting threats. Accordingly, the matrix findings are powerful tool to formulate long-term strategies and plans. Initially, Weihrich (1982) used the SWOT technique for strategic purposes and decision-making for the management and marketing of the organization. SWOT technique is a flexible tool not only limited to the management aspect. It can be used for the country's policy planning and so on. For instance, Yuningsih et al. (2018) used SWOT analysis to investigate the challenges faced in implementing effective and sustainable health and education social protection. Furthermore, Ursol et al. (2019) analyze the communities' models of the delivery of primary health care whilst Harrikari et al (2021) explore the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic for social workers in Finland during its first waves in the 2020 spring.

In this study, a SWOT analysis was performed to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by local NGOs in implementing social protection programs to support the refugees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Results

3.1. Strengths and weaknesses analysis

The strengths and weaknesses analysis of local NGOs implementation of social protection measures to assist the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic showed that they have some key strength whilst they present some internal weaknesses. Local NGOs strengths include their

compliance with international laws and human rights, the existence of social protection support with well-defined evaluation criteria for which the refugees can apply at any time during the covid-19 pandemic, and a short evaluation period (1-2 weeks).

However, these local NGOs faced some key challenges that reduce their effectiveness to respond to the needs of the refugees during the covid-19 pandemic. These include the enforced restrictions (lockdown, curfews, etc.) enforced by the country, lack of sufficient budget, and follow up system, lack of consistent communication tools (social media, Facebook, NGO websites, phone calls), language barriers, and the lack of integrated data management system between local NGOs and public Institutions.

3.2. Opportunities and threats analysis

In implementing the social protection measures to support the refugees to overcome the adverse impacts of the pandemic, Turkey's local NGOs had various opportunities that could enhance the effectiveness of their initiatives. These comprised obtaining donations from Turkish citizens and the establishment of collaboration with some Turkey private and public institutions as well as the increase of the number of employees by the arrival of volunteers' citizens. However, local NGOs still could face other threats such as the continuity of the Covid-19 pandemic, the probable increase of the number of refugees from the ongoing conflict in neighboring countries (Syria, Ukraine, etc.) and the social and language differences between refugees and local NGOs workers. The author summarizes the results of the SWOT analysis in Figure 1.

	INTERNAL FACTORS	EXTERNAL FACTORS
Positive	<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of social protection to support worldwide recognized vulnerable groups (refugees) during the covid-19 pandemic; • The variety of social protection programs with well-defined criteria; • Applications for social protection support are opened at anytime; • Short duration of evaluation of the application for social protection support (1-2 weeks); • Local NGOs are consistent with international law and human rights. 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations from individuals' citizens; • Collaboration between local NGOs and some private and public institutions; • Increase in the number of volunteering employees in local NGOs.
Negative	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of reliable and defined budget for local NGOs; • Language barriers between local NGOs employees and refugees; • Inconsistency of communication tools used by local NGOs (social media, Facebook, websites, phone calls); • Lack of following up system after delivery of social protection supports; • Absence of integrated data management system between NGOs and public Institutions; • Difficulty to deliver social protection supports due to various restrictions imposed by the country. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity of the Covid-19 pandemic; • Potential increase in the number of refugees due to various conflicts and starvation in the neighboring countries(Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine); • Social and cultural differences between refugees and host country (Turkey).

Figure 1: Results of SWOT analysis (source: the author)

4. Discussion

The current study investigates the local NGOs implementation of Social Protection measures to support the refugees particularly in Istanbul during the covid-19 pandemic by means of SWOT analysis. The strengths of local NGOs are these institutions have legal bases and delivery of a variety of social protection programs available at any time with a short duration of evaluation to support the refugees during the covid-19 crisis.

However, the study results showed that the local NGOs encountered some weaknesses in providing social protection support to the refugees in the covid-19 crisis include insufficiency of budget, lack of follow up system, consistent communication tools and integrated system in

data management with other public and private institutions. These results aligned with those of Nisanci et al. (2020) who previously highlighted that funding insufficiency of some local charity organizations jeopardize the ability of these organizations to satisfy efficiently to the needs of the applicant for social protection supports. Similarly, Meral et al. (2021) underline that challenges posed by funding threatened the sustainability of the activities of local national NGOs. Also, Abdoul-Azize and SAYIN (2020) highlight that Turkey management system of social protection programs lacks consistent connection between public institutions such as municipalities and other charities organizations. Other weaknesses faced by Turkey local NGOs in delivering social protection support include social and cultural differences between refugees and employees of local NGOs. Earlier, Demir et al. (2019) and McPherson (2020) indicate that language barrier and cultural differences are key challenges faced by the refugees in their hosted living that limited their access to the healthcare system.

On the other hand, the opportunities of Local NGOs are obtaining donations from Turkish citizens, establishment of collaboration of NOGs with private and public institutions and increase of number of volunteers' employees who support NGOs during the covid-19 crisis. This could strengthen their ability to respond to the continuous Covid-19 pandemic and the increasing refugees due to various conflict in its neighboring countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates local NGOs implementation of the Social Protection measures to the benefit of refugees during the covid-19 pandemic in the Province of Istanbul, Turkey. It showed that most of local NGOs comply with international laws, human rights, and delivery a variety of social protection measures. These measures rely on well-defined criteria, are available at any time and their applications are shortly evaluated. Though local NGOs experienced erratic funding, used inconsistent communication tools lack of integrated data management system between NGOs and public Institutions. This could reduce local NGOs ability to respond to the probable increasing of refugees due to various conflicts in Turkey neighboring countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine) combined to continuous the Covid-19 crisis.

6. References

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