

**ADDRESSING URBAN DISPLACEMENT:  
SPECIFIC NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES**

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Speakers: **Karen Jacobsen**, Associate Professor, Feinstein International Center,  
Tufts University  
**Dale Buscher**, Director, Protection Program, Women’s Commission for  
Refugee Women and Children  
**Andrea Lari**, Senior Advocate, Refugees International

Moderator: **Elizabeth Ferris**, Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Brookings-Bern Project  
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**Speaker Bios**

**Karen Jacobsen** is Associate Professor at the School of Nutrition and Science Policy, Tufts University, and teaches at the Fletcher School (Tufts). She is based at the Feinstein International Center where she leads the Refugees and Forced Migration Program. Jacobsen’s current research focuses on urban refugees and IDPs, and on financial interventions in conflict-affected areas, and she is working on a book on refugee camps. She directed the Alchemy Project from 2001-2005, which provided grants and conducted research and impact evaluations on micro-enterprise initiatives in displaced communities in Africa. She has worked with IRC on a survey of Burmese migrants in Thailand, and with NRC/IDMC on surveys of urban IDPs. Her most recent book, *The Economic Life of Refugees* was published in 2005. She teaches courses on Field Research Methods and on Forced Migration. Her earlier research investigated security and protection issues in refugee camps, a study for UNHCR on self-settled refugees and local integration; research on security problems in refugee camps, on the environmental impact of refugees in asylum countries, and on the policy responses of host governments in Africa and Southeast Asia to refugees. She holds a B.A. from University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Dale Buscher** is the Director of the Protection Program at the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children where he leads the Commission's work on refugee livelihoods, displaced out-of-school youth, gender, and UN advocacy in New York. Dale has been working in the refugee assistance field since 1988 in a variety of capacities and in both field and headquarters locations. He began his refugee field work in the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines and moved onto work with the Haitian refugees when they were interned at Guantanamo Bay. He subsequently worked with displaced Kurds in Northern Iraq, with Bosnian refugees in Croatia, with Kosovars in Albania and in Kosovo during the return and reintegration process. Dale went on to work as the Director of Operations for the International Catholic Migration Commission in Geneva where he oversaw the organization's \$25 million international programs – covering 20 countries and 800 staff. During his 4-year tenure at the ICMC headquarters, Dale also started numerous new programs for the organization during extended field postings in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Mr. Buscher has also worked as a consultant for UNHCR's Department of International Protection writing a field handbook entitled, *Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements: a reference guide of good practices in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern*, and later on a Strengthening Protection Capacities Project focused on four refugee hosting countries in Africa. Dale has authored numerous publications, presented at workshops and conferences around the world and undertaken research on conflict and displacement in twenty-five countries. Dale earned his Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Utah and earned a Bachelors of Science degree in both psychology and sociology from Iowa State University.

**Andrea Lari** is Senior Advocate with Refugees International (RI). He joined the organization in 2004 and has conducted missions to Sudan, the Great Lakes and Southern Africa regions and Colombia. In these missions, he has particularly focused on the humanitarian and protection needs of refugees and internally displaced people. Before joining RI, Mr. Lari was a researcher for Human Rights Watch where he focused on Angola and forced displacement. Mr. Lari's career in humanitarian work began when he volunteered with Jesuit Refugee Service in Angola. He then served as their Country Director for Angola from 1998 to 2000 and conducted humanitarian needs assessments in Pakistan and Afghanistan in early 2002. Mr. Lari has a master degree in Political Science from the University of Bologna, where he wrote a field-based final thesis on human rights protection of Guatemalan refugees in southern Mexico, and has completed the International Summer School at the Refugee Studies Program in Oxford, UK.

## **Presentation by Karen Jacobsen**

Though aid agencies are increasingly aware on the special needs of urban IDPs, most of the available information concerning this group is anecdotal or qualitative. Tufts University and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) have collaborated to develop a tool to profile and count non-camp dwelling IDPs in urban areas. The tool was designed to develop a methodology for collecting quantitative data on urban IDPs and a conceptual framework with which to understand it. So far, the tool has been locally adapted and implemented in three urban areas: Khartoum, Sudan; Santa Marta, Colombia; and Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

In each city, a random sampling method first selected target neighborhoods and then approximately 1000 people for the distribution of a household survey. This sampling strategy relied upon census data, Google Earth and other GIS technologies. Researchers also canvassed local organizations to identify the neighborhoods where IDPs lived. These areas were weighted and sampled accordingly to control for IDPs' tendency to cluster together.

As there is no consensus about an operational definition for IDPs, the tool identifies as IDPs those who are originally from the conflict area and who left during the conflict. For example, in Abidjan, IDPs were defined as those displaced or evicted from a conflict affected area after 2001.

Practically, the tool has the potential to generate significant useful information on urban IDPs, including:

- *A conservative range of the number of IDPs living in an urban area.*
- *The creation of IDP profiles.* Such profiles highlight factors such as length and causes of displacement.
- *A comparison between urban IDPs in one locale and those living in another.* For example, the studies found that IDPs in Khartoum were more likely to cite employment prospects as a reason for their migration while IDPs in Abidjan were more likely to attribute their displacement to the conflict.
- *A comparison between urban IDPs and the host community.* This analysis is particularly useful as it furthers an understanding of the ways that displacement can result in a mix of challenges and opportunities. For example, IDPs in Abidjan experienced a higher rate of unemployment than the host community. This finding is in line with the popular assumption that urban IDPs are often worse off than the host community. Yet the research also revealed that IDPs were not doing much worse economically than other urban poor. This could be attributed to the fact that IDPs are living with the host community and are accessing the same income.

The tool's findings illustrate the complexity of internal displacement and the need for further empirical analysis.

## **Presentation by Dale Buscher**

To discuss urban IDPs, it is necessary to place them within the broader rural to urban migration context as increasing urbanization impacts the humanitarian community's ability to identify, serve and protect IDPs in urban areas. Additionally, for policy and program guidance with regards to urban IDPs, it is helpful to look at the challenges and learning provided by UNHCR's efforts to serve urban refugees.

Today, for the first time, more than 50 percent of the world's population lives in urban areas. In 2030, it is expected that this figure will grow to 5 billion people with 95 percent of the growth in less developed countries. As the world becomes urbanized, so too do the displaced. IDPs may travel to urban areas to escape conflict or in search of economic opportunities. As urban land is often scarce and expensive, urban IDPs often live in substandard shelter and slum conditions and confront the same challenges as the urban poor – unemployment and under-employment, limited of access to basic services, and poor infrastructure – roads, transportation, and sanitation. Over-crowded slums also create fertile conditions for violence and often lack adequate law enforcement. When a bulge in the youth cohort is combined with rapid urbanization in slum areas, you get highly volatile, dangerous, low income communities. Governments, however, may remain indifferent or hostile to urban IDPs, uninterested in providing services to these communities, and may even be the cause of their displacement.

The process of UNHCR's efforts to develop a policy on urban refugees can provide some valuable lessons for those seeking to develop policies on urban IDPs. In 1995, a UNHCR discussion paper questioned whether the organization should provide assistance to refugees in cities. It was felt that this would only reward people who have the means to move and reestablish themselves. For this reason, the paper suggested that it might not be appropriate to provide urban refugees with the same types of assistance as that provided to those in camps. In 1997, UNHCR's first policy document on urban refugees incorrectly suggested that most were single young men. It further stated that to provide assistance to urban refugees could result in support for irregular movement. This statement is in clear conflict with the right of refugees to freedom of movement. In the context of refugee camps, the need for UNHCR to provide prolonged assistance is seldom called into question but this has not been the case for refugees in urban areas where some form of means-testing is usually required.

In 2002, UNHCR hosted a workshop in Moscow on the issue of urban refugees. Here, participants recommended a new policy be created that focused on refugee protection and state responsibility. In 2006, a new draft policy was circulated for comments. The policy suggests that interventions should focus on facilitating refugees' access to rights, targeting refugees with specific needs and focusing on community-based activities. However, the policy has yet to be finalized.

UNHCR's development of an urban refugee policy provides some guidance for those seeking to create policies for urban IDPs. In particular, it demonstrates how forced migrants in urban settings can often be misunderstood or overlooked. A useful urban IDP policy would pair this institutional memory with an understanding of the global trend of urbanization.

### **Presentation by Andrea Lari**

Lessons learned from Colombia's internal displacement crisis can, to a certain extent, be applied to other urban contexts. Yet this comparison must be undertaken with caution, as certain characteristics do set Colombia apart, particularly, Colombia's position as a middle income economy, the prolonged nature of displacements and the political polarization of segments of the country's population.

Over 200,000 Colombians are displaced every year by fighting, crop fumigations or outright expulsions from their land with Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups particularly effected. Overlapping and repeated displacements often make it difficult for IDPs to mobilize and advocate for their rights. There have also been many cases where IDP leaders are targeted by hostile forces. For these and other reasons between 30-40 percent of Colombia's urban IDPs remain unregistered. As such, they end up ineligible for state and state/NGO-sponsored services.

While cities tend to offer a wider range of economic opportunities, urban IDPs tend to generate meager incomes at only half of pre-displacement levels. Economic ostracism often occurs as a result of racial and class-based exclusion and potential employers may assume that IDPs are aligned with or in support of the FARC or other rebel movements.

Public policy in Colombia provides a strong legal framework with which to protect and provide assistance to IDPs. Additionally, the Guiding Principles are incorporated into law and policy and the constitutional court has made several supportive rulings. Lari argues that the gap that exists between this framework and the central government's implementation of the law is beginning to narrow. Yet at the local level, the divide remains wide.

Lari put forth three main recommendations to further the assistance of Colombia's urban IDPs:

*First, IDP's needs must be prioritized.* Steps towards this include: i) operationalizing Colombia's legal framework at both local and central levels; ii) anchoring IDP policies in other related initiatives, such as local development strategies; and iii) the provision of psychological services.

*Second, IDPs must be identified.* This can be achieved through: i) building the capacity of IDP organizations to enable them to provide services to their members; ii) providing greater support to local community-based institutions, such as churches; and iii) more pro-active initiative, increased commitment and assistance from local administrators.

*Third, the overall capacity of municipalities must be increased in order to absorb IDPs into the workforce.* Central government should assist those municipalities that lack the means to provide social services to IDPs and should request international resources when needed. The private sector should likewise explore ways to anchor or support microenterprises for IDPs.

## **Discussion**

Karen Jacobsen reported that they found fewer differences between urban IDPs and the urban poor than had been expected; on many indicators, IDPs cannot be identified as having needs that differ from those of the communities that host them. One participant emphasized the difficulty in obtaining a precise calculation of the number of IDPs in a given context. In some country situations, it is even possible to produce an estimate within a range of several million. Both he and Jacobsen agreed that the IDP figures quoted for Darfur are a 'fantasy' as no one can be sure of the exact number. In light of these challenges, Birkenes lauded the development of the Tufts-IDMC tool.

Some participants noted that increasing urbanization is intrinsically linked to increasing rates of urban poverty. As such, any response to urban displacement must also include steps to address this poverty. Other participants countered that while urban poverty is an important issue which needs to be addressed, displacement agencies, such as UNHCR, were not in a position to address it. Some were concerned that a comparison of IDPs to the urban poor may result in a failure to appreciate the economic and social impacts of the loss of livelihoods. Yet Jacobsen cautioned participants from making this assumption. She argued that it is equally possible that those who are unable to make the journey from rural to urban areas are worse off than those with the means to do so.

There was a desire to understand the differences between urban IDPs who had recently been displaced and those who had been living in the city for longer periods.. Some participants suggested that it was very likely that the most recently displaced IDPs were the most vulnerable. Yet Jacobsen argued that it was equally possible that the newly displaced benefit from anchors provided by friends and family members who had been displaced earlier.

One participant argued that the use of urbanization as a conceptual framework for understanding urban IDPs has its limitations. In Baghdad, for example, the majority of IDPs are moving from one urban neighborhood to another. Urbanization does not account for this conflict-induced displacement, which, Jacobsen concedes, may occur with increasing frequency in light of the rise of urban warfare. The same participant suggested that another useful exercise would be to use the tool to examine the differences between urban IDPs and urban refugees. The results could generate an understanding of the forces that encourage or prevent displaced families from crossing a national border.

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