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The Refugee Journey:
An Exploration of the Role of Organizations and Psychological Processes

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Abstract

Throughout history, both human-made crises and natural disasters have displaced populations, forcing people to leave their homes. This not only results in lasting scars on those who flee but can also profoundly impact entire societies. Drawing from the fields of organizational studies, migration studies, and psychology, we argue that understanding the long-term effects of refugee migration requires a comprehensive examination of the entire refugee journey. During pre-, mid-, and post-migration phases organizational actors play a pivotal role in shaping refugees' individual and collective experiences. At the individual level, refugees may experience Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Post-traumatic Growth. At the collective level, transgenerational trauma evolves into a shared memory, profoundly influencing the long-term outcomes of refugee migration, which is intersected by Coping Skills and Spillover-Crossover effects from work to family. By highlighting the intricate interplay between these psychological processes and organizations we shed light on how much contemporary society has been—and will continue to be—shaped by the opportunities extended to, or withheld from, refugees. We underscore the imperative for organizational scholarship to more clearly theorize refugee migration as distinct from broader migration phenomena, and outline a path forward for research, policy, and practice.

Keywords: refugee journey, organizations, psychology, labor market integration, organizational scholarship, traumatic shocks, migration

Throughout history, both human-made crises and natural disasters have uprooted populations, forcing them into displacement. The resulting trauma not only leaves lasting psychological effects on people who flee their homes but can also deeply impact societies. To illustrate this with one example: The Siege of Sarajevo, among the longest in modern warfare, demonstrates how an entire society can be disrupted. In 1991, Sarajevo was home to 525,980 people. By 1994, the city's population had dropped to approximately 300,000, with 60% of the pre-war residents fleeing and many resettling abroad (Bassiouni, 1994). Today, more than 30 years later, displacement and collective trauma continue to shape the Bosnian capital, fueling ethnic nationalism, economic stagnation, and disillusionment, leading to further emigration (Higgins & Zivojinovic, 2024). Those that fled continue to experience the psychological aftermath, even as they establish new lives, facilitated (or sometimes impeded) by a variety of organizational interactions.

As of 2025, humanitarian crises in Ukraine, Palestine, Myanmar, Venezuela, and other regions persist. We do not yet know the long-term impacts for these nations, as well as the countries receiving their displaced populations, but there is little doubt that these traumatic shocks will continue to result in lasting disruptions (Klüppel, Pierce, & Snyder, 2018). Moreover, existing theoretical lenses—typically developed for voluntary migration— are insufficient for fully capturing refugee migration, as they often yield incomplete or even misleading predictions (Szkudlarek, Nardon, Osland, Adler, & Lee, 2021). The motivation for our perspective article starts with these societal concerns and the realization that we lack an integrated scholarly understanding of the key factors that shape outcomes of refugee migration along their journey. We put forward three core arguments.

First, we contend that it is crucial to study the refugee journey in its entirety. This point has been made in migration studies but virtually ignored in organizational scholarship. The refugee journey begins with the pre-migration stage, where individuals face the life-

altering decision to remain in their home country or flee abroad. During this stage, intergovernmental and humanitarian organizations serve as key actors that influence these choices. This is followed by the mid-migration, or transit phase, which involves crossing international borders, and interacting with organisations such as smugglers and traffickers, refugee camps, and private foundations. The journey culminates in post-migration, which entails interaction with resettlement agencies and employing organizations in a new country (de Haas, Castles, & Miller, 2020). These various organizational actors have a profound impact on shaping refugee experiences, whether in positive or negative ways.

Second, to better understand the interlinkages between these different organizations and the refugee journey, we must take into account the psychological processes that unfold at both individual and collective levels. At the individual level, refugees' psychological responses to the external, often acute, circumstances are far more complex and nuanced than typically assumed. Individuals can experience Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)—sometimes, concurrently (Acquaye, 2017; Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014). These experiences intersect with Coping Skills and Spillover-Crossover Effects from work to family. At the collective level, transgenerational trauma "persists beyond the lives of the direct survivors of the events, and is remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space" (Hirschberger, 2018: 1).

Third, while historical traumatic shocks have been shown to influence organizational dynamics (Klüppel et al., 2018; Pierce & Snyder, 2018), we propose that organizations also have the power to transform the outcomes of refugee migration through their responses to the needs of those affected. By deepening our understanding of the multitude of organizational actors involved at each stage of the journey and how these interactions impact refugee psychology, we outline potential policy and practice implications, aimed at helping to

mitigate the long-term effects of trauma and foster more positive outcomes—not only for individuals and organizations but also for broader society.

To ground these core arguments, we draw on three distinct yet interrelated bodies of literature: migration studies, psychology, and organizational scholarship. Arguably, the substantial gaps in theorization on refugee migration (de Haas, 2021) are due to the lack of interconnectedness between these different fields.

Migration studies is a multidisciplinary body of work from sociology, anthropology, economics, law, population geography, and political science that specifically examines migration. In this literature, research on refugees has been largely policy-driven, addressing the causes of displacement, legal frameworks for refugee protection, and societal discrimination, yet with limited attention to the organizational actors involved (Fransen & de Haas, 2022). The psychology literature on refugees typically focuses on micro-level processes and outcomes such as mental health (Bryant, Nickerson, Morina, & Liddell, 2023; Chan, Young, & Sharif, 2016; Steel, Chey, Silove, Marnane, Bryant, & van Ommeren, 2009). Finally, organizational scholars have begun to engage more actively with the topic of migration only in the last decade, as illustrated by a steadily growing number of special issues focused on it in our journals. However, papers on refugees remain in the minority within this literature, and they almost exclusively focus on labor market integration in the host country, that is, the post-migration stage (e.g., Amin, van Burg, & Stam, 2024; Knappert, Ortlieb, Kornau van Dijk, & Maletzky, 2023).[1]

We have organized this perspective piece as follows. First, we define the term "refugee" and explain how the refugee journey differs from the experiences of other

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[1] Please see introductory editorials and individual papers from the following Special Issues on migration, published in management and business journals (listed by guest editors' names): Hernandez, Choudhury, Kulchina, Wang, Shaver, Zellmer-Bruhn, and Khanna (2025); Wehrle, van Dijk, Szkudlarek, and Newman (2025); Minbaeva, Narula, Phene, and Fitzsimmons (2024); Szkudlarek, Nardon, and Toh (2024); Groutsis, Vassilopoulou, Ozbilgin, Fujimoto, and Mor Barak (2023); Andresen, Suutari, Muhr, Barzantny, and Dickmann (2023); Hajro, Caprar, Zikic, and Stahl (2021); Barnard, Deeds, Mudambi, and Vaaler (2019); and Dietz (2010).

forcefully displaced populations. We then address each stage of the journey, the organizational actors involved, the underlying psychological processes, and their interaction. Figure 1 presents an overview, emphasizing the interplay between organizations and psychological processes throughout the three stages of the refugee journey, influencing the outcomes of refugee migration. While we highlight key elements that arise at each phase of the journey, we acknowledge additional nuances. By integrating insights from migration studies, psychology, and organizational studies (see summary in Table 1), we open new lines of inquiry, enlarge the scope of considerations and offer fruitful avenues for future research.

< Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 About Here>

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE REFUGEE JOURNEY AND OTHER FORMS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

While all refugees are forced migrants, not all forced migrants fall under the legal classification of refugee. Forced migration broadly encompasses internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum-seekers, refugees, and others in need of international protection (e.g., stateless persons) (IOM, 2019).[2] IDPs remain in their home country, but are forced to move to a different region; globally, IDPs make up the largest portion (nearly 60%) of forcibly displaced people (UNHCR, 2025). Examples are Yemenis relocating within the country due to the ongoing civil war, Eastern Ukrainians moving to Western Ukraine because of the conflict with Russia, or people from places that are prone to climate related hazards relocating within their countries. The term "refugee," on the other hand, carries a specific *international connotation*, as defined by the 1951 UN Geneva Convention. It applies to a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or . . .

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[2] There are other forms of forced displacement that are beyond the scope of this perspective article. For example, in migration studies, slavery—whether historical transatlantic slavery or modern slavery—is considered a distinct category of coercion and human rights violation, rather than a form of refugee migration.

unwilling to return to it" (UN General Assembly, 1950). At the time of writing, the largest numbers of refugees are from Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2025). The Geneva definition can also be applied retrospectively. For example, people who survived the Holocaust and fled their home countries because of it can be understood as refugees, since their experiences align with the conditions that came to define refugee status in 1951.

Historically, the highest total of forcefully displaced individuals on record was after World War II, with 175 million, or 8% of the world population (Fransen & de Haas, 2022). Today, that number—including IDPs, asylum-seekers, refugees, and others in need of international protection—is estimated at 122.6 million people, constituting approximately 1.5% of the world's population (UNHCR, 2025). Among them, the number of refugees as defined by the Geneva Convention, is estimated to be 37.9 million. Since the recognition of refugee status as a legal category in 1951, which set grounds for systemic data collection, the percentage of *refugees* as a portion of the world population has fluctuated between roughly 0.1% and 0.4%, depending on outbreaks and duration of violent conflicts, with no discernable linear trend (Fransen & de Haas, 2022; UNHCR, 2025).

In this perspective piece, we focus on the *refugee journey*. While there is no universally accepted conceptualization of the journey, it is typically considered to be a three-phase process: pre-migration (traumatic shock in the country of origin), mid-migration (flight/transit), and post-migration (settlement in a foreign country). Refugee journeys differ from other forms of forced migration in four important ways.

First, refugees cross international borders—sometimes multiple borders. Second, they typically undergo a formal asylum process that involves screenings and assessments, and may include interrogations and detention (IOM, 2019; Pollozek & Passoth, 2024). Their resettlement is often arranged by designated agencies in the receiving state, resulting in the

deprivation of freedom of mobility (Ahani, Gölz, Procaccia, Teytelboym, & Trapp, 2023; Beaman, 2012). IDPs rarely go through such a structured and rigid process. Third, refugees frequently undergo acculturation stress, which refers to the challenges of adapting from their original culture to a new host culture (Berry, 1997; Starck et al., 2020). They must familiarize themselves with new cultural values and norms, navigate different social expectations, and often learn a new language (Hirst et al., 2023; Lee, Szkudlarek, Nguyen, & Nardon, 2020). In contrast, IDPs typically do not need to adapt to a new culture. Finally, although their numbers are significantly smaller than IDPs, refugees attract far more media and public attention due to their international context (Fransen & de Haas, 2022; Klein & Amis, 2021). They often face mislabeling, scapegoating, and stigmatization, being portrayed as threats to national security or economic stability of the transit and receiving countries (de Haas, 2023; Welfens, 2022). These differentiators make the refugee journey particularly challenging.

PRE-MIGRATION: IMPRINTS OF TRAUMATIC SHOCKS

> "*no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear*
> *saying-*
> *leave,*
> *run away from me now*
> *i dont know what i've become*
> *but i know that anywhere*
> *is safer than here*"
> Warsan Shire, Writer and Poet, Daughter of Somali Refugees

Historical traumatic shocks, such as the Holocaust, the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, or the Siege of Sarajevo, exemplify the severe trauma that communities and individuals face when confronted with conflict (DeAngelis, 2023). These shocks reshape culture in enduring ways, and influence the operations and viability of the organizations operating within the affected environments, sometimes even paving the way for the emergence of new organizational forms. The ways in which organizations react to pre-

migration conditions in turn, influence the people living in the region, and can cycle back to influence the conditions themselves.

Organizations in pre-migration

Events that lead to displacement have a profound impact on local organizations, creating a range of challenges from operational disruptions and security concerns to the need for careful coordination. Organizations may either withdraw from or continue operating in conflict zones (Chen, 2017; Oh & Oetzel, 2017). They may engage in humanitarian actions and peacebuilding (Reade, McKenna, & Oetzel, 2019) but they can also become perpetrators (Slim, 2012).

Focusing on profit in a highly unpredictable environment can lead to a pattern of decisions that, over time, "make a company short-sighted", that is, unable to grasp the local risks (Belthoste & Nivet, 2020: 1575). An example is the French cement group Lafarge, with its subsidiary in war-torn Syria. The company brought its European employees back home, but it required the local Syrian workers to stay on the job, critically endangering their lives. They had to navigate dangerous checkpoints to reach their workplace amid heavy fighting (ECCHR, 2016).

In contrast, some organizations have taken actions that help mitigate harm and contribute to conflict resolution. For instance, the media organization CNN—under the leadership of Christiane Amanpour—played a critical role during the Bosnian War (1992–1995) by broadcasting graphic, on-the-ground reports of civilian suffering. These powerful images and stories mobilized global public opinion, particularly in the West, and pressured governments to intervene. The resulting actions, including the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, helped bring an end to the conflict and reduced prolonged exposure to violence—thereby mitigating further psychological harm (Harvard Kennedy School, 2025).

Less apparent is the way in which traumatic shocks can result in lasting cultural changes that disrupt organizational structures and strategies (Nunn, 2009, 2012; Klüppel et al., 2018). There is some evidence that historical events, such as the African slave trades leave behind enduring legacies—mistrust, ethnic fragmentation, and weakened institutions (Pierce & Snyder, 2018), but such studies are rare in our field(s).

Traumatic shocks can also trigger the formation of entirely new organizational forms. To illustrate, the aftermath of World War II prompted the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which both shaped international human rights frameworks, including the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1989, IOM broadened the scope of its operations to encompass various aspects of migration management while UNHCR maintained its focus on forcefully displaced populations (IOM, 2024). However, both organizations continue operating in conflict-affected areas, providing humanitarian assistance, emergency shelter, displacement tracking, and (mental) health services. There are also other UN organizations, such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, that coordinate humanitarian assistance and oversee the implementation of peace agreements, thus serving a vital role in the pre-migration context.

These last examples illustrate how traumatic shocks can catalyze the formation of organizations dedicated to addressing the complex needs of populations in conflict zones, thus, potentially mitigating the long-term psychological impacts of trauma.

Psychology in pre-migration

In the pre-migration stage, individuals experience a clash between their hopes and aspirations, and the possibility of action (de Haas, 2021). The decision to stay or migrate is highly complex. International migration is just one potential response to difficult circumstances, and various personal, regulatory, economic, and safety barriers can impede

cross-border mobility (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018). Lubkemann (2008) highlighted two forms of *immobility*: voluntary, where individuals choose to remain in their home country despite hardship and the risks involved, and involuntary, where individuals wish to leave but lack the resources or opportunities to do so. In both cases, the pre-migration stage is marked by significant stressors, which can further complicate the decision-making process and deepen the psychological burden of those considering emigration.

This psychological distress, alongside traumatic experiences such as violence, persecution, and the loss of family members and loved ones, is an often-overlooked contributor to PTSD, which is defined as a mental health condition that can develop because of exposure to a highly distressing or traumatic event. The American Psychiatric Association lists the following symptoms: "(a) re-experiencing the trauma in painful recollections, flashbacks, or recurrent dreams or nightmares; (b) avoidance of activities or places that recall the traumatic event, as well as diminished responsiveness (emotional anesthesia or numbing), with disinterest in significant activities and with feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; and (c) chronic physiological arousal, leading to such symptoms as an exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering, and guilt about surviving the trauma when others did not" (APA, 2023).

Research on PTSD among refugees in the psychology literature started gaining traction in the early 2000s (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). Symptoms of PTSD can begin as early as three months after the first exposure to traumatic event(s), which means they are likely to emerge during the pre-migration stage (NIH, 2023). PTSD often also persists beyond the pre-migration stage, continuing into the mid- and post-migration phases. However, it must be noted that meta-reviews of studies in psychology indicate that empirical evidence regarding the prevalence of PTSD among populations exposed to war and conflict

remains sparse and often conflicting, due to the varied sampling approaches and

methodologies (Morina, Stam, Pollet, & Prieb, 2018).

To sum up, PTSD can and does occur as early as the pre-migration stage. The role of

organizations is crucial in either amplifying (as in the case of Lafarge) or alleviating (as in the

work of UNHCR) its risks.

MID-MIGRATION: NAVIGATING THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY

"The humiliation was hard to bear. Many of the faces I saw spoke of the same thing.
In their own countries, these people had power, even the respect of their communities.
Here . . . we were barely human. We were the beasts that gave this place its name."
Gulwali Passarlay, Public Speaker and Author, Afghan Refugee

The shift from pre-migration to mid-migration involves facing the tangible physical,

psychological, and emotional challenges of displacement. This stage is rarely mentioned in

organizational research on refugees (Szkudlarek, Nardon, & Toh, 2024). The broader field of

migration studies has given more attention to mid-migration, but it is still frequently regarded

as just an "in-between" phase: liminal, challenging, or even "meaningless" (Crawley &

Jones, 2021). However, millions of refugees experience prolonged periods of transit, and

permanent resettlement numbers are extremely low (Bryant et al., 2023).

Mid-migration is anything but "meaningless." It is often a dangerous period for

refugees, characterized by heightened risks and uncertainties. Many find themselves trapped,

with onward travel rendered impossible due to insufficient economic and social capital

(Aleinikoff & Zamore, 2019). A case in point is Syrian refugees in Turkey, who aspire to

move to Western Europe but are unable to do so because of these limitations (Üstübici &

Elçi, 2022). At the same time, however, many become highly mobile within transit countries,

moving between different refugee camps, from camps to urban areas, within cities, or across

provinces (Betts, Omata, Siu, & Sterck, 2023).

Various organizational actors play a role during this stage, in both positive and negative ways. They are often collectively referred to as the "migration industry" (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; de Haas et al., 2020). This includes a range of entities such as smuggling organizations and human traffickers, humanitarian groups, and refugee camps; private firms are less often involved but may support or build camp and border infrastructure (Ballesteros & Gatignon, 2019; Light, 2013; Salt & Stein, 2002).

The interplay between organizational actors and refugee experiences during mid-migration has a profound impact on individuals' psychological well-being. Many refugees find themselves in situations where they have little to no control over their circumstances. As Viktor Frankl (1962) poignantly observed, when we are no longer able to change a situation, are we not then challenged to change ourselves?

Organizations in mid-migration

Many governments attempt to prevent asylum seekers from crossing their countries' borders by employing deterrence policies (Aleinikoff & Owen, 2022; Rausis, 2023).[3] Such measures are not without consequences. Evidence from case studies shows they often lead to more asylum seekers turning to smugglers or traffickers and undertaking illegal overland and maritime journeys (de Haas, 2023). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has noted that human smuggling and trafficking are among the fastest growing transnational for-profit activities (OECD, 2015). The two are not the same. *Smuggling* refers to "the use of paid or unpaid migration intermediaries to cross borders without authorization" (de Haas et al., 2020: 35). Smugglers are not always "the bad guys" but can also be family

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[3] Deterrence policies refer to asylum-seeker detention and prosecution, as well as various forms of resistance endorsed by the state. Examples include the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the 2022 UK-Rwanda Asylum scheme, and Manus Island Regional Processing Center funded by the Australian government from 2001-2017. Historically, countries in Africa and Asia that host the largest numbers of refugees have rarely used deterrence policies or closed their borders to asylum-seekers (Aleinikoff & Owen, 2022). This may be shifting, as recent policy research indicates that these countries are also starting to adopt more restrictive policies modeled after those of higher-income nations (Rausis, 2023).

members, friends, and small humanitarian organizations that want to help asylum-seekers. In contrast, *human trafficking* refers to the use of coercion and various forms of exploitation against vulnerable individuals, which can lead to extreme conditions that strip individuals of any choice or agency (de Haas, 2023).

Although it is hard to obtain estimates of profitability for black-market organizations that facilitate refugees' arrivals to a new country's border, there is substantial evidence that their gains are considerable. Some estimates suggest that globally, annual profits from human smuggling and trafficking activities amount to between 7 to 30 billion USD, which surpasses what the European Union or the United States contribute to global humanitarian aid (European Council, 2023; UNODC, 2018). To illustrate this with specific examples, the smugglers in charge of a cargo ship with 360 migrants and refugees that Italian border authorities intercepted in 2015 earned close to 3 million USD, with each person paying between 4,000USD and 8,000USD for the illegal transportation (Coleman, 2015). A more recent BBC investigative journalism series on illegal passages from France to the UK across the English Channel indicates a cost of around 3,300USD per person (Harding, Luu, & Clahane, 2024). It is a troublesome reality that, despite the high risk of exploitation, many refugees voluntarily engage with smugglers or traffickers because to be granted legal protection under international law they must first physically arrive at the destination country's border (de Haas et al., 2020).

Other important organizational entities during transit include refugee camps. According to the UNHCR, in summer 2023 Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh hosted more than 900,000 refugees, while the largest refugee camp in Africa, Kakuma in Kenya, hosted around 201,000 people (UNHCR, 2023). By contrast, the largest refugee camp in Europe, the Moria center in Greece, in its peak hosted around 20,000 persons (Pérez-Sales, Galán-Santamarina, Zunzunegui, & López-Martin, 2022).

An individual's duration in a camp can differ greatly, from days and weeks to years and even decades. Many refugee camps, though initially intended to be a temporary solution, have evolved into lasting settlements or even "accidental cities" (Jansen, 2018). In migration studies, refugee camps have been theorized as spaces of power and control that enable the institutional exclusion of refugees from broader society and restrict their individual agency (Böhme & Schmitz, 2022; Pollozek & Passoth, 2024). They are (massive) organizations often referred to as *total institutions* (Goffman, 1961), that is, highly bureaucratic places, "where the inhabitants are depersonalized and where people become numbers without names" (Harees, 2012: 566). In other words, individual identity—such as a person's education, profession, and life experience—is replaced by an institutional identity (i.e., "refugee"), which undoubtedly impacts individuals' psychology (Musa, 2023).

Similarly, the limited research by organizational scholars on refugee camps primarily focuses on the extreme precarity of these camps as non-traditional organizational settings (Chowdhury, 2021; Hultin, Introna, Göransoon, & Mähring, 2022; Mintzberg, 2001; Musa, 2023). However, Betts and Bradenbrink (2020) suggest an alternative view on what refugee camps could be, with business organizations playing a key role in creating economic opportunities within them. An example is the IKEA Foundation's program in Dollo Ado, the largest private sector involvement to date in a refugee camp context. The main mission of the program was to shift from focus on charity to refugee self-reliance. Other studies have also confirmed that employment in refugee camps generates positive outcomes, including improvement in psychological wellbeing of refugees (Hussam, Kelley, Lane, & Zahra, 2022; Kodeih, Schildt, & Lawrence, 2023).

In brief, multiple organizations—both illicit and institutional—shape refugee experiences during the mid-migration phase and, in turn, impact their psychological responses.

Psychology in mid-migration

From the psychological perspective, mid-migration triggers flight stress and acceptance of extremely risky conditions. Refugees often have no other choice but to place themselves at the mercy of smugglers or traffickers when attempting to cross borders (Echterhoff et al., 2020). In his memoir, Afghani refugee Gulwali Passarlay writes: "One of the strangest things about this journey was how whenever a smuggler or a driver gave us an instruction, we simply followed it…Without questioning or really even thinking, we put our lives into the hands of strangers, time and again" (Passarlay & Ghouri, 2015: 167). He describes in intimate detail how such experiences of risk-taking and suspension of one's agency can have negative psychological effects on individuals.

Although documenting these adverse outcomes is essential, it is equally important to recognize that not all refugees who have been exposed to traumatic pre-migration events and the precarity of mid-migration continue to suffer PTSD symptoms. Psychology researchers caution that overly pathologizing refugee experiences may obscure the diverse and nuanced psychological responses to trauma (Sultani et al., 2024). A growing body of research in psychology explores Post-traumatic Growth (PTG) within refugee contexts (Chan et al., 2016; Umer & Elliot, 2021; Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018). PTG is defined as "the positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004: 1). Notable early insights into PTG include Carl Jung's exploration of how psychological distress can support growth and Viktor Frankl's work after his own survival in the WWII concentration camps (Frankl, 1962; Sultani et al., 2024).

Importantly, PTSD and PTG can occur in traumatized individuals concurrently—they are not two opposite ends of the same continuum (Acquaye, 2017). However, PTSD is likely to occur earlier in the journey than PTG. In the pre-migration stage, chronic exposure to war

and violence typically leads to survival-focused coping, which limits the cognitive space needed for growth processes. PTG theory holds that growth occurs after the individual has had time to reflect and rebuild meaning—conditions rarely available in active conflict zones, yet more likely to occur in mid-migration. A meta-analysis by Shakespeare-Finch and Lurie-Beck (2014) noted that time since trauma is positively correlated with PTG.

The phenomenon of PTG is close to the concept of resilience. However, there are qualitative differences: whereas resilience is individuals' ability to adapt to adversity by retaining characteristics that existed before (e.g., elasticity, self-confidence), PTG is about developing new qualities that did not exist before the exposure to traumatic events. In other words, when adversity strikes, it pushes individuals to the brink; however, astonishingly, reaching these limits can be transformative, potentially leading to the discovery of new horizons (Papadopoulos, 2007).

PTG is typically measured by the PTG Inventory (PTGI), which captures five areas: Relating to Others, New Possibilities, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, and Appreciation of Life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). PTG is not isolated to a few unique circumstances—estimates are that about half to two thirds of trauma survivors have moderate-to-high levels of PTG (Collier, 2016), suggesting it is more common than one might think. Experts argue that similar estimates likely apply to refugee populations (Sultani et al., 2024). Studies exploring why some refugees are more likely than others to develop PTG show mixed results. There seems to be a general consensus, however, that female refugees tend to score higher on PTG compared to male refugees, possibly because they are more inclined to engage in productive and contemplative rumination and stress-related emotion management (Sultani et al., 2024; Vishnevsky, Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Demakis, 2010). Furthermore, interestingly, there are some indications that PTG may be more prevalent among refugees than among IDPs (Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2003).

Those refugees who experience PTG often rely on effective coping skills (Acar, Acar, Alhiraki, Fahham, Erim, & Acarturk, 2021; Matos, Costa, Park, Indart, & Leal, 2021; Umer & Elliot, 2021). There is emerging research in migration studies (Böhme & Schmitz, 2022) and in psychology (Nickerson et al., 2022) on coping strategies of refugees during mid-migration. According to the Stress and Coping paradigm by Lazarus and Folkman (1984: 141), coping is defined as "changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person." This theory further differentiates between emotion-focused and problem-focused types of coping. The former involves managing own emotional responses to stressors, while the latter aims to directly address and resolve the external issues. When external circumstances are beyond one's control, emotion-focused coping may prevail (Lazarus, 1993; Nickerson et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of different coping strategies is contextual, depending on the intensity of external stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, Nickerson and colleagues (2022) studied coping strategies among 1,216 refugees from various ethnic backgrounds transiting through Indonesia. The authors found that positive emotion-focused coping—specifically, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, and hope—was strongly associated with better mental health in lower-stress conditions. However, under extremely high-stress conditions, the effectiveness of these same coping strategies on refugee well-being was diminished, suggesting that acute external stressors may counteract the positive emotion-focused coping.

In short, refugees' psychological responses to the external circumstances encountered on their journeys toward safety are far more complex and nuanced than typically assumed. They may experience PTSD and/or PTG, in which positive changes, facilitated by effective coping, emerge following adversity. Organizations play a pivotal role in this context by

providing conditions that either heighten or reduce stress. Traffickers create high-stress environments that strip refugees of agency and expose them to extreme risk. In contrast, innovative private-public sector partnerships within refugee camps foster self-reliance, supporting pathways toward PTG.

POST-MIGRATION: ADJUSTING TO NEW REALITIES TO REBUILD LIVES

> "*A refugee is someone who survived and who can create the future.*"
> Amela Koluder, Manager and Author, Bosnian Refugee

Post-migration—typically defined as the period following the granting of asylum in a host country—has received far more attention compared to pre-migration and mid-migration. However, across different academic disciplines, most studies on refugee post-migration focus on Australia, New Zealand, and high-income countries in Europe and North America (Betts, 2021; Fransen & de Haas, 2022). In contrast, we have very limited insights into resettlement dynamics in other parts of the world, where in fact, the majority of refugees reside. As we write this in mid-2020s, 71% of all refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2025). Before the war in Ukraine, this number was 83% (UNHCR, 2022).

High-income countries are better equipped to allocate resources to resettlement programs and conduct research on their effectiveness (Knappert et al., 2023; Kovacs, 2015). For instance, in Germany, the largest European host of refugees, annual nation-wide household surveys have enabled collecting and analyzing data on refugees' language proficiency, family situation, employment, and housing since 2013 (Bundesamt für Migration, 2024). Similarly, the New Zealand government regularly evaluates its resettlement programs, including reception, community orientation, and housing support (New Zealand Immigration, 2024). However, the allocation of resources toward refugee-related causes can fluctuate in response to shifts in public opinion. For instance, Mittermaier and colleagues (2022) examined how prosocial organizations in Germany, which provided support to

refugees, were negatively impacted by public incidents allegedly committed by refugees, threatening their access to funding.

Outside of wealthy countries, many host states are unable to provide refugees with basic legal assistance or access to public services due to the economic challenges faced by their own citizens. The absence of formal resettlement frameworks leaves refugees in the dark regarding their protection rights and options, and responsibility is often allotted from the governments to non-profit organizations (Rausis, 2023).

Across these distinct contexts, the involvement of organizational actors influences refugee psychology, but refugees also found and contribute to organizations. Furthermore, as we will explain, the stress associated with adapting to new social and employment systems affects not only the emotional state of individual refugees but also of entire families, in some cases even transcending generations.

Organizations in post-migration

Refugees typically have little to no choice over their resettlement location, as in most destination countries, placements are coordinated by resettlement agencies. For example, in the U.S., refugee resettlement is typically managed by specialized non-governmental organizations (Ahani et al., 2023; Jiang, 2021). The location choices made by these organizations determine refugees' access to welfare and employment opportunities (Ermansons, Kienzler, Asif, & Schofield, 2023). An important factor in these resettlement efforts is the presence of similar refugees. Beaman (2012) assessed the placement of various nationalities of refugees by the International Rescue Committee, a major resettlement agency in the U.S., across multiple cities. She found that having a greater number of longstanding network members (that is, other refugees of the same nationality in the same city) improves the chances of finding employment and results in a higher hourly wage. On the other hand, an increase in the number of social network members who have been resettled in the same year

or one year prior to new arrivals resulted in poorer labor market integration outcomes of the latter.

Ineffective placement is exacerbated by systemic barriers, including language skill prerequisites, discrimination or xenophobia, and the devaluation of refugees' prior educational credentials and work experience: what Lee and her coauthors refer to as the "canvas ceiling" (Lee et al., 2020). In a study of nearly 120 employing organizations in Australia, Szkudlarek and Lee (2024) found that those companies that had no previous experience in hiring refugees tended to harbor more misconceptions regarding refugees as a viable talent pool. The authors suggested that strengthening partnerships between resettlement agencies and potential future employers could reduce such biases. The complementarity among diverse organizational actors—that is, each of them not only fulfilling its own role but also sharing knowledge and enhancing others' efforts—is a critical mechanism for reducing the canvas ceiling and accelerating refugees' integration into the labor market (Knappert et al., 2023).

Once employed, there are stark differences in refugee treatment among organizations. There are documented instances of companies that knowingly lowered their management standards under the excuse that they were being socially responsible by providing jobs to those who most needed them. A *New York Times* series exposed abuses of underage refugees in the U.S. forced to work 14-hour shifts in dangerous conditions, under the guise of "repaying sponsorship" (Dreier, 2023). An academic study in Denmark found that particularly those firms that exhibit higher levels of job insecurity profit from hiring refugees because of their willingness to accept lower pay, work long hours, and put extra effort to retain their jobs (Santangelo et al., 2024).

However, there are also companies that have developed specific programs for refugee integration into their workforce. In the Netherlands, ABN AMRO Bank has committed to

hiring refugees under an initiative that includes a coaching scheme focused on language and cultural training, along with individual support (Kohlenberger, Žilinskaitė, & Riosa, 2023). Similarly, Daimler, Telekom, Allianz, ThyssenKrupp, and Siemens have created apprenticeship and employment schemes designed to meet the specific needs of refugee recruits. Between 2016 and 2019, under the "Wir-Zusammen" (We Together) initiative, these companies, along with 30 other corporate partners, provided employment to more than 33,000 refugees in the German labor market (Kohlenberger et al., 2023; Wir-Zusammen, 2019).

The peak in private sector involvement is probably still to come. In 2022, the World Economic Forum established The Refugee Employment Alliance. Within one year, this initiative developed partnerships with 140 Chief Human Resource Officers from more than 20 industries, including multinational enterprises such as Adecco, Flex, and IKEA. This is another example of how a traumatic shock—Russia's invasion of Ukraine that led to widespread displacement—has catalyzed the formation of a new global organizational initiative. Two core objectives of the WEF Alliance highlight how a response to a traumatic shock can shape future involvement of the private sector: the first one being to "distill learning from the rapid labor market integration of Ukrainian refugees," and the second, to "build capability and resilience for future refugee crises" (WEF, 2024).

Beyond large organizations responding to a crisis, there are also examples of refugee entrepreneurs, such as George Soros and Peter Munk, who survived the Nazi occupation of Hungary during WWII, crossed multiple borders, and went on to become highly successful founders and philanthropists (Osnos, 2022; Rohmer, 1997). A more recent example is Hamdi Ulukaya, founder and CEO of Chobani, a U.S.-based company, who, as a Kurd forced to leave eastern Turkey, partnered with a local community college to train hundreds of refugee workers—who now make up 30% of Chobani's workforce (Gibson, Gibson, & Webster,

2021). Ulukaya also established the Tent Partnership for Refugees, which collaborates with more than 400 companies worldwide to provide mentoring, educational opportunities, and other pathways for refugees to integrate into the workforce (Tent, 2025).

There are, of course, many other examples of refugee intellectuals and scientists who have shaped the cultures in which they settled (Heilbut, 2019; Micinski & Lindey, 2022; Moser, Voena, & Fabian Waldinger, 2014). To name just a few globally renowned figures: Hannah Arendt, Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, Edward Said, Otto Stern, John von Neumann, and Robert F. Williams.

Psychology in Post-Migration

Aside from potential continuation of both PTSD and PTG, post-migration may be characterized by 'spillover-crossover', comprised of the interrelationship between the home domain and the work domain. Bolger and coauthors (1989: 175) differentiate between the two constructs: "in spillover, stress experienced in one domain of life results in stress in the other domain for the same individual," whereas crossover "involves contagion across people, whereby demands and their consequent arousal cross over between closely related or otherwise linked individuals." Put simply, the former refers to the same individual transmitting the feeling of being stressed at work to the personal life domain (or vice versa), and the latter refers to a situation in which stress in the workplace results in affecting the individual's family members (or vice versa).

Research in psychology has demonstrated that the emotional state of refugee parents significantly influences their children's ability to cope with resettlement distress. For instance, when refugee parents experience unemployment during their first year of resettlement, it is associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety in their children (Tousignant et al., 1999). This dynamic is further complicated by the fact that refugee parents

often rely on their children as cultural liaisons, given their quicker language acquisition and host-country schooling (Lustig et al., 2004).

Migration scholars have also observed that nuclear refugee families tend to rely less on traditional reciprocity norms compared to other types of relationships. While people generally favor relationships characterized by a roughly equal exchange of support, this expectation appears to be less prominent within refugee families, where maintaining reciprocity is often not a primary concern. Despite differing integration goals across individual family members, refugee families often adopt a shared perspective that frames these varied goals as part of a collective effort to benefit the household as a whole (Klok & Dagevos, 2022).

Building on this understanding of family dynamics, it is important to recognize that the psychological consequences of resettlement extend beyond the immediate family context and may persist across generations (Hirschberger, 2018; Smelser, 2004). The concept of transgenerational trauma—the passing of psychological effects stemming from experiences like war, injury, or poverty across multiple generations was first introduced in the 1960s (Rakoff, Sigal, & Epstein, 1966). The study of the connection between PTSD and transgenerational trauma in the context of refugees is very recent, with many questions remaining. This gap is partly due to the limited intersection between these two domains of research within psychology (DeAngelis, 2023).

The few existing studies that examine PTSD across generations have mostly focused on Holocaust survivors and their offspring. For instance, Danieli and colleagues (2015: 233) identified distinct behavior patterns in adult children of Holocaust survivors, "including the potential for offspring to be insecure about their own competence, to feel the need to protect their parents, to be alienated from their peers, to be obsessed with the Holocaust, to feel the need to always be in control, and to be immaturely dependent." She termed these responses

reparative adaptational impacts, suggesting that the children, often unconsciously, attempt to "repair" the world for their parents, grandparents, and themselves. In a different context, Rudahindwa and colleagues (2020) studied the transmission of PTSD symptoms in Rwandan genocide survivors and their offspring, comparing them to a group of Rwandan refugee families living abroad that had not been directly exposed to the genocide. They found that PTSD symptoms were experienced in the same vein across both groups and generations. Although the control group was not directly affected by the genocide, their mental health was impacted.[4]

As we illustrated in this section, refugee psychology in the post-migration phase is very complex, and its effects can extend beyond individuals. These effects can be negative, such as the transmission of trauma across generations, but there are also more positive outcomes, as we illustrated with the examples of successful refugee entrepreneurs, scientists, and intellectuals.

RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Given the significant gaps in the theorization of refugee migration, there is a great opportunity for organizational scholars to contribute (de Haas, 2021; Szkudlarek et al., 2021). Unfortunately, much of the research to date remains siloed in separate disciplines, each addressing different issues and challenges, with little integration across them. By integrating insights from organizational science, migration studies, and psychology we next propose potential pathways for research, policy, and practice (See Table 2 for a summary).

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[4] Recently, researchers have also begun examining another potential pathway for transgenerational trauma through the lens of epigenetics—the study of how genes can be affected by environmental factors (DeAngelis, 2023). Although still nascent, this research highlights how trauma experienced by one generation may leave biological imprints, potentially affecting the health and mental well-being of future generations (Sarigedik, Naldemir, Karaman, & Altinsoy, 2022).

Understanding Organizational Actors Throughout the Refugee Journey. Our understanding of the pre-migration stage is very limited. Emerging research examines how firms operate in conflict zones, including the potential negative impacts of providing materials, infrastructure, or financing to authoritarian regimes or armed groups, and, in extreme cases like Lafarge, contributing directly to human rights violations (Belhoste & Nivet, 2021). However, to the best of our knowledge, this body of research has not explored how firms might hinder individuals' capacity to emigrate, exacerbating the consequences of traumatic shocks. For instance, researchers could examine technology companies that provide surveillance used to monitor or block escape routes, private firms managing border security, or airlines conducting visa checks before boarding and enforcing measures that block refugees from fleeing.

We also know very little about the potential positive actions of firms that engage in humanitarian aid and facilitate safe emigration. Research on companies that provide logistics and transportation expertise to deliver supplies in areas with damaged infrastructure, or on companies that offer mobile connectivity, could help us rethink how we frame and study humanitarian aid in the pre-migration context. We also encourage organizational research on the humanitarian efforts in (and beyond) conflict zones provided by the IOM, UNHCR, and other specialized UN agencies, along with their cross-sectoral partnerships that have received little attention in scholarship. From the policy perspective, this line of research would directly contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10.7 (facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Regarding mid-migration, migration scholars have repeatedly highlighted the theoretical and empirical gaps in this area, describing it as the "black box" of migration research (Cranston et al., 2018). As we have described, organizations are key actors in this phase of refugee migration. Organizational scholars are well equipped with tools to analyze

legal and illegal forms of organizations within the migration industry. For instance, smugglers and traffickers are adept at establishing transnational contacts, partnering with stakeholders internationally, and using digital technologies, social media, and cryptocurrencies to commit crimes (IOM, 2021). In other words, they function as transnational organizations (Salt & Stein, 2002). However, this has received scant attention in the business and management literature (Crane, 2013; Hajro et al., 2023). Such research could draw from existing studies of black-market organizations such as mafias (e.g., Gambetta, 1993; Gond, Palazzo, & Basu, 2009). Like mafia structures, human trafficking entities can be best understood as profit-maximizing organizations that thrive in spaces in which legal support for asylum-seekers is fragile and scarce. Furthermore, a better understanding of how these organizations function has the potential to contribute to policy solutions. Eradication of human trafficking is embedded in SDG 8.7 (the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery and human trafficking).

Concerning the study of refugee camps, while in migration studies they are often theorized as spaces of power and control that institutionalize the exclusion of refugees from broader society, organizational scholars could explore alternative perspectives. The example of the IKEA Foundation involvement in Dollo Ado offers many important lessons about not only improving camp conditions but also building sustainable refugee economies (Betts & Bradenbrink, 2020). As organizational scholars, we should be asking ourselves: How can our research contribute to creating a roadmap for public-private sector partnerships in refugee camps? What are the pre-conditions for such collaborations to be successful? Which organizational entities within firms should be responsible for such engagement—corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments, human resources, operations management—and why? Research on these questions could move beyond descriptive work to include prescriptive and normative elements with an impact on practice.

As we mentioned, the post-migration phase—specifically, refugee integration into the labor market—has been the primary focus of organizational scholars. This is commendable: organizational scholarship has much to contribute to the multidisciplinary conversation on refugee resettlement. We have a long history of studying diversity (Hajro, Gibson, & Pudelko, 2017; Ely & Thomas, 2001), workplace inclusion (Nishii, 2013), organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001), CSR (Carroll, 1991), cross-sector partnerships (Gibson, 2022) and cross-cultural management (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). These perspectives could not only strengthen existing scholarly understanding but could also help organizations develop effective practices for supporting refugees during resettlement (Guo et al., 2020; Loon & Vitale, 2021).

Yet, there are still many gaps to be filled. For example, research in our field on resettlement agencies remains limited (Jiang, 2021). Also, while we know that organizations can mitigate the impact of external influences such as anti-immigration attitudes, biases, fears, and public polarization (Tracey & Phillips, 2016), how they do so in the context of refugees is not yet fully understood (Mittermaier, Shepherd, & Patzelt, 2022). The case of Chobani illustrates how an organization can combat refugee stigmatization by progressively embracing, rather than distancing itself from, its association with the refugee workforce. This also raises important questions: What happens when a company gains a reputation for treating refugees well? What impact does this have beyond its boundaries? Furthermore, as we write this, it is still unclear how the WEF Refugee Employment Alliance will evolve. This initiative holds the potential to foster a cultural shift in how the private sector views refugees, making it another promising subject for research.

Finally, to briefly return to our earlier differentiation between refugees and IDPs: though some of the questions and research pathways presented in this section also apply to the latter, in the post migration stage key differences emerge, such as organizational

challenges related to cross-cultural management or language barriers, as well as legal and policy connotations associated with the term "refugee," which are generally less pronounced in the case of IDPs. We encourage future research examining these differences.

Understanding Psychological Processes Throughout the Refugee Journey.

Refugees constitute a heterogeneous population, consisting of individuals with varied predispositions, needs, and mental health outcomes (Mendola, Parroco, & Li Donni, 2023, 2023). However, in public discourse and even in some of the academic literature, they are typically portrayed as highly susceptible to mental health issues (El-Bialy & Mulay, 2020). We do not deny the severity of psychological consequences resulting from the refugee journey. Nonetheless, as research on forced migration in our field advances, organizational scholars should avoid over-pathologizing the refugee experiences. One surprising observation that has surfaced in meta-reviews on PTSD is that its prevalence among refugees might be much lower than some frequently cited claims, both in science and in public discourse (Bryant et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2016; Steel et al., 2009). This is important to note because assuming higher numbers of PTSD among refugees than is actually the case can be misleading and harmful to those so labeled as well as to organizations that employ them.

The reality is complex: some refugees merely survive, many adapt to their new circumstances, and others even thrive. More scientific insights are needed to challenge the many inadequate narratives surrounding refugees. If we are to contribute to policy and practice, how we frame forced migration and view refugee experiences matters. Being a refugee in itself is not a psychopathological state: "Despite being exposed to the most devastating nature of the events, not everybody is crushed by them. In fact, the majority of individuals do not require professional attention because a great deal of their healthy functioning remains intact and unaffected by the devastation" (Papadopoulos, 2007: 308).

Specifically, we suggest gaining a better understanding of PTG among refugees. On a micro level, PTG and coping are processes that can be promoted by organizations through fostering individual competences, trust, and connection (Matos et al., 2021; Umer & Elliot, 2021), as well as appreciation for inherent human dignity (Gibson et al., 2023). We encourage research that tackles the following questions: What is known about specific coping processes that foster PTG among refugees in organizational contexts? What, if any, theoretical frameworks from our field could contribute to a better understanding of the positive transformation after trauma? What potential organizational interventions could be used to promote PTG in refugees? For instance, we know very little about the applicability of narrative interventions—writing or storytelling sessions that support healing and transformation—for fostering PTG in organizational settings (Umer & Elliot, 2021). Storytelling can enable refugees to establish a sense of social connection and belonging (Sultani et al., 2024). We also encourage researchers to engage in longitudinal studies that explore the efficacy of other types of organizational interventions such as motivational interviewing (Ehret, LaBrie, Santerre, & Sherman, 2015), self-affirmation exercises (Cohen & Sherman, 2014), or cultural shifts at the collective level to cultivate mutual perspective taking, reciprocal respect, embeddedness, and communal advocacy (Gibson, 2022). Providing evidence on whether and how these interventions have the power to improve the work lives of refugees illuminates a way forward for practice.

Another gap in the current research on PTG among refugees is the lack of a culturally sensitive measurement. The PTGI was originally developed and validated in the U.S. on samples of American students (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; 2004). It may be interpreted differently or be less valid in other countries (Powell et al., 2003). Cross-cultural management research has shown that there are significant differences between Western and non-Western cultures (House et al., 2004) from which refugees most often originate. Thus,

the PTGI should be used with caution, and, where possible, supported by qualitative studies (Sultani et al., 2024). Organizational scholars have pioneered the field of intrafirm global mobility and have a strong understanding of its various aspects, such as culture shock, cross-cultural adjustment, and organizational support (for recent reviews see Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019; Fan, Zhu, Huang, & Kumar, 2021; Lazarova, Caligiuri, Collings, & De Cieri, 2023). They could leverage this knowledge to create a cross-culturally validated measure of PTG, to better inform policy and practice regarding which strategies or experiences maximize it.

From the family perspective, organizational scholars have explored the spillover-crossover dynamics in the context of corporate expatriates and their partners or spouses (Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010; Reiche et al., 2023). Expatriates may encounter different or increased job responsibilities and adjustment stress, and the spouses who accompany them on international assignments may be sacrificing their own careers and social circles (Dimitrova, 2018). How refugees are affected by spillover and crossover remains largely unexplored. Refugees' and their families' adjustments have little in common with those among expatriates (Szkudlarek et al., 2021). Thus, a better understanding is needed as to how spillover and crossover between family and workplace domains affect refugee integrative processes. Examining these various issues would yield a better understanding of within- and across-family differences in the refugee resettlement and workplace integration. Although several of these research pathways apply to IDPs as well, we should note that the family dynamics can differ significantly, as crossing international borders often places additional burdens on refugees and their children as discussed.

Finally, we want to acknowledge methodological challenges in conducting research on refugees. First, studies on refugee psychology have been predominantly based on data from Western Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand (Fazel et al., 2005;

Betts et al., 2023). Although it is very important to understand the settlement dynamics and integration trajectories of refugees in these regions, we should not ignore the selection bias inherent to this research. Since statistically those refugees who manage to arrive and apply for asylum in high-income countries are a minority, our current picture of forced mobility in the global context is all but complete.

Second, to gain a more holistic understanding of refugee integration, we should address a wider range of intersectionality features, including social class, religion, race, and gender. For instance, there is empirical evidence in psychology that refugee women are more likely to develop both PTSD and PTG than refugee men (Acquaye, 2017; Sims & Pooley, 2017; Vishnevsky et al., 2010). This is particularly important in those cases, like the Ukraine, where women constitute the largest number of refugees employed by host country organizations (Aigner et al., 2024). Hence, future studies should explore unique experiences of women refugees, complex ways in which they respond to adversity, and organizational factors that may promote integration in the workplace.

Third, potential biases and idiosyncrasies can include conditions arising from the personal background of the researchers and their motives for doing the research. Yet, as noted by Yin (2015), there are many examples of insightful studies on comparably sensitive topics: for example, white researchers who studied black families' social life (e.g., Hannerz, 1969; Stack, 2008), as well as studies by those with closely matched racial or ethnic identities (e.g., Brubaker et al., 2006; Sarroub, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). Our suggestion is that data collection teams should ideally include both: researchers who have similar backgrounds to refugees and those who do not. Such arrangements would enable the research teams to, on the one hand, be sensitive to cultural signals and engender trust and, on the other hand, bring fresh eyes to the research setting.

A qualitative research approach that could be particularly useful in these contexts is engaged scholarship (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018). According to this perspective, researchers cannot be fully separated from what they are studying (Van de Ven, 2007). The researcher's presence at any stage of the refugee journey inevitably influences the research context, and the two are likely to shape each other in a reciprocal manner. We suggest that by adopting an engaged scholarship approach, the connection between the researcher and refugee participants can be seen as a strength, providing deeper insights into emotions, coping mechanisms, and psychological outcomes. Empathy also plays a crucial role, as researchers must ensure that refugees fully understand the purpose, risks, and potential benefits of the research, especially given the traumatic experiences they have endured. Engaged scholarship also often connects findings more directly to practice, given researchers are immersed in the context, and may serve as participant-observers, consultants or action researchers.

Understanding Long-term Outcomes of Traumatic Shocks and Refugee Migration.

The impacts of refugee migration extend beyond the individual and span across generations. There are many open avenues for future research into these transgenerational effects. Traumatic shocks may influence the formation of new national or ethnic narratives and identities, which in turn can reshape key organizational elements like values, norms, and purpose. Yet, the heterogeneous impact of transgenerational trauma on organizations from a historical perspective remains understudied (Klüppel et al., 2018). We encourage more research into these aspects in the context of refugee migration.

Research on transgenerational trauma in psychology has primarily concentrated on its psychopathological, health-related effects. There is a recognition of the need to examine it also in terms of its broader cultural, social, and political consequences (Smelser, 2004). Similarly to psychological responses to trauma by individuals, the collective memory of

traumatic shocks can lead to both a paralyzing, paranoid outlook or, in contrast, a potential for growth (Hirschberger, 2018). However, the mechanisms that establish and sustain these processes at the individual and collective levels can differ greatly, warranting further exploration.

This presents a significant opportunity for organizational scholars. The various types of organizations discussed in this perspective piece (e.g., firms, resettlement agencies, IOM, UNHCR) play an important role in assisting communities affected by traumatic shocks. As we have emphasized throughout, examining the interplay between the refugee journey, psychology, and organizations can shed light on how contemporary society has been influenced by traumatic shocks and, hopefully, provide pathways for mitigating their negative effects in the future.

CONCLUSION

Our motivation for writing this perspective article began with the need to understand the key factors that shape the outcomes of refugee migration. By drawing on research in organizational scholarship, migration studies, and psychology, we delineated the intricacies of the refugee journey, the organizations that hinder or facilitate it, and the underlying psychological processes of refugees. We proposed potential pathways for research, policy, and practice. Our final message is that as organizational scholars, we can and should shape a scientifically grounded narrative that has the power to influence business practice, policy-making, and public perception of refugees, and, most importantly, improve human lives.

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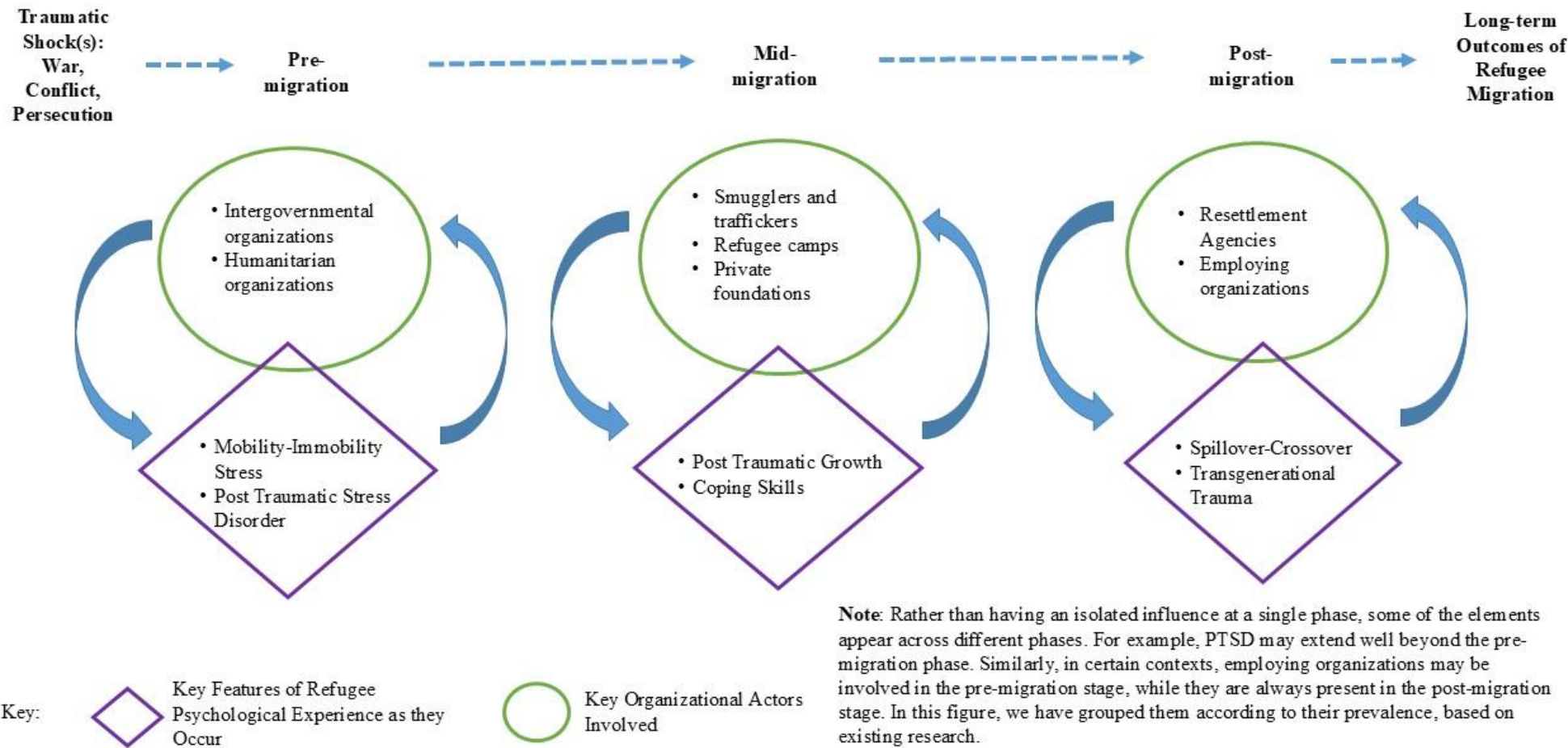
Figure 1. A Framework for the Refugee Journey

Traumatic Shock(s): War, Conflict, Persecution

Pre-migration

Mid-migration

Post-migration

Long-term Outcomes of Refugee Migration

- Intergovernmental organizations
- Humanitarian organizations

- Mobility-Immobility Stress
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Smugglers and traffickers
- Refugee camps
- Private foundations

- Post Traumatic Growth
- Coping Skills

- Resettlement Agencies
- Employing organizations

- Spillover-Crossover
- Transgenerational Trauma

Note: Rather than having an isolated influence at a single phase, some of the elements appear across different phases. For example, PTSD may extend well beyond the pre-migration phase. Similarly, in certain contexts, employing organizations may be involved in the pre-migration stage, while they are always present in the post-migration stage. In this figure, we have grouped them according to their prevalence, based on existing research.

Key:

Key Features of Refugee Psychological Experience as they Occur

Key Organizational Actors Involved

Table 1. Summary of Prior Research on Refugee Migration

Domain of scholarship	Focus/priorities	Key exemplars cited in this article
Organization Studies: Management, International Business, Organizational Behavior, Strategy, Entrepreneurship	Traumatic shocks & organizations	Klüppel et al., 2018
	Recruitment, organizational support, and workplace integration	Guo et al., 2020 Hirst et al., 2023 Knappert et al., 2023 Lee et al., 2020 Loon & Vitale, 2021 Szkudlarek et al., 2021, 2024
	Organizational performance	Santangelo et al., 2024
	Corporate social responsibility	Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021 Reade et al., 2019.
	Refugee camps	Chowdhury, 2021 Kodeih et al., 2023 Mintzberg, 2001 Musa, 2023
	Refugee vocational identity	Amin et al., 2024 Wehrle et al., 2018
	Media and public perception of refugees	Klein & Amis, 2021
	Refugee resettlement agencies and prosocial ventures	Jiang, 2021 Mittermaier et al., 2022
Migration Studies: Multidisciplinary domain focused on migration encompassing Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, History, Law, Population Geography, and Political Science	Forced migration patterns	Betts et al., 2023 Fransen & de Haas, 2022 de Haas et al., 2020 de Haas, 2023
	Mobility vs. immobility	Erdal & Oeppen, 2018 Lubkemann, 2008 De Haas, 2021 Üstübici & Elçi, 2022
	Migration industry, smuggling and trafficking	Betts, 2021 Cranston et al., 2018 de Haas et al., 2020 Salt & Stein, 2002
	Legal frameworks for governing refugee migration	Aleinikoff & Zamore, 2019 Aleinikoff & Owen, 2022 Micinski & Lindey, 2022 Rausis, 2023 Welfens, 2022
	Refugee camps	Betts & Bradenbrink, 2020 Böhme & Schmitz, 2022 Hussam et al., 2022 Jansen, 2018 Pollozek & Passoth, 2024

	Resettlement strategies, and social and economic integration into host-societies	Ahani et al., 2023 Beaman, 2012 Betts, 2021 El-Bialy & Mulay, 2020 Mendola et al., 2023
Psychology Applied Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Education and Counselling, Cross-Cultural Psychology	Refugee mental health, broad overviews	Echterhoff et al., 2020 Ermansons et al., 2023 Fazel et al., 2005 Steel et al., 2009
	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder	Acquaye, 2017 Bryant et al., 2023 Hussain & Bhushan, 2011 Papadopoulos, 2007 Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014
	Post-traumatic Growth	Acquaye, 2017 Chan et al., 2016 Hussain & Bhushan, 2011 Papadopoulos, 2007 Powell et al., 2003 Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck, 2014 Sims & Pooley, 2017 Sultani et al., 2024 Umer & Elliot, 2021
	Coping	Acar et al., 2021 Matos et al., 2021 Nickerson et al., 2022 Rakoff et al., 1966
	Family experiences and refugee children psychology	Lustig et al., 2004 Tousignant et al., 1999
	Mental health of women refugees	Starck et al., 2020
	Transgenerational trauma	Danieli et al., 2015 Hirschberger, 2018 Rakoff et al., 1966 Rudahindwa et al., 2020

Table 2. Recommendations for Research, Policy, and Practice.

Sample Research Questions	Concepts/Theories[5]	Methods[6]	Context	Potential Policy and Practice Implications
Pre-migration How do organizations hinder opportunities to emigrate from conflict-affected zones? What organizational actors provide (humanitarian) support in the pre-migration phase, and how? What social and/or psychological factors influence an individual's decision to stay or leave, and why? What psychological factors contribute to or mitigate the emergence of PTSD in the pre-migration phase?	• Corporate complicity (Ruggie, 2000) • Corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1991) • Organizational justice (Guo et al. 2020)	• Archival • Autoethnographic • Case studies • Ethnographic • Migration databases[7]	• Regions in crisis	• Provide possibilities for those with aspirations to move • Improve conditions of border-crossings • Establish and foster cross-sectoral partnerships for humanitarian aid in conflict zones • Contribute to SDG10.7 "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned/well-managed migration policies" • Create a roadmap for public-private sector partnerships in pre-migration; contribute to SDG17 "Partnership for Goals"
Mid-migration How do legal and illegal organizations within the migration industry interact to facilitate the transit stage? What can existing research on mafia structures teach us about human smuggling and trafficking in the context of refugee migration? What are the long-term psychological implications of risk-taking when in the hands of smugglers or traffickers?	• Transnational organizations (Salt & Stein, 2002) • Total institutions (Goffman, 1961) • Accidental cities (Jansen, 2018)	• Qualitative (interviews, focus groups, narrative analysis, content analysis) • Intervention Studies • Longitudinal	• Physical journey • Transit regions • Refugee camps	• Reduce or eliminate illegal transnational business activities of human trafficking • Improve refugee camps conditions and efficacy; shift to focus on employment and self-reliance • Develop best practices for corporate involvement in mid-migration • Contribute to SDG8.7 "The eradication of forced labor, modern slavery and human trafficking" • Contribute to SDG10.7 "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned/well-managed migration policies"

[5] We provide suggestions as to potential concepts and theory bases to ground the research questions, recognizing there are other alternatives that could be drawn upon.

[6] Although many methods could be used at each phase of the journey, we highlight those likely to be most promising given the challenges associated with particular methods at a given phase.

[7] Examples of internationally recognized databases on migration: Refugee Population Statistics Database (managed by UNHCR), Migration Data Portal (managed by the IOM), International Migrant Stock (managed by UNDESA), International Migration Database (managed by OECD), Indicators of Immigrant Integration (managed by OECD), Global Bilateral Migration Database (managed by the World Bank), Migration and Remittances Briefings (managed by the World Bank).

Sample Research Questions	Concepts/Theories[5]	Methods[6]	Context	Potential Policy and Practice Implications
What processes foster PTG among refugees? How can organizations shift from a focus on charity to refugee employment and self-reliance to challenge views of camps as spaces of power and exclusion?				• Create a roadmap for public-private sector partnerships in mid-migration; contribute to SDG17 "Partnership for Goals"
Post-migration How can organizations foster refugee labor market integration? What happens when a company gains a reputation for treating refugees well? How can organizations mitigate the impact of external influences on refugee integration, such as xenophobic biases, fears, and polarization? What organizational interventions could promote well-being in refugees? How do spillover and crossover between family and workplace domains affect refugee integrative processes? How do various forms of social identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, intersect to shape refugees' psychological processes and resettlement experiences? When and how do refugee migration experiences result in transgenerational trauma?	• Canvas ceiling (Lee et al., 2020) • Organizational justice (Guo et al. 2020) • Diversity Climates (Hajro et al., 2017) • Workplace inclusion (Nishii, 2013) • Cross-sector partnerships (Gibson, 2022)	• Intervention studies • Longitudinal • Qualitative (interviews, focus groups, narrative analysis, content analysis) • Survey-based • Migration databases	• Host-countries • Organizations employing or supporting refugees • Refugee households	• Improve refugee resettlement practices • Create organizational incentives for increased employment of refugees; reduce devaluation of refugee prior educational and professional credentials ("canvas ceiling"); improve refugee policies and practices in organizations (e.g., equity, diversity and inclusion, organizational justice, CSR) • Design organizational interventions to promote PTG in refugees (e.g., storytelling, motivational interviewing, self-affirmations) • Create and validate cross-cultural measures for PTGI • Support refugee families in resettlement; develop policy and practice advice specifically for refugee women with children • Contribute to a scientifically informed public narrative on refugee intake • Contribute to SDG8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth"