

Reference Paper for the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

Academic Trends in Forced Displacement

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Abstract:

Academics are recognized in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) as stakeholders whose scholarship can help deliver on the aims of the GCR (para. 43). Recent years have seen a burgeoning of engagement across diverse disciplines, including anthropology, geography, economics, architecture, urban planning, and health studies. This paper, without an ambition of completeness, offers an overview of the evolution in some of the most influential debates on forced displacement currently taking place across some of these disciplines. It shows that a convergence of political factors, increased transborder mobility, and the higher status of forced displacement in the academic research agenda have ignited greater scholarly engagement with forced displacement as a field of enquiry. Thus, consistently with the GCR's principles, we highlight the potential for constructive engagement between academe and policymaking.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Quantitative Evidence	3
2. Evolutions in academic concepts	11
2.1 Recent developments in the anthropological debate	11
2.2 The debate in political science and international relations.....	12
2.3 The economic approach and the role of microdata.	14
2.4 Evolution in international legal studies	16
2.5 Health studies approaches toward forced displacement.....	18
3. The influence of the Global Compact on academic research.....	20
4. Conclusions	21
References.....	23
Appendix.....	32

Introduction

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), affirmed on 17 December 2018, recognizes the role of academics as actors within the forced displacement space. Paragraph 3 lists academics among the stakeholders with whom the GCR “...intends to provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all United Nations Member States”. Hence, academics are considered at the same level as other actors, whose role is traditionally more established with respect to refugees and forced displacement, such as international organizations, humanitarian and development actors and local governments. Moreover, the GCR (paragraph 43) promotes the institution of a global academic network to facilitate research, training, and scholarship opportunities to support the objectives of the global compact itself.

Such a recognition of the role of the academic community appears the natural step in response to a long process which has seen a considerable increase in the academic work focusing on forced displacement and related topics. Importantly, the GCR has also provided a further impulse to the academic interest in forced displacement. The introduction of the GCR, in fact, represents a defining moment in the way stakeholders respond to forced displacement. The GCR has facilitated the emergence of a debate on some of the most crucial aspects related to forced displacement. Examples of the topics addressed in the academic context are the nature of humanitarian interventions, the intrinsic motivations behind them, the role that national and local governments, UNHCR, and other institutions can effectively play in managing forcibly displacement and achieving durable solutions for those forcibly displaced. These elements were already part of the academic debate and have achieved new importance as a result of the affirmation of the GCR.

The aim of this paper is three-fold. First, we intend to document, making use of some simple statistics and graphs, the growth in the academic production on forced displacement, over a number of different subjects. Besides providing the raw data, we also explore the possible reasons for the increase of academic interest. Second, we focus on a subset of disciplines and highlight the evolution of academic research conducted on the studies on refugees and other displaced people. Given the complexity and breadth of the subject, we cannot be exhaustive in this review of the disciplinary debates, but we intend to offer a compendium of some of its focal points. Third, we aim to provide an initial discussion on the way the GCR can influence the academic debate.

The structure of the paper closely follows its aims, and the next three sections are devoted to investigating each of the three objectives highlighted above.

1. Quantitative Evidence

In the past ten years, social sciences as well as other academic disciplines have witnessed an increased interest in forced displacement as a subject of enquiry. While refugee studies have been an autonomous disciplinary field at least since the early 1980s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014), more recently a wide array of disciplines like political science, economics, law, international relations, demography and public health have begun prioritizing forced

displacement as a subject of research. Intuitively, this is due to the convergence of two factors. First, economic conditions, environmental issues, repressions, and wars have forced a greater number of people to leave their homes. Second, and consequently, political systems, above all in the global north, have recently begun seeing forced displacement as a phenomenon requiring greater attention to respond to its political, social, and economic implications. Whereas, in the global south, the question of people's mobility and displacement has always had a crucial importance.

As a first step to identify the evolution of academic work in the field of forced displacement, we have consulted several academic databases and verified the absolute number of papers that have been produced over the course of the last decades. Such a simple exercise led us to identify three main results which represent the starting point for the analysis presented in the next pages:

1. Since the beginning of the 2000s, there has been an evident increase in the number of papers that look at forced displacement;
2. This increase is not confined to those disciplines which traditionally have devoted more attention to forced displacement, but it can be detected over a wide range of disciplines, spanning from legal studies to health studies, economics and urban studies.
3. The large majority of academic papers on forced displacement are published in high income countries,¹ although most of the research is conducted on non-high income countries.

Specifically, the exercise has been conducted by verifying within different databases how many papers (published in academic journals) could be found if searched making use of keywords that should identify relevant contributions. Examples of keywords (i.e., words that appear in the title) that have been used are: “forced displacement”, “asylum”, “internal displacement”, “refugee”, and combinations of similar strings.² At the same time, we tried to exclude articles which we did not focus explicitly on forced displacement issues, and therefore eliminated terms such as “disaster” from our search codes.³ In order to identify the inter-temporal evolution in the way academics have approached forced displacement, these search tasks have then been repeated over different decades, starting from 1940 until 2020.

The growing trend in the number of papers is a common feature of most of the disciplines on which we have focused our attention. As an example, consider the case of Economics, as presented in Figure 1. The increase in the amount of interest devoted to the issue of forced displacement in the last decade is stunning.

¹ We define high income countries following the categorization proposed by the World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/XD>

² Strings varied slightly across disciplines to accommodate for the different meanings that words may have in different contexts. For example, the word “asylum” was not used when browsing through Architecture publications.

³ More details on the search methods and strings can be obtained from the authors.

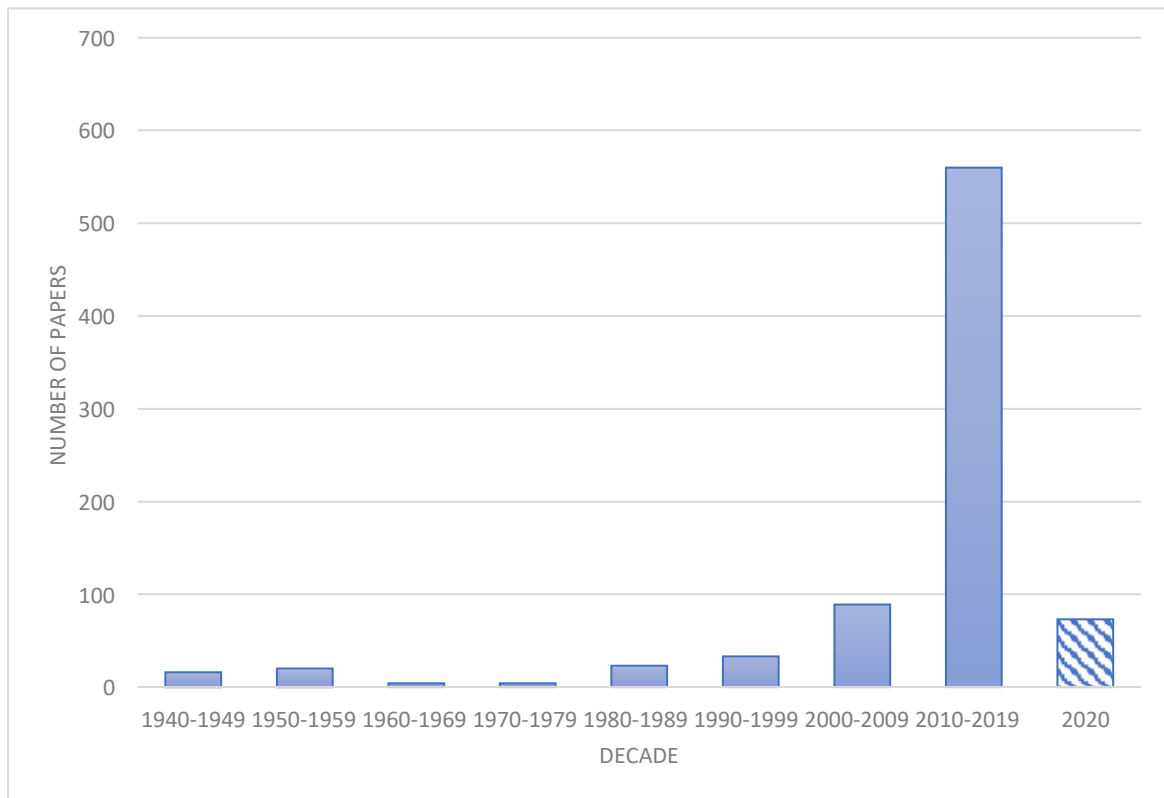


Figure 1: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Economics.

Note: Authors' calculations based on data from Ideas/Repec. Details available from the authors

The number of papers published in the period 2010- 2019 is more than six times the number of those published in the previous ten years, and around three times the total number of papers which focused on refugees and displaced people over the entire period 1940-2009. Even discounting for the possibility of double counting some entries or using keywords which are too broad, the difference between what one can observe in the last ten years and the previous periods is extremely relevant.⁴

It can be argued that the sharp increase in economic papers is largely due to a lack of interest on refugee issues by economists in past decades. Effectively, if one looks at the Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, published in 2014, Economics is not included among the disciplines reviewed in the first part of the publication. However, if we now turn our attention towards other disciplines which have instead focused on forced displacement for a longer period of time, we can notice how for several of them the trend in publications resembles what already observed in Figure 1. This is evident from Figure 2, which shows the evolution in the number of scholar articles published in Sociology and related to forced displacement. As one could expect, given the long history of interest in displacement by sociologists, in this case the increase in publications over time is more gradual. Nonetheless, once again the increment in the number of publications observed over the last decade is

⁴ The figures report absolute numbers, which reflect also an increase in the total number of papers produced over all topics. Nonetheless, by looking at examples from Economics, it can be noted that the proportional increase in the number of papers detected on forced displacement cannot be found if searching the repositories with other key words related to the economic literature, such as “economics”, “economic”, “effect”, etc.

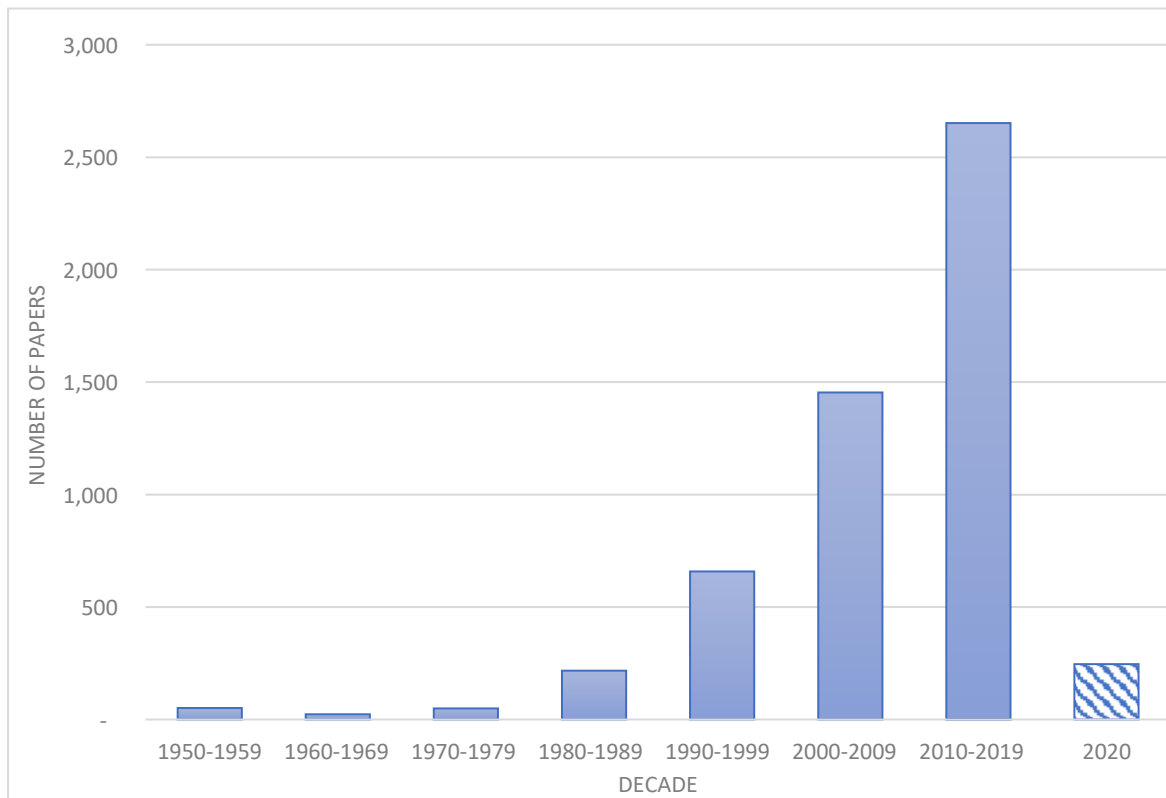


Figure 2: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Sociology.

Note: Authors' calculations based on data from ProQuest. Details available from the authors.

extremely relevant: the number of Sociology papers almost doubled with respect to the period 2000-2009 and more than tripled with respect to the what observed in the 1990s.

Similar patterns can be found in other disciplines, such as Legal Studies (Figure 3) and Health Studies (Figure 4). In particular, for this last subject, the evolution resembles what already observed in the case of Economics, with a real explosion of publications in the last few years. This indicates that the considerable increase in the research efforts on forced displacement can be detected also in subjects which over time have devoted more attention than Economics to this phenomenon, with a significantly larger total number of papers published in the area in different decades (see Figure 5). Moreover, the number of papers on forced displacement within research fields such as health studies can only be expected to continue expanding, as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

To complement this evidence, we can briefly mention the evolution observed in other disciplines, such as Political Sciences, Education, Anthropology and a group of subjects comprising Urban Studies, Geography and Architecture. For these disciplines, the absolute number of papers published in relation to forced displacement is generally smaller than those characterising the subjects analysed so far (with the exception of Economics), but they also tend to show a considerable growth papers published in relation to forced displacement. Therefore, by and large, the trends in line with those identified in Figures 1 to 4, the only exception being Anthropology, for which the data indicate a small decline in the number of published papers in the period 2010-2019 (See Appendix Figures A1 to A4).

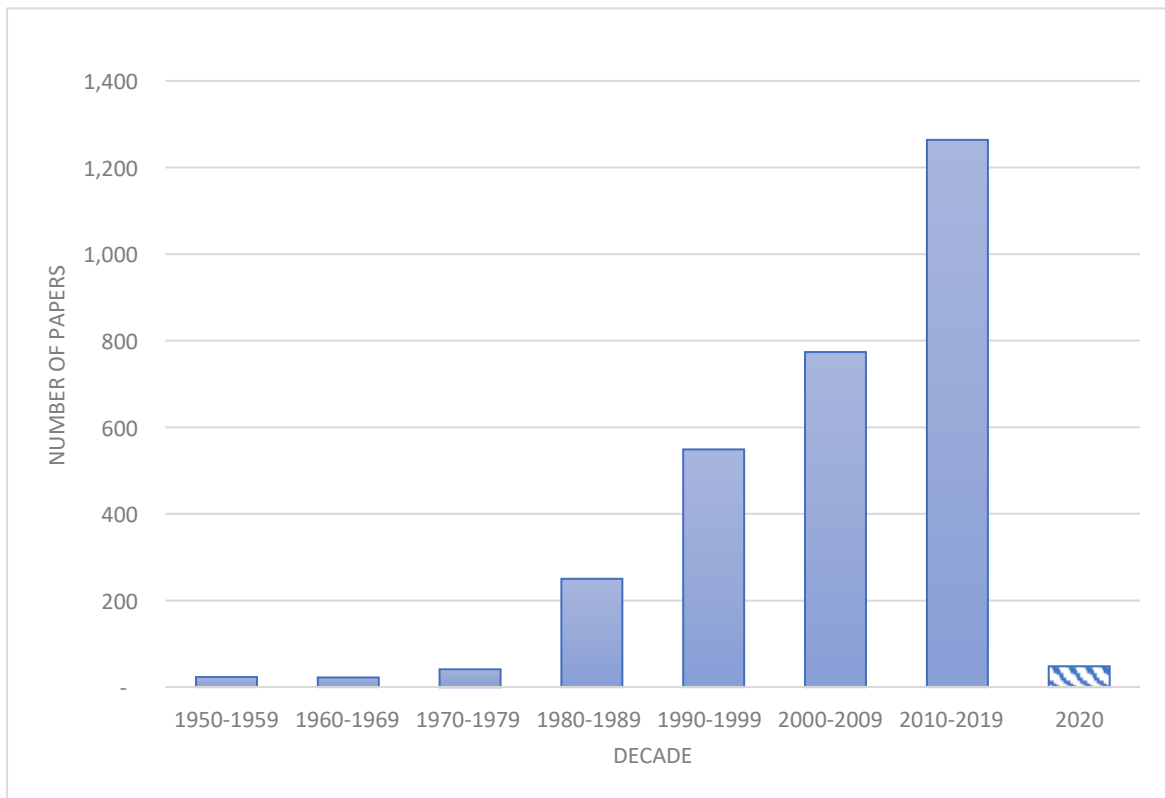


Figure 3: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Legal Studies.
 Note: Authors' calculations based on data from HeinOnline. Details available from the authors.

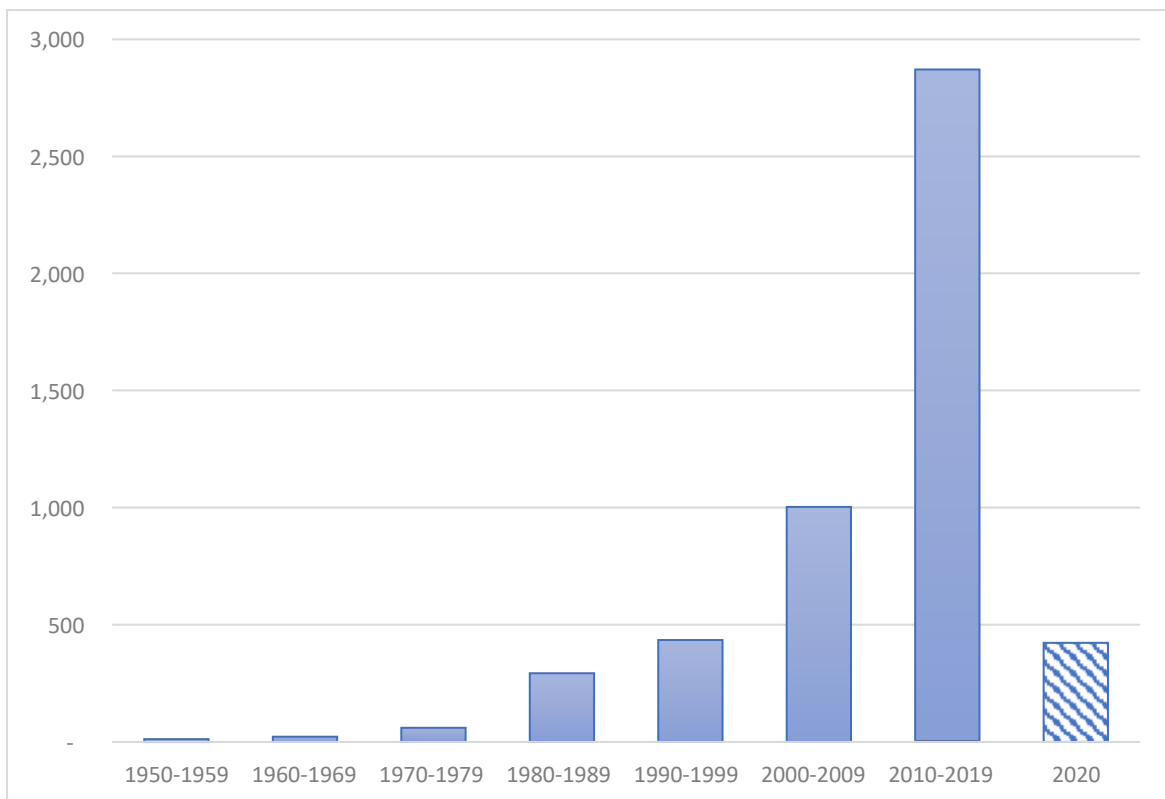


Figure 4: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Health Studies.
 Note: Authors' calculations based on data from ProQuest. Details available from the authors.

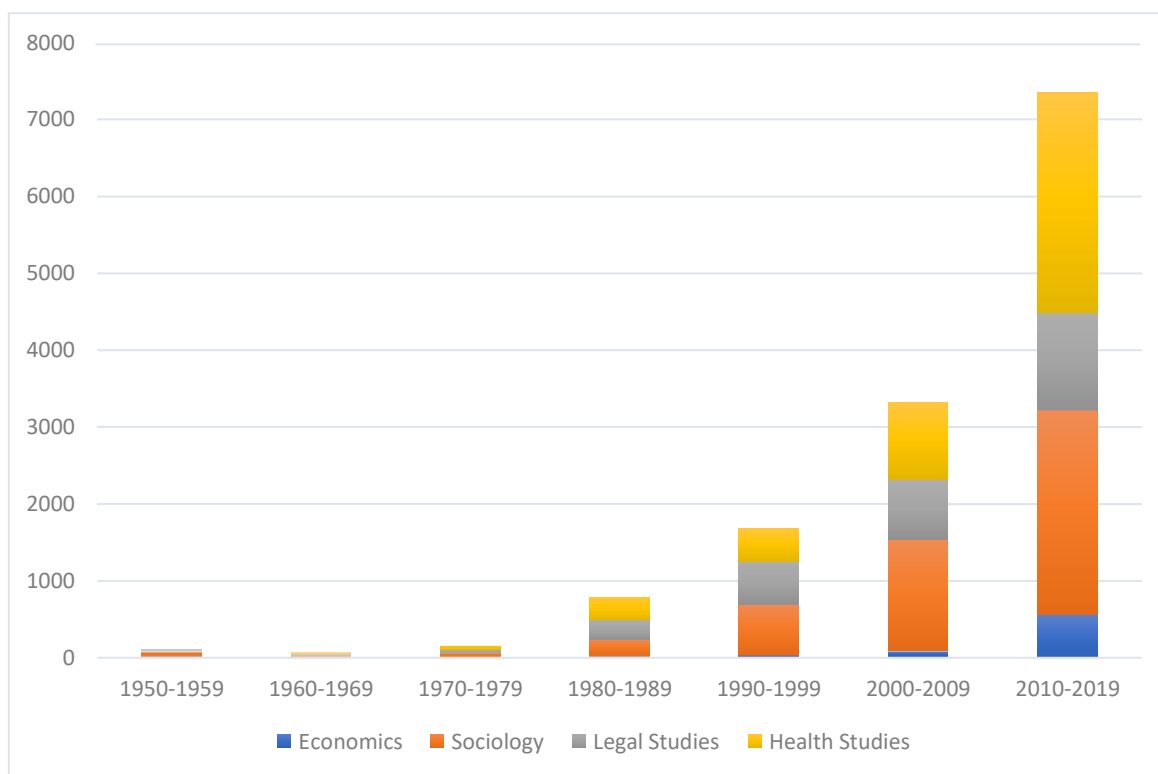


Figure 5: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade and academic field.

Note: Authors' calculations based on data from several databases. Details available from the authors.

However, the figures in the Appendix also reveal another interesting fact: the growing interest in forced displacement issues by researchers in fields which traditionally have not focused on refugees or displacement. The reference is to disciplines such as Education or those we have grouped in the last Figure: Urban Studies, Geography and Architecture. Although the number of papers in these fields is still relatively small, the time trends clearly point towards the development of new research strands on forced displacements.

Observing the constant raise in the amount of research produced over a wide set of disciplines, leads to ask whether this increase can be observed across different areas of the world and what its implications are in terms of the contents of the proposed analyses. We will try to answer the second question in the next section; in the remainder of the present section, instead, we focus on the geographical dispersion (or lack thereof) of research on forced displacement.

Figure 6 presents some evidence on the publishing location of the papers on forced displacement over the last three decades.⁵ Differently from the other pieces of evidence presented so far, the Figure does not denote a clear trend, but a rather stable situation in which a clear majority of papers is published in high income countries, independently of the specific decade in which the research was published. This contrasts with the indications from Figure 7, which shows how the research efforts largely focused on non-high income countries. The

⁵ Ideally, instead of the place of publishing, one could analyse the country of academic affiliation of the authors. Unfortunately, this information is often not available in papers published before 2010 and included in the databases we consulted. Nonetheless, focusing on those few papers for which this information was available, the picture which emerged closely resembles what observed in Figure 6.

only partial exception is given by an increase in the proportion of papers focusing on high-income countries in the period 2010-2019. A deeper look at the data, reveals that this increase in interest in the situation of those forcibly displaced in high income countries only became apparent in the period 2015-2019. This is likely to reflect a reaction to the recent emergence of refugee crises which have interested many high-income countries (mostly in Europe).

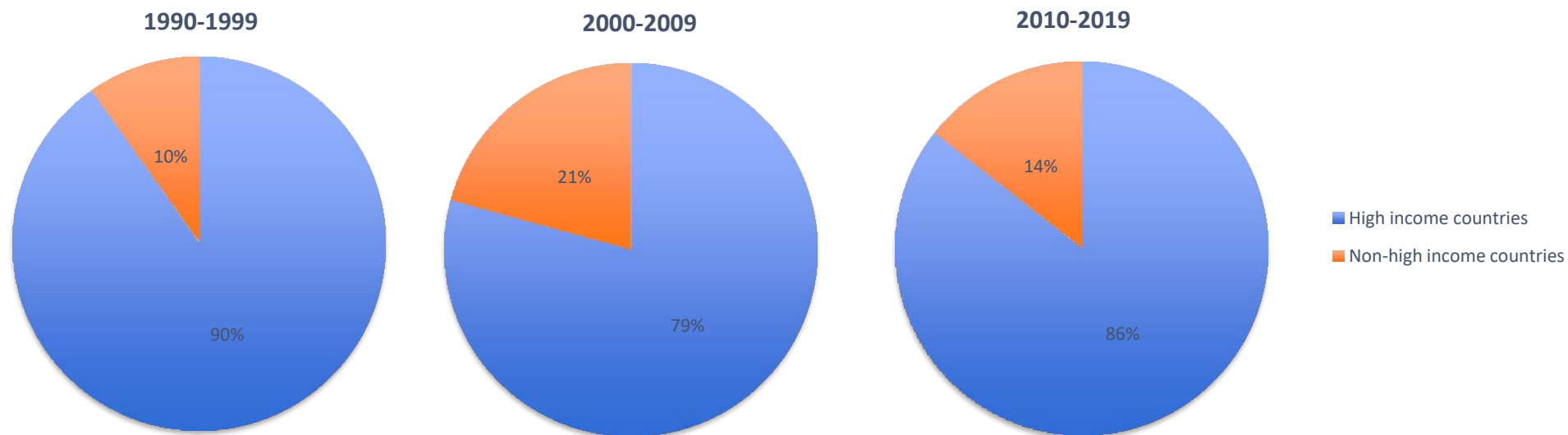


Figure 6: Proportion of papers by country of publication (Economics, Health studies, Legal studies and Sociology).
 Note: Authors' calculations based on ProQuest database. Details available from the authors.

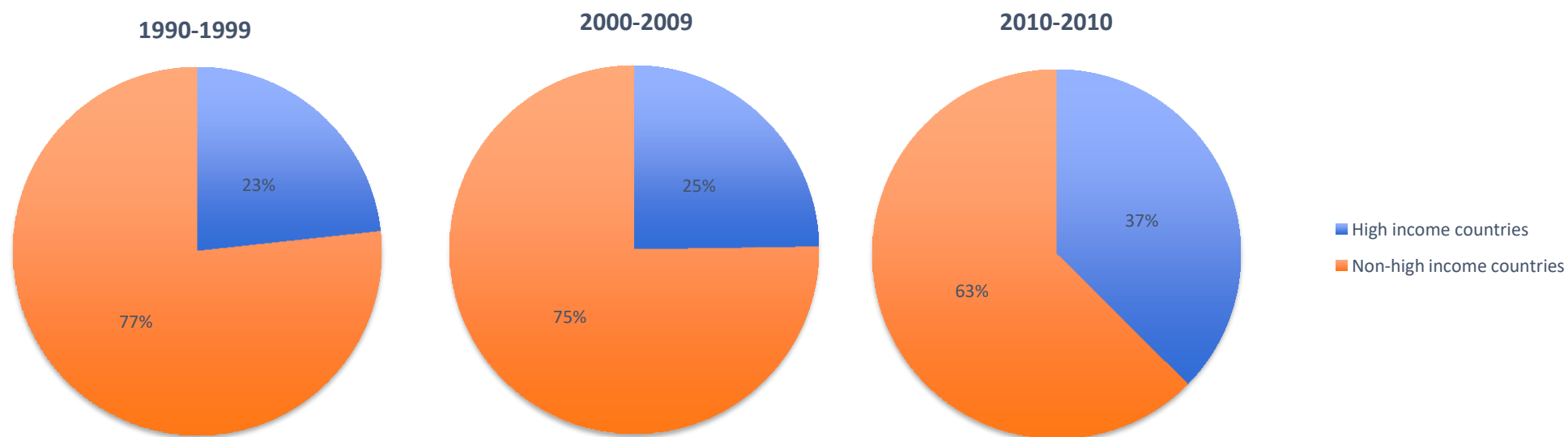


Figure 7: Proportion of papers by country of analysis (Economics, Health studies, Legal studies and Sociology).
 Note: Authors' calculations based on ProQuest database. Details available from the authors.

2. *Evolutions in academic concepts*

Having identified some of the main trends in the evolution of academic research on forced displacement from a merely descriptive point of view, we now want to assess whether an evolution can also be found with respect to the conceptual and empirical analyses proposed in the academic studies. The idea is to offer some examples of the ways in which the academic debate has advanced through the introduction of innovative concepts and exploring new analytical angles concerning the study of forced displacement. To this aim, we focus our attention on those disciplines which either have been traditionally focused on forced displacement, such as Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science and International Studies; or have experienced a considerable increase in the number of papers on refugees and displaced people over the course of the last ten years (Economics, Legal Studies and Health Studies).

The papers we have included in this (inevitably partial) review differ significantly in terms of contents, methodologies and research approaches. These differences reflect the motivations for research in specific fields: while forced displacement has more often been the subject of disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, greater political relevance and increased research funding have attracted disciplines such as political science, international relations, and economics. This has also marked a shift in focus, because the anthropological and sociological traditions have been concentrated mostly on bottom-up approaches to the subject while disciplines like political science, international relations and economics also focus on the structures and institutional orders that influence the contemporary dynamics of displacement.

2.1 *Recent developments in the anthropological debate*

As one of the disciplines that has played a key role in the foundation and development of migration and forced displacement studies, anthropology has continued to contribute to this field also recently with its characteristically critical take on events. Traditionally, anthropological work directs its focus of enquiry towards the social construction of phenomena like group identity, place, space, and time. Through these analytical lenses, it investigates how people exercise their mobility and how this impacts their collective lives.

At least three themes are at the core of the recent anthropological debate on forced displacement and these often intersect with other disciplinary contexts. One subject, at the crossroads between geography and anthropology, concerns the question of space. Especially with regard to phenomena like the Syrian refugee crisis, anthropologists have questioned conventional ideas of spatiality such as the national territory. Syrian displacement has highlighted the significance of forms of collective identification that go beyond national territoriality and illustrated the relevance of networks like religion (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2019), kinship (Miettunen and Shunnaq, 2020), or other supranational identities like Arabism (Chatty, 2010; Shami, 1996). This type of research often highlights how transnational networks have survived state territorial borders and then constitute back up networks which refugees use in their processes of relocation.

The second theme of enquiry, also related to space, has concentrated on the question of a refugee shelter and camps. The literature recently had to address the fact that in crises such as Syria, the greatest majority of refugees have opted for self-settlement in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas. This has opened new perspectives on how refugees constitute spaces as a result of policies of exclusion from host states and societies but also by establishing their own relations with the local contexts and international humanitarian actors. Michel Agier, for example, has reflected on ideas of spatiality like heterotopia or borderlands, as a way to conceptualize the space and forms of exclusion that refugees experience also when living outside of camps. These accounts show how the space that refugees inhabit and constitute with their presence are like no others because they are produced by forms of exclusion that do not map onto the national territoriality. Refugees, instead, constitute with their presence spaces that are neither fully inside nor entirely outside states and societies. An idea that has also been described as the liminal condition of refugees. Examples include cases such as the so-called “Jungle” of Calais (France) or the centres of temporary reception that have been established especially in the global north by states that are interested by phenomena of displacement (Agier, 2019; 2010; Boedeltje, 2012; Lafazani, 2013).

The idea of hospitality has emerged as another theme of enquiry in the anthropological literature. In this case, scholarly work reflects on the modes in which people’s mobility has generated discourses of reception of refugees framed as acts of hospitality. Scholars investigate the variations in meaning, the limitations, and the strategic use of the concept of hospitality when used by institutional sources as well as social actors in responding to displacement. The result is an illustration of the differences in the use of the concept, and how this connects to things such as the legal status of refugees, access to aid or shelter. Among their core claims is that no facile interpretations of hospitality should be accepted, instead, there should always be an analysis of the broader context in which is used to better understand its nature. (Carpi and Pınar Şenoğuz, 2019; Wagner, 2018; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Mason, 2011; Chatty, 2017; 2020) Examples relate to cases like Lebanon, Turkey, or Jordan whereby the principle of hospitality, as embedded in local cultures, kinship, or religion, has been turned into a resource for governments and social actors to develop a narrative of reception of refugees in host communities, especially at the early stages of the crisis. Yet, later phases have shown how what was depicted as an unnegotiable principle of hospitality of the beginning it turned out to be a strategy of reception highly dependent on the availability of economic support and subject to political dynamics.

2.2 The debate in political science and international relations

The 2011 uprisings in the MENA region and the Syrian civil war, in particular, have been of central interest because of their impact on global dynamics of people’s movement and their repercussions on European countries.

One of the key thematic areas of research relates to Syrian displacement and the question of their integration in the local economy especially the job market. This emerged as a key theme in conjunction with the realization that the Syrian crisis would have not been the short-term

situation that many expected it to be at its inception. The protraction of conflict has raised questions over the sustainability of a response to displacement based on external support towards those countries hosting the majority of Syrians as country of first arrival. This model had to be reinterpreted to facilitate greater self-reliance from the displaced population thus attributing importance to the question of the economic inclusion of refugees. Furthermore, given that countries like Lebanon and Jordan (among the main hosts of Syrian refugees) also experience their structural issues, the humanitarian perspective on the crisis has converged towards a broader developmental concern that included not only the displaced population but also the local host societies.

As a result, academic research has increasingly looked into the possibility of facilitating the economic inclusion of refugees without burdening further infrastructures and socio-economic balances that were already under pressure before the crisis. This converged also with the interest, common especially among European states, to examine how to invest more sustainably in countries of first refuge as a means of reducing onward movement.

Paul Collier and Alexander Betts have been among those who argued for the integration of refugees into local job markets (Betts and Collier, 2015). According to this interpretation, refugees constitute a valuable economic source the integration of which can foster self-reliance among refugees' households and contribute to the economic growth of host states.

While the economic integration of refugees is not a new approach, the combination of mass displacement phenomena in to areas that are economically challenged has led to the adoption of measures such as the Jordan Compact whereby the regularization of access to work of Syrians has been traded for looser trade conditions between the EU and Jordan (European Commission, 2016). This approach to the situation has sparked reactions among scholars. The idea of greater economic integration has been criticized for not taking into sufficient account the local economic structures in host states. The effectiveness of the measure has been questioned because host states may make the acquisition of work permits a bureaucratically daunting and sometimes expensive task for refugees; furthermore, governments are not always transparent as regards the actual numbers of permits issued, and permits may be limited to specific economic sectors and economic zones like Special Economic Zones (Lenner and Turner, 2019; Gray Meral, 2020; Sahin Mencutek and Nashwan, 2020).

From a more theoretical perspective, there has been criticism over the idea of embedding refugees into a discourse of economic productivity. This has been considered problematic because it shifts the focus of policymaking from a rights-based perspective (whereby a refugee is entitled to in-principle protection as a right holder) to a view that interprets responses to displacement as conditional to economic sustainability (Al-Mahaidi, 2020; Turner 2019). In addition, according to Tsourapas, this type of policy has led to the formation of “refugee rentier states”, i.e. states that capitalize on refugee presence to extract economic and political benefits from donor states in the global north (Tsourapas, 2019).

Connected to this debate is the research interest generated by the concept of resilience. A ubiquitous term (yet rarely defined), resilience has become a way to describe the adaptive capacity of individuals and societies to the conditions of refugee life. While it has acquired a

positive connotation highlighting refugees' entrepreneurship, perseverance, and initiative; scholarly work has more recently questioned how this term has been used. The shift to "resilience humanitarianism" has been seen as a change from an idea of aid-recipient individuals as inherently vulnerable, to people that are endowed with agency and, therefore, the capacity to react autonomously to the difficulties that displacement causes (Hilhorst, 2018). This is an important change in perspective that finds its roots in the work of Barbara Harrell-Bond (Harrell-Bond, 1986) who has criticized the passive representation of refugees in the humanitarian narrative. The light-hearted use of the term, as well as its vagueness (on some occasions referred to refugees, on others used to describe refugee host societies, economic structures, or else), has eventually caused criticism.

Policymaking relying on resilience as its sole pillar has been criticized as a form of buck-passing whereby host societies and refugee populations are given the responsibility to address the challenges of displacement based on their presumed resilience. This tends to make actors such as states not directly involved in crisis management and international organisations less responsible for the consequences of displacement (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015; Gottwald, 2014).

A third theme of the social sciences debate on refugees concerns the question of the definition of the term refugee itself and the use of other forms of identification in contexts of displacement. While this is not a new subject (Gatrell, 2013), it has acquired increased significance concerning the most recent cases of forced displacement especially in the Middle East where the 1951 Refugee Convention has been ratified only by few states. The semantic uncertainty of refugee as a defining category, according to scholars, produces forms of inclusion and exclusion through social ordering by identifying persons through different labels such as *prima facie* refugees, *de facto* refugees, or by assimilating refugees with migrants (Janmyr, 2017a; Janmyr and Mourad, 2018; Stevens, 2014; Mourad and Norman, 2020).

Not only this, but the politics underlying the acknowledgement of refugee status also influence demographic statistics and political perceptions. As Fitzgerald and Arar observe "Refugee numbers are flawed and can be intentionally misleading. These numbers serve political purposes: to advocate for increased aid or influence admissions policies." (Fitzgerald and Arar, 2018, 391) This has, in turn, generated scholarly interest also in the newly emerging forms of global migration and refugee governance (as the GCR itself) and in the generation of reliable data, as advocated by the GCR.

2.3 The economic approach and the role of microdata.

As seen in the previous section, until recently the economic literature had remained largely silent on the phenomenon of forced displacement and economists often did not distinguish between voluntary migration and forced displacement (Ruiz and Vargas, 2013). Nonetheless, in the last few years, the availability of new data combined with the emergence of displacement crises which have interested several Western countries have led to an increased interest in this field.

It is possible to highlight an evolution in the themes on which economists have focused their attention. Early literature has looked at the effects that displacement exerted on those forcibly displaced, with respect to their economic and labour market outcomes. Specifically, several contributions analysed the long-term effects induced by displacement following World War II (Sarvimäki et al., 2009; Falck et al., 2011; Bauer et al. 2013). Interestingly, the long-term perspective is currently the subject of a new wave of studies, which explore the contemporary outcomes of long-past event. Becker (2020) summarises these papers, which cover both the effects of WWII (Becker et al., 2020) and other historical events, such as the Partition of British India (Bharadwaj and Mirza, 2019), or even more distant ones as the Greek population resettlement (Murard and Sakalli, 2019) or the Huguenots diaspora in Prussia (Hornung, 2014). Becker indicates the emergence of three main themes: First, displaced people are in many cases high-skilled minorities that bring benefits in terms of education, productivity and innovation to the areas that receive them. Second, agglomeration forces— cost savings that emerge from locating economic activities in the same geographical area— together with infrastructure investments, can make the most out of even massive flows of forced migrants. Third, uprootedness, the experience of being forced to migrate, can have lasting effects on forced migrants and their descendants by changing preferences towards education as a portable asset.

Focusing on other recent strands of literature, one can identify three main areas of research as predominant among the economic studies related to forced displacement. The first, which is based on theoretical contributions, develops models and methods for the optimal allocations of refugees across different countries. The aim of these papers is to identify a set of conditions under which a certain allocation of refugees across countries can improve the welfare of the population of both host and origin countries. Azanert (2018) proposes a model in which the allocation of refugees towards low-income countries can foster the economic growth of the host country, by stimulating its process of human capital accumulations. Andersson et al. (2018) design a dynamic matching model which takes into account the characteristics of the refugees and those of the potential host localities to produce an “optimal” matching algorithm which guarantees an improvement in the economic conditions of the host country. Trapp et al. (2018) follow a similar approach but make use of machine learning to deliver an algorithm-based allocation of refugees that can improve their labour market outcomes.

Clearly, the allocation of refugees across different countries is not a purely theoretical question, but one that has extremely concrete economic, social and political consequences. Unsurprisingly, the second strand of the literature that has emerged in recent years has examined the political implications of the influx of refugees into host countries. The debate in this area is largely dominated by papers which focus on the European experience. Dustmann et al. (2017) look at the ways in which the 2015 influx of refugees towards the European Union differ from other large movements of displaced people towards Europe, and in particular with respect to refugee movements triggered by the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. They argue that at least three features distinguish the 2015 refugee crisis from that in the early 1990s: first, the political climate was very different, as in 2015 European countries were “still entangled in the aftershocks of a deep recession, riddled by populist and separatist national movements and challenged by deeply divergent views about how to address this humanitarian crisis”. Second, the Balkan wars were considered mainly a Western responsibility, while in 2015 a multitude

of actors and geo-political interests came into play, over which Western nations has limited power. And third, in 2015 “...the refugees (...) heading towards Europe are perceived to be culturally more distinct and greater in number than those in the early 1990s”. In their conclusions, they argue for the establishment of a coordinated European policy to respond to refugee crises. This is in line with what argued by Altemeyer-Bartscher et al. (2016) and Bordignon & Moriconi (2017). Other contributions have focused on more specific politically-sensitive consequences of the influx of refugees in European countries, including analyses on the electoral impact (Dustmann et al., 2016), fiscal consequences (Ruist, 2019), and public opinion (Gerhards & Schupp, 2016).

Finally, a third, important trend in the literature, looks at the consequences that the establishment of refugee communities have on the host communities.⁶ Although not completely innovative (Callamard 1994 studied the impact that the presence of refugees from Mozambique had on host communities in Malawi), this literature has expanded considerably in recent years and has often focused on communities located in developing countries. As mentioned, this evolution is linked to the availability of new micro-datasets and survey techniques. The literature is rich and covers several countries, mostly in Africa and the MENA region. Overall, the findings tend to be positive. In a recent paper, Lorschmann et al. (2019) show that the presence of Congolese refugees has contributed to stimulate the economic development of host communities in Rwanda, leading to both economic and social improvements. Maystadt and Verwimp (2014) show that the establishment of refugee camps for Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Tanzania led to an improvement of the welfare of the host communities; while focusing on the same areas, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva (2016) detect an increase in farming and livestock activities among individuals in host villages. Positive effects have also been found in Kenya (Alix-Garcia et al., 2018). Finally, several papers have analysed the impact that the influx of Syrian refugees has had on Turkish (Tumen, 2016) and Jordanian communities (Fallah, et al. 2018). The researchers are able to identify several positive effects of the presence of refugees for members of the host communities, for example in terms of lower commodity prices, or more opportunities in the formal employment sector. However, some negative effects emerge, with respect to employment levels (Del Carpio and Wagner, 2015; Tumen, 2016; Ceritoglu et al., 2017) and, in some instances, wages of native workers (Bagir, 2018). These effects are often detectable among lower skilled workers: this indicates the importance of analysing the economic impact of forced displacement for multiple subgroups of the population. In turn, this highlights the role that detailed microdata play in the assessment of different effects.

2.4 Evolution in international legal studies

It should not surprise that contextual to the rise of the political and social importance of forced displacement as a phenomenon, is an increased scholarly interest in how international and

⁶ Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2017 and Ogude, 2018. For a comprehensive review on the topic, see Verme and Schuettler (2019)

domestic law have developed. As seen in Section 1, that of legal studies is in fact another area which has witnessed a constant increase in research publications related to forced displacement.

Needless to say, international law constitutes the primary regulative framework for all those involved in international phenomena of displacement, i.e. refugees, IDPs, states, INGOs and the UNHCR has the primary role of supervision over its implementation (Loescher et al., 2012). This is already a problematic aspect that has been critically investigated by David Kennedy, who claims that the very language of law has the potential effect of consolidating forms of exclusion and categorization, thus reverting the effects of humanitarian policies. (Kennedy, 2004)

Nevertheless, the legal debate on displacement is evolving fast and a few areas of enquiry can be identified as some of its central concerns. Prominent is the debate on how international and regional (especially in the global north) frameworks have dealt with displacement until now and, especially, under the pressure of the recent developments. David Cantor discusses whether we may be witnessing the end of refugee law. He acknowledges a scattered disciplinary context whereby different approaches fail to constitute an integrated legal corpus, but the recurrent and extensive refugee rights violations that we witness nowadays are not sufficient to declare the demise of refugee law. Instead, this calls greater harmonization among different approaches to the refugee in the international legal system including human rights-based approaches, classical refugee law perspectives, as well as regional and domestic legal studies on the subject (Cantor, 2017).

The second area of enquiry concerns the degree to which the existing international legal system, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 protocol, have been effective in responding to increasing high volumes of cross-border movements (Feller, 2014; Stevens, 2014). In this respect, the adoption of the GCR by the UNGA in 2018 has produced the opportunity for academic debate on its nature, intents, and chances of success (Akram, 2019; Aleinikoff, 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2019; Grandi 2019). While a comprehensive assessment is premature for the time being, the literature acknowledges that the GCR has produced an innovative scenario for refugees' international protection. This is especially true as concerns the question of burden-sharing for which the GCR demands a fairer distribution among stakeholders, thus potentially leading to a legal basis for this to happen (Betts, 2018; Doyle, 1986).

From a more distinctly legal perspective, Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen observes that the GCR can constitute a possible source of soft law that may influence international actors approaches to displacement. Importantly, the GCR incorporates and reiterates the relevance of the pre-existing legal instruments for refugee protection and it does so also for states that are not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention. This means that it can potentially become a means for the further consolidation of international refugee law and its potential expansion also towards states that have previously resisted its influence (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2019). In areas like the Middle East, one of the global crossroads of displacement where the 1951 convention has not been ratified by a large majority (Janmyr, 2017b), this can be a significant development.

This leads to another area of enquiry that cuts across the legal and political dimensions of the contemporary refugee debate and is concerned with the question of the status of forcibly displaced people. Debates concerning the definition of the refugee concept (Gatrell, 2013) and its legal determination have been an enduring feature of the scholarly enquiry on forced displacement. Recent developments, however, have pointed to the importance of this analytical angle, because the current crises such as Iraq, Syria, and the long-standing Palestinian question among others, have all underlined the importance of the question of refugees' legal status. In countries which have not acceded the 1951 Refugee Convention this is problematic because well-established legal sources for the recognition of refugee status are lacking (Janmyr, 2017a). Often, the sole sources available to protect refugees are customary international law and, where existent, the Memoranda of Understanding between the UNHCR and the host states. Domestic legislation is often non-existent when it comes to refugees, and their presence remains primarily regulated by migration law. This produces different refugee identities and forms of status that make the refugee vulnerable and liminal in its condition (Stevens, 2014). The issue does not concern only the global south, refugee-naming has turned out to be a crucial factor also in Western approaches to displacement especially as concerns the distinction between so-called economic migrations and forced displacement. This distinction influences the policies related to the determination of the status of people moving across borders shaping the nature of the political and social response (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018; Sigona, 2018).

Statelessness is another topic in which legal perspectives have crucial importance and that has witnessed important developments in recent times. Already in 2014, the UNHCR released a Handbook on Protection of Stateless People highlighting the relevance of the subject. The need to address the question of statelessness through appropriate legal means and innovation of legal thinking has been further exacerbated by the increase of this condition (both de facto and de jure) as a result of forced displacement in cases like Syria (Aranki and Kalis, 2014), Palestine, the Kurds, (Akram, 2018) and the Rohingyas to mention some examples.

Foster and Lambert (2019), in this respect, have highlighted how innovative interpretations of the 1951 Refugee Convention play an important role in shaping contemporary protection of de jure stateless people, notwithstanding the fact that this was not its original purpose. This is further compounded by the presence of human rights treaties and, obviously, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons that further contribute to addressing situations of statelessness as human rights violations. Although these are steps in the right direction, they highlight that there is still much work to do for statelessness to disappear. Their concerns focus for example on the lawfulness of practices such as the withdrawal of nationality and the prohibition to return to the country of origin on the basis of lack of nationality (Foster and Lambert, 2019).

2.5 Health studies approaches toward forced displacement

Health-related studies on those forcibly displaced have gained extreme relevance during 2020. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn much attention on the living conditions in refugee camps. Several features characterising the living conditions of forcibly displaced

persons can facilitate a fast spread of the virus: high population density, a lack of knowledge about COVID-19 among the people living in the camps, and a lack of access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (Islam and Yunus, 2020). Besides research on the responses to the pandemic in camps (Alqutob et al., 2020; Vonen et al., 2020), health and social sciences scholars have started investigating the development of methods for the detection and modeling of contagion in settings, as refugee camps, in which large scale testing is not feasible (Truelove et al., 2020; Lopez-Pena et al., 2020). These methods, if proved empirically valid, can represent an important advancement in the scientific literature, with consequences that can go beyond the immediate effects on forcibly displaced people.

Health scientists are probably among the best placed researchers to react to the challenges that the pandemic has brought to the displaced people and their hosts. Millions of refugees and internally displaced people currently live in areas of the world in which the incidence of diseases such as malaria, ebola, cholera or HIV is particularly high. The experience accumulated in studying these diseases and their impact within camps⁷ can constitute a solid basis for research on COVID-19.

Besides the attention devoted to the way diseases have affected the life of displaced people, we can mention here three other important strands of literature which health scientists have developed in relation to forced displacement.⁸

The first one investigates the physical consequences of displacement (or its causes). As displacement might be the result of conflicts and violence, those affected by it are often exposed to physical traumas. Nasir et al. (2004) reviewed the existing literature on the prevalence of injuries among Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This group of people was of particular interest due to the high likelihood of reporting an injury due to explosions. Sadly, these events are still very common in many contexts, and in particular in fragile countries. As noted by Hyder and Razzak (2013), the lessons learnt in terms of injury prevention schemes can inform public and private responses that can be applicable to many developing countries.

A considerable number of contributions have focused on the mental health consequences of both displacement and the traumatic events that many displaced individuals have experienced in their lives. This literature has expanded considerably in the last decade, contributing to the growth of health studies on forced displacement, which we discussed in Section 1. Some articles look at evidence from different groups of refugees (Keyes, 2009; Dapunt et al., 2017), and generally conclude that refugees are indeed more at risk of developing psychotic disorders when compared to members of host communities or non-refugee migrants. Many authors focus on subgroups of the displaced population, with specific references to women (looking in particular at the psychological impacts of gender violence; Sipsma et al., 2015; as well as the mental health implications of pregnancy and maternity while displaced; O'Mahoney and

⁷ For some examples of these contributions and without any presumption of completeness, see: Holmes (2001); Anderson et al. (2011); Williams et al. (2013); Shannon et al. (2019).

⁸ The medical literature on forced displacement is extremely rich, so in this section we will refer mostly to existing literature reviews.

Donnelly, 2010) and children (Fox et al., 1994; Reavell and Fazil, 2016; Mitra and Hodes, 2019).⁹

The last topic which emerges in the contemporary literature is one which has acquired more relevance as a result of the increased inflows of refugees in Western countries and focuses on the access of displaced people to national health systems. Clearly, besides the implications from a sanitary perspective, this issue is particularly important also from policymaking perspective. As a result, the geographical focus of articles that assess the degree to which refugees and other displaced people can access health services have changed over time. Until some years ago, researchers focused mostly on forcibly displaced people and host communities in developing countries (see for example, the analysis on Uganda by Orach and De Brouwere 2004; 2006) or specific developed countries (e.g., Australia; Davidson et al., 2004). The most recent contributions, instead, have enlarged the spectrum of countries to assess the differences that characterize access to health services for displaced people around the world and developed economies in particular (Chiarenza, et al., 2019). The general message is that of an extremely fragmented set of systems in which displaced people can often experience considerable barriers in accessing basic health services.

3. *The influence of the Global Compact on academic research*

The previous sections have highlighted the raising importance attributed to forced displacement in a number of academic disciplines. The starting point for this analysis has been the recognition of the role of the academic within the GCR. However, it is important to realize that the introduction of the GCR itself represents a significant change in the research space of forced displacement. Therefore, the GCR has sparked additional academic interest focusing on the effects that the implementation of the principles presented in the Compact can exert over different academic domains.

Despite the short amount of time elapsed since the approval of the GCR, the literature is already quite rich, and it would not be possible to provide here a complete summary. Nonetheless, we can start by highlighting one of its most interesting features, which is in line with what discussed in the previous sections: these academic articles span over a large set of disciplines, including some which are not typically linked to forced displacement studies. As examples of this broad spectrum of academic subjects, one can consider the article by Shaffer et al. (2019), who look at the role of nurses in the implementation of the GCR and their ability to influence, via their professional role, the perception of migrants and refugees by the public; and the paper by Koslowski (2019) on the implication of the GCR on travel security for refugees.

In 2019 the journal *International Migration* published a special issue on the GCR (and the Global Compact on Migration). This offered the possibility for a first, intense academic exchange on the value, premises and innovative aspects of the Compacts. As could be expected, several contributions focused on the concrete applicability of the GCR and its implementation. Some of the critics indicated a lack of realism in the principles put forward by the Compacts.

⁹ A special research focus on women and children can be found also in disciplines other than Health Studies. Scholars in Education, Sociology and Economics have devoted much attention to both population groups, studying the direct and indirect effects that forced displacement can exert on them.

For instance, this has been raised in the case of the applicability of the GCR to labour markets (Martin and Ruhs, 2019). Nonetheless, other scholars have indicated the catalytic role of the Compact, which, although not binding, does not exist in a vacuum (Gilbert, 2019) and its interactions with existing national and international laws can lead to a full operationalization of its contents.

Other researchers have focused on the impact that the GCR may exert on specific regions, such as Africa (Ndonga Githinji and Wood, 2018; Sharpe, 2018; Carciotto and Ferraro, 2020), the Middle-East (Akram, 2019), or Asia Pacific (Goodwin-Gill, 2019). As in other contexts, the views tend to be quite polarized between those who see the GCR (often analysed in combination with the GCM) as not sufficient to address the specific needs of those displaced in the region; and those who highlight instead the role of the GCR in providing a framework within which stakeholders can operate more effectively to address the needs of those forcibly displaced.

In the future, it is reasonable to expect further analyses of the GCR, especially in relation to its implementation and operationalization in different regional contexts. It is nonetheless worth highlighting how scholars have already noticed its potential to ‘galvanize change’ (Betts, 2018) and ‘provide a timely and much-needed impetus to re-energize local strategies’ (Akram, 2019).

4. Conclusions

Academic work on forced displacement is complex and multifaceted. In this paper we have illustrated some of the trajectories of its development without any ambition for completeness but highlighting some of the core characteristics that shape contemporary scholarship on refugees and refugee crisis management. We have seen that, despite the sharp increase in academic research production on displacement, this is highly concentrated in and dependent on high-income countries. Reflecting a broader and problematic connection between power and knowledge, the “Global North” with its academic centres and research funding schemes dominates the field of research. Nonetheless, the issues related to forced displacement concern all world regions and therefore knowledge production about these phenomena should be inclusive to more accurately reflect the reality. How can this bias be corrected to better reflect a principle of inclusiveness and to make knowledge about refugee-related issues genuinely universal?

There is a need for the facilitation of greater symmetry in the academic debate between interlocutors of different parts of the world and different academic centres. Initiatives such as the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum and the UNHCR Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network are examples of interactions between academia and socio-political actors that can decentralize the debate and foster collaborations across different institutions around the world.

We have highlighted, furthermore, the multiple respects in which the academic debate on refugees has evolved, contributing critically and constructively to public thinking and policymaking. No single response, no single academic discipline, no one-size-fits-all approach, can address comprehensively the questions that policymakers, humanitarian actors, host

communities, and displaced people themselves raise. A call for interdisciplinarity may seem the obvious consequence of this, but we have also shown that each disciplinary field retains value through its degree of specialism reflected in methodologies, concepts, and approaches that make each of these disciplines unique. There is a trade-off between expanding the field of enquiry to integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives and deepening knowledge within each disciplinary context. Interdisciplinarity has importance for its capacity of facilitating an integrated perspective, but discipline-specific knowledge often better reflects the academic mission of in-depth analytical work to respond to the characteristics of each type of crisis.

This then raises a final point, to what extent has scholarly research succeeded in offering useful notions and thoughts to those involved in phenomena of displacement? In some cases, it was possible to illustrate a connection between knowledge production and policymaking but in others the connection is not as obvious. The policy-scholarly gap needs to be addressed so that academic research can acquire better sources and greater awareness of the challenges produced by displacement crises and policymakers can as well benefit from the thinking, innovation, and knowledge that good scholarly work can offer them. This is also important in a long-term perspective given that researchers are often also the teachers and educators that will form the next humanitarian operators as well as the citizens and social groups that will be living side to side with displaced populations. At the same time, reinforcing the collaborative efforts between academia and international organizations can lead to concrete results in terms of better policies. For example, collaborations in relation to the collection and analysis of data can critically inform the design of policies and ultimately benefit those forcibly displaced.

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Appendix

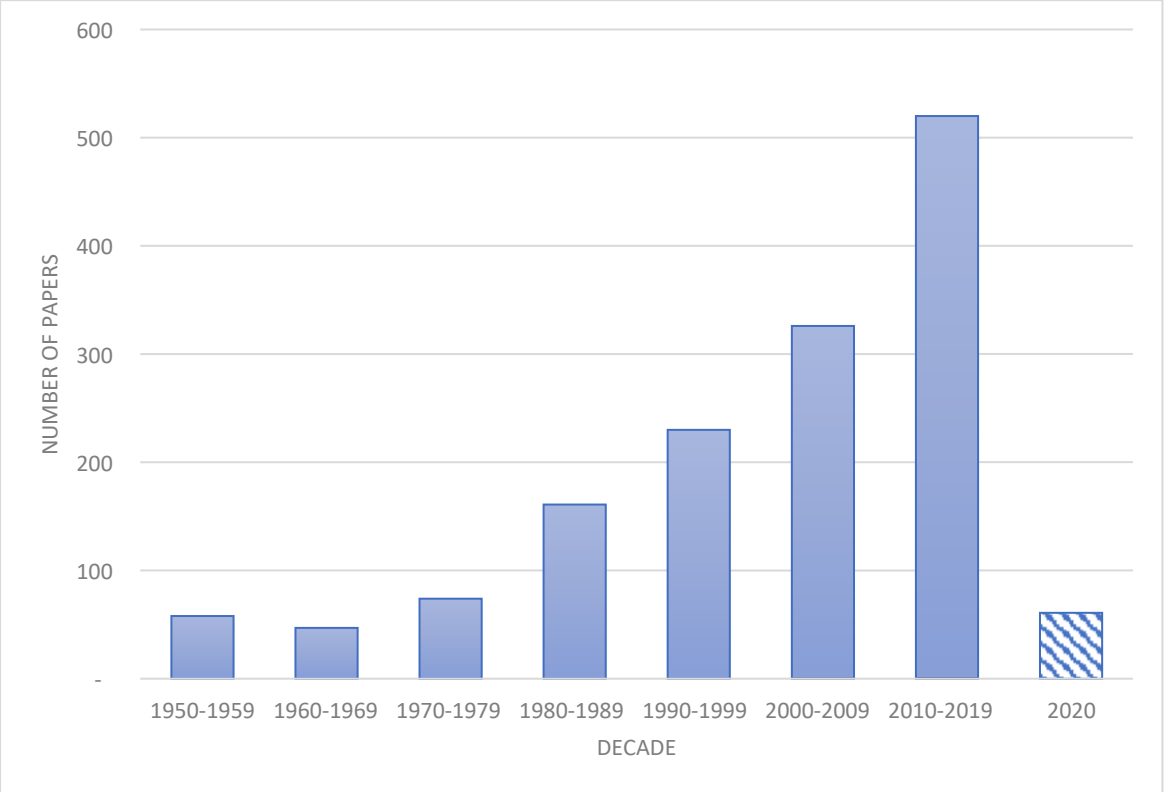


Figure A.1: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Political Sciences
Note: Authors' calculations based on data from ProQuest. Details available from the authors.

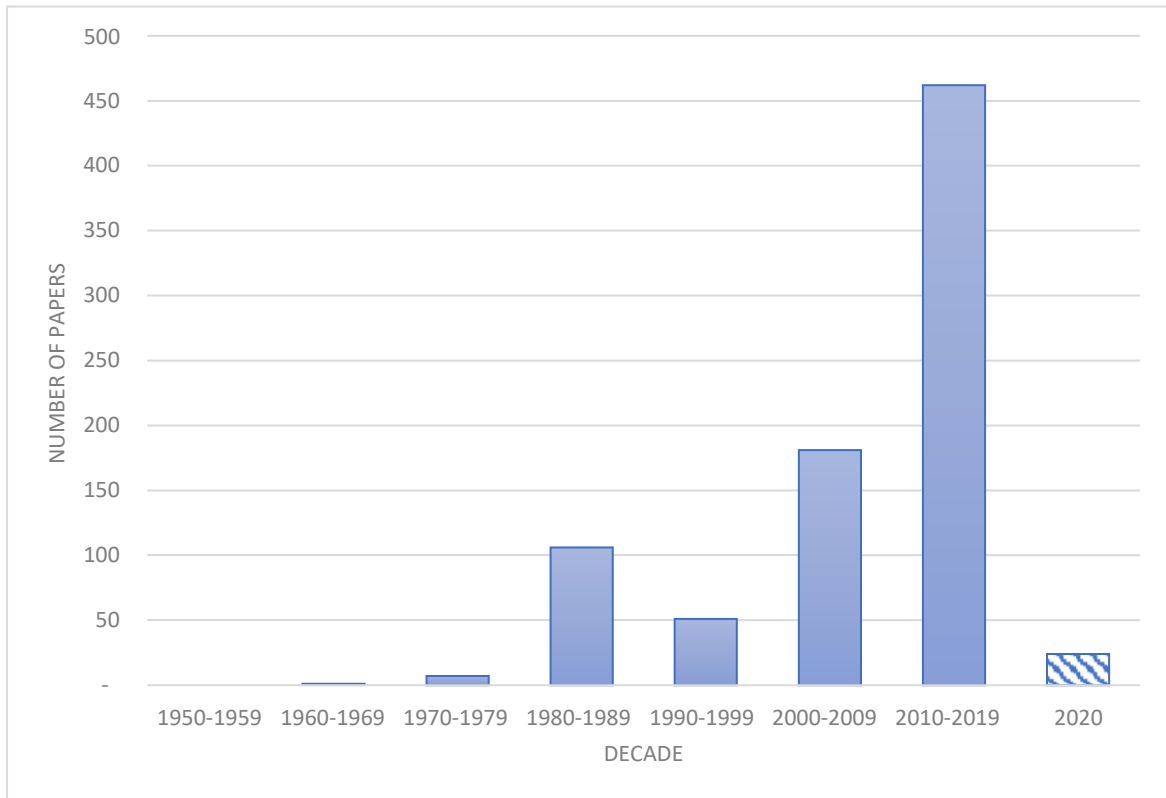


Figure A.2: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Education
 Note: Authors' calculations based on data from ProQuest. Details available from the authors.

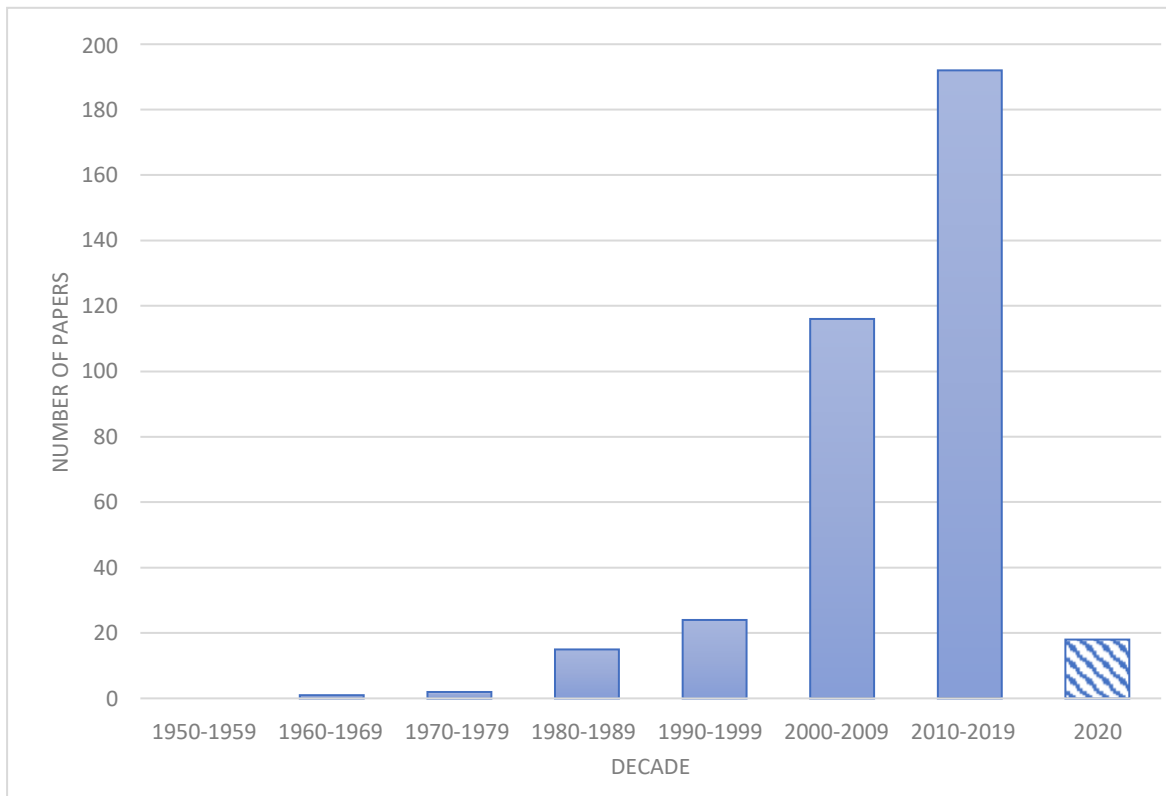


Figure A.3: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Urban Studies, Geography and Architecture
 Note: Authors' calculations based on data from ProQuest. Details available from the authors.

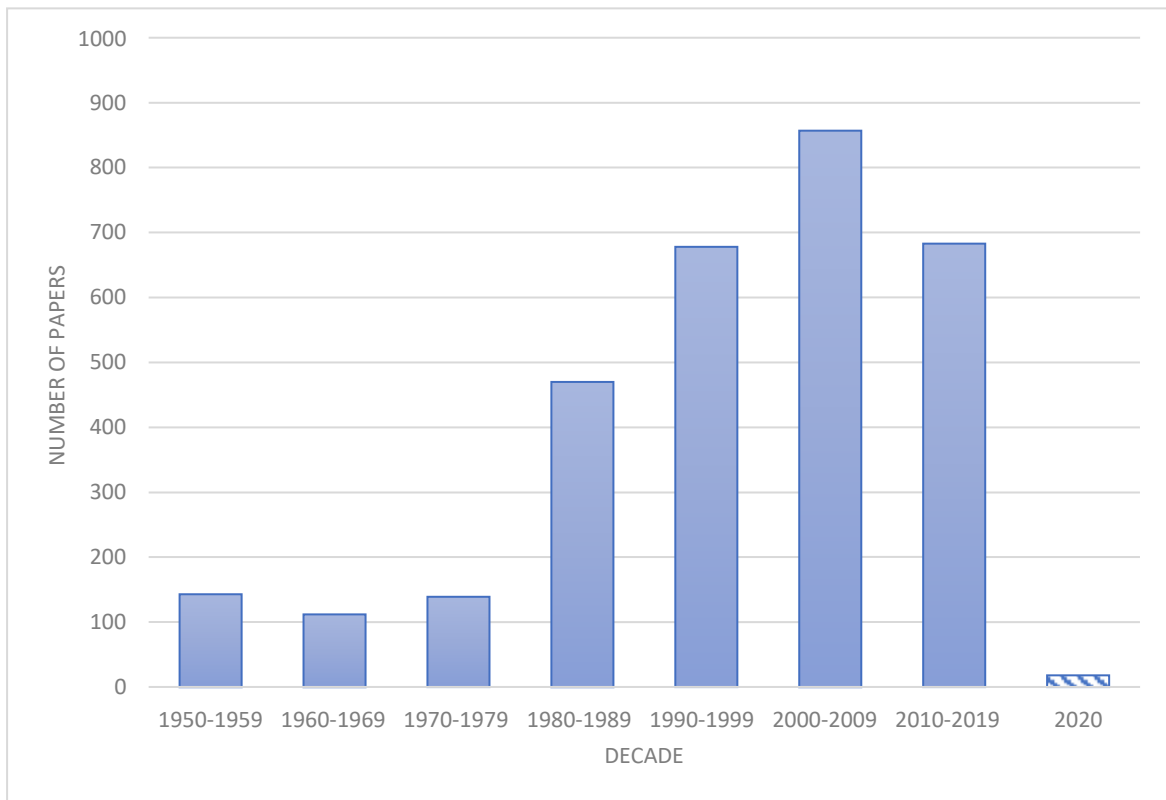


Figure A.4: Number of papers on forced displacement by decade; Anthropology
 Note: Authors' calculations based on data from JSTOR. Details available from the authors.