

Charity
begins at home, but
does not end there.
FRANCIS BACON

**THE STORY OF
FIFTY YEARS**

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SABANCI FOUNDATION 50 YEARS

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*Entrepreneur, visionary, and courageous
Hacı Ömer Sabancı.*

*Resourceful and nurturing
Sadıka Sabancı.*

*Two philanthropists with hearts
full of compassion.*

*They pioneered this journey,
which has now reached its fiftieth year.
We honor their memory with respect,
longing, and gratitude.*

FOREWORD

GÜLER SABANCI

SABANCI FOUNDATION
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF
TRUSTEES

Philanthropy holds deep significance in our family culture. After establishing Sabancı Holding in 1967, we were inspired by our roots in Adana to launch the Sabancı Foundation in 1974, when my grandmother Sadıka Sabancı donated her entire estate to formalize our philanthropic work. We take pride in the Foundation's 50 years of service, during which it has remained central to our Group's mission.

Throughout these five decades, we have reached out unconditionally to those in need, since for us it meant sharing “a piece of our heart.” Our family has always embraced and nurtured this culture of unconditional giving. As my grandfather Hacı Ömer Sabancı wisely stated, the principle of “*sharing what we have gained from this land with the people of this land*” has guided us in supporting those in need, addressing their challenges, and, most importantly, creating positive change in society through our work.

For half a century, we have focused on social development while adapting our philanthropic strategy to align with Türkiye's achievements. By closely monitoring developments both in Türkiye and globally, we have embraced innovative approaches for the new era. We remain steadfast in our belief that beyond constructing buildings, reaching out to people and taking holistic approaches are essential for addressing today's challenges.

We've channeled the Sabancı Group's industrial and economic strength into social and cultural initiatives, becoming one of Türkiye's foremost family foundations. Through the ecosystem we've built over the years, we continue to impact millions of lives across Türkiye.

We have gifted our society with more than 120 lasting contributions, including schools, student dormitories, cultural centers, teachers' houses, health institutions, sports facilities, and social spaces across 78 residential areas throughout Türkiye. Beyond these physical structures, we've launched enduring cultural and artistic projects vital to social development. Our long-standing support spans various cultural initiatives, including the State Theaters—Sabancı International Adana Theater Festival, the Turkish Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, the Sabancı Foundation Short Film Competition, and the excavations in the ancient city of Metropolis.

For 50 years, we have strived to ensure quality education, equal opportunities, and continued access to education for girls—driven by our conviction that education is the path to social development. The Hacı Ömer Sabancı Hall of Residence for Girls, built in Ankara in the early 1980s, embodied this commitment and met a crucial need for female students pursuing their education. We have always approached our work with this mindset, and we always will.

Beyond providing over 55,000 scholarships, we continue to celebrate the achievements of young people, artists, and athletes through our awards programs in education, arts, and sports.



Dedicated to creating a society with equal rights for all, we focus on supporting women, youth, and people with disabilities—groups who face disadvantages in our country. Through the Sabancı Foundation Grant Program, running for nearly 20 years, we have brought attention to their challenges and supported NGOs working toward solutions. We have become partners to these organizations, sharing our experiences along the way. Through our Changemakers Program, we spotlight those who take action to solve problems rather than simply discussing them.

The global landscape of multiple crises continues to transform our philanthropic work. While challenges grow, cooperation becomes increasingly vital for solutions. Yet collaboration alone isn't sufficient—we need a true unity of purpose to overcome these challenges. At the Foundation, our professionals and stakeholders are deeply committed to creating lasting impact through our shared vision.

Young people are essential partners in achieving this unity of purpose during these challenging times. Their keen awareness, swift action, and powerful voices make them invaluable in addressing social issues. They bring fresh perspectives to social challenges, offering inclusive and innovative solutions shaped by their deep understanding of our changing world.

“The country will definitely be modern, civilized and innovative. For us, this is vital. The effectiveness of all our sacrifices depends on this.” As the Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emphasized, transformation is an indispensable requirement.

At this milestone of our 50th anniversary, we at Sabancı Foundation have partnered with fourth-generation family members to craft a strategy for our future. As we enter our second half-century, we remain committed to advancing our mission by staying attuned to global developments in philanthropy and refining our focus areas.

As we begin this new chapter, we look forward to many more decades of working together to reduce inequalities.

GÜLER SABANCI, CHAIR OF THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
SABANCI FOUNDATION, WITH HACI
ÖMER SABANCI, WHO PAVED THE
WAY FOR THE FAMILY TO ESTABLISH
THE FOUNDATION, AND HER
GRANDMOTHER SADIKA SABANCI,
WHO LAID THE FIRST BRICK BY
DONATING ALL HER ASSETS...

CHAPTER ONE

While a new
country was in
the making...

In 1906, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, a boy named Hacı Ömer was born to Pembe and Hacı Sabancı in the village of Akçakaya, Kayseri. At this time, Anatolia was exhausted by wars raging on multiple fronts. Poverty gripped the land, and every household mourned a fallen martyr.

Then came the World War I, bringing more misery to the already declining Ottoman Empire.

This loss left the family destitute and Hacı Ömer suddenly found himself responsible for his mother and brother.

Together with his uncle Ahmet, he embarked on a journey. Their destination was the city of Adana—an arduous 450-kilometer trek they had no choice but to make on foot.

GÜLER SABANCI: Their village, Akçakaya, nestled in the foothills of Erciyes, offered little for farming. The fertile plains of Adana were their only hope. Hacı Ömer showed remarkable courage in making this journey on foot, and his exceptional work ethic would serve him well.

Hacı Ömer reached Adana in 1921, coinciding with the city's liberation. In this more promising land of fertile soil and thriving commerce, he began anew. Working as a cotton laborer, he gained intimate knowledge of this remarkable crop—light in weight yet heavy in value. Through diligence and thrift, he built his savings. All the while, he never stopped dreaming.

1. *Hayat* magazine, Turkish industry supplement in the 50th year of the Republic, issue 36, 30.08.1978, p. 5.

This is how he described his early days in Adana to his friends:

I used to work for 85 kuruş a day. I would spend five kuruş each on breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I paid ten kuruş a day to stay at the Pamukçu Inn. After paying ten kuruş for my laundry, I would save the remaining 50 kuruş. I would often gaze at the Pamukçu Inn—the grandest and most beautiful building in Adana at the time—and think, “If I could own that place, I would want for nothing else.”¹

His dreams—the Pamukçu Inn and much more—eventually came true. All he had needed was time. Within two years, he had invested his savings and

begun trading cotton, though modestly at first. He started with cotton bale pressing, then expanded to transportation and weighing.

Hacı Ömer, who had left his village for the big city during the Ottoman Empire's final days, witnessed his country's liberation from occupation, its declaration of independence, the establishment of the Republic, and its rebuilding from scratch.

The Republic's founder, the Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was spearheading numerous reforms to elevate Türkiye to the ranks of modern civilization. Understanding that economic independence was crucial for building a nation-state, he devoted himself to advancing both agriculture and industry.

In this Türkiye that had risen from its ashes, the number of factories grew dramatically—from 386 before 1923 to 1,087 between 1923 and 1933.

Hacı Ömer Sabancı was growing alongside the Republic. In 1928, when he decided to start a family, he married Sadıka Sabancı, who was also from Akçakaya. She had suffered her share of early losses, having lost her mother at a very young age. She had taken care of her siblings and always shouldered responsibility. She stood out not only for her manual dexterity but also for her ability to manage people.

She had a cheerful temperament—a constructive person who looked for solutions to every problem. She had set herself a goal in life: to make people happy.

Like Hacı Ömer, she was a hard worker—he at work, she at home. With the births of İhsan, Sakıp, Hacı, Şevket, Erol, and Özdemir, the family's demands grew. Sadıka provided the structure necessary for Hacı Ömer to work hard.



IN TÜRKİYE, A COUNTRY
THAT ROSE FROM THE
ASHES, HACI ÖMER
SABANCI ALSO MADE
SOMETHING OUT OF
NOTHING.

SAKIP SABANCI: When my father came home at noon, the table had to be ready. He would go straight to the table from the front door. In winter, he would sit down without removing his coat or hat and eat quickly. Then he would get up and leave again. After

returning in the evening, he would eat again and work on his calculations with papers and promissory notes. As we grew older, we began to help him.²

While teaching his sons about cotton, he was also teaching them about trade—and through trade, about life itself. He would gather them at dawn and take them along to purchase cotton from the farmers. He gave them responsibility at an early age, making them his partners. The business grew alongside the children.

SADIKA SABANCI: Every evening when he came home from work, he would gather all six of them around him and tell them what he had done that day. I would stand in a corner and listen in amazement. They were all children—how could they understand these things? Then some time passed. He granted signature authority to each of them individually. İhsan and Sakıp were still in their teens, totally inexperienced. I would say, “What are you doing?” He would turn serious and reply, “I want the children to learn right from wrong through their own experience.”³

World War II had broken out, following the first war that had brought great destruction to both Hacı Ömer’s country and family. While Türkiye managed to stay out of the conflict, he seized the opportunity to expand his business. He acquired partnership in a cotton and cotton gin factory, and his agricultural holdings expanded significantly.

In 1942, the family moved from their modest house with its dirt roof to a larger home on the same street—a change that transformed not just their address but their entire way of life. Initially called the “Pink House” for its distinctive color, it later became known as the “Lion House” after a lion statue was placed in its garden.

SAKIP SABANCI: Though my father had limited means in those days, he surprised us by purchasing and carefully overseeing the installation of that lion sculpture. This was remarkable since he barely had time to rest, spending his days trading cotton. His dedication to art, despite his busy schedule, left a lasting impression on us. Today, I too make time to appreciate and collect art.⁴

Hacı Ömer’s business empire continued to flourish. He systematically expanded from cotton to yarn, from yarn to fabric, and from fabric to printed textiles through a partnership with the Bosna

2. Altan Öymen, “01 Adana” article series, *Cumhuriyet*, September 21, 1981, p. 7.

3. *Hayat* magazine, Turkish industry supplement in the 50th year of the Republic, issue 36, 30.08.1978, p. 6.

4. Sakıp Sabancı, “The Houses I Have Lived In,” <https://sakipsabanci.com.tr/yasadigim-evler.php>.

family to establish Bossa. Later, he ventured into oil production with Yağsa and subsequently Marsa. Through determination, diligence, and vision, he kept building his enterprise. New ventures emerged: Bossa Flour and Ginning Factory, Bossa Textile Factory, Oralitsa, Aksigorta, Teksa, Çimsa, Yünsa, and Kordsa.

Hacı Ömer Sabancı lived by his core belief, displayed prominently on his factory: “*Work is the greatest act of worship.*”

Fertile lands met thriving industry as Adana and Hacı Ömer Sabancı grew together, each strengthening the other. The 1950s brought rapid development to the city, spurred by the construction of the Seyhan Dam and modernized agricultural practices.

As his industrial empire expanded, Sabancı recognized Türkiye’s need for robust financial institutions. Together with fellow businessmen from Kayseri living in Adana, he spearheaded the establishment of a bank. This collaboration among 83 individuals gave birth to Akbank, which would eventually become one of Türkiye’s leading financial institutions.

Meanwhile, Türkiye was in a state of flux. A multi-party regime was in place, and the Democratic Party had come to power with its belief that economic development depended on the private sector. Hacı Ömer Sabancı’s fortunes were about to rise, and he knew he had to share this prosperity.

GÜLER SABANCI: Hacı Ömer was a person of devotion who faithfully gave his *zakat*. After achieving wealth, he decided his first major charitable act should benefit his hometown. He built a primary school in the village of Akçakaya in 1959 and then provided the village with much-needed water.

There are two types of people in life: those who accept the status quo, and those who set out to change it. It is the second type who bring about

İHSAN, SAKIP, HACI,
ŞEVKET, EROL, ÖZDEMİR
SABANCI BROTHERS.



HACI ÖMER SABANCI, WHO
DEVELOPED PRODUCTION
FROM COTTON TO YARN,
AND FROM WEAVING TO
PRINTING, WAS ONE OF THE
KEY PLAYERS IN ADANA’S
FLOURISHING INDUSTRY.

great transformations—those who refuse to accept existing conditions, who strive for change, who never give up.

Having been denied an education and tested by poverty himself, Hacı Ömer was determined to offer other children a different life. Growing up fatherless, he had learned to be self-reliant. He knew that passively waiting for the state to provide water and schooling would serve no one.

GÜLER SABANCI: This is the essence of philanthropy—making yourself useful, being part of the solution, not merely depending on the state, but contributing to those in need through your own determination, strength, hard work, and earnings. This is how my grandfather's story of philanthropy began.

Hacı Ömer Sabancı never forgot his impoverished past. These vivid memories helped him empathize with others living in similar conditions.

The memories of Eid al-Fitr holidays spent in Adana during his days as a cotton laborer remained fresh in his mind. Later, when he had acquired wealth, he would invite poor people he met on his way home from Eid al-Adha prayers to his house for roasted sacrificial meat. Sadıka would welcome dozens of guests into their home. From day one, she had committed herself to sharing their blessings.

Hacı Ömer was a man of faith who held his religious duties in high regard. Giving *zakat* was his foremost priority. Beyond offering treats during holidays, he would distribute his own products and purchased goods to those in need in his native village. He firmly believed that those who achieved prosperity through the country's opportunities had an obligation to give *zakat* from their earnings.

Despite overcoming most of the hardships from his difficult childhood, one thing remained unfulfilled—he had never completed his education. While life's circumstances had prevented his older sons from pursuing education as well, his sons Şevket, Erol, and Özdemir realized their dreams. They brought their father joy by graduating from Tarsus American College and continuing their higher education in the UK.



HACI ÖMER SABANCI WAS A DEEPLY INDUSTRIOUS MAN. HIS GREATEST TREASURE WAS THE INSCRIPTION HE HAD ENGRAVED ON THE FACTORY: "WORK IS THE ULTIMATE WORSHIP".

EROL SABANCI: My father was overjoyed not only that we received an education that fostered business acumen, but also that we could speak foreign languages. Whenever I met a foreigner, he would eagerly push me forward, saying “Speak, speak,” and watch the conversation with a broad smile. His evident pleasure filled me with joy, as I could feel his pride in me.⁵

For Hacı Ömer Sabancı, education held paramount importance. He understood it was the key to overcoming misfortune and the only path to his country’s development.

It was fitting that after declaring, “We must share what we earn from this land with the people of this land,” his first action was to build a primary school in his home village.



HACI ÖMER SABANCI
WITH THE THEN
PRESIDENT CELAL BAYAR.

5. Sadun Tanju, Hacı Ömer, *Apa Ofset*, 1983, p. 273.

6. Sakıp Sabancı, *İşte Hayatım, Radar Reklam AŞ*, 1985, p. 218.

SAKIP SABANCI: “It is wrong to expect everything from the state,” my late father would say, and we continue this belief. Merely paying taxes and considering one’s duty completely goes against our ancestors’ comprehensive approach and forward-thinking mindset. They not only paid taxes and *zakat* and served the state—even risking their lives when necessary—but also readily endowed their properties for the public good.⁶

During these years of hard work and prolific production, Hacı Ömer developed the habit of traveling to Istanbul in the summers. In 1951, he began house-hunting in Istanbul. As soon as he saw the mansion overlooking Emirgan, he declared, “This is it.”

Shortly after purchasing the mansion, he learned of an auction. The furniture from the Mahmut Muhtar Pasha Mansion in Moda was up for sale. Hacı Ömer, an avid collector of antiques and sculptures, returned from that auction with a horse sculpture he deeply admired. This acquisition inspired the mansion’s new name: Atlı Köşk (The Mansion with the Horse).

Two horse statues graced the garden. One was the work of French sculptor Louis Doumas, acquired at the auction. The other—a replica of one of the four horses taken from Sultanahmet Square during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and placed in Venice’s San Marco church—was a gift from an Italian machinery supplier.

While living in the mansion—built in 1925 by Italian architect Edoardo De Nari for Prince

SADİKA, HACI ÖMER,
SAKIP AND GÜLER
SABANCI IN THE GARDEN
OF ATLI KÖŞK...



AT ATLI KÖŞK, WHERE
THE FAMILY GATHERED
IN THE SUMMER., THE
NEIGHBORHOOD’ NEEDS
WERE A FREQUENT TOPIC
OF CONVERSATION.

Mehmed Ali Hassan of the Egyptian Khedive family— Hacı Ömer made a prescient observation that would become legendary: “*This house will eventually become a museum.*”

At Atlı Köşk, summer family gatherings extended beyond business discussions to address community requirements. “What does Adana need? What about Kayseri? How can we help our relatives and neighbors?” The younger generations grew up immersed in these conversations.

Sadika had a unique gift for understanding family and relatives. With her strong communication skills and intuition, she earned her son Sakıp Sabancı’s description of her as “the pillar of the family.” Indeed, she was the force that kept the family united and thriving.

GÜLER SABANCI: Since childhood, I remember my grandmother's motto: “Let’s make people happy.” This was her constant focus. I believe making people happy carries more warmth than simply helping—it’s more nuanced.

SADIK, HACI ÖMER,
GÜLER AND ÖZDEMİR
SABANCI.



Çalışmağa Doyamıyan

TÜRK İŞ ADAMI



★ Ahmet Emin Yalman, Vatan ★

Türkiye'nin ticaret ve sanayi işlerinde mühim rol oynayan Hacı Ömer, fakir bir hamalken, nasıl muvaffak olduğunu ve Türkiye'nin başlıca milyonerlerinden biri arasına girdiğini anlatıyor.

ADANA'da Akbank'ın umumî merkezini ziyaret ettiğim sırada, Hacı Ömer'le tanışmak ve konuşmak fırsatını buldum. İyi bir tesadüf eseri olarak kendisi o sırada bankaya yakın bir yazıhanede imiş, buluştuk, uzun uzadıya görüştük.

Hacı Ömer; vatandaşların şahsî azim ve teşebbüslerini birer enerji kaynağı haline getirmek suretiyle bir memleketin neler kazanacağına canlı bir örnektir.

Hacı Ömer neler yapıyor? Bir defa memleketin en ileride gelen müteahhitleri arasında yeri vardır. Anıt - Kabir, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Ankara'da Teknik Üniversite, Keçiören hastanesi, Samsun tütün depoları, Denizli'de Sümerbank'ın tesisleri, Sivas Posta ve Telgraf binası, sanat mektepleri, diğer türlü türlü

su ve bina işleri gibi taahhütlerde ya müteahhit veya ortak sıfatıyla rol almıştır.

Bundan başka Adana'nın başlıca çiftçilerinden, pamuk tüccarlarından ve fabrikacılarından biridir. Hatay'da ipekçilik işlerine bile yetişir. Sahibi bulunduğu Erciyas Otelinin idaresi ile de alâkadar olur.

Namusun kıymeti

Sözü Hacı Ömer'e bırakıyorum. Ticarete namusun ne gibi bir kıymet teşkil ettiğini bana şöyle anlattı:

— Ticarete en kârlı yol, ticaret kaidelerine sıkı surette riayet etmek ve tam mânâsıyla namuslu olmaktır. Bizde öyleleri vardır ki, malı satarlar, fiyatlar yükseldi mi vermezler, veya «ağır bassın, fazla kazanayım» diye denklere taş katarlar. Bu

My grandmother was an exceptional manager; in fact, she taught me my first lessons in leadership. She was constructive, skilled at unifying people, and had a remarkable talent for guiding everyone toward shared goals and projects.

In the union of Hacı Ömer and Sadıka Sabancı, charity was at the heart of everything. Hacı Ömer was, as Ahmet Emin Yalman described him, “a living example of what the country could gain by turning the personal determination and initiative of citizens into a source of energy.”

In 1952, at the end of an interview titled “The Turkish Businessman Who Can’t Stop Working,” Ahmet Emin Yalman wrote the following:

Hacı Ömer reminded me of the famous billionaire Carnegie, whom I had the opportunity to meet personally when I was a student in America. Like Carnegie, Hacı Ömer loves making money not for pleasure or glamour, but as an exciting sport—a way to create job opportunities and benefit the public. He cares deeply about educating people and sharing his experience with everyone.⁷

As his sons began to take over the business, Hacı Ömer Sabancı slowed his pace. He spent more time on the farms and gardens. The harsh living conditions of his youth had worn down his body, and diabetes had diminished his strength.

Though only in his 60s, he could no longer bear the weight of the years. He bid farewell to this life on February 2, 1966. His last words were “*We rushed, we ran, we fought, we broke, we built, we boasted — but in the end, it was all in vain. This is all that remains in our hands.*”⁸

HACI ÖMER SABANCI
WAS 60 YEARS OLD WHEN
HE DIED, LEAVING HIS
BUSINESS AND DREAMS
IN SAFE HANDS.



FINDING SOLUTIONS TO
PROBLEMS, SHARING
AND MAKING PEOPLE
HAPPY... THESE
WORDS DEFINE SADIKA
SABANCI.

7. Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Bütün Dünya*, June 1952, p. 658.
8. Sakıp Sabancı, *İşte Hayatım, Radar Reklam AŞ*, 1985, p. 95.

It was an early farewell. His sons inherited not only his principle of “sharing what we earn from this land with the people of this land” but also the work he planned and the dreams he dreamed.

This value came from both parents. Sadıka Sabancı continued her charitable works even after Hacı Ömer Sabancı’s passing, distributing *fitrah* and *zakat* and helping those in need. With her intuitive understanding of people’s needs, she consistently sought ways to bring joy to others.

SERRA SABANCI: My grandmother always kept ready-made gifts at home. It didn't matter who they were for—boxes, packages, and various items from her travels were always on hand, carefully selected and prepared. She took great joy in giving these gifts when opportunities arose. I remember the fabrics, for instance... Back then, ready-made clothes weren't as available as they are today. I remember how fabrics would arrive from Bossa in bulk, and at her house, they would be cut and packaged for specific individuals. Sharing... It was simply woven into the fabric of her life.

“You leave, your property remains, your wealth remains,” Sadıka would say. “The trick is to make it work in the world. When you leave, you take only your peace of mind and inner satisfaction. My heart is content, and that is enough for me.”

The Sabancı brothers drew strength from this teaching in their charitable endeavors. While focused on addressing the needs of their immediate community, they also felt driven to build upon and elevate the legacy inherited from previous generations.

SAKIP SABANCI: This specific approach to philanthropy was ingrained in our culture. Through our travels and observations abroad, we gained deeper insights. We came to understand that successful organizations, companies, and families operated in two spheres—excelling in business while actively engaging in social causes to give back to the society that nurtured them.⁹

9. Sakıp Sabancı, *İşte Hayatım, Radar Reklam* AŞ, 1985, p. 219.

CHAPTER TWO

“For such
a good deed
I pledge all
my assets.”

After Hacı Ömer's death, The Sadıka Sabancı Secondary School and Hacı Ömer Sabancı Hall of Residence for Technical Students were built in Adana, and scholarships were granted to students in need.

The family's charitable works, though not yet institutionalized, had evolved into significant public initiatives. These marked the first steps toward creating lasting social impact.

On June 19, 1972, a newspaper article appeared alongside a photograph of Sakıp Sabancı laying the ceremonial first mortar:

"The foundation of the Sabancı Cultural Complex, built by Hacı Ömer Sabancı A.Ş. and recognized as the most modern cultural complex in our country, was laid with a ceremony yesterday at 16:30."¹⁰

10. "The foundation of Sabancı Culture site was laid ceremonially," *Cumhuriyet*, June 19, 1972, p. 7.



SAKIP SABANCI, AT THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF THE SABANCI CULTURAL COMPLEX, JOY AND PRIDE EVIDENT ON HIS FACE.

"The greatest challenge Türkiye faces today is in education and culture," said Sakıp Sabancı, chair of Sabancı Holding, at the ceremony. "While modern nations are swiftly moving toward technical education, Türkiye strives to keep pace through state resources and overcome its underdevelopment. Everyone who prospers from this land has a duty to help educate its people."

The concept of providing this assistance in a structured, institutional manner began to take shape. The path forward was clear: establish a foundation.



THE HACI ÖMER SABANCI TECHNICAL STUDENT DORMITORY WAS ONE OF THE FIRST MAJOR BUILDINGS THE SABANCI BROTHERS BUILT HONOR THEIR FATHER'S NAME.

The Arabic word *waqf* means “to give completely, to give fully.”¹¹ In legal terms, a foundation is a property-based entity with legal status, created when an individual or organization dedicates assets to a specific, lasting purpose. Foundations operate independently as non-governmental organizations, without membership structures or profit motives.¹²

The history of foundations dates back to ancient times, with the earliest examples found in Middle Eastern countries, Ancient Greece, and Rome. In Islamic societies, a foundation (*waqf*) fulfills vital social functions. In Islamic law, a foundation meant transferring the right to benefit from a property or its income to the public for a specific purpose, without time limitations. During the Ottoman period, foundations flourished. By the mid-16th century, thousands existed in Anatolia.

In the early 20th century, large foundations emerged in the United States, funded by industrial wealth. Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller Jr. pioneered these foundations. After 1940, a new wave of foundations arose, supported by individuals, families, and corporations.

In the Ottoman Empire, the largest centralized foundation organization was the Haremeyn Waqf, which transformed into the Nezareti Evkaf-ı Hümayun in 1826. In 1920, foundation affairs moved to the newly established Ministry of Sharia and Awqaf, and in 1924, after the Republic’s establishment, to the General Directorate of Foundations.

The Turkish Civil Code No. 743 of 1926 replaced the term “foundation” with “facility,” defined as “the allocation of a property to a specific purpose for a limited period.” Compared to Western counterparts, this regulation significantly restricted contributions to social development.

From 1923 to 1967, foundation establishment stagnated. However, the Foundations

EDUCATION WAS ONE OF THE PRIORITIES THE SABANCI FAMILY CHOSE FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE COUNTRY. THE SADIKA SABANCI MIDDLE SCHOOL WAS BUILT TO FULFILL THIS VISION.



THE PILLAR OF THE FAMILY, SADIKA HANIM, DONATED ALL HER PROPERTY TO THE FOUNDATION WITH A SINGLE WORD FROM SAKIP SABANCI.

11. General Directorate of Foundations website, <https://www.vgm.gov.tr/kurumsal/tarihce/tarihte-vakiflar>.

12. Vehbi Koç Foundation Encyclopedia, <https://ansiklopedi.vkv.org.tr/Kategoriler/Kavramlar/Diger/vakif>.

Law No. 903 of 1967 opened doors for private foundations, with Vehbi Koç Foundation, established in 1969, becoming the first.

One day, Sakıp Sabancı visited London with his wife Trkan and met Vehbi Koç and his daughter Semahat Arsel. During dinner, Semahat Arsel asked pointedly, “Why don’t you establish a foundation as the Sabancı family?”¹³

This question sparked the realization of an idea that had been brewing in their minds. The brothers decided to pursue this path, but they needed their mother’s approval and support.

13. Sakıp Sabancı,
“... bıraktığım yerden
Hayatım,” *Doğın Kitap*,
2004, p. 337.

SADİKA HANIM
ESTABLISHED THE
SABANCI FOUNDATION BY
SIGNING THE DONATION
AGREEMENT.



Sakıp Sabancı, who had succeeded his father as the head of the holding company, knocked on Sadıka's door. "Mother," he said, "you know all the people you make happy, the people you help... We want to gather them under a foundation. We need your contribution for this."

When he explained the foundation's purpose and plans, Sadıka didn't hesitate. "Okay," she said, "I'll donate everything I have. If it's going to be such a good deed, then it's all *halal*."

SADIKA SABANCI
RECEIVED THE
MOTHER OF THE YEAR
AWARD FOR HER
GENEROUS DONATION,
SURROUNDED BY HER
SIX SONS.



GÜLER SABANCI: The Foundation's vision extends beyond distributing zakat—it aims to build schools, student dormitories, and undertake larger projects with greater social impact. Mr. Sakıp understood this clearly. Using the mother's resources meant using the resources of the whole family. My father and uncles deeply respected their mother and believed in the wisdom of her actions. This request for donations reflected their desire to perpetuate her presence and reputation.

Thus, on March 22, 1974, a court decision approved the official deed of the Hacı Ömer Sabancı Foundation, signed by the six siblings to institutionalize their family's tradition of charitable acts. The Foundation, known as Vaksa, was established with donations from the Sabancı family and three Sabancı companies (Bossa, Pilsa, Teksa).

Following in their father's footsteps, her sons reached out to address key societal issues in education and health. Meanwhile, Sadıka Sabancı made what was then the largest donation in the Republic's history—her entire assets, including houses, fields, land, and shares in many companies, amounting to 25 million liras. That same year, she proudly received the Mother of the Year award from the Turkish Mothers' Association.

DİLEK SABANCI: I was ten when the Foundation was established. I remember the excitement and speeches of my father and uncles. "We will try to address the problems of society," they said. I can never forget my grandmother's joy. When you understand poverty and the feelings of those experiencing it, you become even more motivated to show solidarity and share.

CHAPTER THREE

“As we journey
through this
beautiful world,
Let's leave behind
a cherished
memory”

When the Hacı Ömer Sabancı Foundation was established with strong funding, ambitious goals, and dreams, Hacı Sabancı—the third child of the family—became its first president. During his 24-year tenure, he worked tirelessly to extend the Sabancı Group’s industrial and economic influence into social causes.

SERRA SABANCI: My Uncle Hacı was someone who found joy in helping others and reaching out to everyone. He never turned anyone away. Given his character, it was natural that he became the founding president of the Foundation.

Education was the primary focus during this initial period. The Foundation aimed to provide scholarships to financially disadvantaged youth, build dormitories for girls lacking educational access, and develop vocational and technical schools—all crucial for Türkiye’s development.

The Foundation has also prioritized initiatives and investments for integrating disabled individuals into society since its inception.



GÜLER SABANCI: Hacı Sabancı led the Foundation with the full support of our family. During my grandmother’s lifetime, we would gather regularly.

HACI SABANCI, THE THIRD CHILD OF THE FAMILY, SERVED AS THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE SABANCI FOUNDATION.

Mr. Hacı would present the projects, sparking lively discussions: “Should we build a larger school? Do we have enough resources? Could we accommodate 500 students in the hall of residence instead of 300?” The family would debate these matters. My cousins and I attended these meetings—they were open to anyone interested.

Sadika’s involvement extended beyond meetings. She attended every opening and groundbreaking ceremony, taking pride in the photographs of herself at ceremonies with a shovel in hand published in newspapers.

In Adana, she regularly visited the school named after her. The Girls’ Hall of Residence in Ankara, once the city’s tallest structure, was another source

of great pride. With 28 floors, the Hacı Ömer Sabancı Hall of Residence for Girls stood as one of Ankara's tallest buildings, serving an essential need by housing 1,100 students. Upon its completion, the Ministry of National Education honored the Sabancı Foundation through Sadıka Sabancı.

Whenever she visited Ankara, she would drive past the building, even if not stopping inside. "Girls will study," she would declare, "They will come from Anatolia and study in Ankara."

In an interview with *Milliyet* newspaper on the Foundation's 10th anniversary, she spoke with her son Sakıp Sabancı: "Sakıp, I want you to build social and educational facilities throughout Anatolia, not just in Adana and Kayseri. Build foster homes for girls especially. Extend your helping hand beyond the regions where your factories are located. Earn the blessings of those young people. Remember, a smile and a kind word create beauty. Don't be satisfied with the 33 we have built—otherwise, you will not have my blessing."¹⁴

14. Yener Süsoy, *Milliyet*
Renk supplement,
4.12.1984, p. 1.

DURING FAMILY
GATHERINGS,
FOUNDATION WORK WAS
THOROUGHLY DISCUSSED,
AND DECISIONS WERE
MADE COLLECTIVELY.



Like Hacı Ömer Sabancı, she had devoted herself to providing future generations with opportunities she never had. Educating girls was her personal mission.

As reported in the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet*:

The Hacı Sabancı Hall of Residence for Girls, built by the Hacı Ömer Sabancı Foundation, will be inaugurated today. Simultaneously, the groundbreaking ceremony for the İhsan Sabancı School of Practical Crafts for Girls will take place.

The hall of residence will house 600 female students from Southern Anatolia and Çukurova who come to Adana for higher education, offering comprehensive educational facilities. This 10-story modern building features study rooms, meeting spaces, sewing workshops, music rooms, seminar halls, student and teacher lounges, dormitories, and a spacious dining hall. The hall of residence will provide free accommodation and board to children from low-income families, giving them the opportunity to pursue their studies.

The İhsan Sabancı School of Practical Crafts for Girls will offer vocational training to young women who do not pursue higher education.¹⁵

Sadika would beam with joy whenever these news stories appeared in the newspaper, carefully clipping and preserving each one.

SAKIP SABANCI: This is our hope: Let us follow each other's example on this path today, as we did in the past. As we journey through this beautiful world, let us leave behind a pleasant memory, a smile, and the warmth of love.¹⁶

In its first decade, the Sabancı Foundation, funded solely by the Sabancı Family, established permanent facilities across Adana, Kayseri, Istanbul, Van, Kocaeli, and Mersin. These included seven educational institutions, three student dormitories, two health facilities, one library, one sports facility, and one cultural site. Among these initiatives—aimed at fostering a



WITH JOY, SADIKA SABANCI POURED THE FIRST MORTAR INTO THE FOUNDATION'S GROUNDWORK, A SHOVEL IN HER HAND.

15. *Cumhuriyet*, October 28, 1976, p. 5.

16. Sakıp Sabancı, "... bıraktığım yerden Hayatım", *Doğan Kitap*, 2004, p. 343.

modern, productive, and creative generation—the cultural center in Adana was particularly noteworthy.

Within the framework of the Sabancı Foundation, the Sabancı family built modern halls of residence for technical students and female students—each with a capacity of 450 students—along with primary schools and technical schools in the city... But what they are really proud of is the cultural complex they built in 1976 and handed over to the Ministry of Culture.

These words were penned by Altan Öymen, who visited Adana in 1981 while reporting for *Cumhuriyet*. “I visited this site with Tan Oral,” he wrote.

It makes the current building of the National Library in Ankara look like a hut in comparison. However, it has operational shortcomings. For instance, the air-conditioning units don't work. The reason? The Ministry of Culture has managers and civil servants but no technicians to maintain it [...] It houses 250,000 books, yet lacks works on Adana's unique history—works we can find elsewhere [...] There are barely one or two old works by Adana's novelists, including Yaşar Kemal [...] The library receives newspapers and magazines, but only those the library director approves of. Those he disapproves of never arrive [...] To summarize: While the Cultural Complex building is thoroughly modern [...] its operation could use the same level of modernization.¹⁷

This was indeed a powerful observation. It likely helped spark the mindset that would drive the Foundation to enhance its charitable work's effectiveness.



THE HACI ÖMER SABANCI
GIRLS' DORMITORY STOOD
AS ANKARA'S TALLEST
BUILDING AT THE TIME OF
ITS CONSTRUCTION.

17. Altan Öymen,
Cumhuriyet,
September 22, 1981,
p. 7.



Starting in Adana, the family gradually expanded to five more cities. Growing requests and needs from across the country led to broadening their scope of work. After all, they lived by their motto: “Giving back to the people of this land what they had earned from this land.”

From İzmir to Kayseri, numerous activities were happening simultaneously. Municipalities and governorships contacted the Foundation and the Sabancı brothers to inform them of their needs. Even though the family wished to help everyone, circumstances prevented them from keeping up with all requests.

While the Foundation supported health and cultural initiatives, education remained the primary focus—a clear reflection of the family’s core values.

SADIKA SABANCI MADE
IT A PRIORITY TO VISIT
EVERY FOUNDATION-
BUILT FACILITY AND
ATTEND THEIR OPENING
CEREMONIES.

SAKIP SABANCI: As the Sabancı Family, we have been blessed by the Almighty to lead the way in transforming the financial means this country gave us into charitable facilities for its people. We, the sons of Hacı Ömer, were born in single-story houses without

electricity or running water, with only a makeshift bath in the kitchen—we thought a two-story house was a palace. We attended mud-brick schools with outdoor toilets and no heating. Today, we find joy in building schools, halls of residence, hospitals, and providing scholarships to school-age children. We hope these children will reach further and achieve even greater excellence than we have. Our dream is that no child in our homeland should lack access to education or housing.

Beyond schools, halls of residence, and a cultural center, the Sabancı Foundation expanded its vision to include sports. At a press conference announcing the construction of an Olympic-sized swimming pool, Hacı Sabancı stated: “Our Foundation strives to provide Turkish sports with an international-calibre facility. As sports grows in importance and becomes increasingly international, we see a pressing need for fundamental sports facilities in Türkiye.”¹⁸ His speech revealed another key mission of the Sabancı Foundation: supporting young people in their pursuit of international recognition across various fields.

During these developments, some questioned whether naming each building after a family member was too showy. Sakıp Sabancı addressed this directly.

“While Turkish traditions might suggest that naming a school too prominently is inappropriate,” he began, before revealing the deeper rationale: “We must adapt these traditions to modern times. Our society is still developing. The name on these buildings isn’t mere self-promotion—it’s an invitation. If this message inspires just one person in a million among our 45 million citizens, that means 45 new schools. Those who don’t understand might call it propaganda or showing off.”¹⁹

In 1985, the Foundation accelerated its construction of permanent works and built the Özdemir Sabancı Indoor Swimming Pool at Çukurova University in

İHSAN, HACI, AND ÖZDEMİR
SABANCI AT THE OPENING
OF THE HACI ÖMER SABANCI
CULTURAL CENTER, NAMED IN
HONOR OF THEIR FATHER.





THE ADANA CULTURAL SITE WAS BUILT ACROSS AN EXPANSIVE AREA TO SERVE THE REGION'S INTELLECTUAL NEEDS.

Adana, the Sadıka Sabancı Library in Ankara, the Sadıka Sabancı Carpentry Workshop in Artvin, and the Sabancı Primary School in Bingöl. That same year, they also completed the restoration of the State Museum of Painting and Sculpture in Ankara.

In 1986, the Foundation opened two Sabancı Cultural Centres—one in Kahramanmaraş and another in Kayseri—along with the Sabancı Primary and Secondary School in Erzurum and the Sabancı Foster Home for Girls in Artvin. By year's end, with the completion of three educational institutions, two cultural centers, a student hall of residence, a library, a kindergarten, and a health center, the Foundation had made significant progress since its establishment in 1974.

On the opening day of the Sabancı Foster Home for Girls in Artvin, a daily newspaper article highlighted the continuing challenges in education:

The year of "lack" in education: Buildings are inadequate, with classrooms holding 80–90 students. Four million village children must study in mixed-age classrooms. Some 1,255 villages still lack primary schools. Anatolian high schools are struggling. The East and Southeast regions face both teacher housing shortages and declining teacher numbers. The textbook crisis remains unsolved, with another year of schooling to proceed without books.²⁰

18. *Cumhuriyet*, 4.11.1977, p. 8.

19. Yener Süsoy, "Virgölüne dokunmadan Sakıp Sabancı," *Milliyet Renk* supplement, 11.03.1987, p. 1.

20. "Eğitimde yok yılı," *Cumhuriyet*, September 20, 1986, p. 7.

The Turkish Presidency recognized the Sabancı Foundation's educational contributions in 1987. The Foundation expanded its reach to Batman, Edirne, and Sivas through new elementary schools, high schools, and cultural centers.

In 1988, the General Directorate of Foundations named Sabancı the Foundation of the Year. It increased its permanent works to 46 by completing ten facilities across five provinces, including first-time investments in Bolu and Hakkari. By its 14th year, 17,000 students were enrolled in Sabancı Foundation schools, 3,000 students lived in its residence halls, and over 50,000 people used its libraries monthly.

THE SABANCI FAMILY
ENRICHED KAYSERİ,
THEIR ANCESTRAL CITY,
WITH THE CONSTRUCTION
OF A CULTURAL SITE IN
KAYSERİ.



In its second decade, the Foundation added 50 new permanent works across Türkiye. Since its establishment, it had built 68 facilities across 27 provinces and provided 16,000 student scholarships.

June 6, 1988, was a painful day for both the Sabancı family and the Sabancı Foundation. When Sadıka Sabancı departed this world, she left a profound legacy not only for her children and grandchildren but also for the nation's youth.

GÜLER SABANCI: My grandmother set an example for the whole family through her involvement with the Foundation—she inspired us all toward greater philanthropy. When I look back at what my grandmother did, I see a strong leader, a silent force. She always kept her sons in the forefront while remaining in the background herself. Though she never sought the spotlight, she was an influential figure. To be well remembered, to be a good person, to be useful, to be solution-oriented—these are the qualities that my grandmother sought.



UPON HER PASSING,
SADIKA SABANCI LEFT
A PROFOUND LEGACY
TO HER EXTENDED
FAMILY. HER PASSIONATE
COMMITMENT TO GIRL'S
EDUCATION REMAINS A
CORNERSTONE OF THE
SABANCI FOUNDATION'S
MISSION.

One of Sadıka's deepest concerns was ensuring that girls completed their education. The Sabancı Foundation honored her legacy by strengthening its support for girls' education, opening halls of residence and foster homes in Bitlis, Erzincan, and Şanlıurfa in 1989.

In the Foundation's 15th year, Hacı Sabancı, who had always preferred to stay out of

the limelight, received recognition. Çukurova University awarded him, as President of the Foundation, an honorary doctorate for setting an example through building educational, sports, cultural, and health facilities for young people.

At the ceremony, Hacı Sabancı called the honorary doctorate one of the greatest awards of his life. “The Sabancı Group has grown and developed in this country,” he said.

Our late father taught us to work hard, earn, and fulfil the needs of this country. All the siblings and executives of our organization have united in solidarity to bring our Foundation to its current strong position. In good health, we earn through hard work and take pleasure in dedicating part of our earnings to these causes.

His wish eloquently captured the Foundation’s mission: “Let’s provide better opportunities for the youth, who are the guarantors of our future in our developing and growing country.”

The Sabancı Student Residence built by the Foundation in the TRNC opened in 1990. During this period, several permanent works were established: the Sabancı Technical and Vocational High School for Girls in Şanlıurfa, Sabancı Cultural Centre in Malatya, Yüksel Sabancı Art Centre at Yıldız Technical University, Sabancı Student Residence for Girls in Yozgat, Özdemir Sabancı Sports Hall in Istanbul, Sabancı Police House in Beylerbeyi, Sabancı Teachers’ Guesthouse in Manisa, and Sabancı Children’s Home in Ordu.

In the 1970s, Türkiye remained relatively isolated. The 1980s marked the country’s opening to the world and increased international cooperation. The 1990s brought expansion beyond national borders. During this time, the Sabancı Foundation began monitoring global



THOUGH HACI SABANCI
PREFERRED WORKING
BEHIND THE SCENES, HIS
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
GARNERED WIDESPREAD
RECOGNITION AND
APPRECIATION.

philanthropic activities more closely. The Foundation joined leading philanthropic platforms—the Council on Foundations of the United States (COF) in 1987 and the European Foundation Centre (EFC) in 1991—to exchange knowledge and experience. In 1993, the Foundation became a founding member of the Third Sector Foundation of Türkiye (TUSEV), showing its dedication to developing civil society and philanthropy in Türkiye.

As Türkiye's philanthropic activities became more globally integrated, Hacı Sabancı appeared on a TRT television show and announced the Foundation's budget: TL 20 billion in 1991 and TL 24 billion in 1992, emphasizing its ongoing efforts to increase resources.

When journalist Güngör Uras asked, “Do you think your income stream will continue to grow?” Sabancı responded:

We have strengthened the Foundation to ensure its long-term independence. Even if future generations don't maintain the same level of involvement, the Foundation will sustain itself through its own revenues. We've established numerous institutions and introduced founder shares. A portion of profits flows directly to the Foundation. We've donated shares from every company to our Foundation. Our Foundation now holds assets worth over 300 billion in current stock-market values. Yet we're not satisfied—we continue to strengthen it further.

Years later, when the third generation assumed responsibility for the Foundation, they provided the same assurance about the Sabancı Foundation's future.

SUZAN SABANCI: The key is addressing social issues and needs comprehensively while maintaining the Foundation's financial strength. Social causes require financial sustainability. People trust and depend on you. That's why sustainability is crucial. As the Sabancı family and Group, we maintain the Foundation's robust structure. The Foundation's financial base and assets remain extremely solid.

CHAPTER FOUR

Where the Light of Hope Burns the Strongest: Education

I believe that Türkiye will achieve greater heights through one single criterion: caring for people. This will only happen through appreciation of people and providing better education.”²¹

These words by Sakıp Sabancı capture the essence of the Sabancı Foundation’s mission. Throughout its history, the Foundation has built lasting educational initiatives while providing scholarships. Focusing primarily on university students, these scholarships promote equal educational opportunities. Over 50 years, the Foundation has awarded more than 54,000 undergraduate scholarships.

The scholarship programs include University Entrance Scholarships, Scholarships for Top Students from Priority Development Provinces, Scholarships for Students with Disabilities, Conditional Donation Achievement Grants, and Bereavement Grants.

The Foundation’s support extends beyond graduation. Recipients gain access to internships at Sabancı Group companies, mentorship from alumni, and a network through Scholars Meetings. This creates a lasting sense of community among Sabancı Foundation scholars.

While each person’s journey is unique, guidance from others’ experiences can be invaluable. Through sharing experiences and fostering solidarity, scholars learn from diverse perspectives. As Dr. Sare Aydın, a scholarship recipient, reflects: “When I received this scholarship, I thought: If some people have changed my life today, I also have to touch the lives of others in the future.”

21. “Türkiye’nin Sakıp Sabancı’sı,” documentary film, Birand Productions, 2004.

GÜLER SABANCI: This new world we live in is the world of “networking.” We organize these meetings to build community, to motivate and know each other better, and to strengthen our family bonds. In this spirit, we have launched a mentoring program.

The Foundation also demonstrates its commitment to people with disabilities by awarding annual scholarships to top performers in the Higher Education Institutions Examination. These scholarships go to the five highest-scoring students in each of the visually, orthopedically, and hearing-impaired groups.

Scholarships have changed the lives of thousands of people. One of them is Dr. Rıza Kadılar, who now provides mentoring and coaching training at the academy bearing his name. After graduating from METU Industrial Engineering, Kadılar applied to Stanford University for a Master's degree in economics. His acceptance letter brought both joy and sadness—while achieving this great success, he was unable to celebrate because he couldn't even afford a plane ticket. There was only one solution: a scholarship. When the Sabancı Foundation granted him one, they simply said, “We don't want anything in return. Go and do well.” And he did. That scholarship, arriving at his moment of despair, has always symbolized hope for him.

DR. RIZA KADILAR: I was facing a desperate situation, and this scholarship gave me hope. As long as there is hope, there is a solution.

There is a concept called the butterfly effect: the flapping of a butterfly's wings can create a storm thousands of kilometres away. A small contribution at the beginning can pave the way for tremendous gains.

This was the story of Dr. Mehmet Turgut, who received a Sabancı Foundation scholarship while studying medicine at Çukurova University in 1981. After graduating from the Faculty of Medicine, Turgut established the paediatric department at Adıyaman University Faculty of Medicine, following his work at the Paediatric Clinic at Adana Numune Teaching and Research Hospital. He served as Department Head of both Internal Medicine and Paediatrics at Adıyaman University Faculty of Medicine. Throughout his career, he touched countless lives, healed many children, and taught hundreds of students.

Sabancı Foundation scholar Erdinç Öztürk was among the first 251 students to enter Sabancı University's undergraduate program. He graduated from the Microelectronics Engineering Program of the Faculty of

THE TEACHERS NETWORK
PROJECT OPERATES
THROUGH COLLABORATION
WITH FIVE MAJOR
FOUNDATIONS: THE
MOTHER AND CHILD
EDUCATION FOUNDATION,
THE AYDIN DOĞAN
FOUNDATION, THE ENKA
FOUNDATION, THE MEHMET
ZORLU FOUNDATION,
AND THE VEHBİ KOÇ
FOUNDATION.



Engineering and Natural Sciences in 2003 and completed his Master's and Doctorate degrees at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the USA. In 2017, he returned to become a faculty member at his alma mater.

In 2019, his outstanding achievement made both his school and the Sabancı Foundation proud: Öztürk and his team made history by solving the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Time Capsule cryptography puzzle 15 years earlier than expected.

Sabancı Foundation has always believed in joining forces when it comes to education. In 2003, the Education Reform Initiative (ERI) was established within Sabancı University under the leadership of Üstün Ergüder and Tosun Terzioğlu, the university's Founding Rector. ERI has become a collaborative structure supported by private foundations and stakeholder organizations, with



the aim of developing and researching educational policies.

Education is not a one-sided process—the teacher is as vital to this equation as the learner. ERG’s interviews with teachers revealed that they lacked adequate professional development tools and felt isolated due to limited peer-to-peer exchange. This led to the creation of the Teachers’ Network project, which connects teachers with colleagues and professionals from various disciplines, enabling them to share knowledge, collaborate, and grow stronger together.

The network empowers teachers to leverage their interests, knowledge, and competencies while providing tools and methods to learn from other disciplines. The Teachers’ Network project operates through collaboration with six major foundations: the Mother Child Education Foundation, Aydın Doğan Foundation, ENKA Foundation, Mehmet Zorlu Foundation, and Vehbi Koç Foundation.

Sabancı Foundation has also worked to apply insights from its other programs to education, particularly in promoting gender equality. The Purple Certificate Program, which began as part of the Joint Program for the Protection and Promotion of the Human Rights of Women and Girls (BMOP)—the first united project of UN agencies in Türkiye—was supported by the Foundation from 2006 to 2015.

This initiative continues today through Sabancı University’s Gender and Women’s Studies Centre of Excellence (SU Gender), working to enhance teachers’ awareness of gender equality and develop this perspective in education.

The Foundation’s work in education and teacher development began with local and national projects under the Grants Program and evolved through partnerships with various public stakeholders. The Foundation championed promising local projects with potential for wider impact, establishing collaborations to implement them throughout Türkiye.



THE PURPLE
CERTIFICATE PROGRAM,
ADMINISTERED BY
SABANCI UNIVERSITY,
FOCUSED ON ENHANCING
TEACHERS’ AWARENESS
OF GENDER ISSUES.

One such initiative focused on village teachers. Led by the Village Schools Change Network Association, this project aimed to create an innovative education model for village schools with mixed-age classrooms.

Beginning in the villages of Şanlıurfa, the project developed into a successful model for mixed-age classrooms, reaching hundreds of teachers and students in its early years. Initially supported by the Sabancı Foundation from 2018 to 2021, the project expanded from Şanlıurfa to Diyarbakır, Malatya, Samsun, Siirt, and Muş.

A young educator who attended the children's workshop in Muş shared this powerful testimony:

I will never forget my first week there. I was nearly in tears when I returned. I didn't even know how to address the children. I had to think ten times before forming a single sentence. Now I can effectively communicate at least half of what I want to convey to the children.

THE PURPLE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM WAS IMPLEMENTED BY THE SABANCI UNIVERSITY GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES EXCELLENCE CENTER (SU GENDER).





In partnership with the Ministry of National Education, the project spread across Türkiye, leading to the creation of a Companion Guidebook for village schoolteachers. This resource covered essential topics like working in rural conditions, rural development, and classroom management. Both the Activity Book and the Companion Guidebook were printed and distributed to all village teachers nationwide through the Ministry of National Education.

THE RURAL SCHOOLS
EXCHANGE PROJECT
REACHED HUNDREDS
OF TEACHERS AND
STUDENTS.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: We recognized that improving education quality in village schools starts with supporting teachers. This project began with our belief that village schools offer exceptional opportunities for achieving our ideal educational vision. We take pride in witnessing the empowerment and transformation of teachers. We believe that skilled teachers who can change lives with a single touch have the power to transform society.

The English Together Project—implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education General Directorate for Teacher Training and Development, the British Council, and the Sabancı Foundation—supports the continuous professional development of English teachers. In just three years, it has made a lasting impact by reaching 37,000 English teachers and approximately 16 million students.

NEDİM BOZFAKIOĞLU: Our relationship doesn't end after we hand over the schools to the Ministry of National Education. We closely monitor building maintenance, repairs, renovations, and teachers' needs. We continue to provide support—we never lose contact or take our hands off.

While successful educational projects have continued, special attention has been given to improving the quality and success of schools bearing the Sabancı name.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: Teachers, students, parents, the PTA, and the school principal all work together. We prioritize improving the school climate and supporting social-emotional development. The School Climate Model, which began as a pilot study at Hacı Sabancı Anatolian High School, has now spread to 78 schools across 39 districts in Istanbul since the 2022–2023 academic year. Based on our results so far, this model helps both students and teachers reach their potential. I hope it will spread throughout Türkiye.

The Project to Support Social Emotional Development, part of the School Climate Model, was launched by Prof. Yankı Yazgan and his team at Sakıp Sabancı Anatolian High School in the 2019–2020 academic year. This three-year project, which created an ecosystem involving all school stakeholders, helped improve the school's academic standing. The school joined the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program in the 2021–2022 academic year and is now ranked as the seventh most successful Anatolian High School in Türkiye.

MELİSA SABANCI TAPAN: In this rapidly changing world, if we aim to contribute to society, we must learn continuously and apply what we've learned. I'll always remember my grandfather Sakıp Sabancı's teaching that investing in education is the most valuable business. I hope to never give up on learning and education.





SAKIP SABANCI WITH STUDENTS
FROM THE SAKIP SABANCI
ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL - ONE
OF THE COUNTRY'S LEADING
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

CHAPTER FIVE

Creating a future

In 1983, a law amendment granted private foundations the right to establish and operate higher-education institutions. This presented a significant opportunity for the Sabancı brothers, who had been dreaming of founding a university since the 1980s.

In the 1990s, the Foundation shifted its focus to collective work and collaborations. The concept of “doing it together” with society had emerged, and establishing the university would prove crucial for shaping the future.

When Güngör Uras asked “Can a foundation establish a university?” on the 1991 TRT program *Konuların İçinden*, Hacı Sabancı replied:

It is not without its challenges, but it can be done. Certain foundations are now becoming capable of this—and so they should. Today, it’s more than just building student residences or schools. Foundations abroad are allocating serious resources for research and development on AIDS, cancer, and the environment. We will gradually reach that point.

They realized that building structures for knowledge wasn’t enough—they needed to produce knowledge itself.

In July 1994, immediately after the Sabancı Holding Board of Directors made their decision, Mr. Hacı invited Güler Sabancı to his office.

GÜLER SABANCI: I sensed they would share a decision they had previously discussed. They said, “Our dear girl, we are embarking on this auspicious journey for our future, our family, our reputation, and our love for this country. You are young, dynamic, well-connected, and open to the world. We want you to direct this project on our behalf. We will be your supporters.”

The shared vision was to create a university that would bring fresh perspectives to the nation’s educational landscape and foster innovative ideas aligned with the changing world. Rather than following an existing model, they aimed to design something entirely new and unique.

First, they secured a large plot of land in Tuzla for the campus. Then they began exploring three essential questions:

What should an ideal university look like? What does Türkiye need? What should a 21st-century university look like?

More than 50 scientists, researchers, students, and businesspeople from 22 countries and various disciplines participated in a Search Conference that produced the university's philosophy: "To create and develop together." This philosophy of collaborative development and finding common ground through diverse perspectives has become the cornerstone of Sabancı University's culture.

The university's logo design exemplifies how "co-development" can have far-reaching effects. Mehmet Ali Türkmen, the winner of a young designers' competition who created the logo, stated: "I'm from Adana. The Hacı Ömer Sabancı Cultural Centre played a huge role in my life. I first discovered foreign magazines



SAKIP SABANCI, ERDAL
İNÖNÜ, TOSUN TERZİOĞLU,
AND GÜLER SABANCI AT
SABANCI UNIVERSITY.





in their library, and that's what inspired me to become a designer."

Under the leadership of founding rector Prof. Dr. Tosun Terzioğlu, Sabancı University pioneered a revolutionary system in Türkiye. It became the country's first university to offer program-choice flexibility. The university deliberately avoided creating traditional academic departments, believing they could limit interdisciplinary interaction and lead to premature specialization.

Sabancı University comprises three faculties: Engineering and Natural Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences, and Management Sciences. Students select a faculty upon entry. After completing their first year, they declare their preferred undergraduate degree program and are placed accordingly.

GÜLER SABANCI: I believe the right to choose in life is fundamental to democracy and personal growth. This freedom enables people to succeed. I'm proud to say that Sabancı University graduates are now thriving in prestigious organizations.

HÜSNÜ PAÇACIOĞLU: We have supported and developed effective, sustainable, and innovative programs that will help our society build a better future.

Moreover, the Board of Trustees guaranteed academic freedoms—the foundation for discussion and dialogue—before the university even opened its doors. The statement below marked another innovative step in Türkiye's higher education landscape:

THE SABANCI UNIVERSITY'S
LOGO EXEMPLIFIED THE
SABANCI FOUNDATION'S
FAR REACHING TEMPORAL
INFLUENCE.

A university, by tradition and definition, is an autonomous teaching and research center that seeks, produces, communicates, and disseminates knowledge for the public good. It is obligated to provide scientifically sound and qualified education to its society and the world. As emphasized in the “Magna Charta Universitatum”—signed by 388 university presidents from across Europe and around the world in Bologna in 1988—the teaching and scientific research at universities must remain ethically and intellectually independent from all political and economic power centers to fulfil this obligation. In line with this universal principle, Sabancı University’s Board of Trustees, faculty, and administration assume joint responsibility for ensuring and protecting complete freedom of research, thought, and expression.²²

Through its International Advisory Board, university-industry cooperation, projects, and substantial scholarship offerings, Sabancı University has proven itself in a remarkably short time.

HAYRİ ÇULHACI: A university is an immense and transformative project. It’s where knowledge and science come to life, where the future takes shape. Knowledge is generated, accumulated, and shared through meaningful interaction. It creates a vital platform for discussion and dialogue—this is what makes it truly significant.

22. The full decision is available at <https://www.sabanciuniv.edu/tr/akademik-ozgurluk>.



SABANCI UNIVERSITY, ESTABLISHED IN
1999, ACHIEVED A RANKING OF 351-400
AMONG 2,092 UNIVERSITIES IN THE
TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION (THE) 2025
WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS.



CHAPTER SIX

A philanthropist
whose
contributions
transcended
his lifetime:
Sakıp Sabancı

As preparations and excitement for the university were in full swing, the family was struck by profound losses. Özdemir Sabancı, the youngest of the brothers, was assassinated in 1996. In 1998, another devastating loss followed—Hacı Sabancı, who had served as chair of the Foundation for 24 years and dedicated himself to transforming philanthropic dreams into reality, passed away.



After the untimely departure of his brother Hacı Sabancı, Sakıp Sabancı assumed the chairmanship of the Foundation's board of trustees.

Born on April 7, 1933, Sakıp Sabancı was the second child of the family. During his early years, when his father Hacı Ömer had not yet achieved financial success and the family struggled to make ends meet, formal education had remained out of reach. As his father's business flourished, Sakıp took on increasing responsibilities. He began as a teller at Bossa Flour Factory, advancing to farm manager and eventually becoming the manager of Bossa Textile Enterprise.

Following their father's death, the Sabancı siblings founded Sabancı Holding, with Sakıp Sabancı serving as its first Chairman of the Board of Directors—a position he maintained until his passing. His achievements

GÜLER, SAKIP, HACI,
AND ŞEVKET SABANCI,
JOINED PRESIDENT
SÜLEYMAN DEMİREL
THE TURKISH
GRAND NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY SPEAKER
YILDIRIM AKBULUT
AT THE UNIVERSITY'S
INAUGURATION
CEREMONY.

earned him 15 honorary doctorate degrees from various universities. He received prestigious decorations from the governments of Japan, Belgium, and France for fostering international friendship, along with Türkiye's State Distinguished Service Medal and the Grand Prize for Culture and Arts for his contributions to social, cultural, artistic, and educational causes.

In describing himself, he emphasized his philanthropic legacy over his business accomplishments.

SAKIP SABANCI: I resent being described merely as a wealthy person; I take pride in my social personality and richness of heart. We will be judged not by the money we leave behind, but by our works.

During the opening ceremony of Sabancı University on a rainy October day in 1998, Sakıp Sabancı looked skyward and exclaimed, "Thank God, thank God, thank God! We will see these young people all over the world. They will plant the Turkish flag wherever they go." Witnessing the university's inauguration bearing his family name brought him immense joy. He expressed one more wish: "God willing, we will also see the opening of the museum."

This dream was what would become today's Sakıp Sabancı Museum. The family residence known as Atlı Köşk (Equestrian Pavilion) purchased by Hacı Ömer Sabancı in 1951, became Sakıp Sabancı's family home in the 1970s.

The Atlı Köşk was more than just a building—it housed priceless collections. Sakıp Sabancı began his collection of manuscript books and calligraphy with a plaque inscribed by Sultan Mahmud II. The collection grew substantially through private acquisitions in the 1980s and, from 1989 onward, garnered significant attention through international museum exhibitions, ultimately inspiring the creation of a dedicated museum.

When Sakıp Sabancı decided to share his collection of paintings, which included early Turkish



SAKIP SABANCI PLANTING
A SAPLING IN THE
UNIVERSITY GARDEN...
SADLY, HE DID NOT LIVE
TO SEE THOSE SAPLINGS
MATURE.

artworks and pieces by foreign artists who worked in Istanbul during the late Ottoman period, he proposed, “Let’s turn the mansion into a museum and connect it to the university.” Subsequently, he donated his entire collection to the university.

In 1998, the Atlı Köşk was assigned to Sabancı University to be transformed into a museum. In 2002, under the direction of art historian Nazan Ölçer, it opened its doors as the Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum (SSM).

The ground floor of the Atlı Köşk remains preserved as the Family Halls, displaying the original

SAKIP, EROL, AND GÜLER
SABANCI WITH KEMAL
DERVİŞ, MEMBER OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY
BOARD OF SABANCI
UNIVERSITY. THIS WAS
SHORTLY BEFORE SAKIP BEY
ASSUMED THE FOUNDATION’S
PRESIDENCY FOLLOWING HACI
SABANCI’S UNTIMELY DEATH.



SAKIP SABANCI HANDS
OVER THE KEYS OF
ATLI KÖŞK, NOW
TRANSFORMED INTO
A MUSEUM, TO GÜLER
SABANCI, CHAIR OF THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF
SABANCI UNIVERSITY.



furniture used by the Sabancı family during their residence in the mansion.

At the museum's opening ceremony, Sakıp Sabancı reflected on his five decades in business. While the Sabancı Group had accomplished numerous projects and formed international partnerships, he noted: "I have seen that the success and permanence of an organization cannot be measured by economic values alone. In fact, you are only as great as your contribution to the fields of art, culture, and education. The best way to communicate the significance of a country like Türkiye, which acts as a bridge between Europe and Asia, is to share its rich artistic and cultural heritage."²³

SAKIP SABANCI
CELEBRATES AS
THE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATES ITS
FIRST CLASS.

23. "Sabancı Üniversitesi
Sakıp Sabancı Müzesi
Açıldı," <https://www.sabanci.com.tr/haber-detay/sabanci-universitesi-sakip-sabanci-muzesi-acildi>.

He enjoyed this pleasure of sharing for just two years. When he passed away in April 2004, he was secure in the knowledge that he had entrusted the Sabancı Group, the Sabancı Foundation, and the Sakıp Sabancı Museum to capable hands.

Between 1998 and 2004, Sakıp Sabancı served as chair of the Sabancı Foundation, and his influence on the organization continues from past to future. His legacy benefits our country through his will, the assets



THE DİLEK SABANCI
CONSERVATORY IS
LOCATED AT SELÇUK
UNIVERSITY.



he left behind, the scholarships and awards he established during his lifetime, and the permanent works bearing his and his family's names.

The Sakıp Sabancı Secondary School in Adana, Sakıp Sabancı Mardin City Museum and Dilek Sabancı Art Gallery, and Sakıp Sabancı Kandilli Education and Culture Centre each fulfil vital needs in their respective fields.

The Sakıp Sabancı Anatolian High School in Istanbul ranks among Türkiye's leading Anatolian High Schools, demonstrating that their support enhances both infrastructure and educational quality.

"My eyes and my heart cannot get enough of charity work," he once said. He constantly urged himself forward: "Keep going, do more! Achieve more in social and economic endeavors," and "Keep running, do something more before the train reaches the last station."

And run he did—not only in his own name but also in honor of his family members. His tireless efforts led to the creation of the Metin Sabancı Schools, Metin Sabancı Baltalimanı Bone Diseases Hospital, Türkan Sabancı School for the Visually Impaired, Türkan Sabancı Bebek Park, Dilek Sabancı Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, Dilek Sabancı Conservatory, and Dilek Sabancı Park for People with Disabilities.

The Sakıp Sabancı Family's enduring support has been fundamental to the Sabancı Foundation's 50-year journey. Family members' contributions have shaped a significant portion of the Foundation's individual donations, powerfully demonstrating the family's dedication to social good.

MELİSA SABANCI TAPAN: I was born into philanthropy. My grandfather, mother, aunt, cousins—philanthropic values were woven into our family's fabric. In such a family, these values naturally become your standard. My high-school internship at the Sabancı



MELİSA SABANCI TAPAN,
REPRESENTING THE THIRD
GENERATION, CARRIES FORWARD
THE PHILANTHROPIC LEGACY OF
THE SAKIP SABANCI FAMILY.



Foundation proved both educational and transformative. The experiences I gained there shaped my own philanthropic journey, and I built Gate27 on the values I inherited from Sabancı.

The Sakıp Sabancı Museum stands as one of the major institutions reflecting its founder's deep appreciation for culture and the arts. The museum has hosted several internationally acclaimed exhibitions, including "Picasso in Istanbul," "Rodin, the Grand Master of Sculpture, in Istanbul," "Abidin Dino—A World," "Three Capitals of Islamic Art with Masterpieces from the Louvre Collections: Istanbul, Isfahan, Delhi," "ZERO—Countdown to the Future," "MACK—Only Light and Colour," and "Ai Weiwei—On Porcelain."

For its tenth anniversary, the museum undertook a forward-looking digitization project of all its collections. The digital archive now contains 77,000 images spanning the collection of book arts and calligraphy, the painting collection, the Abidin Dino archive, and the Emirgan archive—all accessible at <http://digitalssm.org>

ONE OF SSM'S MOST
NOTABLE EXHIBITIONS
WAS AI WEIWEI'S "ON
PORCELAIN".



CHAPTER SEVEN

Towards lasting and sustainable impact

The 21st century ushered in profound changes. Civil society evolved alongside these developments, necessitating new methods and approaches.

Individual philanthropic efforts gradually gave way to institutional initiatives, while pooled resources led to more impactful aid programs. Though philanthropy's core values—love for humanity and the fight against inequality—remained unchanged, innovative approaches became necessary.

Collaborative efforts proved essential in developing multi-dimensional solutions to social problems. This shift demanded longer-term, strategic planning to achieve lasting results.

After Sakıp Sabancı's passing, Güler Sabancı, representing the family's third generation, assumed leadership as chair of both the Foundation and the Holding. She shared Foundation Board responsibilities with her cousins, including Suzan Sabancı.

SUZAN SABANCI: The Sabancı Foundation represents an invaluable sphere of activity that fills us with pride. We, the third generation, carry forward Grandfather Hacı Ömer's principle: "To give back to our country what we have earned from this country." The Foundation's selfless work continues to this day, and we're honored to carry this responsibility.

The 2000s brought both economic growth and alignment with European Union regulations. This period saw the emergence of new wealth holders, along with fresh perspectives on philanthropy and charitable giving.

The 2001 judicial reform bolstered the third sector, while the 2004 amendments to the Law on Foundations empowered civil society to take on a more active role.

As collaborative approaches replaced centralized systems worldwide, Türkiye adapted to this evolution. Since the Republic's state-centered beginnings, both individuals and institutions have increasingly shaped social development.²⁴

24. Filiz Bikmen, "Meeting The Dynamic and Changing Shifts in Turkish Society," sf. 8.

As Prof. Dr. Üstün Ergüder, Chairman of the Board of Directors of TÜSEV, stated in the foreword of the *Guide for Foundations' Grant Programs*: “Foundations should invest not only in addressing urgent needs but also in identifying the underlying causes related to economic-social systems and addressing them in innovative ways.” His following statement particularly defined future priorities in philanthropy: “Instead of implementing only their own projects, foundations should support and pioneer social change by establishing strategic partnerships with organizations that have expertise in specific fields, are aware of local needs, and maintain close ties with community groups.”²⁵

Since the establishment of the Sabancı Foundation in 1974, more families and foundations had begun building permanent works—student residences, health and cultural centers, and schools—to be donated to state institutions. These actions toward social change and development would create an even greater impact.

The landscape of institutional philanthropy had evolved, with digitalization becoming the new standard. The Sabancı Foundation needed to redefine its role in this changing world. It was time for a fresh perspective for the Foundation, which had always been an industry pioneer.

GÜLER SABANCI: We sought international guidance on this journey. We discovered that major global foundations like Ford and Rockefeller had started similarly to us, and upon reaching a certain stage, they began focusing on programs and initiatives as much as physical infrastructure to drive social change. We needed to follow the same path.

The Foundation then began its internal transformation. First, the abbreviation Vaksa, which had never gained widespread acceptance, was retired, and the name Sabancı Foundation officially adopted. The second step involved relocating operations to the Sabancı Center in Istanbul to facilitate the transformation and strengthen communication with all Sabancı Group stakeholders.



25. Vakıfların Hibe Programları İçin Rehber, Publications, May 2013, No. 59, p. 6

THE SAKIP SABANCI MIDDLE
SCHOOL IN ADANA UNDERWENT
COMPLETE RENOVATION FOR THE
FOUNDATION'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY.



After thirty years as the
Foundation's headquarters, it was time to bid farewell to
Adana. This transition, however, would prove challenging.

HAYRİ ÇULHACI: The people of Adana hold Sabancı dear to their hearts. Sabancı pioneered Adana's industrialization, contributing numerous industrial facilities to the region. They created employment, fostered growth, and generated prosperity. As a foundation, they've also constructed many vital institutions—schools, student residences, and cultural centers. There's even a magnificent mosque by the riverside, built by the Sabancı Foundation in Adana.

GÜLER SABANCI: I understand that relocating the Foundation's headquarters to Istanbul disappointed the people of Adana—they felt hurt. However, we've

remained true to our commitment. Adana holds an irreplaceable position in our hearts. It's the province where we maintain the most permanent works, which we renovate annually. In our 50th year, we renovated the Adana Sakıp Sabancı Secondary School, one of our earliest educational institutions.

In May 2006, responding to social changes in Türkiye and globally, the Foundation began a restructuring process at its new headquarters. After strengthening its infrastructure and establishing its core values and principles, the Foundation turned its attention to strategy development.

Through a series of meetings and conferences during this restructuring period, the Sabancı Foundation defined its mission: “Making a difference by creating original, innovative and lasting values to develop social potential and instil social awareness in future generations.”

The Board of Trustees decided to launch new programs and projects supporting social development while enhancing existing initiatives. This marked a shift in the Foundation’s role as it embarked on a new path to support civil society.

SERRA SABANCI: Philanthropy is a long-standing, evolving culture passed down through generations in our family. We’ve kept this culture vibrant by adapting to changes and embracing innovations. During the Foundation’s early years, we focused on permanent works where needs were greatest. Recently, we’ve embraced concepts like lasting impact and the multiplier effect. In this new era, we’re concentrating on activities that create meaningful change through their multiplier effect.

GÜLER SABANCI: We’ve focused on growth and expansion. As social values evolve, we’ve redefined our philanthropic direction. To create a more enduring and sustainable impact, we’ve adopted “strategic philanthropy.”

Research was conducted to determine the focal points of this new path. The findings revealed a concerning trend of hopelessness and pessimism among youth. Educational attainment was particularly troubling—while 56 percent complete high school, only 18 percent advance to university.²⁶

Survey respondents identified violence and unemployment as the priority areas of concern,

26. “Philanthropy’s Turkish models,” Filiz Bikmen Bugay, Alliance, September 2009, p. 19.



with women's rights receiving only 15 percent support. Yet in the World Economic Forum's 2006 gender gap index, Türkiye ranked 105th out of 115 countries.²⁷

Based on these findings, three focus groups were identified for the new program: women, youth, and persons with disabilities. With 41.7 million women, 13 million young people, and 8.5 million people with disabilities, it became evident that these groups—who make up the majority of Türkiye's population—faced significant barriers to equal and active participation in social life.

Women encountered violence across all aspects of life while battling gender inequality. Young people with limited economic, social, and cultural resources struggled to access the same opportunities as their peers.

THE UNITED NATIONS
JOINT PROGRAM FOR
THE PROTECTION AND
PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S
HUMAN RIGHTS ALIGNED
WITH THE SABANCI
FOUNDATION'S VISION
FOR THE FUTURE.

27. Global Gender Gap
Report 2006, World
Economic Forum, p. 9.

People with disabilities faced ongoing challenges in accessing their legally guaranteed rights, working to overcome both physical barriers and societal prejudices. For those belonging to multiple disadvantaged groups, the situation was even more challenging. These complex issues demanded a comprehensive solution.

While developing a new roadmap focused on strategic philanthropy, the Foundation discovered a pivotal project. Hüsni Paçacıoğlu, then General Manager of the Sabancı Foundation, returned enthusiastically from a United Nations meeting.

The United Nations Joint Program for the Protection and Promotion of Women's Human Rights aligned perfectly with Sabancı Foundation's future vision and new collaborative management approach. However, they identified one crucial missing component.

GÜLER SABANCI: Early and forced marriage of girls is a widespread problem. This practice marks the beginning of girls'—and later women's—unequal status in society. That's why we added "Human Rights of the Girl Child" to the project. We emphasized two key points: first, that girls are children until age 18, and second, that every girl child must be in school. Education gives them awareness and knowledge of their rights. Achieving this would be a significant step forward.

Through a partnership between the Ministry of Interior and the United Nations, the program worked with civil society organizations to identify problems. Local Equality Action Plans were then drafted in Izmir, Kars, Nevşehir, Şanlıurfa, Trabzon, and Van.

At the program's first annual evaluation meeting, Güler Sabancı said: "We view this project as an important step toward Türkiye's development, as it aims to strengthen women's position in social, political, cultural, and economic spheres. We are proud and happy to participate. The Sabancı Foundation's financial support will help implement the most successful projects within the Joint Program and enable future initiatives—this was a key factor in our decision to join."²⁸



THE PROGRAM FOCUSED
ON EDUCATING WOMEN
ABOUT AND PROMOTING
GENDER EQUALITY
AWARENESS.

After finalizing the detailed Local Equality Action Plans, implementation began. The Foundation launched Grant Programs, supporting 34 local projects across six pilot provinces. Through local government ownership and sustained effort, these projects reached approximately 300,000 people.

Over four years, the program achieved significant results: 80 *mukhtars* in Şanlıurfa's villages and neighbourhoods helped educate 35,000 people on gender issues; more than 1,200 women in Nevşehir learned about breast cancer and women's health; a Trabzon project supporting mothers with visually impaired children raised awareness among 65,000 people; and a health initiative for seasonal agricultural workers in Şanlıurfa reached 200,000 women and children.

Additionally, through Sabancı University's involvement, 1,313 high school teachers attended gender equality seminars, with 153 receiving Purple Certificates.

Launched in 2007, the Sabancı Foundation Grant Program focused on supporting projects that were innovative, sustainable, and replicable across provinces. The program emphasized institutional partnerships and encouraged men's participation in advocating for women's rights.

28. Speech at the First Annual Review Meeting of the United Nations Joint Program for the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Women and Girls, December 5, 2006.

A notable success was Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Şimşek's Seasonal Agricultural Workers project at Harran University, which led to the 2010 Prime Ministry Circular on Improving the Working and Social Lives of Seasonal Mobile Agricultural Workers—demonstrating how public institution involvement drives change.

This pioneering program, the first comprehensive women's initiative at the local level to receive support from all United Nations agencies in Türkiye, was recognized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as one of the world's best rights-based programs.

The work continued into a second phase from 2012 to 2015, with the Sabancı Foundation providing financial and strategic support as the program expanded to 11 provinces: Aydın, Çanakkale, Edirne, Erzincan, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Kastamonu, Kayseri, Kocaeli, and Ordu.

GÜLER SABANCI: Gender equality is a fundamental development goal. Many problems stem from society's deeply embedded gender inequality. We cannot achieve empowerment and development without addressing this issue. World Bank research shows that when women have greater control over household resources, they invest more in children's futures, which positively impacts economic growth.

In 2011, Güler Sabancı, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Sabancı Foundation, received the Clinton Global Citizen Award for her contributions to women and girls. She then presented the Foundation's commitment to address child marriage at the CGI 2012 meeting.

Following this commitment, Sabancı Foundation hosted a meeting titled "Together We Can End Child Marriage: Examples from Countries," run by Girls Not Brides, a global organization addressing this issue.



IN 2011, GÜLER SABANCI WAS HONORED WITH THE GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AWARD FROM THE CLINTON GLOBAL CITIZEN AWARD FOR HER WORK ADVANCING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' CAUSES.

The 2013 meeting brought together 52 civil society representatives from Africa, South Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Later that year, in December, Princess Mabel van Oranje of the Netherlands, Founder and President of Girls Not Brides Platform, participated in the Sabancı Foundation Philanthropy Seminar titled “Challenging the Impossible.”

This initiative inspired a musical tribute in 2015. Renowned artist Sezen Aksu dedicated her song “Kız Leyla” to the Sabancı Foundation, calling it “a sister to the song Ünzile.” Performed by Sertab Erener and featuring a music video²⁹ directed by Çağan Irmak, the song premiered at the 2015 seminar “There are Award-Winning Women in the Lead.”

The decade-long program, conducted in partnership with the United Nations, coordinated various activities with local administrations and non-governmental organizations. Its most significant achievement across 17 provinces was uniting local governments, governorships, municipalities, and NGOs toward a common goal. This collaborative approach to identifying problems and developing solutions embodied the Sabancı Foundation’s principle of “achieving together.”

As the program concluded, participants recognized it as just the beginning of a longer journey. Türkiye’s ranking of 125th among 142 countries in the World Economic Forum’s 2014 Global Gender Gap Report highlighted the need for continued effort toward gender equality.

The program’s enduring impact confirmed the Foundation’s approach and motivated further action.

29. The video can be watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h_nNfqpeywh

ZERRİN KOYUNSAĞAN: The United Nations Joint Program gave us the expertise to launch larger grant programs. We built connections with international foundations, and our staff attended conferences to learn from others’ practices. This helped us develop comprehensive institutional knowledge.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Long- Term Travel Companionship

As we entered the 21st century, changes inevitably transformed the world of philanthropy. The goal of “doing good” merged with “making a difference.” Traditional philanthropic organizations were joined by digital giants like the Gates Foundation and Google, whose influence reached beyond national borders to gain international scope.

The Sabancı Foundation began examining its role in this changing landscape. Through search conferences, meetings, and exchanges of ideas, it mapped its future direction. When the Foundation decided to share these discussions with civil society rather than keeping them internal, it led to the launch of seminars in 2007 that continue today.

The inaugural seminar brought together civil-society representatives, private-sector leaders, and public organizations with international experts to explore new approaches. It addressed the Sabancı Foundation’s key question during this transformation: “The Changing Role of Foundations in the World.” The presentations by Barry D. Gaberman, Vice President Emeritus of the Ford Foundation, and Craig Kennedy, President of the German Marshall Foundation, proved groundbreaking for philanthropy in Türkiye.

Foundations aiming to drive social change and make an impact needed to strengthen civil society. The grant programs they initiated extended

THE THIRD AND FOURTH
GENERATIONS UNITE:
SUZAN SABANCI,
GÜLER SABANCI, SERRA
SABANCI AND MELİSA
SABANCI TAPAN.





beyond mere financial support. Kennedy particularly highlighted foundations' unique ability to unite key actors across communities, countries, and regions—a power that could shape political agendas. “Efficiency through pooling resources and ideas around a single goal, cooperation among foundations, and partnerships between foundations and governments on joint projects” became the essential principles for 21st-century philanthropy.

Regarding Türkiye, Kennedy observed:

Those of you here today from the Turkish foundation sector should know that this country is undergoing a period of profound political, cultural and economic change and innovation. This is a time when you all need to think a little more broadly than the norm, take some risks and venture out and be innovative. In this way, you will be able to keep up with the process of change that the country is currently going through and you will be on an excellent path to take the development to the next stage.³⁰

30. “The Changing Role of Foundations in the World,” seminar, 2007, <https://www.sabancivakfi.org/i/assets/documents/dunyadavakiflarindegisenrolu.pdf>, p. 15.



When the Sabancı Foundation launched its Grant Scheme, few local organizations or foundations were funding rights-based NGOs in Türkiye. The Foundation was committed to providing both financial and technical support to NGOs, creating spaces for inter-organizational knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Women, youth, and people with disabilities—who together make up most of Türkiye’s population—lacked equal access to social justice and societal participation. Those facing multiple disadvantages experienced even greater challenges. In response, the Sabancı Foundation’s Grant Programs, launched in 2007, focused on projects addressing the challenges of disadvantaged groups whose needs remained invisible and rights unrecognized.

“SOWING SEASON”
BRINGS TOGETHER
GRANTEE PROJECTS TO
SHARE THEIR STORIES,
WHICH THE SABANCI
FOUNDATION THEN
PRESENTS TO THE PUBLIC
THROUGH A SIMILARLY
TITLED BOOKLET.

Among the first supported initiatives was the “Obstacles Are Lifting” Project by the Women’s Centre Foundation (KAMER), known for its successful work on women’s issues in Southeast Türkiye.

Nebahat Akkoç, KAMER’s founder, was inspired by a question at a women’s issues panel in Erzurum: “So what are you going to do for persons with disabilities? For example, how can these individuals who have been subjected to violence apply to you?” The questioner was the mother of a disabled daughter—raising an issue KAMER hadn’t previously considered.

The project surveyed 15,000 households across five provinces, documenting the number of children and women with disabilities. The study revealed that 7.3 percent of people in these cities had disabilities. Among the women visited, 44 percent were illiterate and 90 percent unemployed. Of those with disabilities, 45 percent had never attended school, half received no social assistance, 78 percent required home care, and women exclusively provided all caregiving.

Neighbourhood Meetings and Children’s Festivals were organized. Five hundred children participated in the festivities, including 200 with disabilities. The events not only encouraged children to get to know each other but also increased their visibility in the community.

While KAMER worked to make a difference in others’ lives, it underwent significant internal changes. “While working on this project, we realized that none of us knew sign language,” said Akkoç: “We simply froze in front of a hearing-impaired person. So we contacted the Turkish Youth Federation and said we wanted to learn sign language. Then we realized that we had built KAMER offices on the second and third floors, never considering how a person with mobility challenges could access them. We moved ten of our offices to ground floors and are building ramps in buildings with elevators.”³¹

GÜLER SABANCI WITH PEGGY
DULANY, CHAIR OF THE
SYNERGOS BOARD.



31. Sabancı Foundation
October Time Booklet,
2009–2010, p. 16.

KAMER submitted its comprehensive project report to all decision-making authorities, particularly Parliament, and shared it with other organizations in the field. They also revised and republished their booklet on combating violence against women after realizing it lacked content addressing violence against persons with disabilities.

The Six Dots Foundation for the Blind launched its Integration of the Visually Impaired into Business Life project, acknowledging that breaking down prejudices is more challenging than splitting the atom.

The project, implemented in Ankara, Bursa, Gaziantep, and Istanbul, aimed to demonstrate to both employers and visually impaired job seekers that visually impaired people can excel in many professions, highlighting new career opportunities in our changing world.

Hülya Vural, visually impaired from birth, shared her key insight about “not giving up” during project seminars:

When starting any job, breaking prejudices comes before learning the work itself. Your initial challenge is the mutual unfamiliarity between you and your environment. People try to help even when you stand up from your chair, assuming you can't do it alone. They carry this prejudice that you “can't do the job”—even for simple tasks like throwing out trash, they insist on helping. But we can overcome these barriers. We prove what we're capable of by taking initiative and showing them, “I can do it.”³²

The program, launched through an open call, follows a thorough evaluation and selection process. After expert assessment, successful institutions join the Grant Programs network, connecting with similar organizations and participating in knowledge-sharing initiatives.

Sabancı Foundation maintains close oversight through one-on-one interviews, field visits, and comprehensive report evaluations, working collaboratively with supported institutions. This monitoring leads to targeted support in various areas, from

32. Sabancı Foundation
October Time Booklet,
2009–2010, p. 43.

communication to evaluation. The Foundation also creates public awareness through press releases, news coverage, video content, and events.

The successful projects' inspiring stories are shared with civil society during "October Time" events and in accompanying publications.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: A grant is unconditional support—given without expecting anything in return. This guides our approach to projects. We believe in collaborative progress, offering customized support for each organization's unique needs. Our NGO selection process is rigorous. Take the women's association from Hakkari Yüksekova—our Advisory Board reached an impasse, with mixed opinions. Our grant programs manager Özen insisted on a field visit, which led to our decision. The outcome was remarkable: we helped establish Yüksekova's first women's association, giving them crucial momentum.

The story of the Yüksekova Women's Association that Safkan mentioned merits telling.

In 2018, during a period of strict curfews in Yüksekova, Hatice Temir proclaimed, "There should be a women's association in Yüksekova." Though her days of secretly studying with her mother's help were past, she hadn't forgotten her experiences or feelings. She knew the system needed to change.

Her mother initially opposed the association idea out of fear. Hatice Temir explained carefully: "Mom, remember how we worked together when you helped me attend school in secret? That was essentially an association. My sisters were part of it too."

She reached out to Nebahat Akkoç, the KAMER Foundation chairperson whom she'd met during university, for guidance. When she discovered the Sabancı Foundation's Grant Program had opened, she thought, "Support from an organization like the Sabancı Foundation will amplify our voice and build local trust."

With the help of Nebahat Akkoç, she prepared a project dossier. The project, titled "Being a Woman in Yüksekova," aimed to



conduct field visits and identify the needs of women in Yüksekova. When the Foundation awarded a grant to this locally drafted project, she was overjoyed.

The Yüksekova Women's Association visited 637 households during an emotionally challenging process. "After leaving each house, we would be crying and reaching out to each other," says Temir. "Suicide cases, intense domestic violence, dozens of women waiting for help ... Though we were inexperienced at first, we grew stronger through the data we gathered from the project."

The association then established a women's cooperative to promote economic empowerment and launched literacy courses. They distributed their findings report to all public institutions.

THE YÜKSEKOVA
WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION,
FOCUSED ON WOMEN'S
SOLIDARITY, RECEIVED
ITS PROMARY SUPPORT
FROM THE SABANCI
FOUNDATION.



HATİCE TEMİR: When the district governor told us, “From now on, I will act according to the book prepared by the Yüksekova Women’s Association, not according to the data of the Social Services or the Police,” we realized we had achieved something significant. This recognition opened many doors for us in public institutions.

NEVGÜL BİSEL SAFKAN: After we provide grant support, NGOs gain opportunities to receive support from other programs and funds, using our reference to move forward. We offer comprehensive support because this is a partnership, a true companionship. Sometimes when an organization receives grant support, we determine it would benefit from an additional term. Long-term support is crucial.

To demand rights, one must first understand them. The United Nations collaboration from 2006 to 2015 focused on women and girls learning and defending their rights. Though the program concluded, its mission continued through the Grant Program. According to the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, Türkiye’s inequality metrics, which had previously matched the world average, dropped significantly below the average after 2006. This progress made it essential to intensify efforts further.

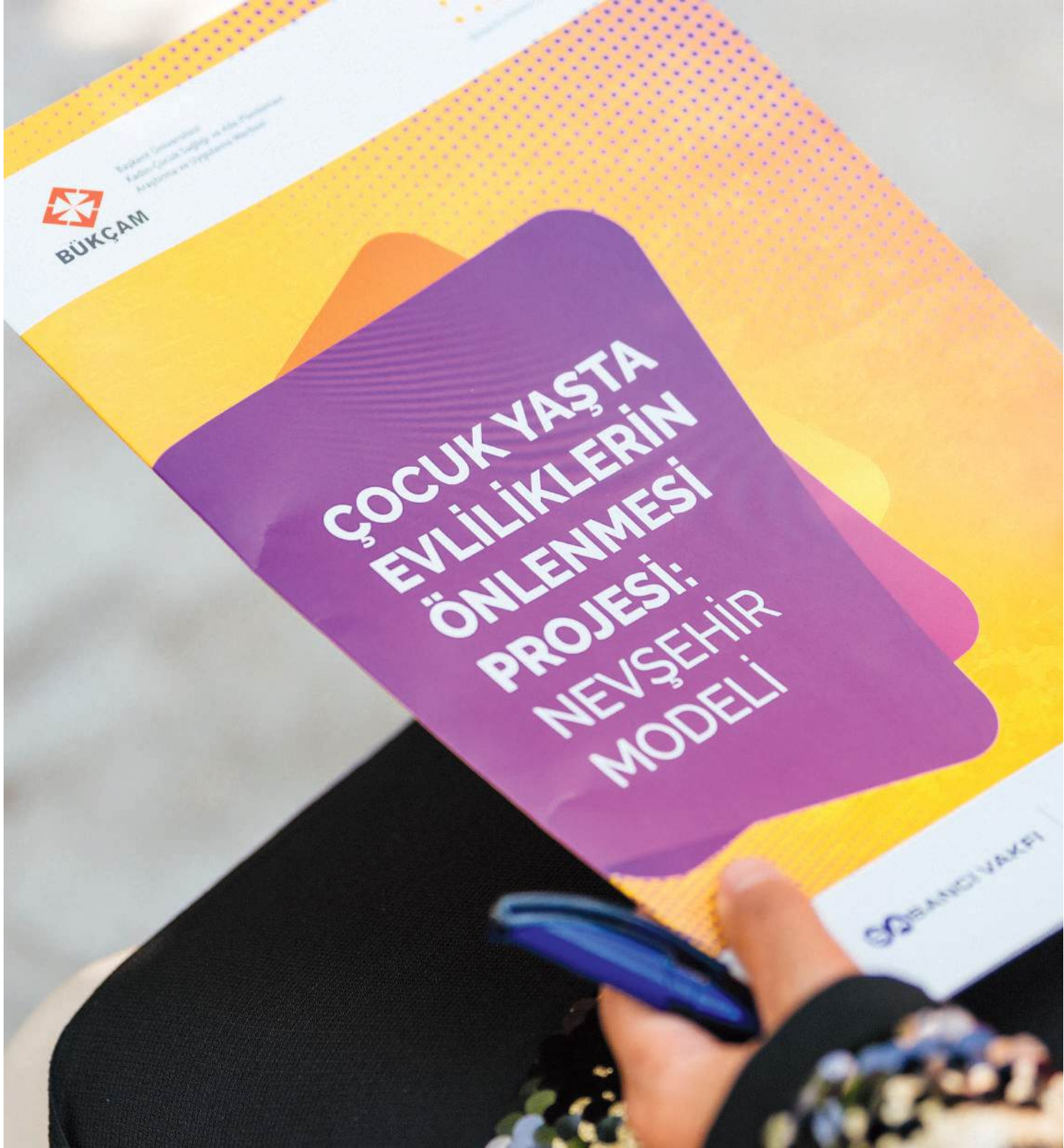
The partnership with the United Nations evolved into new initiatives, including the Prevention of Child Marriage project—the Nevşehir Model project—managed by the United Nations Population Fund and supported by the Sabancı Foundation. The project addressed how girls forced into early marriage face domestic violence and sexual-abuse risks, and encounter serious health risks during pregnancy and childbirth due to their incomplete physical and mental development.

Nineteen former child brides became health mediators, educating other women through home visits in their neighborhoods. The project’s success led to its expansion to both Nevşehir and Van.

“I was forced into marriage at age 12 and became a mother at 13½,” says Fatma Çingilitaş, one of the participants. “Before this project, I didn’t realize I was a ‘child bride.’ I endured much suffering and continue to struggle. This project has educated me and given me tremendous self-confidence.”



THE PREVENTION OF
CHILD MARRIAGES:
NEVSEHIR MODEL
PROJECT WAS
IMPLEMENTED THROUGH
DIRECT INTERVIEWS.



CHAPTER NINE

“Societies must reach beyond their own borders to solve their problems.”

The Sabancı Foundation has made people with disabilities one of its key focus groups. It supports numerous projects to ensure that these individuals can fully exercise their rights and actively participate in educational, social, and economic life.

This commitment to supporting persons with disabilities began with Metin Sabancı, the son of Sakıp Sabancı.

GÜLER SABANCI: Metin Sabancı raised our awareness on this issue. He illuminated our path. Through his guidance and the consciousness he instilled in us, our Foundation has been a pioneer in supporting civil society initiatives for people with disabilities.

The Foundation's pioneering institutions include the Metin Sabancı Center and Schools, Türkan Sabancı School, Secondary School and Vocational Training Center for the Visually Impaired, Dilek Sabancı Gülen Yüzler Vocational Rehabilitation and Workplace Center for People with Disabilities, and Dilek Sabancı Park.

In 2006, when the Foundation made the rights of persons with disabilities one of its core strategies, the United Nations was drafting its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The General Assembly's adoption of this convention validated the Foundation's strategic direction.

Türkiye signed the Convention on March 30, 2007. Its first article affirmed the Foundation's mission:

"The purpose of this Convention is to promote and ensure the full and equal enjoyment by all persons with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to strengthen respect for their human dignity. The concept of disability includes persons with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or perceptual impairments which constitute an obstacle to their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other individuals."

The Sabancı Foundation has consistently upheld the principles of this convention.



METİN SABANCI
INSPIRED THE FAMILY TO
CHAMPION DISABILITY
RIGHTS AND EXPAND
THEIR WORK IN THIS
AREA.

DİLEK SABANCI: The Sabancı Foundation represented Türkiye in the European Consortium of Foundations for the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009. We were Türkiye's sole authorized foundation among the five or six participating countries. This consortium promotes the adoption and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It documents and reports on the most successful disability-rights projects.

The Association for the Visually Impaired in Education was among the institutions that received grants from the Sabancı Foundation. While international and national legislation guarantees the right to equal education for people with disabilities, truly obstacle-free campuses remain an unfulfilled promise. Many areas—from building design to distance education practices—fail to meet accessibility needs.

The Association gathered 25 students with various disabilities from universities and convened them in Istanbul and Ankara. Between 2014 and 2016, with the Foundation's support, they conducted a Current Situation Analysis on Accessibility for People with Disabilities in Universities through their Initiative of University Students with Disabilities project. This led to the creation of a *Handbook of Findings and Suggestions for a University without Obstacles*.

Emre Taşgın, one of the Association's founders, notes that the initiative has fostered greater collaboration among disabled students. Together, they discuss challenges, explore solutions, and take concrete action.

Accessibility is a fundamental right of persons with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates that: "Appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to live independently and participate effectively in all spheres of life and to ensure that persons with disabilities have access on an equal basis with other individuals to the physical environment, transport, information, and communication facilities, including information and communication technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open to the public in both rural and urban areas."



NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: Accessibility is a crucial priority for us. We integrate accessibility into everything we do. As our activities and operations have become increasingly digital, we ensure all our content remains accessible. We maintain the highest standards of accessibility in all our large-scale meetings.

THE METİN SABANCI
SCHOOLS ARE
RECOGNIZED AS LEADING
INSTITUTIONS IN THEIR
FIELD.

International cooperation brings great value to disability-rights initiatives. The Sabancı Foundation participates in the Zero Project Conference, organized by the Vienna-based Essl Foundation, which aims to eliminate obstacles faced by people with disabilities. Since 2012, this conference—one of the world’s largest disability-focused events—has gathered innovative practices and policies while raising awareness and promoting effective solutions.

MARTIN ESSL: The Sabancı Foundation and Zero Project have built a strong partnership over the past decade. The Foundation actively discovers and promotes innovative solutions, exchanging knowledge between Türkiye and the global community.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE
VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN
EDUCATION, A FOUNDATION'S
GRANTEE, ASSESSES UNIVERSITY
ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH
COMPREHENSIVE REPORTING.



Global cooperation is more crucial now than ever before. Societies must reach beyond their own borders to solve their problems. This makes our partnership particularly significant.

Since 2013, the Sabancı Foundation has been an active conference participant. It facilitates the exchange of successful models between Türkiye and

other countries in the field of disability rights. Through this partnership, Nevgül Bilsel Safkan, General Manager of Sabancı Foundation, serves as a Zero Project Ambassador. One of the Foundation's key achievements through Zero Project is bringing the VL2 Storybook App to Türkiye—a bilingual storybook application developed by Gallaudet University in the USA for hearing-impaired children.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: Through Zero Project, we've connected many Turkish institutions with exemplary organizations worldwide. At the recent Zero Project conference, I observed an outstanding school where students with various disabilities learned together in inclusive classrooms. I promptly shared this model with our stakeholders at the Ministry of National Education. We're dedicated to implementing beneficial practices.



CHAPTER TEN

Kindness is contagious

After launching its Grant Programs for social change, the Sabancı Foundation expanded its mission to empower individuals—not just institutions—to change the world.

Inspired by a similar program in the USA, journalist Cüneyt Özdemir approached the Sabancı Foundation with what would become the Changemakers project.

The program shares stories of “changemakers” who tackle problems in their communities and inspire society.

Through an open call, candidates apply to become Changemakers in six categories: environment, education, economic development, health, social justice, and citizen participation.

The Foundation pre-screens applications before an Advisory Board—comprising businesspeople, academics, and civil society experts—evaluates them.

MERAL TAMER: As the Advisory Board, our selection criteria are innovation, inspiration, dissemination, and financial sustainability. The financial sustainability

“THOSE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE” EMERGED FROM COLLABORATION BETWEEN JOURNALIST CÜNEYT ÖZDEMİR AND THE SABANCI FOUNDATION.



criterion can be particularly challenging. During evaluation, we learn from both the finalists and each other. It's truly inspiring for us all.

Selected Changemakers begin a long-term journey with a needs analysis conducted by experts. These individuals and organizations join the Changemakers Network, working closely with the Sabancı Foundation through workshops and events.

Each participant's story is captured in a special film, broadcast on CNN Türk and later shared on YouTube.

Initially, the program faced uncertainty: "Can we find enough Changemakers? Can we continue for a second year?" By its 15th year, the program had attracted 5,000 applicants—far exceeding expectations.

MELAHAT AYDIN
EARNED RECOGNITION
AS A CHANGEMAKER
FOR HER VILLAGE-
TO-VILLAGE GIRLS'
EDUCATION PROJECT.



CÜNEYT ÖZDEMİR: This revealed how many “Changemakers” in Türkiye were waiting to be discovered. They were always there, but invisible and unrecognized. Their stories inspired others to implement projects they’d hesitated to start. As the saying goes, kindness is contagious—truly inspiring stories began to spark more inspiring stories.

Over 15 years, the stories of 216 Changemakers from 47 cities have reached millions of viewers. This visibility created new opportunities, while strategic support ensured these opportunities led to meaningful outcomes.

One of the guests of the 2012 season of the Changemakers program was Melahat Aydın, a school principal who initiated the “Bir Şans Daha” (One More Chance) project to help girls access education. At the time, Aydın was the principal of Muş Central Girls’ Regional Primary Boarding School. Upon noticing the absence of girls in the classroom, she and her fellow teachers traveled from village to village to persuade families. When roads became impassable by car, she even journeyed on horseback. Though she initially aimed to enrol 100 girls in school, her project ultimately brought hope to nearly 150.

Another Changemaker, Suat Arı, transformed the village of Eziler in Denizli. Upon his appointment as a physical education teacher at Mustafa Kaçmaz Secondary School, he discovered that none of the students participated in sports. Determined to change this, Arı introduced sports to both students and their families, despite facing family opposition and budget constraints. He successfully trained 120 students—including 45 girls—in 14 different sports, from *bocce* and darts to softball, baseball, field hockey, cricket, rugby, flag football, and orienteering, helping them become licensed athletes.

In 2020, he established the Güney Eziler Sports Club. The club went on to represent Denizli in three sports, winning the national 2nd League championship in field hockey. Three athletes qualified for the National Team camp, and the club became Denizli’s

sole representative in golf. Through sports, the village's fortunes were transformed.

After his selection as a Changemaker, Arı's success grew. He organized a golf tournament with the Sabancı Foundation, leading to his appointment as District Youth Sports Manager. Denizli Uğur Schools sought his sports expertise and offered full scholarships to female students at his village school. His crowning achievement came when he secured a spot for the 2024 Los Angeles Olympics in cricket.

MERAL TAMER: Through monitoring applicants and projects, we've witnessed significant developments in civil society. While earlier years saw more modest initiatives, we now see an increase in comprehensive projects for people with disabilities. New projects are emerging that leverage digital technology to support the disabled community. The individuals who apply to Changemakers consistently demonstrate remarkable creativity.

Hasan Kızıl from Mardin is another individual using technology in his struggle for good. His mission to help injured and disabled animals began one winter night when a cat with a broken spine, trapped in a car, died in his arms.

Inspired to help disabled animals, Kızıl discovered specialized walkers and prostheses. He began by creating walkers from dismantled toy cars at home. With later sponsorship from companies, he expanded into producing prostheses. His work, which gave new life to creatures ranging from eagles to turtles and from dogs to cats, gained such recognition that his story was featured in textbooks. Though he initially struggled with limited materials, Kızıl now creates walkers and prostheses using a three-dimensional printer, thanks to widespread support.





Another changemaker is Özlem Ceylan, whose journey began as the mother of a child with allergies. She faced two challenges: managing her son's allergies while fighting for his rights to education. During his pre-school years, she discovered that kindergartens wouldn't accept children with allergies or adapt their facilities to accommodate them. Ceylan found strength in numbers: 16 families facing similar challenges joined forces to establish the Association for Life with Allergy in 2016. Despite limited resources and experience, they helped everyone who reached out to them.

The breakthrough came with an unexpected call from Kartal Municipality about a child with allergies whose working mother couldn't find an accepting

IN DENİZLİ'S EZİLER
VILLAGE, SUAT ARI
TRANSFORMED LIVES
THROUGH SPORTS,
INTRODUCING STUDENTS
TO 14 DIFFERENT
DISCIPLINES AND
HELPING THEM BECOME
LICENSED ATHLETES.

nursery. Kartal Mayor Altınok Öz, a physician himself, was determined to solve this problem. Their search led them to Özlem Ceylan.

ÖZLEM CEYLAN: When we explained our situation, the mayor grabbed his car keys and said, “Come on, we’re going.” He drove to an empty plot and asked, “Shall we build you a nursery here?” Six months later, we opened Türkiye’s first nursery dedicated to children with allergies.

The day-care center named after Mevhibe İnönü proved successful and set an exemplary standard. It was showcased as a model for 85 countries at the Zero Project Conference.

In 2019, Özlem Ceylan received another phone call, this time from the Sabancı Foundation. The Association for Life with Allergy had been selected as a Changemaker, and its application to the Foundation’s Grant Program was accepted. Its initiative, the Academy for Living with Allergy, produced 50 training videos covering food allergies, respiratory allergies, and skin allergies—all available on the academy’s website. The videos featured insights from psychologists and practical guidance on using medical devices. This resource has become an invaluable guide for families across the country whose children suffer from allergies.

The website includes an interactive game to raise awareness among children. The Academy has proven essential for many families, particularly during the pandemic when access to doctors and hospitals was limited.



ÖZLEM CEYLAN’S SEARCH FOR TREATMENT FOR HER CHILD’S ALLERGIES LED HER TO MAKE A LASTING IMPACT ON NUMEROUS CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

ÖZLEM CEYLAN: Before the Sabancı Foundation, we were a self-sufficient team of volunteers. The Foundation elevated us to a professional level. While our causes and messages remain the same, our voice is now stronger. We’ve gained confidence as an organization. Though the Foundation’s grants and training are invaluable, their greatest gift was instilling in us the belief that we can succeed.

Three university friends advocating for basic rights in education, employment, and access to culture and arts, Seben Ayşe Dayı, Serim Berke Yazar, and Hale Yıldız founded the social enterprise All Things Accessible to make venues, events, and festivals more accessible—

addressing challenges they personally faced in social participation. Their initiative adopted the motto “If there is accessibility, there is no disability.”

They recognized that modern accessibility extends beyond physical adaptations to include content and communication. Their work encompasses creating recommendation reports for institutions, conducting awareness training, and providing consultancy services.

After joining the Changemakers program, All Things Accessible achieved a breakthrough in Türkiye by making the exhibition “Yesterday, Today Istanbul” at SSM accessible to visitors with visual and hearing impairments. The team has since become a leading authority in accessibility consultancy.

Admittedly, bad news tends to get higher ratings than good news. Disasters, crises, and catastrophes often take center stage in the media. Through Changemakers, the Sabancı Foundation set out to challenge this reality.

CÜNEYT ÖZDEMİR: While mainstream news bulletins typically focus on negative stories, we chose a different path with YouTube and social media channels. Eventually, we left television behind entirely. Even after 34 years in journalism, I still can't hold back tears when sharing Changemakers' stories. I'm proud of our region, our people, and our shared humanity. Finding, uncovering, and telling these stories with a miner's dedication has been one of the greatest honors of my professional life.



EVERYTHING ACCESSIBLE,
AFTER JOINING THE
CHANGEMAKERS
PROGRAM, MADE SSM'S
“YESTERDAY, TODAY
ISTANBUL” EXHIBITION
ACCESSIBLE TO VISITORS
WITH VISUAL AND
HEARING IMPAIRMENTS.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Different aspects of social development

While discussing the Foundation's work, Sakıp Sabancı would often emphasize the aspect of culture and arts. Though he regretted delaying his efforts in this area, he worked diligently to make up for lost time. His vision was for his homeland to embrace this cultural opportunity.

The Sabancı Foundation pledged to make culture and arts accessible to everyone. The Adana Theatre Festival, launched in 1998, exemplified this commitment. The festival brought numerous local and international plays to Adana's residents, while a magnificent stage constructed on the Seyhan River transformed the entire city into a theater venue.

The 2011 closing show left such an indelible impression that it remains in the city's collective memory. The Dutch Close Act, an international theater company, brought its spectacular ensemble of dancers,

THE FOUNDATION
BRINGS ART AND
CULTURE TO ALL
THROUGH THE STATE
THEATERS SABANCI
INTERNATIONAL ADANA
THEATER FESTIVAL,
TURNING THE CITY INTO
A GRAND STAGE.



musicians, and acrobats to Adana's streets. The performance—beginning at Atatürk Park and concluding at the Train Station—featured a unique wagon carrying future travelers, propelled by a metal sphere and guided by a clairvoyant.

Following Close Act's example, France's Trans-Express Theater also transformed Adana's streets into their stage. In their production *Freedom of the Violins*, aerial acrobats played a massive drum while swinging on giant pendulums, accompanied by violinists performing thirty meters above ground.

GÜLER SABANCI: Twenty-five years ago, inspired by the late Sakıp Sabancı's dream of establishing Adana as a cultural hub, we began with a local festival. Today, we take pride in seeing world-renowned theaters competing to perform in Adana. Our festival has become a benchmark for others throughout Türkiye.

The festival emerged during a time when mere financial backing was deemed insufficient, leading to a broader collaborative initiative. The Sabancı Foundation earned recognition not only for its lasting contributions but also for its vital support and guidance to civil society.

Established in 2005, the Sakıp Sabancı Lifetime Achievement Award honors masters who have significantly advanced theater arts and holds a prestigious position in performing arts. Recipients include Cüneyt Gökçer, Macide Tanır, Bozkurt Kuruç, Yıldız Kenter, Genco Erkal, Müşfik Kenter, Gülriz Sururi, Haldun Dormen, Rutkay Aziz, Zeliha Berksoy, Cihan Ünal, Erdal Özyağcılar, Ayten Gökçer, Ayla Algan, Işıl Kasapoğlu, and Nevra Serezli, with Zihni Göktay as the most recent honoree.

Işıl Kasapoğlu, the 2019 award recipient, captured the Sabancı Foundation's impact on Turkish theater:

Throughout my 40–45 years of performing across Anatolia, I encountered Sabancı halls everywhere. This meant so much to us in theater. While theater receives support from state and municipal institutions, the backing from major companies and foundations was particularly meaningful. I'm grateful not just for this festival but for all the Sabancı theaters I've encountered throughout Anatolia.



IN 2018, ACCLAIMED
CINEMA AND THEATER
ACTRESS AYLA ALGAN
RECEIVED THE SAKIP
SABANCI LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
AT THE ADANA THEATER
FESTIVAL.

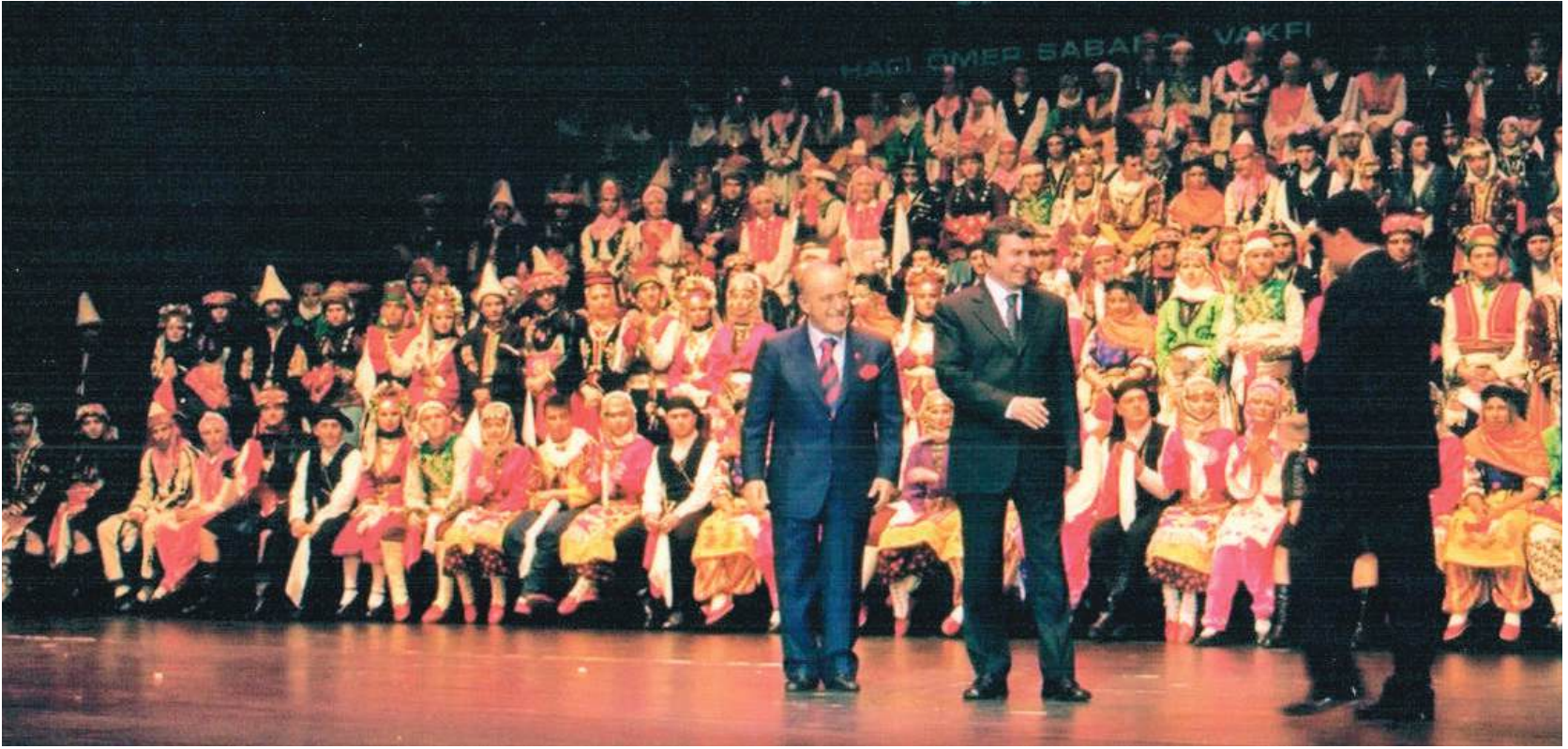
The history of the Foundation since 1974 reflects profound social changes. Türkiye evolved from its relative isolation in the 1970s to gradually opening up in the 1980s, developing a desire for global engagement in the 1990s, and embracing technological transformation in the 2000s.

Throughout these changes, the Sabancı Foundation has maintained its mission of connecting local and universal values. The Folk Dance Competition, organized in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, exemplified this commitment to preserving local culture while fostering international connections.

TÜRKAN SABANCI: Sakip Sabancı believed that traditional Turkish arts were our country's rich cultural assets that must be protected. He placed immense importance on passing this cultural heritage to future generations.

The Turkish Folk Dance Competition, running from 1994 to 2012, embodied Türkiye's commitment to preserving and sharing its cultural values. Over two decades, it showcased 400 troupes and more than 20,000 dancers, awarding nearly 200 prizes through nationwide qualifiers and rehearsals.

In 2006, actress Mehtap Ar approached the Sabancı Foundation with a children's theater proposal. Her vision was to bring theater to children across Türkiye, reaching the furthest corners of Istanbul and



Anatolia. The Mehtap Ar Children's Theater toured annually, presenting plays focused on human relations, featuring lyrics by Aysel Gürel and enhanced by dance, special effects, and lighting—introducing nearly one million children to theater.

Mehtap Ar explained that her work stemmed from “her deep love for children, her growing desire to connect with them, and her belief that theater, as a major art form, plays a crucial role in shaping children's personalities and awareness.”

Rather than using existing scripts, she created original plays that reflected contemporary life, avoiding traditional animal characters and fantasy elements. Her approach emphasized empowering children to make their own decisions in everyday situations rather than giving direct advice.

With an eight-person team, she traveled nationwide, performing plays such as “Love Requires Labor,” “Friends,” “Give It a Chance,” “The Sun is for Everyone,” and “Reading, Reading, Reading,” opening new horizons for many first-time theatergoers. From 2006 to 2014, with the

THE FOLK DANCE
COMPETITION
EXEMPLIFIED THE
BALANCE BETWEEN
LOCAL HERITAGE AND
GLOBAL INTEGRATION,
REFLECTING SAKIP
SABANCI'S DEDICATION
TO TRADITIONAL
TURKISH ARTS.



Sabancı Foundation's support, the company performed over 3,000 shows across 72 provinces and 213 districts in Anatolia and Istanbul, covering 60,000 kilometers.

ZERRİN KOYUNSAĞAN: Mehtap Ar was incredibly dedicated. She expressed her desire to reach all children through theater and sought our support. For eight years, she traveled throughout Türkiye, even performing in prisons. It was truly remarkable work.

In 2009, the Sabancı Foundation began supporting another cultural initiative: The Turkish Youth Philharmonic Orchestra (TUGFO), under Cem Mansur's leadership. The orchestra annually selects young musicians from conservatories across Türkiye, offering them professional orchestral experience and opportunities to perform at national and international festivals while participating in orchestra exchange programs.

Founded by Cem Mansur in 2007, TUGFO was the country's first youth orchestra, comprising musicians aged 16–22. Its mission—educating youth, bridging local and universal cultures, and promoting social development through art—aligned perfectly with



SAKIP SABANCI AND
HACI SABANCI JOIN THE
FINALISTS AT THE FOLK
DANCE COMPETITION.



the Sabancı Foundation's vision. The orchestra also aims to challenge cultural prejudices while showcasing Turkish culture globally.

Each year, 100 newly selected members attend a summer training camp at Sabancı University. Beyond music instruction, they participate in the Democracy Lab, developing team spirit, leadership skills, decision-making abilities, and learning about responsibility, democratic participation, active listening, and mutual respect.

THE TURKISH YOUTH
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA, CONDUCTED
BY CEM MANSUR,
COMPRISES YOUNG
MUSICIANS SELECTED
ANNUALLY FROM MUSIC
CONSERVATORIES ACROSS
TÜRKİYE.

CEM MANSUR: It's exceptional in Türkiye for a state-independent classical music project to maintain such longevity. This success stems from the consistency of both our vision and support. Our summer camp at Sabancı University goes beyond working with excellent teachers and rehearsals. We cultivate social responsibility, emphasize music's role as a universal language, and facilitate interactions with distinguished professionals across various fields.

Every year, following their summer training, the orchestra performs both in Türkiye and abroad. These performances take place in the world's most prestigious concert halls alongside renowned musicians. This tradition began with their very first concert in Istanbul, featuring Murray Perahia, one of the greatest pianists of our time. Since then, the orchestra has performed with distinguished artists such as Salvatore Accardo, Shlomo Mintz, Kristof Barati, Alice Sara-Ott, Natalia Gutman, and Stephen Kovacevich in Europe's major concert halls. Their performances have graced stages in Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Milan, Linz, Bonn, Amsterdam, Budapest, Prague, Bratislava, Brussels, Verona, Ravello, Florence, Bologna, Essen, Dortmund, and Warsaw.

A highlight of their journey was performing before Queen Beatrix during the 400th anniversary celebrations of Dutch-Ottoman diplomatic relations. Their 2017 Berlin concert reached an even wider audience through a live broadcast on Arte TV, one of the world's leading cultural channels.

CEM MANSUR: TUGFO is the most meaningful, exciting, and indispensable project I've undertaken, both as a musician and as a human being. In our Democracy Laboratory open rehearsals, we demonstrate how polyphonic universal music teaches people to listen to each other, respect others' voices, lead when needed, follow when appropriate, take responsibility, express emotions, and coordinate their physical and spiritual being at the highest level—all while learning about proportion and so much more.

GÜLER SABANCI: This orchestra is our pride and joy. They bring honor to us through their performances in Europe's most prestigious halls. We've touched the lives of more than 1,000 talented young people. Throughout this journey, we've witnessed these young musicians soar like birds, both during camp and in concerts. I'm confident that our orchestra members will continue to make our country and us proud as they spread their wings across the globe.

Hande Küden stands out among TUGFO members who brought honor to the Sabancı Foundation through their achievements. Küden joined the orchestra at age 15 during the project's first year.

She steadily advanced in her career and, after serving as a trainee in 2012, became concertmaster at the German Symphony Orchestra in 2016.

In a historic achievement, she was elected by orchestra members to join the first-violin section of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, becoming the first Turkish violinist to be officially accepted into the orchestra in its 138-year history.

CEM MANSUR: The Sabancı Foundation's enthusiastic support and belief in us enables this exciting project to continue. While philanthropy is often viewed simply as charitable giving, I believe that in a modern, civilized society, the private sector, public sector, and NGOs must share responsibility for sustaining cultural institutions—this is essential for society's spiritual health. Music is too important to be entrusted to just one of these organizations. In Türkiye, the perception of "classical" music as an elitist, foreign, and inaccessible art form may hinder its growth and broader appreciation. The TUGFO model can only positively impact our artistic life if it extends into our professional arts sphere.

Beyond TUGFO, the Foundation has maintained honorary membership in the International Ankara Music Festival since 2008. The festival, organized annually in April by the Sevda-Cenap and Music Foundation, features symphonic orchestras for its opening and closing concerts. The program consistently showcases young talents and facilitates collaborative performances between Turkish and international artists and ensembles.

STRUCTURES, INSCRIPTIONS, SCULPTURES, STATUES, CISTERNS, GLASS AND CERAMIC OBJECTS FROM THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF METROPOLIS ARE ON DISPLAY AT THE MUSEUMS OF EPHESUS AND IZMIR. SINCE EXCAVATIONS BEGAN, OVER TEN THOUSAND SMALL ARTIFACTS HAVE BEEN RECORDED.



The Sabancı Foundation's support in the field of culture and arts spans from music to archeology.

The ancient city of Metropolis, located between Yeniköy and Özbey villages in Torbalı district of İzmir, has a rich history spanning from the Neolithic Age through the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods, to the Principalities and Ottoman eras. Excavations began in 1990, revealing structures, inscriptions, sculptures, coins, and glass and ceramic objects—now exhibited in the Ephesus and İzmir museums. Over 10,000 small artifacts have been documented since the excavation's start.

The Metropolis excavations, managed by the Metropolis Lovers Association, have received continuous support from the Sabancı Group since 1998 and the Sabancı Foundation since 2003.



SERDAR AYBEK: This is a massive city spanning about 160 acres. Sabancı provides one of the longest-running archeological support programs in Türkiye. Continuity is crucial in excavations—we're one of the few sites operating year-round since the beginning. Our excavation house serves as both accommodation and a research institute, with staff always present on site. This sustained presence is made possible through the Sabancı Foundation's support. The project also creates employment in the neighbouring villages of Yeniköy and Özbey. Recently, we launched "Time Travel in Metropolis," a children's program. We've welcomed nearly 3,000 children from Torbalı for workshops, and for most, it was their first time experiencing an ancient city.

In 2023, to mark the completion of 30 years of archeological excavations and research conducted in Metropolis under the direction of Prof. Serdar Aybek, the Sabancı Foundation published *Metropolis: City, Life, Human*. The book presents the findings of civilizations and societies that lived in the city, along with the results of various studies conducted there.

In the early 2000s, Istanbul Governor Muammer Güler approached Sakıp Sabancı about restoring the Cavalry Barracks—a significant historical building in his hometown of Mardin. The building, commissioned in 1889 by Diyarbakır Governor Hacı Hasan Pasha and designed by architect Sarkis Elyas Lole, had served as a gendarmerie station and tax office for many years.

Though Sakıp Sabancı agreed to the request, he passed away before the project could begin. His family and the Sabancı Foundation, viewing this project as part of his legacy, completed the restoration. In October 2009, the Sakıp Sabancı Mardin City Museum and Dilek Sabancı Art Gallery opened with the exhibition “Nature, People and Sea,” featuring selections from the Sakıp Sabancı Museum Collection.

The Sakıp Sabancı Mardin City Museum highlights Mardin’s urban development and way of life. Through traditional handicrafts, ethnographic items, local costumes, and tombstones from different faiths, the museum illustrates the city’s rich multicultural and multi-religious heritage.

NAZAN ÖLÇER: Museums not only exhibit artifacts but also preserve social heritage and memories of the past. In our mission to memorialize Mardin, we aim to showcase the city’s living culture, values, key personalities, and significant places for future generations.

DİLEK SABANCI: Many exhibitions from the Sakıp Sabancı Museum now travel to Mardin. The museum displays both Turkish and international works. The museum and gallery have positively influenced Mardin, boosting tourism and transforming the local culture.



NAZAN ÖLÇER, GENERAL
MANAGER OF SAKIP
SABANCI MUSEUM, WITH
DİLEK SABANCI AND
NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN.

It is the power of individuals that drives social development. Such power is not only dependent on economics or governance; motivation also plays an integral role. Seeing those who succeed and being inspired by these other stories can inspire the energy needed to persevere.

Recognizing the impact of sharing inspiring stories and raising awareness through the Changemakers program, Sabancı Foundation launched a long-term culture and arts project in 2016. The Foundation created the The Sabancı Foundation Short Film Competition to harness art's power as an essential tool for raising social awareness.

The competition, under the artistic direction of producer Zeynep Atakan, addresses a different global social issue each year. Past themes include Refugee Women (year one), Child Laborers (year two), Discrimination (year three), Digital Loneliness (year four), Changing Climates, Changing Lives (year five), New Professions in the New World (year six), Young Women in

THE WATER CRISIS WAS CHOSEN AS THE THEME FOR THE EIGHTH YEAR OF THE SHORT FILM COMPETITION.



Neither Education nor Employment (year seven), Water Crisis (year eight), and Climate Migration (2024).

Beyond highlighting these issues, the competition nurtures young artists and advances the short-film medium.

ZEYNEP ATAKAN: The idea of expressing cinema's impact through social issues and creating opportunities for filmmakers was really valuable. Sustaining dreams is as crucial as realizing them—all while maintaining uncompromising quality. This project, which began as a competition, has grown to include a finalists' camp, training sessions, network meetings, and market selections. It has become a platform that embraces everyone in art and cinema, whether competing or not, fostering continuous communication.

Each year, alongside the international advisory board, an opinion leader is selected to provide contestants with expert insight into the chosen theme. The competition goes beyond simple winning and losing. Finalists who pass preliminary selection enter an intensive learning process where they can plan their future in the film industry.

The Market section, launched in 2021, connects ten non-finalist films with leading film professionals and festival representatives from Türkiye and worldwide.

ZEYNEP ATAKAN: The films produced over these eight years are screened at various events and prestigious festivals worldwide, as their themes remain relevant and the films never "age." More significantly, this foundation's collection creates a valuable film archive that serves as a reference for current and future generations.

The Sabancı Foundation Short Film Competition quickly gained recognition across Europe, earning an award at the European Film Awards—an event organized by one of Europe's most prestigious institutions, the European Film Academy.

At the award ceremony, Güler Sabancı accepted the Prix Film4Climate, the Grand Prize for Sustainability, saying:

We believe in cinema's transformative role for the world's future and social development. Our world faces multiple crises—climate emergency, growing inequalities, and poverty. Overcoming these challenges requires

vital cooperation between public, private, and civil society organizations. Additionally, human-made wars continue to create daily tragedies. I yearn for peace, and hope the new year brings tranquility, allowing us to focus on addressing climate emergency, inequalities, and poverty, where we can collectively work toward a sustainable world.

Among the Sabancı Foundation's sustainability initiatives is the *Papuduk* book series, whose origins trace back many years.



PAPUDUK, A CHARACTER FROM SERRA SABANCI'S CHILDHOOD, WAS REINTRODUCED TO RAISE CHILDREN'S AWARENESS ABOUT ANIMAL PROTECTION AND ECOLOGY.

SERRA SABANCI: *Papuduk* is a rabbit's tale I heard countless times from my grandmother—a cherished character in our family history. Witnessing animal violence in the media sparked my thoughts on nurturing children's compassion toward animals. I believed that hearing this story through a rabbit's perspective would resonate deeply in their imagination.

Creating the *Papuduk* series required careful consideration. The story's rabbit protagonist needed to come to life on paper, which was achieved through Ece Zeber's skilful illustrations. For the writing, the team chose Tolga Öztorun, a first-term Changemaker and dedicated animal-rights activist.

Öztorun has dedicated himself to protecting and caring for stray animals. He produced radio programs about street animals and volunteered as a reporter at Fatih Municipality Yedikule Animal Shelter. His Changemaker project, the groundbreaking short film “Ezber,” featured prominent artists including Sevinç Erbulak, Emre Karayel, Ayla Algan, Derya Alabora, and Lale Mansur, bringing attention to Türkiye's stray animal situation.

TOLGA ÖZTORUN: Since becoming a Changemaker, I've maintained strong ties with the Sabancı Foundation. We collaborated to revive Papuduk, a fairy tale character Ms. Serra remembered from her grandmother's stories, though only the beginning remained intact. Using the surviving fragments from their memories, I developed the story's middle and conclusion. With Ms. Nevgöl's dedicated support, we moved forward with book publication.

The texts were co-authored by Tolga Öztorun and creative drama instructor Lider Hepgenç, with Serra Sabancı contributing to one book. Following review by Prof. Dr. Feyza Çorapçı, Tekir Kitap printed 360,000 copies, which were distributed free to 165,000 children.

LİDER HEPCENÇ: As specialists in animal rights and ecology, Tolga and I found it challenging to select just ten topics, given the numerous issues we want children to consider. We hope future Papuduk stories will explore additional themes.

The series, designed for children aged 7–9, comprises ten books focusing on animal rights and nature appreciation, plus two activity

books. Audio-described versions for visually impaired children, narrated by Eda Ece and Seyran Aksoy, are accessible on the Sabancı Foundation website.

LİDER HEPCENÇ: Our books have reached the most remote corners of Türkiye.

Meeting children who know, love, and read Papuduk, whether online or in person, has been our greatest satisfaction.

The Papuduk Practical Guide for Educators, developed with the Teacher Network, offers guidance for teachers to foster critical thinking about animal rights and ecological issues. It includes practical resources and a comprehensive glossary of key concepts.



THE PAPUDUK SERIES
CREATED A NEW FOCUS
AREA IN THE FOUNDATION'S
SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The problem of
our age:
Women neither in
education nor in
employment

As the Foundation approached its 50th anniversary, with its years of experience, expertise, and close ties to civil society, it sought a new project that would create significant impact.

Following the same approach it had taken during the transformation period, the Foundation conducted research to address the country's pressing issues. The priority areas identified were climate emergency, urbanization, and economic problems. Among women's rights issues, violence against women emerged as the top concern.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: The second most critical issue we identified was women who are "neither in education nor in employment." Türkiye has a large young population, and a significant portion of this group is neither studying nor working. When we compared this with OECD and European countries, we found that Türkiye consistently ranks lowest, with the rate particularly high among women.

According to the research results, 34.7% of young people aged 18–29 in Türkiye are neither in education nor employment. While this rate is 24% for men, it rises dramatically to 50.5% for women—meaning 3,554,000 young women in Türkiye are neither studying nor working.

GÜLER SABANCI: Think about it—3.5 million young women in Türkiye who neither attend school nor work each morning. This ratio is alarming! Our first step will be to mobilize these women and help them recognize their capabilities. We know women can achieve anything when they set their minds to it. We want young women to take charge of their future.

Sabancı Foundation decided to set up a new project, NEET (Not inEmployment, Education or Training), to support women by raising awareness and developing training and employment opportunities. It would empower them and ensure their participation in social and economic life. They aptly named it Young Women Building Their Future.

This challenge exists globally. The term NEET is used worldwide, and numerous organizations address this issue. The Sabancı Foundation chose the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as its field coordinator.

SEHER ALACACI: Unlike typical donors who simply provide grants and monitor progress, Sabancı Foundation has consistently collaborated with us to shape

the process. We evaluated their data, shared our experiences, and together developed this project.

LOUISA VINTON: Women who are neither in education nor employment face one of the highest risks of being left behind. However, we believe we can develop solutions that will help Türkiye harness the enormous potential this large group of women represents.

The project, launched in 2021, targeted young women aged 18–29. During the design phase, UNDP consulted with women’s organizations to learn from their field experience and gather their insights.

SEHER ALACACI: We’ve identified two distinct groups among NEET women. The first consists of those who left their jobs due to caregiving responsibilities—women who’ve stopped job hunting, lost hope, withdrawn from society, and accepted their situation. The second includes those actively seeking work but

THROUGH
EMPOWERMENT AND
VOCATIONAL TRAINING
PROGRAMS, HUNDREDS
OF YOUNG WOMEN HAVE
FOUND EMPLOYMENT.



facing barriers: they either can't find jobs, can't find suitable positions, or don't match existing job requirements. Addressing both groups required us to examine various gender-equality issues, including the care economy, care policies, and violence.

This ambitious project required strong stakeholders—both the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security were brought on board. Eleven pilot provinces were identified: Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, İstanbul, İzmir, Konya, Mardin, Trabzon and Van. Following the 6 February earthquake, provinces in the disaster zone were also included in the project.

At the project's start, field research was conducted in Adana, Diyarbakır, and İzmir with approximately 2,000 NEET women to identify their problems and needs. Based on these findings, empowerment and vocational training programs were implemented across various fields. Around 1,200 NEET women participated in these programs, with hundreds successfully entering the workforce. The training empowered young women and enhanced their employment prospects.

The Opportunities Map helped NEET young women locate nearby jobs, trainings, and internships across Türkiye. Through this platform, hundreds of organizations collaborated to offer opportunities to young women.

The Mentoring Program paired NEET young women with experienced professional women, generating significant interest. Conducted in two phases during 2023 and 2024, the program connected 1,200 NEET women with nearly 1,000 mentors, facilitating over 3,000 meetings. Hundreds of participants entered the workforce afterward. The exchange of knowledge and experience boosted the confidence of many young women.

SEHER ALACACI: We captured public attention through an effective communication and PR campaign. We also drew the attention of policymakers. This raised awareness among local governments and Provincial Directorates, leading them to address the issue more thoughtfully. NEET became a recognized concern, spurring additional projects.



SABANCI FOUNDATION
GENERAL MANAGER NEVGÜL
BİLSEL SAFKAN AT ONE
OF THE “YOUNG WOMEN
BUILDING THEIR FUTURE”
TRAINING SESSIONS.

The Young Women Building

Their Future project expanded through its grant program, receiving applications from both the pilot provinces and areas affected by the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. Seven projects from 20 provinces were selected, each addressing NEET women's employment:

- NEET Women in Industry, Productive Women of the Sea, Building Resilience of NEET Women in the Labor Market, Women Empowered by Software, Blooming Hopes of Women Affected by Disasters, NEET Women in Human Resources, and Ada Lovelace Academy: Empowering Women Software Developers through Mentoring and Training.

The project successfully helped numerous young women gain employment.



1,100 NEET (NOT IN EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION OR TRAINING) WOMEN
WERE CONNECTED WITH ONE
THOUSAND MENTORS THROUGH
THE MENTORING PROGRAM.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Achievements
grow as they are
celebrated

There's an old saying that talent flourishes with recognition. Success grows when it's encouraged through acknowledgment and awards.

Since 1994, the Sabancı Foundation has committed itself to recognizing merit. To date, it has presented more than 1,240 awards to individuals and organizations that have achieved national and international success in education, arts, and sports.

The education awards, launched in 1994, were the first initiative. Each academic year, the Sakıp Sabancı Education Award honors the top three graduates of Istanbul Sakıp Sabancı Anatolian High School and Adana Sakıp Sabancı Secondary School, while the Dilek Sabancı Education Award recognizes the top three graduates of Istanbul Dilek Sabancı Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School. Winners receive 25, 15, and 10 Republican gold coins for first, second, and third place, respectively, along with a personalized certificate.

The Sakıp Sabancı Sports Award recognizes athletes who win gold medals at the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, and Special Olympics World Summer Games. The Dilek Sabancı Sports Award honors winning teams and athletes at World and European Championships held at Antalya Dilek Sabancı Sports Hall in Olympic or Paralympic sports.

DİLEK SABANCI: Investing in young people and the future through recognizing excellence in sports, arts, and education is a vision we inherited from my dear father, Sakıp Sabancı. He firmly believed in encouraging the success of young people, athletes, and artists. We are proud to continue these awards, which he initiated during his lifetime and entrusted us to maintain.

The Sakıp Sabancı Art Prize rewards the top three graduating students from the painting, sculpture, and traditional Turkish arts departments of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, awarding 40, 25, and 15 Republican gold coins for first, second, and third prizes, respectively.

The Sabancı Foundation not only gives awards but has also earned prestigious recognition

itself. In 2009, Güler Sabancı, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, accepted the Raymond Georis Innovative Philanthropist Award, making the Sabancı Foundation the first Turkish organization to join Europe's top philanthropy awards.

The Foundation received further recognition from the Clinton Global Initiative, founded by former US President Bill Clinton. Güler Sabancı was honored with the Clinton Global Citizenship Award in Corporate Leadership for her work advancing women's and girls' human rights and Türkiye's social, cultural, and economic development.

THE SAKIP SABANCI
SPORTS AWARDS
RECOGNIZE ATHLETES
WHO WIN OLYMPIC GOLD
MEDALS. DİLEK SABANCI
VIEWS THESE AWARDS AS
AN INVESTMENT IN THE
FUTURE.



At the New York ceremony on September 22, 2011, former US President Bill Clinton praised the award recipients, saying, "These extraordinary individuals have worked to find creative solutions in areas such as improving education, access to health care, and protecting the environment, and they deserve recognition."

Another significant honor was the David Rockefeller Bridge-Builder Leadership Award, presented to Güler Sabancı on October 8, 2013, in Geneva, Switzerland, recognizing her work in community leadership and social development.

In 2013, the Sabancı Foundation received the Business Initiative Directions International Quality Gold Star Award for its outstanding achievements in leadership, innovation, and technology, driven by its commitment to quality and excellence.

These accolades reflect two important aspects of the Foundation: its commitment to conducting local work according to universal values, and its embodiment of women's leadership in the 21st century.

PEGGY DULANY: Until recently, men led the majority of foundations, but we are now seeing the emergence of female leadership in philanthropy. Women are particularly skilled at developing sustainable solutions that require complex, interconnected approaches. Their natural abilities to work collaboratively, listen deeply, and bridge divisions to reach solutions are proving invaluable in this field.

From a global perspective, the Foundation has made significant efforts to engage in international relations, staying current with worldwide approaches to civil society and philanthropy while showcasing Türkiye's achievements internationally. The Foundation maintains active membership in several key organizations: the European Foundation Centre (EFC), now known as the European Philanthropy Association (Philea), the Council on Foundations of the USA (COF), the Synergos Institute Global Philanthropy Network (GPC), and the Foundations 20 (F20) Platform.

As a founding member, it participated in the Gender Equality and Disability Thematic Networks within the European Foundation Centre. The Foundation supported Girls Not Brides to monitor global strategies against early and forced marriages—one of its key focus areas. In disability advocacy, it has become a crucial stakeholder in the



Zero Project Conference, which showcases exemplary practices worldwide.

The Foundation served on the European Foundation Centre's Board of Directors in 2011, 2012, and 2020. In 2023, it joined the Advisory Board of the Centre, now renamed Philea.

DELPHINE MORALIS: The Sabancı Foundation brings a lot to Philea in terms of ideas and experience. It connects work in Türkiye with international initiatives, hosts events, and supports TUSEV-organized meetings. This demonstrates the Foundation's dedication to internationalizing Türkiye's philanthropic ecosystem and civil society.



The climate-change crisis, a legacy of the previous century, has intensified since the early 2000s, demanding innovative coping strategies. The Sabancı Foundation made history as Türkiye's first and only foundation to join the Foundations 20 (F20) platform for Sustainable Development and Climate Change. By signing the International Philanthropy Commitment to Tackle Climate Change,³³ the Foundation has pledged to leverage its resources, independence, and influence to address this challenge.

2020 made history as a year when the entire world faced an unprecedented collective challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted severe damage not only to public health but also to the social fabric of society. It exacerbated existing social problems and widened inequalities.

Sabancı Foundation believed the philanthropic ecosystem needed greater flexibility to help civil society address the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining ongoing work in education, culture, arts, and social change.

Acting on this belief, it became Türkiye's first foundation to sign the "trust-based philanthropy" commitments³⁴ initiated by the European Foundation Centre (EFC) and the Union of Foundations (COF), organizations where it has held long-standing memberships.

33. https://www.sabancivakfi.org/i/assets/documents/Iklim_Degisikligi_Ile_Mucadele_Icin_Uluslararası_Filantropi-Taahhodu.pdf

34. <https://www.sabancivakfi.org/tr/genel/covid/19/taahhudumuz>

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

New problems, new ways

The 21st century has witnessed humanity's ongoing trials posed by our planet—from natural disasters like earthquakes, forest fires, floods, and storms to the climate crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.

The climate crisis—or more accurately, the climate emergency—has grown to such proportions that it overshadows many other challenges. It affects every aspect of society, compelling philanthropy to forge new paths.



The COVID-19 pandemic transformed philanthropy, as it did many other aspects of life. The rise and dominance of digital technology has also reshaped philanthropic methods. As needs have become more visible, civil society organizations have innovated new approaches to address them.

Meanwhile, we've seen a surge in challenges including income inequality, gender inequality, domestic violence, and unequal access to resources.

During these challenging times, one word emerged as central during the pandemic: solidarity.

Charity, benefaction, philanthropy—each term represents distinct periods with its own nuances.

FOLLOWING THE
FEBRUARY 6
EARTHQUAKES, THE
SABANCI FOUNDATION
QUICKLY ESTABLISHED
NEW SCHOOLS IN FIVE
DISTRICTS OF HATAY.
SABANCI ARSUZ MIDDLE
SCHOOL IS AMONG THESE
NEW FACILITIES.

While solidarity defines our current era, volunteerism may soon take center stage, as exemplified by the Sabancı Group.

GÜLER SABANCI: Sabancı Volunteers³⁵ launched the Sabancı Youth Mobilization project, creating strong connections with non-governmental organizations. This raises important questions: Where do corporate social responsibility projects end and Foundation work begin? How do these initiatives overlap? As we enter a new era, answering these questions will help guide the Foundation's future direction.

NEVGÜL BİLSEL SAFKAN: Collective support has recently gained prominence. Civil society and individuals have stepped in where government support was limited. These efforts require better organization—strengthening solidarity, building partnerships, and raising awareness across various issues. We expect volunteering to become central in the next 50 years, with philanthropic organizations playing an increasingly vital role.

2023 was marked by the February 6th Kahramanmaraş earthquake, whose impact will resonate for years. Sabancı Volunteers and Sabancı Foundation swiftly mobilized to address the region's essential needs.

Education continuity emerged as a critical priority. Within three months, three school buildings opened in Hatay's Reyhanlı, Dörtyol, and Arsuz districts. Two additional permanent schools were built in Hassa and Arsuz districts, followed by the initiation of a sixth project—the Special Education Vocational School in Kırıkhan district.

The initiative expanded with the opening of the Hatay Teacher Solidarity Space, designed by the Teachers' Network to support the professional and personal growth of educators in the earthquake zone.

Through the Disaster and Emergency Fund, existing structures were adapted for temporary housing. The Foundation provided basic food and hygiene supplies, increased support for scholarship recipients,

35. Sabancı Volunteers is a social responsibility program involving the entire Sabancı Group.



organized kite and *Papuduk* workshops for children, and distributed books—all accomplished with the help of various partners.

GÜLER SABANCI: Transparency and reliability are crucial in philanthropic organizations. Our foreign partners provided substantial aid during both recent and previous earthquakes, channeling it through the Sabancı Foundation. This demonstrates their trust in our work and shows our shared values with partners.

HAYRİ ÇULHACI: Foundation activities inspire both partners and Sabancı Group employees. Knowing that your work creates shared social value builds organizational respect and belonging. It encourages innovative thinking about social impact, and all Sabancı Group employees maintain a strong connection to the Foundation.

SUZAN SABANCI: The Sabancı Group spans numerous business sectors and has become a respected organization nationally and internationally. Our impact reaches many—from employees and their families to customers and business partners. Our deep connection to people has been crucial in establishing us as “the Sabancı of Türkiye.” Companies and executives consistently support the Foundation generously when their ventures succeed.



SABANCI LASSA MIDDLE
SCHOOL IN DÖRTYOL
FEATURES NINE
CLASSROOMS, A LIBRARY
AND A SPORTS FIELD.



One of the most prominent factors in Sabancı Foundation's half-century history has been the Sabancı family's unwavering commitment to philanthropy. New generations have thoughtfully carried forward this inherited responsibility, maintaining their full support of the Foundation.

Throughout this journey, the Sabancı Group has also fulfilled its duties admirably.

ENERJİSA ATATÜRK PRIMARY SCHOOL WAS BUILT IN HATAY'S HASSA DISTRICT FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY 6 EARTHQUAKES, FUNDED BY E.ON, ENERJİSA'S FOREIGN PARTNER.

NEDİM BOZFAKIOĞLU: Hacı Ömer Sabancı's philosophy of sharing spread throughout the organization. Both industrial and banking companies within the Sabancı Group have consistently supported the Sabancı Foundation. The Sabancı brothers themselves have always provided personal support. Sakıp Sabancı, in particular, made significant contributions by donating a portion of his estate to Sabancı University and the Sabancı Foundation.

HAYRİ ÇULHACI: The Group has always organized fundraising efforts to ensure the Foundation's sustainability, a practice embraced by both family members and shareholders. This value, inherited from our past, will continue into the future. Our primary goal remains the prosperity of Turkey, the growth of our companies, and the strengthening of the Foundation's resources.



A TEACHERS' SOLIDARITY SPACE
OPENED IN HATAY AFTER THE
EARTHQUAKE TO SUPPORT THE
PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL
TEACHERS.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Opening doors into the future

“Giving away money is much more difficult than earning it. Or rather, anyone can donate, but it is difficult to donate effectively.”

These words come from Warren Buffett. He made this statement in 2010 when he and Bill Gates launched the Giving Pledge movement. More than 120 business leaders, including Michael Bloomberg, David Rockefeller, Mark Zuckerberg, and others, joined the initiative and pledged to donate a significant portion of their wealth to foundations.

The Sabancı brothers and their mother Sadıka Sabancı made this same commitment 50 years ago—long before the Giving Pledge movement—when they established the Sabancı Foundation in 1974.

ZERRİN KOYUNSAĞAN: Philanthropy is in the DNA of the Sabancı family. They dedicate all their energy and focus to the Foundation's work. The fourth generation is well prepared. What drives this? I believe it's permanence. As they say, how long does a person truly live? As long as their name endures after death.

CEYDA SABANCI DİNÇER: We pass on our commitment to philanthropy and foundation responsibilities from generation to generation by sharing our values and beliefs. Our family elders demonstrate their dedication through exemplary behavior and storytelling. Maintaining and developing this legacy from my grandfather and our family elders serves as both a personal pride and social duty.

The Rockefeller Foundation stands as one of the world's most respected and exemplary foundations. The Foundation, bearing the family name, embodies a multigenerational legacy of philanthropy. Peggy Dulany, a Rockefeller family member, explains that their tradition of preparing future generations began with family gatherings, sharing experiences, and discussing philanthropy's importance. Young members are encouraged to support causes they care about, and those showing interest and promise gradually transition into working with foundations of varying sizes.

New generations of the Sabancı Foundation grow up absorbing and internalizing the responsibilities of philanthropy and foundation work

within their family. They understand their role as bridges, carrying forward family values into the future.

SUZAN SABANCI: The Sabancı Foundation has reached its current position because we, as a family, united and believed in its mission. While building successful businesses, we carefully considered how to channel resources from this success to the Foundation and how to optimize their use in foundation activities. My foremost wish is for the next generation to carry this same sense of responsibility and awareness. They too should unite and work together.

As Suzan Sabancı indicated, the next generation is preparing to guide the Sabancı Foundation's future. They face new dynamics and needs: the potential dominance of artificial intelligence, the emphasis on sustainability, and the urgency of climate action. These emerging themes, trends, and decisions await the new generations.

CEYDA SABANCI DİNÇER: I believe advancing technology and digitalization will enable the Foundation to broaden its influence, create more diverse projects, and reach wider audiences. This will enhance philanthropic activities' effectiveness and accessibility, both locally and globally. In a world where environmental sustainability grows increasingly crucial, given the complexity of environmental challenges, I believe the Foundation must take decisive action and develop solutions.

GİZEM BİLEN: Currently, "sustainability" primarily relates to sustainable energy, but I envision its meaning expanding to encompass sustainable living across various domains. I also see potential for the Sabancı Foundation to explore impact investing—investments designed to achieve specific social or environmental benefits. This growing international field addresses issues including environmental protection, gender equality, and educational equity.

HALUK SABANCI DİNÇER: We're in an era where business and philanthropy converge. Organizations now bear certain responsibilities and establish their presence through their support initiatives. Our philanthropic work at Sabancı Foundation should align with our holding company's activities. In today's world, the climate crisis and energy transition represent our most urgent challenges. Industry leaders must both contribute to solutions and take initiative. As an industrial holding company, our generation inherited this challenge. We need to increase our engagement in this area. This transformation will shape the Foundation's future direction.

The future of the Foundation—this was the topic of the last Search Conference held on March 23–24, 2024. Oğuz Babüroğlu, Sabancı University Search Chair, chaired the meeting to determine goals and strategies for the next 50 years. Young generations of the Sabancı family joined experts in philanthropy from Türkiye and around the world at this two-day conference to share their ideas.

MELİSA SABANCI TAPAN: We are in a very fluid period worldwide. We have realized that human beings are not the sole owners of the planet. While the problems of the last 50 years still await solutions, we now face the challenges of the future. There are new words, new concepts ... The Search Conference was very productive in this respect.

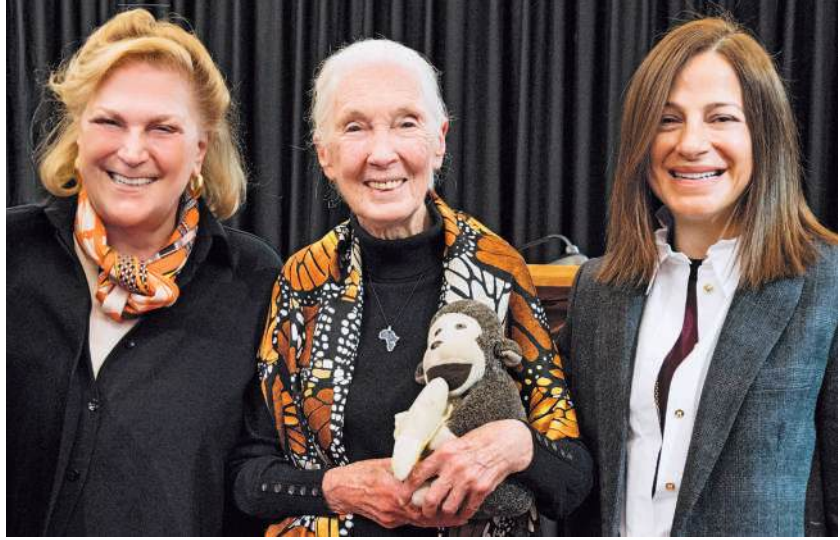
YOUNGER
GENERATIONS OF
THE SABANCI FAMILY
JOINED THE TWO-
DAY CONFERENCE,
WHERE PHILANTHROPY
EXPERTS FROM
TÜRKİYE AND
WORLDWIDE SHARED
THEIR INSIGHTS.



As a result of the conference, Sabancı Foundation established a philanthropic strategy for its second 50-year period, aiming for wider impact through cooperation with local and global stakeholders for a greener and fairer world.

“We are endowed with an intelligent brain, a developed ability to love and feel compassion, as well as an indomitable spirit,” says ethologist Dr. Jane Goodall in her latest book: “This fighting spirit is in all of us; only some are not aware of it. We can nurture this spirit, give it a chance to take wings and fly, to instill hope and courage in others.

Hope is often misunderstood. People often think that hope, in its simplest terms, is passive wishful thinking: They hope something will happen, but do nothing about it. [...] I hope that people realize that their actions, no matter how small they may seem, can make a real difference.”³⁶



BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBERS GÜLER SABANCI AND SEVİL SABANCI ATTENDED JANE GOODALL'S SPEECH AT SSM ON JUNE 20, 2024, GIVEN AT THE SABANCI FOUNDATION'S INVITATION.

HAYRİ ÇULHACI: Throughout life there are things we take and things we give. In youth, you are more interested in what you receive. But when I look back, it is actually what we give that makes life meaningful. This also applies to organizations. If you want to leave a mark, what you give is important. This is true immortality.

GÜLER SABANCI: I have been working for more than 45 years. Therefore, I now know how to distinguish between duties and emotions. It is the work of the Foundation that still excites me, that reminds me of human love, that reminds me that I am a human being. When I appraise people, I think about how much benefit they create—what do they do? Production is sacred for me. It is a sacred thing for people to help each other. I think it is a great fortune, a great blessing to be able to lend a hand. To be of benefit is a blessing for humanity.”

SERRA SABANCI: Being instrumental in bringing a smile to the face of someone you have never met, providing a small support that may change the course of their life—these are very precious things that I have witnessed since my childhood. The fact that my family has been recognized for its philanthropy over the years is both emotionally meaningful and an honor for me.

Jane Goodall also reminds us that hope is contagious. The method of transmission of hope is inspiration—the inspiration of those who struggle, those who take action, those who do not accept “that’s the way it is,” those who strive to make a difference. Behind this inspiration is a love of humanity, the desire to produce, and a great deal of labor.

Hacı Ömer Sabancı, who 70 years ago adopted the principle “*Sharing what we have obtained from this land with its people*” was such an inspiration.

He understood that the power of hope and goodness is so great, so unifying, that it brings together people who have never known each other, have never met, or even lived in the same time zone.

36. Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams, *The Book of Hope*, translation into Turkish: Şiirsel Taş, Meav Publishing, 2024, p. 233.

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DİLEK SABANCI AND CÜLER

SABANCI.



**WE EXTEND OUR HEARTFELT GRATITUDE TO
İHSAN, SAKIP, HACI, ŞEVKET, EROL, AND ÖZDEMİR SABANCI,
WHO CONTRIBUTED WITH GREAT DEDICATION TO BRINGING
THE SABANCI FOUNDATION TO WHERE IT STANDS TODAY.**