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Ethnic Economy in Milano: The Case of the Turkish Immigrants in the Kebab Sector

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The concept of ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the economy represents the employment patterns in a particular country. Ethnic economies consist of immigrants from a specific ethnic group who are either self-employed or employ other members of the same ethnic group. Immigrants often experience discrimination and exclusion in the labor market and the outcome of this process is a high rate of unemployment. Ethnic economies seem to have emerged to provide a potential alternative to unemployment for immigrants. Comprising a big part of urban economies, immigrant entrepreneurs may create their own businesses and support other immigrants if the business reaches success. Besides contributing to the economics of the countries, immigrant entrepreneurs also open the way for the integration of immigrants in their new host societies. By creating an ethnic economy to overcome discrimination and exclusion, immigrants are making themselves attractive and integrated into the host society. In Italy, many immigrants who came from Turkey and eventually settled in Milano between 1988-2010 are self-employed in the kebab fast-food restaurant sector. Interviews showed that most of them migrated as asylum-seekers, looking for work, study, and living. The research findings from this study provide valuable insights into the significant role played by the ethnic economy in the integration process of Turkish immigrants within the city of Milano. Furthermore, these findings also shed light on the broader impact of the ethnic economy on societal dynamics and urban development within the region, more broadly.

Keywords: ethnic entrepreneurs, integration, ethnic economy, migration, ethnicity.

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Introduction

The concept of ethnic economy refers to a specific economic sector run by immigrants with foreign backgrounds, capitalizing on their ethnic resources and social networks (Light & Gold, 2000; Light & Karageorgis, 1994). Immigrant individuals and/or groups usually establish small family businesses where they are the owners and employees and do not require any skilled labor. The ethnic economy is characterized by its flexibility, encompassing informal employment, the absence of social security, long working hours, challenging working conditions, busy schedules, and low wages.

Ethnic entrepreneurs follow one another in entrepreneurial chains. One ethnic entrepreneur creates a path for the other and this path enables other small enterprises to follow and grow. The ethnic economy creates an alternative space characterized by solidarity and trust, which serves as a boundary against the discrimination and hostility faced by immigrants in the host country. According to Cao (2022), the ethnic economy is not a tool for integration; rather, it consists of self-help economic activities driven by ethnic solidarity, serving as a defense against hostility. However, according to Rath, Swagerman, Krieger, Ludwinek, & Pickering (2011), economic integration plays a crucial role in the societal and economic integration of immigrants into local communities.

The migration process goes hand in hand with the discussions on integration. The integration process could be defined as a double-sided process in which both parties need to move toward each other. In this process, both the commitment of the immigrant to his/her own culture and adaptation to the host country's norms need to be achieved together. The absence of one of these two sides brings assimilation or isolation. According to Berry (1997), successful integration could be achieved when the host society embraces cultural diversity and both parties acknowledge each other's rights. Consequently, immigrants are expected to adopt the fundamental values of the dominant society, while host societies should restructure their institutions to align with the needs of newcomers. Integration policies differ based on the role of the state. But they follow traditional key indicators such as labor market participation, educational level, language skill and naturalization, political participation, sense of belonging and levels of intermarriage (Avcı & Kırışçı, 2006; Haliloğlu Kahraman, 2014).

Successful integration cannot be achieved by prescribing a specific path and outcome. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to integration that can be followed by both migrants and host societies across generations. Integration can manifest differently in various aspects of society. For example, migrants can be integrated into the labor market, but they can be excluded from participation in civil society and political processes. Conversely, some immigrants may become active citizens, engaging in social and cultural interactions, yet they may encounter challenges related to limited access to education and employment opportunities. While both cases can be viewed as integration failures, they require different political interventions. Integration can also involve completely different ways of interacting with the host society. For example, some migrants may build social networks through work relationships and find a partner in the general population. Many others, however, rely on family and kinship networks or neighbors of the same race or ethnicity to create stability and develop roots in the host society (The European Commission and the OECD, 2003).

Integration in Italy has received the government attention since the 1980s. To manage the influx of migrants, various administrative programs and migration regulations have been implemented. However, it was not until the mid-1990s that the first integration law specifically addressing the integration of immigrants was passed. Then, the three-year migration planning document *Documento Programmatico Triennale* was introduced as the first policy instrument

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in Italy. This planning document defined the main priorities and planned integration measures for the years 1998-2000. The third planning document of 2005 was the last national strategy that aimed at the integration of migrants. In 2017, the Italian government introduced the national integration plan for beneficiaries of international protection defined in Regulation 18/201 and this plan put priorities for 2017-2018, including interreligious and intercultural dialogue, language learning, access to education, participation in the workforce and vocational training. Local governments and local public services with the support of non-governmental organizations were responsible for the implementation of the plan. However, at the end of 2019, the implementation of the plan was limited to three regions, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, and Calabria. Since 2012, newly arrived migrants are obliged to sign a so-called *Integration Agreement* right after receiving their first residence permit. The program includes language courses, civic education and professional training. Except for this agreement, Italy does not have a self-standing integration law (European Commission, 2023).

Immigration from Turkey to Italy began in the 1980s, with Milano being one of the attractive destinations for immigrants. They came for employment, family reunification, study and asylum, asylum requests, and humanitarian reasons. Lack of cooperation around migration issues and subsequent tensions between Italy, the EU, and other European states, a national/municipal reception system was introduced in 2013 (Bini & Gambazza, 2020). This pioneering approach, the Milano Model, is constituted by different individuals and agencies with the city council to provide basic daily needs for refugees. In addition to being the financial capital of Italy, Milano's approach toward refugees and migrants made the city more attractive to migrants.

Although the rate of migration from Turkey to Milano has been relatively low, the impact of their ethnic economy has been significant for both Turkish immigrants and the Italian population. For Turkish immigrants, the kebab shops have become an integral part of the Italian society. Thanks to their fast-food shops, Turkish immigrants have developed a group identity. Like any other post-industrial/low-skilled market, the kebab sector is easily accessible and attractive for many aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs.

This article addresses the issue of Turkish immigration to Italy/Milano, underlines its special character, discusses the integration problem arising and their problem-solving method, which is the inclusion of kebab restaurants, as an integral part of the ethnic entrepreneur sector, into the Italian labor market. This article also delineates the current situation of Turkish immigrants, who constitute one of the smallest groups of all immigrants in Italy and who are largely undocumented. Integration of Turkish migrants' profile in Milano is classified by typical key indicators of integration such as labor market participation, language skills, citizenship, political participation, level of intermarriage and sense of belonging.

The article, therefore, focuses on notions of ethnic economy and researches its impact on the integration of Turkish migrants in Milano. To establish this correlation, a theoretical framework is initially introduced. Subsequently, the utilized data and methodology are presented, followed by the results demonstrating how Turkish migrants have developed their adaptation skills through their involvement in kebab restaurants. Finally, comments and suggestions are offered to improve the integration strategies for countries.

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Ethnic Economies' Geography

With the rising numbers of the immigrant population, small business activities carried by migrants in destination countries have been focused on by many academics. Migrant entrepreneurs' motives are influenced by various factors at the national, local, and individual levels. While some researchers focus on resource mobilization (Waldinger, Aldrich, & Ward, 1990), others define supporters and the restrictive side of the environment or the system (Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006) or discuss barriers and favorable principles to support an entrepreneurial mindset (McElwee & Smith, 2012). For example, Kloosterman & Rath (2001) refer to empirical evidence containing the demand-side of opportunity structure. They suggest that social networks, the interaction between the entrepreneurs, family issues, and household dimensions play a key role in the development of entrepreneurial behavior. Motivations to start up ethnic business may contain multi-level dimensions. Opportunity structure is a useful concept to define both the motivation and strategies behind ethnic business.

With the new visible aspect of globalization, immigrants from less-developed or developing countries move to their destination countries with the motivations of either work, education, or living through asylum-seeking processes. Their mobility inevitably generates new patterns of capital and labor flows. Immigrants themselves offer their exotic products and services to far-off places to adapt to new host country life. These sectors are generally labor-intensive and low-skilled. Hence, immigrants of the same ethnic groups are self-employed and employees in this economy. In the ethnic economy concept, it may be misleading to think that only ethnicity has a crucial role in the formation of an ethnic economy. On the contrary, it is important to take into account the economic, institutional, and social context of the market (Rath, 2000).

Besides their economic impact on respective host societies, they also create new spaces of leisure and consumption (Rath, 2007). This goes through phases. In their first phase, the immigrants generally work in various jobs that they do no alternative. To exemplify, Portes & Manning (1986) analyzed the U.S. context and showed that migrants had generally lived in the host country for ten years as wage workers. This experience of self-employment contributes to the social integration of migrants. Furthermore, the factors affecting the creation of ethnic businesses are also important. The motivations behind the aim of opening an ethnic business in the destination country also shed light on how immigrants feel about the context they live in. The report published by Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2001) highlighted the concept of opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs. According to the report, opportunity entrepreneurs have a positive context that these ethnic immigrants perceive as a chance in the market. They thus tend to explore it. However, necessity entrepreneurs have a negative context around them. Consequently, they also launch a new ethnic business not because they have an option, but because they do not have any alternatives in the market. These entrepreneurs are generally victims who have unfavorable working conditions. These pull and push factors in the market economy also motivate immigrants to create their own jobs in the destination countries.

The history behind the experiences of the migrant groups during and after the migration process, education, employment structure, and discrimination also affect the patterns of their labor market and economy. Morales (2008) examined the skin color of migrants which is one of the factors determining the migrants' labor market patterns while Khattab (2012) evaluated migration histories, educational background and color racism. According to Light (1993), the employment structure, occupational and industrial clustering affects migrants' labor market patterns. On the other hand, Colic-Peisker & Tilburg (2006) claim that ethnicity and racial discrimination also play an important role in the formation of migrants' labor market patterns.

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Migration patterns and ethnic disparities experienced in the country of origin could be transferred to the destination country. In this situation, immigrants could experience similar inequalities in the destination country as well. All kind of migrants' patterns and ethnic disparities also affect their access to benefits in their destination country and keep them at the least desirable position in the ethnic economy. Thus, the histories, motivations and ethnic disparities of immigrants should be taken into account when planning for integration through labor markets (Kesici, 2022).

For immigrants, starting their own business in the destination country is important. By setting up a new business, immigrants create their own job and take the advantageous position to sustain themselves in the host country. By creating a new ethnic economy, they also built a suitable host environment for newcomers (Rath, Swagerman, Krieger, Ludwinek, & Pickering, 2011, p. 2). In the market, employers of ethnic businesses generally decide to sell a product that already exists. That is because the close contact with the existing market makes acceptance of the ethnic product itself easier. Due to this, many ethnic businesses follow and check the similar economic process applied by the immigrants who come previously (Waldinger, Aldrich, & Ward, 1990).

Ethnic business owners are also employers for newcomers. Sometimes these businesses also value kinship and trust more than market policies and formal rules (Rath, Swagerman, Krieger, Ludwinek, & Pickering, 2011, p. 58). Although not seen in every ethnic business, family migrants are often among the owners of ethnic businesses. Family members are a convenient, flexible, and cheap pool of labor for some small ethnic businesses. In other cases, ethnic businesses might find professionals from host societies to be an effective means of expanding their reach to new segments of society (Rath, Swagerman, Krieger, Ludwinek, & Pickering, 2011).

Chain migration is a consistent feature of modern migration and it is defined as a social process in which potential migrants within a family or community are encouraged by previously migrated family members, friends and follow them to a new place of residence (Eurenius, 2019). In the chain migration process, pioneer immigrants provide information about opportunities, support for travel, transportation, housing and employment to their followers. First, they come without their families and they struggle with the problems alone. Migrants who migrate for short periods often live in temporal spaces. The critical point in the creation of the migration chain is the decision to return or to transform the temporal into a permanent settlement of families.

According to Light (2018), apart from the ethnic economy, the informal economy is another way through which immigrants can economically support themselves. While ethnic economies are often established firms with proper addresses and permits, informal economy is usually not documented and operate outside the official spaces. This makes it difficult for the government to regulate workers' wages or working conditions such as safety and health conditions in the informal economy. In this sense, the informal economy is viewed as a "shadow economy" through which the economy of goods and services are run and managed by kinship and community relationships instead of formal arrangements (OECD/ILO, 2019). Migrants have access to information through informal networks, family members and friends who had earlier embarked on the journey to Europe. Not only in the host societies, but those informal networks are also often used to enable the migrants find new routes and means to reach their new host societies. Information about the smuggling activities, successes and failures of smugglers is quickly transmitted between migrants and their families, as well as within the migrant community and within the networks of migrant smugglers (European Commission, DG Migration & Home Affairs, 2015).

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In recent years, refugee crises showed that EU countries have structural weaknesses, especially in the urban policies for integration (Coulibaly B, Herkrath M, Serreli S, Monno V, 2019). The camps are shown as an initial reception policy while they face segregation and marginalization in urban areas in the later periods. During the reception period and after the camps, human rights are ignored and deemed meaningless. These kinds of oppressive and control-oriented mechanisms also increase intolerance and conflict in towns and cities. All these complex problems depend on the lack of urban policies. The inconsistency of existing integration policies and their repercussions on urban policies and planning practices results in physical degradation, inequalities, and other kinds of social problems in cities.

City's influential economic, political, or cultural positioning can have positive or negative impacts on migrant economies. The development of ethnic economies is heavily influenced by local policies and spatial conditions. It is important to note that differences in ethnic economies are not only observed between different types of cities, but also within urban areas, specifically between inner-urban and suburban ethnic commercial neighborhoods. Furthermore, variations can be observed between cities with different levels of scalar positioning, highlighting the impact of scale on the development of ethnic economies (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Folmer & Risselada, 2013; Folmer, 2014; Folmer & Kloosterman, 2017; Kloosterman, 2019).

The effectiveness and responsiveness of urban planning and policies depend on the ability to accommodate citizens' diversifying cultural and social needs (Qadeer, 1997). Urban planning and urban policies are powerful tools in innovating approaches toward the integration of migrants while these tools are also regulating and reorganizing the governance arrangements at an urban scale. Hence, new forms of integration paths for migrants could enable the authorities to develop more inclusive forms of integration strategies in urban spaces. Supporting the ethnic economy could be one of the integration policies for national-local authorities. However, many welfare states which actively strive to prevent discrimination and assimilation do not support the creation of ethnic economies (Wahlbeck, 2007). This article also shows that rethinking integration through the ethnic economy is a creative way to discover alternative policies for integration.

Turkish Migrants in Italy and Milano

Italy has gradually become a multi-ethnic society where migrants from Albania, Morocco, China, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Egypt are the largest ethnic groups (**see Figure 2**). The legal framework, in particular the regularization, is an important dimension to understand the dynamics of immigrant arrivals, settlement, and consequently integration.

Regularization programs for immigrants are the expressions of a variety of migratory dynamics as well as socio-political tensions between EU states. Italy is already one of the major attraction points for third-country migrants who could prefer regular or irregular entries according to their current status. In regular arrivals, not only the reasons for family reunification and employment but also the naturalization of long-term migrant residents, countries launch different mechanisms. On the other hand, in the case of irregular entries of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, the legal framework of the Geneva Convention and Dublin III defines the Italian reception system (Bini & Gambazza, 2020, p. 3).

The statistical data depicted below was acquired from I. Stat (The Italian National Institute of Statistics). The statistics were analyzed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the demographic characteristics of Turkish immigrants in Italy and Milano.

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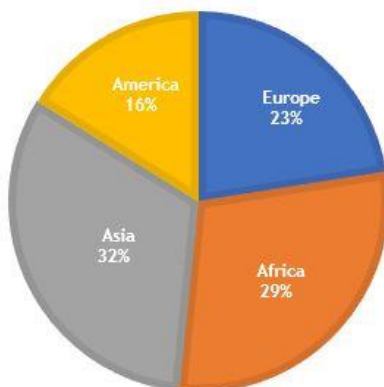


Figure 1: Residence permits of citizens in 2020
Source: Data obtained from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (I.Stat)

According to residency data collected by all municipalities of Italy, foreign citizens residing in Italy as of the 1st of January 2021 amount to 5,171,894 (I.Stat). Between 2020 and 2021, the immigrant number slowly increased to roughly 132,257 persons. Between 2020-2019 and 2019-2018, this increased by 43,473 and 148,252 respectively. Within Europe, Italy has been experiencing a large number of migrants and asylum seekers via the Mediterranean route (Caritas Italiana, 2019, s. 15). This is a so-called mixed flow, mainly from sub-Saharan African countries that flee persecution and conflict to reach better lives and opportunities.

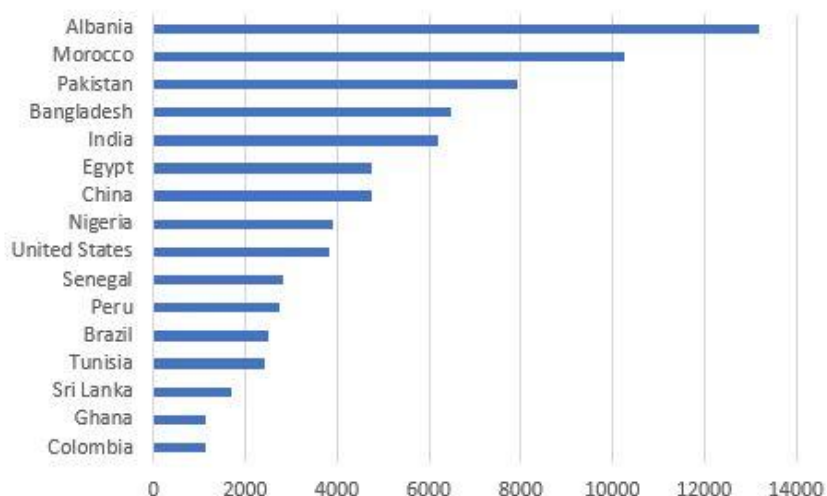


Figure 2: Most frequent immigrants' nationalities in Italy in 2020
Source: Data obtained from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (I.Stat)

Among the regions of Italy, the Lombardy region is the major arrival point for migrants and asylum seekers. In 2021, 23% of the total inflows settled in the Lombardy region, which is consistent with the rates of 22% in both 2020 and 2019. Milano, Italy's industry hub and the capital of the Lombardy region, has the largest share of the migration flow in Italy. I. Stat data shows that 444,708 persons have moved to Milano in 2021, which is 41% of the immigrants in Lombardy in 2020 while this rate was about 39% in 2019.

According to residency data, the number of Turkish immigrants is not among the top ten countries of origin of foreign citizens residing in Italy (**could be seen in Figure 2**). The official Turkish immigrant population accounted for 0.03% of the total Italian population in the years 2018, 2019, and 2020 (I.Stat, 2021). In 2018, Turkish immigrants recorded 21,962 and it increased to 22,288 in 2019 and dropped to 21,802 in 2020. The statistics also show that the

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population of Turkish immigrants recorded as 19,777 in 2021 which is the lowest population in the last four years (I.Stat 2021). The decrease registered between 2019-2020 might be due to the pandemic.

Table 1: The Comparison of Italy and Turkish Population.

Years	Italy Population	Turkish Population in Italy
2018	59,816.673	21,962
2019	59,641.488	22,288
2020	59,236.213	21,802

Source: Data obtained from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (I.Stat)

The reason for issuing residence permits diversifies. The reasons for entry are recorded under the four headings: employment; family reunification; study and asylum request; and humanitarian reason. Among all entry reasons, the study reason has the highest rate for Turkish immigrants. Across Italy, legal entry for study reasons accounted only for 50% in both 2018 and 2019 while it decreased to 36% in 2020 which is equal to 323 persons. In 2020, the number of arrivals to Italy for all four reasons decreased and 91 persons applied for employment reasons while 334 persons took a family reunification permission. 146 permits were issued for asylum humanitarian protection reasons in 2020 while 252 registrations were delivered in 2019. In 2018, the number of asylum seekers was 358 persons. Nevertheless, during the last three years, the regular inflow of Turkish immigrants has declined. This result might be related to the high unemployment rate in the Italian labor market. Due to the unsterilized Italian economy and restricted or reduced quota available for migrant workers, Italy might be losing its attractiveness for Turkish migrants (Caritas Italiana, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, the distribution of the resident foreign population in Italy almost perfectly shows parallelism with the Turkish immigrant population distributed across the country. Almost a quarter of foreigners prefer to settle in the Lombardy region, and one-third of the total Turkish immigrants in Italy also live in this region (Purkis & Gungör, 2016, p. 441). Similarly, when the I. Stat statistics for the years 2018-2019 and 2020 are analyzed, and it is seen that more than one-third of the Turkish population who immigrated to Italy every year has settled in the Lombardy region. In 2018, 37% of the total Turkish immigrants settled in the Lombardy region, while 40% in 2019 and 34% in 2020. It is seen that the majority of the Turkish population migrates for study purposes, followed by family reunification, employment, and finally, asylum requests and humanitarian reasons.

The statistic related to Milano shows that more than half of the Turkish immigrants in the Lombardy region choose to settle in Milano. In 2018, 71% of Turkish migrants in the Lombardy region were concentrated in Milano. This percentage remained relatively stable, with 72% in 2019 and 71% in 2020.

Table 2: Distribution of Turkish immigrants by years

Years	Annual Turkish flow to Italy	Annual Turkish flow to Lombardy Region	Annual Turkish flow to Milano
2020	913 persons	314 persons	227 persons
2019	1848 persons	738 persons	540 persons
2018	2370 persons	905 persons	654 persons

Source: Data obtained from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (I.Stat)

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According to I. Stat records, the Turkish population resident in Milano recorded as 3,534 in 2021 which accounted for 0.007% of the total Milano population.

Table 3: Total Turkish Population by Years

Years	2021	2020	2019	2018
Turkish Population in Milano	3,534	2,796	2,633	2,664

Source: Data obtained from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (I.Stat)

The aforementioned statistics provide valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of Turkish immigrants in Italy. It is worth noting that the influx of Turkish immigrants to Italy has predominantly occurred since the late 1980s, resulting in a relatively smaller Turkish community compared to several other European countries.

Research Context and Methodology

Immigrants from Turkey were selected as the focus of this study. Due to their low population in Italy, it has been observed that there is not enough research on Turkish immigrants. Although the rate of Turkish immigrants in Italy is very low (0.03%), the impact of the kebab sector run by Turkish immigrants is significant for Italian society.

Kebab shops have become an integral part of the relationships between Turkish immigrants and Italians, as well as a significant aspect of Turkish identities in Italy. Through these fast-food shops, Turkish immigrants have developed a group identity and social groups among themselves. Besides these, these shops have a symbolic function to integrate and communicate with Italian society. Similarly, the kebab economy is on the road to becoming a part of the local heritage in Italy.

The kebab means roasted meat derived from the Arabian Kabab which is also very similar to Gyros (of Greeks) and Shawarma (of Arabs). All versions of kebab in each culture consist of meat grilled. The differentiating part of each kind of kebab is the sources served and the type of meat. Turkish Kebab is typically made with mostly beef, chicken, or turkey and it is a traditional Turkish dish in Turkey. As in Turkey, in every city, every town, and every neighborhood in Italy, one may find a kebab shop which is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the Italian market. According to o statistics, there has been a continuous rise in the percentage of people consuming at least one meal outside their homes since 2001 (Cersosimo, 2011).

To become a part of the mainstream national food heritage, openness to change in the market is important (Sirkeci, 2016, p. 153). This Turkish dish is prepared with kinds of meats like lamb, beef, goat, or chicken and is often accompanied by a choice of sauces. The recipes used in kebab dish depends on the host country's taste and preferences. Thus, the flexibility of replacing ingredients of kebab dishes enabled it to enter the Italian market easily. Besides these criteria, price, availability of suppliers, and availability of skills to prepare and serve are also helping the kebab sector to join the new market. The "kebhousse" kebab shop is one of the indicators that the kebab sector has been recognized as a part of the Italian national food culture. This restaurant was founded by an Italian entrepreneur and offers kebab menus to its customers. Kebhousse started to serve at 5 different locations (3 of them in Milano, one in Rome, and the other one in Biella) with an interior design that differs from the classical Turkish kebab restaurants. It benefitted from the existing Turkish kebab ethnic pool. The *kebhousse's*

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menu, unlike Turkish restaurant menus, also offers its customers vegetarian menus, hamburger menus, and dessert options. At first, this is a good sign that Italian society loved kebab fast food, and these kinds of initiatives make the host society get to know the Turkish ethnic group and foster further integration. On the other hand, this means that Turkish kebab businesses may have to compete with big fast-food chains in the future.

The case of Turkish immigrants in Milano presents the power of the ethnic economy in terms of integration. To understand the power of ethnic economy in the integration process, firstly, we need to understand the histories and motivations of the immigrant group. Then, we need to focus on their behavioral patterns for adaptation in the destination country. This article, therefore highlights how Turkish kebab affected the integration of the Turkish migrants in Milano.

This study is based on field research, a review of the relevant literature, and statistical data obtained from I.Stat. Field research was undertaken in the period between September and December 2021. Qualitative interview methods were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interviewees' perspective on their situation. All of the interviews were carried out in Turkish. Interviews have been conducted with twenty-one Turkish immigrants who are owners or employees at Turkish kebab restaurants. The interview measured the aspects of the general demographic characteristics of the Turkish community, shop and accommodation preferences, the reasons behind their location preferences, and motivation to enter the food sector (opportunities and vulnerabilities in the food sector). In addition to these interviews, observations in these restaurants constitute the ethnographic data for this study. The map below shows the distribution of Turkish restaurants. The red location pins indicate the shops that were interviewed, while the pink location pins represent those that could not be interviewed due to the owner's unwillingness and other circumstances that prevented the interview process.

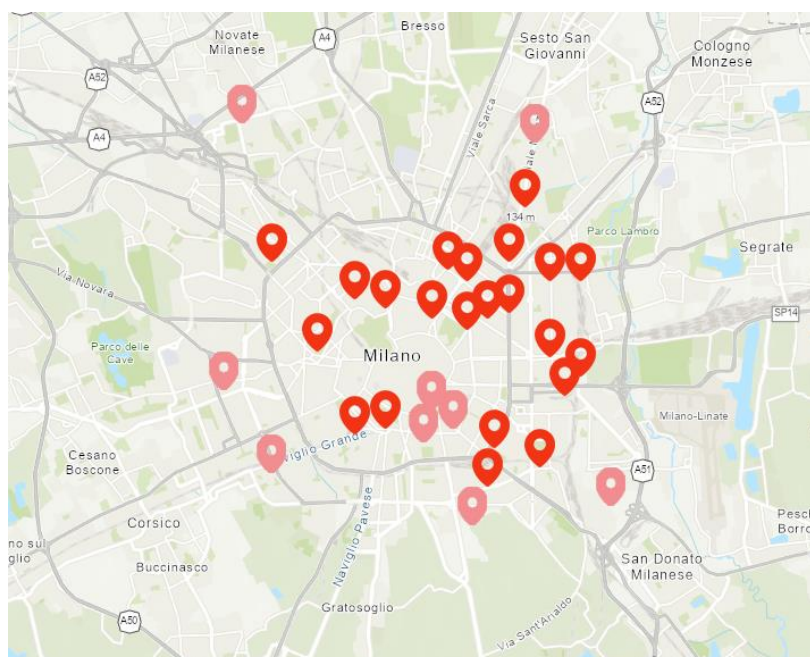


Figure 3: Distribution of 21 Turkish Restaurants
Source: Adapted from <https://maps.app.goo.gl/MJVj8iMmJy7Ncwoj8>

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The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, which involved manipulating indicators of integration such as labor market participation, language skills, citizenship, political participation, level of intermarriage and sense of belonging to observe their effects on the dependent variable which is the influential role of the ethnic economy in terms of integration. The list of questionnaires was derived from the indicators of integration obtained from the literature review. The answers for each theme and respondent were coded and labeled according to the Content Analysis method.

Integration Process of Turkish Immigrants

In many countries, the integration policies focus on labor market participation, language skills, citizenship, political participation, level of intermarriage and sense of belonging. Thus, in this study, the integration process of Turkish immigrants in the kebab sector has been evaluated according to the key integration indicators mentioned above.

Turkish asylum seekers often benefit from informal networks to reach the destination country. These informal networks provide assistance to Turkish asylum seekers throughout their journey and even after they arrive in the destination country. Turkish immigrants claimed that they took advantage of illegal organizations called “*şebeke*”. The informal social channels like relatives, friends, or social community members provide them the contact for these illegal organizations. This formation is nothing more than smugglers. Asylum seekers indicated that they used these profit-seeking illegal groups to pass the borders and reach the destination point. In addition to this, asylum seekers in my focus group stated that networks of “*şebeke*” also provide them with their first job which is generally informal work. These illegal organizations also contribute to the expansion of informal sectors in destination countries. As a result, it is understood that these illegal groups offer some of the basic duties of institutes and agencies to asylum seekers illegally.

The presence of women working in Turkish-owned kebab restaurants was extremely rare. Among 21 interviews, only 2 interviewees were female while the rest of them were male. Moreover, it is noteworthy to mention that out of the 3 interviewees who declined my interview request, 2 were women and 1 was a man. The study of kebab restaurants also revealed that there is no gender balance in Turkish businesses. The majority of Turkish women migrated to Milano through family reunification. This profile is dominated by unemployed women and their work careers are discontinuous as a result of motherhood. Hence, these women are economically and socially dependent on men which also affects their integration process. Furthermore, it is common practice at these kebab shops for the majority of Turkish restaurant owners to prefer hiring Turkish employees who are their relatives or friends from their home country. Although not very high, some restaurants (only 2 restaurants) also prefer to employ co-ethnic immigrants. The employees were predominantly immigrants from Turkey or members of other immigrant groups like Uzbek (who can also speak Turkish very well) or African. This also indicates that Turkish restaurant owners prioritize employees who are suitable for flexible working hours and willing to accept lower salaries.

Labor Market Participation

For migrants, social networks play a significant role during the different stages of migration, such as finding employment and integrating into society in the destination country. The social network refers to nodes that are tied together by different sorts of relationships like friendship, economic exchange, influence, and common interests. These sorts of ties enable the immigrants to integrate into their host countries while also maintaining a connection to their home countries. Besides the social network, social capital is also a need to make migration

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possible. Information, motivation about migration, adequate budget, persuasion, and aid are also necessary resources for this mobility. Without exchanging social capital within the social network, it could not be mentioned the quality of the tie itself (Poros, 2011). Migration is simply very risky for individuals and, immigrants search to minimize their risks by using their networks in their destination areas.

21 interviews indicate that the first kebab restaurants in Milano were established at the beginning of the 1990s. When the early Turkish immigrants entered Italy, they did not have the opportunity to choose a job and they only had a chance to work in the informal sector. Their first jobs in Italy were usually working as an employee in factories or the construction sector while some of the immigrants had a chance to work at Turkish restaurants. During their initial years in Milano, they were more likely to be engaged in the informal labor market, where there were no formal contracts or welfare provisions, and wages were often below the legal minimum. In the following years, some immigrants found formal work in various sectors, including the steel industry, publishing, and automotive (Purkis & Güngör, 2016). The first jobs that they occupied with low wages could be evaluated as on-the-job training for Turkish immigrants for their future jobs.

The first Turkish immigrants utilized their transnational connections like relatives/friends in another European country or Turkey. This support was financial as well as technical and moral to establish the first kebab restaurant in Milano. This situation where former ethnic employees become self-employed later shows an ethnic economy in the sense outlined by Light and Gold (2000). The former comers have been crucial for those arriving later on. This is because the majority of kebab restaurant owners and employees have previously worked as employees in kebab restaurants operated by other Turkish immigrants. For this reason, the pioneer immigrants were essential for the establishment and development of the ethnic economy in Milano.

Over time, as migration from Turkey to Italy continued, social networks began to form between the pioneer immigrants and those who arrived later. The early immigrants stated that they did not receive support from family, relatives, or friends during their migration process to Milano. While early asylum seekers claimed that there were no options to choose a particular destination country, the rest of the immigrants said that they preferred Italy due to the quota available for migrant workers introduced by the Italian government yearly. Plus, the social network was not fully formed in the beginning, and the pioneer immigrants did not utilize this connection. Due to this, early Turkish immigrants were not as lucky as the second or third generations of migrants. The later comers were the actual beneficiaries of the social network. According to Collyer (2005), social network theory is not sufficient in explaining asylum seekers' migration preferences. Surprisingly, except for the pioneer immigrants in my focus group who did not know any other individuals or organizations in destination countries, all the asylum seekers stated that they took financial, technical and moral assistance from their relatives and friends before, during and or after the migration process. According to interviews, Turkish asylum seekers benefitted from relatives and friends. Therefore, it could be said that the social networks of Turkish asylum seekers were effective in choosing Milano as a final destination. Contrary to Collyer's claim, it is seen that social ties also affect Turkish asylum seekers' migration processes to Milano. Borrowing money is crucial for Turkish immigrants to finance their migration processes. Besides this, most of the Turkish immigrants provided information mostly from friends and their family members.

According to Lewandowska and Elrick (2008), agents and institutions play a significant role in migration and job-seeking processes in destination countries. Notably, it is observed that institutions did not play a significant role in assisting Turkish immigrants in finding housing or

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employment. None of the interviewees reported receiving any assistance from institutions or agents. Seemingly, for my focus group, whose motivation to migrate was to work in Milano, these agents and institutions are not fully formed yet.

Regulations and bureaucratic procedures could also affect labor market participation (Demirdağ, 2021). For instance, simple and reduced entry regulations, along with effective or lighter bureaucratic procedures that could be merged under government support, could foster the establishment of ethnic entrepreneurs. Likewise, national strategies and plans that value diversity and multiculturalism will prioritize social mixing and equality. These initiatives will encourage and motivate the establishment of ethnic entrepreneurs in the destination countries.

Language Proficiency

There is no doubt that the language proficiency of immigrants is important due to its connection to the economic performance of the host society. This approach was first introduced by economist Chiswick (2007) and he stated that like education; language skills are also a form of human capital and it has a direct relation with immigrants' economic outcomes. Hence, better second language skills enable immigrants to better understand the local labor markets. Interestingly, this issue has been discussed by Meng & Meurs (2006) in France over African and non-African immigrants. According to statistics, immigrants from Africa who speak French before migration are more likely to gain higher earnings in the host country.

My interviews indicated that none of the Turkish immigrants has Italian language proficiency before migration. Due to their little or no ability to the Italian language usage, Turkish immigrants could only get lower-quality jobs under inferior working conditions where language skills are less required. Thus, this limited knowledge of the Italian language may have forced them to find alternatives in the labor market. At that point, kebab restaurants are the easiest way to join the Italian economy. Working in a kebab restaurant is a useful experience to open their own kebab and pizza businesses in the future. Plus, the work in these fast-food shops is simple to learn and this ethnic business requires minimal capital investment. Participating in urban economies with ethnic businesses also enables them to acquire Italian language skills. Out of the 19 interviewees, it was found that they learned the Italian language by practicing at work. They stated that municipalities were providing language courses but they did not prefer these courses. They stated that they could not make extra time to attend these language courses. From this, it is understood that learning the language of the host country while earning money is the most efficient way for Turkish immigrants.

Proficiency in the language of the host country is a crucial factor for participating in the labor market. Turkish immigrants, in particular, acquire language skills through ethnic entrepreneurs rather than relying solely on language training provided by local authorities. While many countries include language training in their integration programs, this study highlights the need for an additional integration strategy specifically tailored to Turkish immigrants. Among my focus group, only 2 interviewees came to Milano by family reunification at early ages (nearly 12-15 ages) and joined educational life in Italy. Due to that chance, these two interviewees acquired second language skills at Italian schools. All of the interviewees also claimed that they do not know another European language except for their mother tongue and Italian language. Among the 4 Turkish immigrants, it was reported that they encounter challenges when communicating in public institutions such as hospitals, migration offices and so forth.

Level of Inter marriage

Inter marriage is one of the measures of social and cultural integration. This social interaction enables two different ethnicities' interaction by breaking down ethnic exclusiveness (Khoo,

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2011). Intermarriage generally occurs in multicultural societies where there is an opportunity for social interaction between people of different ethnic groups. Researchers Meng & Meurs (2006) wrote that European immigrants (mainly from Spain and Italian) had the highest intermarriage rate, close to 50% while Turkish immigrants had the lowest intermarriage rate. There are many factors affecting the level of intermarriage but the crucial ones are the generation, education level, demographic and religious patterns of migrant groups (Nottmeyer, 2009). Among Turkish immigrants in Milano, only 2 interviewees intermarried with an Italian citizen and the rest of the interviewees made a marriage with Turkish mates. This result shows that Turkish immigrants have still a similar pattern of behavior in mate selection and they haven't fully achieved social integration yet.

Due to the limited language skills and social borders, intermarriage rate in the first generation of immigrants is low while it is more common in second and third generations. For instance, Turkish immigrants, the largest immigrant group in Germany had the lowest rates of making intermarriage in the first generation while the second and third generation is more open to intermarrying. Parallel to this trend in Germany, those who made intermarriage in my focus group are also the second generation of Turkish immigrants. Furthermore, the immigrant group's level of education also influences the rate of intermarriage. Participating in any educational process in the host country or being highly educated also affects the adaptation to the host country. In my focus group, of the 21 interviewees, only 2 Turkish immigrants have joined educational life in Italy. However, two interviewees did not make intermarriage and found partners from Turkey. This could be because of their parents who pressure them to marry within the same ethnic background. This study shows that Turkish immigrants are not still close to intermarriage and they are less likely to interact with the host society. Still, ethnic business is the primary and only channel to evolve personal relationships with Italian society.

Citizenship & Political Participation

Citizenship is one of these integration indicators (Avcı & Kırışçı, 2006, p. 131). The reason behind this approach comes from the proposition that citizenship proves the sense of belonging of immigrants to the host country (Caritas Italiana, 2019). Of the 21 interviewees, only 2 interviewees were having citizenship. The remaining interviewees had long-term residence permits or short-term residence permits with labor laws for third-world countries. Immigrants who have long-term residence permits could vote in the local elections while they could not vote in the national elections. Turkish immigrants claimed that the long-term residence permit rights are sufficient for them. According to my observations, they are not as interested in Italian political life or political participation in Italy as they are in the Turkish political climate. They follow the Turkish country's agenda and make much of voting for general elections. They stated that they don't want to apply for citizenship, because in this case, they will lose their Turkish citizenship. Correspondingly, although returning to Turkey is not among their short-term plans, they expressed a desire to spend some time in their home country during their retirement years. Hence, Turkish immigrants have an attempt to protect and continue the relations and connections with their home country.

Sense of Belonging

When it comes to the sense of belonging feeling, those 4 interviewees stated that they feel a part of Italian society. They also expressed a sense of belonging and attachment to the neighborhood where they settled. Interestingly, 2 of these 4 interviewees have Italian citizenship. Based on this result, it is difficult to determine whether there is a precise connection between citizenship and the development of a sense of belonging. That is because there are many parameters affecting the sense of belonging to the host society. Nevertheless, 3 of these 4 interviewees are the second generation who came to Milano through family unification at a young age. Migrating at a young age could be the reason that eases and

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compensates for the adaptation process to a new living context (Albert, 2021).

Conclusion

The ethnic economy represents a significant step taken by Turkish immigrants towards achieving improved financial prospects in Milano. This tool not only brings them economic success but also enables them to partially integrate with host communities socially, culturally, and politically. This article contributes to the literature by presenting how the ethnic economy affects the integration of immigrants in the destination country. Acquiring practical skills by working in kebab restaurants before opening their restaurants is deemed advantageous for Turkish immigrants. As a result, many immigrants find themselves involved in the labor market, hoping to eventually establish their own businesses. Transitioning from employee to self-employment is prominently observed in ethnic economies overall (Light & Gold, 2000). This study also proves that this pattern is common for Turkish immigrants in Milano.

This study also suggests that contrary to Collyer's viewpoint, social networks play a crucial role in facilitating labor market involvement among Turkish asylum seekers. Throughout various stages of the migration process, Turkish asylum seekers received financial, technical, and moral support from their relatives and friends.

Thanks to the ethnic economy, Turkish immigrants have developed proficiency in the Italian language and become part of the Italian labor market. However, when it comes to intermarriage, it is observed that a majority of Turkish immigrants, including those belonging to the second generation, tend to select partners from the same ethnic background, which reinforces transnational connections and can be seen as a challenge to integration. Additionally, Turkish immigrants in Italy generally display a limited interest in the political affairs of the host country and demonstrate a low propensity to apply for Italian citizenship. They also have a low sense of belonging in their host country. While kebab restaurants enable Turkish immigrants to achieve partial economic and professional integration, they have yet to fully achieve social, cultural, and political integration.

The case of Turkish immigrants examined in this article also demonstrates that integration indicators such as level of citizenship, political participation, intermarriage, and sense of belonging are hard to develop. This study shows that the ethnic economy, on its own, is not adequate for the integration of immigrants. It can only make a start for the integration process and the process needs to be supported by additional strategies.

For many asylum seekers and immigrants, the integration process is a rocky one. They face traumas when leaving their home country and encounter discrimination and exclusion along the way. Learning a new language and finding basic employment is also challenging at the beginning of their adaptation process. These disadvantages make asylum seekers and immigrants on the margins of host countries' economies and societies. Additionally, there are a dozen immigrant characteristics that shape the migrant's life in the host country. At that point, where the asylum seekers and immigrants are settled within the host country is a critical factor. The place where they are settled could either be an obstacle or a path for their successful integration. According to a report by Immigration Policy Lab (2022), two refugees from the same country who settle in different places may have different outcomes, with one being able to find a job easily while the other faces challenges. Some locations have a strong labor market and community-based organizations that influence migrants' access to job opportunities. Thus, governmental and non-governmental organizations need to think of settlement strategies to promote the ethnic groups' integration process by making the best matches possible.

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There is always potential tension between the host society and minor groups. To control and reduce this tension, new arrangements should be implemented. It is necessary to create a new commitment path between the host society and immigrants, separate from international agreements and procedures. The past experiences, beliefs, and identities of minority groups shape their relationship with members of the host country. Due to these differences, diversifying strategies are needed for all immigrant populations in society. For the host country, understanding the major characteristics and dynamics of immigrants is the starting point for designing strategies that are specific to each minority group. The absence of a national policy on diversity limits the ability to effectively incorporate diversity, pluralism, and equity. Developing comprehensive and inclusive planning policies for culturally sensitive urban development is another key issue for the acceleration of the integration process of immigrant groups in the host country.

The planning systems and policies generally contain universal standards (Zhuang, 2008). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these standards may not consistently and effectively cater to the distinct challenges and issues experienced by each city. Hence, it is crucial for urban planners and local authorities to proactively develop planning guidelines that are specifically designed to meet the diverse needs of immigrants as they integrate into society. This will contribute to creating an inclusive environment and ensuring a seamless transition for immigrant communities.

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