

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Turkish Immigrants in Italy: On Migration and Living Together*

Mustafa Demirtaş¹

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Uşak University,
Department of Sociology, Faculty
of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Uşak/Türkiye

ORCID: [0000-0001-6384-662](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6384-662)

E-Mail:
mustafademirtas35@gmail.com

March 2025

Volume:22

Issue:2

DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1627518

Abstract

This article, which focuses on the experiences of Turkish immigrants living in Italy, examines how the migration process paves the way for living together with differences and for cultural, social and economic change. As part of a qualitative study, data was collected through interviews with 50 Turkish immigrants using a snowball sample and participant observation. The results show how Turkish immigrants maintain their differences in Italy and how these differences are maintained in an intertwined environment that is mutually beneficial. Immigrants do not tend to suppress other identities in order to prove their identity. On the contrary, they enrich the social structure by passing on their cultural values. This situation allows both the immigrants to express themselves and the natives to learn about other cultures. The interaction between Turkish and Italian society breaks down prejudices and strengthens the sense of common life. This article shows how living together with differences strengthens the common life and how it contributes to the immigrants' adaptation processes to the new way of life.

Citation:

Demirtaş, M. (2025). Turkish immigrants in Italy: On migration and living together. *OPUS– Journal of Society Research*, 22(2), 251-264.

Keywords: Migration, Difference, Turks, Culture, Italy

Öz

İtalya'da yaşayan Türk göçmenlerin deneyimlerini ele alan bu çalışma, göç sürecinin kültürel, sosyal ve ekonomik dönüşümlerle birlikte nasıl farklılıklarla bir arada yaşama yolunu açtığını incelemektedir. Nitel bir araştırma olarak, kartopu örneklemiyle 50 Türkiyeli göçmenle yapılan görüşmeler ve katılımcı gözlem yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Bulgular, Türk göçmenlerin, İtalya'da farklılıklarını muhafaza ederek, bu farklılıkların birbirini besleyen bir iç içe geçmişlik içinde nasıl sürdürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Göçmenler, kimliklerini kanıtlama adına öteki kimlikleri baskı altına alma eğiliminde değildir. Aksine, kültürel değerlerini paylaşarak toplumsal yapıyı zenginleştirirler. Bu durum, hem göçmenlerin kendilerini ifade etmelerine hem de yerel halkın farklı kültürleri tanınmasına olanak tanır. Türk ve İtalyan toplumu arasındaki etkileşim, önyargıları azaltarak ortak yaşam duygusunun güçlenmesini sağlar. Bu makale, farklılıklarla birlikte yaşamanın birlikte, ortak bir yaşamı nasıl güçlendirdiğini ve göçmenlerin yeni yaşam biçimlerine uyum sağlama süreçlerine ne şekilde katkı sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Farklılık, Türkler, Kültür, İtalya

* Bu çalışma TÜBİTAK 2219 "Yurt Dışı Doktora Sonrası Araştırma Burs Programı" tarafından desteklenmiştir.

Introduction

Migration is a complex phenomenon that goes beyond a displacement movement and has various social, political and economic consequences. It is not only an individual experience, but also a dynamic part of social change (De Haan, 2000). This phenomenon, which cannot be explained by a single theoretical approach and involves many elements, is moving in the world in which we live, together with the question of "how to ensure coexistence in a complex society." The harmonious relationship between immigrants, who have different cultural values from the local people, and the host society is mortgaged, as if there were always a price to pay. Welcoming newly arrived immigrants and sharing time and space with them comes with the expectation that immigrants will take on certain obligations from the outset, even if they do not want to. Do the immigrants really have a relationship with the local people that must be accepted? How do they carry on their daily lives in an environment that is different from their own culture? To what extent can they preserve their differences in this new environment? To what extent do they develop their relationships with the local people? This article aims to show the process that Turkish immigrants living in Italy go through in overcoming cultural boundaries and creating a common life with their differences.

According to Gordon Marshall's definition, "migration is the permanent movement of individuals or groups across symbolic or political boundaries into new settlements and societies" (1999, p. 685). At a time when anti-immigrant sentiment was on the rise across Europe and the coexistence of different people within a society was becoming increasingly difficult (Bauman, 2017), these permanent relationships of movement that the immigrants who went from Turkey to Italy entered into with the Italian population show how different lifestyles create an experience of coexistence. When the migration process is considered within an understanding that gives more importance to the voices of Turkish immigrants' life practices and is more useful for realizing the possibility of living together with differences, focusing on immigrants' lifestyles based on differences prepares the ground for discussions on new ways that allow them to be

considered a legitimate and equal part of the society in which they live. It opens up productive perspectives on the phenomenon of migration and the way immigrants exist in the country they go to.

Looking at the idea of living together with differences with Turkish immigrants living in Italy can give an insight into how and under what specific conditions a common life can be created with the Other, the Other who always tries to remain different as a person. This insight can give immigrants more space and enable them to exist as equals in this society. If we try to focus on the question of how conditions can be created that allow Turkish immigrants to develop their own differences in the best possible way, the following questions can be traced: How can a common, equal life of Turkish immigrants living in Italy be maintained despite their differences? Which relationships that are forged in everyday life are defined as dependent on difference? How can different cultures, with their differences, live together in a common society? This article examines the answers to these questions through the experiences of Turkish immigrants in Italy. Their lifestyle and their tendency to build relationships with the local people show the possibility of establishing a life that respects diversity and difference in daily practice. As Claude Lévi-Strauss said, "the diversity of cultures depends not so much on the isolation of human societies from one another, but on the relationships that bind them together." (2022, p.26). The real contribution of Turkish and Italian cultures to each other lies not in the enumeration of their particular inventions, but in the unifying differences they offer each other.

Even today, thousands of immigrants continue to immigrate to Italy and other European countries, and those who immigrated before continue to live in Italy and other European countries. At a time when the relationship between immigrants and local people has evolved into an "enemy" one, and the efforts of nation states to maintain their claim to purity by seeking new forms of security such as protective walls (Brown, 2017) the question arises as to how people can continue to live together in peace in the same geography and how they can get out of the position of being "wasted lives" (Bauman, 2016, p.42; 2003, p.87). In order to

find a modest answer to this question and thus overcome the limitations of the concept of "assimilation" as an immigration policy" (Göker and Meşe, 2011, p.70), which dates back to the last century and no longer works in modern times, this article examines the experiences of Turkish immigrants living together with their differences, especially in Italy. It aims to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the debates on migration within the framework of an understanding in which immigrants become more visible in the public sphere, the voice of their life practices becomes more meaningful and the possibility of living together becomes more useful. Thus, this article contributes to identifying the changing structure of migration through everyday relationships and highlighting its unique aspects by conducting an analysis of Turkish migrants' coexistence with the local people in Italy, where they have migrated to.

Theoretical Framework: Living with Differences and Social Belonging

The phenomenon of migration is not just a process of people moving between physical spaces; it is a multi-layered social reality in which cultural identities are reshaped, new relationships to socio-spatial structures emerge and the boundaries between the 'self' and the 'other' are redrawn (Nail, 2015; Castles & Miller, 2013). The migration process involves immigrants' efforts both to adapt to a new social structure and to preserve the cultural codes from which they originate. This dual process plays a crucial role in the construction of immigrants' identities and their relationships with the local society. Especially in countries that have received relatively new immigrants, such as Italy in the European Mediterranean belt, the experience of living together with different ethnic groups offers unique examples of immigrants' social adaptation practices.

The concept of cultural integration, as proposed in J. W. Berry's (1992) model, refers to immigrants preserving their own culture while interacting with the local society. According to Berry, cultural integration goes beyond one-way strategies such as assimilation or separation; it is a "two-way" process in which immigrants both preserve their own

identity and build healthy relationships with the local society. This situation can also be clearly seen in the example of Turkish immigrants in Italy. As the research has shown, Turkish immigrants continue to strive to integrate into Italian society while maintaining their cultural identity and embracing the practice of living together with their differences.

In this context, the concept of "difference" points to a critical point in understanding the phenomenon of migration and the processes of social belonging. Viewing difference not as a threat or an element of conflict, but as a source of social wealth, creates a positive framework for mutual interactions between immigrants and the local society (Bauman, 2016). This study also shows how differences are transformed into opportunities for coexistence and how a mutual "learning" and "exchange" process is constructed through the daily practices of Turkish immigrants in Italy.

In this context, Stuart Hall's (1992) theory of "identity" is also an important conceptual point of reference. According to Hall, identity is not a static and unchanging structure, but a process that is reshaped through historical processes and encounters. Using the example of Turkish immigrants in Italy, it can be observed that the identities of immigrants become flexible and change when they come into contact with Italian culture. While immigrants are nourished by their culture of origin, they also construct a hybrid identity by adopting elements of the Italian lifestyle. Everyday practices such as the incorporation of the Italian tradition of "coffee and croissant" into Turkish breakfast habits are concrete examples of this cultural hybridity.

Cultural differences are often a touchstone for the coexistence of immigrants. In the case of Italy, however, it can be observed that Turkish immigrants both preserve their own cultural practices and develop a lifestyle that is compatible with Italian culture. The friendly relations that immigrants establish with Italians prove that differences become a factor that strengthens coexistence. In this way, immigrants find a way to be "different and common at the same time" on an individual and social level.

On the other hand, it is found that class and space-related factors also play an important role in

the process of Turkish immigrants living together with their differences in Italy. In particular, the research data shows that Turkish immigrants are economically strong in the central and northern cities of Italy and live in the city centers and in close proximity to Italians. According to Loïc Wacquant's (2008) theory of "social exclusion," the displacement of immigrants to the periphery of the city deepens social exclusion, while integration into the city center facilitates social adjustment processes. The fact that Turkish immigrants live spatially in the same neighborhoods as Italians can be seen as a factor that facilitates living with the differences.

Finally, Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "living together" supports the main axis of this article. According to Bauman, one of the most fundamental problems of modern societies is how differences can live together (Bauman, 2003). The visibility of immigrants in the public space, contributing to the local society without giving up their own cultural practices, prevents the weakening of social ties and creates a "bridge" between differences. The experience of Turkish immigrants living in Italy can also be considered in this context, as these groups, despite having different cultural codes, enable "coexistence with differences" by developing harmonious relations with Italian society.

According to Bauman, the coexistence of differences is inevitable in modern societies, and the question is how to deal with these differences. Bauman emphasizes the dynamic structure of immigrants' experiences, especially with the concept of "liquid modernity" (2000, 2005), which is associated with uncertainties and transience. As Turkish immigrants in Italy began to settle permanently in Italy, which they initially regarded as a "transit country," they began to build more permanent ties with local society and stabilize this fluid process.

There is also a growing literature on the migration experiences of Turkish immigrants in Italy (Çakırer, 2010; İhlamur-Öner, 2012; Purkis & Güngör, 2015; Purkis, 2019; Beqo, 2018; Beqo, 2019; Beqo & Ambrosini, 2022). Studies on the experiences of Turkish immigrants in Italy provide findings that support this theoretical framework. Çakırer (2010) and Purkis & Güngör (2015) exam-

ined the efforts of Turkish immigrants to both preserve their own culture and integrate into Italian society. Purkis (2019) discusses how immigrants strengthen their social ties while preserving their cultural differences and how their cultural identities are shaped to gain social acceptance. Beqo (2019, 2022) examines the differences in Turkish immigrants' social relationships as an expression of social integration and belonging. These studies show how Turkish immigrants develop their cultural identities and social ties by integrating them into the fabric of both their own and the local society.

As a result, this theoretical framework shows that the processes of migration, cultural differences and coexistence interact in a multidimensional way, especially for Turkish immigrants in Italy. The social relations and cultural interactions that immigrants enter into with Italian society transform cohabitation from a purely economic necessity into a cultural project of coexistence. In this context, it becomes clear that immigrants maintain their own cultural practices while creating a livable common space with the local society, which is also the aim of the study. This study, developed within the framework of migration and cultural differences, will contribute to the understanding of the social adaptation practices of Turkish immigrants in Italy.

A Brief Assessment of the Migration from Turkey to Italy

Italy differs from other European countries in its history of migration. It began to receive a large influx of migrants from the late 1970s (Moralli, Musarò and Parmiggiani, 2023, p.566). This situation continued after the 1980s, and in these years Italy's transition from a country of emigration to a country of immigration became evident in the public sphere (Ambrosini, 2013, p.177; Salomoni 2012). Flows to Italy have also increased due to the lack of an immigration policy (Bettin & Cela, 2014, p.48). Italy sometimes served as a destination country for immigrants and sometimes as a transit country for immigration to northern European countries (Purkis and Güngör, 2015; Çakırer, 2010; Sirkeci, 2006). Immigrants generally work in low-

value and labor-intensive jobs in the labor market that local people are reluctant to do, even if they are unemployed (Mingione, 1999; Quassoli, 1999). These jobs are no longer filled by local people, but by foreign immigrants, especially immigrants from countries outside the European Union. International immigrants are becoming the most important source of labor for the economy (Schierup et al., 2006). Deprived of their means of livelihood, immigrants flock to regions where capital accumulation is faster and capital movement are more frequent in order to sustain their lives (Purkis, 2018). In this context, most immigrants are concentrated in the northern and central regions of Italy (Ambrosini, 2012, p.4). We must say that Italy offers them more blue-collar jobs in these regions (Fullin, 2016).

The migration of Turkish immigrants to Italy can be considered a relatively new wave compared to the waves of migration to other European countries. This wave has been observed since the second half of the 1980s and has increased continuously (Beqo, 2019a, p.75). Italy was used as a bridge for Turkish immigrants to other European countries, especially until the early 2000s. As it was more difficult to get from Turkey to European countries such as France, Germany and England in the 1980s, Turkish immigrants first came to Italy and then moved on from there to other European countries. From the 1980s to the early 1990s, Italy was considered a transit country for immigrants compared to other European countries (Beqo, 2019b, p.532; Beqo and Ambrosini, 2022, p.485). The migration of Turkish immigrants did not originally take place with the intention of settling here in the long term, after arriving in Italy, they tried to leave Italy by various ways (Schuster, 2005, p.768). In fact, this situation changed in the early 2000s, and from that time until today, immigrants no longer use Italy as a bridge, but prefer to live here for many years. If we look at the results of the interviews conducted with Turkish immigrants living in Italy, we can see that since the early 2000s, almost all immigrants from Turkey wanted to come to Italy first. They no longer use Italy as a transit country to another country. In addition, most immigrants believe that this country is a safe country for them.

If we look at the number of Turkish immigrants living in Italy today, we see that this number has reached around 20,000 in the last five years. In 2019, there were 18,780, 10,619 men and 8,161 women. In 2020, there were 19,168, 10,847 men and 8,321 women. In 2021, there were 20,999, 11,863 men and 9,136 women. In 2022, there were 18,930, 10,972 men and 7,958 women. In 2023 there were 20,080, 11,587 men and 8,493 women (I.STAT, 2024).

Table 1. Turkish immigrants living in Italy

Years	Women	Men	Total
2019	8,161	10,619	18,780
2020	8,312	10,847	19,168
2021	9,136	11,863	20,999
2022	7,958	10,972	18,930
2023	8,493	11,587	20,080

It can be said that the number of Turkish immigrants in Italy has changed to some extent over the last five years, both upwards and downwards. However, it is noticeable in the data that the numbers of female and male immigrants are quite close to each other. The vast majority of Turkish immigrants live in the north of Italy. In other words, they are concentrated in the northern regions, the most developed parts of Italy, as is the case with other immigrant groups. Although their numbers are small compared to immigrants from other countries and they are a relatively new immigrant group in Italy, they live in many cities in northern Italy. In these cities, they work in various sectors, such as carpet weaving, construction, market management, teaching, office assistance, customer service, logistics, jewelry, waitressing, translation, bar management, truck driving, cryptocurrency consulting, project management, tourism business, real estate, etc. Nevertheless, it can be said that the best-known sector is kebab sector. Kebab stores, which offer the opportunity to work on their own account and do not require large capital, are at the top of the list of businesses established mainly by Turkish immigrants. These kebab stores, usually family businesses with little capital, can be seen as a catalyst that allows them to integrate into the Italian system through economic life.

In Italy, some of the Turkish immigrants interviewed work in fields such as jewelry, teaching, office assistance, college lecturers, cryptocurrency

consultants, real estate agents or project managers, suggesting that they are increasingly finding a place in sectors that require expertise. Those who have come here in the recent past are mostly middle class. The number of those who are financially well off in Turkey but prefer to live in Italy for various reasons is quite high. In addition to those who come for business reasons, education, family and political reasons are also among the obvious reasons for migrating from Turkey to Italy.

The integration processes of Turkish immigrants in Italy show differences, especially between the groups that immigrated after the 1980s and in the 2000s. Turkish immigrants who came to Italy in the 1980s were generally employed in the industrial areas in the north of the country and worked mostly in low-skilled jobs, especially in factories and the construction sector. The economic integration of immigrants during this period took place mainly in labour-intensive sectors, and their social integration was largely characterised by working life. The immigrants who came to Italy in the 2000s, on the other hand, are more heterogeneously structured and are made up of people with different levels of education and immigrants from different occupational groups. Their integration processes go beyond working life and extend to all areas of life, from education to social and cultural life.

It is clear that gender plays a crucial role in the integration processes of Turkish immigrants in Italy. Immigrant women have different experiences of integration than men, due to both traditional family structures and social norms in Italy. Turkish immigrant women in particular were mostly limited to roles within the family and remained in the background compared to men in social life. The fact that women have to work as domestic workers or in low-paid care and cleaning jobs, combined with the restrictions imposed by gender roles, has made the integration process more difficult. This situation has resulted in migrant women having a lower socio-economic status and encountering more difficulties in the integration process. However, it can be said that the situation of Turkish women's participation in the labour force, especially in the 2000s, has developed more positively

compared to the 1980s. Turkish women who immigrated after the 2000s have started to work in more skilled occupations such as teachers, office workers, engineers, translators and project managers. Although the increase in these occupations indicates an improvement in the socio-economic situation of women, it is important to remember that women have fewer economic opportunities compared to male immigrants and face barriers in accessing these opportunities. These gender differences are an important factor influencing the role of immigrants in social life and their coexistence with the native society. The more active participation of women in social life is an element that can facilitate not only their individual integration, but also the integration of the immigrant community as a whole.

The social adaptation processes of immigrant groups in Italy are not limited to economic integration. Cultural adaptation processes are also an important part of this integration process. Immigrants from Turkey have more difficulties than other immigrant groups in terms of linguistic, cultural and religious differences. This situation affects both the social adaptation of immigrants and their coexistence with the local society. Although Albanian and Ukrainian immigrants came to Italy under similar economic conditions, their integration processes developed differently as they were more similar in terms of culture and religion. Albanians and Ukrainians had an easier time adapting to the social structure in Italy as they had closer ties in terms of culture and religion. For Turkish immigrants, on the other hand, the lack of Italian language skills was a major obstacle. The cultural diversity and multi-religious structure of Turkey affected the social dynamics within this immigrant group and made the integration process a little more difficult. Therefore, the cultural obstacles faced by immigrants from Turkey are more complex and multidimensional compared to other immigrant groups.

The migration adventure of Turkish immigrants in Italy is different from the migration adventures in other European countries. First of all, Italy was primarily a transit country for them and not a country of arrival. While many European

countries have used recruitment programs to encourage migration from Turkey since the 1960s, Italy has had no such program. On the contrary, the first migration from Turkey to Italy in the 1990s was characterized by irregular flows of mainly low-skilled Turkish migrants and Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees. Over time, the profile and motivations of these migration flows have changed and today, for example, Italian universities are accepting a growing number of students from Turkey (Carignani & Rosina & Beqo, 2022). It should also be noted that the number of middle and upper class Turkish immigrants here is considerable. Although one of the most important reasons for migrating from one place to another is generally considered to be material deprivation, it can be stated that material deprivation is not the most important factor for their migration adventure in Italy, at least not today. Even though the economic situation in Italy worsened in the following ten years as a result of the 2008 economic crisis (Ambrosini, 2018), it can generally be said that Turkish immigrants who are already middle class and have a good job in Turkey come here for personal, social and political reasons and work here in skilled jobs as they would in Turkey.

Method

This research, started in 2024, is based on data from semi-structured interviews conducted with 50 Turkish immigrants (26 women, 24 men) in central and northern Italian cities (Rome, Milan, Bologna, Verona, Padova, Pisa, Trento, Florence, Brescia, Bergamo, Ferrara, Vicenza, Modena, Trieste, Genoa, Venice, Parma and Turin) until early 2025. These cities, which are among the most economically, socially and culturally developed places in Italy in terms of the presence of formal and informal sectors such as industry, agriculture, services and construction, as well as in areas such as health, education, artistic activities, fashion and design, can be considered places where immigrants can realize their "dreams". Turkish immigrants live in these Italian cities in large numbers. In this article, Turkish immigrants who have been living in Italy for at least one year are included in the research group. In order to better understand the particularities of

their everyday life practices and to determine the meaning of the migration experience, it was deemed appropriate to conduct field research among Turkish immigrants who have lived in Italy for at least one year.

The participants are single, married, married with children, and over 18 years of age. It can be observed that these immigrants, who immigrated to Italy from different cities in Turkey (Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Adiyaman, Malatya, Antalya, Hatay, Kahramanmaras, Adana), live in different regions in different cities in Italy. The vast majority of immigrants live in the same settlements, neighborhoods or apartments as the Italians in the city centers. There are no Turkish neighborhoods in Italy as there are in Germany. Most Turkish immigrants do not live in slums or suburbs near train stations. They live in the city centers scattered with Italians. One of the most important factors ensuring this is that the Turkish immigrants who have come here in the recent past are mostly middle class and work in professions that bring good financial returns. Although rents are high in the centers of most central and northern Italian cities, Turkish immigrants live in the centers because they have relatively good jobs there or are financially well off. An effect that reinforces "social exclusion," as Loïc Wacquant puts it, is not noticeable in spatial terms (Wacquant, 2008).

The sample of this study, which attempts to analyze the relationship between the phenomenon of migration and the coexistence of differences in the above-mentioned cities in central and northern Italy, was selected with the snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen as a particularly suitable sampling for reaching a specific target group to be addressed with the research. This sampling allows researchers direct access to the targeted group by expanding the sample group through a few initial participants. However, the potential limitations of snowball sampling should also be considered. Since this sampling usually relies on other people known to the participants, the sampling may be limited to the social networks of the initially selected individuals. This may result in a particular segment being over-represented and the sampling therefore having a limited ability to reflect the general population. However, it would

be misleading to claim that the limited social networks of the snowball sampling always prevent it from reflecting the general population. In this study, people who have lived in Italy for many years and have a certain level of experience and knowledge were initially selected. Thanks to these characteristics, the sampling was increasingly diversified and deepened with the people they suggested. This sampling was particularly effective with hard-to-reach people such as housewives abroad. As a result, the snowball sampling was successful in reaching often hard-to-reach communities and the research was conducted with a greater diversity of participants.

In this context, three groups of migrants can be mentioned at the most basic level. The first group is the first immigrants who arrived after 1980. The first immigrants are those who generally build the memory of migration with their life practices aimed at not causing “problems” to the local society. The second group are the immigrants who came to Italy in the 2000s. This generation, which is in the middle in terms of cultural affiliation, has rather distant relations with local society compared to the first generation. Furthermore, it is a group that tends to settle down to a certain extent over a longer period of time and set up its own business. The third group consists of those born in Italy, referred to as “children of immigrant families,” who have no problems speaking the language and mastering Italian cultural codes. A total of 50 people of different ages, at different stages of life and from different socio-economic backgrounds living in different parts of Italy were interviewed. In this way, it is possible to look at the migration process of Turks in Italy, which is complexly related to class, gender, generation and other social differences, with a comprehensive and relational analysis from a theoretical and practical point of view.

Although qualitative studies can be ethically challenging for both participants and researchers, they are an important source of in-depth analysis of sensitive issues in people’s lives. Moreover, qualitative studies are of particular importance for uncovering the complex, contextual and multi-layered dimensions of immigrants’ migration dynamics (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2019, p.2). It should be

recognized that the empirical findings in this research are based on qualitative rather than quantitative data. An attempt was made to take a more qualitative approach (which of course does not mean that a quantitative approach was completely neglected). Qualitative research and participant observation are effective methods to gather the results in the field. It is assumed that the qualitative research method is suitable to understand what cannot be expressed numerically and to capture the experiences and stories of immigrants. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information about the immigrants’ living conditions, their working lives, their identity affiliations and their relationships with local society and, in particular, their daily living practices.

To increase the reliability of the research, expert opinions were sought on the prepared semi-structured interview questions, and the interview questions were adapted according to the suggestions received. The researcher was in the same environment as the participants during the research process so that accurate and complete answers were possible. Conducting face-to-face interviews of at least one hour with each participant ensured that the research process was traceable and clearly documented. Participants were informed of the research prior to the study and told that their views would be sought on a voluntary basis afterwards. A separate interview was arranged with each participant to obtain detailed responses. In this research, the validity criterion of the research was strengthened by including the participants’ statements to a large extent and focusing on their experiences. Before participating in the research, all participants were informed about the research and their consent was obtained. In addition, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research and Publication of the University of Uşak prior to the research. The collected data were described, explained and interpreted, and the results were presented.

Findings

The first question asked of Turkish immigrants regarding social affiliation was a question about citizenship. The aim was to find out what effects the

acquisition of Italian citizenship has on social relationships and identity. 5 apart from the Turkish immigrants who have Italian citizenship, the Turkish immigrants were asked the question: Would anything change in your social relationships if you were granted Italian citizenship? Although the answers varied in terms of personal experiences, it is possible to draw a general conclusion.

Table 2. Social Relationships

Question: Would anything change in your social relationships if you were granted Italian citizenship?	
Nothing would change in my social relationships	40
There would be differences in my social relationships	5
Total	45

In general, people who want to acquire Italian citizenship see this situation as a strengthening of legal and economic rights. Italian citizenship offers advantages, in particular the privilege of holding EU citizenship, access to the labor market and freedom to travel. In addition, the right to claim social benefits in Italy offers another important contribution. In terms of social relations, however, Turkish immigrants do not believe that acquiring Italian citizenship brings about significant changes in their social relations.

When the second question was put to the Turkish immigrants in Italy: "To what extent do the differences in your lifestyle (which of course also depend on the economy) contribute to building social and spatial relationships with the local people, or do they create obstacles? They explained that it's good to be multicultural, that Italians see diversity positively and in some cases they even want to get to know you because of it. Turks in Italy argue that the differences in social relations with local people are an enriching experience thanks to mutual interaction and understanding.

In fact, the efforts of Turkish immigrants to survive in Italian society go hand in hand with the desire to preserve and cultivate their own cultural identity. The relationships they establish with Italians do not lead them to isolate themselves completely from their own culture. They try to build a life in Italy while preserving their own differences. However, they do not lead a closed lifestyle. They

try to understand Italian culture and build a connection to it. They try to build a cultural bond with the Italians without losing their own differences. This type of bond helps the immigrants to preserve their own culture and at the same time show that they are changing their lifestyle. Because differences can be used to forge a common bond. 18-year-old Gül, who has been living in Milan as a student since 2022, says the following: "I have to preserve my culture here. I have lived with my differences since the day I arrived. But there are also things that I have integrated into my lifestyle. I eat things here that are not part of breakfast in our country, like coffee and croissants. Of course, there is a limit to what I have absorbed from the Italian lifestyle." The fact that Turkish immigrants continue their lives here with their differences by integrating some aspects of the Italian lifestyle into their own has a positive effect on their social relationships with Italians. This is because, for most Turkish immigrants, Italians appreciate the differences, and the immigrants' efforts to do the same do not seem to interest them much. The similarities between Italians and Turkish immigrants seem to be that they try to understand differences instead of judging them and engaging in cultural interactions. 45-year-old Sinem, who has lived in Milan since 1998 and works in the logistics sector, emphasizes that Italians are interested in differences: "There are Italians who are curious about my language, there are Italians who are curious about our TV series. This leads to an exchange of information. A friendly conversation develops. Some of these friendships can then develop into a strong friendship." 36-year-old Duygu, who has lived in Bologna since 2010 and works as a translator, also emphasizes the importance of the differences for both groups in everyday life: "I think my differences are interesting for them. I don't have to try to be culturally like the Italians or do anything for that matter. For example, I cook Turkish food for them. It's as if they are attracted to the difference." It can be said that one of the main similarities between Turkish immigrants and Italians is that they respect each other's differences.

Another question asked of Turkish immigrants living in Italy was: "Who do you have more to do with in your social life?"

Table 3. Social life

Only Italians	21
Only Turks	5
Turks and Italians	24
Total	50

When evaluating this question, a number of cultural, economic and social factors must be taken into account. In Italian society, social relationships are largely characterised by local communities, family ties and business relationships. Immigrants generally tend to establish closer social relationships initially with people from similar cultural backgrounds. In the case of Turkish immigrants, these relationships are usually limited to other Turkish immigrants and family members. However, as their social and economic life progresses, their interactions with the Italian population increase. Especially in the workplace and at school, immigrants tend to build more relationships with local people. They build deeper social ties with the local people. While the social relationships of Turkish immigrants may initially be limited to ethnic and cultural groups, over time they spread to more diverse social circles thanks to economic opportunities and cultural adaptation processes. Therefore, the differences between the lifestyles of Turkish immigrants and Italians are not an obstacle for them to establish social relationships or partnerships.

When asked the question “Do you see a difference between the Turkish and Italian lifestyles? If so, what kind of difference do you see?” Turks believe that there are no major differences in lifestyle between them and Italians. While the Turkish lifestyle is mainly characterized by traditional family structures and community-oriented values, the Italian lifestyle is based on a more individualistic and free spirit. In Turkey, family ties are strong and social relationships are focused on family, relatives and friends. In Italian society, the family is important, but individual freedom and personal space are more strongly emphasized. In addition, hospitality plays an important role in the Turkish lifestyle and social events are usually held at home or in crowded, family-oriented establishments. According to 35-year-old Elif, who has been living in Pisa since 2008 and is working on her PhD, “Turks are more hospitable. Turks are more considerate

than Italians when it comes to hospitality.” In Italy, social life tends to take the form of outdoor socializing, cafés and restaurants. However, food culture is a strong unifying element in both societies, but Turkish cuisine is more ethnically and regionally diverse, while Italian cuisine is more homogeneous, mainly due to regional differences. These differences affect the daily lifestyle, social relations and cultural norms of the two societies. Furthermore, according to 25-year-old Utku who lives in Bologna in 2023 and works in a kebab store, “Italians do their best to make the day as pleasant as possible. Turks, on the other hand, work all the time.” Italians love to attend social events and take an active part in social life. They try to strengthen their social ties in an enjoyable way by meeting up at activities such as local festivals, concerts and food events.

The relations between Turkish immigrants in Italy and the local people are close. When asked the question Turkish immigrants living in Italy: “What kind of relationship do you have with the local people in Italy?”, the majority of immigrants answer that they have good relations with the local people. In this context, 60-year-old Hasan, for example, who has lived in Verona since 1986 and works in the carpet trade, says: “My children go to the same schools as Italian children. I also see Italians and Turks getting married. I can say that there are good relations between the Turkish and Italian populations,” and points to the positive interactions between the two peoples. The influence of Italian culture does not pose a threat to Turkish immigrants. When Turkish immigrants were asked: “Do you see the interaction and differences between Turkish and Italian families as a threat to the traditional Turkish family structure?”, almost all immigrants answered “No”

Table 4. Turkish and Italian families

Yes	1
No	49
Total	50

The influence of Italian culture is not perceived by Turkish immigrants as a threat, but as a contribution to increasing their cultural wealth. The different perspectives offered by Italian culture enable individuals to adopt an equal life. The coming

together of different cultures deepens social bonds. Different lifestyles help people to get to know each other and support each other in difficult times. Where there are differences, a common unity can be created that forms a certain unity of solidarity in every situation. The ability to exist in this society with differences, not to make radical changes in lifestyle and to maintain solidary relationships on a common basis are important factors that enable Turkish immigrants to stay in Italy for a long time.

An individual's sense of belonging to a society is closely linked to their lifestyle and social acceptance. If some immigrants find a good job, this can give them a sense of being a legitimate part of the new society in which they live. However, the sense of belonging is not limited to professional status. A person's sense of belonging to a society is also measured by the extent to which they have internalized the culture (Wells 1994: 43), values and lifestyle that comprise the skills, beliefs and behaviors acquired by the people who make up that society. For example, belonging to the Italian culture, mastering the language, participating in local activities and building social relationships all contribute to the individual being seen as a legitimate part of this society. At the same time, people rallying around a common goal or value and supporting each other helps them feel like a legitimate part of that society. It should therefore be emphasized that acceptance as a legitimate part of a society is not only measured by economic status, but that living with differences plays an important role in strengthening social belonging and ensuring that people come together and build a strong bond based on shared values and goals. In this context, Turkish immigrants were asked: "Do you feel that you belong to Italian society? If you don't feel you belong, what is the criterion for being accepted as a legitimate part of Italian society?" In response to this question, they do not mention the economy as the only criterion for being accepted as a legitimate part of society. They state that knowledge of the language and adaptation to Italian culture are important criteria. They believe that cultural and professional training, such as language courses and vocational training, help to convey these. For this reason, they call for the efficiency and diversity of institutional organizations to be strengthened. The

experiences of Turkish immigrants living together with their differences with Italians are important factors that enable them to stay in Italy.

When Turkish immigrants living in Italy were asked another question: "Do you believe that you are socially excluded from the upper, middle or lower classes of the country in which you have settled?", all immigrants answered no. In this context, Turkish immigrants responded to the last question: "Do you see a secure future for yourself here or are you preparing to migrate again?" the majority of Turkish migrants responded that they see a secure future here.

Table 5. A secure future

Yes	48
No	2
Total	50

From the early 1970s to the early 2000s, Italy was considered a transit country for Turkish immigrants to reach other countries, but today it is seen as a place to stay for many years in differences. The life of Turkish immigrants in this place helps to rethink the definition and limits of different ways of life through daily relationships.

Discussions and Conclusion

It is important to see how immigrants from Turkey to Italy organise their daily lives in the face of the difficulties of living in a different cultural environment. This understanding plays an important role in our efforts to get to know each other and create a common living space. The coming together of different cultures, thoughts and experiences strengthens the bonds of living together with differences and reinforces social cohesion.

The life of Turkish immigrants in Italy is a complex experience, both on an individual and social level. This is because the migration process not only leads to a physical change of location, but also to cultural, social and economic changes. A process that involves many variables, such as migration, cannot be static and cannot be explained by a single reason. The act of migration should not be seen as a one-way movement and immigrants should not be seen as individuals acting only according to

economic needs. The social relationships that immigrants establish in their daily lives are important variables for understanding this act. Viewing migration only as a result of international demand for labor or as a rational decision by individuals to maximize individual income is a very limited approach to understanding the migration experience. Immigrants are not beings free of social ties and relationships and acting out of economic motives, but rather relational beings involved in various social interactions in the society in which they live.

The Turkish immigrants try to build a life in Italy with their differences within these interactions. Their differences do not see another difference as an enemy. On the contrary, the differences live in a reinforcing interrelatedness. Thus, Turkish immigrants in Italy find conditions that allow them to develop their own uniqueness. In general, people in Italy do not tend to suppress other identities in order to prove their own identity. They lead their lives in a framework in which differences are respected and living together with other identities does not lead to a feeling of restriction in the individual's life. They enrich the social fabric in Italy by sharing their cultural values. This situation allows immigrants to express themselves and helps the native society to learn about other cultures. The mutual interaction between immigrants and local people breaks down prejudices by building a bridge between the two cultures and strengthens the sense of common life in society.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature on migration and living together with differences. Focusing on the transformations of immigrants not only in spatial but also in cultural, social and economic planes, this research analyzes the experiences of Turkish immigrants living in Italy in a local context and addresses the phenomenon of migration in a multi-layered structure. The study, which reveals that in the relations established by immigrants with the local people, differences are not an obstacle but rather an element that strengthens social harmony and togetherness, shows how common life practices can be developed by preserving differences. The ways in which Turkish immigrants interact with Italian society while preserving their identities in daily life reveal that cultural diversity is not a threat but a

source of social enrichment in terms of immigrant studies and in this context, it offers a perspective that goes beyond traditional approaches such as "assimilation." In this respect, the study adds a new dimension to the discussions on migration and social belonging and provides a concrete and current example of how differences are an element that strengthens living together.

In conclusion, this study examined the experiences of Turkish immigrants in Italy in terms of social belonging and social relations. The results show that Turkish immigrants try to adapt by preserving their cultural differences in their relationships with Italian society. It was emphasized that Italian citizenship is generally associated with a strengthening of legal and economic rights, but does not bring about significant changes in social relations. Turkish immigrants have established positive social relations with the native population by respecting the Italian culture and adopting some elements of the lifestyle. Cultural interaction and mutual understanding have led to an enriching experience for both communities. The immigrants associate their sense of coexistence with their differences not only with economic success, but also with learning the language and cultural adaptation. Italy, which was initially seen as a transit country, has developed into a long-term living space with friendly and supportive relations. It has been noted that Turkish immigrants see a secure future here and do not suffer from socio-spatial exclusion. It can be said that the life of Turkish immigrants in Italy is an experience that strengthens cultural diversity and social ties.

References

- Ambrosini, M. (2012). We are against a multi-ethnic society: Policies of exclusion at the urban level in Italy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (1), 135-155. <https://doi:10.1080/01419870.2011.644312>
- Ambrosini, M. (2013). Immigration in Italy: Between economic acceptance and political rejection, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 14 (1), 175-194. [https://doi: 10.1007/s12134-011-0231-3](https://doi:10.1007/s12134-011-0231-3)

- Ambrosini, M. (2018). *Irregular immigration in southern Europe. Actors, dynamics and governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barrero, Z. Ricard, & E. Yalaz (2018). *Qualitative research in european migration studies*. London: Springer Nature.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2005). *Liquid life*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2016). *Strangers at our door*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2017). Symptoms in search of an object and a name, (Heinrich Geiselberger Eds.). *The Great Regression*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. & D. Leonidas (2020). *Ahlaki körlük*. (Akın Emre Pilgir, Çev.). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Beqo, I., G. (2019a). Migration from Turkey to Italy and family relationships among migrants. *The Journal of Migration*, 6 (1), 73-96. <https://doi:10.33182/gd.v6i1.625>
- Beqo, I., G. (2019b). Women in Here, Women in There: Changing Roles and Lives of Women Migrants from Turkey in Italy, *Migration Letters*, 16 (4), 531-541. <https://doi:10.33182/ml.v16i4.607>
- Beqo, I., G. & Ambrosini, M. (2022). Reimagining the homeland: diasporic belonging among Turkish and Kurdish second generations in Italy, *International Review of Sociology*, 32 (3), 483-500. <https://doi:10.1080/03906701.2022.212-1118>
- Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society. *International Migration*, 30 (1), 69-85. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.1992.tb00776.x>
- Bettin, G. & Cela. E. (2014). The evolution of migration flows in Europe and Italy. *Economia Marche: Journal of Applied Economics*, 33 (1): 37-63.
- Brown, W. (2017). *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.
- Castles, S. & Miller, M. J. (2013). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Çakırer, Y. (2010). Göç trafiğinde araftakiler: İtalya'daki Türkler, (M. Murat Erdoğan Eds.), *Turks abroad: Migration and Integration in its 50th year*. Ankara: Orion.
- Carignani, S. & Rosina, M. & Ince Beqo, G. (2023). Like 'falling leaves': The migration of the highly-skilled from Turkey to Italy. *Iceonline*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366538620_Like_falling_leaves_The_migration_of_the_highly_skilled_from_Turkey_to_Italy.
- De Haan, A. (2000). Migrants, Livelihoods, and Rights: The Relevance of Migration in Development Policies, *Social Development Working Paper*. 4: 1-39.
- Fullin, G. (2016). Labour market outcomes of immigrants in a south European country: Do race and religion matter? *Work, Employment and Society*, 30 (3), 391-409.
- Göker, G & Meşe, G. (2011). Türk göçmenlerin İtalyanlara bakış açısı: Bir kültürlerarası iletişim araştırması. *Selçuk İletişim*, 7 (1), 66-82.
- Hall, S. (1992). The question of cultural identity, (S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew Eds.). *Modernity and Its Futures*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Ihlamur-Öner, S. G. (2012), Göçün kadınlaşması ve sosyal refah rejiminin dönüşümü: İtalya örneği, (S. Gülfer Ihlamur-Öner & N. Aslı Şirin Öner Eds.) *Küreselleşme Çağında Göç: Kavramlar, Tartışmalar*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Istat.http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_POPSTRCIT1#
- Marshall G. (1999). *Sosyoloji sözlüğü*. (Osman Akınhay ve Derya Kömürcü, Çev.). Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları.
- Mingione, E. (1999). Introduction: Immigrants and the informal economy in european cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23 (2), 209-211.
- Moralli, M. & Musaro, P. & Parmiggiani, P. (2023). From social integration to social emplacement: Perspectives from Italian rural areas. *International Review of Sociology*, 33 (3), 565-586.
- Nail, T. (2015). *The Figure of the migrant*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Purkis, S. (2018). Invisible borders of the city for the migrant women from Turkey: Gendered use of urban space and place making in Cinisello/Milan. *Journal of Migration Integration*, 20 (1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0600-2>.
- Purkis, S. (2019). Invisible borders of the city for the migrant women from Turkey: Gendered Use

- of urban space and place making in cinisello/milan. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(1), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0600-2>.
- Purkis, S., Güngör, F. (2015). Experiences of migrants from Turkey in Milan/Italy. *Istanbul University Journal of Faculty of Political Sciences*, 53, 1-29. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/254035>.
- Quassoli, F. (1999). Migrants in the Italian underground economy, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23 (2), 212-231.
- Salomoni, F. (2012) Göç verenden göç alan ülkeye geçiş: Akdeniz modeli ve İtalya örneği, (S. Gülfer İhlamur-Öner, N. Aslı Şirin Öner Eds.). *Küreselleşme Çağında Göç: Kavramlar, Tartışmalar*, İstanbul: İletişim. 417-438.
- Schuster, L. (2005). The continuing mobility of migrants in Italy: Shifting between places and statuses. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(4), 757-774. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830500109993>.
- Schireup, C.U., P. Hansen and S. Castles (2006). *Migration, citizenship, and the european welfare state a european dilemma*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sirkeci, I. (2006). *The environment of insecurity in Turkey and the emigration of turkish Kurds to Germany*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Strauss- Lévi, C. (2022). *Race and history*, New York: Legare Street Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Wells C (1994). *Sosyal antropoloji açısından insan ve dünyası*, (Bozkurt Güvenç, Çev.). İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi.