"THIS IS THEIR MENTALITY" – THE ROLE OF HABITUS ON INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Since the summer of 2015 some of the North Aegean Islands have received a huge influx of refugees, mainly from the Middle East war-zones. Under the EU-Turkey "Common Statement", in March 2016, migrants arriving in Greece are now expected to be sent back to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or their claim is rejected. That, in combination with the increasing anti-immigration rhetoric in some EU countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the ensuing tightening of the EU border controls, started to create a sense of an "entrapment" of the newcomers (migrants/refugees) inside the Greek territory. Refugee who decided (unwillingly or not) to apply for asylum in Greece, have –among other things– to rapidly adapt themselves to the new socio-economic environment. This paper focuses on the case of Lesvos (the biggest in size of all the Aegean islands, and the one that received the biggest inflow of refugees in the last five years), and it attempts to capture key aspects of educational provision for refugee children/adolescents (6-17 year old) at: 1) an official RIC, 2) a municipal host-camp, and 3) a refugee shelter run by NGOs

and Solidarity groups. The study's target population is educators working in the RIC, the camp and the shelter, who offer courses to refugee minors, as well as general support services to their families. This field research is based on semi-structured interviews with some of those volunteers. Enlightened by the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his notion of *habitus*, we attempt to explore the conscious or unconscious formulation of differentiated "horizons for action" between native educators, on one hand, and refugees/students, on the other, in the sense that each individual based on her/his own *habitus,* which is heavily conditioned by certain qualities and quantities of "economic", "social" and "cultural" *capital,* exercises widely contrasting strategies and develops diverse actions resulting in differing outcomes.

Keywords: *migrants, refugees, Aegean Sea, Lesvos, education, habitus, distinction.*

▉ ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Από το καλοκαίρι του 2015 ορισμένα από τα νησιά του Βορείου Αιγαίου δέχθηκαν τεράστια εισροή προσφύγων, κυρίως από τις ζώνες πολέμου στη Μέση Ανατολή. Σύμφωνα με την «Κοινή Δήλωση» ΕΕ-Τουρκίας, τον Μάρτιο του 2016, οι μετανάστες που φθάνουν στην Ελλάδα αναμένεται να σταλούν πίσω στην Τουρκία εάν δεν υποβάλουν αίτηση ασύλου ή η αίτησή τους απορριφθεί. Αυτό, σε συνδυασμό με την αυξανόμενη ρητορική κατά της μετανάστευσης σε ορισμένες χώρες της Κεντρικής και Ανατολικής Ευρώπης και την επακόλουθη εντατικοποίηση των συνοριακών ελέγχων της ΕΕ, άρχισε να δημιουργεί μια αίσθηση «παγίδευσης» των νεοεισερχόμενων στην ελληνική επικράτεια. Πρόσφυγες που αποφάσισαν (απρόθυμα ή όχι) να υποβάλουν αίτηση ασύλου στην Ελλάδα πρέπει να προσαρμοστούν γρήγορα στο νέο κοινωνικοοικονομικό περιβάλλον. Αυτό το άρθρο επι-κεντρώνεται στην περίπτωση της Λέσβου (το μεγαλύτερο σε μέγεθος νησί του Αιγαίου, το οποίο και δέχθηκε τη μεγαλύτερη εισροή προσφύγων τα τελευταία πέντε χρόνια), και επιχειρεί να συλλάβει βασικές πτυχές των εκπαιδευτικών δράσεων για παιδιά και εφήβους πρόσφυγες (6-17 ετών) σε: (1) ένα επίσημο Κέντρο Υποδοχής και Ταυτοποίη-σης (ΚΥΤ), (2) έναν δημοτικό καταυλισμό, και (3) ένα καταφύγιο προσφύγων που διευ-θύνεται από ΜΚΟ και ομάδες αλληλεγγύης. Ο πληθυσμός-στόχος της μελέτης είναι εκ-παιδευτικοί που εργάζονται στο ΚΥΤ, στον καταυλισμό και στο καταφύγιο, οι οποίοι/ες προσφέρουν μαθήματα σε ανήλικους/ες πρόσφυγες, καθώς και γενικές υπηρεσίες υπο-στήριξης στις οικογένειές τους. Αυτή η έρευνα πεδίου βασίζεται σε ημιδομημένες συ-νεντεύξεις με μερικούς/ές από αυτούς/ές τους/τις εθελοντές/τριες. Βασιζόμενοι/ες στο θεωρητικό έργο του Pierre Bourdieu, ειδικά την έννοια του habitus, προσπαθούμε να διερευνήσουμε τον συνειδητό ή ασυνείδητο σχηματισμό διαφοροποιημένων «οριζόντων για δράση» μεταξύ γηγενών εκπαιδευτικών, αφενός, και προσφύγων μαθητών/τριών, αφετέρου, στον βαθμό που αυτοί οι ορίζοντες εξαρτώνται σε μεγάλο βαθμό από ορισμέ-νες ιδιότητες και ποσότητες «οικονομικού», «κοινωνικού» και «πολιτιστικού» κεφαλαίου ασκούν αντιφατικές συχνά στρατηγικές και αναπτύσσουν διαφοροποιημένες δράσεις, με διαφορετικά αποτελέσματα.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: *πρόσφυγες, Αιγαίο Πέλαγος, Λέσβος, εκπαίδευση, habitus, διάκριση*

◼ INTRODUCTION

From the summer of 2015, Greece has experienced a huge influx of refugees, which by far exceeded existing capabilities in reception and hospitality (in addition to the stark socio-economic condition of a country already in its sixth year of recession). In 2014 the number of arrivals in Greece by sea was estimated at 41,000 persons, in 2015 the number climbed to more than 856,000, then dropped significantly in the next three consecutive years, but it rose again in the second half of 2019. From January to October 2019, some 57,100 refugees and migrants have arrived in Greece by land and sea, 32% more than the same period last year (43,300) (UNHCR, 2019).

Throughout this crisis, refugees and migrants arriving in Europe have not intended to stay in Greece, but instead aimed to continue their journey towards other EU countries. Circumstances "started to change drastically as of mid-February 2016, with the progressive establishment of border restrictions between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, followed by further restrictions along the Western Balkans route, leading to an effective closure of the route on 8 March 2016 for non-EU citizens without requisite documentation" (UNHCR, 2016, p. 10). Under the EU-Turkey deal ("Common Statement") in March 2016, migrants arriving in Greece are now expected to be sent back to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or their claim is being rejected. That, in combination with the increasing anti-immigration rhetoric in some EU countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the ensuing tightening of the EU border controls, started to create a sense of an "entrapment" of the newcomers (migrants/refugees) inside the Greek territory. As of end of January 2020, Greece hosted 115,600 refugees, of whom 74,400 located in the mainland and 41,200 on the islands (UNHCR, 2020). Some of the Aegean Islands close to the Turkish coastline (mainly Lesvos, Chios, Kos, Leros, Samos) shared the largest burden of the refugee population. Lesvos has been deeply affected by major refugee flows. In 2019, according to official figures, 7,622 persons applied for asylum in Lesvos (a total of 42,862 from 2013), as compared to 453 in Rhodes and 4,844 in Samos (4,066 and 19,128 from 2013, respectively)[1].

This paper focuses on the case of Lesvos, and it attempts to capture key aspects of informal educational provision for refugee children/adolescents (6 to 17-year-olds) at: a) an official "Reception and Identification Centre" (RIC), b) a

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1. See http://www.immigration.gov.gr/web/guest

municipal host-camp, and c) a refugee shelter run by NGOs and Solidarity groups. Enlightened by the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his notion of habitus (1977, 1984, 1988, 1990a,b,c, 1993, 1998), we attempt to explore the conscious or unconscious formulation of differentiated "horizons for action" between native educators, on one hand, and refugees/students, on the other.

The study's target population is educators working in the RIC, the camp and the shelter, who offer informal education classes to refugee minors, as well as general support services to their families. The field research combines semi-structured interviews with those volunteers and participant observation at the sites where they carry out their learning activities. For the purpose of this paper (which is part of an going process), we will limit our analysis to the semi-structured interviews.

■ THE NOTION OF *HABITUS*

Along with the other two famous notions of the "cultural capital" (and it various forms and manifestations) and of the "field", Bourdieu developed also an understanding of the operation of practices occurring in social relations, through the use of the concept "strategy'", which is understood as a specific orientation of practice. In contrast to the way the term is used in ordinary language, where it is based on conscious calculation, strategy in Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus is dependent on "habitus", which, as a result of socialisation, engenders in individuals a disposition below the level of consciousness to act or think in certain ways (Bourdieu, 1988, 1998; Reay, 2004, 2015). Habitus, is "genetically (as well as structurally) linked to a position" and it expresses both *the space* of the different or the opposed positions constitutive of social space […] and a practical stance *towards this space*" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 2; our emphasis). Thus, it is the "basis of strategies of reproduction that tend to maintain *separations, distances* and *relations of order(ing),* hence […] reproducing the entire system of differences constitutive of the social order" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 3; our emphasis).

The role of habitus in educational practices is a very important analytical tool for understanding attitudes and practices that produce or reproduce "distances" and "distinctions" between differently positioned persons in the social space(s). This is because education in industrial –as well as post-industrial– societies is usually associated to a more "meritocratic" social model and is perceived as a tool in the hands of organised polities (societies), in order to combat inequalities and injustices, and promote social mobility (Apple, 1981; Boudon, 1974; Halsey, Heath, & Ridge, 1980; Husen, 1974; Parsons, 1959).

■ AIM OF THE STUDY

In our study we try to capture key aspects of the educational provision for refugee children/adolescents (6-17 year old) in the island of Lesvos, Greece. The target group of this study, are school-age minors (i.e. below 18 years of age) who are offered informal classes on Greek language and some preparatory tutorials in various "core" subjects of the formal curriculum of the Greek primary & secondary school. We are interested in exploring how these "border dwellers" deal with these requirements, and how the "locals" who are engaged in educational provision treat them, consciously or not. In order to clarify why we chose this particular target group in this study (i.e. the "local educators" and *not* the refugees themselves), we need to point out that Lesvos, from the beginning of the crisis, is a unique example of a local administration that had to adapt and cope with the humanitarian crisis despite the *absence of central planning*, and has become a "new –at least for an EU country– and experimental model of 'humanitarian governance', involving international organisations, European institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)" (Psimitis, Georgoulas & Nagopoulos, 2017, p. 1).

Research questions that inform and guide –but not limit– our study, are the following:

1. What are the locals' intentions regarding the educational interventions for refugee children?
2. What models (if any) do the (volunteer) educators have in mind for the "integration" of refugee children within the local community?
3. What sort of pedagogical methods do the educators employ in order to educate their students, and which are their main aims in the curriculum content they offer?
4. What kind of conscious or unconscious differentiated "horizons for action" are evident among native educators, on one hand, and refugees/students, on the other?

The emerging *concepts, ideas, values* and *attitudes* that sprang out of the analysis have been linked to the notion of "habitus" because this concept can reveal the conscious or unconscious formation of differentiated "horizons for action" and exemplify the new divisions and "distinctions" (Bourdieu, 1984) that the "growth of politicised humanitarianism on a global scale" (Papataxiarchis, 2018, p. 239) may entail.

THE CONTEXT

Before we proceed with some notes about the methodology, which can be described as an "ethnography in unstable places" (Greenhouse 2002), we must sketch a brief account of the settings (social, spatial, political and emotional) in which this study took place.

– First, we have the "Moria" camp in Lesvos, which is a RIC (it is widely known as a "hotspot"), set up by the Greek Asylum Service. Five RICs started operating in Greece, on the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos. The "Moria" camp in Lesvos (just 7 kilometers away from the capital Mytilene, on its north-western side) became a "closed-type" detention centre. Today (March 5th, 2020), Moria hosts almost 20,000 persons, while its capacity stands at 2,800[2].

– Another examined site is the "Kara Tepe" camp, which is located about 2.5km to the northeast of Mytilene. The camp is managed by a special organisation affiliated to the Municipality of Lesvos and is under the supervision of the UNHCR. The purpose of the camp is to provide temporary housing for asylum seekers while they await their registration processes. As of December 2017, there were 990 recorded refugees at the Kara Tepe camp (Makris, 2017). While Kara Tepe has been lauded for its infrastructure and community-like atmosphere, the camp still faces a great deal of challenges, such as the inadequate access to electricity, limited space and resources for food preparation, lack of targeted mental health interventions for the youth, and poor access to legal advice. In August 2017, Kara Tepe's accommodation capacity was expanded by 56% to make room for up to 1250 persons (Kostaki, 2017). In early March 2020, the number of refugee and asylum seekers hosted in Kara Tepe reached the 1,235 persons[3].

– Lastly, the PIKPA's camp, or "Village of All Together", is an open refugee camp in Mytilene. It is a former summer camp for children, which was not in use and run-down, and from 2012 onwards it has been transformed to a self-organised, autonomous space run by volunteers. Its main objective is to stand in active solidarity with the refugees and "fight against the barbaric European immigration policies" (Lesvos Solidarity, 2015). In parallel, it raises awareness

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2. See https://infocrisis.gov.gr/8078/apotyposi-tis-ethnikis-ikonas-katastasis-gia-to-prosfygiko-metana steftiko-zitima-tin-5-3-2020/

3. See https://infocrisis.gov.gr/8078/apotyposi-tis-ethnikis-ikonas-katastasis-gia-to-prosfygiko-metanasteftiko-zitima-tin-5-3-2020/

and does advocacy work for human rights violations and any acts of humiliation, violence and attacks against refugees.

METHODOLOGY

Our study is a *case-study,* it is based on what is commonly called "interpretive research" epistemology and uses an ethnographic methodology. We find it useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localised occurrences or contexts and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs, or practices (Babbie, 2011, chap. 9; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, chap. 6).

The field research combines *semi-structured interviews* with people working as education and support staff in the refugee sites described above, as well as *participant observation* at the same sites, by members of the research team, in early 2018 (February-March). In this paper we will not focus on the material extracted from the participant observation process because this is on-going project.

The participants were four:

1. A male mathematics teacher, who was working with an NGO at the "Kara Tepe" site;
2. A young female teacher, recent university graduate of a Primary Education Department, who was working at the "Moria" RIC (hot-spot);
3. A female psychologist, who was working at the "PIKPA" site; and
4. A female education manager, who was working with an NGO at the "Kara Tepe" site.

All of them have been working with minors for more than 2 years in the island of Lesvos, not limiting their work in camps but also working in shelters and other welfare and/or education projects.

The main issues covered during the interviews were the following:

- The situation in the camps (problems, difficulties, actions)
- Results of the education programs in the last 2 years
- The present education programs (targets, structure, methodology)
- Problems and gaps in their relationship with the formal Greek education system
- Relations with the Local Community
- The interviewees' policy proposals for amelioration of the educational provision for the refugee children.

The interviews were (digitally) recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed interviews were analysed using open- and selective-coding procedures. That is, apart from the main themes, we did not "invent" any other kind of categories

of analysis, and we let words (that is concepts and notions inscribed into these words) springing out of interviewees during their conversation with the interviewer (e.g. words such as "rights", "children", "refugees", "need" "education", etc.). The results of that *first-level analysis,* which included the most frequently used concepts were then grouped into a *higher level of coding*, through the combination of words into semantically important phrases and whole sentences, leading to the creation of a more general reference framework than the previous one (e.g. "refugee children have every right to be educated"). That reiterative, inductive process led to a conceptual "saturation", in other words, to a point at which the information gathered begins to be redundant.

RESULTS

In presenting the findings of our study, the analytic schema regarding the various aspects of *habitus* proposed by D. Reay (2004) proved very helpful in reconstructing the way *habitus* was manifested in the interviewee's narratives. Reay (2004, pp. 432-435; also in 2015) in trying to unveil the psychosocial dimensions of the habitus, she offered three related aspects of it:

1. Habitus as *embodiment,* in the sense that habitus "is embodied, it is not composed solely of mental attitudes and perceptions".
2. The relation between habitus and *agency,* since habitus is "potentially generating a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action".
3. Habitus is a *compilation of collective and individual trajectories,* since a "person's individual history is constitutive of habitus, but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of".

Habitus as embodiment

As we said earlier, "habitus" is the result of socialisation and engenders in individuals a disposition below the level of consciousness to act or think in *certain ways* (Reay, 2004, 2015). Bourdieu notes that habitus is expressed through durable ways "of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 70).

> *Formally, we have not been given any instructions … we did what we had to do … We thought that we were free to choose* [the teaching methodology and the learning material]. (Female, young primary school teacher, working at the Moria's RIC)

Some of those *ways of thinking* and *acting* are not necessarily compatible with the knowledge, cultural norms, attitudes, behavioural pattern, tastes or needs of the learners (and their families). Some things are taken for granted by the respondents, and quite often the "different" is degraded as "abnormal" or "irrational".

> *I truly believe that speaking English is of paramount importance, because if you can't communicate… Arabs were like… "Alibaba" and stuff… Arabs were cursing Pakistanis… Pakistanis were hurling insults against the Arabs… We tried to show them that **this is Europe,** open up your minds!* (Female, young primary school teacher, working at Moria; authors' emphasis)

> *It's hard for most of those kids…. They don't even know how to sit on the chair… they jump around… They have not developed **a proper school behaviour**… It is important to integrate into the society… to **learn manners**…* (Male, mathematics teacher, working at Kara Tepe; authors' emphasis)

Sometimes, the narratives of the interviewed educators unveil insurmountable legal, cultural and mental barriers and "distinctions" between the "local experts" and "mediators", on one hand, and the "foreigners", the "vulnerable", the "helpless", on the other. Certain actions on the part of the refugees are considered as "unthinkable", and their whole survival needs to undergo a continuous mediation, a kind of "filtering" of activities that are deemed "suitable" or not.

> *– If a [refugee] parent wishes to register his/her child to the local school, … is this possible?* (Interviewer)
> *– No, no! Absolutely no! It must be done through the local educational organisations …* (Female, teacher / education manager at Kara Tepe)

Of course, this does not necessarily imply an "exclusionary" attitude, which is unconsciously manifested by the educators, *vis* the refugees. On the contrary, such a reaction is based on previous negative experiences and a conscious assessment of the odds of having done something useful for the refugees, within the existing cultural settings.

> *We have tried to register those children to various school-preparatory classes, sports-clubs etc., …. The owners or managers of those facilities would simply not accept the children…. There were excuses about the way "other parents" would react to such a development… There was a clearly racist attitude towards the refugees.* (Female, teacher / education manager at Kara Tepe)

Habitus and agency

Habitus is a kind of a transforming machine that leads us to reproduce the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively *unpredictable way* (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 87). This becomes clearly evident in the volunteer educators of our study, especially in the early stages of the educational interventions, when there had not been any organised state initiative.

> *Our educational provision is for preschool children… It is based on the logic of the "forest school", which originates from Scandinavia… The aim is … **free expression, free play, respect of the nature**, … the program is not standard…*
> (Female, psychologist, working at PIKPA; authors' emphasis)
> *I think that **we are lucky** to have these people here… I believe that what's good for them [the refugees] is equally good for our society… this **mix of cultures…***
> (Male, mathematics teacher, working at Kara Tepe; authors' emphasis)

It is obvious that, while they are trying to create an intercultural context where everyone fits in, this is not an easy task. The different habits (the "habitus") change slowly. At the same time, the educators recognise – and mainly accept – the structural limiting factors, because they need to prepare the young participants for integration within the schools when they finally go, to follow the dominant education system. In other words, there is always an emphasis on the constraints and demands that impose themselves on people (Reay, 2004, p. 433)

> *Our target is to register to the formal education system… They **need to integrate**…. (Female, psychologist, working at PIKPA; authors' emphasis)*
> *Teaching is done on voluntary basis … However… we follow the Ministry's [of Education] curriculum… Our **job is to prepare them to go to school.** (Male, mathematics teacher, working at the Kara Tepe camp; authors' emphasis)*

Habitus as a compilation of collective and individual trajectories

Habitus, within, as well as between, social groups, differs to the extent that the details of individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another (Bourdieu, 1990b), with many factors, such as *age, gender, race, educational experience, family wealth, place of origin, personal skills* and *talents* etc., intervening in the outcome of an individual's response to the various circumstances.

> *Sometimes we decided to paint the room with colours… Then there were riots at the [Moria] camp, and nothing was finally done! … Some people were not feeling comfortable with that… With me, it was ok… **I'm familiar with this kind of…***

*say… **mess**!...* (Female, young primary school teacher, working at Moria;
authors' emphasis)
*Apart from my **general teaching experience**, I have been working for two years
with unaccompanied children… There is a problem when we have new arrivals…
The [volunteer] teacher has to "go back" and teach the basics to the newcomers.
… I'm **relatively new in this camp**…* (Female, teacher / Education manager
at Kara Tepe; authors' emphasis)

■ DISCUSSION – CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we tried to sketch a general picture –among the many possible
ones– of the educational situation of the refugee children on the island of Lesvos,
with special reference to the informal activities taking place, in recent years, at
three emblematic sites close to the capital city, Mytilene. Those activities and
interventions are organised by voluntary and activist groups and by certain NGOs,
depending on the availability of the educators, the movement of the refugee
population, and the special –sometimes completely unforeseen and unpredictable–
circumstances created by the precarious condition of the refugees, the processing
capacities of formal sites (e.g. the RICs set up by the Greek Asylum Service), the
existing humanitarian infrastructure on the island, the handling of the inflows from
the Greek State's competent authorities and the changes in the European Union's
immigration policy.

Moria emerged –as expected– as a "closed", alienating, precarious space, where
education is a "privilege", and not many alternative projects and initiatives can
flourish. PIKPA and Karatepe, emerged (from the narratives) as more "open" and
welcome spaces, with some participatory practices, where individual initiatives
can make a difference. These differences –and there are many– need to be further
elucidated, through an extension of our research to other sites, as well as to other
actors in the field (i.e. refugees, educators, NGO and activist-organisations'
representatives, key policy-makers at local, regional and national level, etc.).

It became evident, through our interviews, that the volunteers' choices are
bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints they find themselves in.
The most important conclusion is that, no matter how "progressive" their general
attitudes might have been, what emerged is a manifestation of differentiated
"horizons for action" between the "locals" (in this case, educators), on one hand,
and the "foreigners" (in this case, refugees) on the other. We note that, despite
the good intentions expressed by the interviewees, and their efforts to initiate an

integration process that is based on intercultural values, their narratives unveiled an "internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable" (Reay, 2004, p. 435).

Although we identified differences of individual habitus (Editor's note: Plural of habitus is habitus) among the interviewees (based on *gender, age, cultural capital, professional experience* etc.) and differentiated responses to similar tasks, there was a sense of an unconscious reproduction of "cultural superiority" –and a taken-for-granted "inferiority" of the "other", for that matter– ingrained in their habitus, during their daily interactions with the refugees, especially the minors. Although the examined individuals do not necessarily ascribe to traditional notions of "national identity" or "national boundaries", and they are more open to the idea of "border-crossing", quite often –mostly unconsciously– they treat the refugees as "border dwellers", those always in "transition", hence, reproducing new "divisions" and re-configuring new "border-scapes" within the traditional ones (Agier, 2016).

There is no space for such a comparison. Indeed it's out of the scope of the article.

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Hellenic Republic / General Secretariat of Information & Communication: https://info-crisis.gov.gr/

Lesvos Solidarity: https://lesvossolidarity.org/en/

ReliefWeb: https://reliefweb.int/

United Nations High Commission for Refugees: http://data2.unhcr.org/en