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Refugiados en movimiento: retos políticos, legales y sociales en tiempos de inestabilidad

«Refugees on the move: political, legal and social challenges in times of turmoil»

Alisa Petroff, Georgios Milios, Marta Pérez (eds.)

REFUGIADOS EN MOVIMIENTO: RETOS POLÍTICOS, LEGALES Y SOCIALES EN TIEMPOS DE INESTABILIDAD

«REFUGEES ON THE MOVE: POLITICAL, LEGAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF TURMOIL»

Elaborated by:
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Focus on international migration és una col·lecció d'accés obert promoguda i coordinada pel **CER-Migracions** de la UAB-UB, centre de recerca interdisciplinària per a l'estudi de les migracions internacionals. L'objectiu de la col·lecció és consolidar un espai online de divulgació acadèmica que permeti fer arribar a la comunitat científica i al públic general interessat, treballs inèdits individuals i col·lectius que suposin rellevants aportacions teòriques, empíriques i/o metodològiques per a l'estudi de les migracions internacionals.

Focus on international migration es una colección de acceso abierto promovida y coordinada por el **CER-Migracions** de la UAB-UB, centro de investigación interdisciplinar para el estudio de las migraciones internacionales. El objetivo de la colección es consolidar un espacio online de divulgación académica que permita hacer llegar a la comunidad científica y al público general interesado, trabajos inéditos individuales y colectivos que supongan relevantes aportaciones teóricas, empíricas y/o metodológicas para el estudio de las migraciones internacionales.

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Introduction

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According to UNHCR (2017), nearly 65.5 million people have been forced to flee their home globally. Among them, 22.5 are refugees, with approximately half of them being minors. Additionally, there are 10 million stateless people; their nationality and the access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement have been denied. Internal conflicts and wars are the main reasons behind the fact that, every minute, 20 people are forced to flee in the world. Throughout history, we have to go back to World War II to find similar figures.

In the European context, the so-called "Refugee Crisis" worsened with the humanitarian crisis and the arrival of people seeking international protection at the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2013. After the events linked to the Arab Springs and its multiple consequences, refugees have been overexposed in the Media, as well as in the political discourses in Europe, magnifying its presence and effects. Nevertheless, data shows that only 17% of the total number of displaced people arrived to Europe; refugees are mainly being hosted by countries in conflict zones (especially bordering countries) (UNHCR, 2017).

Even though the figures of arrivals to Europe were not disproportionate, taking into consideration the magnitude of the violence in the region and the size of the population in EU countries and their resources, the images projected in the Media and the messages sent by anti-migration political parties revealed hostile and negative approaches towards the arrival of refugees. Metaphors linked to natural disasters (floods, avalanches, etc.) that show the devastating and irreversible character of these arrivals have only been counteracted by the tragic picture of the Syrian kid Alan Kurdi in 2015 (wrongly named "Aylan") (IOM, 2018), a picture that disturbed the consciences of European societies.

The public opinion and media debates have been extended to academic debate as one of the most relevant impacts of this crisis implies a reconfiguration of mobilities and new ways of understanding transnational dynam-

ics. In addition, unsupportive and inhospitable policies and legal frameworks at international, regional, national and local level have been designed and encouraged by different European countries.

With these reflections as a starting point, the CER-M (UAB-UB) organised the international conference "Refugees on the move: thinking beyond the Euro-Mediterranean crisis" on the 21st and 22nd of April 2016 at the CCCB and *Espai Contrabandos*. The conference aimed at creating a space of debate and reflection around the theoretical, political, legal and social implications of these displacements are causing. International and national academics, as well as experts and professionals working in the field participated in the event. As a result of the conference, and based on the contributions of the participants, the CER-M team presents this bilingual monographic entitled "Refugees on the move: political, legal and social challenges in times of turmoil".

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the monographic analyses:

- The role of the international community, through the UNRWA, in the management of the refugee crisis in the Middle East since the end of the '40s until today (chapter 1 – in Spanish: *La UNRWA y los refugiados de Palestina. Protección y desarrollo humano en el contexto de las crisis de refugiados en el Próximo Oriente,* Oscar Monterde Mateo);
- The political situation and the main causes of the displacements of Syria, the country with most displaced people in the world, behind South Sudan and Afghanistan, (chapter 2 – in English: Syria's Refugee Crisis: History of a Mass Exodus, Naomí Ramírez Díaz);
- The European Agenda on Migration (2015) and the various reforms of the European Directives about the Dublin regulation, with a special focus on the secondary movements of refugees between EU countries (chapter 3 – in English: EU responses to refugees' secondary movements in times of crisis of international protection, Chiara Denaro and Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo);

- The EU- Turkey Agreement, how it affects the European Common Asylum System and the implications of considering Turkey as a safe country (chapter 4 – in English: The EU-Turkey Joint Statement of March 2016. An 'ad-hoc' solution to the Refugee crisis or a new pillar for the European Common Asylum System external dimension?, David Moya and Georgios Milios);
- The link between asylum and vulnerability from a legal perspective; more precisely, the European Asylum Law and how the issue of vulnerability has been captured by the Reception Conditions Directive and the Relocation Decision (chapter 5 – In English: Vulnerability in the context of EU asylum policies: the challenges of identification and prioritisation, Natalia Caicedo and Andrea Romano);
- The case of Sicily and the arrivals of mixed flows to Italy (migrants and refugees) from North Africa that, even if they are not recent, have become a humanitarian crisis during the spring in 2015-2016. The chapter presents the results of the research EVI-MED, which shows the complexities in the migration and refugee management in Italy (Constructing and Evidence Base of Contemporary Mediterranean Migrations) (chapter 6 – in English: Refugees' reception in Italy: past and present of a humanitarian crisis, Alessio d'Angelo);
- Risk and vulnerability factors influencing mental health and psychosocial health: the need to incorporate the cultural competence in the design of programmes addressed to vulnerable groups and the main challenges this implies (chapter 7 – in Spanish: *Necesidades de Salud Mental y Psicosociales de los Refugiados en Europa*, Stella Evangelidou, Adil Qureshi and Francisco Collazos).

Talking about "refugee crisis" means accepting that the causes are limited in time, as a result of processes that happen in a concrete moment and have a beginning and end. However, what we are witnessing today are forced displacements motivated by structural causes.

In this sense, it should be noted that the nature of conflicts has changed. Interstate wars are disappearing, leading to structural conflicts whose forms of direct violence towards civilians provoke significant displacements (Grasa, 2007).

The perpetual instability in Middle East is a clear example of the structural character of modern conflicts. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the origin of this instability in the region is not recent, as it dates to the end of the '40s, when 800,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced to neighbouring countries or areas (Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon).

It is important to highlight the international response to this conflict and compare it to the current humanitarian crisis response. Thus, faced with the situation of extreme vulnerability, the international community reacts in a unanimous way and in 1948 the United Nations created the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) with the aim to coordinate and channel international aid. Later, with the implementation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugee (UNRWA), it is intended to take a step towards a regional development programme for the socioeconomic integration of these people. However, the disputes between Israel and the Arab countries for the control of the resources and infrastructures, together with the fact that it was only an assistance mandate, not a political one, explain the failure of this project, inspired by the Marshal Plan.

Today, nearly 8 million Palestinians are forcibly displaced, of which 5.5 million are in UNRWA's areas of operation. The existence of this agency, conceived at its beginning as temporary, is a clear example of the international community's failure to manage the refugees in Palestine. Authors such as Nachmias (2009) are very critical of the current purpose of the agency, highlighting that it is part of the problem instead of part of the solution. Perpetuating the mission for almost 70 years (over a population that is no longer considered refugees and have been integrated into the societies that hosted them), implies a dependency that should end

through a transitional process that provides legitimacy and power to the Palestinian Authority (body created in 1993) and that finalizes with the end of the UNRWA.

Despite Syria having been a safe place for Palestinian refugees for decades, the outbreak of the war has had an important effect on the overall population of the country. According to the UN, 5 million people have left the country and 9 million are internally displaced, figures that shape one of the biggest humanitarian crises of the last 70 years. To better understand the devastating consequences of a situation that today is perceived as politically unviable, we must go back to 1971, when Hafez al-Assad (the father of the current President Bashar al-Assad) takes power and turns Syria into an autocratic country where no form of political dissidence is tolerated. The terrorism perpetrated by the Syrian state to contain any kind of protest against the regime has been consolidated over the past decade. Indeed, this is the condition for many other countries in the region; such dynamic culminates with the so-called Arab Springs, a movement initiated in Tunisia and subsequently extended to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrein, Libya and Syria. Key vindications of these movements are related to improvements in living conditions and, above all, the demand for greater rights and freedoms (including freedom of speech).

In particular, in March 2011 Syrian protesters, inspired by the Arab Spring, were severely repressed by the regime. The first movements of the armed opposition were made up of a mixture of civilians and deserted soldiers. What started as pacific demonstrations became, one year later, a vicious civil war (ICRC, 2012). According to Listes (2013), there are currently nearly one thousand armed groups operating in Syria. Although their common objective is to overthrow the regime, they do not share a political project, sometimes they even compete with each other. In addition, jihadist groups take part in these opposition guerrillas, some of them affiliated with al-Qaeda, defending the superiority of the Sunni and violence as a way to impose it (CIDOB, 2017).

Libya is another country that helps to explain the impact of the Arab Springs in the humanitarian crisis that Europe is currently facing. Following Syria's case, the autocratic and corrupt government of Gaddafi caused revolts by the part of the population that lacked freedom, suffered inequalities and experienced high unemployment rates. The brutal repression over civilians to stop protests is another common element between the two countries. Nevertheless, despite the similar context, the international answer has been different and this is related to their political-international and geostrategic situation. In this sense, as opposed Syria, the international community response in Libya has been agreed and highly institutionalised. The agreement on the application of the "responsibility to protect" principle (UN), with the use of armed forces in order to avoid a massive violation of human rights in Libya, has been reached for different reasons (Marrecho, 2013).

In the first place, a lack of allies in North Africa, given the repression lived in Libya; other countries such as Tunisia and Morocco had taken the path of democratic reforms. In addition to this, the international political weaknesses of the Gaddafi regime as a sponsor of international terrorism generated the rejection of the international community since the 1980s. Lastly, Libya's airspace accessibility is another element that allows us to better understand the international community agreement to invade the county. In Syria's case, there has not been a unanimous response from the international community, because the relationship between the Bashar al-Assad regime and the Western world is a lot more nuanced. Traditionally, conflicts between the Syrian government and Western countries have not been as intense; this is why trying to exhaust the diplomatic and economic pressure was a viable option. In fact, the USA and the Arab League have adopted economic sanctions against the regime, although, the EU was the most conclusive (Koening, 2012).

Secondly, unlike Libya, Syria is at the very core of the political and religious convulsions, where Sunni and Shia Muslims dispute power. In addition, it is important to highlight the energy conflict and interests: the construction of oil pipes that cross the country to provide gas to Europe impacted two political blocs – Iran, Syria and Iraq on one side (with the support of Moscow) and Turkey and the Gulf countries (with the support of Washington) on the other side. In this sense, the majority of warring countries in Syria are exporters of gas with interests in any oil pipeline (Orenstein y Romer, 2015).

Finally, the geographic distance between Syria and the EU or the USA would have hindered a potential military intervention (Marrecho, 2013). In 2015, two following events added more complexity to the war situation, showing the lack of consensus of the international community. Even though both Russia and the USA have taken initiative in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria, Russia has intervened militarily supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime, while the USA has contributed to training and supplying the opposition groups with arms (Hanelt, 2016).

The situation of extreme violence in the region, worsened (occasionally) by the inadequate action or inaction of the international community, has caused an exodus without precedent; first, migration was to safer countries in the region and then later to Europe. Nevertheless, arriving in Europe does not end the agony of these people. Despite the fact that the assessment for eligibility of an asylum seeker case is based on individual characteristics, the nationality determines to a great extent his or her legal status, especially in the case of those arriving to Italy. From this perspective, getting to Europe through a "safe" country turns a lot of people into economic migrants and, therefore, not eligible as refugees. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Alessio d'Angelo, research highlights that among the main motivations to leave their country are: "persecution or direct violence" (49%), "worried about my or my family safety" (43%) and "war" (24%). On the other hand, people fleeing from war and situations of violence also seek to improve their lives; therefore, the

line between asylum and economic migration is even more diffused in the field, with mixed flows overlapping with traditional flows of entry to the EU. This is mainly due to the fact that people move using the same routes and resort to the same networks to get into the EU irregularly (Triandafyllidou y Mantanika, 2017). In this sense, there are three routes to the EU that have gained importance since the humanitarian crisis. In the first place, there is the Eastern Mediterranean corridor, from Turkey to the Greek islands, through the Aegean Sea. This was the main point of entry to the EU in 2015 and the figures started to decrease from March 2016 as a consequence of the EU-Turkey Agreement (European Council, 2016).

Between 2014 and 2016, 40% of arrivals to Greece were Syrian citizens, 21% Afghan and 13% Iraqi. Regarding the profile of people who arrived to Greece, it mainly corresponds to women and children, representing an increase from 27% in September 2015 to 60% in March 2016 (UNHCR, 2016). Unfortunately, it is worth noting the number of those who have not arrived and who have died due to the constant shipwrecks that have taken place in the Mediterranean. As for the registered deaths in this route, IOM values them at 806 (2015), 434 (2016) and 45 (2017). The Mediterranean Central corridor implies crossing the sea from Libya and Egypt (to a lesser extent from Tunisia or Algeria) to Italy. It has become the main route of entry since March 2016. In the first half of 2017, 83,752 people arrived to Italy; while in the first half of 2016 it decreased to 70,222. The number of registered deaths decreased as well, although to a lesser extent, going from 3,073 during the first nine months in 2016, to 2,471 during the same period in 2017 (IOM, 2017). Despite this slight decrease, the Mediterranean central route is still the most dangerous, with an average of one death for every 50 people arriving to Italy (White y Singleton, 2017). People using this route come mainly from Sub-Saharan countries and the Horn of Africa, especially young men and mainly those with primary education. These characteristics, as opposed to those of people arriving through

the East corridor, have contributed to the construction of a political and media discourse in Italy different from the discourse generated by the flows perceived as more vulnerable. This has led to greater arbitrariness when "screening" between asylum seekers and economic migrants, allowing less margin to seek asylum for those arriving by this route.

Lastly, there is the Western Mediterranean corridor, from North Africa to Spain, through the Strait of Gibraltar. The last available data points out that, from January to September 2017, 12,122 people arrived to Spain through this route (IOM, 2017). Since August 2017 an extremely dangerous new route has been detected through the Black Sea (Gillet, 2017).

In response to this unprecedented situation, what has been the reaction of the EU and what measures have been implemented? According to Dimitriadi (2015), the European response exists in contradiction; there is a desire to "fortify Europe", strengthening the borders and externalising its management, and there is a moral and legal responsibility to welcome asylum seekers. In relation to the policy of externalising borders, its implementation has started before the so-called refugee "crisis". López-Sala and Godenau (2017) define this policy as an "*out and up process*", which translates into the coordinated management between host countries and neighbour countries (from origin or transit), through "cooperation agreements".

As an example, in 2010 the Government of Silvio Berlusconi signed an agreement with the Gaddafi regime and Libya became a relevant actor for the EU in its policy of externalization of borders. The Mobility Partnership represents another example of this policy. In 2013, Morocco signed this partnership with its EU Southern neighbours, through which it made a commitment, among other things, to reinstate migrants coming from third countries who have been previously expelled from Europe. However, it is the controversial EU-Turkey Agreement (2016) that has reinforced the European externalisation policy. The long process of negotiation ended with the agreement

by which Turkey promised to block the exit of boats and accept the return of asylum seekers who have arrived to Greece after the signature date (20th March). The Agreement is based on an exchange mechanism: for each Syrian refugee returned from Greece to Turkey after March 2016, one is resettled. In addition, the EU offered Turkey future visa exemption in the Schengen area for Turkish citizens (under the compliance of 72 conditions), 6,000 million euros to cover the expenses derived from the reception of refugees – under the framework of a broader programme of cooperation for development - and the reopening of talks about the potential accession to the EU. Currently, only 3,000 million euros has been transferred (European Commission, 2018). Taking into consideration the uncertain legal viability of the Agreement, European leaders have backed the agreement, expecting it to be effective not because of its implementation, but because new arrivals would be discouraged (Collett, 2016).

Despite European leaders branding the Agreement as a success or even as a good practice, it has received numerous critics. In addition, it has been brought to light that "chequebook diplomacy" is the main European strategy to reinforce a security approach in exchange for economic counterparts (Sanahuja, 2015). Unfortunately, after this Agreement refugees have become a bargaining chip in the EU and Turkey negotiations. On the other hand, the operation and sustainability of this Agreement are in question because of the following arguments: the distrust between the parties, the political situation in Turkey after the frustrated *coup d'état* and the fact that the EU would hardly be able to satisfy the requirement to eliminate the visa for Turkish citizens. These elements, according to Arango (2016), would make the Agreement unfeasible in the medium-term. Three lessons have been learned since signing the Agreement one year ago (Koenig, Walter-Franke, 2017): 1) comprehensive agreements should not and cannot subordinate the EU foreign policy to short-term objectives linked exclusively to migration control; 2) the EU should be aware and ac-

knowledge the commitments of solidarity and sharing of responsibilities, in order to protect itself from blackmail by third countries; 3) EU members should encourage agreements with a win-win-win effect, which take into account the migrant rights as well as the legal and safe alternatives in a rigorous manner. This policy of securitisation and externalisation of borders coexists, contradictorily, with a policy of moral and legal responsibility towards people seeking international protection. From this perspective, the Common European Asylum System, (CEAS) is, since 1999, the fundamental pillar of the European Asylum policy. Its basic principles revolve around the idea that the EU is a protection area and the member states are able to ensure common standards. The implementation of the CEAS is based on three European Directives (Asylum procedures, reception conditions and qualifications) and two Regulations (the Dublin Regulation and EURODAC) (European Commission, 2015).

There are two crises that question the Dublin System, both linked to secondary movements. The first one took place in 2011, when 25,000 Tunisians arrived through the Mediterranean Sea and were identified in Italy but decided to move to France. The second one (2013-2014) occurred when refugees, especially arriving from Syria and from the Horn of Africa, managed to avoid the identification process by the Italian authorities in order to travel North, through passive resistance, protests or negotiations with the authorities not to have their fingerprints taken. Facing this situation, some Nordic countries pressed Italy so that they re-incorporated the identification and collection fingerprints, even if this included the use of force. This measure led to an increase in illegal secondary movements, thanks to the proliferation of smugglers, and the favourable response of many countries to re-establish internal borders.

The European Agenda on Migration 2015 includes two key elements that intend to: 1) correct the imbalances occurred from the Dublin crisis; and 2) avoid secondary movements of refugees. Firstly, the creation of the

hotspots, which aim at guaranteeing the identification by the first countries of arrival and the distinction between refugees (who are eligible to be granted asylum) and economic migrants (potentially returnees). The first Italian hotspots were opened in Sicily (four in total): Lampedusa, with a capacity of 500 people; Pozzallo, with a capacity of 300 people; Taranto, 400 people; and Trapani, 400 people. These are not new facilities, but existing reception centres that have been remodelled. Equally, Greece counts five hotspots: Lesbos, with a maximum reception capacity of 1,500 people; Chios, where 1,100 people are received; Samos, with a capacity for 850 people; Leros, 1,000 people; and Kos, 1,000 people. Nevertheless, Doctors Without Borders reports in a recent article (March 2018) of the overcrowding situation in the camps. For instance, in Lesbos more than 5,000 people are have gathered and 2,000 in Samos. According to a recent study (ECRE 2016), the implementation of hotspots in Italy and Greece pose some challenges. In the first place, the existence of previous filters that often prevent people to seek asylum (through admission interviews, forms such as the '*foglio notizie*' in Italy or the application of the concept of "safe third country"). Sometimes, a second filter is added: the priority nationalities to seek asylum. Other challenges experienced at the hotspots are the lack of accurate information and the insufficient existence of interpreters and cultural mediators. Besides, according to the same report, detention is the principle used to guarantee its functioning, even in the case of non-accompanied minors. There is no proper monitoring of the practices taking place at the centres; thus, there is a lack of awareness of potential human rights violations.

Apart from the hotspot perspective, the second element of the European Agenda on Migration 2015 (through the Decision of 14th September) consists in the relocation of 40,000 asylum seekers from Italy (24,000) and Greece (16,000) to other EU countries that voluntarily, accept these applications. A later Decision, from 22nd September, increases the number to 120,000 people "in evident need of international protection", who must be mandatorily relocated through established quotas by countries (with the exception of Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic). The Commission's proposal (COM(2015) 451 9th September) implies a distribution between member states, using objective criteria (40% population size, 40% GDP, 10% the average of asylum applications in the past, 10% unemployment rates), together with other qualitative criteria related to the potential of the asylum seeker to integrate (command of the language, qualifications, etc.). However, the relocation system shows two key problems (Carrera y Guild, 2015): 1) the protection of refugees is perceived as a share of border burden and not as a EU collective responsibility. The philosophy behind the relocation is based in the erroneous idea that the responsibility and capacity to manage and resolve asylum applications must be assumed exclusively by the first country these people enter. Additionally, the preferences of asylum seekers are not taken into consideration and there is no personal and family evaluation in this sense; 2) the lack of confidence in the member states being able to guarantee proper reception conditions regarding the fulfilment of human rights. An incentive for the people staying in the country is the reception process. If this would have been implemented properly, which has not happened in the majority of countries, the European asylum system would not be in question, as it is today.

Tensions, mistrust and different sensitivities translated into non-compliance amongst member states concerning the relocation system. Data from the European Commission shows that two years after, in September 2017, slightly less than 30% of the agreement (29,401) was fulfilled. Countries that have met their obligations to a greater extent, taking into account the allocation of relocated people are: Germany 30.8% out of a total of 27,536 people; France 22.7% of the total 19,714; and Spain 13% of the total 9,323. Poland and Hungary have not relocated anyone, whereas the Czech Republic has not admitted anyone since mid-2016. By contrast, Austria started to accept

refugees in the summer of 2017. According to the latest data from the Commission on the Support of the Member States in the Relocation Mechanism, a total of 33,721 people were relocated until February 2018. Šelo (2017) points out two elements to explain this failure: the technical obstacles (identification, registration and selection procedures in Greece and Italy) and the barriers related to the discourses of fear and insecurity that anti-refugee parties have disseminated among the public opinion. This has undermined many countries commitment to solving the crisis.

The relocation mechanism places an emphasis on "people in clear need of international protection", prioritising vulnerable groups such as children or people in need of medical assistance. Refugees have been exposed to wars, armed conflicts or hunger (structural factors), which make them, indeed, eligible to be considered a vulnerable group. Other vulnerability factors related to personal characteristics are: gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, disability, etc. that in an intersectional way could aggravate these fragility conditions. The consideration of the vulnerability condition is relatively new in European asylum legislation, meaning that until recently vulnerable groups were invisible.

At the international level, UNHCR is pioneering protocols to prioritise vulnerable groups. The Resettlement Handbook (UNHCR, 2011) identifies the following vulnerable profiles: people in need of physical or legal protection; survivors of torture or violence; people with medical needs, women, adolescents, children at risk; family reunification cases; people who lack foreseeable sustainable alternative solutions.

However, in the European context, it was in 2013 when the Dublin Regulation took into consideration the specificities of vulnerable groups with the Directive on Reception Conditions 2013/33/EU. More precisely, a vulnerable person, as defined in its article 21, includes minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence. The need to take into consideration the particular needs of asylum seekers during the reception process is being discussed under the reform of the Common European Asylum System. Despite a lack of consensus on this issue, emphasis is placed on the importance to assess and properly document the cases that could be identified as vulnerable. Nonetheless, facing the collapse of the hotspots, the lack of economic and human resources to deal with vulnerable groups continues to be the main barrier in achieving this goal. An additional obstacle slowing down relocation is the identification process of vulnerable populations, especially in the case of unaccompanied minors. Finally, there is a certain incompatibility between the qualitative criteria of potential integration (competences, language, and qualifications) and the priority to relocate vulnerable groups. While the Relocation Decision recognises the urgent need to resolve the situation of vulnerable asylum seekers, member states show little availability and concern in this respect.

Beyond the legal considerations in relation to vulnerable groups and their prioritisation when claiming asylum, it is worth highlighting some health and social conditions amongst refugees and particularly of those most vulnerable. Problems identified include: tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis A and B, parasitic diseases and especially mental health diseases (Humphris y Bradby, 2017). In particular, mental health challenges are significant. Post-traumatic stress, depression, psychosis and suicide attempts are the main mental disorders suffered by the refugees. Otherwise, risk factors influencing refugees' mental health are linked to personal, cultural, social, legal and labour factors, including the conditions of the journey. These risk factors go through the different migration phases and, occasionally, the risk factors get worse with the situations of uncertainty suffered during the asylum application or under the harsh living conditions faced in the hotspots.

According to Doctors Without Borders (2018), a real mental health crisis is taking place in camps on the Greek islands. The overcrowding and precarious facilities and the persistent violation of rights worsen the already fragile mental health of the refugees. These conditions could be extended even after relocation takes place, as refugees are exposed to a series of difficulties when accessing health care services in general, and mental health care in particular. These difficulties are: bureaucracy, language and cultural barriers or simply the lack of knowledge of the system, among others. Other obstacles are those related with the professionals dealing with this group. This is why there is a need to count on experts with intercultural competencies; thus, being sensitive when detecting differences between psychological discomfort, the reasons of it and the expectations to alleviate the symptoms (Evangelidou et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this intercultural competence has to be institutional and must entail an organisational and professional competence, recognising the agency of the refugees and overcoming the exoticism syndrome (support is provided because of the love to cultures perceived as exotic) or the saviour syndrome (support is provided from a position of superiority) (Qureshi, 2018).

Through the chapters included in this monograph, the origin of the conflict in the Middle East and its devastating consequences among them unprecedented human displacements, have been revealed. At the same time, it highlights the shadows and, to a lesser extent, the lights in the European management of the humanitarian crisis. As a final reflection, it is worth mentioning that we are not witnessing a refugee crisis but we are facing a multilevel crisis with a domino effect, which has allowed the weaknesses of the European project to surface and has sparked discourses that were thought to have been overcome.

In the first place, it is a humanitarian crisis with a high presence of vulnerable groups (unaccompanied minors, women in extreme conditions) and a high number of deaths during the journey. Nevertheless, what has produced the most stupor in this humanitarian crisis is that, far from finding relief, many of the people who have arrived to Europe have seen their vulnerability perpetuated or worsened.

This humanitarian crisis included a governance crisis, an institutional crisis of the European project since the EU has sufficient expertise and resources to be able to welcome with dignity people who have fled from war. However, the different sensitivities of European countries have revealed the internal political fractures and the growth of right-wing xenophobic populism, which led to an unfortunate and highly criticised management of the situation. On the one hand, Europe shields its external borders, converting bordering countries (developing countries that do not offer democratic guarantees for the respect of human rights) into the main managers of the phenomenon. On the other hand, the repeated disobedience of some member states (especially Eastern European countries) with respect to relocation quotas, shows the fragile integration of these countries, whose cultural and identity imaginaries are not prepared to incorporate these people properly. In this way, the ideals, values and commitments that have been the fundamental pillars of the EU are being broken, which endangers its political and institutional project.

Finally, the current crisis is a crisis of hospitality and solidarity, since the policies carried out by the states constantly question the legal status of vulnerable people (Rodríguez, 2017). At the end of 2014, Operation Mare Nostrum, which rescued 138,000 human beings and was replaced by the Frontex Operation Triton, aimed at controlling arrivals to Europe and, to a lesser extent, saving the lives of people trying to reach their coasts. This is one more example of how the EU spends millions of euros in shielding the borders, focusing mainly on how to prevent the entry of these people. Additionally, speeches that fuel xenophobic and Eurosceptic populist parties have flourished in a climate of generalised renationalisation (Arango, 2016).

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