

# The Impact of GCR on Local Governments and Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Başak Kale\* and Murat Erdoğan\*\*

## ABSTRACT

In the last couple of years, more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees have been hosted under the “temporary protection” scheme in Turkey. Despite these high numbers Turkey did not have a centralized refugee settlement and integration policy. As a result, various stakeholders including local governments have played critical roles in providing refugee assistance services. This research looks at the role of local governments in delivering services evolving from emergency response to local integration. This article argues that this role with respect to the United Nations’ Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) has to be further strengthened. The data for this research were collected through a comprehensive study based on interviews and surveys carried out in İstanbul with local authorities, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and its 39 district municipalities in 2016-2017. Although this research has its focus on İstanbul as the selected case study, the findings can reveal conclusions relevant to global implications and perspectives.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of years, Turkey became one of the major refugee-hosting countries in the world. Before the Syrian civil war, there were only approximately 60.000 refugees from different ethnic and national backgrounds in Turkey (DGMM, 2018a). Now Turkey is hosting half a million non-Syrian refugees and more than 3.6 million Syrians have been provided with protection and assistance under the ‘temporary protection’ scheme. In this process, various stakeholders including local authorities and governments (municipalities)<sup>1</sup> have played critical roles in providing refugee related services and protection. When Syrian refugees<sup>2</sup> in mass numbers arrived, a comprehensive migration and refugee policy was in the process of development in Turkey. One of the main goals of this new policy was to establish the foundations of an extensive refugee protection<sup>3</sup> policy with strong integration elements. However, the Syrian civil war had a drastic impact on the development of Turkey’s long-term goal of building a comprehensive refugee protection. During the development of the migration and refugee policy under the European Union (EU) pre-accession process, the annual number of asylum applications in Turkey was as low as 21,871 (UNHCR, 1998). With the exponential increase in numbers, the development of this policy has been upended by the Syrian refugee protection crisis.

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\* Middle East Technical University, Ankara

\*\* University of British Columbia, Vancouver

The lack of an official state refugee integration (*de jure* integration: Arendt, 1986; Hovil, 2014) policy on refugee integration, combined with the delayed international humanitarian response, has meant that Turkish society and local host communities have had to accommodate the needs of the newcomers in an ad-hoc arrangement. The social acceptance of host communities coupled with an unprecedented engagement of local authorities and governments made up for the lack of state level integration policies. This unplanned shift of responsibility from national/state to local/municipal level created a significant workload on local governments. Instead of waiting for the adoption of a nationwide refugee integration policy, local governments adapted to meet immediate needs of refugees with unofficial integration policies (*de facto* integration, Hovil, 2014) at the local level, which are not instituted centrally by the Turkish state.

At the global level, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) aimed at promoting responsibility-sharing for refugees and host communities to find solutions for those who have required international protection and assistance. Aiming to incorporate the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) as an operational plan for a more comprehensive and coordinated response, GCR comprises of a framework and a programme of action for member states and all relevant stakeholders including local authorities (UN, 2018). GCR recognizes the fact that local authorities “are often first responders to large-scale refugee situations” and they are “among the actors that experience the most significant impact over the medium term” (GCR, 2018, paragraph 37). GCR’s acknowledgement of the role of local governments is quite noteworthy. This was a reflection on the need for further inclusion of local authorities and governments in providing comprehensive solutions and services for those in need of international protection and assistance. Despite the importance of the inclusion of local governments in GCR, their roles in GCR could have been further extended with respect to local integration efforts, as the results of this research show, presenting empirical findings on the importance of local governments such as governorships, district governorships and municipalities in providing services and assistance in refugee protection situations that can strengthen refugee self-reliance and ease pressures on host communities. This research suggests that taking these findings into account, GCR can be implemented to support local governments in their efforts of refugee protection.

This research also aims to demonstrate facts that local governments can adapt in a dynamic manner to the changing needs of refugees. Likewise, the role of municipalities can easily convert from providing emergency response to local integration within the course of couple of years. Although this research focuses on İstanbul, the findings can reveal conclusions with global implications reflecting on other municipalities in Turkey or in other cities hosting urban refugees in different parts of the world. The findings of this research can also contribute to the discussions of further inclusion of local governments in the implementing of GCR via the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). The mechanism within GCR can be utilized to strengthen this critical role of local governments on refugee integration with support through long-term and sustainable financial assistance, maximizing the effective and efficient use of resources, exchanging and building upon good practices, and overcoming infrastructure limitations.

Different studies relating to Syrian refugees so far have looked at different aspects of refugee policy development or implementation in Turkey (German Marshall Fund, 2015; Ferris and Kirişçi, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2016; Kaya and Kıraç, 2016; Çamur, 2017; İneli-Ciğer, 2017; Kale, 2017; Mertek, 2017; Çetin et. al., 2018; Erdoğan, 2018; Getmansky et. al., 2018). Studies that focus on the link between GCR and local governments are much needed, but few of them exist. The literature on the role and impact of GCR explores topics such as the normative aspects and nature of the “compact” (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2019); the regional tools employed within it (Dare and Ababe, 2019) and whether or not it was able to address the gaps in the international refugee regime (Betts, 2018). In few exceptional articles, the role of local authorities in GCR has been either mentioned or covered. Türk argues that GCR employs new and deeper working relations with states, national and local authorities (TÜİK, 2019). Brandt and Earle argue that local

authorities are important “to play a role in a much-needed coordination” (Brandt and Earle, 2018). Aiming to contribute to literature on GCR and local authorities, this research aims to present assessments on both the content and outcome of GCR. While doing so, before going into a detailed discussion on Syrian refugee protection in Turkey, this research first looks into the role of local governments within GCR. Later, it discusses the engagement of local governments in refugee protection. Following this, the empirical findings of the comprehensive fieldwork completed on the role of local authorities, metropolitan and district municipalities of İstanbul are analysed. This article concludes with policy recommendations on strengthening the role and scope of local government representation in the implementation of GCR.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were collected through a comprehensive study carried out in İstanbul through interviews and surveys conducted with local governments including İstanbul Governorship, its district governorships, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and its 39 district municipalities in 2016-2017.<sup>4</sup> These interviews are complemented by an interview with the İstanbul Head of DGMM. During this research, İstanbul had a population of over 15 million and the total number of Syrians living in Turkey was 3,083,617 (TÜİK, 2019). The number of Syrian refugees living in metropolitan İstanbul in 2016 was 539,062 (DGMM, 2018a).<sup>5</sup> The methodology adopted in this research includes interviews with local government authorities (İstanbul Governorship and district governorships). In addition to these interviews, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the roles of local governments, surveys are conducted with 27 district municipalities, which are selected to represent 96,22 per cent of the entire Syrian refugee population in İstanbul (Appendix 1). Twelve district municipalities that host a smaller percentage of refugee population (18,207 Syrian refugees representing 3.78% of the total Syrian refugee population) are included in the interviews, but not in the surveys.

The interviews and surveys aimed at gathering information on the legal and administrative frameworks and the municipality practices regarding services provided to Syrian refugees. Marmara Municipalities Union’s Report of the Workshop ‘The Role of Municipalities in Service to Urban Refugees’ was useful in complementing the interview and survey data (MMU, 2015). Two other reports were also beneficial in providing background information on general activities of district municipalities. The first report was on the ‘İstanbul Competitiveness Index’ (Şeker et al., 2010) and the second report was on the ‘Social Structure Presentation’ prepared by the Directorate of City Planning, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İMM, 2016).

### **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Role of Local Governments**

UNHCR envisages that the GCR with its overarching objectives can address the basic protection challenges existing in new and protracted refugee situations around the globe. GCR represents a high-level political commitment to develop an instrument with an array of tools to respond to refugee crises around the globe in an intelligent way (Grandi, 2018). GCR aims to promote and provide “a basis for predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all United Nations Member States, together with other relevant stakeholders” including local authorities (GCR, 2018, paragraph 3) (UNHCR, 2018b). Developing a role for local authorities in refugee response situations can relate to objectives of GCR directly. GCR recognizes the fact that local authorities “are often first responders to large-scale refugee situations” and they are “among the actors that experience the most significant impact over the medium term” (GCR, paragraph 37) (UNHCR, 2018b). While this is the case, if the legal framework on the role of local authorities

such as municipalities is not clear, the funding is insufficient, the refugee distribution among different districts is uneven, or the resources are tight, local authorities can face various types of challenges in providing services or protection to refugees. As can be seen in the examples of Jordan and Lebanon, these limitations can impact social cohesion resulting in rising tensions between refugees and host communities (Guay, 2015). In the cases of Lebanon and Jordan, tensions emerged between refugee and host communities and between local communities and administrative authorities leading to a potential tipping point (Ibid).

Taking these concerns and risks on board, GCR aimed to develop mechanisms to strengthen institutional capacities, infrastructure and accommodation, not only at the national level but also at the local level. Policy and legal developments on refugee protection have traditionally been at the international and state level (Ferris, 1987; Gordenker, 1987; Gallagher, 1989; Zolberg et al., 1989; Betts, 2009; Betts and Loescher, 2010; Loescher, 2017; Betts and Collier, 2018). In that respect, involvement of local authorities (GCR, paragraph 37) and municipalities (GCR, paragraph 38) for the regional consultative processes in the negotiations and implementation of the global compact was an innovative approach (UNHCR, 2018b). This involvement, however, has to be further extended. The role of cities and municipalities are recognized within GCR for sharing good practices and approaches. Sharing “good practice” experiences of municipalities is important. However, the role of local governments through GFR can exceed beyond these collaborative efforts. As it can be seen from the local governments in İstanbul, local governments can be actively be involved in developing innovative solutions to respond to the needs of refugees and citizens at local level. The case of İstanbul presents factors showing that active involvement of local governments in developing policies is critical, while GCR can provide mechanisms such as financial contributions and resource sharing schemes to make this involvement long-term and sustainable.

## SYRIAN REFUGEE PROTECTION AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN REFUGEE PROTECTION IN TURKEY

In Turkey, 4.1 million refugees are living mostly in urban settings (DGMM, 2019). The majority of Syrian refugees are living in urban centres (93%) while a limited number of them are living in refugee camps (3%) located predominantly outside urban areas (DGMM, 2019). In most Western European countries, refugee settlement agencies provide a structured system of refugee integration. In these structured systems, the asylum seeker is assigned to a particular municipality based on a quota system. For example, in Denmark, refugee integration services settle a refugee in a particular district where the refugee is not allowed “to move from the municipality assigned, unless another municipality is willing to take over the responsibilities or if the refugee can take care of herself/himself” (Refugees DK, 2019). Turkey does not have an official settlement policy for Syrian refugees. Originally settled through a registration process in assigned cities, Syrian refugees can move to different districts according to personal circumstances.

In Turkey, migration management and refugee protection have been on the policy development agenda since the launch of EU pre-accession process in 1999 (Kale et. al., 2018). The EU pre-accession process aimed at establishing a comprehensive migration and refugee policy with a specialized civilian institution on migration as well as a national law specific to international protection and migration management. The mass arrival of thousands of refugees within a relatively short period of time has postponed the adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013,<sup>6</sup> the launch of the Directorate General Migration Management (DGMM) and the development of a comprehensive migration, refugee and integration policy. LFIP was Turkey’s first specific national law on migration covering various issues that fall under the migration management field. DGMM became the first civilian institution in Turkey, which is specialized on migration

management. It aimed at taking over this policy area from security forces while allowing staff specialization in this field.

DGMM, after its establishment, began working on the development of a national policy on migrant and refugee integration, which was based on LFIP. LFIP included a specific article on integration. Instead of defining integration as “migrant integration”, Article 96 of LFIP called the integration process “harmonization (*uyum*)”. It was argued that the new approach to migration management was aimed at developing an understanding that will portray integration as a two-way process. The aim was to emphasize the need for a mutual understanding and acceptance between the host (society) and the hosted individuals (migrant, asylum seeker or refugee). This understanding was a direct result of the Turkish experience with Turkish immigrants in Germany. Recognizing the difficulties encountered by Turkish “guest-workers” in Germany with respect to integration, Turkey opted for developing an integration policy, which did not include cultural and social assimilation at its core. This perspective was in line with the conceptualization of integration as “a two-way process of adaptation, involving change in values, norms and behaviour for both newcomers and members the existing society.” (Castles et al., 2002, p.116) However, one must not conclude that these developments brought a clear-cut official state policy for refugee integration in Turkey.

The hope for an immediate resolution of the Syrian civil war and the return of Syrian refugees supported Turkey’s understanding on “temporariness” which hindered integration efforts. This is mainly because developing a state policy for refugee integration proved to be problematic. There was no consensus at the state level on a strategy for the management of population diversity. The management of the population diversity has been a long-standing discussion in Turkey and becoming a multi-ethnic society has never been an official state goal (Karpas, 2002). Established after the dissolution of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey was founded as a nation-state without the aim of emphasizing its societal ethnic, religious or sectarian diversity (Kale, 2014). At the government level, there was also an undeclared fear that a structured state supported integration policy would have undermined temporariness, which would in the long-term encourage Syrians to stay in Turkey permanently.

In the meantime, despite the lack of consensus on the development of an integration policy at the state/national level or in other words *de jure* integration, the social acceptance of Turkish host community towards Syrian refugees turned out to be “fragile” but high (Erdoğan, 2015). Compared to other countries in the region hosting high number of Syrian refugees, such as Lebanon or Jordan (Guay, 2015) widespread social tensions between refugee and host communities were not observed. This article does not suggest that there were no problems regarding to social cohesion and Syrian refugees in Turkey. However, compared to other countries in the region hosting high numbers of Syrian refugees, the Turkish case shows high social acceptance levels (Erdoğan, 2015). One of the reasons for high social acceptance in Turkey can be attributed to the fact that a minority of refugees live in refugee camps, while the majority of refugees are living in urban settings. Local governments in urban settings can act as agents of integration efforts at the local level, contributing to social cohesion. Due to these efforts, social cohesion and acceptance in Turkey with this increased number of refugees has stayed resilient while widespread anti-refugee incidents were not seen. The lack of wide spread anti-refugee clashes does not indicate that Turkey is agreeing to become a multicultural country. Turkey is not immune to the challenges brought by the influences of globalization and immigration on identity, citizenship and societal diversity. These challenges have been experienced by many industrialized and Western countries around the globe (Bauböck and Heller, 1996; Joppke, 1999; Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer, 2000; Brettell, and Holifield, 2000; Castles, 2000; Faist, 2000; Geddes, 2000; Betts, 2011; Castles et al., 2013).

Since 2011, many local governments in different cities in Turkey had to respond to the immediate needs of refugees. They took the initiative to provide services at the district and local levels. Local authorities such as the Governorship of İstanbul and district governorships are given the authority to act on refugee related issues. In order to coordinate activities on migration management

DGMM established offices in different cities and provinces. These local offices were mainly responsible for registering Syrians. At the national level, DGMM acted as the coordination institution for refugee registration and information collection. However, the rapid increase in numbers and the unfounded expectations for the Syrian civil war to be over soon hampered the development of a state level integration policy. A state level integration policy could have been more effective in providing consistent and nationwide mechanisms to support refugees' access to formal employment and education.

The lack of state level integration policy gave grounds for local level integration efforts. This de facto integration policy was in line with Hovil's definition on local integration in which integration take place as an informal process "primarily at a local level whereby refugee individuals or groups negotiate belonging in the locality in which they are living" (Hovil, 2014). Municipalities as stakeholders working directly with the refugees first started with emergency response and humanitarian assistance activities. Overtime, these emergency response activities turned into local integration efforts in order to support social cohesion among district inhabitants. Although there was no clearly defined understanding of social cohesion by local governments, the general understanding was to keep "solidarity" among fellow citizens or avoid tensions. This understanding is in line with the conceptualization of social cohesion in literature where social cohesion as a concept evolved to include aspects of social exclusion, inclusion, social capital and social mobility (Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Putnam, 2007; Cheong et al., 2007; OECD, 2012).

Responding to the needs of refugees was not a straightforward municipal effort due to legal ambiguities. Turkish Municipal Law No. 5393 Article 14 defines the role and duties of municipalities accordingly: "Municipality services are provided to citizens through the most appropriate methods and at the closest locations to the citizens." (Law No. 5393, 2005) The law specifies that eligible individuals who can receive municipal services have to be Turkish citizens. Taking into consideration a minimalist legal interpretation, Syrian refugees should not be eligible for municipal services. The Court of Accounts (*Sayıştay*) audits municipal expenses at the central level. In order avoid legal controversies, some municipalities hesitate to provide services to Syrian refugees. However, the second part of Article 14 can provide a basis for legal justification to provide services for non-citizens. It states that: "In providing services, different methods should be used to provide services to the handicapped, old, sick, and people with low-income." From a maximalist interpretation, it will be possible to include Syrian refugees into the category of 'people with low income.'

The maximalist interpretation can also utilize Municipal Law Article 13 to include Syrian citizens in the definition of "fellow citizens (*hemşeri*).". Article 13 defines "fellow citizens" who share the same city as follows: "Everyone who is residing within a municipal district is a fellow citizen. All fellow citizens have the right to contribute to municipality decisions and services, receive information about municipality activities and benefit from municipality aid." One may argue that asylum seekers, refugees and people under temporary protection can all be considered under "fellow citizen" category of the municipal law. This research's findings demonstrate that in few cases municipalities can be hesitant to use this maximalist interpretation, while in most others they will choose to do so and they will justify their actions as a non-legal, but "humanitarian obligation". An amendment of the law to include refugees and temporary protection holders as potential beneficiaries for municipal services can clarify these issues. GCR highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capacities, infrastructure and accommodation at local level with respect to relevant legal frameworks (GCR, paragraph 37). However, as can be seen from the Turkish case, relevant legal frameworks may not always be sufficient to support efforts at local level. Amendments at the national and local legal frameworks may be necessary to clarify the mandate or role of local governments.

The other challenge that arises in providing services and aid to Syrian refugees is the financial aspect. In Turkey, one of the funding sources of municipalities is tax revenue from the central budget proportionate to the number of "citizens" that reside within their district boundaries. (Law No.

5779, 2008) The amount of the population-related tax for a municipality changes over time. As Syrians are residents but not citizens, municipalities do not get any financial contribution proportionate to the hosted refugee population. For municipalities where thousands of Syrian refugees reside within their districts, this limitation on their financial resources becomes a critical issue.<sup>7</sup> For example, in certain urban locations such as Kilis, the refugee population can be higher than the resident Turkish citizen population. Likewise, distributing financial and other types of aid to non-citizens becomes problematic. In most of the survey answers, district municipalities stated the need of an amendment to include refugee population to municipality funding allocations through İİBank.<sup>8</sup> This is in line with the paragraph 37 of the GCR where it states that institutional capacities including funding and capacity development has to be strengthened at local level. (GCR, paragraph 37) This research's findings present factors indicating that, in order to overcome these challenges and provide services to refugees, İstanbul district municipalities found creative mechanisms to distribute various types of aid and support which include pairing aid efforts with national and international NGOs, collaborating with the city and district governorship offices, joining forces with foundations, businesses or various philanthropists. Refugee Compact and GFR can act as platforms to develop methods with various stakeholders in support for their local integration efforts for sustainable funding schemes.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES BY MUNICIPALITIES

The arrival of Syrian refugees to district municipalities brought the first main challenge, which was identifying the number of refugees. This was particularly important because the refugee numbers varied from district to district, creating an uneven and unbalanced distribution among all İstanbul district municipalities. In order to identify refugee numbers, initially municipalities have to make sure that refugees are registered with the nationwide database of DGMM.<sup>9</sup> During the time that this research was conducted, there were 478,850 registered and 60,812 pre-registered refugees in İstanbul. These figures meant that by the end of 2016, 12 per cent of all Syrian refugees in İstanbul were pre-registered and they were waiting for the approval of their registration. By March 2019, there were 558,437 Syrian refugees in İstanbul and all pre-registered refugees were approved (DGMM, 2018b). The importance of registering and identification of refugees is also recognized in GCR as a tool to ensure the integrity of refugee protection systems and for providing solutions in support for refugees (GCR, paragraph 58).

In identifying the numbers and acquiring reliable data, some municipalities showed preference for collaborating with DGMM and while other municipalities opted for establishing their own databases. The need for reliable, comparable and timely data for evidence-based measures is very clearly stated in GCR (GCR, paragraph 45). Similarly, to identify the refugees in need, some district municipalities used the Social Support Database (SOYBIS) of the Ministry of Family, Work and Social Services, which is a national database of need based services for Turkish citizens (SOYBIS, 2019). Various interview respondents indicated that utilization of this nationwide SOYBIS database for refugees could have overcome the duplication of aid and supported allocation challenges. Instead, municipal access to SOYBIS database was not allowed after 2016. With this limitation, municipalities developed their own needs assessments for Syrians. This highlights once again the importance of paragraph 37 of GCR, that relevant national frameworks have to be ensured to strengthen infrastructure and institutional capacities at local level.

Within the analysed 39 district municipalities of İstanbul, emergency response and humanitarian assistance covers a wide array of activities and the range of these services can differ from one district municipality to the other. Overall, the municipal emergency response services range from

providing shelter, accommodation and soup kitchens to the distribution of goods including dry food, heating supplies, blankets, bedding, clothes, household goods and furniture. Most of the municipalities already have had services under the category of “poverty” and “neediness” for Turkish citizens living in their districts. These services were extended to Syrians. In supporting refugees in need, municipalities also cooperated with the district governorships by utilizing their foundation “Fak-Fuk-Fon”, which is specialized in arranging various types of support for persons in need.

Providing accommodation is an important emergency response service offered by municipalities. Some municipalities stated that they have immediately utilised certain municipality locations for refugee accommodation and shelter. In the medium-term, some of the district municipalities supported Syrian refugees to find rental properties. The shortage of rental properties available for refugees created in certain districts a rental market of converted unused building spaces such as basements or garages as rental properties. The survey answers indicate that in rare and exceptional instances, Fak-Fuk-Fon foundation was able to provide a limited amount of funding for refugee rental support.

One other form of humanitarian assistance provided by district municipalities for refugees is food distribution, which can take various forms. Some district municipalities provide soup kitchens either on site or in specific hot food distribution locations. Some others provide dry food supply packages and either distribute them from onsite municipality offices or directly deliver them to refugee family homes. During Ramadan some district municipalities distribute additional food packages to refugee families who are recognized as “in need”.

Distribution of other household items, such as furniture, blankets and mattresses, is also a common practice among various municipalities. These types of household items are usually collected through donations from philanthropists. District municipalities such as Ataşehir, Beyoğlu, and Güngören have developed a need-based system called ‘the social market’ for distributing household items, goods, and food supplies. In these markets, municipalities provide donated household items to be collected by the district municipality citizens or refugees. This system is recognized to be a more discreet way of distribution of aid or donations. In a similar manner, in cold winter months when heating becomes an important issue in İstanbul, some municipalities provide heating materials such as coal packages or heaters to district citizens (Fatih Municipality, 2019). With the arrival of Syrian refugees this service is extended to refugees.

In providing emergency response and humanitarian assistance, district municipalities express their concerns on how municipalities have encountered criticisms from local residents who do not feel comfortable with the usage of municipal resources for non-citizens. In order to avoid such negative feedback and the political risk associated with it, some district municipalities have consciously avoided providing certain services for refugees. In some other districts, municipalities have either limited the scope of their services or the number of their beneficiaries. As responsibility-sharing mechanisms lie at the heart of GCR, this analysis highlights the importance of carrying responsibility sharing to local level where some districts hosting more refugees than the other require further resources. Despite these challenges as it will be seen in the next section, overtime municipalities have developed more detailed mechanisms to support refugees.

## PROLONGED REFUGEE STAY AND THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES ON LOCAL INTEGRATION

In countries that have official integration policies for refugees such as Canada and Germany, settlement assistance and orientation programs support refugees in their first years of integration to their host communities (Korntheuer et al., 2017). This type of settlement assistance includes most basic needs with immediate and essential support such as “reception services, assistance with

accommodations, links to mandatory federal and provincial programs, life skills training, and orientation on financial and non-financial information” (IRCC, 2016). In other countries such as Australia, federal versus regional level responses complement local level settlement policies that foster socialization and adaptation of refugees and migrants alike. (Boese and Phillips, 2017).

In Turkey, the lack of national/state level integration services gave way to local governments to take the lead in providing de facto local integration. In doing so, district municipalities developed different institutional structures. In most of the district municipalities such as Başakşehir, Bakırköy, Arnavutköy, Avcılar, Beylikdüzü, and Büyükçekmece, refugee-related services are operated by the Social Aid Work Departments of the municipality. In few municipalities, a special integration related department was created either by the existing municipality staff or by the staff recently employed to work on refugee related activities. Zeytinburnu district municipality is one of the few municipalities, which has developed a specialized ‘Integration Service’ under their social services centre AKDEM (AKDEM, 2019).<sup>10</sup>

In the process of local integration, the range of services that municipalities offered included language courses, psycho-social support, vocational training courses, birth control education, maternity and infant hygiene classes, substance abuse support groups, disability and elderly care, social and cultural activities, employment services and providing legal advice. The range of services can differ from one municipality to another, as there was no standard set of services agreed by different districts. There is usually no consensus on the integration related roles of municipalities and activities range from promotion of local integration, social cohesion and local economic development. A state level integration policy could have provided services consistent among different districts such as access to vocational training for adults or language training both for adults and children.

In İstanbul, in providing local integration related services, individual or institutional ownership of refugee settlement realities gave way to more comprehensive policies in some district municipalities than in others. Some municipalities declared their need and interest in establishing ‘migration units’ to tailor much needed response to refugee related policies, because the services needed by Syrian refugees necessitated different strategies from the services needed by Turkish citizens. Nearly all of the district municipalities have declared the importance of such a specialized departments working on migrants or refugees. District municipalities of Beylikdüzü, Büyükçekmece, Esenyurt and Şişli established “Migration/Foreigners Units” specialized in migration/refugee related matters. In establishing these, the aim was to delegate some of the registration, database and coordination activities to these units.

In 2015, Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU)<sup>11</sup> established the Migration Policy Center (MPC) to facilitate joint activities, services and policies on migration and integration among the member municipalities (MMU, 2018). The goal was to facilitate sharing information and experience, engage in “activities where local governments can benefit from global level good practices and experiences, to develop cooperation and establish common platforms between local governments and other national/international institutions, organizations, NGOs and universities,” (MPC, 2019). It also aims to contribute to the policymaking process with the positive and beneficial affects of migration to society and local communities (MMU, 2015). In order to achieve these goals, a Migration Committee and a Migration Platform composed of majors and municipality representatives were also established. These changes in the institutional structures of municipalities present factors on how local governments can adjust institutionally to the needs of refugees. GCR recognizes the importance of providing services through local and national services providers in a way that benefits both refugees and host communities. It is therefore important to establish systems that will not only focus refugees alone without benefiting host communities over time (GCR, paragraph 66).

Institutional adjustments sometimes require staff composition changes. Most municipalities declared the need to employ staff who can work specifically on the services offered to refugees such as refugee settlement experts, psychologists, trauma specialists, interpreters and female social

workers. Despite the need to recruit specialized staff, municipalities cannot always employ them due to financial limitations or other procedural restrictions. GCR recognizes the need to recruit local personnel and strengthen the institutional capacities “bearing in mind the need for continued capacity of local actors, organizations and structures” (GCR, paragraph 37). In action, municipalities with staff limitations will function with difficulty to offer a variety of local integration related services including healthcare and education related support. In İstanbul district municipalities, healthcare related support includes help by municipality staff in getting refugees’ hospital appointments. It can also include hospital transportation. This health-related support extends to providing medical equipment (i.e. wheel chair, hearing aid) or distribution of medical related supplies (i.e. hygiene products, baby formula, baby diapers, etc.).

Legal aid support is another form of local integration related service offered by some district municipalities. The legal support can be providing interpretation support for legal documents such as rental contracts. In certain cases, municipalities can act as a guarantor for refugees with their tenancy agreements. Although these incidents are rare, they can demonstrate the changing role of municipalities. In Şişli Municipality’s Refugee Solidarity and Support Centre (UCLG-MEWA, 2016) similar refugee integration related services are provided free of charge.

For district municipalities education is an area of major concern. The number of school aged Syrian refugee children is very high in İstanbul. Their enrolment and attendance at schools is considered crucial by many local authority and government representatives. Education related support includes helping the refugees to register their children to local public schools and distributing stationary packages. Zeytinburnu district municipality’s AKDEM offers language-training courses for school age children. However, not all municipalities systematically offer this language training service to all school aged children. Compulsory education for school aged children lies in the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Some municipalities developed Turkish language training courses for adults and some others were able to extend their vocational training services to Syrian refugees. İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality has an active life-long learning centre specializing in vocational training and language courses (İSMEK). Within İSMEK, Turkish language courses as well as vocational training courses are offered to Syrian refugees (İSMEK, 2019). GCR aims to raise attention to education and encourage states and relevant stakeholders to contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems for refugee and host community children and youth (GCR, paragraph 68). As indicated in GCR additional support to expand education facilities and teaching capacities are important (GCR, paragraph, 69). It can be seen in districts of İstanbul hosting the highest number of refugees, this type of support is critical not only for refugees but also for host society members to overcome obstacles for enrolment and attendance.

In their responses to refugee-related needs, municipalities have shown innovative means to minimize the integration-related challenges for both refugees and host communities. One of these innovative approaches is Ataşehir Municipality’s food bank system. Ataşehir municipality has developed a food deposit card (Atakart), which is distributed among district residents in need of financial support (Ataşehir Municipality, 2019). This card has a certain amount of monthly uploaded credit and it works in more than twenty supermarkets around the Ataşehir district. Using this card, district residents can buy their basic food needs from partner supermarkets without using cash. Ataşehir municipality is in the process of distributing these cards to refugee families. This project aims to boost local economic activities in local supermarkets while preserving the refugee’s dignity in receiving support. Similar cards are available in other district municipalities such as Arnavutköy and Esenyurt.

Another novel approach in responding to refugee needs is through utilizing social media. Communication with refugees to disseminate information about municipality services or activities can be a challenging task. Acknowledging that refugees use smart phones quite extensively to access social networking websites, one particular municipality decided to launch a Syrian refugee support

group on Facebook. It was considered an effective method of disseminating local integration-related information. Taking this idea a step forward, the municipality staff plans to develop a smart phone application which will allow more specific functions and operations to be used more extensively.

In providing these local integration-related services, almost all district municipalities have declared their concern in accessing to a wider range of resources and funding opportunities. The limited amount of funding available for refugee related activities at the local level restrains the scope of the services that municipalities offer to refugees. In order to be more effective, municipalities need legislative and funding resource changes. First of all, through legislative changes, central funding allocation proportionate to refugee population should be taken into consideration. Secondly, it is clear that international and national funding opportunities are important in supporting services for municipalities. Not all of the surveyed municipalities have presented evidence that they are familiar with international funding schemes such as the EU grants or other international funds. Training given to municipality staff on international and national grant applications can extend funding possibilities for municipalities. In addition, municipalities have expressed their concerns with regards to negative attitudes of district residents towards services provided for refugees. Refugee related awareness campaigns or social activities including both communities can help to overcome host community prejudices towards refugees. This will foster good relations and peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities (GCR, paragraph 84).

As a positive development, the legal and financial limitations experienced by municipalities on providing refugee-related services gave way to developing collaborations and partnerships with various international organizations, NGOs and other partners to support refugee related aid distribution. In the process of Syrian refugee settlement and integration, NGOs and INGOs became active actors working in partnership with district municipalities. Some of the municipalities have declared that they prefer the involvement of NGOs/INGOs to distribute aid, as this method requires less time and labour from them. However, other municipalities declared their concern about faith-based NGO involvement, as they do not wish to be identified as collaborating with particular NGOs. Overall, nationwide and well-known NGOs such as ASAM or Mülteci-Der have reputations such that most municipalities seem to be comfortable working with them.

One other reason why municipalities prefer to collaborate with NGOs and INGOs is to avoid additional staff recruitment. Utilizing the resources of civil society organizations means that the necessity of employing additional staff members with Arabic language skills is not essential. Some of the district municipalities mentioned that there has been an increase in their staff numbers due to the increased workload that they have encountered. Especially in the municipalities where the number refugees is higher than 10.000 and diverse set of services are provided, it is possible to see that these municipalities employed additional staff members working Syrian refugee related services which in certain cases include Arabic interpreters.

As has been indicated by Hinger et al., a better understanding of the local responses to migration and settlement can be key to identifying and acting upon various divergences in coordination (Hinger et al., 2016). Local governments have been the focus of some comparative research in Europe in shaping relationships between resident populations and newcomers in the establishment of migrant advisory bodies, local regulations and resource allocation (Alexander, 2003). Similar developments have been observed in İstanbul district municipalities where inclusion of Syrian refugees and other refugee populations to the City Councils with refugee representation is now becoming a matter of discussion. Through representation, refugees can be part of the development of policies and activities focusing on particular local needs and resources. In delivering such services, collaboration among various municipalities can be useful and essential. Despite this need, the general level of collaboration and cooperation among different municipalities has been so far weak. The essential reason for the lack of collaborative effort is the demand for local responses for local challenges. One other reason for the lack of collaboration among municipalities is the political party differences between them. GCR clearly emphasizes the need for networks of cities and municipalities to share

their good practices and innovative approaches (GCR, paragraph 38). In order to provide novel and tailored solutions with the support of UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders these collaborations have to be strengthened.

Overall, in providing local level services, with a focus either on emergency response or on local integration, secure and long-term funding is important. Donations or philanthropy-based support can limit long-term policy planning by local governments. Similarly, financial support based on international sources that are bound to short-term contracts by INGOs or NGOs, foundations, bilateral agreements can be useful in delivering immediate needs or services, but this type of financial support mechanism can limit long-term policy planning and activities. Local governments, in that respect, struggle to find long-term sustainable financial support for their services and projects that can be tailored for refugees. The importance of tools underlined by GCR such as funding and partnerships to support local authorities' responses to refugee needs and assistance has to be operationalized and implemented. This can support the resilience of host communities.

## CONCLUSION

Taking İstanbul as its case study, to look at İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and its 39 district municipalities, this research aimed at emphasizing the critical role of local authorities and municipalities in refugee hosting situations and integration processes. This research presented factors on how developing strong roles for local authorities and governments in refugee response situations can relate to the objectives of GCR directly. While promoting collective responsibility, strengthening the role and capacities of the local authorities in their responses to the needs of refugees can directly ease the pressure on host countries. Secondly, as local authorities become refugees' initial and immediate contact at the local level, developing methods for local authorities can also significantly enhance refugees' self-reliance. Finally, the tools such as funding, partnerships and data gathering and sharing can expand access to third-country solutions (UNHCR, 2018a). This article argued that, unlike many Western countries, a comprehensive refugee settlement and integration policy at the state level does not exist in Turkey. The lack of a centralized system created a refugee-led settlement policy all around the country including in different districts of İstanbul. Instead of waiting for the adoption of a nationwide *de jure* refugee integration policy, municipalities adapted to meet the immediate needs of refugees with *de facto* integration policies at the local level.

The results of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 municipal elections brought governing political party changes in various cities. In major cities such as İstanbul and Ankara metropolitan municipalities are now governed by the opposition party CHP. The governing AK party runs the majority of the district municipalities. These recent changes can indicate challenges for cooperation between different district and metropolitan municipalities in the future. However, it will not be realistic to expect drastic changes in the roles of municipalities regarding their services towards refugees.

At the heart of GCR lies the issue of responsibility sharing between states and different stakeholders on refugee protection. While states in theory like to retain discretion on responsibility sharing, in practice the responses can be far more complex, in which "a precarious iteration between generic commitments and situation-specific application, gradually building soft normative consensus (through 'generic agreements') while building State confidence that practical application leads to mutually beneficial outcomes (through 'situation-specific' commitments)" (Betts, 2018). The findings of this research clearly show that burden and responsibility-sharing mechanisms for refugee related situations should not be limited to international level, but creative solutions should be developed at local level. As can be seen in İstanbul, distribution of refugees among various districts can be unbalanced. The *laissez faire* approach for refugee settlement has to be compensated with

financial support mechanisms by central governments. As indicated in the GCR the mobilization of timely, predictable, adequate and sustainable public and private funding is key to the successful implementation of the global compact (GCR, 2018, paragraph 32).

National authorities have to be on board in providing legal authorization and resource allocation for municipality services with respect to refugees. Clarifying legal ambiguities on the role and responsibilities of municipalities is in critical importance. Providing a strong legal stance on the role of municipalities can pave way to straightforward central, regional and local funding possibilities. In this way, a national level responsibility and burden sharing can be achieved among different district municipalities. In the distribution of financial contributions from the national level to local, the amount given per individual refugee should be higher than the amount given per local resident. This is simply because the needs of refugees require specific attention, which will come at a higher cost. Betts argues that GCR already identifies mechanisms for financial or in-kind contributions with genuinely innovative character (Betts, 2018, 3). In order to facilitate change, GCR has to push further for this role not to be only normative but also practical.

With their critical role in emergency response and local integration, local authorities and especially municipalities can leverage the GCR to attract more support to their efforts in two ways. First of all, GRF will be an excellent opportunity for municipalities to receive more attention in creating methods to exchange and build upon good practices. The proposed digital platform developed by UNHCR to facilitate good practices can be utilized in the exchange of information on refugee related services and activities developed by different municipalities all around the world. These services or activities may focus on issues locally, but their essence in reflecting refugee emergency and integration needs will have global implications. Secondly, the GRF will provide an instrumental occasion for pledges that take the form of financial, material and technical assistance. The findings of this research clearly indicate that sustainable and sufficient funding is necessary for municipalities to provide services for refugees and other residents. In addition, international resource allocation in the form of financial, material and technical assistance will be essential in supporting the efforts of refugee hosting states. As an evidence of international responsibility and burden sharing, these types of contributions will not only promote global collective responsibility, but it will also strengthen the role and capacities of the municipalities and their services towards host and refugee communities.

GRF can be a direct platform for pledges by local governments for their specific needs of funding, technical assistance, material needs from governments, IOs and other stakeholders. International funds and a fair distribution of resources can enhance the capacities of the local governments while empowering the refugees with self-reliance. Utilization of the GCR can also influence the quality of the services that local authorities and municipalities can provide, not only to refugees but also to host community members.

GCR is presented as a unique opportunity to push forward the role of local governments in shaping local integration-related activities in order to fit the needs of refugees and municipalities in a more detailed and tailored approach. As explained by Mr. Grandi, the global momentum received through GCR for international support can address the challenges experienced by host communities (Grandi, 2018). In this process, the role of local governments should be clear and emphasized. As can be seen in the case of İstanbul, the role of local governments in local integration of refugees is extremely valuable and undeniable.

## NOTES

1. In the context of Turkey, this research argues that both local governments (municipalities) and local authorities (governorships and district governorships) work together in finding solutions on a systematic, ad-hoc or project related basis. In Turkish context, "local governments" refer to the elected representatives

at the municipal level, where as “local authorities” refer to the appointed members of public institutions or bureaucracies by the central government, such as the governorship officials or local representatives of various national level ministries or state institutions. Although this distinction between the elected (local government) versus appointed (local authority) is clear in Turkey, our research demonstrates that this technical differentiation can become blurred at the operational and practical levels. In that respect, this research prefers to extend the meaning of the term local governments to include both the elected and appointed representatives.

2. The term “Syrian refugees” is used in this research to in define the Syrians who fled the Syrian civil war. The official legal status of Syrians living in Turkey is defined in the Temporary Protection Regulation (DGMM, 2019).
3. Turkey has kept a geographical limitation on the application of the 1951 Convention (UN, 1951), which means that refugees coming outside Europe are considered as “conditional refugees” according to Turkey’s new LFIP.
4. This research utilizes the data generated for the report on “Urban Refugees from Detachment to Integration.” For details see also (Erdoğan, 2017).” Due to the restrictions on the blind peer review process, the name and the author of this report is not included in the pre-review version of this article. The details are available to the Editor of the Journal and these details will be included prior to the publication of the article.
5. There are still a number of unregistered refugees in Turkey including İstanbul. There can be various reasons why refugees may not be registered to the DGMM database. Although it is difficult to know the accurate number of unofficial refugees in İstanbul, it is clear that the number of Syrian refugees is much higher than the official figures.
6. LFIP also included the European Union *acquis* inspired article on the “temporary protection status” which became the basis of the legal status of Syrians in Turkey.
7. In Turkey, district municipalities do not have the authority to determine local taxes and fees. An important source of income for district municipalities is the transfers from the general budget tax revenues, which constitutes approximately 52% of the total income of district municipalities and 65% of metropolitan municipalities. (Union of Municipalities in Turkey, 2018).
8. This bank distributes funds to municipalities from a central budget proportionate to the municipality’s district population (İlbank, 2019).
9. Registration of refugees with DGMM allows them to get a national ID number and access to national level services.
10. This unit under AKDEM is called the “Social Compliance Unit.” It provides a wide range of services including social consoling, language courses for both children and adults, social and cultural activities, a “Migrant Women’s Club”, and an integration course for refugee children.
11. MMU has a goal to establish a platform for strong collaboration and cooperation among its 191 district municipality members from all around the Marmara geographical region.

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## APPENDIX 1: İSTANBUL MUNICIPALITY DISTRICTS AND THE POPULATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES (2016)

Districts(*Asian side)	Total District Population	Syrian Refugee Population	Proportion of Syrian Refugees to Total Population of the District
Küçükçekmece	761.064	38.278	5.02
Bağcılar	757.162	37.643	4.97
Sultangazi	521.524	31.426	6.02
Fatih	419.345	30.747	7.33
Esenyurt	742.810	29.177	3.92
Başakşehir	353.311	26.424	7.48
Zeytinburnu	289.685	25.000	8.63
Esenler	459.983	22.678	4.93
Sultanbeyli*	321.730	20.192	6.27
Avcılar	425.228	19.554	4.59
Arnavutköy	236.222	17.838	7.55

APPENDIX 1  
(CONTINUED)

Districts(*Asian side)	Total District Population	Syrian Refugee Population	Proportion of Syrian Refugees to Total Population of the District
Bahçelievler	602.040	17.710	2.94
Gaziosmanpaşa	501.546	17.709	3.53
Şişli	274.017	15.269	5.57
Ümraniye*	688.347	14.858	2.15
Kağıthane	437.942	14.216	3.24
Güngören	302.066	12.727	4.21
Sancaktepe*	354.882	12.072	3.41
Beyoğlu	242.250	11.841	4.88
Bayrampaşa	272.374	11.004	4.04
Eyüp	375.409	10.779	2.87
Beylikdüzü	279.999	6.728	2.40
Büyükçekmece	231.064	5.555	2.40
Pendik*	681.736	4.951	0.72
Tuzla*	234.372	2.794	1.19
Silivri	165.084	2.375	1.43
Çekmeköy*	231.818	2.309	0.99
Maltepe*	487.337	2.230	0.45
Bakırköy	223.248	2.191	0.98
Üsküdar*	540.617	1.987	0.36
Beykoz*	249.727	1.947	0.77
Kartal*	457.552	1.773	0.38
Sarıyer	344.159	1.754	0.50
Ataşehir*	419.368	1.436	0.03
Kadıköy*	465.954	650	0.13
Çatalca	67.329	428	0.63
Beşiktaş	190.033	277	0.14
Adalar*	15.623	167	1.06
Şile*	33.477	166	0.49
Total (Temporary protection)	14.657.434	478.850	3.26
Total (Temporary Protection + Pre-registration)	14.657.434	539.062 (478.850 + 60.812)	3.67