

# Refugee Livelihoods Network (RLN) September 2005

## In This Issue:

- Urban Refugee Livelihoods
- Key Publications and Reports:
- Formalizing the Informal Economy: Somali Refugee and Migrant Trade Networks in Nairobi
- Is Legal Status Enough? Legal Status and Livelihood Obstacles for Urban Refugees
- Just Enough for the City: Urban Refugees Make Their Own Way
- Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Local Government Response
- Forthcoming Events
- Work in Progress

## Featured Links:

- [Forced Migration Online Research Guide on Urban Refugees](#)
- ['The Economic Life of Refugees', by Karen Jacobsen](#)
- [American University of Cairo Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Working Papers](#)
- [University of the Witwatersrand Forced Migration Working Paper Series](#)

## Urban Refugee Livelihoods

As was noted in the RLN of April 2004, information on the ways refugees in urban areas pursue livelihood strategies has long been extremely limited, despite the fact that a very large number of refugees live their lives in cities in the region. This issue will look at what has happened since April 2004 in terms of research activities and projects for urban refugees. It provides a follow-up of earlier introduced urban refugee projects in Johannesburg and Cairo. Also, a number of papers are presented that address interesting issues. These papers illustrate that urban refugees manage to carve out a living in the various 'global cities' of the South. They are often self-employed, finding niches in the informal economy. Also, some of them are well-connected transnationally. Thus, various authors stress that urban refugees should be seen as an asset to regional economies. At the same time, these refugees do often live marginal lives; especially facing problems due to their poor legal status. Yet, assistance programmes for urban refugees are still hard to find. Various papers recommend policies and projects to focus on (legal) local integration as a durable solution for urban refugees.

The RLN moderator invites subscribers to send in abstracts for possible contributions to the Refugee Survey Quarterly (RSQ), the UNHCR academic journal on refugee issues. The journal is published by Oxford University Press (OUP), which also publishes the International Journal of Refugee Law and the Journal of Refugee Studies. The RSQ June 2006 issue will focus on Refugee Livelihoods. For this issue, contributions are requested in the shape of original articles. Furthermore, those who have published on refugee livelihoods are requested to send full bibliographical details in order to have these included in this issue's select bibliography. The deadline for sending in article abstracts is 31st of October, whereas bibliographical information needs to be sent no later than 31st of January. Contributions can be sent to the RLN moderator, who will be guest-editor for this issue, at [C.Horst@inter.NL.net](mailto:C.Horst@inter.NL.net). Those who send in abstracts will be contacted about the possibility of having their article published in the RSQ June 2006 issue.

[For further details on the Refugee Survey Quarterly, click here.](#)

## Key Publications and Reports:

Living on the Margins: The Analysis of the Livelihood Strategies of Sudanese Refugees with Closed Files in Egypt

In this paper, Katarzyna Grabska argues that refugees in Egypt, the majority of whom live in Cairo, stay on the margins of the host society in terms of their cultural, religious, social, economic, and political participation. Marginalisation happens in three ways: the government restricts rights and access to services for refugees; the host society adopts mistrustful and negative attitudes toward refugees; and refugees themselves fail to integrate into the host society, as Egypt is seen by many as a transit point on the way to a western country. Grabska indicates that legal status influences opportunities, as those without legal status and thus a limited access to various rights, are forced to live on the extreme margins of Egyptian society. Furthermore, she stresses that the impact of refugees on the host society

should not be overlooked. Refugees pay high rents and are consumers on the Egyptian markets, while the remittances they receive constitute significant cash inflows. The paper argues that, although research on urban refugees in the South is growing, it still tends to be largely invisible to policy makers. Only by considering the local conditions in the asylum country, can the dilemmas of local integration in developing urban centers be adequately addressed. According to her, the current self-reliance strategy adopted by UNHCR is not based on an in-depth understanding of the reality of life for refugees in places like Egypt. As such, Grabska sees the need to reassess the UNHCR policy towards urban refugees.

[Click here to access FMRS Working Paper No 6, June 2005](#)

### **Formalizing the Informal Economy: Somali Refugee and Migrant Trade Networks in Nairobi**

Elizabeth Campbell in this paper indicates that urban refugees remain under-researched for three reasons: in urban centers it is difficult to discern where the refugee community starts and stops; refugees live in these centers illegally and are largely not entitled to protection or assistance; and governments often are also against refugees residing in cities. In studying a specific group of urban refugees in the South, the paper aims to contextualize urban refugees locally within the specific history and development of Nairobi and globally within the framework of economic globalization and transnational migration flows. Campbell's conclusions are that, contrary to official state pronouncements and local popular opinion in Kenya, urban refugees are not an economic burden on the state but rather have proved themselves to be successful entrepreneurs. If refugees and their businesses would be removed from Nairobi, this would, according to her, result in an economic catastrophe, so firmly entrenched are they into the fabric of the city. Refugees exist in Nairobi, are well-connected to transnational trade networks, and are there to stay. As such, legal local integration would be a viable durable solution for Kenya's urban refugees.

[This GCIM Working Paper, published September 2005, can be accessed here](#)

### **Is Legal Status Enough? Legal Status and Livelihood Obstacles for Urban Refugees**

This paper by Sarah Bailey analyses whether refugees living legally in urban areas face the same livelihood challenges as those without legal status. Refugees living legally in urban areas have rights to employment, identity documents, and freedom of movement that are not guaranteed to those without such legal status. At the same time, numerous examples exist of the deportation, detention, and exclusion from employment and self-employment of urban refugees with legal status. Furthermore, legal refugees in, for example, Johannesburg, Kampala and Cairo face alarming levels of poverty. Thus, legal status is not enough: it does not necessarily provide access to the rights guaranteed in international treaties or to socio-economic opportunities, and does not protect refugees from discrimination, xenophobia and general human rights abuses.

[Click here to view Sarah Bailey's MA thesis, published in April 2004](#)

## Just Enough for the City: Urban Refugees Make Their Own Way

In this paper, derived from her new book 'The Economic Life of Refugees', Karen Jacobsen argues that urban refugees are a good example of a potential win-win situation for both host countries and refugees. According to her, urban refugees can easily be an economic asset rather than a burden to cities in the global South. Developing countries need to harness the economic power of urban refugees by creating or smoothing the passage of informal sector businesses into the formal sector. Many urban refugees are entrepreneurs whose economic contributions to the city can be maximized by implementing their rights to work and to freedom of movement. By speeding up access to refugee status, as well as simple improvements in access to credit, bank accounts, and recertification procedures, governments and the corporate sector can smooth the way into the formal sector, where refugee businesses can be taxed and regulated. Donor states and relief agencies can encourage and enable host countries to assist urban refugees by compensating for reasonable expenses to public health, education, and other social support systems that benefit refugees. In addition, donors may support vocational education, microcredit, and other programs that improve urban refugee livelihoods, but which most urban refugees cannot afford or access. This support should not take the form of parallel relief structures and special services for refugees, but should supplement existing national services.

[Access this chapter of the World Refugee Survey 2004 here.](#)

## Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Local Government Response

The chapters in this volume, edited by Loren Landau, discuss a range of areas where poorly conceived and implemented legislation, administrative bias and/or corruption, all negate the rights and interests of forced migrants while also negatively impacting the social and economic fabric of Johannesburg. Housing policy and practice makes it difficult for many migrants to get accommodation and to base their economic activities. Furthermore, lack of effective identity documents is at the root of a range of social and economic challenges, such as lack of access to financial services; difficulties in getting housing and work; vulnerability to exploitation by employers, landlords and the police; and difficulties in accessing schools and health. The book illustrates how addressing such forms of social exclusion will not only help ensure that the rights of forced migrants are respected and their livelihoods are promoted, but will also improve the effectiveness of development policy and public service generally. By encouraging investment in the city, capitalizing on latent economic potential and demand, stabilizing the environment for business, and improving quality of life, these are developments that will benefit all of Johannesburg's residents.

[The full text of this book can be accessed here.](#)

## Forthcoming Events

The 10th biennial gathering of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) will be hosted by the Centre for Refugee Studies of York University in Toronto, Canada, from June 18th to 22nd 2006. The theme for the conference is 'Talking across borders: new dialogues in forced migration studies'. This conference will bring together academics, NGOs, policy makers, government representatives, and forced migrants themselves from a wide array of disciplinary and geographic backgrounds. Dialogues are envisioned between these different actors, across the North-South divide, and across disciplines.

A small group of researchers is considering organising a panel on the subject of urban refugees in North and South. Anyone interested may contact Ellen Lammers on [e.g.lammers@uva.nl](mailto:e.g.lammers@uva.nl). Note that the deadline for submission of proposals for IASFM is 15 October.

[For more information on IASFM 10, click here.](#)

## Work in Progress

Pia Vogler is currently working on an MA thesis project on adolescent Burmese refugees in Thai camps from an anthropological perspective. In this research, she is principally interested in phenomena identified by youth as threatening their socio-economic livelihood and in coping strategies they develop in order to counter these threats. In particular, she is interested in dangers and coping-strategies after darkness, when humanitarian aid-workers are absent, but incidents of abduction, military attacks, theft etc. more frequent. This MA thesis might serve as preliminary work for a PhD and Pia would be happy and grateful if list-members who could give any advise on this topic could contact her at [pia\\_vogler@yahoo.de](mailto:pia_vogler@yahoo.de). She is currently enrolled in a post-graduate studies programme jointly organized by the Institute for Development Studies (IUED) and the Graduate Institute for International Relations (HEI) in Geneva. Until December 2005, she will be serving as an intern at UNHCR. In January 2006, she will depart to Northern Thailand where she will conduct fieldwork over a period of two months.

The Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty at the University of Sussex, together with various partner institutions, engages in a number of research projects on migration. One of the sub-themes deals with 'Rights-based approaches to forced migration'. In line with the Centre's approach to other types of migration, the objective of this sub-theme is to consider in more depth the variety of ways in which forced migrants themselves seek to minimise the costs and vulnerabilities associated with forced displacement, whilst also maximising any benefits that might be associated with being in new places. In particular, the sub-theme will focus on the way in which forced migrants view policies developed for or towards them, and seek to mobilise actual or potential rights in the context of different institutional responses. Such an analysis will contribute to understanding the dynamics of forced migration, and especially onward displacement that is often associated with initial forced relocation. It will also contribute to a re-evaluation of the tools and institutions for an international response to forced migration, and in particular an evaluation of the value of rights-

based approaches. For more information about this project, contact Kasia Grabska at [kgrabska@aucegypt.edu](mailto:kgrabska@aucegypt.edu).

[Click here to read the full project description.](#)

The Refugee Livelihoods Network is an initiative of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. (EPAU) The views expressed by contributors to the Network and in documents electronically linked to the Network are not those of UNHCR. For issues other than refugee livelihoods, EPAU can be contacted by e-mail at [hqep00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqep00@unhcr.org)