

The Role and Capacity of Local Government in Managing Migration in Istanbul

*Yeşeren Eliçin**

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Turkey is the first country of reception for Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war. It hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, more than 90% of whom are living in urban and peri-urban areas. However, Turkey is among the countries preserving 'geographic limitation' of the 1951 Convention, which prevents asylum-seekers coming from non-European countries from being granted refugee status. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection, adopted on 4 April 2013, keeps Syrians under "temporary protection", with access to health and education systems, labour markets, social assistance, and some other services. The aim of the article is to scrutinize the activities of metropolitan and sub-tier municipalities of Istanbul with regard to the Syrian population. The legal, administrative, and financial means employed by these municipalities will be observed in order

* Yeşeren Eliçin, Professor at the Political Science Department of Galatasaray University, Turkey (redovita profesorica politologije Sveučilišta Galatasaray, Turska, e-mail: yelicin@gsu.edu.tr)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4355-0972>

to assess their capacities, aptitudes and needs to provide sustainable solutions.

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Turkey has adopted an open door policy and accepted Syrian citizens, in line with the principle of non-refoulement (Kirisci, 2013; Koca, 2015, p. 209).¹ According to the Ministry of the Interior, as of 24 May 2018, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is 3,589,384,² the largest number of refugees in a single country in the world.³ However, Turkey's mechanism of accession to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees confines the extent of the Convention's application to European asylum seekers. According to the Turkey's Settlement Act, emphasis has been placed on persons of Turkish descent and culture as the immigrants eligible for settlement in the country and possible citizenship (Icduygu, 2015, p. 5).

Turkey's Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), adopted on 4 April 2013, has introduced major changes in the country's asylum system. Asylum seekers have been placed under "temporary protection" and intended for settlement in another country instead of being accepted as refugees for settlement in Turkey. The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) is the main body in charge of policy-making and management of international protection for all foreigners in Turkey. Turkey also adopted a Temporary Protection Regulation on 22 October 2014, which sets out the terms of protection, comprising the scope of temporary protection, the rights and obligations, and the procedures for the people who are granted temporary protection.

Actually, only about six per cent of refugees in Turkey live in 22 camps in southeast Anatolia, whereas the rest are settled in urban and peri-urban

¹ This research has been financially supported by the Galatasaray University Research Fund, under Grant 17.104.001.

² http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2017/2/58b3f4714/which-countries-host-the-most-refugeesquest.html>

areas.⁴ The Turkish cities hosting the largest numbers of out-of-camp Syrians who have temporary protection (TP) status are Istanbul (561,159), Sanliurfa (475,782), Hatay (445,095), Gaziantep (384,285), Mersin (208,139), Adana (202,676), Bursa (145,197), and Kilis (136,319).⁵ However, when the proportion of refugees compared to city population is taken into account, the top four cities are Kilis with 96%, Sanliurfa with 24%, Gaziantep with 19%, and Mersin with 12%.

This article examines how municipalities are managing the process in Istanbul, the city hosting the largest number of Syrians (they represent 3.7%⁶ of the population). It attempts to highlight the legal and organizational structures, service delivery schemes, and financial capacities of local administrations, which have had to face an unprecedented refugee influx since 2011. Istanbul has a two-tier local administration with 39 district municipalities (*ilce belediyeleri*) at the lower level and metropolitan municipality at the upper level. Both metropolitan and district municipalities have considerable decision-making powers. The metropolitan municipality is responsible for coordination of the entire urban area, whereas districts are responsible for decisions related to scheduling specific activities and furnishing services and functions on a daily basis. The upper level enjoys some control power over the lower level, especially on issues concerning the budget and urban planning.

2. Methods

The study utilized qualitative research methods, conducting semi-structured interviews with the representatives of municipalities and associations working in collaboration with municipalities on the issue of Syrian refugees. It was carried out in 21 lower-tier district municipalities out of 39 having a Syrian refugee population greater than 10,000 according to the data retrieved from previous research (Elicin, 2018).⁷ From November 2017 to January 2018, the related departments of 21 lower-tier municipalities, as well as the metropolitan municipality, were called and

⁴ https://www.afad.gov.tr/upload/Node/2374/files/Barinma_Merkezlerindeki_Son_Durum+6.pdf

⁵ http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik

⁶ http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713

⁷ The number of Syrians in Sisli decreased below 10,000 since then (see table 1).

asked how they dealt with Syrian refugees. The metropolitan municipality reported having no particular policy concerning Syrian refugees, whereas some lower-tier municipalities reported only granting access to services intended for disadvantaged groups. No contact could be established with the officials of Fatih and Umraniye municipalities.

In the second phase (February-May 2018), semi-structured interviews were conducted with the representatives (mostly department heads) of municipalities delivering more elaborated services for Syrian refugees. These were Bagcilar, Beyoglu, Esenyurt, Gaziosmanpasa, Kagithane, Kucukcekmece, Sancaktepe, Sultanbeyli, Sultangazi, Sisli, and Zeytinburnu, as well as the social workers of Sisli and Sultanbeyli refugee centres and the chair of the board of the Refugee Solidarity Association (Sisli). The interviews consisted open-ended questions concerning the scope and content of services delivered, the legal and administrative limitations/possibilities encountered, and the financial resources mobilized.

3. The Role and Capacity of Local Government in Managing Migration in Istanbul

The top three districts with the largest number of Syrian refugees in Istanbul are Esenyurt (55,863), Bagcilar (49,942) and Kucukcekmece (43,519). The top three districts with the highest ratio of Syrian refugees to their total population are Zeytinburnu (8.45%), Arnavutkoy (8.19%), and Sultangazi (7.79%), which are on the European side. The district with the largest number of Syrian refugees on the Anatolian side is Sultanbeyli, with 23,181 people (Erdogan, 2017, p. 54). The situation is also highly striking in terms of the speed of the refugee population increase in Istanbul. Unless refugee mobility between the provinces is brought under control and stabilized, it will not be a surprise if more than 25% of all Syrian refugees in Turkey should end up in Istanbul in the near future.

Table 1. *Number of Syrian Refugees in Istanbul*

District Municipality	Numerical rank	District Population	Number of Syrians (TP)	Ratio of Syrians to pop. (%)	Ranking in the quality of life index	Rank by ratio
ESENYURT	1	795,010	55,863	7.03	29	8

BAGCILAR	2	751,510	49,942	6.65	28	9
KUCUKCEKMECE	3	766,609	43,519	5.68	12	10
SULTANGAZI	4	525,090	40,904	7.79	36	3
ESENLER	5	457,231	33,064	7.23	35	6
FATİH	6	417,285	31,432	7.53	5	4
BASAĞŞEHİR	7	369,810	27,475	7.43	26	5
ZEYTİNBURNU	8	287,897	24,313	8.45	18	1
AVCILAR	9	430,770	23,752	5.51	27	11
SULTANBEYLİ	10	324,709	23,181	7.14	38	7
BAHCELİEVLER	11	598,097	21,524	3.56	15	17
GAZİOSMANPASA	12	499,766	20,450	4.09	33	14
ARNAVUTKOY	13	247,507	20,273	8.19	39	2
KAGITHANE	14	439,685	16,766	3.81	22	16
UMRANIYE	15	694,158	16,482	2.37	23	21
GÜNGÖREN	16	298,509	14,399	4.82	24	13
SANCAKTEPE	17	377,047	13,398	3.55	34	18
BEYOĞLU	18	238,762	12,986	5.44	6	12
EYÜP	19	377,650	11,109	2.94	9	20
BAYRAMPASA	20	273,148	10,702	3.92	13	15
SİSLİ	21	272,803	8,110	2.97	4	19
PENDİK	22	691,681	6,468	0.94	17	28
BEYLİKDUZU	23	297,420	3,588	1.21	19	25
BUYUKCEKMECE	24	237,185	3,101	1.31	14	22
TUZLA	25	242,232	3,025	1.25	21	23
USKUDAR	26	535,537	2,562	0.48	7	33
BAKIRKOY	27	222,437	2,453	1.10	3	26
SARIYER	28	342,753	2,386	0.70	8	32
BEYKOZ	29	250,410	2,278	0.91	20	30
CEKMEKOY	30	239,611	2,200	0.92	31	29
MALTEPE	31	490,151	2,165	0.44	10	34
SİLVİRİ	32	170,523	2,072	1.22	32	24
KARTAL	33	459,298	1,906	0.42	11	36
ATAŞEHİR	34	422,513	1,504	0.36	16	37

KADIKOY	35	452,302	513	0.11	2	38
CATALCA	36	68,935	304	0.44	30	35
SILE	37	34,241	268	0.78	37	31
ADALAR	38	14,478	141	0.97	25	27
BESIKTAS	39	189,356	98	0.05	1	39
TOTAL (TP)		14,804,116	556,676			
TOTAL (TP+PR)		14,804,116	559,562			

Source: Author, based on TUIK, 2016 database; Information obtained from the Directorate of Migration Management (10 May 2018); Seker, 2015, p. 9.

Syrian refugees have mostly concentrated in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Istanbul. The lower-tier municipalities that have the lowest quality of life are Gaziosmanpasa, Sancaktepe, Esenler, Sultangazi, Sile, Sultanbeyli, and Arnavutkoy. Zeytinburnu is a medium-level quality-of-life neighbourhood, whereas Sisli has been classified in the highest level (Seker, 2015). It is also interesting to note that some municipalities have lost considerable Syrian population between December 2016 and May 2018. The three districts where the most important decreases were observed are Sisli (47%), Beylikdüzü (47%), and Buyukcekmece (44%).⁸

According to the Ministry of the Interior, the number of Syrian refugees with temporary protection status in Istanbul stood at 561,159 on 31 May 2018.⁹ Approximately 700 TP transactions per day were carried out in Istanbul (Erdogan, 2017, p. 34). However, as of February 2018, the Directorate of Migration Management has stopped the registration procedure for an indefinite period.¹⁰ All this leads to some serious challenges municipalities experience in their management of the refugee situation.

The first challenge concerning the municipalities' actions regarding the refugee population refers to their legal grounds. The lack of a clear duty assignment leads to hesitations in some municipalities and serves as a pretext for inaction in others. As the EU and External Relations Department head of Sultanbeyli underlined, the reticence of municipalities, which lack institutionalization, is probably caused predominantly by their unwillingness to revise their strategic plans, budget heads and coding structure in

⁸ See Elicin (2018) for previous Syrian populations.

⁹ http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik

¹⁰ <http://www.dw.com/tr/suriyelilerin-istanbula-kayd%C4%B1-durduruldu/a-42465450>

order to respond to the challenges they face. This is why a clear assignment of responsibility accompanied by financial allocation in line with the population increases caused by refugees may have motivated local administrations to take the initiative and be more proactive.

The language barrier is another significant challenge for municipalities in their interactions with the refugee population. Many of them employ translators and Arabic speaking personnel, as well as offer Turkish language classes for refugees.

The third important challenge refers to the financial resources they deploy. There is no state fund transferred to municipalities with the aim of meeting the needs of refugees. Local administrations need to operate within their existing budgets to serve the incoming refugee population, which obviously creates a significant challenge for them, as there is no budget allocation designated to the refugee population. Nevertheless, the central government provides some funding through AFAD, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Difficulties in getting accurate information concerning refugees are another important challenge for local administrations. There is no systematic exchange of data and information between the General Directorate of Migration Management and municipalities. Some local officials mentioned the difficulties they have had in working with and even in getting an appointment with the district directorates. Therefore, almost all municipalities choose to collect their own household-based records. The Sultanbeyli Refugee Centre has acquired a web-based software system capable of keeping extremely detailed database on refugees.

Municipalities have no proper budget dedicated to the needs of refugee population. The substantial services and assistance programs conducted by municipalities have been assured with funding provided by national and international NGOs (see Table 2).

4. Basic Organizational Structures Adopted by Municipalities to Deliver Services to Refugees

Seven years after the Syrian refugee influx started, no legal, administrative, or financial arrangements have been effected to fix a framework of action for local administrations. The central government opts for the centralization of almost any kind of operation related to refugees. Direct aid and assistance in kind have been put in the care of AFAD, district di-

rectorates of Migration Management, and the Regional Directorate of Family and Social Policies. The government plans to centralize all aid through EYDAS (Decision Support System for Disaster Management) and an accreditation and certification system oriented to NGOs and private sector companies in order to control and organize INGO activities (Mackreath & Sagnic, 2017, pp. 54-56). Indeed, some INGOs had difficulties in getting authorization to work in Turkey, like the US-based International Medical Corps (IMC), Mercy Corps, and Handicap International, which were recently forced to close down.¹¹ It is also difficult to note any efficient collaboration and coordination between central government agencies and district municipalities. For example, although district directorates of the Migration Management register Syrian refugees, the district directorate of the Ministry of Health, which undertakes a vaccine campaign financed by UNICEF, asks the help of district municipalities to locate Syrians. The municipalities furthermore complain that when they have to recourse to these agencies on behalf of refugees, they are confronted with too much bureaucracy and rejection. In Istanbul, the metropolitan municipality takes no action and is almost completely absent from the field. Indeed, a Social Services Department official stated that the assistance and services delivered to Syrians are entrusted to the Directorate of Migration Management by the central authority and thus, the issue is entirely out of concern of the Metropolitan Municipality. This absence has also been pointed out by lower-tier municipalities, which have emphasized their need for policy guidance and coordination, whereas the metropolitan municipality perceives the refugee issue more from a security and social assistance standpoint. As far as lower level district municipalities are concerned, three different organizational strategies to deal with the refugee population can be observed: association-municipality collaboration, assigning an existing department to deal with refugees, or nothing more than responding with existing social assistance means.

4.1 Association-municipality Collaboration

The most successful organizational structure seems to be the refugee centres created within the perimeters of two municipalities, Sultanbeyli and Sisli. Formally, there is no administrative connection between the

¹¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/turkey-expels-refugee-aid-charities-in-growing-purge-m7cw97v9t>; <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/03/inside-turkeys-ngo-purge/>

municipality and the centre. In order to avoid legal and administrative obstacles, an association establishes a refugee centre and the municipality procures logistical support within the framework of a protocol signed between them. As they do not have a proper budget allocated to refugees and clear legal assignments, these two municipalities look for possibilities of collaboration with other government agencies, NGOs, and INGOs, which allows them to enhance their capacities to solve problems and increase the effectiveness of their service delivery.

In Sultanbeyli, which is one of Istanbul's financially weaker municipalities, the Refugees and Asylum-Seekers Association (*Mülteciler ve Siginmacılar Yardımlasma ve Dayanisma Derneği*) manages an all-embracing and efficient refugee community centre founded in 2014. However, the president of the association is one of vice-mayors of the municipality and the board of directors is mostly composed of municipality officials.¹² Hence, the association is strongly controlled by the municipality. A five-storey building has been allocated in order to integrate all services available to refugees (legal counselling, aid in kind, health, education, and training). Even the central government's Istanbul Directorate of Migration Management had a coordination office there until early 2018. The centre has personnel of 130-140, the majority of whom are Syrians. In Sultanbeyli, a Refugee Education Centre for the young and a women's guesthouse are among the facilities available to refugees.

Sisli Refugee Centre, located in a modest apartment, is based on a cooperative model connecting an NGO and a local administration, which assures that the centre, has autonomous status. In Sisli, the Refugee Solidarity and Support Centre (*Mülteci Dayanisma ve Destek Merkezi*) was established in October 2016, with contributions from the Refugee Solidarity Association (*Gocmen Dayanisma Derneği*) and Expertise France. This NGO association was created by a group of people specialized in fields answering the needs of refugees such as medicine, psychology, law, and human rights.¹³ The association and the municipality signed a protocol after almost ten months of discussion. As in the case of Sultanbeyli, initially the municipality assured merely logistics support. However, the partnership has the capacity to evolve into a strong cooperation and teamwork as the representatives of the association and of the municipality confirm their will to make municipal amenities more accessible to refugees. The cooperation also gave rise to a Consultation Council composed of the French Consul in Istanbul, two

¹² See <http://multeciler.org.tr/hakimizda/yonetim-kurulu/>

¹³ Interview with chair of the board of the Refugee Solidarity Association.

members from Expertise France, two members from the association, and three members from Sisli municipality (representatives of Health, Social Assistance, and External Affairs departments). The centre employs a Kurdish-speaking social worker and a medical coordinator of Syrian origin. They also have a psychologist working on a voluntary basis.

These centres provide information and guidance to refugees in accessing socio-economic, health, education, and legal rights. They work not only with Syrians but also with other vulnerable refugee and migrant groups in the region. They receive refugees from other districts and even from other cities like Kocaeli, Tekirdag, Yalova, and Bursa. The establishment of refugee centres and administrative units responsible for migration and refugee issues in at least some Istanbul municipalities may be considered as responsive local actions. These actions should be strengthened by the legal and financial empowerment of municipalities in order to nurture social cohesion and alleviate rising social tensions between refugees and host communities.

The creation of a new municipal subdivision to deal with refugees is not a common practice. In 2015 a migration unit was created under the Department of Social Support Services in Sisli. Two young officials of the unit consider this to be an indicator of the municipality's enthusiasm to develop local policies on refugee issues, although it does not yet have a proper budget.

The unit seemingly tries to explore the role it may have and the possibilities of developing a number of projects. A field research about the demographical features of the Syrian population in collaboration with a university, a study on the experiences of Syrian entrepreneurs, creation of a community centre embracing a women's shelter and a training program on women's health were mentioned as projects under consideration. The Migration Unit occasionally gives support to the Refugee Centre for activities like refugee women meetings, New Year celebrations or allocation of sport facilities for children. In Zeytinburnu, shortly after the beginning of mass migration from Syria in 2011, a subsection titled *Integration into the City* was created under AKDEM and the Centre opened its facilities to refugee populations. Similarly, since January 2018, Bagcilar municipality has tried to create a council responsible for integration with the collaboration of WALD.

4.2 Duty Assignment of an Existing Structure

In Zeytinburnu, Kucukcekmece, Bagcilar, and Beyoglu, local administration has opted to seek appropriate solutions within the given institutional framework. In Zeytinburnu, the Centre for the Support of Family, Women

and the Disabled (*Aile Kadin Destekleme ve Engelliler Merkezi, AKDEM*), created in 2007 under the Directorate of Social Assistance, ensures an important part of services delivered to refugees.

Kucukcekmece municipality managed to collaborate with national and international NGOs through its Strategy Development Department. It is interesting to note that in Sultanbeyli it is also the Strategy Department that manages and coordinates services for refugees. Thanks to their proficiency in working with NGOs, conducting research, gathering and processing information, and establishing and maintaining relations with international organizations, these departments developed capabilities and aptitudes for their institutions.

Beyoglu municipality created a social market in 2010. It is managed by a foundation whose board of trustees is largely composed of municipality members. A protocol has been signed between the municipality and the foundation, and the head of the Social Assistance Department is responsible for the management of the social market. The market has a food bank and accepts donations in kind. People in need are given a virtual credit card for shopping in the market. Five hundred Syrians families are among 5,500 families who have been granted a credit card.

4.3 Social Assistance as Usual

Many of the studied municipalities are managing to treat the refugee population within the framework of their existing social assistance programs, which basically consist of collecting donations of food, clothing, and household goods for people in need. Even though these municipalities do not make any particular effort for refugee populations, they nonetheless welcome them into existing social programs and workshops. They furthermore offer means, capacity, and staff to NGOs and central government agencies. In fact, “the municipalities tend not to perceive the situation as an urgent problem, because on the one hand there are legal obstacles and on the other hand the refugee population is still less than 10% of the municipal population” (Erdogan, 2017, p. 69). Nevertheless, Fatih municipality deliberately refrains from delivering services to refugees in order to avoid a negative reaction from the local people, as well as to avoid attracting more refugees coming and settling in their district, which would stretch local capacities to meet their needs effectively (Erdogan, 2017, p. 77; Woods & Kayali, 2017, p. 14). Along with Umraniye, it is also one of two municipalities with which no contact could be established for this research.

5. Services Delivered to Syrian Refugees

Almost all the district municipalities in Istanbul treat Syrian refugees within the framework of assistance to the poor and needy. Only a few municipalities are invested in integration-oriented and longer-term services or programmes. However, project based municipality-NGO partnerships seem to have a potential to develop in future.

In general, local administrations simply integrate Syrians into existing services and outreach programmes assured by their Social Assistance Departments such as donations of food or household goods within a scheme of assistance to poor and needy families (see Table 3). Most of them consider donation distribution to be a major way of helping refugees. Municipalities cannot offer direct financial support. Refugees needing cash are directed to district governorates. In addition, municipalities visit refugee families to investigate their living environment and to inspect their needs on the spot.

Most municipalities have specialized in counselling and informing refugees about their legal and social rights, as well as about social services available to them. They guide refugees in gaining access to public institutions, information and services, particularly in health and education. In Sultanbeyli, the refugee centre offers legal aid, especially concerning employment and business establishment issues. The centre has two lawyers who also help the Syrian population in case of legal disputes among themselves and concerning violence against women. Legal advice is given by the Sisli Refugee Centre by the volunteers of TOHAV (*Toplum ve Hukuk Arastirmalari Vakfi*, Foundation for Social and Juristical Research). Zeytinburnu, Gaziosmanpasa, and Kucukcekmece municipalities also provide legal aid, while Sancaktepe municipality provides logistic support to UCLG that ensures legal and psychosocial assistance. Almost all municipalities help unregistered refugees to take the necessary steps to register, as several rights and services are only accessible to those who are registered, including health and education.

Municipalities direct refugees to the appropriate health centres and hospitals but some offer more advanced services. In Sultanbeyli 15 Syrian physicians worked at a polyclinic and a laboratory¹⁴ incorporated into the Refugee Centre until April 2018. However, Syrians doctors were not permitted to work in Turkey until 2017. In 2016, a decree about the working license of persons under temporary protection was published and in December 2017 the first 26 Syrian doctors completed a training programme and obtained licenses to

¹⁴ See <http://multeciler.org.tr/multeciler-dernegi-hizmet-rehberi/>

work.¹⁵ Sultanbeyli officials stated that, starting from April 2018, the polyclinic incorporated in the Refugee Centre would be taken over by the Ministry of Health and continue to serve as an Advanced Migrant Health Centre. After the takeover of health services by the Ministry of Health, the pharmacy store providing medications not covered by the Turkish health system was also closed down. The polyclinic receives over 300 patients daily, and during peak hours gives assistance by phone. The physiotherapy and rehabilitation section is supported by Relief, which replaced Handicap International. An orthopaedist, five psychologists (two of which are Syrian), and five physiotherapists (three of which are Syrian) work there with the help of 25 translators. Four of the translators are specialized in health issues and escort refugees to other public health institutions if necessary. The centre also has six vehicles to transport severely disabled persons. Sisli Refugee Centre has a medical coordinator who is a physician. Nevertheless, the medical coordinator only directs the refugees to the appropriate health institutions and does not practice medicine. In the Centre, refugees who are not accepted by public hospitals and high-risk patients are directed to a contracted private hospital and pharmacy where they are given proper healthcare. Refugees can also benefit from the services of the municipal Health Department which employs physicians, a dentist, and a medical laboratory. In Zeytinburnu, refugees have been accepted in AKDEM, and provided with comprehensive health services including hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, and special education for disabled persons. Home care and psychosocial therapy have also been provided, especially for traumatized children. As far as health services are concerned, the major challenge is not access but the language, which may become a barrier between Syrians and health professionals (Woods & Kayali, 2017, p. 15). Thus, refugee centres that employ Arabic-speaking personnel meet a crucial need.

One of the serious challenges for local administrations is the education of refugee children where the language barrier is most severely felt. Furthermore, Syrian children who lack the necessary official documents, such as passports and their old school records, are not accepted to Turkish public schools. According to a report prepared by the Human Rights Commission of the Turkish Assembly, nearly 350,000 Syrian children (35%) remain entirely outside the education system¹⁶ and many of them are left with no choice but early marriage or work. Indeed, this is often the case for children of the most disadvantaged families. Some municipalities have

¹⁵ <https://www.memurlar.net/haber/716208/26-suriyeli-doktor-calisma-izni-aldi.html>

¹⁶ https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/docs/2018/goc_ve_uyum_raporu.pdf

programmes to get these children into school by means of a financial support offered to families.

Refugee children, hence, have two options: Turkish public/private schools, and temporary education centres (TEC). Although the government plans to gradually abolish TECs¹⁷ in order to integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system, only 75,000 of Syrian children are educated with their Turkish peers (see TBMM, 2018). In addition, these children face bullying, exclusion and school failure. Another problem for Syrian children attending Turkish schools is the fact that teachers have not been trained to teach Turkish as a foreign language or taught how to deal with children suffering from the trauma of war and upheaval. Municipalities have programmes to teach children the Turkish language and to help them succeed in school. Sultanbeyli, Sisli, Zeytinburnu, Kucukcekmece, and Gaziosmanpasa municipalities among others offer language courses for children and adults. The Sultanbeyli and Sisli Refugee centres organize school support programmes gathering young Turkish and refugee children. A mentor support programme for primary school students has been put into practice in Sultanbeyli. The mentors follow Syrian children's academic achievement, language skills, and psychological assessments. When necessary, remedial education programmes are organized in the Centre as well as sports, cultural and arts activities. Sultanbeyli has a child friendly zone in the Refugee Centre and a kindergarten nearby. Kucukcekmece municipality plans to create a Youth Development Centre thanks to the contributions of Expertise France and the French Development Agency. In Zeytinburnu, AKDEM has solicited the collaboration of Yildiz Technical University to develop an appropriate method and content for teaching Turkish. It had also conducted a programme designed to train primary school teachers working in public schools how to interact with Syrian children who suffer from learning disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which may lead to failure at school.¹⁸ The Ministry of Education, which considers the programme as interference into its competence area, wishes to stop it. Nevertheless, the coordinator of AKDEM affirms that they continue to receive numerous requests from schools. The municipality has also submitted a project proposal to Save the Children, concern-

¹⁷ According to the Ministry of Education, there are 67 temporary education centres in Istanbul.

¹⁸ The coordinator of AKDEM, a clinical psychologist who supervised the programme, described the reaction of schoolteachers who do not want Syrian children in their classes because of behavioural disorders and low success rates.

ing women, young girls and children. Bahcelievler municipality provided building land for a TEC.

As far as employment is concerned, local officials are aware of the fact that it is crucial for refugee families to gain financial independence and to get integrated into the host society. In Sultanbeyli the Refugee Centre was formerly collaborating with IMPR Humanitarian and is currently working with the United Work to help Syrian entrepreneurs to get work permits and set up businesses. The Centre operates like an employment agency, making a record of job seekers' requirements on the one hand and of Turkish firms needing employees on the other. The Sultanbeyli Refugee Centre organizes vocational courses. A project financed by SECUA aims at training 20 Syrians and 20 Turks in construction work. The women are given education in entrepreneurship, and successful ones are awarded a money prize. One hundred Syrians and one hundred Turks are working together in return for minimum wage and travel fare within the framework of a three-month project financed by GIZ. Sisli Refugee Centre provides job-focused training, too. Twenty Syrians have been given nursing education within the framework of a project supported by the UN and the municipality. The refugee women have been given first-aid education with the contribution of MEDAK (Medical Rescue Association). The officials of Sisli municipality are also seeking opportunities to support small entrepreneurs via ISKUR. Kucukcekmece municipality organizes entrepreneurship education delivered by KOSGEB (Small and medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey) as well as training on CV preparation and work permit application. One hundred and nineteen Turks and ninety Syrians are provided work for four and a half months within the framework of a project financed by GIZ and IBC (International Blue Crescent). Beyoglu municipality is currently working on a project titled *There Is Hope in the Kitchen* that will be supported by the WFP. Syrian and Turkish young people will be trained in cooking and offered employment. Bayrampasa, Beyoglu, and Gaziosmanpasa direct refugees to their employment units where refugees are treated under the same conditions as Turkish applicants. Workshops for education and training in crafts may also prepare refugees with craft skills for the wider creative economy. Zeytinburnu, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Gaziosmanpasa, and Kucukcekmece offer diverse workshops including crafts, music, computer literacy, tailoring, and hairdressing. In Zeytinburnu, a trademark (*kar sercesi*) was spontaneously created at a migrant women's workshop, then the municipality organized the sale of the workshop's products in a nearby shopping mall to gain financial support for the women. Seeing that the products were in demand, more women applied for the workshop and sub-

sequently AKDEM had to restructure it. Groups of 12 women were asked to complete a training package comprising of Turkish language and women's health education before attending the *Kar Sercesi* program. Further, AKDEM decided to concentrate on making superior products and putting them on the market. Manufacturing is limited to one particular product – handbags. In order to create their own trademark, a designer was engaged to work with refugee women. Simultaneously a project proposal was submitted to the UNHCR for financing.¹⁹

Table 2. *The INGO donations in Istanbul*

Fund provider	Sum
Sultanbeyli	
UNHCR	350,000 USD
Hilfeshunger /GIZ	2,678,410 USD
Handicap	553,600 USD
Relief	759,374 USD
Sub total	4,341,384 USD
Kucukcekmece	
UNHCR	341,300 USD
IMC/ Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul,	15,000 USD
Expertise France/French Development Agency	1,417,673 USD
IOM, Netherlands Consulate General in Istanbul	31,540 USD
GIZ/IBC	1,171,130 USD
Sub total	2,976,643 USD
Sisli	
Expertise France	415,000 USD
Sub total	415,000 USD
Zeytinburnu	
UNHCR	60,500 USD
Save the Children	Pending
Sub total	60,500 USD
Total	7,793,527 USD

Source: Author, based on interviews with the municipal officials.

¹⁹ Interview with the coordinator of AKDEM.

Naturally, the most urgent need for Syrian refugees is housing. However, the competences of Turkish local administration with regard to social housing are not very clear. The municipal law (binding ordinary municipalities and the lower tier of metropolitan municipalities), enumerates housing among their general duties. Nevertheless, social housing or accommodation for disadvantaged or low-income groups is not mentioned in the law. Hence, social housing is not a domain in which Turkish municipalities have been actively involved. Seven years after the beginning of Syrian migration, housing seems to be left to the refugee population's endeavour. It is probable that in-between social networks and familial ties assist with housing and help the refugees by giving advice about the new city. However, some municipalities (Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu) offer short-term accommodation facilities until the persons in need find permanent accommodation. In Sultanbeyli, there is a women's guesthouse comprising nine apartments reserved for victims of violence or those without a family. Gaziosmanpasa also has a women's shelter. Similarly, Sisli municipality has signed a protocol with Mor Cati Women's Shelter Foundation in order to provide accommodation to women who need protection or are in danger.

The Sultanbeyli Sisli and Zeytinburnu municipalities take a rather forward-looking standpoint on integration-oriented programmes, because they consider the Syrians living within their territory to be part of the permanent population. The representatives of these municipalities emphasized the need for policies intended to strengthen the refugee populations so they could work for a living and become self-sufficient. Various studies (Woods & Kayali, 2017; Erdogan, 2017) evaluating municipal actions towards Syrian refugees in Istanbul, as well as the interviews we have conducted with the representatives of the Sisli, Sultanbeyli, and Zeytinburnu municipalities, confirm that the education and professional background of mayors and municipal officials are decisive for the scope and quality of services delivered. Consequently, some municipalities deal not only with satisfying the daily needs of refugee populations but also with their integration into Turkish society and urban life, as in the case of Zeytinburnu and Sultanbeyli. These also appear to have a leading role concerning the support, services, and diversified solutions delivered to Syrian refugees. Indeed, Zeytinburnu has historically been a destination for internal immigration. Currently, the positive and embracing attitude towards refugee populations is attracting Syrians as well as Afghans, Uzbeks, and Uighurs. The coordinator of AKDEM confirms that the mayor is genuinely sensitive to the difficulties of refugees and acknowledges that a substantial part

of the refugee population will not leave and are potentially permanent residents of the district. She also points out the risk that the excluded populations and especially young people could develop a harmful anger in the future. Therefore, the municipality is trying to elaborate more diversified and advanced integration policies based on teaching the Turkish language, culture, and values. The Zeytinburnu municipality is taking part in the project *Learning of Local Bodies to Integrate Immigrants*, aimed at better integration of immigrants and funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.²⁰ Furthermore, the municipality works with universities on diverse issues concerning immigration and refugees. For instance, it collaborates with Bezmi Alem University on a social solidarity project which aims to connect families in need with people who wish to help the refugee population and are looking for a reliable facilitator to achieve this. The Sultanbeyli municipality, moving on from the idea that there are two parties engaged in integration processes (the immigrants, with their qualities, energies, and adaptation, and the receiving community), considers the process to be an interaction between two sides. The receiving society should evolve to understand and accept the other, which is why they prefer to call the process harmonization rather than integration. The Sultanbeyli Refugee Centre undertakes various studies to fight the negatives perceptions in Turkish society and to facilitate the integration of Syrian refugees. They motivate Turkish and Syrian neighbours to come together for brunch under the surveillance of a facilitator. The Centre forms refugee councils for men, women and children and makes use of the feedback taken from these councils. In addition, a webpage²¹ has been created to fight against prejudices about Syrians that Turkish people may have. Sultanbeyli municipality conducted a research²² in collaboration with Hacettepe University on the perceptions Syrian and Turkish residents have of each other. The study confirms that in Sultanbeyli the positive public perception of refugees is above the national average. Indeed, having almost completed their institutional and physical infrastructure to receive refugees, Sultanbeyli thereafter aims at concentrating on fighting hate speech and assuring social cohesion. Sisli municipality aims to strengthen the refugee population through community centre psychosocial support activities. A refugee's chair has been created under the roof of the City

²⁰ See www.ll2ii.eu

²¹ <http://multeciler.org.tr/suriyeli-multecilerle-ilgili-dogru-bilinen-yanlislar/>

²² <http://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeliler-sultanbeyli-ornegi/>

Council. A series of seminars on women's health have been organized in collaboration with the History Foundation, which many Syrian women have attended.

Table 3. *Municipal services delivered to refugees in Istanbul*

Donations in kind	Avcilar, Bagcilar, Bahcelievler, Basaksehir, Bayrampasa, BeyoğluEsenler, Esenyurt, Eyup, Kagithane, Kucukcekmece, Sancaktepe, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Sultangazi, Umraniye, Zeytinburnu
Counselling	Avcilar, Bagcilar, Bayrampasa, Beyoglu, Esenyurt, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu
Translation	Avcilar, Bagcilar, Bayrampasa, Beyoglu, Esenyurt, Gaziosmanpasa, Kucukcekmece, Sancaktepe, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Sultangazi, Zeytinburnu
Logistic support for the public sector, NGOs and INGOs.	Bagcilar (Kizilay); Bahcelievler (land for TEC); Beyoglu (WFP, SGDD-ASAM); Esenler (BM); Gaziosmanpasa (MEWA-WALT); Kagithane (UNICEF); Sancaktepe (Bogazici Vakfi, Besir Dernegi, UCLG, Turkish Red Crescent, IBC); Sultangazi (BMHCR, WALD).
School support	Kucukcekmece, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu
Employment	Bayrampasa, Beyoğlu, Gaziosmanpasa, Kucukcekmece, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu
Psychosocial support	Gaziosmanpasa, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu
Language courses, training programs and social activities	Bagcilar, Beyoglu, Esenler, Gaziosmanpasa, Kucukcekmece, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu
Legal support	Gaziosmanpasa, Kucukcekmece, Sancaktepe, Sisli, Sultanbeyli, Zeytinburnu.

Source: Author, based on interviews with municipal officials.

6. Conclusion

The assessment of local capacities to deal with refugee populations reveals the association-municipality cooperation as the most efficient scheme of action. Sultanbeyli municipality, the pioneer of the model, seems to have

developed very effective collaboration schemes, especially with INGOs *via* the Refugee Centre. Thanks to the expertise and financial support assured by these organizations, it has been able to produce many resourceful solutions in a highly proficient and professional manner in numerous diverse fields. Evidently, as an AKP-affiliated municipal administration, it originates from the same political and ideological source as the central government, which allows it greater freedom of action.

The same juxtaposition can be observed between the refugee population and Sultanbeyli's social fabric.²³ As an opposition municipality, Sisli seems to be trapped between the responsibilities dictated by the humanitarian values it defends and the legal and administrative restrictions clearly more binding for opposition municipalities. In any case, in Sisli the municipality-association partnership seems to be promising but needs a more decisive boost from the upper hierarchy of municipal administration. The association, which is better able to understand the refugee population's needs, tries to have an impact on the municipality's policy development and regulatory steps like hiring Arabic-speaking personnel or improvement of the procedure to be followed when a refugee has been directed to the Municipality's Health Department for medical consultation.

In Zeytinburnu, where an existing unit has been charged with refugee issues, a welcoming atmosphere has been assured for refugees and it is a good example of how creative solutions can be taken out of the existing conditions if there is will to do so. Similarly, Kucukcekmece carries out several projects financed by national and international NGOs. However, most lower-tier municipalities take no action other than opening their ordinary schemes of social assistance to refugee populations.

Overall, local administrations have had to accept large refugee communities and attempt to meet their needs without clear provisions of a well-defined legal framework on the assistance and services they should deliver to refugees. Moreover, the central government has provided no additional funding or relocation of funds for refugee populations. This is why the scope and content of the actions taken by lower-tier district municipalities in Istanbul vary according to their process-managing capacity and the

²³ It is interesting to note that the large settlement at Sultanbeyli, which is located roughly 35 km from the city centre, was informally built. The development of Sultanbeyli largely took place during the 1980s, and its pioneers were promoting the idea of a neighbourhood with an Islamic way of life. Sultanbeyli had thus been transformed from a tiny village to an influential lower-tier municipality by 1987 (Pinarcioglu & Isik, 2008, p. 1360).

local leaders and officials' standpoint. This may also explain the complete absence and inertia of the upper-tier metropolitan municipality.

However, some district municipalities are trying to develop further comprehensive schemes of support and longer-term integration programmes for Syrian refugees, even if their policy-making is *ad hoc* and non-systematic, and the policies developed are sometimes insufficient or unsustainable. Nevertheless, even the most proactive ones have difficulties developing better policy actions and adapting their social cohesion policies to the migration context of their territory. It would not be wrong to claim that muddling through determines local action, which has been built gradually. Lack of coordination between district municipalities and other local public institutions has been observed, especially the Governorship, the District Governorates, the provincial and district directorates of Migration Management, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, whereas the metropolitan municipality is completely absent. Local officials²⁴ point out the need for a ministry responsible for migration and integration referring to the actual situation in which eight different ministries have to cooperate for effective action.

Yet, the inaction of the government may also be considered as a political choice. The EU-Turkey refugee agreement, which confines refugee question to negotiation context, prevents Turkish government from taking binding legal measures and determining medium- and long-term policies. Neither the central authority nor the locally elected mayors openly accept that Syrian refugees are here to stay. Furthermore, the government is inclined to centralize the management of the refugee issue, to diminish the role of local authorities, and to strain both the public sector and civil society capacities. This considerably limits the ability of municipalities to carry out social inclusion policies for refugees and create solutions for the problems of exclusion, local conflicts in the informal economy, delinquency, and the like. As emphasized by a Sultanbeyli official interviewed for the research, having no reliable perspective for the future means that refugees drift into despair and anxiety, which in turn jeopardizes every effort towards their integration into the host society. There is a crucial need for inter-institutional coordination between the state and the municipalities, in particular on issues related to employment, housing, education, and health.

²⁴ Interview with the coordinator of AKDEM.

Refugee populations unquestionably put extra pressure on the service delivery capacity of local administrations in fields such as health centres and schools. The most important percentage of municipal revenue comes from central government transfers, which are calculated based on the population. Obviously, the population refers to Turkish citizens and the refugee population, which makes up to ten per cent of total population in some municipalities, is not taken into consideration. However, it is not possible to obtain any valid data on municipal spending concerning refugees, as this extra burden cannot be explicitly seen in the budget items. International funding is clearly the most important means of building the capacity of local administrations to deal with refugees effectively. Although it is not possible to determine the exact financial burden that refugees impose on municipalities, it is clear that they require financial support from the central budget in order to be able to plan and carry out necessary policy actions to deal with refugee issues.

Nonetheless, it is also clear that when there is political will, municipalities can create capacity to overcome financial or organizational obstacles and to find out inventive solutions. The associative model permits municipalities to collaborate with INGOs, to access financial resources and to transfer valuable knowledge concerning refugee issue. They also have capacity to develop a better understanding of protection and integration of refugees, to fight with prejudices and to improve the local reception of refugees.

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THE ROLE AND CAPACITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MANAGING MIGRATION IN ISTANBUL

Summary

Turkey is the first country of reception for Syrians refugees escaping the civil war. It hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, more than 90% of whom are living in urban and peri-urban areas. However, Turkey is among the countries preserving "geographic limitation" of the 1951 Convention, which prevents asylum-seekers coming from non-European countries from being granted refugee status. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), adopted on 4 April 2013, keeps Syrians under "temporary protection" with access to health and education systems, labour markets, social assistance, and some other services. The lack of financial resources and legal clarity regarding the responsibilities of local administrations concerning refugees is a major obstacle to the enhancement of local action. These administrations have had to accept large refugee communities and are attempting to meet their needs without a well-defined legal framework concerning the assistance and services they should deliver to refugees. This

is why the solutions we found vary from one municipality to another, depending on the local administration's willingness, creativity, financial resources they can deploy, and building capacity. International funding is clearly the most important means of building the capacity of local administrations to deal with refugees effectively. Although it is not possible to determine the exact financial burden refugees impose on municipalities, it is clear that they require financial support from the central budget in order to be able to plan and carry out necessary policy actions to deal with refugee issues.

Keywords: *municipal services, Turkey, Istanbul, migration, Syrian refugees*

ULOGA I KAPACITET LOKALNE SAMOUPRAVE U ISTANBULU ZA UPRAVLJANJE MIGRACIJAMA

Sažetak

Turska je zemlja prvog prihvata sirijskih izbjeglica koje bježe od građanskog rata. Primila je 3,6 milijuna ljudi izbjeglih iz Sirije, od kojih više od 90% živi u gradskim ili prigradskim područjima. Turska spada među države koje se drže geografskog ograničenja navedenog u Konvenciji o izbjeglicama iz 1951. godine koje tražiteljima azila koji dolaze iz neeuropskih zemalja ne dopušta dođelu statusa izbjeglica. Zakon o strancima i međunarodnoj zaštiti od 4. travnja 2013. stavlja Sirijce pod privremenu zaštitu s pristupom zdravstvenom i obrazovnom sustavu, tržištu rada, socijalnoj pomoći te nekim drugim službama. Manjak financijskih sredstava i zakonodavne preciznosti u reguliranju obaveza lokalne samouprave u vezi izbjeglica velika je prepreka poboljšanju lokalnih aktivnosti. Lokalne su jedinice morale prihvatiti veliki broj izbjeglica te pokušavaju namiriti njihove potrebe bez preciznog zakonodavnog okvira za pomoć i usluge koje izbjeglicama treba pružiti. Zato se rješenja utvrđena istraživanjem razlikuju od jedne lokalne jedinice do druge, ovisno o volji, kreativnosti, dodijeljenim financijskim sredstvima i kapacitetu pojedine jedinice. Financiranje iz međunarodnih sredstava je najvažniji način povećanja kapaciteta lokalnih jedinica za aktivnosti povezane s izbjeglicama. Premda nije moguće utvrditi točan financijski teret izbjeglica za lokalnu samoupravu, jasno je da je potrebna financijska pomoć središnje države da bi se moglo planirati i provesti lokalne politike za izbjeglice.

Ključne riječi: *lokalne službe, Turska, Istanbul, migracije, izbjeglice iz Sirije*