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- Lancaster Index to Defence & International Security Literature
- Peace Palace Library
- Research Papers in Economics (RePEc)
- Social Sciences Information Space (SOCIONET)
- Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESEARCH ARTICLES

72

**Possibilities for Epistemic Violence in Asylum Process:
Lessons From the Case of Finland**

By Katri Gadd and Laura Lehtikunnas

88

The Clash of Japan's FOIP and China's BRI?

By Daisuke Akimoto

101

The Evolution of the Syrian Humanitarian NGOs and External Challenges

By Mazen Alhousseiny and Emrah Atar

121

The Composition of Multiple Times and Spaces in the Protests

By Semra Akay

BOOK REVIEWS

135

Eric D. Weitz

A World Divided

The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States

By Marco Marsili

138

Seth Anziska

Preventing Palestine:

A Political History from Camp David to Oslo

By Umut Uzer

141

Erik Voeten

Ideology and International Institutions

By Francesco Trupia

144

Elizabeth R. Nugent

After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transition

By Ilker Kalin



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The Evolution of the Syrian Humanitarian NGOs and External Challenges

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ABSTRACT

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Syrian humanitarian sector was limited to two types of NGOs till the Syrian conflict started; traditional charities composing of religious or ethnic focus NGOs, and the Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs) that were affiliated by governmental figures. They both failed to respond to the needs of civilians in non-governmental controlled areas. This has forced Syrians with limited or no previous experience in this sector to act immediately and independently. However, after the crisis erupted, the commitment to their case, availability of funds, and hospitality from the neighbouring countries evolved them very quickly to become the primarily organised responders in the non-governmental controlled territories. Those newly formed humanitarian groups tried to link humanitarian interventions with early recovery activities without losing the scope of being a voice advocating for the human rights of the innocents. The Syrian Humanitarian NGOs based in Turkey were delivering their assistance to the vulnerable communities inside Syria further than where they physically reach without even evaluating the risks that might affect their lives or their beloved families. In some cases, they were the only humanitarian actors in besieged areas as Rural Damascus or Eastern Aleppo and hard to reach locations as Rural Homs or Northern Hama. Those security threats are now less impactful on their existence compared with the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental external challenges that they are facing and can highly affect their presence. The external challenges that they are witnessing that might affect not only the way they are operating but their sustainability as well. Those external challenges were focusing on political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental to form the well-known PESTLE analysis that categorises these external threats and risks. As new Syrian NGOs have spread within countries nearby as well as in the diaspora, this article will only focus on those that were based mainly in Turkey due to several reasons explained in the article.

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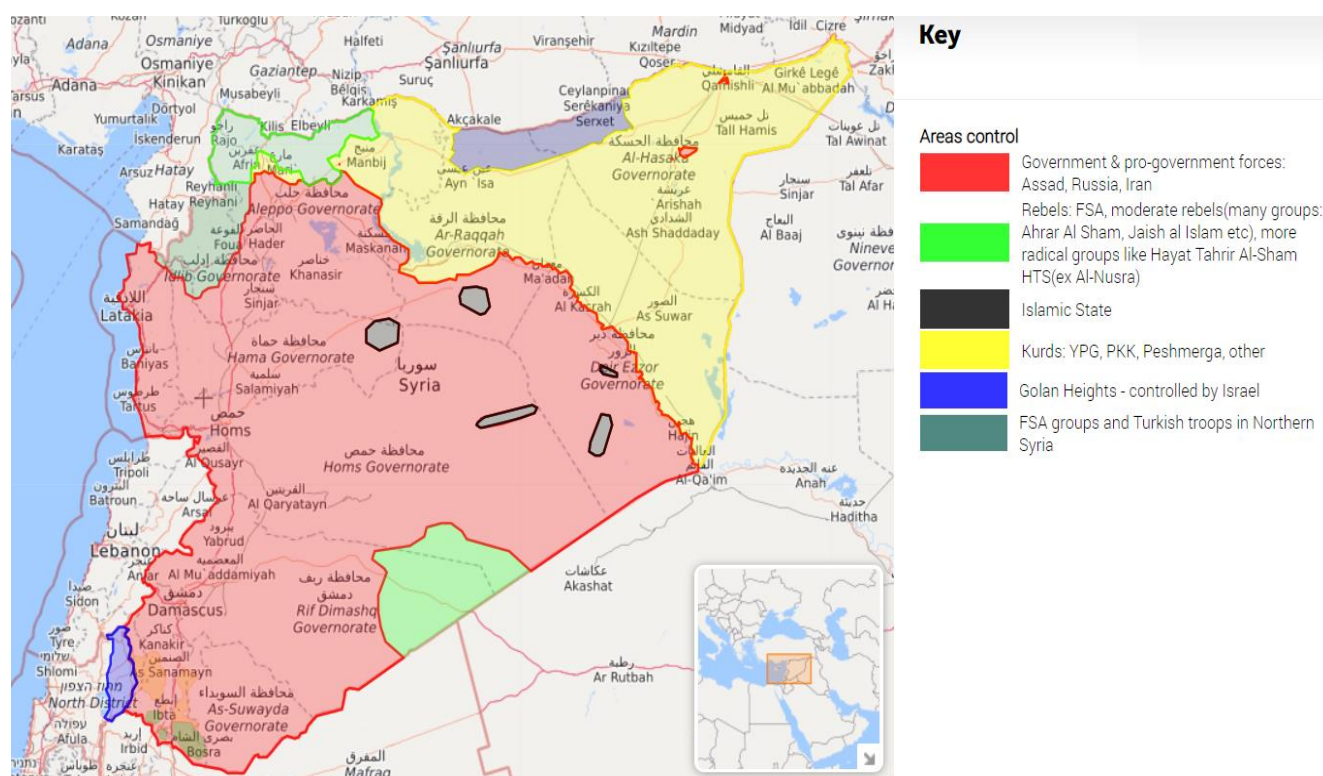
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Introduction

The Syrian conflict started in March 2011 after the civil demonstrations within the country transformed rapidly into civil unrest (Ferris and Kirisci, 2016). Then, in June 2012, it was classified by the International Committee of the Red Cross -ICRC as a civil war that affected the whole region (Meininghaus, 2016). After a decade of the Syrian conflict, more than 387 thousand were killed, and more than 205 thousand were recorded to be missed (BBC, 2021), 13.4 million were internally displaced (OCHA, 2021), together with around 5.6 million refugees in countries around the globe (UNHCR, 2021). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR, 2017) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, 2021) classified it to be the worst human-made crisis after the Second World War.

The country was divided into several territories, each under separate authorities (Khalaf, 2015). As shown in figure 1 by the Liveuamap website (2021), the Government of Syria is now controlling more than half of the country, where its presence is limited to the coast, southern and central regions. While the remaining areas, mainly the Northwest and Northeast of the country, is under the control of the various rebel groups and the Kurdish forces, respectively.

Figure 1: The divisions of the Syrian territories among the groups in June 2021



Source: <https://syria.liveuamap.com/> (2021)

Against all principles of International Humanitarian Law, the Government of Syria has used humanitarian aid as a tool of war, and politicised relief, thus breaching the humanitarian principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, and Independence (Meininghaus, 2016). Even though there were over 1,400 registered humanitarian associations and charities before the crises (Taki, 2012), those organisations have still failed to respond to the needs of vulnerable people in the non-governmental controlled territories

(Meininghaus, 2016). In addition, legal and illegal organisations have come to the agenda as organisations that are considered 'Trojans' within the dominant nationalist system (Dag, 2018).

The vacuum in the humanitarian space that those non-governmental organisations-NGOs have created was covered by new grassroots foundations and diaspora organisations (Qayyum, 2011). Many of those grassroots charities moved their head offices to the countries nearby and registered there for several reasons; one of them is closed to the donors and international partners NGOs. These informal cross border operations, among other factors as well, have also encouraged the UN Security Council to approve the cross-border resolution 2165 in February 2014 that allowed UN agencies to respond to the needs of the non-governmental controlled areas from the countries nearby independently from the government regulations only with coordination and information sharing (Meininghaus, 2016).

These newly founded NGOs, which have limited or even no previous experience in the humanitarian field, have evolved rapidly, compared with the relevant theories discussing the development of humanitarianism listed by Michael Barnett's book *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (2011).

Within this article, a literature review indicates the types of organisations, the history of humanitarian NGOs, and theoretically their roles. Then a case study of Syrian humanitarian NGOs operating from Turkey responding to the communities in need inside Syria will follow the literature review to criticise those theories and show how those newly formed Syrian NGOs have developed and improved their responses to create their own fingerprint. It will then move to the external challenges that they are witnessing that might affect the way they are operating and their presence and sustainability. Those external challenges were listed according to the most famous PESTLE analysis that categorises external threats and risks between political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental.

As new Syrian NGOs were spread within countries nearby and in the diaspora, this article will only focus on those based mainly in Turkey due to several reasons. Firstly, Turkey is the hub for the most significant UN cross border operations (Humanitarian Aid, 2020). Secondly, Turkey has hosted the most significant number of those NGOs and facilitated their interventions for years. Thirdly, it is the most substantial experience of the writers as closely working with them from different perspectives: as a partnership focal point employee at several INGOs working and supporting SNGOs, directly through being a staff member with SNGOs, as a trainer providing independent consultancies, and as a member of networks and platforms that are consisted of the new Syrian NGOs.

The Role of Humanitarian NGOs

Organisations can be defined as a structured group of people who work, participate, coordinate, and support each other in a system to achieve a defined goal (Cunliffe, 2008). Organisations are mainly divided into three sectors as public organisations such as ministries, parliaments, or local councils; private organisations such as cooperatives, enterprises, or companies; and the third sector, as it is called in the UK, NGOs or private voluntary organisations, as they are known in the USA such as humanitarian or human rights organisations, or charities (Bromley and Meyer, 2014). Regardless of the different divisions, there are standard features among the organisation, such as the existence of goals, the structure of the team, the resources used, and the set of operations that runs the system (Hudson, 1999). NGOs are divided based on those services and programmes, including but not limited to humanitarian and emergency relief, human rights, development, democracy, peacebuilding, environmental (Barnett, 2011).

As Michael Harris clarified, people and particularly beneficiaries, who are the poorest of all, are the core of the NGOs as people are the main funders, motivators, and reason for existence for charitable organisations (Poulton and Harris 1991). In addition to the description of the NGOs as a group of citizens for the philanthropic goal supported by voluntary donations (OECD, 1988), humanitarianism is the compassion to help and provide aid to others (Barnett, 2011). The charity and philanthropy concepts have existed since the formation of humanity (Loch, 1910), with the term humanitarianism being officially used during the early nineteenth century (Barnett, 2011). According to Hudson, the charity was practised by early Egyptian citizens through a developed ethical code as a form of social support. It was also practised in India during the Buddhist Empire as well as the Greek and the Roman Empires. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have also encouraged these sorts of actions and embedded them within the religion as a way to please God (Hudson,

1999). This ethical code did not have the same official or organised structure that humanitarianism has today. This gives us a summary of the role of humanitarian NGOs from the day they existed until now, which position people as the core of their goals.

Barnett divides humanitarianism into three different eras: "an imperial humanitarianism, from the early nineteenth century through the World War II; a neo-humanitarianism, from the World War II through the end of the Cold War; and a liberal humanitarianism, from the end of the Cold War to the present" (Barnett, 2011: 29). Perhaps the most important milestone during the imperial humanitarianism age was the establishment of the first international humanitarian organisation which is the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863 by Henry Dunant, as a result of his witness on the impact of the Battle of Solferino on injured soldiers in 1859 (ICRC, 2010). States supported ICRC until the formation of the first Geneva Convention in August 1864 to govern the sick and wounded soldiers (Stroup, 2012). The main programmes for the humanitarian organisations that existed during the imperial humanitarianism period were more centralised as fighting slavery, in addition to supporting prisoners and soldiers of war.

In contrast to the imperial humanitarianism age, during the neo-humanitarianism age, hundreds of international NGOs were formed to help in the reconstruction of European countries devastated during World War II. In addition to the reconstruction of Europe, they also assisted in the development of populations within decolonised countries. The purpose of the NGOs in this age was to support vulnerable affected people outside the border of the hosting countries. This was done by either providing lifesaving relief assistance through the distribution of clothes, food, and medical supplies or through the establishment of new development projects that were needed for the post-war age, such as education and training, agriculture, water, and hospitals.

Though during the third age, liberal humanitarianism, thousands of local NGOs were formed, working closely with their international counterparts to develop their communities and recover them from the impact of poverty, war and natural disasters. This age was not mainly focusing on development but also advocating on behalf of the affected communities. The role of the NGOs in this age was not limited to the assistance they provide, whether relief assistance or development; it moves beyond that to cover the new shape of programmes such as lobbying for changing policies, convincing governments, and protecting civilians (OECD, 1988). This classification matches as well with David Korten's work who looked at the different stages of NGOs: starting with the relief and welfare, which provides the emergency assistance to individuals and families, moving to the community development that enhances the neighbourhoods and villages, then the sustainable system developments which support regional and national institutions and finally People's movements which change behaviour or policies (Lewis and Kanji, 2009).

Assessing External Threats against Organisations

Organisations are not operating in an isolated atmosphere; they are open systems surrounded by external factors (Senior and Fleming, 2006; Myers et al., 2012). This environment might either be an immediate stakeholder, e.g., suppliers, or it might be a contextual environment, e.g., the countries nearby (Myers et al., 2012). One of the best tools to identify the external environment is called the PEST or PESTLE Analysis (Senior and Fleming, 2006; Mullins, 2016; Myers et al., 2012). As shown in figure 2, the abbreviations of the following factors form the name of this tool: The Political, Economic, Social, and Technological factors (PEST); some other factors were added later to upgrade the tool, which are the Legal and Environmental ones (PESTLE).

In addition to legislation of operations, the political factors take governmental policies and actions into consideration. The economic factors understand the overall economy, the market functioning, and funding mechanisms. The social factors look at demographic areas. The technological factors check the use of technology and infrastructure. And finally, the environmental factors look at ecological life with relevant regulations.

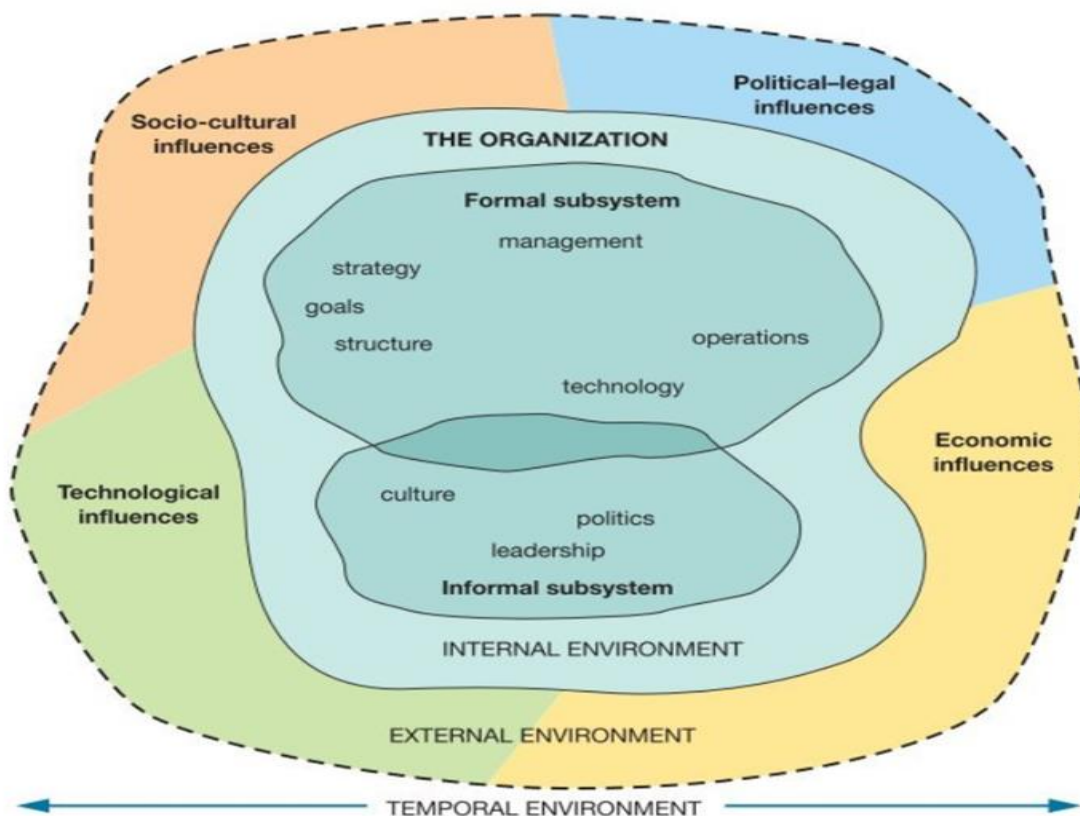
To understand each factor, a set of questions need to be answered within the organisation as follows: what does this factor specifically change, why does this factor make changes, how do the changes take place, how has this change affected the organisation, what is the effective duration of this factor on the organisation (Hughes, 2006)?

Methodology

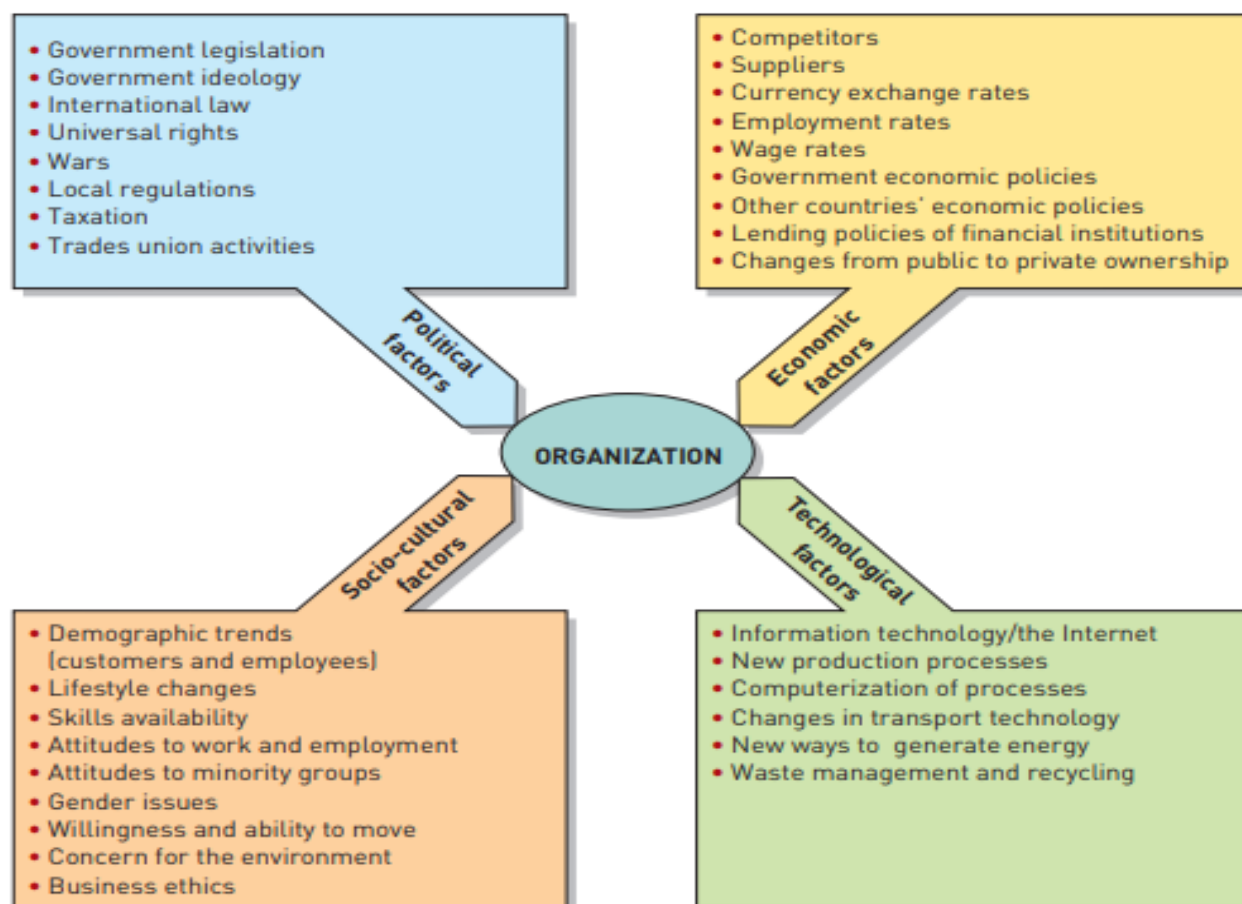
Although various valuable resources cover the humanitarian NGOs and their roles, only a few pieces of research and articles were made on the Syrian case. The available secondary resources can provide a broad overview of the context but with only limited details that cannot be used to build this research. Thus, a variety of primary data was obtained to seek the depth of the challenges, triangulate the data gathered, and study the recommended feedbacks that were tested. Those primary sources were structured surveys to fulfil the PEST- Political, Economic, Social, and Technological analysis, in addition to semi-structured interviews with key informants.

PEST or PESTLE analysis is the most useful tool that could assess and provide understanding for the multi-dimensional environment surrounding the organisational system (Senior and Fleming, 2006; Perera, 2017). It is a way together with the famous SWOT analysis form integrated method to strategical planning for organisations (Rastogi and Trivedi, 2016). Figure 3 demonstrates a deep understanding of PEST factors in the organisation. Therefore, the PEST version is used with integrating the legal and political challenges together while preferring to avoid focusing on the last category of the modified tool, which is the environment, as it needs a separate research focus to highlight those types of challenges and their effects within this article.

Figure 2: The organisational system operating in multi-dimensional environments



Source: Senior and Fleming, (2006: 32)

Figure 3: PEST factors and organisational change

Sources: Senior and Fleming, (2006: 36)

The primary data was a combination of qualitative information to know more about the evolution of their NGOs as well as quantitative to understand the external challenges and their scale. Both the surveys and the interviews targeted the senior management of the Syrian NGOs, such as chairpersons, directors, and chief executives. The research was an opportunity to engage with 20 Syrian NGOs and their members that are based in Turkey and operating in non-governmental areas. There are hundreds of Syrian NGOs registered and operated in Turkey, only 135 of them were registered with the UN OCHA platform by 2018 (OCHA, 2018). Out of these 135 registered NGOs with UN OCHA, 20 Syrian NGOs were selected for the survey covering the various categories that they might fall under, e.g., diaspora vs grassroots, humanitarian vs development or human rights NGOs as well as high vs low annual budgets trying to cover the various categories. 2 of those 20 surveyed NGOs were selected to be interviewed on their establishment process. Although these two were formed by the Syrian Diaspora living in the EU, they still have their biggest operational offices in Turkey and registered within the Turkish government and the UN OCHA platform.

Humanitarian NGOs in the Syrian Context

The History of Syrian Humanitarian NGOs

The evolution of the Syrian NGOs is very similar to the global process described by Michael Barnett with some singularities.

The charitable activities in Syria existed hundreds of years ago as a sort of community solidarity between the wealthy and poor neighbours living together in a closed environment (Atar, 2019). As stated above, the three main religions in Syria and the Middle East: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, supported and encouraged these charitable efforts. The religious leaders were also controlling some of these activities within the places of worship, convincing their followers that it is a way to get closer to God. Perhaps the first known structured faith-based charities were during the Ottoman empire. The first Christian and Islamic Syrian Charities are known as "the Association Saint Vincent" and "Al-Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association" were founded in 1863 in Damascus and 1878 in Beirut, respectively (Ruiz de Elevira and Zintl, 2012). Tens of charities were established early in the 20th century that were either targeting specific population groups such as youth, orphans, women or elders, or religious sections such as Shia, Sunni, Orthodox, Catholic or even ethnicity such as Arab, Assyrian, Armenian. After the French Mandate was ended in 1946, a slight improvement in the existence of the charitable organisation as well as the type of interventions was noticed. The number of registered charities increased from 73 to 203 during the 1950s (Ruiz de Elevira and Zintl, 2012).

As in Michael Barnett global division for humanitarian work, the Syrian charities during that period can be classified under imperial humanitarianism (Barnett, 2011). These charities provided traditional assistance to the communities, such as sponsoring orphans, senior citizens, and poor families, providing medical treatment and education that was integrated with religious studies.

Charitable activism was blocked when the state of emergency was declared in the country after the Baath Party seized control in 1963. From that date till 2000, when Bashar Al-Assad took control of the presidency after the death of his father Hafez, the number of charities dropped from 596 to 513 as the regime at that time was not a fan of the civil society in any form, including the independent unions, human rights organisations, and others as they were seen as a threat to their leadership (Ruiz de Elevira and Zintl, 2012).

Within the first few years of the presidency of Bashar Al-Assad, the country has witnessed some sort of openness, things that were considered taboos, prohibited and prosecuted by his father's iron-hand way of control became less restricted in Bashar's era (Collins, 2018). That period was called Damascus Spring. It is worth mentioning that during that period, cell phones, internet, and satellite TV connections were officially permitted, the registration for new charities was allowed and encouraged by the government, the existence of independent media such as newspapers and magazines was approved, along with other civil activities as well.

Although the number of registered associations increased significantly to 1,400 in 2003, according to statistics from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, it was still less than other nearby countries such as Lebanon and Jordan that had 3,500 and 2,000 respectively (Taki, 2012). During that period, in addition to local philanthropic and faith-based charities, a new form of NGOs was established to accommodate the enthusiasm of the youth, which is the biggest category among all age groups. These new NGOs that were known as Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs), were strongly affiliated with, if not managed directly by, government networks such as the president's wife and cousin (De Martino, 2017). The creation of such organisations was used mainly to show the openness of civil society in Syria and to attract funds from external donors (Ruiz de Elevira and Zintl, 2012). Syria Trust for Development which was established and led by Bashar's wife Asmaa Al-Assad, was the biggest among all, while Al-Bustan Association, another large charitable organisation, was established and led by Bashar's cousin Rami Makhlouf.

Organisations during that era can be classified as neo-humanitarianism according to Michael Barnett definition. The GONGOs differed from charities as instead of keeping religious leaders at the top of the hierarchy; they kept regime allies and key connectors at the top. The activities that were implemented both by the faith-based charities and GONGOs were more developmental than emergency response focused, as

they worked on social development, environment and culture enhancements, and economic support such as the establishment of well-served hospitals, supporting the marriage of young couples, and skills development of unemployed citizens. The two types of organisations did not compete with each other for funding nor implementation, as each one of them has its audience and supporters. The faith-based charities were funded by the local businessmen and middle-class breadwinners and targeting their religious followers, whereas the GONGOs were mainly funded by external governmental funds and targeted the youth as secular non-religious.

The New Syrian Humanitarian NGOs

This did not last long. Due to the Syrian crisis in 2011 as part of the Arab spring, many young and mid-aged men and women tried to support the civilian victims of forced displacements outside those two types of organisations and in an informal way. The main reason behind this was mainly to respond independently outside the monitoring control of the regime. The rationale for such an action was to ensure that vulnerable civilians are not excluded from receiving the necessary assistance based on their political views or ethnicity. The seeding funds for such initiatives were mainly from the close networks of those new inexperienced aid workers. Subsequently, their efforts were adopted by the Syrian diaspora, who shared with them the same values and beliefs and funded their activities. The Syrian diaspora has tried to cover the gap in civil society, particularly the humanitarian sector, through reshaping those initiatives (Qayyum, 2011).

This has led to the formation then the development of new humanitarian NGOs different from the pre-existing faith-based charities and GONGOs. More than a year from the spark of the Syrian unrest, the Syrian government started chasing, arresting, torturing, and executing some of those new aid workers as they are operating outside the control of the regime. This has forced those philanthropic men and women to move their programmes to the opposition-held areas and manage operations from outside the country, such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, as it is easier to meet the donors and provide the humanitarian commodities (Atar, 2021). In addition to the grassroots groups, the Syrian diaspora has also formed some new NGOs in their host countries to ensure that their fund-raising efforts remain legitimate and sustainable. As the displaced grassroots groups formed offices for their newly established NGOs in the countries nearby, the diaspora NGOs have also registered their operational offices in Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan to work closely with the affected communities inside Syria. Interviews were done with the Chairs of two of those Syrian diaspora NGOs in this regard: Dr Ayman Jundi and Dr Ghanem Tayara.

Dr Jundi, who is a Consultant in Emergency Medicine at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and a Clinical Senior Lecturer in Disaster Medicine at the University of Central Lancashire, co-founded one of those Syrian Diaspora NGOs named Syria Relief with other Syrian expatriates based in the UK (Alhousseiny, 2020; Alhousseiny, 2021). When asked about how Syrian relief was established, Dr Jundi stated that:

"Two of the group members decided to go over to southern Turkey, to see if they can buy food and warm clothes and tents for the civilians Syrian refugees, stranded in no-man's land. So, we started a very informal fund-raising campaign amongst friends and acquaintances. We raised over £20,000 in two days. The two friends went over and bought winter clothes, tents, and non-perishable food, and managed to get them smuggled across the borders into Syria".

As this was not an easy exercise nor the issues could be solved with one round of support, Dr Jundi and his colleagues tried to find other, more consistent and professional ways for providing support, this led to the registration in The Charity Commission in September 2011. Dr Jundi was asked if he ever thought their NGO would be as big as it is today, and he said:

"No, we most certainly never thought we would be here today when we were in the process of setting up the charity. Now, we have annual turnover of over £20 million. When we started, the trustees were doing everything themselves. We then had some volunteers, who then became employees. Now we have a nice office in Manchester with professional teams looking after programmes, fund-raising, media and marketing, and all other aspects of our work. We have offices in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, staffed by experienced professionals who deal with the various aspects of humanitarian work on the ground. We now have eight Trustees, who now set the course and strategy of the charity and have no operational duties."

Dr Tayara, who is a Principal General Practitioner with an interest in Cardiology and is the Lead Prescriber at Bridge Surgery in Redditch as well as one of the founders of Syria Relief, has worked hard with other leaders of Syrian Diaspora NGOs to coordinate the assistance provided to the affected communities in Syria. This coordination has formed the Union des Organisations de Secours et Soins Médicaux-UOSSM (UOSSM, 2019). Dr Tayara was the chair of UOSSM and still has a leadership position within its Board. According to Dr Tayara, UOSSM was established by several independent Syrian Diaspora NGOs registered in the UK, USA, France, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland, with a main objective of UOSSM was to utilise the resources and assistance to prevent duplication of efforts as much as possible. And then, the NGO became a federation that combines UOSSM country members.

Many of those grassroots and diaspora charities moved their head offices to the host countries, thus became closer to the donors and international partner NGOs. The humanitarian intervention from the countries nearby was known as cross-border operations, and these organisations have resorted to cross-border operations because they mistrusted the Government of Syria's sincerity in delivering aid to needy communities.

According to UN OCHA, more than 135 NGOs registered in Turkey provide relief and assistance inside Syria (OCHA, 2018). That new generation of the Syrian Humanitarian NGOs, whether they were formed by expatriates or grassroots, can be classified as Liberal Humanitarianism according to Michael Barnett classification, due to their roles. Indeed, they were formed to support the civilians that were forgotten by the pre-existing NGOs due to the regime of strict control, but they also work as the voice of the vulnerable families and communities.

Even though these newly founded NGOs had limited or even no previous experience in the humanitarian field, but they have evolved rapidly compared with the relevant theories discussing the development of humanitarianism listed by Michael Barnett in his book *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*.

They are now recognised as major actors in conflict resolution together with other forms of Civil Society Organisations, trying to put an end to the suffering of millions of Syrians living as prisoners, refugees or internally displaced with non-humanitarian conditions under the form of Syrian Civil Society Support Room (Hellmuller and Zahar, 2018).

The External Threats Facing the New Syrian NGOs

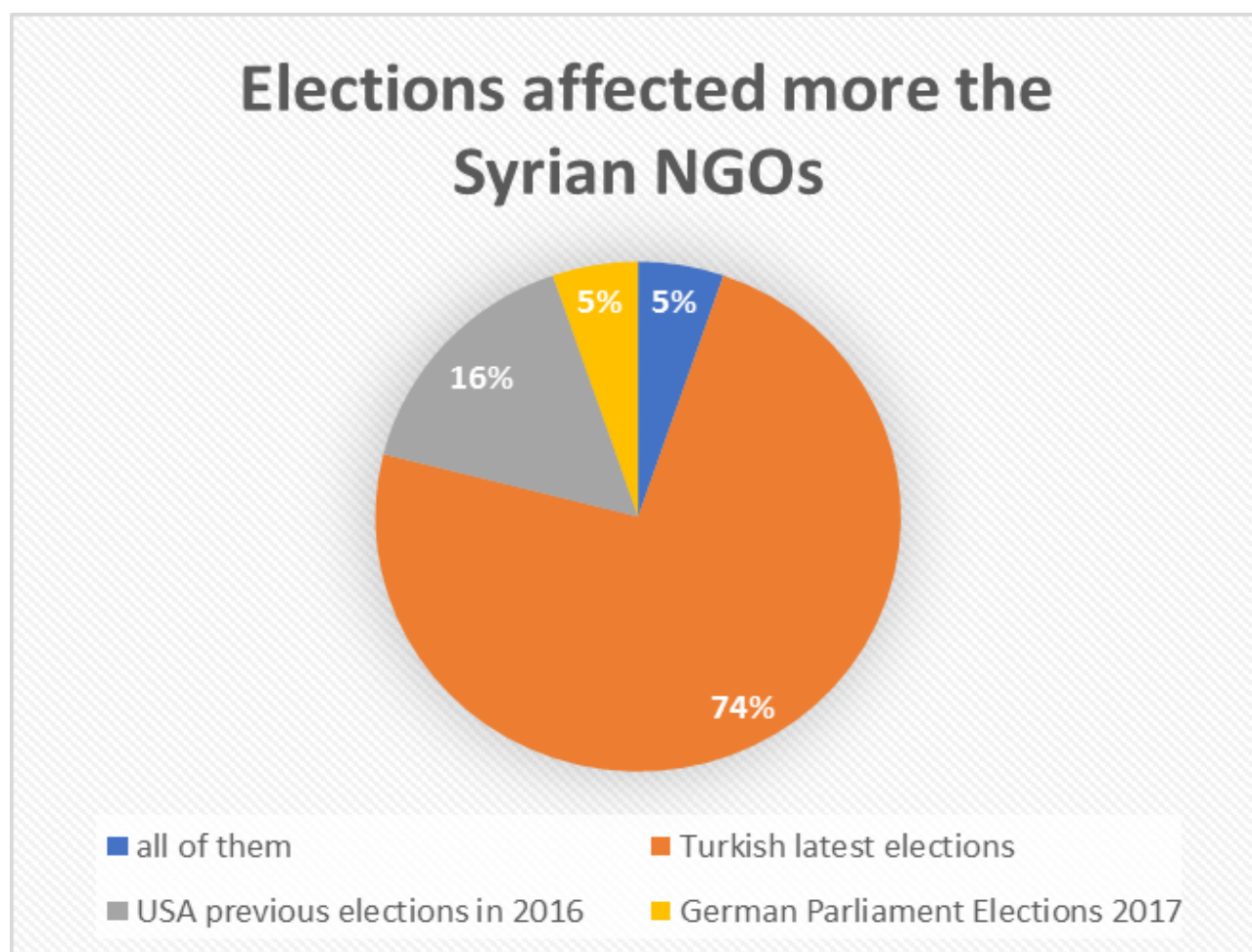
By November 2020, 42,418 UN full of aid trucks have crossed the border to be delivered through SNGOs, 2.5 million children were reached through education, 8.3 million individual benefited from the food security and livelihood assistance, 45.6 million medical cases were treated, 9.9 million individual were supported with non-food items and shelter, 2.2 million cases were supported with nutritional assistance, and 9.5 million individual has received clean water and wastewater services (UNOCHA, 2020). They knew that the majority of those reached beneficiaries were targeted from the Turkey hub. Thus, the humanitarian response from Turkey and particularly through the SNGOs were considered the main lifeline for the 4.1 million citizens living in the non-governmental controlled area in the northwest of the country where more than half of them were considered internally displaced from their own towns, villages, and cities. For this purpose, the following external challenges have been identified through the shared questionnaire. The identified challenges are divided into several categories according to the PESTLE analysis.

Political/Legal Challenges

Starting with the political challenges, as shown in figure 3, the latest elections in Turkey was the most affecting external political election on the Syrian NGOs working from Turkey. In contrast, the main impact of the USA elections in 2016 was the decrease of funds from the USA government to Northwest Syria during Trump's presidency compared with Obama's one. However, the Turkish elections have forced the government to increase and strengthen its regulations and procedures against SNGOs and Syrian Refugees in Turkey. This was due to the ruling party's loss in the latest elections, mainly as it has given a facilitation to Syrians since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Those additional regulations have created uncertainty for SNGOs as they were not in place during their registration (Mellen and Lynch, 2017; Weise, 2017). However, the Turkish authorities audited SNGOs on those new regulations for backdated transactions. As a result,

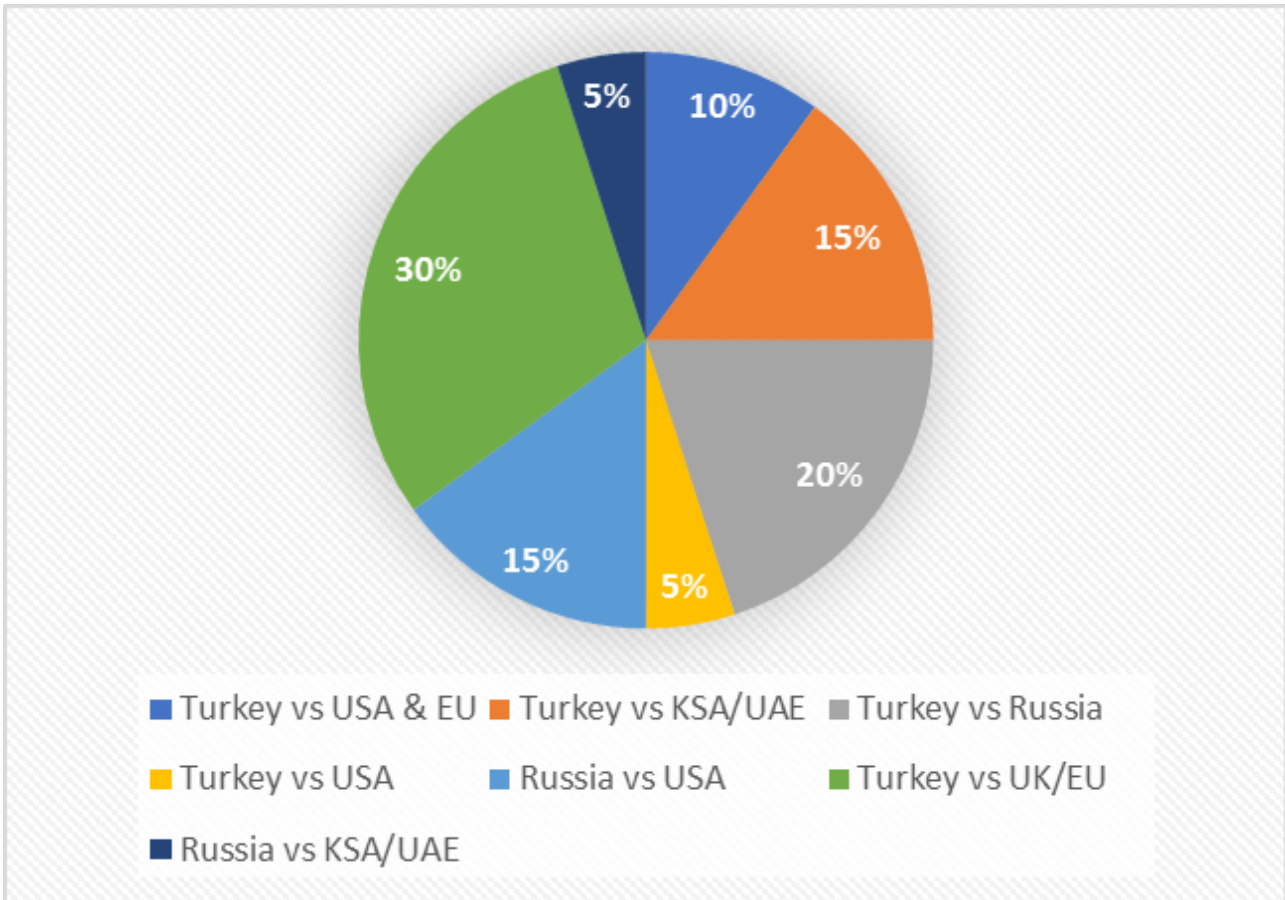
many SNGOs were penalised, so their fear about their destiny and the existence in Turkey as a country that used to host them increased.

Figure 4: The most affecting international elections on SNGOs

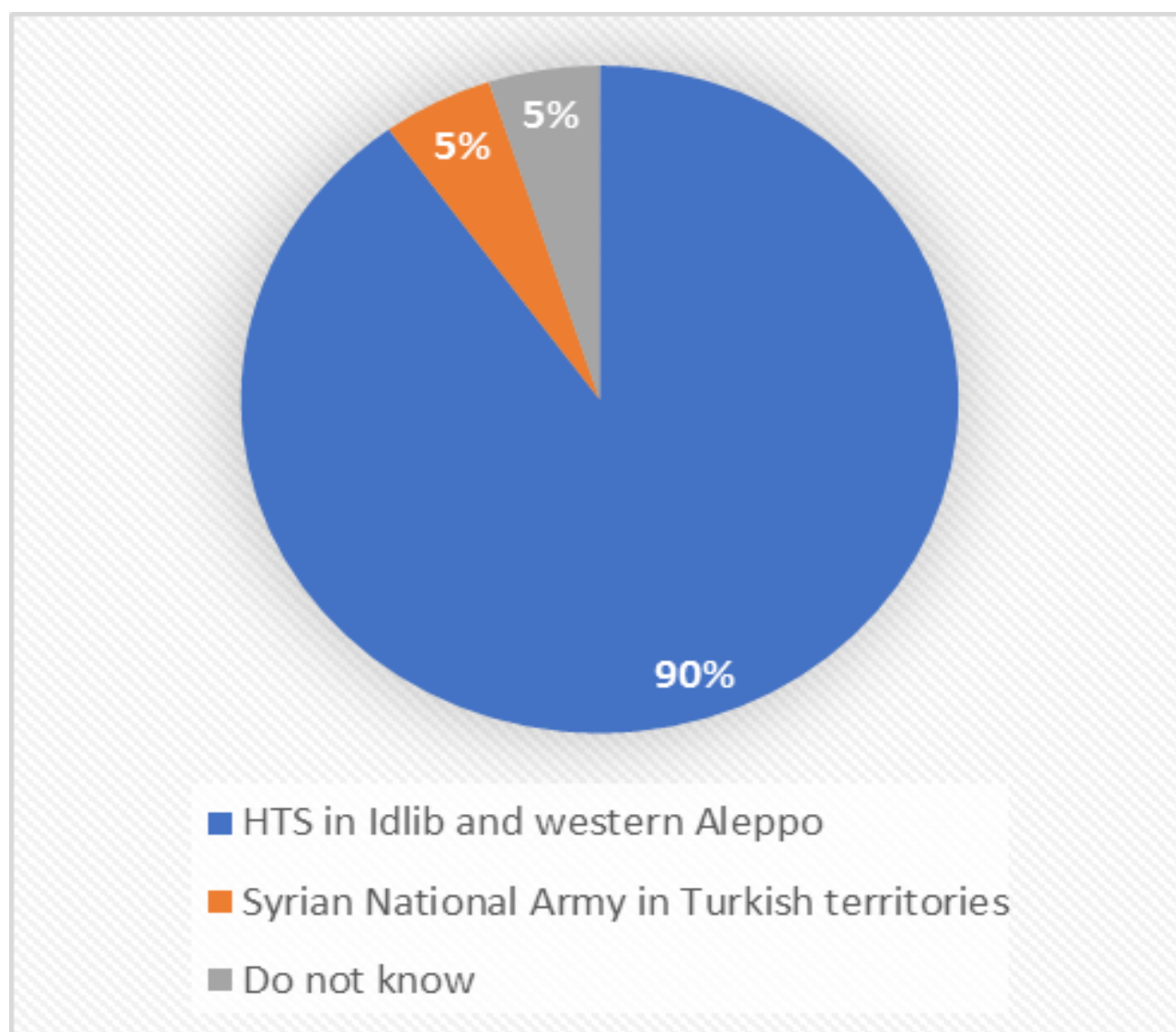


Working in the Northwest of Syria also changed after the Turkish elections as new additional regulations have also hampered the operations there. After the control of several territories in North Syria by the Turkish military forces and the Syrian armed groups affiliated, many western donors suspended their activities as political pressure on the Turkish move. This act has pushed the local Turkish authorities responsible for those Syrian territories to seek ways to increase operations there either by forcing or encouraging NGOs based in Turkey to shift part of their activities from Idlib to the Turkish controlled territories. The Turkish authorities linked the renewal of work permits for the non-Turkish humanitarian staff members, including Syrian refugees, to the level of programs in the Turkish controlled territories inside Syria. This action has forced NGOs to replace the Syrian humanitarian workers with Turkish citizens.

Figure 5: Political relationships primarily affecting SNGOs



Secondly, as shown in figure 4 and based upon the questionnaire responders, the tension between Turkey and EU/UK was the primary affecting international political relationships among the others followed by the coordination between Turkey and Russia, after that the tension between Turkey and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia / United Arab Emirates as well as between Russia and USA. The common impact of the deterioration of relations between Turkey and the other countries that used to fund the humanitarian programs in Northwest Syria is the decrease of their financial commitment as a means of pressure on Turkey. In contrast, the tension between Russia and the USA impacted the renewal of the UN Security Council Cross Border Resolution that legitimise the humanitarian operations of the UN Turkey Hub for Northwest Syria.

Figure 6: Opposition armed groups mostly affecting SNGOs

Thirdly, the conflicts between the armed groups in Northwest Syria have resulted in the full control of the classified radical group known as Hayat Tahrir Al Sham-HTS on Idlib and Western Aleppo. In contrast, the Syrian National Army, which is an opposition group affiliated with Turkey, has controlled the North of Aleppo and Ar Raqqa. As resulted in figure 5, the impact of HTS is much higher than that of the Syrian National Army. Significantly, HTS has negatively affected SNGOs after their ultimate control of Northwest Syria as this has jeopardised humanitarian operations and led donors to suspend stabilisations programs and decrease funds of humanitarian programs. HTS has imposed several threats on the NGOs' operations through taxation that they have requested in several methods, arrestment and pressure made on humanitarian and medical workers, and force for implementation as per their regulations. All of this has made them seen as the sole de facto authority, which was then used to form a governmental body under their lead named Syrian Salvation Government-SSG. The SSG has replaced various civil, administrative bodies in Idlib, such as the local councils and directorates of some services.

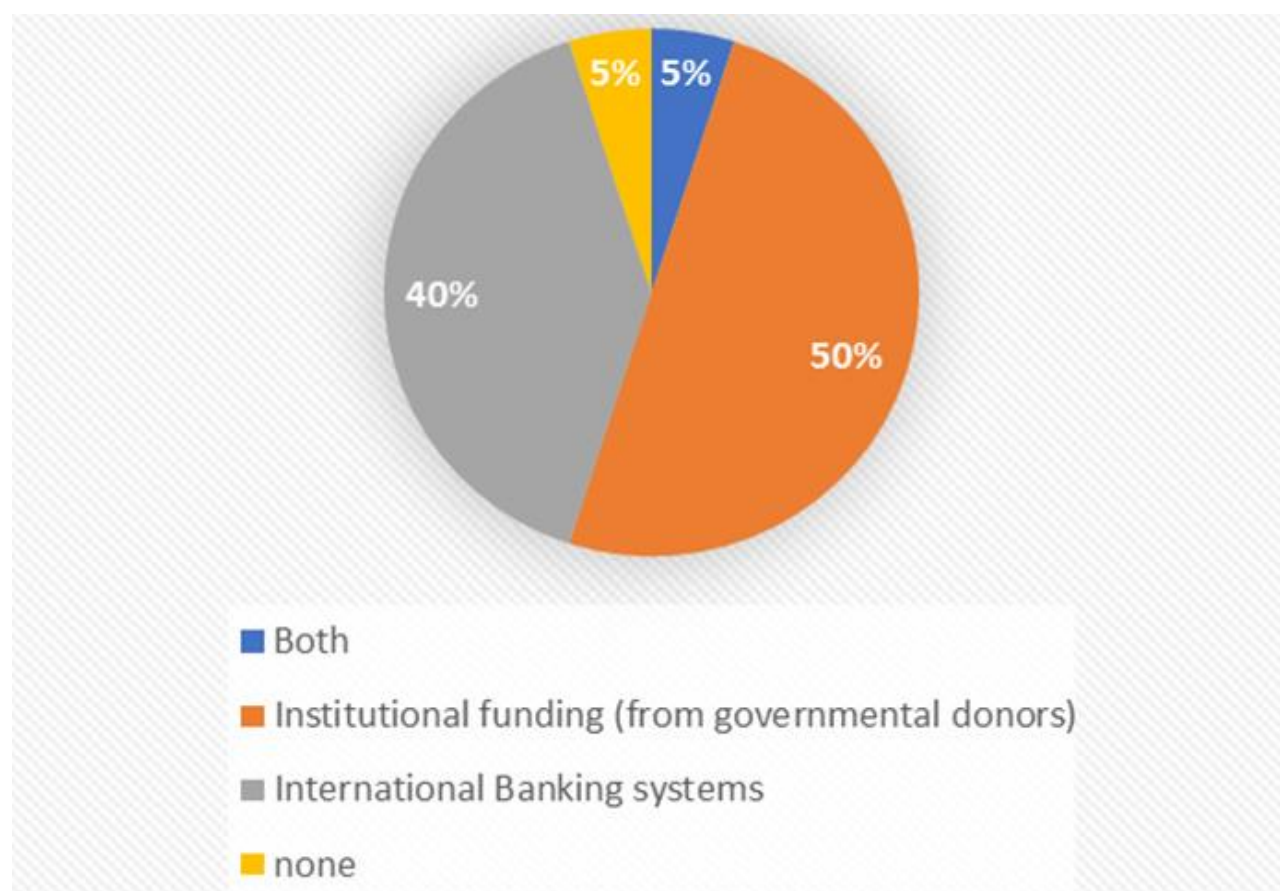
Fourthly, the shift in power dynamics inside Syria that resulted in gaining more territories by the Syrian government forces against various oppositional groups has affected negatively Syrian NGOs working from

Turkey. Some of those SNGOs were operating in farther locations than Turkish border governorates because they were targeting Rural Damascus and Homs at the centre of the country as well as Daraa at the southern region of the country. Those NGOs have lost access to those areas that led to the suspension of their programs, loss of facilities and assets, and displacement of their qualified staff members. Additionally, the loss of operational areas in North Hama and Southern Idlib has led to a massive flux of displaced families that SNGOs had limited financial capacities to respond. This limitation to accessible areas has strengthened the competition environment among SNGOs rather than enhancing the close coordination as they are now working harder to gain any grant opportunity.

Economic Challenges

Firstly, as shown in figure 6, half of the questionnaire responders linked the decrease of the institutional funding to the additional restricted global regulations and laws, especially those related to counter-terrorism. At the same time, most of the other responders linked the new regulations and laws to the barriers that they are facing in banking systems. It is noticed that many governments, especially donors, are overbalancing counter-terrorism regulations against humanitarian principles. Instead, they should not be facing each other; instead, they should be working with each other to support the most vulnerable civilians in the most challenging contexts. Thus, some of those governments and donors that used to support the Syrian humanitarian crises have either decreased or suspended their financial commitments to Northwest Syria due to the sole control of that area by the prescribed armed group HTS.

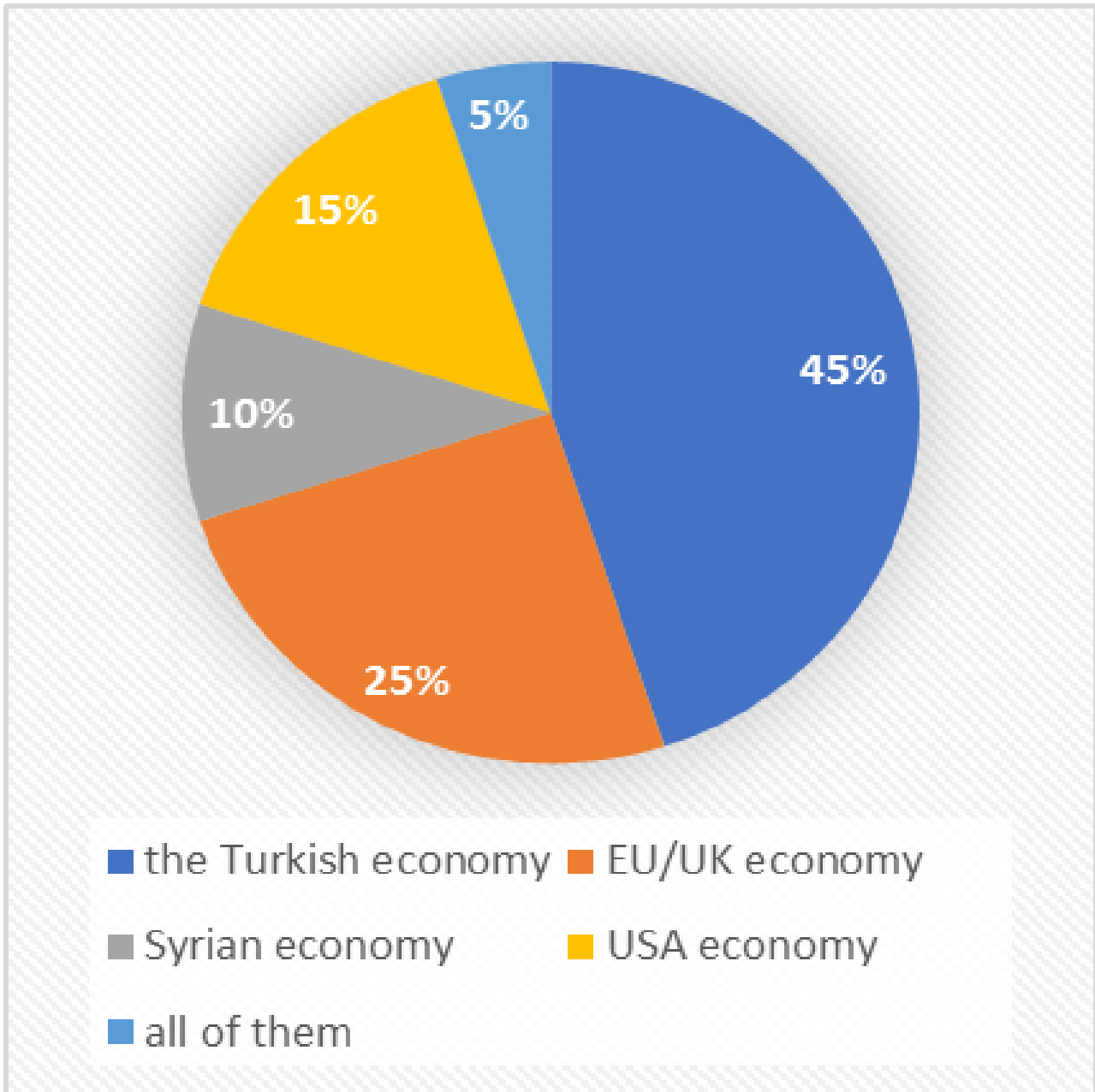
Figure 7: Global regulations affecting SNGOs



Those counter-terrorism regulations have affected the NGOs responding in that area through decreased funds and unclear banking systems that created so many barriers on NGOs (Daher, 2020). Those banking systems' difficulties with transferring essential project funds to Turkey to ensure the continuation of the humanitarian interventions have either caused a delay for transactions, closure of bank accounts, additional

losses due to changed exchange rates, or even financial transfer suspension is withholding the money in some cases.

Figure 8: Most affecting countries' economic stability on SNGOs



Secondly, as shown in figure 7, almost half of the responders thought that the Turkish economic stability affected the SNGOs working from Turkey; in contrast, some weighted the EU/UK and USA economic stability. The Turkish economic issues, such as the devaluation of the Turkish Lira, which inflated the Turkish market, have increased project and operational costs on the SNGOs. It is worth knowing that the Northwest of Syria is heavily relying on the Turkish market to provide essential daily commodities; thus, the instability of the Turkish economy has also impacted the market there. The devaluation of the Turkish Lira has also resulted in additional regulations from the Turkish government to limit financial transactions' currency to be only in Turkish Lira preventing contracting and transferring to be made in USD or Euros. This regulation has created additional losses for NGOs as their contracts in the Northwest of Syria are made in

USD while the funds received are made by the donors' currencies, e.g., USD, GBP or Euros. Thus, the Syrian NGOs have to do several currencies exchanges from the moment they receive the funds until the distribution of assistance to vulnerable families. However, according to the questionnaire responders, the impact of the EU/UK and USA economic instability was a decrease of institutional funds or prioritising other humanitarian crises over the Syrian one.

Thirdly, according to most of the responders, the functionality of the Turkish market and donors' compliance has encouraged Syrian NGOs to do most of their purchase activities from Turkey instead of Syria. This has led to two main impacts; first, the southern region of Turkey has witnessed inflation of prices because of demanding exportation to Syria; second, imported commodities to Northwest Syria has remarkably participated in both reviving economy and fighting monopoly made by some limited local sources.

Fourthly, although the severe devaluation of the Syrian Pound did not affect operations of Syrian NGOs, it has affected the economic situation of civilians in Syria generally and Northwest particularly (REACH, 2020). The impact was demonstrated by increasing more the number of vulnerable people that made 80% of the Syrian people below the poverty line, according to Lowcock (2020). This has forced civilians in Northwest of Syria to replace the Syrian Pound with the Turkish Lira in their local daily transactions to avoid additional harm caused by the devaluation of the Syrian Pound.

Sociocultural Challenges

Firstly, the massive displacements of civilians moving to Northwest Idlib from the beginning of the crises until today has made the area home for about 4 million individuals (UN OCHA, 2019). About 2.7 million of the inhabitants were displaced from their hometown, and around 850 thousand of them were displaced between December 2019 and March 2020 (UN OCHA, 2020 a). The social results vary from a community to another. In some areas, this has created tension between host communities and displaced people, while in others, communities have hosted the displaced families with hospitality and support (IMPACT, 2020). But for sure, these massive displacements have changed the demography of the areas in Northwest Syria. Some communities as Afrin, have changed from a majority of Kurds ethnicity to Arabs, while other communities have changed from a sectarian group to another (IMPACT, 2020). The impact of these displacements has increased the number of vulnerable families as newcomers came with only clothes on their bodies. Thus, they need essential assistance as well as additional community services such as education, health and water. This means additional pressure on SNGOs working from Turkey to respond to the needs of the displaced people and trying to create a balance with services provided to target host communities as well.

Secondly, the social impact of refugees in Turkey has not differed from that in North of Syria. Because millions of Syrian refugees received support from the Turkish government in Turkey a tension between both refugees and host communities has been created and led to the loss of elections for the Turkish government during 2019. This has forced the government to change its approach towards Syrians working in Turkey as well as Syrian NGOs.

As Syrian workers, the duration of working without legal documents has already passed a long time ago. Increasingly work permits are not provided smoothly as they were before. Additionally, Turkish authorities have made spot checks on Syrian refugees with no legal work or residence permits to be deported to North Syria (Leghtas, 2019). This procedure has forced Syrian NGOs and INGOs to replace Syrian staff, who used to work with them for years and have received so many capacity development activities, with fresh staff members with Turkish citizenship. Thirdly, the tension between Turkish host and Syrian refugees' communities has also forced the SNGOs to shift their operations from Northwest Syria to respond to refugees and their hosting communities in Turkey to mitigate the tension.

Lastly, the increased number of refugees in Europe has also affected SNGOs in Turkey as some European countries have shifted part of their funds, which used to be allocated to Syria, to be devoted to integration programmes for refugees in Europe and Turkey.

Technological Challenges

The cross-border regulations encouraged SNGOs as well as INGOs working from Turkey to use a remote management modality to rely on technology to cover gaps of direct monitoring and supervision. In addition, the increased compliance regulations of donors linked with the counter-terrorism laws and other regulations forced SNGOs to improve their systems and automate them as much as possible. Not all SNGOs have available financial and operational capacities to purchase those required software systems to automate their processes, such as accounting software, monitoring and data collection systems, supply chain application, human resource management and project management systems. Thus, those who own those capacities have improved their performance by decreasing time consuming and bureaucracy in implementing day-to-day tasks that facilitated their processes. As a result, those SNGOs have received additional funds as donors consider them more reliable to work with than other NGOs.

Additionally, investment of the Turkish authorities in the infrastructure of Northwest Syria, such as telecommunications and postal services, has remarkably supported SNGOs. The telecommunication system has provided a reliable internet and GSM connection for NGOs to continually communicate with their staff. At the same time, the postal service has allowed NGOs to use the wire transfer method to send funds needed to their field staff and suppliers.

Environmental Challenges

The environmental challenges were not reviewed within this research as they are out of the scope of the research objective and need a separate study to identify and assess.

Conclusion

Although the love of giving, supporting, and helping as a form of individuals then charities have been so important for those in need for centuries, their impact was originally limited to the provision of food parcels, the usage of the winterisation items and the heal through the medicines given. The role of NGOs then developed to provide long term sustainable impacts through the establishment of hospitals, schools, and infrastructure but without an ultimate goal. This goal is recently identified per each humanitarian NGO, recognised by their members, and shown externally through their set of programmes. Those goals are now the core motivators for the NGOs to continue their actions though there are sometimes that manoeuvring around the principles is witnessed due to the linkage between the funding, legal and political views of the governmental donors and the weaknesses of the NGOs in front of the funds and the continuity of the operations. This evolution method was also applicable to the Syrian context as NGOs developed with time from just providing aid to advocating on behalf of the vulnerable affected people. Syrian NGOs are now not just delivering agencies on behalf of their international counterparts; they are drawing the future of their country through close engagement and participation in the resolution discussions and meetings.

Sufficient and detailed information was given about the importance and use of the most popular external challenges assessment tool which is known as PEST analysis. The PEST questionnaire showed that Turkish latest elections, the relationships between Turkey vs USA and EU, and HTS control on Idlib and Western Aleppo were the most political change that affected SNGOs working from Turkey. While the additional regulations and laws on institutional funding, the economy in the USA and the devaluation of the Turkish Lira were the most economic change triggers that affected SNGOs. In addition to some other social triggers like the tension between the hosting community and the refugees, and some other technological triggers, e.g., the usage of the automated software for some operational activities.

It is recommended to follow up on this research by assessing the remaining challenge type from the PESTLE, which is the environmental challenge. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic is still fresh to be evaluated; however, some direct results have already started affecting SNGOs working from Turkey. They might be operational difficulties such as decreased productivity, coordination, and communication due to working from home, or programmatic such as additional load on NGOs' facilities and services due to an increasing number of vulnerable people. Thus, it is worth diving more deeply into this type of challenge to check how the pandemic and other environmental challenges have affected the operations of the Syrian NGOs working from Turkey.

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