

FMO Research Guide: Urban Refugees

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Overview

Although it is difficult to analytically divide urban and rural areas and rural and urban migrants, this research guide attempts to focus on those aspects of forced migration that are distinctly urban. Many of these themes — shifting identities, struggles for livelihoods and services, legal protection — are well represented in the broader refugee studies literature, a literature which has, to date, been dominated by discussions of ‘rural refugees’. There is much work to be done comparing the similarities, differences, and interactions among forced migrants

living in camps, rural settings, and urban environments. This research guide, however, is premised on the belief that the greatest analytical purchase comes from integrating the study of urban forced migrants with more general discussions of urbanization and urban phenomena. Such inquiries, especially when used in conjunction with general refugee studies literature, can provide conceptual and methodological guidance, hypotheses, and comparative reference. Drawing attention to the under-explored dimensions of urban life has the added benefit of helping refine existing causal and empirical assumptions and conceptual categories. Geographically, this research guide has a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa, due to the author's experience in conducting research in that region.

Apart from those described above, there are at least three specific reasons why the study of forced migrants in urban areas benefits explicitly from its intersection with a broader urban studies literature:

1. Despite forced migrants' long-standing presence in the world's cities, there are surprisingly few studies focusing exclusively on displaced persons' experiences in and effects on the urban environment. This oversight is rooted at least partially in the methodological challenges associated with studying refugees in urban environments (see Research methods) as well as thematic and conceptual biases within 'refugee studies'.
2. There is a growing body of theoretically and methodologically sophisticated literature within the parameters of 'urban studies', much of which is applicable to the study of forced migrants. Indeed, 'urban studies' inquiries into displacement, social and political marginalization, and livelihood strategies all speak explicitly to established themes within 'refugee studies'. This literature also includes discussions about shifting patterns of identity; new translocal forms of social and political organization; and concerns over environmental

sustainability, health, education, and gender. These too resonate with established ‘forced migration’ issues.

3. Whereas camps may be at least formally distinguished from the social, economic, and political processes surrounding them — although this separation is never absolute — such distinctions make little sense in urban areas. Even in those rare instances where urban refugees inhabit designated buildings or areas, they almost invariably rely on local markets and social services. In doing so, they interact with local populations to a degree not necessarily seen among camp-based refugees. As the majority of urban forced migrants do not live in such areas but rather stay — however temporarily — among other migrant groups or amidst host populations, it is often senseless to analytically distinguish, *a priori*, between the processes affecting these sub-populations. Instead, research and advocacy are likely to be served when analysts are able to identify similarities and differences between forced migrants and hosts, who may themselves also be recent migrants.

1 Introduction

Over the past decade, natural population growth and migration caused by failing rural economies and protracted local and regional conflicts have resulted in the rapid growth of cities throughout much of the developing world. In Africa, a region still largely characterized by rural agricultural production, urban growth rates have been the highest in the world (Simone 2003). Although there are few hard facts, it is likely that refugees and asylum seekers (defined in the broadest sense) constitute a significant part of this urban growth. According to the UNHCR’s 2001 statistical yearbook, only 40 per cent of all persons of concern to the UNHCR worldwide were living in refugee camps. While 47 per cent were dispersed in rural areas or not specified, 13 per cent were in urban areas. This 13 per cent translated into 1.9 million refugees across 116 different countries. Although Europe and Latin America have the highest relative percentage of urban versus rural refugees

(reflecting general population patterns), the absolute numbers in Asia and Africa make them a particularly significant group in those regions. There is, moreover, no reason to believe that these numbers will decrease in coming years. Indeed, the combination of continuing conflict and tightening asylum policies makes it likely that the number of self-settlers moving to urban areas will continue to grow.

The population trends alluded to above have the potential to transform both forced migrants and the cities in which they live. In the first instance, cities experience changes in their demographic profile and economic patterns of trade, employment, and investment. Attitudes held by local populations are also likely to shift, possibly towards novel forms of cosmopolitanism or, more commonly, towards heightened xenophobia. The transnational ties and networks migrants forge through their social, economic, and kinship ties with their home countries and diasporas further afield will also link cities to other urban nodes and rural areas in other countries: a rarely recognized form of globalization from below (Sassen 1995; Faist 2000; Castells 1996).

Urban migrants' transformations may be no less dramatic or analytically curious. In addition to the various psychological, emotional, and physical hardships often associated with any form of forced migration, movements from rural areas to cities are almost universally associated with exposure to new patterns of production and disparate (and often dynamic) values and identities. Those moving among third-world cities, or between third-world cities and those in Europe and North America, may be better equipped to negotiate urban economies than those from rural areas, but are also likely to confront language barriers, discrimination, violence, and extended periods with ambiguous legal status. Forced migration to cities also regularly marks the beginning of a longer journey, to other urban centres regionally, or to cities elsewhere in the world. Even those who never reach their intended terminus — if indeed they have one in mind — may live their lives in a

sense of permanent transition, not wishing or able to return to their community of origin and unable to proceed elsewhere.

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European Science Foundation: Urban Science -
http://www.esf.org/esf_article.php?language=0&article=285&domain=3&activity=8

Mega-Cities Project - <http://www.megacitiesproject.org/default.asp>

International Metropolis Project -
http://www.international.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html

UrbEUROPE - <http://www.urban-europe.net/research/research-topics.htm>

2 Definitions and legal issues

2.1 Status determination

While categorizing migrants as refugees or forced migrants is always a challenge, doing so effectively is key to effective protection, advocacy, and analysis (see Research methods). Definitional boundaries are not always clear, and forced migrants' own actions may only further complicate the process. Many people, for example, make false claims for refugee status while others who could apply for asylum do not. Still others, faced with interminable status determination procedures, may effectively purchase their residency rights. While these are hurdles everywhere, there are at least three reasons why making such categorizations is particularly problematic in urban areas:¹

1. Whereas many camps, formal refugee settlements, or reception centres are located close to international borders, few urban centres share such proximity. This means that almost all people reaching the city under their own power (i.e.,

¹ Many of these points were drawn from a presentation made at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, by Fedde Jan Groot, Deputy Representative to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in South Africa, entitled 'UNHCR's Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas: The Case of South Africa' (30 April 2003).

having not been resettled) will have travelled considerable distances, often following circuitous routes passing through multiple countries. These journeys — spanning considerable expanses of both space and time — make it difficult to determine a given individual's provenance and the political or security conditions at the time of departure. While it is never easy to definitively determine if someone comes from a part of a country experiencing conflict or persecution, in urban settings it may not even be possible to determine from what country a person has come. A further consequence of journeys through multiple countries is that many urban refugees — especially those who self-settle — get classified as 'irregular movers'. As discussed below, issues of legal definition often become more complicated when an individual has passed through another country (or countries) that could have plausibly provided sanctuary.

2. Cities are likely to attract relatively larger numbers of people who have been smuggled across borders or who were victims of traffickers. Many of these will have been promised jobs before leaving their countries of origin only to find themselves effectively forced into criminal networks upon reaching their intended destination (if, indeed, that is where they end up). As many do not come from countries experiencing violence or patterns of persecution — or have not individually experienced a well-founded fear of such — few will be able to effectively claim asylum. If and when these people are detained, they are often classified as criminal or illegal immigrants and risk deportation.
3. Forced migrants — however one chooses to define 'forced' — often live in immigrant neighbourhoods among other co-nationals who may or may not be 'forced'. Distinguishing between the two is both a conceptual and empirical challenge. That many of the 'legitimate' refugees living in a given area will have demonstrated considerable agency in choosing their destination — and will

usually be influenced by economic as well as security concerns — further complicates efforts to make firm divisions.

A number of other factors intensify the processes of legal status determination. Refugee camps or settlements are often part of a constellation of aid workers, government/immigration officials, and humanitarian organizations that can guide prospective asylum claimants and help ensure that their cases are handled properly. While the overall density of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials may be higher in urban areas, there are often very few dedicated to refugee protection or processing asylum claims. The implications of this *vis-à-vis* status determination and protection are threefold. First, people who objectively qualify for refugee status under domestic or international law may have no direct exposure to anyone who can inform them of their rights and guide them through the asylum process. As a result, many would-be (or should-be) refugees simply do not apply for asylum. Second, even those who know their rights may have difficulty in finding the appropriate individual or office to file a claim. The absence of immigration offices in areas where someone lives may make it too expensive (in time and transport) to apply. For those without proper documentation, travelling also exposes them to the risk of discovery by immigration officials or other problems with the local police. Lastly, once an application to the host government has been made, the low density of refugee advocates means that there are few people to monitor cases or advocate on the behalf of refugees. As a result, many who should be entitled to refugee status and who have applied for it may be arbitrarily turned away or refused asylum based on easily remedied technicalities.

2.2 Protection and assistance

In addition to the concerns discussed above, there are a number of other factors that may limit legal protection and hinder efforts to provide assistance. Much like self-settled refugees everywhere, forced migrants in urban environments are often highly mobile, moving in and out of communities. As a result, even those with

legal status are effectively untraceable. In places where they are not entitled to, or chose not to live in, specialized housing, there may be no practical way to keep track of where these populations are centred, or the services they need and use.

Urban refugees' *de facto* integration (or invisibility) raises political as well as technical protection challenges. At the very least, the absence of a large aid 'community' means there is likely to be little political pressure to distribute aid or ensure that refugee rights are respected. Moreover, urban refugees are less photogenic and visible than those in camps. Without compelling images, urban refugees are not likely to garner international media attention or benefit from international aid and advocacy. Effective protection is only further limited by the fact that both host governments and donors are not generally keen on encouraging urbanization through forced migration because maintaining urban refugees is expensive and many assume that those who make it to cities can support themselves.

As noted, many host governments' wariness of 'irregular movers' raises a further protection issue. Whereas all signatories of the 1951 Convention are legally obligated to protect asylum seekers crossing their borders directly from a country or area in crisis, many states will not, *a priori*, recognize the claims of those passing through other countries where they might have received protection. A general suspicion that such people are motivated by economics, not persecution, further heightens host governments' reluctance to offer asylum. Without special protection, urban refugees must rely much more on domestic rights legislation than those in internationally managed camps and settlements. In countries with poor human rights practices, or where rights organizations do not make it their business to protect asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, this can be an especially acute concern.

In response to some of these challenges and a growing recognition of the long-term existence of urban refugees, the UNHCR introduced its *Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas* (Urban Refugee Policy) in December 1997. While this represented a step towards ensuring that the rights of urban refugees are protected, the policy has been difficult to implement for technical, logistical, and political reasons.

According to Human Rights Watch (2002), the most fundamental problem with the Urban Refugee Policy is its lack of detailed protection recommendations. Instead, the policy focuses almost exclusively on assistance and ignores the very real protection needs of refugees in urban areas. While the UNHCR has recognized the inadequacy of the policy (Kemlin, Obi, and Crisp 2002), the organization continues to struggle with the very real challenges in developing a strategy that is legally sound, politically palatable, and financially feasible. As a result of ongoing debates within UNHCR, it is likely that a new policy will soon emerge (Buscher 2003). Whether such a policy will have direct effects for its intended beneficiaries will, of course, depend much on donor support and host governments' resources, attitudes, inclinations, and capacities.

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3 Research methods

3.1 Definitions

The first stage in any empirical investigation is precisely determining one's subject of study. There is, however, no single 'right' definition of who qualifies to be called an urban forced migrant (see Definitions and legal issues). Some researchers rely on narrow legal definitions: those people living in urban environments who have been legally classified as refugees, for example. Others include asylum seekers along with refugees. While these are appropriate for particular kinds of studies, it risks excluding many who qualify under a more 'common sense' definition of forced migrant. It also excludes those who have not applied or have ensured their right to residence through extra-legal channels. Recognizing this, at least one study (Jacobsen and Landau 2003) has adopted a more expansive definition of their study population: all those coming from 'refugee-producing countries' who are living, however temporarily, in a given urban environment. While this means including people better designated as 'voluntary' than as forced migrants, it implicitly recognizes that the division between these groups may not be as firm as a strict legal designation suggests.

Definitional issues are further complicated by questions of what 'forced' means, what qualifies as an urban area, and for how long after arrival a person should be categorized as a migrant rather than a permanent resident (Spear 1983). Although much of the discussion above deals with people who have fled international borders or have been displaced by war and famine within their own countries, one might quite legitimately include those displaced by evictions, slum clearances, or urban renewal projects as urban forced migrants (see Evictions, forced removals, and slum clearance). Again, the definition used depends on the author's objectives: the debates with which the study is intended to engage, and the kind of claims it is intended to make.

Having determined who qualifies as an ‘urban forced migrant’, one must then decide where the boundaries of the city are. Official census designations may be useful in this regard as they help to demarcate an area of study and may facilitate the collection of comparative (geographic or longitudinal) data. Such reliance is not, however, without risk. Many peri-urban or squatter settlements are excluded from official statistics and do not appear on city maps or as part of the city proper. The role of these areas in urban economic, political, and social processes should, however, qualify them for inclusion. As they are often the areas in which new migrants (domestic and international, voluntary and forced) first settle, excluding them will only weaken the proposed research.

In concluding, it is worth noting that there are valid reasons for maintaining heterogeneous definitions with the growing literature on urban refugees. Before engaging with — to support, test, or challenge — others’ work, it is important to keep in mind the definitions that have used and the relative benefits and costs of the definition and concepts employed. In order to ensure clear communication and allow others to evaluate your claims, it is important that one be explicit about how and why you have selected a particular approach.

3.2 Field work challenges

Apart from the conceptual challenges discussed above, urban environments provide more than their fair share of technical and logistical hurdles. While only exposure and preliminary study will help define the obstacles to be overcome, there are compelling ethical and methodological reasons to consider the following common challenges confronting those working in urban settings.

3.2.1 Sampling

Reaching a conceptual definition of a forced migrant is the first step in developing a concrete sampling strategy. Implementing such a strategy is, however, remarkably difficult with urban refugees, the majority of whom are self-settled

among host populations. In camp settings there are often more or less accurate estimates of the size of one's intended study populations and their spatial distribution. Even with self-settled migrants in rural settings, there are often local authorities who can help to identify newcomers and estimate their numbers and location. Except where urban refugees are resettled and monitored by officials or aid workers, it may be very difficult to garner such information within cities. While aid workers or representatives of refugee communities may provide some guidance as to the location and numbers of people in a given area, these may be considered only as very general, and possibly highly biased, estimates. In such environments, developing a sampling frame that allows one to make claims of representativeness is difficult, but by no means impossible. When this is a goal, one must be prepared to adopt an innovative strategy demanding creativity, a willingness to compromise, and a readiness to place limits on one's claims (see Kibreab in AUC 2003; Jacobsen and Landau 2003; Bloch 1999).

Having developed a sampling strategy — whether it involves case studies, snowballing, cluster sampling, network analysis, or other techniques — one faces a series of additional technical hurdles, as outlined below.

3.2.2 Populations

Urban populations — of both hosts and refugees — are often much more heterogeneous than those in rural settings. Physically locating the 'type' of people one is interested in researching may, therefore, require considerably more effort than in other environments. That people may consciously (and convincingly) adopt other national or ethnic identities as a part of their livelihood or asylum strategies only further complicates such efforts.

3.2.3 Households

Although all researchers face challenges in defining a household's size and composition, these may be particularly acute in urban areas. Not only are multiple

families or groupings likely to be sharing a residential address, but members of one family may not be able to effectively identify or enumerate others within the residence. Given that most urban refugees are self-settled, membership in any of those units is, moreover, likely to be considerably more fluid than in rural areas, with people moving in and out of the household from across borders or from within the same urban area. The uncertainty and insecurity associated with low-income housing in many urban areas (see Evictions, forced removals, and slum clearance) further increases the difficulty of tracking individuals over time. That many people live in tightly confined spaces may also make it difficult to speak with particular individuals without interference. This is especially likely when trying to interview women. Even when others remain quiet during an interview, the presence of kin or neighbours may limit what respondents are willing to reveal.

3.2.4 Diverse communities

Exploring or comparing different ethnic or national groups among a forced migrant population, or including host populations for comparative purposes, raises additional methodological concerns. To begin with, one must broker access to multiple communities. There is also likely to be the need for multiple translations of questionnaires, a task that must be done carefully to ensure that substantively equivalent questions are asked to all people. One must also address varying norms and recognize the political pressures affecting potential respondents' willingness to speak with outsiders. Some communities are likely to be forthcoming with information while others — either as a result of cultural norms or fear of discovery — may remain reticent. There is, therefore, a need to consider the effects of the environment on the quality of the responses collected.

3.2.5 Location

Forced migrants typically find accommodation in those parts of cities that are deemed least desirable due to poor infrastructure and services or physical

insecurity. This creates additional technical and physical challenges for researchers, including:

1. Transportation for researchers and respondents may be difficult, and communicating with migrants in advance of a meeting or to follow up may be next to impossible (although access to cellular phones can be a positive aspect of urban research).
2. The residences themselves can present access problems as the researchers try to navigate security systems, doormen, or dangerous corridors.
4. Broader security concerns — for researchers, research assistants, and respondents — must not be overlooked. At the very least, heightened suspicion will make it more difficult to convince respondents to participate and may bias what they reveal. Moreover, certain areas may be effectively inaccessible at night, precisely the time when one would wish to interview those working during the day. A visit by an obvious outsider to a building may also alert other residents (or immigration officials) to the presence of a refugee or undocumented immigrant, putting the respondent in danger of harassment or deportation.

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4 Policy and advocacy concerns

The large-scale influx of refugees into urban areas raises unique challenges for both refugee advocates and those charged with managing the cities in which forced migrants live. Delivering services to people who are not included in a census or who do not have proper documentation is difficult under any circumstances. Moreover, whereas refugees living in internationally managed camps are in principle often guaranteed access to a minimum of social services (e.g. water, health care, education, housing), forced migrants settling in urban areas — even when part of a formal resettlement programme — typically rely on existing public services. And while international agencies often have sophisticated means of determining necessary water and food allocations for those in camps, no such standards exist for urban refugees. The fact that delivering aid to those in urban areas is often many times more expensive only discourages aid organizations from

taking on, developing, and ensuring such standards are achieved. Efforts are also not helped by a prevailing belief among aid agencies and domestic governments that urban refugees are able to take care of themselves. (Buscher 2003; Bascom 1995).

While urban forced migrants are likely to face similar difficulties to the poor local population in accessing services, migrants face a series of additional challenges. Those living without proper documentation, or where refugee documents are not widely recognized by front-line service providers, are unlikely to access public services effectively. Others face communication challenges, or may simply not be aware of the services that are available or their rights to them. There are many reports in South Africa and elsewhere that even when documentation is in order, migrants are refused services as a result of outright discrimination or xenophobia. With few public champions, they may have little recourse and will be forced to go without services or seek them through private — often informal and unregulated — markets.

The presence of non-national populations entitled to use public services — as legally registered refugees are in most places — raises issues for city planners. From a technical standpoint, local (or sometimes national) governments must ensure that people who do not speak a local language have the chance to learn those skills. In the meantime, concessions must be made so that non-nationals will not be misdiagnosed in hospitals and that children will not go without education or protection. The provision of accommodation (or ensuring fair access to it), access to credit, business licences, bank accounts, and legal services are all thorny governance challenges even when dealing with poor urban citizens. These are almost always magnified with non-national populations. As most urban refugees live in resource-scarce environments, it is especially critical that urban planners

make such arrangements without giving the appearance that they are dedicating precious resources to what are often popularly resented populations.

4.1 Accommodation

Access to affordable housing is essential for all urban residents' personal and economic security. In many cities, however, migrants face difficulty in securing appropriate accommodation. Whereas domestic migrants and the urban poor may be able to call upon extended family or close friends to provide shelter, such resources cannot be universally assumed for forced migrants (although many do stay with family and friends upon arrival). Instead, forced migrants most often compete with local residents in the (often) low-cost housing market or resort to self-built housing in shantytowns, slums, or peri-urban settlements. As such, many forced migrants' concerns in securing accommodation are parallel to those of the urban poor generally. There are, however, potentially significant and noteworthy differences between the two groups.

Emergency housing or shelters may, in some instances, provide legally recognized refugees with certain temporary advantages over national migrants. In most cases, however, host governments do not dedicate space in public housing to forced migrants. Moreover, what public shelter is available for non-citizens is typically available only for short periods immediately after arrival. Without citizenship or permanent residency, refugees may not be eligible for other public housing. The chances are even lower for those awaiting the resolution of asylum claims or who are undocumented.

Without adequate money for a deposit, local references, or permanent employment, forced migrants are often severely disadvantaged in the private housing market even when their papers are in order. Under such circumstances, forced migrants frequently find themselves subletting or taking rooms within another household not previously known to them. Alternatively they may find a landlord willing to grant a

short-term contract at a premium price. These choices are not ideal and may have significant consequences. Subletting often makes forced migrants vulnerable to exploitation by the contract holder, while sharing accommodation with unknown families makes them vulnerable to health risks, theft, and physical or sexual violence. Short-term contracts may mean that forced migrants — who regularly earn less than comparably employed nationals — pay more for their accommodation and are required to relocate frequently within a given urban area. Those squatting or living in informal settlements may also be subjected to eviction or slum clearances (see Evictions, forced removals, and slum clearance). Such relocations are likely to have significant effects on migrants' livelihood strategies, given the time, expense, and psychological uncertainty associated with moving. Frequent moves may also retard migrants' (and their neighbours') ability to build 'social capital': the personal networks necessary to find employment and gain access to schools and other social services. Those not able to find any form of formal housing may end up on city streets exposed to even greater physical risk and economic uncertainty.

4.2 Evictions, forced removals, and slum clearance

Evictions, forced removals, and slum clearances, often under the guise of public health campaigns, infrastructure improvement, or urban regeneration initiatives, have at least two significant consequences for those concerned with forced migration (and forced migrants) in urban areas. For the reasons discussed above, forced migrants arriving in urban areas are often forced to compete with poor 'locals' for limited low-income housing. In rapidly growing cities the competition can be fierce, and public efforts to limit the growth of slums and squatter settlements may further restrict access to accommodation for all marginalized populations. As the neighbourhoods where forced migrants first settle are often popularly associated with urban decay, these areas may be particularly targeted for efforts to improve sanitation, sewerage, safety, or cities' public image.

Evictions of various kinds are also, in and of themselves, a cause of forced migration. Although rarely considered under the rubric of refugee or forced migration studies, such movements should be classified as a form of internal displacement. In severe instances, they may also stimulate international migration. Nowhere was this illustrated more explicitly than in apartheid-era South Africa, where the occupants of whole neighbourhoods were moved out of central urban areas in the name of ‘separate development’ and racial purity (Murray and O’Regan 1990). Even in less extreme circumstances, people may or may not be given advance warning or compensated when their residences are either condemned or destroyed (Patel, d’Cruz and Burra 2002). Those living in informal settlements — often considered illegal by policymakers — are particularly unlikely to be adequately compensated or assisted in their search for alternative lodging (Macharia 1992). While such relocations may not involve formal asylum claims — and will almost never involve international aid — many of the social and economic consequences associated with them parallel the experiences of those displaced by persecution, famine, war, or natural disaster.

4.3 Education²

The right to education and its benefits for refugees are widely discussed in the forced migration studies literature. In urban areas, education may play a particularly critical role in social integration or in helping those coming from rural areas to garner the necessary skills to be economically competitive. As the numbers of unaccompanied minors living in cities climb — in Africa a lethal combination of war, poverty, and HIV/AIDS is creating unprecedented numbers of orphans — providing education to both forced migrants and local children is a growing concern. While many of the challenges of accessing and benefiting from education apply equally to forced migrants in rural and urban settings, there are a number of

² Many of the points in this section are drawn from Shani Winterstein and Lee Stone’s ‘Forced Migration and Education in Johannesburg’, prepared for a workshop entitled *Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Public Policy Response* held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (12 August 2003).

issues associated with access to education that are particularly significant in urban environments.

Forced migrants often face considerable problems in accessing education. The most obvious obstacles they face are legal provisions or long-standing practices that may prohibit forced or undocumented migrants from accessing public educational services. Even where migrants are technically ensured places, they may face discrimination from school administrators who do not wish to see non-national children in their classrooms or from teachers who will not encourage full participation. Due to the long journeys migrant children take from their countries of origin — or the fact that educational services there may have been disrupted due to economic or political crises — many are not of appropriate age for their education level. Many schools will not, for example, enrol students if they are more than two or three years above the class average. In other instances, forced migrants face problems of access similar to other socially and economically marginalized groups within urban areas, particularly school fees and expensive, time-consuming, or insecure transport to schools. The fact that many forced migrants earn less than locals and live in peripheral areas without schools only exacerbates these concerns. The short-term economic opportunity costs of sending children to school may, as everywhere, further discourage enrolment. Fears that children are being exposed to undesirable cultural values or practices may have a similar effect.

Once in the classroom, children who have experienced trauma or the psychological stresses of relocation may also have trouble concentrating and keeping up with work. As most urban refugees make use of existing schools rather than special facilities, these difficulties may be magnified by the need to listen and read in a new language or make adjustments to new pedagogical techniques or teacher expectations. Classmates and forced migrants' attitudes about religion, gender roles, race, and nationality may also provide further obstacles to learning.

Website:

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4.4 Health

Given the cramped conditions under which urban forced migrants often live, frequently without clear water or proper sewerage, access to health care is a critical public health issue. Access to clinics and hospitals is, of course, only a small but significant part of a larger set of health-related issues including broader public health campaigns, awareness, and education, along with the provision of culturally appropriate mental and psychological services. Forced migrants in city areas share many of the problems in accessing health care faced by both refugees in rural settings and other marginalized urban residents.

As it is impossible to review the full range of mental and physical health concerns facing these groups, it is instead worth drawing attention to those that may be distinctive to urban forced migrants. There are, for one, rarely special facilities or programmes dedicated to the urban refugees' health needs. City-based forced migrants consequently must most often rely on existing public and private health services. As high-quality private services are usually unaffordable, this will most often mean reliance on informal health care services (including 'traditional' medicine) or public hospitals and clinics.

As with many other social services, accessing public health services is linked to forced migrants' legal status, rights, and documentation. Depending on national (or sometimes local) legislation, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are entitled to different levels of services and often fall under different fee schedules. While recognized refugees will usually be entitled to similar services as

the urban poor, they may not be aware of their rights or may be unfamiliar with the administrative requirements for accessing care. Moreover, unless they are issued with proper documents and those documents are recognized by front-line healthcare workers, they may not be able to effectively utilise those services to which they are entitled. Even with documentation, it may not be possible to convince front-line healthcare workers to provide appropriate care. In Johannesburg, for example, forced migrants regularly report being turned away by intake nurses who either do not accept their documents or do not recognize migrants' rights to service. In other instances, forced migrants report being given only partial prescriptions or being charged for services that the law requires they be given free or at reduced costs. Given that forced migrants — particularly recent arrivals — typically earn less than the local populations among whom they live, even reduced fees may be difficult for them to afford.

Even with the best intentions on the part of healthcare workers and host governments, forced migrants must overcome a number of technical hindrances. Perhaps the most significant and immediately dangerous of these surrounds the issue of communication and the provision of culturally appropriate health care. In linguistically heterogeneous urban environments, it is practically impossible for hospitals to retain staff members who are able to communicate with all of their potential clients. While certain facilities that cater to particular ethno-linguistic groups may be able to hire a translator or someone able to communicate with their clientele, this is not usually a first priority. The resulting misdiagnoses and prescriptions can be dangerous if not lethal. There are also instances in which forced migrants may feel uncomfortable interacting with hospital staff. Such uneasiness is particularly common in, but by no means limited to, women and girls. The consequence is that they may either not go to a clinic when needed, or they may feel uncomfortable speaking with someone who is not a member of their ethnic, linguistic, or religious community.

4.5 Networks, livelihoods, trade, and the informal economy

Forced migrants living in urban areas are unlikely to receive the kind of direct monetary or nutritional assistance provided to many refugees settled in camps or formal settlements. Given the expense associated with urban living, most of those not receiving some form of assistance or subsidies still rely on other forms of income generation to make ends meet. To do this, the majority of the world's urban refugees — especially those in poor countries — support themselves through casual labour or participation in the informal economy (Lindstrom 2003). As such, the study of urban refugee livelihood strategies resonates strongly with inquiries into other marginalized groups' economic and productive activities in the urban economy. For the poor in any urban environment, this means contending with violence, poor transportation and infrastructure, crowded living conditions (which limit the ability to work from home), and stiff competition for the few available jobs.

While all urban poor face considerable challenges in meeting their material needs, forced migrants face a range of challenges less likely to affect the nationals amongst whom they live. In many places, there are severe restrictions on immigrants' and asylum seekers' rights to work and their entitlements to welfare or other forms of social support. While most countries allowing refugees to self-settle outside of camps also afford them the right to work, refugees face a number of disadvantages when competing with members of the local population. Although immigrants' willingness to work for lower wages than similarly qualified nationals often makes them desirable to employers, employers may not recognize refugee identity documents as legitimate or accept them as providing the holder with the right to work. They may also use the lack of legitimate documentation as an excuse for lower wages or other forms of exploitation. There may also be scepticism about an immigrant's commitment or qualifications for the position, or worry that an applicant may be too temporary or otherwise unreliable. Others will, quite

legitimately, be concerned about problems of communication across a language barrier. Some employers may simply discriminate or believe that the presence of a foreigner will turn away xenophobic customers.

Although forced migrants in cities are often relatively educated and skilled — self-selection often brings the most entrepreneurial and educated to cities (Sommers 1995; Kuhlman 1994) — many may not be initially prepared to work in a new environment. This is not only so for people who were previously living in rural areas, but for doctors, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals whose credentials are not valid without additional training or local certification. Those wishing to start their own businesses — whatever the size — also face problems obtaining business licenses (when required) and accessing financial services like savings accounts and credit. As many urban migrants rely on self-owned enterprises, the lack of such services is of particular importance. Little access to credit provided by banks, local organizations, or extended family — something more likely to be available to local entrepreneurs — limits the kind and size of business enterprise a forced migrant can hope to start. (It should be noted, however, that at least some forced migrants are supported by families or friends still in their country of origin.) Even the smallest business owners without bank accounts are at an additional risk. Since they are effectively forced to work in a cash economy, both their goods and earnings are vulnerable to theft. For people living in shared or insecure housing, the risks are particularly great. One can also not ignore perennial harassment by police. While the police may periodically raid all informal businesses and try to prevent hawking and other forms of street trading, immigrants (especially those without proper documentation) are particularly likely to have their goods seized or be asked to pay bribes or other forms of protection money. As many work in informal jobs outside (e.g., hawking, construction, cleaning) they are also vulnerable to general theft and assault along with xenophobic violence.

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http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:4838

5 Theoretical concerns

5.1 Social integration

As Bascom (1995) notes, the integration of urban refugees is one of the most poorly understood and under-researched topics in forced migration (along with repatriation). Much of the challenge of social integration, from both an analytical and practical perspective, is linked to urban areas' heterogeneity and dynamism. Although one must never assume rural settings to be static, and the arrival of forced migrants and aid can be destabilizing, one rarely witnesses the kind of ethno-linguistic, national, or economic variety common in cities. The interactions of such a heterogeneous population also raise the possibility of new identities and novel forms of social organization simultaneously incorporating values, practices, and activities from multiple social and geographic origins (see Globalization, transforming identities, and translocality). At the very least, the close proximity of migrant and 'local' populations will lead to considerable debate over cultural values (Hirschon 2000). The results of these debates are theoretically and practically significant and anything but pre-ordained.

Xenophobia is one of the most common responses to the interactions of foreign migrants and host populations. While refugees and migrants everywhere are often greeted with hostility — scapegoated as the cause of crime, vectors of disease, and a threat to locals' economic opportunities and cultural values — urban migrants' typical reliance on existing markets and public services makes them particularly vulnerable to the effects of xenophobia (Human Rights Watch 1998). With few local allies, police harassment or vigilante justice may be popularly tolerated if not encouraged. In the most extreme instances this can result in violence or illegal detention or deportation. More commonly such tendencies manifest themselves as

petty harassment and extortion, discriminatory hiring practices, difficulty in obtaining accommodation, and exclusion from social and financial services.

That many cities are destinations for large numbers of internal migrants, many of whom maintain strong links to rural home areas, further confounds a simple model of integration or assimilation.³ In areas of rapid urbanization, structural change, or urban renewal, it may be difficult to determine who is integrating with whom. In many parts of the world, urban areas — and especially particular neighbourhoods within cities — serve as temporary destinations for nationals from throughout a country seeking new experiences, economic advancement, transit to another location, or simply adventure. Such people may only temporarily stay in the city or may quickly move to other neighbourhoods where they will settle more permanently. One must, therefore, be careful to delineate the boundaries of ‘community’ in developing indices of integration. While one might measure economic integration by comparing employment and wage profiles across nationals and non-nationals (see Networks, livelihoods, trade, and the informal economy), discussions of cultural integration are far more complex. Rather than convergence along a set of cultural values and practices (including language) it may in many instances make more sense to speak of hybridization. As in all refugee situations — but perhaps even more so than in those areas where aid is readily available — displaced people’s individual characteristics are key to the ways in which they integrate or assimilate, and establish livelihoods. The pre-migration character of particular cities — their level of diversity, demographic dynamism, and physical infrastructure — and the values and resources of those who live in them also play significant roles in structuring emerging behavioural patterns.

³ For this point I am grateful to Graeme Gotz’s ‘Local Government and Forced Migrants: Framing Paper for Discussion’ prepared for a workshop entitled *Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Public Policy Response* held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (12 August 2003).

Website:

International Metropolis Project –

http://www.international.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html

5.2 Globalization, transforming identities, and translocality

Throughout the world, cities are important nodes in the global exchange of ideas, information, goods, capital, and people (Sassen 1998; 1995). For many, globalization is synonymous with the expansion of information technology and the movement of business elites and multinational corporations (Castells 1989). Cross-border goods trades and remittances have an undeniable impact on the people and communities on both ends of the exchange, and there can be little doubt that the forced (and voluntary) migration of people in the world's cities challenges domestic political, economic, and social processes. Although less pronounced than in camps or settlement schemes, the involvement of international actors such as the United Nations and the invocation of international law may, moreover, contest state institutions' authority and sovereignty.

The close proximity of multiple national groups in a given urban area is also likely to engender novel identities, affiliations, loyalties, and forms of social organization (see Social integration). Although it is premature to dismiss national borders and the identities associated with them, there is a growing need to reconsider their role in people's lives. In some instances, cities — or parts of them — become transnationalized: filled with people from elsewhere with little commitment to the territory they inhabit or the solely domestic processes surrounding them. In other instances, the massive influx of refugees (and other migrants) into cities is strengthening nativist discourses and host populations' commitments to their national territory and ideals, however understood. The short-term effects of this may be segregation of 'foreigners' and 'natives' within a given urban environment. Over time, however, these divisions are unlikely to be maintained. Mixed marriages (between forced migrants and hosts and among various migrant groups), business enterprises engaging locals and migrants, the creation of new linguistic idioms and

religious organizations, and the diffusion of ideas will necessarily have transformative effects on all involved (Mandaville 1999). Under what conditions particular outcomes are likely, what those outcomes may be, and what they will mean for migrant and host populations remains one of the most significant and under-explored themes in forced migration research.

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