

## Panel 13: **Syrians and Policies On the Move: Middle East to Europe**

Thursday 17, 14-16, Aula A8

Convenors: **Tuba Bircan** (HIVA – KULeuven), **Ulaş Sunata** (Bahçeşehir University)

Discussant: **Pinar Senoguz** (Gaziantep University, Turkey)

In the last months political agendas densely populated with Syrian refugees knocking the doors of Europe. Syrian crisis is about to reach its fifth year and no end to foresee yet. Since the outbreak of the crisis in March 2011, almost half of the Syrian population (around 8 million) has been forced to leave all their belongings and their homeland (UNHCR, 2014). Over 40% of these refugees have sought a remedy in neighbouring countries. Ongoing crisis and hence the instability in the region forced Syrians to turn to Europe for protection. Despite of different strategies and approaches from different European countries, under a EU rule called the Dublin Regulation, refugees are supposed to stay in the first European country they arrive in until their asylum claims are processed. However, European governments have restricted legal passage to those fleeing from war. Although mark of good will for Syrian refugees exists among EU countries and some other Western actors, the refugee influx has mainly been seen a temporary emergency. Instead, international arena should recognize the transition of Syrian refugees challenge from a short-term regional issue to long-term international concern that deserves a coordinated human focused answer. Particularly starting from 2014 and accelerating during the year 2015, with the preminent growth of refugee flows throughout Europe public debate on their equitable distribution that challenges social cohesion within European countries, regions, municipalities and neighborhoods has escalated. The objective of the panel session is to deal with the evolution, current situation and latest developments in the field of Syrian refugee migration to Europe and national and international socioeconomic and policy responses. For this panel session, we would like to invite contributions that address local and regional experiences, historical overviews and comparison, cross-national comparisons of Syrian refugee flows, public and policy discourses and responses. Papers may provide for conceptual issues, case studies or preliminary results from ongoing research on the topic.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Katharina Lenner** (European University Institute), *The evolution of refugee policies in Jordan*

This paper analyses how policies relating to the Syrian refugee crisis have evolved in Jordan – the country that, along with Lebanon, hosts the largest Syrian refugee population in relation to the overall population. Relating current projects of governance to Jordan's previous experiences with refugee influxes, it seeks to extrapolate the major characteristics and fault lines of the evolving refugee response in the country. The paper argues that these particularly relate to: 1) patterns of international assistance and the expectation thereof; 2) the aversion towards the economic and social integration of the newcomers to the country; and 3) security concerns. The paper, cognizant of the multiplicity of actors involved, looks at how these factors have played into the institutional structure of the refugee response, the

ways in which Syrian refugees are counted, and the shaping of labour regulations. Finally, the paper analyses how policy changes in Jordan connect with the flow of refugees to Europe, i.e. how they have shaped migration trends to Europe and been shaped by them.

2) **Lieselot Vanduynslager** (KULeuven), *Recent refugee policy measures in Brazil responding to Syrians on the move*

Fleeing from the Syrian crisis originated in 2011, almost half of the Syrian population is on the move. With eyes on Europe, most of them arrive in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon and many continue dangerous journeys to Europe. Much more distant, Brazil is also becoming an emerging transit and destination country for people affected by the Syrian crisis, linking up with a strong Lebanese-Syrian migration tradition in the country. Even though the number of 2100 recognized Syrian refugees is still limited – however more than some European countries –, Brazil has been taking a proactive role in the region and beyond. In 2013, it has adopted a Resolution that enables Syrians in the Middle East to issue a special visa to travel to Brazil, where they can apply for asylum. An ‘open-door’ policy unique in its kind, that has been welcomed and recognized by the international community. This article gives an overview of the recent influx of Syrians in Brazil and aims to analyse the evolution of refugee policies and specific measures undertaken for Syrian refugees within a regional perspective.

3) **Ulaş Sunata** (Behçeşehir University), *Turkish Migration Policy towards Syrian Asylum Seekers*

Refugee crisis was the most critical title of the global political agenda in 2015 and it looks like it will continue to do so in the near future, particularly for Turkey. Known as the traditional sending one, especially for Europe; Turkey suddenly became the world’s biggest receiving country of refugees by year 2015. The Syrian crisis and Turkish open border policy are the main reasons behind the boom in the size of refugee population in Turkey. Except Syrians, there are refugees in Turkey from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Somali, Myanmar, and Pakistan. Although Turkey has welcomed the enormous size of refugees, its registration system caught unaware and its legal regulation remained highly controversial. According to the geographical restriction in the law, non-Europeans cannot be accepted as refugee in Turkey. Hence, Turkey has validly accepted asylum seekers in the name of international protection. Regarding the mass influx, Syrian refugees have however a specific condition called “temporary protection status” among all other non-European asylum seekers. The ambiguity of their legal status and the obscurity in the real numbers has brought complicated consequences.

4) **Tuba Bircan** (KULeuven), *Refugee policies in Belgium before and after Syrian Crisis*

Repression followed by Syrian crisis has led to a tide of more than 4,6 million Syrians fleeing to other countries, more than 1 million of whom seeking safe haven in Europe. These numbers are on a continuous rise. Only in 2015, there were 35,451 asylum applications in Belgium, when the number in 2014 was 17,213. The refugee crisis has had a powerful effect

on the Belgian public, and citizens and Civil Platform engaged in helping hundreds of refugees arriving in Brussels. However, citizens and the associations are overwhelmed as they feel the government is dragging its feet and they think that the Belgian government should take greater responsibility for the humanitarian crisis. Associations are even threatening to file a complaint with the European Commission if political leaders do nothing to speed up the registration of asylum seekers. This paper aims to examine the acclimatization of the Belgian asylum policy to the refugee influx in the last years, especially after the acceleration of conflicts in Syria and the widening impact of ISIS in the region. The question of the study is: What are the adaptations and reforms in Belgian asylum legislation since the beginnings of 90s considering the nexus of contemporary refugee flows?

- 5) **Stefania Panebianco** (University of Catania), **Iole Fontana** (University of Catania), ***The EU and the Syrian crisis: reframing EU migration and asylum policies as an instrument of R2P (?)***

This paper addresses the EU implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle in the Syrian crisis. By adopting a broad definition of the Syrian crisis –which comprises both the escalation yielding to civil war and the following refugee crisis- this paper focuses on: (1) the implementation of R2P in both EU discourses and response; (2) the changed international attitude towards R2P after the armed intervention in Libya and the way how the EU framed and implemented R2P accordingly. The paper argues that, whereas EU implementation of R2P was hampered by systemic constraints (such as the incapability of the international community to negotiate an agreement with Russia), the EU and its Member States can still take significant steps towards R2P for Syria by addressing the issue of refugees on the European territory. Yet, internal divisions and reluctance among Member States limit the application of R2P in this sense.