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### Navigating risks, shaping mobilities

*A mixed-method study of migration aspirations among displaced people from Syria and Afghanistan in Turkey*

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## **Chapter 6:**

Migration Aspirations in Relation to  
Border Closures, Employment  
Opportunities and Risk-Taking  
Attitudes: Lessons from an  
Experimental Online Survey

### Abstract

This article investigates the effect of structural and individual factors on migration aspirations in a secondary migration context. Through an online experiment conducted with Syrian migrants ( $N = 551$ ) living in Turkey, we unpack factors explaining aspirations to stay and move onward from the current country of residence. The findings indicate that open borders alone do not compel migrants to move onward. Instead, employment opportunities in their current residence play a crucial role in shaping aspirations to stay put. Moreover, individuals inclined to take risks are more likely to migrate, even when strict border controls are in place. By highlighting the question of what motivates migrants to stay instead of moving onward, this research emphasizes individual differences in forming migration aspirations and contributes to migration aspirations literature in the secondary migration context.

**Keywords:** *Migration aspirations, employment, border closures, Syrian refugees, survey analysis, experimental design, risk-taking*

### Introduction

On June 14, 2023, eight years after so-called 2015 “refugee crisis,” a fishing trawler carrying 750 migrants from Italy to Greece sank in the Mediterranean Sea. Only 104 survived, making it one of the deadliest incidents of its kind in recent times. In the aftermath, Greek border guards were accused of intentional involvement in the trawler's sinking, leading to significant criticism and controversy. The incident was much more than a tragic border spectacle: it has multiple layers, and offers insights into how migration policymaking affects migrant journeys that are full of risks.

Despite being one of the deadliest incidents, the June 14<sup>th</sup> incident is not unique or unusual in the Mediterranean. The EU's migration and border policies have turned the Mediterranean route into a space of violence, death, drowning of refugee boats, and pushbacks (İşleyen & Qadim, 2023; Tazzioli, 2016). Meanwhile, funding schemes in the context of migration governance construct host countries – usually the ones neighboring conflict-torn regions – as spaces of opportunities to avoid migrants moving onward to developed Western countries (Müller-Funk et al., 2023). Albeit limited, and insufficient, it is assumed that providing opportunities such as employment to migrants would make them integrate in the host countries and eventually increase their aspiration to stay put. In a way, migration policies oscillate between increasing border controls along migration routes, and providing migrants with opportunities in order to keep them where they are (Kipp & Koch, 2018). Yet, some migrants who are more prone to take risks still embark on dangerous journeys, usually as a way of showing resistance towards border controls (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Maâ, 2023; Schapendonk, Bolay, & Dahinden, 2021).

In this context, the following open question can be posed: To what extent are migration aspirations subject to exogenous shocks, such as border closures, or opportunities such as employment, in the context of secondary migration? While tackling this important empirical puzzle, our conceptual framework also aims to explore whether migrants' *risk-taking attitudes* influence their aspiration to embark on dangerous journeys.

This research contributes to the migration literature by focusing on secondary migration aspirations, where individuals had to flee their home country for another and consider further migration from the first host country. To answer what motivates migration aspirations in such constrained mobility contexts, we test the effect of structural and individual level factors with a between-group online experimental survey conducted with Syrian migrants in Turkey.<sup>23</sup> We include *border closures*, *employment opportunities*, and *subjective risk-taking attitudes* as factors affecting migration aspirations. Experimental research has so far been used to investigate migration decision-making outside the context of forced migration (Ewers & Shockley, 2018; McKenzie & Yang, 2012; Petzold, 2017). Hence, using experiments to study migration aspirations in a forced displacement context is a novel approach. Recently, only a few experimental studies have investigated migration aspirations using the framework of push and pull factors between destination and origin countries (Bah & Batista, 2018; Detlefsen, Heidland, & Schneiderheinze, 2022; Hager, 2021). We contribute to this research line by employing an experimental setting that enables us to manipulate the structural factors shaping onward migration aspirations in forced migration contexts. Plus, our approach allows us to gain insights into the variations in individual personality traits.

Existing research explores factors shaping migration aspirations mainly at the structural and individual levels, within the context of either the home or destination country. Structural-level-focused studies examine the impact of border externalization policies on migration management (Cobarrubias et al., 2023; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010), while individual-focused research investigates perceptions of individuals, life cycles, and personal attributes (Alpes, 2014; Boccagni, 2017; Kuschminder, de Bresser, & Siegel, 2015; Syed Zwick, 2022). A few studies examine migration aspirations at a combination of individual and structural levels (Helbling & Morgenstern, 2023). Moreover, the majority of research on migration aspirations, with a few exceptions (Hager, 2021; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Müller Funk, 2019), has concentrated on either the home or destination country, largely overlooking aspirations to stay in the current host country. This research aims to address

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<sup>23</sup> Turkey does not offer any long-term solutions for Syrian migrants, and the overwhelming majority of them have a temporary legal status. While official numbers indicate that over 200,000 Syrians received Turkish citizenship (see: <https://www.diken.com.tr/soylu-vatandaslik-alan-suriyeli-sayisi-200-bin-950/>), an overwhelming majority of Syrians have a dubious legal status. The Regulation on Temporary Protection grants access to public services such as healthcare and education, but it does not grant the right to work in the formal labor market. Despite the provision of basic services, many Syrian refugees face obstacles on a daily basis due to informal employment, scarce livelihood opportunities, rising living costs, and widespread anti-immigration attitudes in society (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017). See the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) website: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last accessed: April 5, 2023

this gap, generating insights into the onward migration decision-making patterns in forced displacement contexts.

Our findings indicate that implementing open border policies does not in itself compel migrants to move onwards. Instead, migrants consider employment opportunities in their current place of residence, even when borders are open for passage (i.e., to such welfare states as the EU countries). However, migrants' aspirations are not only shaped by these policies. Migrants are neither victims, nor passive pawns without agency (De Haas, 2021). Thus, our study also provides a room for human agency by analyzing differences in individual characteristics in forming migration aspirations. Our findings show that individuals with a higher inclination for risk-taking are more likely to move onward, even when confronted with strict border controls. Incorporating risk-taking attitudes as individual characteristics brings a novel approach to migration literature, showing that not every migrant can be deterred by strict border controls.

Turkey is a suitable case to explore secondary migration aspirations. Besides being a host country for around 3.6 million registered Syrian migrants, Turkey poses geographical significance as one of the European Union's external borders.<sup>24</sup> After the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016, Turkey has been constructed as a space to deter migrants from entering the EU's borders and equipped with, albeit inadequate, policy interventions which aim to foster migrants' aspirations to stay put by providing opportunities for local integration (Üstübcü et al., 2021). Based on a convenient sample of Syrians living in Turkey ( $N = 551$ ), we asked the participants to assess four experimental vignettes about a hypothetical person and a control group. We crossed two vignettes involving *border closures* and *employment opportunities* to evaluate the conditions that would shift migration aspirations.

The article is organized as follows. We first discuss the existing literature on migration aspirations, particularly explaining the relevance of *border closures and externalization policies*, *employment opportunities*, and *risk-taking attitudes* in migration journeys by presenting our hypotheses. Plus, we briefly present the social, political and legal contexts that Syrian migrants are subjected to in Turkey that inspired the design of the survey experiment. Second, we explain our data and experiment design. The third section lays out the results using regression models. Finally, we discuss the policy implications of the interaction between border externalization policies and employment opportunities, and the role of risk-taking attitudes in migration aspirations literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We define *migration aspirations* as the perspectives of migrants on their future mobility. The *aspirations-abilities framework* combines structural and individual factors to understand how aspirations and abilities are formed (Carling, 2002, 2014; Carling &

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<sup>24</sup> The PMM website <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> Last accessed: Aug 28, 2023

Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018). To unpack how *aspirations* are formed, the framework analyzes communal social, economic, and political contexts at the macro level, and individual characteristics at the micro level, in determining who wants to migrate and who wants to stay. On the individual level, the framework focuses on the characteristics that affect how people cope with restrictive migration policies. Against this complex theoretical model, this paper selects two aspects at the structural level (border externalization policies and employment opportunities), and focuses on risk-taking attitudes at the individual level.

### Structural Factors: Border closures and externalization policies

The externalization of migration management has become a significant concern for various countries, including the U.S., Australia, the member states of the European Union, and, more recently, countries in the Global South (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). Externalization is a broader term and refers to the activities undertaken by states, directly or indirectly, outside their territorial boundaries to control borders (Cobarrubias et al., 2023).<sup>25</sup> Notably, the states in the Global North have developed strategies to prevent the entry of undesirable migrants at their borders (Hyndman & Mountz, 2008). Scholars have explored how this unwanted migration influences the processes of border externalization in receiving states (Stock, Üstübcici, & Schultz, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019), focusing on the practices of state actors (Côté-Boucher et al., 2014; El Qadim, 2017) at the discursive and practice levels (İşleyen, 2018a, 2018b; Karadağ, 2019). While the literature has debated the effectiveness of these border externalization practices, the impact of such policies on migrants' perceptions has received less attention (Hager, 2021). This study aims to contribute to this particular research trajectory.

Common sense would say that open borders would increase migration. While open borders may initially increase migration from less developed to developed regions of the world, evidence shows that they also bolster circulation and return (de Haas, Vezzoli, & Villares-Varela, 2019; Flahaux & Vezzoli, 2017; Vezzoli, 2021). Second, closed borders are assumed to be stopping migrants without documents. Some scholars show that border enforcement policies decrease the number of migrants crossing the borders (Alden, 2017; Sorensen & Carrion-Flores, 2007). Despite the decreasing numbers, border closures fail to deter migrants from taking risks (Dávila, Pagán, & Soydemir, 2002; Gathmann, 2008; Douglas S Massey et al., 2016). Rather than stopping migrants, closed borders direct them to pursue alternative, more dangerous channels (Vezzoli, 2021). In a way, border externalization policies create a self-perpetuating cycle, forcing migrants to take risks at borders rather than deterring them (Douglas S Massey et al., 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> In our study, we employ the term "externalization" as a comprehensive concept encompassing various practices, such as border closures, controlling smuggling networks, or border guards' attitudes towards refugees. Although our research does not specifically delve into distinct forms of border externalization policies, it aligns with and contributes to the existing literature in this field. Acknowledging the differences between the concepts of border closures and externalization, we use both terms interchangeably.

Due to challenging living conditions, some Syrians residing in Turkey are inclined to consider onward migration, particularly towards Europe. Being deprived a full-fledged refugee status without a prospect of local integration (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017), experiencing economic vulnerability compared to natives (Elçi et al., 2021), and facing limited access to protection (Karadağ & Üstübici, 2021) pose significant challenges for Syrians living in Turkey. Recent strict visa policies and closed borders limit their options for legal migration channels (Welfens & Bekyol, 2021), and direct them to take high risks in undocumented migration (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023).

When Syrian migrants first arrived in Turkey, many moved on to seek asylum in EU countries. In 2015, around 1.3 million migrants fled Turkey. The EU and its member states responded to this influx by closing their borders under the discourse of "the refugee crisis".<sup>26</sup> In response, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan (November 2015) and the EU-Turkey Statement (March 2016) were implemented, representing the EU's efforts to externalize its migration and border policies (İşleyen, 2018a; Üstübici, 2019). Additionally, Turkey was promised financial support by the EU, under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), to be spent on the protection and integration of displaced communities, especially Syrians. The design of these policy interventions reflects the rationale of the current international asylum regime, perceiving the secondary mobility as politically undesirable. Although the legal basis and effectiveness of these migration and border policies are widely debated (Aydın Düzgüt, Keyman, & Biehl Öztuzcu, 2019; Daniş, 2021; Pries & Zülfikar Savci, 2023; Schiefer et al., 2023; Tekin, 2022; Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017), to our knowledge, there is no study measuring the effectiveness of these policies and the validity of their assumptions in the context of Turkey using survey experiment methods.

Evidence suggests that aspirations to move onward from Turkey persist (Kuschminder et al., 2019; Üstübici & Elçi, 2022), despite the strict border controls initiated with the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016. According to the latest statistics from the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) (2023), the number of migrants apprehended at the borders increased after the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Despite the EU's efforts to externalize its migration and border policies with the EU-Turkey Statement, border crossings continued. The number of apprehended individuals tripled between 2015 and 2019, from 146,485 to 454,662. Although the number of apprehended individuals declined during the pandemic to 122,302, in 2022 it reached a second peak of 285,027. The majority of apprehended migrants are Afghans and Syrians but also include Palestinians and Iraqis. Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) (2023) data also show a similar trend for the Eastern Mediterranean route for undocumented border crossings. The total number of people who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea since 2014 has reached almost 25,000 (Sunderland, 2022). In short, people who face dire living conditions may feel

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<sup>26</sup> See Pallister-Wilkins (2019) for a critical view on the representation of migration journeys: <https://www.societyspace.org/articles/walking-not-flowing-the-migrant-caravan-and-the-geoinfrastructuring-of-unequal-mobility>

compelled to continue their journey despite the risks (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). Hence, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 1: Decreasing (increasing) risks at the borders and welcoming (exclusionary) policies in wealthier countries motivate aspirations to move onward from (stay in) the current country of residence.*

### Employment Opportunities

The second line of research focuses on the role of employment opportunities in migration aspirations. The effect of employment opportunities on migration aspirations is commonly measured from the origin-host country perspective, i.e. employment opportunities in host countries (Becerra et al., 2010; Chindarkar, 2014; Groenewold, de Bruijn, & Bilsborrow, 2012; Roth & Hartnett, 2018). The role of employment opportunities in the secondary migration context is less studied (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021). This section discusses the research on the role of employment opportunities in migration aspirations.

Previous research shows that economic concerns motivate onward migration towards countries with better employment opportunities (Collyer, 2006; Collyer et al., 2012; Hager, 2021; Kuschminder, 2018; Van Hear, 2006). In the secondary migration context, satisfaction with employment opportunities fosters aspiration to stay in the current place rather than move onwards. Some other research, however, shows that regular income and remittance capabilities can provide migrants with the opportunity to make savings for onward migration (Donini, Monsutti, & Scalettari, 2016), especially in countries where migrants do not have alternative channels to smuggling. Shortly, financial security is a strong determinant in forming migration aspirations. The direction of migration aspirations, based on employment opportunities, is still contextual: while for some, financial means may enhance capabilities to move onwards, for others, it may imply improving one's livelihood, hence fostering aspirations to stay put (Mata-Codesal, 2018).

Formal employment opportunities for Syrian migrants in Turkey are limited due to policies that restrict their integration into the labor market. For instance, the Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection launched in January 2016, based on the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, allowed Syrians to access work permit procedures through their employers, although implementation has been somewhat restricted. Of almost 2 million working-age Syrians, only 91,500 individuals were granted work permits in Turkey.<sup>27</sup> As a result, most working-age Syrians have ended up in insecure or underemployed positions in the informal sector (Bélanger & Saracoglu, 2020; Düvell, Schiefer, Sağiroğlu, & Mann, 2021). The lack of or limited employment opportunities in Turkey poses a significant challenge for migrants who aspire to stay in Turkey but feel obliged to move onwards. In this regard, we hypothesize that:

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<sup>27</sup> See Work Permits of Foreigners 2021, published by the Turkish Ministry of Labor <https://www.csgeb.gov.tr/media/90062/yabanciizin2021.pdf>



*Hypothesis 2: Legal (precarious) employment opportunities foster (hinder) aspirations to stay in the current country of residence.*

### Individual Factors: Risk-taking attitudes

Even when border crossing is "a matter of life and death" (Walters, 2011, p. 138), some migrants aspire to migrate despite the risks involved (Kaytaç, 2016; Strasser & Tibet, 2019; Topak, 2014). Research shows that incorporating risk-taking attitudes into migration aspirations research could explain why individuals aspire to move onwards, stay, or return (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023; Williams & Baláz, 2014). If individual differences in risk-taking attitudes significantly shape migration aspirations, then structural conditions, such as border externalization policies, would not impact all individuals equally. Border externalization policies are predominantly based on the assumption that being aware of risks on the route would deter migrants. But this assumption that migrants lack knowledge fails to account for individual differences in risk-taking propensity, which can vary widely among migrants. Therefore, the effectiveness of these policies in deterring migration cannot be assumed to be universal and must be understood within the context of differences in individuals' characteristics.

Migrants who venture the risks of borders are neither incognizant of the risks involved in their journey nor "irrational" decision-makers (Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2023). Conversely, migrants are often well-informed about the dangers *en route* (Belloni, 2016). With this information, migrants anticipate the risks at each step of their migration journeys and form their aspirations accordingly (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). These findings challenge the notion that migrants are passive victims entirely reliant on external constraints (De Haas, 2021). Instead, migrants exhibit agency, and their attitudes toward risk-taking are highly individualized. In this regard, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3: High (Low) tendency to take risks decreases (increases) the effects of structural barriers on the aspiration to move onwards (stay put).*

In light of this background, the hypothetical vignettes in our survey experiment are developed to echo a real-life policy environment marked by border closures and the government's selective provision of legal employment opportunities. Recent border and migration policy developments in Turkey, explained above, make the latter a suitable case to test these hypotheses on the impact of border controls and employment incentives on migration aspirations.

### **Data Collection and Methods**

We conducted an online survey from November 18 to December 31, 2020, utilizing Facebook and Instagram advertisements to recruit participants ( $N = 551$ ). These ads invited individuals to participate in a survey regarding their migration experiences in Turkey. To

ensure privacy and anonymity, we collected data from the Qualtrics survey tool and randomly assigned respondents to different experimental groups. The survey and its advertisements were presented in Arabic and were geographically limited to Turkey. Furthermore, we targeted Syrian individuals through online advertisements, inviting them to participate. All participants were provided with an informed consent form before initiating the survey. Only those who granted their consent were given access to the survey questions. Respondents who only partially completed the survey, those who later indicate not having Syrian nationality, and those who failed attention checks were excluded from the analysis. It is worth noting that this survey formed part of a broader study. On average, participants took 31 minutes (standard deviation = 42) to complete the survey.

We chose not to offer incentives to recruit participants for several reasons. Firstly, while incentives are commonly used to increase response rates in online surveys, our pilot surveys did not indicate any difficulties in obtaining responses that would necessitate the use of incentives. Secondly, research suggests that incentives can introduce measurement errors, as respondents may rush through the survey to obtain the incentive quickly (Elliott & Valliant, 2017). Additionally, offering incentives may raise ethical concerns, particularly in the context of our study in Turkey, where Syrians often live in precarious conditions and rely on aid for their livelihoods. Providing a survey with a prize could be perceived as misleading and may create a sense of dependency on aid among respondents.

The convenience sampling technique employed in our study had certain constraints due to our reliance on Facebook and Instagram advertisements for participant recruitment. As a result, our sample may exhibit bias towards individuals who are more educated, literate, and financially affluent, potentially overlooking illiterate, elderly, and economically disadvantaged Syrian refugees. Furthermore, since the survey was conducted online, possession of a smartphone or computer and access to Facebook and Instagram accounts were prerequisites for participation. Consequently, our sample is limited to Syrian refugees who have access to these devices and online platforms.

Despite the inherent challenges associated with sampling, recent research suggests that online platforms can be valuable tools for surveying hard-to-reach populations, including immigrants and refugees (Elçi et al., 2021; Ersanilli & van der Gaag, 2020; Pöttschke & Weiß, 2021). Additionally, without comprehensive knowledge of the total population of Syrian refugees in Turkey, it is difficult to ascertain whether an in-person survey conducted in a specific neighborhood densely populated by migrants would be more accurate and representative than an online survey. It is important to note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, online surveys provided researchers with a safer means of collecting data. Furthermore, compared to face-to-face and phone surveys, gathering data through social media advertisements proves more cost-effective, time-efficient, user-friendly, and secure.

### Experiment Design

Table 6.1. Experimental vignettes

<b>No treatment</b>	<b>Introduction</b>		Now, you are going to read a story about Ahmad and his family. Please read the story and then answer the question.
	<b>Control</b>		Ahmad is a single man living in a shared flat in Istanbul and working in construction. His parents are in Syria, and their livelihood depends on the money he sends them.
<b>Open borders</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>T1</b>	Control + Ahmad <b>could not find work</b> in the last two weeks because of the economic crisis. One day, he hears from a friend that the journey from Turkey to Europe is getting less risky because <b>borders are now open</b> , and countries such as Germany will accept more refugees.
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>T2</b>	Control + Ahmad's boss offers him <b>a permanent job</b> where he can work with a work permit and social security. One day, he hears from a friend that the journey from Turkey to Europe is getting less risky because <b>borders are now open</b> , and countries such as Germany will accept more refugees.
<b>Border closures</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>T3</b>	Control + Ahmad <b>could not find work</b> in the last two weeks because of the economic crisis. He hears from friends that the journey to Europe is now <b>more dangerous than ever</b> . Smugglers may demand extra money, or the boats may sink. Coastguards can also be cruel to migrants.
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>T4</b>	Control + Ahmad's boss offers him <b>a permanent job</b> where he can work with a work permit and social security. He hears from friends that the journey to Europe is now <b>more dangerous than ever</b> . Smugglers may demand extra money, or the boats may sink. Coastguards can also be cruel to migrants.

We employed a between-group experimental design to examine the impacts of border closures and employment conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five different groups (see Table 6.1.). Next, they were introduced to the following statement: “Now, you are going to read a story about Ahmad and his family. Please read the story and then answer the question.” Those in the treatment groups were exposed to one of the four distinct experimental vignettes (T1, T2, T3, or T4), each depicting a hypothetical individual, while participants in the control group were presented only with a baseline scenario. Table 6.1. summarizes the experimental design, illustrating the various combinations of border

closures and employment opportunities manipulated to create favorable and unfavorable conditions for migration recommendations.

When designing the experimental vignettes, we constructed a hypothetical person to uphold ethical considerations. This approach was chosen to avoid disseminating misinformation within refugee communities and networks, as direct questions and factual scenarios could potentially lead to speculation about the situation at the borders. Our primary concern was to prioritize the safety and well-being of the participants. Hence, opting for a hypothetical person was deemed the best option. In addition, we aimed to decrease variation in the stimulus, which would be high if, for example, we primed participants to think about their current situation.

Our objective was to examine the impact of border closures and employment opportunities on migration aspirations. To achieve this, we presented Ahmad's situation to all groups. We sought to determine whether the border and employment conditions differed from the control group. We chose Ahmad as a familiar figure among the Syrian refugee population in Turkey, as they often work in precarious jobs. Additionally, we focused on a single male migrant rather than a migrant with a family, as the presence of a family can complicate migration decision-making (Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). In other words, by constructing a control group, we aimed to understand the respondents' migration aspirations when the conditions of border and employment were not explicit. Then, we aimed to test whether the changing conditions of borders and employment opportunities make any difference in the direction of migration aspiration. Methodologically, we sought a baseline group to detect variations from the control group and significant differences across treatments, as experimental interventions affect aspirations (Gaines, Kuklinski, & Quirk, 2007; McDermott, 2002).

Table 6.2.: Distribution of respondents per experiment group (Note: The number of observations is in parentheses)

	<b>Control</b>	<b>Unemployment &amp; Open borders</b>	<b>Employment &amp; Open borders</b>	<b>Unemployment &amp; Border Closures</b>	<b>Employment &amp; Border Closures</b>	<b>All groups</b>
<b>Age</b>	28.61 (178)	30.24 (97)	27.77 (92)	30.85 (87)	28.90 (87)	29.17 (541)
<b>Male</b>	0.60 (182)	0.61 (98)	0.50 (92)	0.47 (88)	0.54 (89)	0.55 (549)
<b>Education</b>	0.85 (181)	0.83 (98)	0.86 (92)	0.82 (88)	0.91 (89)	0.85 (548)
<b>Wealth</b>	0.46 (183)	0.45 (99)	0.44 (92)	0.42 (88)	0.42 (89)	0.44 (551)
<b>ESSN</b>	0.28 (183)	0.30 (99)	0.34 (92)	0.34 (88)	0.39 (89)	0.32 (551)

We checked the randomization and distribution of respondents in the experimental groups according to their demographic characteristics, whether they receive the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) aid<sup>28</sup>, and their level of wealth. The Wald test after the multinomial logistic regression received an insignificant result ( $X^2(20) = 25.64$ ,  $p = 0.178$ ), which means randomization is successful (see Table 6.2 for the distribution of demographic and ESSN variables). Hence, we do not need to use control variables.

### Variables

Following the presentation of the vignettes, we asked the following question as our dependent variable: "If you were Ahmad, would you be willing to stay in Turkey, or move on to another country, or return to Syria?" Descriptive analysis of the responses reveals that 53.53 per cent of respondents recommended staying in Turkey, 44.29 per cent suggested moving to another country, and only 2.08 per cent selected the option to return. While the return option was included in the question for theoretical reasons, we did not specifically

<sup>28</sup> Initiated by the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) is a major cash transfer program funded by the EU to improve the living conditions of refugees in Turkey.

prime for it. Including the return option aligns with the common practice in measuring migration aspirations across three categories in the context of secondary migration (Carling, 2019). It is important to note that the number of respondents recommending a return ( $N=21$ ) was relatively low in proportion. As a result, we generated three dependent variables. First, our main dependent variable is binary, excluding return responses from the analysis. Second, as a robustness check, we generated another binary dependent variable in which we coded both move and return as 1 and 0 otherwise (see Appendix 1). Third, we generated a categorical dependent variable. We coded move responses as 1, stay responses as 2, and return responses as 3 to conduct a multinomial logistic regression (see Appendix 2). The results do not show a striking difference between dependent variables (see Appendices). To assess our assumptions, we conducted a logistic regression analysis using our main dependent variable and dropping the return responses.

We considered subjective risk-taking attitude as a moderating factor for the effects of border closures and employment opportunities. Risk-taking attitudes are fundamental drivers of human decision-making processes, influencing individuals' perceptions of risk, their willingness to take risks, and their overall behavioral responses to uncertain situations. In the context of our study, we argue that individuals' risk-taking attitudes are relevant for understanding advice-giving behavior because they shape how individuals assess and respond to dangerous circumstances. By examining the relationship between risk-taking attitudes and advice-giving behavior, we aim to elucidate the underlying mechanisms forming individuals' aspirations. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence advice-giving behavior in real-world scenarios.

We operationalized subjective risk-taking attitudes using a general question that captured individuals' overall tendency towards risk-taking: "How do you see yourself in general? Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks, or do you try to avoid taking risks in your life?" Respondents provided their responses using a Likert scale ranging from "not willing to take risks" (1) to "extremely willing to take risks" (5). The average score was 2.63, with a standard deviation of 1.16, reflecting the participants' self-perceived inclination towards risk-taking behavior. We opted for a self-reported assessment of risk for two primary reasons. Firstly, risk-taking attitudes are known to be influenced by individuals' personal life experiences (Barnett & Breakwell, 2001), making self-perceptions theoretically relevant for measuring risk-taking. Secondly, subjective measurement of risk attitudes is considered a valuable overall measure, as it is presumed to capture a stable risk preference capable of predicting risk-taking behavior across different domains (Charness, Gneezy, & Imas, 2013).

Self-reported measurements of risk are often criticized for overlooking domain-specific differences in risk-taking attitudes. For example, an individual might be more inclined to take risks in financial matters but less so in health-related issues. To address this concern, Weber, Blais, and Betz (2002) developed the DOSPERT scale, which aims to capture variations in risk-taking preferences across different domains. However, due to the length

of our survey and to avoid cognitive fatigue among participants, we opted for a simpler elicitation question. Therefore, we utilized a single, simplified self-reported measurement, which is also easier for participants to comprehend (Charness et al., 2013).

### **Results: The Interplay between Border Closures and Employment Opportunities, and the Mediating Effect of Risk-taking Attitudes**

In this section, we use evidence from the experimental survey to answer the following two questions: To what extent are migration aspirations subject to exogenous shocks, such as increasing or decreasing risks at the borders? And to what extent are they shaped by opportunities such as employment? We conducted two different logistic regressions to test the effects of treatments, including moderation with subjective risk-taking attitudes (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 illustrates that all treatments significantly differ from the control group except for the first treatment. All three treatments significantly motivate aspiration to stay in the current country of residence. The first treatment priming for the lack of employment opportunities in the current country of residence and the lack of obstacles on borders does not significantly differ from the control group (see Figure 6.1). Working in odd jobs renders many migrants in an unbearable and uncertain situation and blurs the line between being unemployed and working in insecure odd jobs. In this regard, the migrant profile in the control group and the first treatment were similar. However, the margins plot illustrates that respondents in the unemployed and open borders vignette are more likely to move on to a third country than stay in Turkey compared to other treatment groups. Thus, a significant difference between "Unemployment and open borders" and "Employment and open borders" indicates that employment is crucial to staying, even when borders are open.

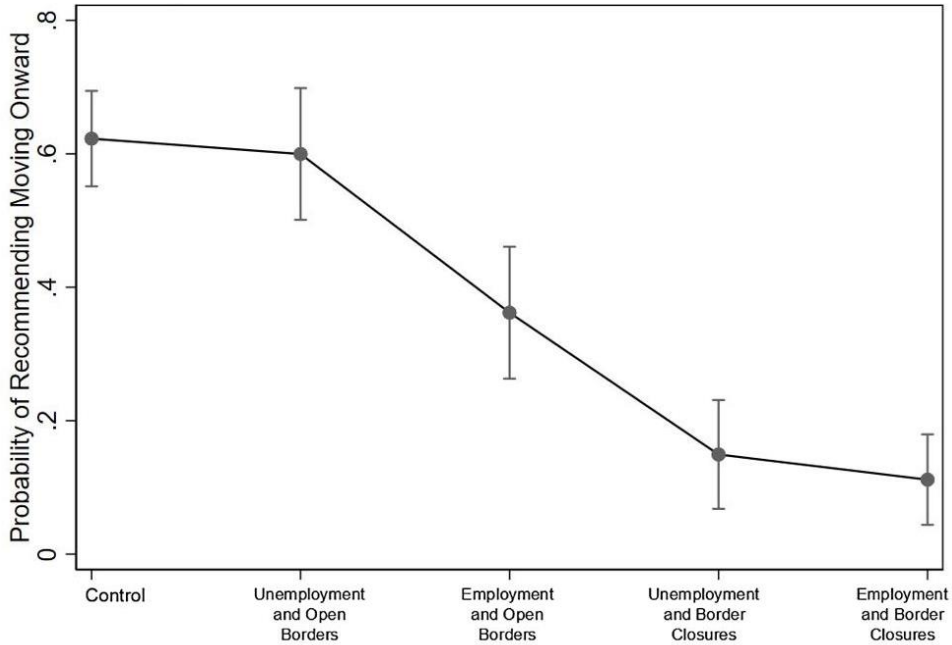
Policymakers assume that border externalization policies deter migrants from moving onward. This assumption on the effectiveness of deterrent migration policies overemphasizes the significance of border closures. Moreover, the emphasis on border closures overlooks the effect of opportunities provided for migrants. At first sight, our results indicate that migrants recommend staying in the country of residence when borders are closed, and countries do not implement welcoming policies for migrants (see Figure 6.1). However, what is surprising in our findings is that opening the borders does not increase the probability of recommending moving onward. Contrary to the expectations of policymakers, open border policies and welcoming policies of the destination countries are not the main drivers for migrants to recommend moving onward. In this regard, based on the interrelation between border closures and employment opportunities, we explain why the assumption that border enforcement policies deter migrants is wrong.

	Model 1 Aspiration to Move	Model 2 Aspiration to Move
<b>Reference: Control</b>	1	1
Unemployment & Open borders	[1.000,1.000] 0.895	[1.000,1.000] 0.625
Employed & Open borders	[0.539,1.487] 0.349***	[0.169,2.320] 0.264*
Unemployment & Border closures	[0.206,0.588] 0.117***	[0.079,0.889] 0.0129***
Employed & Border closures	[0.062,0.224] 0.0785***	[0.002,0.095] 0.0363**
	[0.038,0.162]	[0.004,0.372]
<b>Subjective Risk-taking Attitude</b>		0.841
Reference: Control * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		[0.656,1.079] 1
Unemployment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		[1.000,1.000] 1.151
Employment & Open borders * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		[0.730,1.816] 1.104
Unemployment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		[0.731,1.666] 2.218*
Employment & Border closures * Subjective Risk-taking Attitude		[1.190,4.133] 1.322
		[0.614,2.847]
<i>N</i>	541	540
pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.148	0.161
Odds Ratios; 95% confidence intervals in brackets + $p < 0.1$ , * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , *** $p < 0.001$		

Table 6.3.: Logistic Regression Results



Figure 6.1.: Average Marginal Effects of Treatments on Move Aspiration



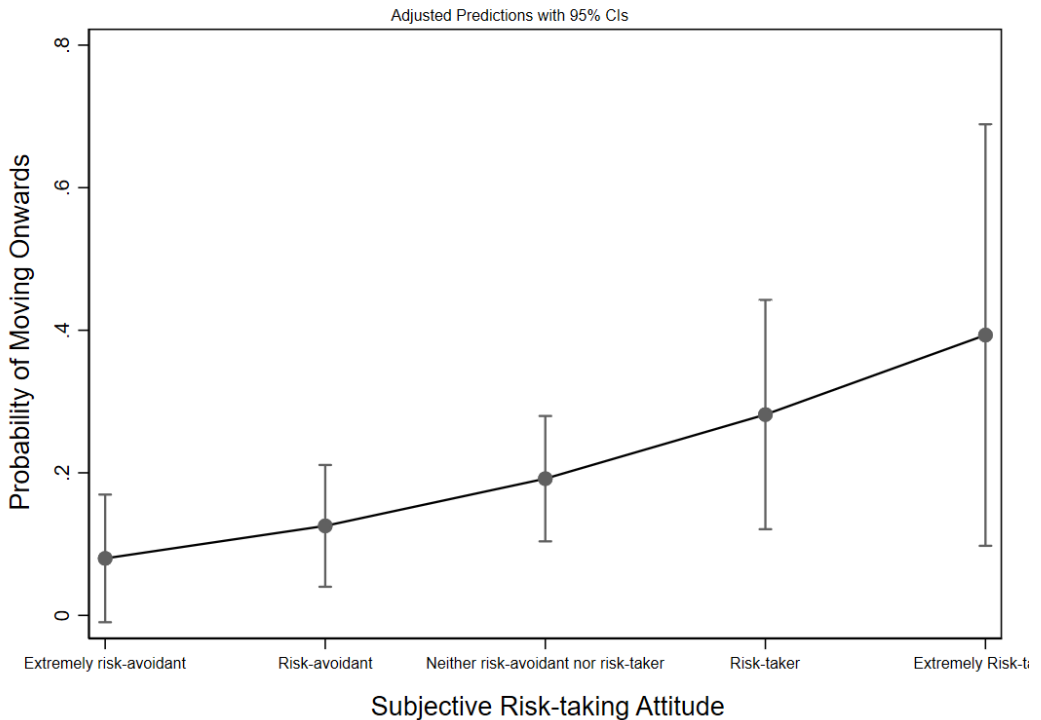
First, our experimental design confirms that *border controls* should not be considered separate from *employment opportunities* provided to migrants. As Figure 6.1 shows, employment opportunities significantly increase migrants' probability of staying in the current country, regardless of the conditions of the borders. In other words, when migrants are provided with employment opportunities, staying in the current country is seen as a better option than moving onwards to Europe, even when the dangers on the route are minimal. In this regard, we reject *Hypothesis 1*, indicating that decreasing dangers at the borders and welcoming refugee policies in European countries motivate aspirations to move from the current country of residence. This finding has two implications regarding migration aspirations based on *opportunities* and *obstacles*. First, *obstacles* at borders *per se* do not determine migration aspirations. Plus, risks of border crossings *per se* cannot predict change in migration decision-making. Second, this finding provides counterevidence to policymakers' assumption that all migrants will eventually aspire to move onwards when borders are open, and only stricter border policies can stop migration.

Second, even when borders are open, and countries are welcoming, *opportunities* can amplify the aspiration to stay in the current country. For instance, when comparing the first and second treatments, we observe that employment opportunities strongly decrease the probability of recommending moving onward (see Figure 6.1). While the probability of

moving onward is more than 60 per cent in the first treatment, it decreases to 37 per cent with an employment opportunity. If we imagine a single male working in odd jobs in Turkey, an employment opportunity including a secured work permit would significantly reinforce aspiration to stay. Thus, the findings support *Hypothesis 2*, indicating that employment opportunities motivate aspirations to stay in the current country of residence. We argue that relatively open border policies for migrants do not necessarily feed the aspiration to move. The employment opportunities generate a significant difference between aspirations to stay and move, and are more determinant in forming migration aspirations than border externalization policies.

We conducted the second logistic regression by taking risk-taking attitudes as a moderator (see Model 2). Figure 6.2 shows the predicted probability of the move aspiration when there are no employment opportunities in the current place and when borders are closed, moderated by subjective risk-taking. We assume that these are the conditions under which only risk-taking migrants would recommend moving onward. Hence, the results show that recommending moving onward significantly increases depending on to what extent participants are risk-avoidant or risk-taking. As risk-taking increases, the probability of moving to another country increases from 8 per cent to 40 per cent when borders are closed,

Figure 6.2.: Predicted Probability of the "Move Aspiration" of "Unemployment and Border Closures" Vignette Moderated by Subjective Risk-taking



and our hypothetical person is unemployed. Thus, we can confirm *Hypothesis 3*, namely that as the tendency to take risks increases, the impact of border closures on the aspiration to move onward decreases.

The *lack of employment opportunities* prime plays a significant role in understanding the aspiration to move onward when the borders are risky to cross. Respondents provided with the unemployment and border closures prime are significantly more likely to recommend moving onward when they are more willing to take risks in general (see Figure 6.2). This finding implies that strict border policies may discourage some migrants from onward migration but do not deter *every migrant* on the move similarly. We can explain this variation by personal attitudes towards risk-taking. If we imagine an unemployed risk-taking migrant whose family is dependent on the money they send, border control policies would not be deterring. The lack of employment opportunities in the country of residence could be highly unacceptable for risk-taking migrants who aspire to move onward even when border crossing is dangerous. Hence, structural factors, *opportunities*, and/or *border closures* cannot be separated from *individual characteristics* in migration decision-making.

## Conclusion

This study examined factors influencing secondary migration aspirations in forced displacement contexts. Through an online survey experiment, our findings indicate that simply opening borders and implementing welcoming policies do not necessarily incentivize all migrants to consider moving onward. Instead, legal employment opportunities are perceived as preferable to migrating to EU countries, even when border conditions are relatively safe. Additionally, our results highlight the role of individual differences in risk-taking attitudes in determining whether migrants recommend moving or staying. Specifically, migrants with a higher inclination for risk-taking are less deterred by border closures and are more likely to consider moving onward.

Our findings carry significant implications for policy-making, ethical considerations, and analytical approaches. First, there is a growing demand for evidence-based migration policies, as many responses to undocumented migration tend to be reactive and driven by public discontent (Douglas S Massey et al., 2016). Especially in the current European context, policymakers are increasingly inclined to implement externalization policies to deter people on the move (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Cobarrubias et al., 2023). De Haas (2023) makes a similar critique, drawing on historical examples to demonstrate that border restrictions are counter-productive. He argues that such restrictions increase the costs associated with migration, thereby leading to a rise in irregularized entry and stay (De Haas, 2023). Additionally, he suggests that these restrictions disrupt circulation and diminish returns (De Haas, 2023). In line with this demand, our study emphasizes the need for more research that collects evidence on the effectiveness of different policy options. We aim to stimulate a discussion on how survey experiments, which capture the perspectives of migrants, can contribute to building this evidence base.

Secondly, our findings have political and ethical implications concerning the allocation of limited public resources for migration control. The relative effectiveness of employment opportunities in increasing aspirations to stay informs policymakers about where they can strategically invest their resources. We argue that investing in employment opportunities is a more ethical, humanitarian, and sustainable approach than solely focusing on border controls or externalizing such controls to third countries. However, it is essential to exercise caution in implementing this policy recommendation, as further evidence is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of various policies. Overall, our study highlights the importance of evidence-based policymaking, ethical considerations in resource allocation, and the potential of survey experiments to inform migration policy discussions.

Third, from an analytical perspective, our analysis raises the need for further research to explore why it is crucial to incorporate risk-taking attitudes into migration aspirations literature. As demonstrated in our research, when migrants' risk-taking attitudes are taken into consideration, the generalizability of the effectiveness of border externalization policies for all migrants living under similar conditions becomes questionable. By revealing that the onward migration aspirations of Syrian migrants are significantly influenced by their subjective risk-taking attitudes, we challenge the assumption that border closures effectively deter every migrant. Hence, we suggest incorporating risk-taking attitudes into the analysis of micro-level factors that impact migration aspirations (Carling, 2019). Further research in this area would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in migration aspirations and abilities.

Our research has some limitations. First, the subjective risk attitude is a self-reported measurement, which can be influenced by individual biases or social desirability effects. Individuals may have difficulty accurately assessing their risk attitudes, especially if they lack experience in the specific domain being examined. Despite this shortcoming, research shows that subjective measurement of risk attitudes is still a valuable tool in predicting risk-taking behavior across different domains of research (Charness et al., 2013).

Another limitation is around the use of online surveys. Online surveys effectively reach difficult-to-reach populations (Ersanilli & van der Gaag, 2020), yet some population segments may not be adequately represented. For example, individuals without Internet or social media access may be less likely to participate in an online survey, which could lead to a biased sample. However, we lack publicly available demographic data on Syrian migrants living in Turkey. Hence, it is difficult to assess the potential impact of limitations on data representativeness (Elçi et al., 2021). Moreover, our experimental design presented the single-dimensional profile of a hypothetical migrant – a single male migrant working in odd jobs –. We acknowledge that these scenarios do not reflect the heterogeneous profiles of Syrians in Turkey including dimensions such as being single versus with one's family, gender, age or education. However, the predominant image of border crossers is single male migrants. In this regard, we can justify our choice of the hypothetical profile of a migrant based on our research aims. We acknowledge these potential limitations and encourage

further research with alternative methods of data collection that may be more inclusive of all members of the population of interest.

Our study focused primarily on the individual-level factors influencing migration aspirations of Syrian migrants in Turkey. One important limitation is that we did not explore the role of meso-level factors such as social networks, which prior research suggests significantly impacts migration aspirations (Della Puppa & King, 2019; McIlwaine, 2012; Müller Funk, 2019). Social networks can influence destination choices and adaptation to a new country (Müller Funk, 2019). Future research can address this gap by examining how social networks, or more specifically, transnational social ties, shape the destination choices, migration aspirations, or, their perceptions about remigration within a forced migration context. By analyzing these connections, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the decision-making process for migrants at different levels of analysis.

Finally, our data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected border controls. Thus, the pandemic might have added another layer impeding migration aspirations to move on. More research should be conducted in the post-COVID-19 period on this topic. We hope that the findings of this survey experiment, which was staged in Turkey, will have implications for similar contexts, where opportunities for migrants are scarce, out-migration is risky, and international cooperation on the "containment" of refugee flows is high.