



In conversation with Emine Sabancı Kamyşlı:

New models for youth employment in Turkey

An entrepreneurial approach combined with a passion for the topic: How Emine Sabancı Kamyşlı addresses one of Turkey's most urgent social issues.

When I think about Turkey, a couple of families come to mind that have been instrumental in developing the country's philanthropy and serve as its "Rockefellers". Sabancı Kamyşlı is one of these.

Although she comes from a philanthropic family, she is quick to point out that she applies the same rigor to her social investments as she does to her for-profit ventures: Emine Sabancı Kamyşlı is Vice Chairperson of Esas Holding, the largest family-owned investment firm in Turkey, and leads the Holding's social investment arm, Esas Sosyal.

The family's social investment approach

Sabancı Kamyşlı is willing to share the most important and eye-opening insights she has gained because, as she stresses, she believes in spreading knowledge and experience. "My family set up Esas Sosyal 'Social Investments' as one of our core business units, instead of a separate charitable foundation. Philanthropy is more than simply giving money. Donating does not necessarily mean you've assumed your responsibility to society. You need to be more strategic."

Esas Holding has four other business units, namely private equity, asset management, real estate and venture capital. These are all profit-driven, while operating within a framework that takes into account environmental, social and governance factors. Esas

Sosyal, however, has only one goal and motivation: to have a measurable social and economic impact on society. But this doesn't stop them from applying the same rigor, metrics and goals in their social investments as they do in their for-profit ventures.

"We see Esas Sosyal as a business unit and we treat it as one. It's so, so important to give your social investments the same attention and structure as you do any other business," Sabancı Kamyşlı explains. "Having a passion for the topic is crucial. I believe in equal opportunities for youth, which fuels hope – not fear – for the future. Equally important is making sure that interventions and investments are needs-based and impact-driven," she continues.

A focus on youth unemployment

In the beginning, Esas Sosyal commissioned a comprehensive mapping of the most pressing needs in Turkish society, and where they could be complementary to other actors. They identified youth unemployment as the issue they wanted to focus on. In Turkey, educated youth struggle to find jobs. In 2020, for example, 36 percent of young people with university diplomas were unemployed, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. Sabancı Kamyşlı believes that the hope of its youth is Turkey's most valuable currency, and that their prolonged discouragement can easily turn to fear of what the future may bring.

Esas Sosyal's social investment strategy focuses on the school-to-work transition of youth, specifically new university graduates, who face higher unemployment rates. The Şevket Sabancı

First Chance Program, their flagship investment, addresses the inequalities faced in accessing employment opportunities. It has had a significant impact to date, providing more than 200 youth with full-time employment, skills training and mentoring for one year at over 30 NGOs. It also supports youth in overcoming other barriers to employment, for example, helping them with English language skills through the *Hayırlı Sabancı English Chance Program*, and has harnessed the support of 30 additional companies that contribute to these objectives.

Investing in research

Sabancı Kamışlı then turns to the importance of research and sharing knowledge: “When we agreed on our cause, we commissioned deep research into root causes and tried to find potential solutions worth investing in. Research is hard work, and it takes time and resources. Many skip this step and just dive in. A lot of money is unnecessarily lost that way, in my view.”

From Esas Sosyal’s perspective, it is important to have the backing of surveys and data, including the views of all stakeholders – be they managers, mentors or the youth themselves. By taking this approach, their investments are based on evidence and involve the views of all stakeholders.

They run three evaluation cycles throughout the program. The KPIs for these evaluations are: new jobs offered before

completion (86%), and new job entry within three (93%) and six months (100%) of program completion. After the first four years, Esas Sosyal commissioned an independent impact assessment from Bilkent University. It revealed a statistically significant impact on future employment for youth who participated in the program.

Another important realization for Esas Sosyal was that they needed to approach youth unemployment holistically. “Many young, unemployed people are experiencing emotional distress. They are unable to sleep, and social relations suffer. This is the reason why we offer soft skills and stress management training. We built a whole ecosystem to support them and to ensure their continued success in the program and thereafter,” says Sabancı Kamışlı.

The value of transparency

One hallmark of their approach is the fact they share their learnings freely. Esas Sosyal make all of their research easily available for others. “When you are doing research for public benefit, I believe you should share it. In this space, no one is a competitor. We spread our knowledge as much as we can,” Sabancı Kamışlı says. It is indeed a pleasure to see how they as a family share their learnings, including this article, to hopefully also inspire other philanthropists.

Article by: Nina Hoas, Head of LGT Philanthropy Advisory

Photo: generously provided by Emine Sabancı Kamışlı