

Introduction

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Since we started working on this book, the world has changed dramatically. First, the Covid-19 pandemic took the global community by surprise. The speed with which it spread was alarming. All borders had to be locked down, bringing refugee flows to a virtual halt. Meanwhile the disease entered overcrowded refugee camps in Greece, creating additional havoc and misery. Second, the global health crisis caused extreme vulnerability in both developed and developing host country economies as growing unemployment generated huge economic insecurity for most citizens and especially for the refugee population.

Refugees are a highly vulnerable population deserving utmost attention. Tragically, they were mostly ignored by the media and by host country governments during the pandemic. In this book we question this attitude and argue that the refugee crisis is still one of the most critical predicaments of our time.¹ It continues to be the most salient human indicator that demonstrates the deeply rooted contradictions inherent in the global capitalist system.²

The magnitude of this immense problem cannot be reduced to numbers, but it would be helpful to review some data on its sheer enormity. According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), 80 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced due to wars, religious and political persecution, civil conflict, violence and famine, and environmental collapse by the end of 2019 (UNHCR 2020). Of this huge mass of people, approximately 26 million have fled their homelands. Most of these refugees are hosted in developing countries like Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Bangladesh, and 6.6 million are Syrians (UNHCR 2020). Currently, Syria is in the midst of the tenth year of its civil war, and more than 11

million Syrians—nearly half the country’s population—have been displaced either within Syria or to nearby countries.³

With an estimated four million Syrian refugees and more than three hundred thousand people of concern from other countries, Turkey hosts more refugees than any other country in the world (UNHCR 2020). The majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey live in poverty and are dispersed in densely populated urban settings in Istanbul, Izmir, and other major cities. Though the “temporary protection” status of Syrian refugees provides access to a range of free public services, including healthcare and education, refugees in Turkey lead a precarious life. The pandemic has further deteriorated their substandard living conditions. Food insecurities, lack of adequate sanitary conditions, insufficient access to online education, and loss of jobs are widespread problems among the refugee population.⁴ The picture gets worse each day due to political volatility, growing tensions with the local populations, and increasing economic insecurity within the country.

Those who seek economic and political security in Europe also face considerable challenges. The European response to irregular migrants is brutal. In 2015, Europe was faced with the arrival of more than one million people in the EU zone, an overwhelming problem that Europe struggled to respond to. This development turned into a humanitarian and political crisis, as most EU countries erected fences and closed their borders. Later, the controversial EU-Turkey deal of 2016, designed to prevent asylum in Europe, sharply reduced the number of refugees reaching Europe.⁵ Currently, getting to Europe is harder than ever.

Nevertheless, boats bound for Greek islands continue to fill up as economic hardships and limited access to basic rights persist for refugees. Among those who survive the journey, thousands are stranded in camps in Greece⁶ and along the borders of Eastern European countries. Desperate to reach their destinations and in hope of getting asylum, they are often met with discrimination and violence. Currently, tens of thousands are being held in official detention centers and for long periods of time. Many European governments justify the need for containment and the closure of borders with reasons of national security against vilified “others.”⁷ One harrowing response to the refugee inflow has been the rise of populist right-wing movements.⁸

Meanwhile many scholars and activists have responded to the ordeal of the refugees in a most humane way, demanding solidarity. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman described the current refugee issue as the crisis of humanity. In a 2016 interview, he said, “I don’t believe there is a shortcut solution to the current refugee problem. Humanity is in crisis—and there is no exit from that crisis other than the solidarity of humans” (Evans and Bauman 2016).

Why This Book?

Refugees on the Move highlights and explores the profound complexities of the current refugee issue by focusing specifically on Syrian refugees in Turkey and responses from some European countries. Some of the issues we examine are the causes of the movement of refugee populations, the difficulties they face during their journeys, the daily challenges and obstacles they experience, and host governments' responses to managing and overcoming the so-called "refugee crisis."

Our decision to focus on Syrian refugees in Turkey and Europe stems from both our interest in the topic and our experiences in this area. We have had the opportunity to carry out projects with refugees and do research on different aspects of the issue in both Turkey and Europe. Our fieldwork and findings confirm the multidimensionality of refugee studies. In this volume, our goal is to bring together authors from a wide spectrum of perspectives who are grounded in disciplines such as political economy, anthropology, sociology, political science, and economics. We believe that methodologies such as fieldwork, interviews, and surveys specific to various disciplines enhance the book's scope and reach. The linguistic pluralism apparent in each chapter reveals the critical role each author's identity plays in the effectiveness of the narrative.

We must keep in mind that it is impossible to create a singular refugee narrative since refugee experiences are extremely diverse depending on the specific historical and geopolitical context. As research in this volume reveals, life experiences vary substantially even within this specific group of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Europe. The daily life of each person within displaced populations is different depending on class, occupation, location, gender, and age.⁹ In addition, attitudes in developed host countries also differ toward educated versus uneducated, skilled versus unskilled, well-to-do versus ordinary refugees. Recognizing the refugees' individual stories is important.

Furthermore, to fully understand refugee issues, we need to analyze and question the international context in which the refugees arise.¹⁰ The problem is not only the increasing number of refugees or the policies implemented to resolve this crisis but also the system that produces and reproduces refugees. We are encouraged to create solutions to the problems refugees face—housing, health, education, unemployment, xenophobia—and there is no doubt that these require urgent establishment and immediate response. However, awareness of the root causes of forced migration arising from systemic contradictions should also be on our agenda. Without having a rigorous political approach to address the root causes and material conditions in which refugees arise, remedial policies will not be sufficient to combat the ever-increasing number of refugees no matter how effective they are.

Finally, we would like to point out that while most research focuses on the refugee crisis in Europe, the majority of the world's refugees still lives in the Global South, frequently in countries bordering their own. The political developments in Europe suggest that Turkey and other developing countries will continue to bear the burden of hosting millions of refugees in the foreseeable future.

The Book

The book is divided into four sections:

Part I, titled “Different Perspectives on Migration: Migration and Neoliberalism” presents different approaches to migration and the refugee crisis.

In chapter 1, Sungur Savran uses a Marxist approach to describe the causes of migration flows and the refugee crisis. He argues that structural mechanisms—that is, the logic of capital accumulation—have been the root cause of all migratory flows since the nineteenth century. After examining the differences between migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, Savran posits that refugees ultimately end up being part of the reserve army of labor within the capitalist system.

In chapter 2, Kemal Vural Tarlan argues that traditional migration models fail to explain some of the complex issues related to the status of refugees. He focuses on migrant and refugee labor, which he considers to be the only unchanging variable over time, and examines this variable within the formal and informal labor markets of host countries. Tarlan's chapter is based on eight years of fieldwork in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, during which he interviewed refugees employed in the informal sector. What remains consistent in all these countries is that migrants perform low-wage labor. His observations point to the fact that migrants and refugees in these countries provide the most demanded form of labor in the informal sector where working conditions tend to be hazardous.

The tragic image of the body of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian-Kurdish child, that washed up on the Turkish shore in 2015 became iconic as it circulated throughout Western media. Many haunting images of children and adults on dinghies continue to bring attention to refugees and their hard and dangerous journey through the treacherous waters of the Aegean and the Mediterranean Seas.

In chapter 3, Mariam Durrani and Arjun Shankar focus on the colonizer-colonized relationships and show how images of suffering or dead refugee children like Aylan Kurdi are reproduced and circulated to garner empathy in the West. These images indicate that borders have become ever more hostile over time. The question the authors address most poignantly is, to what extent do images of suffering children perpetuate the stereotypic un-

derstanding of whose suffering should be redressed and whose suffering can be consumed as a matter of public voyeurism?

Part II, titled “Host Country Economies and Attitudes,” deals with the problems of refugees in host countries.

In chapter 4, Saime Özçürümez and Deniz Yıldırım question why policies that aim at increasing the employability of refugees do not lead to a successful process of social integration. The authors conclude that several factors prevent the integration of refugees and claim that the international legal framework for refugees, the structure of the economies in host countries, and the socioeconomic profile of refugees are among the many barriers.

As mentioned above, in 2015 hundreds of thousands of refugees walked toward Europe, crossing dangerous terrain and ending up in remote areas on Eastern European borders. Although most of these countries prohibited the refugees’ passage, their plight, broadcasted thorough various news media outlets, contributed to changing public attitudes toward them.

In chapter 5, Anil Duman examines the changing sentiments toward migrants and refugees, the growing prejudice against them, and the evolving anxieties of nationals who fear the economic impact of this incoming flow of people. She discusses how these changing attitudes have strengthened the anti-immigrant populist ideologies in the context of Central and East European countries. Her findings suggest that the prejudices of the nationals are triggered by the perception that migrants will “steal” their jobs and benefit disproportionately from the welfare system.

The future of Syrian refugees in Turkey continues to be a topic hotly debated among academics, policymakers, NGOs, and government officials. It is also on the minds of many Turkish citizens. On the other hand, refugees need to evaluate the choices of returning home to Syria, permanently settling in Turkey, or, if possible, continuing on to European countries.

In chapter 6, Ahmet İçduygu and Damla B. Aksel examine these possibilities and address the likelihood of long-term or permanent settlement in the host country. They compare the similarities of and differences between Syrians in Turkey and Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan. Their research reveals that refugees continuously live in a state of “permanent temporariness.” In the second part of their chapter, the authors provide an analytical and theoretical framework for permanent settlement.

Part III, titled “Europe and Migration: Past and Present,” examines how European states respond to the inflow of migrants and refugees.

The huge refugee inflow to Europe in 2015 led to a dramatic increase in economic, legal, and social policy discussions and political decision-making within the European Union.

In chapter 7, Everita Silina investigates the patchwork of European policies aimed at containing the flow of refugees by critically examining the evolving legal guidelines. Her review of the efforts to establish refu-

gee camps on five Greek islands and the practices regarding these refugee camps reveals the crisis of EU governance. Silina concludes that this so-called “hotspot approach” provides only short-term solutions to the problem. According to the author, this approach removes the refugees from public view solely to conceal the deeper crisis of EU governance.

An increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers are detained around the world and denied their basic rights, often living in conditions below international standards. Migration-related detention not only creates extraordinary hardships for the detained but also disrupts these communities through the separation of families. Nevertheless, keeping them in a state of perpetual waiting and uncertainty is still one of the instruments that states use to contain the flow of refugees.

In chapter 8, David Herd investigates the meaning of detention and its increased use by the state as a globalized response to human inflows. He examines the detention centers in the United Kingdom and the immigration policies that aim to create a “hostile environment” for undocumented immigrants turning them into non-persons.

The inflow of refugees to Germany following the opening of borders by Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015 continues to dominate the political and social debate. That year marked the arrival of over a million refugees in Germany to be processed as asylum seekers.

In chapter 9, Marion Detjen explores the historical factors that led to the arrival of refugees in Germany and the resulting changes in the political and cultural landscape. At first, refugees were met with open arms, and volunteers offered resources and assistance to help them settle in their new “home.” The volunteers secured housing, education, and work for the refugees with the support of the state and promoted social integration through language and culture courses. Yet, the large influx of refugees also sparked controversies regarding the challenges of integration and the impact of refugees on German society and culture. Taking 2015 as the starting point, Detjen traces the debates about what it means to be a migrant and refugee and how these attributes relate to the nation-state.

Part IV, titled “Refugee Agency,” consists of chapters focusing on the decisions that refugees make and the actions they take to survive and continue living in the mostly adverse conditions they find themselves in.

The smartphone became a tool of survival for the refugee on the journey to safety. It mapped routes, charted roads, and helped navigate the seas that threatened to swallow those traveling in crowded, precarious vessels supplied by smugglers. The smartphone was also a means of communication among separated family members and friends while providing information on the passage ahead.

In chapter 10, Stephan O. Görland and Sina Arnold examine the role of smartphones as indispensable tools of flight. They argue that smartphones

enable refugees to self-organize, share information, and achieve greater autonomy of movement. Equipped with smartphones, refugees inform themselves about their destinations. They chart specific routes and avoid the ones with border patrol and police presence. Moreover, smartphones can save lives in emergency situations. On arrival, refugees use these tools to overcome language barriers and negotiate urban spaces.

The Syrian refugees in Turkey do not constitute a homogenous population in terms of socioeconomic class. In fact, many Syrian refugees have no access to the formal employment sector and work instead in the urban informal sector. Most of these low-wage informal jobs are in textiles, construction, and manufacturing, often in various sweatshops.

In chapter 11, Danièle Bélanger and Cenk Saraçoğlu focus on the urban labor market in Turkey and look specifically at the social relations of production in which Syrian refugees participate. They address the complex relationships of Syrian workers with their employers and fellow Turkish and Kurdish workers. The results they present are from their fieldwork on small businesses conducted in Izmir from 2016 to 2018. Belanger and Saraçoğlu argue that Syrian refugees currently constitute an important segment of the working class in Turkey, and, as such, they should not be considered refugees but migrant workers.

In chapter 12, Samer Sharani presents fieldwork he conducted through interviews with Syrian refugees in Turkey, Germany, and Sweden. His chapter examines their narratives to understand how they make the decisions regarding where they would like to reside in the future. The interviews reveal the dilemma of the refugees in terms of whether they should stay permanently in their host countries or return home.

The book ends with the remarks of Cem Terzi, MD, the cofounder of the Association of Bridging Peoples, which is a nonprofit charity and solidarity association.¹¹

It is our hope that the chapters contained in this collection will enhance the public debate and understanding of the refugee issue and contribute to the work of academics, policymakers, and various organizations active in the field.

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Notes

1. The concept of “crisis” is used in three different contexts by the authors of this book: as the systemic crisis of capitalism that often leads to displacement of people, as the trauma and hardships of the displaced people, and as the crisis of the nation-state in dealing with the incoming refugees.
2. For an extensive analysis in this volume see Savran, chapter 1: “The Political Economy of Migration.”
3. The post-9/11 U.S. wars have forcibly displaced at least thirty-seven million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria. See Vine et al. (2020).
4. For further discussions see Balcioğlu (2018); Leghtas (2019); Kınkoğlu (2020); Santana de Andrade (2020).
5. With the EU-Turkey deal, European leaders agreed that every individual who arrived irregularly on Greek islands—including asylum seekers—should be returned to Turkey. In exchange, Turkey would receive €6 billion to assist the vast refugee community hosted in the country, and Turkish nationals would be granted visa-free travel to Europe. The deal also stated that once the number of irregular arrivals dropped, a “voluntary” humanitarian scheme to transfer Syrians from Turkey to other European countries would be activated.
6. Refugees face high risks on their journeys including the capsizing of their boats and drowning in crossing to Greece. However, they still continue with these dangerous attempts in order to reach their destination. The facilities in Greece currently house more than 16,290 people. These overcrowded camps with sub-standard living conditions have always been a temporary and palliative solution. See General Secretariat for Information and Communication (2021).
7. For a critique of the “crisis” framework and its role in migration management, see De Genova (2016); Reece (2016); De Genova and Peutz (2010).
8. For a comprehensive description of this development see chapter 9 by Detjen in this collection.
9. For women’s experience at all stages of forced migration, see Friedman et al. (2017).
10. For an analysis of the international context, see Haddad (2008).
11. The Association of Bridging Peoples promotes the development and strengthening of public friendships between people. It also facilitates solidarity during political and natural catastrophes with severe social consequences. The organization is known for its work with refugees in Turkey.

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