International Writing Workshop

Paris, 3-5 December 2025

Aid Networks and Mechanisms in a Migratory Context: Europe and the Middle East (1945-1970)

This call for papers aims to prepare a collective publication focused on the actors and practices of assistance to migrant populations in Europe and the Middle East between 1945 and 1970. The project adopts an innovative perspective, emphasizing on-the-ground dynamics and the interactions among the various actors involved in migration-related aid, between cooperation, competition and entanglement. It also seeks to shed light on lesser-known figures—third-party actors in the field of displacement assistance—whose roles, though significant, have often remained marginalized in historical scholarship. An editorial workshop, designed to coordinate and refine the submitted texts, will be held at the German Historical Institute in Paris on December 3-5, 2025 (exact day to be confirmed). Selected contributors will have reviewed the draft papers of the other participants ahead of time, so that the workshop can be fully dedicated to collectively aligning and revising the contributions. All participants will be expected to submit their draft papers prior to the event to enable in-depth collaborative work during the workshop.

Rationale

This project focuses less on the macrostructures governing migration than on the **practices of aid and benevolence**, and their effects on migratory trajectories. While the history of institutions overseeing migration is relatively well documented, that of **local-level practitioners** working directly with affected populations remains underexplored. By shifting focus in this way, the project also aims—where possible—to foreground the voices of assistance recipients, aligning with a new paradigm in migration history that moves away from an exclusively institutional perspective (Lucassen & Lucassen 2005; Diaz 2021). Drawing on a dynamic and evolving historiography, it seeks to reconstruct entire **migratory trajectories**, also responding to a persistent imbalance between the dominant field of immigration studies and the relative scarcity of research on emigration (Moch 2003; Brettell 2014). Finally, examining **transnational relief practices**—beyond the scope of national welfare policies—offers a means to analyze the dynamics of an aid field shaped by interwoven, cooperative, and competing networks.

"Assistance" to migrants is often understood as the range of mechanisms aimed at meeting the basic needs of precarious migrant populations—the term highlighting the asymmetrical power dynamics at play in these practices. While the concept has already been studied, it has been mainly within the framework of national welfare policies addressing both immigrants and nationals. In contrast, this project focuses on the transnational chains of aid that accompany migration journeys, emphasizing the forms of **interaction** between aid actors, and drawing on scholarship on the **mixed economy of welfare and relief** (Giomi, Keren, Labbé 2022).

During the period under consideration, numerous organizations provided assistance to an equally diverse set of migrating populations, including:

- *Public administrations* of countries of origin, transit, and destination (diplomatic and consular networks; armed forces such as police, customs, military; public assistance agencies)
- *Intergovernmental organizations*, such as UNHCR or UNRWA
- *Civil society organizations* (local and international associations, trade unions, NGOs, Red Cross movement)
- *Private intermediaries* (formal and informal solidarity networks, diaspora communities)
- *Religious groups* (Churches and faith-based organizations, missions, religious foundations). Particular attention will be paid to the latter, especially in light of research based on the archives of the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958), opened to scholars in 2020, which reveal the Catholic Church's significant involvement and the underlying ideological structures of its engagement.

The goal is to bring these various types of organizations into dialogue, focusing closely on their operational logics and aid practices. This comparative approach should allow for a reconstruction of both **cooperative dynamics and competitive tensions** within the assistance field—without overlooking hybrid forms of "coopetition".

As for defining the beneficiaries—migrant populations—we adopt the definition proposed by the International Organization for Migration, which emphasizes the non-legal character of the term *migrant*: "A person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently". Our approach thus includes both **international and internal migrations**, often closely intertwined due to shifting borders and the frequent involvement of the same actors across both domains—particularly evident in the immediate postwar period. Recent scholarship has also questioned strict distinctions between types of migration (political, forced, economic), showing how survival needs or poverty often drive movements that may be classified as forced (Akoka 2020). As such, refugees, internally displaced persons, political exiles, and labor or economic migrants will all be considered within a continuum of mobility forms and corresponding aid mechanisms.

Chronological and Geographical Scope

The period under consideration begins in the aftermath of the Second World War and ends in the late 1960s. The historiographies of the **WWII and its aftermath**, on the one hand, and of **the early Cold War**, on the other, remain too often disconnected. This project therefore starts with migrations triggered by the end of the war and the reconfiguration of the European map, particularly around the phenomenon of Displaced Persons (DPs, broadly defined)—a field that has seen dynamic scholarly growth (Salvatici 2008; Daniel Cohen 2012; Defrance and Maspero 2015; Gatrell 2019; Nasaw 2020). This includes, *e.g.*, forced displacements in Central Europe, assistance to former prisoners of war (repatriation and resettlement), and Jewish migrations from Holocaust survivors to Palestine.

The focus is primarily on aid mechanisms responding to displacements caused by conflicts and their resolution. The scope includes migrations stemming from **WWII**, **decolonization**, the **construction of nation-states** (such as Palestinian refugees following the Nakba, displacements linked to the Algerian War), **imperial logics** and the **Cold War** with, for example, **intra-European movements** in the wake of uprisings in East Berlin (1953), Budapest (1956) and Prague (1968). Particular attention will be paid to how the geopolitical context of the Cold War shaped both the international interest in displaced populations and the forms of assistance mobilized—especially through rivalries between pro- and anti-communist organizations.

Rather than focusing on chancelleries or UN institutions, the project adopts a **practice-oriented approach** and **micro-historical perspective**, using aid practices as a privileged observatory for

examining the **circulation of actors, knowledge, and resources**. The selected geographical scope — **Europe and the Middle East** as spaces of emigration or immigration— is intended to juxtapose models and practices of assistance that circulated, were adapted, or contested within these regions, particularly in the context of post-imperial reconfigurations (notably the end of colonial mandates in the Middle East) and Cold War dynamics.

This call seeks, in particular but not exclusively, to open reflection on **transregional transfers**: the movement of personnel, funds, practices, and expertise between Europe and the Middle East, particularly through international organizations (such as the Council of Europe and the Arab League) or diasporic mobilizations. Underexplored from this angle, migration policies within the framework of pan-Arabism (Dawisha 2003) and the emergence of the oil industry (Halliday 1984; Chalcraft 2011) merit further investigation.

By encouraging research focused on the forms and actors of aid related to migrations to, from, or within the Middle East, in particular, this call aims to contribute to a historiographical rebalancing. It seeks to foster dialogue between historians specializing in the region and to move beyond a historiography still largely Eurocentric, predominantly centered—especially for this period—on European and American political and military concerns.

This project also intends to integrate insights from **postcolonial studies** to critically examine imperial legacies within aid mechanisms, asymmetries in the production of humanitarian expertise, and tensions between Western frameworks and local or South-South logics. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the issue of Palestinian refugees represent a central point of analysis, to be examined in light of the dynamics of cooperation, rivalry, or asymmetry previously discussed. However, other configurations also warrant exploration, notably the early **labor migrations** from or within the Turkey–Middle East–Maghreb area.

The ***terminus ad quem*** is situated in the late 1960s, marked by the 1967 Bellagio Protocol—a turning point in international refugee law that removed the temporal and geographic limitations of the 1951 Geneva Convention and was subsequently ratified by the United States—as well as by the Six-Day War and the 1968 repression of the Prague Spring and the significant wave of migration they triggered.

Core Areas of Inquiry

We welcome proposals that engage with the issues outlined above. Particular consideration will be given to contributions addressing the following themes:

- Migrants' experiences with aid mechanisms, potentially through a comparative lens.
- The dynamics of interaction among aid actors: collaboration, competition, or hybrid forms among public and private assistance structures.
- The relationship between humanitarian assistance and major geopolitical shifts: the impact of the aftermath of World War II, the Cold War, and postcolonial transformations.
- Transnational circulations of personnel or expertise across different institutional and territorial settings, as well as financial transfers.
- Individuals involved in aid provision, with attention to their status (volunteers, staff, refugee-staff), the narratives they construct, and the personal or professional trajectories that led to their involvement.

Submission Guidelines

Proposals for papers, preferably in English, should be no longer than 500 words, and accompanied by a short bio-bibliographical note of maximum one page. Please send both documents as a single PDF file to **anm@francemel.fr** by **30 June 2025**. As the workshop aims to produce a coherent edited volume, selected contributors will be asked to submit a first draft of their paper (20,000-30,000 characters,

including spaces) ahead of the meeting, by **1 November 2025**. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered in full or in part, pending final funding confirmation.

Organization : Alexandre Bibert (Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris), Fabrice Jesné (Université de Nantes, CRHIA), Marie Levant (École française de Rome, Institut français du Proche-Orient).

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