

BOOK REVIEW

Alexander BETTS and Paul COLLIER, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*

(London, Penguin Random House, 2018)

Saadet ULASOGLU IMAMOGLU

Dr., Lecturer, Kırklareli University, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

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E-mail : bilgi@uidergisi.com.tr

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Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System

Alexander BETTS and Paul COLLIER

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Saadet ULAŞOĞLU İMAMOĞLU

Dr., Lecturer Kırklareli University, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Kırklareli

E-mail: u.saadet@klu.edu.tr

Orcid No: 0000-0002-1495-6877

The global refugee regime designed to provide protection to people fleeing persecution was harshly criticized for failing to handle the recent refugee crisis, led by the Syrian conflict, that has been ongoing since 2011. With this book, Betts and Collier offer a comprehensive analysis of the Syrian refugee crisis and inadequacies of the global refugee system. They examine the causes of the crisis, evaluate the weaknesses of global refugee regime, identify problems that have made the regime inefficient and ultimately offer a new approach to overcome the regime's shortcomings.

The first part of the book explains the reasons behind the largest refugee crisis that Europe has experienced since the Second World War. The authors argue that state fragility in Syria resulted in violent disorder which eventually led to mass flight (p. 25). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency of the global refugee regime, gathered people fleeing Syria in camps located in countries neighboring the origin country, which was a method prevalently used since 1980s (p. 41). According to the authors, the Syrian refugee crisis intensified when many refugees who were constrained in camps in the regional host countries attempted to go to Europe by risking their lives (p. 73-78). In Europe, the frontline countries -Italy and Greece - overwhelmed with refugee flows, abandoned their first country responsibilities, stemming from the Dublin Regulation, that held the member of the European Union where an asylum seeker first arrived responsible to examine the asylum application (p. 79-80). When refugees were unrestricted by the frontline countries, the borderless Schengen Area facilitated refugees' movements towards the wealthy countries of Northern Europe -especially Germany (p. 81). With Chancellor Merkel's decision to accept refugees who arrived in Germany, the authors contend that the extent of the crisis expanded.

The second part starts with moral thought experiments on duty of others to assist refugees, rights of refugees to migrate, and responsibilities of both refugees and host countries for integration. The authors conclude their thought experiments by stating that the international community has a duty to support refugees and that states should share the burden regarding refugee protection (p. 124-125). According to them, the main problems of the current refugee regime are the negligence of countries

geographically distant from fragile states and the lack of opportunities to protect refugees' dignity and autonomy in developing countries hosting the majority of the world's refugees, owing to their proximity to conflict and crisis. Major refugee-hosting countries in the developing world enclose refugees into camps and deprive them of the formal right to work because of resource scarcity (p. 128-129). In a global refugee system based on provision of emergency aid in terms of food, shelter and clothing, refugees who are not offered jobs or freedom of movement in the first asylum countries risk their lives to become closer to developed countries (p. 131). As a solution, the authors suggest constraining refugees in 'havens' - countries proximate to the origin countries - and providing economic support to these havens (p. 135). Therefore, the regional havens will offer more development opportunities to refugees, and refugees will remain there until peace comes to their home countries.

The third and final part discusses whether the Syrian refugee crisis, and also the refugee situation in Kenya, would have escalated if the authors' approach was applied from the start. According to the authors, when the Syrian conflict triggered flights, if the UNHCR and the World Bank had cooperated to fund the regional host countries under the supervision of European countries, the regional havens would not have been overburdened by refugee protection (p. 230). Additionally, there would have been more job opportunities in the haven countries to support refugees so that they would not have risked their lives to move to Europe. Similarly, if the European Union had offered trade concessions to Kenya, investments would have increased in that country and refugees would have been able to find more income-earning opportunities (p. 231).

Overall, the book presents important insights over the Syrian refugee crisis and the shortcomings of the global refugee regime, based on the authors' expertise on forced migration and development. Nevertheless, their approach needs to be better substantiated. First and foremost, the argument that refugees would not take dangerous trips to go to Europe if the international community financed the haven countries to provide freedom of movement and jobs to refugees needs to be supported by cross-national data at the individual level. An analysis of refugee movements should consider factors that motivate people to flee, to choose countries where they seek asylum, and to return to their home countries. Of course, people might not have much options when their physical integrity is threatened and choose to flee towards countries close to their home countries. However, assuming that refugees would stay in the regional host countries once they have bread-winning opportunities would be an omission of political and social factors that would motivate people to move. If we want to fix the broken refugee system, it is important to account for refugees' opinions about the conditions under which they would stay in the havens, flee to other countries or return to their home countries. Based on cross-national data at individual level, policymakers could have a chance to produce better policies to handle present and future displacement crises.

Equally important, the argument about constraining refugees to neighboring states because of the shared ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties with the host societies neglects the likelihood that the same ties could jeopardize the delicate ethnic balance in the haven countries. The recent studies have already shown that ethnic ties between refugees and groups in the host countries spread the conflict towards the neighboring countries.¹ For example, the Kosovo crisis in 1999 led Kosovar Albanians to

1 Idean Salehyan and Kristian S. Gleditsch, "Refugees and the Spread of Civil War", *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2006, p. 335-366; Seraina Rüegger, "Refugees, Ethnic Power Relations, and Civil Conflict in the Country of Asylum", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 56, No 1, 2019, p. 42-57.

seek safety in other countries including North Macedonia. The influx of Kosovar Albanian refugees strained the relations between majority Macedonians and minority Albanians in North Macedonia, and the country eventually fell into violence.² Bearing this possibility in mind, individual cases should be carefully investigated before making assumptions that countries which host ethno-religiously related groups will be better handle refugee crises. Here, individual level data on the attitudes of people in host countries towards refugees would facilitate to make successful policies regarding refugee situations.

Consequently, Betts and Collier deserve to be praised for proposing a new approach that would provide a dignified life to refugees and thus save them from life-threatening attempts. However, their approach reduces refugees' needs to economic factors and neglects their needs related to political and social factors. Furthermore, that approach should be elaborated by taking into account opinions of refugees whose lives are attempted to be protected and of people living in the regional host countries in order to prevent unintended consequences.

2 Rüeegger, "Refugees, Ethnic Power Relations, and Civil Conflict in the Country of Asylum".