

## ARTICLE

# Expanding the boundaries of the local: Entrepreneurial municipalism and migration governance in Turkey

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## Abstract

This study investigates why and how entrepreneurial municipalism is manifested in the case of Turkey despite limited local government autonomy and capacity in the area of migration governance. This article suggests four entrepreneurial strategies to understand and explain the variation in municipal practices: local networking, community engagement, organizational adaptation, and city branding. The most common strategies adopted by municipalities are local networking and community engagement often based on external funding alternatives that bring rapid and locally contingent, yet less durable and future-oriented solutions to challenges of forced displacement in urban settings. Against this background, this article highlights the importance of pathways that cultivate a culture of diversity and inclusion in the context of sustainable local integration by investing more resources in organizational adaptation and city branding. Finally, this study suggests redefining the concept of municipal capacity in terms of performance by focusing on the entrepreneurial strategies employed by local governments in their day-to-day practices.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial municipalism; local governments; migration governance; performance; Turkey

## Introduction

Questions about the role of local governments in migration governance have generated ongoing controversy among scholars and practitioners. There is a growing consensus around the idea that immigrant integration constitutes a significant theme of local governments in need of local policies (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). However, the debate over whether local governments operate through cooperative or contentious forms of municipalism in the national-local migration governance nexus continues (Hernes 2017). To overcome this impasse, researchers suggest a focus on “informal and uncertain ways” that generate new spaces of governance in the refugee crisis management context (Cochrane 2020, 527). However, the context that generates

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innovative spaces of local governance beyond the *modus operandi* of existing institutions as well as the specific mechanisms at work have not been systematically examined.

This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by analyzing and classifying entrepreneurial strategies employed by local governments in their daily environments without undergoing substantial capacity-building reforms or complex democratization processes. It does so by investigating the practices of fifteen municipalities across Turkey recognized for their active involvement in the area of migration management following the massive refugee<sup>1</sup> inflows since 2011 (Lee and Guadagno 2016; McAuliffe et al. 2019). Turkey serves as a critical case study to explore entrepreneurial municipalism under adverse conditions of limited local government autonomy within a highly centralized immigration policy regime; lack of previous experience in coping with massive and protracted population displacements at the local level; and inadequate legislation regulating local government financial and institutional capacity to design and implement immigrant and refugee-oriented policies. Based on the Turkish experience, this study seeks answers the following questions: Under what conditions have municipalities in Turkey evolved as entrepreneurs while facing protracted and massive refugee displacements since 2011? How (to what extent) do these municipalities employ entrepreneurial strategies to confront refugee related challenges in their daily environments?

This article suggests that entrepreneurial strategies have been used by municipalities in Turkey due to the urge to proactively handle urgent situations coupled with a lack of a centrally coordinated response leaving room for interpretation at the local level. Textual analysis of municipal policy documents and local/national media news features reveals that entrepreneurial strategies, categorized under city branding, organizational adaptation, local networking, and community engagement, have been utilized to varying degrees. The findings presented here concur with current debates on pragmatic municipalism, which is a relatively new approach in local government research emphasizing problem-solving through alternative delivery methods under circumstances of fiscal stress (Kim and Warner 2016). The idea of entrepreneurial municipalism sits well within this approach, envisaged as the future of local government studies through its emphasis on diverse local spaces for bottom-up, innovative, and spontaneous action (Barnett et al. 2020). The findings reported here also expand the spectrum of migration studies by tracing the factors that trigger municipalities to act in an entrepreneurial fashion and exploring how entrepreneurial strategies are being used while responding to immigrant and refugee-related challenges at the local level.

This article is organized as follows: The first section focuses on entrepreneurial municipalism as a new concept that can be used in the area of migration governance. The second section introduces municipalities facing massive and protracted refugee displacements in Turkey since 2011 as emerging entrepreneurs in local migration governance. The third section examines entrepreneurial strategies based on a thorough comparison of fifteen municipalities facing massive and protracted refugee

<sup>1</sup> The term *refugee* here refers to the forcibly displaced Syrian population registered under a temporary protection status in line with the Temporary Protection Regulation issued on October 22, 2014, in Turkey.

displacements across Turkey. The final section draws conclusions and offers suggestions for future research on entrepreneurial municipalism as a benchmark for spanning the boundaries and leveraging the performance of local governments in the area of migration governance.

### Assuming an entrepreneurial role in migration governance

In this study, entrepreneurial municipalism refers to all those municipal initiatives that have a proactive and innovative orientation with the intention of coping with daily challenges of forced displacement in urban settings. The terms *policy entrepreneurship* and *entrepreneurial municipalism* used in this study should not be confused with the terms *refugee entrepreneurship* and *ethnic entrepreneurship* already being used in migration studies referring to self-employment of refugees and other migrant group as a pathway for their integration into the society (see Wauters and Lambrecht 2008). Entrepreneurial municipalism, instead, is a framework consisting of several strategies that can be used by local governments to handle refugee situations in their daily practices.

Entrepreneurial forms of municipalism have emerged as a response to more passive or reactive forms of municipalism that have dominated local government action in the area of migration governance. The role of local governments as prominent actors dealing with challenges related to mixed migration flows became evident in the complex migration context emerging in the 2015–2016 Mediterranean “migration crisis” (Caponio 2019; Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018; Geuijen et al. 2020; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). The difficulties in “partnership-based models of multilevel governance” among national and European actors in the midst of dissonance over the content of the challenge and the possible policy solutions were exposed during this episode (Geuijen et al. 2020, 245–246). It was during this time that many local governments in Europe embraced the idea of policy entrepreneurship “influenced by a wider ‘municipalist’ philosophy of the city” (Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt 2020, 5). Through research on local governments’ actions in this period, many studies noted that while the scope of their formal action remained contested, municipalities implemented spontaneous, innovative, and informal strategies (see Caponio 2018; Caponio and Donatiello 2017; Geuijen et al. 2020; Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt 2020; Mahieu and Van Caudenberg 2020; Oomen and Leenders 2020; Schader 2020; Schultz 2020). It is such strategies deployed in daily practices of local governments that, this study suggests, develop into entrepreneurial forms of municipalism over time.

By employing entrepreneurial strategies, municipalities move away from confrontational politics and “ideological sclerosis of the national debates” (Caponio 2019, 10) toward day-to-day practices aimed at solving local problems with a pragmatic approach (Oomen and Leenders 2020). Entrepreneurial municipalism suggests a shift toward individual agency exercised by municipal civil servants who either improvise or use discretion to solve everyday problems encountered within local forced migration contexts. Accordingly, these actions constitute a fertile ground to generate a new understanding of policy action in local migration governance.

Certainly, there are points of convergence between previous approaches such as the multilevel governance (MLG)<sup>2</sup> approach and the framework of entrepreneurial municipalism proposed here. For instance, both approaches recognize transnational networks and international donor agencies as critical in explaining the local dimension of migration governance. However, the underlying assumptions used in these approaches are very different. The MLG approach assumes that local governments have considerable autonomy and, therefore, focuses on capacity-building reforms with the purpose of task sharing across tiers of governance. The framework of entrepreneurial municipalism focuses primarily on innovative practices employed by municipalities in their daily environments to pragmatically respond to protracted refugee situations without necessarily going through substantial capacity-building reforms or complex democratization processes.

This study does not trivialize the important role of capacity-building reforms or democratization processes at the local level. Yet, entrepreneurial municipalism becomes particularly useful in those situations in which local governments face critical urban challenges posed by constantly changing environmental, economic, and social factors. Against this background, municipalities should reinvent themselves by adapting their activities in accordance with the needs of different population groups, particularly the most vulnerable communities in the society including refugees and asylum seekers, to avoid further marginalization and escalating social conflict. In this context, “as city authorities engage specific local actors and neighborhoods to co-create and try out new and different ways of ‘doing’ rather than ‘giving’ reception” (Oliver et al. 2020, 3). In the process of “doing reception,” municipalities utilize entrepreneurial strategies that enable them to respond more quickly and effectively to different refugee situations.

In this context, the forced migration context in Turkey constitutes a pertinent case study in which municipalities challenged by a massive influx of forcibly displaced people in millions were forced to act through rapid response mechanisms amidst rudimentary bureaucratic processes and political controversies at the national level. The following section examines why and how municipalities in Turkey have become entrepreneurial in migration governance by investigating various municipal practices since 2011.

### **Municipal initiatives amidst mass refugee influx**

This section traces the contextual conditions that triggered local authorities in Turkey to employ entrepreneurial strategies in their daily work while coping with challenges induced by massive influx of forcibly displaced Syrians into their cities. After the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, Turkey adopted an open-door policy toward those fleeing conflict in Syria and pursued policies complying with humanitarian emergency measures. In the early years of the inflow, there was not a coordinated national policy on international protection with effective and durable responses to protracted refugee displacements leading to a policy vacuum in migration governance (Mencütek 2018). In a context of rudimentary legal and institutional

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<sup>2</sup> MLG approach was originally developed by Peter Scholten in the context of Dutch migrant integration policies (Scholten 2013).

framework at the national level in these years, having to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of the forcibly displaced Syrians in many cities motivated those local governments to act through improvised responses “characterized by a mix of unplanned pragmatism at the local and regional level” (Hoffman and Samuk 2016, 4).

There are, of course, some structural constraints to the response of local governments. Turkey has a highly centralized immigration policy regime where local governments have very limited autonomy, legislation that does not specify the responsibilities and authority of municipalities in this field, and no specific funds to engage in policy making in migration management. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) clearly charges public authorities primarily the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) within the Ministry of Interior at the national and local levels (LFIP 2013) with the role of steering migration governance. Within this institutional setting, municipalities cannot go beyond what national policy has endorsed or can, at most, contribute to policy making by offering suggestions to DGMM in a cooperative framework (see LFIP 2013, Article 96). Nonetheless municipal services to non-Turkish nationals have been justified with Article 13 of the Municipality Law, which entitles them to provide aid, services, and information to all those residing within their territories considering them as fellow inhabitants or townsmen (Law No. 5393, Townsmen’s Law, 2015).

The broad range of municipal services in migration management have surpassed the structural constraints mentioned in the preceding text. Municipal support to Syrian refugees ranges from more immediate *philanthropy-related services* such as providing “shelter, accommodation and soup kitchens [...] dry food, heating supplies, blankets, bedding, clothes, household goods and furniture” to more future-oriented *integration-related services* including “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” (Kale and Erdogan 2019, 231–232). Due to the lack of funds, municipalities capitalize on the projects of NGOs as “alternative service providers” (Woods and Kayali 2017, 18).

The response of local governments in Turkey in the period between 2011 and 2016 sits well within the framework of how crisis or perceptions of an approaching crisis “can provide a rupture for ways of working, stretch existing resources, alter the priorities of policymakers, and trigger the transformation of existing practices” (Schiller and Hackett 2018, 2). It is during such times that due to “lack of effective knowledge in the area, and the demand for innovation and activism leads street-level bureaucrats to use unique entrepreneurship strategies aimed at influencing policy” (Lavee and Cohen 2019, 476). Only after 2016, new policies and institutions were designed in line with a social cohesion approach targeting the forcibly displaced as well as other vulnerable groups. The delayed national policy response was due to “the lack of previous experience and weak institutional capacity to pursue policies around social cohesion [...] and the cautious choice of the government [...] intended to prevent abrupt transformations that could lead further tension in the country” (Özçürümez et al. 2021a, 604).

After 2016 the national government introduced a set of institutions to operate in line with the agenda of social cohesion – a long-term policy with a rather symbolic nature replacing the earlier emergency-driven approach to refugee crisis. Yet, “what

transpires in the particular forced migration context of Turkey suggests that many social cohesion models can be identified” (Özçürümez et al. 2021a, 610), which complicates the conversion of social cohesion into a formal policy target, let alone its implementation at the local level. Nevertheless, lack of standardized measures did not hinder local government intervention, on the contrary, it created a space for local authorities to adjust their response to the needs of local communities through their own assessments and strategies. Moreover, the most disadvantaged neighborhoods with affordable housing constitute the urban spaces that offered accommodation to the forcibly displaced populations (Özçürümez et al. 2021b). Such neighborhoods, with already existing socioeconomic problems, are deprived from some of the most basic public services and are prone to conflict, violence, and crime. Physical proximity made municipalities by default better informed about the local challenges in the urban neighborhoods and rendered their intervention through services targeting deprived communities urgent and vital.

Paradoxically, municipalities continue to be deprived of the legal authority and the policy capacity to intervene immediately in international protection practices at the local level. Research points out the ongoing deficiencies of local governments in Turkey particularly in terms of financial and human resources and policy-making capacities in the area of migration governance (Eliçin 2018; Genç 2018; UNDP 2018). Their findings highlight that municipal policy processes can best be described as “muddling through” (Eliçin 2018, 95), which might have negative repercussions for the sustainability of the current social cohesion schema in the medium and long term. In this context, despite the efforts directed toward capacity building, “institutionalization of the support and full acknowledgement of municipalities as a key actor of migration management and social inclusion” (Callet-Ravat and Madore 2016, 24) has not yet been achieved. Hence, assessments of local government capacity aiming to examine the scope of the responses of municipalities and their effectiveness in service delivery including opportunities for social inclusion in the forced migration context need to account for the persistent administrative centralism. Despite its accuracy from a governance standpoint such research falls short of providing an explanation for the effective local responses to forced displacement on the ground.

More recent research attributes the success of the municipalities to the willingness of the mayors to take action (Betts et al. 2021; Eliçin 2018). This connection is made stronger particularly in those provinces or districts that share the same ideological stance with the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP), such as in the cases of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality or Sultanbeyli District Municipality (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020). Some studies suggest that municipalities with mayors from JDP are more active in compensating for the gaps that state institutions leave in terms of delivering the needs of the forcibly displaced at the local level (Betts et al. 2021). This episode, which does not involve any substantial changes to existing institutional structure, turns local governments, “particularly the ones considered to be faithful to the state” (Danış and Nazlı 2019, 153), into agents of the national government. Such claims, though, need to be complemented by research on the tremendous efforts and motivation of the municipal civil servants in their daily work. They also need to explain the existing bottom-up processes, especially the collaboration taking place among municipalities and other partners such as international NGOs, local NGOs, and local businesses acting together to address urban challenges.

Overall, the effective responses of municipalities to the needs of the refugee population in Turkey can be explained neither as a function of an expansion in their formal institutional capacity in migration management nor as a consequence of a devolution of administrative power to the local level. Giving credits to the mayors only conceals several processes that take place in daily municipal operations. This study offers an alternative explanation inspired by the idea of entrepreneurial municipalism, which focuses on the innovative and spontaneous tools employed by municipalities facing the challenges of forced displacement in their daily work. It also maintains that entrepreneurial municipalism, which characterizes the core strategies leading to the effective response at the local level, has been possible as a consequence of the expanding scale of and the urgency to meet the protection needs of the forcibly displaced during their prolonged stay in primarily urban settings. Accordingly, in the forced migration context, municipalities had no choice but to take matters into their own hands as the most relevant actors particularly for rapid assessment and delivery of everyday needs of both local and forcibly displaced populations. Simultaneously, the national government pursued a “let-them-be” and “let-them-do” strategy toward local governments’ initiatives, which also broadened the local governments’ discretionary authority, however, without formalization of their *de facto* activism into *de jure* responsibilities.

Based on the preceding analysis, the entrepreneurial approach of municipalities in Turkey is triggered by three main factors: (a) crisis, or perceptions thereof, with irreversible socioeconomic and political consequences for urban areas, particularly in deprived neighborhoods where refugee populations are concentrated compelling local governments to respond rapidly; (b) a national policy vacuum or gaps in policy processes at the national level at least until 2016, which turned local governments into *de facto* key actors as well as implementing partners for delivering services to the forcibly displaced alongside the local population in an expanding and diversifying manner; and (c) the symbolic nature of social cohesion agenda since 2016, the implementation of which heavily depends upon the interpretation of local authorities.

Several studies aimed to explain the incipient culture of policy entrepreneurship among municipalities in Turkey, particularly within the framework of delivery of social services toward the general population within urban areas (Ergülen et al. 2020; Koçak and Kavi 2014; Şimşek and Altun 2020) without any analysis on implications for the local refugee populations. Recently, some scholars proposed to examine the narratives manifested in the daily work of local governments as helpful tools to understand “diverse paths taken by local governments, reflecting specific social and political contexts” (Lowndes and Karakaya Polat 2020, 2), coming close to the characterization of entrepreneurial municipalism in migration governance. As an extension of an interpretative approach, this line of inquiry helps unpack the reasoning behind the municipal engagement such as different beliefs and meanings that motivate local authorities to respond to the needs of the groups of the forcibly displaced. Yet, it does not fully address the specific mechanisms municipalities employ to meet needs of the forcibly displaced in their daily practices. Considering this gap in the literature, this study develops an understanding of entrepreneurial municipalism by introducing categories of municipal practices to decipher the content and extent



of policy entrepreneurship in response to forced migration challenges at the local level in Turkey.

### Data and methods

This research is based on a comparative study of fifteen municipalities (twelve metropolitan municipalities, two provincial municipalities, and one district municipality)<sup>3</sup> across Turkey recognized for their active involvement in Syrian refugee reception – including both rapid response to Syrian refugee crisis through emergency relief measures and support to longer-term social cohesion processes at the local level. The dataset includes both cities and small municipalities with different ratios of refugees over the total population to account for varieties of entrepreneurial practices according to demographic characteristics and administrative status of municipalities. The examination of municipal practices is based on a textual analysis of documents obtained from (a) official municipal information (municipalities' policy documents and strategic action plans), (b) national and local media sources (news features on municipal activities, interviews, speeches and statements of civil servants working in the local government), and (c) publications of the Union of Municipalities of Turkey (information on municipality projects, programs, conferences, seminars, and international partnerships). The collected data has first been synthesized into an activity report including the practices of fifteen municipalities in the area of migration management during the ten-year period from 2011 to 2021. Inductive approach has been followed to classify and quantify textual data under categories and subcategories constructed throughout the coding process.

At the end of the coding process categories and subcategories have been constructed referring to four entrepreneurial strategies employed by municipalities in their daily work in the area of migration management, namely, city branding, organizational adaptation, local networking, and community engagement. *City branding* as a category is extracted from textual data (words, phrases of sentences) that refer to (a) frequent use of concepts such as “social cohesion,” “social integration,” and their variations that included some future-oriented vision toward refugee inclusion in the society vis-à-vis terms implying temporary residence such as “refugee hospitality,” “humanitarian aid,” or “guests” and (b) frequent use of concepts such as inclusion, diversity, equity, and access as attributes of welcoming cities within a framework of longer-term strategic planning and urban development. *Organizational adaptation* as a category is extracted from textual data that refer to (a) development of a new unit (formal department/joint center) functioning under the municipality with specialized staff working on refugee-related issues and/or (b) constant information exchange with municipalities in Turkey and other countries with the purpose of identifying and sharing best practices in migration management. *Local networking* as a category is extracted from text that refers to (a) density of interactions with local partners including representatives of the national government at the local level,

<sup>3</sup> Refugee population in Turkey is concentrated within metropolitan municipalities that consist of 78 percent of the national population. For more information on municipality types in Turkey visit the official website of the Union of Municipalities of Turkey. Available at <https://www.tbb.gov.tr/en/local-authorities/types-of-local-governments/> (accessed 20 March 2020).



international NGOs, local NGOs, businesses, and so forth and (b) initiation and coordination of multistakeholder projects. Finally, *community engagement* as a category is extracted from textual data that refer to (a) construction of local spaces/platforms in which municipalities act as key players in offering refugee relief services as well as psychosocial support services and (b) supporting bottom-up activities that involve community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, or refugee associations.

For the purpose of this analysis, each category has been assigned a discrete nominal value of low, moderate, or high. The aim of the textual analysis is twofold. It examines variation (a) across fifteen municipalities according to their performance as entrepreneurs in migration management and (b) across specific dimensions of entrepreneurial municipalism, that is, entrepreneurial strategies. Local governments that systematically utilize entrepreneurial strategies in their daily work display a relatively high level of entrepreneurial municipalism compared to those who do not systematically utilize entrepreneurial strategies. This assessment is important to identify those entrepreneurial strategies that are utilized more frequently across all municipalities. Textual data been classified under three categories: (a) low level of entrepreneurial municipalism (entrepreneurial strategies are rarely used by municipalities); (b) moderate levels of entrepreneurial municipalism (entrepreneurial strategies are present yet not systematically used by municipalities); and (c) high levels of entrepreneurial municipalism (entrepreneurial strategies are used frequently by municipalities).

## Results and discussion

The results of the textual analysis are summarized in Table 1. Findings reveal variation in terms of entrepreneurial municipalism, that is, the extent to which municipalities employ entrepreneurial strategies ranges from low to high. Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and Sultanbeyli District Municipality display the highest level of entrepreneurial engagement while Konya Metropolitan Municipality and Osmaniye Provincial Municipality stand at the opposite end of the continuum displaying the lowest level of entrepreneurial engagement. Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Kayseri, and Mardin Metropolitan municipalities exhibit moderate performance as entrepreneurs in migration management. Such variation suggest that municipalities can actively engage with refugee related issues contingent upon their local specificities. Even though the causes are not obvious, the presence of variation once more confirms the argument of pragmatic municipalism (vis-à-vis national control) under adverse conditions of limited autonomy and inadequate policy-making capacity at the local level as well as policy vacuum and political ambiguity at the national level.

The results do not reveal a relationship between the use of entrepreneurial strategies and the population base of the municipalities (ratio of refugees over the total population). Despite having a relatively low ratio of refugees over total population (less than 10 percent) Ankara, Bursa, and Kayseri Metropolitan municipalities display a moderate level of entrepreneurial municipalism in the area of migration governance. Kilis Provincial Municipality and Hatay Metropolitan Municipality, however, display a relatively low level of entrepreneurial municipalism despite high ratios of refugees over total population (more than 25 percent). Similarly, the results do not reveal a relationship between the use of entrepreneurial strategies and

**Table 1.** Entrepreneurial Strategies for Coping with Protracted Displacement across 15 Municipalities in Turkey

Municipalities	Ratio of refugees to the total population*	City Branding	Organizational Adaptation	Local Networking	Community Engagement
Kilis P. Municipality	75.51%	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Hatay M. Municipality	26.33%	Low	Low	High	Moderate
Gaziantep M. Municipality	22.08%	Moderate	High	High	High
Şanlıurfa M. Municipality	20.27%	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Mersin M. Municipality	12.94%	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Adana M. Municipality	11.40%	Low	Moderate	High	High
Mardin M. Municipality	10.72%	Low	Low	High	High
Kahramanmaraş M. Municipality	8.21%	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Osmaniye P. Municipality	8.05%	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate
Bursa M. Municipality	5.99%	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Kayseri M. Municipality	5.89%	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High
Konya M. Municipality	5.51%	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate
İzmir M. Municipality	3.43%	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Ankara M. Municipality	1.85%	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Sultanbeyli D. Municipality**	8.90%	Moderate	High	High	High
<b>Overall Values</b>	<b>15.04%</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>

\*The ratio of refugees to the total population is obtained from the Directorate of General of Migration Management. Retrieved on 25<sup>th</sup> of December, 2021 from <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>

\*\*Data on the ratio of refugees to the total population dwelling Sultanbeyli district in Istanbul are retrieved from SUKOM database published on the Refugees Association official website (January 2020). Retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> of March, 2021 ~<https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyelilerin-kente-gocu/#:~:text=SUKOM%20verilerine%20g%C3%B6re%20Sultanbeyli%20il%C3%A7esinde,ise%20s%C4%B1radaki%20il%C3%A7e%20konumund%C4%B1r.>

municipalities' administrative status. Sultanbeyli Municipality displays a high level of entrepreneurial municipalism in migration management despite being a district municipality. İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, by contrast, displays a relatively low level of entrepreneurial municipalism in migration management despite being

one of the largest three cities in Turkey distinguished for social municipality services (Koray and Temiz 2014).

Table 1 also reveals varying levels of utilization for each entrepreneurial strategy across all municipalities in Turkey. The level of utilization serves as a benchmark to assess the degree local governments act as entrepreneurs along specific dimensions of city branding, organizational adaptation, local networking, and community engagement. It also serves as a practical guideline that can be used by local civil servants to enhance the performance of local governments in migration management. Overall assessment of all municipalities' performance reveals that municipalities across Turkey exhibit relatively high levels of "local networking" and "community engagement," moderate levels of "organizational adaptation," and very low levels of "city branding."

Findings reveal that the majority of municipalities including Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, and Mardin Metropolitan municipalities as well as Sultanbeyli District Municipality display higher levels of local networking. These municipalities maintain close ties with various local partners including representatives of the national government at the local level, international NGOs, local NGOs, businesses, and so forth and are capable of initiating and coordinating multistakeholder projects oriented toward refugee issues. Network initiatives are common among municipalities for various practical reasons. First, local networking serves a rapid response mechanism to counter the possible risks and threats arising from increasingly unexpected, massive, and protracted population movements. Second, networks have proved to be very flexible policy tools that can be employed both in situations of high uncertainty, unpredictability, scarcity of resources, and political ambiguity within the framework of humanitarian relief operations/programs as well as longer-term processes oriented toward strengthening refugee integration and social cohesion at the local level. Finally, local networking requires the least transformation in terms of institutional and political structure of the local governments and capitalizes upon external funding alternatives, spontaneous stakeholder interactions, and locally contingent solutions for refugees and other vulnerable population groups.

Among others, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality can be distinguished as a particularly successful case that has established direct network interactions with many local, national, and international organizations such as the EU, UNHCR, UNICEF, and UCLG-MEWA by designing and implementing many donor-funded projects and cooperative agreements in social service delivery. Interactions between Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and other stakeholders have been classified as centralized small world networks (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020) in which the municipality plays a critical role in binding all actors together. To carry out its leadership roles, Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality established the Immigrant Affairs Office under the Department of Health and Social Services in 2015, which is the first of its kind in Turkey, and therefore holds a truly innovative status.

Sultanbeyli District Municipality represents a different model of networking based upon interactions with many local, national, and international organizations such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), Welt Hunger Life, Sequa, Relief International, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and Internal Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC), tied together through the active engagement of the Refugees Association, which serves as a

mediating actor. Interactions between Sultanbeyli District Municipality and other stakeholders have been classified as distributed small world networks (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2020) in which the municipality together with the Refugees Association play a coordinating role by steering other actors involved in refugee-oriented activities at the local level. Sultanbeyli District Municipality has invested in positive stakeholder relations, particularly by enhancing the role of the Directorate for Strategy Development, already existing within municipality's institutional structure. Even though this directorate is not specialized in the provision of services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, it has been quite successful in building bridges with external service providers through project-based cooperation. Unlike policy networks discussed in the literature, small world network mentioned in the preceding text are built upon less regularized and more spontaneous and fluid ties among partners, yet they are effective in providing services to refugee and other vulnerable population groups in urban areas.

The findings also reveal that municipalities in Turkey work closely with their communities, particularly refugee groups within their territories. Adana, Gaziantep, Kayseri, and Mardin Metropolitan municipalities as well as Sultanbeyli District Municipality stand out as municipalities that perform better in terms of community engagement. These municipalities have contributed to the construction of local centers/platforms offering refugee relief services as well as psychosocial support services. They also have encouraged various projects including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, or refugee associations with the purpose of facilitating interactions and improving communication between different community groups. In the second case, municipalities encourage a more bottom-up and participatory approach to migration governance. Sultanbeyli District Municipality stands out as a particularly successful case in terms of community engagement initiatives. Such initiatives have been facilitated through its organic link with the Refugees Association, which has served as a multipurpose community center since 2014.

Community engagement initiatives are part of broader municipal efforts to respond to refugee crisis in an entrepreneurial fashion. In crisis situations local governments are more likely to respond quickly, spontaneously, and innovatively to effectively help their communities rather than extrapolate future developments under standardized circumstances. The cases under investigation show that crisis can be conducive to the emergence of local spaces in which municipalities can act as key players in offering refugee relief services as well as other services related to socioeconomic and cultural issues oriented toward local community groups. Such local spaces facilitate direct contact between local civil servants and refugee groups and individuals and, therefore, turn into fertile ground for street-level entrepreneurship. Such direct encounters might lead to situations in which "program implementators down the line put some of their own, locally adjusted stamp on programs as they work out the real world of collaborative management" (Agranoff 2018, 242).

Organizational adaptation is another entrepreneurial strategy that reflects the municipalities' ability to adjust to their changing environment through their ability adopt the best practices existing in local migration governance. Organizational adaptation requires municipalities to adjust in line with best practices in local migration governance though information exchange with other municipalities bonded by a

sense of solidarity to respond to immigrant- and refugee-related challenges within their territories. This form of horizontal policy learning makes possible the emergence of a municipal politics that has a symbolic nature and avoids friction with the national government, which can be disruptive and counterproductive in a country such as Turkey. Findings show that Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and Sultanbeyli District municipalities make use of organizational adaptation as an entrepreneurial strategy in a systematic manner. The majority of municipalities display moderate level of organizational adaptation with some of them striving to replicate the same model implemented by Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, including Adana, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, and Mersin municipalities.

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality serves as the best example to illustrate practices of organizational adaptation in partnership with donors involved in refugee response at the local level. Particularly since 2015, this municipality has expanded its traditional responsibilities by focusing, consolidating as well as diffusing good practices in the area of migration management. GMM established one formal department, the Directorate of Migration Management Department, and several innovative centers including, among others, the Social Research Center (SARMER), Ensar Community Center, and Women Empowerment and Solidarity Center (SADA). These centers serve as innovative platforms that make use of instruments such as joint resource mobilization, in terms of human, financial, and material resources. The presence of specialized staff in such centers is critical for carrying out joint situation analysis and risk assessment with relevant stakeholders. Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality also served as a model of migration management by spreading its best practices to other municipalities in Turkey through systematic information exchange and good practice dissemination in Turkey and abroad.

Despite their active entrepreneurial engagement with refugee issues in their daily practices, municipalities in Turkey have not been very keen to employ strategies of urban development that avoid tension, conflict, and reactive forms of urban activism. The findings show that municipalities under investigation have not put much effort in branding their city as particularly welcoming, diverse, or inclusive. Local governments in Turkey have already been active in employing city branding campaigns in areas of cultural tourism (Bıçakçı 2012), urban regeneration (Aksoyly 2012), and economic development (Karabağ et al. 2012). Yet, they seem to refrain from using such campaigns in migration management. This is partially due to the municipalities' limited political autonomy and policy capacity, which compels them to keep politically sensitive issues that could lead to friction with the central government out of the public debate. Low levels of city branding could also be a reflection of diminishing levels of social acceptance of the local population toward refugees over time, resulting in local government reluctance to project long-term integration of refugees in their municipal strategic plans. Social acceptance and solidarity toward refugees in Turkey is largely based on the notions of "hospitality" and "humanitarianism," which reached a point of fatigue particularly after 2016. Since then, Syrian refugees have increasingly been treated as "risky outsiders" (Koca 2016, 55) due to rising security concerns.

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and Sultanbeyli District Municipality are exceptional cases, which display moderate level of city branding particularly through their active participation in fora such as the International Forum on Local Solutions to

Migration and Displacement or the Marmara Urban Forum on Cities Developing Solutions, respectively. Both these municipalities have been passionate to share their successful city experiences in migration management. Besides they have been quick to embrace and celebrate ideas such as “social cohesion,” “inclusion,” “city solutions,” or “city-level partnerships” within broader efforts to make their cities more sustainable and resilient. Yet even these municipalities have not been very successful in integrating refugee health and social services to their longer-term planning, especially municipal strategic plans. In this respect, more work needs to be done at the intersection of local migration governance with urban planning and development.

It is important to note here that municipalities might display variation over time in their tendency toward entrepreneurial behavior. For instance, despite the skeptical attitude of the local population toward the refugee issue, the new mayor of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality (elected in 2019) drastically changed the municipal orientation from passive and noninterventionist to welcoming and supportive of the displaced Syrian population, which can easily be observed in his refugee-friendly rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> The most significant municipal initiative was setting up a new department, that is the Directorate of Urban Justice and Equality in 2021,<sup>5</sup> responsible for carrying out projects and services aiming at creating new opportunities and empowering vulnerable populations groups in the city including refugees and asylum seekers. In this respect, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality represents a remarkable case of organizational adaptation orchestrated mainly by the efforts of the new mayor and his team. Nevertheless, it would be hasty to arrive at any conclusions about the effectiveness of the respective department and its ongoing projects. It is also difficult to predict whether synergy will emerge in the combined actions of municipal authorities, on the one hand, and civil society and business actors, on the other hand, leading to good governance practices in refugee response. Hence, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality has been assigned a moderate value for organizational adaptation in local migration governance. The case of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality has a twofold significance for this study. First, it shows how municipal responses can significantly shift over time highlighting the need for longitudinal research on the topic of entrepreneurial municipalism to avoid overgeneralizations. Second, it reveals the role of mayors as entrepreneurs in providing innovative solutions to refugee issues highlighting the

<sup>4</sup> Tunç Soyer was the Republican People's Party candidate, who was elected as mayor of İzmir in 2019. He is known for his refugee friendly rhetoric, which is often at odds with the official position of the Republican People's Party. See the following news sources for more information: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/tunc-soyer-suriyeli-siginmacilar-insanlik-disi-kosullarda-yasiyor-1702625> (accessed 24 March 2022);

<https://onedio.com/haber/tunc-soyer-flamingolarin-da-baskaniyim-dedim-siginmacilara-mi-sahip-cikmayacagim-997908> (accessed 24 March 2022);

<https://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/tunc-soyer-multecilerle-yasamayi-herkes-hazmetmeli> (accessed 24 March 2022); and

<https://www.haberturk.com/tunc-soyer-multecilerle-birlikte-yasiyoruz-herkes-bunu-hazmetmeli-3145871> (accessed 24 March 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Available at [https://www.izmir.bel.tr/YuklenenDosyalar/Dokumanlar/3\\_29032021\\_102502\\_kentsel-adalet-ve-esitlik-sube-mudurlugu-calisma-usul-ve-esaslari-hakkinda-yonerge.pdf.pdf](https://www.izmir.bel.tr/YuklenenDosyalar/Dokumanlar/3_29032021_102502_kentsel-adalet-ve-esitlik-sube-mudurlugu-calisma-usul-ve-esaslari-hakkinda-yonerge.pdf.pdf) (accessed 24 March 2022).

need for further research investigating the impact of mayors as agents of change in local migration governance.

At the theoretical level, the framework of entrepreneurial municipalism suggested here is built upon a depoliticized discourse that prioritizes *localist policy solutions* on immigrant- and refugee-related issues. Entrepreneurial municipalism does not underestimate the role of municipal politics yet seeks to go beyond ideological and partisan divisions with the intention of highlighting municipal practices, particularly local government engagement with collaborative projects developed to support forcibly displaced people in urban settings. Such engagements have not received adequate attention in the literature of local governments in Turkey, which concentrates mostly on issues pertaining to municipal politics, namely, the ideological stance of mayors and the capacity of local governments vis-à-vis the central government.

At the practical level, entrepreneurial strategies employed by municipalities at varying degrees have the comparative advantage of facilitating rapid and effective refugee response. Effectiveness, here, refers to (a) the degree to which entrepreneurial strategies contribute toward “doing reception” collectively with other relevant stakeholders by generating innovative solutions addressing refugee challenges in urban settings, as well as, (b) the degree into which entrepreneurial strategies are entrenched within the organizational structure of municipalities and turn into practices of good governance with the potential of being further improved in the context of urban development and diffused across different municipal contexts. Among the entrepreneurial strategies suggested in this study, local networking and community engagement capture the former dimension or the governance side of entrepreneurial municipalism. Organizational adaptation and city branding, however, capture the latter dimension or the sustainability side of entrepreneurial municipalism. Municipalities in Turkey turn out to be more effective in terms of governance of entrepreneurialism, and less effective in terms of sustainability of entrepreneurialism, preventing innovation from reaching a level of maturity where entrepreneurial strategies can be diffused and reproduced across organizational and policy contexts.

Overall, the preceding analysis reveals municipalities in Turkey act entrepreneurially mainly through rapid response mechanisms that rely on spontaneous actor constellations and external funding alternatives (local networking) and initiatives that facilitate interaction and communication between different community groups at the neighborhood level, especially small-scale activities including language training, awareness raising, psychosocial support activities, and so forth (community engagement). Municipalities in Turkey are less inclined toward adopting best practices of migration management through policy learning or upgrading the scheme of their organizations to deal with refugee situations and prevent future emergencies (organizational adaptation). They are even less inclined toward publicly endorsing diversity and social inclusion policies that require long-term commitment to issues of migration (city branding). Hence, in spite of municipal attempts to act entrepreneurially, questions remain as to whether entrepreneurial municipalism in Turkey is just another passing fad likely to become prominent during emergencies or a new model for migration management contributing to sustainable local integration and social cohesion.



## Conclusion

This study highlights the significance of entrepreneurial municipalism as a pragmatic and innovative approach to local government engagement with migration and refugee challenges. It also suggests four entrepreneurial strategies that can be employed by municipalities across a wide range of institutional settings, namely (a) city branding, (b) organizational adaptation, (c) local networking, and (d) community engagement. Entrepreneurial municipalism neither aims to bring substantial changes in the institutional and political opportunity structure, nor does it aim to solve the conundrum of interaction between central and local governments often depicted as a zero-sum game over jurisdictional powers. Even though it seems to be less ambitious in terms of its achievements, entrepreneurial municipalism reveals the hidden dynamics of local government engagement with urban challenges in their daily work, which often goes unnoticed by researchers and policy makers.

The case of Turkey illustrates how crisis situations serve as drivers of entrepreneurial municipalism in migration management, even under the most adverse contextual conditions. The massive refugee displacements to urban areas provided conducive ground for the emergence of local network and community engagement initiatives that capitalize on external funding alternatives, spontaneous stakeholder interactions, and locally contingent solutions for refugees and other vulnerable population groups. The findings reveal that municipalities under consideration quickly adjust their organizational abilities to respond to refugee crisis yet are less prepared toward preventing future emergencies through strategies of organizational adaptation. Moreover, municipalities hardly ever invest in city branding with the objective of turning their cities or districts into welcoming spaces for refugees and other immigrant groups in the long run. These findings indicate that local governments in Turkey invest less on the long-term aspects of entrepreneurial municipalism, which raises doubts about their willingness to cultivate a culture of diversity and social inclusion in urban settings and bring meaningful policy change in terms of policy design and policy implementation in the area of local migration governance.

The main advantage of entrepreneurial municipalism is that it generates innovative “spaces” of local government engagement that differ from more radical forms of municipal engagement studied under the framework of multilevel governance that requires substantial municipal reform and decentralization processes leading to increased local government autonomy and policy discretion; and new municipalism that requires substantial democratization processes leading to the formation of new participatory bodies within municipalities and citizen-centric decision-making platforms with powers to resist or challenge national government position and policies. Such innovative spaces of local engagement facilitate the investigation of emerging immigration countries such as Turkey, where local governments have considerably limited autonomy and inadequate jurisdiction for policy implementation in migration management.

Going beyond the Turkish case, this study suggests paying more attention to performance as an important conceptual tool that captures the degree to which entrepreneurial strategies are employed in the daily operations of local governments. Municipal performance, which can be used to evaluate responses of local governments in their daily operations, stretches beyond the conventional definition of

municipal capacity that necessitates some degree of decentralization of power and concentration of resources in the hands of local authorities. Focusing on performance evaluation requires scholars to borrow tools from management and policy research, by incorporating terms such as managerial thinking, interorganizational learning, leadership roles, and benchmarking. Considering all the preceding, this article suggests combining migration, policy, and local government studies – all connected through a solution-oriented approach supportive of the idea of entrepreneurship in local migration governance.

As an exploratory study aiming to understand, explain, and categorize the practices of municipalities when faced with protracted displacement. Examining the effects of entrepreneurial municipalism, that is, their actual impact at the policy and individual level goes beyond the scope of this study. Hence, future research can consider addressing the following evaluative questions on the existing entrepreneurial practices: Do they support social cohesion processes through high-quality interaction between diverse groups of people and communities? Do they create spaces and opportunities to address the needs and sensitivities of diverse groups of people and communities? By examining the concept of entrepreneurial municipalism across various institutional settings, different contextual conditions, and policy challenges, future studies can expand our understanding of different manifestations of policy entrepreneurship across country cases. Further studies on the motivations and actual impact of entrepreneurial municipalism on policy processes at the local and national levels can advance our understanding of entrepreneurial engagement as a mode of governing in an ever-expanding context of global policy challenges.

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