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Like "falling leaves": The migration of the highly-skilled from Turkey to Italy(*)

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1. Introduction

This article explores high skilled migration from Turkey in Italy. The theme is very much understudied, but requires scholars' and policymakers' attention. Indeed, high-skilled migration is one of the main tenets of a globalised world where borders seem to be less relevant for qualified people. Further, high-skilled migration has caused large debate over its potential "brain drain" effect on countries of origin. Finally, both Italy and Turkey are struggling to retain skilled labour. It is therefore intriguing to understand migration patterns between these two Mediterranean countries. In this paper, we do so by exploring three dimensions: why high-skilled migrants leave Turkey (and why they choose Italy), their social inclusion in the migration context (in Italy), and what their future plans are.

High-skilled migration has often been studied through the lenses of 'brain drain' and remittances. On one hand, some scholars view high-skilled migration as a threat to countries of origin, taking away their educated and skilled workforce and generating a 'brain drain'. On the other hand, others expect it to contribute to the development of such countries, particularly through remittances and higher investments in human capital[1].

Yet, relatively little research has examined *high skilled migrants' motivations* to leave their countries in the first place[2]. This may be due to the general understanding of high-skilled

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[1] L. Beltrame. *Globalizzazione e fuga dei cervelli*, in *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* XLIX (2) /aprile-giugno 2008, p. 277 ss. ; F. Minneci, *If there were a 'Highly Skilled Red Octopus'? The Case of Italian Highly Skilled Mobility at Times of Crisis*, in *Economics and Sociology*, 8(3)/2015, p. 170 ss.; M. A. Clemens, *Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?* in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 25(3)/2011, p. 83 ss.
[2] S. Ozcurumez, and D. Yetkin Aker, *What Moves the Highly Skilled and Why? Comparing Turkish Nationals in Canada and Germany*, in *Int Migr*, 54(3)/2016, p. 61 ss.; A Niraula, and A. Triandafyllidou, *Highly Skilled Migrant Decision-Making Under Uncertainty: A Literature Review*, Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement, Working Paper No. 2022/9 September 2022, p. 2.

migration being voluntary and rather straightforward (as opposed to asylum migration, for instance), and mostly based on rational economic calculations. Some recent publications present however a different picture, in which uncertainty plays a role for qualified workers too, such as in times of pandemic[3].

The neglect of high skilled migration is particularly stark in Italy, where "[a]lmost *nothing is known* about the skilled foreign workers"[4]. This is to be attributed to a range of factors, first of which the fact that high-skilled migration to Italy is more limited than in other European countries (such as the UK), and the lack of data. Yet, the lack of data has not prevented the emergence of a burgeoning literature on irregular migration in Italy and Europe. Moreover, the *proportion of foreigners among skilled workers* in Italy also seems to have been increasing since the 1980s[5]. Finally, if anything, considering Italy's difficulties in not only attracting but also retaining qualified workers[6], understanding *the drivers, challenges and aspirations* behind high-skilled migration becomes of key importance.

In this paper, we thus aim to start filling the above-mentioned gap, by *examining Turkish[7] high-skilled migration to Italy.* The literature on Turkish qualified emigration is limited, with authors typically focusing on flows in general, or flows to countries like Canada and Germany[8]. To our knowledge, however, *no existing research examines Turkish high-skilled migration to Italy.*

Turkish migration to Italy presents key peculiarities. While several European countries made use of labour recruitment schemes since the 1960s to promote migration from Turkey, no such scheme was in place in Italy. On the contrary, initial migration from Turkey to Italy in the 1990s was predominantly characterised by irregular flows of low-skilled Turkish immigrants and Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees. Gradually, the profile and motivations of this migration flow evolved, with the result that, today, Italian universities receive increasing numbers of students from Turkey.

Investigating migration drivers at the macro, meso, and micro level, *this article thus aims to shed light on the under-explored phenomenon of highly skilled migration from Turkey to Italy*. To do so, we rely on a range of sources: To assess evolving trends in Turkish migration to Italy, we examine official datasets on migration dynamics, primarily from ISTAT and EUROSTAT. To understand migrants' trajectories and aspirations, we rely on *20 interviews* with Turkish high-skilled migrants in Italy, and analyse them thematically to assess respondents' motivations for migrating, current social and cultural integration, and future aspirations. The findings are then triangulated, to add validity and reduce possible researchers' bias.

The article is organised as follows: The first section delves into the meaning of "high skilled migration", and its relationship with globalisation dynamics. The paper then provides an overview of Turkish migration to Italy, before discussing the methodology, and bringing in migrants' perspectives, by analysing the interviews conducted with Turkish migrants in Italy. The final section discusses the findings and concludes.

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[3] A Niraula, and A. Triandafyllidou, *ibid*., p. 4 ss.

[4] A. Venturini and C. Villosio *Skilled Foreign Workers in Italy: An Alternative Measurement Method*, Laboratorio R. Revelli Centre for Employment Studies, 2022, Working Paper N. 12, p. 5 ss.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 8

[6] G. Tintori & V. Romei, *Emigration from Italy after the crisis: The shortcomings of the brain drain narrative*, in J. M. Lafleur and M. Stanek (eds.) *South-North migration of EU citizens in times of crisis*, Cham, 2017, p. 49 ss., Cham; F. Minneci*, If there were a 'Highly Skilled Red Octopus'?*, cit.

[7] In this study, 'Turkish' refers to people with a passport of the Republic of Turkey, regardless of ethnicity.

[8] S. Ozcurumez, and D. Yetkin Aker, *What Moves the Highly Skilled and Why?*, cit.; N. Güngör and A. Tansel, *Brain Drain from Turkey: Return Intentions of Skilled Migrants,* in *International Migration*, 52 (5)/2012, p. 208 ss.; H. Karaduman and E. Çoban, *Brain Drain in Turkey: An Investigation On The Leading Motives Of Skilled Migration*, in *Eurasian Journal of Researches in Social and Economics (EJRSE*) 6(7)/2019, p. 322 ss.

2. Theoretical considerations: High-skilled migration and globalisation

"High-skilled migrants" represent today 30% of the 232 million international migrants[9]. Yet in academic analyses, the term "high-skilled migration" has only recently become the object of increased attention: Based on Google's database of published books, the term 'high-skilled migration' was virtually never used until 1988.[10] Since then, its frequency has increased by over 30 times (as of 2007)[11].

According to the Collins English Dictionary, "highly skilled" means *having specialized training, knowledge, and experience in order to carry out complex physical and mental tasks*[12]. As the definition reveals, *education* is often perceived as a key determinant of skill level, and is generally associated with someone having at least a bachelor's degree. Yet, the notion that education alone defines skills is controversial[13]. Having "specialised experience" is thus a second key determinant of skill level. As a matter of fact, most governments define 'high-skilled migrants' through both education and occupational factors[14].

2. 1 Brain drain or brain gain?

Academic and policy debates on high skilled migration frequently focus on 'brain drain', namely the depletion of human capital in countries of origin. Brain drain has been studied through the lenses of *human capital and the centre-periphery dichotomy*: While the former theory focuses on the micro-level, putting the emphasis on individuals' utility maximisation efforts in seeking greater return to their skills and education, the latter focuses on macro-level dynamics and their uneven nature[15]. For both, however, the core idea is that 'most highly educated people coming from developing countries moved where their education reaps the highest benefit, that is industrialized countries'[16]. Indeed, research suggests that qualified workers tend to emigrate more (as opposed to low-skilled workers), and generally from developing to developed countries[17]. According to OECD data, small African and Caribbean countries (such as Fiji, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Malawi and Mauritius) are particularly affected by brain drain, with some having over 40% of their high-skilled workers abroad[18]. Thus, this 'traditional view' stresses the relevance of both human capital and core-periphery dynamics, ultimately cautioning against the brain drain impact that high-skilled emigration can have.

The above has been contrasted with the "circular approach", according to which, what we are experiencing is not so much brain drain, but *brain circulation*. From this viewpoint, globalisation has impacted high skilled migration in three main ways[19]. First, through the globalisation of production, new centres have acquired prominence, going beyond the traditional core-periphery dichotomy and facilitating a more circular migration. Second, neoliberal globalisation led governments to view migration as a competitive field, in which they ought to attract the 'best and brightest'. Brain drain is thus no longer an exclusive problem of developing countries, but of developed ones too. Third, transnational corporations

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[9] G. Pastore and G. Tomei *High-Skilled Migration and the Knowledge Society: Theories, Processes, Perspectives* in *Arxius* 39/2018, p. 26 ss.

[10] https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=high-skilled+migration&year_start=1950&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3.

[11] C. Parsons, S. Rojon, S. Samanani and L. Wettach, *Conceptualising International High-Skilled Migration*, IMI Working Paper 104, 2014, p. 4.

[12] Definition of the high skilled: https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/highly-skilled date 20 December 2022.

[13] R. Skeldon, *High-Skilled Migration and the Limits of Migration Policies*, in Czaika M. (ed.), *High-Skilled Migration: Drivers and Policies*, Oxford, 2018, pp. 49-50.

[14] A. Weinar and A. von Koppenfels, *Highly-Skilled Migration: Between Settlement and Mobility*, Cham, 2020, pp.9-35.

[15] L. Beltrame. *Globalizzazione e fuga dei cervelli*, cit.; F. Minneci, *If there were a 'Highly Skilled Red Octopus'?*, cit.

[16] F. Minneci, *ibid*.

[17] G. Pastore and G. Tomei *High-Skilled Migration and the Knowledge Society*, cit.

[18] E. Sanchez-Montijano; A. Kaya & M. J. Sökmen, *Highly Skilled Migration between the EU and Turkey: Drivers and Scenarios*. FEUTURE Online Paper, 2018, p. 21.

[19] L. Beltrame. *Globalizzazione e fuga dei cervelli'*, cit., p. 278 ss.

play an increasingly relevant role in relocating personnel, thus modifying the key actors behind migratory flows. Overall, for the circular approach, discussions about brain drain should in fact be replaced by discussions about brain circulation.

Indeed, Clemens[20] questions the relevance of brain drain, arguing that the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon is underdeveloped, and evidence hard to measure. First, following Mountford, the *potential* to emigrate can incentivise investments in human capital in countries of origin. Since not everyone will eventually emigrate, the overall skills level of the country-of-origin increases[21]. Second, remittances can contribute to the development of countries of origin[22]. This is through financial contributions, but potentially also through 'social remittances'[23]. In sum, high skilled migration is expected to benefit countries of origin through the increased investment in human capital, economic and social remittances, and, possibly, migrants' return.

The idea of brain circulation considers the more complex dynamics of migration and mobility in the 21st century, going beyond the view of migration as a linear phenomenon. Yet, it has been questioned whether it "idealises" the movement of high skilled migration[24]. Perhaps, as suggested by Beltrame[25], brain drain, and circulation are *complementary*, more than alternative processes: While brain circulation is taking place, 'globalisation did not remove the core-periphery polarisation'.

As a matter of fact, *empirical evidence* on the above has been mixed and hard to evaluate[26]. On one hand, Verfurth[27] finds that Turkish (high-skilled) migrants who first moved to Germany and then returned to Turkey, can facilitate cross-border knowledge transfer in multinational enterprises, for instance by maintaining connections and transferring best practices. Sbalchiero and Tuzzi[28] likewise suggest that Italian scientists who emigrated may contribute to improving the Italian academic system, by sharing practices adopted by universities abroad. On the other hand, however, Vecchione[29] examines the impact of high-skilled migration from Southern to Northern Italy on the accumulation of human capital, by looking at university enrolment rates. The results suggest that 'the constant outflow of high-skilled migrants from the Mezzogiorno to the Center and North of Italy have, over the years, reduced the accumulation of human capital in the emigrants' regions of origin, undermining the competitiveness of the entire South[30]. Ultimately, for Gökbayrak[31], conducting surveys with 130 Turkish engineers working abroad, high-skilled migration has the potential to have a significant positive effect in countries of origin, but only in the context of appropriate policies and of economic and political stability.

In this context, *Italy* is in a peculiar situation. On one hand, the Italian emigration rate for high-skilled individuals is higher than that of many OECD countries (standing at 10%, against France's 3.4%)[32]. On the other hand, Italy struggles to attract high qualified foreigners: these represent only 15.4% of overall

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[20] Michael A. Clemens, *Economics and Emigration*, cit.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] N. Güngör and A. Tansel, *Brain Drain from Turkey*, cit.; U. Fratesi, *Editorial: The Mobility of High-Skilled Workers – Causes and Consequences*, in *Regional Studies*, 48(10)/2014, p. 1587 ss.

[23] P. Levitt, *Social remittances: Migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion* In *International migration review*, 32(4)/1998, p. 926 ss; T. Faist, *Migrants as Transnational Development Agents: An Inquiry into the Newest Round of the Migration–Development Nexus*, in *Population, Space and Place*, 14/2008, p. 21 ss.

[24] B. Bönisch-Brednich, *Migrants on Campus: Becoming a Local Foreign Academic*, in B. Bönisch Brednich and C. Trundle (eds.), *Local Lives: Migration and the Politics of Place*, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 167-182; F. Minneci, I*f there were a Highly Skilled Red Octopus'?*, cit., p. 173.

[25] *L. Beltrame. Globalizzazione e fuga dei cervelli'*, cit., p. 250 ss.

[26] N. Güngör and A. Tansel, *Brain Drain from Turkey*, cit.; M. A. Clemens, *Economics and Emigration*, cit.

[27] P. Verfürth, *Highly skilled (re-)migrants in multinational enterprises: Facilitators of cross-border knowledge transfers*, in *Global Networks*, 22/2022, p. 447 ss.

[28] S. Sbalchiero and A. Tuzzi, *Italian Scientists Abroad in Europe's Scientific Research Scenario: High skill migration as a resource for development in Italy*, in *International Migration*, 55(4)/2017 p. 171 ss.

[29] G. Vecchione, *Skilled Migration and Human Capital Accumulation in Southern Italy*, in M. Bellandi, et al (eds.), *Regional Development Trajectories Beyond The Crisis*, Milano, 2018, pp. 199-210.

30 *Ibid*., p. 208.

[31] Ş. Gökbayrak, *Skilled Labour Migration and Positive Externality: The Case of Turkish Engineers Working Abroad*, in *International Migration*, 50: e132-e150.

[32] L. Beltrame *Globalizzazione e fuga dei cervelli*, cit.

migrants in the country, as opposed to 34.5% in the UK[33]. In fact, the OECD Talent Attractiveness Indicators[34] show that Italy is among the least attractive countries for potential high-skilled migrant workers, along with countries such as Israel, Mexico, Greece and Turkey. In addition, Italy is one of the European countries that have issued fewer blue card work permits for skilled immigrants[35].

Based on such statistics, attracting and retaining high-skilled workers seems a problem for the country, both when it comes to immigration and emigration. As stated by Minneci[36], 'the outflows of talented Italians seem not to be compensated by human capital inflows, with a simultaneous lack of brain circulation'. Indeed, Italy's problem is not so much brain drain (since other EU member states export similar proportions of high-skilled) but the inability to attract skilled labour in turn[37].

2.2 The drivers of high-skilled migration

Moving beyond the debate on 'brain drain', it is important to assess the drivers of high-skilled migration. Existing literature has largely focused on explaining the mobility of asylum seekers and irregular migrants. As a result, theoretical discussions of the determinants of high-skilled migration are rarer[38], though on the rise.

As for much of the broader migration literature, the starting point for existing analyses of high-skilled migration is often the push-pull model, according to which, people move based on rational calculations related to cost and benefits. Here, economic determinants are often considered crucial. The lack of economic opportunities and attractiveness of better job prospects have indeed been repeatedly found by the literature to play a fundamental role in driving migration, both at the high- and low-end of the skills level[39].

Economic factors and opportunities take however different forms, going beyond the traditional understanding of wage differentials as being the main determinant. As an example, studying high-skilled migration from Southern Europe, find that this is often driven not so much by 'sheer necessity' (in the form of unemployment), but rather by respondents' concerns about their prospects (such as business opportunities, and academic or professional training)[40]. The authors particularly highlight the concept of *relative deprivation*, namely deprivation relative to one's peers in countries of origin (due to corruption and nepotism), other countries (where such factors are perceived as less significant), and own ambitions or plans.[41] In the case of Italy and Greece, the authors argue, relative deprivation was exacerbated by the Eurozone debt crisis[42].

Beyond economic factors, and particularly when it comes to shaping the decision of the country of destination, *personal networks***,** as well as cultural and identity factors, have also been found as signifycant[43]. Indeed, by strengthening the connections between more and less developed countries, globalisation facilitates the creation and growth of transnational communities, whose role is key in assisting the

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[33] *Ibid*.
[34] https://www.oecd.org/migration/talent-attractiveness.
[35] E. Di Pasquale and C. Tronchin, *Lavoratori stranieri qualificati, idee oltre agli slogan*, in *La Voce*, 14/9/2022.
[36] F. Minneci, *If there were a 'Highly Skilled Red Octopus'?*, cit., p.175.
[37] G. Tintori & V. Romei, *Emigration from Italy after the crisis*, cit.
[38] A Niraula and A. Triandafyllidou, *Highly Skilled Migrant Decision-Making Under Uncertainty: A Literature Review, Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement*, Working Paper No. 2022/9 September 2022, pp.4-5.
[39] L. S. Talani, M. Rosina, O. Torrisi, G. Monteleone, R. Deliperi, *La migrazione secondaria. Il caso della comunità italo-bengalese nel Regno Unito*, Comites Londra, 2022; H. De Haas & T. Fokkema, *The effects of integration and transnational ties on international return migration intentions*, in *Demographic research*, 25/2011, p. 755 ss.
[40] A. Triandafyllidou & M. Ambrosini. *Irregular Immigration Control in Italy and Greece: Strong Fencing and Weak Gatekeeping Serving the Labour Market*, in *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 13(3)/2011 p. 251 ss.
[41] On the role of corruption in favoring high skilled emigration and hindering qualified immigration, see A. Ariu and M.P. Squicciarini, *The balance of brains—corruption and migration: Corruption could be an important factor for emigration and immigration decisions by highly skilled professionals*. EMBO reports. 2013, Jun; 14/6, p. 502 ss.
[42] A. Ariu and M.P Squicciarini, *The balance of brains,* cit.
[43] L. S. Talani, M. Rosina, O. Torrisi, G. Monteleone, R. Deliperi , *La migrazione secondaria*, cit.

migration process[44]. This is facilitated not only by the increased social relations between previous and future migrants, but also by the revolution of communications and decline in transportation costs[45]. In Castles's words, globalisation has increased the 'cultural capital and technical means' that are necessary for people to move[46]. As noted by Triandafyllidou and Gropas[47], high-skilled migrants' networks are rather different from those of low-skilled migrants, and more likely to relate to professional and business networks. Ban[48], for instance, highlights the role of labour recruiting networks, arguing that head-hunters and labour brokers are key in facilitating the movement of skilled and semi-skilled workers across Europe, and an 'overlooked category of agents of economic transnationalism'.

To wrap up, in analysing the link between high-skilled migration and globalisation, the literature has largely debated 'brain drain' and core-periphery dynamics, in which high-skilled workers tend to move from developing to developed countries. When it comes to the specific drivers of migration, economic factors are often considered crucial. The role of globalisation further emerges by strengthening links between countries of origin and destination, in particular by facilitating the creation of transnational networks.

2.3 High-skilled migration from Turkey

A few studies have examined the drivers of Turkish high-skilled migration. Karaduman and Çoban[49], surveying 148 Turkish citizens with tertiary education residing abroad, found that better job and income opportunities, education, and networks (among other factors) played a key role. In particular, occupational factors were ranked as a top factor in leading to the migration decision by 45% of respondents. Simultaneously, the quality of education and adherence to the rule of law were perceived as key in 'pulling' migrants to specific destinations. Finally, almost half of the respondents had personal networks in the country of destination, before migrating.

Ozcurumez and Yetkin Aker[50], conducting 112 interviews with highly skilled Turkish migrants in Canada and Germany, similarly found that economic factors were crucial. They stress however that 'higher wages are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition [for respondents] to choose one country over another as their destination. [Instead, respondents] focus on economic opportunities in relation to their career plans'. Based on their findings, the quality of education, and whether a country is perceived as 'immigrant-friendly' or not, are additional key considerations in the choice of the destination country. Finally, here too social networks emerged as influencing the choice of destination country. Interestingly however, that was not only in the form of having friends or family in a country, but also as related to the presence of a large co-ethnic community.

Finally, and in line with the above, Güngör and Tansel[51] deem economic factors as key, but stress that this is not only in the form of wage differentials. In their view, 'unemployment, and economic and political instability' in Turkey, as well as 'better career prospects and lifestyle freedom' in receiving countries, are important determinants.

Thus, high-skilled emigration from Turkey has often been related to economic factors, and the choice of the country of destination to employment opportunities, institutional and policy frameworks, and personal networks.

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[44] D. Massey, J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino, J.E. Taylor, *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*, in *Population and Development Review*, 19(3)/1993, p. 431 ss.
[45] M. Rosina, *The criminalisation of irregular migration in Europe*, cit., p. 38.
[46] S. Castles. *Why Migration Policies Fail*, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 27(2)/2004a, p. 211 ss.
[47] A. Triandafyllidou, and R. Gropas, *"Voting With Their Feet": Highly Skilled Emigrants From Southern Europe*, in *American Behavioural Scientist*, 58(12)/2014, p. 1621 ss.
[48] C. Ban '*Economic Transnationalism and its Ambiguities: The Case of Romanian Migration to Italy*', in *International Migration*, 50(6)/2012, p. 144 ss.
[49] H. Karaduman and E. Çoban, *Brain Drain in Turkey*, cit.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 209.

If moments of crisis can ignite latent migration desires, however, *the current economic and political situation* in Turkey is likely to exacerbate the above. While the Turkish GDP saw an average yearly growth of 5.8% between 2002 and 2021, the situation has drastically reversed since then[52]. Inflation reached 83% in September 2022, and the lira plummeted to historical lows.[53] Based on a Yöneylem Social Research Centre survey, two in three people in the country have difficulties buying food and paying rent[54]. The political situation is meanwhile deteriorating, with Freedom House changing Turkey's global freedom status from 'partly free' in 2017, to 'unfree' since 2018, in light of president Erdoğan's efforts in concentrating power and dismissing key checks and balances.[55] In light of the above, experts expect migration, particularly of the highly-skilled, to be greatly incentivised[56]. Indeed, Dudu and Rojo view 'the authoritarian policies and practices of the AKP and the loss of economic stability'[57] as key 'push factors' behind Turkish high-skilled migration.

2.4 Turkish migration to Italy: 1990-2020

Turkish emigration is growing, and increasingly qualified. Among OECD countries, Turkey has the 8th largest diaspora network, with 2.1 million nationals living abroad as of 2010[58]. Turkish emigration is also increasingly *skilled*: the proportion of Turkish migrants with a university degree went from *4.4% in 1980 to 12.4% in 2010*[59]. If in 1980, about half of the highly-skilled Turkish workers went to Germany, by 2010, the USA was the top receiver of qualified Turkish migrants, capturing about 23% of such flows[60].

In this context, migration from Turkey to Italy began in the 1990s. If initially, it mainly included irregular flows of Kurdish asylum seekers and Turkish economic migrants (predominantly made up of single men), it then shifted to include family reunification[61], and only later to incorporate international student mobility (mostly in the form of Erasmus) and high skilled migration[62].

Table 1. Resident foreigners with Turkish citizenship as of January 1st (2015-2021)

	2015	*2016*	*2017*	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*
Total ITALY	**19450**	**19388**	**19217**	**19509**	**18780**	**19168**	**20999**

Source: https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri/turchia

Over the last few years, migration from Turkey to Italy seems to have slightly increased. 20,999 Turkish people were regularly present on the Italian territory in 2021, against the 19,168 of 2020 and the 18,780 0f 2019[63] (not counting those who renounced their Turkish passport). This is roughly

[52] J. Askew *Soaring inflation and a collapsing currency: Why is Turkey's economy in such a mess?*, in *Euronews*, 05/10/2022.
[53] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63120478; https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/ eurofxref-graph-try.en.html.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2022.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] S. Dudu & T. Rojo, *The European Union as a destination of Turkish migrants in 2008–2018*, in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2022, p. 1 ss.
[58] E. Acar *An Outline of Skilled Emigration from Turkey to OECD Countries: A Panel Data Analysis*, in *International Journal of Economics and Innovation*, 3(1)/ 2017, p. 1 ss.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] G. Ince-Beqo, *Migrazione tra il desiderio e la paura della casa: Le esperienze delle donne migranti della Turchia in Italia* in *Mondi Migranti*, 40(1)/2020, p. 185 ss.
[62] S. Samuk, *Turkey country profile*, in I. Fontana, M. Rosina and S. Samuk (cur.), *La dimensione esterna della politica di migrazione italiana* (DEPMI), The Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, 2022.
[63] ISTAT, Data on foreign residents.

consistent with figures of Turkish residents in Italy in 2018-2015. Although the above represents a rather low figure when compared to other nationalities present in Italy (Albanians for instance were over 380,000 in 2020) or other migrant communities from Turkey in other European countries (slightly less than 3 million in Germany), the number has been growing steadily in recent decades[64].

Moreover, the composition of such flows has also changed, to the extent that today, entering for study reasons is the most common way. As a CESPI report[65] shows, the number of students enrolled in Italian universities rose from 940 in 2015 (about 1.29 percent of total foreign admissions) to 2,626 in 2020 (about 2.72 percent of the total), with the two most popular regions being Lombardy and Piedmont.

Interestingly, Italy has been considered as a transit country for many migrants and refugees coming from Turkey, hoping to move further North to other EU countries, especially in Germany[66]. In the 1990s, the aspirations of Kurdish asylum seekers matched Italian migration policies, based on fewer border controls to facilitate the mobility of arrivals to other European countries[67]. The Dublin Regulation of 1997, however, changed this situation, making them apply for asylum in the first EU country they arrived in[68]. And yet, the changed policy context did not necessarily hinder migrants' aspirations, as recent research has shown that second-generation Turks and Kurds in Italy often aim to move to Germany, where they feel their diasporic identity would be better suited[69].

Overall, being quite recent migration flows (especially when compared to other European countries where flows were regulated by bilateral agreements since the 1960s), the Turkey-originated community in Italy is quite young, with first generation migrants being predominantly middle-aged. We may therefore expect networks not to be as well-developed as in other European countries, yet.

Having examined the theoretical debates surrounding high-skilled migration, and the history of migration from Turkey to Italy, the remainder of the paper focuses on the interviews conducted with Turkish professionals in Italy. Specifically, section 3 discusses the methodology, and section 4 analyses the interviews to shed light on respondents' motivations and aspirations.

3. Methodology

To explore high-skilled migration, we conducted 20 online semi-structured interviews. In reaching participants, snowball sampling was used. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to be flexible. The average interview lasted one hour, and all interviews were recorded upon the consent of the interviewer.

The interview questions can be separated into three categories: their past decisions (motivations to leave Turkey and go to Italy), their social and cultural life in Italy, and their future migration/mobility plans (if any). In this paper, we mainly focus on the motivations, as the questions regarding leaving Turkey and moving to Italy have been an integral and major part behind the philosophy of interviews.

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64 S. Dudu & T. Rojo, *The European Union as a destination of Turkish migrants*, cit.

65 https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/approf. 18 de silva-diplomazia culturale italia-turchia 0. pdf.

66 G. Ince-Beqo, an d M. Ambrosini, *Reimagining the homeland: diasporic belonging among Turkish and Kurdish second generations in Italy,* in *International Review of Sociology* 32(3)2022. p. 483 ss; S. Purkis, *Invisible Borders of the City for the Migrant Women from Turkey: Gendered Use of Urban Space and Place Making in Cinisello/Milan* in *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(1)/2019, p. 261 ss; I. Sirkeci, *The Environment of Insecurity in Turkey and the Emigration of Turkish Kurds to Germany*, New York, 2006.

67 A. Triandafyllidou & M. Ambrosini *Irregular Immigration Control in Italy and Greece*, cit., p. 251 ss.

68 M. Armelloni, *Comunità e ambiguità: Il caso dei rifugiati politici kurdi*, in M. Van Aken (cur.). *Milano rifugio*. Napoli, 2008.

69 *Ibid*.

Online interviews regarding high-skilled migrants[70] have been quite relevant as we think about the geographically dispersed population samples. To reach the highly skilled migrants, we used our own networks and afterwards we did snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was crucial at this point as those proposed by the smaller group of first interviewees proved to be from different backgrounds. This, then helped the researchers to diversify the sample not only in terms of the scholar vs. non-scholar dichotomy but also regarding gender, class and age.

The interviewees sample includes 17 professionals (engineers, researchers, designers, consultants) and 3 students. Although students are not yet technically "high skilled migrants", their insight was important to better understand the aspirations of individuals about to become so.

Table 2. Interviewees' list

	Gender/age	*Profession*	*Region*
1	Female1 /28	Student	Lombardy
2	Female 2/ 27	Postdoctoral researcher	Marche
3	Female 3 / 32	Finance & insurance sector	Emilia Romagna
4	Female 4/ 40	PhD researcher	Marche
5	Male 1 /35	Engineer	Piedmont
6	Male 2 /35	Engineer	Marche
7	Male 3 /30	Engineer	Lombardy
8	Female 5/ 50	Manager	Lombardy
9	Male 4/30	Engineer	Lombardy
10	Female 6 /45	Multinational company employee	Lombardy
11	Male 5 /30	Researcher	Tuscany
12	Female 7 /33	PhD researcher	Tuscany
13	Female 8 / 3	PhD researcher	Tuscany
14	Male 6 /30	PhD researcher	Tuscany
15	Male 7/20	Student	Lombardy
16	Female 9 /20	Student	Lombardy
17	Male 8 / 32	Designer	Liguria-Holland
18	Female 10/35	Multinational company employee	Lombardy – Holland
19	Male 9 /28	PhD researcher	Tuscany
20	Female 11/35	Turkish teacher	Tuscany

We follow Bryman (2016) in "exploring how interviewees might discuss a topic in different ways or differ from each other in certain ways or exploring whole texts such as transcripts and asking how they differ" (p.586). Hence, we analysed the interviews according to their differences and similarities in how they discuss the reasons for leaving Turkey, the reasons for choosing Italy, how they define their social and cultural integration, and how they explain their various future plans. We

[70] Ş. Samuk & S. Burchi, *Preparing for online interviews during Covid-19: the intricacies of technology and online human interaction,* in *SN Social Sciences*, *2*(10)/2022, p. 1 ss.

found the commonalities and divergences amongst the narratives, which paved the way for the emerging themes (see Table 3).

4. Migration drivers, integration, and future plans

Interview analysis followed the main themes of the interview outline and are therefore categorized as follows: migration drivers (why migrating from Turkey and why choosing Italy), cultural and social integration (mobility dissonance and differentiated embedding) and future plans (stay, return, move to another country). The emerging themes are collected in Table 3, and expanded upon in the next subsections.

Table 3. Emerging themes

Migration drivers	*Integration*	*Future intentions*
Why leave Turkey? • Economic factors (employment opportunities, career progression, wage differentials, …) • Social and cultural factors (prestige, knowledge-based sectors) • Culture of migration • Previous mobility as a perpetuator **Why move to Italy?** • Attractiveness of specific sectors (design, cultural heritage, architecture…) • Geographic proximity • Cultural and linguistic ties • Role of randomness	**Factors shaping integration:** • Cultural familiarity • Language • Finding/not a long-term job • Having/not a partner **Other themes** • Mobility dissonance • Attachment to Italy (for those who have left)	**Mobility plans** • Staying in Italy • Moving to another European country • Returning to Turkey (temporarily or permanently)

4.1 Theme 1: Migration drivers: Why migrating and why to Italy?

This section will examine the motivations for leaving Turkey and going to Italy. Why did respondents leave Turkey?

To begin with**,** *economic factors* were an underlying motivating factor for most respondents. Several respondents mentioned the *precarity* characterising work life in Turkey, particularly in the academic sector. This does not mean that there is not any precarity in the Italian labour market. Yet precarity in Turkey, as reported by our interviewees, is at such a level that some young people do not feel as "normal" - as they struggle to pay rent, to obtain loans from banks, and more broadly to think about settling down. The prolonged precarity accompanies postponed transitions to adulthood. The sense of precarity was particularly acute among researchers: "I can see and plan my future only up until the next contract" (M, 31). Another PhD researcher (M, 29) also underlined that their contracts were dependent on the whims of the professors and the polarisation at the universities in Turkey. Beyond employment conditions, political and economic instability was mentioned by several participants as an important driver in the decision to leave Turkey. Overall, fears about not being economically self-sufficient largely shape the lives of the highly skilled Turkish migrants.

Social and cultural aspects played some role too. Results demonstrate that reasons for the emigration of the highly skilled to Italy is wanting to *feel at ease in a culture* (in this case, it could be generalised as the European culture rather than the Italian culture) where there is more acceptance of diversity. Hereby, diversity can be defined *gender, age and class* wise but even more general than that, diversity could also mean having *a different lifestyle* such as having a hobby that others respect

and do not estrange. Our sample includes people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and they all agree that the societal pressure (in some cases, it can be called "*mahalle baskısı"neighborhood pressure*) can be overwhelming. Especially when the research participant comes from a small town or even a medium sized city, neighbourhood pressure (how one is surrounded by demands of uniformity as the society does not tolerate change) is observed. Furthermore, the neighbourhood pressure reveals itself in different ways influencing the lives of both females and males. For instance, not being "manly" enough, having long hair, having different gender choices as well as having a character that opposes the life-style of the majority, but even simple things like reading a different genre of books are reasons to apply this pressure to individuals. Then, as the young and well-educated people come to Italy they see that there are less cultural taboos and codes on *age, gender and class*. Amongst our interviewees, three of the males involved in their PhDs underlined the fact that they felt this pressure. A research participant was shocked to see when he went to Poland for his Erasmus exchange studies, that there were older people riding bikes. That would be unacceptable where he comes from as people would think that older people should either be using a car or simply stay home.

Interestingly, *networks* were not found to be particularly significant. More than half of the respondents reported not knowing anyone in Italy before migrating. One of the interviewees defined the leave from Turkey to Italy as "yaprak dökümü", in other words, *"falling leaves"* or "defoliation". This term is mostly used for death in Turkish case but this time it meant mass migration of the highly skilled. In this context, some participants experienced leaving the country almost as an obligation: "everyone was going, there was no reason to stay" (M, 30). The fact that "everyone is leaving without looking back" (as one of the interviewees said) suggests the emergence of a 'culture of migration'[71]. Considering the great emphasis placed in the literature on migrant networks, their scarce relevance may be surprising. However, it can be understood in light of the quite recent nature of Turkish migration to Italy. In other words, we may be witnessing the formation of a new migration corridor.

In this context, why did respondents go to Italy specifically?

First, for certain sectors, Italy retains *key attractiveness. Positive perception of Italy in certain areas of study and work* played a key role. For several of the researchers interviewed, one of the most important factors for moving to Italy was entering knowledge-based sectors for which Italy plays its role in globalisation, including cultural heritage, art history, design, chemistry and certain engineering studies. Studying these themes in Italy earn them *"prestige".* A PhD (33 years, female) researcher who is about to graduate from Cultural Heritage said, "when I say that I do PhD in Italy to people I meet in Turkey, they take me more seriously". She also felt that she was more in the heart of Europe in terms of access to knowledge: "Since Italy is in the middle of Europe, books can arrive from France, Switzerland if needed". Italy is amongst the southern European countries but compared to the peripheral situation and sentiment of being in Turkey, Italy is spatially in the heart of Europe.

Cultural and linguistic ties of the respondents with Italy also seem to have played a role for several respondents. The Italian high school graduates we spoke to, chose Italy for their cultural and linguistic capacities and affinity. For those who are older, and are highly skilled, the cultural, political and economic reasons are quite common. However, amongst the older cohort, there were two people in the sample who also went to the Italian Cultural Institute or took private lessons in order to be able to speak Italian.

Besides, the belief in the higher education system has been in decline in Turkey in both younger and older cohorts. The scholarship opportunities are also considered by all the interviewees who come to Italy for undergraduate studies, both MA and PhD. Therefore, economic considerations are combined with the idea of better-quality education.

Geographical proximity was also mentioned by one interviewee. A research participant with an MA completed in the USA, suggested (F, 35) that after her grandmother got sick in Turkey, she started to

[71] J.H. Cohen & I. Sirkeci. *Cultures of migration: The global nature of contemporary mobility*, Austin, 2011.

think that she should be closer to home so that she would be able come with a plane without having greater difficulties in traveling.

Finally, an interesting finding is that an element of *randomness* was present for several interviewees. The role of randomness could be seen as the flip side of underdeveloped networks linking potential and actual Turkish migrants in Italy. The randomness of going to Italy is quite explanatory in many of the interviews. One of the interviewees defines Italy as "not so competitive as the UK and the USA". This recalls previous findings in the literature, according to which the country of destination is not necessarily a premeditated choice. In the case of asylum seekers in Italy, Rosina finds that for several respondents the country was 'not [their] choice'[72], attributing the answer to the role of smugglers and, possibly, SAR operations. Ince-Beqo and Ambrosini[73] similarly report that smugglers in Turkey charge different prices for different European countries, and that Italy, being one of the cheapest destinations, has been increasing popular. When it comes to high-skilled migrants, Triandafyllidou and Gropas find that 26% of Italian and 17% of Greek nationals did not specifically choose their respective countries of destination, but just sought to migrate[74]. Thus, the element of *"randomness"* involved in the migration process highlights that this is not necessarily a pre-determined and straightforward journey, but a more complex one, made up of opportunities and constraints, both at the high- and low-end of the skills level.

Randomness is complemented by the fact that some could not get *visas* for other countries. After a long search for a study abroad visa, some respondents ended up opting for more secure destinations and secure PhD programmes with scholarships. In one case, the UK refused a visa to a research participant, who could thus not leave for the degree in the UK. In another case, the interviewee originally wanted to go to the UK, but eventually gave up because of longer waiting times for a visa. Visa difficulties concern Italy too, as one respondent said that she had great difficulty in obtaining a visa from the Italian embassy, while it was easier for her to receive a visa from Holland. Overall, it was underlined that getting an Italian visa was difficult but not impossible.

The troubles on visas shows that there are serious doubts about the "mobility" of all the highly skilled as there is a hierarchy between the highly skilled depending on where they come from and depending on their European vs. Non-European origins. This inequality is imposed and reproduced by visa regimes, and even the skilled often struggle to overcome these barriers[75].

4.2 Theme 2: Italy: Cultural and social interactions in everyday life

The way that highly skilled migrants integrate socially, culturally, and economically varies to a great extent depending on their character, language skills and their socio-economic situation. The city that they live in, the company they work for, if they are scholars or not, their age group, if they speak the language or not, and whether they find a partner or not make significant difference. We found heterogeneous results regarding social and cultural integration. However, we also found that the length of the period they spend in Italy matters: The longer they stay, the more probable it is that they will be integrating into the community[76]. Furthermore, changes in the life-course (marriage, separation, finishing studies, finding a job etc.) influence the integration paths and processes of highly skilled migrants. Building on the above, in this section, we explore mobility dissonance and differentiated embedding for the highly skilled Turkish migrants.

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[72] M. Rosina, *The criminalisation of irregular migration in Europe*, cit.
[73] G. Ince-Beqo, and M. Ambrosini, *Reimagining the homeland*, cit.
[74] A. Triandafyllidou, and R. Gropas, *"Voting With Their Feet"*, cit.
[75] B. Bulut-Sahin & Y. Kondakci, *Conflicting Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education: Evidence from the Turkish Case*, in *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 2022; M. Czaika, H. de Haas, and M. Villares-Varela. *The Global Evolution of Travel Visa Regimes*, in *Popul Dev Rev*. 44(3)/2018, p. 589 ss.
[76] H. De Haas & T. Fokkema. *The effects of integration and transnational ties on international return migration intentions*, cit.

4.2.1 Mobility Dissonance

In several of the interviews, we identify instances of 'mobility dissonance'[77]. Mobility dissonance happens when people realise that their expectations, in terms of imagined feelings and imagined status that they would obtain in the host country, are not met once they become migrants. These struggles, however, shall also be considered under the circumstances that they are newcomers, and their problems correspond to those of any migrant newcomer who finds a pristine environment to live in and get accustomed to.

Examples of mobility dissonance emerged in several cases. In one case, a PhD researcher who was politically active back in Turkey, expected to find similar activism and socialisation modes, but was soon deluded by the fact that there were no student clubs, discussions, criticisms, and ideas that help a community grow. In another case, a highly skilled female professional who worked in Milan for a while, mentioned difficulties in housing and integration. As she reported: "even if I was paying more than half of my salary for an apartment, the apartments were old and dark." Moreover, "my office mates were very nice but I felt that they did not want to speak English […] I felt a bit lonely. Then due to the Covid-19 I escaped to Turkey and worked from there for a long time." After three years in Italy, she looked for jobs elsewhere, and eventually moved to the Netherlands.

At the same time, however, some of those who have left Italy report a strong sense of attachment to the country. A male of 33 years, after living in Italy for 10 years, spoke perfect Italian and was well integrated into the labour market. Just the salary was not good enough for him to save, and so he decided to move to Holland. What is interesting about him is that he felt quite a strong *cultural attachment to Italy as a result of learning the language and feeling part of the society.* If he returns from Holland, he returns back to Italy not to Turkey. This is in line with previous studies on secondary migration, suggesting strong attachment of the foreign community of 'onward migrants' to their Italian links in many cases[78].

4.2.2 Differentiated Embedding and Liquid Integration

Language skills and life stage were found as key in shaping respondents' sense of integration.

First, *language* can be both a key enabler and a barrier. In one case, for instance, one respondent reported that (M, 22): "In every opportunity I went to … (a big city) from … (the small city) for Italian courses and started to socialise even in the bars, and cafes. This has become a habit, so I started to speak Italian." Eventually, his social, cultural, and linguistic integration made him feel more at ease and overcome the initial sense of loneliness. In an opposite case, lack of language skills for a PhD researcher affected their self-confidence and sense of integration.

Second, one's life stage can greatly affect integration. This was exemplified in the interviews by the case of a PhD researcher who left Italy with Covid-19, got married in Turkey and eventually decided to stay there. This is remarkably familiar with the term "differentiated embedding"[79] where aspects of connecting to a place changes according to life circumstances and life course.

Not only for socialisation but also to feel at home in a place, language influences the lives and decisions of highly skilled migrants. Life course events are also significant making them decide where to stay and what to do. And yet, having better housing in the beginning, having more self-confidence during studies and being content with the work are of great importance for one to feel at home and not search for other options to move. Whilst mobility dissonance is inevitable for those

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[77] S. Bygnes, *Not all Syrian doctors become taxi drivers: stagnation and continuity among highly educated Syrians in Norway* in *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(1)/2021, p. 33 ss.

[78] L. S. Talani, M. Rosina, O. Torrisi, G. Monteleone, R. Deliperi, *La migrazione secondaria*, cit.

[79] L. Ryan *Differentiated embedding: Polish migrants in London negotiating belonging over time* in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(2)/2018, p. 233 ss.

who had diverse expectations, differentiated embedding is a routine part of life course for many. Therefore, integration varies and fluctuates throughout time as the term liquid integration implies[80].

4.3 Theme 3: Should I stay or should I go? Future intentions

Looking at respondents' future plans, we find heterogeneous results, due to life circumstances and different employment sectors. Future intentions revolved around: leaving Italy for another European country (9), leaving Italy to go back to Turkey (1), and wanting to stay in Italy (8).

4.3.1 Leaving Italy for another country

Often, the decision to move to another country is driven by career-oriented decisions, and facilitated by the presence of family or friends in those countries.

Career considerations play a key role for many respondents. Particularly those who go to Italy as highly skilled migrants via a multinational company, do not look for determinants such as social and cultural integration, but focus on career advancement. In this case, if they observe that these rules regarding meritocracy are not very much applied, they do not hesitate to change their workplace. A female research participant at the age of 35 lived in Italy for three years working in a multinational company. She said "people ten years younger than me started to have promotions that I could not have, it seemed like there was favouritism." They would not compromise their career if they do not understand the rules of the game in Italy, and they would rather move. Likewise, a male respondent (33 years of age) studied and started working in Italy. He was happy about where he lived, learnt the language, and worked non-stop since he started his studies, showing integration. He eventually leaved Italy seeking better salary in another European country.

The above is an example of onward migration from Italy to other countries. In particular, we found the Netherlands to be one of the countries of choice for several respondents. Although networks did not seem particularly relevant for the primary migration (from Turkey to Italy), they were more established when it came to secondary migration (from Italy to countries like Germany and the Netherlands). For some, Italy is thus a steppingstone that will help them continue their migration path to northern European countries.

Overall, highly skilled ones leave Italy for several reasons: *uncertainty and precarity, the mismatch between age and salary expectations, and not having clearer rules for career advancement* for those who work in both private and public sectors. In this sense, why Italians leave Italy[81] is similar to why Turkish leave Italy in search for better quality jobs. Pugliese (2018) prefers to use the term drivers (as we did) to define the reasons rather than just summarise the pull and push factors. In this case, the drivers are many and mostly related to realising *professional needs* in differentiated labour markets that offer diverse opportunities[82]. Drivers, in short, are multi-layered, as our paper shows.

4.3.2 Leaving Italy to go back to Turkey

A minority of respondents expressed the intention of returning to Turkey. Life-course events can define the conditions in which the return becomes permanent. A PhD student who finished her PhD thesis in Italy returned to Turkey temporarily and decided to get married for instance. In this case, settlement in Turkey was more advantageous rather than searching for jobs in Europe. She said: "I

[80] J. Skrobanek, & S. Jobst, S. *Liquid integration. Thinking beyond conventional understanding*, in *Миграция как ресурс социально-экономического и демографического развития* 2019, p. 307 ss.
[81] E. Pugliese, *Votare con i piedi*, in *Parolechiave*, 26(2)/2018, p. 121 ss.; S. Morano Foadi, *Key issues and causes of the Italian brain drain*, in *Innovation*, 19(2) /2016, p. 209 ss.; M. Alberio, F. Berti (cur.), *Italiani che Lasciano l'Italia. Le Nuove Emigrazioni al Tempo della Crisi*, Milano, 2020, p. 141.
[82] *Ibid*.

never had a chance to settle down till now. Unless I find an extraordinary job where my partner can also follow me, I aim to search for jobs here in Turkey and stay here".

In certain cases, there is a limbo, where the thesis is written and finished, the graduation awaits. Again, within this period, a research participant can choose to go to Turkey and search for jobs in Europe staying at home not to deal with the inconveniences of the visa regime or rent a place (causing financial burden eventually). Hence, the decision to return can also be a temporary and forced idea, whilst one waits for the conditions to become ripe to go back again to Italy or any other country in Europe where a decent job can be found.

4.3.3 Wanting to stay in Italy

There are also cases in which staying in Italy becomes more important due to other life course events, such as finding a partner and building a relationship. In this case, the state of transition is experienced in Italy. After finishing a PhD, a non-EU migrant has one year to search for jobs. This period is used to find any kind of job, not necessarily pursuing an academic life.

A young female (33 years old) is a PhD student in her last year of study and she has a partner that is a major motivation for her to stay. She is willing to work in different jobs than academic life (even low skilled jobs if she finds a legal one) for a temporary period so that she can stay. Having an Italian partner facilitates interaction with Italians, making also the idea of staying in Italy more pleasing, but the use of English as the communication language narrows the boundaries of the space in which interaction takes place because "most Italians are not fluent in English" (F, 35). On the other hand, for those who want to stay in Italy the similarities between two countries are essential: "Italy resembles Turkey in terms of climate, food, spending time away from home. That's why I would like to live here" (M, 35).

This section shows that most of the highly skilled Turkish immigrants we interviewed like Italy. However, if they can bring their skills to bear in another, more meritocratic place, they voluntarily or involuntarily move to that country. The similarity and cultural affinity are quite important reasons to get used to living in Italy. Yet, deciding to stay mostly depends on career considerations and having a partner or not. In our sample, none of the PhD students were able to find jobs instantly in Italy. We cannot generalise, but there is a need to look at each sector of PhD and see which ones are more prone to stay depending on what they study and what their thesis is about. Overall, our paper demonstrates that career considerations and life circumstances (such as marriage or partnership) make a great difference in changing the plans of the highly skilled Turkish migrants.

5. Conclusion

Very little is known about high-skilled immigration, particularly in the Italian context. What motivates qualified workers to move? What are key factors shaping their integration trajectories, and what are their ambitions?

In this paper, we have particularly examined high-skilled migration from Turkey to Italy, to start filling such gap. Unfortunately, no data is available on the qualification of Turkish migrants in Italy. Hitherto, the literature has often noted that Italy struggles to attract and retain the highly skilled[83], and the 'circulation of brains' cannot be realised whilst Turkey seems to be continuously losing its highly skilled youth.

Starting from viewing contemporary migratory flows as inherently linked to the process of globalisation, we have reviewed data on Turkish migration to Italy. This revealed a ten percent increase in 2021 (compared to 2020) in the number of Turkish migrants who have resident permits

[83] G. Tintori & V. Romei, *Emigration from Italy after the crisis*, cit.; F. Minneci *If there were a 'Highly Skilled Red Octopus'?*, cit., p. 170 ss.

in Italy. We also found quite a noticeable increase in the number of Turkish students who choose Italy for Erasmus studies.[84]

To expand on the above, we conducted interviews with 20 Turkish qualified workers currently in Italy. These were key to bring to light several previously underexplored aspects.

First, in line with existing literature, economic motivations, as well as cultural and social factors, were found to be important drivers of emigration from Turkey. Precarity and economic instability emerged from several interviews as key, to the extent that a respondent referred to the many qualified Turkish migrants as "falling leaves". Moreover, cultural unease in Turkey, and the view that migration increases one's 'prestige' were among the social and cultural factors motivating several of the respondents to leave their country.

Interestingly, we found little effect of networks, reflecting the relatively recent nature of Turkish migration to Italy (compared to that to Germany, for instance). Simultaneously, the interviews revealed an element of randomness in choosing Italy. This result is not unique, recalling similar trends with asylum seekers and low-skilled migrants[85]. In the case of highly skilled, however, we suggest that the element of randomness may be interpreted as the flip side of networks that are still in embryonic stages.

Regarding integration, an interesting contradiction was found. On one hand, some interviewees reported signs of 'mobility dissonance'[86]. In other words, expectations of easy integration, based on anticipated similarities between Italian and Turkish culture, were not always met. Instead, several interviewees revealed having struggled to integrate, due to language barriers, housing difficulties, their socio-economic situation, or lack of smooth transition from studies to finding jobs. On the other hand, however, a few respondents now living in other European countries reported a strong sense of cultural and emotional attachment to Italy.

Finally, when it comes to future intentions, nine out of twenty research participants intended to leave Italy. Career considerations and personal life-circumstances were often said to be key drivers of such decision. In particular, having a partner was often very influential on the decision to stay. In contrast, returning to Turkey is an option considered only by a very small minority of the interviewees.

Overall, in this research, we have started to unpack Turkish high-skilled migration to Italy, investigating migration drivers, integration levels, and future intentions. Although findings are hard to generalise, due to the limited nature of the sample, they are of key interest, as they are among the very few resources available on Turkish high-skilled migrants in Italy. Looking forward, the increasing number of Turkish students moving to Italy would be worth investigating further, comparing also the two countries' higher education systems. A second theme that deserves further research is how Turkish high-skilled migrants operate in the knowledge-based economy, and as agents of transnational diasporas.

4 6. Annex: Interview questions

- Why did you decide to leave Turkey/study abroad?
- Why did you choose Italy? Did you consider any other country and if so, why Italy?
- Did you know someone in Italy or someone who had moved there, before coming?

[84] https://ambankara.esteri.it/ambasciata_ankara/it/ambasciata/news/dall-ambasciata/2021/12/italia-chiama-tu_rchia-rapporto.html.

[85] M. Rosina, *The criminalisation of irregular migration in Europe*, cit.; G. Ince-Beqo and M. Ambrosini, *Reimagining the homeland*, cit.

[86] S. Bygnes, *Not all Syrian doctors become taxi drivers*, cit.

- Did you go to an Italian high school or language school?
- How is the Italian higher education system different from the Turkish one?
- Culturally, do you feel at ease?
- Do you think that studying in an Italian university will help improve your future prospects?
- Do you plan to stay in Italy after you finish your studies, or do you plan to move to another country, or back to Turkey?
- How did Covid-19 affect your arrival/stay to/in Italy?

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Abstract

In questo articolo analizziamo il flusso di migranti altamente qualificati dalla Turchia all'Italia, due Paesi caratterizzati dall'incapacità di trattenere manodopera qualificata. Da un punto di vista teorico, le teorie neoclassiche si aspettano che la migrazione sia una funzione degli squilibri spaziali (ad esempio, fattori di attrazione e di spinta con spiegazioni macro). Tuttavia, tale rappresentazione non è in grado di cogliere adeguatamente le complessità e i cambiamenti osservati nella migrazione dalla Turchia all'Italia nel corso del tempo. Indagando l'esperienza migratoria a livello macro (fattori strutturali), meso (reti, parentela) e micro (aspirazioni personali), il presente lavoro mira a far luce sul fenomeno poco esplorato della migrazione turca altamente qualificata in Italia. Esaminiamo 20 interviste con migranti altamente qualificati giunti in Italia negli ultimi dieci anni, per comprendere le loro traiettorie migratorie, l'integrazione sociale e culturale e i progetti futuri.

Parole chiave*: migrazione altamente qualificata; fuga dei cervelli; circolazione dei cervelli; integrazione; migrazione successiva; Turchia; Italia*

*

In this article we analyse the flow of high-skilled migrants from Turkey to Italy, as two countries characterized by their inability to retain skilled labour. From a theoretical viewpoint, neo-classical theories would expect the migration to be a function of spatial disequilibria (for instance, pull and push factors with macro explanations). Yet, such representation cannot adequately capture the complexities and changes observed with migration from Turkey to Italy over time. Investigating migration experience at the macro (structural drivers), meso (networks, family kinship), and micro level (personal aspirations), this paper thus aims to shed light on the under-explored phenomenon of highly skilled Turkish migration to Italy. We examine 20 interviews with highly skilled migrants who came to Italy within the last ten years, to understand their migration trajectories, social and cultural integration, and future plans.

Keywords*:* high-skilled migration; brain drain; brain circulation; integration; onward migration; Turkey; Italy