

Understanding Iranian Refugee Discourse in Turkey on Twitter by Using Social Network Analysis

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More than 39,000 Iranian refugees are purposefully “trapped” in Turkey, which represents an increasing trend. Iranian refugees are a specific case in migration history because the push factor is not war, but rather a “unique” reason. Most of them will later not be able to go back to Iran because the Iranian government has imposed the entry permit policy. For the first time, this research will analyse the voices of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey by utilising the Social Network Analysis (SNA) with NodeXL and Gephi software using 29,987 Twitter data, obtained from February to April 2019. The finding is that most of the conversation starters come from among the refugees themselves (@m5ggw436vg6ln4i, @mahya2019, and @

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kindnes65049573), tweeting mostly about “resettlement”, “Canada”, and “EU”, with 4,369 tweets expressing positive, and 7,360 expressing negative sentiments about the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, the process of resettlement to Canada is rendered nearly impossible because of the very low acceptance rate (below 2%), hence the UNHCR must search for another long-term solution for the Iranian refugees who are in the refugee camp today.

Keywords: immigration, law, Social Network Analysis, refugees, Iranian refugees

1. Introduction

Today, migrants number more than 281 million individuals, or 3.6% of the world's population (IOM, 2021, p. 3). Global migration rates continue to be at their highest level since the end of World War II. Furthermore, forced migration continues to be a major driving force in human movement. The fundamental driving force behind mass displacement is an increase in violence on a global scale. As more people lose their homes due to war in their own nations, the phenomenon of mass migration is sparked. In the year 2015, more than 65.3 million individuals were homeless and stranded, and that number is continually rising, according to a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Most of them are refugees (16.1 million) and asylum seekers (AIDA, 2020). The ongoing conflict in several other regions of the world has made many people lose their homes and lives, and forced them to flee to safer places. A mass influx of people caused the European migrant crisis which occurred from 2015 to the first quarter of 2016, when more than one million refugees from the Middle East and North Africa walked thousands of miles to reach the first transit point, Turkey, and crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Greece, the second transit point which would lead them to Europe. This was a hard and painful process for the migrants facing difficulties in terms of living conditions and the integration process (Castelli, 2018, p. 3–4). Those refugees were known to have entered the European Union (EU) territory through those two main entry points.

The main reason why the EU has become the primary destination for asylum seekers is because it is politically stable, more open, offers em-

ployment opportunities, and most importantly, international protection (Hager, 2021, p. 943–945). Because EU member states have ratified the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, the EU has a responsibility to protect the fundamental rights of people seeking asylum on its territory, along with the *non-refoulement* principle under the European Convention on Human Rights, regulated by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (Poon, 2020, p. 75–92). This means that once the refugees enter EU territory, they cannot be deported back to their country of origin.

However, several EU member states rejected refugees while exhibiting increasing xenophobia, racism, and violence against their arrival (Rowe et al., 2021, p. 7–12). The migration and asylum problems in this refugee crisis thus even converted into a security issue (Trauner, 2016, p. 315–319). The emphasis on security issues occurred along with a series of cases of terrorism in Europe, terrorist incidents in several European countries known to have been promoted by terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State or ISIS, where the organisation is from the refugees' country of origin (Crone et al., 2017, p. 15–18). The threat of terrorism has made some member states establish internal border controls to anticipate cases of terrorism. The establishment of border control by member states has even ruled out the implementation of Schengen as a free travel system in Europe (Hofmann et al., 2020, p. 2).

As an administrative solution to address the quota rejection problem, EU member states (not the European Commission) and Turkish Government committed to the “Joint Action Plan” to improve support for asylum seekers and refugees and their host communities in Turkey, as well as to deepen cooperation to prevent irregular migrant flows, through a combination of intentions and actions. Turkey has decided to open its labour market to the refugees who have registered, as well as to impose additional visa conditions on refugees and other nations. Turkey has promised to boost efforts to prevent irregular migration from Turkey to the EU by bolstering the Turkish Coast Guard's ability to combat illicit migrant smuggling in the Aegean Sea.

Turkey is known for its long historical background as a refugee transit country. In 2019, about 4 million of them had already been staying in Turkey for more than a decade. Most of them are Syrians (3.4 million), Afghans (172,000), Iraqis (142,000), Iranians (39,000), Somalis (5,700), and others (11,700). Iranian asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most numerous groups in Turkish camps. They had been going to Turkey continuously since the revolutionary wars in early 2000s. Over time, their motivation for migrating from Iran to Turkey has changed and today, be-

cause of the current migration regime they cannot go back to Iran because of the entry permit policy implemented by the Iranian Government (Moghadam & Jadali, 2021, p. 31–33).

Iranians continuously migrating to Turkey for years are becoming a unique case in the history of migration. Unlike the popular motives, such as conflicts, better jobs and education, their motives to migrate are different from others'. Many of the Iranians are not even willing to stay in Europe, but rather prefer to stay in Turkey. In the pre-European refugee crisis, the islamisation of Iran under the shah governance which started in the 1970s created the "opposition", and people who rejected the Islamic ideology tended to move to Turkey as political refugees (Dekker et al., 2018, p. 9). Also, many Iranian women are rejecting forced marriages to Afghani men, used as a political tool by Afghani men to gain Iranian citizenship through their marriage, and these circumstances force Iranian woman to move to Turkey as refugees. Most interestingly, many Iranians work as "refugees" under the management of non-governmental organisations which are funded by the UNHCR (Rivetti, 2013, p. 313–314).

In 2019 more than 39,000 Iranian refugees stayed in Turkey, and the number almost doubled to 69,000 in 2020. Until September 2018, the UNHCR facilitated the asylum process for Iranians and their relocation to foreign countries. The Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management has been reviewing their applications since then. In 2019, only 3,588 Iranians applied for international protection in Turkey, according to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). Moreover, less than 2% of the applicants were accepted, while the flow of Iranian refugees into the Turkish territory has continued.

The interesting fact is that more than 83% of the Iranian refugees who live in Turkey are connected to the Internet, and most of them are using the Twitter social network for daily conversation (UNHCR, 2016). For the first time, historical data obtained from Twitter will be used to understand the pattern of conversation, actors, and keywords which reflect the desires of Iranian refugees in Turkey. The discussion of this research becomes very important for understanding the discourse of Iranian refugees who are purposefully "trapped" in Turkey, because, with more Iranian refugees coming in, they will influence the economic, social, and cultural sectors whether in transit or destination countries, directly or indirectly (Ibrahim & Matter Nassir, 2022, p. 4–6).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Perspective

A refugee can be defined as a person who is outside his or her place of nationality “because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, or nationality”, according to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Moreover, the persecution can happen because of religion, nationality, social group membership, and political affiliation reasons, and because of that, he/she is unable or unwilling to return (Migration, 2011). From these definitions it can be concluded that refugees are persons who fear being persecuted because of a specific reason and are not willing to return to their home countries. Based on that description, migration becomes more complex and needs to be elaborated theoretically.

Developmental perspective. The first theory in migration is the developmental perspective. This approach was developed after World War II, in the era from the 1950s to the 1970s. According to neoclassical migration theory, migration is a type of efficient allocation of production inputs that benefits both the sending and the receiving nations. According to this “balanced growth” approach, the re-allocation of labour from rural, agricultural regions to urban, industrial sectors (within or across borders) is a precondition for economic progress and, thus, a constituent component of the overall development process (De Haas, 2011, p. 13–22). Workers’ scarcity will ultimately result in unrestricted movement of labour in an unconstrained market system, corresponding with greater marginal productivity of labour and rising pay levels in migrant-sending nations. Capital flows are predicted to travel in the other direction, from labour-scarce to capital-scarce migrant-sending nations.

Neo-classical migration theory views migrants as atomistic, utility-maximising individuals, ignoring alternative movement motivations as well as migrants’ membership in social groupings such as households, families, and communities. Return migrants were viewed as key agents of change and innovation in development theory throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Migrants were supposed to bring back not just money, but also fresh ideas, expertise, and entrepreneurial mindsets. Migrants were supposed to have a constructive role in the development, and contribute to the increased geographical dissemination of modernisation in underdeveloped nations in this manner, and remittances have also been credited with playing an essential role in supporting economic growth (De Haas, 2011, p. 15).

North-South perspective. This perspective is based primarily on the demise of the old migration structure, in which emigrants are considered “a loss”

for their home countries (Southern countries) and immigrants are thus “won” by the country of destination (Northern countries) (Samet, 2013, p. 2247). It entails a direct influence of brain drain, i.e. depreciation of human capital and, as a result, a reduction in developing countries’ economic growth. Emigrants and their progeny are now important participants in many developing nations’ development initiatives. In addition to the induced impact of brain drain as a stimulant to domestic education, the worth of immigrants stems from their contribution from afar (diaspora option), as well as their contribution from inside the country.

There are enormous advantages to their return home (return option). Thus, circular migration implies a “brain drain” followed by a “brain gain” (feedback effect), where we find both the diaspora option and, particularly, the return option, from which developing countries’ economies can benefit in terms of economic growth through technology transfer of their nationals in the North, including remittances, links to international trade and foreign investment, and diaspora networks (diaspora option). Another benefit is the physical return of nationals (return option).

Neoliberalism perspective. Migration and associated labour issues are critical parts of global political economy. Most recent studies demonstrate a belief in a presumably free and self-regulating market as a means of establishing a just and equal society. From a North-South standpoint, the chapter connects the re-launch of global labour force management strategies in quest of cheap and flexible labour to rising inequalities across and within nations and regions. It contends that increasing socioeconomic disparities, as well as labour market fragmentation and precarisation, are necessary conditions for international migration. In the age of neoliberalism, international migration and forced labour are the most common modes of human movement under great vulnerability.

Based on the three main perspectives above, it may be concluded that economy-related factors had dominated the motives to migrate in the past. However, the situation happening today has changed and migration theory cannot explain it yet. The push and pull factors that motivate people to migrate from origin to destination countries are becoming very diverse and developing rapidly. A new phenomenon in migration is the “climate refugees”. Many countries today are experiencing such circumstances, reinforced by extreme changes in terms of the environment, causing natural disasters and motivating people to move from their home country to another country, which is also called the “green security migration” (Ari & Gökpinar, 2020, p. 47–52).

The green security migration phenomenon has already happened. In Shishmaref, Alaska, and Nanumea, Tuvalu, people have been relocated because of the increased water level, which could potentially cause flooding, and these people are called “climate refugees” (Marino & Lazrus, 2015, p. 346). Furthermore, in the Iranian refugees’ case, the situation is also rapidly changing compared to previous circumstances. The Iranian refugees in Turkey are moving because of the political oppression, gender discrimination, and “fake” work as refugees. That is why it is very important to understand the situation directly from the field to address the Iranian refugees’ problem.

2.2. Crisis Situation

A million people fled to Europe in the worst refugee crisis in human history, the 2015 European refugee crisis. According to Eurostat data, 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the 28 EU member states, Norway, and Switzerland in 2015, nearly doubling the previous high-water mark of roughly 700,000 set in 1992 after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Conflicts, both recent and long-standing, have displaced hundreds of thousands of people in each of these states. Some have been internally displaced, others have sought safety in neighbouring countries, and still others have attempted the often risky trek to Europe (and beyond) in search of asylum.

Germany has been Europe’s leading destination country for asylum seekers since 2012, with 442,000 asylum applications in 2015. Following Germany, Hungary (174,000 applications) and Sweden (156,000 applications) received the most asylum applications in 2015. Meanwhile, France (71,000) and the United Kingdom (39,000) received nearly the same number of applications in 2015 as in the years preceding the refugee influx. Refugees were not distributed evenly throughout Europe, with some nations accepting more asylum applicants than the European average. In 2015, the EU-28, Norway, and Switzerland had 250 asylum seekers for every 100,000 people. In comparison, Hungary and Sweden had the largest numbers of applications (1,770 and 1,600 respectively). Meanwhile, Germany had 540 applications per 100,000 inhabitants, which was still much higher than the overall European average. In 2015, France had just 110 applications per 100,000 people in its overall population, whereas the UK had only 60 applicants per 100,000 people.

The EU and Turkey negotiated an agreement, known as the EU-Turkey Deal, on 18 March 2016, which has substantially slowed the flow of mi-

grants from the East through Turkey to Greece, and eventually to other areas of the EU. According to the UNHCR, around 8,000 refugees came to Greece between April and July 2016 following the implementation of the deal with Turkey. Before the deal, around 150,000 migrants came to Greece between January and March of 2016. Meanwhile, part of the migration to Europe is moving to the southern Mediterranean route to Italy, with waves of mostly Sub-Saharan African migrants (not Syrians, Afghans, or Iraqis) increasing. Italy has absorbed around 90,000 migrants.

Furthermore, after the EU refugee crisis from 2015 to 2016, the European Union (EU) and the Government of Turkey have negotiated to prevent the mass movement of asylum seekers and refugees, primarily from the Middle East region, which is “rationalising” a blanket return and detention of asylum seekers, thus potentially violating the *non-refoulement* principle of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Helme, 2021, p. 70). This agenda calls for a system emergency response by implementing relocation or IDP distribution schemes temporarily in all member countries. This policy was established to help people in need of international protection and ensure a fair and balanced participation of each member state (Fernández-Huertás Moraga & Rapoport, 2014, p. 104). However, this refugee distribution scheme was not approved by some EU member states, such as the countries of the Visegrad Group, which reject the quota system proposed by the EU (Ivanova, 2016, p. 37).

The refugee-related problem is getting more complex for the Iranian refugees because the problem is not only in the regulation itself but also in the connection between those refugees and their native country. Most of those who apply for asylum either will not or cannot go back to their home countries because of the unstable political situation (Fatemi, 2017). Most Iranian refugees refuse to join the Assisted Voluntary Return conducted by the UNHCR, and at the same time, they have stayed in Turkey to this day without any further plans of migrating somewhere else.

2.3. Joining the Crowds with the Social Media

When weary, scared migrants arrived on Greek shores, one of the first things they requested was an Internet connection. Water, food, and shelter could wait. It was impossible to notify their loved ones that they had arrived safely. Connectivity, as a strong weapon for protection, education, livelihoods, and health, may also make UNHCR activities more efficient, cost-effective, and ultimately successful. Connectivity for Refugees, an ini-

tiative by UNHCR's Innovation Service, addresses three fundamental challenges: making connectivity available, inexpensive, and useful. In doing so, it is attempting to find methods to bring the digital revolution to displaced people and the humanitarians who serve them (Narli, 2018, p. 279).

The UNHCR established the Internet connection for the refugees who stayed in Turkish refugee camps, by working together with Vodacom Turkey starting from September 2016. The Internet connection is provided because today the importance of connection is equal to that of the basic human rights services which must be provided to the refugees worldwide, while the smartphone used to access the Internet is described as a tool for surviving in the refugee camp (Jauhiainen, Özçürümez, & Tursun, 2022, p. 202). In 2016 alone, there were more than 180,000 calls recorded, with the number increasing by more than 200% in three months of service. Internet availability also enables those refugees to use online forms of payment and access many services from outside of the camp, including posting their issues and everyday life on the Internet (Narli, 2018, p. 277). The refugees in the refugee camp in Sanliurfa (South-Eastern Turkey) and a community centre in Istanbul are also connected by using smartphones because of the similarity in their "unstable" condition, which pushed them to discuss problems within the social media platform (Smets, 2018).

3. Method

As a research framework, the qualitative technique using Social Network Analysis (SNA) was applied. The main pattern of interaction was recorded, and the related issues happening among the Iranian refugees in Turkey were identified. Big data analysis with NodeXL, RStudio, and Gephi mapping software was used for the data analysis. To conduct big data analysis, data mining procedures were used, where data mining itself can be defined as the process of extracting data and patterns from big datasets (Manyika et al., 2011).

Table 1: *Data mining tasks and techniques*

Data Mining Task	Description	Techniques
Segmentation or clustering	Clustering the groups that describe the data	Cluster Analysis

Classification	Adding labels to the datasets	Bayesian classification Decision tree induction Artificial neural networks Support vector machine
Association	Analysing the relationship between the users, and conversation clusters	Association rules Bayesian networks
Deviations	Wrapping up the items, to understand the information spread	Cluster analysis Outlier detection Evolution analysis
Trends	Lines and curves summarising the database, often over time	Regression Sequence pattern extraction
Generalisations	Compact descriptions of the data	Summary rules Attribute-oriented induction

Source: Author, based on Kitchin (2014, p.72).

SNA is a set of approaches for mapping, measuring, and analysing social interactions between individuals, groups, and organisations. The SNA analysis allows for the examination of patterns and types of relationships between actors, where these actors (individuals, groups, or organisations) are represented in a network map by structural nodes, and linkages are explored. It is based on the idea that all large datasets contain non-random, valid, new, helpful, and eventually intelligible information (Bahri & Widhyarto, 2021, p. 97). The type of data (structured, unstructured, or semi-structured) and the objective of the study influenced the approach chosen (Siguenza-Guzman et al., 2015, p. 500).

After the data was extracted with the NodeXL Software, the analytical tools RStudio software Version. 4.0 with the Snowball, Rstem, TwitteR, TM, NLP, Sentiment Analysis, and Sentiment Packages were used to analyse the text of tweets and sentiments in those specific tweets. After that, the Gephi Mapping Software, version 0.9.2, was used to identify the interactive map and actors. RStudio programming with Python Language Programming was used to analyse big data-based data from Twitter.

Finally, associations can be weighted or valued, which can be used to determine the strength or frequency with which information is shared in a network. This study used big data from the Twitter social media network from February to April 2019. The historical data from those particular

points were used because at that period, irregular migrations of Iranian refugees crossing the Turkish border had reached their highest level since the EU refugee crisis in 2015.

4. Data

This study used 29,987 tweets, collected between February and April 2019. Only tweets with the *#Iranianrefugees* hashtag are included in the dataset. The *#Iranianrefugees* hashtag appears as the first hashtag; however, this study also uses other hashtags connected to the primary hashtag, such as *#turkeyrefugees*, which are still related to the Iranian refugees in Turkey. Each “replies to” relationship in a tweet has an edge, as does each “mentions” relationship, and each tweet that is not a “replies to” or “mentions” has a self-loop edge. The details of the data used in this research can be described as follows:

Table 2: *Twitter data used for the analysis*

Connections	Number of tweets/Posted words
Mentions	21,778
Retweet	5,535
Replies to	2,454
Tweet	220

Source: Author.

The data collected using the NodeXL software also limits the data, to the coordinates of the refugee camp, and the data’s maximum geodetic distance is 2.365716 miles. These details in data collection are to make sure that if the tweets mostly come from the camp itself, they will present the Iranian refugees who already are in the Turkish camp.

4.1. Tools

Three clustering algorithms were provided by the analysis tools used in this research. The Stanford Network Analysis Platform (SNAP) library is the first clustering algorithm, and it calculates network metrics from an analysed graph. The second algorithm is the Wakita-and-Tsurumi algo-

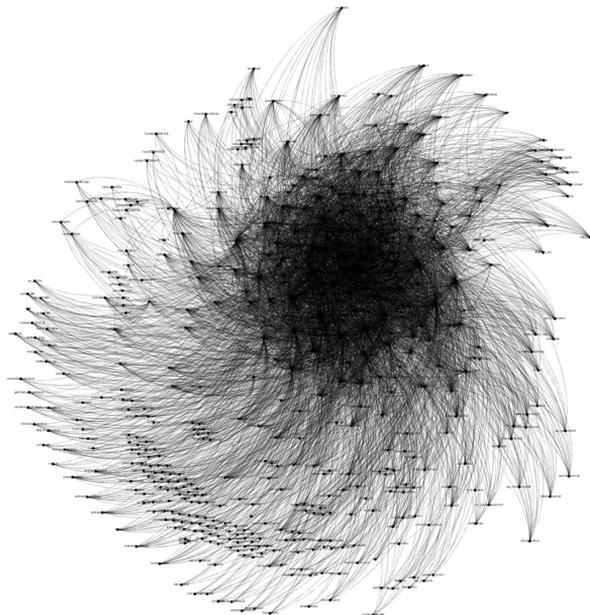
rithm, followed by the Girvan-Newman algorithm and the Clauset-Newman-Moore algorithm. The data scrapping and analysis were conducted using the NodeXL Software version 1.0.1.411.

The Clauset-Newman-Moore technique was used in this study to understand related vertices and divide them into groups. The data was then organised into multiple databases to examine the discussion starter, influencer, active engager, network builder, and information bridge. Data mapping to understand the connection between involved actors was conducted using the Gephi Mapping software version 0.9. The data output of that software was stored using Microsoft Excel to make the data readable and usable for further analyses.

5. Results

After conducting a data analysis using the Gephi Mapping Software, and NodeXL SNA Analysis Software, the conversation pattern between the Iranian refugees in Turkey in the 2019 period can be drawn as follows:

Figure 1: *Conversation mapping of Iranian refugees on Twitter social network in 2019.*



From the conversation network above, we will identify the most active users, who have the role of a conversation starter:

Table 3: *Conversation starter users in the conversation cluster*

Username	Tweets counted
rk70534	1,072,759
feldart	454,629
reuters	384,894
nytimes	357,275
time	316,343
washingtonpost	312,363
aanaseer	308,410
politico	302,921
bbcworld	293,481
usatoday	283,412

Source: Author.

After extracting the data using NodeXL software, the 10 users above can be identified as conversation starters. Conversation starters are the users who spread their perspectives about a social phenomenon or analysis to their followers (Recuero, Zago & Soares, 2019, p. 10). From that one can conclude that those users are opinion leaders with regard to the issues discussed by the Iranian refugees in Turkey.

Table 4: *Top 10 most influencing users in the conversation cluster*

Top 10 vertices, ranked by betweenness centrality	Betweenness centrality
m5ggw436vg6ln4i	37473.23613
mahya2019	20745.98569
kindnes65049573	19806.41368
stranger760	19552.94603
boostan	19193.12731

rashidi90369417	18606.30695
maryamnrouzi11	17079.71804
alibakhahi	16464.35572
najibfarshahin	16345.89673
phillip07536035	15041.42637

Source: Author.

Table 5: *Top 10 most used hashtags in the conversation cluster*

Top hashtags	Entire graph count
iranianrefugeesinturkey	4446
resettlement4iranian	1048
canada	848
humanrights	797
refugees	537
iran	473
iranian	223
eu	201
resettlement	191
unhcr	154

Source: Author.

Also, after the opinion leaders were identified, in the next step, the most used hashtags were identified to understand the main issues happening in a conversation network. A hashtag is also a form of socio-technical formation that serves social media research as the criterion for corpus selection as well as demonstrating the intricacy of online participation and the voice of a community, represented in the conversation cluster (Omena, Rabello, & Mintz, 2020, p. 2-3). After the hashtag has been identified, one may conclude that the most interesting issues which became the focus of the Iranian refugees in Turkey are resettlement, human rights, Canada, and the European Union (EU).

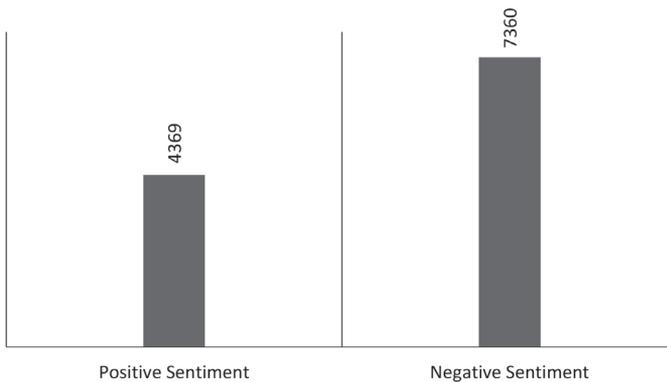
Table 6: *Top mentioned words in the conversation cluster*

Top mentioned in entire graph	Entire graph count
eu_ungeneva	2,080
refugees	2,016
justintrudeau	1,458
honahmedhussen	1,327
ungeneva	1,292
unhumanrights	1,204
refugeeschief	1,165
unicefchief	596
unhcr canada	532
unicef	441

Source: Author.

Another interesting fact is that Iranian refugees also tried to mention several political figures and government institutions in their tweets. The mentioned word helps shape the issues of a community in the conversation to be fully understandable, by involving third parties which may be responsible for the mentioned issues.

Figure 2: *Sentiment analysis of the conversation cluster about resettlement issues*



Source: Author.

Sentiment analysis using a lexicon dictionary was also conducted in this research. The tools used for conducting the sentiment analysis were Microsoft Azure NLP services. Sentiment analysis can be used to measure the satisfaction of a group of people, community, or population with relevant issues or the policies which address them (Wankhade, Rao, & Kulkarni, 2022, p. 5732). It can be concluded that Iranian refugees were mostly not satisfied with the officials who are responsible for their fate in the refugee camp in Turkey. From the results extracted above, several points can be concluded, as follows:

- a) Most of the conversations in the Iranian refugees' conversation cluster on the Twitter social network platform were primarily initiated by the refugees themselves, and several mainstream media spread the issues along with the conversation network. Those perspectives are from the Iranian asylum seeker and refugee community voices of communal issues;
- b) Most of the Iranian refugees who are involved in the conversation had requested resettlement as refugees in third countries, like the EU and Canada by the UNHCR;
- c) Most Iranian asylum seekers and refugee communities are not satisfied with the long process of resettlement by the UNHCR.

After the results are presented, a legal analysis will be conducted to understand whether the resettlement of those refugees to the European Union and Canada is possible from the legal point of view.

6. Discussion

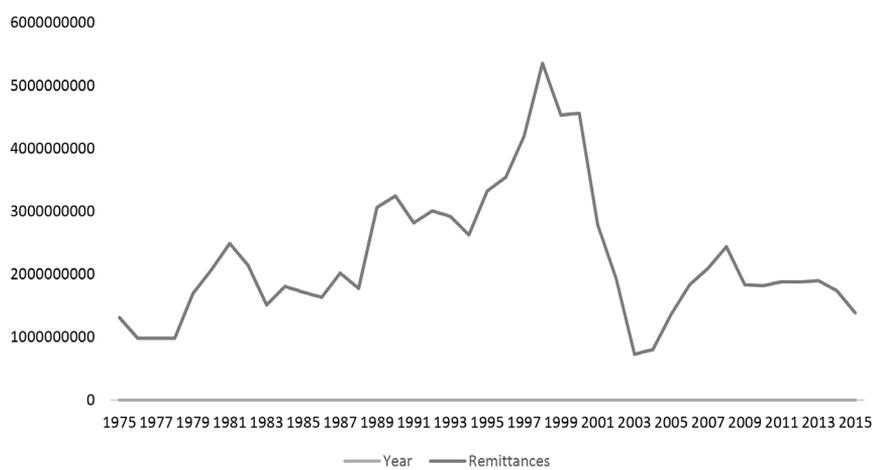
6.1. Why Turkey is Open to Refugees

Turkey has been one of the primary destination countries for asylum seekers and refugees since the 19th century. The first official immigration laws on asylum seekers entering the Ottoman territories were enacted after the Sultan adopted an open-door policy, by issuing the decree which was approved by the High Council of Tanzimat on 9 March 1857 (Massot, 2016, p. 169). The decree is about the protection of refugees from any religious restriction, and making sure those refugees can enjoy the full freedom to follow their religion, whether they are Christian, Muslim, or Jews. The result of that first immigration law was the forced migration of people from the Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire after the Russians

occupied Circassia during the Crimean War (1853–1856). Afterwards, Turkish openness towards the refugees continued, throughout the forced displacement which occurred after World War I and II (1923–1945), the Balkan countries' mass movement in the early 1950s, signing of the “Open Migration Agreement” with Josip Broz Tito in 1953 followed by a new migration wave from Macedonia to Turkey, when Turkey received more than 800,000 refugees from the Balkans (LATİF, 2002, p. 7).

On the other hand, Turkey has always been one of the top 10 remittance-receiving nations. From 2005 to 2015, there were more than 4 million Turks known to be living abroad, most of them in EU territories, in particular Germany (1,761,041), France (359,034), and the Netherlands (358,846) (Escap, 2013), and “the Turkish economy has relied on migrant remittances to fund its balance of payments deficit for decades”. This means that the Turkish government, as well as the political and economic situation are highly dependent on EU territories. As reported by the World Bank, Turkish economy's dependency on remittances is continuously increasing, as follows:

Figure 3: Turkey's acceptance of remittances from foreign countries 1975–2015



Source: Author, based on World Bank, 2015.

That political and economic situation is the most influential factor why Turkey has also become a transit and migrant hub since the 1980s. The role of Turkey as an asylum seeker- and refugee-transiting country was reinforced after the European refugee crisis from 2015 to 2016. In 2015,

more than 1 million asylum seekers tried to enter EU territory (UNHCR, 2020).

Historically, the Iranians who became refugees in Turkey can be traced back to the early Gulf War. In the 1980s, when refugees from Iran and Iraq began to flood into Turkey in large numbers, the flow of asylum seekers to Turkey changed dramatically. Previously, the majority of asylum seekers who sought refuge in Turkey had come from Europe, especially during World War II and the early years of the Cold War. This dynamic shifted after the Iranian Revolution, when 1.5 million Iranian refugees fled to Turkey in one of the greatest non-European migrant surges in Turkey's history (Kuschminder, Bresser & Siegel, 2015).

The massive flood of Iranian asylum seekers was followed by a surge of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers later in the 1980s. As part of the murderous Al-Anfal campaign, the Iraqi government bombed the Kurdish city of Halabja using chemical weapons on 25 August 1988. The Iraqi city, which was occupied by Iranian soldiers and Iraqi Kurdish rebels, had a population of over 70,000 people, the majority of whom were internally displaced (IDPs). Survivors of the incident fled to Turkey, although Turkey originally refused to allow them in owing to security worries about PKK infiltration among the Kurdish refugees.

The Turkish government provided regular food supplies, wood-burning stoves, television, and sports activities to Iraqi Kurdish refugees, but, as with Iranian refugees, Turkey only allowed them to stay for a short time. A week after the refugees were permitted into Turkey, Turkish officials rounded up some 2,000 of them and transferred them to Kurdish villages in Iran against their will. At least 20,000 refugees fled to Iran within six weeks after the first migration following the chemical attack, owing either to Turkish influence or the harsh temperature of the mountainous region where they were living. This kind of movement from the Iranian territory to Turkey is still happening today.

6.2. What Do the Iranian Refugees in Turkey Want?

Many of the scholars' articles concluded that many Iranian refugees are stuck on the way to reach Europe. The research conducted by Zijlstra (2014) found that many Iranians saw Turkey as a transit country rather than a destination country, in part because Turkey maintained a *laissez-faire* approach, encouraging most Iranian migrants and asylum seekers to continue their journey to third countries. Most of the refugees go to

the nearest EU member states that they can reach (Zijlstra, 2014). Many Iranians are choosing Turkey as their transit country because there are a lot of similarities between Turkey and Iran, especially in terms of culture and political interest, and also Iranians do not have to apply for a visa to travel to Turkey (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p. 19). Furthermore, as an Islamic state, Turkey offers the more “moderate” Islamic sharia law, which guarantees more freedom and democracy among people. Meanwhile, Iran implements a strict sharia law, which limits people’s basic rights. Many of the Iranians who entered Turkey as asylum seekers and then became refugees, are trying to enter EU territory. Most of the Iranians tried to enter the EU via the Western Balkans route.

However, unlike the previous findings, this research found that most of the Iranians are willing to join the resettlement program in a third country, which is Canada. Many of the related words and hashtags are related to resettlement and Canada, and even the name of Justin Trudeau as prime minister of Canada was posted 1,458 times. These findings are supported by previous research, namely by a survey conducted on 36 Iranian students in Turkey. Although a small minority of students reported that Turkey was their first option, 80% of the participants stated that they had truly wished to go to the United States, Canada, or Europe, as these areas constitute the hierarchy of destinations for Iranian students as migrant workers or refugees (Zijlstra, 2014, p. 187). Outside the refugee camp, the same story also appeared. It was found that in 2021, more than 11,000 Iranians were accepted as “investment refugees” in Canada, being highly educated and fluent in English. Compared to those refugees who settled in the Turkish refugee camp, the investment refugees’ condition is very different. Also, those conditions create a brain drain for Iran, because many of the best talents are students who previously studied in Turkey, and rich people with new job opportunities who fled to Canada (Entezarkheir, 2018, p. 5).

Furthermore, this research also found that many of the Iranians who already applied for resettlement are disappointed with the slow process conducted by the UNHCR. As described in the results, only 4,536 refugees are satisfied with the UNHCR services, while 7,360 refugees are not satisfied. To understand this situation, it is necessary to be familiar with the political position of Turkey in the management of refugees. Politically, Turkey agreed to a “geographic limitation” clause when it joined the 1951 Convention, which has subsequently limited the Turkish government’s ability to give formal refugee status to only European asylum claimants. However, between the 1980s and 2017, rising Middle East instability

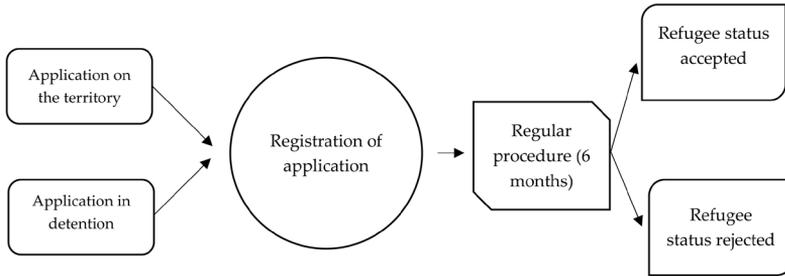
resulted in a huge influx of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, forcing Turkey to modernise its refugee and asylum-seeker management system. Turkey's reaction to refugees has changed dramatically from its previous experiences, and the government's current stance contrasts significantly with that of the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s and 1990s namely, Iraqi Kurdish children fleeing to Turkey were not required to be educated, and foreign relief groups were often denied entry to camps housing Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers.

To resolve the refugee crisis, the European Union finally signed the EU-Turkey Statement on 18 March 2016. This document contains nine points of agreement between the European Union and Turkey. First, illegal immigrants should return from Greece to Turkey. Second, for every Syrian refugee who returns to Turkey, another Syrian refugee will be resettled to the European Union based on the UN vulnerability criteria. Third, Turkey will prevent illegal migration to Europe in any way. Fourth, Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme, i.e. the relocation of refugees from Turkey to all member countries, will be enforced if illegal migration ends or is reduced significantly. Turkey also ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention about refugees and the 1967 Protocol.

Moreover, at the national level, Turkey has the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) No. 6458/2013 and other related laws that provide the legal basis, mentioned in the literature review. Constitutional Court Decision 2016/22418, and Art. 53/3 and 54 of LFIP that was amended by Law No. 7196 amending several acts, regulate the procedures for asylum seekers applying as refugees in Turkey. Firstly, the potential applicants must contact a Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) to submit a temporary protection request. UNHCR is no longer participating in the registration of applications as of 10 September 2018. If the PDMM is unable to register the application, the applicant is instructed to report to a separate province ("satellite city") within 15 days, where he or she must reside and register the application. Although transportation costs are not covered, DGMM refers those in need to NGOs like SGDD-ASAM for help. The PDMM's procedure is not uniform, and people are frequently denied registration without being sent to another PDMM (Fig. 4).

The authorities have complied with the judgment, and deportations are now frequently halted by appeals, implying that rights to avoid *refoulement* have been reinforced. However, there have been fears that this will lead to an increase in "voluntary returns". Negative judgments under the expedited procedure and inadmissibility judgments must be appealed to the courts within 15 days. Negative judgments rendered in the normal procedure

Figure 4: Procedures for obtaining refugee status in Turkey

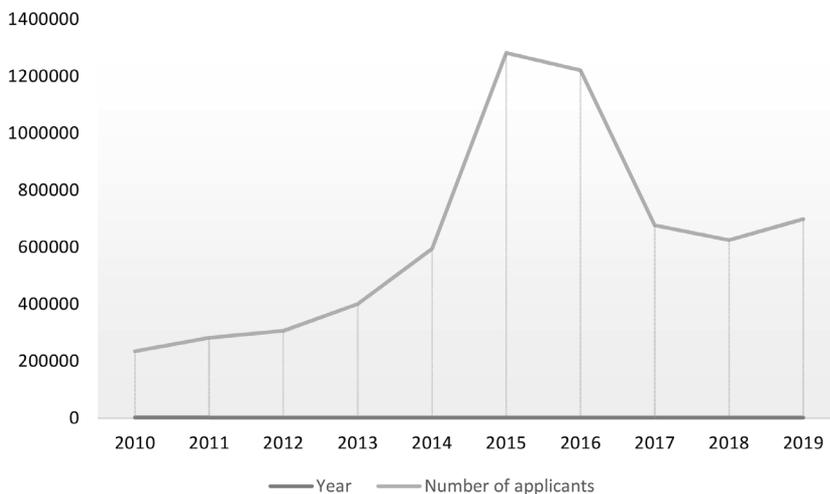


Source: Author, based on Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), 2021.

can be appealed to the International Protection Evaluation Commission (IPEC) within 10 days or the appropriate Administrative Court immediately within 30 days; the latter remedy is used in practice. Except for those facing deportation on grounds of “public safety”, “public health”, or “participation in a terrorist or criminal organisation”, all international protection appeals have a suspensive effect, allowing applicants to remain in Turkey until all other options have been exhausted.

On the other hand, the number of asylum seekers is increasing from year to year. The peak happened in 2015 when more than 1 million refugees in Turkey applied for asylum in the EU territory. The data is as follows:

Figure 5: The number of asylum seekers in the EU from Turkey from 2010–2019



Source: Author, based on Eurostat, 2020.

However, in 2015, the UNHCR office in Turkey filed 18,260 applications for resettlement to guarantee that refugees can be relocated from Turkey. However, only 7,567 individuals were relocated from Turkey in 2015, with 1,140 of them being Syrians. This is roughly 0.25% of the country's 3 million asylum seekers and refugees, a number which is still rising (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 19). The increasing number of rejected resettlement applications has made resettlement in Canada nearly impossible. Therefore, the most feasible solution other than resettlement must be addressed to hear the Iranian refugees' voices in Turkey.

In terms of theoretical analysis, developmental perspectives can be used as the analysis framework. In terms of the Iranians' motives to move to Turkey as refugees, most of the Iranians want to have a better life, economically, politically, or even personally because of the oppression in their home country. Many of the Iranians who fled to Turkey from neighbouring countries are using the refugee status, as mentioned by Haas (2013), as a "self-help development tool", which makes those people avoid the circumstances, and gain a better life, compared to their home country (Haas, 2013). Because, in the long-run, many of those Iranian refugees who request resettlement in Canada, will contribute positively to their home country.

7. Conclusion

After conducting a historical Social Network Analysis (SNA) on a dataset of 29,987 tweets with the *#Iranianrefugees* hashtag obtained from February to April 2019, from the research findings several important points can be concluded based on the Social Network Analysis (SNA) which was performed on Twitter's big data in 2019. First, most of the refugees are concerned about the resettlement issue, with more than 19,993 tweets that were tweeted and talked about it on the social media platform. Second, most of the Iranian asylum seekers who were not granted refugee status have requested to be resettled in EU territory and Canada. Third, the refugees criticise the long process of obtaining refugee status, by using negative sentiments on the social media platform. It is also evident that Iranian asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey are concerned about the issues of resettlement in Canada and the EU.

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UNDERSTANDING IRANIAN REFUGEE DISCOURSE IN TURKEY ON TWITTER BY USING SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Summary

The problem of asylum seekers is still a major concern worldwide, including for the transiting countries like Turkey, which hosted more than 4 million asylum seekers in its territory. The main question is, how long is this going to continue? To answer that question, understanding what Iranian asylum seekers want is also very important, in order to define a long-term solution. Based on the data analysis in the paper, most of the refugees who have already settled in Turkey for more than 3 years, mostly want to join the programme of resettlement to several refugee recipient countries, such as Canada and the European Union (EU), conducted by the UNHCR. However, there are some obstacles for them to successfully be admitted in the resettlement programme. First, the acceptance rate is very low, under 5% yearly, and the required processing time is sometimes more than five years. The proposed solution is to open access to education for Iranian refugees and implement the EU Blue Card for the refugees and asylum seekers to resettle them voluntarily to EU territory. Hopefully, that legal solution can become a long-term solution for Iranian asylum seekers and refugees who are to this day still struggling in the Turkish territory.

Keywords: immigration, law, Social Network Analysis, refugees, Iranian refugees

RAZUMIJEVANJE DISKURSA IRANSKIH IZBJEGLICA U TURSKOJ NA TWITTERU KORIŠTENJEM ANALIZE DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA

Sažetak

Tražitelji azila još uvijek predstavljaju veliki problem širom svijeta, a posebno u tranzitnim zemljama poput Turske koja je udomila više od četiri milijuna azilanata na svom teritoriju. Osnovno pitanje koje se postavlja jest trajanost takve situacije. Da bi se na njega odgovorilo i definiralo dugoročno rješenje ovog problema, vrlo je važno razumjeti što sami tražitelji azila iz Irana u Turskoj žele. Analiza podataka u radu pokazuje da većina izbjeglica koji su u Turskoj već više od tri godine želi sudjelovati u programima preseljenja koje vodi UNHCR u jednu od država primateljica poput Kanade ili zemalja Europske unije. Ipak, ostvarenje njihovih planova otežavaju određene zapreke. Ponaajprije, stopa prihvata u takve programe vrlo je niska (na godišnjoj razini ispod 5 %), a procesuiranje pojedinih slučajeva ponekad traje dulje od pet godina. U radu se predlažu rješenja poput otvaranja pristupa obrazovanju iranskim izbjeglicama te implementacija režima plave karte EU-a za izbjeglice i azilante. Takav zakonski okvir mogao bi predstavljati dugoročno rješenje za iranske izbjeglice i azilante kojima boravak na turskom teritoriju još uvijek predstavlja problem. Ključne riječi: imigracija, zakon, analiza društvenih mreža, izbjeglice, iranske izbjeglice