

Urban Humanitarianism in Jordan: A New Approach for the 21st Century

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Abstract

Refugee populations worldwide are increasingly settling in non-camp, largely urban areas. In the Syria crisis, 90 percent of the nearly 5 million Syrian refugees live in urban settings in the regional host countries. Yet the humanitarian response model remains rooted in an encampment paradigm, and fails to meet the needs of both urban refugees and the host communities in which they live. This paper explores the history and development of “urban humanitarianism,” and examines how it has been applied, and can be improved, in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. Drawing from fieldwork in Jordan in 2015 and 2016, this paper proposes reforms to shift the humanitarian system away from the camp-based sectoral model, and towards an urban, participatory, non-camp framework for refugee response.

Introduction: The Urbanization of Refugees

In March 2016 the Syrian refugee crisis officially became a protracted refugee crisis, entering its fifth year. Migration and refugees have since shifted to the forefront of international conversations, driven in large part by the scale of the Syrian crisis, but also by the migration situation that developed in Europe in 2015. As refugees and other migrants reached Europe's borders in unprecedented levels, the humanitarian crisis became a human disaster, characterized by thousands of drowning deaths, a lack of shared responsibility, and the establishment of squalid refugee camps throughout Europe. Despite the media attention paid to the European migration situation, the larger refugee crisis is primarily taking place in developing regions. The Syrian crisis is overwhelmingly concentrated in Syria's neighbors and over 95 percent of the more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees reside in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. While the EU struggled to distribute just over one million refugees into 28 member states in 2015, host countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been the frontline responders to the Syrian crisis with far fewer resources. The humanitarian system is failing its beneficiaries and host states, both due to a lack of funding and the shortcomings of a humanitarian model rooted in an encampment paradigm. This paper explores the development of urban humanitarianism in Jordan, drawing from the literature on refugees, development, and urbanism. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, it explores ways to reform the Regional Response Plan for Syria and proposes systemic changes that will make the framework of urban humanitarianism globally viable.

In the regional host countries Syrian refugees are referred to as guests, indicating that they are intended to be a temporary population.¹ Although the Syrian crisis is now protracted, host governments, donors, and, to some degree, international organizations (IOs) continue to respond to the crisis with policies rooted in hopes for "temporariness."² As Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in the same countries can attest, such policies fail to help long-term refugees re-establish lives of dignity and independence, and gains are often achieved by the ingenuity and perseverance of the refugees and members of the host community themselves.³ Complicating the model of temporariness, usually implemented by housing refugees in camps, 90 percent of Syrian refugees live in non-camp settings where their presence and quasi-permanence are more visible. Urban refugees are of particular interest to development actors, since their economic activities and use of public services impacts local development outcomes.

Integrating humanitarian and development activities has been a central goal of the Syria Regional Response Plans led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This paper builds on the current Syria Regional Response Plan for Jordan (JRP) and contributes new approaches based in urban studies. The proposed reforms to the urban humanitarian framework are informed by the lived experiences of urban refugees to respond to the failures of encampment models. Drawing from the fields of humanitarian studies and urban affairs, the reforms to the urban humanitarian framework suggested here cross disciplines to address challenges particular to the non-camp, urban refugee experience. This paper builds on ongoing qualitative ethnographic research conducted in Jordan in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in June 2015 and March 2016, as well as ongoing interviews with stakeholders, academics, and

¹ El-Abed, "The Discourse of Guesthood."

² Ward, "Refugee Cities."

³ El-Abed, "The Discourse of Guesthood"; Shami, "Gender, Domestic Space, and Urban Upgrading"; Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces."

policymakers. By addressing the realities of non-camp refugees, urban humanitarianism has the potential to facilitate in practice what has only been a goal in policy: durable solutions for refugees, development for the host community, and a more sustainable global refugee regime in the 21st century.

Section II of this paper summarizes pertinent research on urban refugees, the Syrian refugee crisis, humanitarian development, and critical urban studies. Drawing from this body of literature and fieldwork in Jordan, Section III operationalizes a new framework of humanitarian assistance in urban areas, illustrating how Jordan can become a successful case study in the transition from emergency to humanitarian development aid in urban areas. Section III explores the domestic and systemic changes necessary to make such transitions possible in urban refugee situations more broadly. Section IV offers concluding thoughts and areas for further research.

Locating Urban Humanitarianism: The Nexus of Urban Refugees, Humanitarian Studies, and Urban Affairs

This paper is situated within the literature surrounding urban refugees, humanitarian development models, urban studies, and refugee studies in Jordan. Because urban refugees were largely considered “irregular” migrants by host governments and aid organizations until 2009, the literature on urban refugees is thin compared to that on camp refugees. Research in urban studies and humanitarian development contributes important bodies of knowledge and highlights areas for improvement in urban refugee responses. Central to the understanding of urban refugees are discussions surrounding refugee camps, refugee livelihoods in the face of restrictive policies, and local integration as a durable solution.

Urban Refugees and Humanitarian Development

As more refugees have settled in urban areas the world has experienced an exponential growth of urban populations. Urbanization is a defining feature of globalization and a major side effect of rapid economic development. More than half of the world’s population now lives in urban centers, as economies develop away from agrarianism and opportunities in cities prove more lucrative. The explosion in urban development offers planners a chance to design cities and infrastructure for the future: nearly all of the world’s population growth will occur in cities in the coming decades, and more than half of the infrastructure required to meet this growth needs to be built by 2050.⁴ Urban areas will be of particular concern in developing countries, where most urban growth will occur. Cities produce the majority of global GDP, serve as political, economic, and cultural centers, and aggregate economic and human capital. Cities also face many challenges, including those posed by climate change, rising sea levels, and scarce natural resources. Urban resilience is a buzzword among urban planners who want to ensure that cities grow sustainably and with contingency plans for disasters and environmental changes.

The urbanization of populations worldwide is matched by the growth in refugee populations in urban areas. Part of this growth in urban refugees is explained by the same push-pull factors that draw other migrants to cities, but also by a shift in UNHCR and host government policies toward non-camp refugees. Until 2009, the UNHCR’s aid framework in urban areas was

⁴ Birch and Wachter, *Global Urbanization*, 31.

determined by a controversial and restrictive 1997 policy document on urban refugees.⁵ The policy characterized urban spaces as “illegitimate” for refugee settlement, except under a very narrow category of exception. Even then they were not eligible for humanitarian assistance and were expected to be self-reliant. This policy, and the threat of arrest and harassment for those who “illegitimately” continued to reside in cities despite the legal consequences, caused under-registration of urban refugees. Research suggests refugees viewed the registration process as pointless at best, since they would not receive assistance in return, and directly harmful at worst, leading to identification as an illegal migrant and possible deportation back to the camps or another country. The majority of refugees may have resided in urban areas well before now, with some scholars positing the idea as early as 1992.⁶ Due to under-registration and lack of data, the numbers of refugees in urban areas prior to 2009 are even less reliable than the shaky estimates of today.

The Iraqi refugee crisis after 2003, which grew exponentially after 2006, spurred the creation of a new UNHCR policy document on urban refugees in 2009.⁷ For the first time urban spaces were designated by UNHCR as legitimate places for refugees to live and made them eligible for assistance.⁸ This was a monumental shift in the international refugee paradigm, and a reaction to the growing body of research that suggested many camps were permanent long-term fixtures, that the host state and refugees themselves would benefit much more from local integration of refugees; and that, given funding shortfalls, refugee responses in urban areas could be much more cost effective, and help transition to a “development approach” to humanitarian aid.⁹ The shift was reflective of the attitudes of host countries in the MENA region at the time toward refugee camps: while some built them, most did not seek to keep all Iraqi refugees within them, nor did these camps ever have the capacity to do so.¹⁰

The Syrian refugee crisis has played out almost entirely in cities in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. Syrians now make up nearly a third of the more than fifteen million refugees registered with UNHCR, and since the beginning of the crisis have settled in non-camp settings. The Syrian crisis tipped the scales between camp and non-camp refugees: approximately 68 percent of the world’s registered refugees now live in non-camp settings, with 58 percent living in cities.¹¹ Despite this shift, humanitarian policy and practice remain firmly rooted in camp-based paradigms. The existing international refugee regime is failing to provide meaningful protection and durable solutions for urban refugees, even as conflicts worldwide drive displacement to historic levels.

The Syrian refugee crisis in particular has highlighted the shortcomings of the camp-based model of humanitarian aid: 90 percent of Syrian refugees live outside of camps, and the camp-based aid model has proved incapable of meeting the needs of urban refugees.¹² The Lebanese government banned camps for Syrians entirely and more than one million Syrian refugees are scattered in approximately 1,700 different locations throughout the country. In Jordan and Turkey, where camps were constructed early in the crisis, 85 percent of Syrian refugees

⁵ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, xiv.

⁶ Harrell-Bond, Voutira, and Leopold, “Counting the Refugees.”

⁷ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, 2.

⁸ Crisp, Janz, and Riera, *Surviving in the City*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, 2.

¹¹ Ward, “Refugee Cities,” 78.

¹² *Ibid.*; *Independent Program Evaluation*.

live outside of camps. As refugees themselves reject encampment, and host countries and IOs incrementally accept this reality, a new urban humanitarianism must develop to address the needs of tens of millions of non-camp displaced persons worldwide.

Despite policies prohibiting refugees from urban settlement throughout most of its history, since the birth of the UNHCR in 1950 refugees have migrated in numbers large and small to urban centers. Migration to cities has been both direct (refugees fleeing to urban centers from their home countries), or indirectly from refugee camps or other detention facilities. The reasons that refugees leave camps are complex and multifaceted, but one common thread is the nature of the camps themselves:

Living inside a refugee camp – however invisible the line between the camp and its surroundings and despite ongoing contact between the inside and outside – marks one's life and defines one's position: a position that is simultaneously excluded from and included into host society, excluded spatially and legally while simultaneously being defined and contained by surrounding society.¹³

In camps, people are stripped of their rights, identities, and agency. Cities provide the opportunity to earn a living, access services, and live in relative independence and dignity, an intangible and invaluable quality. Urban areas also provide anonymity for those who do not wish to be identified or treated as refugees.¹⁴ Camps lack such avenues for anonymity and integration. Moreover, the Middle East has a contentious history with refugee camps because of the Palestinian case. Exiled for nearly seventy years without an end in sight, they have transformed into quasi-permanent populations in neighboring countries. In the Syrian and Iraqi crises both refugees and host governments fear “Palestinianization” of refugee populations, for different reasons: Syrians fear becoming like the large populations of Palestinians living in poverty in camps, while governments fear the political upheaval that has occurred throughout the decades in Palestinian camps.¹⁵ Even where camps are constructed, most Syrian refugees choose not to reside in them.

Despite lacking legal rights and protections to work in most host countries,¹⁶ refugees in urban areas earn livelihoods and contribute to the domestic economy through informal markets.¹⁷ Refugees bring their own “refugee resources” – including humanitarian aid, human capital, and financial assets – to their host communities. Syrians are no exception, with high levels of education prior to the civil war and a thriving business community that has almost entirely joined the diaspora. If channeled through effective policies aimed at urban inclusion, these resources can carry large benefits.¹⁸ Many if not most refugees in urban areas work with or without legal permission, and “refugees could be highly beneficial to cities if they were allowed to pursue productive lives absent legal restrictions, harassment, and insecurity.”¹⁹ Protracted urban refugee

¹³ Turner, “What Is a Refugee Camp,” 4.

¹⁴ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, 4-5.

¹⁵ El-Abed, “The Discourse of Guesthood.”

¹⁶ Jordan passed a work permit program for Syrian refugees in February 2016, promising to enroll 200,000 Syrian workers in return for concessionary rates on loans, and other benefits. Despite the success of the Government of Jordan and UNHCR in registering 30,000 Syrians by October 2016, the push towards widespread access to formal work has not yet met its goals.

¹⁷ Grabska, “Marginalizing in Urban Spaces,” 287.

¹⁸ Jacobsen, “Can Refugees Benefit the State?,” 577.

¹⁹ Jacobsen, “Refugees and Asylum Seekers,” 273.

situations can only be addressed in the long-term through inclusive policies that support a life of self-sufficiency and dignity.

Inclusion and integration of refugees in host communities is not only a question of economics, but also a question of refugees' right to a durable solution. The three durable solutions defined by UNHCR are resettlement, return, or local integration, with emphasis on the first two options. Encampment is in reality the "fourth durable solution," as decades-old camps throughout the world illustrate.²⁰ While local integration is not the primary durable solution pursued by UNHCR, it is *de facto* the most widespread, even if host governments erect barriers to full integration. Local integration, even on a temporary basis, may provide the most feasible pathway to a durable solution for urban refugees, as neither resettlement nor return are viable in many cases.²¹ Such local integration requires expanded cooperation with domestic actors, both in government and civil society, as well as development and urban stakeholders. Urban settlement challenges the ability of humanitarian agencies to adequately meet the needs of refugees, but the payoffs of local integration of refugees and humanitarian development aid models far outweigh the costs of continuing the encampment model.²²

Despite decades of leading scholars and practitioners (including within the UNHCR) arguing for local integration, development approaches, and co-assistance of refugees and host communities, UNHCR was slow to revise its policies and practices regarding urban refugees.²³ Partially due to political difficulties with host governments, but also to factions within and close to UNHCR interested in perpetuating the encampment model, it took twelve years for UNHCR to revise its urban refugee policy in 2009.²⁴ The new policy, which legitimized urban refugees and promised expanded and improved assistance, was released in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis, which, like the Syria crisis, played out largely in urban areas.²⁵

Long before the UNHCR's 2009 urban refugee policy, however, the agency had been experimenting with models of humanitarian development aid. Early efforts to incorporate development strategies into UNHCR programs included integrated zonal approaches in the 1960s (now known as community-based or area-based approaches), aid and development strategies in the 1970s and 1980s, and development aid for returnees in the post-Cold War repatriations of the 1990s.²⁶ Each approach enjoyed limited success but failed to achieve stated goals due to the lack of UNHCR's mandate for development, the division of labor with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other development agencies, and institutional shortcomings (lack of planning, poor choice in implementation partners, and exclusion of refugees from processes).²⁷ UNHCR has taken strides to address many of the initial causes of failure in development humanitarianism. It is thus increasingly called upon to foster development in host countries, and works more regularly with development actors like UNDP, the World Bank, ILO, and UN Habitat. UNHCR has also addressed many of its institutional shortcomings, and the Syrian refugee crisis represents the most participatory, development-focused approach to an urban

²⁰ Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*.

²¹ Crisp, *The Local Integration and Local Settlement of Refugees*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*; Crisp, *Surviving in the City*.

²³ Ward, "Refugee Cities."

²⁴ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, xiv.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Crisp, "Mind the Gap!," 168.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

refugee crisis in UNHCR's history. With reassessment and revision, the Syria Regional Response holds the potential to transform the way international actors respond to refugee crises worldwide.

Critical Urban Studies

The twin processes of the urbanization of global population as a whole and the urbanization of refugees cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, these trends reinforce each other. As recently as 1950, only 16 percent of the world's population lived in cities, but the urban population has since grown to encompass over half the global population.²⁸ Most urban growth in the last century has taken place – and will continue to take place – in developing countries.²⁹ This creates both challenges and opportunities. During the highest period of Western European urbanization, states' economies and governance were more developed than in their counterparts in the developing world today and also had the population valve of colonial holdings to mitigate some of the challenges of rapid population growth. Approximately 42-43 million Europeans, who would have otherwise settled in European cities, left their home countries for the colonies before 1913.³⁰ Europe has thus avoided many of the challenges of rapid urbanization and population growth experienced in the developing world today.

The field of urban studies in the 21st century is primarily concerned with many of the same issues confronting humanitarian agencies: the “urban research agenda encompasses growth (mapping and prediction), delivery of critical services (water, health, education, personal safety), basic support (housing, transportation, employment, food security) and municipal capacity and finance.”³¹ These same themes appear repeatedly in UNHCR urban refugee reports and the Syria Regional Response Plan. The growth of cities in the developing world, and the concentration of refugees in these countries and cities, challenges poorly funded and mismanaged municipal governments in host countries, which negatively affects both host populations and refugees.

These issues will only grow, as most of the world's population growth is projected to occur in developing cities in the coming decades.³² Despite its challenges, this growth also represents an opportunity for urban planners and humanitarian and development actors. Properly planned and managed cities are more resilient to climate change and natural disasters, can more easily accommodate population growth, and provide more equitable livelihood opportunities for their residents. With the recent growth in humanitarian action in cities, refugee agencies have an opportunity to positively influence these processes. In addition to natural population increase, migration has long been a key driver of urban growth. In its simplest form, this migration is conceptualized as rural-to-urban movement as a result of industrialization. In reality, migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that includes rural-to-urban, urban-to-urban, circular, and international migration patterns.

Unlike the relatively young field of urban humanitarian studies, a vast body of research exists on issues related to population increase and concentrated poverty in cities, but is seldom referenced in the humanitarian literature. In interviews with humanitarian, development, and urban stakeholders, it is apparent that the two fields are often not in conversation at critical junctures. Humanitarian actors' and urban stakeholders' goals often run counter to one another. Urban infrastructure in many refugee-dense areas also benefit from humanitarian investment and

²⁸ Kasarda and Crenshaw, “Third World Urbanization,” 467.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 468.

³¹ Birch and Wachter, *Global Urbanization*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 27.

attention. The focus on humanitarian development has led to the incremental inclusion of and collaboration with development actors in the last two decades,³³ but to move towards a truly developmental, participatory model of urban refugee response, the UNHCR must model the same relationship with relevant urban stakeholders and learn from research in urban areas. When a non-camp refugee crisis plays out in urban spaces, it cannot be divorced from its urban context or the challenges and opportunities that the complexity of cities presents.

Operationalizing Urban Humanitarianism: The Case of Jordan

It is little wonder that refugees have increasingly sought lives and fortunes outside the confines of camps, the shortcomings and desperate conditions of which are well documented.³⁴ What is more surprising is that host governments and international actors have permitted this shift without putting up more of a fight, despite deeply rooted cultures of humanitarianism and governance that favor encampment. Host governments in developing countries historically favored policies of encampment to isolate or quarantine the effects of refugee crises from their citizens. Refugees are housed in camps that are usually constructed in rural areas, where they can at once be easily presented to the international community in aid appeals as well as targeted for aid delivery. Camps permit host governments to meet their international responsibilities toward refugees without the social, economic, and political risks local integration entails.

Yet it is not only host governments that are to blame for the long-persisting encampment paradigm in humanitarian responses. Entrenched interests, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and contractors whose incomes depended on the continuation of the encampment model lobbied unsuccessfully against the reform of UNHCR urban refugee policy in 2009 that legalized refugee residence in non-camp settings for the first time.³⁵ In the years since, particularly in the Iraqi and Syrian crises, the UNHCR and other major stakeholders in the humanitarian industry have taken significant strides toward a transparent and development-based model of urban refugee responses. Other organizations have shifted operations from camps to urban areas, and new actors have come onto the scene from the private sector and development field.

The unique confluence of global media attention and host government willingness to house refugees in urban areas in the Syrian refugee crisis has provided a viable opportunity for a development- and urban-based refugee response. Yet significant challenges remain to operationalize urban humanitarianism in practice, from funding shortfalls to the slow pace of institutional and government change. The most obvious and largest challenge throughout has been a resource shortage. The UNHCR's Regional Response Plans are consistently funded at 50 percent or less. Despite large pledges made at the February 2016 London Donor Conference, only 45 percent of the 2016 appeal has been received at the time of writing in November 2016.³⁶ Some issues go beyond funding, however, and in other cases organizational changes have led to significant improvements in refugees' access to and satisfaction with assistance, without infusions of more funds.³⁷ A shift in institutional approach and management is also necessary to more effectively respond to urban refugee crises.

³³ Crisp, "Mind the Gap!"

³⁴ Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*; Turner, "What is a Refugee Camp?"

³⁵ Koizumi and Hoffstaedter, *Urban Refugees*, xiv.

³⁶ Post London Conference Tracking Report. *Supporting Syria and the Region*, November 3, 2016.

³⁷ Grabska, "Marginalization in Urban Spaces."

To understand the urban humanitarianism framework outlined below, it is first important to understand the goals of such a framework. An effective urban refugee response as defined here will result in four outcomes:

1. Refugees can live lives of dignity in non-camp settings;
2. Refugees are largely integrated in local structures;
3. Host countries capture benefits of hosting refugees and overall development due to the infusion of humanitarian funds and expertise;
4. Local institutional capacities are enhanced by funding and technical assistance.

A successful urban refugee response in the Syria crisis in Jordan would demonstrate to other host countries, particularly those still employing encampment models, that refugees in non-camp settings can be boons to, not burdens on, a host country's socioeconomic and political situation.

The case of Jordan is explored here to illustrate how the urban humanitarianism framework can be improved and better implemented within host countries and globally. In many ways, Jordan represents the most progressive model of urban humanitarian response in the Syria crisis. The Government of Jordan (GOJ) instituted a participatory planning process to create its response plan in coordination with UNHCR and other humanitarian and development actors. Inter-sectoral working groups gather stakeholders by sector (governmental, non-governmental, international, local, etc.) to foster collaboration and offer a venue for dispute resolution and discussion. This contrasts directly with Lebanon, where IOs have sidelined local actors, as well as in contrast to Turkey, where the government leads the response, and often interferes in the activities of IOs. Jordan has struck a delicate balance between government leadership, local collaboration, and international involvement in the refugee response in urban areas. While these relationships are often troubled – embodied in the 2015 suspension of all urban shelter projects that derailed IO activities and turned donors off shelter programs – sectoral working groups have served as venues for dispute resolution and collaboration.³⁸ According to officials at UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior, working through the Shelter Working Group, the suspension on shelter was lifted by GOJ in July 2015, a move that likely would not have occurred absent the existence of such bodies.

Despite the progress made in Jordan, key concerns by NGO and IO stakeholders include adequate assessments and mapping, a lack of incorporation of urban planning best practices in programming, as well as tensions between certain IOs, NGOs, local actors, and the GOJ. Government officials from the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and Foreign Ministry have expressed concerns over the legal and economic infrastructure of refugee work rights recently announced by King Abdullah II in the wake of the London Donor Conference. The framework of urban humanitarianism addresses each of these concerns while remaining flexible enough to be applied in the diverse contexts in which urban refugee crises occur. This framework is organized into two categories: reforms within host countries and systematic reforms on the international level.

³⁸ Kelberer, “Seeking Shelter in Jordan's Cities.”

Host Country Reforms

Assessment and Mapping: Humanitarian organizations and host governments frequently cite the enormously complicated challenge of responding to refugee crises in urban settings. Unlike in camps, where everything is laid out on a grid and refugees are easy to identify, in urban settings, refugees are not always registered, not geographically confined, and are extremely mobile and often difficult to reach. Assessment and mapping from the onset of a crisis play a key role in filling this gap in stakeholder capacity to adequately identify and serve refugees and the host communities. Although expensive and time-consuming, conducting ongoing local assessments of markets, services, refugee needs, and population demographics are essential to a successful urban refugee response.³⁹ Mapping of local coordinating and implementing partners, refugee skills and market needs, and existing infrastructure is also key to understanding what resources already exist, what must be improved, and what must be expanded or introduced. Technology is central to the collection of refugee-generated, timely data. Using apps or websites to reach urban refugees and aid providers addresses both the costs and time intensive quality of current mapping and assessment practices. Despite UNHCR and other organizational efforts to coordinate among stakeholders and conduct assessments in Jordan, there is no centralized database of local and international organizations. Their contact information, especially location, is extremely inconsistent and difficult to find, making it difficult for refugees or coordinating agencies to find them. There is also a lack of mapping of refugee skills and labor market needs, and this will be even more vital with the institution of refugee work permits in March 2016.

Context-Driven Urban Planning: Another missing feature of the current refugee response plan in Jordan is context-driven urban planning. The JRP 2016-2018 is rooted in both refugee protection and host country development, but the funding allocations do not reflect the most pressing urban infrastructure issues that have been exacerbated by the refugee crisis.⁴⁰ National and international development projects are often criticized for focusing on big, flashy projects while ignoring less visible yet more significant problems. Localized approaches to humanitarian and development initiatives create the opportunity to make these invisible quality of life improvements more visible to the local community on a micro scale.

The areas of housing and water infrastructure in Jordan illustrate this issue. In the case of housing, Jordan already experienced an affordable housing shortage prior to the Syrian conflict and now requires at least 48,320 additional units in the next year to meet increased demand.⁴¹ Housing costs, especially in the rental market, have skyrocketed up to 300 percent in some areas and nationally prices have increased at least 14 percent on average from 2013 to 2015.⁴² The lack of adequate and affordable housing, as well as the competition for jobs, is consistently reported as the primary cause of intercommunal tensions between refugees and Jordanians, yet housing projects have been given low priority and low funding, and were suspended by the government in urban areas for much of 2015. Despite the focus of the JRP 2016-2018 on a development approach to the refugee response, the appeal for housing was one of the smallest at \$89 million through 2018, receiving more only than transportation and energy.

Water infrastructure is another area where development approaches tend toward large, visible projects, while more impactful small-scale or less visible projects go underfunded. A 2015

³⁹ Profiling Urban Displacement Situations.

⁴⁰ Jordan Response Plan 2015; Jordan Response Plan 2016-2018.

⁴¹ In Search of a Home, 5.

⁴² Ibid., 14.

report by MercyCorps found that 50 percent of piped water is lost to leakage and private wells, technically illegal but often controlled by powerful interests.⁴³ Water conservation education is also not given priority by local entities, although many Jordanians complain that Syrians lack a culture of water preservation and engage in wasteful consumption.⁴⁴ A focus on water use reduction paired with upgrades to piping systems, matched by political will within the GOJ to address private wells, would ensure that desalinated water from the large projects currently underway in the Red Sea/Dead Sea region is not lost to leakage and mismanagement. There is also a lack of local capacity to ensure that newly constructed water infrastructure is appropriately maintained: in one area, only six engineers serve an area larger than Hawaii.⁴⁵ Developing local capacity through training and personnel policies is necessary to ensure the long-term viability of water projects undertaken with humanitarian funding.

While the JRP 2016-2018 is one of the most participatory planning documents the UNHCR has ever issued, key voices are still missing, namely those of the urban planning community. While national ministries and international development actors have a seat at the table, local urban planners and municipal representatives would be able to give insights such as those related to micro-interventions in housing and water infrastructure. These projects may lack the public relations impact of large-scale development projects, but would be more consequential to the country's overall development and the long-term benefits of refugee funding.

Legal and Economic Infrastructure: Following the February 2016 London Donor Conference, King Abdullah II announced the introduction of work permits for Syrian refugees, with the goal of using humanitarian and development funds to create 200,000 jobs for refugees and 1 million jobs for Jordanians. Offering work permits to Syrians requires legal infrastructure to ensure that permits are accessible, easy to renew, and that protections are in place to prevent abuse of Syrian employees. While only 1 percent of Syrians currently possess work permits, many of the approximately 655,000 registered refugees in the country work in the informal market, where they lack protections against wage fraud and other abuses by employers and do not pay any income tax to the government. In return for increased humanitarian funding and tax revenues from legally working refugees, the GOJ must pass legislation to codify refugee work rights and permit processes in national law, as well as set up special monitoring offices where Syrian and other refugees may register complaints, and charges of abuse are independently investigated. The current GOJ plan also limits Syrians to working in fields where many already work informally, primarily agriculture and construction, while barring them from jobs in the service sector and information economy. To fully capture the benefits of Syrian education and skills, GOJ must retract restrictions on work permits, allowing refugees to work in any sector for which they are qualified. This will contribute both to Jordan's economy and a post-conflict Syrian economy.

Granting Syrians work permits and creating the legal infrastructure to support them does not mean that there will be jobs to employ refugees or Jordanians as a result of aid infusions. Additional foreign direct investment (FDI) and support of special economic zones (SEZ's) are two of the main conduits for job creation in Jordan, particularly in the nascent manufacturing sector.⁴⁶ As a representative of the Ministry of the Interior said in an interview with the author,

⁴³ Tapped Out, 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; Farishta, *The Impact of Syrian Refugees*.

⁴⁵ Tapped Out, 5.

⁴⁶ "Forging New Strategies in Protracted Refugee Crises."

“You can’t just build a zone without creating incentives for investment.”⁴⁷ These conditions include domestic tax incentives for foreign investors (which are largely already in place in the country’s SEZs), as well as policies within donor countries themselves and international financial institutions to support growth and development in refugee-dense countries. Trade and finance actors such as the International Monetary Fund should create a new category for refugee host countries that would give them similar preferential treatment in loans and trade as Least Developed Countries. Donor countries should consider tax incentives for companies that invest in refugee-dense countries, as well as tariff relief for goods and services produced within them. Jordan suffers from the relatively high exchange rate of the Jordanian dinar, and establishing a manufacturing sector that will support the employment levels promised by the King will be nearly impossible if the exports it generates are too costly. The EU and US in particular should grant Jordanian exports tariff relief, and encourage domestic corporations to invest in Jordan as well as other refugee host countries.

Systemic Reforms

Implementing the above reforms in Jordan and elsewhere will not fundamentally restructure the global framework for urban humanitarianism. Systemic obstacles such as institutional mandates and organization, lack of interagency cooperation, and the sometimes contradictory role played by the international community still stand in the way of a fully operationalized urban humanitarian framework.

Restructuring UNHCR: The UNHCR’s current organizational structure and staffing do not lend themselves to responding to refugee crises in urban areas. UNHCR staff themselves report feeling overwhelmed by the task of working both in camps and urban areas and often lack the training and expertise to operate in urban settings. This makes sense given the decades-long opposition to refugee settlement in urban areas, but cannot continue if the UNHCR hopes to adequately meet refugee needs and foster host country development. The UNHCR should thus redistribute its activities (and funding) according to the proportion of refugees in urban areas. Encampment models are more expensive, and so receive a disproportionate amount of available humanitarian funding. As host governments increasingly permit the settlement of refugees in urban areas, this model must change to allocate funds more equitably between the two units.

Staff portfolios also should be split between urban and camp response, with a coordinating body to oversee the two in each sector, as sector responses in urban areas have been shown to be fundamentally different from those in camps. Shelter, for example, is much more complex and politically contentious in urban areas, and for staff who have worked in camps for their entire careers it is difficult to find the time for the training and education necessary to successfully operate in urban environments. Urban shelter is also interconnected with other areas of aid provision more directly than in camp settings, and acts as a force multiplier for other interventions.⁴⁸ The current sectoral or cluster model needs to be augmented by planning bodies that create inter-sectoral impact assessments, which both highlight areas for collaboration between sectors and help to prioritize funding. New urban refugee response units should be staffed both by UNHCR and by local organizations and urban planners to ensure that they are able to navigate and leverage the local context. As UNHCR restructures its organization, it also

⁴⁷ Author interviews, Foreign Ministry of Jordan, Amman, March 2016.

⁴⁸ Kelberer, “Seeking Shelter in Jordan’s Cities”; In Search of a Home.

sets the standard for other IOs to do the same, and to incorporate more local voices into their urban refugee activities.

New Partnerships: The Syrian refugee crisis has marked a distinct shift in inter-agency partnerships among UN entities, humanitarian NGOs, and development actors. In the past, UNHCR experienced issues of distrust and mandate mismatch between itself and development agencies such as UNDP, leading UNHCR to sometimes abandon development projects and development agencies to insist refugees are not a part of their mandate.⁴⁹ In the Syria crisis, however, UNDP, UN Habitat, ILO, WTO, World Bank, and other development actors have been instrumental in mapping and assessment exercises as well as ongoing development assistance. Nascent partnerships between development and humanitarian partners must be institutionalized and mandates of development actors revised to include migrants and refugees in their official responsibilities. The Sustainable Development Goals' inclusion of migrants as a population of concern for development provides a crucial opportunity to rethink the ways that migrants can contribute to development in cities.⁵⁰

While these relationships have tentatively and informally begun to coalesce, the UN must codify them so that they continue in the various contexts of urban refugee responses worldwide, not just in the Syria crisis. The concerns of humanitarian and development actors are increasingly intersecting, including the “need to promote empowerment, equity and sustainability so that they are mutually reinforcing”⁵¹ among the people they seek to serve. These overlapping concerns should be captured in a newly envisioned and institutionalized relationship between humanitarianism and development.

The Role of the International Community: If the international refugee regime is broken, then the international community has only itself to blame. Increasingly restricted access to asylum and resettlement has led to less than two percent of refugees being resettled to developed countries.⁵² Host countries in the developing world rightfully complain that they are shouldering far more than their fair share of responsibility without the prerequisite resources, and many do not want refugees to permanently integrate due to a variety of socioeconomic and political reasons. Local integration as a “temporary durable solution”⁵³ is currently *de facto* pursued in urban refugee situations in the Syria crisis, and the international community can make this solution more tolerable by fully funding the UNHCR's 2016 appeal. To date, only 28 percent of funds have been received by UNHCR despite pledges totaling 6 billion euros for 2016 at the London Donor Conference.⁵⁴ In addition to meeting these funding appeals, a new system of finance for refugee responses must be established so that those countries not bearing their fair share of refugee resettlement are taxed in international dues that are used for refugee responses. Such a fund would be self-sustaining and alleviate the need for grandiose (and never met) funding appeals by UNHCR each time a new crisis arises. It also allows UNHCR and host countries to carry out long-term projects without fear that funding will disappear and projects will be suspended, as often happens during the annual budget turnover. UNHCR also must reform its finance model,

⁴⁹ Crisp, “Mind the Gap!”

⁵⁰ “Transforming our World,” Article 29.

⁵¹ UNDP Human Development Report, 13.

⁵² Syria Crisis Fair Share Analysis 2016.

⁵³ Crisp, *The Local Integration and Local Settlement of Refugees*, 3.

⁵⁴ Post London Conference Tracking Report.

which is outdated and uses a budget-based model that is “common in public sector organizations but out-dated elsewhere,” and work toward a “reflective, adaptive, and strategic financial management to ensure that money is used for what works best.”⁵⁵ A recent independent evaluation found that:

A quick-response is necessary to save lives yet it can also become the modus operandi of an operation. This is a prolonged crisis. The refugees’ needs are unlikely to decrease in the foreseeable future. UNHCR needs to develop a strategy that links with the Governments in Lebanon and Jordan, further facilitates the entry of other assistance and development actors (while maintaining UNHCR’s focus on refugees), and that seeks every opportunity for continuous improvement, efficiency, and cost effectiveness.⁵⁶

Finally, recognizing that conflict and climate change are projected to create tens if not hundreds of millions of forced migrants in the coming years, developed countries must scale up resettlement quotas equitably to share the responsibility for settling refugees and other forced migrants. Such resettlement is necessary to avoid the destabilizing effects of migration and securitized migration policies. The only true durable solution to refugee situations, of course, is to create conditions that substantially decrease the number of refugees: ending and preventing conflicts, investing in developing country capacities, and addressing global climate change and other natural or human disasters.

Conclusions: Toward Urban Humanitarianism

The reforms proposed here will be difficult to implement and will not be enough to fundamentally change the way the international system responds to refugee situations. They will also not “solve” the migration crisis worldwide or completely fix the current humanitarian system, which unfairly distributes responsibility for the forcibly displaced. The turn towards urban humanitarianism lays the groundwork to make life more bearable for both urban refugees and the communities in which they live, as well as provide a pathway to a durable solution (however temporary) in local integration. As urban refugee situations expand globally, more research is needed to reframe how the humanitarian and international community respond to these long-term effects of urban displacement. The proposed urban humanitarian framework is one more step on a long path to development-based humanitarian response, and will require further reassessment and revaluation as situations evolve and interests and stakeholders change.

In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, these reforms constitute the difference between a refugee response rooted in temporary encampment and one based in the reality of a protracted urban refugee situation. Work permits for Syrians in Jordan cannot solve the issues of funding, institutional organization, and a global refugee system that places almost all responsibility on the host countries. Reorienting resources toward assessment and mapping activities, incorporating urban stakeholders and research, and creating the legal and economic infrastructure for work permits would improve the lives of both urban refugees and the host communities in the immediate future. In the long-term, restructuring UNHCR, institutionalizing humanitarian and development actor collaboration, reforming the humanitarian funding system,

⁵⁵ Independent Program Evaluation, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

and redefining international responsibility for refugees will provide the pathway to durable, sustainable solutions for urban refugee situations worldwide. These reforms present a true opportunity to change the prevailing paradigm surrounding refugees from one of burden to one of benefit; without them, the already creaking international humanitarian system can only gather more rust and inevitably crumble beneath its own inadequacy.

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