



Editorial: Managing Forced Displacement: Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

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Keywords: refugee resettlement, refugees, vulnerability, forced migration, sponsorship, complementary pathways

Editorial on the Research Topic

Managing Forced Displacement: Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

Refugee resettlement aims to offer refugees long-term protection in countries who voluntarily commit to the admission of refugees yet select refugees for admission in function of specific selection criteria. Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has emphasized that vulnerability be the most important resettlement criterion, alongside with the absence of possibility for refugees to safely return to their countries of origin or to integrate locally in their first country of asylum. Focusing on vulnerability, UNHCR recommends “traditional” resettlement for <10% of refugees worldwide – and eventually <1% have, for years, been resettled. Alongside resettlement, recent international initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees have promoted the expansion of “complementary pathways” in which refugees are resettled on the basis of other selection criteria such as education and skills, and where non-state actors are also strongly involved in the resettlement process. Several countries and actors have in the last decade become involved in such schemes. In this edited collection, emerging and established scholars offer insights into resettlement and complementary pathways from their design and their implementation in global and local perspective, focusing on countries in which refugees are selected for resettlement, to the processing at work during resettlement schemes, to the participation of resettled refugees in resettling states.

Welfens and Bekyol investigate how vulnerability is defined in resettlement and humanitarian programs under the EU-Turkey statement and focus on Germany as an admission country. Drawing on document analysis and original fieldwork insights, they show that vulnerability as a policy category designates some social groups as more vulnerable than others, rather than accounting for contingent reasons of vulnerability. In policy documents, the operational definition of vulnerability and its relation to other criteria remain largely undefined. In selection practices, additional criteria curtail a purely vulnerability-based selection. These criteria exacerbate existing or create new vulnerabilities. Welfens and Bekyol conclude that, in the absence of clear definitions, resettlement and humanitarian admission programs’ declared focus on the most vulnerable remains a discretionary promise, with limited possibilities of political and legal scrutiny.

In this context, some actors have more power than others. Schneider analyses refugee resettlement through the prism of multi-level governance and proposes a common terminology of all stages of the resettlement process. Highlighting the diversity of resettlement programs, her article relies on a comparative case study of the German resettlement and humanitarian admission programs from Jordan and Turkey and examines diverging objectives and interdependencies between resettlement stakeholders, such as UNHCR and resettlement countries. As a result, Schneider argues that the increasing emphasis on national selection criteria by resettlement

OPEN ACCESS

Edited and reviewed by:

Nergis Canefe,
York University, Canada

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Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Refugees and Conflict,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Human Dynamics

Received: 28 April 2022

Accepted: 31 May 2022

Published: 10 June 2022

Citation:

Garnier A and Hashimoto N (2022)
Editorial: Managing Forced
Displacement: Refugee Resettlement
and Complementary Pathways.
Front. Hum. Dyn. 4:931288.
doi: 10.3389/fhumd.2022.931288

countries, including Germany, puts resettlement countries more in the center of decision-making authority—in contrast to a diffusion of power that characterizes multi-level governance.

Emphasizing the agency of resettlement candidates in the West African context, Ménétrier presents the case of a group of African lesbian and gay refugees who hope for resettlement to the global North. Because their first country of asylum criminalizes homosexuality, local UNHCR agents conduct refugee status determination and resettlement procedures behind a veil of secrecy, at the risk of antagonizing their local partners and confusing aspiring refugees. Non-governmental organizations from the global North cooperate with local LGBT associations to relocate LGBT Africans out of the same African countries. Ménétrier shows African resettlement candidates' efforts to qualify for all these programs simultaneously, unaware of the mutually exclusive aspects of some; to become visible to institutions and “sponsors” they deem more powerful, at the expense of solidarity within their group.

Turning to global and national refugee politics, Thomson critically investigates the language of “burden-sharing” and its impact on resettlement candidates in Eastern Africa and resettled refugees in the US context. She shows that the language of burden-sharing endures at the global and national level despite its harmful potential as a state-driven concept. A prime example of this is former US president Trump's anti-immigration policies and rhetoric, which demonstrate how state attempts to lighten their burden have far-reaching effects, including long-lasting everyday burdens for refugees who have already been resettled. Long-term ethnographic research in refugee camps and with resettled refugees provides empirical evidence to engage in the critical policy analysis and discourse analysis of burden-sharing in this piece.

Korntheuer et al. highlight tensions between a focus on resettled refugees' vulnerability and their perception as “burdens”. Their paper explores emerging scholarship on integration and resettlement of refugees with disabilities in two of the top five resettlement countries in the world, Germany and Canada. Findings highlight three dominant themes: being a “burden” on society, being invisible, and agency and resistance. They show the importance of reshaping the policies, discourse and definition of integration, and the consequences this can have on research, service delivery, and evaluation of integration and resettlement.

Turning to the proliferation of complementary pathways, Tan maps out how European countries have recently adopted the community sponsorship model. His article puts forward four core elements for the model: shared responsibility; controlled arrival; additionality to resettlement; and retention of ultimate responsibility by governments. While engaging with the academic discussions on transnational policy transfer, the paper also sets out practical challenges for the future development

of community sponsorship, including the maintenance of protection and non-discrimination principles; the question of the additionality; the question of bottom-up or top-down; and efficiency.

The sustainability of complementary pathways is at the core of Hyndman et al. paper, who focus on the endurance of Canada's private refugee sponsorship program over decades. Based on interviews with long-term sponsors, key informants, and other community leaders, the authors argue that private refugee sponsorship is a way of connecting local community actions to global politics of injustice and displacement. Furthermore, refugee newcomers in Canada become part of the communities and society in which they stay. Having left family members behind in refugee camps and cities of refuge, many become sponsors themselves. This phenomenon of “family linked” sponsorship is a defining and sustaining feature of the program, motivating family members in Canada to team up with seasoned sponsors to “do more”.

Common themes run through the seven articles of this collection. Authors offer insight into the proliferation of actors in refugee resettlement; how resettlement actors, including refugees, define “vulnerability”; tensions between resettlement's focus on the vulnerable and the portrayal of resettled refugees as a burden; and how various actors including resettled refugees can develop and sustain community sponsorship, the most established “complementary pathway” of refugee admission. These insights are critical as refugee resettlement, after years of decline because of the COVID pandemic, is expanding again, partly due to the dramatic events unfolding in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AG and NH contributed equally to the drafting and writing of the editorial. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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