

Introduction to the Special Section: Migration, War and Violent Conflict

Katarina Mozetič, Johan Ekstedt, Anders Hellström, Måns Lundstedt, Brigitte Suter & Magdalena Ulceluse

INTRODUCTION

Wars, invasions, violent conflicts, and political instability drive unprecedented levels of forced migration. Today, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has reached record highs. According to UNHCR,¹ more than 120 million people are displaced worldwide, with protracted crises unfolding in, among others, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and beyond.

Violent conflicts—and their cessation, for that matter—profoundly reshape patterns of (im)mobility, revealing the complex intersections between displacement, cross-border movements, and immobility. These forced trajectories transform individuals' recollections of the past, as well as their self-understanding and social relations, influencing family structures and communal conviviality locally and across borders. As displacement becomes increasingly protracted, humanitarian relief and international refugee protection face mounting challenges. At the same time, refugees are increasingly framed as transient guests rather than permanent residents, a narrative that legitimizes their speedy repatriation at the first sight of political changes in their regions of origin.

This Special Section brings together timely and critical perspectives on the lived realities of displacement, return, and resettlement in contexts shaped by war and violent conflict.

PRESENTATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The Special Section opens with the contribution *When Is Home? Temporality, Closure, and the Continuum of Return After Assad*, authored by Jasmin Lilian Diab, Maybritt Jill Alpes and Estella Carpi. Drawing on narratives from Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Türkiye, the authors show how repatriation efforts following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 are perceived as premature and disconnected from refugees' complex realities. Rather than a final act, return emerges as provisional, investigative, and circular—shaped by insecurity on both sides of the border. By rejecting the notion of closure in 'post-Assad' Syria as implied by numerous international and host-country actors, the authors reveal how refugees reimagine return as part of an open-ended displacement trajectory. This article is also available in Swedish.

In their commentary *Connecting the Dots Amidst Turbulence – Analysing the Disruptions in People's Translocal Lives in Times of War*, Benjamin Etzold and Marie Godin propose translocality as a conceptual lens to understand how violent conflict reshapes people's lives across multiple places. The piece bridges migration and conflict research, calling for multi-sited and relational approaches to capture the disruptions and reconfigurations of (im)mobilities and social life in times of war.

Tanja Manthey-Gutenberger's article *Transgenerational Transmission of Forced Migration Experiences in Palestinian Families: A Biographical-Narrative Analysis* explores how experiences of war and displacement echo through generations. Focusing on Palestinian families living in Germany,

she reveals how personal biographies are shaped by inherited narratives—manifesting in restrictive parenting rooted in war experiences, and a lingering sense of existential insecurity. The study highlights the urgent need for further research into resilience and support mechanisms for affected families.

The following contribution *Waiting for Resettlement: Insights from Rwandan Refugee Camps* by Caroline Leclercq sheds light on refugees' experiences of navigating identification and selection processes for resettlement. Drawing on qualitative material from refugees and the UNHCR office in Rwanda, Leclercq shows how refugees view resettlement as a rare opportunity for rights and dignity. Yet prolonged uncertainty and limited access to information foster dependency and mistrust, exposing a persistent gap between formal procedures and lived realities.

In her article *Retrospective Reassessing: Ukrainians' Memories of Life Before the War*, Olha Haidamachuk explores memory as a dynamic process under conditions of war, trauma and crisis. Through Ukrainians' retrospective reassessments of pre-war life, Haidamachuk demonstrates how war trauma reshapes individual and collective memory, altering how the past is valued and narrated. Personal testimonies not only register loss but also uncover cultural patterns of adaptation, self-censorship, and resilience.

Focusing on an often-overlooked group—fathers—the article *"Men Are Worth No More Than a Shoe Here": Syrian Refugee Fathers Navigating Loss of Identity After Displacement in Germany* examines the emotional toll of displacement. In the text, Shaden Sabouni reveals how forced migration uproots people not only from their homes, but also identities. In her delicate engagement with these men's changing family roles, Sabouni exposes their hidden struggles and quiet attempts to restore dignity in the aftermath of displacement. This article is also available in Swedish.

Together, these contributions offer grounded insights into the complex and evolving dynamics of migration, war, and violent conflict. They challenge simplified narratives of displacement and return, foregrounding the lived experiences, emotional landscapes, and structural constraints that shape and are entangled with conflict-related mobility.

In addition to the contributions featured in this Special Section, we encourage readers to explore the rich array of articles presented in the journal's General Section.

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¹ UNHCR (2025) *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2024*. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/global-trends-report-2024.pdf>