

Forced Displacement: The ‘Refugee Crisis’ and its impact on Global Tourism

Refugees, a Global Phenomenon: Major Trends & Issues

Many people have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to global issues such as oppression, human rights violations, climate change, disasters, and geographical events. Recently, this has increased “from 41 million in 2010 to 82.4 million in 2020” (UNHCR, 2021, p. 6). Of these displaced people, 26.4 million were granted international protection and recognised as refugees (UNHCR, 2021). Bloch (2020, p. 439) summarised international key sites of displacement since the 1950’s (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1

International key sites of displacement globally since the 1950’s

Insert Figure 1 about here

These historical and continuing conflicts lead to one per cent of the global populations or 1 in 95 people displaced by force (UNHCR, 2021). Table 1 summarises the major sources of refugees since 2000 (Desilver, 2022). As is shown in the table, the Ukraine ‘refugee crisis’ is now the second largest ‘refugee crisis’ after Syria. It is also the fastest growing ‘refugee crisis’ since World War II in which more than 5.3 million refugees were displaced from their country within only two months. A further 7.7 million people have been displaced internally within Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022). As tourism businesses have faced increased oil prices, plus disruption and uncertainty over travel due to the pandemic, the current war in Ukraine presents another challenge. Despite these negative consequences, it has provided opportunities for other destinations as tourists turn their attention to safer countries away from the conflict (UNWTO, 2022a). This crisis illustrates that displacement of people is not limited to poor countries and even European countries are not immune from this global issue.

Predictions for the future for 2030 and beyond indicate that the future trends for the number of displaced populations will far out exceed current figures. The World Bank’s report in 2021 predicts that climate change could force 216 million people to move by 2050. This figure could be exacerbated as food crises have worsened since 2020 due to prolonged conflicts, extreme weather conditions, and the economic ramifications due to COVID-19 (Safi, 2021). Climate change stimuli does not qualify a person for refugee status and existing statistics exclude those who are forcibly displaced due to climate change. Despite this restriction, Aljazeera in 2020

report noted that 55 million people had been forced to move due to having no access to food, water, or jobs, as well as violence and conflict resulting from extreme climate change. Changing weather patterns also illustrates that richer countries are not safe from potential displacement due to climate change (Taylor, 2017).

Table 1

Major sources of refugees since 2000 (number of refugees is in million)

Insert table 1 about here

There are wider social implications that need to be considered when trying to examine the crisis and its impact for global tourism. In this vein, this chapter provides a broad overview of the global impact of the ‘refugee crisis’ for tourism and discusses tourism academic discourses that have been significantly shaped by refugee studies. First, we define and explain the language that is typically used to label people within this global issue to reveal its political and marginalising nature. As other tourism scholars have argued, this is crucial to address as the language used to label a group of people is neither neutral nor unpolitical (McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019). As Gillovic, McIntosh, Darcy, and Cockburn-Wooten argue, “[l]anguage has the power to create, describe, condone or justify attitudes and behaviour” and we would also argue shape tourism research agendas too (2018, p. 615). Next, stakeholders and their interests in the topic are discussed, along with potential future trends and drivers. Finally, we suggest avenues for future work advocated by critical tourism scholars, who have argued that we can reflect and change our social practices, communities, and societies to become a force of hope (Cockburn-Wooten, McIntosh, Smith, & Jefferies, 2018).

Crucial for understanding the topic is to unravel definitions. The definition of a ‘refugee’ draws from the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951) which states that the term relates to “any person who owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Weis & Cambridge University, 1995, p. 6). Prior to a person’s request for refugee status being formally approved by the host country, they are referred to as an ‘asylum seeker’. This is defined as someone seeking international protection. There can be a certain amount of confusion and overlap between the terms refugee and migrant, particularly

within the tourism context. The difference is that migrants usually have freedom of movement and can leave their home to seek better opportunities in a host country. In comparison, a refugee's freedom to move is significantly restricted, plus, they are more likely to experience physical and mental health issues as a result of experiencing or witnessing violence.

The use of the category 'refugee' is often generalised to imply a common identity and is mainly due to frequent stereotyping of groups in the media and other sources. Zetter (1988, p. 1) highlights that the term 'refugee' is "one of the most powerful labels" currently used in any discussions involving humanitarian concerns as well as in national and international public policies. It is often used to create social differentiation which results in both perpetuating stereotypes and cements a particular status for the individual. This issue is evident in tourism studies, particularly those that tend to present refugees as a homogeneous common community that ends up projecting a one-dimensional representation rather than acknowledging the diverse realities and experiences (e.g. Pappas & Papatheodorou, 2017). Lenette (2019) and other scholars have highlighted the negativity surrounding these terms and suggests terms like "people with lived experiences", 'people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds', and 'knowledge holders'" (p. 14). These terms acknowledge an individual's rich lived expertise and their agency to articulate these experiences. All this would help to redress some of the power imbalances that often frame research that focuses on refugee-background communities.

Tourism scholars have approached the global 'refugee crisis' essentially in two key ways. Some scholars have investigated the impact of this crisis and problems for the host country and business of tourism. While scholars from critical and social justice orientations have approached the crisis in a broader manner, as one that involves us all to be accountable and proactively involved in changing this situation for the better. Research that has positioned refugees as a problem for the business of tourism has lamented that refugee inflows have severely affected a destination's image, resulting in negative tourism profits (e.g. Zenker, von Wallpacha, Braumb, & Vallaster, 2019). Figure 2 illustrates the word frequency used in research about refugees in the tourism literature. The majority of this work aims to provide policy recommendations to governments about how to deal with the 'problems' generated by refugees (e.g. Pappas & Papatheodorou, 2017). This is illustrated in the study by Tsartas et al. (2020) on the effects of refugee inflows on a tourist destination. They examined the reactions of local stakeholders to the presence of refugees in Chios and Lesbos Island. Their findings illustrated the negative attitudes from local stakeholders around the presence and perceived effects of the refugees' inflows on tourism. In a European study, Zenker et al. (2019) focused on the effects

of 'refugee crisis' on tourists' decision structure in four countries: Austria, Germany, UK, and US. They inferred that "tourists place greater importance on perceived security [than] perceived openness of a destination" (p. 207). All these researchers tend to be doubtful in their conclusions about whether the refugee crisis is actually beneficial for tourism.

Figure 2

Word frequency used in research about refugees in the tourism literature

Insert Figure 2 about here

Within this body of research, scholars have examined possible ways that the 'refugee crisis' could be managed. Remedial actions and cooperation among tourism stakeholders has been offered as one possible solution to restore the positive image of a destination (e.g. Tsartas et al., 2020). Some scholars have illustrated positive impacts for the host country by identifying the economic opportunities that the 'refugee crisis' presents for tourism businesses, which may also develop a "culture of hospitality" based on diversity, tolerance, and compassion" (Pappas & Papatheodorou, 2017, P. 38). These economic opportunities may arise as the influx of international volunteer tourists and refugee aid workers arrive to a destination to offer their humanitarian services and use tourism services during the low season which brings positive economic impacts (e.g. Tsartas et al., 2020). Ultimately, these studies position refugees as groups that are detrimental to the economic values within a capitalist framework as well as promoting depersonalising 'othering' discourses (Freedman, Kivilcim, & Baklacioğlu, 2017).

The rise of critical and advocative orientated tourism research toward refugees is particularly significant. These studies argue that tourism must stop providing opportunities only for privileged tourists to travel and enjoy leisure activities which generate profits for large corporations. They also state that any research *about* or *with* refugee background communities should practice an inclusive, proactive manner that enhances agency for change. Within this perspective, scholars view tourism as a mechanism for facilitating economic empowerment and the social inclusion of refugees. For instance, Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe, & Boluk (2019) argue that "refugees are not welcome while tourism (for those privileged) is developed" (p. 1927) and criticise the "discriminating applications of mobility" in tourism "as an assertion of power and privilege" (p. 1927). They conclude that the right to travel for some communities needs to be reconsidered, especially as we face a future scenarios of global challenges caused by global climate change.

Researchers within this perspective such as Scheyvens and Biddulph (2017), examine the exclusive nature of tourism and critique its tendency to objectify and exoticise the ‘other’. They discuss the importance of making tourism more inclusive and hospitable by including marginalised people in the production, representation, and consumption of tourism. Pechlaner, Nordhorn, and Poppe (2016) examined tourism and hospitality features associated with asylum seekers in order to evaluate the culture of welcome, quality of service, and relational aspects of a host country. Their study conclude that substantial improvements need to be made around creating a welcoming hospitality climate for refugees. Gibson (2006) also questioned the limited and exclusive nature of hospitality in her work examining the response shown in the UK and argues that the threshold of hospitality is revealed by the tolerance of strangers. According to this study, “a true ‘welcome’ involves accepting the unexpected visitation; it is much more than inviting a guest who conforms to the expectations of the host” (Gibson, 2006, p. 696).

To achieve equity and justice, tourism needs to provide opportunities for marginalised populations, including refugees, to participate in decision-making and receive the benefits of tourism development. Within these studies, researchers criticise the current definition of hospitality, as an inseparable part of tourism, in which it accepts the foreigner, the ‘other’ only up to a certain point, and usually with restrictions. Tourism offers hospitality only if the ‘other’ follows our rules, culture, political system, and so on (Borradori, 2003). According to these critical studies, tourism must be returned to the original concept of hospitality and the political and business processes that designate some people as stranger than others must be avoided (Ahmed, 2000). Despite their advocacy toward refugees, some of these studies in this orientation still have limitations. Some of this research does not include empirical research that includes the voices of refugees, for instance. So refugees’ perspectives, experiences, and agency as key stakeholders in this issue remains rather absent.

Stakeholders and their involvement

A variety of stakeholders are involved in tourism. Key stakeholders involved in the tourism and ‘refugee crisis’ include the media, refugee-service organisations, tourism businesses, and refugees. Within certain tenants of the media, the term ‘refugee’ is used as a quick and easy hook for their audiences, with a tendency to draw on easy stereotypes, labels, and negative images of crisis. Additionally, refugees are often discriminated and negatively framed in the media as a threat to security, jobs or viewed as an ethnic threat by those with nationalist

tendencies (Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017). This type of news coverage can sometimes exaggerate negative consequences, and influence audience perceptions of refugees as a crisis, all of which can impact perceptions of a tourist destination by tourists and authorities in tourist-generating countries. This might result in declining number of tourists from certain areas. On the other hand, positive media reports depicting a destination's openness, hospitality from residents, and narrations of concrete support that include integration initiatives, all have the potential to positively influence the perception of a tourist destination and may shape future decisions to travel (Zenker et al., 2019).

Other stakeholders in this issue are refugee aid and refugee-service organisations that exist outside and within host countries. International refugee aid agencies often position refugees not as individuals, but as a homogenised group of clients with “an assumed set of needs” (Zetter, 1991, p. 44). Western humanitarian organisations “frequently resort to a vocabulary of trauma and vulnerability to describe the condition of refugees who have survived conflict and persecution” (Sigona, 2014, p. 372). Refugee-focused service providers in the host country can help refugees with education, employment, social engagement, mental health and wellness to successfully integrate into the new country. McIntosh and Cockburn-Wooten (2019) conducted research to understand the type and level of welcome provided by refugee-focused organisations in New Zealand. They concluded that refugee service organisations within the host country can also inevitably end up portraying refugees as vulnerable others, deserving humanitarian assistance. Both the media, in their quest for readers, and refugee aid organisations, in their quest for donors (Ludwig, 2016) create this stereotypical construction of human suffering, which affirms notions of refugees as victims without agency (Zetter, 1991). Researchers and activists within tourism have argued that these images, stereotypes, and labelling perpetuate refugees as victims of their own individual circumstances rather than as an outcome of international political and climate change global events (Ludwig, 2016). Critical postcolonial scholars further argue that these constructs reaffirm refugees as colonial subjects, and re-colonises them in a second way, after the violence of their displacement and dispossession (Ahmed, 2000).

Tourism businesses are another stakeholder affected by ‘refugee crisis’. Some tourism researchers try to understand the effect of ‘refugee crisis’ on tourism businesses. For example, Pappas and Papatheodorou (2017) investigated complexity in their study focusing on tourism accommodation providers and their decision processes within the current Greek ‘refugee crisis’. This study concluded that the significant influx of refugees may have a detrimental impact on

the tourism sector, since sun-seeking tourists are discouraged from visiting places where refugees are waiting to be relocated. Ivanov and Stavrinoudis (2018) examined the impact of refugees in their study of the accommodation industry on four Greek islands. They discussed how hotels adopted coping mechanisms to reduce the negative consequences of the 'refugee crisis'. Much of this research is orientated around positioning refugees as a problem for the business of tourism and lamented that refugee inflows have severely affected a destination's image, resulting in negative tourism profits (e.g. Ivanov & Stavrinoudis, 2018; Zenker et al., 2019).

Refugees are an important stakeholder for consideration of this global issue on tourism, yet can often feel excluded and frustrated by how they are represented. This continuous focus on this feature of their identities, which is no longer salient to their current realities, tends to ignore their resilience, contributions, and talents. Shneikat and Alrawadieh (2019) investigated the role of entrepreneurship in the hospitality sector and how it had the potential to integrate refugees in to the host country. They concluded that the term refugee was perceived negatively by the respondents and tended to affect the quality of the data by promoting a defensive attitude among them. It is clear that "definitions of categories of people, such as 'refugees' arising from the refugee and humanitarian regime are not necessarily meaningful in the academic field" (Scalettaris, 2007, p. 37), nor are they meaningful for the person with a refugee background. "These are policy related labels, designed to meet the needs of policy rather than scientific enquiry" and "bear assumptions which reflect the principles underlying the [bureaucratic policy] system" (Scalettaris, 2007, p. 37). For these reasons, using categories imposed by international policy, which have wider negative connotations, may actually inhibit the development of theory, hinder solutions, limit understandings, and reduce possibilities for engagement with social processes for positive change (Bloch, 2020).

Trends and Issues

The refugee crisis does present some challenges, as is already evident in Ukraine refugee crisis, nevertheless, tourism businesses could transform this crisis into a positive opportunity by employing refugees. This would provide individuals with an income, security, and improve their prospects for integration while addressing the current skills gaps for the sector. According to The Times, Ukrainian refugees could offer solutions rather than challenges for the UK, since the country is facing the worst staffing crisis the tourism sector has seen with about 230,000 vacant positions in holiday parks, visitor attractions, motels, hotels, restaurants, pubs, cafes,

and guesthouses (Haslam, 2022). This allows hospitality businesses to actively seek staff from Ukrainian refugees. Similarly, Greece has turned to the Ukrainian refugees to help fill more than 50,000 staff shortages for the tourism sector (Magra, 2022). The 'refugee crisis' can become an opportunity for tourism businesses if restrictions are lifted, so people can be employed in the sector. If individuals from a refugee background gain access to employment opportunities, then they will be less dependent on any government benefits or aid provided by their host countries. It will result in a win-win situation for refugees and tourism businesses.

A concerning forecasted trend and issue for 2021 has been the consequences of COVID-19. COVID-19-related travel restrictions have had far-reaching impacts on both tourists and refugees' mobility. By mid-July 2020, IOM estimated that the pandemic had left nearly three million people stranded abroad (Benton, Batalova, Davidoff-Gore, & Schmidt, 2021). The worst year for the tourism sector had been 2020, with a 73% decrease in arrivals from international tourists (overnight visitors) compared to 2019 (UNWTO, 2022b). COVID-19 has also exacerbated the situation of globally displaced people, as they constitute one of the most vulnerable populations affected by pandemic. Despite the fact that 1.44 million refugees worldwide need to be resettled immediately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, only 22,770 were resettled in 2020. This is an 80 percent decrease from 2019 and the lowest resettlement in almost two decades. To reduce the spread of COVID-19, many countries restricted movements in and out of their borders. This has made it difficult for those fleeing war and persecution to reach safe destinations. In addition to governments restricting opportunities to leave their country, in some cases, COVID-19 may have also been a key factor in triggering new movement of people in 2020. For instance, in Yemen, displaced people have started to report the pandemic as a reason for their displacement (UNHCR, 2021).

Climate change is an ongoing issue for tourism and the 'refugee crisis'. The global forecast for population has identified that by 2050, nearly 10 billion people will be in conflict over the scarce resources (Baker, 2020). Those factors, combined with the likelihood of increased natural disasters, mean even stable countries will be vulnerable by 2050 (Baker, 2020). Due to the increasing number of international forcibly displacements, the United Nations has added refugees as a new dedicated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators framework in 2020. This dedicated refugee indicator highlights the importance of prevention of situations that create forced displacement and the need for durable protection for those already displaced (UNHCR, 2019).

Within academia, there remains an issue and tensions around both labelling and knowledge production. As our earlier examples illustrate, some articles focus on addressing the political, socio-cultural, and economic impacts of refugee from the perspectives of the host community and often refer to the phenomenon as a ‘refugee crisis’. Using the term ‘crisis’ has deliberate implications. Usually defined as a negative event, a crisis is seen as a deviation from normality that has negative effects on destinations' or organisations' activities (Pforr & Hosie, 2008). According to Freedman et al. (2017), describing something as a ‘crisis’ emphasises the events exceptionality. Exceptionality legitimises any governmental decisions and measures aimed at enforcement, policing, and increasing control at its borders. The ‘crisis’ labelling which has been perpetuated in mainstream tourism research, also diverts attention away from the underlying causes of migration and from related political problems, focusing attention on the urgent need for humanitarian relief (Freedman et al., 2017).

Institutions in wealthier nations typically fund and conduct academic research, and critical researchers argue that this maintains the hegemonic state in power within the post-colonial world order. In this mainstream economic orientation, researchers have tended to exclude the voices and experiences of refugees, leaving them voiceless in their research. As Māori scholar Tuhiwai Smith (2021) notes that “research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1), as traditionally, it has been a colonising practice even when occurring in decolonising spaces. To counteract this tension, critical tourism and social justice researchers have advocated for more inclusive research *with* rather than only *on* refugees to open up opportunities for communities to illustrate hidden or ignored community-led knowledge about a topic. Such approach might reshape the current discourse around refugees as competent co-researchers, rather than portraying them merely as objects to be sampled and analysed.

Contributions, Future Work and Conclusions

To improve the future, tourism businesses can play an important role in ‘refugee crisis’ situations by providing services to refugees. It is an emerging response to the situation in Ukraine in which tourism businesses in neighbouring countries, supported the Ukrainian refugees by providing them with free accommodation, transportation, and food. The UK Guardian newspaper for instance, reported that accommodation providers across 19 countries have signed up to offer free accommodation to Ukrainian refugees (Bowes, 2022). These initiatives have shown that the tourism sector can collaborate and unite for the greater good.

Another way tourism business can improve the future is through employing refugees. This would involve reducing government restrictions to allow tourism businesses to employ refugees. Refugee inflows could provide opportunities for tourism businesses to compensate for the shortage of employment in the sector.

Mainstream tourism scholars also need to reconsider their framing to reflect on their assumptions that tend to represent refugees as a threat and passive. Rather, there could be an acknowledgement that there is possible value of refugee's inflows for the tourism sector. Similarly, within the research design processes, it is crucial that tourism scholars apply the principle of 'nothing about us, without us' (Charlton, 2000) and consider the equal involvement of diverse stakeholders in their scholarship. "Tourism stakeholder collaboration, creative thinking, dialogic communication, and planning is crucial for enabling problem-solving around complex, unconsidered, and polysemous issues" (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2018, p. 1491) - like refugee inflows.

This chapter has identified the historical, current, and future predictions of the global issue of the 'refugee crisis'. We then moved to highlight that the global 'refugee crisis' has been approached by tourism researchers in two ways. Some academics have examined the impact of the 'refugee crisis' and the challenges it has caused for the host country and the tourism businesses. While others from a critical social justice approach advocate for an inclusive and proactive research. They further argue that any research conducted *on* or *with* refugee-background communities should enhance agency for change. Following on from this section, we turned to identify different stakeholders in the topic and how some tourism researchers colonise the space of research by excluding the voices of refugees. While the number of refugees will increase in the future, we discussed the possibilities and positive role tourism businesses and tourism scholars could play to improve the future situation for displaced people.

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Figure 1

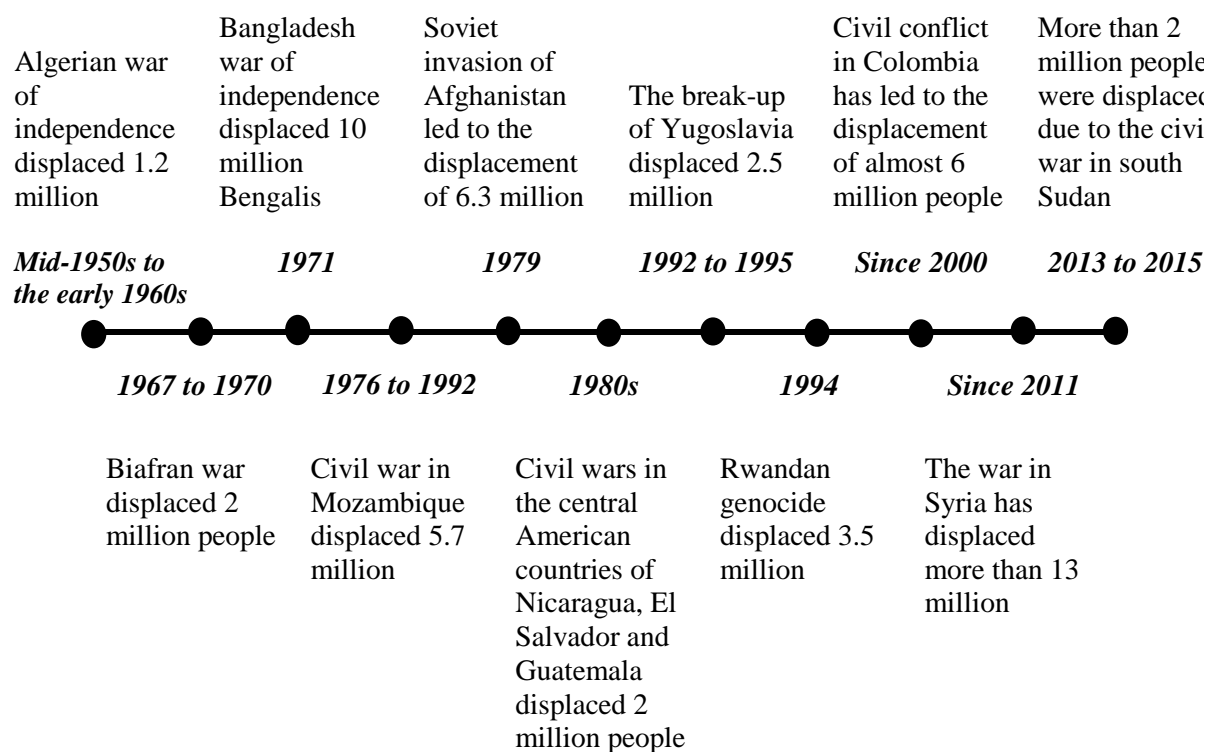


Table 1

Source country	Event	Year	Number of refugees
Afghanistan	Taliban insurgency	2002 - 2021	3
Iraq	U.S occupation and insurgency	2003 - 2012	2.4
Syria	Syrian civil war	2011 - present	6.8
South Sudan	South Sudanese civil war	2013 - 2020	2.5
Venezuela	Venezulean economic-political turmoil	2014 - present	5
Ukraine	Russian invasion	2022	5.3

Note: The number of Ukrainian refugees was updated based on the last report by UNHCR (2022).

Figure 2

