

SOC 125M. Sociology of Refugees, Asylum, and Forced Migration. Spring 2025

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T/ Th 8:00- 9:20am
DIB 121

Office hours: SSB 462 by appointment

WHY TAKE THIS CLASS?

This course uses a sociological lens to understand experiences of forced migration and policies that attempt to define, manage, and control refugees. We begin by re-imagining the United States, not as a “nation of immigrants,” which implies people who moved voluntarily, but rather as a country fundamentally built on *forced* migration. Building on this provocation, we sketch out the conceptual debates about who is a refugee. Are economic migrants who move to meet basic levels of subsistence “refugees”? How should we conceive of other kinds of forced migrants, such as those moving at least in part because of climate change, natural disasters, or domestic violence? We will then examine flight from countries of conflict, mass hosting in the developing countries of the Global South, resettlement in the rich democracies of the Global North, asylum-seeking, and diasporic engagement and return. While very few individual refugees pass through all these stages and places, we will use these categories to analyze different types of refugee policies and experiences. We will learn how refugees are embedded in a world system of control and humanitarian protection in which policymaking in one context is strongly shaped by actors elsewhere. The course will provide a *tour d’horizon* of the origins of refugee movements, explanations of policies, and sociological insights into refugees’ lived experiences.

One of the goals of the course is to adopt a researcher’s mindset: In an era of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” what are the empirical questions we should explore to adequately discuss claims that we hear? What are the underlying assumptions, which may not be explicitly stated, about migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced persons?

READINGS:

You are expected to read all of the sources listed before each class (about 25-50 pages per class). All of the readings are on Canvas except for two books, which can be ordered at the links in the titles: [*The End of Asylum*](#) (2021) and [*The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach*](#) (2023).

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS:

Eight times during the quarter, you will write in-class 5-minute essays reacting to our readings, films, and discussion. There is no make-up for missed mini-reactions, but the two lowest grades will be automatically dropped.

The mid-term will take place in class on April 29.

Oral presentation project. Each of you will select a population that has been displaced. Using the analytical frameworks developed in this course, and referring both to course readings as well as your independent research, discuss definitional issues around this population (e.g. are they

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legally defined as refugees?) and how their displacement and reception in countries of transit and hosting can be understood through a systems approach. Sources should be academic articles and books and reports from reputable NGOs, international organizations, and governments.

May 20. 1-page outline of presentation due.

May 29, June 3, June 5. Oral presentations to the class.

Academic integrity is an integral part of being a student and a scholar. You must do your own work and credit others for their work. UCSD regulations on academic integrity will be strictly enforced. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask before turning in the assignment. See https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/26017/external_tools/63/ for details.

GRADES:

16%: 8 discussion reactions (worth 2 points each)
32% Midterm exam
20% Oral presentations
32% Final exam

If you are struggling, please contact me as soon as possible.

CLASS DISCUSSION:

Forced migration is often an emotionally and politically charged topic. Opinions from all points of view are welcomed. Please express them in ways that are respectful of all of us.

Do not record or distribute material from anyone in class (including fellow students, guest speakers, or the professor) without their permission.

COURSE OUTLINE:

April 1. Overview

Discussion prompt: Why are you interested in the sociology of forced migration?

April 3. Who is a refugee?

Read:

“Who Is a Refugee?,” ch. 2 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

April 8. The UNHCR

Guest speaker: Gabriela Coelho Lemos, UNHCR

Read:

UNHCR 2024. “UNHCR Global Trends 2023.” Geneva: UNHCR.

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/global-trends-report-2023.pdf>
[skim details]

April 10. A systems approach

Read:

“A Systems Approach to Displacement,” ch. 1 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

April 15. The refugee regime

Read:

“Making a Legal Refugee Regime,” ch. 3 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

Text of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status on Refugees and text of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees:

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10>

Discussion prompt: What types of forced migrants or rights are excluded from, or included in, the UN Refugee Convention in ways that you find ethically objectionable?

April 17. Refugee decision-making

Read:

“Should I Stay or Go?,” ch. 4 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

Watch:

“Refuge(e)” New Day Films, 2018.

<https://ucsd.kanopy.com/video/refugee-0> (15 min)

April 22. Logics of exit

Read:

“Exit,” ch. 5 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

April 24. Internal displacement

Read:

Barutciski, Michael. 1998. “Tensions between the Refugee Concept and the IDP Debate.” *Forced Migration Review* 3:11-14.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement.

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023>

Discussion prompt:

What is most at stake in the IDP debate? How is that reflected in the leading global report from the IDMC?

April 29. Midterm

May 1. The Turkish Case

Guest speaker: Şevin Sağnıç, UCSD Department of Sociology

Read:

“The World’s Leading Refugee Host, Turkey Has a Complex Migration History,” Migration Policy Institute, 2023.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkey-migration-history>

May 6. The Jordanian Case

Guest speaker: Prof. Rawan Arar, Department of Law, Societies, and Justice, University of Washington

Read:

Arar, Rawan. 2025. “Humanitarian Fiction: Examining the ‘Host’ in Refugee Receiving Contexts.” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*.

May 8. Humanitarianism and Power

Read:

“Powerful Hosts,” ch. 7 in Arar, Rawan and David FitzGerald. *The Refugee System: A Sociological Approach* (Polity 2023)

May 13. Border externalization

Read:

FitzGerald, David, 2020, “Remote Control of Migration: Theorizing Territoriality, Shared Coercion, and Deterrence,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (1): 4-22.

May 15. Resettlement

Read:

Donato, K. M. and Ferris, E. 2020. Refugee integration in Canada, Europe, and the United States: Perspectives from research. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 690(1), 7-35.

Discussion prompt:

Peruse the UNHCR data source on resettlement and report the most interesting piece of data, and explain why it’s interesting theoretically.

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html>.

May 20. Integration in the United States

Guest speaker: Molly Fee, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Oxford

Read:

Ch. 5. Fee, forthcoming

May 22. Introduction to asylum

Read:

Introduction and Ch. 1 and 2 in Schrag, Philip G, Andrew I. Schoenholtz, and Jaya Ramji-Nogales. 2021. *The End of Asylum*: Georgetown University Press.

Watch:

“Seeking asylum: An immigrants’ journey to America,” CBS News.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/seeking-asylum-an-immigrants-journey-to-america-cbsn-originals/>

May 27. How the U.S. asylum process works

Guest speaker: Leah L. Chavarria, Esq. Senior Associate Attorney, Hurwitz Holt, APLC

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Read:

Ch. 3-6 in Schrag, Philip G, Andrew I. Schoenholtz, and Jaya Ramji-Nogales. 2021. *The End of Asylum*: Georgetown University Press.

May 29. Student presentations, Part I

June 3. Student presentations, Part II

June 5. Student presentations, Part III

June 12, 8-10am, Final exam

OPTIONAL BOOKS:

- Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Gatrell, Peter. 2013. *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. Oxford University Press.
- Betts, Alexander. 2009. *Forced Migration and Global Politics*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bon Tempo, Carl J. 2008. *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- García, María Cristina 2017. *The Refugee Challenge in Post-Cold War America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- FitzGerald, David Scott. 2019. *Refuge Beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers*. Oxford University Press.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR): <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/>
- Migration Policy Institute: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/migration-information-source>
- Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at UCSD: <http://ccis.ucsd.edu/>
- Refugee Law Initiative, University of London, <https://rli.sas.ac.uk/>
- Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES IN SAN DIEGO:

- <https://ccis.ucsd.edu/programs/service-opportunities.html>
- <https://www.rescue.org/volunteer-opportunities/san-diego-ca>
- <https://sdrefugeetutoring.com/>