

Weekend reading and listening: migrants, beyond aid, toward data, malaria, Rojava revolution, and oil cronyism

By Camilla Burkot and Terence Wood

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Along with the devastating earthquake in Nepal, the plight of migrants and refugees across the world was difficult to ignore this week. Sarah Stillman of the *New Yorker* [highlights](#) an under-reported and disturbing practice: migrants, especially children and young people, being kidnapped and held for ransom. As US border security tightened, an activist notes, 'the more people can charge, [and] the more dangerous the trip becomes'.

This is, of course, a near perfect analogy to what is happening in the Mediterranean. On the Crooked Timber blog, Chris Bertram [finds](#) the EU's [ten-point plan](#) on migration to be largely 'irrelevant to events'. Despite their obligations to provide sanctuary under the Refugee Convention, sanctions and deterrents pushed by (largely northern) European countries have created a situation in which migrants are left with virtually no alternatives to unscrupulous people smugglers charging extortionate prices.

Though the economic impact of migration has been [hotly discussed](#) in the run up to the UK election, this recent NBER [Working Paper](#) [gated; ungated PDF of an earlier version [here](#)] finds that (in the US context at least) native-born workers actually benefit significantly from the arrival of immigrants, via job creation and increased wages in the non-traded services sector.

Also in response to the Mediterranean crisis, Marta Foresti makes the [case](#) that the development community should start seriously engaging with migration — in fact we must do so, if we are serious about moving 'beyond aid'.

Also on the subject of beyond aid, Owen Barder's [essay](#) on 'the aid ring fence' highlights three major challenges for development — fragile states, inequality in middle income countries, and global and transboundary problems — and identifies four implications for development policy. The challenge, of course, will be finding a way to actually implement the 'new mind-sets' and consensus he is advocating for.

The notion of 'big data' and data quality also figure prominently in discussions on how to

improve aid and development effectiveness. A recently released [report](#) from ODI on ‘the data revolution’ argues that quality data is the key not only to measuring development progress, but also to sparking it.

Global health activists were hard-pressed to find much to celebrate this World Malaria Day (April 25), with clinical trials of the most advanced malaria vaccine (RTS,S) showing [disappointing results](#). However, others have chosen to interpret these findings as a ‘glass half full’ situation, arguing that though the vaccine may not (yet) be of public health significance, it is still a step in the [right direction](#). And while drug resistance remains a serious threat, some [new research](#) pointed to possible mechanisms for delaying the spread of resistance.

In western Kurdistan (northern Syria), militias including the all-female YPJ are playing an important role in the fight against ISIS. Though whether the ‘Rojava revolution’ is giving rise to a [socialist enclave](#) may be debated, there is [little doubt](#) that these women occupy a unique niche within the Kurdish community and the greater Middle East.

Finally, PRI [reports](#) [article and podcast] on the ascendancy of Folorunsho Alakija to the position of ‘richest black woman in the world’ in December on the basis of her oil wealth. Though she is a singular figure, Alakija’s story can be taken as emblematic of the personal connections — and sheer luck — required to get ahead in Nigeria.

About the author/s

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