

# TURKS IN GERMANY:

## An Evaluation of Socioeconomic Integration

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This research evaluates the socioeconomic integration of those with Turkish heritage living in Germany. Although Turks first arrived in Germany just after World War II, their socioeconomic integration continues today. This research evaluates the structure of the German labor market, the education system, and language gap, and determines their roles in the discrimination against Germans with Turkish heritage. Personal accounts are also included to illustrate the struggles Turkish immigrants have faced over the years due to both cultural and economic factors. This paper challenges Germany to reexamine its so-called “welcome culture,” or “Willkommenskultur,” as they reflect on their treatment of Turkish immigrants and plan for their future after Chancellor Merkel’s recent re-election.



When Turks arrived in Germany after World War II, they were referred to as “Gastarbeiter” or “guest-workers.” The irony in this statement is that Turks who arrived in Germany to fill the post-war employment gap can hardly be called guests – instead of returning to Turkey, they settled down, brought over their families, and continue to live in Germany. There are now 3.5 million people with Turkish heritage residing in Germany, which is home to half of Europe’s Turkish population.<sup>1</sup> Even though guest worker recruitment ended in 1973, Turkish immigrants continue to enter Germany through family reunification or as asylum seekers.<sup>2</sup> Although the Turks have been in Germany for over three generations, socio-economic integration remains incomplete. This study considers the limitations faced by Germany’s Turkish community as they strive to integrate socio-economically.

Various factors can be used to measure Turkish integration within German borders. The most common way to measure integration is to compare the socioeconomic achievement of Turks with the native German population; the differences observed in unemployment rates and performance in schools are effective indicators. Factors such as language skills and citizenship rates can also gauge Turks’ abili-

ty to succeed in the labor market.<sup>3</sup> While this study focuses on socio-economic integration, integration is a multidimensional process, to which socio-economic integration is central to other forms of cultural and social integration.

Socio-economic integration of the Turkish community in Germany, which was originally seen as a community of guest workers, was not a national goal until the 2000s. Until then, the Jus Sanguinis, or “Right of Blood” principle applied to Germany as an ethnic state, barring children born to immigrant parents from citizenship status.<sup>4</sup> When Turks entered Germany during the labor shortage of the 1970s, attempts at integration were not made because guest workers, German politicians, and German society believed that Turks would eventually return to their homeland. As a result, Turks did not learn German, a factor which limits their options for economic participation and has denied them the opportunity to connect with German society.<sup>5</sup> The first generation of Turks in Germany may have been satisfied working low-skilled jobs, as the quality of life in Germany was better than its Turkish counterpart; however, the second and third generations are trying to integrate more fully in order to achieve equal opportunity in the workplace with the

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knowledge that they are in Germany to stay.

The Turkish community is at a significant disadvantage in the German workplace. They face discrimination when seeking work, as résumés with Turkish-sounding names are less likely to be called for interviews.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Expert Council on German Foundations on Integration and Migration found that an applicant with a German name gets an interview for every 5th application they send, while applications with Turkish names are called every 7th application.<sup>6</sup> This imbalance is due to prejudice and stereotypes, as well as fear that Turkish employees may not be liked by German customers.<sup>6</sup> Thus, prejudice hinders the upward mobility of workers with Turkish heritage in the German labor market.

The occupations in which Turkish men are overrepresented are highly affected by structural and cyclical change. To make matters worse, earning potential and opportunities for advancement are lower for Turks. Even after completing language courses, they have a higher risk of unemployment and occupational mismatch. This statistical analysis is partially due to employer discrimination. Employer's perceptions about the work-related behavior of Turkish groups regarding punctuality, loyalty, and other traits alter productivity expectations, even for workers with vocational qualifications. To counter this form of discrimination, anonymous job applications have been suggested.<sup>7</sup> The gap between German and Turkish workers is also highlighted by the wage disparity. Turks earn, on average, 20 percent less than native German workers with otherwise identical skills. The gap is smaller for Turks with German language capabilities and education. Im-

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migrants can catch up by one percentage point per year, but the process slows down over time and wages never converge. Turks with the same education as Germans do not have jobs with as much occupational autonomy as natives.<sup>8</sup>

While Turks are given certain socio-economic privileges, the job market remains divided between Germans and Turks. Turkey's 1964 Association Agreement with the European Union grants considerable concessions to Turks over other non-EU nationals. According to the agreement, Turkish Nationals in Germany may apply for unlimited labor market access after four years of employment, compared to five years of employment or six years of residence for other Third Country Nationals.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the unemployment gap remains high. When compared to the 6% rate of unemployment among German natives, 20% of those with Turkish heritage are unemployed.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Turks have limited access to public-sector employment, including civil service positions like policemen, judges, prosecutors, teachers and university lecturers, and federal administrative positions. These occupations are open to German and EU citizens only.<sup>8</sup> Germans are also quite over-represented in white-collar jobs, while



Turks are largely confined to blue-collar jobs.<sup>9</sup>

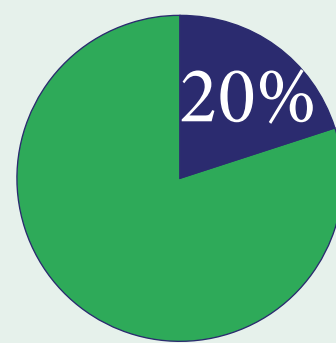
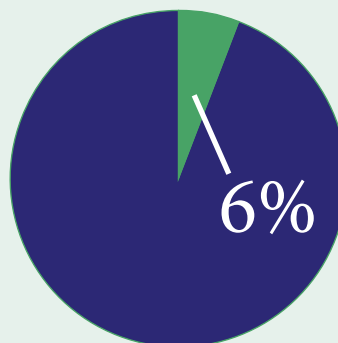
What sounds promising is that Turks constitute the largest group of business owners among foreigner groups in Germany. In fact, 51,000 are business owners providing jobs for 265,000 persons.<sup>10</sup> This may seem encouraging for Turkish socio-economic integration, as business ownership allows Turks to achieve upward mobility. However, it can also be regarded as a disadvantage and may lead to ghettoization.<sup>10</sup> Because Turkish-German workers suffer from a lack of qualifications and several forms of discrimination, they may have no other option but to open up, for example, Döner Kebab restaurants. Business ownership and self-employment as forms of immigrant entrepreneurship threatens the position of minorities in the labor market and increases their socio-economic isolation from Germans. In reality, business ownership may not be enough to catch up. Business ownership often represents a dead-end situation and traps immigrants into long-standing precariousness. Business ownership also keeps Turks isolated within their ethnic community and prevents them from learning and interacting with German language and culture. Furthermore, living and working conditions are often harsh, lead-

ing to frustration and disillusionment, furthering the gap between immigrants and natives.<sup>10</sup>

The problems faced by Turks in the job market can also be attributed to their below-average levels of education. Opportunities for employment, higher income, and job security in Germany all depend on one's education and vocational paths. The under-representation among young Turks in regards to higher education and professional degrees is directly related to the education levels of their parents. The parents of second and third generation Turks are still unlikely to be educated. The influence of parental education on achievement is largest in Germany, so the role of education for social stratification and chances of the next generation are even larger in Germany than in other EU countries.<sup>9</sup> The discrepancies can be blamed on the structure of the German education system, which is tracked. The children of Turks are more likely to attend the lowest of the three secondary school tracks and leave the educational system without achieving any certificate at all. Half of Turkish students do not attain vocational or professional degrees, while among Germans, the rate of those without a degree is only half as high.<sup>9</sup>

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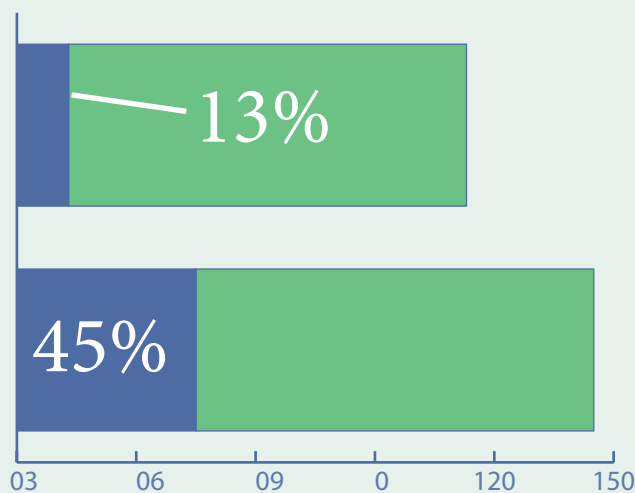


tionally designed in a way that disadvantages Turkish students. The education system is tracked, sending only the most-promising students to high school and barring everyone else from chances at attending college. In fourth grade, teachers make the fateful decision whether students will be sent to the low-level Hauptschule, the mid-level Realschule, or the high-level Gymnasium. The fourth option, the Gesamtschule, combines all three forms under one roof, allowing students flexibility to switch schools as needed. The Gesamtschule was put in place to serve the needs of underprivileged and immigrant children. The Hauptschule provides students the least demanding curriculum. While only a third of German children learn here, nearly three quarters of all Turkish-German children are put in these schools. Furthermore, German children are four to five times more likely than Turkish children to study at the high-level Gymnasium. While 45% of German children were enrolled in a Gymnasium, only 13% of those with Turkish origin are placed in it.<sup>11</sup> Most Turks are placed in the low-level

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Hauptschule, where only half actually receive a certificate. Even with the certificate, they are at a disadvantage in the labor market due to their lower-quality education. Their struggle upon entry into the labor market is evidenced by the 1/3 of Turks who are unable to get an internship after receiving their degree. Those lucky enough to find internships are limited to becoming beauticians or mechanics. Largely due to the tracked system, experts have concluded that Turkish children in Germany are in the “worst possible situation.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Germany performs the worst among the European countries in regards to educating its migrant children. It is clear that several structural factors have resulted in the lower standard of education among those with Turkish roots.

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Turkish-Germans are also limited by their lack of German language knowledge, which hinders their academic success. Teachers are influential in deciding the track of Turkish students within schools. A lack of German language skills means that a child will likely be assigned to the Hauptschule. To remedy this problem, a 2005 immigration law created German language courses for immigrants in an attempt to promote integration.<sup>11</sup> By 2007, it was mandated that immigrants arriving to Germany to meet a spouse must either speak some German or enroll in government-sponsored language classes. While some view this measure as forced assimilation, it was an attempt to improve educational achievement for the children of immigrants. Turkish students with parents who can both communicate with their teachers and help them with homework are more likely to be placed in the Gymnasium.<sup>11</sup> Bringing German language skills to Turkish Germans has been an attempt to help them succeed in school and become more prepared to competitively enter the labor market.

For the interactive tasks required in many occupations, German language skills, along with behavior in accordance with social and cultural norms, is key. The language barrier contributes to the labor market's discrimination and segregation. Therefore, the federal government provides German lessons to adults as a part of general and specific integration courses. Some language courses focus on job-specific language needs to bridge the gap.<sup>7</sup> The initiative, "German in the Workplace" includes support for language teachers, companies, and labor unions interested in enhancing the workplace communication skills of Turkish workers. Reading, writing, digital competence,

proficiency in information and communication technology, and study skills are provided by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Nearly half of the participants of this program found a job or vocational training placement. The program will receive funding until 2020.<sup>7</sup>

Former Turkish guest worker, Cennet Kadem, shared her experience with learning German in order to becoming integrated into German society. Kadem learned German language skills on her own, with the help of a radio program. Her language skills helped her integrate into the socioeconomic realm of German society, and as a result, all five of her children made it to the university level. Kadem feels that she and her husband took two decades to integrate, and that a little bit of help could have eased her integration process. Kadem explains, "The politicians weren't concerned about us. No one talked about the need to integrate because we had been here for so long. We only heard about integration for the first time 10 years ago, or maybe 15 and then they asked 'why haven't people integrated.'"<sup>5</sup> Kadem's experience is evidence that language is key to socio-economic integration, and with a little help, this type of integration for Turks in Germany can be beneficial.

A cultural difference in values prevents some Turks from acquiring the language skills necessary for socio-economic integration. For example, Imhan K, a Turkish wom-

3  
# of Turks in  
German Parliament

an living in Germany, had her welfare benefits slashed after her husband refused to let her take German courses. Imhan's husband believed that language courses and potential entry into the labor market would interfere with her ability to take care of their son and fulfil her role as a homemaker. Now, German courts must decide whether immigrants can be forced to learn the language associated with the adoption of western culture in order to receive welfare benefits.<sup>12</sup>

Some Turkish-Germans have achieved great success despite the odds. Since the mid 1980's, a small but slowly-growing group of second-generation Turks have experienced upward mobility. Turkish college attendance

provides an example for the German population, which may not expect Turks to reach such levels. Even so, Turkish men earn less in higher-level jobs than men with German heritage.<sup>13</sup> Such disparities are of special interest to the three Turkish members of parliament, who are using their position to push for the socio-economic integration of Turks.<sup>11</sup>

The socio-economic limitations faced by Turks can be attributed to German citizenship and naturalization laws. Before German naturalization law was changed in 1999, guest workers and their children rarely qualified for citizenship. Reforms allowed the second generation who had lived in Germany for at least eight years to hold dual citizenship in Germa-



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is increasing and the number of Turkish teachers, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and university graduates is on the rise. Turks are no longer stuck in their stereotypical niche industries like catering, retail trade, and travel agencies. Instead, they are becoming involved in banking, tourism, brokerage, marketing, consulting, advertising, and data processing sectors. Furthermore, some Turks have become famous authors, artists, and three are members of parliament. The public great success of some Turks contributes to the mobility process, which sets an example for the Turkish community.<sup>11</sup> Their visibility also

ny and in Turkey, although they must relinquish one nationality by their 18th birthday. Even though the law was relaxed, citizenship remained low among Turks in Germany, at only 26%. This number is low because there is a high correlation between poverty and religiosity among Turks in Germany, making it even less likely for Turks to seek citizenship. Their failure to gain citizenship makes them appear to many as a group of "outsiders."<sup>11</sup>

While citizenship is a path to socio-economic integration, it is clear that many Turkish-Germans are simply not interested in attaining citizenship. Negative attitudes to-





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wards Turkish-Germans makes them less interested in becoming German citizens. Turks' higher unemployment rates also affect citizenship aspirations negatively.<sup>14</sup> These problems can partially be blamed on the inadequate structures of residence and naturalization policy in Germany. For example, a highly-settled permanent group of non-nationals' status is only partially reflected in their residence status.<sup>2</sup> Further developments of citizenship-related laws are thus necessary.

Germany is developing a "Wilkommenskultur," or "welcome culture" in order to make it a more attractive and enticing environment for immigrants.<sup>15</sup> While this type of cultural is positive, it still lacks actual means to effectively carry out its goals. This lack is evidenced by the Turks' struggle to attain the education and language skills needed to be successful in a labor market that already discriminates against them. Further policy change is needed to clarify the concept of "Wilkommenskultur" and determine how Turkish immigrants can catch up in the labor market and become socio-economically integrated in Germany.



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## ENDNOTES



- 1 Catherine Ross. Perennial Outsiders: The Education Experience of Turkish Youth in Germany. At The Crossroads of Secular West and Traditional East. Hein Online, 2008.
- 2 Simon Green. The Legal Status of Turks in Germany. Taylor & Francis Online. 24 Jan 2007.
- 3 OECD/European Union (2015), Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, OECD Publishing, Paris.
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- 5 Turks in Germany still lack a sense of belonging. Deutsche Welle. 29 November 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/turks-in-germany-still-lack-a-sense-of-belonging/a-36199779>
- 6 Ethnic-Turks ‘face German job market discrimination.’ Anadolu Agency. 27 March 2014. <http://aa.com.tr/en/archive/ethnic-turks-face-german-job-market-discrimination/171405>
- 7 Burkert & Haas. Investing in the Future: Labor Market Integration Policies for New Immigrants in Germany. MPI International Program, November, 2014.
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- 9 What are the chances of young Turks and Italians for equal education and employment in Germany? The role of objective and subjective indicators. *Soc Indic Res* (2007) 82: 209. doi:10.1007/s11205-006-9038-6
- 10 Antoine Pecoud. “Cosmopolitanism and Business among German-Turks in Berlin.” *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*. Volume 2, Issue 1. March 2002.
- 11 Andreas Potts. Ethnic and Social Mobility: The Case of Turks in Germany. Springer Link 2001.
- 12 Bruno Shrep. Turkish Family Fights Language Requirement. Spiegel Online. 24 September 2013.
- 13 Rob Euwals. Immigration, Integration and the Labor Market: Turkish Immigrants in Germany and the Netherlands. Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit. March 2007.
- 14 Martin Kahanec. Political Economy of Immigration in Germany: Attitudes and Citizenship Aspirations. *International Migration Review*. 26 May 2009.
- 15 Fuchs, Richard. Willkommenskultur, gibt’s die noch? Deutsche Welle. April 2016. <http://www.dw.com/de/willkommenskultur-gibts-die-noch/a-19171796>.

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