

Call for Paper Abstracts

Special Issue: Who is a Refugee in the 21st Century?

Guest Editors: Ulrike Bialas (Max Planck Society), David FitzGerald (UC San Diego), & Aryan Karimi (University of British Columbia)

“We don’t like to be called ‘refugees’,” wrote Hannah Arendt in 1943 amidst the consolidation of new protection regimes by some western nation-states. In 1951, the United Nations introduced the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, providing a formal definition of who counts as a refugee in need of protection. Since then, the Convention’s terms have been amended in 1967 to expand the eligibility criteria for protection. These treaties serve as reference points for parties to the Convention, which then interpret and implement their own national policies to determine who is a refugee and entitled to protection.

Yet, as Arendt points out, there are gaps between how top-down policies define refugee criteria and how individuals understand their own experiences of displacement, persecution, cross-border mobility, and demands for legal recognition in host countries. Arendt’s contemporaries fleeing the Nazi regime preferred to identify themselves as “newcomers” or “immigrants,” despite sometimes being categorized as refugees by nation-states and receiving societies. This gap between top-down and bottom-up definitions persists. Currently, Ukrainians are legally categorized as protected individuals under the European Union’s *Temporary Protection Directive* and as temporary immigrants under the Canadian *Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel* policy. Yet, research publications and everyday parlance predominantly refer to these Ukrainians as refugees. The question remains whether they refer to themselves as refugees, immigrants, temporary visitors, or something else altogether, and how these self-designations evolve over time and across different contexts. Similar questions apply to other groups, such as the Rohingya in South Asia, Venezuelans in Latin America, Middle Easterners in Europe, or Sudanese in Africa.

We therefore invite contributions to a Special Issue exploring “Who is a Refugee in the 21st Century?”. We invite paper abstracts that focus on the empirical bottom-up experiences of individuals and groups who have been (internally or internationally) displaced from their recent or original place of residence due to factors such as armed conflicts, persecutions, and natural disasters. How do these groups refer to themselves, and which political, racial, gendered, socioeconomic, and age-related factors shape their self- and other-ascriptions as refugees or otherwise? How do subjective understandings and self-descriptions vary situationally and over time? Authors are encouraged to reflect on the impact of (inter)national definitions of “refugee” but prioritize empirical and on-the-ground experiences including feelings of shame and honor, financial (in)dependence, temporal aspects of displacement, legal possibilities of return, relations to other migrants, and trust in the receiving societies.

Abstract submissions from around the world, particularly from outside of Europe and North America, are highly encouraged. Please submit your 400- to 500-word abstracts by **March 31st, 2025**, to aryan.karimi@ubc.ca. Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by **April 25th, 2025**. The abstracts and the Special Issue proposal will be submitted to the *Journal of Refugee Studies* for publication consideration.