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Impact of Migration Policies on Ukrainian Migrants in Turkey: Embrace vs Provision

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to elucidate decision-making processes of Ukrainian forced migrants of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds relocated in Turkey in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian War since 2022. We examine trends in prospective plans, including return, settlement, migration to third countries, and identify key factors influencing social integration in Turkey. To this end, extensive field research was conducted in five provinces in Turkey – İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir and Antalya – between 2022 and 2024. This study employed qualitative method consisting of in-depth interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including Ukrainian diplomatic representatives, migrant organizations, Turkish provincial migration management officials, and post-2022 Ukrainian migrants who were residing in Turkey under various statuses. The findings indicated that decisions between permanence and transience were determined by the state's migrant and asylum policies along the embrace and provision continuum. In addition, active involvement of ethnic organizations of Ukrainians in migration processes appear to act as a factor that either triggers or hinders social cohesion.

Keywords: Ukraine, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian (Ahıska) Turks, Turkey, migration policies

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Introduction

Syrian migration has transformed Turkey from a predominantly country of origin and transit into a major destination country, prompting numerous academic interests on the subject, especially on the securitization of migration (Küçük 2021). Since the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2014, which escalated into a full-scale invasion in 2022, Turkey has been one of the countries accepting refugees from Ukraine. Ukrainian forced migrants were not seen as a threat due to their much lower numbers, dominance of female refugees, higher cultural and economic capital, European identity, and stronger motivation to return when the war ends. Therefore, they were neither securitized by the local public nor by the Turkish state. Nevertheless, this

marks another major mass migration after Syrians within a decade without a clear end in sight, solidifying Turkey's position as a country of reception.

Ukrainians have distinct characteristics when compared with their Syrian counterparts, including their higher socio-economic situation, return motivations, migrant identities, political histories, existing social networks, and political mobilization capabilities. Moreover, Turkey is one of the first signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, albeit with a geographical limitation. Although Syrians cannot be regarded *de jure* as refugees under national laws and international obligations, Ukrainians perfectly fit into the refugee category since they come from a member country of the Council of Europe (CoE). Yet, there has been little research on the recent wave of Ukrainian migration to Turkey (Teke Lloyd and Sirkeci 2022; Deniz and Özgür 2022; Gürsoy Erdenay 2025; Biletska and Gherghina 2025), which includes three distinct ethno-religious groups from Ukraine: ethnic Ukrainians belonging to Orthodox denomination, Crimean Tatars and Ahıska Turks of Muslim origin. Therefore, the migration policy toward different ethnic and religious groups holding the same nationality presents an opportunity to observe Turkish policy-making regarding mass migration. This paper starts with the premise to fully assess Turkey's migration and reception policies towards Ukrainian forced migrants and analyze the impacts of these policies on migrant decision-making and future migration trajectories comparatively.

Against this background, we conducted a qualitative study on migrant settlement and integration services between February 2022 and July 2024. The research methodology involved content analysis of major policy and legal documents, relevant websites, and printed media outlets. In addition, participant observation was also conducted in state-run centers, migrant settlements, provincial migration management offices, migrant and diaspora organizations, and consular events. This was further supported by 40 interviews with activists, volunteers of migrant and diaspora organizations, Ukrainians under various migrant categories, and government and consular officials at both central and local levels.[1] Semi-structured questions encompassed experiences of border-crossing, decision-making processes in choosing Turkey, acquisition of migration status, future plans, transnational links and familial considerations, problems and levels of satisfaction in the settlement process. Given that this research focuses on migrants who have chosen to remain in Turkey rather than transit migrants at least during the duration of the fieldwork, the sample was selected accordingly.

As regards the structure of the paper, this brief introduction will be followed by placing the case of Ukrainians in the existing migration literature and outlining a conceptual framework in explaining the reception and initial settlement of forced migrants, emphasizing the impact of migration policies and transnational factors, such as migrant and/or diaspora organizations, on migrant decision-making. Then, we will provide a brief history of migration of Ukrainians, Ahıska Turks, and Crimean Tatars to Turkey. Finally, we will present three distinct case studies

1 This research was funded by the Office for Scientific Research Projects at the Social Sciences University of Ankara (Project No: SBBF-2023-211), and ethical committee clearance was obtained prior to the fieldwork to ensure the personal safety and anonymity of participants (Decision Number: 69287). The real names of all participants who voluntarily participated in this research after signing the consent form were hidden and they were given pseudonyms.

of Ukrainian migrants focusing on reception policies according to ethno-religious background. Each case will then be divided into three sub-headings as border crossing, migration status, settlement and adaptation to provide a detailed comparison before the conclusion part.

Conceptual Framework: Placing Ukrainian Forced Migration to Turkey in the Context of Global Forced Migration

The field of refugee studies has primarily focused on the experiences of refugees in the Global North, despite the fact that low and middle-income countries hosted 75 per cent of 43.4 million refugees globally and 69 per cent of all refugees live in neighboring countries (UNHCR 2024a).[2] However, the literature on refugee studies either tends to overlook experiences of major refugee-receiving countries in the Global South or the issue is mostly taken up as a matter of moral humanitarianism under the umbrella of International Relations and legal studies, rather than integration paths or comparative politics (FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Çelik 2021; Phillimore 2021; Wihtol de Wenden 2023). Consequently, refugee literature did not adequately theorize the refugee agency, perhaps due to enormous power gaps among refugees from the Global South and the states and societies of the Global North. Examining the case of countries outside the context of the Global North, which do not pursue this type of governmentality towards refugees is important to understand refugee agency better for developing a more comprehensive and generalizable theorizing on refugees. Therefore, the Ukrainian case in Turkey is important to understand refugee agency in decision-making.

To understand refugee agency outside the Western context, we need to conceptualize migration – whether voluntary or involuntary – as a journey during which migrants make a series of ongoing decisions (Kaytaz 2016: 191). Transnationalism and multiculturalist approaches to migration demonstrate that migrant intentions, motivations, and decision-making processes are quite complex (Faist et al. 2013), encompassing a range of considerations, including the option of return, transit, resettlement, and type of status to pursue. Additionally, migrants may have diverse intentions and efforts to adapt to their circumstances, as well as periods of indecision. The existing literature indicates that migrant motivations are significantly influenced by the reception environment, which is shaped by a range of factors including social and humanitarian policies, the political environment, and economic conditions (Money 2010: 12; Kaya and Nagel 2021: 250). However, this macro approach would result in a one-sided interpretation, potentially overlooking the role of human agency. It is evident that migrants' sense of identity and belonging (Warner and Srole 1945), their social networks, and convertible social and cultural capital (Akçapar 2010; Erel and Ryan 2019) also exert an influence on decision-making processes at the micro level. Nevertheless, another pivotal factor in migrant decision-making is the meso level, which is largely affected by the development and implementation of migration policies and practices by actors within the migration governance system, including host and home states, domestic and transnational civil society institutions,

2 That number excluded Palestinian refugees under the mandate of UNRWA which amounts to 6 million in 2023.

international organizations, and private enterprises (Penninx and Garcés-Masceranas 2016; Kuschminder and Waidler 2020: 191).

Focusing on three distinct groups of Ukrainian forced migrants in Turkey – ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and Ahıska Turks, this study investigates the impact of variations of Turkish migration policies due to ethnic and religious backgrounds and analyzes how different reception policies influence migrants' decision-making processes, including settlement choices, return intentions, or onward migration to third countries. By utilizing the "embrace" and "provision" model, the article classifies the Turkish government's approach into a continuum, assessing both the degree of support provided to and the identification with each group. Furthermore, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature by focusing on Turkish reception policies and their impact on Ukrainian migrants, specifically in a non-European context. While most studies focus on migration and integration within the Global North, the emphasis on Turkey's segmented approach enriches the broader discourse on migration governance considering Turkey's critical role as both a transit and destination country.

By questioning the role of state policies and domestic and international institutions of migration governance, we were able to identify two concepts that influence the decision-making of Ukrainian forced migrants in Turkey. The first concept, "embrace", is drawn from the literature on diaspora policy (Adamson 2016; Gamlen et al. 2019). It illustrates the policies and processes developed by the state and the actors of migration governance that encourage host state identification among migrant populations. This is achieved by developing social and political ties among the host society and migrants, implementing policies to increase the positive perception of migrants by the host society and forging a common identity. The second concept, "provision", is proposed in this paper to refer to the ways in which state and non-state actors involved in migration governance provide a range of economic resources necessary for settlement. Such provisioning includes not only humanitarian aid designed to meet survival needs, but also additional resources that enable individuals to "make a life," including access to employment and educational opportunities, social services, local integration, building social support groups, and all other necessary initiatives. The term "provision" is preferred to depict a new model based on state responsibility despite economic burden and can be contrasted with the Western model of immigrant settlement that increasingly embodies neoliberalization, which depends on individual responsibility and delegation to the private sector (Kymlicka 2013). As evidenced by the cases of migrants and their host state, Turkey, these new concepts were required to depict the specific characteristics of migration governance in the Global South more accurately. We contend that these two concepts offer a more comprehensive understanding of migrant receiving countries in the Global South, as the organization of migration regimes is not primarily guided by "governmentality" (Hiemstra 2010), but rather by a combination of *ad hoc*, informal, and evolving measures and initiatives. The contribution of this paper is to present these two terms as a means of elucidating Turkish reception and adaptation policies regarding forced migrants from Ukraine, with a view to influencing the decision-making

processes of Ukrainians of different ethnicities. Since Turkey always had a positive reception policy towards kin communities, it would be interesting to unearth different attitudes of the state towards nationals of the same country – in this case, Ukraine. Despite emphasis on policy, however, this paper does not dwell into political mobilization of migrant/diaspora organizations, as concepts of "embrace" and "provision" are merely used in understanding refugee reception and adaptation as a political process.

Historical Background of Ukrainian Migration to Turkey

Ukrainians

Since the 1990s, Ukrainians have migrated to Turkey for various reasons, including marriage, business, and recreation. Until the late 2000s, they often associated themselves with Russians. Due to their fluency in the Russian language, they were able to find employment and even contribute to Russian tourism in Turkey (Deniz and Özgür 2022: 256-257). However, following the Euromaidan revolution, Russian occupation of Crimea and incursions into Donbas, Ukrainian diasporic activity and diaspora nationalism have increased (Deniz and Özgür 2022: 247). According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, as of 2022, there were nearly 50,000 Ukrainians residing in Turkey and their numbers doubled compared to 2021 (TUIK 2022), while the Ukrainian Embassy in Ankara reported even higher figures.

Based on official figures, 85,000 Ukrainians have entered Turkey since the war broke out on February 21, 2022 (Akçapar 2023). Ukrainian officials indicated that 40,000 Ukrainians immigrated just to Antalya in the initial months of the war, with approximately half of these individuals subsequently traveling to Europe. As of September 30th, 2022, there were a total of 145,000 Ukrainian refugees in Turkey out of whom 5,116 have applied for international protection. By the end of 2022, 46,804 Ukrainians were granted short-term residence permit renewable every three months, while 7,131 individuals were granted international protection (Interview, migration officer, Ankara 2023). In June 2023, the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) announced that the number of short-term Ukrainian residents had fallen to 40,872. However, they remained among the top ten groups of permanent residents in the country. As of June 2024, this number declined to 40,000, including 3,230 international protection applicants (UNHCR 2024b). Unlike those in Europe, Ukrainians in Türkiye were neither granted temporary protection nor formal refugee status. Considering naturalized citizens especially Ahıska Turks and irregular migrants, it is estimated that the total number of Ukrainians in Türkiye ranges between 65,000 and 70,000 (Biletska and Gherghina 2025).

Post-2022 migrants were predominantly women between the ages of 18 and 45 and older women migrating if they had accompanying family members with them (Interview, Ukrainian Consulate official, Antalya 2023). In addition, nearly 2,000 Ukrainian orphans were also relocated to Antalya and Ankara under the tutelage of Ukrainian volunteers and teachers thanks to humanitarian initiatives. There also exists some Ukrainians who were

married to Russian and Turkish citizens. It can be argued that most Ukrainians who entered Turkey after the recent war in 2022 mainly regarded Turkey as a transit country, because some of the European Union (EU) countries, such as Germany and Ireland, offered monthly compensation and job opportunities. Those who are in a less precarious situation chose Turkey as a destination, i.e. if they have some form of income, either through their own businesses or through remittances in Europe sent by family members in Ukraine or in Europe.

Crimean Tatars

Crimean Tatar migration to Turkey dates further back in history. Following the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 1783, a significant number of Crimean Tatars migrated to Ottoman lands throughout the 19th century, settling in Anatolia and Dobruja (Aydın 2021a). The remaining Crimean Tatars declared the Crimean People's Republic in 1917, but this was swiftly taken over by the Soviet Union. On May 18, 1944, Crimean Tatars were forcibly removed under Stalin's orders and relocated to different parts in Central Asia and Siberia. This resulted in the loss of approximately half of their population during the deportation while 300.000 Crimean Tatars were able to return to their homeland between 1989 and 1994 (Williams 2021).

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a significant number of political figures, including Crimean Tatar National Parliament (*Mejlis*) members, dissidents, young individuals, and religious persons, left Crimea due to Russian oppression (Aydın and Şahin 2019). The majority resettled in mainland Ukraine, while only a few chose to settle in Turkey or nearby Poland. The Crimean Tatar diaspora in Turkey spearheaded the Second World Crimean Tatar Congress, which brought together members from 14 countries and officials from the Ukrainian and Turkish governments to take unified action against the occupation of Crimea (Aydın 2021b). Only a small number of generally well-off Crimean Tatars immigrated to Turkey after 2014 and they settled in Antalya, where migrant communities of Ukrainians and Russians had already established a community.

The majority of Crimean Tatar forced migrants from mainland Ukraine in 2022 were internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had experienced the third exile after 2014. During the early stages of the war, hundreds of Crimean Tatars, mostly women and children, were transported by bus with the assistance of the Turkish Embassy in Ukraine and were initially hosted in government residences and dormitories (*Anatolian Agency* 2022a). In response to Russia's announcement of compulsory military service, some Crimean Tatars holding Russian passports promptly emigrated from the country and typically relocated to Turkey, often after spending some time in Russia or Central Asia. Those who held tourist visas eventually returned after their visas expired. While the majority of these Crimean Tatars subsequently left for Europe and Canada, some remained, including a large refugee community from Ukraine called Crimean Family (*Kırım Ailesi*), comprising 100 women and children, and some other religious groups. Currently, most Crimean Tatars from occupied Crimea reside in Eskişehir since there is a large and established community in the province and they were immediately given international protection status.

Ahıska (Meskhetian) Turks

Like the Crimean Tatars and other nationalities with a strong Turko-Muslim identity, Ahıska Turks were involved in a forced deportation in 1944. This deportation was ordered by Stalin who had them relocated from their homeland of Meskheti Javakheti in Southern Georgia to Central Asia and Siberia. Unlike Crimean Tatars, Ahıska Turks were unable to establish a strong national movement due to the absence of a substantial intellectual class. However, their social networks and family structure facilitated the preservation of their ethnic consciousness (Aydıngün 2002: 193). In the aftermath of the Fergana massacre, over 16,000 Ahıska Turks resettled in Russia's Krasnodar region, while more than 100,000 migrated to Azerbaijan. Due to the lack of political rights and the denial of residence and work permits in Krasnodar, 15,000 Ahıska Turks resettled in the United States with the assistance of International Organization for Migration (Ganiyeva 2012: 183). Georgia promised to organize and complete the return of Ahıska Turks in order to become a member of the CoE, but this endeavor was hindered by economic difficulties and lack of political will. Ahıska Turks requested permission to immigrate to Turkey after 1991, should they be unable to return to their original homeland (Aydıngün 2002: 50; Aydıngün and Aydıngün 2014: 27-29).

In 1992, the Turkish government enacted a law on immigration and settlement for Ahıska Turks, implementing Law on Settlement No. 2 (1934) for those deemed eligible for "settled migrant status". However, only 150 of them were officially relocated in Iğdır province Eastern Turkey in 1993. The majority settled independently over the course of more than 20 years following the law's implementation (Ganiyeva 2012: 185). According to the World Union of Ahıska Turks (WUAT), around 20,000 Ahıska Turks came to İstanbul during this period. It should be noted that Ahıska Turks who arrived in Turkey after 1992 were not automatically granted Turkish citizenship (Aydıngün 2022). Moreover, some Ahıska Turks migrated to Turkey illegally and have acquired resident rights in due time, including the right to work, social security, and education (Ray 2000: 409-410; Aydıngün 2022: 190). In 2009, the existing Ahıska migrants in Turkey were granted the right to apply for citizenship[3] but in the category of general applicants.[4] Since then, 30,000 more have immigrated to Turkey. According to WUAT, the total number of naturalized Ahıska Turks has reached 138,000 (Interview, WUAT representative, İstanbul 2023).

Between 2015 and 2016, Turkey facilitated the transportation of approximately 1,000 Ahıska families from Ukraine. These families were given housing in Eastern Turkey in Erzincan and Bitlis, where there were already extant communities. In 2017, all Ahıska Turks were granted the right to long-term residence, regardless of whether they were living in Turkey or not. Before the war broke out in 2022, Ahıska Turks resided mainly in the rural areas of

3 Law No. 3835 on the Admission and Settlement of Meskhetian Turks in Turkey dated 2.07.1992 was adopted and in line with the Provisional Article 1 added by Article 19 of Law No. 5838 dated 28.02.2009. A new regulation was introduced with the applications of Meskhetian Turks for Turkish citizenship, paragraph d of Provisional Article 1 added by Article 19 of Law No. 5838.

4 Pursuant to Provisional Article 1 added by Article 19 of Law No. 5838 dated February 28, 2009.

Donbass and Dniepropetrovsk regions of Ukraine, which were occupied by Russia at an early stage. The newcomers were also settled in these two provinces in Turkey where they were given shelter (*Anatolian Agency* 2022b).

Reception Policies of the State and Decision-Making Processes of Migrants

Turkey is known to have diverse policies and practices regarding different groups of migrants (Kaya and Nagel 2021: 235). Along the embrace and provision continuum, Turkey demonstrates different levels of reception towards three categories of Ukrainian migrants. While Turkey did not commit itself to offer the best possible living conditions or humanitarian assistance for ethnic Ukrainians, others – Crimean Tatars and Ahıska Turks – were treated differently. Migration governance shapes the reception environment and levels of adaptation, which can be conceptualized along the axis of "embrace" and "provision" and can be observed in policy mechanisms regarding 1) border-crossing, 2) migration status, 3) settlement and adaptation. These three factors, in return, influence migrant decision-making processes, including return, temporary or permanent stay, indecision, transit, application to international protection, and commitment to integration.

The Case of Ethnic Ukrainians

The migration governance of ethnic Ukrainians can be summarized as "weak embrace and weak provision policy" with regards to three policy mechanisms explained below.

Border Crossing

Ukrainians preferred Turkey as a destination, especially those who had family members and friends already settled in the country. According to a Turkish migration official:

> "Because of the previous experience with Syrians, the state knew what to do when Ukrainians came. The experience of Syrian mass migration helped us develop migration administration. The immigrants were promptly recorded and immediately provided with temporary accommodation." (Interview, migration officer, Antalya 2023)

The state provided temporary residence in Gölbaşı, Ankara for 200 people, and long-term residence for 35 Ukrainian orphans in Etimesgut district in Ankara. Some Ukrainian businessmen also rented two hotels in Antalya for orphans who were brought under a special agreement between the Turkish and Ukrainian governments. The orphanages from the Kharkiv region were transported with their teachers and staff to Beldibi and Side in Antalya where they were placed under the responsibility of Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Childhood Without War, a Ukrainian civil society organization founded by businessman Ruslan Shostak, managed and funded the orphanage. Ukrainians received some shelter and humanitarian aid from the state, but the majority of their needs were met by the Ukrainian

Embassy, diaspora organizations (mostly composed of immigrants from 2014), International Committee of the Red Cross, and Turkish civil society organizations.

Migration Status

According to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection dated 2013, Turkey offers asylum seekers two types of status: temporary protection and international protection. While Ukrainians have immigrated to Turkey in large numbers, they have not been granted the same temporary protection as in Europe.[5] After 90 days of visa-free period, Ukrainian citizens are either required to apply for international protection or one of the residence categories. The category of international protection is divided into refugee status, refugee with conditions and secondary or subsidiary protection. Unlike Syrians, Ukranians' entry was not considered as part of mass migration, and they did not receive temporary protection. Consequently, they were granted "subsidiary protection" – a status for individual migrants who face serious danger if they return to their home country.

According to a migration official, this status was preferred for Ukrainian migrants rather than international protection because of their strong willingness to work and take responsibility for their own livelihoods (Interview, migration officer, Eskişehir 2023). This status, however, must be renewed annually and does not require resettlement to a safe third country, unlike conditional refugee status. Subsidiary protection allows access to social services, is offered for one year period, and presently provides Ukrainians with work permits although the application period takes at least six months. However, travel within Turkey is restricted and leaving the country would result in a loss of status. In Antalya, only approximately 300 out of 18,000 Ukrainians were granted subsidiary protection in 2023 whereas Ukrainian orphan children were given humanitarian visas which offer access to health services.

Furthermore, Turkey allows Ukrainian citizens to apply for short-term (renewable every two years) and long-term (permanent) residence permits after the extension of 90 days period on the grounds of continuing war. While many Ukrainians prefer the short-term visa to stay with friends and family and be mobile in Turkey and be able to visit Ukraine and relatives in Europe, this status does not provide access to public services. Furthermore, short-term residence for up to five years can be obtained by purchasing real estate, establishing a business, or investing an amount determined by the state. Consequently, the number of Ukrainian home purchases has increased twofold, from 1,246 in 2022 to 2,572 in 2023 (Akgündoğdu and Trissel 2023).

Settlement and Adaptation

The "provision" aspect of state policy was observed with regard to settlement and adaptation issues such as housing, social security benefits, humanitarian aid, work permits, the right to education, and other relevant rights (such as the right to bring a motor vehicle). The long-term accommodation of ethnic Ukrainians was left to the migrants themselves, who were assisted

5 Temporary protection was offered to Syrians under Law on Aliens and International Protection, Article 91.

by the Ukrainian Embassy, social networks, and migrant organizations. A Ukrainian official notes that European countries mostly provide sufficient accommodation, health services and material support for Ukrainians while Turkey does not. He also notes that:

> "It is important to provide work permits as the majority of Ukrainians are university graduates and cannot work in simple jobs. Opening business is also difficult for them. They do have money, but they encounter many bureaucratic hurdles. Lack of access to employment is the main reason that half of the people transited to Western European countries. These refugees were, in fact, highly skilled." (Interview, Ukranian Consulate official, Antalya 2023)

The majority of Ukrainian forced migrants in Turkey were women with children who received inverse-remittances from their husbands or family members working in Ukraine. Ukrainian participants expressed a desire for more assistance with accommodation and income from the Turkish government, which has been identified as a significant factor in the decision of many Ukrainians to transit or return. The decline of the Turkish economy and the diversion of resources to accommodate a significant number of Syrians under temporary protection constrained the government's willingness to commit to assisting yet another group of forced migrants. Consequently, they gravitated towards areas where Ukrainian communities had previously settled often in concentrated and dense neighborhoods, including metropolitan city of Antalya, Alanya vicinity, and other southern coastal provinces of Turkey, as well as major urban centers such as İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, and Bursa. The settlement in touristic provinces where many foreigners reside allowed them to avoid being perceived as a refugee group. Following the recent migration flow, Mahmutlar of Alanya has become a "comfort zone" and a new ethnic neighborhood for Ukrainians (Kaya and Nagel 2021: 247). With regard to relations with Russians who also settled in significant numbers in Antalya, the Ukrainian consulate official in Antalya underlines these issues:

> "Ukrainians and Russians also reside as mixed communities in certain neighborhoods of Antalya, such as Konyaaltı, but they do not socialize due to fear. The provincial migration administration monitors these communities closely and does not permit rallies that could potentially lead to conflict. For instance, Russian May 9 Victory Day celebrations have traditionally been large events. However, this year they were unable to obtain permission." (Interview, Ukrainian Consulate official, Antalya 2023)

The cases of ethnic Ukrainians are generally handled by the provincial migration management offices. Those in Antalya, Alanya, İzmir, and İstanbul, are quite specialized on Ukrainians. PMM also has a separate department for facilitation of adaptation and has regular meetings with other ministries. The Foreigners' Assembly (*Yabancılar Meclisi*) at the local government is quite active in different districts in Antalya where Ukrainians are also represented. In the case of ethnic Ukrainians, international civil society organizations cooperate with provincial migration management offices to facilitate the acquisition of the best possible status in the country. Ukrainian diaspora and migrant organizations also provide

guidance on migrants' rights and help them prepare their documents. In brief, the state did not provide a status that would readily lead to long-term residence and considered Ukrainians as temporary or transit migrants. A Ukrainian former migrant in İstanbul, mentioned about the rapid transformation and political mobilization of Ukrainian migrant organizations quite eloquently:

> "The purpose of Ukrainian migrant organizations has undergone a transformation in the wake of war. Currently, we are engaged in the teaching of the Ukrainian language and traditions to foster a sense of national identity. We also collected funds to support the war effort in Ukraine by obtaining the requisite official permissions." (Interview, female Ukranian, İstanbul 2023)

Ukrainian nationals with subsidiary protection or short-term residence permits were permitted to enroll their children in Turkish schools. This option was most commonly selected for children in elementary school age, while middle and high school students continued their education in Ukraine online. They were also those sending their children to schools run by the Russian community in Antalya to preserve continuity in their education system. However, the revival of Ukrainian language as opposed to Russian was on the rise thanks to efforts by migrant associations and the Ukrainian Embassy. Interestingly, one of the major reasons for preferring Turkey for ethnic Ukrainians was the lack of aggressive integration policies in Turkey. Official of the orphanage in Beldibi, Antalya explained this further:

> "Currently, I am in communication with some Ukrainian women with children in Germany who are interested in immigrating to Turkey. The primary motivation for this is the obligation to enroll their children there in national schools. As these women want to return to Ukraine after the war, they do not wish to assimilate into Germany." (Interview, female Ukrainian, Antalya 2023)

Ethnic Ukrainians were sympathized with as victims of war and Turkey protected their human rights while providing security. Turkish officials also provided a relatively smooth and speedy administrative process and basically unlimited possibility of renewing their short-term residency, but they did not provide options for long-term integration and financial benefits. Beyond this basic support, the provisioning of services extended to Ukrainians was largely delegated to Ukraine and its diplomatic missions as well as migrant organizations and social networks. This constitutes weak provisioning and indicates a neoliberal approach in which Ukrainian individuals were encouraged to work and make their own living while the state takes care of only people with special needs. In terms of integration, Turkey preferred a more hands-off and less controlling approach to the integration of ethnic Ukrainians due to their strong ties to their home country and geopolitical considerations. This situation is considered as weak embrace by the Turkish state. As a result, Turkish migration and reception policies have influenced Ukrainian decision-making processes. A large number of migrants either returned to Ukraine or resettled in Europe triggering secondary migration. Interestingly, a significant number of migrants still preferred to stay in Turkey due to the ability to maintain greater ties to Ukraine, the availability of individual resources to settle and live in Turkey, and ironically the

lack of strong integration demands from the Turkish government. The respondents excessively emphasized their "guest" status in the interviews, which also corroborated the state's attitude towards them.

The Case of Crimean Tatars

Migration governance towards Crimean Tatars can be described as "weak embrace and strong provision" when evaluated in terms of the three policy mechanisms described below.

Border Crossing

The evacuation of Crimean Tatars was primarily conducted by the Turkish Embassy in Kyiv in collaboration with the Crimean Tatar transnational diaspora organizations. A participant shared the story of her escape from Melitopol, a city in southern Ukraine now under Russian occupation:

> "I was working for the government in Melitopol when the war broke out. Following an interrogation, I was released and sought counsel from the Mejlis. They advised me to flee the country since I was a politician. Given that my husband is in the military and my son was reluctant to leave Ukraine, my daughter and I escaped via the humanitarian corridor, first to Zaporizhie and then we arrived in Lviv. We boarded buses provided by the Turkish government and arrived in Edirne. From there we were resettled in Eskişehir." (Interview, female Crimean Tatar, Eskişehir 2023)

Another group of Crimean Tatars had to leave Russian-occupied Crimea when compulsory mobilization and conscription was announced in Russia. Crimean Tatars in Crimea became Russian citizens after annexation in 2014, yet they generally avoided compulsory military service up until the war against Ukraine. Since they had Russian passports, they could not go to Europe directly and they used Turkey for their transit passage. Another participant recounted her experience:

> "In September [2022], my husband and I departed from Crimea with two children by car and then by bus. First, we arrived in Georgia. The children were in possession of only Russian passports and lacked Ukrainian passports, which resulted the Georgian officials denying them passage. [This was due to the fact that Georgia did not recognize the annexation of Crimea]. We then proceeded to a relative who resided in a southern Russian city where we stayed for ten days. There, we took a plane to İstanbul for which we had to pay 40 thousand rubles. For a week we stayed in the home of a Crimean Tatar friend in İstanbul. Finally, we settled in Eskişehir. In this process, the Crimean Tatar diaspora members provided valuable assistance, including assistance in preparing documents to apply for migrant status and in accessing medical care. My parents still reside in Crimea. If we had not left, my husband and brother would have been forcibly conscripted in the Russian army. This is why the elderly wanted the younger

> generation to leave while they assumed responsibility for the upkeep of their residences and properties." (Interview, female Crimean Tatar, Eskişehir 2024)

The Crimean Tatar *Mejlis* requested some former migrants form a "coordination center" to assist new arrivals with their documentation and help their migration processes. A volunteer at the center, said:

> "We help people who fled the conscription. We work closely with the Ukrainian Consulate in İstanbul and PMM to address the concerns of Crimean Tatars. The majority of Crimean Tatars do not prefer international protection in Turkey but short-term residence as they want to be able to return their homeland or transit to other places. Many of them also do not apply for long-term residence since they do not see the need for it as their eventual intention is to go back." (Interview, male Crimean Tatar, İstanbul 2023)

All Crimean Tatars from Ukraine were promptly settled in state facilities in Turkey and provided with food, clothing, medical, and other humanitarian assistance. According to a representative from the Crimean Coordination Center, approximately 10,000 individuals of Crimean Tatar origin were present in Turkey by mid-2023 (Interview, male Crimean Tatar, Eskişehir 2023). Initially, they were assisted by diaspora organizations. However, many subsequently migrated to European countries and Canada as a result of better financial aid and employment opportunities there. Crimean Tatars from Crimea who were relocated to Europe obtained Ukrainian passports during their stay in Turkey as European countries did not accept them with Russian passports. Some others who came directly from Crimea with their families, though, chose to remain in Turkey perceiving it as a more convenient option to return homeland once the war is over.

Migration Status

In the aftermath of Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, numerous Crimean Tatars fled the region due to concerns of persecution. At the time, Crimean Tatars were granted the right to pursue long-term residence based on their identity that can be categorized as "Turkish kin". Since the law does not provide a clear definition of "Turkish kin", it leaves the determination to the executive branch, which considers national interests and bilateral relations in making its decisions (Saatçioğlu 2021: 1090). Until the 1980s, Turkish kin status was only granted to individuals coming from Western nations. However, it was later extended to those from other territories. In response, Crimean Tatar *Mejlis*, and diaspora organizations in Turkey were consulted regarding the type of status that should be afforded to the migrants. The Crimean leaders in exile requested that the state should refrain from granting Turkish kin status due to the risk of de-populating Crimea, in consideration of previous patterns of emigration of Crimean Tatars. However, in 2022, the mounting pressure on Crimean Tatars in both Crimea and the recently occupied regions of Ukraine prompted both the diaspora and *Mejlis* to appeal to Turkey for granting of Turkish kin status for potential migrants (*Anatolian Agency* 2022d; *Hürriyet* 2022).

As a result, PMM established a fast-track migration office for Turkic migrants (*Türksoylular Özel Ofisi*) and created the "Turquoise Residence Card" (QHA 2022). Turkey, with the assistance of international organizations, such as International Centre for Migration Development (ICMPD) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has established and developed a migrant identification system. Moreover, Crimean Tatar diaspora and migrant organizations provided guidance to migrants about their rights. Many of them lack financial resources to wait for long periods in Turkey, since they left jobs and livelihoods in a hurry to escape sudden mobilization.

Nevertheless, many immigrants including those who arrived before 2022 reflected that the long-term residence made their lives easier despite lengthy processing time which might exceed nine months. This demonstrates that despite Turkish authorities' initial willingness to "embrace" Crimean Tatar refugees, the *Mejlis* opposed the idea due to concerns that naturalizations and fast integration might jeopardize the Crimean national identity and quest for sovereignty. It is, however, noteworthy that some Crimean Tatars did not apply for long-term residence. Instead, they have applied for subsidiary protection, citing the lengthy procedures, additional documentation requirements, and their immediate need for access to health, education, and other social services. The inclusion of the right to work for those under subsidiary protection made their economic adaptation easier in Turkey although they expressed their longing to return.

Settlement and Adaptation

The Crimean Tatars received extensive benefits, such as accommodation, humanitarian aid, and university scholarships. This indicated the strong provision in terms of settlement. However, they were not granted "settled migrant" status with a few exceptions. Crimean Tatar leaders did not advocate for this status initially because it would require new refugees to settle in state-designated areas that are sparsely populated in Turkey's eastern provinces. The state and diaspora organizations supported the desire for new arrivals for compact settlements. For example, "Crimean Family" was provided housing for 100 women and children in a single apartment building. Turkish officials also took into account the existence of a large Crimean Tatar diaspora in Turkey and the welcoming attitudes of local society when settling the Crimean Tatars. They tend to be white-collar and urbanized people who prefer to live in cities, despite the higher costs of living. Many respondents in Eskişehir still continue to work remotely at their government jobs in Ukraine and are thereby able to make ends meet.

Unlike ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars were quite willing to send their children to the Turkish schools. The close proximity of the Turkish culture and language to those of the Crimean Tatars contributes to social inclusion and rapid adaptation in education. Despite concerns about the future, the respondents all expressed their desire to return. Yet, age is a major determinant in decision-making on final destination country as shown in the examples below. While the older opted for return, the younger generations preferred to be more mobile and saw no contradiction in living in more than one place.

> "We are praying and waiting for the victory here, then we want to go back to our homeland Crimea." (Interview, female Crimean Tatar, Eskişehir 2023)

> "Crimea is my ancestry, my civilization, my homeland. It is impossible for me not to return and continue to live here." (Interview, male Crimean Tatar, Eskişehir 2023)

> "After getting my education in Europe, I want to live both in Turkey and Crimea in the future." (Interview, male Crimean Tatar, İstanbul 2023)

In the case of the Crimean Tatars, the Turkish state also consulted with the Crimean Tatar political organizations to offer the most suitable migration status which would enable the appropriate level of integration, which can be described as weak embrace despite financial support and providing shelter that can be translated as strong provision. The Crimean Tatars' desire to maintain their transnational ties with their homeland and their plans to return to Crimea were respected by the Turkish state. Both the Turkish state and the Crimean Tatar ethnopolitical authority, *Mejlis*, were against the idea of the de-Tatarization of Crimea encouraging return to the original homeland in the possible future. This direct involvement underlines that not only the hosting state but diaspora organizations can play an important role in migrant decision-making processes.

The Case of Ahıska Turks

Migration governance regarding Ahıska Turks can be summarized as "strong embrace and strong provision" in terms of the policy mechanisms related to border-crossing, migration status, settlement and adaptation.

Border Crossing

Following the outbreak of war in Donbas in 2014, state involvement was necessary as most Ahıska Turks from Ukraine lived in the Donbas region. Turkish military personnel accompanied the evacuating community and brought them to Kharkiv in 2015. From there, they were flown directly to Erzincan and settled in state-provided accommodation. An Ahıska Turk activist in Antalya stated that:

> "The evacuation of Ahıska Turks that took place in 2015 and 2016 was more organized than the one in 2022. The Turkish state could have foreseen the war in Ukraine and planned the evacuation in advance because it was warned by diaspora organizations." (Interview, male Ahıska Turk, Antalya 2023)

Despite apparent lack of preparation, the Turkish state, along with the Ahıska Turk diaspora organizations, were able to execute the collective transfer of almost the entire population of Ahıska Turks, even from places where there were hot conflicts. In 2022, when Russia attacked Ukraine, the representative of the WUAT in İstanbul stated that their central authority and representatives in Ukraine prepared a list of people to be evacuated and they were able to bring most of the Ahıska Turks from Ukraine within 25 days, except for those in occupied Kherson. As Russia did not allow a large-scale humanitarian corridor from Kherson,

3,000 Ahıska Turks were transported by bus to Sochi with the assistance of the Turkish Foreign Ministry and then transported by 11 Turkish planes from Sochi to Elazığ where they were temporarily accommodated. In May 2022, it is reported that 180 Ahıska Turks arrived in Elazığ (*Anatolian Agency* 2022c). One of our respondents explained how evacuation took place from the rural places where Ahıska Turks dominantly lived:

> "Together with the Turkish Embassy in Kyiv, the Ahıska organization made an evacuation plan. We were under siege amidst bombardments. There was no electricity. No phones were working. We were told to wait. So, we stayed in shelters for four days with very little to eat. Some went to the Embassy and stayed there for a while. Some of our people started to arrive in Turkey by airplanes on May 22, 2022. Some others came with their own initiatives. 1,300 people came from Sochi, Russia. There was a direct airplane to Elazığ where we were settled. On February 20, 2023, some of us were resettled in Ahlat area. Eventually everyone will have to move there since construction of our housing project began" (Interview, WUAT representative, 2022).

Some families had to travel through Georgia and enter Turkey through the Sarp border gate before arriving in the Elazığ province (Interview, female Ahıska Turk, İstanbul 2023). The evacuees were also settled in state residences in Edirne, Kırklareli, Tekirdağ, Eskişehir, and Bursa. Within a few weeks, the vast majority of Ahıska Turks were settled in their permanent residences which were handed to them in a short period of time.

Migration Status

In the aftermath of war in Donbas in eastern Ukraine back in 2014, Ahıska Turks expressed growing interest in coming to Turkey to find peace as a reaction to long-decades of exile and political conflicts in history. The Turkish branch of WUAT immediately began lobbying for "settled migrant status" which provides housing, employment, and financial support. After the war broke out in Ukraine in 2022, Ahıska Turks were immediately given international protection and subsidiary protection with easier access to work permits. Soon enough, first "settled migrant status" and then Turkish citizenship was granted to thousands, especially those in Ahlat district in Bitlis. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan approved a list of newcoming 1.000 Ahıska Turks for naturalization within three months (*T24* 2022). For those who could not get automatic naturalization, they stayed close to their family members living in Bursa and Antalya. There were also those without Ukrainian citizenship but managed to obtain international protection after arrival. However, due to lack of documents, the naturalization process could be long and arduous hindering access to social services and involving several bureaucratic problems. A 35-year-old female migrant expressed her problems when the identity papers were stolen from her house together with the cash they brought with them:

> "We came to Turkey from Ukraine weeks before the war broke out in 2022. As I have a daughter with cerebral palsy, doctors suggested that she can be better taken care of in Turkey, but our documents were stolen here. As a result, she has

> not been able receive the health or education services she needs for many months now as we cannot prove that we are Ahıska Turks. But isn't it obvious that we speak Turkish as a native language and have Turkish culture." (Interview, female Ahiska Turk, Antalya 2023)

Settlement and Adaptation

Ahıska Turks settled mainly in rural and eastern regions in accordance with the Turkish political stance and due to proximity to their homeland, Ahıska region in Georgia. After granting houses, apartments and/or land plots to Ahıska Turks, one member from each household of the 2015 immigrants had access to employment options. These earlier refugees also received small but regular financial support. However, many Ahıska families at the time went through secondary migration and settled in cities, such as Antalya, İzmir, and Bursa. This time, in cooperation with Ahıska diaspora organizations, Turkish state aimed to integrate Ahıska Turks quickly. Unlike two other groups, Ahıska Turks came as a family and even as an extended family. Since many of them have at least three dependent children under the age of 18, males were exempted from mobilization into the Ukrainian army. Although the settlement and adaptation process is not always easy due to problems related with sudden evacuation and displacement, when compared to ethnic Ukrainians, Turkey has demonstrated a strong embrace towards Ahıska Turks by recognizing an overwhelming number of them as "settled migrants" who have served to nationalize Turkey since the 1990s. Turkish state and society viewed migration of Ahıska Turks almost as an exercise of the "right of return" during which the state took full responsibility from evacuation to final settlement. This could be characterized as strong provisioning.

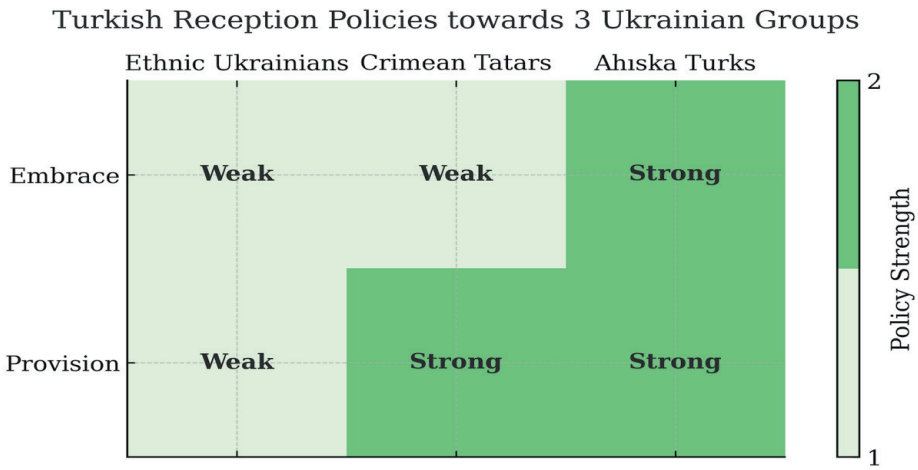
Among the younger generation, however, there were some who migrated from Turkey to different European countries, such as Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. While the diaspora organizations were worried that they would be assimilated and eventually lose their Turkishness, economic incentives, social networks, and better opportunities for children acted as a pull factor. Yet, as a female participant mentioned her new life as a refugee in Europe, return is an option only to Turkey due to weak embrace and strong provision in the new country of settlement and also her close kin left behind:

> "We were settled in Elazığ but we did not like the conditions although it was safe – thank God. My husband has a cousin here. We did not have much to lose. That is why we left everything behind again and started from scratch. My parents stayed in Turkey though. They were tired of displacement since they arrived in Ukraine after the Ferghana event in Uzbekistan. There are many Ukrainians around with whom we get along well and small number of Ahıska Turks from Ukraine. The Swiss government pays the rent and covers expenses. Children study well and learn German. My husband works in a decent job. But we are concerned about losing our culture, our language and we plan to go back to Turkey eventually even if the war in Ukraine ends and settle there permanently. You feel very 'foreign' here. We are used to living together as a big family." (Online interview, female Ahıska Turk, Zurich 2024).

Comparison of Reception Policies in Turkey and Its Impact on Migrant Decision-Making

The reception policy towards Ukrainian post-2022 migration can be divided into three major stages: arrival, protection, and (re)settlement. In the first stage of the reception policy, Turkey followed an open border policy towards all Ukrainian citizens, since 90-day visa-free regime between the two countries was active. The same was true towards Crimean Tatars, who arrived from the occupied Crimea along with other Russian citizens. The Crimean Tatars and Ahıska Turks were evacuated using special military forces and direct buses or flights. This reflects the responsibilities undertaken by the Turkish state and their treatment equivalent to that of Turkish citizens in Ukraine. Turkey also provided temporary accommodation to the Crimean Tatars and Ahıska Turks arriving from Ukraine. Crimean Tatars arriving from Russia and ethnic Ukrainians, who mostly came individually, however, were rarely provided with temporary initial accommodation, and the state left this issue to be resolved by diaspora and migrant organizations.

Figure 1. Turkish Reception Policies towards 3 Ukrainian Groups



Source: Made by authors using fieldwork data and conceptualization

During the second stage of the reception policy, ethnic Ukrainians were offered humanitarian protection and short-term visas, which, although temporary, could in practice be renewed indefinitely. In contrast, in most cases the visas of Russian citizens could not be extended. Crimean Tatars and Ahıska Turks were offered long-term residence permits based on the status of Turkish descent, but not all Crimean Tatars applied for this status and were satisfied with the subsidiary protection. These were mostly Crimean Tatars who had plans of returning Crimea once the threat of conscription had passed as they carried Russian passports after the annexation in 2014. For those who wanted to resettle elsewhere, the Ukrainian Embassy provided documents usually with the assistance of Crimean organizations. Turkey wanted the Turkish groups to stay, while accepting the ethnic Ukrainians only temporarily,

not only because of ethno-religious differences, but also taking into account the dire need of the Ukrainian state for the return of its population, and Turkey's support for Ukraine's statehood. This supports the idea that immigration policy can be understood as part of foreign policy (Duncan 2020). Diaspora and migrant organizations of all three groups have generally supported, and at times guided, Turkey's migration and adaptation policies.

In the third stage, characterized in terms of settlement and adaptation, Turkey adopted a *laissez-faire* approach towards ethnic Ukrainians and their organizations, while providing educational opportunities but limited work permits. Social services were offered only to those with subsidiary protection, leaving the duty of meeting the necessary needs to diplomatic missions and migrant organizations. The limited provision led many ethnic Ukrainians to leave for other countries. The state assumed full responsibility, however, for the permanent settlement of the majority of Ahıska Turks and willing Crimean Tatars, providing them with citizenship, social security and financial assistance. With the support of their diaspora organizations, the majority of Crimean Tatars' strong desire either to return or transit, and focus on maintaining transnational ties and identities, limited the state's integration of them.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian case confirms that Turkish migration policy continues to be highly segmented system of reception. Turkey's policies towards three groups of Ukrainian migrants can be compared and classified into three tiers with regards to whether a migration status amenable to naturalization or long-term residence is provided (embrace) and the level of economic opportunities are allocated for migrants (provision). Turkish migration governance concerning ethnic Ukrainians can be classified as weak embrace and weak provision while that of Crimean Tatars can be classified as weak embrace and strong provision. Contrastingly, migration governance of Ahıska Turks can be classified as strong embrace and strong provision (See Figure 1).

A detailed examination of reception, adaptation, future expectations, and secondary migration patterns among ethnic Ukrainians, Ahıska Turks and Crimean Tatars reveal that Ahıska Turks predominantly have established permanent residence in Turkey, while the future of Crimean Tatars remains uncertain. In contrast, ethnic Ukrainians are more inclined to return and transition to third countries than the other two groups. In addition to individual and transnational social networks, the reception policies of the Turkish state towards Turkish descendants and other groups and the attitude of migrant associations/diaspora organizations have a direct impact on individual decisions whether to stay in Turkey and their social adaptation processes.

The multi-group comparative approach adapted in this study not only provides insights into how Turkish migration policies differentially impact Ukrainian forced migrants based on ethnicity and religion, but it also presents a novel framework by introducing "embrace" and "provision" model to analyze state-migrant relations for understanding how different levels of state support (macro level) and diaspora organizations/migrant associations (meso level) shape

migrant decision-making (micro level) in the Global South. However, the future is still vague as regards to when the war ends, when and whether all Ukrainian refugees would be able to go back for the reconstruction of their country. Previous studies emphasized that the longer it takes to come up with a viable solution, temporary migration result in permanence, changing migration and return decisions of affected populations. Future studies on the topic should focus on comparative perspectives of migration and reception policies towards Ukrainian refugees dispersed all throughout Europe and role of diaspora organizations in hindering or facilitating integration.

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