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Article

The invisible dynamics of migration: the new order established by Syrians under temporary protection in Ankara through social networks

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the effect of social networks in Syrians' access to housing, employment and urban services in Ankara which is one of the first applications of Social Network Theory in Turkish Urban and Regional Planning. Focusing on Syrian holders of Temporary Protection identification documents, the study explores how informal links affect everyday life and migrants' navigation within the city. The study is conducted in two neighborhoods, one (Önder) with a high density of Syrian residents and the other (Bostancık) with much less. The analyses reveal how different demographic patterns are connected to the structure and efficacy of social networks. Using face-to-face interviews and social network analysis implemented in R Studio, the paper highlights how relational connections shape migrants' choice of housing, work, and access to metropolitan amenities. The results illuminate pathways of access and opportunities across the urban environment through bonding and bridging networks. This research contributes to planning studies by enabling a sociological approach and it illuminates the mechanisms often neglected, which enable migrants to get along in urban life. The findings highlight that social networks are not just support mechanisms but essentially spatial tools for how migrants negotiate their urban environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration refers to the movement of people from one geographical area to another, regardless of the reason behind it or the distance involved (IOM, 2019; Bartram et al., 2019). While this phenomenon has always been a part of human history, the factors driving migration and the ways it unfolds have transformed significantly over time—especially under the influence of globalization, which has reshaped traditional mobility patterns. To better understand these shifts, various disciplines— particularly economics and sociology—have developed theoretical frameworks that examine migration from different perspectives. These theories generally fall into two main categories: macro-level approaches (Todaro, 1969; Harris & Todaro, 1970; Wallerstein, 2004; Stouffer, 1940; Lee, 1966; Taylor,

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1986; Stewart, 1941; Zipf, 1946; Isard, 1960) and micro-level perspectives (Sjaastad, 1962; Crawford, 1973; Mincer, 1978; Stark, 1991). What both levels have in common is the recognition of social networks as a key factor influencing migration decisions and outcomes. In this context, Social Network Theory—serving as the conceptual foundation for this study—offers valuable insights into how individuals' connections shape not only the migration process itself but also the adaptation and integration experiences that follow.

Although Social Network Theory was originally developed by sociologists, it has since been embraced by a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, and psychology (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). At its core, the theory focuses on the ties and interactions among individuals or groups within a particular social context (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The theoretical development of social networks emerged from a need to better understand the social and functional outcomes of these connections. Scholars widely agree that individuals gain access to information, opportunities, and various forms of support through their social networks (Hazzard-Robinson, 2012). Accordingly, Social Network Theory aims to examine these connections to uncover the tangible and intangible benefits they provide (Chang, 2018).

When viewed through the lens of migration, social networks play a pivotal role—not only in shaping the initial decision to migrate (Ethier, 1985; Grieco, 1998), but also in supporting individuals throughout the migration journey and during their post-migration integration (Massey et al., 1990; Massey & Espinosa, 1997). Access to social and financial capital often influences whether and how individuals choose to relocate. For example, chain migration is often facilitated by pre-established networks that offer guidance and support (Lee & Roseman, 2006; Portes, 1997; Chiswick, 2005).

In the case of Syria, the civil conflict that erupted in 2011 led to a large-scale displacement of people, with Turkey becoming the primary destination due to its geographical proximity (Harunoğulları & Cengiz, 2014). What began as forced international migration gradually evolved into a pattern of chain and voluntary migration. To manage the unprecedented influx, Turkey introduced a legal status known as "temporary protection," which grants Syrians specific rights such as non-refoulement, access to basic services, and open-border policies (General Directorate of Migration Management, 2024). Although refugee camps were initially established to accommodate early arrivals, many were later closed, resulting in the relocation of a growing migrant population into urban settings.

The migration wave that began in 2011 surged rapidly until 2017, after which it plateaued. As of August 2024, the number of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey stands at 3,096,157, of whom 89,241 reside in Ankara (General Directorate of Migration Management, 2024). Given the prolonged migration process since 2011 and the recent stagnation, there is a need to analyze migrants' social networks and resources both during and after their movement. It is essential to investigate the factors influencing their choice of settlement, the social networks and resources they rely on to secure housing and employment, their access to urban services, and their participation in urban transportation.

This study aims to elucidate the role of social networks in facilitating access to housing, the labor market, and urban services for Syrians under temporary protection. The existing literature lacks comprehensive studies that examine the impact of social networks across these three dimensions. A review of the literature indicates that most studies tend to focus on a single aspect, such as housing or labor markets, without providing a holistic analysis. Furthermore, there are no comparable field studies in this area. Thus, this study's uniqueness lies in its comprehensive analysis of all relevant factors— housing, labor market, and access to services—along with a comparative field study conducted in two distinct neighborhoods. Consequently, this study fills a significant gap in the literature.

This study adopts a distinctive approach by comparing three key dimensions—housing, labor market access, and urban services—across two neighborhoods in Ankara, selected based on the demographic distribution of Syrians and Turks. Önder, the first neighborhood, has a notably high concentration of Syrian residents and represents one of the densest migrant settlements in the city. In contrast, Bostancık hosts a significantly smaller Syrian population relative to its total number of residents. By examining these two distinct urban contexts, the research seeks to uncover how social networks shape the experiences of Syrians under temporary protection—particularly in their access to essential resources and their patterns of urban movement.

Beyond its focus, the study brings several methodological and conceptual innovations to the field:

It applies Social Network Theory to analyze spatial mobility, highlighting how personal connections influence where and how migrants navigate the city.

It introduces this theory—most often used in sociology and anthropology—into the domain of urban and regional planning, providing a fresh analytical lens to examine the intersection between social ties and spatial behavior.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of migrant integration in urban spaces but also expands the potential applications of Social Network Theory within planning research.

Literature Review

Migration is now commonly recognized to be a complex, multi-dimensional process shaped by the interplay of a host of economic, political and social factors. It is not one monolithic migration but resides at a spectrum of forced

and voluntary migration. Drivers are the outcome of a combination of structural imperatives and individual agency (Castles et al., 2014). The dynamic nature of displacement since 2011 is a showcase for this intricacy: while the initial displacement was mostly caused by urgent conflict-related needs, later shifts have been defined by chain migration and family-based connections exploiting established urban networks in host cities.

Migration spatiality is deeply shaped by opportunity structures as much as social networks. Classic migration theories like Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970), have explained movement in terms of economic disparities. But more recent research suggests that urban form is also determined by housing markets, governance systems, and informal economies (Massey et al., 1990). For the temporary protection holders, such migration is owed not only to a search for stable work, but also to the gravitational pull of established social networks in neighborhoods like Önder and Bostancık.

Models of integration provide another useful lens for this inquiry. Historically, assimilationist approaches have constructed integration as a linear process of acculturation, however more contemporary views underscore not only the importance of social inclusion and network participation, but also people's access to rights and assistance. These models show that the participation of migrants in urban life depends not only on institutional arrangements but also on how they are able to insert themselves into support networks offering crucial information, trust and hands-on assistance.

This wider arena of popular anti-immigrant debate collides in particular with Social Network Theory, which you will see is the theoretical framework for this research. According to Social Network Theory, the quality and strength of relational connections has a profound impact on an individual's opportunities, constraints and options for adaptation (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Granovetter, 1973). Alternatively, for migrants social networks can map out the ways of accessing housing, work and urban services. Bonding may help meet needs and provision within rather cohesive groups, whereas bridging and linking can enable to enter new information and institutions. These relational dynamics become more prominent for Syrians on temporary protection, whose legal status restricts them to formal systems with significant gaps, which are frequently filled through personal relationships.

Drawing from migration literature in conversation with Social Network Theory, this study reframes migration as an embodied movement not only across borders but also a relational process that is deeply nested within social networks. This integrated approach enables a nuanced understanding of how migrants' everyday practices in the city and their spatial mobility through the urban space are shaped by the networks they produce and rely on.

The concept of social networks can be traced back to early structural approaches in sociology, particularly the work of Ferdinand Tönnies on social ties and community structures (Tönnies & Loomis 1999), Émile Durkheim's analysis of social relations as embedded within broader social structures (Durkheim, 1982)., and anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). A social network is defined as a finite set of actors and the relationships that are formed among them. These relationships are explained through social connections based on nodes and ties. "Nodes" represent individuals or entities, while "ties" refer to the relationships that connect one node to another within a network structure (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Hazzard-Robinson, 2012; Wellman, 1982 as cited in Chang, 2018; Abbasi et al., 2012; Freeman, 2004; Granovetter, 1977; White, 2002).

In the era of globalization, patterns of relationships between individuals have shifted significantly, prompting individuals to re-evaluate their connections and safeguard their resources. Consequently, the importance of social ties has increased, as individuals aim to maintain existing relationships, foster new interpersonal connections, and build new relationships. Social network ties help individuals categorize people and their relationships. Through social network analysis, a systematic method for studying social structures using network frameworks, individuals can identify and evaluate these connections. Such networks are characterized by nodes (individuals or groups) and ties (the relationships between them) (Mehreen et al., 2019).

Social network theory uses social network analysis as a method to assess relational links. Social network analysis comprises a set of approaches and techniques used to examine the exchange of resources between actors (Wellman & Berkowitz, 1997). It explores the phenomenon of organizational relationships from a micro perspective through three key elements: actors, relationships, and ties. Additionally, social network analysis helps to understand the impact of these relational ties on individual behavior (Chang, 2018).

White (2002) argued that social network analysis focuses on the patterns of ties between actors within a social system or the links through which one unit of an entity is related to other units. These patterns are examined to understand how social structures may either constrain or enhance the behavior of actors. Rather than providing categorical descriptions of social systems, network analysis examines the patterns of ties that connect actors (Berkowitz, 1982; Wellman, 1983; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994).

One method to reveal a social network involves asking questions about the ego-other relationship, focusing on the characteristics of the ties between the ego (the focal individual) and members of their network. The type of ties reflects the nature of the relationship between the ego and the alter (Marsden, 2012; McCarty, 2002). Parameters re-

lated to these questions vary in the literature according to different institutions, organizations, and researchers. For instance, the OECD measures social networks at five basic levels (Harper, 2002), while the World Bank defines two main axes and six sub- dimensions of these axes (Grootaert et al., 2004; Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002; Jones & Woolcock, 2009). Other studies examine social networks at three levels: micro, meso, and macro (Grootaert, 2001; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2000; Granovetter, 1973; Durlauf & Fafchamps, 2005; Putnam, 1993; Norris, 2000; Ostrom, 2000).

In this study, the parameters used to measure the social network include Practical Help (Strang & Quinn, 2021; Lamba & Krahn, 2003), Emotional Support (Strang & Quinn, 2019; Lamba & Krahn, 2003), Access to Rights (Strang & Quinn, 2021; Lamba & Krahn, 2003), Trust (Putnam, 2000), Collaboration (Putnam, 2000), Adaptation Assistance (McMichael & Manderson, 2004), Information Gain (Putnam, 2000), Social Capital as a formation throughout the integration process (Lamba & Krahn, 2003), Definition of Community (Aizlewood & Pendakur, 2007), Power (Morrice, 2007), Safety (Deuchar, 2011), Reciprocity (Putnam, 2000), and Social Bridging, Bonding, and Linking (Putnam, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

As of August 2024, there are 89,241 Syrians under temporary protection registered in Ankara, constituting 1.51% of the city's total population (General Directorate of Migration Management, 2024). In the Altındağ district, where the Önder Neighborhood (the first study area) is located, 41,660 Syrians under temporary protection reside, making up 11.38% of the district's population. Meanwhile, in the Mamak district, which includes the Bostancık Neighborhood (the second study area), 5,008 Syrians under temporary protection live, accounting for 0.80% of the district population (General Directorate of Migration Management as cited in Savran, 2020). According to the Address-Based Population Registration System data for 2022 from TÜİK, the population of the Önder Neighborhood is 1,770, while the Bostancık Neighborhood has a population of 3,759 (TÜİK, 2022).

The study area was chosen from these two neighborhoods because of their contrasting population patterns. The study aims to uncover how different population patterns shape social networks that influence the daily practices and intra-city movement of migrant individuals, by selecting neighborhoods in Ankara with the highest and lowest proportions of the Syrian population. Figure 1 depicts the city's Central Business District (CBD), the urban study area, and the selected neighborhoods' locations. The figure highlights Ulus and Kızılay, defined as the CBD of Ankara, as well as Siteler, one of the province's key urban employment areas. According to the Health and Safety Labour Watch Report (2019), most Syrians living in Ankara are employed in the Siteler district. This area is referred to as "Little Aleppo" due to its proximity to employment opportunities and the

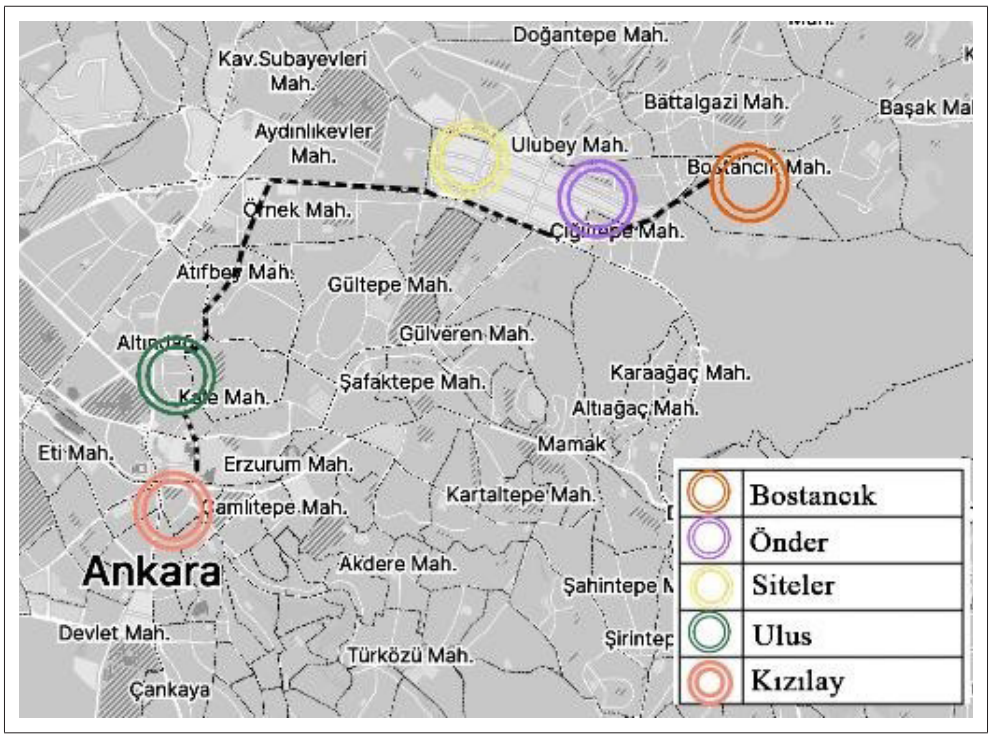

Figure 1. Location of the study area within the city.

development of affordable housing stock created by the urban transformation processes that began in the Önder and Ulubey neighborhoods.

Research Design, Sampling and Analysis

This research is grounded in Social Network Theory and adopts a qualitative methodology, specifically a phenomenological design. This approach is particularly useful for exploring phenomena that people are aware of but do not fully comprehend. Such phenomena may include experiences, perceptions, events, or social patterns that are familiar yet difficult to articulate or understand in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The central goal of phenomenological research is to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by analyzing individuals' lived experiences (Ersoy, 2017). By identifying shared or contrasting experiences among participants, researchers aim to construct a deeper understanding of the issue at hand (Creswell, 2014; 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

In this study, the phenomenological design was used to explore how Syrians under temporary protection make sense of their migration experiences and daily urban lives in Ankara. Structured interview questions were developed to guide data collection, resulting in a comprehensive form consisting of 74 items. These questions address demographic and economic characteristics, migration trajectories, and the adjustments migrants have made in their new environments.

The study population consists of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. The sample focuses specifically on residents of two neighborhoods in Ankara: Önder in the Altındağ district and Bostancık in the Mamak district. Fieldwork was conducted through face-to-face interviews, involving 113 participants in Bostancık and 114 in Önder, offering a robust dataset for examining both shared and neighborhood-specific migration experiences.

The data analysis phase commenced after the fieldwork was completed and consists of two stages. In the first stage, the collected data were subjected to a Two-Way ANOVA analysis using SPSS software to identify significant relationships between the variables that would serve as inputs for social network analysis. ANOVA was conducted with the understanding that questions with a significance value greater than 0.05 indicate homogeneity of variances, as tested by the homogeneity of variances test. A significance value below 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Subsequently, social network analysis was performed on these groups of questions.

Social network analysis examines individual behavior at the micro level and the structural patterns of relational ties at the macro level, highlighting the dynamic interactions between actors and the networks they form (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Social networks function simultaneously as both causes and consequences of individual behavior, shaping opportunities while being actively shaped by individuals who initiate, maintain, or terminate ties (Wellman, 1983; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). As noted in the literature, the instrumental value of these relationships determines whether particular network structures and positions generate opportunities or impose constraints on actors (Wellman & Berkowitz, 1997). To capture these dynamics, social network analysis employs a range of measures used to characterize and compare network structures, including various forms of centrality (Freeman, 1979; Borgatti, Everett & Johnson, 2013), the identification of strongly connected clusters, and the detection of actors who occupy unique or strategic positions within networks (Freeman, 2004; Borgatti et al., 2013).

For the social network analysis component of this study, the R Studio software was utilized, incorporating three key packages: Igraph, Haven, and Tidyr. The Igraph package offers a robust set of tools for building, analyzing, and visualizing complex network structures. Haven was used to seamlessly import data from statistical programs such as SPSS and STATA, ensuring smooth integration of previously collected datasets. Tidyr assisted in organizing and transforming the data into tidy formats suitable for analysis.

Once the necessary packages were loaded, network models were constructed using graph-based methods. Among these, Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) played a central role by representing individuals and their connections as nodes and edges within the network. These models enable the analysis of relational patterns by incorporating the unique attributes of each node, such as behavioral traits or information flow.

To further enhance the visualization and interpretability of these networks, the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm was employed. This force-directed layout algorithm calculates optimal distances and positions between nodes, allowing for a clearer representation of the social network's internal structure. By using this method, the spatial arrangement of connections becomes more intuitive, offering deeper insight into the relational dynamics at play within the migrant communities studied.

Social network analysis identifies nodes, hubs and authorities. The concepts of hubs and authorities in social networks represent people's relationships and interactions with each other. Hubs are often focused on popularity and having a wide circle, while authorities are characterized by deep knowledge and expertise. Authorities are people who have deep knowledge and expertise on a particular topic. They are individuals who generate valuable content on a specific subject, earning the trust of other users. Given people's roles and interactions in social networks, some users may stand out as hubs, while others are defined as authorities.A favorable hub represents a node that points

to many other nodes, while a favorable authority represents a node connected by many different hubs. In other words, hubs represent people and categories that are numerically more networked with others, while authority represents the node that hubs are more connected to. In social networks, large nodes and small nodes refer to the importance of a node, usually calculated based on a user's connections in the social network. Large nodes are high-ranking nodes in the social network. In social networks, distance refers to the strength or closeness of the relationship between nodes. This distance is usually calculated based on factors such as connections, interactions or shared characteristics between nodes.

RESULTS

Demographic and Socio-Economic Structure

The age range of the interviewees is between 15-68. The cluster is between the ages of 26 and 40. It is known that individuals mostly live with 5-8 people at home. Women in the working age range commonly view themselves as housewives. Among all participants, those who had professions in Syria such as architects, laborers, officers and teachers are employed in unskilled jobs in Turkey. When asked about the participants' migration processes, the most common year for migration to Turkey was 2014. Parallel to this, the participants received temporary protection status in the years 2014 and 2015. Some of the interviewees stated that they lived in provinces such as Kilis, Hatay, Gaziantep, which are closer to the Syrian border, before Ankara, which was selected as the sample area. Those who came to Turkey in the 2nd or 3rd stage of their migration stated that they migrated to Ankara through acquaintances or relatives as an example of chain migration.

Along with the demographic information given in Table 1, the demographic and socio-economic structures and migration processes of the participants who were interviewed face-to-face within the scope of the study, despite the neighborhood differences, are similar.

Social Network

To measure the social networks of individuals, questions were developed based on the parameters identified in the literature review. However, when the research focuses on migration, not all parameters may effectively explain all migration flows and the social networks of migrants. Therefore, while questions related to all parameters were included in the field study, the Two-Way ANOVA analysis (as shown in Table 2) was used to identify questions with significant relationships. These questions were subsequently used as the basis for the social network analysis. Separate social network analyses were conducted for the two neighborhoods that constitute the study's sample, and the results were compared.

First, the social network analysis results for individuals living in the Bostancık Neighborhood, focusing on the independent variable "education level" and various dependent variables, were interpreted. For individuals in Bostancık Neighborhood, relatives serve as a reliable center during emergencies, while both public institutions and relatives function as authoritative entities. This differentiation aligns with the literature on social capital stratification, particularly Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. The cluster analysis shows that public institutions, and those with undergraduate and graduate education levels, form one cluster, while another cluster comprise individuals with secondary school education and their relatives. This pattern suggests that those with

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

		Bostancık Neighborhood	Önder Neighborhood
Gender	Female	49.6%	59.6%
	Male	49.6%	39.5%
	Unanswered	0.8%	0.9%
More than one family in the Same Household	Yes	22.1%	8.8%
	No	75.2%	90.3%
	Unanswered	2.7%	0.9%
Year of Migration	2010-2013	20%	11%
	2014-2017	69%	85%
	2017-Present	11%	4%
Legal Status	Unregistered	6.3%	14%
	Temporary Protection ID	83.2%	83.3%
	Citizen	8%	0.9%
	Unanswered	2.7%	1.8%

Table 2. Results of the Two-Way ANOVA

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Significance
Person from whom a loan can be requested	Educational Level	0.009
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.028
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.178
Emergency contact person	Educational Level	0.177
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.236
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.522
People who receive help in the job finding process	Educational Level	0.045
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.007
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.034
People who receive help in the dwelling finding process	Educational Level	0.917
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.023
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.368
Places to visit outside the neighborhood	Educational Level	0.017
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.369
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.401
Leisure time activities	Educational Level	0.047
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.042
	Educational Level * Neighborhood of Residence	0.389
Person from whom a loan can be requested	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.048
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.014
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.038
Emergency contact person	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.040
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.926
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.595
People who receive help in the job finding process	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.023
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.049
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.018
People who receive help in the dwelling finding process	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.021
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.148
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.826
Places to visit outside the neighborhood	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.484
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.022
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.387
Leisure time activities	Arrival Date in Turkiye	0.149
	Neighborhood of Residence	0.149
	Arrival Date in Turkiye * Neighborhood of Residence	0.278

a bachelor's degree or higher tend to rely on institutional structures—forms of bridging social capital— that facilitate access to wider, more heterogeneous networks and higher institutional trust (Putnam, 2000; Lamba & Krahn, 2003). In contrast, individuals with lower education levels rely more heavily on kinship-based ties, reflecting bonding social capital, which is commonly observed in marginalized or tightly-knit migrant communities (Granovetter, 1973; Morrice, 2007). In the context of job searching, Syrian friends, relatives, and public institutions are identified as key nodes, with Syrian friends emerging as the primary authority. The cluster analysis indicates that individuals

at nearly all education levels, except those who are literate or illiterate, form a common cluster with Syrian friends—again illustrating how bonding ties play a central role in securing employment among refugees. In housing searches, Syrian friends, relatives, and public institutions are also among the most connected nodes, with Syrian friends notably prominent. According to the cluster analysis, one cluster consists of Syrian friends and individuals with postgraduate education, while another includes relatives and individuals with lower education levels. Finally, the analysis of urban service use shows that as education level increases, individuals' engagement with services outside the neighborhood also increases. This aligns with existing research indicating that higher education is associated with broader networks, increased mobility, and greater interaction with formal institutions, while individuals with lower education levels tend to engage primarily within their immediate social circles (Putnam, 2000; Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

When analyzing the social network results for individuals in the Önder Neighborhood concerning the independent variable "education level" and various dependent variables, relatives and Syrian friends emerged as central figures during emergencies. The predominance of kin- and community-based ties in crisis situations reflects strong bonding social capital, which is typically more salient in tightly knit or socio-economically constrained migrant settings (Putnam, 2000; Morrice, 2007). Although public institutions form part of the networks of individuals with postgraduate education, they remain relatively peripheral for the broader community—consistent with research showing that lower education levels often correlate with reduced institutional trust and limited engagement with formal systems (Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

Cluster analysis further indicates that relatives and individuals with primary and secondary education form one cluster, while Syrian friends and individuals with high school education form another. This pattern aligns with Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong ties, which dominate among close kin and co-ethnic peers, and weaker ties, which are more likely to facilitate access to broader resources but appear less developed in Önder. Unlike in Bostancık Neighborhood, associations and public institutions emerge as weak ties in the job search process—a finding consistent with literature on marginalized migrant communities where employment is typically accessed through bonding-based networks rather than through bridging institutional channels (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000).

Similarly, in the housing search process, relatives and Syrian friends remain the most central nodes. While individuals with higher education incorporate public institutions into their networks, associations again represent the weakest ties. This reliance on strong familial and co-ethnic ties reflects bonding- oriented strategies commonly observed in refugee communities facing socio-spatial isolation (Morrice, 2007; Strang & Quinn, 2021). The relatively low level of urban service utilization among residents of Önder Neighborhood—and its increase with rising education levels—also mirrors broader findings that higher education enhances the likelihood of forming bridging ties and interacting with formal urban systems (Putnam, 2000; Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

The social network analysis results based on the "dates of arrival in Turkey" also resonate with migration literature, particularly regarding the transition from initial, more institutional forms of support to chain migration dynamics. For individuals who migrated in the early phases of the Syrian civil war, public institutions served as stable centers during emergencies. This early reliance on institutional actors corresponds to integration frameworks suggesting that newcomers initially depend on formal support structures when social networks are not yet established (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, after 2013, relatives became the primary centers—a clear indication of chain migration processes in which bonding ties increasingly structure settlement patterns (Massey et al., 1990; Granovetter, 1973).

In job searching, Turkish friends emerged as central nodes for those who migrated before 2014, but after this period, Syrian friends became the primary authorities. This shift reflects the gradual consolidation of co-ethnic networks, which often become the dominant channels for economic participation as migrant communities grow (Morrice, 2007). The housing search process shows a similar pattern. Before 2014, public institutions and Turkish friends were important; after 2014, relatives and Syrian friends became central. This aligns with the literature on refugee settlement, which highlights that as communities expand, bonding networks increasingly replace bridging networks as the primary means of securing housing and daily resources (Putnam, 2000; Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

A different trend was observed in urban service utilization, residents of Önder exhibited a much more closed social structure and a lower rate of urban engagement compared to those in Bostancık. This mirrors findings from social capital research indicating that communities with dense bonding networks but limited bridging networks often have restricted access to broader urban opportunities (Putnam, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

Urban Mobility

The visible form of social networks among Syrians under temporary protection in Ankara is reflected in their patterns of urban mobility. This connection between social ties and spatial movement aligns with the concept of navigational or spatial capital, which refers to individuals' capacity to move through the city and access opportunities based on the strength and diversity of their social networks (Strang &

Quinn, 2021). To understand these patterns, mapping was conducted based on responses to questions such as where their Syrian acquaintances live, where they meet with these acquaintances, where their active workplaces are located, where they spend their free time, and where they prefer to shop. The density of network connections shown in the maps illustrates the frequency and reach of mobility across Ankara.

Mapping the locations where individuals meet their Syrian acquaintances—strong nodes in their social networks (Figure 2)—reveals that those living in Bostancık Neighborhood exhibit significant urban mobility toward Önder and Hüseyingazi Neighborhoods. This mobility is shaped not only by spatial proximity but also by the presence of dense co-ethnic clusters in these neighborhoods. Such clustering is widely discussed in the migration literature, where ethnic enclaves are known to attract mobility due to shared cultural resources, familiarity, and perceived safety (Portes, 1997; Massey et al., 1990). Following Önder and Hüseyingazi, Karapürçek, Ulubey, and Battalgazi Neighborhoods also show substantial levels of mobility, suggesting that Bostancık residents maintain a more extensive network of bridging ties compared to residents of Önder.

According to Figure 3, intra-neighborhood mobility is particularly intense in Önder Neighborhood, where residents frequently interact with acquaintances living in the same neighborhood. This highly localized mobility pattern reflects a form of bonding social capital, common in communities with limited economic resources or a history of marginalization (Morrice, 2007; Deuchar, 2011). Although Önder displays limited inter-neighborhood movement compared to Bostancık, it does have notable mobility with a few nearby neighborhoods such as Battalgazi, Ulubey, and Hüseyingazi. Notably, while Önder is a primary destination for residents of Bostancık, there is relatively little movement from Önder to Bostancık. This asymmetry is consistent with research showing that residents of dense migrant enclaves often have less navigational capital and thus more restricted mobility patterns (Strang & Quinn, 2021).

Interview responses further indicate that acquaintances of Bostancık residents are dispersed across the city, whereas acquaintances of Önder residents are highly concentrated within their own neighborhood. This pattern reinforces the idea that Önder Neighborhood is characterized by localized bonding ties, while Bostancık residents rely on a more diverse set of relationships that encourage broader spatial movement.

This pattern suggests that the social networks of Syrians in these two neighborhoods operate differently: Önder Neighborhood's networks are more localized, while Bostancık Neighborhood's networks extend more broadly across Ankara.

Work-related mobility provides another lens into how social networks shape spatial patterns. According to Figure 4, the majority of people from Bostancık Neighborhood commute to Siteler due to the concentration of employment opportunities in the furniture sector. Proximity and affordability are central determinants of this mobility, yet the fact that many residents also travel to Ulus, Önder, and Hüseyingazi suggests the presence of both bonding and bridging ties supporting employment access. Workers in Ulus and

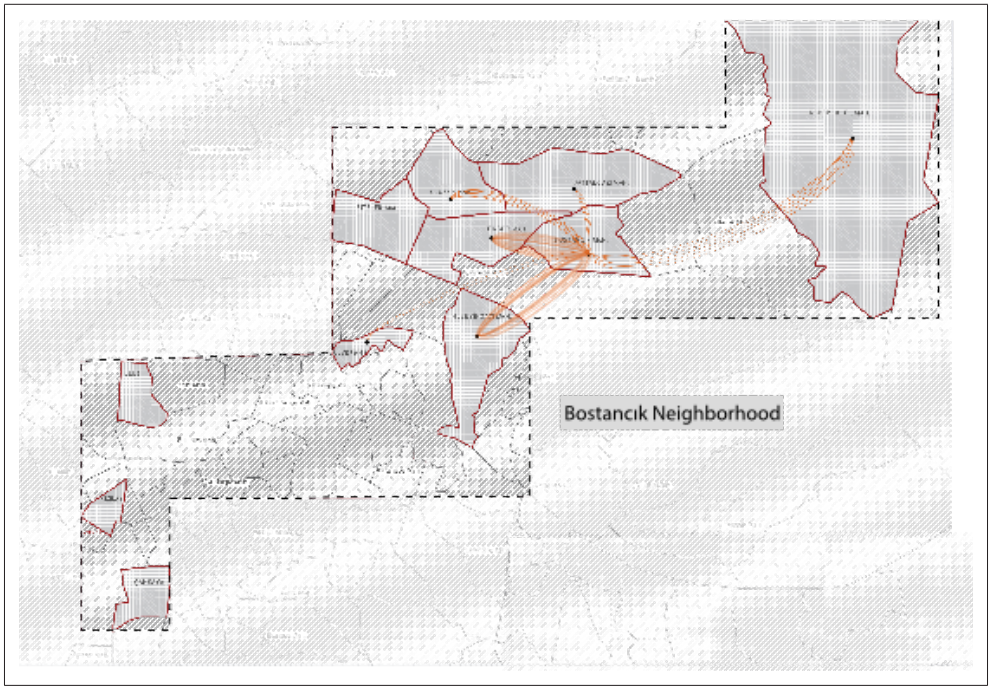

Figure 2. Meeting activities of people living in Bostancık neighborhood with their friends.

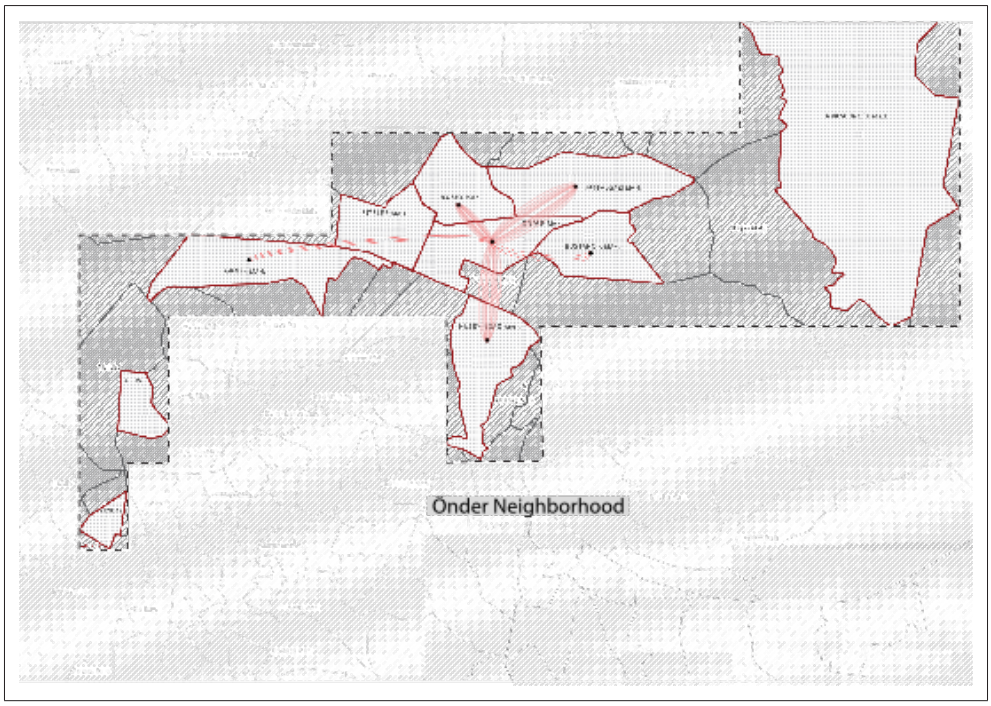

Figure 3. Meeting activities of people living in Önder neighborhood with their friends.

Kızılay—primarily individuals with higher education—illustrate the role of bridging capital in enabling access to more formal or diversified labor markets (Putnam, 2000; Lamba & Krahn, 2003).

Figure 5 shows that Siteler is likewise the most common destination for work-related mobility among residents of Önder Neighborhood. However, unlike Bostancık, Önder's work mobility remains more neighborhood-bound, with fewer connections to citywide labor markets. This again reflects localized bonding structures, which, while offering strong internal support, may constrain opportunities for socio- economic mobility (Morrice, 2007).

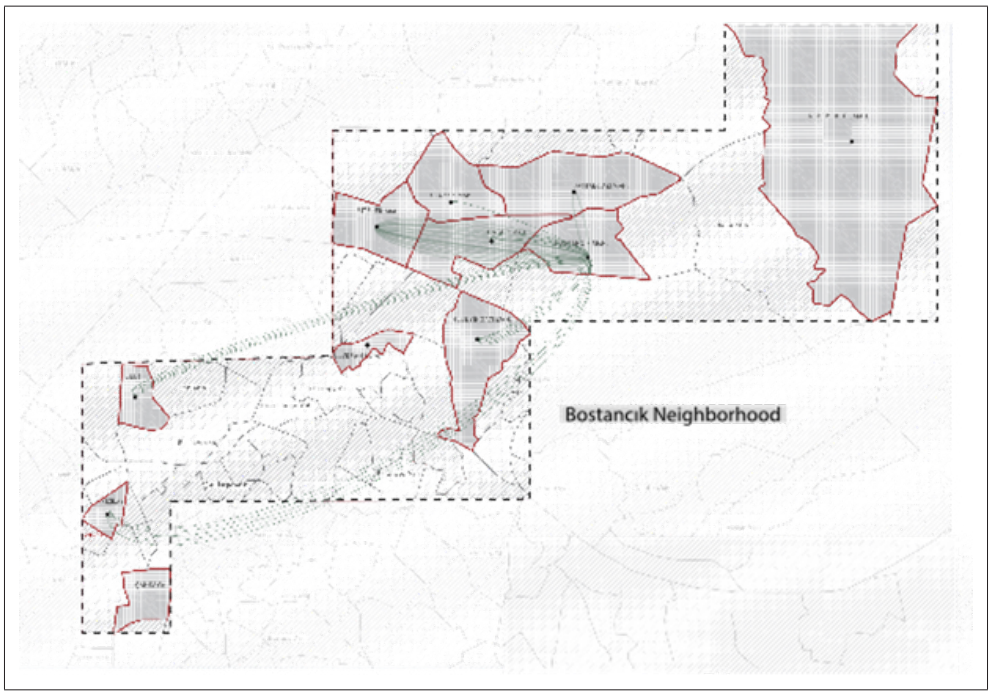

Figure 4. Work-related mobility of Bostancık neighborhood residents.

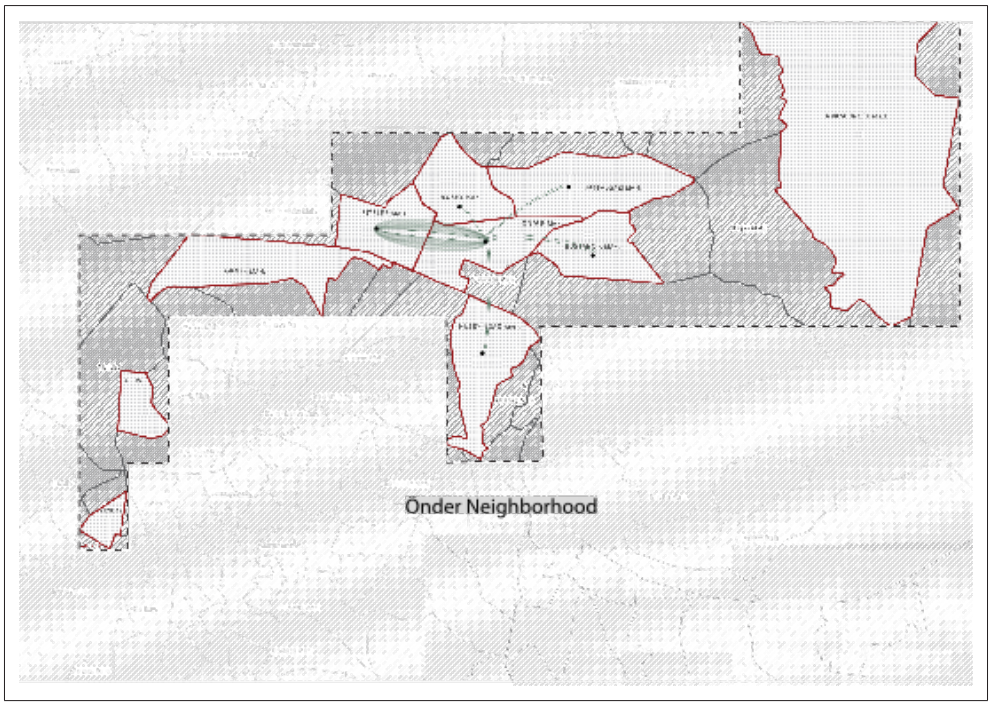

Figure 5. Work-related mobility of Önder neighborhood residents.

Shopping-related mobility also highlights significant differences between the two neighborhoods. According to Figure 6, Bostancık residents frequently choose Önder for shopping due to the availability of culturally familiar products and affordable options—patterns consistent with enclave-based consumption behaviors described in migrant geographies (Portes, 1997). The preference for Hüseyingazi relates to the presence of a local market, while trips to Ulus and Kızılay indicate higher levels of navigational capital among some residents.

In contrast, Figure 7 shows that residents of Önder largely shop within their own neighborhood, resulting in limited urban-scale movement. While they do visit Hüseyingazi

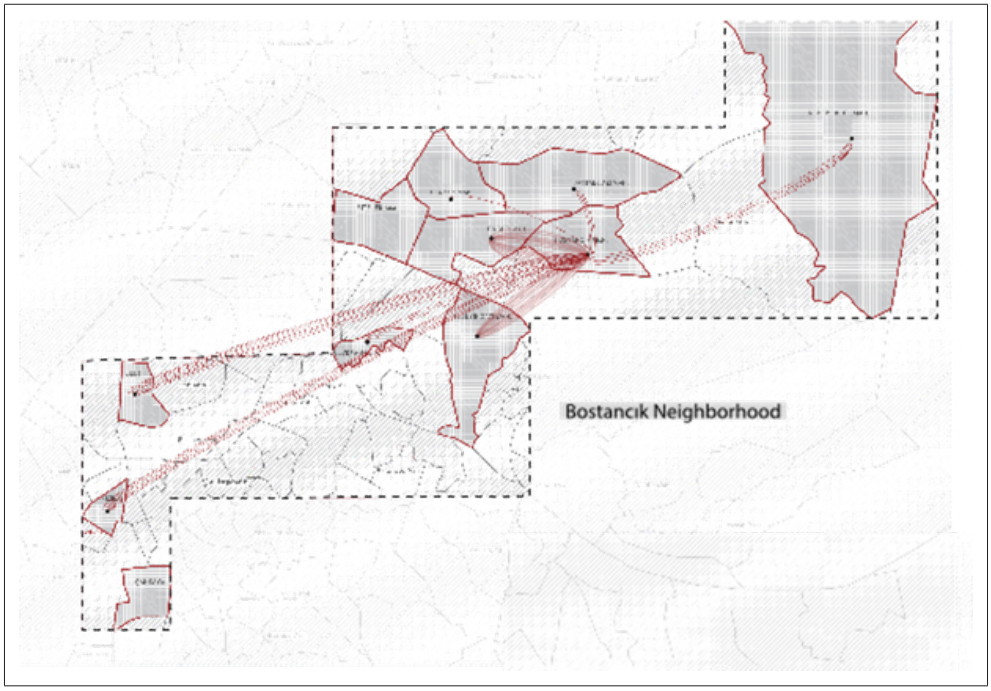

Figure 6. Shopping-related mobility of Bostancık neighborhood residents.

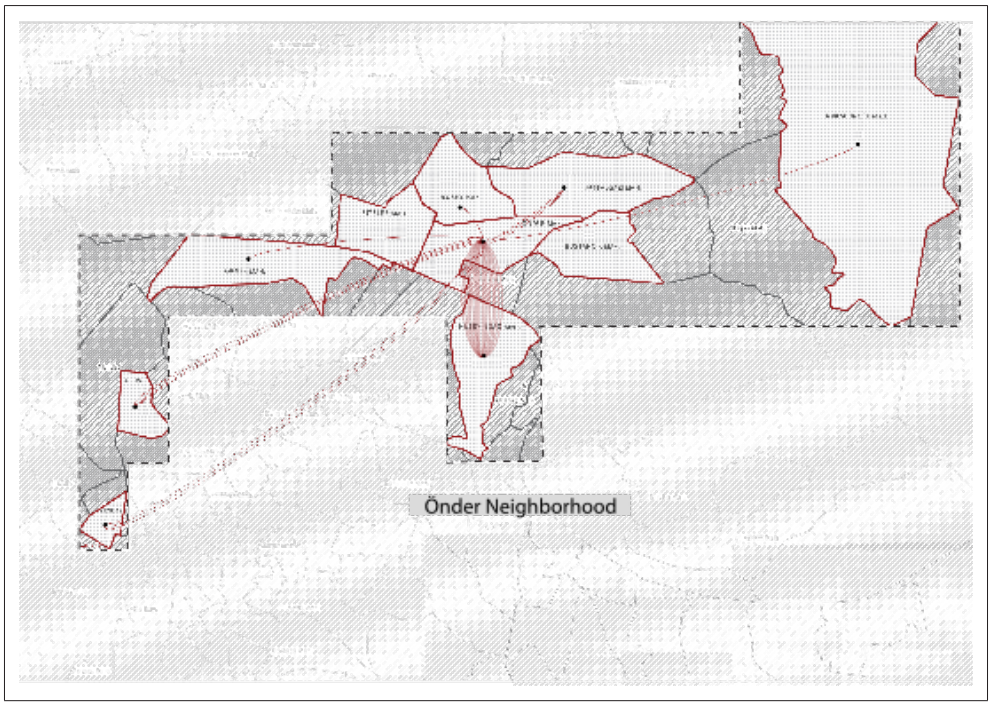

Figure 7. Shopping-related mobility of Önder neighborhood residents.

and occasionally Battalgazi or Ulubey, their mobility remains comparatively constrained. Such restricted spatial behavior aligns with findings on urban marginality, wherein dense bonding ties and limited institutional engagement reduce individuals' ability—or perceived ability—to navigate broader urban environments (Deuchar, 2011; Morrice, 2007).

Taken together, the mobility patterns of both neighborhoods reflect the broader argument of the study: bonding-dominant networks produce localized mobility, while bridging-oriented networks facilitate broader spatial reach. Bostancık residents' wider mobility aligns with their more diverse social connections, whereas Önder's enclave-like structure reinforces inward-looking, spatially limited patterns of everyday movement.

DISCUSSION

Three types of social networks influence the labor market participation of Syrians under temporary protection. Individuals who were unemployed upon arrival in Turkey but were previously employed in Syria have utilized various social networks to access the labor market. However, the neighborhood's population pattern affects the type of social network and social capital utilized. Unifying social networks, such as those involving public institutions and associations, are more effective in neighborhoods with smaller Syrian populations than in those with larger Syrian populations. Conversely, binding social networks (e.g., connections with relatives or friends) play a more dominant role in job-finding processes in neighborhoods with a higher density of Syrians.

Beyond describing social network structures, the findings reveal how everyday access to housing, employment, and urban services is actively shaped by the configuration of social ties. Rather than functioning as neutral background conditions, social networks emerge as dynamic mechanisms that mediate migrants' spatial choices, mobility patterns, and forms of urban participation.

The population pattern of neighborhoods where Syrians under temporary protection live directly affects their access to housing, the labor market, and urban services. The primary reason for this is that the population pattern causes changes and diversification in individuals' social networks. A relatively high concentration of Syrians in a neighborhood strengthens the bonds among them but reduces their interactions with people of different languages and ethnicities. While this may strengthen intra-group connections, it limits access to information and services. In such cases, individuals may miss out on valuable information and services from other groups or public institutions/organizations, resulting in a more restricted framework for accessing housing, the labor market, and urban services. Field studies conducted in Bostancık and Önder Neighborhoods support this conclusion. The proportion of Syrians

in the population of Bostancık Neighborhood is lower than in Önder Neighborhood. Research findings indicate that the social networks of Syrians under temporary protection residing in Bostancık are more diverse compared to those

in Önder. Furthermore, in terms of access to housing, the labor market, and urban services, residents of Bostancık Neighborhood benefit more from their social networks and have a broader network. In contrast, those living in Önder Neighborhood remain within a narrower framework in these areas.

In this respect, the findings partially align with previous studies on Syrian migrants in Turkey, which emphasize the central role of kinship and co-ethnic networks in accessing employment and housing. However, unlike much of the existing literature that treats migrant communities as relatively homogeneous, this study demonstrates that neighborhood-level population patterns create significant internal differentiation in social network structures and spatial mobility outcomes.

The length of stay in Turkey and the education level of Syrians under temporary protection are crucial parameters that shape their social networks and capital. As the length of stay increases, individuals' social networks and capital diversify. The date of arrival also significantly affects this diversification. Those who arrived during the initial years of the migration flow tend to have stronger unifying social networks than those who arrived later. For those arriving after the first wave, the binding social network became more dominant as the migration took the form of a chain migration model. From the perspective of education level, a higher education level leads to more diverse social networks. For example, Syrians with bachelor's and graduate degrees are more likely to engage in unifying and bridging social networks—networks that are less common at other education levels. It has been concluded that these connecting and bridging social networks are particularly effective in accessing housing. In the early years of migration, the influence of unifying social networks was more prominent among newcomers. However, as the migration evolved into a chain migration model, the connecting social networks gained importance. The population pattern of a neighborhood also plays a role: in neighborhoods with fewer Syrians, public institutions and associations are more effective in the housing process, while in areas with a higher number of Syrians, binding social networks—such as relationships with relatives and Syrian friends—become more prominent.

Although Syrians living in Bostancık and Önder Neighborhoods display similarities in demographic and migration characteristics, they diverge significantly in processes like finding housing, participating in the labor market, and benefiting from urban services. This divergence is primarily due to differences in population patterns. Önder Neighborhood has a high Syrian population that relies heavily on binding social capital for urban processes. In contrast, Bostancık Neighborhood has a relatively smaller Syrian population, allowing Syrians under temporary protection to diversify their social networks by interacting with other residents beyond their own relatives and acquaintances. The literature suggests that individuals who form their social networks exclusively through acquaintances and relatives face more limitations in accessing information, finding employment, and participating in urban mobility. On the other hand, those who diversify their social networks—engaging with people outside their ethnic group and with different languages or beliefs—find it easier to access information and the resources they need. The differences between Bostancık and Önder Neighborhoods illustrate this point: Syrians in Bostancık, with their more diverse social networks, have broader opportunities compared to those in Önder, who mainly rely on their binding social capital.

Figure 8 presents a map of the total urban mobility of individuals living in Bostancık Neighborhood. According to the total urban mobility map formed within the framework of the social networks of individuals living in Bostancık Neighborhood, the neighborhood with the most intense ties and the highest mobility is determined as Hüseyingazi Neighborhood. Khüseyingazi Neighborhood is the neighborhood where individuals have both work, shopping and acquaintances outside of themselves and where the frequency of visits is high. In addition, Gülveren Neighborhood, Önder Neighborhood and Karapürçek Neighborhood were determined as the places where they both have acquaintances and go for shopping. There is a relationship with Çankaya, Solfasol, Siteler and Ulubey neighborhoods only for work purposes. The neighborhoods that create mobility for both working and shopping are Ulus and Kızılay. In Bostancık Neighborhood, the radius of the inner belt, where intense relations and mobility are observed, is 3.7 kilometers, while the radius of the outer belt is 8.7 kilometers. The movement areas within this belt were calculated as 43.3 km2 in the inner belt and 236.4 km2 in the outer belt.

According to the total urban mobility map (Figure 9) formed within the framework of the social networks of individuals living in Önder Neighborhood, the neighborhoods with the densest ties are Ulubey, Battalgazi and Hüseyingazi Neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are both work foci and shopping and visiting foci where acquaintances are located. In addition, Örnek Neighborhood was identified as a place where they both have acquaintances and where they go for shopping. Siteler Neighborhood is the place where they are only active for work purposes. There is a mobility with Ulus, Kızılay and Karapürçek neighborhoods only for shopping. The neighborhoods where they have only acquaintances and where they provide mobility for visiting purposes are Demirlibahçe, Bostancık, Doğantepe and Solfasol. The radius of the inner belt, where intense relations and mobility are observed in Önder Neighborhood, is 2.5 kilometers, while the radius of the outer belt is measured as 5.7 kilometers. The movement areas within this belt were calculated as 20 km2 in the inner belt and 101.6 km2 in the outer belt.

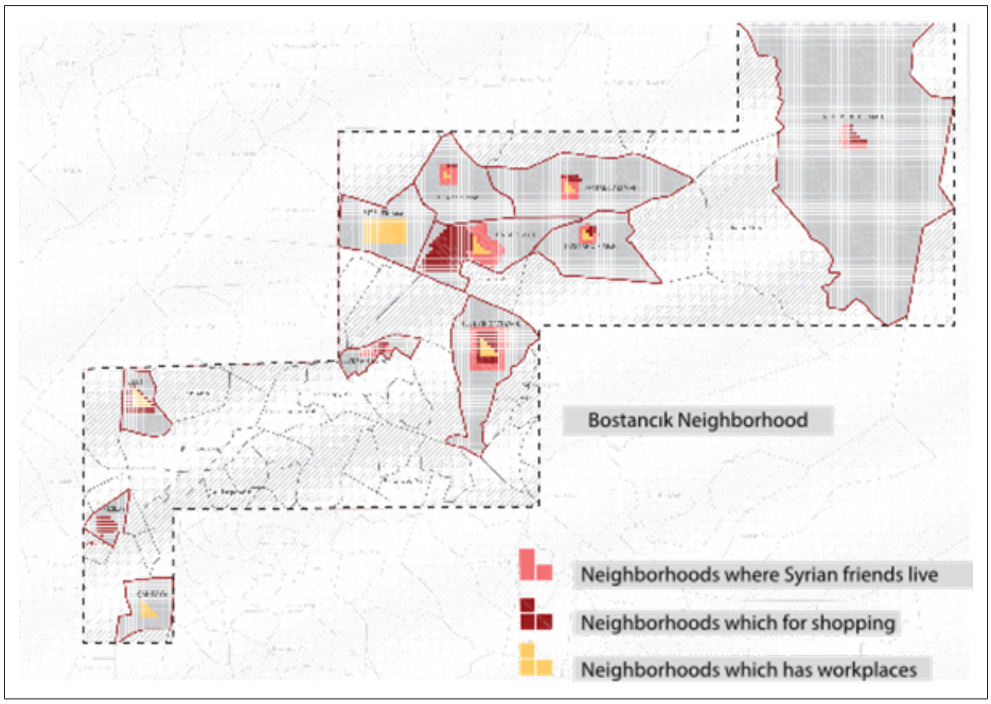

Figure 8. Urban mobility of Bostancık neighborhood residents.

When the mobility of the two neighborhoods within the city is compared, it is determined that Önder Neighborhood has a stronger relationship with the neighborhoods spatially close to it. For this reason, both the inner and outer belt radius were measured to be less than Bostancık Neighborhood. Bostancık Neighborhood, on the other hand, establishes more relations with the rest of the city than Önder Neighborhood.

The significance of these findings lies in demonstrating that integration outcomes cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics such as education or length of stay. Instead, they are deeply shaped by the interaction between

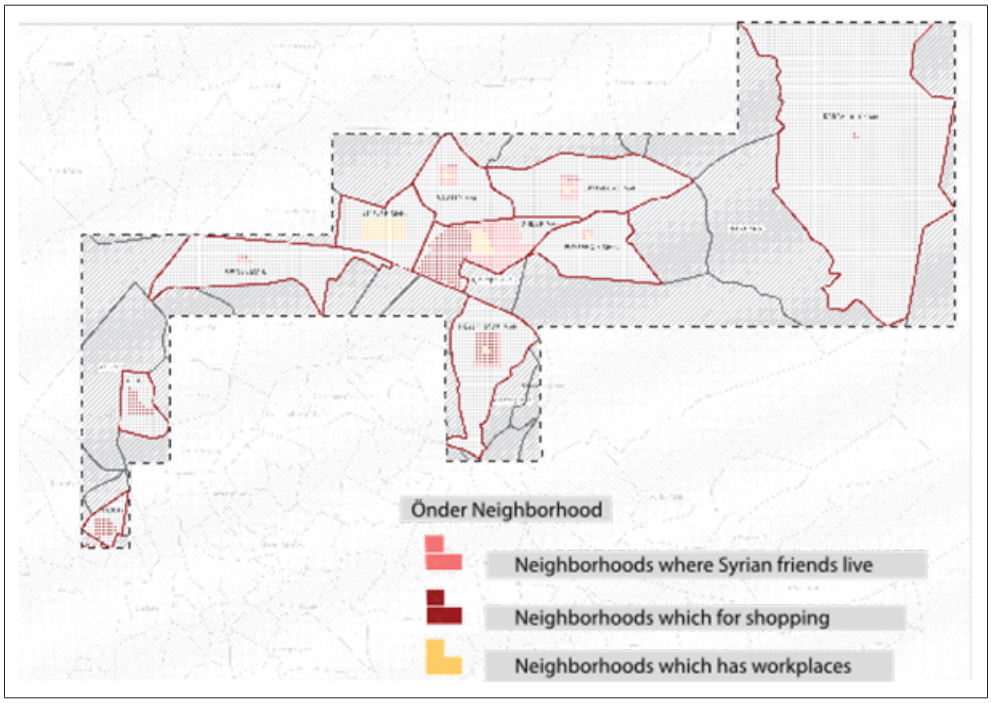

Figure 9. Urban mobility of Önder neighborhood residents.

social networks and urban spatial structures. From an urban planning perspective, this highlights the importance of considering neighborhood-level social dynamics when designing policies aimed at improving migrants' access to housing, employment, and urban services.

CONCLUSION

For migrants, three fundamental challenges typically arise following the migration process: (1) access to housing, (2) access to the labor market, and (3) access to urban services. Previous research has shown that intense migration movements often lead to rising rental prices, thereby reducing the stock of affordable housing for migrant populations. Access to housing becomes particularly challenging in cases where migrants lack pre-existing social networks or contacts in destination areas. In this context, social networks play a critical role not only in securing housing but also in facilitating participation in the labor market. The coexistence of bonding, bridging, and linking social networks has been shown to accelerate job access and labor market integration. However, when migrants' networks are predominantly bonding-based and limited to co-ethnic ties, access to employment opportunities and information tends to remain constrained, placing individuals at a relative disadvantage.

Migrants also face difficulties in accessing urban services such as education and healthcare. While legal status and institutional frameworks are important determinants of access, existing studies emphasize that the integration of social networks and social capital significantly shapes these processes. The findings of this study align with earlier research in demonstrating that social networks are central to migrants' integration into urban life. At the same time, the results suggest that integration trajectories and patterns of urban mobility differ even among migrant groups with similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics. In the case of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey, variations in neighborhood population patterns, length of stay, and education levels contribute to differentiated access to housing, employment, and urban services. Individuals who arrived during the earlier phases of migration and who possess relatively higher educational levels tend to occupy more advantageous positions in these domains, a pattern also noted in previous empirical studies.

The contribution of this study lies in its comparative, neighborhood-scale analysis and its integration of social network analysis with spatial mobility mapping. By examining how social networks operate differently across neighborhoods with contrasting demographic compositions, the research provides additional empirical evidence on how local population patterns shape migrants' everyday practices and access to urban resources. Rather than positioning itself as superior to existing studies, this research builds on and extends previous findings by offering a spatially grounded perspective on the interaction between social networks and urban structures.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of considering neighborhood-level social dynamics in the design of housing, labor market, and urban service policies targeting migrant populations. Recent policy measures in Turkey, such as restrictions on foreign population concentration at the neighborhood level, may further reshape migrants' social networks and access mechanisms. In this sense, the study provides a contextual framework for assessing how evolving migration policies influence social networks and urban integration processes over time.

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