Integrations of Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services: Opportunities, Difficulties and Expectations

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Abstract

There are many Institutions and Ministries working on social welfare directly or indirectly, aiming to provide better life conditions for all citizens in Turkey. Although the center of the social policies is the newly founded Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, the Ministry needs to work in cooperation with other public institutions and voluntary organizations in order to fulfill the tasks given. An effective way of coordinating the services provided by diversity of institutions is using integration opportunities presented by information technologies. Aim of this paper is to expose the key points and the problems of interagency information sharing and integrations in social service welfare besides the benefits, from the perspective of MoFLSS members.

Keywords: Integration, E-Government Gate, Social Policy.

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Introduction

Information Communication Technologies have been changing all aspects of societies including the way of making business, governing the states and countries. "Technological revolution has also been enabling the introduction of new services, better and faster delivery of existing ones and provides cheaper and more effective communications between different parties. Nearly all developed nations regard developing e-government as a key strategy for ensuring their success in the 21st century, and are rapidly implementing major initiatives in this area". (Shahkooh et al, 2009: 544) According to Naralan, Governments are inspired by the success stories of commercial corporations that carried their business on the internet and increase their profits, so they decided to provide services for citizens over internet. Use of IT for providing government services which usually named as E-Government became widespread all over the world due to efficiency, agility, saving of both money and time, transparency. From now on, Government Institutions regard citizens as customers to be satisfied and focus on Citizen Oriented Services. (Naralan,2008: p3) It is stated by Heeks that it is a well-known secret in the computer industry that information systems projects are more likely to fail than not.(Heeks, 2006:3). Yıldız and Polat regards as a problem that projects related to government considered as completely separated projects and underestimated the possible integrations with the central government projects and local government project. E-Government project developed by any government organization should be able to share information or interoperate with other E-

Government applications such as MERNIS, TAKBIS and VEDOP. (Yıldız & Polat, 2012:8). Use of ICT within social service agencies is no longer the issue. It is clear that social welfare work requires the support of ICT to progress in an information rich environment. Use of information technologies for client and management information systems in addition to practitioner/service user decision support systems, including the rapidly developing use of intranets and internets for communication within agencies and between agencies, and as a medium for dissemination of service information have been more contested. Child-care and community care policies have raised the profile of inter-agency working, particularly by health and social services in UK (Rafferty, 1997) One of the most well-known high profile cases is the Victor Climbie Inquiry and the related report prepared by Lord Laming in 2003. Death of Victor Climbie who was abused and then killed has become a striking example) which inflamed the debate concerning collaboration and information sharing between different Government Agencies and resulted in development of integrated systems such as Risk of Offending Generic Solution' (RYOGENS) and Integrated Children's System (ICS.

 It is strongly stated in National E-Government Strategy and Action Plan that there exists an urgent need for integration of information systems between the government institutions working in social area in Turkey. Ministry of Family and Social Policies founded in 2011 by consolidating social issues related institutions is the center of social policies except social security. In 2018, Ministries has been re-organized and with Ministry of Labor as "Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services". Many information systems have also been consolidated since 2011 including efficient and currently active ones such as Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) integrating 16 public institutions via web service, and legacy ones such as Management Information System (YBS) focusing on social services and related enterprise resource management. Ministry aims to replace the legacy YBS with a new "Family Information System". Integration opportunities with other Ministry and Institutions are one of the hot topics that almost every end user expects to be included in the project plan.

E-Government Approaches

There are many different definitions of the E-Government shaped by the view point of the authors. In general E-Government refers to government's use of technology at internal processes of the state, in addition to the web-based internet applications to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens, business partners, employees, other agencies and entities.

In various models of e-government development, integration is generally considered as an important stage. Generally, governments experience four phases on the way of implementing E-Government applications consisting of listing, online operations, vertical and horizontal integrations. (Naralan,2008:458, as cited in Lee et al.) Similarly, a four phased classification is proposed in which phases can be listed as, information, interaction, operation and transformation in which diversity of

information systems is integrated and citizens can access to government-to-citizen and government – to- business services from single address. (Delibaş & Akgül, 2010, as cited in Uçkan, 2003) The third stage of the model suggested by the Layne and Lee is the integration of government operations within functional areas in government. Agencies working in the same functional area integrate their online operations such as FBI, CIA, and the NSA. The final stage is horizontal integration. Different functional areas are integrated within the same electronic system and put to use through a central portal. The last two stages focus on the integration of the provision of e-government activities within the existing governmental structure. (Yıldız, 2007, as cited in Layne and Lee 2001, p. 124).Similarly, Heeks (2006), refers to a four-stage model (as cited in Ebrahim et al., 2003) in which third stage of model emphasizes integration: Back-office processes are altered to allow either vertical integration of different levels of government, or horizontal integration that brings together related functions/services.

General Directorate of Social Assistance and the Kızılay has cooperated for social integration of Syrian refugees and coordination of social assistance for Turkey citizens. In the context of the program, a G2N(Government to Nonprofit) integration over E-Government Gateway and interoperability model has been established in 2016. Purpose of the project has been delivering the €3 Billion fund provided by European Union for Syrian refugees, effectively and transparently using the powerful information system infrastructure(ISAIS) and strong provincial organization distributed within all over the country, namely 1001 Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation in every county of General Directorate of Social Assistance.
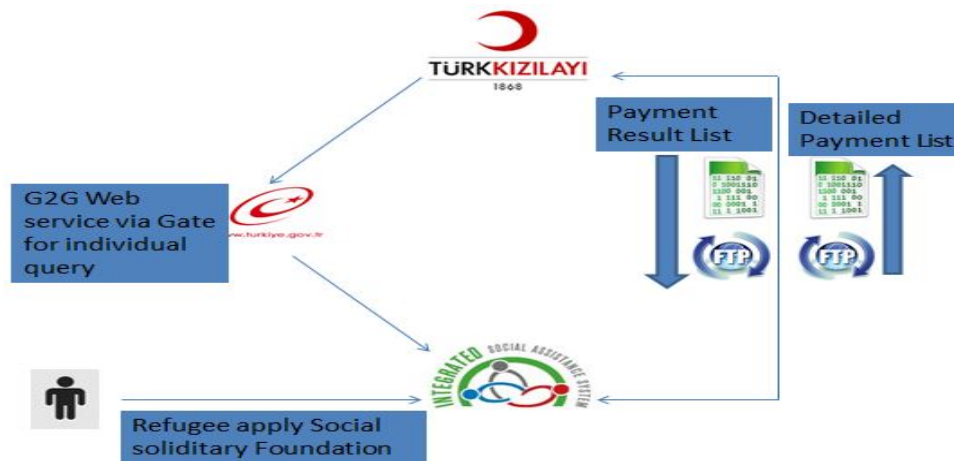

Figure 1: Kızılay And General Directorate of Social Assistance G2N Integration

Sustainable development goals of the government at the hearth of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development have lead governments to a holistic approach. In this context, the concept of Whole-of-Government (WoG) has been emphasized in the "United Nations E-Government Survey 2016" which

denotes public service agencies working together across organizational portfolio boundaries in a shared response to particular issues. WoG is closely associated with "Connected" and "Joined- Up" government concepts. The growing importance attached to WoG approaches has been accompanied by a more integrated approach to E-Government and online service delivery. There is a trend towards providing service delivery through "one-stop-shops" online, or through other systems, including call centers, allowing managing public services in interrelated areas. WoG approach has also been accepted and paid attention by Turkish Government.

Figure 2: Integrated Scholarship Application(WoG)

Research Section

Main purpose and subject of this research is investigating the ways of interagency information sharing and integration of IT systems of Government Institutions, prerequisites in brief, benefits, interoperability in terms of both technical and organizational issues, and role of the E-Government Gate infrastructure when integrating systems, providing WoG Services over E-Government Gate. There are some good examples of such integrations yet already that will be examined in this research which will provide vision for others. Current and planned IT Project and Integrations of Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services are going to be focused as real life examples. In the light of the action research conducted by the Author, observations and the experiences has shown that, although none of the integration processes are exactly same with each other, almost all of them share some common characteristics and steps taken. These steps can be listed as;

- Preliminary & Official Prerequisites
- Network infrastructure (VPN) & Accessing and preparation for internal use.
- Developing the software code for consuming service & Deployment

Each step listed above has its own characteristics in terms of problems frequently encountered and required specific approaches for solutions. An interview conducted in the context of the research has also contributed and supported the observations of the Author.

Research Results

Preliminary & Official Prerequisites phase of integrations generally consists of decision of the integration, determination of the required data and the related organisation that will be integrated, meetings for clarification of the process, official writings and as a final point, signing the protocol for defining the procedures and laws to be based on. One of the two main problems is finding right counterpart when the subject of the integration is related multiple units of the Ministry and secondly preparing re-usable and resistant protocol text to suit up constantly changing environment of the governance. Many of the integrations have been made using web services or FTP file sharing protocol. In general, institutions prefer setting Virtual Private Network for more secure communication. For setting up a IPSEC VPN tunnel, network teams of the two counterpart organization should work closely and remain in contact. Government Institutions have been using diversity of network communication and security servers supplied by different vendors. That becomes a problem in some cases, particularly when the network team that is responsible for managing the network infrastructure is not experienced. At this point, Kamunet which is closed and secure government network project and G2G services over E-Government Gateway is supposed to solve many of the problems above.

After all official and technical prerequisites told above have been completed; final step is integrating the data of other institution to the business rules and the information system truly. In general, understanding the data structure and the meaning of the counterpart institution's data is prone to errors. For example, Social security status of the citizens is periodically checked from the databases via the web services provided by the Social Security Institutions. Problem is that social security status of the citizens cannot be classified simply just as active and inactive easily. Constantly changing legislation of the Social Security, distributed organizational structure of the Institution before 2005 and the complex and blurry nature of the social security status makes it very difficult to "understand" and determine the status of the citizens. Web services served by the Social Security Institution is claimed to provide all information for determining the status of the citizens, but it is a challenge to extract the social security status of the citizens from those services for every citizen truly.

In the context of the Interview concerning integrations of Ministry, information systems of the Ministry, benefits and difficulties encountered, contribution of top level managers to integrations has been asked to the employees to the Ministry's central organization. Almost all of the interviews stated that use of an information system is necessary for increasing service quality. Especially, large number of the citizens that have been benefiting from social aids and also social services necessitates the use

of information systems for organizing and conducting those service processes properly. It is stated that Case Management Approach yields more benefit and performance in comparison with other approaches. Especially in social service area including women and children affairs requires multi-stakeholders implementing their own responsibilities within the case management. For example, there is a service loop between police force, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Family and Ministry of Justice in the case of violence against women. These four institution works on the same case almost simultaneously. Especially, interviewees working on social assistance area emphasized the benefits of the integrations implemented within the ISAS and the SOYBİS repetitively. Citizens that were applying for social aids had to collect many official documents from a diversity of other government organizations for proving their income level formerly which takes much time, effort and monetary cost. After the advent of the SOYBİS and ISAS that have many integrations with other government organizations, citizens does not have to collect almost any documents; instead, personnel can easily access the social security information, salary information, vehicle and estate ownership and some other auxiliary data owned by other government organizations using ISAS within a few minutes. Women services against violence and murders have also benefited from integrations deeply. Before the integration with Ministry of Justice, court verdicts had a long way including posting and classification before delivering Ministry of Family, Labor And Social Services. After the integration established between Ministries, data flow is implemented instantly; the data has been entered to the system of the Ministry of Justice, then proper action is taken by the Ministry of Family as soon as possible which reduces bureaucracy. Integrations have multiple steps from beginning to completion and every step is conducted by different units of the organizations. Both technical staff and managerial units have to work in coordination for a successful integration. When there is not a dedicated coordinator which controls all steps of the integration, problems may stay unsolved and nobody is aware of that there is a bottle neck. In fact integration process is not a one time work, in contrast it is a continuous process; even if everything is completed successfully and data flow is succeeded between counterparts, any of the steps that have successfully passed before may change and data flow may stop. More over if this change is about the data structure and/or the validity of the data has been changed without notifying the consumers of the data presented, then there is a risk of conducting false operations depending on that "changed" data. Top level Managers commitment and sponsorship is one of the key factors determining the success of the integration. One of the interviewees working on social assistance stated that due to the distributed structure of the social policies within Ministries, this top level commitment of integration should start from the prime ministry of Presidency which has power over all Ministries. E-Government Gateway is also considered as an important player for integrations due to providing G2G services over a central point to all Government Institutions.

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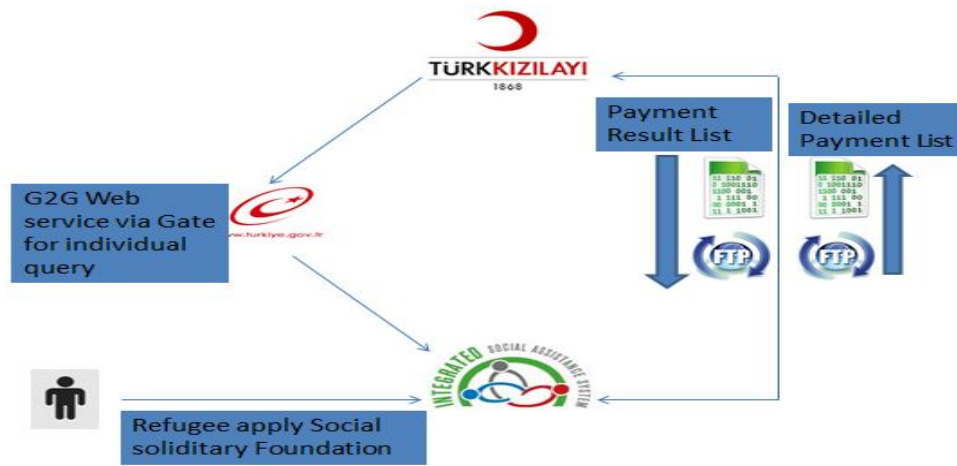
Figures and Tables

Figure 3: Kızılay And General Directorate of Social Assistance G2N Integration

Figure 4: Integrated Scholarship Application(WoG)