

Migration culture in the making: Germany as a reference point in youth migration from Turkey to Europe

Helin Kardelen Kavuş, İzmir University of Economics, İzmir/Turkey

ABSTRACT

Turkey has a long history of emigration to Germany, officially initiated over sixty years ago with the signing of the labour migration agreement. This agreement marked the beginning of a migration trajectory that has since evolved in various forms. Today, a new wave of migration is emerging, driven by educated urban youth who are increasingly becoming central actors in this migration landscape—not only in Germany, but across Europe. Research conducted in Athens, Greece, with highly educated young migrants from Turkey working in transnational call centres reveals that Germany continues to serve as a significant reference point in their migration journeys. This symbolic role of Germany surfaces in four key themes within participants' narratives. First, migrants often compare their current country of residence with Germany, either positively or negatively. Second, many express a future prospect of remigration to Germany. Third, Germany features in their reflections on daily life in the host country. Finally, when discussing their ongoing ties with Turkey and their place in the diaspora, young migrants often draw on their perceptions of Turkish immigrant communities in Germany as a point of comparison. The analysis suggests that a long-standing migration history can foster a broader "culture of migration," one that shapes the imaginations and trajectories of not only migrants themselves, but of society at large.

CV

Helin Kardelen Kavuş completed her PhD in Sociology at Middle East Technical University in April 2025 and is currently a Research Assistant in the Department of Sociology at İzmir University of Economics. She obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees in Sociology from Middle East Technical University (METU). Her master's thesis examined female ethnic entrepreneurship in the context of Turkish women entrepreneurs in Germany. Her doctoral research, based on fieldwork conducted in Athens as an Erasmus PhD exchange student at Panteion University, focused on the contemporary migration of educated youth from Turkey to Greece employed in call centres. Her research interests include labour migration, feminization of migration, ethnic entrepreneurship, and high-skilled migration.