

## **Street-Level Bureaucrats and Provision of Welfare Services to Forced Migrants in Turkey**

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**Abstract.** Since 1990s Turkey has become a net migrant receiving country, and in 2012 it faced the largest inflow of migration in its history. In addition to the inflow of migrants from Syria large numbers of forced migrants from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and various African countries entered Turkey. This situation led Turkey to create new institutions, and mechanisms to regulate migration, which included the delivery of basic welfare services to forced migrants. This study examines basic welfare services offered to migrants in Samsun and Denizli, two Anatolian cities hosting forced migrants from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan as well as those from Syria. Provision of welfare services to migrants in both cities was examined through the lens of street-level bureaucrats in education, health, social assistance, and municipal services.

**Keywords:** *Forced migrants, refugees, welfare services, education services, health services, social assistance, refugees, asylum seekers, street-level bureaucrats*

### **Introduction**

Since early 1990s, Turkey has hosted large numbers of forced migrants. Forced migrants include refugees, asylum seekers, and people displaced because of conflicts or disasters (Castles, 2003: 13; Becker, and Ferrara, 2019:1). Iranian Revolution, the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the Gulf War, conflicts and the political turmoil in the Middle East, are the main political, and economic reasons behind the migration towards Turkey. While high-migration countries are closing their borders to immigrants, flexible visa applications, geographical location, and large informal labour market have resulted in Turkey becoming a centre of attraction for forced migrants. As a result of its open-door policy after the Syrian civil war, the number of forced migrants in Turkey increased significantly.

Major countries of origin of forced migrants are Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and several African countries. After mass migration from Syria, Turkey has become the country hosting the world's largest refugee population. The mass inflow of Syrian

asylum seekers has led to national and international programs and projects focus mainly on the Syrian population. However, taking a look at countries of origin of asylum seekers in several provinces of Turkey we see a cosmopolitan migrant population. Turkey hosts more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees under the temporary protection regime; 454,662 irregular migrants most of whom are from Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as 368,230 asylum seekers and refugees under international protection most of whom are from Afghanistan (46 %) and Iraq (39 %) (Karadag Caman et. al. 2020).

Parallel to the influx of migrants, there has been an explosion of migration studies in Turkey. Yet, neither the provision of welfare services nor the attitudes of public service providers to migrants are issues that are adequately addressed in these studies. Furthermore, there are relatively limited number of studies that focus on forced migrants other than Syrians. This study, in turn, differs from others in that it analyses welfare services offered to all forced migrants from the perspective of service providers. Since the 1990s, receiving countries have started to use limiting immigrants' civil and social rights as an immigration control mechanism (Hollifield 2000: 130). Although the Law No 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LoFIP) grants forced migrants in Turkey certain de jure social rights, they face too many difficulties in exercising these rights, and accessing basic welfare services. These de facto barriers are not only means of limiting immigration but also stem from the lack of an integration policy, language barriers, and prejudices of street-level bureaucrats. They play gatekeeping role for welfare service access of immigrants (Atac and Rosenberger 2018: 6). They are "public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work" (Lipsky 2010:3). Lipsky (2010) reveals how street -level bureaucrats' implementation and actions differ from central level policies and planning. He points out the paradoxical character of street level bureaucracy. While bureaucracy implies a set of rules and structures of authority, street level implies a distance from the central authority. Street -level bureaucrats must make decisions as to whether the rules are to be applied. Policies come alive in the daily practice of the street level bureaucracy. The daily application of the detailed rules and regulations are much more complex and diverse than the legislators planned. This creates discretionary power for street-level bureaucrats (Bovens and Zoruridis 2002: 175). Üstübici (2020:3) stresses the important role of street-level bureaucrats for legitimizing the equal provision of welfare services to



both migrants and citizens when confronted by the citizens and she calls their strategies as 'street-level justifications'. Hospitality and religious brotherhood discourse, developing empathy and eliminating the social risk are the three main justifications which Üstübici states.

In this article, after discussing the de jure and de facto conditions of forced migrants' access to basic welfare services including health, education, and social assistance, street level bureaucrats' attitudes to forced migrants are analysed in the light of the qualitative data which was collected in Samsun and Denizli. The aim of this study is to show how the welfare services provided to immigrants differ with the practices of street level bureaucrats at the provincial level and draw attention to the lack of a centralized migration policy.

## **Methods**

Face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 public service providers in two cities Samsun and Denizli. These provinces are selected for the study because they are satellite cities hosting forced migrants from other origins in addition to Syrians. The Ministry of Interior designates some cities for immigrants under international protection or who are international protection applicants where they can register and stay while waiting for official procedures. Leaving the satellite city is restricted. Presently there are 62 such satellite cities. Samsun and Denizli are among satellite cities that host the highest numbers of Iraqi and Iranian migrants, respectively. Starting from 2013 when it became one of the satellite cities, Samsun became a destination point for immigrants from Iraq.

Interviewees were asked both technical questions concerning welfare services delivered to forced migrants and questions regarding their attitudes towards these migrants. This was for identifying services that migrants are legally entitled to and obstacles they face in the delivery of these services. Notes were taken during interviews since interviewees did not accept tape-recording. Names of participants are not used, only the institutions they represent are indicated in parentheses.

## **Basic Welfare Services to Forced Migrants**

Forced migrants in Turkey are legally entitled to have access to many basic

welfare services. The problem emerges in the exercise of these rights. There is also stratification among forced migrants with respect to their level of access to services. For example, Syrians under temporary protection have access to more rights compared to conditional refugees (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2019: 16). Because of the mass migration of the Syrian population, national and international programs and projects mostly focus on the population under Temporary Protection. In the past decade, Turkey's policies regarding basic welfare services offered to forced migrants have transformed. Diplomatic relations were effective in this transformation. For example, "the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal" has expanded the scope of services by EU supported projects. The future of the deal will be decisive in the financing and the scope of the services offered to forced migrants<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Health Services to Forced Migrants***

According to LoFIP 89/3 "applicants or international protection beneficiaries who: a) are not covered with any medical insurance and do not have financial means (to afford medical services) provisions of the Social Security and Universal Medical Insurance Law shall apply. For the payment of the premiums on behalf of persons to benefit from the universal medical insurance, funds shall be allocated to the budget of the Directorate General.". However, in December 2019, the Law was changed to limit free health care rights of international protection applicants. With the change, the applicants need to pay for health care insurance premium one year after the registration of their application, with the exception of persons with special needs (Karadag Caman et. al. 2020). Syrians under temporary protection can still access healthcare services free of charge. Services such as immunization, neonatal screening program, pregnant / pre-natal follow-up, infant /child follow-up, reproductive health counselling, which is offered within the scope of primary health care services, are offered free of charge to everyone, including immigrants.

Although legally provided free healthcare services to asylum seekers have the same quality as to those offered to citizens, there are numerous de facto

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<sup>1</sup> EU Turkey Refugee Deal was signed four years ago, on 18 March 2016 to address the issue of Syrian refugees. Besides millions of refugees, it affected Turkey as the host/transit country and Greece as Europe's point of entry. Due to political uncertainties between Brussels and Ankara and Ankara's manoeuvre in late February to reduce border controls on illicit entry to Greece, the future of this deal remains as questionable (Duvell *et al.*, 2020).

problems regarding access. Asylum seekers can access free health services only in the provinces where they have their residence addresses (Sayim, 2018: 146). However, a considerable number of asylum seekers are not living in the cities they are registered. While Syrian migrants under temporary protection are registered in cities they have moved to; migrants who applied for international protection status are placed in satellite cities. Syrian migrants settled in refugee camps or houses they could find in provinces that are close to the border when they first arrived. However, they then move to other cities over time due to limited employment and housing opportunities in these border cities. Changing province-city is subject to permission and this permission is granted in some exceptional cases. Many Syrians are now living in cities other than the ones they are registered to. Other forced migrants are not allowed to leave the satellite city that they have been placed. They have no freedom of movement and they have to appear once or twice a week in PDMM to prove their presence there (Sanam 2014:55). Besides, the refugees experience many access problems including language barriers, cultural barriers, lack of knowledge about the functioning of the health system in Turkey, and health care workers' negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees (Karadag Caman et. al. 2020). Furthermore, the applications procedures for international protection status may take longer and access to free healthcare services is not possible without having identity documents as a foreigner (Durmaz et al. 2017: 39).

A participant in the GAR (2020:14) study, says the following about how compulsory residence in the registered province may become an obstacle to accessing health services even for those Syrians in a relatively advantaged position: *"Syrians do not know where to go when they or their children fall ill. They don't have trust in state hospitals in particular since there is police there. In fear of being returned to border provinces or to Syria (...) they seek these services elsewhere. They prefer finding some alternative ways in the health system; going to a hospital is only the last resort."*

With the change on 13.04.2020, COVID-19 treatment is also offered free of charge to everyone. According to the research conducted by ASAM (2020), the most common reasons for not being able to benefit from health services are being unable to leave home, thinking that health institutions are closed, lack of documentation and insufficient information.

Presently, the project "SIHHAT" (Improvement of Health Status of Syrians under Temporary Protection and Relevant Services Delivered by The Republic of

Turkey) is in implementation. Informative booklets and leaflets in Arabic are distributed as part of the project. However, there are no materials in other languages –such as Persian- since the project does not cover non-Syrian migrants. Similarly, as part of the same project, Arabic translators are employed at State Hospitals, but no such service is provided in other languages.

The Migration Health Department was established within the Ministry of Health in 2014. Immigrant Health Centres are established in provinces to provide basic health services to Syrian asylum seekers under the SIHHAT Project. The Centres are completely financed from the project budget. In addition, “Polyclinics for Foreign Nationals” were launched to serve migrants other than Syrians. All expenses of the polyclinics are covered by the Ministry of Health budget. However, the delivery of health services to nationals and refugees and to different refugee categories in separate spaces may have the effect of weakening the culture of living together. Hence, health centres designated for refugees must have temporary status in the process of integration.

Migrant communities state that they face serious discrimination by health workers and other patients at hospitals while receiving services. This discrimination may assume a range of forms from refusal to see the patient to physical and sexual assault (GAR 2020: 16).

### ***Education Services to Forced Migrants***

LoFIP provides that applicants or beneficiaries of international protection and their family members shall have access to primary and secondary education in Turkey. However, 400 000 of 1 700 000 forced migrant children are still out of school (UNICEF 2020). For Syrian children over the years, we see that the rate of school enrolment increased from 30% to 61.9% in the period 2014-2019 (Ili 2020: 51). The education of Syrian children in Turkey is a vital issue in terms of preventing the emergence of a lost generation and a decent future life and future plans to ensure coexistence in peace (Erdogan, 2020: 9).

The education policy of Turkey for migrants is totally shaped in the context of Syrian migrants as reaction to the various stages of massive Syrian inflow. Policies in the period 2011-2012 were based on the assumption that they would return. For example, in 2012, the Minister of Education (MoNE) of the time Dincer, had stressed the temporary nature of migration and associated education services saying, “We

did not endeavour to teach Turkish to Syrian children. We see them as guests in our country and expect them to return as the situation in their country improves and order is established" (Sabah, 2012). However, as it became clearer towards 2014 that the migration was actually permanent, the MoNE gave weight to curriculum arrangements and adopted more comprehensive emergency measures (IPM, 2018: 15). This change in the attitude of the ministry can be seen clearly in a statement made by MoNE Deputy Minister in 2020: *"There are around 600,000 children in our education system today. But there is around that much out of the system... Let's not suffice with teaching these children literacy and mathematics only; let's give them the culture of socialization and living together as well."* (MoNE, 2020).

Following massive immigration, Turkey followed two paths in the education of Syrian children: Their enrolment to state schools where they attend with their Turkish peers or enrolment to Temporary Education Centres (TEC) where education medium is Arabic and in line with the curriculum in Syria (ERG 2017: 13). TECs were launched in 2014, but when it became clear that migration was permanent, these schools were closed upon a decision which was taken in 2019. The circular sent by the Ministry to district education directorates asked to direct Syrian students to religious schools where some courses are taught in Arabic (Sputnik, 2017).<sup>2</sup> This may facilitate the adaptation to school for children from Syria and Iraq whose native language is Arabic, but these schools with their special curricula focused on religious education cannot be expected to respond to education needs of all refugee children.

The MoNE is implementing projects for the integration of migrant children with are supported by international organisations such as The Primary School Catch-up Program and The Project on Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into Turkish Education System (PICTES). In 2019, foreign students with inadequate Turkish language skills started to take 24 hours of Turkish course a week in their adaptation classes (Ili 2020: 46).

In spite of wide-scale legislation and project work in the field of education, problems in the integration of refugee children still persist. Studies on the issues identify the major problems of Syrian migrant students in the field of education as follows: Poor school performance and school frustration due to language and communication problems, absence of foreigner identity cards, cultural differences, facing exclusion and prejudices, local and migrant children forming different peer

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see <https://tr.sputniknews.com/yasam/201709201030221685-meb-suriyeli-ogrenci-imam-hatip-genelge/>

groups, fights, crowded classes, disciplinary problems, high rates of school absenteeism, frequent changes of address, parents' inability to speak Turkish, the discriminatory attitude of students, teachers and school managers towards migrants, conceiving migrant children as source of cheap labour, and poor physical infrastructure in some state schools (Sahin and Sumer 2018; Emin, 2016; Gozubuyuk 2017; Kirişçi 2014; Levent and Cayak, 2017; Ozer *et al.* 2016). With the COVID-19 pandemic the education of children from poorer Turkish and migrant families became even more problematic. The ASAM (2020) Education Sector Surveys show that 70 % of refugee children are enrolled in schools during the pandemic. However, it is also stated that only 48 % of these children can benefit from distance education despite being enrolled.

### ***Social Assistance to Refugees***

LoFIP states that “*Access to social assistance and services may be renewed to applicants or international protection beneficiaries who are in need*” (Art. 89/2). Besides LoFIP, there is Law No. 3294 on Promoting Social Assistance, and Solidarity which states the objective as encouraging social assistance, and solidarity, and improving income distribution by extending assistance to citizens in deprivation and to foreigners living in Turkey and adopting measures to ensure social justice. Social Solidarity Foundations extend assistance to citizens and immigrants in difficult conditions with the funds they receive periodically from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund. Foundations are under the inspection of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Assistance.

The Red Crescent, Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and relevant United Nations agencies have a leading role in social assistance and services extended to forced migrants. An important part of social assistance and services to migrants is financed by international funds through various projects. The Social Adaptation Assistance<sup>3</sup> (SAA) is the backbone of this assistance to migrants. The SAA covers foreigners in

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<sup>3</sup> The criteria for eligibility for benefiting from the SAA are determined by the General Directorate of Social Assistance, Red Crescent, World Food Programme and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). In this programme, applicants who are found eligible are paid 120 TL a month through their Red Crescent cards. There are 1,696, 555 refugees benefiting from this scheme (KIZILAY, 2019).

Turkey who live out of refugee camps under international or temporary protection. This assistance is funded by the European Union budget.

The discriminatory discourse in the public targeting immigrants mainly focus on the claim that these people benefit from assistance and services that are denied to local people. This disinformation about social assistance is spread mainly through social media. A study by Arslan and Yildiz (2019:251) reveals that though assistance to refugees covers a wide range of legislation only a small proportion of people covered by the survey can actually benefit from this assistance.

The inequity in social assistance and services delivered to Turkish citizens is also applicable for the migrant population as well. There are big gaps in social policies supposed to back up integration and social inclusion processes and social services that are supposed to be managed through central-local government coordination. Forced migrant populations clung on to life by foreign-funded assistance. The cessation of this assistance in case of formal employment makes these people more strongly inclined to seek informal employment. Meanwhile, it is not certain how long this international assistance will last. In the absence of empowerment and employment creating mechanisms, this situation carries the risk of welfare dependency.

## **Results of The Field Study on Welfare Provision to Forced Migrants in Samsun and Denizli**

### ***Provision of Health Services to the Forced Migrants***

In Denizli and Samsun Provincial Directorates of Health (PDH) the personnel who are responsible for immigrant health have been interviewed with regarding the access of forced migrants to health services. The most important problem in the delivery of health services to immigrants is the immigrants who live in Samsun or Denizli while registered in other provinces:

There are many who have their registries in other provinces. For example, there are many coming here while having their registries in other provinces. I cannot calculate the number of vaccinations. I visit homes one by one, but I cannot find the same child in the same house in successive rounds. When our citizens change their residence, I can follow their health status from available records. But this is not the case with migrants. Yes, the Population Directorate can follow the registry over göç.net but it has no mechanism of control. How can I follow a person having one vaccine in Amasya and the other in Çorum? The employment of a migrant is crucial since employment will tie that migrant to the city where he or she is employed and

thus curb mobility from one province to the other. It will also facilitate adaptation to the city concerned.

Interviewees stated that no special effort is made to inform immigrants about Polyclinic for Foreign Nations and other health services and immigrants can reach sufficient information through their social networks: “I don’t know how, but they all know it. Here (Polyclinic for Foreign National) there were 12,000 procedures within a year. They hear it through what is called ‘whisper newspaper.’” (Samsun PDH)

The major argument of the Ministry of Health is not to deny services that it delivers to migrants to its own citizens. First step services are delivered free to all. But they get stuck in the system at second step services if not registered as foreigner ... The Ministry said each province should establish its Polyclinic for Foreign Nations with their own means.”(Samsun PDH)

### ***Provision of Education and Training Services***

In order to assess migrants’ access to different education opportunities interviews were conducted with the representatives of Provincial Directorates of Education (PDE) in Denizli and Samsun, and also with representatives of Youth Centres and Adult Education where occupational, artistic, and sportive courses are offered.

Face-to-face interviews conducted in Samsun and Denizli show that prejudices are determinative in the field of education services. The approach of personnel in PDEs towards migrants display striking differences and this factor affects province-level design of services as well. It is clear that the process of education of migrant children too will differ depending on the approach of school directors and teachers to migrants. Stereotypes are determinative in the assessment of different migrant groups by PDE representatives in Denizli: “There is no problem with Afghanis, they are Turkish anyway. School managements are troubled with groups from Iran... In fact, their presence is just for kicks or on some sexual or religious reasons”. (Denizli PDE)

The reasons that led Iranians to flee their country are mostly related to tyranny and oppression they faced for their faith including Bahaism and Christianity as well as their sexual and political identities. Many public service providers in Denizli have the conviction that all Iranian migrants are either LGBTI or Christian. Hence, discrimination against immigrants coincides with discrimination against non-

Muslims and the LGBTI community. Another point is that there are many highly qualified Iranians who maintain their middle-class style daily practices which feed the argument that “they need no social protection.” For example, practices like throwing home parties, meeting at picnic grounds, using alcohol, and wearing makeup distinguish Iranian refugees from Syrians and Afghans. Afghani immigrants are not fully accepted by the host society as well, but their utilization of some public services is still positively conceived since they are Muslims, some are Turkmen, and mostly in poverty.

Stereotypes associated with different migrant groups are also stressed by the representative of Samsun Youth Centre:

Mostly oil-rich Iraqis have money and they usually do not work. Here, Afghans are in construction, Syrians just remain idle, and Iraqis wander around. Still, there are Syrians working in industry and furniture sectors. We must get them acquainted with sports and solve their license problems. Sports and arts are very important in integration. (Samsun Youth Centre)

Iranians preferred courses in beauty and hairdressing the most of all courses offered so far. In fact, many of them have jobs in this profession. There are also some running their own beauty parlors. They cannot start their own business with their documents but working for someone else fixes it. Their own hairdressing and make up is flashy anyway. It is quite clear that Iranians came by their choice. But Afghans are different: They come here by walking without food and water on mountains; some are even without shoes. (Denizli Adult Education Centre)

Some projects implemented at the province level facilitate the integration of migrant children to education. For example, the Project “Garden of Dreams” covers education and training in Turkish literacy, intra-family communication, adolescence, and reproductive health at the same organized activities such as Ramadan dinners, picnics and reading books together. Here, each immigrant child and his/her family are matched with a Turkish family:

At the beginning, we faced some problems in matching families, but they were solved later. They had the joint experience of visiting a hospital, going to a picnic, etc. Turkish and refugee women started to spend time together... Students have problems of adaptation due to cultural differences. There were frequent questions such as ‘Why can’t I attend school with a beard?’ or ‘Why no makeup while at school?’ ...Since children mostly witnessed warfare back in their country many said they wanted to be a soldier or in a special combat force in the future. We referred these children to guidance and research centres and supported them in their career plans. (Samsun PDE)

Instead of holistic integration policies aimed at migrants, what is more common instead are integration projects implemented by local organisations and

The United Nations (UN) agencies. Although such projects may contribute to migrant integration, their duration and target population are limited. There were often two responses to questions in relation to migrant services posed to provincial directorates: “We do it if instructions came from the Ministry” and “We do it if it is included in a UN project”. As most projects target Syrian migrants, other migrant groups are often excluded:

It is not possible to include in this project groups other than Syrians. If the Ministry says OK, then we can. But we also thought about what we could do for the employment of the parents of these children, but yet we have no project on this. We have to observe balances in the country as well. It seems better to create opportunities for them to start their own business rather than wage employment. (Denizli Youth Centre)

The coordination between different UN agencies and different ministries is very inefficient. This leads to situations where some groups can be identified as a target group for various projects due to their sheer numbers while migrant groups cannot access any service:

The United Nations commissions a separate social adaptation project to each agency and no agency is aware of what the other is doing. So, you have no integration as a result. Now we are going to cooperate with the Ministry of Family in the context of Social Adaptation Project. Yes, there is a need for a coordinating board, but right now there are many boards without any function. Personally, I do not participate to meetings of many boards; nobody is doing what he is supposed to. There must be a board that works autonomously, rooming-in members who really want to do something. At present, we don't even have our province-level strategic plan related to migration. (Denizli Youth Center)

### ***Migrants' Access to Social Assistance and Services “You assist them but not us”***

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with representatives from Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF) and Red Crescent as two major organizations assisting migrants. Interviewees included 2 representatives from SASF and 1 from Red Crescent in Denizli and 2 SASF and 1 Red Crescent representatives in Samsun. This section provides information first about interviews with SASF representatives and then Red Crescent. Representatives from both organizations relate the complaint of local people “*You are helping them, but not us*”:

There are many citizens complaining about assistance to immigrants; they think they are unemployed because of them being here. It is true that labour became much

cheaper with migrants particularly in the construction sector.(Samsun İlkadım SASF)

Iraqis who are well off buy property here and get a temporary residence permit. But people do not know the difference between International Protection status and temporary protection. So, they say ‘The Iraqis are fine, they have money, and yet they still enjoy assistance. (Samsun SASF)

Turkish citizens first showed hospitality and regarded them as guests. They supplied such materials as furniture and so on. As they turn out to be permanent, negative reactions started to emerge: ‘So they care for foreigners but not for us...’ Our explanations do not satisfy people; we say it is not us but some international organizations that extend assistance, but it does not work.”(Denizli Merkezefendi SASF)

After Syrians, Afghans constitute the second populous group applying for assistance. Iranian and Iraqi asylum seekers have a very small share in total assistance extended. However, there is no database with information disaggregated by country of origin and legal status...Applications to the system are recorded only as Foreigners and Turkish citizens.” (Denizli SASF)

It is frequently stated that forced migrants have some of their official documents missing, it is difficult to be certain about the number of household members due to polygamy and there is leakage in social assistance to the non-poor. In interviews with staff from foundations in Denizli it was observed that some were disturbed about the increasing number of immigrants and their dependence on assistance. It is also believed in SASFs that Iranians are in Denizli for arbitrary reasons including their sexual orientation and they don’t actually need any assistance.

Red Crescent is another important institution coordinating social aid for immigrants. There are three basic forms of Red Crescent’s assistance to needy citizens and immigrants. Food packs, canned meat, and minced meat, and social market. In the social market, there are items like clothes, shoes and bed sheets. The means of service delivery in different provinces by representatives of the same institution may be shaped by the representative’s prejudices towards migrants. For example, while the Red Crescent representative in Samsun is more willing to deliver services to refugees without any discrimination, the representative in Denizli has biases against those from Iran in particular: The interviewee of the Denizli Branch stated their mission as *“helping all those in need regardless of religion, language, race or sex.”* He said that Turkey as the most merciful country in the world as it pursued an open-door policy, and their intention is to maintain this overall policy in Denizli trying to help incoming asylum seekers as much as they can. In spite of these

statements, there are still some discriminatory practices in service delivery. The majority of applicants to Red Crescent Denizli are Syrians followed by Iranians and Afghans. But the situation is problematic when Iranians are concerned because of the negative attitudes towards transgender and gay Iranians:

Iranians mostly come for their sexual orientation. Those who come in for assistance may appear and act in quite negative and irritating ways. Gay people are coming, excuse me, double-sex persons are coming...Then you see local people going angry and saying, 'Does Red Crescent help such persons?' So, we left them out and put a note at the gate saying, 'Only families with five members can apply'. So single (LGBTI) Iranians came no more...

The representative of Red Crescent Samsun branch thinks that it is correct to extend assistance to all needy immigrants:

I was first asking why they flee instead of fighting for their county. But I changed my mind after listening to their stories. There was a doctor from Damascus who used to own a private hospital with his wife. He was walking out in winter with slippers. I then realized that they are in such a difficult position that our assistance means something. But they have to learn Turkish at least for adaptation. Courses in Turkish language and occupational training must be made compulsory while giving them some pocket money. (Samsun Red Crescent)

Red Crescent Coordinates Social Adaptation Assistance (SAA), which is financed by funds from the European Union and United Nations. In this assistance scheme migrants can access supplies with a bank card known as "Red Crescent Card". Red Crescent assistance to asylum seekers leads to the reaction of local people. *"Recently there is a circulation of Red Crescent Card in social media; everybody is sure that their donations are going to Syrians."* (Denizli Red Crescent)

Another problem expressed by social assistance workers is the cessation of SAA when people find formal employment. Hence, many forced migrants prefer to work informally. In crowded households, it is difficult to subsist on the payment from informal jobs and SAA.

### ***Welfare Services of Municipalities to Forced Migrants***

In the research, interviews were conducted with 8 staff from 5 municipalities in Samsun and Denizli. Interviewees from most of the municipalities referred to Article 14 which states: "The municipal services shall be rendered in the most appropriate manner at the places nearest to the citizens. It is a basic principle to adopt a procedure most suitable for the disabled and old people as well as for those

in destitute and with limited income.” In spite of the term “citizens”, this article does not place an explicit obstacle to service provision to asylum seekers and immigrants as evidenced by the steps taken by many municipalities in this direction. As a matter of fact, some municipalities in Turkey have set up units for immigrants, and provide social services, language, and vocational training courses, and cultural, artistic and sports activities for them (Gultasli et.al., 2020).

Aside from their general urban services, Municipalities in Denizli, have neither welfare services focusing on immigrants nor integration activities. The representative of Denizli Municipality stated that the citizens would resist the provision of services to immigrants, but he added that the cultural and artistic activities could provide significant opportunities for the integration:

Immigrants here have a bad image. It arouses antipathy when some (trans) Iranians wander around with different dresses at night... Local people believe that Syrians are admitted to schools without any test. Information pollution creates misconceptions. This tension can be relieved through the arts. For example, Iranian painters organized an exhibition even here in our hall. (Denizli Metropolitan Municipality.)

The Municipalities has no signboards, brochures, or documents in any foreign language. And they think there is no need for: “They come here with somebody speaking Turkish anyway, so we didn’t feel any need.” (Denizli Metropolitan Municipality.)

It is stated that there is no barrier to immigrants if they want to participate in courses in sports that are given in 20 different branches. However, it was also stated no immigrant group is allowed to municipal swimming pools: “Iranians apply for, but we exclude from our swimming pools all immigrant groups in suspicion of infectious diseases and not knowing whether they are fully immunized.” (Denizli Metropolitan Municipality.)

Different immigrant groups apply to the municipality from time to time seeking assistance, but no assistance is made to any group of immigrants:

We have no scheme of assistance to asylum seekers, but still local citizens are mad at us saying ‘you give them but not to us. Just imagine what it would be like if we really made such assistance. So, immigrants go to Sevgi Eli<sup>4</sup> where mostly Syrians can take out in a basket some ‘worn-out’ clothes nobody else would ever look at. (Denizli Metropolitan Municipality.)

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<sup>4</sup> The “Sevgi Eli” (Hand of Compassion) is a unit established by the Metropolitan Municipality to distribute to the poor through income test in kind donations made by inhabitants of Denizli.

The Denizli-Pamukkale Municipality has no services specific for immigrants. The reason is stated as the emphasis on “citizen” existing in the Law on Municipalities.

Maybe the law does not say ‘don’t help and provide any service to foreigners’, but we are worried that we can’t handle what will be coming if we ever start it. It is because we have a large community before us whose number we don’t know. And one more thing, we are hesitant also because of possible pressures from local people even if the law does not prohibit it. (Denizli Pamukkale Municipality)

One important characteristics of Pamukkale Municipality is the social market but, only citizens can shop in this market. Immigrants cannot benefit from cash and in-kind assistance extended to citizens in need. The Municipality organizes excursions for specific target groups but so far, no immigrants have ever taken part in these excursions. In the summer months’ children were given swimming lessons in inflatable pools provided by Pamukkale Municipality. Immigrant children were left out of this activity. An Iranian father lodged a complaint to the Presidency’s Communication Centre when his child was not accepted to swimming course after which municipality stepped back and allowed.

Samsun Metropolitan Municipality has no municipal service that is specific for immigrants. Nevertheless, it is stated that there are few applications to the Family Counselling Centre existing within the municipality by forced migrants and these applicants receive socio-psychological support. The municipality staff holds the opinion that Iraqi asylum seekers enjoy high levels of income and they don’t need social assistance: “Food and fuel assistance was extended to our Syrian ‘guests. We helped some in settling in their houses. But the situation of Iraqis is better off in economic terms, they have no pressing needs and no request for assistance.” Data provided by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, however, suggest that this is not true. The fact that Iraqi asylum seekers do not apply to the Municipality may be interpreted as their lack of awareness of such support mechanisms or disbelief in their eligibility.

The Canik Municipality (Samsun) delivers many services and, conducts projects related to forced migrants in Samsun province. The Canik Municipality extending special services to forced migrants mainly composed of Iraqis, Syrians, and Afghanis for the last 7 years. Many forced migrants prefer this part of the city for

lower rental pays and relatively easy transportation. It is estimated that the number of migrants within district boundaries is around 4,000-5,000:

Iraqis are the dominant group. The number of Afghans is limited and there is higher circulation in that group, they continuously change their place.” Two personnel in the Municipality are in charge of services to forced migrants and updating immigration data: “Here we collect and keep information about the number of household members, their competence in Turkish, who can do what in households, occupational status, educational status, etc. Our municipality is also in constant contact with Provincial Migration and Security Directorate.

In fact, we have neither any budget nor officially given mandate to deliver services to this population group known as migrants. But we made it our work. It was too difficult to identify migrants in our district. We gathered statistics house by house... In fact, the motive of their first application to us was asking for in cash and in-kind assistance. But this requires some change in the mentality of our own citizens since they may say ‘why help others while we are here’. Given this, we first organized the gathering “Migrants Meet their Helpers” in which 50 migrant and Turkish families got together. Through local headmen, we reached materially well-off families eager to help migrants. They still have their contacts. Then we organized the “Night for Serving Hearts” with the participation of migrant and Turkish families.

The Canik Municipality implemented the project “Fraternal Hand for Youth” in partnership with UNHCR. This project included 2,000 young migrants from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The objective of the project was to ensure young people’s integration by improving their sociocultural potential. Educative, cultural, health-related, and sports activities conducted with the participation of Turkish and immigrant children included picnics, football tournaments, Ramadan dinners, kite festivals, Turkish language courses, and exhibitions. Migrants received cash and in-kind assistance while psychological rehabilitation and health screening accompanied. The Municipality also extended occupation building courses to asylum seeker women. The association “Kardeş Eli” (Fraternal Hand) extending assistance to asylum seekers are also supported by Canik Municipality: *“They were helping asylum seekers near the mosque with their amateur initiatives. We gave them support and an association was established. We pay their rental.”*

While Samsun Municipality regard migrants as “guests” Canik Municipality uses Islamic references for both the host community and migrants. In materials

related to the integration of migrants like “Ansar Hand in Brother Land”<sup>5</sup> published by the municipality, the Islamic faith of migrants is brought to fore. The local inhabitants of Medina, who host the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his followers when they emigrated from Mecca are called ‘the Ansar’. These frequent references by the ruling party express a selective humanitarianism in which brotherhood and Islam are prioritized over rights-based humanitarianism (Icduygu et al. 217: 459). Canik Municipality’s discourses and practices that include migrants’ religious references mentioned may have effects that exclude non-Muslim migrants. Hospitality is another discourse that is often repeated by service providers but does not serve an inclusive migration policy (Ustubici, 2020: 9). Carpi and Senoguz (2018: 33) indicate how hospitality towards Syrian refugees in Turkey become both national and individual action.

## Conclusion

As forced migrants began to stay in Turkey permanently the content and coverage of welfare services have changed and improved. However, the absence of a comprehensive integration policy still hinders actual access to many services. The rate of school enrolment of immigrant children is still strikingly lower than local children. Though formal arrangements related to health services are inclusive there is still difficulty in access because of language barriers and the state of residence in places other than registered. The majority of immigrant families have only one breadwinner. Informal employment and poverty are both common. Externally funded social assistance including Social Adaptation Assistance is far from enabling these families to cope up with poverty. In time, it may be more effective to shift funds presently used for social assistance toward mechanisms for language training, employment creation and social integration, and to social services for migrants.

There are two important issues raised by all interviewees concerning their role in city-level migration management. The first is the lack of coordination between national, international, and provincial actors who are supposed to deliver migration related policies and extend services. All parties point out to the Provincial Migration Management as the office that should undertake this coordination duty. Yet, the

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<sup>5</sup>For more information see [https://www.canik.bel.tr/Icerik/Dosya/www.canik.bel.tr\\_94\\_KG8U35IN\\_www.canik.bel.tr-94-tt8e78az-kardesprojeyeni555.pdf](https://www.canik.bel.tr/Icerik/Dosya/www.canik.bel.tr_94_KG8U35IN_www.canik.bel.tr-94-tt8e78az-kardesprojeyeni555.pdf)

Management cannot even fulfil its essential duties due to staff shortage. The second issue that is also frequently raised is the absence of a detailed national integration policy. Some street-level bureaucrats prefer not to provide services based on their own prejudices when they do not receive detailed migration policy orders from their ministries. It has been observed that street level bureaucrats, who are hostile to immigrants due to their race, religion and gender identity, justify their hostility with moral norms. On the contrary, some other bureaucrats try to expand services to immigrants on their personal initiatives. The arguments of street level bureaucrats who want to provide services to immigrants are based on hospitality, Islamic brotherhood, victimisation or human rights similar to Üstübici (2020). Due to the absence of provincial migration policies organized up at the ministerial level, street-level bureaucrats have a wide discretionary power. Despite legal regulations, the level of welfare services offered to forced migrants varies according to the existence of projects supported by international institutions, the attitudes of bureaucrats towards immigrants, and the dominance of immigrants in the city. In addition, these services are provided selectively according to their religions, perceptions about their neediness, and their gender identity. Meanwhile, it must be noted that the weight of Syrians in terms of numbers among all migrants led relevant policies and projects to be Syrian-focused. Yet, each immigrant group has different needs and disadvantages.

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