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Social Welfare Practices of the State and NGOs in Turkey: New Trends and Necessities*

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Abstract: This study will discuss the changes in the social welfare practices of Turkey after the year 2000. In order to assess the extent of these changes, government practices and the activities of social welfare non-governmental organizations have been analyzed. Data has been collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis using the qualitative research method. In-depth interviews were carried out with people working in public institutions and in NGOs. As a result of this research, it can be concluded that there has been a quantitative and qualitative increase in both government and NGO activities compared to previous years. Also, contrary to popular belief, the total amount of financial aid provided by NGOs in Turkey has been found to be less than that of public institutions. However, despite the quantitative increase, both groups appear to be insufficient at producing mechanisms for eliminating social exclusion, one of the biggest causes for the manifestation of poverty. It is therefore recommended that social welfare providers in Turkey, especially NGOs should work on the problem of social exclusion in the coming years.
Keywords: Social Welfare in Turkey, Social Policy, NGO Activities, Social Exclusion, Poverty

Türkiye’de Kamunun ve STK’ların Sosyal Yardım Uygulamaları: Yeni Eğilimler ve İhtiyaçlar

Özet: Bu çalışmada 2000 yılı sonrasında Türkiye’de sosyal yardım uygulamalarının değişimi ele alınmaktadır. Söz konusu değişimin hangi boyutlarda yaşandığını değerlendirebilmek amacıyla kamu uygulamaları ve sosyal yardım alanında çalışma yapan sivil toplum kuruluşlarının faaliyetleri analiz edilmiştir. Nitel araştırma geleneği içerisinde yer alan derinlemesine mülakat ve doküman inceleme bu çalışmanın veri toplama teknikleridir. Derinlemesine mülakatlar kamu kurumlarında ve STK’larda görevli olarak çalışan kişilerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda kamu ve STK uygulamalarının geçmiş dönemlere nispetle hem niceliksel olarak arttığı ve hem de niteliksel bir gelişme gösterdiği tespit edilmiştir. Sanılanın aksine, Türkiye’de STK’lar tarafından yapılan sosyal yardım miktarının, kamu kurumları tarafından yapılandır az olduğu görülmüştür. Yine de, bu nicel artışa rağmen, gerek kamusal gerekse sivil aktörler, yoksulluğun en önemli tezahürlerinden biri olan sosyal dışlanmayı ortadan kaldıracabilecek mekanizmalar üretme konusunda yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu çerçeveden hareketle makalede, Türkiye’de sosyal yardım faaliyetinde bulunan aktörlerin –özellikle STK’ların– bundan sonraki dönemlerde sosyal dışlanmaya yönelik çalışmalar yapmaları önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye’de Sosyal Yardım, Sosyal Politika, STK Faaliyetleri, Sosyal Dışlanma, Yoksulluk

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Social welfare provides in kind and in cash assistance, as well as social services for lower income households. The expenses for such assistance are covered in the budget for the general public. Social insurance on the other hand targets the insured population and is financed through insurance fees (Beland, 2010, p. 20). Social welfare is viewed as a sub-area of social policy along with the concepts of *social services*, *social security*, and *social redress* (Taşcı, 2010). In this study, social welfare will be viewed as a sub-field of social policy which also includes social services. As mentioned by Kesgin (2013, p. 21) social welfare nowadays is mostly reinforced by social services, being planned and implemented in an integrated manner in many countries. In Turkey, unlike the social welfare systems of the West, individual and family initiatives are still seen as effective methods for solving social problems. Therefore, this study will analyze NGOs and public institutions as vehicles of *social welfare*.

In terms of institutions, *social welfare* is involved with public and private institutions, as well as NGOs. In terms of the type of assistance, it is involved with compassionate and cash assistance, developmental aid, aid for employment, etc. Recipients of social welfare can be people with or without social security, refugees, the elderly, children, young people, victims of war, the disabled, and so on (Howell, 2001, p. 257). This study will not analyze the social welfare practices for people with social security, because the social welfare practices targeted for this population are of a different quality (Kesgin, 2013, p. 23). The focus will be on the compassionate and cash assistance targeting poverty reduction.

NGO practices have been more visible since the new millennium, the time when institutions began to emphasize the importance of social welfare and allocated a larger budget for such policies (the State Audit Board [DDK], 2009, the State Planning Organization [DPT], 2012; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012). These changes have also confronted the criticisms that social welfare policies lead people to laziness, that they make the poor segments of the population dependent on political parties and politicians, that they do not offer radical solutions to eradicate poverty but instead perpetuate poverty and abuse by politicians to gain the support of the electorate, etc. (Kesgin, 2013, pp. 20-21).

The purpose of this article is to understand the dynamics of this change and to identify new necessities by revealing the current orientations. In this context, the details of institutional practices have not been analyzed but rather the current orientations of the social welfare providers have been identified and assessed. The central and local practices of institutions have been analyzed as a whole, without making any distinction between these two. In-depth interviews and document analysis techniques were used in order to identify the

changes and new tendencies. To this end, 26 in-depth interviews were conducted in a total of 18 institutions, 10 of which were NGOs, and the other 8, public institutions. The questions in these semi-structured interviews were prepared in accordance with the technical structure of the institutions. 13 participants rejected the recording of their interviews, so only 13 recordings were made. Participants were selected from among prominent public institutions and NGOs.

The Basic Characteristics of the Welfare Regime in Turkey and Social Welfare

Social welfare systems may vary according to the understanding of the concept of welfare, as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics and levels in that country. In this context, we can classify¹ the welfare regime into four fundamental regimes, depending on the weight of the welfare state (Northern Europe / Social Democrats), family (Southern Europe), civil society (Continental Europe, Corporate) and the free market (Anglo-Saxon, Liberal) (Dinç, 2009).²

In Southern European welfare regimes, which includes Turkey, networks such as family, community, neighborhoods, hometowns, and political affiliations play a role in sustaining an individual's life during unemployment, sickness, or old age as well as regular and formal state interventions and market relations (Buğra, 2001, pp. 23-25). There are two main approaches towards the social welfare practices within the framework of family, relatives, neighbors and township patterns. According to the first approach, after the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies in the 1980's, the labor market was transformed; and with globalization and privatization processes, job security decreased, ultimately undermining the social solidarity that supports the social welfare practices. This approach assumes that the solidarity pattern cannot function in the new era as it did in the past, and therefore the state should implement social policies to fulfill this function (Buğra & Keyder, 2003).

The other approach considers one of the weakest aspects of the Western welfare regime to be the lack of family, neighborhood, and township relationships. The criticisms towards this welfare regime can be summed up as follows: it does not encourage people to find full-time employment, it creates benefit-dependent people, it increases the number of benefit recipients, and it weakens family ties. It is recommended that the government in Turkey should reinforce social solidarity that is mainly based on family ties (Dinç, 2009).

¹ For a detailed analysis of the classification of welfare states, please see Özdemir, 2005.

² Other than this classification, see Coşkun and Güneş, n.d., p. 5 for a new classification for 24 OECD countries.

One of the most important features of the welfare regime in Turkey is it is carried out both by the government and by NGOs. It can be argued that rather than aiming to prevent poverty, these practices mostly target poverty alleviation and help individuals and/or families maintain their minimum life standards. Between the first years of the Republic of Turkey and the transition to a multi-party system, there was almost no social welfare policy in Turkey. In this period, only government officials benefited from pension and health care services (Buğra & Sınmazdemir, 2005). The ruling Democratic Party made the first attempt to fight against poverty, and it was in this period that the Social Services Institute was founded in 1959 with the support of the United Nations, and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations in order to replace the charity system. The second step taken in this context was to found the General Directorate of Social Services in 1963 ((Dönmez, Öğülmüş, Tatlıdil, & Ersöz, 2009, cited in Fişek, 2007). Law No. 2022 enacted in 1976 stipulated a pension for the poor and elderly over the age of 65 as well as the disabled (Buğra & Sınmazdemir, 2005). According to Göçmen, in the 1980s, the transition to a liberal economy and the socio-economic changes that came with it necessitated the government to take action against poverty (2011, p. 119). In 1986, the Social Assistance and Solidarity Act were enacted to reduce the effects of poverty, and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund was established as an off-budget fund.

In addition to these tendencies in public institutions, the Habitat meeting in the first half of the 1990's and the Marmara earthquake in the second half, placed NGOs on the national agenda. NGOs intensified their efforts in this period and became important groups in providing social benefits across the country and around the world. Some suggest that as a result of the neo-liberal conservative policies that started with the AK Party government in 2002, the state has withdrawn from social policies, which has in turn facilitated and strengthened the existence of NGOs (Göçmen, 2011, p. 117). However, considering the budget allocations of NGOs and public institutions³, it can be concluded that the government has gradually consolidated its position on social policies. Since the turn of the century, social welfare expenditures have increased significantly (DDK, 2009; DPT, 2012; Kesgin, 2013, p. 19; OECD, 2012).

Social Welfare Practices of Public Institutions and of NGOs

Social Welfare Practices of Public Institutions

Very often, public authorities express that social support practices are car-

³ The research that this study is based on has also analyzed the annual budgets of NGOs' functioning in the field of social welfare.

ried out under the welfare state⁴ concept, even though these practices were only intended to produce workarounds for a potential social crisis until 2004. However, public institutions have been revising their fields of study, staff, and systems according to new economic and social needs, enhancing their functioning mechanisms with new investments.⁵ In this context, during the interviews with DPT (State Planning Organization / Ministry of Development)⁶ officials it has been expressed that public efforts for the provision of social welfare will continue to grow in the coming years.

With a rights-based approach, the government is planning to support people who are *unable to work*, and this is an important decision that will determine the future of social welfare practices. However, in interviews with officers in public institutions, it has been expressed that the state should not make a sharp distinction between those who are able and unable to work as social assistance mechanisms will be active for those who can work as well. Public institutions are also planning to develop employment-oriented social assistance policies for individuals who are capable of work.⁷

On the other hand, the existence of the working poor makes employment as a social welfare evaluation criterion difficult. Individuals who are already included in the social security system often do not benefit from the services offered under the social welfare system. Public institutions help individuals who are on social security only in case of an urgent need. The development of mechanisms for providing social assistance to the working poor constitutes a topic of priority in public institutions.

Despite the country's economic stability, an increase both in the number of people receiving benefits and the amount of benefits can be interpreted as the country's welfare benefits not being equally distributed among the different segments of society. One of the main problems often mentioned by public institutions is duplicated aid, an issue which probably arises from a lack of coordination (DDK, 2009). This problem has tried to be minimized by bringing social welfare institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies established in 2011, and through the Integrated Social Welfare Project.

⁴ In discussions on social policy, it would not be correct to use Welfare State and Social State interchangeably. Welfare State is defined as "the manifestation of social state in developed countries after the 2nd world war", whereas Social State has historically been one of the fundamental qualities of states (Aysan, 2006, p. 62).

⁵ 9th Development Plan (DPT, 2007), Medium Term Program (DPT, 2010) and Long Term Progress [2001-2023] Strategy (DPT) have significant objectives for achieving social welfare.

⁶ DPT still existed at the time of the study. The institution turned into The Development Bank in 2011. Later on, many public institutions have been annulled and converted into various institutions with different titles. Such changes in names and titles are indicated with "/" in the manuscript and given with both old and new names.

⁷ For details, please see Odabaşı, 2009.

An analysis of the budget figures in public institutions may reveal that the financing of such practices does not create a significant problem. According to OECD (2012) data, despite not being as highly developed as other countries, the share of the budget allocated for social welfare is increasing every year in Turkey⁸. In 2012, the budget allocation was 17.2% in Turkey (DPT, 2012). This ratio was 12.03% in 2001. In a study measuring the effectiveness of public budget allocation on social welfare (Buğra & Adar, 2007), it has been found that public resources were not used efficiently and effectively. In developed countries, the budget is greater and allocated resources are used more efficiently.

On the other hand, another important topic that appears in the interviews is that public policies induce changes in the culture and habits of charity. The way the benefits have been provided has created a symbiotic relationship between public administrators and the public (the poor) based on mutual interest, which in turn influences the culture of aid. There are also some arguments about whether duplicated aid that takes place due to a lack of coordination among public agencies has reiterated the “culture of poverty” (Genç & Adıgüzel, 2011, p. 11). Strengthening the technological infrastructure of the social welfare system and the introduction of an integrated structure have brought in a framework of objective criteria, helping to prevent the duplication of aid and enabling a more transparent process.

Social welfare practices are both qualitatively and quantitatively increasing, however, there are still not enough policies to ensure social inclusion. Social Support Program (SODES) and newly sprouting Community Centers may be considered as important steps towards social development and inclusion. Nevertheless, the lack of government interest in conducting research into the causes of the creation and continuation of poverty appears to be a major problem.

Social Welfare Practices of NGOs

Göçmen’s study (2011, p.124) shows that the primary reason for NGOs ability to function in the realm of social welfare is their religious sensitivity. This study has also discovered that humanitarian and moral reasons are some other major factors. It is possible to suggest that both intentions are intertwined in Turkey.

The increased visibility of urban poverty, increased donations to NGOs, the efficiency of NGOs, and new opportunities that rules and regulations have brought for NGOs are some of the main reasons for NGOs interest in social welfare. A significant number of social welfare NGOs operate in metropolitan

⁸ The OECD report does not include post 2009 data for Turkey.

dwelling. NGOs that mainly operate in small-sized cities have a shortage of financial resources. Although local organizations get support from business people in their immediate environment (Göçmen, 2011, p. 126), considering the profile of business people in the various provinces of Anatolia, the major source of funding for these NGOs is the central organization.

As regards the types of aid provided by NGOs, there are around 50 different types of compassionate and cash assistance. The main reason for this variety is the new requirements of individuals and families that have emerged over time. Besides their regular social benefits activities, NGOs provide various campaign and project-based assistance. Such campaigns and projects are quite tempting for NGOs as they stimulate an increase in donations and create more visibility and popularity in the media. When it comes to identifying new trends, NGOs often copy the activities of other NGOs. The major reason for this lack of originality is their reluctance to carry out preliminary studies in identifying new work fields. NGOs often lack a research and development unit to conduct such infrastructure services.

The study also shows that NGOs have taken new directions, one of which regards their relationship with the state. Both the state and NGOs intend to strengthen their relationships that have so far been weak. Göçmen distinguishes NGOs in terms of their relationship with the state as “old” and “new” organizations. Accordingly, old organizations, established between 1970 and 1990, usually see the state as a prohibitive barrier and a controlling force whereas new organizations established after 1990 define the state as a supportive and assisting force in terms of its role in social policies (2011, p. 128). Many of the NGOs interviewed within the scope of this study have a close relationship with the state as regards their overseas operations. They have also expressed there should be more collaboration in their domestic operations. NGOs are of the opinion that by taking advantage of the financial opportunities provided by the government, they can achieve a lot more, and this common belief dissolves the distinction between old and new organizations.

NGOs believe that compassionate and cash assistance cause laziness and do not constitute an ultimate solution to poverty, therefore they are not sustainable. Similar to public institutions, NGOs have also mentioned the need for a distinction between those who are able to work and those who are not able to work. The interviewees have often expressed that such a distinction is necessary so that they can focus on revenue and/or efforts to generate employment for those who are able to work. As for those who are unable to work, it is agreed that the state and NGOs should provide ongoing assistance. In this context, NGOs which work towards generating employment and job-training activities prefer not to provide continuous assistance for those who are able to

work. They refer applicants to public-funded projects and training or implement their own projects.

Göçmen, in his study about NGOs operating in the realm of social welfare, talks about some significant training courses as well as assistance practices that NGOs have been involved in (2011, p. 125). However, this particular study has discovered that such activities provided by NGOs are quite limited, and some NGOs have only expressed willingness towards this goal. NGOs intend to offer counseling services and psychological support to protect the integrity of a family. The underlying reason for this training seems to be a need to exchange knowledge and experience for helping families out of poverty, rather than solely expressing religious sensitivity.

The new arrangements, rules and regulations for public health and services for the disabled have led to a reduction in NGO investments in this sector. NGOs have begun to provide medical services abroad. As a result of the amendments made to fund raising laws, more and more NGOs have started reaping the benefits of this opportunity and have increased their revenues through projects like *Food Banking* and *Public Benefit Status*. In addition, some NGOs have been publishing various reports and carrying out lobbying activities for some legal regulations in the public sector. However, lobbying still remains at a very limited level.

Conclusion

The distinction between working and non-working people will determine the basic characteristics of Turkey's welfare regime in the future. Both public institutions and NGOs are planning to develop employment projects for people who are able to work as well as provide regular financial aid for those who are unable to work. In the coming years, the number of working poor is expected to rise all over the world and this is one of the greatest challenges in the fight against poverty (Key Indicators of the Labor Market [KILM], 2011). Therefore, the government should revisit the distinction between the working and non-working population, and new welfare mechanisms targeting the working poor should be developed.

Social welfare policies that prioritize development should contribute to employment projects which prevent both rural and urban poverty as well as support social and cultural activities. If these efforts aim at improving not only the economic but also the social and cultural conditions of the poor, they will contribute to promoting social inclusion as well. The integration of social welfare practices, which were previously viewed separate as social aid and social services, will be a significant step in enhancing public policies. In this context, the concept of social welfare must be redefined within the framework

of public welfare (Genç & Adıgüzel, 2011, p. 11).

Public institutions tend to focus on projects about family and marriage. The draft text of Social Services and Aids System Commission Report prepared within the scope of the Ministry of Development's 10th Development Plan (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development) recommends that within the framework of preventive and protective work for family, a family and social counseling system should be developed and the number of social services and rehabilitation centers should be increased. The same report highlights the need for a change in mentality regarding social welfare. This change requires the public welfare system to be based on rights; to supply rather than demand a respect for human dignity. In addition, the criteria for entitlement should be objective, and preventive policies should be given priority.

Regarding the outreach of NGOs, it could be asserted that they have come a long way. However, as has already been frequently mentioned, it is not necessary for NGOs to provide financial aid to the elderly, children, youth, women, the disabled, orphans and the unemployed. Based on the personal judgments of those interviewed and the studies done on this topic, homeless children, disabled children, intelligent but poor children, female victims of violence, unemployed people who have professional training, unskilled and unemployed people, those who want to set up their own business, the working poor, people who are in debt, people who want to get married, drug addicts, schizophrenics, etc., are cited as groups who should be given priority in receiving assistance.

At present, the most necessary type of assistance is cash assistance. Charities most frequently face demands for credit card debt payments, bills, and rent payments. However, NGOs and public institutions have not yet developed a solution for such demands. Other types of assistance that are requested from public institutions and NGOs are guidance and counseling services, socialization, cultural activities, legal support, etc. These requests are directly related to the social exclusion/inclusion issue that public institutions and NGOs have not yet addressed properly. It can be concluded that public and NGO activities should focus on the social exclusion aspect of poverty and develop mechanisms to address this issue. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as a confinement of these institutions' activities to a single domain. The government and NGOs have to redefine their social roles, and only through such increments will it be possible for Turkey to attain a welfare regime that is compatible with its own social, historical, and cultural codes.

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