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# MIGRATION, BUSINESS & SOCIETY'S AGENDA FOR PRACTICE-INFORMED RESEARCH ON FORCED MOBILITY: SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE



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# About us

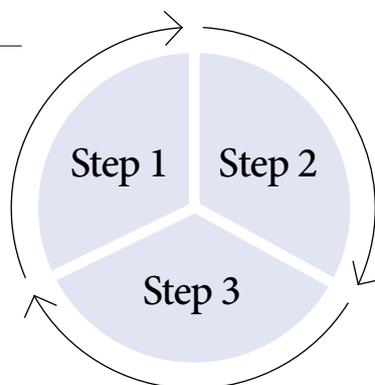
Migration, Business & Society (MBS) is a global research and policy think and do tank that works toward achieving migration-specific targets such as those reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals. The organization brings together nearly 200 scholars, business executives, and migration experts from the public sector, representing 33 countries and nearly 120 universities and organizations.

Our key priorities are: (1) To involve business leaders, policy experts, and scholars from allied sciences in informing business researchers; (2) To nudge business researchers to engage in transdisciplinary research projects; (3) To incorporate the findings from these efforts into practice, policy, and business school curricula.

1.

BUSINESS LEADERS, POLICY EXPERTS  
& SCHOLARS FROM ALLIED SOCIAL  
SCIENCES INFORM BUSINESS RE-  
SEARCHERS

MBS Advisory Board & Cosigners  
engage in transdisciplinary  
expertise exchange



2.

BUSINESS SCHOLARS  
INITIATE RESEARCH

MBS produces research agendas,  
initiates research projects,  
organizes academic webinars  
and events, publishes  
in academic outlets

3.

MBS INFORMS BUSINESS, POLICY,  
AND BUSINESS SCHOOL CURRICULA

MBS prepares research translations, toolkits,  
presentations, practice-oriented publications,  
and pushes for change in business school  
teaching and executive education

# About this Agenda

This is the second MBS practice-informed research Agenda, with a focus on forced migration. Its contents have been informed by scientific literature, as well as meetings with our [Advisory Board](#), [Cosigners](#) and [Members](#), our [Webinar series](#) and [Expert Talks on Migration](#). We present what we learned from all these sources of inspiration in order to encourage transdisciplinary research on forced migration.

Over the recent years, research on forced migration in business and management literature has made considerable progress. Scholars have explored the barriers encountered by asylum seekers and refugees in their search for employment, their integration into workplaces and into society more broadly. Research has also examined employers' perspectives and refugee entrepreneurship. This progress is reassuring: It signals that business scholars are assuming the responsibility not only to advance theory but also to think about improving employment outcomes and therefore, opportunities for refugees to earn a decent livelihood.

How forced migration is framed matters. Dominant narratives situate our perceptions and shape public opinion, policy, and organizational practices. Migration statistics can be presented in different ways. Asylum seekers and refugees can be portrayed as victims, “a threat,” or survivors. Narratives can also lead to hierarchies between and within groups of refugees and thus stratify their access to the labor market.

In short, how we as academics theorize global mobility and communicate our findings can influence how policy makers formulate policies, how businesses run refugee employment practices, and how society perceives humanitarian action.

# Key messages

Here are the five key messages of this Agenda:

- ▶ Forced migration: statistics, patterns, and climate mobilities
- ▶ Firm's perspective
- ▶ Economic lives of refugees
- ▶ Migration industry and refugee human rights
- ▶ The importance of psychology in refugee research

# *Forced migration: Statistics, patterns, and climate mobilities*

## Statistics and patterns

As we write this in 2025, the humanitarian crises in Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Sudan, Venezuela, and other places are still evolving, and their long-term consequences are unknown. Many describe this as an era of humanitarian crisis. The general opinion is that the numbers of refugees—intensified by military conflicts, civil unrest, and climate change—are increasing drastically and that “the world has entered a new age of refugee migration” (Fransen & de Haas, 2022: 101).

Today, the global number of forcibly displaced individuals exceeds 118.3 million, or around 1.4% of the world population. This includes 73.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), 36.4 million refugees (the Geneva Convention's definition<sup>1</sup>), and 8.4 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2025).

Discussing these statistics demands precision and consistency to avoid confusion and misunderstandings. First, the lack of differentiation between IDPs who move within their home countries and refugees who cross international borders has often led to misconceptions among

the general public about the numbers of the latter. Second, the number of refugees has not increased linearly but has historically fluctuated sharply. For example, in 1992, the global number of refugees was 17.8 million. In 2005, it had decreased to 8.7 million, but in 2015, it had rebounded to 17.2 (de Haas, Castles and Miller, 2020).

In their publication on long-term trends and patterns in global refugee migration, Sonja Fransen and Hein de Haas (2022) study patterns of forced migration between 1951 and 2018 using the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Population Statistics Database. They show that, depending on levels of conflict, international refugee numbers in the time period studied fluctuated between 0.1% and 0.3% of the world population (today's percentage is around 0.4%).

As for the numbers of forcefully displaced individuals, the highest total ever reached was after World War II, with 175 million, or 8% of the world population at the time, which is “much higher than current levels even by absolute, let alone relative, numbers” (Fransen & de Haas, 2022: 103). In short, the facts do not support the narrative of a long-term increase in refugees. Furthermore, according to Fransen and de Haas, an additional explanation behind the increase in absolute numbers is that the more comprehensive global datasets of today include more countries and populations.

Another common misconception in many high-income societies is that most people seek asylum and want to migrate to the West. Yet, nearly 71% of the world's international refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2025). This is caused by many factors,

<sup>1</sup> The Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) defines a refugee as someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

including deterrence policies: political efforts of countries in the “Global North” to stop refugees from reaching their borders (Aleinikoff & Owen, 2022; Rausis, 2023).

“

Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda are three countries that until recently hosted at least as many refugees as the whole of the European Union combined.

”



Alexander Betts,  
Oxford University,  
MBS Advisory Board member

## Climate mobilities

Climate-induced migration has clearly gained visibility in media and political discourse. The early debates on “climate refugees” and whether their numbers would reach hundreds of millions date back to the 1990s. Likewise, much of the current discussion on this topic fortifies the assumption that global warming is triggering mass migration. The danger in this narrative is that it portrays climate migration “as a looming security crisis”—which has been politically used as a rationale in the “Global North” for securing national borders (Boas et al., 2019).

Scientists, however, push to move the discussion on the climate-mobility nexus beyond linear terms. Among the studies first to warn against

the narrative of climate-induced mass migration was a 2011 Foresight study on climate change and migration (Black et al., 2011). Since then, multiple studies have shown that “relations between climate change and human migration are often indirect, small-scale, and taking shape in context-specific ways, influenced by a host of other socio-economic and political factors” (Boas et al., 2022: 3365). Indeed, the “impacts of climate change on displacement remain largely unquantified” (Thalheimer et al., 2024: 1). Consistently, many scholars agree that climate mobilities—a term that avoids assumptions that the movement of people “is unidirectional or mono-causal, or inherently positive or negative”—is a more appropriate way to capture this complexity (Boas et al., 2019: 902).

Similarly, de Haas (2023), and Morrissey (2021) caution against using the concept of “climate refugees”: Although it mobilizes public concern with environmental degradation, it does not reflect the actual facts behind forced mobility. People living in the regions most affected by the slow-onset effects of the climate change, such as desertification and drought, often lack the resources needed to move across borders. In fact, environmentally induced mobility typically involves short distances within the same country.

Even the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that significant knowledge gaps remain regarding migration in the context of adverse climate conditions (2024). And the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) expresses “low confidence in quantitative projections of changes in mobility, due to its complex, multi-causal nature” (quoted in IOM, 2021: 239), and points out instead that “specific climate events and conditions may cause migration to increase, decrease or flow in new directions” (Cissé et al., 2022: 52).

In other words, although environmental factors caused by climate changes undoubtedly disrupt and threaten livelihoods, it is empirically difficult to distinguish between climate-induced mobilities and other factors that trigger cross-border migration.

## *Firm's perspective*

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Whereas refugee intake and resettlement remain the prerogative of nation states, the private sector plays an immense role when it comes to integration of refugees into the labor market. There is a burgeoning business and management literature on recruiting, hiring, and integrating refugees into organizations (for overviews see Hajro, Žilinskaitė, & Gibson, 2025; Szkudlarek et al., 2021). For example, research by Human Resource Management (HRM) scholars has looked into refugee recruitment practices, internships, onboarding, coaching and training, skill and career development programs, upward career mobility, as well as the role of employers in fostering cross-sectoral partnerships to advance refugee employment (Hirst et al., 2023).

Researchers have also examined the specific employment obstacles faced by skilled refugees—the “qualifications paradox”. Because many governments focus on humanitarian motives—meaning they prioritize the vulnerability aspect—they often ignore the skills and competencies of applicants for asylum (Szkudlarek et al., 2021). This makes it harder for firms who may be keen to employ refugees to identify the right candidates from the available refugee pool.

Migration scholars and mobility experts have also observed gender-based hurdles that women refugees face in seeking and securing employment (Aigner et al., 2024; Ortlieb et al., 2024). According to a study by the International Rescue Committee and the Georgetown Institute

Firms' perspective for Women, Peace and Security, if the access to employment and wage gaps in the top 30 host countries were closed, women with refugee backgrounds could contribute up to \$1.4 trillion to the annual global GDP. Other key findings from this report revealed that highest refugee women employment rates were in the US with 40% and Uganda with 37%, but as low as 6% in Germany, Jordan and Lebanon; and that the gender pay gap was highest in Turkey, with the difference of roughly 94 cents per dollar between refugee women and host men (Kabir & Klugman, 2019).

Despite structural hurdles, refugees—regardless of gender—are found to be highly motivated to integrate into their workplaces and host societies, and they have low turnover rates. Empirical evidence attests that companies that hire refugees evaluate their performance positively, are keen to recruit from the refugee pool again, and recommend refugee candidates looking for employment to other firms (Kohlenberger, Žilinskaitė, & Riosa, 2023; Szkudlarek & Lee, 2024).

The importance of the role of the private sector in accelerating global support for refugees is also echoed in The World Economic Forum's Refugee Employment Alliance, co-chaired by the UNHCR and the Ingka Group. The three core objectives of this initiative are: (1) to draw valuable lessons from the labor market integration of refugees from Ukraine, (2) to improve labor market outcomes for refugees; and (3) to develop private sector capabilities for responding to future humanitarian crises (WEF, 2023). The initiative has partnered with 140 Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) from more than 20 industries, including multinational enterprises such as Adecco, Flex, IKEA, and ManpowerGroup.

“

MNEs are well-positioned to integrate refugee employees largely because they already have the capacity to do so because they're so well-versed in integrating employees who migrate across borders. They're experts in moving people across borders and integrating them into their workplace.

”



Stacey Fitzsimmons,  
University of Victoria,  
MBS Member

Besides providing direct employment, the private sector has the capacity to support development opportunities in countries that host the most refugees, for instance, in large and long-term refugee camps/settlements. As Alexander Betts argues, “If refugees can be empowered to meet their basic needs independently of aid, and also contribute to the economy of the host society, this has the potential to benefit everyone” (2021: 7). Business scholars have not yet sufficiently addressed the social and economic implications of private-sector involvement in this context (Hajro et al., 2025). We still need to better understand the motivations of the private sector in engaging in social-impact initiatives in refugee-hosting regions and devise means for driving positive change.

Finally, all but ignored in business research on refugees are the potential vicarious impacts on those who are trying to help, including work colleagues who are closely involved with aiding

refugees to integrate. As MBS Member Betina Szkudlarek explained, an example of the former could be a Polish national who is helping a refugee colleague from Ukraine and becomes exposed to a form of secondary traumatization that includes compassion fatigue and even potential burnout.

“

We should not forget those who invest their time and effort in helping refugees. Helpers are also exposed to significant stress. They can also experience negative impacts on their cognitions, emotions and psychological and physical well-being. This, in turn, may negatively affect their performance at work.

”



Betina Szkudlarek,  
University of Sydney,  
MBS member

# Economic lives of refugees

We have borrowed the title for this section from a phrase used by Alexander Betts in his book *Wealth of Refugees: How Displaced People Can Build Economies* (2021). Betts points out that despite immense adversities, refugees engage in numerous economic activities, from production to consumption, from borrowing to lending, and from innovation to entrepreneurship.

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Despite their dire situation, these refugees find ways to (re) build their lives in whatever way they can. I find that some refugees extended their temporary shelter to create tea stalls or tiny grocery shops. Some are building wooden and bamboo items for household purposes and plant limited crops of vegetables. More surprisingly, I observe camp bazars with a variety of essential products and services on sale.

”



Rashedur Chowdhury,

*University of Essex,*

observations during his field research in Kutupalong, the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

## Refugee entrepreneurship

It is well-known that migrants are overrepresented among innovators and entrepreneurs. Recent literature suggests that refugees are also no exception to this phenomenon. However, as pointed out by Abebe (2023), research on refugee entrepreneurship (RE) is fragmented and lacks coherence, mostly for two reasons: its context-specific nature and the multitude of disciplines that investigate this topic. The author traces the beginnings of academic research on RE to the mid-1980s and highlights the seminal contributions of Gold (1992). Gold pointed out how the entrepreneurial activities of refugees were ontologically different from those of other types of immigrants, and therefore, he advocated for separate analyses. In the second half of the 1990s, research interest in RE declined, and attention shifted to the labor market integration of refugees. The scholarly work on RE resumed in the mid-2000s and, unsurprisingly, peaked after the 2015 “refugee crisis” in Europe, with extensive focus on arrivals from Syria. As Abebe’s analysis reveals, in the fields of entrepreneurship, economics, management, and marketing, out of the 62 publications on RE between 1980 and 2020, only 11 appeared before 2015 (2023: 325).

The existing research on RE has largely focused on the factors that drive or hamper it. Refugee entrepreneurs face language and cultural differences, host-country ethnocentrism, and limited access to finance. Furthermore, state-imposed obstacles regarding refugees’ access to the labor market and to entrepreneurship vary across countries and time periods. For example, most EU countries allowed refugees from Ukraine to work immediately upon arrival, but this was not the case in 2015-2016 with the Syrian refugees. There are also other opportunities, like social

networks among diasporas that may facilitate entrepreneurial activities.

RE scholarship has also studied the personal characteristics of refugee entrepreneurs, including business acumen, entrepreneurial spirit, risk taking, and self-reliance (Honig, 2020). There remains an open debate between individual agency- and culture-driven explanations. The latter approach, which considers RE as “cultural” or “ethnic” traits of certain groups, has been criticized for two reasons: first, it may lead to stereotyping and, secondly, displaced populations are not always homogeneous (Cederberg & Villares-Varela, 2019). Attention must be paid to a range of intersectionality features, such as social class, religion, race, and gender.

## Refugee remittances

As we mentioned at the beginning of this section, entrepreneurial endeavors are only one aspect of the economic lives of refugees. Like other migrants, many refugees contribute to development in their originating countries through remittances and social transfers.

Transaction costs of sending remittances through official channels in different countries can vary from 6% to 20%, and even higher, which is far from the UN Agenda SDG 10.c target of 3%. In spring 2022, Western Union—a multinational giant that handles roughly half of the global remittances sent across borders each year—announced a zero-fee offer for remittance transfers to Ukraine. This initiative, however, has since ended (Western Union, 2025).

The uncertainty about the course of the Russia-Ukraine war continues, and predictions of its outcome are hazardous. Nevertheless, we know from other examples how durable remittance-sending can be. In the 1990s, the war in Bosnia killed about 5% of the population, and half of the population was displaced (25% as IDPs and another 25% as international refugees) (Ibreljic, Kulenovic, Kadusic, & Smajic, 2006).

Twenty-two years after the outbreak of the war, Bosnia was the fifth largest recipient country of remittances as a percentage of its gross domestic product, amounting to nearly 22.5% of GDP in 2004 (World Bank, 2006). This further supports the long-term importance of lowering the costs of remittance transactions, not treating it as an effort limited to the current situation.

In our first MBS Agenda, we called upon business and management scholars to tackle the questions of remittance costs. These questions remain as urgent as ever.

What are the bottlenecks within multinationals like Western Union and MoneyGram that continue to keep remittance costs at twice the SDG10 target level?

What type of competition are new players like fintech firms able to offer in this industry?

What is the impact of securitization measures—such as antimoney laundering and combatting the financing of terrorism—upon remittance service providers?

*MBS Agenda  
for Practice-Informed  
Interdisciplinary Research  
I.*

# *Migration industry and refugee human rights*

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As we noted above, business researchers and business leaders—like the 140 CHROs who have committed to The Refugee Employment Alliance introduced by the WEF—have focused on economic integration of refugees in receiving societies and organizations. Yet finding a job is one of the later steps for refugees in their long journeys. From the moment they decide/are forced to leave their homes to when they arrive at their destinations, many must endure dangerous and precarious trips through other countries.

Migration studies include a body of research on the meso-level structures that enable cross-border migration. These structures are often referred to as the migration industry (de Haas et al., 2020), which consists of humanitarian organizations, immigration lawyers, legal and illegal labor brokers, smugglers and human traffickers, and other intermediaries. Human smuggling and trafficking are among the fastest growing transnational criminal activities (UNODC, 2024). The two are not the same. Smuggling refers more generally to “the use of paid or unpaid migration intermediaries to cross borders without authorization” (de Haas et al., 2020: 35). In contrast, human trafficking refers specifically to those smuggling practices that are exploitative and use force, coercion, and fraud. An often-overlooked fact is that most illegal border crossings entail smuggling rather than human trafficking and that smugglers are not always “the bad guys” but can also be family members, friends, and others who want to help asylum-seekers.

Human trafficking is a wicked global problem and a highly profitable illegal enterprise. Although precise figures on the profits of black-market organizations facilitating refugees’ arrivals at new borders are difficult to obtain, evidence suggests that these gains are substantial, generating an estimated \$150 billion globally each year. Despite only around 50,000 cases being reported to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2020 by 141 countries, up to 50 million people worldwide—the equivalent of the populations of South Korea or Uganda—may be subjected to various forms of exploitation (UNODC, 2024).

To illustrate this with a specific example, the traffickers in charge of one of the cargo ships with 360 migrants that Italian border authorities intercepted in 2015 earned close to \$3 million, with each migrant paying between \$4,000 and \$8,000 for the illegal transportation (Coleman, 2015). A more recent BBC investigative series on illegal crossings from France to the United Kingdom via the English Channel reported that traffickers charged approximately \$3,300 per person (Harding, Luu & Clahane, 2024). A troublesome reality is that, despite the high risk of exploitation, many refugees voluntarily engage with smugglers and traffickers because to be granted legal protection under international law—a long-term benefit for refugees and their families—they must first physically arrive at the destination country’s border (de Haas et al., 2020; Hajro et al., 2025). This requirement presents a major obstacle in fighting trafficking.

Organized human traffickers are adept at establishing transnational contacts, partnering with

stakeholders internationally, and using digital technologies, social media, and cryptocurrencies to commit crimes and hide profits (IOM, 2024). In other words, they partially function as transnational enterprises. However, such organizations have received scant, if any, attention in the business and management literature (Hajro et al., 2025). We do not know how the actions of these transnational illegal enterprises affect the movement of refugees, how these flows influence policymaking in refugee receiving countries and what the potential implications are for employing firms. For instance, human trafficking may result in anti-migration sentiments and lead to strengthened border controls, in turn, making it more difficult for firms that are experiencing labor shortages to have access to legal labor pools of foreign workers.

Business scholars are well-equipped with tools to analyze different forms of organizations, including illegal ones. They could draw from existing research on “dark” or black-market organizations, such as mafias (see Gambetta, 1993; Gond, Palazzo, & Basu, 2009). Like the 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. A better understanding of how these organizations function has the potential to contribute to solutions at the broader societal level. Eradication of human trafficking is embedded in the UN Agenda 2030, specifically, in SDGs 8.7 (the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery and human trafficking) and 10.7 (achieving safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration) (Hajro et al., 2025).

Finally, as the violent conflicts in Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine, and other places have shown, legitimate business organizations are at risk in crisis situations of slipping into illegal or immoral actions. As our Advisory Board member Neill Wilkins explains, firms that rush to employ refugees may lower their recruitment, hiring, and management standards, based on the excuse that they are being socially responsible

by providing jobs to those who most need them. This also deserves more attention from business scholars, especially those who study corporate social responsibility and sustainable development.

“

The tragedy within a tragedy is whenever you get people who are vulnerable and desperate, there will always be those others who will then take advantage, and it's awful because you also perhaps will get those who will say, 'Well, it's an emergency so we can lower standards around labour rights, around inspections because it's better to have any job rather than nothing.' We need to guard against this because it's the start of a very slippery slope.

”



Neill Wilkins,  
*Consultant Specializing in Migrant Workers*

# *The importance of psychology in refugee research*

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Research in psychology offers multiple perspectives and possible interventions to prevent and treat the psychological problems of migrants and refugees and support their well-being and social integration (Schwarz et al., 2022). Although an in-depth review of this rich literature is beyond the scope of this Agenda, we will introduce and briefly comment on three core areas of special relevance for refugee studies but insufficiently addressed in business and management research. These three are trauma and growth, coping and social support, and spillover-crossover effects.

## **Trauma and growth**

Refugees are often exposed to traumatic circumstances from the beginning to the end of their migration journeys. Premigratory events may include war, violence, persecution, forced labor, and separation from their families. The tribulations encountered during their journeys have also been discussed in migration studies. Equally critical are the challenges encountered during resettlement. These vary from loss of social support and cultural adaptation to discrimination, financial hurdles, and unmet health care needs (El-Bialy & Mulay, 2020).

Because of the difficulties mentioned above, refugees are often portrayed, in the media, and also in academic literature, as highly susceptible to mental illness, especially, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Simich, Roche, & Ayton 2012). PTSD is defined as a mental health condition

that can develop because of exposure to a highly distressing or traumatic event. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association lists the following symptoms: “(a) reexperiencing 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).

However, as El-Bialy and Mulay (2020) and Papadopoulos (2007) caution, scholars should be careful not to fall into general assumptions that all refugees are intrinsically vulnerable to mental health problems. The portrayal of refugees as prone to mental illness is, unfortunately, closely connected to the discourse of refugees being a burden on society. Quantitative surveys on the prevalence of PTSD among refugees have revealed varied findings. For example, the prevalence rate of PTSD was an estimated 30.6% in a meta-analysis of 161 articles comprising more than 81,000 refugees and other conflict-affected persons from 40 countries (Steel et al., 2009). A more recent review article, with focus on resettled Iraqi refugees in several Western countries reported that PTSD prevalence rates ranged from 8% to 37.2% (Slewa-Younan, Uribe Guajardo, Heriseanu, & Hasan, 2015).

Although these numbers illustrate the possible effects of PTSD on some refugees' well-being,

they also show that most refugees (two-thirds or more) do not experience full-fledged PTSD (Sultani et al., 2024). The reality is complicated: “some refugees merely survive, many adapt to their new circumstances, and others even thrive” (Hajro et al., 2025: 14).

Indeed, the psychology literature records examples of posttraumatic growth (PTG) among refugee samples (Sleijpen, Haagen, Mooren, & Kleber, 2016). PTG is defined as “the positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004: 1). The ability of some survivors of traumatic events to process their experiences and difficulties is the main precursor of PTG, which indicates the main challenge is to abandon old schemas in favor of adapting to new circumstances (Chan et al., 2016). The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory identifies five areas of PTG: Relating to Others, New Possibilities, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, and Appreciation of Life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Individuals who go through PTG “develop new understandings of themselves, the world they live in, how to relate to other people, the kind of future they might have and a better understanding of how to live life” (Tedeschi, qtd. in Collier, 2016).

Although it is impossible to enumerate how many traumatized refugees experience the transformation described as PTG, the estimates of moderate-to-high PTG in the general population of trauma survivors range from half to two-thirds (Collier, 2016). The findings of the few studies of refugees and PTG are mixed. For example, Hussain and Bhushan (2011) studied 226 Tibetan refugees across two generations and found that those individuals who recalled a greater number of traumatic incidents also showed greater levels of PTG. There were, however, significant generational and gender differences. Other studies, on the contrary, reported that moderate levels of trauma lead to the highest levels of posttraumatic growth. Therefore, more exploration is needed.

“

My journey began far from any laboratory. I grew up in Amman, Jordan, in a refugee family of ten children, in a home with no running water and no electricity, sharing our space with livestock, our family’s livelihood. Hardship was everywhere. My chances for success were slim . . . Many years later, while studying how MOFs (metal–organic frameworks) take and release water, I recognized something revolutionary . . . It echoed the rhythm of my childhood—yet now offered a solution to the very hardship we had once endured. I often wonder whether I would have recognized that pattern of data had I not lived it first.

”



Omar M. Yaghi

University of California, Berkeley  
Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 2025

Excerpts from his speech at the Nobel Prize banquet  
(Photo: Omar Yaghi 413953 by  
Christopher Michel 1-7-2025.jpg)

This is where business scholars could step in. To the best of our knowledge, business research has hardly recognized the issue and has not yet undertaken to explore in depth the combined possible effects of trauma, PTSD, and PTG on refugees’ workplace integration.

## Coping and social support

The literature on coping and cross-cultural adjustment in the field of expatriation (see Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Herman & Tetrick, 2009; Tung, 1998) draws largely from the stress and coping paradigm developed in psychology in the 1970s by Lazarus and colleagues (see Lazarus, 2000). It is unclear, however, to what extent—if at all—the findings in expatriation research apply to the study of the coping strategies of refugees. As Szkudlarek and colleagues (2021) aptly note, expatriates and refugees represent two extremes of global mobility.

There are very few studies in the business and management literature that explicitly focus on the role of coping mechanisms of refugees (e.g., Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018). Migration studies contain evidence that coping promotes PTG in refugees. For example, cognitive coping in the form of reappraisal was predictive of PTG in a sample of 50 Kosovar refugees (Ai et al., 2007). Similarly, positive attitudes and cognitive coping positively affected PTG in the earlier mentioned study of Tibetan refugees (Hussain & Bhushan, 2011). More recently, Nickerson et al. (2022) examined coping strategies in 1,216 refugees of diverse ethnicities in Indonesia. They found that positive, emotion-focused coping—particularly self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, and hope—was closely linked to better mental health under certain conditions.

El-Bialy and Mulay (2020) studied coping strategies in the context of refugee resettlement and found that some rebelled at their portrayal as vulnerable. We will address refugee vulnerability later in our concluding thoughts section. Refugees interviewed by El-Bialy and Mulay described the ways in which they sought to embrace a sense of empowerment to offset their portrayal as a “burden” in their destination country and to deal with their daily experiences of slights, condescension, and discrimination.

An especially effective coping strategy is seeking social support from different sources, such as

family members, friends, and colleagues (Colic-Peisker, 2009). Among business scholars, Newman and coauthors (2018) studied the impact of three different types of social support on refugee well-being in a workplace context: perceived organizational support, perceived family support, and perceived supervisory support. They found that whereas the first two types were positively related to psychological well-being of refugee employees, the relationship between perceived support from supervisors and well-being was, surprisingly, not significant.

These studies reveal important findings. However, a multitude of questions remain that deserve our attention.

## Spillover-crossover

The spillover-crossover paradigm used in psychological research looks at the interrelationship between the home domain and the work domain. Bolger and his coauthors (1989: 175) differentiate between the two constructs: whereas in spillover “the stresses experienced in either the work or home domain lead to stresses in the other domain,” in crossover “the stresses experienced by one’s spouse at work lead to stresses for oneself at home.” Westman (2001: 717-718) broadened the definition of the latter “to include stress and strain experience by the individual at home leading to stress and strain experienced by the spouse in the workplace.” 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 at home.

Business scholars have explored the crossover-spillover dynamics, again, mostly in the context of corporate expatriates and their partners/spouses (Lazarova, Westman & Shaffer, 2010; Reiche et al., 2023). How refugees are affected by crossover and spillover is largely neglected. 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).

As we mentioned above, Szkudlarek and colleagues (2021) emphasize that refugees' and their families' adjustments have little in common with those among expatriates. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine highlights those differences, as refugee families deal with separations in the chaos of war and their flight from it, and some parents (especially fathers) confront having to separate from their children. And even when the families can move together, relocation undoubtedly takes a huge toll on family life because of the trauma, grief, and stress of resettlement in new social and employment systems (Gangamma, 2018).

Migration scholars, however, have highlighted the resilience of the relationships within refugee families undergoing resettlement. They have shown that nuclear family relationships are the key to acculturation and integration during stressful times because they are "less based on reciprocity norms than other relationships" (Klok & Dagevos, 2022). Klog and Davegos (2022) assert that refugees within a family may have different forms of integrative goals but ultimately resolve their differences by adopting a viewpoint in which these differing goals are seen as a joint endeavor to benefit the entire household.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, a family perspective would be incomplete without taking into account refugee children's experiences. They may be feeling significant bereavement, confusion, homesickness, and loss of friends and extended family members.

The uprooting experiences can disrupt their development time and give rise to long-term

<sup>2</sup> In addition, other studies have shown that in highly collectivist cultures, the concept of family extends beyond the nuclear family unit. For example, Haines, Rutherford, and Thomas (2018) have studied how Vietnamese refugees in the US drew emotional and social support from a complex social network and how this, in turn, helped them overcome trauma and function effectively during the early years of resettlement in the new country.

adverse effects. Examining these issues would yield a better understanding of within- and across-family differences in the refugee integrative processes (Schwartz et al., 2022). It would also make the family-workplace crossover-spillover picture more complete.

In short, previous literature demonstrates that individuals do not form their goals for integration and commit to achieving them in isolation; indeed, both the goals and commitment reflect their family situations (Klok & Dagevos, 2022). Nevertheless, in both migration studies and business and management literature, a better understanding is needed on how crossover and spillover between family and workplace domains affect refugee integrative processes.

“

Having lived through the occupation of Sarajevo, followed by my family's escape and a long migration journey across several countries, I have been profoundly shaped in my upbringing and psychology. It was a constant series of ups and downs, and at times the path forward for my parents, my brother, and me was not visible at all. Yet, taken together, these experiences brought me to where I am today, though in a counterintuitive and entirely unexpected way.

”



Aida Hajro,  
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## *Claiming a seat at the table: How we as business scholars can achieve impact?*

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The aim behind MBS Agendas is to present underexplored questions and inspire scholars to embark on developing ways to answer them.

In the present Agenda, we have looked at statistics and patterns of forced migration that contradict the mainstream perceptions about asylum flows. We have called for a more nuanced understanding of the potential impact of climate change on human mobilities. We have also highlighted the progress and the potential of the work currently underway on the firms' perspective. We provided a brief overview of the multidisciplinary research on RE and highlighted refugee contributions to development through long-lasting remittances. Our penultimate section looked at the migration industry, including smugglers and human traffickers, and called upon business scholars to pay more attention to these profitable illegal forms of business. Finally, we have emphasized the importance of psychology in refugee research.

These sections point to many paths and avenues for research. Here are a couple of concluding thoughts.

First, the overarching theme throughout this Agenda has been on shifting the narrative on forced mobility in the business and management discourse. We agree with Alexander Betts that "The starting point for refugee research is to think about refugees not just as a humanitarian issue but also as a development issue, as an issue for the global economy. So while, of course, it is extremely important to meet the most urgent needs in the emergency phase, we should be moving away from the conception of refugees as merely victims in need of assistance" (Migration, Business & Society, 2022).

Other migration scholars, too, have repeatedly warned against an overemphasis on vulnerability as a static characteristic of refugees. Vulnerability narratives tend to make a distinction between forced migrants who are identified as deserving protection and those who are not. These portrayals also reflect gender biases. As noted by Mainwaring (2016: 2): "It is the voiceless, female refugee who has become the poster child of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other advocacy organizations, while the specter of a male migrant haunts the borders of the first world."

Narratives of vulnerability can be misleading and potentially even harmful to those so labelled (Smith & Waite, 2019). For instance, in discussions on refugee integration into the host society labor market, refugees and other humanitarian migrants face contradictory demands. On the one hand, they are expected to appear as vulnerable and at risk, but on the other hand, they must show resilience and be "willing and able to 'overcome' their vulnerability" (Welfens, 2022: 1) as soon as possible in order to become loyal, integrated organizational members.

Furthermore, emphasizing refugee vulnerability distracts from their stories of survival and resilience that also loom large in their experiences (Simich et al., 2012). In business studies, research by Pesch and colleagues (2022, 2025) further supports this. Their interviews with refugee employees, their supervisors and colleagues in German companies demonstrated that host-country employers' inclination to think about refugees through the vulnerability lens can lead to refugee employees feeling marginalized and deprived of agency in their workplaces. Therefore, the authors suggest complementing the vulnerability discourse through a capability

lens that recognizes refugees' talents, skills, and self-reliance<sup>3</sup> (Pesch et al., 2022).

Second, this Agenda has also attempted to show that the multidisciplinary field of migration studies is vast and that both business and management scholars can learn a lot from it and contribute to it. There is an ecosystem of peer-reviewed journals dedicated to migration, including voluntary and forced mobility, that publish high quality empirical and conceptual work. These include the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, the *International Migration Review*, *Migration Studies*, *Population and Development Review*, and the *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. Of course, as Verbeke and colleagues (2017) and Wood and coauthors (2018) noted, importing theories from other disciplines brings both opportunities and challenges. Although it can “strengthen the predictive and explanatory capacity of extant theoretical frameworks” in our fields (Verbeke et al., 2017: 2), importing new insights should be done with caution, avoiding “crude applications” and oversimplification (Wood et al., 2018: 405).

Engaging in the multidisciplinary dialogue on forced migration will allow us to think outside the box. To contribute to creating sustainable and responsible refugee policies and corporate practices we should also “think outside the whole building full of boxes” (Kanter, 2010). This means proactively engaging with business leaders, policy makers, human rights experts, and above all, refugees themselves.

As a whole, a more nuanced and engaged scholarship on refugees could help governments and businesses to have more realistic projections of actions needed.

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<sup>3</sup> Also worth noting is new longitudinal research on upward mobility of refugees in their destination countries. See the work by Bankston III and Zhou (2021) on Vietnamese refugees in the US and Abramitzky and Boustan's (2022) *Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success*.

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