

# **Istanbul Local Government Policy on Managing Syrian Refugees Integration**

**Audi Izzat Muttaqien**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Email: [audiizzat@yahoo.com](mailto:audiizzat@yahoo.com)

**Sidik Jatmika**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Email: [sidikjatismika@umy.ac.id](mailto:sidikjatismika@umy.ac.id)

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## **Abstract**

The integration of Turkish refugees is a policy of harmonizing refugees into society, and the Istanbul local government tries to implement policies in the same direction as the Turkish Central Government. This article examines the policies and role of the Istanbul government in handling Syrian refugees in the Istanbul area in refugee integration. Turkey has been one of the largest recipients and donors of aid for Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, Istanbul has been a place where many migrants live, especially Syrian refugees. This research uses qualitative methods by collecting data through literature studies and descriptive data analysis. The article uses the cosmopolitanism theory to explain how the Istanbul government's policy in accepting refugee arrivals and its intention to help refugees are based on humanitarian principles. The findings showed that the lack of clarity in the Turkish government's general policy, which does not provide general standards and procedures for refugee integration, caused the Istanbul local government to adopt adaptive policies. Health and education are still the main challenges constrained by resources and funds. The assistance the Istanbul government provides Syrian refugees is motivated by humanitarian reasons, where the Istanbul government views Syrian refugees as human beings with the same rights as other Turkish citizens through a cosmopolitanism approach.

**Keywords:** Istanbul, Local, Refugee, Syrian, Turkey

## **Abstrak**

Integrasi pengungsi Turki merupakan kebijakan mengharmonisasikan pengungsi ke dalam masyarakat, dan Pemerintah Daerah Istanbul berusaha menjalankan kebijakan yang searah dengan Pemerintah Pusat Turki. Artikel ini mengkaji tentang kebijakan dan peran pemerintah daerah Istanbul dalam penanganan pengungsi Suriah di wilayah Istanbul dalam integrasi pengungsi. Turki telah menjadi salah satu penerima dan donor bantuan terbesar bagi pengungsi Suriah. Sementara itu, Istanbul selama ini menjadi tempat tinggal banyak migran, khususnya pengungsi Suriah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui pengumpulan data melalui studi literatur dan analisis data deskriptif. Artikel tersebut menggunakan teori kosmopolitanisme untuk menjelaskan bagaimana kebijakan Pemerintah Istanbul dalam menerima kedatangan pengungsi dan niatnya untuk membantu pengungsi didasarkan pada prinsip-prinsip kemanusiaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketidakjelasan kebijakan umum Pemerintah Turki yang tidak memberikan standar umum dan prosedur integrasi pengungsi menyebabkan pemerintah daerah Istanbul mengambil kebijakan adaptif. Kesehatan dan pendidikan, menjadi tantangan utama yang masih terkendala sumber daya dan dana. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kosmopolitanisme menjelaskan bahwa bantuan yang diberikan Pemerintah Istanbul kepada pengungsi Suriah dilatarbelakangi oleh alasan kemanusiaan, dimana Pemerintah Daerah Istanbul memandang pengungsi Suriah sebagai manusia yang mempunyai hak yang sama dengan warga negara Turki lainnya.

**Kata Kunci:** Istanbul, Lokal, Pengungsi, Suriah, Turki

## Introduction

In 2018, more than half a million Syrians under temporary protection were in Istanbul out of 3.5 million Syrian refugees across Turkey (UNICEF, 2019). Historically, Istanbul has been a host city for many migrants and has become a haven for many Syrian refugees in Turkey by accommodating more than other Turkish cities, compared to other large cities such as Izmir, which has under 300 thousand, and the Turkish capital, Ankara, which even just under 100 thousand, Istanbul accommodates around 550 thousand, even higher than cities on the Syrian border such as Gaziantep which accommodates 500 thousand (UNHCR, 2019). Still, compared to the total population of Istanbul, the number of Syrian refugees is less than 4%. In contrast, a city like Kilis is so densely packed with 130k refugees out of a population of 136k that the number of Syrian refugees in Kilis is 95% compared to the population (3RP, 2019). There is a district of Sultanbeyli in Istanbul with an above-standard refugee density; in 2016, there were 21,000 Syrian refugees out of the district's total population of 320,000 (Balcioglu, 2018; Daniş & Nazlı, 2019).

Local governments tend to be politically dominated, with conservative parties being the main political actors in local governments, such as the AKP, which is the government party; since the formation of the Sultanbeyli municipal structure, parties have controlled local governments, so local government policies are influenced politically (Hürriyet, 2017). Sultanbeyli District, Istanbul, has a low literacy rate, but compared to other areas in Istanbul, the fertility rate is very high, so employment is a significant concern for refugees (Sultanbeyli Municipality, 2015). In its management, the local government collaborates with many parties, such as the Association for Refugees as an NGO (Daniş & Nazlı, 2019, pp. 4-5), in providing many services in an organized way to support refugees in the area, showing that local authorities play an essential role in the integration process of migrants.

Turkey had a centralized political tradition before the 2000s, so the central government tended to be more potent than local governments; this centralized political structure

continues to include refugee management (Bayraktar, 2014). Dominant government affiliates such as The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and other ministries or directorates related to migration and refugee affairs, before finally, the critical role began to emerge from civil society organizations recognized by the Turkish government in helping refugees (Daniş & Nazlı, 2019, pp. 7-8) after initially implemented open door policy for refugees where conflict and war in Syria affected Turkey's situation (Mufidah et al., 2022, p. 244; Robby, 2021, p. 295).

The increasing scale and complexity of the global refugee situation and related to forced displacement are recognized by international organizations such as UNHCR (Albu, 2019), so there is tremendous pressure on the response in dealing with refugees to seek solutions through local integration. First, asylum countries must look at the prospects of local integration in long-term solutions for refugees, seeing refugee situations with prolonged problems. For example, from 2011 to 2019, Turkey received the most significant number of refugees, with 3.6 million Syrian refugees (Erdoğan, 2019). Turkey also forged international partnerships, such as with the EU in 2016, so Turkey understands the need for a more comprehensive solution to overcoming the dynamics of refugees, a global issue, such as through local-level policies. There is a contrast between local and national policy approaches; local policies are factored in ideology, interests, opinions of the region, and the influence of local communities related to the voter base; these factors are formulated to be implemented as refugee integration policies at the local level. Memişoğlu & Yavçan (2022, pp. 1-2) see the need for a policy-making mechanism that combines bottom-up and top-down, multi-level governance also needs to be considered as an instrument for formulating refugee integration policies for the Istanbul government.

When the Turkish government implemented Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) no. 6458 in 2013, a more structured policy implementation for refugees was attempted. Apart from focusing on humanitarian aspects and coordinating irregular immigration

matters, integration practices are also trying to be implemented. Integration refers to the Turkish government centralizing migration policy by establishing the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). The Turkish government calls integration the term harmonization or *uyum* in Turkish, with the hope of living between the Turkish people and outside communities such as refugees. The integration focus includes providing social and educational services to refugees (Bither et al., 2016). This research tries to explain the role and policies adopted by the Istanbul government in integrating Syrian refugees.

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Method**

To examine the policies of the Istanbul government, the author uses the cosmopolitanism theory to explain the intention of emphasizing humanitarian issues regarding the refugee crisis. Protection of human rights, the emancipation of global peace, and emphasis on promoting democracy are the main essences of cosmopolitanism and moral solidarity for all people, including those outside the country's borders (Fine, 2007). The commitment is following the policy steps taken by the Istanbul government in protecting Syrian refugees who are seen as fellow citizens or non-citizens affected by human rights violations. Cosmopolitanism has a vision of achieving prosperity for all humankind, including non-citizens, which Fine (2007) describes as a caring attitude that creates emancipation and a sense of human sympathy for the surrounding situation. Even though Syrian refugees are not Turkish citizens, the Istanbul government still helps without discrimination by seeing that Syrian refugees are human beings who also have the right to a safe life.

The basic argument for cosmopolitanism sees equal rights, where all human beings are equal and entitled to the same rights; we also cannot remain silent when other people experience suffering (Appiah, 2017; Fine, 2007). When suffering beyond territorial boundaries occurs, especially when the state fails to guarantee the rights of its people, Fine (2007) sees the intervention of other states to

facilitate these rights even though the state's responsibility is limited to its territory. The same can be seen in the Istanbul government's commitment to helping Syrian refugees. Syrians became victims of war due to the Syrian government's failure to manage their country, which caused misery for Syrians, forcing them to flee.

To limit the scope of the research, the authors focus on research that elaborates on the policies of the Istanbul government in dealing with refugees in Istanbul, Turkey, from 2013 to 2019. The local government cooperates with other parties, including the central or national government, in dealing with refugees in their area. The Istanbul government actively collaborates with external parties, such as international organizations and local NGOs, with a similar mission in dealing with refugee problems. This study uses a qualitative method by elaborating the data collected, analyzed, and observed in depth to explain how the Istanbul government implements policies to deal with refugee problems in the Istanbul area. The authors use literature study techniques for data collection by collecting sources of articles and books as primary data, while news and reports are secondary data. The author analyzed the data using descriptive techniques by analyzing and describing the role of the Istanbul government in assisting and providing service assistance to refugees in Istanbul, according to data obtained from the literature.

### **Result and Explanation**

As a metropolitan city, Istanbul is not proactive in dealing with refugee issues; as a result, an institutional and management model to deal with refugees is not established in each district. Every district in Istanbul sees that Istanbul as a metropolis will play a significant role and become a major player in integration, including financial and administrative affairs and even politics. However, without waiting for directions from the center of Istanbul, districts in Istanbul took the initiative to develop a multi-level network to make it easier for them to deal with refugees; the Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) was formed which functions as a special migration-center and forum for its

members in formulating regional policies related to migration since 2015 and consists of 190 members as the largest regional local government association in Turkey. MMU succeeded in encouraging members to mobilize many resources by building international partnerships and increasing their capacity. In addition, cities also facilitated the exchange of knowledge so they could help refugees (Memişoğlu & Yavçan, 2022, pp. 11-12).

Incomplete paperwork in the registration of refugees in Istanbul cannot reliably establish the exact number of refugees in Istanbul. Still, in its estimation, Istanbul has become a significant destination for migrant groups. It is the largest recipient of Syrian refugees, with half a million out of one million refugees from various countries living in Istanbul (Erdoğan, 2017, p. 29). Given social cohesion and humanity to help Syrian Refugees, the Istanbul government follows the central government to provide for Syrian Refugee's needs in Istanbul. Still, the ambiguity of the national policy direction is an obstacle for the Istanbul government to maximize its capacity and assist the needs of refugees within the legal framework and policies they implement. Each district in the city of Istanbul has its policy approach; broadly speaking, they use a community center approach in addressing the needs of refugees by helping them but also trying to fend off views of creating special treatment for Syrian refugees. There are movements and sentiments in Istanbul that show anti-Syrian attitudes based on the anxieties and complaints of Istanbulites because there is a tendency for Syrian refugees to have preferential access to assistance and social services (Kavas et al., 2019; Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019; Üstübcü, 2022). Districts in Istanbul City also use an equal human rights approach to gain a stable image for many migrant groups. In dealing with refugees, some local authorities in the districts tend to have political interests due to party interference in certain areas. For example, Şişli district is under the control of the opposition party. So, there is a clash of policies where the AKP, as a pro-government party, develops its understanding of implementing policies related to refugees (Lowndes & Polat, 2022, pp. 406-408).

NGOs in Istanbul have obtained legal status and are officially recognized by the government as associations, such as one based in the Sultanbeyli District, Istanbul, called the Association for Refugees (MD), which focuses on alleviating the conditions of individual refugees. MD consists of local and high-level officials in the municipal government because their networks and connections with prominent figures such as state officials, local leaders, and parties facilitate their goals. MD also focused on education by establishing a temporary education center that accommodated 400 Syrian children; this activity took place in a government-allocated building with a local government-approved free school bus service (Erdoğan & Demirel, 2020). Initially, the Ministry of Education managed this school in 2015 before being run by MD in 2017. Even so, the Ministry still helps pay teacher salaries thanks to international assistance such as The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), demonstrating efficient collaboration between parties from state agencies, local government, and local organizations (Danış & Nazlı, 2019, pp. 8-9).

The local government also has good relations and involves an official neighborhood head or so-called Muhtar, whose area base in certain districts plays a role in helping Syrian refugees by accommodating those in need, offering assistance services, finding jobs, and accompanying patients in hospitals. Then, the District Office of Religious Affairs organized activities to create a friendly environment and solidarity between refugees and the surrounding community in communicating; they also distributed donations collected at the mosque (Danış & Nazlı, 2019, p. 10).

Services for refugees are provided under the assistance of the Istanbul government, starting from health services, which include medical care assistance offered by local government staff and later assistance in referring refugees to certain hospitals if needed. Then, transportation facilities to hospitals are also included, and medical equipment such as wheelchairs and distribution of medical equipment such as health products are also included in the facilities provided (Cloeters & Osseiran, 2019).

One of the areas of primary concern is the issue of education; Istanbul has a very high number of Syrian refugee children of school age. Istanbul's government believes that their attendance at schools is essential, so there is encouragement and support for them to enroll in local government schools; the municipality has also provided Turkish language training courses and writing packages. Although these services are not equally provided in all areas of Istanbul, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the compulsory education agenda for school-age Syrian children. Turkish language training courses are not limited to children; they are also available for adult refugees. Istanbul is the highest refugee recipient; Kale & Erdoğan (2019, p. 10) see the importance for all parties, including the community, in helping facilitate refugees in educational activities and encouraging their attendance through school registration provided by the Istanbul and central government (Nimer & Oruç, 2019).

For legal assistance, the local government's help is still limited to guaranteeing refugees regarding their rental-related matters of legal documents because refugees have the right to receive legal assistance at no cost if the decision they receive is adverse and unfavorable (Soykan, 2012; Elicin, 2018). However, in practice, this problem rarely occurs, not to mention that the role of local governments is still being held back because the Turkish Central Government has not provided clear guidelines for handling refugee issues through competency standards or local government responsibility documents. Local governments like Istanbul are required to adapt to unanticipated and unprecedented problems. Quick and appropriate assistance must be implemented by the government of every city facing the arrival of refugees. As the citizenship law is not yet clear, if the local government takes the initiative to assist Syrian refugees, it is feared that it will be considered unlawful by the courts because it incurs costs for non-Turkish citizens (Elicin, 2018; Bidinger et al., 2014).

Other innovative breakthroughs were also initiated in facing the integration challenges of Istanbul refugees, such as in the Atasehir district, which developed a food bank system as

financial assistance in the form of a card; it functions as a monthly credit and can be used in many supermarkets around Atasehir, this policy also has a positive impact on economic turnover, especially for local supermarkets, this system has begun to be implemented in other districts of Istanbul (Elicin, 2018).

The Istanbul government tried to avoid legal and administrative obstacles; cooperation was formed as a protocol framework with associations by establishing refugee centers. The Istanbul government was also assisted by logistical assistance from this collaboration (Eliçin, 2019; Erdoğan, 2017). In addition, national and international NGOs are involved with other government agencies to overcome the improper allocation of funding for refugees and unclear laws; it is hoped that this will increase the effectiveness and capacity of services for refugees with the involvement of other parties (Eliçin, 2019).

The cooperation protocol signed by the Istanbul government and the Association results from a discussion of about ten months, hoping to facilitate access to municipal facilities for refugees in developing the results of the partnership cooperation. A consultative council consisting of language, medical, and psychologist experts has also formed thanks to the collaboration between the two; its function is to guide refugees in providing information and assisting their access in many areas, including education and health, although based in the Sultanbeyli district, this council also accepts to serve refugees from another district. According to Elicin (2019, pp. 439-440), this policy is a responsive attitude from the Istanbul government in managing refugees by establishing administrative units for refugee centers. Still, legal empowerment and budget management must be strengthened to reduce tensions between residents and refugees and maintain social cohesion.

The Istanbul government seriously considers effectively conveying information to Syrian refugees to assist the refugee integration process (Dekker et al., 2018). The local government has disseminated information effectively through social media as a forum for information on refugee services. Recalling that smartphones are

the most frequently used tool by refugees, the government is trying to develop detailed and featured smartphone applications that can effectively disseminate information further. The local government's main challenges in the smartphone application development process were funding and access to resources, coupled with residents' negative attitudes towards providing services to refugees. However, limited resources are an impetus for the local government to take advantage of the involvement of partners such as international organizations and NGOs because it requires minimal effort, while the tendency is to avoid faith-based NGOs because it can trigger identification in a specific direction. In particular, if there are massive numbers of refugees, then the involvement of NGOs will be beneficial in hiring additional staff, such as the need for Arabic interpreters as a bridge of communication between the city administration and the Syrian refugees. It can be seen that Turkey does not explicitly have a centralized system for dealing with refugee issues, including in Istanbul, so the Istanbul government is required to meet urgent needs by adapting the implementation of policies at the regional level; local integration of refugees cannot be separated from its role because of the commitment of local governments such as in Istanbul who can effectively pursue policies according to the situation needed (Kale & Erdoğan, 2019, pp. 11-13).

In urgent situations, local governments in various Turkish cities have chosen to improvise and take initiatives in assisting and providing services at the local level since 2011. For example, as a local authority, the Istanbul government is empowered to act according to circumstances in dealing with refugee problems. Some of the challenges that arise for the local government when faced with several situations related to law, such as Article 14 of Turkish Municipal Law No. 5393, which stipulates that city services can only be obtained for those who are Turkish citizens so that Syrian refugees are not included in groups that can get services, some cities choose not to serve Syrian refugees to avoid being caught up in the law. On the other hand, there is justification for local governments

choosing to help because the second part of the article encourages serving groups such as low-income people and Syrian refugees to be included in that category. According to Kale & Erdoğan (2019, pp. 5-6), Turkey's legal framework is insufficient with relevance only to support efforts at the local level; the mandate and role of local governments need to be clarified through amendments to the national and local legal frameworks.

Turkey is limited to national policies due to geographic boundaries that are maintained by the country, and in the end, there was the ratification of the 1951 UN Convention. Only European citizens were given formal refugee status, so local integration policies became the foundation and legal basis for non-European asylum seekers. Concerning identity and culture, there are challenges from the basis of Turkish law regarding Turkish immigration policy, where Law No. 2510 stipulates that people of Turkish descent and attached to Turkish culture can obtain refugee status or migrate and settle in Turkey. Turkey's migration policy is influenced by past events, such as in 2013 when the legislative framework was expanded for people who need international protection due to events in the country of origin with a new protection status; Turkey calls it harmonization. Then, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was adopted in the same year. In addition, since 2015, the Syrian refugee problem has been protracted, which has been the main reason for Turkey to focus initially on a temporary policy to become a long-term one, so a strategy to facilitate local integration was also designed due to the limited possibilities for the return or resettlement of refugees (Memişoğlu & Yavcan, 2022, p. 3). The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) expects stakeholders, including local governments, to provide immigrants with new skills and knowledge to make them more independent (Demirhan & Aslan, 2015). Local governments that are flexible and lax in granting permits without strict inspection of migrant temporary work can have an impact on many employers choosing to employ them informally (Dedeoğlu & Bayraktar, 2019; Memişoğlu & Yavcan, 2022, pp. 4-5).

Many obstacles interfere with the process of integration of refugees at the local level, with the absence of institutionalization in Turkey in handling refugees. Not to mention the unclear roles and tasks that must be carried out, causing doubts for each district local authority in the city of Istanbul to determine the structure, budget, and strategic plan (Eliçin, 2018; Eliçin, 2019).

Language is also a barrier due to the difficulty of interaction between the Istanbul government and the Syrian refugee population. The impact of language barriers, for example, the lack of access to health services for Syrian refugees who need them due to their inability to speak Turkish (Abohalaka, 2018). Hospital interpreters are the primary solution in gaining access to health services. The Turkish government makes it free and provides the same rights as Turkish citizens for Syrian Refugees to access health services. However, efforts to follow standard procedures in accessing health services are hampered by language. Apart from health services, the labor market is a significant issue that Syrian Refugees cannot access due to language barriers. The Turkish government has facilitated Syrian refugees with work permits and subsidies for companies to employ Syrian refugees. However, the language barrier is limiting and still becomes a significant obstacle to Syrian Refugees' lack of understanding of their rights and job competition in Turkey (DailySabah, 2019). Therefore, offering Turkish language classes for refugees or hiring Arabic translators becomes necessary.

In addition, another significant obstacle is that the limited financial resources cannot meet the needs of refugees because funding is not allocated explicitly for refugees, not to mention that the incoming refugee population is a large number (Eliçin, 2019). Local governments in Turkey, including Istanbul, do not have official mandates or standards for dealing with refugees, so funding is also outside the plans. The available funds are only intended for registered residents, so refugees are omitted (Bither et al., 2016), which refers to the population-funding ratio, as in the case of social services in Istanbul. Funds were available for 15 million of the total population of 15.5 million in 2019, of which approximately 3.2% more who were Syrian

refugees were not included because they were not included in the calculations (Rottmann, 2020; İçduygu & Osseiran, 2022). As a result, the government prioritizes child refugees, those with health problems and special needs, as well as refugees with valid work permits. Even then, most were only given an extension of up to a month before being relocated to be transferred to another province (Leghtas, 2019).

The lack of communication between the local government and DGMM resulted in inaccurate information obtained by both parties, resulting in another obstacle for the Istanbul government because the exchange of information did not occur systematically (Eliçin, 2019, pp. 436-437). The Turkish central government does not yet have clear standards and procedures for dealing with unprecedented refugees. So, a lack of communication between governments can impact decision-making errors. Especially providing aid to non-Turkish citizens can be considered a violation of the law because the citizenship law still mentions funding for Turkish citizens (Bidinger et al., 2014; Bither et al., 2016).

Funding is a challenge that hinders assistance to refugees; local government funding comes from the center's tax revenues according to the number of residents adjusted for the district or area. While the presence of Syrian refugees does not contribute financially to tax revenues, limited financial resources are a significant problem with the arrival of thousands of new residents to be accommodated, even though the number of refugees in some cities has exceeded the area's original residents (Kale & Erdoğan, 2019). The Emergency Social Support Net (ESSN), which has existed since 2016, is the Turkish government's largest cash assistance program for Syrian refugees for daily needs, provided every month (Cetinoglu & Yilmaz, 2021). The main source of funds is the UN agency at 62% and the Turkish government at 13%. The amount each individual receives varies, with the majority of 85%, receiving 17 to 29 USD and the remainder receiving more than 29 USD below 15% (Cetinoglu & Yilmaz, 2021; İçduygu & Osseiran, 2022). However, due to limited funds, only half of the Syrian refugees in

Istanbul benefit from these assistance facilities (İçduygu & Osseiran, 2022).

Istanbul's government uses the roles of external parties by collaborating with many national and international NGOs, groups of individual philanthropists, and businesses. This collaboration aims to provide services to refugees, focusing on the distribution of aid and various types of assistance, such as ESSN as a cash-based support (Kale & Erdoğan, 2019; Cetinoglu & Yilmaz, 2021). In Istanbul, identifying the number of refugees is the first step, which is a challenge because it is essential to ensure an even distribution of refugees and a balance in the number of refugees in the Istanbul area; checking the database registered with the DGMM is confirmed by the Istanbul municipality (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2018). For three years, there has been significant progress from 2016 to 2019; initially, more than 470 thousand refugees were registered, leaving 60 thousand, while out of 550 thousand refugees in 2019, all had registered status (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2018).

Istanbul has a wide range of coverage regarding humanitarian assistance and emergency response; however, the range of services differs in each area of Istanbul; many services are offered to refugees, such as providing accommodation and shelter. Besides that, there is also a public kitchen that functions as a distribution center for various things, including clothing, dry food, and household goods. The local government also facilitates services for low-income people, initially only for Turkish citizens, and now applies to Syrian refugees. Istanbul's government and others are trying to avoid domestic conflicts by not holding services only specifically for Syrian refugees, triggered by criticism from residents disappointed with the use of resources devoted to foreigners (Kale & Erdoğan, 2019, pp. 6-8).

At the first arrival of refugees in 2011, most of the role of the local district authorities in Istanbul was limited to helping those in need or poor conditions by sourcing from the distribution of donations to help refugees, not many of whom were fully committed to investing in services and projected long-term

integration. The Istanbul government disseminates information regarding their rights and provides counseling; refugees are also guided to gain access to public services, especially health and education. However, the Istanbul government cannot help with financial support, so it will be directed to contact the Governor. Education policy is a consideration for the Istanbul government in its policy focus because 35% of Syrian children do not have access to education due to various reasons. Primarily, the problem was related to official documents, where they also could not be accepted into Turkish public schools, resulting in them being required to work or marry early (Yildiz, 2017). Now, Syrian children can go to public or private schools and temporary education centers (TEC). Still, TEC is trying to be abolished slowly to integrate Syrian children into Turkish schools (TBMM, 2018). The local government in several districts of Istanbul sees the need for language courses for children and adults as a school support program for Syrian children because there is much bullying against them. Mentors are also provided to assess and help Syrian children academically. Several districts offer job preparation training, such as a vocational course in Sultanbeyli and job-focused training in Sisli (Eliçin, 2019, pp. 442-447).

Housing is the most critical and urgent need for Syrian refugees, and the local government in Turkey does not have a specific policy. However, several districts in Istanbul City facilitate accommodation for refugees in need, such as Sultanbeyli and Sisli, which provide women's homes for victims of violence and need protection (Woods & Kayalı, 2017; Eliçin, 2019). Due to the continuous arrival of refugees over time, the number of refugee camps provided by the government reached its total capacity (Akgündüz et al., 2015). Many refugees must choose the option of renting a house outside the camp provided by the government in the city receiving refugees in a particular area, usually the southern part of each city. The tendency is that local Turkish residents will leave their rental houses and move to better quality ones, with rental houses previously occupied by refugees (Balkan et al., 2018). Due



to limited funds, Syrian refugees live in low-quality rental houses. Refugees also choose areas close to refugee camps to facilitate access the Turkish government provides, such as health and social access (Akgündüz et al., 2015; Balkan et al., 2018). The Istanbul government considers Syrians a permanent population living in their area, so integration of refugees becomes a policy orientation; an approach to strengthening the population is also pursued so that they can independently earn a living (Woods & Kayalı, 2017).

### Conclusion

Significantly and effectively, the Government of Istanbul utilized its authority to help Syrian refugees despite the ambiguous framework of the Central Government. These initiatives in policy implementation became decisions pursued in the local integration process of refugees. Challenges ranging from funding, resources, and language to the minimal role of the Central Government are trying to be overcome by the Istanbul government to maximize policy effectiveness to facilitate assistance to Syrian refugees. Efforts through the policies carried out have shown results that have a practical impact on the survival of Syrian refugees in Istanbul. Policies related to easy access to health, education, and other social access help refugees with Syrian children who are now enrolled in public schools or temporary education centers and assisted with Turkish language services. In addition, other Syrian refugees have easy access to medical care at hospitals with facilities that have been provided, such as transportation and furniture.

To facilitate the distribution of aid to Syrian refugees, the government of Istanbul is aware of the importance of external parties being involved, including government associations, NGOs, and partners, to help the refugee integration process by exchanging information, collecting donations in funding, and jointly building units for refugees such as education centers. The Istanbul government's drive in helping Syrian refugees is humanity that reasonably views them as entitled to equal rights. However, the Istanbul government is also careful not to appear to favor Syrian refugees in

front of residents. Using a cosmopolitan approach, the government of Istanbul implemented policies to help Syrian refugees in the hope of facilitating their better lives and treating them by giving them the rights they deserve, as cosmopolitanism sees that every human being is equal.

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