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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Positive versus negative contact and refugees' intentions to migrate: The mediating role of perceived discrimination, life satisfaction and identification with the host society among Syrian refugees in Turkey

Zafer Özkan¹  | Naif Ergün²  | Hüseyin Çakal³ 

¹Department of Psychology, Ordu University, Ordu, Turkey

²Department of Educational Sciences, Mardin Artuklu University, Mardin, Turkey

³School of Psychology, Keele University, Keele, UK

Correspondence

Zafer Özkan, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Science and Literature, Cumhuriyet, Mustafa Kemal Blv. No: 478, 52200 Altınordu/Ordu, Turkey.
Email: zaferozkan25@gmail.com

Abstract

Most research on refugee integration focuses on attitudes toward refugees among the members of the host society. Consequently, little is known on refugees' intentions to return home or migrate to another country. The present research investigates whether positive and negative contact with Turks are related to Syrian refugees' migration decisions via perceived discrimination, identification with the host society, and life satisfaction. Using a sample of Syrian adults ($N = 285$), we found that positive contact with Turks was associated with reduced return intentions via perceived discrimination and identification with the host society and with reduced intentions to migrate from Turkey to the Western countries via life satisfaction. Negative contact was only associated with increased return intentions via perceived discrimination. This study underscores the role of intergroup contact to better understand migration decisions of refugees and potential underlying mechanisms to explain this association. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's Community and Social Impact Statement.

KEYWORDS

identification, intergroup contact, migration, perceived discrimination, refugees

1 | INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2019, 26 million individuals have been forced to leave their origin country and to live in another country as refugees. Understandably, most research on refugees almost exclusively focuses on refugee mental health and well-being (Okazaki, Guler, Haarlammert, & Liu, 2019), and factors promoting or hindering refugee integration (Echterhoff, Hellmann, Back, Esses, & Wagner, 2019). Consequently, little is known about why and how refugees decide to return home or migrate to another country.

Here, we focus on voluntary return intentions and willingness to migrate to another country among Syrian refugees in Turkey. More specifically, we explore how positive and negative interactions with the host society are associated with decisions to return to home or migrate to another country by examining the mediating roles of perceptions of discrimination, identification with the Turkish society, and life satisfaction. In what follows, we first survey the extant research on intergroup contact, intergroup attitudes and behaviour. We then apply this framework to intentions to return home (Syria) or to migrate another country.

Integration in a host society is a multidimensional process that involves both the refugees and individual members and institutions of the receiving country. As in any other intergroup context, it is rife with mutual perceptions of prejudice, threats, attitudes and action tendencies on the basis of norms and values of the groups involved (Esses, Hamilton & Gaucher, 2017; Hahn, Richter, Schupp, & Back, 2019). Research evinces that intergroup contact theory is well positioned to address and account for how these social psychological processes factor into refugees' decision making on returning home or migrate to other countries.

Allport (1954) suggested that under optimal conditions (i.e., equal status, cooperation, common goals and institutional support), intergroup contact can reduce prejudice. Since then, hundreds of studies have attested the positive effects of contact on intergroup relations (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Vezzali & Stathi, 2017). A meta-analysis of 515 studies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) showed that the optimal conditions proposed by Allport, in fact, are not essential but can lead to even greater prejudice reduction when they are present. What is more, both advantaged and disadvantaged group members benefit from intergroup contact (Powers & Ellison, 1995; Tropp, 2007). The present research applies this perspective to host society–refugee relations and investigates the associations between quantity of contact and intentions to return home or migrate to the Western countries from Syrian refugees' perspective as a disadvantaged group in Turkey.

To date, most research on contact examined the role of positive contact and paid less attention to negative contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, negativity is also a part of intergroup contact experiences. Compared to positive contact, negative contact is more strongly associated with outgroup prejudice (Barlow et al., 2012; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009); however, positive contact is more frequent than negative contact (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). Thus, recent research on intergroup contact focuses on both positive and negative contact (Árnadóttir, Lolliot, Brown, & Hewstone, 2018; Meleady, Crisp, Dhont, Hopthrow, & Turner, 2020). The present research also takes into account this valence in motivating refugees' return or migration intentions. We expect that positive contact to be associated with reduced intentions to remigrate while negative contact would be associated with increased intentions to remigrate.

Positive contact is associated with several positive outcomes such as improved outgroup attitudes (e.g., Pettigrew et al., 2011), reduced perceived discrimination (e.g., Dixon et al., 2010), reduced intergroup anxiety (Stephan, 2014). Thus, more positive interactions with the host society can motivate refugees to stay where they migrated and demotivate them from returning to their home country or migrate to another country. Taken together, refugees who experience positive contact might feel more welcomed and might not wish to remigrate.

Along similar lines, if migrants experience lots of negative contact with the host society, this might influence their intentions to return to their home country. Research shows that negative contact is associated with outgroup avoidance (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012). In fact, daily hostile contact experiences with the people who have conflicting world views can be so impactful that people might decide to confine their movement to their own communal areas as (Dixon et al., 2020). In more extreme cases, individuals might decide to migrate altogether (Echterhoff et al., 2019).

Previous research on immigrants showed that Turks who had more negative experiences with Germans reported more willingness to return (Tezcan, 2019). Similarly, research conducted among European immigrants in Britain showed that negative contact was related to both increased experiences of prejudice and future contact avoidance (Meleady & Forder, 2019). We assume that this might also be the case for the Syrian refugees in Turkey. If the negative contact with the majority group members is frequent and it is safe to return, then refugees can consider returning to their home country or migrating to another country.

2 | MEDIATORS BETWEEN INTERGROUP CONTACT AND MIGRATION INTENTIONS ASSOCIATIONS

People are not willing to stay where they regularly have negative contact with others. However, those who experience positive contact might be more likely to stay (Di Saint Pierre, Martinovic, & De Vroome, 2015). Thus, we hypothesize that three processes (i.e., perceived discrimination, identification with the host society and life satisfaction) could explain the associations between intergroup contact and refugees' intentions to return and migrate to other countries.

To our knowledge, research on perceived discrimination and intentions to migrate to another country among refugees is scarce. Previous research shows that positive contact can reduce perceived discrimination (Dixon et al., 2010; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). For instance, Tropp, Hawi, Van Laar, and Levin (2012) showed that cross-ethnic friendships are associated with reduced perceived discrimination over time. One study by Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) found that contact with Dutch was negatively associated with return intentions via perceptions of reduced discrimination among immigrants living in the Netherlands. Although interesting, these results are inconclusive in the sense that they did not differentiate between positive and negative contact. Positive contact could make refugees feel less discriminated against which in turn could reduce their intentions to migrate. In contrast, negative contact could increase refugees' perceptions of being discriminated and this in turn could increase their intentions to migrate. Thus, in the present research, we examined the mediating role of perceived discrimination for both positive and negative contact.

We also argue that identification with the host society can play a central role in the association between intergroup contact and intentions to migrate. The acculturation framework suggests that when different groups come into contact, they reevaluate their identities (Berry, 1997; Zimmermann, Zimmermann, & Constant, 2007) and some immigrants might embrace both identities (integration) or embrace only the host identity (assimilation). We expect that embracing the identity of the host society more will be associated with reduced intentions to migrate among refugees.

Indeed, contact could help people to build a connectedness with a larger group. This connectedness is a central component of identification that is a sense of psychological bond and belonging (Leach et al., 2008). Social categorization as a member of a group then has fundamental connections with cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions towards others (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For example, people are more likely to help ingroup members compared with outgroup members (Dovidio et al., 1997). Furthermore, previous studies repeatedly showed that social identification is related to increased well-being, life satisfaction and reduced depression (e.g., Eller, Cakal, & Sirlopu, 2016; Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). However, people can feel solidarity with outgroup members as well. Putnam (2000) suggested that contact can work as a bridge to sustain social capital which has several benefits at the societal level, such as generation of broader identities and improving the living conditions of the whole community. Accordingly, Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) found that contact with Dutch natives was associated with reduced return wishes via increased host country identification among migrants. If people perceive themselves as connected to the host community then they will benefit from this connectedness and would be less inclined to migrate elsewhere. In line with previous work, we expected positive contact with the host society to be positively and negative contact to be negatively associated

with identification with the host society. Stronger identification, in turn, is expected to be associated with reduced intentions to return.

Apart from perceived discrimination and identification with the host society, life satisfaction can also explain the association between intergroup contact and migration intentions. Life satisfaction is a core part of psychological well-being (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and evidence shows that people's psychological well-being is closely related to their contact experiences with others (Bagci, Kumashiro, Smith, Blumberg, & Rutland, 2014; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). For example, disabled people's friendships with non-disabled people are linked to greater psychological well-being (Bagci, Turnuklu, & Bekmezci, 2018). Similarly, Bosnian adults' post-war contact was positively associated with several positive outcomes, for example, lowered post-traumatic stress disorders, increased outgroup trust, and intergroup forgiveness (Voci, Hadziosmanovic, Cakal, Veneziani, & Hewstone, 2017). Tip, Brown, Morrice, Collyer, and Easterbrook (2019) longitudinally replicated these positive effects of contact on mental health and well-being among refugees in Britain. Refugees who have positive contact with British people reported increased well-being. Consequently, we think that positive contact might be associated with increased life satisfaction. Which in return can be associated with reduced intentions to return and migration to the Western countries while the opposite can be expected for negative contact and intentions to migrate.

3 | THE PRESENT RESEARCH

This research aimed to investigate whether and how the contact valence, positive versus negative, is associated with intentions to return and migrate to the West among Syrian refugees in Turkey. Among all of the refugee groups, Syrians are currently the largest (6.6 million) refugee group in the world and Turkey hosts the largest, 3.6 million, number of Syrian refugees globally (UNHCR, 2019a). Against this background, we surmised that positive contact would be associated with reduced intentions to return and migrate to the West among Syrian refugees in Turkey. Conversely, negative contact could enhance these intentions. In line with previous research, we hypothesized that perceived discrimination (Dixon et al., 2010; Tropp et al., 2012), identification with the host society (Leach et al., 2008), and life satisfaction (Bagci et al., 2014; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008) could mediate these associations. Specifically, we proposed that more positive contact with the Turkish host society would be associated with higher life satisfaction and identification with the host society, and lower perceived discrimination. Consequently, lower perceived discrimination, stronger identification with the host society, and greater life satisfaction would in turn be associated with less willingness to return and migrate to the West among Syrian refugees in Turkey. Contrariwise, more negative contact with the host society would be associated with lower life satisfaction and identification with the host society, and with higher perceived discrimination, which in turn would enhance Syrian refugees' intentions to return home and migrate to the West.

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Participants and process

In total, 285 Syrian adults completed the survey (141 women, 143 men, 1 other, age $M_{age} = 35.12$, $SD = 11.33$). According to a sample size calculation proposed by Westland (2010), a minimum sample of 218 participants are needed for the anticipated effect size ($d = 0.30$), the desired probability ($p = .05$), and the statistical power (0.80). Thus, our sample of 285 participants is adequate. Majority of the participants were living in the cities closer to Syria (249 in the eastern cities, for example, Mardin, Diyarbakir, Sanliurfa; 27 in the Western cities, that is, Istanbul and Ankara, 9 did not state).¹

The data were collected online ($N = 185$) and via a pen-paper survey ($N = 100$).² The online questionnaire was distributed via social media whereas paper-pen surveys were collected by a Syrian female research assistant. The participants were informed about the study aims and procedures. No reward was given.

4.1.1 | Measures

All the measures were translated from Turkish to Arabic by a bilingual scholar. The Arabic version of the survey was evaluated by 10 bilingual native speakers on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*totally agree*) whether the translations were appropriate to the Arabic that Syrians speak ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 0.70$), comprehension was good ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.10$), and any Syrian would understand the sentences ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.81$).

We measured all constructs with seven-point Likert-type scales. Thus, higher values indicated more positive and negative intergroup contact, stronger perceptions of discrimination and identification with the host society, more life satisfaction and more willingness to return or migrate. Intergroup contact measures were adopted from Dhont and Van Hiel (2009). *Positive contact* was measured with three items asking the frequency of positive contact with Turks (1, *not so often*; 7, *very often*): ‘How often do you have pleasant contact with Turks?’, ‘How often do you have friendly contact with Turks’, ‘How often did you have positive experiences with Turks up till now?’ ($\alpha = .82$). *Negative contact* was measured with two items: ‘How often do you have unpleasant contact with Turks?’, ‘How often do you have a conflict with Turks?’ ($\alpha = .78$, $r = 0.64$, $p < .001$).

We adapted two items from Bagci, Piyale, Bircek, and Ebcim (2018) to measure *perceived discrimination*: ‘How often did you personally experience discrimination because you are Syrian?’ and ‘How often do you think the society discriminates against Syrians?’ (1, *not at all*; 7, *all the time*, $\alpha = .72$, $r = 0.57$, $p < .001$). *Life satisfaction* was measured using three items adapted from Diener et al. (1985): ‘In most ways, my life in Turkey is close to my ideal’, ‘The conditions of my life in Turkey are excellent’ and ‘I am satisfied with my life in Turkey’ (1, *not at all*; 7, *all the time*, $\alpha = .84$). *Identification with the host society* was measured with three items adapted from Leach et al. (2008)’s solidarity items: ‘I feel a bond with Turks’, ‘I feel solidarity with Turks’ and ‘I feel committed to Turks’ (1, *not at all*; 7, *all the time*, $\alpha = .92$).

Return intentions were measured using two items: ‘If Syria becomes a safe place in the coming years, I would lean toward the idea of a permanent return’, ‘If Syria becomes a safe place in the coming years, I would intend to return permanently’ (1, *totally disagree*; 7, *totally agree*, $\alpha = .93$, $r = 0.87$, $p < .001$). *Migration to the West intentions* were also measured with two items ‘I lean toward to the idea of going to developed Western countries in the future’ and ‘I intend to go to developed Western countries in the future’ (1, *totally disagree*; 7, *totally agree*, $\alpha = .94$).

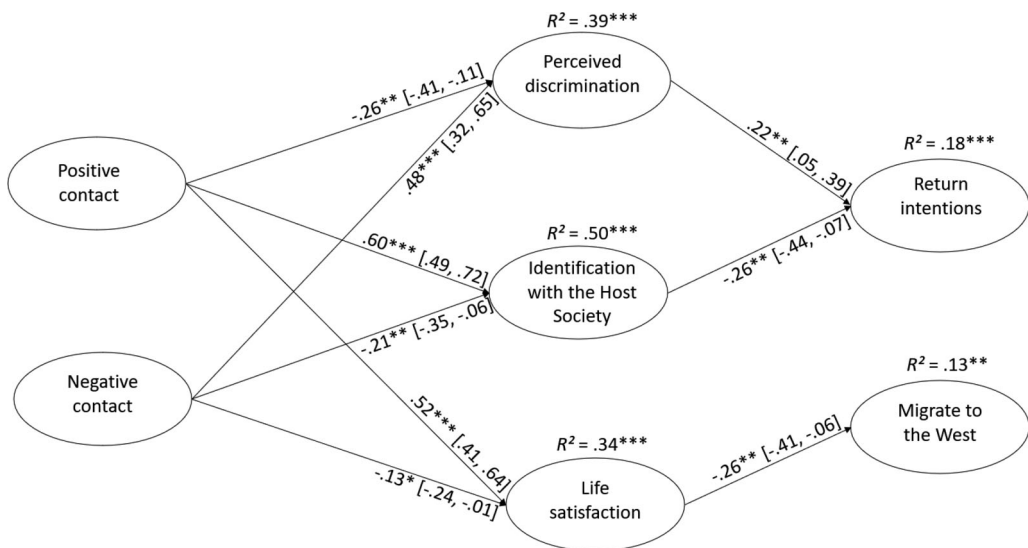
5 | RESULTS

We present the descriptive statistics in Table 1. We used Mplus software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017) to test our theoretical model in structural equation modelling (SEM) with robust maximum likelihood estimation (MLR).

We evaluated the fitness of our model with the chi-square test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative fit index (CFI). A good fit is achieved by $\chi^2/df < 3$, a CFI value > 0.95 , an RMSEA of < 0.06 , and an SRMR of < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We employed our observed variables (question items) to form latent variables. A confirmatory factor analysis showed that all observed variables loaded significantly onto their respective latent factors and our measurement model fit the data well ($\chi^2(97) = 121.50$, $\chi^2/df = 1.25$, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03 [0.01, 0.04], SRMR = 0.03)³. Additional tests showed that multicollinearity was not a concern (for all predictors and mediators the tolerance values > 0.30 and VIF values < 3.00).⁴ We then tested our proposed model (Figure 1) in which we entered positive and negative contact as

TABLE 1 Study 1: Means, SDs, and correlations between variables

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive contact	4.51 (1.25)	—	-.31***	.52***	-.34***	.61***	-.27***	-.27***
2. Negative contact	3.73 (1.13)		—	-.29***	.40***	-.44***	.20**	.11
3. Life satisfaction	3.62 (1.62)			—	-.42***	.69***	-.32***	-.33***
4. Perceived discrimination	4.32 (1.58)				—	-.39***	.15*	.25***
5. Identification with the host society	4.27 (1.75)					—	-.29***	-.34**
6. Intentions to migrate to the west	4.23 (2.05)						—	.11
7. Intentions to return	4.50 (1.96)							—

* $p < .05$;** $p < .01$;*** $p < .001$.**FIGURE 1** The structural equation model. Non-significant paths, correlations between independent variables, correlations between mediators, and correlations between dependent variables are not presented due to presentation purposes. Model fit: $\chi^2(97) = 121.48$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.25$, CFI = 99, RMSEA = 0.03 [0.01, 0.04], SRMR = 0.03. Path coefficients are standardized estimates. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

independent variables, discrimination, identification with the host society and life satisfaction as mediating variables, and intentions to return and migration intention to the West as dependent variables.

We report all effect sizes with confidence intervals obtained via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping creates standardized point estimates (PE) with bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) to control for possible bias resulting from small sample sizes or non-normal distributions. PEs with CIs without zero between two values indicate significant path co-efficient. A summary of indirect effects is presented in Table 2. As expected, positive contact was indirectly and negatively associated with return intentions via perceived discrimination ($\beta = -.06$, [-.12, -.01]), and identification with the host society ($\beta = -.15$, [-.27, -.04]). In a similar vein, positive contact was also indirectly associated with intentions to migrate the West via life satisfaction

TABLE 2 Indirect effects of positive and negative contact on return intentions and migration to west

Path	Mediator	PE (β)	95%CI
Positive contact-return intentions	Perceived discrimination	-.06	[-.11, -.01]
Positive contact-return intentions	Identification with the host society	-.15	[-.27, -.04]
Positive contact-migration to west	Life satisfaction	-.13	[-.22, -.05]
Negative contact-return intentions	Perceived discrimination	.11	[.02, .19]

Note: We report significant indirect effects only. Confidence intervals without zero indicate a significant indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

($\beta = -.13$, [-.22, -.05]). Contrary to our expectations, negative contact was indirectly and positively associated with return intentions only via perceived discrimination ($\beta = .11$, [.02, .19]). Our proposed model explained 17 and 13% of the variance in our criterion variables return intentions and migration to the West, respectively, and 34, 39, and 50% of the variance in our mediating variables, life satisfaction, perceived discrimination and identification with the host society, respectively.

The data are cross-sectional and it is difficult to rule out alternative causal explanations. First, perceived discrimination, life satisfaction and identification with the host society might be associated with return intentions and migration intentions to the West via positive and negative contact (Alternative Model 1). Second, individuals could also be harbouring intentions to return to their home country or migrate to the West. These intentions might be associated with positive and negative contact via perceived discrimination, life satisfaction and identification with the host society (Alternative Model 2). Third, identification with the host society might be associated with intentions to migrate through intergroup contact, perceived discrimination and life satisfaction (Alternative Model 3). First alternative model had an acceptable good fit, $\chi^2(103) = 151.48$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.47$, CFI = 98, RMSEA = 0.04 [0.03, 0.05], SRMR = 0.04 but had a significantly worse fit $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 33.75$, $p < .001$ compared to our proposed model. Second alternative model too showed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(102) = 149.52$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.46$, CFI = 98, RMSEA = 0.04 [0.02, 0.05], SRMR = 0.07, but again our proposed model had a significantly better fit compared to our proposed model $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 31.50$, $p < .001$. We rejected both alternative models. Third alternative model also showed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(103) = 164.72$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.60$, CFI = 97, RMSEA = 0.05 [0.03, 0.06], SRMR = 0.07, once more our model proposed a significantly better fit, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 46.99$, $p < .001$.⁵

6 | DISCUSSION

We examined the associations between positive and negative contact and refugees' intentions to remigrate (when it is safe to return) and migrate to the West. We also tested potential mediators for these associations. We found that positive contact was associated with reduced intentions to return via reduced perceived discrimination and increased identification with the host society; and with intentions to migrate to the West via increased life satisfaction. Negative contact on the other hand was only associated with return intentions via increased perceived discrimination.

These findings extend previous work on intergroup contact theory by showing that contact does not only improve outgroup attitudes (Hodson & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) but that it could also influence refugees' decision making related to their intentions to return home or migrating to another country. Our findings are consistent with previous work on the associations between increased socio-cultural integration and reduced return intentions among migrants (Anniste & Tammaru, 2014; Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015). We contributed to this line of research from intergroup contact perspective in several ways.

First and foremost, previous studies focus mainly on the effect of positive contact on attitudes toward refugees among the members of the host society and studies conducted among refugees took into account only positive

contact experiences (e.g., Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015). In the present research, we examined both positive and negative contact (Pettigrew & Hewstone, 2017) among refugees. Surprisingly, the effects of positive contact on return intentions and intentions to migrate to the West were more pronounced. These results contradict previous research (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012). Thus, researchers need to take into account both types of intergroup contact and test their simultaneous effects. Research looking at alternative outcomes (e.g., civic participation of refugees, entrepreneurial activities or political behaviour) other than classical intergroup processes (e.g., prejudice reduction) would be particularly welcome. In a similar vein, research should also focus on giving more voice to the refugees and increasing their visibility in the mainstream psychological research. Refugees are the primary stakeholders and the end-users of the research on refugee studies. Research focusing on refugee experiences would contribute to their welfare more than research focusing on attitudes and behaviour towards the refugees.

Second, previous researchers predominantly focused on perceived discrimination as a motivator for fighting against injustice (Klandermans, Van der Toorn, & Van Stekelenburg, 2008; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). However, fighting with discrimination via social movement may not be the optimal or only solution especially when one's group is in precarious conditions. Refugees, as other severely disadvantaged communities, often find themselves in situations with restricted access to civil liberties such as civic participation or collective action to challenge their conditions. In the absence of such rights and liberties, they may simply opt to return home or migrate to another country. Consistent with previous work (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015), we found that perceived discrimination among refugees is associated with return intentions.

Di Saint Pierre et al. (2015) conducted their studies among economic migrants' wishes but not refugees' intentions to return. Moreover, they focused on perceived discrimination and identification with the host society only. We believe that we extend this line work at two fronts. We considered the role of life satisfaction as an alternative mediating process and investigated whether the effects of contact via our mediating processes (perceived discrimination, identification with the host society, and life satisfaction) extend to intentions to migrate to another country. These results introduce a new avenue for research on how dimensions of contact with the host society could influence decisions to leave among refugees. Results showed that positive contact is associated with reduced intentions to return home or to migrate to another country. Besides, our results also speak to the more traditional research on contact and prejudice reduction and its applications to refugee–host society relations (see Dixon et al., 2010; Tropp, 2007). We found that contact is related to reduced perceived discrimination and demonstrated that perceived discrimination can explain the associations between contact and return intentions. These results are understandable in the sense that individuals do not intend to stay in a place where they are highly discriminated against, and so would rather return to their home country to avoid further inequity when it is safe to return.

It is important to note that perceived discrimination was more closely related to return intentions while its correlation was weaker for migration intentions from Turkey to the Western countries. This might be due to the perception that they might still experience discrimination (maybe even more) in the Western countries (see André & Dronkers, 2016). In the present context, refugees share the same religion with the host society, and Syrian culture is more similar to Turkish compared to the Western European culture. Lower levels of life satisfaction and 'non-discriminated' and financially satisfied refugee images from Europe might motivate refugees in Turkey to migrate Europe. Future research could investigate whether perceptions of similarities between the host culture and refugee's culture or even perceptions of identifying with a common superordinate group, a common Muslim ingroup, play any role in these processes.

Third, we extend the previous research on acculturation and integration by showing that positive but not negative contact contributes to the integration. We showed that identification with the host society mediates the association between contact and return intentions. We conceptualized identification as a solidarity-based *identification with the host society* (Leach et al., 2008). In the present findings, identification with the host society appeared, albeit qualitatively, to have a slightly stronger role in explaining the association between positive contact and intentions to return. Increased positive contact was related to stronger identification with the host society, which in turn was associated with reduced return intentions. This result is in line with the acculturation framework in terms of the ways

people re-evaluate their ethnic identities when they migrate to a different country and have contact with the host group members (Berry, 1997; De Vroome, Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2014). Refugees who had more positive contact experiences with locals can feel more integrated to the host country and identify more with the host country, which in turn might reduce their intentions to return.

Last but not least, our findings are in line with the research on well-being among refugees. Our results demonstrate that negative contact might have detrimental associations with societal well-being by reducing life satisfaction and increasing discord between the refugees and members of the host society. Previous research evinced that life satisfaction is fundamentally related to mental health (Lombardo, Jones, Wang, Shen, & Goldner, 2018). Our results showed that negative intergroup contact was associated with life satisfaction, which in turn was associated with intentions to migrate to the West. These findings are also in line with previous work, which shows the impact of quality of contact on positive mental health and political behaviour in a similarly disadvantaged group context, indigenous communities in Chile and Mexico (Eller et al., 2016; Eller, Sirlopu, & Cakal, 2021). Indigenous communities remain as the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups, especially in the Global South. Previous work by Eller and her colleagues showed that contact with the mainstream society benefits their mental health and civic involvement. Our findings corroborate this research by showing that refugees', as a similarly marginalized and disadvantaged group, contact with the Turkish society improves their life satisfaction. Future longitudinal or experimental research looking at how contact relates to mental health and well-being vis-à-vis integration to mainstream society among severely disadvantaged communities would be particularly welcome.

7 | LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We acknowledge that the findings we present might be subject to several limitations. First, our design is cross-sectional and employs a relatively small sample size. Thus, our findings can only represent a snapshot of the psychological process at a single point in time, the data collection period. It might be problematic to generalize our results to the general population and other contexts.

Accordingly, longitudinal studies would be better positioned to provide more conclusive evidence to confirm or refute our hypotheses as they would be able to trace the change over time. Psychological processes related to migration intentions among refugees are dynamic and therefore could be easily influenced by the political and social context. For instance, refugees would be more inclined to consider migrating if European countries are to adopt policies more favourable to migration. Experimental studies manipulating contact or mediating processes would also provide more causality. That said, it would not be easy to test these hypotheses in controlled laboratory settings, which might also raise additional issues regarding external validity.

Second, our choice of measures is limited in the sense that we focus on exit oriented intentions. The very same measures, dimensions of contact via perceived discrimination, identification with the host society, and life satisfaction might also be associated with intentions to stay on integrate to the society. Similarly, asking refugees about their intentions to migrate can provide valuable information about their future behaviour. It might be argued that it is problematic to draw conclusions on actual behaviour from research that measures intentions only (see Armitage & Conner, 2001). However, intentions are also the strongest antecedents of actual behaviour (Albarracin, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001). Accordingly, they might provide an alternative approximation of the actual behaviour, especially when working on sensitive topics (i.e., migration to another country) among vulnerable populations (Çakal, Halabi, Cazan, & Eller, 2021). Relatedly, we also acknowledge that it might be difficult to do so for issues of social desirability and recruitment. In Turkey, for instance, all refugee-related research requires special permissions from government agencies, which might be difficult to obtain. Moreover, such scrutiny might introduce a certain amount of bias to the results as refugees might be concerned about the social desirability or might fear that their participation would jeopardize their current situation.

Third, one might argue that our findings can be explained by the eponymous 'third variable' that we did not measure. More specifically, the refugees' options might be considered limited due to the ongoing situation in Syria. However, Turkish government has started to take concrete steps, in coordination with the UNCHR, to repatriate Syrians (UNHCR, 2019b). This is a current development that, we believe, makes our findings more relevant than ever.

In conclusion, the current research provides insights into the roles of positive and negative contact on refugees' intentions to return the homeland and migrate to the West. This study also attempted to explain how intergroup contact is related with these decisions by providing the mediating roles of perceived discrimination and identification with the host society for intentions to return and life satisfaction for intentions to migrate to the West. Cumulatively, we believe that we bring good news with our findings. Policymakers tasked with making decisions related to the welfare of refugees might benefit from the evidence we present here. Refugee-host society relations are a fundamental component of both refugee welfare and integration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Zafer Özkan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7831-2491>

Naif Ergün  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5346-5053>

Hüseyin Çakal  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6227-9698>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Further demographic variables that used in the study and comparisons of the scores of refugees who live in the Eastern and Western cities are reported in Appendix.
- ² There was no impact of data collection type on any of the measures, $F_s(1,283) < 2.81$, $ps > .09$ except for life satisfaction levels $F(1,283) = 32.31$, $p < .001$. People who completed the online survey had higher life satisfaction compared to paper-pen survey takers ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.62$ vs. $M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.47$).
- ³ Testing of the main model with demographic variables controlled is provided in the Appendix, Figure A1.
- ⁴ Positive contact, Tolerance = 0.60, VIF = 1.66; Negative contact, Tolerance = 0.74, VIF = 1.36; Life satisfaction, Tolerance = 0.48, VIF = 2.10; Perceived discrimination, Tolerance = 0.73, VIF = 1.36; Identification with the host society, Tolerance = 0.39, VIF = 2.54.
- ⁵ We also tested our main model with three demographic variables (monthly income, level of education and Turkish level) as covariates. After including monthly income, level of education and Turkish level as covariates, all of the paths remained significant with one exception; the association between identification with the host country and return intentions disappeared (these results are available in the supplementary materials). The alternative model with the demographic covariates was significantly worse than the main model $\Delta\chi^2(36) = 159.51$, $p < .001$. Thus, we rejected this model.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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APPENDIX A

Other demographic variables that used in the study

We asked about participants' level of education, Turkish language skills and their monthly family income ($M = 1,387.73$ TRY, $SD = 1,844.15$).

Turkish language skills were obtained with a single question: 'What is your Turkish speaking level?' Responses were provided on a seven-point scale from 1 = *I cannot speak any Turkish* to 7 = *Excellent* ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.70$).

A preliminary analysis revealed that level of education, family income, Turkish language skills were moderately related to intentions to return or migrate to the Western countries. More specifically, intentions to return the homeland were significantly lower among high school graduates ($N = 34$, $M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.85$) compared to the other participants (No formal education, $N = 24$, $M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.92$, $p = .002$; primary school, $N = 45$, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.79$, $p = .008$; university, $N = 133$, $M = 4.59$, $SD = 2.03$, $p = .018$, postgraduates, $N = 7$, $M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.26$, $p = .006$). In a similar vein, ability to speak Turkish was negatively correlated with intentions to return home ($r = -0.18$, $p = .003$) and intention to migrate to the West ($r = -0.19$, $p = .001$). Finally, family income was negatively correlated with intentions to migrate to the West ($r = -0.20$, $p = .002$) but not with intentions to return home ($r = -0.06$, $p = .33$).

An investigation of certain demographic variables also implies that some of our findings might be influenced by the level of education, age, family income and Turkish language skills of our participants. However, our primary interest was to understand whether and how contact dimensions are related to intentions to return home or migrate to the West. We did not incorporate these demographic variables into our model because that would have further complicated our empirical model. Future research could employ larger sample sizes and provide a more comprehensive account of how demographic variables factor into the social psychological processes we investigated.

Comparisons of the scores of refugees who live in the eastern and western cities

ANOVA analysis compared the scores of refugees who live in the Eastern and Western cities. Results revealed that there were no differences of intentions to return, positive and perceived discrimination, $F_s(1,275) < 1.17$, $p_s > .30$. However, scores of negative contact, identification with the host society, life satisfaction and intention to migrate to the West differed, $F_s(1,275) < 8.26$, $p_s < .04$. Refugees who live in eastern cities reported more negative contact ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.13$ vs. $M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.19$), less identification with the host society ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.74$ vs. $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.62$), less life satisfaction ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.62$ vs. $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.48$), and more intention to migrate to the West ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.03$ vs. $M = 3.28$, $SD = 2.02$).

Testing the main model with demographic variables controlled

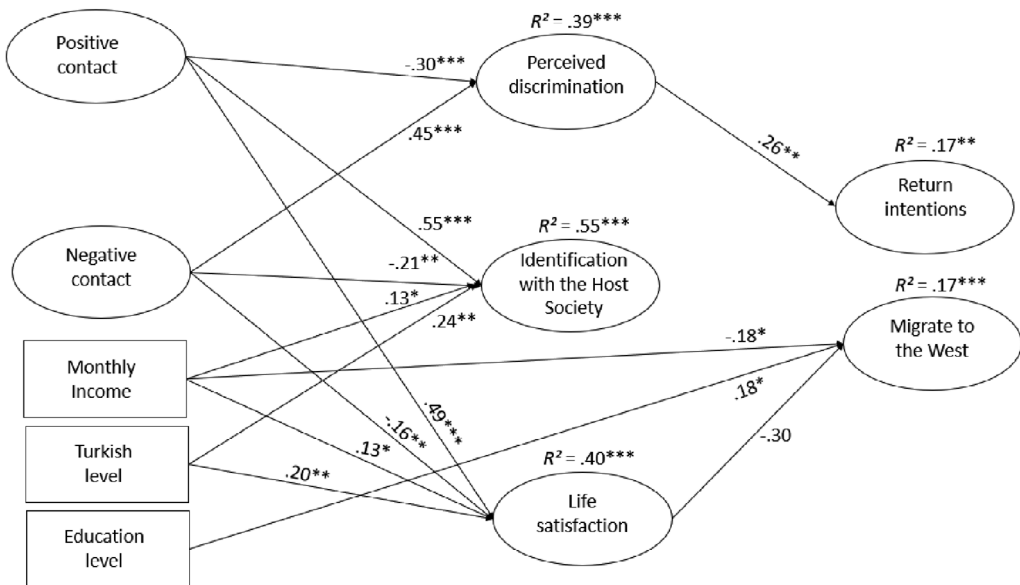


FIGURE A1 The structural equation model. Non-significant paths, correlations between independent variables, correlations between mediators, and correlations between dependent variables are not presented due to presentation purposes. Model fit: $\chi^2(133) = 249.68$, $p < .05$, $\chi^2/df = 1.88$, CFI = 95, RMSEA = 0.06 [0.05, 0.07], SRMR = 0.06. Path coefficients are standardized estimates. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$