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PRE- AND POST-2022 MIGRATION DYNAMICS OF UKRAINIAN NATIONALS IN TURKEY

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This exploratory case study investigates the dynamics of Ukrainian migration to Turkey following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, while addressing the migration dynamics prior to the invasion. Drawing on both literature review and a small-scale field research conducted in Istanbul from October 20–28, 2023, the paper explores Turkey’s policies towards foreigners, with a particular focus on Ukrainian nationals, and their potential future within the country. In the initial stages of this conflict, approximately 844,000 Ukrainian nationals entered Turkey. However, by May 2023, around 822,000 had left. Despite this decrease, Turkey continues to host a number of forcibly displaced Ukrainian persons, exceeding the figures in several European countries. Presently, it is estimated that around 38,500 Ukrainian nationals are living in Turkey, either holding valid residence permits or being under international protection. The research primarily aims to shed light on their future in the country by focusing first on the legal procedures and support measures directed towards them. Additionally, the article delves into the distinct resettlement processes for Turkic ethnic groups, particularly Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars, within the broader scope of Ukrainian forced migration. These groups, while part of the larger displaced population, follow different legal procedures due to their ethnic ties with Turkey. The study also addresses the different types of residence permits chosen by Ukrainians and argues that many of these individuals are more accurately described as “refugee-like” rather than fitting the formal refugee definition under international law. By evaluating Turkey’s response to the Ukrainian migration crisis, this article aspires to serve as a foundational source on this topic, which has been scarcely addressed in the literature.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war; forced displacement; Ukrainian Nationals; Meskhetian Turks; Crimean Tatars; refugee-like status

Introduction

Since its founding, the Republic of Turkey has consistently opened its doors to various migration groups, making it a country that primarily received migrants from its establishment until the end of World War II. Indeed, since the 1920s, the migrants to Turkey have largely comprised Turkic and Muslim communities from territories that were under Ottoman rule for centuries. Migration to Turkey has continued in different periods up to the present day, and these groups have often been regarded not merely as “migrants” but as “natural citizens” of the country [Üstübici, Kirişçioğlu… 2021, *8*].

Following World War II (WWII), Turkey also became a country of emigration due to the growing labor needs of the European countries. Additionally, it continued to receive

immigrants from neighboring regions after the Cold War, the Yugoslav Wars, the Gulf Wars, and, most recently, the Syrian Civil War. As noted in the data from the Presidency of Migration Management under the Ministry of Interior, significant mass migration movements to Turkey have occurred throughout the republic's history. Some of the most notable examples include 384,000 people from Greece between 1922–1938, 800,000 from the Balkans between 1923–1945, 51,542 from Iraq in 1988, 345,000 from Bulgaria in 1989, 467,489 from Iraq in 1991, 20,000 from Bosnia between 1992–1998, 17,746 from Kosovo in 1999, and 10,500 from Macedonia in 2001 [Göç Tarihi n.d.]. In light of this data, it would not be wrong to define Turkey as a "country of migration" [İçduygu and Kirişçi 2009].

According to a statement from the Directorate General of Migration Management in May 2023, the total number of registered foreigners in the country was 4,990,663. Of these, 3,381,429 were Syrians under temporary protection, 300,720 were individuals from various nationalities under international protection, and 1,308,514 were foreigners residing with a residence permit [Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı Türkiye'deki... 2023]. Additionally, as of December 14, 2023, the number of irregular migrants apprehended stood at 242,456 [İkamet İzinleri 2023]. The fact that the total number of registered foreigners is nearing five million is noteworthy, with the majority being Syrian refugees. This has led to the emergence and expansion of a considerable amount of research in this area. To date, most studies have focused on this community, exploring their socio-economic conditions, social integration, and public attitudes towards them at city, regional, and national levels. Furthermore, these studies have delved into state policies regarding the Syrian refugees under temporary protection, as well as the involvement of international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational organizations in addressing their needs. In this context, studies on nationals from other countries who have recently migrated to Turkey have largely been overlooked or remain very limited – and one such group is Ukrainian nationals.

Since the onset of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Europe has been confronted with a substantial forced migration crisis. Approximately fourteen million Ukrainians have been displaced, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [Ukraine Refugee Situation... n.d.]. This is not Ukraine's first experience with forced migration; a similar situation arose in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas region, displacing around one and a half million people [IOM Brings Up the Situation... 2018; Gürsoy 2020]. While these events may seem cyclical, the current crisis differs significantly in scale and nature. Previously, displacement was predominantly internal, affecting a fraction of the current numbers. However, the present situation has gained an international dimension. Despite a higher count of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Ukraine, the exodus of Ukrainian nationals has placed considerable strain on neighboring countries, including Poland and Romania, or other European Union (EU) countries, predominantly Germany, which have had to provide humanitarian aid and support to a large influx of forcibly displaced people. Moreover, this crisis has extended beyond the EU's borders, with significant numbers seeking refuge in non-EU countries like Moldova and Turkey. Additionally, countries with substantial Ukrainian diaspora communities, such as Canada, have become key destinations for those fleeing the war [Ukraine Refugee Situation... n.d.; Lorinc 2023].

As of September 9, 2024, the UNHCR reports a total of 38,525 Ukrainian nationals residing in Turkey, with 2,930 of them having submitted applications for international protection. This places Turkey ahead of several EU countries regarding the number of forcibly displaced Ukrainian hosted. Drawing from a comprehensive review of pertinent literature and insights gained from small-scale field research conducted in Istanbul from October 20–28, 2023, this article aims to assess the current circumstances of Ukrainian

nationals in Turkey. It mainly explores Turkey's policies regarding these people and considers their potential future in the country.

The Russia-Ukraine War has had a profound impact on numerous regional players. It has led to significant security and economic challenges for the surrounding region and its neighbors, along with undeniable humanitarian concerns that are closely linked with these issues. Viewing the Russia-Ukraine War through the lens of forced migration reveals it as a recent instance that has intensified the global issue commonly referred to as the "refugee crisis" [Kononov 2024; Jaroszewicz, Grzymski and Krępa 2022; Åslund 2022]. Forced displacement is a phenomenon as old as human history, however, the term "refugee crisis" gained prominence following World War II, particularly in response to the massive displacements in Europe that led to the establishment of the UNHCR in 1950 and the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention. As Loescher points out, the concepts of "the refugee problem" and the "refugee question" were scarcely acknowledged in the literature prior to WWII [Loescher 2001, *4*]. Since then, the world has faced several significant forced displacement crises, such as the displacement of 14 to 18 million people during the Partition of India in 1947, the ongoing Palestinian refugee crisis that began in 1948, the refugee crisis that followed the Vietnam War from 1975 into the 1990s, the Afghan refugee crisis initiated by the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, and the continuing Syrian refugee crisis that began in 2011.

While the term "refugee crisis" serves to encapsulate these complex situations, it can sometimes oversimplify the varied nuances of forced displacement, and at times, it may be even applied to instances of mass immigration. This generalization risks overlooking the important legal distinctions, diverse experiences of displaced populations, and even can exacerbate xenophobia and securitization towards the forcibly displaced [Esses, Medianu and Lawson 2013]. Nonetheless, the term endures, supported by its historical significance, media attention, and its practicality in addressing political and humanitarian dimensions. Consequently, global studies [Cunliffe 1995; Loescher 2001; Martin 2014] and case studies [Agustín and Jørgensen 2018; Parekh 2020; Almustafa 2022] regarding forced displacement are frequently framed under the broader category of "refugee crises". Nevertheless, as the categories of forced displacement are detailed in the following sections, the refugee designation does not apply to the majority of forcibly displaced Ukrainians in Turkey. Therefore, throughout this article, Ukrainian nationals who arrived in Turkey after the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine started in 2014, as well as the 2022 full-scale war, will be referred to as "forcibly displaced", unless their specific statuses are mentioned (e.g., refugee-like, refugee, or of Turkish descent).

This article presents an exploratory case study methodology aimed at delving into the relatively overlooked issue of Ukrainian forced migration to Turkey, triggered by the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. This approach is designed to enhance the current body of research by identifying critical issues and establishing core principles, thereby enriching the understanding of the data. The primary goal of such exploratory research is to gain a deeper insight into the subject matter, rather than testing a specific hypothesis, with the intention of expanding the scope of existing literature on the topic [Stebbins 2001; Frederiksen, Phelps and Kimmon 2018]. Given the predominant focus on the more pressing Syrian refugee crisis, Ukrainians have not been a focal point in Turkey's migration discourse. Prior to the full-scale war, scholarly attention on Ukrainians in Turkey was largely confined to immigration studies, with a particular emphasis on topics such as intermarriage, intra-community solidarity, and the organizational structures of Ukrainian groups. In these contexts, Ukrainians are often featured as part of broader investigations into migration patterns in Turkey.

Although limited, there are some recent studies post-2022, with a focus on understanding how Ukrainians are perceived within Turkey through their representation in social media and the press [Kazan and Pirçek 2023; Varol 2023; Kachybekova and

Pazarbaşı 2024], and how they publicly express solidarity with their home country, including through participation in pro-Ukrainian demonstrations held in Turkey [Biletska and Gherghina 2025]. To navigate this terrain, the current study leverages document analysis as its principal research methodological tool. This entails a thorough review of both international and national literature alongside contemporary data and reports from governmental and nongovernmental entities, civil society organizations focused on Ukrainian displacement, and various media and social media sources in Turkey. The study also incorporates an examination of online databases maintained by local research centers, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the data collection process.

In order to validate the findings and propositions framed by the literature review and to accurately assess the situation of Ukrainian displaced people in Turkey, I conducted a small-scale field research in Istanbul, one of the cities with the highest concentration of Ukrainian nationals, between October 20–28, 2023. During the field research, separate meetings were held with a Ukrainian academic, a researcher from the Ukrainian Association, and an official from the Consulate General of Ukraine in Istanbul. However, these meetings were not conducted as interviews; instead, they were consultations to verify the consistency of the findings, aiming for data triangulation. Based on the data obtained, this exploratory case study aims to organize the existing data and provide a framework that can serve as a foundation for future studies.

Understanding Forced Migration: Legal Protections in Turkey for Foreign Nationals

Every year, millions of people are forced to leave their homes due to ethnic and political conflicts, violence, persecution, human rights violations, social oppression, natural disasters, and the adverse effects of climate change. Forced migration became a prominent topic of international debate in the early 1990s, in the aftermath of the Cold War, when millions of people were displaced from their homes. Today, forced migration continues to be a subject of study across various social science disciplines as the number of displaced individuals grows daily. In particular, the humanitarian aspects of this issue, such as aid and social integration, have become critical concerns for governments, local and international civil society organizations, and supranational institutions [Gürsoy 2021, *1–2*].

According to UNHCR data, in 2023, the number of forcibly displaced people has increased to 117.3 million, which is nine million more than the previous year and 28 million more compared to two years prior. Of this population, 62.5 million are IDPs, while the remainder includes 35.3 million “refugees” and 5.4 million “asylum seekers”. Another striking fact from UNHCR data is that 52 % of the world’s “refugees” come from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine [Figures at a glance n.d.].

As highlighted by UNHCR data, contemporary discussions on forced migration now encompass various categories. UNHCR classifies displaced people under different concepts, primarily including refugees, refugee-like persons, stateless individuals, asylum seekers, IDPs, IDP-like individuals, and others in need of international protection. It is beneficial to define these distinct groups briefly.

As previously noted, the largest segment of displaced people consists of IDPs. The United Nations (UN) defined IDPs in 1998 as individuals who are compelled to flee their homes or places of habitual residence due to natural or artificial disasters, armed conflicts, widespread violence, or human rights violations without crossing internationally recognized state borders. The UN has also established guiding principles for their protection [Deng 1999]. However, these guiding principles and definitions are not legally binding at the international level. The fate of IDPs remains the responsibility of their home countries.

The “Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons”, which came into force in 1954, defines stateless individuals as those “not recognized as citizens by any state”.

While international law categorizes refugees and stateless persons as distinct entities, it is possible for an individual to be both a refugee and stateless simultaneously [Ending Statelessness n.d.]. A typical example of statelessness involves children born to refugees in the host country. If being born in the host country does not confer citizenship, and the parents' citizenship from their home country is insufficient to establish a legal family connection, these newborns often face the issue of statelessness [Namondo 2020].

Refugees are individuals forced to migrate across international borders due to war, violence, or the threat of persecution. The rights and status of refugees are protected and guaranteed under the UN's multilateral treaty, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol [A Guide... n.d.]. Asylum-seekers are individuals who have crossed international borders and applied for international protection in the country they have entered but whose application has not yet been processed. The term "refugee-like persons" refers to individuals who have fled their country due to security risks, similar to refugees, but have not applied for refugee status for various reasons [Persons Who are Forcibly Displaced... n.d.].

The fundamental rights and freedoms of all migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are guaranteed under international law, regardless of where they come from, how they arrive, or where they end up. The most fundamental international legal frameworks protecting these groups are, without a doubt, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (specifically Article 14, relating to asylum), the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol), and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Additionally, there are regional instruments such as the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, the Common European Asylum System, and the Dublin Regulation [Refugees, Asylum Seekers... n.d.].

One such regional legal framework, similar in nature, is the Temporary Protection Directive, which was activated for the first time by the EU on March 4, 2022, following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War [Temporary Protection n.d.]. This law was initially designed in the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars to be used in the event of a mass influx of migrants into any EU country, and it came into force in 2001. The directive aims to provide immediate assistance (such as education, healthcare, and social aid) to large groups of asylum seekers by granting them temporary protection status [Ukraine Situation... 2022].

Following the Russia-Ukraine War, the activated law initially established a temporary protection period of one year, set to last until March 4, 2023. If the reasons for this protection remain valid, the right to protection can be automatically extended for an additional six months, twice (up to March 4, 2024). Furthermore, in the event of ongoing war, the European Commission has been granted the authority to propose an additional year of protection and to extend the duration further (up to March 4, 2025). It is anticipated that if the war concludes earlier, the temporary protection rights will be terminated [How to Apply for a Shelter... n.d.]. Given the unlikely prospect of an end to the war in the near future, representatives from EU member states convened in Brussels on September 28, 2023. They extended the "Temporary Protection" directive for another year, until March 4, 2025. They also agreed to develop strategic policies for potential scenarios beyond 2025 [Temporary Protection Directive... 2023].

The binding nature of international law stipulates that, for a refugee to apply for international protection in the host country, that country must be a party to the relevant agreements. Currently, among the 149 countries that are members of the UN, 44 have not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The majority of these non-signatory countries are concentrated in South and Southeast Asia, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Eritrea, Libya, Mongolia, Cuba, and Uzbekistan [Janmyr 2021]. Additionally, some countries, like Indonesia, have opted

to address refugee and asylum-seeker issues through national legislation [Namondo 2020]. Turkey became a party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention on August 29, 1961, and to the 1967 Protocol on July 1, 1968, with a "geographical limitation" clause [Dost 2014, *34*; Türkiye'deki Mülteciler... n.d.]. This geographical limitation clause stems from the definition of a refugee accepted in the 1951 Convention, which primarily considers individuals forced to flee due to events occurring in Europe [Dost 2014, *36–37*].

Following the outbreak of conflict in Syria in 2011, mass waves of forced displacement brought Syrian asylum seekers to Turkey. Since these individuals did not fit the standard definition of refugees accepted in Turkey, a specific directive was implemented in 2012. Subsequently, the "Temporary Protection Regulation" came into effect in 2014. This regulation is designed to cover only citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic, stateless individuals, and refugees who had previously resided in Syria. It outlines the rights, obligations, and procedures pertaining to those granted protection under its provisions.

Additionally, the "Law on Foreigners and International Protection, numbered 6458", which came into force on April 11, 2013, establishes the procedures to be followed for asylum seekers in Turkey. The General Directorate of the Presidency of Migration Management under the Ministry of Interior (hereafter Presidency of Migration Management) is responsible for implementing these procedures, and there are provincial directorates of Migration Management in each province [Hakkımızda n.d.].

It is important to note that a separate legislation applies to "Turkish descent" foreigners. Law No. 2510, known as "*İskan Kanunu*" (*The Resettlement Law*), established the foundational policy for resettlement in Turkey, enacted in 1934. This law underwent numerous amendments before being repealed in 2006 and replaced by Law No. 5543 on Resettlement, which came into effect on September 26, 2006 [İnan 2016, *28*]. According to this law, a resettled immigrant is defined as "someone who is of Turkish descent and culturally connected to Turkey, brought explicitly from abroad under special legislation and granted real estate" by the provisions of this law.

In addition to the aforementioned situations of forced migration, Turkey, like many other countries, requires foreigners to obtain visas for entry into the country. However, citizens of certain countries are legally exempt from this visa requirement and may stay in Turkey for up to 90 days within a 180-day period. Furthermore, citizens of some countries, including Ukraine, can enter Turkey using just their national identity cards. Based on agreements with specific countries, citizens from these nations may also receive residence permits valid for 7, 15, 30, or 60 days [Çelik 2023; Yabancıların Tabi Olduğu... n.d.].

Ukrainians in Turkey before the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War

Following Ukraine's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, the country witnessed a significant shift in migration patterns spurred by newfound travel freedoms. This period saw a variety of minority groups moving either back to their ancestral lands or towards countries with established diaspora communities. However, the predominant motive driving emigration has been economic in nature. The shift towards a market economy, coupled with the rise of a powerful oligarchy and ongoing economic challenges, has positioned labor migration as a significant aspect of Ukrainian society [Teke, Lloyd and Sirkeci 2022, *525*].

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many individuals from former Eastern Bloc countries, including Ukraine, migrated to Turkey for economic reasons. In the initial years, many of these migrations occurred legally; however, some migrants remained in Turkey without work permits after their visas expired [İçduygu 2004, *29*]. Alternatively, some engaged in shuttle migration, briefly entering Turkey to engage in suitcase trade [Demirdizen 2013, *330*].

Over time, the sectors in which these migrants worked expanded to include translation, fashion, and tourism. In recent years, Ukrainian migrants have also begun working

in domestic services and caregiving for the sick and elderly [Demirdizen 2013, *330–331*]. Additionally, some Ukrainians have come to Turkey for educational purposes or to enter into mixed marriages. Given the establishment of approximately 23 cultural and solidarity associations across various provinces in Turkey, it would not be inaccurate to describe a growing Ukrainian community that was increasingly visible in the country prior to the latest conflict [Kültür Dernekleri n.d.].

Recent data from various sources indicate a modest increase in the number of Ukrainians who have obtained residence permits in Turkey since the early 2000s. For instance, in 2000, approximately 2,500 Ukrainians held residence permits in Turkey, and by 2010, this number had risen to around 6,000 [Toksöz, Erdoğdu and Kaşka 2012, *50*]. Following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, there was a notable surge in the number of Ukrainian citizens migrating to Turkey. In July 2020, the Turkish Ministry of Interior's Directorate General of Migration Management reported that 16,416 Ukrainians held residence permits in Turkey [Statistics of Ukrainians... n.d.].

Additionally, approximately 3,000 Meskhetian Turks living in Eastern Ukraine, who found themselves caught in the war zone during the 2014 clashes, were relocated to Turkey's Erzincan and Bitlis provinces under the instructions of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [Ukrayna'dan Erzincan'a... 2020].

Ukrainians in Turkey after Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

Since 2022, the number of Ukrainians in Turkey has increased significantly due to the war in Ukraine. According to an official statement by Vasyl Bodnar, Ukraine's Ambassador to Ankara, by May 2023, 844,000 Ukrainians entered Turkey, while 822,000 have since left the country[1]. In September 9, 2024, the UNHCR reported a total of 38,525 Ukrainian nationals residing in Turkey, with 2,930 of them having submitted applications for international protection. This marks a decline from the figures reported a year earlier, in November 2023, when there were 42,720 Ukrainians in Turkey, 4,475 of whom had applied for international protection [Ukraine Refugee Situation... n.d.]. During the initial stages of the conflict, the Republic of Turkey provided temporary shelter for Ukrainian citizens entering the country, initially in various provinces such as Kırklareli, Edirne, Eskişehir, and Bursa, and later relocated those in continued need to a camp established in Elazığ [Bölgesel Gelişmeler... 2022].

Under the "Agreement on Procedures for Mutual Travel of Citizens between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine", signed in 2011 and enacted in 2012, citizens of both countries can enter each other's territory without a visa for stays not exceeding thirty (30) days from their date of entry. They may also stay for up to 90 days within a 180-day period (Article 1.1). However, those intending to stay longer, work, reunite with family, or attend an educational institution must apply for a visa (Article 1.2) [Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararı 2022].

Additionally, the Republic of Turkey offers six types of residence permits for foreigners: short-term, family, student, long-term, humanitarian, and for victims of human trafficking [İkamet İzni Çeşitleri n.d.]. At the outbreak of the 2022 war, the Ministry of Interior instructed provincial governors to facilitate residence permit applications for Ukrainian citizens who were trying to enter or were unable to leave Turkey. Furthermore, applications for humanitarian residence permits were accepted for those meeting the necessary conditions [İçişleri Bakanlığı'ndan... 2022]. In this context, most forcibly displaced Ukrainians in Turkey tend to apply for a renewable short-term tourism residence permit, typically valid for up to two years. In addition to this option, some seek to enter Turkey with work or education visas, while others obtain residence permits through family reunification [Ukrayna'nın Ankara Büyükelçiliğinden... 2023].

Furthermore, the data research indicated that those unable to return to their home country or afford the residence permit application fees often apply for international

protection. Despite the costs associated with this option, many forcibly displaced Ukrainians prefer short-term residence permits due to the freedom of movement they allow and the more straightforward, faster application procedures compared to international protection. Under the relevant regulations, individuals registered under international protection must reside within the provincial borders assigned to them [Uluslararası Koruma... n.d.].

According to the recent residence permit data shared by the Presidency of Migration Management [İkamet İzinleri 2024], approximately 35,497 Ukrainians reside in Turkey, most holding short-term residence permits, and 6,492 holding family residence permits. As previously mentioned, about 2,930 Ukrainians live in Turkey under international protection [Ukraine Refugee Situation... n.d.]. Apart from those residing in designated areas indicated by the Directorate, the vast majority of this group live in cities such as Istanbul, Antalya, Izmir, Muğla, and Ankara [Since War-Start... 2022]. The field data also revealed this concentration in these cities, pointing out that the already existing Ukrainian population in these areas significantly influences their choices. Additionally, the familiarity of these coastal cities as tourist destinations for Ukrainians in previous years has played a crucial role in their selection. Moreover, the remaining Ukrainians in Turkey, following the initial wave of arrivals and departures, appear to be planning to settle in the country, as evidenced by a growing trend in both entrepreneurship and property purchases. Although official data from the Turkish Statistical Institute on Ukrainian enterprises in Turkey has not been made available since 2022, previous trends indicate an increase in Ukrainian business presence, with the number of Ukrainian enterprises rising from 8 in 2016 to 51 in 2022 [Yabancı Kontrollü Girişim… 2024]. This increase is likely linked to the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Official statistics also reveal a surge in home purchases by Ukrainians in Turkey between 2021 and 2022, with an increase of 106.4 %. In 2021, Ukrainian nationals acquired 1,246 homes, which jumped to 2,572 in 2022, and they continued to purchase 1,720 properties in 2023 [Akgündoğdu, Trissel 2023].

Another significant finding from the relevant literature and field research is that a distinct process is applied to "Turkic" communities under legal regulations. In June 2022, a Presidential decree was issued to settle approximately 1,000 Meskhetian Turkish families in Turkey, primarily from Ukraine [Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararı 2022]. These Meskhetian Turks were initially placed in temporary shelters before being relocated to a camp in Elazığ. A recent lottery was held for the settlement of these Meskhetian Turks in their new homes in Bitlis Ahlat[2] [Elazığ'da ki Ahıska Türkleri... 2022]. Additionally, as a result of the recent war, the Presidency of Migration Management has included Crimean Tatars in the "Turkic" category. Those who can prove their identity as Crimean Tatars with official documentation can apply for long-term residence permits in Turkey without the requirement of residing continuously for eight years [Türkiye, Kırım Tatar Türklerine.... 2022; Kırım Tatarları... 2022]. In this context, long-term residence permits have also been granted to 2,012 Crimean Tatars [Kırımoğlu Göç İdaresi... 2023].

Another key finding concerns the humanitarian and social integration assistance the Republic of Turkey provides to forcibly displaced Ukrainians. From the moment Ukrainians began arriving in Turkey, they have received various forms of urgent humanitarian aid (such as aid cards and temporary accommodation), psychological support, and assistance with access to education. Additionally, support services have included consultations on accessing rights and services, as well as legal assistance. These initiatives have been implemented through collaboration among state institutions (such as the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Red Crescent), local NGOs (such as Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilization (SGDD-ASAM) and local Ukrainian cultural and solidarity associations), and international organizations (like United Nations Children's Fund, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNHCR), and they continue to be carried out [Akçapar 2023; Bölgesel Gelişmeler... 2022]. In the initial phase, Turkey also took steps to protect 1,380 orphaned or unaccompanied Ukrainian children and

their accompanying adults under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies [Savaş Mağduru… 2022]. In May 2023, still 34 orphaned Ukrainian children and their guardians were officially under Turkey's protection[3].

However, beyond these humanitarian and social aids, Turkey does not provide forcibly displaced Ukrainians with special legal status and a comprehensive social security package, as implemented by the EU [Ukrayna'nın Ankara Büyükelçiliğinden... 2023]. Under the temporary protection laws established by the EU, Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection have access to employment, adequate housing, social assistance or income support if needed, medical care, education (for individuals under 18 in state institutions), and banking services. They also have the right to reunite with family members and enjoy free movement within EU countries [Temporary Protection n.d.]. Consequently, some of the Ukrainian nationals who initially arrived in Turkey later transitioned to EU countries.

Correlatively, another significant finding is that Ukrainian nationals represent a mobile community in Turkey. As previously mentioned, from the beginning of the war until May 2023, approximately 844,000 Ukrainians entered Turkey, and around 822,000 of them subsequently left the country[4]. The General Director of Foreigners at the Presidency of Migration Management emphasized in her speech at the panel titled "Ukrainians in Turkey within the Framework of Regional Developments" that Ukrainians form a "mobile community" [Bölgesel Gelişmeler... 2022]. The United States (U.S.) Department of State's 2022 report on Turkey also noted that a "significant number" of Ukrainians later left Turkey to return to Ukraine or move to a third country. Ukrainian nationals prefer third-country locations, including EU countries, particularly Germany. They also preferred Canada, where the Ukrainian diaspora is strong. Since the start of the war, approximately 1,200,435 Ukrainians have sought refuge in Germany [Ukraine Refugee Situation... n.d.], and around 200,000 have gone to Canada [Lorinc 2023].

An official from the Consulate General I consulted during my field research in Istanbul confirmed this perspective, further emphasizing that the ultimate goal of the Ukrainian government is for the globally dispersed war-displaced nationals to return to Ukraine. They also confirmed that returns to Ukraine have visibly increased. This view aligns with data from UNHCR and the IOM. According to a report published by IOM number of IDPs and those returning to permanent settlements in Ukraine from abroad was approximately 4.573 million, with around 22 % of these returns coming from outside the country [Ukraine – Conditions of Return... 2023]. UNHCR also predicts that approximately 3.4 million "refugees" and IDPs will return by the end of 2024 [Ukraine Situation n.d.].

Conclusions

The study set out to explore a relatively underexamined dimension of forced migration in Turkey: the arrival and settlement experiences of Ukrainian nationals displaced by the ongoing war with Russia. In doing so, it also considered earlier waves of Ukrainian migration, such as those following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the subsequent unrest in Eastern Ukraine. These earlier movements help to contextualize the more recent patterns observed after 2022, offering important insights into shifting mobility strategies and motivations within this group.

Although the number of Ukrainians in Turkey is significantly lower than other displaced populations – particularly Syrians – their situation presents equally important questions for forced migration scholarship. Their case reveals how existing legal and institutional frameworks fall short in accommodating individuals who, while not formally recognized as refugees, nonetheless find themselves in circumstances that warrant protection. In this regard, many Ukrainians in Turkey exemplify what can be termed *refugee-like* populations since those who remained in Turkey largely favor short-term residence permits over formal asylum procedures. This choice is not coincidental; it reflects both the structural limitations of Turkey's migration system – marked by its non-EU status and

lack of a comprehensive protection directive – and the practical consequences of formal asylum, such as restrictions on movement imposed on applicants who are assigned to specific provinces. In response, many adopt mobility strategies that prioritize legal flexibility and personal autonomy, revealing how displaced individuals actively negotiate between legal constraints and everyday needs, often seeking protection through alternative, non-institutionalized paths.

More broadly, the case challenges linear narratives of migration. Rather than viewing displacement as a one-way path from a home country to a host country, the Ukrainian experience highlights the reality of transnational lives shaped by movement, uncertainty, and adaptation. These individuals often maintain ties across borders and build lives that span multiple locations.

In line with the goals of exploratory case research, this study does not aim to offer generalizable conclusions. Instead, it hopes to raise new questions and point toward areas needing deeper investigation. By focusing on legal ambiguity, mobility preferences, and socioeconomic realities, the study invites reflection on how forced migration is understood – and how future policies might better respond to its complexities.

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Х. Е. Гюрсой Ерденай

Динаміка міграції українських громадян до Туреччини до і після 2022 року

У цій науковій розвідці досліджується динаміка української міграції до Туреччини після російського вторгнення в Україну в лютому 2022 року, а також розглядається динаміка міграції до вторгнення. Спираючись як на огляд літератури, так і на невелике польове дослідження, проведене у Стамбулі 20–28 жовтня 2023 року, автор висвітлює політику Туреччини щодо іноземців, з особливим фокусом на громадянах України і їхньому потенційному майбутньому в країні. На початкових етапах цього конфлікту приблизно 844 000 громадян України в'їхали до Туреччини. Проте станом на травень 2023 року близько 822 000 осіб виїхали. Незважаючи на цей спад, у Туреччині все ще перебуває певна кількість вимушено переміщених осіб, яка перевищує цифри в деяких європейських країнах. Наразі близько 38 500 українських громадян проживають у Туреччині, маючи дійсну посвідку на проживання або перебуваючи під міжнародним захистом. Це дослідження передусім має на меті пролити світло на перспективи їхнього майбутнього в країні, фокусуючись насамперед на юридичних процедурах і заходах підтримки, спрямованих на них. Крім того, у статті розглядаються різні процеси переселення тюркських етнічних груп, особливо турків-месхетинців і кримських татар, у ширшому масштабі української вимушеної міграції. Ці групи, бувши частиною більшої спільноти переміщених осіб, дотримуються інших правових процедур завдяки своїм етнічним зв'язкам із Туреччиною. У дослідженні також розглядаються різні типи посвідок на проживання, які обирають українці, і стверджується, що багатьох із цих осіб доречніше називати "подібними до біженців", ніж такими, що відповідають формальному визначенню поняття біженця згідно з міжнародним правом. Оцінюючи відповідь Туреччини на українську міграційну кризу, пропонована стаття має на меті стати базовим джерелом на цю тему, що майже не висвітлювалася в літературі.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна; вимушене переміщення; українські громадяни; турки-месхетинці; кримські татари; статус "подібний до біженця"; Туреччина

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