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Nermin Abadan-Unat
Astray and stranded at the gates of the European Union: African transit migrants in İstanbul*

Deniz Yükseker
Kelly Todd Brewer

Abstract
This paper discusses the consequences of EU migration control policies on irregular and transit migration in Turkey by focusing on African migrants. Our argument is that the EU’s concern with transit migration through the Mediterranean and hence its externalization and securitization of migration control have contributed to Turkey’s becoming a waiting room for irregular and transit migrants. Based on the findings of a survey with African migrants in Istanbul and analysis of secondary sources, we show that many African migrants get stranded in Turkey. In the absence of an institutional setup for migration management and the prevalence of a security approach, migrants are faced with humanitarian problems and human rights violations.

Keywords: African migrants in Turkey, asylum seeking, irregular migration, transit migration, EU migration policy.

Introduction
Ahmad, a young Somali, escaped the internal war in his country to somewhere on the Eastern Mediterranean coast after a long journey. He...
paid a human smuggler to take a boat to reach Greece, where he would seek asylum. When the boat was captured by security forces off the Aegean coast, he discovered that he was in Turkey! Overcoming the bureaucratic hurdles, he applied for asylum after a few months. He joined several other Somalis in İstanbul to share a small apartment, doing odd jobs to survive while waiting for the asylum procedure to be completed. Six months later, his asylum application was rejected. He tried to stay out of the path of the police. Disappointed and desperate to move on, this time he traveled to Edirne in order to cross the Meriç (Evros) River into Greece illegally. Greek authorities captured him and handed him over to the Turkish authorities, who then detained him. Once released from detention, he contested the rejection. Thus started another year of waiting. He was granted refugee status the second time, but since Turkey does not settle non-European refugees, his resettlement to a Western country took another year. Over the course of several years, Ahmad was successively a refugee fleeing war, a transit migrant, an asylum-seeker, a rejected asylum-seeker, an informal migrant worker, an asylum-seeker again, and finally a recognized refugee. Although this is the story of a single man, the characteristics of transit migration and asylum seekers’ movements to Turkey in the past decade display many of these elements, often in the individual experience of a single migrant. In this paper, we will discuss how irregular and transit migration to Turkey has been shaped in the course of the European Union’s (EU) quest to externalize and securitize migration control. Using the case of African migrants in İstanbul, we will show how this often leads to migrants being stranded in Turkey, and that this also raises important human rights issues.

The EU has been tightening migration control since the 1990s, and as a result countries to the east and south of “Fortress Europe” have increasingly been assigned the duty of buffering against irregular and transit migration directed towards the EU. During the 2000s, this buffer zone came to include Turkey in the east of the Mediterranean. Irregular and transit migration in and through Turkey has increasingly attracted

1 Irregular migration refers to movements of people who, owing to illegal entry or the expiry of their visas, lack legal status in a host county. The definition of transit migration, as we will discuss below, is a contentious issue. A transit migrant is an irregular migrant whose eventual destination point is supposed to be another country, rather than the current host country in which s/he is located. Thus transit migration has the connotation of ongoing movement and short duration. Both irregular migration and transit migration—as a sub-category of irregular migration—are primarily state-centric policy terms rather than social science concepts. For a criticism of this terminology, see Michael Collyer and Hein de Haas, “Developing Dynamic Categorisations of Transit Migration,” *Population, Space and Place* 17 (2011).
scholarly attention in the past decade. More recently, the links between Turkey’s transit migration experience and the EU accession negotiation process have also come under critical investigation. Nevertheless, more research is necessary in order to delineate the characteristics of irregular and transit migration in Turkey, and to identify the parallels between Turkey’s emergence as a transit zone and other transit countries to the south and east of the EU. The aim of this article is to contribute to that goal by taking a closer look at African irregular and transit migration to Turkey. Migration from sub-Saharan Africa to and through Turkey is small when compared to other forms of irregular migration to the country and African migration to other countries; nevertheless, its patterns give us important clues as to the nature of transit, security issues, and human rights concerns. We seek to show that African migration to Turkey has been shaped in the course of the EU’s externalization and securitization of irregular and transit migration across the Mediterranean. The empirical evidence for this paper comes from the findings of a non-representative survey that we carried out in 2006 in İstanbul with African migrants, interviews with various stakeholders, as well as a canvassing of secondary sources.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we will briefly discuss the notion of transit migration as a form of irregular migration. This will be followed by a brief description of transit migration in the Mediterranean Basin. Then, a short overview of Turkey’s experience with irregular migration over the past several decades will set the stage for a discussion of the survey findings and secondary materials on African migrants in Turkey. This discussion will be centered on several issues: the parallels between North African countries’ and Turkey’s position as buffers around the EU borders; the blurry characteristics of transit migration in Turkey; and human rights issues surrounding transit. Our main points

4 The sample for the survey is not a probabilistic one, since this was impossible to achieve among an undocumented, floating population. However, we sought to reach members of different nationalities, both men and women, and both asylum-seekers and transit migrants.
will be that the EU’s migration control policies result in the diversion of African migration towards Turkey; the boundaries between transit migration, irregular labor migration, and asylum-seeking are blurred, since migrants, unable to enter the EU, are often stranded in Turkey; and the security approach to migration imposed by the EU, combined with the lack of institutions for migration management in Turkey, inevitably leads to human rights violations.

Irregular and transit migration towards the European Union

Irregular migration from south and east of the Mediterranean and from Eastern Europe towards the EU has become significant since the 1990s.\(^5\) The EU has sought to build barriers to irregular entries, not only through more rigid policing of land and sea borders, but also via the “political construction”\(^6\) of a “fortress” demarcating its peripheries. Since the 1990s, the EU has demanded from the countries on its periphery to stem irregular flows, sometimes with the promise of more development aid and migration control funds (as in the case of North Africa), or with the prospect of EU accession—a prospect already fulfilled in East-Central Europe through the 2004 Enlargement. Countries that have been assigned the task of migration control first in East-Central Europe and then further east and south (e.g., Turkey, Ukraine, and North Africa) have variously been described as “transit zones,” “transit belts,” or “buffer zones.”\(^7\) Regardless of the terminology, the position of these countries in terms of migration control and the characteristics of irregular migration have some commonalities. First, many of the countries which have been an integral part of Western European migration systems as labor-senders have now become migrant-receiving countries and/or transit zones. Secondly, they have started receiving migrants from distant regions affected by political or economic turmoil with which they did not have previous histories of immigration.\(^8\) Thirdly, some of these countries had

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8 See, Michael Collyer, “States of Insecurity: Consequences of Saharan Transit Migration,” (Centre on Migration, Policy and Society 2006); İçduyguy, “Irregular Migration in Turkey”; Greta Uehling, “Irregu-
to assume more responsibility for controlling irregular migration under pressure from the EU. One way through which this is done is re-admission agreements between EU countries and transit countries, whereby an irregular migrant caught in the former has to be taken back by the latter. Another way is tighter policing of land and sea borders and more effective persecution of human smuggling and human trafficking cases. Yet, this political construction of buffer areas has also had (unintended) consequences. Thus, fourthly, increased migration control mechanisms have arguably not led to a decline in irregular migration to the EU, but to migrants being stranded, the prolongation of transit, securitization of migration control, and increasing human rights and humanitarian issues. Below, we will discuss these ideas in some detail.

Some have argued that through this process the EU is externalizing immigration control. Initially during the conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s, Hungary and other countries had to host the majority of Yugoslavian refugees; either the refugees could not go further west due to the increased policing of borders, or because buffer countries through which they had passed had to re-admit them. Since then the zone of transit has moved to Ukraine and Turkey as a result of the eastern expansion of the EU, but also across the Mediterranean to Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya. The externalization of migration control operates through the EU’s regional and bilateral instruments (European Neighbourhood Policy, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, accession processes) or through international mechanisms (through International Migration Organisation [IOM] facilitation).

Countries like Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco were already integrated into European migration systems as labor migrant senders, but now they have a new dual role within those migration systems. They are on the

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9 A re-admission agreement lays out procedures for one state to return irregular migrants to their home state or another state through which they passed en route to it. See IOM, “World Migration. Costs and Benefits of International Migration,” (Geneva: International Organisation of Migration, 2005).


12 Stola, “Two Kinds of Quasi-Migration.”


14 Düvell, “Transit Migration.”
itinerary of transit migrants from other countries who intend to reach the EU, and they themselves are a destination point for irregular migration. For instance, Morocco is a transit point for some sub-Saharan African migrants, but it also hosts many sub-Saharan irregular labor migrants. On the other hand, Libya was already an important destination for regular and irregular labor migrants due to its pan-Arab and pan-African policies and because of the labor needs of its economy, but in the 2000s it also became a stepping stone for sub-Saharan migrants to reach Europe.

Nevertheless, recent scholarship has emphasized that transit migration is a politicized concept. It denotes an actual migratory phenomenon—those people who are on the move from an origin country to a final destination point—but at the same time it is a discourse—a “war cry directed at countries that are expected by European Union countries to keep unwanted migration off European territories.” Transit migration is also politicized by transit countries in their relations with the EU, in the context of development aid (e.g., Morocco), diplomatic relations (e.g., as when Libya started to expel irregular migrants in 2007 to appease the EU), or accession negotiations (e.g., Turkey). This also makes it a blurry concept: it is difficult to describe what transit exactly constitutes, whether it is the migrants’ intention to reach a European destination point, or their existing state. Recent studies point out that the process of migration should be analytically privileged, emphasizing the “fragmented” nature of the migrants’ journey, rather than a putative destination point.

Securitization of migration towards the EU forms the background to this debate. According to the security paradigm, migration, especially from the Mediterranean region into Europe, is portrayed “as an incursion of an insecure space into a secure one.” This has led in the 2000s to increasing militarization of migration control, not only through the

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15 Joris Schapendonk, “The Dynamics of Transit Migration: Insights into the Migration Process of Sub-Saharan African Migrants Heading for Europe” (University Nijmegen, not dated); Collyer, “States of Insecurity.”
17 Düvell, “Transit Migration.”
18 Franck Düvell, “Questioning Conventional Migration Concepts: The Case of Transit Migration,” in Workshop on “Gaps and Blindspots of Migration Research” (Central European University, Budapest, 2006), 5.
19 Düvell, “Transit Migration.”
deployment of national military units, but also through the formation of Frontex (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) in 2005, which has carried out numerous operations to intercept illegal migrants off the coast of West Africa, in the Mediterranean, and more recently at the Greek-Turkish land border.

One of the consequences of this externalization and securitization of migration control is increasing humanitarian and human rights issues. Some argue that, precisely because of increasing controls, migrants rely on human smugglers and take more risky routes in the hope of reaching Europe. On the contrary, EU authorities justify the militarization of migration control partly on humanitarian grounds, arguing that it reduces deaths of would-be migrants traveling on hazardous sea routes. But at the same time, the complex structure of migration control leads to increasing human rights violations in countries both south and north of the Mediterranean. There are ongoing concerns about the treatment of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers in Greece, Italy, Spain, and France, not only in terms of their social exclusion and profiling, but also in terms of human rights violations during detention, deportation of asylum-seekers, and expedited asylum procedures. More significantly, the implementation of re-admission agreements, the measures to patrol borders and prevent clandestine movements into EU countries, and the implementation of first-country-of-asylum procedures lead to increased human rights violations in transit countries which seek to clamp down


25 Laitinen, “FRONTEX Five Years on: a Short Discussion of the Agency’s Key Activities and Outcomes to Date (Interview).”


on transit migrants under pressure from or as part of their agreements with southern EU countries or with the EU itself. We want to contextualize irregular and transit migration in Turkey and in particular African migration within this framework.

Irregular migration in Turkey

It has become commonplace to say that Turkey is no longer a sender of labor migrants to Western Europe, but has a complex position within European migration systems as a sender as well as a receiver of irregular migrants, and as a zone of transit. Since the 1980s, tens of thousands of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants—pushed out of their countries due to wars in the Middle East, the economic collapse in the former Soviet Union, and ethnic and international conflict in sub-Saharan Africa—have found their way to Turkey in search of livelihood or in the hope of eventually reaching Western Europe or North America. Whereas people hailing from former Soviet bloc countries are considered to be irregular labor migrants (sometimes also called circular labor migrants) looking for work in Turkey, the majority of irregular migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa are assumed to be in transit through Turkey. It is impossible to arrive at an accurate estimate of the scale of irregular and transit migration. The main indicator is the number of apprehensions of foreigners by Turkish security forces for visa and passport violations. According to this indicator, nearly 800,000 people were apprehended between 1996 and 2008. Assuming that the number of irregular migrants who are not apprehended might be two to three times higher than those caught by security forces, the scale of irregular and transit migration through Turkey might in fact be much higher.

Turkey’s recent experience with irregular migration exemplifies the externalization and securitization of migration control discussed above. Before and during the accession negotiations, the EU specifically men-

28 Pastore, “Core-Periphery Relations.”
29 Ahmet İçduygu and Kristen Biehl, “The Turkish Case: İstanbul,” Managing International Urban Migration: Türkiye-Italia-Espana (İstanbul: MIREKOC, 2009); İçduygu, “Irregular Migration in Turkey.”
30 For irregular labor migration from former socialist countries, see Leyla Keough, “Globalizing Post-Socialism: Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe,” Anthropological Quarterly 79 (2006); Ayşe Parla, “Irregular Workers or Ethnic Kin? Post 1990s Labor Migration from Bulgaria to Turkey,” International Migration 45, no. 3 (2007); Kirişci, “Informal ‘Circular Migration’ to Turkey.” For the distinction between irregular and transit migration, see İçduygu and Yükseker, “Rethinking Transit Migration in Turkey.”
31 See Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Sert, “Irregular Migration at Two Borders: the Turkish-EU and Mexican-US Cases,” ed. The German Marshall Fund (Washington, DC: GMF, 2010), 5. Nevertheless, it should be noted that apprehension statistics also include repeat arrests of the same people. See İçduygu and Yükseker, “Rethinking Transit Migration in Turkey.”
tioned the need for stemming transit migration passing through Turkey, increased and effective border controls, criminalization of human smuggling and trafficking, establishing reception centers for asylum-seekers, and the full implementation of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees. Turkey has responded to these demands through signing re-admission agreements with Greece as well as with several countries to its east through which transit migrants arrive in Turkey; through the adoption of international treaties on, and the enactment of laws and regulations criminalizing, human smuggling and trafficking; and through increased cooperation with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on asylum procedures. It has however resisted the demand to lift the geographical limitation on the Geneva Treaty and sign a re-admission agreement with the EU until eventual accession. Therefore, Turkey continues not to grant refugee status to and settle refugees from non-European countries, although it processes their asylum applications.

Turkey’s position on this issue is that the EU is shifting the burden of migration to its peripheries, rather than sharing it. This is how the EU’s externalization of migration controls appears from the perspective of the Turkish government. What we wish to accomplish in this article, on the other hand, is to examine the consequences of this situation for the migrants. In the remainder of this article, we will focus on the case of African migrants in Istanbul in order to discuss those consequences.

**African migration to Turkey**

Migration from Africa to Turkey should be viewed in the context of population movements within that continent, as well as within Turkey’s location in European migration systems. Due to persistent economic hardship, widespread poverty, and internal as well as international wars, sub-Saharan Africa is considered to contain the most mobile population in the world. A noteworthy pattern of migration is the irregular migration from West Africa to and through the Maghreb, which has been on the rise during the past two decades due to the region’s own economic pull, in addition to the lure of Europe. Another significant pattern is that of refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing conflicts in Central and East

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33 İçduygù and Sert, “Irregular Migration at Two Borders,” 9-10.

34 IOM, “World Migration.”
African countries, Somalia being a major country of origin.\textsuperscript{35}

Africans started to arrive in Turkey as irregular migrants or asylum-seekers in the 1990s, as indicated by several reports on irregular migration and refugee flows.\textsuperscript{36} It is estimated that about 10,000 African migrants reside in Turkey, including asylum applicants/refugees and irregular and transit migrants.\textsuperscript{37} The volume of irregular African migration to Turkey appears to be only a fraction of irregular migration from other countries. The numbers of people apprehended by the Turkish police for “illegal entry and exit, illegal stay, and visa and residence permit violations” between 1995 and 2005 give us an indication of this. Only about six percent (35,095) of the total number of people detained for the above-mentioned reasons (580,139) were from African countries, the largest groups being from Somalia and Mauritania (Table 1). Another data source for illegal border crossings between 2006 and 2008 indicates that about 20 percent of the apprehended persons (48,302) were from Africa (primarily from Mauritania [5,044] and Somalia [3,690]).\textsuperscript{38}

In parallel fashion to the ratio of Africans among irregular migrants, African asylum-seekers also constitute a minority among asylum applicants in Turkey. In 2009, only around 8.5 percent of active asylum applications with UNHCR’s Turkey office were by African nationals. In that year, the largest groups of asylum-seekers were Iraqis (8,003 people), Iranians (4,104), Afghans (3,226), and Somalis (1,258), whereas only 272 people were from other African countries, out of a total of 17,854 active applications.\textsuperscript{39}

Africans thus do not constitute a major flow of irregular and transit migration to Turkey; nevertheless, their very presence demonstrates Turkey’s changing position in European migration systems, based as it is on increasing externalization and securitization of migration control by the EU. In the following two sections, we will advance three inter-related

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{35} Aderanti Adepoju, “Review of Research and Data on Human Trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa,” International Migration 43, no. 1/2 (2005).
\item\textsuperscript{37} Here we are not concerned with formal mobility from Africa to Turkey, exemplified by university students or those migrants whose status is legalized through marriage with a Turkish citizen.
\item\textsuperscript{38} The latter data is from the General Command of the Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard Command. Since the zones of operation of the police and gendarmerie are separate in Turkey, the two sets of figures are not comparable. See İçduygu and Yükseker, “Rethinking Transit Migration in Turkey,” Table 3.
\item\textsuperscript{39} The other African countries were Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Mauritania, Congo, Rwanda, and Angola, respectively. UNHCR figures also indicate that the rate of granting refugee status to Africans and members of other nationalities, when compared to Iraqis and Iranians, is lower (72, 100, and 88 percent, respectively, in 2007). Figures were compiled from UNHCR Turkey office’s web site: http://www.unhcr.org.tr.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
arguments in light of the literature on irregular and transit migration in the Mediterranean region as discussed above. First of all, African migration to Turkey to a certain extent is the result of the EU’s externalization of migration controls. Many of the migrants are transit migrants who have been diverted to Turkey while trying to reach EU countries. But secondly, transit is a complex and prolonged experience. For instance, transit and asylum-seeking are enmeshed with each other, because of the factors that initially triggered people to leave their countries and due

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected African countries</th>
<th>Selected Other countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
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<td>Cameroon</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>Gambia</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
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<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>Guinea</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Iran</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>Poland</td>
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<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Romania</td>
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<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>S. Leone</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Unknown Country of Origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total, all countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>580139</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to the difficulties of reaching the EU. This means that many migrants are stranded in Turkey, which brings their experience closer to those of irregular labor migrants who operate in the informal economy. Lastly, migrants stranded in Turkey are treated mostly in security terms in a setting in which institutional capacities for migration management are lacking, thus leading to significant human rights issues.

African transit migrants in Istanbul: Astray and stranded

Before discussing these issues in detail, some information on the characteristics of the surveyed migrants is in place here.⁴⁰ The survey respondents hailed from different parts of Africa.⁴¹ The majority had entered Turkey illegally, and all had irregular status at the time of the survey. Half of them had applied for asylum in Turkey. Among the respondents, 34 percent had entered Turkey on valid visas and passports, and 66 percent had entered illegally. Almost all Nigerians, D.R. Congolese, and Kenyans had entered legally, whereas almost all Somalis, Mauritania, Eritreans, and Ethiopians had entered illegally (Table 2). Of the Somali respondents, 44 said that they had traveled to Turkey by boat, and 8 had entered across land borders. Only one Somali had flown into Turkey. All 21 Nigerians, all 9 D.R. Congolese, and 5 Kenyans had traveled by air. Mauritians mostly had arrived by boat; and Ethiopians had traveled on foot across land borders. Those who had come by boat had entered Turkey in İzmir in the west, while some had entered Turkey across the land border with Syria in Hatay province, and a few reported having arrived in Turkey by land across the border with Iran (Van province). Around half of the respondents had made asylum applications in Turkey. Of the Somalis, 43 had made applications, whereas 9 had not, which might be due to the fact that they had just arrived in the country. Less than half of all of the D.R. Congolese, Mauritians, Eritreans, and Ethiopians had made asylum applications, as opposed to all Burundians (Table 3).

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⁴⁰ Since irregular migrants are a floating population, random sampling was out of question; therefore, the proportions of different countries of origin in the sample do not represent their actual comparative community sizes in Istanbul. The survey questionnaire was prepared in English. It was conducted in January and February 2006 with the help of two Somali men who acted as translators and helped us gain access to the migrants. Because many issues are shrouded in security concerns for migrants, not all respondents were willing to answer all questions. The percentages mentioned below were calculated based on valid responses.

⁴¹ The 131 respondents to the survey were from 10 different nationalities, Somalis (53) and Nigerians (21) being the largest groups. The other respondents were from Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mauritania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi, and Sudan. They included 77 men and 54 women. Somalis contained the largest group of women (30). Two other completed questionnaires were not included in the analysis below due to reliability issues.
Astray in Transit: One of the findings of the survey was that many migrants either had not intended to come to Turkey in the first place, or, even if they had come willingly, wanted to migrate to the EU. In response to the question “why did you come to Turkey and not some other country?” 40.8 percent of the respondents marked “I was deceived that I would be taken to Greece but was left in Turkey” (Table 4). About 80 percent of Somali respondents marked this answer, as well as a similar ratio of Mauritanians and more than half of Eritreans. As we discussed above, Greece, like other southern EU countries, exercises tight con-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Legal Entry</th>
<th>Illegal entry</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Burundi</td>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
trol on its sea borders, which thus diverts human smuggling towards the Turkish Aegean coast. The EU’s asylum procedures stipulating that persons should seek asylum in the first country they enter, as well as Greece’s re-admission agreement with Turkey help bolster this diversification. There were reports in 2006 that Greek coast guard boats sometimes deliberately directed migrants’ vessels towards Turkish waters.\textsuperscript{42} Reportedly, a number of Africans who sought asylum in Turkey testified at the UNHCR and Turkish police that their boats were steered away from the Greek coast into Turkish territorial waters by the Greek coast guard.\textsuperscript{43}

In the case that migrants came to Turkey of their own will, the motivations were mixed (Table 4). While many in this group (31.3 percent), especially Nigerians and Ghanaians, cited the presence of friends in Turkey as the reason why they had traveled here, some expressed an intention to travel to Europe eventually (11.6 percent). These responses should be evaluated in light of Turkey’s visa regime for sub-Saharan Africa. Until 2005, visa requirements for nationals of various African countries were relatively lax. West Africans who either intended to reach the EU through Turkey or were looking for opportunities in İstanbul, such as in the suitcase trade or by joining a football club, could arrive on short-term visas. Following the launch of Turkey’s EU accession negotiations, in 2005 the Turkish visa regime for 48 sub-Saharan African countries was altered, such that applications now had to be approved by the Ministry of the Interior before a Turkish consulate could issue a visa.\textsuperscript{44} The Foreigners’ Police assumed that many West Africans in İstanbul had arrived on valid visas before the visa regime change and subsequently got stranded in İstanbul; meanwhile illegal entries to Turkey by African nationals increased after 2005.\textsuperscript{45}

Another indicator of many migrants’ intentions to reach the EU was in the responses to the question “What country do you want to go to from Turkey?” Around 46 percent of those who answered this open-ended question said they wanted to reach Greece or Western Europe (Table 5). More than two-thirds of the Nigerians and Ghanaians gave this answer. However, there were also those who wanted to remain in


\textsuperscript{43} Interview with UNHCR officer, Ankara, February 2, 2006; interview with officials at the Foreigners’ Desk of the İstanbul Security Department, March 30, 2006.


\textsuperscript{45} Interview with officials at the Foreigners’ Desk of the İstanbul Security Department.
Table 4: “Why did you come to Turkey?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Had friends in Turkey</th>
<th>Had relatives in Turkey</th>
<th>Turkey is easy to enter</th>
<th>Easy to get a visa to Turkey</th>
<th>I could apply to UNHCR in Turkey</th>
<th>Easy to enter EU via Turkey</th>
<th>Easy/cheap to get an illegal visa/passport in Turkey</th>
<th>Came to play football professionally</th>
<th>Decieved that I would be taken to Greece but was left in Turkey</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %, all countries</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Turkey (21.4 percent), or go back to their country of origin (11.2 percent). The responses of Somalis were mixed, given that most of them were waiting for the results of their asylum applications or to apply for asylum.

The above-cited responses demonstrate that African migration to Turkey in the 2000s has been shaped in the shadow of EU’s migration policies, and particularly Greece’s migration control measures. As such, many African migrants in İstanbul appear to be transit migrants intending to move on to Greece. But at the same time, we witness great diversity in their experiences, thus calling into question the nature of transit. Next, we turn to an analysis of survey responses that point to the blurred boundaries between transit and irregular labor migration and flows of asylum-seekers.

Stranded in Transit: As mentioned above, various studies have emphasized the blurriness of the concept of transit, as well as the vague boundaries between transit and other forms of mobility. African migrants’ predicaments provide ample evidence that there is no easy way to categorize their migration experience in Turkey. In the first place, the strict distinction between the UNHCR’s definition of refugees who flee armed conflict and hence are in need of protection, on the one hand, and economically motivated irregular migrants on the other hand is questionable. Studies on mobility in Africa suggest that collapse of food production, armed conflict, generalized violence, and economic distress often go hand in hand. Nevertheless, protection and granting of refugee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Won’t leave</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Will wait for UNHCR decision</th>
<th>Will go back to my country</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
status by the UNHCR continue to operate according to the Geneva Convention’s definitions, which do not entirely reflect the realities of widespread human rights violations and generalized violence that can be witnessed in many countries. Furthermore, there has been a tendency in the EU’s asylum regime towards restricting eligibility for asylum applications and increasing rejections. 46 Our survey lends some support to this perspective, since the security-related and economic reasons for having left one’s country of origin were mixed, and yet many respondents had not applied for asylum.

West African respondents mostly cited economic difficulties as the reason why they had left their countries, whereas Somalis predominantly cited threats against their security (Table 6). Of the Nigerians and Ghanaians, 64.3 percent and 77.8 percent, respectively, cited economic difficulties as their reason for migrating. Of the Somalis, 66.7 percent said that an attack against their family had prompted their decision to leave. A further 30 percent cited other threats and increasing violence. Of the D.R. Congolese, 27.3 percent marked increasing economic difficulties as the cause of their decision to leave the country; and 63.7 per-

46 For criticisms of the limited scope of the refugee concept under the Geneva Convention used by the UNHCR, see, for instance, Jennifer Hyndman, Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For a criticism of restrictions on asylum-seeking, see Khaled Koser, “New Approaches to Asylum,” International Migration 39, no. 6 (2001).
cent of them cited violence and security threats. Of the Mauritanians, 14.3 percent said that they had left the country because of economic difficulties, but the rest of them cited threats and attacks against their family. Likewise, Ethiopians cited both economic reasons (57.1 percent) and security threats (42.9 percent) as the causes of their migration.

But not all of those who only mentioned security/violence as the reason for leaving their country had made asylum applications in Turkey. Among the 50 respondents who answered both the above question and whether they were seeking asylum, only 35 had made applications. Between 2003 and 2006, the UNHCR Turkey office’s rate of granting refugee status to people from Africa (as well as from countries other than Iran and Iraq) was below 40 percent annually, on grounds such as the difficulty of verifying the identity of Somalis. Also, the UNHCR did not consider the nationals of some countries to be in need of protection according to the criteria for defining refugee status. Furthermore, there were complaints that Turkish security forces who at sea and land borders detained migrants when they illegally entered Turkey did not always allow them or inform them about procedures to apply for asylum. Therefore, activists and aid workers helping migrants in İstanbul think that many Africans were discouraged from or uninformed about applying for asylum.

A second set of indicators concerning the blurriness of the notion of transit pertains to the migrants’ prolonged periods of stay and the uncertainty surrounding their presence in Turkey. Several studies point to the misleading connotations of the term transit, since its definition is based on a putative destination point and projects an “imagined future,” rather than the very fragmented process of migration itself. For instance, research on sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco shows that, although the majority of them declare an “intention” to travel to the EU, in fact they are often stranded in that country under poor living and working conditions and may even be in need of protection (although they are not asylum-seekers). Based on the survey responses, we may observe that many African migrants also appear to be stranded in Turkey.

One factor that blurs the nature of transit is the migrants’ duration of stay in Turkey, as indicated by the responses to the question on how long they had been in Turkey (Table 7). Of the respondents, 28 people had arrived in İstanbul during the preceding 3 months; 55 had been here

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47 Interview with representatives of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in İstanbul, September 15, 2005; interview with UNHCR representative.
for 3 months to 1 year; 29 had been in Turkey for 1 to 3 years; and 17 had been here for more than 3 years. Nearly 80 percent of the Somalis had been here for up to 1 year, whereas the majority of Nigerians and Ghanaians had lived in Istanbul for more than 1 year. Thus, West Africans, many of whom had entered Turkey legally several years ago, appeared not to be able to travel west into the EU, a goal stated by many of them. Information about visa expiration also demonstrated this point. We asked those respondents who had entered Turkey legally but were now in irregular condition after their visas had expired. Of those who answered this question, 35.5 percent said it had been 1 to 3 years since their Turkish visa had expired. 25.8 percent said it had been 3 months to 1 year. And 22.6 percent of the respondents’ visas had expired more than 3 years ago. Almost half of those who overstayed their visa were Nigerians. Next came Ghanaians and D.R. Congolese.

Table 7: Duration of stay in Turkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>0-10 days</th>
<th>11-90 days</th>
<th>3-12 months</th>
<th>1-3 years</th>
<th>&gt; 3 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observation that many respondents were stranded is strengthened when we take a look at how much longer they planned on staying in Turkey. In response to the question about their intended length of stay, 64.7 percent said that they had no plans about when to leave; 19.3 percent said they would stay until they attained their goals; 9.2 percent said that they would remain here until they found a chance for clandestine passage to Europe; and 6.7 percent said that they were waiting for the UNHCR’s decision on their application. In response to the question “What would you do if you failed to cross the border into Europe?” 35.2 percent of the respondents said they would continue to stay in Turkey;
22.5 percent expressed the intention to return to their countries; and 24 percent had no idea. Hence, for many migrants there was no end in sight to their prolonged stay in Turkey.

We should also emphasize here the intertwining nature of irregular and transit migration and asylum-seeking. The asylum procedure is a lengthy process that may take several years. In the course of this process, rejected applicants become transit migrants who make attempts to cross into Greece illegally, by boat across the Aegean Sea or by wading through the Meriç River in Edirne during the summer months when the water level is low. Among our respondents, there were Somalis who tried one or both of these methods. However, asylum-seeking may also be a resort for someone who holds irregular status and fears deportation. In other words, a transit migrant might apply for asylum in order to “buy time” during her/his quest to enter the EU. This is the reason why some migrants reportedly declare their nationality as Somali if caught by security forces while trying to enter or leave Turkey, in the hope of avoiding immediate deportation and applying for asylum.49

While Turkish security forces are inclined to perceive many asylum-seekers not to be bona fide applicants, we should keep in mind that it is in fact because of the EU’s increasingly restrictive asylum regime that many people from various countries of origin in Africa do not qualify for refugee status.

A third set of issues pertains to the living conditions of African migrants in Istanbul. A prolonged stay forces many transit migrants to look for some way to earn an income here. Not only irregular and transit migrants, but also people with active asylum applications who have temporary legal status in Turkey do not possess work permits.

We asked the survey respondents how they provided for themselves financially (Table 8). The largest number of responses was “I do odd jobs” (31.3 percent); 16 percent of the respondents said they had no source of income; 13 percent said they “worked for wages in a workshop/firm”; 10.7 percent said they peddled goods; and 6.9 percent said they received money from charities. Some said they borrowed money from friends (6.1 percent), and families sent money for some of them (5.3 percent). Among the 6.1 percent of the respondents who marked “other” when answering this question, some mentioned that they were living on money which they had brought with them to Turkey, and two mentioned working for NGOs. Among Somalis, the largest group said

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49 Interview with UNHCR officer; briefing by Edirne Police Department to MIREKOC workshop participants, May 15, 2009.
Table 8: “How do you provide for yourself in Istanbul?”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Informal wage work</th>
<th>Odd jobs</th>
<th>Peddling goods</th>
<th>Family sends money</th>
<th>Received money from UNHCR</th>
<th>Received money from charity</th>
<th>Borrow money from friends</th>
<th>Beg for money</th>
<th>No source of income</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %, all countries</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents could choose more than one option.
they had no source of income; among Nigerians and Ghanaians, doing odd jobs was more common. Nigerians and Ghanaians also reported peddling goods. Likewise, Mauritanians most commonly reported doing odd jobs and selling goods. Ethiopians reported working for wages more than any other group; this stems from the fact that some women worked in domestic service. Several Somalis and a Sudanese said they begged for money. The responses to this question indicate that the majority of the migrants were operating in the informal sector in the poor neighborhoods where they lived. About half of them lived in Kumkapı and Aksaray, areas known to house migrant and floating populations in İstanbul. Some migrants sought to make money by doing odd jobs in the Kumkapı fish market or other marketplaces. Nearly 40 percent lived in poor neighborhoods such as Tarlabası and Dolapdere in the Beyoğlu district. Among these, some worked on and off in garment or lighting workshops for very low wages.

There are very few places where asylum-seekers and migrants can ask for social aid in İstanbul. These include a number of church charities and the refugee support program of a human rights organization. Among the survey respondents, about one-fourth said that they had never applied for nor received any aid. About one-third had applied to the İstanbul Interparish Migrants Program, which provided emergency medical care, blankets, and food. About one-fifth had applied for or received the one-time financial aid that the UNHCR gives during the asylum application process. These responses make clear that there is hardly an institutional framework, governmental or non-governmental, to provide humanitarian and social aid to irregular migrants and asylum-seekers.

Not surprisingly, then, the biggest problem reported was financial. In answer to the question “what are your greatest problems in İstanbul?” about 42 percent of the respondents mentioned lack of income; housing was the third most mentioned problem with 10 percent. As we observed while conducting the survey, the small rental apartments that half a dozen or more migrants shared were often in derelict condition, without heating and sometimes looking unsafe to inhabit. While the living conditions of the majority of the migrants were poor, the social environment within which they found themselves was also often a cause for complaint. Around 30 percent mentioned mistreatment by others as a significant problem in their lives in İstanbul, making it the second most selected option for this question. Some respondents mentioned prejudicial attitudes by neighbors and landlords. Mistreatment by police might be a more significant issue (which resulted in the death of a Nigerian man in 2007), which we will discuss below.
To summarize, a significant group among the migrants we contacted were somehow stuck, still hoping to realize their wish to reach a Western country, but having to cope with the harsh realities of life in İstanbul. Below, we discuss how this state of being stranded is further complicated when taking into account the consequences of the securitization of migration.

Securitization and human rights issues
In the first section, we mentioned that Turkey’s concern with irregular and transit migration has been shaped within the context of the accession negotiations with the EU. Although transit migration by Iranians, Iraqis, and Afghans has existed since the 1980s, it was only in the second half of the 1990s that policy-makers started to talk about this phenomenon.50

What exactly is Turkey’s policy on irregular and transit migration? It may be said that Turkey does not have a clear migration policy; ironically, this de facto constitutes its migration policy.51 The securitization of migration along the EU’s demands falls into this void. Security forces are tasked with stepping up measures for more effective border control, combating human smuggling and trafficking, identifying asylum-seekers, and processing asylum applications. Part of these procedures takes place within the context of the re-admission agreement with Greece, which stipulates that those migrants who arrive in Turkey first (although they crossed into Greece next) should be Turkey’s responsibility. Yet, the institutional framework for handling irregular migration is incomplete at best and dismal at worst. This is so not only in terms of structures, but also in terms of human resources and the implementation of basic policies. In what follows, we will move from the specific case of African migrants to broader concerns regarding humanitarian and human rights issues.

One set of issues relates to the fact that irregular and transit migration and even the movement of asylum-seekers are primarily treated as security issues, with little regard for the problems that migrants face in Turkey. First of all, someone who enters Turkey illegally is automatically classified as an illegal migrant (yasadışı göçmen), even if s/he subsequently makes an asylum application. An asylum application gives one a temporary “legal” status in Turkey, but if her/his case is rejected twice,
s/he falls back into illegality. Likewise, someone who enters Turkey legally falls into illegal status once her/his visa expires. Furthermore, one cannot legally work in Turkey under any of these statuses. Since 2006, asylum-seekers with active files have been required to reside in “satellite” cities—that is, several provincial centers across the country—where they are expected to report regularly to the Foreigners’ Police and are entitled to a small amount of social aid. If an asylum applicant fails to remain in that city and travels back to İstanbul (or İzmir), s/he is considered to have violated her/his legal status. Since opportunities for earning an income are few in provincial cities, some asylum applicants reportedly violate the residence requirement. The Foreigners’ Police perceive people in such situations not to be *bona fide* asylum-seekers, but as illegal migrants. To summarize, for the majority of African migrants, their legal status in Turkey is uncertain at most, if not at all, times.

African migrants who are stranded in Turkey become more susceptible to police scrutiny as their stay in İstanbul is prolonged. Among the respondents of our survey, around 32 percent reported that they had been detained by the police once. Significantly, even Somali asylum-seekers who had temporary residence permits were among those who said that they had been detained (Table 9). Furthermore, more than one-third of the respondents reported having been stopped and searched by the police in the city, often more than once. At the time we conducted this research, deportation of irregular African migrants was not common, since the Department of Security did not have enough funds to pursue irregular migrants or to repatriate them back to African countries. Hence, they were *de facto* “tolerated aliens.” Under these conditions, then, policing of African irregular and transit migrants and asylum-seekers in İstanbul took the form of harassment and intimidation, rather than constituting a security issue *per se*.

### Table 9: “Were you ever detained by police?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes, once</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.R. Congo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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52 Interview with officers at the Foreigners’ Desk of the İstanbul Department of Security.  
53 Ibid.
Such harassment and intimidation reported by several African migrants became deadly in one incident involving a Nigerian man. Festus Okey was taken to the Beyoğlu police station on suspicion of drug possession and killed by a police bullet on 20 August 2007. Documents showing that he was an asylum applicant were found on his body. The court case against the police officer charged with shooting him has been lingering since then. Okey’s killing highlights at least three issues. First, many migrants came forward to testify that police harassment and beating of African migrants were not uncommon, as reported, for instance, by the Refugee Advocacy and Support Program of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly. Furthermore, the court’s seemingly deliberate slowness in reaching a verdict on the charged police officer sends out the message that police harassment may go on. Secondly, the court case also shows that African migrants (or for that matter many other migrant communities) are not organized enough to make their voices heard. And lastly, civil society activism on behalf of (African) migrants is still weak.

A second set of issues, humanitarian ones, surrounds clandestine entries into and departures from Turkey. The televised scenes of people trying to cross the Mediterranean into Spain or Italy by boat have become commonplace in the past decade. News stories about capsized boats, drowned people, and rescued migrants during attempts of clandestine entry into Greece across the Aegean Sea or the Meriç River have also made headlines in recent years. The operation of human smug-
glers along these dangerous routes thus causes a significant humanitarian problem. Yet humanitarian issues are not limited to attempted illegal border crossings. Once caught or rescued, irregular migrants are taken to detention centers—İzmir, İstanbul, Edirne, Kırklareli, and Van are some of the locations of these so-called “guesthouses”—where they may spend several months or longer before being released (if they make asylum applications) or deported. Two reports prepared by human rights organizations detail the unsuitability of the conditions at some of these detention centers, which are operated by the police departments of those provinces. Heating, ventilation, overcrowding, lack of hygiene and healthcare services, and inadequacy of meals were some of the issues raised in both reports. Ironically, in the case of the Tüneca detention center in Edirne, police also publicly complained about these conditions in an effort to bring them to the attention of the Ministry of Interior. The unpleasant details of the conditions in these detention centers aside, our point is that, although Turkey has undertaken to deal with irregular and transit migration in response to EU demands, it does not even have the infrastructure to handle the circulation of people through its borders. This fundamental lack then creates humanitarian problems for the migrants.

A third set of issues pertains to the manner in which both Greek and Turkish security forces deal with clandestine border crossings, which creates serious human rights violations. The implementation of the re-admission agreement between Turkey and Greece appears to be a tug-of-war, whose victims are often transit migrants, Africans included. Turkish authorities complain that Greece sends migrants who clandes-

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58 Although many respondents to our survey indicated having used the services of human smugglers, we could not collect enough information on this issue in our research. For human smuggling in Turkey, see Ahmet İçduygu and Şule Toktaş, “How do Smuggling and Trafficking Operate via Irregular Border Crossings in the Middle East? Evidence from Fieldwork in Turkey,” International Migration 40, no. 6 (2002).


60 Briefing by Edirne Department of Security to MiReKoc workshop participants, May 15, 2009. See also Human Rights Watch, “Stuck in a Revolving Door,” 52.

61 Although there are serious allegations about the human rights violations committed by Greek authorities in dealing with transit migrants, we will not discuss this issue in detail here. See, for example, ibid.
tinely cross into that country back to the Turkish border or Turkish ter-
ritory covertly, rather than under the re-admission agreement.62
There have been cases in which migrants have been tossed back and
forth between Turkish and Greek authorities across the Meriç River.63
In addition to sending back migrants, currently Greece is actively seek-
ning to prevent the arrival of transit migrants. For this purpose, Frontex
in 2006 started the “Joint Operation Poseidon” in the Aegean Sea in
order to intercept migrants approaching the Greek islands from Turk-
ish waters. Since October 2010, Frontex’s Rapid Border Intervention
Teams have also been deployed at the Greek-Turkish land border.64
More recently, Greece announced that it would set up barbed wire along
the Meriç River at the Turkish border.

What are the consequences of the intensification of this security
approach? The dumping of migrants at the Turkish borders and their
unending quest to reach Greece via Turkey increases human rights viola-
tions against transit and irregular migrants in several ways. First of all,
violations such as beatings and ill-treatment are reported at the time of
the arrest of migrants. Secondly, once detained, irregular migrants are
often deprived of procedural rights: they may be refused information
about how to apply for asylum, and about the reasons and expected du-
ratio of their detention; even asylum applicants may be held in deten-
tion for months;65 and they do not have access to judicial review of their
detention.66 It should also be noted here that Turkish civil society or-
ganizations (CSO) have not been allowed into these detention centers.
Apart from advocacy for the improvement of conditions and the report-
ing of human rights violations, CSOs could play an important role in
providing humanitarian aid. Thirdly, we should also mention the inad-
equacy of human resources for dealing with irregular migration and asy-
ylum applications. In the past decade, several programs were conducted
to train police officers working at Foreigners’ Desks, on how to identify

62 See, for instance, Şimşek, “Mülteci Kampında Aşk bile Yasak”; Human Rights Watch, “Stuck in a
Revolving Door.”
63 An alarming case was the bouncing back and forth of more than 250 African migrants, some with
UNHCR protection, between Greece and Turkey across the land border in Ipsala, Edirne, in 2001,
sometime before the re-admission agreement took effect. See, İHD, “Afrikalı Göçmen ve Mülteciler
Açığa ve Ölume Terkedildi,” (İnsan Hakları Derneği, 2001).
64 FRONTEX.
65 The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2010 that the Turkish government had to pay repara-
tions to two Iranian refugees and a Tunisian man who sued Turkey on the grounds that their freedom
and right to personal safety were violated while in detention in the Edirne and Kırklareli detention
66 Helsinki Citizens Assembly, “Unwelcome Guests.”
asylum-seekers and handle their applications. But, by the authorities’ own admission, retaining officers who have received training or are experienced with handling irregular migration and asylum procedures in locations where they are highly demanded is a big administrative hurdle. Given that security forces in some areas do not even have basic knowledge about Turkey’s obligations under the Geneva Convention not to return asylum-seekers to their countries of origin where they would be in danger, violations of the principle of non-refoulement sometimes occur.

To summarize, our argument is that the securitization of migration control between Greece and Turkey sets off a chain reaction during which irregular and transit migrants’ as well as asylum-seekers’ human rights may be violated at every step, as they try to enter Turkey or Greece, in detention, when released, or while being deported. However, we do not want to suggest that human rights violations are unexpected or unintended consequences of securitization. On the contrary, it could even be claimed that Turkey is using rights violations in the context of an undeveloped institutional framework as a de facto policy for restricting migration.

Conclusion
In this paper we have sought to show that the EU’s externalization of migration control has had consequences for Turkey, which has become a zone of transit between the EU and countries from which migrants and asylum-seekers originate. Focusing on the case of African transit migrants, we have argued that this flow is a result of the EU’s security approach to migration from south of the Mediterranean. Thus, transit migrants are migrants who went astray when they sought to enter Greece. But we also have questioned the category of transit migration, since the process of “transit” is often prolonged and full of uncertainties for many Africans migrants. They have to make a living in Turkey, while continuing to hope that they can leave the country. Hence, they are stranded migrants, more so than being in transit. Lastly, we have argued that securitization leads to human rights violations at every step of African (and other) migrants’ journey. As Greece struggles to keep out migrants, Turkey treats these “unwelcome guests” through polic-

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67 Interview with ICMC officers.
68 Briefing by officers of the Foreigners’ Desk, Edirne Department of Security.
69 Over the past decade, there have been cases in which Iranians, Syrians, and Iraqis (some of whom were caught while trying to cross the border into Greece) were deported despite warnings against doing so by the UNHCR. See UNHCR, “UNHCR Deplores Refugee Expulsion by Turkey which Resulted in Four Deaths,” (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008).
70 Helsinki Citizens Assembly, “Unwelcome Guests.”
ing measures, without adequate infrastructure or trained personnel and often in violation of basic human rights. Here we would like to re-emphasize the blurriness of the notion of transit, and the intertwining of asylum-seekers’ and transit migrants’ movements. It is partly this blurriness which opens the way to human rights violations.

Finally, we make two suggestions based on these findings. On the one hand, social science research on irregular migration has to critically engage categories introduced by states based on their political concerns and reconceptualize them in light of the experiences of migrants. Thus, migration process itself should be at the center of theory-building, rather than categorizations based on legality and territoriality. The example we gave at the outset of this article highlights the need to introduce concepts that capture the often fragmented and contradictory experiences of irregular migration as well as formal institutions’ incapacity to respond to them properly. On the other hand, conceptually sounder research can also be used to inform the making of migration policy that takes into account migrants’ lives, and not only states’ priorities. The discussion here demonstrates that EU policies externalize not only migration control, but also human rights violations, without necessarily curbing migration. Migration policies should therefore be informed by the realities of the migrants’ lives and pay attention to their rights, rather than being based on notions of state security only.

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