

Short-bios of the SRII Research Team



Dr N. Ela Gökalp-Aras (Principal Investigator, Senior Researcher) is the Senior Researcher at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII) (since 2017). She is the Principal Investigator (PI) of GAPS: De-Centring the Study of Migrant Returns and Readmission Policies in Europe and Beyond Project and the co-leader of Work Package 2 (Legal and Policy Infrastructures of Returns in the EU). Previously she served as the PI of the “RESPOND: Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond Project” Horizon2020 Project and was the co-leader of “Refugee Protection Regimes and Comparative” and “Prescriptive Analysis” Work Packages.

Dr Gökalp-Aras has more than 20-year experience and worked in different capacities and roles at public institutions, national and international NGOs, and the private sector in project management, in particular, 12-year experience in academia and research. Before SRII, she worked as a faculty member of (lecturer, then as the Assistant Professor) International Relations, as the EU expert, and as the Director of the Project Development and Coordination Office and Technology Transfer Office (TTO) at two different universities. She has a BA degree in International Relations from Ankara University (2000) and an MSc (2005), and a PhD (2013) in Sociology from the Middle East Technical University with a PhD dissertation that she analysed the EU’s irregular migration policy and its implications in Turkey. She is also a postgraduate student of the Climate Change and Development MSc. Programme at SOAS London University. Her research and teaching experience focuses on European integration, EU–Turkey relations, international organisations, international migration (irregular and transit) and asylum regimes, border management, security, climate change-food security-migration nexus, international human rights, research and project management. Dr Gökalp-Aras published two co-authored books, many articles for international peer-reviewed journals, including International Migration Journal, Comparative Migration Studies and the International Spectator, and chapters in several edited volumes, reports and policy briefs. She is the Director of the Migration Research Centre of the Association of Development, Migration and Social Policies (DEMIS-MIREC) and one of the editors of the International Journal of Human Mobility (IJHM).

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Dr Neva Övünç Öztürk (Senior Researcher) is the senior Researcher at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII). She is a graduate of Ankara University Faculty of Law. She pursued her academic career as a faculty member at the Private International Law department of the same Faculty and continues to teach Foreigners Law and Refugee Law (Immigration and Asylum Law) at Ankara University Faculty of Law as a faculty member. Her PhD thesis, completed in 2014 and published in 2015 as a book in Turkish, focused explicitly on refugee status determination. As a European Commission Jean Monnet Scholar, she conducted research for her doctorate at the Queen Mary University of London.

Moreover, she has presented papers at several international scholarly conferences and provided training for NGOs and senior public officers on Immigration and Asylum Law. She has also had the opportunity to work closely as a legal expert with multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual teams in numerous projects conducted or benefited by national and international institutions, such as the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, World Bank, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Presidency of Migration Management of Türkiye (PMM). She has also contributed to Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). Her contributions to these projects mainly focused on the following subjects: international protection procedures, temporary protection, irregular migration and readmission procedures, legal aspects of migrant and refugee integration, legal aspects of human trafficking and rights of migrants and refugees. She is also one of the members of the Scientific Board of the Human Rights Centre of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations. Her scholarly publications are related to immigration and asylum law.

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Hakan Ünay (PhD. Candidate, Researcher) is the Researcher at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII). He has a BA degree in International Relations from Selçuk University (2017) and an MSc degree in International Relations from Necmettin Erbakan University (2021). He is currently continuing his education in International Relations as a PhD candidate. Previously, he was the coordinator of “Bridging Youth and Young Professionals in a Migrational Context via Digitalization” within the scope of Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation among organisations and institutions -Youth Education and “Increase Participation, Achieve Success” projects within the scope of Erasmus+ KA1. Between 2019-2022, he worked as a researcher at the Migration Research Foundation, an NGO operating in the field of migration in Turkey. Ünay, whose main areas of work are borders, border management and migration policies, focuses especially on the border crossing experiences of migrants. Environmental migration and border cinema are also among his fields of study. Ünay has fieldwork experience at Turkey’s with Iran, Syria, Iraq, Greece and Bulgaria borders. He is also the film review editor at Borders in Globalization Review and the producer of a radio program ‘Sınır(lı) Konuşmak’ (Border Talks) on Açık Radyo, a radio operating in Turkey for many years.

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Umutcan Yüksel (Researcher) is the researcher at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII). He is a graduate of Abant İzzet Baysal University International Relations Department and currently continuing his master education in Human Rights Law at Istanbul Bilgi University. He has more than 10 years professional experience in protracted displacement, emergency management and post-emergency settings with a focus on humanitarian protection and information management. He has first-hand experience on refugee return, social cohesion, conflict sensitivity, border and migration governance, influx and emergency preparedness, access to justice/legal aid. He possesses an extensive technical knowledge on quantitative research, big data validation and analysis, and robust human rights monitoring mechanisms. He also worked with various national think-tank organizations and international organizations such as European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), Welthungerhilfe, German Development Cooperation (GIZ), and Diakonie at different capacities and roles.

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