

## Workshop Report

10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event of TurkMiS, 15<sup>th</sup> International Workshop

**“Advances, Recent Trends and Knowledge Gaps in Forced Migration and Refugee Research in and on Turkey”**

29 and 30/7/2020, IMIS, Osnabruck, GPM, Ankara and FFVT (online)

### Report

#### Introduction

The 15<sup>th</sup> TurkMiS workshop simultaneously celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Turkey Migration Studies network which was founded in 2011 in Oxford. TurkMiS aims to promote and exchange international research on migration and migration policy related to Turkey and the wider region. Whereas the first workshop in 2011 embarked on ‘mapping Turkish international migration studies’ addressing ‘old questions and new challenges’ the 2021 workshop aimed to take stock of a decade of research primarily on forced migration, the modernisation of Turkey’s migration regime since 2008 and the advances made whilst identifying certain knowledge gaps and distortions. Other than 5, 10 years ago, as Ahmet İçduygu noted during the discussion, the workshop was held under the impression of a recent heated politicisation of force migration. This was triggered by a statement of the leader of the main opposition party which is considered by many not helpful to enhancing social cohesion; instead, in the worst case, this is seen as rather unleashing xenophobic. The workshop, its results and follow-ups shall instead contribute to an evidence-based debate.

The workshop brought together around 30 participants, mainly from Turkish higher education and the German GIZ branch in Turkey but also some international universities in the UK, Canada and Germany plus a few participants from an international organisation and an NGO. It served as a pretext to a largely Turkish-German conference held on 26 November in Istanbul.

The event was organised under the umbrella of the Turkey Migration Studies network (TurkMiS) and in collaboration with IMIS, GPM, GIZ Ankara and the FFVT project.

#### Presentations

The first panel was devoted to mobility and the external dimension chaired by Başak Kale (METU). Sezgi Karacan, Ottawa university, analysed the interplay of the governance of mobility, individual responses to this and how this shapes the im/mobility of Syrian Refugees in Turkey. Her presentation focussed on the control of Syrians’ mobility especially between cities, she explained that the number of bordering agents have diversified and multiplied. The overall policy approach was characterised as one of “care and control”. This, she demonstrated is crucially important to understand how the migration through Turkey to the EU could effectively been brought to a halt in 2016.

*The ensuing discussion highlighted the need for further research of other controls, notably the introduction of visa to Syrians in 2015, forced returns, the construction of walls and even shooting and killing on the southern and eastern borders of Turkey.*

Didem Daniş, Galatasaray university, added to the analysis the impact of the EU on migration governance of Turkey, she asked, provocatively, whether Turkey can merely be considered a sub-contractor of the EU and its efforts to externalise migration control or whether Turkey pursues her own policy goals. She related Turkey's policy to some authoritarian neoliberalism, pointed to the legal ambiguity of the 2016 EU-Turkey statement subsequently spearheading some informalisation in international relations. Hidayet Siddikoğlu shared a dramatic report from the war zone in Afghanistan. He vividly illustrated the then quickly changing situation, the emergency on the ground and the individual urgency to get oneself and the families out of the country and into safety. Notably, he noticed a panic discourse on social media partly driven by foreign media suggesting that the international community has abandoned the country. The consequences have been long queues at the passport office and exploding costs for visa to Turkey. Notably the elites and investors have since been leaving the country raising questions over the further development of the country.

*Siddikoğlu's report raises the pressing questions how many more Afghans will require international protection and whether the EU, just as in 2014 at the onset of the crisis of mass displacement in Syria, is prepared or again rather complacent.*

The second panel addressed the urban and economic lives of refugees and was chaired by Esme Bayar (GIZ). Feriha Nazga Güngördi from Çankaya University extended the theme of the previous panel by analysing the continuity of mobility at different scales (international to local), the differential settlement patterns within Turkey and the drivers thereof. Apart from dispersing refugees to satellite cities processes within cities occur in the absence of state intervention, hence refugees are the main agents of mobility within cities. Here, distinction can be made between transit and destination districts; accordingly, on the regional level local mobility hubs can be identified. Key drivers are employment opportunities, affordable accommodation and ethnic networks. The following presentation by Nur Sultan Çırakman, METU, revealed a "vicious circle" of chronic poverty and food insecurity of urban Syrian refugees in Southeast Turkey resulting in a process of "dying slowly". Her research findings suggest that this is more dramatic in regions with high density of refugees where living expenses are higher and rising fast (food inflation stands at 17%). Whilst earlier on Başak Kale noted the low employment rate of Syrians and the even lower proportion of Syrians with permission to work, just 120,000 or 4%, Büşra Uslu Ak, GIZ, found that the language barrier, lack of education or lack of recognition of foreign certificates are key obstacles. This is further aggravated by gender discrimination, lack of information on workers' rights and cumbersome permit applications. The results are negative coping strategies including drug abuse, begging and child labour. During Q&A it was suggested that whilst employers prefer not to offer regular contracts Syrians too often prefer irregular employment as to not jeopardise their additional though meagre benefits. Başak Kale's and Kemal Kirişçi's presentation embarked from the observation that conventional policies such as the EU's programme to providing benefits to refugees are of limited effect, notably with regards to economic integration. The pandemic revealed the limits and unsustainable nature of humanitarian aid and made matters worse. Instead, taking the precedence of the EU's Jordan compact they propose mechanisms offering trade and agriculture incentives to Turkey in exchange for promoting formal employment of refugees.

*However, whilst the proposal is economically compelling it remains to be discussed how under conditions of an economic crisis, increasing xenophobia, intensified competition over jobs and the popular resistance against providing work permits to refugees such a policy could gain public approval.*

The subsequent discussion also pointed to the quadruple crisis of Turkey, the economic crisis, the pandemic, the country's relative international isolation and the recently increasing influx of Afghan refugees.

In his keynote, Ahmet Icduygu, Koc university, contextualised the ongoing research and policy debate by taking a historical point of view of Turkey's responses to previous mass influxes of displaced people, such as from the Balkan and Iraq. The factors influencing these responses include state-oriented bureaucratic choices, international relations, the cultural meaning of refugees, ethnicity and kinship, historical linkages and security threats. He then noted that the cases of Syrians or Afghans are different in that they are neither Turkish, as it was the case with displaced people from the Balkans, nor staying only temporarily as it was the case with Iraqis in 1991. He argued that the current mass movements have therefore become an almost ontological question for Turkey with regards to her trajectory, the increasing diversity, the costs and benefits of migration and her potentially more fluid identity. The key question he raised is - the unpopular this might be - whether there is and if yes what would be the absorption capacity of Turkey or a specific locality? He also suggests that the returning of Syrians will be becoming an issue in the next general election (2023).

The third panel chaired by Didem Danis was opened by Aysegul Kayaoglu, ITU, who analysed the drivers of the attitudes which Turkish nationals hold vis a vis Syrians. Her research (N=2,600) finds that the strongest attitude Turks hold is that refugees should stay away from them and ideally that they are separated in camps. Second, that they hold strong anti-Syrian sentiments (Syrians are perceived too different), third they are generally biased against asylum seekers and fourth that they believe that they are economically harmful. Notably, contacts with refugees seem to increase hostility. Breaking this further down across different groups in society her research shows that religious people are least hostile because they perceive Syrians as religious "brothers and sisters" whereas non-believers are more strongly "anti-Syrian". Hakan Gülerce, Harran University, presented his research on the perceptions Syrians in Şanlıurfa have of Turkey. He interviewed 1,600 Syrians in one of the southern provinces bordering Syria hosting one of the largest number of Syrians. His initial results imply that 50% of the Syrians feel integrated and that 23% believe that there is a cultural similarity between Syrians and Turks. This is, they believe, because Turkish people in that province also often speak Arabic and because the region - divided by the border - nevertheless displays cultural similarities. But still 24% are unhappy in Turkey, many feel exploited and 20% believe they are perceived negatively by Turks. Miresi Busama, GIZ Ankara, by sketching the many projects implemented by the GIZ as part of the Regional Refugee & Resilience plan (3RP) provided an example of how one agency set up a fairly unique refugee response programme in Turkey. She, emphasised the focus on social cohesion and some key principles, notably "do no harm", "leave no-one behind" based on "enabling actors" with the aim to facilitate "linking", "bridging" and "bonding". She reveals a lack of coordination among different mechanisms, bureaucratic obstacles, incomplete concepts, policies and implementation and emphasised the lack of monitoring and the need for more data as well as a better integration of all actors including science.

*The workshop revealed an interesting de facto alliance of religious and conservative and liberal actors who for different reasons favour international protection of Syrians whereas the secular classes seems to be rather hostile to this idea. It also illustrates that whilst certain programmes aiming at enhancing social cohesion strongly reflect the ideas of interculturalism some research nevertheless contradicts its assumptions, notably that contacts diminish hostility.*

### Panel debate

The workshop was concluded by a panel debate by Atilla Toros, former director general of the DGMM, Ayca Akdeniz from ICMPD Turkey, Erdem Ayçicek from the NGO MSYD-ASRA, (Association of Assistance Solidarity and Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Ankara) and Dr. Didem Daniş, Galatasaray University. The first round was devoted to a retrospective. Atilla Toros depicted the development of the new 2014 Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the transfer of almost all migration matters from the police to a specialised Directorate General for Migration Management as a "transparent and participatory process" and indeed a "revolutionary"

transformation". A good balance was "struck between community and refugee benefits". The key drivers he identified as expectations from the EU, Turkey's own needs and interests and the mass influx from 2013/14. In this context he also acknowledged the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and the security/freedom dilemma this posed. Further to this he argued that Iran, instrumentalising migration, is the most important but also less well researched country for understanding irregular and transit migration in the region. He concludes that, so far, Turkey has "not faced any significant problems in terms of migration management and social acceptance so far" compared to other countries. Finally, he believes that the EU did "not understand" Turkey and "did not empathise"; instead, national interests prevail and therefore "responsibility sharing is dead". Aycan Akdeniz adds the importance of the "shift from meeting basic needs to ...integration" needs of Syrians but also emphasises the importance of "border management" and specifically "risk assessment" for the sake of tackling irregular migration. In contrast, Erdem Ayçiçek suggests there still is a "governance crisis" with regards to refugees; for instance, he points to the significant number of unregistered refugees. Thereby, he implies that access to refugee status determination process and to the labour market are imperfect which is further aggravated by the pandemic. Finally, Didem Danis recalled the dual impact of the EU: on the positive side, the EU inspired the modernisation of the Turkey's migration regime including its humanitarian approach while on the negative side, notably during the last five years, there is the EU's externalisation approach placing unduly responsibility on Turkey. Also, she suggests that the "capacity to produce flexible solutions" was diminished due to this process of institutionalisation. On the academic side she criticises that whilst students were eager to study and research migration much of this was wasted as the system was unable to accommodate this.

*At the time of introducing the LFIP it was passed unanimously by parliament. However, in the meantime, migration policy became a matter of controversy in Turkey. The debate illustrates that the discourse on migration threats and border security is already gaining ground. The workshop left unanswered though the question how in future the LFIP will be implemented and what this might mean for the initially rather humane approach?*

The second round addressed the future agenda. Attila Toros argues that the recent conflict is actually "about all foreigners in the country". Recent statements by the opposition leaders triggered populist and aggressive responses. Aycan Akdeniz believes that the gradual granting of citizenship and longer-term residents and work permits are the way forward whilst the discourses and discussions on this issue need to be depoliticized. He calls for more research to improve the evidence base. She also underlines the protracted nature of displacement in Syria and emphasises that Syrians deserve a "more predictable and permanent solution" and clarified that "we cannot encourage return". Erdem Ayçiçek reinforces this and calls for a whole new refugee integration process while, importantly, involving refugees in the decision making process. Finally, Didem Danis highlights the risks of the current controversy, emphasises that the various actors share the same universal values although these may be derived from different ideological and political perspectives and suggests the need for increasing resilience. In the subsequent discussion it was suggested that the xenophobia which became apparent during the current controversy were already latent within society whilst the relevance of the local conditions of integration as well as the economic dimension were highlighted. Finally, some controversy became apparent with regards to whether we talk about a country's capacity to absorb immigrants or social cohesion.

*Several of the questions raised during the workshop will be discussed further at a conference on refugee integration in Istanbul on 26/11/2021*

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We extend our thanks to the contributors and participants of the workshop. We accept responsibility for any misrepresentation that we might have made of the views expressed during the debate.