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## Viewpoint

## Refugee influx: Repercussions and research agenda for service scholars

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## ABSTRACT

Service provision is an integral part of hosting refugees. However, the service scholar community has remained rather dormant in regard to focusing on refugee issues. This is indeed surprising given international refugee influx is today one of the more pressing issues for developing and developed countries alike. This research note aims to identify the demands on countries' "service ecosystems" after an influx of migrants arrives in a country, and suggests research avenues for scholars. Resolving service related issues can assist practitioners and government bodies in how to better design and manage the interface between refugees and the new (service) ecosystems these actors have entered when reaching a host country. Therefore, this research note outlines the challenges of such refugee in- or through flux relating to service provision by focusing on the incoming actors (refugees) as well as the resident actors (locals, service providers, government bodies etc.). Repercussions as well as the subsequent agenda for inquiry for service scholars outlined refer to the various system levels from micro to macro, such as on individual, family, city, regional, state and national level, but also outside the system on an international level.

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a surge in migration of people from countries who have been exposed to war or unrest, violence, persecution, natural disasters, environmental crises, poverty or other factors, culminating in a record number of 65.3 million displaced people in 2015 (accounting for just under one percent of the world's population) – of which 21.3 million were refugees (Angeli, 2016; Caprani, 2016; UNHCR, 2016a, 2016b). Approximately 34,000 refugees are displaced every single day or 24 refugees every single minute and one of every 200 refugees is a child. In 2015, over 50% of these refugees worldwide came from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Despite the fact that countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Americas host the majority of refugees (94%), refugee influx into Europe has become a particularly testing and contentious issue irrespective of the comparatively lower percentage (6%) of refugees predominantly arriving from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq to be accommodated (UNHCR, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Notwithstanding that developing regions host 86% of all refugees – with 13.9 million people the highest number in 20 years (UNHCR, 2016b) – challenges for developed countries have equally arisen and, as for developing countries, lie in multiple areas. Some of the key challenges of refugee influx are outlined below and focus on different sets of actors who necessitate or drive service provision. This viewpoint will then outline a research agenda for service scholars.

## 2. Refugees

The refugee as the focal point of attention for scholars, governments, service providers and also citizens of a host country, is an individual who has absconded their country because of persecution, war, violence, fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (Amnesty International, 2012; UNHCR, 2016d). Most of these people cannot or do not want to return home. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are predominant causes of refugees escaping their homeland (UNHCR, 2016d). According to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 13 (2) and 14 (1) "[e]veryone has the right to leave any country, including [their] own (...)" and "(...) to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (UN, 1948/2016).

## 3. Repercussions

Refugees seeking shelter in another country and potentially applying for asylum are not a new phenomenon (Angeli, 2016; Gatrell, 2013; UNHCR, 2016b). Yet, due to the increase in numbers in recent years (Clark and Simeon, 2016), even developed countries appear to be somewhat ill prepared to receive, manage and coordinate, host and integrate these new arrivals (Lindsay and Rogers, 2014; UNHCR, 2016b). This might not necessarily be a matter of the cost per refugee per year of an approximate US\$ 119,000 (Nie, 2015) but is perhaps due

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to other factors. For example, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016b, p. 34) the “refugee emergency in Europe tested asylum and reception systems in 2015 (...). Existing frameworks were in many instances unable to facilitate the management of the crisis or preserve the protection space in a sustainable manner”. Yet, the refugees still kept coming and therefore also kept entering these “new systems”. In service research, these systems are also called service ecosystems (Fisk et al., 2016; Vargo and Lusch, 2016). In such service ecosystems the established actors in the system have already been interacting with one another, integrating resources and are linked by institutions (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). These actors (locals, service providers, government bodies etc.) cooperate on various system levels from micro to macro (such as on individual, family, city, regional, state and national level – but also outside this system on an international level) (cf. Fisk et al., 2016). Both categories of actors, refugees and resident actors, are used to outline the issues which they might encounter and to outline a research agenda.

### 3.1. Perspective of refugees as actors entering the service ecosystem

On *micro systems level* (individual, family), for example, due to the loss of their home, their livelihood, their community (UN, 2016), refugees might arrive with diminished personal resources (Benson, 2004) and, apart from requiring basic services, such as food and shelter provision, they might need medical and psychological aid (Feldman, 2006; Keller et al., 2006; Reimann et al., 2016; Römer, 2016). Further, if arriving with relatives, integrating themselves and their families into the host country is important, for example, there might be the need of childcare and protection as well as education (cf. “Refugees”, 2015a; Reimann et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2016). Moreover, the new environment might not be comparable to their home country in terms of consumption opportunities. Hence, refugees might have to learn how to access and use certain services (Julien, 2016) and products, for example when pursuing their fundamental right of seeking and applying for asylum (European Commission, 2015) or during daily consumption. Another challenge can be to find employment and integrate into the workforce of the host country (cf. Nie, 2015; “Refugees”, 2016a; Reimann et al., 2016) and to potentially avoid poverty (cf. Fisk et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2016). Connected to this might be having to liaise with social service providers or government agencies, for example, to avoid exploitation, abuse or violence or to assist with family reunification (UNICEF, 2016).

On *meso systems level*, establishing a new community outside their homeland might be a much needed endeavour (cf. UNICEF, 2016).

Lastly, on *macro systems level*, and owing to entering a different culture, the new arrivals are required to adapt to and integrate into a new society (cf. “Refugees”, 2015b).

### 3.2. Perspective of other actors already residing in the service ecosystem

On *micro systems level*, citizens already residing in the service ecosystem might be concerned that refugees increase the likelihood of domestic terrorist attacks (Diehl, 2016a; Wike et al., 2016) or evoke an upturn of crimes, assaults and harassments (Diehl, 2016b; “Refugees”, 2015d; Schulz, 2016). Further, apprehension might exist that refugees become a burden on the country because they could take away jobs and social benefits (Wike et al., 2016; see also Angeli, 2016). Resentments that too many resources are spent on the newcomers might emerge (McCarthy, 2016). What is more, uncertainty or apprehension might occur as to how to interact with refugees due to language and cultural barriers (“Refugees”, 2015b, 2015c).

On *meso systems level* coordination of refugee aid provided by different agencies, providers and administrative bodies might be required (Berres, 2016). Refugees might necessitate a combination of services, such as medical services, social services or translation services

in a city or region. Here, the allocation of resources to enable service provision is pivotal. For example, refugees might have to be medically examined by doctors, provided with temporary housing in shelters, given social counselling etc. (Lindsay and Rogers, 2014).

Such coordination of refugee matters might equally be necessary on *macro systems level* for nationwide services, such as asylum services where the national service entity might have to allocate refugees within the host country as per an asylum quota (cf. “Refugees”, 2015b; “Refugees”, 2016b; Reimann et al., 2016) and then coordinate asylum procedures with the local agencies or councils in the regions or states and other service providers, such as for transportation of the refugees to the allocated regional bureaus for application, hearing etc. Finally, beyond the macro systems level of one nation, the quota of refugees amongst countries, potentially the agreement on an international distribution key and refugee transfers and care might have to be negotiated and coordinated (Becker, 2016; “Refugees”, 2016c; Reimann and Wittrock, 2016).

## 4. Research agenda

As can already be deduced from the challenges outlined above, research on refugees encompasses an interdisciplinary field of study (Gatrell, 2013; Mason, 2007). Yet, such research focused on refugees has not transcended to the field of service research, despite similar global challenges having been highlighted (Fisk et al., 2016), and regardless of the fact that existing research in other disciplines relates to or discusses refugee service provision (see, for example, Critelli, 2015; Keller et al., 2006; Lee, 2014; Newbold et al., 2013; Peisker and Tilbury, 2003; Richards, 2016; Rowley et al., 2006 and Watters, 1998). Hence, this note urges service researchers to address the key challenges and repercussions which correspond to but are not limited to the range of service themes on the different system levels as identified above. These can be detailed as outlined below.

### 4.1. Perspective of refugees as actors entering the service ecosystem

On *micro systems level*, the study of the lived service experiences of refugees before and during transiting (“Refugees”, 2016d; Schneider, 2015), but particularly also after having entered a country (cf. New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2008), to derive implications for service design, require closer investigation. Such work has impact on literally improving the actors’ journeys and service experience along the way as well as in the host country and such studies might equally impact service design on *macro systems level* and beyond. Further, the specific refugee needs (Watters, 1998) and behaviours in regard to existing and new service value propositions need further research to more effectively and efficiently supply basic (for example, food, temporary housing, medical, child protection or translation services) and additional services (such as financial advice, work and income services). Moreover, a closer analysis of the difference of refugee consumer behaviour compared to local actors’ consumer behaviour appears to be an understudied area. In particular, the identification of culture-specific service and consumption practices (cf. Warde, 2014) of refugees might have implications for value propositions in the host country. For example, clothes retailers might have to adjust their offerings, redesign changing rooms, retrain staff and adjust their advertising. Connected to this the integration of “refugee resources” in the host country, who at times might have different capabilities of “doing things” warrant investigation. For example, apart from providing service to replenish the potentially depleted personal resources of refugees (Römer, 2016) via healthcare and other services, knowledge and skills in regard to service use need to be studied. Which training or instruction do refugees require to utilise host country services, such as banking, IT, healthcare, public services etc.?

On *meso systems level*, finding one’s “footing” again in a foreign country might include to establish a community or connect with fellow

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