Conflict-Induced Displacement of Skilled Refugees: 
A Cross-Case Analysis of Syrian Professionals in Selected OECD Countries

Desplazamiento de refugiados calificados inducido por conflicto: 
un estudio de casos cruzados de migrantes calificados sirios en países de la OCDE

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Abstract: The mainstream literature on skilled diasporas has focused on economically-induced professional migration and free-choice mobility of educational elites. I introduce the concept of conflict-induced displacement of skilled refugees (CIDSR) to study the skilled Syrian refugees as political migrants who flee from violence and conflict in their home countries. I use a cross-case analysis of seven OECD countries (Brazil, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Turkey, the U.K. and the U.S.) to prove that the Syrian CIDSR is a crisis but also an economic and political opportunity. OECD countries take advantage of the skilled refugees in order to maintain growth in their aging economies, solve brain drain caused by internal conflict, as well as to strengthen their status as moral powers.

Keywords: conflict-induced displacement of the skilled (CIDS), brain gain, Syrian refugees, OECD

Resumen: Las corrientes dominantes sobre diásporas calificadas se han centrado en la migración profesional inducida económicamente y en la movilidad de libre elección de las élites educativas. Presento el concepto de desplazamiento de refugiados calificados inducido por conflicto (CIDSR, por sus siglas en inglés) para estudiar a los refugiados sirios calificados como migrantes políticos que huyen de la violencia y el conflicto en su país de origen. Utilizo un estudio de casos cruzados de siete países de la OCDE (Brasil, Canadá, Alemania, México, Turquía, el Reino Unido y los EE. UU.) para demostrar que la CIDS siria es una crisis, pero también una oportunidad económica y política. Los refugiados calificados son utilizados por los países de la OCDE para mantener el crecimiento de sus economías envejecidas, para resolver la fuga de cerebros causada por conflictos internos, o para fortalecer su condición de poderes morales.

Palabras clave: desplazamiento de personal calificado inducido por conflicto, ganancia de cerebros, refugiados sirios, OCDE

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Introduction

A revision of the mainstream literature on skilled migration shows very few recent studies of skilled refugees in general and even less on the Syrians in particular. This gap in the literature on conflict-induced displacement of skilled professionals (from now on, CIDSR) may be explained in various ways: first, it may be due to the difficulty of obtaining reliable quantitative and qualitative data; second, because of their assumed reduced numbers in comparison to the overall magnitude of temporary migrants; and third, because of their selection based on the humanitarian compassion rather than on human capital attributes, as DeVoretz et al. (2004) assume.

Migrants in general and refugees in particular, have often been viewed as uprooted people who could be a menace for the economy and social stability of countries of destination. An earlier study by Malkki (1995, p. 26) verses on the “sedentarist metaphysics” that comes from our conception of the world as a “discrete spatial partitioning of territory” in the segmentary fashion of the multicolored school atlas. The term "the nation" is commonly described by such metaphoric synonyms as "the country," "the land," and "the soil". (Malkki 1995, p. 26)

By comparison to economic skilled migrants, Syrian refugees are people with roots in their country, they are attached to their territory and their migration is part of a sudden forced migration. They did not plan their migration, and that makes the process a lot more shocking than in the case of economic migrants. Furthermore, we ignore whether the migration of Syrian professionals is temporary or permanent. While previous studies show that only a fraction are
likely to be permanently resettled (Zong and Batalova, 2017), many of the skilled Syrians in the diaspora don’t know themselves if they will return or not.

When compared to the voluntary mobility of skilled workers among transnational companies or with the planned process of migration of what the previous literature has studied as the medium skilled worker, skilled refugees are an extreme case in terms of numbers and context. As such, skilled refugees are considered separately from economic migrants. However, previous academic experience has shown that extreme cases themselves can serve to widen our view on the broader context of the migration of skilled professionals.

This study explores the hypothesis that Syrian CIDSR is used by receiving OECD countries with two main purposes: a) balance human capital needs to solve brain drain caused by internal conflict (Turkey) or to maintain growth in aging economies (Canada, Germany, and the UK); and b) strengthen their status as moral powers (Brazil, Mexico, and the US)\(^1\). In brief, Syrian skilled refugees pose a humanitarian crisis but also an economic and political opportunity for the main countries of destination.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a general view on the integration of skilled Syrian refugees to various countries and identify different political approaches, which could also serve as a starting point for new field research. I combine the theoretical background of migration theory with case study techniques typical for international relations studies. Due to the lack of a regional policy for refugees in North America and Europe, a comparison among regions was not feasible. This study is reduced to selection of seven OECD countries with a significant

\(^1\) Moral power is a concept previously introduced by Sharp (1960), and later applied by Goren and Chapp (2017) to study how public public opinion on culture war issues shapes partisan predispositions and religious orientations.
international role as refugee hosts: the main receiver of Syrian refugees in the world (Turkey), two European countries (Germany and the UK); two in North America (Canada and the US) and two Latin American countries (Mexico and Brazil). The study was limited to these seven destinations taking into account the scarcity of information regarding skilled refugees in particular.

Previous literature on refugees has focused on the humanitarian aspects of their integration and very few studies have divided Syrian refugees in skilled and unskilled, which can be due to the novelty of the problem, the difficulty to identify how many skilled individuals are living in or outside the camps, and even it may be explained by ethical reasons. This being a humanitarian problem, it may seem unjust to give more relevance to one type of refugee in particular. However, we believe that comparing different populations among the Syrian refugees does not mean that we disregard the unskilled, on the contrary, we try to see if selectivity is applied when humanitarian purposes should prevail.

Our main research questions are: How is conflict-induced displacement different from economically driven skilled migration? Why do selected countries accept Syrian refugees and what are their policies of integration as compared to other migrants? Are traditional approaches on skilled migration useful to study the vulnerability of skilled refugees?

The article is structured in four main parts: a) theoretical approaches to conflict-induced migration; b) general characteristics of Syrian refugees; c) cross-case analysis of selected host countries; and d) conclusions.
Theoretical background

Skilled refugees are not a new subject of analysis, as there is previous literature on intellectual exile (Said, 1993, among others). However, the figure of the skilled refugees has powerfully re-emerged in the current context of global migration crisis. Skilled refugees, and in particular the Syrian ones, are not the typical cosmopolitan professional seeking to travel and not be bound to particular territories; skilled Syrians are not the scientific nomads of our times. Paraphrasing from a classic book on exile written in the 19th century by Victor Hugo (2014, p. 36), for the exiled, any land is the same as long as it is not the Syrian land. Exile is not a material problem, but rather a moral one.

Civelek (2017, pp. 27-28) studies refugees as liminal subject of international relations, citizens of their home countries but devoid of territory and without economical rights. Refugees in general are ambiguous individuals, finding themselves in a uncertain “transition” period, with no clear future. “The designation “refugee” suffices alone to isolate her/him in the socio-political field. Moreover, as a member of a sub-population, the refugee poses a “problem” to the upper-population” (Civelek, 2017, p. 28).

Due to the scarce previous evidence on Syrian skilled refugees, we assume their situation is similar to the overall cohort of population in exile and that their roles are different from economically driven migrants. As such, exceptional views on the economic migration of professionals are not suited or even clash with the topic of CIDSR. I will however remind those studies that may help us compare conflict - induced and economically induced skilled migration.

For instance, the proposal of a Global Skills Partnership (Clemens, 2015), that involves an ex-
ante public-private agreement to link skill formation and skilled migration for the mutual benefit of origin countries, destination countries, and migrants, is not possible in ethnic conflict and civil war. This type of brain drain is difficult to anticipate.

Recent literature on cosmopolitan identity might also clash with our object of study. For instance, Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017) show how foreign-based professionals define themselves as “non-nationals”, downplaying their own national affiliations and cultural differences. According to the author, professional elites in the diaspora demarcate their cosmopolitan “us” in relation to their original national (mono) culture. This type of cosmopolitan identity as a mode of collective belonging, part of a wider discourse of globalization, certainly coexists with the conflict-induced displacement of the skilled, but both require very different methodological strategies.

Another approach to the skilled migrant’s identity is the quality distinction or discrimination between migrants’ qualities, skilled vs. unskilled. Cranston (2017, p. 2), starts from a linguistic observation: while migrants are expected to stay abroad, “expatriates” are presumed to return to their home country. In the context of the rise in popularity of Far Right parties in Europe and the US, the first ones are considered to be bad and the former, good. Restrictive migration policies would privilege expatriates, but not migrants. The skilled “good” migrant is now expected to go abroad, work, and return to his home country. The questions that immediately emerge are: do Syrian refugees plan to return? Are they able to do so? Are they good or bad, in terms of their contribution to the country of origin?
However, other aspects of the current discussion on skilled migration may be extremely useful for the insight on skilled refugees. Surprisingly, I may return to the discussion of knowledge colonialism and dependency theory (Maniglio, 2017, p. 28) that criticizes the way in which main countries of destination define immigration quotas to reinforce their power over knowledge production and reproduction. In the case of refugees, as further explained, being skilled is a double edge sword, as they are eligible to an exclusive citizenship, let into a country (such as Turkey) but they may not be allowed to leave, because of their skills.

The questions on skilled refugees and ethnic conflict have been addressed, to our knowledge, in four papers that precede this one: two based on statistical models (Bang and Mitra, 2013; Christensen et al., 2018), and two qualitative economic analysis (Smith, 2016; Uzelac et al., 2018).

First, the pioneering study of Bang and Mitra (2013, p. 387) finds that ethnic civil war increases the fraction of tertiary skilled emigrants, and it also reduces the stock of professionals in the country of origin. Long lasting ethnic civil wars may lead to the formation of skilled diasporas that may eventually help with the resolution of conflict and the reconstruction of their economy of origin. The model of Bang & Mitra proves the importance of the duration of ethnic conflict, in which each additional year of ethnic civil war increases the fraction of highly skilled emigrants by 0.7% at a minimum (Ibid.: 399). In line with the mainstream economic literature on skilled migration, Bang and Mitra also confirm the positive effect of skilled migrants (in this case, refugees) for the host country.
Five years later, Christensen, Onul, & Singh (2018, p. 25) add on the study of Bang and Mitra, showing that the ethnic wars and conflicts also change the proportion of educated people in the economy. In this way, predictions may be done about human capital flight and therefore make effective policy recommendations.

A different qualitative study by Smith (2016: 29) calls for a change of perspective on refugees from burden to “boon”, appreciating their economic value and adopting the “economy of sharing” typical for Islamic economies. Starting from fieldwork on the Syrian skilled refugees arriving in Germany, Smith elaborates on how the sharing economy redistributes excess to a community. This economic model refers to the sharing of access instead of individual ownership and it offers the potential for refugees to help one another and their local community, as well as to allow the local community to help them (Smith, 2016:53-55).

A last study of Uzelac et al. (2018, p. 35) seems to be a continuation of the proposal of Smith, as they describe two types of capital relevant for the study of refugees: bonding capital, which is created among members of refugee groups, and bridging capital, which refers to the connections between individual refugees and outside actors, such as citizens of the host community or aid agencies. A third type of capital, the social one, may also strengthen the position of people vulnerable to exploitation, as in-group networks can warn them of exploitative or unreliable employers or landlords. Both types of capital are relevant for the study of skilled Syrian refugees.
General Characteristics of Syrian Refugees

The conflict in Syria started in 2011, with protests against President Bashar al-Assad, in parallel with the Arab Spring. Since than, the civil war has provoked the internal or international displacement of two thirds the Syrian population. Some studies also attribute this conflict to climate change reasons (Kelley et al., 2015), which would mean that Syrian refugees are both climate and political displaced. A more recent research by Sirkeci et al. (2017, pp. 1-2) attributes the Syrian refugee crisis to what they call as the “3Ds of human mobility: demographic deficit, development deficit and democratic deficit”, all speeded up by the civil war, but present in Syria before 2011. Their study finds that the present refugees crisis was preceded by a generalized desire to migrate in the Syrian population, that exploded during the humanitarian crisis afterwards.

International efforts were made to de-escalate conflict and make return a more plausible plan for many of the Syrians. By May 2017, international intermediaries of the conflict (Russia, Iran and Turkey) advanced the implementation of “de-escalation zones”, and talks were held on post-war reconstruction and the return of Syrian refugees to Syria (Vignal, 2018). However, in April 2018, the United States, France and Britain, still launched airstrikes to punish President Bashar al-Assad for a suspected chemical attack.

To sum up, the conflict has been going on for seven years now and it is far from over. The infrastructure of the country is collapsed and 85% of the remaining Syrians now live in poverty (Vignal, 2018). 95 percent of people lack adequate healthcare and 70 percent lack regular access to clean water. Half of the children are out of school. The estimated number of
victims since the beginning of the civil war was 470,000 people killed, among which 55,000 children (World Vision Staff, 2017).

From the former population of 21 million in Syria, about two thirds have left their homes, with estimated figures at 6.3 for the internally displaced and 7 to 8 million international migrants in 2017. This is a scale of population displacement unseen since the World War II (Nowrasteh, 2016). Previously populated areas have been largely destroyed and emptied of their inhabitants, while other areas, mostly in the regions held by the al-Assad regime, are now crammed with displaced Syrians. (Vignal, 2018)

Most of the Syrian refugees are to be found in neighboring countries: with Turkey and Lebanon hosting 3 and 1 million Syrian refugees, respectively. (World Vision, 2017; also see figure 1) The Gulf States are hosting about 1.2 million Syrians on work visas but they are not legally considered refugees or asylum seekers because those nations are not signatories to the UNHCR commission (Nowrasteh, 2016). At the peak of the European migrant crisis in 2015, 1.3 million Syrians requested asylum in Europe (World Vision, 2017). About 60,000 Syrian were received in North America (ibid., 2017).
La revista Norteamérica publica versiones Ahead-of-Print (AOP) de los artículos dictaminados tras una rigurosa evaluación de tipo doble ciego y tras haber sido aceptados por el Comité Editorial con el fin de ofrecer un acceso más amplio y expedito a ellos. / Norteamérica publishes Ahead-of-Print (AOP) versions of all manuscripts that have undergone a rigorous double-blind peer-review and been approved for publication by the Editorial Board in order to provide broader and earlier access to them.
percentage of the population over the age of 15 that can read and write. 97% of the Syrian children were enrolled in primary school, making Syria a leader in education among its peers in the region. Before the war, in the early 2000s, at any given time there were 100,000 Syrians in university, upwards of 6% of the population at the time. (Smith, 2016: cxliii)

These features are now reflected in the overall characteristics of the Syrian refugees. Some studies have identified two generalized profiles of Syrian refugees: a poorer, rural worker based in camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, and a richer, middle-class professional living outside of refugee camps, recently migrating to Europe via the Greece and Western Balkans route (Sasnal, 2015). It has thus been assumed that Syrians in Europe come from the richer part of Syrian society, previously employed outside of the agricultural sector (in services, trade, construction, health service, and education), with university studies, economically active and accustomed to gender equality. (Sasnal, 2015, p. 1) They are also the ones who could afford a trip of thousands of euros to Europe.

Barry Stein points out that, “(Syrian) refugees are not poor people. They have not failed within their homeland; they are successful, prominent, well-integrated, educated individuals who fled because of fear of persecution”. (Stein, professor of Political Science, interviewed by Smith, 2016, p. cxxvii) To be sure, a survey with 305 Syrian refugees in Austria, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Betts et al., 2017) shows that 38% of them have university education, and one-third were employed in either skilled work or the professional services industry in Syria. Due to their high levels of education, it has been assumed that they may contribute to the economies of the countries of destination. A study by Global Ministries (2018) shows that
main countries receiving Syrian refugees have experienced a growth in their GDP from 2017 to 2018, by 3.5% (Turkey), 2% (Lebanon), 3.5% (Jordan).

**Cross-Case Analysis of Selected Host Countries**

**Method**

Information was gathered on the overall conditions of receptions of Syrian refugees in seven OECD countries: Turkey, Germany, the UK, Canada, the US, Mexico and Brazil. In what follows, I present a cross-case comparison of the policies on Syrian refugees in these countries, in order to assess various national approaches to deal with the Syrian CIDSR.

The analysis is structured in five levels of study: a) the foreign policies for the acceptance of Syrian refugees; b) domestic policies and national legislation; c) private and not-for-profit initiatives; e) social and economic integration of the Syrian CIDSR; and d) testimonies of Syrian skilled refugees. These five levels of analysis are not necessarily exhaustive or the most socially relevant, but they are the ones that could be actually used for an equitable comparison, based on the available data in the academic literature, governmental and NGO reports and media features. In comparison to a multiple case study that would explain each difference by country, I chose to present the analysis according to each variable of study that elaborates on a certain level of analysis.

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2 The information will be analysed in this order, from the closest to the furthest, seeing Syria as a point of departure.
a) Foreign Policies for the Acceptance of Syrian Refugees

The seven selected countries show mixed approaches to receiving refugees, and they all signed the 1951 Refugees Convention, except the US which is only part of the 1967 UN Protocol Related to the Status of Refugees. Central to these two agreements is the principle of non-refoulement, that is, no refugee should be returned in any manner to a country or territory in which his or her life or freedom would be threatened. The Convention also prohibits restrictions of refugees leaving to a third country (Diab, 2017).

According to the Dublin Regulation applied in Europe, the first country where an asylum seeker arrives is responsible for processing their application and resettling them, which explains the high concentration of Syrian refugees is certain countries, such as Turkey or Greece. To ease the burden in these two destinations, the EU leaders agreed on a voluntary system for sharing and redistributing the refugees. (Gilbert, 2017, pp. 24-25)

However, Turkey has been the main receiver of Syrian refugees, with 3 million Syrian individuals since the start of the crisis in Syria, making up 3.5% of the Turkish population. Most of the refugees applying for asylum in Europe or North America have first passed through Turkey, a country that acts as a nodal point for conflict-induced displacement.

According to the EU rules, after a refugee arrives in the European Union, he or she must wait between six and nine months to be granted asylum. (Smith, 2016) This means that the refugees are granted temporary residence permits but they cannot work till they obtain the status of asylum, which allows them access to work, education, language classes, and social insurance system. The application process may last for a year, a period during which the
refugees cannot apply for asylum in another country. This procedure was applied by Germany and also by the UK, before its announcement of exit from the EU.

Among the Syrians who were accepted in Europe, the majority are males, half of them under 24, a fact explained by the dangers of human trafficking in the passage, and also described as “asylum Darwinism.” Even though they generally do not speak the language of the country where they arrive, these men are assumed to integrate to the economy and serve to sustain Europe’s demographic stability and economic growth. Therefore the acceptance of refugees in general and Syrians in particular, has also been characterized as “an example of economic pragmatism” (Loo, 2016).

A significant part of the Syrian refugees, especially the educated ones, who arrive with the biggest cohort to Turkey, Greece, Italy, Lebanon and other neighboring countries, afterwards apply for asylum to Germany, the country that takes in most of the refugees in the EU. Over the past 30 years, Germany received 30 percent of all the asylum applications in Europe—a greater share than any other country. (Loo, 2016). According to the same author, this may be due to the image of Germany as a democratic country where laws are respected, but also to the strong diaspora networks that help reproduce the intake of certain populations, for instance, from the Middle Eastern countries and African countries like Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea or Nigeria. Actually, the German system was criticized for instantly rejected an important number of Syrian refugees directly at the border, in violation of both the Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Asylum and for shifting responsibilities to Eastern
European states which are often seen as unprepared or ill-equipped to handle large groups of asylum seekers. (Diab, 2017, p. 91)

Even so, Germany is known as a main destination for refugees in Europe. Since 2011, Germany received Syrian 41,000 refugees (Nowrasteh, 2016). By comparison, the UK only resettled 2,898 Syrian refugees by 2016 (Gilbert, 2017), with a more uncertain record of employment. Only 1.1% of the Syrian refugees arriving in Germany spoke the language. (Nowrasteh, 2016). Despite language difficulties, 73% of the Syrian refugees (30 thousand) were reported to have found a job with a salary that made them subject to social insurance contributions. (Knight, 2016) A qualitative analysis on Syrian refugees in Germany actually found that most of them were medium or high skilled. (Smith, 2016)

Studies show that the recent intake of refugees after the 2015 has resulted in the biggest population increase in more than 20 years and has boosted Germany’s population by more than one percent. (Loo, 2016) For instance, in Germany, there is a high percentage of Syrian doctors that represent the fourth largest group among foreign doctors in the country—2,159 Syrian doctors are said to presently practice in Germany. (Loo, 2016)

While North America received far less Syrian refugees than Europe or the Middle East, their characteristics are slightly different from the European-based ones. Among the 26,615 Syrian refugees who came to Canada between 2015 and 2016, there is a significant segment of working age Syrian refugees (18 years and above), generally male. (Magnet et al., 2017). 17% of the Syrian refugees arriving in Canada have undergraduate or graduate studies. For Toronto, where 6,805 Syrian refugees were settled, the skills figure is even higher: over 55% of them
come with high occupational skills and experience, according to the same study (Magnet et al., 2017).

The case of Canada presents a singular mixed policy that combines governmental funds with private funds for refugees. As such, 65% of the Syrian refugees are privately sponsored, 27% arrived through government assistance and 8% through blended sponsorship (Grant 2017). While 12% of the government sponsored refugees found work in 2016, more than half of the privately sponsored Syrians, who are also more skilled and tend to have higher rates of university degrees, are already integrated to the job market. (CCIRC, 2017)

However, the educational level for almost a third of the Syrian population in Canada has not been assessed. Syrian families arriving in Canada have an average of 5 to 8 members, much larger than Canadian families. Their integration is more difficult due to the scarcity of large homes and sometimes, to the fact that only one or two of the family members, generally men, are working.

Canada fulfills a similar role to Germany in the North American region. It is more open than the US to receiving refugees for humanitarian purposes, under conditions of low population density and an aging society. In 2015, Canadians older than 65 outnumbered those under 15 for the first time, a disproportion that the Canadian government is trying to solve through it´s immigrant friendly policy. In particular, Canada has welcomed Syrian refugees as a "national project" and as part of its longstanding humanitarian tradition (IECBC, 2016). According to immigration minister John McCallum, “more immigrants for Canada would be a good policy for demographic reasons” (Mohdin, 2016). Canada´s plan is to increase the intake
of economic migrants and skilled workers, that had been blamed in the UK and the US for depressing wages and taking jobs from locals. Canada actually admitted 55,800 refugees in 2016 and 40,000 in 2017. This may be explained by the diminishing flow of Syrian refugees, that reached its peak in 2015 and then decreased.

The Syrian refugees arriving in the US have similar characteristics to the ones in Canada. By comparison to Europe, where refugees are allowed entry into the European countries and then apply for asylum, the US applies an enhanced screening process for all the Syrian refugees, and entering the American territory (Global Ministries, 2018). Of the 18,000 Syrian refugees welcomed in the US since 2011, 25% are men escaping terrorists, condemned by ISIS for leaving Syria and rejecting its extremist ideology. (Global Ministries, 2018). To prevent terrorism, 27 US states opposed accepting Syrian refugees in 2015.

However, former President Obama approved the intake of 10,000 refugees. (Gowans, 2017) A third of the Syrian refugees went to California, Michigan, and Texas, where most of the broader Syrian immigrant population lived (Zong and Batalova, 2017). Half of them were children under 14. Ninety-eight percent of the Syrian refugees resettled in the United States were Muslim and about 1 percent Christian.

Syrian refugees in the US were later banned by President Trump in 2017, who issued one of his first executive orders on refugees and visa holders from designated nations such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and of course, Syria. While the order was aimed at limiting the entry of terrorist fighters, it also affected true refugees in need of humanitarian aid
(Nowrasteh, 2015), who would virtually not compete for jobs with American workers (Dyssegaard et al., 2016).

Despite the encouraging characteristics of Syrian migrants in North America and Europe, and their traditions as countries of asylum, both Mexico and Brazil have received few Syrian refugees after the 2011 war. In Mexico, there were only 16 Syrian refugees registered in 2014 and there is no information about the increase in that number afterwards. Brazil received 400 asylum petitions from Syrians in 2016, down from 1,500 in 2014. (Renwick, 2017) Even when their number is so small, many of them find it difficult to get a job, as shown later in this study.

Latin America has indeed been a low receiver of Syrian refugees, but an interesting destination to study the conditions for south–south refugees’ resettlement. While Mexico lacks a governmental plan for Syrian refugees, Brazil acts as a transit destination, similar to Turkey, mainly due to the “lack of economic opportunities to convince refugees to permanently call it home” (Renwick, 2017).

The same study by Renwick shows that around 9,000 people have refugee status in Brazil. Syrians make up the largest group, followed by Angolan, Colombian, and Congolese refugees. Since 2010, Brazil has more than doubled its intake of refugees, but their labour integration has been diminishing due to the economic crisis. For instance, there were 2,700 refugees employed in the formal sector in São Paolo in 2014 but only 371 in 2016. (Renwick, 2017) Many refugees in Brazil work in the informal sector and are vulnerable to exploitation, which means this cannot be the final option for Syrian CIDSR, who choose to apply for further asylum in Canada, Chile or Germany.
b) Domestic Policies and National Legislation

Even when the domestic and foreign policies on Syrian refugees are very much related, national programs differ if they are aimed at image promotion, humanitarian purposes of management of human resources and brain drain.

The position of Turkey as a main refugee receiver has been interpreted by some authors (Hintz and Feehan, 2017) as an attempt to improve its image and “occupy a moral high ground” in the face of European Union. In particular, about 300 Syrian refugees were granted the chance to apply for Turkish citizenship, a program also reinterpreted as a way to revert the brain drain of dissident Turks. According to Hintz and Feehan (2017), “rather than ending the purge that has targeted over 100,000 academics, journalists, and other educated Turks accused of being involved in terrorist activities, Erdoğan sees their replacements in the Syrians to whom citizenship will be granted. The system being drafted is similar to the points-based systems for migrants in Australia and Canada; through this system only those with the skills to contribute to Turkey’s economy will be granted permanent status in Turkey. This plan is intended to mediate Turkey’s “acute shortage” of skilled workers, evidenced by 57 percent of Turkish employers reporting that they experience difficulty in finding workers to fill open positions.”

In general, the legislation available in the examined cases follows the national guidelines, besides the existence of regional agreements, as in the case of the European Union. Turkey is the only country that actually changed its legal framework after the start of the Syrian war. The New Law on Foreigners and International Protection in Turkey (2014) increases the legal certainty for asylum seekers and refugees by establishing the rights of the refugee
Population and giving them the possibility of enforcing those rights in a national court; it also increases the predictability and legality of the administration’s decisions. However, the law application is not always accurate, due to the domestic conflict in Turkey and to the process of governance through executive orders. This is a situation that further complicates cooperation on refugees with the other countries of the EU.

Turkey is at the center of current debates because of its role to prevent refugees traveling to Europe. Currently, Turkey hosts 3,320,814 Syrians (Sirkeci et al., 2017, p. 12). For a more accurate interpretation of the Turkish policy on Syrian refugees, it is important to note at least two relevant moments. At first, Turkey had an open door policy that let virtually all the Syrians into the country and therefore, there was no record for their entries either (Spilda, 2017). This phase was also accompanied by a warm welcome by the Turkish population, who used to think that Syrian immigration would be temporary. By comparison to European countries, the United States and Australia, refugees were not placed in any detention centers in Turkey (Civelek, 2017). However, a second phase came accompanied by an increasing awareness that most of the Syrian refugees would stay. The issue was also increasingly politicized, in Turkey as in the European countries. Refugees in general, Syrians in particular, became part of a more generalized discourse that considered them an invasion that would abuse the welfare state (Unutulmaz, 2017, p. 214). This is even more evident in a country such as Turkey, where the discourse of diversity has not been popular, on the contrary, “strong republican ideals of a unified nation embodied in the imagination of a modern Turkish citizen.” (Unutulmaz, 2017, p. 227)
Germany for its part, established a process of formal evaluation and recognition procedure for foreign qualifications, under a program called “integration by qualification” (Loo, 2016) and financed by 2.2 million Euros, available for regular migrants, but also for refugees. The corresponding information is available in Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Tigrinya and Pashto—the languages most commonly spoken by refugees. Those people who lack documentation on their studies may undergo a “skills analysis” including the submission of work samples, interviews or practical examinations.

Other countries such as the UK only have resettlement programs for vulnerable persons, but do not necessarily plan to assess their skills to integrate them to the job market. The UK plans to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees by 2020 (Gilbert, 2017). As the second largest bilateral donor supporting Syrian refugees, the UK Department for International Development has provided more than £2.3 billion in international aid to the Syrian region since 2012. (Gilbert, 2017, pp. 35)

In January 2016, an open letter to the Prime Minister supported by 120 leading economists in the UK stressed the economic indicators and arguments for welcoming refugees to the UK: “Refugees should be taken in because they are morally and legally entitled to international protection, not because of the economic advantages they may bring. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the economic contribution of refugees and their descendants to the UK has been high.” (Gilbert, 2017, p. 45)

This is different from Canada, where refugees are only screened for criminal background or health problems. The Government created the Syria Emergency Relief Fund and actively...
cooperates with the private sector for blended sponsorship of the refugees. However, their labor integration is not a main topic of the Canadian approach. In the words of Senator Ratna Omidvar: “There has been an outpouring of support to welcome Syrian newcomers from all sectors, public and private. But missing was a clear focus on helping them find the right employment to match their skills and capabilities. Skilled immigrants and refugees present a great opportunity for our economy and for employers.” (cited in Hire Immigrants, 2017)

The US has offered yet another approach to the integration of the Syrian refugees, at least before the ban in 2017. The government was working with resettlement agencies to find locations where there was a previous community of Syrians migrants, and where jobs and housing would be available. That is, once the Syrian refugees are accepted, the government would take care of their integration. However, with the change of presidency, Syrian refugees were depicted as “compromised by terrorism” by President Trump and threatened to be sent back (Dyssegaard et al., 2016, p. 1), as previously mentioned.

However bad this discourse may seem, other OECD countries in Latin America generally lack long-term governmental plans to receive and integrate Syrian refugees. Presidential changes also have significant consequences, in Brazil as in the US. While former President Dilma Rousseff initiated talks with the EU in 2016 to accept ten 100,000 refugees in the next five years, the plan was suspended under the administration of Michel Temer. (Renwick, 2017) Brazil has a humanitarian visa for refugees, but it offers no resettlement plans for those who manage to pay their way into the country.
In both North America and Latin America, there is no evidence of a change in the national legislations on refugees due to the arrival of the Syrians, except for the mentioned ban by President Trump. There are no regional agreements either, which could be partly explained by the lower inflow of Syrians than in Europe and Middle East states.

d) Private and Not-for-Profit Initiatives

Few countries manage to involve the private initiative with the skilled refugees integration, despite the fact that their working potential has been noted by various reports of transnational human resources agencies. In Europe, there is a good record of public private cooperation for the refugees. For instance, in Germany there are various website programming courses such as “Refugees on Rails” and ReBoot Kamp, among other, founded by the German tech entrepreneurs for refugees who may afterwards find jobs in the technology industry. (Smith, 2016) Apparently, Germany may actually need those refugees to fill in vacancies in engineering jobs (Smith, 2016). An interesting detail is that refugees who get a job after having taking these courses, pay the course for another refugee, encouraging help and cooperation among the Syrian community itself. (Smith, 2016, pp. 58-9). This type of high tech peer to peer economy also enables donation of computers and volunteering activities from the engineers who teach, sometimes using the headquarters of companies such as Microsoft and Google.

Apart from the high-tech courses, there are alternative initiatives such as the Migration Hub, a start-up business that involves refugees for purposes of social innovation and entrepreneurship, and Kiron University, funded to help refugees finish their degrees. The admission at Kiron is not based on academic requirements, language tests, passports or
residency permits; it even provides each student with a free laptop and internet access. In 2016, Kiron enrolled 2,600 refugees in Germany, of which 80% were Syrians (Loo, 2016).

A similar initiative is the Refugee Career Jumpstart Project (RCJP), a Canadian non-profit focused on streamlining the process between the arrival of refugees and their employment, with an excellent response during its fundraising lobby in big cities of Canada. (Hire Immigrants, 2017) There are other initiatives oriented towards skilled refugees, that are not bound to any country in general, but work on a global bases. Such is the organization “Talent Beyond Boundaries”, that received 8,000 application from skilled refugees, mainly Syrians at the moment, who aim to be hired by companies around the world (McGhee, 2017).

By contrast, Latin American initiatives have little support from the private sector, with the exception of the Habesha project, a locally-based NGO, designed to select an elite force of Syrian students from diverse regional and academic backgrounds to study in Mexico. Since its foundation in 2015, the organization managed to enroll 14 Syrian students in Mexican universities. This project carefully selects the winners of the support, as they have to be recommended by an international institution and then pass through rigorous background and health checks. “We choose them like little pearls and we take care of them so well. We make sure that today there’s a psychologist and tomorrow there’s a mathematics professor. And finally they will go to universities that 99 percent of Mexicans would like to attend,” says Adrian Meléndez, coordinator of the project (Weaver, 2017).
e) Social and Economic Integration of the Syrian CIDSR

Integration problems of Syrian CIDSR seem to be similar in all the countries covered by this study, such as limited knowledge of the language, truncated professional networks; and often poor physical or psychological health. (Smith, 2016) These barriers were even higher for women, who generally lacked work experience. Due to prejudice, discrimination and difficulty in recognizing credentials, many of the skilled had but limited economic participation in the host countries. With time, this may lead “individuals to lose their capacity for skilled employment” (Smith, 2016, p. 52).

The conditions of reception are quite different depending on each country and the economic status of the refugees. While Turkey certainly hosts a huge number of Syrians, they are not necessarily offered the best living conditions in the camps, unless they come from well-off families who can afford paying rent and education for their children. It is estimated that 10% of the Syrian refugees live in camps and the ones outside only register to get access to social services. (Spilda, 2017, p. 54)

While in the years when the Syrian crisis started, the Turkish population was welcoming the refugees, with time problems started due to their unsuccessful integration and their uncertain status. Previous research shows that Syrians currently in Turkey have set up 4,000 businesses (Hintz and Feehan, 2017), thereby helping to boost the country’s economy. The problem of integration of the Syrian refugees in Turkey started with the closure of borders in several European countries, which determined that many refugees would stay in Turkey. At the same time, Syrians in Turkey complained about the issuance of few work permits. This in turn,
caused a change of attitude in the Turkish population, at a time of high domestic political instability that led to constant change of personnel at governmental institutions. At the peak of the Syrian crisis, the normal legislative procedure was replaced with legislation through presidential decrees.

Paradoxically, being skilled may be a problem for the Syrian refugees, as the European Union might want to take them in, while Turkey is trying to prevent them from leaving the country (Demircan, 2016; Hintz and Feehan, 2017). The U.N. refugee agency in Ankara declared that they were “aware that the Turkish government has, in some cases, applied education criteria when issuing exit permits to Syrian refugees selected for resettlement from Turkey.” However, the Turkish government responded by denying this procedure. The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu declared: “We are against the selective approach to resettlement. No one can say ‘I want to get the Christian ones, I want to get the best educated ones, the [able-bodied] ones and not the disabled ones.’ Selective approach is not humane. You cannot select people like you select the sheep and goats from the market” (cited in Feldman, 2016).

Even when the German government accused the Turkish one of bad practices, the arrival of Syrian refugees in Germany also brought problems. Some of the shortcomings of the skills assessment process in Germany have been its concentration in the fields of teaching, engineering, nursing, and medicine, as well as its excessive formalization, incompatible with a very fast process of expulsion and differences in the educational systems of Syria and Germany (Loo, 2016).
However, the social integration of Syrian refugees has been object of state policies in Germany, where the native population has been trained by the principles of the Willkommenskultur (the welcoming culture). Syrian refugees were offered cheap language classes and citizens were called to help refugees and make them feel welcome. (Smith, 2016, p. 41)

The German government also promoted the use of social entrepreneurship to integrate Syrian refugees in an increasingly multicultural context that could “enhance the competitiveness of Germany’s economy” (Smith, 2016, p. 43). According to the results of fieldwork realized by Smith (2016), among the Syrian refugees in Germany there are many professionals with higher education and multilingual preparation, whose main desire is to get reunited with their families.

By comparison, the Syrian refugees in the UK arrive with a vulnerability assessment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon. In the UK, aid is administered at a local level and refugees are provided housing arrangements, education services, safety briefings, and orientation support. The vulnerability assessment prioritizes those refugees who cannot be supported effectively in the Syrian region, such as women, children, the elderly, victims of torture and sexual violence, and the disabled. This leads us to conclude that those refugees who make it to the UK are not necessarily the most skilled but the most vulnerable. The selection is mainly based on humanitarian reasons.

Refugees in North America have faced similar problems of integration, and many are still unemployed after more than a year in Canada or the US. “While Canada has won praise for...
La revista Norteamérica publica versiones Ahead-of-Print (AOP) de los artículos dictaminados tras una rigurosa evaluación de tipo doble ciego y tras haber sido aceptados por el Comité Editorial con el fin de ofrecer un acceso más amplio y expedito a ellos. / Norteamérica publishes Ahead-of-Print (AOP) versions of all manuscripts that have undergone a rigorous double-blind peer-review and been approved for publication by the Editorial Board in order to provide broader and earlier access to them.
households, men are more under pressure than women to find work. “[English] classes are mandatory, but they tell us work is also mandatory,” says a refugee in the US. (Frej and Abdelaziz, 2017)

Nevertheless, the profile of Syrians in the US is quite promising. Although Syrian refugees represent a new flow to the United States, a small Syrian immigrant community, has been residing in the US since the late 19th century. As of 2015, approximately 83,000 people born in Syria resided in the United States, accounting for less than 0.2 percent of the overall foreign-born population of 43.3 million (Zong and Batalova, 2017). This small community of Syrian immigrants has higher levels of education and English proficiency than the overall foreign-born population, according to the same authors, as 39% are college graduates, vs. 30% US born. In general, there is a relatively low workforce participation by Syrian women, but 49% of the Syrian men in the U.S. work in high-skilled occupations—e.g. managerial, business, science. (Global Ministries, 2018). This means that Syrian refugees, both men and women, will be integrated to a highly competitive Syrian community and their contribution to the US economy promises to be high.

The above mentioned study by Zong and Batalova (2017) shows that Muslim immigrants in general have been better integrated into U.S. society than in many Western European countries, where many report feeling marginalized and alienated. This is also the case in Latin American countries, as the last section of testimonies shows.
j) Testimonies of Syrian CIDSR

This final part has the purpose of revealing how re-skilling and deskilling affects the integration of Syrian professionals. On this respect, many of the testimonies of the Skilled Syrians in the selected countries illustrate similar problems.

First, they talk about the necessity to deal with smugglers to get to a safer place in a neighboring country or in Europe, about the uncertainty of their future and their fears to go back to Syria for the moment. For instance, Essa Hassan (29), a Syrian student hosted by Mexico, doesn’t know when and if he will return to Syria. In the meantime, he plans to study a masters in social engineering and make a contribution in Mexico. “When you see the blood, you know it’s not going to end any time soon (...) The first goal for me really is to give something back” (cited in Zissis, 2018). In a similar way, Syrian professionals interviewed in various countries appreciate the opportunity of having escaped, of being alive, and are thankful to the county that received them “If I’m looking toward the future (...) there is dignity (in the US) ... At the end of the day, they did give us health care. I want to work so I can pay taxes. To thank this country.” (Taqi, chef, interviewed by Frej and Abdelaziz, 2017)

Second, they recall the difficulties in finding a job, besides their previous experience in Syria and extra courses in the country of arrival. In particular, we recall the case of Adnan Almekdad (interviewed by Grant, 2016), a former veterinarian owner of an animal clinic back in Syria, former manager and strategist at several pharmaceutical startups, author of two books. Adnan now lives in Canada with his wife and three daughters, has made friends and learned
English, but could not find a job in a year’s time as a refugee. "I am skilled—I have experiences in working, management, manufacturing processes. It's hard."

Syrian CIDSR shows high costs of translation of professional degrees, that in most of the cases, the refugees cannot pay. For the skilled refugees, not having employment completely obstructs the process of integration, therefore in their cases, labour integration may settle the path for cultural and social integration as well. "I want to find a job before the end of the first year, because it's a long time to sit and wait. Canada means many things to me, and one is to find a job or a business (...) You know, you're not feeling like a citizen if you don't have a job, you do not belong to the place." (Almekdad cited in Grant, 2016)

Third, long wait periods for a skilled job deskills people, as big gaps in their curricula are negatively interpreted by the employers, even though many appreciate that with time, they have acquired resiliency and adaptability. In order to reactivate their skills and combat employers’ prejudices, refugees who have been inactive for a number of years may have to train again and strengthen their curricula. (Gilbert, 2017)

Fourth, the integration desires are quite high, even at the price of a temporary distance from the Syrian culture and community abroad. Contrary to the US experience where Syrian refugees are resettled within the Syrian community, the ones in Canada show the wish for integration even at the cost of not being with their own. Says Richard, a former medical doctor in Syria, now in Canada: "I think if you're going to be Canadian, you should be with Canadians, act like a Canadian, speak like a Canadian. And be friends with Canadians (...) If you want to be
successful in this country, you have to stay outside your community, and work with other communities, and with other cultures." (Interviewed by Hire Immigrants, 2017)

Lastly, Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico seem to be more opened and tolerant with the refugees, by difference to other OECD economies where Syrian migrants are already seen through stereotyping eyes. Says Melendez, coordinator of the Habesha project in Mexico: “There are no stereotypes about Syrians here. There are no stereotypes about Muslims. So it’s very easy for them to come and people will be welcoming. It means we are able to create our own narrative about Syria, about Islam about Middle East cultures because we don’t have one.” (cited in Zissis, 2018)

Apparently, Latin American countries may also serve as alternative destines for skilled refugees rejected by European countries. Says Saeed Mourad, a former orthopedic surgeon in Syria, now running a restaurant in São Paulo, Brazil: “At first I thought we’d go to England, where I [studied medicine], but they didn’t accept me. (...) We brought our own money with us. I will never [have to] live in a camp or a tent. Not all refugees can do what I did, because they don’t have the money. If the war stopped today I would be on the first line to go back to Damascus.” At the same time, he would prefer to be in the US with one of his sons, but he knows he will not get a visa under the Trump presidency. (cited in Renwick, 2017)

Conclusions

The study of Syrian refugees, skilled and unskilled, imposes a return to the theoretical perspective of diasporas in the original understanding of the concept, that is, displaced people driven abroad by multiple traumas of departure. As such, we propose the study of Syrian
refugees as a necessary change of framework from economically induced skilled migration to conflict driven migration.

Our main findings verse on the conceptual differences between conflict-induced and economically induced displacement of the skilled, as well as on the international cooperation for skilled refugees. Globalization allows the coexistence of cosmopolitan migrants working in transnational companies who reject belonging to one nation in particular, along with the vulnerability of refugees who would like to belong to any country. At one extreme, we have those who have a nationality and a steady place to live but reject being stable; at the other, we have professional refugees who don’t have a country to live, but would like to get rooted again. Both are skilled migrants, they just belong to different national backgrounds. Some seem to have been born in more unlucky places.

Even when the economic explanation of skilled migration has overshadowed the humanitarian one, it is necessary to study both patterns for the displacement of the skilled. By comparison to planned migration, CIDSR lacks clear spacial and temporal limits: migrants ignore when and if they will return to their homes and they do not really get to choose their countries of destination, but go where they are accepted. Certification processes are also more complicated in the case of CIDSR: as many of the skilled refugees do not bring their diplomas and they do not study the language of the country of destination in advance. Therefore, CIDSR is accompanied by a double process of deskilling and re-skilling, where the refugees have to reinvent their lives and careers.
From the point of view of international cooperation, regional policies towards refugees in general, skilled in particular are few, if any. This fact makes impossible a coherent comparison between North America and Europe, but also leaves space for regional agreements and cooperation on CIDSR.

While there is evidence of Syrian CIDSR being used for human capital purposes in certain countries with aging demographics (Germany, Canada) or to solve previous domestic brain drain problems (Turkey), Syrian refugees tend to be selected based on humanitarian purposes, rather than on their skills. All the countries included in this study, but perhaps more explicitly in the cases of Turkey, want to position as places welcoming foreigners, as “moral powers” as opposed to the anti-migrant discourse promoted by right-wing parties in the US and Europe.

Even so, this overall survey of the policies for Syrian CIDSR in selected OECD countries has proved the need for improved policies of labour integration of skilled refugees that would benefit both the individuals and the countries of destination. As opposed to brain drain produced by economic migration, better work opportunities for the skilled refugees do not affect the countries of origin more than the damage caused by the exile itself.
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