

PART II

The internationalization
of the Russian refugee
question

From prisoners of war to Russian refugees: continuity of policies

Abstract

This chapter engages with the reasons why the humanitarian responses to the forced displacement of white Russians, who had fought against the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, became a matter of inter-governmental intervention. Their sheer number and dire conditions, the geography of the displacement in fragile post-imperial regions, and the measures of denationalization adopted by Soviet Russia laid the foundation for inter-institutional cooperation, with the establishment of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees at the League of Nations.

Keywords: white Russians, denationalization, High Commissariat for Russian refugees, anti-communism, refugee politics.

If the former prisoners of war waiting to return to their motherland were worthy of the interest which the League of Nations displayed in them, surely also the Russian refugees, without protection, without country, likewise victims of the scourge of war, will not be abandoned by the League of Nations to their tragic fate.¹
—Memorandum by Gustave Ador to the League of Nations.

[The Russian refugee question] is a problem which affects the direct material interests of a great number of the Governments of Europe, and which indirectly is of great importance to the reconstruction of Russia and, through Russia, to the reconstruction of the prosperity of Europe and of the world.²
—Fridtjof Nansen.

During the Greater War, Russians experienced massive migrations. Nearly six million escaped from the Central Powers' armies that were advancing from the West; to cope with their needs, the Russian government established an internal governance

¹ 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. Memorandum from the Comité International de la Croix Rouge at Geneva to the Council of the League of Nations, signed by Ador, February 28, 1921.

² 3 League of Nations O. J. 1134 1922, Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, high commissioner of the LON to the fifth committee of the Assembly, September 15, 1922.

of assistance and resettlement.³ Once the war was over, from 1918 to 1922, up to two million Russians crossed states' borders to find asylum "at the doors of Europe," in Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Bosphorus, and the Far East.⁴ Referred to as "white Russians," since they were enrolled in the White armies during the Russian Civil War, they left in unplanned waves and often brought their families with them.⁵ The first group moved westwards from Ukraine, occupied by the Central Powers and then by the Soviets in 1918. A few months later, more Russians reached Poland and the Baltic region. In March 1920, General Anton Ivanovich Denikin and his followers, won over by the Bolsheviks, were forced to evacuate from Novorossiysk to the Bosphorus, thanks to the assistance of the British navy. In November 1920, nearly 150,000—General Piotr Wrangel's followers—frantically moved from the Black Sea port of Odessa again to the Bosphorus and were assisted by the French navy. Famine in Ukraine, the spread of typhus, and a broken economy contributed to create further flows.

As John Hope Simpson writes, under the label of Russian refugees, we find a heterogeneous group. Ethnically, Russians were the majority, yet we also find Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Turks, Georgians, Ukrainians, Tartars, and Calmucks. Socially, there were political, military, and civil emigrants, officials, and civilians who happened to find themselves in newly created independent states, or Jewish refugees from Ukraine.⁶ For instance, most Russian refugees who reached the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes came from urban settings instead of the countryside; men outnumbered women (they were 69%), yet there were also many unaccompanied children. In the Balkans, Russians were mainly young, as 66% of them were aged between 19 and 45. While a few traveled in family settings, almost

³ Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*.

⁴ Numbers are contested. Russian organizations abroad and the American State Department counted two million Russian refugees. ACICR, C.R.87 5/70, Copy of Cable Received from ARC Headquarters, Washington, March 4, 1921. ACICR, C.R.87 5/122, Prince Lvoff to da Cuhna, May 24, 1921. After a few months, based on the reports that they were able to collect, Russian organizations decreased their stated number of Russians to one and a half million. ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922-1924, volume 8, *Mémoire sur la question des réfugiés russes présenté au Conseil de la Société des Nations par la Conférence des Organisations Russes réunie à Paris en août 1921*.

⁵ On Russian migration, see Tatiana Schaufuss, "The White Russian Refugees," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 45–54. Robert H. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988). Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Norman Stone and Michael Glenny, *The Other Russia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). Paul Robinson, *The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920-1941* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2002). Marc Raeff, "Recent Perspectives on the History of the Russian Emigration (1920-40)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History* 6, no. 2 (2005): 319–334.

⁶ Simpson, *op. cit.*, 83–84.

two-thirds of Russian men were unmarried. There were more educated than illiterate Russians.⁷

Not only were Russians numerous and in dire conditions, but they were also displaced in what international humanitarian organizations perceived to be unsettled regions, due to ongoing warfare, because of the post-imperial transition and of new states' borders. While Central European states extended limited welfare programs to Russians, including food, shelter, clothing, and emergency medicine, they lacked the economic resources and the political willingness to do more.⁸ Coupled with the fragility of new governments which engaged in massive state-building processes, international organizations were left space to intervene: Russian organizations such as the exiled Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor, American organizations including the ARC and the YMCA, the societies of the Red Cross movement, the UISE and the SCF—just to quote the main ones—attempted to meet the immediate needs of displaced Russians.⁹ Most of them were already operating in Central and Eastern Europe on behalf of destitute civilians, and children among them, and extended their programs to Russian refugees.

Chapter 3 interrogates why and how the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Labour Organization, and the League of Nations engaged into the Russian refugee question. The ICRC was drawn to protect Russians out of humanitarian compassion, inter-institutional competition, and prestige—alongside its programs for prisoners of war. In the eyes of the ILO, dealing with the Russian displacement, even from afar, was an opportunity to collect data on Soviet Russia,

⁷ William Chapin Huntington, *The Homesick Million, Russia-out-of-Russia*, (Boston: Stratford Co., 1933): 25–28.

⁸ For Russian refugees in specific countries, see Alexandra Fortounatto-Behr, *Les réfugiés russes en Allemagne 1918-1925, histoire d'un accueil forcé* (Dissertation, Paris: 2003). Hélène Menegaldo, *Les Russes à Paris: 1919-1939* (Paris: Éd. Autrement, 1998). Catherine Klein-Gousseff, *L'Exil russe: la fabrique du réfugié apatride, 1920-1939* (Paris: CNRS, 2008). James E. Hassell, "Russian Refugees in France and the United States between the World Wars," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series 81, no. 7 (1991): 1–96. Elena Chinyaeva, "Russian Émigrés: Czechoslovak Refugee Policy and the Development of the International Refugee Regime between the Two World Wars," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 8, no. 2 (1995): 142–162. Sam Johnson, "'Communism in Russia Only Exists on Paper': Czechoslovakia and the Russian Refugee Crisis, 1919–1924," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 03 (2007): 371–394. Elena Chinyaeva, *Russians Outside Russia: The Émigré Community in Czechoslovakia 1918-1938* (R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001). On cultural aspects, see Catherine Gousseff and Anne Sossinskaia, *Les Enfants de l'exil: récits d'ecoliers russes après la Révolution de 1917* (Paris: Bayard, 2005). Robert Chadwell Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). John Slatter (ed.), *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917* (London, England; Totowa, N.J.: F. Cass, 1984).

⁹ ACICR, Correspondence C.R.87.2, Annexes au mémorandum présenté par le CICR au Conseil de la SDN sur les réfugiés russes, February 28, 1921.

whose borders were difficult to cross, and to test its technical expertise on international migration and on unemployment.¹⁰ Regarding the LON, it felt morally and politically responsible for displaced Russians, as two of its member states, France and Great Britain, had supported the White armies in the Russian Civil War; the inter-governmental organization understood their displacement as a consequence of the Great War, as it did for POWs, and connected humanitarian relief to peace and reconstruction. By looking at inter-institutional connections and by situating the three organizations in the interaction with governments and private, voluntary organizations, this chapter shows that expert knowledge and empirical data shaped the contour of refugee politics. It also demonstrates that gendered, classist, and racist biases permeated humanitarian protection, determined who was deemed to be worthy of protection, and produced a plurality of discourses around the providers and the recipients of assistance—discourse which still much informs our understanding of forced migrations.

3.1 The ICRC and Russian refugees

Alongside POWs, children and people stricken by epidemics or starvation, Russian refugees were the “war victims” towards whom the ICRC wished to extend its peace-time mandate, as it was stated in the 174th circular of late November 1918.¹¹ News on the conditions of displaced Russians reached Geneva from Europe and beyond. In the words of delegate, Georges Dessonnaz, stationed in Narva, “life was rough for the Russians who lived in Estonia, without work, without means of livelihood, without news of their homeland.” Those who repatriated often did so at the risk of their life.¹² Dessonnaz also wrote:

Most of them live miserably and accept any job, provided they can survive and not be driven out of here. A general's daughter serves here as a *sommelier*; an officer sings there, a colonel is a sawmill guard. Many come to our office hoping to find a place in our camp, but our employees do not want to abandon their positions.¹³

¹⁰ AILO, R100/1, Note sur l'intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, undated.

¹¹ On the ICRC and Russian refugees, see Corine Nicolas, “Le CICR au secours des réfugiés russes 1919-1939”, *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 95, no. 3 (2009): 13–24. Piana, *L'humanitaire d'après-guerre*. Kimberly A. Lowe, “Navigating the Profits and Pitfalls of Governmental Partnerships: The ICRC and Intergovernmental Relief, 1918–23,” *Disasters* 39, no. 2 (2015): 204–218.

¹² ACICR, B MIS 35, Dessonnaz to ICRC, September 30, 1920.

¹³ ACICR, B MIS 35.5-518, Personal letter from Dessonnaz to Oberholzer and Temmel, November 17, 1920.

Before the headquarters of the ICRC decided whether to extend its humanitarian protection to Russians, delegates took personal initiatives. Solicited by the SCF, in November 1920, Dessonaz managed the distribution of clothing and food to Russian refugee children, who had arrived with the followers of general Yudenich in Narva;¹⁴ he would soon coordinate food distribution beyond Narva in other Estonian cities.¹⁵

News on the conditions of Russian refugees also reached the ICRC from the outside, proving the collecting nature of the archives of the international humanitarian organizations. The Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor¹⁶—which emerged in coincidence with late-nineteenth-century social reforms, and which followed their compatriots in exile—shared detailed reports on the number, on the dislocation, and on the conditions of refugees.¹⁷ Georges Lodyginsky for the Russian Red Cross wrote that Russian refugees in Finland were mistreated and, when they decided to voluntarily repatriate, were often met by Bolshevik gunfire. He also denounced that among the Russians who happened to be in Estonia, there were a group of intellectuals who were employed in swamp forests, a type of work for which they were not physically skilled, and which risked undermining their health.¹⁸ According to Lodyginsky, waiting for long-term solutions to be internationally agreed upon, Russians who were concentrated in areas going through a delicate post-imperial transition could be temporarily resettled elsewhere and set in productive employment. Once the political context would calm down, hopefully in favor of the White armies, Russians would return through “the apparatus created for POWs” by the ICRC. Lodyginsky was one of the many international officers who suggested the use

¹⁴ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/618, Dessonaz to Frick, November 25, 1920.

¹⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35, Dessonaz to ICRC, May 31, 1921.

¹⁶ Catherine Gousseff and Olga Pichon-Bobrinckoy, “Avant-Propos,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 667–671. Olga Pichon-Bobrinckoy, “Action publique, action humanitaire pendant le premier conflit mondial,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 673–698. Dzovinar Kévonian, “L’organisation non gouvernementale, nouvel acteur du champ humanitaire,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 739–756. Catherine Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 757–776. Paul Robinson, “Zemgor and the Russian Army in Exile,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 719–737.

¹⁷ ACICR, C.R.87 5/16, Note sur la question des réfugiés russes by Frick, January 24, 1921. ACICR, C.R.87 5/9, S. Sklabinsky (Russian Red Cross) to ICRC, December 9, 1920. Information on the number, conditions, and relief by Russian refugees is organized by country. ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Extrait du rapport du Comité de l’Union des Zemstvos à Constantinople sur la question de l’organisation du travail des émigrés, January 25, 1921.

¹⁸ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/495, Lodyginsky to Boissier, October 9, 1920. On the rescue for Russian intellectuals, see Tomás Irish, *Feeding the Mind: Humanitarianism and the Reconstruction of European Intellectual Life, 1919–1933* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

of the routes, of the camps, and of the logistics put in place for prisoners of war to the protection and, ultimately, to the resettlement of Russian refugees.¹⁹

From the first exchanges of letters and reports, an amalgam of discourses on Russian refugees emerges. The 174th circular that the ICRC distributed in November 1918 described refugees as victims, people who suffered at the hands of their own government and because of the failed Allied interventions during the Russian Civil War. Since they were helpless, refugees were also worthy of protection, which the ICRC was ready to provide alongside the extension of its mandate from wartime to peacetime. However, by means of the reports coming from the field, the ICRC headquarters in Geneva soon learnt that not all Russians were alike. Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Lederrey, stationed in Constantinople, pressed to distinguish between real and fake refugees: only those who showed an attitude for self-help were worthy of protection.²⁰ A few months later, Georges Burnier, again from Constantinople, enquired about the conditions of Russian prostitutes: in a moralizing tone, he suggested that only those willing to detour from the “path of vice” should be assisted.²¹ These examples suggest that protection did not apply to all and came across as a discriminatory, selective, and ambiguous practice, embedded with notions of moral, racist, and gendered superiority.²²

Discourses of victimization were neither stable nor exclusive: Russians were often described as threats. Because the followers of the white generals, Denikin and Wrangel, did not hand over their weapons when they evacuated from the Black Sea to the Bosphorus, there were chances that they might endanger public security, especially since the Eastern Mediterranean region was experiencing a delicate post-imperial transition.²³ As far as public health was concerned, the poor sanitary conditions of camps turned Russian refugees into potential carriers of epidemics, whereas Russian prostitutes in Constantinople were told to spread venereal diseases to the Allied soldiers, and, through them, to their families. There were instances when dangers were abstract. Even though Russians had left because they opposed Bolshevism, they were still seen as potential political agitators, capable of endangering social and political cohesion. Gustave Ador worried that uneducated Russian refugee children might become “useless and harmful elements of the

¹⁹ ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Memorandum by Lodyginsky, January 1921.

²⁰ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

²¹ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, May 2, 1922, 45.17871.x.

²² ALON, *Mémorandum du Haut-Commissariat à la Sociétés des Nations pour les Réfugiés Russes*, à la Section Économique et Financière de la Société des Nations, C.C.R.R./PV.1 annexe.

²³ AILO, R201.1, *Télégramme envoyé par Briand à Londres, Rome, Bruxelles, Washington, Copenhague, Madrid, Stockholm, La Haye, Lisbonne, Constantinople, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico, Buenos-Aires, Christiania*, 19 Janvier, 1921.

Europe of tomorrow.”²⁴ Real or exaggerated, the Red Cross capitalized on threats to secure Western governments’ political and financial support.

Last, Russian refugees might turn into vectors through whom postwar societies could be rebuilt. For instance, in the reports addressed to the ICRC and the LON, the exiled Russian Red Cross coupled relief with rehabilitation and reconstruction. “The relief work for the Russian émigrés who remain in Europe must have the precise aim of giving back to Russia citizens who are able to work well, healthy physically and morally.”²⁵ When it became clear that the road from relief to repatriation might entail a more or less permanent local integration or resettlement, Russian organizations pushed for refugees to become self-sufficient and to contribute to the host society. This idea was largely shared by liberal circles of Geneva-based international organizations which, in Nansen’s words, feared that Russian refugees could “affect the direct material interests of a great number of the Governments of Europe.”²⁶

This heterogenous amalgam of discourses both informed and were informed by the several solutions that the ICRC formulated for Russian refugees. The words of Marguerite Frick-Cramer embody the uncertainty of the situation: “What would be the point of organizing, for example, workshops in Serbia if it is decided to bring about a movement of emigration to Argentina or if one gets guaranties sufficient to send back the biggest part of the Russians in their own country?”²⁷ It is not surprising that, while it was in touch with the ILO and the LON to internationalize the question, the ICRC negotiated with Russia the terms of a massive repatriation.²⁸ Indeed, in a telegram to Chicherin, who had already collaborated with Nansen on the repatriation of POWs, Ador suggested that Russians could return home by using the logistics in place, under the neutral supervision of the ICRC.²⁹ Ador’s proposal reflected the hopes of part of Russian refugees, as we read in the following petition:

²⁴ 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. The Question of the Russian Refugees.

²⁵ ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Memorandum by Lodyginsky, January 1921.

²⁶ League of Nations O. J. 1134 1922. Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, high commissioner of the LON to the fifth committee of the Assembly, September 15, 1922.

²⁷ ACICR, C.R.87 5/16, Note sur la question des réfugiés russes, January 24, 1921, by Marguerite Frick-Cramer.

²⁸ Attempts at massive repatriation also came from the British authorities. Since the summer of 1919, Great Britain had made itself responsible for the relief of Russian refugees belonging to the army of the white general Anton Ivanovich Denikin but tried to end its humanitarian and financial support. Therefore, the British government negotiated an amnesty for Russian refugees with the Bolshevik authorities. Russian white generals strongly opposed the British proposal for repatriation, fearing persecution and hoping to be able to reverse the political situation in Russia. National Archives (NA), Foreign Office (FO), 371.8159, N8453.43.38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922. NA, FO, 371.8150, N1791.43.38, Draft Briefs 16.3.1922, 28, Russian refugees, C.B.C.33/28 by Evans.

²⁹ ACICR, CR 87, Ador to Chicherin, undated. Likely early January 1921.

Petition from the old men of the colony of Russian refugees in the town of Shabtz, in Serbia. In the general flood of refugees from Russia in the summer and autumn of 1920, due in part to fear and threats from the troops of the Soviet Government and in part to their being cut off from their homes by military operations in Kuban and due to the impossibility of returning, we, a few old people of 60 and 70 years of age, ex-Kuban Cossack officers, also left. We took part in no military operations against the Red troops in Kuban or the Crimea and belong to no political party but love our native Russia and wish her well. We therefore beg you, Mr. High Commissioner, to make representations to the Soviet Government to overlook the past and to allow us to return to our homes in the Kuban provinces where we, though old men, will use all our strength, our knowledge, and our skill to help the Russian people and our families in agricultural work and in such work as will reconstruct the economic fortunes of our native land.³⁰

While massive repatriation did not happen and only a small number of Russians (6,000 agriculturist Cossacks who repatriated to the Don and Kuban regions) returned under international supervision, it is striking to realize that diverging solutions—including repatriation, local integration, and resettlement—were explored at the same time.³¹ Such a convergence suggests that there was no “general plan,” in the words of Frick-Cramer, to protect Russians and that such protection depended on the circumstances. Some of the ways in which the ICRC understood the conditions of displaced Russians would be embraced, yet, partially, by the ILO.

3.2 The ILO and the Russian questions

Differently from the ICRC and the LON, the International Labour Organization is not a humanitarian organization and did not turn into one.³² The reasons for the ILO intermittent interest in Russian refugees was twofold: it was curious and concerned about the Soviet experiment; and it aimed to establish a “...supranational authority that regulates the distribution of the population along rational and impartial lines, controlling and directing migratory movements and deciding

³⁰ ALON, R1717, Petition from the old men of the colony of Russian refugees in the town of Shabtz, in Serbia, to the High Commissioner for Russian refugees, 45.18425.18542.

³¹ On questions of repatriation, protection, and voluntariness, see Martyn Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea: Fridtjof Nansen, Constantinople and the First Modern Repatriation of Refugees Displaced by Civil Conflict, 1922–23,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 3 (2010): 495–524. Long, “Early Repatriation Policy.” Katy Long, “Refugees, Repatriation and Liberal Citizenship,” *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 232–241.

³² Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”.

whether countries are open or closed to specific immigration flows.”³³ Addressing, even partially, the needs of displaced Russians became an opportunity to test the intersection of migration with unemployment.³⁴ It was also instrumental to experiment with the possibilities and shortcomings of technical cooperation, which was framed as apolitical, and which became a quintessential feature of the ILO.³⁵

At the end of WWI, the ILO was a new organization that was spurred by the Treaty of Versailles.³⁶ Overlapping historical processes contributed to its establishment: late-nineteenth-century social reformism across Europe, the role of trade unions during the war efforts on the home front, and the lobbying of the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.³⁷ In the words of his first influential president, the French socialist, Albert Thomas, the ILO was meant to “establish humane working conditions everywhere; establish and implement a system of international labor legislation, subject to reservations imposed by the sovereignty of each state and by the conditions prevailing therein.”³⁸ Peace and social justice would be obtained by expanding workers’ social protection internationally, and this would offer “a peaceful alternative to revolution.”³⁹

³³ Albert Thomas, “Albert Thomas on the International Control of Migration”, in *Population and Development Review* 9, no. 4 (1983): 707.

³⁴ Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Ingrid Liebeskind-Sauthier, “Albert Thomas, le BIT et le chômage : expertise, catégorisation et action politique internationale,” *Les cahiers Irice* 2, no. 2 (2008): 157–179. Paul-André Rosental, “Géopolitique et État-providence. Le BIT et la politique mondiale des migrations dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 61, no. 1 (2006): 99–134.

³⁵ Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales.” Dzovinar Kévonian, “*Les réfugiés européens et le Bureau international du travail: appropriation catégorielle et temporalité transnationale (1942-1951)*,” in Alya Aglan, Olivier Feiertag, Dzovinar Kévonian (eds), *Humaniser le travail. Régimes économiques, régimes politiques et Organisation internationale du travail (1929-1969)* (Bruxelles, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2011): 167–194.

³⁶ Antony Evelyn Alcock, *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London, Macmillan, 1971). Franco De Felice, *Sapere e politica. L’Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro tra le due guerre, 1919-1939* (Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988). Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Vincent Viet (eds), *L’Organisation internationale du travail: origine, développement, avenir. Pour une histoire du travail* (Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011). Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, Susan Zimmermann (eds), *Women’s ILO: Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards, and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).

³⁷ Olga Hidalgo-Weber, *Social and Political Networks and the Creation of the ILO: the Role of British Actors*, in Kott, Droux (eds), *op. cit.*, 24.

³⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*

³⁹ James T. Shotwell, “The International Labor Organization as an Alternative to Violent Revolution,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 166 (1933): 18–25. Sandrine Kott, “ILO: Social Justice in a Global World? A History in Tension,” *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement* 11 | 2019, no. 11 (2019): 21–39.

As for its structure, member states, the same that adhered to the LON (Austria and Germany were exceptions as they were immediately admitted to the ILO and only later to the LON), were represented by two delegates from the government, one from the employers, and one from the workers, who sat at the annual international labor conference, where recommendations and conventions were approved, and in the Governing Body, the decision-making body. In turn, the *Bureau international du travail* (BIT), where the Russian refugee question developed, acted and still does as the permanent secretariat, led by Thomas. Moreover, Article 398 of the Treaty of Versailles established a tight collaboration with the LON: questions including the regulation of working hours, social protection, and the freedom of trade unions belonged to the ILO, whereas migration and unemployment were negotiated with the LON.⁴⁰

As soon as it became operational, the ILO engaged in normative work: it formulated, discussed, and approved a series of important recommendations, including those on unemployment, maternity protection, child labor, and night work for women. The ILO also expressed curiosity towards Russia and concern about the fascination that Bolshevism exerted among the working class in the West, which was attributed to the Soviet experiment's higher standards of work and production.⁴¹ Hence, in 1920, the Governing Body suggested sending a commission of enquiry to Russia; a Russian Section was created at the BIT, headed by Guido Pardo who had first-hand knowledge of Russia and who spoke the language.⁴² In haste, Pardo coordinated the publication of a questionnaire for the commission of enquiry to use and negotiated with the Soviet government the terms of the enquiry.⁴³ However, the deep mistrust that Soviet Russia had towards Western countries created an unfortunate context for the ILO commission of enquiry, which did not receive the green light. As a result, the Labour Organization collected Soviet newspapers and gathered all sorts of documents, including those written by the government's economic ministry; it also showed an interest in "other manifestations of Russian social life, having repercussions on working conditions in Europe," meaning Russian refugees.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Manuela Tortora, *Institution spécialisée et organisation mondiale. Étude des relations de l'OIT avec la SdN et l'ONU* (Bruxelles, E. Bruylant, 1980): 77.

⁴¹ Sandrine Kott, "OIT, justice sociale et mondes communistes. Concurrences, émulations, convergences," *Le Mouvement Social* n° 263, no. 2 (2018): 139–151.

⁴² *Minutes of the Second Session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, held in Paris, January 26–28*, (Genève, ILO, 1920): 20–22.

⁴³ International Labor Office, *Labour Conditions in Soviet Russia, Systematic Questionnaire and Bibliography, prepared for the mission of enquiry in Russia* (London, Forgotten books, 2012).

⁴⁴ AILO, R100/1, Note sur l'intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, undated.

Meanwhile, the ILO tested the extent of its mandate. Treated separately in the Convention, unemployment and migration were weaved by the first international labor conference in October 1919⁴⁵. The conference suggested that an unemployment section would elaborate policies “relating to the migration of workers and the condition of workers and foreign workers,” while an international emigration commission would “consider and report what measures can be taken to regulate the migration of workers outside their own states and to protect the interests of migrant workers residing in states other than their own.”⁴⁶ In doing so, the ILO wished to expand internationally the terms of the 1904 treaty signed by France and Italy, when the former agreed to improving the social protection of workers in Italy to ease the competition with France, where many Italians had migrated. As historian Paul-André Rosental, suggests, the ILO connected the geopolitics of migration with social protection and unemployment globally.⁴⁷ Migration, which was seen as a collective choice rather than an individual one, could benefit, if duly managed, both the country of emigration and of immigration.

In March 1920, the Governing Body created the International Emigration Commission (IEC), composed in equal parts of representatives of governments, entrepreneurs, and workers, coming from both European and non-European countries, both places of immigration and emigration. Institutionally, the ICE drafted resolutions and addressed them to the Governing Body, which judged if they could be discussed by the international labor conferences and, from there, transferred to the member states.⁴⁸ Soon after the creation of the commission, Thomas sent a questionnaire in which member states were asked to share migration statistics, references to migration treaties, and how they understood the future of the IEC. The 32 answers received allowed the ILO to prepare two reports, one on the methods for collecting statistical data and the other on the treaties relating to immigration and emigration of about 50 countries.⁴⁹

In late 1920, after the massive, unexpected arrival of Russians in the Bosphorus, the ILO was urged to intervene. Lodyginsky for the Russian Red Cross asked the Labour Organization to mediate with governments and employers in order to find remunerated employment for displaced Russians.⁵⁰ Around the same time,

⁴⁵ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”, 865–870.

⁴⁶ League of Nations, *International Labour Conference, first annual meeting, October 29, 1919 – November 29, 1919* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1920): 276.

⁴⁷ Rosental, *op. cit.*, 109.

⁴⁸ *Migration. The International Emigration Commission*, in “International Labor Review,” IV, 1921, 3, 85–110.

⁴⁹ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione,” 869–870.

⁵⁰ AILO, R201/6, *Le problème des émigrés russes par Lodyginsky*. AILO, R201/1, Varlez to Thomas, undated.

Aristide Briand, the French ministry of foreign affairs, similarly pushed for the ILO to “[establish] a plan for the settlement of Russian refugees in areas that could welcome them,” especially since France had just discontinued relief in Constantinople.⁵¹ These two requests, formulated by different actors, had a crucial commonality: rather than being helpless victims, Russians were understood as unemployed migrants, who, when resettled along labor lines, could not only be independent but also contribute to postwar reconstruction. In doing so, the Russian Red Cross and the French government proved to understand what was at stake for both displaced persons and for the ILO.

A third actor played a crucial role in associating the ILO with refugee politics: the Red Cross. In late December 1920, Eduard Frick and Lucien Brunel for the ICRC pressed Harold Butler, the British deputy-director of the BIT, to find employment for Russian refugees, who were portrayed to be both without a state and without a country. Would the BIT host an Emigration Bureau, charged with the collection of data, the organization of Russian refugees in Eastern Europe into professional categories, and the matching of offers with applications?⁵² In this early phase, as we have seen, resettlement along employment lines was believed to be temporary as displaced Russians would eventually repatriate, thanks to the logistics in place for prisoners of war. The principle behind this—clearly unrealistic due to the ethnic mixing in post-imperial Central Eastern Europe—was that the alignment of ethnicity with nationality would guarantee peace and stability. When Russia approved a decree of denationalization and made the return of refugees impossible in late 1921, governments and international organizations derogated to the nation-state principle and allowed the permanent resettlement of refugees across Europe and beyond.

While the creation of an Emigration Bureau in Eastern Europe was a sound proposal, it also epitomized the strategies of the ICRC, which regularly volunteered to coordinate the relief programs implemented by other organizations, as a way to divert attention from its endemic lack of resources and to capitalize on its delegates’ expertise. This happened with the Constantinople-based Bureau for the Relief of Russian Refugees and a Vienna-based Central Bureau for the Fight against Epidemics.⁵³ To make the case stronger, Frick and Brunel shared many documents with the BIT: a memorandum concerning Russian refugees; a report on the refugee situation in Constantinople; minutes of the first two assemblies of the private organizations working for Russian refugees in Constantinople; a copy of the individual form that would be used to conduct the census of refugees in Constantinople and in

⁵¹ AILO, R201/1, Briand to Thomas, January 25, 1921.

⁵² AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, December 29, 1920.

⁵³ Marta Aleksandra Balinska, *Une vie pour l’humanitaire: Ludwik Rajchman (1881-1965)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).

the Balkans; and a list of refugees as of December 25, 1920.⁵⁴ Collecting information and sharing it was a classic procedure among international organizations.

The ILO took the request of the ICRC seriously. At first, it launched another enquiry to verify the truly anti-Bolshevik attitude of displaced Russians: fleeing Bolshevism across international borders did not seem to be enough to prove one's political allegiance.⁵⁵ Then, in January 1921, Thomas and Butler turned to the Governing Body, where representatives of governments, trade unions, and employers were in attendance. In particular, Thomas was eager to understand whether the establishment of an Emigration Office in Eastern Europe would not "exceed [the] scope [of the ILO]" upon which the work of coordination might fall.⁵⁶ The proposal was received with mixed feelings. Contrary to the BIT's positive attitude, Louis Varlez, the director of the migration and unemployment section, believed that the early stage of the IEC would negatively impact refugee work;⁵⁷ he was also reluctant to commit the ILO beyond the social protection of industrial workers, who constituted its core group.⁵⁸ The proposal was eventually rejected, and the BIT committed to providing technical assistance to the Emigration Office.⁵⁹ However, the establishment of the office remained a dead letter, mainly on account of the plan's underdeveloped status.⁶⁰

Regarding Thomas, in February 1921, he requested the IEC to investigate whether member states would welcome Russians.⁶¹ Most governments cited widespread unemployment for denying entry.⁶² For instance, Butler lobbied the British government, suggesting that Russians could work in agriculture in the Dominions or the Colonies.⁶³ Again, such a proposal was rejected. "There is no chance that either Canada or Australia will be able to take any of the Russian refugees whom you mention and therefore it would only raise false hopes if it were suggested to those responsible that they should communicate with us direct on the subject

⁵⁴ In addition to a copy of a telegram concerning Russian refugees in Bulgaria and two other telegrams received from an ICRC delegate in Belgrade AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, Geneva, January 17, 1921.

⁵⁵ AILO, R202/1, Varlez to Lemerrier, January 11, 1921.

⁵⁶ AILO, Minutes of the sixth session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, January 11-13, 1921.

⁵⁷ AILO, R201/1, Note pour Butler, Civils russes réfugiés, December 27, 1920.

⁵⁸ AILO, R202/1, Varlez to Lemerrier, January 28, 1921.

⁵⁹ AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, Geneva, January 17, 1921.

⁶⁰ AILO, Minutes of the sixth session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, January 11-13, 1921.

⁶¹ AILO, R202/1, Projet de lettre – réfugiés russes, undated.

⁶² ALON, Conférence d'étude sur la question des réfugiés russes, note sur l'intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, présentée par le Bureau International du Travail, C.R.R.7., August 19, 1921.

⁶³ AILO, R201.1, sub-folder called correspondence avec le gouvernement anglais, Butler to Amery, chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee, February 1921, no day.

[...].”⁶⁴ Only Brazil showed an interest, less out of humanitarian compassion, on account of Russians’ employability on the plantations and because, being white, they could improve the mixed population.⁶⁵ Moving Russian refugees *en masse* out of Europe to countries which needed a labor force looked a promising solution for the ILO. Yet, it also pointed out an unsolved question, “whether labor safeguards in receiving countries would match labor laws in western Europe,” especially in view of discriminations entrenched in the “colonial clause.”⁶⁶

These examples—the BIT’s suggestion to frame Russians as unemployed migrants, as well as the Brazilian and British diverging responses—hinder a couple of reflections. While the intuition of addressing the needs of Russians by resettlement plans along employment lines was highly innovative, it failed to acknowledge that forced displacement was also a humanitarian and legal endeavor. Moreover, as we will see both in the settlement of Russian and Armenian refugees, they turned out to be involuntary pawns in the making of a racialized and gendered labor governance, by which, as fragile migrants, they were quickly transformed into cheap, under protected workers.⁶⁷ As Christopher Szabla writes, refugees got caught up in settler colonialism: on the one hand, European states got rid of groups which were displaced, unemployed, and possible carriers of political and social unrest; on the other hand, Latin American states welcomed refugees in order to “grow economically and to fortify their societies against the threat of raids by the natives whom new populations were displacing,” hoping to be later admitted into the “family of nations.”⁶⁸

How did Russian leaders, organizations, and refugees perceive the plans that had been developing at the headquarters of international humanitarian organizations? General Wrangel and Russian organizations in the Balkans vocally opposed repatriation plans, as they feared for their safety, as well as the option of the Brazilian resettlement. By being in Latin America, Russians were too far away had a counter-offensive been launched against the Reds, and they feared becoming “white slaves” on the plantations.⁶⁹ In the spring of 1921, alarmed by France’s decla-

⁶⁴ AILO, R201.1, sub-folder called correspondence avec le gouvernement anglais, Amery to Butler, March 17, 1921.

⁶⁵ ALON, R1713, Letter from Astrov, 45.14500.12319.

⁶⁶ Robson, *Human Capital*, 41. See also Christopher Szabla, “Entrenching Hierarchies in the Global Periphery: Migration, Development and the ‘Native’ in ILO Legal Reform Efforts,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 21, no. 2 (2020): 334–372.

⁶⁷ ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

⁶⁸ Szabla, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, “Domestic Service and Urbanization in Latin America from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in Dirk Hoerder and Amarjit Kaur (eds), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 86–102.

ration to discontinue its feeding programs in the Balkans, as well as by the French willingness to either repatriate Russians or resettle them in Brazil, numerous letters written by refugees reached the League of Nations.⁷⁰ One letter, written by the Russian colony in Derventa, situated in present-day Republika Srpska, made reference to the sacrifices of Russian refugees, who had fought against the Red armies and alongside the Allies; to the political responsibility that France should show towards fellow Russians; and to the superior Western civilization which might risk succumbing under the communist threat.

...To reward us for six painful years of fighting for the victory of culture and civilizations, [France] proposes to her faithful allies: either fall into “white slavery” in Brazil or return to the tyrannical kingdom of the Red International... It is to you civilized peoples, it is to you governments, it is to the League of Nations, that we address our prayers – help save the remnants of the Red Army with its leaders, who fought for your happiness!! Do not let the children of great Russia die of hunger, who prefer to be refugees than to remain under the Bolshevik government. Growing Russia will pay you a hundred times more than the aid provided. This is the last time we send our appeals, and if our voice does not awaken your consciences, do not forget that the children of future Russia will then be your mortal and pitiless enemies, that now they are faithful allies.⁷¹

Similarly, the Russian colony in Dubrovnik wrote:

Refusing to believe that the civilized world can persist in its role as a passive spectator in the face of the greatest common spoliation of history, the Russian colony of Dubrovnik allows itself to make a direct appeal to the League of Nations, convinced that this great institution will find the means to preserve the Russian army – this handful of brave people through all tests – to put an end to what is currently happening in Russia and to provide for the needs of Russian refugees until social order is restored.⁷²

3.3 The Red Cross shares the burden

In times of experimentation, refugee politics took unexpected turns. As soon as the ICRC realized that displaced Russians could not resettle under the aegis of the ILO

⁷⁰ ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

⁷¹ ALON, R1713, Rapport de la colonie de 165 réfugiés russes, évacués de Crimée, V. Derventa Le Royame S.H.S. Bosnie, 45.12319.12319x. Translated from French.

⁷² ALON, R1713, Compte-rendu de la séance de l'assemblée générale des membres de la colonie russe à Dubrovnik du 10 avril 1921, 45.12319.12319x. Translated from French.

and would not easily repatriate, it adapted its strategy. To do so, it chose the simplest, less expensive, more productive way: it conveyed and hosted a conference which took place from February 16-17, 1921 in Geneva, where inter-governmental organizations, the LON and the ILO, private, voluntary institutions, the LRCS, the UISE, the SCF, Russian organizations, and the French government (the only one to be invited due to its role in assisting Russians in Constantinople) were in attendance.⁷³ With the conference, the ICRC had the intuition of bringing together a diverging set of actors, both governments and private organizations. Far from being unique, conferences became a preferential tool of international diplomacy, as they favored data-sharing and discussion.

The charismatic ICRC president, Ador, opened the meeting: building on the reports that the organization had received, he shared the total number of the displaced, the geography of forced displacement, their needs in terms of general and specialized assistance (for the old, invalid, orphaned, and sick ones) as well as their legal status. To Ador's introduction, Englantyne Jebb for the UISE reacted by exposing the work done to assist Russians and the difficulties encountered; other private organizations closely followed her example. However, it was Paul Verchère de Reffye, the general consul of France in Geneva, who had the lion's share and illustrated at length France's role in protecting Russians in Constantinople, particularly in the light of discontinuing the programs. Being seated at the same table did not mean that governments and international organizations were equal or that their opinions were evenly taken into account.

Two were the conference's main outcomes. It was agreed that assisting Russian refugees should not exclusively fall on the states of first asylum, but to the whole international community, which was called on to financially contribute. Then, a high commissioner for Russian refugees should be appointed, alongside the successful exchange of POWs.⁷⁴ Both resolutions were welcomed by inter-governmental and private organizations alike, particularly Russians; Thomas went

⁷³ The ICRC had the largest delegation with Ador, Chenevière, Ernest Sautter, Frick, Lederrey, and Burnier. Emerson of the American Red Cross could not attend the conference, but he assured the ICRC that his organization was willing to cooperate for the relief of Russian refugees. The LON was represented by Rachel Crowdy of the Health Section, Joost Adriaan van Hamel and Van Kleffens of the Legal Section, and Vladimir Slavik of the Political Section. Thomas, Butler, and Varlez of the Service des questions russes represented the ILO. De Reffye, general consul of France in Geneva, represented the French government. Donald Brown represented the LRCS. The UISE was represented by its vice-president, Englantine Jebb, Mac Kenzie, Etienne Clouzot, and L.B. Golden for the SCF; the Russian Red Cross was represented by Czamanski and Lodyginsky. AILO, R201.2, Réunion relative à la situation des réfugiés russes, 1^{ère} séance tenue à Genève le 16 février 1921 au siège du Comité International de la Croix Rouge.

⁷⁴ AILO, R201.2, Réunion relative à la situation des réfugiés russes, 2^{ème} séance tenue à Genève le 17 février 1921 au siège du Comité International de la Croix Rouge.

further, suggesting that “a man of a real international authority to group all the efforts” should be appointed.⁷⁵ The task ahead included the determination of the legal status of Russian refugees, the decision whether to repatriate or resettle them, and the coordination of the several actors which were relieving them.⁷⁶ A few days later, the ICRC officially transmitted to the LON Council a series of documents (table 1): a memorandum on the conditions of Russian refugees, their numbers, their needs, and the number of aid organizations taking care of them.

Table 1. Total number of Russian refugees and the list of institutions assisting them by country.⁷⁷

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Austria	5,000 (especially in Vienna)	Danish Red Cross and Russian Red Cross
Bulgaria	2,500 in Bourgas, Messembrie and Sosopol; 2,000 in Varna and Nova Zagoru; 600 in Roustschouk, Plevna, Liaskowes and Tirnovo; 1,000 in Sofia. The total was 4,495 men, 1,619 women, and 739 children	Bulgarian Red Cross, Russian Red Cross; Srs de Nicolas
Czechoslovakia	5,000 refugees	Russian Red Cross; section of the Central Committee for Russian refugees in London; Czechoslovakian Red Cross; committee of assistance to Russians chaired by the mayor of Prague, M. Baksa, financed by the Czechoslovakian government
England	15,000	Russian Red Cross Society (Baron Raush); British Committee of the Russian Red Cross; Central Refugee Committee in London (Count Ignatieff); SCF
Estonia	7,858 men, 4,022 women, and 2,964 children	<i>Comité des émigrés russes en Esthonie</i> ; M. Ragojnikoff; Swedish Red Cross and SCF

⁷⁵ ACICR, C.R.87-2/39ter, Annexe 1, Situation des réfugiés russes en Europe et organisations qui s’en occupent, February 28, 1921.

⁷⁶ ACICR, C.R.87.SDN, communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Mémorandum adressé par le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge à Genève au Conseil de la Société des Nations, February 10, 1921.

⁷⁷ ACICR, C.R.87.2, Annexes au mémorandum présenté par le CICR au Conseil de la SDN sur les réfugiés russes, February 28, 1921.

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Finland	3,953 men, 4,762 women, and 6,033 children	
France	150,000	French government; <i>Conseil general de l'ancienne Croix-Rouge russe</i> ; comte Bobrinsky; M. Goloubeff
Germany	300,000 refugees and among them 65,000 in Berlin	ICRC mission; mission of the former Russian Red Cross; mission of the Soviet Red Cross. The German government gave them 2.35 marks. 4,000 refugees in the camps of Altengrabow and Wunsdorf were fed by the German government
Greece	200,000 in Athens, in Salonika, and in the Pireus	<i>Comité de l'Union de Secours aux Russes de Grèce</i>
Hungary	A limited number of Russians were self-sufficient	ICRC
Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes	31,700 refugees	Russian Red Cross
Italy	20,000	Russian Red Cross; <i>Comité de secours aux russes</i> ; M. Weidemiller
Latvia	17,218 men, women, and children	Russian Red Cross; M. Goudim-Levrovitch; ICRC mission; Lady Muriel Paget's mission; SCF
Lithuania	3,000	
Poland	100,000 refugees scattered between Voltynia, Grodno, Dubno, Sarne, and Kowel; 3,000 orphans	ICRC mission; Russian Red Cross's mission, Mme Loubimoff; Friends; SCF, Miss Vuillamy
Sweden	1,000 refugees	Section of the Committee for Russian refugees in London, M. Goulkevitch
Switzerland	4,000	Former and present Russian Red Cross; several local Russian and Swiss committees

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Turkey	7,500 civilians in the area of Constantinople; 5,000 civilians authorized to settle at their own expense in the area of Constantinople; 64,298 military in the camps; 779 enlisted in the French Foreign Legion; 2,027 in hospitals in Constantinople; 4,961 on the "rade Beicos"; 10,000 unidentified. Total 94,070 refugees	Russian Red Cross; Zemgor; White Red Cross; ARC; Italian Red Cross; YMCA; ICRC's mission; SCF; gifts from Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish Red Cross...
Total: 785,433 Russian refugees		

Only the LRCS did not adhere to the policy recommendations that were spurred by the conference. Donald W. Brown, acting director-general of the LRCS, saw divergence rather than convergence between POWs, who were forcibly displaced, and Russian refugees who, in his own words, "voluntarily left their own country"; he opposed the appointment of a high commissioner and suggested that private organizations should be given a more prominent position in the plan; and he also believed that Russian organizations in exile could protect their compatriots without the intervention of the LON.⁷⁸ If one can understand that different actors could offer diverging views on the same humanitarian emergency, the ongoing tensions between the ICRC and the LRCS might have motivated Brown's position. It took the ICRC a few weeks of negotiation for the LRCS to eventually support the appointment of a high commissioner for Russian refugees in March 1921.⁷⁹

Guaranteeing the LRCS's support was a strategic choice: the ICRC knew that having the LON's member states accept responsibility over displaced Russians would not be easy. While the LON Secretariat engaged in lengthy discussions with its constituents, the Red Cross continued its work of information gathering and lobbying. On March 18, 1921, it participated in a conference on refugee children in the Balkans, organized by the ARA at its London offices, where the ARC, the SCF, and the

⁷⁸ "Whereas the repatriation of prisoners of war was purely [sic] a governmental function and one which therefore properly came under the League of Nations, the question of the Russian refugees who now find themselves scattered throughout various parts of the world, due to the fact that they voluntarily left their own country, is one for voluntary effort to cope with, in conjunction with such help as individual governments of the countries in which these refugees find themselves might give." ACICR, C.R.87 5/43, Brown to Ador, February 17, 1921.

⁷⁹ ACICR, C.R.87-5/79, Conférence avec les général Henderson, March 10, 1921.

American Relief Administration European Children's Fund were in attendance.⁸⁰ Since the international protection of children enjoyed favorable momentum, the conference articulated the rescue of refugee children within world peace, stability, and reconstruction.⁸¹ It also decided that information was to be shared and the division of labor established.⁸² The ICRC would feed Russian refugee children in the Bosphorus, Bulgaria, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; the ARC would continue caring for Greek refugee children in Salonika; and the ARAECF would feed children in Hungary.⁸³

In April 1921, the ICRC showed proactiveness in information gathering and charged the British General C. B. Thomson, who was knowledgeable about the region, to verify the conditions of Russians displaced throughout the Balkans.⁸⁴ Such information would be instrumental had a high commissioner for Russian refugees at the LON been appointed.⁸⁵ Assisted by Maurice Gehri of the UISE, Thomson met with government representatives; he suggested that an officer should be appointed to cope with Russian refugees nationally; he verified the exactness of reports that were sent to Geneva; and he tried to classify refugees in three groups: those who desired to emigrate, those who wished to repatriate, and those who either wanted

⁸⁰ ACICR, C.R.87 5/85, Feeding of under-nourished children in the Balkans, March 17, 1921.

⁸¹ On the international history of child protection, see Dominique Marshall, "The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations: The Declaration of Children's Rights and the Child Welfare Committee of League of Nations, 1900-1924," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 7, no. 2 (1999): 103-148. Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights in Imperial Political Cultures: Missionary and Humanitarian Contributions to the Conference on the African Child of 1931," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 12 (2004): 273-318; Joëlle Droux, "La tectonique des causes humanitaires: concurrences et collaborations autour du Comité de protection de l'enfance de la Société des Nations (1880-1940)," *Relations internationales* n° 151, no. 3 (2013): 77-90. Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!' Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-War Britain," *Historical Research* 86, no. 231 (2013): 116-137. Heide Fehrenbach, "Children as Casework: The Problem of Migrating and Refugee Children in the Era of World War," in Jacqueline Bhabha, Daniel Senovilla Hernandez, and Jyothi Kanics (eds), *Research Handbook on Child Migration* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Pub, 2018): 23-36. Elisabeth Pillier, "German Child Distress, US Humanitarian Aid and Revisionist Politics, 1918-24," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 3 (2016): 453-86.

⁸² ACICR, C.R.87 5.88, Etat actuel de la question d'un secours international aux réfugiés russes, March 22, 1921.

⁸³ AILO, R201.2, Frick to Varlez, March 19, 1921.

⁸⁴ ACICR, C.R.87, Neuvième séance du Conseil de la SDN, February 26, 1921, M/21/29/1.

⁸⁵ ACICR, B MIS 15, MIS.15.2/274, Brunel to Burnier, April 26, 1921. "His mission is considered by us as a useful preparation for the action in favor of the Russian refugees, a preparation which will only greatly facilitate the task of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations, if he is appointed, and which in the contrary case will nevertheless constitute an important step towards the solution of the problem." Translated from French.

or had to stay in the country of first asylum.⁸⁶ Thomson's final assessment confirmed that repatriation was the best solution for military and civilians.⁸⁷

3.4 The LON and Russian refugees

In the spring of 1921, Drummond hastened member states to advise whether the LON should protect Russian refugees, knowing that the Council was "most anxious to give assistance," yet within "certain limits."⁸⁸ Understanding what were the limits of refugee protection and the reasons for the LON's involvement was key.⁸⁹ Responses were mixed: Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom expressed a general support; Denmark, Finland, and Poland dwelled on the conditions of Russian refugees in their countries; only Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, and Switzerland endorsed the appointment of a high commissioner.⁹⁰ As soon as governments' responses came in, Gabriel Hanotaux, the French representative to the LON Council, compiled a report which was later distributed to all member states and which served as the basis for a memorandum, published on June 27, 1921, where consensus was reached on a number of points: Russian displacement was an unexpected consequence of WWI, for which a "carefully chosen" high commissioner should be appointed; an inter-governmental conference would be convened; and negotiations should be initiated between the LON Secretariat and governments on questions of financing.⁹¹

Regarding the appointment of the high commissioner, at first the names of Colonel William Haskell for the ARA and of Colonel Robert Edwin Olds for the ARC were advanced on account of their vast experience in humanitarian relief.⁹² Their American nationality also counted in the equation: the LON Secretariat, which saw

⁸⁶ ACICR, CR 87 2/301, Instructions données au général Thomson pour sa mission dans les pays des Balkans pour étudier cette question des réfugiés russes.

⁸⁷ ACICR, C.R.87, Report on Russian refugees in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey by Thomson, May 31, 1921.

⁸⁸ ACICR, C.R.87, Drummond to Ador, March 1, 1921, 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. The Question of the Russian refugees. ACICR, C.R.87-5.61, Copie de la lettre adressée aux gouvernements, March 4, 1921.

⁸⁹ Kimberly A. Lowe, *The Red Cross and the New World Order, 1918-1924* (Dissertation, Yale, 2013), 173–227.

⁹⁰ 2 League of Nations O. J. 485 1921. The Question of the Russian refugees. II. Summary of the documents received by the Secretariat.

⁹¹ ALON, R1713, The Question of the Russian Refugees, Report Presented by M. Hanotaux, French Representative and Adopted by the Council on June 27, 1921, C.133(b)M.131.1921.VII, 45.13687.12319.

⁹² ALON, C1117, Letter to Lodge, May 31, 1921. NA, FO, 371.6868, W 8316.38.38, Memorandum on the LON and Russian Refugees by Emrys Evans, July 15, 1921.

in the Russian refugee question both a matter of politics and money, believed that Haskell and Olds could ease the contacts with American philanthropies, whose resources were incomparably larger than those available in Europe. It was after their refusal that Drummond and Noel-Baker turned to Nansen, who enjoyed a good reputation for successfully managing the exchange of POWs. Yet, Nansen had already accepted another mandate, acting as high commissioner for famine relief in the Volga region, where he coordinated the feeding and medical plans of European humanitarian organizations.⁹³ Moreover, in the medium term, he hoped to resume the academic work that he had put on hold to pursue his political career.⁹⁴

It took Noel-Baker's careful negotiation for Nansen to accept.⁹⁵ Not only did the British officer appeal to humanitarian compassion, alongside the discourses formulated on displaced POWs, but he also believed that the Russian refugee question could be solved by a part-time "travelling agent".⁹⁶ How can we understand such a serious misrepresentation of refugee work, knowing that, in the summer of 1921, Noel-Baker possessed abundant data on the articulation of Russian displacement in terms of relief, politics, and law? On one hand, Noel-Baker, far from being a lonely voice, embodied the widespread belief that Russian refugees, whose displacement was rooted in WWI, could be quickly repatriated, by using the same machinery in place for displaced former combatants. On the other hand, the British officer also epitomized the credo, according to which Russians could not possibly live in permanent exile. At least at the beginning, the brand-new international system, where political and social stability could be obtained by matching ethnicity with nationality, was not ready to already face such a glaring exception.

It is important to stress that the decision to appoint Nansen was not unanimous. The British Foreign Office believed that it was inappropriate for the same person to provide relief to famine-stricken regions in Russia and to Russians in exile.⁹⁷ The United Refugee Relief Organization in London went further: "it [was] both practically inexpedient and morally inadmissible to combine the task of championing the Soviets and of protecting the interests of the refugees".⁹⁸ To accommodate British

⁹³ Vogt, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F1, legg 1, Baker to Nansen, Geneva, August 6, 1921.

⁹⁵ "I cannot take the responsibility to remain inactive if something really useful can be achieved for the relief of Russia"—this is what Nansen stated. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F1, legg 1, Handwritten letter from Nansen to Baker, July 27, 1921.

⁹⁶ NBKR, 4:472, Memorandum on the possible action of the League in connection with Russian refugees by Noel-Baker, May 6, 1921.

⁹⁷ NA, FO 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Comments by Emyr Evans, March 8, 1922.

⁹⁸ NA, FO 371.9336, N7299.46.38, Memorandum from United Russian Refugee organizations in London to Lord Cecil, London, August 13, 1923. The United Refugee Relief Organization in London grouped the following institutions: the Russian Red Cross, Russian Refugees Relief Associations,

skepticism, the LON made sure at least to separate the staff in charge of refugee work and famine relief. Nor was Nansen's entourage held in great esteem. Frick, who was in charge of refugee and famine work, was suspected of undertaking a personal side business in Berlin and had to resign.⁹⁹

The LON eased Nansen into the position by organizing a new conference on Russian refugees in late August 1921 with the presence of interested governments and a few international organizations. The conference's inter-governmental imprinting marked a break from the gathering that the ICRC had convened early the same year which saw a much larger participation of private, voluntary, sectarian organizations.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, much to the chagrin of Russian organizations in exile, they were not invited. As we read in the letter addressed to Drummond by Jean Efremoff, the former Russian representative in Switzerland, "aren't the Russians who are the most interested and who have the duty and the right to provide all the information and all the necessary questions?"¹⁰¹ One should not forget that Russian organizations had just met in the Conference of Russian Refugee Organizations in Paris, where they formulated important policy directions that could be of use to the LON.¹⁰²

At the August meeting, one after the other, governments shared their take on the Russian refugee question. In Finland, "the organization of relief was not [an] easy matter for a country that [had] just passed through the horrors of the war, and where even the food supply of the general population presented serious difficulties"; "un-accustomed to discipline and order" Russian refugees were told to conspire against Finnish "hospitality." The French delegate spoke of the danger of keeping armed Russian soldiers in the Bosphorus, only to be echoed by the Polish delegate who spoke of invasion and burden.¹⁰³ In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, where an institution dealing with Russian refugees had just been created, the high commissioner should first communicate with the Ministry of Foreign

Russian Self-Help Association, Russian Children Welfare Association, Russian Relief Fund, Russian Army and Navy Ex-Service Men' Association, Russian Academical Group, and Northern Association.

⁹⁹ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Russian refugees at Constantinople and elsewhere, March 10, 1922.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1721, Conference on the Russian Refugee Question, Geneva, August 26, 1921, C.227.M.203.1921.VII, 45.15145.13564.

¹⁰¹ ALON, R1713, Efremoff to Drummond, July 3, 1921, 45.13785.12319.

¹⁰² AILO, R201.6, Mémorandum sur la question des réfugiés russes. Fourteen Russian organizations were present. La Conférence des Ambassadeurs de Russie; les Représentants de l'Armée Russe, le Comité Central de la Croix Rouge Russe; le Comité des Zemstvos et des Villes; le Comité Parlementaire Russe; le Comité National Russe; le Union pour la libération et la régénération de la Russie; le Union Commerciale et Industrielle; le Comité des Banques; le Association des Universitaires; l'Association des Hommes de Lettres; le Conseil des Chemins de Fer Privés; l'Association des Avocats; l'Association des Ingénieurs. De Giers, dean of the Russian Ambassadors, was the president of the conference.

¹⁰³ 2 League of Nations O. J. 1006 1921.

Affairs in order to respect institutional hierarchies. These examples show how most of the governments which, *nolens volens*, happened to welcome displaced Russians, formulated discourses around collective security, cultural clashes, and economic burden, while dismissing moral and political obligations.

At the end of the conference, national representatives were asked to report to their governments and asked for instructions.¹⁰⁴ Eventually, Nansen came to office as the high commissioner for Russian refugees at the LON on September 1, 1921; he mainly worked from Lysaker, near Oslo, and regularly traveled to Geneva for meetings and conferences, and also made his way to Russia, the Balkans, and Armenia. In Geneva, the staff of the HCR was small: in addition to a bilingual secretary, a deputy high commissioner—first Frick, then de Watteville, both from the ICRC, and last, the British Thomas Frank Johnson—assisted Nansen.¹⁰⁵ Delegates of the Red Cross and, to assist on specific projects, *ad hoc* appointed experts such as engineers and agronomists would be dispatched in places of displacement and intervention across and beyond Europe.

3.5 The first steps of the HCR

What might appear as a detailed analysis of institutional politics, ideological tensions, and interpersonal connections, instead exposes the specific context where manifold actors—from governments to inter-governmental organizations, from private organizations to civil society associations, and from lawyers to social workers and experts—were drawn to refugee protection in the early 1920s. While the establishment of the HCR was an absolute novelty in international relations, the LON also set a number of conditions. First, the HCR should not engage in direct relief, which fell to governments and private organizations, as there was no money at Nansen's disposal aside from a small amount for the benefit of the Geneva

¹⁰⁴ This is what the August 1921 conference wrote about the financial and economic side of the refugee work: "The Conference expresses the opinion that, as the present situation of the Russian refugees is of interest to the whole world, it would not be right to leave the burden of helping them to the few nations which have hitherto been the only ones to assume it, both out of humanity and because of their geographical situation, which may involve them in sacrifices beyond their strength, and that not only all the member states of the League of Nations, but all the states of the civilized world should be invited to contribute to this urgent and indispensable work of world solidarity a contribution commensurate with their resources." Translated from French. ALON, *Mémoire du Haut-Commissariat à la Société des Nations pour les Réfugiés Russes, à la Section Économique et Financière de la Société des Nations*, C.C.R.R./PV.1 annexe.

¹⁰⁵ ALON, R1731, Drummond to Nansen, September 21, 1921, 45.16056x.16056. Johnson was the author of a book on refugee policies, Thomas Frank Johnson, *International Tramps: From Chaos to Permanent World Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1938).

office. Second, the high commissioner was appointed on a one-year mandate, on the assumption that Russians could be easily repatriated or resettled. This means that Nansen's mandate was renewed by the LON's Assembly meeting in September. Third, the HCR should only protect Russians: this excluded the refugees created by the adjustment of post-imperial borders or sub-group as Russian-Jewish refugees, for whom Lucien Wolf, the president of the Jewish Colonization Association, would have wanted to create a specific sub-section.¹⁰⁶ In the 1920s, the work of the HCR would only be extended to Armenian, Assyrian, and Assyro-Chaldean refugees.¹⁰⁷

Fourth, the LON had a collectivist approach to Russians, who were defined as having lost the protection of their state of origins. If being a needy Russian abroad was enough to receive international protection, since a refugee was not asked to individually prove the reasons for her flight, a group approach was problematic as it dismissed the fragile conditions of specific categories such as women or children. This was clear to a specialized organization like the SCF which, in the summer of 1921, unsuccessfully petitioned the HCR to create a sub-section in charge of Russian children.¹⁰⁸ However, it also happened that humanitarians in the field adapted their work: this was the case for the relief measures on behalf of "fallen" Russian women in Constantinople, thanks to the donations of Scandinavian women's organizations who reacted to Nansen's personal appeal; this was also the case for the educational and vocational programs that were especially established for Russian children and youth.¹⁰⁹ Last, experiments in refugee politics and humanitarian protection at the end of WWI contributed to creating discourses about their supposedly apolitical nature. When the LON's member states did establish the HCR, they also insisted that its actions would be outside of politics. What appears as a constraint at times left space to innovate refugee practices, of which Nansen's passport or communication campaigns are good examples.

¹⁰⁶ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Wolf to Drummond, C.R.R.8, August 15, 1921. Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Empire, The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Metzger, "League of Nations, Refugees, and Individual Rights," in Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch (eds), *Refugees in Europe, 1919-1959: A Forty Years Crisis?* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 101-120.

¹⁰⁸ ALON, R1719, De Geer and Golden to Drummond, Geneva, August 24, 1921, 45.15044.12930. A conference took place in Stockholm, organized by the UISE, from September 25-26, 1921 to discuss relief measures already undertaken by private organizations and to set up a plan of action for future operations.

¹⁰⁹ ALON, JO, Rapport général sur l'œuvre accomplie jusqu'au 15 mars 1922 par M. Fridtjof Nansen, Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations, Avril 1922. The organizations were the *Conseil national des femmes norvégiennes*, the *Conseil national des femmes danoises*, the *Conseil national des femmes suédoises*, and the *Union des femmes islandaises*. They provided a donation of £1,000.

As soon as Nansen was appointed, another international conference met in Geneva from September 16-19, 1921. It was no coincidence that the conference occurred in concomitance with the LON Assembly—an element which would make refugee work visible, and which would ease the participation of national representatives, international officers, and a large number of relief organizations, yet again with the exclusion of Russian organizations.¹¹⁰ Deputy high commissioner Frick, who welcomed the participants, started by giving a general overview of Russian refugees' conditions, particularly in Constantinople. Governments closely followed. France was about to stop the feeding plans for Russians in Constantinople, as it considered food provision “an international affair”; the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which dwelled on having provided abundant assistance to displaced Russians, called upon the states which had not done their part yet, on account of not hosting refugees on their territory, to do so.

Unsurprisingly, heated discussions happened around finances. Faced with governments' well-proved reluctance to allocate financial resources for humanitarian protection, Nansen wished to publicly appeal for money, but after checking first with private organizations about how much they could donate. This project was critically received by Wolf, for whom these organizations had a better time launching the appeal, as they connected with their supporters more easily than governments with citizens. To back up his suggestion, Wolf reported a successful fundraising campaign which occurred in the United Kingdom, based on “one pound for one pound,” meaning that for each pound given to charity, the British government provided another pound.¹¹¹ In the words of Lewis Golden of the SCF, gifts from governments “should stimulate and not discourage private charity and vice versa.”¹¹² All in all, the September conference formulated recommendations, which were not binding but instead offered a “road map”: Nansen was asked to contact governments based on the fact that Russians lacked identification documents to cross international borders; the ILO was officially identified as the organization which would help resettle refugees upon much needed political and economic

¹¹⁰ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 16, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.1. For governments: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, China, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. For international organizations: the ICRC, the LRCS, the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies, the ILO, the NER, the European Student Relief and World's Committee Christian Federation, the World's Committee of the YMCA, the ARC and Refugees Fund, the SCF, the UISE, the Armenian Refugees Lord Mayor's Fund, American Refugee Fund, and the Lord Mayor of London Fund.

¹¹¹ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 16, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.1.

¹¹² ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 17, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.2.

considerations; it was agreed that Nansen would directly appeal to governments and international organizations, Russians among them, to financially support refugee work.¹¹³

Practices of protection were immediately implemented. The HCR's first action was to have a more detailed picture of the Russian displacement; it did so by conducting a census in asylum countries, thanks to the collaboration of the ICRC and the ILO, which gathered information, advised on legal matters, and implemented coordination plans.¹¹⁴ The census was composed of three different forms. Form A pertained to data regarding sex and age; form B focused on profession, which was defined according to sex, age, and civil status; and form C concentrated on the distribution of refugees who could not find employment.¹¹⁵ Despite laudable efforts, it proved difficult to intercept those refugees who lived outside the camp system in cities' neighborhoods. Hence, local institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the police department that was in charge of the control of foreigners, and autonomous relief organizations were associated with the international plan.¹¹⁶

The witty words of Captain Lawford Samuel Childs, a Briton who implemented important refugee work for the HCR in Constantinople and who wrote a chapter entitled "Refugees – a permanent problem in international organizations," do a wonderful job to illustrate some of the HCR's main challenges.

'There is nothing in the Pact about refugees,' the henchmen of hegemony would murmur apologetically to Dr. Nansen when he besought them in the corridors for more money for his work; and when he pressed them, as he always did, they would say that their Governments were rather uneasy about the whole question and that Dr. Nansen must excuse them, as they were due for an important session to consider the experts' report on the work of the sub-committee on phytopathological questions. The epidemic among the elm trees in Europe which was decimating the number of trees available for coffins and

¹¹³ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 19, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.3.

¹¹⁴ AILO, R201.20.1, Butler to Nansen, September 24, 1921.

¹¹⁵ NA, FO 371.6870, N11776.38.38, Memorandum on Russian refugees in Constantinople, October 21, 1921. NA, FO, 371.6871, N12375.38.38, Census of Russian refugees in camps. This document was followed by a list of six questions. The first one dealt with the total number of refugees under the jurisdiction of the government concerned. The second one dealt with the number of refugees at public expense (a distinction to be made between men, women, and children). The third one covered the number of refugees who had no prospect of being self-sufficient by means of a paid job (the same distinction was made between men, women, and children). The fourth question was for invalid refugees. In the fifth, the refugee was asked to declare what his profession in Russia had been. The sixth question asked how many refugees were helped by private humanitarian organizations.

¹¹⁶ ACICR, C.R.87.5.214 généralités, Recensement des réfugiés russes dans les camps et recensement des réfugiés russes non internés dans les camps, November 10, 1921.

other purposes, including armaments, – there, they declared, was a serious matter, which required their attention, and it was, moreover, a direct result of the War, for during the terrible bombardments the wounds in the trees had caused the appearance of various new forms of fungoid growth, which, in their turn, had harbored the parasites which were killing the trees in defiance of the efforts of the experts to deal with them. As for refugees, well, perhaps if Dr. Nansen could promise an immediate, cheap, and efficient scheme for transferring all the refugees which were a charge on their countries to the territories of somebody else, they would see what they could make their Government agree the credits.¹¹⁷

From the outset, Nansen relied upon a handful ICRC delegates, who allocated part of their time to protecting Russian refugees: Captain Georges Burnier in Constantinople, Georges Dessonaz in Sofia, Dr. Bacilieri in Bucharest, N. Ramseyer in Estonia, Edouard Gallati in Latvia, Baron Rudolphe de Reding-Biberegg in Hungary, Henri Reymond in Austria, and Victor Gloor in Poland.¹¹⁸ Being already on the spot, delegates rarely met with Nansen and instead received general instructions by letter: they were asked to put the HCR in touch with governments, to implement the census, and to provide empirical data, and often ended up performing consular functions.¹¹⁹ Left with a large amount of freedom, delegates were kept accountable for currently estimating how much time they put into refugee protection, in addition to their ongoing projects, and for keeping accurate budgets.¹²⁰ Local conditions were determinant: if Baron Rudolph de Reding-Biberegg, based in Budapest, spent one-fifth of his time on Russian refugees, Victor Gloor had to increase the personnel in the Warsaw office, as all of his time was occupied with protecting displaced Russians. As we will see in Chapter 5, which concentrates on the assistance to Russian refugees in Constantinople, Captain Georges Burnier spent two-thirds of his time dealing with refugee-related questions, as one can read in the following table.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Lawford S. Childs, “Refugees – a Permanent Problem in International Organization,” *War Is not Inevitable: Problems of Peace; Thirteenth Series* (London: Peace Book Co. LTD, 1938), 197–198.

¹¹⁸ ACICR, C.R.87.5/197, Nansen to ICRC, September 24, 1921.

¹¹⁹ ACICR, C.R.87.5/197, Instructions for Dr. Nansen’s Delegates, October 10, 1921.

¹²⁰ ACICR, CR 87.2/201 à 300 Généralités (janvier 1922 à janvier 1930), Lettre de Brunel, secrétaire général du service des missions, aux délégués du CICR à Belgrade, Berlin, Budapest, Constantinople, Narwa, Riga, Trieste, Varsovie, Vienne, Geneva, January 12, 1922. ACICR, CR 87.2/203 ter généralités, Projet, aide-mémoire correspondance concernant les frais du CICR pour le HC pour les réfugiés russes.

¹²¹ ACICR, B, MIS 33.5.538, Missions et postes de CICR s’occupant des prisonniers de guerre. May 10–11, 1920.

Table 2. List of the Red Cross missions, May 10-11, 1920. Courtesy of the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.

Mission in Berlin	It took charge of all Russian POWs in Germany and the transport of these POWs to other countries. It allowed the passage of Austro-Hungarian POWs through Germany.
Mission in Prague	Transport of POWs between Czechoslovakia and other countries of former Austria-Hungary. It also took charge of Russian POWs in Czechoslovakia with the support of the Czechoslovakian Red Cross Society.
Mission in Vienna	It maintained contact with the Austrian government and other ICRC missions that worked with Austrian POWs who were still in Siberia, Poland, and Romania.
Mission in Budapest	It maintained contact with the Hungarian government and other ICRC missions that worked with Hungarian POWs who were still in Siberia, Poland, and Romania. Furthermore, it took care of Russian POWs in Hungary and of the camp in Budapest where some workshops were set up for them.
Mission in Warsaw	The ICRC mission worked on behalf of Ukrainian (Galician) and Russian POWs kept captive in Polish camps. It negotiated their passage through Poland from both East to West and West to East.
Mission in Bucharest	Bacilieri, working for the Swiss delegation in Bucharest, oversaw transports through the Danube.
Mission in Narva and in Björko	The mission in Narva focused on the exchange of German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Czech POWs coming from Russia and Siberia with Russian POWs still in Germany. Its main task was to clean, disinfect, and feed POWs from the Central Powers coming from Russia before transporting them to Stettin.
Mission to Siberia	Its aim was visiting and relieving POWs from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire that were kept captive in Eastern Siberia and in Japan. A sub-mission was sent to Irkutsk to verify the possibility of transporting the greatest number of POWs in steamers destined for Europe.
Missions to Lithuania, Latvia, Constantinople, Southern Russia (Odessa and Novorossiysk), and the Caucasus (Batoum, Ekaterinodar)	These were exploratory missions to study the possible transport of Russian POWs to their country and of Austrian Hungarians back to Central Europe.

As in the case of Colonel V., Russian refugees did not shy away from petitioning the LON directly. The most active ones appear to be those who were first resettled in the

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. In late December 1922, a group of Russians who were trained as locksmiths in Serbia wished to migrate to the US, where they might “...improve practically in certain branches of technology by working in factories richly equipped from a technical point of view.”¹²² In addition to group requests, individual ones reached the League of Nations too, opening a sad window into the desperate material conditions of Russian refugees. One Russian family, living in Ljubljana, asked for 3,000 dinars in order to buy a sewing machine, thanks to which the wife would be able to work and to support the family.¹²³ An invalid Russian man living in Serbia, who had lost his left hand during the war, and who was supposed to support two babies, his mother, and an invalid brother, asked Nansen for USD 750 in order to open a shop. The money would be returned, Sergia L. wrote, giving his word as “an officer of the old imperial Russian army.” Poignantly, Sergia begged Nansen to “help [him] to stand on [his] feet and live like a man.”¹²⁴

What do these letters say? They put into concrete words the misery that the majority of Russians experienced in exile, where some received some form of assistance, whereas many others tried to find the means to be self-sufficient. They suggest that Russians perpetuated discourses of victimhood as a legitimate foundation for their requests, yet they also stressed the importance of work to escape their misery and to free themselves from foreign relief. What is also interesting is that refugees did not advance abstract requests: they sketched rudimentary business plans, such as in the case of the shop opening and the sewing machine, or they knew the prize of a boat ticket to America. As for Nansen, his reply to all letters, with a few exceptions, was coherent with his mandate: there was no means to intervene.¹²⁵

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the ICRC delegates that were spread across the European continent to deal with POWs were among the first to witness the desperate conditions of Russian refugees. From Estonia, Georges Dessonaz reported that refugee camps had sprung up since 1919 on the eastern border of the country, where the followers of the white general Yudenich had found asylum.¹²⁶ De Chabannes La

¹²² ALON, R1717, Lettre écrite par le président de l'Union de serruriers et monteurs, sortis du Cours spéciale en serrurerie et de montage établi dans l'usine technique du Ministère de guerre à Kragujevac, December 21, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²³ ALON, R1717, Colonel Z. to Nansen, November 30, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁴ ALON, R1717, Sergia L. to Nansen, June 6, 1924, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁵ ALON, R1717, Nansen to Serge N., November 30, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁶ AICRC, B MIS 35, Dessonaz to ICRC, May 31, 1921.

Palice, headquartered in Constantinople, witnessed the impromptu and massive arrival of Russian refugees from Crimea in November 1920.¹²⁷ These delegates, alongside their colleagues in Geneva, immediately extended their limited resources to include needy Russians, who were understood to be war victims, in line with the ICRC postwar manifesto.

Building on the expertise and knowledge of Russian humanitarian organizations, as well as on the work of its delegates, the Red Cross played a central role in conceptualizing the refugee in different, yet not mutually exclusive, ways. Despite its limited resources, the ICRC was pivotal in raising the question of Russian refugees with the ILO and then with the LON, where it became an inter-governmental question with the creation of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees and the appointment of Nansen as high commissioner. The different conceptualizations of the refugee overlapped, cohabitated, and, at times, produced clashes among the actors involved. The ICRC considered Russian refugees as “war victims,” “without protection and without country,” and thus entitled to humanitarian aid. To the ILO, Russians were economic migrants, who could engage in remunerated activities, no longer depending on charity and actively contributing to postwar reconstruction. Russian refugees were also a political and social category, as they were forced to leave their country and seek protection and welfare services elsewhere.

Ideas of civilization and racism played a role in settlement plans and immigration policies. The ILO tried, and failed, to settle Russians in the British Dominions and Colonies in the belief that they would be good (and white) settlers. Both the British government and the LON believed that Russian refugees would fit better in Eastern and Southeastern Europe because of their linguistic and religious proximity to the local societies. Russians then were welcomed in postwar France as workers due to the fact that French men had passed away during wartime and because they were white, thus avoiding the racial anxieties that people of color from the colonies created in the *métropole*. The situation was similar in Brazil, which opened the door to Russians as workers on the plantations because they would contribute to the “racial betterment” of its racially mixed population.

From the appointment of Nansen as high commissioner in June 1921 and the creation of the High Commissariat at the LON, the seeds of what would become our current governance emerged. International, inter-state, and transnational forms of cooperation between organizations and governments gave way to a never-before-seen structure at the LON, which already constituted a political novelty in the interwar period. Instead of being addressed by governments or associations alone, the refugee question was internationalized through the arena of the LON. As we

¹²⁷ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople.

have seen, this internationalization went through twists and turns, often suffering from a lack of political and financial support. However, the existence of the High Commissariat for refugees, whose structure and functioning were grounded on the international repatriation of prisoners of war, was already a mirror for these changing times, alongside the creation of specific committees and commissions, the propaganda measures that international organizations used, the legal definitions, and the establishment of the Nansen passport.

The global governance of refugee protection: obstacles and innovations

Abstract

This chapter presents the main innovation of the global governance of refugee protection, suggesting that it embodied both the failure of statecraft and was a source of innovation. Private and voluntary organizations, of a religious and a secular nature, which were central in providing immediate relief, found a place in inter-governmental politics; the Nansen passport and the first definition of refugee were approved; fundraising techniques increasingly built on visual politics to emotionally engage the audience, hoping for financial support; and, as of 1925, the governance saw refugees as unemployed migrants to be resettled beyond Europe, in mandated Middle East and in Latin America. Officers, humanitarians, and lawyers offered crucial expertise.

Keywords: global governance, experts, Nansen passport, fundraising events, employment.

The very nature of the refugee work, which is essentially of a cumulatively pioneer constructive character, precludes anything like an accurate estimate being afforded of the absolute results obtained. Emigration currents are created, and their directions shaped, but it is impossible to estimate accurately their ultimate volume, as when the way has once been paved for the introduction of refugees by the establishment of systematic methods, their relatives and friends usually follow independently.

—Memorandum by the director of the International Labour
Office on the work of the refugee service.¹

The history of international refugee protection and the making of global norms carries both constraints and possibilities: it is a history of deadlocks and innovations; it is about utopia, compassion, and the driest cynicism.² As we have started to see, the displacement of an unexpected number of Russian military and civilians into the unsettled areas of Central Eastern Europe and the Middle East created

¹ R1602, Memorandum by the director of the International Labor Office on the work of the refugee service, 1926, 40-52990-41465.

² Ethnographic work has been useful to analyze the making of global norms, Marion Fresia, “Building Consensus within UNHCR’s Executive Committee: Global Refugee Norms in the Making,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27, no. 4 (2014): 514–533.

preoccupations among national and international organizations. Governments which emerged from the imperial collapse extended limited assistance, while international humanitarian organizations, many of which were already *in loco*, adapted their mandate to the circumstances. The International Committee of the Red Cross was one of them: from the Baltics to the Bosphorus, its delegates reported about the desperate conditions of displaced Russians, especially vulnerable children. The Red Cross turned to the International Labour Organization first and then to the League of Nations, where the question became an inter-governmental concern and where the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, headed by Fridtjof Nansen, was created.³

At the end of the war, massive humanitarian emergencies occurred where ideas about humanitarian protection, which had emerged in a plethora of prewar and wartime settings, met a completely new international system. This created a peculiar context in which the widespread crises of statecraft and insufficient resources left space for the elaboration of path-breaking political, humanitarian, and legal solutions.⁴ While private and voluntary organizations, religious or secular, are scattered throughout this book, as they played a crucial role in offering immediate relief to needy prisoners of war and refugees, this chapter wishes to reflect more deeply on the interplay of the non-state sphere in the inter-governmental realm. It does so by examining the emergence and the running of the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations, a special body which was created in the fall of 1921 to support and advise the High Commissariat. As the Advisory Committee discussed at length, the lack of financial resources hindered refugee protection. This explains the importance attached to communication campaigns, where visual resources were mobilized, aimed at moving the Western public and at unblocking financial contributions. Locally, initiatives including lotteries, balls, or festivals were organized for the benefit of “next-door” Russian refugees rather than the “distant other.”⁵

Thanks to its first-hand experiences across Europe and the Middle East, the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations was acutely aware that refugees were stuck in a limbo: as soon as the Russian and the Turkish states approved decrees of denationalization, which denied the possibility of return, refugees had a hard time resettling, as they lacked the documents to cross international borders. Again, the impasse opened the doors to an innovative solution, the Nansen passport. We will see how the document came into being and how its implementation varied, depending on national regulations. The Nansen passport gave way to the

³ ALON, R1713, The Question of the Russian Refugees, Report Presented by M. Hanotaux, French Representative and Adopted by the Council on June 27, 1921, C.133(b)M.131.1921.VII, 45.13687.12319.

⁴ Dubin, *op. cit.* Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”.

⁵ Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other”.

development of international refugee law.⁶ Meanwhile, the ILO came back into the picture. If, in 1921, the Labour Organization had refused to play a central part in refugee politics, as it exceeded its mandate, only a few years later it agreed to resettle Russian and Armenian refugees, as it saw in them unemployed migrants, mostly agriculturists who would help “colonize” underpopulated areas of the Middle East and Latin America, at times at the expenses of the local population.⁷ By an unexpected twist, from 1925 to 1929, the LON and the ILO joined forces to “liquidate”, in their own words, the refugee question. They were yet to see that refugees had already become a permanent actor of international relations.

4.1 The early years of the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations at the HCR

We have seen that aid organizations played a central role both in implementing relief plans for Russian refugees and in pushing for solutions to be articulated at the international level. Article 25 of the LON Covenant explicitly mentioned private organizations, particularly “the establishment and cooperation of duly authorized voluntary national Red Cross organizations having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.”⁸ Yet, as Philip Noel-Baker noticed, “general principles” regulating the interaction between the LON and aid organizations had not been settled and would rather emerge from practice.⁹ Humanitarian protection and refugee politics offered

⁶ Reflections on the LON humanitarian and social work already started during the interwar period. Rachel E. Crowdy, “The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (1927): 153–69. Weindling, *op. cit.* Borowy, *op. cit.* Piana, “Humanitaire et politique, in medias res.” Céline Paillette, “De l’Organisation d’hygiène de la SDN à l’OMS: Mondialisation et régionalisme européen dans le domaine de la santé, 1919–1954,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 32, no. 2 (2010): 193–198. Balinska, *op. cit.* On the international work on children, see Marshall, “The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations,” Droux, *op. cit.*; Baughan, “‘Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!’, For the international regulations on matters of cannabis and alcohol consumption, see Liat Kozma, “The League of Nations and the Debate over Cannabis Prohibition,” *History Compass* 9, no. 1 (2011): 61–70. Philippe Bourmaud, “Les faux-semblants d’une politique internationale: la Société des Nations et la lutte contre l’alcoolisme dans Les Mandats (1919–1930),” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History / Bulletin Canadien d’histoire de la médecine* 30, no. 2 (2013): 69–90. See also Rodríguez García, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*

⁷ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*. Robson, *Human Capital*.

⁸ The Covenant of the League of Nations.

⁹ Quoted in Thomas Richard Davies, “A ‘Great Experiment’ of the League of Nations Era: International Nongovernmental Organizations, Global Governance, and Democracy Beyond the State,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 18, no. 4 (2012): 408.

preferential spaces for observing the interplay of non-state and inter-governmental actors.

With the *placet* from the LON Secretariat, in September 1921, Nansen suggested the creation of a committee having a consultancy capacity where “Russian and foreign organizations would preserve their absolute autonomy in their own field of activity, [and have] full control of their own funds.”¹⁰ The move was clear: the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, which had a limited range of action, attempted to rely on the resources and the expertise of private organizations and charities to formulate policy directions, while, by joining the ACPO, aid organizations acquired legitimacy, created coalitions, and avoided the duplication of efforts.¹¹ Institutionally framed within the HCR, the ACPO turned out to be a space for discussion, information gathering, alliance making, and policy suggestions, and acted as a critical ally to the HCR in many instances. In 1922, it supported the creation of the Nansen passport, and, in 1924, it advocated for refugee work not to be dismissed.¹²

How did the ACPO work? Between 1921 and 1925, the committee met once a year (on September 19, 1921, on November 24, 1921, from May 29-30, 1922, on April 30, 1923, and on September 3, 1924), upon the initiative of the LON Secretariat or of the HCR, which determined the agenda, also thanks to the inputs of aid organizations. Indeed, before the meeting, private voluntary organizations shared reports which laid the foundation for future discussions. In turn, the ACPO produced further documents and recommendations that Nansen forwarded to the LON Assembly and the Council.¹³ Due to its under-theorized status, the ACPO could be convened at crucial moments. This happened in the spring of 1922, when Nansen needed support for the inter-governmental conference on the certificates of identity that would take place in July of the same year. In the words of Noel-Baker, “I think a discussion of some such agenda as this would please the Committee of Voluntary Associations and would enable us to elicit their support, for what it is worth, with the Governments in some of the proposals which we intend to lay before the Council.”¹⁴

¹⁰ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Resolutions passed at the conference of delegates on Russian refugees on September 16, 17, and 19, 1921. ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Mémorandum sur la question des réfugiés russes présenté par la conférence russe réunie à Paris en Août 1921, C.R.R.10.

¹¹ For a discussion on the ACPO from 1926 to 1930, which also contains a table with the list of the organizations for each meeting, see Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 343–353.

¹² Steve Charnovitz, “Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18 (1997).

¹³ Chris Ansell, Egbert Sondorp, and Robert Hartley Stevens, “The Promise and Challenge of Global Network Governance: The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 18, no. 3 (2012): 333, 317–337.

¹⁴ ALON, R1736, Baker to de Watteville, March 9, 1922, 45.19454.X17337.

As far as membership was concerned, any organization interested in the Russian refugee question was welcome to attend (see table 3). During the first meeting of the ACPO, we find 12 organizations; 11 during the second; nine during the third; 15 in April 1923; and 13 in September 1924. The number of organizations increased to 24 when the ACPO extended its work to both Russian and Armenian refugees.¹⁵ Here is the list of those in attendance in September 1921: the International Committee of the Red Cross, the *Union internationale de secours aux enfants*, Save the Children Fund, the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies, the Armenian Refugees' Fund, the Fight the Famine Council, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Near East Relief, the European Student Relief World Christian Federation, the World Jewish Relief Conference, the Russian Red Cross, and the Zemgor.¹⁶ These institutions were quite different from one another: while the ICRC and the ILO had much larger mandates than refugee protection, there were those that targeted ethnic groups, such as Armenian, Jewish, or Russian, and those that worked in relation to specific categories such as women and children. Neither was there homogeneity in the typology of relationships that aid organizations created with the LON: if the ICRC, the UISE, or the SCF had already established agreements on refugee work, institutions including the NER and the Jewish organizations were never formally associated with the inter-governmental organization, yet they crucially contributed to debates around questions including identity documents or emigration plans.¹⁷

If we move from the level of private organizations to the level of international civil servants, the diversity was even larger.¹⁸ Frick, who acted as the chairperson during the first ACPO meeting, was working towards the repatriation of POWs for the ICRC.¹⁹ His wife, Marguerite Frick-Cramer, had served in the International Agency for Prisoners of War for the ICRC, together with a young Suzanne Ferrière,

¹⁵ ANB, Ms.fol. 1988, F10.Ia legg 35, Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Refugees held at the International Labour Office, September 10, 1925. In addition to core organizations, at the 1925 meeting, there were many new ones, connected to the Armenian question: President of the late Armenian Republic, *Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance*, *Comité Central de secours pour l'Arménie*, *Comité de l'Association internationale pour le Proche-Orient* and of the *Comité Central de l'œuvre suisse de secours aux Arméniens*, British Society of Friends, *Comité Central des Réfugiés Arméniens*, and *Comité Philarménien belge*.

¹⁶ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume I* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁷ For Jewish organizations at LON, see Jaclyn Granick, "Les associations juives à la Société des Nations, 1919-1929: l'accès sans l'influence," *Relations internationales*, no. 151 (2013): 103–113.

¹⁸ Saunier, "Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux." Kott, "Une 'communauté épistémique' du social?" Rodogno, Gauthier, Piana, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ L'expérience du Comité international de la Croix Rouge en matière de secours internationaux, 56.

who was also the spokesperson of the UISE.²⁰ Georges Lodygensky represented the Russian Red Cross, while Sophia Panine and Nicolas Astroff represented the Zemgor.²¹ The two larger groups were composed of British and Americans. For British organizations, we find Lewis Golden, the treasurer of the SCF; Wolf, who represented the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies; Rev. Harold Buxton and John Harris for the London-based Armenian Refugees' Fund, an organization established after the Hamidian massacres with Buxton having traveled in Armenia and Harris being engaged in anti-slavery activism in Belgian Congo;²² and George Paish acted on behalf of the British-based Fight Famine Council. Representing American organizations were B. A. Davis for the YMCA and G. L. Berry for the NER. S. Harvanowsky represented the European Student Relief World Christian Federation, and Zevi Aberson the World Jewish Relief Conference²³.

What did these men and a few women have in common? It was their knowledge of internationalism, humanitarian aid, charity, philanthropy, and refugee work. At the ACPO, they talked to each other, and shared data and expertise, which turned out to be instrumental for creating new knowledge. If the group of humanitarians sitting at the ACPO were an "epistemic community"—a category borrowed from political science which has been productively mobilized to study international organizations—other determinants including nationality, education, gender, age, class, and religion are instrumental to understand where ideas and practices of refugee protection originated.²⁴ The prevalent American, British, and Swiss nationalities of the ACPO members over the small number of Russians mirrored the civilizational categories that the new international system had inherited from the pre-world order, coped with the ideological divide which separated liberalism and Bolshevism: those with financial and political credentials had a more influential place in the decision-making process in the ACPO.

Alongside geopolitical hierarchies, knowledge embodied gendered discriminations: not only men outnumbered women but they also had a university degree and were often in command, whereas two of the three women, Ferrière and Panine, had learnt social work and philanthropy from practice, with Frick-Cramer being an

²⁰ Fiscalini, *op. cit.*, 142, 162.

²¹ ALON, Commission des Réfugiés Russes, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinary, Conférence des réfugiés russes, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921.

²² Noel Buxton, Harold Jocelyn Buxton, *Travels and Politics in Armenia* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914). On Harris, see Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, 175; Ribi Forclaz, *op. cit.* Kevin Grant, "Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no. 2 (2001): 27–58.

²³ Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism*, 142–149.

²⁴ Kott, "Une 'Communauté Épistémique' du Social?"

exception as she had a doctorate and taught history at the University of Geneva.²⁵ Different generations met in the ACPO: Wolf and Panine were the elders of the group and embodied late-nineteenth-century charity and philanthropy, which were at odds with liberal ideas of efficiency and professionalism in the aid industry, particularly endorsed by the Americans. This aspect is closely connected to the coexistence of paid and voluntary work: the ICRC was probably the most striking example of an organization built upon voluntary work, especially at the level of the Geneva-based Committee to which Frick, Frick-Cramer, and Ferrière belonged. Humanitarian aid was also a matter of class, as among its ranks, the ACPO exclusively counted representatives of high bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Regarding religion, there were Protestants of different denominations, Jews, and Orthodox Christians. The diversified amalgam of individuals and experiences which crossed paths in the ACPO created the context where re-conceptualized and new ideas about charity, progressive philanthropy, and morality informed refugee politics.

As we have seen, the first meeting of the ACPO took place as a spontaneous side event to the September 1921 conference on Russian refugees through which Nansen inaugurated the new position of high commissioner.²⁶ The most heated topic was the fragile presence of Russian refugees in Constantinople, whose conditions were so dire that the ACPO decided to quickly reconvene. This happened in November 1921, when the relief organizations in attendance recommended that Nansen pressed the League of Nations Council to communicate with governments, both members and non-members, on the challenges that displaced Russians in Constantinople faced. Such an example carries a double significance. On the one hand, private organizations largely acknowledged governments' primacy in international relations and, if they failed to do so, Frick did not shy away from reminding them that refugee protection was "a question of competence" falling into the governmental realm. On the other hand, non-state advocacy was imaginative and informed governments' decisions. For instance, private organizations suggested that Russians in Constantinople would be transported abroad, upon the granting of transit visas, and helped find "the means necessary to their maintenance and their settlement in productive employment." Wolf was particularly vocal: refugees should be urgently

²⁵ Adele Lindenmeyr, "Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762-1914," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (1993): 562-591. Adele Lindenmeyr, "The First Soviet Political Trial: Countess Sofia Panina before the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 4 (2001): 505-525. Fiscalini, *op. cit.*, 142.

²⁶ ALON, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinary.

given an identity document, while their legal status was “an entirely different question” that could be momentarily postponed.²⁷

Crucial questions were discussed at the ACPO. In May 1922, Wolf denounced the consequences of American and Canadian anti-immigration policies on desperate Russian refugees, for whom quota measures remained unchanged.²⁸ To bypass the problem, Wolf was happy to “take refugees off the hands of the High Commissariat,” provided that Jewish refugees had access to “political privileges and facilities.” Wolf was particularly critical of the recent anti-immigration laws approved by the United States:

...The great immigration countries [were] earnestly asked to share in these sacrifices by such a relaxation of their immigration restrictions as [would] enable a substantial proportion of these refugees to settle in their midst, the numbers, qualifications and other conditions to be determined hereafter by mutual agreement.²⁹

However, Wolf’s request remained a dead letter, on account of Russian refugees being seen as Bolshevik agents by the American and Canadian governments, despite the fact that they had become refugees to escape from Bolshevism.³⁰ Neither did the dire conditions of Russian children being underfed, uneducated, or sick with tuberculosis soften the anti-immigration policies.³¹

Alongside the expansion of the HCR, in 1924, the ACPO enlarged its mandate to Armenian refugees and created a large number of specialized sub-committees on questions including resettlement, identity documents, or the needs of refugee

²⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./PV.2.

²⁸ At times, Jewish organizations bypassed the LON, contacting countries that had approved anti-immigration laws, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and worked towards softening their policies. This is what Wolf reported at the fourth meeting of the ACPO in 1923. ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1. On the history of American politics towards refugees, see Bon Tempo, *op. cit.*

²⁹ ALON, R1714, Resolution proposed by Mr. Lucien Wolf of the Jewish Colonisation Association and adopted unanimously by the Advisory Committee of Voluntary Organisations for relief to Russian refugees at its meeting from May 29-30, 1922, 45.21041.12319.

³⁰ ALON, Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for the relief of Russian refugees, held on Monday May 29 and Tuesday May 30, 1922 at the offices of the Secretariat, C.C.R.R./P.P./PV.1.

³¹ ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1.

children.³² In time, the ACPO would gain further independence: in 1926, private, voluntary organizations were asked to contact their respective national delegations and investigate whether further cooperation with the LON was possible; in 1927, the refugee problem was so far away from being “liquidated” that the ACPO decided to meet twice a year as work was pressing;³³ in 1929, the members of the ACPO pushed for the HCR to become a permanent organization.³⁴

The ACPO also went local: mirroring the delegations of the High Commissariat based in Austria, France, and Hungary, it created local committees which gathered all aid organizations engaged in refugee protection.³⁵ By 1925, when part of the work was transferred to the ILO, ten out of eleven HCR delegations relied upon national committees of the ACPO. Moreover, a local anchoring was considered to be the best solution for the LON to reach governments, which were called to financially contribute on top of their annual contributions to the LON and in addition to the resources that had been already deployed on their territories to assist both Russian and Armenian refugees. Yet, the consequences of the economic crises in the 1930s worsened an already compromised situation.

Table 3. List of private, voluntary organizations participating in the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations, from 1921 to 1925.

September 19, 1921	President E. Frick; M. Frick-Cramer (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. B. Golden (SCF); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); H. Buxton and J. H. Harris (Armenian Refugee Fund); G. Paish (Fight the Famine Council); B. A. Davis (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); S. Harvanowsky (European Student Relief World, Student Christian Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodygensky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor) ³⁶ .
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³² The Armenian sub-committee for the settlement of Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon, as we will see in Chapter 7; the special technical commission for the juridical situation of Armenian and Russian refugees; the sub-committee for the management of the revolving fund; the sub-committee for Russian refugees in Istanbul; the special commission for appointments; the sub-committee for the study of the conditions of refugee children; the sub-committee for the anti-tuberculosis funds; and the sub-commission to study the distribution of documents. Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 348.

³³ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 9 septembre 1926 tenue au BIT, A/C-3-1926. ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 7 septembre 1927, A/C-6-1927.

³⁴ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 22 mai 1928, A/C.1-1928 (1). ALON, C1471, Comité consultatif des organisations privées, séance tenue à Genève le 15 février 1929, A/C-4-1929.

³⁵ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, General report submitted to the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45,27914.12319.

³⁶ ALON, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinary.

November 24, 1921	President E. Frick; M. Frick-Cramer (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf and L. Ginsberger (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); K. Fries (Student Relief World, Student Christian Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); L. Bryson (League of Red Cross Society); Major Buxton (Imperial War Relief Fund); H.B. Butler; G. Pardo, and Villalonga (ILO) ³⁷ .
May 29-30, 1922	L. Brunel (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf and L. Ginsberger (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); De Salis (League of Red Cross Society); H.B. Butler and Dickinson (ILO) ³⁸ .
April 20, 1923	President F. Nansen; L. Brunel (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); B. A. Davis (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); G. Milsom (League of Red Cross Society); Dickinson, Hentsch, Corbett (ILO); Rev F. Komlosy (Russian Relief and Reconstruction Fund); Arciszewsky (Representative of the Polish Delegation); G. Goulkévitch (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); Dr. Ferber (Delegate of the Free City of Danzig) ³⁹ .
September 3, 1924	E. Clouzot (ICRC and UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies and SCF); J. H. Harris (Lord Mayor's Fund); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); C.V. Vickery (NER); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); Capt. C. Peterson (League of Red Cross Society); H.B. Butler and M.L. Varlez (ILO); G. Goulkévitch (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); G. F. Gracey (Friends of Armenia); T. Strong (International YMCA); M.A. Andréadios (delegate of Greece); M.V. Colocotronis (Greek <i>chargé d'affaires</i>) ⁴⁰ .

³⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./PV.2.

³⁸ ALON, Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for the relief of Russian refugees, held on Monday May 29 and Tuesday May 30, 1922 at the offices of the Secretariat, C.C.R.R./P.P./PV.1

³⁹ ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1.

⁴⁰ ALON, C1468, League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, meeting of the Advisory Committee held in Geneva, at the Offices of the Secretariat, on September 3, 1924, C.C.R.R./O.P.4th session/PV.1.

September 10, 1925	President F. Nansen; L. B. Golden (SCF and UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); I. M. Smith and J. H. Harris (Lord Mayor's Fund and Friends of Armenia); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); L. Motzin and L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); Capt. C. Peterson (League of Red Cross Society); A. Thomas, H.B. Butler and T. F. Johnson (ILO); G. Goulkévitch (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); A. Khatissian (President of the late Armenian Republic); G. Sinapian and Y. Agathon Bey (<i>Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance</i>); M. Papajanian (<i>Comité Central de Secours pour l'Arménie</i>); A. Krafft-Bonnard (<i>Comité de l'Association Internationale pour le Proche-Orient, Comité Central de l'Oeuvre Suisse de Secours aux Arméniens</i>); J. Burt, K. D. Courtney and H. Clark (British Society of Friends); W.M. Kotsching (International Student Service); B. Nikolsky (<i>Comité Central de Patronage de la Jeunesse Universitaire Russe à l'Étranger</i>); R. Pelantová (Czechoslovakian Red Cross Society); L. Pachalian (<i>Comité Central des Réfugiés Arméniens</i>); K. Jeppe (Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East of the LON); W. Orr (Council of the YMCA of the US); R. Larned (International Migration Service HQs); D. L. Rayner (Greek Branch of the International Migration Service); H. La Fontaine (<i>Comité Philarménien Belge</i>).⁴¹
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4.2 Communication, publicity, and fundraising

Financial resources (or the lack of thereof) shaped humanitarian protection and refugee politics. The annual contribution that the LON made to the HCR was only meant to cover administrative costs which figured in temporary expenses.⁴² Governments' share was then crucial, yet difficult to secure. To that end, Nansen mobilized all types of discourses, ranging from moral compassion to political responsibility; he connected the humanitarian needs of displaced persons to world peace and postwar reconstruction; he even highlighted that desperate Russians could be vectors of social, medical, and political instabilities. Yet, the most heartfelt

⁴¹ ANB, Ms.fol. 1988, F10.1a legg 35, Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Refugees held at the International Labour Office, September 10, 1925.

⁴² This is the full list of questions listed under the temporary headline: the Temporary Commission for the Reduction of the Armaments, the International Blockade Committee, the repatriation of prisoners of war, the Commission of Enquiry regarding the deportation of women and children in the Near East, international bureaux and organizations—including the Committee for International Questions regarding Intellectual Cooperation, the Commission of Enquiry to Albania, the Committee of allocation of expenses. 2 League of Nations O. J. 1037 1921. Chapter III in the budget.

or even the most threatening appeals could do little against a simple fact: by the beginning of the 1920s, governments believed that they had already done enough to assist Russians. When, in the fall of 1921, France wished to discontinue the programs for Russian refugees in Constantinople, the numbers were brought to the attention of the HCR.

[...] The cost of the assistance of Russian refugees evacuated from the Crimea exceeded 150.000.000 francs. This sum had been provided as follows: 86.000.000 by the Ministry of War on the account of the Levant Army, 50.000.000 by the Navy, 6.000.000 by the merchant marine on special account, and 1.246.000 francs by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the account of the Committee for liquidating Wrangel assets. This money should be considered as an advance to the paid back from the Russian government to the French one.⁴³

Governments' growing disinterest towards postwar emergencies prompted the visual politics of humanitarian aid, which was made possible by recent technical innovations, and which flourished thanks to the rise of the consumer culture.⁴⁴ At the end of the war, the International Committee of the Red Cross realized that more articulated communication strategies were pivotal to broadening the political consensus, to emotionally moving the audience, and, hopefully, to raising contributions. This is the reason why a propaganda commission was established in 1919; its work concentrated on the running of local and national campaigns in Switzerland. While the commission continued to rely on traditional media, such as posters, postcards, stamps, and booklets, it also organized public screenings in Geneva where photographs were showcased, commented on by one of its delegates, and where "propaganda movies" were projected.⁴⁵ In late 1920, the Red Cross mandated the realization of four movies to be shown first at the 10th Conference of the Red Cross movement, which met in Geneva in late spring 1921. Such a short notice epitomized

⁴³ AICRC, C.R.87/SDN communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Russian refugees, development of the question since the last meeting of the Council, memorandum by the Secretary-General and resolution adopted by the Council on September 2, 1921, C.292.(a)1921.VII. Measures taken by the French government to assist Russian refugees, statement by M. de Reffye, French Consul-General in Geneva.

⁴⁴ For a study on the ARC, see Kevin Rozario, "'Delicious Horrors': Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2003): 417–455. The history of visual politics of international organizations is a field undergoing expansion. For some examples, see Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 303–334 and Kate Manzo, "Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood," *Antipode* 40, no. 4 (2008): 632–657.

⁴⁵ Francesca Piana, "Photography, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence: the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War," in Fehrenbach and Rodogno, *op. cit.*, 140–164.

the institution's uncoordinated attempts to regain primacy within the movement. By portraying its flagship programs—the campaigns against typhus in Poland, the exchange of prisoners of War In Estonia, the assistance for Russian refugees in Constantinople, and child relief in Budapest—the ICRC put itself and the delegates at centerstage, stressing once again humanitarian compassion, professionalism, and determination. The receiving ends are innocent victims, needy children, or adults being displaced and in disarray.⁴⁶

As far as Nansen is concerned, from the outset, he complemented the appeals to governments with those addressed to civil society. As soon as he was appointed high commissioner for Russian refugees, in the fall of 1921, Nansen reached out to collect money for Russian refugees in Constantinople, followed by another appeal on behalf of Russian women in the city.⁴⁷ Thanks to the assistance of the LON Information Section, Nansen also published articles in newspapers, hoping to increase the visibility of refugee work.⁴⁸ Alongside the widespread use of propaganda movies, Nansen brought back from the famine-stricken Volga region a new one, thanks to which he tried to convince Western donors of the purely humanitarian, non-political call on behalf of starving Russians.⁴⁹ Two years later, in late 1923, Nansen toured the US in order to “tell the people of America about the suffering caused by the present conditions in Europe,” presenting in particular the desperate conditions of Ottoman Greeks and Armenians in the Near East, from which he had just returned.⁵⁰

Despite being small in scale, at times local initiatives brought more tangible results. In the fall of 1922, the Sofia Office of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees organized a grand ball, the proceeds from which helped to supply

⁴⁶ For work on the visual politics of the ICRC, see Enrico Natale, “Quand l’humanitaire commençait à faire son cinéma: les films du CICR des années 1920s,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 854 (2004): 415–437. Sébastien Farré and Yan Schubert, “L’illusion de l’objectif. Le délégué du CICR Maurice Rossel et les photographies de Theresienstadt,” *Le Mouvement Social* 227, no. 1 (2009): 65–83. Fania Khan Mohammad and Daniel Palmieri, “Des morts et des nus: le regard du CICR sur la malnutrition extrême en temps de guerre (1940–1950),” in Renée Dickason (ed.), *Mémoires croisées autour des deux Guerres mondiales* (Paris, Mare, & Martin, 2012), 85–104. Valérie Gorin, “When ‘Seeing Was Believing’: Visual Advocacy in the Early Decades of Humanitarian Cinema,” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2021): 18–27.

⁴⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./P.V.2. A second appeal would be launched in February 1922. NA, FO, 371.8155, N2955.43.38. Handwritten note by R.A. Leeper, March 28, 1922.

⁴⁸ ALON, R1720, Baker to Komlosy of the Russian Relief and Reconstruction Fund, March 10, 1922, 45.19199X.12930.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Hicks, “Documentary Film and the Volga Famine: Save the Children Fund’s Famine (1922),” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 3 (2023): 645–667.

⁵⁰ ALON, R1756, For the hungry little children of the Near East. Golden Rule Sunday, December 2, 1923, 48.32579.29451.

children with much-needed winter boots.⁵¹ The same office organized a lottery in January 1924, aimed at assisting children, invalids, and sick Russian refugees living in the city. A “temporary committee” was created to organize the lottery and to represent the main organizations responding to the needs of Russians. This committee was composed of representatives of the League of Nations, of the Bulgarian government, and of local and international organizations, such as the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Russian Red Cross, and the Union of Russian Towns.⁵² As many as 250,000 tickets were issued, of which 1,169 were winning numbers. The total sum of the lottery was 2,500,000 levas, while the sum of the winning tickets amounted to 500,000 levas. The profits were distributed to various organizations that were focusing on particularly fragile categories: the Russian Red Cross helped invalids and child internees; Zemgor established a consumptive sanatorium; the Sofia school provided clothing for destitute children, while the Students of Sofia University assisted university students.⁵³

Similarly in Constantinople, where Russian refugees were in dire conditions, fundraising activities were organized, from concerts to exhibitions showcasing handcrafts produced by the refugees.⁵⁴ Indeed, the American Red Cross established workshops where refugees did embroidery and sewing work, as well as wood carving and furniture making; products were then sold to tourists in the city.⁵⁵ In Aleppo, the Danish Karen Jeppe equally established workshops where Armenian women did embroidery, reproducing the traditional patterns of their region of origins and where boys crafted goods which were sold in Denmark and elsewhere.⁵⁶ The underlying idea was for refugees to be self-supporting and to contribute to their own rescue by means of a concrete activity. Jeppe, who owned a camera, also took photographs which were then used in the written press and in public campaigns in Denmark, as a strategy to communicate and raise empathy. While only a few, fully captioned, photographs are left in the League of Nations’ archives, Jeppe’s full album is preserved at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan.⁵⁷

⁵¹ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, general report submitted to the ACPO at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45-27914.12319.

⁵² ALON, R1742, The statute of the Temporary Committee of the Lottery organized for the purpose of helping the children, the invalids, and the sick Russian refugees, 45.21997X.20135.

⁵³ ALON, R1742, Collins to Johnson, January 26, 1924, 45.21997X.20135.

⁵⁴ ALON, C1398, Fonctions du Bureau de Constantinople: Bureau International du Travail, Service des réfugiés, mois de février 1925.

⁵⁵ ALON, C1437, Extracts from Mrs. Miles report, undated, possibly 1925, R404/1/66/1.

⁵⁶ ALON, R640, Deportation of women and children in Turkey and the neighboring countries, memorandum by the secretary-general, September 4, 1922, A.28.1922.III, 12.23010.4631.

⁵⁷ ALON, R641, Annual report “B” supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

4.3 The “Nansen passport” and legal definitions

Refugee work was about humanitarian practices and policies as much as about international law. In their unexpected exile, a few Russians brought identity documents and passports, which were no longer valid as they had been issued by non-recognized *de facto* authorities, while many had no documents at all.⁵⁸ Indeed, passports became compulsory to cross states’ borders only at the end of WWI when a rigid system of control was put into practice.⁵⁹ Moreover, Soviet authorities approved a decree on December 23, 1921, which deprived the majority of Russian refugees of their citizenship.

A Government decree declares that the following persons have forfeited their Russian citizenship: 1. Those who have resided continuously abroad for five years without obtaining certificates from the Soviet representatives by June 1, 1922, except in the case of countries having as yet no such representatives. 2. Persons who left Odessa after October, 1917, without Soviet authorization. 3. Persons who served voluntarily with the counter-revolutionary armies and organizations. 4. All other Russians resident abroad who fail to get registered at the Soviet Legations by [the] above-mentioned date”. This new law also stated, “[A]ll these persons may, however, petition the all-Russian Executive Committee through the nearest Soviet representative not later than June 1, 1922.”⁶⁰

As legal scholar George Ginsburgs, writes, mass denaturalization was “new both to the Soviet government and to international law.”⁶¹ The decree of December 1921 would be confirmed by Article 12 of the Statute of 1924, which the Soviet Union approved after its official creation in 1923.⁶² Amnesties allowed a few Russians to repatriate, especially Cossacks; this happened on their own initiative or under the aegis of the ICRC and of the LON.⁶³

⁵⁸ Louise W. Holborn, “The Legal Status of Political Refugees, 1920-1938,” *The American Journal of International Law* 32, no. 4 (1938): 680, 680–703. For stateless persons, Rubinstein talked of “repudiation” from the state of origin. J. L. Rubinstein, “The Refugee Problem,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)* 15, no. 5 (1936): 716–734.

⁵⁹ Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*. John Torpey, “Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate ‘Means of Movement’,” *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 3 (1998): 253, 239–59.

⁶⁰ FO, 371.8150, N1791.43.38, Draft Briefs 16.3.1922, 28, Russian refugees, C.B.C.33/28 by Evans.

⁶¹ George Ginsburgs, “The Soviet Union and the Problem of Refugees and Displaced Persons 1917-1956,” *The American Journal of International Law* 51, no. 2 (1957): 329, 325–361.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 333. See also, Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea.” Long, “Early Repatriation Policy”.

Rooted in the writings of jurists, Hugo Grotius and Emmerich de Vattel, the norm of asylum had a long tradition in customary law; yet, as stakeholders would soon realize, its implementation remained vague.⁶⁴ To asylum governments, Russian refugees were foreigners, whose rights and duties were uncertain, and who would potentially become a burden to public assistance in the delicate post-war reconstruction. While those who stayed locally might undergo processes of naturalization which varied according to the rules in place, many had to resettle in order to find remunerated employment. In the first case and most certainly in the second one, an identity document was necessary. This is the context where the Nansen passport came into being: while being an absolute novelty in international relations, since the League of Nations acted as the putative state of stateless Russians and Armenians, it was also a means to protect the nation-state and postwar welfare systems from “threatening” foreigners.⁶⁵ Instead of addressing inequalities or addressing the root causes of forced displacement, international refugee law inherited nineteenth-century civilizational categories.⁶⁶

As soon as he came to office, Nansen pushed asylum countries to issue identity certificates thanks to which Russian refugees could cross states’ borders in order to find employment and become self-sufficient. To do so, he relied on the expertise of Russian lawyers: André Mandelstam, a member of the Institute of International Law, addressed a memorandum to the LON Secretariat on the legal position of Russian refugees;⁶⁷ further discussions took place on the occasion of two conferences that occurred in Paris in early 1922 in the presence of Russian jurists and representatives of the HCR.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Nansen asked the International Labour Organization about the typology of documents that would safeguard the interests of Russian refugees as workers.

⁶⁴ Peter Pavel Remec, *The Position of the Individual in International Law According to Grotius and Vattel* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960).

⁶⁵ For a reference on the place of refugees in international law, see Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher (eds), *Refugees in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ ALON, R1725, Memorandum regarding the legal position of the Russian refugees by André Mandelstam, C.R.R.3., 45.14387.14387.

⁶⁸ Baron Nolde, professor at the University of Petrograd and member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, affiliated with the Institute of International Law; Aleksandre A. Pilenko, professor at the University of Petrograd; Jacob Rubinstein, lawyer at the Court of Kharkov; and Gronskey, professor at the University of Petrograd. ALON, R1728, PV des conférences des représentants du Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations pour les réfugiés russes et des juristes russes, tenues à Paris le 30 et 31 janvier et le 2 février 1922, 45.19251.15823. Dzovinar Kévonian, “Les juristes juifs russes en France et l’action internationale dans les années vingt,” *Archives Juives* 34, 2 (2001): 72–94.

It is thought that a considered opinion from the legislative section of the International Labour Office would carry great weight with the governments interested in bringing this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. The High Commissariat is of the opinion that a simple papier d'identité would not be an instrument of sufficient protection to the workers vis-à-vis the employers. The opinion of the International Labour Office on this very important question would, it is thought, be one of the principal arguments which the High Commissariat might bring forward in pressing the Governments to take urgent measures to grant Russian refugees on their territories a recognized and valid legal status.⁶⁹

In March 1922, the HCR prepared a draft certificate that the LON Council distributed to member states for advice. This initiative was closely followed by a letter in which Eric Drummond asked for governments' views on Nansen's proposal and investigated the legal position of Russian refugees in their respective countries. France replied and suggested that a conference would be convened to discuss the technical and legal matters connected with certificates for refugees. Participants would then agree on a certificate under which all the legal dispositions that already applied to refugees in asylum countries were accepted.⁷⁰ Following the French proposal, the High Commissariat for Russian refugees organized an international conference from July 3-5, 1922 in Geneva.⁷¹ A model identity document was created, commonly referred to as the Nansen passport, as well as "an arrangement relating to the granting of identity certificates" to standardize procedures. Without dismissing local peculiarities, the rationale behind the certificate and the Arrangement was to provide refugees with a document that might have general validity and foster coordination among governments. The LON Council approved the recommendation of the Geneva conference on July 20, 1922.⁷² The Nansen passport was valid for one year and would lose its validity in the event that the Russian refugee obtained a new nationality. "On presentation of the certificate (which identifies the bearer as a Russian refugee), the refugee may in certain circumstances be admitted into the State which he wishes to enter [...]."⁷³

⁶⁹ ALON, Note for the International Labor Office, November 23, 1921, C.C.R.R.OP/1.

⁷⁰ ALON, R1729, Papers of Identity, Memorandum of the High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, C.L.79(b)1922, 45.22592.15833.

⁷¹ Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Poland, Romania, the Kingdom of the SHS, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. There were also Corbett and Dickinson for the ILO, de Watteville as Assistant HCR and secretary-general of the conference, and Johnson for the HCR. Van Hamel of the LON Legal Section acted as the president. ALON, R1728, Governmental Conference on Passports for Russian Refugees held at Geneva, July 3-5, 1922, C.C.R.R./C.I./PV.1.(1), 45.21597X.15833.

⁷² ALON, R1714, Russian refugees, Report of the Fifth Committee as submitted to the Third Assembly by Ador, delegate of Switzerland, A.141.1922, Geneva, September 25, 1922, 45.23660.12319.

⁷³ Arrangement with regard to the issue of certificates of identity to Russian Refugees, July 5, 1922, paragraph 5, 355 LNTS, 238.

With the 1922 Arrangement, international refugee law, grounded in the European public law political tradition, took the first step toward the establishment of agreed norms and rules to codify the rights of stateless people.⁷⁴ However, echoing lawyer James Hathaway, “its purpose [was] not specifically to meet the needs of refugees themselves [...] but rather to govern disruptions of regulated international migration in accordance with the interests of states.”⁷⁵ Indeed, the Arrangement did not determine who was a refugee; it was not binding upon states, nor did it limit states’ sovereignty. Created for Russian refugees, the Arrangement was then extended to Armenian refugees on May 31, 1924. Soon after, painstaking debates took place at the LON as to whether to extend the Nansen passport to other groups. As Claudena Skran writes, upon the request of the Belgian delegation in 1926, the HRC was asked to examine the possible extension of the passport.⁷⁶ Such opening saw various private and voluntary address reports to the Refugee Section of the ILO on the conditions of specific groups, among which we find “19,000 Assyro-Chaldeans in the Caucasus and Greece, 9,000 Ruthenians in Austria and Czechoslovakia, 100,000 refugees in central Europe, including 10,000 former Hungarians in Austria, France and Romania, 16,000 Jews in Romania” and a few Turks in Greece.⁷⁷ Eventually, the LON Council reiterated that humanitarian protection could only be extended to refugees whose displacement was a consequence of the war; this means that the Nansen passport was exclusively extended to Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, and Turkish refugees in 1928.⁷⁸ Figure 5 is an example of a Nansen passport delivered by Luxembourg.

How did the Nansen passport work? After adhering to the 1922 Arrangement, governments could grant it as a provisional passport to which visas would be added.⁷⁹ A diversified set of institutions—local or provincial authorities, refugees’ committees, or the local office of the HCR—applied for visas on a family or individual basis.⁸⁰ Yet, the Nansen passport carried restrictions: governments did not allow refugees to return; they had no obligation either to issue visas to Nansen

⁷⁴ Holborn, *op. cit.* James C. Hathaway, “The Evolution of Refugee Status in International Law: 1920—1950,” *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1984): 348–380.

⁷⁵ James C. Hathaway, “Reconsideration of the Underlying Premise of Refugee Law,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 31 (1990): 129–183.

⁷⁶ Skran, *op. cit.*, 114–115.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ ALON, Arrangement concerning the extension to other categories of refugees of certain measures taken in favor of Russian and Armenian refugees, signed at Geneva, June 30, 1928.

⁷⁹ Work on the Nansen passport still needs to be written. One of the few and early exceptions is the work of Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill on the reasons why Canada did not accept the Nansen passport and on the measures that Canada adopted instead. Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Rejecting ‘Misfits’: Canada and the Nansen Passport,” *International Migration Review* 28, no. 2 (1994): 281–306.

⁸⁰ Individual visa applications contained a brief history of the refugee and the reasons for her/his emigration. ALON, C136, Nansen office for refugees, delegation in Germany (Berlin), correspondence

passport holders or to protect them or allow them to move freely. Granting the Nansen passport did not imply that refugees would be given the financial resources needed to travel.⁸¹ Furthermore, it was not until the 1933 Convention that Nansen passport holders would automatically benefit from the law governing the status of foreigners in the countries of asylum.



Fig. 5. Example of a Nansen passport. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁸²

with and concerning Russian refugees currently residing in (moving into/out of) Germany (legal status, Nansen passport, visas, etc.) letters A-Z (1923).

⁸¹ ALON, C1228, Letter to the High Commission of the League of Nations, Geneva, March 19, 1923, unsigned.

⁸² ALON, C1416/312/R.409/40/1 – International Labour Office Refugees Service – Legal Status and Identity Certificates of Refugees – Luxembourg.

Local regulations shaped the granting of the Nansen passport. In Austria, the government collaborated with the HCR, most likely as it received a great deal of economic and financial help from the LON with its postwar recovery. This explains why the Austrian authorities delegated to the national office of the HCR in Vienna the decision on who was eligible for a passport, thus surrendering part of its sovereignty to an international organization.⁸³ Opposite is the case of Lithuania: despite adhering to the 1922 July Arrangement, the Baltic state delivered only a limited number of passports to Russian refugees. It preferred to furnish Russian refugees with ordinary residence permits, which would not give them the right to be admitted to another country. As Russians had neither passports nor Nansen papers, they were often expelled to Soviet Russia.⁸⁴ Indeed, at the time, the principle of *non-refoulement* had not yet been formalized; it would be formulated only in the Convention of 1933.

The situation was even more complicated in Constantinople, the ex-Ottoman capital, which first experienced an inter-Allied occupation, and which was then integrated into the new Turkish state. Between 1918 and 1923, at the apex of the Russian refugee crisis, the city did not have a formal territorial authority, and the Allied Powers were *de facto* responsible for the government of Constantinople. In view of the Kemalists' control of the city, faced with the looming dangers of expulsion, Nansen urged the Allies to grant identity certificates to Russian refugees, while the office of the HCR would take care of printing and distributing the papers.⁸⁵ The Italian and British governments followed Nansen's suggestion, whereas the French government did not, as it did not consider itself to be the formal territorial power of Constantinople.⁸⁶ Knowing that France had initiated the conference on identity documents, such an attitude was certainly incongruous. To cope with the situation, the Inter-Allied Bureau of Passports of the LON in Constantinople delivered passports to Russian refugees.⁸⁷ Things changed once more when, in 1922, the Turkish government took control of the city and decided to issue a special Turkish passport to Russian refugees who refused to contact the Soviet consulate in the city (Germany was the only one to accept Soviet passports at that point). The Turkish

⁸³ ALON, R1715, Rapport présenté sur l'activité de la Délégation en Autriche et en Hongrie du 1^{er} IX 1922 au 1^{er} août 1923 au Haut-Commissariat de la Société des Nations pour les Réfugiés par Henri Reymond, Vienna, August 10, 1923, 45.29424.12319.

⁸⁴ ALON, R1715, Rapport général sur la situation des réfugiés russes en Lettonie, Esthonie et Lithuanie pour la période du mois d'août 1922–mois d'août 1923, 45.29424.12319.

⁸⁵ ALON, C1443, Note concerning the Provision of Identity Certificates for Russian Refugees in Constantinople, circulated to the High Commissioners of the Principal Allied Powers by Nansen, High Commissioner of the League of Nations, R409/06/1.

⁸⁶ ALON, C1443, Poincaré to Nansen, December 5, 1922, R409/06/1.

⁸⁷ ALON, C1443, Oungre to Wolf, September 24, 1922, R409/06/1.

passport was meant to substitute the Nansen passport, since Turkey did not adhere to the 1922 Geneva Arrangement. Visas of departure would only be attached to the special Turkish passport—the Turkish authorities refused to allow Russian refugees to leave if they did not possess it.⁸⁸ This explains why the representatives of the HCR did all they could for the Turkish and Nansen passports to be considered equal.⁸⁹

As these case studies suggest, the limits of the Nansen passport soon became so evident that a new inter-governmental conference was convened from May 10-12, 1926, one year after the technical services of the HCR migrated from the LON to the ILO. On the same occasion, the first legal definition was approved, and was soon extended to Armenian refugees.

A refugee was any person of Russian origin who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Union of Soviet Republics and who has not acquired another nationality.⁹⁰

Interpretations of such definition vary. Historians, Claudena Skran and Michael Marrus, agree that such definition eased refugees' access to humanitarian assistance; moreover, a group approach potentially protected all Russians abroad, without the need to individually explain the reasons for the flight. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this included a kaleidoscopic group of white Russian soldiers and officials who fled with their families; people who escaped the famine of 1920 and 1921; aristocrats; and middle-class people.⁹¹ However, the definition made reference neither to the political, ideological, economic, or religious causes that had uprooted Russians nor to the legal obligation to offer them asylum.⁹² Likely, maintaining good relations with refugee-producing countries Russia and Turkey, at that time still outsiders of the "family of nations," appeared to be more important than denouncing the events from which millions of people sought protection abroad. All in all, 54 governments recognized the Nansen passport for Russian refugees, while 38 governments recognized the Nansen passport for Armenian refugees.

⁸⁸ ALON, C1443, McKinnon to Johnson, December 10, 1923, R409/06/1.

⁸⁹ ALON, C1443, Letter from Childs, November 27, 1923, R409/06/1.

⁹⁰ ALON, Arrangement of May 12, 1926 relating to the issue of the identity certificates to Russian and Armenians Refugees.

⁹¹ Skran, *op. cit.*, 1-7. Marrus, *op. cit.*, 3-13.

⁹² Hathaway, "Reconsideration of the Underlying Premise of Refugee Law." Long, "Early Repatriation Policy." Siegelberg, *op. cit.*

4.4 Political refugees or economic migrants? The ILO perspective

Early on, the BIT provided technical “non-political” expertise to the LON on Russian refugees, by framing humanitarian protection and refugee politics at the crossroad of migration and unemployment.⁹³ Since 1921, the BIT participated in the inter-governmental conferences that Nansen organized at the LON and played an active role in the meetings of the ACPO; Guido Pardo, the head of the Russian Section, and Louis Varlez, the head of the Emigration and Unemployment Section, tightly collaborated with the LON; an officer, D. Dickinson, was detached from the Russian Section of the BIT to the HCR.⁹⁴ For an organization that wished to limit its involvement in the Russian refugee question, the density and the frequency of inter-institutional and personal connections prove quite the opposite.

Thanks to the newly created IEC, the ILO was one of the few organizations, if not the only one, able to collect widespread data on international migrations—data that informed its work. At its first meeting in August 1921, the IEC presented 29 resolutions where it exposed the abuses that migrants underwent in the place of departure, during the journey, and upon arrival. Yet, it did not limit itself to denouncing abuses but put forward a solution for each resolution. For instance, to migrants who often ignored national legislations, governments should issue advice on the procedures and risks before embarkation. Local charities and institutions were encouraged to coordinate their efforts, especially knowing that the migrant would not have the same access to social protection than the national worker. The outcome of the IEC’s meeting was that the governments in attendance unanimously approved the resolutions and that the BIT prepared ten reports, two of them containing executive measures for the formulation of statistics and for the international coordination of national legislations on migration.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, the question of Russian refugees opened the door to experimentation.⁹⁶ Building on the initiative that Thomas undertook in early 1921, when he investigated with the IEC whether governments would resettle Russians on their territory, in October of the same year, Butler, the deputy-director of the BIT, consulted European and overseas governments once more.⁹⁷ As the request was

⁹³ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”: 877–885.

⁹⁴ AILO, R201/10, Thomas to Drummond, August 19, 1921. AILO, R201/20/1, Butler to Nansen, September 23 1921.

⁹⁵ AILO, International Labor Review, “Migration. The International Emigration Commission,” 4 (1921): 3, 96–97.

⁹⁶ AILO, R201/20/1, Provisional record of the third session of the International Labor Conference, supplement, no. 23, November 18, 1921, Relief of Russian Refugees, communication addressed to the Conference.

⁹⁷ AILO, R202/3/B, Butler to the Danish and Norwegian governments, October 4, 1921.

met with renewed skepticism, the BIT adapted its strategy and, upon the request of Nansen and of the LON, undertook the census of Russian refugees in various countries where it paid attention to their professions, as a way to launch programs of local integration or resettlement.⁹⁸ As soon as the census was completed, the BIT promptly transformed empirical data into a detailed report, soon distributed to governments and organizations.⁹⁹ It also contacted countries of possible emigration to investigate whether they would be willing to accept Russians. Here is an example of a cable addressed to the Peruvian government in the fall of 1921.

In order to the end the problem of the Russian refugee question the League of Nations has appointed Nansen High Commissioner stop A special Conference of Governments has decided upon the taking of a general census of Russian refugees in order to obtain the exact number; the sex, age, civil status and occupation stop The Conference has entrusted the International Labor Office with the question of finding employment by emigration to overseas countries stop It is desired to ascertain what classes of Russian refugees might employment in and under what conditions stop Would the Peruvian government bear the cost of journey and settlement stop Would it be willing to send representatives to the Port of embarkation to select refugees stop The International Labor Office calls attention of the Peruvian government to the importance of the efforts made by the League of Nations in view of the extreme necessity of settling this question rapidly stop please reply urgently.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1921, Varlez adjusted the work of the IEC to the conditions of Russian refugees: they should be examined before embarkation, hence avoiding being considered “unfit” once they reached Ellis Island or Halifax, and they should be provided with a passport. According to Varlez, “the immigration of Russian refugees would [have] be[en] significantly facilitated,” had overseas countries mitigated their anti-immigration laws.¹⁰¹ Clearly, the BIT framed Russian refugees as unemployed migrants rather than as an unexpected byproduct of the Great War. Yet, the BIT’s involvement in Russian refugees’ resettlement did not exclude other solutions. Indeed, both the LON and Czechoslovakia urged the BIT to share its knowledge of Russia’s politics and economics in view of agreeing on repatriation

⁹⁸ AILO, R225/1, Liste d’occupations des réfugiés russes sans travail, undated. The lists include fishermen, farmers, tanners and leather workers, textile workers, food producers, carpenters, paper workers, bricklayers, painters, gas and water technicians, transport workers, commercial employees, secretaries, representatives of the liberal professions, domestic workers, warehouse workers, transport workers, and unskilled laborers.

⁹⁹ AILO, R202/1, Note pour M. le directeur, undated but likely fall 1921.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1734, Telegram, 45.16776.16404.

¹⁰¹ AILO, R202/1, Note de la section d’émigration par Varlez, undated, likely fall 1921.

plans. Repatriated refugees could become “pioneers of Western methods, ideas and culture” thanks to the vocational training that they had received in exile.¹⁰²

The ILO was neither alone nor the first institution to embrace “assistance through labor.”¹⁰³ In the countries of first asylum, Zemgor had created offices that helped refugees to be hired in the public or private sectors, or create small businesses, such as crafting or sewing shops, or work in agricultural colonies, for instance. It soon became clear that these measures, albeit important, could not neutralize the shaky status of postwar markets, where refugees competed with national workers, and could not tackle the conditions of fragile categories, such as the intellectual, invalid, or old ones. Hence, Zemgor suggested that Russians should be assisted in crossing international borders and in finding employment abroad.¹⁰⁴ While the question of passports was studied at the LON, the Legal Section of the BIT suggested that Russian organizations in exile or the offices of the HCR produce a “certificate of nationality” to which visas should be added in order to cross borders; once having arrived in the new country, Russian refugees should be given regular residency permits which would ease their insertion into the local labor market, where they would enjoy the same status and social protection as nationals.¹⁰⁵ If the expert knowledge of the BIT certainly informed the discussions around the making of the Nansen passport, it was not until 1933 that refugees and nationals would be extended the same amount of social protection. As historian Catherine Gousseff highlights, Russian refugees were turned into cheap laborers, whose social, economic, and political rights were long undermined.¹⁰⁶

The so-called disentanglement of the ILO from the refugee question was further challenged by the needs arising from the Greek and Armenian displacements to which the organization responded, by sharing its technical expertise.¹⁰⁷ By 1924, though, it became clear that the refugee question would not be easily “liquidated” and that Russian as well as Ottoman Armenian and Greek refugees would have to be resettled, since repatriation plans were impossible. Indeed, as we have seen, the establishment of post-imperial Russian and Turkish citizenry went hand in hand with the approval of decrees of denationalization which turned white Russians

¹⁰² AILO, R219/2, Note for the director by D. Dickinson, April 6, 1922.

¹⁰³ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”: 881–882.

¹⁰⁴ AILO, R201/9, L’assistance aux réfugiés russes par le travail par Zemgor, November 23, 1921.

¹⁰⁵ AILO, R204/2/1, Note sur la situation juridique des réfugiés russes en tant qu’ouvriers, et sur la manière de leur assurer la jouissance d’un statut régulier, November 24, 1921.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture,” *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie – Empire russe – Union soviétique et États indépendants* 46, 4 (2005): 757–776.

¹⁰⁷ Kontogiorgi, *op. cit.* Davide Rodogno, in collaboration with Shaloma Gauthier and Francesca Piana, “Relief and Reconstruction Programs in Greece, 1922–1925,” in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013): 147–170.

and Armenian refugees into stateless persons, while the internationally endorsed ethnic cleansing between Greece and Turkey annihilated the possibility of return. As many private organizations suggested—including Zemgor, as well as the Jewish Colonisation Association—it was of the utmost urgency to match job offers and requests at the international level rather than at the national one.¹⁰⁸

By the mid-1920s, there were three options that the HCR had, i.e., to close, to continue working within the LON Secretariat, perpetuating the same political and financial problems that had hindered its activities, or to transfer part of its work to the ILO. As per usual, the HCR consulted with the organization's member states: to the British government, "the service [was] or should be, a dying one: nothing [was] advanced to show that it [would] be either better done, or sooner ended, by the ILO, and the whole weight of 'inertia' [was] against the transfer."¹⁰⁹ From their end, Australia, South Africa, and Venezuela believed that it was not in the mandate of the LON to find employment for refugees, not even through joint policies with the ILO.¹¹⁰ Yet, despite these opposing voices, the member states of the LON were rather in favor of getting rid of refugee work by collaborating with the ILO.

As of the spring of 1924, thanks to inter-institutional discussions, the basic principles were settled: legal and political questions would continue to be managed by the HCR, whereas the BIT would be responsible for the technical work.¹¹¹ The approval was easier from the LON side: in June 1924, the transfer was positively welcomed during a meeting at the Secretariat.¹¹² Problems, rather, were raised from the ILO side, where the question was discussed during the meetings of the Governing Body. On the one hand, a few officers lamented that the expert knowledge provided by the BIT to the LON had not been correctly acknowledged; taking over refugee work would officially shed light on the organization's specific contribution. On the other hand, a majority perceived the transfer as being imposed by the LON, which rather delayed the discussion of other delicate questions including the budget and the total number of Russian and Armenians refugees needing protection.¹¹³ This

¹⁰⁸ AILO, R204/7, Thomas to Wolf, April 20, 1923. AILO, R204/7, Wolf to Thomas, May 2, 1923.

¹⁰⁹ NA, FO T160.225, Refugees, General, League of Nations activities in connection therewith November 1, 1923–October 12, 1925, F8415, Letter to Kingham, Ministry of Labour, June 3, 1924. Along the same lines, George William Rendel, the authoritative chief of the Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office, argued that the transfer of the activities on behalf of refugees to the ILO would not improve their general conditions. NA, FO 371.10467, N3197.17.38, Handwritten note by G.W. Rendel, April 7, 1924.

¹¹⁰ Skran, *op. cit.*, 190.

¹¹¹ AILO, R201/20/5 jacket 1, Nansen to Thomas, February 23, 1924.

¹¹² AILO, R201/20/5 jacket 1, Transfert éventuel de l'oeuvre des réfugiés au BIT, PV d'une séance tenue au secrétariat de la SdN, June 18, 1924.

¹¹³ Minutes of the 22nd session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, Geneva, April 1924. Even if numbers were contested, the ILO reported that in 1925, there were 400,000 Russian

explains why, more than helpless refugees, in the discussions at the ILO, Russians and Armenians came across as an “element of danger for the development of social progress,” from which local labor markets should be protected.¹¹⁴ What is interesting here is to see how different actors articulated the word protection in relation to humanitarian compassion and refugee work.¹¹⁵

Since inter-institutional connections proved tense, inter-personal ones turned out to be crucial. During the whole process, Nansen was in close touch with Thomas, who never hid his interest in refugee work. “I need hardly add”—Thomas writes to Nansen—“it would give me the greatest pleasure personally to be associated with you in the self-sacrificing and humanitarian work on behalf of the refugees and which has already given such notable results [...]”¹¹⁶ Moreover, the transfer was also endorsed by the ACPO: not only did its members officially express appreciation for the work that the BIT had previously done on behalf of refugees, but most of them already knew the organization from within, as they had been affiliated with a new body, the International Committee of Private Organizations for the Protection of Emigrants.¹¹⁷ At his end, Nansen stressed the non-political character of refugee work and argued that questions with a political character—such as passports and the negotiations with the Soviet authorities—had already been solved by the LON.¹¹⁸

After having double-checked the budget, having reduced the number of HCR staff, and having investigated how the passport system worked, the ILO agreed to extend its technical services to refugees. To do so, it advanced two preliminary conditions: the transfer would only take effect beginning on January 1, 1925, and the LON Assembly would have to include a financial provision for the refugee issue in the budget for 1925.¹¹⁹ There was another element which explains the ILO’s interest in Russian refugees. In May 1924, the Italian government organized a conference in Rome on emigration and immigration, from which the ILO was at first excluded. Playing a more active role in refugee work was probably instrumental in gaining authority in international migrations when the ILO’s role was unsure.¹²⁰

and Armenian refugees looking for employment. AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 2, PV d’une conférence de représentants des gouvernements relative à l’émigration et l’immigration des réfugiés, convoqué par Nansen, Geneva, September 27, 1924, CR/EI/PV1.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the 23rd session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, Geneva, June 1924.

¹¹⁵ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”.

¹¹⁶ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Thomas to Nansen, personal, March 4, 1924.

¹¹⁷ ALON, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Letter from the ACPO to Nansen, undated. Linda Guerry, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Nansen to Thomas, April 3, 1924.

¹¹⁹ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, ILO, 22nd session of the Governing Body, Geneva, April 1924, 2nd supplementary report to the director. AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, High Commissioner for refugees, budget for the year 1924.

¹²⁰ Rosental, *op. cit.*

Things moved fast. In October 1924, the Governing Body instructed the director to “draw up a scheme of the services providing employment for the refugees.” While the administrative cost would be covered by the LON, the scheme would encompass the “investigation, coordination and communication of offers of employment made to the refugees, the conditions in which the refugees [could] take advantage of such offers and an estimate of the number of refugees for whom employment [was] to be found.” In line with Nansen’s mandate, no direct relief was possible and, the service being temporary, it would be closed down as soon as possible.¹²¹ Nansen would continue to act as the high commissioner, being responsible for political and legal actions, whereas the work of the HCR and its delegates would be transferred to the newly created Refugee Section at the BIT, headed by Thomas Frank Johnson, who closely collaborated with Verlaz.¹²² A centralized system of accounting and control was also created.¹²³

The ILO Refugee Section immediately undertook a new census of refugees. Differently from previous attempts, this time delegates paid much more attention to the professions of refugees (the form contained 25 professional categories and 14 sub-categories).¹²⁴ One of the more tangible aspects of the ILO’s work for refugees was the transfer of nearly 50,000 able-bodied men to France, where they found employment in agriculture and industry.¹²⁵ It was established that firms would address their requests to the ILO, which was charged with transmitting them to its agents on the spot and recruiting suitable refugees for the positions.¹²⁶ For Russian refugees, the ILO greatly relied on the help provided by Zemgor and other Russian local organizations in France and elsewhere. The French government also played a proactive role in the settlement of agricultural refugees in its territory and created coordinative bodies with Russian organizations and the ILO for this purpose. For instance, the French Ministry of Agriculture arranged for the settlement of Russian refugees as *métayers* in France: for that, the HCR selected refugees who used to be agriculturists, especially Cossacks, and advanced small sums for their transports and preliminary expenses. It also resettled from Greece 50 Armenian orphans, despite the opposition of Armenian organizations, which rather targeted Soviet Armenia.¹²⁷

¹²¹ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Thomas to Drummond, October 21, 1924.

¹²² AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Questions concernant les réfugiés, note du Docteur Nansen, Haut-Commissaire pour les réfugiés, Transfert à l’Organisation Internationale du Travail de l’Oeuvre de secours en faveur des réfugiés russes et arméniens, C.553.1924.XIII.

¹²³ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Nansen to Thomas, October (the day is missing) 1924.

¹²⁴ Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales”: 98. Skran, *op. cit.*, 190.

¹²⁵ Skran, *op. cit.*, 192.

¹²⁶ Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture”: 757–776.

¹²⁷ ALON, R1602, Memorandum by the director of the International Labor Office on the work of the refugee service, 1926, 40-52990-41465.

As soon as the ILO was officially associated with the refugee work, in March 1925, it sent a mission to Latin America hoping to create agricultural settlements.¹²⁸ Again, the main idea was to avoid refugees leaving the congested “peripheral” places of Central Eastern Europe and the Middle East for Europe, where they would end up competing in the labor market with local laborers. Foremost, the Labour Organization privileged the protection of fragile postwar economies over the protection of refugees, whose legal status was often uncertain, living conditions dire, and rights badly respected.¹²⁹ The ILO mission was led by James Procter, the former Director General of the Imperial Ottoman Bank in Constantinople, whom we will meet again in chapter 5, and benefited from the expertise of Varlez for the BIT, the Russian, Brunat, professor of agriculture, and a representative of the Jewish Colonisation Association, which paid for the trip. Among the countries visited, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay were open to the settlement of Russian and Armenian refugees.¹³⁰ There was a great demand for colonists and agricultural laborers both in Argentina and Brazil, where industrial work was also needed.

In the case of colonists [Burnier] estimate[d] that a minimum capital of £50 per family [was] necessary, and in some cases a higher figure, quite apart from the cost of the transport. In the case of laborers, whether agricultural or industrial, such a sum would not be necessary, but the cost of transport would still have to be fund except in cases where the Government authority was prepared to offer it.¹³¹

According to historian Laura Robson, the use of the term ‘colonist’ was not anodyne; she situates the resettlement plans for Armenian and Russian refugees in Latin America in direct continuation with the Ottoman responses to the Muslim refugees from the Balkans and from the South Caucasus in the nineteenth century and with “early twentieth-century ideas about removing Europe’s Jews and using them as colonial settlers across the globe, particularly in rural areas ripe for industrial development.”¹³² Argentina, which was believed to be hampered in its development by the lack of rural population, privileged those refugees who wished to settle in the countryside, as colonists or agriculturists, provided that they were morally/physically fit, and ready to face years of hardship. Brazil was interested in refugees working on coffee plantations, where they would take care of trees, and

¹²⁸ ALON, C1469-1, Mémorandum sur les considérations financières relatives à l’établissement d’émigrants pour le pays d’Outre-Mer par Procter.

¹²⁹ Robson, *Human Capital*, 52.

¹³⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10A, legg 4, Mission en Amérique du Sud.

¹³¹ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, 40-46395-41465.

¹³² Robson, *Human Capital*, 60.

harvest and clean the fruit. In regard to the rumors about the bad working conditions on the plantations, Procter reassured that the Brazil government took actions against mistreatment, but he also feared that refugees would take a long time to build wealth. Taking the example of the United States model, in both Argentina and Brazil, resettled refugees were also instrumental in controlling the indigenous territory from social unrest and strikes.¹³³

The mission to Latin America also negotiated with private companies¹³⁴. Across the four countries, Procter reported that there were possibilities of employment in the railways, mines, light and power companies, tramways, and public and private works. In a letter signed by W. K. Billings for the Sao Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company, we read that he was looking for “3,000 men for unskilled labor in the construction of the Serra power plant and auxiliary works at the Serra do Mar between Santos and Sao Paulo.” After listing the wages and all the facilities at the workers’ disposal, Billings stressed that, despite the fact that their health conditions were excellent, there had been malaria cases. This explains why a careful medical examination upon embarkation was required: the HCR could select the most adequate refugees and make sure that a proper contract would be signed.¹³⁵ The main idea was to avoid problems, which were not infrequent. For instance, a group of refugees, which embarked in Greece for Brazil, lamented about the food during the trip; upon arrival, they declared to be artisans and hoped to find jobs in the cities, opposing to work on the coffee plantations; later, they left the fazenda.¹³⁶ Moving to Paraguay, Procter’s mission interacted with other private companies, some of them foreign-owned, whereas in Uruguay, the Mortgage Bank might advance money to buy a farm, through which the colonists would become the owners.¹³⁷

Once the mission went back to Geneva, Procter reported in length to the League of Nations and to the International Labour Organization, waiting for instructions. An immediate result was for the BIT to create two offices in Latin America which negotiated the resettlement of refugees, yet in smaller numbers compared to what had initially been hoped for.¹³⁸ For instance, by 1928, between 90,000 and 100,000 Russians had settled in Argentina: “the advantage which [was] most appreciated by

¹³³ Ibid., 61–62.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹³⁵ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, Letter from A. W. K. Billings to Procter, July 13, 1925, 40-46395-41465.

¹³⁶ ALON, C1427, Funducian to Zwerner, December 9, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹³⁷ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, Letter from Colonel Procter to the Uruguayan Ministry of Industry, April 27, 1925, 40-46395-41465.

¹³⁸ Skran, *op. cit.*, 191. Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales”: 105. ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés. Procès-verbal de la séance du 22 mai 1928 tenue au Bureau International du Travail à Genève, A/C.5-1928.

the refugees when they [came] to live in the Argentine [was] at first of a psychological rather than of a material nature.” Russians were told to appreciate the fact that they faced “the same difficulties and influenced by the same desire to make good” as other groups of migrants, including Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and Poles. Thanks to the resettlement in Latin America, “the refugee may feel that he [had] a permanent home at last and that he may stay there as long as he [wished] without being under the necessity of frequently changing his abode as a result of legislation or special disability due to his staatenlose condition.”¹³⁹

The picture is less idyllic though. Unemployed refugees were deemed to bring social and political unrest by offering their work at lower wages, hence competing with local laborers in fragile European markets. Alongside a colonial mindset, international humanitarian organizations aimed to resettle refugees into supposedly vacant lands where, by means of their (mainly) agricultural labor, they would help develop the national economy; in doing so, refugees also became part of an “investment opportunity” in the short and long run.¹⁴⁰ As we will see in Chapter 5, Russian refugees in Constantinople were offered a contract thanks to which they would resettle to France and elsewhere; they also agreed to pay back the cost of the boat trip, by subtracting a monthly portion of their salary. Or, turning to the criticism around the embedded inequalities of the global governance of refugee protection, not only did the relocation of refugees as economic migrants to the “peripheries” of Europe concur to transform them into a commodity, but it would also make them involuntary supporters of the system of exploitation which had produced them in the first place.¹⁴¹

Soon enough, the ILO struggled to collect the money that would allow refugees’ resettlement in Latin America. While the LON paid the administrative expenses and some governments chipped in, overseas travel demanded massive financing.¹⁴² Hence, Nansen suggested to create a “revolving fund” by which refugees were advanced the money for the trip to Latin America, which they would pay back by means of their work. Such a proposal was discussed at the 1926 inter-governmental conference in Geneva, yet it was not approved. The Jewish Colonisation Association then stepped in and advanced the financial resources for colonization schemes in Latin America.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, another idea was put forward, i.e. the establishment

¹³⁹ ALON, C1470, Refugee advisory committee, note by Mr. Childs, director of the South American Delegation of the Refugee Service, A/C-3-1928, May 21, 1928.

¹⁴⁰ Robson, *Human Capital*, 66, 58–67.

¹⁴¹ Chimni, *op. cit.*, 362–363. Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo, *op. cit.*

¹⁴² Simpson, *op. cit.*, 191–226. ALON, Russian and Armenian Refugees: Report to the Seventh Assembly, September 3, 1926, A.44.1926.

¹⁴³ ALON, C1470, Refugee advisory committee, note by Mr. Childs, director of the South American Delegation of the Refugee Service, A/C-3-1928, May 21, 1928.

of the so-called “Nansen stamp.” Indeed, refugees, with the exception of the destitute, were requested to buy the Nansen stamp (fig. 6)—blue for Russians and red for Armenians—and glue it to the Nansen passport annually.



Fig. 6. Example of a Nansen stamp. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.¹⁴⁴

Once more, Nansen is represented as a powerful hero: his Greek-style profile occupies the central space of the stamp; at the top of the stamp, there is a mention of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, while at the bottom right, we find the acronym of the ILO. More interestingly, the Nansen stamp is yet another example of how refugees contributed to their own relief and resettlement. Such an innovation paved the way for Russian and Armenian refugees to be represented in a special sub-committee of the ACPO, by which, once more, they shaped humanitarian policies and refugee work.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ ALON, MC42/B.6/1, Nansen stamp.

¹⁴⁵ Skran, *op. cit.*, 193.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter shows how the emergence of the global governance of refugee protection constituted an absolute political novelty in the interwar period: it was the result both of governments' limited interest in refugees and a clear example of experimentations. As soon as the High Commissariat for Russian refugees was established, Nansen and his deputy-officer, Philip Baker, tried to maximize the chances of success by officially associating private organizations with the work of the League of Nations. Such a choice reflected the increasing role that these institutions, some more than others, had in humanitarian protection and refugee politics; it also suggests that they possessed the expert knowledge and the financial resources that the HCR lacked. The creation of the ACPO turned out to be a good intuition, as the committee crucially supported refugee work in times of crises. Instead of shrinking, the ACPO underwent a significant expansion throughout the 1920s, when *ad hoc* committees were created. Moreover, an expanding notion of epistemic community—where expertise is enriched by determinants such as nationality, education, gender, age, class, and religion—allows one to see the commonalities and peculiarities that non-state officers brought to the ACPO. From this amalgam of experiences, originated the seeds of refugee work that we know nowadays.

Similarly, the establishment of the Nansen passport in 1922 and the legal definition of Russian and Armenian refugees, which was agreed upon in 1926, embody both the shortcomings and the possibilities behind the internationalization of humanitarian protection and refugee work. They epitomized the failures of the international system, and its institutions and governments, to protect people from persecution. And yet, they also offered to these same persons some (limited) forms of protection, by allowing them to move across international borders by means of an especially crafted passport, and by fitting them into a collective legal definition. The same ambivalence extends to the establishment of communication and fundraising campaigns, which the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO initiated in different forms and capacities, both in Geneva and in the places of intervention.

Singling out the involvement of the ILO in the refugee question allows one to understand the reasons why the organization designed a global racialized and gendered labor system. While, among governments and private organizations, there was widespread agreement that refugees should be assisted to find employment across international borders, the Labour Organization instrumentalized the question to test its technical expertise in the migration–unemployment conundrum. In turn, resettling refugees away from Europe became an opportunity for those countries which wished to expand their agricultural and industrial plans, as well as for those industries which anticipated the cost of the trip, knowing that refugees would repay it in time.

The formalized cooperation between the LON and the ILO on the refugee work was short-lived. Following a decision by the Governing Body of the ILO taken in the spring of 1928, the High Commissariat for refugees went back to the LON, since the Labour Organization refused to continue the work on behalf of refugees. It estimated that the task had been fulfilled and that no more resources could be collected to help the refugees who were still lacking employment. The new decade marked a significant change in the refugee organization of the LON: in the 1930s and especially during the war and in its aftermath, forced displacements were different and possibly far more complicated than in the 1920s, and so was the work of the new Nansen International Office for Refugees and of the many other organizations which followed.

Unsorted Constantinople: protecting white Russians from the inter-Allied occupation to modern Turkey

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the humanitarian programs on behalf of Russian refugees in Constantinople, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire soon to be integrated into modern Turkey. The ICRC, the LON, and the ILO, which feared for the safety of displaced Russians who risked being forcibly expelled to Russia, designed and implemented several plans, from local integration to resettlement in Balkan countries, France, and Latin America. At times, Russians accepted decisions made on their behalf; other times they protested. International organizations considered Constantinople to be a test case, from where successful plans could be exported elsewhere.

Keywords: Russian refugees, Constantinople, inter-Allied occupation, modern Turkey, protection, expulsion.

The presence of Russians “hinder[ed] local people causing a new cost of living and threaten[ed] security in a city populated by Greeks, Muslims and Armenians super-excited by recent events.”¹

In the words of Fridtjof Nansen, “[...] anything which can be done to enable the Russian refugees to cease living as the involuntary recipients of charity and to enable them to find some scope for their capacities for work [...] [was] a real contribution to a number of difficult problems, for which the majority of European countries are seeking a solution.”²

¹ Note pour le Conseil des Ministres sur les évacués russes en Crimée, Paris, November 29, 1920. Commission de publication des documents diplomatiques français, *Documents diplomatiques français* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987).

² ACICR, C.R.87 SDN 84 à 100, Russian refugees, Report submitted to the Council by Nansen on May 13, 1922, C.280.M.152.1922.

During the Great War and its aftermath, Constantinople was an unstable dynamic place, caught between the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of modern Turkey. The Armistice of Mudros, signed on October 30, 1918 between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire to end WWI, had agreed upon the partition of the empire and the foreign occupation of Dardanelles and Bosphorus forts.³ In May 1919, Greece occupied Smyrna in Asia Minor, aiming to govern all ethnic Greeks across the Aegean Sea. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920 between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies, confirmed the Greek control of East Thrace and Western Anatolia, and formalized the inter-Allied occupation of Constantinople under a joint commission composed of France, Italy, and Great Britain.⁴ However, the outbreak and the results of the Greco-Turkish War invalidated previous agreements: in September 1922, the victorious Turkish cavalry regained Smyrna, provoking mass killings, the fire of the Armenian neighborhood, and a massive exodus of Ottoman Greeks and Armenians towards Greece. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, eventually recognized the establishment of the Turkish Republic, while it dismissed the creation of independent Armenia and Kurdistan.

Of all the places where Russians were exiled, Constantinople underwent the most delicate transition. It was a congested metropole of one million inhabitants, "...a waiting room or corridor for much of the Russian refugees, a destination point for the Muslim refugees from the Balkans, country of origin and a destination of resettlement for the deported Armenians, Greeks, and other non-Muslim communities."⁵ Large numbers of Ottoman subjects—including Armenians, Greeks, and Muslims—had reached Constantinople as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, WWI, and the Armenian genocide.⁶ Used to accommodate foreigners, among whom were Russians who, since the late nineteenth century, had traveled south for tourism and business, including sex work, Constantinople was nevertheless unprepared for the massive

³ "I. Opening of Dardanelles and Bosphorus, and secure access to the Black Sea. Allied occupation of Dardanelles, and Bosphorus forts. VII. The Allies to have the right to occupy any strategic points in the event of any situation arising which threatens the security of the Allies. Mudros Agreement: Armistice with Turkey (October 30, 1918)".

⁴ On the occupation of Istanbul, see Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918-1923* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999) and James Edmonds, *Occupation of Constantinople, 1918-1923* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2010). On the social history of Istanbul up until the nineteenth century, see Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵ E. Tutku Vardagli, "League of Nations' Refugee Operations through İstanbul: Back to the Origins of International Refugee Question," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 51 (2020): 154, 149–173.

⁶ There are a couple of historical novels on Constantinople, Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Charles King Gardner, *Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

arrival of white Russians.⁷ Evacuations from the Black Sea region had already started in the spring of 1919 and continued for almost two years. In early 1920, the followers of General Anton Ivanovich Denikin escaped from Odessa and Novorossiysk to the Bosphorus, thanks to the support of his Majesty's government, which had sided with Denikin.⁸ In early November 1920, it was the turn of General Piotr Wrangel's followers, supported by France. This last group was the largest, composed of nearly 135,000 Russians, half of them military men and the other half women and children.⁹

Anybody who looked at the Bosphorus in the early days of November 1920 witnessed an unforgettable scene. Almost overnight, boats of the Imperial Russian Navy and of the fleets of the Allied and Associated Powers congested the straits.¹⁰ In the words of Vera Dumesnil, the wife of the French vice-admiral, Charles-Henri Dumesnil, "...the boats' bridges are black, black, everything is black, they make only one black spot. They are human beings standing up. Chest against chest. They do not move, they cannot, supported by each other."¹¹ As soon as Russians were allowed to disembark, which took a few days, the occupation powers proceeded with their dispersion: civilians stayed in the city or in its vicinity, living independently or in hastily organized camps and accommodations; the military was placed out of Constantinople under the responsibility of the French army. Indeed, there was the widespread preoccupation that Russians would draw on local resources, which were already scarce, or that they would spread epidemics.¹² Moreover, as Russians kept weapons hoping to launch and organize a counter-offensive against the Reds, they were seen as security threats.¹³ This explains why military men were further scattered: Wrangel's followers stayed

⁷ See the work by Philippa Hetherington, "Red Lights on the Black Sea: the Traffic in Women and the Production of Imperial Russia's Southern Border," a talk given at the Institute of Historical Research in London, February 24, 2016.

⁸ NA, FO, 371.8159, N8453.43.38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922.

⁹ Richard Pipes, "Les relations diplomatiques du gouvernement Wrangel en Crimée, 1920," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 4, no. 4 (1963): 432–433. ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

¹⁰ Huntington, *op. cit.*, 12.

¹¹ Vera Dumesnil, *Le Bosphore tant aimé: récit* (Bruxelles: Editions du Paon, 1947), 29. Translated from French.

¹² AILO, R201.1, Situation au 20 décembre 1920. The ICRC provided a list with the dislocation of Russian refugees in Constantinople.

¹³ "The meeting of nearly a hundred thousand refugees in a region with very limited resources offers serious economic disadvantages, and most importantly, even though General Wrangel's old army no longer exists, his soldiers have been disarmed and no longer regarded as mere private individuals, their prolonged concentration around the Straits in idleness and in a miserable situation could constitute a real danger to the security of Constantinople and the peace of the East. It is therefore important to disperse them without delay." Translated from French. AILO, R201.1, Briand to Thomas, January 25, 1921. 3 League of Nations O. J. 827 1922. Part IV, Constantinople, The Straits, and Black Sea Ports.

in Gallipoli across the Aegean Sea; the Kuban Cossacks on the Greek island of Lemnos and the Don Cossacks in Chataldzha, East Thrace.¹⁴

While Russians with contacts, means, or a liberal profession settled and contributed to the arts and to business, the majority were destitute.¹⁵ From a Red Cross propaganda movie, one of the four movies which were shown at the International conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in the spring of 1921 and from the photographs taken by the director of the American Red Cross in the Near East, Charles Claflin Davis, we see typical scenes of displacement and intervention: military men queuing for food, emaciated children being fed, sick women hosted in a hospital caught surprised by the presence of a camera, as well as the miserable interiors of refugee camps, of barracks, and of warehouses.¹⁶ Several institutions, issuing from the Russian diaspora, as well as from liberal, missionary, and social reformer groups, tried to meet their needs.¹⁷ Among the main ones were the Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor, American, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, and Spanish Red Cross societies, the YMCA, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the *Union internationale de secours aux enfants*, and Save the Children, which all enjoyed a large freedom of action under the inter-Allied occupation.¹⁸

In the next few months, the number of Russians across the straits quickly dropped. Indeed, Wrangel and Great Britain contributed to resettling most Russians to neighboring states, including Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The choice of the Balkans was no coincidence: the geographical proximity to Constantinople made travel affordable, while it did not

¹⁴ Bruno Bagni, "Lemnos, l'île aux Cosaques," *Cahiers du monde russe* 50, no. 1 (2010): 187–230. Some white Russian soldiers turned into transnational fighters and joined the Francoist side during the Spanish Civil War. Xosé M. Núñez Seixas and Oleg Beyda, "‘Defeat, Victory, Repeat’: Russian Émigrés between the Spanish Civil War and Operation Barbarossa, 1936–1944," *Contemporary European History* (2023): 1–16.

¹⁵ Jak Deleon, *The White Russians in Istanbul* (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi Publications, 1995). Türkan Olcay, "The Cultural Heritage of the White Russian Emigration in Istanbul," *Quaestio Rossica* 10, no. 4 (2022): 1318–1333.

¹⁶ "International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva: Russian Refugees in Constantinople," in *Humanitaire et cinema: films CICR des années 1920* (Humanitarian Action and Cinema. ICRC films in the 1920s), *Memoriav*, J.-B. Junod, 2005. Harvard Law School Library, Charles Claflin Davis visual materials collection (<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/images/olvgroup12376/catalog>, last seen October 9, 2023).

¹⁷ Kathleen Sheldon, "No More Cookies or Cake Now, 'C'est la guerre': An American Nurse in Turkey, 1919 to 1920," *Social Sciences and Missions* 23, no. 1 (2010): 94–123. Müzeyyen Karabağ, "From Stay-at-Home Women to Career-Minded Women: The Istanbul YWCA, 1919–1930," *Women's History Review* 31, no. 3 (2022): 496–521.

¹⁸ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922–1924, volume 8, *Rapports sur les travaux du Haut-Commissariat pour les réfugiés* présenté à la quatrième Assemblée par le Docteur Fridtjof Nansen, September 4, 1923, A.30.1923.XII.

preclude a future repatriation; it also was believed that sharing cultural, religious, and linguistic ties would ease the local integration, especially since immigration to North America was hindered by the approval of quota measures.¹⁹ As we have seen in Chapter 3, while Russian refugees in the Balkans were better received than elsewhere, their conditions were still precarious: a few wished to repatriate, others opposed both repatriation and resettlement in Brazil, while others wished to integrate locally, hoping that the LON would provide small loans to start businesses.

The harsh reality was that in 1922, almost two years after their massive evacuations from Crimea, there were still between 25,000 and 35,000 Russians in Constantinople. As if the situation was not serious enough, their conditions worsened due to the politics of ethnic cleansing between Greece and Turkey and Constantinople's integration into Turkey, which resumed or established diplomatic relations with all major governments, yet it did not adhere to the LON until 1932.²⁰ Modern Turkey engaged in widespread nationalizing policies and closed the doors to international organizations, with a few exceptions. It also developed a discretionary attitude towards foreigners: it welcomed migrants whose professional expertise could be of use and provided Russian refugees with temporary permits, not adhering to the Nansen passport system.²¹ Turkey maintained good relations both with Soviet Russia and with Western states, while it pushed against granting citizenship to non-Muslim populations.²²

Chapter 5 adopts the prism of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization to examine humanitarian protection for white Russians. It does so by paying attention to the organizations' interactions with Ottoman authorities, occupation powers, Turkish institutions, private charities and relief organizations, and refugees. Alongside the exchange camp of Narva, Constantinople was again "at the doors of Europe": international organizations could experiment with populations' politics particularly under the inter-Allied occupation, when the Ottoman authorities were weak and ineffective.

¹⁹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 31–50. Bagni, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Yücel Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003): 186–206.

²¹ Pınar Üre, "Conditional Welcome: Russian Refugees as a Source of Skilled Labor in Interwar Turkey," *Euxeinos* 11, no. 32 (2021): 12–24.

²² Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız, "Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions," *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3–4 (2023): 522–549. The work of Pınar Üre is crucial to understand the continuities between subjecthood and citizenship from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish state, as well as the tensions between secularism and religion. Pınar Üre, "Remnants of Empires: Russian Refugees and Citizenship Regime in Turkey, 1923–1938," *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 2 (2020): 207–221.

5.1 The Red Cross and its attempts at coordination

The International Committee of the Red Cross already had a delegation in Constantinople when Russian refugees started pouring in. Since 1919, the delegate, Count de Chabannes la Palice, had been mandated to protect prisoners of war, as well as Armenian and Syrian refugees.²³ At the moment of Russians' massive arrival in November 1920, the ICRC sent alarming cables to its delegate, who happened to be in Paris.

One hundred thousand Russians [sic] disembarked camped in bad conditions fifty thousand still on board stop epidemics threaten terribly stop sheets linen completely lacking disinfection equipment partially French effort splendid but insufficient.²⁴

However, for reasons which were unknown even to the ICRC, Chabannes la Palice did not hurry back. Instead of recalling its delegate to his duty, the ICRC launched an appeal for funds for the Red Cross movement: the collected money allowed for a new delegate, Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Lederrey, to be appointed and sent to Constantinople in December 1920.²⁵ Lederrey had a vast experience in relief work: he had visited POWs in Germany and directed a sanitary train from Vienna to Ukraine; he had also been the chief of the Vienna mission, where he centralized relief operations.²⁶ The newly appointed delegate was skilled and ready to open a separate office within the existing one, especially charged with the protection of Russians.

Hoping that more financial contributions would come, the ICRC volunteered to collaborate with the UISE and the SCF, its "sister" organizations, and made itself available to distribute goods kept in Constantinople warehouses. What could go wrong between the ICRC which had expertise but no means and the UISE and the SCF which had the means but no officers in the city?²⁷ Yet, a matter of competences arose in relation to whom was supposed to take the lead. Indeed, Chabannes la Palice was still in Paris and had not officially delegated to Lederrey, who was

²³ ACICR, B MIS 15/2/11, ICRC to Chabannes la Palice, August 24, 1920.

²⁴ ACICR, B MIS 15 Constantinople, Correspondance de la mission du CICR à Constantinople, Intercroixrouge 3449 to Chabannes Union Franco Syrienne 3 Francorusse, Paris, December 3, 1920.

²⁵ AILO, R201.6, Bulletin d'information de la Société de la Croix Rouge Russe (ancienne organisation), mission de Genève, January 1921. Several articles of the *Bulletin* were dedicated to the question of Russian refugees in Europe. See ACICR, C.R.87/5/180 bis généralités, Le Comité international de la Croix Rouge et les réfugiés russes, August 15, 1921 and the articles of January 15, 1921, February 15, 1921, and March 15, 1921.

²⁶ ACICR, B MIS.37.1, ICRC to Federal Counselor charged with the federal military department, October 25, 1920.

²⁷ AILO, R201.6, Bulletin d'information de la Société de la Croix Rouge Russe, January 1921.

in Constantinople.²⁸ Confusion was high and (mis)communication worsened it: Chabannes la Palice maintained a separate correspondence with the SCF, which was left to believe that food had been distributed, whereas Lederrey did not officially bring up the impasse, thinking that the ICRC did not trust him. While being an “empty-handed” ICRC delegate was difficult, shaky managerial skills and unclear communication did not help.²⁹

Meanwhile, Lederrey took the initiative to convene a conference which met on December 13, 1920 at the Russian Embassy, where Russian aid organizations as well as American, British, French, and Italian representatives of governments and private organizations were in attendance.³⁰ To Lederrey, the assistance provided by government and the private institutions had contributed to alleviating the suffering of Russians. Yet, the large number of private and voluntary organizations operating in Constantinople would benefit from information sharing and coordination, something for which he had experience. For that, the ICRC, which was an “apolitical” and “exclusively humanitarian” organization, could be of help, while it would also respect the independence of each institution involved. According to Lederrey, humanitarian aid involved two steps: emergency relief and rehabilitation programs. Upon disembarkation, the occupation powers had been distributing refugees amongst institutions—including hospitals, sanatoria, dispensaries, maternities, kindergartens, and camps—whereas aid organizations had provided medication, food, linen, soap and disinfectant, heating, bedding, clothing, and shoes. Thinking beyond relief, Lederrey proposed to create an office which, by centralizing information, would ease the work of private and voluntary organizations. The Red Cross delegate did not stop there but offered further details. According to his first-hand knowledge of the situation in Constantinople, the best way would be to select Russian refugee women, who knew both the language and the psychology of their fellows. These women, carefully trained and managed, would collect data and categorize refugees as “real” and “fake” ones. In Lederrey’s

²⁸ ACICR, B MIS.37/136, ICRC to Lederrey, January 22, 1921.

²⁹ ACICR, B MIS 15, MIS 15.2/198, Chenevière to Lederrey, January 22, 1921. “You will easily understand how important it is for the donor organizations, that the effects they have stripped themselves of have arrived safely and have helped to alleviate, to a small extent, the appalling misery that reigns in the Russian refugee camps, so that they can make further appeals which, no doubt, will not remain unsuccessful.” Translated from French. ACICR, B MIS 15.2/372, Burnier to ICRC, July 28, 1921.

³⁰ The United States was represented by M.F.H. Belin of the American Embassy, Hamilton Bryan, Navy Commander, and Claflin Davis of the ARC. Major General Welsh of the general staff represented Great Britain. For France, there were Miss Defrange, Miss Celine Picard, and M. Labussièrre, representing private agencies, Colonel Despres of the general staff, Lieutenant Colonel Balvedat, chief of the Red Cross mission, and Dr. Ortoni, on a mission for the War Ministry. Mr. Chabert from the colonial office represented Italy. The wife of General Wrangel represented Russian private relief, Senator Ivanitzky had a semi-official position, and Georges Lodyginsky represented Russian organizations.

words, the aim was “...not to reach only those who claim the most (they are rarely the real needy) but those who are really worthy of being rescued.”³¹

There are some good and not-so-good intuitions in Lederrey's plan. While the centralization of all information on Russian refugees made sense, it might as well have duplicated ongoing efforts. At the request of the occupation powers, since May 1920, Russian Countess W. Brobinsky had been running an office which registered Russian refugees in the city.³² Hence, the creation of a new office to achieve the same ends responded more to the ICRC's attempt to overcome its endemic lack of resources than to an accurate assessment of the situation. Moreover, if employing Russian refugee women was a good idea, Lederrey took for granted that, by means of their gender, women were natural caregivers, and that, by means of their displacement, they would have accepted any unpaid work offered to them. Last, an underlying civilizing mission pushed to distinguish between the refugees who passively waited to be helped and those who helped themselves, which was an core principle of international humanitarian aid. In Lederrey's understanding, the inactive ones were unworthy of being protected, whereas humanitarian aid should target those who had shown an attitude for self-help and who, by being assisted, might aspire to reach the higher standards of Western societies.

Regarding rehabilitation, to Lederrey, “assisting [was] trying to raise up beings who have fallen physically, materially and morally to the bottom of the social ladder.” This could only be achieved by means of productive employment: regardless of whether the refugees were repatriated, locally integrated, or resettled, work was instrumental to strengthening refugees' role in society. Lederrey also suggested that relief could become a business.³³ Instead of having refugees accept low-paid jobs, with the risk of creating rivalries with local laborers in Constantinople (this would become the leitmotiv of the ILO only a few months later), international aid organizations could create workshops of embroidery, sewing, woodcarving, or furniture making, where refugees were employed. In Lederrey's understanding, it would be a circular system by which refugees produced the goods of which they were in need. It would also be a vicious system though, as it implicitly expected that Russian refugees offered their services for free.³⁴

³¹ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

³² Klein-Gousseff, *L'exil russe*, 68. ACICR, B MIS 15, ICRC to Burnier, September 28, 1923.

³³ Michelle Tusan, “The Business of Relief Work: A Victorian Quaker in Constantinople and Her Circle,” *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2009): 633–661.

³⁴ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

After the first meeting, Lederrey convened a second one on December 24, 1920.³⁵ Previous discussions proved useful, as private organizations, of a religious or of secular mandate, came prepared and submitted empirical data on the number of Russians, the geography of their dispersion, the functioning of workshops in refugee camps, and the special care that was needed by separated families and by fragile categories, including children, as well as invalid and sick refugees. However, with the exception of Lederrey, participants neither felt the urge to institutionalize the meeting nor to coordinate. Indeed, Lederrey diplomatically communicated to the ICRC that the meetings' immediate result was bringing different institutions to the same table.³⁶ Other actors were rather doubtful. American institutions, in particular, poorly judged the ICRC and refused to be subordinated to it or even to work in partnership. "I do not think we want to get into any partnership arrangement with the International Committee or its representatives," is what Colonel Olds of the ARC wrote.³⁷ Far from being an isolated incident, this attitude reflected the tensions that had emerged in coincidence with the creation of the LRCS a few months earlier. For instance, when, in the spring of 1921, the ICRC committed to providing food to Russian refugee children in Constantinople, Gallipoli, Lemnos, and the Balkan area for the next six months, American organizations feared that the plan would be unfeasible.³⁸

Eventually, in March 1921, Chabannes la Palice returned to Constantinople and distributed the long-awaited food to Russian refugee children.³⁹ While the distribution went smoothly, it also embodied the discretionary nature of relief: the UISE and the SCF had made clear that Russian refugee children should be the only targets, at the expense of equally needy Armenian and Jewish children.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, changes happened at the ICRC office in Constantinople: Lederrey left, and a new delegate, Captain Georges Burnier, was mandated to protect Russians.⁴¹ Burnier turned out to be a delegate for whom humanitarian aid did become a profession. Prior to

³⁵ The United States was represented again by M.F.H. Belin. Major General Welsh of the general staff represented Great Britain. For France there were Madame Defrange, Madame Dumesnil, Madame Picard, Colonel Despres of the general staff, Lieutenant Colonel Balvedat of the Red Cross, Commandant Raymond, and Dr. Orticoni, on a mission for the War Ministry. Ivanitzky represented Russian organizations. Lederrey represented the ICRC.

³⁶ AILO, R201.2, Lederrey to ICRC, December 25, 1920.

³⁷ HA, ANRC, Box 128, Constantinople, folder 19, Davis to Olds, December 15, 1920. HA, ANRC, Box 129, Constantinople, folder 5, Olds to Davis, Paris, April 8, 1921.

³⁸ HA, ANRC, Box 128, Constantinople, folder 4, Davis to Olds, Confidential, March 28, 1921.

³⁹ On competing programs for Russian refugee children, see Elizabeth White, "A Category 'Easy to Liquidate': The League of Nations, Russian Refugee Children in the 1920s and the History of Humanitarianism," in Rodríguez García, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*, 201–214.

⁴⁰ ACICR, B MIS 15/2/243, Intercroixrouge 4282 to Chabannes la Palice, March 24, 1921.

⁴¹ ACICR, B MIS 15.2/198, Chenevière to Lederrey, January 22, 1921.

Constantinople, he had inspected camps of Russian internees and coordinated relief actions for children in Hungary; once in the city, he engaged in food distribution and linked the various offices of the High Commissioner for Russian refugees across Europe and globally; after the mission, he would be assigned to Syria and Lebanon, working with post-genocide Armenian refugees.⁴²

Being experienced did not mean that Burnier had an easy time. For instance, he reported on Russian refugees showing up at the office when they heard that the French government and the ARC intended to close down their feeding programs in the fall of 1921. Poor Russians literally picked the ICRC, “crying, shouting, and making scandal,” somehow making Burnier’s working environment less than ideal.⁴³ Moreover, Burnier’s tasks multiplied: institutionally, he had a triple hat, acting on behalf of the ICRC, the UISE, and the LON.⁴⁴ The triple affiliation articulated in manifold ways: upon the reception of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Burnier reported on the conditions of children; he negotiated repatriation plans to Russia and resettlement plans in Czechoslovakia; he studied whether refugees could be resettled in the areas of Asia Minor, recently cleansed of Ottoman Christians; he registered Russian refugees and, among them, Russian prostitutes; and he distributed flour. Each task entailed many more: for instance, the evacuation of Russian children to Czechoslovakia involved obtaining passports, organizing delousing and vaccination procedures, preparing shelter, and negotiating shipping procedures.⁴⁵

Between December 1921 and January 1922, Burnier carried out a census of Russian refugees in and around Constantinople.⁴⁶ While he foresaw that registering the refugees living outside camps would be difficult, he was rather taken aback by the open ostracism of Zemgor. Indeed, the Russian organization shared depreciative rumors to dissuade Russians from registering: Nansen would be so close to Moscow to transmit the results of the census; families of Russian refugees previously registered in Lithuania had been jailed in Russia; among the census-takers, there would be untrusted Jews; and one of Burnier’s staff had commercial interests with the Soviets. These allegations, soaked in anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism, witness the difficult environment where international humanitarian organizations happened to work.⁴⁷

⁴² ACICR, B MIS 15.1 E.A.E-Z, Instructions to Burnier, March 1, 1921.

⁴³ ALON, R1734, Burnier to ICRC, October 17, 1921, 45:16984.16485.

⁴⁴ L’expérience du Comité international de la Croix Rouge en matière de secours internationaux,

54. ACICR, B MIS 15-2/549, Brunel to deputy high commissioner, December 28, 1921.

⁴⁵ ACICR, MIS 15.5/513, Burnier to the ICRC, January 20, 1922. ACICR, Procès-Verbaux de la Commission des Missions, séance du 17 novembre 1922.

⁴⁶ ALON, C1380, Burnier to the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, October 26, 1921, R201/20/3/66.

⁴⁷ ALON, C1380, Burnier to High Commissariat for Russian refugees, December 20, 1921, R201/20/3/66.

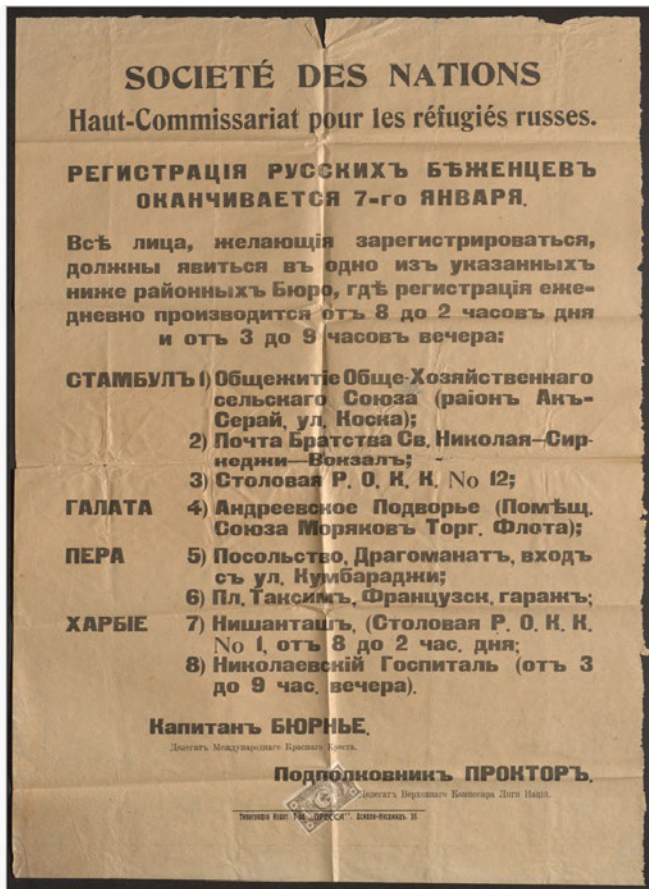


Fig. 7. Poster for the census of Russian refugees in Constantinople. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁴⁸

Despite lacking the support of Zemgor, Burnier relied on the collaboration of the occupation powers and of the police, as well as of 36 minor Russian institutions. His goal was to have the most precise picture of the number, the conditions, and the professions of Russian refugees. To that end, he affixed bilingual posters across the city, in French and Russian, to reach in particular the refugees living outside camps and institutions (see fig. 7); he urged all organizations to pass on the information and push refugees to join; and he hired four statisticians and 75 census

⁴⁸ ALON, R1733, Poster, Census of Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.17254.x16404.

takers.⁴⁹ Actual work began on December 27, 1921, and lasted for a couple of weeks; latecomers were given the possibility to register until mid-January 1922. The census started in the hospitals, schools, and camps at Lannes, Sirkédji, and Sélimié; later on, there were simultaneous registrations in six offices in Constantinople, on the Bosphorus, and on the islands of San Stefano; it was then the turn of the colonies and agricultural farms. Every evening, the census papers were brought to the Russian Embassy, checked, and registered.⁵⁰

“Seeing the enthusiasm that the refugees put into coming to register and the fear they ha[d] at not arriving on time, we can estimate that the total that we will have will correspond exactly to the real total figure,” wrote Burnier at the end of the operation. A further proof of the census’s truthfulness was that the total number of registered Russians matched the data previously collected by Zemgor. It was then the ILO which offered its technical expertise and which, by elaborating the collected data, prepared tables for use by officers in the field. We learn that the total number of registered Russians amounted to 23,861 and that there were probably 10,000 more who did not register as they did not depend on charity. Among those who registered, the largest number were unemployed (18,719), while only 930 men, women, and children above 14 had a remunerated activity. The remaining share was composed of the old and invalids (1,493) and minors up to the age of 14.⁵¹ According to Burnier, the crucial difference between the census carried out by the LON and the one carried out by Zemgor was in relation to the data concerning refugees’ professions: Zemgor claimed that the majority of Russians were agriculturists, maybe thinking that they would be more easily resettled, whereas the LON observed that the specter of professions was much larger. Far from being anodyne, having data on refugees’ education and professions would direct evacuation plans and respond to the needs of asylum countries.⁵²

5.2 Policing women’s bodies

Alongside the general census of Russians in Constantinople, Burnier and the LON took an interest in a specific group: Russian prostitutes. This was the reaction of an enquiry prepared by Zemgor in the fall of 1921 on account of data collected by the

⁴⁹ ALON, R1733, Burnier to Nansen, December 22, 1921, 45.17254.x16404. ALON, C1380, untitled document containing the budget of the census, R201/20/3/66.

⁵⁰ ALON, R1733, Burnier to Nansen, December 22, 1921, 45.17254.x16404.

⁵¹ ALON, R1723, *The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople* by Samuel Hoare, February 8, 1922, 45.19759.13913.

⁵² ALON, C1380, Burnier to Nansen, January 4, 1922, R201/20/3/66.

Allied police: it was reported that there were 2,428 registered Russian prostitutes in Constantinople, of whom 2,218 had chosen prostitution due to “unemployment, destitution, and continued famine” and because they could not obtain a visa to reach their families abroad.⁵³ In the enquiry addressed to Nansen, Zemgor alternatively framed Russian prostitutes as single migrants with no family network or as “white slaves.” In doing so, it built on the discourses formulated since the late nineteenth century by reformist and feminist organizations, which denounced the sexual exploitation of innocent white women pushed into prostitution by racialized men and which lobbied for the suppression of state legislation regulating medical examinations for prostitutes and of authorized brothels.⁵⁴ The white slavery movement had migrated to the LON and had found in the Social Section, headed by the British social reformer, Rachel Crowdy, a place to develop under the heading “the traffic in women and children.”⁵⁵

Following Zemgor’s enquiry, Nansen hastened to issue an appeal about Russian women in Constantinople, “unfortunate victims” who worked as prostitutes and addressed it to a number of feminist organizations in Europe and the US.⁵⁶ Nansen’s dramatic words convey the urgency of the situation:

For transporting these women to the countries where their friends are situated, for feeding them until they can be so transported, for placing them in Homes, and for assisting them in other ways, I need funds, and need them urgently, and I venture to hope that your Organization might be able to send me a sum, however small, to assist me in the steps that I hope to take.⁵⁷

⁵³ ALON, R1738, Astrov and Panine for Zemgor to Nansen, October 31, 1921, 45.17871.17871.

⁵⁴ Petra de Vries, “‘White Slaves’ in a Colonial Nation: The Dutch Campaign Against the Traffic in Women in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Social & Legal Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 39–60. Camiscioli, *op. cit.* For the movement in Russia, see Siobhán Hearne, “Sex on the Front: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Russia’s First World War,” *Revolutionary Russia* 30, no. 1 (2017): 102–122.

⁵⁵ Katarina Leppänen, “Movement of Women: Trafficking in the Interwar Era,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 30, no. 6 (2007): 523–533. Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des Blanches: enquête sur la fabrication d’un fléau* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009). For trafficking in the mandates, see Liat Kozma, “Regulated Brothels in Mandatory Syria and Lebanon: between the Traffic in Women and Children and the Permanent Mandate Commissions,” in Rodríguez García, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*, 153–165. On the Kinsie’s reports, see Paul Knepper, “The Investigation into the Traffic in Women by the League of Nations: Sociological Jurisprudence as an International Social Project,” *Law and History Review* 34, no. 1 (2016): 45–73.

⁵⁶ ALON, R1738 Letter by Nansen, November 9, 1921, 45.17871.x. Nansen’s appeal was addressed to the International Women Suffrage Alliance, the International Council of Women in Rome and Geneva, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, Worlds Y.W.C.A, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, the International Council of Women in Paris, the International Women Suffrage Alliance, the International Women Suffrage Alliance in Milan, and the *Association Catholique International [sic] des Oeuvres de Protection de la jeune fille*.

⁵⁷ ALON, R1738, Letter from Nansen, November 7, 1921, 45.17871.x.

Nansen's appeal was only met by Scandinavian women's organizations, which provided £1,100. This sum was used for the creation of a maternity hospital, the enlargement of a workshop that could employ women, and the evacuation of a few women abroad. Meanwhile, in mid-November 1921, Nansen also charged Burnier to investigate the conditions of Russian prostitutes.⁵⁸ To the ICRC delegate, "the report submitted [...] by Mr. Astroff and the Countess Panine [was] only a fantasist novel." First, he contested the number: only 169 Russian women worked as registered prostitutes in brothels, and the majority had migrated prior to the Great War. The remaining women worked as waitresses in restaurants, music halls, and coffee shops, and were not prostitutes. Second, Burnier highlighted that Russian women were often not alone and had migrated with their families, with whom they wanted to resettle, subject to the payment for visas.⁵⁹ Hence, according to the ICRC delegate, equating all Russian working women with prostitutes was an offense to their morality and posed a problem to their evacuation, as governments might refuse to welcome them. Burnier's report was seconded by another, written by the British High Commissioner in Constantinople, Sir Horace Rumbold, who confirmed his findings and reflections.⁶⁰

Russian women's bodies became the battleground for diverging discourses around morality, gender, migration, and race.⁶¹ On the one hand, at least formally, Zemgor shamedly admitted having misinterpreted the data of the Allied police (Russian registered prostitutes indeed numbered 169, whereas 2,218 was the total number of prostitutes in the city) and regretted to have created a case.⁶² However, we cannot exclude that Zemgor might have exaggerated the number and the conditions of Russian prostitutes to prompt a policy response. This explains why Russian prostitutes were presented as vulnerable single women, even if they had migrated with their families, for which prostitution became a strategy for survival. Zemgor might have been also reticent to admit that the Russian patriarchal system had been disrupted by forced displacement: instead of being protected, women ended up providing for their fathers, husbands, and sons.⁶³

On the other hand, Burnier contested that all Russian women working in public spaces were prostitutes and reported that, in addition to the registered and unregistered prostitutes, some Russian women who already had remunerated jobs turned

⁵⁸ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 16, 1921, 45.17871.X.

⁵⁹ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.X.

⁶⁰ ALON, R1738, Rumbold to Nansen, November 25, 1921, 45.17871.X.

⁶¹ For an example in the 1920s, see Siobhan Hearne, "The 'Black Spot' on the Crimea: Venereal Diseases in the Black Sea Fleet in the 1920s," *Social History* 42, no. 2 (2017): 181–204.

⁶² ALON, R1738, Astroff and Panine to Frick, December 13, 1921, 45.17871.X.

⁶³ Hetherington, *op. cit.*

to prostitution “of their own free will and without constraint.”⁶⁴ To confuse structural poverty with personal agency—as Burnier did—is problematic. As historian Julia Laite argues, the separation of women’s labor migration and sex trafficking “willfully ignored or suppressed moments when they obviously intersected and downplayed the role of other exploited and badly paid licit work that sustained the global economy.”⁶⁵ The same applied to the contours of rehabilitation: in a moralizing and racialized language, Burnier stressed that only Russian women who would leave the “path of vice” should be assisted and offered a job.⁶⁶ This suggests that the precariousness and exploitation of refugee women’s labor conditions were not met with the same urgency as sex trafficking.

Once more, employment was central to the moral and physical rehabilitation of women refugees. To this end, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), one of the many aid organizations that were present in Constantinople, replied to Nansen’s appeal and brought to his attention to have a small office in the city. There, a social worker, Ruth F. Woodsmall, had opened a small hostel for Russian girls, where they lived at a reduced price; moreover, an employment bureau helped them find “honest work.”⁶⁷ A few months later, Woodsmall undertook a detailed report whose goal was to establish whether it would be advisable to organize training courses (nursing and office work) for Russian women in Constantinople.

Investing in their training is a sound business proposition in lifting them out of the refugee class and thus saving financially in the long run...Whether they remain[ed] in Constantinople if they can find work or [were] evacuated, is a matter of indifference, providing that they can be helped to take care of themselves.⁶⁸

Woodsmall’s extremely careful plan had a pragmatic component: once trained, Russian women would have to be easily employed either in Constantinople or in any other country. Moreover, the cost of the training would be contained, as the many American relief workers in the city, including doctors, nurses, and clerks, could act as teachers. One should not forget the moral component: acknowledging “demoralization resulting from the continuous state of being a refugee,” in

⁶⁴ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁵ Julia Laite, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women’s Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (2017): 37–65.

⁶⁶ ALON, R1738, Charrier and Burnier to Nansen, May 2, 1922, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁷ ALON, R1738, Charlotte Niven to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁸ ALON, R1738, Report by Ruth F. Woodsmall, Investigation on the advisability of establishing training courses for Russian women in Constantinople and plan for organizing workshops for making hospital supplies, August 28, 1922, 45.22868.17871.

a language which anticipates the “DP apathy” in post-WWII camps, the training course would also contribute to the morale of women.⁶⁹

The proposals were enthusiastically received by the LON Social Section and, personally, by Rachel Crowdy.⁷⁰ However, it is unclear if any of these plans were ever implemented, especially since Crowdy was “horrified” to realize, in October 1922, that the YWCA proposal had been left unanswered.⁷¹ This is yet another example of a good plan that turned sour due to an inter-institutional lack of coordination, which had direct consequences for the lives and bodies of Russian refugee women.

5.3 The local HCR office: feeding and evacuation plans

As we have seen, as soon as Nansen was appointed as the high commissioner for Russian refugees in September 1921, he was alerted about the dramatic conditions of 25,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople. Lacking resources, the high commissioner begged France and the American Red Cross to continue their feeding programs. The appeal had mixed results: France agreed, whereas the ARC was reticent. In turn, Great Britain, which at first had refused to assist the military under the responsibility of the French army, changed its mind, thanks to the pressure of the LON and of the British high commissioner in Constantinople, Sir Horace Rumbold.⁷² In order to coordinate the efforts, the Briton, Colonel James Procter, the former Director General of the Imperial Ottoman Bank in Constantinople, chaired the International Relief Committee (or Constantinople Relief Fund), which centralized American and British private and government resources to feed 4,500 and 5,000 Russians, respectively.⁷³

Meanwhile, Nansen established a local office of the High Commissariat for refugees in Constantinople under the joint responsibility of Procter and Burnier.⁷⁴ Having a Briton on board was meant to ease the relationship with the British government, which, upon Nansen’s insistence, allocated £20,000 in cash and kind,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ALON, R1738, Crowdy to Baker, 15 Avril 1922, 45.17871.x.

⁷¹ ALON, R1738, Crowdy to Johnson, October 19, 1922, 45.17871.x.

⁷² Skran, *op. cit.*, 185–189. In the words of General Charles Harington, the British Commander in Chief of the Allied Occupation Army, “...our Government had said that the responsibility had rested on the French and that we were not to assist, but I defy anyone who witnessed that scene to have refused help.” Charles Harington, *Tim Harington Looks Back* (London: J. Murray, 1940): 101.

⁷³ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople by Samuel Hoare, February 8, 1922, 45.19759.13913.

⁷⁴ ALON, R1723, Report no. 3, Memorandum of the work done by the Constantinople Relief Fund for Russian Refugees, from November 30, 1921 to January 31, 1922, submitted to the Committee, 45.19656x.13913.

less out of humanitarian compassion and more out of the concrete and conceptual dangers that Russian refugees were deemed to pose (including Russian prostitutes who endangered the health of British soldiers). Thanks to an additional contribution of £9,000 from other humanitarian organizations, Nansen could feed 10,000 Russian refugees for a period of two months, while he also hoped that Britain's contribution would prompt France's reaction. We shall remember that providing direct relief did not fit into Nansen's mandate.

However, the problem was far from being solved; it even became more and more dramatic by the hour. This pushed Nansen to consider any plans which might bring money to the HCR. In the fall of 1921, the high commissioner was asked whether he would feed and resettle to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes the remaining "old family" of Denikin's followers, 4,432 Russians who were under British responsibility.⁷⁵ Indeed, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes which, at first, had accepted Denikin's Russians upon the payment of a lump sum, grew reticent, especially since the massive evacuation of Russians in November 1920, after which Great Britain and Wrangel competed over the resettlement of their *protégés*. Britain solved the impasse by paying £150,000 to the League of Nations to get rid of its responsibility towards Denikin's followers.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, the assignment of British money to the HCR came with the "British way of doing things." It was no mystery that Britain had been skeptical of Nansen's ability, and this explains why Procter was charged to administer British money.⁷⁷ The latter relied on experienced colleagues: Burnier as well as Captain Lawford Childs—who had acted as a British military intelligence officer in Russia during WWI and who had managed British agricultural colonization plans for Russian refugees in the Balkans.⁷⁸ In the course of a few months, Denikin's followers were resettled from the island of Lemnos, Egypt, and Cyprus to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The management proved to be particularly efficient: out of £150,000 only £78,170 was used; the balance was partially refunded to the British government and partially used by the LON to feed refugees.⁷⁹ Such a success

⁷⁵ NA, FO, 371.8154, N1753.43.38, Memorandum, Liquidation of His Majesty's Government Russian Refugees Obligation, Part I Numbers and Cost by Childs.

⁷⁶ NA, FO, 371.8159, N8453.43.38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922.

⁷⁷ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Handwritten note by R.A. Leeper, March 3, 1922. Embodying the pivotal role of Britons in the plan, some correspondence also referred to the Office of the High Commissariat as "Procter's office in Constantinople." NBKR, 4/472, Baker to Charles Tufton of the Offices of the Cabinet, Paris, March 27, 1922.

⁷⁸ NA, FO, 371.8155, N3519.43.38, Handwritten note by Evans, April 4, 1922. ACICR, C.R.87/5/282 généralités, de Watteville to ICRC, March 17, 1922. Huntford, *Nansen*, 636. Skran, *op. cit.*, 187.

⁷⁹ This is how British money was spent. To the Istanbul Relief Fund for Russian refugees (the organization created by Colonel Procter) to relieve 196 children, £30 per head: £5,880; to Yugoslavia

does not mean, though, that all went smoothly: despite the fact that the British government had “no right to interfere [...] unless the money [was] actually being wasted,” it also made sure that Procter and Childs sent regular updates.⁸⁰ This patronizing attitude bothered Nansen, especially since the British government seemed to have a hard time recognizing that the League of Nations succeeded where it had failed.⁸¹

In the same busy fall of 1921, knowing that, in addition to Denikin’s soldiers, 25,000 more Russian refugees in Istanbul had to be resettled, Nansen asked Sir Samuel Hoare, a British MP, to investigate where “there [were] good prospects of securing [Russian refugees] productive employment and a tolerable life” in the Balkans.⁸² By then, the LON possessed enough data to assess the situation and might not have needed external advice. It is safe to argue that, by appointing Hoare, Nansen hoped that the British government would be convinced of the gravity of the situation and would provide additional financial resources. Hoare’s trip began in December 1921 and lasted a couple of weeks: he started off in Prague, where there was a concentration of Russian refugees, and traveled to Constantinople where he met with the representatives of the many international organizations stationed in the city. Eventually, he headed to Athens, Sofia, and Belgrade where he met with the local HCR offices and with national authorities.⁸³

In March 1922, Hoare submitted a report to the LON Council. He first began by ruling out two impracticable proposals—the repatriation of 2,000 Siberians to Vladivostok, as too expensive, and the settlement in Thrace, which was already congested with Ottoman Greek refugees. Based on Burnier’s census, Hoare concentrated on two solutions: repatriation and resettlement. As for the former, while he believed that “the great majority of the Refugees [...] will wish to return to Russia at the first safe opportunity,” it would have been necessary to negotiate a general political amnesty. This, indeed, happened on a small scale only—for a group of Cossacks

for preliminary liquidation expenses: £6,630: to Yugoslavia for the final settlement of 1,500 refugees kept in the camp of Lemnos: £18,000; liquidation expenses in Yugoslavia: £29,320; to Childs for the evacuation and transport of Russian refugees from Egypt and Cyprus until September 20, 1922: £1,000; contribution to the expenses of headquarters: £1,000; for refugees’ winter clothes: £3,000; reserve fund for eventual claims: £7,000; total: £71,830; balance available out of the initial grant of £150,000: £78,170. NA, FO 371.9335, N1939.46.38, Provisional statement as of December 31, 1922 of the expenditure incurred by the High Commissioner for refugees under the League of Nations in connection with the Russian refugees taken over by the British government, Geneva, February 1, 1923.

⁸⁰ NA, FO, 371.8158, N7066.43.38, Handwritten note by Evans, July 7, 1922.

⁸¹ ALON, R1715, Johnson to Avenol, 28 April 1923, 45.28099.12319. NA, FO, T160.225, Refugees, general, League of Nations activities in connection therewith 1 November 1923 – 12 October 1925, F8415, Russian refugees, 8 December 1923.

⁸² ALON, R1736, Frick to Hoare, 22 November 1921, 45.17555.X.

⁸³ ALON, R1736, Memorandum, undated, 45.17555.X.

who repatriated from Bulgaria under the international protection of the LON and of the ICRC.⁸⁴ It was on resettlement that the LON should concentrate its efforts. To fight against the reluctance of Balkan countries to accept refugees *en masse*, the LON would have to submit “specific requests at the most suitable moment, for the admission of special categories.” Bulgaria could accept children and intellectuals, from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes the remaining White armies, and from Czechoslovakia 700 students in addition to the remaining agriculturists.⁸⁵

Hoare had two practical suggestions. The first was to provide a “continuity of efforts,” namely the creation of a local HCR office. This proposal is a bit surprising as an office already existed under the leadership of Burnier and Procter; yet Hoare seemed to suggest that the office should stay in touch with all the other HCR offices in the region to ease the dispersion of Russians. Moreover, within the existing office, Procter created an Advisory Committee composed of the Allied High Commissioners and all private organizations working on behalf of Russian refugees, including Russian ones.⁸⁶ Second, the LON would have to negotiate individual visas for the refugees. “It is almost impossible for a Russian in Constantinople, even though he has some means and a good reason for entering a neighboring country, to obtain the necessary visas.”⁸⁷ To do so, Hoare pressed for a sum of £30,000 to be allocated to the HCR Constantinople office and used exclusively for administration, visa, and relief programs upon refugees’ arrival in the new country.

What the LON could not foresee was that Hoare’s report would create tensions.⁸⁸ Back in London, speaking in the House of Commons and in the articles and letters that he addressed to the British papers, including the *Northcliffe Press* and *The Times*, Hoare denounced the inactivity of the League of Nations in humanitarian

⁸⁴ Simpson, *op. cit.*, 68–74. Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea”. Martyn Housden, “Humanitarian Endeavour in the Black Sea Region. The League of Nations, White Russian Refugees and Constantinople, 1920–23,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 6, no. 4 (2008): 109–115.

⁸⁵ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.19759.13913.

⁸⁶ Particularly, in the Advisory Committee, we find the Russian Committee of Turkey, composed of 80 organizations, charged with coordinating and assisting the relief and evacuation plans. The *Comité Russe de Turquie* was chaired by His Grace, the Archbishop Anastassy. According to the prevalent approach to humanitarianism, the committee claimed to be apolitical. It launched several appeals to different governments and humanitarian organizations to facilitate the evacuation of Russian refugees from Constantinople and to find the necessary funds to pay for the transport and maintenance of the refugees during and after their evacuation. ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922–1924, volume 8, Russian Committee in Turkey, Materials concerning the evacuation of Russian refugees from Constantinople, November 1922. This document traces the story of the Russian presence in Constantinople since 1920. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F4a, Nansen fil og fra, Mitchell Anna, Comité Russe de Turquie signé par Archeveque Anastassy, Professeur Alexinsky, N. Kieselbasch, Constantinople, November 2, 1922.

⁸⁷ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.19759.13913.

⁸⁸ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Russian refugees at Constantinople and elsewhere, March 10, 1922.

emergencies.⁸⁹ The British MP rightly observed that the work of the organization was greatly limited by the willingness of governments to financially contribute to refugee work—which was a fair observation. “[...] The financial side of the question is the basis of the whole problem and if the League is not prepared to have it faced, the League had better abandon its attempts to deal with the Refugee problem [...],” wrote Hoare.⁹⁰ His attitude created embarrassment; his public denouncement obliged Eric Drummond to contact J. D. Gregory of the Foreign Office Northern Department and suggest that Hoare was to be kept “on [the] right lines.”⁹¹

Meanwhile, the League of Nations tried to collect the sum of £30,000 that Hoare had estimated would “liquidate” the Russian refugee problem in Constantinople. To Drummond, the evacuation of refugees was “very solid work, which [was] well worthwhile to continue even if it [was] carried out under circumstances of anxiety.”⁹² As it did for the repatriation of POWs, Britain offered £10,000, provided that France and Italy gave the same amount; not only did this not happen, but it also froze British contributions. Nansen ended up obtaining £11,700 from various LON members and small contributions from Brazil, Belgium, China, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, and Switzerland. What really changed the course of events was that the ARC stepped in and contributed a grant of £12,500. The HCR office in Constantinople had £26,700 at its disposal for the implementation of evacuation plans.⁹³

The involvement of the ARC created a channel for the LON to reach other American institutions. Procter asked the American Relief Administration, which was already financing Russian organizations thanks to a donation of the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, whether it could organize feeding plans for a period of four months starting from June 1, 1922, while the LON arranged and implemented their evacuation.⁹⁴ The ARA agreed not without a certain caution; the American high commissioner, Admiral Mark Lambert Bristol, suggested going “very slow in accepting responsibility feeding Russian Constantinople pending negotiations of Procter for evacuation of refugees.”⁹⁵ To keep track of the whole operation,

⁸⁹ NBKR 4/472, Secretary-General, Russian refugees at the next Council meeting, March 22, 1922.

⁹⁰ NBKR, 4/472, Hoare to Nansen, March 6, 1922.

⁹¹ NA, FO, 371.8155, N2537.43.38, Drummond to J.D. Gregory, Geneva, March 6, 1922.

⁹² NA, FO, 371.8155, N2537.43.38, Drummond to Hoare, Geneva, March 7, 1922.

⁹³ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, General report submitted to the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45.27914.12319.

⁹⁴ NA, FO, 371.8156, N4265.43.38, Walter Lyman Brown to H.A.L. Fisher, London, April 28, 1922. Two American officials working for the LON Secretariat, Mr. Arthur Sweetser and Mr. Huntington Gilchirst, also facilitated the connection between the ARA and the LON. On the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, see ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10G1, Confidential report on Russian refugees addressed to Nansen, undated and unsigned.

⁹⁵ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6. Cablegram from Bristol: “If we take over Procter work and negotiations fail would be in embarrassing position with all

a Constantinople Evacuation Committee—composed of Procter and Burnier for the League of Nations, Arthur Cuming Ringland of the American Relief Administration, and Davis of the American Red Cross—met weekly for four months.⁹⁶

Regarding the feeding plans, the Constantinople Evacuation Committee decided whom, among the refugees, waiting to be evacuated, had the right to be fed. Yet another body, a Russian Feeding Commission, organized refugees into categories: hospital patients, residents of children's homes, those who could not work (invalids, convalescents, men over 55, and women over 40), able-bodied adults, children under four, and nursing or expectant mothers. Parallel to the scientific approach to the diet of exchanged POWs in Narva, the most fragile categories, including hospital patients, residents of children's homes, and those who could not work, received a full ration, ranging from 1,466 to 2,000 calories per day. Able-bodied men received less, ca. 1,133 calories, and would have to work for the balance. The last category—children and pregnant and nursing mothers—received more milk, cocoa, and rice. Food was dispatched from warehouses every two weeks and distributed to 39 feeding stations in Constantinople, which also received precise instructions about cooking and feeding processes. A system of control was created, with Russians appointed to check on the development of the operations, and daily reports for each feeding station were compiled.⁹⁷ Even the baking of bread was carried out according to a precise (American) formula.⁹⁸

Despite the creation of joint committees and control mechanisms, problems emerged. In September 1922, the ARC asked the LON to send updates on the evacuation plans.⁹⁹ Not only did the American organization wish to widely publicize its work, but it also competed with the ARA and did not want to beg for news.¹⁰⁰ From its end, the LON had all interests to comply, as, in the meantime, the Eastern Mediterranean region was undergoing another unexpected humanitarian catastrophe, the massive expulsion of Ottoman Christians from Asia Minor, the Pontus, and Eastern Thrace directed to Greece. Inter-institutional cooperation paid off: in November 1922, the ARC provided another grant of \$10,000 to hasten the evacuation plans for Russian refugees.

refugees our hands and no way escape as red cross did last September," April 25, 1922.

⁹⁶ ALON, R1723, Bristol to Procter, August 4, 1922, 45.22228x.13913.

⁹⁷ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6, The American Relief Administration in Constantinople, September 8, 1922.

⁹⁸ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6, Russian refugees in Constantinople. A report on the operations of the American Relief Administration acting for the trustees of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, first program – July 1 to November 1, 1922, by Arthur C. Ringland, December 13, 1922.

⁹⁹ ALON, R1723, Ross Hill to de Watteville, September 9, 1922, 45.22228.13931.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1724, Baker to Childs, Athens, November 10, 1922, 45.24989.13913.

While Russians had been fed, Burnier negotiated evacuation plans, paid travel expenses, and helped refugees obtain visas. It was a group resettlement, not an individual one—something which the HCR favored as it brought immediate results, but which resulted in being expensive. Resettlement countries expected a payment for each refugee, especially for the invalid ones, who would fall within the charge of the state. Between 1921 and 1922, Bulgaria accepted 1,000 invalid Russian refugees together with their families; 1,000 men who were employed in the Pernik mines; and some children. The local integration of men/workers proved difficult though, as they were seen as being Bolshevik agents. Tensions in Bulgaria obliged Burnier to screen refugees and to guarantee that they would not affect the national security of the country.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, Hungary accepted 1,000 men from Gallipoli; 1,200 Siberians were sent from Constantinople to Vladivostok; in the fall of 1922, 5,000 more refugees were evacuated to Bulgaria and 5,000 to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The following is a detailed breakdown of a group of Russians evacuated from Constantinople. During the second week of March 1922, among the 155 evacuated Russians, 106 were men and 49 women. The largest number included agriculturists (20), teachers (18), and engineers (15), as well as those who had not had any specific training (32).¹⁰² Regarding age, 60 ranged from 21 to 30 years old, while 76 were in the age range of 31 to 55.¹⁰³ Only six were illiterate, whereas the majority went to school (30 to primary school, 29 to high school, and 44 to university).¹⁰⁴ Ethnic Russians were the majority (127), followed by Calmucks (17), with a small number of Poles, Ukrainians, Jewish, and Armenians.¹⁰⁵ Most of them were resettled in the Balkans.¹⁰⁶

The HCR was well aware that the geopolitics of resettlement targeted countries including Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which would be soon saturated. To take the pressure off, the HCR office in Constantinople initiated the “Individual Departure Scheme,” which allowed a small number of Russians into America, Australia, and Canada, the three countries which had

¹⁰¹ ALON, R1718, *Mémoire sur la situation des travailleurs russes dans les mines de l’Etat “Pernik”*, 45.24899x.12608. NA, FO, 371.9335, N260.46.38, Report by Nansen respecting Russian refugees, communicated to the LON, January 30, 1923.

¹⁰² ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau V d’après les professions*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰³ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau VI d’après l’âge*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁴ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau VII d’après l’éducation*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁵ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau II d’après les nationalités*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁶ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau I d’après les pays où on se rend*, 45.19656x.13913.

recently approved anti-immigration laws. Differently from the above-mentioned schemes, which worked on a collective basis, this other one was individually organized. However, this type of evacuation was more economical, as no lump sum was to be paid, and was addressed to a “deserving class who should not been deprived of opportunities of evacuation because they [had] chosen to work instead of living on a charitable relief.”¹⁰⁷ Thanks to the collaboration of the LON, the ARC, the ARA, and Bristol Disaster Relief Committee, a first group of 598 Russians was selected and evacuated to the US. The plan’s success opened for other trips: up to 1,800 Russians were individually resettled. As the cost of the overseas trip was high, refugees agreed to return the money once they had become self-supporting.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, French charities, including the controversial catholic *Placement familial*, run by abbé Joseph Santol, contacted the HCR over the resettlement of Russian boys¹⁰⁹. Santol suggested that Russians could be resettled in farms and industries of the French areas devastated by the war. This would allow them to become self-supportive and to incidentally expand the local labor market. In the summer of 1922, at the peak of the refugee crises in Constantinople, the local office of the HCR jumped on the occasion and proceeded with the transfer. Hence, two groups of Russian children (46 in total) were sent to France: while the trip was paid for by the League of Nations, *Placement familial* took care of them upon arrival and before they were distributed to their assigned families.

Unsurprisingly, the decision was met with the ostracism of Russian aid organizations, which feared that the boys would be exploited, forced to forget their language and culture, or to lose their national and religious identity.¹¹⁰ The publications of mistreatments and abuses in a Russian journal in Paris intensified the dispute.¹¹¹ This criticism did not go down well with the representative of the High Commissariat for refugees in France, Maurice Hainglaise. In his words, rather than children, Russians aged between 12 and 28, had fought during the civil war, and risked being sent back to Russia,¹¹² were not sold but placed with French families; and they were provided with clothing and medically treated upon arrival. While he was ready to admit that the families had not been carefully chosen and

¹⁰⁷ ALON, R1743, Childs to Baker, letter and annex, December 6, 1922, 45.20706.20706.

¹⁰⁸ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, Report to the 25th session of the Council on the work accomplished by the HCR on behalf of Russian refugees since the last meeting of the Council, C.473.1923, 45.29424.12319.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth White, *op. cit.*, 207–211.

¹¹⁰ ALON, R1720, Hainglaise to Johnson, January 19, 1923, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹¹ ALON, R1720, “La traite des blancs” signed VV. and published in Poslednia Novosti, undated, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹² Ten out of 100 were legally adults, as they had declared the wrong age upon selection and embarkation. ALON, R1720, Hainglaise to Johnson, March 14, 1923, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

that contracts should have been signed, Hainglaise highlighted several times that Russians should simply be thankful for the interest that France showed them instead of complaining about the living conditions.¹¹³ New policies were negotiated for a third group of Russians (54 refugees), including follow-up visits in the families and in the workplace.¹¹⁴ Though the ongoing dispute between the HCR and Russian organizations put an end to the project, it continued to be implemented elsewhere.

As historian Elizabeth White has correctly argued, this example shows the diverging agendas around the resettlement of Russian children. The HCR wanted to get rid of them at the lowest possible cost, and it considered the scheme successful, especially in the light of other pressing issues. Hainglaise lamented to have postponed the negotiations for the resettlement of 600 Russians from Constantinople to French farms due to the ongoing dispute. In turn, Russian aid organizations attached moral and political values to the sort of their fellow citizens, who were called to contribute to the future of their national community.¹¹⁵ We do not know how Russian children, teenagers, and young adults experienced the migration and the placement. Their paths are mediated by the words of the relief workers of the League of Nations: while the majority seemed to have adapted, a few were mistreated, others ran away, and others were unwilling to work. Yet, a few individual documents (*fiche individuelle*)—which contained biometrical data, a photograph, and references to the family and to education—restituted some paths. We read about Ageii A., 15, who traveled unaccompanied, while his family stayed behind in Russia, and wished to become a taxi driver.¹¹⁶ Georges P., born in Kharkov, had lost contact with his parents in 1919, and wished to learn a technical profession.¹¹⁷ Nicolas A. was a 16-year-old orphan: the Bolsheviks killed his mother, his father fought in the civil war, and his brother died after reaching Constantinople. Nicolas A. had worked for the British High Commissioner, and played the trumpet, hoping to become a professional musician.¹¹⁸ Beyond inter-institutional disputes, these fiches tell of difficult lives, steady survivals, and fragile hopes for the future. The eyes of these Russian teenagers let us wonder where they would end up and what would happen to them.

¹¹³ ALON, R1720, Letter by Hainglaise, February 12, 1923, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁴ ALON, R1720, Note sur l'hospitalisation dans les familles françaises de garçons russes abandonnés à Constantinople ou ailleurs, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth White, *op. cit.*, 207–211.

¹¹⁶ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Ageii A. No. 32, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁷ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Georges, No. 31, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁸ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Nicolas A., No. 34, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

5.4 Refugee work during the first years of the Turkish Republic

During the inter-Allied occupation of Constantinople, the reports produced by the ICRC delegates or by the LON/ILO experts contained only a few mentions of Ottoman authorities. We are only let to know that Russian refugees were exempted from paying local taxes in Constantinople, except for exit visa fees. Things changed immediately after the end of the Greco-Turkish war and in coincidence with the “exchange of populations” between Greece and Turkey. During the Lausanne Peace Conference, Hamid Bey, the Ottoman representative in Constantinople, expressed the desire to see Russians leave within two or three months. Understandably, the declaration produced panic among Russian refugees, who feared being forcibly extradited to Soviet Russia. Those who could pay spontaneously decided to leave; the others hoped that the Turkish government would not engage in any violent or repressive measures.

Meanwhile, the HCR tried to find a solution through different channels. Nansen appealed to Western governments, asking them to soften their migration policies; he wished that the LON's member states would pressure Turkey into granting asylum to refugees; and he lobbied the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to welcome 5,000 refugees upon a meager payment of £10,000. Since none of the three options worked, paradoxically it was Soviet Russia which provided a temporary solution.¹¹⁹ In the bilateral negotiations between Russia and Turkey, it was agreed that Russian refugees would not be repatriated against their will. On the contrary, Russia preferred for refugees to stay in Constantinople “where, in due course, our representatives [would] be able to carry out the filtration of the refugees and organize their repatriation to Russia.”¹²⁰

Nevertheless, before leaving Constantinople, the occupation powers tried to make sure that Russian refugees would not forcefully repatriate. To this end, the British high commissioner, Rumbold, talked to General Ismet Pacha, one of the members of the Turkish delegation to the Lausanne Conference, stressing that forced repatriation would be against the Turkish asylum tradition.¹²¹ As we have seen in Chapter 4, Nansen asked that the occupation powers grant identity certificates to Russian refugees, since the Ottoman authorities had not adhered to the Nansen passport system.¹²² Welcomed

¹¹⁹ NA, FO, 371.9335, N1117.46.38, Note by the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, January 25, 1923.

¹²⁰ NA, FO, 371.9335, N260.46.38, Report by Nansen respecting Russian refugees, communicated to the LON, January 30, 1923.

¹²¹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F4a, Nansen fil Hoare, Samuel (London), Astroff to de Watteville, Geneva, December 18, 1922.

¹²² ALON, C1443, Note concerning the Provision of Identity Certificates for Russian Refugees in Constantinople, circulated to the High Commissioners of the Principal Allied Powers by Nansen, High

by the Italian and British governments, France rejected the proposal, on account of not formally governing the city.¹²³ Hence, the Inter-Allied Bureau of Passports intervened and delivered passports to Russian refugees.¹²⁴ The post-imperial transition and Turkey's independence did not make it better. Turkey did not adhere to the Nansen passport system, and it decided to only grant Russian refugees "Turkish" identity certificates. Difficulties immediately appeared. For instance, in October 1923, a Russian refugee student who was in Belgrade wished to re-enter Constantinople, as he had received a scholarship for the Robert College. Yet, the visa was denied on account of the Turkish authorities not recognizing the identity certificate issued by the Serbian government.¹²⁵ Worse, the Turkish documents did not guarantee that asylum countries would accept them, and they were only supposed to last six months, during which refugees should organize their evacuation.¹²⁶ Moreover, the Turkish authorities handed over the Russian Embassy and Consulate in Constantinople to the Soviets—a thing which fragilized stateless Russians even further.

Meanwhile, the conditions of those Russians who were still in Constantinople after the city was integrated into the Turkish state continued to deteriorate. As it had been the case of many more before, letters were addressed to the League of Nations, asking for immediate relief. Writing to Nansen, General Nicolas D. explained that he was already retired by the time the monarchy collapsed; despite the fact that he kept himself away from political struggle, he was jailed by the Bolsheviks in December 1917, on account of having served the tsarist army. Soon liberated, he went with his family to Georgia before making his way to Constantinople.

Thrown by a merciless destiny to Constantinople without any means of subsistence, my family, which is made up of five people, is very worried about its future. To protect ourselves from death from famine, my wife and my daughters sold everything they had on them that had any value, that is to say all the jewelry. We currently have nothing left to sell.¹²⁷

In the letter, Nicolas D. begged the League of Nations to pay the monthly pension which the Russian government owed him; the money would be returned to the inter-governmental organization once the Bolsheviks were defeated. With his words, the Russian general described himself as a victim—he was old, invalid, and

Commissioner of the League of Nations, R409/06/1.

¹²³ ALON, C1443, Poincaré to Nansen, December 5, 1922, R409/06/1.

¹²⁴ ALON, C1443, Oungre to Wolf, September 24, 1922, R409/06/1.

¹²⁵ ALON, R1717, Johnson to Childs, October 15, 1923, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁶ NA, FO, 371.9335, N1117.46.38, Note by the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, January 25, 1923.

¹²⁷ ALON, R1717, Nicolas D. to the League of Nations, March 15, 1923, 45.18163.13913.

in distress—but he also appealed to his contribution to Russia and to the right to be allocated a pension.

When the inter-Allied occupation finished, in October 1923, there were still 7,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople. A few hundred of them were resettled in Canada, France, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and the United States.¹²⁸ In spite of all the efforts, Russians amounted to between 3,000 and 5,000 Russians.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, a Turkish law restricted the movement of Russians, who were denied the possibility of finding remunerated employment outside the city of Constantinople. At the same time, those Russians who had already left Constantinople, temporarily leaving them behind, were not permitted to travel back and fetch their family.¹³⁰ If, during the inter-Allied occupation, Constantinople was a place of restriction because Russians neither had a passport nor the means to cross states' borders, as of 1923, Turkish nation-building processes contributed to further restricting Russians.

The context in which the HCR office in Constantinople happened to work was not easy. Procter knew well that the negotiations with the countries of resettlement were complex—and this explains why he was annoyed when Russians refused to leave. For instance, in 1923, he arranged for 900 Russian invalids to evacuate to Bulgaria, an option which they opposed. Despite Procter's policy, according to which refugees who refused to evacuate might not be given a second chance until all of the others would leave, a compromise was reached. Invalids would be sent to Serbia, provided that Russian aid organizations would take care of their relief.¹³¹ This example is interesting for two reasons: first, Procter's attitude was spurred by the pressure that the League of Nations received from the American Relief Administration regarding the correct and efficient use of money. Second, clearly international officers disliked Russian refugees' self-determination.

A changed context—alongside the transfer of the technical services of refugee work from the LON to the ILO—shaped refugee work: as of the mid-1920s, the HCR office acted “as a clearing house of offers of work and requests for employment.” To

¹²⁸ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922-1924, volume 8, Letter from the delegate of the High Commissioner in Constantinople regarding the present Russian refugee situation by Childs, October 22, 1923, C.676.M.273.1923 (C.R.R.62). Two tables were annexed to the letter: the first one showed the number of Russian refugees who left Constantinople through the intermediary of the LON during the period from August 1 to September 1, 1923; the second one emphasized the departure of refugees during the period from September 1 to October 2, 1923. ALON, R1716, Tableau no. 1, Évacuation des Russes de Constantinople à partir du I/IX/23 au I/III/24.

¹²⁹ ALON, C1398, Memorandum sur la question d'organisation du travail des réfugiés russes en Turquie, R402/1/66/1.

¹³⁰ ALON, C1418, La question russe en Turquie par Lemtiougov, January 5, 1927, R410/66/0/1.

¹³¹ ALON, R1717, Letter to Zwerner, February 7, 1923, 45.18425.12542.

cope with the structural lack of money, various fundraising activities were organized, from concerts to exhibitions showcasing handicrafts produced by Russian refugees.¹³² Other institutions helped: the ARC organized workshops where Russian refugees did embroidery and sewing work, as well as wood carving and furniture making;¹³³ Russian organizations made “various products” available for potential clients;¹³⁴ the American institution, Russian Refugee Relief, managed by Anna Mitchell and Alma Ruggles, provided money and in-kind contributions.¹³⁵

Constant obstacles and recurrent problems convinced international officers of one crucial thing: no international agreement could be implemented without the green light of the Turkish authorities. This explains why the LON/ILO officers frequently traveled to Ankara, privileging personal connections over a correspondence that might lead to misunderstandings and hasty decisions. For instance, when Noursret Bey, the diplomatic delegate in Constantinople, received a higher appointment and moved to Ankara, there were hopes that their consolidated cordial connections could ease refugee work.¹³⁶ At times, even Thomas Frank Johnson, the assistant high commissioner, made his way from Geneva to Ankara, hoping to dissuade Turkey from expelling Russian refugees.

Zooming specifically into the HCR office, it had evolved since the early involvement of Procter and Burnier. In April 1924, Childs experienced a career advancement and was appointed as a delegate for all of the Balkan delegations: based in Constantinople, he traveled to Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and organized evacuation plans.¹³⁷ In the following months, the turnover of international officers would be quick; there would be J.M. Charpentier, Raymond Schlemmer, and Guillaume Zwerner. Their task was to guarantee a constant liaison with the ILO offices in Europe and Latin America, with Turkish authorities *in loco*, and with the headquarters of international organizations in Geneva.

Differently to what happened with POWs and Armenian refugees, after 1925 no direct relief was given to Russians. In Constantinople, the space of protection was an office in the Pera neighborhood, where a small cohort of local and refugee staff completed the international equipe: Mr. Hesse, chief of the office; Mr. Nicolas Lemtiougov, a Russian refugee who turned into liaison officer; Mr. Killesse,

¹³² ALON, C1398, Fonctions du Bureau de Constantinople: Bureau International du Travail, Service des réfugiés, mois de février 1925.

¹³³ ALON, C1437, Extracts from Mrs. Miles report, undated, possibly 1925, R404/1/66/1.

¹³⁴ ALON, C1398, Letter signed by Childs and Glasoff, 1925, R402/6/66/1.

¹³⁵ ALON, C1397, Mitchell to Charpentier, June 1, 1926, R402/1/66/3.

¹³⁶ ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Johnson, July 8, 1927, R402/8/66/2.

¹³⁷ ALON, C1396, Burnier to Johnson, April 15, 1924, 45.19586.x. ALON, C1380, Childs to Johnson, May 20, 1924.

conciierge and porter; and Mrs. Papazian, the typist.¹³⁸ Among the four of them, it is on Lemtiougov that we have some information. By acting as a liaison officer, a refugee turned into a provider of protection for his fellow citizens. While we do not know about his education or professional skills, Lemtiougov certainly appeared to be a good fit to the League of Nations that hired him in 1921 and to the ILO, which confirmed its appointment in 1925. His day-to-day work in Constantinople was quintessential: he negotiated with local and foreign institutions, kept the financial books, discussed matters with the shipping companies, and prepared all the necessary arrangements for evacuation trips. In 1927, when Charpentier took two months of leave, Lemtiougov was appointed as “acting delegate,” waiting for a new Red Cross delegate, Schlemmer, to arrive.¹³⁹

However, Lemtiougov's life was different from that of his international colleagues. First, he could not move freely, as crossing international borders on a Turkish identity card and not on a Nansen passport exposed him to the risk of being denied return. It was only in 1928 that Lemtiougov took a vacation to France, where he applied for naturalization since he was married to a French woman. To make the trip possible, both Anna Mitchell, the American relief worker who closely collaborated with the LON, and Johnson appealed to Turkish authorities for a special permission.¹⁴⁰ Second, his salary was lower than the one allocated to the international staff. This became a matter of discussion when, in May 1928, the Red Cross delegate in charge of the office, Zwerner, left. By then, the LON-ILO office, run thanks to American private donations, would be used for more evacuation plans. The position was then offered to Lemtiougov, who accepted it and who asked for an increase in his salary. In his own words:

As you were kind enough to point out yourself, I already have six years of service, and I have never bothered you with this question. Today, however, I find myself in the need to raise this question, especially since I will have, due to the fact that I must remain alone here, more responsibility and will be obliged to pay various essential costs relating to our work...¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ ALON, C1397, Constantinople sub-delegation administrative account December 1925, R402/1/66/1.

¹³⁹ ALON, C1400, Letter to Lemtiougov, June 10, 1927, R402/8/66/2.

¹⁴⁰ ALON, C1400, Mitchell to Johnson, June 8, 1927, R402/8/66/2. In the words of Anna Mitchell, the American relief worker who closely collaborated with the LON, Lemtiougov was rather overwhelmed by the job's demands. She hoped that he could receive a visa which allowed him to travel. “I know after being here, you can realize what the strain of this job would be for five years on an end without a break, never able to get out of sight as it were of one's office; at the end of such time the human machine needs a real breathing spell”.

¹⁴¹ ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Johnson, May 23, 1928, R402/8/66/1.

Thanks to a slightly increased salary, Lemtiougov continued to work for one year in Constantinople. In September 1929, though, his contract was terminated due to lack of funds. In taking the initiative to leave for Geneva, Lemtiougov left the office in the hands of Mrs. Papazian, the typist, who found herself acting as a delegate.¹⁴² Meanwhile, in the Swiss city, he talked to all who mattered, asking for an indemnity, which would buy him some time in order to find other employment. Lemtiougov denounced that, over the years, the salaries of the local staff had been reduced in order to meet the increasing cost of the correspondence, as well as of the water, the electricity, and the telephone bills, while the salaries of the international staff had remained unchanged.¹⁴³

A Lemtiougov case arose in Geneva. After meeting with him, Thomas, the director of the ILO, was shocked to realize that the disparities between the treatment reserved to the local and to the international staff had not been adequately addressed. Since he could not do anything, he launched the ball into Nansen's court, questioning the high commissioner's apparent indifference to the situation.¹⁴⁴ While Nansen was, in principle, not against having the same salary for all, there was a widespread preoccupation that Lemtiougov's request would create a precedent for other members of the local delegations, for which there was no money. The archival documents suggest that no payment was made in favor of Lemtiougov. After early 1930, we do not know what happened to him.

More than a simple anecdote, Lemtiougov's litigation allows the imagining of the professional and personal relations emerging from refugee work, relations which otherwise risk being obscured by the self-referential nature of liberal internationalism. From the many letters, reports, and accounts that contain his name, we easily understand that Lemtiougov's work had been central during the nine years when he was employed by the League of Nations and by the International Labour Organization. On a few occasions, he was left in charge of the whole office, when the Red Cross delegates left on vacation or when the turnover of international officers had not been well organized. And, yet, the crucial difference, was that, being a refugee, Lemtiougov was deeply affected by the precarious nature of refugee work and by the decisions made in Geneva.

¹⁴² ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Papazian, September 25, 1929, R402/8/66/4.

¹⁴³ ALON, C1397, Charpentier to Johnson, April 13, 1926, R402/1/66/3.

¹⁴⁴ ALON, C1400, Thomas to Johnson, October 8, 1929, R402/8/66/4.

5.5 Evacuation plans against xenophobia

The growing xenophobia in Turkey extended to Russians in Constantinople as well. In an attempt to protect Constantinople's fragile labor market over the lower wages that foreigners were inclined to accept, in December 1925, a Turkish law came into force which prohibited all foreign workers from being employed in Turkish restaurants, shops, and factories, or from driving cabs. In early 1926, the HCR office sadly realized that the law was strictly enforced. Lemtiougov noticed that 700 Russians alone, working in the American colleges and in the Pera restaurants, could lose their jobs. Yet, differently from other foreigners who might leave, Russians could not easily resettle abroad.¹⁴⁵ Hence, Lemtiougov tried to intercede with Turkish authorities, yet with little effect. Russian refugees were so panicked that they besieged the office of the HCR, for which the police were called.¹⁴⁶

The local refugee office was in the best position to observe the consequences of the law on Russian refugees. A Greek chauffeur saw its license taken away; an Albanian man, who had worked for 30 years as the gateman of the American Constantinople College, was dismissed; in late December 1925, the Standard Oil was forced to fire all foreign workers, including Russians, and to keep only the Muslim ones. In January 1926, when the law enforcement became vigorous, it became clear that Russians could not stay behind. While their evacuation to France looked promising, as the cost of the travel would be contained, by the mid-1920s the country was saturated and did not need foreign labor as it used to. Russians did not stay unactive though. A group of them applied to the ILO to be resettled to Paraguay and guaranteed that they would pay back the cost of the travel. The case of Paul C. is particularly telling. Fired by the Anatolian Railroad when the company decided not to employ non-Muslims, he was later employed by Standard Oil, yet he soon lost his job again due to the enforcement of the 1925 law. Together with other Russians, Paul C. turned to the HCR office, which offered the possibility to migrate to Latin America, where a job would be awaiting him thanks to which he would pay back the cost of the visa and of the travel.¹⁴⁷

The emergency was not yet over that the situation precipitated a few months later. A new Turkish decree stipulated that Russian refugees were supposed to move back to Russia, stay in Turkey with adequate documents, or move to a third country by August 1, 1927.¹⁴⁸ The first solution was impinged by the Soviet government, which was no longer interested in having refugees back. Regarding

¹⁴⁵ ALON, C1418, De Giers to Nansen, February 28, 1926, R410/66/0/1.

¹⁴⁶ ALON, C1418, Ruggles to Johnson, January 13, 1926, R410/66/0/1.

¹⁴⁷ ALON, C1418, Ruggles to Butler, February 17, 1926, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁴⁸ ALON, C1402, Schlemmer to Johnson, August 6, 1927, R402/10/66/1.

Turkish citizenship, even if naturalization was possible, non-Muslims had little chance to obtain it.¹⁴⁹ Last, moving abroad was hindered by having to obtain a visa and pay for the travel.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, France, which had been the main country of immigration, closed its doors due to the economic crisis. Hence, in early 1928 the Turkish government granted an extension: the last group of 3,000 Russian refugees should leave by February 6, 1929.¹⁵¹

By that time, the LON-ILO office had carried out a new census of Russian refugees. They were 2,879: 1,555 men, 956 women, and 368 children. There were a large number of unqualified workers, in addition to peasants, taxi drivers, woodworkers, sailors, painters and decorators, builders, electricians, domestic workers, secretaries, business owners, intellectuals and medical doctors, and those who did not have a profession such as the invalids and the children.¹⁵² While some refugees were voluntarily repatriated, pending the authorization of the Soviet authorities, many were evacuated to countries where they could be employed. The refugee office negotiated visas and work contracts; established contacts with governments; pressured the Turkish police to provide passports for departure; and tried to lower the price of the sea trip for destinations like Latin America. Thanks to the mediation of the ILO, France offered 600 visas, Tunisia 250 work contracts, Bulgaria 500 visas, and Bolivia 50 work contracts.¹⁵³ There was also hope that Russians could be resettled in Cyprus and Palestine and other countries.¹⁵⁴

Cases were treated through a group approach, especially when it pertained to agriculturists, whereas they were treated individually when it came to specific professions. For instance, the Paraguayan railroad asked for five specialists. Léonide G., a fitter, received a technical education in Russia, worked in the Samaro-Zlato railroad, before he took the road of exile. In Constantinople, he worked as a mechanic. Basile K. was a blacksmith both in Russia and in Turkey; Kosma C. a carpenter; Michael Z. a turner; and Nikifiore P. a boilermaker. Three out of five could financially contribute to pay for the travel, whereas two did not have any resources.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Üre, "Remnants of Empires".

¹⁵⁰ ALON, C1418, Memorandum les réfugiés russes, May 24, 1927, R410/10/0/1.

¹⁵¹ ALON, C1443, The problem of the last 3,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople, December 16, 1927, R409/56/1.

¹⁵² ALON, C1470, Le problème des derniers réfugiés russes de Constantinople, undated.

¹⁵³ ALON, C1470, Bolivian concessions LTD, an agreement between the Company and the Settler.

¹⁵⁴ ALON, C1470, Bureau International du Travail, 38ème session du Conseil d'administration, Genève, février 1928, 6ème question à l'ordre du jour: Organisation et programme du Service des réfugiés, G.B. 38/264.

¹⁵⁵ ALON, C1452, List signed by Lemtiougov, undated but likely 1927, 348-Rr-412-2-47-1.

Money, or the lack thereof, remained one of the most pressing problems. It was calculated that the sum of £47,250 was necessary for resettling all Russians. Since governments continued to be reluctant, American organizations intervened, as they had already done in 1922. These were the ARC, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, and the Russian Refugee Relief.¹⁵⁶ While only invalid refugees would directly benefit from the collection, the others would have to enroll in the so-called “revolving fund”: refugees received a small sum to pay for the tickets and for the first few weeks in their new country; the sum would be repaid from the salaries, within the limit of 1/10 of their full monthly wage.¹⁵⁷ By means of this system, Russian refugees were not just receiving humanitarian aid, but were also fully involved in the implementation of the project and in the resettlement of more compatriots. In other words, visas and work contracts were two sides of the same coin.¹⁵⁸

The refugee office also had to fight the recalcitrance or, worse, the antagonist position of Russians. Indeed, some refused to be resettled overseas, hoping that Turkey would eventually agree on granting them citizenship. Yet, an unexpected element created a new rush: as we have seen for the “Lemtiougov case,” the ILO announced that the local office would close down by May 1928. This news, together with the pressure of Russian organizations from the old regime, pushed refugees to leave.¹⁵⁹ In turn, the ILO evacuated political prisoners and prostitutes, and guaranteed that it would find a way to continue assisting Russians in the future.¹⁶⁰ The small office continued to work for some time on a reduced staff and budget. Indeed, more petitions from Russian refugees would be sent in the following months, when the Turkish government confiscated their properties.¹⁶¹ Isaac Z., who was evacuated from Crimea to Constantinople, could save enough money to buy a house in the city. He later resettled in France, and he continued to live on the monthly allowances from renting the house in Constantinople, at least until 1925, when the Turkish government requisitioned them. Isaac Z. was painfully aware that, as a refugee, he could not be represented by the Russian council in the city; hence, he addressed his

¹⁵⁶ ALON, C1470, Le problème des derniers réfugiés russes de Constantinople, undated.

¹⁵⁷ ALON, C1419, Evacuation by Lemtiougov, January 2, 1927, C412/1/666/2.

¹⁵⁸ ALON, C1397, Childs to Hesse, June 18, 1925, R402/1/66/3.

¹⁵⁹ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés. Procès-verbal de la séance du 22 mai 1928 tenue au Bureau International du Travail à Genève, A/C.5-1928.

¹⁶⁰ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, rapport du Haut-Commissaire pour les Réfugiés sur la situation des réfugiés russes en Turquie et sur l'établissement des réfugiés russes et arméniens en France et en Tunisie (point 8 b et c) de l'ordre du jour, A/C.-2-1928, 21 mai 1928.

¹⁶¹ ALON, C1440, Loi no. 1062 concernant l'application de mesures de représailles à l'endroit des biens en Turquie des ressortissants des états étrangers qui ont saisi les biens des sujets turques à l'intérieur des leurs propres frontières (journal officiel no. 608 du 15 juin 1927), 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

request to the League of Nations, acting as a putative government. “I have the honor to explain to you that I bought my house while already a refugee. Victim myself of the Russian revolution, I cannot be held responsible for the losses that this revolution caused to Ottoman subjects.”¹⁶² Isaac Z. referred to himself as a victim of the revolution and of the discriminatory decisions made by the Turkish government.

Far from being an isolated accident, more letters are to be found in the archives. Writing on behalf of a group of white Russians, B. was very vocal in denouncing the situation, for which the LON and the ILO could not do much:

White Russians are exposed to an almost oppressive and stigmatized law which is dictated under the impulse and auspices of Soviet Embassy. Driven from our paternal domain, expelled from our native abodes, we are hunted like wild beasts, and we are condemned and sent to the grave. Our spirits are humiliated, and we are debased by the last scene of your life. Our rights have not been appreciated or respected by the Turkish Government who found easier to exterminate than to help us and who forget that the purpose of every Government is to make men better and happier and not infamous and miserable.¹⁶³

Negotiating and implementing the evacuation of Russian refugees was a massive exercise in red tape. A kaleidoscope of tables, different in the quality and in the amount of data that they contained, emerges from it. Cases were treated individually, and, in doing so, reconstitute a few words about the single person, while others refer more generally to a family or to a group. Some contain the names of Russian refugees, in addition to their profession and family configuration.¹⁶⁴ Recurrent tables show the countries where refugees were evacuated, pushing our imagination across the world.¹⁶⁵ Others open more directly to the history of labor, by matching refugees with their future employers.¹⁶⁶ The most complete lists contain the name of the refugee, nationality, date of departure, country of destination, information on the contract, the name of the person who paid for the travel, and the admin work provided by the LON/ILO office.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² ALON, C1440, Isaac Z. to Drummond, July 31, 1928, 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

¹⁶³ ALON, C1440, B. to Drummond, October 1, 1929, 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

¹⁶⁴ ALON, R1402, Contrats pour la France, R402/10/66/1. See also ALON, R1402, Agriculteurs pour l'Argentine, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁵ ALON, C1402, Tableau des évacuations de Turquie par pays de destination du 1er juillet 1928 au 30 juin 1929, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁶ ALON, C1402, Situation of the Russian refugee question in Stamboul, undated, likely 1929, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁷ ALON, C1419, Bureau international du travail, section des réfugiés, Société des Nations, liste des réfugiés évacués de Constantinople le mois de juin 1925, R412/1/66/2.

After all, the question of Russian refugees in Constantinople remained “unsorted”: by 1928, when the LON/ILO office was closed down, 1,800 Russians still remained in the city, of whom 1,000 had applied for Turkish nationality (only 10 Russian refugees obtained it). The LON-ILO then addressed a formal request to the Tewfik Ruchdy Bey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, urging him to accept the 1,000 requests for naturalization and allow the office to find solutions for the remaining 800 refugees.¹⁶⁸ This was partially achieved, since we know that the situation of Russian refugees continued to be discussed by the Nansen Office throughout the 1930s, as well as by post-WWII humanitarian organizations, including UNRRA and IRO.

After the formal withdrawal of the LON/ILO from the city, a small office continued to work, thanks to the financial resources of the American Committee managed by Miss Mitchell. Once again, in 1932, the Turkish government approved a law which forbade foreigners from specific employments, putting Russian refugees out of work. The LON intervened with Turkey, which by then had become a member state, asking to accept demands of naturalization.¹⁶⁹ The question was dragged on for a long time with no formal engagement from the Turkish side.¹⁷⁰ Despite more than one decade of humanitarian programs to relieve, rehabilitate, protect, repatriate, or resettle Russian refugees in Constantinople, the question remained “unliquidated,” to use the words of the LON.

5.6 Conclusion

The exchange of POWs across Europe and beyond was still underway when the Red Cross delegates started reporting on the dire conditions of Russian refugees in Constantinople. Spontaneously, they extended their limited resources to assist Russians, among whom were many children. Meanwhile, reports written by Russian organizations in exile reached the desks of the ICRC in Geneva, giving alarming numbers and asking for a response. Interestingly, the ICRC first turned to the ILO that—it was believed—could resettle Russians alongside the needs of postwar labor markets; when the ILO declined the offer, the ICRC contacted the LON where the HCR

¹⁶⁸ ALON, C1470, League of Nations, High Commission for Refugees, Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for Refugees, meeting held at Geneva February 15, 1929, note by the assistant high commissioner on the situation of the Russian Refugees in Turkey, A/C 2-1929.

¹⁶⁹ ALON, C1475, Office international Nansen pour les réfugiés sous l'autorité de la Société des Nations, Conseil d'administration, dixième session, compte rendu de la séance du 31 octobre 1934 présidée par M.L.B. Golden, vice-président, C.A.-82-1934.

¹⁷⁰ ALON, C1475, Nansen International Office for Refugees under the authority of the League of Nations, Managing committee and finance commission, 15th joint session convened at Geneva on October 28, 1935, situation of the Russian refugees in Turkey, J.C.141-1935.

was eventually created in September 1921, framing the question of Russian refugees in the inter-governmental realm.

Both in Geneva and in Constantinople—where the followers of Generals Denikin and Wrangel had found asylum at the crossroad of the city's inter-Allied occupation and of its integration into modern Turkey—gendered inequalities and racial hierarchies fueled humanitarian protection. Lederrey stressed that only self-reliant Russian refugees could receive international assistance thanks to which they might reach the higher civilizational standards of their saviors. Similarly, only those Russian prostitutes willing to leave behind their “path of vice” might undergo physical and moral recovery. Instead of protecting women, humanitarian aid further marginalized them: not only had Russian refugee women chosen prostitution to survive, but the same Western men who potentially benefited from their services were also those who decided whether they were worthy of assistance.

Regarding Russians, they were far from being helpless. Fortunately, the international organizations' red tape opened breaches into agencies and forms of resistance. When interviewed prior to resettlement, the Russian youth in Constantinople recounted how they overcame dramatic events and expressed hopes for the future. Russian organizations were vocal in opposing resettlement plans in Brazil, fearing that refugees would be exploited on the plantations. The officer in Constantinople, Lemtiougov, protested against the fact that his contract was not renewed, whereas many others asked for help to have their confiscated properties restored.

Within the square kilometers of Constantinople and its broader region, the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO formulated a series of discourses on displaced Russians—being victims, threats, and vectors of postwar reconstruction—which influenced the solutions agreed on their behalf. They also became acutely aware of the challenges that Russian refugees faced: they could not resettle, as they lacked passports and entry visas, and, after Turkey regained control of the city, they had a hard time locally integrating. It was in the peculiar context of Constantinople that “permanent solutions” for the “refugee problem” were designed, implemented, tested, and—when they worked—exported elsewhere. Taken together, Constantinople and its broader region appeared to be a massive space of forced displacement, humanitarian protection, and containment, from which it was extremely difficult to leave in the direction of the West, where anti-immigration laws had been approved, and where it became increasingly challenging to stay.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of space, see Timur Saitov, “Constructing a Refugee Through Producing a Refugee Space: Russian Migrants in Occupied Istanbul (1919–22),” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10, no. Dis-Placed (2021): 337–360.