

Local Policies in the Fight Against the Covid-19 Pandemic: Ankara and Rome Municipal Councils' Decisions

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Received: 8. 8. 2021

Revised: 26. 1. 2022

Accepted: 16. 3. 2022

Published: 31. 5. 2022

ABSTRACT

Purpose and methodology: This study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic is included in municipal councils' decisions and investigates the local policies developed through these decisions. Ankara and Rome Municipalities were selected as study samples. Turkey and Italy are both unitary states and their local government structures are similar because their local government systems are part of the Franco group, as defined by Hesse and Sharpe. Both cities have gained the status of metropolitan cities under the legal regulations adopted in recent years. For this reason, Ankara and Rome present similarities in terms of both the areas they serve and the responsibilities of being the capital. The decisions of their municipal councils were reviewed from March to December 2020. The decisions were analysed within the framework of the relevant commissions and application areas, and the local policies implemented in the fight against COVID-19 were put forward.

Findings: According to the analyses, the Ankara Metropolitan Municipal Council intensified its decisions on economic support, social assistance, cleaning, public health, and local diplomacy, while the Rome Metropolitan Municipality's policies focused on security, education, economic support, social assistance, cleaning, and transportation services. As a result, both municipalities brought their COVID-19 proposals to the agenda of the council. Municipal assemblies played a vital role in helping their countries fight the pandemic as administrative units that provide the legal basis for implementing local policies. Strengthening local assemblies and expanding their mandate and responsibility in times of crisis could also

support the success of central government policies. The findings reveal that fast and effective solutions delivered by local governments through local policies successfully curbed the pandemic that had spread around the world.

Practical Implications: The policies implemented by local governments were impressive and complementary to central government policies, providing a valuable guideline for policymakers.

Keywords: local policies, COVID-19, Ankara, Rome, local government

JEL: H75, H83, Z18

1 Introduction

While providing urban services as the units closest to the public, local governments identify the existing problems and produce policies by offering solutions. The policies implemented by these units, which all enjoy administrative and financial autonomy, are important in terms of efficient, fast, and solution-oriented services in the city. Since the areas served by local governments are generally in cities, their work and policies become even more crucial when problems, such as pandemics, affecting the cities arise.

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged at the end of 2019 had a particularly notable impact on the cities. In the fight against it, the importance of local governments came to the fore. Especially in metropolitan cities, the dense population and mobility required the municipalities to respond quickly. In this context, it was important to produce solutions to the unique problems of the cities through local and central government policies. Population density, economy, city planning, housing stock, and industrialization of each city are unique. Hence, for solving the problems specific to the cities during a pandemic period, local policies may be more effective than central government policies. As local governments better predict the city's limitations, strengths and weaknesses, needs, and the applications that yield results, they are expected to deliver more efficient and faster policies.

2 Literature Review

Throughout the pandemic period, a vast array of new academic research was produced, covering several disciplines besides health sciences. As regards public administration, many studies were published about how both central governments and local governments fought against COVID-19, how they developed the relevant policies, which legal processes they underwent, and the changes they faced in financial management.

This part of the study focused on a short literature review of some of such studies. One of them was produced by Kuhlmann and Franzke (2021). They aimed at analysing *Länder* and local governments' institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from an intergovernmental perspective. They tried

to find out how the intergovernmental system in Germany responded to the crisis and to what extent the pandemic changed the pertinent patterns of multi-level governance. Another study was about the Czech and the Slovak intergovernmental systems. Jüptner and Klimovský (2021) considered the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis and tried to examine how it affected all socio-political and economic levels and structures and the behaviour of individual levels of government. They pointed out measures adopted by the governments and their impacts on a multi-level governance system.

Several studies examined other European countries. Hegel and Schnabel (2021) examined how European federations (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) managed the COVID-19 period. Askim and Bergström (2021) studied the difference in the government response to COVID-19 in Norway and Sweden, specifically their crisis management and multi-level governance. Hegele and Schnabel (2021) found that Austria and Switzerland adopted a centralised approach, whereas Germany opted for decentralised decision-making. They explained this situation with the distribution of powers. As regards Norway and Sweden, Askim and Bergström (2021) identified similar threats in these countries. According to the findings, Sweden opted for far less strict countermeasures than Norway. While Norway's government response was similar to that of many European countries, Sweden chose soft measures, i.e., recommendations and guidelines.

There are also other studies that analysed several areas of public life and the financial impacts of the pandemic. For example, Horvat et al. (2021) analysed the digitalisation of public administration in relation to delivery, speed of procedure, usage of new technologies on Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak cases. The research consisted of an analysis of the laws in force in these countries. Szarowská (2021) examined the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Czech region of Moravian-Silesian. The study relies on secondary statistical data from the Czech Ministry of Finance and monitors financial statements from each region. It also covers in-depth structured interviews made with representatives of the Moravian-Silesian region. Černěnko et al. (2021) examined the impact of the pandemic on the tax revenue of Slovak local governments. In the study, tax revenues were compared and examined in the context of size categories of local governments as well as physical space – regions and districts. At the end, the author said that there was a “sad conclusion” because their dependence on local government tax revenues made them vulnerable to economic fluctuations.

In our study, similar to other studies, the policies pursued by local governments in the fight against COVID-19 are discussed. A distinctive feature of this study is that it examines municipal council decisions of the two selected capitals, Ankara and Rome. The contribution of these decisions to the fight against the pandemic is analysed.

3 Methodology

The present study evaluates municipal councils' decisions to explore how local governments fought against the COVID-19 pandemic and which policies they pursued. The decisions examined were those of Ankara and Rome Municipalities. Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and Rome Municipality are both capital municipalities of their respective countries. The decisions they made and the local policies they put in place were important in the fight against the pandemic.

The two countries as well as the two cities selected for our study have similar characteristics. Turkey and Italy are both unitary states with Ankara and Rome, respectively, as their capitals. The local government structures of both countries are similar. The powers of the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality were expanded by the Law No. 6360 in 2014, including districts. Rome is governed by the Delrio Law enacted in 2014 that gave Rome a special status and included its districts. There are sub-government units and districts in both cities. Within their boundaries, the districts are autonomous but depend on the metropolitan administration for some basic decisions such as city planning, zoning, and transportation issues.

The study included the decisions made by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council and the Rome Municipality Council between March 2020, when the first cases of COVID-19 appeared in Ankara and Rome, and the end of 2020. On each municipality website, with due consideration that there might be different spellings related to the pandemic, COVID-19 related decisions were scanned with different keywords. The Ankara municipal council discussed 27 decisions, while the Rome municipal council discussed 35. After the results had been obtained, each of these decisions was analysed.

The study focused on municipal councils because they are one of the main administrative bodies of the municipalities. The development of local policies follows the decisions taken by municipal councils. Therefore, the course of the fight against COVID-19 was determined based on parliamentary decisions. At the time of the study, the COVID-19 pandemic was not fully over yet.

4 Local Public Policies

Policy is a set of behaviours that includes a series of activities and their results on specific issues, creates a roadmap for a known target, and includes the implementation phase of the decisions taken as a result (Hecló, 1972, p. 84). Public policy studies are intended to solve public problems using scientific analysis and make suggestions to improve and design better policies (Demir, 2011, p. 110). Public policies are options and decisions suggested for achieving a set of policy objectives. In some conditions, public policies are undertaken by local institutions within the framework of the solution of local problems, their authority, and responsibility. To this end, the practices carried out in providing local services to the public, the solutions developed for local

problems, and the decisions taken all make up the local policies. It is the local governments that implement these policies.

Local public policies include the implementation of local and joint needs and services of local governments that concern the city's residents. These policies are carried out on a scale determined by the boundaries of local governments and are designed by a combination of local actors who influence, directly or indirectly, and are involved in the process (Erdoğan, 2020, p. 50; Çakırer-Özservet, 2016, p. 49). Among the duties of local governments are public health, environment and cleaning, disaster management, fighting epidemics, and other responsibilities required thereby.

Local governments, as the administrative units closest to the citizens, support central governments in the quick and effective implementation of public policies. At the same time, they take an active part in the success of policies on a smaller scale by developing local public policies according to the characteristics of each city. The success rates of public policies are thought to be greater at the local level. Both supporting public policies and determining and implementing city-specific local public policies are important in issues such as the fight against the pandemic.

The aim of the study was determined by examining the local public policies of Ankara and Rome Municipalities. Accordingly, it seen was established that the efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic were supported by locally developed public policies.

5 Local Governments Legal Framework

5.1 Local Governments in Turkey

In the 1980s, the paradigm of public management changed worldwide, and the new order that emerged triggered some reform movements in Turkey. Local policies were also prioritized in this context. In the first stage, Metropolitan Municipalities were established in 1984 by the Law No. 3030. The European Charter of Self-Government was adopted in 1985, which Turkey ratified in 1992. In the 1990s, the public administration structural reform efforts gained momentum. The efforts to reorganise the powers and responsibilities of the Charter in favour of the local sphere began in the 2000s.

The report titled "Change in Management for the Management of Change" published in 2003 is a comprehensive roadmap indicating the necessity of policies to be implemented, why they are needed, and policy recommendations. The report mentioned that the public administration vision of the 21st century should highlight local and decentralization structures (Dinçer and Yılmaz, 2003, p. 30).

With the Law on Special Provincial Administration, the Metropolitan Municipality Law, and the Municipality Law adopted successively in 2004 and 2005, the restructuring efforts were accelerated (Emini, 2009, p. 35). With the Law

No. 5747 adopted in 2008, sub-tier municipalities and district municipalities were abolished in places where metropolitan cities were established, and only district municipalities were included. With these laws, local governments gained power and autonomy and participation policies were targeted.

The Law No. 6360 was adopted in 2012 and came into effect after the 2014 local elections. The law is described as “reform in reform” (Özer, 2013, p. 97). With the Law No. 6360, fundamental paradigm shifts were experienced in urban management. To this end, the service area of all metropolitan municipalities was extended to the provincial administrative boundaries, new districts were established and, accordingly, the duties and powers of the metropolitan municipalities were increased. Municipalities of provinces with a population of 750,000 and above were converted into metropolitan municipalities.

Considered as the continuation of the public administration reform efforts, the Law No. 6360 aims to provide solutions to many problems related to metropolitan cities while offering a new administration structure (Çelikyay, 2018, pp. 135–136). In this process, the legislation on special provincial administrations was also revised.

The Law No. 6360 introduced significant changes in the administrative structure, financial system, political aspect, geography, representation and participation, personnel structure, service delivery, zoning and planning order, and the socio-cultural dimension resulting from the decrease in the rural population (İzci and Turan, 2013, p. 119). The duties of metropolitan municipalities include zoning plans, urban transformation, disaster management, infrastructure services, transportation, geographical and urban information systems, agricultural areas, environmental health, water and wastewater service, cemeteries, terminals, municipal police, fire brigade, emergency aid, culture, art and tourism services.

One of the main consequences of the change in the metropolitan municipality system is related to the division of duties and powers between municipalities. Accordingly, metropolitan municipalities are equipped with vast powers. With the new regulation, there is a partial increase in the authorities of the district municipalities compared to the Law No. 5216. The role of the metropolitan municipality is seen chiefly as ensuring harmony and coordination. In a sense, a centralized metropolitan system was created by becoming more centralized (Arikboğa, 2018, pp. 16–17).

5.2 Local Governments in Italy

The *Law on Local Administrations* adopted in 1982 strengthened the municipalities and provinces. The law gave new duties and powers to the municipalities and provided equity. Provinces now serve as a bridge connecting municipalities and regions.

With the reforms introduced since 1990, the process of strengthening local governments in Italy continued. With the Law No. 124/1990, local govern-

ments gained greater authority. When metropolitan cities were established, their powers were transferred to metropolitan cities to prevent the priority control of the powers of local governments by the central government. At this point, the reforms made in 1990 and in 2001 were crucial for local governments (Celata and Coletti, 2014, p. 396). In 1972 and in 1990, significant authority was transferred to local governments by the central government in agriculture, health, construction, and public transportation. In addition, local governments continued to be under the supervision of the central government as a requirement of the unitary structure (Vesperini, 2011, p. 6; as cited in Küçük, 2019).

As a result of the legal arrangements made between 1990 and 1997, the financial autonomy of local municipalities and regional governments increased significantly. After the reforms in 1990, autonomy in real terms was given to local governments. With the law enacted in 1993, a legal basis was established for municipalities to elect their own institutions, council members, and managers. In order to make local governments more autonomous, the changes to the constitution continued in the 2000s, focusing on regional development policies.

With the constitutional reforms of 2001, the power of regional administrations increased (Tabossi, 2007, p. 1). These reforms resolved the autonomy problems in the constitution regarding the duties and powers given to local governments. The Italian administrative units were categorized as municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities, regions, and central governments.

The history of metropolitan urban regulation in Italy dates back to the 1950s. In 1990, only legal regulations could be made for metropolitan cities. However, metropolitan cities could not be implemented under the legal regulation due to Italy's specific problems. Their inclusion as local government units in the constitution in 2001 strengthened the legal status of metropolitan cities. With the law adopted in 2014, 10 metropolitan cities were established in Italy. Rome is one of them (Coşkun, Pank and Şen, 2019, p. 302).

With all these constitutional arrangements, the institutions in which centralization is intensely pursued are now governed by a multi-polar system. The new regulations also institutionally strengthened the autonomy of local governments. The public authority was reorganized with a local to national understanding. With this reform, municipalities were given more importance and local governments came closer to the citizens (Marchetti, 2010, p. 91). All units at various levels were met with an egalitarian approach and local governments became stronger. As a result, the regions obtained an important role in planning regional policies (UCLG, 2004, p. 3). Thus, based on the framework drawn by the constitution, the position and powers of the state were limited (Olivetti, 2014, p. 148).

6 Ankara and Rome Municipality Management Characteristics

6.1 Ankara Metropolitan Municipality

Ankara, the capital of the Republic of Turkey, is located in Central Anatolia, which can be considered the centre of Turkey (Ministry of Culture and Tourism). With a population of 5,663,322, it is the second most populous city after Istanbul (tuik.gov.tr) and the third largest city with an area of 24,521 km² (Ceyhan and Tekkanat, 2018, p. 27).

Ankara is one of the first three cities where a metropolitan municipality administration was established by the Law No. 3030 of 1984. The people elect the mayor and the council through elections held every five years. Ankara has 25 districts. Table 1 presents Ankara's districts and their populations.

Table 1: Ankara Districts and Populations

| District | Population | District | Population | District | Population |
|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| Akyurt | 37,456 | Etimesgut | 595,305 | Mamak | 669,465 |
| Altındağ | 396,165 | Evren | 3,045 | Nallıhan | 27,434 |
| Ayaş | 13,686 | Gölbaşı | 140,649 | Polatlı | 126,623 |
| Bala | 25,780 | Güdül | 8,438 | Pursaklar | 157,082 |
| Beypazarı | 48,732 | Haymana | 28,922 | Sincan | 549,108 |
| Çamlıdere | 8,883 | Kahramankazan | 56,736 | Şereflikoçhisar | 33,310 |
| Çankaya | 925,828 | Kalecik | 12,941 | Yenimahalle | 695,395 |
| Çubuk | 91,142 | Keçiören | 938,568 | | |
| Elmadağ | 45,122 | Kızılcahamam | 27,507 | | |

Source: Ankara Governorship

The duties and powers of metropolitan municipalities and district municipalities in Turkey are mainly determined by two separate laws. These are the Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 and the Municipality Law No. 5393. The main duties and responsibilities of district and metropolitan municipalities are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Main Duties of District and Metropolitan Municipalities

| District Municipalities (Law No. 5393) | Metropolitan Municipalities (Law No. 5216) |
|---|---|
| <p><i>land development planning, water supply, sewerage and transport, sanitation and solid waste, geographic and urban information systems, municipal police services, burial services and cemeteries, culture and art, tourism and promotion, youth and sports, social services and social aid, weddings, vocational and skills training, cultural and natural assets, historical urban fabric areas, school buildings, environment and environmental health, tree planting, parks and green areas and housing, construction or repair of school buildings, borrowing and accepting donations, leisure and recreational facilities open to the public</i></p> | <p><i>preparing the metropolitan municipality's strategic plan, annual goals, investment programs according to the budget plan, approving and implementing the master plan of every scale, implementing the metropolitan transport master plan, coordinating transport and public transport services, building or repairing squares, boulevards, avenues and main roads within the metropolitan municipality's purview, naming and numbering squares, boulevards, avenues, roads and streets, setting up geographic and urban information systems, ensuring the protection of the environment, agricultural land and water basins, drawing up the metropolitan area's solid waste management plan, operating or licensing passenger and freight terminals, building or operating social facilities serving the entire metropolitan area, building, repairing or operating regional parks, zoos, animal shelters, libraries, museums, sporting, leisure and recreational facilities and similar facilities, designating cemetery areas</i></p> |

Source: Law No. 5393 and Law No. 5216

As seen above, metropolitan municipalities are responsible for basic services that require a holistic coordination throughout the city. These services are approving zoning plans, street names, managing urban transportation, building

and operating water and sewerage services, constructing urban main roads, infrastructure, managing intercity terminals and solid waste recycling. They serve the area within the administrative boundaries of the city, including rural areas. District municipalities, on the other hand, perform their duties within the boundaries of their districts.

All decisions related to municipality’s duties require the approval of the city council. Hence, specialized commissions consisting of council members were established within the council. Each issue is first discussed in the relevant commissions which prepares a report. After that, the issue is presented to the council for approval.

The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council is one of the governing bodies of the municipality. One out of five members is elected from the district municipal councils. The Ankara Metropolitan Council consists of 143 members. It is obligatory to establish a public works and housing commission, an environment and health commission, a planning and budget commission, an education, culture, youth, and sports commission, and a transportation commission. The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council commissions are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Commissions

| No | Commission Name | No | Commission Name | No | Commission Name | No | Commission Name |
|----|---|----|---|----|----------------------------------|----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Agriculture and Livestock | 9 | Estate | 17 | Naming | 25 | Elderly and Orphans |
| 2 | ATAK (History and Culture Research) | 10 | EU and Foreign Relations | 18 | Planning and Budget | 26 | Tourism |
| 3 | Audit | 11 | Family Commission | 19 | Protecting Underground Resources | 27 | Transportation |
| 4 | Consumer Protection | 12 | Human Rights | 20 | Public Relations | 28 | Ulus Historical City Centre |
| 5 | Craftsmen and Artisans | 13 | Infrastructure Service | 21 | Public Works and Housing | 29 | Urban Aesthetics |
| 6 | Disabled people | 14 | Law and Tariffs | 22 | Rural Development | 30 | Water and Channel Services |
| 7 | Environment and Health | 15 | Management of Dam Ponds and Irrigation Channels | 23 | Shanty Problems | | |
| 8 | Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men | 16 | Management of Geothermal Waters | 24 | Social Affairs | | |

Source: www.ankara.bel.tr/meclis-kararlari

6.2 Rome Municipality

The city of Rome is located in the Lazio Region, one of Italy's twenty regions. Rome is the country's capital and also the most important city in Italy, be it historically, politically, economically, or socially. Rome has a population of approximately 4 million. It is the most populated city in Italy and the third most populated in the European Union. The area of Rome is 1,285 km² and covers one-third of the territory of Lazio.

Rome has been inhabited for almost three thousand years. Within the boundaries of the city of Rome is the Vatican, the smallest independent country in the world. The metropolitan city of Rome was established in 2015 under the Local Administration Reform No. 142/1990 and the Law No. 56/2014, thus replacing the Province of Rome. The legal establishment of metropolitan administrations took place on 1 January 2017. However, administrations have not yet been fully operational in all cities.¹

The city of Rome is governed by the Mayor of Rome. There are two groups of metropolitan cities in Italy. The first group is located in regions with ordinary status, which are entirely regulated by the Delrio Law. These are the municipalities of Roma Capitale, Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bari, Firenze, Reggio Calabria and Naples. The second group consists of four metropolitan cities in special-status areas: Cagliari, Catania, Messina and Palermo.

There are 15 municipalities in Rome. The people elect the mayor and the council through elections held every five years (Roma Tiburtina, 2021). Besides the 15 municipalities, Rome is divided into several subdivisions which, however, are not recognized as local government units. These are *rioni*, *quartieri*, *sub-urbe*, and *zone*.² There are a total of 121 subdivisions and communes under the Municipality of Rome. The municipalities' subdivisions with the largest population are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Municipalities with the Largest Populations in the Municipality of Rome

| Municipalities | Population | Municipalities | Population |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Rome | 2,866,733 | Anzio | 53,760 |
| Guidonia Montecelio | 88,238 | Velletri | 52,998 |
| Fiumicino | 75,378 | Civitavecchia | 52,942 |
| Pomezia | 61,207 | Ardea | 48,495 |
| Tivoli | 56,568 | Nettuno | 48,346 |

1 <<https://rm.coe.int/local-and-regional-democracy-in-italy-monitoring-committee-rapporteur-s/1680759b3b>>.

2 <<https://rm.coe.int/local-and-regional-democracy-in-italy-monitoring-committee-rapporteur-s/1680759b3b>>.

With the constitutional amendment of 2001, metropolitan cities were added to the local government units existing under the 1948 Italian Constitution. Thereby, metropolitan cities have also become local government units regulated by the Constitution. While creating metropolitan cities, large municipalities were combined with their neighbourhoods, which envisaged a strong urban economic and social integration. Metropolitan cities have administrative and financial autonomy like other local government units (Art. 119). Under Article 142 of the Constitution, the provinces of Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Bari, Naples, and Cagliari became metropolitan cities.

According to the amendment introduced in the Constitution in 2011, Rome is regulated by a separate state law. Rome was given a special status by the Law No. 42/2009 approved in 2010 and supported by a Decree. The capital city has more powers than a typical city, special provisions on financial and budgetary matters, and a more detailed administrative and organizational autonomy. The city is the subject of specific provisions in various laws and regulations. The 2009 Fiscal Federalism Act is one of them.³

The statute of Rome contains specific provisions about the city's internal, territorial and administrative structure. Accordingly, the Mayor of Rome is also a member of the Rome City Council (Assemblea Capitolina). The metropolitan mayor and council members are elected by the people of Rome. Citizens also check the mayor's policy guidelines and can request his resignation when necessary with a motion of no confidence.

The Metropolitan Municipality Council is the political and administrative management and control body. The council consists of the mayor and 48 council members. The council exercises the powers granted to it by law and statutes under constitutional principles. The relations between the council, the Municipal Council, and the Standing or Special Metropolitan Municipality Commissions are defined and governed by the council regulation. The duties of the Metropolitan Municipalities are equivalent to the duties and powers of provincial councils (Roma Assemblea Capitolina, 2021).

The duties of the Metropolitan Council are to increase local government performance and keep local expenditures to a minimum by coordinating municipalities on environmental protection, including basic services, transportation, schools, and social programmes (Roma Assemblea Capitolina, 2021).

Municipal commissions contribute to a clearer fulfilment of their political-administrative guidance and control functions through in-depth and specific discussion of the issues falling within their competence. According to the parliamentary regulation, there are commissions appointed for the functions of drafting, inspection, control and direction. Among the commissions, the Rome Capital Commission and the Capital Election Commission have their own agendas. Municipal commissions are shown in Table 5.

³ <<https://rm.coe.int/local-and-regional-democracy-in-italy-monitoring-committee-rapporteurs/1680759b3b>>.

Table 5: Rome Municipality Commissions

| No | Commission Name | No | Commission Name | No | Commission Name |
|----|--|----|--------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Budget | 6 | Public Works | 11 | Environment |
| 2 | Transportation | 7 | Urban Planning | 12 | Trade |
| 3 | Education Policies | 8 | Culture and Youth | 13 | Equal Opportunities |
| 4 | Social and Health Policies | 9 | Control, Security, and Transparency | 14 | Real Estate and Housing |
| 5 | Sports, Wellbeing, and Quality of Life | 10 | Bylaws and Technological Innovations | 15 | Tourism and International Relations |

Source: <www.comune.roma.it/web/it/commissioni-capitoline.page>

7 Policies of Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic

7.1 Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council Decisions

Turkey started to work on informing and raising awareness of the public about the pandemic since the outbreak occurred. First, the “COVID-19 Guide” was prepared and a helpline “Call 184” was set up. The most important players in this process were the Ministry of Health, municipalities and non-governmental organizations. Besides these, municipalities also carried out activities to raise awareness and inform the public through the internet, phone lines and other tools. Municipalities rearranged urban public transportation, increased social assistance, postponed some rents and payments taken by municipalities and switched to remote working in accordance with the measures taken by the central government. On the other hand, when the government announced that some policies will be carried out and managed only by the central government units, discussions were launched between the central government and the municipalities. For example, social aid campaigns previously initiated by Ankara, Istanbul, Konya, and Gaziantep metropolitan municipalities were terminated in accordance with the campaign initiated by the Presidency (Turan and Hamza Celikyay, 2020, pp. 14–15). In such cases, central policies were prioritized and municipalities only supported central government policies within the scope of their duties.

The decisions made in the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council between March 2020, when the first COVID-19 case was announced in Turkey, and December 2020 were examined as follows: first, the date range was determined between 01/03/2020 and 31/12/2020. Then, considering that there may be different spellings related to the pandemic and the virus, the search included

various keywords, namely "COVID-19," "Pandemic," "COVID or COVID," "Epidemic," "Corona," "Corana," "Korana," "Korana," "Kovid," and "KOVID". It was observed that the search was not case-sensitive. Besides, it was seen that the decisions spelled the virus as "Covid-19", "Covid-19", and "Covid-19." All these scanning results were compared with the "decision number" data, and duplicate records were eliminated. As a result, 27 records were obtained (Council Decisions, www.ankara.bel.tr). The decisions taken in the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council during the COVID-19 pandemic are listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Ankara Metropolitan Municipality's Council Decisions Regarding COVID-19

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| 08/05/2020 | 530 | Providing in-kind and cash assistance to families in need of help due to the COVID-19 epidemic, out of the Social Assistance and Services Regulation, by the Social Services Department. |
| 08/05/2020 | 531 | Providing masks, disinfectants, gloves, and hygiene materials in response to requests from other municipalities, public institutions, and organizations. |
| 08/05/2020 | 532 | Providing masks, gloves, disinfectants, and protective materials to municipalities of other countries, especially Sarajevo, Zagreb, Nicosia, and the Republics of Turkey, upon request. |
| 09/07/2020 | 557 | Continuation of activities with current term members since the 26 th Term Member Elections for Children's Council could not be held due to the COVID-19 epidemic |
| 14/07/2020 | 722 | Decision on the subscriber practices of the General Directorate of ASKİ (Ankara Water and Sewerage Administration). |
| 12/08/2020 | 874 | EU and Foreign Relations Commission Report on the measures to be taken to protect citizens from the epidemic and prevent the spread |
| 12/08/2020 | 923 | Child Rights and Activities Commission Report on the preparation of guidelines by the relevant departments of universities to support the developments of the children in the COVID-19 epidemic. |

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| 12/08/2020 | 924 | Education Culture and Youth and Sports Commission Report on raising awareness of the youth about precautionary and health and social life. |
| 12/08/2020 | 938 | Consumer Protection Commission Report on the monitoring of social distancing rules in markets and stores |
| 12/08/2020 | 947 | Tradesmen and Craftsmen Commission Report on supporting the financially affected tradesmen. |
| 13/08/2020 | 973 | Elderly and Homeless Commission Report on investigating the physical and psychological effects of the elderly citizens who stayed at home for a long time. |
| 09/09/2020 | 1097 | Child Rights and Activities Commission Report on the promotion of mask use by the children and the production of specially designed masks. |
| 10/09/2020 | 1134 | Real Estate Commission Report on the temporary use of existing immovable property for victims of domestic violence to maintain their shelter, nutrition, and social life. |
| 10/09/2020 | 1140 | Public Relations Commission Report on monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic process in the Altındağ District, investigating the rate of increase and raising public awareness about masks. |
| 12/10/2020 | 1311 | Family Commission Report on investigating the human impact of the panic and fear of the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| 12/10/2020 | 1323 | Environment and Health Commission Report on raising awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| 12/10/2020 | 1340 | Consumer Protection Commission report on increasing demands for disinfectant products. |
| 12/10/2020 | 1346 | Real Estate Commission Report on the rent debts of workplaces belonging to the Metropolitan Municipality, which were closed during the pandemic period. |
| 13/10/2020 | 1351 | Tradesmen and Craftsmen Commission Report on disinfectant and cleaning of commercial establishments in industrial zones. |

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| 13/10/2020 | 1353 | Public Relations Commission Report on the investigation of the measures taken by the Metropolitan Municipality within the boundaries of Pursaklar District. |
| 13/10/2020 | 1355 | The Report of the Commission on Equal Opportunities for women and men on taking preventive measures for public health of the "Mother, Milk, Baby" project. |
| 13/11/2020 | 1501 | EU and Foreign Relations Commission Report on research on meeting and exchanging ideas on a platform such as Webinar due to the epidemic. |
| 14/11/2020 | 1538 | Consumer Protection Commission Report on the kind of help and support provided to the consumer by the municipality. |
| 14/11/2020 | 1539 | Tourism Commission Report on organizing nature walks in our surrounding districts for our citizens staying at home. |
| 15/11/2020 | 1550 | Tradesmen and Craftsmen Commission Report on eliminating grievances of AŞTİ (Ankara Intercity Terminal Operation) tradesmen. |
| 17/11/2020 | 1561 | Public Relations Commission Report on the investigation of the social and economic conditions of the tradesmen operating in the Çankaya district. |
| 11/12/2020 | 1765 | Education Culture and Youth and Sports Commission Report on the organization of information seminars on the digital platform where patients with Parkinson's and movement disorders can access all advanced treatments. |

Source: own.

All decisions on fighting the pandemic were adopted unanimously. It is seen that the first decisions were made on 8 May, approximately two months after the first COVID-19 case had been reported. The first implemented policies result from decisions to provide in-kind and cash aid to families in need and to provide masks, disinfectants, gloves, and hygiene materials to municipalities abroad and public institutions in the country upon request. It is seen that the situations that were the subject of the decisions were examined and reported by different commissions. Table 7 shows the distribution of decisions by commissions.

Table 7: Distribution of Decisions by Commissions

| Commission Name | Number of Decisions |
|--|----------------------------|
| Mayor's proposal | 5 |
| EU and Foreign Relations Commission | 2 |
| Family Commission | 1 |
| Environment and Health Commission | 1 |
| Children's Rights and Activities Commission | 2 |
| Real Estate Commission | 2 |
| Tradesmen and Craftsmen Commission | 3 |
| Public Relations Commission | 3 |
| Equal Opportunities Commission for Women and Men | 1 |
| Culture and Youth Sports Commission | 2 |
| Tourism Commission | 1 |
| Consumer Protection Commission | 3 |
| Commission for Elderly and Orphans | 1 |
| Total | 27 |

Source: own.

Several decisions were made regarding Mayor's proposals, Tradesmen and Craftsmen, Public Relations, and Consumer Protection Commissions. However, it is seen that the commissions to which other decisions are attributed vary, and decisions were taken on issues of concern to almost all commissions.

Women-Old-Young-Child Policies

The decision to keep the mechanisms such as Women's Council, Disabled Persons Council, Children's Council, which are extremely important in terms of participatory policies, running were not neglected during the pandemic period. Since the General Council meetings of the Children's Council could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic, also the election of members for the new term could not be held. Thus, it was decided to continue the activities with the current members of the council.

Decisions to produce specially designed masks were made to create a joint guide with the relevant departments of universities and encourage children's mask use to support the development of children during the pandemic period. At the same time, a decision was taken to provide training seminars on

online platforms and later, at the Youth Centre, to raise awareness of young people and distribute hygiene materials in schools. During the pandemic period, citizens over a certain age were restricted from going out. It was decided to investigate the physical and psychological effects that might have arisen from this situation.

Additionally, research was carried out on the impact of panic and fear for all citizens. According to a decision taken, municipal estates were used as temporary shelters so that women and children victims of domestic violence could preserve their shelter, nutrition, and social lives.

Social Policies

It was decided to distribute milk to the expectant mothers, as determined by the Provincial Health Directorate. Besides, in-kind and cash assistance were provided to families in need. The municipality also decided to provide hygiene materials to municipalities and other public institutions upon request.

The council decided to make plans to visit remote areas, small settlements, plateaus, historical and natural beauties of the city. Italy decided to take into account the heart and mental health of the citizens who stayed at home for a long time. Furthermore, the council decided to organize seminars on the digital platform for patients with Parkinson's and movement disorders.

Local Diplomacy

Policies regulating foreign relations were not disregarded during the pandemic period. For example, in cooperation with the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN Women), it was decided to meet, live or online, with foreign mayors who could set an example for gender-responsive budgeting in the municipality, exchange ideas, and create an infrastructure for best practices works. Similarly, it was decided to exchange information about precautions and protection methods with twin towns and provide hygiene materials to the requesting municipalities.

Economic Policies

Due to some delays in payments resulting from the pandemic, the application of default interest on Ankara Water and Sewerage Administration (ASKI) invoices was stopped. The default interest collected on the applied invoices was regulated and regulation was made to return it to new invoices by settlement.

In order to implement social distance rules in shopping malls, decisions were taken to determine the places without distance lines on the surfaces, investigate what can be done to further support the tradesmen who were negatively affected by the economic measures, and eliminate the grievances of the tradesmen of the Ankara Intercity Terminal Operation (AŞTİ). It was also decided to restructure the debts arising from lease agreements during the pandemic for tenants of the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality.

Additionally, decisions were made regarding consumer protection in terms of use of chemicals such as alcohol and disinfectant products and the disinfection and cleaning of commercial establishments located in the industrial zones.

Policies for Districts

As a metropolitan municipality, Ankara provided support to district municipalities in the fight against pandemic to the extent it deemed necessary. This support was in line with the motions or proposals of the district municipal council members in the council. Decisions were adopted with regard to the Altındağ, Çankaya and Pursaklar districts.

In the Altindag district, decisions were made to investigate the growth rate and raise public awareness about masks in relation to monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and economic conditions of the artisans in the Çankaya district, and the measures to protect the artisans in the Pursaklar district.

7.2 Rome Municipality Council Decisions

In Europe, the pandemic showed its most devastating impact in Italy, with many cases and deaths. Italy ranked first in Europe in terms of the number of deaths due to COVID-19. A total of 3,067,486 cases were seen in Italy, and the number of people who lost their lives was 99,785.⁴ The country ranks 8th in the world's number of cases (Worldometers, 2021).

Italy was forced to close the schools and restaurants, implement curfews, distribute masks and disinfectants at regional and local levels. Vaccination campaigns were mostly managed by central government. For the implementation of all policies, central government acted in coordination with local governments considering local needs and demographic differences.

With the Presidential Decree of 9 March 2020, Italy's "red zone" was expanded to cover all of the country. The Decree also introduced regulations for regions and municipalities. It was forbidden for all citizens living within the boundaries of the region/municipality to leave the municipal boundaries and to organize cultural, religious and sports activities. The activities of schools and universities at all levels were suspended. Persons in close contact with infected people had to be quarantined and reported to the Local Health Service's Department of Prevention. Furthermore, the places where immigrants live were visited by the Security and Civil Protection Department of the Municipality of Rome and information was given about the measures to prevent the epidemic (Brodolini, 2020, p. 9).

With the Italian Civil Protection Decree, EUR 400,000,000 was allocated to municipalities for emergency food solidarity measures. With these funds, Italian municipalities were able to help citizens shop in supermarkets and other food stores, as well as provide credits (*buono spesa*) to stores in the form of

⁴ As of 28/03/2021.

food vouchers to purchase food and other essential goods in times of emergency (Brodolini, 2020, pp. 3–8).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, regions and provinces in Italy were categorized into white, yellow, orange and red zones corresponding to the three risk scenarios for which certain restrictive measures applied. The Lazio Region was in yellow at the time this paper was written. This classification was based on a regulation issued by the Ministry of Health.⁵

In crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the countries' rapid and effective policies have a significant role in process management. The pandemic showed its effect especially in the cities, and therefore the decisions made by local governments, the policies they implemented, and the work they performed in the fight against the pandemic were of great importance.

In this context, the activities, decisions, policy preferences, and implementation priorities of Rome as the capital of Italy, the most populated city of the country, and a tourist city were of great importance. Examining the decisions made by the Municipality of Rome and the policies it put into practice also revealed the situation of local life in Italy. The relevant council decisions of the Municipality of Rome are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Rome Municipality's Council Decisions Regarding COVID-19⁶

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| 13/03/2020 | 61 | The decision of the municipality to have the authority to reach the places where services are carried out in violation of the travel restrictions so that the activities of distributing food to the homeless and needy citizens can continue. |
| 13/03/2020 | 60 | The decision to assist the homeless through Civil Protection, take appropriate and necessary measures, protect public health. |
| 13/03/2020 | 59 | The decision by AMA SpA ⁷ employees to systematically sterilize the streets and all vehicles and carry out waste management activities was approved with 14 votes in favour and 11 votes against. |
| 13/03/2020 | 58 | The decision to act together with the government in taking the necessary measures to implement activities such as school cafeterias, services, activities for school adaptation. |

5 <www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioContenutiNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=english&id=5367&area=nuovoCoronavirus&menu=vuoto>

6 <www.comune.roma.it/servizi2/deliberazioniAttiWeb/elencoDati>

7 <www.ama.it/chi-siamo/ricerca-sviluppo>

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| 13/03/2020 | 57 | The decision to suspend the payment terms issued through collection and allow instalments, acting together with the government as long as the state of emergency is declared. |
| 13/03/2020 | 56 | Temporary suspension of the payment of the rents of commercial facilities and the decision of the owners to pay their rent in instalments. |
| 13/03/2020 | 55 | Under the management of the Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale, ⁸ the decision to reduce the contribution to be paid by the self-employed, reduce the social security rate equally over 50% of the social security rate and the income exceeding the minimum was adopted with 20 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 54 | The decision to make available accommodation facilities for the homeless and to identify the buildings belonging to the Municipality of Rome. |
| 13/03/2020 | 53 | The decision on economic measures regarding local taxes for production and hospitality activities was unanimously adopted with 25 votes in favour. |
| 13/03/2020 | 52 | The decision to assist in meeting the needs of health institutions, making hospitals free and accessible, and using hospitals in emergencies was adopted with 17 votes in favour and 5 against. |
| 13/03/2020 | 51 | The decision to extend the call for registration to kindergartens through the offices of the Municipality of Rome until 3 April 2020. |
| 13/03/2020 | 50 | The decision to take the necessary measures for the social security conditions of the workers and extend the ongoing construction permits and zoning contracts was accepted with 20 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 49 | The decision to activate emergency services for vulnerable populations at risk of isolation and coordinate service providers, unions, and cooperatives. |
| 13/03/2020 | 48 | The decision of AMA SpA ⁹ company to carry out urban waste management and to protect the health of its employees was accepted with 19 votes in favour and abstentions. |

8 <www.inps.it/nuovoportaleinps/default.aspx>

9 <www.comune.roma.it/web/it/ama-spa.page>

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| 13/03/2020 | 47 | The decision to allow users to access and use all kinds of data in the city periodically was accepted with 20 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 46 | The decision to distribute a sufficient number of masks and disposable latex gloves to the City of Rome Police Service. |
| 13/03/2020 | 45 | The decision to encourage the use of flexible working hours in all workplaces in accordance with remote working methods, protect the health of employees, and consider the relevant needs. |
| 13/03/2020 | 44 | The decision to provide more assistance to the citizens, eliminate the risk of collapse of the health system, and act by considering the protection of public health of the employees in the institutions as the primary benefit was adopted with 21 votes in favour and 5 against. |
| 13/03/2020 | 43 | The decision to solve urgent problems in the struggle for life of disabled citizens and their families, support them, and continue the education of disabled youth. |
| 13/03/2020 | 42 | The decision to continuously clean frequently used public transport vehicles, metro stations, and stops. |
| 13/03/2020 | 41 | The decision to encourage offices to clean all schools and municipal offices and deal with specialist companies that can issue certificates for products used. |
| 13/03/2020 | 40 | The decision to determine all unused intensive care quotas of the municipality in case of epidemiological emergency, open hospitals, and start social and health activities was accepted with 20 votes in favour and 5 against. |
| 13/03/2020 | 39 | The decision to home deliver basic needs for the elderly and citizens, activate a toll-free number for those with disabilities or serious illnesses, and coordinate responsible volunteers. |
| 13/03/2020 | 38 | The decision to provide protective masks to public transport drivers. |
| 13/03/2020 | 37 | The decision to exempt schools from paying lunch and transportation fees was adopted with 21 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 36 | The decision to organize an information campaign on cleaning and disinfection activities in government offices. |

| Decision Date | Decision No | Decision Summary |
|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| 13/03/2020 | 35 | The decision to provide on the municipality web portal information on the measures and risks to the citizens to minimize the risk of infection. |
| 13/03/2020 | 34 | The decision to provide food, consumables, and medicines to citizens in quarantine with a toll-free number was adopted with 25 votes in favour. |
| 13/03/2020 | 33 | The decision to close the borders of the city of Rome, if deemed necessary, was accepted with 21 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 32 | The decision to temporarily prevent evictions and foreclosures was adopted with 23 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 31 | The decision to evaluate every possible situation with the unions regarding all issues aimed at protecting the employment of the employees was adopted with 21 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 13/03/2020 | 30 | The decision to support education rights such as payment of education contributions, school meals, and school transportation was accepted with 20 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 04/09/2020 | 90 | The decision to carry out studies on the activities of tourist attractions and amusement parks. |
| 09/10/2020 | 146 | The decision to provide masks to all personnel, including the opening of schools, cleaning, implementation of health standards, transportation of students, school staff, educators, and teachers, was approved by 24 votes in favour and abstentions. |
| 09/10/2020 | 145 | The decision to protect the right to education and carry out more activities within the school structures and services was approved by 20 votes in favour and abstentions. |

Source: own.

The Municipality of Rome adopted effective decisions to reduce the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the city and successfully manage the process. The first case in Italy was seen on 31 January 2020. In the Municipality of Rome, the first council decisions regarding COVID-19 were taken one and a half months after the first case emerged. From March 2020 to December 2020, a total of 35 decisions were adopted. Most of the decisions were taken unanimously. The decisions taken during the pandemic process were generally related to the deferred and instalment payment of taxes, the protection

of the employment of the citizens, the provision of in-kind and cash aid to the citizens in need, the distribution of masks and disinfectants to the municipal employees and those in need, and education and social policies applied for children and youth.

Health Policies

The Municipality of Rome made decisions on health policies to protect the health of citizens. In the context of health policies, Italy was the country most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. Hence, there were many municipal council decisions regarding health in the city of Rome. Many decisions were adopted and health policies implemented, such as informing the public, taking precautions regarding the ways of protection from the virus, determining the number of patients in hospitals in Rome and putting all hospitals into service, distribution of masks and disinfectants, and disinfection of public transportation vehicles, subways, and stops.

Women-Old-Young-Child Policies

The policies of the Municipality of Rome cover all citizens of the city. Additionally, decisions were taken to prevent children, youth, and disabled people from being deprived of education and social activities during the pandemic. Cleaning and controlling schools, parks, entertainment centres and planning to increase green spaces for children were among the prominent policies during the pandemic.

Social Policies

In-kind and cash aids were provided to families, homeless, unemployed, disabled, and elderly people in need of help due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided to provide masks, disinfectants, gloves, and hygiene materials to municipal employees and those in need. In this process, social policies were also implemented through the free helpline and volunteers.

Economic Policies

One of the areas that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the most was the economy. The city council made important decisions to protect the employment of the citizens within its borders, defer the payment of rents, suspend and introduce instalments on payments issued through collections, and produce solutions for the problems of the homeless, the unemployed, and the disabled. Policies were also implemented to postpone the payment of the contribution that families have to pay for education and school services and support education rights such as school meals and services until the pandemic was over.

With regard to the decisions made and the policies implemented by the Rome Municipal Council, successful studies were carried out. Considering the role of local governments, as the units closest to the public, in identifying problems and producing fast and effective solutions made the importance of the local level even more visible. When the first cases emerged in Italy and were followed by a very rapid increase, the inadequacy of central policies and the

health system was revealed. However, with the work and activities of the local governments, the situation in Italy started to improve. In particular, by making decisions on health policies and putting them into practice shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, the Municipality of Rome set an example for other municipalities and positively managed the pandemic process in the city. The decision of the Municipality of Rome for all citizens living in the city also increased its success. In addition to pioneer studies, social policy decisions and especially economic decisions were adopted to support the citizens.

8 Analysis

The study examined the decisions made by the Ankara and Rome municipal councils regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Decisions relate to the period from March 2020 to December 2020. The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality unanimously adopted 27 decisions concerning the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a meaningful example of the council's solidarity with the general public health and safety. To this end, some decisions were discussed as mayoral proposals without being referred to the commissions. The first decisions came to the council's agenda about two months after the first case was seen and involved helping the families in need and distributing masks and hygiene materials. In the above period, the Municipality of Rome discussed 35 decisions. The first decisions on distributing food to the economically disadvantaged citizens concerned public health and cleanliness and hygiene of the streets. Three decisions were passed with a majority of votes. These were the decisions to reopen the health institutions affiliated with the municipality, sterilize the streets systematically, and carry out waste management activities. In some decisions, some council members abstained. The names of the commissions were not available in the decision reports of the Rome Municipal Council.

In general, decisions were mostly taken on aid materials, economic supports, health, and cleaning. Decisions for women, the elderly, the young and children were remarkable. The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality made decisions not only in the country but also in the cities with which it is related abroad. Decisions generally concerned economic support for shopkeepers and tenants of workplaces, aid to families in need, distribution of hygienic materials and masks. Otherwise, decisions were made regarding education and social policies for children and youth, food control, cleaning and physical needs of schools, amusement parks and venues, and playgrounds. Decisions were made regarding deferral of contributions to be paid for educational institutions, taking measures regarding public transportation, suspending collections and instalment payment. In addition, there were decisions about instalment payment of rents for commercial facilities, reducing self-employment contributions, extending the duration of construction permits and zoning agreements. Supporting remote working, protecting the employment of employees, tourist attractions, venues, and amusement parks were other topics concerned by the decisions. An analysis of the decisions taken by the Ankara and Rome Municipal Assemblies reveals that an important effort was put for-

ward against the COVID-19 pandemic, and effective decisions were taken in this fight. These policies will significantly strengthen the management of the pandemic in the city and support central policies. It is very difficult to manage a global pandemic in metropolitan cities such as Ankara and Rome. Decisions made in municipal councils regarding COVID-19 are crucial in terms of ensuring an effective fight. It was observed that the local policies determined and implemented by local governments had a key impact on the management of a successful process by producing solutions to urban-specific problems in cases such as disasters and pandemics.

9 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had severe impacts on all aspects of life in many parts of the world. Both central governments and local governments found themselves involved in a complex struggle. Countries had to develop a series of policies in this challenging process. How quickly and effectively the decision mechanisms and policymakers responded to problems and developing demands also affected the resulting success. In this process, the whole world turned into a kind of laboratory where each country developed public policies with a different approach.

Local governments indeed played an important role of this process. It is the responsibility of local governments to implement central government's decisions, supervise their implementation or develop policies by making some urgent and vital decisions at the local level. The importance of local governments came to the fore in the fight against the pandemic. It has thus become more important to develop local policies, especially in big cities where settlement density is high.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the same for all countries but its effects were faced differently from one country to another. Also the responses of the governments differed from one government to another. Most of hitherto research involved case studies for countries and local governments. The pandemic crisis affected all socio-political and economic levels, structures and the behaviour of individual levels of governments. Jüptnerand Klimovský (2021) studied the impacts on the case of Germany, Jüptnerand Klimovský (2021) and Szarowská (2021) on the case of the Czech regions, and Askimand Bergström (2021) on the case of Norway and Sweden. There were also studies examining other European countries. Hegeleand Schnabel (2021) examined the ways of coping with the COVID-19 crisis in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Some governments chose to adopt a centralised approach while others chose a decentralised one. Some countries, such as Norway, followed strict countermeasures while others, e.g. Sweden, followed soft measures (Askimand Bergström, 2021). As Černěnko, et. al., 2021, discussed in their research, most countries faced devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Italy was the country with the most COVID-19 cases in Europe. The ability of the central government and local government to fight against the pan-

demic and to produce policies were thus even more important in Italy than in other European countries. The rapid increase in the number of cases and their spread throughout the country, especially to the regions in the north, increased the role of the local governments. In this period, the central government and local governments worked together. The central government provided support to the municipalities for the services where the municipalities alone were not sufficiently effective. The Municipality of Rome was generally successful in managing services such as safety, sanitation, hygiene and public health issues.

In this study, which deals with the cases of Ankara and Rome municipalities, the decisions made in the fight against the pandemic in both councils were examined. Both municipalities quickly determined and put into practice the priority needs of the citizens. They supported the struggle of the central government with their decisions. Many needs were met locally and effectively. It can be concluded that, especially in unitary states, if the central government's policies are coherent with the local governments, local governments are more likely to be supported and successful in combating COVID-19. For example, the Ankara metropolitan municipality began an aid campaign for the people in need and was interrupted by the central government because the central government began an aid campaign at the same time. Similarly, the distribution of masks was discussed as to which level of government should provide this service, central or local.

It is obvious that either central or local governments cannot fight the pandemic alone. When facing a global crisis, it becomes important for municipalities to produce local policies. It is known that the services, duties and powers of the municipalities differ according to the size and population of the cities. The responsibilities of municipalities increase especially during difficult periods such as a pandemic. It is necessary for municipalities to plan budgets, make strategic plans, establish emergency committees to struggle with disasters. Municipalities should produce local policies and get the support of the central government. On the other hand, the central government should support the municipalities especially in terms of financial issues so that the municipalities can provide services quickly and effectively.

COVID-19 is not the first pandemic the world has faced. Unfortunately, the world will face more global disasters such as climate crisis, global warming, fires and floods. For this reason, some lessons should be learned from the past period. Local governments are subject to the subsidiarity principle and are the closest units to the people. Central governments should give support to local policies which can come into effect more quickly than central services. Central budget tax revenue should be extended to municipalities. All debts belonging to municipalities can be deferred or cancelled by central governments. Also, if there are restrictions on social aids, central governments should remove them. For efficient and effective policy results, if a local government can deliver a service successfully, the central government should not provide same service in the same city. To successfully combat COVID-19

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and other disasters, it is recommended that policymakers make decisions that strengthen the decision-making mechanisms and update the laws and regulations concerning the central and local governments' roles to give greater authority to local governments for effective challenges.

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