

New Discussions/Overlooked Issues in Migration Research

Historically an immigration county, Türkiye has become not only a migrant receiving country but also a part of international migration management, discourse and policies in the last decades. It is possible to observe from published official figures² that there are more than four million people under Türkiye's asylum regime, as well as more than one million migrants with residence and work permits, and perhaps even more migrants who live/are forced to live undocumented. In recent years, the rapidly growing number of different migrant groups has become visible in political debates, in the public sphere, in social policy and, obviously, in academia. We observe with concern that these debates encourage hateful discourse against migrants, especially in the election climate and in the aftermath of growing economic problems. The perception of migrants as a threat and their scapegoating by political parties is certainly not new; former US President Donald Trump who accused Mexicans as "criminals", UKIP in the UK and the rise of far-right parties such as the National Front, AfD or Lega Nord in Western Europe have been on the agenda for decades. Although these parties have not achieved a majority, their influence on public opinion and policy debates far outweighs their vote share (de Haas et al., 2020, pp. 1-2). Academic studies show that the discourses on migrants by far-right parties' as the sources of social problems (i.e. the reason for unemployment or high crime rates or as a threat to social cohesion) usually do not reflect the social reality. On the contrary, migrants contribute to the increase in social welfare and capital accumulation as a cheap, precarious and exploitable labour force while they do dirty, dangerous and demeaning (3D) jobs unwanted by locals. There are no reliable statistics on the increasing crime rates caused by migrants, on the contrary, usually migrants are the targets of criminal acts and are under the surveillance of both the state and citizens. Historically the assumed need for controlling migrants and migration serves the interest of the privileged classes, and it is closely related to the privileges attributed to modern citizens and dividing the working class between citizens and non-citizens (Piore, 1979).

Especially in times when hatred and violence against migrants become visible in the public sphere, as researchers working in the field of migration, we have to turn our focus to the right directions to understand the social reality beyond the visible. Undoubtedly, with the increasing number of migrants in Türkiye and their visibility in daily life, the number of studies on international migration is rapidly increasing. However, while international migration to Türkiye is the subject of research in different academic disciplines such as sociology, political science, international relations or geography and law, it can be argued that the areas of focus of these studies are generally not independent from governmental political discourse and migration policy (Erder and Yüksekler, 2014).

² Minister Yerlikaya: "There are 4 million 888 thousand and 286 migrants in in our country" <https://www.iha.com.tr/ankara-haberleri/bakan-yerlikaya-ulkemizde-bugun-itibariyla-4-milyon-888-bin-286-gocmen-bulunuyor-17441353> Accessed 27 July 2023. Erişim 27 Temmuz 2023. Also see Annual Migration Reports <https://www.goc.gov.tr/raporlar3>, Accessed 27 July 2023.

Syrian refugees, who have become one of the most important topics on both Turkey's and the international agenda in the last decade, were initially the subject of debates/research on urgent needs and legal status, but later, as migration became permanent, they became the subject of research on integration and the social and economic effects of migration, which the state also addressed. On the other hand, even before the Syrian migration, border security and human trafficking, undocumented migrants and migration management, migrant labor, relations with the EU and legal legislation were popular topics among researchers in Turkey (Coşkun, Sarılioğlu and Dinçer, 2020, p. 72). Although there is a limited number of independent studies, the increase in the number of these studies, which focus specifically on the national policies of the state and the migrant and refugee groups deemed acceptable by the state, is also closely related to the political discourse and the financial support offered. As Stephen Castles (2010, p. 1572), one of the most prominent thinkers in the field of migration, who passed away in 2022, states, the distinct position of the field of migration from other social sciences is closely related to its policy-oriented structure as well as its multidisciplinary nature. In fact, migration studies are often identified as a "soft spot" of the state as it points out the conflicts between the interest of the state and human rights, women's rights, labour rights or children's rights. Not only states but intergovernmental and international organisations also support migration research or programmes in order to control, audit and manage migrants.

The idea for this special issue is closely related to the above-mentioned debates in the field of migration. A significant number of the articles in this issue are the products of the fruitful discussions we had within the scope of the graduate course "Current Issues in Migration Studies" at METU Department of Sociology last year. With the participation of researchers from outside the course, the theme of the issue has evolved over time towards issues that are not discussed much or overlooked in the field of migration. In this context, some of the articles in this issue point to important areas that have been overlooked and some of which are only recently being discussed, such as state policies on Turkish citizens abroad, climate refugees, migrant athletes, or women's cooperatives for refugee women. These articles aim to open up new debates based on literature and accessible data rather than exhaustive research based on fieldwork, and at the same time, hint at possible areas of research in near future.

Gizem Kolbaşı Muyan's paper titled *Turkey's Diaspora Engagement Policy during AK Party Era: Long-Distance Nationalism* presents an original approach to the role of the state in the diaspora making with a long-distance nationalism perspective. Türkiye has been known for its diaspora policies which focus on citizens living abroad, sister organisations and international students in Türkiye since the early 2010s. Kolbaşı Muyan interprets these policies as a political project of AKP governments and relates them with a nationalistic perspective and New Ottomanism perspective as the basis of diaspora policies. Regarding migration, diaspora politics gain an important role in determining political developments in the "motherland" Türkiye and representatives as political actors abroad.

Barış Can Sever's paper titled *An Evaluation on the Possibilities of Human Mobility and Immobility Regarding the Climate Crisis in Türkiye* examines climate mobility as a new and important topic for migration issues in Türkiye. By promoting the terms "climate crisis" and "climate justice", Sever argues that the climate mobility issue could be analysed from a human mobility/immobility perspective which should be fitted in social change and transformation. The issue of human mobility/immobility originated from climate change presents a new issue for both national and international migration discussions.

M. Dilara Cılızoğlu's paper *Can Women's Cooperatives Be a Solution for the Empowerment of Syrian Refugee Women?* discusses the role of cooperatives funded by international organisations in 'empowering' Syrian refugee women in Türkiye. Based on on-line material and discourses, Cılızoğlu examines the discourses by three recently established cooperative projects funded by international organisations (ILO, WVI and FAO). The paper focuses on how cooperatives have become a part of neo-liberal strategies with empowerment and self-reliance discourses. Adopting a critical gender perspective, Cılızoğlu argues that non-material precarity is as important as rights-based and economic empowerment in empowerment discussions. Cılızoğlu also questions the prejudices and stereotypes on non-material precarity while she points out the lack of a clear definition and operationalization of empowerment.

Yavuz Yavuz analyzes another overlooked discussion topic of migration and sports with his paper titled *Thinking Migration and Nationhood in the Realm of Sports: Migrant Track and Field Athletes in Turkey During the 2016 Event Cycle*. Yavuz examines the relationship between sports and migration by focusing on the athletes representing Türkiye in the 2016 Summer Olympics and in the 2016 European Athletics Championships. Supported by selected media coverages, his analysis presents an original perspective as it discusses how sports and migration are constructed as a part of a reimagining of ethnicity and nationhood in Türkiye.

The increase in the number of migration studies also brings the need to reflect on methodological and ethical concerns related to migration studies. Umut Yüksel's contribution, *Politicization and Instrumentalization of Migration Research in Turkey: Ethical Challenges*, draws attention to the potential difficulties arising from asymmetrical power relations in migration research and the risk of 'over-research'. In his article, Yüksel suggests following a dual imperative approach that should be scientifically sound but also relevant to migration policies. In this final article of the special issue, Yüksel's article contributes to the issue with an interesting discussion on the methodological and ethical issues faced by migration researchers.

We hope that the contribution of the articles presented here will inspire further discussion and research in the field of migration. Without a doubt, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed, and this special issue, in which we took the courage to publish it with young researchers can be seen as a modest effort to broaden the debate on migration-related issues in academia.

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