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## Estimating the potential migration from Turkey to the European Union: A literature survey

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# Estimating the Potential Migration from Turkey to the European Union: A Literature Survey

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HWWI Policy

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by the

HWWI Research Programme  
Migration Research Group

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# **ESTIMATING THE POTENTIAL MIGRATION FROM TURKEY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION: A LITERATURE SURVEY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The likelihood of a potential migration flow from Turkey into the European Union (EU) has increasingly been the focus of debates among academics and policy makers. As having one of the fastest growing populations of Europe, Turkey and its migration potential are the nexus of fears and concerns. Against this background, this paper is a survey of the growing literature on the estimations of the volume of potential migration from Turkey to the EU within the context of possible Turkish membership. Taking into account the methodological problems, drawbacks of the data and definitional issues, this article aims at critically evaluating the existing literature. In the light of ‘potential migration’ discussions, this paper emphasizes the necessity of a shift in the focus of debate from quantitative aspects, that are overemphasizing the economic aspects, to qualitative dimensions of migration potential from Turkey to the EU.

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## I. Introduction

Currently, EU receives 35,000 net migration from Turkey annually. Possible increase in the volume of migration potential from Turkey, in the case of full membership, generated considerable interest among economists and was subject to several econometric studies. These empirical attempts can be categorized into two groups. First group of studies use surveys and statistically evaluate these surveys to conclude about future trends in migration. Second group of studies econometrically shows the forecasted volumes. In this paper, both group of studies will be summarized and assessed.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section is a review of the literature on the forecasts of volume of Turkey's potential migration. Then follows a discussion of the drawbacks and downsides of the existing literature. It is followed by a section showing the insufficiency of estimations yet calls for a shift in the debate. The last section contains concluding remarks and further questions.

## II. Review of The Literature

In the literature, there are several approaches utilized in estimating the amount of potential migration. Error correction models test for the equilibrium in the long run in which part of the population has the potential to migrate. Gravity models analyze annual migration potential via various explanatory variables such as stock of existing migrants in the country, income discrepancies, unemployment rate differentials etc. Estimations depending on opinion pools are used to forecast the amount of expected migration flow. Based on earlier migration experiences, extrapolation is constructed in some studies for the forecasting purposes.

Togan (2002) makes a forecast of free Turkish migration to Germany. This forecast is based on an estimated model of immigration to Germany from EU-15, Norway, Turkey, the United States and former Yugoslavia, which is done by Boeri and Brucker (2000). Boeri and Brucker (2000) first estimates an error correction model taking account of migration responses to short run deviations from long run equilibrium relations. The data on migration to Germany from 18 industrialized countries over the period 1967-1998 is utilized in this study. It is concluded that the Turkish immigrant population starts out at about 2.2 million in 2000 and reaches about 3.5 million in 2030 under the assumption of zero restriction on migration.

Flam (2003) forecasts Turkish migration to Germany under the assumption that such migration will be completely free from restrictions from 2000 to 2030. Using the estimation of Boeri and Brucker (2000), free migration from Turkey to Germany from 2000 to 2030 is forecasted and estimation results are same with Togan (2002).

Lejour *et al.* (2004) elaborate on the potential migration flows following the accession of Turkey to the EU with a CGE (computable general equilibrium) model via which they explore the implications for labor markets. They expect that 2.7 million people will permanently move from Turkey to the EU in the longer term. The majority of these people

will settle in Germany, where Turks have settled in the past as well. Around 4 % of Turks will move to the Netherlands. Lejour *et al.* (2004) analyze the macroeconomic effects of these immigration flows as well. An expected inflow of 2.7 million Turks would reduce GDP in Turkey by between 1.8 % and 2.2%, and increase it in the EU-15 by between 0.5% and 0.7%, depending on the skill composition of migrants. In per capita terms, income in Turkey will rise while it falls slightly in the EU. If migrants are primarily unskilled, also wage inequality in the EU is likely to rise.

Krieger's (2004) report on the examination of the quality of life in 18 European countries is based on the data from the European Commission's Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2002 and standard EU-15 Eurobarometers. According to this report, in Turkey, the second youngest age group has the highest probability towards migration. This study shows that different family structures in Turkey may be the reason for later migration during the life course. Another explanation could be that the young age effect is superimposed by the 'student effect'. Students, the majority of whom are between 18-24 years old, have a significantly higher propensity to migrate than other occupational groups in Turkey. According to this study, in Turkey, unemployment is an important driver of migration, higher education is a pull and facilitating factor and the male influence on migration is insignificant in Turkey.

Erzan *et al.* (2006) employ the method of EU Commission report<sup>2</sup> namely the Seemingly Unrelated Regression (SUR) or Equations (SURE). The simulation results in this study for net migration from Turkey to the EU-15 over the period 2004-2030 is between 1 and 1.2 million foreseeing a successful accession period with high growth and free mobility starting 2015. If Turkey's membership process is endangered and high growth cannot be sustained, 2.7 million people may be penetrating the EU-15 despite the restrictions on the labor mobility. This study simulates couple of different scenarios and estimates different rates for Turkey's migration potential. Yet under the free movement scenario, amount of migration will reach to one million between 2004 and 2030. However, under the guest worker scenario, the amount is doubled itself and in 2030 the total accumulated migration stock would be 1.8 million. According to another scenario under the high growth rate and free movement assumptions, it is expected to have an increase by 2.1 million from 2004 to 2030. Finally, assuming low growth rates accompanied by non-free movement, migration flow from Turkey in 2030 exceeds 2.7 million.

Quasier and Reppegather (2004) by the Osteuropa-Institut (Munich) forecasts, in the absence of transition periods and with full application of free movement as from 2013, the long term potential migration from Turkey to Germany at 4.4 million. This forecast is based on the existing number of Turkish migrant as well as economic differentials at that date. Authors of the study emphasize that using DIW (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) methodology, would ring down the estimate to 0.5 million.

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Alvarez-Plata, Herbert Brücker and Boris Siliverstovs, Potential Migration from Central and Eastern Europe into the EU-15- An Update (Berlin: DIW, 2003)

Krieger and Maitre (2006) question the structure of potential migrants from Turkey. Their study is based on Eurobarometer Survey which is conducted by the European Commission. This data includes Poland, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, New 10 (eight of the formerly Communist Central and East European countries plus Cyprus and Malta.) and EU-15. According to this data, the highest intention to migrate is in Turkey with 6.2 %. The Turkish respondents topped the list of all 13 countries in the study as far as the general intention is concerned and are nearly at the bottom concerning a firm intention. Only 0.3 % of the Turkish population has a firm intention to migrate over the next five years. Krieger and Maitre (2006) come to the conclusion that , assuming a Turkish population stock of -all inhabitants of 15 years and older- nearly 48.9 million in 2003, this would lead to a predicted migration potential of 3.03 million for the general intention and 0.15 million for the firm intention. Based on the indicator defined by Krieger (2004), ‘basic intention to migrate’, one would predict a minimum amount of around 400.000 Turkish citizens over five years in the EU-15. Based on the same data set, Krieger and Maitre (2006) underlines the risk of youth drain for Turkey in which 8% of population between 15 and 24 years is willing to migrate. As far as the 25-39 year old age group is concerned, Turkey has the highest percentage. It is concluded in this study that Turkey has a slightly higher age profile than the other countries under study. With respect to mobility, Turkey has the highest proportion of a male population which is mobile (doubling the numbers for women). This study also shows the risks of brain drain since 15% of population with the university degree and 12% of students are willing to migrate. Among the unemployed, 12 % of them have potential to migrate. According to this study, Turkey is the only country in which rural migration rate is higher than the urban rate (7 % to 5%)

### III. How to Approach the Literature?

#### *Definitional Issues*

In analyzing the available forecasts, it is crucial to initiate the discussion with the very definition of “potential migrant”. The questions of “when, how and why a person becomes a potential migrant” must stand at the heart of all estimations, especially the ones based on opinion pools. “Migration intention” is a complicated concept whose measurement is fairly complex. Due to the subjectivity of the concept and its sensitivity to time, most of these studies suffer from these definitional absences. One of the main drawbacks of opinion pools and individual surveys is the biased impact of setting of questionnaire on the flow of answers. Hence, especially in the surveys, the distinction between the “intention” and “act” itself must be clearly underlined. For instance according to an opinion survey<sup>3</sup>81% of Turks prefer to stay in Turkey if the economic welfare gets better. Whereas, as it is explained in the literature review section, in Eurobarometer surveys, Turkey takes the top place when one considers the potential to migrate. Literature makes these forecasts under the present-day conditions and

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<sup>3</sup> Çarkoğlu, A., Erzan R., Kirişçi K. and H. Yılmaz, 2002. ‘Türk Halkının Avrupa Üyelğine Bakışı, TESEV.

does not take into account the political and economic changes that are expected to happen in the EU accession process. Main reasons behind the intention to migrate which are for sure “economic” are planned to be partly eliminated or at least to be improved under the EU membership. In that sense, Erzan *et al.* (2006)’s study is particularly important and diverge from the rest of literature due to its simulations under different scenarios of future Turkish economy.

#### *Methodological Problems and Drawbacks of the Data Sets*

The type of methodology varies from one study to another. Some of the studies replicate each other and reiterate the results. There is no doubt that assumptions behind the estimated models require a quality assessment. Traditional econometric models of estimations have the risk of reaching misleading results due to the data aggregation. These forecasts have some limitations due to the available data, especially with respect to Turkey. Deeper studies require the combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

#### *Wideness of the Range*

As it is briefly shown in the previous section existing research measuring and predicting the amount of future migration from Turkey into the EU presents varying numbers. Figures with respect to volume of potential Turkish migrants from Turkey to the EU range between 0.5 to 4.4 million. It is sufficient to say that the literature lacks an agreement on a reasonable interval with a minimum and a maximum value. Wideness of the range is rather large and quite sensitive to the data sets and methodologies that are applied, which brings the reliability of numbers into discussion.

#### IV. Numbers: ‘Necessary But Not Sufficient’

Besides all the fears related to the cultural, religious and political issues behind the reluctance of the EU about the Turkish accession, demographically, Turkey’s size and growing population is one of main fears of Europe. It is forecasted in several population studies that, Turkish population will excess that of Germany by 2010. In terms of voting rights, this provides Turkey with the largest share in the political arena. With the membership of Turkey, the population of the EU will increase by more than 15%. Hence the likelihood of massive migration flow from Turkey is the main concern for the EU. Most of the studies establish the truth of this argument. Exceptions do exist in the literature. For instance Erzan *et.al* (2006) argue that the fear of the EU about the volume of expected migration is not realistic. It is forecasted in this study that under the lack of full EU membership and free movement of labor, migration flow will be even at higher levels. The migration experience after the Eastern enlargement also proved that the actual migration flows are fairly below the expected levels, following the accession.

#### V. Concluding Remarks



Forecasting the approximate volume of potential migration is quite necessary especially for policy makers however not sufficient. One should be cautious when approaching the estimation literature since range is rather wide, quality of the data is poor and methodologies are unclear and inconsistent. Moreover, the focus of the debate should rather shift to the profile, the structure, the dynamics, the regional distribution, trends and mechanisms of potential migration and to the motivation of migrants to come to Europe. In this sense, studies based on the interpretation of Eurobarometer surveys give us some clues to some extent yet suffers from the weakness of data set.

Implications of these studies for policy matters are even more crucial, which is not sufficiently researched in the literature. Policy making in Turkey at national level providing the profound policy measures to retain potential Turkish migrants from migration decision, before the Turkish accession takes place, should be at the nexus of future migration management. Migration management would be challenging both for the EU and Turkey with the accession of Turkey to the union. Under a planned rational management, potential migration could turn into an opportunity for both parties. National government, local authorities together with the EU institutions must immediately initiate necessary preparations which play a significant role in transforming migration potential from being a challenge to an opportunity. Until the exact date of full membership both Turkey and the EU will evolve and develop which would bring new challenges and opportunities for both sides as well. Neither Turkey nor the EU would benefit from an unmanaged and unplanned migration flow.

Consequently, these studies are crucial contributions to the scientific debates on future migration trends however these forecasts have to be interpreted with some caution. To shift the focus of the debate one should assess the history of Turkish migration to the Europe, at the first place, so as to initiate a discussion about the future migration.

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