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Turkish Newcomers' Experience of the Belgian Labour Market: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study explored the integration process of Turkish-speaking migrants in Belgium from a phenomenological perspective. In collaboration with Antwerp's ATLAS integration hub, we conducted six focus groups comprising 59 Turkish-speaking newcomers with diverse religious, national, and regional backgrounds to examine Turkish integration in Belgium. Participants told their stories and deconstructed their knowledge of the local people, particularly the cultural distinctive subjective beliefs and prejudices. Focus group members discussed their expectations, problem, ambitions, and cultural differences in Belgium's multicultural society. Group composition was designed to be informal and diverse and promote peer support. Each group included some participants who were socially integrated, employed, and fluent in an official language. Although qualitative analysis revealed factors limit Turkish-speaking migrants' opportunities in the labour market, group exchanges yielded solutions for building social capital and bridging differences, highlighting the importance of open-minded migrant integration course organisers and a kind and empathetic approach to the process.

Keywords: Qualitative study; integration; labour market; social capital; Turkish migrants

Introduction

People migrate to other countries for various reasons, such as finding work or studying, or to escape from war and lack of human rights in their home countries (Arat, 2001; Aydin & Avincan, 2020; Girdap, 2020; Kepenekci, 2005). Further, Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) emphasize

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the "Conflict and Migration Cultures Model". This theoretical framework suggests that conflicts in the source countries, rather than the attractiveness of the destination country, play a motivating role in the analysis of human mobility. The same model indicates that this insecurity continues even after migration and persists in the destination country in the form of discrimination, ultimately impacting the integration issue.

Living in a Western country can be attractive to newcomers for many reasons. However, it is essential to analyse both the social and cultural capital of the individual at the micro level and the needs of the society at the macro level to understand the potential challenges they might face (Kiliç, 2016, 2023; Nohl et al., 2018).

In the 21st century, questions about human rights remain crucial, with cultural fears, political conflicts, and wars continuing to be a reality. Although the Second World War is more than half a century behind us, the issue of human rights is still relevant. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly, 1948) states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as the right to work, free choice of employment, and protection against unemployment. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that newcomers are not vulnerable and that their human rights are respected.

In 2020, the employment rate of the working-age population in the European Union (EU) was higher for EU citizens (73.3%) than for non-EU (57.6%) (The EU website, 2021). Generally, only limited job opportunities exist for non-EU citizens; they have fewer opportunities in economic sectors, including public administration, defence, and in the private sector (The EU website, 2021). Mostly, they find employment as unskilled workers (e.g., domestic workers and cleaners; personal service providers; care workers and construction workers; unskilled workers in mining, manufacturing, and transport; and agricultural and fishery workers) (The EU website, 2021). This situation produces potential reasons for dissatisfaction among migrants, particularly for the highly educated.

Globalisation, movement due to migration, integration, and multiculturalism have always been a part of Europe's history (Bade et al., 2011). Hagendoorn et al. (2017) emphasized the relationship between cultural and socio-economic integration in their quantitative research on the Netherlands. In 2020, Belgium was a multicultural country with a population of 11,492,641. However, only 7,806,078 of these were native Belgians, while 2,259,912 were naturalised Belgians and 1,426,651 were not Belgian citizens (having foreign nationality) The webpage of the Federal Migration Centre, 2021). The December 2016 statistics from the Flemish Employment Service (VDAB) revealed that 149,006 people were looking for a job in 2016, of which 97,495 were Belgians and 51,511 were unemployed migrants. In December 2009, there were 171,481 unemployed people in the country, of whom 124,791 were Belgians and 46,690 non-Belgians. Certain figures of the VDAB *Studiedienst* from December 2016 indicate that unemployment differs from one background to another. Moreover, demographics varies; for example, native Belgians have the largest overall share of the population aged 65 and over (VDAB, 2017). In contrast, naturalised Belgians have the largest proportion of the population under the age of 18. Foreigners have the largest proportion of the 'working age' (from 18 to 64 years) population (Federal Migration Centre, 2021).

Since 2014, the Flemish integration policy has been implemented by the Flemish Agency, which consists of primary and secondary civic integration pathways (Domestic Administration Agency, 2016). The primary civic integration pathway comprises a newcomers' social

orientation course that provides an initial introduction to Flemish society and basic Dutch language education. Additionally, vocational orientation is offered to provide guidance on possible careers and assistance in finding jobs, cultural activities, and education opportunities to study. Individual counselling is also offered. In an additional secondary integration path, the choice that migrants make during the primary integration path is further shaped by going to work or further studies (The website Agency for Integration, 2021). The annual report of the *Agentschap Inburgering en Integratie.* (2015). The annual report of the shows that 37,045 newcomers from the population register were selected as a target group for an integration programme (Agency for Civic Integration, 2015).

The Agency for Integration and Integration (2016) stated that during the integration programme, people acquire knowledge about the Flemish and Belgian society and the necessary skills to participate in the society. In addition to knowledge and skills, norms and values have a place in the programme. Accordingly, people need to be introduced to specific Belgian norms and values (Agency for Integration and Integration, 2016). Newly arrived migrants in Belgium attend social integration courses, wherein they are divided in classes based on the languages they speak, religion, nationality, and region.

In this study, we interviewed Turkish migrants and facilitated discussion of their migration experiences, including their circumstances before migrating to Belgium, current situations, and visions for the future. The aim of this study was twofold: (1) to gain a deeper understand of immigration, especially the migration of Turkish-speaking people, and (2) to explore how focus group interventions, incorporating teachers and coaches, can aid the integration process and program. Thus, we invited participants to share their experiences, discuss the challenges faced in the labour market, propose solutions, and narrate their ideas and aspirations with respect to their integration process.

Data and Methods

Participants

The study included two groups of first-generation Turkish-speaking migrants—Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Bulgarians—who resided in Flanders and were following an integration path for foreigners. All participants were enrolled in the same integration class for Turkish speakers. The participants included teachers, students, artists, housewives, a dancer, bar workers, caricaturists, psychologists, poets, professors, and unemployed individuals who had immigrated to Belgium from Turkey or Bulgaria, Denmark, or Holland. They were diverse in regard to age (9–60 years) and educational background, and had originated from big cities, small towns, or villages, and held diverse worldviews, philosophical and religious beliefs, and political perspectives. The youngest participant was interviewed alongside her mother in the same focus group.

To ensure diversity within each group, we purposefully allocated each participant to one of the six focus groups. We also ensured that each group included some individuals who were employed, had been integrated with the society for several years, and had acquired an official language.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the research was conducted in a manner that was honest and scientifically responsible, we complied with relevant ethical requirements related to research respondents. Specifically, we took steps to ensure voluntary cooperation, provided complete and accurate information to participants, and ascertained that anonymity was maintained and that no adverse effects would result from either participation or non-participation. By following these ethical guidelines, we aimed to conduct the research in a manner that was respectful of participants' rights and privacy.

Methodology

The study was conducted in collaboration with Atlas, an agency that supervises migrants' integration, as the social orientation courses in the primary integration path were similar to those of the research.

Informal focus-group-type interviews comprised the survey method. To ensure the discussions were varied and of a holistic nature, we adopted a qualitative research approach that (a) allowed for data collection both at specific moments and across time and (b) covered several differing situations.

For the focus group interviews, we sent the letter to the organisation and the teacher, as a voluntary cooperation, and asked them permission to conduct this research. Subsequently, the organisations and teachers of the respondents informed them that one of the researchers of this study would participate in a focus group discussion in a class held in an informal setting. The participants in the focus groups interacted with each other while the teachers, who were also immigrants with experience with the integration process, joined in the conversation and shared their opinions. The idea was to gather information until a 'saturation point' was reached. Each meeting with the participants took approximately 120–160 minutes. The provision of written informed consent obtained from the participants contained the permission to use writing materials and interviews for the research. We informed all the respondents of the study and asked their permission to record the interviews. Participants first took part in focus groups as part of an integration course held at the Antwerp Integration Office and completed semi-structured questionnaires designed to accommodate free response. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 14 experienced migrants, who shared their experiences, expectations, problems, and ambitions in informal social environments such as cafes. This allowed participants to express themselves freely and discuss their social and cultural integration process. Applying this focus-group method for the newcomers was advantageous for group discussions, as, for example, the reactions and responses of one participant could elicit memories and discussion from others, helping them remember things they may have otherwise forgotten. Thus, open-ended questions raising various topics encouraged flexible and dynamic thinking about common issues and sharing among the group members.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws on a range of philosophical perspectives, including intersubjectivity, hermeneutics, the hermeneutic circle, existential phenomenology (Heidegger, 2008), and transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1989). The Interpretative

Phenomenological Approach, as adopted by Palmer et al. (2010), was also applied to understand and interpret activities related to specific phenomena in a given context.

Phenomenology was essential to this study, as it provided a means of deducing the essence of what 'hermes' is, while hermeneutics, as an interpretive theory, involved collecting as much data as possible to make the situation comprehensible. To gather valuable information for the research, we conducted an open-question semi-structured focus group interview in an informal setting; the interview helped participants feel more comfortable in communicating and sharing their experiences.

The post-structuralist perspective of Deleuze and Guattari (1983) and the philosophical aspect of Sartre (1946) also influenced the interpretation of the data. Sartre's existentialism emphasizes individual freedom, responsibility, and subjectivity and reacts against the deterministic aspects of rationalism, idealism, and positivism. These philosophical aspects provided a basis for the dynamics and interpretation of this research.

Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure used in this qualitative study aimed to explore participants' subjective experiences and emotions by adopting a holistic approach that incorporated intersubjectivity, hermeneutics, the hermeneutic circle, existential phenomenology, and transcendental phenomenology (Heidegger, 2008; Husserl, 1989). In addition, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was utilized as part of the hermeneutic phenomenology to make sense of activities related to specific phenomena in a given context.

The focus groups were conducted in an informal setting where participants interacted with each other and teachers who were also immigrants with experience in the process. The aim was to gather information until the 'saturation point' was reached. Participants were encouraged to express themselves freely through various activities, such as eating, drinking, sharing local dishes, and chatting together.

The study recognized the unique experiences and perspectives of each participant, making diversity a recurring concept. The pluri-interpretative nature of post-modernism enabled a more nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives and perceptions of the participants. The phenomenological core (Heidegger, 2008), or essence, was seen as vital, and the 'open-question', semi-structural form of focus-group interviews in an informal setting was used to ensure respondents felt comfortable and communicative.

Thematic narrative analysis was used to identify common elements and patterns across cases, which focused on the stories and sought to identify common elements to theorize across cases (Riessman & Speedy, 2007). The analysis process involved reading the transcripts several times, inductive coding, developing themes and sub-themes, and identifying core narrative elements associated with each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, validity was obtained through cross-referencing with the research area in the discussion section. Multiple data collection methods were used simultaneously to triangulate the findings. In summary, this study used a holistic approach that incorporated various philosophical perspectives and qualitative analysis techniques to explore participants' experiences and emotions regarding adult education and social and cultural integration.

Results

The results suggested that newcomers have various expectations about the labour market, depending on their educational background, future plans, personality, talents, and experiences. Experience expert migrants mentioned that establishing a social network was important, while newcomers were relatively new in the process of trying to find a way towards their dream jobs and other possibilities within the labour market.

Newcomers shared their ambitions and obstacles with the focus groups. Some of them already had a job; therefore, the adaptation process was much easier. They stressed that their focus was on other areas of the integration process, such as learning the local language. They said that it was very difficult to find time to attend language courses. They preferred weekend and evening courses, which were more flexible, although some reported that they worked more than 60 hours a week and could not go to language courses at all but spent time with their families.

Some newcomers immigrated because of unexpected events and other life-threatening incidents, which made them seek political asylum. They shared their frustrations about merely trying to survive while facing issues regarding their qualifications and labour market realities. Many of them emphasised that they had already sacrificed their dreams. Others highlighted the fact that they were self-employed or even acted as guides for cultural and social organisations for other migrants.

The purpose of finding a job ranged from supporting the family to being independent, developing a career, and being active in society. While some participants came to Belgium for work, others were already employed but sought better prospects for the future.

Finding employment allows newcomers to participate in social life in the new country. The newcomers who participated in the survey had managed to find various kinds of jobs. Less-educated newcomers have more opportunities in the labour market. Participants with more education had difficulties finding employment because of the language barrier, even though they had work experience. They were frustrated about not being able to make use of the experience.

Respondent 6 is a young woman who came to Belgium with her family; she did not need an education in her homeland but is working with her husband in a supermarket in Belgium. For her, a job is not merely to earn money; it is also a means to communicate with the natives:

> *'We have a workplace, but I don't speak any foreign languages. We also have Flemish customers, but my husband never looks, and they would never say hello… I also try to establish eye contact; for example, with a lady, we smile as she goes by, and I communicate with her by phone with a translation app.'*

Respondent 23 shares that he is under pressure to find a job and that there are important issues around integration, while the native people expect newcomers to work:

> *'The Belgians are waiting, so we can work for them'.*

Respondent 28 came to Belgium as a financial adviser. He has applied for professional equivalence; the process generally takes six months.

Learning a local language is extremely important for highly educated Turkish-speaking migrants trying to find a job in Belgium. Respondent 66 is highly educated and observes that there were not enough educated migrants 30 years ago; however, the new migrants are different. He expects VDAB to offer him more assistance in finding a job that utilises his abilities, as he has 11 years of work experience but cannot use it in the new country. Therefore, he is not satisfied with integration courses and emphasises that integration courses should dovetail with VDAB to help him find a job. Other newcomers are also frustrated; they want their situation in Belgium to be the same us their situation in their homeland with respect to work. They are desperate to find appropriate employment for their education level.

Respondent 67 shares that the newcomers who have studied social sciences have difficulty finding jobs because they need to be more fluent in the language. However, the highly educated newcomers who have studied engineering, chemistry, or mathematics have more opportunities in the labour market because the language is not as important for them.

> *'Lifelong learning. All my cognitions are Turkish, and this is the problem'.*

Some participants find having to abstain from their former profession while in Belgium very difficult. Although they know that opportunities for professionals to continue their careers in Belgium are limited, they see the restrictions as unfair. . For example, Respondent 68, a 26-year-old woman, explains her motivation to learn the local language before coming to Belgium. She is a language teacher; hence, she regrets having to work as a cleaning lady after arriving in Belgium, which is often the only option in the labour market for migrants like her. She says that she did not have a problem with the job in the short run, but in the long run, she wants to be employed in her field. She seems emotional and her voice trails off significantly as she speaks about it.

Qualifications, Experience, and Language

The results indicate that language is a substantial obstacle for highly educated migrants in their search for employment. Consequently, they often have jobs for which they are over-qualified. Additionally, most often their diplomas are unrecognised, which can also cause problems. Moreover, whenever highly skilled migrants apply for a job below their level, employers question their long-term plans. Having experience in a specific field is an advantage, but employers often differentiate between work experience in and outside Belgium.

Respondent 48, who came to the country as a professor, narrates his experiences in writing articles, publishing books, and giving seminars. He had spent the previous 25 years as an academic and had begun to learn the local language; he delineates his feelings of frustration. He wants to work and desires positive discrimination for trained qualified staff. He shares his experiences with the bureaucracy, which have led to personal problems:

> *'There is an incredibly slow, heavy, incredibly bureaucratic clumsiness, so, when you look at it from this aspect, you get offended'.*

He came to Belgium for political reasons but is satisfied with finding a job or a place in the new society. He explained his feelings and difficulties on an academic platform but did not receive a response.

The respondents openly share their experiences regarding the process of employment and finding a place for themselves in society. They narrate the challenges involved and how they

overcome them over time. The 'experience experts' point out that there are some job opportunities in the mother tongue. For example, Respondent 60 is a consultant from Istanbul who stated thus:

> *'I think the best therapy for newcomers can be conducted in their mother tongue'.*

The respondents feel that newcomers work in very difficult jobs compared to native people. Respondent 60 elaborates on this aspect:

> *'They work in the chemical industry, for example. Construction work, the grooms who come here work with the Turks for very little money. Foreigners don't speak the language, except in the chemical industry.... Women are also crushed: you don't work.... My patients only use language where they play and have no social activities. Common diseases of my patients include anxiety and depression. Anxiety is most visible in men, as they work in heavy jobs at a young age. If they take a break, they are afraid they will be unemployed. They are afraid they will never get a job again or will be living here all their lives: "I have lived, so what am I going to do now?" "I have not lived my life", they live in fear. And, the women's wishes are also crushed. They are criticised by their in-laws. Moreover, because the work they do as maids is seen as the lowest level of work in Turkey, and they can only clean here, they feel bad because they have no training and speak no language to work in another job. They become really cynical about not having a valid diploma and not speaking the language. They do not feel that they are human. After a while, they become depressed. They think that nothing good will happen in their lives. Bulgarians of Turkish origin take this seriously; they have a very active life in their own country; they are fun, can go out, and can take care of themselves. It doesn't matter whether they live in the village or the city. They earn money here, buy houses in Bulgaria, and come back. They have children, they read, they see how they live, and work hard to earn a lot of money. They work so hard that they cannot live the quality of life they had experienced in Bulgaria. They suffer from anxiety and depression'.*

Experience experts compared past events and job opportunities with those today. They report that social and labour market expectations have changed over time. Respondent 73 is an experience expert who came to Belgium when he was a child and is now a social worker who supports teenagers with difficulties in finding jobs. His father came to Belgium to work in the mines in 1975; he would like to live in Turkey with his family.

Respondent 1 is an artist who organises cultural activities, and a caricaturist. He gives workshops to international students in various countries and is also an experience expert who came to Belgium as a child. His father was a highly educated migrant. As a first-generation Turkish-speaking migrant, he was able to find a job easily, and gave Turkish lessons to children to support learning in their mother tongue. For some respondents, earning money and their work status are less important because they want to indulge in artistic creation and actively participate in human rights demonstrations and democratic events in Belgium. For them, earning some money to live and artistic and creative ventures are equally essential.

Respondent 63, an experience expert, is a dancer. He had a wide social environment and came from a big city in his homeland, and now works part-time to earn income:

'I do not have a fixed contract. I get unemployment benefits for three months a year'.

He works in Belgium as a drama teacher on projects subsidised by the government. He says that it was not always easy to find a project in the cultural sector, explaining that when he

came to Belgium, he held various jobs such as cleaning, selling potatoes, or working in an iron factory. However, he was not physically strong enough for those jobs. He explains it in a humorous way, laughing:

> *'My first job here was at an iron factory. On the second day, they dismissed me: Look how thin you are!'*

His social networks helped him meet a Turkish psychologist and he was able to start working in the more enjoyable cultural sector.

Some participants initially accept jobs beneath their educational level but eventually find their dream job through a long process. Some migrants, who are experience experts and who came to Belgium as children, prefer working in the social and mental health sector, where they can assist other vulnerable migrants or newcomers who have just arrived and need administrative and professional support. They mention that social networks are important in finding a job; there are other avenues and opportunities, but they can be more challenging.

Respondent 53, an experience expert, came to Belgium as a child and eventually graduated from university, working as a guide to find employment for vulnerable groups in society. The experience expert speaks Turkish. She states that she had worked with people of more than a hundred nationalities in the city in which she lived, highlighting the importance of language proficiency, motivation, and understanding work expectations as important factors when searching for a job. She indicates that a curriculum vitae is an important element and shared the reasons why migrants cannot find work that easily in Belgium. She explains that migrants have several problems in finding a job and a greater chance of becoming unemployed due to various causes. She clarifies that language problems make finding work difficult and that migrants' diplomas may not be recognised in Belgium, which may be the reason their experience in their homeland do not count in the new country.

Respondent 53 further elucidates that migrants who come from EU countries can find work easily because they have learned the language, as a lot of EU languages are similar. EU migrants are mostly employed as seasonal workers or in the construction sector. She asserts that cultural differences play a role. The real reason they cannot find work in their chosen fields could be discrimination:

'There is a very small chance that they can do their job or find a job in their sector, as they had in their country of origin. This is not the case for everyone, but a general observation. They cannot do it in a short period, and there is little chance of diploma equivalence. The language is not enough here. The employer is afraid because they think that highly educated people will quickly look for or find another job or that they are not sure whether they have the talent to work with their hands, which, in practice, lower educated people are usually better at. Some are good with their hands and others are better with their brains... If you have experience on an intellectual level, you may not be as good, in practice, as a housewife. These factors are important for employers. If someone does not have a degree, then there is a chance of getting that job. If someone was a nurse, and their diploma is not the same here, then they can continue studying, although there is no guarantee of a new job. It is investing in yourself; that can take a long time. Sometimes I recommend jobs as a volunteer. Of course, there

are rules sometimes abused by companies, where they should offer long-term contracts.'

She elaborates on the obstacles, observing that everyone has a different threshold to overcome:

> *"There are different kinds of problems. For example, some migrants have no diploma, no work experience, or no official documents. Sometimes, they have physical problems. At times, their previous job gives them a bad reference. Some have had mental problems because of depression. Some are drug addicts or have a criminal record. Some people have an age problem because they are around 50 years old. The employer doesn't want to hire them. Gender can be also a problem in finding a job'.*

Respondent 61 is about 50 and had come to Belgium almost 15 years ago. He spent his whole childhood and young adulthood in prison for political reasons and came to Belgium as a political refugee. Although he suffered trauma in prison, he wants to begin his new life with the opportunities available in Belgium. He went to language classes and graduated with a high language level. He managed to get employed with the help of social organisations. However, the contract allowed a refugee to work only for one-and-a-half years, after which the person could receive unemployment benefits, while new refugees could have the same job with the same contract. He currently has health problems and cannot work in the construction or chemical sector, which have job opportunities. He had no experience in his homeland either.

Respondent 61 says he is past his prime and believes that 20-year-olds cannot be compared with a 50-year-old who has spent his life in prison. Feeling uncertain about his life and future, he is frustrated but tolerant because his goal had been to start his life again after his imprisonment. He nurtured a lot of hope as an asylum seeker; he took Dutch courses and achieved the highest certificate for language learning (level 4.2). He shares his frustration with the labour market after his enthusiasm to start a new life in Belgium waned:

> *'Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW) provides the means to work. They let you work until you fill in the unemployment premium and let you benefit from unemployment allowance. I worked for one and a half years, which is typically the duration for which migrants get work here at my age. It was an office job. When the term was over, my wife had to go back to her country. They asked me to work, but my foot was crippled, and although I wanted to do it, it was difficult for me to get a job. We got some papers from the VDAB and were able to get my wife a visa. It reduced my motivation, and I was not able to work for health reasons. On the one hand, the system wants you to work, but on the other, it demotivates you. Yes. On the one hand, you are restless; you want to do something, and you want to be at peace with yourself. I wasn't able to find the job of my dreams anyway, but it can have a financial benefit. I gave the VDAB a chance, and it did not happen. I wanted to have a job that I could do as a care provider. They call sometimes. They do office work at VDAB, doing things on the computer, but they don't think about people's psychology, which is how the existing capitalist system had been installed. In this respect, there is a system that has been installed since 1965: unemployment money. Benefits are taken away from people after a while here, so my wife cannot go to language school. They force the people to do it'.*

Respondent 60 is married to Respondent 61. She is 54 years old and a therapist. She came to Belgium after falling in love with her husband. She shares the frustration of her husband and tries to support him:

> *'They use these people as middlemen and, once in a while (if you get a job), they will ask us to have a meeting. I don't know what they are trying to do. In this regard, there are people who use the system and earn income, while those who need it are in trouble. There is such an automatic thought here. A near injury is not something that goes through the waist, and they want reports every year. Furthermore, people get nervous about incompetence. For example, in a period of eight years, prices have risen a lot; when I came in, my husband got 700 euros, and we could pay the rent and make ends meet. Now, they give me that money because I work, and only our rent and bills can be paid. Nobody comes here for fun. Turks, Moroccans, and Afghans are seen as "are you human?" Human rights do not apply to everyone here. Nobody comes here because they travel the world with this blessing, coming here out of necessity. After all, my husband's freedom - his life - is in danger. He had a job, so why did they eliminate him? That is how the system works; to pay for and replace unemployment'.*

Respondent 62 is also an experience expert. He came to Belgium as a child, and is a psychologist and writer, and supports migrants who need therapy. He also thinks that the conditions of integration and opportunities in the labour market are different now. Respondent 55 is a woman who had studied in Bulgaria as an engineer; she pursued local language and integration courses, and VDAB courses for six months. She managed to find a job in a company but was overqualified for it. Another participant, Respondent 54, is an experience expert who came to Belgium as an adult who arrived with a high level of German proficiency. He attended a language course before finding a job in 1996 and began to work with newcomers.

Respondent 59 is sixty and shares his concerns about asylum seekers who have experienced difficult life events at an older age and are struggling to find jobs, and empathised with them:

> *'He says he gave me 20 or 25 years. It's not easy... There's something for 40 years in total. I am someone who loves Belgium as little as Turkey. I am in love with Belgium, but the circumstances are starting to make me nervous.'*

Discussion

This study's framework is based on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and interpretive theories that emphasise participants' subjective experiences and feelings. Recognising Turkish-speaking migrants' distinct social, cultural, and linguistic expectations—which may differ from those of the host society—is crucial to any exploration of their experiences. These individuals have diverse forms of capital, including social, political, financial, and built capital, all of which are shaped by power dynamics within society (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, they may not necessarily adapt to their new environment well.

Their expectations, background, and the gap between their mother tongue and the language of their new country (Isphording, 2013), which can be a predictor of their success, differ; hence, they also have diverse needs (Hooghe, 2006; Kılıç, 2023). Moreover, goals and expectations differ from person to person (Van Zichem, 2013), as confirmed by our findings. All of these can affect their opportunities in the labour market.

Meanwhile, experience expert migrants, who shared their experiences in the labour market, pointed out that establishing a social network is important. However, newcomers, being relatively new to the country, often struggle to navigate their way towards their desired job and explore other possibilities.

Many of these newcomers already have jobs, which made the adaptation process easier for them. They could then focus on other issues in the integration process, such as learning the local language. Nevertheless, when work takes up a significant amount of their time, attending integration and language courses becomes difficult.

To mitigate these challenges, authorities can offer newcomers various courses that take into consideration their skills and social capital. Such courses would encourage political and public cooperation (Kılıç, 2016; Spierts, 2005).

From this perspective, the programs implemented in Flanders, Belgium, are a potentially positive contributing factor in preventing the classification of the labour market. Nohl (2008) stated that new arrivals are not always welcome in the country. In this study, certain migrants have spoken about discrimination in the labour market, which made them feel unwelcome. Moreover, the labour market, cultural fear (Furedi, 2006), and xenophobia in society (Bauman, 2000) can be linked. De Cuyper and Pulinx (2014) emphasized lifelong learning and asserted that newcomers need language instruction and must attend a professional course. As mentioned earlier, the labour market can pose challenges for Turkish-speaking newcomers because of their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hooghe, 2006; Kılıç, 2016).

Our study shows that focus groups perform the role of social integration courses by providing peer support to migrants in an informal setting, allowing them to share experiences and solutions with each other. They provide opportunities to deconstruct newcomers' knowledge about local people, subjective beliefs, and prejudice; such knowledge helps bridge gap between the culture of newcomers and that of their new country. Focus group interventions that incorporate teachers and experienced migrants can significantly assist new migrants in the integration process.

The participants discussed their expectations, problems, and ambitions, and highlighted how living in a multicultural society is a different and enriching experience. The focus group discussions and interviews reveal that the social and cultural capital of Turkish-speaking migrants can limit job opportunities for them in the labour market. Nevertheless, such an informal setting can be a safe environment in exchanging experiences, possibilities, and solutions, which builds social capital to bridge differences. To guarantee impartiality and equity for all immigrants, regardless of their backgrounds or motives for migrating, it is crucial to prioritize human rights when assisting them as they acclimate to a new country.

Limitations

This research is qualitative; hence, it has some limitations given that participants are describing their subjective world. The researcher also has experienced in this area and, thus, they approached the research as a way of experimenting with the newcomers and their own realities to examine problems in the integration process.

This type of study requires a variety of participants to adequately observe individual and cultural differences; therefore, this research was conducted in the cities of Brussels and Antwerp, and the focus group was held in Antwerp. However, including additional Belgian cities would have provided a more holistic perspective. The research could also conduct meta-analysis to compare other migration research and their problems in Europe or other countries, to establish further similarities and differences.

Conclusion

This study focuses on newcomers and Turkish-speaking migrants, including those with experience or expertise in organising various focus group discussions between members of vulnerable groups who can learn from one another. A country that, despite having limited resources, holds its door open for newcomers and takes fundamental responsibility for them, fosters a good experience for those new arrivals. This approach comprises the essential elements of practices that enable newcomers to envision future possibilities for themselves in countries where they feel welcomed when they may otherwise feel conflicted, vulnerable, dependent, and unwelcome. Migrating to a Western country presents unique challenges; thus, consideration of each newcomers' background as well as the needs of the society is essential to manage those obstacles and promote successful integration. Given the principal human rights issues in the present day, and we must protect newcomers to ensure they are not left in vulnerable situations in the host country. The support newcomers provide to each other could be more productive if the period of social integration courses were longer and insensitivity was reduced through informal gatherings and focus-group interventions. Such interventions can help obtain immediate feedback on the integration process and track the progress of migrants. When newcomers are guided based on such feedback, it enables them to utilise a significant number of opportunities in the labour market.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 provides insights on the constitution and diversity of participants in the focus groups. This information is collected using the data from responses to the questionnaires, distributed after focus group discussions. The responses were provided either in writing or verbally during in depth-interviews. Table 1 helps us to observe (a) the diversity of participants' professions and education and (b) their various reasons for coming to Belgium. Our study included numerous respondents from high-profile professions and with academic degrees.

Table A1. Participant demographics

Gender	Age (years)	Education	Profession	Marital status	Working hours (per week)	Language at home	Languages	Original country	Reason to come	City/village	Focus/inter	Respondent number
Male	48	Secondary	Unemployed	Divorced	0	Turkish	Bulgarian, Dutch	Bulgaria	Work	Akdere	Focus	1
Male	29	Basic	Driver	Married	24	Turkish, Arabic	Turkish, Arabic	Turkey	Marriage	Mersin	Focus	2
Male	38	Secondary	Worker	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Marriage	Istanbul	Focus	3
Female	23	Secondary	Hairdresser	Married	0	Kurdish	Kurdish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Sanliurfa	Focus	4
Female	24	High school	Anaesthetist	Married	0	Turkish, Dutch	English	Turkey	Marriage	Gaziantep	Focus	5
Female	31	Secondary	Housewife	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Marriage	Kahramanmaras	Focus	6
Female	46	Basic	Polisher	Married	20	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	To work	no info	Focus	7
Female	38	Basic	Hairdresser	Married	0	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch	Turkey	Marriage	Konya	Focus	8
Male	41	Secondary	Pharmacist assistant	Married	0	Turkish, Zazaki	Turkish, Zazaki	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Bingöl	Focus	9
Female	42	Basic	Cook	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Marriage	Izmir	Focus	10
Female	32	High school	Caregiver	Married	0	Turkish, Turkmen, Arabic	Turkish, Arabic, Danish, Dutch	Iraq	Asylum seeker	Kobe haun	Focus	11

Female	30	Bachelor	Teacher	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	No info	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	12
Male	48	PhD	Dentist, Professor	Married	0	Turkish	English, Dutch	Turkey	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	13
Male	42	Bachelor	Financial advisor	Married	0	Turkish	English	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Izmir	Focus	14
Male	25	Bachelor	Advocate	Single	0	Turkish	English	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Ankara	Focus	15
Male	29	Bachelor	Company	Single	0	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Ankara	Focus	16
Female	43	Basic	Housewife	Single	0	Kurdish	Kurdish, Turkish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Elazig	Focus	17
Female	50	Basic	Job seeker	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Istanbul	Focus	18
Female	22	Secondary	Student	Single	0	Kurdish, Turkish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Istanbul	Focus	19
Male	41	Basic	Driver	Married	36.25	Turkish, Bulgarian, Dutch	Turkish, Bulgarian, Dutch	Bulgaria	Work	Razgrad	Focus	20
Male	32	Bachelor	Engineer	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, English	Turkey	no info	Bursa	Focus	21
Male	30	Secondary	Driver	Married	50	Turkish	Turkish, English	Bulgaria	Work	Kircaali	Focus	22
Male	26	Secondary	Worker	Married	40	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, English	Turkey	Marriage	Konya	Focus	23
Male	34	Secondary	Transport sector	Married	34	Turkish	Turkish, English	Turkey	Marriage	Izmir	Focus	24
Male	35	Secondary	Driver	Married	60	Turkish, Bulgarian	Turkish, Bulgarian, Dutch	Bulgaria	Work	Razgrad	Focus	25
Male	no info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	26
Male	no info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	27
Male	no info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	28
Male	no info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	Asylum seeker	no info	Focus	29
Female	23	Secondary	Unemployed	Married	0	Kurdish, Turkish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Marriage	Sanliurfa	Focus	30

Male	31	Bachelor	Logistics	Married	0	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Marriage	Istanbul	Focus	31
Male	44	Basic	Pita maker	No info	0	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Marriage	Aksaray	Focus	32
Female	38	Secondary	Housewife	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian	Bulgaria	Marriage	Kircaali	Focus	33
Female	44	Secondary	Cashier	Married	34	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian	Bulgaria	Work	Kircaali	Focus	34
Female	49	Basic	Housewife	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian	Bulgaria	Work	Haskova	Focus	35
Male	43	Basic	Baker	Divorced	no info	Turkish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Marriage	Elazig	Focus	36
Male	41	Secondary	Pita maker	Married	40	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Marriage	Asylum seeker	Focus	37
Male	34	Secondary	Bar man	Married	42	Dutch, English	Turkish, English, Dutch	Turkey	Marriage	no info	Focus	38
Female	42	Secondary	Housewife	Married	0	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Marriage	Izmir	Focus	39
Female	38	Secondary	Housewife	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Bulgaria	Family	Krumougrad	Focus	40
Female	48	Secondary	Fashion designer	Married	20	Bulgarian, Turkish	Bulgarian, Turkish	Bulgaria	Family	Hasko	Focus	41
Male	54	Left university	Driver	Married	44	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Adiyaman	Focus	42
Male	26	Secondary	Electrician	Married	35	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, Dutch, English	Turkey	Marriage	Elazig	Focus	43
Male	42	Incomplete secondary	Roof worker	Married	40	Turkish, French, Dutch	French, Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	no info	Antalya	Focus	44
Male	30	Secondary	Driver	Married	60	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian	Bulgaria	Work	Kircaali	Focus	45
Male	45	Basic	Driver	Married	no info	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Marriage	Ankara	Focus	46
Male	38	Secondary	Driver	Married	38	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch, English, Bulgarian	Turkey	Better future for children	Bursa	Focus	47
Male	22	Secondary	Hairdresser	Married	13	Turkish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Family	Aksaray	Focus	48

Male	45	Secondary	Educator	Married	40	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian, Russian	Turkey	Family	Aydin	Focus	49
Male	36	Secondary	Worker	Single	40	Kurdish, Turkish	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch, French	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Hakkari	Focus	50
Male	20	Secondary	Polisher	Single	36	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian	Bulgaria	Work	Ruse	Focus	51
Female	38	Master	Supervisor	Single	0	Turkish	Turkish, English, Dutch, French	Turkey	Family	Turkey	Interview	53
Male	No info +50	Bachelor	Supervisor	Living Together	0	Turkish	Turkish, English, Dutch, German	Turkey	Family	Istanbul	Interview	54
Female	31	Bachelor	Engineer	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Bulgarian, English, Dutch	Bulgaria	Family	Bulgaria	Interview	55
Male	31	Master	Physics	Living together		English	Turkish, English, Dutch	Turkey	Love/friend	Izmir	Interview	56
Male	55	Academy	Artist	Single	0	Turkish, French, Spanish	Turkish, French, Spanish, English	Turkey	Father was asylum seeker	Istanbul	Interview	57
Male	45	Bachelor	Supervisor	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch, English	Turkey	Family	Bursa	Interview	58
Male	No Info +-60	Bachelor	Supervisor	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Family	Sivas	Interview	59
Female	54	Bachelor	Psychologist	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Family	Istanbul	Interview	60
Male	50	Secondary	Poet	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, Dutch	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Istanbul	Interview	61
Male	42	Master	Writer, Psychologist	Married	0	Dutch	Turkish, Dutch, English, French	Turkey	Family	Turkey	Interview	62
Male	44	Bachelor	Dancer	Single	0	Turkish	Turkish, French, Dutch	Turkey	Love/friend	Izmir	Interview	63
Female	No info +50	Bachelor	Artist	Living together		Turkish	Turkish, English, Dutch	Turkey	Work	Istanbul	Interview	64
Male	50	High School	Artist	Married	0	Turkish, Dutch	Turkish, Dutch, English, French	Turkey	Family	Karaman	Interview	65
Male	No info +20	Bachelor	Bar man	Single	0	Turkish	Turkish, English	Turkey	Love/friend	Turkey	Focus	66
Male	28	Bachelor	Teacher	Single	0	Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish, English	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Turkey	Focus	67

Female	26	Bachelor	Teacher	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish, English	Turkey	Marriage	Turkey	Focus	68
Male	28	Secondary; leaving	Electrician	Single	6	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish, Dutch	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Istanbul	Focus2	52
Female	26	Bachelor	Student	Single	0	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	no info	Istanbul	Focus5	69
Female	26	Basic	Job seeker	Single	0	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkish, Kurdish	Turkey	Asylum seeker	Adana	Focus4	70
Female	41	Basic	Cook	Married	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Marriage	Kirsehir	Focus4	71
Female	11	5th year	Apprentice	Single	0	Turkish	Turkish	Turkey	Came with mother	kirsehir	Focus4	72
Male	46	Bachelor	Supervisor, Politician	Married	36	Turkish, Kurdish		Turkish, Kurdish, English, Dutch, French	Family	Elbistan	interview	73

Table A2 presents the topic list of the focus group discussions. The participants occasionally spoke about specific topics in each focus group. It was the benefit of using a semi-structural method, which gave them the freedom to voice their opinions when they had the opportunity to share specific problems regarding the integration and inclusion process in the host country.

Table A2. Focus group discussion topic list

Number	Topic
1	Self-knowledge/introduce yourself
2	Experiences regarding language learning
3	Integration course
4	Integration-Cultural differences (rules and values)
5	Circular questions (think about the perceptions of native people)
6	Introspection
7	Current-past experiences with native
8	Positive sides of life in Belgium
9	Prejudices (negative sides of life in Belgium)
10	Your social environment
11	Social networks
12	Family structure-Marriages
13	Jobs
14	Health problems
15	Tradition/
16	Religion