

# SYRIAN MIGRATION AND MUNICIPAL EXPERIENCES IN TURKEY INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SERVICES

Bursa, Kocaeli, Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli, Şahinbey

Compiled by

**Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kaya**

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Local Governance and Migration Series

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**2021**

**ISBN:** 978-91-986575-1-7 (Online PDF Version)

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**Graphic Design**

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**The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions** (SALAR, SKR with its Swedish acronym) is a member organization for all of Sweden's municipalities, country councils and regions. SALAR, and its predecessors, has existed for over 100 years and strives to promote and strengthen local self-government and the development of regional and local democracy. Due to the global nature of challenges that municipalities face today, SALAR is also an important actor at the international arena of local governments. It is active in the global organization for municipalities, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), in its European branch, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and as the secretariat for the Swedish delegations to the EU Committee of Regions and for the Council of Europe Local and Regional Congress.



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SKL International has been operating in Turkey for over twenty years with the Turkish-Swedish Municipal Partnerships Network Project (TUSENET), Turkish-Swedish Partnership for Local Governance (TUSELOG) and ongoing Resilience in Local Governance Project (RESLOG Turkey). In this scope, SKL International supports municipalities and municipal unions in Turkey and also contributes to the establishment of permanent relations and cooperation between the local governments in these two countries.

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**SKL  
International**



**Union of Municipalities  
of Turkey**



**Çukurova  
Municipalities Union**



**Marmara  
Municipalities Union**



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**We express our sincere thanks to the Pilot Municipalities for their dedication in this process.**

## **ÇUKUROVA REGION**

Adana Metropolitan Municipality

Hatay Metropolitan Municipality

Mezitli Municipality

Reyhanlı Municipality

Sarıçam Municipality

Seyhan Municipality

## **MARMARA REGION**

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality

Orhangazi Municipality

Osmangazi Municipality

Sultanbeyli Municipality

Şişli Municipality

Zeytinburnu Municipality

SYRIAN MIGRATION AND MUNICIPAL  
EXPERIENCES IN TURKEY  
INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SERVICES

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## Acknowledgments

The RESLOG team sincerely thanks the mayors of Bursa and Kocaeli metropolitan municipalities, and İstanbul Esenyurt, İstanbul Sultanbeyli, and Gaziantep Şahinbey district municipalities, together with all the municipal officials who embarked on this journey with us, and willingly contributed and wholeheartedly supported us in writing this book. We especially thank Pelin Feymi (Bursa Metropolitan Municipality), Yusuf Gündoğdu, Erkan Dakdevir (Esenyurt Municipality), Merve Erarslan (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality), Cansu Mirzanlı (Sultanbeyli Municipality) and Ercan Kılınç (Şahinbey Municipality), who collaborated with us throughout the project, and wrote their municipal success stories for this publication.

# Resilience in Local Governance Turkey Project (RESLOG Turkey)

## M. Sinan Özden

RESLOG Turkey Project  
National Project Manager

The local governments of Turkey and Lebanon have been impacted by the unexpected and massive wave of migration resulting from the Syrian civil war. As a result, it has become necessary to strengthen the resilience\* of local governments in accordance with the principles of peace and inclusiveness.

RESLOG (Resilience in Local Governance) 2018-2020, is a project implemented in these two countries which have been impacted by the Syrian Migration Crisis, with the initiative of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), financed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and funded by the Swedish Government. RESLOG Turkey is conducted with the cooperation and project partnership of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Union of Municipalities of Turkey, Marmara Municipalities Union, and Çukurova Municipalities Union. In total, 12 pilot municipalities from Marmara and Çukurova regions are included in the Project. RESLOG is a pioneer in the prioritisation of the involvement of regional municipal unions in strengthening local governance.

The Project is a part of the efforts of local governments and local government organizations in the face of intense, rapid and unexpected migration. In this regard, RESLOG Turkey aims to contribute to national migration policies that reflect local realities and needs, to strengthen inter-municipal learning and support structures through regional associations, and to improve holistic planning and governance at municipal level.

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\* Resilience is the ability to withstand destructive effects and return life to normal. Resilience is defined as the ability of a substance or system to return to its original form and position after a problem or deformation.

## Preface

### M. Sinan Özden

RESLOG Turkey Project  
National Project Manager

RESLOG Turkey attaches significant importance to the development of an information base for local governments. For almost 10 years, since the beginning of the migration flow from Syria to Turkey, Turkish municipalities have been working to meet humanitarian needs while making great efforts to keep cities prosperous and develop them in the face of this unexpected and massive population increase. They are praised and considered successful in the international arena as well.

We believe that this experience should be recorded and shared. Throughout this process, our municipalities have sought right answers to many questions on the practical issues. For this reason, we have planned a series of 12 meetings called “Knowledge Generation Meetings” and a book series under the name Local Governance and Migration covering the meeting outputs, to provide a discussion platform on innovative topics and an information base for municipalities to facilitate their participation during their intensive efforts.

Marmara Municipalities Union has been conducting highly competent work for strengthening the information base on local governance and hosting our meetings held every two months.

I hope that after the completion of the RESLOG Project, these meetings and publications, aiming at facilitating access to information in Turkey as well as saving and disseminating the information produced within the municipalities, will be continued as a tradition with the contribution of both our municipalities and municipal unions.



## Foreword

### Local Governance and Migration Book Series

#### Gül Tuçaltan, PhD

RESLOG Turkey Project

National Project Coordinator

Developmental Editor of the Local Governance and Migration Book Series

For the last decade, the local governments in Turkey have had to produce immediate solutions for a number of increasingly varying urban and social problems. The first test of local governments was to welcome a fragile population forced to reside in a foreign country and to coordinate humanitarian aid services at the local level. In this process, as a natural consequence, the immigrants and refugees with a different language and culture have become part of the labor market and everyday life. This has made municipalities the main actors in two challenging issues: infrastructure planning for the growing population and identification of the services needed to live together with different cultures and to ensure and maintain social harmony. However, the municipalities' radius of action has been restricted due to the limited financial resources, personnel inadequacies, national migration policies focusing on strategies at the national government level rather than local governments' needs in the fields of migration and urbanization, and uncertainties related to the ongoing migration crisis (for example, Turkey cannot predict whether there will be a new mass migration in the near future or not).

In brief, the international mass migration and the Syrian refugee crisis have resulted in fundamental demographic, social, cultural and ecological changes in urban areas and also created the need for re-addressing the matters of urbanization, infrastructure, municipal service delivery and urban planning. In order to manage these multilayered and complex processes and respond to migration-related urban problems, municipalities need new tools for information, skills and implementation enabling them to understand their existing working area and to produce innovative solutions with limited resources within this area as the traditional tools and understanding we have used to date for urban planning are no longer sufficient to understand, handle, and change this unstable situation.

At this point, this series created within the “Knowledge Generation and Dissemination for Policy and Planning Activities” as part of the RESLOG Turkey Project is designed to address these exact needs of the municipalities. RESLOG Turkey Local Governance and Migration Series consists of 12 original publications at the intersection of migration, urban planning and local governance, aiming to blend the existing knowledge in these fields with new approaches that may have a positive impact on the perspectives and practices of local decision-makers.

The publications focus on three main areas. In other words, this series includes three groups of books. The first group of books includes Turkey’s experiences related to migration, basic concepts about migration and local governance, existing approaches and the false facts in these fields. Regarding the refugee crisis, we present in this group the financial problems encountered by municipalities in the provision of inclusive services, the resource management models and alternative funding sources for these problems, as well as the challenges faced by the municipalities in their practices related to migrants and refugees within the scope of human rights and the legal framework and certain information on administrative jurisdiction, supervision and the regulations of other institutions. This group also includes the books about urban profiling as an effective tool for data collection to identify spatial, social and economic changes (such as housing, infrastructure, health, education, open green spaces, etc.) experienced by the municipalities affected by migration and to map this data in order to relate them to development, spatial and urban planning, and books on the generation of concrete and feasible solutions for the improvement of municipal services. The issues addressed in this group of books also outline the interventions and practices of municipalities in the field of migration and local governance and identify their fields of work.

The second group of Local Governance and Migration books aims to introduce to the municipalities new approaches and intervention tools related to local governance used around the world and in Turkey. In this group, we provide information to our municipalities on governance of diversity for the construction of fair and egalitarian cities comprising all social groups; preparation of the migration master plans to make

the municipalities, prepared against the ongoing or potential effects of migration, and the disaster risk reduction approach which can be integrated into all stages and fields of local governance, addressing the recovery and transformation of urban systems.

The third group of books focuses on practical experiences of Turkish municipalities. In this group, those municipalities share their everyday experiences in the areas of humanitarian aid, urban planning and infrastructure management, use of the potential created by migration, and development of alternative financing, in the context of inclusive service provision, despite the increasing population, potential financial limitations and personnel inadequacies. The authors of these publications are the municipalities themselves. Thus, this group of RESLOG Turkey Local Governance and Migration books supports the mechanisms for municipalities to produce and disseminate knowledge in their fields of work.

The approach summarized above is an output of the in-depth interviews with the relevant units of the project partners, namely Turkish, Marmara and Çukurova Municipalities Unions, the problem and needs analyses conducted together with the pilot municipalities under the Project, and the interviews with experts involved in both professional and academic activities in the field. In particular, I express my sincere thanks to Ms. Merve Ağca, Migration Policy Expert of the Marmara Municipalities Union, for her valuable contribution in the process of identifying themes and for our long-term exchange of ideas.

The RESLOG Turkey team believes that the Local Governance and Migration publications will contribute to the development of the intellectual and practical basis needed for the local decision making and planning mechanisms as a prerequisite for inclusive and peaceful service delivery. We hope that our publications can provide the municipalities with insight into what approaches should be adopted for addressing the issue of migration from an urban perspective.



## INTRODUCTION: SYRIAN MASS MIGRATION AND INCLUSIVE MUNICIPAL SOCIAL SERVICES

This series of publications by the Resilience in Local Governance Project (RESLOG Turkey), resulted from extensive cooperation with three groups of metropolitan and district municipalities. The first book focused on municipalities which responded successfully to mass migration in general. In this book, the second group share success stories which focus on the services they provided for Syrian migrants. In the third book, the third group tell the stories of their success in facilitating social cohesion between Syrian migrant and local communities.

Since the first years of the Syrian mass migration, Bursa and Kocaeli metropolitan municipalities, and Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli and Şahinbey district municipalities achieved notable success in providing services for migrants. This book shares the stories of how they responded, and provided relevant and effective services, using an inclusive and social approach. However, these good practice examples are not generally known or recognized, and this study aims to present and promote these practices nationally and internationally.

Each section begins with the municipality's historical experience of migration, as the background to their efforts in responding to the Syrian mass migration, followed by demographic information, and an account of the services offered to the Syrians. They also share how they cooperated with other local, national and international actors and the migrants themselves to address the needs of the Syrian and local communities, plus a unique story written or related by an appointed official.

These municipalities developed new organizational skills, capacities, and joint projects to respond to the social, economic, cultural and practical challenges and problems of mass migration, and experience in responding effectively to the needs of rapidly increasing migrant populations. As municipalities governing some of Turkey's most highly populated cities and districts, their resilience and innovative solutions, their stories contain valuable lessons for other municipalities facing mass migration challenges, in Turkey and elsewhere.

Migration Processes and Demographic Information

Official data shows that in March 2020, approximately 1.5 million of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey were the in cities of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Şanlıurfa and Mardin, all located along the Syrian border, though many Syrians had migrated to the larger industrialized cities to the west, especially after 2015.

The table below shows that Syrians in Turkey tend to migrate internally, with İstanbul, Adana, Bursa, Mersin, İzmir, Konya and Kocaeli as industrialized cities being the main centers of attraction. In March 2020, these six cities hosted a total of 1.39 million Syrian migrants.<sup>1</sup> The cities of municipalities involved in the RESLOG Project are home to nearly 2.9 million Syrians, or over 80% of all Syrians in Turkey.

City	November 2014	July 2017	March 2020
İstanbul	330.000	495.027	496.485
Gaziantep	220.000	336.929	450.031
Hatay	190.000	397.047	438.741
Şanlıurfa	170.000	433.856	422.729
Mardin	70.000	96.062	88.062
Adana	50.000	165.818	246.462



1 A consensus is yet to be reached on the definition of Syrians in Turkey. On account of the geographical limitation it imposes to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Turkey grants refugee status only to individuals coming from the European borders. For the Geneva Convention, see: [http://www.danistay.gov.tr/upload/multecilerin\\_hukuki\\_durumuna\\_dair\\_sozlesme.pdf](http://www.danistay.gov.tr/upload/multecilerin_hukuki_durumuna_dair_sozlesme.pdf). The term 'migrant' in this book is used as defined by the United Nations: "A migrant is an individual who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate". However, common usage includes short-term temporary migrants such as seasonal farm-workers. For more information on the UN definition of migrant, see: Glossary on Migration, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf) Accessed on July 23, 2020.



City	November 2014	July 2017	March 2020
<b>Kilis</b>	49.000	127.175	112.192
<b>Mersin</b>	45.000	153.976	210.623
<b>Konya</b>	45.000	79.139	113.736
<b>Kahramanmaraş</b>	44.000	93.408	92.293
<b>Bursa</b>	20.000	114.498	175.649
<b>Batman</b>	20.000	20.181	15.118
<b>Şırnak</b>	19.000	15.080	14.973
<b>Kocaeli</b>	15.000	34.957	55.183
<b>İzmir</b>	13.000	113.460	146.352
<b>Osmaniye</b>	12.000	46.157	49.544
<b>Antalya</b>	10.000	458	2.199
<b>Kayseri</b>	9.500	62.645	75.806
<b>Diyarbakır</b>	5.000	30.405	22.881
<b>Adıyaman</b>	2.500	27.084	21.688
<b>Samsun</b>	1.230	4.540	6.687
<b>Niğde</b>	1.100	3.848	5.192
<b>Aydın</b>	1.000	8.806	7.849

Table 1: The numbers of Syrians in selected Turkish cities<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the updated statistical data about the number of Syrians under temporary protection see the official website of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

Cities on the border such as Gaziantep, which host large numbers of Syrians in proportion to their native populations, have struggled to access additional resources from central government to meet their growing responsibilities. Yet despite financial hardship, the border cities have managed to handle the mass migration quite successfully, using their past experience, limited resources and solution-oriented approaches to provide services for the Syrians.

Although many municipalities have done well in providing services for the Syrians, this was little-known until recently. Knowledge and experience dating back centuries certainly contributed to their success, as most Turkish cities have received migrants of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds throughout history.

In this book, we asked our stakeholders to focus on their achievements and how they attained them, rather than on their problems, as there are several studies and needs analyses that identify migration-related problems, including those conducted by the RESLOG project.<sup>3</sup> Documenting the successful practices of municipalities in Turkey is rare, though the value of telling success stories and sharing positive examples and good practices is increasingly recognized.

## The Storytelling Method

This book presents the success stories as narratives related by our municipal stakeholders. We know the RESLOG municipalities, and that they have numerous stories to share which give insight into the life, values, history of our people, and our traditions of tolerance, acceptance and respect for the rights of others, including migrants.

We all grew up with fairy tales and stories, and these intriguing stories helped us to understand life, moral values and how to communicate with others. Stories also connect our past experiences to the present, and as they are pictorial and involve our emotions, they are memorable,

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3 For more information about the RESLOG documents see <http://www.reslogproject.org/en/publications/>



interesting, and often instructive.<sup>4</sup> The stories told by the municipalities in this book in the context of migration have heroes and messages worth sharing with others.

Each municipality set an example by working in cooperation with other organizations, by striving to realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), and by successfully providing services to the Syrian migrants using its own resources and holding to the principle of fellow citizenship in Turkish Municipal Law.

Storytelling reveals and communicates the rich elements of actual, lived experiences.<sup>5</sup> Our project partners reflected upon and wrote about their experiences, including the human element of personal values and feelings, as well as their services and the positive changes that resulted in the lives of the beneficiaries.

Storytelling enabled our stakeholders to share the human side of their projects and policies, and we assisted them by providing a guidebook and online webinar on storytelling. We engaged in two-way communication with our stakeholders, and the process involved a great deal of consultation. Despite limitations due to the pandemic, our project partners were enthusiastic and supportive in sharing their voluntary contributions to this book. Other municipal actors, civil society representatives and migrants also supported and were included in the process. This book makes these success stories known, as good practice examples that can assist others in Turkey and elsewhere to respond to mass migration.

## Key Elements in Storytelling

We selected the content of the stories in consultation with our stakeholders, and the approach which emerged focuses on cities' historical relationship with migration and migrants, and shares individual experiences and stories of hope.

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<sup>4</sup> Gadinger, et.al., 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Linda & Adorisio, 2009.



We believed that it was important for our stakeholders to share their history, as a key factor that has enabled Turkish society and government to respond successfully to the Syrian migration. Sharing individual experiences of hosts and Syrian migrants enhanced the stories. This included sharing the sense of cultural and religious belonging in their host cities that emerged among the Syrians, the social networks they have established, and the rights-based approach adopted by host municipalities, which emphasized the principle of fellow citizenship.

Telling these stories is important, as the world is largely unaware of Turkey's success in dealing with mass immigration, relative to examples in other countries. Our stakeholders wrote positive stories that give hope for the future. If we go beyond the statistics and listen to their stories, migrants give us hope, and plant the seeds of a better future in our consciousness. We all agreed that stories, films, advertisements, photographs, dances and other cultural, literary and artistic activities that speak of hope are much needed in these troubled times.

Our municipalities worked with great devotion and in close cooperation with the RESLOG team throughout, despite of the inconveniences imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. We were truly inspired by their contributions, recommendations and questions during our collaboration in preparing this book, and we learned a great deal from them. Rather than us drafting a book with pre-defined boundaries for them, we developed it together, and they made an invaluable contribution. The only requirement was to use the storytelling method, with mutual interaction and consultation. We believe this was successful, although the COVID-19 Pandemic prevented us from organizing the planned face-to-face meetings, workshops and focus groups. We aim to complete the process via online meetings, discussions, and consultations, and communication via telephone and email.

## **The Mass Migration of Syrians to Turkey**

The migration of millions of Syrians to Turkey due to the Syrian civil war and its worsening human rights violations made Turkey the country hosting the largest refugee population in the world by 2015, which it still is in 2020. In August 2020, the total number of refugees in Turkey was



over 4 million, including 3,605,152 Syrians under temporary protection.<sup>6</sup> Turkey has largely used its own resources to assist the migrants, though significant international financial aid has been provided, particularly by the EU.

The mass migration of Syrians to Turkey has been described as a ‘crisis’ from the start. Many recall the photograph of a Turkish coast guard carrying the tiny body of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy washed up on a beach in Bodrum in 2015, which catalyzed international awareness of Turkey’s “refugee crisis”.<sup>7</sup> Refugees or asylum seekers who reached Europe in growing numbers strengthened extreme right wing populism, especially in Germany, Sweden, France and the UK.<sup>8</sup> Germany and Sweden were countries of choice, as they offered refugees better opportunities, and many had relatives and social networks, which attract and support migrants, and speak their language.<sup>9</sup>

Migrants also follow in the footsteps of others and seek existing social networks in Turkey. In August 2020, there were 506,301 Syrians in İstanbul, about 90% of them being Arabic speaking Sunnis from Aleppo. Migrants naturally prefer to settle in neighborhoods where they have friends or relatives. Historically, Aleppo was the Ottoman Empire’s third biggest cosmopolitan city after İstanbul and İzmir, and Aleppo has historical, cultural, social, religious, commercial and even political ties with Anatolia and İstanbul.<sup>10</sup>

These historical relationships and transnational social networks are key elements that define migration routes. Thus, contrary to EU public opinion, many Syrians want to stay in Turkey and return to Syria when the war ends, rather than move to Europe. While some Syrians may stay in Turkey, many are reportedly keen to return to their homeland.<sup>11</sup>

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6 For detailed, up-to-date statistics, see the website of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM): <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecicikoruma5638>

7 For photos depicting Aylan Kurdi’s body washed up ashore, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees> Accessed on August 13, 2020

8 Kaya, 2019

9 Hear, 1998; Hear, 2004.

10 Kaya, 2016; Kaya & Kırac, 2016.

11 For relevant studies, see Fabbe, et al., 2017; Kaya & Kırac, 2016.

Recent studies show that only 2 to 5% of all Syrians want to move to Europe, which indicates that most Syrians in Turkey are content with the services they receive from Turkish municipalities.

Unlike EU countries, Turkey does not define the Syrian migration as a crisis, though daily life for Syrians living in Turkey is far from problem free. Over a period of nine years, a number of tensions and conflicts between the Syrians and native populations were observed.<sup>12</sup> Despite being largely overlooked by the mainstream media, these are often covered in local and social media. Public institutions including municipalities, NGOs, political parties, and the media thus need to avoid discourse that may trigger social tension and conflicts involving the Syrians.

Mass migration to Turkey since 2011 has created challenges in terms of developing and implementing regulations and policies. However, the prevailing view among municipalities is that international migration contributes to socio-economic, cultural and intellectual wealth rather than threatens national security, and Turkey has embraced a combination of developmental and protectionist approaches regarding migration, the latter evidenced by its military intervention to create a safe zone along the border in northern Syria.<sup>13</sup>

The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No 6458) of 2013 takes this approach. The Regulation on Temporary Protection of October 2014<sup>14</sup> is based on the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Turkey strives to formulate best practices with regard to migration management by continuously revising its policies. Multi-faceted processes of migration management drive policy discussions in a complex and often politically sensitive context. Inclusive policy-making is thus of critical importance for adopting and implementing effective

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12 Recently, we have seen an increase in the number of studies focusing on the growing tension between the native population and the Syrians in different cities, and possible solutions. See International Crisis Group (ICG), 2018; Mackreath & Sağın, 2017; Herwig, 2017.

13 Kaya & Erdoğan, 2015.

14 For the full text of the Regulation on Temporary Protection, see <https://www.refworld.org/docid/56572fd74.html>.



policies that will ensure integration and social cohesion between host and migrant communities. The quality of the services provided by municipalities to the Syrian migrants is also critical in this regard.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015<sup>15</sup> guide the work of governments, municipalities, NGOs and international development organizations regarding ecological, economic and social development and gender equality. This vision and its goals directly concern migrants, refugees and disadvantaged social groups on a local level, in terms of healthy urban environments, adequate education, employment opportunities and decent living conditions. The municipalities covered in this book have worked hard and provided services to meet the UN SDGs to the extent possible.

They are also guided by the principle of ‘fellow citizenship’ in Article 13 of the Municipal Law, and strive to provide services equally to non citizens. Migration due to civil war has pushed most Syrians into extreme poverty, and this, plus war and migration related trauma and language difficulties puts them in an extremely vulnerable position, and makes many increasingly introverted.<sup>16</sup>

Municipalities thus need to proactively develop policies and services to address the problems confronted by the Syrians. In order to overcome preconceived opinions among the native population regarding the Syrians, they need to develop, in cooperation with the field offices of the Directorate General of Migration Management, an effective communication strategy to ensure that Turkish citizens are informed more accurately about the Syrians. The municipalities covered in this book offer Turkish language courses to overcome communication difficulties, which are a key cause of social tension. RESLOG municipalities have also developed other services and projects that help Syrians become active members of society, rather than passive aid dependent victims.

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15 For detailed information on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recommended by the United Nations, see <https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/tr/home/sustainable-development-goals.html> Accessed on June 27, 2020

16 Erdoğan, 2015.

Turkey has experienced other significant migrations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, forced migrants arrived in the Ottoman Empire en masse due to wars, uprisings, ethnic conflicts, the emergence of nation states, and the expansionist policies of great powers such as Russia. By the end of the century, migrants numbered hundreds of thousands, or even millions,<sup>17</sup> which brought changes in migration and settlement policies, and in the political, economic, social, cultural and demographic structure of the Ottoman Empire.

These changes progressed in parallel with modernization, constitutionalization and economic liberalization following the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict in 1839. While migration to Anatolia continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, before and after the proclamation of the republic, Armenian, Greek and Syriac groups left Turkey *en masse*. The processes leading to the emergence of nation states generally involve demographic and cultural homogenization<sup>18</sup>.

On the other hand, after World War II, large numbers of Turks migrated as guest workers to Western European countries, and subsequently, to Arabic Gulf countries. Following the negative developments that occurred in Bulgaria in the final years of the Cold War, hundreds of thousands of people of Turkish and Muslim origin migrated to Turkey after 1989.<sup>19</sup> In 1991, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people were forced to migrate to Turkey to escape the political repression of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. In 1993, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians fled the oppression of the Serbians to seek refuge in Turkey. Having faced mass migration on many occasions throughout its history, Turkey has responded in an accommodating manner on each such occasion.

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17 Karpas, 2015.

18 For a detailed discussion on the matter, see Anderson, 2009; Gellner, 2008; Hobsbawm, 2010.

19 Kirişçi and Karaca, 2015.



## Migration and Municipal Legislation

In the past decade, the role of local actors in managing migration has far surpassed that of international and national actors.<sup>20</sup> The concept of local focus was introduced in migration studies to emphasize that the local administrations need to assume more active roles in migration management.<sup>21</sup> Local administrations world-wide have become more active in managing migration, and various international local government networks support this, in line with the UN SDGs, which they have adopted.

The role of Turkish municipalities in migration management gained further prominence with the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement of March 2016,<sup>22</sup> and has certain unique aspects. For instance, the principle of *fellow citizenship* in Article 13 of Turkish Municipal Law requires that municipalities provide services to meet the needs of all people living in their territories.

### Article 13

Everyone is a fellow citizen of the city which he resides in. Fellow citizens shall be entitled to participate in the decisions and services of the municipality, to be informed about municipal activities and to benefit from the aids of the municipal administration. Aid shall be extended in such a way so as not to hurt human dignity. The municipality shall perform necessary activities to improve the social and cultural relations between the fellow citizens and to preserve cultural values. While performing these activities, it shall take measures to enable participation of the universities, professional organizations public institution status, trade unions,

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<sup>20</sup> Scholten & Penninx, 2016

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the concept of 'local focus', see Scholten & Penninx, 2016

<sup>22</sup> For detailed information on the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement, see [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/18\\_mart\\_2016\\_turkiye\\_ab\\_zirvesi\\_bildirisi\\_.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/18_mart_2016_turkiye_ab_zirvesi_bildirisi_.pdf) Accessed on July 23, 2020

non-governmental organizations and experts. Each person, who is settled or domiciled or has relations within the municipal territory, shall be liable to comply with the municipality's law-based decisions, orders and notifications and to pay municipal taxes, levies, duties, contribution and participation shares.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to frequently reiterate the above on local and national levels, and to communicate these rights and municipal responsibilities to the general public, and that they apply equally to migrants, and are based on the 'fellow citizens' principle in municipal law. This should encourage positive community attitudes and actions regarding migrants, integration and social cohesion.

Municipal social assistance and relief activities for migrants have a legal basis in Article 14 of Municipal Law No 5393, according to which social services and assistance are among the Duties and Responsibilities of Municipalities, and should be provided to "people of low income, the poor and the destitute, the desolate and the disabled." Social assistance is also listed as an expenditure item in Article 60 on Municipal Expenditure.

Article 7 of the Metropolitan Municipality Law No 5216 specifies "health care services, hospitals, mobile health care units and social and cultural services of all kinds for adults, the elderly, the disabled, women, children and the youth, and establishing social facilities for these purposes" as "duties and responsibilities of metropolitan and district municipalities".

In Article 24 of this Law, "social services and assistance for people on low income, the poor and the destitute, the desolate and the disabled" is listed as an expenditure item. However, despite Article 13 containing the principle of providing services on an equal basis to all municipal

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23 For the full text of the July 3, 2005 Municipal Law No 5393, see <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5393&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5> Accessed on October 10, 2020



residents, Municipal Law № 5393 is not entirely consistent. For instance, Article 14 appears to make a distinction between citizens and non-citizens in the formulation “Municipal services shall be rendered in the most appropriate manner at places nearest to citizens.” There thus appears to be scope for different interpretations of the law with regard to migrants. However, most municipalities stand by an inclusive interpretation.

Article 9 of the Municipal Law emphasizes the importance of considering neighborhood residents’ common wishes, which requires their participation in identifying needs.

#### **Article 9.**

The municipality shall provide the necessary assistance in kind and support, within the limits of its budgetary resources, to meet the needs of the neighborhood and the mukhtar’s office and resolve any problems; it shall consider the neighborhood residents’ common wishes when making decisions and endeavor to ensure that services are provided in such a way as to meet the neighborhood’s needs.

In terms of equal distribution of services, it is important that a municipality delivers services to citizens and migrants in a uniform manner. As available resources affect the quality of services, it is essential that municipal budgets include the needs of migrants.<sup>24</sup>

Article 14 of the Municipal Law details the nature and scope of services that may be provided by municipalities, including infrastructure and cultural and social services.

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion on how municipalities can contribute to social cohesion of Syrians and other migrant groups, see Genç, 2018.



#### **Article 14.**

Provided that such services be of local and common nature, municipalities;

a) Shall provide or cause to provide services in the following areas: urban infrastructure facilities such as land development planning and control, water supply, sewer and transport; geographic and urban information systems; environment and environmental health, sanitation and solid waste; municipal police, fire fighting, emergency aid, rescue and ambulance services; urban traffic; burial services and cemeteries; planting, parks and green areas; housing; culture and art, tourism and promotion, youth and sports; dormitories for middle and high school students; social services and social aid; weddings; vocational and skills training; economic and commercial development. Metropolitan municipalities and municipalities with a population of more than 100,000 shall be obliged to open guest houses for women and children. Other municipalities may open guest houses for women and children based on an assessment of their financial means and service priorities... Municipal services shall be provided to the citizens at the nearest possible locations and by the most appropriate methods. The methods used in service provision shall be appropriate to the situation of the disabled, the elderly, the destitute and individuals with low income.

The municipalities covered in this book managed to successfully provide these Article 14 services to all residents, in a convenient and appropriate manner. Some, such as Bursa Metropolitan Municipality and Şişli Municipality, have adopted a participatory governance model that includes their city councils. Article 76 of the Municipal Law specifies the objectives and functions of city councils.



## **Article 76.**

The city council shall endeavor to implement the following principles in urban life: development of an urban vision and awareness of fellow citizenship; protection of the city's rights and remedies; sustainable development; environmental awareness; social aid and solidarity; transparency; accountability; participation and local administration. The city council shall comprise representatives of professional organizations with public institution status, trade unions, public notaries, universities (if any), relevant non-governmental organizations, political parties, public institutions and organizations, and neighborhood mukhtars and other parties of interest. The municipality shall provide assistance and support in order to ensure that the city council's activities are conducted in an effective and efficient manner. Opinions formed within the city council shall be placed on the agenda of the municipal council and deliberated at its first meeting. The working procedures and principles of the city council shall be laid down in a regulation to be issued by the Ministry of Interior.

The legal regulations governing municipalities in Turkey give urban residents the right to participate in democratic decision making processes and convey their needs, issues and suggestions to the municipality via the city council, and municipalities that facilitate such public participation are leaders in terms of successful governance.

Regarding equal distribution of services, it is important that municipalities deliver the same services to migrants and citizens without discrimination, and inform migrants regarding the availability of services and their right to them, as an important aspect of promoting integration and social cohesion.

However, ensuring the sufficiency and quality of services in the face of rapid population increases is a major challenge, given limited municipal resources and central government transfers, which are based on the number of citizens, which does not take account of resident migrants. Municipalities thus need to provide services to far more people with the same capacity and financial and other resources, and failing to do so adequately can have a significant negative impact on the attitude of local communities regarding migrants, and on social cohesion.<sup>25</sup>

There is clearly a need for legislation to ensure that municipalities are allocated budgets by the national treasury that are proportionate to their responsibilities with respect to migrants. This is particularly important for municipalities and cities with a high proportion of Syrian migrants relative to Turkish citizens.

Until this is realized, assistance provided to Syrians will continue to provoke jealousy among the native population and intensify hostile feelings toward them, particularly in neighborhoods where poverty and inadequate services are problems for the native population as well as for migrants. Perceived and actual competition for scarce resources and services, and resulting tensions, are a key barrier to integration, intercultural harmony and social cohesion.

## The Scope of the Study

This book contains stories regarding successful municipal services provided to Syrian migrants by Bursa and Kocaeli metropolitan municipalities, and Esenyurt, Sultanbeyli and Şahinbey municipalities. Each municipality outlines their historical experiences of migration and migrants, demographic information regarding the Syrians, the services provided to them, and shares a story written or related by an official.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information about the history of Bursa see <http://www.bursa.com.tr/?lang=en> accessed on August 13, 2020.



All five municipalities referred to the principle of fellow citizenship in Article 13 of the Municipal Law as the basis for providing equal services to all residents, regardless of whether they are citizens, or not. Bursa Metro presented its human centered understanding of social municipal work; Kocaeli Metro emphasized its data based approach to service provision; Esenyurt Municipality focused on its identity as a district of hope by virtue of the socio-economic services it provides; Sultanbeyli Municipality shared the role of its refugees association in identifying and meeting the needs of Syrian migrants; and Şahinbey Municipality focused on its social and environmental approach to meeting the needs of migrants.

These success stories differ, yet they have three distinct common features: the capacity to provide services using their own limited resources; a participatory approach involving cooperation with public institutions, private corporations, international organizations, NGOs, and migrants themselves; and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A participatory approach was also used by the RESLOG team in compiling this book.

## BURSA METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY: A SOCIAL APPROACH TO MUNICIPAL SERVICE PROVISION

### Bursa's Migration History

Archeological research dates the first settlement near Bursa city center to 2700-2500 B.C.<sup>26</sup> Bursa Province has had a significant place in the history of several states since ancient times, since the Kingdom of Bithynia. The city was part of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, and served as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It has maintained its importance in the Republic of Turkey, due to its industrial growth, agricultural production and tourism.

Bursa was given province status and surrounded by walls by King Prusias I of Bithynia (232-192 B.C). Hannibal, the Carthaginian King who swore an oath of hatred against the Roman Empire, set out from Carthage (present day Tunis) with his cavalry and elephants, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and the Pyrenees Mountains (which divide Spain from France), and descended into northern Italy to threaten Rome. However, when defeated, he and his army sought refuge first in Antakya, and then with King Prusias I of Bithynia, where he was welcomed as a victorious commander and deeply respected. As a reward for this warm welcome, Hannibal and his soldiers built a city which they named Prusias, and gave it to King Prusias I as a gift.

Bursa is a city of migrants, which grew and developed with migrations from Rumelia and all four corners of Anatolia, throughout history. Bursa received a large migration of Muslim from Rumelia and Caucasias after the Ottoman Russian War of 1877 1878. Many of these migrants, also known as the “93 Immigrants”, were settled in the province of Hüdavendigâr. Documents in the municipal archives indicate that they were provided with substantial aid by the municipality, which even built houses for them,<sup>27</sup> and migrant children were readily admitted to boarding schools in Bursa, including the Schools of Arts and Agriculture.

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<sup>26</sup> Tekin, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> For detailed information on Bursa's migration history, see Kaplanoğlu & Kaplanoğlu, 2014; Karpat, 2015; Güleriyüz, 2015



In the 1880s, more than 30 000 migrants from Ruse settled in Bursa. During this period, neighborhoods consisting entirely of migrants emerged. As a result of mass migrations in the 1880s, 18 new villages and 15 new neighborhoods were established in Bursa Central District. Migrants were given cash assistance for settlement, and municipal budgets funded relocation assistance and subsistence grants, health care, and funeral expenses for migrants.

As the number of migrants in Bursa increased, the first migrant commission was founded in Bursa in 1888.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, migrant commissions were established in the districts of Orhanlı and Yenişehir in 1892, in Karacabey and Mustafakemalpaşa in 1899, and in Orhangazi and İnegöl in 1903. These commissions included representatives of both native and migrant communities. After settling in Bursa, the migrants sought jobs to secure their livelihoods, and some even applied to serve in the army in times of war, with their carriages and animals. It is reported that among the Caucasian ‘93 Migrants’, approximately 1,000 households of Pomak migrants, who did not speak Turkish, settled in Karacabey. Albanians and Bosnians, who also did not speak Turkish, settled in Bursa in large numbers during the same period. Resolving the social and economic problems of these large groups of migrants was always a priority for bodies governing Bursa. Migratory inflows to Bursa yielded several positive outcomes: hard-working migrants contributed significantly to the city’s economy, resulting in substantial developments in trade and agriculture, and they enhanced Bursa’s ethno-cultural diversity.<sup>29</sup>

Bursa continued to receive migrants from different sources throughout the 20th Century. Mass migrations of Turks and Muslims from Bulgaria in the 1950s and after 1989 were primarily to Bursa. Nearly 15,000 Bulgarian Turks migrated to Bursa in 1951, and many were employed by the Merinos Factory. The construction of Hürriyet, İstiklal and Adalet neighborhoods on the Bursa Mudanya Road created new settlements for 1,500 people. Those who settled in Orhangazi expressed gratitude that local communities welcomed them so warmly.<sup>30</sup>

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28 For information about Migrant Commissions founded in the 19th century Ottoman Empire, see Kale, 2015.

29 See Kaplanoğlu & Kaplanoğlu, 2014.

30 For detailed information about the migrants who arrived Bursa in the 1950s, see Pinar, 2014.

In 1980, nearly 400,000 migrants of Turkish origin migrated to Turkey, mostly to Bursa and İstanbul, to escape the oppressive Bulgarian regime, forming a ‘human bridge’ between Bulgaria and Bursa, which is still active today, with ongoing mobility between the two locations.<sup>31</sup> According to official statistics, the number of migrants settled in Bursa was around 80,000 in 1989. To curb the rapid growth of the migrant population, migrants were subsequently banned from entering the city.<sup>32</sup>

## Syrians in Bursa: Demographic Data

Bursa is one of the cities most affected by the forced mass migration of Syrians that emerged in 2011. The historical experience of Bursa and its municipalities with migration and migrants manifested itself in the capacity to swiftly respond to this intense mass migration, and to support other organizations to do so. Bursa differs from Turkey’s other border provinces in that Syrians, especially those involved in the textile sector in Syria, preferred to settle in Bursa due to its leading position in the global textile industry. According to Directorate General of Migration Management data, in August 2020, Bursa was home to 176,710 Syrians.<sup>33</sup>

A city of rich natural beauty, with strong tourism and industrial sectors (particularly, textile and automotive sectors), Bursa is located on the Silk Road, and is Turkey’s fourth most populated city. Due to its developed industrial sector, Bursa attracts migrants from all over Turkey including İstanbul, including many Syrians who have lived in Turkey for up to nine years. Syrians in Bursa have mostly arrived in the last few years to benefit from its employment, housing, health care, and educational opportunities, along with its multicultural environment created by the city’s rich migration history.

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31 Cigerci, 2018.

32 For detailed information on the matter, see İnginar, 2010.

33 For the distribution of Syrians under temporary protection by province, see the website of the Directorate General of Migration Management, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> Accessed on August 14, 2020



The majority of Syrians residing in Bursa today were originally from Aleppo, and the historical, cultural and commercial ties between Bursa and Aleppo, especially the silk and textile industries, make this a natural migration path.

## Municipal Services Provided for Syrians in Bursa

Bursa has a long history of significant migration, including from the Balkans and other Turkish cities such as Erzurum and Artvin. In line with its historical response to migration, Bursa strives to provide migrant oriented services through an integrated approach with two fundamental pillars: sustainable services and institutions, and multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Examples of sustainable institutions include the Museum of Migration History, the City Council Foreigners' Assembly, the Social Work and Assistance Unit, and the free Bursa Art and Vocational Training Courses (BUSMEK). Joint projects include cooperation with institutions such as the Office of the Governor, the Provincial Directorate of Migration, the Provincial Directorate of Health, the Provincial Directorate of National Education, the Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports, the Association for Supporting Syrian Refugees, Kalbi Selim Association for Education, Culture and Solidarity, the Turkish Red Crescent Community Center, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms, Humanitarian Relief (IHH) Bursa Branch, and the Refugee Support Association/Refugee Support Center (MUDEM).<sup>34</sup>

### Bursa Museum of Migration History

The Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's Museum of Migration History<sup>35</sup> which opened in November 2014, preserves Bursa's historical cultural heritage and enriches the city's cultural and socio-cultural life. It provides an overview of migration throughout Bursa's 8,500 year

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34 For information on services provided by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality for the Syrians, see <https://www.bursa.bel.tr/?sayfa=search&s=Suriyeliler> Accessed on August 14, 2020

35 For the website of Bursa Museum of Migration History, see <http://bursagocmuzesi.com/> Accessed on August 14, 2020



history, both voluntary and to escape wars or oppression. Due to its geographical proximity to İstanbul and location on the route between the Balkans and Anatolia, Bursa has always been a destination for Black Sea, Aegean, Balkan and Anatolian migrants.

The Migration Museum, the first of its kind in Turkey, is in the Museums Complex of Atatürk Congress and Culture Center, established by the municipality in a public park in the city center. Its displays include documents and items which trace migrations from prehistoric times until today, that reflect the impacts that migration had on peoples' lives, and stories of migrants' lives and struggles to adapt to new lives in Bursa.

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality preserves, promotes and publicizes Bursa's values as a global cultural city, and how its native and migrant communities live together in harmony. Its social awareness projects and events include International Migrants Day, attended by 250 children in 2020, with activities such as Syrian and Turkish children's drawings and letters reflecting their dreams, hopes and empathy with others.

### **Bursa City Council**

Bursa's city council is a pro coexistence platform where all citizens are represented and have a voice.<sup>36</sup> The council has a number of assemblies, including the Foreigners' Assembly,<sup>37</sup> which represents and supports foreign migrants and their integration by addressing their issues and developing appropriate solutions. The Bursa Foreigners' Working Group, the first of its kind in Turkey, was established in May 2010, and consists of capable volunteers in areas including business, social life and education.

The Working Group, which gained official status with the establishment of the Foreigners' Assembly in April 2018, currently organizes activities that are implemented by over 300 foreign volunteers from 28 countries.

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36 For the website of Bursa City Council, see <https://www.bursakentkonseyi.org.tr/> Accessed on August 15, 2020

37 For information on the Foreigners' Assembly, see <https://www.bursakentkonseyi.org.tr/meclisler/icerik/bursa-kent-konseyi-yabancilar-meclisi> Accessed on August 15, 2020



Plans are underway to develop additional solutions to migration related problems, especially those involving the Syrians.

### **Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's Art and Vocational Training Courses (BUSMEK)**

BUSMEK provides free Turkish language courses certified by the Ministry of National Education, to support the social and economic integration of Syrians and increase their chances of finding jobs. Syrians who complete the language training can then attend free certified vocational training courses. From 2013 to August 2020, a total of 1,167 migrants (654 women and 513 men), attended the Turkish language courses.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Fellow Citizenship Law and Social Assistance**

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality develops infrastructure and provides services for local and migrant communities, and particularly the Syrian victims of forced migration, on an equal basis without any discrimination, based on the 'fellow citizens' law. During the first two years of mass migration, the Syrian migrants' basic needs for shelter, food, clothing and fuel were met by municipal social assistance services, and the municipality continues to assist poor and deprived Syrians and Turkish citizens in need, on an equal basis.

### **Cooperation with NGOs**

Bursa municipality cooperates with all relevant NGOs, including those representing migrants, in providing services to the Syrians. The Healthy Life Support Project, in cooperation with the Refugee Support Association, supports Syrian women needing socio psychological counselling with regular home visits by municipal and association psychologists and social workers. In cooperation with the Refugee Support Association, Women's Meetings are organized on 8 March every year to enable native and Syrian women to share their life experiences, and raise awareness regarding the issue of child marriages.

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38 For detailed information about BUSMEK, see <http://busmek.bursa.bel.tr/> Accessed on August 15, 2020

Basic Life Skills Training with a focus on employment is offered in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Kalbi Selim Association organizes Turkish language courses and social and cultural activities for Syrian children, and wheelchairs and walking support for Syrians with disability. The municipality cooperated with IHH to ensure that orphaned Syrian children are able to benefit from ongoing municipal social assistance. A free translation service is provided in cooperation with the Association for Supporting Syrian Refugees, and refugees in need are helped to access municipal social assistance. The municipality prioritizes the sustainability of all these joint activities and services.

### **Bursa Municipal Social Services**

The success of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's response to the mass migration of Syrian refugees is based on services provided via sustained relationships and cooperation with other organizations, as outlined above. When assessed against the UN Sustainable Development Goals, municipal services provided to Syrian refugees and local communities have contributed to Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16), and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

The story below, which shows how a person's life can be touched, is shared by Pelin Feymi and her co-workers at the municipal Social Benefits Office of the Social Services Section.



*Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's Foreigners' Assembly*

## Bursa Municipal Social Services

**Pelin Feymi**, R&D Section, Bursa Metropolitan Municipality

I am a sociologist in the Social Benefits Office of the Social Services Section of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, as one of a team of sociologists, psychologists and social workers. Our office deals with requests for assistance on a one to one basis. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we received a phone call regarding a Syrian family living under extremely difficult conditions who needed food aid. Photos of the house where the family lived were sent to us via WhatsApp. On April 27, 2020, I went to the address provided, a 5 story building, but no families at this address matched the description of the family reported.

I arranged a meeting with the mukhtar to inquire about the whereabouts of the family. As I walked down a street trying to find the house, I noticed children's clothes hung out to dry over a wood pile. I knocked on the door of what appeared to be a coal bunker. No one answered, but I could hear children's voices inside. I knocked again, and RC, the woman mentioned in the phone call, opened the door and was scared to see a public officer standing in front of her. She called her husband, MC, who could speak Turkish, so we were able to communicate.

This Syrian family of two adults and three children had been in Turkey for four years. Their original place of residence was Diyarbakır, but they moved to Bursa where they had relatives. The cash aid they received from the Turkish Red Crescent had ended, because they did not have an official residence in the city.

MC tried to support his family by collecting scrap, but now they had no income whatsoever, as collecting scrap was prohibited due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. I noticed that RC was pregnant, though she did not know for how long, but MC said they expected the delivery sometime after Ramadan and that they had never been to a doctor. The family was not registered in Bursa, and as a public officer, I was obliged to report this to the Provincial Directorate of Migration.

I was informed that Bursa was no longer registering Syrians as city residents, and that inter city travel was banned due to the COVID-19 outbreak, but that they could apply to change their place of residence to Bursa, supported by a report indicating that RC was pregnant. I informed MC regarding the procedures to follow.

Meanwhile, the Social Assistance Evaluation Commission of the Municipality's Social Services Section decided to respond to the family's urgent need for food and cleaning materials needed



due to the COVID outbreak, although they were not Bursa residents. A food parcel and cleaning materials were delivered to them the same day.

When I called MC a week later, he told me that they hadn't yet gone to the hospital to get the report, as they were afraid of the COVID-19 outbreak. As soon as the normalization period began, I went back to the family and learned that they had gone to the hospital, got the report and completed the official registration process.

The family could now benefit from all municipal services and sustain their lives. We provided the family with clothing, and I learned that RC had given birth to a baby girl. I made a third status evaluation visit to the family, and we continue to monitor and support them.

The municipality follows similar processes for all services provided to migrants in need of social aid, which are equivalent to those provided to locals in need, as we regard everyone as fellow citizens. However, despite all our efforts, we are unable to reach every migrant and native resident in need, and only respond to applications made to the municipality.

Bursa Metropolitan Municipality continues to lead the way in developing solutions and services to respond to migration-related issues, in cooperation with other public institutions and NGOs. We use our specialized human resources, and sustainable partnerships to improve the quality of life for all, in a people-centered, sustainable city and urban environment.

## KOCAELİ METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY: DATA - BASED SOCIAL SERVICES

### Kocaeli's Migration History

Kocaeli is on important road and rail routes connecting Asia and Europe, and is one of Turkey's leading industrial cities. It was capital of the Kingdom of Bithynia from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 1st Century B.C, and was later named Olbia, Astakos, Nicomedia, İznikmid and İzmid respectively. After the Kingdom of Bithynia was conquered by the Romans, the city was named Nicomedia in honor of its founder, and was for centuries the world's fourth largest metropolis after Rome, Antiocheia (Antakya) and Alexandria (İskenderiye). When İstanbul was made capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, Emperor Justinian destroyed the road between Kalkhedon (Kadıköy) and Nicomedia (İzmit) for military reasons and due to the new transport route through Nicaea (İznik), Nicomedia started to lose its significance.<sup>39</sup>

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Kocaeli entered the dominion of the Seljuks, and was then conquered by the Crusaders during the Crusades. The city was subsequently taken by the Ottoman ruler, Orhan Bey, and was named İzmid until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when it was renamed Kocaeli in honor of the Ottoman commander Akçakoca Bey, who had conquered the region in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

After the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, Kocaeli became one of its fastest growing cities, especially in terms of industrialization, due to its proximity to İstanbul and the availability of transportation. The İzmit Paper Factory opened in 1934 as the first in Turkey, followed by SEKA, a second cellulose and paper factory in 1944, which was enlarged in 1954, 1957 and 1959. Kocaeli has become an advanced industrial zone due to rapid industrialization, which continues today.<sup>40</sup>

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39 For detailed information on the history of Kocaeli, see Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality's website, <http://kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/pages/tarihce/16> Accessed on August 18, 2020

40 For another detailed resource on Kocaeli's history, see Kocaeli Chamber of Commerce website, <http://koto.org.tr/kocaelinintarihcd5c534709154c5> Accessed on August 18, 2020



Kocaeli was home to a largely homogeneous population until the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Due to its key position as İstanbul's gateway to Anatolia, its accessibility via a rail route and a port, and its arable land, Kocaeli has always been a center of attraction for migrants. Particularly from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Armenians from Iran and Eastern Anatolia migrated to settle around Kocaeli. The population of the area grew and became increasingly heterogeneous in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when Muslim and Turk migrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans were settled in the region.

While the proportion of Muslims in İzmit's Karamürsel and Kandra districts was approximately 58% in 1830, it reached 69% by 1914. The non Muslim population increased until 1860, and declined thereafter, due to increasing numbers of Muslim migrants, and people of Greek origin migrating to Greece. The transfer and settlement practices implemented during World War I and the War of Independence, coupled with the subsequent population exchange, contributed to the homogenization of the population throughout the country including in Kocaeli, with the exception of İstanbul. Kocaeli's population continued to grow during the Republican Era, both through immigration and internal migration.<sup>41</sup>

The first mass migration to Kocaeli was the Bosnian migration after the 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, which was followed by other migrations during the Ottoman Russian War, the Balkan Wars, World War I, the Population Exchange of 1924, and the Republican Era. People arriving in the city *en masse* from different locations enriched the city's culture with new elements, while other cultural characteristics were lost as Greek and Armenian minorities left the city during the formation of the nation state.

Since İstanbul's provincial borders ended at Bostancı during the Population Exchange of 1924 and Tuzla was the small village of Gebze back then, people of Greek origin in the area from Bostancı to Tuzla were subjected to population exchange. The Greek population that migrated from Darica to Greece named their new place of settlement

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41 İpek, 2015.



Aritzu, which was Darica's ancient name, and Greeks who left İzmit named their new home Neu Nicomedia (New İzmit).<sup>42</sup> As a city that developed through migration, today's Kocaeli is still characterized by migration.

Kocaeli is one of Turkey's most developed industrial cities, and has thus experienced large and continuous waves of internal migration over the years, creating problems related to post migration urban integration. Kocaeli's demographic structure changed with the new migration during its rapid industrialization phase in the 1960s. The rural population exceeded the urban population until 1970. Data on annual migration induced population growth indicates that Kocaeli ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among the cities with the highest migration induced population increase during the 1975 80 period, 7<sup>th</sup> in the 1980 85 period, 5<sup>th</sup> in the 1985 90 period and 6<sup>th</sup> in the 1995 2000 period.<sup>43</sup>

However, the 1999 earthquake caused a large migration outflow from Kocaeli, and the city ranked for the first time among the top 10 provinces with the largest migrant outflows in Turkey. Today, Kocaeli is among Turkey's highest migration receiving provinces, after İstanbul. In 2014, Kocaeli welcomed 79,697 immigrants, and 55,060 emigrants left the city. Kocaeli's net migration rate has increased to 14.4%, well above the average of 9.3% in the Eastern Marmara Region.<sup>44</sup>

## Syrians in Kocaeli: Demographic Data

Kocaeli has faced a large migration of Syrians in recent times. In August 2020, the number of Syrians in Kocaeli Province was reportedly 55,063.<sup>45</sup> Due to its industries and employment opportunities, it is a preferred place of settlement for Syrians and for migrants from İstanbul, its neighbor. Kocaeli's fastest growing industrial region, the

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42 Ulugün, 2015.

43 For detailed information on Kocaeli's demographic structure and the related municipal statistical data, see <https://kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/pages/nufusvedemografi/572> Accessed on August 18, 2020

44 Kocaeli's provincial migration rates are given on the municipal website, see <https://www.kocaeli.bel.tr/webfiles/userfiles/files/%C4%B0%C3%A7%20G%C3%B6%C3%A7%20%C4%B0statistikleri.pdf> Accessed on August 18, 2020

45 For statistics published by the Directorate General of Migration Management, see <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> Accessed on August 18, 2020



district of Gebze, is a major recipient of internal migration in Turkey, and hosts over 15,000 Syrians.<sup>46</sup> The Syrian population in Kocaeli has grown significantly in recent years, from  $\pm 15,000$  in November 2014, to 34,957 in July 2017, and 55,183 in March 2020.

There are 10,372 foreigners with residence permits living in Kocaeli, and 345 foreigners under international protection. Approximately 1.5% of all Syrians in Turkey live in Kocaeli, mainly in three districts: Gebze with  $\pm 15,000$  Syrians, Darica with  $\pm 11,000$ , and İzmit with  $\pm 6,000$ . According to municipal data, 1,813 Syrians have voluntarily returned to Syria from Kocaeli. The number of foreigners resettled in a third country from Kocaeli by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was reportedly 1,859.

## Municipal Services Provided for Syrians in Kocaeli

Besides education and health care services for Syrians, Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality provides a range of social work services, plus environmental care, water and sanitation, solid waste management, and police, fire, emergency rescue, ambulance and other services on an equal basis to all residents, in line with the fellow citizenship law. The municipality uses feedback from the Foreigners' Assembly and Working Groups of the city council to provide migrant oriented services.<sup>47</sup>

The Social Services Section Social Fabric Project collects and regularly updates data on all social assistance services requested by Syrian refugees, from the date of their arrival in the city.<sup>48</sup> The municipality uses this data to produce daily, weekly, monthly and annual reports on social assistance services provided, to develop its database on refugees, and to respond to their requests in the most appropriate manner. Home visits by specialized personnel assess the needs of migrants applying for

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46 For more detailed information on Gebze, see Tezcan, 2011.

47 For detailed information on Kocaeli City Council, see <https://kocaelikentkonseyi.org/> Accessed on October 3, 2020. The City Council's International Students Working Group is a participatory platform that addresses the needs of the foreigners in the city.

48 For a detailed list of the services provided by the Social Services Section of Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, see <https://www.kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/pages/sosyalhizmetler/250> Accessed on August 18, 2020.

social assistance, and how to meet legitimate needs, while the Social Assistance Evaluation Commission makes the final decisions.

The Social Fabric Software System<sup>49</sup> is used to monitor all processes involved in providing assistance to migrants, and to determine any shortcomings, which speeds up the delivery of assistance, and prevents duplication of assistance. It also records all actions of the Social Services Section, and provides a social map of Kocaeli, which includes all social projects in the city.

Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality develops its social assistance and solidarity activities based on respect for human dignity and values, and makes sure that no one is left behind. ‘The Municipality with a Heart’ is the motto of the municipality when providing services to the Syrians, and the municipality has developed projects to build ‘the happy city of the future’. These include investments in infrastructure and transport, smart city applications, social solidarity and urban development, aid to culture and arts, health and education services, disaster and risk management, and support for tourism and industry.

## Kocaeli, the Social Municipality

Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality aims to be an example in the field of data based municipal social services. The Social Services Section has also contributed by transferring its knowledge and experience to several other municipalities. Its Social Fabric Software System Project and the 41 Food Cards and 41 Clothing Cards projects meet the basic needs of poor people (41 is Kocaeli’s license plate code).

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<sup>49</sup> Launched in 2016, the Social Fabric Software System Project captures all projects implemented by Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality’s Department of Health and Social Services on a single platform, to ensure that management and reporting activities are carried out in a fast, effective and consistent manner. The Social Fabric Software Project has five main modules: Social Assistance, Milk for Moms and Welcome Baby, White Hearts, The Disabled and the Elderly, and Housing and Accommodation. The project also has five sub-modules: People, Management, Cards, Reports and Fieldwork. For detailed information about the Social Fabric Software Project, see <https://www.kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/news/haberler/3/kocaelisosyalbediyeciliktedeconcu/22165> Accessed on August 18, 2020



The municipality has performed well in terms of the UN SDGs of Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17). Our social approach is characterized in the following success story shared by Merve Erarslan of the Social Services Section.



*Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality White Hearts Education and Development Center*

## Kocaeli: Municipal Social Services for Migrants

**Merve Erarslan**, Social Services Section,  
Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality

Berakat is a young man who left his home in Syria in 2019, and eventually settled in Kocaeli. He applied to the municipality for social aid services, and we visited his home to assess his needs. The shy and sad 20 year old Berakat started to tell us his life story. He had lost his left leg and arm in a bomb explosion in Syria, and was married, but had left his wife in Syria. We could see in his eyes that he was struggling to stay alive all by himself.

As the conversation progressed, he smiled as he told us that his wife was pregnant and expecting a baby girl. He wanted his family to come to live with him, as soon as he had put his life in order. Our municipality supported the family reunification process, and his wife and daughter joined him some months later. He said that most Syrians had great hope of finding a new life in Turkey. He told us that he was not receiving any aid, and that the house he lived in and the furniture belonged to the mufti, who asked a fraction of the market rent.

When we informed him that he would receive regular food aid and a monthly disability grant, in addition to other municipal social assistance, he humbly thanked us and expressed his gratitude to our municipality. We made sure that he knew how to reach us at any time by contacting our call center, and that we also offered material and spiritual support, should he wish to make an application.

Berakat applied to receive in cash fuel assistance, which the municipality offers every winter. He now leads a peaceful life with his wife and daughter Ayşe in their warm new home, without fear of barrel bombs or being forced to leave the country.

When faced with challenges, people generally find solutions. The Syrians, whose country was destroyed, suffered great psychological damage, but now lead a different life here in Turkey. Another example is Adnan, who came to our district with his mother and grandfather after losing his father in the war at the age of 13. He receives municipal social assistance, and support from professional staff at our White Hearts Education and Development Center.<sup>50</sup>

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50 For detailed information on Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality's White Hearts Education and Development Center, started in 2018, see <https://www.kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/birimler/sosyal-hizmetler-subemudurlugu/80/32995> Accessed on August 18, 2020



The Center develops the potential of young people who are unable to continue their education for various reasons, via a year-long training program that enhances their school performance and develops manual and sporting skills. It helps high-risk children to develop life skills, find a profession in line with their skills and abilities, and become integrated into social life.

For Adnan, who suffered war induced trauma, we organized individual and group therapy to stabilize his emotional state. We observed that he often rubbed his hands together, became introverted and distant from his friends. He usually remained silent, but tried to run and hide whenever he heard an airplane - his biggest fear.

For two years we worked with Adnan, using expressive therapy methods and healing games, until he overcame the trauma of war that he experienced as a child. On completing the program, he had overcome his fear, and even grew quite fond of drawing airplanes. His self esteem and his ability to express himself in social situations increased. He could now focus on his lessons, and he received higher grades in school. Today, Adnan is happy and sleeps easily at night, just as a child should.

Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality's success in meeting the needs of all fellow citizens in need is due to our social service approach and our sound database, using the Social Fabric Software System, which we believe are good practice examples for other municipalities in Turkey.

## ESENYURT MUNICIPALITY: THE DISTRICT OF HOPE

### Esenyurt's Migration History

Esenyurt is one of 39 districts in İstanbul, which had a population of 806,860 at the time of the first Turkish census in 1927, and which then increased rapidly, particularly after 1950. Until the 1950s, İstanbul's population was concentrated in Suriçi, Kadıköy and Üsküdar regions, but major waves of migration led to new settlements on both sides of the city, including Esenyurt. According to the Address Based Population Registration System, İstanbul's population was 15,067,724 in 2018.

Esenyurt remained a village with an agricultural economy until the late 1960s. The demand for labor created by industrial development then led to a large mobility of migrants, and the development of trade, education and health care sectors in a phase of rapid development. In the past three decades, the district has become a high density housing area with numerous multi storey apartment buildings, and a burgeoning construction sector. This has made the district even more attractive for internal, international migrants.<sup>51</sup>

The first settlement in Esenyurt was Köyiçi, now the district's center. Founded in the early 19th Century on farmland, the settlement was named Eşkinöz in honor of a family among the farm shareholders. The demographic character of the area started to change during the 1920-1938 period, as migrants from Romania and Bulgaria were settled in Eşkinöz. The settlement's name was changed to Esenyurt in 1967. The village of Kırış, a Greek village prior to the Republican Era, became a Turkish village when Turks settled there after the population exchange treaty with Greece in 1923.

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51 For detailed information on the historical developments in the district of Esenyurt, see Ayhan, 2019.



Esenyurt remained a village settlement of Çatalca District's Büyükçekmece Town until 1987. With a growing population, the settlement was merged with the town of Kıracı into a district in 2008.<sup>52</sup> According to Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) 2020 data, Esenyurt had a registered population of 954,579. When the many international migrants and Syrians under temporary protection are included, the total population is over 1 million, making it one of Turkey's most densely populated districts, with 43 neighborhoods and several industrial plants.

## Syrians in Esenyurt: Demographic Data

From the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Esenyurt was one of the districts to which Syrians migrated en masse. The district's ample housing supply, large industrial area and a growing construction sector offering numerous job opportunities, made Esenyurt an attractive destination for Syrians. Esenyurt municipal data estimated that the district hosted over 150,000 international migrants and refugees in August 2020. Directorate General of Migration Management data estimated in January 2020 that the population included ±56 000 Syrians and several thousand Afghan and Iraqi migrants.

Many Syrian asylum seekers initially depended on aid provided by the municipality and other organizations, but many have now found jobs as semi skilled workers in a wide range of sectors including construction and manufacturing. While most Syrians live in the poor inner neighborhoods of the district, there are also some well-off refugees who tend to purchase several apartments in luxury apartment construction projects, in order to be granted Turkish citizenship.

Other similar districts are Fatih in İstanbul, Çarşamba in Bursa and Hayati Harrani in Şanlıurfa, which are attractive to migrants due to low rents and living costs, compared to other areas. However, many locals see this tendency to create language and culture-based community areas as a barrier to coexistence.

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52 Ibid.



Problems that arise between natives and Syrians relate to different lifestyles, the language barrier, growing competition for jobs in the face of increasing unemployment, and disputes regarding the use of public spaces such as parks. Addressing these issues is largely a municipal responsibility.

In addition to rapidly meeting the needs of refugees, Esenyurt Municipality has provided various services to help Syrians become self-sufficient, e.g. reducing ‘red tape’ for entrepreneurs, small business owners and tradesmen. District Directorate of National Education data shows that over 12,300 primary and secondary school students with a temporary protection status attended public schools in Esenyurt in the 2020-2021 school year.

## Municipal Services Provided for Syrians in Esenyurt

Since the beginning of the Syrian migration, Esenyurt Municipality worked on projects in areas such as social services, health care, psycho-social support, culture, education, etc., and services are provided to all foreigners, including the refugees, without discrimination. The Migration Services and Foreigners’ Office established under our Foreign Affairs Section provides counseling services to resolve the problems faced by foreigners.<sup>53</sup>

In 2013, Esenyurt Municipality established a liaison office staffed by Arabic-speaking personnel, to assist Syrians find the services they need, such as language courses or health care. Esenyurt Municipality also cooperates with local NGOs, international organizations, and İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, to identify and resolve the problems of Syrian residents. Due to the difficulties in accessing central government funds to assist refugees, the municipality has to find resources via partnerships, and make the best possible use of its own resources for projects that enable Syrians to increase their resilience and become self-reliant.

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53 For detailed information on Esenyurt Municipality’s Foreign Affairs Section, see <https://www.esenyurt.bel.tr/home/mudurlukBilgileriDetay?MudurlukAdi=D1%C5%9E-%C4%B0L%C4%B0%C5%9E%EK%C4%B0LER-M%C3%9CD%C3%9CRL%C3%9C%C4%9E%C3%9C>  
Accessed on August 16, 2020.



The projects include courses, informative activities and cultural and artistic activities for adolescents and children from both the native and migrant communities, and the municipality has established 10 Cultural Centers, three Youth Centers, a Continuing Education Center and five Knowledge Centers in the district.<sup>54</sup>

The municipality also has a Voluntary Return Project, which may appear to contradict an inclusive approach to migrants, but it is a solution that has been adopted by several EU countries, and is based on the voluntary return principles defined by the International Organization for Migration.<sup>55</sup>

This project has received wide coverage in the mainstream media, and has been heavily criticized by certain groups.<sup>56</sup> As this book focuses on social services provided to the Syrians, the activities of the voluntary return project will not be addressed in detail.

Implementing a voluntary return program while at the same time offering social services for refugees that encourage integration, gives refugees a choice to stay, or return if and when they wish to do so, which respects their freedom to choose, and increases their options. Ultimately, such programs are justified by the number of refugees who choose to use them, and if there are no applicants, the programs will naturally end.

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54 For detailed information on the matter, see Esenyurt Municipality's Annual Activity Report for 2017, [http://www.sp.gov.tr/upload/xSPRaport/files/NTKD2+Esenyurt\\_17\\_FR.pdf](http://www.sp.gov.tr/upload/xSPRaport/files/NTKD2+Esenyurt_17_FR.pdf) Accessed on October 3, 2020

55 IOM has defined a series of internationally adopted principles of voluntary return, under the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Program that has been implemented since 1979. See International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018.

56 For news reports published on Esenyurt Municipality's website and in the mainstream media, see <https://www.esenyurt.bel.tr/home/IcerikDetay?projecadi=150%20Suriyeli%20Daha%20Esenyurt%E2%80%99tan%20%C3%9Cikelerine%20D%C3%B6nd%C3%BC&id=320> Accessed on August 16, 2020, and <https://www.cnnturk.com/yerel-haberler/istanbul/esenyurt/esenyurtta-117-suriyeli-gocmen-ulkelerine-ugurlandi-1035719> Accessed on August 16 2020; <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/amp/haber/esenyurttaki-117-suriyeli-ulkelerine-dondu-1522230> Accessed on August 16, 2020.

## Esenyurt: The District of Hope

The Migration Services and Foreigners' Office of the Foreign Affairs Section is responsible for all processes pertaining to foreign residents, whether temporary or permanent. This office also establishes and coordinates relationships and cooperation with other public organizations, NGOs and international organizations working on refugee matters. Esenyurt Municipality governs one of Turkey's most densely populated districts with a population of over 1 million, and aspires to become a beacon of hope for all fellow citizens, by effectively using its own capacity and resources.

Through its inclusive approach which provides services to all residents as 'fellow citizens' in a fair and equitable manner, the municipality has contributed significantly to realizing the UN SDGs, particularly Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

In the following section, Yusuf Gündoğdu and Erkan Dakdevir from the Foreign Affairs Section share a story of hope involving the municipality and a Syrian family.



*Esenyurt Municipality's Continuing Education Center*



## Esenyurt: The District of Hope

**Yusuf Gündoğdu** and **Erkan Dakdevir**,  
Esenyurt Municipality Foreign Affairs Section

Nahla witnessed the harsh realities of the Syrian civil war, and left her country to seek refuge in Turkey with her family in fear of their lives, after she lost one eye in a bomb explosion. Nahla came to İstanbul in 2013. She was poor, and struggled to sustain her life and care for her disabled daughter. Towards the end of that year, she contacted our municipality to request assistance, and from then on, her life started to change for the better.

We helped the family, as our guests, to access the special education their disabled daughter needed, and their extremely difficult living conditions gradually started to improve. We made the doctor's appointments for the disabled child and monitored her health status, and provided the family with humanitarian aid, including social and health care services.

Our Coordination Center for the Disabled meets the medical needs of fellow citizens like Nahla, and organizes various activities to enable their participation in social life. Providing medical services for the disabled significantly improves their lives.

The journey of Nahla and her family, which started in very difficult circumstances, ended in Esenyurt: A District of Hope, where they were able to embrace life again. Though one of Turkey's most populated districts, Esenyurt is a beacon of hope for all fellow citizens with its socio-economic environment and job opportunities, cultural diversity, socialization activities, and wide range of municipal services.

Our municipality helps fellow citizens like Nahla, who struggle to live under harsh conditions. After registration, our Social Assistance Affairs Section provides humanitarian aid. Our Coordination Center for the Disabled provides medical care and equipment, and our Women and Family Services Section offers psycho-social counseling and therapy, with translators at three centers, including the recently opened Social Life Center.

These centers help women develop entrepreneurial skills while earning an income through the sale of hand crafted products. All female fellow citizens, including migrants, will be able to sell their products in boutique shops that we plan to open. Our social approach strives to ensure that all our ‘fellow citizens’ are able to lead dignified lives, and benefit from our services without any discrimination.



# SULTANBEYLİ MUNICIPALITY: MUNICIPAL PARTICIPATION AND THE REFUGEES ASSOCIATION

## Sultanbeyli's Migration History

The history of Sultanbeyli District dates back to ancient times. It served as a resting place for expeditions to the east and west during the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and as a base for various tribes in their passage to Anatolia and Europe. Located on the route that connects İstanbul to the continent of Asia, Sultanbeyli maintained its strategic importance in military and political terms throughout history. After İstanbul was conquered by the Ottoman Empire, Sultanbeyli became the gateway to İstanbul.<sup>57</sup>

The area was sparsely inhabited farmland, until Turkish migrants from Bulgaria settled on Sultanbeyli Plain in 1945. The newcomers were integrated into the increasing population, and the growing settlement was granted village status in 1957, after which it continued to grow due to rural-to-urban migration and urbanization.

A characteristic that distinguishes Sultanbeyli from other districts of İstanbul is its largely internal migrant population who came mostly from the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia regions. Many are poor, and daily life in Sultanbeyli resembled the rural lives they left behind in many respects, enabling them to preserve their traditions and culture, while living an urban life in a large city.<sup>58</sup>

Sultanbeyli became a municipality in December 1987 and was granted district status in 1992 and became the preferred destination for migrants from Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia during the 1990s. In the early 2000s, Sultanbeyli continued to welcome victims of the forced migration in Turkey, as well as foreigners escaping conflicts and wars in neighboring countries to the east.

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<sup>57</sup> For detailed information on the history of the district of Sultanbeyli, see the website of the District Governorship of Sultanbeyli, <http://www.sultanbeyli.gov.tr/ilce-tarihi> Accessed on August 19, 2020

<sup>58</sup> For detailed information about the social change in Sultanbeyli, see Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001.

Key factors attracting migrants to Sultanbeyli were the district's multicultural fabric and its favorable socio-economic and living conditions. Most foreign migrants coming to Sultanbeyli at this time were from Iraq and Afghanistan. After 2011, Sultanbeyli became the preferred district in Western Turkey and İstanbul for Syrians fleeing the civil war, as it offers a familiar lifestyle.

Annual population data shows that the district has constantly grown due to internal and external migration. İstanbul is a developing and migration receiving city that continues to expand its urban perimeter, which impacts the district of Sultanbeyli.

Migration processes generally involve varying dynamics. Areas such as Kadıköy, Üsküdar and Mecidiyeköy are a fair distance from the city center, and despite previously being preferred by poorer migrants, Sultanbeyli is now also home to people with middle and higher incomes, due to the recent increase in construction and its proximity to a number of industrial zones.

## Syrians in Sultanbeyli: Demographic Data

Sultanbeyli is one of İstanbul's 39 districts, and is on its Anatolian side. It has 15 neighborhoods and a population of 327,789, making it the 14th most densely populated district of İstanbul. In January 2020, there were over 30,000 migrants in Sultanbeyli. It thus had the largest migrant population in İstanbul's Anatolian side. Refugees Association SUKOM data for October 2020 puts the number of Syrian refugees in Sultanbeyli at 18,102.

Sultanbeyli is attractive for Syrian migrants due to its relatively lower cost of living and rents, its poorer population, the availability of accommodation, relatively low commodity prices, its conservative social dynamics, and a traditional lifestyle based on neighborhood relationships and solidarity.



The native population's acceptance of the first Syrian migrants in late 2012, especially due to their common religion, also attracted Syrians to the district.<sup>59</sup> As the civil war in Syria worsened and expanded in 2014, incoming migrants increased significantly, and major cities where friends or relatives lived became the second stop in the migration journey of many Syrians.<sup>60</sup>

The Refugees Association's online database<sup>61</sup> put the number of registered refugees in Sultanbeyli, Ümraniye, Sancaktepe and surrounding districts at 33,349 in October 2020, with 18,657 in Sultanbeyli alone, which amounted to nearly 9% of the indigenous population. Sultanbeyli ranks 9<sup>th</sup> among all 39 districts of İstanbul in terms of number of resident refugees, and 5<sup>th</sup> in terms of the ratio of refugees to indigenous population.<sup>62</sup> Sultanbeyli District hosts the largest number of refugees in İstanbul's Anatolia side, and twice the city's average.

The number of Syrians in Sultanbeyli increased sharply after 2012, especially in 2014 and 2015, as the conflict in Syria grew more violent and forced migration to Turkey gained momentum. 6% of all Syrian refugees in Sultanbeyli arrived in 2013, 42% in 2014, 35% in 2015 and 17% in 2016. In 2017, 727 Syrians moved to Sultanbeyli. 82% of all Syrians in Sultanbeyli did their first registration in the district.<sup>63</sup> Over 50% of Syrians in Sultanbeyli were under the age of 18, 53% were men and 47% were women, and 85% were originally from Aleppo. The number of Syrian households in Sultanbeyli was reported to be 5,995, and the average number of people per family was 5.18.<sup>64</sup>

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59 For a detailed discussion on cultural and religious similarities that are among the determining factors for the Syrian migrants' migration routes, see Kaya, 2017.

60 The "Social Network Theory", a well-established theory in International Migration Studies, asserts that during the migration process, migrants are inclined to opt for migration destinations where groups, with whom they are ethno-culturally or religiously connected, had previously migrated. For detailed information on the Social Network Theory, see King, 2012.

61 The Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association Database, <https://multeciler.org.tr/> Accessed on August 19, 2020.

62 For detailed information on the matter, see Erdoğan, 2017, <https://www.raporlar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/6-yilinda-Turkiyedeki-suriyediler-sultanbeyli-ornegi.pdf> Accessed on August 19, 2020

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.



Most Syrian refugees learn about Sultanbeyli from friends and relatives who live, or have connections here, who report that Sultanbeyli offers a safe and stable environment for migrants, compared to other places. This is clear in the quotes below from focus groups with Syrians in the district in July 2020, and in the Sultanbeyli Municipality stories provided to RESLOG for this book.

“In the early years, even Turkish citizens were taking Syrians in need to Sultanbeyli. When we arrived at the Istanbul bus station, we did not know anyone here. We told taxi drivers that we knew no one and they told us about Sultanbeyli. We first thought Sultanbeyli was a person, not a location. They called people in Sultanbeyli, who came and took us to an empty apartment. Everyone here helped us, saying that we were guests. This was in 2014.”

“Life in Sultanbeyli is similar to the Syrian traditional lifestyle and culture, even though there are not as many job opportunities compared to other neighborhoods in İstanbul, such as Dudullu or Pendik.”

Other quotes indicated that Syrians in Sultanbeyli felt that the district met their expectations in terms of the municipal services, and that they appreciated the similarities between the local culture and that in their homeland, and the socio-economic environment and employment opportunities.

## **Municipal Services Provided for Syrians in Sultanbeyli**

In the early phases of the unprecedented mass migration of Syrians, the uncertainties, the arduous registration process, the constantly increasing numbers of migrants, and the confusion about where they should apply for assistance made it clear that an organized structure was needed to systematically address all the problems of the Syrian refugees in Sultanbeyli.<sup>65</sup>

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65 For a detailed evaluation on the matter, see Ibid.



Given the large Syrian population and the district's limited resources, there was clearly a need for effective and sustainable solutions. A key municipal objective was to minimize social, cultural and economic tensions by meeting the needs of Syrians suffering poverty and deprivation, while ensuring that the native population did not resent the services provided to the Syrians.

The Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association was thus founded in December 2014, to enhance the effectiveness and scope of projects and services for Syrian refugees in the district.<sup>66</sup> A Deputy Mayor became the Chairman of the Association, to ensure efficient coordination between it and the municipality.

Unfortunately, under the Municipal Law, no appropriation is allocated in municipal budgets for migrant related spending and services. As a solution, Sultanbeyli Municipality established an association and community center which secured national and international funding for several projects. Compared to municipalities, NGOs are more able to access such funding, based on project applications to donors.

Sultanbeyli Municipality is thus able to carry out joint projects in cooperation with the Refugees Association and other public institutions, NGOs, universities and volunteers, and coordinate humanitarian assistance for refugees, thus enhancing the efficient use of its limited resources.<sup>67</sup> In 2013, the Municipality and Refugees Association developed web based software to keep records and demographic data on all refugees in the district, in collaboration with the District Department of Security. This software now constitutes the basis for all the work of the Refugees' Association.<sup>68</sup>

Personal information is confidential, and software enables the Association to identify the needs of refugees and develop projects to meet them, and to manage its fundraising activities and relationships.

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<sup>66</sup> For detailed information on The Refugees Association, see <https://multeciler.org.tr/> Accessed on August 19, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> For detailed information on the SUKOM database, activated in 2018, see <https://multeciler.org.tr/sukom-suriyeliler-icin-sosyal-yardim-yazilimi/> Accessed on August 19, 2020.

All refugee-related activities are monitored on the SUKOM database, which enables assessment of the efficiency and impacts of projects and activities.

False or misleading data, especially regarding the Syrians, is a general problem in Turkey, and the SUKOM software minimizes this problem for Sultanbeyli and the surrounding districts. It also enabled the digitization of the association's administrative processes, and provides a comprehensive electronic information system.

Services provided by Sultanbeyli Municipality and the Refugees Association to the Syrians in the district include social services, protection, mental and emotional health-care services, physical therapy, legal and psychological and employment counseling, work permits and licensing, child-friendly spaces, Turkish language and vocational training courses (e.g. in construction, sewing, hairdressing, computer skills, and music), social cohesion activities, refugee assemblies, schooling, kindergarten, women's safe houses, a hospital appointments system, emergency basic needs assistance, a call center, family counseling and early childhood services.<sup>69</sup> Municipal services such as environmental cleaning, parks and gardens, etc., serve all 'fellow citizens' of the district, without any discrimination.

### **Sultanbeyli: Municipal Participation and the Refugees Association**

The Refugees Association, established by Sultanbeyli Municipality and a group of municipal personnel and philanthropists, has been supporting migrants since 2014. It has enabled the municipality to respond to the needs of Syrian migrants by developing projects, undertaking research, collecting data and securing funding, thus overcoming the constraints of limited resources due to the lack of national government funding.

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69 For details regarding services provided by Sultanbeyli Municipality Refugees Association, see <https://multeciler.org.tr/multeciler-toplum-merkezi/> Accessed on August 19, 2020



The Refugees Association is the first of its kind in Turkey, and a success story in its own right. It has accessed international and national funding and cooperates with public, non governmental, academic and other local, national and international organizations. It has enabled Sultanbeyli Municipality to respond to the migrants' specific needs and provide them with targeted social services, in cooperation with NGOs, international organizations, the native population and migrants themselves.

Sultanbeyli Municipality has also performed well in realizing the UN SDGs of Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17). The following success story, shared by Cansu Mirzanlı, Project Coordinator in the Social Support Services Section describes this process from the viewpoint of Syrian and local employees of the Association.



*Sultanbeyli Municipality Refugees Association*

## Sultanbeyli: Municipal Participation

**Cansu Mirzanlı**, Sultanbeyli Municipality,  
Social Support Services Section

We have been through both hard and happy times until our Association, initially part of the Coordination Center on a 500m<sup>2</sup> plot, moved to the new Community Center, where it is today. All the steps that got us here were stories of supporting the newly created lives of refugees, with the strength and devotion that comes from solidarity.

In a workshop organized in 2018, Zafer Söğütçü, the Deputy Mayor of Sultanbeyli and Chairman of the Refugees Association, described the role of Mayor Hüseyin Keskin in the establishment of the Association:

*“Something the Mayor said in 2014 is very important for me. He said: ‘They are going through a difficult test; they lost their homes, they lost their land. This is not only a difficult test for them. We too, are being tested. We are being tested as to how we stand by them and how we approach them.’ This perspective became an important motivation for us to launch projects here in Sultanbeyli, about which many other municipalities had reservations.”*

Today, we continue to develop projects in collaboration with many local, national and international public and private institutions and NGOs. The Refugees Association and its accomplishments are a key Sultanbeyli story of hope, which changed refugees’ lives for the better, and opened up new horizons for those who worked to make these changes possible. We share the following stories as examples.



Yahya Osman, Syrian Geography Teacher and Translator shared her story: “When I came to Turkey via Beirut in 2013 with my mother, father and sister, we were greeted by someone I knew. This man had a brass shop and he was selling his products in Syria. Sometimes he needed a translator, and I helped him with this. He took us to his shop in Sultanbeyli, and gave us a furnished flat in an apartment building in Mecidiye Neighborhood that belonged to his family.

Back then in 2013, there were 2,530 Syrian families in Sultanbeyli, and I longed to meet and talk to them in my own language. 34 months after our arrival, people from the Municipality came to our house together with the Director of Social Services, and asked if we needed anything. We received food aid for 23 months after that, but then it was cut off.

Towards the end of 2013, I met Halil İbrahim Akıncı from the municipal Strategy Development Section, who was interviewing Syrians. He asked me if I needed anything and what types of projects would best help Syrians. I indicated that we needed to go beyond humanitarian relief and provide permanent solutions. After that, we started visiting the Syrian associations in Sultanbeyli with Mr. İbrahim. We visited an association on Ziya-ül Hak Street, now known as the Syrians’ Street, and told them about our plans to open a Coordination Center, which they warmly welcomed.

In cooperation with the Department of Security, the new Refugees Association started issuing ID cards to Syrians in Sultanbeyli in 2014. Each day, 200-300 ID cards were issued. The news spread by word of mouth, and Syrians who became aware of this started to move to Sultanbeyli. At that time, the

civil war had not yet spread to Aleppo. When it did, people from Aleppo started to come here, and the Coordination Center was established in 2014, led by Mr. İbrahim. Women, and especially those abused by their husbands and wanting a divorce, started to come to the Center, and a safe house was opened to support them.

As the number of refugees grew, the need to collect data emerged. I had a friend who was also a translator, and we visited neighborhoods to record the information and addresses of Syrians. The municipality provided us with a car, and a computer to save the data. We also made sure that items donated by Turks reached migrant families.

Before I met Mr. İbrahim and started to work here, I used to translate subtitles for TV shows on websites, sometimes without sleeping all night. When I started this job, I was able to lead a regular life. I worked hard, including after hours, but I was more than happy to do so. I got married in 2015, and now have two children.

We worked as social workers together with the municipal personnel, and visited Syrian families together with the Director, sometimes until midnight to identify their needs, and to search for sources of aid.

In 2014, we were a team of two translators and two municipal personnel, plus a field worker and a driver. One day, the German organization GIZ, [Welthungerhilfe (GIZ WHH)] contacted us to discuss the Community Center Project, and they agreed to pay a portion of the rent for the building we use today.”

Ali Rennan, a Syrian Translator shared his story: Before coming to Sultanbeyli, I had lived in other places including İzmir, Antep, Konya, and Diyarbak, but I did not see any support or services



on a par with those provided here. Here they offered us free translation and psychological support services, social services, language courses and much more.

I have experienced so many great things here. From being a shepherd, I have become a translator. I had talent, but no one to use my talent. If someone asked me to move to the European side of İstanbul, I would decline. Here, I am closer to my culture, there is no discrimination, and life, including rent, is more affordable. I have lived here since 2014. One day while walking down a road, I saw a sign advertising the courses given by the Association. I attended and successfully completed the courses, and I now work as a translator. My dreams have come true.”

Ahmet Selman Özdemir, a Turkish Graphic Designer: “I have worked as a graphics designer and social media director at the Refugees Association since 2016, and have developed my abilities significantly during these four years. The needs of the Association evolved as the organization grew, and contributing to meeting these needs has enabled me to learn new things and gain new experiences in my field. I love my job and I am very happy working for the Association.”

Fatih Gökyıldız, Turkish Deputy General Coordinator, Refugees Association: “A Turkish citizen came to us seeking our assistance to evict a Syrian renting his apartment who had not paid the rent for three months. We retrieved the Syrian’s information on the SUKOM system and arranged to meet him. He told us that he worked at nights, and was unable to reach the landlord, who worked during the day. His wife and children at home were unable to understand or explain the situation, or communicate with the landlord, as they did not speak Turkish.



We arranged a meeting between the landlord and the occupant to arrange settlement of the debt. Later on, his wife attended the Association's Turkish language courses, during which she was able to leave her child at our child care facility. This story was both sad and thought provoking, as it stemmed from the language barrier."

These stories by our Syrian and Turkish co workers at the Refugees Association show that our municipality firmly embraces the principles of participation and cooperation in providing services for Syrian migrants, and that we strive to create a social environment that enables Syrian and native 'fellow citizens' to coexist and interact harmoniously.



# ŞAHİNBEY MUNICIPALITY: A SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

## Şahinbey's Migration History

Sahinbey is a district and municipality in the city of Gaziantep, which was one of the first settlements founded in Anatolia on the route between the Mediterranean lands and Mesopotamia. Gaziantep maintained its importance throughout history as a center of attraction where various civilizations, cultures and religions blended or coexisted over the centuries. The city's neighbors are Suriye, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye and Adıyaman. The provincial population of 214,499 in the 1927 census has increased greatly in recent decades, at well over Turkey's average population growth rate, due to the migration.

The district of Şahinbey was named in honor of Commander Şahinbey, Commander of the Turkish Revolutionaries stationed on the Kilis Road during the War of Independence, who fought the occupying French Army in defending Antep.<sup>70</sup> The district is the largest in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in Turkey, and the largest of the three central districts in the Province of Gaziantep.

Due to its location, Gaziantep's ethno-cultural background is characterized by its heterogeneity. Today, Gaziantep's population is over 2 million, including native Turk, Kurd and Arab populations and other migrants, plus students from numerous countries attending its universities. The provincial population density is 290 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. The most densely populated district is Şahinbey, with a population of 92,000. The average annual population growth rate of Gaziantep is reported as 2.2%.<sup>71</sup>

On account of its location and industrial and commercial activities, Gaziantep is an important economic hub in the wider region. Over 25% of its land is arable plains, some irrigated from the Euphrates River.

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70 For detailed information on Şahinbey's history, see <https://www.sahinbey.bel.tr/idet/353/1057/> Accessed on August 19, 2020

71 For detailed information on Gaziantep's history and demographic structure, see <https://gaziantep.bel.tr/tr/gaziantepikesfet/gaziantephakkinda> Accessed on October 11, 2020

Gaziantep is a rich agricultural region where high-value crops such as pistachios, olives, cotton, grapes, paprika, lentils, wheat, barley and linen are grown. It is also an industrial and commercial hub where the products of Eastern and South Eastern Anatolian regions are processed for domestic and international markets. The organized industry zones, small industrial areas and free economic zones located throughout the city are important for the country's economy and industry.<sup>72</sup>

Gaziantep has an extensive transportation network, including an international airport and railway and road links serving Turkey's commercial relationships with Middle Eastern countries. With its distinctive culture, significant investment and great potential, tourism has also become a leading sector of the local economy. Renowned for its industrial and commercial capabilities, Gaziantep accounts for 13% of all Turkey's exports, which indicates its significance for the Turkish economy. The district is the source of 90% of pistachios, 85% of dried nuts, 60% of pasta, 45% of cotton yarn, and 10% of towels exported from Turkey.

Gaziantep is also one of Turkey's leading cities in gastronomy, with a rich multicultural, cuisine offering over 300 different dishes. Gaziantep became a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Creative Cities Network, and was chosen as the 2015 City of Gastronomy. With its unique history and museums, Gaziantep is a city of culture and tourism, and with four universities, it is also a city of learning.

Located on the Silk Road that passes through Turkey's TRC1 Region, which comprises Gaziantep, Adiyaman and Kilis, Gaziantep has been on a major migration route throughout history. The TRC1 Region was significantly impacted by migration, and Gaziantep has in recent decades experienced a rapid population increase, unplanned urbanization, and a lack of urban space and infrastructure. A 2009 *Economic and Social Integration Project in Migration Receiving Cities (EKOSEP)* field study reported that reasons for migration to Gaziantep were economic, personal and

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<sup>72</sup> For a newspaper article appeared in the national media about the City of Gastronomy Gaziantep, its cuisine and its membership to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, see: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gaziantep-unesco-yaratici-sehri-uyeligini-kazandi-40026094> Accessed on October 11, 2020.



familial,<sup>73</sup> and that most migrants were of rural origin, and had migrated to the city for economic reasons.

Gaziantep has long experienced a rate of population increase well above Turkey's average, due to the large mobility of migrants attracted by its level of industrialization. Gaziantep is the most developed trade center, and the city receiving most migrants in South Eastern Anatolia.

According to the Hasan Kalyoncu University report, *Analysis of the Current Migration Situation and Strategies in Gaziantep*, the top six provinces from which migrants come to Gaziantep are Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Adıyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Diyarbakır and Van,<sup>74</sup> and 93.3% were born in Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia, where there is high unemployment.

Migration is an issue for most large Turkish cities and districts, and has created challenges in the fields of education, health and urban development and services for the district of Şahinbey. Most migrant families are poor, poorly educated, and have many children, and the women and children are most affected by migration. Most migrant families have financial difficulties, and Şahinbey Municipality prioritized assisting them to resolve their problems, and facilitating their integration into social life.<sup>75</sup>

## Syrians in Şahinbey: Demographic Data

In August 2020, due to the significant migration from Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia, Şahinbey's population reached 926,544, and there were 450,741 Syrians under temporary protection in Gaziantep. The population of Şahinbey District is larger than those of 51 provincial centers and six metropolitan cities in Turkey, and includes ±300,000 Syrian refugees.<sup>76</sup> Migration has resulted in challenges

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73 For details about the EKOSEP Project, implemented from December 2007 to November 2010 to address the negative impacts of rapid migration and resolve problems due to ongoing rural-to-urban migration in four migration-receiving cities in Turkey (Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep and Erzurum), see <http://ekosep.blogspot.com/2009/05/ekosep-nedir.html> Accessed on August 19, 2020

74 Öztürk, et al., 2018

75 For detailed information on the demographic structure in the district of Şahinbey, see <https://www.sahinbey.bel.tr/idet/354/1081/nufus> Accessed on August 19, 2020

76 Data published by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management of Gaziantep shows that the district of Şahinbey hosts 273,889 Syrians as of July 1, 2020

regarding education, health, environment, cleanliness, infrastructure and employment in the district, where families are mostly poor, poorly educated and have many children.

Şahinbey became a central district municipality in 1989, and its 2,202 personnel strive to provide human centered services in 181 neighborhoods. Though receiving more refugees than most districts after 2011, Şahinbey has managed to successfully absorb them in a spirit of solidarity, in cooperation with other public institutions including Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, and international organizations and NGOs.

In the early days of the Syrian civil war, there were 168 Syrian migrants under temporary protection in the Province of Gaziantep, which jumped to 46,633 in 2013, and reached 326,373 by 2015, in a period of increasing tension. In September 2020, 212,237 Syrian refugees in Gaziantep were aged 0 to 18; 229,362 were 18 to 64 and 7,992 were over 64. Almost all of the 300,000 Syrians in Gaziantep lived in Şahinbey; 51% were men and 49% women, and most were poor.<sup>77</sup> They prefer the district due to the relatively low living costs, cultural similarities and ample job opportunities.

## Municipal Services Provided for Syrians in Şahinbey

Şahinbey Municipality embraces the principle of ‘fellow citizenship’ in Article 13 of Municipal Law N° 5393: “Everyone is a fellow citizen of the city which he resides in. Fellow citizens shall be entitled to participate in the decisions and services of the municipality, to be informed about municipal activities and to benefit from the aid of the municipal administration. Aid shall be extended in such a way so as not to hurt human dignity. The municipality shall perform necessary activities to improve the social and cultural relations between the fellow citizens and to preserve cultural values.”

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<sup>77</sup> According to the data taken by Şahinbey Municipality from the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management there were 273.889 registered Syrians under temporary protection in Şahinbey as of 1 July 2020.



Şahinbey Municipality endeavors to provide services for everyone living in the district on an equal basis, including the 300,000 Syrian residents. Municipal social facilities and services play a key role in preventing tensions between the host and refugee communities, and developing a culture of living together. The Youth Centers and Social Facilities provide training programs at 130 different venues, with role-model teachers and a well established training system.

Special emphasis is placed on social cohesion, given the linguistic, cultural and lifestyle differences, and Turkish, Kurdish and Arab trainees attend courses and seminars together. Social and other activities also serve to bring together participants from different ethnic backgrounds on common ground. Vocational training courses contribute to social and skills development, and increase available human resources. Municipal social facilities thus serve as ‘cohesion centers’. Other municipal services provided to the Syrians include:

- Since 2011, the municipality has spent TL 315 million to support the integration of the Syrians into social life
- 618 city parks, including the Green Valley Park,<sup>78</sup> the biggest park in Turkey, are open to all<sup>79</sup>
- Exercise equipment, stationery and toys were provided for Syrians living in refugee camps
- Syrians benefit equally from social, cultural, artistic, sports, skills and vocational training courses provided in over 200 Municipal social facilities, care homes and youth centers. 16,065 trainees have successfully completed the certified Turkish language course organized by the municipality in cooperation with Gaziantep University, and have received certificates. 1,523 Syrian trainees are currently attending various courses, and 15,943 Syrian students were provided with stationery.

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78 For a promotional video on the Green Valley Park, the biggest park in Turkey, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3r0a-er03k> Accessed on August 20, 2020.

79 For detailed information about the playgrounds and gardens built by Şahinbey Municipality, see <https://www.sahinbey.bel.tr/modul/parklar/Default> Accessed on August 20, 2020.

- The municipal soup kitchen provides hot food to 854 Syrian families every day. 8,500 servings of free soup are served every morning, and 15,302 families have received food parcels. Syrian families in need were provided with home appliances, carpets, furniture, and clothing.
- 13 battery operated wheelchairs and 75 manual wheelchairs were provided for Syrians with disabilities.
- Civil marriages of Syrians are performed swiftly and according to official procedures.
- Those planning to open businesses are provided with counseling, including on the applicable legislation.
- Humanitarian relief activities for Syrians living across the border, in refugee camp tent cities, and in the district are ongoing, e.g. ±150 tons of flour and 2 million loaves of bread have been sent as emergency food assistance.

The services offered by Şahinbey Municipality for all ‘fellow citizens’ in the district, whether native or Syrian, reveal a successfully combination of social and sustainable services. The common culture, kinship ties and history of the Syrians and the native population are the basis for Şahinbey Municipality’s service approach.<sup>80</sup>

### **Şahinbey: Social and Sustainable Municipal Services**

Şahinbey Municipality priorities are very similar to those of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, which prepared Turkey’s first Regional Climate Action Plan in early 2010.<sup>81</sup> This plan prioritized

- the creation of eco-regions
- establishing an Energy Info Point for local residents, and a Local Energy Agency
- improving public transport by using available infrastructure, and transitioning to advanced ‘green’ technologies
- providing incentives and support for energy efficient vehicles
- improving the energy efficiency of sewage treatment plants
- expanding green areas.

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<sup>80</sup> For a promotional video presented by Şahinbey Municipality on its social services, see <https://www.sahinbey.bel.tr/watch/17/40/sosyal-belediyeçilik-tanitim-filmi> Accessed on August 20, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Bostancı, 2014.



In line with the above approach, Şahinbey Municipality has worked to realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The municipality has created several new green areas, parks and gardens,<sup>82</sup> and achieved notable success in achieving Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12), Climate Action (Goal 13), Life on Land (Goal 15), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

These goals are evident in the success story below, shared by Ercan Kılınç, a project specialist in the Foreign Affairs Section.



*Şahinbey municipal playgrounds*

<sup>82</sup> For information on Şahinbey as a green municipality, see <https://www.sahinbey.bel.tr/haber/1/5821/yesil-alan-miktirimizi-4-000-000-metre-kareye-cikardik> Accessed on August 20, 2020.



## Şahinbey: Social and Sustainable Municipal Services

**Ercan Kılınc,** Şahinbey Municipality, Foreign Affairs Section

Şahinbey Municipality has built several parks for all ‘fellow citizens’, with convenient access for the disabled, women, children and the elderly. Our goal is to integrate everyone in our district into social life by creating sustainable, accessible and convenient green spaces for common use. By increasing the number of green areas, we have improved the quality of urban life in Şahinbey. We respect nature and strive to develop nature-based systems.

Unplanned urbanization due to the rapid population increase and density has made it difficult to create natural solutions and green spaces. For example, we had to resort to expropriation to create new green zones, which placed a considerable economic burden on the municipality. Other challenges are the inappropriate and uncaring use of parks by some ‘fellow citizens’.

Şahinbey District is an important center of attraction with its good environment, ample opportunities for employment and rich historical and cultural heritage. The ongoing civil war in Syria since 2011 resulted in the destruction of many historical sites and buildings there, and caused a massive wave of migration. This is one of the greatest human tragedies the world has ever seen, and Şahinbey Municipality has actively responded to it.

Here, in line with Mesopotamia’s rich historical heritage, refugees as ‘fellow citizens’ need open green areas and parks for psychological relief and to socialize, while trying to cope with



the hardships of urban life and work. Parks are also significant places for Syrians to socialize with local residents. There are cultural similarities between Gaziantep and Syria, and the use of city parks is an important part of daily life for both communities. We are thus constantly increasing the number of parks and trees in our district, in cooperation with both national and local stakeholders, and we encourage residents to plant trees in green areas.

Located near the Syrian border, our municipality has been, and continues to be deeply affected by the Syrian migration, and we work hard to mitigate the impacts of war through humanitarian aid activities, both in the district and across the border, and via our social and sustainable approach to service provision for all.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2014, Turkey has had the largest population of migrants of any country, and its municipalities have played a key role in responding to the mass migration of Syrians through the services they provide, plus innovative new projects. Today, municipalities are more important than ever for people's daily lives and well-being, and vital in providing migrant oriented essential services. The concept of local focus in migration studies literature emphasizes the increasing significance of municipalities and local actors in migration management,<sup>83</sup> which gained further prominence following the EU Turkey Refugee Statement of March 2016.

Our first book shared examples of successfully municipal responses to mass migration, and the third shares how municipalities have facilitated social cohesion. EU funding as of 2016 provided financial relief for the central government to some extent, and the subsequent transfer of funds by the EU to municipalities enabled them to develop projects, activities and services that specifically address the needs of Syrians under temporary protection.

All five municipalities covered in the book referred to the principle of fellow citizenship in Article 13 of the Municipal Law when conveying their success stories, each with a specific focus. Bursa Metropolitan Municipality presented its human centered approach to social services; Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality emphasized its data based approach to service provision; Esenyurt Municipality focused on its identity as a district of hope offering socio-economic services and support; Sultanbeyli Municipality shared how it provided services and solutions for Syrian migrants using a participatory approach via cooperation with its unique Refugees Association; and Şahinbey Municipality showcased its social and sustainable services approach.

The municipal achievements in this book are all based on three important common attributes:

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83 See Scholten & Penninx, 2016



- All municipalities had to provide additional services by making best use of their limited resources.
- All adopted a participatory and social approach in the provision of services, in cooperation with other public institutions, private corporations, international organizations, NGOs, and the migrants themselves.
- All conducted numerous activities that support the local realization of the 2016 UN Sustainable Development Goals, which have been embraced by municipalities throughout the world.

In responding to the Syrian mass migration, these Turkish municipalities became more effective in identifying and resolving existing problems related to the UN SDGs, especially the goals of Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12), Climate Action (Goal 13), Life on Land (Goal 15), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

## THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recommended by the United Nations<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> See <https://www.kureslamaclar.org/en/>

This book in the Local Governance and Migration Series published by the RESLOG Project in Turkey focuses on municipal responses to mass migration, against the background of their historical experiences of migration, which are generally ignored in migration related studies, but contributed to their contemporary migration responses and the development of social cohesion.

This series emphasizes that migration is not merely about numbers but real people and their dreams, expectations and experiences, including migrants and locals, municipal officials and other actors in various sectors with whom they cooperated. Contrary to institutional reports that have become increasingly digitized, our stakeholders have shared the human realities and processes involved in providing municipal services, which should also be included.

Lastly, we believe that this book demonstrates the value of storytelling as a method that enhances narrative reporting, and of focusing on positive achievements and inspiring stories of hope, rather than only on problems, which our municipalities naturally encountered in relation to rapid mass migration, but which have been sufficiently researched and documented elsewhere.

The objective of this publication and others in the RESLOG Local Governance and Migration Series is to record and share how Turkish municipalities used their historical knowledge and experience in meeting the needs of migrants, and how, despite limited financial resources, data and personnel, they managed to respond flexibly and effectively to the Syrian mass migration.



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## ABOUT THE COMPILER

### Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kaya

Ayhan Kaya is a lecturer at the Department of International Relations and Politics of İstanbul Bilgi University. He has been awarded *Jean Monnet Chair* by the European Union Commission in 2011. Since 2019, Kaya has been conducting a European Research Council project (ERC Advanced Grant) focusing on the increasing radicalization among youth in Europe. The project is planned to be finalized by late 2023. Previously a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence during the 2016-2017 academic year, Kaya has studies on the radical right movements in Europe and the Syrian refugees in Turkey in addition to books, articles and translations on a number of topics including diaspora, identity, international migration, ethnicity, nationalism, multiculturalism, citizenship, transnational area, refugees, populism and sustainable development. While working at the European University Institute in Florence in 2016-2017, Kaya taught as an adjunct lecturer at the New York University, Florence campus. Kaya worked and taught at the European University Viadrina in Germany as Aziz Nesin Chair in 2013 and at Malmö University in Sweden as the Willy Brandt Chair in 2011. Kaya has authored several books, including *Populism and Heritage in Europe: Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019); *Populism in European Memory* (London: Routledge, 2019, a compilation book co-written with Chiara de Cesari); *Turkish Origin Migrants and Their Descendants: Hyphenated Identities in Transnational Space* (Palgrave, 2018); *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration* (London: Palgrave, 2013); *Islam, Migration and Integration: The Age of Securitization* (London: Palgrave, 2012); *Sicher in Kreuzberg: Constructing Diasporas* (Bielefeld: transcript verlag, 2001); *Little İstanbul in Berlin* (Büke Publications, 2000); *Euro-Turks: A Bridge or a Breach between Turkey and the European Union?*, co-written with Ferhat Kentel (İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2005, English version: CEPS Publications, Brussels, 2005) and *Belgian Turks*, co-written with Ferhat Kentel (King Baudouin Foundation, 2008). Kaya has also authored a compilation book titled *Migration to Turkey since the 14th Century*, co-compiled with Murat Erdoğan (İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2015); *Migration in Today's Turkey*, co-written with Emre Işık et.al. (İstanbul Bilgi University, 2008); *Roots and Roads: Migration Processes in Turkey*, co-compiled with Bahar Şahin (İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2007); *Majority and Minority Policies in Turkey: Citizenship Debates in the EU Process*, co-compiled with Turgut Tarhanlı (İstanbul: TESEV Publications, 2005); another book compilation titled *Problems Without Borders in International Relations*, co-compiled with Günay Göksu Özdoğan (İstanbul: Bağlam Publications, 2004); and a journal compilation titled *The Journal of Sociology, Special Issue on Cultural Studies*, co-compiled with Emre Işık (Issue 14, September 2000). In addition, he translated the books *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* by Fredrik Barth (İstanbul: Bağlam Publications, 2000: with Seda Gürkân) and *Citizenship and Social Class* by T.H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore (İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2006). Honored with the Research Award of the Social Sciences Association in 2003 and the Turkish Academy of Sciences Award in 2005; Kaya is a member of the Academy of Science.



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