



# A Research on the Social Work Function of Municipalities: Impressions from the Field

## Belediyelerin Sosyal Hizmet Fonksiyonu Üzerine Bir Araştırma: Sahadan İzlenimler

Ceylan SÜLÜ AKGÜL<sup>1</sup>

### Öz

*Çalışma dünyada bilhassa sosyal hizmet alanında birçok ülkede işlevsel olarak faaliyet sürdüren belediyelerin, Türkiye'deki işlevselliğini vurgulamak ve bu alanda hizmet sunan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının hizmete yönelik kapsamlı değerlendirmelerine (alan, sosyal hizmet uzmanları ve müracaatçılar açısından) yer vermek amacıyla kaleme alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda Antalya, Kocaeli, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Sakarya ve Tunceli Belediyelerinde çalışan dokuz sosyal hizmet uzmanı ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmış, elde edilen bulgular ve görseller Maxqda 2024 programı kullanılarak tematik analiz yoluyla yorumlanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre yerel yönetimler içerisinde belediyelerin; hızlı, kolay, erişilebilir, bölgenin dinamiklerine hakim, ulaşılabilir bir hizmet modeli sunduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Yine Türkiye'deki belediyelerin hizmetlerinin ekseriyetle sosyal yardımlar niteliğinde olduğu, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının mesleki müdahalelerinin apolitik düzlemde değerlendirilmediği, bu hizmetlerin halkın ihtiyacı, belediyenin bütçesi, ilin nüfusu, belediyenin büyükşehir-il-ilçe belediyesi olma durumuna göre değişiklik gösterdiği, yaşanan sorunların daha yapısal çözümlerle; yeni sosyal politikalar, tüm belediyelerin kullandığı entegre bir sistem ve ortak projelerle kapsayıcı boyutta geliştirilebileceği vurgusu sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının sahadan aktardıkları deneyimleri sonucunda ortaya konmuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Belediyeler, Nitel Araştırma, Sosyal Hizmet, Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanlarının Görüşleri, Yerelleşme, Yerel Yönetimler.

### ABSTRACT

*This study has been written to emphasize the the functionality of municipalities in Turkey, which continue to operate functionally in many countries in the world, especially in the field of social work and to provide comprehensive evaluations (in terms of the field, social workers and applicants) of social workers providing services in this field. In this context, In-depth interviews were conducted with nine social workers employed in the municipalities of Antalya, Kocaeli, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Sakarya and Tunceli. The findings and visuals obtained were interpreted through thematic analysis using Maxqda 2024 software. According to the findings, it is understood that among local governments, municipalities offer a service model that is fast, easy, accessible, versatile and accessible to the dynamics of the region. It is also noted that the services provided by municipalities in Turkey are mostly in the nature of social aid, that the professional interventions of social workers are not evaluated at the apolitical level. These services vary depending on the needs of the people, the budget of the municipality, the population of the province, the status of the municipality as a metropolitan-provincial-district municipality and that the problems experienced can be developed in an inclusive dimension with more structural solutions; new social policies, a common integrated system used by all municipalities and joint projects.*

**Keywords:** Municipalities, Qualitative Research, Social Work, Opinions of social workers, Localization, Local Governments.

<sup>1</sup> **Corresponding Author | Yetkili Yazar:** Asst. Prof., Munzur University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Social Work, [ceylan.sl@hotmail.com](mailto:ceylan.sl@hotmail.com), [ceylansulu@munzur.edu.tr](mailto:ceylansulu@munzur.edu.tr), ORCID: 0000-0002-9147-9664



## INTRODUCTION:

Localization, as a concept, encompasses local government and decentralization units. Local governments are entities organized within national borders that provide services within the framework of local autonomy. Local government units are constitutional institutions established on a legal basis to address the common needs of citizens residing within their jurisdictions. In European countries, local government units are shaped by regional and environmental conditions through a decentralized approach, granting them greater authority. Although local governments are not entirely independent from the central government, they play a crucial role in reducing bureaucratic burden, enabling swift and efficient interventions, and ensuring accessibility for individuals (Eryilmaz, 2001: 90; Genç, 2009: 60). Furthermore, with the global trend toward decentralization that began in the 1980s, local governments have emerged as the cradle of democracy, serving as vital administrative levels of the state in social policy and welfare practices. They have also become key institutions that reflect societal values and culture while addressing the needs and expectations of the community (Kalaycı, 2020: 15-16). When discussing local government units, municipalities, special provincial administrations, and villages are the primary entities that come to mind. Among these, municipalities stand out as the most effective and expansive, particularly in the field of social work. Municipalities possess the capacity to address numerous social service needs at the local level though the services they provide or have the potential to offer, thereby alleviating the burden on the central government.

Municipalities are institutions that implement pioneering and inclusive policies and practices that can overcome social aid with the services they offer. In this regard, this study aims to highlight the role and significance of social work services provided by municipalities within local government units. It examines the services offered and their evaluations (from the perspective of service users), general assessments of being a social worker, and the development of projects and policies in the field (from the perspective of society as a whole). The study draws on direct and in-depth insights from social workers and reveals the functionality of social services in local governments, especially in municipalities. Written from a very broad perspective and enriched by the experiences of practicing professionals, this study is considered to hold significant relevance

### Social Services Provided by Municipalities

Local government units have an undeniable role in the implementation of contemporary social policies and the provision of all services provided by the central organizations of the social state at the regional level.

A social state is a state that undertakes all kinds of duties and responsibilities toward its citizens. It aims to sustain the lives of its citizens without allowing their standard of living to fall below a certain level, strives to meet social and economic needs in a manner that upholds human dignity, and works to ensure a certain level of welfare for all. Additionally, the social state embodies a positive and proactive form of governance that seeks to promote social unity, solidarity and justice ensuring these principles these phenomena reach the whole society (Yay, 2014; Ersöz, 2003).

As a key representative and intermediary of the welfare state, local governments play a significant role in the field of social work. Through the social municipalism model, local governments take on functions of social control and socialization by promoting social justice and social security. Social municipalism serves as the local level complement of the concept of social state as outlined in our Constitution. It entails a range of duties and responsibilities, including planning, regulating, investing, socializing and exercising social control. It also involves providing, social aid, organizing socio-cultural activities, planning, investing, spending, mobilizing, directing, assisting and guiding in social areas under the local authority (Akdoğan, 1999: 35; Artan, 2012; Acar et al., 2013: 54-55).

For the science of social work, which aims to enhance the well-being and welfare of individuals, the nature of the subject becomes critically important at this point. In this context, the social state is integrated with local governments and social services. Social work strives to address the bio-psycho-psycho-social needs of individuals through comprehensive intervention plans, ensuring that services are delivered in a manner that upholds social justice, balance, and human dignity.

In this context, local governments, which are capable of carrying out numerous significant activities for social services, play a crucial role in both preventing social problems and resolving them swiftly. Unlike other units, local governments face fewer legislative challenges in implementing social policies and services, and the feedback from their activities is more readily obtained. By implementing macro policies at the micro and mezzo level, local governments have the potential to produce mechanisms that ensure the active participation of all individuals in the process and increase the functionality of the central government. Again, the fact that social aid and social services provided by municipalities are organized by a single unit facilitates service provision and provides complementarity in meeting the needs. Finally, it is known that municipalities, which have been operating in the field of social work for many years, have a considerable accumulation of experience (Genç et al., 2020: 244-249; Kesgin, 2016).

All kinds of psycho-social, physiological and security needs of individuals in disadvantaged groups — such as children, women, the elderly, youth, people with disabilities, dependents, the sick and the homeless— can be addressed through social services. These services are tailored to the size, quality, budget, and population of the region, ensuring that the needs of vulnerable populations are met effectively.

***For children:*** Providing children's services such as kindergartens, nurseries and day care centers, and adolescent orphanages; contributing to children's education and adequate nutrition; working on the rehabilitation of street children; offering preventive health services; and organizing various social-cultural activities. ***For women:*** establishing art, culture and sports facilities to promote socialization; offering vocational training, job placement, and skill development courses. ***For young people:*** Conducting vocational training and job placement activities; organizing social-cultural activities; working to prevent bad habits and substance abuse; providing educational assistance; establishing youth centers; and building recreational and sports areas. ***For the elderly:*** Providing nursing homes, care centers, home care services, home health services, technical material support, physical (spatial) arrangements; offering in-kind assistance (coal, food, medicine, clothing), cash (monetary) aid; opening guesthouses near hospitals for relatives of patients, ***for people with disabilities:*** Delivering treatment and care services in physical therapy and rehabilitation centers; offering vocational and job training courses; providing in-kind and cash aid; facilitating transportation, and education; and implementing measures to improve physical (spatial) and socio-cultural environments. ***For families in need:*** Opening soup kitchens, counseling service units, and rehabilitation centers. establishing health centers, mobile health buses, pre-diagnosis centers; guiding social groups, non-governmental organizations and mass organizations; fostering solidarity and cooperation; expanding family education centers; and providing comprehensive in-kind, cash, and psycho-social services to families in need (Aysoy, 2006: 34; Ateş, 2009; Negiz, 2011: 327-328).

The diversity of local governments in the field of social services is seen as a significant step toward enhancing the importance and strengthening the role of central governments. By decentralizing responsibilities, the current burden of the ministry will be alleviated, making it easier to identify gaps in social services proactively. This approach will also enable the expansion of effective strategies, policies, and projects at the macro level, paving the way for impactful social work practices.

## 2. Method

In this qualitative research, data were obtained through in-depth interviews with nine social workers employed in metropolitan, provincial, and district municipalities. The study utilized thematic analysis, a method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), to break down the dataset into smaller components, identify themes, analyze patterns, and report findings. This approach is widely recognized as one of the most effective methods for qualitative data analysis.

Municipalities, as part of local government units, play a crucial role in implementing a wide range of social work practices. In this context, the primary objectives of this study are:

1. What is the place and importance of social services provided in municipalities for individuals and society?
2. What is the place and importance of being a social worker working in the municipality?
3. What are your views and experiences on social services provided in municipalities in accordance with the paradigm of social work science?
4. What can be done to improve the social services provided in municipalities and transform them into a professional dimension?

Based on the aim of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with social workers actively employed in municipalities, with their permission. This approach allowed for an investigation into the status, significance and importance of social work, as well as the roles and activities of social workers within the local government.

Due to the reluctance of municipal experts to participate in the interviews, the snowball sampling method was deemed to be more appropriate. Patton (2018) defines this method as a process in which previously interviewed participants refer researchers to other potential participants who meet the criteria of the study.

In this context, priority was given to provinces with a large population and a diverse social service, where social workers were referred to as key contacts. Through the snowball sampling method, social workers from Antalya, Kocaeli, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Sakarya and Tunceli were selected. Interviews were conducted between 06.03.2024 and 30.03.2024 and were completed before the local elections on March 31, 2024.

Three main limitations were encountered in this study. The first relates to sample selection. The study employed snowball sampling method, which reduced the researcher's ability to ensure a balanced distribution of participants by gender. Since all participants were women, the findings predominantly reflect the female perspective. Another limitation stems from the nature of municipalities as political institutions. This not only limits the sampling method but also requires the researcher to clarify to participants beforehand that there is no political purpose. In order to reach the saturation point of the answers obtained from the study had no political agenda. Lastly, to research data saturation and analyze the in-depth interview findings using appropriate methods, the sample size was limited to 9 participants.

Due to the difficulty in reaching the participants, a minimum of one year of workplace experience was required. Consequently, interviews were conducted with social workers who had at least one year or more of experience.

During the data collection phase, an informed consent form created by the researcher and a semi-structured interview form with 15 questions were used. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews and observational notetaking. Each interview lasted an average of 60 minutes. The recorded data were transcribed, transferred to the Maxqda 2024 program, and analyzed by categorizing them into main themes and sub-themes.

### 2.1. Ethical Issues

Munzur University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee, in its letter dated 05.03.2024 and numbered 2024/2, stated that there is no ethical problem in conducting the study.

### 2.2. Working Group

The study group consisted of social workers with at least one year of field experience. Interviews were conducted before the local elections on March 31, 2024. Participants, selected through the snowball sampling method, were employed in Antalya, Kocaeli, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Sakarya, Tunceli municipalities.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous, and their verbal consent was obtained before the interviews. The specific municipalities where they worked were not disclosed, both to allow participants to respond more freely and in accordance with their questions request. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1.** Basic Information for Social Workers

Participant	Gender	Age	Graduation	Job	Working Experience
1.W.	Woman	28	Social Work	Social Worker	3 years
2.W.	Woman	29	Social Work	Social Worker	7 years
3.W.	Woman	30	Social Work	Social Worker	6.5 years
4.W.	Woman	30	Social Work	Social Worker	5 years
5.W.	Woman	30	Social Work	Social Worker	4.5 years
6.W.	Woman	28	Social Work	Social Worker	4 years
7.W.	Woman	35	Social Work	Social Worker	5 years
8.W.	Woman	30	Social Work	Social Worker	7.5 years
9.W.	Woman	26	Social Work	Social Worker	1.5 years

### 3. Results and Discussion:

The findings from the interviews, based on the professional knowledge, skills and experience of social workers, were presented through key direct quotations and discussed with support from the literature.

Evaluations by social work experts on municipalities within local governments were categorized into main themes: **"The Place and Importance of Social Service- Positive and Negative Reviews, Evaluations on the Services Offered -Positive and Negative Reviews, About the profession- Positive and Negative Evaluations, Services Offered and General Evaluation."** These themes were further divided into sub-themes that contained both positive and negative evaluations. Visual representations of the main theme and sub-themes were created using the "Creative Coding" tab in the Maxqda 2024 program and are shown below (See Figure 1).

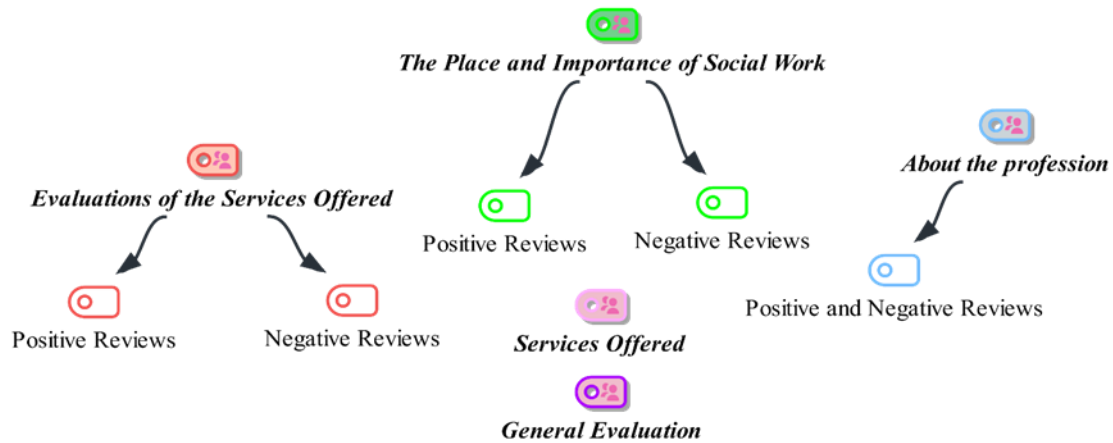


Figure 1. Main Theme and Sub-themes

### 3.1. Services Offered

Evaluations of the services provided are categorized under the relevant themes. Visual representations of key findings from the main theme were generated using the Maxqda 2024 program. (See Figure 2).

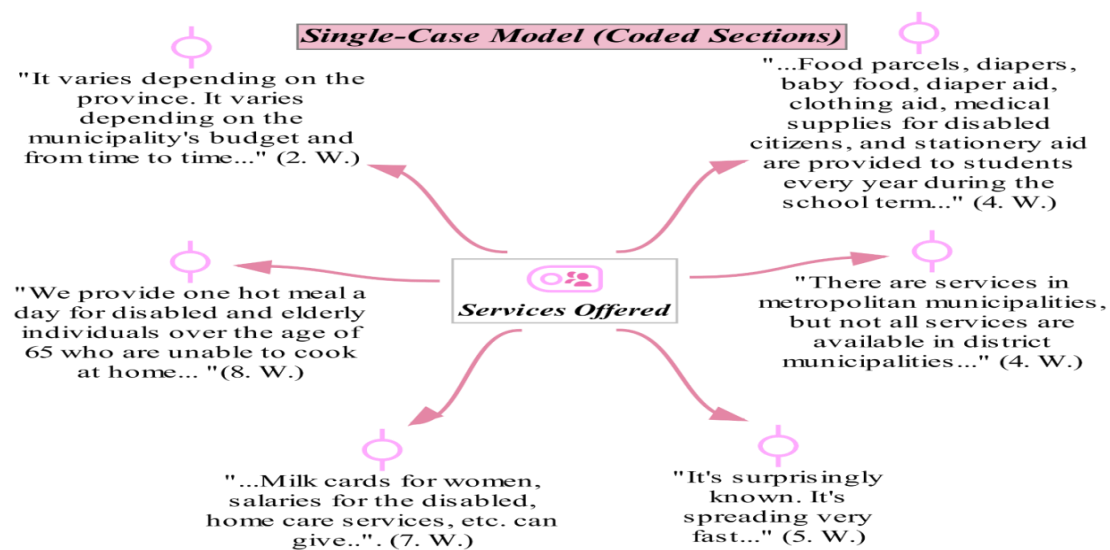


Figure 2. Services Offered

*"We have a social service building. Social aid and trainings are carried out in our building with expert friends. We also have an elderly daycare center. We do not have a social service directorate. We have a social service building under the Directorate of Culture and Social Affairs. Everything is done from there. The library and project units are also connected there. There are individual interviews, group work, and training. In-kind and cash aids are provided." (1. W.)*



*"It depends on the province. It varies according to the budget of the municipality and according to the periods. Mayors have priorities and areas of interest. Our aid levels change accordingly. There are periods when social work activities are high, while there are periods when they decrease with the change of administrators... We offer all kinds of services such as training, seminars, events, excursions. Associations also request assistance from us. There are three branch directorates in the Department of Social Services. There are family and children branch directorate, children branch directorate, disabled services branch directorate and social services branch directorate. In the social services branch directorate, direct in-kind cash aids are provided. We provide clothing aid, market aid, guidance and counseling services, medical aid, education, hobby courses, excursions, seminars." (2.W.)*

*"There is a disabled coordination unit for the disabled. There is a project covering disadvantaged groups. There is a women and family directorate. We are supporting a project that has already been opened. Disadvantaged families apply. We go to meet with them. There are units for individual counseling, family counseling, psychological support, excursions, entertainment, activities... Anyone who has reached the age of eighteen can apply... There are separate services for working and non-working people. Support is provided according to income based on need... There is a women's family unit. They provide residential shelter for women in need of shelter. There are temporary shelter centers as well as permanent shelter centers. As far as I know, the addiction unit is also under the women's family unit and there is an organization for people who want to be treated for addiction. Our social services unit has public milk support for children. This is support given to families who are found eligible as a result of our examinations. Within the scope of the project, we support families with fire, flood, disease and emergency situations. Apart from this, food parcels, food, clothing aid were provided... There are also employment offices. If there are job requests from the families we visit, we direct them to the employment offices. There are kindergartens for children. Elderly people can move to temporary accommodation centers. There is also a shelter center. They can stay there. These units are mostly for women, others are more temporary." (5.W.)*

*"There is only a directorate of social aid affairs. We can only provide support in terms of food, the other aids are provided by the district governorship. Or metropolitan municipalities do it. They can provide milk cards for women, salaries for the disabled, home care services, etc." (7.W.)*

To ensure a comprehensive evaluation in this study, the participants were first asked about the social services provided by municipalities within local government units. The prominent findings from their responses indicated that municipalities implement a variety of service models. Notably, it was emphasized that municipalities adapt their service models based on the dynamics and needs of the city they serve, thereby expanding their areas of operation in this field.

While social service experts working in metropolitan municipalities stated that there is a social workers in the municipalities where they work and that services are provided to many disadvantaged individuals by different units affiliated to the relevant directorate, social workers working in district municipalities or provincial municipalities stated that their fields of activity are narrower and are carried out without being under the roof of the relevant directorate.

Among the services offered are: nursing homes, women's shelters, women's counseling centers, fairy tale houses, kindergartens, home for the homeless, shelters for the powerless, residential accommodation centers (both temporary and permanent), centers for the disabled, one hot meal a day for disabled and elderly individual over the age of sixty-five who are unable to cook at home, diaper

aid, medical supplies for disabled citizens, hygiene parcels, milk card for women, public milk for babies, diapers, baby food and baby biscuit support, newborn support package, marriage package, salary for disabled individual, home care services, education allowances, stationery aid, food parcel, furniture support, clothing aid, market aid, guidance and counseling services, medical aid, education, hobby courses, excursions, theater, seminars, etc."

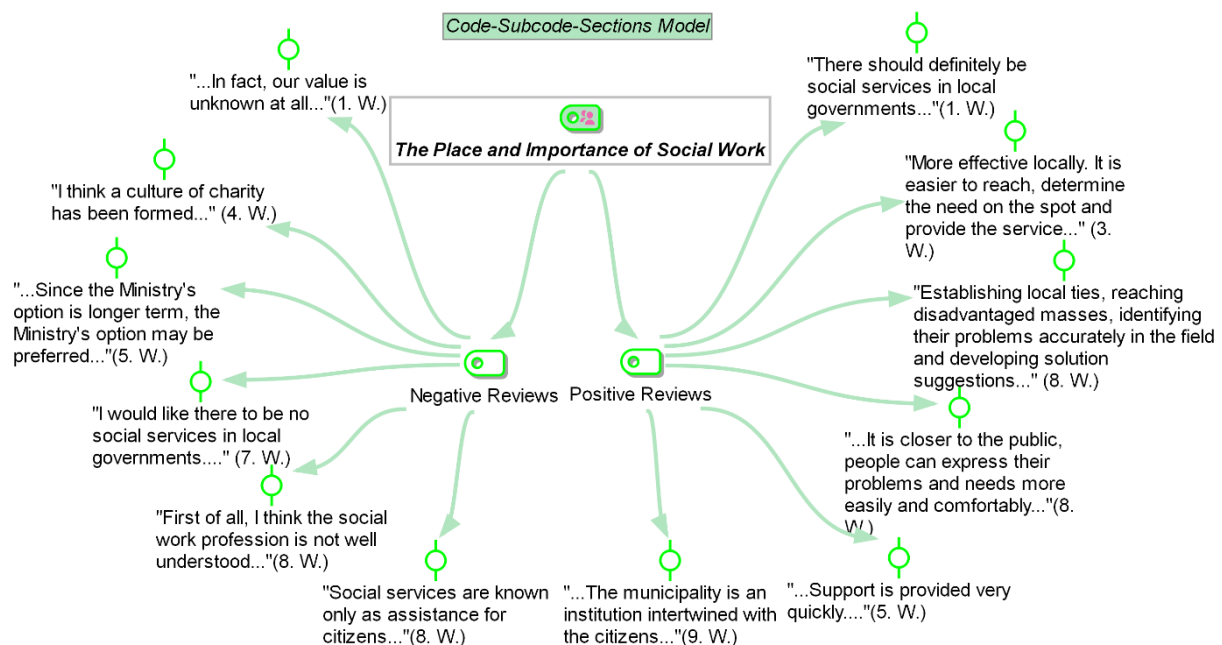
Social workers reported that they work in coordination with the Police Department, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Family and Social Services when necessary, and provide services based on to the regional situation, the development level of the municipality and its budget. However, in the following sections of the study, the narrative that these services are mostly limited to social assistance, one-off and low budget was frequently reiterated by them. Additionally, the services offered in district municipalities are limited to aid (such as food, milk, biscuit support), while metropolitan municipalities with a larger population offer more comprehensive and different service models.

In the study conducted by Genç et al. (2020), the services provided to individuals in need by the Social Development Center Social Services unit of Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality of Turkey were listed. According to this, the unit provides: Hot Meal Assistance, Food Parcel Assistance, Fuel Assistance, Education Assistance, Home Renovation or Home Assistance, Shelter Assistance, Social Assistance Card (Including Bills), Patient Diaper Assistance, Educational Seminars, Elderly Support Center (unit where health, activity services, home visits, personal care assistance are provided for the elderly). However, it was emphasized in the study that the services provided remain in the social assistance dimension and that psycho-social support, guidance and counseling services, which will increase the well-being of the applicants and complement social service practices, are insufficient.

In the current situation, it is understood that local governments provide services to many individuals in the field of social services and contribute to the solution of problems in accordance with regional dynamics, especially at the local level, but may remain limited in some areas.

### 3.2. The Place and Importance of Social Services (For Social Work)

The main theme of the place and importance of social services offered was analyzed by dividing it into sub-themes of "positive and negative reviews". Visuals related to the striking findings of the main theme and sub-theme were obtained using the Maxqda 2024 program. (See Figure 3).





### Figure 3. The Place and Importance of Social Work

#### 3.2.1. Positive Reviews

*"There should definitely be social services in local governments. Social services are the field that can also improve the mood of the individual in the area where he/she feels incomplete, lonely or in need. There should even be a social worker in every mukhtar." (1.W.)*

*"It is more effective locally. It is easier to reach and identify the need on the spot and deliver the service. When they cannot meet the criteria to receive the service from the Ministry, they can apply to us. We work in coordination with the Ministry and other public institutions. When they cannot get service from there, they are directed to us, and we provide the service. If we cannot provide it, we can refer them to other units." (3. W.)*

*"I think municipalities respond faster to applications. Support is provided very quickly. On the same day of the application, we make an interview, submit the documents, check them and immediately meet the cash needs. The food and drink needs of the citizens are met on the same day. Women who apply to the provincial directorate for shelter can stay in temporary accommodation centers of municipalities until their procedures are approved. If they are inpatients in the hospital, they can stay in the temporary accommodation centers of the municipality until their procedures are completed at the ministry... Although some of the families we visited were told that they cannot receive financial support, they can talk to our unit officers and help them on an individual basis. Some of the houses we went to examine applied to the District Governorate for financial aid but could not receive aid because they did not meet the conditions. I think municipalities are more flexible in this regard." (5. W.)*

Under this category, the participants defined the social services provided by the municipalities as "absolutely necessary, effective, fast, easy, convenient, accessible, close to the people, intertwined with the citizens, knowing the needs of the region".

Even the participant coded 6. W. expressed this issue as follows:

*"For example, in the municipality where I work, daycare centers were opened. I think it is very valuable for this to happen locally. Because many houses are visited for various reasons. Interviews are conducted. Therefore, the municipality has a lot of data. As a local government, it can know the number of working women in the regions of the city where it is located, their need for social economic support and the services that the region needs the most... Is there a high density of elderly or disabled people? It can open units such as kindergartens or elderly care centers for them. That's why this is valuable at the local level." (6. W.)*

In this context, it emphasizes that local governments have an important role in identifying the needs and deficiencies of the people and addressing regional issues. This is significant for the efficiency and relevance of the services provided. Additionally, it is also among the prominent findings that the bureaucratic structure is flexible and has faster and more effective interventions.

With social municipalism in line with the principles of subsidiarity and easy accessibility, municipalities try to heal the devastation caused by globalization on the one hand and to overcome structural and institutional problems on the other (Kesgin, 2012: 176-177). One key factor that sets local governments apart in the field of social services is that they are faster, more practical and accessible in-service delivery compared to social service organizations that provide services in the central provincial structure. This is of highly significant for social service provision and constitutes one of the most valuable areas that the research wants to emphasize.

In the research conducted by Genç et al. (2020) on Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality on the subject, this situation was particularly emphasized and it was determined that applicants who want to receive services can easily apply with their Republic of Turkey identity card or identity card and that service provision is carried out according to the appropriate service model with the social examinations made by the professional staff as a result of the application made. The study also concluded that this situation is perceived as a convenience for the applicants, adopted, supported and therefore preferred.

### 3.2.2. Negative Reviews

*"Actually, the issue that takes local governments the most is social services. They limit us only to social aid. Like giving food packages to a citizen. However, we organize many activities. In fact, what we want to do is to integrate society with each other through group and awareness activities. Priority services are always based on food. However, maybe he needs spiritual help before food. Maybe his traumas are more dominant in his life..." (1.W.)*

*"I think local governments should be active in terms of social services. However, I don't think it is right to provide social aid directly, because this time the focus turns into something to receive social aid from the municipality. There is a relationship of giving and receiving. No one talks about the unimproved road on their street. People can buy their milk if they can. When the municipality spends its budget on these things, it can do the rest incompletely. They can say things like, "You built the Metro like this, you didn't fix that road!" because they spent this budget on social aid." (6. W.)*

*"I wish there were no social services in local governments. Since it is a political place, sometimes there can be misuse. Since they are concerned about votes, services can be vote-oriented. I am conscientiously very uncomfortable with this situation, so I think everything related to social services should not be in municipalities. Normally, we wanted to load food cards and support during Ramadan, but this was canceled because it was thought that the aid parcels should be visible during the election time." (7.W.)*

Many participants who emphasized that there should be social services within local government units, especially within municipalities, stated that social aid eroded the paradigm of the profession from service to aid. In particular, the participants who complained about this issue stated that the emphasis on the economic-based needs of individuals in the services provided is not in line with the nature of social work. İpek and Erciyes (2020) also found that social services provided by municipalities have turned into social aid and that there are problems in the understanding and awareness of social services.

Especially the participant coded 8. W.;

*"Social services are only known as aid for citizens. Something material is expected. It is a profession integrated with this. In this respect, I do not think that the profession is sufficiently recognized."(8. W.)*

The participant coded 4. W. said;

*"I think it is not enough. It is also known as Ramadan parcels by the public. Parcels, diapers... If the municipality provides these aids, we can receive these services. Sometimes they think we also come from the district governorship." (4. W.)*

Based on these statements, it is understood that the aspect of social work that covers the individual in terms of bio-psycho-social and spiritual aspects and deals with them from a systematic point of view

can be limited from time to time and especially the individuals' receiving services have an expectation to meet their economic-based needs. In this regard, the emphasis on "food parcels, cash aid cards, milk and diaper aid" comes to the fore. While the predominance of the need for nutrition, which is one of the most basic physiological needs of the individual, is a reasonable situation, it is also possible to infer those other services (education, counseling, care, security, social, cultural activities) should also gain importance in accordance with the nature of the systematic perspective. Akinboade et al. (2012) evaluated the services provided in the Sedibeng district municipality in South Africa and concluded that while the applicants were satisfied with the services provided only in the field of water and electricity supply, they found other services in professional service provision (such as creating job opportunities, reducing crime) inadequate and limited.

This makes municipalities competent in limited areas such as water, electricity and infrastructure services instead of providing a comprehensive service model in a professional sense.

Trydegård and Thorslund (2010) evaluated the elderly care services provided by local governments in Swedish welfare services. Accordingly, it was found that even in important services such as home help and nursing homes, budget constraints were imposed, and the decentralization and universal structure were weakened. In particular, 'welfare municipality' and 'local social policy' appear to be less accurate than heretofore when describing the Swedish model of elder care.

Apart from these, participants also made statements that can be considered as negative, such as "explaining the services and the content of social services due to frequently changing administrators, shifting the direction of services from time to time due to voting concerns and the effects of politics".

### 3.3. Evaluations of the Services Offered (For Applicants)

The main theme of the evaluations of the services offered was analyzed by dividing them into sub-themes of "positive and negative evaluations". Visuals related to the striking findings of the main theme and sub-theme were obtained using the Maxqda 2024 program. (See Figure 4).

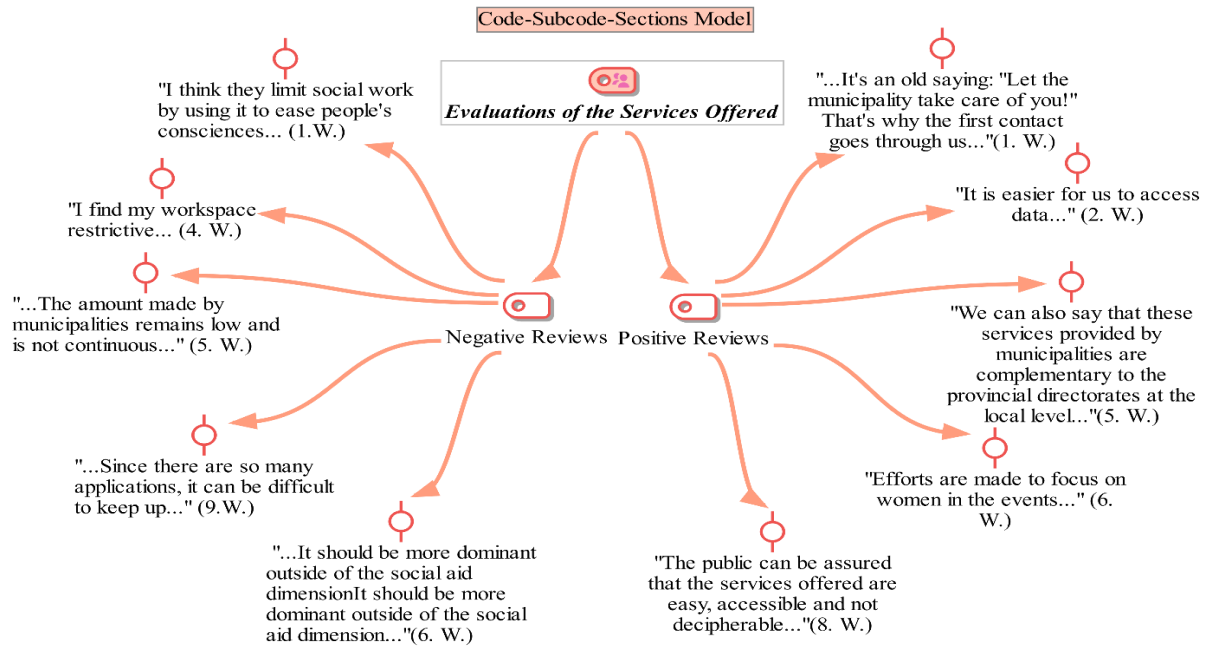


Figure 4. Evaluations of the Services Offered

#### 3.3.1. Positive Reviews

*"We are able to contact the individual more closely. Because the first aid module that comes to people's minds is the municipalities. It is faster... We can conduct direct individual interviews and direct them to the appropriate places quickly and accurately..." (1. W.)*

*"It is an efficient service. It is easier for us to access data. We are already working with the district governorship system. We can access people's information. We developed this system ourselves. Through that system, we only receive residence information and general population information from the district governorship. We have a social investigation report on the system. We do not have a common system with other institutions. We only received a list from the hospital for a period to reach people in need. We also have a message system. From here, we inform citizens about the services." (2. W.)*

*"The support they provide is more diverse. We can also call these services provided by municipalities the local complement of provincial directorates. These services should definitely be provided. Because I think they fill the gap in a fast and useful way where the Ministry cannot reach. For example, daycare centers are a great need for children. New ones are constantly opening. He also knows the dynamics of the region he is in better. Since he knows the problems and needs of the local people, he takes measures and creates solutions accordingly. A department called Mukhtars Department was opened. We can communicate and liaise with mukhtars one-to-one. We occasionally visit mukhtars' offices and get information. When a citizen encounters a problem, we can contact the mukhtar directly and provide support to the citizen. If this process were done at Provincial Directorates, it would be a waste of time due to the procedure." (5. W.)*

*"The public can be sure that the services offered are easy, accessible and not decipherable. For example, an addicted individual is never labeled. If this person goes to a hospital, they are registered, but there are no registration events here." (8. W.)*

Participants were first asked questions to decipher the place and importance of social services and then they were asked to express in detail the positive and negative aspects of the social services provided by municipalities in terms of applicants. As a result of the findings obtained, in the evaluations that were considered positive, it was emphasized that local government units are the units that "have a good command of the problems experienced by the applicants, respond quickly to their needs and are frequently applied by the applicants" in terms of the applicants.

Even the participant coded 1.W. said, *"It is an old saying: "Let the municipality deal with you!" so the first contact is with us. There can also be a lot of cases related to social services. We direct them to the right places and institutions. It is an easy referral." (1. W.)* emphasized that municipalities are the first units that come to mind and respond to all kinds of needs of individuals within local governments.

Apart from these, another prominent narrative is the "complementary and supportive role" of the services provided by local governments in addition to the services provided by the ministry. It is also understood that many comprehensive services that will increase the well-being of individuals are provided by local government units in coordination and cooperation with the ministry. However, a few participants stated that the aid provided by local government units have become localized and that the aids have gone beyond providing services and gained the appearance of only economic support. In this context, it has been observed that the participants who made positive statements frequently expressed negatives in addition to positive views on certain issues. In this regard, striking results were obtained in the research conducted by Gendel-Guterman and Billig (2020). Accordingly, it was concluded that non-monetary factors are also highly determinant in the level of satisfaction. A good relationship between the municipality and citizens is found to be highly determinant of citizen

satisfaction. Therefore, an important emphasis was placed on municipal policies that encourage an emotional connection between citizens and the city they live in. Improving service activities was seen as a necessary but not sufficient course of action.

This highlights the need for the localization of the assistance provided and the need for services to go beyond being a means of economic support.

### 3.3.2. Negative Reviews

*"In general, the process is based on in-kind and cash aid. We cannot assess the issues that the profession should really focus on. I find my field of work restrictive for the applicants. It supports the family economy. But the disadvantage is that this is limited to certain periods." (4. W.)*

*"Compared to the financial assistance provided by the Ministry, the amount provided by the municipalities is low and not continuous. While provincial directorates provide regular and high amounts of financial support, I think it is a disadvantage that municipalities provide one-time and low financial aid. Municipalities also pay high fees. However, these aids are valid for situations such as earthquakes, fires and floods." (5. W.)*

*I think that social aid should be a single system carried out under a single roof through the ministry, because citizens can receive support from the ministry, the municipality and the mukhtar's office. In this case, applicants get confused. I don't find it nice to have in-kind aids. There should be no in-kind aid at all... People may not want their neighbors to know that they receive social support assistance. It means a violation of this. I think the right to privacy is violated. The vehicles of the institutions have emblems and clothing on them. It gives the impression that I am with my citizens. In terms of social services, I think that local governments should be much more dominant, but in terms of social aid, I think it should be at a lower level than it is now... In terms of social aid, it should be completely under the supervision of the ministry." (6. W.)*

Participants who are thought to have given negative answers to the questions directed towards the evaluation of the social services provided by the municipalities from the perspective of the applicants; statements that "the aid provided make individuals dependent and especially the aids provided by the municipalities are short-term and very limited in amount" are becoming more frequent. As mentioned before, social workers, who emphasize that social services have an important place in local government units in general, have constantly criticized that the services offered are short-term, low-budget and more aid-oriented than service-oriented. In particular, the participants stated that the applicants "apply to multiple places such as municipalities, district governorships and ministries, which is an exhausting, tiring and repetitive process for them and for the municipalities".

Kesgin (2016) emphasizes that municipalities are important actors among local government units, that the principle of "subsidiarity" has been accepted as one of the basic principles of local governments in the context of closeness to the people worldwide with the globalization movement; however, the repetitiveness of social aid provided by municipalities, especially the fact that two different municipalities have a say in the same place and service area within the borders of big city municipalities, reinforces service repetition, leads to waste of resources and wears out the applicants.

There are also statements that the widespread use of promotional activities (such as the presence of municipal emblems) in the services provided in municipalities harms the applicant's right to privacy and confidentiality and stigmatizes them.

### 3.4. About the profession (For Social Workers)



The main theme of evaluations on becoming a social worker was analyzed by dividing it into a single sub-theme that includes both "positive and negative reviews". Visuals related to the striking findings of the main theme and sub-theme were obtained using the Maxqda 2024 program (See Figure 5).

### 3.4.1. Positive and Negative Reviews

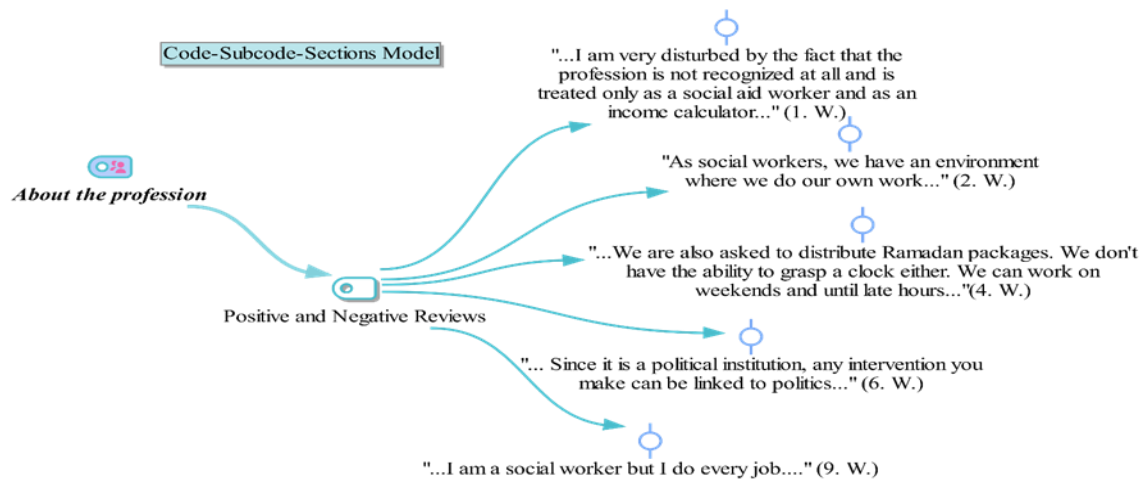


Figure 5. About the Profession

*"The disadvantage is experienced regardless of party. For example, the citizen says, "I am from this party, you will help me" or "I call this party, you will help me". We say, "Of course you can call, but you are not suitable for this place" and send them away. Or there are many people from acquaintances who ask, "Can you help me if I come?" I am very uncomfortable with the fact that the profession is not recognized at all and is only seen as a social aid worker and treated like an income calculator. Or we are very distressed by the interventions of associate degree or open education graduates who are not suitable for the profession. If you can bring a person into society, if you can feel that you have touched a person's life when you come home, if you can make a difference and open a space, you reach professional satisfaction. I see this as the only advantage." (1. W.)*

*"Reaching citizens only through social aid does not provide professional satisfaction. We are asked to distribute gifts on special occasions such as Teachers' Day and Women's Day. We are also asked to distribute Ramadan packages. We also have no concept of time. We can work on weekends and until late hours." (4.W.)*

*"In previous years we distributed roasted meat. Professionals distribute them. There is no separate distribution staff for them. There is absolutely no political reference. I feel very sad when I see them in advertisements. While a professional staff working in local government improves himself/herself in his/her profession by interviewing many more people, it can also be insufficient in terms of deepening, following a case and reaching the necessary places." (6. W.)*

*"I started to communicate more with people. I was able to empathize and feel their emotions and difficulties. It is very nice to go to their house and share that feeling with them..." (7. W.)*

Social workers frequently expressed their positive and negative evaluations together at the point of reaching professional satisfaction.



In order to protect confidentiality and to enable the participants to express themselves comfortably, no information was given about the status of the municipality where they work. However, it is understood from the answers given by the participants at the point of experiencing professional satisfaction, fulfillment and professionalism that there are significant differences according to the working status of the social worker in the district municipality, provincial municipality and metropolitan municipality.

Social workers working in metropolitan municipalities stated that there is a directorate for social work in the municipality where they work and that many activities are carried out under this directorate.

Social workers working in a provincial municipality or district municipality stated that there is no social service unit, that they are limited in the professional intervention process, that the social work profession is not fully known by the institution, that they provide services in many different fields of activity outside their job descriptions (such as distribution of aid packages, taking part in events) and therefore their level of professional satisfaction is very low.

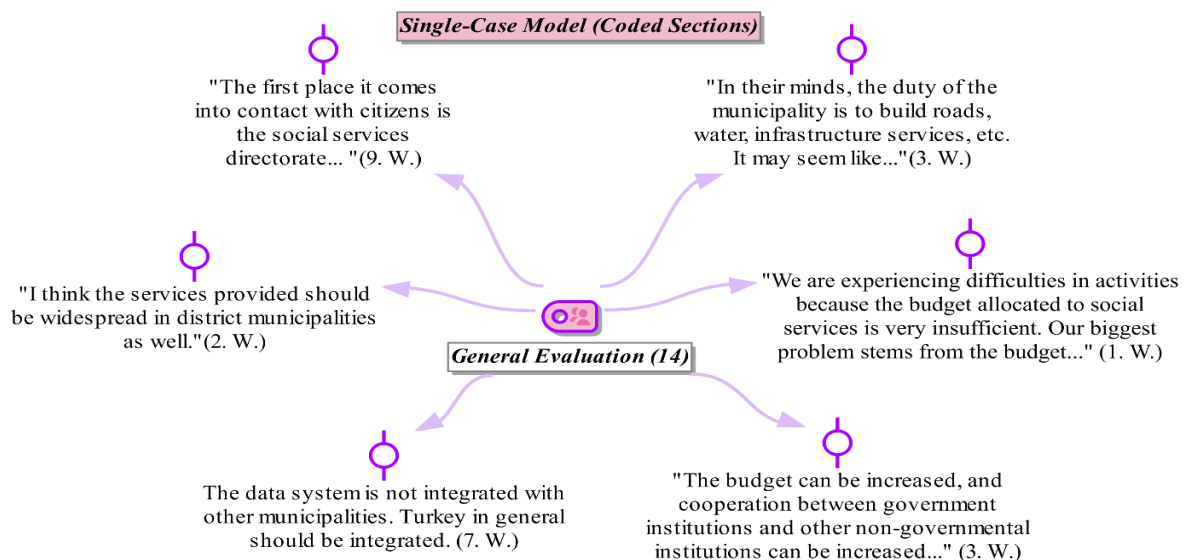
The data obtained in this part of the study are of great importance. As mentioned in the literature, social services provided in municipalities impose important responsibilities on social services and social workers within the understanding of social municipalism. In this context, the professional satisfaction and competence of the social worker is as important as the provision of social services. As a matter of fact, İpek and Erciyes (2020) emphasized that there is a disorganized institutional structure at the country level, and that there are different service offerings among provincial and district municipalities. The first determination on this issue is that the units providing social services vary from municipality to municipality and provide services under different names and roofs. In particular, the insufficient number of social service experts working in municipalities was emphasized.

In addition to this, although it is pointed out that there is a problem of merit in the field, there are also complaints about the negativities arising from the provision of services by people who are not equipped with knowledge and transferring information to people working in units including social service institution managers. Similarly, in the study conducted by Artan (2012) on social services in local governments, attention is drawn to the low number of personnel trained in social work in municipalities and many social service institutions.

Finally, participants stated that since local government units are political institutions, applicants evaluate their position from a highly political perspective. Professionals stated that they acted professionally and apolitically, but it was emphasized that the perspective on them and their professional interventions was evaluated at the political level and this situation wore them down.

### 3.5. General Evaluation

The findings regarding the participants' general evaluations are presented under the relevant heading. Visuals related to the main theme were obtained using the Maxqda 2024 program (See Figure 6).



**Figure 6. General Evaluation**

*"I think the services provided should also be widespread in district municipalities. If the budget is increased, we have no shortcomings." (2. W.)*

*"The duty of the municipality may come to mind as building roads, water, infrastructure services and so on. But in fact, what is called social municipalism should be considered more comprehensively." (3. W.)*

*"The budget can be increased, cooperation between state institutions and other civil society organizations can be increased. I would like to be able to provide services to citizens beyond social aid. I am restricted in terms of providing services. While districts are more in the aid dimension, provinces can provide more social services. We enter our own data manually in Excel. The municipality has its own software, but it is not working very well at the moment... Some citizens do not know e-government. It can be very painful for me to access those documents through citizens. We don't share our data with any institution. We must share. Municipalities are mostly seen as places of social aid, but these aids may not be enough." (4. W.)*

*"Applicants are confused. They have to struggle to access a service. I think the central government and local government should sit at a table and enter into a new social policy, understanding of what we can do and how we can do it. At a point where we leave everything aside, all identities, all political views aside and unite on human rights and human dignity... I dream of a system where the central government and the local government are in partnership. I think it can be possible with new social policy searches..." (6. W.)*

*"There are social service departments in metropolitan cities. There are units for all kinds of disadvantaged individuals. But we have units that provide services under an unrelated directorate. Then you have to keep up with too many practices outside your job description. There should be a disabled unit, a women's unit, an elderly unit. The worst part of the municipality's work is that it is not sustainable... There is no monitoring, no reporting... There is no electronic system. We have a data entry that we created with our own labor in Excel spreadsheets. Since we do not have an integrated system, we cannot see the services they receive from other units. There is no reporting system. This information remains with individuals and may not remain as institutional information." (8.W.)*

Participants were asked to make a general evaluation of the social services provided by local government units and to make suggestions, if any. The answers received from the participants again showed a significant variation depending on whether the municipality where they work is a metropolitan municipality, district municipality or provincial municipality. In metropolitan municipalities, it was emphasized that there is a "social work directorate", whereas in provincial and district municipalities, it was emphasized that "there is no directorate for social work" and "the services provided are limited (in terms of aids)". Participants mostly emphasized that "the budget allocated to social services may be limited and insufficient" and that the services provided "may be one-off and at times insufficient to meet the demand".

Another comment was related to the electronic system of the municipalities where data on applicants are entered and various information is accessed. While social workers working in metropolitan municipalities stated that they have an electronic system where they can access data on applicants, social workers working in some provincial municipalities stated that they do not have an electronic system integrated with other institutions and that they perform data entry manually. In both cases, it was also stated that there is no integrated system where general information is shared with other public institutions.

Gendel-Guterman and Billig (2020) emphasize that as technological capabilities improve, citizens' expectations of the level of service provided by the municipality increase. In the wake of high mobility and well-developed media networks, information and developments regarding events in other places are becoming much more accessible to citizens. Therefore, municipalities are expected to utilize all technological possibilities in professional service delivery. In today's technology, "Smart City" (Belanche et al., 2016) applications are now being implemented and incorporated into managing applications and other public services and associated systems. Moreover, Belanche et al. (2016) found that citizens prefer to use the web as a tool to interact with the municipality. Therefore, to connect with citizens more efficiently and quickly, municipalities should build similar and common technological systems integrated into their regular activities.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of collaborating with other public institutions, non-governmental organizations, associations and foundations to enhance the well-being of applicants. They particularly highlighted the need for economic support to be provided by a single unit to prevent confusion among applicants. This approach would also ensure better coordination of services and more efficient distribution of resources from a central source.

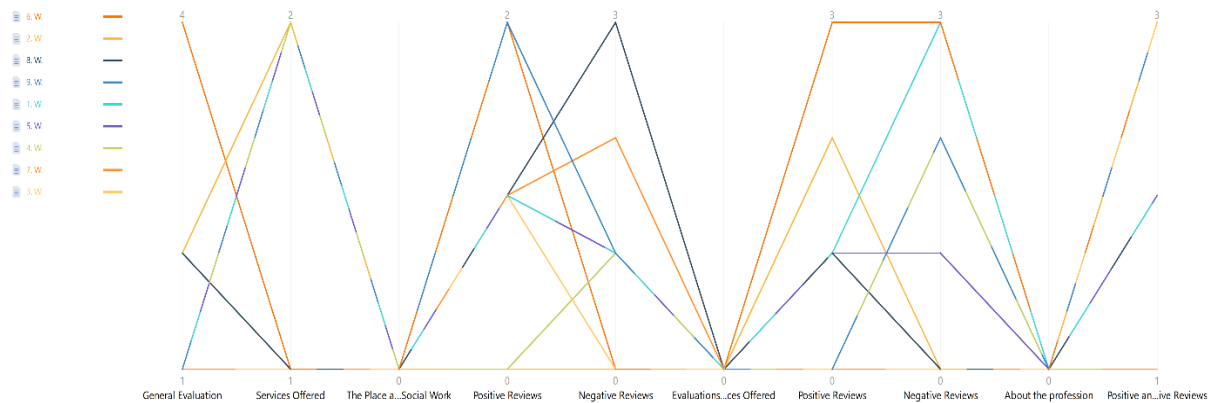


Figure 7. Emphases in participants' statements

An analysis of the main themes and sub-themes using the Maxqda 2024 program reveals that participants' evaluations of the service delivery in metropolitan, district and other municipalities show parallel patterns (See Figure 7).

## Conclusion

Local governments play a crucial role as intermediary institutions in ensuring efficiency, productivity and effectiveness. They facilitate the easy, fast and on-site determination of common needs, service delivery and the promotion of social justice within the democratic framework. Among local government units, municipalities are particularly significant as key representatives and actors of the welfare state. Within their ability to address social problems, local governments play a vital role in preventing and resolving contemporary social issues. Their contributions to social work are substantial, encompassing various services and responsibilities.

As part of the study, interviews were conducted with nine social workers from the Antalya, Kocaeli, Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin, Sakarya and Tunceli municipalities before the 2024 local elections. The research examined the role of local governments in providing social services, with a particular focus on the significance of municipalities. Key aspects explored included social service areas, effectiveness and competence (both from the perspectives of experts and applicants, as well as their impact on the overall well-being of the whole society).

Accordingly, the statement "Social work has an important function and place in municipalities" was frequently emphasized. Except for one participant, all other participants emphasized the "necessity and importance" of social services provided by local governments. The most important factor underscoring the value of these services was the perception that local government units are "fast, efficient, practical, accessible, and closely connected to the public." They were described as being intertwined with the citizens, frequently preferred, and the first point of contact for applicants, due to their deep understanding of regional issues and dynamics as well as their strong representation and influence.

Among the services offered are nursing homes, women's shelters, women's counseling centers, children's homes, kindergartens, homeless shelters, and residential shelters (both temporary and permanent centers). Additional services include disability centers, daily hot meals for disabled and elderly individuals over the age of 65 who are unable to cook at home, diaper assistance, medical supplies for disabled citizens, hygiene parcels and milk card for women. Support for infants includes public milk for babies, diapers, baby formula, baby biscuits, and newborn support packages. Other services provided are marriage packages, disability salaries, home care services, education allowances, and stationery aid, food parcels, furniture, clothing, and groceries. Local government also offer guidance and counseling services, medical aid, education programs, hobby courses, excursions, theater, seminars, and more.

It was emphasized that the scope of services provided differ depending on whether the municipality is a metropolitan, provincial or district-level. In metropolitan municipalities, social services tend to be more comprehensive covering areas such as education, psycho-social support, caregiving, security, socio-cultural activities, protective-preventive measures. In contrast, provincial and district municipalities primarily focus on social aid, such as milk, food parcels, and biscuit aid, which are typically one-time and low budget.

Similarly, social workers in metropolitan municipalities stated that their department has a dedicated social work directorate overseeing multiple service areas. In contrast, those in provincial and district municipalities reported that social service areas are not organized under the specific directorate,

leading to narrower and more limited-service areas. They also noted that they often perform tasks beyond their professional scope, such as food parcel distribution, which significantly impact their job satisfaction and sense of professional fulfilment.

Due to the low budget and short-term nature of the aids provided, applicants may seek support from multiple units. It was emphasized that this situation causes dependency and confusion, making the process tiring and exhausting for applicants. Additionally, in some cases these aid programs may compromise the confidentiality and privacy of the applicants.

Finally, the services provided are not evaluated apolitically by the applicants and there is no integrated data system connecting public institutions and municipalities.

To establish a comprehensive service model in municipalities, an essential representative and complementary body of the central government, it has become increasingly important to revise existing policies based on the knowledge and experience of practitioners. Additionally, services should be delivered in a more coordinated manner, ensuring better collaboration with other units. Developing an efficient electronic data system that simplifies processes without overburdening applicants is a crucial step towards achieving this goal.

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declare that they do not have a conflict of interest with themselves or other third parties and institutions.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval is required for this study. (The ethics committee approval of the study is attached as a pdf. In addition, detailed information on the ethics committee letter is given in the relevant section of the study.)

**Financial Support:** No financial support was received for the study.

### REFERENCES

- Acar, H., Negiz, N., & Akman, E. (2013). *Sosyal Politika ve Kamu Yönetimi Bileşenleriyle Sosyal Hizmet Temelleri ve Uygulama Alanları*. (1 Baskı). Maya Akademi.
- Akdoğan, Y. (1999). Sosyal Belediyecilik, *İstanbul Dergisi*, 29-35.
- Akinboade, O. A., Kinfact, E. C. & Mokwena, M. P. (2012). An Analysis of Citizen Satisfaction with Public Service Delivery in the Sedibeng District Municipality of South Africa. *International Journal of Social Economics*. 39(3): 182-199.
- Artan, T. (2012). *Yerel Yönetimlerde Sosyal Hizmetler*. Sabev Yayınları.
- Ateş, H. (2009). Sosyal Belediyecilik, *Çerçeve Dergisi*, 17(49): 88-95, [http://www.musiad.org.tr/img/yayinlarraporlar/cerceve\\_dergisi\\_49\\_13.pdf](http://www.musiad.org.tr/img/yayinlarraporlar/cerceve_dergisi_49_13.pdf).
- Aysoy, M. (2006). Sosyal Devletin Sosyolojisi. *Sosyal Politikalar Dergisi*, Sayı:1.
- Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., & Orús, C. (2016). City Attachment and Use of Urban Services: Benefits for Smart Cities. *Cities*, 50, 75–81.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp0630a

- Ersöz, H. Y. (2003). Doğuştan Günümüze Sosyal Politika Anlayışı ve Sosyal Politika Kurumlarının Değişen Rolü, *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 53(2): 119.
- Eryılmaz, B. (2001). *Kamu Yönetimi*. İstanbul: Erkam Matbaası.
- Genç, Y. (2009). Yerel Yönetimler ve Sosyal Hizmet Uygulamaları. *Kamu'da Sosyal Politika Dergisi*, 9, 60-67.
- Genç, Y., Çavuşoğlu, O. ve Çöpoğlu, M. (2020). Sosyal Politika Geliştirme ve Sosyal Hizmet Uygulamalarında Yerelleşme: Sakarya Büyükşehir Belediyesi Sosyal Gelişim Merkezi Örneği. *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 20(46): 235-272. <https://doi.org/10.21560/spcd.v20i54504.623297>
- Gendel-Guterman, H. & Billig, M. (2020). Increasing Citizen Satisfaction with Municipal Services: The Function of Intangible Factors. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* (2021), 18:171–186, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-020-00267-y>
- İpek, M. ve Erciyes, C. (2021). İstanbul İlçe Belediyelerinde Sosyal Hizmetler ve Sosyal Hizmet Algısı. *Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet*, 32(1), 1- 22. DOI: 10.33417/tsh.747695
- Kalaycı, S. (2020). *Yerel Yönetimler ve Sosyal Hizmetler*. Çizgi Kitapevi Yayınları.
- Kesgin, B. (2012), Kentsel Yoksulluğa Yönelik Yerinden ve Yerel Müdahale; Sosyal Belediyecilik. *SDÜ Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 26: 69-180.
- Kesgin, B. (2016). Sosyal Hizmetin Yerelleşmesi ve Sosyal Hizmette Yerel Yönetimlerin Artan Rolü. *Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 14(4): 319-340. <https://doi.org/10.18026/cbayarsos.282798>
- Negiz, N. (2011). Sosyal Yardım ve Sosyal Hizmet Faaliyetleri Açısından Isparta Belediyesi: Farkındalık, Yararlanma ve Değerlendirme Açısından Bir Araştırma. *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16(2): 323-341.
- Patton, M. Q. (2018). *Nitel Araştırma ve Değerlendirme Yöntemleri*. M. Bütün, S. B. Demir (Çev. Ed.). 3. Baskı. Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Trydegård, G. B. & Thorslund, M. (2010). One Uniform Welfare State or a Multitude of Welfare Municipalities? The Evolution of Local Variation in Swedish Elder Care. *Social Policy & Administration*, 44 (4): 495–511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2010.00725.x>
- Yay, S. (2014). Tarihsel Süreçte Türkiye’de Sosyal Devlet. *21. Yüzyılda Eğitim ve Toplum*. 3(9): 147-161.