Migration, Securitization, and State Policies: Evaluating Afghan Irregular Migration and Repatriation Centers in Türkiye[*]

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Abstract

This study delves into an extensive exploration of migration and securitization policies within the context of Türkiye, with a specific focus on Afghan irregular migration and the function of repatriation centers. The research scrutinizes state policies that initiate the migration process of Afghan irregular migrants to Türkiye, deficiencies in border security, and related practices. The influence of key global events such as the Taliban's takeover, the withdrawal of US and NATO forces, and the ensuing political turmoil in Afghanistan are examined as triggers for migration. These factors, coupled with issues such as personal safety, unemployment, and poverty, have led to increased internal and external migration. The study also investigates the myriad challenges Türkiye faces in dealing with the surge of migrants. Housing, health, education, integration, employment, social services, urbanization, and various public policy areas are all areas strained by this influx. Attention is given to the Return Centers under the Directorate General of Migration Management, where irregular migrants are gathered with the aim of repatriation to their home countries. The study explores the incidents, causes, consequences, and security issues encountered during this process. As part of the research, interviews were conducted with Afghan migrants who were willing to participate. These interviews provided insights into their experiences before migration, during their journey, and after arriving in Türkiye. The interviews shed light on the experiences of migrants, including the struggles they face, their reasons for migration, and the impact of their journey on their lives. Additionally, the study delves into the role of the Tuzla Repatriation Center, located in Istanbul's Tuzla district and operated by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management. Despite the confidential nature and ever-changing data at the center, the research attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of its operations and the experiences of the migrants housed there. The findings of this study are significant in understanding the complexities of migration, the role of repatriation centers, and the effects of state policies on the lives and experiences of migrants. The research provides valuable insights into the challenges and potential policy implications of managing migration and offers potential pathways for addressing these issues effectively.

Keywords: *Migration; Securitization; Repatriation Centers; Afghan Irregular Migrants; Türkiye's State Policies*

1. Introduction

Migration is a significant event in today's world, influenced by factors such as population growth and resource depletion. It has been studied by various disciplines due to its political, social, and economic implications throughout history. The outcomes of migration vary

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depending on its origin and destination, leading to the development of new migration policies and practices.

Türkiye, due to its geographical location, is highly exposed to migration. Recent political events in Afghanistan have triggered a new wave of migration. With the withdrawal of NATO forces and the political turmoil in Afghanistan, the Afghan people have been fleeing their country. The Taliban's control of the government has reignited migration from Afghanistan. Türkiye's growing economy, culture, and geopolitical position make it both a destination and a transit point for irregular Afghan migrants. A significant portion of this migration occurs through Iran, which is in close proximity to countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Türkiye, seen as a gateway to Europe, becomes a migration hub as a result. This type of migration is often referred to as irregular migration.

Our research focuses on the state policies that initiate the migration process of Afghan irregular migrants to Türkiye, the deficiencies in border security, and related practices. Issues such as the Taliban's takeover and the withdrawal of the United States of America (USA) and NATO forces have brought attention to the problems that force internal and external migration, such as personal safety, unemployment, and poverty. Migrants' cross borders with the goal of reaching European countries or staying in Türkiye and dispersing throughout the country. Türkiye faces challenges in housing, health, education, integration, employment, social services, urbanization, and various public policy areas in the short and long term. Captured irregular migrants are gathered at Repatriation Centres under the Directorate General of Migration Management to be repatriated to their countries. Our research also investigates the incidents, causes, consequences, and security issues encountered during this process. These topics form the core of our research problem.

The Tuzla Repatriation Centre, located in Istanbul's Tuzla district and operated by the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management, was included in our study. Due to the confidential nature and ever-changing data at the center, creating a suitable sample was challenging. Therefore, we conducted interviews with Afghan migrants approved by the Repatriation Centre managers who were willing to participate. These interviews followed an in-depth method and involved Afghan migrants categorized as irregular migrants, gathered to be deported from Istanbul or other cities. The interviews focused on their pre-migration, migration journey, and post-migration experiences. In addition to pre-structured questions approved by the ethics committee[3], participant observation was also conducted.

2. Migration and Securitization Policies of Türkiye

In the 21st century, the phenomenon of migration has become a source of fear and unease due to globalization and the emergence of migration waves. The presence of migrants from different groups, ideologies, and beliefs accentuates the dichotomy of "us" and "other" (Kinnvall, 2002). In an effort to manage migration and protect its borders, the European Union (EU) has implemented asylum assimilation and human rights agreements as part of its migration policy. However, securitizing migration management poses challenges for the EU as it seeks to align migration management with its own values and institutions.

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[3] Ethics committee approval for the survey form used in data collection was secured from the Istanbul Topkapı University Scientific Research Ethics Committee (decision dated 24.08.2022, No. E-31675095-100-2200009509).

The prominence of migration among nations is due to the structural changes it can bring to a region. In Türkiye, the regional changes resulting from the Syrian migration, which began in 2011 under an "open-door policy", have started to manifest in society. Instead of dismissing the issue or diverting attention to other events, it is crucial to address the intense migration to Türkiye and develop effective securitization measures.

Türkiye undertakes migration securitization activities through the Directorate General of Migration Management and with the support of law enforcement forces. While it is natural for the entry of millions of refugees within a short period to pose certain challenges, high rates of these problems or their disruption to the local population can lead to dangerous deadlocks, exacerbating extreme nationalist sentiments between communities (Elmas, 2022). Considering the significant refugee population within Turkish borders, understanding their adaptation to the country becomes essential.

Migration, driven by individuals' security concerns, presents security challenges for both migrants and the host population. The securitization of migration arises from the fear that it may disrupt the homogeneous structures, identities, cultures, beliefs, and values of the host country's citizens. From the state's perspective, securitization involves border security, countering terrorism, and addressing potential criminal organizations. Technological advancements and information sharing have made organizing and executing terrorist acts easier, with border crossings facilitating the movement of terrorist group members and their potential attacks. Individuals planning terrorist acts can exploit the low level of securitization measures and migrate, whether legally or illegally.

Türkiye, having grappled with terrorism for years, faces challenges such as creating a sense of otherness and discrimination towards foreigners in society, which occasionally escalates to violence. These challenges contribute to the recruitment of new members for terrorist organizations. Consequently, states have reevaluated their security approach to terrorism. In terms of securitizing migration, measures such as increased border controls, technology utilization, new visa control systems, and effective inspection and security systems are being implemented. The security sector has expanded to include electronic security systems, border units, and passport and repatriation centers, all aimed at addressing migration-related security concerns (Rumelili, 2017).

2.1. The Contradictory Relationship between "Migration" and "Security"

Migration, now acknowledged as a security issue, is approached from four perspectives. The first focuses on border controls, counter-terrorism measures, and regulations that exclude migration. The second examines migration policies as a security issue, considering the neglected human rights and fundamental freedoms of refugees and migrants. The third emphasizes the acceptance and integration of migrants who introduce differences to society. The fourth takes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the situation of migrants in the host country (Özçelik, 2019).

Internal conflicts and wars are primary reasons for migration, which also impact the psychology and behavior of individuals on the move. The hardships experienced in their home countries, the challenges during migration, and the problems encountered upon arrival in host or transit countries leave deep scars, making migrants prone to violence and spontaneous reactions. Therefore, providing psychological support within the framework of securitization

or migration policies is crucial. Migration events that occur beyond the control of the state can lead to both soft and strict measures. State policies often face challenges in striking a balance between human rights and migration policies. While hard security measures are considered necessary to counter threats, issues such as drugs, human trafficking, and international migration fall under soft security concerns for states (Brauch, 2008). When examining the refugee issue as a "problem" dimension, it becomes evident that it affects stability, security, and peace at the international level (Kaygusuz, 2020).

Furthermore, achieving one-sided security in terms of border security is untenable. Bilateral border security is necessary for effective border security policies between states. Bilateral arrangements can be exploited by organizations involved in human trafficking, taking advantage of migration events. Additionally, individuals with refugee status can organize against the state through state or non-state interventions, posing a threat to the state's existence and security. Consequently, migration is seen as limiting state authorities and sovereignty (Erdoğan, 2013).

Migration, particularly in the context of security, is securitized as a potential threat to the host country's political environment and can potentially alter domestic political dynamics through relationships established with ethnic or political groups that share the same ideology as the migrants. Harsh decisions made by the current government regarding migrants can lead to a loss of political support. As a result, governments must address the needs of refugees. However, this may not always be well-received by the local population.

Another aspect of migration is its role as a bargaining chip in international relations. For instance, negotiations and agreements with Türkiye aim to prevent the migration of irregular migrants and those under temporary protection within Türkiye's borders to European countries. The decisions made through these negotiations, which enable these migrants to remain in Türkiye instead of being distributed across European countries, are based on negotiated agreements. However, deficiencies in Türkiye's securitization methods are evident when evaluated from the perspective of securitization theory.

Migration has the potential to influence the political environment of the host country. Ideological beliefs brought from migrants' home countries can shape domestic politics through relationships with ethnic or political groups that share similar ideologies. Harsh decisions made by the current government regarding migrants can impact electoral outcomes. Therefore, governments must address the needs of refugees. However, these efforts may not always be perceived favorably by the local population.

In addition, migration becomes a subject of negotiation in international relations. For example, negotiations and promises are made with Türkiye to prevent the migration of irregular migrants and those under temporary protection within its borders to European countries. The decisions made through these negotiations, which deviate from the principle of allocating these migrants to all European countries, are entirely based on negotiated agreements. Türkiye's securitization methods, according to securitization theory, exhibit certain deficiencies.

In the final essence on this issue, it is likely to emphasize that migration and securitization policies in Türkiye are influenced by globalization and the emergence of migration waves. The securitization of migration poses challenges for both the EU and Türkiye. It is crucial to strike a balance between security concerns and the protection of human rights and fundamental

freedoms. Effective securitization measures should encompass border controls, counter-terrorism efforts, regulations that address migration issues, and policies that promote the acceptance and integration of migrants. Psychological support for migrants is also essential. Bilateral cooperation is crucial in achieving border security, while international relations should aim for comprehensive and equitable approaches to migration. Governments must address the needs of refugees while considering the concerns of the local population. It is vital to evaluate securitization methods in light of securitization theory to ensure their effectiveness and alignment with international norms and values.

2.2. Presidency of Migration Management and the Establishment of Repatriation Centres in Türkiye

Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) in Türkiye is a governmental organization dedicated to developing migration-related policies, facilitating labour force participation for migrants, making strategic decisions on migration in line with human rights, and effectively implementing these decisions (PMM, 2017). It was established to outline migration management policies in Türkiye and serve as an effective tool in combating migration (PMM, 2017). The Directorate General of Migration Management, operating under the Ministry of Interior of Türkiye, is responsible for conducting migration activities, implementing planned programs, and providing assistance to foreign nationals (Çakı, 2018; Adıgüzel, 2016). The establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management was defined in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458, published in the Turkish Repuclic *Official Gazette* dated 04/04/2013 and numbered 28615.

Repatriation centers, established under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458, aim to facilitate the return of irregular migrants detected within the country to their countries of origin. Managed by the Presidency of Migration Management in Türkiye, these centers serve as facilities for holding individuals who are in the process of being deported or removed from the country (Alakuş, 2020). Strategically located at 28 points throughout the country, these centers prevent the scattering of migrants and provide temporary accommodations until the irregular migrants are returned to their countries of origin. These facilities also have additional functions, such as preventing the spread of infectious diseases within the country and ensuring the control of foreign nationals linked to terrorism for security purposes. One specific facility, the Tuzla Repatriation Center (TRC) of Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Migration Management, was established for this purpose.

Constructed in compliance with European Union standards, these facilities aim to ensure the controlled presence of monitored irregular migrants while meeting their accommodation needs. However, due to the lack of cooperation from countries of origin and challenges in controlling national borders, the workload of the institution has been steadily increasing and has become nearly insufficient.

To address significant migration events and streamline planned procedures related to migrants, the 2000 Accession Partnership Document and the 2005 Revised Accession Partnership Document were adopted. These documents also include the implementation of plans and projects aimed at compliance with and application of the EU acquis. According to these documents, if it is determined that an individual within the scope of irregular migration has transited through a country that is a party to the document, the transit country is required

to readmit the irregular migrant. Türkiye, due to its geopolitical location, has become a migration outpost for European countries based on these documents.

Migrant return centers are established in provinces or districts with a high population of irregular migrants. The location of these centers is determined by the relevant General Directorate, presented to the Ministry, and approved by the Ministry for the establishment of Repatriation Centers in the region. These centers, where irregular migrants are admitted and accommodated, can be established in suitable locations determined by the Governorship. Temporary centers can also be established in case of emergencies. The standards and structure of these centers are determined by the PMM. The establishment, operation, or management of these centers is regulated by the directive, which emphasizes the protection of the right to life, a dignified approach in line with human dignity, maximum protection of vulnerable children, prioritizing the needs of individuals with special needs, ensuring the confidentiality of personal data of migrants, providing relevant information to migrants or individuals involved in the procedures, meeting and strengthening the psychological and sociological needs of migrants, providing an environment suitable for worship and beliefs, and providing all services without discrimination (PMM, 2017; Alakuş, 2020; Çakı, 2018; Adıgüzel, 2016). The establishment of repatriation centers and their compliance with international standards demonstrate Türkiye's commitment to effective migration management. However, ongoing challenges, such as the lack of cooperation from countries of origin and the increasing workload, highlight the need for continuous efforts to address migration issues. Through its policies and facilities, Türkiye aims to ensure the protection of human rights, the well-being of migrants, and the overall control of migration processes within its borders.

3. Causes of Irregular Migration from Afghanistan

The irregular migration from Afghanistan has become a significant global migration event, distinct from other migration cases such as Northern Iraq or Syria. The rapid and massive emergence of Afghan migration sets it apart in terms of its global reach (Bozok, 2018). Türkiye, being a transit and destination country, has witnessed the direction of migration towards its borders since 2003 (Bozok, 2018). Factors contributing to this phenomenon include Türkiye's geopolitical position and its evolving migration policy, transforming it from a transit country to a destination country over time (Kahraman, 2017).

Economic reasons play a major role in Afghan migration, which continues to this day. The ongoing conflicts have further accelerated the pace of migration, leading to various outcomes (Geyik Yıldırım, 2018). Iran, due to its cultural and linguistic similarities with Afghanistan, has become an attractive option for Afghan immigrants. However, the attitude of the Pakistani government toward Afghan-origin individuals has hardened, prompting Afghans to seek migration to countries with better economic development and social opportunities (Geyik Yıldırım, 2018). The events in the region, including the establishment of new nation-states and borders, have increased the international significance of migration events. Economic disparities, security issues arising from internal and international conflicts, advancements in technology facilitating access to information, and the emergence of legal and illegal transportation networks have all contributed to the rapid increase in migration types in the international community (İçduygu, 2012; Boran, 2021). Despite the strict border measures implemented by various countries to control irregular migration flows, millions of people continue to live in irregular migrant status each year (İçduygu, 2012; Boran, 2021).

Türkiye, due to its geopolitical position, stands out as one of the most affected countries by these migration waves, serving as a bridge for citizens from economically and socially devastated countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Irregular migrants, whose main destination is usually Europe, use Türkiye as a transit country (İçduygu, 2012). Thus, it is crucial to classify the migrations in Türkiye and other Western countries targeted by these migration events based on the countries involved. The civil war in Syria, as a neighboring country, has been a determining factor for the migration tendency of Syrian citizens to Türkiye. In Afghanistan and Iraq, long-standing security problems, along with economic failures, contribute to the reasons for migration (Bozok, 2018). According to international migration law, the main reason for migration determines the status of individuals or groups when they pass through the target or transit country. Legal distinctions are made among refugees, economic migrants, irregular migrants, and victims of human trafficking (Bozok, 2018).

The wars and internal turmoil in Afghanistan have led to a substantial increase in migration. Afghanistan has faced numerous occupations throughout its history. The Old Soviet Union's invasion, regime changes in neighboring countries, the political turmoil created by the Saddam regime in the Middle East, civil wars, and the collapse of communist regimes have made Türkiye a target and destination for irregular migration movements (Arınç, 2018).

Türkiye's location in the chaotic region makes it one of the receiving countries for migration in the globalized world. The irregular migration waves towards Türkiye and Western countries involves a complex structure, including refugees, asylum seekers, irregular migrants, transit migrants, and regular migrants. Migration has become a process that concerns all nations in the globalized world, requiring constant updates to combat migration issues. The persistence of migration problems can be attributed to the geopolitical plans, imperialist desires, and exploitation ambitions of developed nations in these regions. Armed forces of Western states or ideological terrorist organizations often hinder the establishment of institutional order in countries facing civil wars or political and economic instability (Arınç, 2018).

Türkiye's migration problem is closely related to Iran's migration and migrant policies since the majority of irregular migration towards Türkiye and Western countries takes place on Iranian territories. Iran, bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan, plays a significant role in Türkiye's irregular migration problem (Elçi, 2021).

According to the research conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in June 2020, the main factors driving Afghans to choose Türkiye as their destination include family reunification, easy and fast access to shelter, economic reasons, and the aspiration for better living standards (MMC, 2020). According to this research, the number of Afghan migrants entering Türkiye by crossing the Iranian border has also increased recently. Due to the embargoes implemented in Iran, which borders Afghanistan, the economy has deteriorated, and it has been eliminated from the countries that can be migrated to. Therefore, Türkiye is seen as an ideal migration country.

4. Securitization in Türkiye within the Scope of Afghan Irregular Migration

When explaining the concept of security, it is important to consider the various variables that affect security. Migration is a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only the individuals involved in migration but also the external environmental factors that influence

their decisions. A narrow examination of security in a specific area makes it challenging to define and explain the concept (Özcan, 2011). The concept of securitization originated from the work of the Copenhagen School, a study group in European security studies. Wæver (1993), one of the founders of this group, identifies three key pillars of their work: securitization, security sectors, and regional security. Another significant group associated with the theory of securitization is the Paris School, which proposed an alternative approach to securitization practices and policies by focusing on the securitization of official state institutions. Initially, securitization theory emerged and developed in the context of European security concerns, but it later expanded to address issues such as environmental developments, religious structures, terrorist incidents, migration, and border security issues arising from migration (Sula, 2021).

However, securitization is not a preferred or recommended approach for achieving progressive change and problem resolution. In recent years, irregular migration and securitization have become challenges for Türkiye, requiring a two-dimensional approach that balances a humanitarian perspective towards migrants with ensuring national security. This dual perspective makes it increasingly difficult to make legal and political decisions. Policies are implemented to prevent irregular migrants from entering the country and to deprive them of their basic human rights. Deportation policies are also implemented as a result of these measures. However, it is essential for states to uphold international and humanitarian values in their decision-making processes concerning migration. While certain compromises are made from the perspective of state security to mitigate specific risks and address social inequality and terrorism, compromising on the fundamental principles of state sovereignty, such as the right to control border crossings against irregular migration, is often justified as a means to reassert sovereignty and counter international law (Koser, 2005; Dalaman & Türkmen, 2022).

The impact of international migration on political, social, cultural, and economic levels is increasingly framed within the context of security. The view that irregular migration poses social, cultural, religious, linguistic, and other threats to state security is becoming more prevalent. States are concerned about the potential creation of an insecure environment through the entry of irregular migrants. The constant discussion of migrants as a security threat and the inseparable link between migrants and insecurity can perpetuate the assumption that migrants bring about insecurity, reinforcing this notion in the public sphere (Dalaman & Türkmen, 2022).

Repatriation Centers serve as facilities to detain foreign irregular migrants who enter the country illegally and are not citizens of the country. These centers are located away from residential areas and implement security measures to restrict entry and exit. It is important to note that these centers are not criminal institutions for holding criminals but rather aim to keep irregular migrants away from incidents and actions that may occur within the country, ensuring the peace and security of the country's citizens (Dalaman & Türkmen, 2022). However, due to securitization, these measures involve standardized, fixed, and relatively inflexible practices of control, surveillance, discipline, and imprisonment, establishing a perception of irregular migrants and refugees as figures associated with crime.

5. General Findings Concerning Irregular Afghan Migrants at the İstanbul Tuzla Repatriation Center (TRC)

Türkiye has positioned itself within migration issues as a permanent or transit migration focus for migrants. While transit migration finds its place within the concept of irregular migration, there is no full definition. According to the United Nations, transit migration is the type of migration where migrants temporarily use the country, they are in to transition to their target country (Tepealti, 2019). This migration term is the cost and result of the hardships, long journeys, and almost always not using any means of transport that migrants have to endure to reach their goals. Before 1980, Türkiye, which was a migrant sender for economic reasons and could only accept refugees from Europe due to the 1951 Geneva Agreement, has become both a "transit" and "target" country for refugees coming from the east with recent developments (İçduygu & Keyman, 2000: 383). Participants interviewed in-depth at TRC have been in Türkiye illegally for approximately an average of 5 or 6 years. A significant number of them came to Istanbul from the Central Anatolia region. During this period, they worked in jobs with a high degree of difficulty to sustain their lives.

5.1. Demographic Implications and Potential Challenges of Afghan Migrant Influx in Türkiye

Migration movements have prompted discussions about the potential threats to national identity and citizenship in many countries, necessitating a redefinition of these concepts (Giddens, 2005: 28). Hence, it is imperative to adopt a multifaceted approach to data collection related to migration, incorporating sociological, anthropological, demographic, legal, and political perspectives. Limiting the concept to a demographic viewpoint would be an oversimplification. Kritz, Lim and Zlotnik (1992) have delineated the dynamics of migration from historical, cultural, and technological angles in their studies. They have underscored the diverse impacts of migration on the social, political, economic, and demographic structures of both the receiving and sending countries. Additionally, they posited that the scope of demographic data should be broadened and scrutinized on a larger scale.

In-depth analysis of Afghan migrants at the Tuzla Repatriation Center reveals that the highest concentration is within the 20-25 age bracket, constituting 87% of the participants. While the presence of a young population in the labor market is deemed beneficial, their largely unskilled status is projected to have a negligible impact on the labor force.

Research conducted in EU countries indicates that out of the 227 million people in the labor market, 21 million (9 percent) are migrants (İçduygu, 2017). As the aging population is inadequately supplemented by the younger generation, the influx of migrants is viewed as a solution to this gap. However, in the context of Türkiye, which already has a sufficient young population, the employment of migrants as inexpensive labor is expected to exacerbate unemployment rates and detrimentally impact the livelihoods of the local populace.

This young migrant population also poses a potential security issue. The lack of information about their backgrounds, circumstances in their home countries, and propensity for crime creates a security vulnerability. The inclusion of a young population from a region fraught with terror and war within national borders, without sufficient information about them, could have negative implications for national security.

The data further reveals that all the irregular Afghan migrants under study are single, thereby devoid of any familial responsibilities. The single status of migrants increases their mobility as they are not encumbered by familial considerations. This newfound freedom could potentially lead to adaptation issues due to cultural differences, further complicating the migration scenario; as stated in this manner by the one of Afghan interviewees:

> Getting married in Afghanistan is hard. The economy is very bad and there is a dowry. I couldn't get married because I didn't have a situation. If I could save money here, I could get married when I returned. (Abdel, Age 27)

One critical demographic aspect pertaining to the irregular migrant populace dispersed throughout the nation pertains to their educational attainment. An interviewee's statement elucidates the educational landscape in Afghanistan:

> I could never go to school. My little siblings are studying now. They study as much as the Taliban allows. (Samim, Age 23)

Education is dictated by the capricious decrees of a governing body. This predicament of an uneducated irregular migrant population residing in the nation could instigate cultural discord and a dearth of acculturation, thereby exacerbating the interactive tension between them and the indigenous populace. Irregular migrants deficient in education are likely to end up in unregistered, labor-intensive occupations due to their educational background.

In the study, the participants, owing to a lack of comprehension of the Afghan educational system, were inquired about their literacy status. The data revealed that out of the total, 37% of irregular migrants are literate, and 63% are illiterate. Given Türkiye's urgent requirement for a skilled workforce, it is evident that this necessity remains unfulfilled. The brain drains from Türkiye, predominantly to European nations, cannot be compensated by this means. For such a possibility, it is imperative to reassess the existing migration policies, enhance the country's appeal, and pave the way for qualified and quality migration. Additionally, there is a pressing need for supporting lower vocational training that facilitates brain migration for highly skilled occupations. Essential investments in this direction should be urgently strategized and executed.

A crucial aspect concerning the education of irregular migrants often overlooked is the potential education they may have acquired in their homelands. It is worth noting that Afghanistan is a profoundly religious nation, with the majority of the populace receiving ideological instruction in religious seminaries. The Taliban, predominantly comprising Afghan Islamic clergy and Pashtun-origin students from rural areas who obtained their ideological education in Pakistani seminaries (Aras & Toktaş, 2008; Katzman, 2015), have established a national administrative structure based on a radical interpretation of Islam.

One of the most significant demographic issues that migrants face in their host country is the language barrier. In his study, Doğan (2019) conducted interviews with Afghan migrant students, some of whom reported feeling excluded upon their arrival (during their non-Turkish speaking period) but this negativity vanished after they started learning Turkish; some reported no exclusion, while others indicated they were still excluded even after learning the language. However, a cosmopolitan structure can be observed throughout Afghanistan's history. Therefore, Turkmen, along with Uzbeks and Tajiks of Turkish origin who reside in

the country, are predominantly fluent in Turkish and show language similarities. Hence, it is possible that irregular Afghan migrants may have some knowledge of Turkish.

Out of the irregular Afghan migrants who participated in the study, 75% or six individuals were Turkish speakers. The remaining two either had no or very limited knowledge of Turkish. The research indicates that the similarity in ethnic origin increases the rate of language acquisition. This linguistic proximity leads to an increase in the preference of irregular Afghan migrants for Türkiye. From a migrant's perspective, knowing the language is a significant advantage. Knowing the language of the country they aim to live in saves them from additional effort or cost. Furthermore, the policy Türkiye implemented in Afghanistan, such as opening language courses and health clinics, increases the number of Afghans who speak Turkish.

5.2. Influx and Disposition of Irregular Afghan Migrants at the Tuzla Repatriation Center (TRC)

The staff at the TRC have stated that the primary rationale for Afghan irregular migrants selecting Türkiye is its role as a transit country. Additional factors include Türkiye being a Muslim nation, its superior economic conditions compared to Afghanistan, and the presence of employment opportunities. Upon apprehension in Türkiye, these migrants are accommodated in the TRC until their repatriation. The TRC, serving under the contributions of the EU and local laws, adheres to humanitarian values and accommodates all irregular migrants until their departure process initiates.

As per the interview, irregular migrants in the TRC are informed about their legal and judicial rights from the moment of their apprehension. This procedure is not punitive but ensures they are under surveillance until their repatriation. The process begins with law enforcement officers apprehending the Afghan migrants in their respective provinces and bringing them to the center. After processing by the TRC staff, a repatriation plan is devised.

The center has a capacity of 900, but this figure fluctuates due to the dynamism of arrivals and departures. The duration of stay for irregular migrants typically spans three months, but it can extend up to six months due to lengthy procedures or correspondence with respective countries.

The TRC has the infrastructure to provide food and accommodation for 900 individuals concurrently. The center operates round-the-clock, with bed and room planning carried out for incoming irregular migrants. Feedback from the migrants suggests a generally positive perception of the center, as follows:

> The facilities here and the behavior towards us are quite good. We have the right to make phone calls. We have smoking hours. We have beds. The rooms are not crowded. (Abdülaziz, Age 25).

> Everything is good here except being closed. We can talk to our family on the phone. There are things to spend time. For example, there are books. We have no problem with worship. There is a mosque, we can pray. We have no problem with eating and drinking. We have air intake hours. The behavior of the staff towards us is good, they listen to us. (Zabihullah, Age 25)

In the initial phase of planning, a specialist team engages in the identification and authentication of calls and personal data. Any items of value are carefully preserved and scheduled for delivery during the dispatch process. In relation to the execution of deportation procedures for non-regular migrants from the TRC, diplomatic liaisons are established with the Afghanistan Consulate to expedite the repatriation of formally registered Afghan non-regular migrants. The Consulate is supplied with the number and identities of the detained individuals, and consultations with the Consul are conducted either at the center or remotely, as necessitated. Following approval from the Consulate, the deportation process initiates with the necessary planning and correspondence.

Regarding transportation, negotiations are conducted with Turkish Airlines to facilitate the return of non-regular migrants to their countries of origin. In the event that seats to Afghanistan are not available, substitute arrangements are coordinated with Afghan airlines. The dispatch of financially capable migrants is self-funded, whereas the European Union assumes the cost for those lacking funds, in accordance with regulations. If the Consulate does not authorize a return, the non-regular migrant is transported by terrestrial means to the province of Van for deportation via the Iranian border.

In general, the TRC experiences minimal conflict between staff and non-regular migrants, with the exception of those suffering from substance abuse issues or psychological disorders. To date, no instances of rebellion or mass uprisings have been recorded at the center. However, non-regular migrants associated with terrorist activities present the highest security risk. Such individuals, and those causing disturbances, are isolated within the center.

5.3. Occupations of Irregular Afghan Migrants in TRC and the Jobs They Perform in Türkiye

Migration movement at the individual level harbors potential for opening novel opportunities, catalyzing the acquisition of professional employment, and contributing to the augmentation of the skilled labor force. Migrants possessing professional skills can integrate into the labor force in the destination country, thereby exerting a positive influence on its economic development. The influx of more qualified migrants, or those high-capacity individuals who would be classified under the 'brain drain' category, can also prove beneficial for the country's development.

However, the recent wave of migration directed towards Türkiye does not align with either of these categories. As per the data collected in Tuzla GGM, none of the irregular Afghan migrants interviewed demonstrated high competency levels or held a profession that necessitates technical knowledge.

The majority of the interviewed migrants were primarily engaged in unskilled labor. A substantial proportion of the group was involved in animal husbandry, while the remainder occupied other unskilled occupations. The current diversity of occupations does not yield the requisite contribution to the country's economy. It is discerned that irregular migrants possessing more qualifications and skills tend to prefer America and European countries over Türkiye.

Türkiye has enacted the Law on Work Permits of Foreigners to regulate the employment of foreigners within its territory. This law is designed to delineate the boundaries where irregular migration and migrant labor can be employed and to consolidate work permits under a single

administration. Furthermore, the law provides for penal sanctions to deter illegal labor or unauthorized employment.

The lack of qualifications among Afghan irregular migrants within Türkiye's borders, and the fact that the professional groups they belong to can be fulfilled by the country's citizens, negates the possibility of yielding economic benefits. Additionally, the propensity of these migrants to constitute cheap labor, coupled with the potential to usurp employment opportunities from the country's citizens thereby escalating the unemployment rate, has been posited (Dearden, 2000).

A notable finding from the research indicates that Afghan migrants demonstrate the greatest competency in animal husbandry. This is exemplified by the experiences shared by some migrants, as follows:

> I came to Istanbul Fatih. My acquaintances here arranged a job for me. Then I started working at a butcher who is dealing with animal husbandry. (Savsan, Age 21)

> In Istanbul Çatalca, I started working with my friends who are working related to my profession, I was working in a farm where there were horses. My brother was also working in the same place. We were making a comfortable living. (Abdulaziz, Age 25)

European nations have initiated the implementation of restrictive securitization policies to curb the entry of unqualified and unskilled migrants into their countries while facilitating the entry of qualified, well-educated, and technically proficient migrants. Türkiye should adopt similar securitization policies concerning unqualified migrants who are deemed unacceptable both economically and culturally, thereby expediting their departure from the country. In tandem with this, Türkiye should foster communication with countries that are the source of migration and conduct diplomatic negotiations in alignment with mutual interests.

5.4. Factors Influencing Afghan Immigration: Personal Narratives and Broader Perspective

The migration of unskilled and irregular Afghan immigrants is a complex phenomenon, influenced by various factors. Economic circumstances, war, and internal unrest are among the major triggers for such movements (Castles, 2008; Bodur, 2017). As one migrant, Zabihullah (25), recounts: "*Taliban has taken control of almost every part of Afghanistan... this oppressive war situation disrupted mine and my family's whole order.*"

The narratives of Afghan immigrants often reflect the prevalent wars and internal strife in their homeland. Savsan (21) and Abdülaziz (25) both share stories of loss, fear, and the pursuit of safety and economic stability in Türkiye.

According to the neoclassical theory, economic considerations primarily drive migration, as individuals seek to establish a comfortable and secure life (Castles, 2008). This perspective is echoed by Abdel (27) and Samim (23), who migrated to Türkiye due to economic hardships and increasing Taliban pressure in Afghanistan.

Push factors prompting migration include low economic income, fear, poor living conditions, and political and religious pressure, while target countries offer high labor demand, quality of

life, economic strength, and freedoms (Bodur Ün & Paydak, 2017). Reza (25) and Muradi (25) cite positive perceptions and opportunities in Türkiye as key motivations for their migration.

The survey reveals that a majority of irregular immigrants cited economic reasons for their migration, with 50% also referencing regional security issues due to terrorism. 25% noted the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan as a factor, while 37.5% mentioned political chaos as a reason for migrating (Castles, 2011). Mirzayee (24) exemplifies the impact of these factors, stating: "*Taliban has taken control of almost every part of Afghanistan. Our health and livelihood problems increased... I came to my relatives and started working.*"

5.5. Migration Routes and Ways of Arrival to Türkiye

In recent years, the rise of nation-state-focused ideology and the effects of globalization have led to variations in migration movements and their causes across regions. Economic, political, and security events in Afghanistan have destabilized the region, prompting people to migrate. Consequently, the most popular destination for these migrants is European countries. Particularly when considering migration movements from the East to the West, Türkiye's strategic importance is underscored by its role as a transit route to Europe. Türkiye, viewed as the easiest and shortest route from the region to European countries, has become both a transit and destination country for migrants. İçduygu (2015) has pointed out a connection between Türkiye's inability to complete its nation-state development and its continuation of migration policies implemented in the 20th century.

Irregular migrants who decide to migrate due to economic reasons are known to spend all their savings on this journey. Migration, due to border violations and being carried out illegally, is generally a movement done on foot. İçduygu and Toktaş (2002) noted in their study that the migration period lasts about a year from the time a person leaves their home country. They found that migrants stay in Türkiye, perceived as a transit country, for an average of two years and that planning and reaching the destination country also takes about a year. They revealed that migrants spend an average of 900 dollars for migration to Türkiye and approximately 2800 dollars to go from Türkiye to their destination country.

Before starting to migrate, migrants are observed to set off on their journey after receiving references from those who have migrated to Türkiye. They obtain information about both the destination country and the migration route. An Afghan irregular migrant expressed this situation as follows:

> I met with people in Afghanistan who had come here before. I went to Iran. They sent me to someone else in Iran. He brought me to the Turkish border. When we crossed the border into Türkiye, two people welcomed us. It was night. They settled us somewhere. We stayed there for ten days. Then they picked us up and sent us to other cities on different buses. I went to Gebze, then moved to Istanbul. (Reza, Age 25)

There are two different ways to migrate to Türkiye. 50% of the participants have chosen the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran-Türkiye route:

> I used a bus to cross from Pakistan to Iran. We walked a bit when crossing the Iranian border. Then inside Iran, we came to the Turkish border partly by walking and partly by car. A friend in Pakistan helped me a lot. On the Iranian side, I negotiated with

people who transport migrants, and they brought me all the way to Istanbul. (Muradi, Age 25)

37.5% of the migrants have used the Afghanistan-Iran-Türkiye route. One participant did not want to speak clearly about the route they took. In the study of Bodur Ün and Paydak (2017), it was seen that migrants mostly avoid answering questions about how they travel most. In the data they obtained in their study, 3% of the migrants have organized their own migration, 76% have done so through smugglers, and 21% have avoided answering this question. 26% of the migrants did not answer the question of how they contacted the smugglers. 19% of the migrants stated that they reached the smugglers by themselves, and the remaining 55% stated that they reached the smugglers through their neighbors, family, and relatives.

5.6. Detention Points and Arrival to the TRC of Irregular Afghan Immigrants

Irregular Afghan immigrants in Türkiye often venture into various provinces within the country in search of employment, following advice from relatives and acquaintances. This movement is typically characterized by engagement in low-skilled labor such as porterage, shepherding, construction, and field guarding, predominantly in Anatolian cities. Over time, however, the majority gravitate towards Istanbul, owing to its extensive job market and its reputation as a gateway to Europe (Abdulaziz, 25).

In Istanbul, these immigrants undertake any available work, while concurrently striving to evade detection and maintain their undocumented status. The concomitant challenges of securing employment and avoiding apprehension exert significant psychological stress on these immigrants. Yet, they report no experiences of harassment or violence due to language and cultural differences, instead emphasizing the kindness and hospitality shown by the Turkish people.

Typically, these immigrants are apprehended by security forces during routine identity checks, often in districts known for high concentrations of both documented and undocumented immigrants. For instance, Abdel, 27, was detained during a routine check while in Istanbul to purchase animal feed and attend to personal needs. Similarly, Savsan, 21, was apprehended during a traffic stop in Fatih, Istanbul, while Muradi, 25, was detained during an ID check while transporting goods in Istanbul.

5.7. Post-Repatriation Future Plans of Irregular Afghan Migrants

Irregular Afghan migrants predominantly prefer Istanbul in Türkiye due to its large population, cosmopolitan structure, suitable job opportunities, being on a transition route, and its connection to the sea. Istanbul is the city most preferred by irregular migrants in Türkiye due to economic, demographic factors, and the opportunity to connect to international transportation networks, as well as established migrant relations networks. Due to these characteristics, migrants in Istanbul have the opportunity to work off the books, find accommodation, and aim for third countries. Areas like Tarlabaşı, Dolapdere, and Esenyurt in İstanbul serve as important shelters for irregular migrants along with other urban poor, while various areas of the city, primarily Aksaray-Laleli, offer opportunities for finding jobs and off-the-books work (Tepealtı, 2019). These are regions where irregular migrants are densely located or are effective in terms of employment.

It is also evident that Istanbul is seen as a gateway to Europe. The following quotes summarize this situation in the conducted interviews:

> I tried to learn the language by working and earning money in Türkiye. But in the future, I want to find a way to live more freely and go to Europe. I have friends who have gone to Europe, and they are very comfortable. (Abdulaziz, Age 25)

> I came to work in Türkiye to take care of my family. I wanted to bring my family and live here when I learned that it was a place where animal husbandry was common. I have relatives who have gone to Europe. If the conditions there are better, I would consider going. Because there is a lot of opportunity in Türkiye. I want to bring my family who is in difficult conditions. (Savsan, Age 21)

> There is unemployment in Türkiye too, and the wages are low. For this reason, I want to save some money and go to Europe to live comfortably. (Samim, Age 23)

The rising cost of living in Türkiye and the increasing difficulties in making a living have also affected Afghan migrants; this situation has also increased their desires to go to Europe or wealthy Arab countries:

> I came to work in Türkiye to take care of my family. Since they pay in dollars outside of Türkiye, I can save more money. Life in Türkiye has started to become difficult now. Especially, I will definitely go to places where I can earn more money. I worked in many places in Istanbul. Eminönü, Laleli, Fatih, Merter. But in the future, I definitely want to go to Dubai to work. (Muradi, Age 25)

The law enforcement that enables the capture of irregular migrants is the Provincial Gendarmerie Command personnel in rural areas and the Provincial Police Department personnel in urban areas.

While they are satisfied with the accommodation, food, drink, health, and communication facilities provided to them in the Tuzla Repatriation Center where they were brought after their capture, and the availability of other opportunities, they are not pleased to be repatriated. In addition, they are pleased with the abundance of sporting activities such as table tennis and carpet field in the center. However, they are suffering from the shortness of the 15-minute period they are taken out to get fresh air. They also state that they are pleased with the attitudes and behaviors of the Istanbul Provincial Gendarmerie Command and Provincial Immigration Administration personnel working in Tuzla GGM. Irregular migrants are already making plans to return after their capture. Some migrants who were interviewed on this subject said:

> Yes, I am considering returning right away. Because I have a system in Türkiye, there are places where I can work related to my profession and I have acquaintances. (Abdel, Age 27)

> Yes, I am considering returning. Because I have a system in Türkiye, I know many people who are still living in Türkiye. I will definitely come back. (Mirzayee, Age 24)

Migrants have completed their adaptions during the time they lived in Türkiye and established a fluent social system for themselves. The opinions of a migrant who participated in the related interview are as follows:

I established a system in Türkiye and I was about to start a family. I have a Syrian girlfriend; I am planning to marry her and live in Türkiye. (Reza, Age 25)

Irregular migrants generally state that they will return as soon as possible once the internal turmoil, Taliban threat, security, and economic crises in their countries are over.

6. Conclusion

Whilst Afghanistan does not share a physical border with Türkiye, the historical, cultural, and religious affiliations serve as significant impetuses for the migratory movements from Afghanistan towards Türkiye. Respondents underscore the significance of religious and historical unity, positioning Türkiye as the primary destination. Irregular migrants, whose migration motivations align with those of regular migrants under international accords, abstain from seeking legal status, opting instead for informal residence and work, either for irregular passage to Europe or due to the suboptimal living conditions in satellite cities and the perception of elevated income potential in metropolitan areas such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

Migrants from Afghanistan residing in Türkiye can be bifurcated into two categories. The primary category comprises those who have secured protection status via applications for international protection, whilst the secondary category encompasses Afghan migrants who have migrated to Türkiye with economic motives and aspirations for an improved standard of living. For the initial category of Afghan migrants, their duration of stay in Türkiye is extended owing to the diminution in the numbers in the transition quotas to other nations and the protracted procedural processing. Those who exceed their permitted tenure transition from regular migrant status to irregular migrant status. The motivations for Afghan nationals' migration to Türkiye are multifaceted, incorporating political, economic, security, health, and educational factors.

Afghan nationals embarking on migration to Türkiye are primarily illiterate migrants devoid of specialized skills or employment histories. They encounter numerous challenges contingent on their status in Türkiye. In this vein, Türkiye, being both a transit and permanent migration nation due to its geographical positioning, presents Afghan refugees and migrants, who grapple with dilemmas on transition to third countries or permanent residence in Türkiye, with certain impediments.

Afghanistan features prominently on the global stage due to predicaments such as the power struggle of the Taliban regime, the ensuing intervention by the USA, sustained internal conflict, economic and political instability, the withdrawal of US forces from the nation, and the Taliban's subsequent forcible usurpation of power again, all of which foster an environment of oppression and violence. These dilemmas compel individuals to undertake both internal displacements and emigration from the country due to factors such as personal security, unemployment, and poverty. Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye are primary destinations for these international migrations.

Consequently, informal employment in the nation depresses the wages proffered to the labor force. Afghan workers, compelled to toil under harsh conditions and low wages in the labor market, are also subjected to negative anti-immigrant behaviors. The absence of an efficacious migration policy in Türkiye, coupled with the ambiguity in its existing policies, serves to exacerbate the complexities of migrants' lives.

These migrants, lacking significant labor force skills and with a deficient education level, harbor fears of deportation due to their unregistered and unauthorized presence, and they become victims of human trafficking predicated on labor exploitation. Informal employment detrimentally impacts the employment of the native populace and the economy at large. To holistically combat human trafficking, also denoted as modern slavery, it is inadequate to merely augment inspections. It is incumbent both to eliminate resources that could engender human trafficking and to foster awareness about human trafficking amongst all individuals who must coexist as a consequence of migration.

Following the establishment and operationalization of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) affiliated with the Ministry of Interior in Türkiye, it is discerned from statistical data that the struggle against both irregular migration and human trafficking has intensified. Essential administrative and legal modifications have been implemented in the fight against human trafficking. Nonetheless, given that the surge in migrant numbers also escalates the number of foreigners who could potentially be victims of human trafficking, it is evident that the issue necessitates comprehensive attention in all its facets.

The assertion that can be drawn from this discourse is that complex and distressing questions that may emerge regarding matters such as global inequality and poverty as causes of irregular migration, or a shared moral stance and responsibility that can be determined against irregular migrants, are being overshadowed by effective protective measures, laws, policies, and administrative tools that have the ability to curtail international migration and prevent irregular migration (Dalaman & Turkmen, 2022).

In the context of securitization in Türkiye, the relationships between state institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) ought to be structured transparently and explicitly, and the authority should unequivocally reside with the Directorate General of Migration Management. Therefore, all financial, legal, and technological support should be proffered, and the Directorate should be transformed into a more dynamic entity through accurate planning and programming. Additionally, the functioning of the inspection mechanism should be amplified for the purpose of monitoring the policy related to migrants and refugees by the Directorate of Migration Management. Moreover, political relations should be enhanced with organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the integration and adaptation of migrants and refugees, and efforts should be undertaken to facilitate the accessibility and usage of human rights-based and humanitarian aid.

In summation, the present-day phenomenon of unchecked immigration is progressively linked with security concerns. Despite being one of the nations most influenced by migration, there appears to be an insufficient focus on security within our country, primarily due to the absence of any effective mechanisms to ensure security. The future outcomes of the security approach, upheld by border security and the Directorate of Immigration, remain indeterminate. In a country where immigrants constitute nearly an eighth of the population, the substantial burden has incited humanitarian crises and potential intercultural conflicts.

In immigrant-receiving countries, the multifaceted impacts of migration, encompassing cultural, political, economic, and financial aspects, could potentially transform into an external security issue. The state bears the responsibility to secure a safe environment through diplomatic negotiations with countries posing risks, targeting an idealistic approach that

ensures a peaceful, war-free environment. It is incumbent upon Türkiye to prioritize the conservation of its demographic structure and preclude any actions or movements that precipitate transformative changes by implementing preemptive measures. The state should not shy away from adopting stringent measures when necessary to maintain social security and stability.

In this context, international migration is perceived as a reality influencing demographic security, social stability, social security systems, cultural identities, internal security, and structures of the welfare state. Consequently, the perception of migration movements as a clear threat should not be conjoined with humane responses.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed to the study equally.

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