Chapter 12
Root Causes of Irregular Migration in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of Afghans and Syrians

Ahmet İçduygu and Birce Altıok

12.1 Introduction

Over the last four decades, conflict, political turmoil, and economic devastation in Afghanistan and, more recently, in Syria, have resulted in the emergence of numerous irregular migrants and refugees. Initially, they sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan (in the case of Afghanistan) and Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (in the case of Syria). Subsequently, they embarked on a journey to enter Europe through a migration corridor that developed in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, faced with the stringent policies of "Fortress Europe," the majority of these migrants and refugees find themselves compelled to enter Europe without proper authorization, thereby placing them in an irregular migratory context.

This chapter evaluates the initiation and perpetuation of migratory flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Europe, which operate through the Eastern Mediterranean corridor over the decades. It establishes a connection between the root causes of migration and the notion of fragile or weak statehood, as well as protracted refugee situations. It is important to note that other countries, such as Iraq in the Middle East, can also be examined within the framework of weak statehood, considering their migratory flows spanning over three decades. Therefore, the theoretical and analytical framework presented in this chapter can be extended to encompass other countries and regions. The selected cases, focusing on migration flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean, provide a valuable

A. İçduygu (✉)
The Department of International Relations and the Department of Sociology, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey
e-mail: AICDUYGU@ku.edu.tr

B. Altıok
Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc), Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey
e-mail: baltiok@ku.edu.tr

© The Author(s) 2024

R. Zapata-Barrero, I. Awad (eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_12

framework for understanding the root causes of irregular migratory flows that have significant impacts on the Eastern Mediterranean region and Europe as a whole. Although the concepts of "root causes" and "fragile or weak state" may be subjects of debate, they possess analytical value by connecting to various aspects of the irregular migration systems between the Global North and Global South. Given the scarcity of research on the relationship between weak statehood, refugee flows, and irregular migration, and their implications for migratory systems between the Global South and Global North, exploring this connection through an analytical framework applied to selected case studies is crucial. By focusing on weak statehood, this chapter delves into the dynamics and mechanisms behind the root causes of irregular migration and asylum flows, providing insights into why and how people choose specific migration routes over time. The resulting discussions also contribute to the assessment of policy outcomes for the effective governance of irregular migration and refugee flows.

Within the framework of a historical and comparative study, this chapter first presents an analytical framework that establishes a relationship between the notion of state fragility and the root causes of migration. This framework aims to explain the initiation and perpetuation of irregular migration and refugee flows over time. Secondly, at a macro level, drawing upon desk research and secondary data, the chapter evaluates the formation of a migratory system between these selected fragile states and Europe. It specifically focuses on the transit country role of Turkey, situated in the Eastern Mediterranean. Lastly, at a micro level, the chapter examines the linkages between the situation in fragile states, the individual intentions of movement, irregular journeys, and destination choice based on in-depth interviews conducted with Europe-bound Syrian and Afghan migrants in Turkey.

12.2 Linking the Concept of State Fragility with Root Causes of Migration

The analytical and theoretical framework of this study explores the concept of weak statehood as a fundamental driver of migration, examining two critical country cases—Afghanistan and Syria—from three key perspectives. *Firstly*, by considering weak statehood as a root cause, we gain a valuable tool that not only explains the initiation of migratory flows but also sheds light on their perpetuation over time. In this context, migration from Afghanistan and Syria, with a subsequent direction towards Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean, is viewed as a consequence of weak statehood stemming from social, economic, and political turmoil in these countries. *Secondly*, linking weak statehood to the underlying causes of migration enhances our understanding of the dynamics and mechanisms of mixed flows, encompassing irregular migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. *Lastly*, this connection carries significant policy implications and serves as a critical instrument for fostering improved governance of migration. Within this framework, we commence with an

examination of the concept of weak statehood and its various interpretations in the literature, subsequently establishing its relevance within the theoretical context through the aforementioned three main arguments.

Over the past two decades, the concept of "fragile states" or "weak statehood" has become widespread within the developmental and policy-oriented sectors, yet its analytical adaptation has been lacking. The concept has been defined in multiple ways, leading to considerable criticism due to its lack of clarity, susceptibility to political motives, and its emphasis on Western governance standards (Fisher, 2014; Nay, 2013). Within the academic literature, a significant range of definitions for "fragility" can be found. These definitions primarily revolve around the state's performance in what is perceived as its core tasks. However, disagreements arise when it comes to identifying these core functions and the necessary capacities for states to effectively carry them out. While acknowledging the criticisms expressed by others, this study adopts the concept of *weak statehood* to refer to a statehood that is *dysfunctional*. In general, the determinants of weak statehood can be categorized into three main groups: (1) *social aspects*, which encompass the large-scale movement of individuals into and out of the country, resulting in a humanitarian crisis and the deterioration of the state's social infrastructure; (2) *economic factors*, which involve uneven economic trajectories that favour specific groups or significant disruptions leading to a decline in state capacity; and (3) *political indicators*, which include the overall delegitimization of the state, criminalization, failure to provide public services, arbitrary enforcement of laws, human rights violations, and the control of coercive means by certain groups. (Sekhar, 2010). A closer examination of the literature reveals further exploration of alternative definitions and categorizations. Ferreira (2017) distinguishes between two groups of fragility definitions based on the latter component. One set of definitions assesses the strength of a state (as opposed to its fragility) based on state effectiveness and legitimacy, while others utilize a three-dimensional framework that incorporates, with some variation, the concepts of legitimacy, capacity, and authority. (Ibid).

Building upon the aforementioned definitions, weak statehoods are conceptualized here as governments that lack the necessary legitimacy, capability, and authority to effectively fulfil their essential functions. The fragility of nations is closely associated with political unrest, social conflicts, and economic instability (Bissell & Natsios, 2001; Guillaumont & Guillaumont Jeanneney, 2011), which also contribute to the emergence of migration flows. When states fail to protect their citizens or meet their basic needs, individuals residing within the country may feel compelled to leave the country. Migrants in this category, who depart due to the inability to maintain their basic living conditions caused by insufficient governance, can be classified as "survival migrants" (Betts, 2013). Up until this point, weak statehood has proven valuable in explaining the initiation of migratory flows as individuals seek refuge from volatile situations in their respective countries. However, the concept is equally instrumental in comprehending the continuation of migratory flows over time. For instance, the study conducted by Martin-Shields (2017) has offered preliminary evidence of this relationship through a descriptive analysis of data from UNHCR and IDMC. The findings reveal that countries lacking significant

deficiencies in terms of state authority, capacity, and legitimacy experience notably smaller flows of internal displacement and refugees compared to states with deficiencies in at least one of these aspects. Furthermore, the study suggests that low authority and capacity play a more prominent role in conflict-driven internal displacement compared to low state legitimacy. The lack of state authority can manifest in violent local conflicts, triggering migration flows between different regions within a country. If the state fails to effectively address these internal migration flows, it can lead to further displacement. This means, while weak statehood can trigger refugee flows, particularly when a state's weak authority and capacity result in economic and social unrest (Martin-Shields, 2017), this also impacts the perpetuation of migrant flows over time.

By applying the analytical framework of weak statehood and migration to the Mediterranean region, a growing dichotomy has emerged between migrants who are in a favourable situation and those who are considered unwanted (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016, p. 53). In this context, the link between weak statehood and different categories of migrants from the same origin country provides an explanation for the occurrence of such divergences. For example, the relationship between unwanted and accepted migrants mirrors the relationship between non-failed states and failed states, which plays a significant role in understanding irregular migration in the Mediterranean, where irregular entry is prevalent (Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, 2018, p. 384). The issue of skilled and unskilled migrants, as well as the categorization of migrants as "accepted" with regular status, prompts us to explore the connection between weak statehood and mixed flows. The connection between weak statehood and the perpetuation of migratory flows over time gives rise to overlapping categories within migration movements, including irregular migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, migrants with residence or work permits from the same origin country, and so on. Therefore, considering weak statehood as a root cause of migration provides a crucial qualification to understand not only refugee flows but also their connection to mixed migratory flows.

The final aspect of considering weak statehood as the root cause lies in its link to policy relevance and the promotion of good governance in migration. As discussed earlier, the conditions that give rise to weak statehood not only impact the initiation of migratory flows but also contribute to their persistence over time, resulting in diverse dynamics and mechanisms within mixed flows. Hence, within the framework of fostering good governance in migration, comprehending the connection between weak statehood as a root cause of migration becomes essential for effective policy governance. This is particularly crucial within the institutional framework for establishing legal norms, policies, and practices that regulate and manage migration while addressing the underlying drivers of migration through good governance. In this regard, well-established and well-managed migration policies necessitate the involvement of various stakeholders. In situations characterized by weak statehood, macro-scale interventions and assistance are considered as mechanisms to address the root causes of migratory movements and reduce the flow of refugees. If appropriately managed, such interventions can serve as tools for promoting good

governance in migration. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms in weak statehood contexts remains a subject of intense debate.

The question of aid and its impact on the continuous flow of refugees has been examined by various scholars, including Dreher et al. (2019), who found no evidence suggesting that total aid provided to origin countries reduces the overall outflow of refugees in the short term. In the case of Afghanistan, a protracted conflict following the Soviet invasion in 1979 severely disrupted the country's public institutions and economy. During the Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, the state failed to effectively deliver services. Recognizing the significance of Afghan stability for regional and global security, the international community made political and financial commitments to reconstruct the country. This situation made the role of aid increasingly important. However, donors adopted different modes of aid delivery but as far as the total aid is concerned, a large portion of aid flew outside the government budget and national procurement system. Consequently, a parallel public sector emerged, surpassing the size of permanent state institutions and diverting significant political and financial resources away from the development of effective state institutions (Bizhan, 2018; Marquette, 2011). Although aid contributed to economic growth and the expansion of public services, post-2001 Afghanistan faced challenges in maintaining its pre-existing military and administrative capacity. State-building strategies and the aid regime did not effectively foster the development of a strong state. Despite heavy reliance on foreign aid, with over $150 billion sent for non-military purposes from 2001 to 2020, in addition to substantial contributions from allies and international organizations (Shah, 2021), the absence of adequate checks and balances contributed to systemic corruption, economic mismanagement, and the president's exclusive and unrestricted access to a significant share of government funds (Ibid). Consequently, Afghanistan continues to be characterized as a failed, weak, and fragmented state, unable to provide effective services or protect its citizens. In the context of our case studies, the effectiveness of aid mechanisms as part of good governance contributes to the perpetuation of weak statehood and has a causal effect on the persistence of migration flows.

In a nutshell, these three aspects of weak statehood connected to the root causes of migration are, first, linked to the initiation as well as the perpetuation of migratory flows, second, linked to the divergence of mixed categories of migrants, and finally to the good governance aspect connected to weak statehood. To provide a better understanding of the indicators observed in the cases of Syria and Afghanistan, and their connection to the Eastern Mediterranean over the past few decades, this chapter adopts Carling's model (2002, 2014), which outlines the "conditions" and "prospects" that drive aspirations for migration, eventually leading to migration outcomes. As previously mentioned, the economic, social, and political conditions associated with weak statehood create discomfort for individuals. As migration outcomes persist and interventions continue, they influence the "drivers" and "determinants" of migration, perpetuating a cycle of migratory flows. This can also be seen in the networks that assist or resist migrants, providing them with opportunities to settle and maintain connections with their home countries (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018). These opportunities can result in the formalization of different migrant categories, which can be linked to weak statehood. Therefore, any

attempts that reproduce weak statehood, such as external interventions that fail to address structural fragility, further contribute to the "conditions" and "prospects" for increased mobility and, consequently, more migratory flows.

12.3 Weak Statehood as the Root Causes of Perpetuating Migratory Flows – Historical Evidence from the Cases of Afghanistan and Syria

This section aims to provide a historical perspective on migratory flows originating from Afghanistan and Syria, passing through Turkey, and reaching the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan regions, eventually arriving in Europe over the past few decades. It also aims to contextualize more recent migratory flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Europe, with a particular focus on the last decade. Understanding this history is crucial for developing a more critical understanding of current border and migration politics in the Eastern Mediterranean region as a whole, and specifically between the EU and Turkey, which plays a central role in shaping migratory dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Chronologically, to start with the Afghan case, since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Afghans have experienced prolonged displacement for over 40 years. In 2020, there were more than 2.8 million registered Afghan refugees, constituting the second-largest group of refugees in protracted displacement, defined as displacement lasting over five years (UNHCR, 2018). This displacement has been primarily driven by cyclical conflicts and violence. Initially, the Soviet invasion and subsequent Soviet-Afghan War prompted the exodus of 6.3 million Afghans to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan (Schmeidl, 2002, 2011; Wickramasekara et al., 2006). Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in the early 1990s, there was a period of relative improvement in political and social conditions within the country. Emigration rates declined, and there was an increasing trend of refugees returning to Afghanistan. However, a civil war erupted between various U.S.-sponsored militia groups from 1992 to 1996, which not only deepened the collapse of the state apparatus but also triggered new waves of emigration among Afghans. The civil war and the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime resulted in another massive wave of displacement, with several million Afghan refugees seeking refuge primarily in Iran and Pakistan, and also leading to spill over effects in other parts of the world. This further exacerbated the already complex and protracted case of the Afghan displacement.

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, along with the promise of peace through a new state-building process, led to the voluntary return of over 4.6 million refugees to Afghanistan in the following decade (Schmeidl, 2002, 2011; Wickramasekara et al., 2006). However, the second decade of the U.S. War in Afghanistan has been characterized by a resurgence of the Taliban, increased opposition to foreign military forces in the

country, a significant rise in civilian casualties, and a new wave of forced displacement both within and outside of Afghanistan. This period also witnessed the failure of the new state-building efforts in Afghanistan, resulting in the continuation and worsening of weak statehood in the country. As a result, during the 2010s, new waves of displacement occurred. Many Afghans sought to leave the country, not only heading to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran but also venturing further, such as irregularly crossing borders into Turkey and then making their way to European countries. In fact, the movement of Afghans along this migratory corridor to Turkey and Europe was not something new, it had a long history since the early 1980s (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018). In this movement, migrants were not only originating directly from Afghanistan but also included Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan who were attempting to reach other countries. While both Iran and Pakistan initially had an open-door policy for Afghan refugees in the 1980s and 1990s, providing them with basic protection and certain services for employment, education, and healthcare, the situation gradually became more difficult for many Afghans. Since the early 2000s, deportations and forced returns of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan have become routine (Simpson, 2017). As a result of the increasingly dire conditions faced by Afghans in Pakistan and Iran in recent years, more and more Afghans have chosen to seek protection in Turkey or use it as a transit point toward EU territories, utilizing the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan migratory corridors in the 2000s.

Concerning the Syrian case, the conflict that began in 2011 sparked one of the largest refugee crises since World War II. Apart from the internally displaced people within Syria, refugees primarily fled to neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and to a lesser extent, Iraq and Egypt (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020). Initially, these countries responded by maintaining an open-door policy and allowing the flow of refugees. As a result, according to UNHCR figures in 2013, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon exceeded a quarter of a million (UNHCR, 2022a).

In 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey exceeded 1.8 million, with just over one million in Lebanon and more than half a million in Jordan (Ibid). Initially, during the first few years of the conflict, the policies of these three countries emphasized the temporary nature of the refugee situation, assuming that the crisis would be resolved within a relatively short period and the refugees would eventually return (İçduygu, 2015). However, as the years passed, the approaches of these countries started to diverge. Turkey initially responded positively to the influx of Syrian refugees, viewing it as a humanitarian issue. The official discourse focused on the notion of hosting guests. On the other hand, the Lebanese government did not establish a formal national response to the refugee presence and instead delegated responsibility to organizations such as the UNHCR.[1] The option of permanent settlement and integration was never considered viable. Likewise, in Jordan, Minister for International Cooperation and Planning, Imad Fakhoury, made it clear that

[1] The collaboration between the UNHCR and Lebanon and Jordan was regulated by the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding signed to govern the key aspects of refugee protection.

the level of integration enjoyed by Palestinian refugees from 1948 would not be repeated (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020). However, the government views the refugee population as an opportunity for national development, emphasizing the economic aspects of their presence. As time passed, the increasing number of refugees, coupled with concerns about potential security threats and the spill over of war from members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) across the border, led to the securitization of borders. Strict visa requirements and surveillance mechanisms were implemented to prevent migrants from accessing these three countries. Entry for Syrians was limited to extreme humanitarian cases.

In 2015, while the three neighbouring countries of Syria – Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon – were hosting nearly four million refugees, the EU countries were greatly alarmed by the mass arrivals of refugees, most of whom were entering through Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan migratory corridors. Over one million refugees and irregular migrants had arrived on European shores during 2015, and tragically, nearly 4000 lives had been lost during the perilous journey (Spindler, 2015). Over 75% of those arriving in Europe had fled conflict and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan, or Iraq. This immediate development raised the question of "responsibility sharing versus responsibility shifting" between the EU member states and Turkey (and to a lesser extent, Lebanon and Jordan). Consequently, the EU and Turkey engaged in a lengthy and controversial negotiation process, resulting in an agreement known as the EU-Turkey Statement or the EU-Turkey Deal (Smeets & Beach, 2020). This agreement addressed several issues, including the return of irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands, the establishment of a resettlement scheme for Syrians, the prevention of new irregular migration routes, the activation of a voluntary readmission scheme which the EU member states would contribute on a voluntary basis, the acceleration of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, and the disbursement of 3 + 3 billion euros for refugee projects (Aksel & İçduygu, 2019). As a result of this agreement, EU-funded initiatives were introduced in 2016 to facilitate refugee access to education and employment. These developments indicate that Turkish authorities indirectly accepted the possibility of long-term settlement for Syrians and took concrete steps toward their integration, although not explicitly referring to it. However, since 2016, the option of return has been frequently and strongly voiced in Turkey, particularly in the context of creating "safe zones" in Syria for refugees to return to (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020; Altıok & Tosun, 2020).

Similar trends were also observed in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan, citing an ongoing security threat, closed its border and transitioned from a liberal employment policy for Syrians to a stricter one. However, since 2015, Syrians have been granted access to the labour market, and various measures have been implemented to facilitate permit issuance as part of the 2016 Compact deal, which involved receiving billions of dollars in grants, loans, and preferential trade agreements with the EU (Barbelet et al., 2018).

In Lebanon, the government assumed greater control over the presence of Syrians and established its first clear policy in 2014 to reduce their numbers by limiting access to the country and encouraging returns to Syria. In May 2015, the Lebanese

government instructed the UNHCR to suspend the registration of Syrian refugees, accompanied by additional restrictions on labour policies and stricter oversight of informal employment at the municipal level. Consequently, the percentage of Syrian refugees with residency permits decreased, leaving them in a precarious position. In 2017, the government established a State Ministry for Refugee Affairs and partially relaxed registration and labour policies (Atallah & Mahdi, 2017). Nevertheless, Lebanon continued to receive humanitarian assistance due to its status as a host country for refugees.

The policies of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, concerning reception, encampment, and integration, have undergone a shift from an open-door policy to a stricter political stance (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020). Each country has developed strategies, considering domestic and international constraints, while weighing the costs and benefits associated with hosting refugees. However, in all three countries, both the state and society began to feel the growing burden of hosting large numbers of refugees, leading to discussions about the issue of return in the absence of responsibility sharing from developed countries. In the context of limited local integration and the absence of a viable return option, many Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have expressed their intention to seek asylum in developed countries. Consequently, these developments have had a spill over effect, impacting other parts of the world, including Europe, in terms of the local refugee question and irregular migration.

In 2020, just five countries accounted for over two-thirds of all refugees worldwide: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2022b). Within this global context, Afghanistan and Syria hold a prominent position as the top countries of origin for refugees to Europe since the early 2010s. For instance, in 2012, approximately 16% of asylum seekers to Europe were from these two countries, a proportion that increased to nearly 26% in 2014, 17% in 2016, 21% in 2018, and 23% in 2020.[2] In other words, over the past decade, Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers have accounted for more than one-fifth of all asylum seekers to Europe, predominantly arriving through migratory routes passing through the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan regions. These two migratory routes have been the most prominent and active compared to other routes into the continent, mainly due to the significant flows from Afghanistan and Syria in the European migratory system of the past decade.

Over the years, migratory flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Europe have not been limited to asylum seekers alone. Irregular migratory flows from these two countries through the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan regions also constitute a significant part of these movements towards Europe. According to FRONTEX

[2]These figures have been calculated by the authors using the EUROSTAT Asylum quarterly reporting system. For more details, please refer to the source, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_quarterly_report

figures[3] in 2015, one-third of the detected irregular border crossings to Europe occurred along the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan routes, with the majority of cases involving Afghans and Syrians. This proportion increased to nine-tenths of the irregular border crossings in 2015, with the vast majority still being Afghans and Syrians, during what European countries labelled as the migration or refugee crisis. Specifically, in that year, the Eastern Mediterranean witnessed 885,386 people disembarking on its coasts (mainly Greece), accounting for 84.6% of all irregular landings in the three Mediterranean basins (Eastern basin: 84.6%, Central basin: 14.7%, Western basin: 0.7%) (Frontex, 2022). This number also represented 57% of the over 1.5 million irregular border crossings recorded in the Eastern basin between 2008 and 2020 (Ibid). Due to increased border controls, restrictive policies, and practices in Europe, as well as the EU-Turkey deal of 2016 aimed at curbing refugee and irregular migrant flows through Turkey to the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan regions, there was a relative decline in the number of irregular border crossings from these regions in 2016 and 2017. However, the figures remained significant, with nearly three-fifths of the irregular border crossings in 2016 and over a quarter of them in 2017 still taking place through these routes, primarily involving Afghan and Syrian citizens. In 2020, approximately seven-tenths of the irregular border crossings to Europe were detected along the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan routes, once again predominantly involving Afghans and Syrians.

The cases of Afghanistan and Syria illustrate that extended periods of civil war and political turmoil, resulting in weak statehood, lead to population displacements and large-scale refugee movements across national borders. Naturally, neighbouring countries are primarily impacted by these movements as people flee their homes in search of safety elsewhere. However, the prolonged refugee situations caused by deteriorating weak statehood also have a spill over effect, affecting not only local regions but also larger parts of the world. Another consequence of these situations is the emergence and continuation of mixed migratory flows. Weak statehood contributes to the complexity of these flows, which involve various types of population movements, such as refugees, asylum seekers, economically motivated irregular migrants, unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, smuggled persons, and victims of trafficking.

12.4 Micro-level Evidence: Perspectives from Migrants and Refugees

How do Afghan and Syrian migrants themselves, whether irregular migrants or refugees, experience and perceive their migratory journeys and their intentions for settlement? And how do they relate these experiences to the concept of weak

[3] These figures are also complied by the author from FRONTEX statistics; for details, see https://frontex.europa.eu/documents-and-publications/

statehood as a fundamental factor behind their movements? This section presents micro-level ethnographic evidence based on selected interviews conducted with Afghan and Syrian migrants in Turkey between 2018 and 2020. These interviews shed light on the connection between weak statehood and the root causes, drivers, and determinants of migration. The insights from these interviews provide references to a migratory system that encompasses the regions of Afghanistan and Syria, through Turkey, and ultimately towards the Eastern Mediterranean migratory corridor leading to Europe.

The literature highlights the correlation between prolonged wars and the protracted flow of migration (Harrell-Bond, 1989). Similarly, the argument of weak statehood presented here offers evidence of migrants' aspirations and the perpetuation of migratory flows in situations of prolonged weak statehood. The migrant interviews provided below present parallel arguments that are connected to weak statehood and its impact on their migration aspirations.

> "...When I was a child, I started to think about what kind of country I live in, the state cannot provide me with education, security, and job opportunities. I thought that it would not be possible to live in such a country. I want to go to the country that will provide good opportunities... I do not want to live in a country where there is constant uncertainty and insecurity. In Afghanistan, the state does not even meet basic needs such as water and electricity..." *Interview 1*: 39 years old Afghan man, married, 4 children, living in Istanbul, arrived in 2014, interviewed in 2019

A state that fails to meet basic needs and is deemed weak and failed, becomes a root cause of migration and even chain migration. The protracted situation in Afghanistan, as highlighted in the interview below, further underscores how migration flows persist due to weak statehood.

> "... I am told that my grandfather fled from Afghanistan to Iran in 1985 to escape from clashes and to provide education to his children... my father was born in Iran in 1987... then my father, together his parents, returned to Afghanistan in 2002 when the situation in Afghanistan improved a bit.... I was born in Afghanistan in 2003... when I was 10, with my parents we moved to Iran.... because there were clashes, the Afghan state was not able to provide security... even finding food has become difficult... and have no opportunity of school, no job... From Iran, I came to Turkey... Iran state provides us nothing... I want to live in a place where the state makes life easier... I feel more comfortable here....in Turkey... If Afghanistan becomes a real state where I feel secure, water, electricity, jobs, schools get better, of course I wish to go there... But European states better to provide everything to their citizens... I also want to go there..." *Interview 2:* 17 years old Afghan man, single arrived in 2018, interviewed in 2020

The ongoing failure of the state to ensure the safety of its citizens in an insecure environment is considered a key determinant and driver for migration. The forced migration from Syria, caused by the devastating effects of war, leads people to perceive the idea of return as futile due to the state's incapacity and inability to protect and provide for its people:

> "... After 3 years of war in Aleppo, I felt that my life has become unbearable, there is no electricity and water, the streets are filthy and destitute, children can't go to school, there is no state... there is no security without the state...then we said we must escape from here... And we did, we came to Turkey ...We will not return to Syria unless there is a state that

> provides us with everything to live in happiness. . . There must be peace and a state together in Syria, then everything will be fine to return. . .” *Interview 3*: 24 years old Syrian women, married, 3 children, living in Gaziantep, arrived in 2013, interviewed in 2019

The distinction between a weak statehood and a ‘good’ and ‘providing’ state in the minds of individuals further diminishes the desire to return:

> “. . . . We are now three generations of family members here. My parents, my wife, and I myself and our children. . . If Syrian state does not protect its citizens and there is not only one state and society, there will be no peace there. There will be no prosperity. . . It is the state that brings us opportunities. . . . schools, roads, water and electricity, and safety. . . when the state collapses, everyone tries to escape from there. . . For my father and mother, their memories and past, their lands and home are there, but they do not want to return if there is no peace and no good Syrian state there. . .” *Interview 4:* 42 years old Syrian man, married, 4 children, arrived in 2014, interviewed in 2020

The interviews presented here aim to provide insight into how macro-level weak statehood is perceived by individuals, influencing their aspirations and migration experiences. These accounts highlight the everyday discussions surrounding the economic, social, and political conditions that contribute to weak statehood, causing discomfort for individuals. Consequently, due to these protracted cases, migration persists, and the ongoing impact of weak statehood influences the “drivers” and “determinants” of migration, perpetuating a continuous cycle of migratory flows.

12.5 Conclusion

There are several primary factors that can be identified as drivers of migration and the perpetuation of people’s movement. This chapter aims to shed light on the root causes of migration and examines the various ways in which they can manifest. It has been well-documented that different combinations of these factors can intertwine to shape the ultimate direction and nature of migration. Within this context, the primary challenge lies in understanding why certain causes carry more significance than others. By examining the movements of Afghans and Syrians, including irregular migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, and considering the concept of “mixed migration”, this article highlights that persistent weak statehood, coupled with prolonged conflicts and refugee situations, appears to be the primary driver behind the sustained flow of people over several decades.

One could argue that while the scale, diversity, geographical dynamics, and overall complexity of migratory flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Turkey and then to the Eastern Mediterranean have evolved over the years, a migratory corridor has been established within this larger region, perpetuating the movement of people. It appears highly unlikely that any constitutional transformation in Afghanistan and Syria will occur in the near future that could rebuild central authority and strengthen security structures. A significant portion of both countries’ populations have been living abroad as refugees, and the ongoing weak statehood situations continue to contribute to the outflow of citizens from these nations. There is no guarantee that

returnees would be able to establish a stable life given the social, economic, and political contexts that have been heavily disrupted by interventions, wars, and power vacuums with an excessive concentration of authoritarian power. The reluctance to return is closely intertwined with the choices made by those who are able to flee, all of which align with the weak statehood argument presented in this chapter.

In recent years, European countries have expressed increasing concern about irregular migration, as well as asylum and refugee flows, originating from Afghanistan and Syria. These movements have been viewed as both a security risk and a humanitarian challenge. In response, European countries have intensified their efforts to secure their borders in the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkans. However, within these contexts, similar migratory movements have been continuously evolving. The interplay of weak statehoods, protracted refugee situations, and mixed flows of migrants contributes to a well-established migratory system that connects countries with weak states to the European geography. This chapter highlights the significant role of weak statehood in generating ongoing flows of irregular migrants and refugees. We argue that weak statehood forms part of the migration infrastructure that continues to shape migration aspirations and outcomes. Given the persistence of weak or fragile statehood in countries such as Afghanistan and Syria, it is highly likely that prolonged refugee situations and persistent mixed flows of migrants and refugees will persist, as exemplified by the Eastern Mediterranean migratory corridor over the past four decades.

References

Aksel, D. B., & İçduygu, A. (2019, November). *National report on Turkey: Patterns of politicisation on refugees and policy responses.* CEASEVAL Project, Research on the Common European Asylum System, Nr. 10, Chemnitz. http://ceaseval.eu/publications/10_Aksel_Icduygu_TurkeyNationalReport_WP5.pdf

Altıok, B., & Tosun, S. (2020). Understanding foreign policy strategies during migration movements: A comparative study of Iraqi and Syrian mass refugee inflows to Turkey. *Turkish Studies, 21*(5), 684–704.

Atallah, S., & Mahdi, D. (2017). *Law and politics of "safe zones" and forced return to Syria: Refugee politics in Lebanon* (Policy paper, October). Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Barbelet, V., Hagen-Zanker, J., & Mansour-Ille, D. (2018, February). *The Jordan compact: Lessons learnt and implications for future refugee compacts* (Briefing Papers). Overseas Development Institute (ODI). https://www.odi.org/publications/11045-jordan-compact-lessons-learnt-and-implications-future-refugee-compacts

Betts, A. (2013). State fragility, refugee status and 'survival migration'. *Forced Migration Review, 43*, 4.

Bissell, R. E., & Natsios, A. S. (2001). Development assistance and international migration. In A. R. Zolberg & P. M. Benda (Eds.), *Global migrants, global refugees: Problems and solutions* (pp. 297–321). Berghahn.

Bizhan, N. (2018). Aid and state-building, part II: Afghanistan and Iraq. *Third World Quarterly, 39*(5), 1014–1031.

Carling, J. (2002). Migration in the age of involuntary immobility. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 28*(1), 5–42.

Carling, J. (2014). The Role of Aspirations in Migration. Paper presented at *Determinants of International Migration*, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford, 23–-25 September. https://jorgencarling.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/carling-2014-the-role-of-aspirations-in-migration-2014-07.pdf

Dreher, A., Fuchs, A., & Langlotz, S. (2019). The effects of foreign aid on refugee flows. *European Economic Review*, Elsevier, *112*(C), 127–147.

Ferreira, I. A. (2017). Measuring state fragility: A review of the theoretical groundings of existing approaches. *Third World Quarterly, 38*(6), 1291–1309.

Fisher, J. (2014). When it pays to be a 'fragile state': Uganda's use and abuse of a dubious concept. *Third World Quarterly, 35*(2), 316–332.

Frontex. (2022). Annual Risk Analysis (2013–2021), Documents and Publications [yearly reports]. https://frontex.europa.eu/documents-and-publications/

Guillaumont, P., & Guillaumont Jeanneney, S. (2011). State fragility and economic vulnerability: What is measured and why? *Etudes et Documents.* https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00554284/file/2009.18.pdf

Harrell-Bond, B. E. (1989). Repatriation: Under what conditions is it the most desirable solution for refugees? An Agenda for Research 1. *African Studies Review, 32*(1), 41–70.

İçduygu, A. (2015). *Syrian refugees in Turkey. The long road ahead*. Migration Policy Institute.

İçduygu, A., & Karadağ, S. (2018). Afghan migration through Turkey to Europe: Seeking refuge, forming diaspora, and becoming citizens. *Turkish Studies, 19*(3), 482–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2018.1454317

İçduygu, A., & Nimer, M. (2020). The politics of return: Exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. *Third World Quarterly, 41*(3), 415–433. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503

Marquette, H. (2011). Donors, state building and corruption: Lessons from Afghanistan and the implications for aid policy. *Third World Quarterly, 32*(10), 1871–1890.

Martin-Shields, C. (2017). State fragility as a cause of forced displacement: Identifying theoretical channels for empirical research [Discussion paper]. https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_30.2017.pdf

Nay, O. (2013). Fragile and failed states: Critical perspectives on conceptual hybrids. *International Political Science Review, 34*(3), 326–341.

Schmeidl, S. (2002). (human) security dilemmas: Long-term implications of the afghan refugee crisis. *Third World Quarterly, 23*(1), 7–29.

Schmeidl, S. (2011). *Protracted displacement in Afghanistan: Will history be repeated?* Washington DC/Paris, 2011. http://www.refugeecooperation.org/publications/afghanistan/pdf/10_schmeidl.pdf

Sekhar, C. S. C. (2010). Fragile states: The role of social, political, and economic factors. *Journal of Developing Societies, 26*(3), 263–293. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X1002600301

Shah, M. Q. (2021, October 26). What did billions in aid to Afghanistan accomplish? 5 questions answered. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/what-did-billions-in-aid-to-afghanistan-accomplish-5-questions-answered-166804

Simpson, G. (2017). *Pakistan coercion, UN complicity: The mass forced return of afghan refugees*. Human Rights Watch.

Smeets, S., & Beach, D. (2020). When success is an orphan: Informal institutional governance and the EU–Turkey deal. *West European Politics, 43*(1), 129–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1608495

Spindler, W. (2015, December). *2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis*. UNHCR. https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2018). *Global trends forced displacement in 2017*. The UN Refugee Agency. http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2022a). *Syria regional refugee response*. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2022b). *Figures at a Glance*. https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

Van Mol, C., & de Valk, H. (2016). Migration and immigrants in Europe: A historical and demographic perspective. In B. Garcés-Mascareñas & R. Penninx (Eds.), *Integration processes and policies in Europe* (IMISCOE research series) (p. 53). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_3

Wickramasekara, P., Sehgal, J., Mehran, F., Noroozi, L., & Eisazadeh, S. (2006). *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme International Labour Office.

Wolff, S., & Hadj-Abdou, L. (2018). Mediterranean migrants and refugees: Historical and political continuities and discontinuities. In R. Gillespie & F. Volpi (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of Mediterranean politics* (p. 384). Routledge.

Ahmet İçduygu is a Professor at Koç University in Istanbul, Turkey, in the Department of International Relations and the Department of Sociology. He also serves as the Director of the Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc). He obtained his PhD in Demography from the Australian National University and is an elected member of the Science Academy in Turkey. In addition to his own individual research projects, Prof. İçduygu has conducted various research projects for international organizations such as IOM, UNHCR, EU, OECD, and ILO. He specializes in teaching subjects related to migration studies, theories and practices of citizenship, international organizations, civil society, nationalism and ethnicity, and research methods.

Birce Altıok is a Coordinator and post-doctoral researcher at the Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc) in Istanbul, Turkey. She completed her PhD in Political Science and International Relations at Koç University in 2021, focusing on forced migrant groups' access to activism practices in Turkey and Greece after 2010. She received the 2022 APSA Migration & Citizenship Section Best Dissertation Prize for her work titled "Refugee Activism and State Policies in Comparative Perspective: Contentious Voices from Greece and Turkey." With an MA in Human Rights Studies from Columbia University (2011) and a BS in Global and International Affairs from Binghamton (SUNY) and Boğaziçi University (2010), she has been involved in various research projects funded by TÜBİTAK, Erasmus+, Cost Action, and Horizon. She is currently a post-doc researcher in the H2020 project "Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning" and a project researcher in the TÜBİTAK-funded project "Foreign Students in Turkish Higher Education: Structure, Institution and Actor Interactions in Policy-Making Processes." Previously, she contributed as one of the country members to the Cost Action "International Ethnic and Immigrant Minorities' Survey Data Network" (2017–2021). She has publications on foreign policy, social cohesion, and civil society.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

