

Progress report - February 2021
The Boris Mints Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions to Global Challenges

Submitted by:

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Title of the projects: “Refugees in town: assessing the "local turn" of forced migrants integration” and “The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: Examining civil society’s crisis responses for refugees and asylum seekers in Israel”

The overall research project examines how cities deal with the social and economic incorporation of forced migrants. So far, the research has focused on the challenges and the opportunities that local governments face as they mediate between national migration control policies and the influx of asylum seekers in precarious socio-legal situations. In face of the COVID-19 pandemic we have expanded and diversified the ongoing research project and are now working on two interrelated studies simultaneously:

First, we continue the case study on Haifa (henceforth: Study 1) to contribute to the understanding of local refugee integration and migration governance in localities that are not central gateways to migration and yet important for grasping new dynamics of refugees dispersal (Caponio 2020; Çağlar and Glick-Schiller 2015). Following Çağlar and Glick-Schiller (2015), we seek to contribute to the literature seeking a “multiscalar perspective” on relationships between migration and localities, which requires a differentiation “between the situations, opportunities and barriers to emplacement in which people find themselves in different localities” (p. 4). Necessitated by the contemporary context, we include new emergency situations such as those summoned by COVID-19 into the study of asylum seekers’ integration in particular localities, and will thereby be able to further our understanding of how pandemic emergencies impact on populations that are already in precarious conditions. Hence, this research explores the particularities of Haifa as a case in itself and in comparison with previously conducted research on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (Kemp and Rajman 2004; Kemp 2019) as two central Israeli cities as well as mid-size and smaller towns to elicit variation of how different localities exhibiting characteristic differences deal with “aliens” or unclassifiable others within the nation-state. The attached graph shows the dispersion of asylum seekers in Israeli towns while the attached table comparatively summarizes the main findings from this research project so far.

Second, due to the severe consequences of the pandemic for marginalized communities and civil society action, it is of vital importance to provide up-to-date knowledge to understand contemporary crises and their impact on dynamics and outcomes of local and global migration governance (Garkisch et al 2017; Augustin and Jorgensen 2020; Nixon 2020). Grounded in our established research collaboration with ALEF, a civil society organization based in Haifa, we have designed a study examining civil society’s crisis responses to COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic within the Israeli context (henceforth: Study 2).

Similar to many other disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic exposes and exacerbates social, economic, and health care inequalities, particularly for already marginalized communities such as refugees and other migrants (Chatterjee et al 2020; Guadagno 2020; Slobodin and Cohen 2020). For poor communities, physical distancing and lockdowns worsen the pre-existing food and housing insecurities, as well as educational gaps and levels of violence (Waitzberg et al. 2020). For refugees and asylum seekers, precarity or lack of legal status is another crucial factor that renders many of them doubly vulnerable. As non-citizens, often denied residency rights and political recognition within their host societies, asylum seekers face significant barriers to access and provision of social services in general, and emergency measures to alleviate impacts of the pandemic in particular (Gottlieb et al. 2020; Shadmi et al 2020). In other words, globally, communities of asylum seekers belong to the most vulnerable populations during the pandemic and the emerging crises.

Supra- and international level organizations (e.g., Global Refugee Forum 2020, IOM 2020a) and the academic community (e.g., Alawa et al. 2020, Guadagno 2020) call for collaboration between stakeholders on all levels to deal with the immediate, midway, and long-term effects for the most vulnerable populations. Meanwhile, on the local level, organizations have declared a new state of emergency for the refugee population as migrants' vulnerabilities result in contracting COVID-19, not gaining access to appropriate care, showing severe symptoms, psychosocial impacts, uncertain livelihoods, and income insecurity (e.g. Guadagno 2020, 4). Due to inadequate protection and lack of support through the state, the work of civil society organizations is crucial for local responses to COVID-19. However, while they are "providing vital assistance" and are "acting as a critical safety net", they also face a crisis of capacity - induced by "both by the scale of the emergency and increasing constraints on their own resources" (IOM 2020b). Hence, we address a global phenomenon - the role of civil society actors in protecting and supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic - in the local contexts of Israel.

By means of stakeholder interviews and participant ethnography, this study examines the work of approximately 20 local and international civil society organization situated in three major Israeli cities (Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa). Specifically, the research investigates:

- the changes in needs assessment and modes of work;
- the types of response that were adopted and put into practice;
- resource acquisition and management of the responses; and
- the dynamics of relations between relevant stakeholders, including possible changes.

Beyond academic publication a further goal of this study is to broaden the accessibility of this kind of information to more stakeholders within the civil society.

Current State and Progress

In the following, we present a summary of the current state and progress. Given the limitations and restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, all research efforts and interviews are currently conducted online.

1. Research design and plan for Study 1 including training and supervision of two students as research interns in the framework of the MA in Migration Studies at TAU.
2. Mapping and contact of relevant stakeholders for Study 1.
3. Data collection for Study 1 by means of stakeholder interviews.
4. Data collection for both Study 1 and Study 2 based on meetings taking place twice a week with the director of ALEF between March 2020 and February 2021.
5. Continuation of mapping of the asylum seeker population in and around Haifa. Based on our communication with different municipal departments and kindergartens in June 2020 in the Krayot around Haifa, it seems that there are no children of asylum seekers registered outside of the city. We estimate that in Haifa there are currently 20 children aged 0-3, 30 children aged 3-6 and 45 school-aged children belonging to 50 families, and a couple of hundred single men summing up to about 500 people.

Outcomes

Kemp, A. with Meissner, N. (2020). Paradoxes of control: Incorporating precarious migrants in Tel-Aviv in times of restrictive migration policies. In: Feniger et al. *The Routledge Handbook of the Contemporary Israel*, Routledge (*forthcoming*).

Expected Outcomes

1. Report including best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for civil society action in emergency responses based on Study 2.
2. Academic publication based on Study 1 and 2.

Future steps

1. Continuation of data collection by means of stakeholder interviews in Haifa for Study 1 and stakeholder interviews among the civil society organizations working with and for refugees and asylum seekers in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa for Study 2.
2. Transcriptions of interviews for thematic content analysis and in-depth data analysis.
3. Cross-locality comparison between the case of Haifa with Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Cross- and inter-organizational comparison of emergency responses and relationships.
4. Focused analysis of how local communities on the ground—including refugees and hosts—co-exist, adapt, and struggle with integration.
5. Publication of research on a three-localities comparison of local forced migrant integration in Israel based on the cases of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, and of research on civil society responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for asylum seekers and refugees in Israel.

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