

Refugees in Europe:

How are psychologists responding?

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Outline

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Short bio

- Professor of psychology in Istanbul until April 2016, when he was fired infor having signed a peace manifesto.
- Banned from public service for life in February 2017.
- In exile since 2016 and has held visiting positions in Cairo, Macerata, Brussels and Frankfurt.
- Now in Athens.
- Outspoken advocate of children's rights - a Sunday column focused on children's issues in a daily newspaper in Turkey.
- Currently president of the *Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict & Violence (Peace Psychology)*.
- In the past, served as president of the *European Community Psychology Association*.

Definitions

Definition: Refugee

- A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (e.g., members of the LGBTQ community).
- The persecution a refugee experiences may include harassment, threats, abduction or torture.
- A refugee is often afforded some sort of legal protection, either by their host country's government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or both.

Definition: Asylum seeker

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has fled persecution in their home country and is seeking safe haven in a different country, but has not yet received any legal recognition or status.

In several countries, asylum seekers might be detained while waiting for their case to be heard.

In Germany, for instance, an asylum seeker is sent to a camp until a decision is made.

Definition: Migrant

A **migrant** is a person who *chooses* to leave his/her home for any variety of reasons, but not necessarily because of a direct threat of persecution or death.

Migrant is an umbrella category that can include refugees but can also include people moving to improve their lives by finding work or education, those seeking family reunion and others.

Definition: Internally displaced person

An **internally displaced person (IDP)** is a person who fled his/her home but has not crossed an international border to find sanctuary.

Even if they fled for reasons similar to those driving refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight.

Which term to use?

- A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (e.g., members of the LGBTQ community).
- Displaced person – neutral?
- Migrant – more popular
- Asylum seeker
- Recognized refugee

The Scale?

Scale is astounding

- The flow of refugees from Syria via Turkey to Greece is a case in point.
- In 2015 alone, over **800,000** people crossed by boat from Turkey to islands of Greece.
- Most of them were from Syria.
- Over 44,000 have made the journey in less than a month in 2016.
- Many were less fortunate and could not complete their journey: About 160 women, men, and children died in the Aegean Sea again in less than a month in 2016.
- The fate of refugees on boats led to an outcry in 2015 only after photos of a drowned young child was on front pages.

Turkey – between Syrian & Greece



September 2015

- 22 boats in arrived in Skala Sykaminia in one hour.
- Each boat had 40-60 people.
- Quick calculation: 50 per boat.
- Total 1000 people arrived in one hour.
- Each person paid, on average, \$1000.
- A transaction of \$1.000.000 in one hour.

Response from psychologists

since 2015

Response to traumatic events

"If a person has left the country because, for example, they were jailed and tortured and then during their journey they get mistreated by smugglers or the authorities in the countries of transit and then they're forced to live under conditions reminiscent of jails here in Greece, under really shocking conditions; you can imagine that by the time they come to me for help their condition is completely awful."

Grigoris Kavarnos, clinical psychologist
Doctors Without Borders (MSF), March 2018

Vulnerability Assessment

Refugees, asylum-seekers, trafficked persons, stateless persons, irregular migrants and other non-nationals without legal status often experience situations of vulnerability – they are often exposed to heightened risks of harm and require special care, support and protection.

Vulnerability Assessment

Psychologists identify situations of vulnerability so as to inform a range of decisions around the person such as those related to the most appropriate placement and support options in the individual case.

This aims to encourage early intervention, effective care of individuals in need, and partnerships with community services. Further, it aims to reduce the presumption of detention and to encourage a consideration of placement options starting with **the least restriction on liberty and freedom of movement.**

Moria is in a state of emergency

I have worked for 14 years as a clinical psychiatrist in the Mental Health Department of Trieste in Italy. I'm considered an expert on psychiatric emergencies and I work with people who have addiction and psychiatric comorbidities. I treat people who have been victims of human trafficking, I provide mental health support for refugees and people in prison, and advise on protection and social recovery programmes. (...)

Moria is in a state of emergency

In all of my years of medical practice, I **have never witnessed such overwhelming numbers of people suffering** from serious mental health conditions, as I am witnessing now amongst refugees on the island of Lesbos. The vast majority of people I see are presenting with psychotic symptoms, suicidal thoughts – even attempts at suicide – and are confused. Many are unable to meet or perform even their most basic everyday functions, such as sleeping, eating well, maintaining personal hygiene, and communicating.

Moria camp, in Lesvos, has **a maximum capacity of 3,100 people**, but is bursting at the seams, **with over 9,000 people**. A third of them are children, living in appalling conditions, which are contributing to a considerable deterioration of their physical and mental health.

Dr. Alessandro Barberio, MSF clinical psychiatrist, 2018

Adjustment

- Many psychologists work for NGOs.
- These NGOs offer psychological services in order to:
 - 1) help the refugees adjust to their new and often difficult situations,
 - 2) destigmatize psychological services in general.

Efi Latsoudi

PIKPA camp, Lesvos



PIKPA village, Lesvos

PIKPA is a former residential holiday center that now offers temporary shelter to vulnerable refugees. PIKPA volunteers offer access to medical care, education, legal assistance, food, clothes and, crucially, a sense of dignity and respect.

Efi Latsoudi (48) has been helping most vulnerable refugees – children, pregnant women and people with disabilities – find sanctuary since 2012. At the height of the refugee influx in 2015, her volunteer-run initiative became a lifeline for thousands.

“2015 was overwhelming,” recalls Latsoudi. *“It was one incident after another. We did a lot of work and we covered a lot of gaps. After that, the authorities understood that they needed to do something.”*

Efi Latsoudi was one of two winners of the 2016 Nansen Refugee Award for her extraordinary efforts.

An example from Milano

Action-research on the socio-spatial dimensions of centers for refugees and asylum seekers, aimed at transforming interior spaces according to the needs of their inhabitants. (*Università degli Studi di Milano, Department of Cultural Heritage and Environment, Social & Environmental Psychology*).

The project is fully described in the following publication:
<http://aadr.info/design-research-on-temporary-homes/>.

#UniversitatRefugi

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Three years after the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean began, marked by public outrage at the image of little Aylan on a Turkish beach, the UOC reviews the initiatives undertaken to become a **#UniversitatRefugi**, committed to human rights and social justice.

#UniversitatRefugi

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

With its e-learning model, the UOC has been able to reach **people who are in transit, who have not yet arrived to our country or who are trapped in refugee camps beyond our borders, but also those who live here and have not had the chance to resume or start their university studies.**

In February 2016, the UOC opened the **Refugee Welcome Programme**, which consists of offering scholarships to study languages, one of the biggest obstacles in gaining admission to university, and postgraduate specializations. With the slogan "The UOC welcomes", the members of the UOC community (students, faculty and administrative staff) have offered **voluntary mentoring service** to student refugees throughout the academic the year and special tutoring classrooms that cater for these people's specific needs.

Psychology students, too!

At present, only 1% of refugees have access to higher education, a fundamental right that gives these people more tools to start a new life or to help rebuild or improve their home countries.

"I have been able to mentor a student from Senegal who has managed to complete his studies and who now has the possibility of finding work. That, in itself, is reward enough for me." (Encarna Hernández, psychology student)

Psychology students, too!

"Education is a basic need that must be fulfilled and everyone should have access to it". Núria de la Maza (psychology student) thinks that studying helps refugees adapt to the society where they will now live, which is very different from the society they have lived in until now. Equal opportunities, inclusion and culture would be essential concepts in this context.

Psychology as a helping profession

The critical question is:

Who gets helped?

Who receives the help?

- Citizens who come to a public facility (e.g., public hospital)
- Clients – who pay from their own pocket
- Private business employees – their employer pays.
- Military has psychologists and can send them wherever the soldiers are sent to.
- Refugees are not considered citizens. They are not considered part of the public, if they do not have documents. They cannot pay for professional services.
- This is why NGOs are important: NGOs work with refugees and psychologists work in NGOs.

To conclude:

More, much more is needed

Some examples

Too slow to respond

Psychologists in Europe are not good at responding quickly.

The EU is also not good at responding quickly. In Summer 2015, when thousands of refugees were arriving in Lesvos and other islands every day, the EU did nothing to assist.

Similarly, there were perhaps only 5 psychologists in Lesvos in Summer 2015.

The lesson is simple: If psychologists follow the “public service model”, they may not be able to respond quickly.

If psychologists follow the business model (i.e., private practice), they can never respond until there is money to be gained.

The lessons are the same the lessons that were learned in Turkey in 1999, after a major earthquake devastated cities.

Too silent

Psychologists need to take the threat seriously.

The threat is obvious: Far-right groups and parties always use refugees as scapegoats.

If psychologists remain silent, the right-wing propaganda works far more easily.

Prevent displacement; promote world peace now!

- No mass disorder afflicting humankind has ever been brought under control or **eliminated** by attempts at treating the afflicted individual nor by training large numbers of therapists... this is the essence, the whole spirit of public health (George Albee, 1985).

Prevent war

Militarism leads to wars. Many may think the war is in far away lands, as in the case of Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and therefore not so important. But wars mean not only mass suffering but also mass displacement. Wars lead to “refugee crises”.

Prevent war

Militarism also leads to a weapons industry, which always needs wars, away or at home, to make profits.

When militarism prevails in government, academic freedom is bound to disappear. Academic psychologists have to take peace seriously for the sake of their very profession and for the sake of universities.

Militarism is now clearly linked to **extinction**:
Nuclear annihilation (quick) and **climate change** (gradual).

Thanks !

Teşekkürler !

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