

## CONFERENCE REPORT

### Turkish Migration Conference and Migration Challenge

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#### Abstract

Rough estimates suggest that there are five to six million movers (migrants) originated from Turkey and, with the recent influx of Syrians, the volume of movers into Turkey reached record levels - between three to four million. Turkey passed a qualitative and quantitative threshold as a country of movers: Millions moved out whilst millions moved in. The three Turkish Migration Conferences since 2012 reflect that reality. The breadth of topics and depth of discussions highlight a growing academic community interested in this particular case of human mobility. The debates about Turkish migration experiences are rich and reveal patterns of regular, irregular, and circular moves. Different perceptions and legal frameworks point to different implications for Turkey and its Diaspora. The next conference in July 2016 at the University of Vienna is expected to continue this tradition.

**Keywords:** Turkish migration; movers; mobility; refugees; Syrians; migration research.

Turkey's PM Mr Davutoglu referred to the fact that Prophet Mohammad was a migrant when calling for calm and tolerance towards Syrians arriving in 2014. Despite wide spread hostility and occasional violence towards Syrians in Turkey, this relatively positive and pro-immigration attitude is refreshing in comparison to anti-immigration sentiments in many immigration countries. Of course, Turkey's current welcome may not last, and there are many practices and regulations that pose big hurdles for migrants in Turkey. In summer 2015, thousands of Syrians transited Turkey to reach European Union territories. Although Germany's initial welcome reduced pressures in Turkey but later the pressure turned back on Turkey's borders. Eventually at the end of November, an agreement was signed to offer Turkey €3 billion in exchange of keeping Syrians outside the EU borders. Given the high costs of maintaining large population of refugees in Turkey and difficulties in

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patrolling thousands miles of sea and land borders, this deal is unlikely to achieve what it says on paper. As the conflict in Syria and the region continues, Turkey is likely to remain at cross roads of mass conflict migrations for the foreseeable future.

Turkish experience is likely to be of interest for many reasons, including its transition from an emigration country to an immigration country. Despite a long history of immigration (of Muslims and Turkic peoples from former Ottoman territories and some other movements in the past), Turkey has been mostly a source country for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Turkey became a net immigration country. Embracing the history with large scale migrations and the current reality of large numbers of incoming people, Turkey faces challenges, politically, economically and culturally.

To consider Turkish and Kurdish migrants, diaspora experiences, integration issues, education of second and third generations, conflicts, policies, culture and religion, the third Turkish Migration Conference was convened at Charles University Prague in June 2015, organized in collaboration with Regent's University London Centre for Transnational Studies, Charles University Prague Faculty of Humanities, Manisa Celal Bayar University Population and Migration Research Centre, University of California Davis Gifford Center for Population Studies, with support from Transnational Press London, Univerzitetni Servis, and Ria Financial.

About 200 researchers from 25 countries discussed migration issues in, to and from Turkey and the diasporas, devoting special attention to Greek, African, and Mexican and European cases. The scope of the conference, which featured 146 papers by 219 authors in 40 sessions over three days, was very wide, from remittances and language shift to gender and housing. Identity formation among minority internal migrants in Istanbul, migration mechanisms of high skilled Turks and Kurds, irregular migrants arriving in Athens through Turkey, and representation of migrants and migration in Turkish novels and poetry were examples of such wide variety of contributions. What can be done to prevent extinction of Kurdish language? Does ethnic identity moderate gendered experiences of human mobility? How are and should governments react to irregularity in migration movements? The keynote panels focused on different aspects of human mobility, discussing practical questions and conceptual propositions in contrasting cases around the world. These comparisons highlighted the Turkish experience in interdisciplinary contexts.

Turkish Migration Conference 2015 began with a keynote scholars' panel where Douglas S. Massey of Princeton University and Caroline Brettell, two well-known scholars of migration theory who discussed the US experiences. Massey, whose articles appraising migration theories in PDR 12 years ago have sent a benchmark for migration studies, focused on what he considers to be counterproductive US efforts to control Mexico-US migration. Brettell, a

renowned anthropologist from Southern Methodist University, presented her research on Indian immigrants in Texas and discussed citizenship issues, alternate routes of integration, and conceptual challenges in understanding these experiences.

For the first time in Turkish Migration Series, the conference featured invited papers in Turkish. This innovation was very productive for opening new avenues of research. One addition was inclusion of several sessions on migration and literature, highlighting the interest among scholars of Turkish literature and language in migration issues.

The inclusion of Kurdish migration and diaspora, as in TMC 2014, generated a good discussion of this ethnic group's migration experience. There were papers on spatial characteristics, political participation, and gender aspects. Each of these fields is yet to be investigated fully.

Migration policies and policy making was again very popular, featuring over 20 papers particularly relevant to Turkey. The current Syrian refugee crisis warrants more studies and better understanding.

Turkish Migration Conferences since 2012 shown that there is a growing interest in human mobility of Turks, Kurds, and others from Turkey, migration in, through and to Turkey. Conference participants include established researchers and a strong younger cohort. A third of participants have been PhD students, a promising development for Turkish migration studies and the wider field of migration research.

We hope for more representatives from policy making bodies and governments. In 2015, the Turkish Statistics Institute, British Foreign Ministry, Home Office, and few other government departments participated, but more governments would benefit from the debates and knowledge shared in these conferences.

In 2016, the Turkish Migration Conference will be hosted by the University of Vienna from 12 to 15 July 2016 (See: [www.turkishmigration.com](http://www.turkishmigration.com)). We look forward to seeing old and new friends at this event.