

Quest for Citizenship: Examining the Interplay Between Legal Status and (Im)mobility Aspirations of Syrians in Turkey

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Abstract

(Im)mobility aspirations in onward migration is a growing area of study in forced migration that goes beyond the traditional understanding of forced migration patterns. It grants more agency to the individuals and views their movement as a non-linear, fragmented trip that changes based on a variety of factors. This paper contributes to this knowledge by providing evidence on the role of legal status on (im)mobility aspirations by examining the special case of Syrians in Turkey. The study utilizes correlation and regression analyses on a unique data set to analyze the relationship between (im)mobility aspirations and the various legal statuses Syrians in Turkey hold. The findings confirm correlation and causality between the two variables. In other words, the stronger the migrant's legal status becomes the more mobility aspirations decrease and the other way round.

Keywords: *Syrians; Turkey; Onward migration; (Im)mobility; Aspirations; Legal Status*

Introduction

Forced migration studies have witnessed several developments in the last few years, placing more focus on the dynamics of the displacement and the factors that influence forced migrants' (im)mobility throughout their journey. Examining the contemporary patterns of forced migration, the journey starts when forced migrants leave their homes and head to neighboring countries as the primary option to receive immediate shelter (İçduygu & Aksel, 2022, p. 133). While the forced migrants do not have to stay in the neighboring countries after arrival, they have more agency to make decisions; they might live in the new country permanently or stay for a short time and move again to another destination later. Those who choose to settle in the neighboring country might re-evaluate their options and go to other countries sometime later. Recent studies have revealed that forced migrants' (im)mobility decisions are not arbitrary; rather they are made wisely (Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019) and different complex factors mold their decisions (de Haas, 2011; McAuliffe, 2013; Wissink et al., 2013; Kuschminder & Waidler, 2020; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011). Yet, this growing area of research is not sufficiently addressed and still lacks empirical evidence in different contexts.

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The Syrian displacement is one of the more complicated contemporary cases of forced migration so that it has garnered the attention in both the academic and non-academic spheres. After 13 years of conflict (2011 – 2024), the situation has not witnessed any significant changes (Aoyama, 2021), making few chances for Syrians to return home. Hence, they have two primary options: to stay in their host countries, mainly neighboring countries, or to proceed with their journey to the West. Altıok and İçduygu (2022) argued that the neighboring countries of Syria, in particular Turkey, play a double role throughout this displacement: first as a receiving country that offers an immediate secure and welcoming space and second as a point for transit or onward movement. While the number of Syrians in Turkey has reached around four million in the past few years (PDM, 2023c), there are no official statistics on the number of Syrians who reached Europe through Turkey.

Since the first Syrians displaced arrived in Turkey, the approach used by the Turkish government to address the escalating numbers has been a central topic in scholarly debates. Turkey did not have a clear plan on how to manage the Syrian forced migrants or what the future of this displacement meant, making it a precarious context associated with policy turmoil (Baban et al., 2021). This caused Syrians in Turkey to live through several government phases and to experience different legal statuses throughout these 13 years. In practice, the majority of displaced Syrians are registered under a temporary protection regime. However, other Syrians are living on one of the two edges of the human rights scale: the first edge being undocumented with a complete absence of rights and zero access to services, and the other edge obtaining Turkish citizenship and enjoying full rights to live in Turkey and have access to its services.

Even though there is extensive research regarding the Syrian displacement in Turkey, the role of legal status on (im)mobility aspirations is still insufficiently addressed. The literature shows only limited studies have attempted to analyze the influence of temporary protection, or citizenship in general, on the Syrians who have settled in Turkey. However, none of these studies draw a clear analysis of the relationship between the various legal statuses that go beyond citizenship and temporary protection, and the (im)mobility aspirations, leaving it an unexplored area of research.

In this paper, we will bridge this gap by asking the question: how does the variation of Syrians' legal status in Turkey influence their (im)mobility aspirations? In other words, we will try to show a link between the desire to acquire a better legal status as one of the main motivations for Syrians in Turkey to move onward and gamble their lives on a boat to the West. The paper will provide empirical evidence on the role of this factor in the context of Turkey employing a unique data set collected in two major cities, namely Gaziantep and Izmir, using correlation and regression analyses to unveil the relationship between the involved variables.

The paper is structured into five sections. The first section provides a theoretical background on (im)mobility aspirations in temporary contexts and reviews the results of relevant studies that approached the role of legal status on (im)mobility aspirations in Turkey and beyond. In the second section, a brief situational analysis will be conducted to better comprehend the (im)mobility patterns of Syrians from and to Turkey as well as the different legal statuses granted to them. The third section will review the methodology employed in this study, while the fourth section presents the results obtained from statistical analysis. Finally, in the fifth section, the findings will be analyzed, and their implications discussed.



Forced Migrants' (Im)mobility Aspirations and Legal Status

Over the past decade, migration studies have undergone significant development, explaining migration as a complex process influenced by various factors and actors, and the desire for migration can change at different stages of this process (Syed Zwick, 2020). Traditional migration theories, such as push-pull models, neoclassical approaches, and structural theories (Massey et al., 1993; de Haas, 2014; Lee, 1966), fail to capture the nuances of new migration patterns. These models often depict migrants as passive victims with limited or no agency in the migration process (de Haas, 2021), while recent research emphasizes the need to consider multiple levels and dimensions of influencing factors (de Haas, 2011; Van Heelsum, 2016; Castelli, 2018). This shift toward understanding the influencing factors of migration places greater attention on individuals' characteristics and preferences. Hence, instead of focusing solely on the outcome, researchers have started focusing more on individuals' aspirations and capabilities, and the factors influencing these aspirations (Carling, 2002; Carling & Schewel, 2018; Schewel, 2019).

Whether migrants settle in their temporary receiving cities – which are described as living in a “waiting room” – or pursue migration opportunities to another country as their ultimate destination (UN/ECE, 1993, p. 7; Papadopoulou, 2004), further exploration of (im)mobility *en route* and the factors that influence migrants' decisions to continue their journey or remain in a particular country has been strongly encouraged (Kuschminder et al., 2015; Norman, 2019; Üstübici & Elçi, 2022). Research is especially needed in the case of irregular migration as a significant source of transit and onward migration (Düvell, 2008; 2012; 2019). Researchers need to challenge the traditional understanding of forced migration as a straightforward process where individuals from affected countries directly migrate to safer destinations; forced migration is more complicated and varied. It is worth noting that interest in forced migrants' onward journeys and their influencing factors intensified during the so-called “European migration crisis” in 2015, when a significant number of arriving migrants were forced migrants transiting through Turkey and the Balkan routes (İçduygu, 2015). However, the current understanding of forced migrants' (im)mobility aspirations and the factors that influence them, is still uncertain due to the lack of a clear framework or theory explaining non-linear migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015; Townsend & Oomen, 2015). Initial studies indicate that decision-making for onward migration is a highly intricate process influenced by a multitude of factors and various actors (Torfa et al., 2021; Mossad et al., 2019).

Building upon existing research on migration and forced migrants' (im)mobilities, several attempts have been made over the past decade to identify, test, and explain the factors influencing forced migrants' (im)mobility in temporary contexts. Key studies in this area have been conducted by Kuschminder et al. (2015, 2019), Tat Shum (2019), Müller-Funk (2019), Kuschminder and Waidler (2020), Üstübici et al. (2021), Düvell et al. (2021), Kirişçioglu and Üstübici (2023), Koser and Kuschminder (2016), Torfa et al. (2021), Tuzi (2019). These studies have identified a variety of factors such as living conditions, employment status, discrimination and abuse, education opportunities, religious and cultural affiliations, social networks abroad, marital status, gender, and legal status as significant influences on forced migrants' (im)mobility aspirations. Taking a broader perspective, Kargin and Sirkeci (2023) asserted that onward (im)mobility aspirations are closely connected with how the different forms of insecurity are perceived by the migrants in these contexts.

Avoiding uncertainty by obtaining a favorable legal status in the receiving country is considered one of the basic elements that makes forced migrants feel more comfortable and secure during their stay in the receiving country (Baban et al., 2017). Farcy and Smit (2020) claimed that the variation and precarity of legal status influences the aspirations and personal decisions of migrants in Belgium. Similarly, Wyss (2019) stated that legal status uncertainties in Europe might lead to further mobility as migrants aspire through their movement to have better access to basic needs. Still, greater attention needs to be given to forced migrants' (im)mobility aspirations as only a few empirical studies have been done. The relevant studies have shown that forced migrants will have additional mobility aspirations when they realize that there is no stable permanent residency for them in their current location in the future, which prevents them from making long-term plans.

Kuschminder et al. (2019) argued that citizenship is the ultimate goal of migrants, and getting citizenship in their current country influences (im)mobility aspirations. Citizenship is the top legal status and a means to feeling secure. As a general result, Baban et al. (2021) stated that the precarity Syrians live under in Turkey makes some of them decide to travel to Europe to have better living conditions and permanent residency. Tuzi (2019) studied the role of migration policies and how policies and institutional practices influence (im)mobility aspirations. Suggesting that the most relevant factor in forming (im)mobility aspirations is whether or not legal status has been granted. However, contrary to previous findings, Kuschminder & Waidler (2020) investigated the impact of legal status on forced migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan on their (im)mobility aspirations. Their results show that legal status, temporary protection in particular, in Greece and Turkey is an *insignificant* factor in mobility decision-making.

In conclusion, migration studies have witnessed a huge shift from a traditional view to a more nuanced view to explain forced migrants' mobility patterns: fragmented non-linear journeys that depend on the aspirations and the capabilities of the individuals, and the factors that influence these aspirations. In response to the recent migration crises, researchers started to investigate the influencing factors of (im)mobility to understand not only why migrants move onward, but also why migrants do not move (Schewel, 2020). Even though it is clear that the legal status of the forced migrants is essential, the relationship between the different legal statuses in the context of Turkey and (im)mobility aspirations of Syrian forced migrants is still poorly studied empirically resulting in weak and contradicting findings.

Syrians in Turkey: Legal Complexities and (Im)mobility Dynamics

After the start of their displacement in 2011, thousands of Syrians were crossing the borders into Turkey every day. According to recent statistics, Turkey hosts around 3.2 million Syrians over its territory (PDM, 2023c). However, this number covers the Syrians registered under temporary protection only but not the ones who hold other statuses, nor the ones who do not have any status. In this section, we will narrate again the story of Syrian displacement in Turkey, how the Turkish authority dealt with it, and how this treatment has led to a variety of legal statuses that grant/deny the Syrian forced migrants different rights.

To understand the dynamics of Syrians' legal statuses in Turkey and the displaced Syrians' (im)mobility dynamics, we should go back in time to 2011 when the first group of Syrian forced migrants entered Turkey. According to media reports the first arrivals were 252 Syrians just a few weeks after the eruption of the conflict in Syria (Makovsky, 2019). This escalated



quickly and the small group was followed by thousands arriving daily in southern Turkey. However, not all of those crossing the border stayed in Turkey. A group of them had made their plans before they arrived in Turkey. They had decided from the start that they would move to Europe after reaching the Turkish land. Turkey was merely a transit destination for them. Others considered Turkey to be their final destination or at least a temporary one where they will stay until they can go back to their homeland. However, the situation in reality was more complex, and (im)mobility *en route* goes beyond these two groups. Some Syrians had to stay in Turkey even though they had planned to move to Europe, and others decided to continue to Europe though they had not planned to do so originally.

For the ones who stayed in Turkey, Turkish authorities did not grant them full protection under the Geneva Conventions (1951). The reason is that Turkey had signed the agreement but not the subsequent protocols; in other words, Turkey will only grant full protection to the people arriving from the European Union (Ineli-Ciger, 2015). Instead, the Turkish government was implementing an open-door policy, relaxing Syrian entry under the titles of “guests” and “brothers” without passing on any clear legal status or legal rights. From 2011 to early 2014, Syrians living in urban areas in Turkey, who were the vast majority, were bouncing between these labels, depending mainly on what they brought with them to manage their daily life in Turkish cities (Alahmad, 2021).

It is worth noting that, not all Syrians arriving in Turkey after the initial displacement lacked legal status. At that time, Syrians were not required to have a visa, which allowed many Syrians to enter Turkey regularly through its border gates and airports. Once in Turkey they could apply for “touristic” residence permits the same as any foreigner in the country. Yet, this group was not and still is not too large; recent Turkish numbers show that there are less than 100 thousand Syrians who currently hold a “touristic” residence permit (PDM, 2023b). This group has a different set of rights and obligations compared to other groups, which will be clarified later in this section.

In 2013, Turkish authorities took a serious step to regularize the presence of Syrians by enacting law no. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection. This law paved the way to form the Temporary Protection System, which was first applied in 2014 to cover the legal gap and deal with the increasing numbers of forced migrants. It should be highlighted that, even though this system respects the non-refoulement principle, it gives minimum rights to Syrians, which caused it to be heavily criticized as it does not grant them just and fair treatment, especially when it comes to their futures and stability (Zenginkuzucu, 2021; Ineli-Ciger, 2015; Alahmad, 2023).

Even though the doors were open, and authorities were working on regulating the stay of Syrians, receiving communities’ hospitality and Temporary Protection’s formality were not enough to convince huge numbers of Syrians to stay in Turkey. Instead, they preferred to cross the Aegean Sea towards Europe. The number of forced Syrian migrants was escalating dramatically, until it reached its peak in 2015, causing a migration dilemma in the European Union (Melani et al., 2017).

Aiming to stop this one-way movement, and to keep the burden on Turkey to manage the Syrian issue, the EU formed an agreement with the Turkish government in 2016, which is known as the “EU-Turkey deal”. The agreement stated that the European Union would offer financial support worth 3 billion euros, which became 6 billion, to the Turkish government

so that they could provide shelter to the Syrians within Turkey. In addition, they would also support the Turkish government in offering quality services to those who needed them, and facilitate Turkey's enrolment into the European Union (EU Council, 2016). Through the agreement, the European Union also gained the right to send back the Syrians who crossed the Aegean from Turkey, and the Turkish government would be obligated to accept them back, ostensibly halting Syrians' mobility to the West.

After the 2016 deal, entering Turkey became significantly more difficult. Changes included requiring Syrians to obtain a visa before entering Turkey, a 564 km wall was built along the Syrian borders (TRT Haber, 2018), and more restrictions were imposed on the coastal cities of Turkey to prevent Syrians from crossing to Greece. On the other hand, shortly after the agreement, the Turkish government started offering the Syrians in Turkey more services and facilities resulting in a new phase of the Syrian displacement in Turkey under the name of "social cohesion" (Yıldız & Çakırcı-Özservet, 2016), and "exceptional citizenship" (BBC, 2016). According to the Turkish interior minister, Turkish citizenship has been granted to around 240 thousand Syrians so far (Mülteciler, 2023). Overall, the policies and procedures applied from 2016 onward resulted in a rapid increase in the number of Syrians settling in Turkey, as well as a decrease in the number of Syrians entering Turkey. A small number of Syrians continue to enter Turkey now and then, but the peak was reached in 2021. To date, almost 3.8 million Syrians have taken advantage of the temporary protection system (PDM, 2023c).

However, even after all these developments, the stay in Turkey was not pleasant for all Syrians. They have faced several hardships. For instance, having access to temporary protection registration became a challenging process for Syrians as it lacked professionalism and depended partially on the mood of the staff (Alahmad, 2023). This resulted in a new group of unregistered Syrians who could not access any rights or services. Even though there are no official numbers regarding the size of this group, some studies have stated that undocumented Syrians could be around 10% of the total Syrian population in Turkey (INGEV, 2017). In addition, even the ones who were registered under temporary protection found it challenging to gain access to the labor market and procure proper shelter (Erdoğan, 2020).

From 2018 to 2023, an escalation in the frequency of hate speeches and racism incidences by some groups of the Turkish community became more obvious, which showed the failure of the temporary protection system to protect the Syrians (Alahmad, 2023). Between 2011 and 2017, over 70 anti-Syrian campaigns were reported in Turkey (Liszowska, 2020). However, these campaigns became more obvious prior to the Turkish presidential elections (Balta et al., 2022), which led to several casualties and property damage. At the same time, the regulations and policies issued by the Turkish authorities were changing every day and becoming stricter every day. For instance, Syrians who lived outside of their registered governorate could not access health services, Syrians were restricted from relocating to many areas, and lastly Syrians were required to update their information periodically and failing to do so resulted in suspension of their temporary protection rights and deportation under the guise of volunteering to return to Syria (AIDA, 2023).

After experiencing these challenges, the talk about onward migration of Syrians was raised again and Syrians tried to find ways to reach Europe. Recent statistics estimate that in 2022 around 42,000 migrants on boats were pushed back to Turkey while they were trying to reach the shores of Greece (Kisadalga, 2022). The 42,000 on boats, the 2020 Turkey/Greece border



events (Amnesty International, 2020), and the “Caravan of Light”³ of 2022 (Info migrants, 2022), clearly show that a large number of Syrians were looking for an opportunity to relocate to Europe. In addition, more than 20,000 Syrians submitted resettlement applications to the UNHCR in 2022 alone (UNHCR, 2023).

To sum up, Turkish precarity resulted not only in different phases of (im)mobility but also in various legal statuses, with each status granting its holder a different set of rights and denies others. These five legal statuses, from the weakest to the strongest, are as follows. The first group is the undocumented, or Syrians living with a revoked temporary protection card. This group has no rights, zero access to services, and cannot move freely inside Turkey. If the police spot them, they will be deported from the country immediately. The second group is Syrians who are registered under temporary protection but living out of the governorate where they are registered. They have no access to free governmental services. They may use health services but they have to pay for them. If the police spot them, these Syrians will be sent back to their original governorate. It should be noted that there are no specific figures available regarding this group, but its size is substantial enough to pose a challenge for major cities like Istanbul. The governor of Istanbul has repeatedly requested Syrians registered in different governorates to return to their respective cities (PDM, 2023a). The third group are Syrians who are registered under temporary protection and live in the same governorate as their registration. They have access to free health care and may apply for work permits. However, their movement inside Turkey is restricted, as they are required to obtain a travel permit every time they plan to travel from one governorate to another. They are not allowed to travel outside of Turkey and come back; traveling outside of Turkey means losing their temporary protection rights. The fourth group is the “touristic” residence permit holders. They can use health services but under costly private insurance, and they may apply for work permits. The biggest advantage of this group is that they can travel freely inside and outside Turkey. However, they are not guaranteed the renewal of their residence card. The last group, the strongest one is Syrians who have Turkish citizenship. They have full rights to access services, travel freely inside and outside the country, and their citizenship has no expiration date.

Methodology

Data in Use

This paper employs a new probability data set that was gathered between October and November 2022 in the cities of Gaziantep and Izmir, which are among the governorates housing the highest number of Syrians in Turkey (PDM, 2023c). A poll was carried out in Arabic with 1076 Syrians: 541 in Izmir, and 535 in Gaziantep. The sample was taken from these two cities to minimize any bias in the survey results. Combining the two cities gives a better reflection of the reality in Turkey, as these cities are different in political loyalty, closeness to Syria, local cultures, and total number of Syrians hosted.

Socio-economic differences in each governorate were taken into consideration when selecting 20 neighborhoods where Syrians are concentrated. In each of the 20 neighborhoods, five streets were selected using the Kish table technique, and five respondents from the Syrian

³ In September 2022, thousands of Syrians gathered at the Turkish borders with sleeping bags, hoping that the Turkish authorities would open the border with Greece for them to cross to Europe.

community were interviewed by a trained team of data collectors during a random walk. Before conducting the survey, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the committee of the research institution, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study and given the option to decline participation. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

The tested sample is diverse. Thus, it gives a good representation of the Syrian community in Turkey in different categories, for instance: gender, age, marital status, educational level, and arrival year as clarified in Table 1. This data set is unique, as it covers a wide range of self-reported questions, which allows for carrying out a comprehensive analysis regarding the Syrian forced migrants' legal status and their (im)mobility aspirations in the context of Turkey.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondent's profile before excluding the missing values.

Gender	Male	Female	
	532 (49.4%)	544 (50.6%)	
Age	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
	19 years old	75 years old	34.2 years old
Marital status	Married	Single	Other
	687 (63.9%)	291 (27%)	98 (9.1%)
Educational level	Elementary education and below	Secondary and high school	University degree and above
	189 (17.5%)	556 (51.6%)	331 (30.9%)
Arrival Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
	2011	2022	2015

Note: N= 1076

Involved Variables

The dependent variable represents the aspirations of (im)mobility from Turkey. It is asked directly in the questionnaire as follows:

“Personally, to what extent do you want to move from this country to another country?”

The answer options given for this question are on a five-level Likert scale: 1. I never want to, 2. I do not want to, 3. Moderately, 4. I want to, 5. I strongly want to. The options apart from these five were deemed as missing values. Hence the sample size in this analysis is N=1066.

Regarding the independent variable, based on the highlighted legal groups in the previous sections, the participants were asked to point out their legal status. The question has the five legal groups according to its power from weakest to strongest: 1. None, 2. Temporary Protection card from a different governorate, 3. Temporary Protection card from the same governorate, 4. Residence Permit, 5. Turkish citizenship. The options of ‘other’ or ‘I do not want to say’ were also included. However, all the responses were among the five legal groups which means that there are no missing values.

Statistical Method

This analysis has the key objective of clarifying the relationship between (im)mobility aspirations and the legal status in the case of Syrians in Turkey. To do so, two statistical analyses were performed on the data. First, parametric correlation analysis to show if these two variables are correlated in the context of Turkey. Second, a linear regression analysis to test the causality between the different legal statuses and (im)mobility aspirations.



The data was added to SPSS V27, cleaned, and coded according to the order mentioned in the previous sub-section. The frequencies of both variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The frequencies of involved variables.

Scale	(Im)mobility Aspirations	Legal Status
1	146 (13.56%)	32 (2.97%)
2	212 (19.68%)	86 (7.99%)
3	313 (29.06%)	823 (76.52%)
4	240 (22.30%)	40 (3.71%)
5	155 (14.38%)	95 (8.83%)
N/A	10 (0.93%)	0 (0.00%)

Note: N= 1076

Before running the analyses, the assumptions of parametric (Pearson) correlation and linear regression were tested. The results of testing show that the data in use do not violate the assumptions and is appropriate to be used for the two mentioned analyses. In detail, the variables do not violate the level of measurements as both variables are on a five-point Likert scale which allows us to consider them continuous variables (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Pairwise exclusion of missing cases is applied so the assumption of related pairs is not a problem. The data were also examined for influential outliers, and no influential outliers were observed in the histograms or scatterplots of the variables. The histograms of the two variables showed a bell-shaped distribution which indicates the normality of the data. Regarding linearity, the scatterplot of the variables shows that a linear relationship can be drawn. Lastly, the scatterplot of standardized residuals proves that the data meet the assumptions of variance homogeneity. In other words, heteroscedasticity is not a problem as well.

Results

First, a parametric (Pearson) correlation test was performed to assess the relationship between Syrian forced migrants' legal status and their (im)mobility aspirations in the context of Turkey. The results show that there is a negative correlation between the two variables, $r = -.167$, and this correlation is significant $P = < 0.001$.

Second, a linear regression was computed to assess the causality of Syrian forced migrants' legal status on their (im)mobility aspirations in the context of Turkey. The results show that Syrians' legal status can significantly predict the (im)mobility aspirations $\beta = -.274$, $P = < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The recent developments in understanding forced migrants' (im)mobility have shown the important role of individual aspiration and its influencing factors in the decision-making process. Accordingly, we tried to explain the influence of one of the most relevant factors, which is a migrant's legal status. A statistical test was performed on an original data set collected in Turkey to understand the relationship between the various legal statuses and (im)mobility aspirations in the context of Turkey where various legal statuses were assigned to the Syrian forced migrants.

It is demonstrated in the analyses of the correlation and the linear regression tests that (im)mobility aspirations of Syrians in Turkey can be predicted to some extent. The

(im)mobility aspirations will change according to the individual's legal status. In other words, the higher the legal status gets, the lower mobility aspirations go, and vice versa. Hence, any lack of legal status or its rights will directly influence forced migrants' mobility aspirations.

Forced migration takes place in different phases. While basic services and immediate shelter could be enough, it might not be enough in extended displacement contexts. Forced migrants will seek more stable legal statuses that protect them and their children in the future (Müller-Funk, 2019; Kirişçiöğlü & Üstübici, 2023), namely a status that can make them feel safe and equal to local citizens. Bear in mind that having an appropriate legal status reflects stability and access to essential services (Üstübici et al., 2021; Koser & Kuschminder, 2016; Kuschminder & Waidler, 2020; Müller-Funk, 2019), and the individual's general wellbeing (Mirza, 2019). Living on the edge is not a solution; precarity provided by temporary systems and temporary solutions is not enough. Living on the edge will only result in more discomfort and risk-taking, everything or nothing.

This research contributes significantly to the discussion about forced migrants' (im)mobility and proves the crucial role of legal status in these aspirations. However, as stated in the literature, (im)mobility aspirations can be influenced by a variety of factors, with legal status being just one of them. Yet, gaining the highest legal status, which is citizenship, might not be enough to halt migrants' mobility or change aspirations. Onward migration might still be an aspiration if the granted legal status cannot protect migrants from racism or does not offer them better access to services and more freedom. Hence, supporting the argument of Yazgan et al. (2015), as long as Syrians feel insecure in the current receiving countries, their aspirations for onward mobility toward Europe will not end.

In Turkey, it was reported that even the Syrians who got citizenship still faced discrimination in their daily lives and were used by some political parties to fuel hate speeches against Syrians (France24, 2023). Thus, Turkish citizenship might not mean full integration, or being a part of the receiving community; rather, it may only be a kind of safety measure against deportation. However, even though migrants who gain citizenship still may be deported (Al Nofal, 2022), but the safety that Turkish citizenship offers is still better than that of the other statuses available to Syrians in Turkey.

It can be said that legal status in Turkey is like a metaphorical ladder: when going one step up, one feels better, but the move simultaneously unveils new challenges. Forced migrants are inspired to have bigger aspirations when they look to their fellows one step ahead of them on the ladder, as they can see that those ahead are in a more favorable position compared to themselves. Even the original citizens are in a more favorable position compared to migrants with citizenship. These aspirations could be translated into actions if the forced migrant gets the capability to make a change. This nuanced perspective underscores the importance of considering legal status as a dynamic factor in the complex landscape of forced migration mobility. On the other hand, granting and denying citizenship for persons living in precarity should be used carefully, as misusing it, for instance, granting it arbitrarily, which is the case of Turkey, might put the lives of forced migrants at risk again. The foundations for granting this privilege should have clear requirements and procedures for both forced migrants, and the receiving community.

In conclusion, this study contributes significantly to the discourse on forced migrants' (im)mobility, emphasizing the nuanced influence of legal status in shaping (im)mobility



aspirations in the context of Turkey. While legal status is a pivotal factor, acknowledging its dynamic nature and considering a broader spectrum of influences is crucial before the formulation of comprehensive policies and support mechanisms are created for forced migrants in Turkey.

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