

## **The Role of Out-group Network in the Choice of Migration Destination: Evidence from Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

We analyse the association between cultural contact and international migration decision drawing on the inter-group contact hypothesis. Using data on Turkish migrant stock in 22 countries and immigration from these countries to Turkey between 2000 and 2015, we find strong association between the size of the Turkish community and migration flow of host country nationals to Turkey. Our results are robust to country-specific and year-specific effects as well as to exclusion of different channels of cultural contact. Our research brings a new perspective to the importance of networks in migration destination as most research focuses on the presence of in-group national community in the target country. Our findings contribute to the improvement of extant theories of international migration providing insight in the role of cultural contact with the out-group in the choice of migration destination.

**Keywords:** International migration; network migration, contact hypothesis

## Introduction

What is the role of exposure to a foreign culture in home country on individuals' migration decisions? Previous studies have shown culture (Belot & Ederveen, 2012; Sirkeci, Cohen & Yazgan, 2012) and social links (Carrington et al., 1996) to have significant effects on international migration by focusing on diaspora effects and chain migration. Chain migration is triggered by the existence of a diaspora in a host country where members of the diaspora share crucial information and resources with their countrymen who are new arrivals or potential migrants. In most macro level studies of migrant networks, the existing stock of migrants in a target country from a specific origin is being used to predict further immigration from that origin (Alvarez-Plata et al., 2003), for example, this line of research would analyse how the stock of Russian immigrants in Turkey affect further migration of Russian to Turkey.

As opposed to the above mentioned studies, we investigate the role of the migrant stock in home country to facilitate cultural familiarity with the target country and thus facilitate migration. Following up on the above mentioned example, our analysis would focus on the role of Turkish migrants in Russia to facilitate Russian migration to Turkey. We adopt a combined approach based on network theory and inter-group contact theory to examine the relationship between foreign nationals' cultural contact with Turkish migrants (also called the *out-group* in this context) and those foreign nationals' migration decision to Turkey. It is the first study examining the role of the demographic size of the out-group in migration flow to that country, to our knowledge. Therefore, we bring a novel perspective by focusing on the role of inter-group contact in migration.

Inter-group contact theory posits that greater size of the out-group in a country provides opportunities for more positive contact, which in turn diminishes anti-group attitudes. Although initial studies reflect on the necessary conditions - such as equal status, common group goal, and support from the authorities - for the positive impact of intercultural contact on inter-group attitudes, (Allport, 1954), contemporary scholars propose that even without these conditions inter-group contact improves attitudes toward the out-group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Previous research reveals positive relationship between greater out-group size and anti-group attitudes (Giles, 1977; Glaser, 1994; Taylor, 1998; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010), primarily because inter-group contact facilitates learning (Allport, 1954), enhances the knowledge of the out-group

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and makes residents more familiar with the cultural characteristics and the perspectives of the out-group.

We examine country-by-country migrant stock of Turkish citizens in 22 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, United Kingdom, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Ukraine, the United States, Netherlands, France, Romania, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Kuwait, Jordan, Canada) and migration flows of citizens of these 22 countries to Turkey between 2000 and 2015. Specifically, we test the inter-group contact theory based hypothesis that there are significant associations between the population size of the Turkish immigrant groups in host countries and the migration of these countries' citizens to Turkey. We test our hypothesis using statistical significance of relevant coefficients obtained from a model regression. Our findings reveal important insight for the influence of the inter-group contact in migration flows.

Turkish migration landscape with its emigration and immigration rates as well as diversification of its actors provide us a suitable outlet to test our hypothesis. Turkey has long been perceived as a country of emigration (Kirişçi, 2005). The first huge wave of migration movement started after the 1960 constitution of Turkey through which Turkish citizens gained the right to enter and leave the country freely and increased with the official labour agreements between Turkey a number of European countries (Abadan-Unat, 2006). First bilateral agreements was signed in 1961 with (former) West Germany, and after that Austria, Belgium and the Netherland in 1964 and France in 1965 and Sweden in 1967 (Gökdere, 1978). This large-scale labor migration continued with family reunification and family formations in 1980s (Abadan-Unat, 2006; 2011). In 1960s, Australia and Arab countries were other target countries for Turkish skilled workers (Koc & Onan, 2004). In recent decades, Turkey became an immigration country too as social, economic and demographic changes in its neighbours push their citizens to migrate to culturally similar places (Ayvazoglu & Kunuroglu, 2019; Kunuroglu et al., 2018; Şener, 2018; Tezcan 2019) and as wealthy Europeans search for retirement havens.

Different conceptual approaches explain the determinants of international migration in different ways. Economic approaches focus on wage differences, economic incentives and financial benefits (Todaro, 1969) as migration motives whereas the physical distance between

countries is shown to affect the migration cost and the quality information on job opportunities or income differentials (Sjastaad, 1962). Migration has many complex dimensions and an interdisciplinary approach linking different fields of social sciences is more conducive to understand these dimensions. One of the widely used interdisciplinary approaches to migration decision making process is “Rational Choice Theory” where social interaction is perceived as social exchange (Scott 2000) and individuals are perceived as resourceful agents who choose from a set of alternatives in order to maximize their marginal benefit from migration. Mainstream migration theories emphasize the role of social networks as well as social capital in destination country (Faist, 1997; Portes, 1995) as a significant determinant of migration (Boyd, 1989; Wilpert, 1992). However, these studies are based on the economic perspective emphasizing only the economic influence of culture (Hugo, 1981, p. 188) to the extent that its information content facilitates migration decision.

Migration is motivated and stimulated by many different factors, and cultural distance is one of the most important ones among them (Sirkeci et al., 2012; Hercog & Sandoz, 2018; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2021). Our study takes a new and different perspective on the influence of culture in migration decision and investigates the role of Turkish migrants in enhancing the cultural exposure of foreign nationals to Turkish culture. Our analysis suggests that the demographic size of Turkish community abroad is correlated with contact opportunities of the foreign nationals, which in turn leads to an increase in their familiarity with Turkish culture and in return, increase their probability of migrating to Turkey.

### **Empirical Analysis: Migrant Stock Elasticity of Inflow**

OECD’s Migration Outlook Database (OECD, 2011) lists top immigrant sending countries for each of the OECD’s member countries between 2000 and 2009. From this source, we obtain the inflow of migrants to Turkey from Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States. We complement these data with inflow statistics from major European countries (Netherlands, France, Belgium, Romania, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain) as well as from Kuwait, Jordan, and Canada to Turkey in 2000 and 2015 using the immigration dataset of the Statistical Institute of Turkey (TUIK). It is important

to emphasize that the flow of migrants from the above mentioned countries to Turkey does not include Turkish citizens, that is, the return migration of Turkish migration is not included in these numbers. Existing stock of Turkish migrants in respective countries in 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010 are obtained from the migration stock database of the United Nations Population Division (UNPD, 2017).

We employ controls for the size and the economy of sending countries, namely, we control for their population size, total migrant stock, and national income as measured by the gross national product from output prices. Data on total migrant stock is obtained from Migration Outlook (OECD, 2011). Total migrant stock does not include Turkish migrants. The size of the total migrant stock in a country captures important information on that country as a migration destination which other socio-economic and demographic variables may fail to capture. Other control variables that are mentioned above are obtained from the Penn World Tables (Feenstra, Inklaar, & Timmer, 2015) for each sending country. Geographical distance between Turkey and any country is measured as the length of the direct air line connecting the geographical mid-point of Turkey and that of the respective country which we collect using an online tool publicly provided on [distancecalculator.globefeed.com](http://distancecalculator.globefeed.com). Since not every variable is available for every country in every year, the resulting panel is unbalanced. Descriptive statistics of our analysis's variables are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	Obs.	Mean	St. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Inflow of Migrants to Turkey	54	7.57	1.74	3.97	11.03
Turkish Migrant Stock	54	9.59	2.11	5.72	14.32
Population	54	3.25	1.20	0.96	5.68
Total Migrant Stock	54	14.44	1.6	10.34	17.48
National Income	54	12.92	1.67	9.22	16.46
Distance to Turkey	54	7.33	0.65	6.35	8.75

Note: All variables are in logarithms.

Using the above described unbalanced panel data, we regress the inflow of immigrants from the above mentioned 22 countries to Turkey in 5-year windows between 2000 and 2015 on the

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Turkish immigrant stock in these countries over time and standard controls capturing these countries' demographic and economic time-varying characteristics. Hence we estimate the following equation:

$$Inflow_t = \alpha + \beta(TR\ Migrant\ Stock_{t-5}) + \gamma X_{t-5} + \delta + \varepsilon_t$$

where  $t$  corresponds to years 2000, 2005, 2009, and 2015,  $X_{t-5}$  is the vector of country controls such as population, income etc. that are lagged five years,  $\gamma$  is the time fixed effect, and  $\varepsilon_t$  is the error term. Explanatory variables are lagged by five years for two reasons: First, this prevents reverse causality at a technical level, and second, to allow time for explanatory variables to take effect on the migration decision. Introduction of year and country fixed effects allows us to isolate year-specific and country-specific events, respectively, that might affect inflow of immigrants beyond what can be captured by socio-economic control variables.

Since all variables are in logarithms, their estimated coefficients will capture inflow's *elasticity* with respect to each of these variables. Elasticity of inflow with respect to any variable, for example migrant stock, is the percentage change in inflow associated with a 1% increase in the migrant stock. The variable of interest in this analysis is the stock of Turkish migrants in the respective country and the coefficient  $\beta$  is inflow's elasticity with respect to that variable. A 1% increase in the stock of Turkish migrants in a given country is expected to change the inflow from that country to Turkey by  $\beta\%$ .

Our regression results are shown in Table 2. Columns (1) to (3) include all twenty-two countries in our sample and we regress the number of incoming immigrants from twenty-two countries to Turkey in year  $t$  on the stock of Turkish migrants and socio-economic variables in each of these countries in year  $t-5$ .

**Table 2.** Determinants of Migration Inflow to Turkey 2000-2015 --Using a five year lag

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Turkish Migrant Stock	0.491 <sup>***</sup> (0.0847)	0.304 <sup>***</sup> (0.0722)	1.025 <sup>+</sup> (0.596)	0.421 <sup>***</sup> (0.0839)	1.762 <sup>+</sup> (0.953)
Population	2.676 <sup>***</sup> (0.294)	1.394 <sup>***</sup> (0.256)	3.492 (2.554)	1.221 <sup>***</sup> (0.163)	3.512 (3.133)
Total Migrant Stock	-0.709 <sup>**</sup> (0.225)	-0.503 <sup>*</sup> (0.192)	-1.627 <sup>**</sup> (0.467)	-0.153 (0.122)	-2.199 <sup>*</sup> (0.938)
National Income	-1.439 <sup>***</sup> (0.179)	-0.609 <sup>***</sup> (0.157)	-1.898 <sup>*</sup> (0.801)	-0.720 <sup>***</sup> (0.136)	-1.996 <sup>+</sup> (0.968)
Distance to Turkey	-0.0606 (0.236)	-0.190 (0.169)		-0.0704 (0.151)	
Year Fixed Effect	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country Fixed Effect	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Observations</i>	54	54	54	42	42
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.600	0.842	0.879	0.913	0.848
<i>F-stat</i>	21.32	57.37	55.17	62.42	31.71

Standard errors in parentheses; <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$

Columns (1) and (2) include migration to Turkey flow from Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States. Columns (3) and (4) exclude migration flows from Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, and Iran.

We obtain positive and statistically significant coefficients for the stock of Turkish migrants, hence there is a strong positive association between the size of the Turkish migrant stock in a country and the inflow of this country's citizens to Turkey even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic push factors. According to the specification in column (1) a 10% increase in the stock of Turkish migrants in a country will on average be correlated with a 4.9% increase in the inflow of citizens of that country to Turkey.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis in the previous section shows that there is a statistically significant and positive association between the size of the stock of Turkish migrants in a country and the inflow of migrants from that country to Turkey. This finding provides statistically significant support for our hypothesis that a larger out-group contact in the host country (hence the population of Turkish migrants in a foreign country) is associated with more inflow of migrants from that country to Turkey. This association is robust to including several control variables for socio-economic and

demographic characteristics of sending countries, so that we do not capture a simple correlation that originates from pure size effects. For instance, France is a larger country than Norway; France has a larger stock of Turkish migrants than Norway has, and at the same time, more French migrate to Turkey than Norwegians do. The obvious difference between population sizes of France and Norway may be a good candidate to explain the observed correlation between the Turkish migrant stock in either country and the inflow from either of them to Turkey, but we control for population differences so that the association between migrant stock and inflow is net of countries' population differences. Similarly, our extensive control variables for each country's socio-economic and demographic background make sure that we do not have omitted any relevant explanatory factor that may affect the observed correlation between migrant stock and inflow. Once socio-economic and demographic factors are removed, we still expect to observe a 4.9% increase in migrant inflow from a country into Turkey when the Turkish migrant stock in that country increases by 10%.

It is possible that the association between migrant stock and inflow varies differently across years as idiosyncratic shocks may be distributed unevenly across years. In order to correct for correlations caused by year-specific shocks, we introduce year fixed effects in column (2) in Table 2. The point estimate of the Turkish migrant stock elasticity of inflow decreases to 0.3 but still remains highly statistically significant. According to the point estimates and statistical significance of coefficients obtained for socio-economic control variables, Turkey is receiving a larger immigrant inflow from countries that have relatively large population but have relatively low income and a low total stock of migrants net of Turkish migrants. The association between the size of Turkish migrant stock in a country and migrant inflow from this country to Turkey remains positive and statistically significant even when country fixed effects are introduced, as shown in column (3). Country fixed effects control for time-invariant country-specific influences, for example the reason for the Russian immigration to Turkey may be historical connections between Russia and Turkey, or the inflow of immigrants from the Middle East might be drawn because of very specific regional and cultural conditions in Turkey and the Middle East. When country fixed effects are used, point estimate of the coefficient for Turkish migrant stock is larger, but this estimation is obtained with a larger standard error so that its statistical significance decreases, yet it still remains statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.1. In this case, a 10% increase in the stock of Turkish migrants in a country is associated with a 10.3% increase in the inflow of



citizens of that country to Turkey. The direction of socio-economic controls does not change even when country fixed effects are used.

Neighbour countries of Turkey may inherently have a high exposure to Turkish culture and have a large stock of Turkish citizens living in their territory at the same time so that one cannot say that the stock of Turkish migrants in these countries are the only source of exposure to Turkish culture. We drop the neighbour countries as well as Germany<sup>1</sup> from our sample and rerun the regression to obtain coefficients reported in columns (4) and (5) of Table 2. This conservative sample yields a statistically and economically significant inflow elasticity of 0.42 to 1.76, meaning that a 10% increase in the stock of Turkish migrants in a country is expected to be associated with an increase between 4.2% and 17.6% in the inflow of immigrants from that country to Turkey. Hence our main finding that the size of out-group in a country is significantly associated with inflow of from that country to Turkey remains firmly robust.

Migration experience comes up with many risks and difficulties for individuals as it involves leaving friends, family members and the native culture behind. Previous literature states that one of the preferred strategies to minimize these risks is to aim for destinations where new migrants benefit from support networks or cultural familiarity. Our results suggest an important channel to establish cultural familiarity and enhance migration. The larger the stock of migrants (hence out-group) in that country, the greater is the probability that citizens will get in touch with that out-group and become familiar with their culture. Hence our results show a statistically significant association between the cultural contact with the out-group and the migration decision to the country of the members of out-group. As Turkey is a developing country and receives fairly small economic in-migration from Western countries, the analysis is not complicated by strong economic motivations to migrate and robust results are obtained. We expect our results to hold for any similar developing country. Moreover, our analysis carries over also to in-migration to developed countries to the extent that these countries' out-groups in foreign countries create cultural familiarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Germany does not allow double citizenship so that we suspect that immigration data might include many Turks that officially appear as German citizens. We drop data of German citizens' immigration when we rerun our analysis in columns (3) and (4) to make sure that our results are not driven by the return migration of former Turkish citizens from Germany.

Our results are in line with the argument of inter-group contact theory that a large out-group in a community creates more opportunities to have more positive contact and thus develop positive attitudes towards this out-group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Schneider, 2007). Further, intergroup contact tends to alleviate the impact of cultural distance (Schneider, 2007). The mainstreamers get to know more about the culture and norms of the out-group and use that knowledge as a resource in their own migration decision. Our analysis suggests that the demographic size of Turkish community abroad is correlated with contact opportunities of the mainstreamers, which in turn leads to an increase in their appreciation of the Turkish culture and in return, increase their probability of migrating to Turkey. Our results are in line with the previous research by Belot and Ederveen (2011) who investigate the influence of cultural distance in migration between OECD countries and found out that cultural barriers explains migration patterns more than traditional economic factors.

A potential caveat of our study is that we are not directly measuring mainstreamers' exposure to out-group culture. This is measured indirectly by the size of the out-group. As a larger out-group size indicates a larger probability of contact between mainstreamers and out-group members, we take this as a proxy for exposure to the out-group culture, whereas such an exposure may take more different channels, of course. For instance, we are aware that for citizens of neighboring countries, cultural exposure may not be taking place solely via out-group contact. When Turkey's neighboring countries are dropped from the analysis, our results still reveal a significant association between the Turkish migrant stock and the inflow to Turkey. Therefore, our results should be taken as a significant evidence for the influence of cultural contact with the out-group while choosing international migration destination. Further research on other destination countries as well as on alternative measure for out-group cultural contact would definitely expand the scope of our study.

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