

# Mixed Migration Flows and the Changing Dynamics of Migration Research

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This issue features a selection of papers presented at the international workshop titled “Mixed Migration Flows and the Changing Dynamics of Migration Research” which was held in Istanbul on December 15, 2018 as the first activity of an international workshop series on mixed migration flows and trends. The aim of the workshop was to bring together researchers and practitioners from Turkey and abroad to discuss and “challenge current conceptualizations of forced and voluntary migration and to explore new conceptualizations and approaches with a view to grasp the complexity of mixed flows.”<sup>1</sup> As members of the organizing committee, we decided it was quite timely to focus on mixed migration flows and provide a venue for the expression and discussion of multi-disciplinary insights and approaches to this theme. We therefore invited researchers to submit theoretical and empirical papers with a view “to question policy categories that are assumed to be fixed and natural and discuss new ways of analyzing migratory processes.”<sup>2</sup>

The main focus of the workshop was on the state of the art of migration research as well as the conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues and key concepts and categorizations in this field. However, we also received very interesting papers on the policy dimension, which prompted us to include an additional session about this specific issue. Therefore, the workshop was composed of four very lively and participatory sessions on concepts and categories, new perspectives and methodologies in migration research, the politics of othering and policy responses to mixed migration flows.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the workshop participants who contributed to a very vigorous and interesting debate with their fruitful comments. I would like to extend my gratitude to each and every member of the organizing committee for their valuable contributions, from the selection

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of the papers to be presented at the workshop to steering the debates during the workshop. Finally, I would like to thank the contributors to this issue, who devoted so much of their time and effort to help create this collection of articles.

## Mixed Migration Flows

Since the early 1990s, two new conceptualizations have emerged on the changing nature of migration: the *migration-asylum nexus* and *mixed migration*, which attest to the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish factors conducive to voluntary migration from factors leading to forced displacement. As a consequence, it is becoming harder to differentiate refugees from labor migrants, and migratory flows are becoming increasingly mixed and highly complex.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of the growing extent and salience of mixed flows—complex population flows consisting of voluntary and forced migrants—it is becoming extremely difficult to identify the underlying causes of human mobility and decide whether people are fleeing poverty, environmental degradation, persecution, gender inequality, conflict and/or generalized violence, and whether people move with the motivation to find jobs, to join their families abroad, to fulfill individual aspirations or a combination of some or all of these motivations. Different categories of “people on the move” are composed of irregular or transit migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, students, return migrants and unaccompanied minors traveling together irregularly with mixed motivations; they use the same vehicles or similar means and routes, have similar needs, resort to human smugglers and may become victims of human trafficking, wait in transit countries and find themselves exposed to multiple rights violations along the way.<sup>5</sup> Being on the move in irregular flows or in transit entails mobility as well as immobility, pauses and periods of waiting in transit countries to make or revise decisions about the routes and destinations as a response to shifting policies, establish connections with human smugglers or save some money to continue travelling. Therefore, mobility as well as waiting are part of these flows.<sup>6</sup> From the decision-making phase to all of the other stages of these flows, informal migrant networks play a very significant role in terms of providing information about the routes, destination countries and monetary or other means of support.<sup>7</sup> Despite having different legal statuses, those who travel together are exposed to similar risks and “protections deficits.”<sup>8</sup> In brief, mixed migration flows are of a heterogeneous and irregular nature in all of the phases of the migration journey, encompassing different sorts of cross-border movements (long-term, temporary, transit, circular,

chain and return migration), composed of people on the move with different legal statuses and rights and belonging to various categories.<sup>9</sup>

It has to be questioned why and how migration flows have become more complex and mixed. As Richmond argues, human mobility is a response to growing inequality with the transformation of the global economy. Therefore, economic factors affecting migration patterns and flows cannot be fully understood without taking the socio-political context into consideration,<sup>10</sup> or how the world economy and politics are transformed within the context of neoliberal globalization. Voluntary or forced, migration is part and parcel of the restructuring of the global capitalist economy.<sup>11</sup> Dispossession, displacement and deepening inequality force people out of their homelands in the Global South and move them toward the Global North, which is dependent on a cheap and disposable migrant labor force. Growing irregular migration is an end result of the transition to flexible production and informalization. Refugee crises and flows similarly cannot be understood aloof from developments or trends in the global economy, power asymmetries in the international arena or clashes of interests among nation-states as well as non-state actors such as transnational corporations. Therefore, the refugee crises in the Middle East, Asia or Africa cannot be solely conceived as isolated events that erupt due to conflicts in the region. As Zolberg et al. argue, societies that are highly interconnected through transnational ties, and refugee crises and flows are not random events but are instead very profoundly connected and shaped by a series of political and economic transformations.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, factors conducive to the growth of irregular migration within the context of neoliberal globalization also affect forced displacement and refugee flows.<sup>13</sup>

In different parts of the world we see the emergence of mixed migration flows as a response to growing inequality, poverty, climate change, development-induced displacement and/or conflict-ridden displacement passing through, affecting and connecting several countries to each other and to the destination country. Mixed migration flows originate in the Euro-Mediterranean region, including the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and Asia.<sup>14</sup> As Gosh argues, all of these different flows in several parts of the world have distinctive features. For instance, mixed migration flows from Zimbabwe to South Africa emerged as a consequence of economic crisis, torture, dispossession, limitations on access to basic food items as a result of land reform and the political violence conducted by the Mugabe regime against its political opponents. Hyper-inflation and rising unemployment were very much related and intermingled with political factors and gave rise to mixed flows.<sup>15</sup> Mixed flows may originate in different places, but they are

somehow linked and have certain common characteristics that allow us to identify them as mixed migration flows: generalized violence, persecution, insecurity, exacerbation of geopolitical rivalries and growing poverty.<sup>16</sup>

While many on the move may reach the destination countries, these are very dangerous journeys, exposing people running away from violence to different sorts of risks and violence on the way. Within these flows people move or wait but also die, disappear, or fall victim to trafficking,<sup>17</sup> sexual harassment and/or torture. As they arrive in the destination countries, migrants and refugees are exposed to different sorts of risks, including exploitation and discrimination. The process of dispossession that displaced people from their home country accelerates the process of their precarization in the receiving country. Migrants with no social or legal protection or bargaining power do not have any alternative but to agree to work in 3D-jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) and lead precarious lives. The migrant precariat, subject to racial, ethnic and/or gender-based discrimination, is left without any means to organize against capitalism.

Given the complexity of the issue, developing effective policy responses becomes a very difficult task. Mixed migration flows pose very significant challenges to policymakers and state authorities, particularly in the receiving and transit countries, in terms of migration management and adjusting the tools at their disposal to address different categories of people while seeking to control their borders. As many governments opt to enforce restrictive measures at their borders or in their territory against mixed flows, this increases the human cost of mixed migration flows.

## Overview of the Articles

Turkey as a destination and transit country is directly affected by mixed migration flows, which was a significant reason behind the definition of the workshop and the special issue theme. In the last three decades, Turkey has experienced a migration transition from being a predominantly migrant-sending country to being a transit and immigration country for irregular migrants originating from its neighboring regions. Furthermore, Turkey is currently hosting the largest refugee population in the world, mainly of Syrian origin, but also including Iraqis, Afghans and many others. Turkey is also one of the main recipients of asylum applications.

Turkey's EU bid has also turned it into a very important transit as well as destination country for mixed migration flows. Ever more restrictive barriers in the way of irregular migrants and refugees arriving through mixed flows

seeking entry to Europe have led to a growing emphasis on readmission agreements, efforts to deflect asylum-seekers to “safe third” countries or return them to safe countries of origin and even offer them an internal flight alternative.<sup>18</sup> As Gamze Ovacık argues in her article on the safe third country concept, the term emerged to describe a way to control and limit the movement of asylum-seekers and to provide a “solution” to “asylum shopping.” As a country directly affected by mixed migration flows *en route* to Europe and having signed a readmission agreement with the EU in 2013 and a refugee deal in March 2016, Turkey faces the challenge of dealing with safe third country transfers. Ovacık discusses the emergence and evolution of the safe third country concept within the context of mixed migration flows and with reference to Turkey’s experience as a safe third country with respect to the EU countries.

The mixed flows that affect Turkey originate from or pass through the Mediterranean and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Voluntary migration and forced displacement are not new to the Mediterranean. However, in recent years the composition, motivations, characteristics, routes and modes of travel of these flows have become highly complex and mixed.<sup>19</sup> Europe has been the target of these flows; however, since 2015 ongoing mixed migration flows have gained visibility, as between January 2015 and January 2016, 1.2 million people moved from “politically and militarily fractured” Syria, Iraq, Libya<sup>20</sup> as well as Pakistan, Afghanistan and different parts of Africa to Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Forced displacement is not also a new phenomenon in the MENA region. As Dawn Chatty argues, displacement and dispossession are part of the history and current affairs of the region.<sup>22</sup> However, in migration theorizing as well as in forced migration studies the region has been under-represented until recently. Based on a systematic analysis of three migration studies journals over the last two years—the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and the *Journal of Comparative Migration Research*—and interviews with scholars conducting comparative migration research in the MENA region, Zeynep Şahin-Mecütek seeks to address an essential gap in the literature on comparative migration research in the MENA region by focusing on the refugee policies of certain countries, namely Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Comparison of the refugee policies of certain countries in the region subject to same mixed migration flows during the same time period allows us to better understand the impact of these flows in origin-transit-receiving countries and account for changing patterns of migration and policy responses in order to better manage mass refugee flows. This research

endeavor therefore provides guidance and insights to researchers engaged in comparative research.

Another important contribution to scholarship on the MENA region is the article contributed by Mohammed Ouhemou and Mohamed El Amine Moumine, who discuss the evolution of migration policies within the broader context of the political and economic transformations shaping the MENA region, as well as country-specific political and economic concerns and interests. The article compares the migration policies and regulations adopted in the past as well as current policy responses to mixed flows adopted throughout the region. It is possible to see the changing patterns of migration and the composition of the migrant population over the years, as a result of which North African countries have gone through migration transition and become countries of transit and destination. As the authors note, despite the common challenges of the countries in the region, particularly the North African subregion, they have adopted different policy responses, over a range of more accommodative and pragmatic to exclusionary and securitizing approaches. The article also reveals how EU migration policymaking impacts regional migration policies as well as patterns, particularly in North Africa.

While mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean have been the focus of global attention, another major mixed migration flow that gained visibility from 2015 onward is the Central American caravan to the U.S. Migration from Central America to the U.S. through Mexico is not a new phenomenon. However, in recent years migration has grown considerably. Flows from Central America (mainly from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) passing through Mexico and reaching the U.S. have grown to be highly complex over the years. Between 1980 and 2005, migration from Central America to the U.S. increased ten times and reached 3,385,000.<sup>23</sup> Since 2015, the mixed nature of these flows has become more visible, with caravans composed of irregular, transit and return migrants; asylum-seekers; women and families running away from violence or poverty and unaccompanied minors seeking to join their family members in the U.S.<sup>24</sup> In 2015, the number of mixed migrants heading toward the U.S. reached up to 417,000 people.<sup>25</sup> Growing rural poverty linked to climate change is one of the main factors behind the rising levels of emigration.<sup>26</sup>

Mixed flows also reveal the limited state capacity of the origin or transit countries in coping with the effects of climate change, growing poverty, crime and violence. Those fleeing poverty or violence back home are exposed to

many risks throughout the journey as they pass through transit countries; these risks lead them to change routes in order to avoid being kidnapped, assaulted or killed at the hands of gangs. Unaccompanied children, particularly girls, constitute the most vulnerable members of the caravans.<sup>27</sup> As the caravans reach the U.S. border, it is hard to say that they reach the safety and security they are seeking or find refuge from the violence and hardships they are fleeing. This takes us to the policy responses of the U.S. authorities to the mixed flows.

President Trump, starting with his election campaign, approached the migration issue with a securitizing logic; during his presidency he has sought to establish stricter standards for legal and irregular migration. During his election campaign he promised to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexican border to stem mixed migration flows. Facing resistance, he threatened to call a national emergency to fund the building of the wall.<sup>28</sup> In this special issue, Hugh Hutchison compares the Trump administration's stance on migration with that of the Obama administration, seeking to trace the continuity and change in U.S. policy-making on migration. Hutchison was not one of the workshop participants, but we believe it is important to provide the reader with the opportunity to evaluate factors conducive to the emergence and evolution of mixed flows in different parts of the world. Hutchison's article discusses the nature and composition of the flows and evaluates the U.S. policy responses to these flows under both Democratic and Republican presidents. As Hutchinson concludes, despite Trump's harsh rhetoric on migration, we see a significant continuity in his approach rather than a rupture. It would not be wrong to argue that the decisions and actions of the previous administration paved the way for the current measures taken by the Trump administration. Hutchinson particularly elaborates on the treatment of migrants as they reach the U.S., and discusses detentions, returns and deportations under the Obama and Trump administrations.

One of the main concerns regarding mixed migration flows is providing protection for vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children. Many of the refugees travelling in these flows do not have access to protection and they are exposed to different sorts of risks throughout the journey. The securitization of mixed flows lead to the erosion of the rights of refugees; they receive a "less friendly welcome" or face pressures to return to their countries of origin in the countries where they are seeking refuge.<sup>29</sup> It is possible to talk about the rise of an anti-refugee sentiment worldwide, particularly in the Global North, but also in refugee hosting states in the Global South, especially due to the protraction of the refugee crisis. In

such a context, how refugees are represented becomes highly important. In her review article, Müzeyyen Pandir seeks to address how the mainstream media's portrayals of refugees affect their life chances and experiences by shaping perceptions of refugee identities; Pandir reveals how the media fails to fulfil its duty to inform the public, accurately portray migration-related issues and avoid stereotyping migrants and refugees. The media's framing of migration as a problem has implications for social cohesion and social conflict. The dehumanization of refugees by the media functions to shape public and elite views and attitudes and feeds into public fear and anxiety about migration, thus potentially leading to further resentment against refugees and creating more hardships for them to endure.<sup>30</sup> As misrepresentation of refugees leads to social exclusion, marginalization and otherization of refugees, the article elaborates upon two alternative representation strategies, namely empathizing with refugees and rights-based journalism to deconstruct dominant misrepresentations and open up room for the accurate portrayal of refugees.

To better understand the experiences of migrants, refugees and unaccompanied children there is a need to look beyond the statistical figures, state policies or structural factors. This is one of the shortcomings of the IR literature on migration. The voices of migrants and refugees and thus the accounts of their experiences are not heard or are silenced on the macro level of analysis. Dialogue across disciplines may introduce such voices. Leyla Savsar, in her article on children's literature and its representation of refugee children, questions to what extent children's literature reiterates conventional portrayals or even misrepresentations of refugee children and to what extent it challenges them. Drawing on postcolonial studies and narratives of settlement, Savsar seeks to answer whether children's literature and their narratives could be used to criticize and challenge dominant ideas, ideologies and narratives about refugeehood, homelessness and identity, as well as the unequal global order and power asymmetries in international relations that shape migration patterns and migrant experiences.

The six articles in this issue provide a very interesting sample of research and debate on mixed migration flows, aiming to contribute to our understanding of the changing nature of migration and migration research. We hope that the articles will stimulate debate on mixed migration research and inspire new workshops and research initiatives. This issue definitely reinforces our determination to organize the second workshop of the series. In the post-Covid-19 world, we hope to continue to critically engage the questions raised by these articles.

## Endnotes

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- 13 Richmond, “Sociological Theories of International Migration,” pp. 12–13.
- 14 Bimal Ghosh, *Refugee and Mixed Migration Flows: Managing a Looming Humanitarian and Economic Crisis*, Cham: Palgrave, 2018, p. 6.
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- 16 Gosh, *Refugee and Mixed Migration Flows*, pp. viii and 1.
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- 19 Ghosh, *Refugee and Mixed Migration Flows*, pp. 36–37.
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- 27 Gosh, *Refugee and Mixed Migration Flows*, pp. 168 and 172.
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