

**Research Article**

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## EMPOWERMENT OF HUMANITARIAN WORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION AND CONFLICT: A CASE STUDY FROM IZMIR, TURKEY

### ÇATIŞMA VE GÖÇ BAĞLAMINDA İNSANİ YARDIM ÇALIŞANLARININ GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ: İZMİR VAK'A ÇALIŞMASI

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**ABSTRACT**

Since Syrian crisis started in 2011, people who are affected from the conflict have been seeking asylum from neighbouring countries. Turkey now hosts the largest population of Syrian refugees in the world which is about 3.6 million. Not possessing experience of dealing with many refugees from the past, the government of Turkey, international and local non-governmental organizations have taken action as emergency response to the crisis. Most local non-governmental organizations with the funds from the government, the EU and the UN have provided services in almost every sector such as protection, education, employment and health. However, the majority of the humanitarian workers (HWs) who are actively operating in the field do not possess the academic background to be able perform social work at professional level, therefore it is necessary to empower them with the techniques that can facilitate their work in the field. This paper offers an overlook to empowerment of the HWs through a training session focusing on conflict mapping technique in order to raise the awareness of the HWs about the basic concepts of conflict studies and provide them a technique with a practical value to facilitate their work in the field.

**Keywords:** Conflict Mapping, Humanitarian Work, Migration, Training

**ÖZ**

Suriye krizinin 2011 yılında başlamasından bu yana, çatışmadan etkilenen bireyler komşu ülkelerden sığınma talebinde bulunmaktadır. Türkiye şu anda yaklaşık 3,6 milyon Suriyeli bireye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Geçmişten günümüze bu denli büyük bir mülteci akını ile başa çıkma deneyimine sahip olmayan Türkiye'de; hükümet, uluslararası ve ulusal sivil toplum örgütleri krize müdahale etmektedirler. Ulusal kaynaklar, AB ve BM'den fon alan yerel sivil toplum örgütlerinin çoğu koruma, eğitim, istihdam ve sağlık gibi hemen hemen her sektörde hizmet vermektedir. Bununla birlikte, sahada aktif olarak faaliyet gösteren insani yardım çalışanların çoğunluğu, sosyal hizmet uygulaması yapabilmek için akademik geçmişe ve mesleki yeterliliğe sahip değildir. Bu nedenle onları, sahadaki çalışmalarını kolaylaştırabilecek tekniklerle güçlendirmek gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, çatışma dönüşümünün temel kavramları hakkında insani yardım çalışanlarının farkındalığını artırmak ve onlara çalışmalarını kolaylaştırmak için uygulamalı bir teknik sağlamak amacıyla, çatışma haritalama tekniğine odaklanan bir eğitim aracılığıyla insani yardım çalışanlarının güçlendirilmesine bir bakış sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Çatışma Haritalama, Eğitim, Göç, İnsani Yardım

**INTRODUCTION**

Social work practices at micro, mezzo and macro levels involves the stages of engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, follow-up and closure. All stages are vital for an effective social work intervention.

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Moreover, at the engagement and assessment part collecting data is of an important role because the data regarding the individual, the group or the community are going to shape the all the stages that follows. The social workers do benefit from the techniques that are of visual elements to map the situation in detail. This mapping helps social workers to see and assess the situation. Using visuals such as mapping technique is widely accepted as useful as it describes the situation in a page instead of narrating it, which takes large amount of time and effort.

Social workers focus on the interactions and relations among the individuals, groups, families and communities by using ecological perspective (Germain, 1979: 1-25). People sustain their lives in the physical, social and cultural layers of their environment. Physical environment includes the nature, structures and the gaps among them while the social environment consists of friends, family and communities as well as the legal, political and social structures. In the context of migration, social workers plan and realize their interventions considering these layers and structures.

Turkey currently hosts the largest population of Syrian refugees in the world which is about 3.6 million (General Directorate of Migration Management, 2020). The country is not of the experience of dealing with such a large number of asylum seekers from the past (Yıldız, 2018: 144-145) Therefore, the government of Turkey, international and local non-governmental organizations have taken action as an emergency response to the refugee crisis. Most local non-governmental organizations with the funds from the government, the EU and the UN have provided services in almost every sector such as protection, education, employment and health since 2011. However, not all of the humanitarian workers (HWs) who are actively operating in the field possess the academic background to be able perform social work at professional level, therefore it is necessary to empower them with the techniques that can facilitate their work in the field.

### HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this study is that most of the HWs working in the migration field are not social workers and they are in need of theoretical and practical knowledge on conflict. By introducing them to theoretical knowledge on basic concepts of conflict and the technique of conflict mapping, this study aims to support and empower HWs. Through conflict mapping technique, it is expected that HWs will be able to discover the nature of the conflict and intervene in order to prevent, manage, transform and/or resolve a conflict situation. It is also hypothesized that a training session will help with the initiation of a support network among the HWs working at various NGOs in the context of migration for future reference.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Humanitarian aid work is commonly comprehended as a part of "charity" which has its drive from individual or collective conscious. It is mostly a reaction to a certain action which requires immediate attention. However, it can also be interpreted as a practical outcome of a combination of social sciences such as social work, peace and conflict studies, educational science, psychology, political science and so on. This proves that this practical area of work namely humanitarian work has its base on scientific studies. Therefore, this study has two foci which are theory and practice.

Conflict is an evolving process of dynamic interdependence between two or more actors pursuing their respective aspirations but being unable to achieve them because they view that one actor stands in the way of the other actor's goal attainment (Arai, 2017: 18). Taking this definition into account, conflict analysis can support the orientation for future action. Conflicts are dynamic systems. Any intervention becomes part of the system and should focus on supporting the creative, positive energies, in the system or related to the system. Conflict analysis can be used individually or in a participatory manner in a group (Galtung, 2000:38).

Making an analysis does not lead to an objective understanding of the conflict. Rather it makes one's subjective perceptions transparent. This way they can be reflected on and more clearly communicated. With a holistic point of view; individuals, families, groups and communities directly affect one another in their physical, cultural and social environment. Interaction of individuals, groups, families and communities not only affect the environment but also get affected by it. Individuals exist within his/her environment (Gitterman & Germain, 2008: 51-72). Conflict analysis can entail verifying if one is dealing with a conflict or not, determining the actors or parties involved and the conflict boundaries. By using conflict analysis tools, it is possible to focus on certain aspects of the conflict and organize information.

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The social workers commonly use genograms to depict the family and family relations, cultural genograms to discover the cultural background and current situation and eco-maps to show the individual and family in a social context (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012:203-225).

Conflict mapping among other mapping techniques is a tool for the social workers who especially practice in the migration context. It is believed that adding the conflict mapping technique to the already existing mapping techniques used by the social work practitioners will positively impact the effectiveness of the social work practice. At this point it is found out that conflict mapping is of a functional role in depicting the interactions and nature of the relationships concerning the clients.

Conflict mapping technique, like a geographic map that simplifies a terrain, a conflict map simplifies a conflict, and serves as a visual to the actors involved and their functions, limits, their power or their influence in the conflict, their relationship nature with each other, and the conflict theme and/or issues (Lederach, 1995:43). A conflict map represents a specific view point of a specific conflict situation. It aims to clarify relationships between actors, to visualize and reflect on the impact of various actors and to represent the conflict on one sheet of paper giving a first conflict overview.

Conflict mapping focuses on actors and their interrelationships. It is a good tool to start analysing a conflict (Lederach, 1997:10-11). Animosity and alliances are symbolized with different types of lines. It can be used to clarify the conflict from parties' own perspectives. Or it can be used jointly, to understand both sides' view of the conflict. A third party such as a mediator or HWs could interview the conflicting parties, draft a map, ask the parties to modify it from their perspectives, redraft it, and present it as a first joint step toward cooperative resolution. Alternatively, this could be done by parties on one side who would solicit cooperation from their opponents in creating an accurate conflict map.

Conflict theory according to Entelman (2002:201) locates conflict in relations. Conflict springs from interactions as an expression of incompatibility of goals. And so, when what a person wants is incompatible with what others want, conflict arises. From that idea we have to understand relations among parties in order to describe conflict. Before understanding can come, observation of the relations is necessary. The elements of the observation are structured in the methodology of mapping which are subjects, interests, awareness of conflict, power, needs, emotions, relations and alliances. Observation and understanding of each element and its relationship with the other enable an understanding of a conflict situation (Lederach, 2003:38-39).

Therefore, HWs must identify the parties of the conflict among the persons connected with the situation. For each party, we must identify the interests which are in conflict; whether they are recognized as part of the conflict (awareness); what resources are available; what the reference values in the conflict are; what emotions are present; the relations between the parties and the identification of alliances among persons. With the information of all these elements, HWs can reach an understanding of the situation, which enables them to understand it and therefore to take decisions to intervene. Through conflict mapping, it is hypothesized that HWs can discover the nature of the conflict and intervene to make it clarified and resolved.

### RATIONALE

Because the information of the clients should be taken from a holistic perspective especially while assessing the case and determining the intervention model and the targeted outcomes (Teater, 2011:16-39) it is thought that HWs can benefit from the conflict mapping technique in understanding the nature of the conflicting interactions and relationship patterns and lead them to better intervene in the process.

The content of the training has been determined upon a focus-group meeting conducted with seven HWs who work at a Non- Governmental Organization in Izmir. The information gathered through this meeting is as follows:

- This NGO started its operations in January 2017, aiming to support building the problem-solving capacity for people with disabilities and vulnerable groups living in and around Izmir and providing the necessary services for them, identifying those who have high vulnerability and/or are unable to reach the services through communication based field studies and in-office services by field workers and provides them with assistance, through financial support of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (ECHO). In the supervision of a psychologist and a health educator, mental health psycho-social support services, extended guidance and case management activities are performed.

- The HWs working at the NGO are graduates of the departments of Sociology, International Relations, English Literature, Physio-therapy & Rehabilitation and Psychology. Besides the multi- disciplinary background of the HWs, it is found out that HWs experience "conflict" in their daily lives at work and their personal lives.

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The examples to conflict is mostly regarding polarization from macro to micro level in Izmir context.

- It has been explicitly stated that the HWs need for practical techniques regarding conflict resolution to understand and deal with "conflict" in the field. Since they are from different disciplines and not experts on Social Work or Peace Studies, it is concluded that providing not only practical but also theoretical content on conflict will have a positive impact on the professional and personal lives of the HWs.

- Lastly, the lack of a common platform among HWs in migration context in Turkey necessitates a network for HWs. It is thought that a support network among HWs might be a good resource through which they can share their experience, problems which can be analysed and resolved together in a collaborative manner. It is possible to compensate this lack of support network and initiate one among the HWs in Izmir starting from this NGO.

### The Training Session on Conflict Mapping

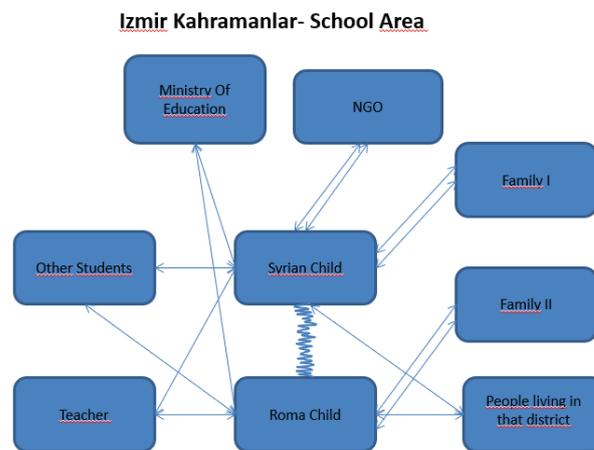
In order to empower the HWs, a training session has been planned and implemented. The session has started with the introduction of main concepts of Conflict. Firstly, the definition of the term conflict has been elicited from the HWs and personal perceptions on Conflict have been discussed. The term polarization has been brought up by the participant HWs and link between conflict and polarization has been stated. After that the concepts of Polarization, Conflict Analysis, Conflict Management, Conflict Transformation and Conflict Resolution are illustrated with their literal definitions, metaphors and examples.

Upon the analysis of the main concept and a break has been given and during that time the classroom has been rearranged for the Example Scenario. Scenario was about a Local Bazaar Situation where one Syrian and one Turkish salesman work. According to the scenario, a conflict emerged between two customers one of whom shops from the Syrian salesman but challenged by another customer about doing so. Through role- playing, the HWs played their roles as salesmen and two customers. After the role- play, mapping of this conflict has been illustrated on the board and the relationship symbols has been introduced to the participant HWs.

After the whole analysis and mapping of the example conflict scenario, the HWs has been asked to work in pairs and come up with a conflict situation that they came across in the field working as a HW. They have been given 20 minutes to discuss and use the conflict mapping technique to further analyse the situation.

Upon completion of their discussions and maps, the HWs have been asked to report back and share the conflict that they have analysed and present the map. Five maps have been presented and their content is as follows:

### Map 1: A Conflict between a Syrian Child and a Roma Child in front of a Public School in Kahramanlar District of Izmir

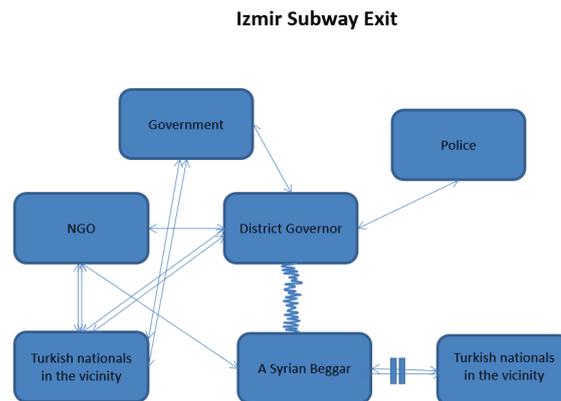


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Kahramanlar district of Izmir province is a known area for its consisting people from different minority groups such as Kurds, Romans and most recently Syrians who are also from different ethnic groups. In most contexts, it is believed by the local residents that Syrians have broken the balance in the area and a competition among these groups have occurred.

In the map, describing the conflict between Syrian and Roman children, the actors are stated as Syrian Child, Roman Child, the other children in the school, the teachers, the local residents, families of the children, the non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of National Education. While presenting the maps, the HWs mentioned the hidden competition element. According to this, the Syrian children are more hard-working than the Roman children at school. Despite their language barriers, they are more successful and grasp the attention of the teachers. With these underlying facts in mind, the HWs have analysed the conflict stemming from jealousy, discrimination and the need for power demonstration to preserve the life conditions. The HWs also added that one of the family members who showed up afterwards asked his child why he did not fight back and scolded him fiercely.

### Map 2: A Conflict between a Syrian Woman begging at a Subway Exit and the Turkish Community in Konak District of Izmir



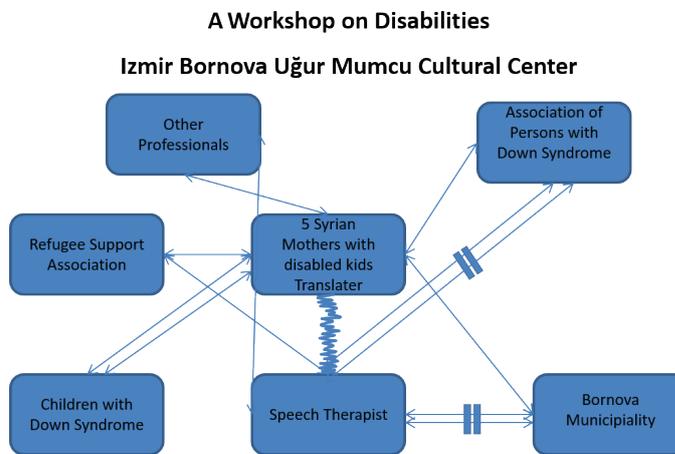
Konak is a famous area of Izmir where mostly people with economically good conditions reside. This conflict has been witnessed by the HWs by coincidence in rush hours after a working day at the subway exit. The parties involved in this conflict is reported as Syrian beggar, an officer from the State department of Social Work, police officers, Turkish local community, and the non-governmental organizations.

While presenting the Map, the HWs have mentioned that a local called the police and complained about a Syrian woman with her baby was begging at the subway exit. Upon this call, an officer from the State department of Social Services and police officers showed up at the scene asking the Syrian woman to come with them to the police station. The woman did not speak Turkish but when she understood that they want to take her in police custody, she became agitated and started to hurt her baby. At that point, local resident intervened making harsh comments on her motherhood, her leaving her country and her breaking the peaceful environment that Konak used to have. The HWs assumed the responsibility to translate but find themselves as mediators among the police, the locals and the Syrian women. The HWs repeatedly stated that they were not ready for such role and they added they felt lucky that the conflict did not turn into a physical fight. At the end of the presentation, some of the HWs asked about whether or not taking part in such conflict is part of humanitarian work and if passing by such conflict after working hours would be ethically correct or not.

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One participant gave the example of a medical doctor who passed by a man who just had a heart attack on the street and the further analysis and links to humanitarian work have been made.

### Map 3: A conflict between 5 Syrian Women and Language Therapists at Bornova Municipality Workshop on Disability in Izmir



Bornova is a district in Izmir with a Municipality with an anti-government political view just as the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality. Municipalities' being anti- government can sometimes lead to hardships regarding the services for the Syrians in the city as it is commonly agreed that the government is to "blame" for the problems related to the Syrians. However, the municipalities are not totally disregarding the situation and they design services such as giving Turkish classes, distribution of food and non-food items, workshops, etc.

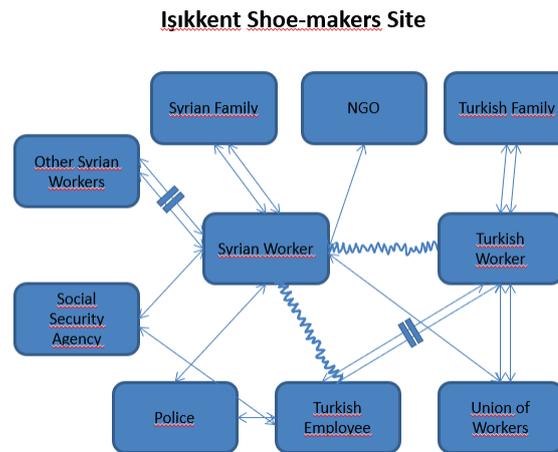
Bornova Municipality arranged a workshop on Disability at Uğur Mumcu Culture Center on 10.05.2017 in cooperation with the Izmir Association for People with Down syndrome. The HWs were also the attendants to the workshop and reported that a conflict between Syrian mothers of kids with Down syndrome and the Turkish experts (Language Therapists) emerged during the workshop. The other actors were stated as the translator, Bornova Municipality, Izmir Association for People with Down syndrome, Turkish mothers attending the workshop, Turkish Children with Down syndrome attending the workshop.

The Turkish Experts did not accept the Syrians participation and protest against them during the speech was being translated into Arabic. The HWs as the translators were felt that they were being protested but in fact they want Syrian mothers and children out of the Conference hall. The Turkish participants applauded, talked and yelled during the workshop. Syrian mothers and children started crying wanted to leave.

While analyzing the conflict through mapping, the HWs mentioned Turkish nationalism, polarization, ethnic discrimination against Arabs as the reasons. However, discussing further, the HWs mentioned "fear" as a core element to the relevant conflict. The fear of losing power or potential loss of being a part of the majority was also mentioned. It is also added that not protesting Syrians might mean that they are fine with the Government's policy on Syrians under temporary protection, which might lead to lose or harm their political identity.

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**Map 4: A Conflict between A Syrian Worker and A Turkish Employer at Isikkent Shoe- Making Site in Izmir**



Within this conflict example which emerged at Isikkent Shoe-making Site on 01.05.2017, the HWs identified the parties to the conflict as the Syrian worker, Turkish Employer, the Police Force, Social Security Institution, Non- governmental Organizations, Worker Unions, Other Syrian Workers at the Shoe- making Site, Other Turkish Workers at the Shoe-making Site and the Families of the workers. The Shoe-making Site in Isikkent/ Izmir is a known area where people from different minority groups work without work permits and social insurance. This area can be categorized under socio-economically deprived places in Izmir Province. The employers at the site are commonly believed that they make children and adults work under harsh conditions with long hours and often fail to pay the salaries in timely manner or avoid paying them at all. The similar cases of Syrians living under temporary protection in Izmir province often come to the attention of the HWs working at the RSC. The Syrians mostly complain about the fact that the language barrier has a direct negative impact on their livelihood and they have their difficulties in finding jobs. They feel obliged to settle for whatever job they are being offered even if it means working illegally and under hard conditions.

When it comes to the specific example that the HWs have raised during the training session, it also fits the general condition that Syrians come across in the context of the livelihood issue. In this context, a Syrian worker has not been paid at all, although it has been working more than two months. The employer seems to postpone paying him using the language barrier as an excuse for not being able to understand what he asks for.

When the Syrian workers has confronted with the Turkish employer, a potentially violent conflict has emerged and other Syrian and other Turkish workers at the Site gather around them. The HW has the function to be the translator and the mediator since naturally language is of the medium of understanding. It is stated that no physical contact has been made however, the situation was extremely volatile. The HW has mentioned the fact that he felt insecure and did not know what to do. The HW wanted to call the police officers but he thought about the illegal condition of the Syrian worker and refrained himself from calling the authorities. After the presentation has been completed a question "What would you do in the situation" to the whole group has been directed. Half of the group has stated that they would have called the authorities but half of the HWs stated that they would not since it is against the wellbeing of the Syrian worker. A small discussion regarding the ethical dilemma that the HW in that situation experienced. It is added that it is also a part of the conflict resolution to overcome these ethical dilemmas in such cases.

**Map 5: A Conflict between Turkish Families and Syrian Families during a Vaccination Campaign in Izmir**

Turkish Ministry of Health in cooperation with the World Health Organization and UNICEF have started a vaccination

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campaign in February this year. With this project, all Syrian Children under the age of five are targeted to be vaccinated against infectious diseases. In each city in Turkey, local NGOs supported the project by disseminating information and providing translators.

In Izmir, Konak District as well the project aimed to be implemented. Therefore, Syrian children and their families were gathered around Gultepe Community Health Centre on 11.05.2017.

A conflict among Turkish people and Syrian Families who brought their kids for vaccination took place. The HWs identified the actors to the conflict as a Turkish family, Syrian family, the Police officer, Muhktar (elected district leader), doctors, nurses, translators and the non-governmental organizations on the Conflict Map.

While presenting and analysing the map, the HWs stated that the reason behind the conflict and the narrative used were about Government's favouring the Syrians and ignoring the Turkish nationals. The Turkish families were inclined to be violent, however, the HWs reported that they were able to manage the crowd by stating the fact that vaccinating the Syrian children will help preserving the Turkish children's health from the diseases sourced from the Syrians. The HWs were able to transform the conflict by privately talking to the Turkish families saying that the government is working for the Turks not the Syrians since they want to protect them against the potential diseases coming from the Syrians. The HWs added that they felt dishonest because they could tell one part of the truth and could not share the fact that they believe vaccination is a rightful service to Syrian children just like it is for any Turkish children.

### RESULTS

HWs' feedback on conflict mapping technique training and its practicality was taken after a week from the training session through individual meetings online. The feedback was mostly positive regarding the use and the practicality of the Conflict Mapping Technique. To be more detailed the HWs stated that the conflict mapping technique has given them the opportunity to have a look at the conflict situations from a broader perspective. It is also reported that identifying actors and parties to a conflict situation has been also a great asset to possess especially in starting the case management cycle in the humanitarian work. The analysis of the nature of relationships among the parties and the actors within a conflict and determining whether they are allies or where the relationship is broken or not are reported to be very helpful in case management in humanitarian work.

They also acknowledge that humanitarian work requires understanding and comprehending all the actors and parties involved and possessing the potential to involve in a conflict to better handle such a situation as professionals, which means that HWs raise awareness regarding the importance of conflict resolution in the humanitarian sector.

In addition to the feedback about above mentioned positive impacts of conflict analysis, the HWs have also stated that they are in need of further support to further understand the conflict situations including the polarization between the Turks and the Syrian which has reached to the climax in Izmir context lately.

Initiation of a support network as an objective of this field report has been suggested by the HWs before mentioned by myself as the facilitator of the training session. Although the original plan of the support network involved HWs' coming together monthly or biweekly and deciding the agenda of the meeting by themselves, the HWs come up with a rather novice and technological solution. One of the HWs took an initiative to start a private chat room named it as a "Self- Support Network".

This chat room has been active for about three weeks now and the HWs share problems, questions, anecdotes and concerns regarding their job and to my understanding from the feedback received and the active participation in the chat room, they feel satisfied by this online initiative. With this, the objective of founding a support network for the HWs has been achieved surprisingly with complete effort from the HWs themselves.

### CONCLUSION

All in all, it can be said that this training has been successfully achieved its aims since the HWs have raised their awareness about conflict resolution, have been introduced to the main concepts of conflict such as the definition of conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution, polarization and the needs-based understanding of conflict. They have also been introduced to the conflict mapping technique theoretical and practically through real life scenarios and role- playing. Upon being presented and practicing conflict mapping technique, the participant HWs also produced their own conflict maps in pairs by analysing a real conflict they have come across recently in their professional lives.

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The training session regarding the conflict mapping technique has received positive feedback which has been taken individually through online meetings a week after the session.

Finally, a support network among the HWs has been set up through complete efforts and initiation of the participant HWs. The idea was put forward by the HWs and the form of it is also decided by themselves as well. They prefer doing the network online by using private chat room and named it "Self- Support Network" which has been actively used by the HWs to share questions, problems, solutions, concerns and experiences.

As for the limitations of this field work, taking only one technique as subject of the fieldwork under the umbrella term conflict and the academic discipline of Conflict Studies is obviously not adequate to equip the HWs with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge of Conflict Resolution.

When it comes to recommendations in line with Richardson (2006), a common curriculum of knowledge, skills, and experience needed for different areas of work within the humanitarian sector; identification of existing needs of the HAWs for training and collective action to develop training to fill the gaps should be developed. Besides, a commitment from all relief organisations to empower the staff or volunteers who are new to social work practice and is of no educational background in social work. Further research should be done to investigate the views of HWs concerning development needs, and current barriers to their practices in the humanitarian sector.

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