

AN URBAN WORLD THAT WELCOMES REFUGEES

The City We Need Now





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act:onaid
ActionAid Association (India)



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FOREWORD

The future geography of refugees will be urban. Firstly, more and more refugees now choose cities as their preferred site of refuge, and secondly, the planet will be more urban by the end of this century. Currently, more than half of the refugee population is residing in cities, as reported by the UNHCR. It is no surprise that cities emerge as the preferred site for refuge due to various factors. Urban areas provide anonymity and better accessibility to health and education facilities and livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, cities offer an extensive network of the informal economy that absorbs the refugee population. But the question remains - are cities willing and able to accommodate and support refugee populations seeking refuge?

An Urban World That Welcomes Refugees: The City We Need is a sincere effort to see how we can move in this direction. Through this document, we urge cities to develop, build and sustain networks of care and solidarity for one of the most marginalised and oppressed sections of modern society.

Emerging policy discourse from various international humanitarian agencies recognises the critical role of cities in responding to the refugee crises. The cities that we hope to build should be able to integrate refugees into host societies while providing them with the right to make their lives. The prison-like camps can no longer serve as a viable option to house refugees. The average period of exile for protracted refugee situations stands at more than 20 years. Additionally, cities have diverse opportunities to offer and gain from incoming refugee populations.

However, integrating urban refugees in host cities will not be possible if cities continue to extend their service based on citizenship rather than the residential status. Therefore, we require not only a rethinking of the citizenship discourse in towns but also an inclusive reimagining of citizenship geared towards an emancipatory future. Refugees living in cities should have access to affordable housing, decent work, education and healthcare facilities, and the freedom to participate in public life.

This conversation will remain incomplete if one fails to highlight the positive experience of cities that have opted for sanctuary policies for refugees. Moreover, cities reap a diverse set of benefits from incoming refugees. Thus, cities have a

window of opportunity to become socially, economically and politically inclusive spaces by successfully integrating refugees into host societies.

Urban governments play a crucial role in making this happen, and we need to build their capacity so that they can serve refugee population groups better. Furthermore, given that cities of the developing world and the global south continue to house the majority of urban refugees, it is critical to developing a mechanism through which cities and community-based organisations in these regions share best practices and innovative solutions. Such a mechanism can be mobilised further to realise the rights of refugees in cities and help build south-south cooperation and collaboration.

It is also imperative to outline the need for further collaborations between international organisations such as the UNHCR and UNHABITAT to mainstream the interests of refugees in the complex city systems. *The City We Need Now* movement launched by the World Urban Campaign reinforces the need for cities to be socially inclusive and engaging; affordable, accessible and equitable; economically vibrant and inclusive; collectively managed and democratically governed. It is necessary to include the refugee voices in such deliberations.

An Urban World That Welcomes Refugees: The City We Need has been published in the hope that it will play a role in creating new imaginations of an emancipatory future, where the right to a dignified life for all refugees is recognised and accepted legally and in practice.

Sandeep Chachra

Executive Director

ActionAid Association

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With An Urban World That Welcomes Refugees: The City We Need Now, ActionAid Association tries to further the public discourse over cities as choice for refuge. We thank the international community who have been moving ahead with this cause and we believe that a future world where refugees are welcome is possible. We are confident that the insights shared in this document on the prospects and challenges of urban refugees will encourage further explorations in an effort to build on the idea and reality of #TheCityWeNeedNow.

We would like to express our solidarity with the everyday struggles of refugees and displaced people all over the world.

Many of our colleagues at ActionAid Association contributed to making this publication happen. We thank them all. Sandeep Chachra conceptualized the publication, provided guidance and the Foreword. Iyca Malhotra, Koustav Majumdar and Lakshyayog have done the research and written this document. The Communications Unit ensured timely publication with Joseph Mathai anchoring the process, doing the final edits and the final structuring of the publication, and M V Rajeevan designing the cover and laid out the pages. As a freelance editor Punam Thakur copy edited the document.



INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is often referred to as an urban century - cities will rise across the globe and define future trajectories of human civilisation. With millions of people arriving in cities in the developing world every month and an estimated 80 per cent of the global GDP coming from urban areas,¹ the proposition of an urban century does not seem far-fetched. Urban areas across the world attract migrant workers from the rural hinterlands for better livelihoods and standard of living. On the one hand, cities are creating jobs and giving higher living standards to many, but on the other, cities are also fostering poverty and destitution at a scale and extent never seen before.²

Throughout the world, the number of refugees living in urban areas is also on the rise. As per UNHCR's estimates, more than 60 per cent of the global refugee population lives in urban centres.³ Cities provide refugees with hope, opportunity, and a sense of anonymity. Unlike in restricted camp settings, cities also allow refugees more freedom of movement and choice. However, while cities offer refugees more freedom and opportunities, the influx of refugees in urban areas, especially those in the global South, impact the urban poor more adversely. Therefore, in the global South the urban refugee population finds itself competing with the native poor and rural migrants for access to labour markets, housing, and even essential services. With nativist politics on the rise across the globe, refugees find themselves further disenfranchised from basic human rights.

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1. The World Bank: Urban Development Overview. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview#1>
 2. Where Will The City-Maker Stay? Available at: <https://www.actionaidindia.org/publications/where-will-the-city-maker-stay/>
 3. UNHCR: The Power of Cities, 2016. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/the-power-of-cities/>

Urban refugees work in the informal economy and are dependent on petty trade and casual labour. They do not have proper housing and live in slums, informal settlements, or at their worksites. These places are typically extremely over crowded, and people do not have access to clean water or sanitation facilities. Physical distancing is an improbable proposition in these spaces and people frequently have to gather at common points to access services such as water and toilets. These areas are more often than not highly underserved and lack critical health and sanitation infrastructure.

Hence, it is understood that local and sub-national authorities like city governments are at the frontline of refugee reception and integration. However, austerity measures and lack of public funding plague city governments' finances across the world. It is imperative to enhance urban authorities' capacities in terms of knowledge, skills, and authority to respond to these challenges thereby enhancing the enjoyment of human rights by all the inhabitants. It is with this idea that the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development adopted the New Urban Agenda in 2016.⁴

The idea of a 'city for all' was furthered by the World Urban Campaign with its *The City We Need Now* movement.⁵ This promotes cities that are socially inclusive and engaging; affordable, accessible, and equitable; economically vibrant and inclusive; and collectively managed and democratically governed. It advocates for cities that foster cohesive territorial development, are regenerative and resilient, and have shared identities and sense of place. It promotes well planned, walkable, transit-friendly, safe, and healthy cities that learn and innovate.

4. UN Habitat: The New Urban Agenda 2016. Available at: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>

5. World Urban Campaign: The City We Need Now 2022. Available at: <https://www.worldurbancampaign.org/thecityweneed>

In *An Urban World That Welcomes Refugees: The City We Need Now*, we discuss how the new urban paradigm as proposed by UN Habitat can incorporate the growing population of urban refugees within its framework. This document furthers the public discourse on cities as a choice for refugees while bringing in the ideas put forward by the New Urban Agenda and the World Urban Campaign. It discusses examples of cities from across the world that have seen some success in integrating refugees effectively. It also brings forward the idea that cities, rather urban host communities, and refugees have a symbiotic relationship in case of economic betterment, the cultural milieu, and overall progress. With cities and urban refugees touted to be on the rise, it is imperative that cities prepare for these new drivers of global displacement. This document highlights how urban policies and infrastructure need to better adapt to the ongoing and future arrival of refugees, which may not be due to conflict alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a rather grim milestone in human history. What started off as a global health emergency, soon turned into an international humanitarian crisis at a scale that had not been seen in the recent past. As the virus spread through the world, country after country started increasing its border controls. Severe restrictions on movement were commonplace throughout the world. Unfortunately, the virus did not subscribe to the idea of human made borders and moved on even with the movement restrictions. However, it was not the virus alone that defied the state mandated border controls. As the pandemic raged throughout the world, conflict and persecution continued to displace people from their homes often across 'closed' international boundaries. Even during the restrictive pandemic year 2020, as per reports by UNHCR-the UN Refugees Agency, 11.2 million people were forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, persecution, and threat of war.⁶ This figure stood higher than what was reported for 2019 when the pandemic and its associated movement controls were still an unimaginable idea.

6. UNHCR Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2020. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends-2020>

According to international refugee law, anyone who has been forced to flee and cross international borders and cannot return home because of war, conflict, or persecution is a refugee. Millions of refugees live in protracted situations, often in low- and middle-income countries facing their own economic and development challenges. By the end of 2020, UNHCR reported that 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide. This equates to one in every 95 individuals across the world, or more than 1 per cent of the world's population being forcibly displaced. This was a sharp rise from the figures that were reported at the end of 2010 when one out of every 159 people worldwide was forcibly displaced; 2021 also saw a significant displacement of people.

With the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan and military dictatorship returning to Myanmar, refugee movements across South Asia witnessed an enormous increase. The war in Ukraine since the beginning of 2022 brought back the refugee crisis to Europe. While conflicts in these three countries have emerged as significant causes of displacement of people, ongoing refugee crises have continued in West Asia and Africa. According to data from UNHCR-the UN Refugee Agency, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide rose close to 90 million by the end of 2021, propelled by new waves of violence or protracted conflicts in countries including Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁷ In addition, the war in Ukraine displaced 8 million within the country this year and more than 6 million refugee movements from Ukraine have been registered.

As global military powers continue to treat smaller and developing nations as a backyard for their war games, citizens of these and their neighbouring countries face continued humanitarian losses. Almost 73 per cent of the refugees are hosted in their neighbouring countries and developing

7. UNHCR Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2020. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends>

countries host 86 per cent of all refugees globally.⁸ Low- and middle-income countries do not often have the resources to effectively support the refugee populations that they host. Due to this, refugees in these regions face several vulnerabilities and human rights violations. Access to basic amenities like proper shelter, food, healthcare, education, and livelihood are often unavailable to such a large group of the population. Many face detentions as illegal migrants, with children often forced into hard labour and women facing gender based violence.

Primarily, addressing the root causes of migration is the responsibility of countries at the origin of the refugee movement. However, averting and resolving a large refugee crisis is a serious matter of concern for the international community. The scope, complexity, and scale of the refugee crisis has increased begging enhanced solutions for assistance and protection. With prolonged violence and no resolution in sight, it is imperative for the international community to ensure the most conducive environment for refugees and working together to put an end to the conflicts. International cooperation for equitable burden sharing, as highlighted in the Global Compact on Refugees 2018 is imperative in the response to crises generating refugees.

It is necessary for a multitude of actors such as regional organisations, local authorities, civil society, academicians, the private sector, international and regional financial institutions, the media, host community members, and the refugees themselves to work together.

With the world turning urban and most of the refugees staying in cities, there is an urgent need to see how we can make our cities more welcoming for refugees so that the world becomes a better place for them.

8. United Nations Global Compact on Refugees 2018. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>



CITIES AS THE CHOICE FOR REFUGE

Most refugees view cities as their best possible option to provide for themselves and their families. The vast complex city structures which are a part and parcel of urban life pose many challenges for the refugees but they are also part of the solution. Opportunities for work that cities provide with their often unregulated labour markets enable refugees to earn while in refuge. Cities are also better serviced than rural areas in the form of education and healthcare facilities. Unlike camped settings, urban areas, especially larger metros, provide greater freedom of movement. For all these reasons cities foster self-reliance among refugees and provide them prospects for successful socioeconomic integration and entrepreneurship.

While the traditional camp settings may turn into de-facto prisons for refugees in host countries, rural camps are considered the ideal strategy for housing the refugees by international aid organisations. The problems associated with self-settlement of refugees in the host countries owing to security also led to the acceptance of organised camps as the preferred mode of extending support to refugee population groups. Self-settlement of refugees was considered advantageous before the emergence of camp settings due to administrative convenience, low costs, independence for the refugee groups, and refugee communities' preferences in terms of location of the sites (Chambers, 1982).

Movement for refugees housed in the camps is often restricted, and even when refugees have access to areas outside the camps, the host actors often regulate it. The arbitrary enforcement of restrictions often results in the harassment of the refugee population in hostile host states. As compared to camps, cities provide adequate opportunities in terms of movement for the refugees and thus, cities are often the preferred location for a majority of the refugees. In addition, the refugee population in rural camps is dependent on aid for survival in the absence of any opportunity to engage in economic activities in the host countries. The

mode of governance in the camps is often not in the hands of the refugee population groups and they face severe restrictions on socioeconomic, cultural, and political freedom. In addition, refugee camps are often seen as temporary or transitory. However, as the average duration of exile for the refugee population in protracted situations was found to be more than 20 years in 2015 (Devictor & Do, 2017), the camps' capability of providing access to dignified lives to the refugee population is questionable. Thus, cities as sites of refuge for refugee populations have become a preferred alternative over camps.

History shows that refugees have been a part of the urban landscape for a variety of reasons. Given the legal battles, bureaucratic hurdles, and political backlash that refugees often face when moving en-masse to cities, it needs to be questioned why they prefer cities as safer places for refuge. A major reason for this is the continued accumulation of wealth and resources in urban centres, an integral feature of urban growth around the world. The skewed distribution of livelihood opportunities in cities and access to services like education, healthcare, housing, and transportation make urban centres attractive for refugees as for rural citizens. Rural-urban migration is often seen as a method of risk diversification and informal social protection against cyclical rural distress. It is an established fact that urban inhabitants, even those who live in slums and squatter settlements, earn much more in cities than what they would have earned in rural contexts. Similarly, refugees are also rational individuals who strategise their decisions, and 'vote with their feet en route to the city' (Fabos & Kibreab, 2007).

Apart from the livelihood opportunities that cities provide, they also provide anonymity and therefore a greater sense of personal security for refugees. When compared to legal urban citizens, the number of refugees living in any urban area is insignificant. This enables refugees to mix with the greater urban population, living with new identities, especially if they share a common language, ethnicity, and way of life. Given that most of the refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries and the colonial borders that the global South follow cut across historical shared national lands, refugees

often find it easier to masquerade as general citizens in an urban setting. Besides providing physical security, anonymity also enables refugees to engage in different forms of income-generating activities by hiding their true identities. In countries, especially in the global South, where there are legal barriers for refugees to access labour markets, the anonymity provided by a city and its large informal economy, allows refugees who share common traits to move freely and earn livelihoods. Most of this would not have been possible had the refugees been in rural settings, as in rural areas and smaller towns, people generally know each other and associate with one another on the basis of common residence or descent.

Host countries and international refugee agencies follow encampment policies by virtue of which they place refugees originating from the same country in the same camp. Such policies do not take into account the heterogeneity within refugee groups from a single country. Even within these groups, there are sometimes factions that have been at war with each other in their origin countries. It cannot be assumed that these historical enmities disappear once they are in refuge. Rather historical differences play a key role in the distribution of and access to essential resources, more so when the resources are scarce. Refugee groups also bring with them the burden of historical social prejudices against one another. Caste and clan identities remain integral to refugees even when they are in refuge. Cities not only provide refugees safety and anonymity from the state but also free them of many social prejudices that they would have faced had they been camped with other members from their country. Hence, by providing an opportunity for anonymity the urban space provides some degree of physical security.

However, this does not mean that all refugees can escape the tyranny of being 'othered' by simply moving to cities. The anonymity that urban settings provide to those forcibly displaced often compounds the challenges due to its hidden nature. Compared to those displaced in camps, it is more difficult to track the living conditions of those displaced in urban areas. Humanitarian agencies find it difficult to gather accurate data on urban refugees and therefore many miss out on humanitarian aid and assistance.

Cities can also turn into ‘poverty traps,’ forcing refugees to survive below subsistence levels. Urban refugees are also in competition with the urban poor for access to shelter, livelihood, and essential public services. While host states, a majority of which are poor and emerging economies, have taken in millions of refugees they do not have the fiscal backing to provide for them. This often puts a strain on the relationship between the host communities and refugee groups. With the rise of nativist and xenophobic politics across the globe, such strains are causing severe opposition to the integration of refugees both at the local and national levels.

Keeping in mind the challenges that urban refugees face in the cities, it is equally important to outline that the coming in of refugees in urban spaces also provides numerous benefits and an array of opportunities to local governments to create inclusive cities. Studies in Africa have shown positive income spill overs to host settings thanks to refugee population groups which contradicts the popular perception that refugees are dependent on aid and do not contribute to the local economy (Taylor, et al., 2016). Such a positive impact will improve further if the refugees are given access to labour markets in host countries which will also contribute towards improving their circumstances. In addition, it is crucial to recognise that a majority of the refugees in the cities contribute significantly to the local economies while coping and managing the complexities that they encounter in often hostile and unfamiliar settings (Bushcer, 2017). A study of refugee groups in Uganda showed that urban refugees not only boosted the local economy by acting as consumers but also created employment for both the refugee and host communities (Betts et al., 2014). Recognising the contribution of refugees to local economies across the world further strengthens the view that cities can benefit significantly from urban refugees if ‘they were allowed to pursue productive lives absent legal restrictions, harassment and insecurity’ (Jacobsen, 2006, p. 273)

URBAN REFUGEES AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATION

Integration options for refugees are often neglected and poorly understood in comparison to other running programmes like repatriation and resettlement (Beverluis et al., 2016). As mentioned earlier, refugee integration brings positive changes to both refugees and refugee hosting societies (Strang & Ager, 2010). Refugee retention can help declining population regions and small communities in the host country to boost their capacity in the labour force and the economy by creating employment opportunities (Fang et al., 2018)

The UN High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2018 put the spotlight on forced displacement in cities.¹ It is not only the refugees who faces challenges when moving to urban areas, but also local host communities, especially the ones on the margins. It is therefore for local and national authorities to first take cognisance of these challenges and better understand them to formulate innovative policies aimed at building resilient communities.

The influx of refugees in cities substantially affects the demographic and economic landscape of urban areas. The arrival of communities also brings with it new cultural and political dimensions. In such a scenario, the municipal authorities' policies and the response of the local host communities play a significant role in defining how refugees integrate with the host society and contribute to the overall development of the city. Municipal governments across the world are facing substantial fiscal challenges, and more so in the case of cities in the global South. In such a scenario, the arrival of refugees to the cities can create greater pressure on concerned local governments' fiscal capabilities. City governments also need effective coordination with the national government in dealing with

1. UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, 2018. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/high-commissioners-dialogue-on-protection-challenges-2018.html>

refugees as such matters mostly fall under the jurisdiction of the national government.

Cities are becoming the physical manifestation of wealth and opportunity whether in the form of occupation, education, or innovations. Opportunities for livelihood are what mainly draw refugees to the cities. But accessing labour markets in the cities also comes with its own challenges. Many countries have laws preventing refugees from accessing labour markets. More often than not, these laws are framed at the national level and city governments have little say in such matters. Even if the law allows refugees to work, the bureaucratic process involved in getting a work permit, forces refugees to look for options beyond the formal sector. Therefore, refugees tend to join the informal economy and work under precarious conditions without any social protection.

Housing is yet to be a right for people all over the world. Cities across the world are facing issues in ensuring affordable and sustainable housing to their own citizens so it is unimaginable that they will be able to provide such services to refugees and other people who have been displaced. This forces refugees to either take up shelter in informal settlements and slums on the fringes of the city or pay exorbitant rents for proper housing facilities. Several studies have shown that refugees often spend about half their incomes on housing and utilities which offset the income gains due to their movement to the cities. The arrival of refugees in unplanned informal settlements on the outskirts of the cities also pose a challenge to the cities' future development plans. This further alienates the refugee population from the city government as their existence is looked upon as an anomaly and a burden on the city's resources.

Housing is just one of the many services required for life in a city. Like any other city dweller, refugees need access to other services like education, healthcare, and utilities. Probably this is one reason why refugees are better off in camped settings than in urban areas. Camps enable aid and other humanitarian agencies to provide such services tailored to the needs of the refugees, more so education services. In cities, such services

are provided by the municipal government for all city residents to enjoy. Refugees, especially those who are unfamiliar with local customs and language find it difficult to access these services. Moreover, even in cases where refugees share ethnicity and language with the host population, they are often kept out of the public registration system. Legal restrictions and bureaucratic procedures plague civilian registration systems, which makes it difficult even for citizens to access them smoothly. Hence, refugees are further cut off from these services. It is often reported that due to their vulnerable circumstances, refugees face violence and prejudice from local authorities and police personnel.

Access to livelihoods, housing, and social services is important for integrating refugees in the cities. But the most significant challenge to integrating or even settling refugees in the cities is the backlash from the host communities. Refugees compete with the urban poor for livelihoods and access to basic services. In resource scarce settings, especially in the global South, this becomes an issue not only for host communities but also for host governments. However, this is not to say that refugees do not face opposition from host communities in the global North. Apart from a resource crunch, refugee movement into the cities is subject to xenophobic attacks by host communities. This is widespread across developed countries where refugees face a backlash due to their ethnic and religious identities. Refugee movements are seen as something which alter the cultural identity of the host city or country.

All societies have their own culture and values that have evolved over time. Different stimuli catalyse transformations. The integration and acceptance of new values or members in an existing community requires an integrative model. Members of a dominant culture can potentially affect the integration process by their attitudes toward the refugees; hence, a comprehensive acculturation process needs to be included in the integration policies (Rauchelle & Dandy, 2015)



INTEGRATING REFUGEES IN THE NEW URBAN PARADIGM

For achieving this goal, an enabling environment for articulating policy and legal demands must be created in cities. This will enhance the protection spaces available to urban refugees and empower them to advocate for their own rights. Advocacy is a key step in designing suitable urban refugee interventions and must be done at all levels with key stakeholders – national governments, private actors, local authorities, religious and faith-based organisations, law enforcement agencies, and private sector employers.

It is no surprise that contemporary cities the world over are devoid of any sense of justice. In fact, cities in the modern world are driven by economic greed and profits are preferred over the rights, needs, and dignity of life. Cities now foster inequalities and violence against the marginalised sections. We urgently need a paradigm shift to understand human settlements and territories as a common good - for present and future generations - that is co-created and must be co-managed. We need to put people and their rights at the centre of the discussions on the future course for urban development. There is an urgent need to ensure that urban policies are formed in a participatory and consultative manner involving all urban dwellers. Accountability and transparency using social auditing measures must be ingrained in the implementation processes.

There is a growing trend across the world to derecognise not just the contribution of the urban poor but to derecognise the urban poor themselves. Refugees, migrants, and the urban poor are often forcibly placed at the margins of the city. The spatial segregation of cities by class, ethnicity, and religious or other social identities restricts the enjoyment of urban life by the marginalised communities in the city. While livelihoods are the main attraction for people moving to the cities, urban policies should look beyond the primacy of economic advancement, especially when dealing with the urban poor. Cities need to ensure not just economic rights but also social, political, and cultural rights for all citizens.

The progressive withdrawal of the State from every aspect of urban life opened up a space for private players, who with three primary tools - electronics, information technology, and service - entered the cities in a major way altering not only the economic but also the physical landscape. Two areas that have been completely usurped in the decades of building neoliberal city structures are the urban commons and public spaces, both in existing cities as well as in the surrounding villages that were appropriated to accommodate expanding cities. As a result, community shared and administered lakes, ponds, public parks, and the common land of merged villages have been taken over by the government and handed over to private developers. The impact of decades of neoliberal urbanization on public land, urban commons, parks, and other spaces is a subject that needs urgent attention.

The heterogeneity of challenges faced by different cities across the world calls for a heterogeneous approach in seeking solutions and building futures. Such solutions need to be participatory in nature, founded on community based knowledge and which follow a bottom-up approach. The urban citizenry is not confined to only urban planners, policymakers, corporates, and academicians. Hence, planning for urban futures should go beyond those confines and include the participation of all constituency groups like civil society organisations, grassroots organisations, trade unions, the media, women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, farmers, indigenous communities, and refugee and migrant groups.

Refugee groups also must be able to participate in decision-making spaces for formulating and implementing public policies and budgets, including territorial planning and control over the urban processes. They are best poised to respond to the challenges that they specifically face while in refuge. Refugees must be given access to essential services in their immediate environment and host societies as well as governments should facilitate this access.

In 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito, Ecuador adopted the New

Urban Agenda (NUA) as a shared vision and framework for a city for all. It urged national governments to adopt inclusive immigration policies while recognising the role of city governments as equal partners in dealing with refugees. It called for decentralisation of power and financing to enable municipal governments to fulfil their duties towards all residents, including migrants and refugees. The New Urban Agenda upholds that the right to the city must be ensured for all citizens irrespective of their identities. It states:

We share a vision of cities for all, referring to the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all. We note the efforts of some national and local governments to enshrine this vision, referred to as ‘right to the city’, in their legislation, political declarations and charters.

However, the legally non-binding nature of the New Urban Agenda results in the absence of any independent monitoring and evaluation of the member states’ commitment to protecting the rights of the refugees in the urban spaces that they inhabit (Beier & Fritzsche, 2017). Despite their participation in Habitat III, national governments remain reluctant to give refugees the right to work and live freely in cities and hence, they continue to prefer camp situations. There is a need for collaborative and cooperative efforts by UNHCR and UN Habitat to convince national and local governments to include refugees in their urban policies and programmes.

In addition, with the vision of implementing the New Urban Agenda achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by 2030, the World Urban Campaign launched its manifesto ‘The City We Need Now 3.0.’ in April, 2022. It puts forward 10 action areas that are necessary to ‘realise the new urban paradigm:’

- » Health and well-being
- » Peace and safety
- » Climate adaptation and resilience
- » Inclusion and gender equality
- » Economic opportunities for all
- » Culture and identity
- » Local governance
- » Urban planning and design
- » Housing services and mobility
- » Learning and innovation

For achieving this goal, an enabling environment for articulating policy and legal demands must be created in cities. This will enhance the protection spaces available to urban refugees and empower them to advocate for their own rights. Advocacy is a key step in designing suitable urban refugee interventions and must be done at all levels with key stakeholders – national governments, private actors, local authorities, religious and faith-based organisations, law enforcement agencies, and private sector employers.

Health and Well-Being

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognised that refugees have a variety of health needs which may differ from host populations.¹ Escaping conflict, persecution, economic or political crises, and severe food shortages, refugees often suffer from grave psychological trauma. Refugee populations are at increased risk of serious mental health trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, which if

1. Available at:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health> and
Cities and refugees: The German experience - Brookings. Available at:
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/cities-and-refugees-the-german-experience/>

left untreated, can damage the prospects of integration. Refugees should be allowed access to public healthcare facilities and special emphasis should be placed on making psychosocial support available to them.

Peace and Safety

The issue of safety and security remains a challenge even for refugees residing in urban settings as security concerns are often weaponised by the host states lobbying for camps to house the refugees. However, studies in the North American context show that cities' sanctuary policies have no impact on crime rates (O'Brien et al., 2019) which contradicts the popular narrative regarding refugees in cities. It is important to note in this context that cities need to develop mechanisms to provide safety to vulnerable sections among the refugee groups such as women and children who are at a higher risk. The refugee population continues to be one of the most vulnerable sections of urban society which requires substantive efforts by local governments to ensure their safety and security.

Climate Adaptation and Resilience

The worsening climatic conditions make it imperative for the international community to recognise the role that climate change and associated extreme weather events play in causing refugee like situations. In the absence of a global framework that regulates the movement of refugees fleeing climate catastrophes, these movements will occur without effective legal protection and humanitarian assistance. Climate change and forced displacements are very often linked, and will increasingly be so.² The intersection requires novel, sustainable, and comprehensive solutions to the multidimensional challenges it creates. With cities at the forefront of refugee inflows, urban infrastructure needs to be prepared for future flows of refugees because of climate events.

2. https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/ActionAid%20CANSAsouth%20Asia%20Climate%20Migration%20report%20-%20Dec%202020_3.pdf

Inclusion and Gender Equality

Urban policies to facilitate the integration of refugee groups must deploy a strong participatory approach that involves refugees as well as host communities. They should be gender, age, and diversity inclusive promoting equality and empowering women. They should also be effective in tackling economic exploitation, discrimination in education, sexual exploitation, and any other threats. Local authorities and urban governance should facilitate the meaningful participation of refugees along with the youth, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

Economic Opportunities for All

Providing refugees with the right to work, move freely, and sustain themselves most effectively ensures their full contribution to their host communities as employers and employees. Enabling self-sufficiency amongst refugees can reduce or even eliminate costs that are otherwise incurred in supporting displaced persons. Hiring processes for refugees are often cumbersome and often rife with challenges such as numerous checks and balances for verifying credentials, lack of access to decent job opportunities, non-recognition of credentials, discrimination, as well as lack of information among employers about whether and how they can hire refugees; these further limit economic inclusion. However, if these barriers are removed, host countries' economic growth may be boosted. For example, if these barriers are removed in Colombia, which is home to 1.7 million Venezuelan refugees, not only will Venezuelans' average monthly income increase, there will also be a significant increase in Colombia's GDP by about US\$1 billion every year (Graham & Dempster, 2020).

Culture and Identity

To achieve inclusion symbiotically beneficial relationships between host communities and refugees should be explored. These relationships can use cultural differences as an asset. Businesses with refugees as their client

Kampala, Uganda: Integration over Relief

The Ugandan handling of the refugee situation is unique and effective. It has adopted a development-based approach to refugee assistance, a marked shift from humanitarian relief (Omata & Kaplan, 2013). Uganda is a signatory to all principal international legal instruments for refugee protection: the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention. In accordance with international instruments, Uganda adopted a new refugee legislation, the Refugees Act 2006 which enshrined the principle of refugee protection. The progressive and unique act recognises refugees' right to work, live in the local community, and move freely within the country rather than being restricted to refugee settlements.

In line with this evolving response to refugees, the Ugandan government promotes self-reliance amongst refugees by allotting land to each refugee household to facilitate economic independence through agricultural livelihoods. Further, refugees are motivated to settle in urban areas to access good employment opportunities, better education, and enhanced access to services. Through these measures the refugee community in Kampala mirrors the global trend of refugee urbanisation. While refugees in Kampala are scattered across the city's low-income areas, there are some homogenous neighbourhoods concentrated with refugees from the same countries of origin. There are areas where Congolese, Ethiopian, and Somali refugees live (Women's Refugee Commission, 2011)

The country has also fostered a flourishing business based on cultural diversity. Eritrean refugees run restaurants which serve traditional dishes and the owners end up employing other refugees too. A similar pattern of employment between migrants and refugees from the same country of origin is also observed in Congolese and Ethiopian communities in Kampala. The Ugandan government's legislation and progressive and integrative approach has made Kampala a formidable example for the rest of the world, displaying higher trends of self-reliance and urban inclusion of refugees.

base can be explored along with introducing new food, art forms, and clothing to the host community. Municipalities can organise refugee food festivals or markets where cultural exchanges can take place and refugee communities' economic activities can flourish. The refugee population can

be acknowledged as a resource within its own right that has the potential to act to meet their own needs and aspirations. Urban programming should involve refugees at all stages and should be designed so as to build on refugees' existing skills and capacities and to aid in their further capacity development.

Local Governance

Integrating refugees in larger cities is a complex challenge that rests squarely on the shoulders of local rather than national governments. However, when it comes to refugees, the national government plays the primary role in decision-making. Diligent coordination between national, sub-national, and local governments must be facilitated to the highest degree feasible. Information sharing and intervention mapping should be periodically done and a 'Refugee Forum' may be established at the municipal level to facilitate this coordination. Nodal officers can be deployed at each level to smoothen coordination.

Urban Planning and Design

The various approaches for integrating refugees with local populations can be enacted through urban planning and design which should focus on creating opportunities for refugees to engage in income generating activities along with refugee-friendly spaces in the city. Local governments should open avenues to engage refugees in participatory urban planning. In addition, refugees should be made stakeholders in planning processes in neighbourhoods where they are meant to relocate. The Kalobeyei New Settlement in Turkana county, Kenya demonstrates the experience of developing an integrated settlement for refugees and members of the host community which was centred on a shared provision of services for both the communities (Terada et al., 2017). Such practices encourage inward and outward integration of refugees in urban settings through instruments of urban planning and design.

Housing and Integration of Refugees in Europe

There is no uniformly applicable model for the provision of housing for refugees and asylum seekers. The model is heavily reliant on socioeconomic conditions and governance system of the country. Country specific asylum seekers and refugees also influence the type of housing that can be offered. The national and local authorities' political commitment towards integrating refugees also influences their access to necessities such as housing. However, cases from Europe show that multi-level governance of integration policies plays a key role in creating suitable housing plans and providing sustainable housing for refugees. National and local governments should collaborate to develop suitable funding schemes and measures to support urban planning and regeneration of local neighbourhoods to meet the needs of refugee integration most effectively.

There are varying examples from European cities to show the different models which have successfully led to housing for refugees. In the Netherlands, the Startblok Riekerhaven programme combines housing with an integration programme by promoting the joint management of housing complexes and the cohabitation of young locals and refugees. This ensures agency of refugees as well as a sense of ownership. In Germany, the housing design is based on promoting a cultural and ethnic mix between different groups. In Spain, their integration is two-fold by involving refugees in the renovation of houses thus including them socially and economically. In the Netherlands, the central government requires the municipalities to provide housing to refugees with a minimum housing quota for them. A digital map is used for visualising and identifying housing development and access and the progress is shared with all municipalities at regular forums.

Housing Services and Mobility

Municipalities must identify both short-term housing for asylum seekers and long-term affordable housing options for refugees. This can be especially difficult in cities such as fast-growing ones in low- and mid-income countries which are already facing existing affordable housing pressures. At the same time, municipalities need to avoid creating segregated enclaves or camps for refugee housing or settlements that can be counterproductive in their long-term integration. Authorities must ensure access to an essential and

varying set of services that can be difficult for refugees to access, including financial services like opening bank accounts and telecom services. These difficulties are caused and compounded by discrimination, language and cultural barriers, and insufficient documentation or status.

Learning and Innovation

Rapid integration of refugee children into the public education system is essential for the long-term absorption of refugee populations. Quickly integrating refugee children into the public education system is critical for long-term outcomes. In addition to the challenge of large-scale, mid-year additions to public schools, administrators must place children from very different educational backgrounds, some of whom have little formal classroom education. Bridge centres offering a foundation to the host country's curriculum may be established to fill learning gaps. Already established community centres can be used for this too. True economic and social integration in most countries requires a working proficiency in the regional language; unfortunately, a few refugees may arrive without this. For refugees above school age, the burden of instruction can fall on non-profits or civic groups. Municipalities should take up the responsibility of facilitating language classes. Cities such as Edinburgh, Oslo, Vienna, and Hamburg have full responsibility for all education and school related matters. In Leipzig, Nuremberg, and Munich an equal responsibility is shared between the regional government and the city authorities to provide early childhood education. In Gothenburg, Sweden, the city administration is responsible for compulsory primary school as well as vocational training. The city authorities also have the responsibility for municipal adult education, which ensures linguistic inclusion by offering Swedish as a language course for immigrants.

INTEGRATING REFUGEES IN THE NEW URBAN PARADIGM

Any strategy or response to refugees should be centred around the cardinal principle of non-refoulement as enshrined in the Refugee Convention of 1951. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence must form the foundation of any response to refugees. Ensuring that people and communities are not forcibly displaced from their homes should be the underlying goal of any attempt to address the issues of refugees.

Local contexts and domestic laws, policies, and procedures should be used for constructing urban refugee interventions. These interventions should reflect the basic universal principles of human rights law, international humanitarian law, international customary law, and refugee law. The right to freedom of movement, right to education, right to recognition before the law, right to access public services, and right to healthcare should be granted and reinforced through these domestic laws and policies.

Advocacy should focus on the protracted expansion and fulfilment of rights and the subsequent improvement of living and working conditions, to protect urban refugees' safety and dignity. For example, in contexts where refugees do not enjoy full rights in the host country, this will include working both at the legislative and policy levels to expand the recognition of refugee rights, while at the same time working within existing constraints to improve existing conditions. In contexts where refugee rights are recognised in law but not in practice, this may mean working with local governments, service providers, and employers at the national, regional, and local levels to raise awareness and understanding about these rights and addressing barriers in their full implementation. Further, these processes must use a participatory approach taking into account both refugee voices and local urban dwellers voices. This will ensure that the programme is more inclusive and bridges the gap between host communities and refugees.

This will require local authorities to play an intensive role as a requisite for outreach, identifying, assessing, and providing suitable assistance to marginalised individuals in the urban refugee population. Local authorities will also have to perform a vigilance and monitoring role to ensure that assistance is delivered in a non-partisan and non-discriminatory manner. This will require local governments to strengthen information collection along with improvements in coordination among the various institutions involved in service delivery in urban spaces. Transparency, effectiveness, and accountability should be the cornerstones of urban refugee programmes thereby making them heavily reliant on practices of external reviews, audits, and evaluations. Municipalities' capacity and potential should be discovered and promoted in identifying and offering suitable support to the refugees.

Humanitarian aid policies should also move away from supporting refugees in camp situations to integrating them with their urban hosts. While there has been considerable development by many international agencies including UNHCR for recognising the needs of urban refugees, distribution of aid is still the primary support mechanism for them. The time has come to move beyond aid. International agencies should also have a mandate of supporting local governments as they are at the frontline of the refugee crisis, and hence one of the most important stakeholders in their integration. If financial support is provided for municipal services which benefit not only the refugee population but the host communities as well, governments and host communities across the world will be more supportive of refugee integration.

Given that a majority of the urban refugees continue to live in cities in the developing world, there is a need to intensify efforts to share experiences and promote cooperation among the cities through South-South cooperation. This will mean that cities across the developing world can share contextual best practices with one another and promote partnerships to accelerate their efforts and upgrade the solutions that they are using for benefitting urban refugees.


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An over view of the world's largest refugee camp at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where 1.4 million Rohingya refugees are living in overcrowded tents. The camp began more than three decades ago, a sad commentary on the "temporary" nature of the refugee situation.

Photo credit: Fabeha Monir/ActionAid