



MiReKoc

## MIGRATION RESEARCH PROGRAM AT KOÇ UNIVERSITY

### Briefing on International Migratory Movements from Turkey

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This briefing aims to summarize the results of the workshop *Migratory Movements Affecting Turkey and Europe* held on October 18, 2008 in Ankara, within the scope of the *Transnationalisation, Migration and Transformation: Multi-Level Analysis of Migrant Transnationalism* (TRANSNET) project funded by the European Union 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. Turkey is represented in the project by the Migration Research Program at Koç University (MiReKoc). Prepared by the MiReKoc team, Ahmet İçduygu, Deniz Sert and Ayşem Biriz Karaçay, the briefing has several objectives, including highlighting the phenomena of migration and asylum seeking movements from Turkey to other countries, suggesting relevant policy changes and creating an effective forum for discussion on this topic among academics, policy makers, implementers and civil society actors in Turkey.

#### **Migration and Asylum Seeking Movements from Turkey to Other Countries:**

- International migratory movements have been concomitant with the history of the Turkish Republic. In the Republic's early period, there were efforts aimed at the creation of a more homogenous society within the process of nation-building. In this framework, the migration of the non-Muslim population within the borders of the new nation-state to other countries was made mandatory and, in parallel to this, the migration of Muslim and Turkic populations living outside the nation-state borders in neighbouring countries to Turkey was welcome. From the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1950s, Turkey lost approximately three million non-Muslims through emigration, whereas it gained a Muslim and Turkic population of approximately two million. Thus, since the foundation of the Republic, international migration has been an important component of various policy areas both politically and economically.
- Apart from the massive migration of the non-Muslim populations out of the country in the early years of the Republic as a part of the nation-building project, migratory movements from Turkey to other countries was limited until the 1960s.
- Following the Second World War, increasing demand in the European labour market led the signing of bilateral agreements between various European governments and Turkey that regulated the migration of Turkish labourers to Europe. Within this framework, during the First Five Years Development Plan (1962-1967), which was prepared after the implementation of the 1961 Constitution, the 'exportation of excess labour force' was identified as an important development strategy, both for the prospective inflow of remittances from the overseas workers and for the reduction of unemployment in the country. Turkey signed the first bilateral agreement with West Germany in 1961 that regulated the general conditions regarding the selection of migrant workers, their employment and payments; similar bilateral agreements were later signed with Austria, Holland and Belgium in 1964, with France in 1965 and with Sweden and Australia in 1967. Less comprehensive bilateral agreements were signed with the United Kingdom in 1961, with Switzerland in 1971, with Denmark in 1973 and with Norway in 1981.
- The demand for migrant workers in Western Europe gradually declined by late 1960s, and the intake of migrant workers almost totally ceased with the Oil Crisis in 1973. During this period, emigration from Turkey shifted to other parts of the world, such as the oil exporting countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and Australia following the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Australian government in 1967. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, re-

structuring programs that started in the newly emerging countries, led to project-based and work related migratory movements from Turkey to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This has been the latest stage of labour emigration from Turkey.

- During this period, despite the new migration movements, Europe remained a target destination for migrants from Turkey. This migration has been in two forms:
  - Turkish migrants living abroad brought their family members to live with them by means of permanent residence permits or by applying for family reunification; and
  - An increasing number of asylum seekers since the 1980s, which constitutes more than two-fifth of those who have migrated from Turkey to Europe. The majority of these asylum seekers are presumed to be Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin.
- These emigration movements, which characterized Turkey as a country of emigration after 1960, had two fundamental consequences:
  - Migrants from Turkey became a sizeable immigrant population living in many countries of the world, and
  - The phenomenon of emigration has been continuing within this established migration culture and networks.
- Today, as a result of the intensified emigration process which began at the beginning of the 1960s, it is estimated that there are more than 4.5 million migrants from Turkey living in many countries of the world with their family members:
  - Almost four million of them are in Europe --- and more than one-fourth acquired the citizenship of their host countries;
  - About 250 000 migrants and their descendants live in North America, and about 100 000 live in Australia;
  - And approximately more than 150 000 migrant workers are in the Middle East and the CIS countries.
- These numbers show that approximately six per cent of the country's current population live in other countries. Thus, the quantitative size of emigrants from Turkey forms another basis for the necessity of identifying migration issues as an important policy area in Turkey.

### **The Emigration Policies of Turkey:**

- It can be argued that from the early years of the Republic until the 1960s, Turkey considered emigration as a political tool, and until the 1980s, as an economical one. However, it is difficult to suggest that effective and comprehensive policies have been introduced in the later periods.
- Especially after 1980, no active or coherent positions were taken regarding emigration. Issues of migration, workers' remittances and their relationship with development, those topics that have been widely debated in the last five years on an international level and in the countries of emigration, have not been major issues on the agenda after the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, for example, the issue of utilization of the 15 billion USD accumulated remittances in the Central Bank, the cost of which is high for the bank, because of the interest rates, is not widely considered by the governmental institutions.
- On the other hand, although there were a limited number of policies introduced by the state in the period between 1970 and 1980 to facilitate the process of integration of returning migrant workers and their families, the state has not been active on this issue since then. Projects developed within this framework include initiatives such as the establishment of schools teaching in German in order to facilitate the educational integration of migrants' children returning to Turkey from Germany, as well as not levying taxes on the household items and business start-up materials that returning migrants brought into the country.
- There is a simultaneous prevalence of two conflicting perspectives that determine the policies regarding emigration and emigrant populations: One of them advocates preserving their bonds with Turkey as much as possible, the other, however, supports their adaptation and integration to their host countries.

- In the last twenty to thirty years, the Kurdish issue, political Islam and the place of secularism in the country have increasingly been associated with emigrant populations, thus, adding another dimension to the emigration policies of Turkey.
- At the same time, as these migrants are expected to participate in lobbying efforts on behalf of Turkey, foreign representatives continue to inculcate Turkey's official views on various topics on these migrants. Occasionally, these campaigns contest Muslim, Kurdish or Alevi sub-identities that emerge among the diaspora, with the belief that these may ultimately prove injurious to the official state-sponsored conceptions of Turkish identity. As a general political project, these migrants are tried to be remained within the state's official position on Turkish identity through teachers and religious officials sent from Turkey.
- Nevertheless, there have been important amendments to the official regulations on the way to solving the migration related problems of migrants and their family members. Especially in the context of preserving the bonds of the migrants' children with Turkey, a regulation which makes it easier for them to pursue their obligatory military service has been introduced: Currently, it is possible for migrant men or their sons to perform their military service for only 21 days provided that they pay a certain amount of foreign currency (5112 Euros or its equivalent in another foreign currency). Considering that 6-15 months of obligatory military service has an historical and ideological basis in Turkey, this easing of the regulations for migrants must be evaluated as a fairly liberal policy. Likewise, the legalization of dual-citizenship in 1981 shows that there is a political will for both preserving the bonds of the migrants with Turkey and enabling them to actively participate and adapt to the political and social life in their host countries. Recently, in order to preserve the bonds of emigrants with Turkey, government officials have begun to consider a series of legal regulations to enable these citizens to vote in Turkish elections.
- In addition to all these policy initiatives, Turkey has recently displayed a positive attitude --- if only at the discursive level --- towards integration, education of these countries' languages, socialization within the local education system, participation in local politics and civil society activities, and acquisition of the host countries' citizenship by Turkish emigrants.

### **Suggestions:**

- As exemplified above, Turkey has no new documents of a positive and concrete nature regarding emigration from Turkey and Turkish migrants living abroad, which have reappeared as important policy issues in the context of Turkey's accession to the EU. As a country of emigration and within the dynamics of the relevant international migration regimes in which it finds itself, Turkey should better administer its migration problematic through the development of a comprehensive, detailed and transparent series of policies that both acknowledge and employ internationally recognized migration policies. These migration policies should:
  - Handle the features of different destination countries and different types of migrations separately,
  - Consider possible new destination countries in addition to the continuing migration flows --- almost all of which are currently directed towards countries with a certain size of Turkish emigrant population,
  - Develop support services for returning migrants and their families,
  - Aim towards sustainability and institutionalisation of policies that increase the economical, social, political and cultural inputs provided by emigration.
- The relevant migration policies should:
  - Envisage the implementation of different policies for different migrant groups currently living abroad --- encouraging, for example, the integration of the migrants in their country of settlement, temporary labour emigrants to invest in their families/regions/country, and student migrants to return to Turkey,
  - Regard the migrants as citizens who deserve state services, rather than agents who should perform the political mission of Turkey in their host countries,
  - Foresee active participation of the migrants themselves in these processes of policy formation and implementation through civil society activities.
- Within this framework, regarding emigration and migrants living abroad, the political agenda should include the following future-oriented policy issues with more specific dimensions:

- Given the prevalent liberal, democratic and global values, state is not expected to manage emigration as an interventionist actor. However, for the following reasons, Turkey should assume certain roles for the effective regulation of emigration, and develop relevant policies:
  - There is still a continuing and intensive wave of emigration due to the networks created by the large numbers of Turkish emigrants currently living abroad;
  - Pressure for emigration from the country is still prevalent; due to this, for example, there are dense irregular (“illegal”) migration and asylum seeking movements originating from Turkey;
  - Global dynamics increase the inclination of citizens to participate in migratory movements in Turkey, just like the rest of the world;
  - In neighbouring countries, the demand for labour force of various qualifications is on the increase due to demographic factors.
- The labor force of various qualifications which aims to emigrate from Turkey can be directed to new countries of immigration (Russia in the north, Italy and Spain in southern Europe) or towards new migration types (temporary, rotational or seasonal).
- Consular services, which will assist permanent emigrants during their adaptation periods, and protect the work and social security rights of the temporary migrants, should be established.
- Concrete services regarding the adaptation of returning migrants and their families to Turkey, especially in work and education areas should be institutionalized.
- Programs that target remittances for investment in the Turkish economy within a productive arrangement should be developed.
- The consular officers, teachers and religious officials serving the migrants and their families abroad should be actively working, educated individuals who are informed about the countries they serve in and speak their languages.
- Those countries that do not accept dual (or multi) citizenship must be negotiated with in order to preserve their functionality in both country of origin and destination.
- The emigrants' right to vote in Turkish elections from abroad must be facilitated.
- The views of the three major actors of emigration ---Turkey, the host countries and the emigrants themselves --- on all of these policies must be taken into consideration. In doing so, the prevalent approach should be one that acknowledges migration as a phenomenon originating in a transnational space that necessitates global governance rather than a phenomenon that is contained within the boundaries of the nation-state. Within this framework, it is crucial to cooperate with other shareholders ---- the host countries, international organizations and civil society actors --- on the basis of “burden-sharing” rather than “burden-shifting”.



M i R e K o c

**Migration Research Program at Koc University (MiReKoc)**

**Rumeli Feneri Yolu, 34450 Sariyer, Istanbul**

**Tel: +90 212 338 1635 Fax: +90 212 338 1642**

[www.mirekoc.com](http://www.mirekoc.com)