



A Symposium about Syrians in Japan

Date: July 21st, 14:00 - 16:30

Place: Sophia University, Yotsuya Campus,
Bldg. 10, Room 301

In person only

Please register from HERE: <https://forms.office.com/r/NrRaB5qXXm>



Thirteen years have passed since the beginning of the popular uprising, armed conflict, and mass displacement in Syria. Twelve million Syrians, half of the country's population, are either internally displaced or have become refugees around the world, which makes it one of the worst mass displacement crises in our modern history. Despite having a rigid refugee system, being far from the Middle East, and being an unpopular destination for Middle Eastern migrants, hundreds of Syrians came to Japan after 2011. According to official statistics, there were only 150 Syrian residents in Japan by 2010, but the number had increased to 1,312 by the end of 2023. The symposium introduces the Syrian culture, the reasons for Syrians to resettle in Japan, their legal treatment by the Japanese authorities, socioeconomic activities, social contributions, the ongoing integration process, higher education, and future aspirations.

Program

Welcome to the workshop Series “Insider Perspectives: Scholars Investigating their Own Cultural Milieu in Japan”

David Slater - Sophia University

Beyond identity politics in Syria: Social identities and intergroup interactions

Dania Alakkad - Hiroshima University

Exploring Syrian Migration to Japan: Motivations and Realities

Yahya Aoyagi (Almasri) - University of Hyogo

Empowering Through Education: Analyzing Japan’s Complementary Pathways for Refugee resettlement and integration

Suzan Hussein - Waseda University

From destination to transit stop: Syrian refugees revising their dreams in Japan

Mohammed Al-Masri - Waseda University

Paper Abstracts and Scholar Bios

Beyond identity politics in Syria: Social identities and intergroup interactions

Dania Alakkad - Hiroshima University

The complex political scene, war atrocities, and refugee crisis have been the focus of intensive studies on the Syrian conflict since 2011. While the bulk of these studies focus on domestic, regional and international politics, little efforts are made to understand social realities and daily life interactions among the Syrian population. My research is an attempt to scratch the surface of Syrian social identities to understand the patterns of communication between civilians beyond the political interpretations of social relations. It aims to discover shared social norms’ function and the acquired values of global citizenship’s role in initiating peaceful intergroup relations.

I synthesize the current debates on Syrian national identity to explain the current complex political context. After that, I turn to social identity theories to escape the political hegemony on social representation. This turn anchors my conceptual framework in the actual dynamics of intragroup formation and intergroup relations. In this symposium, I will explain the cultural diversity in Syria as well as lifestyles in rural and urban cities. I synthesize available secondary data that describe patterns of interactions inside Syria and in countries that host Syrian refugees. This presentation constitutes the departure point of my research to scrutinize the practical attitudes and commonalities between Syrian social milieus to forge better relational identities.



Dania Alakkad is a PhD student in humanities and social sciences at Hiroshima University, Japan. She is a specialist in international peace and co-existence. Dania has a bachelor’s degree in law from Damascus University and a master’s degree in international development and cooperation, and she is engaged in developing a human rights ap-

proach to peacebuilding. Her current endeavors are dedicated to studying the pragmatic co-existence among social divisions of conflict-affected areas.

Exploring Syrian Migration to Japan: Motivations and Realities

Yahya Aoyagi (Almasri) - Hiroshima University

The protracted Syrian war has triggered one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world, forcibly displacing over 12 million Syrians from their homes, equivalent to half of the country's population. In response, Syrians embarked on perilous journeys in the hope of restarting their lives in safety and dignity. Hundreds of Syrians decided to go far away—to Japan—although its notoriously rigid asylum system deters both bona fide and bogus asylum seekers from even entertaining the idea of flying to the East Asian nation. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian war, there were only 150 Syrian residents in Japan by 2010, but the number had increased to 1,312 by the end of 2023. Dr. Yahya examines the reasons behind the Syrian migration to Japan and deciphers the legal treatment of Syrians by Japanese immigration authorities. By analyzing the findings of surveys and interviews with Syrians in Japan conducted between 2015 and 2023 and utilizing his firsthand experience assisting refugee lawyers and interpreting for immigration officers, Yahya explores the Japanese authorities' policies and procedures concerning Syrians in Japan, especially those who opt for informal asylum and never apply for refugee status.



Dr. Yahya Aoyagi (Almasri) is an assistant professor at the School of Economics and Management, University of Hyogo. His main research interests are migration, forced migration, multicultural coexistence, and Japan-Middle Eastern affairs. He holds a Ph.D. in International Public Policy from Osaka University, Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP). His Ph.D. dissertation examined the informal asylum of Syrians in Japan and their socioeconomic conditions. Yahya's interest in refugees began in 2015, conducting research internships in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. He has worked with Japanese refugee lawyers and refugee-support NGOs in the Kansai and Kanto regions. Additionally, he contributed to shaping Japan's response to the higher education crisis unfolding in Syria. He submitted a policy proposal to the Government of Japan advocating for scholarships to be granted to Syrian students in early 2016.

Empowering Through Education: Analyzing Japan's Complementary Pathways for Refugee resettlement and integration

Suzan Hussein - Waseda University

This study critically examines the role of educational pathways within complementary pathways (CP) in Japan, as a means to facilitate access to higher education for refugees, aligning with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4. Through a qualitative case study approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this research delves into the initiation, evolution, and impact of the Japanese Language School Program (JLSP) and other educational pathways designed for refugees. The analysis is centered on understanding how these pathways not only provide refugees with crucial educational opportunities but also support their integration and future prospects within Japanese society. This research is critical in exploring the efficacy of UNHCR's Complementary Pathways Policy in promoting higher education access under CP projects in Japan, the developmental and implementation facets of Japanese Lan-

guage Education Programs for Complementary Pathways students, and the substantial educational and social outcomes. Expected to enrich global discourses on refugee education and integration, this study underscores the significance of educational pathways in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, shedding light on Japan's contribution towards fulfilling the ambitions of the 15by30 target and SDG 4, and reinforcing the principles of inclusivity as detailed by the GCR.



Souzan Husseini is a PhD candidate in International Relations at Waseda University, Japan, specializing in educational pathways for refugees. She has a rich background in the humanitarian sector, having served as a Procurement Officer for Global Communities and Qatar Red Crescent in Turkey, and as a Logistics Assistant for International Medical Corps. Her academic and professional experiences merge to enhance her research on resettlement through education and policy evolution, aiming to impact refugee lives positively in Japan.

From destination to transit stop: Syrian refugees revising their dreams in Japan

Mohammed Al-Masri - Waseda University

Resettlement through safer routes and less competitive pathways to unusual destinations has become a viable option for many Syrian refugees. Within twelve years, migration to Japan shifted from a historically lesser-known path with less than 200 Syrians residing in the country to a relatively more popular sanctuary with over 1300 in 2022 (MoJ, 2023).

Due to the highly esteemed reputation of Japan within the Arab region and the perceived image of life in Japan, Syrians had high expectations and long-term aspirations assuming challenges would be considerably minor. Upon arrival, many changed their plans and decided to leave Japan despite the exceptional quality of life and the convenience of the country.

In this symposium, I'll shed light on the socio-economic factors behind Japan's becoming a transit stop for many newly arrived Syrians. Most of the existing research focuses on immobility in underdeveloped countries of refuge, people's inability to leave their country of origin, asylum seekers stranded in 'transit' countries, and refugees' repatriation barriers. This study shall investigate an unusual case where refugees are living in a developed country presumed to be their final destination, only to realize it has become another phase in their journey.



Mohammed Al-Masri is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, and a researcher with Access Center for Human Rights. Since 2014, Al-Masri has been working with refugee-led non-profit organizations in Syria, Lebanon, and Japan. He holds a BA in English literature from Al-Baath University, Syria, and an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. His doctoral research project investigates the unusualness of Japan as a destination for Syrian refugees and migrants and explores their adaptation strategies, self-identification, naturalization motives, and future aspirations.

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