

Developing Child-Sensitive Strategies in Local Government

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Actors of various sizes all participate in local programmes, plans and actions on the path towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. International and regional cooperation are necessary for attaining these goals, for which central government may prove more crucial in its effects, while the inclusion of local actors is imperative for following both a more efficient path and achieving democratic participation.

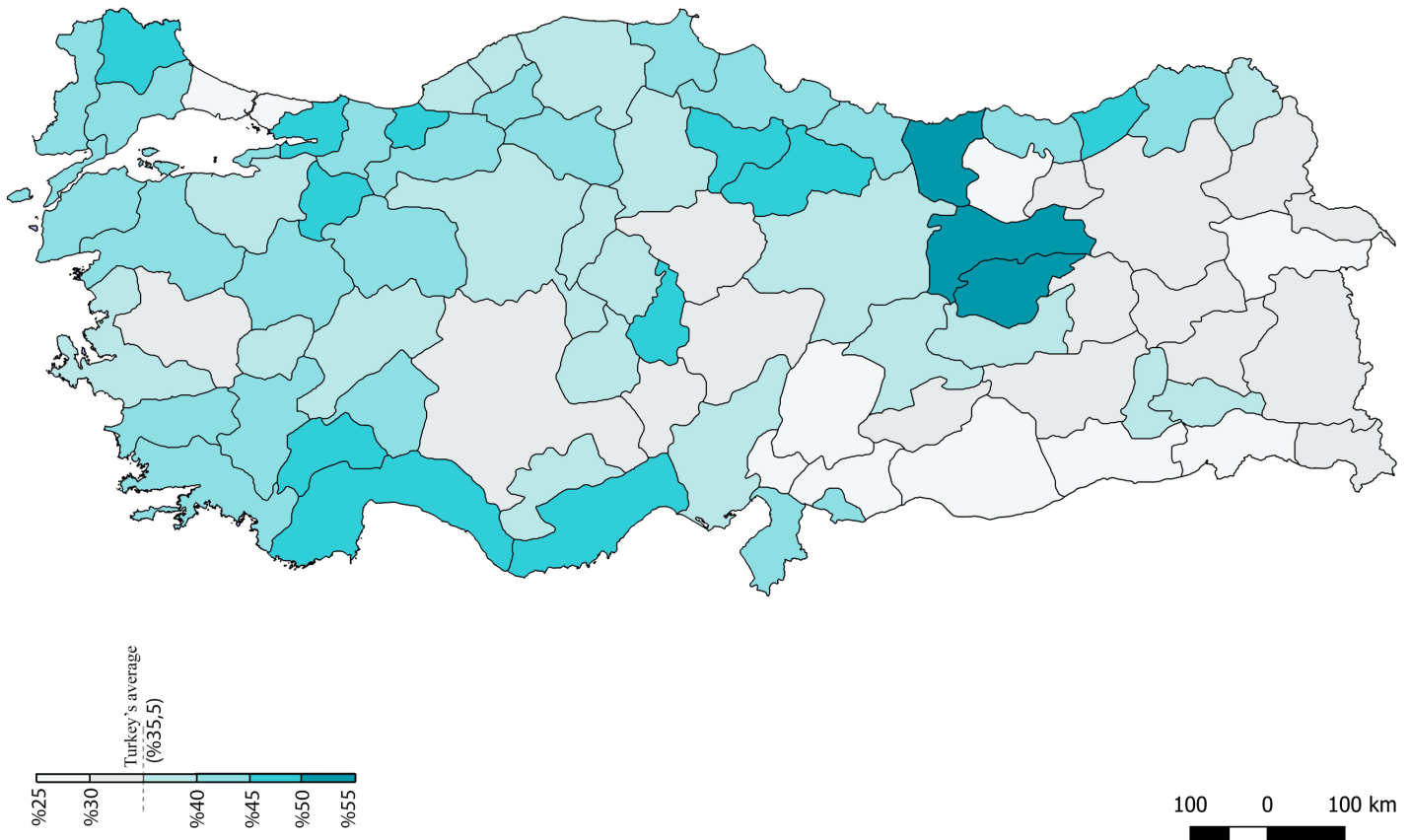
It is thus timely to highlight the importance of local participation in identifying and implementing the 11th Sustainable Development Goal, Sustainable City and Human Settlements. This goal, in which the issues of the right to the city under inclusion(1) the creation of accessible and safe urban spaces for all, and the active and direct participation of civil society come to the forefront, necessitates the active participation of metropolitan municipalities of local governments, as well as district municipalities which are in most contact on many issues with the city's residents.

Some general information about the extent to which local governments take into account the principle of sustainability when providing services points towards the fact that out of 39 district municipalities, 32 used the term sustainability in their 2015 strategic plan, and 21 identified sustainability as a goal (Argüden et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, including the term sustainability in the strategic plan does not mean that municipalities act accordingly. At this point a detailed analysis of services becomes necessary. In this article, the accessibility of local services towards developing sustainable cities, which rest on striking a balance between economic, ecological and social elements, and participation in decision-making, will be debated on the basis of child inclusion in İstanbul.

Why we focus on the issue of child inclusion can be explained by the fact that children are amongst the city's most disadvantaged groups, and constitute more than a quarter of İstanbul's population. Moreover, there reside among children other relatively disadvantaged groups such as the poor, disabled and refugees. Another explanatory factor is that once urban services are made accessible for children, these services will become accessible for most other groups as well.

Figure 1: Net level of schooling in preschool education among population aged 3-5 by cities (Ministry of National Education 2016/'17 Formal Education Statistics)(2)



An evaluation of child equality and participation in İstanbul

There are limited data resources at present for evaluating the benefits enjoyed in İstanbul at the local level on inclusion's principle of access for all, hence we will narrow down our analytic scope and focus on pre-school educational services. Less than a third of children in Turkey enjoy the pre-school educational services provided by the public and private sectors (Word Bank, 2015). In İstanbul, the level of schooling in preschool education (Figure 1) is lower than Turkey's average (Eğitim Sen, 2017).

Among the preschool educational services affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, there are 1313 kindergartens; out of which only 134 are public and the remaining 1179 are private. As for pre-elementary schools, the opposite distribution persists. Considering the size of the population, the number of free of charge kindergartens in İstanbul is significantly low (Fg 2).

When viewed against the geographic distribution of institutions on the level of districts, the inequalities within the city become more pronounced.

The number of registered students shows that preschool establishments are concentrated in districts of high socio-economic status (Fg 3).

When we compare the proportion of children in individual districts with the population of children in the city, and that of registered children in public preschool establishments in each district with registered children across the city (Fg 3), we see in the district groups marked red that the proportion of registered children in preschools fall below that of children across the city. For instance, while the district of Beşiktaş is ranked 35 out of the 39 district areas in the number of children registered in preschools (its share in the entire city is 1,1%), due to its low child population (0,7%) it stands as the most inclusive district.

On the other hand, while the population of children in the district of Esenyurt comprise 7,8% of the entire child population, the number of children registered in preschool public institutions comprise only 4,3% of all children in the city. In other peripheral districts where the child population is concentrated, the insufficiency of preschool education services become more pronounced.

As such, although one can assume that children in districts where these services are lacking can commute to neighbouring districts, it is safe to conclude that access to preschool education services across the city is not equal. In cases where planning is not undertaken according to need, access to services such as nurseries/kindergartens, where physical distance gains importance, puts the city's residents into much financial and temporal hardship.

Figure 2: Preschool education establishments in İstanbul (National Directorate of Education in İstanbul, 2017)

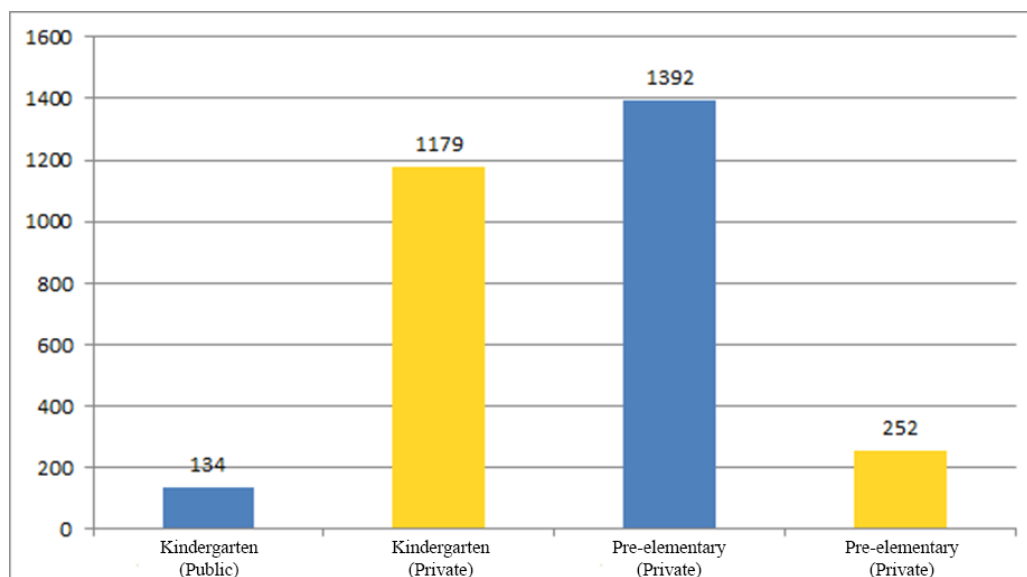
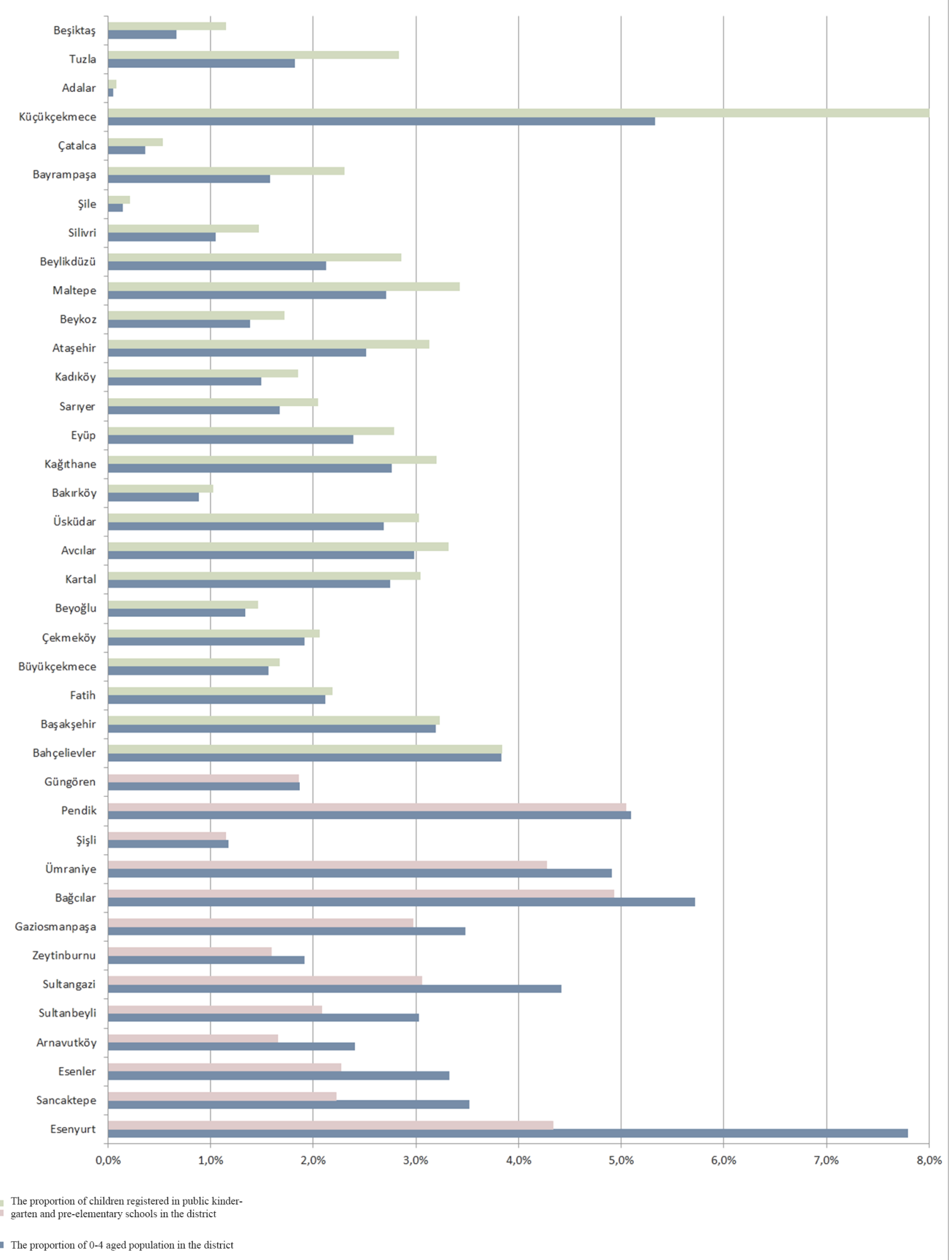


Figure 3: Levels of schooling in preschool education and child population in İstanbul municipal districts (National Directorate of Education in İstanbul, 2017; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018)



"within the capacity of day care centres, only 6% is reserved for children aged below 3"

Another important matter with regards preschool establishments is the significant lack of inclusion of the 0-3 age group. World Bank research survey (2015:8) shows that "within the capacity of day care centres, only 6% is reserved for children aged below 3." One of the most important reasons for this is that kindergartens that are free of charge and affiliated with the Ministry of National Education do not accept children younger than 3.

While İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and some district municipalities operate day care centres for children(3), this free of charge or low-priced service does not cover the 0-3 age group (Erginli, 2018)(4). In this case, achieving participation, another important principle of inclusion, corresponds to the role that children and civil society organizations that work in the area of children play in local governance. While not constituting an ideal model of participation(5), children's councils that convene under citizen councils act as a tool for municipalities to ensure children's participation.

Yet, it is known that this mechanism is not even created by most municipalities(6), and where created, children's participation remains at a most symbolic level(7). Children are thus limited to attending events that are mostly planned by adults, rather than affect those decisions that concern them. On the other hand, it is a matter of another evaluation to what extent these councils, which do not work efficiently with regards participation, include poor, disabled and refugee children.

It is without doubt important that children participate in urban governance on matters that concern them directly. Still, the discussions on the possibility of participation in all decisions –as in the case of all other groups– increase when it comes to child participation(8).

As such, both participation, and the circumstances and the level at which participation is to be undertaken must be discussed(9). On the other hand, the age range of children on municipalities' children's councils is 8-15. There thus arises the issue of parents' participation when decision-making concerns children below the age of 8.

Recommendations on children's right to the city

The development of child-sensitive policies for inclusive local governance along the principles of equal enjoyment of services and participation can be ensured by bringing to forth the issues addressed above with the requisite data, and with central and local government, in acting simultaneously to provide solutions to the issues of their stakeholders, activating participation mechanisms(10). In light of the above discussion, some recommendations are:

The increase in the number of preschool establishments and the opportunity of **all children** to benefit from this service must be parallel. In responding to need, these institutions must also cover children **under 3**. Therefore, neighbourhood-level profiles of households within the city must be produced, and the capacity of and gaps within existing services must be identified using the same measure.

Based on these data, priority areas are an increase in the number of **free of charge** kindergartens (preschool educational institutions) and that these institutions cover children aged between 0-3.

Ministry of Family and Social Policies affiliated nursery services for children aged between 0-3 must be made **free of charge**, or **scholarship** opportunities must be expanded.

When making decisions with regards services, **local governments** (especially district municipalities), which have stronger relations with urban residents than central government, must make **similar, yet more comprehensive and detailed analyses**. This recommendation, although not novel, is one that must be renewed continuously⁽¹¹⁾. Local governments must intervene more frequently in places where central governments are lacking.

To monitor these services for children by local governments, **child-sensitive budgeting** must be undertaken, and a **child unit** created. These units must identify issues such as child labour, lack of access to schools, and girls' relative disadvantage at the local level. Child-sensitive policies must be devised in these directions.

The number of children's councils, which serve as an important tool for **child participation**, must be increased. Moreover, they must be made more efficient and strengthened. The impact of the decisions of these councils on decision-making at the municipality level must be ensured.

In light of the inability of children under the age of 8 to participate in the councils and **parents' excessive influence on decisions concerning small children**, new participatory mechanisms for children of this age group must be created.

In line with the principle of **transparency**, **data** collected for the purpose of monitoring urban services must be made available to urban residents and civil society organisations. The ability to monitor local services by urban residents is a precondition of both equality and participation.

Notes

1. When proposing the Right to the City, Lefebvre (2003 [1970]) foresees the world's march towards complete urbanisation, thus arguing that cities, too, are controlled by capital and the state. The right to the city, which can be summarized as the city's residents taking control, includes the equal enjoyment of the opportunities within the city by all, and the participation of everyone in the decisions that concern the city. This term, proposed by Lefebvre, is strengthened by David Harvey (2008) in his article, 'The Right to the City'. Harvey argues that the right to the city goes beyond access to the city's resources, and includes the right to transform ourselves by transforming the city. Equality and participation are the two utmost components of the right to the city. In this article too, the inclusion of children will be examined on the basis of these two elements.

2. "Institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and day-care centres established in workplaces as per the Labour Law are included" (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2017:35)

3. The Chamber of Accounts ruled that, in the law that regulates the duties and responsibilities of metropolitan municipalities "there exists no provision that the nursery and kindergarten needs of employees' children must be provided for by the municipal budget". Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, despite its appeals against the judgment, has had to stop delivering free of charge nursery services for its employees since 1 January 2018 (The Chamber of Accounts described the municipalities' nursery services as 'budget deficit', 2018)

4. In districts – except for Esenyurt, Sancaktepe and Şişli – where municipalities cater nursery/day care centre services, we see that public preschool institutions already have higher levels of children registered in them (see Erginli, 2018:22 and Fig 3). In other words, in general, districts where municipality services are concentrated are the same as those where establishments affiliated with the Ministry of National Education are concentrated as well.

5. Direct participation may be possible only through the mobilization of neighbourhood councils which are on a smaller scale.

6. According to Erbay (2016:103), the number of districts in Istanbul that have a children's council is 15, out of which 3-4 are inactive. Nevertheless, there are municipalities that are making an effort to convene a children's council.

7. For a comprehensive discussion, see Erbay, 2016. For the field research conducted as part of one of the most comprehensive research on children's rights, Child-Friendly Cities Project, see UNICEF, 2015.

8. Discussed at the "Developing Child-Sensitive Strategies in Local Government" meeting on 14 May 2018.

9. For instance, the design and location of an urban park require different levels of participation. While children's participation is more crucial to determining design, the decision as to where the park should be built must be based on data and thus, requires more than just participation.

10. Without doubt, the problem of inequality discussed throughout the article can be remedied through changes much more fundamental. The recommendations proposed are only some among the steps, of various sizes, to eliminate the problem.

11. The report where child and family sensitive policies are investigated using data from 2017 (see Erginli, 2018), and the website (belediye.istanbul95.org) may be good places to start. The mapping of services for children by municipalities on real estate value maps as a representative tool of Istanbul's age – and poverty – indicates areas where poor children are concentrated, and makes possible monitoring the geographical distribution of services and welfare benefits by district municipalities.

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