

Background

- Aim: To explore the impact of **Turkish national leadership** and its policies on the lived experience of refugee integration in Istanbul.
- Due to the contentious term ‘integration’, it has become a central concept in debates regarding the rights, settlement and adaptation of refugees (Strang and Ager, 2010).
- Turkey and Istanbul were chosen as Turkey “has been the most welcoming country following the Syrian crises” (Osmanbaşoğlu, 2019) and is the largest hosting country in the world (UNHCR, 2023).

Methodology [Qualitative Research]

- **Semi-structured interviews** – ‘a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Given, 2008) - were conducted either face to face in Turkey and the UK, or online over Zoom.
- Interviewees were selected based on their expertise regarding refugees in Istanbul, or due to their involvement with refugees in Istanbul through charities.
- We transcribed non-verbatim and then employed **thematic analysis** as an analytical method to code, analyse and identify themes and patterns (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).
- Three overarching themes were identified. Namely, Turkish Nationalism and Attitudes; Globalised Leadership; and National Government/Leadership.

Literature Review [Educational, Cultural and Economic integration]

- Akar and Erdoğan (2019) highlighted that some Turkish people not only have hostile attitudes towards refugees but state that they are ‘overstaying guests.’ This point has been underscored in Interview 1, who notes that the government did not foresee possible problems of refugees staying for the long-term.
- Literature raises the point of an unequal distribution of refugees and unequal burden sharing amongst nations (Osmanbaşoğlu, 2019). The concern of such a large influx of refugees in Turkey has caused stress on “Turkey’s young legal system” of asylum and immigration as well as stressing its limited resources (İçduygu and Evin Millet, 2016).

Findings and Analysis

Theme 1: Turkish Nationalism and Attitudes

- Discusses the (rising) Turkish Nationalism within Turkey and how these social attitudes have shaped refugee experience. Turkish nationalism being a hindrance to the integration of refugees was a reoccurring theme found in all 5 interviews.

Theme 2: Globalised Leadership

- Refers to the influence of international bodies on Turkish leadership and refugee integration. A notion of “burden” was reoccurring across all 5 interviews.

Theme 3: National Leadership Efforts

Encompasses efforts made by Turkish national leadership to facilitate the integration of refugees.

- Analysed in two sub-sections, (i) Direct Policy Issues and (ii) Wider Economic Policy Issues.
- Interview 4 contends that “they (the leadership) didn’t have any strategy, any plans – they were just accepting refugees.”

Final Remarks

Further research could involve direct interviews with refugees. This will allow us to gain a more personal understanding of their lived experiences of policies under Turkish national leadership.

- It would be beneficial to take a narrow scope on one subset of refugees, such as Syrian woman, who have their own unique experiences and challenges regarding gender and culture.
- This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on refugee integration, providing insights into the complex interactions between national leadership, societal attitudes, and the experiences of refugees in Istanbul.

“In Turkey, at the moment, there are two different communities living side by side but not together.”

Thematic Analysis



References

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