

Literature Review: Urban Refugees

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Introduction

Urban refugee experiences are complex and varied. Their study has expanded in recent years, as scholars recognize the unique challenges that refugees face in an urban environment, and that the international community must overcome in order to provide services to this population. Attention to the experiences of urban refugee populations has also grown within the non-governmental and international organizational communities.

This review examines a broad swathe of the available literature on urban refugees, in order to inform the development of policy work and further research in this area. The focus is on academic works written in English that concentrate analysis on urban refugees inhabiting cities in the Global South and including the Middle East. The review is divided into four broad categories of literature for examination based on the themes most widely present in the examined pieces:

- 1) motivations for urban settlement
- 2) concerns of host countries
- 3) durable solutions
- 4) protection gaps

The general conclusion stemming from this review is that the current body of research is lacking in a number of respects. While it is strongest in advocating for increased protection measures to accommodate the millions of refugees choosing to live in urban environments (rather than in camp-based settlements) and the development of more extensive services to provide for this population, the literature is decidedly lacking when it comes to frank examination of the considerations of host states and communities. Somewhere in between lay attention to refugees' motivations for urban settlement and the economic livelihoods possibilities for urban refugees, and the true availability of durable solutions. More research will be required to support national and international policy development in this area.

1. Motivation for urban settlement

While there is great variation among asylum-seekers and refugees in urban areas in terms of numbers, gender, age, and social vulnerability, a few themes exist that explain their motivations for settling in urban centres rather than refugee camps.

Lifestyle in the country of origin may also determine where refugees settle. Refugees who previously lived in urban centres and have no knowledge of farming do relatively poorly in camps or rural areas, yet do quite well in urban areas where they can use their education, skills and expertise (Crisp et al., 2009, Jacobsen 2004, Marfleet, Sommers 2001).

Horst, Macchiavello, and Sommers 1999 & 2001 all demonstrate the natural connection between refugee camps and urban centres. Many people leave camps in order to work and send remittances back to family members. In camps, money is often scarce and is thus a valuable resource; injections of cash into camps facilitate improvements in general conditions. At the same time, much of the available literature also highlights the difficulties with respect to access to certain services such as secure banking that are often generated by urban living (see section on Protection Challenges).

Refugees in camps are afforded assistance and protection as part of the UNHCR's mandate and as an incentive by the host government to keep them concentrated in one area. By contrast, in urban centres assistance to refugees can be sparse, unevenly distributed, and insufficient to meet basic needs – if it exists at all. For this reason, urban refugees exercise a higher degree of self-sufficiency than those in camps. Refugees settle in urban centres to avoid dependence on rations, boredom, hopelessness, hardships and restrictions that prevail in camps. They use their skills and pursue opportunities provided by greater economic resources, such as education for their children (Campbell 2005 & 2006, Hovil, Jacobsen 2006, Landau & Jacobsen, Macchiavello, Sommers 1999 & 2001).

Refugees in need of or in search of particular services more readily available in urban centres also may choose this lifestyle over camps. Health and education services are generally better in urban centres than in camps. The presence of hospitals and private medical clinics may act as a pull factor toward urban settlements, as well as accommodation, schooling and vocational training, and recreational and intellectual activities (Macchiavello, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children).

Increased communication with UNHCR and family members is another reason for refugees to settle in urban areas. In some cases it is perceived that prospects for resettlement might be better in a city. Communication with family members abroad via internet is easier, and often there are social networks or ethnic enclaves to provide support and assist in the integration process. Some move to be reunited with family already living in urban areas (Horst, Jacobsen 2006, Kibreab, Landau & Jacobsen, Macchiavello, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children).

Urban settlements may be chosen for relative improvements in personal safety and security as well. Corruption and abuse by authorities fosters a stressful and insecure way of life for refugees in camp settings. As will be discussed later, much of the literature demonstrates that urban living also comes with security problems. Finally, refugees may move to urban centres for the anonymity they provide. (Horst, Jacobsen 2006, Macchiavello, Sommers 1999).

Livelihoods

As noted above, many refugees settle in urban areas based on the assessment that this will make them relatively better off. A central factor to this decision appears to be the greater ability to earn a living. In some cases, refugees living in urban settings who do not do well economically return or migrate to camps.

For urban refugees, employment in the informal sector is particularly common. In countries that have not ratified the 1951 Convention or that have not afforded refugees the right to employment, many refugees seek work informally to keep their refugee status hidden.

Often though, employers exploit refugee workers' dire situation and pay unfair wages, demand long working hours, or expose refugees to dangerous working conditions. This goes unreported because refugees fear identification and possible detention or deportation. Due to the lack of regulations in the informal economy and lower wages, refugees struggle to support themselves and their families (Macchiavello, Alexander, Campbell, Crisp et al., Horst, Jacobsen 2004, Landau & Jacobsen, Sommers 1999). To avoid exploitation, a number of refugee groups have procured fake documents and/or pursued entrepreneurship.

Many who pursue business in their asylum countries bring relevant expertise from their country of origin. Self-sufficient refugees are not an economic strain on the host country, and in many cases authorities turn a blind eye to refugees' informal work, tacitly acknowledging their contribution. In fact, they make economic and social contributions to their host cities: rejuvenating communities, expanding markets, importing new skills, and creating transnational linkages. In some cases, such as that of Somali refugees in Nairobi, refugee-run businesses have become integral to the informal markets (Campbell, Grabska, Jacobsen 2004 & 2006, Landau & Jacobsen, Lindstrom, Sommers 1999).

Additionally, many children in refugee families work. Gender biases, low wages and lack of opportunity for workers, lack of awareness about the related dangers of child labour, and a host of other factors have made this dangerous occurrence quite common for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Poverty may also motivate young girls to marry in order to alleviate their economic burden on their family (Women's Commission for Women and Children).

While lacking access to credit has been shown to prevent many refugees from seeking self-employment (Bailey), refugees may find employment with the help of existing communities of co-nationals. They may rely on social capital in the form of support, advice, employment connections and financial services (Banki, Horst, Jacobsen 2006, Landau). In other cases, transnational networks and remittances have helped refugees secure both credit and inexpensive goods to sell in the informal market. These networks begin at the grassroots and are aided by globalization (Campbell, Crisp et al., Grabska, Landau & Jacobsen, Landau).

2. Host Country Concerns

States facing large influxes of refugees often try to restrict their movement to camps or settlements. Even those countries which allow refugees to settle in urban areas refrain from offering material assistance in cities and view urban refugees less than positively.

The available research on urban refugees infrequently addresses the concerns that host countries have about urban refugees and their justifications for refugee encampment. Largely these concerns can be categorized as economic, institutional and financial, security, public opinion and responsibility sharing.

Socioeconomic Pressures

It is widely perceived that refugees are a drain on national resources and a social and economic burden to the state (Hovil 2007, Jacobsen 2007). This is evidenced by the inherent problems of employment: If refugees are *not* employed, they are a clear burden to the state, yet if they are employed, they are taking jobs from the local community, which is equally unacceptable to host governments (Kritikos 2000).

The pressure exerted on a city's socio-economic infrastructure by a large influx of refugees is a strong deterrent to open door policies for urban refugees. Refugee hosting states warrant sympathy for the sheer magnitude of the pressure placed on their urban and community infrastructure (Bailey 2004). In Kenya, for example, prior to 1988 when the refugee population was small, government policy was generous and hospitable, and emphasized local integration. By 1992 the refugee population had swelled to 400 000, overwhelming the system and prompting the government to introduce a restrictive encampment policy (Campbell 2006).

Urban host communities are noticeably impacted by large and rapid intakes of refugees (Bailey 2004, Crisp 2009). Governments face a difficult economic situation and institutional and financial obstacles (Grabska 2006). For example, the arrival of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria caused significant increases in food and fuel prices and placed new pressures on the housing market and public services (Crisp 2009).

Security Concerns

Encampment policies are a deliberate strategy to exert control over refugees in a context of real and perceived security concerns (Bailey 2004). The security threat is multifaceted: refugees are considered a threat to the host state (Crisp 2009), a threat to their country of origin (Sommers 2001), and under threat themselves (Hovil 2009). For all these reasons refugees are generally contained and restricted for the safety of the wider community and themselves. In Egypt, prior to 1995, urban refugees had substantial rights to education, and livelihoods opportunities. However, following an assassination attempt on the Egyptian president, purportedly carried out by Sudanese extremists, the freedoms of urban refugees were severely curtailed (Grabska 2006).

Public Opinion

The literature makes it clear that one of the reasons why host governments support encampment policies is to placate the xenophobic tendencies of the host population. The advent of democratization in the African continent has meant that host governments must remain attuned to public opinion. As local populations are often mistrustful of refugees, governments are under pressure to be strict on refugees without legal status in urban areas (Campbell 2005, Campbell 2006, Bailey 2004).

Responsibility Sharing

As discussed above, host countries contend with massive influxes of refugees which raise socioeconomic challenges to the region. There is a perception among host governments that the international community fails to provide adequate assistance to frequently low-income countries that are under international obligation to allow refugees across their borders (Bailey 2004). From a host country perspective, restricting refugees to camps shifts financial responsibility for meeting refugee needs to the international donor community (Sommers 2001). Therefore compelling refugees to remain in camps and settlements is a method of pressuring the international community to play a direct role in the provision of aid to refugees. Furthermore, in pursuing a long term durable solution, it is deemed easier for the host government to encourage repatriation if refugees are segregated from the host society in camps (Hovil 2007, Sommers 2001) (see durable solutions section).

3. Durable Solutions

The available literature on urban refugees generally argues that conditions for urban refugees must be improved in the short term and does not emphasize the pursuit of durable solutions for urban refugees. The majority of current articles contain varying levels of discussion on local integration, resettlement and repatriation. Repatriation is rarely discussed in the literature; it is argued that most refugees cannot return to their homelands, and even those who can have little incentive to do so. Local integration and more specifically economic integration are discussed most frequently in the literature. Resettlement also receives strong coverage, most often perceived as a limited solution but one that has ramifications on those refugees who remain in urban settings.

Repatriation

Increasing the potential for repatriation is a central justification for encampment policies in African states. Governments operate on the principle that limiting potential for local settlement and integration by forcing refugees to reside in camps is the surest way to prompt refugees to return to their countries of origin (Kibreab 1996, Campbell et al. 2006). This assertion has been supported by the case of Somali refugees in Nairobi, who have contributed to massive economic growth in the region. Due to their economic integration, the expectation of an eventual repatriation movement is deemed unrealistic. It is argued that these successful entrepreneurs will not voluntarily abandon their investments to return to their home countries (Campbell 2006).

Even in the absence of economic integration or livelihood opportunities in the country of asylum, repatriation is often strongly hindered by insecurity in the country of origin. Urban refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan, like others from war-torn societies, are unwilling to repatriate in spite of limited prospects in countries of asylum (Crisp et al 2009, UNHCR EPAU 2000).

Local Integration

Prospects for and challenges to local integration feature prominently in urban refugee literature. Local integration for urban refugees is not presented as a one size fits all solution, as host governments and local populations often treat ethnic, racial and country of origin groups differently (Buscher 2003). Therefore, local integration may be more viable for one group of refugees than for another. An example of this within the literature is Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Cairo. Reportedly, their small population and lack of community or family support within Egypt render their prospects of integration lower than those of other refugee groups (Coker et al. 2003). To promote local integration, UNHCR has emphasized the importance of community building between refugees and host populations. It is believed that positive interactions, particularly at the neighbourhood level, will dispel prejudice and increase the potential for local integration (UNHCR 1996).

It is clear from the available research that host governments are openly opposed to local integration (Landau 2006). A high level of concern regarding the political, economic and social impact of the influx of refugees has been cited as the reason Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, have not contemplated local integration (Crisp et al 2009). In contrast, much of the literature argues that local integration should not be viewed as inherently destabilizing, but rather as a legitimate solution. Nairobi, Kenya is presented as a case in which local integration for already present urban refugees would balance considerations of the human security of the local population and the concerns of the Government of Kenya (Campbell et al 2006, Campbell 2006).

Local integration as a concept can be broken down into social, economic, and cultural integration to describe the different interactions with society (Landau 04). The most frequently discussed way of examining the issue however, has been to contrast *de facto* integration, which usually represents economic integration, with legal local integration. Researchers point to the economic success of refugee groups and suggest that they are in many instances an integral part of the society and have achieved a measure of integration which warrants official recognition (Campbell 2005, Campbell 2006, Horst 2002). It is argued that throughout refugee hosting countries, refugees have integrated peacefully and productively (Campbell et al 2006. Jacobsen 2004)

While the literature emphasizes the importance of economic integration and self reliance for urban refugees, some researchers propose legal status as a crucial element of refugee protection. It is argued that local integration may only be viewed as a true durable solution when national laws are put in place to ensure refugee protection (Lindstrom 2003). Put differently, it is argued that urban refugees who experience systematic forms of legal, social, racial and economic discrimination should not be considered by UNHCR to have achieved a durable solution (Buscher 2003). This is particularly salient given that only refugees who have not achieved a durable solution may be eligible for resettlement.

Resettlement

One of the most important statements on the subject of resettlement as it pertains to urban refugees is UNHCR's acknowledgment that a refugee in an urban area should have

neither more nor less chance of resettlement than he or she would have had in a refugee camp (UNHCR 1997, Buscher 2003).

Resettlement programs serve as a substantive and symbolic gesture of support for host government efforts to contend with mass flows of refugees (Crisp et al 2009). However, resettlement is clearly established within the literature as a limited option which can only offer a durable solution to a small proportion of the refugee population (Alexander 2008, Asylum Access 2009, Crisp 2009, UNHCR EPAU 2000).

Resettlement, despite its limited potential, is front of mind for a majority of urban refugees. Landau and Jacobsen (2004) posit that refugees may sometimes select a country or city to settle in based on the possibility of entering a resettlement program. In some cases, refugees have opted not to accept residence permits or seek legal status in their present country of asylum for fear that it might jeopardize their chance at qualifying for resettlement (Grabska 2006).

In fact, Horst (2002) documents that many refugees are extremely preoccupied by, and overestimate their prospects for, resettlement simply as a result of living in an urban environment from which people they know have been resettled. The more educated and better informed urban refugees often place unrealistically high expectations on the UNHCR, and believe that resettlement is their right as refugees.

Local Integration versus Resettlement

The alternate solutions local integration and resettlement have a multifaceted relationship as evidenced by their discussion in the literature. Buscher (2003) notes the necessity of operating the two solutions in tandem; that resettlement efforts should include simultaneous work with host governments to locally integrate a portion of the urban refugees.

Elsewhere it is noted that in Cairo a lack of possibilities for local integration led to extreme pressure on UNHCR and demands for resettlement to Western countries (Grabska 2006). Campbell et al. (2006) point out that the presence of resettlement programs (and therefore the links to those that have been resettled) can promote or facilitate local integration, as the remittances received by family abroad can be used to meet immediate needs and invest in business opportunities.

4. Protection Challenges

The available refugee literature, above all else, focuses on protection challenges experienced by refugees and IDPs in urban settings. The emphasis in particular is on security concerns stemming from urban refugees' state of vulnerability. A few sources identify and discuss challenges faced by the host governments, UNHCR, NGOs and the international aid community in assisting urban refugees. Themes emerging from the

literature included legal issues; issues with police and government authorities; issues with local populations; access issues; and UNHCR assistance issues.

Legal Issues

International Legislation

The pillars of international protection for refugees are the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Many countries, including India, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria host sizeable urban refugee populations without having acceded to the major articles of refugee legislation (Alexander 2008, Asylum access 2009, Crisp et al. 2009, Women's Commission 2002). States that do not accede to these international agreements generate an environment of vulnerability and insecurity for urban refugees. While the effects of this protection gap cannot be isolated, they are invariably a contributing factor to the lack of access to services, and problems with authorities.

Domestic Legislation

The nature of domestic legislation and its conformity to international legal standards of refugee protection directly impacts the experience of urban refugees in countries of asylum. The national legislation of several key refugee hosting states does not protect refugees. In cases such as Kenya, Thailand and the countries of the Middle East, protection is based upon unwritten ad hoc policies or practices which have not been codified in law or formal policy commitments (Asylum access 2009, Campbell 2005). Without a foundation of institutionalized practice, refugees are subject to treatment which contravenes established international protection norms.

Legal Status

The right to freedom of movement is enshrined in international refugee legislation as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet it is often disregarded by governments hosting refugees (Hovil 2007). Governments hosting significant numbers of refugees often try to keep refugees segregated from the local population, forbidding them from leaving camps or settlements and branding those who self-settle in urban settings illegal.

While the majority of refugees living in urban centers do so illegally, much has been written about Egypt and South Africa, where refugees are legally allowed to settle amongst the urban population. Refugees with legal status in Johannesburg and Cairo have prompted studies into the effect of legal status on urban refugees' livelihoods and security. It has been argued that legal status is insufficient to protect urban refugees.

By itself, legal recognition does not necessarily provide access to the rights guaranteed in the international treaties or to socio-economic opportunities. The constraints applicable to *all* refugees by virtue of their flight and importantly, the economic climate of host countries, may negate the importance of legal access to employment and identity documents (Bailey 2004). It has been observed in the case of South Africa that the legal entitlements guaranteed in the country's specialized refugee legislation do not widely translate into access to jobs, social services and escape from abuse (Landau 2006).

Identity documents

Identity documents are a key element of refugee protection, as they are the first line of defense against arbitrary arrest and deportation and the first step towards accessing social services (Landau 2006). Consequently, the agency responsible for issuing documents plays a significant role in the refugee protection system (Jacobsen 2006). Case studies demonstrate that when host countries are responsible for refugee status determination and issuing documents they are often unreliable, and when the task has been delegated to UNHCR the agency's actions have been restricted.

In South Africa, the department of Home Affairs has been inconsistent in providing identification to recognized refugees. Asylum decisions can take up to three years, leaving refugee claimants without identity documents for a dangerously long period (Landau and Jacobsen 2004, Bailey 2004). In Thailand, refugees have been known to face arrest or detention in a climate of institutional disregard of their UNHCR refugee status documents (Asylum access 2009). In Pakistan, UNHCR has not been allowed to screen or register refugees living outside of camps (Women's commission 2002).

Conflict with Host Community

Local Population

A major inhibiting factor for refugee self-reliance appears to be tension with the local population. In cases where refugees are seen to be doing economically better than locals, xenophobia and discrimination are common (Alexander 2008, Campbell 2005). Landlords and employers know that refugees receive assistance and exploit them into paying higher rent or accepting lower wages. Discrimination of this sort often continues after aid has been discontinued (Alexander 2008).

A central form of insecurity for urban refugees is mistreatment from the local population which takes various forms, including xenophobic attitudes, discrimination and harassment (Campbell 2005, Campbell et al. 2006, Grabska 2006, Jacobsen 2004, 2006, Landau 2004, 2006, UNHCR 1996).

Race and ethnicity influence the levels of discrimination in relations between host and refugee populations (Briant & Kennedy 2004). In Nairobi, each refugee group is perceived differently by the local population and has different relations with it (Campbell 2006). Racial discrimination in Egyptian society particularly marginalizes darker skinned African refugees. Sharing a religious identity with Muslim refugees from African countries such as Sudan does not offset the racist and xenophobic attitudes of locals (Grabska 2006).

Much of the literature documents the frequency with which refugees are victims of physical violence at the hands of local populations (Alexander 2008, Campbell 2005, Jacobsen 2004, Landau 2004, Landau and Jacobsen 2004). Urban refugees are also exploited economically or viewed as competition. Local populations often take advantage of refugees' vulnerability by offering them exploitative and dangerous conditions of employment in the informal sector or by charging them vastly higher fees

than nationals for rent and housing (Crisp et al. 09, Briant & Kennedy 2004). In some cases, locals see urban refugees as rich, and business owners may perceive refugees as competition for clients and resources and take steps to shut down or hinder their businesses (Campbell 2005, Campbell et al. 2006, Jacobsen 2004).

Authorities

Police, immigration officials, city officials and other public servants are absolutely essential to refugee protection. However, according to the literature, by far the most commonly reported source of insecurity for urban refugees is abuse of power by police and authorities. Problems with police and other authorities are sufficiently widespread as to feature prominently in most articles written about urban refugees in the Global South including Malaysia, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Jordan and Pakistan

The most common form of abuse is arrest or harassment as a means to extort bribes from refugees, and is carried out by police and government officials. This is often coupled with detention and the threat of deportation (Alexander 2008, Bailey 2004, Briant and Kennedy 2004, Campbell 2004, Grabska 2006, Horst 2002, Hovil 2007, Jacobsen 2004, Landau 2006, Women's Commission 2002). In Nairobi, bribery is particularly rampant, and poses a significant challenge for low-income or unemployed urban refugees who cannot afford both bribes and daily staples (Campbell 2005). In South Africa, police confiscate or destroy identity documents to pressure refugees into paying bribes to avoid deportation (Jacobsen 2004, Landau and Jacobsen 2004).

It is noted in a couple of instances that refugees have been detained in prison facilities which are overcrowded and unhygienic, have inadequate food or access to basic amenities, and are rife with harassment, physical and sexual abuse, and torture (Alexander 2008, Women's Commission 2002).

In addition, even when the police are not the perpetrators, refugees may still be unable to turn to them for protection. When urban refugees are mistreated by the local community or other immigrants, they rarely report the occurrence to police for fear of further harassment or greater penalty due to their lack of legal status (Alexander 2008, Briant and Kennedy 2004, Crisp et al. 2009).

Rampant extortion and harassment by authorities in almost every urban refugee case study exposes the extreme vulnerability of refugees in urban settings. Refugees are often unable to respond to mistreatment and to claim their rights or access justice (Jacobsen 2006). As expressed in the literature, the ultimate result of systemic harassment and abuse by authorities is that many urban refugees live in a constant state of fear (Alexander 2008, Jacobsen 2006, Grabska 2006).

Bribery and corruption of authorities has had different impacts on refugees depending on their level of wealth. For those who can afford bribes, many more opportunities are available to them, including greater security and protection. Those who cannot are usually also vulnerable to theft and violence in addition to abuse, detention, violence,

xenophobia, discrimination, resentment, ignorance, and even deportation from authorities (Campbell, Jacobsen 2004, Landau & Jacobsen, Sommers 1999).

Access to Services

Urban refugees are frequently unable to access education, medical, and financial services, primarily due to their economic situation and social position as refugees.

Education is a challenge for the children of urban refugees in the Global South. Refugee children in urban areas who lack legal status may not meet school admissions requirements (Briant and Kennedy 2004, Alexander 2008). Alternately, refugees may be legally entitled to access certain educational services but not be able to afford them (Alexander 2008, Landau 2006). A similar poverty-related barrier is that refugee children in urban areas may be pulled out of school and forced to work in the informal economy to support their families (Crisp et al. 2009, Women's Commission 2002).

The lack of access to affordable medical care is a challenge for many urban refugees (Coker et al 2003, Women's Commission 2002). One survey found that help with access to medical services was the most beneficial aid that the NGO community could offer urban refugees in Cairo (Briant and Kennedy 2004). In Malaysia, the cost of care combined with a language barrier and discrimination prevented urban refugees from receiving sufficient healthcare (Alexander 2008). In South Africa it was observed that health officials fail to distinguish between refugees and other immigrants and therefore deny refugees access to basic health services to which they are entitled (Landau 2006).

Urban refugees' inability to access credit and financial services hinders savings, prevents effective entrepreneurship and prolongs poverty. Refugees living illegally in cities are unable to open bank accounts, cash checks or utilize basic financial services (Jacobsen 2004). Even those urban refugees with legal status may be denied access to formal sources of credit and consequently forfeit opportunities to start or expand small enterprises (Bailey 2004). A direct consequence of the inability to access formal financial services is that urban refugees do not have a secure location for their money, making them targets for theft, robbery and extortion (Landau and Jacobsen 2004, Landau 2006).

UNHCR Limitations

UNHCR faces technical and logistical limitations in its efforts to offer protection to urban refugees. Some regions have a mere handful of refugee status determination officers responsible for deciding cases, or a UNHCR protection office of two or three people tasked with protecting hundreds of thousands of refugees (Asylum access 2009, Sommers 1999). The accompanying delays in processing times expose refugees to protracted periods of vulnerability (Asylum access 2009, Buscher 2003, Coker 2003).

UNHCR is also severely hindered by budgetary constraints which dictate the level and quality of assistance available to refugees (Asylum access 2009, Crisp et al. 2009). This

is definitely a factor in UNHCR's reluctance to offer material support to urban refugees, given that delivering aid to those in urban areas is far more costly (Landau 2006).

UNHCR must cope with urban refugee populations of diverse nationalities and ethnicities which are undirected and widely dispersed (UNHCR 1996, Buscher 2003). Coupled with this, they are largely invisible. A legitimate protection challenge arises from the difficulty in distinguishing forced migrants from other immigrants and residents living in the same neighbourhoods (Landau 2004). The urban environment makes it nearly impossible to follow up with individual refugees (UNHCR 1996). The invisibility of urban refugees hinders successful advocacy on their behalf. Urban refugees lack the support of a large aid community or international advocacy and pressure which would expand UNHCR's budget and give UNHCR leverage in dealing with host governments (Landau 2004).

UNHCR efforts to protect and find solutions for urban refugees have also been hampered by their policy choices. Ultimately, UNHCR is bound to operate within the parameters of the host government policies (Buscher 2003). UNHCR has maintained a policy of limiting assistance in urban areas to refugees. While the rationale has been to avoid dependence on material assistance for fear of creating a pull factor to cities, this has been a contributing factor to the state of insecurity felt by refugees in urban areas (Grabska 2006, Buscher 2003).

Future Directions

The available literature makes it difficult to truly grasp the global landscape for urban refugees, as most field work is conducted by a small community of researchers and on a few case studies. Individual articles have been written on a variety of urban refugee populations, however the bulk of accessible information is written about three African cities: Cairo, Nairobi and Johannesburg. It is significant that two out of these three are the lone countries which permit refugees to legally reside in urban areas. This supports the fiction that because many urban refugee populations are illegal they officially do not exist, limiting the opportunity to study the population openly and therefore the available information about the populations.

Current articles on urban refugees are largely focused on advocacy and contain a notable slant in favour of refugees, which fails to fairly consider the strain felt by host communities, or the real validity of host country concerns. As host countries must be partners for any solution, the real challenges faced by governments responding to urban refugees deserve greater emphasis. This is even more evident in a time of global economic uncertainty.

Much of the research lacks quantitative or statistically robust analysis. Most articles contain anecdotal accounts gathered in qualitative interviews which are valuable but fail to generate macro level data on issues. One limitation is that official records are generally nonexistent and the financial cost required to generate more systematic

information is prohibitive. Unfortunately, good policy is rarely constructed through the use of anecdotal evidence, and a deeper body of knowledge is necessary to move policy work forward.

Finally, the available literature does not grant sufficient attention to durable solutions. A better understanding is required on such durable solutions-related matters as the impact of resettlement opportunities on refugee movement to cities, the impact of resettlement on enabling local integration through remittances, and the impact of local integration on the likelihood of eventual repatriation. The UNHCR must always be proactively considering the long term resolution of refugee situations, and incorporating these questions into research is a step in that direction.

For the purposes of this review, two sources of original research on urban refugees were not explored due to time constraints. The University of Witwatersrand, and the American University in Cairo both have forced migration programs which have generated accessible working papers which are excellent resources outside of those discussed in the present literature review.

The UNHCR considers persons of concern to include asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, and the internally displaced. This literature review has been limited to the urban displacement as it pertains to refugees and asylum seekers. Generally, articles about urban refugees do not discuss the plight of IDPs who share the same “space”. There is a small but growing body of literature on IDPs in urban areas which, if analysed, would be useful to compare and contrast against the experiences of refugees. UNHCR published a report on Urban IDPs in July 2008 entitled *Ignored Displaced Persons: The Plight of IDPs in Urban Areas*. Additionally, prominent urban refugee researcher Karen Jacobsen, has a forthcoming article on the subject entitled *Profiling Urban IDPs -- How IDPs differ from their non-IDP neighbors in three cities*. In Khalid Koser and Susan Martin (eds.), *The Migration-Displacement Nexus: Concepts, Cases and Responses*. Berghahn Books. Forthcoming 2009.

A final important research focus would be to explore the connection between urban refugees and the global phenomenon of rural-urban migration. The literature reviewed for this report identified urban refugees as being an inescapable part of that trend. Future research should examine the motivations and experiences of other city dwellers such as the urban poor and economic migrants using available literature on urban displacement more generally.

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