

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

**EVALUATION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF SYRIANS UNDER
TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN TÜRKİYE**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the service delivery of local government units to migrants. In this direction, the study examined analyzed the services provided by the ten provinces with the highest number of Syrians- Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, Konya, İzmir and Ankara Metropolitan Municipalities- based on the data on the website of the Presidency of Migration Management, and subjected them to an evaluation. During the review the services offered by these metropolitan municipalities were reviewed and evaluated through their websites. During the review, services were searched using the keywords “Syrian, migration, migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, and temporary protection.” The results show that since 2011, these ten metropolitan municipalities have provided various services to Syrians, with the nature of these services evolving according to emerging circumstances. In this context, while the services provided in the first years of the arrival of Syrians under temporary protection were mostly aimed at meeting the essential needs of all provinces, the recent services have varied across provinces. However, the review revealed/indicated that these municipalities experience conceptual confusion regarding legal status, as revealed by the website review. Additionally, there is a lack of uniformity in the services provided.

Keywords: Syrians, Metropolitan Municipalities, Service Delivery

JEL Classification: H70, H75, F22

**TÜRKİYE’DE GEÇİCİ KORUMA ALTINDAKİ SURIYELİLERİN
İHTİYAÇLARINI KARŞILAMAYA YÖNELİK YEREL YÖNETİMLERİN
SUNDUKLARI HİZMETLERİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ**

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı yerel yönetim birimlerinin göç eden kişilere hizmet sunumlarını ele almaktır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada Suriyeli göçü özelinde Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı sayfasında yer alan verilerden hareketle Suriyelilerin en çok bulunduğu on il olan İstanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, Konya, İzmir ve Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyelerinin sundukları hizmetler internet sayfalarından 2024 yılı Temmuz ve Ağustos aylarında taranmış ve bir değerlendirmeye tabi tutulmuştur. Tarama yapılırken “Suriyeli, göç, göçmen, mülteci, sığınmacı ve geçici koruma” kelimeleri ile sunulan hizmetler aranmıştır. Sonuç itibarı ile ilgili on büyükşehir belediyesinin 2011 yılından itibaren Suriyelilere çeşitli hizmetler sundukları, sunulan hizmetlerin ortaya çıkan koşullara göre değiştiği görülmüştür. Bu

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kapsamda geçici koruma altındaki Suriyelilerin gelmeye başladıkları ilk yıllarda sunulan hizmetler, ilgili tüm iller kapsamında daha ziyade zaruri nitelikli ihtiyaçları karşılamaya yönelikken son dönem yapılan hizmetlerin ise il bazında farklılık arz ettiği görülmüştür. Bununla birlikte ilgili büyükşehir belediyelerinin özellikle hukuki statü noktasında kavram karmaşası yaşadıkları internet sayfalarında yapılan tarama sonucunda ortaya çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca sunulan hizmetler noktasında da yeknesak bir uygulamanın olmadığı saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeliler, Büyükşehir Belediyeleri, Hizmet Sunumu

JEL Sınıflandırması: H70, H75, F22

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of migration holds a significant place in the history of countries, shaped by its actors, causes, impacts, and consequences. In light of changing conditions, contemporary migrations, both in terms of quality and quantity, have considerably influenced countries' perspectives on migration and migration management, as well as their national policies. Türkiye is one such country that has faced diverse migrations throughout its history, with migration consistently occupying a central place in the national agenda from past to present.

The Syrian migration that began in 2011 marked a new chapter in the country's approach to migration. This wave of migration led to the unification of legal frameworks on migration in Türkiye and fostered institutionalization in managing migration. At this point, central government and provincial units took on significant responsibilities, but the roles and responsibilities of local government units were often overlooked. However, it is well-known that local government units are typically the ones directly interacting with migrants.

This study examines the services provided by local government units to Syrians. The study aims to evaluate the service delivery of metropolitan municipalities in the ten provinces with the highest Syrian populations, based on information gathered from their official websites. Initially, the study provides a detailed conceptual framework on migration and an overview of Türkiye's migration history. It then discusses local governments' service policies related to migration, particularly within the context of legal regulations. Following this, the services offered to Syrians by metropolitan municipalities in the ten provinces, as listed on the website of the Presidency of the Migration Administration were assessed through an analysis of the relevant municipalities' websites.

2. The Importance Syrian Migration in Türkiye's Migration History

The phenomenon of migration, which has existed since the dawn of humanity and encompasses the future, is significant due to its varieties, dimensions, and effects. As in the histories of all countries, migration holds an important place in the history of Türkiye.

2.1. Conceptual Framework of Migration

Migration can be defined as a geographical mobility carried out temporarily or permanently for political, social, economic, environmental, and similar reasons, either within the borders of a country or outside of them. However, it is essential to note that this geographi-

cal movement creates multidimensional effects for individuals, societies, and countries alike. Additionally, throughout history, migration has often been both a cause and a result of social transformation and change processes (Özer & Yıldırım, 2024: 76).

Migration can be classified in various ways. Migrations can be categorized based on their legal status, the individuals' intentions, the destination of the migration, and the reasons for migration. Thus, it is possible to discuss many different types of migration. These types include regular migration, irregular migration, internal migration, external migration, voluntary migration, forced migration, and transit migration. Regular or legal migrations refer to movements that consider the legal regulations of the relevant countries while leaving the country and entering another country. In contrast, irregular or illegal migration signifies movements that disregard these legal regulations. In today's world, irregular migration is particularly prevalent. Internal or national migration refers to movements occurring within a country, often from rural to urban areas, while external or international migration involves moving from one country to another. Voluntary migrations are those conducted entirely at the individual's own will, without any external pressure or coercion, while forced migrations refer to movements that must occur due to pressures such as coercion, violence, or fear (Uzun, 2024: 6; Karakaya, 2020; Taş & Durgun, 2021). Transit migration involves individuals temporarily residing in other countries before reaching their intended destination.

While there are various types of migration, numerous reasons also exist for migration. The first reason is often economic. In particular, it is observed that individuals migrate to achieve better living conditions, earn more income, or obtain better working conditions in cases of internal and voluntary migration. Additionally, lack of job opportunities, absence of economic development, mechanization in agriculture, and division of land through inheritance are economic factors that force individuals to migrate. Social reasons also play a significant role in migration. Individuals may migrate to access better education and healthcare opportunities, improve their social living conditions, or practice their religious beliefs more freely. Political reasons constitute another factor influencing migration, including exchanges, wars, conflicts, oppression, genocides, violence, and changes in national borders. Moreover, environmental factors, such as droughts, natural disasters, and famines, have recently been significant causes of migration (Tamer, 2020: 2811-2013; Adıgüzel, 2018: 45; Yaman, 2019: 20-21).

Regardless of the type, reason, or duration, migration is fundamentally an occurrence centered around individuals. The individuals who migrate are referred to by various names and hold different statuses. National and international regulations significantly influence this. Accordingly, migrants can be referred to as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, or persons under temporary protection. The migrant status encompasses individuals who decide to migrate voluntarily and without any external coercion. Therefore, this concept includes individuals and families who migrate to improve their material and social conditions and increase their future expectations. Refugee status is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention. In the convention, a refugee is defined as "someone who is outside the country of their nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion and is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country or unable to return to it for fear of persecution." The asylum seeker status, while similar to that of a refugee, refers to individuals whose applications for ref-

ugee status have not yet been concluded. Temporary Protection Status is a broad humanitarian measure but is an uncertain status and differs from the “asylum seeker” or “refugee” categories specified in the Geneva Convention (Erdil, 2020; Kök & Güneş, 2017: 191). Temporary Protection Status is a legal mechanism designed to protect individuals whose personal safety is under serious threat and who are forced to flee their countries, allowing for the prevention of humanitarian crises occurring worldwide (Frelick & Kohlen, 1995: 1). This status is especially relevant in cases of mass migration.

Migration has a significant place in the history of all countries. As previously stated, it has the potential to seriously influence countries regarding political, economic, social, security, and demographic issues. In Türkiye’s history, migration has played a crucial role. Since the establishment of the country, it has continuously had to deal with various types of migration.

2.2. Türkiye’s Migration History and Syrian Migration

Türkiye is a country that has been subjected to various types of migration due to its geopolitical position and its location on migration routes. For this reason, it has sometimes received migrants and sometimes sent them away. During the foundation years of the country, there were intensive migrations from the Balkan countries into the country, while in the 1960s, there were migrations outside the country, especially to Germany. It is important to state that internal and external migrations have had a significant impact on Türkiye’s nation-state formation process. There are many reasons for the migrations that occur both internally and externally. Developments, innovations, and reflections of global developments within the country, as well as various problems within the country, have caused migration, while various problems occurring outside the country have also led to migration into the country. Generally, the migrations that have taken place can be subjected to a historical classification. In this context, migrations in Türkiye can be categorized as follows: 1923-1950, 1950-1960, 1960-1980, 1980-2000, and post-2000 (Adıgüzel, 2018; Erdoğan & Kaya, 2015). It is seen that the migrations between 1923-1950 were particularly influenced by the process of nation-state formation, and it is also known that the external migrations during this period were of kinship origin (Cihan, 2024: 2). In this context, the population exchange migration occupies a very important place in the history of the country. In addition, regional problems have also played a role in the migration of kin to the country. In this regard, thousands of people from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania were forced to migrate to the country. During this period, internal migrations also occurred. Most of the migrations were towards Ankara, which became the capital; other reasons such as assignments, marriage, or education also played a role in the small-scale migrations that occurred during the early period (Karadağ, 2024; Özdemir, 2012: 2; Bimay, 2022: 92; Tümtaş & Köse, 2023). However, alongside the mentioned migrations, the Sheikh Said Rebellion occurred in 1925, the Ağrı Rebellion in 1930, and the Dersim Rebellions in 1937, and after these rebellions, resettlement policies and forced relocations were implemented. Thousands of people from the provinces where rebellions broke out, as well as from surrounding provinces, were sent to Western Anatolia (Durgun, 2022: 89). The period between 1950-60 is characterized as a time when internal migrations continued to increase. It is a period when rural-to-urban migration accelerated. The reasons for this can be attributed to industrialization and modernization. Additionally, various migrations arising from regional problems also occurred within the country. During this period, migrations originating from Yugoslavia and Greece were particularly

notable. The period from 1960 to 1980 is significant for Türkiye’s migration outflows. During this timeframe, labor migrations to Germany occurred. The migration of thousands of people was supported with aims such as slowing population growth, reducing widespread unemployment, training qualified labor necessary for industrialization, and reducing social tension (Abadan-Unat, 2017: 131-132; Völker, 1976: 45; Karataş & Ayyıldız, 2021: 479). Migrations caused by regional problems from previous periods continued, albeit to a lesser extent. Internal migration particularly increased from rural to urban areas. The period from 1980 to 2000 was a time when labor migrations changed direction and continued. During this period, migrations from Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Bosnia also occurred. Additionally, after the Gulf War, thousands of people trying to seek refuge from Iraq were transferred to safe areas through the Operation Provide Comfort. Looking at the migrations after 2000, it is observed that the largest wave of migration in the history of the country occurred. This wave of migration is the Syrian Migration that began in 2011.

The events known as the Arab Spring, which also took place in Syria and turned into a civil war, forced Syrians to migrate to many countries, especially neighboring ones. Türkiye is among these countries. The number of Syrians, who initially came to the country as a small group in 2011, is now expressed in millions. The numbers of Syrians under temporary protection status have been specified below over the years.

Table 1: Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Year

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
-	14.237	224.655	1.519.286	2.503.549	2.834.441	3.426.786	3.623.192	3.576.370	3.641.370	3.737.369	3.535.898	3.214.780	3.105.539

Source: <https://www.goc.gov.tr>, accessed from the page. Access Date: 30.07.2024.

Persons coming to the country initially resided in the border provinces and were placed in established accommodation centers. However, it is understood from the data of the Presidency of Migration Administration that a certain number of Syrians now live in all provinces. The ten provinces with the highest number of Syrians are, in order, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, Konya, İzmir, and Ankara (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024).

Syrians who began to arrive in the country in 2011 were initially accepted as guests. Temporary residence permits were granted to those who entered the country legally and applied for residence. As the number of Syrians entering the country increased, a circular was issued in 2012 by the Prime Ministry acknowledging that those who arrived were under temporary protection, under the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles to be Applied to Individual Foreigners Seeking Asylum in Türkiye or Those Arriving in Groups for Asylum (1994 Regulation). However, as the number of arrivals continued to rise, the Law on Foreigners and

International Protection No. 6458 was enacted. Arrangements regarding Syrians were made in accordance with this law, and temporary protection was placed on a legal basis. The temporary protection status applied to Syrians is essentially based on the Temporary Protection Regulation No. 2014/6883 issued under Law No. 6458 (Güneş, 2015: 772; Şimşek, 2018: 377).

The aim of the Temporary Protection Regulation is to establish the procedures and principles for granting temporary protection to individuals forced to leave their countries and unable to return, who come to or cross the borders of the country with the intention of temporary protection, and to outline the rights and obligations of these individuals in the country, as well as the procedures for entry, exit, and duration of stay (Temporary Protection Regulation, Art. 1). Due to the civil war in Syria, people from all age groups have come to Türkiye. Many children, youth, and elderly individuals have left their countries to preserve their lives. According to data from the Presidency of Migration Administration, the largest age groups among the Syrians currently in the country are those aged 0-4 and 5-9. This situation is not only due to the first migration but can also be explained by the high fertility rate after the migration. Furthermore, a significant portion of the total population is under 40 years old, indicating a young population. Additionally, when looking at gender, it is observed that the male population is greater than the female population (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024).

Türkiye provides various forms of assistance and support to Syrians in the country, including shelter, access to basic necessities, education, and healthcare. These aids and supports help to mitigate or eliminate some of the negative effects of migration for Syrians. Migration is not solely an event with negative impacts. However, it is also known that negative effects tend to emerge more prominently during times of mass migration. Moreover, these effects are relevant not only for the migrating individuals but also for the local populations and society as a whole. Indeed, there are several impacts of Syrians under temporary protection on Türkiye from various perspectives, including social, economic, political, and security aspects. Issues such as different languages, different lifestyles, disruptions in education and healthcare services, ethnic and sectarian polarization, and cultural problems, as well as marriages involving Syrians, can be expressed as fundamental negative impacts in a social context. However, these problems can potentially be resolved through proper integration.

In terms of economic impacts, there are problems such as rising rents, increased prices for basic food items, unregistered work, and child labor. On the other hand, it is also seen as a significant advantage that they can fill labor shortages in certain job sectors. Politically, issues concerning citizenship, voting, and access to public services are under discussion. From a security standpoint, there are concerns about the emergence of marginal groups, connections to terrorist organizations, and involvement in crimes related to drugs and prostitution, or being associated with them (Ekici, 2024: 66; Yazıcı, 2024; Doğrul et al., 2023: 123). However, it should be emphasized that all mentioned effects and their sources must be examined as a whole. All resources are interrelated, and finding solutions requires a holistic perspective.

As previously stated, Syrians under temporary protection are spread throughout the country. Various forms of assistance, support, and services are provided to these individuals. While central and provincial organizations play a significant role in general policies and decisions, local governments, especially municipalities, are crucial as they are constantly in contact with these migrating individuals.

3. Migration in the Urban Service Policy of Local Governments

In the management of the post-migration process, local governments are the most important actors after central government and non-governmental organizations. The problems arising from domestic migration are generally due to the insufficiency of economic and physical resources, while social and cultural problems are added in the case of migration following asylum movements. Central governments deal with issues related to sovereignty, such as the entry and settlement of refugees into the country, visas and residence permits, work permits, and citizenship. In contrast, local governments have important responsibilities in the social and cultural dimensions of migration, such as the integration of migrants into society, cultural services, social services, education, and employment (Akman, 2018: 458).

The dominant local government institution in Türkiye is municipalities. Throughout history, municipalities have held an important status in the administrative organization of Türkiye. Although local governments, particularly municipalities, have advantages in solving issues related to migration, there are legislative and financial obstacles to implementing these advantages (Akman, 2018: 459). It is evident that local governments are structures related to public bureaucracy that can directly communicate with migrants and refugees. Local governments, which could directly function in the identification and resolution of problems, cannot find a place for themselves within the centralized migration management system. However, local governments also carry out migration-related activities through “different interpretations” of the legislation (Çevik, 2021: 135).

When examining the legislation governing local governments concerning migration in Türkiye, it is observed that there is no clear expression. Due to the absence of explicit statements, some clauses in legal texts are attempted to be applied to migration through interpretation. Article 13 of the Municipal Law No. 5393 bears the title “Citizen Law.” The provision states, “Everyone is a citizen of the town they reside in. Citizens have the right to benefit from the municipality’s assistance. It is mandatory that the assistance be provided in conditions that do not violate human dignity.” It can be inferred that the term “everyone” also encompasses migrants. When evaluated this way, it follows that municipalities are required to provide necessary assistance to migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, etc., within their borders. Indeed, municipalities provide assistance and services to migrants based on this legal provision. However, the financial situation of the municipalities is crucial here. Municipalities are the most important local government units in Türkiye. Although they are autonomous and have their own budgets, a significant portion of their revenues comes from central budget transfers. Therefore, activities related to migrants constitute an additional financial burden on the municipal budget, leading to financial difficulties for the municipalities.

The provision in Article 14 states, “Municipal services are provided in the closest locations to citizens and by the most appropriate methods. Methods appropriate to the conditions of the disabled, elderly, disadvantaged, and low-income individuals are applied in service delivery.” In this context, the term “everyone” in the citizen law is replaced by “citizens,” and the provision of services to those outside of citizenship is restricted. However, it is clear that the expressions regarding the disabled, elderly, disadvantaged, and low-income individuals open a door to service delivery. This is because among migrants, there may be elderly and disabled individuals, and a significant majority of those coming through forced migration may be

disadvantaged and low-income. Furthermore, Article 38 of the law states, “To use the budget allocation for the poor and needy, to carry out services for the disabled, and to establish a center for the disabled.” This provision also supports the second part of Article 14. Municipalities can indirectly provide services to migrants based on these provisions. However, such a flexible interpretation may not always be accepted in practice. Municipalities are accountable to the central administration and are subject to financial audits conducted by the Court of Accounts. These audits can result in some activities carried out through “interpretation” of various legal regulations being deemed irregular. For example, recently, the meal service provided by the Zeytinburnu Municipality in Istanbul, which has significant activities for migrants and refugees, was considered an irregular expenditure in audits because it was conducted from the municipal budget (Çevik, 2021: 135).

The provisions of Article 14 of the Municipal Law also apply to Article 6 of the Provincial Special Administration Law No. 5302. Article 6 states, “Provincial special administration services are provided in the closest locations to citizens and by the most appropriate methods. Methods appropriate to the conditions of the disabled, elderly, disadvantaged, and low-income individuals are applied in service delivery.” The interpretations made for municipalities are also valid for provincial special administrations. While the term “citizen” restricts the scope of service delivery, the terms “elderly” and “disabled” broaden it in favor of migrants.

The subparagraph (v) of Article 7, titled “Duties and Authorities” of the Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216, states, “To carry out, develop, and establish social facilities for all kinds of social and cultural services aimed at adults, the elderly, the disabled, women, youth, and children, to open and operate vocational and skills training courses, and to cooperate with universities, higher education institutions, vocational schools, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations while providing these services.” The subparagraph (d) related to the duties of district municipalities states, “To provide social and cultural services for the elderly, disabled, women, youth, and children; to open vocational education and skills courses.” It can be inferred from the expressed provisions that there is no distinction made between citizens and foreigners, and the stated services encompass everyone within the municipal borders. Thus, it can be interpreted that migrants within the municipal borders can also benefit from these services, and municipalities can provide services based on these provisions.

The most fundamental text regarding migration is Law No. 6458. Article 96 of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 states, “The General Directorate may plan adaptation activities, benefiting from the proposals and contributions of public institutions and organizations, local governments, non-governmental organizations, universities, and international organizations, in accordance with the country’s economic and financial capabilities, to facilitate the mutual adaptation of the foreign national and the applicant or persons with international protection status to society in our country, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to facilitate independent action in all areas of social life without intermediaries when they are resettled in the country or when they return to their home countries.” There is no clear expression directed towards local governments in this article. In other words, the legal provision does not assign a direct responsibility to local governments regarding migration management. However, reference is made to local governments in terms of cooperation. Moreover, the term “local government” only appears in the stated provision. In this context, it can be inferred that local governments are not prominently featured in migration management.

Despite the ambiguity in the legal framework and the provision of services through the interpretation of laws, concrete matters regarding local governments are included in the Adaptation Strategy Document and National Action Plan published by the Presidency of Migration Administration in 2018, covering the years 2018-2023. A participatory approach was adopted in the preparation of the document, and alongside the central administration, municipalities, NGOs, and international organizations were included in the preparation of the relevant plan. The document states that in addition to meetings held at the central level regarding migration and adaptation, meetings were also conducted at the local level. Local government units, along with the central administration's provincial organization units and NGOs, were present at these meetings. One of the strategic priorities addressed in the document is social cohesion. One of the strategic objectives in line with this priority is to develop coexistence and mutual dialogue at the local level. What needs to be done in this direction is (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024); Making the necessary legal, administrative, and institutional arrangements to strengthen the role of municipalities in social cohesion, Supporting the coexistence of the local population and migrants, it is to strengthen the necessary infrastructure for foreigners to benefit effectively from religious services.

The document outlines necessary steps to achieve the stated strategic aims and objectives, including reviewing local government legislation, making necessary legal changes, organizing workshops at both local and central levels with the participation of municipalities to identify problem areas, adjusting budget allocations based on the ratio of migrants to the local population, increasing information sharing and coordination between governorships and municipalities, establishing various units related to migration and integration in municipalities with high numbers of migrants, raising awareness about migration and integration, employing specialized personnel at the local level to ensure linguistic and cultural development, and organizing events that bring together local residents and migrants (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024).

With the expiration of the 2018-2023 Integration Strategy Document and National Action Plan and in light of changing needs, including the existing six thematic areas (social participation, information, education, health, labor market, and social support services), efforts are underway to prepare a new document coordinated by the Presidency of Migration Administration (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025; Human Rights And Equality Institution of Türkiye, 2024).

Another important document highlighting migration issues and their effects on cities is the 12th Development Plan. Article 138 states, "Türkiye, which has not remained indifferent to humanitarian developments globally and in its region and has extended a helping hand to people under international and temporary protection as it has in the past, is among the countries where forcibly displaced persons seek refuge the most. While the international contributions to cover the high social and economic costs arising from global irregular migration movements, which have high potential to exert pressure on developed countries, remain limited, Türkiye has undertaken significant costs during this process, demonstrating a valuable humanitarian approach. In this context, it is crucial to share the costs of global irregular migration more equitably within the framework of international cooperation, to align migration policies with our country's development goals and priorities in a manner more compatible with social and economic life, and to effectively combat irregular migration."

Article 102 mentions, “The difficulty of access to affordable and reliable housing, spaces for development such as sports and libraries for children and youth, and green areas emerges as significant urbanization problems affecting families. The increase in human mobility, migration, and urban growth complicates participation in social life, highlighting the family’s needs for transportation, health, and security.” Evaluating these statements indicates that local governments have significant responsibilities and emphasizes the need to prioritize local government units in migration management, yet it is noted that these issues are not addressed in the plan. While local governments are included in the plan, there is no mention of local government units concerning migration (Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2024).

As mentioned above, the work of local governments in Türkiye regarding migration has been limited to social assistance. However, local governments are the institutions most affected by the problems arising from the Syrian population in everyday life. It is essential for local governments to undertake work aimed at Syrians to ensure public order, welfare, and safety. In this context, many municipalities in Türkiye also carry out activities for Syrians. However, the lack of legislative and financial support mentioned indicates that municipal leaders act on their initiative to work with Syrians (Akman, 2018: 460).

4. Evaluation of Local Governments’ Services for Syrians: From Theory to Practice

Although there is no clear legal regulation regarding local governments, various initiatives related to migration management have been undertaken by municipalities, which are the most significant local government units. Indeed, this study examines the services provided to Syrians by the 10 cities with the highest Syrian populations, based on data published by the Presidency of Migration Administration —all of which are metropolitan municipalities. The table below shows the 10 cities and the number of Syrians living in each.

Table 2: Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by the Top 10 Provinces

Provinces	Istanbul	Gaziantep	Şanlıurfa	Hatay	Adana	Mersin	Bursa	Konya	İzmir	Ankara
Number of Syrians Living in	530.217	430.176	272.964	255.605	216.334	201.884	171.641	120.585	119.932	89.905

Source: <https://www.goc.gov.tr>, accessed from the page. Access Date: 30.07.2024

As part of the study, the websites of the metropolitan municipalities of the 10 provinces with the highest number of Syrians under Temporary Protection, namely Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, Konya, İzmir, and Ankara, were thoroughly scanned to access the services they provided to Syrians. During the scanning process, the keywords “migration,” “migrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “temporary protection,” and “Syrian” were searched individually on the pages. The information obtained is presented chronologically. It should be noted that the information provided is based on the web page scan and does not cover

services provided by municipalities that were not published. However, municipal websites are particularly important today for ensuring transparency, sharing information, allowing citizens to monitor municipal services, introducing municipalities, and creating a positive image. It would be beneficial for municipalities to pay attention to these aspects.

When scanning the website of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), which hosts the largest number of Syrians, various information related to Syrians was found. First, when looking at the organizational chart of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, it was observed that there is a sub-unit called the Commission for Migration, Migrants, and Refugees under the Assembly Commissions. The services provided by the IMM to Syrians, as obtained from the website, are listed below (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2024):

- In 2013, equipment was allocated to district municipalities hosting Syrians. These districts include İslâhiye, Karkamış, Nizip, Yayladağı, Reyhanlı, Altınözü, Akçakale, Ceylanpınar, and Kırıkhan. The allocated vehicles include patient transport vehicles, garbage trucks, and excavator loaders.
- In 2013, material assistance was provided for Syrians residing in Şanlıurfa and Adıyaman. Thousands of items consisting of 26 different categories were sent to the mentioned provinces.
- In 2014, within the framework of the campaign ‘A Toy from You for Syrian Children,’ toys were collected, and the collected toys were sent to the Turkish Red Crescent General Directorate in Gaziantep.
- In 2014, winter clothing, baby diapers, and strollers were collected through the campaign managed under the slogan ‘Hand in Hand for Our Syrian Brothers.’ The collected aid was delivered to the Turkish Red Crescent directorates in Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep.
- In 2015, a relief campaign was launched under the slogan ‘I’m Cold, Help Me,’ collecting winter supplies, dry food, and hygiene materials for Syrians, which were sent to the Şanlıurfa Logistics Center.
- In 2015, the mayor at that time called for support for Syrians during a speech at the UN summit in New York.
- In 2016, the mayor at that time proposed the establishment of a crisis center to the EU and the UN during a meeting in Ankara with ambassadors on the topic of ‘Solidarity of Local Governments Facing International Refugee Crises.’
- In 2016, the mayor at that time conveyed the importance of opening our doors to Syrians to the consuls general in Istanbul.
- In 2016, the mayor at that time held a meeting with the then United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The main agenda items of the meeting were focused on Syrians.
- In 2019, the mayor at that time announced that a ‘Refugee Desk’ would be established. However, during the web page search, no reference to this unit was found.
- In 2021, a cooperation protocol was signed with the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ). According to this protocol, it was decided that 50% of the international aid would be distributed to Syrians.

- In 2021, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Türkiye representation, aimed at cooperation for individuals under Temporary Protection, international protection applicants and status holders, and asylum seekers.

Looking at the activities described, and the services provided, it has been found that they existed until 2021. It can be said that there has been a stagnation in the process since then. Thus, it has been determined that information has been provided continuously up to this year and that the services rendered have been very diverse. However, it can also be seen that the services provided and the assistance given are carried out through local, national and international dialogue and cooperation. Details of these interactions and collaborations, including who they were conducted with, have been shared on the website. At this point, the existence of inter-actor relations on migration and temporary protection can also be considered an important positive aspect. Furthermore, the establishment of an organisation related to migration is also an important issue. The existence of this organisation also demonstrates the importance the municipality attaches to the issue of migration.

When scanning the website of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, which is the second province with the highest number of Syrians, various information about Syrians was found. First, when looking at the organizational chart of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, it is seen that a Migration Management Branch has been established under the Department of Women, Family, Education, and Social Services. The following information has been obtained regarding the services provided by Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality for Syrians (Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality 2024):

- In 2012, on Teachers' Day, the then mayor met with Syrian teachers. Following that, social activities were carried out.
- In 2012, an information center was established for Syrians. The aim here was to find solutions to the problems faced by Syrians.
- Since 2012, educational services have been provided to Syrian students within the framework of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality's Art and Vocational Training Courses (GAMEK).
- In 2013, the Gaziantep City Council visited the Syrian camps in Nizip to examine all aspects from social life to education, health, and security on-site, and to present reports prepared with the gathered information to the city's authorities.
- In 2013, classes were opened for middle and high school students.
- In 2013, Syrian children were subjected to health screenings.
- In 2013, measles vaccines were administered to Syrian children.
- In 2013, food aid was provided to Syrians.
- In 2013, hot meals were distributed to Syrians every day.
- In 2014, the mayor of the period conveyed the problems and difficulties of Syrians at the Beijing +20 Regional Assessment Meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland.

- In 2014, a zoo trip was organized for Syrian children.
- In 2014, fire training was provided to Syrian children.
- In 2014, a children’s festival service was organized for Syrian students.
- In 2014, “Adaptation and Stress Courses” were organized for Syrians to facilitate their adaptation to Türkiye.
- In 2016, the mayor at the time presented the activities carried out by the municipality for Syrians at an event held in the USA.
- In 2016, the mayor at the time shared information related to Syrians at the 5th United Cities and Local Governments Congress (UCLG).
- In 2016, the mayor at the time provided information about Syrians in Gaziantep at a seminar organized by Minerva, supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, aimed at strengthening the social role of Syrian women refugees in Türkiye.
- In 2016, a Summit on Migration, Culture, and Gastronomy was organized, where the efforts made for Syrians were discussed.
- In 2016, various workshops for children were also organized.
- In 2017, environmental awareness training was provided to Syrian children at the Refugee Support Center.
- In 2017, training was conducted in courses opened under the Social Integration Project for Syrians.
- In 2018, the mayor at the time spoke about migration and Syrians at the European Parliament.
- In 2020, a Workshop on Migration Management was held, aiming to emphasize the importance of inter-institutional information exchange and coordinated efforts.
- GAMEK officials informed parents about the motivation process in children’s education through the seminar they organized.

Looking at the services provided by Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, it is understood from the survey that there has been stagnation since 2020. However, it is also seen that there is a wide variety of services provided. Furthermore, the provision of information regarding Syrians in the international arena also indicates interaction and communication with different actors at this point. The names of these international organisations are also listed on the website. The inclusion of a unit dealing with migration in the organisational chart can also be considered an important positive aspect. This situation demonstrates the importance that the relevant municipality attaches to the issue of migration.

The website of Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality, which hosts the third-largest number of Syrians, was found to lack a search button when it was attempted to be scanned on the subject, similar to the websites of other metropolitan municipalities. As a result, relevant searches could not be conducted. Furthermore, the news, events, and projects sections of the website were scanned for the relevant keywords, but no information was found. Additionally,

no unit related to the topic was accessible in the organizational chart (Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality, 2024). Although it cannot be directly concluded that the municipality in question has not carried out any work for Syrians under temporary protection, it can be said that there are problematic aspects in terms of transparency and accountability. Because nowadays, municipal websites are seen as up-to-date platforms where all municipal services are published. The lack of information here suggests either that the service is not being provided or that insufficient importance is being given to the internet pages.

The website of Hatay Metropolitan Municipality, which hosts the fourth-largest number of Syrians, was scanned on the relevant subject, but no information regarding services for Syrians was found. However, it was determined that in 2021, Republican People's Party (CHP) mayors convened in Hatay, with one of the discussion topics being Syrians. Additionally, looking at the organizational chart on the municipality's website, it was noted that there is a statement indicating "work is in progress." On the other hand, while the units section contains the municipality's service units, there is no unit related to the topic (Hatay Metropolitan Municipality 2024). At this point, a similar comment can be made about Hatay Metropolitan Municipality as for Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality. However, the fact that no information can be found through a search allows for the conclusion that the service is not being provided. Similar situations have been observed in Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality, and similar comments could be made within this municipality.

When the website of Adana Metropolitan Municipality, which hosts the fifth-largest number of Syrians, was scanned, various information related to Syrians was found. First, the website of Adana Metropolitan Municipality includes an organizational chart, which features a unit called the Department of Migration and Refugee Affairs related to the subject. Additionally, the following information regarding services for Syrians was obtained from the municipality's website. However, no date information was found in this information (Adana Metropolitan Municipality, 2024):

- "Turkish, Afghan, Syrian, and Iranian women celebrated International Women's Day on March 8, as reported on the municipality's website, but the content of the news is not accessible.
- Trips have been organized for migrants and the local community, promoting the slogan "No to Violence Against Women."
- Activities in culinary arts have been organized to facilitate the integration of migrants.
- Topics such as gender equality, women's health, and reproductive health have been explained to migrant women.

Although the establishment of a unit within the Adana Metropolitan Municipality to deal with migration is an important issue, it is also possible to say that the services offered are not comprehensive or extensive. Furthermore, the lack of historical information makes it impossible to make a chronological assessment. In this context, it can be argued that the Adana Metropolitan Municipality's website does not contain sufficient information on migration and that the municipality's website is also inadequate in terms of transparency and accountability.

When the website of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, the sixth province hosting the most Syrians, was scanned, various information related to Syrians was found. First, the website of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality includes an organizational chart; however, there is no unit related to Syrians within this chart. However, there is a Social Adaptation Center established under the Directorate of Women's and Family Services and the Directorate of Social Services. Additionally, the following information has been obtained from the municipality's website regarding the services provided to Syrians (Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, 2024):

- In 2022, the Social Adaptation Center began its activities in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since the establishment of the Social Adaptation Center, programs have been organized for children and women. Turkish language training has been provided. Cultural and artistic events have been held. Trainings have been organized in various fields.
- In 2023, a training on gender-based violence, women's reproductive health, and security in relationships was organized in cooperation with IOM. This training was provided to women from both the migrant and local populations.
- In 2024, a "Workshop on Developing Strategy and Action Plans" was held as part of the "Strengthening Civil Participation for the Development of Democratic Local Governance in Türkiye Project," implemented by the UN, with the Turkish Union of Municipalities as the primary beneficiary and the General Directorate of Relations with Civil Society of the Ministry of Interior as the co-beneficiary, funded by the EU. One of the pilot provinces for this project and workshop is Mersin, where the issue of "Migration and Refugees" is one of the main themes.
- In 2024, a "Social Policies Workshop" was organized. One of the topics of the workshop was Syrians under temporary protection. The focus was on cohabitation, the obstacles to it, and proposed solutions.

The Social Integration Centre within the Mersin Metropolitan Municipality can be considered important in the context of integration. Looking at the services offered, it can be seen that activities are mainly focused on educational issues and integration, and that historically, these activities have been carried out over the last few years. This situation indicates that services were not provided during the initial years of migration or that the services provided were not transferred to the website. The relevant municipality remains limited to its website in terms of transparency and accountability.

The website of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality was scanned, revealing various information about Syrians. First, the organizational chart of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality is available, but there is no unit related to Syrians within that chart. The following information was obtained from the municipality's website regarding the services provided to Syrians (Bursa Metropolitan Municipality 2024):

- In 2011, the then mayor visited the tent cities of Altınözü and Yayladağı in Hatay and distributed relief supplies obtained from Bursa.
- In 2011, clothing and toy supplies for Syrian children were sent to the tent cities of Altınözü and Yayladağı in Hatay.

- In 2012, blanket and winter clothing aid was provided. This aid was made to support the relief campaign organized by Uludağ University students.
- In 2012, relief supplies were sent to Syrians living outside the camps. These aids were primarily directed toward the provinces of Kilis and Gaziantep.
- In 2013, the municipality collected two truckloads of aid supplies through an organization organized in partnership with the Humanitarian Relief Foundation. The collected supplies were sent to the camps where Syrians living in Türkiye were staying.
- In 2015, food parcels, clothing, stoves, and coal were provided to Syrian families.
- In 2017, a certification program was organized for the “Turkish Literacy and Vocational Training Course for Syrians Who Have Been Forced to Migrate and Placed Under Temporary Protection,” organized by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Bursa City Council, and the International Middle East Peace Research Association (IMPR).
- In 2018, a health panel for mothers and babies was organized for refugee women as part of the “Safe Space Project for Women and Girls.” This panel was held simultaneously in Istanbul and Izmir.
- In 2022, the municipality continued working on the Resilience in Local Governance Project (RESLOG). Under this project, the “Bursa Together Living Support Program” was prepared, and the municipality received a grant. This project aimed to develop Bursa’s migration master plan and support the integration process.

Looking at the activities of the relevant municipality, it can be seen that activities have been carried out since the first year that Syrians began arriving. However, it is also clear that the services provided in the early days were focused on border areas. It is clear that the services provided cover a wide range and that local, national and international cooperation has been achieved. In this context, it can be said that the relevant municipality attaches importance to the issue of migration and shares information about what is being done on its website.

When the website of Konya Metropolitan Municipality, the eighth city hosting the most Syrians, is scanned, various information regarding Syrians can be found. First, looking at the organizational chart of Konya Metropolitan Municipality, no unit related to migration can be found. The information obtained from the municipality’s website regarding the services provided to Syrians is presented below (Konya Metropolitan Municipality 2024):

- In 2015, a protocol was signed between the municipality and the General Directorate of the Red Crescent regarding the education and social therapy of Syrians.
- In 2016, efforts were made to ensure social integration through EU-supported education programs. In this context, an adult education project was carried out with nine partners from six countries.
- In 2017, a set of books was gifted to Syrian students studying at Temporary Education Centers in collaboration with the municipality and the Provincial Directorate of National Education.
- In 2017, members of the municipality’s Vocational Training Courses (KOMEK) provided children’s shoes, jackets, and similar gifts to current students and Syrian children.

- In 2017, the then-mayor attended the council meeting of the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments held in Barcelona. During this meeting, the refugee issue was also brought to the agenda.
- In 2019, the municipality's youth council implemented the "Will You Be My Brother?" project to facilitate the adaptation of refugee children seeking asylum in Türkiye into society. Various events were held under this project.
- In 2019, activities such as visits to science centers, cinema outings, and picnics were organized for refugee children seeking asylum in Türkiye due to war and various reasons as part of the "Social Integration and Rehabilitation" project for refugees living in Konya. This project was conducted in collaboration with UNHCR.
- In 2020, activities such as psychosocial support, case detection, education, and legal consultancy services were organized for both Syrians and the local community in collaboration with the Red Crescent and the municipality. These activities aimed to promote individuals' social integration and legal rehabilitation.

Konya Metropolitan Municipality has provided services in various areas. It appears that the services provided have been interrupted since 2020. The discontinuation of publishing the services offered on the website after 2020 indicates that the service is either not being offered or that the services offered have not been transferred to the website. Today, the failure to provide service information on websites, which is important in terms of transparency and accountability, constitutes a significant shortcoming. However, as with other municipalities, there are local, national and international collaborations, which are important in the context of migration governance.

When the web page of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, the ninth province hosting the most Syrians, is scanned, various information related to Syrians can be accessed. Firstly, when looking at the organizational chart of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, the Refugee Desk unit, which is under the Department of Urban Justice and Equality, can be found. The information obtained from the municipality's web page regarding services provided to Syrians is presented below (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality 2024):

- In 2020, the İzmir City Council prepared a report on the situation of refugees and migrants during the global pandemic. The report included findings and proposed solutions regarding the needs of refugees and migrants and their access to services.
- In 2021, with the support of UNHCR, an Information Booklet for Municipal Employees regarding Refugees was prepared. The booklet includes information about the rights of refugees in Türkiye and the services provided, common misconceptions about Syrians, the responsibilities of municipalities, civil society organizations to which refugees can be referred, and services provided by İzmir Metropolitan Municipality. This guide lists the services of the metropolitan municipality to which refugees can be referred, including the Milk Baby Project, Soup Kitchen Service, In-Kind Assistance, Temporary Men's Housing, Women's Consultation Center, Shelter, Key Women Studies Holistic Service Center, Children and Youth Centers, Story Houses, Youth and Sports Activities, Libraries, Cultural and Artistic Services, Youth Campuses, Disabled Services, Home Care Services, Funeral

Services, Vocational Training Courses, the Refugee Desk under the Department of Urban Justice and Equality, and the Citizen Communication Center.

- In 2022, during the award ceremony of the national poster competition organized under the slogan “Be a Voice Against Human Trafficking,” the then-mayor participated and made statements regarding migration.

It is important that there is a unit dealing with migration issues in the organisational structure of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality. In addition, a wide range of services have been provided, and centres have been opened, which play an important role in service delivery. However, it is noteworthy that the time frame for service delivery is short. Looking at the municipality’s website, it can be said that its activities are limited, judging by the information on the page, despite the municipality being an important centre for migration issues and conducting significant work in this area.

When the website of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, the tenth province hosting the most Syrians, was scanned, various information regarding Syrians was found. Firstly, the organizational chart of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality is available on the website; however, no unit related to Syrians can be found within the chart. The information obtained from the website regarding the services provided by the municipality to Syrians is presented below (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality 2024):

- In 2020, a “Project for Supporting Refugee Women and Youth” was implemented in collaboration with the municipality and the UN Population Fund. This project established a support center for women and youth.

It appears that information regarding the services provided by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality is very limited. The fact that the municipality, which has a long history as a major city, devotes very limited space on its website to services related to migration can be explained either by the inadequacy of the municipality’s activities in this area or by the failure to give the website the attention it deserves. What is noteworthy here is that, as in other municipalities, there is cooperation in this area.

A general overview of the services provided to Syrians by the above-mentioned municipalities shows that services have been provided since the first years of the arrival of Syrians and that most municipalities continue to provide these services in a differentiated and diversified manner today.

5. Conclusion and Evaluation

Like many countries around the world, migration in Türkiye has significant impacts, leading to important outcomes for central government, provincial organizations, and local governments. The Syrian migration that began in 2011 has led to a new chapter in the country’s migration history. The Syrian migration has brought about legal unity in migration legislation and institutionalisation in the field of migration. At this point, the central government and provincial units have taken on important responsibilities. The duties and responsibilities of local government units in this regard have been overlooked. However, it is well known that local government units are the ones that deal directly with migrants. In this context, the importance of local government units, which are more closely connected with the public, cannot be denied.

The role of local governments in migration and its management in Türkiye is ambiguous. Nevertheless, local government units offer a variety of services to migrants. The influx of Syrian migrants that began in 2011 is an important example that can be addressed in this context.

In this study, the services provided to Syrians by the metropolitan municipalities in the ten provinces with the highest Syrian populations have been evaluated. As a result of the scanning conducted on the websites of the relevant metropolitan municipalities, the following assessments can be made within the framework of the information stated above.

- Firstly, there appears to be a conceptual confusion regarding the legal status of Syrians under temporary protection. It has been identified that the terms migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker are used concerning Syrians. While the conceptual confusion in the initial years of the influx of Syrians may be understandable, the legal status of Syrians was clarified in 2013 with Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation. However, it is still observed that various designations for Syrians appear on the websites of relevant municipalities. Indeed, the names used by each municipality in their services are directly included in the study. This situation can be expressed as a significant deficiency of the relevant metropolitan municipalities. At this point, raising awareness within public administration (central, provincial, local) and among citizens becomes crucial.
- Among the relevant metropolitan municipalities outside the border area, it has been determined that the services provided by the metropolitan municipalities of Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa were primarily aimed at the provinces in the border region during the initial period. These provinces include Kilis, Hatay, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa. The initial settlement of incoming Syrians in the border region and their placement in camps there has contributed to the development of the situation in this manner.
- When looking at the relevant metropolitan municipalities as a whole, it is observed that the services offered in the early years were aimed at meeting essential needs, while later on, services aimed at integration and adaptation were provided. Recently, it has been noted that information has been shared regarding integration, services provided, and issues related to Syrians on the international stage. Given the 13-year history of migration concerning Syrians, it is evident that this situation should be considered normal.
- A notable issue is the lack of uniform application in the services provided by the relevant metropolitan municipalities to Syrians. This situation can be attributed to gaps in the legal framework and the ambiguity surrounding the position of local government units regarding migration.
- Among the mentioned metropolitan municipalities, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Bursa, and Konya have been identified as providing a more intense service delivery compared to other relevant metropolitan municipalities, and they announce these services on their websites.
- A unit related to migration or Syrians has been established in the relevant metropolitan municipalities of Istanbul, Gaziantep, Adana, Mersin, and Izmir. No such unit has been found in other metropolitan municipalities. This situation can be seen as a deficiency for the relevant metropolitan municipalities. It is important for local government units, which

constantly interact with migrants, to establish a unit focused on migration, and it can be stated that municipalities have been delayed in this regard. However, in Türkiye, which is continually exposed to migration, the legal and institutional arrangements regarding migration, established in 2013, can also be seen as a delayed application. Additionally, the lack of clarity regarding the role and position of local government units in migration management can also be regarded as a reason for the deficiencies in local-level organization.

In light of the evaluations made, it can be stated that the relevant metropolitan municipalities have undertaken significant work in providing services to Syrians. However, it is also clear that there are several deficiencies. It is important for local government units, particularly municipalities, to clarify their positions regarding migration and migration management, especially in our country, which is continuously exposed to migration. The clarity of how services will be provided and how financing will be secured is closely related to this issue. Furthermore, given the advancements in information and communication technologies and the importance of websites today, it is crucial for municipalities to use their websites more actively and to make them more user-friendly.

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There are no conflicts of interest among the authors of this article.

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