

PART I

Refugees in public policy and social representation

Introduction to Part I

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Refugees move across borders and seek safe havens while they escape armed conflict, persecution and violence. Refugees suffer social trauma while they are in transit and in places where they arrive. The plight of refugees is complex because they may suffer different forms of trauma where they arrive, all the while aiming to avoid the trauma in their homelands. The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol constitute the core international treaties for governing international protection. Around the world, 148 states are parties to either one or both of these international instruments. The legal and political framework for refugees is governed by international refugee law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. States, while committed to these treaties, are constrained by their own means for providing humanitarian assistance to the arriving refugees. Nonetheless, all states provide after the initial displacement health care, food, shelter, water and sanitation. Whether the refugees are received in accommodation centres or reside in urban areas, attending to their psychosocial needs or trauma-induced ailments comes only later on the agenda of public institutions, international organisations and NGOs. Host communities also suffer from a similar oversight of their needs caused by the presence of refugees in their daily lives. This part of the book seeks answers to the question to what extent, why and how do receiving states and communities address questions around public policy and social representation. In order to do so, the chapters in Part I review the international legislation, the unfolding of legislation on international protection as implementing psychosocial support services, the discourse around trauma and healing in refugee settings, the role of the media in covering the refugee crisis in Europe and its interaction with the implementation of policy initiatives in receiving societies. Part I concludes with a review of the workshop results on public policy and social representation.

In Chapter 1 on international protection and psychosocial support services, Ozcurumez examines the extent to which such support services are linked to socio-economic integration policies through a detailed account of Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. Ozcurumez explains the legal, administrative and institutional frameworks that support Syrians in Turkey and then discusses when and how mental health and psychosocial services became a focus for support providers. Central to the discussion on these services, Ozcurumez outlines current barriers to access, challenges to the Turkish medical system, and the shift from a perspective of temporary support to longer-term social cohesion.

Moving deeper into the subject of psychosocial support, in Chapter 2, Kumpfmüller explores the discourse around trauma and the challenges of justifying social and political trauma in a framework of supports that focuses on individual pathologies. Kumpfmüller shows that trauma occurring due to man-made or social and political events stems from a breach in the social contract. Social or political trauma, while not recognised as trauma clinically, requires that governments take social and political responsibility to find remedies.

Petrucci and Hamburger continue the discussion on trauma in Chapter 3 by examining the relevance of social trauma in relation to the legal definitions underlying refugee status. The chapter considers the clinical development of the definition of trauma with regard to its effects on the individual and society. The authors conclude that while individual trauma is not specified as a precondition for refugee status under the Geneva Convention, social trauma is still a key component in refugee status determination.

Chapter 4 by Jovičić introduces the role of visual representation of refugees in the media in Germany in 2015. Jovičić outlines how refugees were primarily depicted in large numbers, in despair, and with little material wealth or possessions, creating a singular discourse on poverty and destitution, laying out images of trauma for an audience. The discourse, however, is only as effective as it is shocking. Jovičić notes that images shown often desensitise an audience.

Two further chapters cover the role of media and the effects of reporting on public perception and refugee integration and access to services. In Chapter 5, Turudić examines the relationship between media, public perception and the policy process. Turudić explains that negative reporting on refugees in Serbia between 2011 and 2015 created a lack of public support for increasing necessary basic services for refugees. Additionally, accurate and supportive reporting, while published, had little effect on public perception after a negative tone had been set. In the Serbian case, as with other cases, the chapter shows how media affected public opinion which then formally and informally affected policy decision making. In Chapter 6, Radoja outlines the consequences of unchecked reporting by highlighting the reputation of media outlets and public trust, reinforcing the view that public perception is often shaped by media. In the case of Serbia, Radoja shows how media coverage of the most recent refugee influx in 2015 was heavily influenced by domestic politics. Radoja emphasises the central role of language in reporting and just how much “words matter”.

The summary on public policy and social representation (Chapter 7) includes notes from discussion at the expert workshop in Sarajevo entitled “Migration – Trauma in Transition. Exploring Socio-traumatic Roots of Dealing with Refugees”, 7–15 April 2017. The workshop included discussions focusing on the tensions between the varieties of individual experience and the more singular definitions utilised in public policy implementation. Experts discussed the challenges around the risks of creating a pathology of the traumatised refugee and the policy structures in first asylum and resettlement countries that aim to accommodate refugees who experienced traumatic events. Similarly, individual identity can be considered as complex and fluid, while states delivering public policy functionally consider people with more static identities such as nationality.

The discussion on public policy and social representation in migration in this part of the book asserts that there are gaps and tensions between facilitating support for the migrants’ needs and the legal and political framework informing public policy across different cases. While states seek to implement policies that alleviate the challenges experienced by migration at the individual, local and regional levels, domestic preferences and pre-existing institutions continue to shape the perspective from which those policies arise.

References

- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137. Retrieved on 13 February 2018 from www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10
- Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 606, p. 267. Retrieved on 20 January 2018 from <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201125/volume-1125-I-17512-English.pdf>