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In Focus

Nationality, Citizenship and Refugees: A Global Perspective

Benjamin D. Hennig and **Dimitris Ballas** map global migration flows – and find that geography is often the strongest determinant of where people move to.

The birth-right lottery – the random act of being born in a particular part of the world – has a huge bearing on our lives.

Where we are born – and where we have citizenship – can determine the social and economic conditions within which we live.

The Quality of Nationality Index (QNI), developed by Dmitry Kochenov and Justin Lindeboom, aims to quantify decisive indicators that shape and define key components which are strongly linked to having the citizenship of a country. These include economic strength, human development, as well as peace and stability, and also external factors that are related to travel and settlement freedom linked to people's citizenships.

Citizenship plays a pivotal role in one of the defining geopolitical issues of the 21st century: migration. Migration has become a central policy issue globally and especially in Europe and the United States, with populist politicians and media outlets attempting to dominate the political agenda with unsubstantiated claims relating to migrants and refugees who are fleeing to seek safety from conflict or persecution.

Populists often attempt to blur the boundaries between migrants and refugees in an effort to support arguments for more protectionist policies, including curbing migration. They often argue that refugees' main motivation for leaving their countries are to be found in factors related to their

supposed countries of destination, with migrants said to leave countries that display lower quality of nationality measures – such as reduced economic strength and higher levels of violence – for more prosperous and stable societies in the West.

However, looking at long-term global refugee flows through the lens of the Quality of Nationality Index a rather different picture emerges. The pair of cartograms opposite map the origin and destination of refugees between 2000 and 2015 using the QNI. The two maps show each country resized according to the total number of refugees from that country (countries of origin) or to that country (countries of destination) respectively. Overlaid are the colour coded QNI categories, allowing for a quick reference of the state of the QNI in each of these countries.

The global movement of refugees is highly dynamic and can change drastically year on year. These shifts can be accentuated further by media coverage, which in turn influences public perception. Using longer-term data gives us a clearer idea of the movement of people based on verified data, and allows us to see fluctuations in regions that are experiencing ongoing crises.

The maps document the movement of over 170 million people between 2000 and 2015, and the data highlights the changing geopolitical situations, and areas of conflict, during that period. The main origin continents for refugees were Asia at 52 per

cent and Africa at 33 per cent, while Europe was much lower at six per cent. Conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia, played a large role in the collective fleeing of over 10 million refugees from each country.

The dominance of medium-to-low QNI values in these countries can mostly be explained through conflicts leading to a decline in peace and stability and related effects on other internal factors, so that the emerging patterns here are first and foremost not surprising.

The destination countries map, however, shows that the majority of refugees flee close to home, often in neighbouring countries. Asian countries make up destinations for 47 per cent of refugees and Africa follows with 28 per cent. Of the five major destination countries, four of these neighboured a conflict region: Pakistan, Iran, Syria and Kenya. Europe was the destination for just under a fifth of the total global number of refugees between 2000 and 2015. More recently, Germany was the fifth major destination country due, in part, to its recent open-door policy and intake of refugees from 2015 onwards.

The statistics shown here represent approximately 180 million people for the period of 2000 to 2015 compared to approximately 214 million people in the 15-year period before then. Past figures show that the main flows of refugees have always broadly gone from conflict-ridden countries towards relatively safer places within the same region.

For example, between 1985 and 1999, Iran and Pakistan were also the largest two

Refugees: Countries of Origin

Refugees: Countries of Destination

countries of destination, with major conflicts having affected these regions in that period as well. Iran received 19 per cent of the global share of refugees (compared to 9.9 per cent in the recent period) and Pakistan 14.9 per cent (compared to 14 per cent). Most wealthy nations, such as the United States (3.4 per cent between 2000 and 2015) or the United Kingdom (2 per cent), received much lower shares of these global refugee flows in both periods.

Recent figures published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees state that in the past two decades, the global population of forcibly displaced people has grown significantly from 33.9 million people in 1997 to 65.6 million people in 2016 alone.

The world's forcibly displaced population is now at a record high.

From the perspective of the QNI, the emerging patterns in these maps illustrate how few of the global refugee population are heading towards those countries that promise economic strength, human development, or peaceful and stable societies, and that geography plays a much bigger role in these population dynamics. Most of those who manage to reach further away destinations are often those who have been better off, are better educated, or are otherwise more able to overcome such distances. The global dynamics and patterns revealed in these maps also highlight how unfounded and weak is the argument often made by populist politicians

that refugees pose a threat to the quality of life in those societies with a high quality of nationality.

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