

Navigating Risks, Shaping Mobilities:
A Mixed-Method Study of Migration Aspirations among
Displaced People from
Syria and Afghanistan in Turkey

by

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Koç University

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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*To all survivors and
to those who lost their lives on their journeys*

ABSTRACT

Navigating Risks, Shaping Mobilities: A Mixed-Method Study of Migration Aspirations among Displaced People from Syria and Afghanistan in Turkey

Eda Kirişcioğlu Taşan

**Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and International Relations
November 2024**

This dissertation explores how risk-taking influences migration aspirations among displaced Syrians and Afghans in Turkey. While migrants are often portrayed as irresponsible for undertaking dangerous journeys, this research challenges such simplistic views by investigating the structural and individual factors that compel risk-taking. Drawing from the aspiration-capability framework and insights from risk studies, the dissertation examines how migrants interpret and deal with risks during their journeys, shaping their aspirations to move onward, stay, or return. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, to provide a nuanced understanding of how risks are perceived and acted upon by migrants. Findings reveal that migration aspirations are influenced not only by migration policies but also by individual variations in personality, emotions, and subjective assessments of risks. This work contributes to migration studies by highlighting the complexity of migrants' decision-making processes, particularly how risk shapes their aspirations beyond rational-economic frameworks. Ultimately, the dissertation provides valuable insights into the intersection of migration policies and individual resilience, offering implications for policymakers seeking to understand and address the root causes of migration in contexts of displacement.

Keywords: *migration aspirations, risk-taking attitudes, risk perceptions, Syrian refugees, Afghan refugees, mixed-methods*

ÖZETÇE

Riskleri Yönlendirmek, Göçmen Hareketlerini Şekillendirmek: Türkiye’deki Suriyeli ve Afgan Mülteciler Arasında Göçmenlik Arzularına Dair Karma Yöntemli Bir Araştırma

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Bu tez, Türkiye’deki yerinden edilmiş Suriyeli ve Afgan göçmenler arasında risk alma davranışlarının göç arzularını nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Göçmenler, genellikle tehlikeli yolculuklara çıkmalarını sorumsuzlukla ilişkilendiren bir bakış açısıyla tasvir edilse de, bu araştırma, onları risk almaya iten yapısal ve bireysel faktörleri ele alarak bu indirgemeci yaklaşımlara karşı bir eleştiri getirmektedir. Arzu-yetkinlik çerçevesi ve risk çalışmaları perspektiflerinden faydalanan bu tez, göçmenlerin yolculukları esnasında aldıkları kararları (ileriye gitme, kalma veya geri dönme), bu yolculuklarda aldıkları riskler üzerinden incelemektedir. Araştırma, risklerin göçmenler tarafından nasıl algılandığını ve başa çıkıldığını daha derinlemesine anlamak amacıyla nitel görüşmeler ve nicel anketler içeren karma yöntemler yaklaşımını kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, göç arzularının yalnızca göç politikaları tarafından değil, aynı zamanda kişilik, duygular ve risklerin öznel değerlendirmeleri gibi bireysel farklılıklarla da şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, göçmenlerin karar alma süreçlerinin karmaşıklığını vurgulayarak, özellikle riskin, göç arzularını rasyonel-ekonomik çerçevelerin ötesinde nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymak suretiyle göç çalışmaları literatürüne katkı sağlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu tez, göç politikaları ile bireysel dirençliliğin kesişim noktasına dair değerli bilgiler sunarak, yerinden edilme bağlamında göçün kökenine yönelik anlayış geliştirmeye çalışan politika yapımcılar için önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: göç arzuları, risk alma tutumları, risk algıları, Suriyeli mülteciler, Afgan mülteciler, karma yöntemler

Preface

This dissertation is based on the following articles submitted / published in other outlets.

Chapter 4 is based on a co-authored article with Aysen Ustubici which is published as Kiriscioglu, E., & Ustubici, A. (2023). "At Least, at the Border, I Am Killing Myself by My Own Will": Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan Communities. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 1-15. I constructed the theoretical framework, analyzed the data and wrote the majority of the text. The co-author contributed to data collection, theoretical framing, provided supervision, and made contributions to the text.

Chapter 5 is a single-authored article. The article is under review in an international peer-reviewed journal as Kiriscioglu, E. Do Risk-taking Attitudes Influence Secondary Migration Aspirations? Evidence from an Online Survey.

Chapter 6 is co-authored with Aysen Ustubici and Ezgi Elci and published as Kiriscioglu, E., Ustubici, A., & Elci, E. Migration Aspirations in Relation to Border Closures, Employment Opportunities and Risk-Taking Attitudes: Lessons from an Online Survey Experiment. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–22. I constructed the theoretical framework, ran the statistical analysis, and wrote the main text. Aysen Ustubici contributed to development of the theoretical framing, data collection, provided supervision and made contributions to the text. Ezgi Elci contributed to data collection, prepared the data and contributed to improve the statistical analysis.

Chapter 7 is co-authored with Anja van Heelsom which is published as Kiriscioglu, E., & van Heelsom, A. (2024). Stuck in a Whirlpool? The Role of Hope and Despair in Dealing with Risks During Afghan Migration Journeys. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. as I have analyzed the data and wrote the majority of the text. The co-author contributed to the development of the theoretical and conceptual framework, writing of the text and provided supervision.

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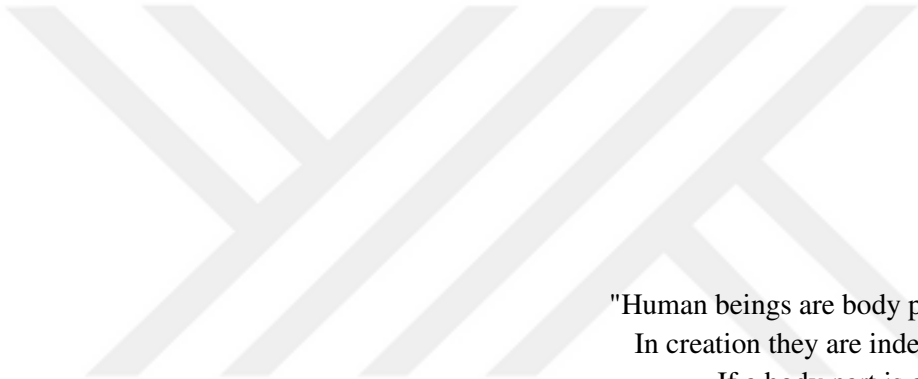
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"Human beings are body parts of each other,
In creation they are indeed of one essence.
If a body part is afflicted with pain,
Other body parts uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you shall not retain."

*Interview conducted by the author, Abdullah,
(Afghanistan, Male, 47), quoting Sa'adi Shirazi's poem
"Bani Adam"*

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research problem

This dissertation explores how risk-taking influences migration aspirations. My journey into this research began in 2016 during the early phases of my graduate studies. At that time, Turkey was experiencing mass migration with the arrival of around 2 million Syrians since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The political and public discourse in Turkey surrounding this mass migration, particularly migration from Syria, had never been more distressing (Kirişcioğlu, 2018). Media outlets depicted border-crossing migrants as individuals taking risks out of ignorance or irresponsibility, leading to heightened concerns among the Western public about an impending crisis. Subsequently, the European Union (EU)–Turkey Statement was enacted, portraying the migration from Syria as a significant 'refugee crisis'.

During this so-called refugee crisis, migrants were often blamed for being irresponsible in putting themselves and their families in danger during border crossings. Blaming individuals—in this case migrants—for taking high risks is not a new phenomenon. Holding individuals responsible for risk-taking can be seen as an artefact of late modern thinking (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). In this era, expert knowledge, statistics, and numerical data construct our perception of reality. When individuals diverge from expert knowledge in their decision-making, the rational choice paradigm often categorizes them as irrational, lacking perception, or ignorant. Trust in expert knowledge and statistics has grown to such an extent in late modernity that rationalization equates to “the belief that one can master all things by calculation” (M. Weber, 1948, p. 139). Max Weber's rationalization concept implies that this modern era belief compels individuals to adhere strictly to rational principles, often disregarding other facets of human existence. This argument is apparent in current political discussions on migration, wherein migrants' risk-taking is frequently attributed to their ignorance or irresponsibility regarding the dangers involved, without delving into the underlying factors and values that influence such decisions.

Nevertheless, attributing risk-taking solely to individual responsibility is a simplistic perspective. Particularly, migrants who take risks with their children are frequently accused of being irresponsible. However, these migrants are often constrained by structural factors such as migration and border policies, which constantly compel them to risk their lives. These policies, including those that indirectly endanger migrants' lives (i.e., the provision of development funding for migrants in host countries, often in the Global South) aim to deter migrants from moving onwards to countries in the Global North. Contrary to the common belief that migration can be

halted through stricter border policies or increased development funding, research on migration journeys has shown that migration will probably never stop (De Haas, 2007, 2023; van Heelsum, 2016). If migration continues to persist, it is important to better understand why migrants take risks and how they navigate the responsibility of their decisions during their journeys.

Based on this background, the central research question of this dissertation is: How does migrants' risk-taking influence their migration aspirations?

Previous research has explored the formation of migration aspirations primarily through the lens of the aspiration-capabilities framework (Carling, 2001; De Haas, 2003). While utilizing this framework, my dissertation's central focus lies more in comprehending how migrants navigate the risks encountered during their journeys and how their management of these risks impacts their migration aspirations. Consequently, I incorporate insights from risk studies to elucidate the complexities of migration aspirations. The lens of risk served my aim to illustrate how migrants interpret risks in multiple ways, highlighting that their aspirations are not solely determined by policy frameworks. Although migration policies undeniably exert an influence on migration journeys, especially constraining the alternatives for migrants on the way, it is essential to recognize that policies do not serve as the sole determinants of migration aspirations.

This dissertation seeks to answer the central research question by employing a mixed-method approach, employing interrelated sub-questions (as detailed in Table 1.1). This approach reveals the significant individual variation in how migration aspirations are formed. Irrespective of the policies in place, the risks encountered during migration depend on how migrants perceive and comprehend these risks. The way in which migrants interpret these risks and envision their future is crucial in shaping their migration experiences. In this context, I embrace an interpretivist approach to understanding risk.

Scientific Relevance

The scientific relevance of this work lies in its engagement with the concept of risk within the migration aspirations literature. Existing research in the field of migration studies has explored the role of risk-taking within migration journeys (Belloni, 2016; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Kaytaz, 2015, 2016). However, a critical gap remains in our understanding of the diverse rationales migrants employ when making sense of risks and ultimately shaping their aspirations. For example, some studies adopt an objectivist perspective in defining risks and argue that migrants decide to pursue onward mobility despite the risks associated with their journeys, as seen in Belloni's work on refugees from Eritrea towards European Union countries (Belloni, 2016). In contrast, certain ethnographic research takes a subjective and sociocultural approach to risk, as evident in studies by Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012), and Kaytaz (2015, 2016). Kaytaz (2015), for instance, focuses on migrants' risk-taking attitudes and presents a typology of these attitudes from an emic approach, shedding light on how migrants conceptualize risks during their migration journeys.

While these studies offer valuable insights relevant to my research, they do not directly establish a clear connection between migrants' risk-taking attitudes and their aspirations to move onwards, stay or return. Furthermore, current research often associates risk with dangers *en route* or the

effects of border externalization policies, yet the nuances of how risk-taking shape aspirations during the journey remain unexplored. This research aims to address this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to gather direct evidence in this context.

Navigating the Terminology: Migrant or Refugee?

In this dissertation, I intentionally use the term "migrant" for specific reasons. The debate surrounding the usage of the terms "migrant" and "refugee" is a nuanced discussion within academic and policymaking circles (Carling, 2023; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Erdal, Mjelva, & Tollefsen, 2023). My deliberate choice of the term "migrant" goes beyond a semantic distinction, carrying political and legal implications for the protection of individuals who have left their home country for another. Migrants represent a broad category that encompasses various subgroups, including forced migrants such as refugees, undocumented people, voluntary migrants, or labor migrants¹. There is ongoing discussion within the field, with some advocating for the classification of all migration as "mixed migration"². Before explaining the rationale behind this choice, I provide a brief overview of the terminology of migrant and refugee. Following this overview, I categorize the consequences of this differentiation between migrant and refugee into three distinct sections.

Some scholars argue that the separation of the terms migrant and refugee has political implications in terms of shaping public discourse and framing discussions around the deservingness of protection for migrants (Božič, Klvaňová, & Jaworsky, 2022; Carling, 2023; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). This differentiation has significant consequences for the protection of displaced people. First, the differentiation implies that economic migrants are not deserving of the same level of protection as refugees, contributing to a broader discourse on the varying degrees of protection warranted by different categories of migrants.

Secondly, this differentiation prompts a critical examination of the normative and legal implications associated with the idea that refugees have different rights than migrants. The central issue with this categorical differentiation lies in the oversight of how these categories are blurred, fragmented, and multilayered, mirroring the nature of migration journeys (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). Legal classifications assigned to individuals on the move often fail to fully capture the complex social realities of migration journeys.

Thirdly, the differentiation fails to acknowledge that migration is not confined to a fixed, static movement between two points, namely origin and host countries. As highlighted by Crawley and Skleparis (2018), individuals might be fleeing due to the lack of financial security in their current country of residence, especially in regions affected by protracted conflicts. However, this does not automatically categorize them as economic migrants. Economic insecurity can be one of the consequences of protracted conflicts, prompting individuals to leave their origin country through a chain reaction of events. As a result, I argue that identifying the primary drivers of migration aspirations along the different stages between origin and destination countries is not simple (Aslany, Carling, Mjelva, & Sommerfelt, 2021; Carling, Caso, Hagen-Zanker, & Rubio, 2023). Migration journeys involve multiple intermediary points, and without considering these various

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I employ the term "migrant" as an umbrella term encompassing both migrants and refugees.

² For more information about the term "mixed migration", see: <https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/MMC-understanding-of-mixed-migration-and-smuggling.pdf>

stages of migration journeys, it is difficult to categorize individuals simply as migrants or refugees.

Having explored the central debate on the use of the terms "migrant" and "refugee," as it will be detailed in Chapter 4, I provide a brief overview of the legal status of Afghans and Syrians in Turkey, which is shaped by different protection frameworks, resulting in distinct categories. Approximately 3.3 million Syrians in Turkey are legally categorized as Syrians Under Temporary Protection, while around 160,000 Afghans fall under the category of non-Syrians under international protection within the Turkish protection system (International Organization for Migration, 2023).³ Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, its ratification only extends refugee status to applicants from Europe. As a result, many Syrians and Afghans within Turkey's asylum system await resettlement to a third country as the sole avenue for obtaining refugee status (Yildiz, 2020). Moreover, a substantial number of Syrians and Afghans remain unregistered with the authorities or have lost their status for various reasons (see Chapter 4 for a detailed overview). These distinctions in legal categories contribute to the challenge of categorizing displaced individuals as either refugees or migrants.

It is significant to note that the differences between Syrian and Afghan migrants are not solely caused by the different legal frameworks but also by their distinct migration journeys inherent to their reasons for onward movement. For instance, as detailed in Chapter 7, the largest Afghan population in the country opts to stay unregistered due to fear of deportation or an aspiration to move to another country from Turkey (Buz, Memişoğlu, Dönmez, & Verduijn, 2020). Conversely, evidence suggests that the majority of Syrians under temporary protection aspire to remain in Turkey instead of moving to another country (Düvell, Schiefer, Sağiroğlu, & Mann, 2021). In summary, the differences between the two groups also depend on their experiences and the nature of their migration journeys.

Despite the legal, categorical, and aspirational differences between Syrians and Afghans living in Turkey, I use the inclusive term "migrant" to encompass asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants in this dissertation. This term comprises all individuals on the move, acknowledging the complexities and multilayered nature of migration journeys. This includes those entitled to international protection under international humanitarian law, the 1951 Geneva Convention, or regional refugee protection instruments, as well as those who may require such protection or assistance but lack the requisite legal right or status (Betts, 2013; Carling, 2023).

Risk-Taking Attitude or Risk Perception?

The way the concept of risk is employed in this dissertation varies across each article. In qualitative articles, I frequently use risk perceptions (Chapter 4), and risk-management strategies (Chapter 7); while in quantitative ones, I employ risk-taking attitudes (Chapters 5 and 6), following the established common usage of the terms. However, I acknowledge that among these concepts, there is a logical order. First, perceptions are observations and cognitive processes in the mind, concerning how people perceive risk. Second, perceptions are followed by "attitudes," which encompass value judgments. Finally, the visible outcome of these mental processes is behavior, which is the action taken.

³ See Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) website: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last access: 19.12.2023

The variation in terminology, such as "risk-taking attitude" or "risk perception", across different articles may appear inconsistent. However, this choice was deliberate, considering the terminologies commonly used in various disciplines and research methods. In quantitative studies, terms like "risk-taking attitude" or "behavior" are often employed to assess individuals' inclinations towards risk. Conversely, sociological studies typically conceptualize risk as a perceptual construct, favoring the term "risk perception". I discuss the sociological approaches to risk in Chapter 2 and I chose to uphold this distinction in the dissertation to effectively address the diverse perspectives within risk research.

Chapter Overview

In *Chapter 2*, I explain the theoretical approach I applied in the rest of the dissertation. I present migration aspirations and risk-taking literature. I provide different definitions of risk and an overview of risk studies in the social sciences.

In *Chapter 3*, I present the methodology employed in this dissertation. Each empirical chapter utilized a different methodology, detailed in their respective chapters. However, all these chapters derived from a certain methodological design, which I connect in this chapter. Additionally, I discuss the challenges of collecting data amidst a global pandemic, COVID-19. In the last part of the chapter, I evaluate my positionality as a researcher in a fragile political context.

Chapter 4 unpacks the relationship between various risk perceptions and migration aspirations. Through evidence drawn from the migration experiences of Syrian and Afghan migrants residing in Turkey, the research shows the significance of risk perceptions as an analytical framework for understanding migration aspirations. This chapter explains why some migrants still aspire to move onwards despite violent borders, while others stay or search for "safer" ways to migrate onward.

In *Chapter 5*, I address the same research question posed in Chapter 4, employing an online survey among Syrian migrants in Turkey. The study specifically distinguishes between two types of risk definitions: technical objectivist, driven by logical decision-making, and subjectively biased, influenced by individuals' self-assessments. Evidence shows that migrants' risk-taking attitudes play a significant role even after controlling for other factors influencing migration aspirations. This chapter makes two primary contributions to the migration literature: firstly, it examines the influence of various facets of risk-taking within the secondary migration context, and secondly, it recognizes the substantial role of self-perceptual and subjective assessments of risk-taking that go beyond rational-economic risk calculations.

Recognizing the constraints related to the randomization of observational data in Chapter 5, I conducted additional research using an experimental approach to explore the impact of subjective risk-taking on aspirations to stay or move onward. *Chapter 6* employs an online experiment conducted under different hypothetical policy scenarios. This experimental design enables controlled manipulation of structural factors, such as border externalization policies and employment opportunities, motivating migrants to stay instead of moving onward in secondary migration contexts. This approach also offers valuable insights into how individual personality traits, such as risk-taking, interact with structural factors influencing migration aspirations.

Building on the findings of the previous empirical chapters, *Chapter 7* delves deeper into the ways migrants deal with risks in their journeys. While prior research has already revealed the relationship between migration aspirations and risk, the role of discrete emotions in taking risks remained uncovered. Therefore, I formulated another research question for this chapter: How do fluctuations between hope and despair influence how individuals deal with risks during migration journeys? Based on in-depth interviews conducted with Afghan migrants in Turkey, the findings contribute to the literature on risk-taking strategies, aligning with Zinn's (2020) non-rational strategies, indicating migrants' efforts to manage risks through hope, even in extremely challenging circumstances.

In conclusion, *Chapter 8* aims to integrate the findings of each empirical chapter by presenting the conceptual framework of this dissertation. I provide insights for the literatures on migration aspirations and risk to demonstrate how this dissertation contributes to each field. The chapter also combines the theoretical and societal implications driven by the findings of each empirical chapter. Furthermore, I aim to address some overarching questions that emerged from my findings. These answers offer implications for the effectiveness of open border policies and migrants' resilience throughout their journeys. While not directly tested, my findings prompted me to consider broader questions with societal and policy-related implications, such as the effectiveness of information campaigns in deterring migration. The chapter concludes with a discussion of these topics, offering valuable insights for future research and policy considerations.

Table 1.1 Summary of empirical chapters

Empirical Chapter	Research Questions	Methodology	Case Selection
Chapter 4. "At Least, at the Border, I Am Killing Myself by My Own Will": Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan Communities	What role does "risk" play in the context of secondary migration? Why do some migrants choose to move on, taking risks, while others aspire to stay?	Qualitative interviews based on on-site fieldwork	Afghan and Syrian migrants in different cities of Turkey (On-site fieldwork in Istanbul and Gaziantep)
Chapter 5. Do Risk-taking Attitudes Influence Secondary Migration Aspirations? Evidence from an Online Survey	Which domains of risk-taking attitudes, namely objective and subjective, influence migrants' aspirations to move onwards, stay, or return?	Online survey data	Syrian migrants

Chapter 6. Migration Aspirations in Relation to Border Closures, Employment Opportunities and Risk-taking Attitudes: Lessons from an Experimental Online Survey	To what extent are migration aspirations subject to exogenous shocks, such as increasing risks at the borders? To what extent are they shaped by integration opportunities in their current place?	Online experimental survey data	Syrian migrants
Chapter 7. Stuck in a Whirlpool? The Role of Hope and Despair in Managing Risks During Afghan Migration Journeys	How do fluctuations between hope and despair influence how individuals deal with risks during migration journeys?	Qualitative interviews based on online and on-site fieldwork	Afghan migrants (On-site fieldwork in Adana and online interviews)

Chapter 2

Theoretical approach

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework underpinning this dissertation. It begins with an exposition of the theoretical framework for migration aspirations, followed by a more in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework related to risk studies. The innovative aspect of this research lies in the connection between risks and migration aspirations. The chapter concludes with an overview of the subsequent chapters, providing insight into the research questions explored in each empirical chapter.

Migration Aspirations

This dissertation defines *migration aspirations* as the perspectives of migrants on their future mobility. While the wording may vary slightly among different authors, the *aspirations–abilities model* (Carling, 2002, 2014; Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018) and *aspirations–capabilities framework* (De Haas, 2003) both address the structural and individual factors that influence migration aspirations. As Schewel (2020) argues, the differentiation between the ability and the desire to migrate provides a more detailed and nuanced way of unpacking migration aspirations. In this regard, this section introduces both the aspiration–capabilities model and aspiration–abilities framework and discusses the pros and cons of applying them to a secondary migration context.

Carling's (2002) *aspirations–abilities model* combines macro- and micro-level factors to understand how aspirations and abilities are formed. To unpack how *aspirations* are formed, the model analyzes communal social, economic, and political contexts at the macro level (*emigration environment*), and individual differences—determining who wants to migrate or stay—at the micro level. The model analyzes *abilities* by the opportunities and barriers that affect the overall ability to migrate on the structural level (*immigration interface*). On the individual level, the framework focuses on the characteristics that affect how people cope with the barriers to migration. By combining macro- and micro-level factors and categorizing forms of (im)mobility, the model provides a useful tool to answer how migrants shape migration aspirations vis-à-vis structural-level factors, such as obstacles at the borders, and employment opportunities (see Chapter 6).

Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, De Haas (2003) replaced the term abilities with capabilities (and opted for the term framework instead of model) to devise an *aspiration–capabilities framework*, which conceptualizes human (im)mobility as individuals' freedom to lead their lives and enhance the choices they have. While the capability perspective emphasizes the role of agency in migration decision-making processes, De Haas (2021) acknowledges that capabilities are tied to social, political, and cultural resources that individuals can access (or perceive they have access to). Both the capabilities and human (im)mobility are constrained by

structural conditions (i.e., border externalization policies). Drawing on Berlin's (1969) positive and negative liberty, De Haas (2021) proposes analyzing (im)mobility outcomes based on external constraints (i.e., closed borders) and capabilities (i.e., access to resources and opportunities).

To generate a more holistic approach, Schewel (2020) integrated the capability concept into the aspiration–abilities model. Schewel (2020) refined Carling's immobility outcomes by describing immobility as a spatial continuity, implying staying in one place for an extended period without significant movement from daily living circles. Being immobile does not imply complete lack of movement, as everyone engages in daily activities like going to school or work. Therefore, while onward migration involves relocating to a new place for an extended period, immobility refers to staying in one's current place of residence for a prolonged duration without significant movement from there.

Schewel's (2020) integration of capability into the aspiration–abilities model was necessary for two reasons. First, Carling's (2002) (im)mobility categorization does not explain how mobility and immobility outcomes change in time when people face various conditions. Here, De Haas' (2003) capability approach contributes to showing the dynamism among (im)mobility outcomes by explicitly including development processes. Second, De Haas' (2003) capability framework connects ability to migrate with “freedom”. In a way, the formation of aspirations is not only tied to abilities but also having the freedom of mobility, regardless of the conditions.

The aspiration–capabilities framework and aspiration–abilities model have faced several criticisms. First, Schewel (2020) criticizes both for failing to explain the factors leading the aspiration to stay (voluntary or acquiescent immobility). The mobility bias originates from the functionalist and neoliberal perspectives, acknowledging immobility as “normal”, and mobility as an “aberration” from the equilibrium (Schewel, 2020). In recent years, there has been an increase in research focusing on the aspiration to stay, particularly in the country of origin (Asayesh & Kazemipur, 2023; Gotehus, 2023; Müller-Funk, 2023; Vezzoli, 2023; Wyngaarden et al., 2023). These studies provide evidence from different cases and demonstrate that staying put is also a proactive and agentic choice. I contribute to this scholarship by showing that staying put in a secondary migration context can also be a way of reclaiming agency.

Secondly, both the framework and model primarily focus on migration potential from the origin country, overlooking migration aspirations along the journey (Brigden & Mainwaring, 2016; Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). While the aspiration to stay in the country of origin is gaining recognition, aspirations to remain in a secondary migration context are often limited and understudied, with only a few recent studies addressing this gap (Hager, 2021; Karimi & Byelikova, 2024; Müller Funk, 2019; Schiefer, Düvell, & Sağıroğlu, 2023). Further research is needed in this secondary migration context. Within this context, migrants flee turmoil in their home countries and seek refuge in neighboring or available reception countries. These migrants encounter different risks compared to those faced in their home countries. Therefore, there is a need for varied analyses to measure aspirations to stay or move, which are contingent upon the immigration context in the host country, potential destination country, or origin country.

Third, secondary migration aspirations require incorporating the option to return to the origin country as well as onward migration. Although the return option can be regarded as a mobility outcome, the aspiration to return requires different sets of explanations. For instance, as Kuschminder (2022) suggests, return aspirations can be a continual stage in migration journeys and are not always an “end” of migration cycles. In this regard, aspirations to move onward, stay

and return should be incorporated in migration aspirations research in the secondary migration context.

Finally, the aspiration–capabilities framework is criticized for its lack of semantic clarity regarding the term "capabilities" or for using the term "immobility" instead of "aspiration to stay" (Müller-Funk, Üstübici, & Belloni, 2023). In response to criticisms raised by Müller-Funk, Üstübici, and Belloni (2023), I have refrained from using the term "immobility aspirations" within the aspiration–capabilities framework presented in this dissertation. Müller-Funk et al. (2023) argue convincingly that the term "immobility" carries connotations of containment or deprivation, which may not accurately reflect individuals' desires to remain in their current location. Indeed, it is very rare for individuals to actively aspire to be "immobile" in the sense of being restricted or constrained. Instead, the desire to stay in one's current place of residence can arise from a variety of motivations, including a sense of attachment to one's birthplace, upbringing, or current community. This desire for stability and rootedness does not necessarily preclude the possibility of mobility in the future. Rather, it can be understood as a desire to recreate a sense of home or belonging (Boccagni, Murcia, & Belloni, 2020; Brun & Fábos, 2015). Therefore, I have adopted the term "aspiration to stay" to accurately capture this nuanced understanding of individuals' desires within the aspiration–capabilities framework. By doing so, I aim to avoid the potential misinterpretation associated with the term "immobility aspirations" and to better reflect the complex interplay between mobility, attachment, and aspirations in migration studies.

Theoretically, both Carling's (2002) model and De Haas' (2021) framework suggest unpacking migration aspirations based on structural and individual factors. For practical reasons and to avoid confusion, this dissertation adopts the terminology in the aspirations–capabilities framework (De Haas, 2021) to unpack migration aspirations through: i) structural conditions, and ii) capabilities that individuals have. First, for structural factors, this dissertation focuses on *external constraints* affecting migrants' ability to migrate. The external constraints refer to border and migration policies aiming to deter migrants from moving onwards such as border externalization measures, depriving migrants of legal status or not providing social services. The capabilities include employment, health services, education, or subsidies in the current country of residence.

Second, individual factors refer to a wide range of factors, from individuals' social networks and family status to personality traits. Among the many individual factors, I focus specifically on migrants' risk-taking attitudes. Incorporating these attitudes is significant for reflecting the complexity of migration decision-making. If individual differences in risk-taking significantly shape migration aspirations, then the effectiveness of structural factors in deterring migration cannot be assumed to be universal and must be understood within the context of differences in individuals' characteristics.

Within this aspiration–capabilities framework, there is a lack of comprehensive insight into how individuals' risk-taking attitudes influence their migration aspirations. To bridge this gap, this research integrates the second theoretical framework of risk-taking attitudes. While the migration aspirations framework emphasizes structural and individual factors, it does not thoroughly address the differences in how risk plays a role in migration journeys. This dissertation endeavors to explore this critical aspect, aiming to provide a new understanding of migration aspirations by considering the role of risk-taking attitudes. This integration is essential as it allows for a deeper exploration of the complexities within the migration aspirations framework, particularly in the context of secondary migration.

Risk-Taking in Different Disciplines

Risk is a contested concept in social sciences in terms of containing diverse meanings in different contexts (Aven & Renn, 2009; Boholm, Möller, & Hansson, 2016; Krebs, 2011). Within the disciplines of psychology, health sciences, economics, and sociology, risk has been conceptualized by various scholars. The term is used in such diverse ways across disciplines that some experts suggest there are very few common threads (Garland, 2003). Instead of connecting interdisciplinary definitions of risk, I aim to present the primary concepts and approaches to risk that are closely connected to different aspects of risk used in this dissertation.

My intention is not to provide an exhaustive review of risk-taking research, as numerous scholars in the realm of social sciences have already offered comprehensive insights (Lupton, 1999a; Wilkinson, 2010; Zinn, 2020). Instead, this dissertation is primarily focused on establishing a systematic connection between risk research and the field of migration studies. To accomplish this, this section first focuses on common usage of the term “risk.” Second, it looks into the different interpretations and descriptions of risks. Subsequently, this chapter further delves into the distinct approach to risk articulated by prominent sociology scholar Jens O. Zinn, which serves as the foundation for this dissertation's investigation.

Common uses of risk and uncertainty

Risk is commonly used interchangeably with the terms harm, hazard, loss, threat, and danger. Different approaches agree that what differentiates risk from these terms is the central idea that reality and possibility are distinctive features of risk (Zinn, 2008b). In other words, risks exist as long as the future is unpredictable and can be altered by human activities. According to Brown (2021), risk differs from danger because it contains “accountability.” In the absence of accountability, danger, hazard, or loss is just an indication of unwanted events (Zinn, 2008b).

The future component of risk is directly linked to the concept of uncertainty. Thus, many scholars comprehend risk and uncertainty together (Aven & Renn, 2009; Bastide, 2015; Brown, 2016; Krebs, 2011; Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Williams & Baláz, 2012; Zinn, 2008a, 2016). This dissertation also comprehends risk and uncertainty together and as strongly related to the unexpected and ambiguous essence of migration journeys (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). Migration journeys are full of danger, threat, and loss in which migrants navigate between different probabilities. As Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) argue, this unpredictability of the beginnings and ends of migration journeys complicates studying migration aspirations.

Hence, I opted to transfer the knowledge generated in the field of risk studies to better comprehend the dynamics of migration journeys. In the following section, I elucidate the core definitions of risk to illuminate the epistemological underpinnings of this dissertation.

Description of risks in social sciences

I follow Zinn (2008b) by classifying risk into three distinct epistemological categories. The first encompasses a technical and scientific approach, emphasizing objectivity. In this view, risk is regarded as a tangible, quantifiable concept to be avoided through rational decision-making. Second, Zinn (2008b) introduces another category situated within rational choice theory: objective risks and subjective biases (See Table 2.1). According to this definition, risks can be measured from a statistical and expert point of view. Contrary to the first definition, this definition acknowledges that individuals can be biased in their decisions. Laypeople interpret the expert

knowledge based on their subjective, biased evaluations of the mere existence of the risks. The third definition adopts a sociocultural perspective, framing risk as a socially constructed element inherent to daily life (Brown, 2021; Zinn, 2008b, p. 8). Here, the understanding of risk is context-dependent, deviating from an inherently rational reality. Further elaboration on these distinctions, including examples of objective and subjective risk definitions, is provided in the following sections.

Table 2.1. Common definitions of risk⁴

	Theoretical origins	Actors	Risk definition
Technical objectivistic	Rational choice, technical risk assessments	Experts calculate the risks	Mere reality, risks exist independently from social structures
Objective risks and subjective biases	Rational choice	Individuals interpret the risks based on an expert calculation of costs and benefits	Risks exist objectively
Socially constructed, subjective	Cultural risk, society	Individuals have bounded agency. Political, economic, and cultural conflicts affect perceptions	Socially constructed. Risks are politicized, culturally based, and shaped by material vulnerabilities

Technical-objectivist definitions

In technical-objectivistic definitions, predominantly adapted by scholars of economics, engineering, and medicine, risk is attributed to human's rationality in assessing and calculating the outcomes of the risks at hand (Lupton, 1999a, p. 2; Renn, 1992; Szmukler, 2003). This rationality-focused perspective assumes that people handle risks based on the accurate expert knowledge that they receive about the possible hazards and gains (see Chapter 5 for a detailed evaluation of rational choice theory). In this regard, risk can be defined as a term "calculated by the probability of its occurrence and the amount of damage" (Zinn, 2008b, p. 5).

The objective definition of risk in the rational choice school of thinking can be seen as an artefact of late modernity. The Enlightenment and Western modernization process presented risk-taking as "irrational" after the widespread use of mathematical and statistical methods. Thus, unnecessary risks are presented as being "foolhardy, careless, irresponsible, and even 'deviant'" in contemporary Western societies (Lupton, 1999b, p. 152).

The technical-objectivistic definition of risk has some limitations. First, calculating risks is not always as straightforward as realist perspective argues. It is true that individuals can rely on scientific or expert knowledge when evaluating the risks in their everyday lives. What surprises experts and pundits are when people continue to take risks despite their wise advice. Experts assume that people take risks because they lack perception or understanding. This might be true in some cases, but laypeople often have good knowledge when taking risks. For instance, research on voluntary risk-taking indicates that individuals take risks because of the value in itself (Lyng, 1990). A study by Lupton and Tulloch (2002) shows that individuals who willingly participate in

⁴ All tables in this dissertation were created by the author, unless otherwise noted.

risk-taking activities (e.g., free diving, surfing, boxing) often do so to confront fear, show courage, or to attain self-actualization or a sense of personal agency. This line of voluntary risk-taking research challenges the assumption that individuals are universally inclined to avoid or reduce risks.

Second, the technical-objectivistic definition overlooks the socio-cultural structures in which people are bounded when assessing risks. People do not always receive accurate or sufficient information about risks. Even if they do, they might not be able to handle risks accordingly due to the socio-economic structures that can limit their capacity to react to risks. When their capabilities are limited or restricted, people often make decisions based on their personal beliefs, emotions, and experiences, which may not conform to discussions centered on rationality (Aven & Renn, 2009).

Objective risks and subjective biases

The second approach relates back to the literature on psychology and cognitive science in decision-making. The subjective biases' definition of risk differs from the technical definition by acknowledging that individuals' perceptions affect how they evaluate risk. For instance, the model proposed by Tversky and Kahneman (1992) comprehends decision-making processes in relation to how individuals prioritize avoiding losses. The argument posits that when faced with two options, individuals tend to choose the one perceived to have more gains than losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). This model still acknowledges that risks objectively exist. Yet, it shifts the focus from the idea of perfect rationality to how individuals perceive gains and losses in decision-making, taking into account framing effects (Druckman & McDermott, 2008).

Despite its contribution to describing risk, this line of thinking portrays risk avoidance as a rational response, often attributing risk-taking to ignorance or a lack of knowledge. This approach presupposes the deviation from rational decision-making as an error to be fixed in decision-making processes. However, risk avoidance or willingness to take risks is not solely linked to rational choice. While some psychology scholars still argue that emotions are irrelevant to making a decision, and can be disruptive (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), others say that emotions do not always cause a biased judgment (Bechara & Damasio, 2005) and often highlight the significance of emotions (Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). The role of emotions, personal beliefs, and experiences in decision-making processes cannot be disregarded. One of my aims in this dissertation is to incorporate emotions into migration journeys to understand individuals' risk perceptions.

Socially constructed, subjective definitions

Sociological theories explore various relationships between the sociocultural creation of risk and its presumed "objective" existence. The socially constructed and subjective definition of risk is, then, related to understanding risks as a feature of lived experiences. Instead of taking risks as given, fixed and static, and based on expert knowledge, the subjective approach aims to make sense of everyday risk-taking (Brown, 2021). Risks are not only about numbers and statistics (Szmukler, 2003), but they also have values for individuals' living experiences such as showing courage or self-actualization (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). I provide more discussion on individuals' living experiences in the following chapters.

The social constructionist approach offers an alternative perspective to the technical definition by examining individuals' perceptions of risk from an emic approach. This means that it considers how people themselves understand and interpret risks. According to this approach, people's

understanding of risks is shaped by their life experiences and personal histories (Brown, 2016; Douglas, 1992; Lupton, 1999b). Rather than making calculations based on probabilities and utilities, individuals assess risks in light of their own experiences, their social affiliations, the resources available to them, and their position within the broader context of their lives and societal power dynamics (Lupton, 1999b, p. 125). As a result, the concept of risk is not fixed but dynamic, molded through social interactions (Lupton, 1999b). François Ewald underscores this idea, stating that 'Nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event' (Ewald, 1991, p. 199).

As will be detailed in Chapter 4, the social constructionist approach rejects the argument that people's responses to risk can be explained by the dualism of rationality and irrationality (Brown, 2016; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Zinn, 2008a). Considering the construction of the meaning of risk, unsurprisingly, people may develop multiple and different rationalities in responding to risks in their everyday lives (Zinn, 2008a). Accordingly, risk assessments function as a way of expressing subjectivity peculiar to one's unique life courses (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Van Voorst, 2014). Rather than an issue of rational calculations of the issues at stake, the way risks are perceived becomes a matter of self-actualization or (re)constructing identity (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002).

In the realm of media narratives and within the presumptions of policymakers regarding migration journeys, a prevailing trend is to employ technical-objectivist definitions. This perspective often labels migrants on the move as unaware of dangers, categorizing their choices as "irrational." Contrary to these notions, extensive research, including the focus of this dissertation, reveals a different narrative. Migrants are frequently well-informed about the risks they face during their journeys (Belloni, 2016; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2023). Possessing a comprehensive awareness of the migration context, migrants navigate through the various risks encountered at each stage of their migration. Instead of relying solely on the existence of these risks, migrants draw upon their own experiences and self-evaluations to make informed decisions about risk management.

New Directions in Risk Research: Zinn's In-Between Strategies

The work of sociologist Jens O. Zinn stands out as a successful endeavor in providing a comprehensive understanding of risk. In this section, I elaborate on how I employ Zinn's risk theory in my research, demonstrating its utility in understanding the multifaceted nature of risk in the context of this study.

Zinn's theoretical framework offers a diverse array of strategies for risk management, effectively merging both positivist and constructivist perspectives (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Zinn, 2008a, 2008b, 2016, 2019). In his work, Zinn underscores the significance of acknowledging that decision-making is driven by multiple logics, with no single logic holding inherent superiority (Zinn, 2016). When experts ignore these risk management strategies, they cannot understand why individuals disregard expert knowledge. Proponents of rational choice, experts, or pundits assume that individuals disregard expert knowledge when they misunderstand it. However, it is essential to recognize that individuals do not follow rational strategies for a variety of other reasons, such as a lack of control over their lives, vulnerability, a lack of access to resources, or prevailing social power structures. This recognition is vital as it underscores that individuals utilize these strategies dependent on socially situated rationalities (Zinn, 2019).

The relevance of this multiple strategies aspect extends to migration policymaking, as it underscores that migrants utilize diverse, non-expert strategies not out of ignorance, but rather as a result of distinct motivations underpinning each type of risk management. The widespread assumption here is that migrants deal with risks based on instrumental rationality. For example, migrants are assumed to move onwards only if there is a tangible benefit, such as a high prospect of finding employment. However, in the context of migration, there may be "mixed forms" of rationality that do not fit neatly into a binary divide between risk and probabilities. As Zinn (2019) argues, individuals address risk through different strategies, often shaped by poor outset conditions, a lack of reasonable options, hope, and susceptibility to misinformation. I elaborate on these strategies outlined by Zinn (2019) in the following section.

Strategies for dealing with risk

Zinn (2019) argues that individuals deal with risk in three different ways (see Table 2.2.). Recognizing non-rational and in-between strategies, such as hope, trust, and intuition, is useful to discover how individuals react to situations where they cannot make use of expert knowledge (Zinn, 2008a). I explain these three strategies below.

First, as discussed in the technical-objectivistic definition of risk, individuals can rely on scientific or expert knowledge when evaluating the risks in their everyday lives. This instrumental rationality approach makes experts and pundits surprised when people continue to take risks despite their wise advice. They assume that people lack perception or understanding. This might be true in some cases, but individuals often have good knowledge when taking risks.

Table 2.2. Three different strategies for dealing with risk according to Zinn (2008a, 2019)⁵

Rational strategies	Utility maximization, calculating pros and cons	Based on expert knowledge
Non-rational strategies	Hope or faith	Connected to future expectations, uncertainty
'In-between' strategies	Emotion, trust, intuition	Build on experience and tacit knowledge

Second, individuals can employ non-rational strategies like hope or faith. Zinn calls this strategy non-rational by referring to the established meaning of "rationality" in technical-objectivist definitions of risk. Within this terminology, hope can be regarded as a non-rational strategy but it is a reasonable one (Zinn, 2016). For instance, research by Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012) shows that migrants embark on dangerous journeys despite the possibilities of death or injury. They rely on the hope that they can end their everyday suffering where they are. Similarly, Bastide's (2015) study on undocumented labor migrants to Singapore illustrates that migrants relied on faith to embark on high-risk migration instead of staying passive. In their particular circumstances, migrants may disregard expert knowledge and take significant risks in order to change their living conditions. Chapter 7 of this dissertation predominantly focuses on one of these non-rational strategies of risk management.

⁵ The table is created by the author based on the categorization of risk-taking strategies in two different articles by Zinn (2008a, 2019).

Third, 'in-between' strategies are based on the idea that individuals' decision-making in late modern societies is complex and volatile (Zinn, 2008a). Individuals cannot calculate every aspect of life based on their gains or losses. If we think of the same migrant who embarks on dangerous boat journeys, this migrant might be aware of the remote possibilities of having a wealthy life with access to resources in what is termed the destination country. However, they still choose to embark on these journeys. Possibilities only being in the distant future can become less of an issue than everyday suffering and limited control over life in the near future (Zinn, 2008a).

Zinn's theoretical framework expands our understanding of various dimensions of risk-taking. Zinn's 2019 article, in particular, elucidates diverse motivations behind risk-taking, varying levels of control (agency), and the degree of consciousness or reflexivity in relation to risk-taking. Essentially, risk-taking can be viewed as a process of shaping or protecting one's identity. This is of paramount significance for my research because it allows me to incorporate these multifaceted dimensions into my own framework.

Zinn emphasizes that risk-taking can fluctuate in terms of agency, with some individuals feeling a degree of control while others have limited choices. He also delves into how risk-taking can function as a means to regain control over one's life, protect social status, or bring about substantial life changes. Moreover, he addresses the significance of skills, social recognition, and the pursuit of safety and security within the context of risk-taking.

In conclusion, Zinn's delineation of three distinct strategies individuals employ in dealing with risk—instrumental rationality, non-rational, and in-between—offers a nuanced perspective on risk management. The instrumental rationality approach, relying on expert knowledge, assumes that people take risks when they lack necessary information. Non-rational strategies, exemplified by hope and faith, reveal a reasonable explanation for risk-taking within the broader context. In-between strategies acknowledge the complexity of decision-making in modern societies, where individuals may prioritize immediate relief over distant possibilities. Zinn's theoretical framework enriches our grasp of risk-taking dimensions, particularly emphasizing its role in expressing agency and protecting identity. This proves integral to the purposes of this research, enabling an encompassing framework for multifaceted risk dimensions.

Applying New Directions in Risk Research into Migration Aspirations

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation attempt to make a conceptual contribution to the migration aspirations literature. Each chapter adopts and analyzes different descriptions of risk, either as being objective or socially constructed. Chapters 5 and 6, with quantitative methodology, predominantly focus on different descriptions of risk-taking. Chapter 7, on the other hand, delves into strategies used by migrants for dealing with risks, such as feeling or losing hope along migration journeys. I explain the theoretical framework used in each chapter and its contribution to migration research below.

As Zinn (2008a) argues, individuals may develop multiple and different rationalities in responding to risks in their everyday lives. In Chapter 4, I conceptualize these multiple and different meanings of risk-taking in relation to migration aspirations. I argue that migrants' risk perceptions are not solely shaped by the mere existence of risks, but are highly influenced by their everyday experiences. Within their specific contexts, what some may perceive as the "real danger" is staying in their current country of residence rather than crossing what others consider

"dangerous" borders. By adopting a social constructionist approach, this chapter shows how refugees themselves assess these dangers and construct their own perceptions of risk during their migration journeys.

In Chapter 5, I explore objective and subjective definitions of risks. This chapter contributes to the discussions around managing risks based on instrumental rationality and subjective sense-making of risks based on survey data. It provides evidence for the argument that the instrumental rationality approach is neither superior nor dominant when dealing with risks in the context of migration aspirations.

I continue exploring the role of objective and socially constructed definitions of risk in Chapter 6, this time by utilizing an online experimental design. Different from Chapter 5, the main theoretical framework of this chapter tests structural and individual explanations for migration aspirations, adopting Carling's (2002) *aspirations-abilities model*. In terms of risk-taking, the chapter shows that migrants exhibit agency, and their attitudes toward risk-taking are highly individualized. The chapter contributes to both migration and risk studies by revealing that the onward migration aspirations of Syrian migrants are significantly influenced by their subjective risk-taking attitudes, indicating the importance of incorporating risk-taking attitudes in the forced migration context.

The main theoretical framework used in Chapter 7 is Zinn's (2016, 2023) non-rational strategies in dealing with risks in migration journeys. Among these non-rational strategies, I analyze hope as a 'non-rational but reasonable' risk management strategy. Following from Zinn's framework, the chapter contributes to our understanding of dealing with risks when one lacks control over their life by showing precisely how hope and despair interact. The chapter shows the significance of hope as a way to deal with risks, even in an extremely vulnerable context; unbearable despair is translated into hope.

In conclusion, the research aims to challenge the prevalent notion that migrants make an "irrational" decision by crossing borders, emphasizing the significance of individual variability in managing risks. The empirical chapters shed light on how migrants navigate risks in their migration journeys. In essence, by bridging gaps in previous research and providing a nuanced understanding of migrants' risk-taking, this dissertation intends to contribute to a more holistic comprehension of migration aspirations. In the final section, I briefly summarize the research conducted in each empirical chapter.

Chapter 3

Method

This dissertation employs a multimethod approach to examine the connection between risk-taking and migration aspirations. In this chapter, I first clarify why I used a mixed-methods design to address my research questions and how it benefits the research. As discussed in Chapter 1, the uniqueness of this dissertation lies in the diverse ways risk-taking is measured in relation to migration aspirations. Therefore, second, I outline the steps taken to measure risk-taking attitudes. Then, I describe the data collection and analysis process. Last, I discuss my positionality within this research and highlight the ethical challenges involved in conducting research within a migration context. I also reflect on how conducting research in a politically fragile environment influenced my choice of methods and data collection.

Research Design: A Sequential Model Mixed-Methods Approach

This dissertation employs a mixed-methods research (MMR) design. This methodological choice was made to generate valuable insights for research with certain policy implications (Creswell, 1999). It responds particularly favorably in comparison to a single-method approach as it combines both qualitative and quantitative data, offering a more comprehensive perspective (Creswell, 1999, 2015). Incorporation of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study particularly benefits research with certain policy implications as it combines high technical quality with jargon-free comprehensive substance (Hutchinson, 1995).

In the context of migration research, applying MMR is also necessary to benefit from the advantages of both positivist and constructivist approaches. As argued by Castles (2012), a positivist approach focuses on enhancing research methods to precisely describe and measure social facts, while a constructivist perspective is significant to understand the processes and what they mean socially. Therefore, employing MMR in this dissertation serves better for the dual purpose of, firstly, producing and informing migration policymaking, and secondly, interpreting the meanings attributed to migration journeys.

Within the framework of MMR, I have adopted a sequential model. As discussed by Creswell (1999), there are three models in designing MMR: convergence, sequential, and instrument-building. In the convergence approach, the researcher concurrently gathers qualitative and quantitative data and then examines both sets of data to draw conclusions. In the sequential model, the research process is divided into two phases, with the second phase building upon or expanding upon the findings of the first phase. In the instrument-building model, the researcher's goal is to

create a tool, such as a survey or questionnaire, by collecting exploratory qualitative data and using them to formulate questions and scales for the instrument.

Amongst the three models in designing MMR, a sequential model best served my purposes in this dissertation. The sequential model is a better fit than the convergence model because I was able to explore different aspects of risk-taking further in each step. To accomplish this, I drew from two distinct research projects, the commonality between them being the exploration of migration decision-making in Turkey (further details provided later in this chapter). Hence, the data collection was not preplanned. Following the completion of data collection for the first project, I opted to concentrate on risk-taking attitudes. Subsequently, for the second project, risk-taking inquiries were further examined, albeit not initially planned.

For instance, I initiated the first project with a qualitative phase, conducting fieldwork that involved observations, interviews, and visits to various cities and neighborhoods in Turkey. The findings from this initial qualitative data analysis, along with my observations, prompted the study to explore the impact of risk-taking attitudes (Chapter 4). In the second research project, I transformed my observations and interpretations into categories or variables that could be quantitatively tested (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). This process entailed identifying themes in the qualitative data and then employing statistical methods to test my hypotheses and research questions (see Chapters 5 and 6). Based on the outcomes of the quantitative analysis, I conducted another qualitative study in Chapter 7 to explore the effects of emotions such as hope and despair in managing risks.

This methodical progression allowed for the exploration of risk from multiple aspects, starting with qualitative fieldwork, and progressing to quantitative analysis. In a broader context, the dissertation highlights the efficacy of MMR in addressing multidimensional and complex research questions such as measuring risk-taking attitudes and migration aspirations. In the following section, I explain how I measure these variables.

Operationalization of Risk-taking Attitudes (Independent Variable) and Migration Aspirations (Dependent Variable)

Measuring individuals' risk-taking attitudes is a complicated process because individuals' risk-taking behavior varies across different contexts. Various methodologies have been employed for measuring risk-taking in different domains. I faced the challenges of researching a concept that was vaguely analyzed in the migration aspirations context.

The main dependent variable was migration aspirations, measured by "Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in Turkey, or return to Syria?" (OECD, 2015).⁶ The responses included "Move to another country", "Stay in Turkey", or "Return to Syria/Afghanistan." This operationalization served the research objectives in two ways. First, the question intentionally focuses on the ideal situation,

⁶ The original question did not ask about a "return" option. I have added this option because return aspirations are still relevant to migration aspirations for some Syrian migrants living in Turkey.

avoiding complexities associated with measuring migration intentions or plans, and instead gauging aspirations related to wishes and desires, which may not necessarily translate into actual behavior (Carling, 2019). Second, the question's framing is open to interpretation and independent of the conditions of the migration journey. It relies on migrants' perceptions of the conditions along the way rather than the actual circumstances during the journey.

Migration aspirations are sometimes overlooked as inadequate predictors of real migration decisions. Since they are measured at specific time periods in people's lives, migration aspirations may be perceived as a snapshot of individuals' attitudes toward migration. However, as Carling (2014) argues, "migration aspirations can be 'real' in the sense of well-established convictions that persist across specific situations." Aspirations have a broader and more enduring nature, capable of persisting over an extended period. While I measured migration intentions and plans in my research, these aspects were not explicitly included in this dissertation. This decision was informed by the understanding that migration aspirations represent a long-term state of mind.⁷

While several authors had previously offered significant insights into operationalizing migration aspirations (Aslany et al., 2021; Carling, 2014, 2019; Carling & Collins, 2018; Üstübeci et al., 2021), the operationalization and measurement of risk were not well-established in the context of migration journeys' research. Determining how to operationalize risk posed a challenge before conducting the research.

To address this, I explored other disciplines working on risk, particularly scholars in behavioral economics who often measure risk in specific domains such as health, finance, and social decisions (Druckman & McDermott, 2008; E. U. Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002). The research on different domains of risk-taking shows that people's tendency to take risks is higher in specific domains (E. U. Weber et al., 2002). However, it was challenging to select the specific domain of risk that aligned with migration journeys, as it could not be likened to a gambler's choice or health issues. Through multiple attempts in pilot surveys, I concluded that risks in migration journeys are more related to general life decisions, proving to be the most suitable risk measurement.

As the main independent variable, I used "subjective risk-taking attitudes," which is a 5-point self-report item asking how much the respondents are willing to take risks in their daily lives (see Chapters 5 and 6). I chose this approach because it is assumed that subjective risk-taking measures a stable, general risk preference influencing behavior across different domains (Charness, Gneezy, & Imas, 2013; Dohmen et al., 2011; Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Walkowitz, & Wichardt, 2015). Furthermore, measuring risk-taking attitudes in different domains in one survey was time-consuming, while subjective risk-taking measurement was not time-consuming. The original survey conducted in the project consisted of eleven modules and took, on average, 36 minutes to complete (SD = 46 minutes). Adding more questions in each domain would have prolonged the survey completion time, which would have potentially caused attention deficit.

Despite the effectiveness of subjective risk-taking attitudes' measurement, there are some studies showing that the domain in which risk is assessed greatly impacts the results (Charness et al., 2013). For instance, a company manager might exhibit different risk attitudes when considering recreational activities versus financial decisions (MacCrimmon & Wehrung, 1990). Here, I

⁷ For additional measurements related to intentions and plans, please refer to the report by Üstübeci, Kirişcioğlu, and Elçi (2021).

developed two strategies in my search for finding the most suitable measurement for the forced migration context.

First, I utilized pilot surveys, as detailed in the data collection section below. I created different risk-taking questions for different domains (i.e., health, and economics). As explained in Chapter 5, objective risk taking is measured by asking a hypothetical gambling question developed by Barsky, Juster, Kimball, and Shapiro (1997). I tried other objective risk-taking questions based on economic decision-making, but they did not create variance in respondents' answers. To measure risk-taking in the health domain, I utilized different questions and randomly manipulated demographic characteristics of a hypothetical person in pilot surveys. However, I could not create variance in responses to the health domain.

Second, studies show that minorities (Kahan, Braman, Gastil, Slovic, & Mertz, 2007) and socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Olofsson & Rashid, 2011) tend to be more risk-averse. Furthermore, a study conducted by Barnett and Breakwell (2001) reveals that people experiencing constant and extreme risks are less concerned about risk-taking. Thus, I conducted pilot surveys with non-migrants (citizens of Turkey) to ensure migration experience did not interfere with individuals' risk-taking assessments. By comparing native respondents' and migrants' risk-taking attitudes, I aimed to understand whether risk-taking as a measurement itself could shape aspirations.

Case Selection: Why were Syrian and Afghan Migrants in Turkey selected?

I selected Turkey as a suitable case for exploring secondary migration aspirations for several reasons. First, Turkey plays a dual role for migrants, serving both as a transit point toward Western developed countries and as a destination for permanent residence. This dual functionality makes Turkey an ideal case for investigating secondary migration aspirations.

Second, the research design focuses on the two largest migrant communities in Turkey, namely Afghans and Syrians. Both nationalities constitute substantial groups that cross the border through Greece and Bulgaria en route to Europe. Turkey hosts approximately 3.1 million registered Syrian migrants and holds geographical significance as one of the external borders of the European Union⁸. Since the implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, Turkey has been positioned as a space aimed at deterring migrants from entering the EU. The country has also implemented policy interventions—albeit insufficient—to provide migrants with opportunities for local integration.

I have also included the second-largest community living in Turkey: Afghans. Official statistics from the International Organization for Migration (2023) indicate that there are approximately 160,000 Afghans holding international protection status (IPS). However, according to estimates from the Ministry of Interior in 2021, around 118,000 Afghans are unregistered in Turkey. Several reasons lead Afghan migrants to remain unregistered. The individual status determination process is lengthy, and it often requires individuals to reside in a specified city where they may lack

⁸ Presidency of Migration Management website: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last accessed March 27, 2024

networks or face challenges in securing employment (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018; Karadağ & Sert, 2023). Additionally, many Afghan asylum claims are rejected, resulting in deportation. Consequently, as detailed in Chapter 7, applying for asylum is often viewed as futile, counterproductive, and perilous, leading many Afghans to choose to remain unregistered.

To conclude, throughout this research, I gathered data from the two largest migrant communities. However, my analysis is not comparative for two main reasons. Firstly, this is due to the absence of official demographic data on Afghan migrants in Turkey, meaning the representativeness of the data was challenging. Secondly, Afghan and Syrian migrants are subject to different protection frameworks in Turkey, and they do not share the same legal status. Syrian migrants are granted Temporary Protection, while Afghans are classified as non-Syrians under international protection. As a result, the needs of these two groups differ. Therefore, I chose not to structure the research in a comparative manner.

Data Collection and Challenges of Conducting Research During COVID-19 Measures

The data for this dissertation were collected as part of two different projects.⁹ The first project aimed to investigate the impact of policy interventions on migrants' decision-making processes. The second project's primary objective was to propose an alternative migration governance model, with our work package specifically aiming to assess the impact of development interventions on migration aspirations (Üstübcı et al., 2021). In a way, both projects centered on migrant journeys and decision-making processes, allowing me to explore migration aspirations throughout the journeys of Afghan and Syrian migrants between 2019 and 2021.

In my role as a researcher in the first project, I worked alongside the research team in Turkey to conduct in-depth interviews in two distinct cities within the country (further details will be provided). Additionally, as a PhD candidate involved in the AdMiGov project, I collaborated with the research team to gather data in Turkey. The main survey and qualitative questionnaire included questions related to migration aspirations and development interventions targeting Syrian and Afghan migrants. I added additional questions focusing on my main research question, such as risk perceptions and risk-taking attitudes, to both questionnaires (refer to Appendix 4 for questions).

Table 3.1. Demographic Information of Interviewees

	The first project		The second project	
	Syria	Afghanistan	Syria	Afghanistan
Number of interviews	19	11	20	23
Average Age	31	29	34	31
Gender	Male: 16	Male: 8	Male: 14	Male: 14

⁹ The first project, "Fluctuations in Migration Flows to Europe", was funded by the Dutch Research and Data Centre (WODC). The project was a collaborative project across three universities in 2019. See the following website for the overall project report: https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/2401/2916_Volledige_Tekst_tcm28-413430.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y. The second project, AdMiGov (Advancing Alternative Migration Governance), was funded by the European Commission. AdMiGov was a collaborative project across 10 universities which ran from 2019 to 2023. For more about AdMiGov, please go to: <https://admigov.eu/>

	Female: 3	Female: 3	Female: 6	Female: 9
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First fieldwork: Qualitative data collection

In the first qualitative data collection, I conducted face to face interviews with 30 migrants, 11 from Afghanistan and 19 from Syria, in April 2019. The fieldwork was carried out over the course of one month in various districts within the provinces of Istanbul and Gaziantep, located in Turkey.

Initially, the recruitment process relied on leveraging the research team's personal networks and using a snowballing approach through community gatekeepers in areas where Afghan and Syrian communities were located. However, most families visited were relatively settled in Turkey, and were more inclined to aspire to stay in Turkey. When the snowballing methodology directed us to contact migrants aspiring to stay in Turkey, I decided to change tack and reach interviewees through random walks in the neighborhood. Approaching individuals without an initial contact person was challenging due to the difficulties of building trust.

The interviewees were predominantly male, with a distribution between middle-aged individuals (between 40 and 50 years old) and younger adults (between 25 and 30 years old). Despite my efforts to achieve gender balance in our sample, I faced challenges in interviewing females due to their limited visibility in public spaces, making one-on-one interviews difficult. Moreover, during household visits, male family members, often seen as the heads of their families, typically acted as spokespeople. When interviewees were proficient in Turkish, interviews were conducted in Turkish. Otherwise, they were conducted in either Dari or Arabic, with the assistance of interpreters who were themselves displaced individuals from Afghanistan or Syria and had prior fieldwork experience.

All individuals involved in data collection adhered to a code of conduct, and they were provided with information regarding the research's motivations, objectives, and ethical considerations. Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes whenever possible. In cases where single men resided in crowded shared apartments, alternative locations were sought such as cafes, shops, or public parks, where the interviewees said they would feel safe and secure. As detailed in Chapter 4, most interviews were audio-recorded, except for two interviewees who preferred not to be recorded. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed and translated into English by native speakers of the migrants' languages. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant, guaranteeing the confidentiality of their identities.

Finally, the interview questions aimed to reveal migrants' aspirations at different phases of their journey. They explored migrants' current aspirations, including their initial decision to leave their country of origin, their experiences *en route*, and their current standing in Turkey. Detailed questions on how and why they crossed—or attempted to cross—the border(s) and how they changed their decisions *en route* enabled me to reveal migrants' risk perceptions on border crossing (see Chapter 4 for more detail).

Change of plans for collecting data amidst a global pandemic

The initial plan for my dissertation was to continue conducting face-to-face interviews and surveys in five different cities of Turkey where Afghan and Syrian migrants are densely populated. In March 2020, two weeks after I started my fieldwork in Turkey, the first case of COVID-19 was announced by the Turkish government. On March 16, 2020, the government took various measures. Universities were closed and offices, schools and many other workplaces switched to online.

On April 1, 2020, the Turkish Ministry of Health announced that COVID-19 had spread around the country. This was the moment when the research team and I had to decide to either wait for the end of the pandemic or switch to online methodology. Due to my time limitation and budgetary reasons in my PhD, and also health and safety reasons, I opted to collect data online. Here, I will explain how I managed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second fieldwork: Quantitative Data Collection

As part of the AdMiGov project, the research team and I conducted three pilot surveys involving Syrian participants and one with Afghan participants to assess the feasibility of online data collection between January and August 2020. The results showed promise in terms of recruiting participants, response rates, and survey completion rates. The main online survey took place from November 18 to December 31, 2020, utilizing Facebook and Instagram advertisements to recruit participants. I used the Qualtrics survey tool to safeguard data privacy and maintain anonymity. The survey and ads were presented in Arabic for Syrians and Dari for Afghans, targeting users in Turkey as the geographical location. I excluded non-Syrian Arabic speakers from the Arabic survey and individuals who were not born in Afghanistan from the Dari survey. The survey began by obtaining informed consent. The participants who did not consent could not access the survey questions. An attention check was also used to exclude certain respondents. In total, I collected data from 551 Syrians and 415 Afghans ($N=966$).

It is important to note that the sample was drawn from online advertising, representing a convenience sample, possibly favoring more educated, literate, and affluent individuals and those with online access. The requirement for a smartphone or computer and social media accounts further limited our sample to those with such resources. However, this method was chosen due to difficulties in drawing random samples from hard-to-reach populations, as population registries were unavailable, and the COVID-19 pandemic heightened risks associated with in-person surveys. Comparisons with official data and attention to gender, age, and provincial distributions helped address some biases in our sample, ensuring reasonable comparability with broader refugee populations (see article by Elçi, Kirişçioglu, and Üstübcü (2021) for detailed information on online data collection).

Second fieldwork: Qualitative data collection

The last phase of qualitative data collection sought to further investigate risk-taking attitudes, building upon the insights gathered from the initial survey. To explore the nuances of risk-taking attitudes, we (the research team) initially aimed to identify potential interviewees through an on-site pilot survey. During this pilot, the enumerators asked survey participants whether they would

like to share their migration journey in a conversation with a researcher. I visited the houses of those who consented to in-depth interviews. However, when the fieldwork had to be suspended indefinitely due to COVID-19 conditions, we decided to continue with online in-depth interviews.

To recruit participants for the online in-depth interviews, we decided to utilize online pilot surveys. We added a closing message to the online survey that replicated the on-site recruitment strategy by asking survey participants whether they would like to share their living experience in a conversation with the researcher. To reassure the participants, we introduced the Migration Research Center at Koç University (MireKoc) as the contact address. We included my official email address as well as the official social media accounts of the research center. Referring to the established institutional history of the research center helped me demonstrate the reliability of the research.

In total, we received 264 emails and direct messages from the research center's official Instagram and Facebook accounts between March 2020 and January 2021. Upon receiving emails from survey participants, I sent follow-up emails and direct messages detailing the research objectives and the informed consent process. After this follow-up information, I did not receive any response from around one third of the survey participants. In the second round of emails and direct messages, we made an appointment together with the interviewee. In this second round, I asked interviewees' preferences for the mode of communication (i.e., Zoom, Google Meetings, Skype, WhatsApp, or phone). Out of the 264 emails and messages received, I was able to conduct 31 online interviews. I reached four of the interviewees through the snowballing methodology. These four interviewees did not participate in the survey. Except for two phone interviews, all interviews were conducted as video calls.

Data analysis

I analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data collected in this study in several different cycles. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 explain the data analysis in detail. In this section, I elaborate more on the main rationale of this dissertation's data analysis. As mentioned above, I employed a sequential MMR model. In line with the rationale of sequential model data collection, I also analyzed each type of data separately to inform the consequent data collection process. I analyzed the data collected for the two projects mentioned previously.

First, I analyzed the qualitative data collected in the fieldwork of the first project in 2019. I conducted data analysis in Atlas.ti using a flexible coding approach, which is a recognized method for ensuring data reliability and validity when working with in-depth interview data in QDA software (Deterding & Waters, 2021). This flexible coding methodology helped me explore emergent themes, guiding the generation of categories for analysis (see methodology section of Chapter 4 for more detail). I discovered a significant recurring theme that was only loosely present during the interviews: risk perceptions. While I had a preliminary notion of risk perceptions as an emerging theme, it was the data exploration process that underscored their potential as a valuable lens for understanding migration aspirations. This phase prompted the formulation of my main

research aim which was to investigate the conceptual link between risk perceptions and migration aspirations.

In the second project, I first aimed to explore whether I could find a relationship between the emergent theme of risk perception and migration aspirations in a large *N* study. To do so, I used the dataset from the online survey conducted between April 5 and April 12, 2020 (see Chapter 5). As explained above, I utilized different measurement strategies to test the effect of risk-taking attitudes on migration aspirations. I conducted a multinomial logistic regression by using Stata 16 software. As a result, I validated the findings of the first fieldwork through observational data. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, migration aspirations are formed by multiple structural and individual factors. Plus, migration aspirations can vary, based on the migration policy context, individuals' living circumstances, and opportunities. Thus, I decided to move one step further than just using observational data.

Following the observational data, I employed an experimental design to investigate the effects of border closures and employment opportunities (see Chapter 6). Experiments are valuable for not only assessing the effects of a specific intervention (e.g., border policies) but also for investigating the causality behind these effects or testing specific theories (McKenzie & Yang, 2012). Migration experiments provide a reliable way to establish alternative scenarios, allowing for a causal analysis of migration's effects (McKenzie & Yang, 2012).

To explore their migration recommendations under different structural and individual conditions, I presented participants with various hypothetical scenarios. This experimental setting enabled me to display variations in individual preferences when shaping migration aspirations. The experimental study also validated the results of the observational data. The results show that migration aspirations are affected by individuals' risk-taking attitudes even after considering the effects of border closures and employment opportunities. The results of the experimental study were specifically significant for my purposes of showing that individual characteristics play an important role in forming aspirations.

Finally, I decided to explore the factors shaping risk perceptions in more detail. Based on the online qualitative interviews conducted between March 2020 and January 2021, I analyzed individuals' lived experiences, stories, and emotions throughout their migration journeys. Based on "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258), I decided to focus on individuals' emotions, using flexible coding methodology (Deterding & Waters, 2021). These emotions included anger, fear, anxiety, hope, and despair. After re-reading the data, I realized that hope and despair have an interactive relationship throughout the migration journeys, which influences how interviewees perceive risks along their journeys. As a result, the last part of the data analysis guided me to indirectly explore another individual factor in forming migration aspirations.

Ethics and Positionality

My positionality affected my access to the fieldwork site, my data collection process, my observations, and my interpretations during the research. Positionality in migration research has been widely studied by scholars, mostly from an insider/outsider distinction.

Rather than presenting insider and outsider as a dichotomy, recent works of migration scholars comprehend the insider/outsider divide as a continuum and as a dynamic process (Carling, Erdal, & Ezzati, 2014; Nowicka & Cieslik, 2014; Pechurina, 2014). Positionality is a dynamic process because the situational position of the researcher is dependent on the ongoing relationship between the researcher and interviewee. The situational position of the researcher is multidimensional and interconnected with the interviewee. It can transform to various in-between positionalities throughout the research (Carling et al., 2014). In this section, I reflect on how my position affected the data collection process and interactions with interviewees.

Regarding my research, I would describe myself as a female, young, middle-class PhD researcher with a Turkish passport. Besides these markers of my insider/outsider status, other markers such as religion and language skills also affected my interactions with the interviewees. I could navigate these aspects more strategically because they are not immediately visible. At first sight, my identity markers situate my positionality as an “archetypal outsider category: a member of the majority population in the country of settlement” vis-à-vis the interviewees (Carling et al., 2014, p. 42). While I faced challenges associated with being perceived as this archetypal outsider in the course of my research, it also conferred certain advantages. For instance, it often led to me being regarded as a more impartial outsider, which facilitated the establishment of trust with the interviewees.

Before I conducted my fieldwork, I was aware of the potential challenges of doing research as a member of the majority population in the host country. Despite my knowledge of these challenges, I came across several obstacles related to my positionality, ethics and my personal migration experience. I explain the challenges of doing fieldwork below, in the phases of access to interviewees, the interview process, and data analysis.

First, as I explain in the next section, the fragile political context in Turkey not only had an impact on me as the researcher, but also added another layer to the already existing vulnerabilities of the interviewees. Here, vulnerabilities refer to structural limitations created by the legal framework, precarious living and working conditions, and deportation probabilities that could affect power relations with the members of the host community (Zapata Barrero & Yalaz, 2019). Being a member of this host community poses a challenge for building a relationship of trust without causing suspicion about my research aims. Thus, it was highly significant for me to explain my research aims clearly in the initial contact. I chose to highlight my ‘student’ identity while explaining that I have no direct relationship with any NGOs, governmental institutions, or authorities in migration policymaking.

Second, during the interview process, several interviewees inquired about my ability to assist them in obtaining a legal identity card or whether my university could facilitate their relocation to their desired destination country. In response to these queries, I reiterated the objectives of my

research and clarified that, as a student, my capacity was limited to providing information regarding refugee associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or the availability of free counseling services for refugees residing in Turkey. At these junctures, I faced a personal challenge as a researcher, feeling that I may have inadvertently raised "false expectations," despite my prior explanations of the research's scope. In light of these encounters, I decided to reflect on the biographical narratives shared by the interviewees. Then, I underscored my limitations as a doctoral student. I expressed my commitment to comprehending their needs, with the hope of making contributions to the migrant community by disseminating the results of the study to policymakers.

During the interviews, some interviewees became visibly distressed, shedding tears as they recounted their arduous migration journeys. As a researcher, I lacked the expertise to address these traumas comprehensively (Demarrais & Tisdale, 2002). Nevertheless, I made efforts to provide information regarding legal assistance, counselling services, and social support. Most interviewees expressed their gratitude for having a compassionate platform to share their stories. Many remarked that they felt significantly relieved after unburdening themselves during the interviews.

Third, at the end of the interviews, I announced that I had no more questions to ask but would like to hear anything the interviewee wanted to add. Ezzy (2010) argues that the interviewees' reactions to these closing statements might be an indicator of their interview experience. By asking these questions, I wanted to understand whether they perceived the interview as a collaborative exchange or as one-sided interference, i.e., conquest or communion (Ezzy, 2010). Nearly all the interviewees expressed a sense of being heard for the first time in their lives during our interactions. Especially the female interviewees indicated that they got emotional during the interview because they talked about their life with someone else for the first time. Most interviewees conveyed their well wishes for the success of my research and offered prayers in support of my endeavors. Some interviewees further expressed gratitude for my dedication to doing research for their community, despite being a foreigner.

Fourth, conducting interviews in a foreign language with an interpreter raises questions about understanding, validity, and potential power hierarchies between the researcher, interpreter, and interviewee (Edwards, 1998; Kapborg & Berterö, 2002; Squires, 2009). I addressed questions in my first language, which is Turkish, to the interpreter. The interpreter translated from Turkish to Arabic/Dari, and then the interpreter translated the interviewee's Arabic/Dari responses to Turkish. To avoid or mitigate the potential problems in translation, I arranged meetings with interpreters before and after the interviews not only to inform them about the research aims and ethics but also to receive information about their life experiences, their perspectives on the research questions, and their feedback about each interview we conducted. Plus, the cooperation of the interpreters in building trust was significant considering their displacement experience in Turkey. As Edwards (1998) suggests, this approach essentially transformed each interpreter into a type of "key informant" within the research process. However, it is important to note that the interpreters were not considered experts (Edwards, 1998).

Finally, my positionality in analyzing and interpreting the data is affected by my migration experience to the Netherlands from Turkey. My migration experience is nothing like the

interviewees' experiences and my intention is not to compare these incomparable processes. Yet, it has significantly influenced how I see my research, interpret what I read, and my preferences to present what and which kind of data in my research.

I came to the Netherlands as a “highly skilled immigrant” who is entitled to a researcher residence permit throughout my PhD research. Although it was sometimes challenging for me to overcome the difficulties of extending my residence permit as a non-European living in the Netherlands, my experiences of being a highly skilled migrant were far from being institutionally difficult. Even in this position, the challenges of being thousands of kilometers away from acquaintances, friends, and family created a transformative emotional experience for me. Several times, I was asked the same question that I asked my interviewees: whether I would like to stay (in the Netherlands) or return (to Turkey).

I already knew the difficulty of answering this question, but being subjected to it myself changed my perception. I became sure that migration aspirations are dependent on time, emotions, and the current situation of the individual. Thus, the last article of this dissertation has a distinctive focus on emotions such as hope and despair (Chapter 7). I chose the concept of hope as a non-rational risk-management strategy (Schulz & Zinn, 2023). At the end of this chapter, I justify my methodological choice for the research question in Chapter 7. Yet, my migration experience is also a reflection of how it affected my interpretation of the interviewees' narratives.

Doing research in a fragile political context: Anti-immigrant and anti-liberal sentiment in Turkey

My ability to access interviewees, and establish effective communication and interactions with them, was markedly influenced and limited by the socio-political environment in Turkey. Moreover, the global COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the challenges associated with conducting fieldwork and collecting data. These contextual factors had profound implications for my capacity to connect with interviewees and manage data efficiently. In this section, I delve into how conducting research in countries like Turkey, marked by competitive authoritarian political systems, was further complicated by the additional impact of a global pandemic on the data collection processes.

In the early 2000s, scholars often regarded Turkey as a nation on the path to democratic improvement, despite certain democratic flaws. However, as the 2010s unfolded, this optimism waned. Recent research increasingly suggests that Turkey has evolved into a competitive authoritarian regime (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, 2018; Öniş, 2023; Somer, 2016). The period after the 2010s has also coincided with the mass migration flow from Syria to Turkey, after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. In 2015, approximately 1.3 million migrants left Turkey and continued their journey to seek asylum in EU countries. The EU and its member states responded by closing their borders, framing it as a "refugee crisis."¹⁰ In reaction, they put into

¹⁰ See Pallister-Wilkins (2019) for a critical view on the representation of migration journeys: <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/walking-not-flowing-the-migrant-caravan-and-the-geoinfrastructuring-of-unequal-mobility>

effect the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan in November 2015 and the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. These actions represented the EU's attempts to shift its migration and border policies beyond its borders (İşleyen, 2018a; Üstübcı, 2019). As a result, the period after 2016 has been marked by the securitization of Turkey's external borders and increase of internal controls (Kuschminder et al., 2019).

Doing fieldwork in the post-2016 period has gradually become harder for researchers. The attempted coup in 2016 and the transition into the presidential system in 2018 increased the central power of the government. The Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) became directly ruled under the Presidency, which increased its direct power in migration governance. During the same period, the DGMM required researchers to send a letter of permission for doing fieldwork with foreigners in Turkey. For both of my fieldworks, in 2019 and 2020, I requested permission from the DGMM. In 2020, an administrative official accepted my permission, explaining that I was not allowed to ask about or use any demographic information. I did not receive any such instruction in 2019. The DGMM did not inspect or check the questions in my fieldwork. However, the permission letter was received to guarantee the safety of the research team (i.e., interpreters and facilitators), and also myself as a researcher. My experience in the field showed me that the DGMM's desire for the request letter was a panopticon tool to keep researchers informed of their sphere of influence.

My fieldwork in 2019 was conducted in a neighborhood of Istanbul, densely populated by Afghan and Syrian migrants. The initial observations and neighborhood walks made me aware that the police were massively deporting migrants following random security checks in the streets. The police were intentionally doing identity checks in crowded squares to intimidate migrants. These security checks posed challenges to securing safe locations for conducting interviews in public spaces. As the research team, we decided to avoid crowded places or squares to conduct the interviews. At the same time, we cooperated with interviewees to select interview venues where they felt secure and at ease. Frequently, interviews took place in homes, cafes, and restaurants owned by acquaintances or friends of the interviewees. At this stage, the police or the authorities were not hard on the research team to deal with, but were hard on the interviewees. Thus, we were cautious not to gain attention from the authorities in the neighborhood.

Three months after my first fieldwork experience, in July 2019, the migration policy environment in Istanbul underwent a significant shift. On July 22, 2019, the Istanbul Governorate issued a statement that mandated Syrian nationals who were not registered in Istanbul to return to their registered provinces. This development had substantial repercussions, with thousands of migrants unable to leave their homes, and many even hesitating to go to work due to the heightened enforcement measures. During this period, I was preparing for my second fieldwork which would take place in March 2020. However, the situation took a complete turn when I returned to the field sites on March 1, 2020, immediately after the Turkish government announced the opening of borders with Greece and Bulgaria.

The second phase of my fieldwork coincided with two major shifts in the socio-political environment in Turkey. The first event was on February 28, 2020, when the Turkish government declared the opening of its western Pazarkule border gate with Greece for free passage. The border opening triggered a mass movement of migrants toward the land border between Turkey and

Greece. My fieldwork was due to start a week later, and I followed the news on media outlets. The news was presenting a “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2013), as migrants were clashing with border guards on the Greek side. I decided to re-visit my fieldwork site in Istanbul.

My firsthand observations in the field revealed that the neighborhood’s hidden smuggling networks, the invisibility of migrants, and the presence of the security forces were totally reversed. The streets were bustling with migrants actively seeking smugglers to facilitate their journey to the border. The crowded squares and city halls that I had formerly avoided, to not draw attention and to protect the team and the interviewees, were full of smugglers arranging border crossing deals with migrants. The fieldwork site was reconstructed as a space where the hypervisibility of migrant illegality (İşleyen & Karadağ, 2023) became the new normal. The neighborhood was crowded with families and children who were either on their way to the border between Greece and Turkey or who had returned from the border after a failed attempt. I did not conduct any interviews during this period except open conversations with migrants on the streets. I left for my fieldwork in the southern Turkish city of Adana a couple of days after the Pazarkule border gate event.

The second event that occurred during the second phase of my fieldwork was a global health crisis. The first case of the global pandemic known as COVID-19 was declared on March 11, 2020, approximately a week after I started my fieldwork in Adana. At the time, when the government initially introduced COVID-19 precautions, I had already completed my interviews with refugees residing in different neighborhoods of Adana. However, I was planning to continue my fieldwork in five other cities of Turkey where the Afghan and Syrian migrant populations were high in number. I could have continued my fieldwork as the government initially did not force individuals to stay at home. However, continuing the fieldwork would have been an extreme risk to public health and could have risked the safety of the research team and the interviewees. Eventually, as the number of deaths and confirmed cases increased, the government began to implement measures aimed at limiting access to public spaces. This included imposing lockdowns during evenings, weekends, and public holidays. The COVID-19 measures encouraged me to dramatically shift my data collection methodology from an on-site to online setting, as I discussed above in the data collection section.

To conclude, a mixed-method research approach was employed to produce knowledge relevant to policy-related research. MMR, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, was chosen due to its capacity to offer comprehensive insights for migration policy and governance. The dissertation employed a sequential model of MMR, allowing for a phased approach to data collection and analysis. The research commenced with qualitative data collection, encompassing interviews and field visits in Turkey, focusing on Afghan and Syrian migrants. These qualitative findings informed subsequent phases of the research, leading to the development of quantitative measures and instruments. The transition to online data collection, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, posed challenges but enabled a larger sample size and maintained research continuity.

My positionality, marked by various demographic characteristics, influenced interactions with interviewees throughout the research process. My positionality was dynamic and situated on a continuum between insider and outsider. Negotiating this positionality, especially within the political context of Turkey, required transparent communication regarding my research aims and

ethics to establish trust with interviewees. Despite initial challenges, I aimed to deconstruct stereotypical positions and embrace the fluidity of in-between or third positionalities, to ensure ethical and respectful engagement with interviewees.



Chapter 4

“At least, at the border, I am killing myself by my own will”: Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan communities

Abstract

It is well-documented that border controls make migration journeys riskier for people on the move. Policymakers construe deaths in migration journeys as resulting from the individual risk-taking attitudes of migrants. However, risks involved in migration journeys are not only related to border control measures. Based on the analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with Syrian and Afghan migrants in Turkey, we embrace a social constructionist approach to unpack how migrants form their aspirations based on their risk perceptions. Our findings explain why some migrants would still move onwards despite violent borders while others stay or search for “safer” ways for onward migration.

Keywords: migration aspirations, Syrian migrants, Afghan migrants, risk perceptions, border crossing narratives

Introduction

This paper explores how migrants’ risk perceptions shape their aspirations during migration journeys. Recent research and media accounts show that creating a hostile environment identified with restrictive arrival policies does not deter migrants from taking arduous journeys. Rapid developments at the border of Turkey and the European Union (EU) create fertile ground to explore this topic. After the introduction of the *EU-Turkey Statement* in March 2016, academic, public, and political debates hailed the “success” of the deal, evident in a decrease in the number of migrants who try to reach the EU countries (Lehner, 2019; Spijkerboer, 2016; Van Liempt et al., 2017). Despite increasing securitization at the Greek and Bulgarian land borders and deteriorating conditions on Greek islands, the undocumented border crossings from Turkey continued (IOM, 2019, 2020). Considering the developments at the EU-Turkey borders and the protection framework in Turkey, this paper initially draws on the migration aspirations literature to answer the following question: Why do some migrants move onwards, venturing all the risks in their journey, while others do not?

The primary conceptual relevance of the paper is its engagement with the concept of risk in the context of forced migration. In the migration aspirations literature, migrants’ decision to move onwards or stay in their residence country is explained by the interaction of various factors

¹¹ Kiriscioglu, E., & Ustubici, A. (2023). “At Least, at the Border, I Am Killing Myself by My Own Will”: Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan Communities. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2198485>

in the contexts of destination, transit, and origin countries (De Haas, 2011; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Wissink, Düvell, & van Eerdewijk, 2013). To a lesser extent, a few migration scholars explain why migrants take the risk of border crossing (Belloni, 2016; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Kaytaz, 2016). The relationship between perceptions of risk and aspirations for secondary migration is understudied within the discussion of migration aspirations. The notion of risk is used interchangeably with dangers *en route* and primarily describes either the initial impetus to flee the conflict zone (Schon, 2019) or the effect of border externalization policies. Previous findings exhibit that border externalization policy have made migrant journeys longer and costlier rather than eradicating undocumented border crossings (Collyer, Düvell, & de Haas, 2012; Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016). Nonetheless, these dangers *per se*, or exposure to death and violence on migration routes, do not necessarily deter people from moving onward (McMahon & Sigona, 2020). As a result, a new approach to studying aspirations for secondary migration and perceptions of risk is needed to unpack how migrants' aspirations are shaped during their journeys.

Our research design includes the two most sizeable migrant communities in Turkey: Afghans and Syrians, to generate a micro-level understanding of fluctuating yet continuing border crossings at the EU-Turkey borders.¹² Both nationalities constitute a sizeable group to cross the border through Greece and Bulgaria to move onwards to Europe.¹³ At the same time, they have been subjected to different protection frames in Turkey, resulting in differentiated legal status (Üstübici, 2019). Around 3,7 million Syrian refugees in Turkey are legally categorized as Syrians Under Temporary Protection. Within the protection system, around 130,000 Afghans are considered under the category of non-Syrians under international protection.¹⁴ Turkey is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention, but a ratification means they grant refugee status only to applicants from Europe. Hence, several Syrians and Afghans in Turkey's asylum system are waiting to be resettled to a third country as the only way to gain access to a fully-fledged refugee status (Yildiz, 2020). Plus, a high number of Syrians and Afghans are not registered with the authorities or have lost their status for several reasons. While we acknowledge this context of forced displacement and despite the various legal categories in Turkey's differentiated and multilayered protection system (Üstübici, 2019), we use the inclusivist umbrella term “migrant” to refer to asylum-seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants in our sample.¹⁵ In addition, we use the term “forcibly displaced migrants” to refer to similar cases of displacement in the broader literature.

The paper first discusses the literature on migration aspirations and risk perceptions. The second section outlines the methodological background of the research. Then, we analyze migration aspirations and risk narratives under three categories: i) to move onwards at all costs, ii) to move onwards with documents, and iii) not aspiring to move onwards or aspiring to stay put. The last section summarizes our main findings concerning our primary argument that risk perceptions in the context of forced migration are not only about survival in relation to border crossings but also about broader life assessments and aspirations for migration.

¹² See Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) website: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration> Last access: 11.08.2022

¹³ See *ibid.*: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration> Last access: 11.08.2022

¹⁴ See *ibid.*: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration> Last access: 11.08.2022

¹⁵ Not using blurred legal categories is a conscious choice to avoid implying a hierarchy between those, mainly refugees who deserve protection and those who do not (Carling, 2017).

Conceptual framework

Migration Aspirations

Why people migrate is a central question in migration studies, and there are various theories, from push-pull to neo-classical economic or structural theories, that have looked at the macro factors explaining migratory behavior (De Haas, 2014; Douglas S. Massey et al., 1993). In our current context where all migration is constrained, the research agenda on migration aspirations has delved into understanding the potential of out-migration, mainly from the developing parts of the world, as well as the implications of unfulfilled aspirations resulting in involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002, 2014; Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018; De Haas, 2021). Within this literature, studying (secondary) migration aspirations in forced migration contexts has remained marginal. This is mainly because forcibly displaced migrants are fleeing to save their lives rather than the economic motivations seen at the core of migration aspirations. In other words, migrants flee their places of origin not only out of an aspiration for a better life but to avoid being stuck in conflict and the danger of death (McMahon & Sigona, 2020).

Although the aspiration-capability model is based on a mobility bias where migration is considered preferable to non-migration, recent scholarship also calls attention to the importance of ‘stay aspirations’ (Schewel, 2020; Wyngaarden et al., 2022). However, aspirations to stay put tend to be left under-discussed in displacement and transit migration contexts (Üstübeci & Elçi, 2022). In such contexts, the initial displacement, usually to a neighboring country, may also be followed by a secondary migration (Brigden, 2018; Kaytaz, 2016; Yildiz, 2020). Various factors have been associated with secondary migration aspirations, ranging from the legal status in the current place of residence (Jordan & Düvell, 2002; Kuschminder & Waidler, 2020; Van Hear, 2004; van Heelsum, 2016) to experiencing discrimination (Brewer & Yukseker, 2009; Kuschminder & Waidler, 2020) or persecution in the country of origin or transit (Syed Zwick, 2022), or from poor living conditions to fear of deportation (Kvittingen, Valenta, Tabbara, Baslan, & Berg, 2018).

Our research aims to fill in two gaps in this emerging literature on aspirations along the migration journey. First, the dilemma of *moving onwards or staying put* in forced migration contexts begs one to revisit the concept of risk and unpack various forms of risks - as perceived by migrants - along with approaches to migration aspirations. Second, we identify a mobility bias in research focusing on journeys. While the literature acknowledges that onward migration aspirations are neither given nor unchangeable, ‘stay aspirations’ have not been studied and conceptualized sufficiently. In our view, considering broader life aspirations and perceptions of risks concerning realizing these aspirations inform our analysis of aspirations for secondary migration in forced migration contexts.

Risk Perceptions

Risk perceptions are predominantly defined in two dimensions in the literature: either as a term based on probabilities and expected values from a rational choice perspective (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1953; Neumann, 1944) and perceived gains and losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1989, 1992) or from a social constructionist perspective, as a term based on personal preferences and beliefs (Douglas, 1992; Lupton, 1999a, 2013; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). From the perspective of rational choice theory, the risk is operationalized in terms of human rationality in assessing and

calculating the outcomes of the decisions at hand (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1953; Neumann, 1944). This technical approach portrays risk avoidance as rational behavior and risk-taking resulting from a lack of knowledge or misperception (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002).

The social constructionist approach challenges the technical approach by understanding individuals' risk perceptions from an emic perspective. Individuals' understandings of risks are socially constructed through their life courses and lifetime experiences (Brown, 2016; Douglas, 1992; Lupton, 1999b; Macgill, 1989; Zinn, 2016). Rather than calculating probabilities and utilities, people evaluate risks based on their personal experiences, membership in social groups, access to material resources, or their location with the life course and power relations (Lupton, 1999b, p. 125). Therefore, a risk is not static but a dynamic phenomenon constructed by social interaction (Lupton, 1999b). As François Ewald remarks in relation to risks: ‘Nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event’ (Ewald, 1991, p. 199).

The social constructionist approach rejects the argument that people's responses to risk can be explained by the dualism of rationality and irrationality (Brown, 2016; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Zinn, 2008a). Considering the construction of the meaning of risk, unsurprisingly, people may develop multiple and different rationalities in responding to risks in their everyday lives (Zinn, 2008a). Accordingly, risk assessments function as a way of expressing subjectivity peculiar to one's unique life courses (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Van Voorst, 2014). Rather than an issue of rational calculations of the issues at stake, the way risks are perceived becomes a matter of self-actualization or (re)constructing identity (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002).

Risk-taking behavior, despite all the dangers and uncertainty, thus, does not result from ill perception or ignorance. Risk-taking becomes a deliberate and agentic choice for lay people even when they are aware of the expert knowledge about the issue at stake but interpret it differently as an expression of their subjectivity (Michael, 1996, p. 119). As our findings indicate, social constructionist perspectives of risk enable us to unpack migration aspirations instead of technical views on risks of undocumented border-crossing, as widespread in the context of the 2016 Turkey-EU statement and elsewhere.

Methodology

In the context of a broader research project, we interviewed 30 migrants, 11 from Afghanistan and 19 from Syria, for a month in April 2019 in different districts of the provinces of Istanbul and Gaziantep in Turkey. In this section, we first explain the recruitment strategy and reflect on the ethical implications of fieldwork with vulnerable populations with precarious legal status.¹⁶ Second, we elaborate on the practical and ethical challenges of doing fieldwork caused by the fragile political context and the hardships of migration journeys. Finally, we explain the interview protocol, coding process, and data analysis.

First, the recruitment of interviewees was based on our networks by snowballing through our gatekeepers in the neighborhoods where Afghan and Syrian communities reside. As the

¹⁶ We use vulnerability to connote to individuals' diminished autonomy and lack of power due to structural factors (Winfield, 2021). As also shown by our interviewees, migrants may lack the resources but they still have agency and strategies to cope with disempowering structural factors (McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015).

overwhelming majority of initially contacted Syrian families aspire to stay in Turkey, we actively sought other informants with current intentions and/or prior experience crossing the borders. Our interviewees were predominantly male and split fairly evenly between middle-aged (40 and 50 years) and young (25 and 30). While we wished to create a gender balance in our sample, we were able to conduct interviews only with six females. The main obstacle was the invisibility of Afghan and Syrian female migrants on the streets to conduct one-to-one interviews. Also, when we visited households, men, as the head, tended to speak on behalf of their families. The interviews were conducted in Dari or Arabic with the help of translators who are themselves displaced Afghan or Syrian individuals and had previous fieldwork experience. We also conducted interviews in Turkish when the interviewee was fluent enough. All parties involved in data collection signed a code of conduct, and we informed them about the motivations, the research aims, and ethical challenges. Interviews generally took place in the interviewees' houses when possible. Since single men live in crowded apartments shared with several others, other places were sought. All interviews were audio recorded, except the two interviewees who preferred not to be recorded. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English by native speakers of migrants' languages. Informed consent was verbally taken before each interview, ensuring all participants the confidentiality of their identity.

Second, the hardships of migration journeys and the fragile political context in Turkey posed practical and ethical challenges during the fieldwork. We conducted the fieldwork in April 2019, when the authorities tolerated undocumented migration. Nevertheless, we could feel the unease of interviewees due to increased security checks in public areas. The migration policy context in Istanbul became tenser after July 2019. On July 22, 2019, the Istanbul Governorate issued a statement and required Syrian nationals who were not registered in Istanbul to return to their province of registration and started the crackdown on undocumented migration. Thousands of migrants could not leave their homes; some even were afraid to go to work. The situation was completely reversed when we revisited the field sites on March 1, 2020, right after the Turkish government declared to open the borders with Greece and Bulgaria, where the streets were full of migrants actively looking for a smuggler to take them to the border. In short, looking retrospectively, the timing of the interviews was interesting. It was during a period when undocumented migration was not largely tolerated, and the crackdown on a daily basis was not in place yet. This relative tolerance by the security forces enabled us to interview Afghans and Syrians who were not registered and potentially on the move but prevented us from reaching out to those who were about to take the journey.

Practically, it was challenging for us to find a safe place to interview in public spaces. For instance, most Afghan migrants in Istanbul were deprived of legal documentation and faced with the risk of deportation. Hence, we asked those to choose where they felt comfortable and safe. We often conducted interviews in cafes and restaurants that interviewees' acquaintances and friends run. Moreover, the possible harm due to emotional distress was another challenge during the fieldwork. Some interviewees cried during the interview when they recounted their migration journey. As the research team, we lacked the technical capabilities to mitigate traumas. However, we strived to provide information about legal aid and social and counseling services. Most interviewees expressed their gratitude for empathetically listening to their stories. At the end of the interviews, many said they felt much better after getting their stories off their chest.

Finally, the interview questions aimed to reveal migrants' aspirations at different phases of their journey. It explores migrants' current aspirations, including their initial decision to leave their

country of origin, their experiences *en route*, and their current standing in Turkey. Detailed questions on how and why they crossed -or attempted to cross- the border(s) and how they changed their decisions *en route* enabled us to reveal migrants’ risk perceptions on border crossing. We also asked questions about their living conditions, current legal status, and satisfaction with life in Turkey, which helped us understand how they perceive the risks in their everyday lives.

We analyzed the data on Atlas.ti by applying a flexible coding methodology. Flexible coding is known for its data reliability and validity advantages when analyzing in-depth interviews with QDA software (Deterding & Waters, 2021). In the first step, we connected transcripts to attributes (demographic variables as age, ethnicity, and gender) and indexed the transcripts to code line by line. The initial indexing of transcripts demonstrated that the push-pull and aspiration-capability models are insufficient to explain various migration aspirations. We created respondent-level memos to explore alternative explanations for migration aspirations. As a result, we explored a significant theme that was vaguely emergent during the interviews: risk perceptions. During our fieldwork, we had already observed that risk perceptions emerged as an important analytical theme. The data exploration process confirmed our initial estimation. In the second step, we applied analytical codes across transcripts to scrutinize multifarious risk perceptions in migration journeys. Ultimately, we could categorize the multiple ways of conceptualizing risks during migration journeys. In the final step, we used the intersection of risk codes and attributes to examine patterns in migration aspirations.

The Narratives of Migrants’ Aspirations and Risk Perceptions

Upon analyzing our interviews, three types of migration aspirations and risk perceptions arose. These categories emerged in a grounded way from the interviews, and the number of migrants in each category is balanced. The three types of migration aspirations are; i) to move onwards at any cost, ii) to move onwards only with documents, iii) not aspiring to move onwards, or aspiring to stay put. Although the aspiration to return is also a possible choice and should be explored, the migrants in our research uttered very limited aspirations to return. Note that these categories are neither pre-defined nor mutually exclusive. For each category, we reflect on how migrants’ reasonings interplay with their risk perceptions.

Needless to say, the interviewees were aware of the possible dangers and threats of border crossing. Their narratives were based on how these risks shaped their migration aspirations. As Brown (2021, p. 70) indicates, “risks never merely exist,” meaning that what is risky varies across time and culture based on individuals’ lived experiences. In this section, we present how understandings of risks vary across the lives of migrants who live, despite nuances, under similar circumstances in Turkey.

To move onwards at any costs: Majbour risks and expressions of agency

It is widely documented that Syrians and Afghans endure dire living conditions in Turkey, barely earn a living, and have difficulties accessing education or healthcare (Karadağ & Üstübcü, 2021). Considering these barriers in migrants’ everyday lives, most do not see a future in Turkey. As a result, onward migration aspirations reflect the desire for a better life (De Haas, 2021). Our interviewees emphasize that they know the risks *en route* but feel they have no choice but to take

the risk of border crossing. They feel obliged to take a risk in order not to lose time in “limbo.” Two main factors influence this feeling of being obliged to take the risk. First, when risks of border crossing are inevitable, migrants feel compelled to take all risks during migration journeys. Second, these inevitable risks are perceived as a means to realize oneself and demonstrate agency. The act of crossing the border conveys a form of agency for migrants.

Migrants who aspire to move onwards at all costs feel compelled, ‘*majbour*¹⁷’, to take the inevitable risks to take the route to European countries to have a better life. Our interviewees were aware of the journey's dangers and limited possibilities of safely reaching EU countries. However, staying in Turkey was not an option. These migrants felt that they could not improve themselves in Turkey. For instance, Ali¹⁸ left Afghanistan in 2015 to move onwards to Europe, where he believed that he could pursue his career as an electrical engineer. Ali went to Iran and worked as a construction worker to earn money to pay to be smuggled to Europe. However, he could not save money as he expected. After staying in Iran for 2.5 years, he came to Istanbul by the help of a smuggler, hoping that he could save money for his journey to Germany. Ali had to cross the violent border from Iran to Turkey under the threat of losing his life. He explains his decision to cross the border to Turkey and to move onwards at a time when undocumented border crossings into Greece through Turkey were becoming more difficult than before:

Migration policies and risks on the route did not affect my decision-making because I had to come to Turkey to move onwards. For example, you must wear a jacket during winter to avoid cold. It is the same. I had to come to Turkey to go to Europe. It does not matter what happens in Turkey. I had to come here – I was *majbour*. (Ali, Afghanistan, male)

At the time of the interview, Ali had not been able to move onwards because he could not afford a reliable smuggler, not because he was dissuaded by the risks involved in border crossing. Migration policies and risks on the route do not dissuade migrants, as Ali, from moving onward because risks on the route are inevitable in migration journeys. In a way, risks on the way to Europe are not deterring migrants. Rather, migrants perceive these risks as obstacles that they need to resist and improvise in their journey. Therefore, risk-taking is a natural part of the journey, such as wearing a jacket during winter.

Single young men were more likely to express this notion of *majbour*. Nevertheless, the aspiration to move onward at all costs is also observable among females and elderly migrants whose lives are full of hardships. For instance, among our interviewees, two Afghan females who aspired to move onward at all costs were exposed to domestic violence. They were ready to take risks on the route, including the risk of death in the sea. At the time of the interview, Zahra, a young Afghan female, was staying in a smuggler's house with her toddler, waiting for the right time to move onwards to a Greek island via boat. Zahra was receiving death threats from her ex-husband, who was deported to Afghanistan. She came to Turkey with the hope of escaping domestic violence. When her ex-husband's relatives in Turkey attempted to kidnap Zahra's toddler, she decided to move onwards at all costs, despite all the risks: “I know that there is a 90% chance of death. Nobody likes to put her life in danger, but we have no other option. I really must take this risk. I do not have any other choice- I am *majbour*.” Zahra knows the low possibilities of safe entry and dangers on the route. Echoing the famous lines by the poet Warsan Shire, “no one puts

¹⁷ Afghan migrants use the word “*majbour*” when explaining their reasoning for taking risks during their journeys. The word can be translated from Dari into English as “being compelled to do something.”

¹⁸ All the names written in this paper are anonymized by the authors.

their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land,” migrants such as Zahra have no choice but to take the risks of death on the route (Shire, 2017). Ultimately, we do not know whether she succeeded to cross, as she was preparing to take a boat from Izmir the day after our interview.

Ali and Zahra aspire to move onwards but their main motivations diverge. While Ali venture the risks on the route to realize himself in the European countries, Zahra is compelled to take risks to protect her toddler and herself from domestic violence. While Ali could not move onwards due to the lack of financial resources, Zahra was waiting for the right time to cross the border in the smuggler’s house. In both narratives, risk-taking demonstrates migrant agency.

Qasim is a middle-aged man from Syria living in Turkey and his narrative on why he is determined to moving onwards exemplifies this willingness to exercise agency despite the high cost involved: “A risk/ bad experience for a few days of border crossing is better than the risks and a difficult life forever here in Turkey.” Despite the possible danger or death along the journey, by taking the risk of crossing, migrants manifest an agency to decide and struggle to achieve a “normal” life. A “normal” life, from migrants’ perspective, is to live without the threat of death and to be able to make their own decisions: “If I went back to the regime, Assad would have put me in jail, or kill[ed] me. At least, at the border, I am killing myself by my own will.” Here, Qasim perceives his risk-taking as a form of control over his own life. By taking risks, migrants find an opportunity to manifest their ability to make decisions and for self-improvement (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002).

As displayed in the narratives of migrants aspiring to move at all costs, risks are not only about control measures at the border. Staying in dead-end jobs, facing discrimination and injustice, or living under poor conditions are also perceived as risks experienced along migration journeys. Interviewees emphasized that as living expenses increase, they aspire to move onwards more than before to have a satisfactory life in another country. Only by moving at all costs, interviewees argue, can they have an opportunity for self-improvement and self-realization, even if there is a risk of death *en route*. For some migrants, however, moving at all costs is not an option, despite these unfavorable living conditions in Turkey.

“To move onwards only with documents”: Dangerous journeys vs. everyday risks

The second category is based on the narratives of migrants who aspire to move onward only when a legal opportunity emerges. Aspiration to move onward only with documents is neglected, and the literature is focused on clandestine journeys, especially when discussing risks. However, as with thousands of conditional migrants in Turkey, some migrant families invest their time to be resettled in a third country instead of taking clandestine journeys. Compared to migrants aspiring to move at all costs, they have to endure longer years of living in Turkey. Most families, at the time of the interview, were waiting for resettlement or family reunification. These families perceive leaving Turkey as the most viable option knowing that the actual number of those getting access to resettlement is indeed very low (Karadağ & Üstübcü, 2021). Migrants’ narratives in this category display two reasons they do not move at all costs. First, most families aspire to move with documents to protect their families from border crossing risks. Protecting the family is not only related to the risks associated with border crossing. So, as a second reason, they want to protect their family because of the risk of starting from zero again in Turkey if they fail to reach the EU countries.

Being with a family versus being single significantly shapes migration aspirations. While migrants such as Qasim have the agency as single men to take the chance of getting hurt, even killed or apprehended on the route, heads of families cannot make this decision readily on behalf of their families. Zahra - trying to save her child from being kidnapped - was an exception rather than a rule. Risks involved in Turkey are perceived and evaluated differently by families. Living with their family and children, men emphasize their role as the protector of their families. They feel responsible for possible dangers along the route. Most male migrants with their families in our research stated that they could have overcome the risks on the route if they had been alone in their migration journey, but as heads of the household, they weigh the risks of the journey differently and preferred to wait for resettlement.

Sardar is one of these migrants who waits to be resettled to Canada. He was a public prosecutor back in Afghanistan, came to Turkey with his family in 2016, and registered under international protection. Sardar works in a grocery store, dissatisfied with his job and treatment as an Afghan grocery man in Turkey. Still, Sardar does not aspire to move onward at all costs because he does not want to risk his children's lives on a boat on the perilous route to Europe. Sardar perceives the risks of living in Istanbul to be as high as crossing the border, but he cannot move onward due to his role in the family as the protector:

My first plan was to stay in Turkey, but if the situation continues like this, it will not be possible for us to live here. It is too difficult. Especially in the last two years, food has been getting too expensive. For example, one-kilogram potato or onion was 1 Lira, and now 5 Lira. Our life here is getting much more difficult every day. My income is not enough to cover our expenses. Because of this situation, we cannot continue living here. Many families had already moved onward, but I did not take that risk to move onwards because of my children. (Sardar, Afghanistan, male)

Being a family and feeling like the guardian of the family shapes the perceptions of risks in migration journeys. Migrants dissatisfied with their lives in their current country of residence are not always willing to take clandestine journeys. Nevertheless, they do not aspire to stay in their country of residence. Thus, the aspiration to move legally is another type of aspiration that needs to be unpacked.

The second reason for migrants aspiring to move onwards with documents is the risk of “starting from zero” if they fail to reach European countries. The fear of starting from zero is frequently emphasized by migrants who endeavor to make a life for themselves out of Nothing. In addition to the physical dangers *en route*, migrants perceive losing their job and accommodation as a risk. When migrants decide to move onward after making a deal with the smuggler, they avoid informing their employers and landlords. If they cannot reach Europe safely or are deported back to Turkey, they do not want to risk losing their work and employment in Turkey. In most cases, the journey takes longer than expected, and the employers or landlords eventually become aware of the situation. Thus, a clandestine journey is not only perceived as risky regarding the dangers *en route*, but regarding the penalties of returning having failed.

Hassan came to Turkey from Syria in 2015 and considered crossing the border on a boat. It was the time when borders were relatively open and many families crossed into the Greek islands. However, it was also when the body of a Kurdish baby, Aylan Kurdi, hit the shores of Bodrum, becoming an iconic image of the risks involved in border crossings. Hassan decided to leave and emptied their house and planned to inform the landlord when they reached Greece. They met with

the smuggler to take the bus to the Aegean Sea. At the last minute, Hassan gave up taking the bus to the coastline. He says he had to cancel the journey because he could not put the image of Aylan Kurdi out of his mind. The fact that his children might not be safe on a boat to Greece and that he could lose everything he owned in Turkey motivated Hassan to change his mind. Hassan, as opposed to Qasim, did not perceive the journey only as an individual (risking their own life, drowning, being detained, or deported):

I will not move onwards if there is a 1% chance of danger for the children! But, if they call me and tell me that I can legally go there (to Europe)... And, if I found that life in there is better than here (Turkey)... Then, I might go there for a better future for my children! (Hassan, Syria, male)

Hassan decided to move onward to provide a better future for his family. When he changed his mind, he realized that even a very low possibility of risk on the route is not tolerable. Of course, the fear of border crossing by boat is not peculiar to migrants with families. Some single migrants living in precarious conditions also avoid clandestine journeys due to fear. However, migrants with families were the most concerned group among our interviewees who took the responsibility of protecting their families. In other words, our interviews suggested that border measures deter the more vulnerable families with young children, more than single men.

Moving only with documents implies waiting to be resettled for an indefinite period. The uncertain process of waiting elicits another aspect of risk-taking for many migrants. They do not know how long they will wait for a new life in another country. Plus, they cannot entirely settle in Turkey with the hope that they will move to another country. Thus, many migrants express their life in Turkey as being in limbo. Despite remaining in limbo, migrants do not aspire to settle in Turkey or move to the European Union countries at all costs. First, staying in Turkey is also perceived as a risk due to the hardships in everyday life. Migrants face precarious work and housing conditions or the risk of not having access to services such as education and healthcare. In other words, the duration of stay in Turkey does not alter their migration aspirations. Second, they do not aspire to move at all costs because they want to make sure that they protect their families from the dangers *en route*. These multiple rationalities induce the aspiration to move onward only when a legal opportunity arises.

Not aspiring to move onwards: The risk of “losing one’s culture”

Concerning Schewel’s (2019) research on voluntary immobility, aspirations to stay put are also at the center of our analysis. The third narrative emerged from our findings, where interviewees explained their aspirations to stay in terms of the risks of not being able to pass on their culture and religious identity to their children in the European Union countries. Rather than the risks involved in violent journeys, they consider the risks of post-migration experience. The more migrants spend time in Turkey, the more convinced that moving onward to another culture involves risks. Migrants perceive staying in Turkey, where they feel religiously and culturally affiliated with, as a way of protecting their identity. On the other hand, migrants perceive moving onward to the European countries as a risk to identity erosion.

Previous studies show that when migrants feel closer to the culture in their country of residence, the aspiration to stay is reinforced (Müller Funk, 2019; Rottmann & Kaya, 2020). In addition, satisfaction with employment and educational opportunities, safety, and social networks in the host country are also significant drivers for aspiration to stay (Müller Funk, 2019). Yet, in our

research, migrants who aspire to stay often expressed dissatisfaction with employment or educational opportunities. Migrants aspire to stay not because they are satisfied with living conditions in Turkey but because they fear losing their culture in other European countries. Furthermore, feeling close to the culture in Turkey *per se* is not sufficient to grasp aspirations to stay. Migrants narrate cultural affinity with Turkey as interrelated with the risk of identity erosion in European countries. Whenever they explain their reasoning to aspire to stay, they compare the cultural affinity with the society in Turkey *vis a vis* Europe. Thus, migrants’ feeling of cultural affinity with Turkey should be reciprocally unpacked with the risk of identity erosion in European countries.

The migrants who aspire to stay indicate that even if they can move onward with their documents, they would prefer to stay in Turkey, as their priority is to protect their religious and cultural identity. Being able to hear the call to prayer, the *azan*, and living in a Muslim country - or at least in a country where traditions are similar – are significant reasons among these migrants’ narratives. Salah is one of these migrants who does not consider moving onward from Turkey: “I would not go to Europe because I have a family here. In Europe, Islam is not as widespread as it is in Turkey. Here, you can at least hear the prayers being called in the mosques.”

Despite the perceived cultural affinity with the society of Turkey, Salah and his family of seven have been struggling with financial and social hardships in Turkey. Arriving from Syria in 2014 and after three months of living in a city close to the Syrian border, Salah and his family moved to Istanbul, hoping they could have better opportunities in terms of education and work. At first, Salah and his family had to live in his sister’s apartment in Istanbul for three months until Salah found a job as a textile worker. Yet, even after finding a job, Salah’s family continued to experience financial difficulties. First, given the conditions in the informal sector, he risks losing his job and not being able to bring food home daily. Second, Salah’s family is not eligible for benefits because the children are over eighteen. Third, Salah was the boss of his workshop back in Syria. As a textile worker in Turkey, Salah experiences downward mobility, making adapting to his new life in Istanbul particularly hard. Alongside financial difficulties, Salah expresses that he feels resentment when he is treated differently by locals in Turkey. Although he feels close to the culture, he feels discrimination: “there are some points where I feel a little like an outsider. For instance, whenever a conflict occurs between a Turkish and a Syrian person, I am immediately blamed, even though I have nothing to do with the conflict.”

Salah still does not consider leaving Turkey for another country, despite his dissatisfaction with the living conditions in Turkey. Plus, for practicing religious migrants like Salah, the main reason to aspire to stay in Turkey is not the existence of social networks and family in their current country of residence. When asked why he aspires to stay, Salah answered: “Mainly religion. In Turkey, you can at least hear the prayers being recited.” Comparing the risks of staying in Turkey to living in Europe, these migrants perceive moving onward as a risk of identity erosion. From Salah’s perspective, like other interviewees who aspire to stay in Turkey, living in Turkey is already full of hardships due to the lack of economic resources and social networks. Even under these circumstances, some interviewees still do not consider leaving Turkey. Rather than a calculation of utility maximization, migrants aspiring to stay in Turkey perceive the risks of losing their cultural and religious identity as a significant factor in shaping their migration aspirations (Lupton, 2013; Van Voorst, 2014).

In line with the previous studies, the narratives of our interviewees indicate that cultural and religious affinity with the host country is an essential factor in shaping aspirations. However, feeling close to the culture *per se* is not sufficient to understand the reasoning for aspirations to stay. First, migrants’ feeling of cultural affinity with Turkey should be reciprocally unpacked *vis a vis* the risk of identity erosion in European countries. Second, evidence from Turkey shows that “Syrians generally think they are culturally similar to locals, whereas Turkish nationals generally hold the opposite view” (Erdoğan, as cited in Üstübcü & Elçi, 2022, p. 4). Regardless of the realities of the existence of cultural and religious affinity, migrants’ *perception* of these similarities shapes their migration aspirations. When Europe is perceived as a cultural and religious antithesis, the risk to identity erosion are very real, and aspirations to stay are reinforced. Finally, the narratives of aspiration to stay pose a significant example for illustrating how people constitute the meaning of risk based on multiple and different rationalities (Zinn, 2008a). Considering migration journeys which inherently consist of multiple risks, migrants attribute different meanings to risks that cannot be solely explained by the dualism of rationality and irrationality (Brown, 2016; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Zinn, 2008a).

Conclusion

Why do some migrants move on despite risk at the borders while others do not? We unpacked migration aspirations by exploring risk perceptions to answer this central question. Using a social constructionist approach to risk helps us to explore migration aspirations concerning perceptions of risk at various stages of the migration journey and settlement. First, considering the other driving factors for migration aspirations, we aim to contribute to the literature by highlighting that migrants’ risk perceptions are not peculiar to survival. Risk perceptions are also related to life aspirations which feed migration aspirations. Second, our analysis shows that migrants do not perceive risks as solely hinging on the dangers *en route*. Instead, for some, risks along migrant journeys are constant and naturalized, such as “wearing a jacket during winter.” Thus, rather than the ‘mere existence of risks’ (Brown, 2021), how migrants perceive these risks determines migration aspirations. As a result, a hostile environment created by stricter migration policies could not deter all migrants as they form their aspirations based on risk perceptions.

Based on the evidence from the qualitative interviews, this research explained migration aspirations through the following risk perceptions: i) feeling compelled (*majbour*) to take risks to express agency, ii) oscillation between dangers of migration journeys and everyday risks of living, iii) preponderance of fear of identity erosion in the European countries over everyday risks of living. Migrants’ narratives in all three categories have indicated different views on the interconnection between time and risk. Migrants aspiring to move at all costs perceive losing time in Turkey as a risk, whereas migrants aspiring to move only with documents must spend more time in Turkey, despite the risks of staying. As migrants aspire to stay, they spend more time in the country and are more convinced that moving onward is a risk to their culture and identity.

Our conceptual framing and discussion contribute to debates on onward migration aspirations, putting migrants’ risk perceptions at the center of analysis. First, we have shown that aspirations to move on arise when migrants perceive the risks of immobility as greater than the risks along the journey. When migrants perceive staying in their residence country as impossible to achieve life aspirations, they feel compelled, *majbour*, to take the dangers on the route. This compulsion

to take risks also connotes a necessity, similar to wearing a jacket during the winter, as Ali suggested. Most of our interviewees aspiring to move onwards at all costs emphasize that they are “not living but only surviving” and struggle to make ends meet in Turkey. Hence, in such circumstances, taking a risky journey may look reasonable (Zinn, 2008a, 2016) beyond the dichotomy of rationality and irrationality.

Second, our findings revealed that not all migrants in Turkey take the risks of border crossing, although they may still aspire to move onwards. Through a grounded approach, we showed that some migrants aspire to move only in with documents without risking their own or their family members’ lives on the route. The idea of putting their family in danger deters these migrants from moving onward through undocumented means. This finding is especially valid for heads of households making decisions on behalf of their family. Nevertheless, aspirations to move onward still exist because staying in Turkey is also perceived as a risk due to the hardships in migrants’ everyday lives.

Third, the narratives of migrants aspiring to stay in Turkey add another layer to explaining how risk perceptions play a role in shaping aspirations. Migrants aspiring to stay in Turkey also face difficulties in their everyday lives in Turkey. Nevertheless, experiencing difficulty is not enough to push migrants to move on. Instead, migrants aspiring to stay in Turkey perceive moving onward as a risk to their cultural and religious identity. The interplay between risks in everyday life and risks of losing identity presents multiple reasoning to respond to risks during their migration journeys (Zinn, 2008a). As a result, all three narratives reveal that the responses to various risks along the journey allow migrants to assert their agency (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Van Voorst, 2014).

The paper aimed to contribute to the literature by considering the multidimensionality of migration aspirations. Showing the difference between the aspiration to move onwards “at all costs” and “only with documents,” our analysis goes beyond a dichotomous model of moving onwards and staying put. The literature’s almost exclusive focus on border crossings prioritizes clandestine journeys over other types of migration aspirations. Thus, we highlight that the motivations for moving onwards from Turkey only with documents, despite the bureaucratic hurdles it involves, provide an additional analytical lens to study migration aspirations. Rather than taking clandestine journeys, migrants can aspire to move with documents or stay in their current place.

The research has some limitations. Given the changing policy environment in Turkey, - entailing a more securitized and exclusionary approach towards migrants of different legal statuses and the increasing focus on return policies (Kayaoglu, Sahin Mencutek, & Erdoğan, 2021; Müller-Funk & Fransen, 2020) - it is still yet to be researched whether migrants’ motivations to stay in Turkey are continuing or not. Moreover, we acknowledge that return aspirations are not covered in our research. Including risk perceptions of return could provide a complete picture of migration aspirations. Secondly, we did not notice social network effects. We would expect that the existence of social networks would reduce the cost of adapting to a new place. However, the number of migrants with family members in Europe or Canada was limited in our research. The wish for reunification of the extended family can also influence migration aspirations. Despite the limitations, our insights on aspirations for secondary migration may provide a starting point to discuss the interplay of socio-economic conditions, family-related factors, and risk perceptions in shaping aspirations.

Further research can unpack factors leading to different risk perceptions among migrants. Along with a spatial dimension, that is, the violent experience of the border crossings, risk perceptions also have a time-specific dimension. Some consider the current situation in the host country as a risk (of losing time), while others consider the secondary migration experience a potential risk. Moreover, we acknowledge that a deeper intersectional reading of risk perceptions among migrants running from different forms of violence is needed to explain migration aspirations better. We invite further research to consider aspirations for mobility and settlement in conjunction with migrants’ perceptions of risk. In addition, we hope our paper inspires other research into the formation of various risk perceptions, taking into account individual, contextual, and structural factors.



Chapter 5

Do Risk-taking Attitudes Influence Secondary Migration Aspirations? Evidence from an Online Survey with Syrian Migrants

Abstract

This paper introduces a new analytical perspective to the literature on migration aspirations by testing the relevance of two domains of risk-taking attitudes. The crossing of the Turkey-European Union (EU) border has become increasingly perilous since the EU-Turkey statement in 2016. Migrants who undertake these hazardous journeys are often portrayed as irresponsible and ignorant, exposing themselves to extreme risks. Previous research on migration journeys has not explicitly examined how various aspects of risk-taking explain migration aspirations. Building upon the framework proposed by Williams and Baláž (2012), this paper distinguishes between two types of risk-taking attitudes: one based on economic theories, operationalized as objective risk-taking, and another based on sociological theories, operationalized as subjective risk-taking. Findings from an online survey conducted among Syrians in Turkey demonstrate the significant role played by subjective risk-taking, even after controlling for other factors influencing migration aspirations.

Keywords: Risk-taking attitudes, migration aspirations, online survey, Syrian migrants, rational choice, secondary migration

Introduction

The migration narrative is dominated by images of perilous journeys. News reports depict overcrowded boats navigating treacherous seas, migrants crossing mountains, seemingly unaware of the risks. This fosters an assumption that migrants underestimate risks caused by their ignorance, leading to tragic outcomes. However, this overlooks the reality faced by migrants, especially Syrian migrants living in Turkey.¹⁹ Unlike economic migrants with more options, forced migrants often have limited choices. The specific risks they encounter on migration journeys are deeply intertwined with their hope for better living conditions and individual experiences.

This raises a crucial question: Which domains of risk-taking attitudes, namely objective and subjective, influence migrants' aspirations to move onwards, stay, or return? Previous research focused on the factors affecting migration aspiration by considering micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors (Van Heelsum 2017; De Haas 2003). While analysis of macro-level-factors initially

¹⁹ According to official statistics of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey, approximately 3.5 million Syrians are officially designated as Syrians Under Temporary Protection (see: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>. Last access on 10.04.2024). Since these individuals do not hold refugee status, in this paper, I will use the term "migrant" to refer to Syrians under temporary protection. Furthermore, following the approach of Carling (2023), I have chosen to use the inclusive term "migrant" also to encompass asylum-seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants. Additionally, using 'migrants' as an inclusive term allows for a comprehensive understanding of the various factors, including force and choice, that shape migration within and outside the refugee category (Carling 2023).

dominated the literature, the micro-level factors - individual traits and psychological factors – have recently become more prominent in their explanatory power (Feyissa Dori, Hagen-Zanker, and Mazzilli 2024; Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, and Mazzilli 2023; Müller-Funk, Üstübici, and Belloni 2023). Among these individual traits, risk is often incorporated as a concept automatically assumed but not studied as a psychological phenomenon or trait (Strasser and Tibet 2019; Topak 2014; Kaytaz 2016; Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012; Belloni 2016; Brigden 2018). While research has explored risk-taking attitudes in labor migration (Jaeger et al. 2010; Heitmueller 2005; Roca Paz and Uebelmesser 2021; Akgüç et al. 2016), its role in shaping the aspirations of forced migrants remains underexplored. As opposed to labor migrants, forced migrants often take hazardous routes to escape dangerous situations. Therefore, the role of risk-taking attitudes for the differences in shaping migration aspirations needs further exploration.

This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how risk-taking attitudes influence migration aspirations within the context of secondary migration. Informed by Williams and Baláz (2012), I adopt a dual approach to conceptualize risk within forced migration studies. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of risk and uncertainty in migration, I draw from their work to justify my conceptual choice. Williams and Baláz (2012) emphasize the importance of considering both economic and sociological theories of risk in understanding the experiences of migrants. Building on their framework, I incorporate the concept of “objective risk taking” from rational choice theory, which focuses on known probabilities of outcomes. Additionally, I integrate “subjective measurement of risk,” that explains risk-taking as an emotional and perceptual process. This approach not only addresses a significant theoretical gap in migration studies but also highlights the importance of considering varied perspectives when examining the complex interplay between risk, aspirations, and migration journeys.

This research contributes to existing knowledge in three key ways to study migration aspirations and risk-taking attitudes. Firstly, it explores how both objective and subjective risk-taking attitudes influence the desire for secondary migration, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping migration aspirations. Secondly, it delineates the specific characteristics and challenges faced by migrants residing in secondary migration contexts like Turkey, allowing for a differentiation of their decision-making process from initial flight situations. Finally, the study highlights the significance of subjective risk-taking attitudes in understanding secondary migration aspirations, going beyond mere cost-benefit calculations embedded in rational choice theory to incorporate the emotional and personal experiences that shape migration aspirations.

This paper is structured into four main sections. The first section introduces the theoretical framework and presents risk-taking attitudes in objective and subjective domains. The subsequent section presents the methodological framework and explains how *migration aspirations* and *risk-taking attitudes* based on objective and subjective domains are operationalized. The third section presents the results and displays the influence of risk-taking attitudes on migration aspirations. It shows how increasing *subjective risk-taking attitudes* affect migration aspirations in the case of a) moving onwards, b) staying, or c) returning. The fourth section concludes with the research findings. It shows how this research can create room for discussion on the drivers of migration aspirations.

Conceptual Framework: Risk-taking Attitudes and Migration Aspirations

In this section, I first discuss the stream that explains risk-taking attitudes as objective, primarily based on rational choice theories, and second, literature that explains risk-taking as a subjective or self-perceptual process.

Rational Choice Theory and Objective Risk-taking Attitudes

In rational choice theory, people are assumed to act in line with their self-interests and make decisions based on a calculation between costs and benefits (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1953). Individuals are assumed to be *homo economicus*, perfectly rational, and constantly seeking to maximize utility. One example of rational choice reasoning is the so-called expected utility theory, formulated by Daniel Bernoulli in 1738. Expected utility theory assumes that individuals do not take risks as long as they cannot calculate the maximum utility outcome (Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007, p. 8). Evidence suggests that the universal assumption of human rationality in rational choice theories is invalid regarding how people differently assess losses and gains (Tversky, 1975). Tversky and Kahneman (1992) proposed a model to make sense of decision-making processes in which individuals are concerned about avoiding losses. The argument is that given two options, individuals will choose the option with more perceived gains than losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). The model shifted focus from the perfect rationality of people to their perception of gains and losses in decision-making and considering the framing effects (Druckman & McDermott, 2008).

Both Tversky and Kahneman (1992) and rational choice theories have limitations in explaining individuals' decision-making processes. Firstly, Tversky and Kahneman (1992) have faced criticism for underestimating individuals' cognitive abilities when assessing risks under different framing conditions. Secondly, both theories portray risk avoidance as a rational response while perceiving risk-taking because of ignorance or a lack of knowledge. However, risk avoidance or willingness to take risks is not always linked to rational choice. For instance, migrants often take risks during their migration journeys and cross borders, even when fully aware of the dangers involved, including the risk of losing their lives. Thus, rational choice cannot be universally applied to all contexts. Individuals can also make decisions based on personal beliefs, emotions, and experiences, which may not align with discussions centered around rationality (Aven & Renn, 2009).

Despite the limitations of rational choice theories, incorporating objective risk-taking as a dimension in this research is feasible and valuable. While objective risk-taking is commonly measured in financial contexts, it can also provide insights into individuals' underlying attitudes in different situations, including migration decisions. Although migration vastly differs from financial decision-making, asking individuals about their willingness to take risks in an unrelated scenario can offer a general indication of their underlying risk attitudes. By incorporating the assumptions of rational choice theory into the study of migration aspirations, the first hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Migrants with higher objective risk-taking attitudes will be more likely to aspire to move onwards.

Other forms of Decision-making and Subjective Risk-taking Attitudes

The second line of research in decision-making literature emphasizes the importance of emotions and perceptions (Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Elster, 1998; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003; Lupton, 1999a). It acknowledges that individuals do not possess unlimited knowledge, time, and information-processing capacity (Bechara & Damasio, 2005). Despite this limited knowledge, individuals are still able to make reasonable choices because the emotional processing of information tends to be quicker and can take into account a wider range of factors compared to cognitive processing (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015; Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001; Zinn, 2008a). In other words, subjective and emotional processing may occur before rational processing, with the rationalization or justification of the outcome occurring afterward (Bechara & Damasio, 2005).

The subjective element in migration aspirations offers valuable insights into why some individuals aspire to move onwards while others stay put. Contrary to the proposition put forth by Tversky and Kahneman (1992), risk-taking is not solely driven by the expectation of direct rewards for one's actions or choices. Individuals may willingly take risks (Lupton, 2013; Zinn, 2023), even when they harbor little or no confidence in the potential gains resulting from their actions. The hope for a better future might have such a strong and salient emotional effect that objective gains become less relevant.

Factors such as fear of crossing borders, anxiety from unfavorable living conditions in Turkey, or the aspiration for a better future in wealthier countries may contribute to the formation of migration aspirations. Therefore, risk-taking should not be automatically deemed unreasonable or solely attributed to individuals' ignorance or lack of self-control (Lupton 1999a; Zinn 2023; Kiriscioglu and Ustubici 2023; Van Bommel 2020). Risk-taking attitudes may even facilitate the pursuit of self-actualization (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002), as taking risks can enable individuals to achieve a sense of personal fulfillment. It is, therefore, crucial to incorporate the subjective element into migration decision-making, leading to the formulation of the second hypothesis in this study:

***Hypothesis 2:** Migrants with higher subjective risk-taking attitudes will be more likely to aspire to move onwards.*

Data and Method

This paper uses a dataset from an online survey in Turkey. Data was gathered between April 5 and April 12, 2020.²⁰ In total, 844 Syrian respondents participated. The respondents were recruited through Facebook and Instagram advertisements by clicking on a link to a Qualtrics survey tool. The link was only available for participants living in Turkey. The participants were asked to indicate their place of birth to ensure that non-Syrian Arabic speakers were not randomly included in the sample. Respondents whose birthplace is different than Syria were dropped from the sample. Moreover, the respondents were asked to indicate their date of arrival to Turkey in order not to include Syrians who came to Turkey before the civil war. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents did not receive any bonuses or incentives.

²⁰ This study was approved by the Koç University Committee on Human Research, Decision no: 2019.389.IRB3.207. The committee was informed regarding the use of online methods after the COVID-19 outbreak and an approval was received.

In using convenience sampling, I did not apply poststratification weights for the Syrian population since the demographic characteristics data of the Syrian migrant population in Turkey is not publicly available. The official data published by the Presidency of Migration Management is only limited to the age and gender of Syrians under TP, and there is no data on the level of education. Besides, an unknown number of Syrians in Turkey are unregistered.

Although evidence suggests that online surveys have promising results, especially with difficult-to-reach populations (Ersanilli & van der Gaag, 2020; Pötzschke & Braun, 2017), they are subject to selection bias (Valliant, Dever, & Kreuter, 2018). Online convenient sampling can have disadvantages in reaching the illiterate, the less educated, and individuals without internet or social media access. Despite the disadvantages, an online nonprobability sample was the most viable option during a pandemic outbreak, compared to other sampling methods such as random-walk sampling and phone surveys.

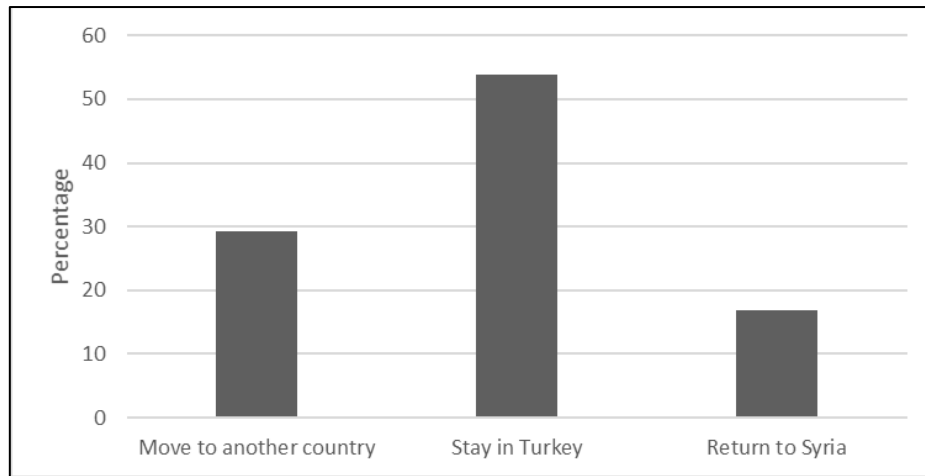
First, due to the pandemic outbreak, conducting face-to-face surveys was impossible for health-related reasons. Second, random-walk sampling could have limited the sample to specific neighborhoods, which could jeopardize the representativeness of the target population. Third, the absence of address-based registration data for Syrians under TP could prompt me to create a snowball sampling, another nonprobability sampling. Fourth, a phone survey was not practically possible due to the lack of a publicly available phone directory for migrant populations. Additionally, phone surveys are methodologically not distinct from online sampling because the sample is biased toward participants with phone access (Pötzschke & Braun, 2017). As a result, despite a potential selection bias, online sampling methods display significant results in reaching minority populations (Pötzschke & Braun, 2017).

Measurement and Variables

The dependent variable is *migration aspirations*. I turned it into a categorical variable constructed with the question, "Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in Turkey or return to Syria?" (OECD, 2015).²¹ The answers are "Move to another country" (29.3 percent), "Stay in Turkey" (53.9 percent), and "Return to Syria" (16.6 percent) (Figure 5.1). The operationalization of the question contributes to the research aims in two ways. First, I deliberately asked about the ideal situation. I did not ask about migration intentions or plans as they make measuring aspirations more complex and confusing (Carling, 2019). I measured aspirations regarding migration wishes and desires, which do not necessarily imply the actual behavior. Second, the framing of the question is open to interpretation and independent of the conditions of the migration journey. The framing relies on migrants' perceptions of the conditions on the way rather than the actual conditions *en route*.

²¹ The original question does not ask for "return" option. I have added return option to the original question because return aspirations are still relevant to migration aspirations for some Syrian migrants living in Turkey.

Figure 5.1. Migration Aspirations of Syrian participants in the survey



The survey contains two questions regarding risk-taking: objective risk-taking, operationalized as a question about income, and *subjective risk-taking*, operationalized as a perceptual evaluation. The low level of correlation between objective and subjective risk-taking attitudes displays the significance of measuring these attitudes apart (see Appendix 2).

As discussed in the rational choice literature, the first primary independent variable, *objective risk-taking*, is measured by asking a hypothetical gambling question developed by Barsky et al. (1997). This objective risk-taking question requires respondents to imagine themselves in a scenario where they are offered a job guaranteeing a stable and certain income every year for life. When respondent takes the offer, there is a 50–50 chance that their current income will be doubled and a 50–50 chance that their current income will be lowered by 30 percent. According to their acceptance or rejection of the offer, a follow-up question changes the level of probabilities. Risk-averse respondents who rejected the first offer are provided with another alternative scenario in which, again, there is a 50–50 chance that their current income will be doubled, but, this time, a 50–50 chance that their current income will be lowered by 20 percent. On the other hand, a risk-tolerant respondent who accepted the first offer is provided with another scenario indicating a 50–50 chance that their current income will be doubled and a 50–50 chance that their current income will be halved. Combining responses to these two items created a 4-point item of risk tolerance, ranging from least to most risk intolerant (Eckles, Kam, Maestas, & Schaffner, 2014).

Figure 5.2. Objective Risk-taking Attitudes of Syrian migrants and natives living in Turkey

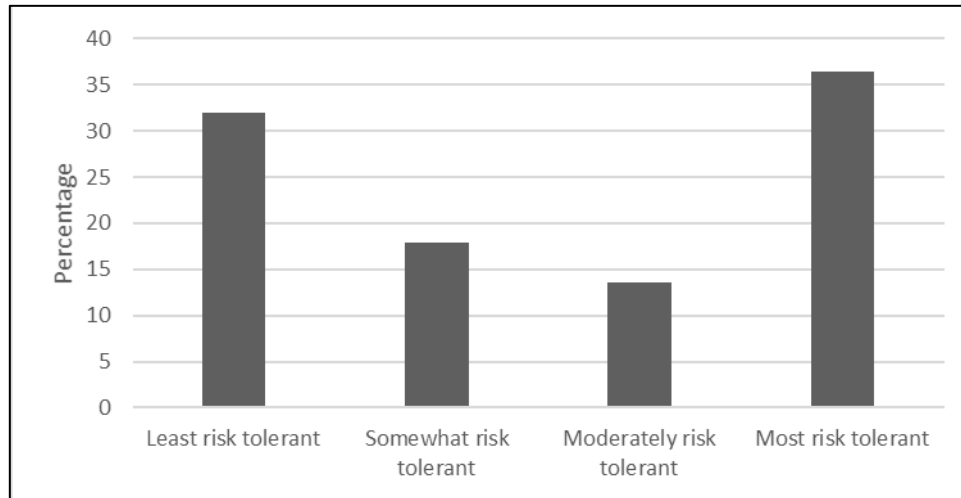
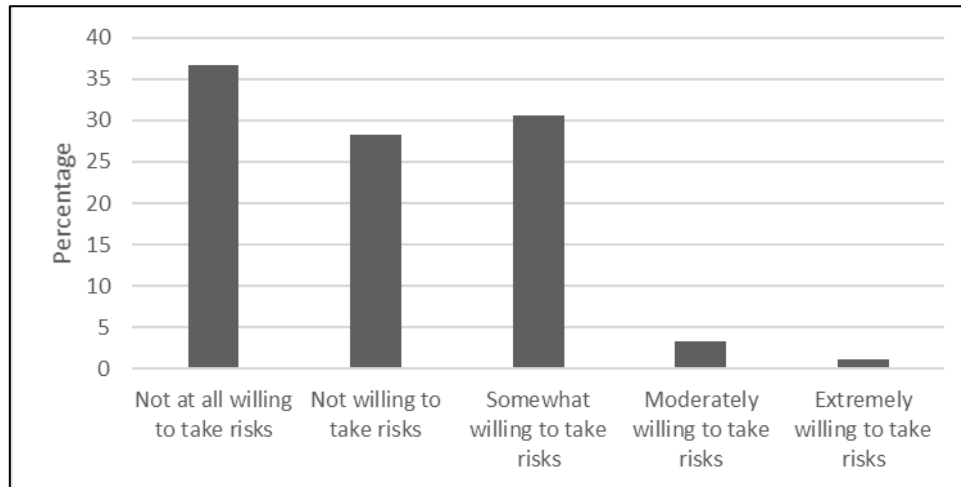


Figure 5.2 shows the distribution of *objective risk-taking attitudes* among Syrian migrants. The distribution of *objective risk-taking attitudes* is skewed towards a more risk-tolerant option. This result indicates that migrants might have a different base level regarding objective risk-taking attitudes than non-migrants. Several other factors might interfere with this conclusion. First, Charness et al. (2013) argue that the cognitive complexity of the question may confuse respondents, and they might answer the question without paying enough attention. Second, many Syrian migrants work in dire situations in the labor market, earning below the minimum wage and lacking social security (İçduygu & Diker, 2017; Karadağ & Üstübici, 2021). Whether their income is doubled or halved, most migrants still live in unfavorable financial situations (Demirci & Kırdar, 2023; Elçi et al., 2021). Considering most Syrian migrants cannot make ends meet, losing half of their income would not be a risky choice.

The second primary independent variable, measuring *subjective risk-taking attitudes*, is a 5- point item asking how respondents how willing they are to take risks in their daily lives (Figure 5.3). Respondents were asked, “How do you see yourself in general? Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks, or do you try to avoid taking risks in your life?” Figure 5.3 shows the distribution of *subjective risk-taking attitudes* among Syrian migrants. The percentage of respondents who are moderately or extremely willing to take risks (4 percent) is significantly lower than the other respondents. This result is in line with the findings of other studies on risk-taking attitudes (Dohmen et al., 2011).

Subjective risk-taking attitudes are operationalized as a more general and self-assessed risk perception question. I have operationalized *subjective risk-taking attitudes* with a general question that captures the overall tendency of individuals’ risk-taking attitudes based on their self-reported assessment for two reasons. First, risk-taking attitudes are based on individuals’ personal experiences in life (Barnett & Breakwell, 2001). Thus, theoretically, the measurement of risk-taking can be attributed to individuals’ self-perceptions. Second, subjective risk-attitudes measurement creates a useful all-around measure (Dohmen et al., 2011). They perform well in predicting risk-taking behavior across various domains (Charness et al., 2013; Lönngqvist et al., 2015).

Figure 5.3. Subjective risk-taking attitudes of Syrian migrants in the survey



As the literature review has shown, migration aspirations are controlled by *structural factors*. I have chosen to include the following variables relating to structural factors in my analysis: *employment status*, *wealth*, *relative deprivation* for economic context, *citizenship status* for political context,²² *Turkish-language skill* and *date of arrival* to the current country of residence for social context, and *gender*, the *number of children*, and *religiosity* for demographic characteristics (Table 5.1). A continuous variable measures wealth by asking whether the respondents own any items from a list of appliances (dishwasher, TV, furniture, etc.). I then took the row means ranges from 0 to 1. To measure *relative deprivation*, the following question intends to understand the difference between socioeconomic status in the country of origin and host country: "On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group among both citizen and refugee communities in Turkey (version 2: in Syria). We would like to know in what group your household is. Please specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes." By subtracting the number mentioned regarding migrants' economic situation in Turkey from their country of origin, a scale between -9 and 9 was created.

I generated a dummy variable for the respondents who had acquired *Turkish citizenship* (obtaining citizenship being 1). Syrian respondents' Turkish language skills are included in the analysis as a significant indicator of social integration in the host country, which is assumed to affect migration in a negative direction (Koser & Kuschminder, 2016; Wissink et al., 2013). Therefore, I have created a 4-point scale for respondents as the following: respondents who can speak, write and read (3), who can speak and have a maximum of two other skills (2), who cannot speak but have a minimum of two different skills (1), and who cannot speak, read, or write (0). The *arrival date* to Turkey is a dropdown question starting from 2011 and ending in 2020. Finally, *religiosity* is measured in terms of respondents' perceptions by asking the question, "Regardless of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are a religious person? How would you rate yourself if '0' corresponds to "not religious at all" and '10' to "very religious?"

²² Most Syrian migrants in Turkey are registered under the temporary protection status status (see Footnote 2). Therefore, I decided to include citizenship acquisition as an indicator of access to legal opportunities instead of temporary protection status.

Table 5.1. Descriptive statistics of participants of the survey

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Wealth	844	0,391	0,137	0	1
Employment status	833	0,167	0,373	0	1
Religiosity	842	6,096	2,244	0	10
Number of children	833	2,096	1,895	0	12
Gender (Male=1)	844	0,518	0,500	0	1
Citizenship	843	0,071	0,257	0	1
Relative deprivation	840	-2,243	2,430	-9	7
Turkish language	844	1,744	1,029	0	3
Date of arrival to Turkey	842	5,235	1,821	1	10

Results and Discussion

This paper aims to test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is about the impact of the increasing objective risk-taking attitudes on migration aspirations. I expect that migrants who are more risk tolerant in terms of finance will be more likely to move onwards. The second hypothesis relates to the relation between an increasing subjective risk-taking attitude and migration aspirations for the case of a) moving onwards, b) staying, and c) returning. I expect that migrants with higher subjective risk-taking attitudes will be more likely to aspire to move onward from Turkey.

By multinomial regression analysis, I test the effects of risk-taking in objective and subjective domains on migration aspirations. Table 5.2 shows that *objective (economic) risk-taking attitudes* do not significantly affect migration aspirations, whereas *subjective (self-perceptual) risk-taking attitudes* significantly affect onward migration. I use the "stay in Turkey" option as the baseline in the model (Table 5.2). For theoretical and practical reasons, I prefer to use 'stay aspirations' as the baseline in the model. The baseline category helps compare different directions of migration aspirations (i.e., testing the effect of risk-taking attitudes on onward migration aspiration compared to the stay aspiration). Theoretically, I can argue that "move to another country" and "return to Syria" aspirations correspond to mobility in contrast with "stay in Turkey," which refers to immobility. Practically, the "stay in Turkey" aspiration is the most frequent answer among migration aspiration choices. Thus, the stay aspiration is the most suitable choice for the baseline category.

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the results indicate that *objective risk-taking* is statistically insignificant for any migration aspiration categories. This result confirms that contrary to the arguments of rational choice-based theories (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1989), there is more than just utility maximization and a simple calculation of the costs and benefits in the migration decision-making process. Moreover, decision-making seems not solely based on the cognitive reasoning of individuals (Bechara & Damasio, 2005), and migrants' cost-benefit calculations alone do not shape migration aspirations. Thus, an objective measurement might not be convenient for measuring a non-behavioral attitude such as

Table 5.2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Migration Aspirations of Syrians in Turkey (Base category: Stay in Turkey)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Move to another country	Return to Syria	Move to another country	Return to Syria
<i>Objective Risk Taking</i>	0,107 (-1.66)	0,0261 (-0.34)	0,0622 (-0.91)	-0,00668 (-0.08)
<i>Subjective Risk Taking</i>	0.246** (-2.92)	-0,0156 (-0.15)	0.262** (-2.84)	0,0137 (-0.12)
<i>Wealth</i>			-1.318* (-1.98)	-2.173** (-2.69)
<i>Turkish citizenship</i>			-0,683 (-1.70)	-0,136 (-0.32)
<i>Relative deprivation</i>			0,0493 (-1.36)	0,00283 (-0.07)
<i>Speaking Turkish language</i>			-0.233** (-2.65)	-0,0757 (-0.71)
<i>Employment</i>			-1.036*** (-3.86)	-0,32 (-1.17)
<i>Date of arrival to Turkey</i>			0,0173 (-0.36)	-0,00277 (-0.05)
<i>Religiosity</i>			-0.189*** (-4.79)	0,0753 (-1.51)
<i>Number of children in the family</i>			-0.0977* (-1.99)	0,0229 (-0.42)
<i>Gender (M=1)</i>			0,347 (-1.9)	1.042*** (-4.66)
_cons	-1.289*** (-6.34)	-1.180*** (-4.98)	0,707 -1,4	-1.249* (-1.99)
N	839		812	
chi2	15,41		121,4	
p	3,91E-03		9,83E-16	
t statistics in parentheses * p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001				

‘aspirations,’ and *subjective risk-taking attitudes* might be better for measuring aspirations in the forced migration context.

The second primary independent variable, the *subjective risk-taking attitude*, is a significant factor in explaining the onward migration aspirations, supporting Hypothesis 2. Respondents more

willing to take risks are more likely to aspire to move onward rather than stay in their current country of residence. Subjective risk-taking is the only variable with a significant positive impact on onward migration aspiration. While structural and other individual factors (i.e., *wealth, employment status, religiosity, the number of children in the family, and language skills*) explain why people stay, *subjective risk-taking attitude* explains why they aspire to move on. Thus, I argue that self-assessment-based risk-taking measurements have more explanatory power than objective risk-taking in the secondary migration context. This result shows that migration aspirations are not purely shaped by utility maximization and that migrants' personal beliefs, experiences, and perceptions play a significant role in shaping aspirations.

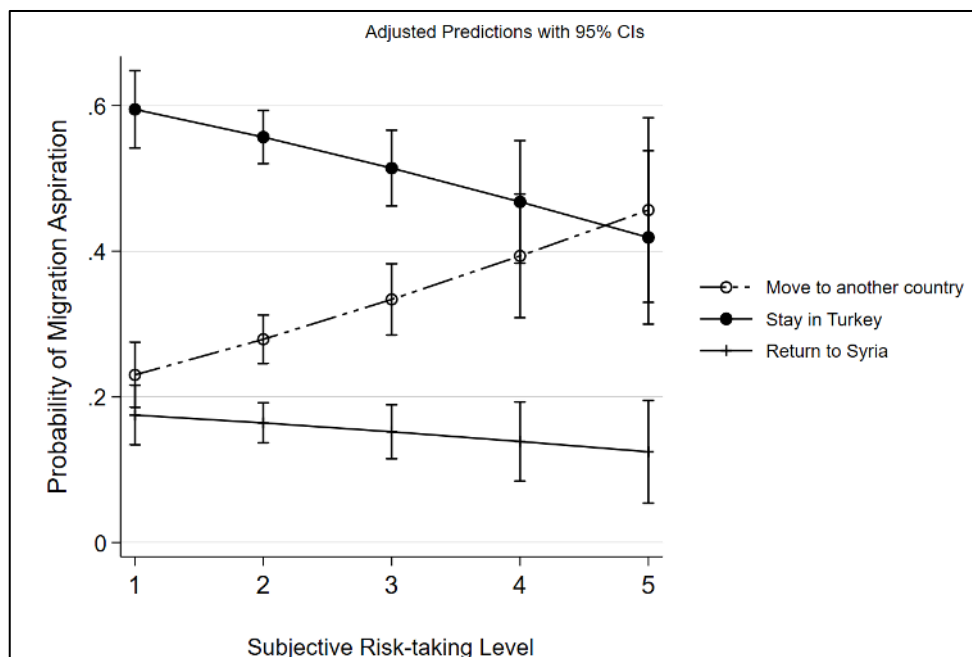
Some control variables significantly affect migration aspirations. First, as Model 2 indicates, as respondents' wealth increases, they are less likely to aspire to move onwards or return than aspiring to stay in Turkey. In other words, poverty and not satisfying basic needs can prompt migrants to leave their current country.

Second, migrants speaking Turkish are less likely to aspire to migrate onward and more likely to aspire to stay. Speaking the host country's language can be regarded as one of the pillars of social integration in the host country, which might indicate that integration can prompt migrants to stay in their current country of residence. Third, migrants who perceive themselves as more *religious* are more likely to aspire to stay in Turkey. This result is expected because religious affinity with the host country can be a significant pull factor for the aspiration to stay (Müller Funk, 2019; Van Hear et al., 2018).

Lastly, as Model 2 indicates, males are significantly more likely to leave Turkey. This result might be related to men's working conditions in Turkey, as their skills and educational backgrounds are unsuitable for conforming and integrating into the local labor market. As Sert (2016) argues, de-skilling after displacement is very common among Syrian migrants, and even highly educated Syrian migrants in Turkey face difficulties finding a job fitting their educational background.

After finding evidence supporting Hypothesis 2, I analyze how increasing subjective risk-taking attitudes influence three types of migration aspirations: a) to move onwards, b) to stay, or c) to return. I analyzed this only for subjective risk-taking since rational risk-taking was not statistically significant in the regression analysis. First, as Figure 5.4 shows, as migrants perceive themselves as more willing to risk-taking, only the aspiration to move onward shows an increasing trend (Figure 5.4). On the other hand, return and stay aspirations show a decreasing trend. In other words, migrants who define themselves as risk-takers are more likely to move onwards. However, the aspirations to stay and to move onward are indistinguishable at the highest risk-taking levels (at points 4 and 5). As a result, migrants who are more willing to take risks are less likely to return to Syria.

Figure 5.4. Probability of Migration Aspirations and Subjective Risk-taking Attitudes



Second, Figure 5.4 reveals that at the lowest risk-taking level (at point 1), confidence intervals of onward migration and return aspirations match one another. This convergence in confidence intervals indicates that aspirations to move onwards and return do not significantly differ for migrants unwilling to take risks. However, the aspiration to stay significantly diverges from other migration aspirations. The risk-avoidant migrants are significantly more likely to aspire to stay in Turkey. A risk-avoidant migrant (at point 1) is 60 percent likely to aspire to stay in Turkey. As leaving Turkey would be a critical change in migrants' daily lives and bring a high degree of uncertainty, risk-avoidant migrants can be more willing to maintain their pre-existing conditions in Turkey. However, this result does not indicate that risk-avoidant migrants are satisfied with their living conditions in Turkey. Instead, this result shows that leaving Turkey either for the EU or Syria would also mean risk-taking due to a rupture in migrants' current living conditions. Here, it is significant to note that risk-taking is not equal to the dangers *en route* because the dependent variable measures the ideal scenario for migration journeys, regardless of the possible risks *en route*.

Third, only the aspiration to return significantly differs from other migration aspirations at the highest risk-taking levels (at points 4 and 5). Among the migrants who are the most willing to take risks, the probability of return aspiration is the lowest. This result indicates that even though migrants perceive themselves as risk-takers, returning to Syria is not an option. Considering the unsafe conditions in Syria, returning to Syria includes various risks. A recent study by Kuschminder and Dubow (2022) also demonstrates that migrants can resist return policies even though they experience extreme distress and hopelessness in their current country of residence. Rather than returning to their country of origin, where living conditions are deteriorating day by day, migrants continue to bear dehumanizing conditions in their current country of residence (Kuschminder & Dubow, 2022). In this case, the return aspiration might not be related to respondents' risk-taking attitudes but the unsafe conditions in the country of origin.

To summarize, the analysis revealed that migrants' subjective risk-taking attitudes significantly influence their migration aspirations, even after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors. This finding highlights the importance of considering migrants' self-perceptual risk-taking attitude beyond simple cost-benefit calculations. The research also displays that the *objective risk-taking* measurement is not a significant indicator of migration aspirations in the secondary migration context. This finding suggests that objective risk-taking measurement may not adequately capture the risk-taking attitudes of migrants living in dire economic situations.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explain which domains of risk-taking attitudes, namely objective and subjective, influence migrants' aspirations to move onwards, stay, or return. From a rational choice perspective, it is assumed that, under ideal conditions, migrants would move onwards if they are unaware of the risks or unable to conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Yet, the evidence show that measure of *objective risk-taking* attitudes does not significantly affect migration aspirations in the secondary migration context. On the other hand, *subjective risk-taking attitudes* are significant in determining migration aspirations, showing that risks in migration journeys seem highly dependent on people's subjective beliefs and perceptions. This finding aligns with the previous research suggesting that migrants are neither constant calculators of costs and benefits nor irrational gamblers who would give everything to maximize gains (De Haas, 2021; Williams & Baláz, 2012).

The findings hold significant implications for the broader fields of migration and risk studies, as well as policies on borders and migration. First, the research findings have implications for the measurement of risk in forced migration context. This research reveals a lack of significant relationship between objectively measured risk-taking and migration aspirations. This challenges the rational choice theory perspective, indicating that objective risk assessment alone cannot fully account for migration aspirations in forced migration contexts. While migrants may factor in economic calculations and better opportunities when shaping their aspirations, these factors alone do not entirely determine migration aspirations. This perspective is consistent with the arguments proposed by Williams & Baláz (2012), who assert that migrants actively assess potential dangers and uncertainties, formulate strategies to address them, and make migration decisions based on their individual circumstances, past experiences, and comfort level with risk-taking. Consequently, this study underscores the importance of integrating various domains of risk-taking attitudes in future research on forced migration.

Secondly, the findings reveal that individuals who perceive themselves as more inclined to take risks may still aspire to move onward despite the dangers in their journeys. This raises questions about the effectiveness of policies aimed at stopping migrants *en route*, such as cooperation agreements between the European Union (EU) and neighboring countries. Despite the intended purpose of these agreements to confine refugees to specific regions and deter secondary movement, the research findings indicate that they do not dissuade migrants who are willing to take risks. Migrants undertaking perilous journeys thereby challenge the assumptions underlying migration deterrence policies. By examining a secondary migration context, this study contributes to the ongoing discussions regarding the impact of such policies on migration decision-making.

This aligns with previous studies (Massey, Pren, and Durand 2016; Pastore and Roman 2020; Vezzoli 2021), highlighting the need for further consideration of the effectiveness and consequences of migration deterrence measures.

Third, the findings have implications for the effectiveness of information campaigns. (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2023; Van Bommel, 2020). Considering migrants are not unreasonable gamblers and shape aspirations vis-a-vis the increasing dangers in Turkey and the journey, information campaigns about the dangers *en route* may not disincentivize all migrants, confirming previous research (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak 2023; Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Van Bommel 2020). Migrants who are more willing to take risks and fully aware of the possible outcomes of their migration decisions will continue to aspire to move onwards, regardless of information campaigns. As this research displays, migration aspirations are significantly affected by migrants' risk-taking attitudes. Not all migrants perceive the dangers *en route* and in their current country of residence similarly. Thus, border externalization policies would not curb aspirations for every migrant living under the same conditions in the same country.

The research has some limitations. First, as discussed above, online convenience sampling can potentially overrepresent literate individuals with internet and social media access. This potential bias towards literate individuals with access to the internet renders the research to make cautious claims on the representativeness of the data. However, the lack of public data on the target population's demographic characteristics is already a concern over the representativeness, irrespective of the method.

Second, risk-taking attitudes might be skewed towards a particular direction amidst structural and policy changes in the forced migration context. For instance, this research measured subjective risk-taking attitudes during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have an impact on migrants' responses to risk. However, considering unstable ruptures in migration policy-making, risk-taking attitudes might always be sensitive toward other structural changes.

Third, subjective risk-taking attitudes are operationalized by a more general self-assessment-based and perceptual question. While the results indicate the significance of incorporating perceptual aspects into migration aspiration research, the effect of discrete emotions on shaping risk-taking attitudes (i.e., fear, anxiety, hope) is not included in this research. Future research can expand the findings of this study by examining the effects of discrete emotions in migration decision-making, like the following research on risk-taking and emotions like faith and hope (Bastide, 2015; Hayenhjelm, 2006). Despite these limitations, the novelty and originality of this study, which presents the significant impact of *risk-taking attitudes* on migration aspirations, can bring insights into forced migration scholarship.

To conclude, further research can investigate by opening discussions about who should protect migrants from making excessively dangerous decisions. Policymakers assume that all migrants will eventually aspire to move onwards, and stricter border policies can stop migration. However, the central question should not be about what kind of migrants can be prevented or what precautions can be taken against migration flows. Instead, the main question is how a better and safer passage can be provided for those migrants who have already decided to move onwards. Further research on risk-taking and migration aspirations is needed to contribute to the forefront of academic, public, and political debates to show that the "success" of the externalization of migration policies is controversial and does not reflect the agency of migrants.



Chapter 6:

Migration Aspirations in Relation to Border Closures, Employment Opportunities and Risk-Taking Attitudes: Lessons from an Experimental Online Survey

Abstract

This article investigates the effect of structural and individual factors on migration aspirations in a secondary migration context. Through an online experiment conducted with Syrian migrants ($N = 551$) living in Turkey, we unpack factors explaining aspirations to stay and move onward from the current country of residence. The findings indicate that open borders alone do not compel migrants to move onward. Instead, employment opportunities in their current residence play a crucial role in shaping aspirations to stay put. Moreover, individuals inclined to take risks are more likely to migrate, even when strict border controls are in place. By highlighting the question of what motivates migrants to stay instead of moving onward, this research emphasizes individual differences in forming migration aspirations and contributes to migration aspirations literature in the secondary migration context.

Keywords: *Migration aspirations, employment, border closures, Syrian refugees, survey analysis, experimental design, risk-taking*

Introduction

On June 14, 2023, eight years after so-called 2015 “refugee crisis,” a fishing trawler carrying 750 migrants from Italy to Greece sank in the Mediterranean Sea. Only 104 survived, making it one of the deadliest incidents of its kind in recent times. In the aftermath, Greek border guards were accused of intentional involvement in the trawler's sinking, leading to significant criticism and controversy. The incident was much more than a tragic border spectacle: it has multiple layers, and offers insights into how migration policymaking affects migrant journeys that are full of risks.

Despite being one of the deadliest incidents, the June 14th incident is not unique or unusual in the Mediterranean. The EU's migration and border policies have turned the Mediterranean route into a space of violence, death, drowning of refugee boats, and pushbacks (İşleyen & Qadim, 2023; Tazzioli, 2016). Meanwhile, funding schemes in the context of migration governance construct host countries – usually the ones neighboring conflict-torn regions – as spaces of opportunities to avoid migrants moving onward to developed Western countries (Müller-Funk et al., 2023). Albeit limited, and insufficient, it is assumed that providing opportunities such as employment to migrants would make them integrate in the host countries and eventually increase their aspiration to stay put. In a way, migration policies oscillate between increasing border controls along migration routes, and providing migrants with opportunities in order to keep them where they are (Kipp & Koch, 2018). Yet, some migrants who are more prone to take risks still embark on dangerous journeys, usually as a way of showing resistance towards border controls (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Maã, 2023; Schapendonk, Bolay, & Dahinden, 2021).

In this context, the following open question can be posed: To what extent are migration aspirations subject to exogenous shocks, such as border closures, or opportunities such as employment, in the context of secondary migration? While tackling this important empirical puzzle, our conceptual framework also aims to explore whether migrants' *risk-taking attitudes* influence their aspiration to embark on dangerous journeys.

This research contributes to the migration literature by focusing on secondary migration aspirations, where individuals had to flee their home country for another and consider further migration from the first host country. To answer what motivates migration aspirations in such constrained mobility contexts, we test the effect of structural and individual level factors with a between-group online experimental survey conducted with Syrian migrants in Turkey.²³ We include *border closures*, *employment opportunities*, and *subjective risk-taking attitudes* as factors affecting migration aspirations. Experimental research has so far been used to investigate migration decision-making outside the context of forced migration (Ewers & Shockley, 2018; McKenzie & Yang, 2012; Petzold, 2017). Hence, using experiments to study migration aspirations in a forced displacement context is a novel approach. Recently, only a few experimental studies have investigated migration aspirations using the framework of push and pull factors between destination and origin countries (Bah & Batista, 2018; Detlefsen, Heidland, & Schneiderheinze, 2022; Hager, 2021). We contribute to this research line by employing an experimental setting that enables us to manipulate the structural factors shaping onward migration aspirations in forced migration contexts. Plus, our approach allows us to gain insights into the variations in individual personality traits.

Existing research explores factors shaping migration aspirations mainly at the structural and individual levels, within the context of either the home or destination country. Structural-level-focused studies examine the impact of border externalization policies on migration management (Cobarrubias et al., 2023; Geiger & Pécout, 2010), while individual-focused research investigates perceptions of individuals, life cycles, and personal attributes (Alpes, 2014; Boccagni, 2017; Kuschminder, de Bresser, & Siegel, 2015; Syed Zwick, 2022). A few studies examine migration aspirations at a combination of individual and structural levels (Helbling & Morgenstern, 2023). Moreover, the majority of research on migration aspirations, with a few exceptions (Hager, 2021; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Müller Funk, 2019), has concentrated on either the home or destination country, largely overlooking aspirations to stay in the current host country. This research aims to address this gap, generating insights into the onward migration decision-making patterns in forced displacement contexts.

Our findings indicate that implementing open border policies does not in itself compel migrants to move onwards. Instead, migrants consider employment opportunities in their current place of residence, even when borders are open for passage (i.e., to such welfare states as the EU countries). However, migrants' aspirations are not only shaped by these policies. Migrants are neither victims, nor passive pawns without agency (De Haas, 2021). Thus, our study also provides

²³ Turkey does not offer any long-term solutions for Syrian migrants, and the overwhelming majority of them have a temporary legal status. While official numbers indicate that over 200,000 Syrians received Turkish citizenship (see: <https://www.diken.com.tr/soylu-vatandaslik-alan-suriyeli-sayisi-200-bin-950/>), an overwhelming majority of Syrians have a dubious legal status. The Regulation on Temporary Protection grants access to public services such as healthcare and education, but it does not grant the right to work in the formal labor market. Despite the provision of basic services, many Syrian refugees face obstacles on a daily basis due to informal employment, scarce livelihood opportunities, rising living costs, and widespread anti-immigration attitudes in society (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017). See the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) website: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last accessed: April 5, 2023

a room for human agency by analyzing differences in individual characteristics in forming migration aspirations. Our findings show that individuals with a higher inclination for risk-taking are more likely to move onward, even when confronted with strict border controls. Incorporating risk-taking attitudes as individual characteristics brings a novel approach to migration literature, showing that not every migrant can be deterred by strict border controls.

Turkey is a suitable case to explore secondary migration aspirations. Besides being a host country for around 3.6 million registered Syrian migrants, Turkey poses geographical significance as one of the European Union's external borders.²⁴ After the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016, Turkey has been constructed as a space to deter migrants from entering the EU's borders and equipped with, albeit inadequate, policy interventions which aim to foster migrants' aspirations to stay put by providing opportunities for local integration (Üstübcü et al., 2021). Based on a convenient sample of Syrians living in Turkey ($N = 551$), we asked the participants to assess four experimental vignettes about a hypothetical person and a control group. We crossed two vignettes involving *border closures* and *employment opportunities* to evaluate the conditions that would shift migration aspirations.

The article is organized as follows. We first discuss the existing literature on migration aspirations, particularly explaining the relevance of *border closures* and *externalization policies*, *employment opportunities*, and *risk-taking attitudes* in migration journeys by presenting our hypotheses. Plus, we briefly present the social, political and legal contexts that Syrian migrants are subjected to in Turkey that inspired the design of the survey experiment. Second, we explain our data and experiment design. The third section lays out the results using regression models. Finally, we discuss the policy implications of the interaction between border externalization policies and employment opportunities, and the role of risk-taking attitudes in migration aspirations literature.

Theoretical Framework

We define *migration aspirations* as the perspectives of migrants on their future mobility. The *aspirations-abilities framework* combines structural and individual factors to understand how aspirations and abilities are formed (Carling, 2002, 2014; Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018). To unpack how *aspirations* are formed, the framework analyzes communal social, economic, and political contexts at the macro level, and individual characteristics at the micro level, in determining who wants to migrate and who wants to stay. On the individual level, the framework focuses on the characteristics that affect how people cope with restrictive migration policies. Against this complex theoretical model, this paper selects two aspects at the structural level (border externalization policies and employment opportunities), and focuses on risk-taking attitudes at the individual level.

Structural Factors: Border closures and externalization policies

The externalization of migration management has become a significant concern for various countries, including the U.S., Australia, the member states of the European Union, and, more

²⁴ The PMM website <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last accessed: Aug 28, 2023

recently, countries in the Global South (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). Externalization is a broader term and refers to the activities undertaken by states, directly or indirectly, outside their territorial boundaries to control borders (Cobarrubias et al., 2023).²⁵ Notably, the states in the Global North have developed strategies to prevent the entry of undesirable migrants at their borders (Hyndman & Mountz, 2008). Scholars have explored how this unwanted migration influences the processes of border externalization in receiving states (Stock, Üstübeci, & Schultz, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019), focusing on the practices of state actors (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; El Qadim, 2017) at the discursive and practice levels (İşleyen, 2018a, 2018b; Karadağ, 2019). While the literature has debated the effectiveness of these border externalization practices, the impact of such policies on migrants' perceptions has received less attention (Hager, 2021). This study aims to contribute to this particular research trajectory.

Common sense would say that open borders would increase migration. While open borders may initially increase migration from less developed to developed regions of the world, evidence shows that they also bolster circulation and return (de Haas, Vezzoli, & Villares-Varela, 2019; Flahaux & Vezzoli, 2017; Vezzoli, 2021). Second, closed borders are assumed to be stopping migrants without documents. Some scholars show that border enforcement policies decrease the number of migrants crossing the borders (Alden, 2017; Sorensen & Carrion-Flores, 2007). Despite the decreasing numbers, border closures fail to deter migrants from taking risks (Dávila, Pagán, & Soydemir, 2002; Gathmann, 2008; Douglas S Massey et al., 2016). Rather than stopping migrants, closed borders direct them to pursue alternative, more dangerous channels (Vezzoli, 2021). In a way, border externalization policies create a self-perpetuating cycle, forcing migrants to take risks at borders rather than deterring them (Douglas S Massey et al., 2016).

Due to challenging living conditions, some Syrians residing in Turkey are inclined to consider onward migration, particularly towards Europe. Being deprived a full-fledged refugee status without a prospect of local integration (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017), experiencing economic vulnerability compared to natives (Elçi et al., 2021), and facing limited access to protection (Karadağ & Üstübeci, 2021) pose significant challenges for Syrians living in Turkey. Recent strict visa policies and closed borders limit their options for legal migration channels (Welfens & Bekyol, 2021), and direct them to take high risks in undocumented migration (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023).

When Syrian migrants first arrived in Turkey, many moved on to seek asylum in EU countries. In 2015, around 1.3 million migrants fled Turkey. The EU and its member states responded to this influx by closing their borders under the discourse of "the refugee crisis".²⁶ In response, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan (November 2015) and the EU-Turkey Statement (March 2016) were implemented, representing the EU's efforts to externalize its migration and border policies (İşleyen, 2018a; Üstübeci, 2019). Additionally, Turkey was promised financial support by the EU, under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), to be spent on the protection and integration of displaced communities, especially Syrians. The design of these policy interventions reflects the rationale of the current international asylum regime, perceiving the secondary mobility as

²⁵ In our study, we employ the term "externalization" as a comprehensive concept encompassing various practices, such as border closures, controlling smuggling networks, or border guards' attitudes towards refugees. Although our research does not specifically delve into distinct forms of border externalization policies, it aligns with and contributes to the existing literature in this field. Acknowledging the differences between the concepts of border closures and externalization, we use both terms interchangeably.

²⁶ See Pallister-Wilkins (2019) for a critical view on the representation of migration journeys: <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/walking-not-flowing-the-migrant-caravan-and-the-geoinfrastructuring-of-unequal-mobility>

politically undesirable. Although the legal basis and effectiveness of these migration and border policies are widely debated (Aydın Düzgit, Keyman, & Biehl Öztuzcu, 2019; Daniş, 2021; Pries & Zülfikar Savci, 2023; Schiefer et al., 2023; Tekin, 2022; Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017), to our knowledge, there is no study measuring the effectiveness of these policies and the validity of their assumptions in the context of Turkey using survey experiment methods.

Evidence suggests that aspirations to move onward from Turkey persist (Kuschminder et al., 2019; Üstübcü & Elçi, 2022), despite the strict border controls initiated with the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016. According to the latest statistics from the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) (2023), the number of migrants apprehended at the borders increased after the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Despite the EU's efforts to externalize its migration and border policies with the EU-Turkey Statement, border crossings continued. The number of apprehended individuals tripled between 2015 and 2019, from 146,485 to 454,662. Although the number of apprehended individuals declined during the pandemic to 122,302, in 2022 it reached a second peak of 285,027. The majority of apprehended migrants are Afghans and Syrians but also include Palestinians and Iraqis. Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) (2023) data also show a similar trend for the Eastern Mediterranean route for undocumented border crossings. The total number of people who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea since 2014 has reached almost 25,000 (Sunderland, 2022). In short, people who face dire living conditions may feel compelled to continue their journey despite the risks (Kıriscioglu & Ustübcü, 2023). Hence, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1: Decreasing (increasing) risks at the borders and welcoming (exclusionary) policies in wealthier countries motivate aspirations to move onward from (stay in) the current country of residence.

Employment Opportunities

The second line of research focuses on the role of employment opportunities in migration aspirations. The effect of employment opportunities on migration aspirations is commonly measured from the origin-host country perspective, i.e. employment opportunities in host countries (Becerra et al., 2010; Chindarkar, 2014; Groenewold, de Bruijn, & Bilsborrow, 2012; Roth & Hartnett, 2018). The role of employment opportunities in the secondary migration context is less studied (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021). This section discusses the research on the role of employment opportunities in migration aspirations.

Previous research shows that economic concerns motivate onward migration towards countries with better employment opportunities (Collyer, 2006; Collyer et al., 2012; Hager, 2021; Kuschminder, 2018; Van Hear, 2006). In the secondary migration context, satisfaction with employment opportunities fosters aspiration to stay in the current place rather than move onwards. Some other research, however, shows that regular income and remittance capabilities can provide migrants with the opportunity to make savings for onward migration (Donini, Monsutti, & Scalettaris, 2016), especially in countries where migrants do not have alternative channels to smuggling. Shortly, financial security is a strong determinant in forming migration aspirations. The direction of migration aspirations, based on employment opportunities, is still contextual: while for some, financial means may enhance capabilities to move onwards, for others, it may imply improving one's livelihood, hence fostering aspirations to stay put (Mata-Codesal, 2018).

Formal employment opportunities for Syrian migrants in Turkey are limited due to policies that restrict their integration into the labor market. For instance, the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection launched in January 2016, based on the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, allowed Syrians to access work permit procedures through their employers, although implementation has been somewhat restricted. Of almost 2 million working-age Syrians, only 91,500 individuals were granted work permits in Turkey.²⁷ As a result, most working-age Syrians have ended up in insecure or underemployed positions in the informal sector (Bélanger & Saracoglu, 2020; Düvell, Schiefer, Sağiroğlu, & Mann, 2021). The lack of or limited employment opportunities in Turkey poses a significant challenge for migrants who aspire to stay in Turkey but feel obliged to move onwards. In this regard, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Legal (precarious) employment opportunities foster (hinder) aspirations to stay in the current country of residence.

Individual Factors: Risk-taking attitudes

Even when border crossing is "a matter of life and death" (Walters, 2011, p. 138), some migrants aspire to migrate despite the risks involved (Kaytaz, 2016; Strasser & Tibet, 2019; Topak, 2014). Research shows that incorporating risk-taking attitudes into migration aspirations research could explain why individuals aspire to move onwards, stay, or return (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Williams & Baláz, 2014). If individual differences in risk-taking attitudes significantly shape migration aspirations, then structural conditions, such as border externalization policies, would not impact all individuals equally. Border externalization policies are predominantly based on the assumption that being aware of risks on the route would deter migrants. But this assumption that migrants lack knowledge fails to account for individual differences in risk-taking propensity, which can vary widely among migrants. Therefore, the effectiveness of these policies in deterring migration cannot be assumed to be universal and must be understood within the context of differences in individuals' characteristics.

Migrants who venture the risks of borders are neither incognizant of the risks involved in their journey nor "irrational" decision-makers (Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2023). Conversely, migrants are often well-informed about the dangers *en route* (Belloni, 2016). With this information, migrants anticipate the risks at each step of their migration journeys and form their aspirations accordingly (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). These findings challenge the notion that migrants are passive victims entirely reliant on external constraints (De Haas, 2021). Instead, migrants exhibit agency, and their attitudes toward risk-taking are highly individualized. In this regard, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: High (Low) tendency to take risks decreases (increases) the effects of structural barriers on the aspiration to move onwards (stay put).

In light of this background, the hypothetical vignettes in our survey experiment are developed to echo a real-life policy environment marked by border closures and the government's selective provision of legal employment opportunities. Recent border and migration policy developments in Turkey, explained above, make the latter a suitable case to test these hypotheses on the impact of border controls and employment incentives on migration aspirations.

²⁷ See Work Permits of Foreigners 2021, published by the Turkish Ministry of Labor <https://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/90062/yabanciizin2021.pdf>

Data Collection and Methods

We conducted an online survey from November 18 to December 31, 2020, utilizing Facebook and Instagram advertisements to recruit participants ($N = 551$). These ads invited individuals to participate in a survey regarding their migration experiences in Turkey. To ensure privacy and anonymity, we collected data from the Qualtrics survey tool and randomly assigned respondents to different experimental groups. The survey and its advertisements were presented in Arabic and were geographically limited to Turkey. Furthermore, we targeted Syrian individuals through online advertisements, inviting them to participate. All participants were provided with an informed consent form before initiating the survey. Only those who granted their consent were given access to the survey questions. Respondents who only partially completed the survey, those who later indicate not having Syrian nationality, and those who failed attention checks were excluded from the analysis. It is worth noting that this survey formed part of a broader study. On average, participants took 31 minutes (standard deviation = 42) to complete the survey.

We chose not to offer incentives to recruit participants for several reasons. Firstly, while incentives are commonly used to increase response rates in online surveys, our pilot surveys did not indicate any difficulties in obtaining responses that would necessitate the use of incentives. Secondly, research suggests that incentives can introduce measurement errors, as respondents may rush through the survey to obtain the incentive quickly (Elliott & Valliant, 2017). Additionally, offering incentives may raise ethical concerns, particularly in the context of our study in Turkey, where Syrians often live in precarious conditions and rely on aid for their livelihoods. Providing a survey with a prize could be perceived as misleading and may create a sense of dependency on aid among respondents.

The convenience sampling technique employed in our study had certain constraints due to our reliance on Facebook and Instagram advertisements for participant recruitment. As a result, our sample may exhibit bias towards individuals who are more educated, literate, and financially affluent, potentially overlooking illiterate, elderly, and economically disadvantaged Syrian refugees. Furthermore, since the survey was conducted online, possession of a smartphone or computer and access to Facebook and Instagram accounts were prerequisites for participation. Consequently, our sample is limited to Syrian refugees who have access to these devices and online platforms.

Despite the inherent challenges associated with sampling, recent research suggests that online platforms can be valuable tools for surveying hard-to-reach populations, including immigrants and refugees (Elçi et al., 2021; Ersanilli & van der Gaag, 2020; Pötzschke & Weiß, 2021). Additionally, without comprehensive knowledge of the total population of Syrian refugees in Turkey, it is difficult to ascertain whether an in-person survey conducted in a specific neighborhood densely populated by migrants would be more accurate and representative than an online survey. It is important to note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, online surveys provided researchers with a safer means of collecting data. Furthermore, compared to face-to-face and phone surveys, gathering data through social media advertisements proves more cost-effective, time-efficient, user-friendly, and secure.

Experiment Design

Table 6.1. Experimental vignettes

No treatment	Introduction		Now, you are going to read a story about Ahmad and his family. Please read the story and then answer the question.
	Control		Ahmad is a single man living in a shared flat in Istanbul and working in construction. His parents are in Syria, and their livelihood depends on the money he sends them.
Open borders	Unemployed	T1	Control + Ahmad could not find work in the last two weeks because of the economic crisis. One day, he hears from a friend that the journey from Turkey to Europe is getting less risky because borders are now open , and countries such as Germany will accept more refugees.
	Employed	T2	Control + Ahmad's boss offers him a permanent job where he can work with a work permit and social security. One day, he hears from a friend that the journey from Turkey to Europe is getting less risky because borders are now open , and countries such as Germany will accept more refugees.
Border closures	Unemployed	T3	Control + Ahmad could not find work in the last two weeks because of the economic crisis. He hears from friends that the journey to Europe is now more dangerous than ever . Smugglers may demand extra money, or the boats may sink. Coastguards can also be cruel to migrants.
	Employed	T4	Control + Ahmad's boss offers him a permanent job where he can work with a work permit and social security. He hears from friends that the journey to Europe is now more dangerous than ever . Smugglers may demand extra money, or the boats may sink. Coastguards can also be cruel to migrants.

We employed a between-group experimental design to examine the impacts of border closures and employment conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five different groups (see Table 6.1.). Next, they were introduced to the following statement: “Now, you are going to read a story about Ahmad and his family. Please read the story and then answer the question.”

Those in the treatment groups were exposed to one of the four distinct experimental vignettes (T1, T2, T3, or T4), each depicting a hypothetical individual, while participants in the control group were presented only with a baseline scenario. Table 6.1. summarizes the experimental design, illustrating the various combinations of border closures and employment opportunities manipulated to create favorable and unfavorable conditions for migration recommendations.

When designing the experimental vignettes, we constructed a hypothetical person to uphold ethical considerations. This approach was chosen to avoid disseminating misinformation within refugee communities and networks, as direct questions and factual scenarios could potentially lead to speculation about the situation at the borders. Our primary concern was to prioritize the safety and well-being of the participants. Hence, opting for a hypothetical person was deemed the best option. In addition, we aimed to decrease variation in the stimulus, which would be high if, for example, we primed participants to think about their current situation.

Our objective was to examine the impact of border closures and employment opportunities on migration aspirations. To achieve this, we presented Ahmad's situation to all groups. We sought to determine whether the border and employment conditions differed from the control group. We chose Ahmad as a familiar figure among the Syrian refugee population in Turkey, as they often work in precarious jobs. Additionally, we focused on a single male migrant rather than a migrant with a family, as the presence of a family can complicate migration decision-making (Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). In other words, by constructing a control group, we aimed to understand the respondents' migration aspirations when the conditions of border and employment were not explicit. Then, we aimed to test whether the changing conditions of borders and employment opportunities make any difference in the direction of migration aspiration. Methodologically, we sought a baseline group to detect variations from the control group and significant differences across treatments, as experimental interventions affect aspirations (Gaines, Kuklinski, & Quirk, 2007; McDermott, 2002).

Table 6.2.: Distribution of respondents per experiment group (Note: The number of observations is in parentheses)

	Control	Unemployment & Open borders	Employment & Open borders	Unemployment & Border Closures	Employment & Border Closures	All groups
Age	28.61 (178)	30.24 (97)	27.77 (92)	30.85 (87)	28.90 (87)	29.17 (541)
Male	0.60 (182)	0.61 (98)	0.50 (92)	0.47 (88)	0.54 (89)	0.55 (549)
Education	0.85 (181)	0.83 (98)	0.86 (92)	0.82 (88)	0.91 (89)	0.85 (548)
Wealth	0.46 (183)	0.45 (99)	0.44 (92)	0.42 (88)	0.42 (89)	0.44 (551)
ESSN	0.28 (183)	0.30 (99)	0.34 (92)	0.34 (88)	0.39 (89)	0.32 (551)

We checked the randomization and distribution of respondents in the experimental groups according to their demographic characteristics, whether they receive the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) aid²⁸, and their level of wealth. The Wald test after the multinomial logistic regression received an insignificant result ($X^2(20) = 25.64$, $p = 0.178$), which means randomization is successful (see Table 6.2 for the distribution of demographic and ESSN variables). Hence, we do not need to use control variables.

Variables

Following the presentation of the vignettes, we asked the following question as our dependent variable: "If you were Ahmad, would you be willing to stay in Turkey, or move on to another country, or return to Syria?" Descriptive analysis of the responses reveals that 53.53 per cent of respondents recommended staying in Turkey, 44.29 per cent suggested moving to another country, and only 2.08 per cent selected the option to return. While the return option was included in the question for theoretical reasons, we did not specifically prime for it. Including the return option aligns with the common practice in measuring migration aspirations across three categories in the context of secondary migration (Carling, 2019). It is important to note that the number of respondents recommending a return ($N=21$) was relatively low in proportion. As a result, we generated three dependent variables. First, our main dependent variable is binary, excluding return responses from the analysis. Second, as a robustness check, we generated another binary dependent variable in which we coded both move and return as 1 and 0 otherwise (see Appendix

²⁸ Initiated by the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) is a major cash transfer program funded by the EU to improve the living conditions of refugees in Turkey.

1). Third, we generated a categorical dependent variable. We coded move responses as 1, stay responses as 2, and return responses as 3 to conduct a multinomial logistic regression (see Appendix 2). The results do not show a striking difference between dependent variables (see Appendices). To assess our assumptions, we conducted a logistic regression analysis using our main dependent variable and dropping the return responses.

We considered subjective risk-taking attitude as a moderating factor for the effects of border closures and employment opportunities. Risk-taking attitudes are fundamental drivers of human decision-making processes, influencing individuals' perceptions of risk, their willingness to take risks, and their overall behavioral responses to uncertain situations. In the context of our study, we argue that individuals' risk-taking attitudes are relevant for understanding advice-giving behavior because they shape how individuals assess and respond to dangerous circumstances. By examining the relationship between risk-taking attitudes and advice-giving behavior, we aim to elucidate the underlying mechanisms forming individuals' aspirations. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence advice-giving behavior in real-world scenarios.

We operationalized subjective risk-taking attitudes using a general question that captured individuals' overall tendency towards risk-taking: "How do you see yourself in general? Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks, or do you try to avoid taking risks in your life?" Respondents provided their responses using a Likert scale ranging from "not willing to take risks" (1) to "extremely willing to take risks" (5). The average score was 2.63, with a standard deviation of 1.16, reflecting the participants' self-perceived inclination towards risk-taking behavior. We opted for a self-reported assessment of risk for two primary reasons. Firstly, risk-taking attitudes are known to be influenced by individuals' personal life experiences (Barnett & Breakwell, 2001), making self-perceptions theoretically relevant for measuring risk-taking. Secondly, subjective measurement of risk attitudes is considered a valuable overall measure, as it is presumed to capture a stable risk preference capable of predicting risk-taking behavior across different domains (Charness, Gneezy, & Imas, 2013).

Self-reported measurements of risk are often criticized for overlooking domain-specific differences in risk-taking attitudes. For example, an individual might be more inclined to take risks in financial matters but less so in health-related issues. To address this concern, Weber, Blais, and Betz (2002) developed the DOSPERT scale, which aims to capture variations in risk-taking preferences across different domains. However, due to the length of our survey and to avoid cognitive fatigue among participants, we opted for a simpler elicitation question. Therefore, we utilized a single, simplified self-reported measurement, which is also easier for participants to comprehend (Charness et al., 2013).

Results: The Interplay between Border Closures and Employment Opportunities, and the Mediating Effect of Risk-taking Attitudes

In this section, we use evidence from the experimental survey to answer the following two questions: To what extent are migration aspirations subject to exogenous shocks, such as increasing or decreasing risks at the borders? And to what extent are they shaped by opportunities

such as employment? We conducted two different logistic regressions to test the effects of treatments, including moderation with subjective risk-taking attitudes (see Table 6.3).

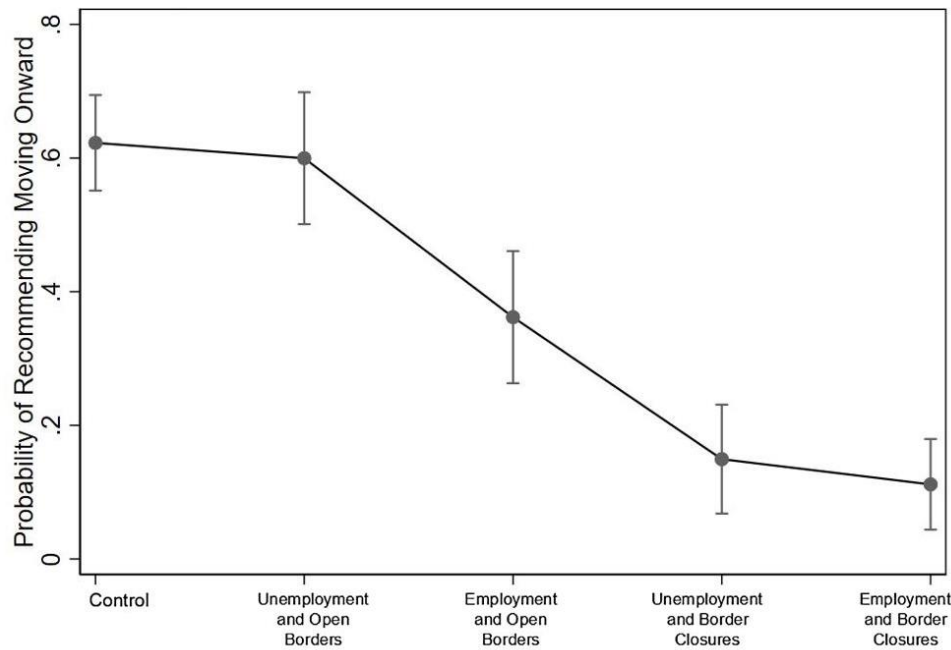
Table 6.3 illustrates that all treatments significantly differ from the control group except for the first treatment. All three treatments significantly motivate aspiration to stay in the current country of residence. The first treatment priming for the lack of employment opportunities in the current country of residence and the lack of obstacles on borders does not significantly differ from the control group (see Figure 6.1). Working in odd jobs renders many migrants in an unbearable and uncertain situation and blurs the line between being unemployed and working in insecure odd jobs. In this regard, the migrant profile in the control group and the first treatment were similar. However, the margins plot illustrates that respondents in the unemployed and open borders vignette are more likely to move on to a third country than stay in Turkey compared to other treatment groups. Thus, a significant difference between "Unemployment and open borders" and "Employment and open borders" indicates that employment is crucial to staying, even when borders are open.

Policymakers assume that border externalization policies deter migrants from moving onward. This assumption on the effectiveness of deterrent migration policies overemphasizes the significance of border closures. Moreover, the emphasis on border closures overlooks the effect of opportunities provided for migrants. At first sight, our results indicate that migrants recommend staying in the country of residence when borders are closed, and countries do not implement welcoming policies for migrants (see Figure 6.1). However, what is surprising in our findings is that opening the borders does not increase the probability of recommending moving onward. Contrary to the expectations of policymakers, open border policies and welcoming policies of the destination countries are not the main drivers for migrants to recommend moving onward. In this regard, based on the interrelation between border closures and employment opportunities, we explain why the assumption that border enforcement policies deter migrants is wrong.

	Model 1 Aspiration to Move	Model 2 Aspiration to Move
Reference: Control	1	1
	[1.000,1.000]	[1.000,1.000]
Unemployment & Open borders	0.895	0.625
	[0.539,1.487]	[0.169,2.320]
Employed & Open borders	0.349***	0.264*
	[0.206,0.588]	[0.079,0.889]
Unemployment & Border closures	0.117***	0.0129***
	[0.062,0.224]	[0.002,0.095]
Employed & Border closures	0.0785***	0.0363**
	[0.038,0.162]	[0.004,0.372]
Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		0.841
		[0.656,1.079]
Reference: Control * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1
		[1.000,1.000]
Unemployment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.151
		[0.730,1.816]
Employment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.104
		[0.731,1.666]
Unemployment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		2.218*
		[1.190,4.133]
Employment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.322
		[0.614,2.847]
<i>N</i>	541	540
pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.148	0.161
Odds Ratios; 95% confidence intervals in brackets + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 6.3.: Logistic Regression Results

Figure 6.1.: Average Marginal Effects of Treatments on Move Aspiration



First, our experimental design confirms that *border controls* should not be considered separate from *employment opportunities* provided to migrants. As Figure 6.1 shows, employment opportunities significantly increase migrants' probability of staying in the current country, regardless of the conditions of the borders. In other words, when migrants are provided with employment opportunities, staying in the current country is seen as a better option than moving onwards to Europe, even when the dangers on the route are minimal. In this regard, we reject *Hypothesis 1*, indicating that decreasing dangers at the borders and welcoming refugee policies in European countries motivate aspirations to move from the current country of residence. This finding has two implications regarding migration aspirations based on *opportunities* and *obstacles*. First, *obstacles* at borders *per se* do not determine migration aspirations. Plus, risks of border crossings *per se* cannot predict change in migration decision-making. Second, this finding provides counterevidence to policymakers' assumption that all migrants will eventually aspire to move onwards when borders are open, and only stricter border policies can stop migration.

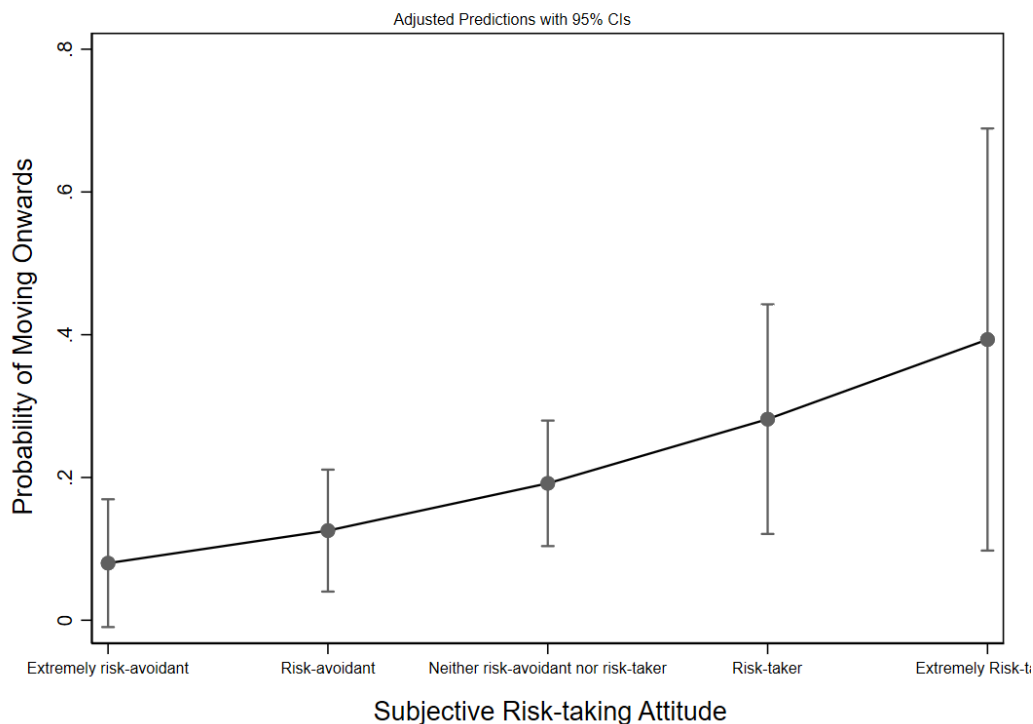
Second, even when borders are open, and countries are welcoming, *opportunities* can amplify the aspiration to stay in the current country. For instance, when comparing the first and second treatments, we observe that employment opportunities strongly decrease the probability of recommending moving onward (see Figure 6.1). While the probability of moving onward is more than 60 per cent in the first treatment, it decreases to 37 per cent with an employment opportunity. If we imagine a single male working in odd jobs in Turkey, an employment opportunity including a secured work permit would significantly reinforce aspiration to stay. Thus, the findings support *Hypothesis 2*, indicating that employment opportunities motivate aspirations to stay in the current country of residence. We argue that relatively open border policies for migrants do not necessarily feed the aspiration to move. The employment opportunities generate a significant difference

between aspirations to stay and move, and are more determinant in forming migration aspirations than border externalization policies.

We conducted the second logistic regression by taking risk-taking attitudes as a moderator (see Model 2). Figure 6.2 shows the predicted probability of the move aspiration when there are no employment opportunities in the current place and when borders are closed, moderated by subjective risk-taking. We assume that these are the conditions under which only risk-taking migrants would recommend moving onward. Hence, the results show that recommending moving onward significantly increases depending on to what extent participants are risk-avoidant or risk-taking. As risk-taking increases, the probability of moving to another country increases from 8 per cent to 40 per cent when borders are closed, and our hypothetical person is unemployed. Thus, we can confirm *Hypothesis 3*, namely that as the tendency to take risks increases, the impact of border closures on the aspiration to move onward decreases.

The *lack of employment opportunities* prime plays a significant role in understanding the aspiration to move onward when the borders are risky to cross. Respondents provided with the unemployment and border closures prime are significantly more likely to recommend moving onward when they are more willing to take risks in general (see Figure 6.2). This finding implies that strict border policies may discourage some migrants from onward migration but do not deter *every migrant* on the move similarly. We can explain this variation by personal attitudes towards risk-taking. If we imagine an unemployed risk-taking migrant whose family is dependent on the money they send, border control policies would not be deterring. The lack of employment

Figure 6.2.: Predicted Probability of the "Move Aspiration" of "Unemployment and Border Closures" Vignette Moderated by Subjective Risk-taking



opportunities in the country of residence could be highly unacceptable for risk-taking migrants who aspire to move onward even when border crossing is dangerous. Hence, structural factors, *opportunities*, and/or *border closures* cannot be separated from *individual characteristics* in migration decision-making.

Conclusion

This study examined factors influencing secondary migration aspirations in forced displacement contexts. Through an online survey experiment, our findings indicate that simply opening borders and implementing welcoming policies do not necessarily incentivize all migrants to consider moving onward. Instead, legal employment opportunities are perceived as preferable to migrating to EU countries, even when border conditions are relatively safe. Additionally, our results highlight the role of individual differences in risk-taking attitudes in determining whether migrants recommend moving or staying. Specifically, migrants with a higher inclination for risk-taking are less deterred by border closures and are more likely to consider moving onward.

Our findings carry significant implications for policy-making, ethical considerations, and analytical approaches. First, there is a growing demand for evidence-based migration policies, as many responses to undocumented migration tend to be reactive and driven by public discontent (Douglas S Massey et al., 2016). Especially in the current European context, policymakers are increasingly inclined to implement externalization policies to deter people on the move (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Cobarrubias et al., 2023). De Haas (2023) makes a similar critique, drawing on historical examples to demonstrate that border restrictions are counter-productive. He argues that such restrictions increase the costs associated with migration, thereby leading to a rise in irregularized entry and stay (De Haas, 2023). Additionally, he suggests that these restrictions disrupt circulation and diminish returns (De Haas, 2023). In line with this demand, our study emphasizes the need for more research that collects evidence on the effectiveness of different policy options. We aim to stimulate a discussion on how survey experiments, which capture the perspectives of migrants, can contribute to building this evidence base.

Secondly, our findings have political and ethical implications concerning the allocation of limited public resources for migration control. The relative effectiveness of employment opportunities in increasing aspirations to stay informs policymakers about where they can strategically invest their resources. We argue that investing in employment opportunities is a more ethical, humanitarian, and sustainable approach than solely focusing on border controls or externalizing such controls to third countries. However, it is essential to exercise caution in implementing this policy recommendation, as further evidence is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of various policies. Overall, our study highlights the importance of evidence-based policymaking, ethical considerations in resource allocation, and the potential of survey experiments to inform migration policy discussions.

Third, from an analytical perspective, our analysis raises the need for further research to explore why it is crucial to incorporate risk-taking attitudes into migration aspirations literature. As demonstrated in our research, when migrants' risk-taking attitudes are taken into consideration, the generalizability of the effectiveness of border externalization policies for all migrants living under similar conditions becomes questionable. By revealing that the onward migration

aspirations of Syrian migrants are significantly influenced by their subjective risk-taking attitudes, we challenge the assumption that border closures effectively deter every migrant. Hence, we suggest incorporating risk-taking attitudes into the analysis of micro-level factors that impact migration aspirations (Carling, 2019). Further research in this area would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in migration aspirations and abilities.

Our research has some limitations. First, the subjective risk attitude is a self-reported measurement, which can be influenced by individual biases or social desirability effects. Individuals may have difficulty accurately assessing their risk attitudes, especially if they lack experience in the specific domain being examined. Despite this shortcoming, research shows that subjective measurement of risk attitudes is still a valuable tool in predicting risk-taking behavior across different domains of research (Charness et al., 2013).

Another limitation is around the use of online surveys. Online surveys effectively reach difficult-to-reach populations (Ersanilli & van der Gaag, 2020), yet some population segments may not be adequately represented. For example, individuals without Internet or social media access may be less likely to participate in an online survey, which could lead to a biased sample. However, we lack publicly available demographic data on Syrian migrants living in Turkey. Hence, it is difficult to assess the potential impact of limitations on data representativeness (Elçi et al., 2021). Moreover, our experimental design presented the single-dimensional profile of a hypothetical migrant – a single male migrant working in odd jobs –. We acknowledge that these scenarios do not reflect the heterogeneous profiles of Syrians in Turkey including dimensions such as being single versus with one's family, gender, age or education. However, the predominant image of border crossers is single male migrants. In this regard, we can justify our choice of the hypothetical profile of a migrant based on our research aims. We acknowledge these potential limitations and encourage further research with alternative methods of data collection that may be more inclusive of all members of the population of interest.

Our study focused primarily on the individual-level factors influencing migration aspirations of Syrian migrants in Turkey. One important limitation is that we did not explore the role of meso-level factors such as social networks, which prior research suggests significantly impacts migration aspirations (Della Puppa & King, 2019; McIlwaine, 2012; Müller Funk, 2019). Social networks can influence destination choices and adaptation to a new country (Müller Funk, 2019). Future research can address this gap by examining how social networks, or more specifically, transnational social ties, shape the destination choices, migration aspirations, or, their perceptions about remigration within a forced migration context. By analyzing these connections, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the decision-making process for migrants at different levels of analysis.

Finally, our data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected border controls. Thus, the pandemic might have added another layer impeding migration aspirations to move on. More research should be conducted in the post-COVID-19 period on this topic. We hope that the findings of this survey experiment, which was staged in Turkey, will have implications for similar contexts, where opportunities for migrants are scarce, out-migration is risky, and international cooperation on the "containment" of refugee flows is high.

Chapter 7:

Stuck in a Whirlpool? The Role of Hope and Despair in Managing Risks During Afghan Migration Journeys

Abstract

Migration journeys are full of risk, navigated not just by physical obstacles but also by emotional tides. This study explores how the fluctuation of hope and despair plays a role in dealing with risks. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with Afghans in Turkey, this paper demonstrates that hope and despair fluctuate along migration journeys contingent upon three elements: 1) empirical evidence about the future, 2) (un)certainly and potential in the future, and 3) the agency or capability to act. The research finds that hope arises when the future is perceived as uncertain, offering individuals alternative pathways and restoring a sense of agency by transforming uncertainty into potentiality. Conversely, despair sets in when individuals perceive their near future as certain, devoid of alternatives. This sense of certainty about the near future leaves migrants feeling trapped, akin to being stuck in a whirlpool.

Introduction

The migration journeys of refugees engaged in escaping from Afghanistan are becoming increasingly difficult, fragmented, and expensive because of authoritarian crackdowns in neighbouring countries, the lucrative nature of smuggling practices, and policies being implemented to prevent people crossing borders. The drivers of, and root causes for, their migration decisions have often been described (Carling & Collins, 2018; Czaika, Bijak, & Prike, 2021; Hagen-Zanker, Carling, et al., 2023; Mjelva & Carling, 2023; Müller Funk, 2019; Van Hear et al., 2018). However, less is known about the influence of emotions such as hope and despair on how people deal with the increased risks involved in migration journeys. This article argues that hope and despair fluctuate, leaving Afghan migrants stuck in a whirlpool of emotions and influencing the way individuals deal with risks at different stages of migration journeys.

Previous research has addressed risk-taking during migration journeys from different perspectives, though not always thoroughly conceptualising its meaning and implications. For instance, some authors have described the risks relating to individuals' legal and protection challenges in Greece, Italy (Linekar & Achilli, 2022), and Turkey (Karadağ & Üstübcü, 2021). Other authors have focused on individuals' experiences and perceptions of risk during migration journeys (Belloni, 2016; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Kaytaz, 2015; Kiriscioglu & Ustübcü, 2023). The focus of these previous works has not been on the underlying emotional process that shapes risk perceptions.

There are several studies that explore the role of hope in dealing with (non-migration) high-risk situations. Hope has been researched in fields such as philosophy (Blöser & Stahl, 2017), psychology (Snyder, 2002), medical science (Corn, Feldman, & Wexler, 2020), bioethics (Simpson, 2004), sociology, and anthropology (Brown, De Graaf, & Hillen, 2015; Crapanzano, 2003; Parla, 2019). The concept of hope has also been applied to clandestine migration journeys (Hagan, 2008; Horst & Grabska, 2015; Kleist, 2023; Kleist & Jansen, 2016; Kleist & Thorsen,

2017; Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Turner, 2015, 2020). The concept of hope is relevant in the case of clandestine migration journeys because the uncertainty inherent in these journeys often creates conditions vastly different from those of economic migration facilitated by visas. Authors who have focused on this subject have usually concluded that hope could be a driver of migration, while a lack of hope might stop migration (Bachelet, 2019; Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, & Mazzilli, 2023; Kuschminder, 2018; Müller-Funk, 2023; Müller Funk, 2019). In a way, hope is included as a factor driving one from local borders (Kleist & Jansen, 2016). However, Crapanzo (2003) argues that hope can also lead to passivity and waiting for better times. In this paper, we take a step further to explore the changing nature of hope in different stages of migration journeys by showing evidence from interviews with Afghan migrants.

Based on this background, the central question this paper seeks to answer is: *How do fluctuations between hope and despair influence individuals' ways to deal with risks during migration journeys?*

To answer the research question, we focus on one of the most sizeable immigrant communities in Turkey: Afghans. The waves of migration from Afghanistan relate to its recent history, which was marked by conflict, civil war, and protracted tensions. Already between 1933 and 1973, there were extreme polarisation and power struggles during King Zahir Sha's rule. The first large wave of refugee migration occurred after the Soviet invasion of 1979 when the elite around the king fled the country: the majority towards Iran and Pakistan and a minority towards Europe and the US. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1988, a civil war evolved. Migration peaked again around 1993 when the civil war intensified.²⁹ From 1996 to 2001, the first Taliban regime held power, but the Taliban was associated with the September 11 attacks in New York, the US bombed Taliban strongholds and tried to establish an interim government.³⁰ Hamid Karzai became the interim head of state in June 2002, and emigration dropped. UNHCR facilitated the return of over six million Afghan migrants. However, in 2008, the unrest between tribal groups increased again, and the security situation deteriorated, leading to displacement. After the sudden withdrawal of US troops in 2021, the second Taliban regime was established, leading to another wave of emigration.

In Turkey, there are around around 160,000 Afghans holding international protection status (IPS), according to official statistics (International Organization for Migration [IOM]2023). In 2021, the Ministry of Interior estimated that around 118,000 Afghans are unregistered (Ministry of Interior, 2021). However, pundits suggest that the largest Afghan population in the country remains unregistered (Sema Buz et al., 2020). As we will show in the result section, there are several reasons for Afghan migrants to remain unregistered. The protracted period during which they remain without legal status in Turkey, puts many Afghans in an extremely vulnerable position, which heightens the importance of producing knowledge on their experiences (Dimitriadi, 2022; Donini et al., 2016; İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018; Jurat, 2022; Karadağ & Sert, 2023; Kaytaz, 2016; Kuschminder, 2018; Schuster, 2011).

²⁹ See: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AFG/afghanistan/net-migration#:~:text=The%20current%20net%20migration%20rate,a%203.34%25%20decline%20from%202021.> Last access 27 September 2023.

³⁰ See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253>. Last access 27 September 2023.

This article provides two contributions to the literature on decision making during migration journeys. The scientific relevance of the article lies in the fact that we propose a new way of exploring hope and despair, and how these emotions relate to risk-taking. We show that the assumption that hope leads to risk-taking and onward migration is too simplistic. We follow scholars who have looked further than the simplistic dichotomy between country of origin and country of settlement, and who acknowledge that a migrant's journey is not always planned from beginning to end: rather, the next step depends on experiences along the way (Brigden & Mainwaring, 2016; Kaytaz, 2016; Lønning, 2020; Müller Funk, 2019; Schapendonk et al., 2021; Üstübcici, 2016). The social relevance of this paper lies in the potential for policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of how Afghans navigate risks and to effectively identify the needs and challenges experienced by Afghan migrants in countries such as Turkey. The findings in this area can inform EU migration policymaking, which currently assumes that making border crossings more dangerous will stop unwanted migration flows.

How Hope and Despair Function when Dealing with Risks

Jens Zinn, a leading scholar in risk studies, presents a general overview of risk management strategies, categorizing them into three main approaches: rational, non-rational, and those in between (Zinn, 2020; Schultz and Zinn, 2023). In this context, "non-rational" refers to forms of knowledge that lack statistical foundation but involve constructing desired futures based on subjective beliefs, such as hope (Zinn, 2008; Zinn, 2019; Schultz and Zinn, 2023).³¹ While Zinn's framework offers insights into risk management, it is important to critically examine his conceptualization of hope as a "risk management strategy." This wording seems to imply a level of intentionality that is not always evident in individuals' feelings of hope. Therefore, we utilize Zinn's framework as a foundational overview of risk-related responses, acknowledging that hope is a psychological response to uncertainty, rather than a deliberate strategy. This paper investigates the role of hope and despair in relation to how migrants deal with risks throughout their journeys.

Jens Zinn, a prominent scholar in the field of risk studies, refers to this appeal to hope as a non-rational form of knowledge (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Zinn, 2008a, 2019). Zinn (2008a) has presented a useful framework in which he distinguishes between three different risk management strategies. He suggests that there are rational and non-rational risk management strategies, and also strategies that fall between these two categories (Zinn, 2020, Schultz and Zinn, 2023). "Non-rational" in this context denotes forms of knowledge that lack statistical grounding but are regarded as "a practice of constructing desired futures" based on subjective beliefs (Schulz & Zinn, 2023).³² Hence, our research centers on hope to investigate its role in migrants' management of risks throughout their journeys. We start with this concept, explaining when the two emotions—hope and despair—arise and how they affect decision-making, offering an explanation for their influence.

Hope has diverse meanings. Lopez, Snyder, and Pedrotti (2003) distinguish 26 ways of thinking about hope and 54 definitions. We align with Ghassan Hage's definition, who describe hopefulness as 'a disposition to be confident in the face of the future, to be open to it and

³¹ It is important to note here that non-rational is not the equivalent of "irrational" or the opposite of rational. Non-rational implies that the specific strategy cannot be evaluated based on the rules of instrumental rationality, it is out of the scope of rationality.

³² It is important to note here that non-rational is not the equivalent of "irrational" or the opposite of rational. Non-rational implies that the specific strategy cannot be evaluated based on the rules of instrumental rationality, it is out of the scope of rationality.

welcoming to what it will bring, even if one does not know for sure what it will bring” (Hage, 2003, p. 24). Hage’s definition reflects diverse ways individuals navigate *uncertainty* and envision a potentially positive *future*. In a sense, Hage’s definition represents an open-ended hope, as classified by Webb (2007), who provides a classification of hope. Open-ended hope reflects a general optimism or attitude toward the future, while in situations with more opportunities, goal-oriented hope can develop, which comes with concrete objectives. Webb’s (2007) work contributes significantly to understanding hope’s multifaceted nature, challenging the idea of hope as a singular experience.

For our definition, we would like to introduce a new element specific to the circumstances of migrants who have limited options and face high risks. This new element relates to the dimension of hope that can provide agency in such high risk situations. Therefore, we define hope as an emotion that enables them to navigate uncertainties and that may provide them with a sense of agency, and control over their lives as a result. Based on this definition, we explore the three elements of hope that we selected as the most pertinent to in the forced migration context. We explore 1) how hope is not always empirically grounded and not easily influenced by expert knowledge or information, 2) how hope is future-oriented, and 3) how hope functions in regard to regaining agency. We concentrate on these three elements of hope due to their significance in the context of forced migration. In voluntary migration contexts, different types of risk management strategies may be dominant. Therefore, we do not assert the universality of these three elements in other contexts. Below we will explain the three elements in more detail.

First, hope tends to be independent of expert knowledge or statistical information about a dangerous situation (Schulz & Zinn, 2023). As Webb’s classification also reminds us, hope can persist even in the face of contrary evidence (Webb, 2007). In a sense, hope can be empirically detached from the reality and maintained even against all odds (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Turner, 2020). Why, then, do individuals continue to feel hope despite contradictory evidence? Essentially, individuals overlook expert knowledge to mitigate their vulnerability. For instance, migrants who take risks by crossing violent borders are most of the time well informed about the dangers *en route* (Bastide, 2015; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Kaytaz, 2016; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). Nevertheless, they take the risk because they believe that moving to another country offers a pathway to realizing their dreams and escaping their current vulnerability. Consequently, hope emerges as a strategy for managing risks and resisting an intolerable situation. However, in certain instances, individuals may experience despair when they perceive no viable alternatives for the future, as elaborated in the subsequent section.

Second, hope is a future-oriented emotion (Simpson, 2004: p. 431) and an ‘imaginative extension of one’s horizon towards a desired *future*’ (Schulz & Zinn, 2023), closely tied to potentialities and uncertainty (Crapanzano, 2003; Turner, 2020). Uncertainty in this context provides the person with a potential future that is full of possibilities, even though it is unknown. Hope possesses the transformative ability to turn the negative impact of uncertainty into positive potentiality. On the other hand, certainty suggests that the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. Despair sets in when these possibilities close, and the future seems certain but leads nowhere. Turner’s (2020) study on Burundian refugees in Rwanda provides evidence for this paradoxical relationship between certainty and uncertainty. Turner (2020) argues that an unpredictable future fuels hope for an end to refugees’ present situation. Conversely, uncertainty about what comes after generates anxiety and complicates decisions regarding returning to Burundi or staying in exile.

Third, hope in high-risk situations is a way of exercising or (re)gaining lost *agency* (Brown et al., 2015; Zinn, 2023). Zinn (2023) refers to Amaryta Sen’s concept of “capacity to act” to define agency (Amaryta Sen, 2010). The argument posits that individuals, when unable to exercise their legally granted (human) rights and faced with limited options to act, resort to risk-taking to overcome these restrictions. So, under these structural constraints, individuals may take high risks to realize their dreams and regain their agency. In essence, risk-taking can serve as a means to regain control over one’s life (Zinn, 2023). However, Zinn warns that even when faced with limited choices, individuals may engage in complex considerations about which hazards to accept. In doing so, individuals may maintain hope against all odds or evidence of potential harm.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge that lacking agency can also turn individuals’ lives into ongoing suffering without visible improvement (Wilkinson, 2005). Therefore, we add the feeling of despair to our model. According to Turner (2020), despair occurs when “the future seems certain to lead to nowhere.” As in the case of Burundian refugees in refugee camps in Kenya,

Table 7.1. *Thee three elements of hope and despair in dealing with risks*

	<i>Empirical grounds</i>	<i>Future</i>	<i>Agency</i>
<i>Hope</i>	Against all odds	Uncertain and full of potential	Provides a way of regaining agency
<i>Despair</i>	No odds or possibilities are existing	Certain and (almost) no alternatives	Restricted agency

when people see their near future without any possible alternatives, their emotions can oscillate between hope and anxiety which might turn into despair (Turner, 2020). As Turner argues, anxiety is also an important component of hope and despair. While we acknowledge the significance of anxiety, we did not include it in our model of risk management strategies because anxiety itself is not a risk management strategy. In the below analysis, we combine the above three aspects of hope, examine when it fluctuates with despair, and how this influences the management of risks during migration journeys.

Method

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Turkey between March 2020 and January 2021 within the AdMiGov project (Üstübeci et al., 2021). We interviewed 23 Afghan migrants (14 females and nine males) in different districts of Turkey, including four face-to-face interviews conducted in Adana. Due to the COVID pandemic and lockdowns, the remaining 19 interviews were conducted online. We reached the remaining interviewees by embedding a request in the online survey that we conducted for the research project. The survey participants were asked to contact us via email or via the project’s social media platforms’ direct messaging tools. The average age of the interviewees was 32.

One of the authors conducted interviews in Turkish, addressing the interpreter. The interpreter translated from Turkish to Farsi/Dari, and then translated the interviewee's responses from Farsi/Dari back to Turkish, using various (encrypted) digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Skype, and Zoom (based on the preferences of the interviewees, preferably with video). The authors informed the interviewees about the research aims at the beginning of each interview. We obtained interviewees' oral consent to record the audio of the interviews. The translators transcribed voice recordings in English. Atlas.Ti was used to conduct the analysis.

To minimize potential translation issues, the author organized meetings with interpreters before and after interviews, not only to brief them on the research objectives and ethical considerations but also to learn about their life experiences and perspectives on the research questions. The collaboration with interpreters, given their experience of displacement in Turkey, played a significant role in building trust. Following Edwards' (1998) suggestion, this approach essentially transformed each interpreter into a kind of "key informant" within the research process, although it's essential to clarify that the interpreters were not considered experts (Edwards, 1998).

To gain in-depth interview information, we asked interviewees to convey their narratives in chronological order (Rosenthal, 2004). The interviewees usually described their migration journey including the following elements: i) their everyday life in Afghanistan and their reasons for leaving the country, ii) their migration experience in Iran [if applicable], and iii) their current living conditions in Turkey and their future aspirations. To gain a deeper understanding of the role of the emotions experienced in each step of the migration journey, we asked the interviewees to explain how they felt at these moments.

Difficulties arose because most migrants had work schedules that usually lasted 10–12 hours a day, including weekends, so it was challenging to arrange the interviews. Second, arranging interviews using email, messages, and phone exchanges was time-consuming, and in such cases obtaining informed consent was more challenging than in face-to-face situations, leading to some potential interviewees dropping out.

The digital interviewing method had shortcomings and limitations. Firstly, it lacked the visual and contextual information typically available in face-to-face interviews, such as nonverbal cues and body language. Secondly, our reach was limited to individuals with access to the internet, a smartphone or computer, and social media accounts. Consequently, our sample may have biased towards more educated, literate, and affluent individuals, as well as those with online access. However, we opted for this method due to the challenges posed by conducting face-to-face interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened health risks. Despite these limitations, we were able to reach migrants residing in different cities where Afghan migrants were not densely concentrated.

Finally, we were able to interview Afghan migrants who successfully arrived in Turkey from Afghanistan. It is possible that some Afghans living in Iran chose to stay there because they could not envision alternatives in an uncertain future. Particularly, poorer Afghan individuals who could not afford smuggling fees may have experienced feelings of despair. For them, the near future may have seemed certain with minimal possibilities for change. Therefore, we emphasize that the scope of our research is limited to individuals who undertook the migration journey to Turkey.

Results: Afghan Migration Journeys – Hope and Despair

Investigating hope and despair together, we now describe our results in five steps: (1) The start of interviewees' journeys in Afghanistan. During this step, migrants typically need to move to the country's capital to find a smuggler. This is followed by (2), crossing the border into Iran. The next stage (3) is their stay in Iran, where life is often not as easy as they had expected. This leads to (4), the decision to cross the border into Turkey, which is accompanied by different emotions. At the time of the interviews, the interviewees had reached step (5): they have arrived in Turkey, where they often find themselves in despair. In Turkey, many migrants struggled to hold onto a glimmer of hope, anticipating change in the near future. However, their prospects and opportunities for the future were limited in Turkey, leading many to lose hope entirely.

Afghanistan: Hope for Change by Moving Onwards and Regaining Agency

Most of our interviewees escaped Afghanistan in either the first or second period of Taliban rule. Ethnic discrimination has been a rampant feature of the Taliban's periods in power, as the Taliban is predominantly Pashtun and other groups are seen as a threat to their power.³³ The Taliban regimes have been oppressive and violent. At the same time, during the other periods reviewed above, the central government was inefficient and ineffective. In regions under the control of the Taliban regime, stiff behavioural rules and harsh physical punishment are prevalent. Any suspicion of disloyalty can lead to threats and intimidation. Women are banned from employment and the public sphere, and girls are prohibited from enrolling in school. As our interviewees told us, even in regions not fully controlled by the Taliban regime, people may receive death threats from the regime.

The interviewees reported that the challenges encountered in Afghanistan significantly enhanced their sense of uncertainty. They conveyed that they felt their sole hope lay in escaping Afghanistan but that they were fully aware of the difficulties that would occur while crossing the border. Nevertheless, they held on to hope even against all odds (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Turner, 2020). Noor shared her lived experiences in Afghanistan, delineating how everyday life was challenging:

Everything in Afghanistan is based on ethnocentrism. There is racism there. We are Hazaras. Our place in Afghanistan is surrounded by the Pashtuns. Moreover, most of the Pashtun people were Talibs and Al-Qaeda. When we pass through their areas, they take everything from us. For example, they consumed food bought from the city. Sometimes, they burn them in front of their eyes. At night, they used to come and knock on our doors and tell us to join them in their fights because they did not have enough men to fight. Sometimes, they forced us to carry weapons and food to them in the mountains. If people do not meet the Taliban's demands, they mistreat and punish people harshly. They beat people. (Noor, Afghanistan, Female, 36)³⁴

³³ The country is home to various ethnic groups, with Pashtun constituting the largest segment at 42%, followed by Tajik (31%), Hazara (9%), Uzbek (9%), and Turkmen (3%). Additionally, numerous smaller minorities reside in isolated enclaves within the mountainous regions, further adding to the intricacies of the social fabric. Many of our interviewees originate from the Hazara minority in the northwest of the country, who are mostly Shi'ite, speak Dari, and have faced severe mistreatment and deprivation throughout Afghanistan's history.

³⁴ All names in the following quotes are pseudonyms given by the authors.

The challenges encountered by our interviewees in Afghanistan extended beyond the rule of the Taliban. The interviewees told us about living in a high-risk environment, including violence related to family and domestic issues, clan feuds, and kidnapping. They said that family feuds frequently led to death. Women in particular are vulnerable to domestic violence and face significant barriers to seeking help. The legal system is weak, and people lack the resources to initiate legal proceedings. Female interviewees said that they lacked protection from the state when exposed to domestic violence.

The potentialities for an uncertain future and the desire to regain agency motivated Afghan interviewees to leave their country. Despite their awareness of the slim possibilities and associated risks, the hope of attaining a "normal life" – one with access to education, employment, a secure home, and the ability to raise children without fear – prompted them to maintain hope and migrate from Afghanistan. Many interviewees expressed feeling constrained in their daily lives, with their livelihoods constantly under threat, and unable to meet their basic needs (Zinn, 2023). Despite moments of despair regarding their country and its future, they remained hopeful, viewing moving out of Afghanistan as a pathway to explore possibilities. Confronted with these structural constraints, individuals were willing to undertake significant risks to pursue their aspirations and reclaim agency.

From Afghanistan to Iran

According to the interviewees, the journey to leave Afghanistan usually starts with a trip to Kabul, the capital city, where migrants engage with smugglers. According to these accounts, payments usually occur after migrants reach Turkey. From Kabul, the smugglers transfer migrants to border cities in Iran and Pakistan by car or truck. The specific route taken may vary depending on the smuggler's choice or availability of routes, considering factors such as weather conditions, security checks, transportation options, and financial constraints.

Border crossings occur primarily in mountainous regions. When heading towards the southern border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, our respondents reported that the Chagai Hills or sometimes the Ras Koh Hills in Pakistan's Baluchistan Province are often traversed. After hours or days of trekking through the mountains, migrants cross the border between Pakistan and Iran, typically in the Zahedan Province of eastern Iran. This part of the journey is particularly dangerous as they must navigate the rule of the Taliban and evade detection by the Iranian authorities.

Iran: No Legal Status, Discrimination, and Fear of Deportation

When our interviewees arrived in Iran, they reported that they discovered that the situation was not as straightforward as they had expected. Without obtaining a visa in advance with an employer for a work permit, Afghan migrants cannot easily obtain legal status in Iran. Requesting asylum often results in rejection. Accessing the formal job market or essential services is difficult without proper documentation, and there are limited prospects for obtaining this documentation later on. Registered migrants holding blue cards also face limitations, with only provisional access to public services. Our interviewees revealed that additional payments are required to enrol children in school. Despite paying taxes, blue card holders receive little to no services in return. In addition, many employers exhibit discrimination against Afghan migrants and offer low wages and

exploitative working conditions. Hassan, an Afghan interviewee who previously lived in Iran, said: 'We could not do anything except work'.

These exploitative conditions create a sense of diminishing agency and reduce individuals' possibilities of reaching a desired future. The desired or imagined future at the beginning of the migration journey often fails in Iran. Therefore, many Afghans begin to feel they are unable to control their lives and consider all potential options. As Zinn (2023) suggested, individuals might consider taking higher risks under these conditions. Hassan's experiences in Iran exemplify the significant erosion of agency among Afghan migrants as they experience discrimination and the constant threat of deportation in this high-risk environment. Discrimination and fear of deportation contribute to profound challenges and the limited ability to control one's own life and destiny. Despite the fact that Hassan had lived in Iran since he was a six-month-old baby and spoke the language well, he never felt accepted; he was bullied and was even expelled from school:

They expelled me from school several times just because I was an Afghan. They called us *strangers*. However, they still cannot distinguish between *Afghani* and *Afghan* people. They call us by our currency. Because of these issues, I was not able to study. I used to work for a year and study the following year. I could not complete my university. (Hassan, Afghan, Male, 30)

Hassan experienced deep humiliation when he was referred to as 'Afghani' – the currency of Afghanistan – rather than simply as an 'Afghan'. The discrimination he faced impacted his life aspirations and provoked the desire to become a film director to show the world in a movie how Afghan migrants live. However, he realised that achieving his aspirations would be difficult in Iran, which led him to migrate to Turkey.

Hassan's decision to migrate to Turkey was also driven by his persistent fear that he would be deported from Iran. Despite possessing legal status, Hassan and his wife remained vulnerable to the constant risks of persecution and expulsion. This predicament is particularly dire for individuals, like Hassan, who have no prior experience of living in Afghanistan. The prospect of being repatriated to an unfamiliar country, where they would be devoid of any sense of belonging, increases their distress. Despite being aware of the challenges and difficulties associated with border crossings, Hassan maintained a sense of hope for his future.

The high-risk environment for Afghan migrants in Iran, characterised by insecurity and uncertainty, is further exacerbated by factors such as insecure legal status, the risk of deportation, and discrimination against migrants. Many of our interviewees expressed facing difficult times in Iran due to this uncertainty, particularly regarding their legal status. Despite these challenges and the possibility of moments of despair, they held onto hope. The uncertainty about the *future* presented them with possibilities. In a sense, hope served to transform the negative impact of uncertainty into a positive potentiality (Crapanzano, 2003; Turner, 2020). For families like Hassan's, the prospect of their children encountering discrimination in Iran became unbearable, prompting them to take risks in pursuit of a better future. Thus, motivated by the desire to *regain agency* and alleviate their current vulnerability, they chose to take the risk and attempt to cross the border into Turkey (Zinn, 2023).

Border crossing to Turkey

The dangers along the migration route from Iran to Turkey are enormous, including the risk of falling in the snow-capped mountains, drowning in rivers, suffering hypothermia, or encountering violence by authorities or smugglers. Our interviewees usually reported that they travelled via Tehran, where they negotiated with smugglers who could facilitate their passage. Once arrangements were made, they travelled to Iranian border cities, such as Maku, Khoy, and Urmiya, and from there they crossed the border through the mountains into the eastern Turkish city of Dogubeyazit, or they crossed Lake Van by boat. The interviewees described the challenges they faced, such as waiting, hiding, and surviving in the mountains without access to food or water. Even after they managed to cross the border, some said that they then returned to Iran, whereupon it was necessary to start the journey again. As described by the interviewees, the border crossing experience is full of danger and uncertainty.

Some interviewees reported that they witnessed deals being struck between smugglers and border police, and that they were subjected to violence. According to the interviewees, smugglers and border police may work together through bribery. According to Farman, in certain situations, smugglers intentionally allow a specific number of migrants to be apprehended by the police, to create the appearance that the police are stopping migrants:

The smugglers make agreements with the border police. For example, if the smugglers attempt to transport 40 individuals across the border, they deliberately take 50 people. Then, the smugglers allow 10 migrants to be caught by the police, which enables the collaborating police officers to demonstrate to the government that they have made arrests. (Farman, Male, 21)

Upon arrival, migrants are taken to 'safe houses' organised by smugglers, where they are accommodated alongside other migrants from Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These safe houses are typically overcrowded. The smugglers demand money transfers and those who fail to make the payments may be held captive for weeks, during which they are subjected to inhumane treatment. Conversely, migrants who can fulfil the smugglers' monetary demands are released, allowing them to continue their journey into Turkey.

Even those who reported being able to continue their journey said their border crossing experience was profoundly traumatic. Despite the immense hardships and dangers, they encounter along the way, migrants take these risks because staying in their home countries means being trapped in a perpetual state of suffering. Staying in their home country was likened by the interviewees to a 'dead end', where they would be subjected to constant hardship. This sentiment was captured in the words of Mahnaz, who equated staying in Iran with 'dying every day', symbolising the insecurity that pervaded her daily life there:

There was a constant threat in Iran. In other words, my life was in danger. The journey was dangerous for just one night or day. Only the area where we had to cross the border was dangerous, and everything could happen. For example, we could be shot by the police, or we could be arrested and sent back. We knew that if we risked putting our lives in danger for only one night, our lives would be better after that. Once we reached Turkey, we would get help from the UN and other organisations. So, if we were to stay there, there would be a constant danger every moment, but the journey had short-term risks and dangers. (Mahnaz, Female, 31)

Mahnaz, like many others, expressed her inability to exist and thrive in Iran or Afghanistan. She believed that migrating to another country would allow her to reclaim her identity as a woman with aspirations regarding personal growth. In her quest to regain agency amidst uncertainty, she embarked on a migration journey, recognising that while it entailed short-term risks and dangers, hope was a factor in managing those risks. She held on to the hope that upon reaching Turkey she would receive assistance from the UN and other organisations. Conversely, she said that to have stayed in her home country would have exposed her to constant danger and despair.

Paradoxically, migrants' most traumatic experiences become a source of hope in regard to attaining a 'normal life' that is devoid of the perpetual fear they experienced in their country of origin. This narrative highlights the uncertainty inherent in hope. While migrants like Mahnaz aspire to cross borders, they simultaneously choose uncertainty over unbearable certainty in their current place of residence. The migration journey is full of risks, yet it offers a future with potentialities, confirming that hope can be fueled against all odds, regardless of the hardships in the present (Webb 2007; Turner 2020; Schulz and Zinn 2023).

Here, a dilemma expressed by many migrants becomes apparent. The border crossing experience proved immensely challenging for most individuals, with moments where they struggled to find the resolve to continue their journey. Yet, many voiced that remaining in Afghanistan or Iran would mean resigning themselves to a lifetime of suffering, feeling a lack of control over their own lives (Zinn 2023). Despite the manifold risks involved, crossing the border emerges as a preferable option, as it offers the prospect of a life where they do not have to endure daily suffering. Their emotions, marked by hope and despair, fluctuated throughout the border crossing journey. However, many held onto hope as a means to manage and overcome the risks along the way and reclaim their agency.

Turkey: Feeling Stuck in a Whirlpool and Feeling Despair

Upon successfully crossing the border into Turkey, the next step differed for each interviewee. While some people strove to reach the cities where their families and relatives lived, those without any social networks travelled to cities to which they were directed by the police. Our interviewees often reported that they found almost all their financial resources depleted, having expended them on smugglers who facilitated their passage. For migrants who lack financial means and/or social networks, their initial days in Turkey are precarious. They find themselves in parks or on the streets, relying on the kindness of strangers to help them secure accommodation and employment. Despite the circumstances, they persevere, having survived the journey thus far. During this period, they only hold on to a glimmer hope, as their near future is not filled with alternatives and potentialities.

Hage's (2003) definition of hopefulness is reflected in the narratives of the interviewees just after crossing the border: at this point, they are open to what the future will bring, even if they do not know for sure what it will bring. Despite this hopefulness after border crossing, over time, their hope gives way to despair as they begin to feel trapped in a future devoid of potentialities. We demonstrate that this fluctuation of hope and despair is primarily caused by the structural constraints they face, as many migrants in Turkey struggle to meet their basic needs. Four significant factors emerge as major challenges in Turkey: (1) the limited possibility of obtaining legal status, (2) harsh living conditions, (3) the prevailing sense that there is no alternative but to attempt to cross the border once again, and (4) discrimination. The discrepancy between the

possibilities they had expected, and what is likely to be possible, expands, leading to the erosion of hope. The signs of despair become apparent.

1) Legal status

After finding a first place to stay, the big dilemma for migrants in Turkey is whether or not to apply for *international protection status*. Remaining unregistered exposes migrants to illegality and the risk of deportation, while registering carries the potential that they will be rejected, deported, or have limited agency in selecting their place of residence in Turkey.

Eligibility for international protection is determined on a case-by-case basis, considering factors such as the individual's experiences, past political activities, and the level of threat they have encountered. In 2018, UNCHR stopped receiving asylum applications from Afghans in Turkey and the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) took over the refugee status determination process. The handover of registration was accompanied by the systematisation of a non-transparent and slow refugee status determination process (Karadağ & Sert, 2023). This registration process leaves many Afghan migrants in Turkey without hope, as Mahnaz described:

I think everything has become so much harder after the takeover of responsibilities by the Turkish government to process the refugee applications and resettling them in a third country. Most refugees now have almost no hope. No one knows what will happen tomorrow. (Mahnaz, Female, 31)

Those Afghans who have obtained international protection status may lose hope over time due to the highly limited and selective process for resettlement to third countries. Afghan migrants with international protection status often endure years of waiting without any assurance of being resettled in a third country. Thus, what Mahnaz is conveying here is that migrants lack hope because there are only a few alternatives for the future. Many of our interviewees are almost certain that their situation in Turkey will not improve anytime soon and the probabilities for third country resettlement is very low. Consequently, they find themselves with only one option: to wait, knowing that their situation will not improve in the near future. This relative certainty about the future makes many feel despair. Their protracted situation is similar to that of refugees who live in the UNHCR camps in Africa: they live on the moment, just hoping that they get out one day in the future (Loescher, Milner, & Newman, 2008).

Among our interviewees, a few were born in Iran, their parents having moved there from Afghanistan. These individuals faced even more limited prospects of receiving asylum status in Turkey, as Iran is considered a safe country. As Parveen expressed, their only option is to misrepresent their migration journey during the asylum interviews: 'We are compelled to state that we originated from Afghanistan. What other choice do we have? Do we have to lie about it?' (Parveen, Female, 21).

Many Afghans opt to bypass the asylum application process in Turkey entirely and remain unregistered. One reason for this is that if a person registers, the authorities compel them to reside in designated satellite cities. They are not granted the autonomy to select the city where they will live and work. The lack of autonomy in selecting the city becomes particularly problematic as employment opportunities are disproportionately concentrated in industrial cities such as Istanbul.

The ambiguity surrounding their legal status in Turkey further amplifies these migrants' stress and uncertainty. They live with persistent anxiety, due to fear of being apprehended and deported.

Even migrants with international protection status live in a state of anxiety, as they must endure a waiting period before being resettled in a third country. The potentialities of the future evaporates into an endless wait, and their near future is certain almost with no alternatives (Crapanzano, 2003; Turner, 2020). They are compelled to hide their identity throughout this waiting period, to avoid discrimination and prejudice. The lack of internal mobility further exacerbates their feeling of being trapped. Many migrants expressed a profound sense of despair, feeling that they were stuck in Turkey, without the ability either to progress or go back, due to the fear of crossing borders again; indeed, returning home was often impossible for them. Now, they see less or almost no alternatives in the near future, the odds of them moving onwards is very low, and they feel they have no control over their lives which restricts their agency. At this stage, we observe that despair is bound to occur.

2) Dire living conditions, housing, and employment

Many interviewees had ended up in dire living conditions, including living in overcrowded housing, experiencing poverty, being unemployed, being subject to abusive work environments, having restricted access to healthcare, and facing discrimination. Regardless of their legal status, most interviewees were forced to work odd jobs in Turkey. Obtaining employment was not sufficient to end poverty for most. They worked in precarious jobs in the construction or textile sectors, and often struggled to make ends meet, despite working up to 12 hours a day. Moreover, many interviewees reported being exploited by their employers, who withheld their wages or paid less than promised. Rabi stated:

There is no ideal working place for us [Afghans] here, and there will never be... because, here, the employers know us as 'yabancı' [foreigners]. Employers hire us because we are foreigners; we are paid less and have no rights. That is how they look at us. (Rabi, Male, 39)

These conditions make them susceptible to feelings of despair. They find themselves unable to overcome these structural barriers or find alternative avenues to improve their living conditions. For instance, due to fear of losing their jobs, many interviewees reported that they remained silent in the face of discrimination, low pay, and unfair working conditions. Working in such jobs can be even more challenging for individuals with health problems. For instance, Abdullah, who suffered from a herniated disc, was employed as a cleaner and had to carry heavy objects, exacerbating his health issues. On top of that, the COVID-19 pandemic also left many Afghans unemployed, exacerbating existing economic inequalities.

3) Accessing healthcare, education, and social services

Migrants who have no papers must pay for health services on the spot and have no right to education or social services. However, even those under international protection face provisional and restricted access to these services. While they have the legal right to access free healthcare, their access can be limited, and the insurance system can be unpredictable (Karadağ & Üstübeci, 2021). Health insurance is suspended one year after registration with the authorities, whereupon people are forced to pay for medical treatment from their own pockets. If they do not have

sufficient financial resources, they must wait until their health insurance card is reactivated. This inaccessibility of healthcare adds to the precarious nature of migrants' migration journeys.

The precariousness of their access to healthcare services further triggers migrants' despair. Given that many of these migrants may not have had proper access to healthcare in Iran and Afghanistan, chronic illnesses or diseases may have remained untreated for years. Zahra described her 12-year-old daughter's struggles with renal impairment and her desire to die rather than continue to suffer:

My child undergoes dialysis for seven years. When we were in Iran, we were more hopeful because we spoke the same language as people in the hospital. Since we came here, my daughter kept telling me, 'Mom, I do not want to live at all. Why am I still alive?' (Zahra, Female, 44)

The challenges in accessing medical care reinforce individuals' belief that their living standards will not improve in the near future. Consequently, this sense of relative certainty about the future, coupled with the lack of alternative possibilities, contributes to feelings of despair. This despair disrupts the flow of everyday life and undermines aspirations.

4) Discrimination

Many interviewees reported that they had initially felt welcomed within the social fabric of Turkish villages and towns. However, they noted that this welcoming attitude had diminished, and had become more and more contingent on their ability to remain invisible within society. They reported that while living on the margins may shield them from discrimination, it also serves as a way to deal with the risk of deportation.

During the presidential elections campaign in 2023, notable political figures and media outlets voiced negative sentiments toward Syrians and Afghans. The prevailing sentiment among the general public, exacerbated by the economic downturn, high inflation, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake, is that Turkey is overwhelmed by the influx of refugees. This sentiment, combined with the exploitative practices within the housing and labour markets, directly exposes Afghan migrants to discrimination. Even before recent developments, Afghan migrants in Turkey frequently reported violence, physical and psychological abuse, and labour exploitation. These factors further compound the complexity of their already challenging circumstances.

Stuck in a Whirlpool: The Future with Almost No Alternatives

After experiencing the above challenges in Turkey -limited legal documentation, fears of deportation, harsh living and working conditions, inadequate access to services, and discriminatory treatment- many of our interviewees feel trapped in a vicious cycle. Despite overcoming the challenges faced in Afghanistan, Iran, and en route to Turkey, moments of despair were often overshadowed by hope. The oscillation between hope and despair was predominantly influenced by hope, fueled by the potential alternatives in the uncertain future and individuals'

ability to take high risks to regain their agency. However, in Turkey, despair often preceded and perpetuated a sense of circularity for many of our interviewees.

Due to these challenges in Turkey, many Afghans contemplate onward migration and crossing yet another border to reach Europe. The lack of viable alternatives left our interviewees trapped in what they perceived to be a situation of despair. For them, the fear of embarking on another journey to reach EU countries had intensified significantly, mainly due to the immense suffering they had experienced during their previous journeys.

The option to move on to Europe was not deemed attractive by our interviewees, not only because taking a rubber boat to Greece or crossing by land into Bulgaria is extremely dangerous, but also because they had received information about the situation in the Greek hotspots and of human rights abuses by border guards. Life-threatening experiences while crossing the border between Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey had profoundly impacted their lives, and they continued to carry this trauma. Health issues, a lack of financial resources, and the physical challenge of crossing borders were perceived as even more difficult for interviewees with children. Nevertheless, their living conditions in Turkey were highly challenging, and their future was unknown.

As captured by Muhammad, coping with the many challenges in each stage of the migration journey is like navigating a *whirlpool* (*gerdap*). He highlighted the mental and emotional strains caused by the constant unpredictability of the future that migrants face. This description makes tangible the sense of despair these people feel. Muhammed aptly described their predicament as like being trapped within a whirlpool, unsure if they will ever escape its grasp. The uncertainty of his life in Turkey bred a circular despair, leaving Muhammad to question how to move forward:

From one side, there is the mental pressure of not knowing what will happen. On the other side, there is a lack of determination we are in. I feel like we are in a whirlpool that pulls us down. I do not know whether we will get out of it. However, it is difficult to survive under these conditions. I do not know how to continue. (Muhammad, Male, 24)

Muhammad's statement encapsulates the collective sentiment of the Afghan migrants we interviewed, shining a light on the complicated nature of their existence in Turkey. The phrase 'not knowing what will happen' underscores the constant struggle against the unknown, enduring a sense of indeterminacy. They were suspended in limbo, caught between their past and future. This prevailing ambiguity weighed heavily on our interviewees' minds, leaving them feeling helpless, as if a whirlpool was relentlessly dragging them down.

On the other hand, paradoxically, many Afghan migrants find themselves trapped in a sense of certainty about the near future: they are ensnared in a whirlpool, unable to move to the EU due to structural factors such as border policies or the financial barriers of smuggling, and returning to Afghanistan or Iran is not feasible. This paradoxical situation is supported by evidence from Turner (2015), suggesting that the perceived security in refugee camps made Burundian refugees' lives predictable and deprived them of the ability to hope for a better future.

Similarly, Afghan migrants in Turkey also anticipate that the situation will remain unchanged. While some still cling to a glimmer of hope for change in the near future, the likelihood is so slim that many have lost hope entirely. Conditions fluctuate, leading to moments of hope followed by

despair. Despite their efforts to break free from the whirlpool described by Muhammad, Afghan migrants find themselves trapped in the same challenges day after day. This is why the transformation of hope into despair is most pronounced in Turkey. Although it was not the final destination for many migrants, they had the option to move to EU countries. However, with the impact of COVID-19 measures and the escalating political tensions surrounding the refugee stigma in Turkey, feelings of despair have outweighed hope.

Conclusion

This paper has described the challenges faced by Afghan migrants throughout their journey to Turkey and posed the question: *How do fluctuations between hope and despair influence how individuals deal with risks during migration journeys?*

Our primary conclusion is that hope transforms into despair along migration journeys depending on three conditions influencing risk management strategies. Hope arises when there is uncertainty about the future, offering individuals alternative possibilities and providing room for reclaiming agency even when the odds of achieving one's goals is low. Conversely, despair sets in when individuals perceive that their near future holds few or no alternatives, thereby limiting their control over their lives, or agency. We observe that as these migrants anticipate fewer alternatives for their future in Turkey, their feeling of being trapped in what Muhammed described as a 'whirlpool' intensifies.

Second, we align with other scholars' working on hope, showing that hope serves as a means of dealing with risks (Hayenhjelm, 2006; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Schulz & Zinn, 2023). We also add that migrants often take greater risks driven by hope to reclaim their agency. However, this observation does not imply that individuals lack the capacity to act or agency when they experience despair or hopelessness. Despite feeling ensnared in a whirlpool of hope and despair and diminished agency, our interviewees exhibited remarkable resilience and perseverance in confronting challenges in their everyday lives, confirming earlier research on Afghan migration journeys (Kaytaz, 2016). Even while feeling trapped, they endured continuing challenges, such as lack of legal status, lack of income, housing and health care while facing discrimination and prejudice. Hence, our analysis indicates that while despair may constrain agency, it does not render individuals devoid of agency.

Our findings complement earlier research conducted with Afghan migrants in Turkey, which has also highlighted their aspirations and challenging living conditions (Buz, Memişoğlu, Dönmez, & Verduijn, 2020; İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018; Karadağ, 2021; Karadağ & Sert, 2023; Kuschminder, 2018). Afghan migration motives are highly influenced by economic deprivation and exploitative labor conditions, leading to despair in Turkey, as previous studies have also demonstrated (Jurat, 2022). However, these studies did not explore the effects of emotions such as hope and despair in managing risks along migration journeys. They also did not explain how hope facilitated during migration journeys. Our research highlights the role of hope in navigating risks and reclaiming diminished agency in Afghan migration journeys. This aspect of agency in our research aligns with Amartya Sen's work on freedom, arguing that in situations of limited

freedom or capability to act, individuals will seek to regain their agency, even if it requires making extreme decisions (Amartya Sen, 1999).

Our findings contribute to the scientific literature on risk-taking strategies and hope in migration journeys in two main ways. First, our findings align with Zinn's (2020) work on risk management strategies and show that individuals respond to vulnerability by taking high risks fueled by feelings of hope. Our analysis provides a deeper understanding of Zinn's (2020) general argument regarding the non-rational management strategies (i.e., hope and faith), by showing precisely how hope and despair fluctuate. While Zinn employs the term "risk management," we emphasize that dealing with risks is not necessarily a deliberate or instrumental strategy; it can be spontaneous and serve as a coping mechanism when confronted with a difficult situation. Our analysis provides further evidence for the argument that hope assists individuals in protecting or regaining their limited agency by taking higher risks (Schulz & Zinn, 2023). However, based on insights from our interviewees, we add another layer to this argument. Even in the absence of hope, individuals can still resist and persist through challenges in their everyday lives while experiencing despair. As a result, we argue that this fluctuation between hope and despair, despite the whirlpool effect, helps migrants navigate their future and manage risks accordingly.

Second, we contribute to the literature on hope in migration journeys. Our findings resonate with Turner's (2020) examination of the changing experiences of hope, anxiety, and despair among Burundian refugees. Burundian refugees in Turner's (2020) research find themselves in prolonged waiting, devoid of any prospects, merely hoping for better times. This situation mirrors the lives of Afghan migrants in Turkey, who are increasingly faced with a certain lack of opportunities in the near future, evoking a sense of being caught in a whirlpool. On the other hand, we also observed that Afghan migrants in Turkey aspire to reclaim their agency, either by attempting to improve their situation in Turkey or by making another high-risk migration decision, such as moving onward to Europe. This finding also aligns with Amartya Sen's work on freedom, suggesting that in situations of limited freedom or constrained capability to act, individuals will seek to reclaim their agency, even if it requires extreme decisions (Amartya Sen, 1999). Therefore, as the analysis has revealed, the role of the agency component in our model is exceedingly significant.

The social relevance of this study lies in its provision of insights for migration governance. Our findings demonstrate that governance strategies aimed at deterring refugees by making their lives almost impossible are ineffective. First, because life in Afghanistan is the most dangerous prospect for them, returning to their country of origin is not a viable option for many. Second, even in conditions of extreme vulnerability, individuals will still strive to regain agency to maintain themselves. They will seek any physical or financial option, find other routes via other countries, and undertake tremendous risks, as they are forced to find alternatives. Therefore, we highlight that prioritising the provision of basic rights to migrants in their current place of residence offers a more ethical and humanitarian approach. This insight should be heeded by policymakers seeking to strategically allocate their resources.

Finally, our study has a few limitations that call for further research. First, our analysis reflects a specific snapshot of the situation of Afghan migrants at a highly precarious moment during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This was a situation of compounding crises (Kuschminder & Rajabzadeh, 2022). COVID-19 precautions added another layer to the feeling of despair in

Turkey, as migrants were disproportionately affected compared to locals (Elçi et al., 2021). However, the post-COVID-19 situation has not mitigated the vulnerability and uncertainty of Afghan migrants' journeys, because of the increasing anti-immigrant discourse in the media and in public deliberations. Second, our observations and evidence are insufficient to show the effect of despair on the decision around the next stage of the migration journey. We were only able to interview Afghan migrants who were currently residing in Turkey. To explore the effects of hope and despair on Afghan migrants' management of risks, further research should be conducted on migrants who have moved to EU countries or the US.



Chapter 8:

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I embarked on a journey to answer the central research question: How does migrants' risk-taking influence their migration aspirations? This exploration began with an observation during the so-called 'refugee crisis' at the EU borders: migrants were often depicted as irresponsible individuals, ignorant of the risks in their migration journeys, putting themselves and their families' lives in danger. This portrayal was misleading because it viewed migrants as the sole responsible party for taking these risks. However, there is a paradox at play here, namely that while migrants are seen as responsible and capable of making decisions to take risks, they are not given the same agency by the media outlets and politicians in assessing and managing these risks. This contradiction highlights the complexity of the issue and emphasizes the importance of understanding migrants' perspectives and decision-making processes in a more nuanced way.

The novelty of this research lies in its primary finding that risk-taking is not a sign of ignorance or irresponsibility, but a responsible and reasonable action rooted in migrants' search for regaining agency. Through interviews and surveys with migrants, I explored the diverse rationales that migrants employ in shaping their aspirations. The narratives of risk-taking and migration aspirations reveal a narrative that is very different from the simple picture often portraying migrants as irresponsible and ignorant actors. Regardless of the policies implemented, the risks faced during migration are contingent on how migrants perceive and understand them. The way migrants interpret these risks and imagine their future plays a critical role in shaping their migration experiences.

One of the most significant contributions of this dissertation lies in its methodological innovation. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, I transcend the boundaries of different disciplines, paving the way for a more comprehensive understanding of migration dynamics. From the emic exploration of risk-taking attitudes to the experimental validation of causal links, each methodological approach enriches the analysis, leading to a nuanced portrayal of the influence of risk on migration aspirations in all their complexity.

The findings of this dissertation have profound, albeit indirect, implications for both academia and policymaking. By illuminating the subjective and objective dimensions of risk-taking and their relation to migration aspirations, the findings of this dissertation challenge the border externalization policies aiming to stop migration to the EU, partly by improving migrants' well-being in their current country of residence. It advocates for an ideological shift away from externalization measures toward policies that highlight migrants' resilience and acknowledge their capacity to act.

I begin this chapter by summarizing the findings of each empirical chapter while highlighting their connections. Then, I explain the theoretical implications that emerge from this dissertation, revisiting the literature on migration aspirations and risk to underscore the contributions of this research. Following that, I discuss the societal and political implications of the findings. The final section concludes by acknowledging the dissertation's limitations and suggesting areas for future research.

Empirical Findings and Connection

I will now provide a concise summary of the findings in each empirical chapter. First, in Chapter 4, I focused on migrants' risk-taking as an individual-level factor shaping migration aspirations. Through an emic approach, I explored three key dimensions in risk-taking during migration journeys: (1) the sense of being compelled (*majbour*) to take risks as a means of expressing agency, (2) the oscillation between the dangers of migration journeys and the everyday risks of living, and (3) a predominant fear of identity erosion in European countries outweighing the everyday risks of living. The findings highlighted the divergent reasoning of migrants in taking risks in their journeys.

To validate these findings with a more comprehensive sample, potentially representative of the migration population in Turkey, I conducted a follow-up study. In Chapter 5, I explored different domains of risk-taking, considering both objective and subjective factors, while controlling for various variables shaping aspirations. The findings revealed that individuals with greater subjective risk-taking attitudes are more likely to aspire to move onwards. Moreover, objective risk-taking attitude (based on economic cost-benefit analysis) did not significantly impact migration aspirations, supporting the findings of Chapter 4. However, Chapters 4 and 5 did not extensively consider structural-level factors in migration aspirations. Therefore, I have decided to incorporate structural factors to ensure that individual-level factors remain significant.

To further validate these findings and overcome the limitations associated with observational data, and to establish causality between variables, I opted for an experimental approach. In Chapter 6, I designed an experiment not only to explore risk but also to investigate structural-level determinants of migration aspirations, such as border externalization policies and employment opportunities. The results suggest that employment opportunities are perceived as making it preferable to stay in the current country, even in situations where border conditions mean it is relatively safe to move onwards. More importantly, the results in the experimental setting confirm earlier findings in Chapters 4 and 5 showing that migrants with a higher inclination for risk-taking are more likely to consider moving onward.

After examining risk-taking across different domains and establishing causal links between variables, I turned to explore factors influencing individuals' risk management strategies. While previous chapters focused on explaining migration aspirations through risk-taking, I recognized that other intervening factors may also play a role in migration journeys. Thus, in Chapter 7, instead of directly addressing who aspires to move onward, my aim was to investigate the role of hope and despair as subjective risk-management strategies. The findings indicate that hope serves as a strategic tool for navigating risks, while despair arises when individuals perceive their near future as certain. This finding underscores the importance of considering hope and despair as significant factors affecting risk management in migration journeys.

The next section describes the contributions that I have aimed to make to studies on migration aspirations and decision-making.

Theoretical Implications: Insights into Migration Aspirations and Risk

In this dissertation, I aimed to contribute to two theoretical epistemologies. The first pertains to migration aspirations, a concept developed by various authors (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018; De Haas, 2003, 2021). The second is to provide significant

insights into risk-taking and risk perceptions, specifically to studies on risk-taking under vulnerable conditions (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Zinn, 2008a, 2023).

Throughout this dissertation, I employed the aspiration–capabilities framework to comprehend migration aspirations. This approach enabled me to incorporate various explanatory variables to understand who aspires to move and stay. By integrating structural and individual-level factors and categorizing different forms of mobility, this framework offers a valuable tool for understanding how migrants shape their aspirations (De Haas, 2003, 2021; Schewel, 2020). In this section, I revisit the key themes addressed in this dissertation and how these themes and concepts contribute to understanding migration aspirations and risk.

First, I included different measurements and descriptions of risk into migration aspirations and explained why it is important to conceptualize risk more thoroughly. A recent study by Carling et al. (2023) explores the root causes and determinants of migration aspirations from a multi-level approach across 25 research areas. While Carling et al. (2023) rightly emphasize the need for comprehensive analysis, the operationalization and measurement of risk in existing research often use overlapping terms like risks, uncertainty, and dangers. This can obscure the diverse meanings and nuances associated with risks. Aiming to address this gap, my research proposes a more differentiated approach to measuring risk, considering its various meanings and how these influence migration aspirations. Building on the multi-level approach of Carling et al. (2023), which explored a broad range of determinants of migration aspirations, this research delves deeper into the specific concept of risk.

Second, this dissertation aimed to contribute to the literature by considering the multidimensionality of migration aspirations. While the aspiration–capabilities framework often treats aspirations to stay and move as mutually exclusive, evidence by Müller-Funk et al. (2023) shows that individuals may simultaneously aspire to move for better opportunities while aspiring to stay to be close to their families and familiar cultural and social environments. Building upon this perspective, I show that the aspiration to move is also not monolithic. By distinguishing between aspirations to move onwards "at all costs" and "only with documents" in Chapter 4, the analysis moved beyond a simplistic model that categorizes movements into either move or stay. Existing literature, with its predominant focus on border crossings, often prioritizes clandestine journeys, overlooking other forms of migration aspirations. I argue that motivations to move onwards from Turkey, even in the face of bureaucratic challenges in obtaining documents, offer an additional analytical perspective for studying migration aspirations. This perspective acknowledges that migrants may aspire to move with documents or choose to remain in their current location, rather than exclusively opting for clandestine journeys.

Third, I utilized Zinn's risk management strategies (Schulz & Zinn, 2023; Zinn, 2016). Non-rational³⁵ and in-between strategies, as outlined by Zinn (2016), effectively depict migrants' decision-making processes in highly vulnerable circumstances. The findings of this dissertation show that risk-taking, based on individual reasoning, cannot be comprehensively analyzed within the confines of rational decision-making norms. Risk-taking in the forced migration context is not based on cost-benefit analysis. Migrants undertake significant risks, whether by crossing the border from Turkey to EU countries or by remaining in Turkey without adequate protection. Risk-taking in vulnerable conditions allows migrants to enhance their capacity to act, or agency, as discussed in Chapter 7. Thus, I illustrated the connection between the aspiration–capabilities framework and risk-taking as a means of reclaiming limited agency. By applying Zinn's (2016) risk-taking concept to De Haas' (2021) capabilities concept, I showed that risk-taking serves as a way to increase one's capabilities. Although individual factors were incorporated into the

³⁵ Non-rational can be defined as not being within the domain of what can be understood or analyzed by rationality, outside the competence of the rules of rational choice. For more information about Zinn's categorizations (2016), see Chapters 2 and 7.

aspiration–capabilities framework, the aspect of risk was not explicitly explored and analyzed in the existing aspirations literature.

Fourth, in this dissertation, I also focused on one of the intangible factors determining migration aspirations, namely hope, as a risk-management strategy. Recent studies on migration aspirations have emphasized the need to measure intangible psychological factors influencing migration aspirations (Feyissa Dori, Hagen-Zanker, & Mazzilli, 2024; Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, et al., 2023; Müller-Funk et al., 2023). For example, a study conducted in Syria and Libya by Müller-Funk (2023) demonstrated that direct exposure to violence not only impacts aspirations but also how individuals respond to violence—either by avoiding it due to fear or by countering it with hope. Similarly, Vezzoli (2023) examined stay aspirations in a small town in Brazil and found that non-economic factors such as proximity to nature, family, and friends contribute to a sense of fulfillment and promote the aspiration to stay. In this dissertation, by focusing on the role of hope and despair in migration journeys, I showed how hope helps migrants reclaim their limited agency and overcome the vulnerability in their present circumstances, despite facing numerous barriers and constraints in their journeys.

Finally, in addition to these conceptual contributions, the research methodology represents an innovative approach in the context of migration aspirations. As Castles (2012) argues, employing multiple or mixed methods enhances the comprehensiveness and depth of research, providing richer insights. Moreover, experimental studies have been relatively underexplored in investigating migration aspirations within forced displacement contexts, with a few exceptions (Hager, 2021). This study addresses such gaps by utilizing an experimental setting to establish a causal link between structural and individual factors and migration aspirations, while also offering a nuanced perspective on measuring risk through different methodologies, which also connects each empirical chapter.

Overall, this dissertation seeks to advance the current understanding of migration aspirations by focusing on secondary migration in forced displacement contexts and offering a nuanced perspective on risk utilizing a mixed-method approach. The next section presents the practical implications for informing EU migration policymaking and addressing the needs and challenges faced by migrants in countries like Turkey.

Societal and Policy Implications: Are border policies effective? Do open borders motivate onward migration? Are information campaigns effective in stopping migration?

The evidence presented in this dissertation offers insights into multiple policy implications within the context of migration and borders. While my primary objective was not to explore whether open borders motivate onward migration, the findings of my research provide valuable insights for policymakers. Specifically, the focus on subjective risk-taking attitudes in crossing securitized borders prompts questions about the effectiveness of structural factors in migration aspirations, such as border policies. In this section, I summarize three policy implications related to: i) border policies, ii) information campaigns, and iii) living conditions in secondary migration contexts.

First, the findings of this calls into question the general applicability of border externalization policies to all migrants living under similar conditions. Previous studies explored the effectiveness of border externalization or open borders (Dávila et al., 2002; Gathmann, 2008; Douglas S Massey et al., 2016). However, this previous research was limited to understanding migration aspirations between origin and destination countries. By focusing on the secondary migration context, the findings of this dissertation revealed the significant influence of subjective

risk-taking attitudes on onward migration aspirations. This finding challenges the assumption that border closures effectively deter all migrants, confirming the findings of previous research (Dávila, Pagán, & Soydemir, 2002; Gathmann, 2008; Massey et al., 2016). Both Chapters 5 and 6 provided significant evidence for this policy implication. In Chapter 5, risk-taking attitudes remained significant even after controlling for other structural variables. On the other hand, in Chapter 6, hypothetical vignettes showed that even when the borders are open to passage to EU countries, employed migrants would aspire to stay in their place of residence. Further exploration in this area would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migration aspirations and capabilities.

Secondly, the findings of this study also hold implications for the effectiveness of information campaigns (Geiger & Pécout, 2010; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2023; Trauner, Brekke, Adam, Cham & Thorbjørnsrud, 2024). Evidence showed that migrants do not shape their aspirations solely relying on the increasing dangers along the migration route. This is exemplified by migrants like Ali in Chapter 4, who aspires to move onwards from Turkey despite the presence of dangers at the borders. These dangers are akin to wearing a jacket during winter—they represent risks that must be taken (*majbour*). Thus, I argue that information campaigns highlighting the risks of the journey may not deter all migrants. Those who are more inclined to take risks and fully understand the potential consequences of their migration decisions will continue to aspire to move onwards, regardless of such campaigns. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, it is also important to recognize that not all migrants perceive the dangers of the journey and their current living conditions in the same way. Therefore, information campaigns may not effectively deter every migrant from moving onward. Although the scope of my research is limited to one country, research conducted by Carling et al. (2023) supports my claim that information campaigns may not be as effective as policymakers assume, based on their research with 25 different research areas.

Thirdly, the findings demonstrate that migration governance strategies aimed at deterring migrants by making their living conditions below satisfactory levels may have limited effectiveness. Both Chapters 4 and 7 showed that most migrants continue to live in Turkey instead of returning to their country of origin, despite facing immense difficulties in meeting their basic needs. For instance, Chapter 7 showed that because life in Afghanistan is the most dangerous prospect for most migrants, returning to their country of origin is not even an option. Moreover, the findings in Chapter 6 highlighted the effect of employment opportunities in forming migration aspirations. Hypothetically, when a migrant is employed in their current place of residence, their likelihood of moving onwards decreases significantly. This pattern persists even when the borders are open for passage, and the EU countries are welcoming. Therefore, many times throughout this research, I have highlighted that prioritizing the provision of basic rights to migrants in their current place of residence offers a more ethical and humanitarian approach.

Nevertheless, this last policy implication should be approached with caution. In their recent research, Vezzoli, Hilhorst, Meyer, and Rijpma (2023) rightly discuss criticisms of 'protection in the region' programs. They argue that these programs suffer from implementation shortcomings and a lack of emphasis on responsibility sharing (Vezzoli et al., 2023). In a similar vein, the evidence from our AdMiGov project's report shows that development interventions such as providing social aid assistance in cash do not induce aspirations to stay in Turkey (Üstübici et al., 2021). Further evidence from Lebanon supports this claim by showing that assistance received does not mitigate aspirations to leave (Kuschminder & Rajabzadeh, 2022). However, evidence from Mali reveals that receiving assistance significantly affects migration aspirations (Claes, Schmauder, & Molenaar, 2021). In this regard, I echo Vezzoli et al. (2023) in their cautiousness about making claims regarding 'protection in the region' programs. I remind readers that these policy recommendations require more evidence and further research from different country contexts.

In conclusion, this dissertation's examination of migration aspirations reveals nuanced insights with direct implications for border policymaking. These findings emphasize the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to border and migration policies that considers the interplay between risk perceptions, structural factors, and individual considerations in migration aspirations.

Limitations and avenues for future research

The dissertation is subject to several limitations based on the data collection methods, the measurement of risk-taking attitudes in migration journeys, and the fieldwork site. These limitations have significant implications for the representativeness and validity of the data. In this section, I explain these limitations and outline what strategies I employed to mitigate them as much as possible. Toward the end of the section, I discuss how the findings of this dissertation can provide insights into the future of migration and risk research.

First, the selected fieldwork site posed several limitations in achieving a comprehensive understanding of migrants' journeys. I conducted interviews with migrants in Turkey, which may be perceived as a secondary displacement country. Migrants in such secondary migration contexts face distinct risks compared to those encountered in origin countries. This shift in context significantly influences migrants' attitudes towards risk-taking. Therefore, an analysis of comparative and longitudinal evidence is essential for a thorough comprehension of migrants' journeys, especially for those transiting through Turkey to European Union countries. In light of this limitation, I have anchored my claims and arguments to be applicable in a secondary migration context. It is crucial to recognize that the relationship between aspirations and risk-taking attitudes may vary between so-called origin and destination countries. In conclusion, to attain a more nuanced perspective, analyzing additional data on the experiences and trajectories of migrants at various stages of their journey might be essential.

Secondly, as outlined in Chapter 3, the COVID-19 pandemic measures prevented the collection of face-to-face data. Consequently, I opted for an online survey methodology, considering it the most practical and secure alternative. However, the use of online convenience sampling, though effective in reaching specific populations, introduces the potential for bias toward literate individuals with internet access. Additionally, the absence of public demographic data on the migrant population in Turkey raises concerns about representativeness. Having said that, this limitation would have persisted even if face-to-face interviews had been feasible. Thus, regardless of the sampling method employed, the lack of public data on the migrant population in Turkey remains a constraint.

Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted border controls. During the pandemic, even as precautions for international movement have become less restrictive, people's perception of embarking on a journey has changed due to the presence of a global pandemic. This shift in people's lives has certain effects on migration journeys as well, potentially adding another layer to examine migration aspirations. However, data collection had already commenced before the implementation of pandemic measures in Turkey. I was able to collect data before the pandemic in 2019, during the first year of the pandemic in 2020, and during the final stage of pandemic measures in 2021. Furthermore, the hypothetical scenarios used in the survey experiment in Chapter 6 enabled me to assess the impact of different policy frames and navigate the influence of COVID-19 measures on migration aspirations. Despite this timeframe, I believe that further research should be conducted in the post-pandemic period to explore this topic more comprehensively.

Furthermore, recent developments in Turkey have impacted its migration policy framework and border controls. The general public in Turkey, influenced by factors such as economic difficulties, high inflation, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake, commonly believes that the country is struggling to cope with the influx of Afghan and Syrian migrants. This perception, coupled with exploitative practices in housing and labor markets, directly subjects migrants to discrimination. Thus, further research is needed to understand whether these policy changes in Turkey will affect migration aspirations.

Fourth, although I have included three directions in migration aspirations—move, stay, and return—I could not provide a comprehensive explanation for return aspirations due to the absence of direct observation on this aspect. During the general election campaigns in 2023, so after the conclusion of my data collection in 2021, leaders of the opposition political parties in Turkey revitalized the repatriation of Syrian and Afghan migrants as an election promise. Given the evolving policy landscape in Turkey, characterized by a more securitized approach and heightened emphasis on return policies, the motivations for migrants to stay in Turkey or return to their origin countries remain an unexplored area. I believe that additional research is needed to delve into the dynamics of return aspirations and their influence on migration decisions.

There is room for future research to further enhance the risk-taking literature in migration journeys. Recent studies demonstrate that gender and age disparities influence individuals' risk-taking behavior (Bogdan, 2023; Carling et al., 2023). For instance, women are more concerned about issues such as sexual exploitation and separation from families, which ultimately shapes their perceptions of risks during their journeys (Bogdan, 2023). While the findings of my research also revealed gender disparities, it lacks a gender-based analysis of risk-taking. In this regard, future quantitative studies should explore different domains of risk-taking more comprehensively. In this dissertation, I only focused on the objective and subjective domains. Developing measures of risk-taking with a battery of questions and seeking a more suitable measurement in the context of forced displacement is necessary.

To conclude this dissertation, I would like to draw attention to a crucial paradigm shift in migration discourse. Beyond the prevailing assumption that stricter border policies alone can deter migration, the emphasis must pivot toward establishing safer passage for those who have committed to the journey. Acknowledging the constraints of a specific COVID-19 era timeframe, I call for ongoing exploration of diverse stages in migration journeys. It is important to remind ourselves, in an echo of Sadi Shirazi's verses, that to truly understand and address the complexities of migration decisions, our collective focus must extend beyond barriers to the shared vulnerabilities of the human experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

This appendix presents additional information about the interlocutors and the fieldwork site. In each empirical chapter, I used different pseudonyms for same people to protect anonymity. Thus, I did not present pseudonyms in this table.

Inter view code	Nationalit y	Legal status in Turkey	Date	Gend er	Intervie w Method ology	Fieldwork site
1	Afghanist an	International protection	01.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
2	Afghanist an	Residence Permit	02.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
3	Afghanist an	Residence Permit	03.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
4	Afghanist an	Undocumented	04.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
5	Syria	Temporary protection	05.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
6	Afghanist an	Not registered	06.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
7	Afghanist an	Not registered	07.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
8	Afghanist an	Not registered	08.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
9	Afghanist an	Not registered	09.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
10	Afghanist an	International protection	10.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
11	Afghanist an	International protection	11.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
12	Afghanist an	International protection	12.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
13	Syria	Temporary protection	13.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
14	Syria	Temporary protection	14.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
15	Syria	Temporary protection	15.04.2019	Fema le	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
16	Syria	Temporary protection	16.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
17	Syria	Temporary protection	17.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
18	Syria	Temporary protection	18.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
19	Syria	Temporary protection	19.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Europea n side
20	Syria	Temporary protection	20.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
21	Syria	Not registered	21.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep

22	Syria	Temporary protection	22.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
23	Syria	Not registered	23.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
24	Syria	Temporary protection	24.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
25	Syria	Temporary protection	25.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
26	Syria	Temporary protection	26.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Gaziantep
27	Syria	Temporary protection	27.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Asian side
28	Syria	Temporary protection	28.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Asian side
29	Syria	Temporary protection	29.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Asian side
30	Syria	Not registered	30.04.2019	Male	Face to face	Istanbul/Asian side
31	Syria	Temporary protection	04.03.2020	Female	Face to face	Adana
32	Syria	Temporary protection	04.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
33	Afghanistan	International protection	05.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
34	Syria	Temporary protection	06.03.2020	Female	Face to face	Adana
35	Syria	Temporary protection	06.03.2020	Female	Face to face	Adana
36	Syria	Temporary protection	06.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
37	Afghanistan	International protection	06.03.2020	Female	Face to face	Adana
38	Afghanistan	International protection	06.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
39	Syria	Temporary protection	07.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
40	Syria	Temporary protection	07.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
41	Afghanistan	International protection	07.03.2020	Male	Face to face	Adana
42	Afghanistan	International protection	07.03.2020	Female	Face to face	Adana
43	Syria	Temporary protection	21.07.2020	Male	Online	Izmir
44	Syria	Temporary protection	22.07.2020	Male	Online	Gaziantep
45	Syria	Residence Permit	23.07.2020	Male	Online	Istanbul
46	Syria	Temporary protection	24.07.2020	Male	Online	Bursa
47	Syria	Temporary protection	24.07.2020	Male	Online	Izmir

48	Afghanist an	International protection	25.07.20 20	Male	Online	Kayseri
49	Syria	Citizenship of Turkey	10.08.20 20	Male	Online	Hatay
50	Syria	Temporary protection	11.08.20 20	Male	Online	Izmir
51	Syria	Temporary protection	22.10.20 20	Male	Online	Mersin
52	Syria	Temporary protection	07.12.20 20	Fema le	Online	Adana
53	Syria	Temporary protection	08.12.20 20	Male	Online	Mersin
54	Afghanist an	International protection	09.12.20 20	Male	Online	Sinop
55	Afghanist an	International protection	11.12.20 20	Male	Online	Ankara
56	Syria	Temporary protection	12.12.20 20	Male	Online	Hatay
57	Afghanist an	International protection	16.12.20 20	Fema le	Online	Kirikkale
58	Afghanist an	International protection	16.12.20 20	Fema le	Online	Isparta
59	Afghanist an	Not registered	17.12.20 20	Male	Online	Balikesir
60	Afghanist an	Not registered	17.12.20 20	Male	Online	Nigde
61	Afghanist an	Not registered	18.12.20 20	Male	Online	Istanbul
62	Afghanist an	International protection	08.01.20 21	Fema le	Online	Denizli
63	Afghanist an	Not registered	09.01.20 21	Fema le	Online	Nigde
64	Afghanist an	International protection	10.01.20 21	Male	Online	Kayseri
65	Afghanist an	International protection	15.01.20 21	Fema le	Online	Bolu
66	Afghanist an	International protection	16.01.20 21	Male	Online	Erzurum
67	Afghanist an	International protection	16.01.20 21	Male	Online	Sivas
68	Afghanist an	International protection	24.01.20 21	Male	Online	Kayseri
69	Syria	Temporary protection	28.01.20 21	Fema le	Online	Adana
70	Afghanist an	International Protection	04.02.20 21	Fema le	Online	Tokat
71	Syria	Temporary protection	06.02.20 21	Fema le	Online	Hatay
72	Afghanist an	International protection	07.02.20 21	Fema le	Online	Istanbul
73	Afghanist an	International protection	04.05.20 21	Fema le	Online	Adana

Appendix 2

This appendix includes additional information about the statistical analysis conducted in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, I used two different models to measure the effect of objective and subjective risk-taking on aspirations to move, stay and return. In Appendix 2.1., I provide two more models. In Model 1, I exclude objective risk-taking from the model. In Model 2, I exclude subjective risk-taking from the analysis. The results do not show differences than the original models. Second, in Appendix 2.2, I provided a correlation table to show that subjective and objective risk-taking variables are not significantly correlated with the dependent variable. Finally, in Appendix 2.3., I present the multinomial regression analysis test results.

Appendix 2.1. Multinomial Logistic Regression Migration Aspirations of Syrian Refugees in Turkey (Base category: Stay in Turkey)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Move to another country	Return to Syria	Move to another country	Return to Syria
<i>Objective Risk Taking</i>			0,1 (-1.5)	-0,00336 (-0.04)
<i>Subjective Risk Taking</i>	0.277** (-3.04)	0,00875 (-0.08)		
<i>Wealth</i>	-1.328* (-2.00)	-2.123** (-2.64)	-1,181 (-1.78)	-2.144** (-2.67)
<i>Turkish citizenship</i>	-0,712 (-1.78)	-0,187 (-0.187)	-0,672 (-1.67)	-0,132 (-0.31)
<i>Relative deprivation</i>	0,0505 (-1.39)	0,00417 (-0.1)	0,0519 (-1.44)	0,00274 (-0.06)
<i>Speaking Turkish language</i>	-0.231** (-2.63)	-0,0745 (-0.70)	-0.221* (-2.53)	-0,0773 (-0.73)
<i>Employment</i>	-1.048*** (-3.91)	-0,334 (-1.21)	-1.015*** (-3.80)	-0,315 (-1.15)
<i>Date of arrival to Turkey</i>	0,0166 (-0.34)	-0,00462 (-0.08)	0,0174 (-0.36)	-0,00584 (-0.10)
<i>Religiosity</i>	-0.192*** (-4.88)	0,0749 (-1.51)	-0.185*** (-4.75)	0,0749 (-1.51)
<i>Number of children in the family</i>	-0.0979* (-2.00)	0,024 (-0.44)	-0.123* (-2.55)	0,0198 (-0.37)
<i>Gender (M=1)</i>	0,354 (-1.94)	1.037*** (-4.64)	0.376* (-2.07)	1.039*** (-4.66)
_Cons.	0,791 (-1.59)	-1.261* (-2.03)	1.117* (-2.31)	-1.212* (-2.00)
Num.Obs	813		813	

chi2	120,6	112,4
p	2,69E-16	1,71E-14

Notes: Multinomial regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Appendix 2.2. Correlations of variables in the dataset

	Migration Aspiration	Subjective Risk Taking	Gender (M=1)	Wealth	Religiosity	Turkish citizenship	Relative deprivation	Turkish language	Objective Risk Taking
Migration Aspiration	1								
Subjective Risk Taking	-0,105 0,002	1,000							
Gender (M=1)	0,040 0,244	0,090 0,008	1,00 0						
Wealth	0,004 0,910	0,064 0,062	- 0,11 7 0,00 1	1,00 0					
Religiosity	0,182 0,000	-0,045 0,189	- 0,22 8 0,00 0	0,04 5 0,18 7	1,000				
Turkish citizenship	0,045 0,193	-0,008 0,816	- 0,09 1 0,00 8	0,10 4 0,00 2	0,028 0,412	1,000			
Relative deprivation	-0,021 0,545	0,022 0,524	- 0,06 7 0,05 1	0,03 4 0,32 2	0,053 0,121	0,094 0,006	1,000		
Turkish language	0,035 0,312	0,078 0,022	- 0,05 1 0,13 7	0,11 2 0,00 1	0,003 0,937	0,084 0,014	0,064 0,061	1,000	
Objective Risk Taking	-0,058 0,089	0,215 0,000	- 0,09 8 0,00 4	0,04 4 0,20 3	-0,079 0,021	-0,019 0,585	0,021 0,548	0,012 0,729	1,000

p values are noted below. Correlation coefficient values below 0.3 are considered to be weak; 0.3-0.7 are moderate; >0.7 are strong.

Appendix 2.3 Multinomial Regression Test Results

Likelihood-ratio tests for independent variables

Ho: All coefficients associated with given variable(s) are 0.

Migration Aspiration	chi2	df	P>chi2
<i>Subjective Risk Taking</i>	8,744	2	0,013
<i>Objective Risk Taking</i>	0,959	2	0,619
<i>Wealth</i>	9,049	2	0,011
<i>Citizenship</i>	3,173	2	0,205
<i>Relative deprivation</i>	1,971	2	0,373
<i>Turkish language</i>	7,074	2	0,029
<i>Employment status</i>	16,516	2	0
<i>Date of arrival to Turkey</i>	0,155	2	0,925
<i>Religiosity</i>	34,512	2	0
<i>Number of children</i>	5,28	2	0,071
<i>Gender (Male=1)</i>	23,061	2	0

Wald tests for independent variables

Ho: All coefficients associated with given variable(s) are 0.

Migration Aspiration	chi2	df	P>chi2
<i>Subjective Risk Taking</i>	8,672	2	0,013
<i>Objective Risk Taking</i>	0,958	2	0,619
<i>Wealth</i>	8,814	2	0,012
<i>Citizenship</i>	2,885	2	0,236
<i>Relative deprivation</i>	1,974	2	0,373
<i>Turkish language</i>	7,013	2	0,03
<i>Employment status</i>	14,941	2	0,001
<i>Date of arrival to Turkey</i>	0,155	2	0,926
<i>Religiosity</i>	32,689	2	0
<i>Number of children</i>	5,124	2	0,077
<i>Gender (Male=1)</i>	22,097	2	0

Appendix 3

In Appendix 3, additional statistical analyses for Chapter 6 are presented. In Chapter 6, two different models were used to measure the effect of border closures and employment opportunities on a binary dependent variable (recommending moving and staying). In Appendix 3.1, two additional models are provided. As a robustness check, another binary dependent variable was generated, including the return option. Both move and return are coded as 1, and 0 otherwise (stay). Furthermore, in Appendix 3.2, a categorical dependent variable (recommending moving, staying, and returning) was used, and a multinomial logistic regression was conducted. The results do not show a striking difference between dependent variables.

Appendix 3.1	Model 3	Model 4
	Aspiration to Move and Return	Aspiration to Move and Return
Reference: Control	1 [1.000,1.000]	1 [1.000,1.000]
Unemployment & Open borders	0.895 [0.540,1.481]	0.583 [0.159,2.141]
Employed & Open borders	0.347*** [0.206,0.583]	0.274* [0.082,0.909]
Unemployment & Border closures	0.122*** [0.065,0.229]	0.0188*** [0.003,0.122]
Employed & Border closures	0.0834*** [0.041,0.168]	0.0451** [0.005,0.378]
Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		0.830 [0.648,1.062]
Reference: Control * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1 [1.000,1.000]
Unemployment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.182 [0.753,1.857]
Employment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.086 [0.721,1.637]
Unemployment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.992* [1.095,3.623]
Employment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		1.254 [0.613,2.568]
<i>N</i>	550	549
pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.145	0.155

Odds Ratios; 95% confidence intervals in brackets + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 3.2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Results (Base category: Stay in Turkey)

	Model 5		Model 6	
	Aspiration to Move	Aspiration to Return	Aspiration to Move	Aspiration to Return
Reference: Control	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Unemployment & Open borders	-0,111 (-0.43)	-0,137 (-0.15)	-0.470 (-0.69)	-2.591 (-1.02)
Employed & Open borders	-1.054*** (-3.94)	-1,227 (-1.08)	-1.331* (-2.08)	11.85 (0.01)
Unemployment & Border closures	-2.141*** (-6.48)	-1,457 (-1.29)	-4.349*** (-4.61)	12.09 (0.01)
Employed & Border closures	-2.544*** (-6.88)	-1,523 (-1.35)	-3.318** (-3.25)	-1.496 (-0.61)
Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			-0.173 (-1.35)	-0.625 (-1.29)
Reference: Control * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			0.00	0.00
Unemployment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			0.141 (0.59)	0.973 (1.12)
Employment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			0.0992 (0.45)	-12.57 (-0.01)
Unemployment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			0.797** (2.71)	-13.16 (-0.01)
Employment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude			0.281 (0.84)	-0.0179 (-0.02)
<i>N</i>	550		549	
Constant	0.490** -3,18	-2.833*** (-5.50)	0.959* (2.50)	-1.333 (-1.19)
r ²				
chi ²	109.8		126.2	
p	4.11e-20		2.76e-18	

Appendix 4 Survey Questions

In this section, I present the survey questions utilized in this dissertation. The questions are not presented in their original order from the AdMiGoV project. Additionally, some questions have follow-up questions, but they are not included here as they were not used in this dissertation. The questions were translated into Arabic and Dari before survey distribution. Experimental design and questions used in Chapter 6 are already presented in Chapter 6; therefore, I did not include those questions in this appendix.

Risk Questions

Q1. Suppose you are the only income earner in the family, and you have a good job guaranteed to give you income every year. You are given the opportunity to take a new and equally good job, with a 50-50 chance it will double your income and 50-50 chance that it will cut your income by a third. Would you take the new job?

Yes / No

(If the answer is Yes to Question 1, Q 1_2 is displayed. If the answer is No, Q1_3 is displayed)

Q1_2. Suppose the chances were 50-50 that it would double your income and 50-50 that it would cut in half. Would you still take the new job?

Yes / No

Q1_3. Suppose the chances were 50-50 that it would double your income and 50-50 that it would cut it by 20 percent. Would you then take the new job?

Yes / No

Q2. How do you see yourself in general? Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks, or do you try to avoid taking risks in your life?

Not willing to take risks (1) Somewhat not willing to take risks (2) Moderately willing to take risks (3) Somewhat willing to take risks (4) Extremely willing to take risks (5)

Migration Aspirations

Q3. Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in Turkey? or return to %country of origin%?

Move to another country (1) / Stay in Turkey (2) / Return to %the country of origin% (3)

Q4. Over the past year, have you considered to move from Turkey? Yes / No

Q5. At the moment are you planning to move to another country, or stay in Turkey, or return?

Move to another country (1) / Stay in Turkey (2) / Return to %the country of origin% (3)

Relative Deprivation

Q6. On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group among both citizen and refugee communities in Turkey. We would like to

know in what group your household is. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes that come in.

Lowest income group (1) - Highest income group (10)

Q7. Again, on an income scale which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group among %country of origin%, we would like to know in what group your household was in %country of origin%. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes that came in.

Lowest income group (1) - Highest income group (10)

Employment status

Q8. Currently do you have a job where you get paid? If you do not, have you ever worked where you got paid?

Currently working where I get paid (1) Currently not working but I did work in the past where I got paid (2) I never had a job where I got paid (3)

Demographic variables

Q9. What is your sex? Male / Female

Q10. In which year you were born? Please select...

Q11. In which province do you live in Turkey? Please select...

Q12. In which country you were born? Please select...

Q13. What is your citizenship? (If you have dual citizenship, please indicate your citizenship at birth.)

Syria (1) / Afghanistan (2) / Stateless (3) / Other. (Please specify) (4)

Q14. Do you have a valid passport? Yes / No

Q15. How many people, including yourself, currently live in your household? Please select...

Q16. Which of the following options does describe your current marital status?

Married (1) / Separated (2) / Divorced (3) / Widow or widower (4) / Single (never married) (5)

Q17. What is the highest level of education which you have completed so far?

No formal education (1) Elementary /secondary (2) Vocational high school (3) High school (4) University graduate (5) Masters (6) University drop out (7)

Q18. Which languages you can speak? Can you tell us whether you can read, write, and speak in those languages?

	Speak (1)	Write (2)	Read (3)
Mother tongue (Arabic/Dari) (1)	☐	☐	☐
Turkish (2)	☐	☐	☐
Other language (Please write in) (3)	☐	☐	☐

Q19. Please tick the box if you have following items in your current place.

Refrigerator (1) / Dish washer (2) / Oven (3) / Washing machine (4) / Plasma or LCD television (5) / Other type of TV (6) / Air conditioner (8) / Automobile (10) / Motorbike (11) / Computer or laptop (13) / Mobile phone (14) / Satellite dish (15) / Internet connection at home (16) / Internet connection from mobile phone (4G) (17)

Q20. Regardless of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are a religious person? How would you rate yourself if '0' corresponds to "not religious at all" and '10' to "very religious?"

Q21. When did you arrive in Turkey? (MM/YY) Year (1) / Month (2)

Q22. What is your current legal status in Turkey?

Temporary protection (1) Asylum applicant (2) Conditional refugee (3) Residence permit (4) No status / Not registered (5) Applied to asylum but rejected (6) Acquired Turkish citizenship (7)

Q23. How many people, including yourself, currently live in your household? Please select...

Q24. How many household members are at the schooling age (between 5 and 17 years old)? Please select...

