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Adapting to staying, or imagining futures elsewhere:

Migration decision-making of Syrian refugees in Turkey

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Abstract

There is a lack of research into the question of how refugees make migration decisions. Building upon the literature concerning migration aspirations and drivers of migration in contexts of forced displacement, this working paper examines the questions of how and why Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Izmir experience mobility and immobility. Drawing on the findings of a mixed-methods study conducted in 2018 amongst refugees in those two cities, it disentangles the many different ways of staying in Turkey. It offers insights into the perspectives of Syrians who aspire to return to Syria but stayed; those who want to remain in the country; those who aspire to move on to another country but stayed; and those who left for Europe but returned to Turkey. The findings of this study show a strong desire to return among the Syrian refugee population in Turkey, should the conflict come to an end. It also finds moderate aspirations to stay in Turkey, and a strong resistance to the idea of migrating further, into Europe. However, aspirations with regard to return and onwards migration were higher than actual migratory behaviour on the ground. The paper highlights that subjective factors such as life satisfaction, imaginings of the future, and hope, are crucial factors at the micro-level that shape refugees' migration decision-making on a micro-level. The hope for return, one day, to Syria had initially motivated many Syrians to remain in Turkey. However, a combination of having given up hope of safely returning to Syria in the future, relatively high life satisfaction in Turkey, and negative ideas about what life in Europe might entail, have led Syrians to consider settling down in Turkey. Access to work is perceived as being easier there than in Europe, and a sense of a common cultural belonging has created strong counter-narratives to Europe as a potential destination.

Contents

Introduction

Aisha, a 28-year-old Syrian woman tells me about her life in Küçükçekmece, a suburb of Istanbul. As the daughter of a school teacher and a housewife, she remembers her childhood and youth in Idlib as being a carefree and ordinary time, before the conflict broke out when she was 21. She and her husband Muhammad did not want to leave Syria at first, and tried to stay for as long as possible in their home country. However, when it became increasingly difficult for him to find a job, Muhammad left for Lebanon, while Aisha remained in Idlib with his brother. Schools were shut down and Aisha's four children stopped attending classes. Still, she and her children stayed. However, when Muhammad's brothers were killed and Aisha witnessed the killing of her nephews and nieces, she and her husband decided to leave for Turkey. First, Muhammad went alone to Istanbul, and found a job in construction, which had been his original profession. There, he worked for 16 months before he was able to save enough money to pay for a smuggler who brought Aisha and their children to join him. Muhammad also continued to financially support his mother, who remained in Syria. Today, Muhammad is increasingly exhausted by his job, where he sometimes works from 7am to 1am. When Muhammad considered to register for resettlement to Canada, Aisha was against it. She does not want to distance herself from Syria, and wishes to return in the long run only if there is sufficient security. Staying close means that she might be able to visit her parents during Ramadan festivities, for example, if the border crossing were to open. Aisha believes that the further away she is from Syria, the less likely she will be to return home. She also does not want to live in a country that she perceives as being too different from what she knows. While waiting for an eventual return, she has been trying to avoid loneliness, and has started to take lessons in tailoring and Turkish at a local NGO. She is grateful that in Turkey, her children will finally go to school again.

Aisha's story showcases the complex migration decision-making processes of urban Syrian refugees living in Turkey today. Turkey currently hosts the world's largest refugee population, including a reported 3.6 million registered Syrians (UNHCR 2019). In a context of a protracted refugee situation and hardening borders between Syria, Turkey and the European Union, this article analyses the ways in which refugees undertake and experience (im)mobility and why. In doing so, it aims to add to the existing scholarship on migration decision-making in contexts of forced displacement, and to that which looks specifically into countries neighbouring those states in which conflict is taking place. Major refugee-receiving countries in the Global South are often neglected in the sociological literature, even though 84% of refugees live in developing countries (UNHCR 2017). For example, in 2015, during – and indeed after – the so-called 'summer of migration' or 'migration crisis', the Western media focussed on those Syrians who were arriving on Europe's southern shores, but less on those who were residing in Syria's neighbouring countries Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq (5.5 million, UNHCR 2019), or on those who had been internally displaced (6.1 million, IDMC 2018) – even if their numbers by far exceeded the number of those who arrived in Europe (1 million, UNHCR 2019). There has also

been less focus on those who for whatever reason stayed put in countries such as Turkey. Indeed, since the early 1990s, many of the countries neighbouring the borders of the European Union, including Turkey, have been termed 'transit' countries (Collyer and De Haas 2012; Collyer, Düvell and de Haas 2012; Düvell 2012), suggesting that everybody wants to move on to European countries, ignoring the perspectives of those who in fact aspire to stay where they are, or, to ultimately return to Syria.

Drawing on data derived from a mixed-methods project conducted in 2018, this article offers a deep empirical look at the migration decision-making processes of Syrians living in two cities in western Turkey: Istanbul and Izmir. It offers insights into the perspectives of four different groups of Syrians: those who aspire to return to Syria but stay in Turkey; those who do not aspire towards onward migration, but instead want to remain in the country; those who aspire to leave Turkey and move on to another country; and those who left for Europe but then returned to Turkey for various reasons. In its findings, the article suggests that participants' economic and political motivations for migrating are intimately linked to psychological ones. It suggests that refugees' subjective feelings – such as life satisfaction, imaginings of the future, and (the absence of) hope – are important factors that shape migration decision-making at the micro-level. Meanwhile, factors including an individual's socio-economic background, political orientation, and gender also deeply affect one's ability to return, stay, or move on.

The paper finds that the intention of ultimately returning to Syria once the war is over originally motivated many Syrians to remain in Turkey. This decision to remain is shaped by further factors, such as the existence of the temporary protection (TP) regime (which allows for access to health care, education, and limited legal security), access to work, and contact with family (which is perceived as being easier in Turkey than in Europe). A sense of a relatively similar cultural and religious environment has also created strong counter-narratives to regarding Europe (rather than Turkey) as a possible destination. In contrast, aspirations for onward migration are often driven by pessimistic ideas of what the future of post-war Syria may be, and by broader life aspirations that are not fulfilled in Turkey. Interviewees often made migration decisions during key moments – when a conscription order arrived, when they witnessed the traumatic death of a loved one, when hope was lost that Syria might change, or when an opportunity to leave Turkey arose. This article also shows that refugees' migration choices are often whole-family decisions. Finally, while women have generally less ability to flee and migrate individually than men, they nonetheless often exercise agency by influencing the destination and time of flight, alongside other migration decisions.

The first section of this article outlines its theoretical framework. After a brief overview of the research design and methodology on which the present study was based (section 2), the third section elaborates on thickening borders and policies governing Syrians in the Turkish context. The fourth section discusses different rationales for migration decision-making, and ways of adapting to staying. Finally, the fifth section discusses the results and draws a general conclusion.

1 Drivers of forced migration, migration aspirations and the role of psychological factors in forced displacement

There is a lack of research into the question of how refugees make migration decisions at the micro-level, and how migration or immobility is undertaken and experienced in different spaces of displacement. Existing studies do not fully explain why people make different decisions in reaction to the same conflict: Why do some people stay in conflict countries while others are displaced internally or across borders? Why do some refugees stay in neighbouring countries and others move on? And how do aspirations for return influence mobility patterns? This lacuna in research is partly linked to the fact that drivers of 'forced' migration are often analysed separately from drivers of 'unforced' migration. Moreover, cognitive elements such as prospective thinking, imaginations, and hope within migration decision-making are often overlooked. This article argues that by bringing together the literature on the drivers of (forced) migration, migration-related psychology research, and migration aspirations, we are better able to answer the important questions raised above.

Theoretical models of drivers of migration, such as the New Economics of Labour Migration theory (Stark 1978, 1984; Stark and Taylor 1991) or the Theory of Cumulative Causation (Myrdal 1957; Massey 1990; Kandel and Massey 2002), have mainly been applied to so-called 'voluntary' migration, as they assume a strong distinction between 'voluntary' and forced migration. This has led to a path dependency of the distinction between the sociology of migration and refugee studies (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). However, boundaries between analytical categories such as 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration are fuzzy, as all migration ultimately involves both choices and constraints (Fischer, Martin, and Straubhaar 1997; Van Hear 1998; Keely 2002; Moore and Shellman 2006; Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2011; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Schewel 2019). Forced migrants make decisions just as non-forced or 'voluntary' migrants do, although these decisions are made within a narrower range of possibilities (Van Hear, Brubaker, and Bessa 2009) and are driven by different configurations of drivers and motivations. Moreover, some forced migrants have more choices than others: social class, for example, profoundly influences how refugees experience their displacement (Van Hear 2004). Migration decisions are also constrained by legal status – a displaced person who does not have access to legal recognition of their status has a narrower set of choices than an asylum seeker, a recognised refugee or a displaced person who is living with a residency permit in a destination country.

While many studies on forced displacement have shown that war and violence in refugees' countries of origin are key causes of migration (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1986; Schmeidl 1997; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006, 2007; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Lischer 2007; Lindley 2010; Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2011; Adhikari 2013; FitzGerald and Arar 2018;), migration processes are often influenced by a multitude of factors and their interactions (de Haas 2011). Moore and Shellman (2006),

for example, develop the hypothesis that refugee flows are greater in the face of state (sponsored) genocide/politicide than they are in response to other state coercion, violent dissident campaigns, or civil wars. Bohra-Mishra and Massey (2011) find that violence has a nonlinear effect on migration, supporting a threshold theory of migration and violence. A number of other studies highlight the importance of economic development and poverty in home and destination countries (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1986; Schmeidl 1997; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2007, 2004; Adhikari 2013). However, empirical results are mixed. While some studies (Ibáñez and Vélez 2008; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003) do not find economic opportunities to be strong or significant predictors for forced migration, others (Schmeidl 1997; Moore and Shellman 2004) find that countries with higher levels of economic development produce fewer refugees. Adhikari (2013) also demonstrates that outward migration is mediated by the destruction of industry and loss of crops, land, and homes. Finally, Van Hear, Bakewell and Long's (2018) 'push-pull plus' model highlights the fact that several combinations of drivers shape the conditions, circumstances, and environments within which people choose to move or to stay put. These drivers include violence, the political economy of the conflict, endemic state dysfunction, and the nature of the journey itself.

In contrast to the relative abundance of aggregate data, few studies have examined how refugees actually make migration decisions at the individual level. This article posits that valuable insights into the complex processes of mobility can be gained when research seeks to understand how migration aspirations emerge and are realised or restricted. In an early paper on migration aspirations, Carling (2002) separated migration into two steps: first a wish to migrate, and second, the realisation of this wish. De Haas (2014) later combined Carling's model with the work of Sen (1999), to form a framework that encompasses two-way connections between migration and development. De Haas understands migration aspirations as a function of people's general life aspirations and perceived spatial opportunity structures, and defines human mobility as "people's capability (freedom) to choose where to live" (de Haas 2014, 23–26). In his framework, the 'capability' to migrate is a valuable freedom in its own right, regardless of people's preferences for staying or leaving. In a more recent paper, Carling and Schewel (2018) suggest to understand migration as containing two distinct steps: the evaluation of migration as a potential course of action, and the realisation of actual mobility or immobility at a given moment (Carling and Schewel 2018, 947).

The aspiration-capability model was originally not intended as being operationalised in a 'transit' context nor to include return as an option. In applying it to such a context, I argue that it helps to highlight the tensions between refugees' mobility aspirations and capabilities and the ways structural forces constraint or cause refugees' aspirations in different ways. It can also enrich the debate about the 'voluntariness' of return migration, as it clarifies when and under which conditions return tilts towards voluntary and when to non-voluntary. In the case of Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Izmir, it shows the strong mismatch between respondents aspiring to return and actual migratory behaviour as well as the

continuum between involuntary and voluntary return. From a policy and normative level, such an approach makes it very clear that refugees' aspirations do not relieve states from their duties to protect or act, on the contrary, rather the opposite. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that the aspiration-capability framework is a useful way to look at refugees' mobility from their point of view and take them into account as agents, not as passive recipients of benefits or humanitarian aid.

Following this framework, in the present article, the aspiration to migrate (or not) and the realisation of mobility are treated separately. I understand (im)mobility aspirations as consisting of two elements: people's wish to move to another country, stay or return, and people's evaluation of which mobility choice is preferable with regard to how they think their future might and should unfold. People's agency thus lies in the process of *evaluating* return, migration or staying as potential courses of action. This process of evaluation is informed by the past, but also oriented toward the present and the future, and is also influenced by people's capability to contextualise past habits and future projects and imagine alternative possibilities (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 963). Migration aspirations can thus change, and should be studied over time (cf. Cwerner 2001; Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013; Boccagni 2017; Erdal and Oeppen 2018).

Despite the recent 'emotional turn' in migration studies (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; den Besten 2010; Bondi et al. 2007), cognitive elements are often overlooked when studying migration aspirations, with the exception of the way in which personality traits have an impact upon migration decisions (Boneva and Frieze 2001; Frieze and Li 2010; Polek, Van Oudenhoven and Berge 2011; Czaika and Vothknecht 2014). With some exceptions, existing migration-related psychology research mostly excludes migration decision-making in contexts of forced displacement (De Jong and Fawcett 1981; Fawcett 1985). Lately, some studies have started to more specifically explore the influence of people's imaginations upon migration behaviour and highlight the importance of cultural imaginations (Teo and Theo 2003; Halfacree 2004; Coe 2012; Schewel 2015; Koikkalainen and Kyle 2016; Thompson 2017). Other scholars have started to look into the importance of hope for migration decision-making, especially in times of uncertainty (Kleist and Thorsen 2016; Kleist and Jansen 2016; Horst and Grabska 2015; Horst and Lysaker 2019). As Kleist and Jansen (2016) show it, hope is required in order to instigate a first journey beyond one's local borders; hope is maintained in order to endure periods of immobility; hope helps to create opportunities in places in which possibilities for livelihoods are limited; and hope might keep migrants "stuck" in their trajectories, unable to reach an intended destination and unable to return.

I argue that what is still missing from the literature on forced displacement is a consideration of how specific constellations of drivers of migration and psychological factors influence refugees' migration decision-making at the micro level. The use of refugees' narratives and microlevel data here offers a unique opportunity to analyse these interlinkages. The next sections show how centrality of hope – or

its absence – and imaginings of the future in respondents' narratives point to the importance of cognitive elements in migration decision-making, in the context of war, displacement and exile.

2 Research design and methodology

This working paper focuses on self-settled urban refugees from Syria in two Western cities in Turkey.[1] The project chose not to use a narrow legal definition of 'refugee', but instead chose to define 'Syrian refugees' as people born in Syria or holding Syrian nationality and living in Turkey in these two cities in 2018. As such, the data provides insights into the living conditions of Syrians who are registered in temporary protection but also those who live without a regular status or with an alternative residence permit. Respondents were selected from those who were aged 18-39 because this age group usually has the highest probability of migrating (Timmerman, Heyse and Mol 2010). Minors (those under the age of 18) were excluded from the project.

Two cities were chosen for data collection: (1) Turkey's biggest metropole, hosting high numbers of Syrians (Istanbul); and (2) a second large-scale city considered to be a 'transit city' on the migration route towards Europe (Izmir). I chose to focus on urban areas because Syrian refugees in Turkey today are mostly to be found in such areas, especially in cities at the Turkish-Syrian border (such as Şanlıurfa, Hatay, and Gaziantep) and in the non-border city of Istanbul, which currently hosts the highest number of registered Syrian refugees in the country (401,928). Other major cities hosting Syrians are southern cities such as Adana, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Mersin, and two big Turkish metropolises, Izmir (93,324) and Bursa (DGMM 2016). While Istanbul and Izmir both host high numbers of Syrian refugees, the percentage of Syrians in the total population of each does not exceed 3% (Istanbul 2.9%; Izmir: 2.3%). This relatively low figure contrasts with those for southern cities such as Kilis (93.3%) or Şanlıurfa (21.2%). Istanbul is the biggest metropole of the country. With a population of 15 million, it is Turkey's economic capital and the most developed city of the country, and is a centre for politics, education, and cultural life. Izmir, meanwhile, is Turkey's third-largest city with a population of 4 million, and is considered a stopping point on the migration route to the Aegean islands. Both cities have attracted internal migrants, especially from rural and border areas in the South East (Sönmez 2013; Demirtas-Milz and Saraçoglu 2015).

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[1] It excludes Syrians living in camps or informal settlements, as well as rural areas. Focusing on self-settled urban refugees was a conscious choice, as most Syrians in Turkey live in urban are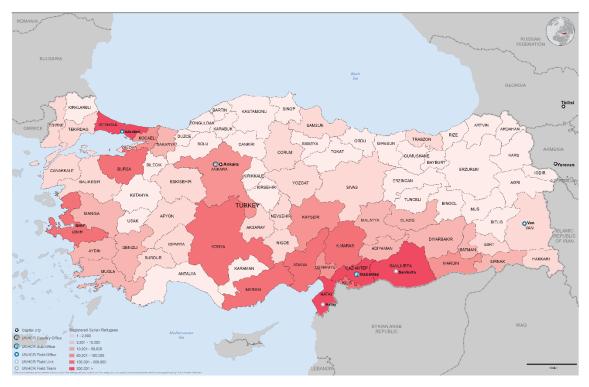as in rented apartments (Erdoğan 2017), while an estimated 7.1 % of the registered Syrian population live in camps (UNHCR 2018).

Figure 1. Provincial breakdown of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey 2018 (UNHCR, DGMM)

The project followed a mixed-methods approach that featured two main methodological components: an individual-level quantitative survey with a sample size of 360 respondents (response rate: 82.9%) and 21 in-depth qualitative interviews. Combining these methods was essential, as it allowed for generalisations to be made whilst also providing the necessary depth and space for the analysis to consider respondents' life histories, the context in which flight and migration decisions were made, personal reasons for fleeing Syria, and changes in aspirations over time. Data was collected in the period of May – July 2018, in collaboration with a team of five young Syrians living in Turkey. These research assistants were university students and/or had experience of working with NGOs providing services to refugees in Turkey. I was present throughout the data collection. The survey interviews were conducted by research assistants, whilst I conducted the in-depth interviews (aided by my assistants who, where necessary, helped me with asking questions and translating). All interviews were conducted in Syrian Arabic.

For the survey, a two-stage sampling strategy was followed, using a combination of multi-stage clustering, random routes, and limited focused enumeration. In each of the two cities, districts hosting high numbers of lower-class and middle-class Syrian were chosen, with their ethnic and religious diversity also playing a role in shaping the selection. Districts in which Syrian refugees settle generally have a number of things in common: more widespread poverty, higher levels of cultural conservatism

and religiosity, a strong sense of community solidarity, and lower costs of living (Erdoğan 2017).[2] The survey included a 50-50% gender quota to enable a gender disaggregated analysis (cf. Müller-Funk e*t al.* 2019 for more details about the sampling strategy). Approximately half of the Syrian refugee population in Turkey is female (Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration 2015; UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2017).

Participants for the qualitative interviews were chosen with consideration of diversity with regard to migration attitudes, gender, ethnicity/religious affiliation, age, and educational background (cf. *Table 8* in the annex for an overview of respondents). Respondents were found via respondents who had previously participated in the survey, as well as through research assistants' personal networks and via exploratory conversations with persons encountered during the fieldwork. This strategy helped to gain access to a diverse sample of respondents. The interview guide included five main topics: the respondent's life history (including their flight and migration trajectory); their perceptions of life in the locality; their perceptions of migration; their personal migration aspirations; their imaginings of Europe. All interviews began with a detailed verbal informed consent process. In the analysis below, interviewees are given fictitious surnames and are quoted with a code.[3]

This article is mainly based on the analysis of the qualitative data derived from the interviews; descriptive statistics drawn from the survey were used to complement the analysis. In particular, I analysed two survey questions that inquired into (1) respondents' reason for coming to Turkey as a destination, and to Istanbul/Izmir more specifically[4], and (2) their reasons for selecting one of four mobility choices when provided with a hypothetical scenario[5]. These two survey questions were open-ended, and allowed hence for giving multiple reasons. I subsequently coded the answers into categories which emerged inductively from respondents' answers.

3 From visa–free policy to thickening borders and mobility restrictions

With time, Turkish-Syrian relations moved from a policy of visa-free movements before and during the first years of the conflict, to a situation of increasingly closed-off borders and military interventions in the later years. Entering, accessing legal protection within, and leaving the country have all become progressively harder for Syrians since 2014. In the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey and Syria had poor

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[2] The research was conducted in the following districts: Istanbul: Küçükçekmece (32.011 registered Syrians under TP), Bağcılar (31.571), Fatih (26.092), Zeytinburnu (18.713); Izmir: Konak (24.536); Karabağlar (20.575); Bornova (17.576); and Buca (8.908).
[3] F = female, M = male, Ist = Istanbul, Iz = Izmir.
[4] "*Originally, why did you decide to come to this country and live specifically in this neighbourhood?*"
[5] "*What would you do if the war was over – (1) return, (2) stay or (3) move on, or (4) return depending on the outcome of the war?*"

relations, because the Syrian regime extended support to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Relations improved after Turkey put pressure on the Syrian regime to end its support for the PKK in 1998. In the following decade, Syria became an important business partner for Turkey: cross-border trade and investment flourished and a visa-free policy allowed citizens of both countries to move at will across the border. This changed when the uprising in Syria began. Turkey became increasingly critical of the regime of President al-Assad, and started to serve as the main staging ground for the Syrian opposition in exile. In summer 2011, Ankara started to openly back both the Syrian National Council (the major civilian coalition based in exile seeking the overthrow of al-Assad) and the Free Syrian Army (Balci 2012). In parallel to these developments, the Kurdish conflict grew into a core political issue in Turkey, which ended a period of relative rapprochement in 2015. Since then, the Turkish military has been directly involved in Syria with three offensives in North Syria: a cross-border operation against forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces in 2016 and 2017, Operation Olive Branch against Kurdish-controlled Afrin in spring 2018, and a military operation in autumn 2019 aimed at removing Kurdish-led forces from the border area and creating "safe zones" for Syrian refugees.

The attitudes of Turkish political parties towards Syrian refugees varies (Betts, Ali and Memişoğlu 2017). While the AKP welcomed Syrians with an open-door policy during the critical years of the influx, and described them as "our guests" and "brothers and sisters" – also with religious and historical references, the main opposition party, CHP, has mainly framed Syrians as being a burden to Turkey. During the presidential elections in 2018, for example, opposition leaders announced that if they won, Syrian refugees would be deported back to Syria (al-Jablawi 2018). President Erdoğan has also tried to change narratives in Turkey regarding historical relations between it and Syria such as the representations of Turkey's loss of its Arab provinces with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during WWI. The latter is an event that has been taught to many Turkish school children as a tale of treacherous Arab tribes who stabbed their Ottoman ancestors in the back. Erdoğan has tried to change anti-Arab sentiments in recent years, for example, by arguing, in a 2017 speech that the saying "[the] Arabs stabbed us in the back" was in fact a lie (Hansen 2016).

Since 2014, Syrians in Turkey have been granted temporary protection (TP) under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) (Soykan 2012). The provisions of the temporary protection regime include the right to legally stay in Turkey, the right to health services (Article 27), and the right to education services (Article 28), as well as the principle of *non-refoulement* and a deportation ban (Art. 6) and principles governing the operation of and support in the camps (Articles 36 to 41) (Toğral Koca 2016). However, the regulation falls short of providing an explicit right to work. TP holders can apply for a work permit, but there is no guarantee that government authorities will grant it (Ineli-Ciger 2014, pp. 32–34). Furthermore, due to a presidential decree it is possible to circumvent the principle of *non-refoulement* in Turkey under certain conditions – namely if there is a threat to

public health, morality or order. This circumvention has been applied, for example, in order to deport regime-critical Kurdish Syrians who support the People's Protection Units (YPG), and also to deport Islamic State sympathisers back to Syria (interview, human rights lawyer, Izmir, 24/11/2017). Moreover, Syrian refugees' access to TP also depends on how they enter the country as they can only apply for a TP permit (*kimlik*) if they enter Turkey directly from Syria via land or sea, and not if they enter from a third 'safe' country. Since 2017, several municipalities have also stopped TP registration, such as Istanbul and cities at the Turkish-Syrian border. This has led to legal limbos and the denial of health care and education to those without a *kimlik*. Over the past years, Turkey has increasingly closed off its border with Syria, and human rights organisations have pointed out that Turkish border guards continue to carry out pushbacks and to kill and injure Syrians as they try to cross the border (Human Rights Watch 2018).

Returning to – and re-entering – Syria is also controlled by the Syrian government. Returnees are vetted upon return by security forces, leading some researchers to conclude that the regime appears to follow the strategy in order to keep large sections of its displaced population out of the country – especially those deemed critical of the regime (Batrawi and Uzelac 2018). According to informed sources, the regime's plans for reconstruction plan to cater for a population of only 17 million people (Vignal 2018a 70), which is significantly smaller than the size of the pre-war population (23 million). The actual numbers of returnees have been low. For example, in 2018, UNHCR reported that 22,410 Syrians returned to Syria from Turkey. Returning also has direct legal consequences in Turkey, insofar as the Turkish government does not allow returnees to seek refuge under TP again, as voluntary departure is considered grounds for cessation of TP. Returnees have to complete a so-called Voluntary Return Form in their city of registration, and ID cards are taken away at the border (Refugee Rights Turkey 2017).

Legal pathways for leaving Turkey have remained restricted since the beginning of the conflict. Applications for work and study visas abroad have a low chance of being accepted. Indeed, the Syrian passport ranks 103rd out of 104 in terms of travel freedom according to the Henley Passport Index, and many Syrians do not have valid IDs in the first place. For example, less than half of survey respondents (43.3%) had ever possessed a passport for international travels; and only 34.7% had a valid passport at the time of the interview. Furthermore, officially, resettlement to a third country through UNHCR cannot be actively pursued. The number of resettlements from Turkey to third countries through UNHCR is low when considered against the number of Syrian refugees currently living in the country (35,682 between 2015-2019, UNHCR 2015-2019).[6]

In recent years, constraints on leaving Turkey have further increased. Since the EU-Turkey Deal in March 2016, the Greek-Turkish border has been increasingly sealed off, and in early 2016, permits for travelling within Turkey were introduced, hindering Syrians trying to reach cities in the West of Turkey,

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[6] https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#oX9P, access: 21 October 2019.

such as Edirne or Izmir. Moreover, attempting to leave Turkey in an irregular manner may lead to detainment or deportation (Refugee Rights Turkey 2017). Also, as with return, leaving Turkey is legally a one-way street: put differently, if TP beneficiaries choose to leave the country voluntarily, they cannot register for TP a second time. The legal status of Syrians who are returned to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Deal meanwhile remains unclear, especially with regard to whether they have access to TP again. Tunaboylu and Alpes (2017) reported that, in 2016-2017, returned Syrians were detained for some weeks, officially for the purpose of identification and security checks. This complex legal context shapes the migration decisions made by Syrian refugees in Turkey. This is discussed below, after a brief description of some of their characteristics.

4 Adapting to staying, or shifting aspirations

Descriptive statistics (see *Table 6* in the annex) reveal in particular respondents' diverse educational backgrounds, family statuses, and their economic vulnerability. Around a quarter of respondents had either attended higher secondary school (14.5%) or university or an equivalent (16.7%). 29.3% had attended lower secondary education, 32.6% primary school and 7.0% had attended no school whatsoever. These educational levels correspond roughly to educational levels found in Syria before the war (World Bank 2010). Two thirds of survey respondents were married (65.6%) and roughly one third (34.4%) was single. 40.6% had no children. With 93.5% of male respondents and 18.8% of female respondents recorded as working, 45.1% reported just about getting by financially, 44.8% had spent savings and borrowed money in the past 12 months, and 10.1% had managed to save money. The following sections focus on respondents' mobility decision-making processes with regard to leaving Syria, returning to Syria, staying in Turkey, moving on, or returning to Turkey from abroad.

Leaving Syria for Turkey or *I want to continue towards my future*

> Then the bombs intensified and the military harassment for my husband. (…) Then the situation became complicated, and I got very tired. And he told me 'I decided that we will leave'. Even if we were against travelling, I was against travelling because I had a goal, I had a mission. I wanted to teach people and change their life. A lot of people needed me, my neighbours, my relatives (…). I left against my wish. When my husband decided that we leave, I didn't forbid it to him because if something happened to him, I would have been the reason. He travelled before me. I refused to travel before he had secured a job and a place to live in Turkey (I6FIst).

The narrative of Maryam, a 35-year-old teacher and mother of two from Aleppo, describing the moment when she and her husband decided to leave Syria, appears at first glance to be person-specific, but it is in many aspects representative of the circumstances under which many Syrian refugees made the decision to leave Syria for Turkey. When Maryam talks about her past in Syria, she describes how the conflict increasingly interrupted her previous life aspirations and slowly weakened her resistance to the

idea of leaving. As with the large majority of interviewees, she was internally displaced before leaving the country, moving in with a family member. For many interviewees, there was frequently a key moment that resulted in leaving, sometimes conveyed by the phrase "the conditions got tight" (*ṣāret tusū' al-umūr*). Such a moment might be the arrival of a conscription order, the acute worsening of economic conditions due to a siege or increasing prices, the traumatic death of friends or family, the fear for the survival of one's children, or the realisation that there was no future for them in the country.

Leaving was not initially imagined to be permanent and was often a family decision: parents and wives supported their sons or husbands in leaving in order to avoid serving in the army; parents supported their daughters in leaving in order to get married or pursue an education abroad; young parents considered leaving in order to secure a school education for their children; unmarried adults left to earn money abroad for family back home in Syria. A recurrent narrative among young adults was that they had left in order to secure their future or the future of their children, while their own parents remained in Syria but supported their decision to leave. While interviewees talked about their feelings of leaving against their wish (*iḍḍarēt inni iṭlaʿ - I was forced to leave*), they were at the same time convinced that leaving was better than staying. They also had the capability and financial resources that enabled them to leave, in contrast to those family members who stayed.

Women whom I interviewed had, in general, more capabilities to stay than their brothers or husbands, as they were not directly affected by military conscription. At the same time, they had fewer capabilities to leave, as they often described being strongly dependent on their husbands' or parents' opinion. However, female interviewees clearly still exercised agency in migration decision-making processes, even in cases of strong financial dependency. 25-year-old Amal, for example, a housewife and mother of four, got married when she was 14 and had completed only primary-level education. After having lived under extremely difficult conditions in Aleppo for seven years, she finally convinced her husband to leave when one of her children was suffering from severe malnutrition:

> There was no solution for my son at the time, I started to make him tea in a bottle but he got even more sick… and the dehydration continued, they told me 'he needs milk'! And I got very tired of it. I told my husband: 'If you want to divorce me, divorce me but the most important thing is that I leave from here! I will not leave my children here in Syria!' (And in the beginning he was against the idea?) Yes, completely. (And you convinced him?) Yes. I even came here to Turkey one month before him. We came to Idlib and he wanted to stay in Idlib! But I wouldn't stay in Idlib! I told him 'I am going to take the children and I am going to my family!' (I10FIz)

Interviewees fled to Turkey because it was the closest or only choice available but also because they had existing contacts and family networks and saw economic opportunities for them (Table 1). Turkey has played an important role in Syria's international trade – in 2011, Turkey was Syria's seventh largest exporter and third largest importer. Especially Northern Syria (and Aleppo in particular) and Southeast Turkey were connected by multiple business networks and transnational social ties prior to 2011. Since the beginning of the conflict, Syrian business people have invested in almost all economic sectors

spanning industrial, commercial and service sectors, as well as private educational institutes and business-related newspapers (Chang 2019 7-8). A government report estimated that by 2016, 20% of the 40,000 factories that in 2010 had been operating in the Aleppo governorate were relocated to Turkey and the Syrian coast or stopped working altogether, while only 10 % were still in operation and 70% were partially or totally destroyed (Vignal 2018b). Participants for the present study mostly originated from northern regions in Syria at the Turkish border, which witnessed fierce fighting or sieges, with 72.8% of survey respondents stemming from the aforementioned Aleppo governorate, 4.4% from al-Hasaka governorate, 3.9% from Deir ez-Zour governorate and 2.8% from Idlib governorate. 9.7% came from Damascus.

Table 1

Reasons for coming to Turkey and the locality of Istanbul/Izmir (coded open-ended question)

Istanbul, n=217	frequency	% of respondents who mentioned this reason
Economic opportunities	74	34.1
Contacts here (family, friends)	65	30.0
Best choice available	45	20.7
Geographically close to Syria	37	17.1
Only choice	37	17.1
Culturally similar to Syria	16	7.4
Presence of many Syrians	9	4.1
Positive advice from someone	6	2.8
Intention to travel further	2	1.8

Izmir, n=143	frequency	% of respondents who mentioned this reason
Contacts here (family, friends)	74	51.7
Best choice available	38	26.6
Economic opportunities	33	23.1
Geographically close to Syria	30	21.0
Only choice	21	14.7
Culturally similar to Syria	8	5.6
Positive advice from someone	8	5.6
Intention to travel further	3	2.1
Presence of many Syrians	2	1.4

Interviewees' narratives clearly show that the *de facto* closure of the Syrian-Turkish borders in 2015 made it harder – especially financially – to enter Turkey, but that this did not ultimately deter them. 34.2% of all survey respondents entered Turkey between 2015 and 2016 (13.9% in 2011-2012, 43.6% in 2013-2014 and 7.2% in 2017-2018). Rather, the closure forced Syrians to resort to the use of

smugglers in order to enter the country (which also increased their risks). All interviewees who fled after the border closing mentioned having entered the country with a smuggler. 25-year-old Mustapha, for example, got wounded when he deserted the army in 2015 after three and a half years of military service. He explained: *When I could step on my foot again, I decided to leave to Turkey. Alhamdulillah. As they say, the angels brought me. I couldn't run or walk a lot, I had crutches and went by smuggling* (I20MIst). Mustapha had just got married when we interviewed him in his home in Zeytinburnu, an Istanbuli suburb. He had also arranged for his wife to join him from Syria with a smuggler.

Reflections on returning or *The impossible choice for the moment*

> Someone who is wanted in the provinces of al-Assad, it's impossible for him to return but people who are not wanted, who didn't participate in the war, they might be able to return in the future. Except for if you were soldier, then you can't. Me personally, when we came here, we made a 5 to 10-year plan, me and my husband. So now, to return and build our life from 0 is very hard. We are not so young anymore, he is 36 and I am 35, it's not easy to start again from the start. Everything we built there is gone and everything we built here would be gone as well. We will not return. (…) Maybe if al-Assad left and reconstruction started (I6Fist).

Maryam's interview excerpt exemplifies the difficult decision-making process concerning return to Syria, which many Syrian refugees face in Turkey, in the seventh year of ongoing conflict. On the one hand, the hope of return was omnipresent among interviewees. Of the 360 respondents to the survey, for example, 30.6% wanted to return to Syria if the war ended, 33.1% wanted to return depending on the outcome of the war, 22.5% wanted to stay in Turkey and 11.4% wanted to leave to another country (2.5% did not provide any answer). The strongest reasons for aspiring to return were a deep emotional attachment to Syria, family and friends still living in Syria, and property left in Syria (which interviewees wanted to reclaim), followed by a deep dissatisfaction with living conditions in Turkey, especially with regard to financial and legal vulnerability (see

Table 2 and Table 3). Return aspirations were often linked to people's wish that life in Syria – including their own living conditions there – should return to what it was before the war. When I asked Amal, for example, about her wishes for the future, she answered: *That I return to Syria! That our life works out. That it changes from what it is now. That it is a bit like what it was like in Syria* (I10Fiz). Return was also aspired to as a way to reunite family members who had been displaced across different countries. Hasan stated:

> Let the war continue for 200 years… even if we live in Turkey by the time, we will return and rebuild the country. (…) So we can reunite around a dinner table. We are all dispersed now, my sister in Damascus, another in Aleppo, another one in Qamishli, my parents in Aleppo, two of my brothers here with me and one in Germany. Of course, we gather in a WhatsApp group and talk to each other all the time... But this is not enough. We are waiting… (…). Of course, we are going to gather in one house beside each other one day… we are all waiting for that… (I17Mist).

Table 2

Reasons for mobility choice mentioned by those who want to return to Syria (coded open-ended question, n=110)

	frequency	% of respondents mentioning this reason
Reasons relating to (changing) links to Syria		
Attachment to the country ('It's my country')	61	55.5
Family and friends in Syria	32	29.1
Flight was temporary; I don't want to be a refugee	9	8.2
Owning property in Syria	8	7.3
Job or education in Syria	4	3.6
Syria has changed; it is not the country that it was when I left	2	1.8
I have not been part of the opposition (I will not be persecuted)	1	0.9
Reasons relating to life in Turkey		
Life in Turkey is difficult; I am unhappy in Turkey	22	20.0
No rights in Turkey (legal situation)	6	5.5
No professional and educational future in Turkey	4	3.6
Language difficulties in Turkey	3	2.7

Table 3

Reasons for mobility choice mentioned by those who want to conditionally return to Syria (coded open-ended question, n=119)

	frequency	% of respondents mentioning this reason
Reasons relating to Syria		
Attachment to my country ('It's my country')	65	54.6
Family and friends still in Syria	17	14.3
If security	17	14.3
If access to my property	12	10.1
If fall of al-Assad	10	8.4
If economic situation acceptable / if prices lower	9	7.6
I don't want to live in exile	4	3.4
If no military service	2	1.7
Turkey		
Too much exploitation in Turkey	17	14.3
No future possible in Turkey	1	0.8

However, other respondents clearly had no aspirations to return. Karim, for example, saw leaving as a political statement, and saw no point in returning:

> My personal opinion is… what is Syria today? In my opinion, the revolution finished in 2013, and from 2014, they won militarily. Who won? Iran, Russia, Germany, France… all countries which sent weapons to bomb small regions. I think the old Syria is finished and the Syria we dreamed about will not come. (…) I call for all Syrians to leave the country. My call is that every Syrian surrenders and leaves (I7Mist).

As with Karim, other interviewees mentioned key moments when they decided against a return to Syria. These were often moments when they lost hope for a future Syria: when they realised that the current regime will probably remain in power; when they got convinced that a future Syria will be politically divided between foreign powers; that the war will continue for a long period of time; or that Syrian society had been negatively transformed through war and conflict:

> Also the character of Syria changed… For example, all my neighbours left, there are new people now. So 70% of people who stayed in al-Assad's regions are either mercenaries or people who have carried weapons or have stolen property. How should we integrate there? (…) So the problem is not al-Assad, soldiers, or bombs but the nature of people who are there (I6FIs).

All respondents strongly emphasised that, regardless of their personal aspirations to return or not, their capabilities to return were low. Above all, personal safety and security were the main concerns. Interviewees who were opposed to the regime or who fled military conscription did not perceive a return to be safe if Bashar al-Assad remained in power. This especially concerned young men who were wanted by security forces. By contrast, women might have higher capabilities to return, which could explain why more women aspired to return than men. Second, many interviewees mentioned economic constraints as a reason for being unable to return; interviewees were afraid that the economic conditions and insufficient infrastructure in post-war Syria would not allow them to find a suitable job; they lacked the financial resources to rebuild their property; or their property was stolen or confiscated during the war.

Just as with leaving Syria, return to the country was a family decision for most respondents. Parents back in Syria, for example, told their children not to come back: *Our families tell us: 'Don't come back to Syria, you haven't tasted life yet… You haven't seen anything of life yet… khalas, you work in Turkey and we live at rest, if you are at rest, we are at rest'* (I17MIst). Interviewees also mentioned their own concerns for their parents' safety and state of mind: *My parents finished their work, they live on their salaries in peace, they don't have big problems. I cannot put them into troubles in regards to arrest or death. They lost two boys, me and my small brother, we are both wanted for the army, so a return to Syria is impossible* (I7MIst). In a context in which return capabilities are highly restricted, return aspirations were either located in a distant future or incorporated into ideas about a future lifestyle characterised by circular mobility between the two countries. In view of the risk of losing TP, respondents also reported that they had decided against returning to Syria for short-term visits:

> At that time, I helped a relative to get a travel permit to go to Syria and return, and when he wanted to return, they didn't let him enter the plane. (…) I realised that this was not a travel

permit but a waiver from temporary protection. (…) Once they are in Syria, they cannot come back to Turkey (I5FIst).

Focusing on the present in Turkey or *Thinking about the future, I no longer do it*

> That we stay close!! That we can smell Syria's odour from close… close to Syria. For example, now, my husband wants to register for a visit for *eid* (I10FIz).

58.3% of survey respondents stated that they did not want to go to Europe even if they were given the necessary papers. 22.5% wanted to stay in Turkey even if the war ended and 33.1% made their return decision dependent upon the outcome of the war (see *Table 7*). Interviewees who aspired to stay in Turkey shared a series of commonalities. Over time, for example, they had often given up hope that a safe return would be possible in the foreseeable future but still wanted to remain geographically close to Syria, to be able to eventually return to or visit the country sporadically. Some, meanwhile, had lost their property in Syria and had no close family member left there. These respondents described Turkey as a relatively safe – yet volatile – country. Interviewees also shared in general a gratefulness towards the Turkish state for having opened its borders to them as one of the few countries in the region. Compared to the authoritarian political context that they knew in Syria, these interviewees perceived Turkey as relatively free, and appreciated living in a society with which they shared similar cultural practices and traditions. 63.0% of survey respondents who aspired to stay in Turkey even if the war ended, for example, thought that Turkey was currently the best country in which a Syrian citizen could live. Even if working conditions were experienced as harsh and exploitative and the Turkish language hard to master, they could imagine building a life there, and saw professional and personal opportunities in the country.

Importantly, interviewees in this category also had the *capability* to stay. First of all, these were mostly respondents who were either politically neutral in the Syrian conflict or who were not openly opposed to the Turkish government. They perceived Turkey as relatively safe compared to what they had lived through and known in Syria. Mustapha, for example, who had deserted the army in Syria, saw himself as being free in Turkey:

> So… I was a soldier… How can you say, there are bad things here…? It is better than Syria, from my point of view… because you know as a soldier… I came… and I had much more freedom… no one owns me… Nobody can tell me, go here, go there… no. *Khalaṣ*, I became free… (…) The difference is… the treatment from the government towards its people (here) is better… A lot. (…) Here, you don't feel a difference between a police man and a citizen. You feel that he serves you. In Syria, you feel that a policeman is the president of the state and the citizen is humiliated. This is the difference. Here there is more respect for the citizen, even for Syrians. There is respect by the state for its people (I20MIs).

Second, respondents in this category managed to generate sufficient income to survive, and did not suffer from complicated or expensive health issues which are not covered through their TP status. Interviewees spoke of the passing of time that had led them to adapt to life in Turkey (*ana tʿawwadet*,

I got used to life, see Table 4). Others mentioned key moments in their decision to stay. These included the realisation that al-Assad will stay in power, and more specific political events such as Erdoğan's victory in the 2018 election, which was perceived by some as a guarantee that Syrians in the country would continue to have access to certain rights. Muhammad, a 23-year-old single man from Aleppo, explained:

> I was always thinking about returning. (…) I took the decision to stay in Turkey when Erdoğan won the elections. Because we were living under a lot of stress during the elections, especially the opposition parties were threatening to deport Syrians, especially to the borders or to Syria. They were playing on this tension. Erdoğan's politics is better for Syrians than those of the opposition parties, he doesn't have a problem if we stay in the country (I8MIst).

Staying was often a family-level decision. The presence of close relatives in Turkey, for example, was mentioned as a main reason for staying, but so too, the opportunity to bring family members to Turkey in the future, as well as the need to financially support family back in Syria.

Table 4

Reasons for mobility choice mentioned by those who want to stay in Turkey (coded open-ended question, n=81)		
	frequency	% of respondents mentioning this reason
Reasons relating to Turkey		
I like Turkey (culture, traditions)	19	23.5
I got used to life here; I built a life in Turkey	18	22.2
Job opportunities in Turkey	14	17.3
Psychologically at peace; I am happy in Turkey	12	14.8
Safety/security in Turkey, rights in Turkey	10	12.3
Family and friends in Turkey	7	8.6
Educational opportunities in Turkey	7	8.6
I like the Turkish government	3	3.7
Reasons relating to Syria		
No security in Syria; destruction in Syria	12	14.8
I will not forget the past; I don't like Syria, Syria changed	4	4.9
No property left in Syria	4	4.9
No one I know or who is close to me is left in Syria	2	2.5
Dislike of al-Assad regime in Syria	2	2.5
Reasons relating to Europe		
No stability possible in Europe	5	6.2

Respondents in this group had started to imagine alternative futures in Turkey, and could imagine making Turkey their home in the long-term. They had often adapted their life aspirations in a way that was acceptable for them, or had managed to continue working in the same profession as they did before their displacement. This might explain the relatively high life satisfaction among survey respondents

who aspired to stay (7 out of 10) despite difficult living conditions, compared to those who aspired to return (5) or to move on (5). Interviewees often described how they had lived through their loss, grown used to a new life and had decided to focus on the present. Maryam, for example, adapted her life plan to be a teacher to that of a mother devoted to her children's successful education while giving private lessons:

> I started to know Turkish, last year I learned Turkish. I started to give lessons and I started to feel alive again. I felt that there is an importance of my existence, the grades of my son improved (…). (Before), I had an objective and a dream. To teach a particular section of students, to change their lives. At the moment this dream is far away, the language barrier is still there. Maybe in the future, there is a way. (…) My conditions are not easy (…) … and my husband is gone the whole day, from morning to evening. I am useful for the children, for the household stuff… My husband isn't responsible for anything; I am responsible for everything. Doctor, vegetables, schools… So my future… I wait until my children get older and then I will revert to building my own future again, *inshallah* (I6FIst).

Over all, respondents who aspired to stay in Turkey held generally negative ideas about a possible future life in Europe, especially with regard to professional opportunities, sociability, cultural differences and family relations. They were afraid, for example, that it would be too difficult to build a professional future, and that they would have to wait too long to be productive in employment again, considering that they would need to master a new language and that their previous work experience would not be fully recognised. Interviewees also imagined that it would be difficult to integrate into a society in which family relations were believed not to be a central priority: *So we have this thing… to visit each other, that the whole family, father, mother, sisters and brothers come and visit another family… and the other way round… You don't have this… (…) We always check on each other, help each other* (I9MIst). Negative imaginations about family relations in Europe were, however, gendered. Some male respondents voiced a deep fear that migration to Europe could change family dynamics, and they dreaded an increase of divorce. Other male respondents could not imagine getting married in Europe, as they considered that it would be impossible to earn enough money to pay for a potential dowry: *Over there, there is nothing towards the future, this is why I am against going to Germany* (I17MIst). Parents also focused on their disagreement with the way in which they imagined that children are raised in Europe, and expressed a preference to live in a country whose traditions and customs they perceived as closer to their own.

Respondents' narratives were embedded in representations of Turkey and Europe prevalent in Turkish politics, which have accompanied the souring of Turkey–European Union (EU) relations in the latter half of the 2000s. Many analysts agree that after the 2007 electoral victory, the AKP started to follow a neo-Ottomanist foreign policy (Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011), which relies on the core themes of Muslimhood and the country's Ottoman past in locating itself as a key regional power (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015). The positive representations of Europe in AKP discourse gave way to ultimately negative representations, in which the European Other was increasingly constructed as an 'unwanted intruder in

Turkish politics' and as an entity that is 'democratically/politically/morally inferior to Turkey'. This is also evident in the way in which Turkey has been presented as a country that offers refuge to those refugees whom Europe does not accept because they are different from them in cultural and religious terms. Research has shown that the AKP's representations of Europe have been both adopted and contested by the Turkish public at large (Aydın-Düzgit 2016, 2018a, 2018b).

Finally, many respondents suggested that they have found ways to adapt to the legal situation and the mobility restrictions imposed by the TP system and travel permits, often preferring legal irregularity over living in a locality in which they cannot access work or reunite with family members. Those who arrived in Istanbul after TP registration stopped in that city in 2018, for example, described limiting their mobility to the neighbourhood in which they lived and worked, or living with falsified documents: *I am registered in Adana, so if I want to get my kimlik (TP) from Adana, first I need to pay the ticket to go to Adana. (…) I still have the temporary paper, not a kimlik yet (…). The problem is that if I go to Adana, I need a travel permit and the travel permit… they are not going to give me one in Istanbul* (I1MIst). Others avoided renewing their papers: *I would need to renew my kimlik but I am afraid of it… that they will take away my kimlik from Istanbul because they realise it is fake. (…) I am afraid to go to the authorities... I am afraid that they will tell me, your name is registered in Gaziantep (…) and that they will put me in prison* (I17MT). Irregularity was especially hard for Syrian women who had married and joined their husbands in Istanbul after TP registration stopped, as it restricted their opportunity for accessing health care in the event that they became pregnant. Others, who had the opportunity to do so, lived with other residence permits in the country, which restricted their internal and external mobility to a lesser extent. For example, Haitham, a music teacher in an international school in Istanbul, lived with a tourist residency and a work permit in the country, which allowed him to move within the country and to leave and return to Turkey without applying for travel or leaving permits. Ultimately, interviewees hoped that obtaining Turkish citizenship in the future might be a possible way to leave mobility restrictions behind.[7] This would also allow them to reconnect with family members living in other countries: *Now that we have Turkish citizenship, things have become easier. (…) I talk to my family every day. I am now trying to get a visa so that I can visit my mother in Dubai. Now I can maybe go and visit her with my Turkish citizenship* (I6FIst).

Imagining a future elsewhere, or *The Syria we dreamed about will not come*

> When I was in Beirut, when I had worked for a year, things narrowed down for me, I didn't find a good job, I couldn't get money transferred, this was my life, Western Union. One day, I went

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[7] Since 2016, Turkish citizenship was technically opened to Syrians (HAREKACT, 2018). However, there is no clear application procedure and it is the Turkish authorities who select candidates from among TP beneficiaries. The precise number of people who have been granted citizenship is a subject of debate but remains low (Al-Jablawi 2017). Candidates who have been successful so far are mostly Syrians with higher educational levels, high financial capital, or holders of university degrees, such as doctors, engineers and teachers.

to receive a payment via Western Union and they told me that the payment was blocked for reasons linked to funding terrorism. It was approximately 200 USD and they stopped it because they thought I was funding terrorism. (…) And there was the chance to leave further than Turkey, I had the wish to improve the way of my life. Many reasons, many small details. But the basis was that I wanted to improve the way of my life. Turkey didn't want a visa and I had the plan with my girlfriend to continue from Turkey. But it didn't work out, so I stayed here. So it didn't work out to continue further. I had planned that the doors would open more and wider here in Turkey than in Beirut (I7MIst).

Karim's story exemplifies the living conditions of young Syrians who have stayed in Turkey despite trying to leave. Some have psychologically adapted to staying, whilst others have not. Karim is a writer in his early 30s, who grew up in Damascus and lives in Istanbul. Political, economic and emotional motivations were closely linked in his migration decision-making: At the beginning of the uprising in 2011, he wrote articles against the Syrian regime under a pseudonym, and lived between Damascus and Beirut for three years until his conscription order arrived and returning became impossible without the prospect of being forced to participate in a war that he was politically against. He had also come to know that a friend had mentioned his name to the authorities under torture. When economic conditions became unsustainable for him in Lebanon, he flew to Istanbul together with his girlfriend in 2015, planning to travel on to Europe. At the time of our interview, Karim did not hold TP in Turkey, as he had arrived from a third 'safe' country and was trying to find a way in which to regularise his stay, as he did not see any other alternative in his circumstances. He had problems surviving financially. Karim lost hope that post-war Syria would ever again become a place in which he might want to live.

Respondents who aspired to leave Turkey referred to key moments at which the opportunity to leave arose, as well as to the importance of chance and people whom they met along the way. At the same time, they had the financial capability to pay for smuggling services and regarded the risks that smuggling entailed as being worth taking. By contrast, the amount of 1000-2000 euros, which was mentioned as common for being smuggled to Greece, was simply unaffordable for many, in a situation in which 90% of Syrians in urban settings in Turkey live below the Turkish poverty line (UNHCR 2016, p. 29). Maha from Aleppo, for example, was 24 when I interviewed her in a café in Izmir. As the sister of eight siblings, she left Aleppo in 2014 to join her brother. She planned to go to Greece with her siblings in 2015 when they heard about a campaign advocating for the opening of the Greek-Turkish border close to Edirne, via Facebook. They cancelled their arrangement with a smuggler at the last minute, when a Canadian acquaintance convinced them that leaving by boat was too risky and offered to help them to apply for a resettlement sponsorship programme instead. At the time of interview, Maha and her siblings were still waiting to learn of the outcome. In the meantime, Maha had learned fluent Turkish and found a job with a local NGO. She had come to like Izmir and had dismissed the idea of leaving irregularly.

Other respondents rejected the idea of leaving with a smuggler from the onset, and tried to influence their chances for resettlement by attempting to get in contact with NGOs, so as to increase their chances

of leaving by other, more regular, means. 12.8% of survey respondents had tried to get in contact with embassies, IOs or NGOs to inquire about asylum applications or resettlement programmes. Zahra, an artist based in Istanbul with her husband, explained:

> Our idea was at the time that we can apply for leaving regularly, through the embassies or a humanitarian visa (…). We registered after two or three months, in 2016, at the DGMM (*Directorate General of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior*). We tried a lot, we decided that. They told us that they had stopped the activities at the UN and told us to go to ASAM (*Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants*)… We went there twice or three times but the office is always closed, there is nothing written, the address is not clear… (…) My friend in our Turkish class who works at ASAM told us that UNHCR stopped. And my brother told me, there is nothing (I12FIz).

Zahra's quote exemplifies the fact that travelling from Turkey to Europe in a 'regular' way is highly constrained. Legally, TP beneficiaries are barred from making a separate international protection request in Turkey. Instead, the DGMM has started to pre-identify cases for resettlement consideration among registered TP beneficiaries, and makes referrals to UNHCR, which finalises the selection of cases to be submitted to resettlement countries (Asylum Information Database 2018). Turkish authorities currently also request exit permission for those wishing to leave the country for resettlement or family reunification, which is only attainable if Syrians are registered in TP. In interviews, some respondents voiced their impression that exit permits were more difficult to obtain if applicants held university diplomas.

Few survey respondents had applied for family reunification (1.7%) or managed to be granted resettlement (1.4%). One example was Grigoryan, a single 37-year-old Armenian Syrian who had successfully gone through the procedure for resettlement to Canada via a private sponsorship system. He had fled to al-Hasaka in Syria in 2012, when his brother, sister and mother went to Lebanon. As he was wanted for the army, he could not cross through regime areas together with them out of fear of military checkpoints. After Grigoryan's brother was selected for resettlement to Canada in 2014, his mother and sister joined the brother in Montreal. At the end of 2015, Grigoryan left al-Hasaka and entered Turkey with a smuggler with the plan of moving on – either joining his family in Canada through resettlement, or entering Greece with a smuggler. When we talked to him in 2018, he was completing his last interview and was planning to travel in the coming months. Grigoryan did not want to return to Syria as he saw no financial or social benefit of doing so. No one of the 200 Armenian families in his original city was left. He explained to me that he was psychologically not strong enough to "*return to a country where half of the people have been killed and a big part of them is in prison*" (I18MIst).

Interviewees in this category generally imagined Europe as a place that offered positive opportunities for the future – especially with regard to professional or educational aspirations which could not be fulfilled in Turkey. People who attempted to leave Turkey, however, also included people who did not

have the economic capabilities to stay in the country. Some respondents, for example, also aspired to leave because they had severe health issues and could not pay for the medical treatment that they needed. Respondents also mentioned societal reasons for wanting to leave. Maha, for example, stated: *I don't want to talk about politics (...). For me it's only important that I don't live in a very religious country, that it's not a country standing on religion... but I don't care if the majority is Muslim or Christian, for me, the problem is the state. I don't want that it has a religious basis* (I11FIz).

Table 5

Reasons for mobility choice mentioned by those who want to move on from Turkey (coded open-ended question, n=39)

	frequency	% of respondents mentioning this reason
Reasons relating to Europe		
Future opportunities in Europe	17	41.5
Education in Europe	14	34.1
Family in Europe	4	9.8
Security in Europe	3	7.3
Humanity / human rights in Europe	2	4.9
Better living conditions in Europe	1	2.4
Reasons relating to Turkey		
Insufficient health care in Turkey	7	17.1
Hard living conditions Turkey	6	14.6
Legal situation in Turkey	1	2.4
Reasons relating to Syria		
Bad infrastructure and difficult living conditions in Syria	3	7.3
No property in Syria	3	7.3
No security in Syria	2	4.9
Syria has changed	1	2.4
The war will continue	1	2.4

While leaving Syria and not returning to Syria were mostly family-level decisions for respondents, the decision to pursue onward migration left more room for individual-level decisions, especially for single adults. Interviewees sometimes acted against the will of their parents back in Syria, who considered smuggling to Greece as being too risky, or were against the idea that they move even further away from them. Maha explained: *They said, no, don't go (laughs). Not because it was risky but because they didn't want us to be even further away... But it's the same, if we are close or near... (Did you tell them about your plan?) They knew that we were thinking about it* (I11FIz). Parents, on the other hand, often pointed out that they had left for their children's sake. Couples sometimes decided together that the father should leave alone, via smuggling, while his wife stayed back with the children as it was considered safer for them to join him later, through family reunification. However, women also exercised agency in these decisions. They refused, for example, certain destinations and influenced the

timing and way in which they were to join their husbands. Naghwe, a 30-year-old Circassian married woman and mother of two, stated: *I told my husband 'If you go to Germany and ask for asylum there, you can consider that I am not coming'* (I5FIst). She was one of the few survey respondents who decided to return to Turkey from Europe, as highlighted in the following section.

Returning to Turkey from Europe and planning to leave or stay

> So the important thing is, I left by plane to Belgium and I got a travel permit, on the basis that I can leave and come back. But afterwards I realised that what I considered a travel permit was in fact a paper saying that I gave up my TP, meaning that you cannot come back (…). So I applied for a travel permit because they don't let you leave if you don't have this signature on this paper (…). On a humanitarian level, it's the worst there is. It's all international politics but they didn't put us here because they are humanitarian (I5FIst).

Out of the 360 survey respondents, only two had returned to Turkey from Europe. Their stories highlight different reasons for returning, and show how considerations surrounding their legal status influenced their irregular entry to (and exit from) Turkey. Naghwe left Syria in 2012 with her husband and children, when the borders between Turkey and Syria were still open. Turkish Circassian community networks facilitated her family's flight via Facebook and supported them initially with transport, housing and household goods once in Turkey. However, Naghwe could not see a future for her family in Turkey. Her husband was earning half of what his Turkish colleagues were earning, working for 50 TRY (15.5 euros) a day, and her children were being bullied at school. After the family managed to save enough money for a smuggler, her husband left for Belgium via Greece in 2015. She joined him 18 months later with her two children. During this time, Naghwe learned Turkish and started to work as an Arabic-Turkish translator for the UN. Upon arrival in Belgium, she received temporary protection. Some months later she decided to file for divorce. As her husband was afraid to lose custody of their children, he returned to Turkey without telling his wife, and took the children with him. She followed him shortly after, entering Turkey irregularly from Greece, crossing the Evros river. Naghwe currently holds no TP in Turkey, and at the time of the interview was working in a clothes shop in Istanbul whilst looking for a way to return to Belgium.

Hasan, a 22-year-old single man living in a working-class suburb of Istanbul, grew up as the son of a civil servant close to the Turkish border. Hasan left Syria in 2015 when his military conscription order arrived and at a time in which the economic conditions in which his family of nine were living had become increasingly difficult. Hasan entered Turkey with the help of a smuggler and got TP in Gaziantep shortly after. He then went to Adana to live with a friend while working as a fruit picker. Eight months later, he moved to Istanbul with his friend's family in search of a more suitable job, as he suffered from a respiratory disorder. Together, they found a house in a neighbourhood that is home to 250 families from their home governorate in Syria. Hasan quickly found a job in a sewing workshop but was forced to stop soon after this due to his ill health. Being unable to register for TP in Istanbul, he did not have access to health care. When Hasan's health deteriorated in 2017, his older brother who

had fled to Germany in 2016 convinced him to join him in Berlin where he could receive medical treatment. He entered Greece irregularly via the Evros river at the start of 2018. He then tried to reach Berlin by plane from Athens five times, every time with newly forged documents, which were identified as falsified each time. After having spent a vast sum of borrowed money on vain attempts, and after witnessing appalling conditions in Greece for several months, he decided to return to Turkey. On this way back, he was imprisoned by Greek authorities because they thought that he was trying to enter Greece irregularly. After his release two weeks later, he re-entered Turkey with the help of a friend who carried him swimming across the Evros river. In our conversation, Hasan talked about his wish to settle in Turkey for the foreseeable future. He did not believe that it was possible to have the long-term future that he aspired to have in Europe – which would entail working in a job suitable for him, and starting a family. Having been a victim of appalling conditions in a Greek jail, in which he shared a cell with 65 people, he swore never to return.

While both respondents' motivations to *leave* Turkey resembled the narratives of those who aspired to leave or had no capability to stay (as discussed above), they each had entirely different experiences in Europe and different reasons for *returning* to Turkey. Naghwe entered Belgium legally and experienced her stay as positive, highlighting the friendly treatment that she experienced during the asylum procedure, the legal conditions supporting her in case of a divorce, and the support that her children received at school. Hasan, on the other hand, highlighted the tough living conditions in Athens, the fact that he only went out at night to avoid police controls, and his urge to take drugs to forget his daily worries. Moreover, Naghwe's decision-making process with regard to return was solely motivated by her wish to reunite with her children. Hasan, on the other hand, decided against his family's wish to return to Turkey when he gave up hope that he would be able to reach Germany. Hasan never considered applying for asylum in Greece because of the drawn out nature of the asylum procedure, and the fact that he had no family links.

Both interviewees had the *capability* to return, although with high risks attached to doing so. They navigated their mobility in a context of high uncertainty and tried to keep a minimum of legal protection in each of the two countries. Naghwe could afford to pay for a flight ticket to Athens and a smuggler to cross the border river, and found herself in a difficult legal situation in Turkey. Before leaving Turkey, she had to apply for a travel permit, through which she lost her right to apply for TP in Turkey in the future. When Naghwe decided to break up with her husband, she started an individual asylum procedure in Belgium in order to keep her residence permit. As her process was ongoing, and as she was afraid that she might lose her temporary protection in Belgium, she decided to re-enter Turkey irregularly. Upon arrival in Turkey, she tried to get TP again, but was refused. At the time of our interview, Naghwe was waiting for the outcome of a visa application that she had made at the Belgium embassy. Hasan, on the other hand, had officially no *kimlik* in Istanbul. He was registered for TP in Gaziantep and had a forged TP permit from Istanbul. As TP beneficiaries cannot register in TP again, Hasan was afraid to

lose his TP upon return, and decided to re-enter Turkey irregularly, pretending that he had never left. When he left for Greece, he kept one of his TP permits in Istanbul, as a backup plan.

5 Conclusion

While some studies tend to describe refugees as passive actors in the decision to leave their country, this article illustrates the role of refugees' agency and aspirations in the context of Syrian forced displacement in a neighbouring country, Turkey. It has aimed at disentangling different ways of staying in two Turkish cities: Istanbul and Izmir, looking at Syrians who aspired to return to Syria but stayed; Syrians who did not aspire to leave to another country and preferred to stay in Turkey; Syrians who aspired to leave to another country but could not do so; and people who left for Europe but returned for different reasons.

First, this article has shed light on the link between mobility aspirations and migration decision-making. Its findings show a strong desire among the Syrian refugee population in Turkey to return to Syria in the case that the conflict there comes to an end. Meanwhile, it finds moderate aspirations to stay in Turkey, and a strong resistance to the idea of migrating further, to Europe. A large number of respondents also did not want to migrate to Europe, even if they were to be given the necessary papers. However, with regard to return and onward migration, refugees' reported *aspirations* were higher than *actual* migratory behaviour on the ground. While aspirations for returning to Syria, for example, were high among respondents, only a small part of respondents were actually prepared to return in the immediate future. Of the 360 respondents of the survey, 30.6% wanted to return if the war ended, and 33.1% made their return conditional upon the outcome of the war, with conditions including sufficient security, the availability of basic services and, for others, a regime change. Importantly, the in-depth interviews show that interviewees did not consider the war in Syria to be finished. Indeed, they voiced major security concerns when considering return. This explains why the available number of actual returns from Turkey to Syria in 2018 (22,410, UNHCR 2018) was minimal compared to the high number of refugees in the country.

Second, this article has argued that it is a combination of political, economic, societal and psychological factors, situated at the macro, meso and micro level that drives refugees' mobility. At the macro level, it is a configuration of structural drivers that has pushed people to leave Syria – violence, persecution, economic recession, and a lack of public services, especially in education. Similarly, considerations to move on from Turkey to another country are partly motivated by insufficient safety, legal vulnerability, and inadequate access to health services, thus confirming Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long's (2018) argument regarding the importance of driver complexes. On a meso-level, the article has underlined the importance of family networks; the location of family members and their role in influencing decisions.

Fleeing was often a family-level decision, with parents tending to stay back in Syria – a finding that corresponds with existing research about the rootedness of older people (Coulter 2013). At the micro-level, the paper highlighted the importance of life satisfaction, future imaginations and (the lack of) hope for a future return to Syria, which have a significant impact on how refugees think about migration. Not being able to realise core life aspirations in a certain locality was an important element for wanting to move on. The salience of such psychological factors confirms recent findings about the importance of cognitive elements in shaping migration decision-making. Koikkalainen and Kyle (2016), for example, have argued that prospective thinking (imagining potential futures) and cognitive migration (the narrative imagining of oneself inhabiting a foreign destination prior to the actual physical move) do indeed influence migration behaviour. In a similar vein, Kuschminder (2018) has identified hope as an important element for Afghan refugees to continue their journey towards Europe, for example.

Third, this article has also identified the capabilities that are relevant for realising aspirations with regard to return, remaining in Turkey, and onward movement, highlighting in particular the importance of refugees' political positioning in the conflict, their socio-economic background, and the role of gender. Refusing to return to Syria if al-Assad's regime stays in power, for example, was a recurrent narrative among interviewees. Displaced people from relatively wealthy or more comfortable economic backgrounds often had more chance to shape their flight trajectories and to pursue alternative legal options to stay in Turkey than did people from more economically vulnerable backgrounds; low pay, hard working conditions, and insufficient access to medical treatment reduced interviewees' capability to stay. Female respondents also had generally fewer capabilities to be individually mobile than men.

Fourth, by highlighting the diverse life stories of young men and women, this article shows that tightening borders and increasingly restrictive policies affect refugees differently; they interrupt circular mobility, deter people from moving on and push people towards irregularity as well as alternative legal options. These results confirm the findings of existing studies that explore the unintended consequences of migration policies, and which highlight the way in which migration restrictions decrease circulation and tend to encourage long-term settlement (Massey and Pren 2012; Czaika and Hobolth 2016; Czaika and de Haas 2017).

It is important to note the limitations of the research on which this article is based. The research was conducted in the seventh year of the Syrian conflict in two Western cities of Turkey; had it been conducted in 2015 (or 2019), the different context would have probably resulted in different outcomes, with a higher number of respondents aspiring to move on. Data from camps, rural areas or bordering regions with Syria would also have yielded different outcomes. Furthermore, the research design was a cross-sectional study that allowed for insights into individuals' migration decision-making at only one moment in time. Although the qualitative interviews did give space for explaining mobility choices made in the past, and for exploring the conditions on which migratory decisions might be made in the future, these are subjective (re)interpretations of past behaviour and prospective behaviour that might

change over time. However, while this article is time- and context-specific, it has also shown that far deeper dynamics – beyond restrictive migration policies – drive refugee mobility.

6 Annex

Table 6

Selected survey results by mobility aspiration (n=360, figures given in percentages)

	Total	Mobility aspirations		
		Return	Stay	Move-On
Individual variables				
Male	51.1	57.6	29.9	12.4
Female	48.9	73.0	16.1	10.9
Age				
18-23 years	23.9	64.3	27.4	8.3
24-29 years	39.4	67.9	19.0	13.1
30-35 years	26.7	60.0	29.5	10.5
36-39 years	10.0	71.4	11.4	17.1
Education (recoded, year completed)				
no education	7.0	56.5	30.4	13.0
primary school (grade 1-6)	32.6	71.6	21.6	6.9
lower secondary (grade 7-9)	29.3	59.4	22.8	17.8
higher secondary (grade 10-12)	14.5	56.9	27.5	15.7
university	16.7	74.6	18.6	6.8
Marital status				
single (including divorced)	34.4	62.8	26.5	10.7
married (including widowed)	65.6	66.5	21.3	12.2
Children				
none	40.6	66.4	23.8	9.8
1-2 children	28.3	66.3	22.5	11.2
3-4 children	23.6	61.5	21.7	16.9
5+ children	7.5	66.7	25.9	7.4
Religious affiliation				
Sunni Muslim	92.2	65.4	22.5	12.0
other	3.9	64.3	21.4	14.3
refusal	3.9	61.5	38.5	0.0
Mother tongue				
Arabic	83.1	67.1	23.6	9.3
Kurdish	14.4	58.0	50.0	12.5
Turkish/Turkmen	2.2	37.5	16.0	26.0
Circassian	0.3	100.0	0.0	0.0
Last residence in Syria (by governorate)				
Aleppo	72.8	65.8	23.7	10.5
Damascus	9.7	68.8	15.6	15.6
al-Hasaka	4.4	62.5	25.0	12.5
Deir ez-Zor	3.9	57.1	14.3	28.6
Idlib	2.8	70.0	20.0	10.0
other	6.4	59.1	31.8	9.1
Main city (governorate)/surroundings in Syria				
main city (governorate)	75.0	65.7	23.4	10.9
surroundings	25.0	64.0	22.1	14.0
Living conditions in Turkey				
Location of respondent				

	Istanbul	68.9	64.2	22.5	13.3
	Izmir	31.1	67.6	24.3	8.1
Currently in paid employment					
	total	56.9	60.6	28.8	10.6
	men	93.5	58.8	29.7	11.5
	women	18.8	69.7	24.2	6.1
Currently not in paid employment					
	total	43.1	71.2	15.7	13.1
	men	6.5	41.7	33.3	25.0
	women	81.3	73.8	14.2	12.1
Household income levels in 2018 (in USD)					
	0-200	6.7	68.2	22.7	9.1
	200-400	36.4	65.8	17.5	16.7
	400-600	31.5	66.0	25.5	8.5
	600-800	12.2	64.3	21.4	14.3
	800-1000	6.4	54.6	40.9	4.6
	1000+	6.7	56.5	34.8	8.7
Financial liquidity (in past 12 months)					
	able to save money	10.1	55.6	30.6	13.9
	just getting by	45.1	62.0	28.5	9.5
	have spent savings and borrowed money	44.8	71.0	15.5	13.6
Assistance received in past 12 months (food vouchers, cash assistance, clothes)					
	yes	35.4	62.9	21.0	16.1
	no	64.6	66.4	24.3	9.3
Current life satisfaction (1-10) (median)		5	5	7	5

Table 7

Mobility experiences, aspirations and attempts (n=360, figures given in percentages)

Mobility experiences		
Lived outside Syria before 2011 (for > 3 months)		5.8
	of whom lived in Arabic countries	5.0
	of whom lived in Turkey	0.6
Returned from Europe to Turkey after 2011		0.6
Year of departure from Syria		
	before 2011	1.7
	2011-2012	18.1
	2013-2014	43.1
	2015-2016	30.6
	2017-2018	6.7
Year of arrival in Turkey		
	before 2011	1.1
	2011-2012	13.9
	2013-2014	43.6
	2015-2016	34.2
	2017-2018	7.2
Displaced to another country before Turkey (for > 3 months)		9.2
Previously lived in another location in Turkey (for > 3 months)		30.0
Legal status		
Passport possession in the past		43.4

Valid passport possession now		34.7
Registered for temporary protection		86.9
	Temporary protection granted	81.7
Applied for residency permit		2.8
	Residence permit granted	2.8
Applied for work permit		6.4
	Work permit granted	3.1
Applied for Turkish citizenship		5.8
	Citizenship obtained	2.5
Mobility aspirations		
Internal mobility aspirations		
	stay in this area	80.6
	move to another urban area	12.8
	move to rural area	3.1
	don't know	3.6
Mobility aspirations if the war was to end		
	return to Syria	30.6
	return to Syria (depending on outcome of war)	33.1
	stay in Turkey	22.5
	go to another country	11.4
	don't know	2.5
Considered return if the war continues		
	no	76.1
	yes	23.3
	don't know	0.6
Considering migration to Europe if provided with papers		
	go to Europe	39.7
	stay in Turkey	58.3
	don't know	1.9
Mobility attempts since 2011		
Applied for Visa		2.2
	Visa obtained	1.4
Applied for family reunification		1.7
Experienced resettlement interview		8.1
	Resettlement granted	1.4
Other attempts		17.5
	tried to get in contact with embassies, IOs or NGOs for visa or resettlement	12.8
	attempted mobility through recourse to smugglers	3.8

Table 8

Overview of in-depth interview respondents

Interview number	Year of birth	Sex	Education	Marital status	Year of flight from Syria	Residence in Syria (governorate)	Job before flight; job after	Mobility aspirations	Legal status
1	1986	male	university	single, 0 child	2017	Latakia	military service in Syria; employee in phone shop in Turkey	return aspirations (conditional) / stay aspirations (conditional)	TP (elsewhere)
2	1995	male	lower secondary	single, 0 child	2012	Damascus	business-owner in Syria; waiter in hookah café	return aspirations (conditional) / stay aspirations	no TP
3	1992	male	lower secondary	single, 0 child	2016	Damascus	skilled manual worker in Syria; works in a restaurant in Turkey	return aspirations (conditional) / migration aspirations / stay aspirations (conditional)	TP
5	1988	female	university	married, 2 children	2012	Damascus	housewife in Syria; works in a clothes shop in Turkey	joined husband in Belgium, returned to Turkey; no return aspirations / migration aspirations	no TP
6	1983	female	university	married, 2 children	2015	Aleppo	housewife and teaching private lessons in Syria; housewife and teaching private lessons in Turkey	no return aspiration / no migration aspiration / stay aspirations	tourist visa
7	1985	male	university	partnership 0 child	2013	Damascus	writer in Syria; NGO work in Lebanon; online work (journalism) in Turkey	no return aspirations / migration aspirations	no TP
8	1995	male	A-levels	single, 0 child	2016	Aleppo	combined working (family business) and studying in Syria; restaurant owner in Turkey	stay aspirations / no migration aspirations	TP (elsewhere)
9	1991	male	A levels	married, 3 children	2013	Deir ez-Zor	worked in family business in Syria; works in construction in Turkey	return aspirations / stay aspirations / migration aspirations	TP
10	1993	female	primary education	married, 4 children	2018	Aleppo	housewife in Syria; housewife in Turkey	return aspirations / stay aspirations / no migration aspirations	TP
11	1994	female	A levels	single, 0 child	2014	Aleppo	school student in Syria; worked as secretary, in a restaurant and NGO in Turkey	migration aspirations / return aspirations	TP
12	1987	female	university	married, 0 child	2013	Damascus	worked as artist in kindergarten in Syria; worked in a restaurant in Lebanon; worked as an artist (for NGO) in Turkey	migration aspirations (conditional) / no return aspirations	TP
13	1994	male	university	single, 0 child	2013	Damascus	university student in Syria; works and studies in Turkey (scholarship)	migration aspirations (conditional) / return aspirations	TP

14	1984	female	university	divorced, 1 child	2013	Aleppo	worked as secretary and trainer in Syria; NGO volunteer and teaching private lessons in Turkey	no return aspirations; migration aspirations (conditional)	TP
15	1985	male	primary education	married, 2 children	2010	Aleppo	business owner in Syria; owns two mobile phone shops in Turkey	migration aspirations / stay aspirations (conditional) / no return aspirations	work permit, TP
16	1999	male	primary	single, 0 child	2012	Damascus	worked in supermarket in Syria; works in tailoring in Turkey	stay aspirations / no return aspirations	TP
17	1996	male	A levels	single, 0 child	2015	al-Hasaka	school student in Syria; unemployed in Turkey	got smuggled to Greece and returned; stay aspirations / return aspirations	TP (elsewhere)
18	1981	male	university interrupted	single, 0 child	2015	Deir ez-Zor	worked in oil company in Syria; works as accountant in company in Turkey	migration aspirations / no stay aspirations / no return aspirations	TP
19	1998	female	university interrupted	married, 0 child	2017	Damascus	university student in Syria; works in factory in Turkey, volunteer teacher in a school	stay aspirations / return aspirations	no TP
20	1993	male	lower secondary interrupted	married, 0 child	2016	Aleppo	worked in tailoring in Syria; works in tailoring in Turkey	stay aspiration / no return aspirations	TP
21	1990	female	lower secondary interrupted	married, 2 children	2016	Idlib	housewife in Syria; housewife in Turkey	no mobility aspirations / return aspirations	TP
22	1983	male	university	married	2015	Damascus	musician in Syria; music teacher and musician in Turkey	migration aspirations (conditional) / stay aspirations / no return aspirations	work permit, no TP

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