

# 10. The local turn in migrant practices in Turkey: Syrians in Bursa<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkey has been exposed to the entry of thousands of Syrian refugees since April 2011. On 3 March 2022 there were 3,747,734 Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Syrians lack permanent legal residence status and political or citizenship rights, and most have only insecure irregular employment. Temporary protection regulation<sup>3</sup> blocks Syrians' path to citizenship and access to individual international protection. The Turkish government therefore grants citizenship to Syrians under temporary protection through 'exceptional citizenship'. Some Syrians are naturalized under the article of exceptional citizenship of the Turkish Citizenship Law introduced in 2009. According to Article 12 (exceptions in acquiring Turkish citizenship) of this Law (Law No. 5901) 'those persons who bring into Turkey industrial facilities or have rendered or are believed to render an outstanding service in the social or economic arena or in the fields of science, technology, sports, culture or arts' can acquire citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Since 31 January 2021 Turkey has issued citizenship to around 193,000 Syrians.<sup>5</sup> Syrians are also gradually becoming the targets of increasing hostility from the majority society in Turkey, because socio-political polarization has become widespread since the failed military coup in July 2016. Another essential source of growing hostility to Syrians in Turkey is the deepening of the economic crisis, which makes scapegoats of refugees, who are blamed for high unemployment and rising prices. Yet Turkey is not just a stop on the way to Europe for many Syrian refugees but is instead a place where many wish to stay if conditions allow (Kaya and Kiraç 2016; Rottmann and Kaya 2020).

Despite its shortcomings in the economic and political integration of migrants and its anti-discrimination laws, Turkey has recently performed relatively well in other areas of the integration of Syrian migrants under temporary protection. The 2020 MIPEX (Migration Integration Policy Index) results demonstrate that Turkey performed well between 2015 and 2020 in the inte-

gration of migrants in accessing education, health services, and naturalization. Turkey's relative success in integrating migrants stems from the engagement of the Directorate of Migration Management, local governments, NGOs, and academia. Since the introduction of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement of 16 March 2016, local actors have become more active in strengthening the processes of integration of Syrian forced migrants residing in Turkey. Based on the findings of field research in the rural districts of Bursa, a neighbouring city of Istanbul, as well as extensive desk research including the scrutiny of legal texts (the Municipality Law and the Law on Foreigners and International Protection), policies at national and local levels, and secondary resources, this chapter analyses how integration policies, practices, and responses have evolved at both central and local levels since the mass migration of Syrians to Turkey.

The chapter presents a multilevel analysis of integration policies and practices giving voice to migrants, local stakeholders, and municipal actors, who offered their first-hand testimonies in semi-structured interviews held in the second part of 2021. Following participatory action research (Lewin 1946; Stringer 2014), various local actors in rural Karacabey, including municipal actors, civil society actors, and migrants themselves, were actively involved in the knowledge production process. A considerable number of stakeholders affiliated with public administrations, international organizations, education/training institutions, trade and/or labour unions, small/large private companies, and migrants was actively involved in the research. In parallel with the spatial distribution and sociodemographic characteristics of immigrants, the profile of local migrant stakeholders includes Syrians, Afghans, and Jordanians. Eventually, 27 immigrants (of whom nine were women, and four were children) were involved in our research activities. Three of the male participants were involved in various activities more than once.

## MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE, LOCAL TURN, AND SUBSIDIARITY

To explain the complex institutional dimensions of governance, migration scholars have found the concept of multilevel governance (MLG) helpful (Panizzon and van Riemsdijk 2019; Scholten and Penninx 2016). MLG was initially defined as the dispersion of authority away from central government – upwards to the supranational level, downwards to subnational jurisdictions, and sideways to public-private networks (Scholten 2020). The interpretative lens of MLG emphasizes the questions of who the actors and institutions involved in governing migration are and their modes of interaction and political-legal commitment. MLG focuses on several policy levels, including

global, supranational, regional, national, and local, on which migration policies are formed.

MLG explores how these policymaking levels interact, contradict each other, can be compromised, and have been systematically theorized through four modes: centralist; localist; multilevel; and decoupled (Scholten and Penninx 2016). The centralist mode of governance aims to bring policy convergence via top-down approaches with a clear hierarchy between government levels. Local governments in the localist mode frame migration policies, including reception, in a specifically local way, which in turn leads to policy divergence. The multilevel governance mode is one in which there is an interaction between the various levels of government without the clear dominance of one level, which engenders some convergence between policy frames at different levels, produced and sustained by their mutual interactions. In refugee governance state actors are likely to remain in charge of the asylum decision-making process and to retain at least some coordinating role in the actual provision of reception and integration by delegating some responsibilities to local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private individuals, which has been conceptualized as a local turn and a politics of subsidiarity.

The *local turn* refers to the delegation of the power of nation-states to municipal authorities and NGOs, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), and private individuals. This turn is deepened by neoliberal forms of governmentality, and the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations (UN) in 2016 and the EU's efforts to engage with local governments in the migration control field (Kutz and Wolff 2020). Local actors act as service providers and creators of local discourses and interpreters of central or international discourses on the ground (Lowndes and Polat 2020). While the local level has been referred to in the discussion of migrant integration (Dekker et al. 2015), it has also been posited in explaining reception (Oliver et al. 2020) and protection through controlling access to asylum (Artero and Fontanari 2021).

## SYRIANS IN TURKEY UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION

The first group of Syrian nationals found refuge in Turkey by crossing into the province of Hatay on 29 April 2011. Initially, the government expected that the Assad regime would soon collapse, and it estimated that at most around 100,000 Syrians would remain in Turkey for two or three weeks (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022). Following the escalation of the armed conflict in Syria, the government declared an open-door policy for Syrian refugees in October 2011. Accordingly, Turkey has allowed Syrians with passports to enter the country freely and treated those who may have entered without documents

in a similar way; it has guaranteed the principle of non-refoulement, offered temporary protection, and committed to the provision of the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for the refugees (Kirişçi 2014). Meanwhile, a discursive component of reception became more apparent. State actors framed Syrians as guests. This political discursive frame was later complemented by the religiously loaded discourse of the *Ansar* spirit. The Turkish government quickly codified its Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) in 2014, echoing the EU's Directive. The directive grants Syrians almost the entire spectrum of refugees' social and civil rights in western societies. The number of Syrians has since increased, while their statuses have varied, as presented in Table 10.1 and elaborated further below.

Since 24 February 2022 Turkey's Temporary Protection regime has granted 3,746,674 Syrian nationals the right to stay legally in Turkey and some level of access to fundamental rights and services. Other Syrians in Turkey have been granted citizenship and residence permits. Since 15 February 2022 the Minister of Interior reports that 193,293 Syrians have been granted Turkish citizenship. However, the temporary protection regulation blocks the path to citizenship and access to the application for individual international protection.

## LOCAL TURN IN REFUGEE GOVERNANCE IN TURKEY

The salience of the local turn as a research agenda has been increasingly observable in a growing number of studies concerning Syrians. One research strand in this regard focuses on encounters at local levels through detailed anthropological studies. Theoretically, some studies benefit from the insights of border and borderland studies, which began to emerge in the 1990s in Turkish scholarship focusing on border economies, forms of border administration, and the maintenance of border security through the lens of anthropology (Aras 2020; Rottmann and Nimer 2020). Another research strand of the local turn in urban areas concerns the municipal authorities' role in responding to the Syrian refugee situation (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022; Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Genç 2018; Kale and Erdoğan 2019; Lowndes and Polat 2020; Kaya 2020). Local interpretations were enacted as part of specific approaches to refugee service delivery. Working with local NGOs, municipalities accessed international funds despite the national government's vociferous critique of the EU refugee policy. Even in an increasingly authoritarian setting refugee policy was constituted through multiple and contingent processes of local government interpretation (Lowndes and Polat 2020).

Local municipalities are one of the key integration actors. However, their service provision is very uneven because of uncertainty about whether municipalities can provide services to non-citizens. Municipalities also provide

*Table 10.1 Changing number of Syrian refugees in major cities between November 2014, 21 July 2017, 12 August 2019, and September 2021*

City	November	July	August	September	City	November	July	August	September
	2014	2017	2019	2021		2014	2017	2019	2021
İstanbul	330,000	495,027	547,943	532,153	Batman	20,000	20,181	22,392	15,702
Gaziantep	220,000	336,929	445,748	457,183	Şırnak	19,000	15,080	15,019	14,993
Hatay	190,000	397,047	432,436	436,951	Kocaeli	15,000	34,957	57,745	55,906
Şanlıurfa	170,000	433,856	429,735	424,827	İzmir	13,000	113,460	145,123	149,273
Mardin	70,000	96,062	87,507	90,076	Osmaniye	12,000	46,157	50,295	46,430
Adana	50,000	165,818	240,376	254,036	Antalya	10,000	458	1,786	3,552
Kilis	49,000	127,175	116,317	106,026	Kayseri	9,500	62,645	79,161	81,338
Mersin	45,000	153,976	201,887	233,520	Diyarbakır	5,000	30,405	33,245	24,010
Konya	45,000	79,139	108,419	121,444	Adıyaman	2,500	27,084	25,549	22,610
K.maraş	44,000	93,408	90,073	94,879	Samsun	1,230	4,540	5,852	8,320
Ankara	30,000	80,279	93,120	102,199	Niğde	1,100	3,848	4,674	6,446
Bursa	20,000	114,498	174,865	179,122	Aydın	1,000	8,806	7,922	7,453

Source: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

(or support the provision of) vocational training and job placement services, healthcare, childcare, legal aid, and social and financial aid to varying degrees. Some municipalities may be inactive because they fear legal and social repercussions. These municipalities are concerned about the negative reaction of local citizens to the reception and integration of refugees in their neighbourhoods (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022). An additional reason for the low service provision for migrants is that municipalities' budgets may be insufficient because they are determined based on the population of citizens. Municipal actors do not know what they are allowed to do legally, so decisions are made individually and ad hoc. Meanwhile, refugees do not know why parts of the same city differ in their treatment of refugees. They must often navigate services with the aid of their peers or informal networks (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022).

Numerous programmes are run by NGOs within the integration sphere, but there is no centralized system for reporting activities and needs assessments, meaning there is a lack of coordination. It is impossible to know how the needs of women, men, children, or LGBTQ+ migrants are systematically served (or not) via the various integration programmes. There are many programmatic overlaps. For example, programmes for refugee children's protection and integration are run by state agencies (e.g. the Ministry of Education), local institutions (e.g. municipalities, city councils), International Organizations (IOs) (UN agencies), International NGOs (I-NGOs), and local implementing NGOs. However, a lack of coordination and cooperation among these actors, actor hierarchies, and short-term earmarked funding seriously affect programme outcomes (Şahin Mencütek et al. 2023).

## MIGRANTS, NATIVES AND MUNICIPAL LAW

Turkish municipalities follow the principle of *fellow citizenship* (*Hemşehrilik* in Turkish) embodied in Article 13 of the Municipal Law and strive to provide equal services to non-citizen residents and initiate projects that foster social cohesion between native and migrant communities. Syrian refugees have been forced to migrate, and because of the civil war most have suffered extreme trauma and impoverishment and are extremely vulnerable. As they struggle to rebuild their lives and meet their many needs with minimal resources in a foreign country, they face significant challenges, including the language barrier. It is unsurprising that their vulnerability and inability to communicate with locals tend to make Syrians introverted (Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022).

Municipal responsibilities include ensuring that native and migrant communities coexist in peace, and their role in this respect is far more important than that of national and international actors (Scholten and Penninx 2016). The challenges nation-states face in realizing the 2016 UN Sustainable

Development Goals and in managing migration and social cohesion have increased significantly, and it is essential that they are also addressed locally. The migration studies literature (Scholten and Penninx 2016) confirms this is happening, and Turkish municipalities have recently started to play a more active role in this regard. This has been given further impetus by the 2016 EU-Turkey Refugee Statement.<sup>6</sup>

The local environment for which municipalities are responsible is where migrants and native populations live, work, interact, use infrastructure, and receive services, the availability and quality of which affect social harmony, inclusion, and coexistence. The Turkish Municipal Law includes the principle of ‘fellow citizenship’, and municipalities are responsible for meeting the day-to-day needs of all residents and promoting a culture of coexistence. Article 13 of the Turkish Municipal Law states: ‘Everyone is a fellow citizen of the city in which he resides. 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.’<sup>7</sup> This article makes municipalities responsible for improving social and cultural relations among ‘fellow citizens’ and grants equal rights and responsibilities to all, whether legal citizens or not, and it is important for coexistence and the social cohesion between the native and migrant communities that the general public is made aware of this.

However, Article 14 makes an implicit distinction between citizens and non-citizens in the statement: ‘Municipal services shall be rendered in the most appropriate manner at the places nearest to the citizens’. This appears inconsistent with Article 13, which refers to ‘fellow citizens’, defined as all residents. Nevertheless, most municipalities accept and act in accordance with the principle of fellow citizenship in Article 13, rather than trying to avoid their equal responsibilities regarding resident migrants by appealing to a literal interpretation of Article 14.

Local municipalities in Turkey still lack central government funding for refugees. As the allocation from the national budget is only indexed to the number of Turkish citizens, the presence of refugees does not result in an increase (Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Yet refugees do not contribute to the municipalities’ budgets, because they are not subject to local tax (Coşkun and Uçar 2018). The limitation on financial resources therefore becomes a critical issue for those municipalities hosting a large number of refugees. Growing numbers of refugees in many cities result in an increase in demand for infrastructure services such as rubbish and sewerage, which need to be compensated without any additional allocation (Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Furthermore, municipal administrators are exposed to the criticism of local residents, who object to the use of municipal resources for non-citizens (Kale and Erdoğan 2019).

The local authorities cooperate with civil society organizations to provide free services and orientation to Syrians about education, health services, and training opportunities. To overcome financial constraints, actively engaged municipalities seek external funding by establishing partnerships with NGOs and international actors. In other words, local municipalities have discovered some 'bypass methods' to obtain extra funds for the welfare of refugees (Betts, Memişoğlu and Ali 2020; Coşkun and Uçar 2018). Local governments have no legal, financial, or political-administrative responsibility or authority. Although they are not active in the formulation and implementation of policies to tackle the refugee issue (Coşkun and Uçar 2018), and they are not provided any extra budget by the central state to meet the needs of migrants under temporary protection, they remain important responsible actors.

## KARACABEY, BURSA: TESTING LOCAL TURN IN A RURAL DISTRICT

Karacabey, the rural MATILDE region, is a district that stands out economically with its agricultural production and with other sectors like trade, industry, transport, and services. However, the vast and fertile soils of the Karacabey plain (776,744 hectares of agricultural land) afford great opportunities for the agricultural sector to make its mark on Karacabey's economic landscape: most of its population is engaged in agricultural production. Besides, animal husbandry, especially horse and sheep breeding, is a highly developed sector in the area, which is known for breeding and raising Turkey's best racehorses. As agriculture and animal husbandry play an important role in production, agriculture-based industry has developed, and this makes the area attractive for investment. Leading food industry factories are based in the area, as well as the import-export industry in the fields of feed, poultry, livestock, and dairy products (Ak 2017). Those working in the industry and agriculture work largely as seasonal workers.

The province's land use covers an area of 1,088,638 hectares. Thirty-five per cent of Bursa's land is mountains and uplands, 48 per cent plateaus, and 17 per cent plains (Bursa 2019). Forty-two per cent of agricultural land is used as farmland, 14 per cent for vegetables, 12 per cent for orchards, two per cent for vineyards, and 12 per cent for olive groves. The agricultural land area has decreased by around 17 per cent since 2006. This is due mostly to deteriorating soil fertility (Bursa 2019). Nevertheless, an increase in higher value-added vegetable, fruit, and olive fields has been observed (Özkan and Kadagan 2019). Bursa's proximity to Istanbul makes it an important hub for providing fresh vegetables, olives, tomatoes, and so on for processing in the factories around Karacabey.



In terms of demographic structure Karacabey is one of Bursa's 17 municipalities, with a population of 84,666 in 2021. Karacabey's district includes 64 villages. Based on their proportion among foreign nationals in Bursa and Karacabey, Syrian migrants under temporary protection, as well as Afghans, are the focus of the case study. Syrians represent a specific subgroup whose population rate corresponds to more than five per cent of Bursa's current population (3.1 million in 2021). The ratio of foreigners to the total population in Karacabey is 3.65 per cent (around 3,000). The foreign population figures include Syrians under temporary protection (2,828), which corresponds to 3.37 per cent of Karacabey's total population (July 2021). Karacabey's agricultural land also attracts thousands of seasonal workers, including Syrians, who come from the south-east and south of Turkey every year between April and September (Sönmez 2017).

Urban–rural linkages were a focus throughout the research activities conducted in Karacabey during the summer and autumn of 2021. The action research's main focus was to understand the role of migrants in the labour market, especially in the agricultural sector, as well as how natives interacted with migrants. Issues of migrants' welcome, housing, and access to services in Karacabey were therefore also scrutinized. Given the spatial distribution and sociodemographic characteristics of immigrants in Karacabey, the impact of international migrants' integration on a rural labour market is at the centre of the research. In what follows the main local challenges and needs are addressed in relation to the governance of refugees by local actors that are not financially and administratively supported by central state actors. In other words, the sections below amplify the details of the local turn in the case of Bursa, Karacabey, an area that is also exposed to the neoliberal logic of migration governance based on the politics of subsidiarity or the delegation of responsibility from central to local actors without the central state's provision of additional financial instruments.

## CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

The Karacabey research identified major challenges and needs of the local participants, who expressed their willingness to see more agricultural-based and environmentally sensitive policies and practices in their region. The research also demonstrated that local stakeholders were very sceptical about the central state actors, which they believed were untransparent and inaccessible. This finding confirms the neoliberal logic of central state actors that are ready to delegate responsibilities for the governance of migrants' integration to local actors without any financial or administrative support. This section reveals the local challenges and needs the local participants raised. Many raised the issues of depopulation, the central state's indifference to agricultural production,

industrialization leading to the shrinking of agricultural land, and the impermanence of refugees that prevented their integration into different spheres of everyday life. Our interviewees also expressed their local needs, while describing the major challenges in their environment.

### **Depopulation and Metropolitan Municipality System as a Challenge to Agricultural Sustainability**

Depopulation in rural areas is a worldwide problem with socioeconomic and ecological consequences (Tenza-Peral et al. 2022; Camarero and Oliva 2019). This problem also constitutes an important challenge for Karacabey. The lack of structural measures for boosting rural development and providing self-sustaining enterprises to help rural producers stand on their own feet has resulted in the shrinking of investment in agriculture (Arıcı and Kirmikil 2017). This process has also triggered the emigration of young locals in Karacabey to neighbouring cities like Bursa and Istanbul. The ongoing demographic pressure, coupled with the fragmentation of inheritance, has rendered agricultural land idle for the last two decades. Our participatory action research has revealed that the younger generation's outwards migration to urban centres threatens agricultural sustainability in Karacabey and neighbouring districts.

Karacabey's vast area of agricultural land means there is a pressing need for agricultural workers, especially in the summer. Agricultural land in Karacabey and its neighbouring district, Mustafakemalpaşa, attracts thousands of seasonal workers from south-eastern and southern Turkey every year between April and September. Some are Turkish citizens; some Syrians. Both seasonal and permanent migrants and refugees are essential agents in the harvesting of fertile agricultural land, an activity neglected by locals because of young people's reluctance to participate in agricultural production, the concomitant growth of emigration, and the fragmentation of inheritance.

The situation is worsened by the lack of support from central state actors for agricultural production and managing the mobility of migrant labour in Karacabey. The legal regulation changing the status of the villages and the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities has further diminished the allocation of sufficient resources for rural development. Law No. 6360 of 2012 rescaled urban areas through the absorption of rural ones (Savaş-Yavuzçehre 2016). The former villages lost their autonomous legal personality within the boundaries of metropolitan areas and were transformed into neighbourhoods run by the metropolitan municipality. Accordingly, 47 per cent of villages and 54 per cent of municipalities in Turkey lost their autonomous power to the metropolitan cities (Dik 2014). This legal and administrative change resulted in the transfer of common goods to metropolitan municipalities. In addition to the depopulation that has already created territorial inequalities, this regulation

is criticized for its hindrance of municipalities in supporting and developing agricultural production in rural areas (Arıcı and Kirmikil 2017). Our interviewees and local stakeholders during the research activities maintained this resulted in a failure to prevent depopulation and regulate supply and demand in both agricultural production and animal husbandry. It was reported that the only way to provide this balance was to rely on a seasonal agricultural workforce of mostly Syrian and Afghan migrants. However, the impermanence of seasonal migrants creates another problem. Native populations do not consider immigrants an asset for long-term local development. Local municipal and public administration actors therefore do not implement any policy to address seasonal migrants' long-term problems. This also places social cohesion beyond local consideration.

### **Uncontrolled Industrialization and its Challenges to Rural Life**

The agricultural production capacity of Karacabey, with its 776,744 hectares of agricultural land and 316,434 hectares of forestland, stands out economically. Animal husbandry, especially horse and sheep breeding, is also a highly developed sector in the district, which is known for breeding and raising Turkey's best racehorses. Yet the uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization in Karacabey (Karaer and Başkaya 2017) gives rise to concern among the local population. During our research the local interviewees specifically articulated their concerns about environmental problems, especially industrial pollution from the uncontrolled concentration of industry poisoning the farmlands in the region.

Over-industrialization seems the main challenge. It creates further impediments to agricultural production. Our field visits and interviews with local stakeholders revealed that locals were greatly concerned about the preparations made by the central state actors to introduce a Hi-Tech Industrial Site (YTSB, *Yüksek Teknoloji Sanayi Bölgesi*) near Karacabey.<sup>8</sup> Although the construction work in the area has already started, none of the local stakeholders, including the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has up-to-date information about what is going on. Locals expressed their anger and anxiety about the lack of consultation and information from the state actors about the region's industrialization plans. There are rumours that some of the heavy industry in Gebze (an industrial district of Kocaeli, a city neighbouring Bursa in the North) will be moved to the district of Karacabey to ease the industrial and urban pressure in Gebze. Locals are genuinely concerned that such a move will result in heavy pollution of agricultural land, wildlife, and the lakes on birds' migration routes. Such ambiguities and the lack of future prospects mean local youngsters are hesitant to stay in Karacabey. This places the immigrant workforce at the forefront of agricultural and industrial production. Many

studies also show that the principles of sustainable development are unknown at the local level (Karaer and Baskaya 2017). The construction of the YTSB in Karacabey seems to pose an important challenge to agricultural sustainability. Dysfunctional local cooperatives/associations are also disappointed by this process. All these challenges have created a strong sense among local actors of being left behind in these remote places ‘which no longer matter’ to those at the centre (Rodriguez-Pose 2017).

### **Temporary Protection Status and Labour Market Informality**

The research data demonstrate that international migrants prefer Karacabey for its job opportunities. Rural Karacabey hosts both Syrians and Afghans, who come to the region to work as seasonal agricultural workers. The district also hosts permanent migrants, who work in factories and workshops. Some immigrants also work in jobs that locals will not do. There are also those who are assigned to work in international projects funded by the EU, such as immigrant health workers employed in Migrant Health Centres (MHCs) within the framework of the SIHHAT project.<sup>9</sup>

Labour markets in Turkey face ongoing structural problems, including a high level of informality, to which immigrants are also exposed. Our interviews and observations confirm that international migrants’ work in Karacabey is very informal. The informal sector generally comprises jobs that are unattractive to the local population, including seasonal agricultural jobs (Caro 2020). Neither Turkish citizens nor international migrants are registered in seasonal agricultural assignments. Syrians under temporary protection mostly work informally as a cheap labour force. Most find themselves working in dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs in highly precarious and unsafe work environments. Because of this informality we did not receive a positive response from the leading industrial producers and factory owners to our requests to interview their migrant workers during our research.

The lack of access to the labour market also makes it exceedingly difficult for Syrians under temporary protection to formalize their status. According to a regulation introduced in January 2016 temporary protection status beneficiaries were granted the right to obtain either a work permit or a work permit exemption. The work permit stipulates a multilayer restriction mechanism: (1) spatial restrictions – the requirement of registration in the province of residence; and (2) a quota system – the number of temporary status beneficiaries cannot exceed 10 per cent of the number of Turkish citizens working at the workplace. These restrictions directly affect the scope and extent of informal migrant labour, even though immigrants are crucial to closing the existing gap in the labour market – for example, Afghan shepherds and Syrian agricultural workers in Karacabey. The difficulties of obtaining a work permit

seem to remain the same even for those who are investing heavily in industry in Karacabey. Two common impediments mentioned by our interviewees were difficulties encountered in naturalization and getting a work permit.

Some state actors such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security argue that there are other reasons that prompt Syrians to cling to their informality in the labour market. According to a study by the ministry the EU's humanitarian assistance programme discourages them from seeking formality. More than 1.6 million Syrians in Turkey rely on the EU's Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) financial assistance. ESSN aid is given to each member of a migrant family if none has formal employment. This is believed to prevent many Syrian refugees who are eligible for ESSN aid applying for jobs in the formal sector, because they fear they will lose this aid.

The qualitative data gathered during the field research also show that gendered dynamics, intersectional discrimination, low salaries, and the instrumentalization of migrant labour remain the major problems to be solved. Concerning seasonal agricultural migrants, it was specifically stated that the system of *dayibashilik* (an intermediary person between landlords and seasonal workers) was open to extensive abuse, exemplifying the instrumentalization of the international labour force. A '*dayibashi*' organized large groups of migrant workers. Groups could have more than 100 workers. In the summer of 2021 each seasonal worker would be paid 100 Turkish Lira (TL)/per day, from which the *dayibashi* took a commission of 20 TL (in August 2021, 100 TL was worth approximately 10 euro). Impermanence also leads to a lack of interaction between locals and migrant communities. This negative correlation makes it difficult for migrants to contribute better to the setting in which they find themselves, which brings us to the challenges to social cohesion.

### Challenges to Social Cohesion

One of the most frequently stated challenges during the research was migrants' lack of Turkish language skills. The language barrier is among the serious challenges to immigrants, especially Syrians, generating a sense of territorial belonging and integration in education and work environments. The emphasis on Syrians living in a closed community with limited or no contact with locals demonstrates the lack of social cohesion (Kaya 2020; Erdoğan, Şener and Ağca 2022), for which schooling is essential. However, precarious conditions such as Syrian families' low income and education levels, parents' employment status, and poor language ability have a negative impact on immigrant children's school participation. The schooling of seasonal migrants' children becomes an even greater issue in situ.

Syrians' prolonged temporary protection status is key to understanding the root cause of the difficulties faced with respect to social cohesion. This

is a matter that is often discussed in various cities, including Bursa. Locals and immigrants interact little in everyday life in either the centre of Bursa or in rural Karacabey. The impermanence of seasonal jobs also plays a crucial role in the lack of interaction between locals and migrant communities in Karacabey. The field research findings reveal that this impermanence explains the inertia of the local authorities in handling the issue of social cohesion.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the centrality of the state in designing policies, there is also adequate evidence for a discussion of the local turn to carry out a politics of subsidiarity. Non-state actors consistently navigate possibilities for participation in the spaces pertinent to refugee affairs in local settings. They play a considerable role in facilitating access to rights and services, and they increasingly become an essential part of the context. However, in many cases the local turn must be acknowledged with caution in state-centric response models because the efforts of non-state actors, intentionally or not, seem to comply with the state's efforts to delegate the task of migrant integration to local actors without any financial or administrative assistance.

Based on the findings of the participatory action research, one can conclude that locals are very aware of the challenges and opportunities, especially in terms of migration's socioeconomic impact on rural development and agricultural production. However, the lack of a rural-based approach at the central state level makes it difficult for local stakeholders in Karacabey to generate stronger models of coexistence between local citizens and migrant-origin individuals engaged in agricultural production processes.

Due to their legal precarity and impermanence, most refugees rarely participate in activities that involve confrontation with the receiving state authorities. They increasingly cooperate with local actors or international organizations, but they are seldom included in the decisions that affect them. At the individual level many refugees struggle to navigate such a complex and stratified system. In their everyday practices, they develop coping mechanisms to improve their reception conditions, empowering themselves for better protection and partial integration. Overall, they seek to overcome in-betweenness by moving to more permanent and dignified life conditions and by challenging the severe implications of impermanence. Some local actors also assist them to navigate impermanence and find belonging.

Our research in Karacabey has revealed that the emergence of local support structures in response to migrants' experiences of deprivation can be celebrated at first glance as a sign of a welcoming culture. However, there is another, darker, side of the coin. The local turn in migration governance in Karacabey and elsewhere also points to the selective affinity of the politics

of subsidiarity and a neoliberal policy doctrine that privileges re-privatization at the expense of the most vulnerable parts of the population. The central state's lack of planning in the realms of agricultural production, financial support, administrative support, depopulation, environmental pollution, and over-industrialization results in the accumulation of responsibilities for local actors in sustaining agricultural production, managing the negative externalities of depopulation, governing migrants' integration, and complying with the legal regulations outlined in the Municipal Law.

Migrant workers mostly work informally as cheap labour. The majority work in highly precarious and unsafe work conditions. A labour law specific to agriculture has not been enacted for many years because of the disorganization of the agricultural sector and the difficulties in distinguishing between worker and employer. The lack of social security for workers in agricultural production is another problem in rural areas. Structural and legal problems therefore create further precarity among agricultural workers in general, who have a strong sense of being neglected and left behind in these remote areas (Rodriguez-Pose 2017). Migrant workers in rural areas suffer even more in such circumstances. Reforming the labour law to empower agricultural workers will therefore require strong political will and a focus on the rural at central state level in the first place.

## NOTES

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2. For up-to-date data see the official website of the Directorate of Migration Management <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>, accessed on 5 March 2022.
3. For a summary of the Temporary Protection Regulation in English see <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-turkey>, accessed on 5 March 2022, and for the original legal document that entered into force in 2014 see <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/10/20141022-15-1.pdf>, accessed on 5 March 2022.
4. See [https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/6585/file/Turkey\\_citizenship\\_law\\_2009\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/6585/file/Turkey_citizenship_law_2009_en.pdf), accessed on 12 August 2021.
5. For granting citizenship to Syrians see *Daily Cumhuriyet* (17 February 2022), <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/suleyman-soylu-turk-vatandasligina-gecen-suriyeli-sayisini-acikladi-1908803>, accessed on 28 February 2022.
6. 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 22 February 2022.

7. For the full text of the Municipal Law No. 5393, dated 3 July 2005, see <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5393&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5>, accessed on 25 February 2022.
8. For more detail about the Teknosab see the official website of the project <https://teknosab.org.tr/index.php>, accessed on 8 March 2022.
9. For more information on the SIHHAT (Health) Project initiated by the European Commission see <https://eng.sihhatproject.org/>, accessed on 6 March 2022.

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