

Research Session 1: Refugees and global migration

Anselm Hager, SM Musa & Sandra Portocarrero
with Raphaëlle Thirion (practitioner)

The first session of HEC Paris' 2nd Inclusive Economy Day (2024) featured presentations by Anselm Hager, SM Musa and Sandra Portocarrero, as well as Raphaëlle Thirion (offering insights as a practitioner). Anselm, Musa and Sandra's research dealt with issues of dignity, economic mobility and integration. Research took place within challenging settings of humanitarian crisis which included: forced migration, life in refugee camps, and constant economic and social isolation. The works presented findings about how people operating in such desperate conditions are, however, able to adapt to the constraints of their environment, and to develop unique solutions. Raphaëlle Thirion also offered practitioner insights during the research session. Raphaëlle's work involves the task of reintegrating legal migrants into the French economy. So Raphaëlle outlined the myriad of social and economic issues that her organization (Humando) helps these migrants overcome.

Summaries of the presentations, insights and discussions generated are discussed below.

Paper 1: Impact of Forced Migration on In-Group and Out-Group Social Capital

Anselm Hager presented work on how migrants and local populations interact with each other in the context of North Lebanon. Anselm was interested in what efforts could be made to better facilitate prosocial behaviour and facilitate integration. Pro-social behaviour affects social capital and cohesion, and so in his study he wanted to test if exposure to migrants could enhance pro-social behaviour, or if it would degrade it.

Anselm performed a quasi-experiment in the context of North Lebanon. He administered a face-to-face survey with to estimate perceptions of Trust, Reciprocity, Altruism and Cooperation among Lebanese and Syrian inhabitants in the region. The survey involved a game where respondents would be able to hypothetically benefit an individual from another population group, including Syrians, Lebanese, or migrant Palestinians (refugees). As migrants are less likely to live in higher altitude neighbourhoods, this offered certain variation in regions where migrants would be located. Anselm used this variation to show that when respondents were living near refugee camps – these respondents would exhibit greater levels of prosocial behaviour. This was attributed to increased contact with refugees, which was hypothesized to increase pro-sociality towards refugees. Other aspects, such as a perceived cultural threat, and how resources might be negatively impacted through labor-market competition, however, were demonstrated to reduce pro-sociality. Anselm indeed found that these aspects affected pro-sociality in expected ways.

During the presentation, fellow researcher Dan Wang (University of Columbia) considered how such a theory would work in a context such as New York City (NYC), a city currently experiencing a massive influx of asylum seekers. Anselm discussed how, in line with prior

theory, the effect of increased contact with refugees might only positively affecting pro-sociality when people are on a similar level of social status. He noted that in NYC there would likely be a greater divide between the social status of asylum seekers and the social status of regular residents (whereas in North Lebanon it would be more uniform).

Paper 2: Institutional Totalization: Securitization, Resource Mobilization, and Resistance in a Refugee Camp

SM Musa presented his qualitative work on experiences in Bangladesh refugee camps. In his presentation he considered that many refugee camps seem prison-like. Musa therefore asked how a humanitarian organization could end up turning into such a total institution. His presentation focused on the context of the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh, the location of the largest refugee camp in the world (961,729 refugees). His study was ethnographic in nature, involving 12 months of fieldwork.

Musa found that the *institutional totalization* behaviour exhibited by humanitarian organizations could lead to feelings of *dehumanization* among refugees. Concerns for *security* and *efficiency* would therefore clash with efforts of maintaining basic *human dignity*. Refugee camps would seem to frequently illustrate such clashes. Musa's research also found that refugees would react through *counter-origination*, and through business activities which helped sustain their *sense of community*. Refugees were also found to engage in *bootstrapping behaviour*, which helped develop resources through networking.

Musa's work led him to propose several policy questions, including:

1. How do we develop more-inclusive opportunity structures?
Often humanitarian organizations employ refugees, having them facilitating some services in the refugee camps. However, because of concerns for security, and needs for efficiency, often these refugees would only be the most well-educated, and the number of refugees involved in such efforts would be minimal (in Rohingya for example, Musa discussed only a small group of 10 refugees being included). Musa encouraged us to think about how we may be able to include a wider group of refugees to in these roles.
 2. How do we enable refugees to have dignity, while maintaining securities and efficiency of management processes?
Motivated by the fact that refugees will have their own interests, and own aspirations for their life-projects – there seems to be little scope at present for humanitarian organizations to enable refugees to advance their own life-projects.
 3. Refugees are also not simply a project to manage, they are people. Musa suggested that humanitarian organizations should make efforts to shift their views about how refugees should be treated, and how refugees could be better considered.
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Paper 3: Entrepreneurial Activity as a Way to Override a Stigmatized Immigration Status

Sandra Portocarrero's work on explored the role of entrepreneurship in the development of a non-stigmatized identity among undocumented immigrants. We know that undocumented immigrants offer greatly to the US economy, but there is still a stigmatized identity attached to the undocumented immigrant status. Entrepreneurship is something that is viewed as culturally trendy, which can (in theory) benefit undocumented immigrants uniquely, because entrepreneurship is less formal and more dynamic, and has less reliance on formal documentation. Sandra asked: how does entrepreneurship allow migrants in vulnerable situations to override a stigmatized social status?

Undocumented immigrants are marginalized, are exposed to precarious works, and experience restricted support from their migrant network. Using an interview of 41 current and 9 former undocumented entrepreneurs, Sandra evaluated routes to entrepreneurial success, and the specific role of funding. In this study, she found that undocumented immigrants viewed entrepreneurship as a viable avenue for their own redemption as a result of three phases:

Phase 1: Immigrants experience *marginalization*; experience restricted access to typical work opportunities, and so mostly accept *precarious work*. Their network of other marginalized individuals also forms an *ethnic cage* which actively restricts their mobility.

Phase 2: Undocumented immigrants become entrepreneurs as a means to *gain respect*, and as a means of empowerment.

Phase 3: Migrants experience *redemption* through entrepreneurship, access to *capital* from organizations and investors, and *community recognition*.

Insights from Sandra's project allows us to reframe how we think about undocumented immigrants and consider how we may learn about entrepreneurship from this population. Entrepreneurship offers a very practical means of success for undocumented immigrants. This is because undocumented immigrants who become entrepreneurs would experience *status override*, as entrepreneurial successes would override their prior undocumented migrant stigma identity.

During the presentation, the audience questioned how the entrepreneurial drive of these undocumented migrants may affect their ability to develop entrepreneurial status, because they are more authentic; this compared to those who were forced into this situation by necessity.

Practical insights from Raphaëlle Thirion:

Raphaëlle Thirion from Humando described her work of providing support and facilitating full-time regular employment for people who are chronically under-employed (undocumented immigrants). Agencies like Raphaëlle's spend time thinking about the challenges to integrating these individuals into regular society.

Raphaëlle outlined how her firm (Humando) deals with both economic and social issues (e.g. challenging social circumstances and heightened vulnerabilities) which represent tremendous challenges in reintegration.

Raphaëlle advocated for making efforts for these individuals to become more *visible* in their workplace (evidence that these employees can be good collaborators, etc., thereby overturning myths about migrant workers). She described specific examples of training clients in French language, and to be job-proficient in heavy industrial transportation by the end of 13-months (which itself was exceptionally fast).

Housing, mobility, family and traumatic issues all disrupt this process of reintegration (e.g. migrants themselves are very reluctant to show vulnerabilities, as they are concerned about maintaining their resilience). Simple social issues, or administrative issues can easily spiral into existential threats in this context. If we consider even the process of adjusting from the status of "asylum seeker" to "refugee" are each fraught with different, unique and ever-increasing administrative issues. Raphaëlle's work and effort in this area demonstrate how practitioner can partner with private employers to better facilitate the process of integration, which can offer mutual benefits for all parties involved.
