

Refugee Livelihoods Network

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Urban Refugee Livelihoods - An introduction by Anita Fabos

A number of recent initiatives have pointed up the relative paucity of information on the ways refugees in urban environments -more specifically, in the expanding cities of the global south- pursue livelihood strategies.

For its part, the UNHCR commissioned a number of studies following criticism leveled against its 1997 UNHCR Policy on Urban Refugees. Although the UNHCR has traditionally thought of its urban refugee caseload in terms of the challenges posed by its protection approach (i.e., the issues of those refugees who have made their way from camps and settlements to cities as well as the secondary movement of refugees from one country to another), there is now a growing recognition that urban settings present specific opportunities and constraints for refugees seeking to improve their livelihoods.

It is clear from some of the contributions by advocates and researchers that refugees in urban settings are enmeshed in transnational networks that include encamped refugees as well as refugees in urban centers in Europe, Australia, and North America. It is also clear that remittances from abroad channeled through these networks are vital to their survival.

There is evidence too that livelihoods pursued on the margins of urban society in developing countries present the risk of exploitation and serious protection problems, as well as increased informal employment opportunities; that large numbers of children remain without access to education, despite possibilities for creative self-help schooling projects; and that thousands of 'closed file' refugees remain hidden and vulnerable. New work on urban livelihoods of refugees needs to take into account the specific characteristics of urban settings, particularly as they relate to access to resources, quality of life, and security.

- Anita Fabos, Senior Lecturer, University of East London

This edition of the Refugee Livelihoods Newsletter looks to highlight some of the work and lessons learned on refugee urban livelihoods.

[Click here to access the Anita Fabos' presentation on 'Dilemmas of Urban Research in Africa'](#)

UNHCR and Urban Refugees

As a result of concerns expressed both within and outside UNHCR, the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) was requested to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas which was introduced in December 1997.

Based on a desk-based global study, a more detailed review of selected case-studies and wide consultations both at HQ and in

the field - including with NGOs - EPAU concluded that the 1997 UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas has proven difficult to implement in practice and that it has in some instances had negative consequences for the protection and welfare of refugees.

[Click here to access UNHCR's policy on urban refugees, EPAU's Evaluation Report of the Implementation of the Policy and other relevant reports.](#)

Ethical and methodological aspects of urban refugee research

The Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (FMRS) program at American University in Cairo has been involved in researching urban refugee livelihoods and has published a number of papers of refugees living in Cairo.

Further to this strategic research direction taken by FMRS, the program held a workshop in 2003 designed to highlight the methodological and ethical issues inherent in the research process among highly marginalised vulnerable, and often hidden refugee populations in cities in Africa and the Middle East. The papers presented in the workshop demonstrated the difficulty researchers have in finding, gaining the trust, and encouraging the sharing of information with urban refugee populations.

For further information on the workshop and to view the report visit the link provided below.

[Click here to view the report from the FMRS workshop on researching refugees](#)

The Johannesburg Project

In September 2002 the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the Forced Migration Program at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University teamed up to explore the transnational and livelihood activities of African refugees and other migrants in Johannesburg. The project addresses gaps in the understanding of Africa's urban refugees and the continent's changing urban realities.

[Click here to learn about The Johannesburg Project](#)

Urban Refugee Livelihoods in Kampala, Uganda - A paper by Michela Macchiavello

Working paper No.95 of UNHCR's New Issues in Refugee Research series entitled 'Forced Migrants as an under-utilized asset: refugee skills, livelihoods, and achievements in Kampala,

Uganda', discusses the practice, adopted by the UNHCR, of placing refugees in agricultural settlements where they are expected to survive by farming. In this paper, Michela Macchiavello examines what skills urban refugees possess and whether by using these skills, they can provide for their most immediate needs, and eventually become self-sufficient.

Michela Macchiavello is a former Research Associate at the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford and is currently a consultant on the International Training Programme on Peacebuilding and Good Governance at the Legon Centre for International Affairs, University of Ghana.

[Click here to access Michela Macchiavello's paper](#)

Forthcoming events

Conference-Livelihoods at the Margins
School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London
8-9 July 2004

Livelihoods at the Margins is a two-day international conference, bringing together a wide selection of multi-regional ethnographic research carried out with people who derive incomes in ways generally excluded from mainstream economic analyses. Delegate places are limited to 50, if you are interested in attending please contact: James Staples, Email: js2@soas.ac.uk

-The 9th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM)
This conference will be hosted by the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and the Latin American Parliament and will take place in São Paulo, Brazil from January 9-13, 2005. The theme for the conference is: The Search for Solutions: Achievements and Challenges.

A special section of the IASFM website has been designated for 'Panel Partners' where panel ideas can be shared. Included in this list is a panel suggestion on 'Refugee and IDP livelihoods' that may be of particular interest for subscribers of the Refugee Livelihoods Network. For further information on this and other potential panels visit the IASFM website provided through the link below.

[Click here for the IASFM panel partners page](#)

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