LivingTogether Programme

Migrant Cities Research:
NICOSIA NORTH
NOVEMBER 2008
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Part 1. Introduction

In April 2008, one of the main pedestrian arteries of Nicosia, Ledra Street, opened after more than 45 years of obstruction by military barricades. This ‘mini-Berlin Wall,’ cutting through the heart of Nicosia, had come to symbolise the division of the capital city, and hence the division of the island. Nicosia had already been a divided capital for almost 20 years when the 1974 war separated the island into north and south. As with everything else on the island, the division of the capital has meant that north and south have developed at a different pace and in a different way, and that while each side has been affected by immigration, each has been affected by it differently. While Cypriots and European tourists poured along the newly opened thoroughfare, immigrants on each side of the checkpoints stared with curiosity across a barrier that they remained unable to cross.

Nicosia is today a sprawling city in the middle of a denuded plain. To the south of the capital begins a gradual ascent into the Troodos Mountains, a favourite retreat for Nicosians in the summer months. To the north of the city are the Five Finger Mountains (Beşparmak in Turkish and Pentadhaktylos in Greek), the high peaks that divide the capital from the Kyrenia, or Girne, coast. Set in the middle of such an open plain, the city’s walls were historically important for its defence. Built by the Venetians, the walls now enclose a population of 10,000–15,000 on both sides of the divide but are dwarfed by the sprawl of suburbs that spread into the low hills and treeless plains surrounding the city. The total population has grown to include almost 50,000 inhabitants in the city’s north and more than 200,000 in the south.

The city was known as a capital from at least the 13th century, when it was the seat of Lusignan rule in the island. For a period of almost 300 years, Cyprus was one of the main destinations for Christians fleeing Muslim expansion in the Levant. The island passed into Venetian hands at the end of the 15th century and then was soon conquered by Ottoman forces.\footnote{For further reading on Nicosia’s medieval period, see George Hill, *History of Cyprus*, Vols. 2-3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1972); Hill, Vol. 4 (1952); Rupert Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus* (Nicosia: K. Rustem & Bros: 1936/1973); Claude Delaval Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria: Materials for a History of Cyprus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908).}

The arrival of the Ottomans transformed Nicosia from the seat of a provincial kingdom to a regional administrative centre of a sprawling empire. The Ottomans set up their administrative apparatus on the island
and made Nicosia its capital, complete with police, judiciary, and the various branches of a provincial bureaucracy.\(^2\) This by necessity meant that the administration must be staffed and the island protected, and the Ottoman administrators, soldiers, and other Anatolian settlers who arrived in the island were the ancestors of the island’s current Turkish community.\(^3\) Over the 300 years of their rule, the Ottomans also transformed the architectural character of Nicosia, building mosques, caravanserais, bathhouses, aqueducts, and bazaars that blended with and were sometimes superimposed on the city’s older Frankish and Venetian architecture. The result was a graceful syncretism that led William Hepworth Dixon, one of the first British administrators of the island, to declare upon his arrival that the city was ‘a little sister of Damascus’.\(^4\)

The 1878 treaty that brought British rule to the island also marked the beginning of a period of modernisation in the city that would accelerate throughout the 20th century. British rule brought European settlement and investment, and in return, Cypriots began to emigrate to Britain as early as the first decade of the 20th century.\(^5\) When Turkey declared its alliance with the Axis powers during the First World War, Britain annexed Cyprus and declared it a colony. This resulted in the first major wave of Muslim migration, as an estimated 4,000–8,000 Muslim Cypriots left the island for Anatolia.\(^6\) The establishment of the Republic of Turkey a decade later resulted in the second wave of emigration, as many Turkish-speaking Cypriot Muslims chose to acquire Turkish nationality.\(^7\)

During the same periods, several thousand Armenians fleeing massacres in Anatolia took refuge in Cyprus, and many stayed. Armenian refugees


\(^3\) In addition, many Christian Cypriots converted to Islam during the Ottoman period. On this, see ibid., 164.


\(^7\) According to one demographer, L. W. St. John-Jones, ‘if the Turkish-Cypriot community had, like the Greek-Cypriots, increased by 101 per cent between 1881 and 1931, it would have totalled 91,300 in 1931—some 27,000 more than the number enumerated.’ St. John-Jones speculates that this difference most likely should be accounted for by assuming that as many as 27,000 Turkish Cypriots emigrated during this 50-year period. See L. W. St. John-Jones, *The Population of Cyprus: Demographic Trends and Socio-economic Influences* (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1983), p. 56.
continued to trickle into the island over the following decade so that by 1956 the Armenian population of Cyprus had increased to 4,500 from its 1911 figure of approximately 500. Armenian immigrants to the island chose to purchase houses in Nicosia mainly from Turkish emigrants who abandoned the island for Anatolia. At the same time, many Greek-speakers from Izmir ( Smyr rna) arrived in the island after a failed Greek campaign to conquer Anatolia resulted in their displacement in 1922, while other Greek citizens from the nearby Dodecanese islands were evacuated to the island during the Second World War. Although many of these returned later to their homes in Greece others settled, establishing businesses and marrying Cypriots.

In the same period the capital of the island was rapidly changing, as the British brought a new colonial architectural style and a new plan for the city’s centre that turned many of its narrow streets into wider avenues. Harry Luke reports that as early as the 1950s Cypriots’ dreams of modernity led them to tear down Ottoman mansions and replace them with concrete apartment blocks. And as this process proceeded, the ethnic composition of the city also changed. In 1881, Turkish Cypriots accounted for approximately half of the city’s population, but by 1931 had been reduced to only a quarter. By 1946, the period immediately before Luke’s visit, the city boasted a population of almost 35,000, of which only 10,000 were Turkish Cypriots. Although there appears to be a growth of more than 10,000 in the course of a decade, the 1946 census also includes within its scope the new areas of the city developing outside the city walls.

The changes noted by Luke, then, were part of a broader process of urbanisation that was simultaneously a process of suburbanisation. While there was an influx of people from villages in the surrounding region, wealthy Nicosians, especially Greek Cypriots and British residents, began to move into new areas outside the walled city. At the time these were

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9 One of the reasons for Armenians to choose the Arabahmet District of Nicosia was that the small existing Armenian community lived mostly in this area and had established a church there. In addition, Armenians fleeing Anatolia were Turkish-speakers and so preferred an area of the city where Turkish was spoken. See Haşmet Gürkan, Dünkü ve Bugünk Lefkoşa (Nicosia: Galeri Kültür Yayınları, 2006 [third edition]), p. 105–106.
10 Percival, op. cit., p. 47.
12 Percival, op. cit., pp.
suburbs, though they have now become central areas of the larger urban sprawl. Most of those who left the old city did so in order to build newer, larger homes on open lots in a suburban style that greatly contrasted with the tightly packed houses of the old city and their hidden gardens at the rear of the house. As the city was transformed into a commercial centre the influx from the surrounding regions increased, and the suburban areas grew. During this same period Turkish Cypriots also gradually began to move into the new suburban areas, many of which were primarily Turkish.\textsuperscript{14}

The late 1950s were marked by a period of Greek Cypriot struggle against British colonial rule and the demand for \textit{enosis}, or union of the island with Greece. Turkish Cypriots strongly objected to \textit{enosis}, calling either for a federal, independent state or division of the island, \textit{taksim}. This period saw the first armed conflicts between Greek and Turkish Cypriots over the political future of the island. Because many of those conflicts were concentrated in the cramped streets of Nicosia 1956 saw the first division of the city, including the barricading of Ledra Street, and its separation into a mostly Turkish north and primarily Greek south. In 1958 Turkish Cypriots proclaimed a separate municipality in north Nicosia.

Only three years after Cyprus gained independence from British rule, intercommunal conflict resulted in the further entrenchment of this division. In addition, approximately 25,000 Turkish Cypriots fled their villages during this period and took refuge in armed enclaves, where they would remain for the next ten years. The largest such enclave was Nicosia, which included the northern half of the walled city as well as the suburbs that emanated from it. Turkish Cypriots from surrounding villages took refuge in the city as well as villagers from other parts of the island who had relatives there, approximately 15,000 in total.\textsuperscript{15} While Turkish Cypriots were arriving from neighbouring villages approximately 800 Greek Cypriots and Armenians were forced out of the area and their houses were allocated to displaced Turkish Cypriots by the new Turkish Cypriot administration. Although restrictions on movement eased in 1968, almost no Turkish Cypriots living in the enclaves returned completely to their villages at that time. Many of those who took refuge in Nicosia would remain there.

It should also be noted that during this period Cyprus as a whole experienced an unprecedented level of emigration, which ebbed and flowed as tensions between the communities rose and fell. Emigration, primarily to

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 155–158.
Britain, increased in the late 1950s during the period of rebellion against colonial rule. It peaked again immediately after the declaration of an independent republic when the change of government resulted in lost jobs for many and a general sense of uncertainty. The third peak prior to 1974 was during the period of intercommunal conflict in the 1960s, when large numbers of Turkish Cypriots emigrated in proportion to their population ratio. Between 1946 and 1974, approximately 115,000 Cypriots left the island.\(^\text{16}\)

In 1974 a Greek-sponsored coup against President Makarios resulted in a Turkish military intervention that divided the island. Nicosia, which was already partitioned, remained so and hence became a divided capital – capital both of the Republic of Cyprus and of the new, self-proclaimed Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (TFSC), later the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Greek Cypriots fled from their homes in the north of the island and many of the Turkish Cypriots originally from the north who had taken refuge in Nicosia returned to their villages, while those from the south enclaved in the city settled in abandoned Greek property there. Overall, approximately 142,000 Greek Cypriots fled to the south, while around 60,000 Turks formerly from the south of the island moved to the north, including those who had already fled to parts of the north during the 1960s.\(^\text{17}\)

Immediately after the war, following the flight of Greek Cypriots from the north, the government of the new state entered into an agreement with the Turkish government to provide property and citizenship to Turkish citizens willing to settle on the island. The new administration wished simultaneously to boost its population and its economy. Property abandoned by Greek Cypriots included many orchards that needed tending, as well as factories and businesses that needed to be run to support the economy of the new state. While many Turkish Cypriots who had left the island during the 1950s and 1960s began to return, their numbers were not sufficient to achieve this and so there was a large influx of Turks to the island immediately after the partition, most settling in empty Greek villages, often in remote areas.\(^\text{18}\)

Few of these initial immigrants settled in Nicosia.

\(^{16}\) Constantinou, op. cit., p. 146.


\(^{18}\) For a discussion of policies and practices related to immigration from Turkey in the late 1970's, see Mete Hatay, Is the Turkish Cypriot Population Shrinking? An Overview of the Ethno-Demography of Cyprus in the Light of the Preliminary Results of the 2006 Turkish-Cypriot Census (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2007).
By the late 1970s, the Turkish Cypriot administration put an end to this facilitated migration as a result of international pressure and for quite a few years the number of Turkish immigrants to the island dwindled to a trickle. Also during the late 1970s and early 1980s more and more Turkish Cypriots moved from their ancestral homes in Nicosia’s walled city into new homes and apartments in the city’s growing suburbs. A second wave of immigration began during this period, this time spurred by opportunities found in Cyprus but not in Turkey. Quite a number of professionals as well as skilled and semi-skilled workers arrived in the island. Many of the latter worked in the north’s growing textile industries, which exported their goods to UK. In addition, restrictions on imported goods in Turkey led to the growth of a ‘suitcase trade’ with north Cyprus as a base. Many textile workers and those involved in the suitcase trade found housing in Nicosia’s walled city, in older houses abandoned by Turkish Cypriots. Although the suitcase trade decreased with Turkey’s economic liberalisation in the 1990s, some of these traders remained on the island, and the regional ties that their trade had established remained important later for future immigration.\(^{19}\) The same period also saw the establishment of Near East University in Nicosia, which attracted an increasingly large population of students from Turkey, some of whom would remain in the island.

By the 1990s, however, a third wave of migration began that was driven by more global market forces. This decade was a period of neo-liberal privatisation in north Cyprus, making it attractive for owners of small enterprises as well as highly skilled professionals such as financial experts hired by local or offshore banks, lecturers who teach in the universities, and businessmen who have investments on the island. Almost all of these have come from Turkey. In addition, by the late 1990s, changes in property laws resulted in a boom in the construction sector, as new bungalow villages and villas sprouted up all over the north, most for sale to the foreign market. The Turkish Cypriot labour market could not meet this growing demand, and many local entrepreneurs also found the wages that Cypriots demanded to be more than they were willing to pay. As a result, construction companies began to bring their workers from Turkey, especially from the poorer areas in Turkey’s south and south-east.\(^{20}\) While many of the immigrants who arrived throughout the 1980s and early 1990s were relatively educated, immigrants who began to arrive in the late 1990s were manual labourers, often with little education and few skills. Large numbers of these workers

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were in addition of Kurdish or Arab origin, many from the area of south-eastern Turkey that had experienced economic devastation and social turmoil as a result of the long-term, low-level conflict there.\textsuperscript{21}

Most construction sites are on the north coast of the island, but accommodation for workers is scarce in villages that are increasingly filled with bungalow complexes and holiday villas. In the first part of the construction boom many contractors chose to have the workers sleep on site without access to adequate facilities. Soon, however, the large, old houses of the walled city of Nicosia, most of which had been abandoned by their Cypriot owners, proved a better means of accommodation. Although the houses remained unrestored, and many lacked proper plumbing or cooking facilities, owners soon found that they could turn their unused properties into boarding houses. They currently charge 100–200YTL (approx. 50–100 euros) per month per person, often crowding as many as 20 or 30 workers into some of the larger houses.\textsuperscript{22}

The character of the walled city has therefore undergone significant change in the past two decades. Although many workers save enough money to return to their homes in Turkey, still others choose to stay and to bring their families to the island. Many of these families also find accommodation in Nicosia’s walled city, where rents are cheaper and where many have networks from their home areas. In addition, shops, restaurants, and coffeehouses that cater to immigrants have sprung up throughout the old city, so that it has taken on an increasingly ‘Anatolian’ character. The names of immigrants’ places of origin are visible in restaurant and coffeehouse names and in the associations of immigrants from the same place of origin that are scattered throughout the town.\textsuperscript{23} The walled city, then, has increasingly taken on the character of an immigrant ghetto, a fact that is today bemoaned in the media by many Turkish Cypriots.

Media portrayals of this ghettoisation tend to cast it as a form of colonisation or Turkification of the walled city. Politically, the media elides the immigrant population with the Turkish state and there has been a tendency to also see the influx of migrant labour as a form of colonisation. The ghettoisation of the walled city of Nicosia, formerly an area dominated

\textsuperscript{21} Kurtuluş and Purkis, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{22} Information determined from interviews conducted in this study.
\textsuperscript{23} According to 2006 official census results 57 per cent of the population in the neighbourhoods of walled city Nicosia are Turkish nationals, 2 per cent hold other third country nationalities, 17 per cent are Turkish nationals with TRNC citizenship, and only 24 per cent are Turkish Cypriots whose parents were born in the island.
by Turkish Cypriots, has led many of them to participate in a form of nostalgia for neighbourhoods that they had abandoned.\textsuperscript{24}

In the media, this nostalgia uses symbols of cultural difference to portray the immigrants’ residence in the walled city as a cultural invasion. Such nostalgia contrasts ‘the jasmine scent of Nicosia’ – a longing for a time when the area was purely Turkish Cypriot – with the odour of \textit{lahmacun}, a type of spicy pizza from the Turkish south-east.\textsuperscript{25} Or, in one of the more comic instances of cultural contrast, journalists began to write about the growing population of pigeons in the walled city. Although they wrote about the pigeons as symbolic of a dirty, multiplying immigrant population, some writers also saw their increase as a sign that Turkish Cypriots had abandoned the area, since in the past their numbers had been kept within bounds by Turkish Cypriots who enjoyed pigeon as a traditional dish.\textsuperscript{26}

In addition, because of the importance of demography in the Cyprus conflict as well as the reasons for and methods of immigration from Turkey in the late 1970s, immigration to the north of the island has become possibly the most highly charged public issue. The British colonial period brought not only representative politics but also a concern for demographic ratios to the island. All elected offices on the island, both local and national, were distributed according to ratios of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. When Cyprus gained independence in 1960 those same ratios were inscribed in the new constitution which aimed to protect the minority Turkish community through guarantees and quotas. As a result, the influx of immigrants from Turkey after 1974 has been officially interpreted by the Republic of Cyprus as an attempt to change the demographic ratios of the island.

Historically a minority in the island, Turkish Cypriots have begun to speak of themselves as a minority in their own country. Traditionally fearful of encroachments on their political rights, Turkish Cypriots have in popular discourse begun to confuse the visual preponderance of temporary immigrants, especially in Nicosia, with those Turkish nationals who have


\textsuperscript{25} Hasan Hastürer, ‘Yasemin kokuları lahmacun kokularının altında kalırken,’ \textit{Londra Toplum Postası}, 9 April 2008; www.toplumpostasi.net/index.php/cat/9/col/73/art/1641/PageName/News_in_ENGLISH

acquired a right to vote and so who may, as Cypriots fear, ‘interfere in our political will’. Moreover, for two decades there were no reliable statistics on the numbers of immigrants from Turkey, resulting in speculation and a climate of fear. In particular, the Turkish Cypriot media consistently portrayed all immigrants as ‘settlers’ – i.e. people who had acquired citizenship and therefore the right to vote – and claimed that they were mobilised by right-wing, nationalist parties who used these voters to stay in office. Although subsequent research has shown that immigrants who have the right to vote do so across the political spectrum and that many immigrants support left-wing parties, the Turkish Cypriot media continues to portray immigrants as interfering in Cypriots’ political will. As a result, the media tends to vilify migrants from Turkey, casting their presence in the island as a form of colonisation that aims at turning north Cyprus into a province of Turkey.

The island’s proximity to the Turkish mainland, the north’s dependence on Turkey, and until recently the ease of migration to and from Cyprus have all meant that the very large majority of immigrants to north Cyprus in general and to Nicosia in particular are citizens of the Republic of Turkey. In 2006, the de jure population of the island’s north was 256,644, of which 178,031 were TRNC citizens, 70,525 were citizens of Turkey, and 8,088 were from other countries. In Nicosia, 37 per cent of the population (18,362 people) was born in Turkey, while 18 per cent of the Turkish-born population (3,320 people) have become naturalised citizens of the TRNC. Both as naturalised citizens and as temporary migrants Turkish nationals constitute by far the most important immigrant group. It should be noted that until recent changes in labour and immigration laws the ease of travel as well as extensive family and regional networks encouraged the perception of northern Cyprus as a migrant labour destination.

Immigrants from Turkey, however, are not the only migrants to the island. The analysis of the 2006 north Cyprus census results reveals that of the 49,868 people living in the municipality of north Nicosia 18,362 (37 per cent) were born in Turkey, 29,016 (58 per cent) were born in Cyprus, and 2,428 (4 per cent) originate in other countries. Nicosia has a relatively large population of Bulgarian Turks, and recent years have seen an influx of

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27 These figures are according to the latest census of the north, taken in 2006. For further analysis of the 2006 census, see Mete Hatay, *Is the Turkish Cypriot Population Shrinking? An Overview of the Ethno-Demography of Cyprus in the Light of the Preliminary Results of the 2006 Turkish-Cypriot Census* (Oslo/Nicosia: PRIO Report 2/2007).

28 A new law was passed in October 2004 that required registration of previously undocumented labourers, and promised fines for those who overstayed their work visas. The law was implemented in May 2005, giving workers several months in which to register.
migrants from South Asia and Africa, especially as students in the north’s universities.  

In addition, there is a more problematic category of immigrants working on the city’s outskirts. The growth of the ‘night club’ industry in the early 1990s coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and many women from former Soviet states began to arrive in both sides of the island at that time. In northern Cyprus, they are officially ‘artistes,’ but they are in fact hired as sex workers. Although there is official supervision of these immigrants’ health through regular health checks, the lack of official recognition of their status as sex workers means that they are often subject to exploitation and abuse, and there have been several reported cases of women being prevented from leaving the island or contacting relatives.  

As should become clear in this report, although immigrants to north Cyprus face many of the same problems as economic migrants elsewhere, they also face special problems as immigrants to an unrecognised state in a divided island. An unrecognised state cannot sign conventions or treaties, including those that protect human rights, and so cannot be held accountable. Most international agencies cannot officially operate in or provide oversight for enterprises in north Cyprus. And for the citizens of Turkey who constitute the large majority of immigrants to northern Cyprus, the importance of demography in the Cyprus Problem impacts their ability to integrate into their new home, their ability to claim basic rights, and their sense of certainty about the future. The pervasive presence of Turkey in the island – militarily, economically, and politically – has made those Turkish citizens who wish to work and live in the island scapegoats for Turkish Cypriots seeking a different future.

We aim in this report to give these and other immigrants a human face and to allow them to explain for themselves the problems they have faced in a climate where those problems are overshadowed by a long-standing political conflict.

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29 The first Bulgarian Turks who arrived in the island in the early 1990s were part of a large exodus of Turks from Bulgaria during this period due to discrimination and persecution under the former communist regime. Some of these returned to Bulgaria when conditions improved, but in the late 1990s other immigrants began to arrive because of worsening economic conditions in their home country and established Bulgarian networks in the north of the island. According to the 2006 north Cyprus census, there were then 751 people of Bulgarian origin residing in Nicosia.

Part 2. Introducing ten migrants

1. Mahmut

Name: Mahmut
Sex: Male
Age: 21
Nationality: Republic of Turkey
Occupation: Chef

Mahmut first thought of coming to Cyprus when his uncle, who was already in the island, promised to find him a job if he immigrated. Many of the young men from Mahmut’s home region, Reyhanlı/Hatay, a southern province of Turkey bordering Syria, had already left the region in search of work in north Cyprus and so his networks on the island were not limited only to his uncle. He first arrived in north Cyprus in 2001, when he was only 14 years old. His father had recently died and he needed a way to support his
mother and two brothers. The younger of those brothers has a genetic
disease, thallasemia, that requires regular blood transfusions.

Even though he had social networks before he arrived in Cyprus, the
conditions when he first arrived were difficult. He worked for almost a year
and a half in a coffeeshop, where he slept on the chairs at night and
sometimes in the parks. Later, he was able to find a house with several
other young men from his home region. Like many young men from the
Hatay region, his only reason for coming to Cyprus is that he is unable to
support his family from what he can earn in Turkey.

_The salary situation in Turkey is bad. We earn more here. That’s
why we came. It [the salary] is two times more._

When Mahmut finally found a job as a cook in a kebab house he was able to
earn enough money to bring his mother and brothers to the island. They
currently rent a house together in the walled city, sharing the house with
another family. Mahmut was unable to get an education because of the
need to support his family. Similarly, his brothers are unable to go to
school, one because of illness and the other because, like Mahmut, he also
works in a cafeteria in the walled city.

_I didn’t have any expectations when I arrived. I came to work, and I’m still
working._

He has worked for employers who were both Turkish Cypriot and
immigrants from Turkey. He says that there is no difference between them,
that in both cases he works 14 hours a day. ‘A boss is a boss,’ he says, and
he has not had problems with Turkish Cypriots. Recent changes in the
labour and immigration laws caused the deportation of most of his friends,
who are now unable to return to the island unless they pay a large fine for
overstaying their visas.

For almost five years Mahmut has spent most of his non-working hours
creating rap and hip-hop music with his friends. He calls himself MC Mahmut
and is a member of a group called Hatay Crew. For the past two years,
Mahmut and his friends have been recording their music in internet cafés
late at night, after their workplaces close. Their music is underground rap,
and most of the lyrics are about the difficulties of their lives. Although he
says that he gets along well with Turkish Cypriots, he was disappointed that
some Turkish Cypriot rappers attacked him with their lyrics, calling him an
Arab and using racist language. Even though he says that he expects no
fame from his music, he does want to be able to record at least one album and video professionally to – as he puts it –‘shake the Cyprus music scene.’ But when asked what his dreams were, his answer was

I’m afraid to dream, because I’m afraid of being disappointed.

2. Mulla

Name: Mulla
Sex: Male
Age: 52
Nationality: Republic of Turkey
Occupation: Construction worker

Mulla is from a small farming village in south-eastern Turkey, where he had no specific profession but was registered on his identity card as a farmer. Since his childhood he has been on the move, traveling throughout Turkey and working at whatever manual jobs he could find in order to send money back to his family. He had worked in the construction sector before coming to Cyprus but had also performed various other sorts of jobs, including digging drainage canals for rice paddies.

If you don't have a profession and need an income to survive, you don't have any choice but to move.

Mulla takes care of his mother, father, wife and child, all at home in his native village. For 15 years, he has come to Cyprus for eight or nine months of the year, excluding the summer months, when there is less work available in construction. He heard about Cyprus from fellow villagers who had come to the island in the past for work. Like all construction workers in the island, Mulla earns a daily wage, and he lives frugally in order to be able to send as much as possible to his family. He earns 50 YTL (approximately 25 euros) per day, and he sends approximately 400 euros per month to his family in Turkey. In the past he worked seven days a week, but the current government recently banned construction work on Sundays in order to allow the workers time to rest. For Mulla and others working in the construction sector, however, this has also meant a 100-euro reduction in their monthly wages.

Each time Mulla begins a new job he signs an agreement with the construction company which states that the firm will provide his food and lodging. This was required by a new labour law passed in 2005. Mulla says,
though, that he has yet to receive any of these benefits and his food and lodging still come out of his own pocket.

As soon as you try to demand what you deserve, they take away your work permit and deport you.

For more than two decades, one of the construction firms has been hiring workers from his home area in Turkey. Because the owner has the telephone numbers of some of his former employees, he calls them whenever there is work available. But despite the fact that Mulla has worked for the same company for the past 15 years he has received no benefits, such as payments towards social security. One year ago he broke his leg and had to be hospitalised for a month, and the firm paid for his expenses. However, he received no wages for the period when he was not working. If the firm had made his social security payments, he would have received 75 per cent of his salary for the period when he was unable to work.

He claims that apart from a couple of large companies, the construction firms don’t care about the health of their workers or provide adequate compensation to families in case of accidental death or disability.

They suck the blood of the Turkish workers. They suck their blood. But we have no choice.

At the time of the interview, Mulla had not received his wages for 58 days.

3. Hatice

Name: Hatice
Sex: Female
Age: 45
Nationality: Bulgaria
Profession: Domestic worker

Hatice is from a small town in eastern Bulgaria, on the Black Sea coast. She began migrating for work in the period immediately after the collapse of communism, a period that she describes as especially difficult for Bulgarian Turks. Her incentives for migration were both cultural and economic: on the one hand, she describes discrimination against Turks, such as prohibition of the Turkish language. Her name was changed to Radka, while her husband and children were given similarly ‘Bulgarian’ names. On the other hand, she
says that the economy of her native area collapsed along with the fall of communism. Although she says the cost of living in her native town is comparable to that in Cyprus, she says that she could make only about 150 euros per month there. She claims that most of the young people from the area are leaving the country due to the high cost of living and economic crisis: Soon there will be no young people left there.

By 1991, when she first left the country for Poland, there had been an exodus from her native area, mostly of Turks taking refuge in Turkey for political and cultural reasons. Hatice also wanted to emigrate to Turkey, but her husband was put off by reports of difficulties that migrants had experienced there. Instead, they emigrated to Poland, leaving her two small children to be raised by their grandmother.

There’s nothing as hard as being away from your children and missing them.

She travelled back and forth to Poland for more than ten years, buying products wholesale from textile factories and selling them. Finally, she was able to open her own shop, and was able to bring her children. But after two years, taxes had become so high that she says they weren’t able to save any money. They returned to Bulgaria, but not long after heard about Cyprus from other Bulgarian Turks they had known in Poland.

When they arrived in Cyprus friends had arranged a job for her, but her husband had to search for more than a month. He finally began work as a painter with a construction company, while she cleans houses. This is quite different, she says, from the work she had become accustomed to in Poland, when she was a small-scale entrepreneur with her own business. She had never before cleaned houses, but she now has ten clients and makes approximately 1,000 euros per month. She and her husband arrived a year and a half before the interview, and they brought the two children later. They’ve now found jobs as well, and she says that they are able to save money.

We found what we expected to find. We came here to save money, and we’re saving it.

They plan to use the money they save to buy flats in Bulgaria for their children. They pay about 500 euros in rent for an apartment in a middle-class area of the city, but because all four members of the family are working, they are able to save. In order to save money, they have very little social life and have hardly left the confines of Nicosia. They have no car,
which makes travel to other parts of the island difficult. When we asked how they spend their leisure time, she answered, ‘We came to work, not to have fun’.

4. Seyman

Şeyman in a Nicosia café during the interview

Name: Şeyman  
Sex: Female  
Age: 19  
Nationality: Republic of Turkey  
Occupation: Student

Şeyman is the daughter of a middle-class family that migrated to Istanbul 20 years ago from Mardin, in south-eastern Turkey. She has visited Mardin only
once and has few ties there. Although her family’s native language is Arabic, she was raised speaking Turkish. She is now a student at one of the universities in north Cyprus, and she decided to come here after her older sister chose Cyprus for her university education. Both she and her older sister decided to come to Cyprus because they wear the headscarf, which is forbidden in Turkish universities.

*My older sister wanted to be able to get an education while wearing the headscarf, but in Turkey they don’t allow it, as you know. That’s why we came.*

She studied in an *imam-hatip*, or religious, school until her final year, when she transferred to a regular secondary school that would allow her to enter university in the faculty of her choice. Now she plans to study business administration but is currently in the preparatory class, improving her English. Before coming to Cyprus, she had mostly heard of it as a centre for tourism and gambling, what she calls a ‘mini-Las Vegas’. She was surprised on arrival to find instead that it had more of a ‘village atmosphere’.

*I was expecting it to be more modern. Coming from Istanbul, it seems more like a village.*

She lives in a rented house in a suburb of Nicosia with her sister and four other students, and she feels that they were lucky in their choice of landlord, since she has seen that some landlords discriminate against students from Turkey and often ask for extravagant deposits on the lease. She spends much of her free time in the walled city, where she visits bookstores. Her dream for the future is to open a bookstore and café of her own, which is why she’s chosen to study business administration.

She complains that it is hard to get around because of the lack of public transport, and she says that she misses Istanbul’s crowds. She plans to return to Istanbul after her education, but she’s glad to have had the chance to meet people from different cultures. At school, she’s met students from other countries, especially Pakistan and Arab states, and she wishes that her English were better so that she could communicate with them more. She says that she is still trying to understand Cypriot culture, especially the Turkish Cypriot dialect, which she finds difficult.

Despite the differences between eastern and western Turkey she still finds someone from Turkey culturally more familiar.
On the other hand, as a woman who chooses to wear the headscarf she finds life in Cyprus easier than in Turkey.

*It’s free here. They don’t pay attention to religion and things like that.*

5. Ciwan

Name: Ciwan  
Sex: Male  
Age: 25  
Nationality: Republic of Turkey  
Profession: Waiter/barman

Ciwan is of Kurdish origin from Adıyaman in south-eastern Turkey. He is the second of four children, and when he was still a boy his family moved from the south-east to Istanbul. There, all the children succeeded to get an education, but Ciwan was unable to enter university because he had studied in a technical high school. His brother, who was studying in Cyprus, encouraged him to come, saying that Cypriots were sympathetic towards Kurds.

Ciwan says that when he first arrived in Cyprus, he faced some adaptation problems and in fact thought of returning to Turkey. He found it difficult to adjust to a place as small as Cyprus after life in Istanbul. And he initially worked in a hotel, where he says that 70–80 per cent of the workers were from Turkey. He says that in the beginning he met few Cypriots, since most of the people around him were also from Turkey. In addition, he found that most Cypriots did not recognise him as Kurdish but instead saw him as another Türkiyeli, or Turk from Turkey. As a result, he has experienced some difficulties, especially in government offices.

*We came here to escape from our problems [as Kurds] in Turkey, but here there’s another problem, which is that they see us as Turks (Türkiyeli).*

He lives in a house just outside the walled city which he shares with three other young men. One of these is a Cypriot student with whom he said he got along well at first, but later cultural differences became an impediment. He now works two jobs, as a waiter in a restaurant during the day and as a barman at night. He says that he’s treated well by the restaurant owner, who is a foreigner and so sticks to regular working hours. He works eight hours during the day, rests four or five hours, then goes to the bar at night.
He has little time to rest, but at the same time he says that he doesn’t do the second job for the money. Rather, he enjoys the work, largely because the bar’s owners treat him politely and with respect. This is something that he doesn’t encounter as much in his other job, and it encourages him to continue. But although he’s on good terms with the bar’s owners, he has little close contact with the Cypriots who frequent the bar.

There’s always the fear that if I say, ‘I’m Kurdish, I’m from the East,’ I’ll get a negative reaction. That’s why I don’t really enter into conversation that much with the customers.

During the small bit of free time he has, he says that he specifically avoids the Kyrenia Gate, an area of the walled city popular with young Turkish soldiers and immigrants. He says that frequenting that part of the old city upsets him because of the living conditions of the immigrants, as well as the state of the historical houses in which many of the immigrants now live.

The Cypriots from Nicosia are now all in the suburbs, and the walled city has been left to ruin. This is your history, and you need to protect it.

At the moment, Ciwan has no plans to remain in Cyprus, largely because he doesn’t think that he will ever assimilate sufficiently to feel fully comfortable here.
6. Hüseyin

Hüseyin is from Reyhan in the Hatay province of Turkey, near the Syrian border. He is from a family of seven children, one of whom is in England and two in Cyprus. Before coming to Cyprus he had worked in factories in Bursa, Ankara, and Istanbul. His older brother came to Cyprus first and began work in a bakery. His older brother’s descriptions of Cyprus as a quiet, tranquil place enticed Hüseyin to come on a visit in 1992. He liked it enough to stay.
Most people who come from Istanbul think of Cyprus as a little village. But I like that. I wanted the peace and quiet.

Hüseyin worked for four years in a supermarket, and he stayed in lodgings that the owner provided above the store. He was unmarried at the time but wanted to think of settling down, and so he saved money to open his own grocery store.

A lot of people save up money to send home, but I used the money for investment here.

He decided to open his mini-market in the walled city, where he has also lived since 1996. Most of his customers are manual labourers who live in the area, and he says that until recently this has created some problems for his business, since manual labour in Cyprus is seasonal. Since the recent opening of the Ledra Street checkpoint, however, his business has improved because of increased pedestrian and tourist traffic. Since the checkpoint’s opening he has also made further investments in the store to make it more attractive. Not long after opening his grocery he married and has since had two children. He says that he chose to have only two children because he’s experienced the problems of a large family.

I look at my father, he had seven children and couldn’t look after them. They’re all over the place. I thought, ‘I’ll have two children, but I’ll look after them well’. It’s enough for me.

He says that he’s always had good relations with his Cypriot neighbours, all of whom are elderly. Younger Cypriots, he says, often complain about the walled city, but only after having deserted it. He recognises that there is a common perception that relations between Cypriots and persons from the Hatay region of Turkey are strained but asserts that this is only a matter of media and discourse. There are problems with the walled city, he admits, but these are problems that should be solved by the local government.

There are too many children running about with no one to look after them. Their parents are working, and they’re not in school. There aren’t enough streetlights in the walled city, even though it’s a tourist area. And they don’t allow people to repair their houses because they’re historic. They should give some guidance and incentives.

One of his biggest concerns is for his children, because he feels that the public schools they attend are not on par with schools attended by Cypriot children. Facilities are lacking, and there is little intermingling with Cypriot
children, most of whom now attend private or suburban schools. He is especially concerned that his children learn English, which he sees as a key to a better future with global opportunities. He feels that his own lack of education, and particularly his inability to speak English, has been a handicap.

He repeats that he loves Cyprus and especially Nicosia, and has made all his investments here. He has lived in many different places, but as he puts it, ‘This is my last stop’.

7. Kenan

Kenan with his employer in the pide bakery where he works

Name: Kenan  
Sex: Male  
Age: 21  
Nationality: Republic of Turkey/TRNC  
Profession: Baker
Kenan is originally from Reyhan in the Hatay province of Turkey, but he came to Cyprus at a very young age, when he was only three or four. His father had come earlier and established himself before sending for the family. His father, who had originally done his military service in Cyprus, later came to the island as a construction worker, then established his own business as a van driver, especially for travelling salesmen who circulate through Cypriot villages.

Because he was very young when his family came to Cyprus, Kenan has no memories of his birthplace. Since his arrival in the island he has visited Hatay once for a brief trip, but he was quite small at the time and doesn't remember it. He is the third of ten children, five boys and five girls. All of them are in Cyprus, most living in the same house in the Arabahmet district of the walled city.

At the age of eight he began working in a bakery that makes pide (a kind of pizza). He would go to work at three or four in the morning, then return home at seven or eight to prepare for school. He was able to study through middle school, at which point he left and began work in the bakery full-time.

I had already entered the business world, and I just continued.

The bakery where he still works is one of the most popular in Nicosia, especially with Cypriots. Its owner, also a Cypriot, learned the profession from his father and the shop has been in business since the 1960s. The owner took Kenan under his wing as an apprentice, and most people who frequent the shop now think that Kenan is his son. When the owner has to be away from the shop for any period of time, Kenan is always in charge.

He loves living in the walled city, because everyone knows him there, and he knows everyone. He's seen many changes in the area, especially with the arrival of more workers from Turkey and the establishment of new shops and businesses. But still he prefers it to any other place.

He speaks with a heavy Nicosian Cypriot accent, even though he studied in a school where there were many immigrants. But because a large part of his life is spent at work, with his Cypriot boss and customers, he speaks in the local dialect and feels no difference between himself and Cypriots.
I feel like I’m from here, like I’m Cypriot. Most people say that about me, too. Anyway, I don’t know anything about Turkey. I’ve only been once.

Because he’s a citizen of north Cyprus, he did his military service in the island rather than in Turkey. Before going into the military he became interested in dance and since returning to work he has begun to dance salsa. Now he and the bakery owner go to salsa schools and parties together, where they meet and dance with other salsa lovers. He occasionally performs publicly as a dancer but always seeks to improve and so continues his dance lessons on a regular basis.

Kenan is expecting that the bakery owner will open another shop, giving management of one to Kenan and one to the owner’s son. His dream is to succeed in the business that he has known since he was a child.
8. Yasim

Yasim on the campus of Near East University

Name: Yasim
Sex: Male
Age: 26
Nationality: Sultanate of Oman
Profession: Student

Yasim came to Cyprus to study for a MSc degree in Finance at Near East University. He learned of north Cyprus over the internet and through the university's representative office in Muscat, his home city. Yasim is one of eight children, and his father, now deceased, had his own real estate business. He received his BA in the United Arab Emirates and returned to Oman, where he was working in the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

When the ministry offered him the opportunity to continue his studies he originally wanted to go to Malaysia, but on discovering Near East
University’s website he gathered information and took it to the Ministry of Education, which had to approve his studies as a civil servant. They told him that it was a credible university, and so he chose to come to Cyprus.

He came to Cyprus in 2006 with his wife, who is studying computer engineering. They initially had some trouble finding housing, since as a married couple they were unable to stay in student housing. He says that they had no one to help them find housing, and they are currently paying $500 per month for a small one-bedroom apartment. However, they recently met a Palestinian family who agreed to rent a somewhat larger apartment to them for less than half that amount. He says that Nicosia is smaller and quieter than he had imagined before he arrived:

> I was thinking that it would be a very modern city, but no, it is a very normal city. It is also very silent, which some people would consider a disadvantage, but for me it is good for my studies.

He says that he has many friends from different groups and that although he knows quite a few Arabs, especially students, his friends also include Cypriots and students from Turkey. Although they do not have a car, he and his wife have travelled with friends throughout the north of the island:

> I am very happy with the culture. It is very close to Arab culture, actually. Because they are affected by Turkish culture, and Turkish culture is very close to ours. The people here are very friendly. It’s great. I’m not feeling that I’m in a European area, I’m feeling that I’m in an Arab country. I’m very happy here.

He reports no problems in practising his religion and primarily prays in the *mesjid*, or small mosque, at the university, since he spends much of his free time on campus. He says, though, that he has little free time because he spends many hours studying, and because he and his wife are both students, they share the household duties. In general, Yasim says that he has had few integration problems and that he enjoys his life in Cyprus. The one incident that he reports in which his Omani citizenship was important was when he initially arrived in the island and was questioned by the police at the airport:

> They were very tough with us, as though we are sick, or bringing some drugs with us.

But because he considers the culture close to his own, he wishes ultimately to return to north Cyprus or go to Turkey to study for a doctorate. Yasim
considers the biggest problem for north Nicosia to be its isolation, because it exists in an unrecognised state. Investment and development are not possible, he thinks, as long as there is no political settlement.

*It should be one island with south Cyprus, and it should be independent. When it will open, many things will change.*

9. **Atilâ**

![Atilâ in his Nicosia home](image)

**Atilâ in his Nicosia home**

Name: Atilâ  
Sex: Male  
Age: 58  
Nationality: Republic of Turkey  
Profession: University lecturer
Atilâ is from the Eğirdir region of western Turkey, where his father was a railway employee and his mother was the daughter of an ağâ, or large landowner. As he puts it, he took refuge in books after his mother lost several children at birth or from childhood diseases and became overprotective of her remaining children. He became a leftist because of his father’s influence, and in 1968, at the height of student activism, he entered the Political Sciences Faculty at Ankara University. In 1971, a military coup led to his expulsion from the university, and during this period he lost a brother, who was killed by right-wing extremists. Until the student amnesty in 1978, when students previously expelled were allowed to return to university, he worked at various jobs, including selling rose oil and growing apples. He returned to the university in 1978 and began his doctorate soon after. But another period of violence led him to flee the country for Germany, where he remained for 17 years. While there, he conducted research on German perceptions of Turks, taught in German universities as a Turcologist, and organised numerous exhibitions. His extended stay in Germany was largely the result of certain writings that had resulted in his being put on a blacklist in Turkey.

He first considered coming to Cyprus when some of his classmates from Turkey began teaching in universities here. He came several times on holiday before accepting an offer from one of the universities. He moved to Cyprus with all of his belongings, including a large collection of books.

*It probably was a good thing that I didn’t go to Turkey. If I’d gone to Turkey with all those books and posters and so on, they would’ve said, ‘Come today, come tomorrow, this book’s forbidden, why did you come here, give us rusvet [bribe].’ They would’ve either driven me crazy, or they would’ve made me sick. Coming to Cyprus, they received me like a groom just returning from military service. The manager of the airport, the hostesses, we all carried my stuff together. I fell in love with the Turkish Cypriot dialect and Turkish Cypriots.*

Many of his students are also from Turkey, and he tries to encourage them to engage in more dialogue with Cypriots, to make friends with them and to visit their homes. At the same time he says that the fact that more than 10,000 students are able to get along without difficulties is because of Turkish Cypriots’ friendly nature. He thinks that the Cyprus Problem overshadows many of the other difficulties that society faces and that it has prevented the full democratisation of the political system.
Solving these problems isn’t difficult. You don’t need money, you don’t need brains. What you need is a conscience to be able to see. And today, the eyes of that conscience are blind.

10. Fatma

Fatma on the terrace of her second restaurant, opened after the success of the restaurant’s first branch in the walled city

Name: Fatma  
Sex: Female  
Age: 48  
Nationality: British/Cypriot  
Profession: Restaurateur

Fatma was 13 years old when her family emigrated from Cyprus to England in 1973. Until that time, her father had been the muhtar, or village head, of the small village where they lived in south Cyprus. Fatma was then studying in the Girls’ Lycée in Nicosia, and she says that her father came suddenly one day and told her that the next day they were leaving for England. The
reason he gave was that he wanted his five children to have a better education. Fatma finished school in England, attended university there studying mathematics, and then spent 20 years as a fashion buyer for retailers who would send her to various countries to acquire collections.

Fatma’s husband Paolo is from Portugal, and when they had their second child they decided that the pace and quality of life in England weren’t satisfying them. They had too little time to spend with their children and so decided to try returning to Cyprus. At first they envisioned it as an early retirement, but soon one of Fatma’s brothers persuaded them to try opening a restaurant in the walled city.

_It was risky, but we always felt that the inner city had to change, because wherever you look around the world city centres are where it’s happening._

She says that they encountered bureaucratic problems at first and that it took them nine months to get the appropriate permissions. She comments that there are many bureaucratic obstacles and little support for people starting new ventures. But she says that they came to love the walled city and that they’ve encountered no problems there.

_People would say, ‘Don’t you have problems with those people, living in those areas?’ But I’ve never come across any difficulties from people living in the area. None at all._

One of the biggest disappointments during their transition back to Cyprus was the educational system. Because their children speak English at home they first sent them to private schools in the north. However they soon found that they were not satisfied with the quality of education and so decided to send them to schools in the Greek Cypriot south.

All of the staff in their restaurant in the walled city come from Turkey, and Fatma is puzzled by the general prejudice against immigrants. As a return migrant who spent many years abroad, she compares their experiences to those of her own family.

_Generally people move anyway for economic reasons. It’s not because they want to go somewhere else and create problems for the people who live there!_

As someone who has invested in the walled city, she also sees the ways in which the media and popular discourse create fear about it as an area. This
is fuelled by neglect on the part of the local authorities which have, for instance, failed to light the streets in the area surrounding her restaurant, leading many people to avoid it. She sees this as indicative of a more general failure to invest in the area and in the people who live there.

If you want to include people in your community, then you have to do something inclusive for them. People complain that the people from Turkey send their money back, they don’t invest it here. But you have to create an atmosphere for them where they would want to stay here, and they would want to put their money back into where they’re living.
Part 3. Analysis

Nicosia is the divided capital of an island rent by a long-term, unresolved conflict.\textsuperscript{31} Because the TRNC has never gained international recognition, the Republic of Cyprus remains the official government of the entirety of the island. For more than three decades, the official stance of much of the international community was that the island’s north was controlled by Turkey, while more informally the TRNC was often referred to as a ‘pirate state’. There have been no official state relations between the TRNC and any country besides Turkey, while the north has suffered from long-term economic and political isolation.\textsuperscript{32} The opening of the ceasefire line in 2003, and the renewal of reunification negotiations that followed led to the easing of some restrictions and to closer relations between Turkish Cypriot leaders and the European Union.\textsuperscript{33} However, the isolation of the north has meant that Turkish Cypriots have been and remain economically, politically, and militarily dependent on Turkey.\textsuperscript{34} Mail, telephone calls, and consumer goods all have to be routed through a recognised state, while the north remains unable to take advantage of the Republic’s unilateral EU entry in 2004. Individual TRNC citizens of Cypriot origin have taken advantage of the open checkpoints and the Republic’s EU-member status by acquiring RoC birth certificates, identity cards, and passports, their own having limited usefulness. As a result, another border has been created within north Cyprus between those who qualify for European citizenship and those who do not.

The TRNC’s status as a ‘quasi-’, ‘pseudo-’, or ‘pirate’ state affects every aspect of daily life, from the most trivial to the most complex. One of the

\textsuperscript{31} For some of the better summaries of the problem, see Cynthia Cockburn, The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus (London: Zed Books, 2004); William Hale, ‘Turkey and Regional Politics after the Cold War: Greece, Cyprus, Turkey,’ Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000 (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000); Niyazi Kızlıyürek, Miliyetçilik Kıskacında Kıbrıs (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002); Keith Kyle, Cyprus (London: Minority Rights Group, 1984).

\textsuperscript{32} For an analysis of some of the difficulties involved in the problem of recognition, as well as isolation of the north, see Constantinou, Costas M. and Yiannis Papadakis. 2001. ‘The Cypriot State(s) in situ: Cross-Ethnic Contact and the Discourse of Recognition.’ Global Society 15:2, 125–148.

\textsuperscript{33} The improvement of relations followed Turkish Cypriots’ support for a United Nations-sponsored reunification plan in 2004. The plan failed at referendum, because Greek Cypriots rejected it. Following this, the EU called for an end to the Turkish Cypriot isolation and assigned 259 million euros for aid and infrastructure in the north. The EU also opened an aid and support office in north Nicosia. However, lack of recognition continues, and the EU now officially refers to the north as ‘the areas not controlled by the Republic of Cyprus government.’

\textsuperscript{34} Ömer Gökçekuş, Kibrislilerin İzolasyonu (The Economics of the Isolation of Turkish Cypriots) (Nicosia: Kıbrıs Türk Ticaret Odası, 2008).
areas of life that is directly affected by the north’s lack of recognition is immigration, in which, as in all others, the north’s ties to Turkey play a determining role. That state, however, has long treated the north as a type of province, providing its ‘security’ through approximately 30,000 troops stationed in the island as well as funding for infrastructure and administration. For a very long time, Cyprus’s northern border was porous, especially with regard to Turkish citizens. This, along with the early facilitated immigration discussed in the introduction has made northern Cyprus a natural destination for workers, especially from Turkey’s south and south-east, who are seeking seasonal or short-term employment.

As we note in the introduction, immigration has become a highly charged public issue that mirrors similar immigration issues throughout the world. The Turkish Cypriot media, as well as an increasingly vehement public opinion, have begun to treat the Turkish immigrant population as a cultural ‘other’ and have called for changes to immigration and labour laws that would discourage migrant labour from Turkey. Moreover, one of the results of isolation and non-recognition has been a lack of international oversight in areas such as census-taking and voting. Because of irregularities in the past, many Turkish Cypriots remain distrustful of their own authorities’ figures on numbers of immigrants and citizens, and so for many Cypriots international oversight would provide a more trustworthy picture of the demography of the north. In addition, there has been almost no academic research conducted on migrant populations in the north. The lack of

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36 It should be noted that the 1992 and 2003 Council of Europe reports recommended that the European Population Committee ‘conduct a census of the whole islands population, in cooperation with the authorities concerned, in order to replace estimates with reliable data (see http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta92/EREC1197.htm, www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/56C62B4C7DF6E1EC2256DC2003ACD3C/$file/Recommendationper cent2003per cent20(2003).doc?OpenElement). The reasons for lack of oversight are explained in Hatay’s 2007 report on north Cyprus’ demography: ‘The involvement of international agencies has been hindered by local politics, and especially by the question of sovereignty. For while the Republic considers any international cooperation with the Turkish Cypriot government to be recognition by implication, previous governments in the north have insisted that any international involvement should be undertaken through the Turkish Cypriot administration’s auspices, precisely in order to achieve a type of implied recognition,’ Hatay 2007, p. 48.

37 For two decades after 1974, authorities in the north denied the unusual influx of immigrants from Turkey. On this issue, see Hatay 2007, pp. 1–13.

38 The only academic studies to date on this subject are, in addition to Hatay’s census research (Hatay 2007), his research on settler voting patterns, Mete Hatay, Beyond Numbers: An Inquiry into the
information they can rely on has created a climate of fear amongst Turkish Cypriots that has also had important consequences for immigrants’ daily lives.

The analysis that follows describes the entire immigrant population of north Nicosia but also takes as its background Turkish Cypriot claims of cultural difference and colonisation in reference to the largest group of immigrants, namely Turkish nationals. The perception of cultural invasion, while referring specifically to that group, has had important legal, political, and cultural consequences for all immigrants to the island. In addition, the state’s lack of recognition means not only that its laws are not recognised and their implementation not questioned, but also that the state cannot be held accountable or responsible to international bodies. And so the lack of recognition that is largely responsible for Turkish Cypriot fears of colonisation has also paved the way for certain abuses that can be documented but not regulated.

Saturday laundry in the walled city beside the barricade that divides Nicosia


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3.1. Legal status, protection and dealing with authorities

The immigrant population of north Nicosia may be roughly divided into four groups, each of which has different experiences of dealing with authorities: (1) white-collar workers and professionals; (2) university students, and (3) manual labourers and small-scale entrepreneurs, along with their families. The vast majority of these three groups are Turkish nationals. In addition, there is (4) a small number of people whose primary reasons for migration are not work-related. This group includes return migrants, mostly from England and Turkey, and people married to Cypriots, again primarily of Turkish origin. Each of these groups has its own reasons for immigration and its own experiences since arriving in the island. As a result it is necessary for us to discuss each group separately. In addition, because education is an important subject for any discussion of intercultural dialogue in north Cyprus, we examine it in a separate section at the end.

(1) White-collar workers and professionals
The smallest group, that of white-collar workers and professionals, is in general the most integrated into the Turkish Cypriot population. Many come from middle-class backgrounds in western Turkey, and almost all have university degrees. White-collar workers such as bank managers may be assigned by their firm to work in Cyprus for a period of time. Professionals such as doctors and professors often have personal reasons for coming to the island, either marriage or an attractive job offer. Between 2000 and 2007, 341 people living in Nicosia gave ‘appointment/assignment’ as their reason for immigration.\(^ {39} \) The actual number of immigrant professionals is difficult to estimate, however, since others fall into the categories of ‘work’ or ‘marriage.’\(^ {40} \)

Professionals and white-collar workers live in the same suburban areas of the cities as their middle-class Cypriot counterparts. They frequent the same restaurants and shops and tend to socialise with Cypriots. This social integration is in some cases eased by intermarriage, since many professionals chose to come to the island as a result of marriage to Cypriots. Education and their perceived contributions to the island also mean that they acquire work permits easily and experience no or little discrimination in terms of housing. Like Cypriots, they send their children to private schools when possible, and they tend to seek health services in

\(^{39}\) Figures provided by Güner Mükellef, head of the Statistic Department of the State Planning Bureau.

\(^{40}\) According to İsmet Lisaniler, there are now initiatives to limit the numbers of immigrants employed in the white-collar sector in order to open spaces for skilled and educated Turkish Cypriots. A recent law, for instance, requires that 90 per cent of bank employees have TRNC citizenship. There are similar efforts underway to limit the numbers of foreign workers employed in tourism and leisure.
private clinics and hospitals. Although white-collar workers often have no intention to remain in the island, professionals frequently come to the island with the intention of settling there.\(^{41}\)

Professors from Turkey constitute a special class within this group. The growth of private, fee-paying universities in the north has made Cyprus an attractive source of income for professors, especially from Turkey’s public universities, where salaries are quite low. Some take advantage of Turkey’s early retirement age to earn a second income in Cyprus after retirement. Others become ‘flying professors’, maintaining their homes in Istanbul and Ankara but flying into Cyprus for several days a week to teach. A smaller number, often with other ties on the island, choose to settle there.

(2) University students
University students constitute one of the largest and most diverse immigrant groups on the island. The oldest university in the north, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), was established in the 1980s in Famagusta. Following its success other universities opened in Nicosia, Girne, and Lefke. Near East University in Nicosia is now the second largest university in the island after EMU. In addition, the smaller Cyprus International University opened more recently on the outskirts of the city. The largest numbers of foreign students in these universities still come from Turkey. Because the language of all the north’s universities is English, however, they also have substantial numbers of students coming from African and Arab countries, as well as from South Asia, especially Pakistan.\(^{42}\)

Diplomas from five of the north’s universities are recognised by Turkey’s Higher Education Council (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, or YÖK),\(^{43}\) providing those diplomas with international recognition. That recognition, however, also comes with a price in that universities in the north must also conform to certain of YÖK’s regulations. YÖK is a highly centralised body which in Turkey regulates all aspects of university administration, from entrance exams to department curricula and the hiring and promotion of faculty. In terms of admissions, students from Turkey who wish to register in the north must undergo the central Turkish entrance exam (Öğrenci Seçme Sınavı, or ÖSS), while students from Cyprus or third countries are exempt and enter

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\(^{41}\) These conclusions are based on participant observation and informal interviews with professionals and white-collar workers.\(^{42}\) For more information about these universities and their student bodies, see Near East University’s website at [www.neu.edu.tr](http://www.neu.edu.tr) and Cyprus International University’s website at [www.ciu.edu.tr](http://www.ciu.edu.tr).\(^{43}\) Information obtained from the YÖK website, [www.yok.gov.tr/denklik/duyurular/d-kktc.htm](http://www.yok.gov.tr/denklik/duyurular/d-kktc.htm).
separate exams given by the university itself. One side-effect of this separate entrance system is that while Cypriot and other students may change their majors after entering the university, Turkish students who enter via the ÖSS do so in a particular faculty and are unable to transfer later to another department.

Despite this, more than two-thirds of the students in Nicosia’s universities are from Turkey. Near East University has a total student body of 14,792, of which 8,452 are Turkish nationals, 5,410 are Turkish Cypriot, and 930 are from elsewhere. The recently established International Cyprus University has a total student body of 3,535, of which 3,395 are Turkish nationals and only 87 Turkish Cypriot, with 53 students from elsewhere. According to the latest census (2006), approximately 4,500 Turkish nationals gave education as the reason for their residence in Nicosia. Other students who do not live in Nicosia proper live on campus, in Girne, or in villages close to the university.

In addition to having a separate entrance exam Turkish nationals also pay higher fees. While NEU’s fees for 2007–08 were 2,200 euros for Turkish Cypriot students and $3000 for other nationalities, Turkish nationals paid 4,600 euros for the year. As a result of their willingness to pay higher fees, Turkish students have long been viewed as a source of income for the north and universities have increased their student populations accordingly.

Since the Turkish national student population began increasing in the 1990s, there has been a perception, promoted in the Cypriot media, that many of the students are wealthy and come to the island because they were unable to get into universities in Turkey. While many students do report that they were unable to get places in Turkish universities it should be noted that university entrance in Turkey is highly competitive. The last ÖSS was taken by 1,615,534 potential university students trying to get into only 433,150 places in Turkish universities.

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44 Near East University website: www.ydu.edu.tr/tr/main.asp?menu=7&info=/tr/info/kayit&sayfa=/tr/kayit
45 Reported during interviews with university students.
In addition, at the beginning of this decade many female students began to discover Cyprus as a place where they might gain an education while still wearing the Islamic headscarf (see Part 2 for a portrait of one such student). Under YÖK’s rules, no woman in Turkey may enter a university classroom while covering her hair in a way that might be interpreted as religious. For many years, individual universities, indeed individual faculties, chose to implement or ignore this rule. Beginning around 2000, however, YÖK enforced a crackdown on this regulation, threatening universities that failed to comply. As a result, a very small number of women chose to uncover their hair; others found creative solutions, such as wearing large hats or wigs. Still others chose to gain an education abroad, and it was at this point, especially, that Cyprus’s covered student body began to increase. One student from Turkey explained,

*I heard about Cyprus from my older sister. She had heard about it from a relative. Word got around that way. People in Istanbul were just beginning to hear that there were universities in Cyprus. My older sister wanted to study covered. As you know, it’s not permitted to study covered in the universities in Istanbul. We heard that here they permitted it. We looked into it, my older sister came and took a look at the situation, and we decided to come here.*

(Şeyman, female, 19, Turkish citizen, student)

This new influx of covered students led to a second perception of ‘otherness’, which is that Turkish students tend to be more religious than their Cypriot counterparts.

Turkish students report that they often have difficulty finding housing. One student told us that:

*Whereas in Turkey people want to rent to students and sometimes lower their rents because they know we don’t have any money, here they want huge deposits and try to put all sorts of conditions.*

(Şeyman, female, 19, Turkish citizen, student)

Some students report that Cypriot landlords have asked for as much as six months’ rent in advance, while others say that some landlords simply refused to rent to Turkish students. Students from Arab and African countries report even more problems. One student from Oman told us,

*The first difficulty I faced was finding housing. Because I came with my wife, we couldn’t stay in the student dormitory. So we had to stay in a hotel for ten, eleven days, which was very expensive. This was the first difficulty –*
nobody helped me to find a flat. (Yasim, male, 26, Sultanate of Oman, student)

This student said that they were able to find an affordable flat only with the assistance of another Arab family that was more settled in Cyprus.

Many students work in Nicosia’s restaurants, bars, and supermarkets, as well as in other sectors that have flexible hours. During the summer months, many work in hotels and resorts in Girne and Mağusa. Some of these students are registered, while others are undocumented. Still others work as ‘interns’, receiving little or no wage in exchange for job training. The ‘Ministry of Labour’ recently discovered that in some hotels up to 60 per cent of the workforce is made up of such ‘interns’ and the Ministry is taking measures to stop this exploitation.

When we looked last year, we found that in some places more than 50 per cent of the workforce was ‘interns’. In one hotel, there were 80 interns out of 100 staff members! We asked how this could be, and we found that they were getting permission from the Ministry of Tourism or Ministry of Education. We looked, and some of these students were studying administration, some were in mechanical engineering, some were studying English. We said, ‘What does this internship have to do with what you’re studying?’ So we put a 15 per cent limit on the number of persons who could be employed as interns. There were interns who were 30, 40 years old! (İsmet Lisaniler, head of the Labour Department)

Most students appear to experience few institutional problems and the university serves as an intermediary with the Cypriot bureaucracy. In addition, most students have the resources to seek appropriate legal counsel in any encounters with the justice system. Nevertheless, students are aware of general perceptions, especially in their encounters with Cypriot criminal justice and law enforcement. One professor reported that his African students complain that police continually stop them at night to check them for drugs. Other students, especially from Arab countries, experience difficulties at immigration when entering the country. One Arab student told us,

In the beginning, when I came to the airport, I had problems because they were very tough with us. They were very tough, as though we were thieves or drug dealers. Not me only, other students have problems. I have a message to the authorities here: they should respect others.

(Yasim, male, 26, Sultanate of Oman, student)
Students’ perceptions that the justice system could, in some circumstances, discriminate against them came to the fore in a recent case when four Turkish students returning from preparing a school project were killed in a traffic accident. The responsible party was a young Cypriot woman, from a prominent family, who was under the influence of alcohol. The students’ friends and family members demonstrated at the site of the accident and appeared in force in the courtroom to ensure that the young woman was granted no leniency because of her status or family connections.49

(3) Manual labourers and small-scale entrepreneurs
Manual labourers constitute by far the largest group of immigrants in north Nicosia. In the 1980s and 1990s, these labourers primarily worked in textile and other industries, in the tourism sector and seasonally in the fields and orchards. Beginning in the late 1990s, a boom in the construction sector created a need for cheap labour and many contractors used previously established networks to bring workers from impoverished regions of Turkey, especially in the south and south-east.50 In addition, the 2003 opening of the checkpoints that divide the island resulted in the exodus of around 3,000–5,000 Turkish Cypriot construction workers, who found that they could make more money working in the island’s south. Again, their places were primarily filled by labour from Turkey. In recent years, as the number of Bulgarian Turks on the island has risen, many of them have also entered this sector.

There are no current figures on regional origins of immigrants, but a 2000 survey showed that 37.2 per cent of the manual workforce came from the Hatay region of Turkey, while another 15.8 per cent came from the country’s south-east. The remaining 47 per cent comes from other regions of Turkey, especially in the south, or from other countries.51 Hatay is one of the geographically closest regions to the island, and approximately two decades of continuous and repeated migration has resulted in extensive networks of employees seeking manual labour; labourers who work for several months in Cyprus and return to their home region; and people from the Hatay region who have settled permanently in Cyprus and who often act as brokers and middlemen in bringing workers from the area and settling them.

Arabic is the first language of many people from the area, which shares a border with Syria. This migration began with changes in agricultural policy in the 1980s that resulted in the indebtedness of many farmers. Many of these have left their families behind to work continuously as seasonal and migrant workers within and outside Turkey since that period. One worker from Turkey said,

*They call us farmers, but we don’t have either fields or gardens, so by necessity we migrate to work in other places (gurbete çalışmaya gidiyoruz).* (Mulla, male, 52, Turkish citizen, construction worker)

Today, most say that the main factor motivating their migration is unemployment in the region or the inability to get by on the amount of money they can earn. In addition, one researcher who did extensive work with labourers from the Hatay region found that many – young men in particular – came to Cyprus because all of their friends were here. This has reportedly resulted in a gender imbalance in the region, as young women are left behind. It has also been one of the main reasons for gender imbalance in Nicosia, where there are today 11,416 males and 6,946 females of Turkish origin.

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52 Kurtuluş and Purkis 2007.  
53 Sinan Çankaya, ‘Even the Flies Are from Hatay: The Unregistered Turkish Labourers in the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) and the Role of Social Networks on their Migration Motives,’ unpublished article, 2006.  
54 Figures provided by Güner Mükellef, head of the Statistic Department of the State Planning Bureau. In addition, it should be noted that certain women’s groups attribute the rise in sexual crimes to the large male population in the city (Kibris Gazetesi, 24 May 2008).
Table 1. Distribution of population of the walled city according to neighborhood, citizenship and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>TRNC</th>
<th>TRNC &amp; other</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>3rd country</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABDI ÇAVUŞ</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKKAVUK</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARABAHMET</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAYDARPAŞA</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İBRAHIMPAŞA</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İLİKPAZARI</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAFESLİ</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARAMANZADE</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELİMİYE</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YENİCAMİ</td>
<td>1686</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Planning Organisation Statistic Department, TRNC.

The push factors for persons coming from the south-east of Turkey are clear, as the region has been devastated by almost 15 years of conflict. Over the past decade, between 950,000 and 1.2 million people have abandoned the region, emigrating to other areas of Turkey and abroad. The conflict has not only destroyed infrastructure and security but has also produced an unemployment problem. In addition, identity politics play a role in some migrants’ decisions to come to Cyprus. Migrants to Cyprus from that region are invariably of Kurdish origin, and some view Cyprus as a place where they will have more personal freedoms. One young waiter explained,

*My cousin was studying in the physical education department. He told me to come. He said that the Cypriot people have a kind of affinity for Kurds. Let me put it the way he put it. He said, ‘Unfortunately, communities that have experienced war have to be close to each other’.* (Ciwan, male, 25, Turkish citizen, waiter)

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Until 2005, immigrant labour to north Cyprus was only loosely regulated. Many workers arrived in the island with tourist visas and either applied for a work permit when they found a job or continued to work without registering. When the tourist visa expired they would simply overstay, since there were no fines. In order to control the numbers of unregistered workers, as well as their working conditions, a new labour law for foreign workers was passed in December 2004 and implemented in May 2005, controlling the way in which labour may be brought into the country and workers may acquire work permits.56 This new law requires that employers apply for permission before bringing labour from abroad and that they register their employees within a month of their arrival. Registration also entails health checks of the employees. Employers are required to pay social insurance, which workers have the right to transfer back to Turkey. Even though the TRNC is not recognised, the parliament did ratify the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, most protective legal instruments for migrant workers, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,57 have not yet been approved.

Workers are issued work visas for the period of their contract, and the government has become strict in enforcing those visas. For each day that workers overstay their visas, they are fined a day’s wages at the minimum wage rate. In addition, those who leave the island failing to pay their overstay fine have it doubled and their names placed on a blacklist. According to İsmet Lisaniler, head of the Labour Department in the north, there are now 31,000 people who have had their fines doubled and who are unable to return to the island for work. One of the young men we interviewed complained, ‘All of my friends left and can’t come back, because they can’t pay the fines’. Although the new regulations have increased the documented labour force, they have not decreased the size of the overall labour force. Rather, those who left the island have been replaced by newcomers, many from the same regions of Turkey, who now arrive with papers in hand.

56 These laws and the protocol with Turkey on the issue may be found at: www.cm.gov.nc.tr/yasalar/2004/43-2004.doc
57 www2.ohchr.org/English/law/cmw.htm
Table 2. Number of work permits granted between 2000 and 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total permits granted</th>
<th>First issue</th>
<th>Renewal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6,113</td>
<td>4,661</td>
<td>1,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5,311</td>
<td>3,942</td>
<td>1,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>5,828</td>
<td>3,521</td>
<td>2,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6,948</td>
<td>4,124</td>
<td>2,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>12,429</td>
<td>9,656</td>
<td>2,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>42,779</td>
<td>36,200</td>
<td>6,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>30,577</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figures for 2000–05 are taken from: www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/cyprus06_en/cyprus06_en?OpenDocument. Figure for the year 2006 has been supplied by İsmet Lisaniler, head of the TRNC Department of Labour.

Chart 1. Number of documented workers since 2000

Source: Hatay 2007, p. 36.

Although the government has become fairly strict in enforcing immigration regulations, workers report that there is little oversight of employers. For example, contracts require that employers provide housing for their employees, but the workers with whom we spoke said that, apart from large
companies, they know of no employer who does this. Instead, workers are left to find their own accommodation and many of them have found it in houses and pensions in the walled city. One worker from Kahramanmaraş in south-eastern Turkey said,

*Before there was no work permit. Now you have to have one. Because of that, they make us sign a contract. If you look at it, you’ll see that according to the contract, the boss has to provide food and lodging. But there’s no enforcement. It’s all on paper.* (Mulla, male, 52, Turkish citizen, construction worker)

The large, old houses abandoned by Turkish Cypriots are now crowded with Turkish workers. Many of these houses are decaying, and they often lack adequate sanitation or cooking facilities.58 Sometimes owners rent by the room, or in other cases large rooms are turned into dormitory-like accommodation. Rents are reported to be approximately 150–200YTL (75–100 euros) per person (six to eight people in one room) per month, meaning that an owner who rents such a house to 20 workers will make approximately 1,500-2,000 euros each month.

According to one official in the ‘Ministry of Labour’, some complaints have been brought by workers, and the Ministry has attempted to mediate. However, many workers who have attempted to lodge complaints have simply been discharged by their employers. One worker told us,

*Whatever you eat, wherever you sleep, it doesn’t matter, you’ll be on time for work. And you can’t fight back. If you try to demand your rights, they’ll immediately fire you, and you’ll have to leave the country.*

(Mulla, male, 52, Turkish citizen, construction worker)

Being discharged automatically cancels workers’ work visas and so results in their being expelled from the country at their own expense. As a result, workers tend to accept that despite contractual obligations, employers will not pay for their housing expenses. In addition, although workers have the right to transfer their social insurance back to Turkey, many of them are unaware of this or other regulations that are to their benefit. For instance, an insured worker who is injured or becomes ill while in Cyprus and requires treatment in Turkey has the right to be transferred to Turkey and to have his treatment there paid for by his social insurance. To do that, however, the medical board in north Cyprus must issue its approval, and according to one

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government official, the board has until now refused to grant such approvals.

There is also no enforcement of labour laws regarding working hours and pay. According to the recent labour law, employees should work 40 hours a week, for a maximum of five and a half days.\textsuperscript{59} They should receive an hourly wage and anything beyond 40 hours should be paid as overtime. In place of this, employers pay a daily wage and some keep labourers on site for up to 15 hours a day, six days a week. Although the amount that they earn in a month is the same as the minimum wage (1,060 YTL, or 500 euros) in many cases they work twice the number of hours (especially in catering). One young waiter from Adiyaman complained,

\begin{quote}
The wages are good, but we work 12 or 13, sometimes 14 hours a day, six days a week. We have Sunday off. But we don’t have a vacation, we don’t get time off for holidays. (Yılmaz, male, 30, Turkish citizen, waiter)
\end{quote}

In addition, the social insurance payments made by their employers should guarantee six months of unemployment payments in the event that they are dismissed from their job. However, the official from the ‘Ministry of Labour’ confessed that these payments are not implemented for workers from Turkey.

Similarly, there is insufficient oversight of safety regulations. One labourer from south-eastern Turkey told us,

\begin{quote}
Up to now, at least 50 of the labourers working in this plain who are from Maraş have died in the construction sites by falling from those big towers. No one even sent their condolences. They just give some small amount of money to the families, that’s it. None of this made it into the press. (Ilhan, male, 50, Turkish citizen, unemployed)
\end{quote}

In the past two years 20 labourers have died on site, eight by falling and others by electrocution or being crushed in machinery. The number of people injured during the same period is 534. These are cases that have been reported to and investigated by the ‘Ministry of Labour’ and so it may be expected that the actual number is higher. For instance, according to a lawyer working for the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation an undocumented migrant worker injured in an accident in 2007 refused to go

\textsuperscript{59} Yabancıların Çalışma İzni Yasası (63/2006 Sayılı Yasa) 23'üncü maddesi altında yapılan Tüzük (Law number 63/2006 Regulating the Work Permits of Foreigners).
to hospital because of fear of deportation and finally died at the construction site where he had been hired.

One former owner of a brick factory reported to us that several years ago he changed the fuel that he used from petrol to natural gas and persuaded his competitor to do the same. He made this change because he knew that it was better for the environment as well as for his workers. But when the Ministry of Interior gave permission for a third factory to begin operation using coal, he quickly realised that he wouldn’t be able to resist much longer.

*At that time, the price for natural gas was 160,000 YTL [approx. 80,000 euros] per month, while the price for petrol was 120,000 [approx. 60,000 euros], and coal was 20,000 [10,000 euros].*

Although he sent numerous letters of complaint to various ministries, he received no reply and when his other competitor switched to coal, he did, as well.

Even though he employed a special system that he brought from Italy and imported cleaner coal from the US he still found that his workers were soon having health problems. ‘One day one of the workers suddenly fainted. We took him to the hospital, and the doctor said he had been poisoned.’ Soon more workers began to faint, and he wrote a letter to the government reporting the problem and asking them to take the necessary measures. They came to his factory and found that the level of toxins was slightly over the limit. He demanded that they also measure his competitors.

*They went to one factory and found that it was ten times over the acceptable limit. When they went to the third one, it was far over the amount the apparatus could measure. My guess is it was a hundred times over the limit. I said that I wanted them to shut all the factories down, mine included. They said, ‘Unfortunately, we’re not going to do anything.’*

Ultimately, he decided to close his factory himself.

Workers are commonly expelled from the country for complaining about working conditions, for minor infractions, or for contracting diseases on the island. According to Labour Department reports, in 2006 alone, there were 23,822 cancellations of work permits for reasons that were not given. Presumably, these cancellations were either because workers were fired from their jobs or because they failed to pass the health exam.
According to the 2007 US Department of State Human Rights Report for Cyprus, 61 per cent of prisoners in Nicosia's central prison were Turkish nationals. A general perception among the Turkish Cypriot public is that most crime in the north is committed by Turks, and there are reports that police and the judiciary tend to treat Turkish nationals more severely. There have also been reports of abuse in the prisons, and the State Department summary confirmed this, stating that when a riot broke out in May 'police allegedly targeted not only rioters, but the general prison population, subjecting scores of prisoners to truncheon blows'. Investigations by the independent Turkish Cypriot Doctors’ Association confirmed this.

There are approximately 20,000 unskilled workers in the island’s manufacturing and construction sectors, most of which are seasonal or temporary. But there are, in addition, approximately 7,500 skilled workers who are employed in various branches of the catering, retail, service and transportation sectors. Because their jobs require training, conditions and pay tend to be better, and these workers are more settled in the island. Most of these workers attempt to bring their families. In the past, many of the families came on tourist visas but now they must show that the head of the family has a work permit. If they choose to enter on a tourist visa, the visa will now be issued for between a week and a month, and fines will be implemented if they overstay the visa. In most cases a worker brings his wife and children, but there are also many cases in which young men who have established themselves on the island send for parents and siblings. One young man who works in catering explained:

“My family at first didn’t want to come. By the time I got my whole family here, I had already missed my period for going to do military service. In order to convince my mother to come here, I had to bring my brother from Alanya and convince him to stay. I wanted to bring the whole family here, and then go to do my service. I called my father and said, ‘Dad, come to Cyprus, it’s much better here.’ He said, ‘What are we going to do there?’ Because he’d never been outside our home region. So I thought, the best thing to do is to bring my older brother, since in our region they respect the older ones. I had a hard time convincing him, but I told him, ‘Come and see what it’s like, and if you don’t like it, you can go back.’ But I was certain that he was going to be pleased.” (Yılmaz, male, 30, Turkish citizen, waiter)

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Table 3. Registered immigrant workforce according to economic sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic sectors</th>
<th>No. employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and husbandry</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, quarrying</td>
<td>3,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>16,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail and wholesale</td>
<td>2,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and restaurants</td>
<td>3,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, warehouse, communication</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial institutions</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>2,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbers and hairdressers</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30,577</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: İsmet Lisaniler, head of the Labour Department (23 April 2007)*

It is well known but undocumented that many of the women in these families are employed in domestic work in Cypriots’ homes, usually for cleaning, but also for childcare or laundry. Some have found informal work in restaurants and shops, but according to one study of workers in the walled city, most women receive no formal or dependable wages. Because their work is not documented or registered, they also make no retirement or social insurance payments. One research team reported,

> In the interviews that we conducted within the home, when we asked the men if the women worked, they would always say that they didn’t, apart from those in jobs with regular wages. In fact, most said, ‘We don’t let our women work.’ But when the interview continued and the women began to participate, it became clear that almost all of them
worked in housecleaning, childcare or nursing, laundry and similar jobs.\textsuperscript{61}

These researchers attribute the lack of credit for women’s contribution to the family budget to the fact that their jobs are, for the most part, a continuation of the division of labour within the family. This devaluation of women’s paid work, they remark, is a phenomenon that may be found in other immigrant communities around the globe.

The most clearly permanent immigrants to Nicosia are small-scale entrepreneurs who have made investments on the island. The owners of small businesses such as groceries or restaurants are usually of similar socio-economic backgrounds to manual labourers but they have managed in various ways to make the leap from day labour to small-scale entrepreneurship. They have usually been on the island longer, often have children who were born in Cyprus, and report few assimilation problems. At the same time many of these small businesses cater to the immigrant workers, since they know the group and its needs. One grocer explained that his sales rise and fall depending on the season:

\begin{quote}
The one thing that’s given me trouble is ‘fill and empty’ (doldur-boşalt). What do I mean by ‘fill and empty’? The people who come from Turkey and go back. Everyone comes according to a season. For instance, some come in the winter, and they go back to Turkey in the summer, when they find other work.’
\end{quote}

(Hüseyin, male, 40, Turkish citizen, grocer)

Within the walled city, there are numerous restaurants, coffeeshops, and groceries that bear the name of the owner’s place of origin and cater to people from the owner’s home region. Many of these small-scale entrepreneurs have married on the island, sometimes to Turkish Cypriots. Many have had children born there or have raised their children there and so consider their residence permanent. Some have gained TRNC citizenship, especially through marriage to Turkish Cypriots, but the majority remain in the island on long-term residence visas.

We also include in category (3) a small number of women, mostly from the former Soviet states, who work in ‘night clubs’ on the outskirts of the city. As we note in the introduction, although these women are officially ‘artistes’, they are in fact sex workers. There is a separate department in the Ministry of Interior that regulates their status. Although the law does not prohibit

prostitution, it is illegal to encourage or force a person to engage in prostitution. According to the US Department of State Human Rights Report, ‘The law regulating the hiring of women at nightclubs and cabarets provides penalties for women and employers who “partially or completely earn a living from prostitution”’ and makes procurement of a prostitute a misdemeanor. Until 2006, no one had been charged for encouraging and profiting from prostitution, but in that year there were four cases. In the first case, the penalty was 15 days in prison.

(4) Return migrants and migration for marriage
Return migrants to Nicosia constitute a small group of approximately 750, 424 of whom have returned from the UK. Another 265 returned from extended residence in Turkey. As we note in the education section, returnees and their children face special problems primarily related to language and schooling. They are well integrated into society and often return after having succeeded in businesses abroad. Their children, however, were usually born in the country from which they immigrated. In the case of those returning from the UK, this creates a problem of language, since the children often are not comfortable speaking Turkish or do not read or write it well. In addition, many Turkish Cypriots had originally emigrated to working-class neighbourhoods of London and other UK cities and their children who grew up in those areas experienced the educational difficulties of other children in such less-privileged neighbourhoods.

Within Nicosia there are also approximately 1,400 people of foreign origin, mostly women, married to Turkish Cypriots. Of these, 1,284 are Turkish nationals. Although the small number of non-Turkish speakers report experiencing some language and other adjustment problems, there appear to be few integration difficulties among the group as a whole.

Education

One of the primary complaints of long-term residents on the island is the quality of education for their children. Turkish Cypriots also complain of the quality of public education, but many attribute the perceived low quality to the presence of immigrants in the schools. One result of this is that the number of Turkish Cypriot children attending private schools has risen.

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62 Figures supplied by the Statistic Office of the State Planning Department, TRNC, based on the 2006 census.
dramatically since 2000, around the same time that larger numbers of immigrants and their families began to arrive from Turkey. While the number of students attending private primary schools in 2000–01 was only 765, now it is 2,833. For the academic year 2007–08, the number of Turkish Cypriot students attending public primary school in the north was 12,324, while the number of students of Turkish origin attending the same schools was 7,411. Similarly in middle and high school education the number of students attending private schools increased from 1,205 in 2000–01 to 2,214 in the 2007–08 school year, with an additional 350 students attending schools in the Greek Cypriot south. One return migrant told us,

I wish there were a school that I would be happy sending my kids to. But they’re not progressive enough, one, and then the standards really aren’t high enough. Maybe my children want to remain in Cyprus, but what if they don’t? They should be prepared for the outside world. And I think the educational system really doesn’t prepare them for that. (Fatma, female, 48, British/Cypriot, restaurant owner)

The fact that many Cypriots now send their children to private schools results in a further complaint of quite a few immigrants, which is that the ability to provide private schooling and lessons for children gives those children an advantage in the future over children educated in public schools. One young immigrant who is supporting his brother’s education commented,

My brother’s education is going well, but it’s not easy. We’re five people, and there isn’t much room. It would be better if he had his own room, his own computer. It would be better if he could do his lessons on his own computer. Or if we could’ve sent him to private lessons. But we can’t do that. We start out aiming high, but we gradually realise that we can’t reach those goals on our own, just with our own effort. In my brother’s class, there are other students who go to private lessons, and they come out ahead. Now he’s saying, ‘If I become a teacher, that’s enough’.

(Yılmaz, male, 30, Turkish citizen, waiter)

Indeed, there has been an increasing division within education, as the two primary schools within the walled city and one middle school just outside the walls have lost Turkish Cypriot students and have become entirely immigrant schools. Many long-term residents complain that it is precisely this ghettoisation of education that is detrimental for their children, whom

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65 Information supplied by Yusuf Karşılı, TRNC Ministry of Education.
they would like to see better integrated into the society. Many immigrants perceive that better teachers and resources go to schools with larger Cypriot populations. In addition, the special needs of recent immigrant children often become handicaps for immigrant children who have grown up in or may have been born in the island.

One official from the Ministry of Education identified three primary problems in the education of immigrant children in Nicosia. The first, he said, is language, since most recent immigrants come from the south and south-east of Turkey and so speak Kurdish or Arabic as their native language.

Language is a problem. Most of those coming from Turkey speak a very low level of Turkish. And there are also the problems of those coming from England. The families of those who emigrated earlier to England and are now returning, their children’s Turkish is not good, and their standard of education is also lower. These children are of course separated in the classroom, and gradually separate classes were created for them. Gradually, they also began to concentrate in particular schools, and so those schools became the schools for these children. (Hasan Alicik, head of the Turkish-Cypriot Educational Planning and Programme Development Department)

As a result, the Ministry of Education has worked to provide intensive Turkish language classes to students coming from Turkey who do not know the language and in some schools they have implemented up to four hours a day of Turkish classes for this group of students.

The second problem that the official reports is one of a different level of education. This is a problem, he says, for some students from Turkey who begin in middle school and have difficulty catching up. But he reports that it is a particular problem for return migrants from England. According to the ministry, many of those return migrant children – many of whom come from working-class areas of England that have experienced education problems – have difficulty keeping up with the work. The official reported that...

...we sometimes encounter interesting problems. For example, a student who’s in the third form of middle school, that is the last grade of middle school, fails a class, and because there’s no possibility of repeating after the final year of middle school, he’s expelled from school. The parents come here, and they can’t understand. They say, ‘I came from Europe, I sold my shop and my house to return, and now you’ve thrown my kid out of school’. (Hasan Alicik, head of the Turkish-
As a result, the ministry began to implement special exams to track children’s progress and allow them to continue their education.

The third problem the ministry official reports is one not directly related to education but experienced in schools, which is the ghettoisation of the walled city and the fact that many immigrants do not mix with Turkish Cypriots or others who are not from their home region or cultural group.

This problem that we experience in schools is actually one brought about by the ghetto life that migration brings. For instance, in the primary schools we were doing geometry and asked the children to bring the measurements of a table. The children don’t bring them. We ask them again, and they still don’t bring them. When we ask why, it’s because they don’t have a table at home! When we ask where they eat, it turns out they eat on the floor or on round stools. (Hasan Alicik, head of the Turkish-Cypriot Educational Planning and Programme Development Department)

In the past, it was common in much of Anatolia to eat on the floor and the tradition continues in parts of the south and east of Turkey today. The official interpreted the lack of a table as a continuation of this tradition.

According to the ministry, because the same children go to the same schools within the walled city, the problem continues into middle school, where it becomes more manifest. The ministry reports that many teachers have complained about student behaviour where that behaviour might be interpreted as lack of full integration into the society. Indeed, teachers in certain schools have requested that immigrant children be removed from those schools and taken elsewhere. The official commented,

These people are going to stay, and so we have to accept them with tolerance, and with all of their differences. We have to accept them without turning them into an ‘other’. We’ve been struggling with this, but really there’s a lot of resistance [from the teachers], in fact there’s a mentality of ‘take them away from us’. If you think about it, a doctor can’t tell a patient ‘I won’t treat you’ just because the patient is from a village, or from another culture. An educator shouldn’t say it, either. But unfortunately, because of the influence of society, and the fact that ‘othering’ is at its highest point now, the teachers in some of the schools – not all of them – they can’t deal with these children’s
problems. We went to the schools and talked to them. We said, ‘You’re the ones who bring them here. You have them clean your houses, you have them build your villas. The woman comes to your house to clean, and you don’t want her child in your school. This isn’t right. We have to teach them to be good citizens’. (Hasan Alicik, head of the Turkish-Cypriot Educational Planning and Programme Development Department).

![Children of the walled city in the square outside the Selimiye Mosque](image)

### 3.2. Social and cultural life

As is clear from the introduction and first section of this report, the largest immigrant group in Nicosia, namely Turkish nationals, is only partially integrated into the social and cultural life of the host community. The degree of their integration depends on the amount of time that they have lived in the island, but even more importantly upon their level of education and their reasons for immigration. White-collar workers, professionals, and people married to Turkish Cypriots tend to be the most integrated, while seasonal or temporary workers are the least. The ghettoisation of the walled city, where many manual labourers, small-scale entrepreneurs and their
families live, has only exacerbated the segregation of a population that the host society has begun, in media and popular discourse, to classify as ‘a colony’, ‘a disease’, and ‘a stain’.⁶⁶

As we noted earlier, lack of reliable information and attempts by the government to obfuscate the issue in the past have made Turkish Cypriots distrustful of any demographic data supplied by the government.⁶⁷ This climate of fear was aggravated by the growing confusion between workers brought to the island on a temporary basis by Turkish Cypriot businesspeople, and ‘settlers,’ or Turks who had arrived from Turkey following the 1974 war and had been granted citizenship and Greek properties. For most Turkish Cypriots there remains no distinction between ‘settlers’ who have the right to vote and whom some Turkish Cypriots believe use that vote to impede the island’s reunification,⁶⁸ and people who migrated temporarily because they could not find work in their home regions. In this circumstance, the growth in the walled city’s Turkish immigrant population seems to present visible and tangible proof that Turkish Cypriot culture is under siege and that Turkish Cypriots’ political will is being taken from them. As one academic who lives in Nicosia recently remarked, ‘I have no problem with my housekeeper, who’s worked for me for 20 years, or with the neighbour with whom I play backgammon. My problem is when they interfere with my political will’. This is also cast as a problem of ‘being in exile in one’s own homeland,’⁶⁹ referring to changes in the human landscape that lead many to claim that ‘we are a minority in our own country’.

In Turkish Cypriot argot, Turks were in the past referred to as karasakal, or ‘black beard,’ a name that supposedly emerged to refer to Turkish military commanders based on the island in the 1960s. Its connotations are not necessarily derogatory, though the word may be used in a derogatory way. There are other derogatory terms that have become more widely used in recent years. One of these is fellah, a word with Arabic origins meaning ‘peasant’ and which in the Cypriot dialect means ‘Arab Gypsy.’ A more recent term which came into use to refer specifically to the large numbers

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⁶⁶ Based on our survey of Turkish Cypriot newspapers between the years 2005 and 2008.
⁶⁷ The lack of reliable demographic data has been filled in the media by largely unsubstantiated estimates which range from 300,000 to one million.
⁶⁸ For an analysis of the broad spectrum of political alliances of Turkish-born persons settled in Cyprus, see Hatay 2005.
⁶⁹ For an analysis of this same period that focuses more on this sense of exile, see Doğuş Derya, ‘Living on the Margins of the ‘Turk’ and the ‘Cypriot’: The Cyprioturk as a Subject of Ambiguity.’ Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Sociology, Boğaziçi University, 2005.
of Turkish nationals arriving to work in the island, is gaco, or ‘Gypsy.’ Both fellah and gaco emphasise the immigrants’ perceived rural or peasant origins, and are used to refer to immigrants from southern and eastern – but not western – Turkey. These terms depend upon an East/West dichotomy, in which Cypriots see themselves (as well as educated, Westernised Turks) as part of the West and immigrants as part of an Orientalised East. This is expressed quite well in an interview with a 28-year-old female resident of Nicosia:

I don’t want to put people down, but it’s mostly workers coming here from Turkey. Everything about them is bad – their clothes, the way they look at you. Anyway they don’t come from normal places, they mostly come from Hatay and the east. I don’t particularly like them. There’s always the same question: Why don’t you like Turks? Hey, I’m also a Turk! It’s not that we don’t like Türkiyeliler, it’s the people from Hatay and Mardin we don’t like.

Another slang term that has come into popular use in recent years is fica, a Turkish Cypriot word for seaweed. This word refers to the immigrants from Turkey who have ‘washed up’ on Cyprus’s shores like dead seaweed brought in by the tide. The word expresses the sense that manual labourers, many of Kurdish or Arab origin, constitute an unwanted invasion that spoils the landscape as seaweed litters a beach.

The media and popular discourse have begun to portray the walled city as a place of crime and disease. Turkish Cypriots commonly complain that ‘we used to sleep with our doors unlocked’ and that they are now afraid to enter the walled city at night. The fact that the walled city is overwhelmingly occupied by males only adds to this impression. In addition there is a common perception that the workers and their families bring diseases and this is one of the primary reasons that parents cite for withdrawing their children from schools attended by immigrant children.

But just as commonly, Turkish immigrants themselves are referred to as a ‘disease,’ indeed a ‘plague,’ that is spreading. One journalist described the walled city of Nicosia as a woman who had been sullied and had developed such a disease:

70 Ironically gaco in the Romany language means non-Gypsy. In the past, Cypriot Roma used this word for persons not of Roma origin, such as Turkish Cypriots.
First shadows began to appear on her face, then black spots. With time the black spots multiplied. According to some they were just a few unimportant pimples, while according to others they were an illness that had no cure. Those who said it was an unimportant illness soon realised that they had been wrong. The black spots multiplied even more. . . . The pure white face had lost its magic. Both the face and the tongue were gradually obscured. 

The author later explains the black spots as ‘an occupation by people with different languages and different skin’. 

There is, then, a general climate of fear amongst the host society that has been difficult for many immigrants to comprehend. Most immigrants from Turkey, before arriving in the island, considered north Cyprus to be an extension of Turkey and so are especially uncomprehending of Turkish Cypriot attempts to distinguish themselves. The Turkish military intervention of 1974 has been engraved in Turkish popular imagination as the protection by Turkey of their island ‘brothers’. Many people throughout the country have friends or relatives who participated in the intervention or who have subsequently done their military service on the island. In addition, Turkey will in 2008 send some 780 million YTL (approx. 400 million euros) to support the north’s economy; the country has sent a similar amount of aid money each year since the 1980s. Several workers remarked to us that ‘if the government [of Turkey] would just send that money to our region, we’d be there right now instead of here’.

The large majority of recent immigrants from Turkey resides in an area of the city that has been mostly vacated by the host community. As a result many of their social networks are tied not to Nicosia but to their home regions, while much of their political participation is a continuation of political affiliations in Turkey. As mentioned above, there are coffeeshops that cater to peoples from the same region, and many of the immigrants spend their leisure time in these coffeeshops. In addition, these coffeeshops and networks are often divided by a language barrier, since the first language of many immigrants is Kurdish or Arabic rather than Turkish. For instance, Kurdish workers use the coffeeshop as a space in which to follow Roj TV, a Kurdish-language channel broadcast from Europe and accessed via satellite. Turkish students who live in other parts of the city similarly

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73 Ibid., 103.
74 One article published by the Fırat News Agency notes changes in attitudes towards Kurdish identity in Nicosia in the past few years. One Kurdish worker quoted in the article sees their ability to watch Roj TV as progress: ‘Until two years ago, when [the police] would search the pensions, if
report that they do not mix much with Turkish Cypriots, while many of the students follow the parties or political affiliation that they supported in Turkey. For example, Kurdish students participate in activities of the local socialist parties, while nationalist students participate in activities of the local right-wing parties. The second-largest group of recent immigrants, Bulgarian Turks, is scattered throughout the city outside the walls, but many still report that their primary social contacts are with other Bulgarian Turks.\textsuperscript{75}

At the same time, the fact that Kurdish workers in Cyprus are able to watch Roj TV, a station forbidden in Turkey, indicates one reason that many immigrants, despite experiencing some forms of discrimination, prefer life in Cyprus to Turkey: the perception of more personal freedom. Unlike in Turkey there are no restrictions on language use or religious practice and there are similarly no official restrictions on displays of cultural or ethnic affiliation. Hence, some Kurdish immigrants or people of the Alevi faith choose Cyprus as a destination because they believe that they will be able freely to express their cultural identity or to practice their faith. And as noted above, Cyprus has in recent years attracted more and more female university students who wish to wear the headscarf. As one young woman whom we interviewed remarked, ‘It’s free here. They don’t pay attention to religion and things like that’.

Turkish Cypriots, though nominally Muslim, have long been a secular society, and it is rare to find Turkish Cypriots who regularly attend mosque, especially in the cities. In Nicosia, many of the small-scale immigrant businessmen do attend mosque on Fridays but workers are rarely able to do so, because of working hours. Many, however, pray at home, as do many students who do not attend the small mosque on their university campus. One researcher reports that many immigrants become less religious after living in Cyprus.\textsuperscript{76}

The most successful immigrant associations, however, are also religious ones. There are two associations of immigrant Alevis, a religious community with roots in Anatolia that is considered a heterodox sect of Islam. Alevi do not worship in mosques but rather in cemevis, and one of the associations

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{75} Eliz Ismail Tefik, ‘Dynamics of Social Citizenship and Identity Perceptions: Immigrant Turks from Bulgaria in Northern Cyprus,’ M.A. thesis, Eurasian Studies, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, December 2007.

\textsuperscript{76} Talip Atalay, \textit{Kıbrıs'ta Yaygın Din Eğitimi ve Cami Hizmetleri: Kurumsal Yapılanma ve Din Görevlileri} (İstanbul: Seçil Ofset, 2007).
\end{footnotesize}
recently received land from the government to build such a temple. There are two associations, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Derneği and Pir Sultan Abdal Derneği, and their festivals are normally attended by representatives from all political parties. Alevi in Turkey number in the millions, and they have had a very ambiguous relationship with the Turkish state and with the majority Sunni Muslim community. Many Alevi remark that life is more comfortable for them in Cyprus, where there is a secular tradition. In addition, ethnic Kurds and Turks from Turkey are united in Cyprus by the Alevi associations and their activities.

Apart from such religious associations there are also – as mentioned above – associations of hemşeriler, or people from the same region of Turkey. The largest of these are the two associations for persons from the Hatay region, one of which produces a weekly newspaper. These associations provide some aid in finding work and applying for citizenship, but many of its members are already TRNC citizens. There is also one association for Bulgarian Turks, many of whose members are also TRNC citizens.

Such civil society organisations, however, do not specifically aim at aiding immigrants. There are also no unions or NGOs whose specific goal is to protect the rights of migrant workers. As a result of this lack of civil society support as well as their own relative isolation many immigrants are unaware of their rights under recent labour and immigration laws. For instance, although workers have the right to transfer their social security and insurance payments back to Turkey, many do not do so because they wrongly believe that they must make extra payments out of their own pockets in order to accomplish this. They are also largely unaware of their rights to health care.

3.3. Sense of belonging and identity

As emphasised above, immigrants’ sense of belonging in the city is primarily related to class, education, and contact with the host community. While many recent immigrants – especially professionals, small-scale entrepreneurs, and people married to Turkish Cypriots – have made both professional and economic investments in the city and indicate plans to stay, the largest number of immigrants is temporary by definition and lives in conditions that make attachment to the city difficult. Unskilled labourers tend to work long hours and have little leisure time. In addition they are often loath to spend money that they would otherwise save or send to their families. The Bulgarian domestic worker whom we interviewed reported that even her two children, both in their early twenties, rarely leave the
house. The entire family is working and saving to buy property in their home town in Bulgaria. ‘We came here to work, and we’re working,’ she says. Similarly, men who have left their wives or parents behind in Turkey send up to three-quarters of their earnings to their families at home. These men report that they spend much of their free time either in the workers’ pensions where they live or in the coffeeshops for people from their home region.

While these temporary migrant workers appear to retain their identification with regions in Turkey, Bulgaria, and elsewhere, immigrants who have been on the island longer express confusion about identity. People in permanent positions and small-scale entrepreneurs who plan to remain on the island and who may have married and had children there are concerned about the rising xenophobia in the local community. One young Kurdish man whom we interviewed said that one of his main reasons for coming to Cyprus was to escape discrimination in Turkey. ‘But here they see us as all the same,’ he said. ‘I’ve actually started feeling Turkish since I came to Cyprus.’ Young people who were born or grew up on the island tend to see themselves as Cypriot, but they are aware that the local community usually does not view them as such.

As a result, many of the immigrants who have been in the island longer have also begun to express negative sentiments about more recent immigrants. ‘The main problem with the walled city,’ one shopkeeper told us, ‘is all the children running around the streets, with no supervision. Their parents are working, and they don’t have time or are too tired to look after them. They skip school, and who cares?’ Others say that, indeed, life used to be better before the arrival of the newer immigrants. ‘They’re right when they say, “We used to sleep with our doors open,”’ one older immigrant told us. ‘Now no one can do that any more.’
Families in front of the garden of Selimiye Mosque in the walled city
Part 4. Conclusion

On both sides of the ceasefire line in Cyprus, the unresolved political problem has long dominated discussions of human rights and has impeded attention to social problems. Feminists in Cyprus have observed that women’s rights are often left unaddressed in order to preserve unity around the ‘national issue’. The human and social rights of immigrants find little place in political discussions that are dominated by the two main local communities – Turkish and Greek Cypriots – and their long-standing, unresolved conflict.

In north Nicosia this problem is exacerbated by the lack of recognition of the government of north Cyprus. While the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004 and so is governed by EU immigration regulations, the government of the north remains outside the EU and indeed unrecognised by any government besides Turkey. As a result the north remains economically, politically, and militarily dependent upon Turkey. Following the division of the island in 1974, large numbers of Turkish nationals immigrated to north Cyprus, where they settled and became citizens. Later immigrants were drawn to opportunities in Cyprus not available in Turkey. In the past decade, the south and south-east of Turkey have become a cheap source of labour for Cypriot factories and the construction industry. But the north’s lack of recognition means not only that immigration depends on local controls alone but also that the government of the north has been slow to recognise its responsibility for protecting the human and social rights of immigrant workers.

In addition, lack of adequate demographic data on north Cyprus in general and north Nicosia in particular has produced a climate of fear among Turkish Cypriots in response to what they recognise as large-scale immigration. Because in the past the government had given citizenship to Turkish nationals arriving on the island, many Turkish Cypriots confuse Turkish nationals who became citizens in the 1970s with recent migrants who have no voting rights. This confusion causes the fear among many Turkish Cypriots that immigrants will ‘impede our political will’. Some left-

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77 Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Cyprus, Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg. (See www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe), 2005. www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/download/Cyprus.pdf
wing organisations perceive this as an organised attempt by Turkey to colonise the island. Because of this perception, many of the same political and social organisations that might otherwise work in support of the immigrants’ rights in this instance wish to keep their stay on the island a temporary one and so do not encourage integration. Rather, they encourage continuous immigration with short stays of residence. Moreover, because their presence has acquired a political dimension inextricably related to the resolution of the Cyprus Problem, there is little international pressure to encourage integration or to support policies that would grant further rights and citizenship.

Apart from the local political dimensions of this immigration, there is in addition a class dimension that has led to reactions against the socio-economic backgrounds of immigrants in north Cyprus. Media and public discourse in general portray immigrants as ‘a disease’ and ‘a blight’ that will destroy the Cypriot character of the island. Although this backlash resembles that of many other European countries and represents a global phenomenon, it is exacerbated in the case of Cyprus by the fact that the unresolved political conflict makes any demographic changes a part of that conflict.

Workers arrived as sectors requiring cheap, manual labour grew, but could not be staffed by Turkish Cypriots, who have a preference for jobs in the civil service. One research team that has conducted research with migrants to Nicosia’s walled city remarked,

In north Cyprus, the foreign (Turkish national) workforce in both the formal and informal sectors is around 50,000, with the greatest number employed in construction. In contrast to this, according to the 2006 north Cyprus census, the number of residents is 178,000, the number of households is 72,000, and the number of persons drawing a government paycheck is 55,000. These figures clearly show that KKTC citizens, as a workforce, have clustered in the public sector, and that there is a structural labour deficit in north Cyprus’s developing sectors. It is this deficit that non-citizen workers, in both the formal and informal sectors, fill.\(^78\)

Turkish nationals had begun to reside in Nicosia’s walled city in the 1980s, renting houses that Turkish Cypriots had abandoned as they continued a process of suburbanisation that had begun some three decades earlier. Many of the larger such houses would later be turned into labourers’

\(^{78}\) Kurtuluş and Purkis 2007.
boarding houses and filled with the unskilled workers who began to arrive in large numbers in the late 1990s.

The result has been a ghettoisation of the walled city, with consequences that affect immigrant life throughout Nicosia. The perception of the walled city as a place of crime and disease, a place dominated by single men who are both poor and uneducated, leads many Turkish Cypriots to avoid the area, especially after dark. In turn, the media and public discourse have begun to portray all migrants as potential criminals who have come to disturb the peace of the island. This is reflected in education in the growing refusal of Turkish Cypriots to send their own children to schools where immigrants are present, and in the requests of some teachers to have immigrant children removed from their classrooms. It is also reflected in the lack of integration of migrant workers, most of whom spend their spare time in spaces owned by people from their own regions of origin.

One university lecturer commented that active intervention is needed to resolve this situation:

The walled city has to be reconquered. What can be done? The universities should rent parts of the city street by street. They could give one street to university lecturers, and what would happen? We'd rebuild it brick by brick. It doesn't matter if it's Turks, English, Americans – you can't take immovable property with you. It'll stay there. And the karasakal [Turkish immigrants] will be obliged to adjust. These children have to be integrated, the new generation. Otherwise, it's a timebomb waiting to go off.

The degree to which immigrants integrate into the host society clearly depends upon their socio-economic background, education, and place of origin. White-collar workers, professionals, and persons married to Cypriots experience few difficulties integrating. Immigrants who have been on the island longer, established themselves, and made investments in businesses or learned trades also claim that they are well integrated into society, even though many also say that their social networks are primarily other immigrants. Their children usually grow up speaking the local Turkish Cypriot dialect and consider themselves Cypriot, although they are aware that many members of the host community do not view them as such.

By far the largest group, however, are manual labourers and their families, almost all from Turkey, many of whom often speak Kurdish or Arabic as a first language and have limited skills or education. They are generally considered an expendable labour force, and the laws that have been put in
place to protect them are not sufficiently implemented. Some teachers protest against immigrant children’s presence in schools, even as they hire their mothers as informal domestic workers to clean their homes. Businesspeople complain about the ghettoisation of the walled city, even as they bring cheap immigrant labour to work in their factories and in construction without providing the housing promised in their contracts. Women’s groups protest that Nicosia has become a male-dominated city, even as many of the same groups do not wish to allow migrant workers to bring their families to the island. The media writes of the flood of immigrants using the public hospital, even as there are few safety checks or implementation of safety regulations. When we asked the head of the Bureau of Tradesmen and Craftsmen what could be done to further integrate this group of immigrants, he replied, ‘If you mean integration in the real sense, there’s no public will’.

Despite this xenophobia has recently been recognised as a social concern, and it is gradually being discussed in public forums and in some parts of the media. However, more work needs to be done both with the media and within the educational system, as the two most important disseminators of information and ideas. Our own survey of the print media in Cyprus, for example, shows biased reporting in which crimes committed by Turkish nationals are endlessly excoriated, especially by columnists, even as the same crimes committed by Turkish Cypriots are given little or no coverage. A recent rape case in Famagusta, for instance, provoked a stream of online commentary in one of the local newspapers’ websites that cast all Turkish nationals as ‘barbaric’ and ‘animals.’ Similar rape cases in which the suspect was a Turkish Cypriot have received little coverage. Such slanted coverage only reinforces common perceptions that immigrants are criminals who have ‘tainted’ the island.

As a result, our recommendations for further integration of immigrant populations in north Nicosia fall into five categories, based on our research with host communities, immigrants, and local stakeholders: (1) oversight and implementation of existing laws, and harmonisation with EU standards; (2) unions; (3) sectoral analysis; (4) multicultural education; and (5) media.

(1) Oversight and implementation of existing laws and harmonisation with EU standards
Until recently, migrant labour in north Cyprus was primarily seen as disposable. Workers were not paid social insurance and often worked without work visas. Under a new labour law, workers must have work visas
in order to remain in the island, and they are fined heavily for overstaying those visas. These fines have been efficiently implemented, resulting in the inability of many workers who overstayed their visas to return to the island. The ‘Ministry of Labour’, however, has been less efficient in investigating violations by employers, including such basic matters as number of hours that labourers work and whether or not safety equipment is used. In addition, there has been little attention paid by the local authorities to the housing conditions of workers, and few services are provided to the areas where they live.

Until now, all harmonisation with EU standards in the north has been unilateral, since the north is considered to be ‘outside the areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus’ and so has not been part of the RoC’s EU integration process. Because of this, although laws are in place, the lack of external monitoring has resulted in a lack of implementation of those laws. In these circumstances there is a real need for independent monitors to research and report on the implementation of these laws and what needs to be done to achieve north Cyprus’s further harmonisation with EU standards.

(2) Unions
Although there is a workforce of 70,000 outside the public sector, only 400 people from this group are unionised. In addition, more than 60 per cent of the workforce working outside the public sector are immigrants. In order to ensure the implementation of existing laws and the further development of workers’ rights in the north, the unionisation of the various sectors of this workforce is essential.

(3) Sectoral analysis
As we explain above, there is currently no reliable research on migrant populations in the island’s north. In order to dispel myths about immigrant populations and understand better their needs and problems, research is needed that would examine each sector of production in turn, including that sector’s role in the economy of north Cyprus and the role of immigrant labour within that sector. In addition, research needs to be conducted on both the push and pull factors of immigration to the north.

(4) Multicultural education
More attention needs to be paid in the schools both to teacher training in multicultural education and to the sources of educational inequality. One of the main sources of inequality in education is the language barrier, as many immigrant children do not speak Turkish as their native language. In order to overcome this inequality, more services should be provided to non-native speakers to help them bring their language skills up to the level of other
students in their age group. In addition, the increasing segregation of schools has become another source of educational inequality. While the Ministry of Education has made some steps to overcome this by attempting to integrate some immigrant children into schools mostly populated by Turkish Cypriots, more work needs to be undertaken in this direction.

The ministry reports that quite a number of teachers experience difficulties with the immigrant children in their classrooms and that some have requested their removal. Although the ministry is aware that such difficulties should be overcome with appropriate training, they so far have not had the support or facilities to undertake sufficient training. Workshops in multicultural education involving educational experts who have worked in culturally mixed areas would be a useful first step in this direction.

One of the main problems reported by both immigrants and teachers alike is the difficulty parents face in finding the time to supervise their children's schoolwork, as well as the lack of educational after-school activities. So far, there has been little attention paid to this problem by local NGOs or the Nicosia municipality. Local community centres that are accessible to students and their families and that provide students with extra lessons and after-school supervision are a possible initial step.

(5) Media
Although the media is independent and operates without constraint in north Cyprus most newspapers in the north are tied to political parties. As a result, most newspapers encourage a particular political viewpoint, primarily through editorials but also, in many instances, through their presentation of supposedly ‘objective’ news. Although electronic media, including television and radio, is gaining importance in north Cyprus, newspapers continue to be widely read and retain considerable influence over public opinion. Despite this, no serious research has been done on the print media in north Cyprus and its influence on public opinion on important issues such as the Cyprus Problem and immigration. We believe that such research would constitute a significant contribution to understanding obstacles to multiculturalism and the integration of immigrants in the island’s north.

Recently, the concept of ‘peace journalism’ has begun to be discussed in the north, exploring how the media and reporting might aid in reconciliation and the search for a political solution to the division of the island. Under this rubric, various workshops have been conducted that brought together Turkish and Greek Cypriot journalists, often outside the island and with the sponsorship of international organisations. However, the concept of ‘peace journalism,’ we believe, in fact replicates one of the problems of journalism
in the north of the island, which is its focused concentration on issues concerning the island’s division and on relations between the island’s two largest communities, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, to the exclusion of other groups.

In addition to reconciliation between the two communities, the concept of ‘peace journalism’ should be expanded to include minority and immigrant groups. While the former have consistently been excluded from discussions and negotiations between the two main communities, the latter now constitute 35 per cent of the de jure population of the entire island and so can be expected to play an important role both in the island’s reunification and in its subsequent development. To this end, we recommend that similar symposia and off-island workshops be conducted that would include journalists from both sides of the island in a discussion of the content, ethics, and effects of journalism regarding immigration.
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