

## Reference Paper for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

### **Urban Displacement, Local Engagement: Examining the past, current and future role of cities in forced displacement**

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December 2020

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#### Abstract:

This paper examines the past and current reality of forcibly displaced people in cities and towns. It argues that growing numbers of urban forcibly displaced people have led to more engagement and partnerships with local urban actors such as municipal governments and local civil society organisations – while also underscoring, and even exacerbating, challenges faced by many municipalities, including limited funding and unrecognised urban needs. Historical examples of urban responses to displacement illustrate the longstanding rather than recent involvement of municipal actors in forced displacement. Through examples from primary research, this paper also highlights the need for more comprehensive data on and assistance to forcibly displaced people residing outside of national capitals. It concludes with a discussion of the future of urban forced displacement and recommendations for policy and practice.

INTRODUCTION.....	2
<i>Overview</i> .....	3
WHERE DO REFUGEES GO?.....	4
LOCAL FUNDING AND THE URBAN DISPLACED.....	5
A LACK OF DATA AND A LACK OF RIGHTS .....	6
ASSISTANCE ACTORS TO THE URBAN DISPLACED .....	8
<i>Municipal authority advocates for the urban displaced</i> .....	9
<i>Refugee-led civil society actors</i> .....	11
HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES ON ADDRESSING URBAN DISPLACEMENT .....	12
<i>The settlement of refugees in urban or rural areas based on background</i> .....	12
<i>The ILO's Employment-Matching Scheme</i> .....	14
<i>Historical refugee assistance in cities and towns</i> .....	15
<i>Contemporary urban resettlement, reception, and assistance</i> .....	16
THE FUTURE ENGAGEMENT OF CAPITALS, SECONDARY CITIES, AND TOWNS WITH DISPLACEMENT .....	18
<i>Cities and COVID-19</i> .....	19
<i>The future of forced displacement</i> .....	20
<i>The future of cities</i> .....	21
RECOMMENDATIONS & TAKE-AWAYS .....	21
CONCLUSION.....	23

## Introduction

Maybe it was a Congolese refugee who walked to Kampala. Or a Syrian refugee who drove to Beirut. We will of course never know, but sometime in the new millennium over half of the world's refugees began to reside in urban areas. Today an estimated 61% of refugees and two out of three of internally displaced people (IDPs) live in cities and towns.<sup>1</sup> When taken together with UNHCR's other people of concern, this figure is only larger. It also echoes broader trends of urbanization (it was only in 2007 that over half of the world's population became urbanites), and foretells those that are likely to continue: by 2050 an estimated two-thirds of the global population will live in urban or peri-urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

These figures on urban displacement challenge traditional narratives and stereotypes – even today the term 'refugee' often connotes images of long rows of tents in makeshift camps – and necessitates a reimagining of the types of assistance and actors involved. While forced displacement has always occurred to urban areas, humanitarian responses to refugees in particular have long been predominantly rural and camp-based. Urban areas present challenges for humanitarian assistance, including identifying displaced people in the first place (any aid worker familiar with UNHCR's advocacy poster of Lego figurines above the phrase 'Spot the Refugee' understands how this also relates to finding refugees in cities). Indeed, it was only in the 1980s and 1990s that UNHCR, governments, NGOs, and academics more comprehensively focused on urban forced displacement<sup>3</sup> despite historical precedents of international assistance to urban refugees throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

This paper examines the past and current reality of forcibly displaced people in cities and towns, with an emphasis on urban refugees in major refugee-hosting countries. It argues that the growing urbanisation of forcibly displaced people has fostered increasing engagement and partnerships for assistance with local urban actors such as municipal governments and local civil society organisations while at the same time highlighting, and in cases exacerbating, the challenges that many municipalities face in terms of funding and a lack of recognition of urban needs. Historical examples of urban responses to displacement illustrate that the involvement of municipal actors is a longstanding rather than recent phenomenon in forced displacement. This paper also discusses a crucial gap in research on forcibly displaced people: their often unacknowledged presence in so-

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2019) Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019. Geneva: UNHCR. P. 33. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf> (Accessed 1 October 2020)

<sup>2</sup> UNDESA (2019) World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision. Geneva: UNDESA. Available at: <https://shop.un.org/books/world-urbanization-prospects-2018-87894#:~:text=World%20Urbanization%20Prospects%3A%20The%202018%20Revision&text=The%20world%20urban%20population%20is,and%20challenges%20for%20sustainable%20development>.

<sup>3</sup> Crisp, J. (2017). Finding space for protection: An inside account of the evolution of UNHCR's Urban Refugee Policy. *Refugee: Canada's journal on refugees*, 33(1), 87-96. P. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Skran, C. M. (2011). *Refugees in inter-war Europe*. Clarendon Press.; Easton-Calabria, E. E. (2015). From bottom-up to top-down: The 'pre-history' of refugee livelihoods assistance from 1919 to 1979. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(3), 412-436.

called secondary (non-capital) cities and towns, which themselves often lack the resources to adequately receive them. Through examples from primary research in Uganda and a range of other countries, this paper highlights the need for more comprehensive data and evidence on and assistance to forcibly displaced people residing outside of national capitals. The paper concludes with a discussion of the future of urban forced displacement and several recommendations for the further engagement of humanitarian, government, and other urban actors in refugee assistance.

## Overview

UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy acknowledges urban areas as legitimate places for refugees to reside (backtracking on its 1997 policy), and paved the way for increased urban programming by international organisations. This was further reinforced in the 2014 UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps. Still, the support refugees receive is generally limited to livelihoods trainings with limited in-kind support for basic necessities. A variety of challenges including shrinking budgets,<sup>5</sup> official national policies of encampment, and limited international assistance in urban areas in many countries mean that support for urban refugees is not commensurate with those in need of it. While refugees in some countries may have the right to access social benefits like healthcare or education, in practice this may be unavailable due to demand or price, thereby effectively leaving many refugees to cater for themselves.<sup>6</sup>

While some research has found that urban refugees tend to be more educated than their rural, camp- and settlement-based counterparts,<sup>7</sup> much of the literature on forcibly displaced people in cities points to challenges such as informal housing and work, and limited access to national systems such as education and healthcare. In contrast to refugees in camps and settlements, urban refugees are generally expected to be self-reliant and make a living through entrepreneurship, generally in the informal sector.

Cities can also be areas of exploitation and abuse for displaced people. In many cases refugees continue to lack the right to reside in urban areas, and therefore lack legal protection when they do. In addition to struggling to access basic necessities, refugees can face intimidation, harassment, fines and even arrest by local authorities. These challenges, particularly in light of rising urbanisation, point to the need for increased awareness of from whom and in which ways forcibly displaced people can receive assistance and rights in urban areas. The following sections examine

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<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2019) Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Asylum Access (2011) No Place Called Home: A Report on Urban Refugees Living in Dar Es Salaam, Dar Es Salaam, Asylum Access, November; A. O'Loughlen and C. McWilliams (2017) 'The Nexus of Displacement, Asset Vulnerability and the Right to the City: The Case of the Refugees and Urban Poor of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania', *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 9(1): 21–45, 21s.; S. Pavanetto et al. (2010) Hidden and Exposed: Urban Refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, London, Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper, March, available at: [www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/5858.pdf](http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/5858.pdf) (last visited 15 Nov. 2020)

<sup>7</sup> Pincock, K., Betts, A., & Easton-Calabria, E. (2020) *The Global Governed? Refugees as providers of protection and assistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

perceptions and gaps in knowledge on refugees in urban areas as well as particular challenges urban actors face in addressing forced displacement.

### Where do refugees go?

There is an ongoing perception that urban displaced people mainly reside in capital cities in the Global South. This perception is mainly driven by policies which do not legally recognise refugees outside of the capital or in urban areas at all, which has negative ramifications for the provision of assistance as well as for host urban areas. Yet as Muggah and Abdenur note, most urban refugees are moving to ‘poor and underdeveloped cities and slums in Africa, Asia and the Middle East...[and] end up living in lower-income informal settlements’.<sup>8</sup>

Literature on urban displacement has disproportionately focused on capital cities,<sup>9</sup> contributing to a perception that they are the main urban destination for migrants and displaced people. Other cities and towns experiencing displacement have received much less attention as sites of settlement and integration by NGOs and INGOs in the Global South. Yet urbanisation increasingly occurs in secondary cities, which have a population of between 10-50% of the country’s largest city and themselves are not the capital.<sup>10</sup> These cities have been expected to grow by 460 million inhabitants between 2010 and 2025 – strikingly higher than the comparative growth of 270 million for megacities.<sup>11</sup> And, as Jacobsen notes, ‘Towns – especially border towns in countries of first asylum – are at the frontline of refugee displacement and are often where refugees settle or spend long periods of time.’<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, secondary cities may not have the same levels of industry or access to government resources as capitals or larger cities. They have also largely remained out of view of international donors and humanitarian agencies working with refugees and other displaced people,

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<sup>8</sup> Muggah, R. & Abdenur, A. (2018) Refugees and the City: The Twenty-first-century Front Line. World Refugee Council Research Paper No. 2, July. Available at: <https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/WRC%20Research%20Paper%20no.2.pdf> (Accessed 12 October 2020)

<sup>9</sup> See for example Campbell, E. H. (2006). Urban refugees in Nairobi: Problems of protection, mechanisms of survival, and possibilities for integration. *Journal of refugee studies*, 19(3), 396-413.; Grabska, K. (2006). Marginalization in urban spaces of the global south: Urban refugees in Cairo. *Journal of refugee studies*, 19(3), 287-307.; Pavanello, S., Elhawary, S., & Pantuliano, S. (2010). *Hidden and exposed: Urban refugees in Nairobi, Kenya*. London: Overseas Development Institute.; Yotebieng, K. A., Syvertsen, J. L., & Awah, P. (2019). ‘Is Wellbeing Possible when You Are Out of Place?’: Ethnographic Insight into Resilience among Urban Refugees in Yaoundé, Cameroon. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(2), 197-215.; Field, J., Tiwari, A. D., & Mookherjee, Y. (2020). Self-reliance as a Concept and a Spatial Practice for Urban Refugees: Reflections from Delhi, India. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 33(1), 167-188.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, B. (2014) Managing Systems of Secondary Cities. Cities Alliance/UNOPS, Brussels.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobsen, K. (2017) Refugees in towns: experiences of integration. Forced Migration Review, Issue 56: 78-29. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599720dc59cc68c3683049bc/t/5a05ed4bf9619a90c24fcf60/1510337868387/FMR+Refugees+in+Towns+Oct+2017.pdf> (Accessed 19 October 2020)

in part due to a lack of robust data on their number of forcibly displaced residents. Discussions with Mayors and other municipal authorities of these cities and towns demonstrate that refugees and displaced people often enter these smaller cities,<sup>13</sup> yet as mentioned above less research has been conducted on their experiences and those of their hosts compared to those entering capitals. Newer international actors in refugee assistance like Cities Alliance and Slum Dwellers International are seeking to raise the profile of migrants and refugees in secondary cities and informal settlements, particularly because, like other cities, secondary cities often find themselves unequipped to deal with large numbers of displaced people. This can result in overpopulated informal settlements, a lack of resources for both locals and the displaced, and other negative ramifications for both cities themselves and those who enter them seeking refuge.

### Local funding and the urban displaced

Secondary cities and towns may lack strong ties to central government and ministries compared to capital cities, or financing mechanisms can overlook municipal needs, all of which in turn can impede municipalities' ability to access funding or for relevant municipal issues to be shared. In Uganda, for example, taxes are collected by the central government and then distributed as grants to districts; funding for municipalities is based in part on population sizes, which are determined from often outdated censuses. While Uganda's Local Government Act provides formulas for resource allocation including number of inhabitants, refugees and asylum seekers are not included in this equation.<sup>14</sup> Despite decentralisation as a key policy reform for the Ugandan government in the early 1990s, municipalities still struggle to access the funding they need to operate. This issue is compounded by the fact that in Uganda refugee issues, and the concomitant international resources, are generally dealt with at a district level. UNHCR data on refugees in the country provides, for example, information on numbers in main refugee-hosting districts but does not have more detailed figures of refugees' geographic locations except for estimates in camps and settlements. While international investments appear to be slowly changing and targeting more municipalities directly, such as the World Bank's recent investment in 14 Ugandan municipalities to improve infrastructure,<sup>15</sup> more work and research is needed to align investments with municipalities particularly affected by refugee influxes, as well as the type of assistance with the needs of refugees and hosts alike.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example presentations made by Mayors at the 2019 Global Meeting on Migration and the 2030 Agenda, 'Cities as Drivers for Sustainable Development', convened by the SDC Network on Migration & Development: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Migration/activities-from-the-network/2019-global-meeting-switzerland/reference-documents>

<sup>14</sup> Government of Uganda (1997) Local Government Act. Kampala: GoU. Available at: <https://www.molg.go.ug/sites/default/files/LOCAL%20GOVERNMENTS%20ACT.pdf> p142.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (2019) Uganda Support to Municipal Infrastructure Development Program. Webpage. Available at: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P117876?lang=en> (Accessed 23 November 2020)

To take another example from a major refugee-hosting country, in Lebanon there has been recognition of the huge role that many of the country's more than 1,000 municipalities have played in the refugee response, in part due to the lack of a cohesive national response.<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging that the role municipalities have played has brought some benefits, one brief states, 'When considering local institutions' roles, it is important to note that municipalities would ideally act as an intermediary, coordinating between Syrian refugees and the central government.' The brief advocates,

A structured national response plan targeting Syrian refugees should be developed in order to formulate universal policies at the national level that simultaneously address micro policies, as well as identify the roles and responsibilities of various actors toward Syrian refugees, including ministries, security sector institutions, and municipalities.<sup>17</sup>

Such recommendations for the clear delegation of roles and responsibilities to both national and local actors could indeed be valuable in many different responses to displaced people which involve urban areas as destinations. However, the suggestion of municipalities ideally acting as intermediaries to assistance rather than primary responders highlights the constrained roles that many municipalities find themselves in – as they often have no choice in what their role is.

Many municipalities are at the forefront of urban displacement, and, while they may in fact be open or even eager to address it, they often lack the financial resources to adequately do so as well as connections to international humanitarian and development actors that might facilitate a more comprehensive response. Research on the role of local politics in the Middle East on Syrian refugees notes that municipalities' opportunities to obtain additional funding for refugee assistance from central governments and public and private donors played a key role in the response refugees received.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the absence of such support, municipalities risk becoming de facto first and last responders without any of the means to do so.

### A lack of data and a lack of rights

This in turn reflects a chicken-or-egg dilemma facing municipalities in many refugee-hosting countries: policies prohibiting the settlement of refugees in urban areas beyond the capital (or at all) then lead to a lack of data of those urban refugees that have settled regardless of policy. As one article on refugees in towns succinctly explains,

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<sup>16</sup> Mahdi, D. (2017) Policy Brief: Understanding Refugee Politics in Lebanon and Calls for Repatriation. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, no. 30. Available at: [https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1518095691-lcps\\_brief\\_30.pdf](https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1518095691-lcps_brief_30.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Betts, A., Ali, A., & Memisoglu, F. (2017) Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis. *Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan*. Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

If you ask about the number of refugees in Mombasa, Kenya, you get conflicting answers. According to the Kenyan Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), there are 15,600 legally registered refugees in Mombasa, over 8,000 of whom are Somalis. Yet one local security official said there are no refugees *legally* in Mombasa, and a Kenyan businesswoman reported, “There are no more refugees in Mombasa.” According to a local legal aid group, there are many more refugees than are formally counted. There seems to be some confusion about the number of refugees in Mombasa.<sup>19</sup>

In these situations, ‘spontaneously settled’ refugees in urban areas are at best invisible and at worst targeted and vilified. Of course, being invisible and in need is hardly a best case scenario for either refugees or the cities and towns hosting them. Arua District in Western Uganda, for example, hosts approximately 250,000 South Sudanese refugees – an estimated 24% of its population. It is estimated by government officials that many of these refugees reside in and outside of Arua Town (some say the town has tripled in size), although an exact figure cannot be provided as refugees are not included in the census.<sup>20</sup> Because they are not formally counted as urban inhabitants, no additional funding is allocated to yearly budgets to account for the increased demand on services that this significant number of people create. This combination of lack of data and funding makes it very difficult for cities such as Arua to adequately plan and provide for all their residents.<sup>21</sup>

Ongoing research by this paper’s author has found a troubling lack of support for refugees in Arua, which has become even more problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>22</sup> The majority of refugees interviewed are registered in one of the three refugee settlements (Rhino, Imvepi, and Bidi Bidi) in Arua District, and have generally returned to the settlements monthly to receive food rations. While not officially allowed, this livelihood strategy has enabled some refugees to pursue livelihoods in Arua Town while still receiving much-needed extra support. However, as part of COVID-19 lockdown measures, non-essential movement was prohibited, meaning some refugees did not travel or else had to travel in dangerous nighttime conditions. Combined with the disruption of livelihoods activities, this lack of access to food has placed an exceptional burden on urban refugees’ ability to take care of themselves and their families. As one South Sudanese refugee in Arua explained in response to refugee needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, ‘Since there is no data on how many refugees are in the city, there is no special consideration for the refugees in terms of food provision by the organisations.’<sup>23</sup> Interviews with members of Arua

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<sup>19</sup> Adan, A. & Duncan, E. (2020) How Refugees Take Control of Who “Belongs”: A Case Study of Refugees in Towns – Mombasa, Kenya. Refugees in Towns Project, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University. Available at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599720dc59cc68c3683049bc/t/5e84ffba21f0f21a29faba29/1585774552612/RI+Report+Mombasa+Kenya.pdf> (Accessed November 23 2020)

<sup>20</sup> Interview, Mayor of Arua, 22/2/2020.

<sup>21</sup> Lozet and Easton-Calabria (2020) Counting Urban Refugees During COVID-19. *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 64: 79-80. Available at: <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/issue64/lozet-eastoncalabria.pdf> (Accessed 1 September 2020)

<sup>22</sup> Lozet and Easton-Calabria (2020) Counting Urban Refugees During COVID-19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Municipality and INGOs with offices in Arua reveal a lack of tailored programmes to refugees' needs, while refugees themselves in Arua explain that they receive no government or INGO support.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, although a range of INGOs have offices in Arua, none of those interviewed had urban programmes and instead solely operated in one of the three nearby refugee settlements.

If urban refugees were properly accounted for in censuses, the municipalities in which they reside would in theory receive more resources from the central government to support their populations, including refugees. The provision of support could then reflect the actual number of those in need, while also potentially shedding light on the contributions such as taxes that some refugees already offer urban areas.<sup>25</sup> Stronger healthcare systems designed for the real number of inhabitants of municipalities, rather than just their citizens, could be created. And in turn the health and well-being of both urban refugees and local citizens could be improved. International organisations might have the information needed to develop urban programmes in cities and towns they don't currently operate in.

The extant gaps in data that preclude these possibilities from becoming reality demonstrate a clear need to include urban refugees in censuses and government planning, including development and city plans, and in cases direct more international programming and support to the urban displaced. However, it should also be acknowledged that data collection and subsequent dissemination is impacted by policy positions and priorities – a country that does not legally allow refugees to reside in cities, for example, is unlikely to collect data on their existence. This reinforces the broader need to continue advocacy and policy engagement regarding UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy and 2014 Policy on Alternatives to Camps, and the rights to urban refugees that they promote.

### Assistance Actors to the Urban Displaced

This section presents some of the key assistance actors to the urban displaced, with an emphasis on municipal and civil society actors. Rising numbers of urban displaced people have opened discussions with a number of actors not commonly associated with such assistance. The 2009 urban refugee policy acknowledged that,

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<sup>24</sup> Surveys with urban refugees, #1-24. Collected August and September 2020 as part of ongoing research in Arua, Uganda, led by this paper's author.

<sup>25</sup> Please note the body of literature on tax contributions that refugees make in contexts of resettlement; however, this evidence is less robust in the Global South due to a lack of data collection as well as the fact that it is estimated that 70% of refugees live in countries with restricted or no right to work. In part due to this, most refugees in the Global South work in the informal sector. Sources: UNHCR (2020) "Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/livelihoods.html> (Accessed 19 September 2020); CDG et al (2020) Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion. Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/locked-down-and-left-behind-paper-71320.pdf> (Accessed 19 September 2020)

In urban contexts, municipal authorities and mayors have a particularly important role to play in the objective of expanding protection space, and UNHCR will consequently place particular emphasis on its relationship with these actors. At the same time, and in pursuit of the same objective, the Office will work closely with the national authorities, the police and judiciary, the private sector, NGOs, legal networks, other civil society institutions and development agencies.<sup>26</sup>

However in many countries it is only more recently that the forging of partnerships with local actors such as local authorities have increased. This can be seen through the promising focus on urban areas and the support that local actors can play which has emerged in the last five years, as seen through events and initiatives including the 2018 High Commissioner’s Dialogue on ‘Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities’, the ‘Welcoming Cities’ initiative, and the Marrakech Mayoral Declaration (expanded on below).

Of central importance is the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, which recognises local authorities as key stakeholders in refugee assistance, as well as civil society, host community members and refugees themselves.<sup>27</sup> ‘In consultation with national authorities and in respect of relevant legal frameworks,’ the Compact reads, ‘support by the international community as a whole may be provided to strengthen institutional capacities, infrastructure and accommodation at local level, including through funding and capacity development where appropriate.’<sup>28</sup> Good practices and innovative approaches by ‘networks of cities and municipalities’ hosting refugees are welcomed.<sup>29</sup>

Such calls for the inclusion of local actors in general and in particular those within cities is needed to increase protection to the urban displaced as well as realise the ‘whole-of-society’ and ‘whole-of-government’ support the GCR advocates. To this end, cities and city systems can offer favourable environments for strengthening such multi-stakeholder approaches.

### Municipal authority advocates for the urban displaced

A variety of actors including municipalities themselves have begun advocating for the rights of the urban displaced. Many of the issues urban displaced people already face have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, municipal authorities, other local actors, and international organisations around the world have sought to house asylum seekers safely, prevent illegal forced evictions, and continue to identify and remotely support displaced people with whom they can no longer meet in person.<sup>30</sup> Yet as the UNESCO Director-General notes, ‘Despite growing literature

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR (2009) UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas. Geneva: UNHCR. P. 6.

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR (2018) Global Compact on Refugees. Geneva: UNHCR. Section I(3).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. para 37.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: para 38.

<sup>30</sup> See the MMC Live Action Tracker: Municipal Migrant & Refugee Sensitive COVID-19 Response & Recovery Efforts, available at: [https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ\\_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4A1Dvw/pub](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4A1Dvw/pub)

and the multiplication of converging actions, the gaps in the knowledge base of local authorities [in relation to urban displacement], in exchanges and in networking, have only partially been addressed.’<sup>31</sup>

The Mayors Migration Council (MMC) is one example of the rise of prominence in local authorities involved in issues of migration, including forced displacement. The MMC seeks to enable cities to engage in migration diplomacy and policymaking at all levels, including in global responses to refugees. Established in 2018, it reflects a growing group of local advocates from around the world seeking a seat at the table of refugee and migrant policy and decision-making. The MMC seeks to institutionalize cities’ formal access to policy debates at all levels on refugees and migrants; build cities’ diplomatic and advocacy capacity to engage in policymaking; direct resources to cities; and support cities in implementing ‘local solutions’ for migrants and refugees.<sup>32</sup> The World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Cities Alliance, and Metropolis are other examples of organisations and networks reinforcing the relevance of local action and advocacy on migration and displacement; as one UCLG statement reads, ‘As the level of government that is closest to citizens, local and regional governments bear the greatest responsibility for “leaving no one behind”, regardless of people’s legal status.’<sup>33</sup>

After the official adoption of the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018, the Marrakech Mayors Declaration was endorsed by 150 city leaders, which called for local authorities to take action in implementing both Compacts, as well as their follow-up and review.<sup>34</sup> Among others, the Declaration recognised in regard to meeting refugees’ needs and supporting communities that ‘Cities and local authorities can experience significant impact in the short and medium term, and with the support of other relevant actors, to deliver assistance through our services in ways that benefit both refugees and our broader communities, where appropriate.’<sup>35</sup>

In many places around the world, municipal assistance to the displaced is already occurring. In cases this takes place as part of wider urban strategies as leaders recognise both the value and the necessity of addressing forced displacement in order to tackle other existing challenges. To take an example from Lebanon, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Byblos, is

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<sup>31</sup> UNESCO (2016) Cities welcoming refugees and migrants: enhancing effective urban governance in an age of migration. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246558>

<sup>32</sup> MMC (2020) What We Do. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/> (Accessed 17 September 2020)

<sup>33</sup> UCLG (2020) Leveraging migrants’ contribution to the emergency and protecting the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis #BeyondTheOutbreak. 20.04.2020. Available at: <https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/leveraging-migrants-contribution-emergency-and-protecting-most-vulnerable-during-covid-19> (Accessed 15 November 2020)

<sup>34</sup> Marrakech Mayors Declaration (2018) Cities working together for migrants and refugees. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5df133ed5c523d063ce20693/t/5ea5fe595aaf842048077e95/1587936857584/Marrakech+Mayors+Declaration.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p3.

now home to over 1,600 Syrians in a population of only 27,000. While its annual population growth rate is an estimated .9%, its annual city budget is a mere 8.6 million USD, illustrative of the challenges municipalities can face when their number of inhabitants rapidly rise.<sup>36</sup> Byblos was selected to join the ‘100 Resilient Cities’ programme funded by the Rockefeller Center,<sup>37</sup> which aims to build and strengthen social networks across the city, including to refugees, in order to increase economic, cultural, and political collaboration. The development of Byblos’ resilience strategy was informed by the Syrian refugee influx, with one of its core pillars to be a ‘peaceful city that embraces and promotes social cohesion and cultural diversity’.<sup>38</sup> It has created neighbourhood committees of 4-5 people that become the link between the municipality and residents as representatives and advocates for different communities in Byblos to help Byblos’ residents tackle local issues and improve lives of all communities, including vulnerable groups such as refugees. As part of this, community and vulnerable groups are supported in participating in decision-making and project implementation. Other initiatives targeting social cohesion have also emerged in the city, such as a Spring Reception Exhibition, which offered Syrian refugee women the opportunity to present handmade embroidery, handicrafts, and food alongside Lebanese women.<sup>39</sup> This example highlights how assisting displaced people can occur as part of wider municipal strategies to strengthen cities in different ways, in this case as a way to reduce conflict and increase social cohesion, which has been cited as a broader challenge Byblos faces due to a longstanding lack of city planning.<sup>40</sup>

### Refugee-led Civil Society Actors

Assistance to forcibly displaced people also comes directly from themselves. Cities can be powerful spaces for advocacy and lobbying around refugee rights and can create opportunities for displaced people to gain much-needed attention on issues of concern. Qualitative research on 80 refugee-led organisations and networks in cities and camps in Uganda (Kampala and Nakivale) and Kenya (Nairobi and Kakuma) found, for example, that those organisations in urban areas were more likely to be advocacy-focused and internationally recognised than those in camps or settlements.<sup>41</sup> This appears to be due to a variety of factors, including proximity to government and international actors in cities, the education levels and other background characteristics of organizational leaders operating in cities, and in cases the pull factors that brought these

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<sup>36</sup> Byblos Municipality (2016) Resilient Byblos: Connecting with our past, creating our future. 100 Resilient Cities/Byblos. Available at: [http://www.resilientbyblos.org/pdf/Byblos\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.resilientbyblos.org/pdf/Byblos_Strategy.pdf) (accessed 1 November 2020)

<sup>37</sup> 100 Resilient Cities (2017) Resilient Byblos: Connecting With Our Past, Creating Our Future. P.15. Available at: [http://www.resilientbyblos.org/pdf/Byblos\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.resilientbyblos.org/pdf/Byblos_Strategy.pdf). Please note the 100 Resilient Cities program concluded on 31 July 2019.

<sup>38</sup> 100 Resilient Cities (2017) Resilient Byblos: Connecting With Our Past, Creating Our Future. P.34.

<sup>39</sup> Al Shahid (2018) Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Women Participate in Exhibition, Byblos. March 28. Available at: <https://alshahidwitness.com/syrian-refugees-exhibition-byblos/>

<sup>40</sup> Byblos Municipality (2016) Resilient Byblos. P. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Pincock, K., Betts, A., & Easton-Calabria, E. (2020) *The Global Governed? Refugees as providers of protection and assistance*. Cambridge University Press.

organisational leaders into urban areas in the first place (for example, as advocates for refugee rights).

One prominent example of a collective of refugee-led initiatives is the Refugee-Led Organisation Network (RELON) in Kampala, Uganda, now a registered company limited by guarantee. Every Thursday afternoon in a small office, leaders of refugee-led organisations from around Kampala gather together to share news, best practices, and plan collaboration. This umbrella network is comprised mainly of Congolese organisations but includes those from South Sudan, Eritrea, and Rwanda, and has now expanded to become a national network. Meetings are held weekly for ninety minutes, with the agenda circulated beforehand and meeting minutes kept as a record. It aims to create connection and partnership between refugee-led organisations in Kampala, but also seeks to act as a united front to the Government of Uganda and international agencies in order to advocate for particular refugee rights and issues. Although the network only began meeting formally in 2017, members have expanded it to other parts of Uganda and aim to eventually expand it internationally. The network has received attention by international actors, including Amnesty International, for their work offering refugees' assistance<sup>42</sup> and forging connections with other refugee-led movements such as the Global Refugee-Led Network (GRN).

### Historical and contemporary practices on addressing urban displacement

Historical examples of local practices and arrangements with local authorities to assist refugees in a variety of ways demonstrate the range of actors historically involved in assistance to urban displaced people, ranging from local authorities to international organisations. They also demonstrate how the presence of refugees has influenced cities. These examples illustrate the longstanding existence of refugees in cities as well as historical good practices to ease host country pressure and foster urban refugee self-reliance. In turn, similar ongoing issues as well as contemporary good practices can be identified from this historical reflection, several of which are discussed in this section.

#### The settlement of refugees in urban or rural areas based on background

In the interwar years, for example, it was common practice for displaced people to be resettled in urban or rural areas based on their vocational and geographical background; this was understood to benefit refugees and host areas alike. The first international institutional response to refugees was in the 1920s in Greece, when the League of Nations helped establish the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission (GRSC) to assist the approximately 1.5 million ethnic Greek refugees expelled from Turkey as part of the Greek-Turkish population exchange. Although most funds

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<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International (2020) Refugee-led initiatives are stepping up and need to be supported – during the pandemic and beyond. 1 June. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/06/refugee-led-initiatives-are-stepping-up-and-need-to-be-supported-during-the-covid-19-response-and-beyond/> (Accessed 20 November 2020)

from the GRSC were put towards rural rather than urban resettlement (just a quarter of the initial budget was devoted to urban settlements), by 1931, 2,000 agricultural colonies and urban quarters had been built around Greece.<sup>43</sup> Settling refugees in both urban and rural areas became the status quo in countries such as Bulgaria and Lebanon. In Syria and Lebanon, ambitious plans to turn Armenian refugee settlements into modern neighbourhoods occurred through organisations working through the League's coordination, which provided entrepreneurial and agricultural loans, home ownership, and employment to refugees; one 1936 report to the League proclaimed that the construction of these neighbourhoods had turned 'Aleppo and Beyrouth from Oriental into modern cities'.<sup>44</sup>

Notably, in Greece, the arrival of refugees marked the first plans of organized social housing in the country. However this housing did not occur within large-scale urban planning due to a lack of orchestration between the main assistance actors.<sup>45</sup> Illustrating how a wide range of unlikely local actors can become embedded in refugee assistance in urban areas, the Greek Ministry of Communications, which was responsible for town planning, actively sought to improve the coordination and coherence of the housing policy for refugees.<sup>46</sup> Despite these efforts, 'planning anarchy' reigned although calls to subject 'the planning aspect of the settlement of the refugees... to the general laws of the State' continued into the 1930s. Yerolympos argues that due to the sudden and significant influx of refugees into Greece, town planning policies were altered – and plans often abandoned entirely – in ways that are still evident today.<sup>47</sup> This demonstrates both the significant and unintended influence that refugee arrivals had and can continue to have on urban areas as well as the importance of adequately merging refugee assistance with urban planning.

In Greece, one way the GRSC sought to assist both refugees and stimulate urban economies was through advocating for refugees to start their own businesses in urban areas, which the government enabled through loans from the Greek National Bank. Loans were also offered through humanitarian organisations such as the American Women's Hospitals (AWH). In 1923, a member of the AWH, Dr Parmelee, wrote in a report that 'time loans' amounting to \$1500.00 USD had been provided to urban refugees. Two loans enabled refugees to open factories where over 150 men, women, and girls were employed to weave cloth, card and spin wool, and make rugs. She expressed hope that more funds would enable the factories to double in size. Multiple smaller loans

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<sup>43</sup> Skran, C. (1985) 'The Refugee Problem in Interwar Europe, 1919–1939', MPhil thesis, Oxford, University of Oxford. P. 48.

<sup>44</sup> 'Rapport de M. B. Nicolsky.' See also Raymond Ke'vorkian et al., eds., *Les Arméniens, 1917–1939: La quête d'un refuge* (Beirut: Presses de l'Université Saint-Joseph, 2006). Cited in: Watenpaugh, K. D. (2014). Between Communal Survival and National Aspiration: Armenian Genocide Refugees, the League of Nations, and the Practices of Interwar Humanitarianism. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 5(2), 159-181.

<sup>45</sup> Yerolympos, A. (2008) Inter-war Town Planning and the Refugee Problem in Greece: Temporary 'Solutions' and Long-Term Dysfunctions. Pp 133-143. P. 138. In: Hirschon, Renee (Ed). (2008) *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece and Turkey*. New York: Berghahn Books.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

offered craftsmen such as street vendors and shoemakers to open their own businesses, which enabled more than 75 refugees to be ‘taken from the Charity Roll’.<sup>48</sup> Through offering loans to refugees in urban areas, refugees contributed to local urban economies as well as supported each other in becoming settled.

Longstanding practices of making cities viable living options for refugees as well as providing support through loans for them to become self-reliant demonstrate both the irony and the necessity of ongoing struggles to achieve both today. While refugees in Kampala, for example, have the legal right to reside in the city – still a rarity in many places in the world – and are expected by the government and humanitarian agencies to be self-reliant if they move out of settlements, accessing micro-finance loans as well as support to access viable markets remains difficult.<sup>49</sup> Ensuring access to financial services to refugees in both urban and rural areas around the world remains a core component of UNHCR’s livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy.<sup>50</sup>

### The ILO’s Employment-Matching Scheme

Although the Greek settlement was considered a success, refugees in countries like Lebanon and Syria struggled to find employment despite the assistance provided to them.<sup>51</sup> By 1924, it had become clear that the refugee ‘problem’ was not a temporary one and that ‘in the main their problem was to find work, or have it found for them’.<sup>52</sup> In response, the International Labour Organization (ILO) was incorporated into refugee relief and rehabilitation efforts to address ‘the employment, emigration and settlement of refugees’.<sup>53</sup> Between 1925 and 1929, ILO initiated a successful ‘employment-matching scheme’ through asking European countries about their needs for foreign employment in order to place skilled refugees, largely based on their existing livelihoods, into suitable positions. ILO, as well as charities, provided oversight in the resettlement process in an effort to prevent the exploitation of refugees. Fifty thousand refugees, mainly from China and European countries, were employed through this endeavour, which proved both cost-effective and successful in enabling refugee self-reliance.<sup>54</sup> Many were settled in urban areas based

<sup>48</sup> Palmeree, R. (1923) Untitled private letter. Folder 3.13, Work Files AWH 1923-1952, Ruth A. Palmeree Papers, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Easton-Calabria, E. (2016) “‘Refugees asked to fish for themselves’”: The Role of Livelihoods Trainings for Kampala’s Urban Refugees’. *UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper Series*, no. 277. Geneva: UNHCR.; Easton-Calabria, E.; Omata, N. (2016) Micro-finance in Refugee Contexts: Current scholarship and research gaps. *Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) Working Paper Series*, no 116. Oxford: University of Oxford.

<sup>50</sup> UNHCR (2018) Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion: 2019-2023 Global Strategy Concept Note. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/operations/5bc07ca94/refugee-livelihoods-economic-inclusion-2019-2023-global-strategy-concept.html>

<sup>51</sup> Migliorino, N. (2008) (Re)Constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis. Oxford: Berghan. P. 75–77.

<sup>52</sup> LN (1933) Human Welfare and the League, League of Nations Union, January 1933, No. 155. O.LNU/1933(8). P. 67.

<sup>53</sup> ILO (1928) ‘Refugee Problems and Their Solution’. *International Labour Review*, 68–85. P. 68.

<sup>54</sup> ILO, ‘Refugee Problems and Their Solution’. Pp. 84–85.

on their knowledge or capabilities in manufacturing and other skills. By 1929, ILO had notably reduced the number of able-bodied refugees seeking employment from 400,000 to 200,000.<sup>55</sup> The majority of refugees that benefitted from this scheme for example were placed in France, which needed able-bodied labourers due to the heavy losses it had suffered during World War I.

Although this employment-matching scheme took place nearly a century ago, many current mobility schemes are strikingly similar. Labour mobility – the so-called ‘fourth durable solution for refugees’<sup>56</sup> – often brings skilled refugees to cities where technology and industry is in highest demand. Wider efforts by UNHCR and other international actors to increase complementary pathways to resettlement, including through skilled work, were laid out in the Global Compact on Refugees and discussions on these have increased in recent months in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Historical refugee assistance in cities and towns

Other historical examples of assistance demonstrate how cities and towns can also be hubs of support to displaced people by a range of different actors. After World War II, refugees in Ireland were included in many social protection measures including the 1939 Public Assistance Act, which required that ‘local authorities shall provide for the maintenance and assistance of all persons in their administrative areas who are unable to provide for themselves.’<sup>57</sup>

A 1940 article detailing the resettlement of European refugees fleeing the Nazis to the United States explained the services offered to refugees by a wide array of public, civil society, and faith-based actors. ‘Americanization begins when the refugees learn to speak English,’ it reads, ‘Classes are conducted by the WPA, the public school systems, by refugee committees, churches, synagogues, by the Adult Education Council, and by the Y’s in New York City.’<sup>58</sup>

It goes on to discuss how commonly overlooked urban areas, such as small towns, offer advantages to some over the large metropolises, and in turn reduce the pressure on overpopulated cities:

Outside New York, in cities and towns all over the try, special committees have been founded which pledge their help in resettling the refugee. These committees enjoy the support of Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic congregations, of the YMCA, and of welfare and business men’s associations. Volunteers—in some of the largest cities, paid social workers—supervise the project. Opportunities for employment which does not create

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<sup>55</sup> Skran, ‘The Refugee Problem in Interwar Europe’. P. 205.

<sup>56</sup> Long, K. (2015) From Refugee to Migrant? Labour mobility’s protection potential. Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>57</sup> ILO (1949) Reports and Enquiries: Conditions of Labour of Refugees and Displaced Persons. International Labour Review.

<sup>58</sup> Saenger, G. (1940, November 1). The Refugees here. *Survey Graphic*, 29 (11), pp. 576-582. Retrieved from <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issues/refugees-1940/>

competition, for the establishment of small enterprises, are canvassed first. Reports are sent to the New York headquarters. M-town is willing to settle three refugee families a year, N-city will accept 20 units per annum. Once a refugee has expressed his willingness to go to a certain part of the country, a report about his personality and training is sent to the local community. When the community writes back, “Expect Mr. Refugee and family,” arrangements for the trip are made.<sup>59</sup>

### Contemporary Urban Resettlement, Reception, and Assistance

Accounts such as these echo good practices that host municipalities themselves are increasingly seeking out today: more preparation and decision-making over receiving resettled refugees. Research on resettlement in Europe notes that while hosting municipalities, civil society actors, and refugees and migrants play a key role in receiving and integrating refugees, they do not play an active role in the process of resettlement itself. This research has found ‘limited transparency, exclusionary decision-making, and narrow spaces for local ownership by refugees and host communities’ to be primary challenges that in turn can impact refugee integration in European municipalities.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, good urban practices exist. The SHARE Network, for example, was created in 2012 as a platform for local and regional actors engaged in resettlement to exchange good practices and learning, with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of local actors in smaller refugee-receiving cities and municipalities that may lack expertise or capacity to address refugees’ specific needs.<sup>61</sup> The Network has identified the importance of pre-arrival planning, including improving the information provided to refugees about their municipalities prior to resettlement and vice versa; creating centrally coordinated partnerships for local integration support; and engaging local service providers, such as for healthcare, housing and education, on local placement to ensure that placement decisions take account of a variety of factors for integration.<sup>62</sup> Despite these gains in both acknowledging and strengthening the role of municipalities in resettlement, Steurner writes, ‘[I]n many EU countries, municipalities neither have the opportunity to voice their interest in resettlement nor reject participation in national schemes,’<sup>63</sup> demonstrating the steps that still need to be taken.

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<sup>59</sup> Saenger, *The Refugees* here.

<sup>60</sup> Stuermer, J. (2019) ‘Who could thrive where?’ *Imagining resettlement as a cooperative mobility strategy*. Rethinking Refuge Platform, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. Available at: <https://www.rethinkingrefuge.org/articles/who-could-thrive-where-imagining-resettlement-as-a-cooperative-mobility-str>

<sup>61</sup> SHARE Network (2020) *Welcome to the SHARE Network!* Webpage. Available at: <http://www.resettlement.eu/page/welcome-share-network> (Accessed 12 September 2020)

<sup>62</sup> SHARE Network (n.d.) *A Place to Live, A Place to Stay: A Good Practice Guide for Housing in Refugee Resettlement*. ICMC Europe. Available at: [http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC\\_SHARE%20A%20Place%20to%20Live\\_Housing%20Go%20Practice%20Guide.pdf](http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/ICMC_SHARE%20A%20Place%20to%20Live_Housing%20Go%20Practice%20Guide.pdf) (Accessed 12 September 2020)

<sup>63</sup> Steurner, ‘Who could thrive where?’

At the same time, as discussed above, today many refugee-hosting municipalities have stepped up to take responsibility for the people in their cities. Notably, some of the strongest municipal practices exist in countries which have experienced some of the largest influxes of refugees. Turkey, for example, now hosts approximately 3.9 million refugees, making it the world's largest refugee hosting country for over five consecutive years.<sup>64</sup> Various relevant good practices exist at the local and national level in Turkey. Nationally, refugees' ability to live in urban areas promotes opportunities for integration and work that many other more restrictive countries lack. 90% of UNHCR's people of concern in Turkey are living in urban settings, meaning that the urban response is a crucial part of the assistance refugees receive. Almost one million refugees live in Istanbul alone. The creation of work permits, and the availability of free education and healthcare in some municipalities, are positive examples of refugee assistance practices, though they also need to be significantly expanded upon.

At the local level, the city of Gaziantep, Turkey, offers an example of an assistance approach based on social justice and promoting the wellbeing of both refugees and refugee-hosting communities. The city has been highly affected by the Syrian refugee influx, and currently hosts between 350,000 and 600,000 refugees, who comprise at least 17% of the population.<sup>65</sup> About 500,000 are these are Syrians living in the centre of the city. The former Director of Migration Management in Gaziantep explains, '...the fundamentals of addressing migration through a lens of inclusion and a respect for human rights has been core to successful management at the local level and an example of why a focus on people and our humanity can be every bit as impactful as building walls or closing down borders'.<sup>66</sup> This so-called 'Gaziantep Approach' has been replicated by other cities in Turkey.

Gaziantep was the first municipality in Turkey to open its own Directorate of Migration Affairs in order to address migration at the local level.<sup>67</sup> First implemented in January 2016, the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality Migration Policy focuses on the needs of all residents to increase integration, and has sought to remain flexible in order to shift priorities as needs and circumstances change. It has become responsible for improving access to education, health services, employment, social services, and humanitarian aid. One way it works to achieve this is through coordination and collaboration with other municipalities, national and international organisations, and universities. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Turkey, for example, has worked

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<sup>64</sup> UNHCR (2018) Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Yalcin (2020) The Gaziantep Migration Model for Building a Resilient City for All in a Time of Crisis. The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 1 June. Available at: <https://www.gmfus.org/blog/2020/06/01/gaziantep-migration-model-building-resilient-city-all-time-crisis>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> International Organisation for Migration (2018) Why Gaziantep Still Matters Seven Years After Start of Syrian Conflict. Geneva: IOM. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/why-gaziantep-still-matters-seven-years-after-start-syrian-conflict>

closely with the municipality to implement projects according to the policy. Collaboration also aides social cohesion itself, as the municipality holds monthly meetings with Turkish, Syrian, and international NGOs to diffuse any arising tensions.

The municipality has continually sought to create pathways to citizenship for Gaziantep's refugees,<sup>68</sup> and has created information and education centres, and community centres that provide schooling for Syrian students, and counselling and advice about rights and social resources. Free healthcare is provided for over 50,000 Syrian refugees in the municipal hospital and medical centre, and the local women's shelter offers support women and children facing domestic violence.<sup>69</sup> These endeavours have resulted in more comprehensive support for refugees than is available in many other cities. The city has also undertaken broader advocacy for municipal refugee assistance, including through co-hosting an International Forum on Local Solutions to Migration and Displacement in 2019, which exchanged good practices between Turkish municipalities and local authorities from around the world. The event culminated in the signing of the Gaziantep Declaration by over 30 Mayors of cities hosting refugees and other migrants, which seeks a transition from emergency to development and resilience approaches in responses to migration and displacement.<sup>70</sup>

Local policy in Gaziantep provides important lessons about the value of coordination with a variety of actors at the local level, which have led to both improved governance and social cohesion between the refugees and Gaziantep's non-refugee residents. The vocational training that many refugees have received has improved their chances of becoming employed, and the Education Centre has contributed to higher levels of first-grade enrollment rates for Syrian children in Gaziantep (98%) than when they were in Syria (85%).<sup>71</sup>

### The future engagement of capitals, secondary cities, and towns with displacement

While previous sections of this paper have highlighted both the challenges urban displaced people face as well as good practices from municipalities hosting displaced people themselves, the future increasingly looks like a significant departure from both the past and the present. This section reflects on the future of cities and of forced displacement, particularly within the current and projected changes and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It then presents some recommendations and key take-aways relating to cities and forced displacement.

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<sup>68</sup> Jebreal, R. (2017) How to Treat Refugees With Dignity: A Lesson From Turkey. New York Times, September 27. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/opinion/turkey-syrian-refugees.html>

<sup>69</sup> Mediterranean Host Municipalities Network (2017) Best Practices in Hosting Refugees. Beirut: Center for Mediterranean Integration. Available at: [http://cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/Refugees%20English%20final\\_0.pdf](http://cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/Refugees%20English%20final_0.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> IFLSMD (2019) The Gaziantep Declaration. International Forum on Local Solutions to Migration and Displacement, 26-27 November. Available at: <https://www.municipalforum2019.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Gaziantep-Declaration-27-November-2019.pdf> (Accessed 15 October 2020)

<sup>71</sup> Mediterranean Host Municipalities Network (2017) Best Practices in Hosting Refugees. P.16.

## Cities and COVID-19

In just a few rapid months, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world as we know it – and it will likely continue to significantly affect cities in terms of inhabitants, strains on infrastructure, and even changes in urban design. At the time of writing, an estimated 90% of all reported COVID-19 cases are in urban areas, demonstrating them as the epicenter of the pandemic. Refugees and other forcibly displaced people are particularly vulnerable, and are among the most likely populations to suffer both the direct and secondary impacts of the pandemic. On top of pre-existing barriers to protection and assistance, many are now excluded from host countries' national COVID-19 responses and relief programs.<sup>72</sup> As the Executive Director of the Mayors Migration Council explained,

Migrants and refugees are really on the front line of the pandemic because they play a big role as essential workers, from picking and packing food and caring for patients to stocking shelves at the grocery stores. But despite that, they face unique challenges – they are systematically excluded from national relief efforts.<sup>73</sup>

In urban areas in particular, humanitarian agencies struggle to find displaced people, as many offices and community centres they commonly work out of are closed. In some cities, such as in the case of Arua, Uganda, discussed earlier in this paper, refugees are excluded from national relief because they are not legally registered as urban inhabitants. Yet particularly in the informal urban settlements and other dense urban areas where many displaced people reside, a lack of basic health infrastructure, overcrowding, and poor sanitation all contribute to the risk of transmission and infection,<sup>74</sup> meaning that both awareness of and access to these populations is of paramount importance.

These risks as well as the impacts that the pandemic has wrought on refugee and other forcibly displaced people's protection, rights, and livelihoods in urban and rural areas alike, including in camps and settlements, demonstrate the urgent need to bolster assistance to displaced people wherever they reside. Particularly for displaced people already living amongst local hosts in urban

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<sup>72</sup> OHCHR, IOM, UNHCR & WHO (2020) The rights and health of refugees, migrants and stateless must be protected in COVID-19 response. Joint press release, 31 March. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2020/3/5e836f164/rights-health-refugees-migrants-stateless-must-protected-covid-19-response.html>; World Economic Forum (2020) Migrants and refugees are being forgotten in the COVID-19 response. This has to change. 12 August. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/refugees-migrants-covid-coronavirus-not-leave-behind/>

<sup>73</sup> Cited in: Wray (2020) Mayors urge policymakers to include migrants and refugees in COVID-19 Support. Cities Today, 29 July. Available at: <https://cities-today.com/mayors-urge-policymakers-to-include-migrants-and-refugees-in-covid-19-support/>

<sup>74</sup> World Bank (2020) Urban and Disaster Risk Management Responses to COVID-19. Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience and Land, World Bank. Available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/575581589235414090/World-Bank-Urban-DRM-COVID-19-Responses.pdf>; IIED (2020) Dealing with COVID-19 in the towns and cities of the global South. 27 March. Available at: <https://www.iied.org/dealing-covid-19-towns-cities-global-south>

and peri-urban areas, the need for inclusion in national systems like healthcare and social protection is apparent for the safety of all.

Promisingly, the pandemic has accelerated this type of inclusion in certain contexts. In Peru, for example, the Government issued a Legislative Decree (No. 1466) which has temporarily opened up the subsidized health system to refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants for COVID-19 care,<sup>75</sup> while in Rwanda the national Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI) has been extended to urban refugees and refugee students studying in urban areas.<sup>76</sup>

Mayors around the world have also responded to the pandemic through calling on States and multilateral partners to provide access to services regardless of migration status, including healthcare and economic relief; empower refugees and migrants to be part of the solution, including through the regularization of work; and to combat disinformation and build positive narratives of refugees and migrants.<sup>77</sup> The Mayors Migration Council has created a tracker of municipal responses to assist refugees and migrants during COVID-19 from around the world, ranging from multilingual information outreach to direct services to advocacy efforts. This list demonstrates the wide-reaching and widespread efforts of cities to assist their inhabitants. The work of such local authorities to include displaced people and other migrants in often overburdened systems at a time of crisis demonstrates the strength of local action – and points to areas where more support should be provided by national and international actors, as well.

### The Future of Forced Displacement

UNHCR data shows that more than 1% of the earth’s population was forcibly displaced by the end of 2019 – and displacement continue to increase. While many people have found themselves *in situ* due to the COVID-19 pandemic, related displacement is anticipated. A new report posits that the climate crisis alone could displace over 1.2 billion people by 2050, and found that the countries most under ecological threat are also those experiencing or more likely to experience conflict. The report states that, ‘Lack of resilience will lead to worsening food insecurity and competition over resources, increasing civil unrest and mass displacement,’<sup>78</sup> which suggests that mixed migration will become more common.

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<sup>75</sup> UNHCR (2020) Access to national services for vulnerable refugees in Peru. 26 June. Available at: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/access-national-services-vulnerable-refugees-peru>

<sup>76</sup> UNHCR (2020) Health insurance in Rwanda: “The COVID-19 response is accessible to nationals and refugees alike”. 24 June. Available at: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/health-insurance-rwanda-covid-19-response-accessible-nationals-and-refugees-alike>

<sup>77</sup> UNHCR-PHAP (2020) Webinar: Inclusive COVID1-9 Responses of Cities in the Americas. 30 July. Available at: <https://phap.org/PHAP/Events/OEV2020/OEV200730.aspx>

<sup>78</sup> IEP (2020) Ecological Threat Register 2020. Available at: [http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2020/09/ETR\\_2020\\_web-1.pdf](http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2020/09/ETR_2020_web-1.pdf)

These figures matter for cities, many of which will likely significantly increase in size while also in cases battling the direct effects of climate change and social and political instability. The ability for localized responses to both displacement and crises is crucial in scenarios such as these, and necessitates the transfer of both funding and responsibility to local actors in more significant ways than has hitherto occurred in the humanitarian and development sectors.

### The Future of Cities

As this paper laid out at the beginning, global urbanization is projected to continue to rise, and the numbers of urban forcibly displaced people is expected to follow. While capital cities are commonly perceived as the main urban ‘pull’ location, recent research challenges this notion. Global evidence demonstrates that city size and economic growth go hand in hand, but not necessarily in the way one might expect. While Frick and Rodríguez-Pose cite for example a positive (but decreasing) effect of city size and urban density on the economic growth in developed countries, it is assumed that this relationship is in fact negative in developing countries. Their research finds that larger city size affects more positive growth when it is combined with numerous industries, good urban infrastructure, and good urban governance – which many cities hosting the most number of forcibly displaced people may lack.<sup>79</sup> In sum, it is not clear that cities in developing countries have better economic growth than towns.

This has implications for urban displacement as well as the assistance that might be offered to address it. If large numbers of forcibly displaced people are concentrated in particular cities, for example, might a voluntary relocation scheme to other smaller cities or towns offer them better economic prospects, and in turn reduce pressure on other cities? Could displaced people in camps or settlements be provided with similar options to pursue work or studies in non-capital urban areas identified as in need of particular skills? How might employment-matching best support smaller cities and towns in attracting the skills they need, while also supporting displaced people in rebuilding their lives? Historical good practices ranging from Greece to the United States, as discussed in the previous section, offer examples of success and demonstrate the viability of such plans. Creativity in urban dispersal schemes that take into account both displaced peoples’ and cities’ and towns’ needs are important as forced displacement remains a reality.

### Recommendations & Take-Aways

As this paper has shown, municipal good practices exist in a variety of different areas, including local leadership, social integration, employment and labour market integration, education, and refugee participation. Several key lessons and recommendations emerge that may be of use for

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<sup>79</sup> Frick, S. A., & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2016). Average city size and economic growth. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 9(2), 301-318.; Frick, S. A. Urbanization, cities and economic growth: trends, recent evidence and policy implications. Available at: <https://regions.regionalstudies.org/ezone/article/urbanization-cities-and-economic-growth-trends-recent-evidence-and-policy-implications/?print=print>

major refugee-hosting countries' central and municipal governments, UNHCR, INGOs, and other key stakeholders. These include:

- **Strengthening municipalities' ability to respond to forcibly displaced people can improve assistance in terms of quality and time of response**, and create tailored integration efforts with better results for both forcibly displaced people and host communities.
- **More data and research is needed on the locations where urban refugees settle**, in terms of size and type of city and town, and how these settings affect their lives, livelihoods, integration, etc.
- **Humanitarian and development actors in refugee assistance could benefit from a deeper understanding of particular challenges facing the cities and towns refugees settle in**, in order to both address added challenges refugees may bring as well as the particular challenges they may face.
- **Ongoing engagement between local authorities and humanitarian actors is essential**, particularly in urban areas where refugees are integrated with local populations.
- **Embedding support to urban forcibly displaced people within wider city strategies or plans for the urban poor may help** manage resentment, increase social cohesion, and can enable quicker results for local economies and public services.
- **Including urban refugees in censuses and government planning is important** to understand numbers and needs, and to ensure that central government and international funding to municipalities takes displaced inhabitants into account. Research into how different minority groups have been better recognised in particular cities may shed light on pathways to achieve this.
- **Upholding and advocating for policies to recognise and support the rights of urban refugees is crucial** to improving their safety, wellbeing, and the assistance they are given. This includes host countries enacting changes to incorporate UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy and 2014 Policy on Alternatives to Camps into their national policy frameworks, and continued advocacy and engagement by humanitarian and other actors to keep these policy shifts on the table.

## Conclusion

As we look at the state of the world's forcibly displaced in cities and towns today, many questions remain. How can cities' capacities to help displaced people be harnessed? How can cities best be supported to do so? Historical practices such as allowing refugees to settle in urban areas based on their backgrounds or preferences, and supporting skilled refugees to find ways to access work in cities through labour mobility schemes demonstrate the importance of responding to displacement with the agency of displaced people at the forefront. Displaced people themselves know best why they live in particular cities or towns, and assuredly know how they could be assisted to improve their lives. Similarly, municipalities and other local urban actors experience the pressures of urban displacement firsthand, and are the first to know where labour gaps, community support mechanisms, and opportunities for inclusion exist. As the number of urban displaced people rises, so too must the amount of support offered to the cities that become their home.

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