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Introduction: Syrian Refugees – Facing Challenges, Making Choices

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Analytically speaking, migration involves a series of decisions. Put differently, it requires facing a range of altering circumstances and making choices – both for the migrants themselves, and for the countries that find themselves impacted by migration. The contextual factors that underlie the various types and patterns of (non-forced or forced) migration differ dramatically. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the people who are doing the moving (especially across international borders), a common element is the decision to move itself – which is almost always taken after facing significant (economic, social, political) challenges – plus decisions about where and how to move, and what to do after moving (de Jong and Gardner, 1981; Carling and Collins, 2017). And for migrants or refugees, once the post-migration stage is reached – typically at the end of a difficult journey that has proceeded through many stages – decision-making remains central; in debates over settlement, integration, naturalization and potential re-migration or return. Decision-making is also the concluding theme of receiving countries as they attempt to deal with the flows of migrants and/or refugees. The policy-making process is replete with difficult choices, including how to respond to the various claims of immigrants or refugees who enter, how long they might stay (i.e. permanently or temporarily), what kind of work (if any) they may undertake, their impact on the welfare system or the ability of migrants or refugees to "integrate" into the communities in which they live (Rousseau et al., 2002; Boswell et al., 2011). Needless to say, these decision-making and policy-making processes are all the harder in the context of forced mass movement, compared to voluntary migration.

All these various aspects of "facing challenges and making choices" have been observed vividly in the last 8 years in the case of the millions of Syrian refugees who have been displaced internally or internationally. Since 2011, as many as a half of Syria's 22 million inhabitants have been forced to flee their homes, temporarily or permanently. Recent UN figures show that more than 6 million are internally displaced within Syria, and there are around 5 million refugees outside the country (UNHCR, 2018). The first wave of Syrian displacement came in April 2011, when hundreds died in clashes between the Syrian Army and opposition forces as the conflict erupted. By the end of 2011, with the country descending into full-scale civil war, thousands had fled to neighbouring countries, with even larger numbers displaced within Syria itself. Two years into the conflict, some 2.5 million Syrians had become refugees, mostly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. By 2015, the number of Syrian refugees in these three neighbouring countries had grown to nearly 4 million – 2.5 million in Turkey, nearly 1 million in Lebanon and half a million in Jordon – in addition to another half million in other two countries in the region, Iraq and Egypt.

In 2015, with the conflict in its fifth year and with no resolution in sight, various secondary movements, which are often seen as a "spillover effect" of mass refugee migration, were triggered. Countries beyond Turkey, Lebanon, Jordon, Egypt and Iraq began to be affected, mainly through the eastern Mediterranean corridor connecting the Middle East through Turkey and Greece to

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Europe. Although the arrivals in European countries were relatively small compared to the huge numbers of Syrian refugees in the Middle East, this development caused a climate of panic in Europe, where the issue abruptly came to be labelled a "refugee crisis" warranting "emergency" action. While anti-refugee sentiments and border closures were seen widely in Europe, some European countries, such as Germany and Sweden, took a more liberal stand. Consequently, since 2015, more than 1 million Syrians have found refuge in European countries, predominantly Germany and Sweden. Moreover, this period also brought about a debate of "responsibility sharing versus responsibility shifting" that was partly used to legitimize and realize the "EU–Turkey Statement" that aimed to "push back" the "Syrian refugee crisis" to the Middle East.

Across the three main host countries – Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan – the initial response was an open-door policy, welcoming the flows of refugees on humanitarian grounds and offering them indefinite leave to remain, on the assumption that the war would end quickly. The open-door approach was accompanied by three other policy elements: ensuring full protection, upholding the principle of *non-refoulement*, and providing optimal humanitarian assistance (Icduygu, 2015). In 2014–2018, the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan remained relatively stable, declined slightly in Lebanon, but grew dramatically in Turkey. In 2018, there were more than 3.5 million refugees in Turkey, nearly 1 million in Lebanon and more than a half million in Jordan. During the last 8 years, with some exceptions, all three countries have adopted a non-encampment policy. Consequently, living in and mixing with the native populations in various neighbourhoods, Syrian refugees have experienced a spontaneous integration process even though they have lived for the most part in very poor conditions. A precarious legal status, substandard housing, limited access to education and health services, and exploitation in the huge informal employment sector have conditioned life for Syrian refugees over the entire period.

In the early years of the Syrian conflict, the policies of the three main hosting countries asserted the temporariness of the refugees based on the presumption that the crisis would end, and the refugees would return home. The approach started to differ between and within countries as the years progressed. For instance, as a response to the protracted refugee situation, Turkey first tended to provide a legal ground for Syrians to be classified as "persons under temporary protection" and then circuitously accepted the likelihood that protracted displacement would turn into long-term settlement. The state even offered some naturalization opportunities to selected Syrians. Yet, since 2017, the official discourse and policy has increasingly emphasized the priority of return and the eventual repatriation of these refugees (Sert, 2019). In Lebanon, the generous reception policy in the early period of refugee flows changed and the government took decisive action for greater control over the presence of Syrians. In 2014, it adopted a clear and explicit policy goal of reducing the number of Syrians in Lebanon by limiting access to territory and encouraging return to Syria (Janmyr, 2016). Jordan has also retreated from relatively liberal policies towards Syrians, and closed its border citing an ongoing security threat, after a car bomb attack in 2016. It also moved from a moderate policy concerning employment of Syrians to a strict one (Barbalet and Wake, 2017). Over time, it would appear government and society in all three countries have felt the increasing weight of hosting large numbers of refugees. This has triggered a radical shift from an initial open-door policy to a feeling of saturation leading to a stricter political stance. In this climate, and after developed countries failed to assume any real responsibility for burden-sharing, the major hosting countries begun to foreground the issue of return, or repatriation. However, this is a trend not only in the main hosting countries in the Middle East; it is also increasingly visible in Europe.

It is within this setting that we observe not insignificant change over time. *First*, the nature of flows has changed – we have seen an increase in the overall numbers and also a shift in the vectors of impact. The flows now affect not only the region in which they emerge but extend beyond, from immediate neighbours to continents and then the entire world, through spill-over effects that eventually reaches transnational scope. At the same time, alteration of status from temporariness to

permanence complicates the three policy options of return, resettlement and integration. *Second*, the international protection regime must adapt, because it is having a hard time addressing the challenges raised by the aforementioned changes that themselves have, in places, affected entire political systems. Within all the change, one thing remains constant – continuing uncertainty. There are considerable variations in how the lives of refugees are directed and manipulated by the current international and national refugee protection regimes, and how their lives are subject to a state of "permanent temporariness" (Icduygu, 2018).

The first set of articles in this issue focuses on the policies and practices of hosting states. These works highlight the changing strategies of states concerning reception, protection and integration in the face of the various challenges that arise when migration issues accumulate. These articles demonstrate that states are more than willing and able to shift policy – sometimes dramatically – when the challenges mount up. For example, Carpi and Şenoğuz examine the hospitality provided to Syrian refugees during the refugee crisis between 2011 and 2016 in the border areas of Gaziantep (southeastern Turkey) and the Akkar region (northern Lebanon). The authors demonstrate how hospitality, apart from being a cultural value and societal response to the protracted refugee influx, is used as a discursive strategy of socio-spatial control by humanitarian agencies and local and national authorities. Similarly, focusing on Sultanbeyli, a peripheral district of Istanbul, Danış and Nazlı analyse the reception practices of civil society organizations and their relationship with state agencies. The authors contend that the reception of Syrian refugees is undertaken by a "faithful" alliance between the state and certain NGOs, a partnership where civil society assumes a supporting role to the state in refugee reception.

The next three articles focus on the spillover effects of migration. In their respective pieces, Tsitselikis and Lehner offer critical perspectives on the EU–Turkey common statement of March 2016. Each article in distinct ways challenges the series of Greece and EU policies and legal principles that have developed over time, including the controversial policy of "border externalization". In a similar vein, Gökalp-Aras analyses Turkey's use of Syrian mass migration as a foreign policy tool in the EU–Turkey relations. She argues that since mid-2015, Turkey, as an opportunistic coercive actor, has been using Syrian mass migration to gain valuable bargaining leverage over the EU. The articles indicate that, rather than bringing durable solutions to the lives of refugees, reception and protection policies have tended to make them more difficult and complicated, often serving states' interests and causing refugees to find their own ways to continue their journeys.

A similar trend is observable with regard to policies of integration. Taking up the condition of Syrian refugees who find themselves in an environment of uncertainty under a regime of "permanent temporariness", a third set of articles in this issue diligently documents how this environment creates a new and unprecedented setting for individuals and families on the move, confronting them with a series of challenges never before encountered. These challenges are not only material, but also psychological. To illustrate, Cantekin explores the difficulties experienced by Syrian refugees living in the camps of Turkey in pre-migration and post-migration environments and the impacts thereof on their mental well-being. She argues for a rights-based approach to policies and interventions for mental health and the psychosocial well-being of Syrian refugees. Cantekin's intervention is an important call for recognition that there is a need to go beyond humanitarian responses in policy-making.

Bucken-Knapp, Fakih and Spehar's article also makes an important intervention that underlines the continued need to explore the diversity of migrant experiences when assessing integration policies and programmes, rather than treating migrants and/or refugees as a single, homogenous group. Based on semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees in Sweden, they suggest that the quality of language training, the complexity of the validation process for educational qualifications and the lengthy administrative procedures constitute significant barriers to access for refugees trying to enter the Swedish labour market that is perceived differently, especially by those with differing levels of education.

Education emerges as an important sub-theme under integration policy. On a macro level, *Unutulmaz* discusses the transformation of Turkey's education policies towards Syrian refugees from early policies that aimed at temporary accommodation to later policies that have aimed at full integration. He argues that this needs to be understood as a changed vision of migration policy, different from the security-driven policies of the past. On a micro level, taking education as the most effective tool for migrant and refugee integration, Çelik and İçduygu introduce schooling options for Syrian children in Turkey. Through the analytical lens of institutional habitus, the authors draw on the accounts of parents to show how school types shape the experiences of students.

Another emerging sub-theme is transnationalism. Şimşek examines whether involvement in transnational activities hinders or supports the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey. She argues that Syrian refugees perceive integration as a survival mechanism and use transnational activities as a strategy for adapting to the new society, especially when they are faced with insecure legal status and a lack of access to rights in the receiving country. Thus, migrants/refugees are inclined to calculate the likely gains and losses of acting, or not acting, and their approach is often tactical, allowing them to end commitments without regret and to pursue new opportunities as and when they arise.

The last set of articles examines the ways in which migrants/refugees affect their surroundings. Focusing on public opinion concerning the naturalization policy for Syrians in Turkey through media coverage, Atasü-Topçuoğlu shows how current political polarization in Turkey affects the public's acceptance of Syrians and challenges Turkey's established migration policy, where each ideological stance accepts Syrians on a selective basis, implying that universal naturalization of Syrians is not welcome; but there seems to be consensus favouring naturalization according to socio-economic criteria. Similarly, looking at the uneven spread of Syrians in Turkey, who make up 4.42 per cent of the total population in the country as of February 2018, Fisunoğlu and Sert compare cities hosting few refugees (control group) with cities with large refugee populations (treatment group) to determine whether significant differences in voting patterns emerged among the Turkish electorate.

We believe that exploring the themes addressed in this Special Issue is imperative if we are to understand and explain the two concluding themes in the ongoing dynamics of mobility under dangerous and difficult conditions that extant international and national refugee regimes produce – the role/power of state institutions and the agency of the refugees. The majority of articles in this Special Issue came out of the 2nd Turkish-German Frontiers of Social Science Symposium (TUG-FOSS), entitled "Forced Migration: Structures, Actors, Processes," a joint undertaking of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Stiftung Mercator and Koç University. The conference took place from 24 to 27 November 2016 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany and brought together young researchers from different disciplines to discuss advances and opportunities in their respective fields along the common theme of forced migration. The additional papers were carefully selected by the editors so as not to damage the coherence among the symposium papers. Each of the articles has undergone a rigorous peer review process to maintain the high academic standards of *International Migration*. We thank the reviewers for their valuable comments in this process. We also wish to thank the journal's chief editor, Prof. Howard Duncan, for his close and professional guidance.

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