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CONFERENCE REPORT

The Migration Conference 2017 Athens, August 23-26, 2017 Harokopio University

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Abstract

According to the UN, in 2015 the number of international migrants was estimated on 244 million, which means that 3,3 percent of the world's population is on the move or live in a country other than his/her country of birth/origin. Globally, in 2014, the number of refugees was estimated approximately 20 million, which has been increasing since the so-called "refugee crisis" has started. This increase in the number of movers called attention to migration studies and approached the issue from a different perspective, under an international and interdisciplinary point of view. Therefore, the 5th edition of The Migration Conference has been organized in a fully inclusive way, bringing about 500 scholars, researches, representatives of policy making bodies, media, and NGOs all around the world together in Athens, Greece. The 6th edition of The Migration Conference in June 2018 at the University of Lisbon is expected to continue this tradition.

Keywords: Greece; migration research; migration conference; mobility; movers; TMC 2017.

Introduction

Between 23 and 26 August 2017, the 5th edition of The Migration Conference (hereafter TMC) took place at the Harokopio University in Athens, Greece. During those days, approximately 500 participants, from all around the world, among Ph.D. students, researchers, scholars and representatives from policy making bodies, presented their papers, exposed their concerns on the future of migration and suggested human rights based solutions for movers around the globe. The supporting institutions in TMC 2017 included Universität Hamburg and its Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy Graduate School of Law, University of California Davis Gifford Center for Population Studies, Regent's University London Centre for Transnational Studies, Migration Institute of Finland, Hellenic Sociological Society, Donau-Universität Krems, Ohio State University, EKKE

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- The National Center of Social Research, Institut de Recherche, Formation et Action sur les Migrations as well several journals including *Migration Letters*, *Remittances Review*, *Border Crossing*, *Göç Dergisi*, *Social Cohesion and Development*, *Kurdish Studies*, *Migration Center*, *Transnational Academy*.

This edition of the international conference on migration studies was a very special one. Firstly, because it was hosted by Greece, a country that has been in the spot light since the so-called “refugee crisis” has broken and, therefore, sessions on migration in, to and from Greece have been included in the programme. This enabled abundance of scholarly exchange and opportunities for presentation and discussions over comparative studies. Secondly, because it was the first time, the series of TMC conferences covered more areas and more fields of study in a comprehensive way from special sessions to workshops as well as movie screenings and training workshops. For instance, it included special sessions, such as “Migration Law and Policy”, “Germany’s Refugee Policy”, and “Conflicts, war, tensions, discomforts and human mobility” among a total of 15 special sessions within a hundred strong session programme.

It was also the first time that legal and economic issues were one of the main focus of the conference and this fact has attracted more law and economic students (also undergraduate, but mainly Ph.D. students) than in the years before. The poster session also enable students to have a more direct and close feedback on their research questions, giving them the opportunity to present their works in a more direct and effective way. Another well attended feature in the conference was training workshops mainly targeting new researchers and PhD students: Dilek Cindoğlu ran a training workshop on grounded theory while Jeffrey H. Cohen and Ibrahim Sirkeci led the “meet the editors” session.

After the welcoming speech of the organizers, the opening plenary session of the conference gave floor to the first invited speaker Neli Esipova, from the Gallup World Poll, USA, who presented their most recent analyses on the Gallup World Poll Migrant Acceptance Index, giving the audience new and intriguing impressions on the level of acceptance of migrants in more than 100 countries. The opening plenary session has also welcomed the key-note speeches of Professor Giuseppe Sciortino, from University of Trento, and Professor Oded Stark, from the University of Bonn, both are renowned scholars in their respective fields. Sciortino problematized the sociology of migration, calling transnationalism into question. On the other hand Stark approached the economics of migration, modeling migration when the individuals’ preferences regarding their relative income are ordinal, working out the resulting spatial steady state



distribution of the individuals, and showing that the aggregate of the individuals' migration choices in the spatial steady state distribution sums up to the social optimum.

The first day of the conference ended up with a round table, which focused on the host country migration debates. Apostolos Papadopoulos, co-chair of the Conference moderated the discussion on "Migration, Refugee Crisis and its Aftermath: Challenges for migration policy in Greece". Panellists took a rather legal perspective and also raised questions about the role of the European Union by the development and support of policies that envision refugees' protection – the principle of solidarity within European Union Member States played an important role during the discussions.

In addition to the keynote speeches, roundtable, workshops and poster sessions there were more nearly 400 presentations in about 100 parallel sessions during the conference. Considering the proportions of the conference and its wide range of subjects approached, the parallel sessions have been very well attended and have also offered an outlet to many subjects which are rarely debated. For instance, subjects which present migration as a journey - citing the example of a paper reporting the hard and subhuman conditions of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa -, as well as the ones presenting innovative migration law and migration management enacted by countries which are not necessarily considered to be suffering from the "migration crisis", such as the cases of Argentina and Brazil.

The parallel sessions were grouped under 60 topics. During those sessions, there have been opportunities to introduce discussions such as the integration and gender issues, especially the protection of refugee women; profound debates on the origin of migrations, calling nomenclatures and classifications into question; the allocation of high-skilled movers into the new society they belong to; the adversities countries have by receiving different faith groups in their society; the decision of movers and non-movers to stay or to go and how it affects their integration processes. Peculiar topics on migration law have also been discussed, such as the case of inadmissible persons who are retained on the borders of states' territories. The return migration has also been comprehensively discussed under the highlighted question of "Building or Burning the Bridges?" - that means, what influences the determination of return migrants (both in receiving and sending countries).

A refreshing aspect of the conference was the presence of many presentations on the movement of people from the perspectives of arts, linguistics and literature. Migration has been explored within literature, as



an artistic manifestation, both as an enriching influence in the language of movers, and as in the language of the receiving countries.

The conference has also been an opportunity to discuss topics, which have been central to the public and political agenda in the last few years, such as the EU-Turkey deal, the hotspots and reallocation schemes especially within the European Union, the welcoming policies to refugees in the Middle East, securitization of migration, border control, among others.

On the third day of the conference, there was the opportunity to listen to another keynote-speaker of the conference, Sociology Professor Saskia Sassen, from Columbia University, who brilliantly draw attention to migrants who are invisible to the eyes of the law and of the authorities. She mentioned cases of people who are not considered as refugees or as people in need of humanitarian shelter, because their cases are not literally covered by the protection of the laws. These people are losing their homes and homelands because of repeatedly destruction by climate change, mining, land theft and/or growing cities. The loss of living spaces is a very relevant trigger factor in all of these cases. Professor Sassen pointed out during her speech that the causes of human mobility have to be deeply analyzed, so that all movers can turn visible to the eyes of law.

TMC 2017 was a space for discussing and exchanging on human mobility, global integration, questions and solutions as well as theories and models shaping our discourses and agendas. Surely we want to repeat the same next year in the 6th TMC in Lisbon, Portugal. Here we repeat our call for papers and contributions. Please visit: www.migrationcenter.org for the call for papers.

We also invite organisations, governments, universities, and companies to support the conference through sponsorships to enable us helping researchers and students from less resourceful institutions and countries through conference bursaries.

The Migration Conference 2018 will be hosted in Portugal, at the University of Lisbon, from 26-28 June 2018 (See: <http://migrationcenter.org/about>). We look forward to seeing old and new friends at the next TMC.

