

IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award 2022 Report

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Funding from the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to complete 8 weeks of in-person research in Istanbul, Turkey, from December 2021 to February 2022 for my master's project. My research explores the differential impacts of Turkish migration and border enforcement policies on Afghan refugees and migrants in Istanbul (I use the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants' interchangeably in this report). Much geographic scholarship has focused on the broader geopolitical contours of Turkey's border policies in relation to the European Union (EU) at the expense of understanding how these same policies constrain the everyday lives and experiences of migrants and refugees within Turkey. In particular, the experiences of Afghans are crucially underrepresented in refugee research both within Turkey and more broadly, despite the fact they comprise one of the largest groups of displaced peoples in the world. In addition, my research sought to understand how displacement within an urban context shapes refugees' and migrants' encounters with the Turkish migration regime. For many refugees and migrants in Istanbul, the border is realized *inside* the city on a daily basis, as opposed to distant border crossings or remote refugee camps, through mechanisms like immigration raids, document checks, and police detention.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I shifted my research approach and framework to incorporate more secondary sources (e.g., news media and historical sources) and discourse analysis in the event that in-person fieldwork and international travel would be entirely impossible. This approach, while necessary given the uncertainty posed by the global pandemic, had many limitations given my primary focus on everyday experiences and encounters of Afghans not

found in secondary sources or migration scholarship. Afghan refugees in Turkey are underrepresented in migration scholarship because they are considered difficult to ‘access’ in fieldwork settings due to language barriers, lack of ‘visibility’ with Turkish NGO organizations (a common vehicle for recruiting refugee research participants), and Afghans’ reticence to participate in research studies. While pandemic-related limitations forced many graduate students to shift to remote methods, this option was not a possibility for me, or my research aims.

IRIS funding for in-person travel provided me the opportunity to gather high quality qualitative interview data to answer the following research questions: (1) How do Afghans specifically experience the effects of the Turkish migration regime and border securitization?; (2) How does border securitization and enforcement at the municipal and neighborhood-level govern and regulate Afghan lives?; (3) What are the specific mechanisms that the Turkish state uses to produce protracted uncertainty for Afghans and how does protracted uncertainty govern the everyday lives of Afghans?

In total, I completed semi-structured interviews with 19 Afghan migrants and one group interview. The majority of interviews were with young, undocumented migrant men who had recently arrived to Turkey following the August 2021 Taliban takeover of the Afghan government. These interviews were conducted with the help of a community liaison who facilitated connections between potential interview subjects and me. I asked questions pertaining to their daily life in Istanbul, housing situation, employment, and access to healthcare, in relation to their protection status (or lack thereof) and their interactions with the Turkish state vis-à-vis border agents, police officers, and migration officials. I also gathered insights into Afghans migrants’ relations with other displaced populations like Syrians, Iranians, Iraqis, and Kurds. I

interviewed Afghan migrants from three different districts, Beylikduzu, Zeytinburu, and Yenimahalle, which allowed for a broader geographic comparison of their experiences within Istanbul. For some interviews, I was able to participate in neighborhood tours with interview subjects to gain a sense of daily patterns and routines not captured in oral interview exchanges. While not originally part of my fieldwork plans, I also interviewed three Afghan students enrolled at Turkish universities. These interviews provided key perspectives on the interactions between different Afghan populations with various immigration statuses (e.g., university students, long-term legal residents, exiled government officials, among others).

During my IRIS-supported fieldwork, I also connected informally with several NGO officials, community representatives, and local scholars that provided further insight and historical context into the livelihood and immigration challenges faced by Afghans residing in Turkey. While I did not conduct formal interviews with these groups, I made valuable connections for future fieldwork trips, opening up new directions for longer-term research. In sum, the IRIS award facilitated foundational research during a challenging time for planning and executing international fieldwork, for which I am grateful for.

