CMEN19, Middle Eastern Refugees in the Global North
7.5 credits.

Course Description
A substantial number of people from the Middle East migrate to those countries that can be collected under the term ‘the Global North’. Many of these people who travel ‘north’ seek asylum. In 2015 alone, more than a million of forced-displaced people left behind their homes in the Middle East and migrated to, among other Global Northern geographies such as Australia or Canada, the European Union. This course will analyse the cultural, political, economic and legal dimensions of seeking asylum from the Middle East in the Global North. Students will engage critically with the current state of research on Middle Eastern Refugees in the Global North and they will meet with locally engaged NGO-workers as well as refugee rights activists who have first-hand experiences of South-North migrations.

Course Objective
Drawing on the overarching theme of ‘The Middle East in Sweden’, in terms of the concerned social actors, this course narrows the focus on refugees understood as forced-displaced people. At the same time, the course opens up the geographical scope in order to discuss those social structures, organizations and institutions that affect the lives of people seeking asylum not only in Sweden but in the Global North more broadly.

With our point of departure being the Swedish asylum system, we will start with tracing the historical roots of the international refugee regime. We will explore asylum systems in other Global Northern countries such as the US, Canada, and, besides Sweden, other EU-countries such as France and Germany, but also Australia and New Zealand. Then, we proceed by assessing empirical research that investigates how Middle Eastern refugees interact with these different administrations of asylum in the Global North. We will read this empirical literature critically, problematizing the seeking of asylum as relational to citizenship, gender and sexuality, class, race/ethnicity, and geopolitics. To address these complex power relations, the self-organized refugee rights activism that has recently emerged in different Global Northern contexts will be the main reference point. Thus, the course will not only highlight the agency of forced-displaced people, and those citizens-in-solidarity who support them, but also examine their political struggles when facing the social structures, organizations and institutions that affect the lives of people seeking asylum in the Global North.

Placing the interaction of Middle Eastern refugees and Global Northern asylum systems at the centre of analysis, the course will offer to its participants: (1) critical insights into current debates about refugees in different (trans-) national contexts; (2) possibilities to gain understanding of different (supra-) national asylum systems (e.g. Sweden within the EU) as well as of the lived experiences of seeking asylum; and, finally, (3) a platform to discuss possibilities for change.