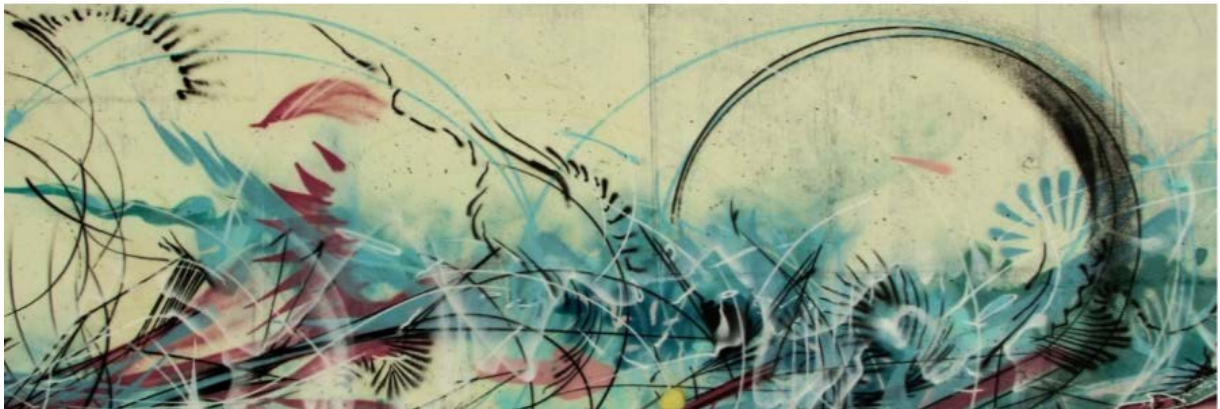# Critical Reflection

KOFF Master Class, February 2021

"Involuntary Immobility: Implications for Peace(building)"

Lucia Bird, Senior Analyst, GITOC
Natalina Haller, Intern, KOFF/swisspeace
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Building on previous work by the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF, the Master Class on "Involuntary Immobility: Implications for Peace(building)", which took place on February 4, 2021, shed light on the issue of migrants trapped in involuntary immobility.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the workshop was held online. It brought together experts from peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian aid. After a conceptual introduction by two guest speakers, the participants from research, practice, and academia conducted a context-specific analysis on involuntary immobility in smaller groups, which allowed them to apply the concept to a real situation. This contributed to the Master Class' applicability and timeliness.

This critical reflection will present the theoretical background of the Master Class and highlight the topic's relevance.

# Key Concept: Involuntary Immobility

Aspirations/ability model

In the first part of the Master Class, Jørgen Carling, Co-director of the PRIO Migration Centre, introduced the participants to the concept of involuntary immobility and its relevance to migration and peace studies.

The "aspiration/ability model" aims to explain why some people migrate while others stay behind. Essentially, the model argues that the reason why people migrate is explicable through two characteristics: a person's aspiration to migrate and their ability to follow this aspiration. Only a small percentage of those who would prefer to migrate are able to do so. A person becomes involuntary immobile, when they are aspiring to migrate, but are not able to follow this aspiration (Carling & Schewel 2018). Both their aspirations and abilities – and therefore ultimately their involuntary immobility – are influenced by many factors on different levels: macro-level obstacles such as restrictive migration policies, and micro-level characteristics on the individual scale, such as gender, age, social status, etc (Carling 2002).
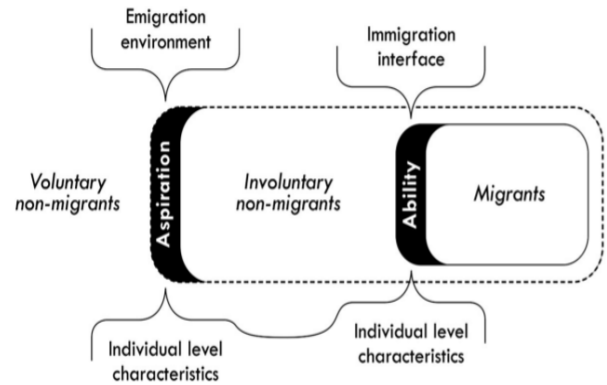
Aspiration/ability model (Carling 2002)

As became clear in the KOFF Master Class, situations of involuntary immobility are not only visible in places where people remain trapped in their original circumstances. On top of that, they may also arise as the *outcome* of a migration attempt. As an example, this may occur in contexts where migration routes are interrupted by a *hostile immigration interface* (external conditions during one's immigration, e.g., restrictive immigration policies, lack of access to housing, flawed asylum procedures) and therefore result in *failed migration attempts* (e.g., becoming stuck on the way).
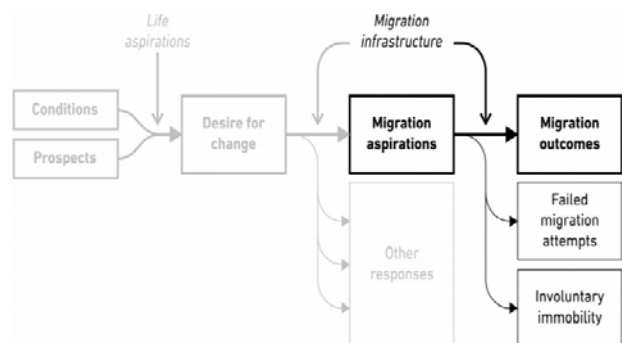
A model of the mechanisms that produce migration (Carling 2017, p. 5)

Immobility can exacerbate already existing tensions and is sometimes a cause for new conflict. Oftentimes, migration is a chain of connected processes. Especially with failed migration outcomes and involuntary immobility, frustration and resignation increase in those affected. It is therefore important to leverage peacebuilding potential and identify risks at the peace-migration nexus when it comes to involuntary immobility. In other words: peacebuilding must consider the specific situation of migrants trapped in some sort of involuntary immobile situation.

Human rights activists, scholars, national and international NGOs point not only to inter-group tensions, but also to the less visible violence at the individual, domestic, and intra-group level, especially in and around refugee camps (Grossenbacher 2020).

This spectrum of violence refers essentially to the terms described by Galtung (1990).

- Structural violence: e.g., lack of political rights, of freedom of movement, of access to education and health, etc.
- Direct violence: e.g., domestic violence, gender-based violence, trafficking in people, (hate) crime, etc.
- Cultural violence: e.g., hate speech, stereotypes, harmful narratives, etc.

Consequently, one could argue that in a situation of involuntary immobility, the affected communities, e.g., the host and migrant communities, are at risk of increased inter- and intra-group conflict across horizontal and vertical lines. Fostering social cohesion and healthy relationships is therefore key to conflict prevention and needs to be considered even in contexts, which are not yet affected by violent conflict (Grossenbacher 2020, p. 21).

The participants of the Master Class discussed how people develop aspirations to move, what factors might impede them in doing so, and what role technology plays in shaping aspirations. Furthermore, there were discussions around the psychosocial impact of involuntary immobility on the affected persons. These remarks indicated that the participants understand involuntary immobility as an aspect to address in their peacebuilding engagement. This makes it all the more important for platforms such as KOFF to provide spaces of reflection and learning on this topic.

Consequences of Involuntary Immobility

Vulnerability to Organized Crime

Lucia Bird, Senior Analyst at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime GITOC, drew the connection to further vulnerabilities, which may be experienced by in-

voluntary immobile persons. In the following, this is illustrated with the example of human smuggling.

Human smuggling is an entire crime type created to meet the needs of the involuntarily immobile. Migrants and refugees move independently where they are able to do so. Smugglers are only required where legal avenues for movement are not available, or too costly, and obstacles to irregular movement are impassable independently. The greater the barriers the movement, the higher the demand for smugglers. Consequently, as legal migration pathways shrink, and borders become increasingly securitized, human smuggling has become increasingly pivotal to modern migration mechanics (Reitano & Bird 2018).

Covid-19 triggered unprecedented movement restrictions to be imposed across the world, swelling involuntary immobile populations. In line with this and underscoring the relationship between human smuggling and migration pathways, research points to an increase in demand for the services of smugglers, and a rise in fees charged by smugglers for their services, since the start of the pandemic.[1]

Increases in fees can have serious implications for the protection risks of migrants and refugees. Some who cannot afford the new fees can find themselves trapped in stasis, either at the point of origin, in transit, or at the destination but wishing to return home. For those in transit, as funds run out due to delays on the journey, vulnerabilities increase. Price hikes may also engender 'pay as you go' and 'travel now, pay later' schemes, where migrants work along the journey to pay off debt to the smuggler. These have been found to significantly increase the vulnerabilities of those on the move, including to exploitation in contexts that constitute trafficking (Malakooti 2020).

Obstacles to movement, such as securitized borders, can create concentrated pools of trapped migrant populations. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a growing transit point for migrants and refugees on the Western Balkans route to Europe, a growing number are sheltering in camps in and near the town of Bihać, in the northwest of the country near the Croatian border. These static migrant and refugee populations are highly vulnerable to exploitation by a range of actors: reports of human trafficking (particularly for sexual exploitation) and extortion in the camps are common.

More broadly, refugee camps and informal shelters are an easy recruitment ground for both human smuggling and human trafficking networks. For example, in Serbia, where

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informal camps and shelters have sprung up across the country (concentrated ahead of areas which prove difficult to cross), smuggling networks reportedly station a member of the network in each camp to facilitate recruitment, and onwards travel, of migrants and refugees.

Flawed policy has created stagnant, concentrated pools of people behind newly securitized borders. These pools of vulnerable individuals constitute a potential profit source for a wide range of criminal entrepreneurs, including human traffickers. The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered further securitization of borders, while also increasing the drivers for migration as livelihoods evaporate (GITOC 2020). Cumulatively, this is set to swell trapped migrant populations, at point of origin, transit and destination. In the context of the pandemic, the risks of contagion add to the protection risks of those on the move and in refugee camps.

To mitigate this, it is key to enable legal migration routes where feasible. Further, it is important to facilitate the localized movement of refugees and other migrants in transit states, to spread numbers more thinly across a large geographic region, avoiding stagnant populations and maximize the chances of integration.

Case Study: Social (de-)cohesion in the Rohingya "refugee crisis" in Bangladesh

Abovementioned implications of involuntary immobility for peace were also addressed in Andrea Grossenbacher's input during the Master Class. She is a Program Officer with KOFF/swisspeace and author of the 2020 KOFF "Toolbox: Migration in Peacebuilding".

Addressing social cohesion is key in peacebuilding, as instable, mistrusting, and exclusive societies face a higher risk of conflict recurrence. The presence of migrants – particularly people trapped in a situation against their will – has an effect on the host community and might even intensify previously existing inter- as well as intracommunal tensions. Especially fragile and instable host countries struggle with the challenges and resulting vulnerabilities for certain social groups, especially within migrant communities. The impact of migration on social cohesion however depends on migration policies, support services, the socioeconomic environment, and similar factors – in Carling's (2002) words, on the immigration interface. These are the very conditions that also influence a person's migration outcome, e.g., their involuntary immobility or failed migration attempt.

To meet the needs of the involuntary immobile as well as those of the host community, and to foster social cohesion, peacebuilding initiatives need to work on trust building, solidarity, inclusion, etc. in a comprehensive and conflict-sensitive way, aiming for sustainable peace.

In the context of the Rohingya refugees 'crisis' in Bangladesh, the social cohesion between and within the host and migrant communities is characterized by several factors. On the one hand, the Rohingya fled to Bangladesh with the aspiration to return to Myanmar one day. However, they are unable to do so. Furthermore, challenges arise regarding restrictions on mobility imposed by the Bangladeshi authorities and the refugees are subject to increased vulnerabilities due to structural, cultural and direct violence. This not only refers to domestic violence and risk of intracommunal conflict, but also to growing tension between the host and the refugee community around Cox's Bazar.

In order to address these risks in peacebuilding, Grossenbacher (2020) finds several entry-points. Firstly, conducting an integrated analysis of the conflict and migration context will help to understand the conflict lines, types of violence, relationships, and roles as well as individual needs and interests. Furthermore, research on social cohesion can provide knowledge about what factors exacerbate social de-cohesion and enhance tensions. Social cohesion initiatives in situations of involuntary immobility need to be designed comprehensively, which requires a human rights-based approach and cooperation between migration, peacebuilding, security, development, and humanitarian sectors. This cooperation should then follow both multilateral and multitrack processes, bridging the gap between migration policies, everyday practice, and local experiences.

This should be accompanied by psycho-social support and the provision of trauma healing services in both host and migrant communities. To contribute to formal and informal dealing with the past processes, peacebuilders can also engage in documentation and archiving; and support and start initiatives that counter harmful narratives, in order to enhance trust and break cycles of violence.

Outlook and ways forward

This Master Class was organized as part of an internship project, which connected to the KOFF joint learning process on migration and peacebuilding. It aimed to show that when addressing migration in peacebuilding, not only people on the move are relevant, but also people who are affected by some sort of negative migration outcome or involuntary immobility. Generally, there is great need for regular migration routes, and thus for a broadened ability to migrate and for a decriminalization of migration in general. It is crucial to avoid situations of trapped migration and to invest in inclusive integration programs as well as to foster progressive migration policies. Contexts in which decision-makers fail to acknowledge this need for sustainable responses to migration, risk provoking and exacerbating violence and conflict, especially at times of mobility-restricting crises such as Covid-19. The Master Class confirmed the relevance of these dynamics for peacebuilding – an assumption that served

as the starting point of the Master Class' organization, especially as it is a highly topical issue concerning Europe.

On the Aegean islands, psychosocial professionals have been reporting extreme cases of self-directed violence for years, and the situation has significantly worsened over the past year, as Covid-19 measures have effectively constrained the migrants' mobility. Human Rights Watch (hrw.org, 23.3.21) reports "discriminatory restrictions" containing the people in overcrowded camps, exposed to limited access to health care and sanitation as well as a grave lack of hygiene products to protect the camps from a spread of Covid-19. Furthermore, the fire, which destroyed Europe's largest refugee camp Moria, left nearly 13'000 people without shelter. Those affected have been transferred to a new camp, Kara Tepe, on the island of Lesvos, where reports show an aggravation of the previously already horrendous situation. These abysmal circumstances lead to extreme levels of frustration, fear, traumatization, and ultimately violence towards others and oneself. Especially women are at a high risk of becoming victim to gender-based violence and harassment, and services for vulnerable persons and survivors of violence remain insufficient. One result of this lack of protectionary measures and facilities, which sparked international outrage, was the case of a three-year-old girl, who was raped at Kara Tepe camp in December 2021 (infomigrants.net, 23.3.21).

Peacebuilders must consider these systematic intersections of violence and migration. Situations of trapped migration, involuntary immobility, and negative migration outcomes are closely intertwined with conflict and violence. There is great need for peacebuilding expertise in conflict prevention and conflict resolution, and it is crucial to build alliances with humanitarian organizations and other actors on the ground, in order to address conflictual inter- and intra-personal tendencies.

The KOFF platform will continue to support joint analysis, reflection, and learning on this and other related topics, in order to build the ground for these alliances, and thereby contribute to sustainable solutions to current challenges.

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The Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF brings together Swiss civil society and governmental actors active in peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and gender equality. The strengths of the KOFF Platform stems from the wide range of expertise, experiences, and perspectives among its member organizations in Switzerland and their partners abroad. These competences are at the core of the platform's work, both in developing joint strategies and approaches for peacebuilding in practice and in informing peace policy at Swiss and international level.

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