

Turkish culture of migration: Flows between Turkey and Germany, socio-economic development and conflict

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Abstract

In this paper we explore the rise of Turkey as a destination for new migrants including the children of Turks and Kurds who emigrated to Europe and Germany over the last five decades. An environment of social, economic and human insecurity dominated migration from Turkey to Europe and in particular Germany over the last five decades; and today, shifts in Turkish society, economy and security are attracting migrants to the country. Ethnic conflicts were one key factor driving migration in the past and as we note, they continue to moderate the relationship between socio-economic development and emigration rates for Kurdish movers in the present. Nevertheless, we argue that the growth of the Turkish economy and increasing social freedoms support an increase in immigration to Turkey. Immigration to Turkey includes returnees as well as second and third generation Turks from Germany among other places.

Keywords: Turkey, Germany, migration and development, conflict, culture of migration.

Introduction

Turkish mobility is a process rooted in the past (dating to the 15th centuries and the attraction the Ottoman Empire exerted) and continues to the present. In the 20th century, Turkish migration was defined by the movement of nationals from the countryside to urban destinations and to Europe as they faced limited opportunities and as ethnic minorities faced conflict and bigotry. In fact, a lack of socio-economic development at the district levels and ethnic conflicts drove much of the migration from Turkey through the mid-1990s and the end of the country's military control. The formal end of military control, political reforms, increasing social freedoms, rapid urbanisation, and economic development are key variables that define Turkey today as both a sending nation and receiving nation.¹ In this paper, we explore the recent history

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¹ "Turkish" refers to all population groups in Turkey, Turks, Kurds, Arabs and others. Our paper draws upon a series of studies carried out in the last 15 years by the authors on insecurity (Sirkeci, 2005b and 2006, 2009a), households and cultures of migration (Cohen and Sirkeci, 2005 and 2011), the Turkish diaspora (Sirkeci, 2005a), the Kurdish population in Turkey (Sirkeci 2000), socio-economic development and migration in Turkey (Icdygu *et al.*, 2001),

of Turkish international migration which is characterised by three distinct periods (mass labour migration, family migration, refugees, asylum seekers and clandestine migrations) and argue that a new era, era of Turkey as a destination country has begun.

Conceptual framework: Conflict and culture of migration

Migration is a fluid process, defined along a continuum that ranges from immobility to mobility. In other words, migration is not defined by dichotomous categories of mover and non-mover measured at specific times that tends to dominate the literature (for critiques see Anthony, 1990; Vertovec, 2003; Levitt and Schiller, 2007). Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) argue that the fluid and dynamic nature of migration links movers and non-movers over space and time and in cultural social and economic ways that develop in relation to an individual's abilities; the strengths and weaknesses of their sending community; and the economic and political realities of sending and receiving countries that include social expectations, opportunities, conflicts, security, and insecurity. Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) call this framework the "culture of migration."

Conflicts around local, transnational and macro-level processes test the culture of migration for movers and non-movers as they build frameworks around which to understand the world. In this paper, we argue that national (within Turkey and Germany) and transnational (between Turkey and Germany) conflicts played a role in determining migration flows. We also argue that regional differences in socio-economic development levels in Turkey have influenced migration patterns. Hence a Turkish "culture of migration" is characterized by these two influences and the dual effect of ethnic conflict and socio-economic deprivation set the scene for migration from Turkey to Western Europe during the last five decades.

The links between socio-economic development and migration are well documented (Castles, 2008 and Raghuram, 2009). Faist (2008) describes immigrant associations as development agents (and on Turkey see Martin, 1991; Paine, 1974). Others see development as a cure for migration (Delgado-Wise and Guarnizo, 2007), while Bauman (1998) argues that the poor often stay at home while the wealthier are mobile. De Haas (2006) reports that policies promoting development as a way to reduce or stop migration are bound to fail. In fact, earlier work on Turkish migration also concludes that neither prosperous segments nor poor segments were dominant in migration flows from the country (Icduygu *et al.*, 2001). District level socio-economic development focused towards individuals at the bottom or top ends of the ladder finds that those individuals are less likely to migrate, in line with the human and social capital theories that indicate those who are financially able and who

shifts in Turkish migration destination (Icduygu and Sirkeci, 1998), ethnicity in Turkey (Icduygu *et al.*, 1999) and immigration and return migration (Sirkeci, 2009b).

have the right qualifications and connections often do move across borders (Sirkeci, 2006).

There has been a shift in migration and in the debates that revolve around migration both within and between Turkey and Germany. Locally (in other words, within Turkey and within Germany) national debates, political reform, development and opportunity have changed the landscape for movers. Turkish nationals including those who are members of ethnic minorities (such as the Kurds) have social freedoms and economic opportunities that were impossible to imagine just a few decades ago. Additionally, at a transnational level, migration between Turkey and Germany has transitioned from a process rooted in cooperation to one that is rife with conflict (i.e. on a continuum of conflict- see Sirkeci, 2009a).

The history of Turkish migration to Germany

Turkish mobility is characterized first by the effects of a rapid urbanization of the country in the 1950s; second, the export of excess labour in the 1960s; third, family reunifications in the 1970s and 1980s; fourth, refugee movement in the 1980s; fifth, asylum-seekers in the 1990s; and sixth, irregular migrants in the 2000s. We argue a new era in migration is unfolding as Turkey becomes a destination country for the Turks who historically moved to Europe² as well as the citizens of other nationalities who arrive in Turkey from Asia and Africa. This new era of immigration is characterised by increasing freedom of mobility for Turkish citizens and the economic growth for the country as a whole. The Turkish government has taken a proactive stance in foreign relations as well and has secured bilateral visa-free mobility arrangements with over 90 countries (MFA, 2011). At the same time, relatively more affluent Turks are now able to travel more freely as they overcome entry barriers which tend to hinder poorer movers.

Turkish migration was defined by bilateral labour exchange agreements in the 1950s and 1960s (Franz, 1994). The most important of those exchanges was between Turkey and Germany. This cooperative alliance brought Turks to Germany. The German economy needed labourers, Turkey had an excess labour force the result was a cooperative agreement that benefited both countries. Nevertheless, Germany's need for foreign labourers declined in the 1970s and 1980s, while Turkey still had an excess labour supply souring the relationship. Germany and Turkey moved away from a cooperative model of labour exchange, which made Turkish citizens face difficulties in obtaining entry permission and in the process many movers turned to undocumented entry throughout the following three decades.

² Sirkeci, first, had called them "European Turks" (Sirkeci, 2002: 9); Østergaard-Nielsen (2000 and 2003b) called these "Euro Turks", a term later frequently used by Kaya (2004). It refers to Turkish immigrants and the second and third generations in European countries.

Nevertheless, migration from Turkey to Germany has continued, albeit in different forms and through different mechanisms. After the 1980 military intervention in Turkey, large volumes of asylum seekers and refugees in the 1980s and clandestine or irregular migrants in the 1990s and 2000s dominated the flows from Turkey to Germany and elsewhere (Sirkeci, 2005a). While the share of 'labour migration' almost disappeared in these flows, the share of family related migrations (e.g. marriages, siblings, parents, partners, or children joining the immigrants) increased to around 70 per cent of all movers (Icduygu and Sirkeci, 1999).

The contemporary setting

The Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security estimates that 3,849,360 Turkish citizens were abroad by 2009. This number includes 1,713,551 Turks who lived in Germany (this number excludes those Turks who are naturalized German citizens; see CSGB, 2010: 50-55)³. Of the nearly 4 million Turks living in Germany, the UNHCR estimates that 161,919 or about 9% arrived as refugees in 2009.⁴ The German Federal Statistics Office notes that 810,481 Turkish citizens were naturalised between 1972 and 2009 (FSOG, 2011).⁵ Undocumented Turkish immigrants are difficult to enumerate, and this makes it difficult to accurately know the size of Germany's Turkish community which some estimate may include between 2.6 million (Boomgaarden, 2010) to 4 million individuals (Haviland *et al.*, 2010; Heine and Syed, 2005). Nevertheless, as we note in the figure below, regardless of the total number of Turks living in Germany, there has been a decline in the numbers of Turks living in Germany since the mid-1990s.

Ethnic conflict over Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey played a significant role in emigration of this minority from Turkey to Western Europe in this period and resulted in the formation of a large Turkish Kurdish diaspora abroad (Sirkeci, 2006; see also Wahlbeck, 1999; Demir, 2012). This conflict with its socio-economic repercussions (i.e. "the environment of human insecurity") constituted a strong push factor for emigration from Turkey. However, improved human rights record of Turkey and the relative freedom offered to the Kurds in the last decade alongside sustained economic growth in the country⁶ makes Turkey an attractive destination. Therefore, Turkey has seen return migration of its citizens and their children as well as growing inflows of other nationalities (Sirkeci, 2009b; Sirkeci *et al.*, 2012).

³ Between 1996 and 2005, 609,533 Turkish citizens acquired German citizenship, the largest number in a decade (CSGB, 2007:26).

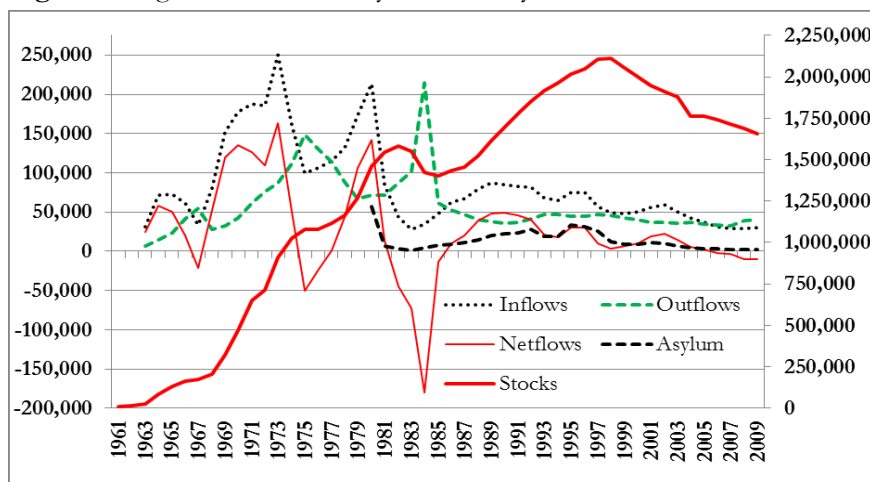
⁴ Between 1980 and 2009, Germany received 412,598 asylum applications from Turkish citizens

⁵ These exclude Turkish children who were registered as German citizens by birth. According to CSGB (2007: 26) 99,717 Turkish children were registered as German citizens between 2000 and 2004.

⁶ According to IMF, Turkish GDP in current prices grew from \$195.5 billion in 2001 to \$797.7 billion in 2011 (IMF, 2011).

The Turkey-Germany migration corridor is not a one-way street. The thin line in figure 1 shows net flows, while the dashed line follows the out-migration of Turkish citizens from Germany. There are peaks after the 1973 energy crisis and around 1983, when a new law was introduced to promote return migration (i.e. *Das Gesetz zur Förderung der Rückkehrbereitschaft*). Turkish emigration from Germany overtook Turkish immigration in 2006 and remained negative for the last five years. Overall in-flows and out-flows of Turkish citizens appear to be similar for more than a decade, but the actual net figure is likely different due to people who hold dual-citizenship.⁷

Figure 1: Migration from Turkey to Germany, 1963-2009



Source: Akkoyunlu (2011); Sirkeci (2006); UNHCR.

The ethnic discrimination and xenophobia experienced by Turks in Germany is another push factor for their return and migration to Turkey. Hence we can argue that conflict in Germany plays a role in the emigration of Turks from Germany. The Turkish immigrant stock in Germany was 75% of Turkish citizens living abroad in 1980 (Gitmez, 1983: 23). During the following 30 years, this share declined to 45% (CSGB, 2010), but it is no surprise that 158,309 (12.5%) of the 1.3 million foreign-born people in Turkey in 2000 were born in Germany (Sirkeci, 2009b), reflecting a significant stream of return migration from Germany. Figure 1 shows a steady outflow of Turkish citizens from Germany since the 1960s, about 40,000 per annum for the last two decades. Not all return to Turkey; some might have migrated to other

⁷ Some evidence for large Turkish out-flows from Germany comes from the Turkish censuses. The last two censuses in 1990 and 2000 report 1,133,152 and 1,260,530 foreign-born individuals in Turkey representing 11% increase in a decade (Sirkeci, 2009b: 12-14). In the 2000 Census, 997,676 of those reported were Turkish citizens born outside Turkey while 85,354 were German citizens. Germany to Turkey it is not possible to speculate further,

countries. This stream of Turks from Germany should be considered within the context of ethnic and religious discrimination which may have encouraged some to migrate to the “homeland”.

Ethnic conflict in Turkey and migration

The treatment of Kurds in Turkey (what is often described as the “Kurdish Question”) remains a major issue and a possible cause for emigration. However, we believe as discrimination declines and economic opportunities grow the decision to migrate to Europe becomes a rather difficult one. For immigrants in Germany costs of staying are higher than the benefits of returning to Turkey. Similarly, the benefits of moving abroad may seem trivial to those in Turkey.

The Kurdish question in Turkey continues to create tension and conflict that affects migration despite significant changes in legislation and some liberalisation of Kurdish language and linguistic rights for the Kurds.⁸ The Kurdish question and the armed clashes in the Eastern and South-eastern provinces are believed to be among the root causes of migration among the Kurdish speaking population in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2006; Celik, 2005; Lyon and Ucarer, 2001). The proportion of Kurdish speakers among the international migrants from Turkey has been larger than the share of Kurdish speakers in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2000; Sirkeci, 2006). The Eastern provinces, where the Kurdish speaking populations are dominant, have also been characterised by socio-economic deprivation (see Dincer *et al.*, 2003 and 1996).

We examine the effect of the conflict on migration flows via a proxy indicator, the violent event counts recorded by Reuters and compiled by Jenkins and colleagues (2006). Following the military intervention in 1980, Western Europe (mainly Germany), witnessed an upsurge in the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers from Turkey. Nearly half a million people fled the country in the four years following the military intervention, which crushed the political movements and organisations and imposed martial law in the Kurdish speaking regions in the East and Southeast (Sayari, 2010). Therefore, Kurds may have dominated the asylum seeking flows throughout the period from the 1980s onwards (Sirkeci, 2006).

Some of the guest-workers of the 1960s and 1970s settled and formed or unified families abroad (Castles, 1986; Rist, 1978), and mass migration of refugees followed (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Hougen *et al.*, 1988). Individual migrants’ narratives show that the guest-workers originally from Kurdish-speaking provinces of Turkey were equally concerned about higher wages abroad and conflict at home (Sirkeci, 2006). When admission as migrant

⁸ In a recent trial, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) case, for example, the judge refused defence statements in “a language believed to be Kurdish”. (Hurriyet, 2011, April 19). The “Kurdish Question” has been dominating the most recent general election debates in the country too.

workers became difficult, they went abroad as asylum seekers. For instance, in the two decades that began in 1990; 52,120 Turkish citizens immigrated to the United Kingdom (UK) while another 33,347 applied for asylum and 54,585 were granted British citizenship against only about 45,000 settlement visas granted to Turkish citizens. Among the asylum seekers, a large segment was Kurdish speaking political migrants.⁹ However, coming from relatively deprived parts of Turkey, many were also concerned with economic opportunities. Personal narratives of Kurdish speaking immigrants in Germany have revealed such mixed motivations with a particular emphasis on the ethnic conflict and discrimination they were exposed in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2006). The conflict in Turkey has sometimes served as an “opportunity framework” for the people, irrespective of their ethnic group membership, because in the absence of other routes for migration, many have sought asylum (Sirkeci, 2005 and 2006).

The figures 2 and 3 plot migration flows from Turkey to Western Europe and Germany and the violent-event counts in Turkey recorded by Reuters (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006).¹⁰ In the case of Turkey, these events are likely to be related to the Kurdish question, since were recorded during the 1990s, the peak of armed clashes and violence. One can argue that there is some degree of correlation with migration out-flows following violence counts with a lag (Figure 2).

A similar pattern can also be identified in asylum-seeker flows from Turkey to Germany (Figure 3). However, it should be noted that violent political events are only one manifestation of the conflict and one aspect of the environment of human insecurity.

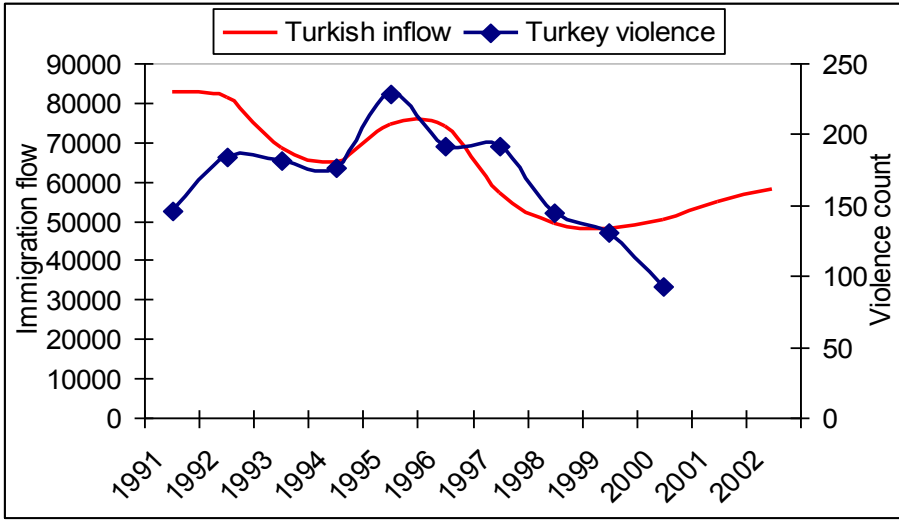
Human insecurity in Turkey manifested itself in four ways: a) violent conflict (e.g. armed clashes, forced displacement, killings by unknown perpetrators), b) socio-economic deprivation (e.g. unemployment, poverty), c) political deprivation (e.g. Political party bans), and d) cultural and social discrimination; all were key drivers for migration from Turkey. About 18% of Turks are Kurdish speaking (Sirkeci, 2000) and they largely live in the socio-economically most deprived areas (Sirkeci, 2006: 53).

According to the Turkish International Migration Survey, nearly 1/3 of migrant households (i.e. those with at least one member who has migrated abroad) were Kurdish and 12.9% of all Turkish in 1996 were Kurds (Sirkeci, 2006: 132). The stock of Kurdish immigrants in Germany is 500,000 to a million (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Sirkeci, 2006), while Meyer-Ingwersen (1995) says there were 580,000 Kurds in Germany in the early 1990s.

⁹ Stevens (2004) argues for the period between 1980 and 1993, the majority of asylum applications made by Turkish nationals in the UK are expected to be made by those with Kurdish origin.

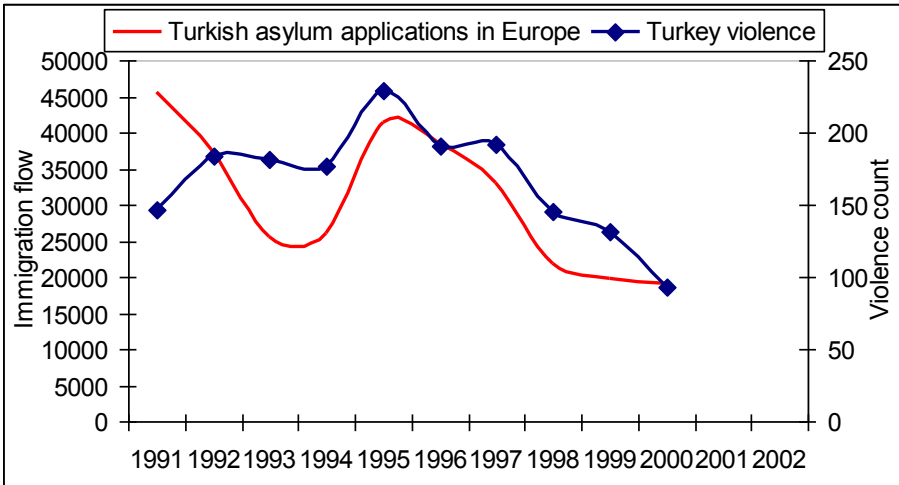
¹⁰ The violence count data comes from the study carried out by Craig Jenkins and his team at Ohio State University (see Jenkins *et al.*, 2006).

Figure 2: Turkish immigration to Germany and violence count in Turkey, 1991-2002.



Source: MPI (2011) and Jenkins et al., (2006).

Figure 3: Asylum seeker flows from and violence count in Turkey, 1991-2000.



Source: MPI and Jenkins et al., (2006)

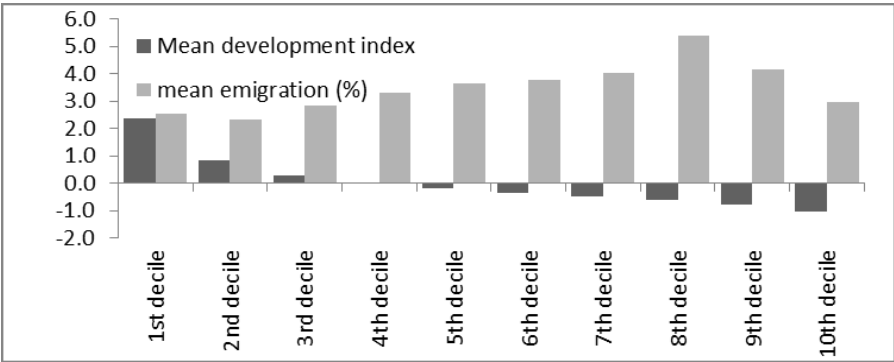
Discussion and conclusion: Development and migration

Piore (1980: 135-140) found that middle classes from middle level developed regions emigrate, and Portes and Bach (1985: 4-5) found that most Latin Americans in the US were from somewhat developed regions. Hammar (1995:

176) argued that emigration may increase when poverty becomes less extreme, and referred to human capital improvements as necessary conditions for migration (Palloni *et al.*, 2001; Pieterse, 2003; McKenzie and Marcin, 2007). Migration propensity is expected to be low among the poorest and the wealthiest segments of populations. For the poorest, international migration requires resources to cross, which can be lowered with networks (social capital) and knowledge (human capital). Once these are in place and the environment is conducive, a culture of migration can develop (Massey *et al.*, 1993; Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011).

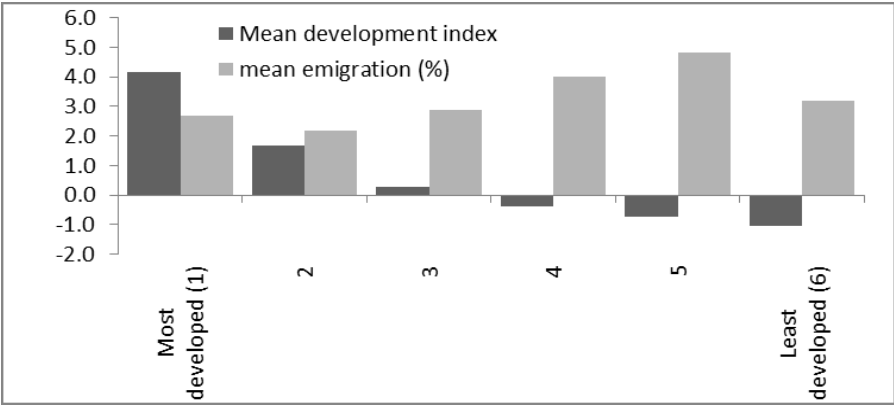
Figures 4 and 5 display average emigration rates and average socio-economic development scores for all districts (N: 858) in Turkey classified into deciles. We found that most migrants are from districts falling into deciles 6 to 9; the lowest and higher ranked districts had significantly lower emigration rates.

Figure 4: Emigration and socio-economic development by deciles, 1990



Source: Based on the data from Icdnygu, Sirkeci, Muradoglu (2001)

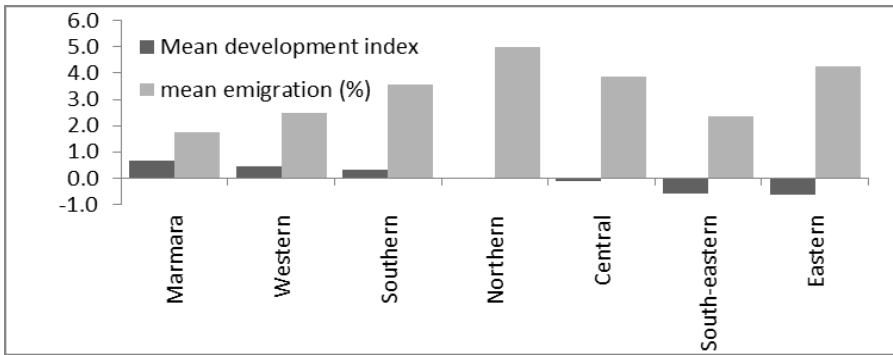
Figure 5: Emigration and socio-economic development levels, 1990



Source: Based on the data from Icdnygu, Sirkeci, Muradoglu (2001)

The fact that vast majority of the least developed districts are populated mainly by Kurdish-speaking groups blurs the line between the ethnic conflict and socio-economic development levels. The environment of human insecurity concept links these two together (i.e. material and non-material components), allowing us to argue that migration is largely driven by the perception of insecurity (Figure 6). The residents of Kurdish-speaking provinces perceive an environment of human insecurity, and some opt to migrate to other parts of the country or abroad. At the same time, the Northern region shows that mid-level socio-economic development coincides with high level emigration rate (Figure 6). The profiles of the Southern and Central regions also support this argument.

Figure 6: Emigration and socio-economic development levels by region, 1990



Source: Based on the data from Icdnygu, Sirkeci, Muradoglu (2001)

International migration between Turkey and Germany has changed as the Turkish economy has grown and social reforms have increased internal security while at the same time, insecurity for Turkish immigrants has increased in Germany. Growing return migration and out-flow of Turks from Germany are likely to be motivated by: a) economic growth in Turkey and b) discrimination and/or other difficulties in Germany, particularly during the global financial crisis. Second and third generation Turks from Germany are possibly the largest segment among the foreign-born in Turkey (Sirkeci *et al.*, 2012). A transition from a source country to a country of immigration is probably still in progress.

This transition is shaped by various trends. First, Turkish migration evolved from the guest-worker movements in the 1960s and 1970s through asylum-seeking and clandestine mobility in the 1980s and 1990s to contemporary movement, which is characterised by multiple motives and transnational networks and spaces build around sizeable diaspora communities in Western Europe. Secondly, increasing prosperity of Turkey and Turks has strengthened migration networks and the relative ease of travel made international

mobility accessible for many more. At the same time, the number of migration destinations for Turkish citizens has expanded as the share of Germany among destinations for Turks has declined from about 75% in 1980 to 45% in 2010.

Migration is a dynamic process that reflects individual and household choices, and macro-level processes in the sending and receiving countries. In the case of Turkey and Turkish migrants, this dynamic process has been characterised by a long standing ethnic conflict in Turkey, socio-economic development level differences between regions of the country, economic growth, increasing human insecurity (e.g. xenophobia) in traditional destination countries (e.g. Germany) and transnational networks and immigrant stocks which shaped the transition of Turkey from a country of emigration to that of immigration in about five decades.

The movers and their households are involved in cost benefit analysis that allows them to make good choices. While until two decades ago, these analyses were pointing towards migrating abroad for Turks. However, now reflecting on the changes at macro level, the choice of return to Turkey for those abroad and of never leaving the country for those at home appear to be good choices.

While we admit, further analyses of the role of conflict and economic development in Turkish migration are needed; a further line of research can focus on the change of Turkish culture of migration.

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