Responsibility sharing in the context of global displacement: Taking stock and looking forward
A comparative inquiry into the responses to Syrian and Ukrainian displacement waves

Concept note of the Seed Fund Project, The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Aalborg University, Denmark, PIs: Associate Professors Tamirace Fakhoury (Department of Politics and Society) and Jesper Lindholm (Department of Law)

In the last decade, the world has witnessed major waves of displacement, spurring heated debates around responsibility-sharing. To this day, however, we lack a tangible legal and normative framework as to how states should share responsibility and cooperate in multilateral platforms over displacement. Various international instruments promote solidarity in the global refugee regime, including the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), which aims "to ease pressures on the host countries involved, to enhance refugee self-reliance, to expand access to third-country solutions and to support conditions in country of origin for return in safety and dignity" (UNCHR, 2018). In practice, nation-states, however, have a great deal of discretion in shaping what solidarity and responsibility-sharing mean and entail in the context of forced displacement. Most recently, High Commissioner Filippo Grandi's opening statement to the 73rd session of the UNHCR Executive Committee has put in stark relief the continued need for solidarity. At the same time, the statement warned against the dark side of deflecting responsibility. [1]

Our project, therefore, seeks to analyze historical, policy, legal and societal conceptions, and practices of responsibility-sharing in the light of mass displacement. It departs from the daring question as to whether and if so, how we can compare responses to Syrian and Ukrainian refugee flight. In 2015 and 2022, respectively, Syrian and Ukrainian displacement waves have arisen as "barometers", testing states' behavior in contexts of flight. It is well established, for instance, that the EU has reacted much more openly and responded much more swiftly to accommodate displaced Ukrainians compared to refugee communities including Syrians and Afghans. Against this backdrop, Middle Eastern states have questioned the GCR's implementation and doubted their initial commitment to it (Fakhoury 2022). While the literature has started to assess what prompted states, cities, and institutions to react differently to both contexts, a systematic assessment drawing on both theory and empirics would be highly beneficial.

In this exploratory workshop, we aim to take stock of various forms and meanings of responsibility-sharing against the backdrop of the two distinct waves of Syrian and Ukrainian displacement. Geopolitics, histories, institutions, legal, cultural, and policy norms matter. Yet how to make sense of the variation and commonalities in responses to both waves of displacement?

We solicit contributions from various disciplinary perspectives around the following questions (broadly defined). We encourage invited participants to draw on a variety of case studies or on their own research and theoretical reflections:

Setting the ground
1. Given its unclear meaning, how do we conceptualize responsibility sharing in the context of forced displacement? how do financial, political, and geographical forms of responsibility sharing build on each other? (Martin 2016)
2. What do we know about historical practices of solidarity and responsibility sharing in global perspective? (Chatty 2017)
3. What is the relationship between the Global Compact on Refugees and responsibility sharing? And to what extent does the GCR clarify the meaning of responsibility sharing (Doyle 2018)

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[1] High Commissioner's opening statement to the 73rd session of the UNHCR Executive Committee (10 October 2022)

Responsibility sharing in practice

4. How have key states diverged and converged around specific issues of responsibility sharing? And how do we understand variation and similarities in the ways key global actors as well as EU institutions have enacted practices of refugee sharing?

5. What variables allow us to understand commonalities and divergences in policy and legal responses to both displacement waves? And what methodological approaches are best suited for grappling with such differences/commonalities?

6. What role does the Temporary Protection Directive play as a means of responsibility sharing,[2] and how to interpret the process surrounding its activation and its related implications? Any precursory instruments that enable us to put the directive in historical perspective?

7. What bottom-up forms of responsibility sharing exist, and what role have civil society and city initiatives played in promoting responsibility sharing?

The exploratory workshop at AAU CPH will bring academic and policy voices together to discuss these complex questions. A mix of presentations, roundtable discussions and cluster work will allow us to take stock of existing initiatives and discourses and to reflect on the development of this collaboration. Potential outcomes consist in the development of a set of pilot case studies or of a research observatory on solidarity and responsibility in the context of displacement.

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[2] UNHCR - High Commissioner's Statement to the United Nations Security Council on Ukraine, 28 February 2022.

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