
REFUGEES AND AGGRESSION: A SUGGESTIVE LINK

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Abstract

This article examines the thesis of far-right populists who claim that refugees are aggressive (already were at birth). This thesis or view has led to the borders of Western countries being closed to refugees, with few exceptions. Step 1 discusses the numbers of people worldwide who have been forced to leave their homes. Stories are also told about what fleeing means to a person and her/his family. Research on the thesis is done using criminological research in the Western world. Furthermore, what psychiatry says about refugees and aggression is examined. The keywords here are the immeasurable number of traumatic events that refugees have undergone and the DSM-5 diagnoses that explain a possible connection between, on the one hand, refugees' traumatic experiences and aggression. This article launches the thesis that refugees are entitled to protection, also because the thesis of the right-wing extremist populists is unfounded. This is elaborated in concrete guidelines for mental health institutions and authorities.

Keywords: Refugees, Aggression, Border Protection, refugee Narratives, and Guidelines

1. Introduction

This link between Refugees and Aggression raises the question: 'where did this link come from?' I wonder if this link has come about through the influence of populists and right-wing extremists.

“Donald Trump for instance tweets that refugees from South-America are criminals. Literally Trump said: “when Mexico is sending its people, they are not sending the best. They are sending people that have lots of problems, and they are bringing those problems with us. They are bringing drugs, they are bringing crime, and they are rapists” (Frankopan, 2018, pp. 47). Trump’s view evokes the suggestion that the relationship between crime and immigration is positive (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 8).”

Is the link between refugees and aggression really justified, I wonder, now that the European Union (EU) is trying to stop refugees at the external borders of the EU by deploying its Frontex organisation? Frontex is a European Agency with its own 'army of border controllers' for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the Member States of the European Union. Is this connection justified now that, as a result of COVID-19, almost no refugees are entering the rich northern part of Europe (including the Netherlands)? Is this link justified now that, due to COVID-19, almost no refugees enter the Netherlands anymore?

This article will first outline the official data on refugee numbers and where they come from. Next, the assumed connection between refugees and aggression is examined in more detail from four domains. Firstly, from the perspective of criminology. The basis for this has been laid in the article 'Unravelling Relations Between immigration, Crime and Super diversity in the United States of America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Steinmetz, 2020). Secondly, from the

experiences of refugees themselves in their homeland, and on their escape route to their possible new homeland. Thirdly, from the perspective of the first early stay in the country of arrival, the prisons - in the Netherlands these institutions are called AZCs (asylum seekers' centres), where refugees have to wait for a residence permit or a rejection. If a residence permit is rejected, the rejected refugees end up in a departure prison or in illegality. Fourthly, this link is examined from the perspective of 'negative' psychiatry, where the DSM-5 is central.

There is another side note to all this. Refugees have their own stress language, which it may be assumed that aid providers (social workers, psychologists, nurses and psychiatrists) do not master, even if the concepts are translated into the language of the country of arrival. This article also looks at what this knowledge and expertise about refugees and aggression means for psychological health care.

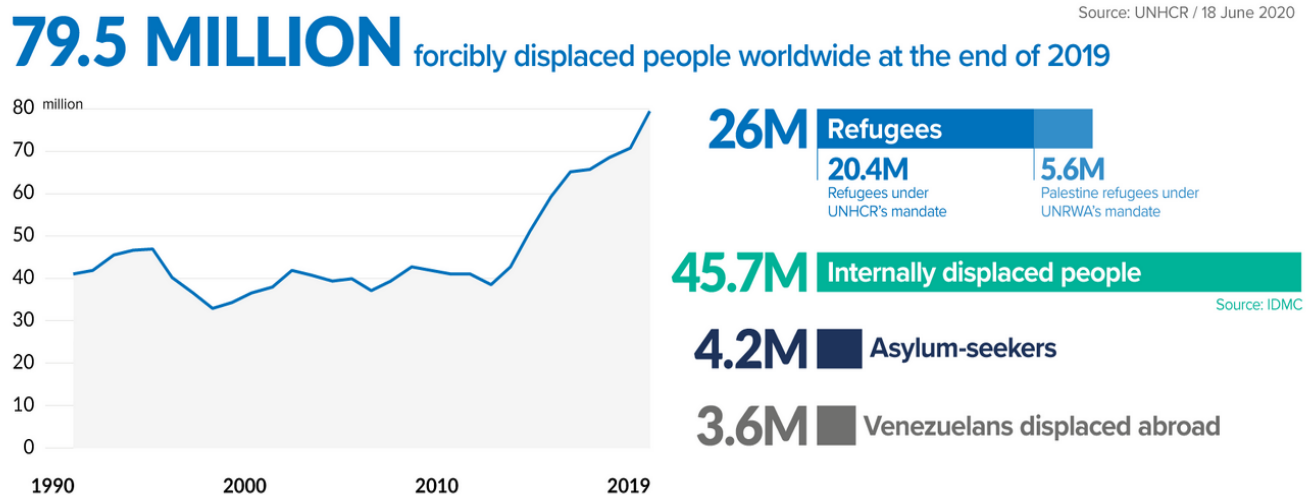
2. Data on Refugees

To get an idea of how many people are forced to flee their home, data from the UNHCR¹ (the United Nations Refugee Agency) are used. See the following quote:

“At least **79.5 million** people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly **26 million refugees**, around half of whom are **under the age of 18**.

There are also millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement.

At a time when **1 per cent of the world’s population have fled their homes** as a result of conflict or persecution, our work at UNHCR is more important than ever before.”



¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

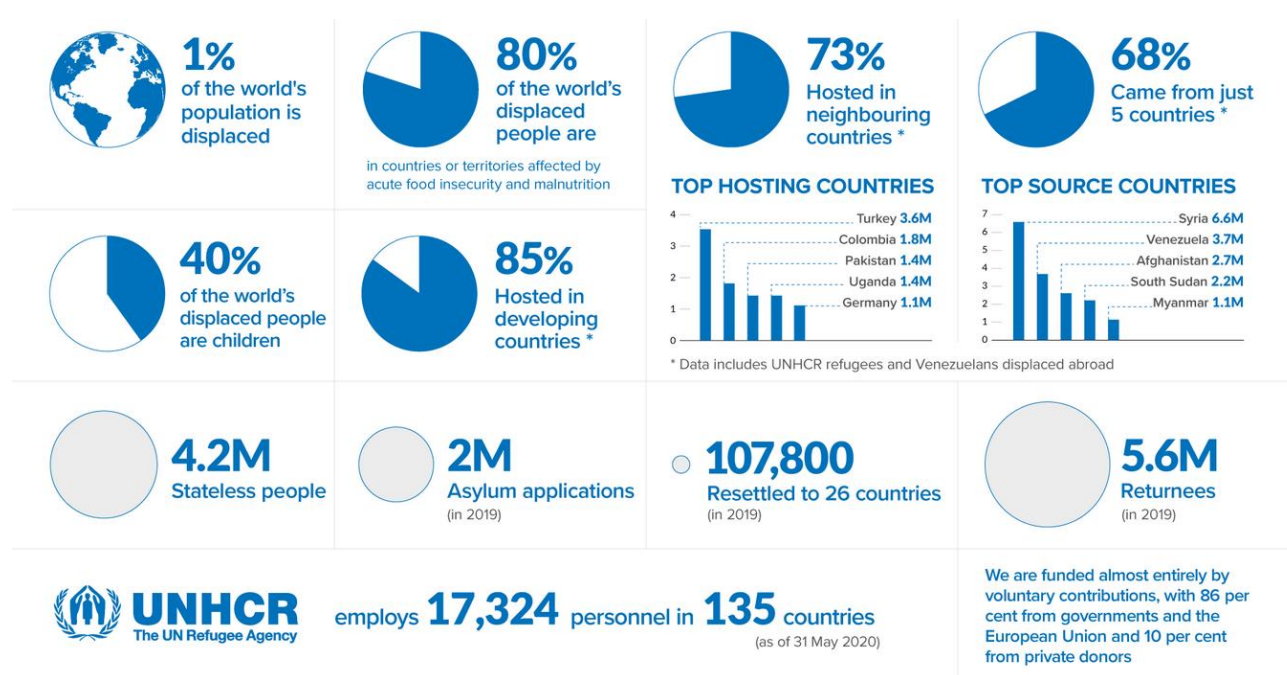


Figure 1 Forcible displaced people worldwide 2019 (source: UNHCR)

This data paints a bleak picture. 1% of the world's population is displaced, they come from countries or areas where there is no food and on top of that poor nutrition, 40% of these people are children and these displaced people mainly live in developing countries (85%). Of all displaced people, 4.2 million are stateless and 2 million have applied for asylum.

"We are witnessing a changed reality in that forced displacement nowadays is not only vastly more widespread but is simply no longer a short-term and temporary phenomenon (UNHCR, 2019)."

The countries that take in the most refugees are: Turkey (3.6 M), Columbia (1.8 M), Pakistan (1.4 M), Uganda (1.4 M) and Germany (1.1 M). Furthermore, most refugees come from the countries Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar.

These are cold numbers. Behind these numbers are stories of people in trouble. Getting so caught up that people have to flee and become displaced is a many-headed monster that strikes every day. The heads of this monster are the world's leaders (the United States, Russia, China and the EU) who think they have to intervene wherever they can. The purpose of this intervention is to exercise power in order to confiscate property and goods that do not belong to them. This is done under the guise of protecting the dollar, euro, and renminbi, stimulating the arms trade, eliminating the Islam, seizing natural resources, wanting to be the world's policeman (Steinmetz 2019), etc. Furthermore, an even more dangerous 'head' of this monster is 'the total lack of respect for the earth'. For example, entire jungles and forests are being cut down to meet Western needs for soya. This is also known as the climate fiasco with the visible phenomena being a Sahara moving further and further south of the African continent and entire icebergs and ice

shelves at the South and North Poles breaking up resulting in such a rise in sea and water levels that countries with residents in coastal areas near the sea, rivers and lakes will have to move their residents to higher ground.

“Several major crises contributed to the massive displacement over the past decade, (2010-2020) and the numbers include people who were displaced multiple times. These crises included but are not limited to the ones listed here:

- ❖ the outbreak of the Syrian conflict at the beginning of this decade, which continues to this day;
- ❖ South Sudan’s displacement crisis, which followed its independence;
- ❖ the conflict in Ukraine;
- ❖ the arrival of refugees and immigrants in Europe by sea;
- ❖ the massive flow of stateless refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh;
- ❖ the outflow of Venezuelans across Latin America and the Caribbean;
- ❖ the crisis in Africa’s Sahel region, where conflict and climate change are endangering many communities;
- ❖ renewed conflict and security concerns in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Somalia;
- ❖ conflict in the Central African Republic;
- ❖ internal displacement in Ethiopia;
- ❖ renewed outbreaks of fighting and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- ❖ the large humanitarian and displacement crisis in Yemen (UNHCR, 2019, p. 6).”

International definitions of the concepts relating to categories of people in need used above are given below (UNHCR, 2019, pp. 64-66):

“**REFUGEES** include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the refugee definition contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees as incorporated into national laws, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection, and those enjoying temporary protection. The refugee population also includes people in refugee-like situations.

PEOPLE IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATION refers to a category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained.

ASYLUM-SEEKERS (with pending cases) are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Those covered in this report refer to claimants whose individual applications were pending at the end of 2019, irrespective of when those claims may have been lodged.

VENEZUELAN DISPLACED ABROAD refers to persons of Venezuelan origin who are likely to be in need of international protection under the criteria contained in the Cartagena Declaration, but who have not applied for asylum in the country in which they are present. Regardless of status, Venezuelans displaced abroad require protection against forced returns, and access to basic services. UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration work together with this population by leading the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, which is aimed at strengthening the protection dimensions and consistent responses across the region in line with human rights standards.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or humanmade disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. For the purposes of UNHCR's statistics, this population includes only conflict-generated IDPs to whom the Office extends protection and/or assistance. The IDP population also includes people in an IDP-like situation.

PEOPLE IN AN IDP-LIKE SITUATION refers to a category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence and who face protection risks similar to those of IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such.

RETURNED REFUGEES are former refugees who have returned to their countries of origin, either spontaneously or in an organized fashion, but are yet to be fully integrated. Such returns would ideally take place only under conditions of safety and dignity. For the purposes of this report, only refugees who returned between January and December 2019 are included, although in practice, operations may assist returnees for longer periods.

RETURNED IDPs refers to those IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities, and who returned to their areas of origin or habitual residence between January and December 2019. In practice, however, operations may assist IDP returnees for longer periods.

INDIVIDUALS UNDER UNHCR'S STATELESSNESS MANDATE are defined under the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons as those not considered as nationals by any State under the operation of its law. In other words, they do not possess the nationality of any State. UNHCR statistics refer to people who fall under the organization's statelessness mandate as those who are stateless according to this international definition. Data from some countries may also include people with undetermined nationality. These are people who lack proof of possession of any nationality and at the same time have or are regarded as having important links to more than one State. UNHCR also works with populations at risk of statelessness, but persons at risk of statelessness are not reported on under the statistical category of individuals under UNHCR's statelessness mandate.

OTHER GROUPS OR PERSONS OF CONCERN refers to individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of these groups above but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.”

Although well-intentioned, these definitions are belly-aching. People who have been driven from their homes alone, with their extended families, or in groups from the same village or town, are divided into categories according to international laws, such as those who have fled from their motherland, those who wish to settle in a fatherland, those who settle in that fatherland or who have no papers to stay in that fatherland, and those who return to their motherland

Irreverently, these definitions are a translation of human rights about 'need and must flee' coloured by the rich western countries' view of 'full is full and that what I have I do not like to share'. That is why it is good to look at what human rights say about the rights of refugees.

What are the Human Rights of Refugees?

Human rights are universal. In short, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights belong to all people, including refugees and internally displaced persons. Refugees also enjoy certain human rights specifically linked to their particularly vulnerable status, including the right to seek asylum, to freedom from forcible return, to freedom of movement, to a nationality, and to receive protection and assistance in securing their basic economic, social and cultural rights.

The Human Rights at Issue²

The Human Rights of Refugees include the following indivisible, interdependent and interrelated human rights:

- ❖ The human right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.
- ❖ The human right not to be forcibly returned to the country he or she is fleeing if such a return would pose a threat to the life, security, or freedom of the refugee.
- ❖ The human right to freedom of movement, freedom to choose his or her residence, freedom to leave any country, including his or her own, and to return to his or her country.
- ❖ The human right to freedom from discrimination based on race, colour, gender, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, or any other status.
- ❖ The human right to equal protection of the law, equal access to the courts, and freedom from arbitrary or prolonged detention.
- ❖ The human right to a nationality.
- ❖ The human right to life.
- ❖ The human right to protection from torture or ill-treatment.
- ❖ The human right to freedom from genocide and "ethnic cleansing".
- ❖ The human right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, shelter and clothing.
- ❖ The human right to work and to basic labour protections.

² <https://www.pdhre.org/rights/refugees.html>

- ❖ The human right to the highest possible standard of health and to access to health care.
- ❖ The human right to live in a healthy and safe environment.
- ❖ The human right to education, to free and compulsory elementary education, to readily available forms of secondary and higher education, and to freedom from all types of discrimination at all levels of education. The human right to protection from economic and sexual exploitation, particularly for refugee women and children.
- ❖ The human right to participation in decision-making which affects a refugee's life, family, and community.
- ❖ The human right to sustainable development.
- ❖ The human right to peace.

Apart from human rights, there is also legislation on non-refoulement³:

“The basic principle of refugee law, non-refoulement refers to the obligation of States not to refoul, or return, a refugee to ‘the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’. 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, art. 33(1). Non-refoulement is universally acknowledged as a human right. It is expressly stated in human rights treaties such as Article 22(8) of the American Convention on Human Rights and Article 3 of the Convention against Torture, the latter of which was further interpreted in the Committee against Torture’s General Comment no. 4.

Additionally, both regional and domestic courts have interpreted the rights to life and freedom from torture to include a prohibition against refoulement. The principle of non-refoulement prohibits not only the removal of individuals but also the mass expulsion of refugees. *See, e.g.*, African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, art. 12(5).

There are two important restrictions to this principle. Persons who otherwise qualify as refugees may not claim protection under this principle where there are ‘reasonable grounds’ for regarding the refugee as a danger to the national security of the host country or where the refugee, having been convicted of a particularly serious crime, constitutes a danger to the host community. 1951 Convention, art. 33(2).”

The appropriate question here is whether all these laws and regulations protect refugees or not? My impression is that the protection is very limited. We have seen this in the United States of America under Trump, who has taken a very hard line on refugees from South America. Fortunately, the Joe Biden and Kamala Harris regime is gradually reversing that position.

“In 2021, the U.S. government is planning for 117,000 unaccompanied children crossing the border without their parents, the most on record. Border Patrol stations are already jailing thousands of kids, and the agency is failing to transfer the vast majority to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelters within the legally required 72 hours.

³ <https://ijrcenter.org/refugee-law/>

Many children are trapped in jails for more than a week without showers, hygiene, social distancing, or other health care. Fortunately, the new Biden administration acknowledges that the most pressing priority is the children's safety and well-being. Nonetheless, several policies that it inherited from prior administrations and has maintained harm children, cause family separation, and lead to unnecessary child detention (Bier, 2021)."

In Europe, the situation is not much better; only a few refugees seep through the web that Frontex has stretched around Europe. The exception is Germany, which is showing its warm motherly heart for refugees, Angela Merkel's heart. Many people are fleeing from the continent of Africa, most of whom are being received in the region or in other countries that are also struggling. In Asia, China plays a prominent role, its attitude towards the Uighurs is sad. In other words, sound laws and guidelines for the protection of refugees will only be successful if NGOs have serious violations of refugees' human rights condemned by the courts. Unfortunately, by then the damage has often been done. Borders of countries and continents have broken the solidarity between people. The unfortunate motto is often: "it's me and the rest can go to hell".

3. Refugees and Aggression: a criminological perspective

The (extreme) right-wing populist opinion of western political leaders such as Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán and Geert Wilders that immigration (new and old arrivals) is associated with more crime has been the subject of further research in the article 'Unravelling Relations Between Immigration, Crime and Superdiversity in the United States of America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Steinmetz, 2020). This proposition does not seem to hold true in the Western world. However, the option remains on the table that immigration is accompanied by increased victimisation and witnessing of crime. After all, old but especially newcomers come into contact with the disrupted part of Western societies mainly in their super-diverse cities, a part where there is a shortage of housing, where people have to live on a very low income, where education and health care are far from optimal and where legal work is hard to find. These observations are also called the Social Disorganisation, a Chicago school theory (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 11), especially when unfavourable neighbourhood conditions in super-diverse cities are linked to crime.

I know that the image that extreme-right western populists ventilate does not substantiate the proposition that immigration is associated with increased criminality. This is caused by the following distortions or racial bias (over-representation). Proportionally, there are more old and newcomers in prisons than the original residents of a town, village, region or country, even if we look at their representation in the population. The same distortion or racial bias can be found in the police and the judiciary, if we look at registered crime (suspect rates, crime rates, and conviction rates), because ethical profiling is commonplace there. Victimisation surveys, i.e. population research among a random number of citizens, show the opposite, namely that more victims of crime are found among old and newcomers than among the native-born population. The causes of these distortions or bias are sought in ethnic profiling (a kind of bias) and institutional racism. In short, if a black or coloured person commits a minor or major offence or is suspected of doing so, she - and usually he - is held to account more harshly than a white person. This suspicion of (extreme) right-wing extremist populists plays into the population's

fear of crime. The population attributes this, among other things, to an increase in immigrants and refugees (Steinmetz, 2020). After all, right-wing western extremist populists are supporters of 'the opinion 'Our People Number one. This fear of crime - read refugees and immigrants - defies all logic. For this fear is not supported by facts, but possibly by (social) media attention.

Refugees as a group pay a high price for fleeing to Western countries, namely a high risk of 'wrongful' conviction or imprisonment.

Very fitting to the above argument is the OECD's assessment that immigrants and refugees should be treated with hope rather than as a threat.

“Migration⁴ is all too often seen as a threat, not an opportunity

Yet this is what we are witnessing more and more. Fears over migration are fuelling populism and mistrust and undermining the capacity of governments to manage flows.

In OECD countries, people think that there are two or three times as many immigrants as there really are! There is a similarly exaggerated perception of how much migrants cost and how much they access social benefits. Half of Europeans think that refugees are going to take their jobs and social benefits. And regardless of actual migrant numbers, half the public in the USA and among the OECD's European Members think “it's too many”.

Our evidence — reported annually in our flagship International Migration Outlook, which has just celebrated its 40th edition — shows that in almost all OECD countries, immigrants contribute more than they take in social benefits. They are productive members of society who work, set up businesses and have innovative ideas. Migrants boost the working age population: over the past 10 years, they accounted for 47% of the increase in the US workforce and 70% in Europe. They also fill jobs in both fast-growing as well as declining sectors of the economy, including the care of the elderly and health care in general.

On the other hand, migration does have short-term costs. And the local impact of large-scale migration may be far stronger in some areas than at the national level. If we don't recognise the real costs being paid by some local communities and the stress of adapting to diversity, we not only look elitist and out of touch; worse still we are failing to point policy in the right direction.

We need to move the debate from managing threats and costs to seizing opportunities, from one of fears to one of hope.”

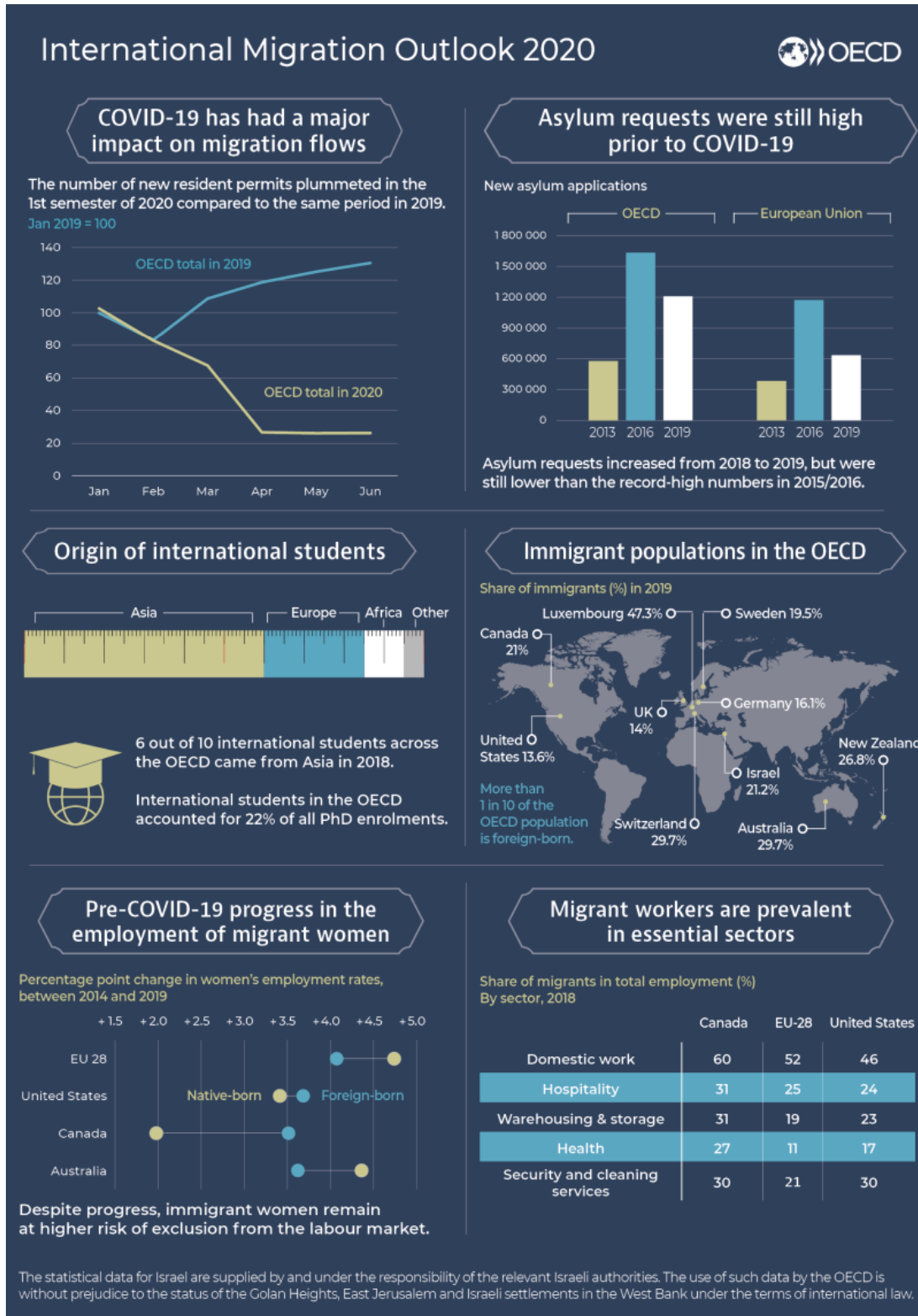
Sadly, due to COVID-19, the reliance on the Western world by newcomers has declined sharply, see OECD statistics below.

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/integration-of-migrants-and-refugees-challenges-and-opportunities.htm>

“Migration flows were stable in 2018 and 2019, but halted in the first half of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. OECD countries, with the exception of Colombia and Turkey, together accepted about 5.3 million new permanent migrants in 2019. This represents a stable level compared to 2018. Flows to the United States and Germany (the top OECD receiving countries) continued to decrease, while in most other OECD countries flows tended to increase, notably in Spain and Japan.

Initial estimates of immigration flows in 2020 suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on immigration flows in the first half of the year, with the number of new residency permits granted to immigrants down by 46% on average in the OECD. Part of the effect might be offset by a rise in flows during the second half of the year, notably for international students, but the current economic downturn will also most likely aggravate the impact on labour migration. Overall, 2020 is projected to be a historical low for international migration in the OECD area (OECD, 2020).”

Refugees and immigrants are indispensable in the labour market. They are especially to be found as domestic workers but also in warehousing and storage and security and cleaning services. Whether the Western world should be proud of this is questionable. Refugees and immigrants pay a high price for this too. This has become clear in this COVID-19 period where many of them have been infected and died (Steinmetz, 2020).



4. Refugees and refuge stories and experiences

Storytelling helps us as human beings to empathise with others. Empathy and compassion increase through stories. Refugees are children (often unaccompanied by an adult), mothers with their children, groups of young men who have to make way in a new homeland, and sometimes a whole extended family, uncles and aunts with their big and small children. Fleeing means escaping misery, (ethnic) wars, famine, genocide and climate disasters. Fleeing is not only escaping, but also travelling, often a dangerous long journey through deserts, countries where refugees are not welcome, and residences where girls and women run a significant risk of being assaulted or raped, or even captured by human traffickers. Some of the refugees risk ending up in prison where they are even tortured.

In short, the distress in the mother country is bad enough, but on top of that come the terrible experiences of fleeing. The price is often a closed border of the so-called safe world. Shocking examples are the border between Mexico and the United States during the Trump regime and the external borders of the European Union with its own guard force, Frontex. A closed border provides various options for refugees, such as staying there for a long time hoping for an opportunity to cross, starting with a year-long application to be admitted into 'the promised land' and being sent back after which the whole journey starts all over again once the refugee has accumulated the necessary funds to pay the refugee traffickers (this trade has become a global industry).

Once a refugee is admitted to the 'promised land', they end up in temporary prison-care centres in various countries. There they must await their admission procedure. Answers are, 'you have been admitted,' 'you may stay here temporarily' and 'you must return because you are from a safe country'. In these prison-like accommodation centres, refugees are hardly allowed to participate in a social life at that location. Unless happiness falls into their lap because local volunteers take care of them.

All in all, because of the misery in their mother country, the journey and stay in the 'promised land', refugees lose many years of their lives without being able to call on education, health care, healthy food and psychological/psychiatric help. Fortunately, many refugees are received in the region or in neighbouring countries. Many of these regions or neighbouring countries can hardly bear the costs of hosting such large numbers of refugees.

Let me give you some examples of refugee stories. These are taken from Global Giving⁵ with the title '**13 Powerful Refugee Stories From Around The World**'.

⁵ <https://www.globalgiving.org/learn/listicle/13-powerful-refugee-stories/>



“Alia fled her home in Aleppo, Syria and is currently living in Damour, Lebanon. She shared her story through Gruppo Aleimar, an Italian NGO which provides free nutritious meals to refugees in the Damour area. Alia is 7 years old.

“The last thing I remember of Syria, before we left, was when my mother was taking me from our place to our grandparents. The roads were full of dead corpses. I saw dead people with no heads or no hands or legs. I was so shocked I couldn’t stop crying. To calm me down, my grandfather told me they were mean people, but I still prayed for them, because even if some considered them mean, they were still dead human beings. Back at home, I left a friend in Syria, her name was Rou’a. I miss her a lot and I miss going to school with her. I used to play with her with my Atari but I couldn’t bring it with me. I also used to have pigeons, one of them had eggs, I would feed them and care for them. I’m worried about them, I really pray someone is still caring for them. But here I have a small kitten that I really love! I miss my home a lot. I hope one day we’ll be back and things will be just like before.”



“Bizimana fled his home in Rwanda and is now living in Nairobi, Kenya. His story was shared with us by Refugees International Japan, which focuses on the health, education and economic livelihoods of people displaced by conflict around the world.

Bizimana was two years old when his family had to flee the Rwandan genocide to Burundi. From there he moved to camps in Tanzania and now lives in Nairobi, Kenya. He received business start-up training and has established a business that has grown so fast he is now able to start a cafe service. He is also a prize-winning singer.”



“Achan fled her home in Pajok, South Sudan and is currently living in a refugee camp in Lamwo District, Uganda. Her story was shared with us by Hope Ofiriha, a Norwegian NGO which assists South Sudanese refugees with medical care, microfinance, and education. She is 75 years old.

Achan is a widow who had eight children. Seven of her children died during the ongoing war in her home country of South Sudan. As a result, she was left with many orphans to take care of. Before the war, she was a peasant farmer in Sudan who cultivated to sustain her extended family. When the war broke out in her community, she and her family ran to save their lives, leaving all their belongings behind. She believes her home has been destroyed by the rebels.”



❖ *“Noorkin and her son Yacob fled their home in Myanmar when Myanmar’s military and Buddhist extremist groups started clearance operations against Rohingya people. They are Rohingya refugees currently living in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh. Their story was shared with us by World Vision. Noorkin is 40 years old and Yacob is 10.*

“Back in Myanmar my father was a farmer and he also went fishing. Along with my siblings, I used to attend school regularly. I was in Grade 2 when we left. We used to learn Burmese literature in school. But it all came to an end the day our house got burnt. The houses in our village was on fire. We couldn’t run to the jungle because it was on fire too. We flee to another village but that village was also attacked. We were stranded so we fled again to a canal and stayed there for two days with no food. We made it across the border and now we live here in the camps,” Yacob explained.

He continued: "I like being a leader. At the centre, I get the children together and them ask them to follow me when I am doing the actions. I tell them 'Please, I am going to start reciting the poem, so follow me.' I am a good boy and a quick learner. I also make other children laugh. It is fun. I want to learn more and more because I want to become a teacher when I grow up."

"They are slowly getting back to feeling normal again," Noorkin said about her children. "I desire a bright future for my children where they can be what they want to be."

5. Refugees, trauma and aggression

Criminologists have further investigated the connection between trauma (posttraumatic stress disorder) and aggression. Caution is advised in interpreting the following correlations. Caution because these are often significant but weak correlations. Therefore, the most important outcomes are formulated as risks of violence and/or aggression. Criminologists look at violence and/or aggression from the perspective of risk factors that arose in the past. (also called historical data). The most important historical risk factors are (Neller, 2006-2007) family instability and the use of violence, but also prominent psychiatric disorders including personality disorders. In addition to these historical risk factors, process-related risk factors are also mentioned, such as anger, unregulated emotions, lack of insight, antisocial or negative attitudes and impulsiveness. Furthermore, Neller et al. (2006-2007, p. 6) state that:

"Traumatised people are at increased risk of flat emotions and insensitivity. This in itself leads to an increased risk of hostility, anger and other emotional regulation problems. Finally, these authors state that traumatised people are further at increased risk of emotion-related psychiatric disorders associated with anxiety and depression."

There seems to be a kind of law here, namely the younger the child is who grows up in an unstable family where violence is used, the more likely it is that this child will be violent and/or aggressive himself. How exactly this comes about is made plausible by the popular social learning theory of Bandura and Walters (1963). The core of this theory is 'bad example leads to bad behaviour'.

Fortunately, it is not just speculation. Neurologists are trying to make it plausible that trauma causes aggression, see Nordman et al. (2020).

"Heightened aggression can be serious concerns for the individual and society at large and are symptoms of many psychiatric illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The circuit and synaptic mechanisms underlying experience-induced aggression increase, however, are poorly understood. Here we find that prior attack experience leading to an increase in aggressive behaviour, known as aggression priming, activates neurons within the posterior ventral segment of the medial amygdala (MeApv). Optogenetic stimulation of MeApv using a synaptic depression protocol suppresses aggression priming, whereas high-frequency stimulation enhances aggression, mimicking attack experience. Interrogation of the underlying neural circuitry revealed that the MeApv mediates

aggression priming via synaptic connections with the ventromedial hypothalamus (VmH) and bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BNST). These pathways undergo NMDAR-dependent synaptic potentiation after attack. Furthermore, we find that the MeApv–VmH synapses selectively control attack duration, whereas the MeApv–BNST synapses modulate attack frequency, both with no effect on social behaviour. Synaptic potentiation of the MeApv–VmH and MeApv–BNST pathways contributes to increased aggression induced by traumatic stress, and weakening synaptic transmission at these synapses blocks the effect of traumatic stress on aggression. These results reveal a circuit and synaptic basis for aggression modulation by experience that can be potentially leveraged toward clinical interventions.”

“Heightened aggression can have devastating social consequences and may be associated with psychiatric disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The circuit and synaptic mechanisms underlying experience-induced aggression escalation, however, are poorly understood. Here we identify two aggression pathways between the posterior ventral segment of the medial amygdala and its downstream synaptic partners, the ventromedial hypothalamus and bed nucleus of the stria terminalis that undergo synaptic potentiation after attack and traumatic stress to enhance aggression. Notably, weakening synaptic transmission in these circuits blocks aggression priming, naturally occurring aggression, and traumatic stress-induced aggression increase. These results illustrate a circuit and synaptic basis of aggression modulation by experience, which can be potentially targeted for clinical interventions.”

Again, I want to return to refugees, to the question of whether refugee experiences lead to violence and aggression. A first step must not be forgotten, namely that many refugees encounter immeasurable amounts of (sexual) violence, indirect and overt. Below are two definitions of refugee victimization experiences, namely overt and indirect violence which is used in this text as an addendum to the theory of Bandura and Walters (1963) that ‘bad example leads to bad behaviour’.

“Indirect Violence is a term for formal or informal social arrangements that hurt particular groups of people, such as the poor, women, or refugees. These obstacles make most aspects of daily living much harder, ranging from keeping your hut in a shantytown to receiving adequate medical care.

Overt violence can range from blatant individual abuse to outright war, but indirect violence manifests in other ways, by informally (through cultural beliefs, behaviours and attitudes) or formally (through rules or laws) causing harm to human life (Schneider et al., 2017).”

Schneider et al. (2017, pp. 82-83) applied the above definitions to Syrian refugees. This produced the following conclusions.

“Indirect violence is widely prevalent for refugees and their journeys. By addressing the themes found in this study, nations and NGOs may be able to make improvements to

their service delivery models, so as to serve better and even empower refugees. Broad issues worth examining might include: (a) The quantity versus quality dilemma—is it justifiable to pack more people in, in exchange for a diminished quality of support—in other words, structural deficiency? (b) The corruption quandary—how can researchers determine the level of corruption, or make recommendations for restoring honest operations, and how can countries become motivated to clean-up corruption? (c) What innovations have been introduced at camps, and which hold promise? (d) The empowerment question—to what degree is self-actualization for refugees an option? and (e) How can transparency in operations and budgeting be promoted, whether for funders or for visiting researchers? Robust, sincere support for major innovations to address indirect violence will prove critical in addressing the Syrian Diaspora and helping refugees rebuild their lives.”

In other words, interventionists or aid workers realize very well that refugees face immeasurable amounts of aggression and violence. They can choose to prevent this but they will also have to take into account the 'stored' experiences of aggression and violence among refugees when providing assistance and support. These experiences can be seen as a volcano that can erupt at any moment.

A beautiful Norwegian self-report study (Gjelsvik et al., 2017) among unaccompanied minor asylum seekers shows that the connection between trauma and violence/aggression is by no means as simple as is claimed. This study is mainly about boys and less about girls, and involves a total of 577 young people who, on average, are about 20,09 years (standard deviation 2,61 years) and who have been in Norway for 4.63 years (standard deviation = 2.4 years). The youngsters mainly originated from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, Somalia, Ethiopia and Iraq. The Norwegian researchers made a not insignificant comment on the research results, namely that the self-reported aggression is relatively low and that there is no significant difference between girls and boys.

“Males displayed higher levels of proactive affiliation-related aggression⁶ than females, while the gender difference for reactive aggression was non-significant. In-group hassles

⁶ “Reactive aggression is rooted in frustration-aggression theory (Berkowitz, 1962, 1978; Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), and is defined as an angry and defensive response triggered by perceived threat or frustration (Berkowitz, 1990; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Vitaro & Brendgen, 2005). Reactive aggression is often used as a synonym for angry, hotblooded, impulsive, emotional or defensive aggression, and the emotion of anger is central in this type of aggression (Gjelsvik et al., 2017, p. 5).”

“Proactive aggression is theoretically founded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1977). Crick and Dodge (1996) defined proactive aggression as “deliberate behaviour that is controlled by external reinforcement” (p. 993). According to the theory, aggression is like all other social behaviour, acquired through direct experiences and observational learning processes. Anticipated rewards motivate proactive aggression, and unlike reactive aggression, pleasure and stimulation are the central emotions experiences.

Roland and Idsøe (2001) have argued that proactive aggression should be divided further, according to the goals the individual is seeking to achieve with the aggressive behaviour. The first is *power-related proactive aggression*,

and perceived discrimination predicted proactive affiliation-related aggression. Moral disengagement partly mediated the relation between perceived discrimination and proactive affiliation-related aggression. Perceived discrimination was the only significant predictor of reactive aggression, but moral disengagement did not mediate the relation. The results derived from this study indicate that hassles after resettlement contributed more to aggression than pre-migration trauma. The study supports the harmful effects of discrimination, which was the most important acculturation-related contributor to aggression in this group of young refugees. The findings are discussed in light of interventions to reduce discrimination and its harmful consequences Research has demonstrated that unaccompanied minors hardly engage in conduct behaviour such as criminal or anti-social activities (Gjelsvik et al. 2017).”

Guidance for the treatment of these unaccompanied young asylum seekers for their aggression can possibly be sought from the approaches based on the DSM-5 (if one is a convinced Western therapist):

“Proactive aggression has similar characteristics to conduct disorder in the DSM-5. This disorder focuses primarily on behaviour that violates the rights of others, violates social norms and includes diagnostic criteria such as fighting, bullying and theft (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) [Gjelsvik et al. 2017, p. 7].”

“Reactive aggression has similar characteristics to the DSM-5 diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The aggressive behaviour in this diagnosis is often associated with emotional dysregulation, and includes symptoms such as angry and irritable mood, and being easily irritated and resentful. In relation to this, Stringaris, Zavos, Leibenluft, Maughan and Eley (2012), among others, have proposed that irritability is an underlying mechanism in oppositional problems and depression. Research focusing on unaccompanied minors asylum seekers shows high levels of depressive symptoms (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2012) [Gjelsvik et al. 2017, p. 7].”

Having explicitly addressed psychiatry, this is illustrated in a South Korean study (Park et al., 2017) that examined the relationship between psychiatry and aggression among North Korean young refugees.

“We examined factors affecting the depressive symptoms and the relationship between depression and quality of life among 131 North Korean adolescent refugees aged 12–24 years. We compared sociodemographic, social, and individual characteristics and perceived the quality of life between participants with and without depression. Thirty-

in which domination, or power over others, motivates the aggressive behaviour. The second is *affiliation-related proactive aggression*, in which being accepted and gaining affiliation with others are the goals of the aggressive behaviour. Research has demonstrated that proactive affiliation-related aggression has been more strongly associated with bullying – a form of aggressive behaviour – among immigrant youth compared to natives (Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009; Strohmeier, Fandrem, & Spiel, 2012). These findings pose question of whether immigrant youth might have a stronger need for affiliation, which more often motivates aggressive behaviour (Gjelsvik et al., 2017, p. 6).”

seven refugees (28.2%) had clinically significant depressive symptoms. The refugees with depression were younger ($t = 2.67$; $p = 0.009$), more likely to be male ($X^2 = 6.98$; $p = 0.009$), and more likely to have a Chinese father ($X^2 = 9.05$; $p = 0.003$) than those without depression. The refugees with depression had lower levels of psychological social support ($t = 2.96$; $p = 0.004$) and resilience ($t = 4.24$; $p < 0.001$) and higher levels of alcohol problems ($t = - 2.08$; $p = 0.043$), aggression ($t = - 3.15$; $p = 0.003$), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; $t = - 2.89$; $p = 0.004$). They also reported lower levels of life satisfaction ($t = 3.31$; $p = 0.001$) and had a more negative view of their future ($t = 2.68$; $p = 0.010$). Interventions to increase resilience, to decrease the impact of traumatic events, and to provide psychological support may be helpful for North Korean adolescent refugees at risk of depression.”

Earlier in this article it was stated that most refugees are hosted in the region. How this occurs can be demonstrated through an example. That example is a study of Congolese refugees in Uganda (Hecker et al., 2015, p. 453). An important conclusion is:

“In regions of ongoing conflict it is important to be aware of the fact that aggressive behaviour in conflict settings might be a consequence of experienced atrocities. Frequent and severe exposure to violence may not only heighten the risk of acting aggressively, but also seems to affect attitudes towards violence and aggression, such that it becomes perceived as appetitive. The combination of trauma-related symptoms (PTSD, depression, alcohol abuse) and enhanced level of appetitive aggression may partially explain the relation between war-related trauma exposure and high levels of community violence. Our findings underline the need for mental health policies and services to be aware of elevated levels of aggression in the aftermath of war and conflict as they potentially contribute to increased family and community violence. Our findings, furthermore, indicate the differential relation between distinct subtypes of aggression and PTSD symptom severity: PTSD symptom severity was positively related to reactive aggression, and negatively related to appetitive aggression.”

6. Refugees and Mental Health and Authority Guidelines

The foregoing shows that providing care services to refugees is no sinecure. This article is mainly about psychological care services. This does not mean that somatic care services are unimportant. Mind and body are inseparable. It is from this perspective that we judge the care services provided. In fact, mind and body represent the extended family, the ancestors, the children, the earth and the universe. This is a view that is common in the continents of Africa, India, China and the Caribbean and also among all persons anywhere in the world who come from these continents and countries. Fortunately, in the meantime, guidelines have been developed in the Western world that indicate the package of requirements that may be set for the physical and psychological care of refugees (Steinmetz, 2019). These guidelines have been developed by the British National Health Service, the APA (the American Psychological Association), the European Union and the WHO.

“Fair and equitable healthcare are central in super-diverse western cities. After all, equality of opportunity is a right and not a fluke. The British National Health Service has guaranteed this right in a number of principles: “care must be accessible to everyone (avoid confusing administrative barriers and anticipate that formal documents are not always in order), access to care must be based on clinical need and not on affordability (not being able to register with a general practitioner leads to avoidance of care), aim for the highest standards of professionalism, organize care so that the patient is central, organize partners (sharing information can be risky for family members in a motherland and can cause deportation anxiety. Care avoidance is seen as a better option), create as much value as possible for the taxpayer (reduce vulnerabilities and prevent abuse) and be accountable (a lot of stress is hidden or not being investigated. Give marginalized people and their experiences a voice).” Furthermore, descale the human- and paper bureaucracy in healthcare. Patients, including immigrants, refugees and expats, experience conversations in healthcare as ruminations, every subsequent professional caregiver does not know what happened in the steps before they got involved. The care has been parceled out by assembly line views from the industrial era. The human scale has disappeared.

Fair and just healthcare are also a concern for the European Union as a whole. An international treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and ratified by more than 150 countries (including the Netherlands), which states that: "The States Parties to this Convention, recognize the right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 12 (1)), and promise to create conditions that guarantee all medical care in the event of illness (Article 12 (2)). In 2000, the World Health Organization strengthened the foregoing by prohibiting discrimination in access to healthcare, as well as resources and rights based on race, color, gender, and language, reflecting the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), which explicitly prohibits discrimination for any reason whatsoever, including language (Article 21) (Steinmetz, 2019, p. 2)."

The multicultural guidelines for treating patients of the American Psychological Association are (Steinmetz, 2019, p. 4):

1. “Promote the awareness that identity and self-definition are fluid, complex and dynamic.
2. Recognize that care providers also suffer from cultural bias, prejudices and formulations that arise from poor knowledge of the other.
3. Recognize that multilingualism, and knowledge of the extended family, tribe, community and culture are necessary.
4. Be aware of the social, economic and physical world of patients.
5. Acquire knowledge about the history of power, oppression and privileges (including (neo) colonization, refugees and immigration history and the residence in a new fatherland).
6. Promote (sub) cultural sensitive interventions.

7. Encourage critical reflection on your own assumptions and practices from an international context.
8. Acquire knowledge about culturally determined stages of development from infants to adults, such as those in Ubuntu and collectivism.
9. Perform education, research, coaching, intervention and supervision in a cultural sensitive way.

Work with sources of resilience, strength and forgiveness on individuals, extended families, groups, community and organization, also to ensure that trauma's decrease sociocultural."

Apart from these above guidelines, another important instruction is needed for counselling, namely to use the counselling method of storytelling and to involve the system. The latter is only possible if the refugee has travelled with her/ his extended family to a hopefully safer 'haven'. Otherwise, it may be possible to work with a small group of refugees who have fled together. This is suggested here because the resilience and sources of strength in groups of refugees and family members can bring hope. I myself have gained experience with storytelling as a support method together with the country teams during the Bijlmer disaster (Sunday night, October 4, 1992) in Amsterdam. The same applies to Afghan youth who fled to Iran. Khodabakhshi-Koolae et al. 2018 have shown that storytelling works with these young refugees to make them feel less lonely. It does not work in attempts to reduce aggression. These Iranian researchers used quasi experimental designs.

In non-Western countries, storytelling is linked to stress languages and disease histories. Illness stories often include a cultural explanation. Stress languages, on the other hand, can be seen as a full-fledged idiom for translating into language and words the stressors a patient has learned to live with. An idiom with its own words and metaphors. These idioms can differ per country and continent. West Africa and the Caribbean work with the idiom of the spider Anansi, the Middle East with the Hakawati storytelling method and Turkey with the coffee house method called Medda (Steinmetz, 2020). Golden keys to treatment are the disease story and the cultural explanation. As well as the many hypotheses about the disease. Should there be any, these hypotheses can be tested with key figures from the extended family or peers. Even more so, the treatment and their commitment to the treatment should be negotiated with them. Finally, I am an advocate of working with healers. They can, for example, use rituals to resolve curses or ask permission from the ancestors.

8. Conclusions

The title of this article is refugees and aggression. This title raises doubts about the linkage of these two concepts. This linkage is popular in extreme-right populist circles. The number of people worldwide who have been forced to leave their homes by wars, genocide and famine is estimated at about 80 million people. Overall, estimates are that there are 26 million refugees. Most refugees reside in neighbouring regions or countries. This is diametrically opposed to the right-wing extremist view.

Fleeing is no fun. Fleeing starts in the motherland, the country of departure. There are many reasons for this. The most well-known reasons are war, natural disasters, famine and political

and/or religious oppression. The journey begins with terrible decisions, such as does the family go as a whole, do only the young men from the family go as possible quartermasters, or do the most vulnerable go first, women children? Fleeing is no fun. Fleeing starts in the motherland, the country of departure. There are many reasons for this. The most well-known reasons are war, natural disasters, famine and political and/or religious oppression. With those decisions comes the hope of meeting family and loved ones again, with the motto the sooner the better. Often that does not come true. Part of the refugees die during the journey, from wars, hardships (including hunger and thirst), torture, rape and imprisonment, drowning or never see their children again. Not always do those back home hear about this fate from their loved ones.

It is not easy to imagine what these decisions entail, it is terrible to have to decide that a very small part of the extended family will attempt to flee. After all, people exist by the grace of other people, the extended family is an indispensable and enjoyable vehicle to spend the time given to people on earth happily and in connection with them. But it doesn't stop there. Some of the refugees are forced to turn right around. This is so at the external borders of Europe and the border between Mexico and South America during the Trump regime. Underlying that decision by governments are many beliefs, such as "full is full", "we don't want to import criminals, and our country is only for Our Kind of People". This course of action is at odds with how Human Rights views refugees. According to Human Rights, protecting human life is a high good. Although most countries in the world have signed up to these rights of the human being who is fleeing and on the move, this does not provide a solution for the humane reception of refugees. In fact, refugees are *persona non gratae*.

On top of the miserable departure from the unsafe motherland and the very dangerous flight to a so-called safe fatherland, to my regret for refugees, comes even more misery. They are received with distrust by Western governments. After all, they may be exploiters, (drugs)criminals and terrorists with a different agenda than that of a refugee. Certainly, there are people who enter as refugees with "evil" intent, to set up a drug or arms network or to commit terrorist acts. Intentionally, above, governments are accused of mistrust laid down especially by right-wing neo-liberal governments. No finger is pointed here at civilians at the local level, who often open their homes to the refugee. Such distrust has profound consequences for a refugee. She/ he ends up in an asylum seekers centre (AZC) with or without their children and possible other family members and/ or members of the same village or city. The name asylum seekers centre is a metaphor for a refugee prison. Asylum seekers are in the Netherlands given a small budget and must apply for asylum from there. My own observations at some Dutch AZC's is not to be cheerful, namely on the access roads I came across young women offering their services to men for a small fee. This way these women could support their children. The outcomes of the asylum application are 'you will be admitted temporarily as long as you behave well' or 'you have to return because you come from a safe country. The latter group of refugees either ends up in a departure prison or goes into hiding and becomes illegal. This article further outlines some stories of refugees. This is done to give a human face to the above argument.

A second theme explored is the possible suspicion that refugees are just that part of the motherland population that is aggressive and violent. International research shows that no

evidence can be provided for this far-right populist suspicion. However, research among victims does show that refugees are at greater risk of becoming victims of crime. The same goes for witnessing a criminal commit a crime. It is possible that one's own victim and witness experiences could encourage a refugee to commit a crime themselves (Steinmetz, 2020).

A caveat to these findings is provided by Van Dijk et al. (2021) based on commercially produced crime data from the household survey of Gallup World Poll in 166 countries around the world during the period 2006-2013. They show that countries with 'poor' socio-economic and political infrastructure (failing democratic institutes and corruption) have higher crime rates (among which victims of theft and violence) than countries with 'good' socio-economic and political infrastructure:

“The results show that African and Latin American countries suffer from the highest levels of various types of crime across the board, followed by countries in Asia. European, North American and Australian countries have average or relatively low levels of most types of crime. Levels of common crime have dropped or stabilized globally except in Africa where they went up. Homicides have fallen almost universally. Trends in organised crime are diverging.

Dimensions of governance emerged as powerful determinants of levels of all types of crime. Important determinants of common crime besides governance were poverty, inequality, and proportion of youth. To some extent changes in these same characteristics of countries were found to be correlated with changes in levels of crime over the past fifteen years.”

Although this side note is not about refugees but about citizens in a household in 166 countries around the world, it can be inferred that potentially refugees are also at high risk of being victims of crime, especially since most refugees are hosted in the region, especially in African, South American and Asian countries.

In addition, this article addresses how psychiatry and criminology view refugees and whether they view refugees as aggressive and/or violent as a result of the many traumas they have experienced in their mother country and on their way to a new homeland. This is done on the basis of risk factors. Risk factors are instability in the family, use of violence and psychiatric disorders, such as personality disorders. These factors are called historical risk factors. In addition, there are also process-related risk factors, such as anger, unregulated emotions, lack of insight, antisocial or negative attitudes, and impulsivity. Furthermore, a law of nature is observed. That law states that the younger a child is who grows up in an unstable family, the more likely that child will later become violent or aggressive. This ‘law’ leans on Bandura's and Waters theory (1963): "bad example leads to bad behaviour." Two comments are appropriate to this part of the argument. Side note 1 is that refugees face an unprecedented amount of horrible experiences in their mother country and on the way to their new fatherland. Side note 2 is that the correlations discussed here are weak but statistical significant. In short, if there is a relationship between trauma and aggression and/or violence, then these are weak relationships (with relatively low correlations). Furthermore, no evidence has been found that people who

have had to leave their homes due to (ethnic and religiously oriented) wars or genocide, oppression, famine, drought and other climatic disasters, such as hurricanes, are far from being a selection of criminals from these mother countries. They do not deserve distrust from the Western world (especially the United States, Europe and Australia) but should be treated with open "comforting" arms.

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