
**PALESTINIANS:THE PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION OF MIGRANTS IN
HOST SOCIETIES –CULTURAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i08.030 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i08.030>

ABSTRACT

The political, social, and economic assimilation of migrants in host society is still one of the most important questions that comes up while discussing the issue of migration. This research paper takes up the aspect of assimilation and its impact, implication and evolution in refugee policy, with special emphasis on the Palestinian migrants. Since the issue of refugees is one of the most important aspects affecting international relations, this topic is extremely relevant in the horizon of global issues today. This paper also substantiates the arguments present with original studies, to understand the practical implications of the problem in the real world.

I. Introduction

The historical debate of Assimilation vs. Integration

“All individuals have their own unique journey in life. The movement by people from one place to another brings about displacement from familiar surroundings and exposure to different cultures, values and norms.” (Frans Meijers, 2018)

"Migration is a phenomenon that shifts space and time. It is an ageless human strategy to improve life and could be defined as a natural behaviour of human beings. What makes migration a subject of investigation are processes like nation-state-building, Europeanisation, globalisation and economic polarisation, which problematise the free movement of people. Academic researchers have responded to the challenges associated with this by drawing upon a range of disciplines, gathering evidence from a variety of countries, and employing an array of methodological tools to examine the emergent and evolving processes and patterns of Europe's new migration. Nonetheless, one is still faced with bewildering diversity in terms of migrant flows and the minority communities that form from these." (Maren Borkert, Alberto Martín Pérez, Sam Scott, Carla De Tona, 2006)

The situation of people of one country migrating in large numbers to another country to escape from adverse conditions- social, economic or political, has more often than not been seen historically as a "crisis."

While some countries have been friendly towards the migrants and tried to offer them asylum and shelter, most have been found to turn hostile when the migrants were seen as "trying to encroach upon the resources which only the citizens of the country were entitled to" or as "seeking permanent residentship of the country and pushing the "original" citizens out."

Naturally, with the aspect of citizens of one country migrating to another, several issues arise, one of the most hotly debated being, "Should immigrants be assimilated or integrated into the host country?" Now before we delve into a discourse on the question, it is important to understand the meaning of these words. People often use these words interchangeably, without understanding the real meaning or implication of what they are communicating. Commonly, there are four policies that a country can adopt with regard to the migrant population in their country: assimilation, integration, separation or marginalisation.

Assimilation and Integration as a process:

The word assimilation defies a simple and generally accepted definition. In classical sociology it is intended to mean a progressive change from a more diverse to a less diverse behaviour. (Domenico de Palo, Riccardo Faini & Alessandra Venturini, 2006). Another fairly recent work (Alba Nee 2003, pp.30-31) defines assimilation as the "attenuation of distinctions based on ethnic origin". In terms of refugee policy, assimilation can be seen as when the refugees adopt the culture of the asylum country.

Integration is looked at as an ideal that asks immigrants to adopt the basic values and principles of the societies they've migrated to (such as the values of equality and respect for the rule of law), but at the same time, immigrants can maintain their distinctive cultural identities and practices. (Prof. Sarah Song, 2018). In terms of refugee policy, integration can be seen as when the refugees retain their own culture while at the same time adopting the norms and culture of the asylum country.

Separation is when refugees are physically separated during the process of displacement. This alienation might happen due to unfavourable or unforeseen circumstances during the process of migration, or due to selective policies of the asylum country that might accept certain family members and refuse others, or not allow family members to stay together because of the family size. Family separation, with significant psychological, social and economic implications, is a key concern for those who flee violence and cross international borders. (Hannah Chandler, Neil

Boothby, Zahirah McNatt, Margaret Berrigan, Laura Zebib, Patricia Elaine Freels, Hamza Alshannaq, Noor Majdalani, Ahmed Mahmoud, Esraa Majd, 2020). With regard to refugee policy, separation can be seen as when the migrant population resists assimilation and prefers identifying with their host country.

Marginalisation of asylum seekers or refugees is said to occur when the government's policies treat asylum seekers as though they are less deserving than the rest of the population (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2013). Thus marginalisation of migrants basically means depriving them of even the most basic amenities necessary for day to day life. In this situation, they are not granted any rights or even the bare minimum in terms of socioeconomic and political securities. With regard to refugee policy, marginalisation can be seen as when the migrant population does not have the identity of either the home country or the asylum country.

The degree of adaptation decides if the migrants raise a political voice for or against the government of the host country (Achilli, 2014). If assimilative policies are adopted, greater participation of migrants in the political systems of the country. However, if the migrants are marginalised in the host society, they might go against the government and create political troubles for the country in question. (Changrok Soh, Yoonjeong You, Youngsoo Yu, 2016) However, assimilative policies should not seem forced or imposing to the migrant population.

II. Overview Of The Palestinian Issue

The history of Palestine is seeped in religious conflict. Most migrants either migrate willingly because of the same, or are displaced in large numbers due to violence and forced to relocate as refugees and start afresh.

The largest displacement of the Palestinian population happened during the two main Palestinian exodus, first during the 1947-1949 war and second during the 1967 conflict. Approximately 750000 refugees were displaced during this period and they had to migrate to neighbouring countries and to other parts of the world.

A large efflux of refugees from Palestine happened during the 1967 six day Arab-Israeli war with Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A large number of refugees were either expelled from the country or had to flee due to security reasons. During this second *Nakba* (literally, catastrophe) Israel carried out expulsion of about 420000 Palestinian people. (Orient XXI) Even after adoption of Resolution 194, Israel has not allowed Palestinian refugees to go back to their homes, not has it granted any compensation for the loss of property. (Changrok Soh, Yoonjeong You, Youngsoo Yu, 2016).

Three-quarters of the Palestinian people are displaced. Approximately one in three refugees worldwide is Palestinian. More than half are displaced outside the borders of their historic homeland. (Terry M Rempel, Oxford Refugee Studies Centre) The maximum number of Palestinian migrants travelled to West Bank, Gaza strip, Jordan and Lebanon. There are about fifty eight Palestinian refugee camps in these four countries.

The UNRWA or The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees was specially formulated to look into the developmental and security issues of Palestinian refugees.

III. Literature Review

- **CHANGROK S., YOONJEONG Y., YOUNGSOO Y. (2016)** Jordan has accepted Palestinian refugees in 1948, although it was not a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention. About 1/3rd of the total Palestinian refugee population of six million has taken refuge in Jordan. With three options, that is repatriation, resettlement (in a third country) and integration (in the first asylum country), the third option seemed to be best suited to the Palestinian migrants, as in any large scale refugee crisis. However, this seemed to be a difficult feat to accomplish, given the change in Jordan's attitude towards Palestinian refugees since 1970s, when it stopped granting citizenship to the asylum seekers.

Assimilative policies, with the correct approach, can help migrants integrate into the host country. From a different viewpoint, since after Jordanian government stopped giving citizenship to the refugees, Palestinian refugees are considered to be not assimilated but integrated into Jordanian society, because they have Palestinian identity and can go back to Palestine at a later date.

The Case Study of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is a good source to understand the problem of assimilation of refugees in host societies. Jordan has adopted a differential policy towards Palestinian migrants from the 1948 war and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS). While the policy towards the former, and the descendants of the former, is assimilative, with them enjoying the same rights as native Jordanians, the attitude towards the latter is marginalisation, wherein they are not even allowed the most basic human rights.

Not only have the PRS not been allowed to enter Jordan since 2012, the PRS already in Jordan have either been detained or not been allowed to work (ILO, 2015) which is clearly against UDHR and Jordanian Refugee Law itself. This is the kind of approach that can create problems in the socioeconomic and political horizon of the country in the

long run.

- **MONAWAR, A. (2006)** He points out that all existing research work regarding assimilation can be distinguished by two major characteristics. Firstly, this literature looks at assimilation as a cultural divide that separates two groups of people, and second, this aforementioned research has always been done by either citizens of the host country, or by academic institutions established in those countries, which indicates an inherent bias in the literature itself. Even though the Palestinians form a distinct and visible community in Smallville, two factors should definitely be taken into consideration, the first being that the attitude of people while dealing with cultural differences will always vary, and the second being, even among the Palestinian community, there are varying degrees of assimilation. However, the fact remains that these groups should be granted cultural citizenship and that differences exist not only between different groups, but within groups as well.
- **TESKE. R.H., NELSON. B.H. (1974)** Both the authors being American ethnologists, they define assimilation as “a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons or groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons or groups; and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” In this research paper, the authors take up the salient features of both assimilation and acculturation and carry out a study to compare and contrast them, in order to delineate and clarify the relationship between the two concepts.
- **RIVERA. G.L. (2014)** The author in this piece questions the assumption that Palestinian immigrants have successfully assimilated in Honduras society. Drawing from several xenophobic reactions towards Palestinian immigrants by people of Honduras, the author writes that Palestinians are in fact, still seen as a culturally distinct group of people in Honduras, owing to their religious affiliation and activities related to commerce and trade. Thus they cannot be considered as an assimilated minority, nor have they mobilised as an ethnic minority to demand resources and rights. The main reason behind this is pointed out to be the social mobility of the Palestinian immigrants in Honduras, and the fact that they have been able to accumulate capital throughout the 20th century.
- **BROCKET. T. (2018)** In this paper, the author talks about the impact of the interaction of transnationalism, assimilation, diaspora and racialization in the lives of second generation Palestinian migrants in New Jersey, United States. The paper mainly focuses on how the Palestinian migrants from Jerusalem and West Bank held on to the ethos of "remaining Palestinian against all odds," and how the choices and decisions they made

informed the way of life of their descendants, especially the members belonging to the second generation.

- **MASRI. Y.E. (2020)** This paper focuses on the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon, but by taking a different approach, that is, by placing emphasis on the "permanently temporary" nature of the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon. The irony is that even after repeated claims being about the welfare of the Palestinian migrant community in Lebanon, according to reports by the The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, the people in the refugee camps still suffer from abject poverty and even after 72 years of being formed, these camps still cover the same limited geographical space that they have done since these were first formed, directly indicating cramped conditions.
- **THORNTON E. (2017)** The main focus of the paper is the challenges that the members belonging to second generation Palestinian migrant community in Managua, Nicaragua have to face. The context is that when the first generation Palestinian migrants arrived in Managua in the 20th century, they did not receive much support from the government. However, as the process of assimilation began with the second generation migrant community, they found themselves with a completely different but equally challenging set of difficulties to navigate. Specifically, the paper emphasises on the personal and societal factors that play a role in the inclusion of Palestinians in Nicaraguan society.
- **DE BEL-AIR. F. (2012)** After establishing the fact that the Palestinians form one of the oldest refugee populations in the world, the paper revolves around the issue of why granting civil rights to Palestinian migrants in Jordan and Lebanon raises concerns among the local population in both these countries. It also throws light on the fact the granting civil rights to the Palestinians cannot be alienated from the cause of the protection of the Palestinian "cause," that is, their right to repatriation, or to return to Palestine. As Palestinian presence in Jordan and Lebanon, the main host countries, becomes increasingly pivotal in the political scenario, a similarly increasing number of arguments are being cited against granting civil rights to the Palestinian population in these countries.
- **HALABI Z. G. (2004)** This paper rivets its focus on the question of how the events that have taken place since the establishment of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon have affected the endemic 'inter-communal' violence in the region. The main reason for this is the fact that the state of Lebanon has adapted exclusionist policies towards the Palestinian community in Lebanon, which has led to brewing of mistrust and dissatisfaction among

the communities, further resulting in communal violence. Palestinians have been systematically excluded from the economic and political setup of Lebanon, thus facing unemployment issues, which is one of the root causes that has pushed the community towards being marginalised in Lebanese society.

- **ZILBERSHATS Y. and GOREN-AMITAI N. (2011)** A study from the Metzilah centre for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought, while the paper mainly revolves around the issue of the return of Palestinian immigrants to their home land, it also forms a very important part of the literature review for this paper since assimilation and repatriation are like the two sides of the coin. The paper elaborates on the history of and the most important issues related to the Palestinian migrant community, followed by the efforts by the international community and international organisations to support them including UN Resolution 194 (III) and Other UN Resolutions, and finally on the resolution of political and ethnic conflicts and the debate between assimilation, separation, and reintegration.

IV. Interpretation Of Primary Data

Materials and methods to collect and present the data:

A survey with questions pertaining to the issue at hand was disseminated to a 100 respondents all over the world. Individuals belonging to different ages, genders, professions and countries from 25 countries across the world took the survey. People from the following countries took part in the survey:

- Bangladesh
- Tanzania
- Algeria
- United Arab Emirates
- Ecuador
- Afghanistan
- India
- United States of America
- Malaysia
- Abu Dhabi
- Nepal
- Romania
- Morocco

- Canada
- South Africa
- Nigeria
- Indonesia
- South Korea
- Sierra Leone
- Yemen
- Honduras
- Tunisia
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Philippines
- Uzbekistan

The purpose of the data collection and analysis:

It is to provide a better understanding of the research topic and its implications. The study of previous research and formerly collected data becomes relevant only when we endeavour to take it further by conducting fresh studies. This analysis might also be beneficial in helping one understand if differential attitudes exist in various societies when it comes to Palestinian migrants or if the attitude towards assimilation and integration of migrants in a society informs the government setup in that particular nation.

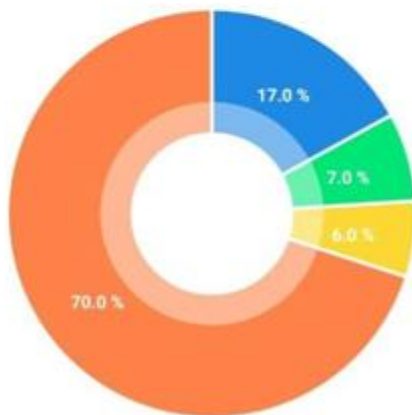
Research ethics were strictly adhered to while carrying out the survey. No question was made compulsory that could lead to personal identification of the survey taker.

We will now look at the specific research questions, the response to them, and try to find out if there is a correlation between the responses.

5. If refugees were allowed to settle in your country, should they have to adopt the culture of your nation, or be allowed to retain their own culture?

PIE CHART

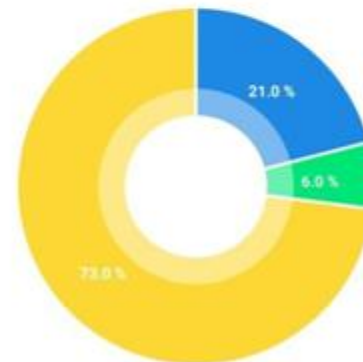
- Definitely retain their own culture - 17
- Definitely adopt culture of the host nation - 7
- Depends upon their nationality - 6
- Should be up to them - 70



6. If PALESTINIAN refugees (refugees who fled after a war in a middle-eastern country) were allowed to settle in your country, should they assimilate (adopt the culture of your nation), or integrate (be allowed to retain their own culture while adopting the culture of your nation?)?

PIE CHART

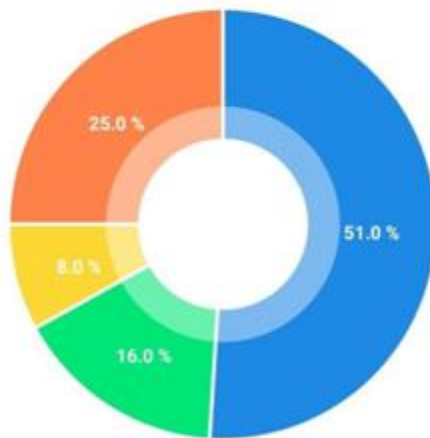
- Definitely retain their own culture - 21
- Definitely adopt culture of the host nation - 6
- Should be up to them - 73



9. If refugees are allowed to settle in your country, should they be given voting rights?

PIE CHART

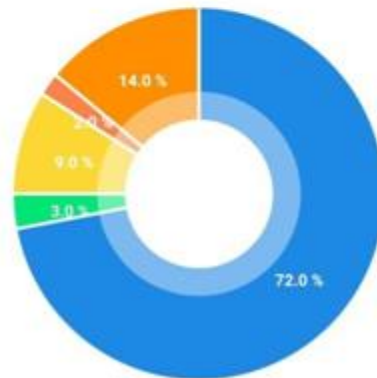
- Yes - 51
- No - 16
- Depends upon their nationality - 8
- Depends upon their loyalty to the host count...



10. If refugees are allowed to settle in your country, should they be given social securities like free education, free meals, unemployment dole etc?

PIE CHART

- Yes - 72
- No, they should be reserved for the citizens ...
- Few can be given - 9
- Depends upon their nationality - 2
- Depends upon the service they render to the...

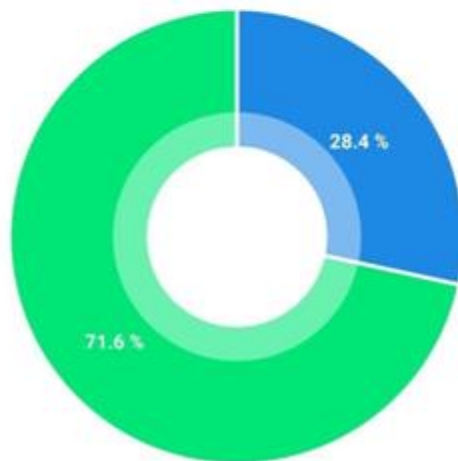


7. What should be the approach of the government of the host country towards the refugees?

8. If refugees are allowed to settle in your country, should they be given permanent jobs by the government?

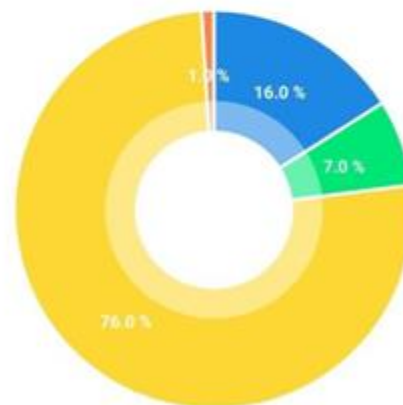
PIE CHART

- Assimilation - 21
- Integration - 53



PIE CHART

- No, only temporary jobs - 16
- Yes, but with lower wages than the citizens ...
- Yes, with equal wages - 76
- They should not be given jobs - 1



V. Data Interpretation And Analysis

Asking them to adapt the culture of one's own nation or allowing refugees to retain their own culture

When we look at this question, it is evident that while the vast majority of survey takers feel that the choice of culture should be left to the migrants, there is a section that feels that whether or not migrants should be given a choice depends upon their parent country.

Asking PALESTINIAN refugees to adapt the culture of one's own nation or allowing them to retain their own culture Coming to this question, there is one noteworthy aspect. All the respondents who responded with "Depends upon their nationality" for the previous question, responded with either "Definitely retain their own culture" or "Should be up to them" for the second question that was specific to the Palestinians. All these respondents were from India,

Morocco or Indonesia. On the other hand, 2% of survey takers who responded with "Should be up to them" in the first question, changed their stance to "Definitely adopt the culture of the host nation" in the second.

The choice between government stance of assimilation or integration for refugees

Another noteworthy trend is that 24% of survey takers who responded with "Definitely retain their own culture" or "Should be up to them" in the the first and second questions changed their stance to "Assimilation" in the third question.

The choice between allowing refugees to have temporary or permanent jobs

While 76% of the respondents felt that refugees should be given jobs with wages equal to that of the common citizens, 16% of them felt that refugees should have only temporary jobs. 7% were agreeable to giving refugees permanent jobs with lower wages while 1% felt that refugees should not hold any job at all. So, while attitudes towards refugees seems to be evolving for the better, there is still a long way to go in terms of peacefully assimilating refugees in the host societies.

Giving refugees voting rights, or depriving them

The respondents seemed to be more divided on this issue, with the highest still in favour of allowing equal voting rights, but with a higher number on the other side of the spectrum. This seems to be a question where the respondents agree that either the nationality of the refugees or their loyalty to the asylum country would play a part, and, the third highest response is an outright "No."

The choice between allowing or not allowing social securities for the refugees

While the majority seems to sway towards giving refugees social securities, a fraction of the respondents would still like to test the loyalty of the refugees towards the asylum country and asses the service they render to it before making the choice.

These results point towards the fact that while the respondents are more accommodating when it comes to providing moral and social support to refugees, the tables turn when it comes to economic and political support and they become reluctant to share resources and opportunity. The results are also indicative of a clear bias, whether knowingly or unknowingly. The role of sensitization in this regard, or lack thereof, will depend upon findings of future studies.

However, the fact remains that the majority of survey takers adopted a Democratic mindset by leaving it to the migrants to choose what kind of treatment should be meted out to them by the

host country. This substantiates the argument that, "Even though a majority of people at present believe whether assimilation or integration should be followed should depend upon the migrants, biases on the basis of the nationality of the migrants definitely exist."

There are certain limitations with regard to data analysis. The main problems are that of a small sample size and unvaried sample demographic, that might have had an impact on the results

VI. Recommendations

Governments should make a thorough assessment of the attitude of people towards migrants in their country, and the situation of migrants in their country. New policies could be brought about to facilitate the social, economic and political development of the refugees while not antagonising the population.

While assimilative policies can in the long run help the migrants fit into the host society, care should be taken not to forcibly deprive the migrant population of their culture and values.

At the same time, the Government should not adopt differential treatment for migrants coming from different nations, unless it is in public interest, to ensure that despise, mistrust and dissatisfaction do not brew

VII. Conclusion

Thus after establishing the meaning and implications of both assimilation and integration and a general study of people's attitude, integration emerges as the most feasible attitude to have with regard to migrants. At the same time, sensitisation programs regarding these processes should be started, so that people can make informed decisions, and steps can be taken towards acculturation so that no divides exist between the people that can create potential conflicts in the nation.

With regard to the Palestinians, it is clear that being one the world's oldest migrant populations, they have experienced different attitudes in the different host countries they have travelled to. In some countries they have experienced marginalisation, in some, willing or unwilling assimilation, and in very few, integration. In most cases, they have wanted the option of repatriation to be open to them. Often, the host countries have changed their attitude towards these migrants and not for the better, causing them immense socioeconomic and political trauma. While the problem of assimilation of migrants in the host society does not seem to be one that can be mitigated very swiftly, the gradual shift in attitude of the people towards a more humane approach when it comes to the migrants assures one that there is indeed hope for the future.

Appendix/Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for conducting the survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPc2btufvqnU3SEncY_tEXK8x9TFQA7w2qS-w8SmSocnCnyO/viewform

Appendix- Samples Of Response Recorded

Responses Received to the survey:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WjlC3sGL-N6TFjS7OqPJMKYbJcDIVfOD-V6erwguPK8/edit?usp=drivesdk>

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