INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
doi: 10.1111/imig.12489

Transnational Activities of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Hindering or Supporting Integration

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on transnational activities of Syrian refugees in Turkey examining the relationship between such activities and integration. The main research question addressed in this article is whether involvement in transnational activities hinders or supports the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey, by drawing upon fieldwork in Istanbul, Ankara, Hatay and Gaziantep. I argue that Syrian refugees perceive integration as a survival mechanism and use transnational activities as a strategy for adapting to a new society, especially when they are faced with insecure legal status and a lack of access to rights in the receiving country. This study contributes to the literature on refugee transnationalism and integration by focusing on the refugees' perceptions of on integration processes and addressing the question of survival.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey has been receiving refugees displaced by the on-going war in Syria since 2011. Despite the number of Syrian refugees settled in Turkey standing at over 3,5 million, Turkey has yet to introduce an effective integration policy covering all integration domains. This article focuses on the integration processes and strategies of Syrian refugees in Turkey and aims to investigate the intersections between legal status, transnational activities and refugee integration. In doing so, I will attempt to answer the question of whether transnationalism helps or hinders integration in the case of refugees with insecure legal status and a lack of access to rights.

The linkage between transnationalism and integration is hotly debated in the academic literature. While some scholars argue that they are mutually supportive (Hammond, 2013; Levitt et al., 2003; Portes et al., 2002; Vertovec, 2009), others highlight that strong transnational ties cause weak integration (Basch et al., 1994; Faist, 2000; Kivisto, 2001). However, while most of these studies explore how transnational practices of migrants influence their integration processes, it is important to make a distinction between refugee and migrant transnationalism. As stated by Harpviken (2014), the role of agencies; their conditions and experiential trajectories in war-related mobility influence the processes of integration and engagement in transnational activities. The importance of an agency's role in understanding the nature of interactions between processes of integration and transnationalism is also highlighted by Erdal and Oeppen (2013). In this article, I explore the links between the concepts of integration, transnationalism and "refugeehood" to show whether being a refugee implies different practices of integration and transnationalism. In the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the main research question addressed is whether involvement in transnational economic activities hinders or supports the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I argue that Syrian refugees perceive integration as a survival mechanism and use transnational activities as

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International Migration
ISSN 0020-7985
Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

a strategy for adapting to a new society, especially when they are faced with insecure legal status and a lack of access to rights in the receiving country.

This article consists of four interrelated parts. In the first part, the theoretical framework of the concepts of integration and transnationalism is explored; the second part explains the research methods; the third presents an overview of Syrian refugees in Turkey after explaining the methods of the research; and in the fourth part, the linkage between the processes of integration and transnationalism is examined through empirical corroboration. This part offers a theoretical discussion on the intersection between integration and transnationalism by focusing on the refugees' transnational activities. Finally, the conclusion discusses the key findings of the research in relation to the literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTEGRATION VS. TRANSNATIONALISM

Integration is a concept hotly debated by academics, policymakers, states and migrants themselves. Robinson (1998: 118) noted that "integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most." The conceptual analysis of migrant integration is mainly dominated by national frameworks, and takes into account the differences between migrants and the members of the receiving society, foregrounding the nation-state as a primary unit of analysis favouring "methodological nationalism" (Glick-Schiller and Wimmer, 2002; Levitt, 2007). Analysing and defining integration through a national gaze disregards the experiences of migrants in the processes of integration (Erdal, 2013). In order to move beyond defining integration within national frameworks that support a one-way process, policy and academic papers define integration as a two-way process including the reciprocity of rights and obligations of both migrants and the members of receiving society (EU, 2010; Phillimore and Goodson, 2008). However, although this definition shares the responsibility between migrants and the members of the receiving society, it is still a part of the hierarchy that is implicit in the discussion when focusing on harmonious relationship between two groups. It does not include the actions and aspirations of many migrants who prefer not to identify with the members of the receiving society (Hammond, 2013). In order to analyse the multi-dimensional processes of integration, it is necessary to focus on the migrants' experiences, aspirations and how they negotiate membership in a particular place, because their experiences might differ according to their migratory status. As stated by Castles et al. (2002) the integration of refugees differs from that of labour migrants because of their motives for migration and their different circumstances in the receiving society.

Refugee integration is defined by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles as a multi-dimensional, long term, dynamic and two-way process which involves the (forced) migrants, individuals and the members of receiving societies (ECRE, 2002). In operationalizing refugee integration, Ager and Strang (2008) developed a widely adopted framework, structured around ten domains grouped under four headings: "means and markers" (employment, housing, education, health), "social connections' (social bridges, social bonds, social links), "facilitators" (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and "foundation" (rights and citizenship). Although this approach offers a way to understand integration processes, it does not take into account the specificity of the receiving societies, the migratory status, social class and conditions of refugees. For instance, integration processes of refugees might be different in developing countries due to the lack of state assistance and limited access to rights. Much of the discussion on the academic level defines successful integration only with reference to the settlement country (Hammond, 2013). This approach supports the dominance of the national framework in defining integration rather than highlighting the aspirations and experiences of migrants – more specifically, how migrants live their lives. Moreover, there has been a major shift in EU policy-framing, which defines integration

as a three-way process by adding the countries of origin as a third actor in the processes of integration (EC, 2011). This approach brings transnationalism into the discussion on the concept of integration.

In this article, integration is understood as a multi-layered phenomenon, ranging from structural to socio-cultural, and as a process rather than an "endpoint", encompassing the empirical patterns of migrant adaptation and the lived experiences of migrants themselves. It pays more attention to the role of agency and its circumstances in order to understand how refugees negotiate their membership of the receiving society. Existing research on refugee integration has not paid much attention to the integration processes of refugees whose legal statuses differ from country to country and who lack access to fundamental rights. It is important to highlight that refugees offered temporary protection face a lack of access to rights and antagonistic perceptions by locals, both of which influence their livelihood in a negative way (Horst, 2006a; 2006b). Hence, the intentions and aspirations of the refugees to integrate with the receiving society, the acceptance of the receiving society towards newcomers and their transnational activities, might be crucial in supporting integration processes.

The transnational perspective on integration has traditionally focused on the role of sending countries, which encourages the emigrants' economic and political engagement from afar, such as remittances including economic, social, cultural and political elements, and has prompted the development of sending countries through the impact of the multifaceted process of integration, as well as the continuity of the transnational activities of migrants (King and Collyer, 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2016). While the concept of integration is understood from a national point of view by dwelling upon "methodological nationalism" (Glick-Schiller and Wimmer, 2002), transnationalism is an approach that emphasises "methodological individualism" and focuses on the experiences of migrants (Lacroix, 2013). Transnationalism is understood as multiple ties and interactions linking migrants across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 2009). The concept of transnationalism, in some definitions, stresses mobility when analysing the relationship between the country of origin and the receiving country. For example, Portes' definition of transnationalism emphasizes aspects of geographical mobility, which are limited to migrants who regularly cross borders between two or more nation-states and are often connected to more than one society economically, politically and culturally (Portes, 1997). However, those who are unable to cross borders due to their immigration status and the associated limitations on movement might also be involved in transnational activities through familial, socio-cultural and economic engagements (Mau, 2010; Faist et al., 2013; Horst, 2006a; 2013). Schunck (2011) defines transnational activities as specific actions of migrants, which connect the receiving and the sending societies. These activities include sending remittances, physical border crossing, cultural activities and exchanging social remittances in the form of ideas and behaviours (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Levitt, 2001; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2003). The role of transnational activities in the process of integration of refugees might be different from that of migrants. The living conditions of refugees, their aspirations, as well as the policies of the receiving countries on their integration, all need to be considered when analysing cross-border activities. For instance, in the case of Syrian refugees, transnational activities mostly take place in the receiving country due to their limited geographical mobility, the on-going conflict in Syria, and their legal status and policies, which may hinder integration. In this article, transnationalism is understood as a coping strategy for refugees who experience difficulties in accessing rights and feel excluded due to an unsecure migratory status, which contributes to their integration processes.

Researchers focusing on the relationship between integration and transnationalism have reported different findings based on the type of relationship between the two at the individual level (Erdal, 2013). On the one hand, some studies show that strong transnational ties correlate with weak integration; if refugees' resources and energies are focused upon the sending country they may be less willing or able to engage in integrative activities in the country of migration (Basch et al., 1994; Faist, 2000; Kivisto, 2001). On the other hand, some studies indicate that integration and transnationalism are

mutually supportive. For instance, economic integration is an essential driver for transnational economic activities, i.e. remittances and investment (Carling and Hoelscher, 2013; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Hammond, 2013; Levitt et al., 2003; Portes et al., 2002; Sturge et al., 2016; Bilgili, 2015; Vertovec, 2009). In these studies, integration is generally state-assisted and seen as a multi-dimensional process. However, in the case of Syrians in Turkey, who are under temporary protection, while the state has introduced an integration policy offering access to education, health care and recently to the labour market, access to these rights is limited in practice. In this case, using transnational activities as a survival strategy may support an environment more favourable for integration.

Syrian refugees in Turkey

Since the crisis in Syria began, Turkey adopted an "open door" policy for Syrians, opening twenty-five refugee camps in the provinces of southeast Turkey alone. Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol on the status of refugees in Turkey, however Turkey applies a geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention. In line with the geographical limitation, asylum rights are limited only to Europeans whereas Syrians who have fled to Turkey are not recognized as "refugees". I will use the term "refugee" when referring to Syrians in Turkey, even though they are not recognized as refugees, implicated with the use of the term.

In October 2011, the Turkish government adopted a Temporary Protection (TP) regime for all Syrians, ensuring nonrefoulment protection, humanitarian assistance and no limit on the duration of stay in Turkey. Subsequently, in April 2013, Turkey passed a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection that clarified the status of Syrians in Turkey, focusing on subsidiary protection, temporary protection[1] status and humanitarian assistance. The rights of Syrian nationals in Turkey now include a lawful stay in Turkey until the conflict ends in Syria and access to health care, education, social assistance and the labour market. Accessing these rights, however, can be difficult in practice. For example, obtaining work permits is difficult and depends upon employers' willingness to offer contracts of employment and for refugees to have held Turkish identification documents for at least six months. In fact, the data of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security indicates that only 4,019 Syrian refugees were granted a work permit during 2015,[2] and only 13,298 in 2016.[3] According to a report published by the Crisis Group, as of January 2018, an estimated 750,000-950,000 Syrians currently work in the informal sector and only 15,000 have obtained the permits needed for formal employment.[4] While a small proportion of Syrian refugees are supported within camps, there are also those who have successfully settled on their own and contribute to the local economy. Syrians also enter the labour market by establishing businesses. As stated in the same report, as of December 2017, there were about 8,000 registered Syrian businesses in Turkey and about 10,000 unregistered enterprises.[5] These businesses are established in Istanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep, Hatay, Sanliurfa, Mardin and Kilis and numerous Syrian businessmen contribute to the Turkish economy by investing their capital in Turkey (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015). According to a study conducted by Building Markets, Syrian enterprises employ on average 9.4 Syrians, the majority of whom previously worked in the informal sector.[6]

On 2 July 2016, the Turkish President announced that millions of Syrians living in Turkey would be granted citizenship. According to a new report on Syrian refugees in Turkey, published by the Turkish Parliament's Refugee Rights Commission, as of 2017 there were 30,000 Syrian nationals granted citizenship in Turkey.[7] The Deputy Prime Minister said that: "Citizenship will be granted initially based on criteria such as employment, education level, wealth, and urgency of one's situation."[8] Not extending the citizenship to all Syrians also highlights selectivity on their integration that discriminates between Syrians in terms of their social class, profession and skills.

As of May 2018, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey reached 3,589,384 million[9] (excluding the unregistered), 93 per cent[10] of whom prefer to reside in towns and cities[11] rather than in camps, including the border cities and metropolitan areas where they experience limited access to

accommodation, social services and job opportunities (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016). According to research conducted by Erdogan (2014) on the social acceptance of Syrians in Turkey, Syrians are represented as a burden to the country, criminals, murderers and rapists; this shapes public perception of them and increases the level of discrimination that Syrians face in the society. The rising number of Syrian nationals living in cities opens discussions around issues of permanency, economic stabilization, political representation and accessibility of public services both for the refugees and wider society.

METHODS

The findings presented here are based on fieldwork carried out in Istanbul, Ankara, Hatay and Gaziantep from April 2015 to January 2016. These four cities were selected for methodological reasons, as each has a different history and experience of integrating migrants. Istanbul has been home to many migrants over many years including Afghans, Somalis, Iraqis, Iranians and Moroccans. Ankara, the capital of Turkey, had hitherto mostly received internal migrants; the arrival of Syrian refugees introduced new diversity into the city. Gaziantep, bordering Syria, has to some extent developed an infrastructure around Syrian refugees including businesses, mainly in the textile, footwear and plastic sectors, established by Syrian refugees and is also a city where national and international NGOs work actively around refugee integration. Hatay, also on the border with Syria, has a large Arabic-speaking population and exported $214 million in 2016 to Syria due to the settlement of Syrian businessman (Koru and Kadkoy, 2017).

By selecting these four cities, I sought to understand whether contextual differences had an influence on the processes of integration. I conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 90 Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Ankara, Hatay and Gaziantep, recruited in cafés and other meeting points. Once I had made some connections, I used a snowballing approach to identify further interviewees. Most of the interviewees were men, aged from 19 to 54; most had very low incomes, though a few informants were living in more affluent districts of Istanbul, Ankara and Gaziantep.[12] Although many of my informants were Sunni-Arabs, I also interviewed many Syrian refugees who were of Kurdish and Turkmen origin. Their length of stay in Turkey varied; while some had migrated six months ago, others had been living in Turkey for four years. None of the informants had stayed in refugee camps and most of them were not registered with the Turkish authorities.

The questions were relatively open, to enable respondents to tell their stories in their own words, and focused on their migration journeys, experiences before migrating to Turkey, experiences in Turkey (arrival, settlement and relationship with the natives), links with Syria and near-future plans. These themes were chosen based on the methodological approach of this research, which takes the migrant-actor level as its foundation and focuses on their experiences. I worked closely with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to English during the interview, used qualitative content analysis to identify a set of common themes from the narratives and then employed a thematic coding system, which helped to create analytical categories. Ethical approval for the project was obtained via Koc University's ethics committee and consent forms, which were circulated to participants before starting the interview process.

RESULTS

Integration vs Transnationalism: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Analysing interactions between integration and transnationalism has methodological and theoretical challenges. Both concepts are controversial and hotly debated, as there are no generally accepted

definitions of these terms (Al-Ali et al,. 2011; Castles et al., 2002). The ways these terms are defined becomes crucial in analysing their relationship with each other. As explored in the theoretical section, integration and transnationalism have different conceptual approaches; while integration is associated with methodological nationalism, transnationalism is based upon methodological individualism (Lacroix, 2013). Consequently, there is a need to revise integration to move beyond the type of conceptualization that is dominated by a national framework in order to have a better combination of these terms.

In order to measure the level of interaction between integration and transnationalism, Erdal and Oeppen (2013: 868) take migrant integration as a starting point and then explore how migrant transnationalism interacts with it. Their conceptual approach highlights the interactions between migrant integration and transnationalism as the balancing acts of migrants who can access opportunities in two or more societies. Erdal and Oeppen (2013) propose a typology of interactions between integration and transnationalism which understands integration within two spheres: structural (economic, political and legal) and socio-cultural (emotional, cultural and religious, and social); and interaction as having three types: addictive (the result of the interaction is the sum of the two parts), synergistic (the result is greater than the sum of two parts), and antagonistic (the result is less than the sum of the two parts). Their typology shows that the interactions between integration and transnationalism are formed by the fact that both are constituents of the spheres of migrants' lives that are relevant to social processes. Rather than focusing on normative approaches, they base their typology on a view of migrants as actors, who act according to choices (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). Taking into account the migrant-actor level view as a basis in analysing the interactions between integration and transnationalism challenges the dominant national framework in defining integration.

Similarly, Dekker and Siegel's (2013) research, focusing on the integration processes and transnational practices of Ethiopian, Burundian, Moroccan and Afghan migrants, also supports the view that there is a positive interaction between integration and transnationalism as the two processes are complementary. Erdal (2013) also stated that migrant integration and transnational activities are parallel processes that are not simply conflating with one another. Focusing on remittance-sending practices of migrants in analysing the relationship between integration and transnationalism, many studies show that integration and transnationalism are mutually supportive (Carling and Petterson, 2014; Carling and Hoelscher, 2013; Sturge et al. 2016; Portes et al. 2002; Bilgili 2015). However, migrant integration and transnationalism might be different from that of refugees due to the refugees' conditions in the receiving society, barriers to cross-border mobility, insecure migratory status and the lack of access to rights. In exploring the interaction between refugee integration and transnationalism, many studies highlight the obstacles that displaced groups face: lack of legal status and rights, limited mobility, unsecure status, exclusion, marginalization and conditions in the countries of origin (Horst, 2006a; 2006b; Iaria, 2013; Carling and Erdal, 2012). For instance, Horst's (2006b) research on transnationalism and the resettlement dreams of Somali refugees in the Kenyan refugee camps of Dadaab discovered that transnational activities such as remittances are essential for their daily survival. The use of transnational activities contributes to their settlement processes in the receiving country. Transnational activities of refugees are widely influenced by the conditions in the sending country and the structural constraints in the receiving country. In analysing how the transnational activities of Somali refugees and Pakistanis in Norway are influenced by the conflict in the sending countries, Carling and Erdal (2012) state that ongoing conflict and state collapse in the country of origin increase aspirations to remit and unemployment or unsecure employment of refugees limit their remittance-sending activities. Exploring the remittance-sending activities of Zimbabwean refugees in Britain, Bloch (2008) argues that the remittance-sending capabilities of Zimbabweans are affected by the structural exclusions in the UK immigration regime. Consequently, "refugeehood" plays a crucial role in analysing how integration processes and transnational activities are interlinked.

In the next section, I will explore the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey by focusing on their perceptions on integration and the use of transnational activities in relation to their adaptation in the receiving society.

The linkage between integration and transnationalism: Transnational activities to survive

In exploring the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey, my approach is based on the refugees' own strategies in regard to their lives in Turkey and in relation to sustaining transnational ties through allowing for their own reflections and perceptions. When examining how structural constraints and the perceptions of the state influence the integration processes of refugees, it is necessary to include the migrants' own understanding of integration and their experiences. To understand the reflections of Syrians on integration, I asked them how they define integration and how such policies influence their settlement process. While the majority of the participants expressed that access to the labour market defined integration, a few of them stated that the important factor was their migratory status.

> When I work, I pay my rent, bills, buy food and feel that I can be a part of society. But, most of the time I feel excluded from society because finding a secure job means you get your full wages and have a guarantee that you will not be out of work. This is very difficult in Turkey. For me integration is about work, surviving in a new country. I do not feel integrated into a society (35 years old, male, Ankara).

> Integration for me is about inclusion in the new society that needs to be supported by Turkey's policies. We do not have a secure status here. We are not even called refugees. We are under temporary protection and we do not know what might happen to us when the government changes its mind and wants us to leave Turkey. I do not feel secure in Turkey and many Syrians feel the same. When there is uncertainty, you do not want to integrate and you feel not accepted (female, 41 years old, Gaziantep).

> There are a lot of Syrians in Aksaray, Istanbul who want to go to Europe. Europe provides homes and money to Syrian refugees. My plan was to go to Europe but I do not have money. If I have equal rights I might stay but do not prefer to stay because they do not want us. How can I talk about integration when I cannot access fundamental rights (male, 25 years old, Istanbul).

> I want to go to Germany and carry on my education there. I do not see any future here. I need to work to buy food, to look after my family, to pay rent. In Germany, they will give us free accommodation, so I can get education (male, 20 years old, Hatay).

These accounts from the refugees on integration show that uncertainty based on their status and access to rights create a barrier on their aspiration to integrate, as supported by the literature (Horst, 2006a, 2006b; Iaria, 2013; Harpviken, 2014; Carling and Erdal, 2012). Syrian refugees' accounts of integration focus mostly on structural domains that include legal status and access to rights rather than socio-cultural domains of integration, which clearly shows that for them, integration represents "survival" in the receiving society. When surviving becomes the main strategy of refugees, they rely on receiving remittances from their families and friends abroad. Some respondents were supported financially by family members and friends in Europe and in the Gulf States, an important and common transnational economic activity for the livelihoods of the refugees (Brees, 2010).

> My uncle lives in Dubai, sends me 300 dollars per month. I could not survive here without this money because Istanbul is very expensive and I am not working now (male, 22 years old, Istanbul).

> I came to Turkey two years ago with my family. After one year of my arrival, I opened a café-restaurant in Gaziantep. I did not have enough investment to open a business here. I borrowed money from my friend who lives in Germany to establish my business. When I need money, my Syrian friend in Germany sends me some from time to time (male, 40 years old, Gaziantep).

The links that they maintain with their families and friends in other countries are essential for their daily survival (Horst, 2006b). In the case of Syrians who experience a lack of access to employment, the remittances they receive from their families abroad enable them to survive in Turkey. This supports that transnational links are used as a strategy to survive. Syrians who were able to access to the labour market stated that they sent remittances to their families in Syria from time to time. The continuity and regularity of this activity depended upon their own economic situation. In the words of three respondents:

> I want to send money to my family in Syria regularly, but I can only send money when I have it, as it is very expensive here and it is difficult to send money each month (male, 36 years old, Istanbul).

> I came here with my husband and children. My mother and father are in Syria. They [mother and father] did not want to come with us to Turkey. They [mother and father] did not want to leave their land. My husband works in catering. His wages are just enough for us to survive. When he receives tips and extra money by working until very late, we can send money to my family (female, 33 years old, Ankara).

> My main problem is not having a secure job. I studied medicine; I have a certificate; I am qualified but I cannot find a job here. I worked in construction but I did not get my wages. I just want a secure job to pay my rent and buy food (male, 25 years old, Gaziantep).

Although most Syrians enter the labour market due to the insecurity of the informal market, minimum wages and not having social security influence their ability to ensure continuity of transnational economic activities. In most cases, sending remittances to their families in Syria was intermittent. The positive correlation between economic integration, measured mainly by employment status, and remittance-sending is supported by most studies (see Carling and Hoelsher, 2013; Bilgili, 2015; Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004; Al-Ali et al., 2001; Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002). For instance, Al-Ali et al. (2001) shows that employed Eritrean refugees are more likely to support their families in the country of origin than unemployed Eritreans or Eritreans working in informal economy. Similarly, Hammond's (2013) research on Somali refugees in the United Kingdom supports that accessing the labour market is crucial for active engagement in transnational economic activities.

Apart from financial remittances, Syrian refugees benefitted from other forms of transnational economic activities including business investments and non-monetary remittances, such as advice and help with finding a job, housing and moving to other destinations. Some established businesses that connected the sending and receiving societies, i.e. opening restaurants, cafés, and convenience stores that sold Syrian food and products in Turkey. In Gaziantep cross-border businesses bring goods from the country of origin and use the knowledge of both economies and societies across the border (Brees, 2010). Opening establishments that connect the sending and receiving societies

by making Syrian goods, products and culture available in Turkey offers the potential for social and cultural exchange and the emergence of new cultural forms. Many interviewees who established businesses in Turkey stated that they brought most of the products from Syria:

> I opened this shop a year ago with my brother. We sell coffee, spices, tea, olive oil, rice and a variety of dry foods, and cleaning material that we brought from Syria. The majority of people living in this area are Syrians and they prefer to consume Syrian products. Our business is going well. In this way, we keep ties with our country in economic terms through buying products from Syria (male, 37 years old, Gaziantep).

> I owned this restaurant two years ago. We mostly sell Syrian food. Even though our main food supplier is Turkish, we have also been bringing some goods from Syria to cook traditional dishes. . .I used to own a restaurant in Syria. My dream is to open a franchise in Syria (male, 51 years old, Hatay).

They bring goods from Syria and sell them in Turkey to other Syrian refugees and Turkish people – local people's utilization of such businesses offers the possibility of adaptation of both Turkish and Syrian residents to their coexistence (Castles et al., 2002; Da Lomba, 2010). The businesses established by Syrian refugees in Turkey are examples of transnational economic activities because these establishments establish economic links between Syria and Turkey and stimulate cultural exchange and social interaction. A Syrian patisserie owner who has a bakery shop in Aleppo run by his relatives in Syria, stated that he brought goods from Syria from time to time and used them to make his own desserts in his shop in Istanbul. He mentioned that his Syrian desserts connect economies across the borders and members of receiving society and Syrians:

> I have opened two Syrian patisseries in a year. I was doing the same job in Syria. At the beginning, most of my customers were Syrians then Turkish people started to buy Syrian desserts; they learn about our food culture. The connection between Turks and Syrians has been established through desserts (male, 45 years old, Ankara).

Cross-border businesses have assisted economic integration by providing an income but they have also supported social integration to some extent. Businesses run by Syrian refugees helped to create an environment for economic, cultural and social exchanges. Some of these establishments had branches in Syria that, through employment opportunities, connected the Syrian refugees in different cities of Turkey the members of the receiving society and individuals in the sending country (Al-Ali et al., 2001). By offering employment opportunities to Syrian refugees, these businesses also assisted the economic integration of refugees, as stated by shop owners in Gaziantep and Hatay:

> I opened this restaurant two years ago and another one a year ago. The majority of the employees in my establishment are Syrians. There are many businesses run by Syrians who choose to employ Syrian refugees to help them financially (male, 50 years old, Gaziantep).

> There are many young Syrians looking for a job. As an employer, I prefer to hire Syrian people to help them. We understand each other better and communication becomes easier (male, 38 years old, Hatay).

Financial remittances and investments as types of transnational economic activities are important aspects of economic integration and networks of solidarity between the refugees, the country of origin and the members of receiving society. In general, the empirical data supports the view that

refugees make a positive contribution to the local economy when they access the labour market and they are able to survive through transnational activities, despite the structural constraints and the obstacles they have to face.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have discussed the integration processes and strategies of Syrian refugees in Turkey and investigated the intersection between legal status, transnational activities and refugee integration. My approach takes the role of agency as a primary actor in the processes of integration in order to show whether being a refugee implies practices different from integration and transnationalism. In order to have a better analysis of the relationship between integration and transnationalism (rather than focusing on the nation-state perspective on integration, which only describes the responsibilities of refugees within the process), it is essential to show how refugees are influenced by these policies, how they perceive integration and what their experiences are in the receiving country. As illustrated using empirical data, having insecure legal status and a lack of access to the labour market hinders the refugees' aspirations to integrate (Da Lomba, 2010; Strand and Ager, 2010). It becomes clear that when Syrians were offered a temporary-protection with no clear legal provision on the time limit and how their status can become permanent, it discouraged them from aspiring to integrate; this can be considered as one of the driving factors for many refugees deciding to move to Europe.

The empirical data shows that the conditions of Syrians in Turkey are reflected in their perceptions of integration. For the participants, integration represents access to the labour market and having a secure legal status, rather than socio-cultural aspects. The participants do not refer to socio-cultural integration when they reflect on their understanding of integration because this is perceived as less important for surviving in Turkey. This supports the notion that the processes of integration are linked with their conditions in the receiving country and are widely influenced by the aspirations of refugees.

According to OECD's report (2017) on labour market integration of Syrian refugees in Germany, labour market conditions of Syrians are positive and their integration framework focuses more strongly on labour market integration through mentorship programs that help refugees obtain employment. In the case of Turkey, however, Syrian refugees face many obstacles in entering the labour market, which is seen as the main contributing factor for surviving in Turkey, where they do not have access to free accommodation, hindering their integration processes as a result. In this respect, this study brings the question of "survival" into the discussion of refugee integration as an important domain of integration, rather than focusing only on the political, legal, economic and cultural domains. In this case, most participants rely on transnational activities as a main strategy to survive in the receiving country. When their goal is to survive, they mainly engage in transnational economic activities rather than socio-cultural activities. The main transnational activities they participate in are sending and receiving monetary remittances and making investments, hence connecting Syria and Turkey. However, the level of participation in these activities differs with regards to conditions in the sending and receiving countries, such as ongoing conflict in the sending country and the lack of job opportunities, limited access to rights, individual conditions such as being unemployed, family reunification, access to resources and, lastly, the aspirations of Syrian refugees. Although many respondents remitted money to Syria, these economic exchanges between Syrians in Turkey, Syria and elsewhere are not regular, as this activity depends on conditions in the receiving country as well individual conditions. As stated by the interviewees, it is difficult for Syrian refugees to find proper and regular employment in Turkey in order for them to send money to their families. In most cases, their participation in transnational activities is related to surviving and

building a new life in Turkey, yet simultaneously to speeding up the processes of integration. For instance, sending and receiving remittances and establishing businesses linking the home and host societies have appeared as important activities in the processes of integration. Empirical data suggests that there are no significant differences between the transnational activities and processes of adaptation of Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Ankara, Hatay and Gaziantep.

My findings support the view that transnationalism and integration are mutually supportive, demonstrating that when they access the labor market, they engage in transnational economic activities, and when their access is limited, they use their transnational links as a strategy to integrate (Carling and Hoelscher, 2013; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Hammond 2013; Levitt et al., 2003; Portes et al., 2002; Sturge et al., 2016; Bilgili, 2015; Vertovec, 2009). Considering that the case of Syrian refugees is unique in legal status and in limited access to fundamental rights with regards to the other types of migrants as well as refugees presented in the wider literature, their transnational activities are used as a strategy to adapt to the receiving society rather than building bridges between the sending and receiving countries. Focusing primarily on the refugee-actor level view in analysing the interactions between integration and transnationalism, this study offers a different framework which brings the conditions of refugees to the foreground and contributes to the literature of refugee integration and transnationalism by discovering that the question of survival is clearly reflected in their perception of integration as they integrate to survive and use transnational activities as a coping strategy.

It is crucial for the receiving country to have a long-term integration policy that considers the needs of refugees, including the granting of citizenship to all refugees, supporting refugee associations and guaranteeing their right to mobility. More specifically, the receiving country needs to have policies that support the labour market integration of Syrian refugees. The current work permit regulation for Syrians could be revisited to make their access to the formal labour market easier. The receiving country should also have policies that encourage entrepreneur refugees to establish businesses and make access to the labour market easier for all refugees, regardless of their profession.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the editors of this special issue for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this article and anonymous referees for their valuable and constructive comments. I am grateful to Helin Akcam for her contribution to the article.

FUNDING

This research was funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu- BIDEB - 114C145).

NOTES

1. On 22 October 2014, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Turkey issued a regulation on temporary protection.
2. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, "Work Permits for Foreigners Statistics 2015", http://www.csgb.gov.tr/media/3209/yabanciizin2015.pdf
3. "Syrian refugees: Struggles in Turkey Intensify", in Al Jazeera, 25 July 2016, Date accessed 13 June 2017, http://aje.io/tn9w.

4. 'Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions', *International Crisis Group*, Report no: 248, 29 January 2018, available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions
5. Ibid.
6. "Another Side to the Story: A market assessment of Syrian SMEs in Turkey", *Building Markets*, June 2017.
7. 'TBMM İnsan Haklarını İnceleme Komisyonu Mülteci Hakları Alt Komisyonu raporu', Sputniknews, 18 January 2018, https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201801181031873614-tbmm-turkiye-suriyeliler-rontgenini-cekti/
8. DW: "Syrian refugees express mixed feelings over Turkish citizenship offer", 14 July 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugees-express-mixed-feelings-over-turkish-citizenship-offer/a-19399783
9. UNHCR- Syria Regional Refugee Response http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224
10. DGGM Statistics and Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD): http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik
11. Many Syrian refugees residing outside of camps have faced difficulties paying rent, accessing employment, the education system and health services.
12. The majority of Syrian refugees in Istanbul settled in the European side districts, including Fatih, Esenler, Esenyurt, Okmeydani, Beyoglu and Basaksehir, so most of my participants live or work in these districts of Istanbul. In Ankara, they live in the districts of Ismetpasa, Altindag, Siteler and Haskoy. In Gaziantep, they live in the districts of Sehit Kamil, Emek mahallesi and Karatas.

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