

## AN IMPORTANT ACTOR IN STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY: LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Yoksulluk İle Mücadelede Önemli Bir Aktör: Yerel Yönetimler

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### ABSTRACT

Poverty is one of the main problems faced and tried to solve by people and countries throughout history. In general terms, it is defined as the inability of people to meet their basic needs. In social sciences, there is no consensus on the concept and definition of poverty as in many other concepts. Unemployment, lack of education, wars, economic development of countries, political instability have an impact on poverty. Poverty is not just a problem of underdeveloped or undeveloped countries. Poverty awaits a solution as an important problem for developed countries. Within the scope of poverty struggle, national and international practices and regulations are implemented. All countries implement poverty alleviation policies within their own administrative structures and economic opportunities. Within the scope of poverty alleviation, central administrations determine policies and struggle. Today, an important actor in the struggle against poverty is local governments. Expectations from local governments are increasing especially after the change in the field of public administration. Local administrations, whose service and duty areas have expanded, carry out important activities within the scope of poverty struggle. In this study, the practices of local governments in the fight against poverty are included. In the fight against poverty, which policies and practices are prioritized, similarities and differences are revealed, evaluations and recommendations are made.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Municipality, Social Policy

### ÖZET

Yoksulluk, tarih boyunca insanların, ülkelerin karşılaştığı, çözmeye çalıştığı temel sorunlardan birisidir. En genel tanımıyla insanların temel ihtiyaçlarının karşılayamaması olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Sosyal bilimlerde birçok kavramda olduğu gibi yoksulluk kavramı ve tanımı üzerinde de tam bir uzlaşma bulunmamaktadır. İşsizlik, eğitim eksikliği, savaşlar, ülkelerin ekonomik gelişmişliği, siyasi istikrarsızlık yoksulluk üzerinde etkili olmaktadır. Yoksulluk sadece az gelişmiş veya gelişmemiş olan ülkelerin sorunu değildir. Gelişmiş ülkeler için de yoksulluk önemli bir sorun olarak çözüm beklemektedir. Yoksullukla mücadele kapsamında ulusal ve uluslararası alanda uygulamalar, düzenlemeler hayata geçirilmektedir. Bütün ülkeler kendi yönetim yapıları, ekonomik imkanları ölçüsünde yoksullukla mücadele politikaları uygulamaktadırlar. Yoksullukla mücadele kapsamında merkezi yönetimler politikalar belirlemekte ve mücadele etmektedirler. Günümüzde yoksullukla mücadelenin önemli bir aktörü de yerel yönetimlerdir. Özellikle kamu yönetimi alanında yaşanan değişim sonrasında yerel yönetimlerden beklentiler artmaktadır. Hizmet ve görev alanları genişleyen yerel yönetimler yoksullukla mücadele kapsamında da önemli faaliyetler yerine getirmektedir. Bu çalışmada yerel yönetimlerin yoksullukla mücadele kapsamında uygulamalarına yer verilmektedir. Yoksullukla mücadelede hangi politikalara, uygulamalara öncelik verildiği, benzerlikler, farklılıklar ortaya konularak, değerlendirmelerde ve önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yoksulluk, Belediye, Sosyal Politika

## 1.INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a phenomenon that exists in all ages and in all societies and where different policies and methods are applied for solution. Poverty is not easy to define as a concept because of its versatility and complexity. Poverty is the most basic phenomenon that occurs as a result of people experiencing difficulties and inability to access the basic materials they need to survive such as shelter, clothing, food, firewood. The phenomenon of poverty in the globalizing world expands the concept of poverty by including general needs such as education, health and socialization in society as well as basic needs. One of the most important reasons for having different opinions in defining the concept of poverty is the difference of opinion on what the source of poverty is. Some views consider poverty as a product of the existing system, while others attribute poverty to the nature of poor people. Since the second half of the 20th century, in the debates about the individuality and structurality of poverty, some opinions argued that poverty stems from individual characteristics, while others have stated that poverty has taken on a structural character as a result of capitalist market relations.

Poverty is closely related to many problems in society. For this reason, policies regarding poverty should be comprehensive. The population structure of the society, the economic situation of the country and the cultural characteristics of the society are important when determining the policies to fight against poverty. While in some societies the solidarity culture is at the prior, in some societies it is less important. The

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problem of poverty is not only the problem of undeveloped countries. Poverty is one of the most important issues for all countries in the world. All countries develop policies for poverty reduction and put forward different projects. Every country takes into account its characteristics while determining its policy. Therefore, although combating poverty is a common problem, it varies from country to country. While central governments come to the fore in some countries, local governments come to the fore in some countries.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY AND ITS TYPES

The phenomenon of poverty may differ from country to country. Basically, if the consumption and income level of the individual falls below the minimum level of basic needs, people is considered poor. This level is called the poverty line. Since social common values will differ in each country, poverty should not be evaluated only on the income of individuals. Factors such as health, social services and education other than income can be evaluated differently and studies can be done accordingly (Karacan, 2017: 61).

In all cultures and across history, poverty is endowed with a rich vocabulary. Published in 1901, Rowtree's report was the first to establish a poverty level for individual families based on estimates of nutritional and other requirements. The main focus in the 1960s was on the amount of sales, expressed per head in macro economic measures such as Gross National Product. Poverty became popular in the 1970s, especially as a result of Mac Namara's celebrated speech in 1973 to the Board of Governors of the World Bank in Nairobi. After the pioneering work of the ILO in the mid-1970s, poverty was described not only as a lack of income, but also a lack of access to health, education and other services (Philip and Rayhan, 2004: 2).

While it is necessary to assess the degree of poverty, the requirements for recognizing people living in poverty are difficult to determine. Previous research have used unidimensional (single-measure) approaches to calculate the extent of poverty and have primarily used income in this evaluation (Alkire and Foster, 2011).

Four new poverty metrics were adopted by the World Bank in 2018 to capture the evolving dynamics of global poverty. In lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income economies, higher poverty lines at US\$3.20 and US\$5.50 a day reflect national poverty lines. The social poverty line, which adapts to the income of each country, captures the rise in basic needs that a person needs to lead a dignified life as a nation becomes richer. Three well-being indices (monetary poverty, access to education and basic infrastructure) integrate deprivation into the multidimensional poverty calculation, offering more insight into the complex nature of poverty (World Bank, 2020).

Poverty means not having enough money to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. But if we examine today's definitions, poverty is much more than not having enough money.

If poverty is seen as a problem, we can be divided into two groups as permanent and non-permanent by looking at the characteristics of the factors that cause poverty and examine their causes. Permanent poverty; People do not have sufficient capacity for work and it is due to their individual inadequacy. Temporary poverty is not caused by a problem with capacity, but by temporary contractions in the current economic system. As a result, a person may lose their job. This temporary situation disappears if a person finds a new job. In persistent poverty, training / seminars are provided for people to acquire a profession. Increasing employment is a solution to temporary poverty (Sema, 2012: 322).

Poverty is correlated with ability and functioning in many fields in this perspective, and the well-being of people living in poverty exceeds the impact of income levels. (Duclos, Sahn, & Younger, 2006).

Many researchers combine scores of multiple variables and use a single score in the multidimensional view. However, since deprivation in one area (i.e. education) does not compensate for deprivation in another area (i.e. unemployment), this approach has problems; thus, each deprivation has a separate characteristic (Alkire and Foster, 2011).

In addition, the rates and stability of the various measures of poverty could differ across countries. For example, material deprivation in European countries has been reported to be more stable than income poverty. (Bossert, Chakravarty, & D'Ambrosio, 2013).

### 2.1.Types of Poverty

Absolute poverty refers to individuals' inability to meet their basic needs. Individuals who cannot meet their needs such as health, shelter, food and water to sustain their lives are called absolute poor. The absolute poverty line can be at different levels between countries and regions (Karacan, 2017: 68).

The inability to reach the minimum standard of consumption to meet basic physical criteria is often expressed as absolute poverty or deprivation. In other words; Absolute poverty is the inability of a household or an individual to meet even the most basic needs, which are necessary to maintain a minimum standard of living. These poor people, who should be perceived as needing first-degree assistance, cannot even meet their basic humanitarian needs, and even if a person in this situation is not helped from outside, it may be inevitable that he will face even the risk of death. Although absolute poverty exists all over the world, it is more prevalent in less developed and developing countries. The unearthing of absolute poverty requires determining the minimum consumption needs required for individuals to survive. Absolute poverty can be determined separately by considering food and non-food components. Based on the recommended daily intake of calories per person for the whole population, individuals consuming fewer calories form a poverty line. For example, according to the World Bank's study in 1990, the price of a food basket of 2,400 calories, which is the minimum amount of calories required for a person to survive, was determined as the absolute poverty line (Tas and Ozcan, 2012:424).

According to the definition of Adam Smith, those who are able to meet their basic needs absolutely but fall below the general welfare level of the society due to insufficient personal resources and whose social participation in society are prevented are relatively poor. Relative poor are more of a second-degree poor rather than first-degree poor, people with a minimum level of living, but below average wealth. Although they partially meet their basic needs, they are insufficient in terms of education, health, social participation (Tas and Ozcan, 2012:424).

In this respect, relative poverty includes those who live below an acceptable standard of living in the society where they live, based on the differences in the distribution of income and wealth rather than the absolute poverty line. Accordingly, relative poverty also arises as a social exclusion problem by preventing the individual's participation in society, together with the condition of not meeting the physical needs of the individual.

**Table 1.** Relative Poverty Rates in Some OECD Countries (Poverty Line 50%)

Conutries/Years	2008	2012	2018
Australia		0,263	0,253
Austria	0,304	0,32	0,304
Belgium			0,331
Finland	0,304	0,323	0,34
France		0,36	0,372
Germany	0,321	0,319	
Greece	0,293	0,379	0,312
Hungary	0,351	0,362	0,368
Italy	0,297	0,332	
Norway		0,24	0,259
Poland	0,279	0,282	0,285
Portugal	0,297	0,35	0,312
Turkey		0,199	

Reference. OECD, 2021

When the relative poverty data of countries are analyzed, while there has been a downward trend in some countries in recent years, there has been an increase in some countries.

Objective poverty (welfare approach) is the determination of the basic needs of the welfare criterion by normative measures. The normative criteria meant here are; consumption expenditures are concrete variables such as daily calories required for survival. Failure to fall below these specified criteria is called objective poverty. Normative criteria are used to assess the causes of poverty and methods of getting individuals out of poverty (Aktan ve Vural, 2002: 5).

Subjective poverty (utility approach), on the other hand, is a concept based on the combination of needs formed by individuals according to their wishes. In other words, the preferences of individuals are given importance in explaining the concept of poverty. Economists tend to adopt an objective approach because of

the difficulties encountered in calculating the total benefit individuals achieve. In this approach, people are not always capable of evaluating what is best for them (Aktan ve Vural, 2002: 6).

In terms of opportunities and living standards, urban and rural areas vary. First, the rural concept is important. The distinction between urban and rural areas depends on the essence of economic life and population concentration. (Alemdar, Demirdogen, & Oren, 2012).

Urban poverty is a concept that describes the concentration of poverty in cities, especially with the effect of globalization. Adequate and regular policy practices are neglected as a result of the weakening of the rural economy and the encouragement of urbanization policies. As a result of this, the political imbalances that developed with the excessive population growth in the cities have made the concept of urban poverty a priority in the world agenda.

Different economic circumstances of individuals in communities contribute to an appraisal of their well-being, both in terms of their private status and the relative economic position of other individuals in the economy. The definition of relative poverty and total poverty brings out this underlying view. Absolute poverty means a situation in which the income or services of the poor are below the level of basic needs or socially acceptable living standards, usually focused on food needs and other products. As opposed to the economic conditions of other people in the study or population, relative poverty refers to living standards. In other words, the lowest population groups equate relative poverty with higher categories and can be calculated in income quintiles or deciles. (Philip and Rayhan, 2004: 7).

As opposed to the economic conditions of other individuals in the study or population, relative poverty refers to living standards. In other words, relative poverty is contrasted with higher categories in the lowest population categories and can be measured in income quintiles or deciles.

## 2.2. Causes of Poverty

Population is one of the factors affecting poverty in many ways. Due to the fact that the population growth rates in industrialized countries remained at very low levels for a long time, it is seen that the population structure in these countries has a stable structure. On the other hand, most of the less developed countries, are faced with a heavy population pressure and the resulting increase in labor force. Rapid population growth is considered to be an important cause of poverty, especially in less developed countries. In addition, it is stated that while the population pressure affects the living conditions in cities negatively, it also causes environmental damage. On the other hand, in some studies, it was stated that in countries where poverty is intense, very high infant mortality rates cause high birth rates and poverty may be the cause rather than the result of population increases (Senses, 2009:152-157).

Bauman argues that overpopulation causes poverty. Bauman refers to the poverty and poor people caused by population growth as waste of economic progress and states that this issue should be addressed. (Bauman, 2018: 48).

Another fundamental factor that determines poverty is migration. The relationship between poverty and migration is not one-dimensional. Different segments of the society may have migrated due to different reasons. There are two main theses on the extent to which poverty is a result of rural-urban migration. The first of these is the poor in the rural areas are pushed to the cities as a result of their low income levels, and the migration will increase depending on the size of the urban-rural differences and thus cause the impoverishment process. The second thesis, on the other hand, sees poverty as a limiting factor rather than encouraging immigration. In addition, it is stated that the landless / small landowner and wage-working poor living in rural areas are the least beneficiary from migration in the face of the difficulties in meeting the migration costs (Senses, 2009:161).

In the process of evaluating the causes of poverty, individual-social characteristics such as age, gender, disability status, family structure; economic-social policies, other social problems such as unemployment, migration, urbanization and many factors such as income distribution should be taken into account. Inadequate economic structure of a country is an important cause of poverty. However, it should not mean that there will not be poverty in a country with a sufficient and large economy. Because as long as there is a fair and unequal distribution of income, poverty will continue to be a major problem even in countries whose economic size has reached a certain level.

## 3. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS and SOCIAL POLICY

Public services in a country are carried out by administrative units determined by certain principles. In this context, state administration structures in all systems consist of two basic units. These are central government and local governments. These two systems are complementary to each other. However, given the conditions such as the economic, social, political, administrative and cultural structure of the countries, it may be possible to apply one of these management principles predominantly.

There are disadvantaged groups in any society whose disadvantageous circumstances occur with regard to their physical, psychological, fiscal, cultural, ethnic, or religious features. Some groups of people are unable to receive such forms of programs because of these drawbacks, thus welfare, which in turn leaves them excluded from society. In general, the spectrum of social policy includes personal social services such as health, social security, education, jobs, community care and management of housing. And social issues such as crime, disability, unemployment and old age, and social disadvantages due to race, ethnicity, gender and poverty. Social policies are typically aimed at maintaining social progress, social justice, social inclusion, social harmony and social balance.

Analysis suggests that social programs are largely related to state or government policies pursued at the national level. Nevertheless, the systemic changes worldwide, which are addressed in the following pages, have required the revival of social policies in the urban context. Social policies ought to be attentive to urban and cities problems.

Debate continues on the institutions that play a role in determining and implementing social policy. Apart from the central and local governments of the state, different institutions come to the fore in the provision of social policy. In democratic countries, the effects of these institutions in the social policy process are increasing. In all countries with a unitary or federal structure, the second largest administrative power unit of the public administration apparatus after the central government is local governments. For this reason, local governments have played important roles in the implementation of social policies throughout history (Ersoz, 2006:760).

### **3.1.Struggle Poverty in Municipal Law**

Important duties and responsibilities in the fight against poverty have been given to municipalities in the Municipal Law No. 5393. Article 14 of the Law made municipalities effective institutions in fulfilling local social policy and social welfare services and increasing the welfare of citizens within their borders. It has been regulated that municipalities will serve such as social services and assistance, youth and sports, providing professions and skills to prevent unemployment, culture and arts, and meeting housing needs.

It is regulated in the same article that metropolitan municipalities and municipalities with a population over 50,000 will open shelter houses for women and children, and municipalities have been assigned an important social service duty and responsibility.

Article 13 of the Law, regulates the issues that municipalities will work on developing social and cultural relations between fellow citizen. That everyone is a citizen of the town where they reside, that they have the right to benefit from municipal aid and that aids must be provided under conditions that do not harm human dignity.

In Article 15 of the Law, it is stated that non-food goods, which are banned from the activity due to unauthorized sales, will be distributed to the poor by municipalities, whose penalties are not paid back within thirty days.

With the regulation made in article 38 of the law regulating the duties and powers of the mayor, using the allowance allocated for the poor and needy in the budget is among the duties of the mayor.

In Article 60 of the Law regulating the expenses of the municipality, social services and aids to be given to the poor, the poor, the needy, orphans and the disabled are also counted among the expenses of the municipality.

In Article 77 of the Law regulating voluntary participation in municipal services, the municipality's health, education, social services and assistance services, providing services for the elderly, women and children, the disabled, the poor and the needy, to ensure solidarity and participation in the town, to increase efficiency, savings and efficiency in services. It was emphasized that they will implement programs for the participation of volunteers.

Similar regulations are included in the metropolitan municipality law within the scope of combating poverty.



#### 4. LOCAL ADMINISTRATION PRACTICES IN STRUGGLE POVERTY

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality provides public relief and cash aids to low-income families who cannot meet their basic needs and reside in Istanbul within the scope of poverty alleviation. Household and Clothing Benefits; It is ensured that families in need, who apply, are supported with the help of home and clothing in line with their needs by conducting a social investigation. Educational Aid; cash education aid is given to all martyrs, orphans and disabled students who receive education and training in primary, secondary, high school and rehabilitation centers in Istanbul. Remigration Service; families who come to Istanbul for various reasons, cannot hold in the city economically and socially and do not have the financial means to go to their hometown want to return to their hometown when offered. Those families are given the opportunity to return with their belongings. Winter Assistance for the Homeless; in order to prevent people living on the streets in cold weather conditions and to prevent deaths by freezing, winter assistance is provided to the homeless. Poor Return Service; oldiers, students and finding a job in Istanbul, receiving treatment, etc. citizens who came for reasons but do not have a place to stay and have no financial means to return to their hometown are provided with a bus ticket to return to their hometown (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Annual Report, 2019).

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, Rehabilitation of Child Working on the Street; It helps to solve the problems of the families of children working on the street, to direct those who do not go to school to education, and if they go to school, it helps their education. The Center helps children who have not started school or who cannot attend school due to material poverty and who cannot continue due to material poverty, to benefit from compulsory basic education by associating them with the school. Compassion Houses; provide services to meet the needs of poor, needy, low-income people and families who reside temporarily as a patient attendant or a patient, but who do not have a place to stay and have financial means, together with their children for a temporary period. Accommodation, Food Service (Morning Breakfast and Dinner), Hospital Service, Guidance and Counseling Services are provided to patients and their attendants from outside the city. Service is provided to orphans living on the streets with shelter houses. Food and cleaning materials are provided. Bread, clothing and coal aid are provided to low income families. Our municipality also renews the damaged household items of the needy, low-income individuals / families whose houses are on fire, and suffered from floods (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

Konya Metropolitan Municipality provided cash assistance to people in need, within the scope of the Fund assistance. Within the scope of the Social Card Bureau service, bread assistance is provided to families in need. It has been providing educational assistance to students who are studying in Primary School, Secondary School and High School institutions within the borders of Konya Province since 2004-2005 academic year. Of these aids; orphans, martyr and disabled students benefit (Konya Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

Izmir Metropolitan Municipality provides public relief and cash aid services to poor families. Cash assistance is provided on holidays. In addition, cash aid was provided to those who suffered from the flood disaster. Food, goods and fuel aid is provided within the scope of aid in public relief. Within the scope of the Aid for Students in Need Project, students in schools with disadvantaged groups were provided with stationery sets, boots and coats (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, with the Food Bank, provides food and clothing aid to the citizens in need with the market and card system. Food aid is regularly provided to poor families (Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

Social aid support (household goods, food, clothing, medical equipment, training set) was provided to families in need within the scope of social assistance services by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality. A shelter service is provided to people living on the streets in winter to protect them from adverse winter conditions. Within the scope of the natural gas project, gas connections were made to the houses of families in need as a result of social studies. In addition, a natural gas bill contribution of 50 TL was made to families in need for four months (Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

With the Social Support Card, citizens in need can shop a wide range of products from local shopkeeper every month as much as the amount loaded on their cards. Our citizens who cannot cook at home due to reasons such as poverty, disability, old age or health problems go to the homes of our citizens in need and

serve a single hot meal a day, lunch and dinner, every weekday. Free course support is given to successful high school seniors or graduates who cannot receive paid education support to prepare for the university exam due to the inadequate economic situation of their family (Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, Annual Report, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of poverty in Turkey and in the world is one of the biggest problems to be solved. Poverty is not defined only by financial insufficiency, and even if different definitions are made, no clear result can be obtained on its definition. When we look at the reasons that lead to poverty, we see the positive or negative effects of the policies implemented by countries in many areas such as education, justice and economy.

At one point in Turkey's assistance to households in poor condition that local governments provide households but rather contribute to the continuity of the show, can solve the situation of individuals living in households temporarily. When the poverty alleviation practices of municipalities are examined, it is seen that similar projects are generally included. In particular, cash aid applications for the poor, card applications that allow them to shop at the markets, and aid of goods and clothing stand out. In some municipalities, university preparation courses for the children of poor families and support for the natural gas bill in winter are provided. However, different applications take place in a very limited way. Combating poverty is the social duty of the state, and struggle against poverty is not possible unless this task is reviewed in the context of poverty and added to basic policies. Within the scope of poverty alleviation, it is important to increase the cooperation of local administrations with non-governmental organizations and to realize joint projects. In order to alleviate poverty, attention should be paid to the efforts of public and voluntary aid organizations to provide families with a profession to overcome poverty and to provide people in the poor segment with a profession that can provide their own livelihood. Each type of poverty needs to be taken into account in anti-poverty strategies. Many problems are encountered in social assistance practices, which is one of the solutions to prevent poverty. While some families receive help from many institutions, some families cannot access help.

Within the scope of poverty alleviation policies, it is known that direct aid policies have little effect on poverty reduction, only the immediate needs of the poor are met, and their poverty continues in the long term. For this reason, fighting against poverty should not rely heavily on social assistance. In this context, sufficient support should be provided to the vocational and education part.

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