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STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS AGAINST PANDEMIC IN TÜRKİYE: PROBLEMS & STRATEGIES*

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Abstract

This article examines and explains the problems encountered and strategies employed by the street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) used during COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts in Türkiye. To this end, the authors adopted Michael Lipsky's street-level bureaucrat concept to explain the conditions and challenges faced by various Turkish street-level bureaucrats (e.g., doctors, nurses, security personnel, and teachers) during the COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts. The article ends with discussing and categorizing strategies used by the Turkish SLBs and directions for future research.

Keywords: *Street-level bureaucrat, COVID-19, Municipality, Türkiye, Public health.*

TÜRKİYE'DE SOKAK DÜZEYİ BÜROKRATLARI PANDEMİYE KARŞI: SORUNLAR VE STRATEJİLER

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'de COVID-19 Pandemisi ile mücadele sırasında karşılaşılan sorunları ve sokak düzeyinde bürokratların (SLB'ler) kullandıkları stratejileri incelemekte ve açıklamaktadır. Bu amaçla yazarlar, COVID-19 Pandemisine müdahale sürecinde çeşitli Türk sokak düzeyi bürokratlarının (örneğin, doktorlar, hemşireler, kolluk kuvvetleri ve öğretmenler) karşılaştığı koşulları ve zorlukları açıklamak için Michael Lipsky'nin sokak düzeyi bürokratları kavramını kullanmıştır. Makale, Türk SLB'leri tarafından kullanılan stratejilerin tartışılması ve sınıflandırılması ve gelecekteki araştırmalara yönelik öneriler ile sona ermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Sokak düzeyi bürokratlar, COVID-19, Belediye, Türkiye, Kamu sağlığı.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 Pandemic significantly influenced all dimensions of our lives, including the administrative efforts to manage the impact of this pandemic in all countries throughout the World. Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), who are the bureaucrats that deliver services in accordance with the policy decisions made at the top echelons of the political system (for Türkiye, the Presidency, the Parliament, the ministries and the municipalities), made sure that all policy decisions taken to minimize the negative impacts of the pandemic are implemented successfully. To this end, SLBs such as doctors, teachers and police officers acted as the first line of defense against the pandemic. They struggled with the unfavorable conditions on the field of implementation, such as lack of funds, personnel and sometimes the lack of cooperation of the citizenry. They tried to make sure that the anti-pandemic policies are implemented as intended, with the minimum amount of policy drift. Therefore, at times, they needed to adapt the generic policies to specific conditions of the implementation context, without too much deviation from the main objectives of the policy in question.

Within this context, this article examines and explains the problems encountered and strategies employed by the street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) used during COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts in Türkiye, with special emphasis on SLBs working at the local level. Such an analysis is timely and important because SLBs are in a critical position to successfully implement the intended public policies with minimal deviations from the policy intent. However, to minimize policy drift and maximize policy success, the conditions in which SLBs work and the factors that influence implementation success in crisis situations need to be well-understood.

The article aims to answer the following questions: Can Turkish SLBs adapt high-level policy decisions to the local conditions & realities of the field during F2F interactions while implementing different public policies? What kind of strategies do Turkish SLBs use for this adaptation process? Do Turkish SLBs need to use their discretionary administrative powers to adapt high-level policy decisions to the conditions and realities of the implementation? While using discretion, do Turkish SLBs divert high-level policy decisions from their intended course and objectives, causing intentional or unintentional policy drift? The article ends with the discussion of factors that influence SLBs' success in policy implementation in times of crisis.

2.CONTEXT: ADMINISTRATIVE EFFORTS TO MANAGE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As part of the fight against coronavirus, each country has developed practices under different policy headings. It has been observed that the policies implemented in different dimensions at the national and local levels act primarily on controlling the epidemic, preventing its spread, and finally, on the principles of continuity of services. Here, street-level bureaucrats are usually active in the implementation process. For Türkiye, doctors, nurses, other health workers, teachers, police, and imams have been prominent actors at the national level. At the local level, it can be said that municipal police officers, social workers, cleaners, transport services, and municipal employees who work for the continuity of services stand out.

About 90% of the population in Türkiye lives in urban areas (TURKSTAT, 2020). For this reason, municipalities also stood out with their services during the Pandemic as the closest service units to the citizens. The Public Health Law, No. 1593, which forms the fundamental backbone of combating the epidemic, also places essential duties on local governments and orders them to participate in health boards established to control and monitor the epidemic (Etiler, 2020: 68). Accordingly, it can be said that throughout the epidemic, local governments have played a significant role in implementing national decisions and shaping policies at the local level.

On the other hand, in times of Pandemic and crisis, the complex and uncertain working environment, limited time, and information resources lead street-level bureaucrats to adapt to this challenging situation. In such unfavorable situations, rules must be flexible so street-level bureaucrats can perform their duties (Brockmann, 2015: 1-15). According to Buffat (2015: 151), the discretionary power of street-level bureaucrats is more prominent in situations where policy goals are ambiguous, resources are inadequate and insufficient, and there are structural problems. The fact that street-level bureaucrats use discretion and go outside certain routines can create an advantage. In this way, street-level bureaucrats contribute significantly to more innovative and successful outputs in policy implementation (Kørnø et al., 2015: 612). In order to combat COVID-19, which has

become a pandemic, extensive policy practices were needed in different areas. In general, local governments' works focus on informative, social, educational, cultural, and health services (Erdoğan, 2022: 44-45; Bilgiç, 2020: 2087). Therefore, local governments have been one of the most critical actors in policy implementations during the Pandemic. Hence, the main research question focuses on the role of municipalities in Türkiye and the role of SLBs during the policy implementations during the COVID-19 Pandemic. How did SLBs, which are the main actors in implementing local policies, shape the practices, what kind of problems were encountered during the policy implementations, and what kind of solutions should be developed for these problems?

Aristovnik et al. (2021: 9) examined the examples of five countries, provision of material and spatial conditions, coordination of urgent tasks, stress caused by overwork, and ICT-based problems most prominent problem areas in terms of administration. In the same study, the uncertainty of regulations regarding the Pandemic and inconsistencies at different times were also counted as one of the biggest problems. In the research conducted by Kulaç and Babaoğlu (2022), interviews were conducted with the district governors and the provincial representatives of the central government. These interviews determined that local-level managers mostly have problems in processes such as employee coordination and digitalization of services. From this point of view, the efforts of SLBs, which need coordination and are responsible for face-to-face services, become the essential requirement for the success of policies. For this purpose, the policies of the municipalities to combat the Pandemic and the efforts of the street-level bureaucrats at the local level as the implementers of these policies are discussed in this study.

In times of chaotic crisis, where resources are limited, such as a pandemic, the practices of street-level bureaucrats are as effective as policy decisions (Brockmann, 2015). For this reason, street-level bureaucrats have been the most prominent actors in the implementation processes of policies. Bakir (2020: 432) indirectly emphasizes the capacity of municipalities in the policy implementation process in Türkiye. Finally, as Bakir envisioned, the central structure was abandoned in the supply of hygiene materials such as mask distribution, and the work carried out by the municipalities was emphasized. Therefore, the study mainly focuses on the problems street-level bureaucrats face in local applications and the answers to these problems. Based on this focal point, the roles of SLBs in practices in crisis environments in Türkiye are discussed.

3. STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Social needs, policy, decision-making, implementation, and policy actors are frequently used as keywords in various public policy studies. The concepts mentioned above can also be described as chains of an intensive network of relations between the government and citizens. The increase in the number of people globally, globalization, information and communication technologies development, and citizen expectations have led to a strict policy process for policymakers. Therefore, policy drafts that come to the government agenda in line with social needs (Knoepfel et al., 2007) may have a legal basis after a long and complicated policy-making process. The fact that social needs, demands, and expectations concern different policy issues overwhelmingly expands the focus of public policy studies (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984: 13). It is stated that public policies are decisions and actions rather than a single decision (Hill, 1997: 7), and various policy actors play a role in each decision and implementation stages and processes. In the policy implementation stage, where the selected policy proposals turn from the thought stage to the action stage (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995: 153), it is essential to reach the determined goals and achieve policy success. Even the formulation stage of policies is shaped functionally; effective and efficient implementation is the fundamental requirement for successful policy outputs (Edwards, 1980: 1).

Although the impacts of various factors, country dynamics, public attitudes, and behaviors are observed in the implementation stage of the policies, the street-level bureaucrats' role is quite determinant. The concepts of street-level bureaucracy and street-level bureaucrats were introduced in the seminal study of Lipsky (1980). Lipsky (1980: 3, 2010: 3) described street-level bureaucrats as "public sector workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work." Street-level bureaucrats provide services to the public in various public institutions and organizations. In other words, street-level bureaucrats respond to citizens' health, education, security, and social policy demands. Therefore, street-

level bureaucrats consist of professional groups such as police officers, teachers, court officers, law enforcement personnel, judges, and health workers (Lipsky, 1980: 3). The number of street-level bureaucrats identified as frontline service providers significantly shares the public sector's comprehensive human resources. Thus, the street-level bureaucracy theory and the different perceptions of policy implantation have central significance for public administration discipline and education (Rowe, 2012: 10). However, the main assumptions and details of the street-level bureaucracy offer a promising perspective for both public policy analysis studies and policy analysts. Many scholars have paid attention to the street-level bureaucracy and scrutinized the role and the influence of street-level bureaucrats on different policy fields in various country cases (see Alcadipani et al., 2020; Brockmann, 2015; Caswell and Høybye-Mortensen, 2015; Ellis, 2011; Erasmus, 2014; Honig, 2006; Jansen et al., 2021; Keiser, 2010; Kørnøv et al., 2015; Lotta and Marques, 2019; May and Winter, 2007; Seva and Jagers, 2013; Ulutaş, 2021; Yang et al., 2021; Zarychta et al., 2019; Zedekia, 2017). Consequently, considering the studies in the literature, the street-level bureaucracy approach introduced by Lipsky (1980) has been applied to different policy areas in many academic studies in the following years. As a reflection of the changing conditions, this situation contributed to fruitful discussions and debates about street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation.

4. TURKISH EXPERIENCE

In Türkiye, macro-level policies such as health, education, security, and justice, which concern the public, are carried out by the central government. Service delivery is monitored and provided more functionally and efficiently through the provincial organizations of the central government in provinces and districts. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic has reshaped policy-making and implementation processes almost worldwide. Central and local government relations, intergovernmental cooperation, and solidarity have significantly impacted the policies made during the Pandemic. The participation and contributions of official, civil, and international actors in the pandemic process formed the basis of successful policy outcomes. Ensuring coordination between administrations during the Pandemic and extraordinary situations contributes to reducing problems related to authority confusion. It is essential to precisely define the definitions of duty and responsibility in terms of efficient service delivery. During the Pandemic, local governments have made significant efforts as they are the closest unit to the public. Although local governments are not responsible for delivering health services, local governments have played a significant role, especially in the transportation of patients, the provision of housing facilities, and the management of transportation services. In this regard, the dissemination of awareness-raising information, contact tracing, recording, and reporting of contacts, investigation of disease outbreaks, enforcing proper environment, ensuring safe water supply, supporting social and economic relief activities, establishing and operating food and non-food distribution centers, building and operating services such as homeless shelters are carried out by local governments (Yılmaz and Boex, 2021: 805-809).

Türkiye has been one of the countries most affected by the Pandemic, primarily due to its geographical location and human mobility. Central and local government agencies have provided substantial services within the scope of health policies. Local governments contribute positively to citizens' quality of life by providing environmental cleaning, infrastructure, green spaces, playgrounds, youth centers, water services, waste management, and recycling (Erdoğan, 2022: 12; Karataş and Beşer, 2021: 1341). During the pandemic process in Türkiye, dedicated efforts have been put forward by various municipalities in many policy areas (see Bek and Bek, 2021; Karataş and Beşer, 2021; Çelikyay and Küçük Bayraktar, 2021; Peker and Köseoğlu, 2021). When the legal regulations related to local governments are examined in Türkiye, it is observed that fundamental duties and responsibilities are given to local governments related to health policies. Within the framework of laws No. 5393, 5216, and 442, the duties of local government units related to health services have been regulated. There are various areas of activity of local governments in cooperation with the central government on environmental and public health issues. Municipal Law No. 5393 covers the functional issues related to the health services of municipalities. In this context, municipalities have responsibilities for issues such as urban infrastructure services, environmental health, cleaning and solid waste, emergency assistance, ambulance, opening, and operating health-related facilities, and taking measures related to environmental pollution. In addition, in Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216, the municipalities' duties in the health field are covered. These tasks include reforestation, creating a solid waste management plan, establishing laboratories for analyzing foodstuffs, and medical facilities, planning for natural disasters, ensuring environmental and agricultural protection, water and sewage services, and establishing mobile medical units.

An overarching legal regulation on epidemics and pandemics entered into force in Türkiye long ago. Public Health Law No. 1593, which entered into force in 1930, determined a road map for the fight against epidemic diseases. In this context, the emphasis has been placed on the cooperation of the central and local governments. Local government units operating in Türkiye have come to the fore in the pandemic process in conducting several services. Some of the services offered by local governments are carrying out public information and awareness activities, cleaning works at regular intervals, managing the production and distribution of masks, providing support for health services, carrying out social aid and support services, controlling the decisions and restrictions taken by the central government and providing psychological support services.

From Türkiye's point of view, it has been observed that practices such as the production of hygiene materials such as masks and disinfectants and the supervision of national decisions stand out. Individual crowdfunding practices developed by some municipalities have also been noted as part of the fight against the Pandemic.¹ Sub-policy titles developed locally in Türkiye and implemented by the locally assigned street-level bureaucrats will be classified and examined below.

4.1. Cleaning / Disinfection Services

During the Pandemic, hygiene was one of the outstanding issues worldwide. In order to combat the coronavirus, rules regarding putting on masks, personal hygiene, and social distancing have been practiced in almost every country. Municipalities are mainly responsible for the cleaning services of urban areas in Türkiye. As part of the fight against COVID-19, the leading service title highlighted by local governments was disinfection operations. In this context, parks, streets, playgrounds, town centers, schools, mosques, cultural centers, food markets, bus stops, and metro/train stations were disinfected by municipality workers. In addition, some municipalities have undertaken hygiene measures in shops that require continuous close contacts, such as hairdressers, and hygiene materials were distributed to all these shopkeepers.² Some municipalities have placed disinfectant booths at entry points in city squares or public spaces, and it is aimed to disinfect citizens or materials through these points.³

In the implementation of all these cleaning activities, the cleaning officers of the municipalities took an active role. When many public servants worked remotely or flexibly during the pandemic period, the cleaners worked overtime and had a busy working period.

4.2. Transportation Services

Public transport was one of the most prominent hygiene topics during the epidemic. Municipalities have disinfected both municipal and private vehicles, such as taxis. Even personal vehicles have benefited from disinfection services in some cities, such as Sanliurfa (Sanliurfa BSB, 2020). On the other hand, both inner-city and inter-city restrictions have been imposed on transport services and limited passenger numbers. Increasing the number of bus tariffs and developing alternative transport systems were necessary for citizens not to be affected by the restrictions. In this context, it was observed that the ongoing interest in bicycle road construction by municipalities in Türkiye accelerated during the pandemic period.⁴

1 Crowdfunding practices carried out by local governments such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Konya MMs are planned to provide support at the local level for citizens experiencing economic problems due to the Pandemic. These projects were canceled after a while because of legal restrictions, and a single campaign was launched nationally (Sayın, 2020).

2 <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/mansur-yavastan-esnafa-hijyen-ve-iscal-harci-destegi>;
<https://www.denizli24haber.com/haber/bozkurt-belediyesiden-esnafa-temizlik-ve-hijyen-paketleri-28717>;
<https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/konyadan-ucretsiz-dezenfeksiyon-hizmeti> ;
<https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/kecioren-belediyesi-pazarlarda-sabit-el-dezenfektani-uygulamasi>

3 <https://www.ankaragolbasi.bel.tr/haberler/golbasi-belediyesi-pazarlar-icin-dezenfektan-kabini-uretti.html>;

<http://www.yalvac.bel.tr/haberdetay/219>;

<https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/malatya-buyuksehir-belediyesinin-covid-19-onlemleri/>;

<https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/buca-belediyesi-ozel-dezenfekte-kabinitepeden-tirnaga-koruma-kalkani/>

4 <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/pandemide-bisiklet-kullanimi-2-3-kat-artti-41754560>;

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/ulasimin-yeni-gozdesi-bisiklet/1977574>

Due to the long time required to develop alternative transportation models, public transportation systems were sometimes crowded. In these periods, when the implementation of the restrictions became difficult, the necessary inspections were carried out by the municipal police. In addition, security guards and drivers who work in municipal companies have taken an active role under the supervision of HES codes, which the Ministry of Health developed, defined on electronic cards used in transportation services or citizens over 65 and under 18 years of age-restricted from using transportation services (VoA, 2020).⁵

4.3. Social and Economic Supports

Social services are one of the issues that municipalities focus most on combating the Pandemic. For example, the municipality of Barcelona has provided about 2.5 billion Euros in rent assistance. Helsinki, London, and New York municipalities provided homeless people with food aid and housing support. Madrid Municipality also allocated housing for the elderly and met their needs during their stay in these residences (Bilgiç, 2021: 2088-2089). Culture and social affairs department employees, social workers, psychologists, and child development professionals working in municipalities in Türkiye took an active role in this period. During this period, policies aimed at groups with special needs, such as disabled people, the elderly, asylum seekers, children, and those with lower socio-economic status, were emphasized. During this period, food parcels and cleaning packages were distributed to those in need. Hot meals were distributed to those in quarantine. The street residents were moved to housing centers, and their needs were met. During this period, direct financial aid campaigns were organized by metropolitan municipalities (MMs) such as Ankara, Aydın, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, and Konya and tried to provide cash support to people in need. On the other hand, after running these campaigns as a single national campaign, some relevant municipalities have developed crowdfunding projects under such headings as payment of bills, food parcel support, rent support, and urban transport support.

Due to the increasing need for socio-psychological support during the Pandemic, some examples, such as the Istanbul MM, have established psychological support mechanisms by telephone. Psychologists and social workers working here provided advice and guidance to the counselee. It has been determined that the support line opened by Istanbul has received applications from 77 of 81 cities in Türkiye (Urhan and Arslançoç, 2021: 964). Therefore, it has been observed that a local practice has evolved into a national form of service. Küçükçekmece Municipality provided a similar service, and Bağcılar Municipality provided similar psychological support through live broadcasts for women staying at home during the pandemic period (Urhan and Arslançoç, 2021).

Some groups, such as disabled people, children, and the elderly, spent the pandemic period entirely at home. Municipalities also took an active role in meeting basic needs. Municipal employees also participated in Fidelity (VEFA) groups, a national project. They support people by shopping for their needs, supplying medicines, and getting their other urgent needs from municipal field officials. Again, it was also observed that in some examples, such as the Istanbul MM, special consulting services were provided for people with disabilities. Şişli Municipality provided a child-specific counseling service and psycho-social support with a psychologist's help. During this period, it was found that the municipalities of Istanbul/Şişli and Istanbul/Pendik also assisted Syrian asylum seekers, such as food and cleaning packages.

Another group that has experienced problems during the Pandemic is farmers. Examples such as Adana, Ankara, Balıkesir, Gaziantep, and Kocaeli metropolitan municipalities have sometimes provided financial and sometimes in-kind support to farmers. In addition, some agricultural supports, such as seeds, seedlings, and greenhouse support, also stood out during the Pandemic.⁶

⁵ <https://tuhim.ibb.gov.tr/haberler/hes-kodu-uygulamasi/>;
<https://hes.eshot.gov.tr/>;

⁶ [https://www.gaziantep.bel.tr/tr/haberler/buyuksehirin-ciftcilere-destegi-suruyor](https://www.gaziantep.bel.tr/tr/haberler/buyuksehirin-ciftcilere-destegi-suruyor;);
<https://www.bursa.bel.tr/haber/ciftciye-fidan-destegi--30004>;
<https://antalya.bel.tr/Haberler/HaberDetay/2212/buyuksehirin-ciftciye-destegi-suruyor>;
<https://www.kocaeli.bel.tr/tr/main/news/haberler/3/buyuksehir-belediyesinin-sera-destegi-ciftcil/37919>;
<https://ankara.bel.tr/haberler/ciftciye-destek-ulkeye-destek>;
https://www.adana.bel.tr/panel/uploads/duyuru_v/dosya/ciftcilere-ve-balikcilara-nakdi-hibe-yardim-destegi.pdf
<https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/balikesir-buyuksehir-ureticilere-destegi-artirdi>

Private businesses involved in urban transport services were also one of the groups supported by municipalities during this period. Restrictions or curfews due to falling revenues while providing some examples of direct cash support to these groups, such as the Ankara MM.⁷ Bursa MM supported passenger fare⁸, Adana MM and Altınordu Municipalities gave fuel support⁹. Burhaniye Municipality delivered gift cards for shopping¹⁰. Aydın MM made applied discounts for service and permit fees.¹¹ As can be seen, various forms of support were provided for the transportation sector during this period. In addition, rent support for merchants, discounts on local taxes, and support packages for loss of turnover were also launched during this period.¹²

Finally, another group supported during this period was street animals. Kayseri MM, Ankara MM, Selçuk, Selçuklu, Üsküdar, Bucak different examples food distribution, Veterinary Services, care services, cleaning services were produced for street animals.¹³

4.4. Health Services

Health care has been one of the most critical topics in combating the Pandemic as a health problem. During this period, transportation services were the first superior services for health workers. For example, the municipality of Rome has allocated one hundred vehicles for transportation services for medical personnel during the epidemic period (Institute Istanbul, 2020). In Türkiye, municipalities have provided free public transport for health workers by the presidential decision (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020). As part of the same decision, health workers also received the right to free municipal accommodation services. Different municipalities, such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Samsun MMs, as well as Şişli, Altındağ, and Akdeniz municipalities, have allocated rooms for health workers in this context (Urhan and Arslankoc, 2021).¹⁴

During this period, support efforts for health services were also carried out. For example, Samsun MM has taken on the disposal of medical waste used within the scope of Covid-19 collected from 565 health institutions in the province (TBB, 2020). Malatya MM has supported Mask production by coordinating textile factories in the province (Kaşık, 2020). İzmir MM performed mask production through professional courses, and mask vending machines was placed at public transport stops. In addition, municipal personnel have distributed masks in busy areas (İzmir BSHB, 2020).

Patient transport services, ambulance services, health advice lines, funeral services, and home care services continued in this period. However, restrictions have been imposed on services that require direct contact, such as home care. During this period, the COVID-19 health support line, established by Gaziantep MM and coordinated with the governor's office, was an essential service delivery and coordination project. During the Pandemic, when ambulance services were concentrated, and demand for home care services increased due to restrictions, they became support mechanisms (Kavas-Bilgic, 2020: 2096-2097).

7 <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/mansur-yavastan-bir-destek-de-oho-ve-otalara/>

8 <https://www.bursa.bel.tr/haber/toplu-ulasim-desteklerinde-bursa-model-oluyor--29611>

9 <https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/adana-buyuksehir-den-toplu-tasima-araclarina-yakit-destegi>;

<https://www.16haber.com/ekonomi/sofor-esnafina-bin-depo-yakit-destegi-h36092.html>

10 <https://www.burhaniye.bel.tr/guncel/haber-arsivi/6572-belediye-den-burhaniye-minibus-ve-servis-soforlerine-alisveris-karti-destegi.html>

11 <https://www.efelergazetesi.com/sofor-esnafini-rahatlatan-karar/>

12 <https://www.tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/tutuncuden-esnafa-kira-mujdesikepez-belediyesi>;

<https://www.selcuklu.bel.tr/haberler/guncel-haberler/2756/selcuklu-belediyesi-nden-esnafa-pandemi-destegi.html>;

<https://www.merkezefendi.bel.tr/haber.aspx?haber=merkezefendi-belediyesinden-esnafa-1200-tl-destek>;

<https://www.haberturk.com/tokat-haberleri/86004706-belediyeden-esnafa-pandemi-destegi>

13 <https://www.haberturk.com/izmir-haberleri/86053348-selcuk-belediyesi-pandemide-sokak-hayvanlari-yalniz-birakmadi>;

<https://tbb.gov.tr/basin-ve-yayin/covid-19/belediyelerimizden-covid-19-haberleri/kayseri-buyuksehir-belediyesi-sokak-hayvanlarini-unutmadi/>;

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/sirkethaberleri/belediye/tbbden-sokak-hayvanlarina-yonelik-projelere-7-milyon-250-bin-tl-destek/661798>;

<https://www.selcuklu.bel.tr/haberler/guncel-haberler/2780/selcuklu-belediyesi-tam-kapanma-doneminde-de-sokak-hayvanlarini-unutmadi.html>;

<https://ankara.bel.tr/haberler/baskentte-can-dostlarin-gunu-kutlandi/>

14 <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/saglik-calisanlari-istedi-buyuksehir-yapti> ;

<https://www.cnnturk.com/yemel-haberler/ankara/altindagda-saglik-calisanlarina-konaklama-destegi-1502757>;

<https://www.samsunetikhaber3.com/haber-samsun-buyuksehir-den-saglik-calisanlarina-tam-destek-15231.html>

5. DISCUSSION

This article examines and explains the problems encountered by and strategies used by the street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) during COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts in Türkiye. To this end, the authors tried to adopt Michael Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrat concept to the local conditions during the Turkish COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts.

The list of Turkish SLBs that contributed to COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts can be listed as follows: Teachers and school administrators in education policies; doctors, nurses, and other health personnel in health policies; policemen, gendarme (rural military police) personnel, municipal police, and night guards in security policies; members of Vefa (Fidelity) Support Groups, which are established as de facto groups made up of both civil servants, NGO members such as the Turkish Red Crescent and volunteers in order to serve the needs of people who cannot leave their homes, such as the elderly and chronically ill, etc.

The authors found out that the primary strategy that the SLBs use is "risk minimization." The subcategories of this risk minimization strategy can be listed as follows:

First, while some SLBs needed to provide public services to implement public policies delivered face-to-face services, a few SLBs had the chance of screen-based service delivery instead of face-to-face interactions. On the one hand, doctors, nurses, other health personnel; police officers, gendarme personnel, municipal police, and night guards; and Vefa (Fidelity) Support Group members provided many face-to-face services, such as health, security, and social services and policies. On the other hand, teachers, school administrators, and university lecturers had the opportunity to provide screen-based educational services, which enabled them to better protect themselves and their families from getting ill.

Two specific policy recommendations can originate from this situation: The first is to transform some face-to-face public service sectors to screen-based services. For example, providing telemedicine services would shield some healthcare workers from illness. A second policy recommendation would be to prioritize vaccination and other preventive policies for the SLBs who have to provide face-to-face services. Among the SLBs, who provide face-to-face policy/service delivery, those working in high-density & high-risk areas should be given priority. For example, police officers working in urban areas are subject to more health risks than gendarme personnel working in relatively more rural areas.

The second subcategory of risk minimization strategies is SLBs trying to protect themselves from COVID-19. For example, citizens arguing with, shouting at, or even spitting at security personnel who warn or fine them for rule violations put SLBs under serious health risks.

Another subcategory of risk minimization strategy that SLBs use is protecting themselves from the citizens' physical or psychological violence violating COVID-19 rules and regulations. A significant increase in such risky confrontations finally led to the Turkish Parliament enacting a long-awaited law protecting health personnel from physical and psychological violence in 2020.

The fourth subcategory of SLB's risk minimization strategies is trying to protect themselves from the political risks of COVID-19-related public policies, especially when politicians correctly or incorrectly perceive them as not sincerely investing in the COVID-19 Pandemic response efforts. In other words, these SLBs can be seen by the politicians as bureaucrats who do not understand the underlying logic/essence of the pandemic relief policies; therefore, not being responsive to or not being kind, compassionate, or empathic enough against the citizens, especially when the citizens are members of the disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, poor or chronically ill. In this case, the risk that SLBs try to manage or minimize is politicians removing them from their offices or penalizing them in some other way.

Another subcategory of risk minimization is SLBs trying to protect disadvantaged groups, such as the elderly, from the mistreatment and abuse of other citizens, who see the elderly as the cause of the Pandemic or responsible for the COVID-19 restrictions. For example, many physical or psychological abuse cases against elderly or Asian-looking people are being reported in several countries.

A sixth subcategory is SLBs trying to protect the poor, chronically jobless, and members of the precariat, people that have jobs with minimal pay, without predictability, security, and benefits, conditions that negatively affect their material or psychological welfare, and result in many different disadvantages ranging from poverty and starvation. In Türkiye, members of the Vefa (Fidelity) Support Groups provided food, money, goods, and services to the people who could not leave their homes, such as the elderly and chronically ill, etc.

A seventh and final subcategory is SLBs trying to protect the law/rule-abiding citizens from violators who systematically disregard COVID-19 limitations such as quarantine rules, lockdowns, social distancing, mask-wearing, etc.

Overall, all these little short-term risk minimization/protection strategies serve a primary underlying long-term objective of protecting the social, economic, and political system from significant shocks, such as political & economic crises and social upheavals. Within this framework, the economic crises stemming from many small and medium-sized businesses closing down and the loss of many service sector jobs are essential. Because of these systematic and irreversible economic problems, significant social protests, such as anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests and looting, might happen.

In order to better understand and explain all the strategies employed by the SLBs and the impact these strategies create, there is a need to extend the definitions and limits of the concept and model of street-level bureaucrats coined by Michael Lipsky. To this end, to decrease the ambiguity in the definition of the SLB concept and the extent of its categorical limits, a street-level bureaucrat during the Pandemic can be defined not only as a civil servant. Instead, the criterion of providing public services or creating public value can be used. Suppose such an extended definition can be used, private sector delivery personnel (e.g., parcel delivery, food delivery), market cashiers, and postal workers (some may be employees of privatized postal services) can also be included in the street-level bureaucrats' category, since they contribute to the provision of public services or they contribute to the creation of public value.

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