# 1. THE POPULATION EXCHANGE MIGRATION TO DENİZLİ-HONAZ

**Abstract** In line with the decisions made during the Lausanne Conference, people from the villages of Vraşno and Kastro in the Grebena district of Manastır Province in Greece became exchange migrants and part of a forced migration. After a challenging journey, the Grebena exchangees were brought to İzmir. Although their resettlement was initially planned for Malatya, a last-minute decision led to their settlement in Denizli and Honaz. During the population exchange period of 1924–1930, 529 households arrived in Denizli, with 82 households initially planned for settlement in Honaz; however, 70 households were ultimately resettled there. Over time, the exchangees overcame numerous difficulties they encountered upon arriving in Honaz and contributed to the homogenization of Honaz's previously heterogeneous structure.

### **Introduction**

Migration from the Balkans occurred over many years but took on a different dimension during the Balkan Wars. The Ottoman Empire’s presence in the Balkans became significantly constrained due to these wars. Newly established Balkan states sought to create ethnic homogeneity and increase their populations, often forcing minorities to migrate. This agenda led to population exchange agreements in several Balkan countries.

In 1913, prior to World War I, an agreement for population exchange was reached with Bulgaria and proposed to Greece, resulting in an agreement with Greece as well. However, the onset of World War I delayed its ratification and implementation.

Before the hardships caused by World War I had ended, the Greeks began their occupation of Western Anatolia on May 15, 1919, leading to a three-year-long conflict. Following the victory at the Battle of the Commander-in-Chief (Başkomutanlık Meydan Muharebesi), many Greeks emigrated from Western Anatolia and Istanbul to Greece.

Greece, struggling to resettle over a million migrants—about a quarter of its population at the time—welcomed the mandatory population exchange initiative raised during the Lausanne Peace Conference. On January 30, 1923, during the Lausanne Peace Conference, Turkey and Greece signed the “Convention and Protocol on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations.” This agreement and protocol facilitated the migration of approximately 500,000 Macedonian Turks to Anatolia in place of the 1.5 million Greeks who had departed Anatolia after the National Struggle.

As the Greek army retreated after its defeat, it destroyed the areas it passed through, while Anatolian Greeks, fearing Turkish retaliation, quickly fled their homes. Although Honaz, then a township of Denizli, did not experience direct occupation during the National Struggle, it became a settlement abandoned by the Greeks during this period.

### **Preparations and Implementation of the Population Exchange**

On May 1, 1923, it was decided that the exchange would involve Rum Orthodox citizens residing in Turkey outside Istanbul and Muslim Greek citizens living outside Western Thrace. On July 17, 1923, the Turkish government issued a decree specifying that exchangees would arrive from places such as Drama, Kavala, Serres, Kozani, Grevena, Nasliç, Kastoria, Kayalar, Karaferye, Vodina, Katerini, Alasonya, Langaza, Demirhisar, Gevgeli, Yenice Vardar, Karacaabat, Zeytinlik, Thessaloniki, and Ksanthe. They were to be resettled in regions including Samsun, Adana, Malatya, Amasya, Tokat, Sivas, Manisa, Izmir, Denizli, Çatalca, Tekirdağ, Karaman, Niğde, Antalya, Silifke, Ayvalık, Edremit, and Mersin.

The implementation of the exchange began after the agreement was signed on August 25, 1923. In accordance with Article 11 of the agreement, the Turkish government established a “mixed commission” during the August 28, 1923 session of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM). On October 13, the Ministry of Exchange, Reconstruction, and Settlement was founded, followed by the enactment of Law No. 363 on November 8, 1923, which regulated the exchange and resettlement processes.

The Ministry of Exchange and Settlement divided the regions for migrant resettlement into ten zones, with Denizli falling under the Fourth Zone. Various challenges arose between Turkey and Greece due to the exchange, and these were resolved with the Ankara Agreement signed on June 10, 1930.

### **Migration to Honaz via the Population Exchange**

Between 1912 and 1998, 2,092 households migrated to Denizli from both domestic and international locations. Of these, 313 households were from within Turkey, while 1,779 came from abroad: 1,116 from Bulgaria, 561 from Greece, 36 from Yugoslavia, 23 from the Soviet Union, 27 from Romania, and 16 from Iraq.

During the population exchange period (1924–1930), 460 exchangee households arrived in Denizli from Greece. Of these, 82 households were designated for settlement in Honaz. However, 12 households soon relocated to Korucuk village in central Denizli, leaving 70 households comprising 274 individuals in Honaz. Reports from the Denizli Directorate of Settlement to the General Directorate of Exchange, Reconstruction, and Settlement of the Fourth Zone indicate that 284 individuals in 70 households were resettled in Honaz.

Of the 70 exchangee households settled in Honaz, 69 originated from the villages of Vraşno and Kastro in the Grevena district, and one came from Samakol. While other parts of Denizli experienced minimal migration, Honaz saw a notable influx of migrants to replace the departing Rum population.

### **Journey of Exchangees from Grevena to Honaz**

During the Greek army's retreat, Anatolian Rum populations fled alongside the army to Greece. This influx created an unexpected migration wave for Greece, which struggled to manage the resettlement. The Greek government facilitated the process by vacating Turkish homes and reallocating livestock and land, often confiscating half of the properties for the incoming Rum migrants.

In the villages of Vraşno and Kastro, Rum migrants from Anatolia were resettled in homes previously occupied by Turkish families. Turkish families were crowded into shared homes, living under challenging conditions while their properties were allocated to the Rum migrants. Both groups cohabited in Vraşno and Kastro for 5–6 months before the population exchange was finalized.

Following the Lausanne Treaty’s stipulation for the exchange of Rum populations in Turkey with Turkish populations in Greece (excluding Western Thrace), Turkish residents of Greece were informed of the decision and began preparations. They packed portable belongings, prepared declarations of property to be submitted in Turkey, and embarked on their journey.

On March 1, 1924, the villagers of Kastro left their long-inhabited lands. They loaded their valuables onto animals and placed the elderly and children on the laden animals, while others traveled on foot. Thus, they began their migration to Turkey, leaving behind their homes and livelihoods.

After leaving Kastro with their animals, the exchangees arrived in Karaferya after a four-day journey, where they stayed in tents for several days. Since there was a railway line between Karaferya and Thessaloniki, their belongings were loaded onto wagons, and they set off for Thessaloniki. The journey to Thessaloniki was fraught with difficulty as the exchangees traveled in the same wagons as their belongings. Upon reaching Thessaloniki, their possessions were unloaded at the port and taken to temporary shelters while awaiting the arrival of ships. They waited nearly two weeks before being allowed to board the ships after their belongings were loaded.

The exchangees from Vraşno, after departing their village, spent one night in Grebene before proceeding to Veryan, where they stayed for ten days and received vaccinations. They then traveled to Thessaloniki, where both the Kastro and Vraşno residents boarded the same ship bound for Izmir.

The sea voyage from Greece to Turkey marked a new chapter in their migration. The voyage was accompanied by continued hardship, including periodic searches by guards for deceased individuals due to concerns about the spread of disease. After a two-day sea journey, the exchangees reached Izmir and were placed in newly constructed barracks in Tepecik. They were provided with bedding and food and stayed in Izmir for over two weeks. While individuals from thirteen villages were dispersed to various parts of Western Anatolia, the people of Kastro and Vraşno remained in Izmir until the end.

The delay in settling the Kastro and Vraşno exchangees highlights a lack of concrete planning. However, the presence of Süleyman Pasha, originally from Vraşno and serving on the settlement commission in Izmir, significantly influenced their fate. Süleyman Pasha and his son Murat Bey intervened to redirect the settlement plans, originally intended for Malatya, to Honaz. Murat Bey's familiarity with the agricultural conditions and climate of Honaz, due to his prior service in Tavas, contributed to this decision. Consequently, the Kastro and Vraşno exchangees were sent from Izmir to Honaz for resettlement.

The exchangees traveled by train from Izmir to Böceli, the station closest to Honaz. Upon arrival in Böceli, darkness had fallen before their belongings could be unloaded. Eager to reach Honaz, they left a few people to guard their possessions and set off on foot. Although the walk from Böceli to Honaz was only two hours, only the younger individuals managed to arrive that night. The elderly made it as far as Koyunaliler village and spent the night in the village mosque, while some others camped along the fields in the cold spring weather.

On the second day, those who had stayed overnight in Koyunaliler village and the fields joined the others in Honaz. The journey, which began on March 1, 1924, was finally completed in early April, with the exchangees arriving in Honaz on April 2.

### **Resettlement in Honaz**

Upon arriving in Honaz, the exchangees faced significant challenges due to the insufficient housing available. The settlement plan had envisioned utilizing the abandoned homes of Rum residents in the current Hisar neighborhood. However, these houses had been looted long before the exchangees arrived, with their furnishings taken and wooden components such as doors and windows removed. The exchangees, hoping to find shelter, discovered only dilapidated ruins. Without official guidance, they began occupying these ruined homes, which were later officially designated for their use.

Initially, multiple families shared the few habitable rooms in the ruined houses. Over time, they repaired the structures room by room, making them livable. Although they were unaccustomed to living in flat-roofed homes, the exchangees adapted to the conditions, as most of the remaining houses in Honaz had flat roofs rather than tiled ones.

The exchange occurred in a nation recovering from a series of wars, with no population, agricultural, or industrial censuses and uncatalogued lands. Despite the planning, many decisions were made on the spot, leading to complications.

The number of Rum residents who left Turkey during the exchange was twice that of the exchangees who arrived. While only about 30% of the Rum population in Turkey had engaged in agriculture, 90% of the exchangees were farmers. This disparity made agricultural resettlement in Turkey more challenging. The exchangees in Honaz, who were all farmers, exemplify this difficulty.

Although the exchangees arrived in the spring of 1924, they were not granted the harvest from that year, exacerbating their struggles with shelter and food shortages. Accounts from residents recall the initial days in Honaz, where everyone was hungry. Municipal authorities provided tarhana soup, bulgur pilaf, and bread to stave off hunger. While there were no issues with the distribution of bread, its quality deteriorated at one point. Exchangees complained about the poor-quality bread to the provincial governor, who intervened with the contracted flour supplier to resolve the issue.

Despite the hardships, the exchangees gradually established a life in Honaz, contributing to the agricultural and social fabric of the region.

**Findings of Investigation and Adaptation of Exchangees in Honaz**

During the investigation into the quality of flour, it was discovered that the flour supplier Sadık had been altering it. Exchangees who took their complaints to the governor reportedly told him:

*"Provide us with unprocessed wheat so we can grind it ourselves in mills and bake bread in small ovens at home, just as we used to in our villages."*

This marked the beginning of wheat distribution to the exchangees, allowing them to make their own bread and resolve the bread issue.

**Challenges and Agricultural Resettlement**

The exchangees faced numerous challenges upon their arrival in Honaz, prompting some to consider relocating elsewhere. However, this was not feasible. While authorities worked on resolving food shortages, the process of dividing the lands left by the Rum population began. One contentious issue was the government's policy of "adiyen iskân" (basic resettlement). Wealthier exchangees from Greece expressed dissatisfaction, as this policy allocated land and property uniformly, without considering the properties they had left behind in Greece. For instance, one exchangee recalled that their family, which had owned a farm in Greece, received smaller and less valuable parcels of land than expected.

Each household was given ten dönüm (approximately 1 hectare) of farmland, with an additional five dönüm per family member, and nine dönüm of garden land per household. However, these allocations often fell short of the recorded measurements. This inconsistency became evident when cadastral surveys were conducted in 1937.

**Land Distribution and Housing Conditions**

Exchangees were resettled in houses previously owned by Rums, with most homes being flat-roofed mud structures and only a few with tiled roofs. These houses were typically two stories, with the ground floors used as storage, cellars, or stables. Due to the growing population and inadequate housing conditions, many exchangees eventually abandoned these houses and built new homes.

**Economic and Social Adjustments**

Economic challenges were significant, as the farmland in Honaz was not always suitable for cultivating the crops that exchangees had grown in Greece. Many were forced to seek work in nearby cities like İzmir, where they labored in tobacco fields and vegetable gardens. Over time, they brought back agricultural techniques learned in İzmir, including market gardening, which contributed to economic improvements in Honaz.

The integration between the local population and the exchangees was initially slow. For around 40 years, intermarriage between the groups was rare, with some initial prejudice against the exchangees. Over time, these social barriers diminished, and intermarriage became common.

**Cultural Impact**

While the arrival of exchangees did not significantly alter the cultural fabric of Honaz, it did contribute to the homogenization of the community. The exchangees introduced new practices, such as wearing Western-style clothing (jackets and trousers) instead of traditional garments like şalvar, baking bread in ovens rather than making flatbreads, and improving transportation by using carts instead of traditional kelters. These changes, along with their contributions to agriculture and other aspects of daily life, left a lasting mark on Honaz.

In summary, the exchangees brought about subtle yet meaningful changes to Honaz, overcoming significant initial hardships and contributing to the area's economic and cultural development.

**The Current Status of Exchangees in Honaz**

Honaz, located 16 kilometers east of Denizli, currently has five neighborhoods: Yeni, Hisar, Haydar, Cumhuriyet, and Hürriyet. The "Hisar neighborhood" is where the exchangees reside. When the exchangees first arrived in Honaz, the neighborhood was called "İstiklal Mahallesi." However, at the request of settlers from Kastro village, the name was changed to "Hisar."

Since 1924, the neighborhood has had various muhtars (local leaders), including Mustafa Yeşilkaya, Mevlüddin İncekara, Mustafa Akan, Necdet Karabenli, Tahsin Özkan, and Hasan Akan.

According to population censuses, Honaz's population was:

* 5,714 in 1980
* 6,333 in 1990
* 7,204 in 1997
* 7,442 in 2000

In Hisar neighborhood, 250 households host a population of 680.

**Community and Infrastructure**

The neighborhood has a mosque, "Hisar Mosque," which was converted from a church between 1945 and 1948. There are no coffeehouses in the neighborhood, but three grocery stores operated by exchangee families and 11 other shops in the Honaz market exist.

**Residential Changes**

None of the exchangees live in the original homes they were assigned upon arrival. Most have demolished their old homes and built new ones, typically two-story houses, either on the same land or on adjacent plots. In some cases, the old homes have been left abandoned.

**Cultural and Emotional Connection**

Many exchangees and their descendants feel a deep longing for the lands they emigrated from, often expressing a sentimental regret over the properties and lives they left behind. These feelings sometimes manifest in statements like, "We left behind so much wealth and property," reflecting the emotional challenges tied to the upheaval of their migration.

**Conclusion**

While the Aegean region was the primary destination for exchangees, Denizli did not experience as intense an influx as İzmir, Manisa, or Balıkesir. Honaz and Denizli city center were among the most affected areas in Denizli, with 81 exchangee households coming from the Vraşno and Kastro villages of the Grebene district and one from Samakol. Twelve of these households later relocated to Korucuk.

The issues faced by exchangees in Honaz mirrored those seen across Turkey: inadequate housing, the "adiyen iskân" resettlement policy, language barriers, climate differences, poor-quality bread, and financial difficulties. These challenges led to ongoing complaints and dissatisfaction during the early years. However, over time, state interventions, the adaptability of the exchangees, and their growing acclimation to the region helped alleviate these issues.