

Refugees in the Mediterranean. Flight, Migration, and Relief during the Twentieth Century

Call for Papers

International Workshop organized by Ruth Nattermann, PI “Transnational Humanitarianism and Refugee Policy in the Age of World Wars” (DFG), Research Centre Global Dynamics

(ReCentGlobe), University of Leipzig

23.10.2025 – 24.10.2025

Location: Rome, Italy

Deadline: 15.12.2024

With the ongoing refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and the current escalation of the Israeli-Arab conflict, research into refugees, migration and forced displacement has gained major significance in contemporary European and Global History. Works at the intersection of refugee studies and the history of humanitarianism are moving into the center of relevant investigations. In this context, the Mediterranean has received key attention as a place of origin of fascist regimes and colonial forms of rule in North Africa, a central sphere for Jewish migration, global center of the Catholic Church, and an important area of transit and socio-cultural transfer between North and South, Orient and Occident, which shaped refugee movements as well as humanitarian actors throughout the Twentieth Century. This workshop invites contributions that investigate displacement, migration, and refugee relief in Southern European countries, the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa during the Twentieth Century. The main temporal focus lies on (but is not limited to) the period between the early 1920s and the late 1960s, discussing the effects of continued or renewed conflicts on refugees in the Mediterranean from the first postwar period to the aftermath of the Second World War and the first decades of the State of Israel.

The workshop aims at a critical discussion of contemporary refugee history in the Mediterranean from a long-term perspective and within an interdisciplinary framework, including social, cultural, and legal sciences. The concept expresses the need for further in-depth, source-critical, and comparative studies into refugees and relief work, analyzing problems and shortcomings of the past that have persisted within international refugee policy to this day. We are interested in new research that perceive refugees (individuals and/or groups) as active historical actors, and examine critically the strategies of relief work and power structures within donor-recipient relationships, drawing on original sources such as ego documents, relevant organizational archives, visual documents, oral history projects, etc.

Papers are welcome that correspond to the following broad themes:

- The role of gender, race, and social class in human mobility and refugeedom
- Religious, ethnic, and political identities of refugees and humanitarians and their impact on intra-Mediterranean migration and aid structures
- Intra-Mediterranean migration and socio-cultural transfer, as well as transatlantic/global connections and relief networks
- Fascistization of humanitarian movements and organizations versus anti-fascist refugee relief in national, colonial, and transnational contexts
- Displacement and forced migration as lived experience, (non-)communication of violence
- Gender-based violence and exploitation; gender dynamics and hierarchies within relevant humanitarian organizations and networks
- Human rights discourse and development of international refugee law
- Visual representation and reception of refugees
- Relations between local and global actors; intergovernmental, state, and non-state organizations

The workshop is organized in the framework of the DFG-funded project “Transnational Humanitarianism and Refugee Policy in the Age of World Wars” (Research Centre Global Dynamics at the University of Leipzig) and will take place in Rome, October 23-24, 2025.

The workshop will be conducted in English. Abstracts of up to 300 words along with a short CV should be sent by December 15, 2024, to Ruth Nattermann (natterma@hotmail.com; Ruth.Nattermann@uni-leipzig.de). Successful applicants will be notified by January 31, 2025. Accommodation and on-the-need-basis travel reimbursement will be provided to active participants.