

## Sustainable Projects by Local Governments in Turkey for Street Animals: An Evaluation and Forward- Looking Recommendations

ÖNDER DENİZ, EMİNE ŞARDAĞI & GÜL COŞKUN DEĞİRMEN

**Abstract** In Turkey, local governments provide services for the protection of stray animals through many different practices. The research analyses the sustainable practices and projects of local governments, which are legally considered to be the main responsible authorities, for stray animals and develops concrete policy recommendations for the future. In this context, the activities of the three largest local governments in Turkey, namely Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, where a large part of Turkey's population lives, were analysed in detail. By applying to three major local governments from official sources, their activities for the protection of stray animals have been reached. In light of these data, very different practices and projects were encountered. Although the names of the practices and projects are different, it has been seen that the view of the problem of stray animals is the same. The research proposes an alternative application to the struggle of animals for life on the streets and the practices that support this struggle. This solution proposal is both more humane than existing projects and saves animals from the dangers on the streets. In addition, the suggestions are more sustainable than the existing projects.

**Keywords:** • street animals in Turkey • local governments • sustainable projects • animal rights • social awareness

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## 1 Introduction

The term "stray animals" is used to describe homeless and unsheltered animals, such as dogs and cats that often live on the streets, especially in Turkey (Çetin, 2021). Another definition considers street animals as those "included in domestic culture in some way but not owned by any person, persons, or institutions, lacking an individual owner or responsible party" (Tandoğan, 2022, p. 1886).

The advent of industrialization and subsequent urbanization have introduced new challenges, notably restricting the living spaces of street animals. Urbanization has led to the disappearance of certain wild animal species, the eradication of habitable spaces for street animals, and the exclusion of domesticated animals introduced to cities from these urban areas (Tandoğan, 2022). The reduction in living spaces has brought about housing problems, which in turn have led to nutritional issues (Melati, 2020). This situation has also resulted in increasing problems for both public and environmental health. Nowadays, with the process of urbanization, the areas where stray animals live are interfered with and restricted, they face nutritional problems, and issues concerning public health and environmental health are on the rise (Yılmaz & Nacar, 2020). The presence of unowned animals, not welcomed for environmental and human health reasons, is increasing due to uncontrolled breeding, abandonment of owned animals, and dumping of their offspring in the environment (Bilgili, 2021).

The number of street animals is increasing for various reasons, and the problems they face are severe (Tamzok, Kük, & Çobanoğlu, 2013). The issues encountered by street animals can be summarized under four main headings: nutrition, shelter, health, and exposure to physical, and psychological violence, and mistreatment (Akllı, 2018; Tamzok et al., 2013). Accordingly, street animals often struggle with hunger due to irregular and insufficient nutrition. Especially with urbanization reducing their living spaces, the lack of suitable shelters and the unsuitability of available shelters pose significant sheltering problems for these animals. Moreover, street animals often face health issues due to consuming spoiled food or being poisoned as part of deliberate efforts to control them. Animals living on the streets are more easily exposed to violence from people. It is easier to attack and mistreat an animal without an owner than an animal with an owner. In this respect, not only the physical health but also the psychological health of animals is damaged.

Dogs and cats that call the streets their home constitute a significant problem in every corner of the world (Sandøe, Jensen, Jensen, & Nielsen, 2019; Voslává & Passantino, 2012; Aydoğdu & Meral, 2019). Dogs and cats live on the streets in almost every city in Turkey (Demirbas, Saral, Safak, & Pereira, 2019). There are generally two reasons for this situation. The first is uncontrolled breeding and the

other is abandonment of animals by their owners (Blouin, 2012). For these reasons, it is difficult to give an exact number of stray animals in Turkey, as this number is constantly changing and difficult to estimate. Stray animals struggle to survive on their own on the streets of the city. Living on the streets means that strays face hunger, disease and a range of other dangerous situations. In particular, they are in a constant struggle to find food and are therefore often malnourished (Broom, 2019). Additionally, it is difficult for them to access clean water sources, increasing the risk of dehydration. The disease is a serious threat to stray animals. Without vaccination or regular veterinary care, these animals are at risk of contracting infectious diseases, which can spread rapidly (Aliyeva & Zeynalova, 2023). They are also more likely to get injured or physically harmed because they have to fight traffic, environmental hazards, and other animals on the streets. The harsh conditions in which stray animals live negatively affect their physical and emotional well-being. Lack of compassion and care among humans leads to these animals being exposed to traumatic experiences. Despite all these difficulties, the endurance and will to survive lead stray animals to survive and to be helped by humans from time to time.

The survival efforts of ownerless animals have reached levels that endanger both their own lives and those of humans. This is due to the increase in the animal population living among the human population and the consequent decrease in resources. As a result, animals struggle to access resources and suffer from hunger or thirst, while also posing a threat to human health as they attempt to access the already limited resources (Aydoğdu & Meral, 2019). Ownerless animals also create issues concerning animal health and welfare due to the lack of resources and necessary veterinary care (Voslářová & Passantino, 2012). Traditionally, the problem is primarily considered to be related to human health and safety. Stray and freely roaming dogs and cats pose a significant threat to human health due to their roles as vectors of diseases (Voslářová & Passantino, 2012). Stray animals found on the streets lead to numerous problems including the spread of diseases from animals to humans and to other animals; bites, scratches, and related issues; and problems related to public safety. The impact of stray animals roaming urban and peri-urban areas on public health includes the emergence and endemicity of numerous zoonoses (Seimenis & Tabbaa, 2014).

There has been a growing awareness of stray animals in Turkey over the last ten to fifteen years. This has led to several important efforts in society to help animals in every sense. A significant part of these efforts is undertaken by municipalities and non-governmental organisations. Sterilisation campaigns are an important strategy aimed at controlling the population of stray animals. These campaigns help prevent the uncontrolled breeding of animals and thus contribute to managing the number of animals living on the streets. They also enhance the quality of life for these animals and limit the spread of contagious diseases. Shelters play a

significant role in providing support for street animals. These shelters help homeless animals find a haven and protect them against injuries or adverse weather conditions. Moreover, these shelters offer regular feeding and veterinary care to the animals. Feeding stations are also important for assisting street animals. These stations regularly provide food and water to animals struggling with hunger. This improves the living conditions of street animals to some extent and alleviates their struggle with hunger.

In Turkey, there was no legal regulation directly related to animal rights until 2004 (Tamzok et al., 2013). The solution to the challenges and problems faced by ownerless animals living on the streets in Turkey is conducted under the responsibility of municipalities (local governments). Animal health, which is closely related to public health, is of great importance in controlling animals living and breeding uncontrollably on the streets (Ayvazoğlu Demir & Koç, 2019). Today, especially dogs and cats living on the streets are shown as a significant problem that needs to be solved by municipalities and the community. Since animal health is largely related to human health, the relationship between animals and humans has gained significant importance in recent times. The increasing numbers of street animals day by day and the various problems this situation brings for them necessitate serious measures, especially by metropolitan municipalities (Yılmaz & Nacar, 2020). Municipalities in Turkey carry out various activities related to the protection, care, and rehabilitation of animals. This article aims to examine the projects of local governments in Turkey towards street animals and assess the sustainability of these projects. Projects aimed at street animals seek to enhance animal welfare as well as to promote awareness and participation in this issue among the community. This article will discuss the experiences and best practices of local governments in Turkey in this field.

## **2 Public health and street animals**

The increasing population of street animals has become one of the significant global issues due to the impacts it presents to society, public health, and environmental problems (Pathak, Rajput, Shukla, & Gupta, 2024; Abdulkarim, Khan, & Aklilu, 2021). The rising population in metropolises includes city dwellers who live near animal populations and produce a substantial amount of waste. Concurrently, the number of street animals, predominantly cats and dogs, is growing daily in large cities. The increase in the number of animals on the streets necessitates more food, water, and shelter for these animals. Meeting these needs through garbage and street scavenging creates an environment that poses a threat to public health. This situation leads to serious public health issues such as an increase in animal bites, the spread of zoonoses to humans; a rise in various viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic agents that humans are exposed to, endangering their safety in public areas (Seimenis & Tabbaa, 2014; Degeling et al., 2021;

Pathak et al., 2024). Seimenis and Tabbaa (2014) state that the emergence of this situation is due to reasons such as close and intense cohabitation of humans and animals; a large number of stray animals in urban environments; financial limitations and resource scarcity, a lack of awareness about health hazards among the majority of the community, and a lack of coordination. Therefore, improving urban and peri-urban conditions regarding street animals requires integrated/coordinated management programs, which involve a significant role for municipalities as well as public and animal health services. From this perspective, creating effective programs that take into account both public health and socioeconomic issues is increasingly important (Seimenis & Tabbaa, 2014). Although making improvements in public health regarding street animals in metropolises is complex and challenging, it is a necessary element. However, it necessitates the implementation of certain measures against the potential negative impacts that street animals could have on public health (Resmi Gazete, 2006).

### **3 The approach of local governments to street animals**

The human-animal relationship has been influencing each other since the earliest periods of history and continues to do so, depending on changing conditions. In cities, where modern lives have been formed, the coexistence of humans and animals is maintained. Especially after urbanization, animals living on the streets face various life challenges. In Turkey, the solution to the challenges and problems encountered by ownerless animals living on the streets falls under the responsibility of the municipalities (local governments) (Koç & Ayazoğlu Demir, 2019).

Today, issues related to street animals have become a significant and current topic among municipalities and the public from the perspective of modern urbanism (Yiğit, Aslim, & Can, 2019; Melikoğlu & Uğurlu, 2012; Demir Erol, 2018). While animals previously played important roles in the sustenance of economic and social life, city life has led them to drift away from nature and natural resources, confining them to limited living spaces. Humans view urban life as their living space, designing and organizing these areas for their use. Consequently, animals, today, have the opportunity to exist wherever, however, and in whatever numbers humans desire (Melikoğlu & Uğurlu, 2012). This situation contributes to the increase in living problems of animals, not only in Turkey but also in different parts of the world. Around the globe, efforts are being made regarding the protection of animals, and animal rights, and addressing issues related to their feeding, shelter, and living problems (Graziadei-Darmas & Irczyk, 2019; Spencer et al., 2017; Lynette, Takayanagi, & Yamaguchi, 1998; Reese & Remer, 2017).

In Turkey, the principles for the protection of animals are established by the Animal Protection Law No. 5199<sup>1</sup>. According to Article 4, clause j of the Animal

Protection Law (2005),

Local governments, in cooperation with volunteer organizations, shall establish animal shelters to protect homeless and helpless animals by providing their care and treatment and shall conduct training activities<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, local governments may establish animal hospitals if deemed appropriate by the relevant decision-making body (Resmi Gazete, 2006).

There is no specific article or regulation in the Municipalities Law of Turkey regarding street animals<sup>3</sup>. However, the Municipalities Law indirectly regulates the duties and responsibilities of local governments concerning street animals. Additionally, the responsibilities and authorities of municipalities are regulated in the second part of the Regulation on the Protection of Animals issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry<sup>4</sup>. Regulations and policies related to street animals are usually established and implemented based on the Municipalities Law or other relevant legal regulations such as the Animal Protection Law.

The provisions related to street animals directly aimed at protection in the "First Part" titled "principles" of Article 4 of the "Animal Protection Law No. 5199" applied in Turkey are clauses a, d, and j.

These provisions state that "all animals are born equal and have the right to live within the framework of this law's provisions, so it is essential to encourage real and legal persons who look after or wish to look after homeless and helpless animals without any material gain and interest purpose, solely with humane and conscientious responsibilities, and to ensure coordination in this context, and it is fundamental for local governments, in cooperation with volunteer organizations, to establish animal shelters and hospitals to protect homeless and helpless animals by providing their care and treatment, and to conduct training activities" (Tiftik, Dilsiz, & T rel, 2015, pp. 198-199). Furthermore, the "Regulation on the Protection of Animals" includes measures to be taken by Provincial Directorates, Provincial Animal Protection Boards, and municipalities regarding homeless animals.

The measures to be taken by municipalities are listed below (Tiftik et al., 2015, pp. 199-200):

- The collection, neutering, vaccination, provision of necessary medical care, marking, and return to their original environment of ownerless or weakened animals, as well as the registration of those adopted.
- Initially recording the animals that arrive at the temporary shelter in the Stray Animal Register, observing them, performing necessary treatments, neutering,

vaccinating, marking, and then returning them to their original environment. It also involves collaborating with local animal protection officers and volunteer organizations to facilitate the adoption of animals coming to temporary shelters.

- Making announcements through municipal bulletin boards, the municipality's online platforms, and all other media outlets to promote the adoption of all animals in the temporary shelter.

- Ensuring the care, vaccination, marking, and registration of stray animals, especially dogs and cats, in the area and neighbourhoods, and coordinating with local animal protection officers, volunteer organizations, and municipal veterinarians for all activities related to neutering, returning to their original environment, and facilitating adoptions by sending them to temporary animal shelters.

- Taking necessary measures related to the collection of food suitable for feeding stray animals, with the consent of the owners of restaurants, businesses, and factories in the area, by gathering food waste generated in their establishments and kitchens.

Apart from the laws and regulations, the protection and management of stray animals can vary depending on the initiative of local governments and local regulations. Municipalities conduct activities related to the care, neutering, vaccination campaigns, operation of shelters, and adoption of street animals by their budgets and policies. Therefore, approaches to street animals can differ from one municipality to another, with these differences being particularly pronounced in large cities. The cities with the largest stray animal populations in Turkey are primarily the most populous ones, such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. In this context, municipalities carry out activities for street animals in three different areas:

- Shelters for Street Animals
- Neutering and Vaccination
- Distribution of Food and Water

Although significant steps have been taken in terms of animal rights violations within the framework of scientific and legal studies, it still seems impossible to claim that there has been a qualified development regarding the freedom, welfare, and rights of street animals today (Akillı, 2018, p. 97).

All living beings have certain basic needs. Despite differences in structure, intelligence, and abilities, all beings should be treated equally (Yıldırım, 2023). All animals have basic needs that are crucial for carrying out their life processes, and meeting these needs is of great importance.

These needs are listed as follows (International Companion Animal Management Coalition, 2024, p.3):

1. Physiological needs – e.g., food and water, appropriate temperature/humidity, air and light conditions, etc.
2. Social needs – preferring to live alone or in a group.
3. Psychological needs – activities for appropriate stimulation and to prevent boredom.
4. Environmental needs – appropriate home, space, and territory.
5. Behavioral needs – e.g., hibernation, nesting, digging.

Fulfilling the basic needs listed above requires more than just meeting the obligations outlined by laws and regulations. Work should also be carried out in the field of social responsibility, and efforts should be made regarding volunteering. Social responsibility is based on the reciprocal relationships between individuals, institutions, and organizations with all actors within society, and in this context, includes activities to be carried out related to societal problems (Özüpek, 2013). Street Animals face direct problems related to their lives within urbanized social life. These problems can be categorized under basic nutrition, exposure to physical and psychological violence and behaviour, and health issues (Akıllı, 2018).

#### **4 Developing and implementing sustainable projects for stray animals in the context of local governments**

The protection of street animals emerges as a societal issue both in Turkey and around the world. It is particularly important to educate the community on the rights to life of street animals, their care, the behaviour that should be displayed towards them, animal rights, and their protection. In the event of any problem encountered within the scope of animal protection, the community should know where to turn, convey the issue to the relevant units, and contribute to the solution. Implementing community awareness projects on these and similar topics is of great importance. As previously mentioned, various services are offered by municipalities in Turkey regarding the protection of animals. However, the care and protection of street animals is not a matter that local governments can handle alone; it requires the support of all sectors of society through conscious behaviour. Therefore, collaborations with non-governmental organizations should be developed and projects implemented, starting with community awareness training. Projects are the totality of planned activities that bring together human and physical resources within a certain time frame and budget to achieve desired outcomes (Salman, 2010).

A work must include specific phases to be considered as a project. Projects begin by identifying the problem or opportunity to be addressed. This involves conducting detailed research about the problem and opportunity, determining the best project solution, the tasks and resource requirements for this solution, the budget, and stakeholders. Risk analysis is performed. Strategies and tactics are set out, and task lists are created. As implementation proceeds, data is collected for measurement and evaluation to determine the project's effectiveness (Heerkens, 2002).

Projects consist of stages such as research, planning, implementation, measurement, and evaluation. In the preparation of a societal project, detailed research related to problem identification should first be conducted. During the research phase of a project, both primary and secondary sources are utilized. Accurate identification of the problem and its causes requires researching stakeholders and target groups related to the topic, reviewing activities and projects previously conducted related to the problem, and conducting a situational analysis based on all gathered data. Proper management of the research process is crucial for planning the project, defining the objectives, goals, strategies, and tactics during the planning stage, preparing appropriate messages for all stakeholders and target groups, setting slogans and messages, choosing effective communication channels, and developing the budget and activity plan.

In the implementation phase, messages tailored to the target audience and the activities conducted are expected to change the attitudes and behaviours of the target groups. It is also essential to measure all activities and techniques used during this phase. The success of the project in achieving its defined objectives and goals can only be determined through measurement results. Moreover, the results from project evaluations serve as valuable data for future projects. Today, project management is indispensable for organizations seeking to create benefits in various fields through different projects. Designing and managing social initiatives as project-based efforts enhances the synergistic benefits of the results, spreading these benefits more widely. Project management is essential not only for creating benefits but also for ongoing development (Radujković & Sjekavica, 2017). Especially today, based on the information above, projects should be implemented on awareness, in-kind and cash assistance, adoption, and protection related to street animals, and the continuity of these projects should be ensured, and a sustainable approach should be established. Moreover, the results of these projects must be measured and evaluated, and new projects should be developed accordingly. It is noteworthy that many local governments today have developed and implemented various projects on this issue (Güven & Yazar, 2021; Yılmaz & Nacar, 2020; Tiftik et al., 2015).

## **5 Research: Studies on the protection of stray animals in three major**

### **cities in Turkey<sup>5</sup>**

This research aims to thoroughly examine the activities and projects directed towards street animals by local governments in Turkey and to assess the sustainability of these initiatives. A literature review revealed a lack of comprehensive studies focusing on the three major cities in Turkey. While existing studies mostly focus on partial activities, there is a recognized need for these projects to be developed in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing recommendations for planning projects related to street animals, thereby laying a solid foundation for future studies. These aspects highlight the unique contributions of this study within the field (Municipality Law No. 5393, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the practices and projects of local governments in Turkey regarding street animals and to develop sustainable, concrete policy recommendations. The case study method has been used in the research. In this context, the efforts of the metropolitan municipalities of Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, which are the three largest provinces in Turkey, towards street animals have been examined. The reason for selecting these three metropolises is the high number of street animals and the volume of related activities in these cities. The data collection process of the study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the activities carried out by the three metropolises regarding street animals and news shared about these activities were examined on their websites. In the second stage, in November 2023, communication was established with the Veterinary Affairs Department Heads of the Metropolitan Municipalities of Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, and official documents related to the activities of street animals were obtained.

In Turkey, one of the most notable aspects of local government services for street animals can arguably be temporary shelters. Although the temporary shelters provided by municipalities are generally criticized in terms of their structures, they are significant rehabilitation centres for street animals. Despite being seen as permanent by the community, these shelters are temporary. Here, animals are usually collected by animal protection officers or volunteers and brought to the shelter. Street animals are housed in the shelters for a temporary period, where their basic needs are met. This includes food, water, cleaning, veterinary services, and suitable living conditions. Temporary shelters, as the municipalities call them, carry out the process of registering each animal. Each registered cat and dog helps to reunite them with their owners and facilitates the tracking of stray animals. Many temporary shelters carry out sterilisation and vaccination of animals. This prevents the uncontrolled breeding of stray animals and prevents the spread of infectious diseases. Temporary shelters can cooperate to direct healthy and properly rehabilitated animals to permanent owners or foster families. Thus,

animals can find permanent homes.

When the activities of local governments in Turkey towards stray animals are analysed, it is observed that there is a practice that can lead to controversy and ethical problems as well as positive steps. This practice involves the practice of releasing stray animals back to the streets after temporary animal shelters. Releasing stray animals back to the streets can carry serious risks to their health and welfare.

Firstly, stray animals are at risk of starvation, bad weather, traffic hazards and various other hazards when they are left on the streets. Limited food and water resources make it difficult for these animals to fight hunger, while living conditions become even more difficult during cold winter months or hot summer days. This can shorten their lifespan and cause health problems. In addition, many volunteers and animal rights defenders criticise the conditions of temporary animal shelters within municipalities. Cramped conditions and inadequate care and healthcare in these shelters can contribute to animals living under stress and the spread of diseases. Therefore, releasing animals from such shelters back onto the streets may be contrary to the aim of improving their quality of life. In this context, the work carried out by local governments in Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, for stray animals is of great importance. Administrations in these cities should carry out various programs to improve the welfare of stray animals, control their populations and minimize human-animal conflicts. These efforts can contribute to promoting a more humane and ethical approach not only in these cities but across the country. At the same time, better planning and resource allocation are required to respond more effectively to the shelter, nutrition and medical needs of stray animals. Within the scope of this research, in November 2023, the Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorates affiliated with the Metropolitan Municipalities of Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir were contacted, and official documents regarding the activities conducted for street animals were obtained. Based on the obtained documents, the activities carried out by the three major cities for street animals are as follows:

### **5.1 Istanbul**

The veterinary services offered by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality encompass a comprehensive emergency intervention and rehabilitation program. This program provides emergency intervention services for traffic accidents and other traumatic emergencies occurring outside of working hours at shelter units that operate 24/7 on both the Anatolian and European sides of the city. Animals in such conditions receive necessary emergency medical interventions from the moment they are taken in. Moreover, the veterinary services of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality also offer various rehabilitation services to stray

animals during working hours at specific shelters like Kısırkaya, Gümüşdere, Cebeci, and units such as the Animal Vaccination and Treatment Unit. These services include neutering, vaccination, marking, and registration.

Considering the results of the activities carried out in 2022, a total of 177,617 examinations and treatments, 53,050 vaccinations, 65,300 microchip registrations, and 39,811 neutering procedures were completed. These rehabilitation services and related statistics are detailed on the official website of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The coordination and execution of these services involve collaboration with volunteers and organizations, district municipalities, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, complying with Animal Protection Law No. 5199. After rehabilitation, the animals are released back into their natural habitats, and food is distributed at designated points for their feeding.

The most up-to-date information, photos and videos about the veterinary services of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality are shared regularly on the municipality's official website and social media accounts, thus informing the public and ensuring transparency. These services can be considered an important step towards improving the welfare of homeless animals in the city and can be seen as part of the local government's efforts to fulfil their responsibilities regarding animal welfare.

## 5.2 Ankara

The activities carried out and services provided by Ankara Metropolitan Municipality towards stray animals are a concrete indicator of the importance the municipality attaches to animal welfare. Although there is no clear information on the estimated number of stray animals living within the municipal borders, a comprehensive support system for these animals has been developed by the municipality. Two Temporary Animal Care Homes and Rehabilitation Centers are operated within the municipality, in Sincan and Gölbaşı, with a total capacity of 3,500 stray animals. These centres meet the needs of stray animals such as neutering, vaccination, tagging, adoption, feeding and treatment.

A total of 99,800,000 TL has been allocated by the municipality for the care and rehabilitation of stray animals for 2023. This allowance covers items such as personnel expenses, medication purchases and food purchases. 197 personnel work in carrying out services for stray animals. As of the end of November 2023, 19,456 stray animals were sterilized, 1,409,266 veterinary services were provided in the same period, and 585 stray animals were adopted as of the end of September (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorate, 2023a).

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (Spreading kindness for the animal friends in the capital, 2020) has taken important steps to expand the existing shelter capacity. In October 2020, KISAMER Gölbaşı Stray Animal Neutering and Adoption Centre was opened and a Cat Treatment Unit with a capacity of 400 cats and a postoperative area with a capacity of 700 dogs were put into service in 2021. In addition, the construction of a new Temporary Animal Care and Rehabilitation Centre with a capacity of 6,000 animals in Karataş, Çankaya is nearing completion and is planned to open in 2023. These developments demonstrate the municipality's commitment to improving the welfare of stray animals and providing them with a better life.

### **5.3 Izmir**

Izmir Metropolitan Municipality's Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorate provides comprehensive services for stray animals in line with Animal Protection Law No. 5199 and other relevant legislation. These services are provided 24 hours a day, every day of the week, through the Stray Animals Emergency Response Unit, which carries out a meticulous assessment process for animals in emergencies and provides treatment services with facilities equipped with modern medical equipment. This unit is the only public organisation that provides continuous service to stray animals throughout Izmir and provides an effective and rapid response, especially in cases requiring urgent intervention.

In collaboration with district municipalities, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality also provides support during working hours to meet the needs of street animals. Moreover, feeding stations have been established at suitable locations throughout the city, considering animal health, environmental, and public health, with regular feeding activities tailored to the seasonal needs of street animals. Between 2019 and 2023, the units within the Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorate conducted examinations and emergency interventions for 146,102 street animals, sterilized 745,142 street animals, and performed surgical operations on 33,700 street animals. The sterilization, care, and treatment of street animals can be carried out both by district municipalities and through the relevant units of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality. Citizens can apply for sterilization procedures by obtaining an appointment online through the municipality's 153 telephone line, the Small Animal Clinic in Kültürpark, or the Pako Street Animals Social Life Campus on the 20th of each month. Izmir Metropolitan Municipality places great importance on ensuring that street animals live in harmony with the environment and the public and on enhancing their welfare. It is emphasized that all related institutions and organizations need to show the same level of sensitivity for more effective and rapid progress in this area.

## **6 Projects of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir Metropolitan Municipalities**

### **for stray animals**

Information obtained from meetings with local governments in the three major cities covered by the research, along with information on the projects carried out by these local governments regarding the subject, has been researched from the institutions' own websites. In this context, information about the projects carried out in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir is presented below.

#### **6.1 Istanbul**

##### **6.1.1 Adopt our canine friends Istanbul project<sup>6</sup>**

The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), in collaboration with Istanbul Volunteers and SemtPati, has initiated a project aimed at facilitating the adoption of street animals. The IMM aims to find permanent homes for dogs residing in Stray Animal Temporary Shelters through this project. Animal lovers interested in adopting from IMM shelters can submit preliminary applications via the SemtPati app. The application process for the project, which is expected to contribute to increasing the number of dogs adopted, will be managed by Istanbul Volunteers through the SemtPati app. Istanbul residents who wish to adopt a dog and have completed the application form will be united with their new furry friends following an evaluation by Istanbul Volunteers and the IMM Veterinary Directorate. The app, which includes pages featuring each dog's age, gender, and photograph, also provides basic information on animal health and care. The "SemtPati" mobile application can be downloaded for free on iOS and Android devices. As part of the "Adopt Istanbul" project, 218 dogs were successfully adopted in the first nine months of 2023 (Istanbul Volunteers, 2023).

##### **6.1.2 Vetbüs project<sup>7</sup>**

Launched by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) in 2019, the Vetbus project offers mobile clinic services to street animals. Based on requests received through the "Alo 153" call centre, schedules are created for the Vetbuses to be dispatched to areas in need. Within the scope of the project, street animals across 39 districts undergo comprehensive health screenings through Vetbuses, and those in poor condition are transported to IMM's animal care homes for treatment until they recover. Citizens can also bring street animals to the Vetbuses for treatment. Each Vetbus is equipped with a veterinary team ready to perform examinations and treatments (Health screening service with Vetbus, 2018).

The Vetbus project provides health screenings, vaccination programs, internal and external parasite treatments, and microchipping for street animals. If an animal does not have a serious illness, it receives outpatient treatment, is identified with a

microchip, and is registered in the system. This allows for the animal's information to be easily accessed later on.

The IMM's Department of Agricultural Services, Veterinary Services Directorate, has expanded the service points of the Vetbus, including university campuses. Initially, services such as internal and external parasite treatment, rabies vaccination, microchipping, treatment, and emergency transport to shelters were started at Yıldız Technical University Davutpaşa Campus and Yeditepe University Kayışdağı Campus. A team consisting of veterinary surgeons, veterinary technicians, and support staff provides services on campuses between 11:00 and 14:00 on scheduled dates<sup>8</sup>. Health screenings are also conducted for stray animals in forested areas. In the first operation, approximately 100 stray animals received health screenings and anti-parasite treatment. Within approximately two months of the Vetbus project, health screenings and parasite treatments were performed for about 280 street animals, and 14 animals were adopted (Vetbus begins to provide services in university campuses, 2023).

## **6.2 Ankara**

### **6.2.1 Stray animal sterilization project<sup>9</sup>**

The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (ABB) is mobilizing its resources and collaborating with the Association of Private Animal Hospitals (OHHAD) to control the unregulated population of street animals. By the cooperation protocol signed with OHHAD, ABB is conducting collection and neutering operations for stray street animals in collaboration with 13 private animal hospitals across the capital. Animals taken from their locations to private animal hospitals are rested for a day before undergoing neutering surgery (Spreading kindness for the animal friends in the capital, 2020). After a 5-day treatment period, the animals are released back into their natural habitats. As part of the project, the Metropolitan Municipality neutered a total of 7,459 street animals over four months, with 1,485 in May, 2,228 in June, 1,836 in July, and 1,910 in August. The municipality aims to neuter an average of 24,000 street animals per year to control the unregulated street animal population. The project aims to bring the population under control within 2 years (Turkey's most comprehensive sterilization project, 2022)

### **6.2.2 Food production project for stray animals<sup>10</sup>**

The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (ABB) has opened a facility with a daily production capacity of 3 tons of pet food, a first in Turkey, at the Sincan Temporary Animal Shelter and Rehabilitation Center (Spreading kindness for the animal friends in the capital, 2020). The facility uses surplus production and recycled food materials for pet food production. Initially, the municipality plans to produce 1 ton of pet food per day at the facility, aiming to save 3.5 million TL

annually through the recycling of food into pet food. Operating under the principle that "every life is valuable in the capital," the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality has taken action to produce pet food with a daily capacity of 3 tons, marking a first in Turkey. The Health Affairs Department has started producing pet food at the Sincan Temporary Animal Care Home and Rehabilitation Center using surplus production and recycled food materials. The savings of 3.5 million TL per year generated by this project are planned to be used to meet other needs of street animals (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality begins food production for stray animals, 2022)

### **6.2.3 E-pati project<sup>11</sup>**

With the "E-Pati" application, citizens who report injured street animals by calling the Başkent 153 line will be able to obtain information online about the condition of the injured animals. Through the application accessible at 'patio.ankara.bel.tr', animal lovers will also be able to adopt cats and dogs. The Metropolitan Municipality will enable the adoption of stray animals rehabilitated at the Sterilization and Adoption Center (KISAMER), Gölbaşı Temporary Animal Shelter, and Sincan Temporary Animal Shelter and Rehabilitation Center through the e-pati application. Animal lovers, who must be over the age of 18, can select the cat or dog they wish to adopt via the 'e-pati. Ankara.bel.tr' website. An adoption record will be issued to applicants who submit their application along with a copy of their ID and a residence declaration (A new animal-friendly application, 2021).

### **6.2.4 Pati park project<sup>12</sup>**

The Metropolitan Municipality has established "Paw Parks" (A project to delight animal lovers: Pati parks are being established, 2021) in the capital, specifically in Öveçler Valley and Batıkent Yıldırım Beyazıt Park, to allow pets to roam and spend time freely. These parks were prepared by the Directorate of Environmental Protection and Control following requests from citizens who faced difficulties walking their pets. In response to the feedback received and anticipating future requests, there are plans to increase the number of paw park areas in the coming days (A project to delight animal lovers: Pati parks are being established, 2021).

### **6.2.5 Leftover food collection project<sup>13</sup>**

The Health Affairs Directorate of the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality has initiated the "Leftover Food Collection Project," aimed at meeting the nutritional needs of street animals with surplus food collected from bakeries, cafes, and restaurants. Businesses interested in participating in the project, launched under the slogan "No More 'Leftovers' in Ankara," can offer their food leftovers by

calling 0312 507 22 47. The Metropolitan Municipality collects leftover meals throughout the day from restaurants, cafes, and bakeries to feed street animals across the city, providing this service free of charge (Spreading kindness for the animal friends in the capital, 2020).

### **6.3 Izmir**

#### **6.3.1 Izmir Metropolitan Municipality produces for canine friends<sup>14</sup>**

The Izmir Metropolitan Municipality has taken another pioneering step in Turkey by developing and starting the production of a special pet food formula for feeding animals under protection at Pako Street Animals Social Life Campus and other shelters. The initiative to produce quality and tasty pet food was motivated by the requirement for municipalities to purchase pet food through tender regulations, which often leads to the procurement of the cheapest options that are not particularly favoured by dogs. As a result, the IMM has begun producing high-quality and healthy pet food in its facilities. Thanks to the formula developed by experts employed by the municipality, pet food with high nutritional value is being produced using black soldier fly (BSF) larvae. The facility established within the municipality procures raw materials for dog food production (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality produces for animal friends, 2023). The facility utilizes eco-friendly, tropical black soldier flies, which lack mouths and stingers, pose no risk of biting or disease transmission, and have a very short lifespan. The harvested BSF larvae, rich in protein and calcium and free from any additives and preservatives, are processed into BSF flour. This flour is then transformed into pet food at the final stage of production in the pet food manufacturing facility located at the Izmir Pako Street Animals Social Life Campus. The project aims to eliminate the need to purchase dog food and, in the future, to meet the nutritional needs of street animals with pet food produced by the municipality (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Health Affairs Department Directorate, 2023).

#### **6.3.2 Rehabilitation service for stray dogs project<sup>15</sup>**

The Izmir Metropolitan Municipality has initiated a project in collaboration with the Izmir Veterinary Surgeons Chamber to neuter street dogs, aiming to prevent uncontrolled reproduction of street animals and to protect animal welfare and public health (Rehabilitation services for stray dogs begin in Izmir, 2022). Through this project, animals are being tagged with ear tags and microchips for real-time tracking, and they are transported to hospitals or clinics where they also receive rabies vaccinations and parasite treatment. The protocol aims to neuter 500 dogs per month (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorate, 2023a). The project planned to be implemented across Izmir, starts in districts with a high population of street dogs. Member clinics of the Izmir

Veterinary Surgeons Chamber neutered 982 dogs of prohibited breeds within two days (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorate, 2023b).

#### **6.4. An assessment of the projects by Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir Metropolitan Municipalities for street animals**

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, in collaboration with civil society organizations, aims to improve animal welfare and promote the adoption of shelter animals through the "Adopt Our Dog Friends Istanbul Project". Stakeholder participation has been ensured in this regard. The continuity of the project's promotion effectively, and the ongoing public transparency of collaboration processes are crucial. Currently, various news articles and press releases related to this project have been found only on the relevant institutions' websites. However, no website specifically managed and updated for the project has been found. Furthermore, it appears that the project only includes processes related to adoption and the care and training of homeless animals. Informing the target audience about more activities, increasing stakeholder support, and expanding the scope of work are important for defining this as a project. No detailed information about the project's budget, activity plans, or goals has been found. The project measurements have only mentioned the number of animals adopted. The project needs further development in this context.

The Vetbüs project, aimed at improving animal health and treatment, seeks to enhance animal welfare. No information about the project's stakeholders, objectives, slogan, sustainability, or long-term measurement results is available on the institution's website. The project is only presented in the news section, and it does not have its own website.

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality's "Sterilization Project for Street Animals" has involved cooperation between the public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations. It features extensive stakeholder participation. The outputs of the work carried out during the project have been provided periodically. Additionally, the project information includes assurances of sustainability over a two-year period. However, the information provided about the project cycle appears insufficient. Like other projects, it has been presented as a news item on the institution's website. No detailed public information page directly accessible for the project has been found.

The "Food Production Project for Street Animals" aims to create benefits for the feeding of animals. The project's objectives are clearly stated. No information about the project outcomes or processes has been found. No detailed information or a website showing the project's continuity has been encountered.

Information about projects named E-Pati, Pati Park, Excess Food Collection, and Izmir Metropolitan Municipality Producing for Dog Friends, found on the institution's website, are merely promotional briefings, with no detailed information about the project processes and activities conducted.

The "Rehabilitation Services Project for Street Dogs" is a participatory project with its goals and processes clearly laid out. Limited information is provided about the project measurement, and insufficient details are given regarding resource creation, social benefit, effectiveness, and sustainability of the project.

## **7 Sustainable solution proposal**

The problem of stray animals in Turkey has had an important place on the agenda of both local governments and non-governmental organizations for years. However, current projects and local government efforts have been insufficient to take permanent and effective steps towards solving this problem. The main problems faced by stray animals include issues such as inadequate shelter capacity, uncontrolled reproduction, malnutrition and access to healthcare. Temporary solutions and limited resources implemented by local governments are far from creating a permanent effect in solving the problem. Considering this comprehensive approach and Turkey's specific structural conditions, it is clear that the implementation of legal sanctions against animal owners and local administrations will play a critical role in solving a large part of the current problem. The rationale for these sanctions is to provide radical and sustainable solutions to the problem of stray animals, both to increase animal welfare and to minimise the negative effects on public health. Adoption and trade through official channels, registration and chipping of animals, increasing ownership responsibilities, more active role of local authorities and compliance with standards are vital for effective management of this problem. In addition, these approaches are also important for protecting animal rights, reuniting lost animals with their families and keeping the stray animal population under control. Another important aspect is that all activities are carried out by monitoring the planning and project stages. It has been observed that many studies conducted in this context are quite insufficient. Ensuring that the activities related to street animals are sustainable is very important in solving the problem. This issue is not only of a temporary nature but continues in the long term. Therefore, creating sustainable projects, raising awareness among relevant target groups, and involving their support in the process enable the projects to be conducted more effectively.

In this direction, solutions to the problem of stray animals are proposed under three main headings:

1. Sanctions directed at animal owners:
  - Mandatory registration and microchipping of all domestic animals.
  - Annual checks on the health and ownership status of domestic animals.
  - Official reporting of deaths or births of domestic animals, with severe legal penalties for non-compliance.
  - Animal trade and ownership should only be conducted through official channels, with a complete ban on animal sales. Even free adoption should be done through legal, official sources.
2. Sanctions directed at local governments:
  - Collection of ownerless animals on the streets by local governments and their transfer to permanent animal shelters.
  - Mandatory compliance of all local governments with standards set by the central government for animal shelters.
  - Quick transfer of street animals to permanent shelters.
3. Additional recommendations:
  - Development of public relations projects related to the relationships between local governments and non-governmental organizations, and encouragement of volunteer work in animal shelters.
  - Heavy penalties for animal owners and local governments that do not comply with the rules.
  - Increase in the number of projects aimed at raising awareness about the care and correct feeding methods for animals found on the streets.
  - Implementation of projects aimed at informing and raising awareness about animal rights and care for younger age groups, preparation of various public service announcements, children's books, cartoons, etc., by relevant units and spreading these projects to schools through national education directorates.
  - Efforts by local governments to change the negative image associated with works related to domestic animals and strengthen the positive image through press relations, ensuring that projects receive more media coverage.

The uncompromising implementation of the practices suggested for solving the street animal problem in Turkey, supported by legal sanctions, is of great importance for both protecting animal rights and enhancing societal welfare. In this context, measures such as the registration and microchipping of pets, health checks, and strict regulation of animal trade should be firmly implemented on a legal basis. Sanctions directed at local governments and the enhancement of shelter standards are crucial parts of this process. Strengthening these practices with legal sanctions will encourage a culture of responsible pet ownership and offer permanent solutions to the street animal problem. Each of these fundamental steps should be project-managed, and the project cycle (research-plan-implement-measure and evaluate) should be followed by the unit or organization running the

project to most accurately and effectively convey it to the target audiences. Messages prepared according to the target audience should be conveyed using the most appropriate communication techniques and channels. Creating an environment where the mandatory behaviour enforced by legal sanctions is embraced with sympathy as a responsible act for societal life will make such projects more effective and widely accepted.

Moreover, the provision of necessary financial support for the resolution of this issue can be facilitated through various mechanisms. In Turkey, local governments generally fund all activities related to street animals from their own budgets. Alternative financial initiatives such as donation campaigns, grant programs, and collaborations with non-governmental organizations, which could alleviate the financial burden on local governments, are seldom utilized. By organizing campaigns through online donation platforms, it is possible to gather support from diverse segments of society. These platforms offer a spectrum of fundraising opportunities ranging from small amounts to substantial donations. Collaborating with local or national animal protection associations allows for the effective utilization of these organizations' existing resources and networks.

## **8 Conclusion**

Although local governments in Turkey are endeavouring to address the problem through existing initiatives and projects for stray animals, the problem of stray animals is still a major challenge, especially in big cities. With the enactment of Law No. 5199 on the Protection of Animals, local governments have assumed a great responsibility. In this framework, the local governments of the three big cities of Turkey have allocated a high budget for stray animals and assigned qualified personnel. Nevertheless, the problem of stray animals in these three big cities continues. The works carried out day by day cause more financial burden to local governments. The persistence of the problem necessitates more radical steps to be taken.

Different projects should be implemented to ensure that stray animals such as cats and dogs living in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir can live in a safe and healthy environment. Keeping animals on the streets is not sustainable. For this reason, local administrations should find permanent healthy environments for stray animals. In addition, the existing laws on animal ownership are inadequate. It is a common practice in Turkey to abandon domestic animals and their offspring on the streets. Although this is a criminal offence, no sanctions are imposed on animal owners. Animal ownership is completely unregistered. Local and central administrations have left the health and care of domestic animals largely to the initiative of their owners.

Imposing enforceable sanctions on local authorities and animal owners is of critical importance in tackling the problem of stray animals. Measures such as the registration of domestic and stray animals, the implantation of chips, regular health checks and the reporting of the birth or death of animals should be implemented swiftly. In addition, strict regulation of animal ownership and trade, the obligation of local governments to collect stray animals, to comply with shelter standards, and the imposition of severe penalties on both animal owners and local governments in case of non-compliance with the rules will make significant contributions to the solution of the stray animal problem. Implementation of these measures with a holistic approach will both increase the welfare of stray animals and improve the quality of life in the communities in which these animals and humans live together.

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#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup><https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5199&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=5199&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.5393.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2006/05/20060512-7.htm>

<sup>5</sup> This document has been prepared based on official information obtained in response to applications made to the Health Affairs Department Directorates and Veterinary Affairs Branch Directorates of the Metropolitan Municipality Mayoralties of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir within the Republic of Turkey. Specifically, the information pertains to application number 2306483674 dated 20 October 2023 for Istanbul, application number 540099 dated 20 December 2023 for Ankara, and application number 2306544990 dated 10 October 2023 for Izmir.

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.istanbulgonulluleri.org/sahiplen\\_istanbul](https://www.istanbulgonulluleri.org/sahiplen_istanbul)

<sup>7</sup> <https://tarim.ibt.istanbul/tr/haberler/3431/vetbus-ile-sokak-hayvanlarina-saglik-taramasi-hizmeti.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://tarim.ibt.istanbul/tr/haberler/11810/vetbus-universite-kampuslerinde-de-hizmet-vermeye-basladi.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/turkiye-nin-en-kapsamli-kisirlastirma-projesi-devam-edyor-15856>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/ankara-buyuksehir-sokak-hayvanlari-icin-mama-uretimine-basladi-15235>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/buyuksehir-belediyesinden-hayvan-dostu-yeni-uygulama-e-pati-14676>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/buyuksehirden-hayvanseverleri-sevindiren-proje-pati-parklar-kuruluyor-14459>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/baskentte-can-dostlar-icin-iyilik-bulasiyor-13626>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.izmir.bel.tr/tr/Haberler/izmir-buyuksehir-belediyesi-can-dostlar-icin-uretiyor/49117/156>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.izmir.bel.tr/tr/Haberler/izmirde-sahipsiz-sokak-kopekleri-icin-rehabilitasyon-hizmeti-basladi/46364/156>.

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